

# Electoral support for FPÖ in regional and national arenas: Different levels of government, same causality?

Viktoria Jansesberger , Zoe Lefkofridi and Armin Mühlböck

Faculty of Cultural and Social Sciences, University of Salzburg, Salzburg, Austria

## ABSTRACT


Which factors contribute to the electoral success of Populist Radical Right Parties (PRRPs)? We empirically investigate the relationship between the Austrian Freedom Party/FP (Freiheitliche Partei Österreich/FPÖ)'s electoral shares and the degree of population's socioeconomic polarization based on data for six regional and national elections and 118 municipalities in the state of Salzburg. Regional elections offer an excellent setting for conducting a thorough test of the argument that relative deprivation provides fertile ground for PRRPs. Our longitudinal study provides clear evidence that the more polarized the socio-economic structure in Salzburg's municipalities, the higher the share of FP supporters. This relationship holds over time and across types of elections: regional elections ('Landtagswahlen') and national elections ('Nationalratswahlen').

**KEYWORDS** Regional elections; populism; Austria; quantitative study

## Introduction

*Under which conditions does support for Populist Radical Right-wing Parties (PRRPs) grow?* The causes of Populist Radical Right-wing Parties (PRRPs) success are a major debate in the literature (Hawkins, Read, and Pauwels 2017; Heinisch, Massetti, and Mazzoleni 2020; Heinisch, Holtz-Bacha, and Mazzoleni 2017; Rooduijn 2015). Examining different types of elections is important for understanding PRRPs' electoral success (Hawkins and Ruth 2015; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012), given that these PRRPs feature in cabinets and parliaments at different levels of government. However, a large part of research is biased towards national (statewide) elections (Schakel and Romanova 2018). As a result, much less is known about PRRP success in *regional*

**CONTACT** Viktoria Jansesberger  [viktoriaanna.jansesberger@sbg.ac.at](mailto:viktoriaanna.jansesberger@sbg.ac.at)

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elections and whether conditions of success vary between national and regional elections.

Seeking to fill this gap, we test whether socio-economic polarization and the associated relative disadvantages are important drivers for the success of PRRPs using a rigorous empirical design based on socio-economic as well as election data at the local level. By approaching PRRP success from a regional perspective, our paper makes both methodological and empirical contributions: First, our meso-level design enables the comparison of electoral results of the *same* party across *different* municipalities. By comparing small subnational units, a high number of cases can be obtained without including *different* parties; this overcomes key problems of existing cross-country designs that compare the electoral success of *different* PRRPs with each other and typically analyze a very small number of cases. Moreover, such a design allows holding institutional factors (e.g. the electoral system) constant, since all cases are located within one single country. Second, we study one of the most successful PRRPs in Europe, and since many decades an integral part of the Austrian party system: the Austrian Freedom Party (FP). In spite of several prominent studies of this party (Aichholzer et al. 2014; Heinisch 2003), none has specifically examined the causes of its success in regional elections. To date, no study has investigated the effects of socio-economic polarization on Austrians' support for the FP in different electoral arenas. Our study covers regional and national contests during thirty years (1984–2018) and analyzes 118 municipalities in the province of Salzburg. The parallel examination of regional and national election results that allows check the robustness of the test results. Third, we rely on votes cast, which provide us with the most accurate indicator of PRRP support compared to survey data, where PRRP supporters are under-represented due to social-desirability bias.

A fine-grained analysis of FP in the Austrian Province of Salzburg offers clear conclusions about the relevance of the socio-economic dimension for the explanation of the electoral success of PRRPs: in both regional and national arenas, the FP fares best in the communities, where the losers of modernization are particularly exposed to the winners of globalization (=polarized socio-economic structure). The hypothesized relationship holds in elections that concern different levels of political representation (regional vs. national) thus providing solid support for the theoretical argument that relative deprivation and discontent fuel PRRP success. We note that Salzburg resembles in certain respect the nation as a whole because of its topographic and socioeconomic diversity: It combines Alpine and lowland regions, urban, suburban, and rural communities, modern and traditional cultural traits, and ranges in socioeconomic terms from extreme wealth to pockets of significant poverty in remote valleys and urban immigrant quarters. Furthermore, our analysis shows that success in regional elections correlates strongly with

success in national ones. Regional elections are widely regarded as events that are subordinate to, and determined by, statewide elections. In elections where there is less at stake, PRRPs are generally expected to fare *better* (González-Sirois and Bélanger 2019; Massetti 2018; Müller 2018; Reif, Schmitt, and Norris 1997; Reif and Schmitt 1980). Yet, as our study shows, this is not always the case. In Salzburg we observe consistently worse results of the Austrian FP in the regional elections under study compared to the national ones. This might reflect the fact that the national organization of FP has historically been more dominant than the regional branches (Luther 2003, 1997). Complementing research on PRRP success in the national parliamentary arena (e.g. Bowyer 2008; Coffé, Heyndels, and Vermeir 2007; Rydgren and Ruth 2013, 2011; Rydgren 2003), our study also adds nuance and depth to the picture painted by macro-level cross-country studies.

