

# The FPÖ's welfare chauvinism<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This paper applies recent theoretical arguments about the relationship between redistributive justice principles and welfare chauvinism to the case of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ). These arguments hold that parties vary welfare chauvinist appeals according to the redistributive principles underlying social programs. Means-tested and universal benefits that produce high levels of native-to-nonnative redistribution are thus prime targets. By contrast, social insurance individualizes benefit claims and thus undercuts the group logic inherent in nativist arguments. The analysis confirms that the FPÖ's welfare chauvinism is mostly targeted at universal and means-tested benefits. Where it is applied to social insurance programs, the purpose is typically to exclude immigrants from non-contributory elements and thus strengthen the insurance principle for non-citizens. The analysis extends beyond existing research by also examining the adoption of welfare chauvinism by the ÖVP and the implementation of such policies by the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition between 2017 and 2019.

## Keywords

welfare chauvinism, FPÖ, Austria, Austrian Freedom Party, ÖVP-FPÖ coalition

## Der Wohlfahrtschauvinismus der FPÖ

### Zusammenfassung

Dieser Beitrag wendet theoretische Argumente zum Zusammenhang zwischen Prinzipien der Umverteilung und Wohlfahrtschauvinismus auf den Fall der FPÖ an. Die Kernerwartung ist, dass wohlfahrtschauvinistische Argumente sich nach den Umverteilungsprinzipien richten, nach denen Sozialleistungen strukturiert sind. Bedarfsgeprüfte und universelle Leistungen erzeugen mehr Umverteilung von der ethnischen Ingroup zur Outgroup und sind daher primäre Ziele wohlfahrtschauvinistischer Argumentation. Das Sozialversicherungsprinzip hingegen individualisiert Leistungsansprüche und untergräbt somit die gruppenbasierte Logik nativistischer Rhetorik. Die Analyse zeigt, dass die FPÖ ihre wohlfahrtschauvinistische Argumentation zumeist auf universelle und bedarfsgeprüfte Leistungen fokussiert. Bei Sozialversicherungsleistungen zielen wohlfahrtschauvinistische Appelle hingegen primär darauf ab, Zuwanderer\*innen von nicht-beitragsfinanzierten Elementen auszuschließen und dadurch das Versicherungsprinzip für Nicht-Staatsbürger\*innen zu stärken. Die Analyse untersucht neben der FPÖ auch noch die Übernahme wohlfahrtschauvinistischer Programmatik durch die ÖVP und die Umsetzung dieser politischen Inhalte während der ÖVP-FPÖ-Koalition zwischen 2017 und 2019.

### Schlüsselwörter

Wohlfahrtschauvinismus, FPÖ, Österreich, Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, ÖVP-FPÖ Koalition

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## 1. Introduction

Welfare chauvinism has become a central feature of the policy platforms of the populist radical right. The large-scale influx of immigrants into West European welfare states during the past decades did not generally reduce the support for redistribution among voters, yet it helped promote the view that social benefits should not be given to natives and nonnatives equally (Brady/Finnigan 2014; Steele 2016). Populist radical right parties (PRRPs) quickly discovered that large groups of voters support the notion that the welfare state should discriminate between citizens and non-citizens. Empirical research has found strong support for the presence of welfare chauvinism among voters (Cappelen/Midtbø 2016; Hjorth 2016; Kootstra 2016; Muñoz/Pardos-Prado 2019). Also, mainstream parties have emulated the radical right's welfare chauvinism under certain conditions (Schumacher/van Kersbergen 2016), for instance, the Dutch Liberals (VVD) have taken a page out of their radical right competitor's book, the Dutch Freedom Party (PVV).

While we thus have learned much about the presence (or absence) of welfare chauvinism among voters and in party platforms, we still know very little about how welfare chauvinism is conditioned by welfare state institutions – at least as far as party policy is concerned. With regard to voters, some research has hinted at a connection between welfare regime types and welfare chauvinist attitudes (Reeskens/van Oorschot 2012; van der Waal et al. 2013). With regard to party policy, the conditionality of welfare chauvinism on institutional arrangements has received very little scholarly attention.

This paper applies a recently developed theoretical argument about the link between welfare chauvinism and social policy institutions (Ennsner-Jedenastik 2018) to the case of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ). Ennsner-Jedenastik (2018) theorizes that welfare chauvinism is conditioned by the architecture of social benefits and the principles of redistributive justice that underlie them. More specifically, he argues that equality- and need-based social programs (i.e. universal and means-tested benefits) are more likely to attract nativist critiques from PRRPs. By contrast, social insurance systems are assumed to be less vulnerable. The present article tests this proposition through an in-depth analysis of social policy proposals put forward (and partly implemented) by the FPÖ since 2005, when the party rebranded itself as the “social homeland party” and welfare chauvinism became a defining feature of the party's agenda (Ennsner-Jedenastik 2016). The analysis uncovers that welfare chauvinism is present for most universal and means-tested benefits, yet not for social insurance benefits. With respect to social insurance, the FPÖ seeks to segregate the systems by citizenship, with the purpose of restricting access to the non-actuarial elements in these

schemes (e.g. minimum pensions, tax-funded compensation payments) to Austrian nationals, thus effectively *strengthening* the insurance principle for nonnatives.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Welfare chauvinism

The term welfare chauvinism was first coined by Andersen and Bjørklund (1990, 212) in their analysis of the Danish and Norwegian Progress parties.<sup>2</sup> It is typically used to denote the application of nativist principles to social policy. Welfare provisions should be more generous for citizens, whereas non-citizens should receive lower benefits, if any. To be sure, not all research applies the term welfare chauvinism in this exact way. Some studies on party competition have used it to denote a position in the two-dimensional policy space that combines a leftist stance on socio-economic matters with a rightist stance on the cultural dimension (especially immigration) (Kitschelt/McGann 1995; Schumacher/van Kersbergen 2016). While such a policy position is clearly consistent with (and often causally related to) applying nativism to social policy, it is not the same thing. For the present purpose, thus, the term welfare chauvinism represents a political view that seeks to favor natives over nonnatives in the provision of social benefits. In other words, it combines a (relatively) leftist social policy position regarding natives with a (relatively) rightist social policy position regarding nonnatives (Otjes 2019).

