

# THE FPÖ'S ROLE IN RESHAPING SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IN AUSTRIA

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## ABSTRACT

Erinn Crider: The FPÖ's Role in Reshaping Social Assistance in Austria  
(Under the direction of Robert Jenkins and Friederike Römer)

The Freedom Party of Austria, as a populist radical right party, has reshaped the Austrian social assistance system. The FPÖ's electoral success and participation at the Federal and Länder level has led to a shift in the range of acceptable social policies for mainstream parties. In order to demonstrate how the FPÖ has concretely affected social policies in Austria, this thesis will follow the development and eventual failure of the Means Tested Minimum Income Reform (MMI). Utilizing data from the Manifesto Project, newspaper articles, party manifestos and election data this thesis illustrates that as the FPÖ gained electoral success, beginning in 2015, the mainstream parties began shifting their policy preferences rightwards and towards welfare chauvinism and welfare limitation, resulting in the failure of MMI. This stands in contrast to the initial negotiations surrounding MMI, which occurred in 2008 during a period where the FPÖ had reduced electoral success and influence.

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## **CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION**

In the case of Austria, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), has been remarkably successful electorally and this electoral success has translated into a strong effect on the Austrian social policy both broadly and in terms of individual reforms. Since the 1940's Austria's political system was defined by a stable two party system divided between the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ). Working in a unique federal system built on cooperation, both formal and informal, the stable system allowed for reforms and policy change through negotiations. The FPÖ's electoral success disrupted and reshaped this system.

I break new ground in this thesis by arguing that the FPÖ, as a Populist Radical Right Party (PRRP), has reshaped the post-war Austrian social policy. The party's electoral success and participation at the Federal and Länder level has led to distinct shift in the Overton Window, or range of acceptable policies, for the mainstream parties. In order to demonstrate how the FPÖ has concretely affected social policies in Austria, my analysis will follow the development and eventual failure of the Means Tested Minimum Income Reform (MMI). Prior to MMI, Austria had federal provisions establishing social assistance, but as a federalist state, Austria's nine provinces or Länder controlled the funding, administration and specific legislation over the program. This resulted in highly variable and often unpredictable levels of social assistance across Austria.

The goal of the MMI reform, pushed through by Austria's center-left party the SPÖ, was to harmonize social assistance benefits across Austria and fight poverty in the country as a whole by establishing a uniform minimum income scheme.

Unlike Austria's mainstream parties, the FPÖ has defined itself along new political issues such as immigration. As a result, one of the most defining characteristics of the party is its' welfare chauvinist stance, or the stance that welfare access should be restricted to 'deserving' natives. MMI was negotiated and passed in 2010, while the FPÖ was in a relative electoral slump and renegotiated in 2015 after the "Refugee Crisis" made immigration an extremely salient issue, catapulting the FPÖ to electoral success. The timing of this reform and the salient nature of its content, social assistance, makes MMI an ideal tool for demonstrating the FPÖ's influence on Austrian policy making.

In order to support my hypothesis that the FPÖ's electoral success has led to a reshaping of Austrian social policy I will first provide an overview of Austrian federalism, the Austrian party system and the history of the FPÖ. Before exploring how the FPÖ has impacted Austrian politics, it is helpful to first understand the unique system that the parties operate within. The next section will detail the data and methods that support this thesis, including a detailed description of case study selection. Following this, I will begin to trace how the MMI reform was developed and eventually failed. In doing this I will highlight the FPÖ's participation in government and party stances on social assistance in the three core stages of Pre MMI, MMI Enacted and Post MMI. In following this timeline it will illuminate how FPÖ electoral success and participation in government at the Federal and Länder levels results in mainstream parties pursuing more welfare chauvinist policies.

## **CHAPTER TWO THEORY**

### **2.1.Austrian Federalism**

Austria has a federal system of government, beginning with the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which relied heavily on municipal authority (Karlhofer, 2015, 60). In this system the Empire laid out laws, but municipalities had the responsibility of interpreting and enforcing these laws. This system persisted through the fall of the Habsburg Empire after WWI, when the crown lands were renamed the Länder of the Austrian Federation on October 1, 1920, when the Federal Constitution was accepted (Erk, 2004, 6). The system was again maintained after WWII (Err, 2004, 6). In the current system all of the powers and responsibilities are between the federal government (Bund), provincial governments (Länder), and the municipalities (Gemeinden) as described in the Austrian Constitution.

On the federal level, like many other European countries, Austria has a parliamentary system. The President, is largely a symbolic figure that is elected every six years. Though the President's powers are limited, the election is an important measure of voter's preferences prior to parliamentary elections. The true political power of the country lies in its bicameral parliament. The Nationalrat (National Assembly) is the main legislative body. Members are elected every five years and the National Assembly is responsible for writing and passing legislative acts. It is also within this body that the Austrian government is formed. In order for a government to be formed and a Chancellor to be appointed, one group must hold the majority of

seats in the National Assembly. If this is not accomplished by a single party, as is often the case, a coalition must be formed. If these coalitions break down new elections can be called outside of the regular 5 year cycle.

The Bundesrat (Federal Council) is the secondary and much weaker branch of the parliament that represents Länder interests (Bussjäger, 2018,187). The Federal Council is composed of representatives from each Länder based on population with the largest having 12 representatives and smallest having 3 (Bussjäger, 2018,187). The Governors of each Land is also able to participate in proceedings, in particular through rotating 6 month chairmanships (Bussjäger, 2018, 190). The main power of the Federal Council is the ability to veto legislative acts passed in the National Assembly, however this veto is rarely used and can be easily overturned in the National Assembly by a repeated resolution (Bussjäger, 2018, 187). As described by Karlhofer (2015, 63), between 2000 and 2014, there were only 24 vetoes in the Federal Council and all of them were overruled by the National Assembly. This unequal division of power has significant implications for Austrian politics. The relative weakness of the Federal Council has pushed Länder to pursue power in other avenues, such as administrative power and informal cooperation.

While the legislative powers of the Länder are relatively weak in the Federal Council, the constitution does outline specific powers for the Länder that are outside of the federal scope. Most federal powers are outlined specifically, but “the so-called *Generalklausel* of Article 15 gave Länder competence in all areas not explicitly mentioned in the constitution. Most Länder competences are determined through this residual clause (i.e., anything that is not specified as federal competence is Länder competence by default)” (Erk, 2004, 2). There can also be overlap

in the regulation of specific subjects as long as Federal and Länder address different aspects, such as the National Assembly legislating that there should be a social assistance system and Länder implementing specific regulations and requirements to access these funds (Gamper and Koch, 2014, 110).

While the federal government might legislate laws, the Länder Governors and governments are responsible for executing and enforcing these laws (Gamper and Koch, 2014, 104). This implementation power includes managing budgeting and spending, which lends itself to significant influence over actual outcome of federally legislated policies (Bussjäger, Schramek and Johler, 2018, 78). This system puts the Länd Governors in a unique and influential position.

This sort of indirect administration makes the position of Governor highly consequential. It is the Governor who has final say in the issues of indirect federal administration (Karlhofer, 2015, 65). Karlhofe (2015, 65) explains that the Governor is in a unique position between the federal government and the Länder governments:

He/she alone is the central government's counterpart, and thus responsible neither to the Landtag nor to his/her cabinet mates in the Land government. Since the Landtag's autonomous legislative competencies are limited and with regard to the dominance of the executive headed by the government, the provincial parliament's scope of influence is narrow, the more so as even its formal right of creating and controlling the government is considerably restricted in practice. Not only is the governor "government head, head of the bureaucracy, responsible agent for [...] indirect federal administration", and last but not least, in all external relations "head of state". Moreover, any candidate for governor is usually leader of his respective party and therefore enjoys strong intra-party authority – as a result, Landtag elections are primarily governor elections.

On the Land level, unlike the president, the executive office is extremely powerful. As a result the Land legislative bodies very rarely interact with the federal legislative bodies. Instead, the Land Governor, who is in charge of all external relations, is the main conduit through which the

Land government and federal government interacts. Governors are also generally the leaders of their respective parties in the Land. Usually Land level parties fall inline with national party guidelines, there is precedence of Land parties breaking away from national party guidelines in significant ways, such as un approved coalitions as will be discussed later. Governors bring their strong executive powers and party influence with them to the many conferences, where a large part of the informal negotiations and cooperation that are foundational to the Austrian system take place.

Arguably, just as important to the Austrian system is the informal cooperation that gives Länder their most influence. Due to the *Generalklausel*, the Länder do have a menagerie of tools, such as concluding treaties, voluntary formal agreements and participating in joint conferences, in order to cooperate between themselves and the federal government (Gamper and Koch, 2014, 104). Voluntary formal agreements, or concordats, are particularly frequent in the field of social welfare (Gamper and Koch, 2014, 112). The benefits of these informal tools for the Länder is clear. “The Länder prefer to enter into agreements with each other in order to achieve uniform standards throughout Austria rather than face the threat of a federal constitutional amendment, which would transfer one of their powers to the federal level” (Gamper and Koch, 2014, 111). Each Länder also has a liaison office that manages and facilitates coordination and cooperation (Gamper and Koch, 2014, 116). The exchange of information and relationship building that happens through these offices can be integral to policy making.

There are a number of conferences and joint bodies in Austria where Länder officials, federal officials, municipality representatives and senior public servants meet, but the most important of the joint conferences is the *Landeshauptmännerkonferenz* (Conference of Land

Governors). While not expressly mentioned in Austria's constitution, The Conference of Land Governors allows the Länder to compensate for the weak *Bundesrat* and represent Länder interests in federal policymaking (Bussjäger, 2018, 193). It is an informal and voluntary meeting, but "being a stronghold of Länder power that is much better able to defend Länder interests than the Federal Council, the Conference of Land Governors has been called 'power in the shadow'" (Gamper and Koch, 2014, 117). It is particularly powerful in terms of negotiating the budgets and cost-sharing for the implementation of the federal laws (Bussjäger, Schramek and Jöhler, 2018, 96).

These strengths of the Länder also lend themselves to subnational variation. As is constitutionally protected, Länder are able to enact their own legislation provided it does not conflict with federal regulations. On the administrative side, differing interpretations and budgeting strategies can result in differing policy outcomes. The same policies presented to different Länder can result in widely different applications of the law, especially when budgeting is concerned. This can be seen in the example of social assistance, where the Länder mandated benefit maximums and requirements can vary dramatically despite it being a federally mandated system. Additionally, the Länder can advocate for their specific interests in the joint conferences and meetings.

## **2.2.Austrian Party System Overview**

For many years the Austrian party system was defined by its stability of its two *Lager*, or parties and associated organizations. The ÖVP, the conservative-Catholic "black" party, and the SPÖ, the left wing "red" party, were overwhelmingly dominant (Erk, 2004,6). As Erk explains, this divide dominated much of Austria's political life.

“The red-black division became the defining political cleavage of the new Austrian state as the public sphere was divided between the two groups according to the system of proportionality (*Proporz*). All bureaucracies and public corporations, from their governing boards to the rank and file, were divided between the two *Lager*,” (Erk, 2004, 6).

The black/red divide extended into all levels of political life, with trade unions, interest groups and professional associations all being aligned along the black/red cleavage. The depth of this divide also signified its stability over many decades. From 1947 to 1983 governing passed between the ÖVP and the SPÖ, unless they entered a coalition together (Erk, 2004, 7).

Beginning in 1983 the FPÖ and eventually The Greens began garnering enough electoral success to participate in coalitions as junior partners (Erk, 2004, 7). This shift in the 1980s was slight with the SPÖ and ÖVP still maintaining the majority of the votes. Until the 1980's they achieved “continuously more than 90 percent of the votes, and the third largest party FPÖ ranging between five and seven percent” (Karlhofer, 2015, 66). Into the 90s however, the FPÖ, previously a social populist party now reinvented as a populist radical right party (PRRP) (Karlhofer, 2013, 46) and the Greens both experienced marginally more success. While they were not anywhere near able to overtake the SPÖ or the ÖVP, their success damaged the ability of the parties to cooperate or as Karlhofer (2013, 46) explains, “...a decline of the parties’ capacity to reconcile conflicting interests.” The truth of the matter is that the Greens and the FPÖ, while far from majority votes, became significant and could no longer be ignored.

Even if more radical parties are not able to gain a majority vote and establish a government independently, they still have the power to radically influence the political landscape. One of the ways the FPÖ has been able to influence mainstream political parties is called the Overton Window. The Overton Window “...describes the spectrum of concepts,

policies and approaches that can be publicly discussed without being ridiculed or marginalized” (Smith, 2019). There are only a certain number of potential policies that could be considered reasonable and probable by the political actors within any political situation and this is determined by a number of factors, such as past precedent, public opinion and each party’s political goals. When political actors deem policy options to be outside the Overton Window these options would have no hope of being discussed, let alone acted upon. However, when extreme parties, such as the FPÖ, publicly take on more radical ideas and have them legitimized through media coverage, debates and electoral success, they can shift the Overton Window. While the window may not shift far enough to include the specific policy ideas expressed by the extreme parties, it can substantially shift the potentially acceptable policy options further in that direction. In short, the electoral success of the FPÖ can force the SPÖ and the ÖVP to consider more right wing populist policy options than would have previously been possible.

Scholars such as Mudde, Schumacher, and van Kersbergen, have also found evidence that successful populist parties can force an even more fundamental change in mainstream political competitors. Based on the assumption that at least part of a party’s motivation is vote and office seeking, it stands to reason that mainstream parties might adjust their platforms after seeing the success of a party such as the FPÖ, especially when this success comes at their own expense (Meguid, 2008). Schumacher and van Kersbergen (2014, 23) summarize this process succinctly, “...(1) Populists take a position that opposes the establishment; (2) from this position, populists enjoy electoral success; (3) mainstream parties accommodate populist parties by adjusting their policy positions away from their traditional stance.” Every party reacts uniquely to these pressures in terms of the policy choices that are shifted and the severity to which they are

changed, but it is easy to imagine why a party might adjust their platform in order to garner more votes.