The remainder of paper is structured as follows: we begin by contextualizing our study of the Austrian FP in the PRRP family and explaining why parties within this family are called 'radical', 'right-wing' and 'populist'; we then briefly review existing literature on the causes of PRRP success with a focus on the role of education (section 2). We proceed with elaborating on our theoretical argument (section 3) as well as our methodology and data, followed by our empirical results (section 4). Finally, we conclude with a discussion of our findings, whereby we critically reflect on our analysis and raise questions for future research (section 5).

### **Populist Radical Right-wing Parties (Prrps) and the determinants for their success**

The party family of PRRPs (e.g. Mudde 2007; Muis and Immerzeel 2016; Rydgren 2007) includes parties in different countries that have the following properties: *First*, parties within this political family are 'radical' because they aim at transforming politics and society by going back to the 'roots' (Latin: *radices*). Radical parties do not suggest the abolition of democracy but its reform, sometimes through drastic changes (Lefkofridi and Casado-Asensio 2013; Mudde 2000). *Second*, these radical parties are 'right' in terms of their positions on the left-right dimension of political competition. Through the decades, the Radical Right has unfailingly stressed the high importance of national identity, opposed immigration, supported a traditional family structure and demanded more law and order (Zaslave 2009, 2004). These parties are *radical right* because their proposal for return to an idealized past underlines traditional value-driven lifestyle, the rule of law and order, 'nativism' and the halt in immigration (Ignazi 2006; Kestilä-Kekkonen and Wass 2008; Lefkofridi and Casado-Asensio 2013; Mudde 2007). *Third*, these parties are 'populist' because they voice strong anti-elite-criticism and emphasize the existence of an ongoing battle between the good and pure people and the corrupt elite.

Thus, distrust and anti-establishment-sentiments are inherent to them (Mudde 2004).

The success of parties that exhibit all the above characteristics (populism, radicalism and right-wing ideology) has been studied in the context of European and national parliamentary elections (Betz 2002; Borriello and Brack 2019; Halikiopoulou and Vlandas 2016; Halikiopoulou and Vasilopoulou 2014; Heinisch 2003; Van Haute, Pauwels, and Sinardet 2018; Van Kessel 2011). This research offers valuable insights into both supply- and demand factors for PRRP success (Georgiadou, Rori, and Roumanias 2018; Hawkins, Read, and Pauwels 2017; Norris and Inglehart 2016; Rydgren and Ruth 2013, 2011; Rydgren 2007): supply-side studies focus on whether and to what extent specific contexts and institutional features provide fertile ground for these parties<sup>1</sup>; demand-side analyses focus on why certain voters are likely to be attracted to PRRPs.

In this paper we focus on the demand side and in particular on education, which has been identified as a major factor in increasing/decreasing one's likelihood to cast a PRRP ballot (Bowyer 2008; Rydgren 2008). On the one hand, highly educated people tend to hold modern and liberal values and put less emphasis on traditional societal institutions, like the church and support non-conventional family structures (Inglehart 1997; Norris and Inglehart 2016, 2009). Thus, the higher the level of education, the lower the likelihood of PRRP support.

On the other hand, levels of educational attainment are also related to skills, occupation, and job security. Since the 1970s, the phenomenon of tertiarization has transformed socioeconomic structures in Western industrial societies in different ways and at various rates of speed. In this sense, the concept refers not only to the ascendance of the third sector of the economy vis-à-vis the first (agriculture, forestry, fishing, and mining) and second sector (manufacturing) in terms of the composition of the occupational structure. It also implies a trend toward top qualified employees and the need to fill intellectually demanding jobs, which are themselves connected with longer schooling and more extensive training. More and more people are obtaining high school diplomas or university degrees and more and more people are working in the higher service sector (excluding sales, transport, tourism).<sup>2</sup> These developments lead to a higher degree of socio-economic diversity, which is reflected in different job opportunities, income opportunities and livelihood opportunities (Baethge 2000; Elkmann, Lauterbach, and Wind 1994; Hawkins, Read, and Pauwels 2017; Kornhauser 2013; Lubbers and Scheepers 2000). However, these processes of socio-economic diversification are also driving the polarization of society. Sections of the population benefit from these developments, but others are falling behind. In the trend towards socio-economic diversification, there are not only winners; these developments also

produce ‘modernization losers’ – namely citizens, who cannot benefit from such trends.

## Modernization losers and PRRPs

Proponents of the ‘modernization losers’-thesis, like Betz (1993), and Minkenberg (2003), or the ‘relative deprivation’-theory, like Gurr (1970), and Runciman (1966), argue that people, who lack the skills asked for in the new economic environment feel deprived because they compare themselves to others, who benefit from globalization. These ‘globalization-losers’ (Kriesi, Grande, and Dolezal 2012; Kriesi, Grande, and Lachat 2006) have troubles adapting to the new environment and know that it probably will not get any easier for them in the future (Betz 1993). They additionally suffer because they compare their socio-economic status now to their own socio-economic status in the past when they were better off (Gurr 1970; Runciman 1966). Even worse, they fear they will be out of work soon.