The literature on welfare chauvinism can be grouped into two strands, one focused on the supply side of politics (i.e. parties' ideology and policy platforms), the other focused on the demand side (voters' preferences). In the former line of research, scholars of party competition have identified welfare chauvinism as an important feature in the policy programs of populist radical right parties (Careja et al. 2016; Fenger 2018; Norocel 2016; Schumacher/van Kersbergen 2016). Earlier research had portrayed PRRPs as pursuing economically liberal policies (Betz 1994; Kitschelt/McGann 1995) – a view that was soon challenged (De Lange 2007; Mudde, 2000; see also Röth et al. 2018). As Mudde (2007, 119) argues, socio-economic matters are only secondary elements in the ideology of PRRPs. PRRPs thus subordinate their views on education, the economy, or the welfare state to their core ideological principles: nativism, authoritarianism, and populism (Ennsner-Jedenastik 2016; Otjes 2019).

The second line of research focuses on voter preferences about redistribution to immigrants. A number of survey-based studies have identified immigrants as the least deserving social group (van Oorschot 2000; 2006;

<sup>2</sup> The precise term was “welfare state chauvinism”.

2008), and found that the size of local immigrant populations as well as attitudes towards immigration shape redistributive preferences (Eger 2010; Finseraas 2008). The degree to which voters embrace welfare chauvinistic attitudes is influenced by a number of factors, such as low cultural capital (van der Waal et al. 2010) and contextual forces such as economic inequality (van der Waal et al. 2013) and cultural heterogeneity (Reeskens/van Oorschot 2012).

More recently, survey experiments have been employed to parse the conditions under which voters are more inclined towards welfare chauvinism (e.g. Kootstra 2016). This research has identified variables such as an immigrant's cultural proximity (Hjorth 2016) or respondent gender (Cappelen/Midtbø 2016) as important explanatory factors. Most importantly for the present purpose, the negative impact of immigration priming on redistributive preferences is larger for means-tested than for universal programs (Muñoz/Pardos-Prado 2019). This finding supports the notion that redistributive justice principles (and their real-world implications) can help explain why welfare chauvinism is targeted at some social programs more than at others.

## 2.2 Principles of redistributive justice

Social programs are organized according to different principles of redistributive justice, of which the three most fundamental are equity, equality, and need (Clasen/van Oorschot 2002; Deutsch 1975). The equity principle demands that benefits are equal to one's contribution. Deutsch (1975, 143) argues that this logic will be dominant when the goal is to maximize economic productivity. The realization of this principle in the realm of social policy is the creation of social insurance programs. Those who contribute more (typically because of higher income) will receive higher benefits should they face unemployment, sickness, or old age. The application of the equity principle maintains status differences between individuals and is therefore a core characteristic of the conservative welfare regime (Esping-Andersen 1990; Kalyvas/van Kersbergen 2010; van Kersbergen 2003).

The principle of equality, by contrast, dictates that benefits are provided equally, irrespective of contribution or need. This principle applies to types of cooperation in which "enjoyable social relations" (Deutsch 1975, 146) are the prime goal. Such universal benefits are typical of the social democratic welfare regime ideal-type.

Finally, the need principle requires benefits to be adjusted to one's material needs. Welfare provisions should be targeted primarily towards the individuals at the bottom of the income distribution – where the marginal utility of each unit transferred is greatest. The need principle should be dominant when "personal development and personal welfare" is the primary goal in

a social relation (Deutsch 1975, 146). The empirical correspondence to this principle is the provision of means-tested benefits, a cornerstone of the liberal welfare regime type.

## 2.3 Welfare chauvinism and redistributive justice principles

As the discussion above makes clear, different societal goals and political purposes call for different redistributive principles. This premise can also be applied to nativist ideology. As first argued by Ennser-Jedenastik (2018), there is a tension between nativist logic and the architecture of some social programs. The strength of welfare chauvinistic appeals should therefore be a function of the degree to which underlying principles or real-world outcomes of a social program are at odds with a nativist worldview.

To begin with, the *equity principle* ("to each according to his or her contribution") is orthogonal to nativist thinking. As Reeskens and van Oorschot (2012) have put it, "merit's underlying importance of economic duties towards society makes no appeal to in-out group conflict." Nativism relies on a group-based logic, pitting the native in-group against the nonnative out-group. By contrast, the equity principle makes no reference to groups, but awards benefits according to individuals' contributions. Anyone – irrespective of group membership – can earn the right to claim benefits by contributing (Ennser-Jedenastik 2018, 297). In practice, social insurance programs produce little native-to-nonnative redistribution, since status differentials between immigrants (who have lower average incomes, see Morissens/Sainsbury 2005) and natives are maintained. Also, immigrant populations in most Western democracies are younger than the general population and thus underrepresented among those individuals that rely most heavily on insurance-based benefits (pensioners and the sick).

The *equality principle* is fundamentally at odds with nativism – at least as long as universal benefits are based on residence or employment, not citizenship. Nativism is an ideology of inequality and thus outright incompatible with the notion that benefits be provided equally. Also, due to the income disparity between natives and immigrants (OECD 2015; Sainsbury 2012, 12), universal benefits generate a considerable level of redistribution from natives to nonnatives.

