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Summary and Keywords

Scholars across politics and communication have wrangled with questions aimed at better understanding issue salience and attention. For media scholars, they found that mass attention across issues was a function the news media's power to set the nation's agenda by focusing attention on a few key public issues. Policy scholars often ignored the media's role in their effort to understand how and why issues make it onto a limited political agenda. What we have is two disparate definitions describing, on the one hand, media effects on individuals' issue priorities, and on the other, how the dynamics of attention perpetuate across the political system. We are left with two notions of agenda setting developed independently of one another to describe media and political systems that are anything but independent of one another.

The collective effects of the media on our formal institutions and the mass public are ripe for further, collaborative research. Communications scholars have long understood the agenda setting potential of the news media, but have neglected to extend that understanding beyond its effects on mass public. The link between public opinion and policy is "awesome" and scholarship would benefit from exploring the implications for policy, media, and public opinion.

Both policy and communication studies would benefit from a broadened perspective of media influence. Political communication should consider the role of the mass media beyond just the formation of public opinion. The media as an institution is not effectively captured in a linear model of information signaling because the public agenda cannot be complete without an understanding of the policymaking agenda and the role of political elites. And policy scholars can no longer describe policy process without considering the media as a source of disproportionate allocation of attention and information. The positive and negative feedback cycles that spark or stabilize the political system are intimately connected to policy frames and signals produced by the media.

Keywords: public policy, media, public opinion, agenda setting, attention

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By 1981, the field of political communication had matured enough to warrant comprehensive treatment in a handbook (Nimmo & Sanders, 1981). The authors characterized the field as experiencing "a healthy, thriving, and burgeoning state" (p. 18). One is struck by the much broader set of topics captured by the 1981 handbook compared to this compilation, and the lack of emphasis on the mass media as communication systems in the earlier volume. But the 1981 volume was far more diffuse and suggestive of possible research directions compared to the coherent summaries of strong bodies of research that characterize the present volume. Today, the research is far more extensive; for example, the 1981 handbook included a single article, by Max McCombs, on the media and public opinion, whereas today there is a whole set of papers describing media effects on the public as well as a separate section on the effects of political campaigns. A similar contrast applies to the media-public policy nexus; the 1981 volume featured a single entry (by Cobb and Elder), while this collection includes five articles with a policy focus.

Cobb and Elder (1971, pp. 408–414) centered a major part of their discussion on policy subsystems, distinguishing between communication essential to subsystem maintenance and incremental policymaking and that associated with major mobilizations and policy changes—those associated with the idea of agenda-setting (or agenda-building, as they termed it) so ably set out by Cobb and Elder elsewhere (1983). This dual role of the media in the policy process remains just as critical today.

Yet to date we have little research that addresses these systemic components of the relations between public policy and political communication, even given the emphasis that the topic receives in this volume. In this article, we explore this divergence, from each side of the divide, and point to potential unifying ideas for the future.

Although scholars of political science and communication have long studied agenda setting dynamics by exploring patterns in attention, there has been a distinct lack of connections between studies of the media and studies of public policy processes (Wolfe, Jones, & Baumgartner, 2013). In particular, "agenda setting" remains more or less a homonym between the two disciplines rather than a research topic with a common theoretical base.

Political scientists have studied agenda setting in the political system by exploring the formation and accessibility of the political agenda, as well as the causes of policy change and stability, often absent of a discussion of the media. Within political science, the public policy field's examinations of the media provide a radically different perspective from that of communication scholars. Policy scholars posit that media attention—similar to policy attention—is episodic, providing high levels of attention to some issues, but ignoring most. Furthermore, studies indicate that the media is a major player in the policy cycle, inserting positive feedback (increased levels of coverage) and negative feedback (low levels of coverage, or no coverage) into the system, potentially corresponding with changes in the intensity of policymaking activity. This perspective argues in favor of

pursuing studies of the relationship between the media and the policy process by focusing on exchanges of information between the two bodies, an information processing approach.

