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Democratization and the Practices of Voting in Habsburg Austria, 1896–1914: New Directions in Research

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Abstract

From the mid-1890s, Habsburg Austria began to follow European trends and experienced a gradual democratization of voting rights, which involved not only an expansion of the electorate but also an innovation of procedures that attempted to modernize elections. In this context, the article calls for a more systematic study of voting practices and attempts to point at some issues that have thus far received insufficient analysis. These include not only the occasional massive violent conflicts at elections that could accompany democratization until World War I but also the presence of women as voters at local and diet elections and the gradual introduction of polling booths. Measures such as allowing single women to cast their vote personally in a few crownlands or attempting to guard the secrecy of the vote suggest the level of experimentation in this period. The state's objective of orderly, "modern" elections is particularly called into question when we consider the extent to which government agents, including policemen and the army, were involved in election conflicts that resulted in fraud and sometimes bloodshed.

Keywords: democratization; polling booth; election violence; voting practices; women's suffrage

From the second half of the nineteenth century, European states began to democratize elections by expanding the electorate and introducing new procedures for voting, notably ballots and polling booths. On the surface, the Austrian half of the Habsburg monarchy did not appear to be an exception in this development. From the mid-1890s, it slowly began to shed parts of the intricate and complex form of enfranchisement that it had introduced in the process of its constitutionalization in the early 1860s. As in the rest of Europe, the privilege to vote had been tied to specific levels of property ownership, tax payment, or higher education. However, Habsburg Austria had also regulated representation by a unique curial system that cast voters into so-called interest groups, defining the political influence of landed property versus that of urban and rural populations. Social and cultural diversity as well as gender were integrated in this multidimensional corporate system of representation in specific ways. From 1896 on, the government began to react to social change and the aspirations of Social Democratic, Christian Social, and various nationalist movements to political power by opening the right to vote to a larger electorate and introducing schemes for more equal representation of language groups. Nevertheless, elections were at times accompanied by violent conflicts in which voters and political groupings confronted both each other as well as authorities and the executive forces. Within these processes the government also began to implement new measures for the election process that—in a European and American context—were increasingly considered necessary features of a "modern" state at the time. It also started to experiment with the long-contested issue of women's suffrage, which was characterized by inconsistent practices at municipal and crownland elections. These innovations, however, were realized in a cautious and step-by-step manner. They had barely gained a foothold when World War I broke out.

The basics of the history of the election systems of Habsburg Austria have been laid out well by now, especially by Vasilij Melik's study of elections in the Slovenian-speaking crownlands¹ and the contributions on the representative bodies of the crownlands and the empire to volume VII of the Austrian Academy of Sciences' long-term project *Die Habsburgermonarchie, 1848–1918*.² However, there is far less systematic research on how elections proceeded; that is, on the practices of voting. As Raffaele Romanelli has observed, the election process is the crucial point in determining who in fact possessed the franchise and could make his or her voice heard.³ Studies on election fraud and violence, such as Melik's work, Harald Binder's book on elections in Galicia, and Eduard Winkler's study on Trieste,⁴ have presented valuable insights into the ramifications of a perspective that questions the voting power of individual citizens due to manipulations of election procedures. Thomas Stockinger's analysis of the 1848 election in the rural regions of Lower Austria (in comparison with the Département Seine-et-Oise in France) is, however, an excellent example of a comprehensive approach that includes election regulations and the election process, irrespective of whether these concerned fraud or spectacular events.⁵ Such an approach points to the implications of voting practices for a social and cultural history of Habsburg elections, a perspective on which international research on elections has increasingly focused since the 1990s, notably in Germany and France.⁶ Especially Yves Déloye and Olivier Ihl have emphasized the view of elections as a "social ritual" and "a staging, codified according to specific challenges and after multiple confrontations."⁷ The technologies of elections were and are always based on political interests.

This article attempts to point at issues that have received insufficient analysis so far and would benefit from systematic research of the election practices in Habsburg Austria. It centers on the period from the mid-1890s, when the vote was gradually democratized and innovations of election procedures eventually attempted to modernize elections as such. This period, however, was also characterized at times by massive violent conflicts. The three aspects presented here are not only chosen as key issues for this focus but also in regard to questioning some specific paradigms of existing historiography. The first aspect refers to elections as sites of violent conflict. Historiography has largely focused on violence that accompanied elections in Galicia. However, was Galicia such a specific case in Habsburg Austria? Can we already draw general conclusions on why violence erupted in connection with elections? And can we follow the assumption that has been made for Europe as a whole that violence at elections

¹Vasilij Melik, *Wahlen im alten Österreich: Am Beispiel der Kronländer mit slowenischsprachiger Bevölkerung* (Vienna, 1997).

²Helmut Rumpler and Peter Urbanitsch, eds., *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848 1918*, vol. 7, pts. 1 and 2 (Vienna, 2000); also Karl Ucakar, *Demokratie und Wahlrecht in Österreich: Zur Entwicklung von politischer Partizipation und staatlicher Legitimationspolitik* (Vienna, 1985); Franz Adlgasser, Jana Malínská, Helmut Rumpler, and Luboš Velek, eds., *Hohes Haus! 150 Jahre moderner Parlamentarismus in Österreich, Böhmen, der Tschechoslowakei und der Republik Tschechien im mitteleuropäischen Kontext* (Vienna, 2015); and Peter Urbanitsch, "Vom neoständischen Kurienparlament zum modernen Volkshaus—Die Liberalisierung des Reichsratswahlrechtes 1873–1911," *Anzeiger der philosophisch-historischen Klasse* 147, no. 1 (2012): 19–50. For an introduction in English see Birgitta Bader-Zaar, "From Corporate to Individual Representation: The Electoral Systems in Austria 1861–1918," in *How Did They Become Voters? The History of Franchise in Modern European Representation*, ed. Raffaele Romanelli (Den Haag, 1998), 295–339. For the level of local government see Jiří Klabouch, *Die Gemeindegeldverwaltung in Österreich* (Munich, 1968); and Jeremy King, "The Municipal and the National in the Bohemian Lands, 1848–1914," in *Austrian History Yearbook* 42 (2011): 89–109.

³Raffaele Romanelli, "Electoral Systems and Social Structures. A Comparative Perspective," in Romanelli, *How Did They Become Voters?*, 1–36, 7–8.

⁴Harald Binder, *Galizien in Wien: Parteien, Wahlen, Fraktionen und Abgeordnete im Übergang zur Massenpolitik* (Vienna, 2005); and Eduard Winkler, *Wahlrechtsreformen und Wahlen in Triest 1905–1909: Eine Analyse der politischen Partizipation in einer multinationalen Stadtregion der Habsburgermonarchie* (Munich, 2000).

⁵Thomas Stockinger, *Dörfer und Deputierte: Die Wahlen zu den konstituierenden Parlamenten von 1848 in Niederösterreich und im Pariser Umland (Seine-et-Oise)* (Vienna, 2012).

⁶To name just a few: Thomas Kühne, *Dreiklassenwahlrecht und Wahlkultur in Preußen 1867–1914: Landtagswahlen zwischen korporativer Tradition und politischem Massenmarkt* (Düsseldorf, 1994); Margaret Lavinia Anderson, *Practicing Democracy: Elections and Political Culture in Imperial Germany* (Princeton, 2000); Yves Déloye and Olivier Ihl, *L'acte de vote* (Paris, 2008); and Malcolm Crook, *How the French Learned to Vote: A History of Electoral Practice in France* (Oxford, 2021). See also the extensive bibliography by Hedwig Richter and Hubertus Buchstein, "Einleitung: Eine Neue Geschichte der Wahlen," in *Kultur und Praxis der Wahlen: Eine Geschichte der modernen Demokratie*, ed. Hedwig Richter and Hubertus Buchstein (Wiesbaden, 2017), 1–27.