Finally, the *need principle* is not per se incompatible with nativist thinking. As a general rule, redistributing income to those who have greater need is not antithetical to having a preference for natives. However, the fact that incomes are typically lower (and benefit claims therefore typically higher) among immigrants in Europe should make nativists strongly adversarial towards means-tested programs. More than any other type of

social program, means-tested benefits redistribute resources from natives to nonnatives. As Muñoz and Pardos-Prado (2019) argue, the notion of means-testing activates the “other-regarding” dimension of social policy preferences (Cavaillé/Trump 2015). This dimension is ruled less by considerations of material self-interest but rather by deservingness evaluations of the groups that will likely benefit. Since nonnatives are typically considered less deserving of benefits (Cappelen/Midtbø 2016; Harell et al. 2016; Hjorth 2016; Kootstra 2016), means-tested social programs provide the most favorable context for political entrepreneurs seeking to employ nativist arguments in the realm of social policy.

It is therefore reasonable to conjecture that welfare chauvinistic appeals are targeted at those policies that most strongly violate nativist logic – either as a matter of principle (e.g. explicitly recognizing all residents of a country as equally deserving) or practice (generating high levels of native-to-nonnative redistribution). By contrast, social programs that are based on the insurance principle should face less nativist critique.

While Ennser-Jedenastik (2018) tests this assumption for the case of PRRPs, there is nothing inherent in the argument that prohibits its application to other parties. The radical right's electoral success may even drive its competitors to adopt such welfare chauvinistic stances (Schumacher/van Kersbergen 2016). While accommodative responses to PRRPs do not necessarily increase mainstream party performance (Krause et al. 2019; Spoon/Klüver 2020; Abou-Chadi/Wagner 2020), the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) under Sebastian Kurz constitutes one of the most successful cases of nativist accommodation. This article therefore extends the analysis to include a discussion of the ÖVP's programmatic profile and the implementation of welfare chauvinistic policies during the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition between 2017 and 2019.

### 3. Case selection, data, and method

The proposition that welfare chauvinism varies with the redistributive justice principles enshrined in a program is tested through a qualitative study of social policy proposals put forward by the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) since 2005. The data are gathered from the FPÖ's election manifestos (2006, 2008, 2013, 2017, and 2019), the 2011 basic program (*Grundsatzprogramm*) (FPÖ 2011), the party's 300-page policy handbook (*Handbuch freiheitlicher Politik*) (FPÖ 2013), its 2017 economic policy platform (FPÖ 2017a), as well as legislative proposals and press releases issued by the party since April 2005.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore,

the analysis will examine the FPÖ's policy impact during its participation in government between December 2017 and May 2019. To conclude, it will briefly apply the same theoretical and analytical framework to the ÖVP.

All manifesto-type documents were read sentence by sentence, and all statements that included welfare chauvinistic references were marked, collected, and sorted into six policy areas: pensions, health care, unemployment, family benefits, social housing, and social assistance (with a generic category for non-policy-specific appeals). Press releases and legislative proposals were identified through keyword searches on the Austrian Press Agency's public platform ([www.ots.at](http://www.ots.at)) and the parliament's website ([www.parlament.gv.at](http://www.parlament.gv.at)). The same classification into policy areas was applied, and (near-)identical statements from different sources were merged. This set of policy proposals provides the material for the empirical analysis.

With regards to the case selected, the FPÖ counts as one of Europe's most successful populist radical right parties, and is certainly emblematic of this party family in terms of ideology and voter profile. Founded in the mid-1950s as a successor to the Federation of Independents (*Verband der Unabhängigen*, VdU), the FPÖ remained a marginal force throughout much of Austria's postwar era, scoring election results in the single digits. From the beginning, the party was torn between a nationalist and a more pragmatic wing (Pelinka 2002). In 1983, the party, then led by a group of more liberal-minded individuals, entered a coalition with the Social Democrats (SPÖ) and thus found itself in national government for the first time. The ensuing internal conflict reached its peak at a party congress in 1986, when challenger Jörg Haider (supported by the national wing) beat sitting party leader Norbert Steger (a liberal) in a leadership contest. As a consequence, the SPÖ declared the coalition terminated and snap elections were called. The populist turn under Haider marked the begin of the FPÖ's electoral rise, culminating in 1999, when, with a vote share of 27 percent, the party eked out second place and subsequently went into coalition with the Christian democratic People's Party (ÖVP). In late 2002, conflict within the FPÖ led to early elections and a dramatic vote loss for the party (only 10 percent voted for the FPÖ). Still, the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition was renewed in 2003, but further internal rifts culminated in a party split in April 2005, when Jörg Haider and most of the party's elites (all ministers and most MPs) founded the Alliance Future of Austria (BZÖ) and continued the coalition with the ÖVP (Ennser-Jedenastik 2019; Luther 2011). The remainder of the FPÖ – now in opposition – was taken over by Vienna party chairman Heinz-Christian Strache. Under

<sup>3</sup> Austria's national news agency (the Austria Press Agency, APA) runs a centralized platform for press releases ([www.ots.at](http://www.ots.at)) that is open to the public. All major parties and their subsidiary organizations feed their press releases into this website. The site can be searched sys-

tematically, e.g. by limiting search results to certain senders, keywords, and time periods.

this new leadership the party steadily built up support, reaching 26 percent in the 2017 parliamentary election. Norbert Hofer, the FPÖ candidate for the (largely ceremonial) presidency even obtained 47 percent of the vote in the run-off election in December 2016, thus underscoring the party's status as a major force in contemporary Austrian politics (Hermann 2019).