While it is easy to understand why mainstream political parties might shift their policy goals in an effort to garner more votes, the question remains: how did the FPÖ manage to get such a dramatic foothold in what was once an incredibly stable two party system? One potential answer points to an evolution of Lipset and Rokkan's political cleavages theory. Lipset and Rokkan outline four major political cleavages that were thought to define political interests and conflicts: owner/worker, church/state, urban/rural and center/periphery (Lipset, 1976). In Austria, the SPÖ and ÖVP defined themselves through opposition on three of these issues: owner/worker, church/state and urban/rural (Aichholzer, 2014, 117).

The SPÖ represented the working, secular and urban voters and the ÖVP took the opposing side, representing religious and rural voters that were often business owners (Aichholzer, 2014, 117). The FPÖ challenges this system by representing entirely new political conflicts in society. The party itself does not have a strong consistent stance on these traditional conflicts and instead focuses on defining their platform in regard to immigration, European integration, anti-elite sentiments and dissatisfaction with established systems (Rooduijin, 2013, 32-33). Caiani and Císař point to impact of globalization as the source of these new conflicts "... the new right-wing populist parties' mobilization of the 'losers' in the processes of globalization is seen to be the driving force behind the restructuring of West European politics" (2019, 4). The positive response of Austrian voters to the FPÖ's identity defined by these new conflicts clearly demonstrates that these issues are indeed salient in Austria and challenges how the SPÖ and ÖVP

have identified themselves for decades. As the SPÖ and ÖVP have not clearly defined themselves along these cleavages, the FPÖ's success comes at their expense.

Those that vote for the FPÖ have not completely abandoned the traditional cleavages, however. Many of these voters share characteristics with typical SPÖ voters, in that they are often low-skilled workers with lower educational attainment, urban and secular (Aichholzer, 2014, 119). Since 1994 a core voter base for the FPÖ has been blue-collar workers, who are often found in urban centers as compared to the rural farming communities that are more often associated with supporting the ÖVP (Kritzing, 2013, 24). The common demographics of the FPÖ's voter base may be due in part to the fact that these groups "are more likely to feel that they are modernization or globalization 'losers'" (Aichholzer, 2014, 118) and therefore have more reason to feel discontented with the current establishment and opposition to the established

government is a key FPÖ objective. This overlap between voter bases is significant because it suggests that Social Democrats may lose the most in regards to FPÖ competition (Aichholzer, 2014, 131).

While SPÖ and FPÖ voters may share some

**Table 1**

**Federal Election Results 1975-2019**

Year	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ
1975	50.4% (93)	42.9% (80)	5.4% (10)
1979	51.0% (95)	41.9% (77)	6.1% (11)
1983	47.6% (90)	43.2% (81)	5.0% (12)
1986	43.1% (80)	41.3% (77)	9.7% (18)
1990	42.8% (80)	32.1% (60)	16.6% (33)
1994	34.9% (65)	25.5% (42)	22.5% (42)
1995	38.1% (71)	28.3% (52)	21.9% (41)
1999	33.15% (65)	26.91% (52)	26.91% (52)
2002	42.30% (79)	36.50% (69)	10.00% (18)
2006	35.30% (68)	34.22% (66)	11.21% (21)
2008	29.26% (57)	25.98% (51)	17.54% (34)
2013	26.86% (52)	24.01% (47)	20.55% (40)
2017	26.90% (52)	31.50% (62)	26.00% (51)
2019	21.20% (40)	37.50% (71)	16.20% (31)

"General Election Results - Austria Totals." *Election Resources*, [electionresources.org/at/nationalrat.php?election=1975&land=.](http://electionresources.org/at/nationalrat.php?election=1975&land=)

characteristics, both mainstream parties feel an electoral decline in response to the FPÖ's success, as can be seen in Table 1.

The biggest difference in individuals that vote for the FPÖ is that their primary motivations are not based on the traditional cleavages that define SPÖ/ÖVP competition. They are concerned with conflict areas of immigration, European integration and anti-establishment sentiments.

Aicholzer summarizes this idea nicely by writing, "a new kind of political polarization has developed and provides the basis for the electoral success of the FPÖ and the associated electoral decline of the two mainstream parties" (2014, 131). This new kind of political polarization refers to the emergence of new cleavages, as discussed earlier and in addition to declining influence, it is likely that the FPÖ's success will force the other parties to define themselves in regard to these new salient political dimensions, which would constitute a fundamental change to Austria's once stable two party system.

Without stability and with the addition of new parties it is more difficult for a single party to win enough votes to form a government on its own and enact policy changes. As is shown in Obinger's (2002, 63) work, much of the policy changes possible in Austria are due to the fact that it has a "permissive constitution," so that an elected party has significant power in passing reforms. Being forced into coalitions due to the votes being siphoned off by the FPÖ and the Greens changes this dynamic: "Policy stalemates are more likely to result from quarrels within a coalition government, since each coalition partner holds veto powers" (Obinger, 2006, 63). This creates a much more challenging environment in which to enact legislation.

### **2.3.FPÖ History**

The rise of PRRPs has been a hotly debated topic for several decades. While populism is a widely recognized word, defining populism and categorizing populist parties has been a challenge taken on by numerous scholars in many works. One of the major features of populist parties is their ability to shift and change according to the events and political climates of the time. In the past populist parties have been "...revolutionary, reactionary, left wing, right wing, authoritarian and libertarian" (Taggart, 2004, 275). Today, populism is mostly associated with the radical right (Mudde, 2004, 549). This ability to change and shift has made it difficult to pin down exact definitions and categorizations of populist parties and movements. Despite this challenge, there remains enough similarities to approach a definition and differentiate between other party families.

One of the most widely accepted definitions comes from Taggart's 2004 work, which outlines several themes that populist parties share. These themes are a hostility to representative politics, identification with a fictionalized 'heartland', opposition to the political elites, and being reactionary to a sense of extreme crisis (Taggart, 2004, 273-275). These themes are based on opposition and forming a distinctive identity based on in-groups and the 'other'. Populist parties uphold a romanticized ideal of the country, what Taggart refers to as 'the heartland'. Within this narrative the natives are the in-group and the others represent a threat to this 'heartland'. This threat can come from outside, like immigrants, or from within as an oppositional party or ethnic minority that is corrupting the idealized country. These themes can be molded and shaped around any established governing party, cultural identity, or perceived threat.

Mudde (2004, 543) likewise points to the defining feature of populist parties being focused on opposition: "I define populism as an ideology that considers society to be ultimately

separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.” Again, this simple design featuring an in- and out-group, while unique and powerful, is easily adapted to the specific circumstances of a state at a specific time. Scholars point to the success of the PRRPS in general as a mobilization of the dissatisfaction felt by those left behind by globalization (Caiani, 2019, 15). These sentiments can be adapted based on a crisis at the time, such as the 2008 financial crisis, which manifested in Euro-skepticism in many parties, or the 2015 ‘refugee crisis’, which made immigration an incredibly salient topic across Europe and anti-immigration/anti-refugee popular amongst populist parties.

The FPÖ has not always been a PRRP, however. The party is as old as the ÖVP and the SPÖ, but it has taken decades of evolution for it to land on successful platform. It began after WWII as a small relatively mainstream liberal party. In 1986, the party’s platform was staunchly anti-elite and from 1991 until 1996 the party was identified as social populist (Van Kessel, 2011, 41). Social populism is defined by the combination of populism and socialism as the party’s core ideology (Mudde, 2007, 48). Social Populist parties still oppose the established system, but are aligned with egalitarian principles (Mudde, 2007, 48). It wasn’t until 1996 that it again transformed into the now recognizable radical right, anti-immigrant and anti-internationalist platform (Van Kessel, 2011, 41).

A large part of the party’s success and growth has been credited to the former leader. Jörg Haider, who took over the party in 1986. He was known for his tight grip over the party, charisma and his dramatic style of rhetoric (Van Kessel, 2011, 42). Opponents to the FPÖ often condemned Haider’s comments, such as praising the Nazi party’s employment policies. But

despite his alleged racist sympathies, his success and the support of the Austrian voters could not be ignored (Taggart, 2004, 271).

Haider led the FPÖ into its current populist and anti-establishment position from his stronghold in Carinthia. Prior to Haider taking over, the FPÖ averaged 5-8 percent of the vote (Aichholzer, 2014, 114). Under his leadership the FPÖ achieved significant political success, especially in comparison to other PRRPs in western Europe. Since 1986 the party has averaged “around 15 per cent of the vote in national parliamentary elections and never falling below the 9.7 per cent of 1986. It is also one of a small number of radical-right parties to have participated in government” (Aichholzer, 2014, 114). The FPÖ’s first peak in power came in the 1999 election, with the party garnering 26.9 percent of the vote and participating in a coalition with the ÖVP (Van Kessel, 2011, 41).

The coalition entered into government in 2000. One might expect that this kind of coalition might signal a positive turning point for the FPÖ with it firmly seated as a major player in Austrian politics, but instead the coalition and the policies it passed resulted in a devastating decline in popularity. One of the most notable accomplishments of this coalition was reduction in welfare by extending the age of retirement (Afonso, 2014, 280). This welfare retrenchment largely affected blue collar workers, who are the FPÖ’s major supporters (Afonso, 2014, 280). As a result when the new elections were called in 2002, the FPÖ lost 34 of their parliamentary seats and witnessed large internal splits within the party that eventually led to the creation of the BZÖ, a right-wing party led by Haider, in 2005 (Afonso, 2014, 281). In addition to betraying their voters by enabling welfare retrenchment, the coalition also struck another blow to the

FPÖ's credibility as an anti-establishment platform is difficult to maintain as part of a ruling coalition (Van Kessel, 2011, 42).

Following this coalition, the FPÖ received the lowest percentages of votes since 1986. In 2002 and 2006 they were unable to garner more than 15 percent of the vote in parliamentary elections (Aichholzer, 2014, 117).

**Table 2**

**Federal Election Results 1999 to 2019**

Year	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	Greens	Resulting Coalition
1999	33.15% (65)	26.91% (52)	26.91% (52)	7.40% (14)	ÖVP/FPÖ
2002	42.30% (79)	36.50% (69)	10.00% (18)	9.50% (17)	ÖVP/FPÖ
2006	35.30% (68)	34.22% (66)	11.21% (21)	10.49% (20)	SPÖ/ÖVP
2008	29.26% (57)	25.98% (51)	17.54% (34)	10.43% (20)	SPÖ/ÖVP
2013	26.86% (52)	24.01% (47)	20.55% (40)	12.34% (24)	SPÖ/ÖVP
2017	26.90% (52)	31.50% (62)	26.00% (51)	-	ÖVP/FPÖ
2019	21.20% (40)	37.50% (71)	16.20% (31)	13.90% (26)	FPÖ/Greens

"IFES Election Guide: Elections: Austrian National Council 2017." *Austrian National Council 2017*, IFES Election Guide | Elections, 2017, [www.electionguide.org/elections/id/3026/](http://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/3026/).

These devastating election results contributed to an internal split within the party resulting in the formation of the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ). The BZÖ was lead by Jörg Haider, who developed a more moderate office-seeking platform (Heinisch, 2018, 1025). Heinz-Christian Strache led what was left of the FPÖ. The BZÖ was moderately successful at the national level, but the majority of their strength was based on Haider's leadership and the parties popularity in Carinthia (Heinisch, 2018, 1025). However, even this moderate success had national implications as the split weakened the FPÖ, the rival for the SPÖ and the ÖVP.

The event that had an even more significant impact on the national stage however, was the disintegration of the BZÖ. Haider died suddenly in a car accident in 2008. While the BZÖ's

platform was more moderate than the FPÖ, the foundation of the party was its leadership rather than its platform (Heinisch, 2018, 1025). When Haider died the BZÖ fell apart and the majority of the BZÖ's supporters returned to the FPÖ. Since then, the newly reunited FPÖ has again been garnering significant electoral success, largely at the expense of the SPÖ and ÖVP, breaking through 15 percent in 2009 (Heinisch, 2018, 1025). In 2017 after the parliamentary elections, the FPÖ again entered into a coalition with the ÖVP with 26 percent of the votes (IFES Election, 2017).

### **CHAPTER THREE CASE SELECTION AND DATA**

Austria was chosen for this thesis for two reasons. Firstly, the FPÖ is one of the most successful PRRP in Europe. Most European countries have instances of PRRPs arising, but often mainstream parties shun them and do their best to keep them from participating in Government. This was the case in Germany when the Alternative for Germany party was tabled extremist and placed under surveillance (Bennhold, 2020) and the Spanish Vox party was banned from a TV debate ahead of an election (Spanish, 2019). Whether thanks to the work of mainstream parties, or due to the independent choices of the voters, in many countries PRRPs have remained in the periphery. From 1980 to 2014 PRRPS have participated in government in only 12 countries and this participation was as a part of the majority government in only 9 of these countries (Abromeit, 2017, 301). In Austria however, the FPÖ has participated in the majority government from 2000-2002, 2002-2005 and after the 2017 elections. The FPÖ's powerful presence in Austria lends itself well for exploring the impacts that PRRPS may have on social policies.

Secondly, Austria's party system was previously known for being a stable two party system. As was referenced earlier, the black/red divide was long held and permeated nearly every aspect of life. This stands at odds to more multi-party and tumultuous systems. With fewer parties, dynamics between them are more clearly identifiable. Additionally, the rise of the FPÖ in such a stable system is clearly a dramatic change, which begs investigation.

The MMI is ideal for showcasing how the FPÖ has reshaped Austria's social policy and the real impact this can have on specific reforms. Firstly, the timing of critical negotiation

periods for the reform coincide with elections. This is ideal as there is more information available. This reform also takes place across a period of substantial change in the FPÖ's popularity, allowing for comparison. In 2010, the SPÖ was electorally successful and the FPÖ was slowly rebounding from their slump in the early 2000's, which captures the dynamics of the party system while the FPÖ is less influential. In 2015, the MMI must be renegotiated and this comes at a time where FPÖ popularity is reaching a new peak. In this way, MMI allows for a comparison on the same policy issue under two different levels of FPÖ influence. Additionally, the salience of the reform, given the FPÖ's welfare chauvinist platform, ensures that information is available for analysis.