⁷Déloye and Ihl, *L'acte de vote*, 11.

generally decreased in the early twentieth century?⁸ The second aspect focuses on the presence of women at the polls at local and diet elections. If mentioned at all, the complex issue of women's suffrage is often simplified by emphasizing that legislation prescribed voting by proxy and that women had been disfranchised from the 1880s on.⁹ As I have shown elsewhere and will outline here, personal voting by women became part of the cautious modernizing process of elections after the turn of the century.¹⁰ However, we generally also need to know in more detail how women voters participated in elections (where they were permitted to do so), be it by proxy or personally. The third aspect refers to a material history of the vote¹¹ and discusses the gradual introduction of polling booths as an attempt to ensure voter privacy, a topic that has not been addressed in studies on Habsburg elections so far. Using booths, however, was not mandatory. That voters could and did fill in (or were assisted in filling in) their ballots outside the polling station and could have their ballots inspected dispels the notion that universal and equal men's suffrage introduced in 1907 for parliamentary elections was as "modern" as has sometimes been assumed in historiography.¹²

Apart from building upon the excellent works by Vasilij Melik, Harald Binder, Eduard Winkler, and others, this study uses archival material from the Austrian State Archive and the Czech National Archive as well as (mainly) German-language newspapers accessible through ANNO, the Austrian National Library's collection of digitized newspapers.¹³ Such sources tend to emphasize what is regarded as exceptional and unusual rather than present everyday practices. For example, violence is reported, but the peaceful act of casting the ballot is not. A systematic study of voting practices can therefore only be conducted in micro-level analyses for a wide range of Austrian Crownlands. Thus, the general aims of the article are to illustrate that a focus on voting practices can enrich the social and cultural history of suffrage in Habsburg Austria and to call for more extensive research.

A Brief Survey of the Development of the Election System

Before presenting the actual cases, this section will outline the development of the election system in Habsburg Austria. After a brief interlude of participatory options during the revolutionary period of the late 1840s, elected bodies were (re)introduced in the early 1860s, starting with local councils on the municipal level and diets for the crownlands.¹⁴ From 1873 on, the Lower House of the Imperial Council was elected by the citizens of each crownland, instead of being composed by delegates from the crownland diets.

The right to vote was based on taxation of landed property, ownership of a house, or income from employment, business, and trade. In addition, more highly educated voters—clergy, government officials, retired military officers, university graduates, and teachers in public schools—could qualify. Enfranchisement was often age- and gender-neutral. Minors and women with property or female taxpayers were included in the franchise, regardless of whether they were single or married, on the municipal and diet levels.¹⁵ Exceptions were some of the statutory towns, such as Vienna, Prague, and Brno,

⁸As put forward by Richter/Buchstein, "Einleitung," 12 (citing Déloye and Ihl, *Le acte*).

⁹For example, Pieter Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, MA, 2016), 291.

¹⁰Birgitta Bader-Zaar, "Rethinking Women's Suffrage in the Nineteenth Century: Local Government and Entanglements of Property and Gender in the Austrian Half of the Habsburg Monarchy, Sweden, and the United Kingdom," in *Constitutionalism, Legitimacy, and Power: Nineteenth-Century Experiences*, ed. Kelly L. Grotke and Markus J. Prutsch (Oxford, 2014), 107–26; and Birgitta Bader Zaar and Carola Riedmann, "Stimmberechtigte Frauen vor 1918: Zum kommunalen, Landtags- und Reichsratswahlrecht für Frauen in der österreichischen Reichshälfte der Habsburgermonarchie," in *Sie meinen es politisch!* 100 Jahre Frauenwahlrecht in Österreich: Geschlechterdemokratie als gesellschaftspolitische Herausforderung, ed. Blaustrumpf ahoi! (Vienna, 2019), 65–79.

¹¹For the aspect of a material history of voting see Déloye and Ihl, *L'acte de vote*, 12.

¹²See, for example, the book title *Hundert Jahre allgemeines und gleiches Wahlrecht in Österreich: Modernes Wahlrecht unter den Bedingungen eines Vielvölkerstaates*, ed. Thomas Simon (Frankfurt, 2010).

¹³ANNO: *Historische Zeitungen und Zeitschriften*, <https://anno.onb.ac.at/>.

¹⁴For relevant literature see notes 1, 2, and 4.

¹⁵Married women could hold property in their own right as, according to the civil code of 1811, marriage was based on the separation of property and not coverture, as was the case, for example, in Britain.

which did not allow women to vote at all.¹⁶ In other municipalities their presence at the polls was usually not permitted, at least at the level of local government, and they had to vote by male proxy. Usually, women could also not be elected, though some crownlands were not explicit about this.¹⁷

The electoral system privileged certain strata of society, above all the wealthy and highly educated over the citizens paying lower taxes. At local elections, voters were grouped into three electoral bodies, respectively two in smaller communities, which benefited the representation of the more affluent segment of the population, including notables. Unequal representation was enhanced in larger towns by a higher absolute census. Nevertheless, the social stratification of voters was not always as clear-cut as the uniform election laws might suggest—at least in the earlier period of the 1860s and 1870s. Because the vote did not always rely on an absolute minimum tax and voters could rather qualify by belonging to the first two-thirds of the tax list in some communities, considerable variations in the necessary tax qualifications within a crownland were possible. This is particularly true of less wealthy crownlands such as Galicia, Dalmatia, and the Bukovina. On the whole, those crownlands with lower tax returns enforced broader regulations for enfranchisement, while the economically stronger ones had stricter qualifications. Further, as Vasilij Melik has established, proportions of voters were larger in rural communities than in towns, and in poorer agrarian regions than in the few industrialized parts of Cisleithania.¹⁸

On the crownland level, the vote in diet elections was based on that for local government. In addition, uneven representation was ensured by a system of corporate bodies, or curiae, officially defined as a “representation of interests.”¹⁹ Great landowners, usually defined as owners of real estate listed in registers for noble or feudal property with a minimum tax, and the chambers of commerce and industry were privileged over cities and towns, and the latter over rural villages. Furthermore, elections in the curiae of rural communities were indirect. Direct elections of the second chamber of the Imperial Council, introduced in 1873, were based on the curial system for the diets. At this level, women were only included among the voters of the curia of great landowners (respectively the most highly taxed in Dalmatia), most likely to strengthen this small curia’s influence.

