

8th ANNUAL

RESEARCH, SCHOLARSHIP & CREATIVE ACTIVITIES CONFERENCE



Project Title: The Effect of Median Judges on Supreme Court Legitimacy

Presenter(s): Meaghan Loeffler

Faculty Mentor(s): Elli Menounou

Session Name: Interdisciplinary Humanities

Type: Oral Presentation

Abstract: While perceptually separate from the other two branches of the federal government, the Judicial Branches' Supreme Court is viewed as an institution abstaining from politics and serving as the largest check on the Executive and Legislative powers. However, intermingling of these branches raises concerns of association that the appointments and the Justices' rulings, post-appointment, are politically aligned with the ideological subscription of the appointers. As a result, close attention to public opinion on the levels of acceptance towards specific decisions and support towards the institution itself is necessary to evaluate in a highly polarized environment but with the existence of a tie-breaking median Justice. The objective of this study is to examine the extent to which public support, both specific and diffuse, varies given respondents' answers to mock Supreme Court decisions with and without the vote of a moderate Justice. The results of this study suggest that individuals are more likely to be in favor of the decisions that host a median justice though may swing in the opposite direction of their ideological alignment while their overall support for Court remains constant. This data will then be compared to levels of acceptance individuals hold when presented with cases either ideologically aligned with their beliefs or not with the absence of a median Justice. This research adds to previous examinations of public support for the Supreme Court and analyzes whether median justices, included in ideologically-based decisions opposite to respondents, affects the level of specific support for the Court.



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