### **3.1.Data**

In order to test my hypothesis that the FPÖ, as a PRRP, has reshaped the post-war Austrian social policy through its electoral success and participation at the Federal and Länder level that has led to distinct shift in the Overton Window for the mainstream parties, I have largely relied on three sources: newspaper articles, party manifestos, and government programs and legislative documents. Much of my argument is focused on party attitudes towards welfare. These sources capture the public's perspective, how the party wishes to be portrayed and actual commitment to legislation. Having this combination of perspectives can provide a more fulsome picture of a party's real attitudes towards welfare. Tracing the party attitudes across elections from 2007 to 2019 also enables a clear demonstration of how Austria's mainstream parties shifted their platforms in response to a changing political landscape.

Newspaper articles, particularly around the time of elections and new legislation, capture politicians' and parties' comments outside of official party documents. In order to obtain the

newspaper articles, I used the Proquest database and searched “*Bedarfsorientierte Mindestsicherung*,” the Austrian name for the MMI reform. I narrowed my search criteria to two specific time periods. The first was 2007-2010, the time within which negotiations and implementation of MMI occurred. The second time period was 2015-2017, which encompasses attempted renegotiations, the failure of MMI and relevant election periods.

I also utilized the Manifesto Project for my analysis. The Manifesto Project is a dataset covering “over 1000 parties from 1945 til today in over 50 countries on fire continents,” (About). In order to create this dataset, country experts read and annotate party manifestos based on policy preferences expressed in these documents. These annotations are used to calculate the number of times a manifesto makes reference to a specific policy preference. A higher score in a category indicates that a party manifesto more frequently mentioned a specific policy preference positively, so it could be inferred that it has a stronger preference towards this specific policy. For this analysis I used three variables: welfare, welfare state expansion and welfare state limitation.

Welfare state expansion variable is calculated by annotating each manifesto’s favorable mentions towards, “need to introduce, maintain or expand any public social service or social security scheme (2017, 18). Welfare state limitation is similarly calculated with the mentions of, “limiting state expenditures on social services or social security,” (2017, 18). Similarly, a higher score in this variable indicates a higher frequency of welfare state limitation being mentioned in a manifesto. The welfare variable is created by combining the welfare state expansion and welfare state limitation variables (2017, 30). This results in a variable that captures the overall

salience of welfare with a higher score indicating more mentions of welfare overall appearing in party manifestos.

Party manifestos and data from the Manifesto Project, indicate how the parties wish to be portrayed. I specifically searched party manifestos for opinions on welfare, social assistance and the MMI reform specifically. As with the newspaper articles, I focused my readings of party manifestos on elections taking place when MMI was being negotiated in 2007-2010 and when the agreement began to deteriorate in 2015-2017.

Government programs and legislative documents move beyond how the party wishes to be portrayed and into what policies the parties wish to and have the ability to enact. Government programs are released by the ruling government in Austria after elections when the new governments are formed and take power. They represent the government's plans and intentions for its term. These programs also take into account Austria's larger political landscape and coalitions. If there is a coalition, the programs are joint documents representing the negotiated stances agreed upon by the participating parties. As with my previous sources, I concentrated my research on the points in time where MMI experienced change: firstly, when negotiations took place and the reform was implemented 2007-2010; and secondly, when the reform began to fall apart and eventually came to an end in 2015-2017.

## **CHAPTER FOUR MMI CASE STUDY**

As was stated above, the MMI reform serves as a tool to illustrate how the FPÖ's electoral successes and participation in government have caused the mainstream parties in Austria to shift towards welfare chauvinist policies. Social assistance, particularly it being available for non-natives Austrians is a salient issue for the FPÖ, making this a very relevant reform. Additionally, The process of the reforms negotiations, implementations, renegotiation and failure takes place during an FPÖ electoral slump in the early 2000's and then electoral success and return to power beginning in 2015, allowing for a clear view of the how the FPÖ's resurgence and the mainstream parties response doomed this social assistance scheme. This section will be divided into three subsections. Firstly, I will describe the social assistance scheme and party positions on welfare prior to MMI, before 2008. Second, I will detail the MMI reform, FPÖ participation during these negotiations in 2008-2010 and corresponding party stances on welfare. The third section will detail the attempted renegotiations of MMI, the FPÖ's resurgence due to the 'Refugee Crisis' and the changed party stances towards welfare from 2015-2017.

### **4.1.The Austrian System Prior to MMI**

The hypothesis of this thesis is based on how Austrian social policy has changed. In order to understand the magnitude and ramifications of change, it is helpful to first understand the system as it was originally. In this section, I will first describe the established system prior to

MMI being enacted. By system, I am referring both to the social assistance scheme in place, Sozialhilfe, and the established party preferences on welfare.

#### **4.1.1. Sozialhilfe System**

Austria, like Germany, has a Bismarkian welfare system, in which benefits are strongly tied to labor market participation and social assistance is generally seen as “a social safety net of the last resort based on subsidiarity and tied to a means-test” (Obinger, 2010, 101). Though social assistance in Austria is meant as a benefit of last resort after other benefits, such as unemployment insurance, have been exhausted, in reality it has been used to make up for the deficits the welfare system presents in other areas (Fink, 2009, 11). These deficits may include scenarios such as, an individual not being eligible for other benefits offered by the Austrian system or an individual exhausting the other benefits that they were eligible for while still needing assistance. While social assistance is a competency area where Länder have maintained a considerable amount of power, there are a few country-wide inconsistencies in intention, provisions and basic eligibility when it comes to this benefit.

As the system of last resort in Austria, individuals seeking access to social assistance must present a sincere need, as is judged by each Land. The fundamental idea of the program is to provide a basic level of subsistence for those who cannot provide for themselves. These needs are defined by the Austrian state as encompassing “housing, nourishment, clothing, personal hygiene, household goods, heating as well as goods necessary for social and cultural participation. This list is not exhaustive, as some social assistance acts mention further specific needs.” (Fink, 2009, 14). As a conditional cash transfer benefit, the Land calculates the amount

based on a rate determined by legislation, often influenced by the size of the household, and then provides a cash transfer to the individual. Some Länder also provide in-kind benefits.

The steps required to get this cash transfer are not always easy, however. Social Assistance is a means-tested benefit, which means an individual must show that they cannot provide for their own basic needs through their own means, the support of their family or through other available benefits (Fink, 2009,11). In addition, they must participate in trainings and programs intended to get them back into the labor market (Fink, 2009, 12). An additional challenge in Austria is that prior to 2010, each Länder had substantially different benefits and eligibility requirements.

Despite considerable pushes towards centralization, social assistance is an area that has stayed largely in the control of the Länder. As a whole the system can be incredibly confusing with remarkably low transparency, which makes it difficult for those eligible for social assistance to understand their rights and predict the outcomes of their applications (Fink, 2009,3). There is also significant variation between Länder both in terms of the eligibility requirements, benefits offered and the clients served (Heitzmann, 2010, 130). This variation stems from the fundamental design of Austria's social assistance system as each of the nine Länder has the responsibility of delivering these benefits, so there are nine different social assistance acts and each one has unique eligibility criteria, benefits, organizational structures and systems of financing, (Fink, 2009, 3).

Perhaps one of the most important areas of variation came in terms of residency requirements for eligibility. Overall, the regulations were unclear and unpredictable between Länder and even between filing offices (Fink, 2009, 27). Overall, Austrian citizens had full

access to social assistance and EU/EEA citizens and privileged third-country nationals could access the benefits if they have obtained a residence permit (Fink, 2009, 13). Asylum seekers were generally supported through other benefits and other third-country nationals were able to access the benefit if they have been living in Austria legally for more than 5 years and had permanent full-time income during this period (Fink, 2009, 13). These restrictions on third-country nationals are very interesting. While access is severely restricted for these individuals in most cases, the abuse of social assistance by non-Austrians is still a highly politicized topic. There have also been claims of some welfare offices refusing to process the applications of some benefit claimants, which is an illegal practice that often targets non-Austrians (Fink, 2009, 12)

In addition to citizenship, some Länder also have specific eligibility requirements in terms of residency. These requirements vary considerably across Länder. Carinthia, Burgenland, Lower Austria and Vorarlberg require a principle residence, but will make exceptions for those who have a “mere stay,” which is generally a residence where the beneficiary will be living for at least three months (Fink, 2009,13). Upper Austria, Salzburg, Styria, and Vienna only require a “mere stay” and Tyrol has no regulations regarding residency of this kind at all (Fink, 2009, 13). In order to be eligible for this benefit, individuals are often in the position of being unable to provide housing for themselves, so residency requirements can have a significant impact on individuals applying to receive social assistance.

Social assistance benefits are calculated based on reference rates. These rates were set individually and autonomously by each Land, which unsurprisingly again leads to considerable amounts of variation. These reference rates serve as maximum cash transfer amounts, which are reduced based on individual income and family resources and increased based on household size

(Fink, 2009, 14). Some Länder (Burgenland, Vienna and Upper Austria) also provide more resources based on other factors, such as individuals being incapacitated for work (Fink, 2009, 14). The difference in benefits for a sole recipient varies as much as 274 Euros month in 2009 (Fink, 2009, 27). Some of this difference is made up in additional transfers for heating and electricity costs (Fink, 2009, 16).

This 274 Euro difference a month is a substantial and impactful, especially when there are a number of inconsistent reasons that these numbers could be enlarged or reduced depending on the Länder. These reasons include marital status, age, and household arrangements (Fink, 2009, 27). While the reasons themselves do not seem unfounded, the fact that they are inconsistent across these nine Länder paints a picture of a difficult and confusing system to navigate and to implement.

The fact that Austria's social assistance system is flawed has been readily acknowledged by scholars such as Fink and politicians such as the SPÖ's Gusenbauer, but the flaws identified have been based on perspective and political platform. In 2007, negotiations began regarding reforming social assistance. The SPÖ intended the reform to make such changes as creating uniform minimum standards, integrating social assistance recipients into standard health insurance, abolishing repayment of benefits and overall harmonizing the complex system between the nine Länder (Fink, 2009,20).

#### **4.1.2. Party Stances**

The SPÖ has been the main force behind welfare expansion in Austria. It is generally pro-welfare and pro-centralization, particularly in comparison to the other major parties. Utilizing the

Manifesto Project, we can see that the SPÖ generally had a higher score on the welfare variable than either the ÖVP or the FPÖ (Volkens, 2019).

Table 3<sup>1</sup>, displaying the Manifesto Project Welfare variable scores is useful for

**Table 3**

Welfare Variable 1949 to 2017

Year	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ
1949	11.9	16	-
1953	12.8	7.3	-
1956	18.7	12.6	8.4
1959	21	5.9	3.0
1962	17.7	11.2	3.6
1966	9.2	9.9	7.8
1970	0	10.3	12.0
1971	18.3	7.1	11.2
1975	19.2	9.5	24.8
1979	13	17.8	12.0
1983	18.7	6.6	8.1
1986	14	5	7
1990	13.4	7.5	2.9
1994	13.4	4.0	3.3
1995	21.6	7.1	7.4
1999	15.6	8.9	4.1
2002	18.6	11.4	13.3
2006	19.7	13.6	11.7
2008	22.3	25.9	15.4
2013	24.8	12.2	17.9
2017	21.4	10.9	16.5

Volkens, Andrea, et al, (2019): The Manifesto Data Collection. Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR). Version 2019b. Berlin: Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB). <https://doi.org/10.25522/manifesto.mpds.2019b>

characterizing, the general stance of the SPÖ. It can be seen that of the 21 elections since 1949 on which the Manifest Project has collected data, the SPÖ had a higher welfare score than both the ÖVP or the FPÖ in 16 elections (Volkens, 2019). It

is notable that in 2008, the beginnings of the

MMI negotiations, the SPÖ's welfare score increased from 19.695 to 22.3, which indicates a

<sup>1</sup> This data is collected from official party manifestos regarding federal elections. This variable in particular created by counting the number of mentions of welfare, both in terms of welfare expansion and welfare limitation.

**Table 4****Welfare Limitation 1990-2017**

Year	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ
1990	0	0	2.8
1994	0	0.729	1.264
1995	1.931	2.5	2.685
1999	0	0.255	0.841
2002	0	0.046	0.45
2006	0.139	0.049	0.923
2008	0	0	0.216
2013	0	0.516	4.348
2017	0.11	4.723	2.434

Volkens, Andrea, et al, (2019): The Manifesto Data Collection. Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR). Version 2019b. Berlin: [Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung \(WZB\)](https://doi.org/10.25522/manifesto.mpd.2019b). <https://doi.org/10.25522/manifesto.mpd.2019b>

substantial increase  
in their commitment  
to social  
expenditures. It is  
also notable that  
based on the  
Manifesto Project's  
Welfare Limitation  
variable, the SPÖ's

score of 0.0 in 2008, indicates that the SPÖ did not mention welfare limitation a single time in their manifesto.

While the welfare variable clearly indicates the SPÖ's commitment to social assistance, it is a general characterization. Looking into the manifestos themselves can provide a more specific insight into the SPÖ's policy goals. For both 2006 and 2008, the SPÖ's manifestos explicitly mentioned issues related to the MMI reform. For example, in 2006 the manifesto said that the SPÖ has three major concerns: sustainable poverty reduction, the integration of disabled individuals and the constantly growing need for these programs (Der Sozialdemokratischen, 2006). It goes on to say that the SPÖ also wanted to make federal social welfare offices the main and only point of contact for those in need (Der Sozialdemokratischen, 2006). While this 2006 manifesto did not refer to the reform by name it did demonstrate that the SPÖ was prioritizing issues that were directly in line with the reform itself. The main framing and selling point of the

MMI reform was poverty reduction, which was listed in 2006 as one of the three major concerns of the party.