Following the 2017 parliamentary election, the FPÖ, again, joined the ÖVP as the junior partner in a coalition government, taking, *inter alia*, the foreign affairs, interior, defense, and social affairs portfolios. In May 2019, the coalition was terminated as a consequence of the now infamous Ibiza affair (featuring a video that showed Strache and another leading FPÖ politician, Johann Gudenus, offering public contracts to a putative Russian oligarch in exchange for covert donations and other forms of, potentially illicit, support).

The analysis proceeds by policy area and covers the period from 2005. This year marks the beginning of the latest phase in the FPÖ's development. From 2005 on the party pursued a more pro-redistributive stance, branding itself as the "social homeland party" (*soziale Heimatpartei*) and strongly embracing welfare chauvinistic policies which up until then had not been central to the FPÖ's programmatic profile (Ennser-Jedenastik 2016; 2019). For instance, Ennser-Jedenastik (2016, 419) reports that there are only two very generic references to welfare chauvinist positions in *all* of the party's election manifestos between 1983 and 2002 combined. It is therefore reasonable to limit the analysis to the period in which welfare chauvinism has been prominent enough to constitute a relevant part of the FPÖ's agenda.

#### 4. Analysis: (mostly) insurance-based benefits

##### 4.1 Pensions

Austria runs a public pay-as-you-go pension scheme, supplemented by occupational and tax-incentivized private pension plans. The public scheme is insurance-based and provides the bulk of income for the overwhelming majority of people in old age. During its stint in government between 2000 and 2005, the Freedom Party together with the ÖVP pushed through a major retrenchment effort (Afonso 2015; Busemeyer 2005), which cost the party dearly at the polls (Heinisch 2003). Since its return to opposition in 2005 the FPÖ has been much less eager to promote pension reform. Only in its 2017 economic policy program does the party vaguely endorse "minimizing the gap between actual retirement age and life expectancy". The party also demands bringing civil servants' pensions into line with the general system more quickly than currently planned (FPÖ 2017a, 40-41).

However, a much more prominent plank in the party's platform has been the proposal to segregate the Austrian social insurance systems into two tiers, one for citizens and one for non-citizens, sometimes further distinguishing between EU citizens, third-country nationals, and asylum seekers (FPÖ 2013, 118; 2017a, 45). Each group's contributions should be used to fund only that group's benefits. While the distributional impacts of such a system could even be negative for the native population (in 2017 only 10 percent of non-citizens were of age 60 or older, yet 27 percent of Austrian citizens fell into that group), the FPÖ also demands that tax-funded compensation payments be retained only for Austrian citizens. Given that the shortfall in the Austrian public pension scheme is currently at around € 10b per year (financed from the general budget), eliminating compensation payments for non-citizens equals a severe pension cut.

At first glance, the FPÖ's proposals on segregating social insurance by citizenship contradict the expectation that insurance-based systems are less subject to welfare chauvinistic critique. However, what the reforms envisaged by the Freedom Party amount to is actually a *strengthening* of the insurance principle for foreigners. Limiting compensation payments to citizens means that non-citizens' pensions would be entirely dependent on what they pay into the system. This notion is corroborated by the FPÖ's skepticism towards paying non-citizens the compensatory allowance (*Ausgleichszulage*), a means-tested benefit that guarantees most pensioners a minimum income (FPÖ 2013, 119-120).<sup>4</sup> In line with this stance, the 2017 coalition agreement envisaged changing the compensatory allowance in order to minimize the export of pension non-contributory benefits to other (mostly EU) countries (Bundesregierung, 2017, 110).<sup>5</sup> Clearly, thus, the FPÖ's welfare chauvinistic appeals with regards to pensions are targeted at the non-insurance elements in the system (tax-funded compensation payments into the pay-as-you-go scheme and the means-tested compensatory allowance).

##### 4.2 Health care

The Austrian health care system is run on an insurance basis, although insurance contributions cover only half

<sup>4</sup> See also press release no. 67, 20 January 2017: [www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20170120\\_OTS0067](http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20170120_OTS0067).

<sup>5</sup> After the fall of the Kurz I cabinet, a broad coalition in parliament (ÖVP, SPÖ, FPÖ, and Liste Pilz) passed the so-called "pension premium", an increased minimum pension for persons with long contribution periods. While ÖVP and FPÖ insist that the pension premium is non-exportable, the Ministry of Social Affairs (in agreement with most experts) views it as an insurance-based benefit that also accrues to immigrants with long contribution periods abroad. Depending on which legal opinion prevails, this could be a rare example of a social policy that expands benefits to immigrants, albeit inadvertently.

of all public health expenditures. Insurance is established automatically with employment, free co-insurance covers dependent family members. Most individuals cannot choose their insurance provider, hence there is no competition between insurers. Mandatory insurance guarantees that only a small fraction of people living in Austria go without being covered (1.2 percent according to Fuchs, 2009). Sick pay is paid out in proportion to income, whereas (most) medical benefits are provided (mostly) free to the insured.

Compared to the FPÖ's overall policies on family benefits and social assistance (see below), welfare chauvinism features much less prominently in the party's health care policy statements. In line with its nativist perspective on social insurance, the FPÖ argues that health insurance should be segregated, with a separate insurance scheme (or, at least, separate accounting) for non-citizens (FPÖ 2008, 9; 2011, 12; 2017b, 17). As for pensions and unemployment, this scheme would be financed by non-citizens' contributions and fund "basic care".<sup>6</sup> The party does not go into further detail, but it is safe to assume that such a scheme would substantially lower access to medical services for foreigners, given that health insurance contributions cover only about half of all public health expenditures in Austria.<sup>7</sup> The FPÖ's health care policy, while sketchier than many other parts of its social policy agenda, fits the logic of the theoretical argument: strengthen the insurance principle for non-citizens while restricting tax-financed cushions in the system to Austrian nationals.

