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**THE AUSTRIAN PARLIAMENTARY
ELECTION OF 2006:
From bipolarism to forced marriage?**

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Keele European Parties Research Unit
(KEPRU)

Working Paper 25

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ISSN 1475-1569

ISBN 1-899488-38-3

KEPRU Working Papers are published by:

School of Politics, International Relations and Philosophy (SPIRE)
Keele University
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ST5 5BG, UK

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Fax +44 (0)1782 58 3592

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KEPRU Working Papers are available via SPIRE's website.

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The Austrian parliamentary election of 2006.

*From bipolarism to forced marriage?**

KURT RICHARD LUTHER

The Background

Austria's 2006 election brought to an end the centre-right coalition led by the Austrian People's Party (*Österreichische Volkspartei*, or ÖVP). Upon first becoming Chancellor in February 2000, Wolfgang Schüssel had faced domestic and international protest over his decision to coalesce with Jörg Haider's right-wing populist Freedom Party of Austria (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*, or FPÖ). In September 2002, after months of conflict between its protest-oriented and pragmatic factions, the FPÖ imploded and its core government team resigned (Luther 2003). The ÖVP's vote soared at the November 2002 election by 15.4 percentage points to 42.3%, its best result since 1983. For the first time since 1966, it overtook the Social Democratic Party of Austria (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs*, or SPÖ). In February 2003 Schüssel revived the ÖVP/FPÖ coalition, correctly calculating that a party that had slumped to from 26.9 to 10% of the vote would be cheap in terms of portfolios and unable to offer much resistance to the ÖVP's policy preferences.

Within weeks, the FPÖ suffered the first of a string of electoral defeats, whose scale exceeded even those during the first ÖVP/FPÖ government.¹ Elements within the FPÖ started to direct at Schüssel's second government a vociferous attack akin to that which had helped topple his first. One central motivations was again their fundamental dislike of the FPÖ's switch from vote-maximization to incumbency. Another was opposition to

* A revised version of this paper will appear in *West European Politics*, Vol. 31, 2008.

the government's neo-liberal policies, which they rightly argued contradicted the FPÖ's programmatic commitment the 'small man' and were a major cause of the party's electoral weakness. In April 2005, the FPÖ split along its irreconcilable internal fault line over governmental and electoral strategies (Luther 2008). Its government team, 16 of its 18 MPs and the Carinthian party left to form the Alliance for the Future of Austria (*Bündnis Zukunft Österreich*, or BZÖ). Haider justified the split (of which Schüssel had advance notice) by reference to the FPÖ's 'negative forces' having 'irreparably damaged' the FPÖ brand.² In effect, the junior coalition partner had been relegated to the opposition benches by a coup led by its 'party in public office'. Since the BZÖ controlled most erstwhile FPÖ MPs, the government's parliamentary majority was more secure. Yet the ÖVP was now even more dominant in the coalition, not least since the BZÖ claimed acceptance of the exigencies of incumbency to be its distinguishing feature.

The coalition's reconfiguration could not reduce the unpopularity of the government, whose critics accused it of abandoning Austrian consensualism and pursuing neo-liberal policies giving excessive emphasis to budget stability and business incentivisation (Tálos 2006). The coalition's opponents argued its controversial pensions reform packages of 2003 and 2004 demonstrated a lack of concern for the socially weak. Deserved or not, the accusation of 'social coldness' (*soziale Kälte*) stuck. By summer 2003, the SPÖ's emphasis on social issues had converted the ÖVP's 6-point lead at the 2002 election into a 3-4 point poll deficit. Like the ÖVP, the SPÖ benefited from FPÖ losses at *Landtag* elections, yet its gains were often larger³ and their consequences more significant. Relative majorities in Salzburg (March 2003) and Styria (October 2005) enabled it to take both ÖVP provincial governorships. In April 2004, SPÖ-candidate Heinz Fischer won the federal presidency, a politically weak, but symbolically important office.

The Greens' vote share increased in seven of the nine *Landtag* elections held during the second Schüssel government.⁴ Having at last won seats in Carinthia in March 2004, the Greens were finally in all provincial parliaments. A further milestone came in October 2003, when following success in Upper Austria they entered their first ever coalition government (with the ÖVP, with whom they had conducted coalition negotiations after the 2002 election).