In the following decades, notions of individual representation (for men) gradually began to gain acceptance, notably at the level of the Imperial Council. Generally, tax requirements were lowered for the curiae of cities and towns and also rural communities, and the introduction of the personal income tax in 1896 added voters on the local level as well. Also in 1896, an additional general curia that consisted exclusively of male voters was first adopted for elections of the Lower House of the Imperial Council, and was then gradually introduced for the elections of the crownland diets. However, members of the other curiae had a second vote in the general curia, aimed at diminishing its political clout. The curial system for the Imperial Council was finally abolished in 1906–7, with only male adults qualifying for the vote. This reform, however, did not significantly change the number of voters, especially as the residence requirement was extended to one year and remained at approximately 20 percent of the population.²⁰ Nevertheless, the government had given in to the

¹⁶On women’s suffrage see the literature mentioned in note 10 and Sabine Veits-Falk, “Das kommunale Frauenwahlrecht in Stadt und Land Salzburg vor 1918,” *Österreich in Geschichte und Literatur* 64, no. 1 (2020): 29–46. Scattered figures show quite considerable numbers of enfranchised women on the local level. In Bohemia, 20 percent of all voters were women in the 1880s, and about 25 percent in the cities of Graz (before 1897) and Salzburg (around 1900). See Peter Urbanitsch, “Die Gemeindevertretungen in Cisleithanien,” in *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848 1918*, vol. 7, pt. 2, ed. Helmut Rumpler and Peter Urbanitsch (Vienna, 2000), 2214. For numbers for Maribor, Ptuj, and Kranj see Melik, *Wahlen im alten Österreich*, 155.

¹⁷This led to the nomination of female candidates in Bohemia and Galicia, with one running successfully in Bohemia in 1912 (though she was prevented from occupying her seat in the end). Luboš Velek, “Der erste weibliche Abgeordnete der Habsburgermonarchie im Böhmischem Landtag 1912,” *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 26, no. 2 (2015): 41–69.

¹⁸Vasilij Melik, “Zusammensetzung und Wahlrecht der cisleithanischen Landtage,” in Rumpler and Urbanitsch, *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*, vol. 7, pt. 2, 1311–52.

¹⁹Minister Anton von Schmerling, cited in Ucakar, *Demokratie und Wahlrecht in Österreich*, 118. For the law see *Reichs-Gesetz-Blatt für das Kaiserthum Österreich* 1861/20 (26 Feb. 1861).

²⁰“Die Ergebnisse der Reichsrathswahlen in den im Reichsrathe vertretenen Königreichen und Ländern für das Jahr 1897,” in *Österreichische Statistik* 49/1 (1897), table VI; and “Die Ergebnisse der Reichsrathswahlen in den im Reichsrathe vertretenen Königreichen und Ländern im Jahre 1907,” in *Österreichische Statistik* 84/2 (1908).

demands of Social Democrats and Czech and Polish nationalist parties for universal and equal men's suffrage in the hope of shattering nationalist parliamentary obstruction by shifting power to the rising mass parties and thus allowing for a stable government.

Moreover, nationalist accusations of uneven representation were increasingly met with compromises introducing distinct electoral districts according to language affiliations based on the census, as was the case in Moravia in 1905 (for the German- and Czech-speaking populations), or later in the Bukovina in 1910 for Ruthenian, Romanian, Polish, and German speakers, and in Galicia in 1914 for the Ruthenian- and Polish-speaking populations.²¹

However, property, tax, and education qualifications as well as the curial system and, in some crownlands, women's enfranchisement, remained in place on the level of diets until the end of the Habsburg Empire. General curiae eventually began to be introduced, backed by uneven representation. Restricted qualification also persisted on the local level, where notables and elitist parties, rather than the new mass parties, continued to be the reference points for voters in smaller towns and communities.²²

Elections as Sites of Conflict and Violence

Elections in Habsburg Austria in the early period of voter participation from the 1860s to the mid-1890s did not differ much from those in other European countries. Bribes, brawls, and disputes were no Habsburg specialty. As elsewhere, specific factors in the regulation of elections were conducive to such incidents. Bernd Rottenbacher has collected a number of problematic issues for the elections of the 1860s.²³ For one, election sites could be far away from voters' homes and involve expensive, stressful, and even dangerous journeys, thus excluding elderly and ill voters and causing others to ask themselves whether the election was worth the trip. Given this, political groups sometimes organized transportation to polling sites, providing for the expenses and catering and thereby attempting to gain "subtle influence."²⁴ Due to local disputes, some voters refused to vote in the neighboring town that had been designed as the polling station for the constituency, or they opposed grouping several municipalities together to one election site, which happened, for example, in Moravia, where Jewish communities were in some cases assigned to Christian ones.²⁵ The legislature began to remedy these problems in the 1870s by creating more polling sites; however, implementation could drag on into the early twentieth century.²⁶ Despite the remedies, voter turnout remained low, for example between 20 and 30 percent in 1873, albeit with large differences between the crownlands.²⁷ As

²¹Gerald Stourzh, *Die Gleichberechtigung der Nationalitäten in der Verfassung und Verwaltung Österreichs 1848–1918* (Vienna, 1985); John Leslie, "Der Ausgleich in der Bukowina von 1910: Zur österreichischen Nationalitätenpolitik vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg," in *Geschichte zwischen Freiheit und Ordnung: Gerald Stourzh zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Emil Brix, Thomas Fröschl, and Josef Leidenfrost (Graz, 1991), 113–44; Gerald Stourzh, "The National Compromise in the Bukovina (1996)," in *From Vienna to Chicago and Back: Essays on Intellectual History and Political Thought in Europe and America*, ed. Gerald Stourzh (Chicago, 2007), 177–89; Gerald Stourzh, "The Ethnicizing of Politics and 'National Indifference' in Late Imperial Austria," in *Der Umfang der österreichischen Geschichte: Ausgewählte Studien 1990–2010*, ed. Gerald Stourzh (Vienna, 2011), 283–323; T. M. Kelly, "Last Best Chance or Last Gasp? The Compromise of 1905 and Czech Politics in Moravia," *Austrian History Yearbook* 34 (2003): 279–301; Börries Kuzmany, "Habsburg Austria: Experiments in Non-Territorial Autonomy," *Ethnopolitics* 15, no. 1 (2016): 43–65; and Börries Kuzmany, "The Rise and Limits of Participation: The Political Representation of Galicia's Urban Jewry from the Josephine Era to the 1914 Electoral Reform," *East Central Europe* 42, no. 3 (2015): 216–48.

²²See the handwritten additions and deletions on ballots that Hannes Stekl mentions for Retz (Lower Austria). Hannes Stekl, *Adel und Bürgertum in der Habsburgermonarchie 18. bis 20. Jahrhundert* (Vienna, 2004), 186; and King, "The Municipal and the National," 103–4.

²³Bernd Rottenbacher, *Das Februarpatent in der Praxis: Wahlpolitik, Wahlkämpfe und Wahlentscheidungen in den böhmischen Ländern der Habsburgermonarchie 1861–1871* (Frankfurt, 2001).

²⁴Ibid., 374.

²⁵Ibid., 377–80.

²⁶Ibid., 372; and Melik, *Wahlen im alten Österreich*, 173–74.

²⁷Peter Urbanitsch, "Die Wahlen des Jahres 1873 zum cisleithanischen Reichsrat anhand ausgewählter Wahlbezirke der Wählerklasse der Landgemeinden und der Städte, Märkte und Industrialorte," in *Hohes Haus! 150 Jahre moderner*

Peter Urbanitsch has noted, a number of voters probably agreed with criticism that the many elections at the national, crownland, and municipal levels were a nuisance as they saw little effect in their vote, especially as the authorities could be relevant actors in election manipulations.²⁸

A major change in the process of voting occurred when universal suffrage for men was realized within the election system of the curiae in 1896.²⁹ The new fifth, general, curia now represented both property and function as well as the adult male population because the voters of the first four curiae received a second vote in the fifth one. The number of votes rose considerably, no doubt aided by the reduction of the minimum direct tax requirement for voters in the curiae of cities, towns, and rural communities from five to four florins.³⁰ Approximately 20 percent of the population had the right to vote,³¹ despite both a residency requirement of at least six months in a community and the disfranchisement of active military personnel and the police. In addition, indirect elections, the mode of voting in the curiae of rural communities and the general curia, was increasingly changed to direct elections, and voter turnouts began to show a correlation between direct ballots and voter participation.³² This election reform, initially introduced for the Imperial Council, was also established for diet elections in the following years.

