PUBLIC ABSTRACT

An important feature of a democratic society is the notion that the actions and decisions of elected representatives reflect their constituents’ preferences. Existing research identifies multiple ways an elected official “represents” the opinions of the public. For example, some elected officials represent their constituents’ preferences absent their personal beliefs and opinions, while other representatives choose to make decisions based on their beliefs absent the views of their constituents. Despite the proliferation in political representation research, one area that has received little attention from scholars is whether the actions of elected officials and their constituents have an influence on how representative elected officials in other jurisdictions are of their constituents. The failure to capture the non-independent features of representation leads to scholars not understanding fully the opinion-policy relationship between politicians and the public.

The goal of this project is to examine the role elected leaders’ actions, individually and collectively, have regarding the relationship elected leaders in other jurisdictions have with their constituents. Using advanced methodological approaches, I investigate whether elected officials’ actions in one jurisdiction influence the representation relationship between contemporary elected officials and their constituents in other jurisdictions and whether this influence is positive or negative. For this project, I focus exclusively on the policy-related actions of elected officials and the policy preferences of constituents. The advanced methodological techniques I utilize allow me to model the actions of an individual politician, or an entire government, as dependent on the actions of their neighbors. I find that accounting for the interdependence among representatives is crucial for understanding political representation.