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Article

The role of political representation for the availability of childcare in municipalities of Upper Austria

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Abstract
The literature on public childcare provision focuses mainly on countries as unit of analysis and investigates public expenditures or enrolment rates. We contribute to existing studies by analysing the availability and flexibility of childcare provision at the subnational level. Although Austrian municipalities experienced childcare expansion, there are remarkable differences in availability and flexibility among them. We test four explanations for this variation: party ideology of local councils, party ideology of mayors, women's representation in local councils, and gender of mayors. Ordinal and logistic mixed-effects models covering 429 municipalities in Upper Austria between 2011 and 2018 reveal that the cabinet share of the Social Democratic party (SPÖ) and women in local councils show a robust association with higher quality of institutional childcare provision, while the Christian Democratic party (ÖVP) is negatively associated. In contrast, mayors play no role.

Keywords
Austria, family policy, childcare, political parties, women representation

Die Rolle von politischer Repräsentation für die Verfügbarkeit von Kinderbetreuung in den Gemeinden Oberösterreichs

Zusammenfassung
Die Literatur zum öffentlichen Kinderbetreuungsangebot konzentriert sich hauptsächlich auf Länder als Analyseeinheiten und fokussiert auf öffentliche Ausgaben oder Betreuungsquoten. Wir erweitern die bestehende Literatur, indem wir die Verfügbarkeit und Flexibilität von Kinderbetreuung auf subnationaler Ebene analysieren. Obwohl österreichische Gemeinden die Kinderbetreuung insgesamt ausgebaut haben, gibt es bemerkenswerte Unterschiede in der Verfügbarkeit und Flexibilität. Wir testen vier Erklärungen für diese Unterschiede: die Parteizugehörigkeit der Gemeinderät:innen, die Parteizugehörigkeit der Bürgermeister:innen, die Repräsentation von Frauen im Gemeinderat und das Geschlecht der Bürgermeister:innen. Ordinale und logistische Mixed-Effects-Modelle, die 429 Gemeinden in Oberösterreich zwischen 2011 und 2018 abdecken, zeigen, dass der Anteil von Gemeinderät:innen der Sozialdemokratischen Partei (SPÖ) und von Frauen im Gemeinderat einen robusten Zusammenhang mit einer höheren Qualität der institutionellen Kinderbetreuung aufweisen, während der Anteil von Gemeinderät:innen der Christdemokratischen Partei (ÖVP) einen negativen Zusammenhang zeigt. Im Gegensatz dazu finden wir für Bürgermeister:innen keine Effekte.

Schlüsselwörter
Österreich, Familienpolitik, Kinderbetreuung, Politische Parteien, Repräsentation von Frauen

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1. Introduction

The topic of work-life balance and the reconciliation of work and family life has become increasingly important in recent years. Public childcare plays a key role in this context. Particularly in rural areas, there is often a lack of public childcare. Therefore, public childcare provision has been expanded in most affluent democracies. In addition to differences across countries, we also find substantial within-country variation.

The existing literature explaining differences in public childcare provision focuses mainly on countries as unit of analysis (e.g. Bonoli/Reber 2010; Hieda 2013; Wiß/Wohlgemuth 2023) with only a few studies addressing subnational differences (Andronescu/Carnes 2015; Bratton/Ray 2002; Busemeyer/Seitzl 2018; Goerres/Tepe 2013; Mosimann/Giger 2008; Walenta-Bergmann 2023a). Furthermore, almost all studies at both national as well as subnational levels investigate either public expenditure on childcare provision or enrolment rates of children. Both aspects, however, do not allow to draw conclusions on neither the quality nor the availability and flexibility of childcare provision, such as daily/weekly opening hours or closing times per year. Schober and Spiess (2015), for example, suggest that in eastern German regions smaller childcare groups increase the employment of mothers. We analyse a childcare index consisting of available days per week, available daily and weekly opening hours, available afternoon childcare, provision of lunch, and available opening weeks per year, representing availability and flexibility according to Yerkes and Javornik (2019). This is important, because a low availability of public childcare makes it exclusive, perpetuating traditional gender roles in caregiving (Kreyenfeld/Hank 2000). Examining childcare flexibility is crucial as it directly impacts parents' ability to balance work and family responsibilities by determining how accessible and usable childcare services are (Gornick/Meyers 2003), thereby influencing labour market participation, particularly for women. Furthermore, limited daily, weekly and annual opening times force parents to depend on informal care (Grönlund/Javornik 2014).

We answer our research question 'What role does political representation play for the availability of childcare in municipalities in Upper Austria?', based on theoretical arguments about partisanship and substantive representation with ordinal and logistic mixed-effects models covering 429 municipalities in Upper Austria between 2011 and 2018. Upper Austria is a crucial case, as it has one of the lowest enrolment rates for children below three years and one of the lowest proportions of children in institutions that fulfil the VIF standard (Vereinbarkeitsindikator für Familie und Beruf) (see below for the explanation of VIF) among states in Austria (Statistik Austria 2023). We hypothesise that the availability of institutional childcare provision varies with the proportion of different parties and women in local councils as well as with the party affiliation and gender of mayors. The results of existing studies regarding the role of parties for childcare provision are inconclusive, which may be due to (slightly) different ideological orientations of the same party family across countries. Childcare spending increases with left parties' cabinet share at national and subnational level (Andronescu/Carnes 2015; Bonoli/Reber 2010; Busemeyer/Seitzl 2018; Mosimann/Giger 2008; Walenta-Bergmann 2023a) and left-liberal governments at national level (Hieda 2013), whilst other studies do not confirm these associations at national level (Bolzendahl 2011; Ennser-Jedenastik 2017; Lambert 2008; Wiß/Wohlgemuth 2023). Furthermore, childcare fees in German cities are higher for middle- and high-income groups when left-wing parties have a majority (Goerres/Tepe 2013). Regarding the role of mayors in municipalities, mayors of left parties show a positive effect on the number and spending levels of women-friendly policies (Funk/Philips 2019; Meier/Funk 2017). These inconsistencies might be driven by measures at the national level, although in many countries local or regional governments are responsible for childcare (Lambert 2008). We therefore test the role of incumbent parties at the local level in a rather small context (municipalities in one state), assuming a rather homogenous behaviour of parties that belong to the same party family.

The literature shows more consistent results regarding the influence of female politicians on childcare provision. Their representation in parliaments and governments increases childcare spending at the national (Bolzendahl 2011; Bonoli/Reber 2010; Ennser-Jedenastik 2017; Lambert 2008; Wiß/Wohlgemuth 2023) and subnational levels (Bratton/Ray 2002; Walenta-Bergmann 2023a) and is associated with lower childcare fees in German cities (Goerres/Tepe 2013). Similarly, studies measuring more broadly women-friendly policies reveal that women mayors have a positive effect on feminine issues (e.g. education and health care) (Funk/Philips 2019), especially when they have significantly more policymaking power compared to other political actors (Smith 2014), and that a larger share of women in local councils increase the number of women-friendly policies (Meier/Funk 2017). Moreover, female mayors show a positive influence on social welfare spending (Holman 2014). However, Meier and Funk (2017) and Smith (2014) suggest that female mayors alone do not contribute to more women-friendly policies in municipalities, and Ferreira and Gyourko (2014), Schild (2013) as well as Rigon and Tanzi (2012) complement these findings with no effect of female mayors and

councillors on the composition of municipalities' expenditure.

Only Blum and Kaindl (2014) address quality aspects of childcare expansion in Austria in a similar way to our study, but they do not systematically address political representation in their qualitative case studies on only six cities. However, we lack knowledge whether the results from country-level studies apply to the local level and whether the results for different measures (women-friendly policies) at subnational level are the same for our measure of childcare availability.

2. The role of municipality councils and mayors for childcare availability

Municipalities hold a key role for childcare provision and are tasked with managing daily operations, personnel, investments, and service expansions. Meanwhile, the state establishes the regulatory framework through legislation and offers funding to support ongoing operations (Mitterer et al. 2022). Therefore, we hypothesise that councillors and mayors are key actors. Their composition or characteristics can explain variation in the availability of childcare at the municipal level, as evidence suggests that (national and local) governments are key actors in family policy (Bonoli/Reber 2010; Busemeyer/Seitzl 2018; Fleckenstein/Lee 2020; Morgan 2013; Walenta-Bergmann 2023a; Wiß/Wohlgemuth, 2023). The local council is the highest body in a municipality. In general, it is responsible for the municipal budget and, therefore, for childcare funds as well as decisions. The mayor chairs the local council and is accountable to it. Council decisions need a majority and mayors cannot overrule the council. Although mayors in Upper Austria are directly elected, they usually belong to the party with most mandates, meaning council votes somehow reflect their position (Anderwald 2021; Oppitz 2021; Stainer-Hämmerle 2022).

Focusing on local councillors and mayors, we are interested in two types of explanations: Party ideology and women's representation. Although there may be differences in explanations for quantitative (enrolment rates, expenditure) and qualitative (e.g. availability, flexibility, child-staff ratio) aspects of childcare, in the absence of studies on the relationship between political representation and quality, we refer below to studies on enrolment rates and expenditure and assess their evidence for availability. The Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) is a Christian Democratic party with a conservative stance, while the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) has historic ties to the working class. The Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) is a Populist Radical Right Party, and the Green Party (Die Grünen) prioritises environmental protection, feminism, and minority rights.

