REACTING TO THE RADICAL RIGHT

Lessons from Germany and Austria

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to explain the variation in the electoral success of far-right parties in Germany and Austria over the past several decades. It argues that the reaction of existing political parties, the tabloid press and civil society to right-wing populism has been different in the two states, and that these differences help explain the divergent development of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) and the German Republicans (REPs). The article explores how the strategies of mainstream political forces affect the coalition markets, party organizations, political recruitment and perceived legitimacy of right-wing populist parties. It concludes by surveying recent developments concerning the far right in Austria and eastern Germany.

KEY WORDS ▪ Austrian Freedom Party ▪ far right ▪ German far right ▪ media effects ▪ right-wing populist parties

Introduction

The rise of right-wing populist parties over the past several decades is one of the most dramatic developments in recent West European politics. The 'first wave' of scholarship on the post-war far right sought to explain why such parties had arisen across advanced industrial societies (Betz, 1994; Ignazi, 1992; Von Beyme, 1988). More recently, scholars have tried to unravel the puzzle of why these parties have become strong in some states but fizzled, or failed to develop, in others. Some analysts have focused on immigration rates as a primary variable (Gibson, 2002; Golder, 2003a; Knigge, 1998), while others have challenged this explanation (Kitschelt, 1995; Norris, 2005). Differences in electoral rules have been deemed important by some (Golder, 2003b; Jackman and Volpert, 1996), while others have argued that the correlation between effective thresholds and vote share for

the far right is not statistically significant (Carter, 2002). A third line of argument focuses on the programme of far-right parties, specifically their ability to create a cross-class coalition between middle class advocates of neoliberalism and working class resentment toward foreigners (Kitschelt, 1995).

Recently, a fourth group of scholars have focused on the interaction between right-wing populist challengers and existing political parties (Downs, 2001; Eatwell and Mudde, 2004; Meguid, 2002; Minkenberg, 2001). Such factors as the openness of coalition markets (Bale, 2003; Kestel and Godmer, 2004) and the legitimacy that other political parties extend to the far right (Bale, 2003) have been deemed critical to the electoral success of right-wing populism. This article seeks to further develop and provide empirical support for this argument. In addition to the reaction of political parties, I also contend that the reactions of the print media and civil society to the far right are important factors in determining the far right's trajectory. By 'combating' right-wing populist parties soon after they appear, mainstream political elites, civic activists and the media undermine the far right's electoral appeal, its ability to recruit capable party members, and weaken its political organization. Conversely, when mainstream political forces either cooperate with or are agnostic toward the far right, right-wing populist parties gain electoral strength, legitimacy and political entrepreneurs that can transform them into permanent forces in the party system. It is important to stress up-front that timing is critical: once the organizations of far-right parties have become strong, their supporters loyal and their officials entrenched in local, state or national governments, efforts to 'combat' the far right may well prove ineffective or counterproductive. This describes the current situation in France and Belgium. The trajectory of far-right parties, similar to those of other political parties, can thus be viewed as path-dependent (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Panebianco, 1988).

This article applies this 'interaction' argument to Germany and Austria.[1] In the mid to late 1980s, right-wing populist parties emerged in each state: the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) in Austria and the Republikaner party (hereafter REPs) in Germany. Yet while the FPÖ went on to become one of the most electorally successful far-right parties in Europe and entered a national coalition with the conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) in 2000, the REPs disintegrated over the course of the 1990s, never capturing more than 2.5 percent in national elections. The collapse of the REPs and the rise of the FPÖ were the direct results of the dramatically different strategies that other political parties, the media and civil groups in the two states adopted toward the far right: German actors combated the REPs, while their Austrian counterparts sought to 'tame' or cooperate with the FPÖ.

Case Selection

Before turning to the cases, it is important to outline the defining features of right-wing populist parties. Although there is still considerable debate over precisely which parties belong in this category (Eatwell, 2000; Mudde, 1996), most scholars agree that they possess two basic characteristics. First, they are wedded to an ethnic conception of the nation and committed to defending it from external threats. Second, such parties are *populist* because they, at least initially, attack the political establishment and seek to tap into, as well as inflame, the resentments of the supposedly ordinary citizen (Taggart, 2000). Such parties often demonize the 'Other', whether it be the immigrant population, the current government or international institutions and actors.

Germany and Austria allow for a 'structured, focused comparison' of far-right parties (George and McKeown, 1985). The two countries use proportional representation, possess a relatively high proportion of foreigners and share much in terms of history and culture. As well-suited as these two cases are to applying Mill's method of difference, one must acknowledge two factors that complicate the analysis. First, the REPs were founded in 1983 and thus represent a new party while the FPÖ dates from 1956 and its forerunner, the VdU, from 1949. The FPÖ was thus already an established party and one that the Social Democratic Party under Bruno Kreisky had brought into government in 1983.