The concerns of citizens, who cannot benefit from modernization, and feel superseded and made ‘invalid’ by it, are further exacerbated by immigration. Immigrants with little knowledge are unlikely to fill jobs in the service sector, due to their missing language skills and/or different educational background. Thus, the modernization losers perceive immigrants as competitors for the few jobs left that require low skills. As they do not want low skilled immigrants to settle down in their community, they vote for PRRP based on the assumption that PRRPs willing to protect them, given that they stand up for stricter immigration laws (Lubbers and Scheepers 2000; Norris 2005; Rydgren 2008). PRRPs appear very attractive for them because they capitalize on skepticism towards the ruling elites (Minkenberg 2003). Modernization losers are angry and skeptical towards the political establishment because they feel that it has done nothing to prevent them from decline in the socio-economic ladder. In this reading, the emergence of radical right-wing populists is primarily associated with changes in Western industrial societies triggered by modernization (Hawkins, Read, and Pauwels 2017; Taggart 2017).

Building on these works, we argue that modernization leads to a situation where people with certain skills (e.g. high education) are capable of working in the nowadays important economic sectors (service sector) and can therefore reap off the benefits of globalization. This group of voters will not vote for populists because they argue against the modernization that benefits them. Others, however, who do not possess these skills feel out of place and fear the future because they find themselves suddenly at the bottom of the social structure and are threatened by unemployment and declining incomes. We conclude that these so called ‘modernization losers’ are worried about being replaced by automatization and/or immigrants, while

others are looking forward to rising living standards in the future (Ivarsflaten 2008; Oesch 2008).

PRRPs offer easy solutions for complex problems and frequently proclaim their intention to change society backwards, when everything was supposed to be better. To this aim, they propose strict anti-immigration regulations, which render them even more appealing for people concerned about their capacity to survive in a changing world and the alleged risk immigrants constitute in this context. While their policy proposals fail to attract modernization winners, modernization losers have incentives to support these parties (Betz 1993; Minkenberg 2003). Even though these arguments might seem perfectly clear on the individual-level, it is less self-evident what they imply for meso-level analyses.

Shifting the focus from the individual voter, we pay attention to variation at the meso level: From the 1970s onwards, socioeconomic change in different ways and rates of speed, is shaping Western industrial societies. The concept of socioeconomic change implies various, simultaneous developments. For one thing, the importance of the tertiary economic sector (services such as public health, information technology, financial services, legal services, education) vis-à-vis the primary and the secondary economic sector (agriculture, forestry, fishing, mining, manufacturing) has grown. On the other hand, this set in motion a trend towards the rising demand for better qualified employees, needed for intellectually more demanding jobs. Since better qualification can only be obtained through more schooling and extensive training programmes, socio-economic change entails a rising degree in socio-economic polarization – some engage in obtaining better education, while others remain relatively unqualified (Baethge 2000; Elkmann, Lauterbach, and Wind 1994). This process of social diversification happens at different rates of speed and municipalities differ regarding the number of inhabitants with higher education. Consequently, the degree of socio-economic polarization varies across municipalities.

Even though the number of high school graduates and academics is constantly rising, they are still in the minority. Some municipalities are predominantly inhabited by poorly educated individuals (unfit for a globalized economic environment) and reflect a very homogenous socio-economic milieu. These communities are characterized by a very low polarization of the socio-economic structure. The contrary occurs in other municipalities, where the proportion of well-educated individuals increases steadily. In these communities the winners of modernization – well trained and highly educated individuals – live close to the losers of modernization; thus, the socio-economic structure is diverse. We argue that this is exactly where advantages and disadvantages of modernization become most apparent, and the gap between its winners and losers manifests itself most clearly.

We stress that modernization conflicts are less likely in municipalities, where all residents are affected in an equally bad manner by this process. The opposite is true for local polities where some can reap off the benefits of globalization, while others face deteriorating living conditions. There, a part of the municipality experiences relative deprivation emerges. In such a setting, modernization-losers are constantly reminded of their poor situation compared to better educated people with higher incomes and more career and livelihood opportunities. When some members of a community are endowed with the resources needed to function in a globalizing world, the ones who are not will clearly perceive their relative disadvantage and have incentives to opt for parties that resist this change (Giebler, Hirsch, and Schürmann 2020; Ivarsflaten 2008; Jetten, Mols, and Healy 2017). We argue that such a milieu, formed by a high degree of polarization in socio-economic terms, carries a high potential for modernization conflicts, and is an ideal breeding ground for PRRPs like the Austrian FP. Thus, we expect variation in socio-economic polarization to matter greatly for PRRP success and hypothesize that:

H: The more polarized the socio-economic structure of a municipality, the higher the share of the PRRPs in regional elections.

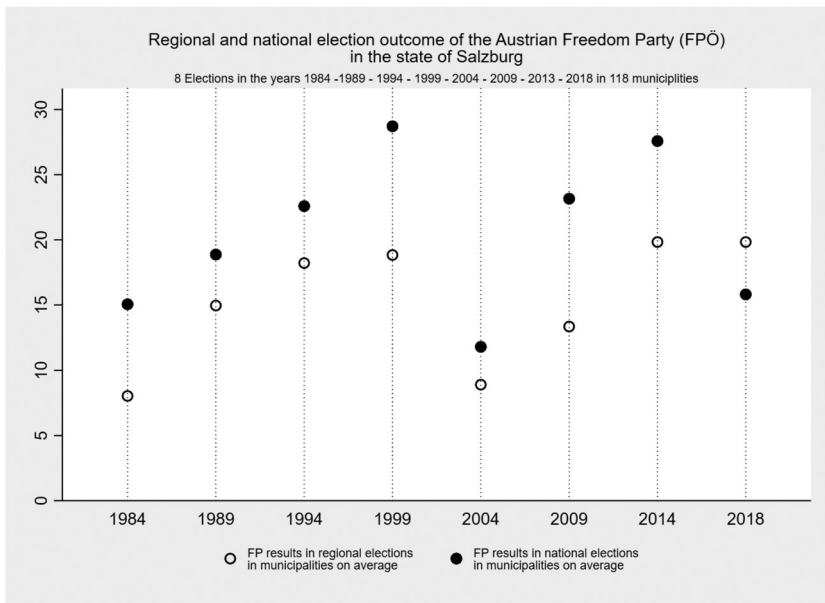
## **Methodology, data & empirical results**

