The Austrians' expectations for the future

Explanations based on a structural equation model combining various predictors of social integration

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Abstract Building on the knowledge that Europe is currently experiencing a high level of pessimism about the future, this article seeks to explain why Austrians view their own future as well as the country's future with either pessimism or optimism. Both “futures” are often framed differently: A personal one that still seems to be under control and a societal one, which is perceived to be uncontrollable. Thus, social unease is higher than personal unease. Using structural equation modelling and data from the “Sozialer Survey Österreich”, indicators of social integration were found to be influential predictors. Results furthermore indicate an underlying explanation, tied to perceptions of societal malaise vs societal wellbeing, driving the opinions on the future in specific directions.

Keywords Social recognition · Social integration · Social cohesion · Austria · Structural equation modelling · Future expectations

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Zukunftserwartung der ÖsterreicherInnen

Ein Strukturgleichungsmodell zu wesentlichen Einflussfaktoren unter eingehender Betrachtung verschiedener Aspekte der Sozialintegration

Zusammenfassung Der Beitrag sucht vor dem Hintergrund eines zunehmenden Zukunftspessimismus nach Erklärungsansätzen dafür, wie Österreicherinnen und Österreicher einerseits ihre eigene Zukunft und andererseits die Zukunft Österreichs wahrnehmen. Die Einschätzung beider „Zukünfte“ geht oft auseinander: die eigene wird als kontrollierbar erlebt, während diejenige der Gesellschaft als außerhalb der eigenen Kontrolle wahrgenommen wird. Ein Strukturgleichungsmodell basierend auf Daten aus dem Sozialen Survey Österreich wird dazu genutzt, Prädiktoren sozialer Integration zu definieren, von denen angenommen wird, dass diese Einfluss auf die Zukunftseinschätzungen haben. Die Ergebnisse legen nahe, dass die Beurteilung sowohl von wahrgenommener sozialer Malaise als auch wahrgenommenem gesellschaftlichen Wohlstand abhängig ist.

Schlüsselwörter Anerkennung · Soziale Integration · Soziale Kohäsion · Österreich · Strukturgleichungsmodell · Zukunftserwartungen

1 Social integration and expectations for the future—two pressing issues of current times

The economic turbulence of the last decade, low political trust combined with ongoing political dissent and recent migration flows have led to feelings of uncertainty in Europe in general and in Austria in particular. Processes of economic polarization and cultural divergence are threatening solidarity in the Western world and have the potential to undermine social cohesion (e.g., Lessenich and Nullmeier 2006). As citizens in Western Europe often review the “golden ages” of the second half of the 20th century as an era of peacebuilding, economic growth, political stability and European integration, the current crisis and upheavals are contrasted with a highly idealized version of this time period (Hofmann 2016; Martins 2017; Lynch 2019; Wincott 2013). This is also true for Austria, where recent data shows that societal fault lines have deepened over the last years (Verwiebe and Bacher 2019, p. 505).

Pressing issues such as the financial crises in 2008 and its aftermath, the “summer of migration” in 2015 or the ongoing discussions about potential solutions to the climate crisis can be seen as major sources of dissent in society and may provoke new cleavages among the population (see Bacher (2017) for a detailed analysis of value cleavages with regard to immigration for Austria). These value polarizations within the public may influence the perception of whether the society as a whole is moving in the right or wrong direction. As several European case studies show (e.g., for Germany Lengfeld and Ordemann 2017; for Finland Nikunen 2016; as well as Hofmann (2016) for Austria), those major societal challenges strengthen the impression among the public that decades of social progress may have come to an end. Furthermore, in Austria many people seem to believe that a peak of wealth has

been reached which goes hand in hand with rising fears of social descent (Hofmann 2016, p. 247). In our view, perceptions of social integration are the key concept to explain Austrians views on their personal futures as well as the future of their country and why both futures are often framed differently.

In this article we aim to operationalize a sophisticated theory-guided model of certain explanatory factors on future expectations. Our theoretical framework will be further clarified in the next section and then empirically evaluated, using the method of structural equation modelling. This will be followed by a discussion of the main results.

2 Perceptions regarding social integration and the future—exploring the main facets at various levels

When one focuses on the expectations for the future, it is notable that insecurities are often not connected with real experiences of social decline but are based on individual or situation driven comparisons. Furthermore, social unease seems to be much higher than personal unease—at least in some prosperous states of Western Europe (e.g., for Germany Heitmeyer 2010; for a comparative overview see, e.g., Aschauer 2017). Current fears of citizens can thus be best described by changes in their expectations for the future. Austrian citizens with a high level of future pessimism may perceive that the ongoing prosperity of Europe in general and Austria in particular is delusive, despite their own living conditions remaining rather stable.

