

# Handbook of Public Policy Agenda Setting

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## 17. Agenda setting dynamics and differences across issues: agenda setting on the economy and foreign policy

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The ability to influence the agenda is of primary importance to the distribution of power in a democratic system. Despite its significance, there is great disagreement among scholars as to the importance of various governmental institutions, nongovernmental institutions (that is, the media or interest groups), and the public in agenda setting. For example, in American politics, scholars have long argued that presidents are the “principal instrument” for nationalizing policy debates (Schattschneider, 1960, p.14). Much traditional agenda setting research emphasizes the significance of presidents in setting the national policy agenda (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Kingdon, 1984). However, empirical research is mixed with regard to the degree to which presidents are able to influence the public or media agendas (Cohen, 1995; Edwards and Wood, 1999; Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake, 2011; Larsen-Price and Rutledge, 2013; Wood and Peake, 1998; Young and Perkins, 2005).

One important theme in recent agenda setting research is that there are significant differences across issues in the way that agenda setting dynamics play out. For example, in the U.S. setting, certain types of issues are ripe for presidential leadership of the agenda whereas others may be more driven by the media or real-world conditions. A consistent argument in the literature is that issue contexts matter greatly in how policy agendas and public attention are shaped and the influence various actors and institutions have in the process (Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake, 2004, 2011; Flemming et al., 1999; Peake, 2001; Rutledge and Price, 2014; Soroka, 2002, 2003; Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006; Walgrave et al., 2008). Much of the pioneering work on agenda setting emphasized domestic policy (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Kingdon, 1984), with little attention given to foreign or economic policy. However, empirical work over the past two decades demonstrates that issue contexts are important and lead to different theoretical expectations on “who leads whom” based on the issue under examination.

In this chapter, I discuss the various theoretical expectations and empirical findings in the literature on agenda setting and apply them

to two key issue areas: foreign and economic policy. I discuss literature on agenda setting dynamics in the U.S. and in other democracies. The examination illustrates three key issue characteristics that impact agenda setting dynamics: 1) the existing salience or prominence of the issue, 2) the importance of events and/or the policy environment for the issue, and 3) the competition between issues for space on the agenda. In the conclusion, I discuss the implications of these insights for future research on agenda setting and briefly suggest the benefits of applying the agenda setting framework to important questions of international relations and foreign policy.

## POLICY AND PUBLIC AGENDAS

It is useful for our purposes to distinguish between two key agendas: the public agenda and the policy agenda. Kingdon (1984, p.3) defines the policy agenda as “the list of subjects or problems to which government officials, and the people outside of government closely associated with those officials, are paying serious attention to at any given time.” The definition demonstrates the significance of agenda setting. In order for an issue or policy proposal to receive attention by government, it first must be placed on the policy agenda. Some problems emerge, attracting the government’s attention, whereas the government never seriously considers other problems. In the proceeding discussion, the policy agenda will refer to the attention given to issues by policymakers, in particular the chief executive and legislators.

There is a significant dynamic component to agenda setting, as well. For example, while the environment may be high on the government’s agenda at one point in time, the issue may fade from the agenda as other issues become more prominent, whether or not the problems underpinning the issue’s rise are addressed directly by new policies (Downs, 1972). New issues have a way of pushing existing agenda issues off of the agenda, creating both positive and negative incentives for policymakers in agenda setting. The negative side of agenda setting (that is, the inattentiveness to issues) is as important to understand for discussions of political power, as is the positive side of agenda setting (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962; Baumgartner and Jones, 1993).

The public agenda, on the other hand, refers to the subjects or problems the mass public considers important and is paying serious attention to at a given point in time. Given the importance of media influence on the public agenda (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; McCombs, 2004; Rogers and Dearing, 1994), political scientists often use media attention as a proxy

for the public agenda (see, for example, Edwards and Wood, 1999; Wood and Peake, 1998). However, it is more appropriate for scholars to treat the public and media agendas as separate concepts, although data limitations may not allow for this. Treating the concepts separately presents a more complete representation of agenda setting dynamics and how such dynamics may differ across issues. For example, Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake (2011) argue that much of the American president's public leadership entails indirect leadership of the public's agenda through the president's limited influence over the media's agenda. In other words, direct influence on the public's agenda is unlikely unless the media first addresses the president's priority issue. Thus, changes in the media environment impact the president's ability to influence the public agenda. Moreover, by measuring the public's agenda directly, scholars are better able to specify when and how the government might lead or respond to the public's issue priorities and properly assess the role of the mass media in this relationship.