Yet the party that Haider took over in 1986 changed markedly thereafter. During the 1960s and 1970s, the FPÖ's leadership had steered the party toward liberalism. Haider embraced both nationalism and populism, and Chancellor Franz Vranitzky (SPÖ) immediately ended the SPÖ–FPÖ coalition after Haider became the junior party's leader. There followed an exodus of liberals from the FPÖ (Bailer-Galanda and Neugebauer, 1997). Friedrich Peter, the former chairman and architect of the liberal turn, left the party less than a week after Haider's victory. Norbert Steger, the liberal party chairman who Haider replaced in 1986, announced that 'if Haider does not distance himself from the Nazis, then I will leave the party'.[2] Although Steger officially left the party several years later, he was no longer active in it after Haider's purge. Some liberals, such as Heide Schmidt and Friedhelm Frischenschlager, remained in the party for several years but, with the party lurching toward right-wing extremism, left the FPÖ in January 1993 and founded their own political party, the Liberal Forum (LiF). The creation of the LiF marked the final collapse of the liberalism within the FPÖ.

As liberals left the party, right-wing extremists and members of the neo-Nazi scene flocked to it. Haider played a central role in this transformation, personally anointing the right-wing extremist Andreas Mölzer as the editor-in-chief of the *Kärtner Nachrichten*, the FPÖ's official newspaper. Mölzer had previously edited right-wing extremist journals that printed articles questioning the existence of gas chambers at Auschwitz. On the local and

state levels, the FPÖ allowed individuals with links to right-wing extremist organizations, such as the German NPD, to appear on party lists and hold political office. Haider would only shift the party further rightward over the course of the 1990s, primarily by exploiting fears over immigration. Thus, while the FPÖ was not a new party like the German REPs, it is safe to say that the 'Haider FPÖ' bore little resemblance to its predecessor.

A second factor complicating the comparison is Austrian consociational-ism. Some scholars have argued that convergence between the main left and right parties, coupled with a clientelist political economy, is a good environ-ment for the emergence of right-wing populist parties (Kitschelt, 1995). This explanation certainly sheds light on the Austrian case, where the cozy *proporz* arrangements between the socialists and conservatives produced an anti-system sentiment that Haider fanned and exploited.

Yet while Austria's consociational system did undoubtedly provide oppor-tunities for Haider's renationalized FPÖ, this common explanation for the FPÖ's success needs to be qualified. Indeed, one can argue that party conver-gence (the SPÖ and ÖVP ruled in a Grand Coalition from 1986 to 1999) cannot really explain the FPÖ's rise and consolidation in the 1980s, even if it helps account for its steady rise in the 1990s. This is because the SPÖ actually won absolute majorities and ruled alone in national government from 1971 to 1983. In other words, the conservative opposition, even while retaining its influence through *proporz*, was out of power for over a decade. Moreover, between 1983 and 1986, the FPÖ was the junior partner in an SPÖ–FPÖ government. Haider thus began his rise after a period of one-party dominance, not during one of party convergence, and immediately after his own party had been in government.

Reacting to the Radical Right

The German and Austrian cases suggest an alternative explanation for the success and failure of right-wing populist parties. Although post-industrial-ization (Betz, 1994; Kitschelt, 1995) and immigration have created pressures that benefit right-wing parties, these pressures themselves do not create success. My central argument is that one must concentrate on the dynamic interaction between right-wing populist challengers and existing political and social actors. The reactions of other political parties, the media and groups in civil society to the far right shape its development through the causal pathways outlined below.

Imagine that existing political parties face the choice of either refusing to cooperate with right-wing populist parties or keeping their options open. When every political party announces and enforces a policy of non-cooperation with the far right, this undercuts right-wing populist parties in the following three ways. First, non-cooperation results in a form of strategic voting that weakens small parties in proportional representation (PR) systems. If small parties are to become anything more than evanescent

protest parties, they must convince their voters that they can have some tangible effect on the political process, either by entering coalitions with larger parties or by passing their own policies, whether on the communal, regional or national level. When every political party announces a policy of non-cooperation with the far right, voters will consider a vote for it as 'wasted' and cast their ballots for more viable parties (Cox, 1997). This effect should occur even if a core group of far-right supporters votes 'sincerely' or 'expressively', meaning that their votes are not influenced by calculations of electoral success. It is sufficient to assume that at least some potential far-right voters vote instrumentally.

Second, policies of non-cooperation send signals to potential voters that the far right is politically illegitimate. There is a large literature demonstrating the effects of elite cues on mass opinions (Zaller, 1992), and it is reasonable to assume that a coherent elite discourse that represents the far right as beyond the political pale should reduce popular support for right-wing populist parties. To be sure, some contumacious, or anti-system, voters might be attracted to the far right precisely because it is demonized by the political class. Yet I hypothesize that the net effect of elite de-legitimation – provided that it comes from both left and right mainstream political parties – is to weaken support for the far right.

Third, non-cooperation adversely affects right-wing populist parties' ability to recruit capable party members. Ambitious politicians who share the goals and ideology of the far right are often unwilling to work for parties that have no hope of winning political office. When political parties, or at least one major political party in a state, do not stigmatize the far right, each of these three mechanisms operate in reverse: votes are not perceived as 'wasted', the party is perceived as legitimate (Bale, 2003), and political entrepreneurs will join it. In addition, when far-right parties are able to hold governing positions in local or state parliaments, they become political incumbents and consolidate power by delivering resources to local constituencies.