In 2008, the SPÖ referenced issues on MMI reform in their manifesto. The SPÖ wrote that they had already done some work towards a needs-based secure minimum income, which was vital for poverty reduction and that this work must be continued (Der sozialdemokratischen Partei Österreichs, 2008). They continued by saying they wanted to reform unemployment insurance and social assistance in order to make the programs sustainable and these changes can be made by increasing minimum payments to above the poverty risk threshold (Der sozialdemokratischen Partei Österreichs, 2008). These goals of the MMI reform can be traced directly to the SPÖ's manifestos. The SPÖ, while not the only architect, was certainly the driving force behind this reform, as it coincided with not only their general poverty reduction goals, but specific policy plans outlined in their election material.

Another crucial indicator of the party's commitment to welfare expansion is their previous policy choices. For example, in the late 1990s as part of a Grand Coalition, the SPÖ pushed forward a reform "...to harmonize the calculation of civil servants' pensions with that of general pensions (Obinger, 2010, 109). Largely, the SPÖ has also worked to counterbalance the ÖVP's attempts to restrict the welfare state, preventing extensive retrenchment aimed reforms (Obinger, 2010, 113).

The ÖVP, the other mainstream part in Austria, has a more conservative outlook on welfare. Returning to the Manifesto Project data, the ÖVP's welfare scores were not widely different from those of the SPÖ. In fact, in five of the 21 elections (1949, 1966, 1970, 1979, 2008) captured by the data from 1949 to 2017, the ÖVP has a slightly higher welfare score than

the SPÖ. While these comparisons certainly illustrate that the ÖVP was generally less supportive of expanding welfare than the SPÖ, to really understand the party's perspective it is necessary to look at past policies championed by the party and the party's own manifesto.

Many of the notable policy reforms from the ÖVP were centered around welfare retrenchment. In 1995 and 1996 the party supported the "Structural Adaptation Acts," which amended 138 federal laws that led to "substantial cutbacks in social policy and public sector spending" (Obinger, 2002, 55). In the 2000s, in a coalition with the FPÖ, the ÖVP passed further significant welfare reforms. The Pension Reform restricted eligibility for early retirement and limited widow's and widower's pensions (Obinger, 2002, 57). Further reforms also cut unemployment benefits, reduced eligibility for emergency funding and ended a federal grant for unemployment insurance (Obinger, 2002, 58).

As cutting welfare is rarely a popular platform, it makes sense that there was a difference between the ÖVP's policies and their manifesto. However, in examining their manifesto it does provide significant insight. In 2006, top priorities included lowering taxes, pursuing active labor market policies and economic growth (Österreichische Volkspartei, 2006). Active about market policies are policies that are intended to help the unemployed and underemployed find work, such as job training and wage subsidies. The 2007 manifesto also suggested that the current state of the welfare system was enough by writing that Austria has the highest ratio of social spending in Europe at 29.4 percent or 9 billion Euros (Österreichische Volkspartei, 2006). While these statements were not expressly anti-welfare state or pro-retrenchment, they made clear that welfare state enlargement was not a top priority and that just maintaining the existing system was adequate.

This idea of the welfare system already being adequate was mentioned for a second time in the 2006 manifesto. The ÖVP wrote that there had already been welfare expansion in the past four years in order to cover vulnerable individuals and due to this expansion. The manifesto stated, “The increase in the minimum pension for single people that we have undertaken is an effective protection against poverty in old age” (Österreichische Volkspartei, 2006). This again reiterates, that while the ÖVP is not outright against social assistance, they are against welfare expansion.

Another interesting insight from the 2006 and 2008 manifestos is that in all of the instances supporting welfare, there is also a distinct overlay of discerning between those that deserve and those that do not deserve welfare. In the majority of the occasions that welfare is mentioned it is in reference to vulnerable populations, such as children, mothers, the elderly, the sick and those with disabilities (Österreichische Volkspartei, 2006) and (Österreichische Volkspartei, 2008). Rather than supporting welfare generally, the ÖVP supported maintaining the current level for the truly vulnerable in society, which was low compared to other European countries.

The FPÖ’s stance on welfare was substantially different from that of the other two parties, due in large part to the fact that populist parties adapt and change rather quickly and that the FPÖ’s major party platform was based on new cleavages. Looking at their welfare score on the Manifesto Project, it has fluctuated dramatically from 1990 to 2017 from a high of 24 to a low of 2.9, the lowest score presented in 1990 (Volkens, 2019). In 2006 and in 2008 the scores were 11.692 and 17.965 (Volkens, 2019). These were the lowest scores of the three parties in both years.

In the 2000s when the FPÖ and the ÖVP entered into a coalition, the main policy reforms were centered on welfare retrenchment. As was discussed in the previous section, there were further reforms reducing unemployment insurance and ultimately these policies, which undercut the FPÖ's blue collar base, the pressure due to the reduction that came as a result of the unpopular reforms and infighting resulted in the end of the coalition and the splintering of the party. This tumultuous period and poor reception for the reforms may have influenced the FPÖ's future stances on welfare, potentially pushing them towards stances more supportive of welfare expansion.

The FPÖ's manifesto for the years 2006 and 2008 makes its position clearer. The party it promoted welfare chauvinism. In 2006, the party wrote that there should be a separate security system for foreigners coming to work in Austria and that there should be no policies to support foreign in workers coming to Austria to serve as nursing staff (Der Freiheitlichen Partei Österreichs, 2006). Notably, the manifesto also walks back the disastrous pension policies of the previous coalition, saying there should be no further increase in the retirement age "because the labour market is not equipped for it" (Der Freiheitlichen Partei Österreichs, 2006). Rather than supporting welfare enlargement, the party was playing on anti-immigrant sentiments and trying to undo the damage of the previous years.

In 2008, the welfare chauvinist position becomes even more defined. The FPÖ writes specifically of the importance of returning foreigners that abuse the social assistance system, have no jobs and have no decent housing (Der Freiheitlichen Partei Österreichs, 2008). The Manifesto Project score refers to broad policy preferences, but it not built to capture the intricacies of the party's platform. Additionally, the fact that the FPÖ has only participated as a

coalition member in government once, in the early 2000's, makes it difficult to evaluate the party based on their past policies. The key to analyzing the FPÖ lies in their manifesto, which clearly supports a welfare chauvinist platform after 2002.

## **4.2.MMI Enacted**

The flaws of Austria's *Sozialhilfe* System have been a topic of debate for decades, largely brought up by the SPÖ. Some of the major complaints being that it is a confusing and inefficient system that does not actually protect those in need from poverty. Fink (2009, 29) wrote, "The current regime of social assistance appears to provide benefits that are considerably lower than the risk-at-poverty threshold,". Despite these long standing complaints, reforming this system was not an easy task. The FPÖ and the ÖVP utilized arguments of welfare chauvinism, accusations of welfare abuse and claims that the current system was sufficient in order to curtail efforts on welfare expansion. There were also considerable arguments on the Länder level, particularly from Länder with right-wing governments, such as Carinthia, that federal reform would lead to the imposition of additional costs on Länder. In this section I will first outline the MMI agreement as it came into force in 2010. Secondly, I will detail the political landscape and party preferences that made this reform possible on the federal and Länder level. This will illustrate that the reduction in the FPÖ's influence allowed for a welfare expansionist reform, framed as a poverty reducing tool of all of Austria, to be enacted.

### **4.2.1.MMI Outline**

Negotiations began in 2007, and an agreement was reached in 2009, but the new policies regarding the MMI scheme came into force in 2010 (Fink, 2009, 20). The agreement was an interesting melding of federal and Länder policies. Prior to harmonization each Länder had a set

of provisions controlling social assistance. The new reform overlaid these already established specific policies, rather than creating an entirely new national framework. It did this by setting national minimums and standards, but still allowed the Länder to legislate details beyond what was specified in the reform (Fink, 2016, 1). Critics of the reform argued that the centralization and harmonization aspect of the MMI reform was not accomplished as benefit levels still varied amongst Länder, but a nationwide minimum was established. Legally, it was a series of agreements between the Federal Republic of Austria and the Länder rather than strictly national legislation (Fink, 2009, 20).

Fundamentally, the reforms focused on harmonizing and raising benefits available in each Länder to reduce poverty levels in Austria. As explained by Leibetseder (2015, 63),

“ The national framework introduced a minimum basic rate of €752.94 (2011), including 25 per cent for housing costs. In households with more than one adult, each adult counted for 75 per cent and each child added 50 per cent to the basic rate towards the household benefit. The provinces were not permitted to undercut the threshold and were asked to provide higher housing support in case of need (Art 15a Vereinbarung). Implementing the new framework, the provinces sought to combine their previous schemes with the new guidelines. Due to miscellaneous mismatches, the benefit level varied between the national minimum of €753 and €1,000 for a single person, and between €1,140 and €2,040 for a couple with two children, including housing benefits.”

These rates, which were comparable to those offered under Austrian old age insurance, were intended to cover all subsistence costs. While intended to including housing, for Länder where housing would cost more than 25 percent of the benefit, such as Vienna, there was an additional benefit that could compensate for this expense (Fink, 2009, 19).

In addition to minimum income, this reform instituted a number of other benefits for those at risk of poverty. First, accessing social assistance was supposed to be made easier as any job center or welfare office would be able to file a claim (Leibetseder, 2015,62). Second, those

that utilized social assistance would also have access to the active labor market policies, such as retraining, through the Austrian Employment Service, which was previously only available for those on unemployment assistance (Fink, 2009, 20). This element was an important change, as unemployment insurance had a time limit and many reliant on social assistance were facing long term unemployment. Third, recipients were integrated into standard health insurance (Fink, 2009, 19).

Another significant change made in this reform was in sanctions or repayments of benefits. The new reforms made it much more difficult for Länder to end, penalize or force payback on received benefits. Previously, Länder were able to force social assistance recipients to payback benefits for various reasons, depending on Land policy, such as future income from employment (Fink 2009, 20). Under the new reform, “nearly all forms of refunding / repayment of benefits by former benefit recipients would be abolished” (Fink, 2009, 20). Sanctions were also severely curtailed. “Sanctions are now allowed only gradually, with written warning to be issued first; the recipient is then accorded sufficient time to eliminate his/her shortcoming concerning job search” (Leibetseder, 2015, 65). Additionally, exceptional circumstances had to be proven for cuts over 50 percent.

While this reform did not result in perfect harmonization of policies, it did make a more navigable and generous system. For the majority of the Länder, this minimum did represent an increase in benefits. A small number of Länder offered higher benefits prior to the reform, but generally these were maximums that were reduced based on factors such as assets and calculated family support at the discretion of the Länder, municipality and even the case worker. Rather than basing the system on maximum payments at the discretion of local actors, this new

agreement provided an easily accessible system with relatively predictable and protected benefit rates.

The increased generosity and accessibility of the benefit was expected to bring a likewise increased price tag by most Länder. Overall, eight of the nine Länder (only Vorarlberg was an exception) increased their spending on cash benefits and increased in number of recipients from 2010 to 2012 (Leibetseder, 2015, 61). However, for Länder these increases did not clearly indicate an overall increase in welfare expenditure. Leibetseder (2015, 61) explains,

“First, all previously uninsured recipients are now included in the health insurance scheme, whereby the federal state covers any additional spending. Second, unemployment (assistance) benefits were raised, thus lowering the costs for topping-up payments in the provincial social assistance scheme as well. Only Vienna, Burgenland and Tyrol experienced higher budgetary costs per capita due to the transition.”

Of course, there were also unaccounted for costs associated with bringing all of the Länder into compliance, with issues such as preparing staff, and these costs could not be recuperated with the abolishment of benefit repayment. However, this quote illustrates that in the deeply interwoven system of federal and Länder competencies and budgets, it is difficult to cleanly say who had won or lost financially at the budgetary level.

Additionally, the consequences were not identical even between Länder, as can be observed in Table 5. The difference in the number of recipients between each Länder and even the proportion of recipients in total population was significant, with Vienna accounting for over one-half of the recipients for all of Austria with the next highest Land accounting for only eight percent of the population. In 2012, as this is when data is available, in Styria, the Land with the 2nd highest number of recipients, there were 19,552 receiving social assistance (Leibetseder, 2015, 60). In 2012, in Salzburg, the Land with the second highest proportion of recipients in the

**Table 5****Number and Proportion of Social Assistance beneficiaries for all Länder**

Year	Proportion of recipients in total population (%)		Expenditure per recipient (Basic Benefit in Euro)		Number of Recipients	
	2010	2012	2010	2012	2010	2012
Burgenland*	0.35	1.06	1869	1563	989	3,023
Carinthia*	0.28	0.89	4259	1966	1,587	4,979
Lower AUstria	0.87	1.17	2359	2026	14,000	18,966
Upper Austria	0.53	1.00	2215	1847	7,441	14,214
Salzburg	2.09	2.25	981	1845	11,057	12,039
Styria	1.11	1.61	1660	1765	13,384	19,552
Tyrol	1.63	1.88	897	2347	11,514	13,465
Vorarlberg	2.83	2.31	854	1757	10,421	8,583
Vienna	6.28	7.31	591	2822	106,675	126,520
All of Austria	2.11	2.62	980	2438	177,068	221,341
Note: *2010 data are for households, 2012 data are for individuals						

Leibetseder, Bettina, et al. "The New Means-Tested Minimum Income in Austria: Discretion and Regulation in Practice." *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2015, pp. 57–70.

total population, 2.09 percent of people were receiving social assistance benefits (Leibetseder, 2015, 60). However, in Vienna in 2012, which had the highest number in both categories, 6.28 percent of people or 126,520 individuals were receiving social assistance (Leibetseder, 2015, 60). Meanwhile, in 2012 in Burgenland, 3,023 individuals received social assistance benefits (Leibetseder, 2015, 60). These numbers clearly show that there is still a significant difference between Länder, though for most the benefit rate increased.

