In an ideal democracy, citizens approach their voting decision by carefully considering the policy platforms, and to a lesser extent, the personal qualities of the candidates running for office. However, citizens do not typically live up to this idealized portrait, often relying instead on cues like polling or partisanship when considering for whom to vote. There are times though when partisanship weighs less heavily on the minds of voters, and they may pay more attention to a candidate’s policy positions and competence. When voters are anxious, they more closely approximate the ideal conception of the democratic citizen. However, certain types of anxiety may lead to different voter behavior, and concerns about terrorism are one of those. When worry about terrorism is elevated, voters not only prioritize strong leadership, but often blindly project leadership qualities onto certain candidates. Furthermore, individuals’ search for a hero to rescue them from terrorist threats often places other candidates, including female candidates, at a disadvantage.

This research has important implications for understanding some of the current dynamics in the 2016 presidential, which is already turning into one that will be analyzed and studied for years to come. Join the CUC on February 24th to hear Professor Jennifer Merolla discuss, “How Do We Decide Who to Vote For.”

Professor Jennifer Merolla earned her PhD in Political Science from Duke. Prior to joining the faculty at UCR, she was an assistant and then associate professor at Claremont Graduate University. Her research focuses on what shapes individual political attitudes and behavior such as candidate evaluations during elections, immigration policy attitudes, foreign policy attitudes, and support for democratic values and institutions. She is co-author of Democracy at Risk: How Terrorist Threats Affect the Public (University of Chicago Press). Her work has appeared in journals such as Comparative Political Studies, Electoral Studies, the Journal of Politics, Perspectives on Politics, Political Behavior, Political Research Quarterly, Political Psychology, and Women, Politics, and Policy.

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