Communication scholars have generally focused on the impact of media coverage on the public agenda, that is, what the mass public believes, feels, and attends to. Scholars in this tradition have studied public opinion formation, evaluation, and engagement. They report finding that the media influences the national (public) agenda through its tendency to focus attention on a few key issues and thus determine the issues, and direction of the issues, that the public cares about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Scholars of political communication extend this inquiry to examine the extent to which the media's agenda-setting capacity drives public attitudes, evaluations concerning the political system, and decision-making within the political process. This research focuses on the quantity and content of media coverage on public perceptions of television advertising in campaigns, candidate evaluations, vote choice, political engagement, and more, finding that the media is a key player in deciding what, and sometimes how, the public thinks about political issues and whether or not one will engage in the political process (Entman, 1989; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; McCombs, 2004).

The independent tracks of these two approaches to agenda setting has led to the development of two disparate bodies of work and two separate definitions of agenda setting, distinct but relevant to one another. The communications literature on agenda setting has traditionally centered on the role of the media in setting the issue priorities of individuals and the mass public, while the policy field has focused on the dynamics of media issue attention and policymaking in the political system.

In this article, we argue in favor of integrating these two bodies of work that, for too long, have talked past one another. We argue that both policy and communication studies can benefit from a broadened, integrative approach toward studying media agenda setting. In doing so, we will begin by providing an overview of the literatures supporting both agenda setting perspectives, highlighting the dividing factors. Next, we will discuss the expanding body of work that has begun to integrate the two approaches to agenda setting in the media. Finally, we will propose four recommendations designed to aid policy and communication scholars in pursuing integrative approaches. These are our recommendations:

- First and foremost, political communication scholars should consider the role of the media beyond its purported role as a linear driver of public opinion or policy. The news media's effects arguably cannot be effectively modeled by linear relationships linking media effects, public opinion, and political activity. The public agenda cannot be comprehensively understood without a thorough understanding of the policymaking agenda and the role of political elites. Communication scholarship has previously neglected to extend the agenda setting capacity of the news media past its causal

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effect on the mass public—thus, we propose extending studies of the implications of media and public opinion to policymaking and the policy process.

• Policy scholars studying policy change and attention allocation should address the role of the media as an institutional actor—often assumed in media studies—in the political system and assess the media as a key actor in the policy process.

• The study of the relationship between the media and policy process would benefit from the use of an information processing perspective, characterized by exchanges of information uncovering policy problems, disseminating information, and potentially driving episodic policy change. A consideration of the media as a source of information supply—drawn from recent policy studies—can provide valuable insight for understanding feedback cycles and changes in attention across studies of both elite and mass politics.

• Finally, a comparative or cross-national approach to studying media and the policy agenda has broad benefits. The symbiotic relationship between the media and the policy agenda is not a uniquely American experience, and the need for an integration of policy studies and political communication is not a uniquely American problem. A number of comparative policy scholars have begun to examine the relationship between the media, policy issue salience, public opinion, and governmental activity, finding significant relationships (Green-Pedersen & Stubager, 2010; Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2008, 2010). Future research efforts should not only continue addressing the links between media and the policy agenda, but should do so comprehensively, and comparatively.

The road to a more integrative approach to agenda setting is not clear nor void of hurdles and pitfalls, but we argue that it is worth exploring, as the potential for a greater understanding of the media within both mass publics and elite institutions is crucial. By combining communication and policy studies, we may be able to approach studies of the media from a more complex approach that explores the cyclical and dynamic nature of mass media influence.

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Origins of Policy Agenda Setting

The policy tradition of agenda setting began in the mid-20th century as a rebuke of pluralist models that either ignored the accessibility of the political agenda or assumed a broad scope of influence for the agenda. E. E. Schattschneider (1960) highlighted the limited accessibility of political agendas, particularly in the context of conflict and power struggles. Schattschneider argued that the outcomes of political conflict are highly dependent on the scope of the surrounding conflict, which is determined, in part, by the number of the political players and the amount of competition involved (1960). Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz (1962) critiqued the standard conceptions of power in the social sciences, arguing that there are two faces of power, one concerning the exercise of power, and one concerning the influences used to limit the scope of conflict or prevent conflict from occurring entirely (1962). Roger Cobb and Charles Elder (1971) highlight the difference between the systemic, public agenda (comprised of issues of high salience for the general public) and the institutional agenda (comprised of issues of high salience for government institutions), and propelled scholars to focus on how the agenda is formed. They proposed three steps to agenda formation: issue creation, issue expansion, and agenda entrance. In the first step, an issue is created as a result of activism by an initiator, in tandem with focusing events that provide the issue with staying power. The issue expands as it garners resources, attention, and mobilizes supporters—all serving to expand the scope of the conflict. Once the issue has expanded to garner high levels of awareness and interest from the mass public, it enters the agenda. Cobb and Elder further support this argument by detailing dimensions of issues that are fundamental to placement on the agenda, including specificity, social significance, temporal relevance, complexity, and historical precedence (1972). As we noted above, Cobb and Elder were the first policy scholars to recognize a key role for the media in the policy process. They depicted a dual role in the policy process for the media—subsystem reinforcement and major mobilizations.