#### 4.2.2. Federal Level Negotiations

Reforming Austria's social assistance scheme had been a topic of debate for years, but enacting the reform was possible because the FPÖ fell into an electoral slump after the early 2000's. As a result of the 1999 election, the FPÖ entered into a governing coalition with the ÖVP, which was a tremendous achievement for the PRRP. This coalition ended disastrously for

the FPÖ. Tensions within the party resulted in the splitting of the party and the formation of the BZÖ in 2005 and in the 2006 election it became clear that the welfare retrenchment policies that were passed were deeply unpopular with the FPÖ's voter base.

Notably, in 2004 the SPÖ's presidential candidate, Heinz Fischer, was elected with 52.4 percent of the vote (Turner, 2008, 156). The president is a largely symbolic position in Austria, but this election is notable because it is highly publicized and participated in by Austrian voters. If nothing else it served as a measure of Austrian public opinion on the parties ahead of the legislative elections. Based on the 2004 presidential election results, voters were favoring the SPÖ and this popularity continued into 2006, as can be observed in Table 6.

**Table 6**

**Federal Election Results 1999 to 2019**

Year	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	Greens	Resulting Coalition
1999	33.15% (65)	26.91% (52)	26.91% (52)	7.40% (14)	ÖVP/FPÖ
2002	42.30% (79)	36.50% (69)	10.00% (18)	9.50% (17)	ÖVP/FPÖ
2006	35.30% (68)	34.22% (66)	11.21% (21)	10.49% (20)	SPÖ/ÖVP
2008	29.26% (57)	25.98% (51)	17.54% (34)	10.43% (20)	SPÖ/ÖVP
2013	26.86% (52)	24.01% (47)	20.55% (40)	12.34% (24)	SPÖ/ÖVP
2017	26.90% (52)	31.50% (62)	26.00% (51)	-	ÖVP/FPÖ
2019	21.20% (40)	37.50% (71)	16.20% (31)	13.90% (26)	FPÖ/Greens

"IFES Election Guide: Elections: Austrian National Council 2017." *Austrian National Council 2017*, IFES Election Guide | Elections, 2017, [www.electionguide.org/elections/id/3026/](http://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/3026/).

This popularity for the SPÖ began to wane in the national parliamentary election in 2006, where the SPÖ won 35.7 percent of the vote and 68 seats in the Austrian parliament, a narrow win over the ÖVP, which won 66 seats with 34.2 percent of the vote (Turner, 2008, 156). Despite the overall drop in votes, the SPÖ retained the important position of having the most

seats in the NationalRat. Obviously, with only 35.7 percent of the vote the SPÖ was unable to form a government independently; a coalition was necessary. The preferred coalition partner would have been the Greens, but these two parties cooperating would still not provide the majority needed to form a government (Twist, 2019, 70). Additionally, the SPÖ refused to form a coalition with the FPÖ, so the only possible coalition partner to form a government was the ÖVP (Twist, 2019, 70). The ÖVP, was not excited about the prospect, but through negotiations and the President of Austria refusing to call a new election, the coalition was formed between the ÖVP and the SPÖ and the Grand Coalition returned (Twist, 2019, 71). As a result of these elections, the SPÖ returned to governing for the first time since 1999 (Viola, 2018, 382).

While both the wins for the presidential and in parliamentary elections occurred at a narrow margin, it was still a significant development. First, the SPÖ held the President of Austria and was leading the coalition in the ruling government, not an insignificant amount of power when trying to negotiate and pass reforms. Second, the FPÖ was less successful, making more space for the ÖVP and the SPÖ, the two major mainstream parties, to again cooperate. With this coalition the government controlled 73.2 percent of the seats in the Austrian Parliament, which is more than enough to enact legislation (Twist, 2019, 70).

However, in 2008 this grand coalition came to an end, due in part to the influence of the Länder Governors. Unsurprisingly, the ÖVP and the SPÖ had a contentious relationship. The SPÖ Chancellor, Alfred Gusenbaur, made some major and unpopular concessions to the ÖVP and these negotiations meant his party could not achieve key campaign promises. As a result of the conflict within the coalition and the SPÖ's perceived lack of progress, Chancellor Gusenbaur was removed as the party leader (Twist, 2019, 73). SPÖ provincial leaders feared his

unpopularity would hurt them in subnational elections, and losses between 25 percent and 40 percent at state elections (relative to their previous totals) in 2008 increased pressure for his removal” (Twist, 2019, 73).

Gusenbaur’s removal and the disintegration of the coalition resulted in a snap election in 2008<sup>2</sup>. During this election, the FPÖ and the BZÖ both saw a slight resurgence at the expense of the SPÖ and the ÖVP. The SPÖ managed 57 seats with 29.3 percent of the vote and the ÖVP had 51 seats with 26 percent of the vote (Turner, 2009, 154). Despite this poorer showing, the SPÖ maintained its slight advantage and the presidency and the arithmetic of coalition forming remained broadly unchanged. The SPÖ and the ÖVP again formed a grand coalition controlling 59 percent of the seats in parliament (Twist, 2019, 72).

The prospect of the SPÖ and the ÖVP cooperating still seemed a challenge.

Thus, the unhappy marriage between the SPÖ and ÖVP was to continue. The ÖVP did not support SPÖ’s proposals to recognize same-sex partnerships, introduce a minimum income level, and change the tax structure so that women were provided fewer incentives to stay at home. Yet both major parties were able to achieve their primary goal of governing and could blame the other for the coalition’s ineffectiveness (Twist, 2019, 73).

Despite these initial misgivings, it is notable that even after a failed government at the end of the previous coalition, the SPÖ was still in a privileged position as the coalition leader with the Chancellors position and 6 more seats than the ÖVP. Additionally, the FPÖ’s position as only the third most popular party and being in opposition, rather than participating in government eased pressures to shift the Overton Window towards the right and provided more space for cooperation and negotiation than previously available in the early 2000s. This change in power,

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<sup>2</sup> Tables detailing election cycles can be found in the Appendix

in conjunction with the pressure on the SPÖ to deliver on campaign promises after a the previously failed government, spurred on more coordination than initially expected.

#### **4.2.3. Länder Level Negotiations**

While the national parties may have found a compromise, agreement did not necessarily hold true for the parties on the Land levels. Land governors are important political figures in their own right and in order for a reform based on voluntary cooperation to pass, all of the Länder must be satisfied by the policy. This portion of negotiations required several rounds and adjustments over the years, largely taking place in the informal conferences that are integral to Austrian federalism. There were three Länder that stood out as particularly difficult to please during negotiations: Lower Austria, Vorarlberg and Carinthia.

Lower Austria and Vorarlberg shared some similarities in their disagreements with the SPÖ-proposed MMI reform. The main issue that these two Länder had with the reform was with the “one-stop-shop” idea. This piece of the reform proposed that the Austrian Employment Services (AMS) was responsible for all of the information and services that individuals using this benefit would need in order to streamline the previously confusing process (Heigl, 2008). A Lower Austria’s Land Official claimed that this “one-stop-shop” idea was dishonest because individuals would still need to interact with Land and municipal authorities in order to access additional benefits (Ettinger, 2008). Ultimately, a compromise was reached where the AMS would be responsible for submitting, pre-examining, and forwarding applications to respective district head offices if specific Länder choose to opt in to this approach rather than having the AMS manage the entire process (Heigl, 2008). Vorarlberg proposed this compromise and Lower Austria agreed (Heigl, 2008).

A potential reason for Vorarlberg and Lower Austria to take issue with the AMS being a one-stop-shop was that it reduced the administrative influence that the Länder would have on the outcomes of these welfare systems. One of the major powers of the Länder was their ability to administer and enact federal legislation. By having a federal service take over the entire process of administering this social assistance, the Länder's power in this field would greatly reduce. Another important consideration was that both of these Länder were governed by ÖVP members<sup>3</sup>. Being ÖVP party members, the leaders of these Länder may have opposed the welfare expansionist reforms, but they are not immune to federal politics. The grand coalition on the federal level pushed the national ÖVP politicians to reach a compromise with the SPÖ in order to participate in and form a government, the Land politicians operated under similar pressures. They likely faced pressure from national party leaders to follow the party line, which had already compromised on the reform. However, Governors are not entirely bound by the wills of the national parties and face local pressures to advocate for their constituents, so they may still push for concessions.

Carinthia also caused significant difficulties in negotiations. Carinthia is a unique Land in Austria as it has been the stable seat of power for the PRRPs, generally the FPÖ, but also briefly the BZÖ. Carinthia continually refused to give its consent to this reform (Fink and Bettina, 2019, 29). The PRRP led government objected to the reform for two reasons. First, they wanted to be exempted as their social assistance rates were already above the reforms quoted national minimum (Fink and Bettina, 2019, 29). However, it is important to note that Carinthia's rate was a maximum, so it could be understood that many individuals using the benefit may have actually

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<sup>3</sup> Länder Election detailed in Appendix

received less than what the proposed national minimum. A second major complaint was that there were no clear guidelines on how many non-EU citizens could access the benefit. Carinthia imposed a strict guideline of only 30 percent of non-EU citizens having access (Wiesauer, 2009).

It is unsurprising that the Länder housing the PRRPs would have such a strong stance against non-EU citizens having access to social assistance, which aligns with their welfare chauvinist tendencies. What is extremely interesting is that through the political power of the Land/Governor, a party with very few parliamentary seats and very little influence on the national level was able to effectively halt a national reform. After significant federal pressure and public criticism from both the SPÖ and NGO's, Carinthia eventually relented in its refusal (Fink and Bettina, 2019, 29).

Other Länder, such as Styria and Upper Austria, also opposed the reform at points in the negotiation process, but they did not have longstanding issues. One reason that some states opposed the reform for a portion of the negotiations was regional elections.<sup>4</sup> The Länder have elections at different times<sup>5</sup> and for those with ÖVP and FPÖ candidates it made sense to stick with the original party platform of being against welfare enlargement and opposing whatever the SPÖ government was proposing. The pressures of an impending election encouraging conservative candidates to oppose the MMI reform was certainly the case for Upper Austria and Carinthia, at least in part (Oswald, 2008). However, as these disagreements were based in election campaigns, in the span of these negotiations the campaigns were relatively short lived. Once elected, politicians faced the same pressures as their predecessors to cooperate.

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<sup>4</sup> Regional election results for relevant Länder detailed in Appendix

<sup>5</sup> Election cycles detailed in Appendix

The negotiations ended in 2009 and the MMI reform came into force in 2010. However, the agreement that came into force is very different from the initial goals proposed by the SPÖ. The negotiation process clearly showed the important roles of Länder in the Austrian system. It is also hard to imagine the reform ever being passed if the FPÖ/BZÖ had more influence. Reduced to a few seats in the Austrian Parliament and dominance in a single Länder, the radical right populists were still able to cause significant difficulties in passing this reform.

#### **4.3.Post MMI**

The initial MMI agreement was temporary from the outset. It came into force in 2010 and was scheduled to be renegotiated, but when the Federal and Länder governments were unable to reach a suitable compromise the reform expired in 2016 (Fink, 2017, 1). This expiration meant that social assistance would once again be under the complete purview of the individual Länder. While managing the initial negotiation was difficult, it ultimately created a relatively successful reform in that it met the SPÖ's goals of expanding benefits and making it easier to access these benefits, so the question to be answered is what changed? In this section I will show that the FPÖ's electoral resurgence, due to the Refugee Crisis, shifted the Overton Window of the mainstream parties towards more welfare chauvinist platforms, which made renegotiating MMI impossible. In order to do this I will first outline the impact of the Refugee Crisis on Austria. I will then detail the FPÖ's electoral rebound on the federal and Länder level. Lastly, I will detail the rightward shifting platforms of the SPÖ and the ÖVP, that doomed MMI.

##### **4.3.1.Refugee Crisis**

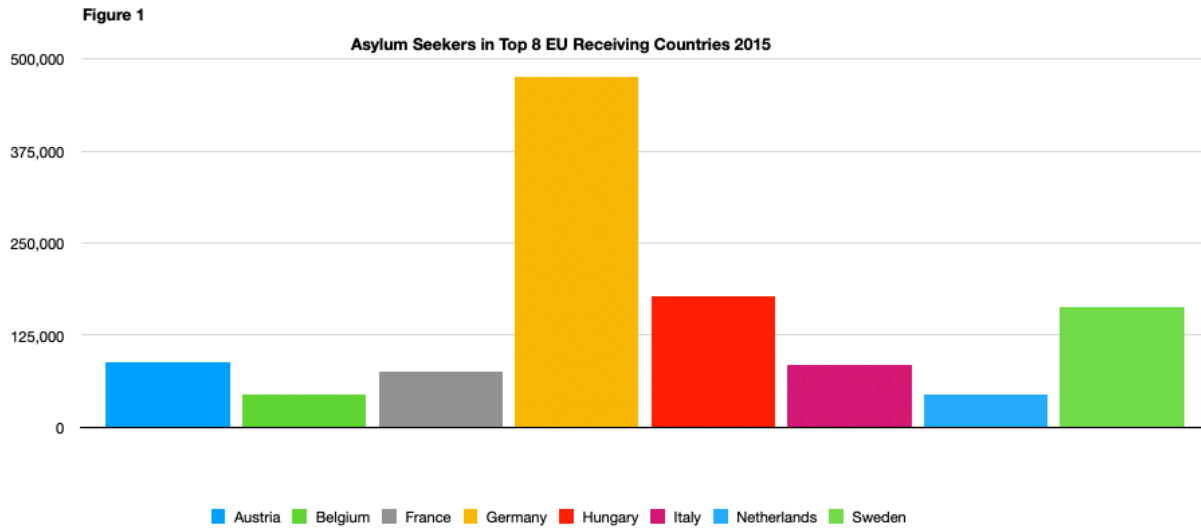
The 2015 Refugee Crisis is an integral part of this story as it fueled the FPÖ's revival. In 2015, waves of refugees came to Europe's shores in unprecedented numbers, fueled by the

conflict in Syria. The issue of migration and refugees became highly politicized and controversial in most of the EU member states. The politicization of immigration held true in Austria as well, with the country receiving criticism from the EU for failing to meet their refugee quota (Ruadhan, 2017) and renegotiating their border policies after 20 years of open borders (Dell'Orto and Wetzstein, 2019, 40). This crisis also gave a convenient and powerful foothold to the FPÖ, which already had an anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim platform.

