This course will introduce you to contemporary research investigating media politics, political communication, political psychology, and public opinion in the U.S. It is organized around the most contemporary research to which I can provide you access—unpublished research papers—but includes a survey of classic and contemporary research that should round out your introduction to research on public opinion and media.

**Anchor articles.** Your primary reading each week will be an unpublished research paper. I will mask the author names for each of these papers and will not provide a complete citation until later.

**Additional readings.** Each week, I have also assigned additional readings that represent key published work related to the anchor article. My suggestion is that you read these additional readings first, give yourself at least a day to mull them over and then read the anchor article. The rationale will become clear as you understand the writing assignment each week.

**Course assignments**

*Weekly Referee Report for Anchor Article*

Each week you are responsible for writing a referee report for the anchor article. The peer review process is central to scholarly research. As an author, you submit your research, usually in the form of articles like these anchor pieces, to a journal editor (the process of publishing books is outside the feasible scope of this class). This editor circulates your work usually to 2-5 peer reviewers, people who have some expertise in your research area. In political science, the most common form of peer review is "double-blind"—the author is not told who the reviewers are and the reviewers are not told who the authors are.

For each anchor article, I would like you to write a referee report that evaluates the assigned paper's argument, evidence, and overall contribution. I would like you to imagine that you are reviewing this paper for a general interest journal in political science, such as *Journal of Politics, American Journal of Political Science*, or *Political Research Quarterly*. In this referee report, I would like you to express a summary judgment: reject, R&R, or accept, and justify the decision based on the qualities of the paper.

I provide additional notes on referee reports at the end of the syllabus.

The referee reports are due each week on Saturday at 5 p.m. and should be e-mailed to me (martin.johnson@ucr.edu). Shoot for two single-spaced pages, 1" margins, 12-point Times New Roman or Arial. You may want a third page and some weeks you might come up short (e.g., 1½ pages). Do not turn your referee reports in late. These weekly writing assignments are worth 40 percent of your grade.
Original Public Opinion or Media Research Project

I want to promote your engagement with empirical political science and the development of your ideas. For the major paper in this class, I would like you to sketch a short paper, around a basic analysis of survey data: 10-12 pages of text with additional tables as needed and references (thus, the paper will be 15-18 pages in all). The paper will have a rudimentary literature review, develop an argument, present expectations/hypotheses and show data to test them. The conclusion should envision how to move this paper forward, toward publication, directing the analytical tools you develop to evaluate other people’s work on your own. Note that I understand that some of you have very little preparation for data analysis and will evaluate your work accordingly. You should envision using developmentally and field-appropriate analytical tools, including document analysis, cross-tabulation, logistic regression, and other forms of analysis. This might even lead to some collaborative research. I will provide more details about this project and my expectations during the next few weeks. The assignment will be due by 5 p.m. on Friday, December 11. It will be worth 40 percent of your grade.

Summary
Weekly referee reports on anchor articles 40%
Participation and class leadership 20%
Original public opinion research project 40%

Schedule of readings

Sept. 26: Introduction

Oct. 3: Civic Education and Knowledge of Government and Politics
Required

Suggested
Oct. 10: **Micro-participation: The Role of Microblogging in Planning**

Oct. 17: **The Attentive Citizen: The Dynamic Impact of Emotions on Attention to Political News**

Oct. 24: **Conformity in Groups: The Effects of Groups on Expressed Attitudes**
Required
Suggested
Oct. 31:  Attributing Blame in Tragedy: Understanding Attitudes about the Causes of Three Mass Shootings

Required

Suggested

Nov. 7:  Framing and Biased Information Search

Required

Suggested

Nov. 14:  War through Partisan Glasses

Required

Suggested
Nov. 21: Biology, Ideology, and Epistemology

Required

Suggested

Nov. 28: Personality, Values and Attitudes toward Foreign and Security Policies


Suggested

Hibbing Political Discussion

Dec. 9 Original public opinion research project due
REFEREE REPORTS

Reviewers examine a research article and critique it. They help a journal editor by discussing the strengths and weaknesses of a paper. They also provide a summary judgment:

- **Reject** – the most common judgment of reviewers. *Political Research Quarterly*, journal of the Western Political Science Association, outright rejects about half of the articles it receives to review. The rejection rate is more than 60% for *American Journal of Political Science* (Midwest). This judgment suggests the journal should not consider publishing this article at this time. The referee is obligated to explain why the paper should be rejected and offers constructive feedback to the authors.