2.1 The role of parties for childcare

Left-wing parties, such as the Social Democrats (SPÖ), have established a reputation for promoting the growth of welfare expenditure, benefits and services, while conservative parties, such as the Christian Democrats, have typically shown more reluctance towards endorsing such an expansion. Previous research has underscored the tendency of left-leaning parties to promote the concept of individual autonomy within society, consequently leading them to advocate for an extensive array of social services provided by the state. This is particularly evident in their support for services that enable parents to combine work and family life. Left-leaning parties typically advocate for progressive family policies that foster gender equality (Inglehart/Norris 2000), which translates into their promotion of publicly funded childcare (Bonoli/Reber 2010; Hieda 2013). Furthermore, for reasons of electoral competition, women and the high-educated middle class emerge as new (potential) electorates (Häusermann et al. 2013; Morgan 2013), who favour social investment policies such as public childcare provision (Garritzmann et al. 2018; Han/Kwon 2020).

Similarly, the genuine voters of Green parties (GRÜNE) – the young, highly educated, and middle-class citizens (Dolezal 2010; Marks et al. 2021) – share a progressive family ideal and gender equality. Hence, Green parties are clearly related to higher expenses for childcare provision (Röth/Schwander 2021).

> *Hypothesis 1a*: Availability of childcare increases with the council share of the Social Democrats and the Green party.

> *Hypothesis 1b*: Availability of childcare increases with a mayor of the Social Democrats.

The Christian Democratic parties (ÖVP), in contrast, have historically played a central role in advocating for the traditional male breadwinner model and the division of gender roles within the family by emphasising the role of the family as the primary caregiver. However, they have adapted their stance on family policy in response to evolving normative values among their constituents, an increasing presence of women in party committees, and the greater participation of women in the workforce. As a result, they now exhibit a greater inclination towards endorsing policies that support women and families in combining work and family life (Giuliani 2021; Morgan 2013; Wiß/Wohlgemuth 2023). Nevertheless, several studies still confirm a negative effect of religious-conservative parties on childcare expenses at national level (Bonoli/Reber 2010) and at the subnational level for enrolment rates of children below six years (Walenta-

Bergmann 2023a) as well as for childcare expenditure (Mosimann/Giger 2008). When it comes to the local level, Christian Democrats in Germany, for example, behave differently than at the national level by attempting to curb the growth of childcare provision (Turner 2011). Therefore, we can assume more prominent differences between Social Democrats and Christian Democrats regarding family policy at the local level (for a similar argument, see Andronescu/Carnes 2015).

The family ideal of Populist Radical Right Parties such as the FPÖ is characterised by traditional gender roles. Their authoritarian thinking is expressed in the promotion of traditional social hierarchies and thus the division of labour between men and women (Ennser-Jedenastik 2021; Mudde 2007). It is a man's job to do paid work and feed the family, whilst women are responsible for unpaid care obligations. In fact, Populist Radical Right Parties put least emphasis on public childcare provision in their manifestos compared with other party families and their voters oppose more investments in public childcare when compared with the respective country mean (Enggist/Pinggera 2022). More specifically, the Austrian FPÖ opposes mandatory institutional childcare (Ennser-Jedenastik 2020) and forcing young mothers to work.

Hypothesis 2a: Availability of childcare decreases with the council share of the Christian Democratic and Populist Radical Right Party.

Hypothesis 2b: Availability of childcare decreases with a mayor of the Christian Democratic and Populist Radical Right Party.

2.2 The role of female politicians for childcare

Regarding women's political representation, we argue that a higher descriptive representation (presence) of women in councils leads to a higher substantive representation (Phillips 1995). Female politicians are more inclined than their male counterparts to address issues specifically concerning women due to their shared experiences and identity (Höhmann 2020). Women, more than men, continue to experience a disproportionate impact when it comes to issues related to achieving a balance between work and family responsibilities and the organisation of caregiving tasks. Reconciliation per se is not a female issue – also men increasingly have difficulties in work/family reconciliation – but usually women rather than men reduce their employment in case of insufficient childcare provision due to persisting traditional gender roles. Having a higher share of women in political power, known as descriptive representation, therefore enhances the responsiveness of political representatives to matters related to gender equality and policies that benefit women, such as the provision of public childcare (Atchison 2015; Schwindt-Bayer/Mishler 2005; Swers 2002).

Similar to the role of party ideology, we argue that not only the gender composition of the local council but also the gender of mayors matters for female-friendly policies such as public childcare provision. Women make a difference for female-friendly policies, most notably when they are in leadership positions with greater power than average local council positions (Smith 2014). In fact, several studies confirm that female mayors spend more on women's issues (Funk/Philips 2019) and social welfare (Holman 2014) and, in particular, for services for children (Smith 2014).

Hypothesis 3a: Availability of childcare increases with the council share of women.

Hypothesis 3b: Availability of childcare increases with a female mayor.

3. Childcare provision in (Upper) Austria

Our focus on Upper Austria is due to its very low enrolment rates of young children and VIF-compliant childcare, as well as for practical reasons, as there is no publicly available dataset for our dependent variable for all Austrian provinces.

As in most countries, the provision of public childcare varies at the subnational level in Austria. Although enrolment rates for childcare for 3- to 5-year-olds (from 71% to 94%) and for children under three years (from 5% to 30%) have risen sharply in Austria between 1995 and 2022, there are significant subnational differences. While Vienna, for example, recorded the highest rate (42%) for children below three years old in 2022, Upper Austria was second to last with only 21%.

Contrary to the judgement of rising enrolment rates is the decision of the Upper Austrian government in 2018 to introduce afternoon fees for childcare. The Upper Austrian government consisting of a Christian Democratic (ÖVP) and Populist Radical Right Party (FPÖ) argued this step with austerity reasoning (Kramesberger 2017). This has led to a political debate in which the SPÖ and Greens heavily opposed the measure (Wortprotokoll des Oö. Landtags 2017). However, differences and seemingly contradictory developments in childcare can be observed not only between states, but also within Upper Austria at the municipal level, as shown by the Childcare Atlas of the Chamber of Labour of Upper Austria (Arbeiterkammer OÖ 2022). This variation can be explained with the division of tasks for childcare. Municipalities play a significant role and are responsible for ongoing operations, staff, investments,

and the expansion of services. The state provides framework conditions through legislation and gives grants for ongoing operations (Mitterer et al. 2022). Childcare-related funds for states and municipalities from the federal state are subject to certain conditions. The "15a-Vereinbarung" is an agreement between the federal state and states regulating financial resources to develop and expand childcare. These funds are not for ongoing operations but for investments and expansion of services only. Previous goals in this agreement were, for example, a mandatory and free-of-charge kindergarten year. The current deal defines goals like increasing the enrolment rate of under-threes to 33% or a better staff-children ratio for 3- to 6-year-old children (Mitterer et al. 2022). However, these goals in the "15a-Vereinbarung" are only goals indeed. Detailed legal minimum standards are formulated at the state level.

The major legislation for childcare provision in Upper Austria is the "*Kinderbildungs- und -betreuungsgesetz (Oö. KBBG)*"[1]. This law regulates, for example, the mandatory kindergarten year and minimum requirements for the size of groups, staff-children ratios, opening hours, and closing times. As our dependent variable, described further down, is strongly influenced by opening hours and closing times, we take a closer look at these categories. Childcare facilities that do not operate five days per week for the whole year need to justify this (§ 6 Oö. KBBG). The weekly opening hours for "Krabbelstuben" (children below three years) and "Kindergartengruppen" (children between the age of three to six) must be at least 30 hours, and for "Hortgruppen" (afternoon childcare for primary school children) 25 hours, respectively. However, it is possible to have opening hours of only 20 hours if demand is low. To justify or prove low demand, parents and children must be consulted (§ 9 Oö. KBBG). In general, it is upon each municipality to what extent it wants or can exceed the statutory minimum requirements. This minimum standard is relatively low compared to the "Vereinbarkeitsindikator für Familie und Beruf" (VIF). VIF is an indicator, defined in the "15a-Vereinbarung" to measure and promote the reconciliation of work and family life. It stipulates 47 opening weeks per year[2], 45 opening hours weekly, four days with 9.5 opening hours and a lunch offer. In Upper Austria, only 24% of 0- to 2-year-old and only 28% of 3- to 5-year-old children are in childcare facilities that meet VIF standards (Statistik Austria 2023), the (second) lowest share for children below the age of three among all Austrian states.

Furthermore, it is upon the municipality whether to run public childcare institutions or to outsource the services to a private provider (usually a non-profit or church organisation). In 2010, about 51% of the childcare facilities for children between three and six years were public, 9% were run by a non-profit organisation, and about 36% were run by a church organisation. Even if a municipality outsources the service, it still pays subsidies such as staff salaries and the provider must meet certain conditions in exchange (Baierl/Kaindl 2011).

Obviously, childcare availability is also a matter of money and therefore municipalities' financial power. Childcare provision and the compulsory school sector represent 19% of all expenses, the second biggest expenditure item for municipalities (Biwald/Mitterer 2021). As already mentioned, the "15a-Vereinbarung" finances only investments and further developments in childcare. State grants and municipal budgets must finance ongoing operations. In Upper Austria, around 38% of all expenditures per child were covered by revenues and the difference must be guaranteed by state grants (Mitterer et al. 2022). This shows that childcare availability and flexibility is often a matter of political priorities when municipalities are confronted with tight budgets.

4. Data and methods

4.1 Dependent variable

Our dependent variable is based on the Childcare Atlas of the Chamber of Labour of Upper Austria (Arbeiterkammer OÖ 2022). This atlas covers institutional childcare facilities[3] and measures certain quality aspects, especially the availability and flexibility of childcare in all municipalities in Upper Austria between 2000 and 2022. The data was collected by the Chamber of Labour itself and the *Institut für empirische Sozialforschung* (IFES). For this purpose, a letter with a questionnaire was sent to all mayors in Upper Austria with survey sheets. Mayors who did not react were contacted via telephone. The Atlas identifies six categories from 1A, which is the best (coded as six) over A, to E (coded as one). The categories were formed according to the following four criteria:

- Availability of childcare for children under the age of three from Monday to Thursday.
- Availability of a kindergarten/nursery school with daily opening hours of at least eight hours from Monday to Thursday.

1 https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=LROO&Gesetzesnummer=20000460&ShowPrintPreview=True

2 As of September 2023, all childcare facilities are required to operate for a minimum of 47 weeks per year (§ 8 Oö. KBBG). Our dataset reflects the period prior to this regulation when municipalities had more flexibility in determining their opening schedules.

3 The Childcare Atlas includes all institutional childcare facilities, no matter if it is public or outsourced.

- 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 until at least 3:00 pm.

Category A must meet all four criteria. Category B only 3, etc. Category E does not meet any criteria[4]. Category 1A must meet all four criteria and, in addition, all VIF criteria, which were described above (Arbeiterkammer OÖ 2022).

Our dependent variable mainly measures the availability and flexibility of childcare. However, the provision of lunch, which is an important aspect of childcare quality, is also measured. Nevertheless, we refer to the availability of childcare, as other quality-related features such as group size or staff-children ratio are not considered in our data. In fact, studies with a more encompassing approach of childcare quality mainly compare countries in only one year (OECD 2017; Yerkes/Javornik 2019).

Although data for the dependent variable are available for 2000 to 2022, our analysis focuses on 2011 to 2018. The measure for the Childcare Atlas has been changed in 2019 and the data after 2018 are not comparable to the data before 2019. The complete set of control variables is at our disposal only since 2011. As a robustness test, we exclude three control variables, allowing us to extend the period to 2004 to 2018. The results for our explanatory variables confirm the findings of the main models with a shorter time span and more control variables (see below).

4.2 Independent variables

Our explanatory variables are the share of the four most important parties in Austria in all local councils in Upper Austria – the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ), the Christian Democrats (ÖVP), the Populist Radical Right Party (FPÖ), and the Greens (GRÜNE) –, based on the dataset of Walenta-Bergmann (2023b). This dataset also contains information about the party affiliation of mayors, the share of women in local councils, and the gender of mayors.[5] Similar to most studies analysing partisanship, we measure the councils share. The argument is that the stronger a party is, the more power it can exert (directly within the council, but also indirectly, e.g., via the media), even when it does not have a majority. However, we also estimate models with absolute majorities as robustness tests (see below).

We add several political and socio-economic control variables to rule out possible alternative explanations. The financial power per inhabitant – defined in the 1960 District Allocation Act (Bezirksumlagegesetz) as property and local taxes plus revenue shares –, debts per inhabitant, and unemployment rate control for the economic power and financial resources of municipalities. The employment rate of women and the share of children below six years account for demand-side factors that might drive childcare provision. Due to potential cultural and logistic differences that might affect the demand and supply of childcare provision, we integrate an urban-rural variable.[6] The urban-rural variable is not included in fixed effects models, because it does not vary within municipalities between 2011 and 2018. All independent variables enter the models with a one-year lag, assuming that council and mayor decisions in year t affect childcare provision in year t+1, because it is unrealistic that childcare availability changes immediately after reform enactment.

4.3 Methods

We test our hypotheses using mixed-effects models. This allows us to estimate the effects of variables at different hierarchical levels (council/mayor, municipality, years) and for different time periods (years and council/mayor terms) (Garritzmann/Seng 2020; Seidl 2023). The three levels include 809 councils (850 mayors) in 429 municipalities over 8 years. We estimate cumulative link mixed-models (ordinal regressions)[7], because the dependent variable is an index of childcare availability consisting of different criteria and a change in the category depends on where in the index it happens, i.e., a change from A to 1A, for example, is not necessarily the same as a change from D to C.

For the ease of interpretation, we also estimate the same set of variables with generalised mixed-effects models (logistic regressions).[8] The first binary model compares the two highest categories of the childcare availability index (1A and A) with all other categories, and the second binary model compares the highest category (1A) with all other categories. In this way, we test the relationships between political representation (partisanship and women representation) and high-quality childcare availability.

4 However, this does not mean that no institutional childcare is provided.

5 During our analysis, we detected some inconsistencies in the overall number of council seats in some municipality years (that could not be clarified in communication with Statistics Upper Austria) and excluded these cases. However, this reduces our sample size for less than 5% and does not affect the results.

6 This variable is based on the eleven-point scale urban-rural typology of Statistics Austria. Categories 101 to 103, representing urban areas, are coded as 1; categories 210 and 220, representing regional areas, are coded as 2; categories 310 to 430, representing rural areas around cities and rural areas in the periphery, are coded as 3.

7 We use the *clmm* function in the R package ordinal (Christensen, 2023).

8 We use the glmer function in the R package lme4 (Bates et al., 2024).

For each estimation strategy, we run separate models for the local council share and party affiliation of mayors for each of the four parties. However, we cannot estimate models for mayors attached to the Green party as there was no green mayor in any municipality in Upper Austria between 2011 and 2018.

5. Results

5.1 Descriptive results

Table A.1 in the Appendix shows the descriptive statistics. Over the entire period 2011-2018, the dependent variable 'childcare atlas category' – ranging from 1 (lowest availability) to 6 (highest availability) has a mean of 4.16. Furthermore, the quality has risen over the years. In 2011, 194 municipalities had one of the two highest categories (5 or 6). In 2018, this number rose to 253 (Figure 1). In general, we can see an increase in the availability of childcare provision in Upper Austria between 2011 and 2018. Figure 2 shows in more detail that the childcare availability category does not change for the majority of municipalities and that the share of municipalities with an increase is higher than the share of municipalities with a decrease in all years. However, the gap is narrowing over time.

Regarding our explanatory variables, the ÖVP dominates local councils between 2011 and 2018 with a share of 53%, followed by the SPÖ (26%) and FPÖ (16%)

Figure 1: Distribution of the childcare atlas categories in 2011 and 2018

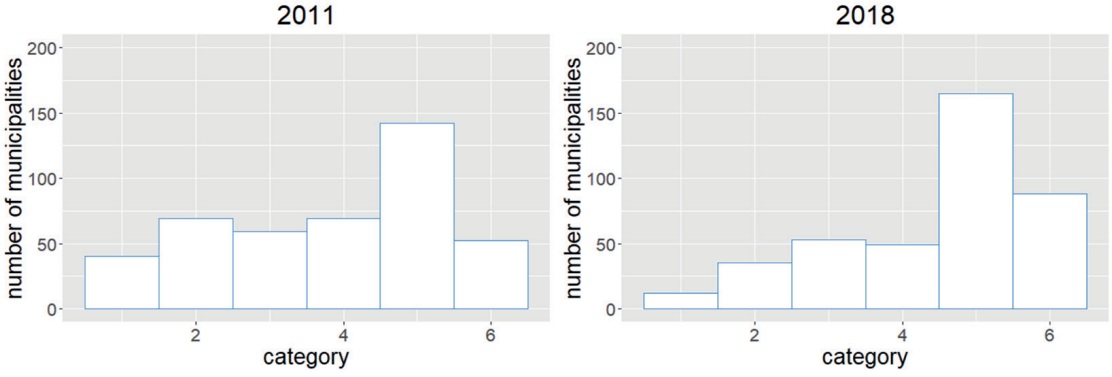


Figure 2: Changes in childcare atlas categories (2004-2018) (% municipalities)