To test our hypothesis about the impact of polarization of a municipality's socio-economic structure on the share of the PRRPs in regional elections, we conduct a longitudinal case-study of the province of Salzburg. Salzburg is a very interesting case regarding the impact of factors like socio-economic deprivation and migrant share on the Austrian FP's success. Being Austria's most important crossing point into Germany, the state of Salzburg has been exposed to modernization and internationalization pressures second to none in the Austrian context. With an overall population of 538,258, the state of Salzburg is dominated by a central metropolitan hub - the City of Salzburg (148,250 inhabitants) – which serves as the province's political and commercial centre. The city is surrounded by a belt of closely connected municipalities. Because of the area's geography and topography (several rivers, nearby mountain ranges and lakes, and the border with Germany on the city's doorstep) access to the central city from different parts of the state is highly uneven. Whereas the villages and towns in the surrounding lowlands are more or less suburbs and exurbs, access to the city for the rural areas further afar as well as for localities nearby but in mountainous terrain depends on limited rail connections and a few major roads. Due to the (by Austrian standards) exorbitant real-estate prices and generally high

cost of living in Salzburg, there is a considerable incentive to live in the more tranquil but better affordable municipalities around the city.

Our focus lies on regional elections. We consider this to be a suitable setting for an internally valid hypothesis test. Additionally, we will carry out a parallel test of our hypothesis with the results of the national elections (i.e. chronologically closest national elections in the period after the regional elections). In this way, useful knowledge can be generated about whether regional and national elections differ in terms of outcome or whether they show similar trends. With the parallel examination of regional and national election results, we check the robustness of the test results. Before testing our hypothesis, we focus on  $Y$ , the dependent variable.

**Dependent Variable:** the electoral share of Austrian FP in regional elections (Landtagswahlen) and in national elections (Nationalratswahlen) in the state of Salzburg at the municipality level in the period beginning from 1984. Figure 1 shows the development of the FP's electoral success in regional and national elections from 1984 onwards. Regional and national elections do not (always) take place in the same year. Therefore Figure 1 depicts always the chronologically closest elections.



**Figure 1.** Source: Landesstatistik Salzburg, own calculations on the basis of regional and national electoral results in the state of Salzburg from 1984 to 2018 (in the case of national elections until 2019). (Link: <https://www.salzburg.gv.at/stat/wahlen/ltw/index2018.html>)



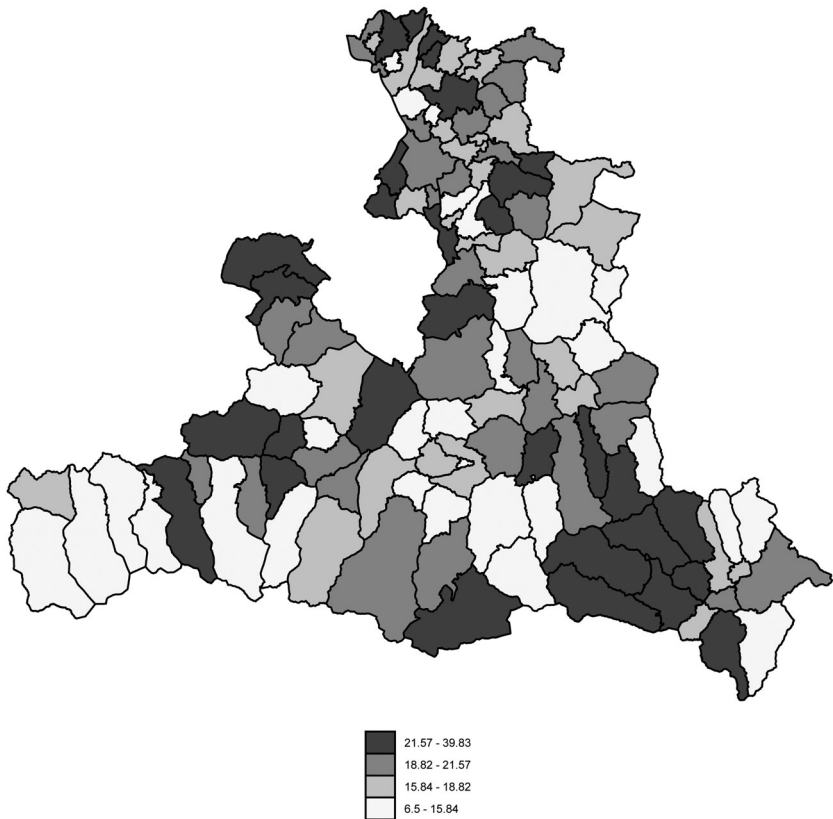
The data refer to political and juridical municipalities as defined by Salzburg state law (in total: 119 municipalities); these are the locations of elections and of all other political as well as commercial activities. As the city of Salzburg is an obvious outlier in terms of size (150,000 inhabitants compared to 20,000 inhabitants in the second largest municipality), we exclude it from our sample. By doing so we create a more homogenous setting for our hypothesis test. Without the city of Salzburg, the average number of inhabitants per municipality in our sample (3,419) is representative of Austrian municipalities. 98,8% of all Austrian municipalities approximate this size. Of course, this implies that our findings are restricted regarding the cases they should apply to, since we do not test our hypotheses on more populous municipalities.

