

# THE POLITICS OF CHILDCARE QUALITY IN MUNICIPALITIES IN UPPER AUSTRIA



**Thomas Pilgerstorfer**, Chamber of Labour Upper Austria & Johannes Kepler University Linz (Master Student)

**Tobias Wiß**, Johannes Kepler University Linz

Young Economist Conference (October 06-07, 2022)

# BACKGROUND

- The topic of work-life balance and the reconciliation of work and family life has become increasingly important in recent years -> public childcare provision
- Countries as units of analysis (e.g. Bonoli & Reber, 2010; Hieda, 2013; Wiß & Wohlgemuth, 2023)
- Few studies on subnational differences (e.g. Bonoli & Reber, 2010; Hieda, 2013; Wiß & Wohlgemuth, 2023)
- Focus on public expenses for childcare provision or enrolment rates
- Difficult to draw conclusions on the quality of childcare provision
  
- Our **contribution**:
  - Systematic analysis of the quality of public childcare provision on the municipal level
  - Introduction of a (novel) quality indicator designed by the Chamber of Labour

# ARGUMENT

The quality of institutional childcare provision varies by the share of different parties and women in local councils as well as by the party attachment and gender of the mayor.

# THEORY

- National and local governments are key actors for family policy (Bonoli & Reber, 2010; Busemeyer & Seitzl, 2018; Fleckenstein & Lee, 2020; Morgan, 2013; Walenta-Bergmann, 2023a; Wiß & Wohlgemuth, 2023)
- Right-leaning parties (ÖVP & FPÖ):
  - Central role in advocating for traditional family models but adapted their stance on family policy (shift of values, women in party committees, participation of women in the workforce)
