Immigration and Voting for the Extreme Right*

MARTIN HALLA†
ALEXANDER F. WAGNER‡
JOSEF ZWEIMÜLLER§

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Does the presence of immigrants in one’s neighborhood affect voting for extreme right-wing parties? We study the case of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) which, under the leadership of Jörg Haider, increased its vote share from less than 5 percent in the early 1980s to 27 percent by the end of the 1990s. To identify the causal impact of immigration on voting for the extreme right, we exploit Austria’s immigration inflow in the 1960s and the resulting settlement patterns, which provide a source of exogenous variation in the spatial distribution of more recent immigrants. We find that the percentage immigrants in a community has a significant and quantitatively important impact on the community’s voting share for the FPÖ, explaining roughly a sixth of its regional variation. Our results suggest that voters worry about a changing ethnic and cultural composition in their neighborhoods and schools, thus pointing to the importance of “compositional amenities.” The evidence is less conclusive as to whether labor market effects of immigration drive voting outcomes.

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†Corresponding Author, University of Innsbruck and IZA; email: martin.halla@uibk.ac.at. Address: Department of Public Finance, University of Innsbruck, Universitätsstraße 15, 6020 Innsbruck, Austria

‡University of Zurich, CEPR, and ECGI; email: alexander.wagner@bf.uzh.ch.

§University of Zurich, CEPR, CESifo, and IZA; email: josef.zweimueller@econ.uzh.ch