The introduction of the general curia, however, also resulted in an escalation of incidents at the polling sites, which is documented by material from the Austrian state archive under the title “Exzesse.”³³ Against the backdrop of new rival parties emerging, election gatherings generally adopted a harsher tone.³⁴ Numerous reports in the press documented upheaval and violence at polling sites, as did reports by individuals and interpellations to parliament on election fraud. Especially popular in the Bukovina and Galicia, for example, was the arbitrary closure of polling stations to keep peasants from casting their vote.³⁵

In some cases, conflict was strongly linked to antisemitism.³⁶ The long tradition of threats against Jewish voters is illustrated in Jeremy King’s book *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans*. King also shows how violence against Jews escalated after 1897, with especially Jewish shops and houses being targeted by window smashing, for example during a riot in 1898.³⁷ Such incidents were not limited to Budweis or Bohemia³⁸ but also occurred in Galicia.³⁹ Politicians of opposing parties considered Jews a decisive factor at elections.⁴⁰ Moreover, antisemitism could occur at election sites. Polling places were not necessarily located in municipal buildings or schools but could be set up in less respectable

Parlamentarismus in Österreich, Böhmen, der Tschechoslowakei und der Republik Tschechien im mitteleuropäischen Kontext, ed. Franz Adlgasser, Jana Malínská, Helmut Rumpler, and Luboš Velek (Vienna, 2015), 166–67.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹*Reichsgesetzblatt für die im Reichsrathe vertretenen Königreiche und Länder* (RGBl.) 1896/168, 169 (14 June 1896).

³⁰RGBl. 1896/226 (5 Dec. 1896).

³¹See note 20.

³²A. L. Hickmann, *Der österreichische Reichsrath 1873–1901: Seine Parteien und Wahlverhältnisse* (Vienna, n.d.). The curiae were separated at elections and voted at different times, with the rural communities, as the curia with the weakest representation, starting off. In practice, this system made it possible that a candidate who had failed in one of the lower curiae could still be pushed through in a higher one. Melik, *Wahlen im alten Österreich*, 174.

³³Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv (OeStA/AVA) Inneres Präs Varia, K. 47 and 48, Reichsratswahlen 1897 Exzesse Böhmen, Galizien.

³⁴For the local level see, for example, Marie Tošnerová, “Beraun—Im Sog fortschreitender Modernisierung,” in Urbanitsch and Stekl, *Kleinstadtbürgertum*, 149; Hubert Weitensfelder, “Bregenz—Liberalismus und Tourismus am Bodensee,” in Urbanitsch and Stekl, *Kleinstadtbürgertum*, 188–90; and Daniel Unowsky, *The Plunder: The 1898 Anti-Jewish Riots in Habsburg Galicia* (Stanford, 2018), 37.

³⁵For examples see Binder, *Galizien in Wien; Die Reichsrathswahlen in Ostgalizien im Jahre 1897. Verfasst vom Ausschusse des ruthenischen Landeswahlcomites* (Vienna, 1898); Johanna Ott, “Landespolitik in der Bukovina an den Beispielen der Reichsrats- und Landtagswahlen zwischen 1900 und 1907” (Diploma thesis, University of Vienna, 2005).

³⁶See especially *Die Reichsrathswahlen in Ostgalizien im Jahre 1897*, 55–56.

³⁷Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848–1948* (Princeton, 2002), 99.

³⁸OeStA/AVA Inneres Präs I/3 Varia K. 47 Reichsratswahlen 1897 Exzesse, Böhmen.

³⁹Unowsky, *The Plunder*. See also Tim Buchen, *Antisemitism in Galicia: Agitation, Politics, and Violence against Jews in the Late Habsburg Monarchy*, trans. Charlotte Hughes-Kreutzmüller (New York, 2020); originally published in German as *Antisemitismus in Galizien: Agitation, Gewalt und Politik gegen Juden in der Habsburgermonarchie um 1900* (Berlin, 2012).

⁴⁰On Jewish representation see Kuzmany, “The Rise and Limits of Participation.”

locations such as inns, which, in turn, led to other problems of election fraud. For example, in 1897 the Ministry of the Interior received reports about the consequences of choosing an inn as a polling station in the Bohemian town of Čivice/Čiwitz in the district of Pardubice with accordingly drunk (Social Democratic) voters.⁴¹ In the antisemitic climate of Galicia, however, taverns or mills were perceived as “Jewish” spaces, especially because taverns were assumed to be sites where peasants were being deliberately made drunk for the benefit of Jewish usurers.⁴² These accusations were now directed against the election of Jewish members of the electoral college who were considered to be “government candidates.”

The most radical escalation concerned riots that resulted in wounded and dead persons. Pieter Judson has documented how peasants in the village of Dawidów/Davidiv in Galicia attacked the election official Stanislav Popel on 13 March 1897 because of allegations of electoral fraud, and, after he had shot one of his attackers, beat him to death.⁴³ Newspapers reported further incidents: a voter was killed by the gendarmerie after riots due to electoral fraud in Czerniejów/Černijiv, and peasants attacked the mayor in Komarno.⁴⁴ In Skole the military shot into the crowd and wounded several people.⁴⁵ The Ruthenian report on the 1897 elections in Eastern Galicia listed further incidents of violence.⁴⁶

Such violent riots were not limited to Galicia, however. A box in the Austrian State Archive containing reports on the “excesses” at the 1897 parliamentary elections in Galicia also includes the fragment of a report concerning the election of the electoral college by the general curia on 23 February 1897 in Albona/Labin, a small municipality on the coast of Istria.⁴⁷ It refers to a complaint by Croatian-speaking voters from rural areas who had come into town to vote but did not make it to the polls and therefore applied to annul the election. Their report underlines the significance of secure spaces both inside and outside the polling station. The polling station was located in the municipal building, which could only be accessed through a narrow alley in the winding town. The Croatian voters reported that this alley was crowded with Italian factioneers who did not allow the Croatians to pass. They were “insulted and mocked,” and “the townspeople threatened to pour ‘hot water and hot oil’” on them. Only a clergyman managed to reach “the large hall in front of the polling station,” where he was insulted and allegedly threatened with a knife so that he left without voting. The remaining eight hundred—or rather, as the election commissioner estimated, five hundred—voters also left the town for fear of bloodshed, having furthermore been prevented from buying anything to eat or drink in the town. The official report produced after the election commissioner and six gendarmes on duty during the election had been interrogated does not give the impression that these officers took the complaint seriously or had intended to interfere. They presented quite a different picture: the alley leading to the building was only about eighty paces long. The anteroom of the polling station had been almost empty, and the polling site had only been slightly crowded early in the day.

Indeed, the role authorities and executive forces played at elections was contested. We have numerous examples from Bohemia and Galicia that point to attempts, supported both by the gendarmerie and the military, to deny voters of lower social strata and opposing groups entry to the polling station.⁴⁸ Furthermore, voters were confronted with organized gangs who tried to steal their legitimization cards, which were required for entering the polling station.⁴⁹ As Harald Binder

⁴¹OeStA/AVA Inneres PräS I/3 Varia K. 47 Reichsratswahlen 1897 Exzesse, Böhmen.