Interactions between the public (and/or media) agenda and the policy agenda represent fundamental research avenues for scholars interested in policymaking in democracies. How are policy agendas formed? Do the agendas of policymakers influence the public, in a top-down (elite-driven) fashion, or is the policy agenda responsive to the public's agenda, in a bottom-up (representative) fashion? Which political institutions take the lead in setting the agenda? Properly assessing such questions requires broad examination of various agendas over time and across issues. Fortunately, our understanding of the dynamics of agenda setting has increased substantially over the past two decades as scholars have endeavored to measure and systematically assess the interaction of agendas over time. When scholars focus their empirical analyses on a variety of issues, more often than not they tend to find different dynamics at play depending on the issues under examination. Later on, I discuss the agenda setting literature that differentiates by issue area and issue attributes.

It is also important to understand that agenda setting dynamics do not occur in a vacuum, as issues compete with one another for space on both the public and policy agendas. Politics in democracies often involves competition between issues and issue entrepreneurs for limited space on the policy agenda (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). Governmental actors are severely constrained because space on the government's agenda is limited, whether one is assessing the executive, legislative, or judicial agendas. Due to this limited agenda space, attention to one issue means other issues will receive less attention. Wood and Peake (1998), in their examination of foreign policy agenda setting, refer to this issue competition as "the economy of attention." According to their analysis, critical events push presidents to address foreign policy issues, supplanting other issues.

Wood and Peake's (1998) examination of an issue in which executives are typically seen as having a great deal of agenda setting influence (foreign policy) actually demonstrates that presidents are seriously constrained by the policy environment (that is, world events), limited agenda space, and their need to respond to media coverage of foreign policy issues.

While much recent scholarship has taken seriously the significance of issue attributes, little has directly addressed the competition between issues for agenda space. I argue later on that accounting for this "economy of attention" is critically important for our understanding of the dynamics of agenda setting in democratic systems.

## ISSUE ATTRIBUTES AND THE DYNAMICS OF AGENDA SETTING

While much of the pioneering work on agenda setting dynamics emphasized domestic policy issues (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Kingdon, 1984), recent work has applied the agenda setting framework to foreign policy and economic policy issues. Broadening analysis to these key policy areas has helped develop scholarly understanding of agenda setting dynamics in two ways. First, by examining a broader set of issue areas, scholars have improved our understanding of the importance of issue attributes to agenda setting dynamics. Issue attributes vary significantly between domestic, economic, and foreign policy issues. The variance, as explained shortly, is not limited to these three broad issue domains, as the attributes identified as important by scholars can vary between issues within issue domains.

Second, foreign and economic policies are key responsibilities of chief executives in most democracies, in particular the U.S. foreign policy is typically seen as in the executive's domain (Wood and Peake, 1998) and economic policy and the economy's health is central to the executive's political strength (Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake, 2005). Thus, examination of these two key policy domains systematically over time allows researchers to more effectively test the claims of executive dominance in agenda setting that are common in the earlier literature. For example, Baumgartner and Jones (1993, p.241), who studied the issues of nuclear power, smoking, pesticides, auto safety, urban affairs, and drug abuse, concluded their influential study claiming, "No single actor can focus attention as clearly . . . as the president." The claim is made, however, without any systematic analysis of the president's policy agenda. Similarly, Kingdon (1984, p.25), who studied health and transportation policy, wrote, "there is little doubt that the president remains a powerful force in

agenda setting, particularly when compared to other actors.” Kingdon, however, recognized the importance of events that may “impinge on” the president’s agenda, citing specific examples in the foreign and economic policy domains. In the second edition of the book, Kingdon (1995) added a brief chapter on Reagan’s budget and tax policies. Kingdon’s new analysis underscored the importance of events and the perceptions of economic problems to agenda setting on these economic issues.