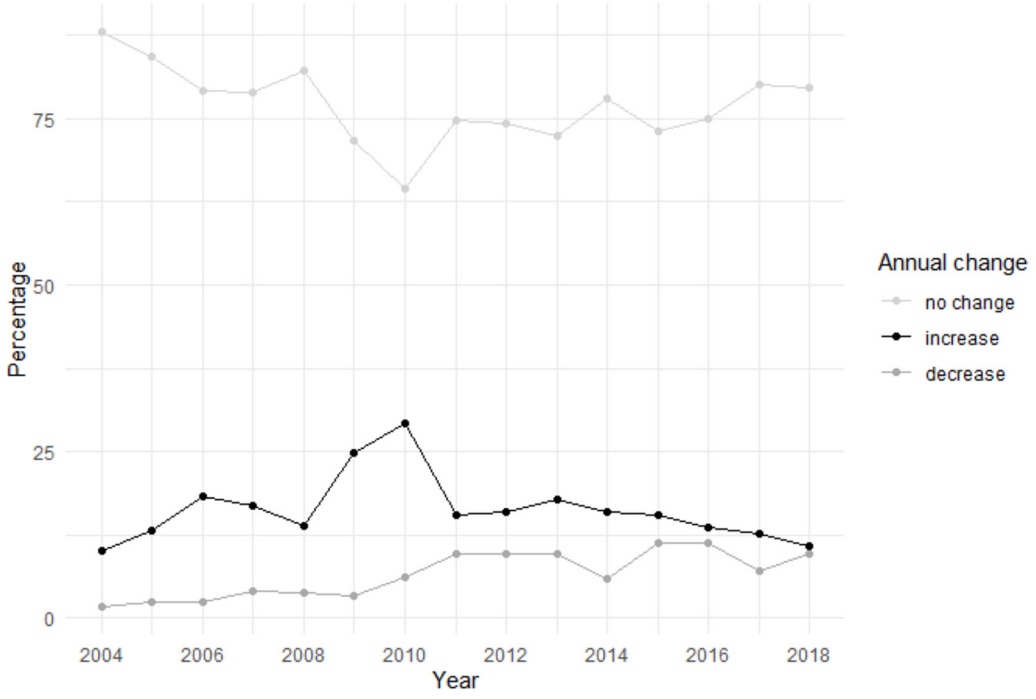
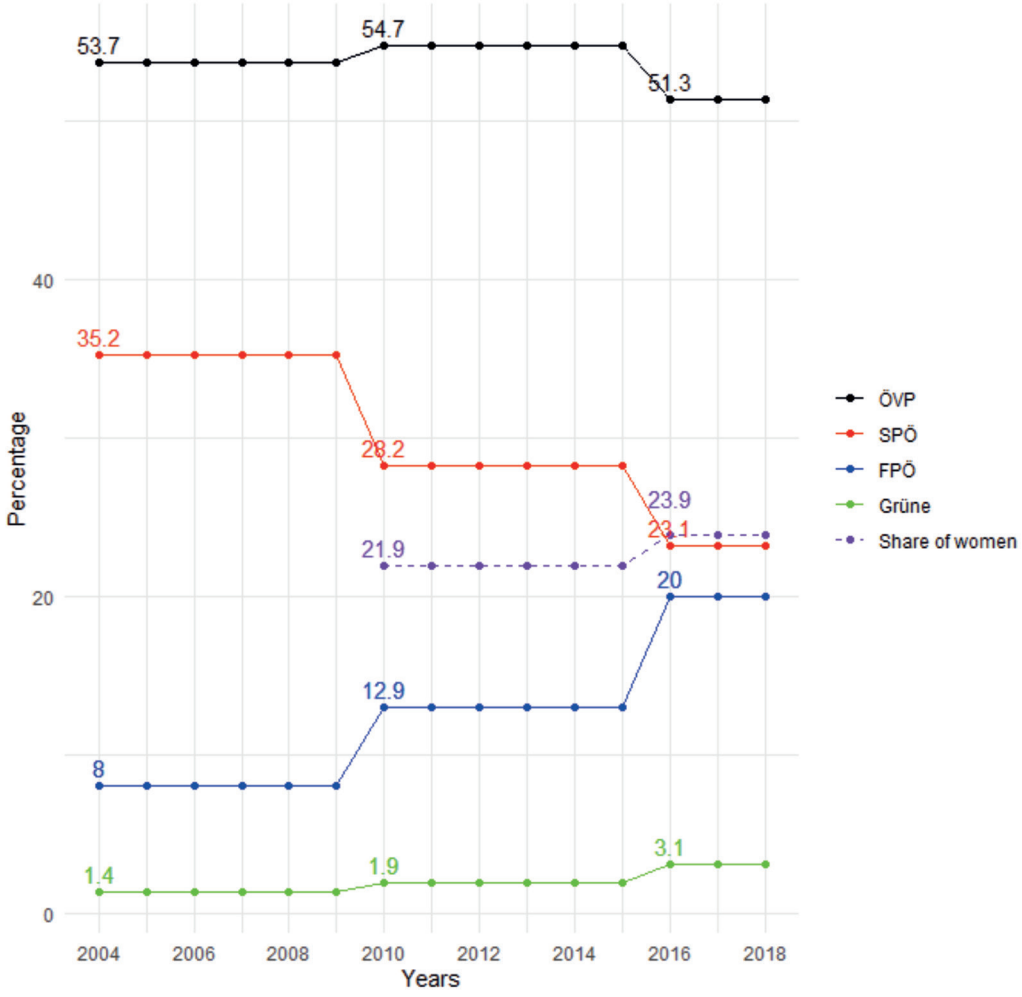


Figure 3: Average council share of parties and women (2004-2018)



(Table A.1). The Green party with a share of only 2% plays almost no role in local politics. Figure 3 reveals that the council share of the ÖVP slightly increased after the elections in 2009 (from 53.7% to 54.7%) and decreased in the following election 2015 to 51.3%. The SPÖ experienced massive losses between 2004 (35.2) and 2018 (23.1), whilst the FPÖ increased its council share from 8% in 2004 to 20% in 2018. The Green party remains weak for the whole period ranging between 1.4% to 3.1%. Data for the council share of women are available only since the election 2009 (21.9%) and they could gain seats in the 2015 election (23.9%).

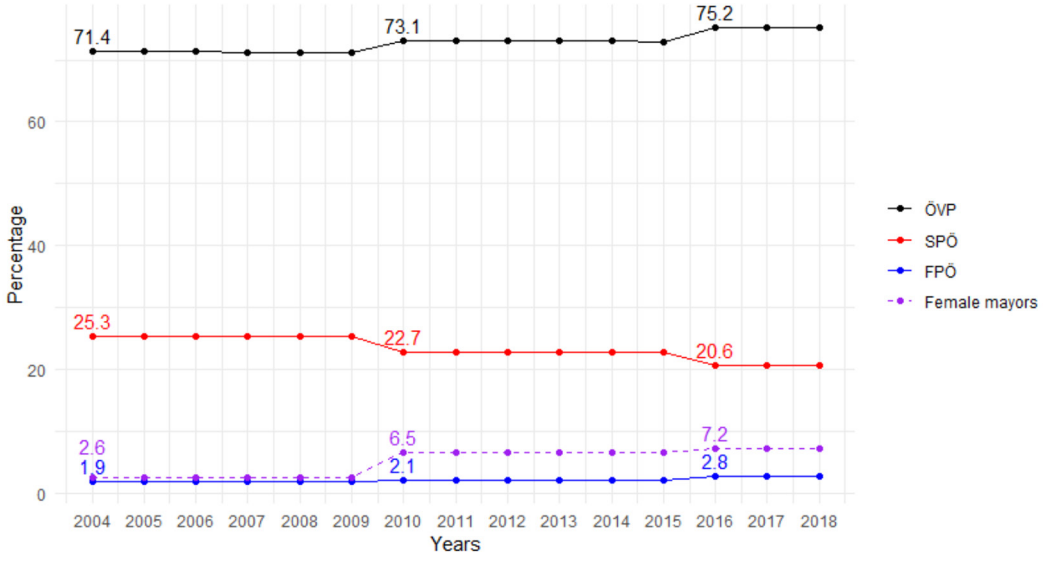
The ÖVP is even stronger when looking at the party affiliation of mayors. The vast majority of all mayors in Upper Austria between 2011 and 2018 are members of the ÖVP (74%), followed by 22% SPÖ mayors (Table A.1). The ÖVP even increased its share of mayors in the elections of 2009 and 2015 (from 71.4% to 75.2%), whilst the SPÖ's share decreased from 25.3% to 20.6% (Figure 4). Only 2% belong to the FPÖ (with an increase from 1.9% to 2.8%) and there is no single mayor from the GRÜNE. Female mayors are largely underrepresented, but their share increased from 2.6% to 7.2%.

5.2 Regression results

Figures 5 to 7 compare the results of our explanatory variables for three sets of regressions: ordinal models, binary models with the two highest categories against all others, and binary models with the highest category against all others. In sum, Figure 5, for example, summarises the results for 12 regression models (for full models including all control variables, see Tables A.2 – A.7).

The share of the Social Democratic party (SPÖ) in local councils shows a significant and positive association with childcare availability for all regression models (at 0.1 significance level), whilst a higher share of the Christian Democratic party (ÖVP) decreases childcare availability in all models (Figure 5). The FPÖ and GRÜNE are not significantly related to childcare availability in any of our models. These findings corroborate the first

Figure 4: Average party affiliation and gender of mayors (2004-2018)



parts of Hypotheses 1a (for SPÖ) and 2a (for ÖVP), but not the second parts for GRÜNE and FPÖ. The latter result might be related to the low overall presence in local councils of these two parties. These results confirm the positive effect of left parties (mainly Social Democratic parties) on childcare expenses found by studies at national and subnational level (Andronescu/Carnes 2015; Bonoli/Reber 2010; Busemeyer/Seitzl 2018; Mosimann/Giger 2008; Walenta-Bergmann 2023a).

Regarding the control variables, public childcare provision is of much higher availability in urban regions compared with rural regions in all models (Tables A.2 – A.4), and higher financial power per capita is positively and higher debts per capita negatively related to childcare availability in the binary model that compares the two highest categories against all others (Table A.3).

Only the ÖVP affiliation of mayors plays a role for childcare availability (Figure 6) confirming the first part of Hypothesis 2b. Effect sizes for mayors are much larger than for parties' council share. An ÖVP affiliated mayor reduces the likelihood of a municipality to have one of the two highest childcare availability categories for 0.82 log-odds (compared to 0.06 log-odds for a one percentage point increase of ÖVP's council share) and even for 1.23 log-odds (compared to 0.05 log-odds for a one percentage point increase of ÖVP's council share) to have the highest category.

This limited effect for mayors' partisanship confirms the finding of Walenta-Bergmann (2023a) for enrolment rates and could be related to their possibly weaker political power vis-à-vis the municipal council. The mayor is obliged to follow the council's instructions. Therefore, the municipality council, as the highest municipal body, is more powerful than the mayor (Weber 2021). However, in a vast majority of municipalities the mayor belongs to the party which holds most of the seats in the council. In our sample, this is the case for about 94% of all municipality-year observations. Thus, a situation in which the council overrules the mayor is possible but probably not the standard case of local policymaking.

Turning to the role of women's council share, all three models confirm Hypothesis 3a and the positive relation of female local council members with the availability of childcare (Figure 7). Their effect size is approximately twice as large as for parties (Tables A.2 – A.4). This is in line with the findings of studies on childcare expenses at national and subnational level (Bolzendahl 2011; Bonoli/Reber, 2010; Bratton/Ray 2002; Ennser-Jedenastik 2017; Lambert 2008; Walenta-Bergmann 2023a; Wiß/Wohlgemuth 2023).