The reaction of the national media to right-wing populist parties is also important. Three specific forms of media influence have received particular attention. First, scholars have used experiments to demonstrate the *agenda-setting* effect of the media, whereby 'those problems that receive prominent attention on the national news become the problems the viewing public regards as the nation's most important' (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987: 16). Second, scholars have found that by elevating some issues over others the media *prime* citizens by influencing their evaluative standards for judging political actors (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987). Third, the media package news in a *frame*, which is often defined as 'a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them' (Gamson and Modigliani, 1987: 143). The central point is that the media influence political attitudes and, as a result, vote choice.

When looking for media effects, analysts often consider the role of television news programmes or newspapers that strive for objectivity (Iyengar

and Kinder, 1987). The role of highly partisan media actors, such as conservative talk-radio hosts in the United States, has begun to receive some attention (Barker, 1999). In Europe, the role of tabloid newspapers in shaping political opinions has been understudied, and the influence of tabloid newspapers on the far right has not, to my knowledge, been explored. Yet I propose that tabloid newspapers are an important factor in shaping attitudes toward the far right, for three reasons.

First, tabloid newspapers in European states often have circulation rates that dwarf those of quality newspapers. In Germany, for example, the tabloid *Bild Zeitung* had a circulation of nearly 4.5 million during the mid-1990s, over seven times that of the second leading national newspaper, the *Westdeutscher Zeitung*, and nearly 10 times that of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ). This gives *Bild*, and the Springer Press that owns it and other newspapers and television stations, a great deal of political influence. German chancellors, for example, are known to keep in close contact with *Bild*'s editor-in-chief.

The political might of the largest tabloid newspaper in Austria is even greater than its counterpart in Germany. Over 40 percent of Austrians read the *Kronen Zeitung* (KZ) daily, giving it the highest circulation rate per capita in Western Europe.[3] In the words of one former Austrian Chancellor, 'it is impossible to govern without the support of the *Krone*'.[4]

Second, there is a large overlap between a tabloid newspaper's readership and the potential constituency of the far right. One of the most consistent
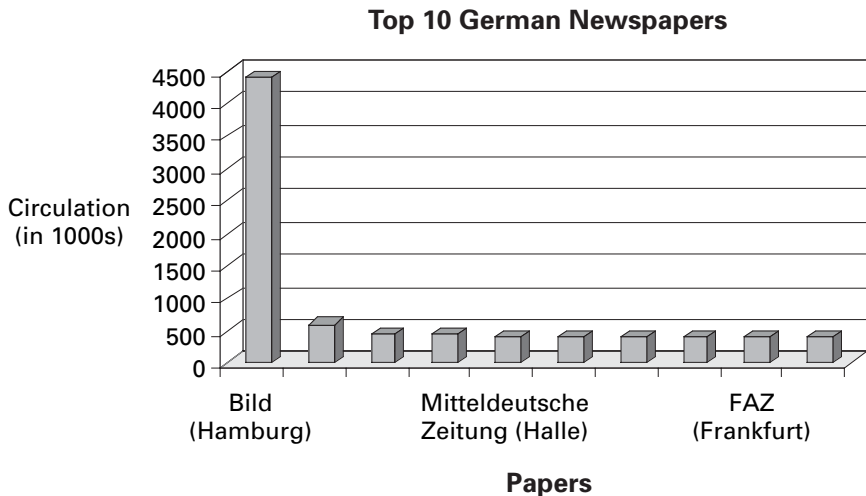

Figure 1. Circulation of major German newspapers, 1997

Note: Newspapers from left to right: Bild (Hamburg), Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, Freie Presse (Chemnitz), Hanoverische Allgemeine Zeitung (Hanover), Mitteldeutsche Zeitung (Halle), Südwest Presse (Ulm), Süddeutsche Zeitung (Munich), Rheinische Post (Düsseldorf), Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (Frankfurt), Sächsische Zeitung (Dresden).
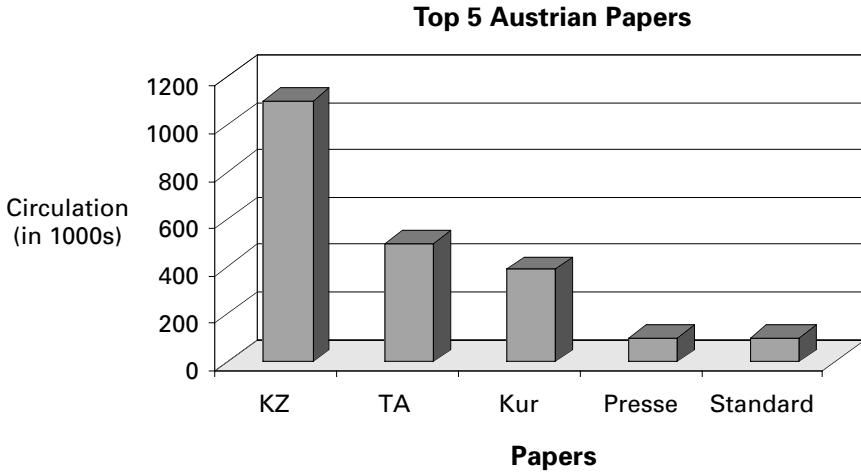
Top 5 Austrian Papers

Figure 2. Circulation of major Austrian newspapers, 1996

empirical findings about far-right voters is that they are, on average, less educated than voters who support other political parties (Falter and Klein, 1994; Kitschelt, 1995; Lubbers et al., 2002). The readers of tabloid newspapers are also, on average, less educated that those of 'quality' newspapers. The position of tabloid newspapers toward far-right parties is thus an important variable in shaping the attitudes of those who are most likely to vote for them.