An important study by Edwards and Wood (1999) sought to systematically test claims of executive dominance by examining the interrelationships of presidential, media, and congressional attention to two foreign policy and three domestic policy issues for the years 1984 to 1994. The findings question the degree to which presidents dominate agenda setting in the U.S. – particularly in foreign policy, where they found presidents were largely responsive to events and media attention, echoing a result found in a prior study by Wood and Peake (1998). However, differences emerged among domestic issues, and the findings suggest presidents can be highly influential under certain circumstances, in particular if an issue is not already salient and “when the issue is important to them [presidents] and constitutes a major presidential initiative” (Edwards and Wood, 1999, p.342). A multitude of studies have since expanded the analysis of agenda setting dynamics to a variety of issues and political settings.

## DIFFERENT ISSUES, DIFFERENT DYNAMICS

The idea that agenda setting and leadership dynamics differ across issues is an old one. For example, ever since Wildavsky (1966) suggested that executive leadership is substantially greater in foreign policy than in domestic or economic policy, scholars have taken more seriously differences in political power structures that are likely to emerge across issue domains. In applying Wildavsky’s “two presidencies” thesis to agenda setting leadership, Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake (2011, p.75) argue that the “lower public interest in foreign policy increases the likelihood that presidents” will lead the public agenda. Additionally, they argue that business constraints on media and the tendency of news coverage of foreign policy to reflect the government’s positions, especially during crises – what Bennett (1990) refers to as indexing – suggest greater presidential leadership of the media’s agenda in foreign policy than for other issues.

A more general theory of issue attributes is required to tackle differences in agenda dynamics, however. Perhaps the most significant issue attribute addressed in the literature is whether or not the issue is a prominent one; that is, is it an issue that is highly salient in the political system and observ-

able to the public? Zucker's (1978) early work in political communication suggests that issues that are obtrusive – that is, issues that are experienced directly by individuals – are likely to yield more limited media effects, whereas for unobtrusive issues people largely rely on media coverage in order to learn about their significance (also see MacKuen, 1981). Foreign policy is a quintessential unobtrusive issue, as the public relies upon the media to learn about external events and foreign relations that it does not experience directly. On the other hand, pocketbook economic issues (for example, unemployment and inflation) are quintessential obtrusive issues, as people experience these issues directly via real-world conditions (Soroka, 2002). As a starting point, this simple hypothesis provides a basis for understanding possible variance in agenda setting dynamics across issues, within broad issue domains, and between the public and policy agendas.

While Edwards and Wood (1999) hinted at the importance of an issue's salience and the degree to which American presidents might influence the media agenda (or vice versa), subsequent research has further developed hypotheses related to this observation. In a study focused entirely on foreign policy agenda setting in the U.S., Peake (2001) argued that the findings of limited presidential leadership of the media's agenda in foreign policy might have been a result of Edwards and Wood's (1999) and Wood and Peake's (1998) emphasis on highly salient, vitally important, and crisis-oriented foreign policy issues, specifically the previous studies' focus on the U.S.–Soviet relationship and the Arab–Israeli conflict. Peake (2001) analyzed several less salient foreign policy issues, including foreign trade and foreign aid, which are not driven by events and often require joint action by the president and Congress and a region of lower salience and strategic importance (Latin America). The results indicated greater presidential influence on the media's agenda and decreased presidential responsiveness to the media. Differences within the foreign policy issue domain, then, are evident as foreign policy issues vary on important issue attributes related to an issue's salience.