- **Revise and resubmit, or “R&R”** – the next most common decision: The author should have an opportunity to revise the paper for additional consideration. R&R reviews make specific recommendations for how the authors can improve their paper for publication. These could focus on clarifying the argument, revising data analysis to provide more appropriate hypothesis tests, or both.

- **Accept** or *conditionally accept*. This is rare and an indication that the paper is ready for publication “as is” or with minor changes that the reviewer trusts the editors to oversee with the authors.

What criteria should you use? To help with this, here are some statements from these exemplar journals:

*Journal of Politics*

Submitted manuscripts to the JOP are evaluated based on their contributions to theory, technical proficiency, and breadth of appeal, and we ask reviewers to address all three criteria to the best of their ability when reviewing a manuscript. If, as a reviewer, you have significant reservations about some aspects of a manuscript, we also would like you to address how reasonable it is to expect the authors to be able to revise the paper in ways that would make it suitable for publication in the JOP. We would also appreciate an explicit recommendation in the text of the review. Should it be accepted as is or pending only minor revisions? If it needs major revisions, would you recommend that we invite the authors to revise and resubmit the paper for further review by the JOP or do you think the revisions are too great or their success too uncertain to encourage the author’s investment of time and energy? If you recommend that the manuscript should be declined by the JOP, can you suggest other journals more appropriate in your view?
AJPS requests that reviews address the following points about the merits of the manuscript in as long a review as a reviewer chooses to provide. The points include, but are not limited, to:

- The extent to which the manuscript addresses an interesting and important research problem or question.
- The amount of creativity or innovation of research informing the manuscript.
- The extent to which the manuscript engages the relevant research literature and contributes to the accumulation of knowledge.
- The quality of:
  - Thought and/or theorizing (as appropriate).
  - Conceptual development or use (as appropriate).
  - Analysis or methodological use (as appropriate).
  - Evidence bearing on the argument, theory, or rival hypotheses, models, or theories introduced (as appropriate).
  - Organization of the manuscript.
  - Communication or written expression in the manuscript.

At the end of a review, the reviewer should provide his/her summary evaluation and her/his overall recommendation:

- **Summary Evaluation**
  - **Excellent** – the manuscript is superb in all respects.
  - **Very Good** – the manuscript is very good in several respects with few minor and fixable problems.
  - **Good** – the manuscript is good in several respects, has several minor but fixable problems and possibly one or more (un) fixable problems.
  - **Fair** – the manuscript is inadequate in most respects and has many minor and major, and largely unfixable, problems.
  - **Poor** – the manuscript is inferior in all respects.

- **Overall Recommendation**
  - **Must publish as is.**
  - **Must publish with minor revisions** (with particular revisions stated in the review).
  - **Revise and Resubmit** – must include a statement of particular improvements. It should be made only when the research and manuscript fundamentals are sound (e.g., theory and hypotheses, and the models or models, as appropriate, are strong, the dataset, as appropriate, is complete, and the literature is consulted), and the manuscript has a >85% probability-of-successful revision.
  - **Decline to publish.**
1. Does the manuscript make a significant contribution to knowledge or theory-building within political science?

2. Does the manuscript address an important social question or political problem? If not, could the presentation be reframed in a way that would better highlight its broader social relevance?

3. Is this manuscript of sufficiently broad interest to be published in PRQ? Would it be more appropriately placed in a specialized journal? Could you recommend other journals that the author(s) should consider?

4. Does the author(s) utilize methods appropriate to the research question? Would the discussion be more comprehensive, and of greater interest to the discipline, if research within other methodological traditions was also addressed?

5. Is the writing clear, well-organized, and free of unnecessary jargon?

6. Are there specific revisions you would regard as necessary for publication?

**Recommendation**

- Publish in its present form with only routine copyediting
- Publish contingent on minor changes; further external review not necessary
- Likely to be publishable after minor revision
- May be publishable after substantial revision
- Requires fundamental revision to be considered for publication
- Not publishable even with fundamental revision
- Inappropriate for PRQ

**NOTE:** Look beyond typographical errors, misspelled words and more trivial concerns.

Is the theory sound and well reasoned?

Did the author(s) test the hypotheses proposed?

Does the evidence support the claims made?

Are there obvious or subtle flaws in the research design or methods used?

Does the paper justify its importance?