The “Refugee Crisis”, as it became known, began in 2015. Facing increased violence and persecution in their home countries, large numbers of people from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq began perilous journeys across the Mediterranean through Libya to Italy or from Turkey into the Greek Islands (Spindler, 2015). The sheer numbers of people arriving at Europe’s shores kept the crisis in the news cycle for months, by December 911,000 refugees and migrants in Europe (Spindler, 2015). During the crisis there were two dominant narratives in the media. Firstly, many news sources focused on the peril and danger that the refugees and migrants encountered at home and on their journey to Europe. Though 911,000 refugees and migrants reached Europe by December of 2015, 3,550 also lost their lives (Spindler, 2015). The other dominating narrative, painted these migrants as either burdens for the state or dangerous.

In Austria, the Refugee Crisis played a significant role in the political landscape from 2015-2017. While Italy and Greece faced the challenge of the majority of the arrivals, many did not remain in where they initially entered the EU. Austria was one of the top destination countries in the EU in 2015.

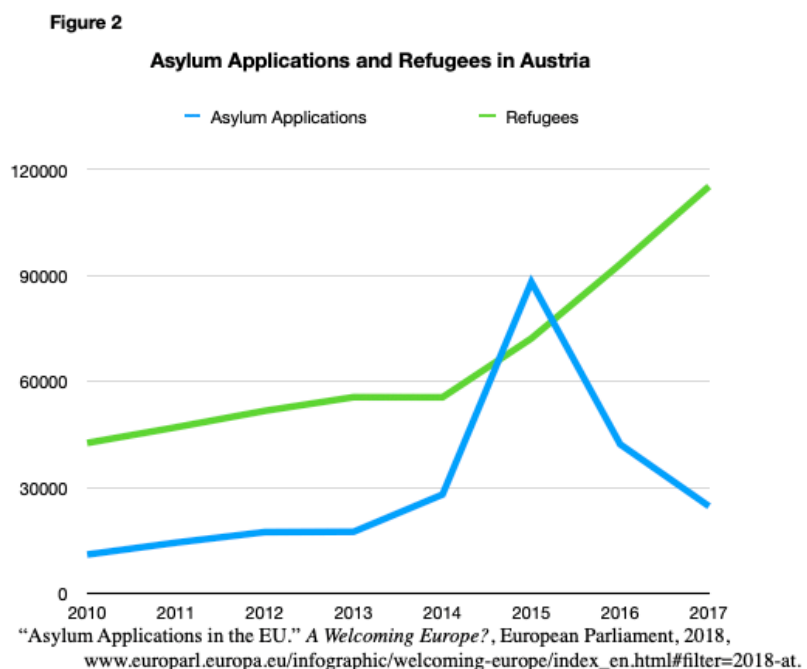
As can be seen in Figure 1, Austria was one of the top eight receiving countries in the EU. In fact, it was fourth in 2015 with 88,160 asylum seekers with a population of 8,576,261



“Asylum Applications in the EU.” *A Welcoming Europe?*, European Parliament, 2018, [www.europarl.europa.eu/infographic/welcoming-europe/index\\_en.html#filter=2018-at](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/infographic/welcoming-europe/index_en.html#filter=2018-at).

(Asylum Application, 2018). Germany, the most prolific receiver had 476, 510 asylum seekers in 2015 with a population of 81,197,537 (Asylum Application, 2018). As defined in this data set, asylum seekers are “people who make a formal request for asylum in another country because they fear their life is at risk in their home country,” (Asylum Application, 2018).

Looking at the data in Figure 2 illustrates that Austria took in a large number asylum seekers, but it paints an incomplete picture. Refugees or, “people fleeing their home country to save their lives and who have been



accepted and recognized as such in their host country” (Asylum Application, 2018), also represent a large number of individuals coming into Austria, with a significant increase beginning around the same period.

The Refugee Crisis began in 2015, but it did not end there as it is a complex and persistent issue. As can be seen in Table XX, Austria saw a spike of asylum seekers in 2015 that declined relatively quickly. The number of refugees, however, continued to climb through 2017. This characterizes the persistent nature of the Refugee Crisis. Taken in terms of Austrian politics, the lasting impact of the crisis has allowed the then 2 year old crisis to remain a salient issue in the 2017 federal elections.

The refugee crisis made immigration and the outsider focused rhetoric of the radical right populist movement salient in a way that it had not been for decades in Austrian politics. Austrians were afraid of an influx of strangers challenging the resources of the state. The FPÖ took this fear, added a layer of Islamic-phobia, magnified it and turned it into electoral successes that dramatically reshaped the political landscape in Austria. This is not to say that the refugee crisis was solely responsible for the FPÖ’s success. In prior elections the party was successful enough in 2013 to win seats in parliament and participate in Länder governments, but the refugee crisis provided a perfect opportunity to push the Party into a far better position than they had previously held.

#### **4.3.2. The FPÖ’s Electoral Rebound**

##### **4.3.2.1. Federal**

Conveniently for the FPÖ, the European Refugee Crisis came on the eve of a series of elections. The salience of the immigration issue propelled the FPÖ into stunning electoral

successes in Länder, Presidential and Parliamentary elections from 2015 to 2017. The FPÖ had already experienced some increase in electoral success beginning in 2010, but the 2015 Länder election and 2016 presidential elections cemented their resurgence and active role in governance (Smale, 2015).

In 2016, Austria held a presidential election. As previously detailed, the position itself is largely symbolic, but the election is notable as a measure of public opinion. The 2016 campaign was a dramatic and closely followed by many people around the world due to the very strong likelihood that Austria would elect a populist right wing president. Interestingly, neither the SPÖ nor the ÖVP, traditionally the two main parties from which all president have come, put forward a successful candidate. Instead, the two most successful candidates came from the Greens, Van der Bellen, and the FPÖ, Norbert Hofer. The SPÖ and the ÖVP candidates were knocked out of the race in the first round (Smale, 2016). These results clearly demonstrated a pervasive dissatisfaction with the traditional parties (Murphy, 2016).

From the outset the 2016 presidential election was a stunning turn of events as it mounted a serious challenge, a PRRP candidate has never done so well in a presidential election in Austria before. The last few months of the presidential race became even more dramatic when, in an unprecedented move, the initial results of the election had to be thrown out and the election redone. "Austria's highest court has overturned the results of presidential election, citing procedural irregularities and ordered a rerun to be held in September or October, an unprecedented decision in the country's post-war history." (Cocoli, 2016). Following this decision, in the second lead up to the election many opinion polls predicted an FPÖ victory (Smale, 2016).

The race was decided by a razor's edge: "The Interior Ministry count gave van der Bellen, a former Green party leader, 50.3 percent of the vote, compared to 49.7 percent for Hofer. The margin of victory was just over 31,000 out of nearly 4.5 million valid votes cast" (Murphy, 2016). Many moderates and left-wing politicians painted the defeat of the FPÖ as a defining rebuke of the PRRP by the people of Austria, but this analysis ignores the important fact that the FPÖ had the best showing they have ever had in a presidential election and very nearly won.

Just a year later, in 2017, Austria held an election for the National Parliament. These snap elections were the result of the failing of the 2013 coalition between the SPÖ and the ÖVP.

"The coalition government that followed the 2013 election was a forced marriage between the two main parties driven mainly by the absence of a viable alternative. Yet the considerable ideological differences between the SPÖ and ÖVP, 'in particular regarding pensions, education and taxes', made the government compromise reached after the 2013 elections a very feeble one" (Bodlos, 2017, 1354).

The tense 2013 coalition was not able to withstand the added pressures of economic stagnation, the Refugee Crisis and the distrust that these disagreements bred (Bodlos, 2017, 1355). After the presidential election, which was disastrous for both parties, the SPÖ and the ÖVP party heads

**Table 7**

**Federal Election Results 1999 to 2019**

Year	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	Greens	Resulting Coalition
1999	33.15% (65)	26.91% (52)	26.91% (52)	7.40% (14)	ÖVP/FPÖ
2002	42.30% (79)	36.50% (69)	10.00% (18)	9.50% (17)	ÖVP/FPÖ
2006	35.30% (68)	34.22% (66)	11.21% (21)	10.49% (20)	SPÖ/ÖVP
2008	29.26% (57)	25.98% (51)	17.54% (34)	10.43% (20)	SPÖ/ÖVP
2013	26.86% (52)	24.01% (47)	20.55% (40)	12.34% (24)	SPÖ/ÖVP
2017	26.90% (52)	31.50% (62)	26.00% (51)	-	ÖVP/FPÖ
2019	21.20% (40)	37.50% (71)	16.20% (31)	13.90% (26)	FPÖ/Greens

"IFES Election Guide: Elections: Austrian National Council 2017." *Austrian National Council 2017*, IFES Election Guide | Elections, 2017, [www.electionguide.org/elections/id/3026/](http://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/3026/).

resigned. As a result of the coalition's failure, the government dissolved and snap-elections were held in 2017.

The results of the elections placed Austria on a decidedly rightward path. The ÖVP secured the most votes with 31.50 percent (62 seats), the SPÖ gained only 26.9 percent (52 seats) and the FPÖ captured 26.0 percent (51 seats) (IFES, 2017). The ÖVP and the FPÖ negotiated a coalition to form a government, marking the first time since 2002 that the FPÖ had been in government. These were not easy negotiations, as they lasted for two months; but they resulted in the FPÖ being allocated key portfolios, such as Interior, Defense, and Foreign Affairs (Bodlos, 2015, 1360). It is important to note that the government program released by the coalition cited tightening regulations on immigration and reducing welfare benefits, particularly for refugees, as policy goals. These goals are directly inline with the FPÖ's welfare chauvinist ideals and with the new coalition the ÖVP no longer faced the pressures to cooperate on welfare expansion, namely the MMI reform, from the SPÖ.

While it was highly unlikely that the SPÖ and the ÖVP would form another coalition, it is notable that the SPÖ announced that it would consider a coalition with the FPÖ, which is a complete reversal on previous party principles that opposed and isolated the FPÖ (Bodlos, 2017 1360). The willingness of both mainstream parties to form a coalition with the FPÖ in order to gain office illustrated a definite willingness to accommodate the FPÖ in response to the party's electoral success. Furthermore, this shift was not met with the same outrage and concern from the rest of the world as it was after the 1999 elections, "the first government formation process between the ÖVP and FPÖ in 2000 had caused severe national and international protest and even

diplomatic sanctions by other member states of the European Union. In contrast, the negotiation process and inauguration in 2017 were accompanied by little critique from European or international leaders and less national protest,“ (Bodlos, 2017 1361).

There was of course still concern from many European leaders that a radical right wing populist, euro-skeptic party being in Government in Austria, but at least on some level their success was accepted and expected more than in 2002.

#### **4.3.2.2. Länd**

The FPÖ also saw a strong resurgence on the Länder stage after the Refugee Crisis. Land elections are important on two accounts. First, they serve as an indication for national political opinion and a potential predictor for national elections (Karlhofer, 2013, 46). Second, as was demonstrated by Carinthia, Lower Austria and Vorarlberg during the original negotiations of the MMI reform, even a single dissenting Länder can prevent negotiations from moving forward due to the power of the Governors. While the FPÖ is pro-welfare for Austrians, the MMI allowed for non-EU citizens to access the benefit, prompting the FPÖ to oppose it. In 2015, Upper Austria, Styria, Burgenland, and Vienna held elections and in all four cases the FPÖ gained substantially, fueled in part by the anxieties surrounding the Refugee Crisis (Smale, 2015).

Table 8

## Länder Election Results 1998 to 2015

Vienna	Upper Austria	Styria	Burgenland	Vorarlberg	Lower Austria	Carinthia
2001	2003	2000	2000	1999	2003	2004
ÖVP - 16.39%	ÖVP - 43.42%	ÖVP - 42.27%	ÖVP - 35.55%	ÖVP - 45.76%	ÖVP - 53.29%	ÖVP - 11.64%
SPÖ - 46.91%	SPÖ - 38.33%	SPÖ - 32.42%	SPÖ - 46.55%	SPÖ - 12.99%	SPÖ - 33.55%	SPÖ - 38.43%
FPÖ - 20.16%	FPÖ - 8.40%	FPÖ - 12.43%	FPÖ - 12.63%	FPÖ - 27.41%	FPÖ - 4.49%	FPÖ - 42.43%
Greens - 12.45%	Greens - 9.06%	Greens - 5.53%	Greens - 5.49%	Greens - 6.03%	Greens - 7.22%	Greens - 6.71%
2005	2009	2005	2005	2004	2008	2009
ÖVP - 18.77%	ÖVP - 46.76%	ÖVP - 38.66%	ÖVP - 36.38%	ÖVP - 54.92%	ÖVP - 54.39%	ÖVP - 16.83%
SPÖ - 49.09%	SPÖ - 24.94%	SPÖ - 41.67%	SPÖ - 52.18%	SPÖ - 16.87%	SPÖ - 25.51%	SPÖ - 28.74%
FPÖ - 14.83%	FPÖ - 15.29%	FPÖ - 4.56%	FPÖ - 5.75%	FPÖ - 12.94%	FPÖ - 10.47	FPÖ - 3.76%
Greens - 14.63%	Greens - 9.18%	Greens - 4.73%	Greens - 5.21%	Greens - 10.17%	Greens - 6.91%	Greens - 5.15%
					BZÖ - 44.89%	
2010		2010	2010	2009	2013	2013
ÖVP - 13.99%	ÖVP - 37.21%	ÖVP - 34.62%	ÖVP - 50.79%	ÖVP - 50.79%	ÖVP - 50.79%	ÖVP - 14.40%
SPÖ - 44.34%	SPÖ - 38.29%	SPÖ - 48.26%	SPÖ - 10.02%	SPÖ - 10.02%	SPÖ - 21.57%	SPÖ - 37.13%
FPÖ - 25.75%	FPÖ - 10.66%	FPÖ - 8.98%	FPÖ - 25.12%	FPÖ - 25.12%	FPÖ - 8.21%	FPÖ - 16.85%
Greens - 12.65%	Greens - 5.49%	Greens - 4.15%	Greens - 10.58%	Greens - 8.06%	Greens - 12.10%	Greens - 12.10%
2015	2015	2015	2015	2014		BZÖ - 6.40%
ÖVP - 9.24%	ÖVP - 36.37%	ÖVP - 28.45%	ÖVP - 29.08%	ÖVP - 41.79%		
SPÖ - 39.59%	SPÖ - 18.37%	SPÖ - 29.29%	SPÖ - 41.92%	SPÖ - 8.77%		
FPÖ - 30.78%	FPÖ - 30.36%	FPÖ - 26.76%	FPÖ - 15.04%	FPÖ - 23.42%		
Greens - 11.84%	Greens - 10.32%	Greens - 6.68%	Greens - 6.43%	Greens - 17.14%		

Stadt Wien. "Landtag." [Wahlarchiv, Wiener Zeitung, 2020, wahlarchiv.wienerzeitung.at/#detailergebnisse](http://www.wahlarchiv.wienerzeitung.at/#detailergebnisse).