The importance of issue salience in agenda setting dynamics was further expounded in work focused on economic policy issues. In their study of the economic agenda in the U.S., Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake (2005) examined attention by the president, Congress, and media to the economy – generally and also broken down into three separate economic issue areas: spending, inflation and unemployment, and international trade. They found that presidential attention is most responsive to media attention on economic issues when they are highly salient – particularly when the economy is suffering and on the issues of unemployment and inflation. President Clinton's attention to the economy had a modest impact on

media attention to economic issues, while Reagan and Bush were responsive to media coverage. Clinton served under a different economic context, however. The economy was strong and therefore less salient among the public. In a more recent study, Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake (2011, p.67) explicate their “salience hypothesis” more clearly and include analysis of the public agenda in addition to the presidential and media agendas. They state that those issues that are especially salient to the public and media are likely to engender responsiveness on the part of the president, whereas those issues that lack prior salience (and thus lack prominence or are unobtrusive) provide opportunities for presidential leadership of the public agenda. Their examination of a subset of economic issues finds that presidents were largely responsive to public concern for and media attention to unemployment (a highly salient and obtrusive issue), but that presidential attention on government spending (a less salient and unobtrusive issue) leads to increased media attention and public concern (Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake, 2011, p.137).

Other issue attributes related to an issue’s prominence or salience are likely to have some bearing on whether the media leads the policy or public agendas or the policy agenda leads the media or public agendas. Perhaps the best study on the importance of issue attributes is Soroka’s (2002) study of agenda setting across a range of domestic and economic issues in Canada. Soroka’s research is especially useful because it applies the agenda setting framework to Canada. By addressing issue attention dynamics outside of the U.S., scholars are better situated to demonstrate that the significance of issue dynamics is generalizable outside of the U.S. system.

Building on Zucker’s (1978) obtrusiveness hypothesis, Soroka (2002) develops an issue typology seeking to explain why the media tends to lead the public and policy agendas on some issues but not others. Soroka also theorizes that concrete issues – ones that are easily visualized – are likely to engender greater media effects on the public agenda than abstract issues. Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake (2004) argued similarly that presidents tend to have greater influence over media attention to salient and concrete issues than issues that are less salient and highly complex. Finally, citing work by Wanta and Hu (1993), who focused their analysis on media agenda setting on international issues, Soroka argues that event-driven issues – which tend to be highly dramatic and easily sensationalized – lend themselves to increased media influence in agenda setting.

Soroka’s (2002) typology includes prominent issues, or issues that are both obtrusive and concrete; sensational issues, or issues that are unobtrusive, concrete, and dramatic; and governmental issues, or issues that are unobtrusive and abstract. He expects limited media effects on

the public agenda for prominent issues, as the agenda is largely driven by real-world conditions (such as the unemployment or inflation rate); for sensational issues, he expects the agenda to be largely media-driven; and for governmental issues, he expects the policy agenda to lead the media and public agendas. While most of the issues Soroka (2002) examines are domestic, he studies several economic issues – including inflation and unemployment, listed as prominent issues, and debt and deficit and taxes – categorized as governmental issues. While Soroka (2002) does not analyze foreign policy, it follows that foreign policy fits the mold of a sensational issue, as it is unobtrusive and highly dramatic. Thus, Soroka's (2002) theory helps explain the counter intuitive findings of significant media effects on the foreign policy agenda present in Edwards and Wood (1999) and Wood and Peake (1998).

For the cases of inflation and unemployment – the prominent issues examined by Soroka (2002) – he finds only limited media effects on the public and policy agendas. Instead, real-world conditions appear to drive the agenda on those issues. The findings run counter to the findings reported by Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake (2005, 2011), who focused on the United States and find substantial media effects on both the public and policy agendas, even when controlling for unemployment and inflation rates. For the governmental issues, Soroka (1999) finds reciprocal relationships between the media and the policy agenda, with increased media influence on debt and deficits especially, and increased influence for the policy agenda on taxes. He argues that for these governmental issues, agenda leadership by government is indirect, in that the influence of the policy agenda on the public occurs through the government's influence on the media's agenda. Soroka's argument is quite similar to arguments made in Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake's (2011, p.67) "indirect leadership hypothesis," in which they state that presidents are likely to have their greatest influence on the public's agenda via their impact on media coverage. Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake (2011) find a similar reciprocal relationship between the media and policy agenda on deficits and spending in the U.S.