⁴²Binder, *Galizien in Wien*, 299–300; Unowsky, *The Plunder*, 35; *Die Reichsrathswahlen in Ostgalizien im Jahre 1897*, 55–60.

⁴³Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, 353; Binder, *Galizien in Wien*, 227; *Neue Freie Presse*, 12 Mar. 1897.

⁴⁴*Neue Freie Presse*, 28 Feb. 1897, p. 4; 1 Mar. 1897, p. 4.

⁴⁵*Neue Freie Presse*, 6 Mar. 1897, pp. 5–6.

⁴⁶*Die Reichsrathswahlen in Ostgalizien im Jahre 1897*, e.g., 56.

⁴⁷OeStA/AVA Inneres PräS I/3 Varia K. 48 Reichsratswahlen 1897 Exzesse, Galizien. See also *Naša Sloga*, 4 Mar. 1897, p. 2 for reports on election fraud from the Croatian perspective.

⁴⁸Binder, *Galizien in Wien*, 299–300.

⁴⁹The cards increasingly became a source of controversy when mass parties such as the Christian Socials and the Social Democrats regularly accused each other of sabotage by not sending the legitimization cards by mail, as was intended. See, e.g., Promemoria of the Reichsrat members Ganser, Hock, Neumann, Ofner, and Zenker on the conduct of the city council elections in Vienna, OeStA/AVA Inneres PräS I/3 31 LTwahlen NÖ 1910–1918 K. 2197, Prot.Nr. 1795 ex 1914, 18 Feb. 1914. Therefore, announcements in newspapers reminded voters before elections to contact the political authorities if they had not received their card.

notes, the usual comment was that the gendarmerie watched but did not intervene.⁵⁰ Such examples that underline how voters could become the object of close collaboration between the authorities and political interests were not limited to Bohemia and Galicia. A parliamentary interpellation of 1911 concerning an election district of the German-speaking community in Moravia reports that almost all of the workers included as voters in the electoral register were employed by the Rothschild ironworks in Vítkovice/Witkowitz. On election day they had to pass through a military cordon and were entertained with food and drink before and after voting. The community police were said to have taken part in the election agitation in uniform, marking ballot papers for businessmen and workers with the name of a certain candidate.⁵¹

Election manipulations decreased substantially after the 1900–1 parliamentary elections in Galicia, when internal instructions ordered the administrative authorities to proceed more cautiously.⁵² Substantial change was also to be expected from the repeal of corporate representation with the introduction of universal and equal suffrage for men at the 1907 parliamentary elections, as well as at direct elections. The reform of 1907 resulted in higher voter participation, which rose to 84.6 percent.⁵³ This increase, however, was also due to the fact that mandatory voting had been introduced in some crownlands—notably in those with few or no problems with election riots: Lower Austria, Moravia, Upper Austria, Salzburg, Silesia, and Vorarlberg. Furthermore, manipulations in the form of distributing “food and beverages and other luxury goods on election day at fake prices or free of charge” were now to be penalized.⁵⁴ The law’s aim was to ensure peace at the polling station. Access was to be undisturbed, and voters were to leave immediately after having cast their vote. In Trieste, for example, guards permitted only small groups into the polling station and then locked it.⁵⁵ The removal of impediments to voting and more equal representation had been a target of the election reform as well. New constituencies were to allow for more polling stations and more homogeneous representation according to language affiliation. The compromises negotiated for Moravia and later the Bukovina intensified these attempts.

However, despite the efforts laid down in law to hold elections in an orderly fashion, clashes and violence continued. The parliamentary elections of 1907 and 1911 were again accompanied by numerous instances of unrest. In 1907, violent riots between Social Democrats and liberal nationalists broke out in Trieste. Similar clashes were reported from Czernovitz/Chernivtsi in the Bukovina,⁵⁶ while smaller ones occurred between Social Democrats and Christian Socials in Vienna and between Christian Socials and defeated German Nationalists and Social Democrats in Wolfsberg, Carinthia.⁵⁷ Elections in Lviv/Lemberg were heavily guarded by the military.⁵⁸ The case of the oil town of Drohobycz/Drohobyč, where the military fired into the crowds on 19 June 1911, killing twenty-six people, including women and children, has become notorious. Apparently, conflicts with supporters of the Zionist and Social Democratic parties were involved, as was the fact that Jewish and Ruthenian voters, who were not known supporters of the government candidate, were denied access to the polling place.⁵⁹ In contrast, state authorities in Bohemia had prepared for unrest, as a memorandum by the governor of Bohemia to the district commissioners from 17 June 1911, two days before the incident of Drohobycz, shows. It demanded that all possible precautions should be

⁵⁰Binder, *Galizien in Wien*, 300.

⁵¹Narodni archiv, IM Präsidium, K. 213, Z. 5131/1912. The head of the district administration of Mährisch-Ostrau rejected all these allegations.

⁵²Binder, *Galizien in Wien*, 303–6.

⁵³Ucakar, *Demokratie und Wahlrecht in Österreich*, 358.

⁵⁴RGBl. 1907/18, 26 Jan. 1907.

⁵⁵Winkler, *Wahlrechtsreformen und Wahlen in Triest*, 188–89.

⁵⁶*Neue Freie Presse*, 16 May 1907, p. 5; Ott, “Landespolitik in der Bukowina.”

⁵⁷*Neue Freie Presse*, 24 May 1907, p. 3; Rudolf Siegl, “Die Reichsratswahlen in Kärnten (1861–1911)” (MA thesis, Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt, 2014), 86–87.

⁵⁸*Neue Freie Presse*, 18 May 1907, p. 3.

⁵⁹Binder, *Galizien in Wien*, 292; Joshua Shanes, *Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity in Habsburg Galicia* (Cambridge, 2012), 279; Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, 2.

taken to prevent violent riots and guarantee the exercise of the vote.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, clashes between Social Democrats and National Socialists, during which shots were fired and fifteen people were wounded, occurred in Plzeň/Pilsen. The police were helpless, as the *Neue Freie Presse* stated.⁶¹ Confrontations were also reported from Trieste—between Social Democrats, National Liberals, and Slovenians—and from Stanislau/Stanisławów/Stanislaviv in Galicia, where a gendarme and a student were wounded.⁶² In Prague the police prevented clashes between Social Democrats and National Socialists; and in Ostrava/Mährisch-Ostrau the military dissolved a Social Democratic demonstration. Vienna, or more precisely the Brigittenau, was another site of violent clashes between Social Democrats and Viennese security guards.⁶³ All these cases underline the growing involvement of Social Democrats in election conflicts as their political potential rose due to universal men's suffrage, at least at parliamentary elections.⁶⁴

In conclusion, fraud, upheaval, and violence were evidently linked to class, antisemitism, and the interest of ruling factions or parties to retain power. These ruling factions increasingly perceived Social Democrats as a threat, though their support was also coveted at times, for example at runoff elections.⁶⁵ According to newspaper reports, violence continued to be a feature of elections in some crownlands until World War I, and the geographical distribution of violence certainly exceeded Galicia. However, the reports also leave us with the impression that the incidents seem to have been most common in crownlands in which nationalist strife was dominant. Clearly, we need to take into account the various local issues and contexts on which violence was based. As Pieter Judson has aptly noted, “Political violence was not simply a characteristic of nationalist conflict but reflected the stakes that many people held in the functioning of a political system that they believed gave them the opportunity to shape their town's future in the context of a larger imperial system.”⁶⁶ Furthermore, more micro-level studies of crownlands that were considered to have more peaceful elections are necessary to determine other ways in which conflicts were fought out, resolved, or evaded. The role of notables and authorities needs to be explained, as well as that of the executive forces, as the example from Istria underlines, which illustrates how difficult it was to maintain regular elections in the eyes of voters.