Though decapitated by the founding of the BZÖ, the FPÖ had simultaneously been freed from the demands of supporting a government (however reluctantly). Its new leader, Vienna party boss Heinz-Christian Strache, immediately returned the FPÖ to populist vote-maximization. At Vienna's provincial election of October 2005, the party conducted an aggressive campaign focused on crime and immigration. Given the scale of its losses since 2000, its 14.8% vote share (falling by only 5.3 points on 2001) was widely interpreted as a success and contrasted with the BZÖ's derisory 1.2%. Haider had wrongly assumed the bulk of the FPÖ would defect to his new party and been unable to develop an organisation outside Carinthia.

At the start of 2006 it thus seemed very likely the general election would be won by the SPÖ, which might well be able to form a government with the Greens. The main uncertainties included whether the BZÖ would obtain the 4% of the vote or one directly elected seat necessary to re-enter parliament. The ÖVP's slim hope for retaining its relative majority seemed to rest upon the expected improvement in Austria's economy. Yet in late March it had a lucky break. It was revealed not only that a bank owned by the Austrian Trade Union Federation (*Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund*, or ÖGB) had lost circa one billion Euros via unauthorised speculation in the Caribbean, but also that the ÖGB was itself close to bankruptcy, primarily because of the consequences of ÖGB president Fritz Verzetnitsch's allegedly illegal attempt to cover up the losses of the bank

(the BAWAG) by mortgaging ÖGB assets to guarantee the debt. Although formally non-partisan, the ÖGB has always been closely associated with Austrian social democracy. For decades, leading ÖGB functionaries sat on the SPÖ executive and the ÖGB presidents were guaranteed SPÖ parliamentary seats.

The ÖVP sought to mitigate its unpopularity and reinforce its reputation for economic competence by rapidly introducing a rescue package including legislation temporarily guaranteeing the bank's liabilities and thus the assets of over 1 million savers. It also jumped at the opportunity to associate the SPÖ with financial incompetence and impropriety (see below). The SPÖ immediately forced Verzetitsch to resign all his party and union positions and insisted the party had no association with this purely 'criminal' matter, but a survey in March suggested 56% believed Gusenbauer had had prior knowledge of the BAWAG's problems. For the first time since 2003, the SPÖ lost its poll lead and by early May, 47% judged its election prospects to have been 'severely' or 'clearly' damaged by the BAWAG scandal. Only 9% thought there had been no impact at all. The SPÖ took further steps to distance itself from the unions. On 10 June, Gusenbauer reported former BAWAG boss Helmut Elsner to the authorities for suspected embezzlement and on 23 June eventually got his party executive committee to agree SPÖ electoral lists would henceforth exclude persons holding high ÖGB office (e.g. its president and the chairs of its constituent unions). Yet the SPÖ remained second in the polls and 64% still felt the SPÖ had some responsibility for the BAWAG scandal (Karlhofer 2007: 86, 88 & 89).

*The Campaign*⁵

Most parties launched their official campaigns in late August. The SPÖ was again supported by a US team of advisers led by Stanley Greenberg.⁶ In light of its substantial

poll lead in respect of social issues (Plasser and Ulram 2007), the SPÖ highlighted record unemployment levels; below-inflation rises in pensions; Austria's 'two-class' health care; deficiencies in the education system and (particularly towards the very end) the problems of elderly care.⁷ The overarching theme was that governments' social coldness had caused gross inequalities in the distribution of the benefits of growth, creating an urgent need for greater social justice, as reflected in the SPÖ's central slogan 'The country needs new fairness'. Specific promises included abolishing student tuition fees, a guaranteed basic income and cancelling Austria's order for 18 Eurofighters ('Social fighters not Eurofighters'). The BAWAG scandal persuaded the SPÖ to prolong and greatly intensify the negative part of its campaign, in part to demobilise ÖVP-voters. Especially noteworthy is the aggressive tone the SPÖ adopted vis-à-vis Schüssel. Using sound recordings of undertakings he had made prior to the 2002 election and pointing out how different subsequent events were, it directly accused him of breaking his promises, indeed of 'lying'.