### 4.3 Unemployment

Unemployed workers in Austria receive earnings-related unemployment benefits with net replacement for individuals currently at 55 percent (rates are higher for people with dependents). All individuals with 52 weeks of employment during the past two years prior to losing their job are eligible. Unemployment benefits are paid for up to a year. After that, insured individuals qualify for emergency assistance (*Notstandshilfe*) which is slightly lower than unemployment benefits (typically 92 percent). In addition, the Public Employment Service (AMS) provides a range of active labor market policies, most importantly training and job placement services.

The FPÖ views immigrant labor as largely responsible for much of Austria's labor market woes, be it high unemployment or downward pressure on wages. The party therefore strongly opposes the Posted Workers Directive (96/71/EC), and proposes to close off parts of the Austrian labor market to immigrants (FPÖ 2017a, 42–43;

2017b, 15). As with all social insurance schemes, the FPÖ seeks to create a separate tier for non-citizens, with no tax funds provided to compensate for budgetary shortfalls (FPÖ 2013, 113). This, again, amounts to a strengthening of the actuarial principle for immigrant workers. In addition, the FPÖ would require non-citizens to apply for a job in their country of origin after 26 weeks of unemployment. Also, foreign workers should not be eligible for emergency assistance or social assistance (*Bedarfsorientierte Mindestsicherung*) after being unemployed for more than 52 weeks (FPÖ, 2017a, 44). Neither should the AMS provide training or job placement for non-citizens, since its supposed purpose is to primarily serve the Austrian unemployed (FPÖ 2013, 112; 2017b, 15). Support through active labor market policies (which one could count as universal benefits) would thus become a prerogative for citizens.

While most of the FPÖ's labor market policies conform to the expectation that insurance-based benefits are less affected by welfare chauvinism than universal and means-tested ones, there is one exception. The proposed elimination of emergency assistance for non-citizens is one case where the FPÖ proposes a direct cut to an insurance-based benefit. To be sure, the notion that emergency assistance is an insurance-based benefit was only legally established by the European Court of Human Rights in 1996. The ECtHR ruled that restricting this benefit to nationals constitutes a violation of article 14 (anti-discrimination) of the European Convention of Human Rights.<sup>8</sup>

## 5. Analysis: universal benefits

### 5.1 Family benefits

The two most important cash benefits for Austrian families are the child care allowance and the family allowance. Both are universal flat-rate benefits in principle, although a 2010 reform established an additional earnings-related version of the child care allowance – a measure that was taken with the purpose of getting more fathers to take on child care duties. Child care allowance is paid for up to three years after childbirth and comes with strict limits on additional earnings. Family allowance is paid to parents with children up to age 24 (25 for men who complete mandatory military or alternative civilian service), and increases with age and the number of children. In addition to these direct benefits, ÖVP and FPÖ introduced a tax allowance of up to 1,500 per child in 2018.

In its most extreme demands, the FPÖ proposes to eliminate these cash benefits for non-citizens altogether

<sup>6</sup> See press release no. 285, 6 June 2007: [www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20070606\\_OTS0285](http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20070606_OTS0285).

<sup>7</sup> In 2016, health insurers took in around € 13b in contributions, yet public health expenditure stood at over € 26b ([www.statistik.at](http://www.statistik.at)).

<sup>8</sup> *Gaygusuz v. Austria*, Application no. 17371/90, see <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-58060>.

(FPÖ 2006, 3; 2013, 36).<sup>9</sup> An idea more commonly floated by the party is to adjust cash benefits for families to the local purchasing power for children living abroad.<sup>10</sup> This would mostly affect labor migrants from Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and other CEE countries, who work in Austria but are entitled to receive family allowances for their children living at home. The ÖVP quickly adopted this proposal (ÖVP 2017, 68) and the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition that entered office in 2017 put it into action.<sup>11</sup> The same indexation was applied to the “family premium”, a tax allowance of up to € 1,500 per child introduced by ÖVP and FPÖ.<sup>12</sup> In response, the European Commission initiated an infringement procedure against Austria (no. 20182372) that was still ongoing in early 2020.

While cash transfers to families are substantial in Austria, more than a quarter of family expenditures are used to pay for in-kind benefits, mostly financing the provision of child care services (kindergartens and crèches). The FPÖ's core tenet regarding institutional child care is that these services should not be made mandatory (FPÖ 2013, 156). Starting in 2010, however, one year of kindergarten was made mandatory, and previous governments envisaged extending this period to two years. Both measures were vehemently opposed by the FPÖ,<sup>13</sup> even though the policy was explicitly designed to improve German language skills among non-native speakers – a longstanding concern for the FPÖ. Yet the party maintains that the government should not force Austrian children who have no language difficulties into institutional child care.<sup>14</sup> Taken together, the FPÖ's policy views on family benefits exhibit strong welfare chauvinistic tendencies. Since family benefits are typically universal, this finding fits the theoretical argument well.

## 6. Analysis: means-tested benefits

### 6.1 Social housing

Social housing in Austria covers around one in four households (Reinprecht 2007), thus making it social

policy area of central importance. While much of social housing is provided by cooperatives, a substantial stock of housing units remains in direct public ownership (“municipal housing”). The city of Vienna alone owns 220,000 social housing units – a legacy dating back to the “Red Vienna” of the interwar period (Kadi 2015).

