The Politics of the Nazi Past in Germany and Austria

This book argues that Germans and Austrians have dealt with the Nazi past very differently and that these differences have had important consequences for political culture and partisan politics in the two countries. Drawing on different literatures in political science, David Art builds a framework for understanding how public deliberation transforms the political environment in which it occurs. The book analyzes how public debates about the "lessons of history" created a culture of contrition in Germany that prevented a resurgent far right from consolidating itself in German politics after unification. By contrast, public debates in Austria nourished a culture of victimization that provided a hospitable environment for the rise of right-wing populism. The argument is supported by evidence from nearly 200 semistructured interviews and an analysis of the German and Austrian print media over a twenty-year period.

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For Julija

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Preface and Acknowledgments

This book analyzes the influence of the Nazi past on postwar German and Austrian politics. Given the omnipresence of that past in both societies, and given the tomes that have already been written on the subject of historical memory in Germany in particular, this was from the start an audacious enterprise. My interviewees often told me as much, and many friends feared that nothing really new could be written about the subject. Yet from the early stages of my research, I became convinced that the connections between ideas about the Nazi past, political culture, and partisan competition in the two societies had barely been uncovered. Sometimes it is the influence of the 800-pound gorilla in the room that is most difficult to measure. When the gorilla takes the form of an idea, rather than a structural or institutional force, elucidating and measuring its effects become even more difficult. Yet, ideas clearly matter in politics. Shying away from phenomena as significant as interpretations of the rise of Nazism and the Final Solution in the successor societies of the Third Reich was no longer an option once my inquiry began, attractive as it seemed at times.

I never intended to write about public deliberation and debates, much less offer a framework for analyzing the ways in which they can transform politics. Yet, the deeper I delved into ideas about the Nazi past, the clearer it became that the engine of ideational change was elite-led public debates. These public debates occurred in a discontinuous fashion and produced enduring legacies that shaped not only future debates about the Nazi past, but also the political environment more generally. I found intellectual sustenance for this observation from diverse fields in political science, borrowing liberally from studies of issue evolution, media effects, public

opinion, deliberative democracy, and historical institutionalism. My hope is that students and scholars working in these fields, whether or not they are intrinsically interested in the Nazi past, may find the approach I have taken useful.

One of my central arguments is that debates about the Nazi past have created very different environments for right-wing political parties and movements in Germany and Austria. I thus offer a political-cultural explanation for the divergent success of the postwar far right in Germany and Austria, one that challenges several of the prevailing theories in the literature. Although I admittedly do not test the hypothesis in this book, I believe that the long-term development of right-wing populist parties is critically influenced by the reaction of political parties, the media, and civil society to them. Despite several recent setbacks in some states (including Austria), their power and influence continue to grow in others. The rise of right-wing populist parties has clearly been one of the most dramatic changes in European politics over the past several decades, and uncovering the elements that help or hinder their development is an important area of research, particularly as European integration, immigration, and globalization raise the types of issues around which the far right appears positioned to mobilize.

It is a pleasure finally to be able to thank all the individuals and organizations that have contributed to this book. Fellowships from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and from the Program for the Study of Germany at the Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies at Harvard University supported two years of field research in Austria and Germany. A grant from the Center of International Studies at MIT allowed me to devote a summer to writing. Professor Karl Kaiser offered institutional support at the German Council on Foreign Relations in Berlin, where Heike Zanzig and Rüdiger Witke were of invaluable help. Gesine Schwann allowed me to participate in conferences at the European University Viadrina and helped me to extend my stay in Germany. In Austria, Anton Pelinka, Ruth Wodak, Heidemarie Uhl, and Walter Manoscheck taught me to navigate the Austrian political scene and provided much hospitality. Nearly two hundred people graciously agreed to be interviewed for this book, and I thank each and every one of them.

Many friends and colleagues commented on this project at various stages. For their helpful suggestions and moral support, I would like to thank Marcos Ancelovici, Steve Ansolabehere, Tim Bale, Adam Berinsky, Dan Carter, Elisabeth Carter, Josh Cohen, Doug Fuller, Kelly Greenhill,

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I owe substantial intellectual debts to scholars I studied with at Yale and MIT. Fascinating courses with Alex Wendt and Juan Linz spurred me to apply to graduate school in political science. My dissertation committee at MIT provided more guidance and support than I had any right to expect. Melissa Nobles gave me copious and insightful comments on more drafts than I would care to admit, and discussions with her often prevented me from going astray. Richard Samuels came on board to give this project a burst of enthusiasm and helpful criticism on the structure of the argument. I "recruited" Andrei Markovits from the University of Michigan for the dissertation that led to this book, and his deep knowledge of German and Austrian politics was a critical resource. His warmth, wit, and wisdom at crucial stages of this project were more important than he knows.

My greatest intellectual debt is to Suzanne Berger. It was she who made me enthusiastic about comparative politics in the first place, and her intellectual influence appears in multiple forms throughout this book. Suzanne's inimitable combination of unwavering support and razor-sharp criticism helped me grow as a scholar, and I thank her for all the guidance she has given me over the years.

Families are normally thanked last in books of this sort, not because they are an afterthought but rather because their contributions are often so fundamental to the success of the project and the emotional well-being of the author. Mine is no different and, given its academic bent, has contributed more directly than most to my own intellectual development. My father has set a standard in scholarship and professionalism in the field of international relations that I can aspire to. I can only dream of being as prolific and widely read as my mother, Suzanne, who writes history, or my sister Robyn, who writes poetry. I am grateful to have been raised in a family where learning is a way of life. I am also blessed to have found

a new family in Austria that shares similar values and makes fieldwork there a joy.

Finally, no one deserves more thanks than my wife, Julija. She claims to know little about political science, but I turn to her more often than anyone else for ideas, advice, and encouragement. Without her, this book would never have been written and I would not be so happy. I dedicate this work to her as a small token of my gratitude.

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