Figure 1 shows that from the mid-1980s to the beginning of the 2000s the FP, led by Jörg Haider, was able to achieve a clear upward trend in both regional and national elections in Salzburg; in all but one cases the results of national elections are *higher* than those of regional elections (regional elections up to 20 percent, national elections up to 29 percent – on average). This is in line with what one would expect given the history and the centralized organization of the FP. The national level party organization has always been more dominant than the regional branches. Consequently, federal campaigns were not only more professionalized, but they also had a considerably higher visibility than provincial campaigns. Furthermore, the national party organization has been able to draw on a pool of experienced and popular candidates, while this was only rarely the case for the regional branches of the same party (Luther 2003, 1997). Finally, the different vote shares of FP across types of elections might also be influenced by differences in turnout rates.

In the 1999 Austrian-wide elections, the FP achieved its historically best national election result and became the second strongest political force, ahead of the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP). In the 1999 national election in Salzburg, the FP even became the strongest party with a 29.4 percent share. In the regional election of the same year, the FP was not as successful as in the national election; but it was able to achieve its historically best result with around 20 percent of the votes. After 1999, however, the FP lost a lot of voters. At the national level, the FP had participated in the federal government together with the ÖVP. Many FP politicians in the federal states and municipalities were dissatisfied with the actions of the government and with their party's participation in it. The turbulence initially led to the resignation of the FP cabinet members and then to a break in the government (ORF TV-Thek Online 2020). New elections at the national level in 2002 followed and ended with a brilliant victory for the ÖVP (42.3% / + 15.4 percentage points) and a total collapse of the FP (10% / –17 percentage points) (Bundesministerium für Inneres (BMI) Online, 2020). With a slight delay, in 2004, the

regional elections in the state of Salzburg reflected these federal-level events. The FP's share of the vote was halved.

The FP was able to grow again in the following election under its new chairman Heinz-Christian Strache. The trend that the national results are higher than in regional elections continued. The upswing was short-lived, however. A video scandal ('Ibiza') again led to the collapse of a national government with FP participation in 2019 (Eberl, Huber, and Plescia 2020). Vice-Chancellor and FPÖ party leader Heinz-Christian Strache had to resign from his offices, there were early elections in 2019 and the FPÖ suffered heavy losses. As can be gleaned from Figure 2, the FP was able to achieve good results in the regional elections in 2018. One may attribute this to the circumstance that in these elections the consequences of the 'Ibiza'-affair had not yet materialized. The national election results represented by



**Figure 2.** Source: Landesstatistik Salzburg, own calculations on the bases of the results of regional elections in the state of Salzburg (Landtagswahlen) 1999. Date/state (regional) election: 07.03.1999. (Link: <https://www.salzburg.gv.at/stat/wahlen/ltw/index2018.html#dl>)

the black circle refer to 2019 (because there were no national elections in 2018).

Figure 2 displays the map of municipalities in the federal state of Salzburg and demonstrates the variation in the FP's electoral share in the regional election in 1999, the year of its greatest success: the darker the municipality, the higher the FP's share. A detailed graphic depiction of the FP success in regional elections over time can be found in Appendix A1.

For our hypothesis test, we do not draw on all election data, i.e. during 1984–2018 (Figure 1), but only on six regional elections (1984–2009) because: (a) this is the period when the rise and fall time of the FP under Jörg Haider occurred; (b) the regional elections in 2013 were called early and held in the wake of a huge regional financial scandal; and (c) we conduct a parallel hypothesis test with the election successes of the FP at the regional and national level; the early 2019 national elections were the result of the 'Ibiza' affair. Thus, the election performance of the FP cannot be interpreted in isolation from this scandal and hence the 2018 regional elections are not comparable to the 2019 national elections. In our analysis, we thus include the following Landtagswahlen and Nationalratswahlen that were organized in Salzburg:

- Regional election 1984 / National election 1986
- Regional election 1989 / National election 1990
- Regional election 1994 / National election 1994
- Regional election 1999 / National election 1999
- Regional election 2004 / National election 2006
- Regional election 2009 / National election 2013

