

Persistence and Activation of Right-Wing Political Ideology

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Abstract :

We investigate the persistence of right-wing ideology in Germany. The “Alternative for Germany” (AfD), founded as a party espousing fiscal conservatism, has turned to an openly nationalist and anti-immigrant platform since 2015. We document this rhetorical change with quantitative text analysis. We further show that municipalities that voted more for the AfD after 2015 also exhibited higher support for the Nazi party in the 1920s and 30s. The historical correlation we observe is positive, significant, and large. In our preferred specification, a one standard deviation increase in historical support for the Nazi party is associated with a 0.15 standard deviations larger change in votes towards the AfD. Our results are robust to controlling for a large set of historical and contemporary covariates, especially relating to unemployment and the recent inflow of refugees from the Middle East.