

Thushyanthan Baskaran (Bochum), 25.11.2024 Departmental Seminar

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Populist policy makers

Abstract (preliminary):

Far-right politicians are increasingly successful across the globe. However, we know little about the characteristics of rank-and-file far-right politicians and lack evidence on the substantive consequences of them acquiring power at the grassroots level. In this paper, we use hand-collected data on about 30,000 political candidates for local council elections in the German state of Saxony to study the characteristics of and policies implemented by politicians from the far-right and populist Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). We find that AfD politicians are mostly new entrants into local politics rather than turncoats from other parties. Results from a close-election design tailored to the proportional electoral system in Saxony also show that AfD councilors have no substantial effects on fiscal policy nor on broader local outcomes (such as the settlement of refugees). We conclude that far-right policy makers -- at least at the grassroots level -- use populist rhetoric mainly as a figleaf to attain the informal benefits of local political office.