Providing a foundation for the study of policymaking in a limited agenda space, Michael D. Cohen, James G. March, and Johan P. Olsen laid out a study of organizations and organizational problem solving (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972). They developed the now well-known "garbage can model of organizational choice," in which organizations are characterized by a collection of decision-makers, problems, solutions, and opportunities, which flow in and out of the organization's attention span. The theory posits that decision makers are constantly searching for opportunities to utilize pre-scripted solutions, issues are searching for opportunities to cause them to rise to the forefront, while solutions are searching for issues to address (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972). In this model, the authors argued that the pairing of problems and solutions in the garbage can occurs mainly due to chance (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972).

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John Kingdon (1984) extended the Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972) study of organizational decision making to policymaking and the policy agenda, defining the policy agenda as a list of problems which government officials, and those associated with government, are paying attention" (Kingdon, 1984). Kingdon (1984) argued that policy change occurs as a function of attention and the simultaneous coupling of problems and solutions, and suggested a number of processes by which issues arise on the policy agenda. In particular, he introduced the concept of a "policy window," a window of opportunity for policymaking that opens when a new problem (or problem definition) arises. In this window, a new solution to a problem may be developed (or a previously concocted solution recycled), and policy change is implemented (Kingdon, 1984). Kingdon envisioned a relatively limited role for the mass media in the policy process, which may have been a side consequence of his reliance on intensive interviews with highly placed policymakers who are more prone to attribute policy making to the goals and motives of individual decision makers than properties of the policy context including media attention.

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Micro-Foundations and Macro-Effects in Agenda-Setting in Policy Studies

Key to all modern work on agenda setting is the notion of collective attention, based on Herbert Simon's classic concept of bounded rationality as applied to the policy making process (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Jones, 2001). Simon originally proposed bounded rationality as a criticism of rational choice models of decision making and argued instead that decisions makers are bound by limited cognitive architectures and unknown factors that impact the decision-making process.

With bounded rationality as a micro-foundation for understanding the causes of policy change and stability, recent studies of policy agenda setting have focused on the roles of attention, information, and feedback in the policy cycle. This work began by introducing the concept of punctuated equilibrium to the social sciences, the notion that policymaking activity is characterized by long stretches of stasis and incremental change, followed by punctuations in policy change, and expands to control for the role of attention in problem prioritization processes in government (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). Applying punctuated equilibrium theory to a policy context, Baumgartner and Jones illustrate that incremental, or stable, policy change is reinforced by a lack of government attention to an issue, while large-scale policy change is associated with heightened government attention to an issue (1993). They also attribute episodic policy change to shifts in framing, venues, and levels of mobilization surrounding the issue (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993, Baumgartner & de Boef, 2008). In their study of major US laws passed between 1947 and 1998, Baumgartner and Jones investigated the informational bases of decision-making, specifically exploring how policymakers interpret, manage, and respond to information (2005). They showed that major policy change is significantly related to how policymakers—and the political system as a whole—process information (2005). In an extension of this argument, Baumgartner and Jones (2015) further explored the role of information and information search processes in government, finding that limited information search processes lead to declines in policymaking, while extensive information search processes are closely related to surges in policymaking activity (Baumgartner & Jones, 2015).

The media has only recently been integrated into agenda setting studies as a major source of information, and as an integral institution in the political system. Writing in 2006, Bartholomew Sparrow noted that policy scholars typically fail to consider the potential role of the media. He went on to propose an agenda for research, suggesting that scholars should consider the media's role as a public diplomat, its patterns of interpreting, normalizing, and disseminating political information, potential disconnects between political issues as presented by the media and as understood by the public, and how the media is able to maintain its impact (relationships with lobbying groups, key legislators, FCC, and the judiciary), both inside and outside of the United States. Sparrow's contribution was to highlight a gap in the literature that continues to persist—

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scholars have been slow to consider the role of uncertainties facing the media in the policy process, and until recently, few had explored the role of the media as a wide-reaching political institution (Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2016).