**Independent Variables:** Our main predictor is the 'Degree of population polarization' (Alesina et al. 2003) in socioeconomic terms measured at the municipality level at specific points in time (=election years). Popular measures to assess the degree of population polarization at the aggregate level are income inequality and the distribution of employees between different economic sectors (Geys 2006). The crucial determinants are always income, employment, and life chances. Education affects all three of them and shapes the ability of individuals to gain from modernization. Therefore, we operationalize the local 'degree of population polarization' in a municipality through the share of individuals with university entrance degrees from secondary schools (i.e. 'Matura' degrees) plus the ratio of university graduates to the total population, which is aged 15 and above. One could object that highly educated people may work in poorly paid jobs, or that individuals with a low level of education could work in jobs with relatively high incomes. In preliminary analyses we found that the level of education is highly correlated ( $r=0.859$ ) with the proportion of people employed in the

higher service sector (not including sales, transportation, tourism).<sup>3</sup> Our indicator therefore seems to be highly valid and captures the concept of socio-economic polarization. A high value indicates a high degree of socio-economic polarization. Maximum polarization results from a ratio of 50–50: 50 percent with university entrance degrees from secondary schools or academic degrees and 50 percent at lower educational levels. Our indicator, measured at the local level, varies from a minimum of 1.4 percent (in the year 1984) to a maximum of 35 percent (in the year 2009). The maximum degree of polarization with 50 percent was never reached. However, the degree of polarization has increased over time, from an average of 6.3 percent in 1984 to an average of 17.4 percent in 2009. The variation between the municipalities also increased during the observation period: range in 1984: 18 percentage points / range in 2009: 29 percentage points. In 1996 marks Austrian membership in the European Union (EU), which, by exerting pressure towards market liberalization, increases the capability gap between educated and non-educated segments of society.

Following previous meso-level studies (e.g. Georgiadou, Rori, and Roumanias 2018; Rydgren and Ruth 2013; Rydgren 2003), we include several control variables in our analysis: First, we control for the election year and the municipality. Additionally, we control for: municipality size (in thousands); the share of foreign nationals in a municipality, the economic efficiency of a municipality, as well as the closeness of the election. The size of a municipality may have an impact on the electoral success of populist radical right parties, because people inhabiting smaller units tend to be rather conservative and more supportive of traditional values (Rydgren and Ruth 2011) like thus promoted by the FP. Furthermore, we control for the number of foreigners living in a municipality; As PRRPs exploit anti-immigration resentments, they are supposed to be more successful in areas where many people from other countries are present (Rydgren and Ruth 2011). In the state of Salzburg, however, the cost of living is high and the region has a number of characteristics (as a cultural centre with a beautiful landscape, central location, etc.) that could attract high-income (EU) foreigners. Foreigners who live in a community can thus themselves be losers or winners or thus positioned on one side or the other of the socio-economic polarization. Irrespective of this, an influence of the proportion of foreigners on the success of RPPR parties is plausible, even though the effect of the control variable may lead in both directions: more or less chances of success for RPPR parties. We measure this through the percentage of people living in a municipality whose citizenship is non-Austrian. If a municipality has more wealth available to build up infrastructure, citizens may be more content and less inclined to support an anti-establishment party. There, PRRP parties may find it harder to exploit anti-elite-sentiments and mobilize through their usually used patterns (Rydgren 2007). In addition, richer municipalities could be more

attractive to people with a higher level of education, because better infrastructure can be offered, for example for the compatibility of family and work. People with higher education are less likely to vote for PRRP parties. As above: the effect can point in both directions, and show more or less success for PRRPs. We measure the financial strength with the sum of the municipal taxes. Fourth, the 'closeness' of the race in a ballot is measured by the distance between the share of votes the first and the second party received. Additionally, a close race may increase voter turnout and thus the chances of being elected, even for PRRPs (Geys 2006). To this end, we integrate voter turnout into the set of variables as a further control. All control variables are available at the online archive of 'Statistik Austria' (Statistik Austria 2019), except for 'closeness', which draws on previous studies' estimations (Heinisch and Mühlböck 2016).

Table 1 summarizes the variables included in our models (1984–2009). We see that the independent variables are all centred at the grand mean (Braun 2010; Langer 2010) and we integrate logarithmized socio-economic predictors into the models (*Degree of population polarization, Municipality size in thousands, Share of foreign nationals, Economic efficiency*). Socio-economic factors often have skewed distributions. The log-transformation of the socio-economic factors in our models makes their distributions more symmetric (Zumel and Mount 2014). In this way, we make sure that for the purpose of our linear regression, the relationship between the X-Variables and the Y-Variable is approximately linear and that the socio-economic X-factors are approximately normally distributed.

**Empirical results:** Our goal is to estimate the effect of population polarization on PRRPs' varying electoral performance in regional elections. We run a parallel hypothesis with its results at national elections that are closest in time. In both cases, we hypothesize that a high degree of population polarization, leads to electoral success for right-wing populists. This is based on the argument that in municipalities with high population polarization, winners and losers of modernization collide. This creates a milieu in which modernization conflicts emerge making the ground for PRRP success more fertile.

We employ a linear mixed model with which we can test in the given contextual setting the effect of the main predictor on the level-1-criterion 'Regional/National election outcome of right-wing populist parties in regional/national elections', measured at the municipal level in the state of Salzburg. In doing so, we employ a cross-classified-model. This is necessary because the units at the lowest level of the model (regional/national elections outcome at the local level) are not nested in a hierarchical sense in upper levels. There are data on elections (level 1) in certain municipalities (level 2 / context 1) at specific points in time (level 2 / context 2). Municipalities and time (election years) have an effect that is both 'cross-classified' and independent of each other on level 2 (defined as 'two way cross classification')

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics – Dependent and Independent Variables in Models.