In Upper Austria there was a proportional representation system and it was a long-held stronghold for the ÖVP (Jenny, 2016, 23-24). The Land Governor, Josef Pühringer, was a member of the ÖVP and had been in office since 1995. He remained Governor, but returned with a 10.4 percentage point fall in votes for the ÖVP, totaling 36.4 percent, “the worst ever result for a returning ÖVP Land governor” (Jenny, 2016, 23-24). The SPÖ also suffered a devastating loss only obtaining 18.4 percent of the votes and a single seat in the Land parliament. Meanwhile the FPÖ surged ahead with 30.4 percent, doubling its previous result (Jenny, 2016, 23-24). As a result of the 2015 elections, the ÖVP and the FPÖ formed a coalition in Upper Austria.

Styria had previously been governed by a coalition between the SPÖ and the ÖVP. Both parties suffered significantly in the 2015 elections. “In the Land election, the SPÖ obtained 29.3 per cent (down 9.0 per cent) and the ÖVP 28.5 per cent (down 8.7 per cent), giving them 15 and 14 seats, respectively. The FPÖ jumped to 26.8 per cent (up 16.1 per cent) and 14 seats (+8)” (Jenny, 2016, 22-23). Here also, the ÖVP and the FPÖ entered a coalition, but during negotiations the SPÖ also offered to form a coalition with the FPÖ (Salzmann, 2015). This offer of a coalition was striking as on the national level the SPÖ has been vocal about excluding the FPÖ.

In Burgenland, the SPÖ’s willingness to cooperate with the FPÖ took an even more dramatic step. Both the SPÖ and the ÖVP had also lost footing, though the losses were slightly less dramatic, “the SPÖ obtained 41.9 per cent of the votes (down 6.3 per cent) and dropped to 15 seats (a loss of three). The ÖVP obtained 29.1 per cent (down 5.5 per cent) and 11 seats (down two). The FPÖ obtained 15 per cent (up 6.1 per cent) and doubled its number of seats to six” (Jenny, 2016, ). The biggest change in Burgenland came with the coalition between the SPÖ

and the FPÖ. “The agreement triggered angry reactions in the SPÖ because it went against a party convention vote banning coalitions with the FPÖ. The SPÖ president of the Land diet gave a damning speech at the swearing-in of the new government and left the party.” (Jenny, 2016, 22).

This coalition was remarkable on two levels. First, it signified a dramatic shift to the right in Burgenland’s SPÖ party. The coalition agreement called for strengthened regulations on asylum seekers and migrants, a core part of the FPÖ’s platform (Salzmann, 2015). Secondly, the coalition was a dramatic break at the Land level from the national party’s line. While a coalition between the SPÖ and the FPÖ was limited to Burgenland at the time, “...the coalition deal has national significance. It prepares the way for similar coalitions in other states, in the capital, Vienna, and at the federal level” (Salzmann, 2015).

Vienna also held Land elections in 2015. As with the previous cases, the FPÖ surged forward at the expense of the more mainstream parties and much of this success was tied to the recent rising fears surrounding immigration (Reuters, 2015). Vienna is traditionally an SPÖ stronghold, which for the most part held intact in 2015, “the SPÖ dropped to 39.6 per cent (down 4.8 per cent) and 44 out of 100 seats. The FPÖ increased to 30.8 per cent (up 5.0 per cent) and 34 seats. The Greens decreased slightly to 11.8 per cent (–0.8 per cent) and ten seats, but became the third-largest party as the ÖVP dropped to only 9.2 per cent (–4.8) and seven seats” (Jenny, 2016, 26). In response to the election results, the SPÖ and the Greens formed a coalition.

As we see in Table 6 and the Land level, the FPÖ’s popularity was reduced in the early 2000’s. Around 2010 the FPÖ’s electoral popularity began to return and around 2015 the party experienced a resurgence in popularity. This resurgence can be in part attributed to the 2015

Refugee Crisis in Europe. In 2015 911,000 refugees and migrants made their way to Europe, fleeing conflict in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. Austria became one of the top 4 receiving countries in the EU and accepted 88,160 asylum seekers in 2015. The FPÖ capitalized on the fear and uncertainty surrounding the crisis with their anti-immigrant and welfare chauvinist platforms.

#### **4.3.3. Shifting Party Stances and the End of MMI**

Based on the federal and Länder elections, it is clear to see that the FPÖ was in a much stronger position following 2015 than in 2010. In part this position was due to the salience of one of their core platforms: anti-immigration. The salience of this topic skyrocketed with the Refugee Crisis, but in this discussion, what is more important than why the FPÖ gained so much electoral success, is what impact did their success have? In the next section I will demonstrate that the FPÖ's success pushed the mainstream parties in a welfare chauvinist direction. This change can be seen in the renegotiation of the MMI reform, which consequently ended because welfare chauvinist perspectives prevented a satisfactory agreement from being reached, unlike in 2010. In order to demonstrate the part shifts during MMI negotiations I will first detail what occurred on the Länder level, as they occurred first in 2015 and 2016, followed by an account of what happened on the federal level.

##### **4.3.3.1. Länder**

The disillusionment of the MMI reform started on the Länder level. In Länder elections across Austria around 2015, the FPÖ made important electoral gains. These gains resulted in the FPÖ forming coalition governments with the ÖVP run Länder such as Upper Austria, Styria and Burgenland. As a result of these changes, negotiations floundered and Länder began altering their

social assistance schemes, even prior to the scheduled end of the MMI agreement (Fink, 2018). These changes were largely in the direction of retrenchment and retrenchment that targeted non-natives.

Lower Austria, Upper Austria, Burgenland, Tyrol and Vienna all made significant cuts to their social assistance schemes effectively damming the MMI, but Lower Austria was one of the first to do so before the agreement had even officially ended. In Lower Austria, the Governor was a member of the ÖVP, making the decision to reduce benefit levels “(by approx. 30%) for all people, including Austrian citizens, who have been living in Austria for less than five years during the last six years, and an upper ceiling on [MMI] was introduced, amounting to €1,500 per month per family/ household,” in 2017 not entirely surprising (Fink 2017). It is notable, however, that the move was publicly described by the Lower Austrian government as an effort to reduce the increased spending as a result of refugees and asylum seekers (Thalhammer, 2016). This anti-refugee and anti-immigrant welfare chauvinism has been a hallmark of the FPÖ’s campaign. In Lower Austria the ÖVP adopted the populist rhetoric of the FPÖ, even celebrating an increased emigration rate from the Land (Winroither, 2017).

Upper Austria was also a particularly interesting and strong example of the changes made by Länder to the MMI under the influence of the FPÖ. In Upper Austria in 2017, the benefit reductions specifically targeted asylum seekers and “benefits for individuals with only a brief history of residence in Austria,” and tied benefits to integration requirements such as German Language courses (Ennsner-Jedenastik, 2020, 8). Using refugees as the motivation to reduce welfare benefits is not unique to Upper Austria, but the extent to which the policies actually target asylum seekers is. Legislation in Upper Austria specifically creates a separate system of

reduced benefits for foreigners without legally permanent residency, specifically temporary asylum seekers (Oö. Landtag, 2016). This legislation was highly controversial in Austria and in the EU, even resulting in highly politicized court cases over the legality of the benefit reduction.

It cannot be surprising that after the FPÖ achieved significant electoral success on the Länder level that Länder began reducing welfare benefits in a decidedly welfare chauvinist style. During initial reform negotiations the ÖVP was not overly fond of this reform, but coalitions on the Länder and federal level enabled negotiations, as was long the foundation of Austrian politics. However, when the FPÖ gained popularity and presented as a viable coalition partner, the ÖVP could transition away from trying to limit the reforms of the SPÖ to welfare retrenchment under the FPÖ's welfare chauvinist platform.

As was previously demonstrated, a single dissenting Länder can prevent negotiations. With so many Länder, outright altering the MMI reform, there is no clear path for negotiations to continue. Most of these dissenting Länder, have already appeared in previous sections as opposing the initial reform in 2010. This opposition was overcome because the SPÖ was able to pressure the ÖVP into cooperating on this reform due to its strength in coalitions on the federal and Länder level. Now in 2015, the pressure to negotiate from the SPÖ has been replaced by pressure from the FPÖ calling for the exclusion of non-Austrians from the system.

#### **4.3.3.2. Federal**

It could be argued that after the Länder elections and subsequent changes to the MMI agreement that the negotiations were already at a dead end. It would be an incomplete analysis, however, to not include the breakdown of support on the national level, especially given the interplay between the federal level and the Länder. Austria had national elections in 2016 and

2017. In 2016, the presidential election did not focus on MMI as a platform point, though welfare chauvinism and anti-refugee sentiments were still a large presence in the FPÖ's politics. In 2017, MMI did come in to play with the Parliamentary elections.

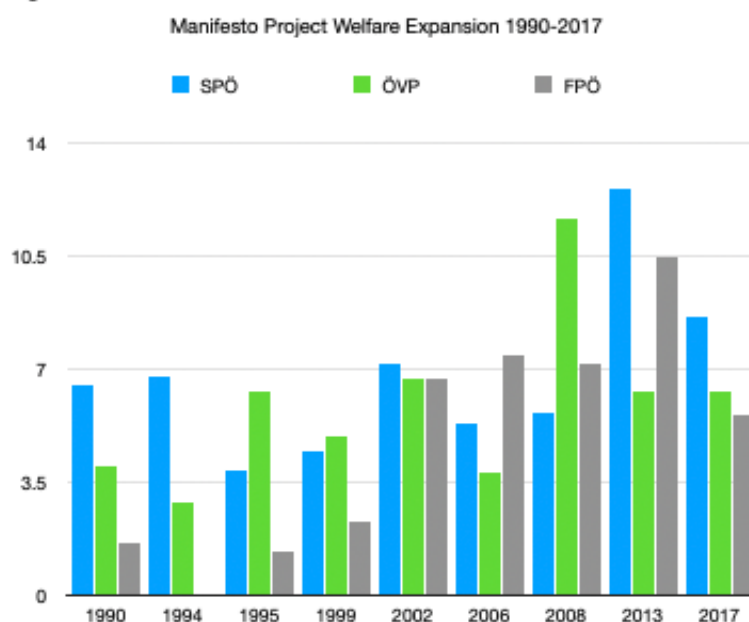
In 2016, Austria's federal government was still a coalition between the SPÖ and the ÖVP, the coalition that initially passed the MMI reform. Länder politics do not happen in a vacuum and when Länder began prematurely altering their social assistance schemes against the MMI agreement, this sent clear signals to the national level. Instead of pressing for these technically illegal changes to be reversed, the SPÖ shifted towards the right by abandoning its position of being opposed to explicit benefit cuts and "signaled willingness to replace cash benefits by benefits in kind to some degree and proposed that beneficiaries of subsidiary protection and persons granted political asylum who receive [MMI] could be forced to live at a specific place in Austria (abolishing free choice of residence for this group)" (Fink, 2016). This is a definitive move by the SPÖ towards welfare limitation and a weakening of their earlier stances.

The SPÖ's movement towards the right can further be seen with the 2017 elections. Based on the Manifesto Project welfare variable, the SPÖ's score fell from 24.8 in 2013 to 21.4 in 2017 (Volkens, 2019). This variable captures the overall party preference on welfare, which can be influenced by many factors. Even more definitive is the party's indication that they would consider a coalition with the FPÖ (Bodlos, 2017, 1360). An SPÖ/FPÖ coalition has occurred on the federal level one time, from 1983 to 1987. At that time the FPÖ was a liberal party and his coalition was formed before Haider reinvented the FPÖ into the PRRP it is known as today in 1986. An SPÖ/FPÖ coalition with the FPÖ as a PRRP has occurred on the Länder level in

Burgenland in 2015, but this was seen as a major break with the national party. The willingness of the SPÖ to consider forming a coalition with the FPÖ in order to gain office is significant and illustrates a definite willingness to shift in policies in response to the FPÖ's electoral success.

The ÖVP also demonstrated a distinct shift towards welfare limitation and anti-immigrant rhetoric. When looking at the welfare variable from the Manifesto Project, it is clear that the ÖVP's score has dropped from 12.2. to 10.9 from 2013 to 2017. It is important to note however, that this change is due to the ÖVP's increase in mentions of welfare limitation rather than any change in their mentions of welfare expansion. This can be seen in comparing Fig. 3 and Fig. 4.