The Presence of Women at the Polls

Reports of violent incidents at elections show us that not only voters were present in the vicinity of the polling stations but also a wider public—women, children, and other nonvoters. As Pieter Judson has remarked, the bloodbath at Drohobycz in 1911 is a case in point. Elections, however, were also marked as festive occasions, in which the families of voters or whole villages participated.⁶⁷ For example, after the absolute tax qualification had been lowered in 1882, newly enfranchised Viennese citizens proudly had their wives and children accompany them to the polls.⁶⁸ Still, women were not only an adornment to politics or observers of election days, we also know of some who were present at elections as voters.

As mentioned in the preceding text, women were enfranchised in a number of towns and rural communities for local government and diet elections if they qualified on account of property and taxation.⁶⁹ Their number fluctuated, depending on the municipality, but could in some cases reach a fifth

⁶⁰Státní okresní archiv Hradec Králové, Okresní úřad Hradec Králové I, prezidiální spisy, inv. čís. 1522, 1911, K. 340, Nr. 202, no. 12.533.

⁶¹Also, for the following: *Neue Freie Presse*, 21 June 1911, pp. 9–10.

⁶²*Neue Freie Presse*, 19 June 1911, p. 3. Also in Aussig/Ústí nad Labem.

⁶³*Neue Freie Presse*, 14 June 1911, pp. 5–9.

⁶⁴*Neue Freie Presse*, 28 Feb. 1897, p. 3, on Bohemia, where brawls occurred between Young Czechs and Social Democrats.

⁶⁵See, e.g., Gabriele Fröschl, “Wels—Im Schatten der Landeshauptstadt,” in Urbanitsch and Stekl, *Kleinstadtbürgertum*, 394. See also Claire Morelon, “Social Conflict, National Strife, or Political Battle? Violence and Strikebreaking in Late Habsburg Austria,” *European History Quarterly* 49 (2019): 650–76.

⁶⁶Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, 355; also, Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), ch. 6: “Violence in the Village.”

⁶⁷Rottenbacher, *Das Februarpatent in der Praxis*, 383–85; Winkler, *Wahlrechtsreformen und Wahlen in Triest*, 197.

⁶⁸*Neue Freie Presse*, 2 June 1885, p. 2: “Fünfguldenmänner Wähler nehmen ihre Familien in Wien zum Wahllokal mit.”

⁶⁹For details, see the literature mentioned in note 10.

of the voters or even exceed a quarter, as in the town of Salzburg in 1909.⁷⁰ Universal suffrage in the new general curiae, however, was always defined as male. At least in the case of elections at the local government level, the law ordered women voters to be represented by a proxy, for example the husband in the case of married couples. In contrast, the early regulations of 1861 for the elections of diets only mentioned personal votes. This contradiction between municipal or community and diet elections led to widespread confusion about how election officials were to deal with women's votes. In the early diet elections of the 1860s they sometimes accepted ballots delivered personally by women. Others only allowed voting by proxy or rejected women's votes altogether, regardless of the form in which they were cast.⁷¹ From the 1880s on, some crownlands adapted diet election laws to reflect those for the Imperial Council and excluded women from enfranchisement on this level altogether, except—as with parliamentary elections—in the curiae of great landowners (Bukovina, Carinthia, Carniola, Istria, Lower Austria, Moravia, Styria, Upper Austria).⁷² Other diets, however, continued to permit women to vote.

Women voting in person or by proxy, however, worried politicians throughout the final decades of Habsburg Austria. The appearance of women in such a political place as the polling station contradicted the prevailing gender ideal of separate spheres, according to which women were assigned to the private domain of the home and family. As the Electoral Reform Committee of the diet of Lower Austria pointed out in 1888, respectable women had no business being present at election sites as these were becoming more and more lively. Polling stations were being “besieged by dense swarms of eager voters and appointed agitators, so that even men need a heavy dose of resilience and self-control in order to push their way through the crowd, to defy scornful remarks and sometimes gross insults.”⁷³ No decent woman should expose herself to such treatment. Above all, members of diets were often concerned that their political opponents besieged women voters, urging them to sign the notification of proxy in their favor or probably even forging these women's signatures.⁷⁴ As a result, many diets discussed abolishing women's suffrage altogether, especially when the Imperial Court issued verdicts in favor of women in the mid-1890s, arguing that the regulations for elections of the diets clearly provided that women were to vote personally and not by proxy. Thus, municipal suffrage for women was put to an end in the Bukovina (1908) and Graz (1897).⁷⁵

Some crownlands, nevertheless, allowed women to continue to vote personally or introduced personal voting at least for single women as a new measure, as was the case for municipal elections in Lower Austria in 1904 and for the statutory town of Wiener Neustadt in 1912, for both municipal and diet elections in Vorarlberg in 1909, and for municipal elections in Upper Austria in 1914 (though this amendment did not come into force here before World War I).⁷⁶ While husbands were usually

⁷⁰Sabine Veits-Falk, “Das kommunale Frauenwahlrecht in Stadt und Land Salzburg vor 1918,” *Österreich in Geschichte und Literatur* 64 (2020): 39. See also Urbanitsch, “Gemeindevertretungen,” 2214.

⁷¹Vasilij Melik, “The Representation of Germans, Italians and Slovenes in Ljubljana, Trieste, Maribor and Other Neighbouring Towns from 1848 until the Second World War,” in *Comparative Studies on Governments and Non-Dominant Ethnic Groups in Europe, 1850–1940*, vol. 4, *Governments, Ethnic Groups and Political Representation*, ed. Geoffrey Alderman, John Leslie, and Klaus Erich Pollmann (Aldershot, 1993), 134; Jiří Malíř, “Die Teilnahme von Frauen an den Ergänzungswahlen in den mährischen Landtag 1865,” in *Magister noster. Sborník statí věnovaných in memoriam prof. PhDr. Janu Havránkovi, Csc.*, ed. Michal Svatoš, Luboš Velek, and Alice Velková (Prague, 2005), 419–31; and Birgitta Bader-Zaar, “Das Frauenwahlrecht vor Gericht. Reklamationen und Beschwerden in der österreichischen Reichshälfte der Habsburgermonarchie,” in *Reflexe a sebereflexe ženy v českénárodní elitě 2. poloviny 19. století*, ed. Milan Vojáček (Prague, 2007), 13.

⁷²For an overview see the table in Bader-Zaar and Riedmann, “Stimmberechtigte Frauen,” 70–71.

⁷³*Stenographische Protocolle des Landtages für das Erzherzogthum Oesterreich unter der Enns, Beilagen*. 5th sess., 6th election period, vol. 1, no. 5, p. 3 (6 July 1888).

⁷⁴Bader-Zaar, “Das Frauenwahlrecht vor Gericht,” 12–13; Veits-Falk, “Das kommunale Frauenwahlrecht,” 37; and Carola Riedmann, “Kommunales und Landtagwahlrecht für Frauen? Die Beispiele der Kronländer Salzburg und Vorarlberg (1861–1918)” (Diploma thesis, University of Vienna, 2021), ch. 6. For a picture of such an authorization see Veits-Falk, “Das kommunale Frauenwahlrecht,” 33.