Thus, the topic of fears regarding individual progress and societal decline are at the fore in this contribution because both realities are often framed differently. And in this context sociological as well as psychological studies have shown that at least within the middle classes there is often a clear distinction between a personal future which appears positive and under control and a societal one which is viewed more critically and perceived to be uncontrollable (Dörre et al. 2011, p. 46; Skeggs 2013, p. 15; Schmidtke 2016; Fritsche et al. 2017).

This ambivalence of framing the individual and societal reality differently can also be confirmed by recent data on subjective wellbeing in Austria. While classical indicators such as individual life satisfaction and stability over time (see OECD 2017, p. 2), point to a high level of wellbeing compared to other OECD countries, Austria has mixed outcomes when it comes to social indicators. While some researchers argue that European societies can be considered as individual achievement societies (e.g., Esping-Andersen and Cimentada 2018; Münch 2010), other publications as well as empirical studies show that social upward mobility—especially in Austria—is often linked to social class and social structure (Herzog-Punzenberger 2017; Hofmann and Weiss 2018). This is connected with persistent inequalities in Austria. While age-related gaps with regard to employment are smaller than the average of the OECD countries, gender differences are somewhat more pronounced. Also, specific studies referring to the Austrian situation confirm the cleavage between subjective perceptions and objective measures of social mobility: On the one hand Hadler and Klebel (2019, p. 129) found that subjective wellbeing and perceptions of social status are persistent over time; on the other hand recent studies illustrated

that social policy measures such as educational expansion did not have the desired effect on upward social mobility, and conversely, social immobility increased over time (see the empirical analysis presented by Leitner and Wroblewski 2019, p. 171; as well as Bacher and Moosbrugger 2019, p. 143).

Furthermore, when it comes to people living at the bottom of society, additional restrictions in objective living conditions may come to the foreground (Schmidtke 2016; Fritsche et al. 2017). Thus, these groups often perceive their own life chances as limited and are susceptible to deprivation. These feelings of being underprivileged compared to other members of the group (individual deprivation) or to out-groups (fraternal deprivation) may lead to critical individual and societal expectations as well because the Austrian government is seen as the prime party responsible for leaving significant parts of society behind (Hofmann 2016; for a broad conception of deprivation see e.g., Rippl and Baier 2005; and Anhut and Heitmeyer 2000).

Following the arguments by Anhut and Heitmeyer (2000) we want to distinguish between three potential states of crisis, which threaten social integration of citizens. Firstly, the crisis of social structure which manifests itself in rising social inequalities and feelings of deprivation. Secondly, the crises of cohesion which is reflected in a decrease in social trust and perceptions of exclusion. Finally, the crisis of regulation which becomes evident in the decline of political efficacy and political trust (see Anhut and Heitmeyer 2000, pp. 44–53). We will now elaborate on those three levels by trying to connect the state of the art in research to potential future prospects of Austrian citizens. Based on those findings we develop specific hypotheses, which will be tested in the empirical section of our article.

2.1 Societal (in-)equality and deprivation: A crisis of social structure

Current changes in the labor market and demographic structure and the shift from welfare to activation (e.g., Dingeldey 2006) have led to intensive debates about the future of the welfare state. Grausgruber (2019, p. 470) illustrates that preferences for redistribution are stronger within groups that tend to have lower education and limited chances for social advancement; therefore, among those who are especially vulnerable to rising social inequalities. This is also reflected in older comparative studies, which confirm that attitudes towards redistribution are typically found to be less common among higher classes (e.g., Svallfors 2004). However, one has to be careful, to avoid oversimplification; van Oorschot and Meuleman (2011) and Roosma et al. (2013), for example, try to conceptualize multidimensional models for the range of welfare state services, the extent of taxes, the efficiency of transfer systems, and the possibilities of welfare state abuse. These approaches are based on the theoretical framework of deservingness and the conditionality of solidarity among the public. Wim van Oorschot (2000) defines certain criteria which help to understand the solidarity patterns among certain groups. While people belonging to higher social classes—especially those of monetary means (Svallfors 2004)—may be less in favor of monetary redistribution as they may follow a more universalistic logic with a commitment to equal citizenship. Although people at the lower end of society may be more in favor of redistribution, they may follow a more selective logic by excluding certain out-groups (van Oorschot 2000, p. 38). Under this logic, these

groups do not belong to the “moral” deservingness criteria because they are seen as culturally excluded (e.g., Muslims) or people may assume that certain groups have no willingness to perform (e.g., long-term unemployed). Therefore it is necessary to focus on relative deprivation (first developed by Stouffer et al. 1949) as well, taking into account that people evaluate their situation in comparison to others. Disappointed citizens thus often perceive their life situation as disadvantaged and attribute these feelings to relevant reference groups who, in their view, experience unjustified privileges. The frustration of being underprivileged may then lead to a higher level of future pessimism (see the frustration-aggression thesis, originally from Dollard and Ford 1971). Within those groups in society who experience social decline or potential unemployment more, deficits of recognition may arise and may lead to a specific reaction such as bullying the underlings (e.g., Pettigrew et al. 2008). People in these groups are more likely to experience unemployment and may exhibit more deficits of recognition.

