

# 5th Political Science & Political economy Conference Titles and Abstracts

Michael Becher, IAST & UT1

*Labor unions and unequal representation (with Daniel Stegmüller and Konstantin Käppner)*

**Abstract:** While political equality is central to the normative ideal of democratic governance, recent research has found that lawmakers in the U.S. and other established democracies are more responsive to the interests of the affluent than to those with low incomes. In this paper, we study the role of labor unions as a voice institution that reduces unequal representation. Empirically, we examine how unions affect political inequalities in the representation of voter preferences in the U.S. House of Representatives. We use administrative data on unions and legislators' roll-call votes matched to preferences of around 278,000 citizens on the same issues extracted from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study. Our empirical strategy overcomes data limitations that have hampered previous empirical tests. We exploit variation in union strength and preferences within districts as well as variation across 26 roll-call votes to show how unions limit unequal representation. We also study how a large trade shock, namely districts' exposure to rising Chinese imports, worsens the representation of low income voters, and how the strength of labor union mitigates the negative impact of trade.