Two recent studies have applied Soroka's (1999) framework to other political settings. A study by Walgrave et al. (2008) employ Soroka's issue typology to study agenda setting in Belgium. The researchers find extensive media effects on the policy agenda across a range of issues, including domestic, economic, and foreign policy issues, which they categorize using Soroka's (1999) prominent-sensational-governmental typology. They do not examine public opinion, however. The study is particularly interesting for our purposes because it includes analysis of foreign policy and economic issues, although it does not disaggregate issues beyond these broad categories, unlike many of the studies already discussed. Walgrave

and coauthors (2008) argue that foreign policy issues in Belgium, while unobtrusive, are not as concrete and sensationalized as they are in the U.S., so they categorize the issue as a governmental issue and expect to find little media impact on the policy agenda. They also argue that economic issues, being prominent, should lead to more limited media effects on the policy agenda. The findings, however, indicate that the policy agenda is highly responsive to media coverage of foreign policy issues and the results on economic issues are somewhat mixed. Thus, the findings by Wood and Peake (1998) of a significant media effect on the government's attention to foreign policy in the U.S. is verified in this particular study of agenda setting in Belgium.

Valenzuela and Arriagada (2011) applied Soroka's (1999) issue typology to agenda dynamics in Chile. The authors argued that in Chile the president's agenda should lead the media's agenda, in turn affecting the public's agenda, due to that country's "exaggerated form of presidentialism" and "weak governmental accountability exercised by the news media" (p.373). Instead, their results indicated additional evidence that the news media is an important agenda setter, as the media often led the presidential agenda. Valenzuela and Arriagada (2011) examined several domestic and economic issues, including unemployment. They expected limited media effects on unemployment (a prominent issue using the Soroka (1999) typology), but instead found strong media effects.

In sum, the agenda setting literature's findings on issue attributes is mixed. This is especially the case when scholars focus their attention on the two key issue domains of the economy and foreign policy. One key finding is that an issue's salience or prominence should impact the interactions between the policy, media, and public agendas. Foreign policy issues, which typically lack salience and are unobtrusive, may engender greater executive leadership of the agenda. On the other hand, economic issues, which tend to be highly salient and obtrusive, may engender less executive leadership. Variance on these attributes exists within these two policy domains, as well. For instance, foreign policy issues that are highly salient and dramatic (for example, the Arab–Israeli conflict) may limit presidential leadership more than is the case for structural foreign policy issues that lack prior salience (Peake, 2001). We also see differences in salience and obtrusiveness between pocketbook economic issues, which are high on both dimensions, and governmental spending issues, which are low on both dimensions (Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake, 2005; Soroka, 2002), with greater influence by the government's agenda in the latter. The importance of these issue attributes to agenda setting dynamics is verified in a limited variety of political settings, in both Western Europe and Latin America (Valenzuela and Arriagada, 2011; Walgrave et al., 2008).

A more consistent finding of this literature is the importance of the media's agenda on both the policy and public agendas. In most studies addressing foreign and economic policy, the media's agenda has a strong influence on the government's agenda, though in some cases the relationship is reciprocal. In the foreign policy domain, scholars of international relations identify claims of media effects on the policy agenda and policy decisions as the "CNN effect." According to Robinson (2013), "the CNN effect came to be understood as shorthand for the notion that mainstream media . . . were having an increased effect upon foreign policy formulation." Some argued that the media's influence on the agenda, through dramatic coverage of humanitarian crises, directly led policymakers to consider intervention. One such case involved the Ethiopian famine of 1984–1985, when the Reagan administration was prodded to get involved based on heavy news coverage of the problem (see Bosso, 1989). By some accounts, television coverage of starvation in Somalia encouraged U.S. policymakers to intervene militarily in Somalia in late 1992 (Hess and Kalb, 2003; Kennon, 1993).

A review of the research on the CNN effect by Robinson (2013) suggests that humanitarian interventions were more likely after the end of the Cold War, as the international system moved away from "a statist international society, in which the doctrine of nonintervention prevailed" to a system where humanitarian "justice was allowed to trump order." Moreover, the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s perhaps allowed for attention to humanitarian issues that were previously set aside due to fear of creating a dispute between the East and the West. The concomitant rise of 24-hour news increased the amount of media attention to these crises as well. Of course, policy agenda shifts that may result from increased media coverage of world crises do not have to reach the level of armed intervention to be significant. In his assessment of the CNN effect, Robinson (2002) finds that media effects on foreign policymaking tend to increase as the policy under consideration moves further away from armed intervention toward less risky ventures, including increased aid.

