

A New Chapter in the Evolution of Right-wing Populist Electoral Winning Formulas

The Implementation and Impact of Portfolio Diversification in Austria

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Abstract

Right-wing populist parties (RPPs) have been exceptionally successful in Austria since the mid-1980s. Since the mid-2000s, the Freedom Party (FPÖ) has faced challengers from within its own party family despite its continuing effort to adapt to shifting electoral markets. We argue that the exceptionally high vote shares secured by competing RPPs in multiple rounds of general elections can be attributed to a new winning formula of portfolio diversification. Supply-side data show that the FPÖ and its rivals varied widely in their policy-based and non-programmatic efforts of linkage building with voters. Using ESS data, we find evidence in the class basis of party electorates that suggests patterns of diversified linkage efforts expanded the joint voter base of RPPs by gaining support among groups of voters hitherto not resonating with RPPs while holding on to the vote of their core constituency. In addition, portfolio diversification plausibly allows RPPs to moderate some of their specific electoral vulnerabilities (e.g. cross-class appeal, repercussions of participation in government).

Keywords: Accountability; party competition; electoral behaviour; right-wing populism; representation

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1. Introduction

Most party systems in Western Europe have seen the establishment of right-wing populist parties (RPPs) since the 1980s. Among these newcomers, the rise of the Freedom Party in

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Austria (FPÖ) has gained prominence for several reasons. First, unlike many other parties of this type, the FPÖ had already existed for three decades at the time of its electoral rise, but then proved effective in its swift response to voters' changing political preferences. Second, scholars' attention was attracted by the key role of charismatic leadership in transforming an old-style honorary party into a successful RPP.¹ This party also represents a role model for RPPs across Europe for replacing the preliminary neoliberal populist anti-statist 'winning formula' with an adapted radical right version (Kitschelt & McGann, 1995, p. 176; McGann & Kitschelt, 2005). Third, the extent of the party's electoral support exceeded the share of the vote of all other RPPs in Europe, except for the Swiss SVP, and peaked at almost 27% in 1999. The subsequent entry into government, which illustrates this party's blackmail and coalition potential (Sartori, 1976; Gruber & Bale, 2014), the landslide defeat in the 2002 general election followed by the break-away of the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ) under Jörg Haider's leadership, secured continued interest in the electoral fortunes of Austrian right-wing populism. In 2017, the FPÖ again joined a coalition government as a junior partner to the conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), which had recently started to embrace right-wing populism itself.

Once back in opposition (from 2005 until 2017), the FPÖ regained strength and quickly re-established itself as a main challenger and an equal to the mainstream parties, the centre-left SPÖ and centre-right ÖVP. The uniquely favourable opportunity structures fuelling RPPs' electoral success remained unaltered, including the formation of grand coalitions, and were reflected in the increased salience of immigration issues and identity politics in the sphere of programmatic reasoning (Dolezal, 2008; Ivarsflaten, 2008). In the sphere of expressive voting (i.e. non-rational emotional reasoning invoked by a politician's charisma, sentiment of party identification and trust promoted by trait identification), the elite-driven package deal politics concluded behind closed doors, which is typical for consensus democracies, continued to create public demand for a more personalized and unconventional politics (e.g. taboo-breaking, placing socio-demographic outsiders in political office, lifestyle-related issues). Not least for organizational reasons, both the SPÖ and especially the ÖVP were limited in their ability to meet such popular demand for personalized and charismatic leadership in the era of politainment (Müller et al., 2004).

That being said, a further differentiation of voter preferences over multiple policy dimensions (e.g. Kitschelt, 2012; Kriesi et al. 2012) continued to reduce the ability of a single party of any type to tap into the full potential of reachable voters, and 'newness' started to transform into a significant competitive advantage (Sikk, 2011).² There is ample empirical evidence in favour of realignment theory and the validity of the concept of party families, implying the regular rise and decline of parties sharing the same or similar familial background (Kitschelt & Rehm, 2015). Quite surprisingly, if we look at the number of parties represented in parliament, this development only impacted the world of right-wing populism. In fact, the FPÖ has lost its monopoly to represent right-wing populism in Austria. The FPÖ and BZÖ were voted into parliament in the 2008 general elections, while fresh challenger Team Stronach, named after its founder Frank Stronach, managed to establish a parliamentary group in the *Nationalrat* mainly thanks to former BZÖ MPs switching to Team Stronach prior to the general elections in September

2013. Together, the three-component RPP camp secured 29.8% of all valid votes (compared to 28.2% for the FPÖ and BZÖ in 2008, 15.1% for the FPÖ and BZÖ in 2006, and 10% for the FPÖ in 2002), clearly garnering more support than all of its mainstream competitors.

Analyzing this reconfiguration on both the demand and the supply sides of political competition, *this article examines if, and how, diversification of linkage building efforts performed by competing RPPs describes an up-to-date electoral winning formula once we switch from individual parties to the party camp/family level?* In arguing that portfolio diversification (i.e. parties' contrasting profiles of linkage emphasis) works as a means for individual parties to more effectively cater to the needs of targeted groups in the electorate, we borrow insights from the literature on 'niche parties'. As pointed out by the 'niche party' concept based on saliency theory, the programmatic convergence of mainstream parties created a void filled by parties that emphasized the policy areas neglected by their rivals and which often operated as single-issue specialists (Meyer & Miller, 2015; for RPPs as 'niche parties', see Wagner & Meyer, 2017).

The lack of 'product differentiation' of centrist parties has been identified as a major driver for the declining vote share of mainstream parties (Spoon & Klüver 2019). Our argument is twofold. First, this logic can be applied to electorally large parties of any type, including RPPs. Despite the FPÖ's continued efforts to adapt its original winning formula, it lost its exclusive status as the sole representative for RPP voters. This is expected to result from (a) the dimensional opening up of political space and stretching of voters' ideal preferences over issue packages, (b) the large electoral potential of RPPs reflected in the past successes of the Freedom Party, and (c) the emergence of rival RPPs appealing to different sets of eligible voters through programmatic differentiation and portfolio diversification. Second, this electoral winning formula is still primarily rooted in programmatic competition, but it encourages party efforts to integrate many or all domains of linkage building between parties and voters. Linkages of accountability and responsiveness between voters and political elites that inform voters' party choice work through politicians' programmatic appeals and policy achievements, the personal charisma of political leaders and selective material incentives in networks of direct exchange (i.e. clientelism) (Kitschelt, 2000).

We examine a sequence of three examples of portfolio diversification in a scenario of competing RPPs and show its electoral consequences. In the 2008 and 2013 general elections, far-reaching differentiation resulted from a combination of responses to market forces and propensities of parties in the absence of horizontal coordination between them. After a period of consolidation, the FPÖ faced a mainstream-populist challenger in a partially transformed ÖVP. We find empirical evidence in a theoretically consistent way that RPPs' specialization on different linkage mechanisms helped parties within the same family to avoid fighting over the same pool of voters. Instead, portfolio diversification led to an expansion of the joint voter base.

2. The evolution of the RPP-specific winning formula conceptualization

Quite a few studies have dealt with electoral support for RPPs in a comparative perspective. However, these analyses do not attempt to assess a party-bloc-specific winning formula, e.g. examining cross-country variation in electoral support for RPPs over time on the grounds of issue competition (van der Brug et al., 2005; Arzheimer & Carter, 2006). Similarly, Coffe' et al. (2007), focus on contextual determinants of party choice notwithstanding the supply-side of competing parties' electoral strategies. In other studies, the dependent variable lacks clear and coherent definition, and choices of case selection confuse share of the vote with the fact of mere representation in parliament (de Lange, 2007).

These limitations are aggravated by country and party specific restrictions in the Austrian case. Not least for non-availability of European Social Survey (ESS) data (since Austria did not participate in round six in 2012), research on RPPs in the 2000s focused until recently on the 2002 and 2006 elections, both atypical for the representation in government of the Freedom Party and BZÖ, respectively. Only later was research extended to include the aftermath of the disputed right-wing government that governed Austria from 2000 to 2007 (Lefkofridi et al., 2014).

A factor common to much of the literature analyzing party competition and electoral winning formulas is a focus on programmatic competition. However, not all voters necessarily focus on policy considerations in their evaluation of a party, nor does it seem helpful to separate different strands of evaluation. For example, there is ample evidence for a close relationship between evaluations of programmatic offers and leaders' character traits. For a significant number of voters, their assessment of a party leader affects their voting decision more than that party's programme (Bittner, 2011). RPPs are particularly prone to leadership-related effects appealing to heterogeneous constituencies. Throughout the consecutive transformations of a formerly conventional old-style honorary party, Haider's leadership abilities secured party cohesion (except for the 1993 break-away of liberal dissenters), and formed lasting electoral alliances even though this strategy incorporated profound programmatic inconsistencies.

Another way in which voters bridge instrumental and affective reasoning is in the assignment of issue competence to certain parties, which is mediated through aspects of party identification for the vast majority of voters, not only party identifiers (Stubager & Sloothus, 2010). In addition, there is no indication that RPP voters differ substantially from supporters of other party families in the way they draw from the menu of instrumental and expressive offers, thus defying the popular idea of their tendency to uniquely favour charismatic leaders across time and space (Rydgren, 2007; for other party types, see Shamir, 1994). This makes it seem 'largely unnecessary to consider static and idiosyncratic factors like personality traits or alienation in today's mass society' (Arzheimer, 2009). As Aichholzer and Willmann (2020) demonstrate, voters prefer political leaders with character traits similar to the basic value-related traits of themselves, but that trait congruence is party mediated through core ideological preferences. This indicates that different leadership styles reflecting distinct character traits may describe an effective tool in campaigning for the support of cross-pressured voters.

On the supply side, parties of all party families put considerable effort into utilizing various non-programmatic linkage mechanisms, albeit in different ways and to varying degrees (Kitschelt, 2007a). All of these mechanisms influence the reasoning of voters in choosing from the party and candidate menu served. Yet, while some linkage building strategies go hand-in-hand, attempts to effectively utilize other combinations of linkage mechanisms to reach out to potential voters might incur various costs and come at great risk, or simply overstretch the resources of a single party. Perhaps most prominently, clientelistic engagement tends to harm a party's credibility in delivering policies to boost the national economy (Kitschelt, 2000). In addition, a study by Haggard and Kaufman (2008, p. 113) suggests that clientelism may be used as a substitute for universalistic social policy. In terms of party choice, the negative economic implications of clientelism and patronage, including ineffective public administration and increased risk of running budget deficits (Hicken, 2011), are predestined to dissatisfy core supporters of both mainstream conservative and social democratic parties (for high-skilled employees in offshorable occupations, see Rommel & Walter, 2018).

Extensive party membership and organization, on the other hand, limit parties' capacity for strategic policy manoeuvres, and might result in programmatic ossification. In other words, parties face hard choices in what linkages to exploit in targeting ever narrower groups of voters, and may quickly overstretch their resources.

3. Data and methodology

Against this backdrop, our analysis of the intriguing Austrian case has twofold implications for the study of party competition and voter behaviour. First, it allows for a substantive argument about the necessity of considering both the policy and the non-policy realms in studies of party choice. Second, we demonstrate the need to further investigate winning formulas for party families by exemplifying the specific case of the RPP family, and by identifying a template of methods for generating a surplus of votes across Western democracies.

In addition to qualitative inquiry and concept formation, we draw on two sources of quantitative data. In Round 4 of the ESS (ESS 4), respondents were asked which party they voted for in the last national election, as well as for information on their occupational background to determine their class membership. The delayed field work period for Austria was November 2010 to February 2011, thus voting behaviour refers to the 2008 parliamentary election at a time when competition within the RPP camp appeared particularly fierce. The country-specific Austrian data file includes 2255 respondents aged 15 years or older, of which 1226 reported to have voted in the 2008 election, and for whom class status could be determined in 1094 cases.

Supply side data comes from the Democratic Accountability and Linkages Project (DALP).³ Party-level variables on the wealth of voter-party linkage mechanisms are derived from an expert survey and include information on parties' policy positions and mobilization efforts, as well as party leaders' operational efforts. Our analysis focuses on national parties in advanced European democracies to establish the depth of the challenger-establishment

demarcation line, and the electoral strategies of Austrian parliamentary parties. We operate with five key variables: an index for the procurement of different categories of targeted goods and services (i.e. clientelistic efforts), a multiplicative index of party-level cohesion, polarization and salience measures to capture programmatic efforts (see Kitschelt & Freeze, 2010, for their definition), and three aspects of mobilization efforts, namely (1) presenting a leader's charismatic personality, (2) invoking loyalty, party history or party identification, and (3) claiming the party is competent to govern. The 'competence to govern' variable refers to a specific mode of policy competition over valence issues and is anchored in economic voting theory (Duch & Stevenson, 2008).