  - Studies still confirm negative effect of religious-conservative parties on childcare expenses and enrolment rates (Bonoli & Reber, 2010; Walenta-Bergmann, 2023a; Mosimann & Giger, 2008; Turner, 2011)
  - Populist radical right parties are characterised by traditional gender roles (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2021; Mudde, 2007)
  - *H2a & H2b: Quality of childcare increases with the cabinet share of the Christian-Democrats and Populist Radical Right Party and with a mayor of these parties*

# THEORY

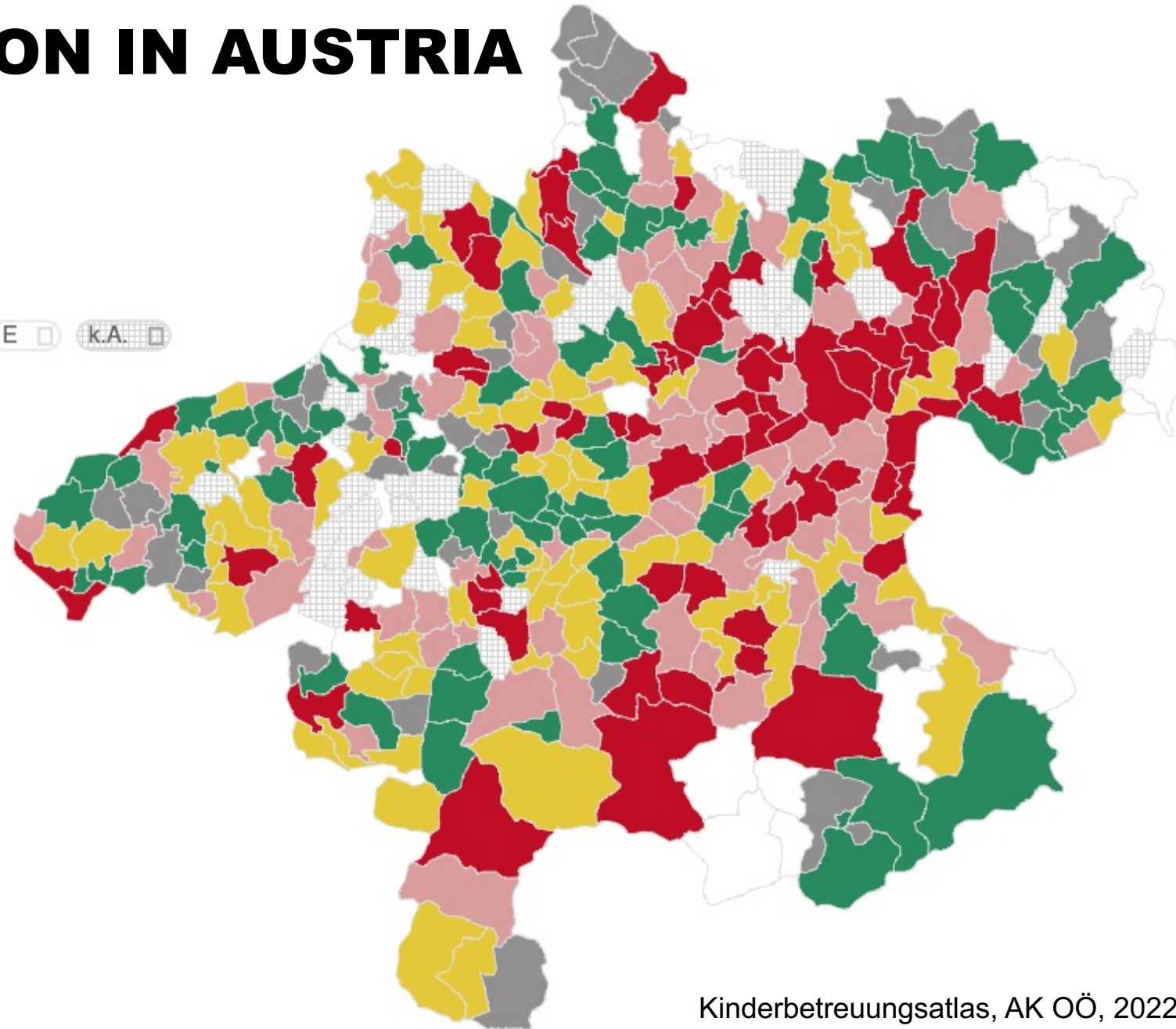
- Left-leaning parties (SPÖ & GRÜNE):
  - individual autonomy within society to enable combining work and family life (Andronescu & Carnes, 2015; Huber & Stephens, 2001)
  - Progressive family policies that foster gender equality (Inglehart & Norris, 2000)
  - Women and high-educated middle class as new potential electorates (Häusermann et al., 2013; Morgan, 2013)
  - *H1a & H2a: Quality of childcare increases with the cabinet share of the Social-Democrats and the Green party and with a mayor of these parties*
- Female politicians:
  - More inclined to address issues concerning women due to shared experience and identity (Höhmann, 2020)
  - High descriptive representation enhances the responsiveness of political representatives to matters related to gender equality and policies that benefit women (Atchison, 2015; Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler, 2005; Swers, 2002)
  - *H3a & H3b: Quality of childcare increases with the cabinet share of women and with a female mayor*