While scholars dispute the veracity of the CNN effect thesis (Bahador, 2007; Livingston and Eachus, 1995; Robinson, 2002), what is clear is that the foundation of the claim – that the media, by deciding what to cover and what not to cover, influences both the public agenda and the policy agenda – is a basic truism. Part of the explanation is due to the media's significance in affecting the public's agenda on foreign policy issues. Broadening the analysis of agenda setting dynamics to foreign and economic policy confirms the basic argument made by traditional scholarship that the media is fundamental to the process.

## “REAL-WORLD” FACTORS AND AGENDA SETTING DYNAMICS

A consistent observation in agenda setting analyses of foreign and economic policy is the significance of “real-world” factors to the dynamics of the process. The key “real-world” factor in studies focusing on foreign policy includes international events. In studies focused on economic policy, the key factor is the economy’s health, measured with various economic indicators including rates of unemployment and inflation, changes in stock markets, and economic growth. Economic events, including the onset of recessions or the collapse of markets, can also be critical. In studies of domestic issues, key concepts related to the “real world” are focusing events, including environmental disasters or mass shootings, and indicators of social problems, such as the crime rate or poverty rate.

Focusing events are an important concept in studies of agenda setting, as their suddenness can vault issues onto the agenda and trigger important policy responses (Birkland, 1997, 1998). Events, however, are likely to play a more critical role in the dynamics of foreign policy agenda setting than for most domestic policy issues. The policy and media agendas are especially responsive to events in the foreign policy domain, as a nation’s foreign policy agenda, according to neorealist theory, is more often than not a response to events that are exogenous to the political system (Waltz, 1979). The international system presents a continuous stream of events that effect attention to related foreign policy issues. This is especially important in the case of the U.S., a superpower with significant national interests spanning the globe. Thus, while focusing events, including oil spills or natural disasters, often prove important for the dynamics of agenda setting in domestic policy, the “progression of events is far more important” in foreign policy, as “the foreign policy agenda operates in the context of a continually unfolding international drama” (Wood and Peake, 1998, p.182).

According to Wood and Peake (1998), international events impact foreign policy agenda setting dynamics in two ways. First, their prominence heightens the importance of the media in foreign policy agenda setting. The authors found that presidential attention to foreign policy issues is responsive both to exogenous events related to each issue and, separately, to media coverage of each issue. The media, however, did not respond to shifts in presidential attention, controlling for exogenous events. As discussed earlier, in a follow-up study, Peake (2001) analyzed less event-driven foreign policy issues (for example, foreign trade and aid) and found the media to be of less significance, with greater presidential influence over media attention.

A more significant finding of Wood and Peake (1998, p.178), however, is the impact of events on attention to unrelated foreign policy issues. Given that issues compete for attention in a limited agenda space (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005), a significant increase in the occurrence of events related to one foreign policy issue should decrease media and presidential attention to unrelated foreign policy issues. For example, Wood and Peake (1998) found that an increase in the number of exogenous events related to the Arab–Israeli conflict significantly decreased presidential and media attention to U.S.–Soviet relations. International focusing events – such as the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the collapse of the Soviet Union in late 1991, or the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 – can have a considerable impact on attention to competing foreign policy issues. Wood and Peake (1998) found, for example, that both presidential and media attention to the Arab–Israeli conflict all but disappeared for some time in the wake of the Soviet collapse. So, while it is a given that an international focusing event will increase attention to related issues, it is also evident such an increase will cause a consequential decrease in attention to competing issues.

