Provincial Party Politics: Have Rural Austrian Voters Shifted Away from The Left?

Background and Literature

- Political realignment has shifted the political party dynamic in the United States, with the Democrats losing significant support in rural and ex-urban regions. Can the same trend be viewed with respect to left-wing parties in rural Austria?
- Literature from the early 1990s cites a dealignment process, with people shifting away from their ancestral party identifications – though both it and subsequent literature postulate that Austrians would, in the future, vote primarily based on personalities (i.e. Jörg Haider, Sebastian Kurz)

Data Source

- Election results for Presidential (BPW), National Parliamentary (NRW), and Provincial Parliamentary (LTW) elections were pulled from Wahldatenbank.at, which gets its data from the Federal Ministry for the Interior and other studies in the Austrian Social Science Data Archive
- Demographic and economic data was pulled from Statistics Austria, a federal institution responsible for national statistical records

Hypothesis

- Although overall Austrian voting characteristics may rely heavily on political personalities, ultimately there is an underlying shift in rural voting tendencies away from the left-wing Social Democratic Party and towards the right-wing Peoples’ Party and Freedom Party.

Analysis and Process

- Step 1: Summary statistics for non-rural and rural districts for every NRW and BPW since 1990. Included with this analysis will be colored maps, graphs, and tables further elucidating the political trend evolution of rural Austria vs. non-rural Austria over the course of the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s.
- Step 2: Regress left-wing party support on variables such as a town/region’s population growth, changes in its age structure, birth/migration statistics, and economic indicators (all encompassed by the $X$ below), along with a lagged indicator representing the town’s past preference for left-wing political parties (with a reference year of 1990). The first model will include only rural towns, the random effects, and a lagged indicator for said town’s previous preference for left-wing political parties; another model will include the same lagged indicator and prior random effects for towns larger than 40,000 inhabitants.

$$\text{left_support}_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{left_support}_{i,1990} + \beta_2 \cdot X_{i,t} + \varepsilon_{i,t}$$

- Step 3: For the province of Styria specifically, maps, graphs, tables, and models like those created for Austria as a whole will be constructed concerning the LTW results to see if any changes in national voting sentiment have trickled down to provincial voting decisions.