Third, media effects are likely to be most pronounced when messages are unambiguous and repetitive (Bennet, 1980). These characteristics are hallmarks of tabloid newspapers, and certainly obtain in the German and Austrian cases. Both *Bild* and *Krone* bombard their readers with clear and consistent messages through their news stories, editorials and readers' letters.

The reactions of civil society, in addition to those of political parties and the tabloid press, to the appearance of right-wing populism are also important. Large and frequent protests about right-wing populist parties not only demonstrate that a significant proportion of the population considers them politically illegitimate, but sustained protest can also create significant organizational and recruitment problems. The mundane tasks of political organization, such as finding places to meet, running information stands and disseminating election materials, become quite difficult when protestors disrupt such activities. Protest also adversely affects political recruitment, because individuals are often unwilling to work publicly for a party that is socially stigmatized. When members of right-wing populist parties are not sanctioned, political recruitment and political organization are much more effective.

What determines the reactions of political parties, the media and civil society to the breakthrough of right-wing populist parties? Although a full

answer lies outside the range of this article, elite reactions in Germany and Austria were shaped by ideas about the legitimacy of far-right ideas and movements in democratic politics. These ideas were in turn the products of the dramatically different ways in which German and Austrian elites confronted the Nazi past (Art, 2006). In Germany, a critical examination of the Nazi past produced a 'culture of contrition' among all elite political actors, and sensitivity to any political party that bore any resemblance to the Nazis or sought to downplay the significance of the Nazi past. In Austria, however, decades of amnesia about the Nazi period and a defensive, nationalist reaction to its re-emergence in the 1980s produced a 'culture of victimization'. Many elite actors denied that Austria bore any responsibility for the Nazi past, and that this past prevented the far right from becoming a legitimate actor in Austrian politics.

Combating the Radical Right in Germany

In Germany, political parties, the media and civil society adopted a clear policy of marginalization, de-legitimation and stigmatization of the REPs following the party's electoral breakthrough in the Berlin state elections of 1989. On the very night following the elections, politicians from the SPD and the Greens gathered in spontaneous demonstrations against the REPs' entry into the Berlin state parliament. They declared that members of their party would actively fight the REPs at every opportunity, and they did so throughout the course of the next several years, participating in countless demonstrations across Germany. The question of cooperating with or secretly encouraging the REPs was never raised. Yet there certainly existed a strategic reason for doing just that. By strengthening the REPs, or at least not committing scare resources to combat them, the SPD could have damaged the CDU/CSU. Since the REPs drew more voters from the CDU/CSU than the SPD, a strong showing in national elections would redound to the SPD's advantage (Winkler and Schuman, 1998). This strategy has been pursued by other leftist parties in Europe, particularly in France and Austria.

The West Berlin elections produced a dilemma for Germany's most important conservative party, the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU). Some conservatives initially saw tactical interest in cooperating with the far right. This option, however, was quickly jettisoned in Berlin, and the CDU/CSU's national leadership ruled out any form of cooperation with the REPs several months later. In several cases, this policy forced the CDU either to give up political power or form unwelcome coalitions. For example, in both 1992 and 1996, the CDU in Baden-Württemberg chose to enter into a highly unpopular Grand Coalition with the SPD rather than form a minority government reliant on the toleration of the REPs. There were, in other words, significant political costs in refusing to work with the far right.

After the CDU announced its position, every party in Germany followed a policy of marginalization, or *ausgrenzung* in German. *Ausgrenzung* prohibited

personal contact with REP politicians, reliance on REP votes to pass legislation and support for any REP candidate or proposal. This occurred at every political level. Party members in communal parliaments were instructed to vote against even the most mundane proposals of the REPs, such as the installation of traffic lights, on principle.[5] Members of the CDU and FDP (the German liberal party) who violated the policy of *ausgrenzung* were immediately banished from their parties.[6]

The German media reacted quickly and decisively to the appearance of the REPs. Of crucial importance was the position of the largest tabloid newspaper. *Bild* is full of racy leads, exclamation points and contains a daily photograph of a topless woman. It also has a clear political slant: conservative with a dash of populism. At times, it has stirred xenophobic sentiment against immigrants and portrayed asylum-seekers as economic refugees who drain the welfare state.[7] But *Bild* possesses another central ideological strain that shapes its position on the Nazi past and on far-right parties. The second pillar of the Springer Press is a commitment to reconciliation with the Jewish people.[8] Any editor who works for the Springer Press must sign a contract committing him or herself to this goal.[9] During his lifetime, Axel Springer (1912–85) donated large sums to Israel and worked tirelessly for German–Jewish reconciliation. Shimon Peres once stated that 'after Adenauer, Axel Springer has contributed more than anyone else to the unique, clear, and significant relationship between Germany and Israel'.[10]