In contrast, we have to reject Hypothesis 3b since we do not find an association between mayors' gender and childcare availability. This confirms the lacking association of female mayors with spending on women-friendly policies by several studies for other countries (Ferreira/Gyourko 2014; Meier/Funk 2017; Rigon/Tanzi 2012; Schild 2013; Smith 2014). Since only 7% of mayors in our sample are women, municipalities' politics is dominated by men and might represent a case of gendered institutions (Acker 1992; Funk/Philips 2019). Male-dominated rules and norms associated with the position of a mayor might hinder female mayors from representing women-specific issues. They might pursue the same policies as men in response to stereotypes and credibility issues associated with women (Funk 2015; Funk/Philips 2019; Koch/Fulton 2011). Furthermore, female mayors might be a selected group of women

Figure 5: Regression results for council share

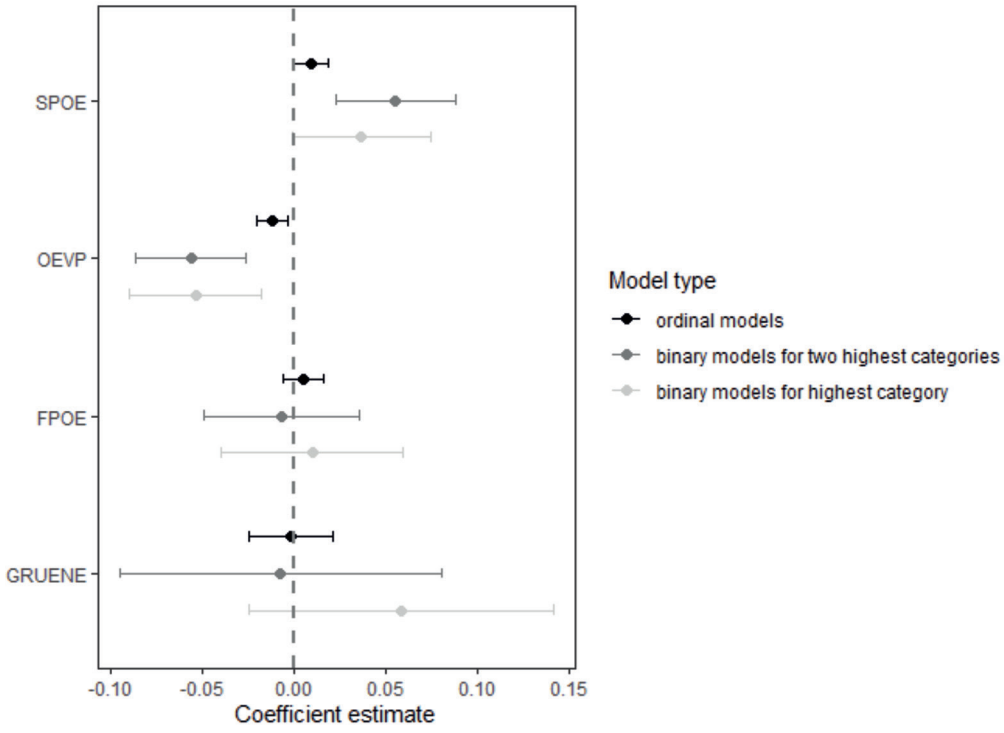


Figure 6: Regression results for mayors

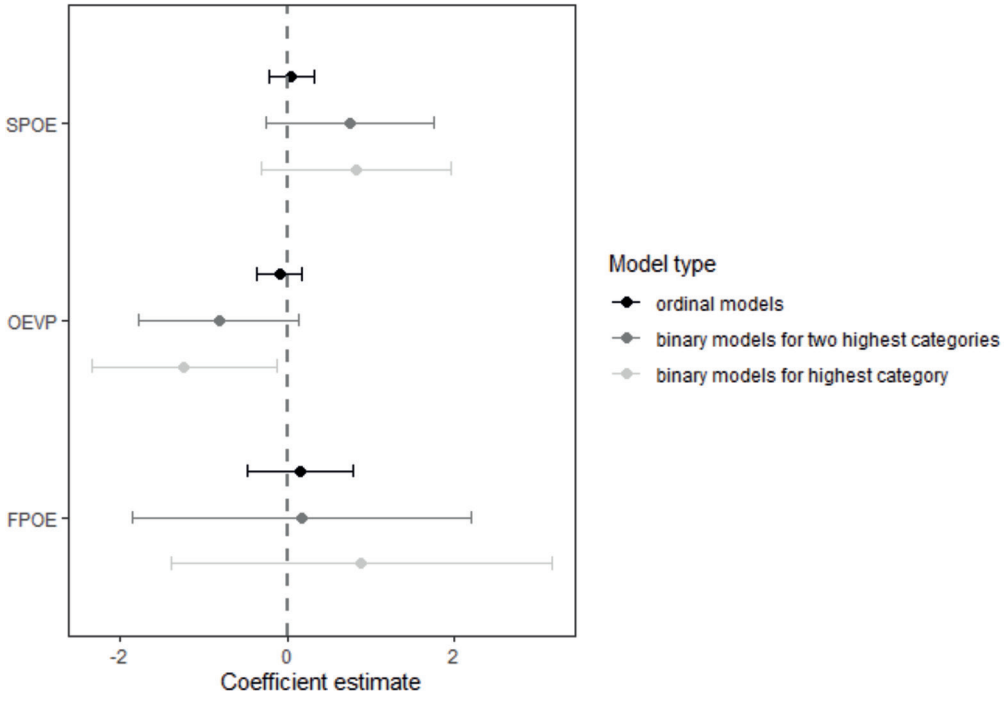
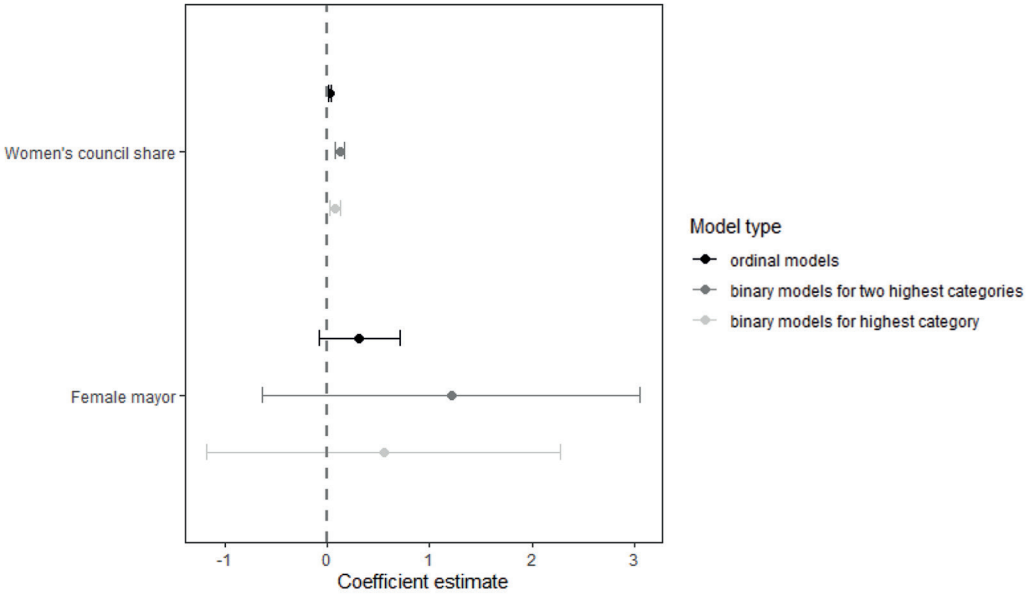


Figure 7: Regression results for women's council share and female mayors



who have experienced gender equality and therefore make no difference between women-specific and other issues, which could explain the lack of effect. Moreover, career-oriented mayors promote policies in line with the preferences of the median voter in order to be re-elected, rather than policies specific to one group such as women (Schild 2013).

The mixed-effects models allow to decompose the variance of childcare availability between different levels. Calculating level-specific intraclass correlation coefficients based on the random parts in Tables A.2 and A.5 reveals that 12-13% of the variance in the ordinal models can be explained with the composition of the council and the characteristics of mayors, respectively, whilst 56-60% can be explained at the municipality level.

5.3 Robustness tests

Several model specifications test the robustness of our findings. By removing three control variables (share of women council members, unemployment rate, employment rate of women), we can estimate the models for a much longer period of time. The results for the years 2004 to 2018 (Table A.8 for council share and Table A.9 for mayors) confirm the findings for party effects of our main models. The only difference is that the positive coefficient of female mayors turns significant confirming Hypothesis 3b for a longer period.

Furthermore, changes in parties' council share might be less decisive than majorities within councils. In line with our hypotheses, we group the Social Democratic and Green party to 'left parties', and the Christian Democratic and Populist Radical Right Party to 'right parties' and calculate whether they have an absolute majority in councils. Estimating different models for 'left parties majority' and 'right parties majority' (Tables A.10 – A.12) reveals that an absolute majority of left parties increases the likelihood of a municipality to have the highest childcare availability category, whilst this decreases when right parties have a majority corroborating Hypotheses 1a and 2a. A majority of right parties is also negatively associated with our ordinal variable, whilst we find no partisanship effect for binary models that compare the two highest categories against all others. Moreover, the positive effect of women's council share in all models confirms Hypothesis 3a.

