

Where's the Party? A Cross-County Comparison of Agenda-Setting Effects and the Role of Party Identification

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One fundamental question in political communication research is the extent to which the media influence public opinion. Many theories have been developed, but what has often gone unexplored is the role of partisanship within information processing models. This study focused on perception of media content by examining whether the media or other factors, such as partisan bias, influence opinions. Using a unique dataset of residents from Indianapolis and St. Louis, combined with local newspaper and national television content, the results of this analysis suggested that factors such as partisanship do shape individual perceptions of important issues, and agenda-setting effects vary across issue, location and partisan group.

Introduction

Although the evidence is mixed as to how influential the media are in shaping public opinion, recent evidence posits the media as a central actor in information processing models (Hetherington, 1996; Zaller, 1992). One such model is the agenda-setting process, or “the process by which problems become salient as political issues around which policy alternatives can be defined and support or opposition can be crystallized” (Erbring, Goldenberg & Miller, 1980, 17). Through agenda-setting, the media affects not only how the news is transmitted to the public, but more importantly, how the public ultimately comes to view and evaluate politics by assigning relevance to those issues covered by the media (Behr & Iyengar, 1985; Graber, 1980).

Given the widespread media usage in society today, agenda-setting is a relevant concern. Democratic deliberation could be jeopardized if the media have a large effect on information processing. If the public were to blindly accept information provided by the media, deliberation would be impeded because discussion would not center around a thoughtful review of the information. Rather, deliberation, if it occurs, would be a result of the agenda of the media. At the same time, people do not have to be blind processors of political information; other factors can work to facilitate or hinder agenda-setting. Because of this, it is important to understand how political information is transmitted and translated into public opinion and what effect the media, and other factors, have in these processes.

This study focuses on public perception of media content by examining media content across two localities to understand the extent to which the media influence public opinion, as well as what differences exist in the media messages transmitted

across locations. In addition, I build on previous research and use the concept of partisan bias to understand not only the role of partisanship in agenda-setting, but also the extent to which partisanship biases information processing and works to either facilitate or hinder agenda-setting.

In order to determine the extent to which location, partisan bias and media coverage affect opinions, I first outline the process of individual level agenda-setting and introduce the potential role of partisan bias in this process. Then, I examine media content across two locations and present a model of agenda-setting focusing on the role of partisan bias.

The Rationale of Agenda-setting

In one of the first studies of agenda-setting, McCombs and Shaw (1972) explored the ability of the media to set the agenda in the course of an election campaign, as well as the effect agenda-setting had on vote choice and candidate evaluation. The results showed that the media had a considerable impact on voters' judgments of what they considered the major issues of the campaign. Following this rationale, agenda-setting research has grown, owing to empirical disagreements. While these disagreements have spurred new research, the field does agree on the processes by which agenda-setting manifests- framing and priming.

Framing refers to changes of the opinion of people because of alterations in the definition of the choice problem (Iyengar, 1987). The media have the ability to frame issues in order to highlight certain aspects at the expense of others. The work of Iyengar and Kinder (1987) demonstrated the powerful impact framing has on the public. Using experimentation, Iyengar and Kinder presented various news stories to a group of subjects, giving some subjects news stories where the main issues were framed to emphasize a certain characteristic. In the end, these subjects identified with the framed characteristic when asked about the news story, demonstrating not only a framing effect, but also an agenda-setting effect.

The news media can also prime particular issues by paying more attention to certain issues. By emphasizing some issues over others, the media prime the public as to what information is more important (Hetherington, 1996). Iyengar and Kinder (1987) explored this in a manner similar to their framing experiments, and found priming to be a robust effect on a person's perception of important issues.

Framing and priming work because individuals are sensitive to contextual cues (Iyengar, 1987), and they conceive of attitudes as information stored in memory and make decisions and inferences by calling to mind accessible information (Zaller, 1992). Information is accessible if it is easy to remember or salient to the person, which can be influenced by the priming and framing of stories. Ultimately, this results in agenda-setting, or "the process by which problems become salient as

political issues around which policy alternatives can be defined and support or opposition can be crystallized" (Erbring, Goldenberg & Miller, 1980, 17).

Partisan Bias. While agenda-setting results tell us that as the media highlights certain issues, people come to attach more importance to these issues, other factors can facilitate and/or hinder this process. Specifically, partisan bias affects how people select and recognize information, which could affect agenda-setting. For example, Democrats might be more susceptible to frames about Democratic issues and in paying attention to these frames, the individual might alter his or her perception of the objective content. Given this, it is important to examine partisan effects in the context of agenda-setting.