Considering the similar configurations of party space, which is populated by the same party families in Austria and other Western democracies (e.g. Oesch, 2012), we believe that our findings are generalizable to some extent. This holds true for the entire profile of linkage building, including phenomena such as strategic and protest voting as elements of programmatic competition, and various domains of expressive forms of voter reasoning (Wineroither & Kitschelt, 2017). Eventually, the ongoing pluralization of national party systems will provide incentives to parties of the same family to engage in strategies of 'marching separately' before elections and 'striking together' following elections.

4. Linkage diversification of FPÖ, BZÖ and Team Stronach

Under conditions of high-intensity party competition, parties' linkage choices reflect specific targeting strategies aimed at selected groups of voters. Since both instrumental and expressive considerations are relevant for party choice, and parties operate under conditions of intense competition and limited resources, parties face hard choices in what linkages to explore and exploit. To arrive at sound interpretations in connecting linkage building profiles to the effects of party-camp specific portfolio diversification, we factor analyzed linkage building efforts at the party level for all viable mechanisms using the DALP data set. Unfortunately, Team Stronach (TS) formed only after DALP was concluded. The case of the TS will therefore be analyzed qualitatively and against the results obtained from DALP scoring and our data reduction effort.

We perform factor analysis to determine the (potentially lower) number of unobserved variables within a 'most similar systems design' (in terms of sites of political preference formation, configuration of the party-political space, the number of basic propensities of party systems, and formal institutions to a lesser degree), i.e. only for affluent democracies with RPPs represented in parliament. Accordingly, we end up with 77 parties from 10 Western European countries that surpass a threshold of 2% vote share. Hence, almost all these parties were represented in parliament (lower chamber) at the time the survey was conducted (2008/09). These are condensed into five established party families, based on established criteria in the field (Mair & Mudde, 1998): Social Democrats (SD), Christian Democrats and Secular Conservatives (CD/SC), Liberals, Greens, and Right-Wing Populists (RPP).⁴

While we are not trying to explain individual RPPs choices of linkage emphasis, a mix of party-specific propensities and parties' different vote- and office-seeking rationales points

to unique abilities of RPPs in Austria to exploit portfolio diversification. For example, notwithstanding programmatic reinvention and organizational transformation, the FPÖ has a record of uninterrupted representation in parliament since its foundation in 1955. To some extent the Freedom Party still represents the traditional German national ‘third camp’ in Austrian party politics. Their inclusion in coalition governments in the years 2000 to 2007 should mean that both the FPÖ (2000 to 2005) and BZÖ (2005 to 2006/07) made great efforts to demonstrate their competence in delivering on campaign promises, and in governing more generally. However, the FPÖ leadership utilized the 2005 split to pursue a consistent strategy of blame avoidance as it sought to detach itself from any legacies of its own cabinet record. Therefore, we expect to see (a) an appeal to party identifiers highlighted by the FPÖ compared to other RPPs, (b) a reduced effort to resonate with potential voters in terms of the Freedom Party’s ‘competence to govern’, and (c) significantly greater overall clientelistic efforts on the part of the FPÖ and BZÖ, given their then-recent inclusion in government, as compared with the peer group of RPPs across Western Europe.

5. Results

First, our results (Table 1) reveal two unobserved variables (i.e. factors and dimensions, respectively) that explain a good deal of variance in patterns of linkage building at the party level. The first dimension, which we name ‘establishment-challenger’, is loaded on the degree of clientelistic effort, evoking party identification and appeal through competence to govern. The second dimension is loaded almost exclusively on the degree of charismatic effort and is hence labelled ‘impersonal-charisma’. Second, FPÖ and BZÖ show clearly deviant patterns of linkage building on both dimensions.

Table 1: Factor analysis, varimax rotation, five variables for 77 parties in ten Western European countries

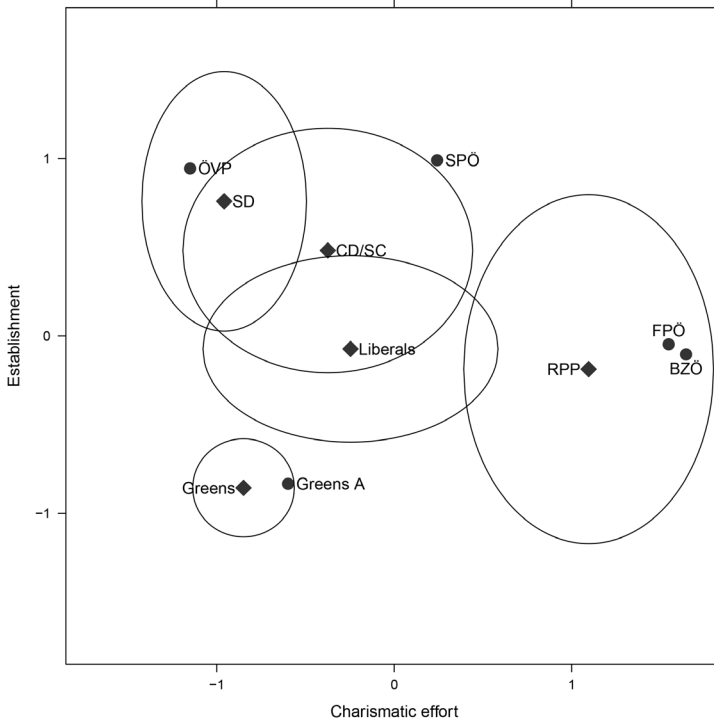
	Factor 1 ESTABLISHMENT- CHALLENGER	Factor 2 IMPERSONAL- CHARISMA
Clientelistic effort (v b15)	0.730	0.188
Programmatic effort (v cosalpo 4)	-0.113	0.172
Charismatic effort (v e1)	0.160	0.985
Party identification (v e4)	0.672	-0.221
Competence to govern (v e5)	0.546	
SS loadings	1.321	1.089
ProportionVar	0.264	0.218
CumulativeVar	0.264	0.482

Note: ‘CoSalPo’ is a multiplicative index based on cohesion, salience and polarization (Kitschelt & Freeze, 2010); ‘DALP-variable b15’ is a summative (additive) index of clientelist effort (scores b1 to b5). Test of the hypothesis that two factors are sufficient. The chi square statistic is 0.58 on 1 degree of freedom. The p-value is 0.448.

Source: The authors.

Figure 1 below presents a number of noteworthy aspects of linkage building patterns. With regard to the propensities of party competition in Austria, on the first dimension we envisage a clear-cut division between mainstream establishment parties (SPÖ and ÖVP) on the one hand, and challenger newcomer parties on the right (FPÖ and BZÖ) and left (Greens), on the other hand (the 'establishment-challenger' dimension).

