Invited Speaker: Justin Grimmer

Measuring How Elected Officials and Constituents Communicate

Abstract: This talk will show how elected officials use communication to cultivate support with constituents, how constituents express their views to elected officials, and why biases in both kinds of communication matter for political representation. To demonstrate the bias and its effects, I propose to use novel collections of political texts and new text as data methods. Using the new data and methods, I will show how the incentives of communication contribute to perceptions of an angry public and vitriolic politicians. Among elected officials, the ideologically extreme members of Congress disproportionately participate in policy debates, resulting in political debates that occur between the most extreme members of each party. Among constituents, the most ideologically extreme and angry voters disproportionately contact their member of Congress, creating the impression of a polarized and vitriolic public. The talk will explain how the findings help us to understand how representation occurs in American politics, while also explaining how computational tools can help address questions in the social sciences.

Biography: Justin Grimmer is an associate professor of political science at Stanford University. His research examines how representation occurs in American politics using new statistical methods. His first book Representational Style in Congress: What Legislators Say and Why It Matters (Cambridge University Press, 2013) shows how senators define the type of representation they provide constituents and how this affects constituents' evaluations and was awarded the 2014 Richard Fenno Prize. His second book The Impression of Influence: How Legislator Communication and Government Spending Cultivate a Personal Vote (Princeton University Press, 2014 with Sean J. Westwood and Solomon Messing) demonstrates how legislators ensure they receive credit for government actions. His work has appeared in the American Political Science Review, American Journal of Political Science, Journal of Politics, Political Analysis, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Regulation and Governance, and Poetics.