The question of which group should profit from welfare is not only based on self-interest but is clearly shaped by moral principles and common assumptions on basic rights of citizens. Besides these necessary extensions on the deservingness heuristic, which is often automatically activated when it comes to attitudes towards the welfare state (e.g., Petersen et al. 2011) social values and institutional frameworks also play a major role. This is prominently addressed by the moral economy approach (e.g., Taylor-Gooby et al. 2019) referring to a historical consensus of group rights.

Although the Austrian middle class is mostly able to achieve stable positions in the labor market, they are also more and more confronted with vulnerabilities due to the rise of atypical work conditions (Fritsch et al. 2019, p. 334 as well as p. 342). When the middle classes are under pressure, the desire to be protected by the state grows due to the risk of falling out of the system in the future (e.g., Rehm 2009). As a consequence, the new forms of crude civiness (e.g., Heitmeyer 2012b, p. 35) may provoke an ongoing subordination to market logic and may increase cleavages between groups which are seen as belonging to or excluded from society. What remains is the feeling that solidarity and cohesion is being shaken, leading to increased discomfort with social developments at the cultural level.

2.2 Social trust and perceptions of societal developments: A crisis of cohesion

When social integration is addressed at the community level, social trust is often seen as one central precondition of civic engagement and a fruitful democratic development. Diminishing social capital and the processes leading to social exclusion are well-researched social phenomena in the field of social cohesion which were prominently addressed by the advocates of communitarianism (e.g., Taylor 1995; Putnam 2000). In this regard Aschauer (2017, p. 330) could show that the effect of the economic crises on social inclusion was rather low and positive experiences of social inclusion may even compensate for harsh labor market conditions, especially in the south of Europe. However, literature highlights that social inclusion may nevertheless affect the perceptions of individual and societal futures (Hofmann 2016). Therefore, the dimension of social trust is of utmost importance, as it represents the second state of crisis in accordance to Anhut and Heitmeyer (2000).

However, it has to be mentioned that Putnam's (2000) critical thesis of diminishing social capital in the United States is only valid to a limited extent in Europe. Social inclusion seems to be intact in many EU countries. Comparative studies throughout Europe show that there are different forms and distributions of social capital (e.g., Pichler and Wallace 2007). Immerfall et al. (2010) have clustered European countries on the basis of their findings on societal engagement and highlight an East-West divide which can be traced back to the early stage of democracy in Eastern Europe. Ken Newton and Sonja Zmerli (2011) have analyzed different forms of trust and their associations most precisely to come to sophisticated conclusions regarding the social and political stability of countries. This relationship is mostly found at the aggregate level (e.g., as already stated by Inglehart 1997) but there is also rising evidence of such an association at the individual level (e.g., Zmerli and Newton 2008). Generalized trust, meaning the inherent belief that most people can be trusted, seems to be related to political trust and to the perception of a healthy state of society. However, some results are controversial (e.g., Delhy and Newton 2005). It is assumed that social trust refers more to the individual level and is thus influenced by social demographics, while political trust refers to the system level and is more strongly associated with political measures. This brings us to the level of institutional integration, which will be discussed in the following section.

2.3 Societal dissatisfaction and political efficacy: A crisis of regulation

In Austria traditional political participation has declined since the 1980s (Glavanovits et al. 2019, p. 446) and the group of people who perceive themselves as powerless grew significantly between 2003 and 2016 (Prandner and Grausgruber 2019, p. 399). This is of importance, as Zmerli and Newton (2017, p. 121) were able to illustrate that in developed democracies political trust and participation are connected to perceptions of current and future societal functioning. In their discussion they argue that trust in the future may strongly depend on the attitudes towards the government and the legal system (Zmerli and Newton 2017, p. 121).

This is further highlighted by Caprara et al. (2009) who argue that an individual lack of political efficacy, defined as the ability to judge, understand and act in reference to political developments, may influence how one perceives specific societal developments, e.g., such as the refugee streams of 2015. This signal event (Heitmeyer 2012a) had an influence on the outcome of the election in 2017, where migration was mostly seen as a problem and a core issue (Bodlos and Plescia 2018). Particularly those who feel powerless accuse the elites of favoring cultural diversity, which is regarded as one main cause for the withering of the welfare state (Crouch 2008, p. 6).

Therefore, the concept of a crisis of regulation by Anhut and Heitmeyer (2000) provides a broad framework to assess perceptions of the future as it encompasses feelings of political alienation at various levels.