Figure 1: Two-dimensional linkage profile of party families in Western Europe and Austrian parliamentary parties as of 2008



Note: The radius of each ellipse denotes standard deviation. Source: Own calculations based on DALP-data.

Source: The authors.

Turning to the profiles of Austrian RPPs, the results indeed reveal a unique pattern of efforts to resonate with different and even antagonistic groups of voters by utilizing and prioritizing a wealth of variants of linkage combinations. Beginning with a configuration on the 'establishment-challenger' dimension and clientelistic effort, we encounter scores for the FPÖ and BZÖ that are only slightly below our cross-country results for the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats/Conservatives. Moreover, this score is representative of the entire family of RPPs in our sample and is counterintuitive, considering its relatively recent origins, and above all, its strong opposition to party patronage in many instances. If we look at our charts, in the absence of a refined statistical analysis devoted to this issue, the overall score seems driven primarily by the vast number of RPPs

that were represented in government during the 2000s, with years of cabinet membership accumulated just before the survey was conducted. The ratio of RPPs with a record of representation in government prior to the year 2008 is substantial, even when compared to established and mainstream party families. Six out of 16 RPPs in our sample participated in coalition governments (BZÖ, FPÖ, FI, AN, LN, SVP), while one backed a minority government (DF). In addition, we observe much greater differences in parties' efforts to mobilize voters through sentiments of party identification between countries than within specific party systems. The strong numerical representation of RPPs in countries known for high levels of clientelism, notably Austria, Belgium, and Italy (Wineroither & Kitschelt, 2017, p. 258), which make up exactly half of all RPPs in our sample, helps to explain the high scores for the entire party family. If we leave out the summative clientelism scores for the Italian parties, we arrive at a rather modest level of effort to appeal to party identifiers of RPPs compared with mainstream party families (for country effects, see the outlier structures in Appendix 1).

While many potential triggers of clientelism (e.g. a personalized electoral formula and active ethnocultural divisions) are absent in the Austrian polity and society, we do find one particular competition mode present for the FPÖ and BZÖ that might help to explain the relatively small gap in clientelistic efforts between the 'party machinist' SPÖ and ÖVP relative to RPPs that only recently entered cabinet life. As governor of Carinthia (since 1999), and in his capacity as key player for federal government survival, Haider frequently engaged in rent seeking that entailed both elements of constituency service and pork barrel politics that potentially reached levels of clientelistic job delivery and contracting.⁵

As expected, the BZÖ clearly scores below the mean for RPPs, while the FPÖ puts significantly higher than average effort into PID (see Appendix 2 for precise scores). The Freedom Party is thus situated somewhat between the Liberal and the Christian Conservative party families. Turning to competition over valence issues (i.e. a party's competence in delivering benefits that all or almost all citizens want, including employment, low inflation, and economic growth), the BZÖ operates above the average RPP and Green party levels, whereas the FPÖ scores remarkably low. This, in part, reflects the different strategies of RPPs to quickly immunize themselves against *ex post* electoral burdens resulting from more recent cabinet membership depending upon the party's degree of cross-class appeal. While all parties tend to lose public support once they are represented in government, disenchantment among followers of RPPs is particularly pronounced and describes another kind of vulnerability specific to this party type (Heinisch, 2003). High levels of cross-class appeal make populist parties vulnerable to the salience of the economic dimension, whether presented as a valence or positional issue.

At this point we may briefly consider two implications of our results. First, clientelistic and programmatic efforts seem not to be mutually exclusive but are instead compatible for parties operating in affluent democracies. This runs counter to several theoretical propositions found in the literature on political development, democratic institutions and state formation (Kitschelt, 2000, pp. 867–68; Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007). Some established parties of different electoral sizes may encounter electoral incentives *and* have the organizational capacity to pursue a 'serve all linkage mechanisms simultaneously' strategy.

Second, the concept of party families can be meaningfully applied to some non-programmatic linkage mechanisms, most confidently party identification and charismatic mobilization. Our results corroborate this. RPPs occupy the first six positions when ranking parties for the extent of their charismatic efforts, while this strategy seems of little attraction or relevance to Green parties.⁶ Also, the range of scores for RPPs' charismatic efforts indicates that the values prioritized by certain party families/types might go hand in hand with greater homogeneity, though there is the risk of ceiling effects, as two RPPs score the maximum value (4.0).

Looking at the results of our factor analysis (results after varimax rotation) and cross-country comparative party (family) evaluation, the FPÖ and BZÖ are almost perfectly spread over the entire menu of linkage building. Both parties cater to different groups in the electorate that are motivated (i.e. convinced, mobilized) through dissimilar linkages. The inclusion of Team Stronach corroborates this impression further. This becomes clear when we examine leadership issues in more detail (the 'impersonal-charisma' dimension). For many years Haider clearly sought to act as a charismatic leader, both within his party and vis-à-vis the electorate, until he resigned as official chairman of his party upon entering government in 2000. Following the 2002 collapse of the broad electoral coalition he had constructed, and the electoral defeat of his new party in 2006, Haider restored his image as an efficient political leader in his final general elections campaign (2008). This time, however, he presented himself as an 'elder statesman', an image that surprisingly resonated with voters in their late twenties to late forties (Wagner & Kritzinger, 2010, p. 289). In sum, the FPÖ and BZÖ employed rather contrasting mechanisms on our second dimension of linkage building strategies.

Turning to leader effects, these in general seem more pronounced for right-wing parties (Costa Lobo, 2008), but the kind of leadership presented to voters can take quite different forms. With the party chairmen of the FPÖ and Team Stronach not pursuing anything like an 'elder statesman' image, there is hardly any similarity in the way Heinz-Christian Strache (chairman since 2005) and Stronach have addressed the task of establishing leader-voter congruency by means of biography and lifestyle, which is essential to voter reasoning in this field (Caprara & Zimbardo, 2004). Completing the picture of diversity, the behaviour of Josef Bucher, chairman of the BZÖ between 2009 and 2013, is again very different to his predecessor Haider and his rivals Strache and Stronach, in that he was reluctant to invoke leadership authority.