The ÖVP campaigned on the themes where polls consistently showed it had a lead: economic competence and Schüssel's leadership. Its message on the former was that Austria was performing well in international comparison, especially in respect of growth and falling unemployment (hence the slogans 'Austria. Successful' and 'Austria. We're doing well here'). As the campaign progressed, there was growing focus on Schüssel, depicted with straplines such as 'Because he can do it' and 'Simply the better'. The campaign failed to present a forward-looking vision and its appeal to voters to opt for continuity rather than risk the red-green alternative included the vacuous slogan 'Austria. Stays better.' Although the ÖVP protested at the SPÖ's 'dirty tactics', it was itself not averse to negative campaigning centred on the BAWAG scandal, for which posters of the ÖVP's Austrian Workers' and Employees' League suggested the SPÖ was responsible.

SPÖ politicians were referred to as part of a corrupt ‘red network’ of ‘penthouse socialists’⁸ and it was alleged the BAWAG had illicitly funded the SPÖ. Towards the end of the campaign, attempts to present the scandal as an exclusively social democratic matter were undermined by revelations of contacts between Elsner and senior ÖVP politicians, including Schüssel himself.

The FPÖ opted for the populist campaign based on welfare chauvinism and anti-immigration that had been successful in Vienna. Its slogans included ‘Austria first’, ‘We for you’, ‘Welfare not immigration’, ‘Secure pensions not asylum millions’ and ‘At Home not Islam’ (*Daham statt Islam*). In an interesting twist, the party deliberately sought to balance its traditional national focus with a heightened emphasis upon the social dimension and campaign graphics thus emphasised the colour red. Specific policy demands included repatriation of long-term unemployed immigrants and limiting welfare benefits to Austrian citizens.⁹ The BAWAG issue enabled the FPÖ to resurrect its anti-political-corruption rhetoric, used mainly to try to discredit the SPÖ, its main rival for the blue-collar vote.

The BZÖ campaign contrasted the FPÖ’s pledge to remain in opposition with its own commitment to government and continuing its post-2000 (sic!) record of social policy reform and tightening criminal justice and immigration policy. In most respects, however, the BZÖ’s national campaign closely mirrored the FPÖ’s,¹⁰ as was to be expected. After all, the BZÖ was fighting for electoral survival and was most confident delivering the type of campaign with which its erstwhile-FPÖ team was familiar. It thus employed a rhetorically aggressive campaign focusing on immigration and the BAWAG affair, but above all on crime. As one of its key targets were former FPÖ voters, it also sought to claim the mantle of legitimate heir to the FPÖ’s successful period of populist vote

maximization (1986-1999). This helps explain the choice of Peter Westenthaler – a former FPÖ caucus leader who had resigned from politics in 2002 – to front its campaign. It is also why the BZÖ's original campaign material dropped the party's official colour (orange) in favour of the FPÖ's traditional blue and included the designation '*Die Freiheitlichen*,' together with the epithet 'the original.' On 1 September, a court ruled this was a deliberate attempt to deceive voters and required the term '*freiheitlich*' to be deleted from the BZÖ literature and web site.¹¹

The Greens conducted a niche campaign targeted at their core voters, preferring policy purity to vote maximization. They had intended to focus on four themes: improving educational provision; promoting female equality; expanding renewable energy and fighting poverty, but felt obliged to counter BZÖ and FPÖ xenophobia and thus added immigration. Considerable emphasis was placed upon party leader Alexander van der Bellen, an economics professor whom polls report is considered trustworthy by voters. He was depicted alongside the slogans 'It can be done without scandal and abuse of power - guaranteed' (designed to hint at but not engage in the BAWAG theme); 'It can be done without xenophobia– guaranteed' (a direct challenge to the FPÖ and BZÖ) and 'You will not regret Green – guaranteed' (to allay fears of a potential Green government). The Greens alone eschewed negative campaigning and for the first time had a realistic prospect of entering government. Activists' coalition preferences differed, but the extent of internal support for assuming office was high. Accordingly, the party made detailed substantive and organizational preparations for coalition negotiation with both SPÖ and ÖVP.