# CHILDCARE PROVISION IN AUSTRIA

- Municipalities play a significant role and are responsible for ongoing operations, staff, investments and the expansion of services
- Federal provinces create framework conditions through legislation and grants of ongoing operations
- State ties conditions to its funds (“15a-Vereinbarung”) for investments and expansion of services
- Legal minimum and VIF standards
- Municipalities organise childcare in this range

# CHILDCARE PROVISION IN AUSTRIA

Gesamt-Kategorien □



# DATA

- Sample: 431 municipalities between 2011 and 2018
- **DV: childcare quality category**
  - Based on the Childcare Atlas of the Chamber of Labour Upper Austria
  - 6 categories from 1A (best) over A to E
  - Criteria focus on availability of childcare for under-threes, 8 daily opening hours Mo-Fr, afternoon childcare & provision of lunch
- **IVs (all lagged):**
  - Party council share
  - Mayor party affiliation
  - Share of women in council, Mayor gender
  - Party share on state and federal level, Share of women on state and federal level, Urban-rural municipality, Financial power (per capita), Debts (per capita), Unemployment rate, Female employment rate, Share of population  $\leq 6$  yrs

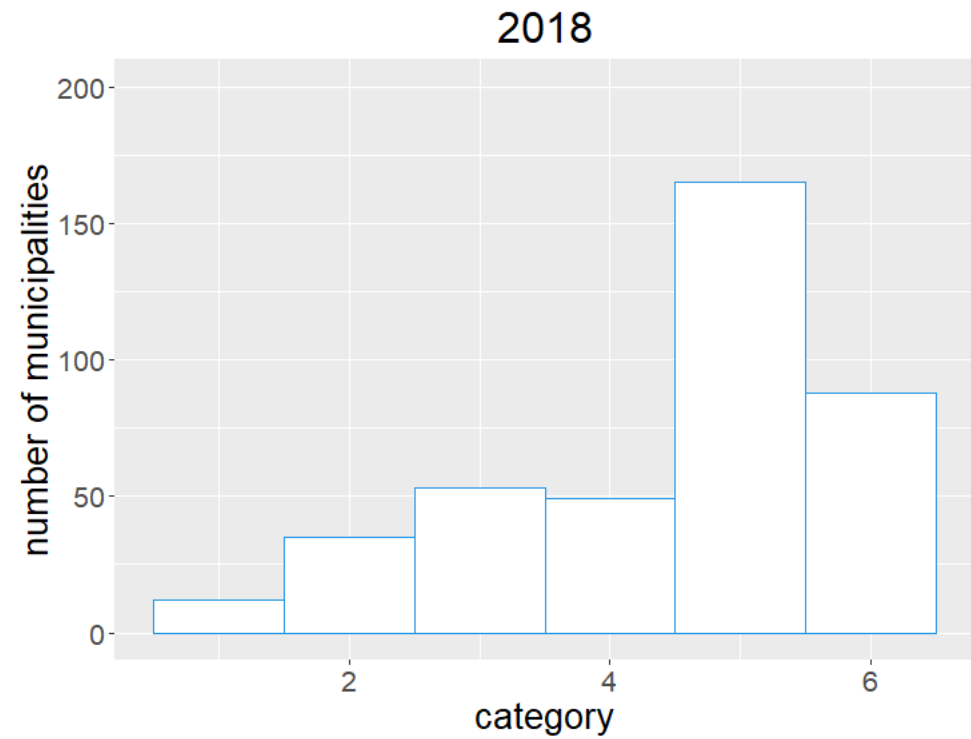
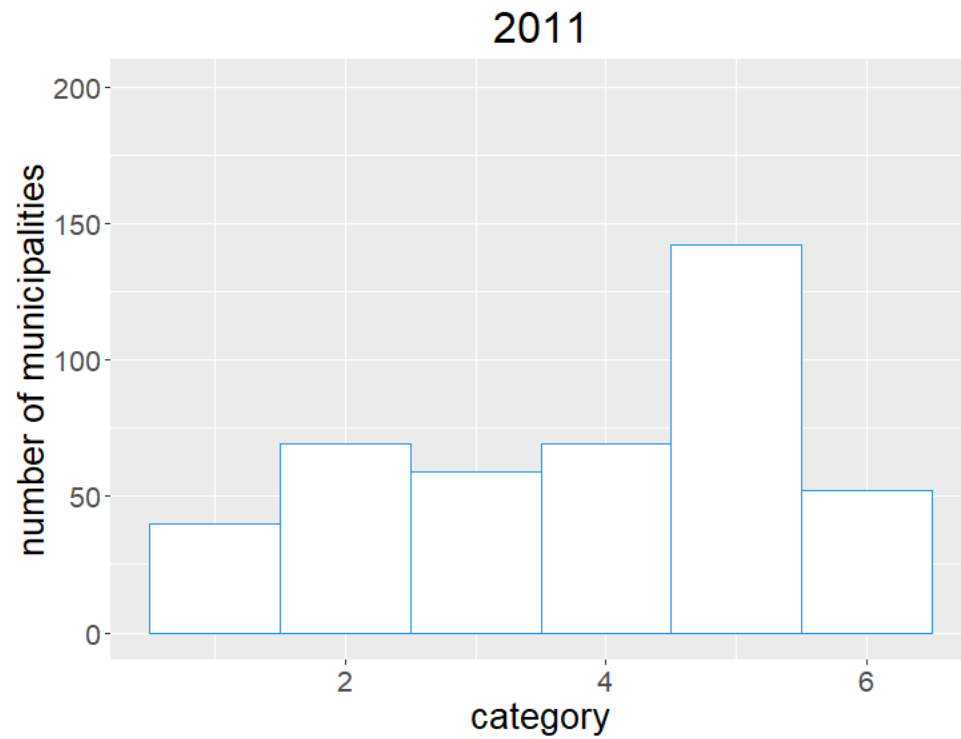


# METHOD

- **Time-series cross-sectional models**
  - Two-way fixed effects model
    - Fixed effects for municipality and time
  - DVs as first differenced variables
    - Short term effect
  - Lagged level DV as IV
- **Mixed-effects models** (Ennser-Jedenastik 2022; Garritzmann and Seng 2020, 2023; Seidl 2023)
  - 3 levels: 1271 local councils in 431 municipalities measured in 9 years
  - Level DV
  - Cubic splines
- Different models for every party and every party affiliation of the mayor
- Robustness tests

# RESULTS

Distribution of the childcare atlas categories in 2011 and 2018



# RESULTS

Shares between 2011 and 2018	ÖVP	SPÖ	FPÖ	GRÜNE
Share of parties in local councils	54%	26%	16%	2%
Share of mayor	74%	22%	2%	0%

Share of women in local councils	24%
Share of female mayors	7%

# RESULTS

Table 1. Panel regression models with municipality and time-fixed effects (cabinet share)

