

Parliamentary elections in Austria: Right-wing extremist FPÖ leads in the polls

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Just over a month before the election of Austria's National Council, the country's lower house of parliament, the various parties are competing to offer the most right-wing programme. The Austrian election campaign is dominated by incitement against refugees, war propaganda and the demand for a police state.

Under these conditions, the far-right Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) leads the polls with around 30 percent. Depending on the poll, the ruling Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the opposition Social Democrats (SPÖ) are both considerably behind the FPÖ.

Trailing far behind, at about 9 percent, are the Greens, the ÖVP's coalition partner. The right-liberal NEOS have the same level of support as the Greens. The Beer Party and the Communist Party (KPÖ) also have a chance of entering parliament.

The FPÖ, which is notorious for its despicable, racist election campaigns, is once again unrestrainedly inciting against refugees. "We need remigration," FPÖ leader Herbert Kickl explained publicly at the presentation of the election programme. To this end, the party first wants to prevent the hitherto applicable family reunification of asylum seekers and further reduce the number of asylum applications to zero. Healthcare, social benefits and education should only be available to Austrians, according to the party.

The election programme of the right-wing extremists is aptly entitled "Fortress Austria, Fortress of Freedom." It openly promotes ethnic nationalism and backward-looking ideology, combined with calls for internal and external rearmament, as well as massive tax cuts for companies.

Already in the European elections in June, the FPÖ became the strongest party, while the governing parties suffered severe losses. The right-wing extremists were

able to win votes, especially among the young voters. But voters from the SPÖ and ÖVP also migrated to the FPÖ.

The vote gains for the right have nothing to do with mass support for a fascist program. In fact, there is a widespread rejection of such policies. Rather, it is the right-wing politics of the other parties that has been preparing the ground for the right for decades.

Since 2020, the ÖVP and Greens have been governing in Austria, largely implementing the FPÖ's policy. Under several Green health ministers, all public health measures were dropped during the peak phase of the COVID pandemic. Spending on the military, police and intelligence services has been greatly increased, and although Austria is not a member of the military alliance, the government is fully behind the NATO war against Russia. As in Germany, the Greens are also the leading warmongers in Austria.

Vice Chancellor and Green Party leader Werner Kogler stood on stage with a Ukrainian flag at the party's Federal Congress on the second anniversary of the start of the war and gave a vicious pro-war speech. Numerous Greens, such as National Council member Ewa Ernst-Dziedzic, have long been vehemently in favour of arms deliveries to Ukraine. More and more Greens see the country's official neutrality as an obstacle.

The character of the ÖVP/Green government became clear in the spring of this year. On March 21, Interior Minister Gerhard Karner (ÖVP) announced at a press conference that more deportations had been carried out in 2023 (12,900 people) than in any year since the creation of the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum. With egregious cynicism, he declared 2023 to be the "Year of Deportations." He explicitly praised the "backbreaking work" of the authorities carrying out the

brutal deportations and announced a stepped-up clampdown for the current year.

The People's Party and Greens also explicitly support the genocide in Gaza. Austria was one of the few countries to vote against the UN General Assembly resolution to improve the humanitarian situation and for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. Ernst-Dziedzic, like all politicians and governments that defend the genocide, justified this on the grounds of Israel's right to self-defence.

Here, too, the government is in line with the FPÖ, a party founded by antisemites and in which Nazi positions are widely represented. Like many right-wing parties, it supports the Israeli government in its onslaught against the Palestinians.

The SPÖ, which leads the government in several federal states, is no better than the parties of the federal government. Its election campaign is also dominated by the topic of "internal security." Under the slogan "More policemen on the street," it calls for the personnel and material strengthening of the security forces.

In practice, the SPÖ has sufficiently demonstrated its agreement with the ÖVP and FPÖ's policies on immigrants and refugees. For decades, the SPÖ dominated Austrian politics and carried out increasingly violent attacks on social and democratic rights.

The SPÖ supports both the war against Russia and the genocide in Gaza. The Social Democrats in the capital Vienna have expelled several younger members after they participated in a peaceful demonstration against the crimes of the Israeli government.

The question of which party will head the government after September 29 remains open. It is up to Federal President Alexander van der Bellen to assign the responsibility of forming a government. Publicly, both the ÖVP and the SPÖ exclude cooperation with the FPÖ. But since 2000, the ÖVP has twice formed a coalition with the far right in the federal government. The SPÖ has also formed coalitions with the FPÖ at the state [provincial] level.

The FPÖ currently governs in three federal states—in Salzburg together with the ÖVP, in Lower Austria together with the ÖVP and SPÖ and in Upper Austria with the ÖVP, SPÖ and Greens.

No matter which government the parties agree on in

the end, they will come into sharp conflict with the population. Social tensions have intensified extremely in recent years. In the country, which has less than 10 million inhabitants, 1.5 million people are considered at risk of poverty. Some 22 percent of children fall under this category.

In the past, Vienna was considered a large city in which, due to a large supply of social housing and a relatively regulated housing market, even middle-income and low-income households could live well. But this has changed dramatically. In 2024 alone, rents in the capital rose by up to 11 percent.



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