Access to social housing is subject to a means test, yet the income thresholds are typically high enough to cover the large majority of the population (80 to 90 percent according to Reinprecht, 2007, 39), thus rendering social housing a quasi-universal benefit. However, municipal (i.e. directly owned) housing mostly caters to lower-income households (and thus enforces stricter income limits), whereas housing associations also target firmly middle-class individuals and families. Much of the political debate revolves around municipal housing, not least in Vienna, where it accounts for one in four household units (Reinprecht 2007).

In some of Austria's nine *Länder*, publicly owned housing was tied to citizenship until 2006, when European regulations necessitated granting access to EU and EEA citizens. The FPÖ vehemently opposed the change at the time and remains strongly critical of non-citizen access to social housing (FPÖ 2011, 7; 2017b, 16). In its policy handbook, the party demands that municipal housing be reserved for Austrian citizens (FPÖ 2013, 39). At other times it has opposed publicly owned housing to be opened to refugees, third-country nationals, individuals with insufficient German language skills (FPÖ 2017b, 16), or non-EU citizens more generally.<sup>15</sup> Alternatively, it promotes an “Austrians' premium” for all municipal housing (FPÖ 2019). In July of 2019 (thus after the fall of the Kurz I government), ÖVP and FPÖ together with the liberal NEOS passed a reform of the federal public housing law (*Wohnungsgemeinnützigkeitsgesetz*)<sup>16</sup> that regulates housing provided by cooperatives (but not municipal housing). The law requires third-country nationals to document five years of permanent, uninterrupted residency in Austria and a certificate (language and values exam) from the Austrian Integration Fund (*Österreichischer Integrationsfonds*). Access for third-country national has thus been severely restricted.

In addition to social housing, the Austrian *Länder* provide housing assistance (*Wohnbeihilfe*), a means-tested benefit for low-income individuals and families whose net income is insufficient to cover their rental costs. The FPÖ has regularly argued that this benefit should not be paid to non-EU citizens.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the two

<sup>9</sup> See press release no. 120, 19 February 2007: [www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20070219\\_OTS0120](http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20070219_OTS0120).

<sup>10</sup> See the party's parliamentary motion no. 199/A(E) from 24 January 2014: [https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/A/A\\_00199/fname\\_337980.pdf](https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/A/A_00199/fname_337980.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> See Bundesgesetzblatt I Nr. 83/2018.

<sup>12</sup> See Bundesgesetzblatt I Nr. 62/2018.

<sup>13</sup> See press release no. 111, 16 September 2016: [www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20160916\\_OTS0111](http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20160916_OTS0111).

<sup>14</sup> One could argue that this view may represent a case of indirect welfare chauvinism (Careja et al. 2016). However, this would only be true if enrollment rates were significantly higher among natives than among nonnatives. Yet, the difference is rather small: 97 percent enrollment rates among 4-year-olds with Austrian citizenship vs. 93 percent among non-citizens (Statistik Austria, 2018, 44). This suggests that the FPÖ's opposition to mandatory kindergarten is not driven by welfare chauvinistic considerations, but by a principled objection against forcing young children into institutional child care.

<sup>15</sup> See these press releases:

[www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20151027\\_OTS0063](http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20151027_OTS0063),  
[www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20110701\\_OTS0285](http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20110701_OTS0285),  
[www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20110225\\_OTS0159](http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20110225_OTS0159),  
[www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20150814\\_OTS0011](http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20150814_OTS0011).

<sup>16</sup> See Bundesgesetzblatt I Nr. 85/2019.

<sup>17</sup> See press release no. 24, 6 April 2013: [www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20130406\\_OTS0024](http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20130406_OTS0024).

Länder governed by coalitions including the FPÖ (ÖVP-FPÖ in Upper Austria, SPÖ-FPÖ in Burgenland, both since 2015) both restricted access to housing assistance for third-country nationals.<sup>18</sup>

## 6.2 Social assistance

The Austrian social assistance program (*Sozialhilfe*, or *Bedarfsorientierte Mindestsicherung* between 2010 and 2019) is a means-tested income replacement program. Between 2010 and 2016, there was an agreement in place between the federal government and the *Länder* about uniform standards (Fink/Leibetseder 2019). Negotiations about a continuation of that agreement broke down not least because the influx of refugees starting in 2015 propelled ÖVP and FPÖ to argue for tighter eligibility criteria and lower benefits for some groups of non-citizens. The FPÖ opposed the *Bedarfsorientierte Mindestsicherung* (BMS) from the start, arguing that it would encourage immigration by individuals whose prime motivation was cashing in welfare benefits. The party even went as far as to argue that the social assistance scheme would “endanger the survival of our country” (FPÖ 2013, 110). As a consequence, eligibility for social assistance should be tied to Austrian citizenship (FPÖ 2017a, 39).

While such drastic measures remain politically (and legally) infeasible, some *Länder* cut benefits for individuals with only a brief history of residence in Austria, made the attendance of German language and “value” courses mandatory to receive the full benefit, or required beneficiaries in some cases to sign an “integration agreement”. The FPÖ was instrumental (though not alone) in pushing for these changes. Yet the Constitutional Court struck down the most restrictive regulations (those in Lower Austria and Burgenland) in 2018 (G 308/2018-8 and G 136/2017-19 ua.), while the European Court of Justice invalidated the Upper Austrian cuts to social assistance for persons with temporary refugee status or subsidiary protection (C-713/17).