While it is apparent that foreign policy issues compete for attention with one another, we do not know if there is competition across issue domains; that is, between foreign policy and economic policy. We can intuit, however, that competition may result across issue domains when attention by policymakers, in particular the president, is scarce. Thus, it makes sense that attention to foreign policy issues (broadly) will compete with attention to economic issues (broadly) and that events in either domain will impact attention both within the issue domain and outside of the issue domain. In other words, the onset of a recession or a market collapse, for example, will surely increase both media and governmental attention to economic issues, as was the case in 2008. However, such a dramatic economic event may also have the effect of diminishing attention to unrelated foreign policy issues. Coverage of the Iraq War, for example, dissipated during 2008 and public concern for the situation in Iraq decreased markedly as public concern for the economy reached new heights (Morales, 2009). Despite this relatively intuitive extension of the agenda setting framework, no existing research has systematically examined competition for agenda space across issue domains. However, recent work in international relations has started to apply the issue competition component of the agenda setting framework.

Application of the agenda setting framework in foreign and economic policy may provide international relations scholars some purchase in the debate over the domestic political motivations for and the effects of presidential uses of force and other foreign policy activities

(DeRouen and Peake, 2002). Diversionary theory, for example, posits that external conflict may divert public attention from political misfortune – such as a souring economy or political scandal – thus providing incentives for executives to use force abroad (DeRouen, 2000; Levy, 1989), an effect popularized in the 1997 film, *Wag the Dog*. Such scapegoating incentives exist in both democracies and nondemocracies, as the distraction effect of military conflict provides an important incentive to leaders threatened by domestic unrest or economic turmoil. The quintessential case is the Falkland Islands War of 1982, when embattled Argentinian president Leopoldo Galtieri launched a surprise attack on British forces stationed on the far-flung British territory (Oakes, 2006; Tir, 2010). In agenda setting parlance, then, the use of force may influence the public's agenda by shifting attention toward the president's foreign policy and away from a poor economy (or other problem). This, in turn, could affect the president's standing with the public, as a shift in public attention toward foreign policy may increase presidential approval through priming (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Krosnick and Kinder, 1990). The heightened salience of foreign policy could lead the public to evaluate the president based on his foreign policy leadership instead of the health of the economy (Edwards et al., 1995).

DeRouen and Peake (2002) apply this line of reasoning to estimate the diversionary effect of presidential uses of force short of war. Their analysis suggests that using force abroad significantly decreases public concern for the economy. As the public becomes less concerned with the state of the economy as a result of the shifting agenda, the president's approval ratings may increase gradually. Thus, while they do not find a direct "rally effect" for uses of force, the analysis suggests an indirect effect of force on presidential approval through the agenda setting and priming effects caused by the increasing salience of foreign policy that results. Their tests, however, are an indirect test of their theory, as the study does not include a measure of media attention to foreign policy. Including a measure of news coverage of the uses of force would be a significant improvement upon this line of research.

Recent scholarship in international relations has further applied the agenda setting framework to issues surrounding foreign policy decision-making and policy formulation. Given the concept of issue competition in agenda setting, some have argued that presidents' foreign policy activities – including dramatic uses of force and less dramatic uses of speech – impact both the policy and public agendas by diverting attention from the economy or other issues toward issues more favorable for the president (see Brule and Hwang, 2010; Meernik and Ault, 2013; Miles, 2014). Thus, presidents may be incentivized to focus their agenda on foreign policy, through speech

or other activities, in order to push other issues off of the agenda. Mazarr (2007) applies the agenda setting framework to George W. Bush's decision to invade Iraq in 2002–2003. He highlights the significance of 9/11 as a focusing event, which opened wide a policy window for officials to apply “a pre existing policy idea [invading Iraq] to the opportunity offered by a focusing event [9/11].” Finally, a recent study by Lindsey and Hobbs (2015) applies agenda setting theory to imply that an “executive bottleneck” exists in presidential attention to foreign policy. They argue that limits to presidential attention, often resulting from other issues pushing foreign policy off the president's agenda, could have significant policy consequences. They examine foreign policy outcomes and conclude that decreased presidential attention to foreign policy may have detrimental effects on the quality of relations between U.S. allies.