Interestingly, only few approaches deal precisely with the links between societal disintegration, perceptions of dissent and future pessimism. Nevertheless, it seems plausible that people who feel nonintegrated are more likely to lose their sense of attachment to society, to feel more alienated from mainstream politics and thus

hold pessimistic views of the future, as proposed by Zmerli and Newton (2017). This vicious circle of future pessimism may ultimately increase people's desire to vote for radical parties and may gradually undermine democratic achievements, as illustrated by a case study on the British EU Referendum 2016 by Gidron and Hall (2017, p. 59). They show that those who believe in Brexit—the leave voters—actually expressed more pessimistic outlooks for the future.

However, it is still open as to whether mostly economic or cultural developments are responsible for alienation. On one side scholars argue that a feeling of precarity and vulnerability (due to high unemployment rates, technological change, outsourcing, etc.) is responsible for moving away from system trust while others state that groups at risk of decline revive their traditional values as a counterreaction to elite policies favoring globalization, post-materialist values and multiculturalism (for a sophisticated summary see Gidron and Hall 2019, p. 2). These insights into current approaches and empirical studies on social integration lead us to several assumptions that will be presented in the following section.

3 Method and results

3.1 Hypothesis

Firstly, referring to the dependent variables, we assume that prospects regarding the individual future are moderately connected with those of the future of Austria. Nevertheless, we speak of two different attitudinal dynamics as we assume that the impacts of various aspects of social integration are slightly different.

Regarding the influence of the above stated societal trends on the perceptions of the future, we expect that institutional trust and political efficacy are linked to positive perceptions of the future of Austria (hypothesis 1a as well as 1b). When it comes to social trust and social exclusion, we expect that the level of social integration has an impact on perceptions about the future of Austria as well as on the perception of the individual's future. Social trust is expected to correlate with more positive views of the future (hypothesis 2a & b) while perceiving a lack of societal embeddedness is expected to lead to higher future pessimism (hypothesis 3a & b). When it comes to social equality and deprivation, we assume that both factors exert different influences on the dependent variables. When people perceive inequalities in Austria as too high, they will expect that in the future Austria will become worse (hypothesis 4). When people perceive their situation as underprivileged, they will be more pessimistic about their future life situation and the societal future as a whole (hypothesis 5a & b).

Additionally, traditional predictors concerning sociodemographic background and status were added as control variables. Adding education and income as control variables is linked to the assumption that people with a higher status have higher prospects for their individual future, (hypothesis 6a and 6b) and are also better integrated. We also controlled for social support and participation in societal associations as previous research showed that social inclusion and participation lead to higher levels of individual well-being and potentially a more optimistic outlook

Table 1 Expected impacts of our independent variables on prospects for the future (information concerning control variables is italic)

Hypothesis	Concept	Indicators	Individual future	Future of Austria
1a	Societal institutions	Institutional trust	N/A	+
1b	and political efficacy	Political efficacy	N/A	+
2a & b	Social trust and	Social trust	+	+
3a & b	exclusion	Perceived exclusion	–	–
4	Societal equality and	Equality in income	N/A	–
5a & b	deprivation	Perceived deprivation	–	–
6a	<i>Structural indicators</i>	<i>Education</i>	+	N/A
6b		<i>Income</i>	+	N/A

Additional control variables: age, gender, social support and participation

(e.g., Muckenhuber et al. 2013; Wallace and Pichler 2009). Bringing those different effects together, which are illustrated in Table 1, our central thesis is that people experiencing a higher level of social integration also express a higher level of future optimism, while disadvantaged groups tend to express pessimism concerning their personal future situation as well as the prospects for the future of Austria.

3.2 Method and data

The data used for the analyses is the Austrian Social Survey (Sozialer Survey Österreich, SSÖ) 2018, which represents a random household sample of $n = 1200$ Austrians aged 18 and above. The survey was conducted with computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI) during the second quarter of 2018.¹

As the aim of this study is to disentangle and analyze various perceptions of Austrian citizens on institutional, economic and cultural integration, and to treat them as independent explanations of potential future expectations, we decided to use structural equation modelling (SEM) as analytical technique. This has several advantages compared to regression analysis; primarily as it allows us to deal with two dependent variables (perceptions of the individual future and the future of Austria) which are interrelated. Nevertheless, it is still fruitful to treat them separately (see Heitmeyer (2010) as an example). Furthermore, the technique of SEM allows including latent constructs, a prerequisite to model the expected influences presented in the theoretical part of the article. Using covariance instead of direct measurements and considering measurement errors as well, further helps to explore the empirical relationships among the chosen variables, while also aiming to explain the maximum variance of the specified model (Kline 1998). SEM thus allows including factor analysis as well as direct and indirect effects based on path-modelling simultaneously. It also allows us to model assumptions of the broad theoretical framework applied. Anhut and Heitmeyer (2000) state three separate dimensions of integration. Nevertheless, they also argue that social disintegration in one dimension

¹ The dataset as well as the method report with an elaborate description of the sample can be found at AUSSDA—the Austrian Social Science Data Archive: Hadler et al. (2019).