On 29 June, the 'Dr Martin List' announced it would contest the election. A well-known publicist parachuted into a safe European Parliament seat in 1999 by then SPÖ-chairman

Viktor Klima, Hans-Peter Martin had soon left the party, but at the 2004 EP election his independent list won 14% and 2 seats on a ticket calling for greater scrutiny of the EU. However, once the 2006 List was abandoned by Austria's largest circulation newspaper (the *Kronen Zeitung*, whose support had been critical in 2004), its campaign lost visibility.

The Result

Although its vote share was down on 2002 and only 2.3 points higher than its 1999 record low, the SPÖ defied all predictions and was returned as the strongest party (see Table 1). A shellshocked ÖVP lost eight percentage points and the chancellorship. The Greens achieved their best ever result (11.1%) and by coming third (albeit by merely 532 votes) acquired a significant number of patronage rights within parliament and beyond. Whilst disappointed at having for the first time only come fourth, the FPÖ had reclaimed its caucus and won 11% to the BZÖ's 4.1%. That the BZÖ had confounded expectations and re-entered parliament was largely due to Haider's Carinthian branch, which won 24.9% locally, i.e. 42% of the BZÖ's total vote. The List Dr. Martin lost out with merely 2.8%. The miniscule vote of Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ) was the largest since 1975. At the 2005 Styrian election, the KPÖ had won 6.3% and four seats, its first provincial seats since 1965. These successes are probably at least in part attributable to the currency of social policy issues and latterly also the BAWAG scandal.

Table 1: Elections to the Austrian National Council (1 October 2006)

	2006			2002		
	Seats	Votes	Votes	Seats	Votes	Votes
	N	(000's)	%	N	(000's)	%
Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs	68	1,664	35.3	69	1,792	36.5
Österreichische Volkspartei	66	1,616	34.3	79	2,077	42.3
Die Grünen – Die Grüne Alternative	21	520	11.1	17	465	9.5
Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs	21	520	11.0	18*	491	10.0
Die Freiheitlichen – Liste Westenthaler – BZÖ	7	194	4.1	-*	-	-
Liste Dr. Martin – Für Demokratie, Kontrolle, Gerechtigkeit	0	132	2.8	-	-	-
Kommunistische Partei Österreichs	0	48	1.0	0	28	0.6
Die Liberalen (Liberales Forum)	-	-	-	0	48	1.0
Others	0	15	0.3	0	8	0.2
Turnout (%)			78.5			84.3

* In April 2005, the BZÖ split from the FPÖ, eventually taking with it 16 seats.

Source: Bundesministerium für Inneres

After two elections at which it had declined, electoral fragmentation rose again, reaching a level only marginally lower than its 1994 record high (Table 2). At 10.2%, net volatility was at its third highest level ever, while GfK Austria's exit poll points to record gross volatility of 26% (Plasser et al. 2007: 169). The 'Non-Voter Party' (i.e. abstention) grew by nearly four points to a record 21.5%. The SORA institute's flow analysis (Hofinger et al. 2007: 197) suggests that of the circa half a million 2002 voters who abstained in 2006, 143,000 had previously supported the SPÖ and 172,000 the ÖVP. In 2002, the ÖVP had

received a net 500,000 votes from the volatility engendered by the FPÖ's implosion and expected to lose many of these weakly-attached voters. Hofinger et al. (2007: 197-205) suggest numbers similar to those who abstained were lost to the Greens (112,000), FPÖ (102,000) and SPÖ (96,000), whilst 60,000 voted BZÖ and 45,000 for Martin. That the SPÖ retained about 80% of its voters and the ÖVP only 72% may well have contributed significantly to the SPÖ victory.¹² The Greens' 69% retention rate was only marginally behind its record 72% in 2002, suggesting the consolidation of a loyal following. The party's main losses were to the SPÖ (19,000), ÖVP (15,000) and (somewhat surprisingly) the FPÖ (15,000). Yet these were more than compensated by inflows, nearly two thirds of which came from the ÖVP. In 2002, the FPÖ had lost half its voters to the ÖVP and retained merely 29%, by far its lowest ever proportion. In 2006, retention recovered to half; some 93,000 abstained; 75,000 voted BZÖ; 42,000 SPÖ and 19,000 for Martin. These losses were narrowly exceeded by inflows, including 119,000 from the SPÖ, 102,000 from the ÖVP and 26,000 from non-voters.