	n	min	range	max	mean	median	st.dev	skewness	kurtosis
FP: Regional election outcome	708	.65	42.27	42.92	13.72	13.45	6.38	.64	3.89
FP: National election outcome	708	3.76	44.74	48.5	20.03	19.68	7.48	.42	2.99
Degree of population polarization(ln)	708	-1.96	3.22	1.26	0	.06	.56	-.43	2.95
Municipality size in thousands (ln)	708	-2.1	4.31	2.21	0	.13	.86	-.18	2.69
Share of foreign nationals (ln)	708	-3.76	5.89	2.13	0	.17	.95	-1.33	5.62
Economic efficiency (ln)	708	-1.56	2.9	1.34	0	.06	.44	-.2	3.09
Election closeness	708	-24.67	74.56	49.89	0	-1	14.48	.44	2.74
Turnout regional election	708	-13.43	27.53	14.1	0	.08	5.05	-.11	2.85
Turnout national election	708	-26.25	41.97	15.72	0	-.06	6.66	-.3	3.12

**Table 2.** Structure of the two-way cross classification.

Local elections (1 bis 708): Cross classified with Municipalities (118) and Time (7)		Ballots ('x' = points to be estimated)					
		1984	1989	1994	1999	2004	2009
Municipalities in the Austrian state of Salzburg	Bruck	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Dienten	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Fusch	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Lend	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Rauris	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Taxenbach	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Zell am See	x	x	x	x	x	x
	(etc. ... 118)	x	x	x	x	x	x

(Rasbash and Browne 2008); these random effect factors are – as we will show – relevant causes for the variation of PRRPs' electoral performance in the state of Salzburg's regional/national elections measured at the municipal level. Detailed information on how we develop our models can be found in Appendix A2 Table 2.

We now proceed with showing the results of our hypothesis test, starting with the Null- and RIO models. In our case, the RIO-Model yields a constant of 13.72 in Model 2a and of 20.03 in Model 2b (cf. Table 3, Model 2a/Model 2b), representing the average elections outcome of the Austrian FP in a) regional and b) national elections in the state of Salzburg across time and municipalities (Braun 2010, 29). Our results clearly indicate that the average FP electoral performance, both on the regional and on the national level, significantly varies between context units and that therefore a multilevel analysis is the appropriate choice.

**Table 3.** Dependent variable: a) Regional / b) National Elections Outcome of Right-Wing Populist Parties.

	Model 1a: Null Model	Model 1b: Null Model	Model 2a: Random Intercepts Only (RIO)	Model 2b: Random Intercepts Only (RIO)
<i>Fixed effects</i>				
Constant (a)	13.72*** (0.240)	20.03*** (0.281)	13.72*** (1.892)	20.03*** (2.514)
<i>Variance components</i>				
Level 1: var <sub>e</sub>	40.65*** (2.161)	55.96*** (2.974)	8.158*** (0.477)	8.499*** (0.497)
Level 2: Context 1: Municipality var <sub>u</sub>			15.39*** (2.192)	16.70*** (2.370)
Level 2: Context 2: Time var <sub>v</sub>			20.62*** (13.09)	36.99*** (23.44)
Observations	708	708	708	708
AIC	4636.4	4862.3	3827.3	3863.3
BIC	4645.6	4871.4	3845.5	3881.6

Standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

**Table 4.** Dependent variable: a=Regional / b=National Elections Outcome of Right-Wing Populist Parties.

	Model 3a: Main Predictor	Model 3b: Main Predictor	Model 4a: Full Model	Model 4b: Full Model
<i>Fixed effects</i>				
Degree of population polarization (ln)	2.443*** (0.620)	2.413*** (0.639)	3.004*** (0.669)	2.747*** (0.687)
Municipality size in thousands (ln)			-1.187* (0.474)	-0.855 (0.465)
Share of foreign nationals (ln)			-0.150 (0.175)	-0.101 (0.180)
Economic efficiency (ln)			-0.169 (0.910)	0.789 (0.936)
Election closeness			-0.0310** (0.0113)	-0.0403*** (0.0115)
Turnout in a) regional b) national elections			-0.0656 (0.0447)	-0.0570 (0.0475)
Constant	13.72*** (1.833)	20.03*** (2.400)	13.72*** (1.812)	20.03*** (2.363)
<i>Variance components</i>				
Level 1: var <sub>e</sub>	14.90*** (2.130)	15.95*** (2.273)	14.01*** (2.049)	14.79*** (2.196)
Level 2: Context 1: Municipality var <sub>u</sub>	19.33*** (12.27)	33.69*** (21.36)	18.92*** (12.02)	32.67*** (20.71)
Level 2: Context 2: Time var <sub>v</sub>	8.015*** (0.469)	8.391*** (0.491)	7.969*** (0.469)	8.319*** (0.491)
Observations	708	708	708	708
AIC	3813.0	3850.3	3819.3	3853.0
BIC	3835.8	3873.1	3864.9	3898.6

Standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

In a subsequent step, we integrate the main predictor into the multi-level model (cf. Table 4: Models 3a and 3b). One may clearly observe the positive effect of the 'Degree of population polarization' in socioeconomic terms. In the regional election Model 3a the highly significant parameter estimate for the main predictor is 2.443. This means that for a one-unit increase in 'Degree of population polarization, we expect a +2.443 increase in the logarithmic scale of the dependent variable (the 'Regional Election Outcome of the FP in the state of Salzburg). In the parallel test of the effect on national elections results (Model 3b) we obtain an almost identical result with a highly significant effect of the degree of polarization as well (+2.413).