Table 2 The dependent variables of our study

Variables/Question	Short de- nomination	Scale and Range	Mean (Median)	SD
Do you believe that your personal living circumstances will ... (<i>n</i> = 1178)	Individual future	1 (get significantly worse) to	3.12 (3)	0.764
Do you believe that the living circumstances in Austria will ... (<i>n</i> = 1141)	Future of Austria	5 (get significantly better)	2.73 (3)	0.852

may be compensated by integration in the other dimensions. Defining error term correlations between the entered constructs allows considering this.²

The following Tables 2, 3 and 4 give an overview of variables integrated into the model. These tables include information on the scales as well as descriptive statistics. The dependent variables deal with the questions of how one's personal life situation will change and how Austria will develop in the coming years. Both variables are based on an identical answer scale. At this point, we can report that the Austrians surveyed are more optimistic about their own future than the future of Austria. On average the Austrians surveyed assume that their life will continue on as it is (mean of 3.12 on a five-point scale). The same holds true for the perceived future of Austria; however, the results show that Austrians are slightly less optimistic when it comes to the future of the country as a whole (mean value of 2.73)³ (see Table 2). As expected, both perceptions are interrelated, but only moderately ($r = 0.374$).

The explanatory variables were split into three groups, each including individual perceptions as well as societal judgments (see Table 3).

The first group of explanatory variables includes institutional trust and political efficacy. To model institutional trust, four variables were used: Individuals reported trust in parliament, in the economy, in the legal system and the educational system. Overall, it can be stated that most of the respondents trust those institutions. However, the legal system and the educational system are attributed with a higher level of trust. The Austrians surveyed are a bit more skeptical regarding the economy and the parliament.

Concerning the two indicators for political efficacy the interviewees argue that they do not have any impact on the government, nor do they predominantly think that it is useful to engage in politics. Overall political efficacy is rather low.

The second group of variables measures general social trust as well as perceived exclusion. The majority of Austrians tend to trust other people and lean towards the opinion that other people will not take advantage of them. This is also mirrored in the fact that respondents do not feel socially excluded, e.g., most of them did not report that they lacked company, experienced loneliness or felt excluded in the last four weeks.

The last group of independent variables addresses the dimension of perceived material inequality. In contrast to the other two constructs, one of the core vari-

² All analysis is done with AMOS 26, based on IBM-SPSS (Version 26).

³ A Paired-Sample T-Test for mean-differences between perceptions of the individual future and future of Austria leads to a mean difference of 0.35, with lower confidence interval 0.3 and upper confidence interval 0.4 ($p = 0.000$, $t = 13.069$, $df = 1131$).

Table 3 Explanatory Variables of our study

Variables/Question	Short denomi- nation	Scale and Range	Mean (Me- dian)	SD
<i>Institutional Trust</i>				
What confidence do you have ...				
... in the parliament ($n = 1166$)	Parliament	1 (no trust at all) to 5 (fully trust)	2.96 (3)	0.911
... in the economy ($n = 1173$)	Economy		3.12 (3)	0.870
... in the legal system ($n = 1185$)	Legal		3.45 (4)	0.936
... in the educational system ($n = 1176$)	Education		3.59 (4)	0.931
<i>Low political Efficacy</i>				
I do not have any impact on the government ($n = 1191$)	Influence on gov- ernment	1 (I do not agree at all) to 5 (I completely agree)	3.44 (4)	1.250
I think it is useful to engage in politics ($n = 1175$)	Political engage- ment	1 (totally agree) to 4 (do not agree at all)	2.99 (3)	0.958
<i>Social Trust</i>				
Generally, speaking. Do you think that people can be trusted? ($n = 1194$)	Trust in others	1 (nearly never) to 4 (almost always)	2.59 (3)	0.784
How often do other people try to take advantage of you? ($n = 1176$)	Fairness of others	1 (all the time) to 4 (nearly never)	3.11 (3)	0.760
<i>Exclusion</i>				
How often did you experience the following in the last four weeks?				
Lacking company ($n = 1197$)	Lack of social contact	1 (never) to 5 (very often)	1.51 (1)	0.844
Felt lonely ($n = 1198$)	Loneliness		1.41 (1)	0.814
Felt excluded ($n = 1197$)	Outsider		1.29 (1)	0.690
<i>Equality</i>				
Do you agree with the following statement: The inequality in income is too large in Austria? ($n = 1188$)	Equality	1 (totally agree) to 5 (do not agree at all)	1.88 (2)	0.912
<i>Deprivation</i>				
Would you say that you are ... in society ($n = 1183$)	Disadvantage	1 (rather privileged) to 3 (rather disadvantaged)	2.08 (2)	0.518
Compared to others in Austria: You get ... ($n = 1152$)	Under-privileged	1 (much more than the just share) to 4 (much less than the just share)	2.37 (2)	0.643

ables is a manifest indicator. Respondents were asked whether income inequality in Austria is too high. Overall, respondents mostly agreed with the statement. The deprivation indicator deals with feelings of being disadvantaged and belonging to an underprivileged group. On average respondents neither perceived themselves as privileged or underprivileged, nor did they perceive themselves as advantaged or disadvantaged.