These recent studies in international relations tell us that concepts related to the agenda setting framework are broadly applicable to studies of political power and decision-making. Scholars of international relations – in particular those that take domestic influences on foreign policy seriously – consider the media as an important domestic influence, largely for its agenda setting role. The idea that the “economy of attention” necessitates that issues compete for attention in the limited agenda space significantly improves our understanding of how some issues come to prominence while others do not, and how those dynamics change over time, often as a result of dramatic events. The notion that attention to one issue means inattention to competing issues may provide an explanation for incentives related to executive leadership in foreign policy. Leaders seeking re-election and popular approval may strategically affect media coverage of foreign policy in order to improve their political prospects.

## CONCLUSION

Agenda setting dynamics differ significantly across both issue contexts and political contexts. Issue contexts are important in how policy and public agendas are shaped and the influence various actors and institutions have in the process. An important line of research focused on issue attributes and the dynamics of agenda setting has significantly improved scholars' understanding of how issues move onto and off the agenda. Scholars have examined a breadth of issues in their analyses of agenda setting dynamics, though most of this work remains focused on the U.S. – with some important exceptions. The work tends to be highly sophisticated statistically, and the data employed by the variety of studies, both in American politics and in comparative politics, continues to improve. As the work continues

to improve, scholars can more effectively make causal claims about the influence of various actors in the process and the consequences of that influence or lack thereof.

Expanding scholarly analysis of agenda setting dynamics to a broader set of issues and a broader set of political contexts is critical in order to improve our understanding of this critical political and policy process. In a sense, the multitude of findings discussed in this chapter speaks to the importance of breadth in our analyses of agenda setting. The seminal work of Kingdon (1984) and Baumgartner and Jones (1993) focused primarily on domestic political issues in the U.S. and did not address foreign policy or economic policy. However, the punctuated equilibrium theory (PET) of Baumgartner and Jones (1993) and the multiple streams approach (MSA) of Kingdon (1984) – discussed extensively elsewhere in this book – are broad enough to be applicable to a variety of political settings and issue contexts. Thus, scholars have continued to build upon these important theories.

The work on agenda setting in foreign and economic policy reviewed in this chapter adds additional considerations to agenda setting theory, which are important as scholars continue to expand their analyses into additional political contexts. Specifically, the analyses discussed in this chapter highlight the importance of issue characteristics in how agenda setting dynamics play out in the political system. The research illustrates three key issue characteristics that impact agenda setting dynamics: 1) the existing salience or prominence of the issue; 2) the importance of events and real-world conditions; and 3) competition between issues for space on the policy agenda. Each of these important insights has considerable implications for our understanding of how the agenda setting process works and builds upon prior theory. Additional analysis is needed to determine whether these insights are generalizable to a broader set of political settings, for example, among emerging democracies or in Western Europe.

One lesson from PET is the notion that the dynamics of attention matter significantly when considering how an issue rises to the notice of governmental actors. After all, the attention of institutional actors is finite, such that attention to one issue generally means another issue receives less attention (that is, there is a competition between issues). The practical effect is that disturbances to the equilibrium of attention to an issue can cause significant policy change as issues are thrust on to *and off* of the policy agenda. The attention given to the set of possible policy issues is interrelated. Thus, we see that significant events in foreign policy, covered heavily by the media, force presidents and other institutional actors to focus on related issues, necessitating less attention to other issues. Moreover, when economic recessions dominate institutional attention,

governmental actors are constrained in the attention they can give other important issues, including foreign policy. Such an understanding of the dynamics of attention has important implications for further study of agenda setting. Most importantly, studies using case studies or single-issue areas must consider the effects attention to other issues might have on the dynamics of attention for the issue under examination. Otherwise, the analysis is incomplete.

Analysis of agenda setting in foreign policy, specifically, has also sparked the interest of scholars working in international relations as they attempt to explain states' actions on the world stage and the effects of these actions on domestic politics. The agenda setting framework, considered broadly, provides scholars of international relations important insights on how foreign policy is shaped in democracies and the consequences of foreign policy activities. While I have only touched on a few of the international relations theories that relate to the agenda setting framework, there is great potential for the pollination of theory and analysis across subfields in the broader discipline.

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