Much of the literature in political science has focused on the usefulness of party identification as a heuristic (Berelson, Lazarsfeld & McPhee, 1954; Downs, 1957; Campbell, Converse, Miller & Stokes, 1960; Markus & Converse, 1979; Nie, Verba, & Petrocik 1979; Kinder, 1983; Sniderman, Brody & Tetlock, 1991; Miller & Shanks, 1996). The basic idea, as stated by Downs (1957), is that people, as rational actors, have limited information since it is not rational to be fully informed about every issue. Therefore, when a person evaluates an item or makes a vote choice, the person uses information shortcuts in making the decision, where party identification may be the most prevalent shortcut. The reason party identification makes a good heuristic is that it has been found to be a strong, psychological attachment formed by an individual. In the seminal work of the *American Voter*, Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes (1960), found party identification to be an attachment that structures an individual's vote choice. Through their analysis, they showed voters to be partisan, non-ideological and unconcerned with issues of the day.

This view has been challenged and a revisionist view of party identification has been explored from the mid-1970s through the 1980s (Franklin, 1992). The central critique from the revisionist school is that party identification might not be as stable of an attachment as previously thought. Rather, party identification has been shown to be responsive to other factors (Jackson, 1975; Franklin and Jackson, 1983; MacKuen, Erikson and Stimson, 1989). While these works do show responsiveness of party identification, additional works have come to critique the revisionist theory, claiming the results are based on methodological choices in measuring party identification (Green and Palmquist, 1990; Abramson and Ostrom, 1991). One critique focuses on question wording (Abramson and Ostrom, 1991). For example, the National Election Study wording implies a longer time horizon and produces more stable responses overtime versus the Gallup Poll wording, which includes the phrase "as of today." This phrase indicates a momentary evaluation of party identification and results in fluctuations overtime (Abramson and Ostrom, 1991). A second measurement critique of the revisionist school focuses on the distinction of party identification from partisanship. Miller (1991) argues these terms need to be measured separately because they measure different concepts. His argument is that partisanship taps the strength component to party identification and this component might be more responsive than one's actual, simple identification with one party

over another. Green and Schickler (1993) also pose a critique of the revisionist school. By using multiple measures of partisanship at a single point in time (rather than using panel data), they show changes can be a result when questions are asked moments apart. This result supports a measurement error critique of the revisionist school, where responsiveness might reflect measurement error, not true changes in party identification.

While the methodological arguments that critique the revisionist school are compelling, Franklin (1992) adds to the debate by testing different conceptions and measurements of party identification. His findings suggest that the seven-point scale traditionally used to measure party identification does tap a single, underlying, continuous dimension of party identification. He argues that the claims of revisionists are not the result of coding decisions. He also finds no evidence that party identification and the strength component of partisanship are different from one another. Overall his results support the claims of the revisionist school. What is most interesting is his discussion of the revisionist school, focusing on common critiques or misconceptions of the findings of this line of thought. Namely, he cautions critics not to dismiss the claims and view partisanship as wildly unstable. Rather, he shows partisanship can be responsive, and this does not have to translate into large, sudden changes in identification.

Overall, the debate over the responsiveness of party identification continues, and a common consensus does not exist. However, the arguments do not discount the usefulness of party identification. There is agreement that party identification is a meaningful concept and does represent an individual attachment. The conflict arises when one considers if the attachment has to be stable and enduring over one's lifetime. When viewed as an attachment at one point in time, party identification can provide an individual with cues for voting and decision-making. Under this framework, there is potential for people to use party identification when evaluating the most important issues facing the nation. For example, Iyengar and Kinder (1987) did find a partisan effect in agenda-setting, where Independents were more susceptible to agenda-setting because they did not have a partisan lens, cueing them as to which issues were important.

Building on the results of Iyengar and Kinder (1987), it is reasonable to suggest agenda-setting works differently for different partisans, but I argue that Independents are not the only group susceptible. Partisanship predisposes people to pay attention to certain issues at the expense of others (Graber, 1997). In connection to agenda-setting, a particular political party can claim certain agenda issues, predisposing members to selectively seek out or filter information specific to these issues. For example, issues of defense and foreign policy are found to be part of the Republican agenda, while issues such as social welfare and education are viewed as Democratic issues. Beyond this, current media content contains more partisan cues due to the rise of cable news and political commentary within cable stations. Therefore, I expect to find that partisanship will have a differential effect for Democrats and Republicans

in terms of perception of an issue as important. This rationale opens the door for new research to further establish the role of party identification in agenda-setting research.