Following the REP breakthrough in West Berlin, *Bild* began a relentless campaign against the party, drawing comparisons between it and the Nazis and constantly reminding its readers of Schönhuber's glorification of the Waffen-SS. The newspaper regularly referred to Schönhuber as the *Führer* (an allusion to *The Führer*, Adolf Hitler) of the REPs instead of using the more neutral term *Chef*, or chief. The editorial that appeared the day after the Berlin election is typical:

> Franz-Schönhuber – The Führer of the 'Republikaner'
>
> **. . . he considers himself the avenger . . .** volunteered for the Waffen-SS. He was a corporal in the *SS-Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler* [Hitler's elite bodyguard division] . . . in October 1981 he published a book: 'I Was There,' a personal avowal of his time with the Waffen-SS. The right-wing extremist 'Deutsche National-Zeitung' voted it book of the year.
>
> Then something happened to the 'Nazi of the Bavarian Radio', something that he had never imagined: The CSU, the Munich community, the Bavarian Radio, they all dropped him. Therein lies the motive for his revenge.[11]

Bild explained the Berlin election as a protest vote and a horrible mistake. The newspaper published interviews with well-meaning citizens who had voted for the REPs. As one taxi-driver explained, 'we really wanted to send those in charge a message . . . but we never thought it would come to this. We didn't want this at all'.[12] Several days later, *Bild* placed a story about the

reaction in Turkey, where Schönhuber owned a holiday home, in the middle of its politics section:

> In the past week the citizens of Bodrum (20,000) marched to Schön-huber's villa and draped his nameplate with a black towel . . . 'We symbolically gave him a black face. We took him without knowing who he is. We took him in our arms like a friend. It was a shock as we realized that we had a poisonous snake among us.'[13]

Finally, German citizens played an active role in combating the REPs. Only hours after the results of the 1989 Berlin election were announced, over 10,000 Berliners joined in spontaneous protests holding signs that read 'we don't need any Nazis' and yelling 'Nazis out!' When REP politicians entered the Berlin parliament for the first time in March 1989, they were forced to use a back door under police protection to avoid the hundreds of protestors blocking the front entrance. Similar protests occurred whenever the REPs held party meetings or election events, forcing the party to meet in remote locations with police protection. A typical REP party caucus, for example, took place in a tent surrounded by police in the middle of an open field.

The combined reaction of German political parties, the media and civil society led directly to the collapse of the REPs shortly after their initial appearance. Political *ausgrenzung* meant that the party stood no chance of passing legislation, nor forming the coalitions necessary to do so. REP politicians appeared ineffective and harassed, and the party quickly gained a reputation for incompetence. The media campaign against the REPs contributed to the party's negative image. Schönhuber complained that *Bild* in particular had turned him into the 'national bogey-man', and other REP politicians claimed that the tabloid newspaper's hostility was an important factor in the party's demise. The leader of the REPs in Bavaria, for example, called the media campaign against the party 'our chief problem'.[14] Although the exact effects of *Bild*'s coverage have not been measured, it is difficult to imagine that the open hostility of Germany's largest newspaper did not adversely affect the REPs' political fortunes.

The constant protests by civil society created a host of everyday organiz-ational problems for the REPs. The party was unable to rent public rooms for meetings since other political parties controlled access to them. The REPs also had trouble finding private venues, either because restaurant and hotel owners were hostile to the REPs or because they feared the reputa-tional, and often material, damage from the protests that would inevitably accompany REP meetings. During election campaigns, the REPs had to hang their signs from high trees to stop them from being immediately torn down. They had problems finding members who were willing to run infor-mation booths during election campaigns because the booths were quickly surrounded by protestors.[15]

REP politicians also claimed that they faced a host of social pressures in their daily lives. The leader of the REPs in one German state lamented that he lost at least a third of his friends after he joined the party. Three of his

cars were set alight in front of his house. When he went to a political function at the town hall, several dozen police were on hand to protect him. Given these pressures, it is perhaps not surprising that he questioned 'whether he did the right thing by putting all his efforts into politics'.[16]

REP members also faced pressure in their professions. Many of those who sympathized with the REPs did not join the party for fear of losing their chances for promotion. The leader of the REPs in one state actually claimed that he advised professional people to leave the REPs for the sake of their careers. REP members who were 'out', meaning that their party affiliation was public knowledge, also stood little chance of holding leadership positions in the voluntary associations and clubs (*Vereinen*) that play an especially important role in German society.

Such social pressures made political recruitment almost impossible. On several occasions, highly educated and upstanding members of the community agreed to head the REP party list in elections, only to withdraw their names after becoming aware of the consequences to their reputation. After their initial success in 1989, the REPs lost 40 percent of their membership within a single year (25,000 to 15,000). By the end of the 1990s, the party consisted mainly of unskilled workers, pensioners and others who, as one leading REP politician put it, 'had nothing else to lose'.[17] Unable to recruit or hold onto capable, educated personnel, the REPs quickly evolved into a party of the uneducated, unskilled and unmotivated. These were hardly the types of party members necessary to build and maintain a fledgling political organization. Nor were they the type of people able to make financial donations. It is little wonder that the REPs were always in financial turmoil. In sum, German elites 'combated' the REPs and prevented the party, despite high unemployment, massive immigration and pressures associated with European integration and globalization, from consolidating itself in the party system. As one REP politician lamented in 2001, 'our significance is now so minimal that we ask ourselves if we should even continue at all'.[18]

'Taming' the Radical Right in Austria?

