Improving Political Media Project

We are inundated with media messages about politics and often make sense of them through our own subjective perspectives. In this project, you will work with a research team to systematically study an area of political media content and investigate broader patterns of media coverage. You will conduct a quantitative content analysis of a specific political media outlet, and, based on academic media effects theory and research, speculate on potential effects of the media patterns you find. Based on your findings, you will develop suggestions for how political media content could better serve our communities.

TOPIC CHOICES

Your team of 3 or 4 students will ask two research questions about one set of:

Research Question 1: How does [your chosen source] portray [your chosen topic #1]?
Research Question 2: How does [your chosen source] portray [your chosen topic #2]?

Options for source (Pick 1)	Options for topic #1 (Pick 1)	Options for topic #2 (Pick 1)
Newspaper coverage (NYT or WSJ)	Campaigns	Citizens / Voters
Campaign ads (women or 2016)	Politicians	Immigrants / Refugees
ONE of the following TV shows*	Political Consultants	People of Color
• Veep (Season 1, Season 2 ep. 1–7)	Democrats and Republicans	Women / Men
• Md. Secretary (Season 1, ep. 1-10)	News Media / Journalists	Young Voters
• Scandal (Season 1, Season 2 ep. 1–3)	A political issue of your choice	

*Note that, to analyze one of the fictional programs, a team must have access to HBO (*Veep*) or Netflix (*Scandal*, *Madam Secretary*).

Rather than choosing the first two topics that look interesting, I would strongly suggest that teams, first, choose a source that they want to analyze, and then familiarize themselves with the content by reading or watching a subset of the texts. Teams should choose topics that appear at least occasionally in the texts so that they will have something to analyze as a team.

GROUP POLICIES

Teams should do everything that they can to make the project a success and to work well with all team members. Occasions do arise, however, when not all team members contribute equally. In the event that this does occur:

(1) You will be asked to complete an assessment of the contributions of each team member both midway through the project and at the close of the project. Individual grades may be adjusted based on these assessments. If a team member has not been contributing equally, this is your moment to let me know. Note that these assessments are confidential and will not be shared with fellow team members.

(2) Teams can be dissolved. If you find that a team member is not contributing to the project, each other team member needs to submit a few paragraphs *clearly* documenting the lack of contribution. This evidence should be in the form of: (a) lack of attendance at in-class and out-of-class meetings; (b) not responding to emails or not getting in touch with team members; (c) inadequate division of work because team member does not take on an equal share of the workload, even when direct requests are made; (d) not meeting agreed-upon deadlines, etc.

No matter whether you are planning to pursue (1) or (2), you are **<u>strongly encouraged</u>** to visit with me as soon as possible if a problem with your team arises, and I can help to guide you through this process.

STEPS IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS AND DUE DATES

Draft codes: Your team will turn in a first draft of your four codes to get some feedback prior to the proposal due date.	*Due September 27 at 11:59 pm*
Proposal Due: Your team will turn in a research proposal that includes a justification of the source and topics of study, the details of your method, and references.	*Due October 11 at 11:59 pm*
First round coding due: Each team member should separately code the same 10% of the units of analysis and upload their coding spreadsheets.	*Due October 28 at 11:59 pm*
Final coding due: All team members should have their final coding completed and upload their coding spreadsheets.	*Due November 18 at 11:59 pm*
Draft analysis: Your team should make a first attempt at analyzing the data to get some feedback prior to the final presentation and report.	*Due December 2 at 11:59 pm*
Presentation: Your team will present your project findings during a poster presentation on the last day of class.	*Due December 11 at 11:00 am*
Final Project Report: Your team will write up a final report of your project.	*Due December 20 at 10:30 am*

PROPOSAL (100 PTS)

Before beginning the analysis, your team will plan your research design.

