State Courts and Mortgage Moratorium Laws in the 1930s

Funds were used to support the collection of data for State Supreme Court decisions on mortgage moratorium laws in the 1930s. The housing market was a major element in the financial crisis of the 1930s and has been pivotal in the current recession. Government reactions to the crises ran the gamut from stimulus plans to far reaching legislative measures. This research project focused on the behavior of one governmental branch, the judiciary, and its role in the crises. To test the hypotheses, funds were used to pay graduate students who compiled an original database that consists of state Supreme Court decisions on mortgage moratorium laws between 1929 and 1940. The analyses of the data indicate that law, institutions and economic conditions combine to influence judicial decision making. Furthermore, this study sheds new light on how American courts operate when assigned a key position in times of economic crises (with implications for the present and near future). With the new data collected with the support of the Rockefeller College Research Incentive Fund, a paper was presented at the Western Political Science Annual Meeting, and an article is currently under review at the Political Research Quarterly.

Udi Sommer
May 8, 2010