It is worth examining the differences between Strache and Stronach in incorporating party structures. Whereas in the 1990s Haider had attempted to position the FPÖ as a movement ('F' label), not a party – a development carried to extremes by Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, being the only member of his party – Strache sought to reverse this trend. Strache exerted top-down leadership embedded in a rather conventional organizational party structure. Indeed, most FPÖ voters hold authoritarian attitudes and approve of strong, unchecked leaders (Donovan, 2020). In contrast, Team Stronach was handled as a one-man show from the beginning. When the party was founded, it immediately garnered ten percent in opinion polls despite not having any concrete programmatic statement, and its front man having no prior record of holding political office, and having no other established politicians in the party. The party programme was released months after

the establishment of a parliamentary group, made possible by the influx of mainly BZÖ MPs. The programmatic appeal, though, kept being overshadowed by the party founder's biography as a successful self-made entrepreneur.⁷

Stronach emphasized his 'real life' experience and business success in his attempts to appeal to voters, and expressed contempt for professional politicians (*Berufspolitiker*), a characteristic he has in common with Italy's Silvio Berlusconi and Czechia's Andrej Babiš.⁸ The Team Stronach programme calls for downsizing government to 'a country management team'. For itself, the party claims to be the exclusive representatives of 'fairness', 'transparency' and even 'truth', using the language of 'knights of anti-politics' (Pasquino, 2005) who prove unable to institutionalize their politics and reform political institutions. Stronach's media interviews often take the form of monologues and are characterised by habitual accusations made by interviewers. When asked by Armin Wolf, the main presenter of the Austrian public broadcasting network ORF's evening news programme, whether he could overrule any decision taken by party leaders or activists, Stronach's immediate answer was 'yes, I have a veto right'. When asked in the same interview whether there was any procedure to replace him, his belated answer was 'no, I guess not' (*Zeit im Bild II*, April 9, 2013). In short, Stronach represents a successful businessman seeking to win political mandates for his party subordinates. As a politician, however, he did not act as a 'policy entrepreneur' in the Weberian, Schumpeterian or Rikerian sense, as one who would create a new political agenda supported by the skilful redefinition of policy alternatives (Winer-oither, 2020). After all, this type of leadership differs markedly from that of the current FPÖ chairman, but might well appeal to voters leaning to the right who embrace self-enhancement goals such as power and achievement orientation (Caprara et al., 2006; Aichholzer & Willmann, 2020).

6. Diversification, class vote and socio-demographic background

In addressing our research question of surplus votes potentially generated by portfolio diversification, we highlight social class voting theory for several reasons. First, scholars have adapted the concept of social class to the landscape of working conditions, market logic and social risks prevalent in post-industrial society in recent years. Based on this new framework, social class background indeed has been shown to inform an individual's preferences across key policies and issues in a theoretically consistent and predictable way (Oesch, 2012; Lefkofridi et al., 2014; Kitschelt & Rehm, 2014).

Second, ample studies have documented the (shifting) class backgrounds of the electorates of all major party families in Western Europe, including the realignment of parts of the working class in favour of RPPs. This should help us to determine whether an expansion of the voter base took place as a very likely outcome of portfolio diversification. The kind of specialization depicted at the linkage level offers better prospects, particularly for the RPP camp, since it might effectively resolve the electoral vulnerability specific to populist movement-type parties when it comes to government participation. RPPs often

suffer from high expectations among followers, programmatic inconsistencies, and high degrees of cross-class support that aggravate the task of maintaining voter-party policy congruence. Small entrepreneurs and blue-collar workers, for example, have become a core constituency of RPPs in several countries but hold very different preferences on several salient issue packages (Ivarsflaten, 2005, p. 465). Therefore, both a major effort to mobilize supporters utilizing non-policy linkages and specialized policy-based appeals (e.g. one party catering to the needs of blue-collar workers, and another catering to the preferences of the petite bourgeoisie) promise to contain loss of support and/or help expand the voter base of the RPP camp in a scenario of competing RPPs.

In fact, while the FPÖ, in the aftermath of its great electoral success in 1999, has managed to maintain high levels of support among both small entrepreneurs and blue-collar workers, the party's overall cross-class appeal has declined sharply since. Based on the International Standard Classification of Occupations 2008 (ISCO-08), published by the International Labour Organization (ILO), which is featured in the ESS (here: round four as of 2008), we apply the eight-class scheme of Oesch (2006; cf. Oesch & Rennwald, 2018).⁹ We find the FPÖ's voter base to be exceptionally homogeneous in terms of class as measured by the Herfindahl-Hirschman-Index (0.21), whereas BZÖ voters are characterized by their class diversity (0.16).¹⁰

Table 2: HHI-values for Austrian parliamentary parties as of 2008 (ESS 4)

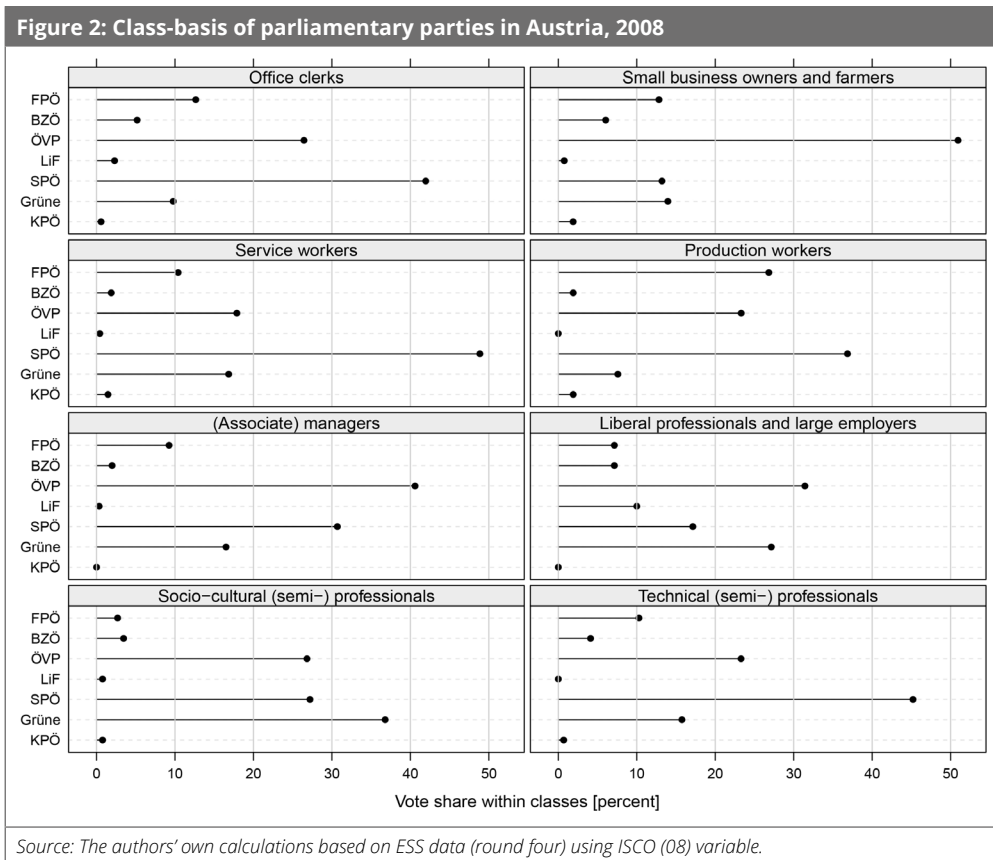
Party	GREENS	SOCIAL DEMOCRATS	PEOPLE'S PARTY	FREEDOM PARTY	ALLIANCE FOR THE FUTURE OF AUSTRIA
Herfindahl	0.166632	0.1812602	0.1511491	0.20954	0.1605499