In one of these studies incorporating the news media into the policy process, Michelle Wolfe (2012) examines the relationship between media attention and the speed of policymaking. Wolfe characterizes the media as a "gatekeeper to arguments and interests," capable of conditioning the speed of policymaking. She argues that the time it takes a bill—once introduced—to become a law increases as media coverage associated with the debate surrounding the bill reaches higher levels. Her findings indicated that increased media coverage slows down the speed of policymaking, as it causes new information, participants, and problem definitions to enter the debate, allowing for counter-mobilization by a bill's opponents. The dynamic nature of media effects on feedback cycles is further explored in a study of front-page articles in the New York Times from 1996 to 2006, where Amber Boydstun (2013) examines the process by which policy issues make it onto the media agenda, uncovering long-standing patterns in coverage. She finds that, by and large, most policy issues receive little to no media coverage, while a few issues receive explosive levels of coverage. She attributes this to positive feedback effects within the media, in which coverage begets coverage, rather than being prompted directly by the scope and duration of the underlying event. This type of work, exploring the role of feedback into the policy system, is necessary to further understand and fully appreciate the media's role in the policy process.

Origins of Media Agenda Setting

Studies of the media agenda can be traced back to Walter Lippman's (1922) observation that the news media filter reality and provide the "pictures in our minds" concerning the course of public affairs and current events. While, for much of the 20th century, communications scholars operated under a "limited effects" media model, arguing in favor of the media's inability to affect public perceptions, scholars soon came to realize that the priorities of the news media strongly shaped those of the mass public. This literature argues not only that the media influences public opinion, but also that the media also has the capacity to influence the direction of public opinion.

In their seminal study of media agenda setting, McCombs and Shaw (1972) compared the level of issue-related newspaper coverage in Chapel Hill, North Carolina with public responses to Gallup's question about the most important problem facing the country. In effect, McCombs and Shaw explored the early stages of opinion formation and information acquisition, finding that the public's perception of the most important problem facing the country closely reflected the patterns of issue coverage in newspapers. This finding launched media agenda setting research and many subsequent studies have confirmed the hypothesis that the media has the capacity to set the public

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agenda (Funkhouser, 1973; Shaw & McCombs, 1977; Weaver, Graber, McCombs, & Eyal, 1981; Winter & Eyal, 1981). Furthermore, comparative scholars of the media have found similar effects across the world (McCombs, 2004).

This work on agenda setting effects has been organized into studies of agenda setting, priming, and framing. Here, the literature posits that media emphases of issues and objects drive the topics that the public thinks about (Wu & Coleman, 2009). Complimentary agenda-setting studies focus on the attributes of issues or how they are framed in the media (Ghanem, 1997; McCombs, 2004). This work highlights the media's ability to draw attention to certain characteristics of issues in the news—the focus is not on *what* the news media emphasize, but *how* they describe their issues of emphasis, thus focusing public attention on certain attributes or frames (Coleman & Banning, 2006; Ghanem, 1996; McCombs, Lopez-Escobar, & Llamas, 2000). Furthermore, this line of work argues that the tone of an issue is just as important as the amount of coverage that an issue receives (Coleman & Banning, 2006).

Stemming from this extensive documentation of the media's agenda setting effects, scholars of political communication have explored the effects of framing and priming by studying if, how, and why media agenda setting can drive public attitudes and engagement in the policy process. Studies of campaigns, candidate evaluations, vote choice, and political engagement find that media framing and priming are key players in deciding what, and how, the public thinks about political issues, as well as key drivers of public engagement in the political process (Entman, 1989; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; McCombs, 2004). In an analysis of national television news, Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder (1987) find that issues in the news are weighed more strongly when the public evaluates their political leaders. In this way, television news coverage has a strong effect on public opinion, without changing underlying attitudes (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). In a later update of this study, the authors find that the issues that receive the most attention in national television news become the most important issues to viewers, while those issues that do not receive attention in national television news are not of the highest importance to viewers (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Similarly, Robert Entman (1989) examined political messages in newspapers, finding a significant relationship between the content of these messages and the political attitudes of readers. While these studies have clearly established a link between the media and the public agenda, and have suggested that issue salience—as driven by media framing and priming—may affect vote choice, they have often lacked a clear reference to how these mechanisms drive change in the policy process. Thus, we may argue that the implications of the media's direct and indirect impacts on the political process have yet to be fully integrated into agenda setting studies.

