

AIKO SCHMEISSER

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CURRENT POSITION

Center for Political Economy, Columbia University
Postdoctoral Research Scholar

2025 - 2026

RESEARCH FIELDS

Labor Economics, Political Economy, Behavioral Economics

EDUCATION

University of Potsdam & Berlin School of Economics

2020 - 2025

Ph.D. in Economics

Supervisor: Marco Caliendo, Thomas Siedler

Title of dissertation: Political and Racial Dynamics in the Labor Market

Harvard University

Jan - May, 2024

Visiting research fellow at the Center for Labor and a Just Economy

University of Göttingen

2018 - 2020

M.Sc. in International Economics

University of Bayreuth

2014 - 2018

B.Sc. in Economics, B.A. in International Economics and Development

WORKING PAPERS

Do Unions Shape Political Ideologies at Work? (with Johannes Matzat), CESifo Working Paper No. 10301.
R&R American Economic Journal: Applied Economics [[latest version](#)]

Labor unions influence economic outcomes not only through bargaining with employers over work contracts but also via political activities that can profoundly shape political systems. In unionized workplaces, they may mobilize and change the ideological positions of both unionizing workers and their non-unionizing management. In this paper, we analyze the workplace-level impact of unionization on workers' and managers' political campaign contributions. We link establishment-level union election data with transaction-level campaign contributions to federal and local candidates in the United States. Using a difference-in-differences design, validated through regression discontinuity tests and a novel instrumental variable approach, we find that unionization leads to a leftward shift of campaign contributions. Unionization increases support for Democrats relative to Republicans not only among workers but especially among managers, suggesting that managers converge toward workers' political preferences. The effects are stronger in settings with more cooperative union-employer interactions, such as when union elections are not contested by an unfair labor practice charge and result in a collective bargaining agreement.

Job Loss and Political Entry (with Laura Barros), arXiv:2410.23705. [[link](#)]

The supply of politicians affects the quality of democratic institutions. Yet little is known about the economic motivations that drive individuals into politics. This paper examines how experiencing a job loss affects individuals' decisions to enter political life and explores its implications for political selection. Using highly granular administrative data linking individual records of political participation with comprehensive employer-employee data for all formal workers in Brazil, and leveraging mass layoffs for causal identification, we find that job loss significantly increases the likelihood of joining a political party and running for local office. Layoff-induced candidates are positively selected on various competence measures, suggesting that economic shocks may improve the quality of political entrants. Further, we observe that the increase in candidacies is more pronounced among laid-off individuals with greater financial incentives from office holding and higher predicted income losses. Finally, using a regression discontinuity design, we find that eligibility for unemployment benefits increases the likelihood of becoming a party member and running for local office. These results are consistent with the reduction in private-sector opportunity costs and the increased time resources explaining the rise in political entry.

Racial Peer Effects at Work: Evidence from Worker Deaths in Brazil (with Katharina Fietz). World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 10899. [\[link\]](#)

This paper studies the impact of working with same-race coworkers on individuals’ retention at firms. Using administrative employer-employee data from Brazil, the paper exploits unexpected deaths of workers from different racial groups as exogenous shocks to peer group composition. The findings show that a decrease in the non-white share of coworkers reduces the retention of non-white workers but does not affect the retention of white workers. The effects are driven by non-whites quitting and moving to new jobs with more peers of the same race than in their old jobs. The findings highlight how peer dynamics can contribute to racial segregation across workplaces.

The Accuracy of Job Seekers’ Wage Expectations (with Marco Caliendo, Robert Mahlstedt, and Sophie Wagner), IZA Discussion Paper No. 17198. *Submitted* [\[link\]](#)

We study the accuracy of job seekers’ wage expectations by comparing subjective beliefs to objective benchmarks using linked administrative and survey data. Our findings show that especially job seekers with low objective earnings potential and those predicted to face a penalty compared to their pre-unemployment wage display overly optimistic wage expectations. Moreover, wage optimism is amplified by increased job search incentives and job seekers with overoptimistic wage expectations tend to overestimate their reemployment chances. We discuss the labor market implications of wage optimism, as well as the role of information frictions and motivated beliefs as sources of overoptimism.