In September 1986, Jörg Haider completed his takeover of the FPÖ in being elected party leader at the convention in Innsbruck. Haider received 59.5 percent of the vote, while the liberal Norbert Steger mustered only 40.5 percent. The newly elected head of the FPÖ played to the euphoria of the party's nationalist base. During the convention, several FPÖ delegates wore Nazi regalia and shouted that Steger deserved to be 'gassed'. The normally FPÖ-friendly columnist Viktor Reimann wrote of 'a drunken atmosphere' marked by 'heckling and verbal attacks that reminded one of the Nazi period'.[19] The Liberal International (an umbrella group of liberal parties of which the FPÖ was then a member) was concerned about the conduct of the Innsbruck convention. The Vice-President of the Liberal International, Urs Schöttli, stated that 'the tones that appeared at Innsbruck were shocking',

and decided to send observers to monitor the FPÖ during the upcoming national parliamentary elections.[20] The group stated that the atmosphere at Innsbruck was grounds for ejecting the FPÖ from the Liberal International.[21] Within Austria's mainstream press, however, only the leftist weekly *Profil* covered the Innsbruck party convention in any depth, arguing that it represented a caesura in the history of the FPÖ.

Yet Haider's takeover had immediate political consequences. Chancellor Franz Vranitzky (SPÖ) declared the end of the national coalition between his party and the hitherto liberal FPÖ. New elections were scheduled for 23 November, and Vranitzky made it clear that his party would not enter a national alliance with a renationalized FPÖ. On the one hand, then, the SPÖ decided on a strategy of marginalization (or *ausgrenzung*) from the moment Haider took control of the FPÖ. The national party held to this strategy throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, and continues to practise it today.

Yet the SPÖ's form of *ausgrenzung* was never as complete as that of its German counterpart. Austrian Social Democrats in communal and state parliaments continued to cooperate with their FPÖ colleagues to pass legislation. The combination of *ausgrenzung* at the national level and cooperation at the local and state levels contributed directly to the FPÖ's success. As Haider railed against a political system that was excluding him from office, angry voters cast their ballots for the FPÖ's communal and state parliamentary lists. A vote for the FPÖ was hardly a 'wasted' one, as a vote for the REPs was in Germany, since FPÖ politicians played an active role in devising and passing legislation. Moreover, as the FPÖ did well in state elections and crossed the 20 percent mark in national elections, leading politicians within the SPÖ publicly questioned the *ausgrenzung* strategy. In 1996, the head of the Styrian SPÖ, Peter Schachner, called for a 'radical change of course' in SPÖ–FPÖ relations. Similarly, the Governor of the Burgenland, Karl Stix (SPÖ), argued that his party should include the FPÖ in political dialogue. After a strong showing by the FPÖ in Vienna, the major Michael Häupl (SPÖ) invited the FPÖ to official discussions about Vienna's future (Bailer-Galanda and Neugebauer, 1997: 136–7). Such open rejections of the *ausgrenzung* policy further signalled to voters that the SPÖ was willing to work with the FPÖ, and that it was only a matter of time before the marginalization strategy was abandoned entirely. Although the SPÖ renewed its *ausgrenzung* strategy after the 1999 elections, leading SPÖ politicians, such as Kurt Schlöggl, have continued to recommend cooperation with the FPÖ.

If the SPÖ's *ausgrenzung* was far from complete, the ÖVP never adopted this strategy. From the 1986 elections to the formation of the ÖVP–FPÖ coalition in February 2000, the Austrian People's Party never ruled out a national coalition with the FPÖ. Indeed, ÖVP leaders often played the 'Haider card' – the threat to leave the coalition and form a coalition with the FPÖ – in order to extract concessions from the SPÖ. It was also the

ÖVP that helped Haider to become the Governor of the state of Carinthia in 1989, after the FPÖ gained 35 percent to the ÖVP's 21 percent (the SPÖ led with 46 percent). By handing Haider governmental responsibility, the ÖVP both legitimated the FPÖ and helped Haider consolidate his power in Carinthia. In the state elections of 1999, the FPÖ captured over 42 percent of the vote, making it the largest party in the state and giving Haider a strong popular mandate.

The FPÖ was supported by Austria's largest newspaper – *Kronen Zeitung* – which is similar to *Bild* in style and content but even more powerful. During the national parliamentary election campaigns in the fall of 1986, *Krone* gave Haider, the head of a party that had polled less than 3 percent in public opinion polls that summer, twice as much coverage as any other Austrian newspaper (Plasser, 1987). From 1986 until February 2000, *Krone* stuck to a pro-Haider line. *Krone*'s most widely read columnist, Richard Nimmerichter, whose column appeared an amazing six days a week for over two decades, referred to Haider as 'an unfaltering representative of the truth and indispensable ally of the average man'.[22]

Apart from giving Haider favourable coverage and lauding him in editorials, *Krone* proved to be a critical ally when the FPÖ suffered political setbacks. During a debate in the Carinthian parliament on 13 June 1991, Haider castigated the national government's employment policies and lauded those of the Third Reich. This statement provoked an outcry from the SPÖ's parliamentary fraction, who convinced an ÖVP that was already looking to get rid of Haider to vote for a motion of no-confidence in the Governor. Haider was dismissed several weeks later, and many considered his political career over.