In exploring agenda-setting and a potential partisan bias, three research questions will be answered. First, does location affect people's perception of most important issues facing the nation? Media coverage occurs at the local and national level, creating inherent differences in the content people are exposed to. Further, variation across localities, for instance population size and geography, also create differences in the content people are exposed to. Therefore, it makes sense that media content will vary. If so, it is important to understand the effects location has on not only media content, but public opinion.

Second, if location does affect people's perception of most important issues, can these differences be explained by media coverage? This question is central to the notion of agenda-setting. If media content emphasizes certain issues, these issues come to play a prominent role in a person's thought process. If location accounts for differences in opinions, then agenda-setting would suggest these differences in opinions will be a product of differences in media content. However, the possibility exists that the differences are not solely a function of media content, which leads to the third research question: are other factors, such as partisan bias, responsible for differences between people in terms of perception of important problems? Given the partisan nature of news, as well as the effect partisanship plays on information processing and vote choice, a connection might exist between media, partisanship and public opinion.

Data and Methods

In constructing the research design for this analysis, I followed the lead of Erbring, Goldenberg and Miller's 1980 agenda-setting study (Erbring et al. 1980), with a few modifications, as noted below.

Locality. I chose to focus my analysis on two counties: Indianapolis and St. Louis. Traditionally a national survey is used or a survey taken in one locality, making this two-county approach unique. These two counties provided variation not only across location, but across ideology of the residents and the media sources, giving me increased leverage to examine the effect of ideology and party identification on agenda-setting. Indiana is typically a Republican state, having consistently voted for the Republican candidate in U.S. presidential elections. On the other hand, St. Louis provides a more liberal/moderate ideology within Missouri, where Missouri, during the time frame of the analysis, consistently voted for the Democratic presidential candidate. The newspapers within both of these areas also mimic these ideologies. The Indianapolis Star has a reputation for being a conservative media outlet. First, the Star has a history of endorsing the Republican presidential candidate. Further, in an article by the newly appointed editor in 2000,

Andrea Neal commented that her first challenge was how to maintain a conservative editorial page (Neal, 2002). In contrast, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch has a history of endorsing Democratic presidential candidates. Further, in a study designed to investigate the declining readership of the Post-Dispatch, a liberal bias was found in political stories (Rodgers, Thorson, and Antecol, 2000). Overall, the evidence does show both areas to be politically distinct from one another, and both major newspapers in the areas to have opposing ideological outlooks.

The variation in ideology across the counties also allowed examination of selective exposure to determine whether people actually do learn (i.e. are affected by agenda-setting) when their media source is in line with their beliefs. The agenda-setting capacity may be stronger for Republicans in Indianapolis and Democrats in St. Louis because the local media are ideologically similar to the population.

Survey Data Source. To assess individual level information, I obtained individual attitudes through the 1996 Political Network Election Study conducted in Indianapolis and St. Louis during the course of the 1996 election year, beginning in February 1996 and ending in January 1997.¹ The survey had approximately 2100 respondents, with approximately 40 respondents interviewed each week until the election and more than 40 respondents interviewed each week after the election. This time frame allowed me to analyze trends cross-sectionally, matching respondents with media content during a specific period. The period also introduced a time series component, where variation could be examined across the course of the year in media coverage, which might uncover stronger agenda-setting effects.

The survey asked respondents a variety of questions, but central to this analysis was the question concerning what the respondent felt was the most important problem (MIP) facing the nation.² The question, widely used in agenda-setting research, served as the dependent variable in the analysis.³ The primary definition of agenda-setting is the process by which problems become salient for the public (Erbring et al., 1980). Thus, if agenda-setting had occurred, it would be evident in the respondents' answers to the MIP facing the nation (Behr & Iyengar, 1985; Graber, 1980).

To analyze the responses to the MIP questions, I created an electronic program to search for key words and phrases and place each response into one of 19 issue

¹ Additional survey information can be found in Huckfeldt, Sprague and Levine (2000).

² "What do you think is the one most important problem facing this country?" A series of follow-up questions were used to ascertain any additional problems the respondents felt were important to the country.