These rulings severely limited the Kurz I cabinet's freedom to reform social assistance. Still, both parties had promised such a reform during the 2017 campaign, and therefore a new framework bill (with details left to the *Länder*, as required by the constitution) was passed in 2019. The *Sozialhilfe Neu* (“new social assistance”) introduced benefit ceilings (instead of floors), cut payments for children, but also included language requirements. Full benefits were only awarded to persons with sufficient knowledge of either German (B1) or English (C1).<sup>19</sup> Only a few weeks after the law went into

force, the SPÖ appealed against it at the Constitutional Court. The court ruled in December of 2019 that the language requirements and the benefit cuts for children were unconstitutional (G 164/2019-25 and G 171/2019-24).

## 7. Extending the analysis to the mainstream: The ÖVP's welfare chauvinism

The analysis has thus far focused on the FPÖ as a typical populist radical right party. However, even at its electoral peaks the FPÖ never controlled anything close to a majority of seats in parliament. Therefore, welfare chauvinistic policies (such as the ones implemented under the Kurz I cabinet) can only become law with the support of other parties. As shown above, the ÖVP has been very willing to follow the FPÖ's lead on welfare chauvinism in recent years. The following paragraphs will therefore examine whether the patterns detected for the FPÖ apply to the ÖVP's policy agenda as well.

Mainstream parties have a number of strategies to respond to challenger parties (Abou-Chadi/Krause forthcoming; Bale et al. 2010; Meguid 2005). This also applies to welfare chauvinism (Schumacher/van Kersbergen 2016). Prior to the “refugee crisis” of 2015, the ÖVP clearly adopted a strategy of diffusion (“ignore”). For example, the only welfare chauvinistic elements in the party's lengthy 2013 manifesto are featured in a short section on “welfare fraud” that lists several bullet points with nativist connotations: “welfare tourism”, “e-card abuse”,<sup>20</sup> or “registration fraud in relation to welfare and social insurance benefits” (ÖVP 2013, 36). No part of the ÖVP's strong critique of the existing social assistance scheme in 2013 was framed in welfare chauvinistic terms.

By 2017, the party had endorsed welfare chauvinistic policies in two areas: family benefits and social assistance. It promoted a five-year waiting period before EU nationals could claim social assistance benefits in another member state, the indexation of family allowances, and a reduction in social assistance for asylees. Importantly, these policy shifts began already *before* Sebastian Kurz took over the party leadership in May 2017. The indexation of family benefits was first proposed by three ÖVP ministers (Kurz among them) in late 2016. Earlier that year, two ÖVP-led *Länder* (Lower Austria and Upper Austria) had already cut social assistance benefits for asylees.

In its 2019 manifesto, the ÖVP proposes a task force to review social benefits for immigrants and

<sup>18</sup> Upper Austria: Landesgesetzblatt Nr. 98/2017; Burgenland: Landesgesetzblatt Nr. 60/2018.

<sup>19</sup> B1 and C1 refer to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

<sup>20</sup> The e-card is a chip card carried by all individuals registered in the Austrian social insurance system.

“identify potential abuse” (ÖVP 2019, item 3), citing health insurance fraud and family benefits as examples. The party also proposes cuts to family allowances for parents (“primarily those of immigrant background”) who allow their children to skip school. With regards to unemployment, the ÖVP supports active labor market policies targeted at refugees (a rare anti-welfare chauvinistic stance), but also demands tighter reasonableness provisions (*Zumutbarkeitsbestimmungen*) for asylees. The one area where nativist elements are conspicuously absent – despite the theoretical predictions made in this paper – is social housing. Here, the ÖVP refrains from all references to immigrants.

In sum, the ÖVP's case mostly follows the pattern outlined in the theory: welfare chauvinism is mostly targeted at means-tested (social assistance) and universal (family allowances) benefits. Where it appears in relation to insurance-based programs (health care, unemployment), it is either targeted at supposed fraudsters or very recent arrivals in Austria – cases for which benefit claims cannot be justified based on the insurance principle. The case of the ÖVP thus

demonstrates that the present theoretical framework can be applied to explain the welfare chauvinism of mainstream parties as well.

## 8. Analysis: summary of results

Table 1 presents a summary of the results. As argued above, the FPÖ has been promoting preference for Austrian natives in all main areas of social policy since 2005. However, as the overview makes clear, the logic by which welfare chauvinist arguments are applied to different program types is strongly conditional on the design of the program. All universal and means-tested benefits discussed above are subject to strong and unveiled welfare chauvinistic critiques. Depending on the circumstances, the group to be excluded varies between refugees, other third-country nationals, non-EU citizens, and non-citizens generally. Yet all of the most important means-tested and universal social programs in Austria have attracted strong nativist appeals from the FPÖ.

**Table 1:** Overview of welfare chauvinism in FPÖ positions & government policies

Policy area	Policy	Program type	FPÖ position (* = ÖVP adoption)	Reforms enacted by ÖVP and FPÖ after 2017
Pensions	Public pensions	Insurance-based, earnings-related	Segregate insurance scheme, no use of tax funds for non-citizens	-
	Compensatory allowance	Means-tested	Eliminate/retrench for non-citizens	Legal situation unclear: inadvertent expansion of benefits to immigrants?
Health care	Medical services	Insurance-based, not earnings-related	Segregate insurance scheme, only basic care for non-citizens	-
Unemployment	Unemployment benefits	Insurance-based, earnings-related	Segregate insurance scheme, no use of tax funds for non-citizens	-
	Emergency assistance	Insurance-based, earnings-related	Eliminate for non-citizens	-
	Active labor market policies	Universal	Eliminate for non-citizens	-
Family benefits	Family allowance	Universal (funded through employer contributions)	Eliminate/retrench for non-citizens*	Indexation to local purchasing power for children living abroad (same for 'family premium')
	Child care allowance	Universal (funded through employer contributions)	Eliminate/retrench for non-citizens	-
Housing	Social housing	Means-tested	Eliminate/restrict for non-citizens	Preferential access for Austrian nationals, EU citizens & long-term residents
	Housing assistance	Means-tested	Eliminate/retrench for non-citizens	(regulated at the Land level)
Social assistance	Social assistance	Means-tested	Eliminate/retrench for non-citizens*	Lower benefits for persons with insufficient knowledge of German or English language

Note: Grey area denotes deviations from the theoretical argument.