Source: The authors.

These results agree with earlier findings by Geering and Häusermann (2011, p. 41), using data from ISSP 2006 and SSÖ 2003 for Austria, which showed the FPÖ scored at the lower end of constituency heterogeneity in a comparison of parliamentary parties from four countries (Austria, Germany, Switzerland, and the UK). The striking over-representation of workers among voters for this party corroborates findings by Oesch (for results pooling FPÖ and BZÖ, see Oesch, 2012), and by Dolezal (2008, p. 125). Dolezal analyzed articles in major daily newspapers and demonstrated that in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the FPÖ moved into the left-authoritarian quadrant (see also Kriesi, 2012, pp. 98–107).¹¹ This is consistent with the replacement by Strache-FPÖ of welfare populist rhetoric with welfare chauvinist appeals stressing distributive agency for natives, an approach which might prove effective at creating electoral appeal in continental-type welfare states (Swank & Betz, 2003; for the role of cultural protectionism, see Oesch, 2008).¹² In contrast to the class backgrounds of voters for both FPÖ and BZÖ, thanks to its founder's personal appeal, Team Stronach managed to gain above average support among blue-collar workers *and* small business owners, a pattern that had characterized the support structure of the FPÖ under Haider's leadership back in 1999 (ISA/SORA, 2013, p. 6).

Moreover, our results reveal stark contrasts in the class backgrounds of the FPÖ and BZÖ constituencies. While support for the Freedom Party has rocketed among produc-

tion workers, its fellow RPP's appeal is almost non-existent in this group. At the other end of the political preference formation spectrum, where the Greens fan base of (semi-) socio-cultural professionals is situated (Abou-Chadi & Immergut, 2019), the BZÖ fares much better than its rival. This is a remarkable finding and provides strong evidence that policy-based differentiation helped the RPP camp to significantly expand its voter base. The same remarkable nexus emerges if one investigates party choice and voter socio-demographic characteristics. In this respect, the FPÖ and BZÖ seem to attract different sets of voters, e.g. young men in the case of the Freedom Party, and young women for the BZÖ (Wagner & Kritzinger, 2010, p. 289).¹³



The drifts and shifts in voter support within the RPP camp described above reflect programmatic re-orientation, but also portfolio diversification at the linkage level on the part of the BZÖ. Josef Bucher, BZÖ chairman from April 2009 to October 2013, having taken the lead after Haider's death in a car accident, sought repeatedly to rebrand the 'movement' in terms of traditional right-wing liberalism. On 26 October 2010, he announced 'ten right-liberal principles' to exemplify the party's programmatic foundation. As early as the end of 2009, this development had led members of the pivotal Carinthia branch (*Land*

organization), which represented a stronghold of nationalist sentiment, to create their own party vehicle, to which the bulk of the branch's functionaries then defected. However, over time this new party (FPK – Freiheitliche Partei in Kärnten) would gradually give up its stand-alone position in favour of repatriation into the FPÖ, which was eventually realized in June 2013.

In fact, incentives to resolve the cross-class party electorate vulnerability as identified by Ivarsflaten are extraordinarily strong for RPPs in Austria. Here, the programmatic distribution of voters reachable by right-wing populist parties posits a real dilemma. As statistics from a recent study by Lefkofridi et al. (2014, p. 86) of 15 countries in Western Europe suggest, eligible voters are rather evenly distributed across the policy space (broadly defined as consisting of left authoritarians, right authoritarians, and right liberals). The ratio between left authoritarians and right liberals in Austria is more balanced than in any other Western European country except for Denmark. Under the assumption of purely programmatic competition, strategic moves to the left and right on the socio-economic dimension promise equal payoffs while making it almost impossible to stay simultaneously attractive to voters from both domains. This means that while the distribution of eligible voters stretched across the policy space is also reflected in different programmatic positionings of RPPs across Western Europe that 'confirm the heterogeneity of the new populist right' (Wüest et al., 2012, p. 259), the resulting dilemma is more pronounced in Austria than elsewhere.

Given the distribution of voters and the positioning of parties in a two-dimensional policy space, party competition in Austria exemplifies a scenario in which vote seeking parties may line up more along a left-right axis running from market-liberal greed and libertarian-inclusive grid/group positions, at the "leftist" end, to redistributive economic greed and authoritarian-exclusive grid/group positions at the "rightist" end (Kitschelt & Rehm, 2015). It is right-wing populism that currently constitutes polar ends of a rotated main axis of competition.

The changing nature of RPPs' class and social composition, together with recurrent patterns of voter exchange (direction, magnitude) with other parties, is reflected in the organizational transformations and ideological re-positionings of the FPÖ during the 1980s and 1990s, which were carried out to push and adapt their original winning formula. Under the leadership of Heinz-Christian Strache (2005–2019), the FPÖ represented continuity with the radical right character of the party in the 1990s, whereas the BZÖ established itself as the heir to the party in its successful early period as a populist anti-statist party in terms of rhetoric and programmatic appeal (Bornschiefer, 2010, p. 432). Consequently, voter exchange primarily occurs between the FPÖ and SPÖ (paralleling the 1990s) and the BZÖ and ÖVP (paralleling the 1980s) (Hofinger et al., 2007, p. 197).

7. Mainstream-conservative ÖVP going populist

The FPÖ has managed to consolidate its position within the RPP camp since 2014/15. But while electoral gains helped the party to re-enter government in late 2017, when the Ibiza video, which showed then-party chairman and vice chancellor Strache contemplating il-

legal kick-back payments, hit in May 2019, it was in fact the ÖVP that emerged victorious in the most recent two general elections. Under new leadership, the ÖVP's fully-fledged party machine quickly evolved a hybrid of establishment and challenger features, attempting to combine the best of two worlds in terms of competitiveness.