Draft Codes (5 pts): By September 27, each team should upload to Blackboard a draft of their research questions and codes. Dr. Muddiman will review the draft and provide feedback that can be incorporated into the proposal. Each team should upload to Blackboard a Word document with the following:
1. The team's two research questions
2. Two codes developed for each research question, including both the language of the code and the coding categories

Proposal: On October 11, each team will upload to Blackboard a research proposal detailing the planned analysis so that the team can receive feedback prior to conducting the study. The proposal will be graded using the following criteria. More details about each of the items below will be provided along with a template groups should use when writing the proposal.
- **Title, Names, and Date (5 pts):** Teams will need to title the proposal, list the names of all team members, and list the date on which the proposal was turned in.
- **Importance (20 pts):** The proposal should include justification for studying the source and topics chosen by the team. This section should cite peer-reviewed, scholarly sources (some from the class readings and some from outside of class).
- **Method (40 pts)**: Each team's method section should include details about the sample/unit of analysis, content analysis codes, and coding plan.
- **Reference List and Citations (10 pts)**: The proposal should include a reference list that includes full citations for all of the sources your team cites in the text of your proposal. These sources should be peer-reviewed, scholarly sources either from academic journals or books. Newspaper or magazine articles, dissertations, conference papers, and other non-peer reviewed sources should be cited if you use information from them, but these citations do not count toward the required academic sources.

Remember to avoid plagiarism by citing your sources both in the text and in the reference list. Any proposals that do not do so will earn failing grades.

- **Writing (10 pts)**: The proposal should use the research report template provided by Dr. Muddiman. The writing should be clear, professional, and accessible to readers who do not have a background in politics and media research. It should be clearly organized, easy to understand, and contain no grammatical or spelling errors.
- **Coding Spreadsheet (5 pts)**: Create a coding spreadsheet using Excel. Dr. Muddiman will describe how to do this and provide templates for the spreadsheets in class. Upload this Excel document as a separate file to the Blackboard assignment submission link.
- **Team Evaluations (5pts)**: These points are individual grades. I will distribute team evaluations to check in on how well your team members are working together. These evaluations need to be completed by each student by the proposal deadline. Individual students' grades may be altered based on the information I receive from the evaluations.

ANALYSIS AND FINAL RESEARCH REPORT (200 PTS)

Coding and Draft Analysis

- **First Round of Coding (10 pts):** Each team member must code the same 10% of the units of analysis and upload an individual Excel coding spreadsheet to Blackboard by October 28 at 11:59pm. Only team members who upload their completed spreadsheets on time will earn points. Further, students who do not turn in their first round of coding will earn a grade of zero for the final research report.
- **Second Round of Coding (10 pts):** Each team member must code the remaining the units of analysis assigned to them and upload their individual Excel coding spreadsheets to Blackboard by November 18 at 11:59pm. Only team members who upload their completed spreadsheets on time will earn points. Further, students who do not turn in their second round of coding will earn a grade of zero for the final research report.
- **Draft Analysis (10 pts):** On December 2 at 11:59pm each team will turn in a draft data analysis to receive feedback from Dr. Muddiman prior to the poster presentations and final report.

Final Research Report: On December 20 at 10:30am, each team will turn in their final report both as a printed, stapled hard copy and by uploading the report to Blackboard (for SafeAssign). The report will be graded using the following criteria. More details about each of the items below will be provided, along with a template groups should use when writing the report.

- **Edited Proposal (50 pts):** Teams should include all of the content included in the proposal, edited based on the comments provided on the proposal and revised to reflect what they actually did when analyzing the media content.
- **Findings (35 pts):** Teams should analyze all four content analysis codes to answer their research questions. This section should include both a written description of the findings, as well as graphs visually depicting the data.
- **Implications of the Findings (35 pts):** Teams should speculate about the potential effects of the patterns of media content they found. They should overview two theories covered in class (agenda setting, framing, cultivation, etc.), then using the lens of these theories, discuss how the patterns of content found in their analysis may affect audiences. This section should cite peer-reviewed, scholarly sources covered in class.
- **Suggestions for Improvement (20 pts)**: Given the results of their analysis, teams should provide specific suggestions for how media content could be *improved* so that it has more beneficial effects

on citizens. Be sure to provide details and examples to make the suggestions clear. End the report with a powerful, memorable statement.