It appears (Plasser et al. 2007: 159-166) the SPÖ received above-average support from women (38%), pensioners (41%) and from skilled and unskilled workers (51 and 41% respectively). ÖVP losses were especially acute amongst blue-collar voters, since many of those who had moved to it in 2002 deserted to the SPÖ, but also to the FPÖ, which was supported by 24% of skilled workers. The ÖVP was the strongest party amongst the self-employed (42%) and as usual enjoyed the overwhelming support of farmers (79%). Green support was higher amongst working women (16%) and the under-30s (22%). It was twice as high amongst the university-educated, which helps explain disproportionately high levels of support amongst white-collar workers (18%), civil servants (20%) and professionals (28%).

The party campaigns were reflected in voters' motivations (Plasser et al. 2007:181-191). Only 16% of the electorate was predominantly candidate-oriented, with the highest proportions being found amongst ÖVP and Green voters (24% and 22%) and the lowest amongst FPÖ and SPÖ voters (12 and 8% respectively). At 47%, those reporting their vote had been decisively positively influenced by their chosen party's issue agenda made up the largest group. The issue oriented were least prevalent amongst ÖVP voters, 44% of whom cited the party's budgetary and economic policy. They were most strongly represented within the Greens' electorate, where 49% named the party's environment and energy policy and 58% its opposition to xenophobia. Some 53% of SPÖ voters emphasized SPÖ support for job security and opposition to welfare benefit reductions. Whilst 51% of FPÖ voters cited opposition to immigration; 57% of BZÖ voters mentioned crime (compared to 29% citing immigration). It appears the BAWAG scandal impacted much less on the SPÖ's vote than the party had feared (Karlhofer 2007). Interestingly, a significant proportion of voters' prime motivation was not support for their chosen party, but annoyance at other parties. These 'angry voters' made up 17% of ÖVP, 27% of Green and 34% of SPÖ voters, but over half (52%) of those who chose to support the FPÖ (Plasser et al. 2007: 190f).

Coalition Bargaining

In 2002, the trend for the effective number of parliamentary parties to increase had been temporarily reversed by the FPÖ's implosion, but now reached a record high of 3.55 (Table 2). For the first time since 1995, five parties were returned to parliament. There were few viable coalitions, however. The SPÖ would have preferred governing with the Greens, but the BZÖ's re-election meant they lacked a majority. The latter could have been secured by including the BZÖ (or even the FPÖ), but that was anathema to

both the SPÖ and the Greens. To ensure the SPÖ recovered the chancellorship, Gusenbauer thus had to negotiate with the ÖVP. Were those negotiations to have failed, Schüssel could in principle have wrested the initiative from the president's designated formatuer and formed a centre-right government, as he had in 1999/2000. Yet the odds were now strongly against him. Even if he had wanted to backtrack on his commitment not to renew the 'black-blue experiment' with Strache's FPÖ, a majority right-wing coalition would have had to include the BZÖ. Though the latter's leadership was desperate for office, the animosity between it and the FPÖ made this constellation unsustainable. Moreover, Strache knew reneging on his promise to remain in opposition would unleash a internal uproar he could not have survived. The only viable coalition was one between the SPÖ and ÖVP.

Table 2 Electoral and parliamentary fragmentation 1983-2006

	1983	1986	1990	1994	1995	1999	2002	2006
Electoral fragmentation	0.58	0.63	0.68	0.74	0.72	0.67	0.67	0.73
Parliamentary fragmentation	0.56	0.62	0.67	0.67	0.67	0.71	0.65	0.72
Effective number of electoral parties	2.40	2.69	3.16	3.87	3.59	3.03	3.02	3.71
Effective number of parliamentary parties	2.26	2.63	2.99	2.99	2.99	3.41	2.88	3.55
Net electoral volatility	4.81	9.95	10.08	15.51	3.90	8.86	21.04	10.24

Source: Calculated by the author according to the indices of Rae (1967), Laakso and Taagepera (1979) and Pedersen (1979).