WORK IN PROGRESS

Shades of Disparity: Employer-Ascribed Race and Labor Market Outcomes in Brazil (with Pedro C. Sant’Anna and Sulin Sardoschau)

The Value of Peers: Coworker Preferences in a Job Choice Experiment

PUBLICATIONS (PRE-PHD)

A Tale of (Almost) 1001 Coefficients: Deep and Heterogeneous Effects of the EU-Turkey Customs Union (with Mario Larch and Joschka Wanner), 2021, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 59(2), 242-260. [\[link\]](#)

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Conference and Seminar Presentations

European Economic Association (Bordeaux), CESifo Junior Workshop on Labor Economics (Munich), Workshop on the Economics of Identity (Berlin), Research Seminar in Economics (Potsdam) 2025, incl. scheduled

Verein für Socialpolitik (Berlin), IZA Summer School (Bonn), Society of Labor Economists (Portland), European Economic Association (Rotterdam), Economics PhD Conference (Warwick), RIDGE / LACEA Workshops on Labor & Political Economy (Santiago de Chile), European Society for Population Economics (Rotterdam), Midwest Political Science Association (Chicago), Political Economy Workshop (Harvard), Rockwool Foundation Graduate Seminar (Berlin), BSoE Applied Micro & Behavioral Economics Workshop (Berlin), BeNA Winter Workshop (Berlin), Applied Young Economist Webinar (online) 2024

European Association of Labor Economics (Prague), European Economic Association (Barcelona), Society for Institutional & Organizational Economics (Frankfurt), European Society for Population Economics (Belgrade), IAAEU Colloquium on Economics (Trier), Research Seminar in Economics (Potsdam) 2023

ifo Workshop on Political Economy (Dresden), Verein für Socialpolitik (Basel), European Association of Labor Economics (Padua), European Society for Population Economics (Calabria), FU Research Seminar for Applied Micro (Berlin), BeNA Winter Workshop (Berlin), BSoE Summer Workshop (Berlin) 2022

European Association of Labor Economics (online), European Society for Population Economics (online) 2021

Services to the Profession

Referee for *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *Labour Economics*, *Empirical Economics*

Board member and treasurer of the Berlin Network of Labor Market Research (BeNA) [\[link\]](#) 2024 -

SCHOLARSHIPS & AWARDS

Joachim Herz Add-on Fellowship for Interdisciplinary Economics and Interdisciplinary Business Administration, 12,500 Euro	2023 - 2025
DAAD Research Stay Grant for Doctoral Students, 4,600 Euro	2024
DAAD Conference Travel Grant, 1,000 Euro	2024
Wicksell Prize of the European Public Choice Society, 2nd place for the research paper "Do Unions Shape Political Ideologies at Work?"	2023
Student scholarship Konrad Adenauer Foundation	2015 - 2018

TEACHING

University of Potsdam

Policy Evaluation (practical session, graduate level)	Summer 2023
Advanced Microeconometrics (practical session, graduate level)	Winter 2021/22, 2022/23, 2023/24
Advanced Methods and Applications in Policy Evaluation (seminar, graduate level)	Winter 2022/23
Research Idea Development Seminar (seminar, graduate level)	Winter 2021/22, 2023/24
Methods in Policy Evaluation (seminar, undergraduate level)	Summer 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025
Statistics (practical session, undergraduate level)	Summer 2022
Supervision of final theses (7× undergraduate and 4× graduate level)	Winter 2021/22 - Summer 2025

University of Bayreuth

Macroeconomics I (practical session, undergraduate level)	Summer 2016, 2017
Microeconomics I (practical session, undergraduate level)	Winter 2015/16

WORK EXPERIENCE

University of Potsdam

Research Assistant at Chair of Empirical Economics	2021 - 2025
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University of Göttingen

Student Research Assistant at the Research Training Group Globalization and Development	2018 - 2020
Fieldwork Assistant for RCT in Cambodia	

German Council of Economic Experts

Internship at Labor Market Team of Scientific Staff	2018
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University of Bayreuth

Student Research Assistant at Chair of Development Economics	2017 - 2018
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German Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy

Internship at Department for Trade Policy with North America	2017
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