⁷⁵For the verdicts see Bader-Zaar, “Das Frauenwahlrecht vor Gericht,” 15–17. For the abolition of women's suffrage see the table in Bader-Zaar and Riedmann, “Stimmberechtigte Frauen,” 70–71; and Bader-Zaar, “Rethinking Women's Suffrage,” 120.

⁷⁶*Landes-Gesetz- und Verordnungs-Blatt für das Erzherzogthum Österreich unter der Enns 1904/76 and 1912/187; Gesetz- und Verordnungsblatt für die gefürstete Grafschaft Tirol und das Land Vorarlberg 1909/16; H. Slapnicka and G. Marckhgott, *Aufbau der Demokratie: Politik und Verwaltung Oberösterreichs 1861–1918* (Linz, 1987), 57–58.*

accepted as proxies, following the “natural” order of family relations, politicians were more comfortable here with single women voting personally, instead of complying with the unpredictable attempts of opponents trying to gain signatures on the proxy notifications. Moreover, women were considered to favor conservatives and were therefore viewed as a curb to “radical” voters—that is, the Social Democrats enfranchised in the general curia, as the case of Vorarlberg shows.⁷⁷

Information on how women experienced personal voting is yet to be determined, and it remains to be seen if the lack of reports indicates the absence of unpleasant incidents. The case of Ljubljana, where the new municipal election law also provided for personal ballots for those women owning property in their own right in 1910, suggests the opposite. Female voters had to cast their ballot at a separate polling station. Despite this spatial separation, they were accosted on the way to the polling place: Slovenian clericals tried to force their party’s ballot papers onto the women, and the car that drove nuns from the convent of St. Ursula to the polling station—with a dispensation from the Pope—was spat at by supporters of the anticlerical Slovenian liberals and had to be protected by the gendarmerie.⁷⁸

Modernization of Voting Technology: “Secret” Ballots and the Polling Booth

According to media coverage, the crownlands in the Alpine regions with stable conservative majorities seem to have had distinctly fewer problems with political clashes and riots during election time. Vorarlberg and Lower Austria were thus not only singled out as allowing the presence of single women at the polls but also became sites for further experimenting with the modernization of elections. As early as the 1870s, voting in election meetings, where votes were recorded verbally and in public, had given way to individual voting using ballots. Voting in public had led to leakage of information and fraudulent methods of gathering voters together and requiring them to vote for a candidate who was at risk of losing. Bohemia, Lower Austria, Salzburg, and the Tyrol belonged to the forerunners in abandoning election meetings. Some crownlands, however, only began to use ballots in the early twentieth century, perhaps reflecting the slower rise of literacy rates.⁷⁹ The election law of 1873 for the Imperial Council still only provided for ballots in the curiae of great landowners and cities and towns. With the introduction of the general curia in 1896 these were implemented in all curiae, together with the abolition of the roll call of voters, which was also gradually adopted by the diets.⁸⁰ Where indirect elections still prevailed, however, the primary elections in the curia of rural communities and the general curia were based on the election regulations of the crownland, so they could continue to be public,⁸¹ as was the case in the aforementioned example of Albona/Labin in Istria.

Ballots did not guarantee secret voting, however, as they were sent home to the voters before the elections, together with legitimation cards listing the name of the voter. They could be filled in beforehand—and controlled. As the *Österreichisches Staatswörterbuch* stated: “Filling out the ballot is a private matter that takes place outside the polling station and, in any case, is not part of the electoral process.”⁸² It was certainly not regarded a private matter by employers (who also controlled voting behavior by giving employees permission to go to the polls as elections were held on working days), the church, or parties that had an interest in inspecting the ballots, an important point particularly regarding illiterate voters.⁸³ In Galicia, for example, where the rate of illiteracy was still very high in

⁷⁷This was the idea behind enfranchising women with a low tax qualification in the general curia with universal men’s suffrage in the larger towns of Vorarlberg. *Gesetz- und Verordnungsblatt für die gefürstete Grafschaft Tirol und das Land Vorarlberg* 1909/16, §§ 16, 17, 18. The act only applied to towns with more than 4,000 inhabitants.

⁷⁸Bader-Zaar and Riedmann, “Stimmberechtigte Frauen,” 72; *Neue Freie Presse*, 24 Apr. 1911, p. 5; 25 Apr. 1911, p. 7; *Reichspost*, 27 Apr. 1911, p. 4.

⁷⁹Such as Gorizia and Istria in 1907 and 1908, respectively. Melik, *Wahlen im alten Österreich*, 178.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 177.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 178.

⁸²Ludwig Spiegel, “Wahlen: B. Landtagswahlen,” in *Österreichisches Staatswörterbuch*, vol. 3, ed. Ernst Mischler and Josef Ulbrich (Vienna, 1907), 913.

⁸³For examples concerning especially conflicts with the Social Democrats about this issue see Narodni archiv, IM Präsidium, Sign. 34/2, K. 212, Z. 5565/1911, Z. 7662/1911.

1910 (more than 40 percent),⁸⁴ the district authorities only handed the ballots over at the polling station, where officially commissioned—and often corrupt—clerks would fill them out for the peasants.⁸⁵ In Trieste, women affiliated with the Social Democratic Party practically guarded the area in front of the polling station at the 1907 elections to prevent other parties from distributing their own lists of candidates to voters, who could then stick them onto their ballots.⁸⁶ Although the law of 1907 for parliamentary elections was the first to stipulate that “for the purpose of filling out the ballot papers, writing props and the necessary pieces of furniture have to be provided by the municipalities concerned,”⁸⁷ the polling station continued to be the place where voters primarily cast their (official) ballot in the ballot box. It was not necessarily the place where the ballot was filled out “secretly,” as the completed ballot could still be brought along from home.

While polling booths were used in the Reichstag elections in Germany from 1903 (where an envelope for the ballot was also handed out) and had been widely discussed elsewhere in Europe, especially in France,⁸⁸ these debates did not immediately resonate in Habsburg Austria.⁸⁹ Only from 1908, the idea of polling booths seems to have gained a foothold. It was included in the election laws for the diet and municipalities with more than two thousand inhabitants in Vorarlberg⁹⁰ and was introduced in Lower Austria, first for the statutory towns of Waidhofen an der Ybbs and Wiener Neustadt in 1912 and subsequently in the amendment to the 1914 Upper Austrian municipal election law, which, however, did not come into effect before the beginning of World War I.⁹¹ The introduction of polling booths had been demanded by both Christian and Social Democratic workers to strengthen the secret ballot and keep undue influence at bay.⁹² The aim was to achieve “elections that were as pure as possible,” as the rapporteur announced in the Lower Austrian Diet in February 1912.⁹³ Some concerns were voiced that elections would take far too long if everyone entered a polling booth,⁹⁴ but in practice there seem to have been no problems in this regard.

Nevertheless, polling booths initially did generate some suspicion. A few voters refused to enter the contraption, but their votes were usually accepted anyhow.⁹⁵ An article in the *Arbeiterzeitung* describes the presence of servants in Wiener Neustadt who opened the curtain to the booth for the voters. Some allegedly did not dare to lift the curtain themselves when they wanted to leave and either slipped out underneath it or just waited inside for something to happen.⁹⁶ Despite ballots being available at the polling station, voters could still bring their own official ballots. Inside a polling booth, they inserted

⁸⁴“Die Ergebnisse der Volkszählung vom 31. Dezember 1910 in den im Reichsrat vertretenen Königreichen und Ländern,” *Österreichische Statistik* 1, no. 2 (1914): 41.

