

# Austrian far-right FPÖ loses massively in parliamentary elections

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Yesterday's parliamentary elections in Austria resulted in considerable losses for the far-right Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) and the social-democratic SPÖ. The conservative People's Party (ÖVP) of former Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and the Greens benefited from the shift. Kurz can now form a government coalition with the FPÖ, the SPÖ or the Greens to continue his right-wing policy.

According to the preliminary final result—postal votes will not be counted until Monday night—the ÖVP total will reach more than 38 percent, an increase of around 7 percent. The SPÖ will lose over five percent, with 21.5 percent of the vote. It is the worst-ever SPÖ result in an election for the National Council, the lower house of the Austrian parliament.

The FPÖ will lose 9 percent compared to the previous elections, for a total of 17 percent. Just behind are the Greens, who failed in the last election at the four percent hurdle, now increased to 12 percent. The liberal Neos will also be represented in parliament, with slightly more than 7 percent.

The result shows that the far right has no mass support. The so-called “Ibiza affair” was only the most striking expression of this. The ÖVP-FPÖ coalition government fell at the end of May after only 18 months. A video, secretly recorded in Ibiza, which showed then-FPÖ boss Heinz-Christian Strache offered government contracts to a supposed Russian investor in exchange for election assistance, triggered the crisis. Since then, Austria has been temporarily governed by a technocratic government.

The FPÖ reacted with an aggressive, far-right election campaign, attacking refugees and foreigners. A few days before the election, the Vienna Public Prosecutor's Office announced it was investigating former Vice-Chancellor and FPÖ leader Strache on

suspicion of embezzlement. Strache, his former office manager and his former bodyguard allegedly submitted inadmissible invoices to the party, thereby damaging its assets.

As the election results became known, a mood of crisis developed in the FPÖ. “We do not interpret it as our goal to want to enter into government negotiations here. The voters did not make us strong enough to do this,” Strache said in his explanatory statement. Voters had given the party a “mandate for a new start,” he said. There was also talk of a split in the FPÖ on election night.

In the SPÖ there was a mood of crisis as well, after its historic collapse. In 1979 the party ruled alone with 51 percent of the votes; by 1999 it had fallen to 33 percent; and in the last two elections it reached its lowest point to date, with 26 percent. This decline is also expressed in the fact that the party's top candidate, doctor Pamela Rendi-Wagner, had only recently joined the SPÖ.

Politically, the SPÖ was barely distinguishable from the ÖVP and FPÖ in the election campaign. When it comes to the issues of refugee policy, internal security and social “reforms,” all the parties are on the same line. Most recently, the SPÖ had dropped any criticism of the introduction of the 12-hour day by the ÖVP-FPÖ government. Rendi-Wagner had declared that they would form a coalition with Sebastian Kurz to prevent the FPÖ from participating in the government.

At the same time, Rendi-Wagner left the field to the right wing within the party. The SPÖ leader in the Tyrol region, Georg Dornauer, who indirectly demanded an alliance with the FPÖ in an interview with a right-wing radical magazine, and Hans-Peter Doskozil, who has already formed a coalition with the FPÖ in Burgenland, set the tone in the party.

The ÖVP benefited above all from the FPÖ's losses. Kurz had spoken out during the election campaign in favour of a continuation of the government with the FPÖ, and had fully adopted its attacks on refugees. Kurz spoke out in favour of zero migration to Europe and as complete an external border protection as possible. Austria, he said, has already "taken in more than enough people."

Kurz implemented the FPÖ's refugee policy, carried out the largest social attacks of recent decades, and placed control of the police, military and secret services in the hands of the FPÖ.

On election night, Kurz or other ÖVP politicians did not commit themselves to a possible coalition. From the standpoint of parliamentary arithmetic, all the alliance options are open for the ÖVP. Whether Kurz would risk an alliance with an FPÖ that has been so weakened is questionable, however.

Another option would be a coalition with the Greens. Besides the ÖVP, they are the clear winner in the election. During the campaign they concentrated mainly on environmental issues, and were the only party to criticise the FPÖ, at least in part. This enabled them to score particularly well with younger voters. Although the Greens also kept a low profile on election night, top candidate Werner Kogler did not rule out an alliance with Kurz's ÖVP.

In fact, the Austrian Greens, like their counterparts in other European countries, are part of the right-wing bourgeois establishment. They are represented in five state governments. In Tyrol, Vorarlberg and Salzburg they already govern with the ÖVP, and in Salzburg with the Neos. In Vienna, they rule in an alliance with the SPÖ, which had had an absolute majority there for decades. In Upper Austria, the Greens form a Provincial Council and work closely with the representatives of the ÖVP and FPÖ.

In all Austria's regions, the Greens implement the austerity measures and the draconian refugee policy of the national government.

Though they originally emerged from the peace movement, the Greens' election program demanded more funds for the police and the military. It praised the "police close to citizens" and demanded the "necessary equipment" to "effectively enforce justice." The Greens support abolishing compulsory military service and the building of a professional army for

"international peacekeeping operations," i.e., combat operations abroad.

In refugee policy, too, the Greens would be in line with Kurz. There is not a word in their electoral program about the inhumane, criminal policies of Austrian and European governments that lead to the drownings of hundreds of people in the Mediterranean. Instead, it calls for "labour migration" to be shaped in the interest of the Austrian economy. An immigration law is intended to divide migrants into useful and useless persons, and to grant them a right of residence depending on the situation.

Regardless of which coalition will ultimately rule in Vienna, it is already clear that the reactionary right-wing policy of recent years will be continued.



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