But *Krone* came to Haider's defence. The editorial staff defended Haider's statement, argued that the Nazis had indeed created jobs and printed a barrage of editorial and readers' letters portraying the young politician as the victim of the machinations of the two major parties.[23] Star columnist Nimmerichter (pen-name 'Staberl') wrote five columns in succession about the Haider affair, which he described as a 'manhunt'. Nimmerichter noted that Haider's statement had a 'certain justification in the facts', since Hitler had virtually eliminated unemployment in Austria within six months after the *Anschluss*. While Haider would have been wise to qualify his statement, Nimmerichter continued that Haider's statement became 'a state affair' when the SPÖ, ÖVP and the Greens 'saw their chance to finally get rid of their annoying competitor Haider'.[24] During the summer of 1991, *Krone* published no fewer than 50 readers' letters about the 'Haider affair', as the newspaper termed it, 44 of which either lauded Nimmerichter's commentary about Haider or defended the FPÖ politician.

Thus, at a time when Haider was considered politically dead by many observers, *Krone* did all it could to resuscitate him. Although it is difficult to measure the precise effect of *Krone*'s campaign, the results of the September 1991 state elections in Vienna suggest that it succeeded. The FPÖ won 22.5

percent of the vote, more than doubling its total from 1987 and robbing the SPÖ of the absolute majority it had enjoyed since 1954. Throughout the rest of the decade, *Krone* would continue to support Haider and passionately defend him against charges of right-wing extremism and Nazi apologia.

Austrian civil society did not react to the FPÖ with the same vigour as German civil society did to the 'Republikaner'. Recall that when the REPs gained 7.5 percent in the Berlin state elections, tens of thousands of protestors took to the streets in spontaneous anti-REP demonstrations after the results were announced. When the FPÖ captured nearly 10 percent in *national* elections, there were no protests in Austria. Haider faced little protest from Austrian civil society until he was winning over 20 percent of the vote in national elections, and even then these protests were sporadic and largely confined to Vienna.

In contrast to Germany, then, the Austrian far right benefited from the actions of elite political actors. The FPÖ of Jörg Haider was not precluded from holding power, and indeed ruled in local and state coalitions before joining the national government in 2000. Austria's largest newspaper gave the FPÖ something akin to free advertising. The prospects of winning political office and advancing quickly within a dynamic party, a party that was not socially stigmatized, led many of Austria's most intelligent and capable young politicians to join the FPÖ. The party also attracted the type of people able to make substantial donations. By the early 1990s, the FPÖ was a highly organized and wealthy political party, and one that was viewed as politically legitimate by the majority of Austrians.

Recent Developments

If the Austrian far right enjoyed two decades of growth and success, while the German far right suffered two decades of stagnation and failure, recent developments appear to put the far right in each state on different trajectories. In 2002, the FPÖ suffered its worst electoral performance since 1986, capturing only 10 percent of the vote in national elections. Many observers concluded that the FPÖ's participation in the national government had weakened it, and that the ÖVP's 'taming' strategy had been a success. Yet while it is no doubt true that the FPÖ lost some of its support as a governing party (Luther, 2003a, b), and right-wing populist parties in general may lose support through participation in government (Heinisch, 2003), public opinion polls several months before the election showed the party running at about 20 percent. Finance Minister Karl-Heinz Grasser (FPÖ) was widely considered to be Austria's most popular politician, and Vice-Chancellor Susanne Riess-Passer (FPÖ) was also running high in the numerous 'likeability' polls published by Austrian weeklies. It was in fact Jörg Haider's mercurial behaviour that contributed to the 2002 disaster (Luther, 2003a). Between 2001 and 2002, Haider made several surprise trips to Iraq to visit Saddam Hussein, which did not play well with the Austrian electorate. In

September 2002, Haider engineered a revolt from the FPÖ's base against the national leadership, which brought down the government and forced new elections. Grasser and Riess-Passer resigned and left the party. Haider, claiming that he feared assassination, refused to lead the FPÖ's party list, a duty that fell to the uncharismatic former veterinarian Herbert Haupt. With the party bitterly divided and the Austrian electorate weary of Haider's ploys, the FPÖ's vote-share plummeted. Several years of intra-party wrangling followed. In April 2005, Haider left the FPÖ and founded a new party, the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ), with several other former FPÖ politicians. The BZÖ remains the junior partner in Schüssel's coalition government, although its future as a viable party of the right is at this point unclear.

So did 'taming' work in the final analysis? As scholars have noted, the FPÖ's transition from an opposition party to a party of government was bound to be difficult and result in some loss of electoral strength (Luther, 2003b). But the magnitude of the FPÖ's collapse cannot be explained by this factor alone. It was Haider's exclusion from the government and the FPÖ leadership that ultimately led him to attack a party that was no longer under his sole control.