³ Following the primary question, there was a follow-up question asking if the respondent would like to name any other important problems. I coded the problems listed as being "most important problems," rather than rank ordering them or coding only the first problem mentioned because I examined agenda-setting on a broad level and was interested if a person reports any of a host of problems that might have been covered in the media, not just a single important problem and other minor problems.

areas reflecting the issues areas given by the respondents. I then manually placed any responses not identified through the search into the appropriate issue area.⁴

Partisan bias. Beyond MIP questions, the survey contained questions used to ascertain partisanship and other key demographics and descriptives. One of the goals of this analysis was to introduce partisan bias to the agenda-setting model, therefore the conceptualization of party identification is central to this analysis. In modeling partisan bias, it was important to take into account the various arguments concerning the measurement of party identification. In particular, a lot of recent attention has focused on the use of not only the seven-point traditional scale, as well as the conceptualization of Independents and leaners within this scale. In particular, scholars have questioned if independence should be mid-point between partisanship (Weisberg, 1980; Miller and Wattenberg, 1983) and if leaners behave more in line with partisans or Independents (Keith, Magleby, Nelson, Orr, Westlye and Wolfinger, 1986).

Weisberg (1980) argues that the standard conception of party identification places independence as a midpoint to partisanship and this might be incorrect. He further argues that the typical scale might not reflect one's ability to identify with more than one party. Through his analysis, he finds that the seven point scale does not order strength correctly, especially for Independents. Instead he finds independence is a complex topic that needs to be better understood. Miller and Wattenberg (1983) also weigh in on this issue and reach similar conclusions. In addition, Keith et al. (1986) analyze the placement of leaners in measures of party identification. Their analysis of the behavior of leaners in presidential primaries, voting stability and party identification shows that leaners actually behave more closely to partisans than Independents. They argue that the seven point scale can be an accurate measurement of party identification. They also suggest additional measures can be used, but they caution researchers from placing all Independents (pure and leaning) into one single category.

Given the debate as to the measurement of party identification, I chose to model party identification by creating three dummy variables, one for Democrats (including strong, weak and leaning identifiers), one for Republicans (including strong, weak and leaning identifiers) and one for pure Independents. These variables were created based on the standard questions used to obtain party identification.⁵ This method was chosen based on the arguments of Keith et al. (1986), as well as Mutz and Martin

⁴ A complete listing of the codebook is available upon request.

⁵ Respondents were asked, "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?" Following this, those who reported "Republican" were asked, "Would you call yourself a strong Republican or a weak Republican?" Those who reported being a "Democrat" in the initial question were asked the follow-up, "Would you call yourself a strong Democrat or a weak Democrat?" And those who reported being "Independent" in the initial questions, were then asked, "Would you consider yourself closer to the Republican party or Democratic party?"

(2001). In their analysis of the hostile media effect, Mutz and Martin (2001) argue that partisans behave differently (Democrats are different than Republicans in behavior). Specifically they show Republicans are more likely to assume a hostile press, while Democrats do not. They argue the traditional seven point party identification scale does not allow for this nuanced result (previous research had concluded all partisans found the press to be hostile). Instead, they created separate dummy variables for Democrats, Republicans and Independents and argue that this distinction captures behavioral differences across partisans. Given the nature of my argument- that partisans are differentially predisposed to agenda setting based on the issue- I find the method of Mutz and Martin (2001) supports the views of both Keith et al. (1986) and the revisionist school of party identification and is best suited for this analysis.

Using these dummy variables, I measured partisan bias through an interaction of party identification, media content and exposure to media content. While party identification alone would show differences in perception of MIP between partisans, to better test the theory, I examined the effects of both content and exposure for partisans. A partisan bias would manifest when partisans were exposed to certain types of media content and would vary across the level of media content.

Additional factors might affect perception of most important problems, and most prominent would be exposure to media sources, as Hill (1985) found that the public's ability to recall news items was largely based on attentiveness. The exposure variables were coded 0 to 7, representing the number of days per week the respondent read the local newspaper or watched a national nightly news program, as reported through a self-report.

Media Source. The media content for this analysis came from the local newspapers in each county, the Indianapolis Star and the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, and the national nightly news programs, from ABC, CBS, and NBC, because exposure questions to both types of sources were included in the individual-level survey.⁶ While agenda-setting studies frequently limit the analysis to newspaper content, I included television content because using only newspaper readers might not present a complete picture. For example, newspaper readers might be different from the general population in terms of education, demographics and partisanship (Wanta, 1997). Further, a larger percentage of the population watches television regularly and controlling for real-world situations necessitated the inclusion of television news coverage in the analysis.

Data for the newspapers and the three national television network evening newscasts came from LexisNexis. I coded all sources for content during the time of

⁶ Based on the constraints of the survey, questions were not asked about local television viewing habits. Although agenda-setting would be expected to occur at the local television level, local coverage was not included in this analysis because exposure to local coverage could not be ascertained.

the survey, beginning one month preceding the initial survey interview. I limited the newspaper analysis to the front page because research has shown people often read and retain only the information contained on the front-page (Erbring et al., 1980). For television content, I coded the entire newscast transcripts.