Lastly, time-series cross-section models might be better suited to assess causality allowing for fixed effects. However, ordinal dependent variables are difficult to implement and rather demanding. As a proxy, we treat the dependent variable as a linear variable and correct for autocorrelation as shown by the Breusch-Godfrey test by transforming it to first differences and adding its lagged absolute level as control variable. Furthermore, we include fixed effects for municipalities and time controlling for time and municipality-invariant factors that might serve as alternative explanations, and counter heteroscedasticity with panel-corrected standard-errors. The positive association of SPÖ's council share and the negative association of ÖVP's council with annual change in the childcare availability category confirm our main models, only the coefficients of women's council share turn non-significant (Table A.13). Lacking effects for mayors' party affiliation and gender are in line with the results of our ordinal models (Table A.14).

6. Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to identify the political drivers of childcare availability in municipalities in Upper Austria. We introduce a novel measure of childcare availability as developed by the Chamber of Labour allowing to assess in particular the availability and flexibility of public childcare provision (daily/weekly opening hours, annual closing times, and provision of lunch). Examining childcare availability in 429 municipalities of Upper Austria allows us to rule out alternative explanations such as different historical developments or culture and norms, which cannot be accounted for in most cross-country studies.

In line with our hypotheses, we find that a higher share of the Social Democratic party (SPÖ) increases childcare availability, whilst more local council members of the Christian Democratic party (ÖVP) reduce it. However, we cannot confirm the hypothesised positive effect for the council share of the Green party (GRÜNE) nor a negative effect for the Populist Radical Right Party (FPÖ). Women in local councils have a positive effect on childcare availability, corroborating our hypothesis. In contrast, we have to reject our hypotheses for mayors. Except for the negative effect of the ÖVP, party affiliation nor gender are related to childcare availability. It might be that the council as a joint decision-making body is more decisive for the politics of municipalities rather than mayors.

Our findings add to the literature, which mostly uses countries as the unit of analyses, by providing more fine-grained knowledge about within-country differences and determinants of childcare provision across municipalities. Determinants of political representation (partisanship and women representation) found for childcare expenditure at national (Bolzendahl 2011; Bonoli/Reber 2010; Ennser-Jedenastik 2017; Lambert 2008; Wiß/Wohlgemuth 2023) and subnational level (Andronescu/Carnes 2015; Bratton/Ray 2002; Busemeyer/Seitzl 2018; Mosimann/Giger 2008; Walenta-Bergmann 2023a) are confirmed for childcare availability at local level. However, we cannot corroborate the positive effect of left parties' mayors on the number and spending levels of women-friendly policies from other countries (Funk/Philips 2019; Meier/Funk 2017). It may be that our country or state as well as the measure of childcare availability explain this difference. Moreover, we complement studies that investigate spending levels or enrolment rates by focusing on availability and flexibility aspects of childcare provision confirming in particular a similar positive role of left parties and women. Political actors thus make a difference not only on the quantitative expansion of childcare places, but also on quality-related issues such as daily/weekly opening times and annual closing times.

Data availability, in particular the lack of socio-economic measures at the municipal level, limits the time period of our analysis. Furthermore, due to a break in the time series and changes in the measure of the dependent variable, we cannot cover the most recent years. Our variables do not provide an all-encompassing measurement of childcare quality but focus on availability and flexibility. Future studies might extend our analyses to further quality issues such as staff-children ratio or costs in combination with availability. Moreover, it would be interesting to figure out whether our findings hold under different contexts for municipalities in other countries.

A more general implication is that the composition of local councils does make a difference for childcare availability. Voting for the Social Democratic party and pushing parties at local level to place more women on their electoral lists and in local councils – independent of their party attachment as our controls show – might be a wise strategy to increase childcare quality in Austrian municipalities.

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Appendix

Table A.1. Descriptive statistics

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Childcare atlas category	3,407	4.16	1.46	1	6
Δ Childcare atlas category	3,404	0.08	0.67	-4	5
SPÖ council share	3,277	26.32	14.65	0.00	76.92
ÖVP council share	3,277	53.42	16.08	10.81	100.00
FPÖ council share	3,277	15.54	10.75	0.00	61.54
GRÜNE council share	3,277	2.36	4.73	0.00	24.00
Left parties_majority	3,277	0.11	0.32	0	1
Right parties_majority	3,277	0.85	0.36	0	1
Women council share	3,277	22.62	9.06	0.00	48.00
SPÖ mayor	3,436	0.22	0.41	0	1
ÖVP mayor	3,436	0.74	0.44	0	1
FPÖ mayor	3,436	0.02	0.15	0	1
Female mayor	3,436	0.07	0.25	0	1
Urban-rural municipality	3,446	2.80	0.56	1	3
Financial power (in 1,000 per capita)	3,426	1.26	1.38	0.04	21.88
Debts (in 1,000 per capita)	3,414	1.95	1.38	0.003	14.54
Unemployment rate	3,449	3.20	1.46	0.33	12.41
Female employment rate	3,452	72.02	4.05	56.05	86.05
Share of population ≤ 6 yrs.	3,452	6.09	1.03	2.12	11.87

Table A.2 Ordinal mixed-effects models for council share

	Childcare atlas category (ordinal)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
1|2	-1.35 (1.39)	-3.92 *** (1.37)	-3.42 *** (1.28)	-3.17 ** (1.33)
2|3	0.26 (1.39)	-2.35 * (1.37)	-1.97 (1.28)	-1.64 (1.33)
3|4	1.78 (1.39)	-0.90 (1.36)	-0.64 (1.28)	-0.20 (1.33)
4|5	3.16 ** (1.39)	0.44 (1.36)	0.61 (1.28)	1.12 (1.33)
5|6	6.43 *** (1.39)	3.59 *** (1.36)	3.50 *** (1.28)	4.24 *** (1.33)
SPÖ council share (t-1)	0.01 ** (0.00)			
ÖVP council share (t-1)		-0.01 *** (0.00)		
FPÖ council share (t-1)			0.01 (0.01)	
GRÜNE council share (t-1)				-0.00 (0.01)
Women council share (t-1)	0.03 *** (0.01)	0.02 *** (0.01)	0.03 *** (0.01)	0.03 *** (0.01)
Urban-rural municipality (t-1)	-0.46 *** (0.13)	-0.45 *** (0.13)	-0.46 *** (0.12)	-0.49 *** (0.13)
Financial power (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	0.05 (0.03)	0.05 * (0.03)	0.05 * (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)
Debts (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	-0.06 (0.05)	-0.06 (0.05)	-0.06 (0.04)	-0.06 (0.05)
Unemployment rate (t-1)	0.08 * (0.04)	0.04 (0.04)	0.05 (0.04)	0.06 (0.04)
Female employment rate (t-1)	0.04 ** (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)
Share of population ≤ 6 yrs. (t-1)	0.08 * (0.05)	0.08 (0.05)	0.05 (0.04)	0.06 (0.05)
Random Effects				
σ^2	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
τ_{00}	1.33 $_{council}$	1.27 $_{council}$	0.98 $_{council}$	1.15 $_{council}$
	6.10 $_{municipality}$	5.63 $_{municipality}$	4.51 $_{municipality}$	5.33 $_{municipality}$
	1.84 $_{year}$	1.84 $_{year}$	1.51 $_{year}$	1.68 $_{year}$
N	426 $_{municipality}$	426 $_{municipality}$	426 $_{municipality}$	426 $_{municipality}$
	809 $_{council}$	809 $_{council}$	809 $_{council}$	809 $_{council}$
	8 $_{year}$	8 $_{year}$	8 $_{year}$	8 $_{year}$
Observations	3190	3190	3190	3190

* p<0.1 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01

Table A.3 Logistic mixed-effects models for council share (childcare categories 1A and A vs. others)

	Childcare atlas category (binary)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(Intercept)	-0.56 (4.66)	2.23 (4.63)	2.95 (4.61)	3.92 (4.78)
SPÖ council share (t-1)	0.06 *** (0.02)			
ÖVP council share (t-1)		-0.06 *** (0.02)		
FPÖ council share (t-1)			-0.01 (0.02)	
GRÜNE council share (t-1)				-0.01 (0.04)
Women council share (t-1)	0.12 *** (0.02)	0.13 *** (0.02)	0.13 *** (0.02)	0.14 *** (0.02)
Urban-rural municipality (t-1)	-2.16 *** (0.47)	-1.97 *** (0.47)	-2.38 *** (0.46)	-2.65 *** (0.50)
Financial power (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	0.44 *** (0.11)	0.43 *** (0.11)	0.43 *** (0.11)	0.46 *** (0.11)
Debts (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	-0.54 *** (0.16)	-0.48 *** (0.16)	-0.47 *** (0.16)	-0.52 *** (0.16)
Unemployment rate (t-1)	0.19 (0.14)	0.16 (0.15)	0.22 (0.14)	0.19 (0.15)
Female employment rate (t-1)	0.03 (0.06)	0.04 (0.06)	0.00 (0.06)	-0.00 (0.06)
Share of population ≤ 6 yrs. (t-1)	-0.03 (0.17)	-0.03 (0.17)	-0.07 (0.16)	-0.06 (0.17)
Random Effects				
σ^2	3.29	3.29	3.29	3.29
τ_{00}	4.11_{council}	4.22_{council}	3.57_{council}	4.40_{council}
	$27.14_{\text{municipality}}$	$26.59_{\text{municipality}}$	$28.23_{\text{municipality}}$	$30.40_{\text{municipality}}$
	5.78_{year}	9.35_{year}	7.09_{year}	7.20_{year}
ICC	0.92	0.92	0.92	0.93
N	$426_{\text{municipality}}$	$426_{\text{municipality}}$	$426_{\text{municipality}}$	$426_{\text{municipality}}$
	809_{council}	809_{council}	809_{council}	809_{council}
	8_{year}	8_{year}	8_{year}	8_{year}
Observations	3190	3190	3190	3190