	$\Delta$ childcare quality category			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
SPÖ council share (t-1)	0.010** (0.004)			
ÖVP council share (t-1)		-0.006* (0.003)		
FPÖ council share (t-1)			0.003 (0.004)	
GRÜNE council share (t-1)				-0.002 (0.007)
Share of women council members (t-1)	0.071* (0.038)	0.076** (0.038)	0.074* (0.038)	0.074* (0.038)
Observations	2,928	2,928	2,928	2,928
R <sup>2</sup>	0.309	0.308	0.307	0.307
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.186	0.185	0.184	0.183
F Statistic (df = 8; 2485)	138.801***	138.204***	137.488***	137.382***

Note: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

Table 2: Mixed-effects models (cabinet share)

	Childcare quality category			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
SPÖ council share (t-1)	0.004* (0.002)			
ÖVP council share (t-1)		-0.004** (0.002)		
FPÖ council share (t-1)			0.003 (0.003)	
GRÜNE council share (t-1)				-0.003 (0.005)
Share of women council members (t-1)	0.012*** (0.003)	0.012*** (0.003)	0.014*** (0.003)	0.013*** (0.003)
N <sub>Government</sub>	1270	1270	1270	1270
N <sub>Year</sub>	9	9	9	9
N <sub>Municipality</sub>	431	431	431	431
ICC <sub>Government</sub>	0.188	0.167	0.189	0.185
ICC <sub>Year</sub>	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
ICC <sub>Municipality</sub>	0.660	0.581	0.659	0.665
Observations	3,347	3,347	3,347	3,347
Log Likelihood	-4,043.240	-4,040.762	-4,044.747	-4,044.086
Akaike Inf. Crit.	8,126.480	8,121.525	8,129.494	8,128.172

Note: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

# CONCLUSION

- Higher share of the SPÖ increases childcare quality
- Higher share of ÖVP reduces childcare quality
- No effect for GRÜNE & FPÖ
- No effect for mayors (neither party affiliation nor gender)
- Women in local councils have a positive effect on childcare quality
  
- Fine-grained knowledge about within-country differences of childcare provision across municipalities
- Focus on quality aspects of childcare provision

# ROBUSTNES TESTS

- Panel regression models with municipality and time fixed effects 2004-2018 (cabinet share)
  - Same results
- Mixed-effects models 2004-2018 (cabinet share)
  - Same results
- Panel regression models with random effects and level variable (cabinet share)
  - No significant results
- Panel regression models with municipality fixed effects (cabinet share)
  - Same results
- Mayor models
  - No significant effects except for one positive effect for FPÖ mayor in Panel regression model with municipality and time fixed effects 2004-2018 (mayor)

# LIMITATIONS

- Availability of data, especially socio-economic control variables
- Accessibility, opening hours and lunch are only one (but crucial) part of the quality of childcare
- Quality criteria could be extended (staff-children ratios, costs, availability...)

# DEPENDENT VARIABLE

- Criteria
  - Availability of childcare for under-threes from Monday to Thursday
  - Availability of a kindergarten/nursery school with daily opening hours of at least eight hours from Monday to Thursday
  - Provision of lunch in institutional childcare facility from at least Monday to Thursday
  - Availability of afternoon childcare for primary school children for at least four days weekly till at least 3:00 pm



# ROBUSTNESS TESTS

Table A.2. Panel regression models with municipality and time fixed effects 2004-2018 (cabinet share)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
		<u>gesamt_growth</u>		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<u>lag(strength_spoe)</u>	0.005** (0.002)			
<u>lag(strength_oevp)</u>		-0.005*** (0.002)		
<u>lag(strength_fpoe)</u>			0.003 (0.003)	
<u>lag(strength_gruene)</u>				0.002 (0.004)
Observations	5,498	5,498	5,498	5,498
R <sup>2</sup>	0.215	0.215	0.214	0.214
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.145	0.146	0.145	0.145
F Statistic (df = 5; 5052)	275.968***	277.454***	275.076***	274.752***

Note:

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

# ROBUSTNESS TESTS

Table A.8. Panel regression models with municipality fixed effects (cabinet share)

⊕

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	<u>gesamt_growth</u>			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
lag( <u>strength_spoe</u> )	0.010** (0.004)			
lag( <u>strength_oevp</u> )		-0.006* (0.003)		
lag( <u>strength_fpoe</u> )			0.003 (0.004)	
lag( <u>strength_gruene</u> )				-0.002 (0.007)
lag( <u>W_quote</u> )	0.071* (0.038)	0.076** (0.038)	0.074* (0.038)	0.074* (0.038)
Observations	2,928	2,928	2,928	2,928
R <sup>2</sup>	0.310	0.309	0.308	0.308
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.188	0.187	0.185	0.185
F Statistic (df = 12; 2487)	93.045***	92.648***	92.169***	92.099***

*Note:*

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01