Table 4 Sociodemographics and socio-structural control variables

Variables/Question	Short denomi- nation	Scale and Range	Mean (Median)	SD
Age in years ($n = 1191$)	Age	18 to 93 years	49.15 (51)	17.878
Sex ($n = 1199$)	Female	1 = Female	51.35%	–
Completed secondary education ($n = 1199$)	Education	1 = completed secondary educa- tion	27.83%	–
Individual net income ($n = 873$)	Income	30 to 7000 €	1602.48 (1500)	741.193
Can count on support in various prob- lem situations ($n = 1200$)	Social Support	0 to 5 situations	4.314 (5)	1.067
Participates at a political, religious or civil societal organisation or club ($n = 1200$)	Participation	1 = participation	59.9%	–

Additionally, we controlled for sociodemographic variables and structural characteristics, and we added two predictors referring to social inclusion. As mentioned before, this group of variables consists of age, sex, education and individual income, but also includes the support of one's social network and the participation in political, religious or civil society organizations or clubs (see Table 4).

3.3 Empirical results

We present the results of the structural equation model in three steps: (1) we focus on the antecedents of both expectations for the future, (2) followed by an analysis of how these futures are perceived and what predictors are relevant to explain variance. In a third step we consider interrelations between the predictors and effects of control variables. For details on the model fit see endnote⁴.

The SEM-model shows that various explanation factors exert different influences on both facets of expectations for the future.

⁴ To evaluate the model a selection of general fit indices which are common in structural equation modelling are used and illustrated at the bottom of the figure. The χ^2 is often used for interpretation but this indicator is sensitive to large sample sizes and is therefore hardly used in survey research (e.g., Cheung and Rensvold 2002). The relative χ^2 controls for sample size but it is also seen as rather old-fashioned coefficient (Kline 2011, p. 204). This means the χ^2 divided through the degrees of freedom. In general a value below 2 represents a high model fit (e.g., Byrne 2010). The coefficients Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) are the two most important criteria for evaluation. The latter compares the proposed model to an independent zero-model where no correlations are assumed. The former is a highly popular fit measure in SEM, which analyses the mean discrepancy of the model per degree of freedom and which is a robust indicator for large sample sizes. Due to the high standard errors of the RMSEA value it is necessary to illustrate the pclose statistic as well (see Fig. 1). Concerning both indicators, the common rules of thumb to test for model fit are applied (RMSEA < 0.05 and CFI > 0.90 respectively) (e.g., Hu and Bentler 1999). Both values show that the model meets the criteria that leads to an acceptable model fit.

Table 5 Results of the SEM (information on control variables is italic)

Hypothesis	Concept	Indicators	Individual future	Future of Austria
1a	Societal institutions and individual efficacy	Institutional trust	–	Confirmed
1b		Perceived efficacy	–	Rejected
2a & b	Social trust and exclusion	Social trust	Confirmed	Rejected
3a & b		Perceived exclusion	Contrary to the hypothesis	Rejected
4	Societal equality and deprivation	Equality in income	–	Confirmed
5a & b		Perceived deprivation	Confirmed	Confirmed
6a	<i>Structural indicators</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Confirmed</i>	–
6b		<i>Income</i>	<i>Confirmed</i>	–

When we look at the main predictors of individual prospects for the future, respondents who show high levels of social trust are more likely to be optimistic. This effect is the most substantial direct effect concerning the dependent variable (confirmation of hypothesis 2a). In contrast, perceived deprivation leads to a more pessimistic outlook (confirmation of hypothesis 5a), whereas individuals who feel socially excluded are more likely to report that they expect their future situation to improve significantly (Fig. 1).

The observed effect between perceived exclusion and optimism about one's future was surprising (contrary to our hypothesis 3a). Likewise, perceived exclusion correlates with less social trust and higher deprivation.

Furthermore, there are additional results concerning the future of Austria. While feelings of social belongingness and trust primarily determine the individual situation, the perception of the future of Austria is mainly influenced by material aspects. The higher the experienced deprivation, the more likely individuals are to see the future of Austria unfavorably (in line with hypothesis 5b). Conversely, those who feel that they live in an equal society—in regard to the distribution of income—are more likely to express a positive view of the country's future (in line with hypothesis 4). However, it is important to note that women are more likely to be concerned about equality, highlighting the fact that Austria is a highly gender-unequal society (European Commission 2019, p. 66).

Next to material aspects, institutional trust influences the perception of the nation's future. Those who trust in public institutions, as well as the economy, are more likely to see Austria's future positively (confirmation of hypothesis 1a).

