MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE
for Political and Social Science

ITC Colloquium Fall/Winter 2026

Wednesday, 23 September 2026, 14:00-16:00
Conference room villa

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Broad Constituency-Building as a Strategy Against the Far Right: The Case of Post-WWII Germany

What explains regional variation in support for the far right? Demand-side or reflection theories assume that the presence of a right-leaning constituency will result in electoral support for the right. Using the case of post-WWII West Germany and drawing on data from 29 elections over 50 years, I show how the resettlement of a right-leaning displaced constituency resulted in increased support for far-right parties only in majority-Catholic regions. Combining political articulation and field theory, I demonstrate how the ability and willingness of center-right parties to broadly incorporate constituencies shaped regional variation in far-right support. In majority-Catholic regions, the center-right party was firmly embedded in the local social milieu and competed over local conservative voters with other parties on the right, resulting in closure to displaced voters. In majority-Protestant regions, the party actively engaged in constituency-coalition building, incorporating voters across social differences. In those regions, the resettlement of displaced voters did not result in increased far-right support. These findings underline the relational dynamics between parties, potential constituencies, and local contexts in shaping political behavior.

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Berenike Firestone is a political and comparative-historical sociologist and a research fellow in the Department of ***Inequality, Transformation and Conflict***, where she coordinates the research area ***Social Change and Transformation***. Previously, she worked with Daniel Ziblatt in the ***Transformations of Democracy*** department at the WZB Berlin Social Science Center. She received her Ph.D. from Columbia University.

Broadly, her research is about far-right politics and support for pluralistic democracy, and the ways in which history and memory shape both of those things. A guiding question of her work is how democratic resilience can be strengthened and democratic citizenship fostered, especially during periods of significant social and political change. She uses a variety of methods, including experiments, statistical analysis, archival research, and qualitative methods. Her work has been published in ***PNAS, Political Psychology, Psychological Science***, and ***Social Forces***.

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