Similar to the coding of the MIP question in the survey, I used the same electronic program to count the number of word mentions, per issue area per week and calculated the percentage of coverage, which is the number of words mentioned divided by the number of lines of total text. The unit of analysis was taken per week in order to mimic the individual-level data and to match each respondent with the media coverage during the time of the interview. Once this was completed, I narrowed the list of 19 issue areas down to four main areas: defense and foreign policy, crime and drugs, social policy (health care, social security, poverty, race and AIDS), and education. These four categories were chosen because each category constituted over 10 percent of the front page coverage during 1996 and over 20 percent of the respondents listed the corresponding issue or issue group as a MIP. In order to examine agenda setting, there needs to be variation in media coverage of the issue and in respondents reporting the issue as important. Therefore, it was necessary to reduce the number of issues from the original 19.⁷ Further, for each issue, there was variation between the newspaper coverage in the two counties, within the two counties, and between the television content and newspaper content.

Using a count of the number of word mentions and calculating a percentage of coverage differs from previous agenda-setting studies. The majority of earlier studies counted the number of stories related to an issue, without reference to overall frequency and total numbers of stories. The only information available was that a story covered the issue of crime, but there was no reference to the total number of stories overall. If testing of agenda-setting were to occur, it was necessary to include some measure of frequency. To say 20 stories mentioned crime might sound impressive, but not if we learn there were 2000 total stories and only 20 were related to crime. To correct for this, I used the percentage of coverage for a particular issue.

I made an additional adjustment for television coverage. Since the survey asked if the respondents watched the nightly news, but did not ask what specific network nightly news program the respondent watched, the measure of television issue coverage was the mean taken between each of the three nightly newscasts' issue coverage. A correlation analysis between the networks showed correlations above 0.50 for the majority of issues. Defense and foreign policy had the highest correlations (ABC-NBC 0.69, ABC-CBS 0.71, NBC-CBS 0.73). The weakest correlation was for social policy (ABC-NBC 0.17, ABC-CBS 0.35, NBC-CBS 0.18). Overall, the network news coverage correlates fairly highly with one another, making the mean content measure appropriate.

⁷ Analyses based on the remaining issues areas have been conducted. These results can be provided upon request.

To create the final dataset, I merged the individual level survey data with the media content data, coded for each week of media coverage during which the respondent completed the survey interview. Therefore, each respondent having reported reading the Post-Dispatch or the Star-News was matched with the actual content of those newspapers over-time.

Media Coverage During 1996

Before addressing if location affects agenda-setting, it is necessary to examine the pattern of media coverage across locations. Since the media cover issues as they arise, and different stories appear on television compared to newspapers, I expected to find variation across time, location and source. To show this, I calculated the mean amount of coverage per source per week. I also calculated correlations between the content of the newspapers. Table 1 displays these correlations.

Table 1. Media Content Correlations During 1996

| | Indianapolis newspaper | St. Louis newspaper | Television |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|------------|
| Defense and Foreign Policy | | | |
| Indianapolis newspaper | 1.00 | | |
| St Louis newspaper | 0.54 | 1.00 | |
| Television | 0.59 | 0.73 | 1.00 |
| Crime and Drugs | | | |
| Indianapolis newspaper | 1.00 | | |
| St Louis newspaper | -0.02 | 1.00 | |
| Television | 0.12 | 0.49 | 1.00 |
| Social Security, Health Care, Poverty, Race and AIDs | | | |
| Indianapolis newspaper | 1.00 | | |
| St Louis newspaper | 0.27 | 1.00 | |
| Television | 0.14 | 0.23 | 1.00 |
| Education | | | |
| Indianapolis newspaper | 1.00 | | |
| St Louis newspaper | 0.09 | 1.00 | |
| Television | 0.30 | 0.14 | 1.00 |

Location. Differences existed between both newspapers, in terms of the mean values of coverage. For the issue of crime and drugs, the Indianapolis Star gave more coverage to these issues than the other two sources. First, in addressing location and source, coverage given by the Star varied compared to coverage given by the Post-Dispatch. The mean amount of coverage of crime and drugs by the Star was 6.54 percent, varying from a low of 3 percent to a high of 16 percent of the front page.

For the Post-Dispatch, the mean was only 4.05 percent, meaning on average, the Star gave 2.5 percent more coverage to the issue of crime and drugs than the Post-Dispatch. Similarly, the correlation between coverage given to crime and drugs by the Star and the Post-Dispatch was -0.02, which indicates significant differences in coverage between these sources. This shows that location and source both affect coverage of crime and drugs, and residents in Indianapolis were exposed to more coverage during the year, on average, than residents of St. Louis.