Yet whilst the SPÖ aspired to extensive change, especially in respect of education and social policy, the ÖVP was disinclined to countenance alterations to the Schüssel government's policies. Negotiations were further complicated by the legacy of the hard-fought campaign and the lack of trust and personal animosity that had persisted between the parties since 1999. Relations deteriorated even further on 30 October, when at the parliament's inaugural meeting the SPÖ, Greens and FPÖ voted for two parliamentary committees of enquiry. The first was to examine the Eurofighter contract and investigate allegations of corrupt practices by key (ÖVP and BZÖ) actors. The second was to establish how Austria's regulatory system had operated in respect of the BAWAG and other financial service providers, as well as to investigate whether the outgoing Finance Minister had exercised favouritism when carrying out his responsibilities. Accusing the SPÖ of bad faith, the ÖVP suspended coalition talks. Speculation of a new election or a minority SPÖ government abounded, but on 16 November, the ÖVP resumed negotiations.

The SPÖ has been accused of having won the election but lost the coalition negotiations. It achieved some amelioration of the recent pensions reform, improvements in child allowance and steps towards the minimum salary goal it had set itself, but had to accept many ÖVP positions. Neither student tuition fees nor the Eurofighter contract were cancelled and this is likely to prove a hostage to fortune at future elections. Although the SPÖ got the chancellorship and six of the remaining thirteen cabinet positions, the ÖVP received the key ministries of Finance and the Interior (both traditionally held by the SPÖ in grand coalitions), as well as the Foreign Ministry. There was bitter intra-party protest at the coalition agreement, which a quarter of the party's executive refused to ratify. Yet Gusenbauer's government was sworn in on 11 January.

Wilhelm Molterer became Vice-Chancellor, whilst Schüssel replaced him as the ÖVP's caucus chair.

Conclusion and future prospects

Throughout most of the last period of grand coalition government (1987-2000), the SPÖ and ÖVP were united by their commitment to EU accession and isolating the FPÖ. The ÖVP's abandonment of the latter goal in favour of an 'innovative' (Mair 1997) coalition with the FPÖ arguably marked a qualitative shift from Austria's traditionally consensual style of party interaction towards an increasingly conflictual, zero-sum style of competition (Müller and Fallend 2004). The 2006 election had been expected to be followed by a wholesale alternation to a red-green coalition and thus a continuation of the trend to bipolar politics. In the event, the outcome was a 'forced marriage' between parties united not by shared substantive or strategic commitments, but mainly by the absence of a viable alternative. To be sure, the coalition rapidly agreed a two-year budget and significant changes to the political system, including increasing the parliamentary term from four to five years, reducing the voting age to 16 and introducing postal ballots. However, it has to date constituted a decidedly conflictual partnership that has made relatively little progress in many key areas, including health and education. Both parties have been unwilling to make concessions, or to allow their coalition partner to be seen to have a policy success. They fear this might tempt the other to precipitate a new election with a view to resuming the party system's recent bipolar logic.

The SPÖ's preference is widely assumed to be a red-green coalition. However, aware that treating the FPÖ as a pariah had in the past weakened the SPÖ's coalition bargaining position, the party's current leadership wishes to retain – at least in principle – the possibility of entering such a coalition in the future.¹³ For its part, the ÖVP is seeking

to maintain both the option of a right-wing coalition with the FPÖ and/or BZÖ, as well as the possibility (preferred in particular by many of its young and urban supporters) of an innovative black-green government. With gross volatility at record levels and about a fifth of the electorate willing to cast their vote for anti-establishment parties ranging from the right-wing populist FPÖ and BZÖ to the Martin List and the KPÖ, the hedging of coalition bets appears to be a rational strategy for both parties to Austria's loveless grand coalition.