⁸⁵Binder, *Galizien in Wien*, 307.

⁸⁶Winkler, *Wahlrechtsreformen und Wahlen in Triest*, 188–89, 197. The legality of ballots with the name of a candidate glued onto them, instead of personally writing it down, was discussed by the authorities, e.g., in Bohemia. Narodni archiv, PM 1891–, České mistodržitelství Praha—presidium 1891–1900, K. 1891, Z. 3246/1897; PM 1900–, České mistodržitelství Praha—presidium 1901–1910, K.2799, Z. 8786/1907, Z. 9079 circ.; IM Präsidium, Sign. 34/2, K. 213, Z. 1918/1912.

⁸⁷RGBl. 1907/17, § 23.

⁸⁸See Malcolm Crook and Tom Crook, “L’isoloir universel? La globalisation du scrutin secret au XIXe siècle,” *Revue d’histoire du XIXe siècle* 43, no. 2 (2011): 41–55; Alain Garrigou, *Les secrets de l’isoloir* (Paris, 2012); Crook, *How the French Learned to Vote*, ch. 5; Hedwig Richter, “Die Konvergenz der Wahltechniken und die Konstruktion des modernen Wählers in Europa und Nordamerika,” in *Normalität und Fragilität: Demokratie nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg*, ed. Tim B. Müller and Adam Tooze (Hamburg, 2015), 70–90; and Isabela Mares, *From Open Secrets to Secret Voting: Democratic Electoral Reforms and Voter Autonomy* (Cambridge, 2015), ch. 6.

⁸⁹See also Winkler, *Wahlrechtsreformen und Wahlen in Triest*, 188.

⁹⁰*Gesetz- und Verordnungsblatt für die gefürstete Grafschaft Tirol und das Land Vorarlberg* 1909/14 (13 Jan. 1909), § 31; 1909/16, § 58.

⁹¹*Landesgesetzblatt Erzherzogtum Österreich unter der Enns* 1912/187 (2 Nov. 1912), § 37; 1912/188 (2 Nov. 1912), § 37; see also the ordinance 1913/13 (17 Jan. 1913). Interestingly, these laws also contained another novelty: namely, proportional representation.

⁹²“Christlichsoziale Arbeiter verlangen Wahlzelle auf dem 9. Parteitag 1911,” *Reichspost*, 9 Sept. 1911, p. 2.

⁹³*Stenographische Protokolle des Niederösterreichischen Landtages*, X. Wahlperiode, Sess. 3, 27 Feb. 1912, 1222.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 29 Feb. 1912, 1290 (Abg. Kramlinger).

⁹⁵*Bregenzer Tagblatt*, 19 Sept. 1909, p. 4.

⁹⁶*Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 28 Jan. 1913, p. 7.

them into an envelope handed out by the electoral commission.⁹⁷ Thus, we cannot really speak of a fully “secret” ballot anywhere in Habsburg Austria—nor, incidentally, in the First Austrian Republic, which finally introduced the polling booth throughout its provinces in late 1918.⁹⁸ Just as in Habsburg Austria, voters were permitted to bring their own ballots, not only official ones but also party lists printed in newspapers, for example. As before, the booth served as a place to fill out the ballot and/or for inserting the ballot into an envelope. In contrast, at the first parliamentary elections in Czechoslovakia in 1920 voters received the lists of candidates beforehand but were only permitted to tick off their preferences in the polling station. The electoral commission checked whether the lists taken to the station had already been marked and gave out new ones to the voters if that was the case.⁹⁹

Conclusion

The main conclusion to be drawn from the aspects outlined here is that we need more local case studies of elections on all levels (for the Imperial Council, diets, and municipalities) to clearly determine and differentiate the practices of elections in Habsburg Austria. More questions than answers have arisen: (1) In which ways were conflicts fought out, resolved, or evaded? Can we establish patterns of violent conflicts? Which political and socioeconomic contexts were they based on? Which roles did authorities and executive forces play in these conflicts? (2) How did voters, especially women, participate in elections in practice? Which experiences did they have? What difference did gender make? How did women and men define their roles as voters? And how were they perceived by candidates? (3) Were attempts to maintain orderly elections accepted by voters as such? How far did they acknowledge new electoral technologies, such as the polling booth, and welcome them as a means to restrain external influences on their individual right to vote?

Generally, we can conclude that Austria took up European trends to widen the electorate and introduce universal suffrage when that seemed politically feasible, at least on the level of the Imperial Council. While abolition of unequal representation and the curial system was still nowhere in sight by 1914 on the level of local government and of the diets of the crownlands, cautious democratization was the focus of multiple reforms in the two decades preceding World War I. These not only included the attempts to secure more even representation according to language affiliation but also the endeavors to allow women to the polls in person and to protect the secrecy of the vote with modern technologies such as the polling booth. Habsburg Austria could turn to European models regarding these issues; however, the monarchy rather treated these innovations as experiments. Especially Britain, which had admitted women to various forms of local government in the second half of the nineteenth century and even made women eligible to hold offices,¹⁰⁰ dismissed voting by proxy. In Habsburg Austria the systematic personal admission of women to the polls was still limited to only a few crownlands and municipalities and largely depended on specific local power relations and interests. Germany provided a model for the polling booths. However, in Habsburg Austria the vote was not fully regarded as a “private affair.”¹⁰¹ Polling booths, still being rare, were not intended to guarantee secrecy, given that ballots could be filled in at home or elsewhere outside the polling station. Thus, we cannot deduce any correlation between polling booths and election results as, for example, Isabella Mares was able to do for Germany.¹⁰² Having said that, Habsburg Austria did not necessarily stand out much in this regard, considering, for instance, that France only introduced the possibility of inserting the ballot into an envelope while standing in the polling booth in 1914.¹⁰³

⁹⁷Also, party lists of candidates were not on display in the booth (because of possible theft by opponents) but rather in front of the booth so that it was possible to observe which list a voter took with him or her.

⁹⁸StGBL. 1918/115, § 27.

⁹⁹*Sbírka Zákonů a nařízení státu československého*, Zákon ze dne 29. února 1920, kterým vydává se řád volení do poslanecké sněmovny, no. 123/1920, § 38.

¹⁰⁰Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865–1914* (Oxford, 1987).

¹⁰¹Garrigou, *Les secrets de l'isoloir*, 54.

¹⁰²Mares, *From Open Secrets to Secret Voting*.

¹⁰³Crook, *How the French Learned to Vote*.

The Austrian government attached more importance to ensuring that voters did not fall under any undue influence at the polling site and to securing orderly elections, especially when universal and equal men's suffrage was introduced in 1907. These objectives, however, contrasted with the extent to which government agents, including policemen and the army, were involved in election conflicts that resulted in fraud and sometimes violent clashes ending in bloodshed. Evidently, social, local political, and party issues were obstacles to democratization that could not be overcome easily, and these obstacles only increased with the involvement of Social Democrats.¹⁰⁴ Overall, the assumption that violence at elections decreased in early twentieth-century Europe does not hold true for Habsburg Austria. Despite attempts to pacify and regulate elections, violence did not cease before the outbreak of World War I.

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¹⁰⁴Isabella Mares (*From Open Secrets to Secret Voting*) has shown similar occurrences of voter intimidation for Germany. She however, emphasizes the role of constraining Social Democrats more than we can perhaps assume for some of the Austrian crownlands.