For education, location produces slightly under a 2 percent difference, where the Star had a mean of 4.46 percent and the Post-Dispatch had a mean of 2.79 percent. Further, the correlation in coverage of education between both newspapers was 0.09, meaning there was a great deal of variation in content between the newspapers. A similar amount of variation was found for the issue of social policy, showing a 2 percent difference in coverage and some variation between the newspapers (Star mean of 5.98 percent, Post-Dispatch mean of 3.96 percent, $r=0.27$).

In contrast, for the issue of defense and foreign policy, location did not affect coverage. Consistent coverage was given to the issue of defense and foreign policy (Star mean of 5.30 percent, Post-Dispatch mean of 5.05 percent, $r=0.54$). Overall, there was variation across location for three of the four issues, which shows newspapers do vary in coverage across location and residents in different areas were exposed to differing amounts of coverage about the same issues.

Source. Beyond the location effects between the newspapers, source effects were present when comparing television content to newspaper content. Overall, the Star outpaced television content by over 2 percent for education (television mean of 2.28 percent, $r=0.30$), and almost 1 percent for crime and drugs (television mean of 5.83 percent, $r=0.12$) and social policy (television mean of 5.06 percent, $r=0.14$). At the same time, television coverage was most consistent with both newspapers with respect to coverage of defense and foreign policy (television mean of 5.83 percent, Star $r=0.59$, Post-Dispatch $r=0.73$). These results show that source matters, and depending on the issue, the media source produced variation in content, across both time and location.

Perceptions of the Most Important Problem Facing the Nation

Having determined that media coverage did vary across location, did this variation affect individual opinions? More specifically, what did the public view as the most important problem, and did this vary across location? As Table 2 reveals, residents in both Indianapolis and St. Louis perceived social policy as most important, while the magnitude varies, showing variation across location.

Table 2. Percentage of Main Respondents Reporting Issue as Most Important Problem

| Issue | Indianapolis | St. Louis |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Defense and Foreign Policy | 11.75 | 10.30 |
| Crime and Drugs | 28.23 | 29.16 |
| Social Security, Health Care, Poverty, Race and AIDs | 30.31 | 32.05 |
| Education | 21.22 | 16.94 |

For Indianapolis, the MIP for respondents was social policy (30.31 percent), followed by crime and drugs (28.23 percent), education (21.22 percent), and defense and foreign policy (11.75 percent). For St. Louis, social policy was the MIP, with a higher percentage of residents in St. Louis ranking it as important compared to residents in Indianapolis (32.05 percent). Crime and drugs (29.16 percent), education (16.94), and defense and foreign policy (10.30 percent) followed.

These results showed that even with the differences in media coverage between Indianapolis and St. Louis, residents in both counties had identical rank-ordering of these issues, though the percentages placing each issue as important varied. These differences might be explained by the variation in media coverage that existed between the newspapers and television nightly news.

An Analysis of Agenda-setting. Having found variation across the location in terms of perception of most important problems, the second research question posed is to what extent can perceptions of important problems be explained by media content? And, the third question poses, does variation in media content produce agenda-setting effects that explain perceptions of MIP, or do other factors, namely partisan bias, affect perceptions? To answer this, I constructed a model containing an individual's perception of an issue as a MIP as the dependent variable (1 if yes, 0 for all others), and party identification⁸, newspaper coverage⁹, television coverage, exposure (to both newspaper and television separately), a dummy variable for which county the respondent lives in, and an interaction between party identification, media

⁸ Dummies for Republican and Democrat included in the model, with the Independent dummy variable as the excluded category.

⁹ In terms of a time lag used for the analysis, a series of models were used to identify the appropriate lag. The rationale was that it takes repeated exposure of an issue to affect a person's perception of the issue as a MIP. The lags are also combined lags, meaning at a two week lag, the media coverage variable consists of the current week's coverage, and the two preceding week's worth of coverage. The results across all models were consistent, showing no change across time lags; the same results were found for the previous week's and current week's coverage combined as were found for four previous week's worth of coverage. Given this result, a one week combine lag (previous week's coverage and current week's coverage) was used for the analyses.

content (both newspaper and television separately) and exposure (to either newspaper or television), as the independent variables.

As Table 3 shows, based on a logistic regression of the above model, agenda-setting effects did exist, as did partisan biases, but these results were not consistent across each issue, rather, certain issues produced agenda-setting effects, while for others, partisan bias best explained perceptions of important problems.

