CHRIS BECKER

jbecker8@stanford.edu
Personal Website
Department of Economics
Stanford University
579 Jane Stanford Way
Stanford, CA 94305-6072
(815) 403 -5573

EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Economics, Stanford University,
      Expected Completion: June 2021
      DISSERTATION: "*Southern Ideology and American Political Economy*"

B.A. in Economics, B.S. in Mathematics Marquette University, 2012-2016 (Summa cum Laude)

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

Prof. Ran Abramitzky (Primary)
Economics Department, Stanford University
ranabr@stanford.edu

Prof. Gavin Wright
Economics Department, Stanford University
write@stanford.edu

Prof. Andy Hall
Political Science Department, Stanford University
andyhall@stanford.edu

RESEARCH AND TEACHING FIELDS

Primary fields: Economic History, Political Economy
Secondary field: Machine Learning Text Analysis

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2018	Teaching Assistant for Prof. Pascaline Dupas, Stanford University, Econ 118 (Development Economics)
2019-20	Teaching Assistant for Dr. Scott McKeon, Stanford University, Econ 102a (Introduction to Statistical Methods for Social Scientists)
2020	Teaching Assistant for Prof. Hongbin Li and Prof. Scott Rozelle, Stanford University, Econ 131 (The Chinese Economy)
2021	Teaching Assistant for Dr. Marcelo Clerici-Arias, Stanford University, Econ 198 (Junior Honors Seminar)

RESEARCH POSITIONS

2015-16	Research Assistant for Prof. Andrew R. Hanson, Stanford University

2017-18   Research Assistant for Prof. Melanie Morten, Stanford University

2018-21   Research Assistant for Prof. Ran Abramitzky, Stanford University

2021   Research Fellow, Roosevelt Institute and Southern Economic Advancement Project

RESEARCH PAPERS

The Rise of Jim Crow Rhetoric in Republican Economic Speeches [**Job Market Paper**]

I use computational text analysis methods to quantitatively show that the Republican Party has taken the rhetoric that was used by segregationists to defend Jim Crow racial segregation in the Mid-20th Century and incorporated it into their modern-day speeches about economic issues. I analyze speeches from the Congressional Record and use machine learning methods to quantitatively identify phrases that were (i) disproportionately used in explicitly racial speeches related to Jim Crow from 1947-1967 and (ii) strongly associated with pro-segregation politicians. I then track the use of these pro-segregation phrases in speeches about economic issues into the present day. I find that over the course of the late-20th and early-21st Century, segregationist language and ideology from the Jim Crow era has become increasingly associated with the Republican Party in speeches about economic issues. However, Republicans have brought back only the abstract, legalistic language from the Jim Crow era— such as language related to "states' rights"— rather than explicitly racist language. This evidence suggests the importance of dog-whistles for signaling racial conservatism in Republican economic rhetoric.

Political Speech about Immigration is More Positive but More Polarized than at Any Time in the Past 150 Years (with Ran Abramitzky, Leah Boustan, Dallas Card, Serina Chang, Dan Jurafsky, Julia Mendelsohn, and Rob Voigt)

We classify and analyze 200,000 U.S. Congressional speeches and 5,000 Presidential communications related to immigration from 1880 to the present. Despite the salience of anti-immigration rhetoric today, we find that political speech about immigration is now much more positive on average than in the past, with the shift largely taking place between WWII and the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965. However, since the late 1970s, political parties have become increasingly polarized in their expressed attitudes toward immigration, such that Republican speeches today are as negative as the average Congressional speech was in the 1920s, an era of strict immigration quotas. Using a novel approach based on contextual embeddings of text, we find that modern Republicans are significantly more likely to use language suggestive of dehumanizing metaphors such as Vermin and Machines, and make greater use of frames like Crime and Legality. The tone of speeches also differs strongly based on which nationalities are mentioned, with a striking similarity between how Mexican immigrants are framed today and how Chinese immigrants were framed during the era of Chinese exclusion in the late 19th century. Overall, despite more favorable attitudes towards immigrants, and the formal elimination of race-based restrictions, nationality is still a major factor in how immigrants are spoken of in Congress.

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

Segregationist Origins of School Choice Ideology?

In this project I use computational text analysis methods to quantitatively identify the origins of "school choice" rhetoric in political speeches. I have collected text data from modern-day press releases and editorials by organizations advocating for (or opposing) school choice policies such as support for school vouchers and charter schools. I am using machine learning classification methods to quantitively identify language associated with school choice proponents today. I will then track the use of this school choice language in congressional speeches historically. I will use these methods to quantitatively test the hypothesis that school choice ideology emerged among segregationist politicians following the Brown v. Board Supreme Court decision in 1954 mandating integration of public schools. This would suggest that early advocacy for modern-day school choice ideology was rooted in a white backlash to desegregation where expanded choice was used to facilitate movement of white students away from racially integrated public schools.

The Effect of Skill-Biased Technological Change on Racial and Labor Politics in the U.S. South
(slides available upon request)

POLICY REPORTS IN PROGRESS

Report on a Plan for a Just Transition to a Green Economy in Louisiana (with Alí Bustamante) - Southern Economic Advancement Project and Roosevelt Institute

SCHOLARSHIPS, HONORS AND AWARDS

2020	Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award
2021	Hoffman-Yee Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence Grant (PIs Prof. Dan Jurafsky and Prof. R. Lanier Anderson)
2021	Dixon and Carol Doll Dissertation Fellowship

INVITED SEMINARS AND PANELS

2021	University of California Berkeley Economic History Seminar
2021	NBER Summer Institute Development of the American Economy Poster Session
2021	Association for the Study of Religion, Economics, and Culture Graduate Workshop
2021	Labor and Employment Relations Association Panel on Racial Economic Inequality in the American South and Regional Economic Policy