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Notes

¹ There were defeats at four of the *Landtag* elections held during 2003 and 2004. March 2003 in Lower Austria: -11.6 points; September 2003 in Tirol: -11.7 points; March 2004 in Salzburg: -10.9 points; September 2002 in Vorarlberg: - 14.6 points. This amounted to

-72.1%, -59.5%, -56.6% and -53.1% of the votes the FPÖ had received at the respective preceding election. At the European Parliament election of June 2004, the party lost 17.1 points (i.e. 73.1% of the number of votes it had received in 1999). The exception to this trend was the Carinthian *Landtag* election, where in March 2004 Governor Haider managed to achieve a modest increase in the party's vote share (+0.3 points).

² As he had been the architect of the party's strategy of populist vote maximization and a key instigator of the internal rebellion that had caused the party to implode in 2002, many commentators considered this rather ironic.

³ March 2003 in Lower Austria: SPÖ +3.2 & ÖVP +8.42%. September 2003 in Tirol: SPÖ +4.1 & ÖVP +2.7%. September 2003 in Upper Austria SPÖ +11.3 & ÖVP +0.7%. March 2004 in Carinthia SPÖ +5.5 & ÖVP -9.1% and in Salzburg SPÖ +13.1 & ÖVP -0.8%. September 2004 in Vorarlberg SPÖ +3.9 & ÖVP +9.2%. October 2005 in Styria SPÖ +9.4 & ÖVP -8.6%; in Burgenland SPÖ +5.7 & ÖVP +1% and in Vienna SPÖ +2.2 and ÖVP +2.4%.

⁴ March 2003: Lower Austria: from 4.5 to 7.2%. September 2003: in Upper Austria from 5.8 to 9.1% and in Tirol from 10.2 to 15.6%. March 2004: in Carinthia: 6.7 % and in Salzburg from 5.4 to 8%; September 2004 in Vorarlberg from 6 to 10.2%. October 2005: gains in Vienna (12.4 to 14.6%), but disappointing results in Burgenland (5.6 to 4.7 %) and in Styria (5.6 to 4.7%).

⁵ The following draws in part on the author's detailed interviews with key actors in the campaign teams of the SPÖ, ÖVP, Greens, FPÖ and BZÖ. For practitioners' reports of their campaigns, see Hofer and Tóth (2007).

⁶ According to some commentators (e.g. Hofer 2007), Greenberg's team played a key role in determining the style and content of the SPÖ's campaign, including its use of negative campaigning.

⁷ Indeed, in the last week of August and first week of September elderly care became the number one issue in the polls (Plasser et al. 2007: 25). On 8 August Schüssel had responded to opposition criticism of government policy in this area by denying there was a 'care crisis' (*Pflegenostand*) in Austria. Yet 11 days later it was revealed his mother-in-law had received care from an illegally employed Slovakian care assistant.

⁸ This was an allusion to Elsner, who had ordered his residence above the BAWAG's premises to be luxuriously furnished by the bank and then organised to purchase it at a significantly below-market price.

⁹ GfK Austria's tracking poll (Plasser et al. 2007: 25f) of early August records only 12% saying the immigration issue was likely to strongly influence their vote, but by late September the figure was 31% (and amongst late deciders it was 40%).

¹⁰ The BZÖ's very different Carinthian campaign is discussed by its manager Stefan Petzner, in Hofer and Tóth, (2007: 83-91).

¹¹ The BZÖ also failed in its attempt to take over the FPÖ's traditional third ballot paper spot, but was permitted to appear on the national ballot paper as 'Die Freiheitlichen – Liste Westenthaler – BZÖ'. In Carinthia, it ran as 'Die Freiheitlichen in Kärnten - Liste Jörg Haider – BZÖ'.

¹² ÖVP campaign insiders attributed the ÖVP mobilizational weakness to the SPÖ's negative campaigning and potential ÖVP voters interpreting the polls as indicating victory was already assured (Interviews).

¹³ This may explain the conciliatory tone Gusenbauer adopted vis-a-vis the FPÖ in late January 2007, when the media published photographs of Strache engaged – alongside individuals later found guilty of right-wing extremism – in what many interpreted as paramilitary exercises.