Defense and Foreign Policy. Neither location nor agenda-setting explained public opinion of defense and foreign policy. Instead, a partisan bias for Republicans and Democrats exposed to both newspaper and television content affected perceptions. In both cases, the effect was negative, with Republicans less likely to perceive defense and foreign policy as a MIP, and Democrats more likely to perceive defense and foreign policy as a MIP when newspaper content or exposure were at lower levels.

The above results are counterintuitive. Given defense and foreign policy is typically an agenda item of the Republican Party, I expected Republicans to be in tune to this issue as a MIP. Second, the effects for Democrats appeared under low content or exposure levels, negating any individual-level model of agenda-setting.

The low presence of perception of defense and foreign policy as a MIP might explain the lackluster results. Only 11.75 percent of the respondents in Indianapolis and 10.30 percent of the respondents in St. Louis listed defense and foreign policy as a MIP.

Crime and Drugs. I speculated that agenda-setting results might be more prevalent when more respondents view the issue as important. Compared to defense and foreign policy, more respondents viewed crime and drugs as important (about 28 percent); however, this increase did not translate into agenda-setting. Agenda-setting, partisan bias and location did not affect perception of crime and drugs as an important problem. Television content was the only significant predictor of perception of crime and drugs as an important problem. To determine the magnitude of this effect, I calculated the predicated probability of perception of crime and drugs as a MIP while television exposure varied, holding all other variables in the model constant at their means. The results showed a 0.15 increase in the probability of perceiving crime and drugs as a MIP as one went from 0 days of television exposure to 7 days of watching the nightly news.

It is unexpected that television exposure alone, rather than content, increased perception of a MIP. It could be that individuals who watch the nightly news regularly are also watching other news shows that contain content concerning crime and drugs (such as local news- which I was unable to control for), and this produced an indirect effect for television exposure on perceptions. Overall, perception of crime

and drugs as a MIP was influenced by television exposure, while location, media content and partisan bias had no effect.

Table 3. Logistic Regression Results for Most Important Problems

| | Defense and Foreign Policy | Crime and Drugs | Social Policy | Education |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Democrat | -0.706 (0.556) | 0.742 (0.482) | 1.574*** (0.495) | 0.262 (0.406) |
| Republican | -0.899+ (0.525) | 0.486 (0.482) | 0.566 (0.489) | -0.074 (0.402) |
| Newspaper Content | 0.020 (0.029) | 0.012 (0.019) | -0.034 (0.024) | 0.052+ (0.028) |
| Newspaper Exposure | 0.032 (0.049) | 0.021 (0.035) | -0.071+ (0.039) | 0.108** (0.039) |
| Television Content | -0.023 (0.046) | 0.047 (0.040) | 0.122** (0.046) | -0.061 (0.067) |
| Television Exposure | -0.047 (0.072) | 0.116+ (0.064) | 0.179** (0.068) | -0.124** (0.050) |
| Democrat*Paper Content*Exposure | -0.011* (0.005) | -0.001 (0.003) | 0.004 (0.004) | -0.016** (0.005) |
| Republican*Paper Content*Exposure | -0.005 -0.004 | -0.001 -0.003 | 0.006 (0.004) | -0.009+ (0.005) |
| Democrat*TV Content*Exposure | 0.008 (0.006) | -0.006 (0.006) | -0.022*** (0.07) | 0.023* (0.011) |
| Republican*TV Content*Exposure | 0.009 (0.005) | -0.007 (0.006) | -0.014* (0.07) | 0.012 (0.011) |
| County | -0.126 (0.892) | 0.031 (0.111) | 0.002 (0.116) | -0.335** (0.130) |
| Constant | -1.203 (0.892) | -2.386 (0.816) | -2.500 (0.870) | -0.988 (0.650) |
| LR Chi2 | 19.99* | 24.17** | 38.12*** | 33.42*** |
| N-Size | 2042 | 2042 | 2042 | 2042 |

Note: Cell Entries are based on logistic regression; Standard errors in parentheses.

