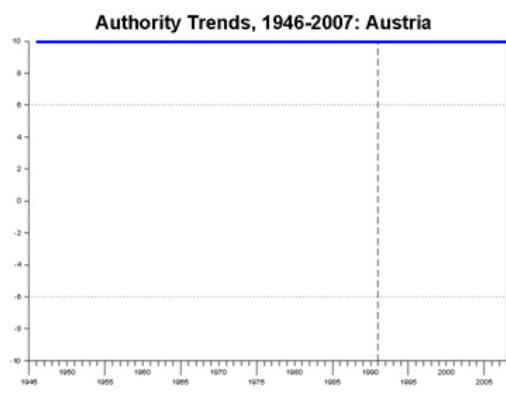


Polity IV Country Report 2007: Austria

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2006</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2007</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>10</td> <td>10</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>10</td> <td>10</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td></td> <td>61</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td></td> <td>No</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2006	2007	Change	Polity:	10	10	0	Democ:	10	10	0	Autoc:	0	0	0	Durable:		61		Tentative:		No		
Score:	2006	2007	Change																						
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Autoc:	0	0	0																						
Durable:		61																							
Tentative:		No																							
SCODE	AUS	CCODE	305	Date of Report	1 November 2008																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
3	3	4	7	5	5																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date		15 March 1938		Begin Date																					
				29 June 1946																					
Polity Fragmentation: No																									
Constitution	1920 (1929)																								
Executive(s)	President Heinz Fischer (SPO); directly elected, 25 April 2004, 52.4% Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer (SPO); selected as leader of ruling party or coalition, January 2007																								
Legislature	Bicameral: National Council (183 seats; proportionally elected; most recent elections, 28 September 2008) Social-Democratic Party (SPO): 57 People's Party (OVP): 51 Freedom Party (FPO): 34 Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZO): 21 The Greens (Grünen): 20 Federal Council (62 seats; elected by provincial parliaments; most recent elections, April 2001; current composition). OVP: 26 SPO: 28 Non-partisans: 8																								
Judiciary	Supreme Judicial Court; Administrative Court; Constitutional Court																								

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Competitive Elections (8)

Austria's government is institutionally formed on the basis of periodic free and fair multiparty elections. The president, a directly elected head of state with largely ceremonial powers, appoints the chancellor (head of government) from the party with the largest representation in the National Council. A left-right "grand coalition" between the Social Democratic party (SPO) and the People's Party (OVP) was the norm in Austrian politics until the late 1990s. After the October 1999 elections, however, the parliament's largest party, Social-Democratic Party (SPO), unsuccessfully tried to establish a coalition excluding the Freedom Party (FPO, a right-wing nationalist party that came second in the elections). When the attempts failed, the former chancellor Viktor Klima (SPO leader) resigned, and Wolfgang Schüssel, the leader of the People's Party (OVP), got the appointment after FPO and OVP formed a ruling coalition in the legislature. Following the November 2002 elections, the OVP attempted, but failed, to form a coalition with the SPO and The Greens; the OVP then turned to its previous partner, the FPO. An OVP/FPO coalition government was formed on 28 February 2003. This right-wing coalition government came to an end with the October 2006 election which ushered in a return to the tradition of a SPO-OVP "grand coalition" government.

Executive Constraints: Executive Parity or Subordination (7)

Austrian government structure utilizes an effective system of separation of powers with mutual checks and balances. The chancellor and the Cabinet are responsible to the National Council. The National Council may withdraw confidence in, and thus remove from office, any minister or the entire government (wherefore the executive is essentially chosen by the parliament and depends on continued support of the legislators' majority to remain in office). The president may also be removed from office by a popular referendum, held on the proposal of both houses of the legislature. Legislation is passed by the National Council and must be approved by the Federal Council. The Federal Council may dissolve the National Council. The judiciary is independent in practice, with no political pressure exerted on it by the executive.

Political Participation: Institutionalized Open Electoral Competition (10)

Over the recent decades, Austria's polity was dominated by the "grand coalition" formed by two of the country's most powerful parties: the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPO) and the People's Party (OVP). The SPO has traditionally received support from the vast majority of urban workers and the lower middle class. The OVP has a centrist Christian Democratic orientation, with a conservative economic policy. It traditionally gains its following from farmers and business people. During the 1990s, increased popular support came to the Freedom Party (FPO), a far-right party advocating an anti-immigration and anti-European Union platform. This trend came to a head in February 2000 when the OVP announced it was forming a coalition government with the FPO. The European Union (EU) reacted immediately by pressuring the new government and imposing sanctions against Austria; this international confrontation led to the resignation of the FPO's controversial leader, Jorg Haider. In part to appease the EU, the new government passed a comprehensive pro-minority rights bill providing expanded constitutional protections for the minorities. A study by the European Court of Human Rights conducted in September 2000 concluded that appropriate legal protection was available for minorities, refugees, and immigrants in the country. EU sanctions were lifted in September 2000.

Disputes within the leadership of the FPO continued through the early 2000s, culminating in a fracture when the Haider-led faction forced the resignation of Vice Chancellor and FPO party leader Susanne Riess-Passer in September 2002. As a result, the ruling coalition collapsed and Chancellor Schüssel dissolved the legislature and called new elections. In the November 2002 general elections, Schüssel's OVP party made major gains (79 seats, up from 52), mainly at the expense of its former coalition partner, the FPO (19 seats, down from 52). However, the formation of a new coalition government was difficult as the SPO declined to form a grand coalition and the FPO, still smarting from its electoral defeat, was not eager to forge a new partnership with the OVP. A new OVP-FPO governing coalition was finally announced in February 2003.

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

On 6 May 2003, Austria experienced its first general strike in fifty years as public and private labor unions protested proposed pension reforms. A second general strike took place on 3 June 2003, in which over one million took part. As a result, the legislature passed a modified pension reform bill that raised the minimum retirement age but did not include the nearly one-third reduction in the amount of pension payments originally proposed. On 20 October 2003, Herbert Haupt (FPO leader) resigned his post as Vice Chancellor in the ruling coalition due to yet another shake up in the FPO party leadership; his government post was promptly filled by Hubert Gorbach (FPO). Many view Haupt's resignation and Ursula Haubner's (Jorg Haider's sister) appointment as FPO managing chairwoman as evidence that Haider had regained control of the party. Despite this shake-up, internal factionalism continued to pull the party apart. In the spring of 2005 most of the party's leadership, including Haider, left the party and formed the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZO). In doing so, the BZO became the OVP's junior coalition partner. In response, the SPO unsuccessfully demanded that new elections be held, claiming that the governing alliance had no democratic mandate. The elections of October 2006 brought to an end to the conservative OVP-FPO coalition government, which had lasted seven years. With a narrow electoral victory by the left-wing SPO, a new SPO-OVP "grand coalition" was inaugurated in January 2007.