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Supreme Court Responsiveness: An Analysis of Individual Justice Voting Behavior and the Role of Public Opinion

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Oral Presentation O2.2

**SUPREME COURT RESPONSIVENESS: AN ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL
JUSTICE VOTING BEHAVIOR AND THE ROLE OF PUBLIC OPINION**

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Despite leading the unelected branch of the federal government, research shows that the Supreme Court regularly decides in line with the public's mood. This study aims to explain why the Supreme Court responds to public mood by analyzing the liberalism of individual justices compared to the liberalism of the general public from 1953 to 2005. Three theories suggesting why the Court may respond to public opinion are discussed, including replacement, political adjustment, and the attitude change hypotheses. An argument for using Court reversals to determine the ideology of the Court is presented and implemented. The Court is analyzed as an institutional actor among the other branches of government, and individual justices are examined as actors within the larger framework of the Court. Public reaction to the Court is also studied as an examination of the Court's role in society.