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Integrative Approaches to Agenda Setting

While the political communication literature has extensively explored public agenda formation in the context of political messages, evaluations, and behavior, much of this literature has stopped short of linking these findings to the broader policy process. Before delving into our recommendations for further integrative work, it important to overview current and past scholarship that has probed the links between media and the policy system.

Bryan Jones and Michelle Wolfe (2010) study the media's patterns of receiving and prioritizing information, extending the scholarship from discussions of public agenda setting. Jones and Wolfe's work provides support for an indexing hypothesis of the relationship between the news media and politicians: this hypothesis argues that debates in the formal political system set the agenda for debates in the media (Jones & Wolfe, 2010).

Frank Baumgartner and Suzanna De Boef (2008) and Amber Boydstun (2013) connect the media's tendency to frame issues from a particular perspective with changes in policy over time. They demonstrate that media framing of the death penalty has a substantial impact on changes in capital punishment policy over time. Along the same lines, Rose and Baumgartner (2013) examine the impact of framing the poor on federal funding of social programs, finding significant links between shifting frames of the poor and federal social welfare spending. Eric Jenner (2012) deviates from the standard analyses of news articles to examine the influence of news photographs, focusing on media coverage of environmental news. Jenner argues that photogrpahic attention to environmental issues in the media influences issue salience for the mass public and elite actors. He examines public opinion polls, environmental news stories in *The New York Times*, and environmental news photographs in *Time* magazine. He finds that news photographs— unlike news articles—have a significant impact on congressional committee attention, but have little impact on public opinion (Jenner, 2012).

Integrative approaches to agenda setting also extend to comparative spheres: Soroka and Lim's (2003) study of media coverage, public opinion, and foreign policy across the United States and the United Kingdom highlighted a strong correlation between foreign affairs issue salience in the media, and in the public mind. Following the previous literature's suggestion that governments react to issue salience, Soroka and Lim posit that issue salience may drive defense spending in the United States and United Kingdom, since changes in spending may be a reaction to foreign affairs issue salience. Peter Van Aelst and Stefaan Walgrave (2011) survey Members of Parliament in Belgium, Netherlands, Sweden, and Denmark, questioning them on their perceptions of the media's power as an agenda setter in the political system. Their findings indicate that the majority of MPs

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consider the media to play a very important—if not the most important—role as an agenda setter in their political systems.

These studies suggest that the media has an unquestionable impact on the policymaking process. But, importantly, policymakers try to influence the media as well. Lance Bennett (1990) developed the indexing hypothesis, positing that journalistic norms constrain news coverage by indexing coverage to what policymakers are saying about an issue being covered. While the thesis has been controversial, the thesis was groundbreaking in its attention to government's effect on media, hence reversing the standard direction of causation of media influence on policymakers, and integrated journalistic norms into the process. Fifteen years later, Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston (2006) re-examined the thesis to try to see when the media might develop alternate narratives based on other sources.

Moving Forward: Bridging the Media and Policy Divide

Media as an Institution Within the Policy Process

Building on recent approaches that have begun to integrate media and policy studies, we argue that researchers must consider the role of the media as a political institution in studies of the political system, public opinion and policy process. Political institutions have norms that shape daily interactions with the policy process, and media outlets are one of many policy actors whose routines and organization lead to a regular presence in the political system. The media's organizational process is characterized by institutional incentives, such as attending to elite actor and consumer demands (Boydstun, 2013). Just as daily subsystem interactions may affect the policy process, so too do the daily decisions that occur within the newsroom. Media scholars have often studied the role of newsroom interactions and institutional norms on the production of news and its impact on citizens, but these institutional patterns have lasting effects for the policy process that remain largely unknown. Meanwhile, the media is increasingly recognized as an integral part of the feedback systems that characterize the policy process (Boydstun, 2013; Wolfe, 2012), but meso- and micro-level studies of the effects of journalistic norms and practices require additional attention. For instance, is the shift toward a more professionalized media and the responding growth of communications staff within Congress a critical factor in the types of issues that make it onto the policy agenda? Or do they impact the nature of those issues, as in the speed, timing, and context surrounding proposed measures? Shifts in digital media—a 24-hour news cycle, the Internet, blogs, and social media—have all changed the way politicians interact with the media and the public, but

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what does this shift mean for the policy process? A closer link between the routines of journalists and their role as a political institution must be integrated with studies of elite policy actors and their relationship to the policy process as a whole.