** p<0.1 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01*

Table A.4 Logistic mixed-effects models for council share (childcare category 1A vs. others)

	Childcare atlas category (binary)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(Intercept)	-5.14 (6.39)	-2.66 (6.38)	-4.19 (6.25)	-4.49 (6.07)
SPÖ council share (t-1)	0.04 * (0.02)			
ÖVP council share (t-1)		-0.05 *** (0.02)		
FPÖ council share (t-1)			0.01 (0.03)	
GRÜNE council share (t-1)				0.06 (0.04)
Women council share (t-1)	0.08 *** (0.03)	0.07 *** (0.03)	0.09 *** (0.03)	0.08 *** (0.03)
Urban-rural municipality (t-1)	-1.32 *** (0.50)	-1.11 ** (0.50)	-1.34 *** (0.49)	-1.19 ** (0.48)
Financial power (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	-0.27 (0.30)	-0.25 (0.29)	-0.27 (0.29)	-0.28 (0.28)
Debts (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	-0.33 (0.22)	-0.30 (0.22)	-0.32 (0.21)	-0.32 (0.21)
Unemployment rate (t-1)	0.29 (0.19)	0.23 (0.19)	0.34 * (0.18)	0.35 * (0.18)
Female employment rate (t-1)	0.04 (0.08)	0.05 (0.08)	0.04 (0.08)	0.04 (0.08)
Share of population ≤ 6 yrs. (t-1)	-0.27 (0.22)	-0.23 (0.22)	-0.28 (0.22)	-0.27 (0.21)
Random Effects				
σ^2	3.29	3.29	3.29	3.29
τ_{00}	1.77 $_{council}$	1.61 $_{council}$	1.75 $_{council}$	1.55 $_{council}$
	22.51 $_{municipality}$	21.97 $_{municipality}$	21.25 $_{municipality}$	19.40 $_{municipality}$
	15.50 $_{year}$	19.19 $_{year}$	14.56 $_{year}$	13.89 $_{year}$
ICC	0.92	0.93	0.92	0.91
N	426 $_{municipality}$	426 $_{municipality}$	426 $_{municipality}$	426 $_{municipality}$
	809 $_{council}$	809 $_{council}$	809 $_{council}$	809 $_{council}$
	8 $_{year}$	8 $_{year}$	8 $_{year}$	8 $_{year}$
Observations	3190	3190	3190	3190

** p<0.1 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01*

Table A.5 Ordinal mixed-effects models for mayors

	Childcare atlas category (ordinal)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
1|2	-3.54 ***	-3.81 ***	-3.51 ***
	(1.27)	(1.30)	(1.22)
2|3	-2.09 *	-2.29 *	-2.13 *
	(1.27)	(1.30)	(1.22)
3|4	-0.73	-0.90	-0.86
	(1.27)	(1.29)	(1.22)
4|5	0.53	0.43	0.35
	(1.27)	(1.29)	(1.22)
5|6	3.48 ***	3.46 ***	3.14 ***
	(1.26)	(1.29)	(1.22)
SPÖ mayor (t-1)	0.05		
	(0.14)		
ÖVP mayor (t-1)		-0.09	
		(0.14)	
FPÖ mayor (t-1)			0.16
			(0.33)
Female mayor (t-1)	0.31	0.33	0.28
	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.19)
Urban-rural municipality (t-1)	-0.46 ***	-0.43 ***	-0.45 ***
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.11)
Financial power (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	0.04	0.04	0.04
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Debts (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	-0.07 *	-0.04	-0.07 *
	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.04)
Unemployment rate (t-1)	0.07 *	0.09 **	0.08 **
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Female employment rate (t-1)	0.01	0.01	0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Share of population ≤ 6 yrs. (t-1)	0.07	0.09 **	0.07
	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.04)
Random Effects			
σ^2	1.00	1.00	1.00
τ_{00}	1.01 $_{mayor}$	1.15 $_{mayor}$	0.88 $_{mayor}$
	4.85 $_{municipality}$	5.29 $_{municipality}$	4.26 $_{municipality}$
	1.27 $_{year}$	1.36 $_{year}$	1.09 $_{year}$
ICC	0.88	0.89	0.86
N	429 $_{municipality}$	429 $_{municipality}$	429 $_{municipality}$
	850 $_{mayor}$	850 $_{mayor}$	850 $_{mayor}$
	8 $_{year}$	8 $_{year}$	8 $_{year}$
Observations	3337	3337	3337

** p<0.1 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01*

Table A.6 Logistic mixed-effects models for mayors (childcare categories 1A and A vs. others)

	Childcare atlas category (binary)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
(Intercept)	4.54 (4.77)	5.74 (4.74)	7.00 (4.77)
SPÖ mayor (t-1)	0.76 (0.52)		
ÖVP mayor (t-1)		-0.82 * (0.49)	
FPÖ mayor (t-1)			0.18 (1.04)
Female mayor (t-1)	1.21 (0.94)	1.27 (0.95)	1.69 * (0.95)
Urban-rural municipality (t-1)	-2.39 *** (0.49)	-2.39 *** (0.49)	-2.50 *** (0.48)
Financial power (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	0.43 *** (0.11)	0.42 *** (0.11)	0.40 *** (0.11)
Debts (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	-0.56 *** (0.17)	-0.57 *** (0.17)	-0.55 *** (0.17)
Unemployment rate (t-1)	0.35 ** (0.15)	0.33 ** (0.15)	0.30 ** (0.15)
Female employment rate (t-1)	0.01 (0.06)	0.01 (0.06)	-0.01 (0.06)
Share of population ≤ 6 yrs. (t-1)	0.00 (0.17)	-0.00 (0.17)	-0.03 (0.17)
Random Effects			
σ^2	3.29	3.29	3.29
τ_{00}	4.33 $_{mayor}$	4.16 $_{mayor}$	4.00 $_{mayor}$
	33.97 $_{municipality}$	35.01 $_{municipality}$	34.29 $_{municipality}$
	7.58 $_{year}$	7.51 $_{year}$	10.05 $_{year}$
ICC	0.93	0.93	0.94
N	429 $_{municipality}$	429 $_{municipality}$	429 $_{municipality}$
	850 $_{mayor}$	850 $_{mayor}$	850 $_{mayor}$
	8 $_{year}$	8 $_{year}$	8 $_{year}$
Observations	3337	3337	3337

** p<0.1 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01*

Table A.7 Logistic mixed-effects models for mayors (childcare category 1A vs. others)

	Childcare atlas category (binary)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
(Intercept)	-2.47 (6.29)	-1.17 (6.50)	-1.41 (6.29)
SPÖ mayor (t-1)	0.83 (0.58)		
ÖVP mayor (t-1)		-1.23 ** (0.57)	
FPÖ mayor (t-1)			0.89 (1.17)
Female mayor (t-1)	0.55 (0.88)	0.42 (0.93)	0.55 (0.90)
Urban-rural municipality (t-1)	-1.53 *** (0.51)	-1.54 *** (0.54)	-1.63 *** (0.52)
Financial power (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	-0.34 (0.30)	-0.35 (0.31)	-0.35 (0.30)
Debts (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	-0.36 (0.22)	-0.37 (0.23)	-0.34 (0.22)
Unemployment rate (t-1)	0.35 * (0.19)	0.33 * (0.19)	0.37 ** (0.19)
Female employment rate (t-1)	0.05 (0.08)	0.04 (0.08)	0.04 (0.08)
Share of population ≤ 6 yrs. (t-1)	-0.25 (0.22)	-0.25 (0.23)	-0.26 (0.22)
Random Effects			
σ^2	3.29	3.29	3.29
τ_{00}	1.72 $_{mayor}$	1.88 $_{mayor}$	1.76 $_{mayor}$
	25.08 $_{municipality}$	27.91 $_{municipality}$	25.99 $_{municipality}$
	18.52 $_{year}$	21.88 $_{year}$	16.71 $_{year}$
ICC	0.93	0.94	0.93
N	429 $_{municipality}$	429 $_{municipality}$	429 $_{municipality}$
	850 $_{mayor}$	850 $_{mayor}$	850 $_{mayor}$
	8 $_{year}$	8 $_{year}$	8 $_{year}$
Observations	3337	3337	3337

** p<0.1 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01*

Table A.8 Ordinal mixed-effects models for council share (2004-2018)

	Childcare atlas category (ordinal)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
1|2	-4.31 ***	-4.83 ***	-4.49 ***	-4.10 ***
	(0.47)	(0.50)	(0.47)	(0.48)
2|3	-2.92 ***	-3.67 ***	-2.93 ***	-2.50 ***
	(0.47)	(0.50)	(0.47)	(0.48)
3|4	-1.76 ***	-2.73 ***	-1.63 ***	-1.16 **
	(0.47)	(0.50)	(0.47)	(0.48)
4|5	-0.57	-1.75 ***	-0.24	0.26
	(0.47)	(0.50)	(0.47)	(0.48)
5|6	2.29 ***	0.60	3.09 ***	3.70 ***
	(0.47)	(0.50)	(0.47)	(0.48)
SPÖ council share (t-1)	0.01 *			
	(0.00)			
ÖVP council share (t-1)		-0.01 ***		
		(0.00)		
FPÖ council share (t-1)			0.00	
			(0.00)	
GRÜNE council share (t-1)				0.00
				(0.01)
Urban-rural municipality (t-1)	-0.27 ***	-0.30 ***	-0.26 ***	-0.16 *
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)
Financial power (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	0.05 **	0.06 ***	0.03	0.04 *
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Debts (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	-0.07 **	-0.08 ***	-0.05	-0.06 *
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Share of population ≤ 6 yrs. (t-1)	0.00	-0.01	0.00	0.02
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Random Effects				
σ^2	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
τ_{00}	0.92 $_{council}$	0.72 $_{council}$	1.21 $_{council}$	1.29 $_{council}$
	4.00 $_{municipality}$	2.57 $_{municipality}$	5.44 $_{municipality}$	6.31 $_{municipality}$
	1.26 $_{year}$	1.20 $_{year}$	1.51 $_{year}$	1.62 $_{year}$
ICC	0.86	0.82	0.89	0.90
N	429 $_{municipality}$	429 $_{municipality}$	429 $_{municipality}$	429 $_{municipality}$
	1280 $_{council}$	1280 $_{council}$	1280 $_{council}$	1280 $_{council}$
	14 $_{year}$	14 $_{year}$	14 $_{year}$	14 $_{year}$
Observations	5917	5917	5917	5917