The ÖVP had embodied the political establishment in all its layers by showing an exhaustive record of uninterrupted representation in government at the time Kurz took over party chairmanship in May 2017. This included powerful (segmented) party branches, deep involvement in clientelistic practices, and a record number of party members in the Western hemisphere (van Biezen et al., 2012). Although the party embodies several features of challenger parties, the career of its leader, Kurz, has many of the traditional characteristics of a *Berufspolitiker* (career politician). In the words of former party whip and 2016 presidential candidate, Andreas Khol: 'Kurz grew out of the sanctums of the party' (A. Khol, personal communication, June 6, 2019). However, Kurz and the ÖVP patrons (i.e. the chairmen of the regional party branches and federations, the *Bünde*) had intended to profoundly change ÖVP party structures. The party reform was intended to supplement the 'party machine' operation with personalist vote elements: strengthened leadership on behalf of the chairman through both prerogatives on candidate selection and intra-party contests.

As Wineroither and Seeber (2018) have recently demonstrated using advanced model-based cluster analysis, establishment and challenger parties indeed employ very different, and in fact antagonistic, linkage packages (see Table 1 for similar linkage dimensionality in Austria). Examples of major parties crossing this demarcation line are very rare across Europe, with successful examples being virtually non-existent (see Enyedi, 2016, for the plausible exception of Hungarian FIDESZ). How did the ÖVP overcome these eminent contradictions in the eye of the public and credibly promise change? We observe a specific assortment of strategies including credit claiming, blame avoidance and technocratic best policy-appeal (Weaver, 1986) that allowed for successful portfolio diversification in the business of winning elections. First, the closure of the so-called Balkan route demonstrated leadership ability through multilateral networking and negotiations. At the height of the international migration crisis in 2015, Kurz, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, stood firmly against German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Austria's Social Democratic Chancellor, who both supported managing the influx of refugees of migrants at the European level. In 2016, at a conference hosted by Kurz in Vienna, the West Balkan countries decided to close their borders. Second, Kurz's youth made it difficult for opponents to label him as part of the political elite. Nevertheless, his record as a career politician did leave him vulnerable to public perception of him as an old school mainstream-establishment representative. Hence, the new party chairman in the summer of 2017 refused to take over the position of vice chancellor in the outgoing cabinet of SPÖ Chancellor Christian Kern. He also declined to accept his seat in parliament following his dismissal as Chancellor by a vote of no confidence in the aftermath of the Ibiza scandal. Both the 'Balkan route closure' narrative and his spectacular rise to party leadership, in conjunction with party reform, helped him effectively deal with the simultaneous tasks of (a) avoiding blame for unpopular decision made by previous cabinets (Kurz had been a member of the cabinet since 2013) and (b) claiming credit for his record as Minister of Foreign Affairs and his role in the breakup of the grand coalition. In terms of blame

avoidance, Kurz employed a strategy like that of Chancellor Schüssel, who had also formed a coalition with the FPÖ in the year 2000: he attempted to place the blame for past government performance on the Social Democrats, he enacted a cooperative leadership within his coalition, a balanced budget and, in the case of Kurz, he expressed strong anti-migrant rhetoric and enacted restrictive migration policies (for Schüssel, see Wineroither, 2009).

Certainly, authentic leadership had to be accompanied by substantial policy switches to win back the large numbers of voters ÖVP had lost to the FPÖ since 2002, the competitor best equipped to expose the ÖVP's electoral vulnerabilities (Krouwel et al., 2020). In fact, the ÖVP's hybridity strategy broke generational and decades-long patterns of voting, allowing the ÖVP to fare better among blue-collar workers compared with the SPÖ, and to reverse a trend of declining vote share by appealing to voters in economically exposed and politically hitherto unsheltered occupational sectors. At the same time, the ÖVP maintained high levels of support among its politically sheltered core constituency, for example farmers and civil servants, two groups the FPÖ had largely failed to resonate with since the mid-1980s (SORA, 2017; Wineroither et al., 2021).

In the policy domain, the Kurz-ÖVP reinvigorated the populist anti-statist formula introduced by Haider, Bossi and Le Pen thirty years earlier. This formula consisted of being (a) strikingly liberal on socio-economic policies, (b) tough on crime and immigration, and (c) moderately but consistently conservative on issues of socio-political governance. It is noteworthy that the ÖVP now engages in soft anti-Brussels rhetoric, including criticism of alleged paternalism and excessive bureaucracy (ORF, 2019). This represents a significant turnaround as the party had previously invested a great deal of effort into building up a reputation as the most pro-integrationist party within the Austrian party system (prior to the liberal NEOS). The party would not limit its anti-elitist and anti-institutionalist rhetoric to the European Commission, though. The Kurz-ÖVP, for example, mounted numerous attacks against 'leftist conspirators' in the office of the Public Prosecutor for Economic Crimes and Corruption (WKStA) (Kurier, 2021). The former chancellor (2017–19 and 2020–21) repeatedly praised common-sense approaches in fighting the Covid pandemic and man-made climate change (APA, 2021), thereby returning to the theme of his government statement as newly elected prime minister in 2017 (ORF, 2017).

Table 3: Evolution of right-wing populist electoral winning formulas in Austria

TYPE	OCCURRENCE	KEY LINKAGE	DIRECTION OF CHANGE	KEY ROLE OF LEADERSHIP	LEVEL OF IMPLEMENTATION
populist anti-statist	mid 1980s	programmatic	transformation, niche	yes, charismatic	single party
radical right	early 1990s	programmatic	evolution	yes, charismatic	single party
portfolio diversification I differentiation	mid 2000s	most/all linkages	differentiation	yes, charismatic	competing parties, intra-camp
portfolio diversification II hybridity	late 2010s	programmatic	reform	yes, non-charismatic	single party

Source: The authors.

While between 2017 and 2019, the FPÖ, which was in government, often employed hard-line anti-migrant rhetoric, the ÖVP contributed legislative deliverables that qualified as large-scale welfare chauvinism (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2020), and rejection of liberal immigration policy. This included the government's introduction of separate classes for migrant children (*Deutschförderklassen*), and its leading role in the exodus of countries from the UN migration pact, as well as new limitations on child support for foreign residents (indexation) that the EU Commission deems a breach of contract.