Media as a Mechanism for Disproportionate Information

Even more important than understanding the media as a formal institution within the policy process, we should begin to understand the effects of media actors' interaction within that process. The media serves as part of a complex information-processing system that influences the public policy process throughout (Jones & Wolfe, 2010). Scholars have argued that the political preferences of journalists, economic pressures, and industry standards are major factors in the process of determining the quantity and content of news coverage. Since the quantity and content of news coverage have significant implications for the public policy process, these factors deserve extensive study when considering the role of the media as a potential disseminator of disproportionate information.

Despite standards of unbiased reporting, the political attitudes of journalists and editorial decision makers may be a major source of bias affecting the topics covered by the news (Hackett, 1984). Researchers have explored this relationship domestically and comparatively, finding a significant correlation between journalists' personal beliefs and their respective news decisions in the United States, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, and Sweden. While this relationship is more significant among newspaper journalists than broadcast journalists, partisanship maintains a modest impact across all news decisions (Patterson & Donsbagh, 1996). Some studies have suggested that media coverage in the United States is characterized by a liberal bias; for example, Groseclose and Milyo study partisan bias in the media by comparing media citations of think tanks and other policy groups to the citations of similar think tanks and policy groups by Members of Congress, finding a strong liberal bias (Groseclose & Milyo, 2005).

The patterns of news generation by journalists and editors combine to produce both positive and negative feedback cycles that characterize how and when elite attention is allocated among issues (Boydstun, 2013). Negative feedback is the process by which changes in the political system are "corrected" or "countered" by an opposing shift back toward equilibrium. In the context of news generation, negative feedback is produced by daily or routine media coverage that maintains the current allocation of attention across issues and the type of frames used to present the issue. Positive feedback mechanisms reinforce changes that may rapidly alter the political agenda, replacing the current policy image or definition with a completely new frame. The media can often supply momentum, and this shapes the policy agenda through positive feedback forces (Boydstun, 2013).

The balance between feedback cycles produces media outputs that are often skewed or disproportionate, such that over time some issues receive a dominant amount of media attention while others receive almost none. For instance, a surge of media coverage may

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follow a highly publicized event—such as Hurricane Katrina—but this positive feedback then limits or curbs the attention of simultaneously occurring events or issues—a negative feedback effect. These skews in attention are the result of a disproportionate information processing system, meaning that agendas do not reflect events in real time or in proportion to the relative magnitude of those events. For policymakers, this disproportionate system holds many implications for policy actors' efforts to sufficiently and substantively respond to policy problems. This means that the issues that policymakers are often compelled to address are likely a function of skewed media coverage. Elite actors are already part of a disproportionate information process in which limited attention and processing power lead to episodic shifts in policy. The media's contribution to positive and negative feedback cycles only add to the complexity of how institutions and actors operate within an episodic and disproportionate policy process.

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Comparative Approach to Policy and Media

Agenda setting in studies of public policy and the media has become much more frequent over the last 20 years, as the underlying foundations of both theories have been found common across multiple political and media systems. Media agenda setting has examined the effects of agenda setting on public opinion and attitude formation in multiple comparative assessments.

Scholars found public opinion toward the final British governor in Hong Kong to be closely tied to the content of news coverage—through weekly tracking polls, they found that the news media often primed the public's reaction (Willnat & Zhu, 1996). A study of media influence in Israel examined agenda building, agenda setting, and priming in the context of four Israeli elections, finding that media coverage has significant priming effects on the voting intentions of individuals and aggregate election results (Sheafer & Weimann, 2005). Similarly, a study of news coverage of a national referendum campaign in Denmark (concerning the introduction of the euro) studied the impact of news coverage of the campaign on public evaluations of political leaders. Here, findings suggest as the issue of the introduction of the euro became more visible in the media, it became more important for shaping evaluations of the incumbent government, prime minister, and opposition leaders (de Vreese, 2004), supporting the priming hypothesis. In studying media coverage of Spanish elections, scholars found a positive relationship between the media's effective attribute agenda about the candidates leading up to the election and the voters' attribute agendas about the competing candidates (Canel, Llamas, & Rey-Lennon, 1996). What is missing from these studies, however, is a discussion of how the media's effects feed back into the political system. This missing link is where media agenda setting ends and policy agendas begin.