No more direct effects were found, leading to the rejection of hypotheses 1b, 2b and 3b. This is especially noteworthy, as political efficacy does not directly influence the perceived individual or societal future, despite indirect effects.

When it comes to the additional background variables, it can be reported that a lack of social trust is associated with weaker social networks and lower educational achievements. Furthermore, perceived deprivation is more common among people with lower income and education. Finally, those who feel socially excluded are more likely to report lower income and a lack of support from their social network. Overall,

Fig. 1 Trimmed SEM. Ovals indicate latent constructs; rectangles indicate manifest constructs. Arrows indicate the expected direction of influence. Residual correlations between the concepts are marked via a [e]-term next to the coefficients as well as dashed lines. Control variables are not included in Fig. 1; effects of control variables can be found in the appendix. All reported effects are standardized effects with a value of $r > 0.10$. Sig.: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. All effects with $p < 0.05$ reported in the appendix. Fit measures: $\chi^2 = 461.765$ (df 171), CFI = 0.948, RMSEA = 0.038, PCLOSE ~1.000

the identified correlations can be traced back to a lack of resources (confirmation of hypothesis 6a and 6b; for specific results see the appendix).

It can be observed that all major independent variables referring to social integration are interrelated. This can be seen in the large error correlations between the concepts measuring various perceptions of societal functioning (notably deprivation and social trust ($r = -0.70$); social trust and political trust ($r = 0.50$) or social trust and social exclusion ($r = -0.44$)). These results indicate an underlying general impression of societal malaise vs. societal well-being, which drives the opinions on the future in specific directions. However, there seem to be differences when it comes to impressions regarding one's own future compared to the future of Austria as a whole.

4 Discussion

Our results show that despite the indisputable relationship between them, future conceptions of individual life circumstances and of Austria are framed differently.

People see their own future in a (slightly) better light when compared to the future of Austria as a whole. Furthermore, different aspects seem to affect those perceptions.

As expected, the perception of the individual future is dependent on social trust and perceived deprivation. These results match both: a) the concept originally established by Dollard and Ford (1971), stating that the frustration of being underprivileged results in a pessimistic outlook for one's future, as well as b) Heitmeyer's (2018, p. 168) recent statement, that deprivation leads to higher levels of uncertainty.

However, next to those theoretically grounded assumptions, we found a surprising effect. Those feeling socially excluded tend to be more optimistic concerning their own future. A possible explanation might be that excluded individuals only see chances for improvement because they already perceive themselves at the bottom of society. This result, while not predicted within our theoretical framework, matches the findings of both Davidai and Gilovich (2015), as well as Alesina et al. (2018). They confirmed that US-Americans who were born into the bottom income quintile overestimate their chance for upward social mobility (Davidai 2018). This underlines the plausibility of the results, even when the US case may not be directly comparable to the Austrian one.

When it comes to the future of Austria, it can be stated that both institutional trust and perceived equality in income, have a positive effect. An even more pronounced effect can be reported when it comes to perceived deprivation. Higher levels of deprivation lead to more pessimistic views for the future of Austria as a whole.

Nevertheless, empirically, we were not able to report significant effects concerning perceived efficacy, social trust, and social exclusion. A potential explanation may be found in Prandner and Grausgruber (2019, p. 399). They previously showed that political efficacy in Austria has been declining since the 1980s. Thus, estimations concerning political efficacy may not be directly connected with prospects for the future. Finally, we could identify an effect regarding perceived deprivation. Those who perceive injustice hold institutions responsible for their disadvantaged position. Maybe this is the reason why they have negative projections regarding the future of Austria.

In general, it has to be mentioned that the latent constructs used in the model are strongly interrelated and the complexity of the model is quite high. The assumptions and attitudes included are highly correlated and interdependent. A society where inequality is felt, where social as well as institutional trust erodes is also one which features low individual efficacy and ubiquitous feelings of exclusion and deprivation. It may be challenging to isolate the relevance of specific single predictors within these interrelated perceptions of societal malfunctioning.

In Austria, perceptions of social inclusion are rather high, and impressions of precarious living conditions are not widespread (see for instance Grausgruber 2019). Nevertheless, the representation crisis of democracy (Linden 2011) seems to already have reached a deeper level. Therefore, it is necessary to address these impressions of social and political malfunctioning by monitoring society with ongoing population surveys. This is also one of the major concerns of well-being studies in Europe and beyond (see for instance Harrison et al. 2011). It seems that if a society—in this particular case the Austrian society—manages to distribute material wealth in a balanced way, both futures will be judged more favorably. This is directly related

to social and institutional trust which confirms the statement of Heitmeyer (2009, pp. 29–30) that societies may be regarded as integrating, as long as system integration and social integration mutually enforce each other.