- **Reference List (10 pts)**: As in the proposal, the final report should include a reference list that includes full citations for all of the sources your team cites in the text of your proposal. These sources should be <u>peer-reviewed</u>, <u>scholarly</u> sources either from academic journals or books. Newspaper or magazine articles, dissertations, conference papers, and other non-peer reviewed sources should be cited if you use information from them, but these citations do not count toward the required academic sources. <u>Remember to avoid plagiarism by citing your sources both in the text and in the reference list. Any reports that do not do so will earn failing grades.</u>

- **Writing (15 pts)**: The final report should use the template provide by Dr. Muddiman. The writing should be clear, professional, and accessible to readers who do not have a background in politics and media research. It should be clearly organized, easy to understand, and contain no grammatical or spelling errors.

- **Team Evaluations (5pts)**: <u>These points are individual grades</u>. I will distribute team evaluations to check in on how well your team members worked together. These evaluations need to be completed by each student by the final report deadline. Individual students' grades may be altered based on the information I receive from the evaluations.

POSTER PRESENTATION (100 PTS)

Groups will create a professionally-designed poster overviewing their project. The poster should be a tri-fold so that it can stand up on a table on its own. The poster must some information related to every section of the final report. It also must be clear, easy to understand, easy to read quickly, and visually appealing. Because the projects will be presented in a poster setting, <u>all</u> members of the group will need to be able to explain the main goal and findings of the research project in a brief elevator pitch *and* will need to be comfortable conversing about the justification for the study, method, findings, implications, etc.

Examples of posters will be provided in class. Additionally, the poster presentation rubric is attached to this document.

Poster Board Rubric

	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Minimal	Deficient
Design (30)	Design is clear, well-organized, professional, and consistent; Minimal use of text; Overall design is appealing and easy to understand.	Design is clear and consistent; Minimal use of text; Overall design is appealing and easy to understand.	Design attempts to be consistent and appealing; Attempts to use minimal text.	Poor attempt at clarity, organization, and consistency; Text is unnecessarily wordy; Design is distracting or inhibits understanding.	No intentional design, organization, or consistency; Text is entirely too wordy; Design is unappealing or difficult to understand.
Content (40)	Information is clear and concise; Content is relevant and accurate; Content covers all major elements of the research project.	Information is clear and concise; Minimal issues with relevance and/or accuracy of content; Content touches on all major elements of the research project.	Information attempts to be clear and concise, but is confusing at times; Some issues with relevance and/or accuracy of content; Content covers most major elements of the research project.	Information is not clear or concise; Frequent issues with relevance and/or accuracy of content; Content covers some of the major elements of the research project.	Information not clear and concise; Major issues with relevance, clarity, and/or accuracy of content; Content does not cover the major elements of the research project.
Presentation (30)	Speakers thoroughly and professionally explain the research project and answer questions in conversational and engaging manner; Speakers seamlessly integrate poster into verbal explanations; Speech is continually enhanced by inclusion of poster; Speakers are dressed professionally.	Speakers explain the research project and answer questions in conversational manner; Speakers effectively integrate poster into verbal explanations; Speech is mostly enhanced by inclusion of poster; Speakers are dressed professionally.	Speakers attempt to explain the research project and answer questions; Speakers attempt to integrate poster into verbal explanations; Speech is somewhat enhanced by inclusion of poster; Speakers are not dressed professionally.	Poor attempts to explain the research project and answer questions; Poor attempts by speaker to integrate poster into verbal explanations; Poster is minimally helpful in enhancing speech; Poster or references to poster are somewhat distracting or inhibit effective delivery; Speakers are not dressed professionally.	Speakers cannot explain research project and cannot answer questions; No intentional attempt to integrate poster into verbal explanations; Poster does not enhance speech; References to poster are distracting and inhibit effective delivery; Speakers are not dressed professionally.

Comments:

Total: _____ / 100