The study of policy agenda setting has benefited from the establishment of the Comparative Agendas Project, which aggregates agenda setting measures across political systems and enables cross-system analyses of global policy. International scholars have been at the forefront of integrating media and policy studies by looking at how the media affects the policy agenda, especially the legislative process. Rens Vliegenthart and Stefaan Walgrave attempt to operationalize both notions of agenda setting by identifying the disparity between media and policy agendas (Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2011). They examine media coverage as an indicator of attention and construct a model to assess how political parties and legislative action contour the media's agenda setting influence. They conclude that the media has a considerable effect on the policy agenda, and that this effect is greater for opposition parties and smaller parties who are more reliant on journalists to get their message across. Another study by Walgrave and Peter Van Aelst offers a comparative perspective that finds media effects on agenda setting in general, though the authors argue for a more dynamic analysis of the relationship between media and policy (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2011).

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It is that call for a dynamic analysis between not only media and policy, but media, policy, and the public, that we echo. Media agenda setting often begins and ends with issue salience in the mass public, and policy scholars refrain from discussing the public implications of media influence on policy. Comparative analysis is a venue for bridging this gap as both the communication and policy fields further broaden the applicability of agenda setting beyond the United States.

Moving Beyond Linear Assumptions

The influence of the media agenda on public opinion is often represented through simple linear models and correlations that illustrate a casual or direct link between the media's message frame and what the public believes to be salient. This assumes a very hierarchical structure in the sense that the media distributes a message that the public subsequently receives, according to the media's ability to prime and frame the issue. Scholars have used this linear structure to test the content of news stories, the tone or attributes of those stories, and more networked approaches that combine both substance and tone of the articles or broadcasts. While the measures of content are further explored, all too often the assumption about the senders and receivers remains the same.

Media scholars struggle with a limited frame about the relationship of media and the public, while policy scholars continue to tangle with the notion of how the media fits into an "untidy" process (Kingdon, 1984). The media can have effects on the policy process as a mechanism for both positive and negative feedback, but it is also a recipient of the outputs of these political processes. Few scholars attempt to grapple with this endogeneity problem, preferring to posit a directional causal arrow from the media to the policy process with few implications beyond that as far as the eventual repercussions for the media, the public, or policy makers.

Both media and policy agenda setting studies stand to benefit from analyses that pull one another away from their corners and embrace the dynamic nature of agenda setting, where effects are not just within elite institutions or the public, but rather part of one larger process. We must consider the media's agenda setting role, not only as a primer for public salience but the effects that has on the issues that politicians take up in Congress or Parliament. The actions of elite officials do not end with the passage of legislation, but have reverberations that extend beyond elite institutions to the public. The media is one connection between elite decisions and public perception, and is able to transfer issue salience from one public to another. Agenda-setting studies cannot and should not move forward without a better consideration for the entire political process rather than one-to-one linear relationships.

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Conclusion

Studies of agenda setting have become increasingly common and more complex as scholars across disciplines attempt to better understand the role of the media. We have argued that the nature of this complexity is too often confined to either elite notions of media influence (policy) or mass public effects (communications), and that agenda-setting studies must begin to look at the relationships both elite and mass publics foster with the media within the agenda-setting process. Instead of relying on small-scale case studies, an integrated approach also enables more complex and collaborative database analysis. New technology enables research that breaks traditional discipline norms, and we must take advantage in the research moving forward.

We have proposed four avenues for better integrating policy and communication studies in ways that bridge the divide between what have historically been two completely separate research agendas. Many scholars studying political processes acknowledge a role for the media in the agenda setting process, but a better understanding of that role should include considerations of the media as a political institution, a disproportionate processor of information within a system that provides information to elite and mass publics, has a comparative studies advantage, and as a bridge between elite and public priorities. The basic principles of agenda setting, priming, framing, and issue definition are ever present across research, and we must take advantage of what is similar and useful to our overall better understanding of media's agenda-setting influence. For too long, two richly diverse and complex bodies of work have talked past one another, and policy and communication studies can benefit from a broadened, integrative approach toward studying media agenda setting.

Acknowledgements

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