***p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, +p<0.10

Dependent variable: Most Important Problem (defense and foreign policy, crime and drugs, social policy and education), 1 if the issue of concern was stated as a most important problem, 0 all others; Democrat: 1 if strong, weak or leaning Democrat, 0 all others; Republican: 1 if strong, weak or leaning Republican, 0 all others; Newspaper Content: percentage of front page of newspaper devoted to specific issue used as dependent variable of most important problem mentioned; Newspaper exposure: number of days per week read the newspaper; Television Content: percentage of evening newscast devoted to specific issue used as

dependent variable of most important problem mentioned; Television exposure: number of days per week watched the nightly news; Democrat*Paper Content*Exposure: interaction of Democrat, newspaper content & newspaper exposure; Republican*Paper Content*Exposure: interaction of Republican, newspaper content & newspaper exposure; Democrat*TV Content*Exposure: interaction of Democrat, television content & television exposure; Republican*TV Content*Exposure: interaction of Republican, television content & television exposure; County: 0 Indianapolis, 1 St. Louis

Health Care, Social Security, Poverty, Race and AIDS. While agenda-setting, partisan bias and location did not influence perceptions of defense and foreign policy or crime and drugs as a MIP to any large degree, both agenda-setting and partisan bias influenced perception of social policy as an important problem. In terms of agenda-setting, newspaper exposure had a negative effect on perception of social policy as a MIP. On the flip side, television content and television exposure had positive effects, meaning the more one watched the nightly news and the more coverage given to social policy by the nightly news, the more likely a person was to report social policy as an important problem.

At the same time, a partisan bias also existed for Democrats, where being a Democrat increased a person's probability of reporting social policy as a MIP 0.22 over Republicans.¹⁰ Considering social policy is traditionally viewed as a Democratic issue, this was expected. Further, the interactive effects of both Democrats and Republicans and television content and exposure were significant and negative. Since television content and exposure alone each had positive effects on perception of a MIP, as did being a Democrat or Republican, the negative effects in the interaction were most likely as result of the zero category for the Democratic variable (Republicans and Independents) and the Republican variable (Democrats and Independents). Therefore, looking at the main effects showed that increases in both exposure to the nightly news and nightly news coverage of social policy led to increase perception of social policy as a MIP, where Democrats were more likely than Republicans to report social policy as important.

Education. The issue of education provided further support, and as Table 3 reveals, location, agenda-setting, and a partisan bias influenced perception of education as an important problem.

First, location was important as residents of Indianapolis had a 0.05 increase in probability over residents of St. Louis in reporting education as a MIP.¹¹ Second, agenda-setting effects appeared for both newspaper content and exposure. An increase in either newspaper content concerning education or an increase in the number of days reading the newspaper led to an increase in reporting education as a MIP.

¹⁰ Predicted probability of reporting social policy as a MIP was calculated for Democrats and Republicans, holding all other variables in the model constant at their mean values.

¹¹ Predicted probability of reporting education as a MIP was calculated, holding all other variables in the model constant at their mean values.

Lastly, partisan bias worked with newspaper content and television content to affect perception of education as a MIP. Although newspaper content and exposure had positive effects as a main effect, within the interactions, newspaper content and exposure led to a negative effect of perception of education as a MIP for both Democrats and Republicans, which again was most likely a result of the zero category of the party identification variable. On the other hand, television content and exposure worked with partisanship to increase perception of education as a MIP, leading to a 0.27 increase in probability of reporting education as important for Democrats and 0.24 for Republicans when exposure to television was high versus low.

Conclusion

This study focused on whether people's concerns are affected by media coverage and partisan bias. Beyond differences in newspaper and television coverage the two counties received, there were differences in perception of MIPs. There was one main similarity between Indianapolis and St. Louis- the rankings of which problems were most important were identical across counties. This was interesting given the coverage of the issues did vary across the two counties. However, since this analysis covered an entire year, media coverage for one week did not have to be the same in both locations to produce this result. Instead, both newspapers might cover crime and drugs at different times during the year and still produce a result showing that respondents find crime and drugs important.

The differences between the two counties were further evident when an agenda-setting model was used to explore the extent to which differences in perceptions of most important problems were influenced by people media content or other factors, such as partisan bias. The results showed that agenda-setting worked differently across issues. This is a very important result for future agenda-setting studies. Typically agenda-setting analyses are conducted with a mirror image hypothesis (Erbring et al. 1980). This means that media content is correlated with respondent mentions of MIPs. The analysis showed that not only are other factors, such as partisan bias, relevant, but one model might not explain all issues. Partisan bias did enhance and diminish agenda-setting effects and is an important element in public opinion.

New avenues in agenda-setting continue to be explored and move agenda-setting research beyond the mirror image hypothesis. A deeper look into agenda-setting should be considered, especially focusing on the processes by which the respondent comes to formulate perceptions of MIPs. In addition, other factors, such as partisan bias, need to be included in order to fully understand the process by which agenda-setting and media influence occur. These results, along with the recent research in agenda-setting, show the media can exert an impact. Research still needs to develop better analyses to uncover the type of influence the media has, with regards to agenda-setting.

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