



Universität Hamburg
DER FORSCHUNG | DER LEHRE | DER BILDUNG

FACULTY
OF BUSINESS, ECONOMICS
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



HAMBURG POLITICAL SCIENCE SEMINAR SERIES — HPS³

INVITATION

Please be invited to the Hamburg Political Science Seminar Series - HPS³ in Winter Semester 2025/2026.

The HPS Seminar Series features international speakers presenting cutting-edge research in empirical political science and political economy. It takes place on Wednesdays. For further information about dates and speakers in WiSe 25/26 please refer to the [HPS³ Website](#).

We welcome on

January 07, 2026 17:15-18:45 CET in VMP9 B130

[Tobias Widmann](#) (Aarhus University, Denmark)

Title: Moral Rhetoric and Electoral Success: Evidence from Seventy Years of Personal Voting in Germany

Abstract:

Moral rhetoric—appeals to fundamental beliefs about right and wrong—is a powerful tool for mobilizing and persuading voters. Yet, who benefits from such rhetoric remains unclear. We argue that negative moral rhetoric is particularly advantageous for politicians stereotyped as less established in the political field. These “space invaders” can use it to credibly signal moral character and bypass traditional dimensions of competition. To test our argument, we combine observational and experimental evidence. Using a fine-tuned transformer model and a longitudinal dataset of parliamentary speeches and personal votes for the German Bundestag, we show that negative moral rhetoric is linked to electoral gains, but only for space invaders, while positive moral appeals are ineffective. A large-N conjoint experiment corroborates these findings. These results reveal voters’ differential treatment of politicians. More fundamentally, by exposing the electoral incentives of different rhetorical strategies, they contribute to understanding the diffusion of negative moralization with consequences for democratic debate.

We invite everyone interested to attend!