By contrast, the party pursues a different logic of argument when it comes to social insurance (pensions, health care, and unemployment benefits). The general idea is to segregate the social insurance system, with one tier for non-citizens strictly governed by actuarial principles: what you pay in determines what you get out. The purpose of segregating the social insurance systems, however, is not to apply different actuarial calculations to citizens and non-citizens, but to restrict non-insurance based elements to the native population. All measures that take the edges off a pure contribution-based system should benefit only Austrian citizens: tax-funded compensation payments into the public pension and unemployment schemes, or compensatory allowances (i.e. minimum pensions). Immigrants should thus be submitted to a strictly actuarial system, whereas the cushioning effects of using tax revenue to pay for pension, unemployment benefits, or medical services would be retained only for Austrian nationals.

## 9. Conclusion

Since 2005, the FPÖ has adopted welfare chauvinistic positions in all areas of social policy. Nativism has thus become a (if not *the*) central feature of the party's social policy platform. However, the FPÖ's welfare chauvinism is meticulously targeted at means-tested and universal benefits, not at insurance-based programs. Given that, after 2015, the ÖVP adopted several of the FPÖ's welfare chauvinistic stances, it is unsurprising that this logic is also at the heart of the coalition agreement negotiated between ÖVP and FPÖ in late 2017. There, the parties enshrined the distinction between granting insurance-based benefits to all and limiting other (universal and means-tested) benefits to natives as a fundamental principle: "Austrian social policy focuses on our own citizens and on those who have already contributed to our system" (Bundesregierung 2017, 117). The Austrian welfare state should thus be based either on citizenship or on contribution. Also, the insurance principle should be strengthened by making "a greater distinction between those who have paid into the welfare system and those who have been residing in Austria for a short period only" (Bundesregierung 2017, p. 117). Between 2017 and 2019, ÖVP and FPÖ followed through on these principles, introducing welfare chauvinistic elements to family benefits, social assistance, and access to social housing.

Overall, the empirical case of the FPÖ since 2005 (and, since 2017, that of the ÖVP) presents a remarkably good fit for the theoretical argument that welfare chauvinism is targeted at means-tested and universal benefits, whereas insurance-based social programs are

better insulated from nativist attacks. The only policy claim that does not fit this pattern is the FPÖ's demand to eliminate emergency assistance (a contribution-based benefit that kicks in after one year of unemployment) for non-nationals. To be sure, the Austrian government and administration long held the view that this benefit should not be granted to all non-citizens. However, since emergency assistance is proportional to prior income and claims are established based on unemployment insurance contributions, there is little question that this benefit is substantively a social insurance program.<sup>21</sup> Another potential deviation from the expected pattern is the curious case of the 2019 "pension premium" that may inadvertently have expanded benefits for immigrants – although this was certainly not intended by ÖVP and FPÖ (and both parties maintain that no such expansion has taken place).

What is more, the Austrian case clearly shows that some of the biggest obstacles to implementing welfare chauvinistic policies are posed by the high courts. The extension of emergency assistance to non-citizens was only granted after the ECtHR established that these benefits were insurance-based. Several attempts to introduce welfare chauvinistic elements into the social assistance scheme were thwarted by the Constitutional Court and the European Court of Justice. In addition, the existing judicature at the European level makes it highly likely that the nativist elements introduced into the family benefit schemes will not survive the infringement procedure brought by the European Commission.

As with all studies of individual countries or parties, there is a question to what extent the results generalize to other cases. First, it should be noted that the findings presented here are in line with, or even stronger than, what has been reported in the cross-national comparison on which the arguments presented here are based (Ennser-Jedenastik 2018). In this analysis, similar patterns are found for populist radical right parties in the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Second, there are reasons to believe that the FPÖ is typical within the family of populist radical right parties in (Western) Europe. It is a member of the *Europe of Nations and Freedom* group in the European Parliament, alongside the French *Rassemblement National*, the Belgian *Vlaams Belang*, the Dutch *Partij voor de Vrijheid*, and the Italian *Lega Nord* in the European Parliament. Its ideological profile is very similar to that of other PRRPs (Ennser 2012). Third, the FPÖ's supporters are similar to other PRRP supporters in Europe (Ivarsflaten 2008; Rooduijn 2018), such that other parties in that party family face similar incentives to employ welfare chauvinistic appeals. Yet,

<sup>21</sup> The ÖVP-FPÖ cabinet sworn in in December 2017 proposed as one of its first measures the abolition of emergency assistance.

the analysis presented in this paper extends beyond the programmatic stances of PRRPs and shows that the same logic based on redistributive justice principles can apply to 1) mainstream parties and 2) policy-making in coalition governments.

To be sure, future research will have to establish the further applicability of the findings presented here in a comparative context. Most importantly, it will be important to examine in greater detail whether redistributive justice principles shape the extent to which welfare chauvinistic rhetoric will be put into practice. If so, the consequences of increased immigration on social policy in Europe are likely to be conditional on welfare regime types. Depending on the precise mix of means-tested, universal, and insurance-based benefits, some welfare states will be more vulnerable to nativist appeals than others. The existing institutional social policy arrangements are thus crucial contextual factors in determining the potential for political entrepreneurs to shape welfare states in a nativist fashion.

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