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Appendix

Table 6 SEM factor loadings and regression coefficients

		Estimate	<i>p</i>	Stand. Reg. Weight	R-square
<i>Dependent: institutional trust</i>					0.046
Indicators	Trust parliament	–	***	0.651	
	Trust economy	–	***	0.683	
	Trust legal system	–	***	0.741	
	Trust education system	–	***	0.509	
Sociodemographics and reported resources	Income	0.000	***	0.111	
	Social support	0.116	***	0.183	
<i>Dependent: low political efficacy</i>					0.191
Indicators	Influence government	–	***	0.587	
	Political engagement	–	***	0.644	
Sociodemographics and reported resources	Age	–0.004	0.023	–0.086	
	Income	0.000	0.005	–0.108	
	Education	–0.509	***	–0.324	
	Participation	–0.286	***	–0.193	
<i>Dependent: social trust</i>					0.078
Indicators	Trust in others	–	***	0.499	
	Fairness of others	–	***	0.484	
Sociodemographics and reported resources	Age	0.003	0.006	0.120	
	Education	0.203	***	0.253	
	Social support	0.045	0.002	0.134	
<i>Dependent: exclusion</i>					0.038
Indicators	Lack of social contact	–	***	0.869	
	Loneliness	–	–	0.921	
	Outsider	–	***	0.677	
Sociodemographics and reported resources	Income	0.000	***	–0.159	
	Social support	–0.079	***	–0.112	
<i>Dependent: equality</i>					0.018
Sociodemographics and reported resources	Female	–0.185	***	–0.101	
	Education	0.176	0.002	0.089	
<i>Dependent: deprivation</i>					0.128
Indicators	Disadvantage	–	***	0.661	
	Underprivileged	–	***	0.773	
Sociodemographics and reported resources	Income	0.000	***	–0.250	
	Education	–0.146	***	–0.204	

Table 6 (Continued)

		Estimate	<i>p</i>	Stand. Reg. Weight	R-square
<i>Dependent: individual future</i>					0.201
Sociodemographics and reported resources	Age	-0.012	***	-0.290	
Latent variables	Institutional trust	-0.099	0.033	-0.093	
	Social trust	0.602	***	0.302	
	Exclusion	0.120	***	0.125	
	Equality	0.075	0.002	0.093	
	Deprivation	-0.313	0.021	-0.140	
<i>Dependent: future of Austria</i>					0.215
Sociodemographics and reported resources	Income	0.000	***	-0.157	
Latent variables	Institutional trust	0.141	***	0.117	
	Exclusion	0.084	0.011	0.078	
	Equality	0.135	***	0.146	
	Deprivation	-0.974	***	-0.384	

Trimmed model; Estimation method: Full Information Maximum Likelihood

Table 7 Significant SEM Correlations

			Correlations	<i>p</i>
<i>Error terms within concept</i>	Trust economy	Legal system	-0.262	***
	Legal system	Education system	0.210	***
<i>Sociodemographics and reported resources</i>	Age	Income	0.106	***
	Age	Education	-0.120	***
	Age	Social support	-0.340	***
	Income	Female	-0.276	***
	Income	Education	0.230	***
	Income	Participation	0.128	***
	Participation	Education	0.105	***
	Participation	Social support	0.070	0.009
<i>Coefficients of latent constructs (error terms)</i>	Institutional trust	Low political efficacy	-0.101	0.024
	Institutional trust	Deprivation	-0.375	***
	Institutional trust	Social trust	0.500	***
	Institutional trust	Equality	0.194	***
	Institutional trust	Exclusion	-0.175	***
	Low political efficacy	Social trust	-0.231	***
	Social trust	Exclusion	-0.440	***
	Social trust	Deprivation	-0.697	***
	Exclusion	Deprivation	0.266	***
	Equality	Deprivation	-0.169	***
	Individual future	Future of Austria	0.283	***

Trimmed model; Estimation method: Full Information Maximum Likelihood

Table 8 Modification Indices (Regression weights)

			M.I.	Par Change
Influence on government	←	Deprivation	16.04	0.454
Efficacy	←	Deprivation	19.129	0.403
Trust Education	←	Deprivation	8.461	0.232
Influence on government	←	Disadvantage	11.071	0.216
Trust Legal	←	Education	17.349	0.19
Influence on government	←	Underprivileged	11.146	0.175
Trust economy	←	Efficacy	20.937	0.173
Influence on government	←	Outsider	13.158	0.171
Influence on government	←	Exclusion	14.201	0.167
Outsider	←	Deprivation	7.648	0.147
Influence on government	←	Loneliness	13.759	0.144
Trust Legal	←	Social trust	4.383	0.144
Trust Education	←	Efficacy	12.407	0.143
Political Engagement	←	Disadvantage	7.907	0.137
Efficacy	←	Exclusion	13.56	0.133
Trust Education	←	Underprivileged	9.906	0.116
Influence on government	←	Lack of social contact	8.491	0.11
Trust Parliament	←	Education	5.214	0.108

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