8. Conclusion

As pioneers of adaptation to altered conditions of party competition, right-wing populists in Austria have experienced continuing success. This is largely down to the series of electoral winning formulas they have employed. Our empirical findings cover crucial aspects of voter-party relations, and provide detailed information on both supply-side and demand-side politics. First, by including DALP data, we increased the scope of our analysis beyond programmatic competition, and investigated the magnitude of clientelistic and expressive efforts by parties in a cross-country perspective. We found clear evidence of patterns of linkage effort on the part of Austrian RPPs, which were capable of resolving electoral dilemmas and vulnerabilities both specific and non-specific to RPPs. Second, using ESS data, we found evidence in the class basis of party constituencies that suggests portfolio diversification expanded the voter base of RPPs by gaining support from groups of voters hitherto not resonating with RPPs (e.g. leftist liberals and libertarians, and young females) while holding onto the vote of their core constituency (e.g. skilled and unskilled workers).

The recent populist transformation of the ÖVP towards hybridity proved extremely effective in diminishing the toxic nature of the establishment status that burdens many mainstream parties across Europe (for Eastern Europe, see Havlík & Pinková, 2012). This might serve as a role model for other major conservative parties in their dual battle against centre-left competitors and the far right (the example of Boris Johnson's Red Toryism naturally comes to mind). Finally, what stands out in the pursuit of winning formulas is the pivotal role of political leadership, which itself appears highly conditional upon both party systemic and character trait-based prerequisites (compared to the failure of the 'good cop, bad cop' performance by CSU-leaders Seehofer and Söder over the course of the migration crisis) but *not* bound to the leader's charismatic prerequisites.

The established RPP model of vote maximization arguably describes a winning formula for Austria's entire political right. As Lefkofridi et al. (2014) have shown, there are good prospects for RPPs in targeting left-authoritarian voters whose ideological preferences are not consistently represented by other parties' programmatic stances. Developments in Austria have 'most clearly exemplified' some RPPs' move towards programmatic representation of voters holding views that combine 'cultural protectionism with the defence of the welfare state in economic terms' (Kriesi, 2012, p. 103).

The preserved *status quo ante* on the left party spectrum contrasts sharply with the drastic reconfigurations that have occurred in the RPP camp. Therefore, not only is

the share of votes for RPPs particularly high in Austria, but although the SPÖ dominated in the 1970s and until the early 1980s, the combined left has failed to gain a majority in any parliamentary election since the mid-1980s (both at the national and European levels).¹⁴ Altogether, our findings point to both the vast electoral potential of parties embracing nationalist appeal *and* the far right hitting a ceiling of popular support in affluent Western societies as vote surplus is generated by the simultaneous presence of radical right and populist right parties, hence corroborating Cas Mudde's (2010) 'pathological normalcy' hypothesis.

Although the findings of this case study are in part country-specific, there is no reason to believe that a mixture of specialization, differentiation and diversification performed by various parties belonging to the same party type or ideological bloc could not significantly increase the electoral stakes in other countries. The structure of the political space in Austria is rather similar to that of national party systems in its peer group of post-industrial societies in affluent democracies: these are populated by the same party families, and show similar ideological distributions of voters. In addition, the entire linkage building profile at the system level largely reflects the European average. Electoral incentives to engage in at least some kind of portfolio diversification are expected to further increase, whether induced by strategic horizontal coordination among existing parties, or precipitated by the entry of challenger parties.

Endnotes:

1. The traditional party cadres and core constituency had to cope with the replacement of German nationalist values by Austrian identity politics, the end of anti-clerical stances in support of 'militant Christianity', and the abandonment of advocacy for supranational political integration. All of these developments occurred within little more than a decade (between 1986 and 1997/98).
2. For empirical evidence and a detailed account of the theoretical argument, see Kitschelt (2012). For further information on the data and codebook, see <https://web.duke.edu/democracy/data.html>. For post-materialism as a general theory of value change, see Inglehart (1977).
3. Many thanks to Herbert Kitschelt and his research team at Duke University for their generosity in sharing their data with us.
4. Our residual category of leftover parties consists of three types of parties: pronounced left-wingers (both socialist and communist); fresh newcomers of – at the time of the study – an undefined programmatic character; and single-issue protest, separatist and regionalist parties.
5. The DALP survey's composition, the content of explanatory comments, and the answer categories do not allow for any further claims and plausibility tests on this matter. Though particularistic and directional in nature, most experts in the field refuse to subsume 'pork barrel politics' under a clientelistic heading and consider it non-contingent on vote delivery (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007, p. 10).
6. The populist anti-establishment character of RPPs becomes apparent through their higher scores on clientelism but lower relevance of stressing competence to govern when compared to Green parties.
7. Stronach had immigrated to Canada in the 1950s and made a fortune in the retail sector.
8. However, Stronach has so far not seized on any kind of entertainment politics detached from his core entrepreneurial activity.
9. For the ISCO-scheme, see ILO (2012). Oesch's theoretically induced scheme of class composition merges educational levels (degree of marketable skills) and professional occupations (various work logics), which, along with gender and age, have been identified in various studies as the main predictors of RPP support (Kitschelt, 2007b, p. 1199).

10. Note the low number of cases at this level of disaggregation for individual party support by specific social class, which calls for cautious interpretation of results.
11. The agreement of our results with those of Oesch (2008) and Geering and Häusermann (2011) is particularly informative, since their analyses covered a period of atypical competition in the absence of a grand coalition government.
12. 'The Handbook of Freedomite Politics' (FPÖ 2013), designed to offer guidelines to party functionaries, proposes the exclusion of third-country nationals (non-EU citizens) from any family-friendly policies and social welfare benefits (p. 37), and the introduction of separate social security (p. 118) and health insurance (pp. 222–23) systems for foreigners. The FPÖ emphasized its positions a number of times by initiating special sessions in parliament and publishing campaign brochures.
13. The predicted vote probabilities suggest intriguing associations in light of our paper's basic analytic narrative. For instance, the BZÖ almost monopolizes the support for RPPs among young voters inclined towards market-liberal policies, whereas we see the opposite effect on the cultural dimension. A similar trade-off can be observed with reference to *ptv* depending on cultural ideology by gender: male voters rally behind the FPÖ, while almost all female voters holding these views prefer the BZÖ (Wagner & Kritzing, 2010, pp. 24–29).
14. Parties on the left scored slightly higher than parties on the right in the 2006 elections, but the failure of Liste Martin to overcome the entry barrier led to a majority of seats being secured for the ÖVP/FPÖ/BZÖ over the SPÖ/Greens.

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