** p<0.1 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01*

Table A.9 Ordinal mixed-effects models for mayors (2004-2018)

	Childcare atlas category (ordinal)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
1|2	-4.12 ***	-4.09 ***	-4.06 ***
	(0.48)	(0.48)	(0.48)
2|3	-2.51 ***	-2.49 ***	-2.46 ***
	(0.48)	(0.48)	(0.48)
3|4	-1.17 **	-1.14 **	-1.12 **
	(0.48)	(0.48)	(0.48)
4|5	0.25	0.27	0.30
	(0.48)	(0.48)	(0.48)
5|6	3.68 ***	3.71 ***	3.74 ***
	(0.48)	(0.48)	(0.48)
SPÖ mayor (t-1)	-0.06		
	(0.10)		
ÖVP mayor (t-1)		-0.04	
		(0.09)	
FPÖ mayor (t-1)			0.41
			(0.29)
Female mayor (t-1)	0.28 *	0.27 *	0.27 *
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)
Urban-rural municipality (t-1)	-0.16 *	-0.15 *	-0.16 *
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Financial power (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	0.04	0.04	0.04
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Debts (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	-0.05	-0.05 *	-0.05
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Share of population ≤ 6 yrs. (t-1)	0.02	0.03	0.02
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Random Effects			
σ^2	1.00	1.00	1.00
τ_{00}	1.30 $_{mayor}$	1.30 $_{mayor}$	1.29 $_{mayor}$
	6.37 $_{municipality}$	6.31 $_{municipality}$	6.34 $_{municipality}$
	1.62 $_{year}$	1.62 $_{year}$	1.62 $_{year}$
ICC	0.90	0.90	0.90
N	429 $_{municipality}$	429 $_{municipality}$	429 $_{municipality}$
	1278 $_{mayor}$	1278 $_{mayor}$	1278 $_{mayor}$
	14 $_{year}$	14 $_{year}$	14 $_{year}$
Observations	5905	5905	5905

** p<0.1 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01*

Table A.10 Ordinal mixed-effects models for council share with left/right parties majority

	Childcare atlas category (ordinal)	
	(1)	(2)
1|2	-1.73 (1.38)	-3.79 *** (1.33)
2|3	-0.12 (1.38)	-2.28 * (1.33)
3|4	1.40 (1.38)	-0.86 (1.33)
4|5	2.78 ** (1.38)	0.43 (1.33)
5|6	6.05 *** (1.38)	3.48 *** (1.33)
Left parties majority	0.24 (0.20)	
Right parties majority		-0.31 * (0.16)
Women council share (t-1)	0.03 *** (0.01)	0.02 *** (0.01)
Urban-rural municipality (t-1)	-0.47 *** (0.13)	-0.48 *** (0.12)
Financial power (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	0.05 (0.03)	0.05 * (0.03)
Debts (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	-0.06 (0.05)	-0.07 (0.04)
Unemployment rate (t-1)	0.09 ** (0.04)	0.06 (0.04)
Female employment rate (t-1)	0.03 ** (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
Share of population ≤ 6 yrs. (t-1)	0.08 (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)
Random Effects		
σ^2	1.00	1.00
τ_{00}	1.32 $_{council}$	1.13 $_{council}$
	6.17 $_{municipality}$	4.94 $_{municipality}$
	1.87 $_{year}$	1.77 $_{year}$
ICC	0.90	0.89
N	426 $_{municipality}$	426 $_{municipality}$
	809 $_{council}$	809 $_{council}$
	8 $_{year}$	8 $_{year}$
Observations	3190	3190

** p<0.1 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01*

Table A.11 Logistic mixed-effects models for council share with left/right parties majority (childcare categories 1A and A vs. others)

	Childcare atlas category (binary)	
	(1)	(2)
(Intercept)	2.02 (4.78)	2.95 (4.73)
Left parties majority	0.72 (0.70)	
Right parties majority		-0.87 (0.59)
Women council share (t-1)	0.14 *** (0.02)	0.13 *** (0.02)
Urban-rural municipality (t-1)	-2.32 *** (0.49)	-2.28 *** (0.49)
Financial power (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	0.48 *** (0.11)	0.45 *** (0.11)
Debts (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	-0.49 *** (0.16)	-0.52 *** (0.16)
Unemployment rate (t-1)	0.24 (0.15)	0.22 (0.15)
Female employment rate (t-1)	0.01 (0.06)	0.01 (0.06)
Share of population ≤ 6 yrs. (t-1)	-0.08 (0.17)	-0.09 (0.17)
Random Effects		
σ^2	3.29	3.29
τ_{00}	3.95 $_{council}$	4.06 $_{council}$
	30.87 $_{municipality}$	30.33 $_{municipality}$
	10.75 $_{year}$	7.90 $_{year}$
ICC	0.93	0.93
N	426 $_{municipality}$	426 $_{municipality}$
	809 $_{council}$	809 $_{council}$
	8 $_{year}$	8 $_{year}$
Observations	3190	3190

** p<0.1 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01*

Table A.12 Logistic mixed-effects models for council share with left/right parties majority (childcare category 1A vs. others)

	Childcare atlas category (binary)	
	(1)	(2)
(Intercept)	-3.90 (6.18)	-3.10 (6.10)
Left parties majority	1.20 * (0.68)	
Right parties majority		-1.17 ** (0.56)
Women council share (t-1)	0.08 *** (0.03)	0.08 *** (0.03)
Urban-rural municipality (t-1)	-1.29 *** (0.48)	-1.27 *** (0.47)
Financial power (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	-0.28 (0.29)	-0.26 (0.28)
Debts (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	-0.33 (0.21)	-0.34 * (0.21)
Unemployment rate (t-1)	0.32 * (0.18)	0.30 * (0.18)
Female employment rate (t-1)	0.04 (0.08)	0.04 (0.08)
Share of population ≤ 6 yrs. (t-1)	-0.26 (0.22)	-0.25 (0.21)
Random Effects		
σ^2	3.29	3.29
τ_{00}	1.59_{council}	1.57_{council}
	$20.65_{\text{municipality}}$	$19.12_{\text{municipality}}$
	15.23_{year}	14.75_{year}
ICC	0.92	0.92
N	$426_{\text{municipality}}$	$426_{\text{municipality}}$
	809_{council}	809_{council}
	8_{year}	8_{year}
Observations	3190	3190

** p<0.1 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01*

Table A.13 Panel regression models with municipality and time-fixed effects (council share)

	Δ childcare atlas category			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
SPÖ council share (t-1)	0.013***			
	(0.004)			
ÖVP council share (t-1)		-0.008**		
		(0.004)		
FPÖ council share (t-1)			0.004	
			(0.005)	
GRÜNE council share (t-1)				-0.003
				(0.007)
Women council share (t-1)	0.005	0.004	0.005	0.005
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Financial power (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	-0.015	-0.014	-0.013	-0.013
	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)
Debts (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	0.053	0.049	0.053	0.055
	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.045)
Unemployment rate (t-1)	0.004	0.004	0.005	0.006
	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)
Female employment rate (t-1)	0.007	0.007	0.007	0.007
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Share of population ≤ 6 yrs. (t-1)	-0.017	-0.017	-0.018	-0.017
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)
Childcare atlas category (t-1)	-0.629***	-0.629***	-0.628***	-0.627***
	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Observations	2,771	2,771	2,771	2,771
R^2	0.308	0.307	0.305	0.305
Adjusted R^2	0.178	0.176	0.175	0.174
F Statistic (df = 8; 2332)	129.831***	128.938***	127.996***	127.882***

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

Table A.14 Panel regression models with municipality and time fixed effects (mayor)

	Δ childcare quality category		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
SPÖ mayor (t-1)	-0.115		
	(0.099)		
ÖVP mayor (t-1)		0.031	
		(0.095)	
FPOE mayor (t-1)			0.234
			(0.187)
Female_mayor (t-1)	0.011	0.007	0.003
	(0.136)	(0.137)	(0.136)
Financial power (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	-0.014	-0.014	-0.014
	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Debts (in 1,000 per capita) (t-1)	0.051	0.050	0.049
	(0.044)	(0.044)	(0.044)
Unemployment rate (t-1)	0.004	0.005	0.004
	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.022)
Female employment rate (t-1)	0.003	0.004	0.004
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Share of population ≤ 6 yrs. (t-1)	-0.014	-0.015	-0.014
	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.027)
Childcare atlas category (t-1)	-0.619***	-0.620***	-0.621***
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)
Observations	2,918	2,918	2,918
R^2	0.305	0.305	0.305
Adjusted R^2	0.181	0.180	0.181
F Statistic (df = 8; 2475)	135.838***	135.559***	135.887***
Note:			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01