**Figure 3**



Volgens, Andrea, et al, (2019): The Manifesto Data Collection. Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR). Version 2019b. Berlin: Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB). <https://doi.org/10.25522/manifesto.mpd.2019b>

In the ÖVP's

2017 party manifesto

there is a dramatic

increase in mentions of

welfare limitation, some

of which speak

specifically to MMI.

The ÖVP specifically

cites the policy goals of

capping MMI minimum

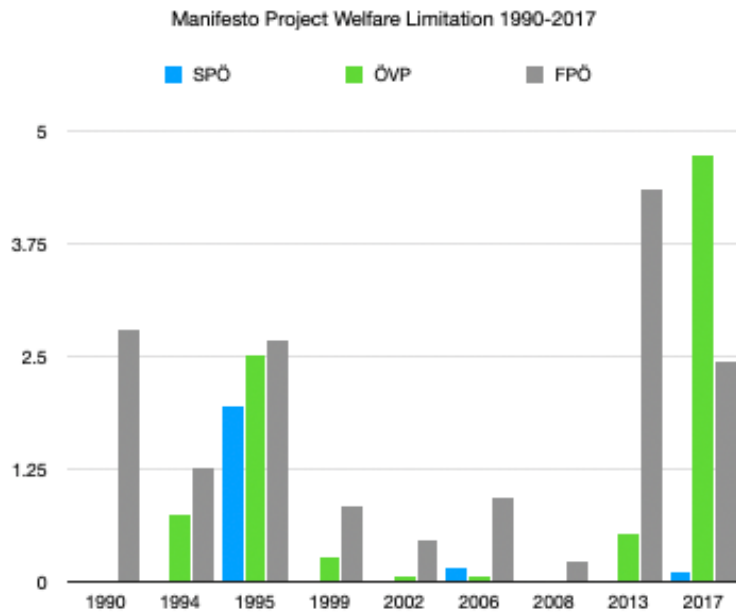
payments at 560 euros

for 5 years for asylum

seekers, compared to the proposed cap of 1,500 euros for all other beneficiaries (Österreichische

Volkspartei, 2017). They also propose instituting harsher consequences for anyone found to be

Figure 4



Volkens, Andrea, et al. (2019): The Manifesto Data Collection. Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR). Version 2019b. Berlin: Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB). <https://doi.org/10.25522/manifesto.mps.2019b>

misusing the benefit  
(Österreichische  
Volkspartei, 2017).

The overlap between  
the ÖVP's and the  
FPÖ's policy  
preferences is  
intentional.

“Media and political  
observers widely  
agreed that Kurz  
boosted his popularity  
mainly by undermining  
the FPÖ's ownership  
of the immigration

issue, and adopting many of the FPÖ's policy positions during the election campaign. Kurz's election campaign included proposals to close Islamic kindergartens and to cut social transfers to recognized refugees, reforms that the FPÖ also supports. Most prominently, Kurz claimed credit for the reduction in immigration to Europe after the closure of the Balkan route in 2016, which helped him convey the image of being competent on the immigration issue.,” (Bodlos, 2018).

Noting the FPÖ's success in 2013 and the popularity of the FPÖ's anti-immigrant/anti-refugee stance given the 2015 refugee crisis, the ÖVP apparently tried to undercut the FPÖ's lead by adopting these platforms leading up to the 2017 election. Even without holding significant electoral power, here the FPÖ has influenced the platform of one of Austria's main stream parties.

After the elections in 2017 the FPÖ and the ÖVP formed a coalition government. As with all Austrian governments before them, they released a program detailing their plans for their

elected term. In this program, an entire section was dedicated to the reform of the social assistance program,. The program framed the need to reform as a need to prevent immigrants and asylum seekers from abusing the welfare system (Zusammen, 2017). The program listed desired reforms that would toughen requirements for all beneficiaries, but also target non-Austrians by specifically reducing the benefits given to asylum seekers, requiring beneficiaries to have long term residence in Austria, and expanding integration class requirements to access benefits (Zusammen, 2017). It is important to remember that through all of these changes, at no point did the FPÖ have a majority of seats in parliament, meaning the success of welfare chauvinist policies is only possible if the other parties participate (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2020, 8). It is clear in this coalition that the ÖVP willing to target asylum seekers and other non-natives in order to pursue welfare limiting policies.

In 2018, the Austrian Government, led by an FPÖ/ÖVP coalition, went as far as to announce a draft bill acting on their goals outlined in 2017. This bill proposed tying MMI benefits to German language skills and the completion of an integration agreement (Fink, 2018). It would also effectively legislate that “MMI should only be granted to citizens of other EU Member States or those from third countries after five years of Austrian residency” (Fink, 2018). This draft bill demonstrated that the ÖVP’s commitment to supporting the FPÖ’s welfare chauvinist policies goes beyond it being a campaign/office seeking tool and into the realm of real action and legislation.

The ÖVP’s slide to the right and willingness to pursue welfare chauvinist policies continued into 2019. In the party’s 2019 manifesto, which captures the party’s policy preferences as it is not a coalition document, it again targets immigrants and refugees for abusing the welfare

system (ÖVP, 2019). The party also put forward concrete policy ideas in the same vein such as a task force to review immigrant benefits, tighter restrictions on benefits for asylum seekers and requiring refugees to participate in active labour market policies such as job training (ÖVP, 2019; Ennser-Jedenastik, 2020).

In the 2015, 2016 and 2017 elections in Austria the FPÖ experienced a resurgence in popularity on the federal and the Länder level. It is impossible to say what may have happened to the MMI reform if the FPÖ had not been so successful. However, it is clear that after these elections the SPÖ was more willing to negotiate on welfare retrenchment and even to form a coalition with the FPÖ. Likewise, after these elections the ÖVP increased their support for welfare reduction, particularly reductions that targeted asylum seekers and refugees. These changes made renegotiating the MMI impossible and point to the FPÖ being a powerful influence in Austrian politics without having to achieve majority support.

## **CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The electoral success of FPÖ and its participation in government at the federal and Länder levels has reshaped Austrian social policy in Austria. In this thesis, I have demonstrated this change in the mainstream Austrian parties by tracing the inception and then failure of the MMI reform. As the timeline demonstrates, after the FPÖ's failed coalition with the ÖVP in the early 2000s, the party lost a significant number of supporters and entered into an electoral slump.

This decline in the FPÖ's influence allowed the mainstream Austrian parties to return to a political landscape more similar to how it looked before the rise of the FPÖ, when grand coalitions and negotiations formed the bases of Austria's system. The SPÖ was electorally successful, controlling both the Presidency and Parliament. As a result, the SPÖ was able to pressure the ÖVP into cooperating in negotiations on the MMI. As a result, the negotiations were successful and the reform was implemented in 2010.

In 2015 the 'refugee crisis' brought on anxieties surrounding immigration and asylum seekers across Europe. In Austria the FPÖ was able to capitalize on these fears which manifested in electoral success across all levels of government. As a result of their success, the corresponding weakness of the SPÖ, and the FPÖ's their commitment to welfare chauvinism the MMI agreement began to fall apart. Länder began making changes to their social assistance systems before the agreement's term ended, effectively ending any hopes of renegotiating the agreement. Then the ÖVP and the FPÖ formed a coalition and made reforming the MMI to a

more restrictive system, especially targeting asylum seekers. This was certainly the death-nail to any hopes of maintaining the SPÖ's MMI reform.

It is important to note that at no point in this process did the FPÖ have a controlling majority of seat in the Parliament, the Presidency or control over the majority of the Länder. However, in a system built on cooperation between two centrist parties, the success of a third radical party disrupted traditional cooperation. The FPÖ's influence also shifted the Overton Window and encouraged office seeking parties to shift their policies in the direction of the PRRP. In the case of Austria, the shift was toward the right and towards welfare chauvinism and welfare limitation, specifically for refugees and asylum seekers.

In such a complex political system, there are many moving parts and parties are influenced by a number of factors. By nature, this analysis leaves significant room for further investigation. One clear avenue would be to expand on the role of the SPÖ, not only in the creation of the MMI reform, but in Austrian social policy as a whole. The discussion could be reframed to consider the SPÖ as the defining factor in the Mmi being passed, rather than the FPÖ being the impetus for its failure. Potentially, instead of focusing on the how the FPÖ's influence disrupted negotiations, a research could investigate how the SPÖ was able to overcome so many veto points, such as Länder, inherent in the Austrian federalist system. Likewise, the SPÖ was able to hold successful negotiations, despite dissent on the federal and Länder levels without a majority in the Nationalrat and with only a small number of seats more than the ÖVP. When the SPÖ lost their footing in the Nationalrat, the negotiations were no longer viable. Future research should be done to determine the role of the SPÖ in social policy reform in Austria.

## GLOSSARY

- Bedarfsorientierte Mindestsicherung- Full Austrian name of the MMI Reform
- Bund- Federal Government
- Bundesrat- Also known as the Federal Council, it is the section of Austria's bicameral parliament that represents Länder interests
- BZÖ- Alliance for the Future of Austria, PRRP
- FPÖ- The Freedom Party of Austria, PRRP
- Gemeinden- Municipal Government
- Generalklausel- Clause in the Austrian Constitution that outlines Länder and Federal competencies
- Läger- This refers to the two mainstream parties in Austria and their camps
- Länder- Subnational governing bodies within Austria, they could be compared to states in the United States
- Landeshauptmännerkonferenz- The Conference of Land Governors, a regular conference that facilitates informal cooperation between Länder and the federal government
- MMI- Means Tested Minimum Income Reform
- Nationalrat- Also known as the National Assembly, this is the other section of Austria's bicameral parliament. This section is the main legislative body and representatives are elected.
- ÖVP- The People's Party of Austria, Mainstream Party
- PRRP- Populist Radical Right Party
- Sozialhilfe- The social assistance scheme in Austria that preceded MMI.
- SPÖ- The Social Democratic Party of Austria, Mainstream Party

## APPENDIX

### A-1

Election Cycles									
Presidential Elections	Federal Elections	Lower Austria	Vorarlberg	Carinthia	Vienna	Upper Austria	Styria	Burgenland	
1998	1999	1998	1999	1999	2001	2003	2000	2000	
2004	2002	2003	2004	2004	2005	2009	2005	2005	
2010	2006	2008	2009	2009	2010	2015	2010	2010	
2016	2008	2013	2014	2013	2015		2015	2015	
	2013	2018	2019	2018					
	2017								
	2019								

Stadt Wien. "Landtag." [Wahlarchiv](#), Wiener Zeitung, 2020, [wahlarchiv.wienerzeitung.at/#detailergebnisse](http://wahlarchiv.wienerzeitung.at/#detailergebnisse).

### A-2

Länder Election Results 1998 to 2015						
Vienna	Upper Austria	Styria	Burgenland	Vorarlberg	Lower Austria	Carinthia
2001	2003	2000	2000	1999	2003	2004
ÖVP - 16.39%	ÖVP - 43.42%	ÖVP - 42.27%	ÖVP - 35.55%	ÖVP - 45.76%	ÖVP - 53.29%	ÖVP - 11.64%
SPÖ - 46.91%	SPÖ - 38.33%	SPÖ - 32.42%	SPÖ - 46.55%	SPÖ - 12.99%	SPÖ - 33.55%	SPÖ - 38.43%
FPÖ - 20.16%	FPÖ - 8.40%	FPÖ - 12.43%	FPÖ - 12.63%	FPÖ - 27.41%	FPÖ - 4.49%	FPÖ - 42.43%
Greens - 12.45%	Greens - 9.06%	Greens - 5.53%	Greens - 5.49%	Greens - 6.03%	Greens - 7.22%	Greens - 6.71%
2005	2009	2005	2005	2004	2008	2009
ÖVP - 18.77%	ÖVP - 46.76%	ÖVP - 38.66%	ÖVP - 36.38%	ÖVP - 54.92%	ÖVP - 54.39%	ÖVP - 16.83%
SPÖ - 49.09%	SPÖ - 24.94%	SPÖ - 41.67%	SPÖ - 52.18%	SPÖ - 16.87%	SPÖ - 25.51%	SPÖ - 28.74%
FPÖ - 14.83%	FPÖ - 15.29%	FPÖ - 4.56%	FPÖ - 5.75%	FPÖ - 12.94%	FPÖ - 10.47	FPÖ - 3.76%
Greens - 14.63%	Greens - 9.18%	Greens - 4.73%	Greens - 5.21%	Greens - 10.17%	Greens - 6.91%	Greens - 5.15%
						BZÖ - 44.89%
2010	2015	2010	2010	2009	2013	2013
ÖVP - 13.99%	ÖVP - 36.37%	ÖVP - 37.21%	ÖVP - 34.62%	ÖVP - 50.79%	ÖVP - 50.79%	ÖVP - 14.40%
SPÖ - 44.34%	SPÖ - 18.37%	SPÖ - 38.29%	SPÖ - 48.26%	SPÖ - 10.02%	SPÖ - 21.57%	SPÖ - 37.13%
FPÖ - 25.75%	FPÖ - 30.36%	FPÖ - 10.66%	FPÖ - 8.98%	FPÖ - 25.12%	FPÖ - 8.21%	FPÖ - 16.85%
Greens - 12.65%	Greens - 10.32%	Greens - 5.49%	Greens - 4.15%	Greens - 10.58%	Greens - 8.06%	Greens - 12.10%
2015		2015	2015	2014		BZÖ - 6.40%
ÖVP - 9.24%		ÖVP - 28.45%	ÖVP - 29.08%	ÖVP - 41.79%		
SPÖ - 39.59%		SPÖ - 29.29%	SPÖ - 41.92%	SPÖ - 8.77%		
FPÖ - 30.78%		FPÖ - 26.76%	FPÖ - 15.04%	FPÖ - 23.42%		
Greens - 11.84%		Greens - 6.68%	Greens - 6.43%	Greens - 17.14%		

Stadt Wien. "Landtag." [Wahlarchiv](#), Wiener Zeitung, 2020, [wahlarchiv.wienerzeitung.at/#detailergebnisse](http://wahlarchiv.wienerzeitung.at/#detailergebnisse).

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