Can young politicians make a difference in political bodies dominated by old politicians? To study this question, we use hand-collected candidate-level data on four municipal elections between 1996 and 2014 in the German state of Bavaria which we combine with detailed administrative data on municipal spending. Implementing an IV design based on close races between young and old candidates for the last party-specific seat, we find that local councils with relatively more young councilors prioritize expenditures on social security, specifically childcare and schooling. Thus, the entry of young politicians into a local council pushes local government’s public spending priorities towards items valued by the young. We further show that this effect is conditional on the age structure of constituencies, suggesting that electoral incentives remain important even in contexts where political selection has strong effects on policy choices.

Zohal Hessami is a Professor for Social Policy and Public Economics at the Ruhr-University Bochum, a CESifo Munich affiliate member and an IZA Bonn research fellow. She is a member of the Faculty of Social Science and an affiliate member of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration. She studies policy-relevant topics such as political business cycles, determinants of individual voting behavior, political selection and consequences of European integration and globalization. Her research has been widely published in journals such as the American Economic Journal: Economic Policy, the Review of Economics and Statistics, and the Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization.