

AUSTRIA

Date of Elections: 6 May 1979

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the members of the National Council following premature dissolution of this body. The Council's term would normally have expired in October 1979; previous general elections were held in October 1975.

Characteristics of Parliament

The bicameral Parliament of Austria consists of the National Council (*Nationalrat*) and the Federal Council (*Bundesrat*).

The National Council is composed of 183 members elected for 4 years. The Federal Council comprises 58 members elected by the country's nine provincial assemblies for terms based on the term of office (up to 6 years) of the provincial legislatures delegating them.

Electoral System

Any Austrian citizen at least 19 years old is entitled to vote for members of the National Council if registered as an elector within the constituency in which he is residing. Disqualified are the insane, criminals, persons confined to a workhouse and parents who have lost their rights over their children.

Electoral registers are compiled on the municipal level and revised continuously. Voting is compulsory in three provinces (Styria, Tyrol and Vorarlberg), abstentionists being fined.

All qualified electors at least 25 years old may be candidates for the National Council. Candidates for the Federal Council must reside in the *Land* which delegates them and must be eligible for, but not necessarily members of, their provincial legislature. Members of the Constitutional Court and the Administrative Court, the President and Vice-President of the Government Audit Office and executives of joint stock companies, banking, commerce, transport and industrial private limited companies, provincial credit institutes and mutual insurance companies are among those persons who cannot simultaneously be members of Parliament.

Candidates for the National Council are nominated by political parties and must be supported either by three outgoing members of the National Council or, depending on the population of the constituency, by anywhere from 200 to 500 electors. For each constituency in which it proposes a candidate a party must pay a deposit equivalent to US\$325 to the Federal Government; this sum is to meet the expenses of printing the

ballot papers and is not refundable. The number of candidates put forward by each party cannot be more than twice the number of seats to be filled.

For elections to the National Council each of the country's nine provinces comprises an electoral constituency; the number of seats allotted to each is based on its population. Seats are distributed among the parties presenting lists of candidates on the basis of proportional representation calculated according to the Hagenbach-Bischoff method, the electoral quota within each constituency being established by dividing the number of seats to be filled, plus one, into the total number of valid votes; every party is given one seat for every completed number of times which this quota is contained in the number of votes cast for it. Seats remaining to be filled after applying this quota are subsequently distributed on the national level on the basis of the d'Hondt rule of highest average, applied to each party's surplus votes. Vote-splitting between different lists is permitted.

In the Federal Council, the number of representatives from each *Land* (at least three) depends on its population (the most populated has 12 representatives). The seats are divided between the parties according to the number of seats they hold in the provincial assemblies, which are determined on the basis of proportional representation.

A vacancy arising in the *Nationulrat* between general elections is filled by the individual who is "next-in-line" on the list of the party which formerly held the seat. Alternate members chosen at the same time as titular members fill vacancies in the *Bundesrat*.

General Political Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

The decision to hold premature general elections was taken on 11 January 1979. It came in the wake of a November 1978 referendum in which the voters had rejected the Government's call to put into operation Austria's first nuclear power plant. But the nuclear issue faded as Federal Chancellor Bruno Kreisky and the governing Socialist Party (SPO) campaigned primarily on a successful economic record of handling labour questions (avoidance of strikes and reduction of unemployment) and raising the country's prosperity while holding down inflation. The major opposition group, the conservative People's Party (OVP), was headed by Mr. Joseph Taus, leader since 1975.

From the beginning of the campaign, Mr. Kreisky warned that if he did not obtain an absolute parliamentary majority he would refuse to lead a coalition Government.

On polling day, the Socialists succeeded in raising their representation to 95 seats—three more than the absolute majority. The victory gave the popular Chancellor an unprecedented fourth term and—a rarity in Western Europe—the renewed leadership of a majority party for the third consecutive time.

Statistics

*1. Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats
in the National Council*

Number of registered electors.	5,186,735
Voters.	4,784,173(92.2%)
Blank or void ballot papers.	54,922
Valid votes.	4.729,251

Political Group	Number of Candidates	Votes obtained	%	Number of Seats	Number of Seats held at Dissolution	Number of Seats won at Previous Elections
Socialist Party.183	2,413,226	51.03	95	93	93
People's Party.183	1,981,739	41.90	77	80	80
Liberal Party.183	286,743	6.06	II	Hi	10
Communist Party	183	45,280	0.96			
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*2. Distribution of Members of the National Council according
to Professional Category*

Salaried clerks.	69
Civil servants.	53
Farmers.	22
Self-employed.	16
Manual workers.	13
Lawyers.	4
Housewives.	3
Doctors.	2
Sociologists.1
	183

*3. Distribution of Members of the National Council
according to Sex*

Men	165
Women	18
	183

*4. Distribution of Members of the National Council
according to Age Group*

Under 30 years.1
30-40.18
40-50.55
50-60.90
Over 60.19
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