When integrating the control variables into the main model (cf. Table 4: Models 4a and 4b), we see that socio-economic polarization nonetheless maintains its influence on the dependent variable. Our main predictor does not lose any power in a setting in which we account for alternative socio-economic, political, and institutional explanations. We expect for a one-unit increase in the 'Degree of population polarization' a +3.004 increase in the logarithmic scale of the regional election outcome of the FP in the state of Salzburg, holding all other independent variables constant (Model 4a). This also applies to the national election results of the FP in the state of Salzburg (Model 4b). In this case, if the



logarithmic scale of the 'degree of polarization of the population' is increases by one unit, we expect the national election result to increase by 2,747. This result underlines the significance of the effect of our main predictor and secondly the control power of the multilevel model.

We tested the effect of the polarization of the population on the electoral success of PRRPs in both national and regional elections. Our results show that the polarization of the population in socio-economic terms has a valid effect on PRRPs' electoral shares. Our parallel tests of the effect across *types* of elections (regional and national respectively) underscore the robustness of the results, as they display almost identical trends. To facilitate interpretation of our logarithmic independent variable, we elaborate more on its effect in Appendix (A3), where we present an additional figure.

## 5. Conclusion

Globalization creates winners and losers, and the 'losers of modernization' are attracted by PRRPs' rhetoric and proposed policies. We translate this argument for the meso-level and hypothesize that the conditions are more favourable for PRRPs in communities, where the people benefiting from globalization (high education) live closely together with modernization losers (low education). While some municipalities are still very homogenous in their socio-economic structure and mainly inhabited by low-skilled individuals, other communities have become more polarized. We assume that in homogenous societies, where an overwhelming majority of inhabitants is poorly skilled, almost everybody suffers from modernization; there, voters will not feel as deprived (everybody is in the same position). In socioeconomically polarized municipalities, however, where the percentage of modernization winners is higher, only a part of the community feels threatened and disadvantaged by globalization; their unbeneficial situation is more visible and leads to a perception of relative deprivation.

In this paper, we argue and empirically demonstrate that PRRPs like the FP gain more votes in a diverse socioeconomic polity. We find that a more polarized social fabric significantly increases the share of FP supporters in regional and in national elections. Approaching the PRRP puzzle from a regional perspective enables a thorough test of the argument that socio-economic polarization leads to support for PRRPs; but our test relied on aggregate votes cast in municipalities and was not performed at the level of the individual voter. Moreover, our fine-grained study is restricted to one Austrian province. Nonetheless, Salzburg does offer interesting insights into the Austrian case, since it resembles the nation as a whole (topographic and socioeconomic diversity). Future case-studies shall put the external validity of our results to empirical scrutiny: does the positive relationship between population polarization

and PRRP-success in regional elections apply to PRRPs in the regional elections of other European countries? Sub-state level analyses can make important contributions to general debates by providing more detail, and thus more depth, nuance and texture, which help us better understand PRRPs success. Despite its limitations, our empirical evidence clearly supports the broader argument that socioeconomic conditions matter greatly for PRRPs' success.

## Notes

1. On the supply side, there are several conditions that can hinder or facilitate the success of PRRPs, which have a very a distinct profile from all other parties in their systems. Following Duverger's Duverger (1954) seminal argument on the mechanical effects of electoral systems, PRRPs proportional electoral systems should provide such parties with more fertile ground compared to majoritarian systems. Not only are thresholds lower but competition for the government is not restricted to two parties only. The proportionality of electoral rules exerts a centrifugal effect on the party system, because they generate a larger number of viable parties and provide incentives for small niche parties to compete Cox (1990). Under proportional representation (PR), political parties are more likely to have a 'fairly well-defined and narrow ideological appeal' Cox (1997). In this regard, the electoral space, that is left for PRRPs, matters for their success. RRPp define themselves mainly through strong opposition to immigration and their emphasis on tradition. Hence, they are likely to gain ground especially when sociocultural issues, such as identity issues, are more salient than economic issues (see also Lefkofridi et al. (2014)). They are likely to gain especially if mainstream-parties' positions converge, because they can then easily argue that the whole establishment is the same and is acting against the true interests of ordinary people. This helps them exploit anti-establishment sentiments Muis and Immerzeel (2016); Rydgren (2007). PRRPs' success can be affected by the stance of other political parties in the system as well as that of the media – whether they fight against them or ally with them.
2. Higher Services = Information and Communication, Finance and Insurance, Real Estate and Housing, Professional, Scientific and Technical Services, Other Economic Services, Public Administration, Defense, Social Security, Education, Health and Social Services, Arts, Entertainment and Recreation, Extra-territorial organizations. This definition was chosen because more highly qualified jobs can be expected in these sectors in particular. Defined according to the OENACE structure of economic activities: see Statistics Austria Online (2008). Development of the ÖNACE. Source: 2008 [https://www.statistik.at/web\\_en/classifications/implementation\\_of\\_the\\_onace2008/development\\_of\\_the\\_onace2008/index.html](https://www.statistik.at/web_en/classifications/implementation_of_the_onace2008/development_of_the_onace2008/index.html)
3. See footnote 2.

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## ORCID

Viktoria Jansesberger  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0126-0889>

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