It was primarily the reaction of the European Union 14 to the formation of the ÖVP–FPÖ coalition that forced Haider into the role of a 'simple party member', and this was the most profound effect of the international protest against Austria.[25] Through their rhetoric and symbolic sanctions, the EU 14 resorted to an international version of the combat strategy. The vehemence of the international reaction to the ÖVP–FPÖ coalition precluded Haider from holding a cabinet position, and he formally resigned the chairmanship of the FPÖ in May in favour of Riess-Passer in large part to end the sanctions. Although both domestic and international observers argued at the time that the sanctions were ill-conceived and would produce a nationalist backlash, their longer term effect was to de-link Haider from the party he had created. In this sense, the combat strategy employed by the EU 14 was ultimately effective.

It remains to be seen whether the FPÖ will recover from its 2002 debacle, and whether Haider will continue to play a leading role in the party. Observers of Austrian politics are notably cautious in declaring Haider's demise, for they have been proven wrong several times before. Most recently, in the Carinthian state elections of 2004, Haider stunned everyone by improving upon his 1999 electoral victory, capturing 43 percent of the vote, and remaining governor. Even if Jörg Haider does not mount yet another comeback on the national level, 'Haiderism' survives as a loose political ideology that has permanently changed the face of Austrian politics. The package of fears and resentments that Haider drew on and fostered, and that *Kronen Zeitung* continues to spread, can potentially be used by politicians from both the FPÖ and other parties.

If the far right suffered setbacks in Austria, the recent success of both the DVU and the NPD in the 2004 state elections in Brandenburg and Saxony

suggest that right-wing extremism is becoming a political force in Germany. The transformation of the NPD into a political party capable of winning representation is especially significant, since the party is highly organized and has set deep roots in certain subcultures (in contrast to the DVU). Yet it is important to note that the recent success of the far right is primarily an *eastern* phenomenon. Although political parties have all enforced policies of non-cooperation with the far right, the NPD in particular has been able to attain a measure of legitimacy in certain cities and towns in the east, which helps explain its recent electoral success (Art, 2004). The contrast between the continued resistance of the west to far-right parties and their rising fortunes in the east is yet another piece of evidence that 'inner unity' remains elusive.

Notes

This article draws from a larger study (Art, 2006: material reprinted here with permission) based on 175 semi-structured and open-ended interviews.

1 This article draws from a larger study based on 175 semi-structured and open-ended interviews with political elites. Unless the interviewees agreed to be quoted, only their titles and party affiliations appear in subsequent endnotes.

2 *Profil*, 22 September 1986.

3 The other four largest newspapers in Austria, as of 1997, were *Täglich Alles* (TA), *Kurier* (Kur), *Die Presse* and *Der Standard*. *Täglich Alles* was driven out of the traditional market by *Krone* in 2000, although it continued to publish online.

4 Interview by author with Armin Thurnherr, Editor-in-Chief of the weekly *Falter*, Vienna, 5 February 2001. Thurnherr was referring to former Austrian Chancellor Franz Vranitzky (SPÖ).

5 Interview with a member of the Berlin State Parliament (SPD), Berlin, 7 February 2002.

6 Politicians from the CDU, CSU and FDP, who preferred to remain anonymous, stated that there were several cases of party banishment. Most party members, however, followed the policy of *ausgrenzung*.

7 See, for example, Christoph Butterwegge, 'Ethnisierungsprozesse, Mediendiskurse und politische Rechtstendenzen', in Christoph Butterwegge (ed.) *NS-Vergangenheit, Antisemitismus und Nationalismus in Deutschland*, pp. 172–217 (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1997).

8 The five pillars of the Springer Press are as follows: 1. To uphold liberty and law in Germany, a country belonging to the Western family of nations, and to further the unification of Europe. 2. To promote reconciliation of Jews and Germans and support the vital rights of the State of Israel. 3. To support the Transatlantic Alliance, and solidarity with the United States of America in the common values of free nations. 4. To reject all forms of political extremism. 5. To uphold the principles of a free social market economy. Taken from the Axel Springer Company, www.asv.de/englisch/unterneh/frame.htm

9 Interview with Oliver Michalsky, journalist for the *Berliner Morgenpost* (owned by the Springer Press), Berlin, 21 November 2001.
10 *Bild*, 31 January 1985.
11 *Bild*, 31 January 1989 (boldface in original).
12 *Bild*, 2 February 1989.
13 *Bild*, 7 February 1989.
14 Interview with Johann Gärtner, Head of the 'Republikaner' Party in Bavaria, Kissing, 22 April 2002.
15 REP politicians I interviewed stressed these points.
16 Interview with leader of the REPs in a German state.
17 Interview with Gärtner.
18 Interview by author with Günther Reich, Berlin, 8 April 2002.
19 *Kurier*, 15 September 1986.
20 *Profil*, 22 September 1986; *Profil*, 6 October 1986.
21 *Salzburger Nachrichten*, 22 September 1986; the FPÖ was thrown out of the Liberal International in 1993.
22 *Kronen Zeitung*, 9 February 1992.
23 *Kronen Zeitung*, 22 June 1991.
24 *Kronen Zeitung*, 20 June 1991.
25 For more on the sanctions against Austria, see Marc Howard, 'Can Populism Be Suppressed in a Democracy? Austria, Germany, and the European Union', *East European Politics and Society* 14: 18–32.

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