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Presidential Agenda Setting in Foreign Policy

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The traditional model of agenda setting places the Presidency as the primary agenda setter in American politics, particularly in foreign policy. Recent challenges to the traditional model argue that the President's foreign policy agenda is inherently responsive to media coverage and international events (Edwards and Wood 1999; Wood and Peake 1998). These studies rely on examinations of a restricted set of highly salient and vitally important foreign policy issues and find limited presidential influence on the foreign policy agenda. I extend the previous analyses of foreign policy agenda setting by examining foreign policy issues that are less salient and arguably less vital to American national security interests. The extended analysis suggests that Presidents have greater influence on the agendas of the media and Congress than recent research suggests. When systemic attention to an issue is generally light and the President makes the issue a policy priority, presidential success in setting the agenda increases.

Political scientists have long held the view that influencing the policy agenda is an important source of political power, especially for Presidents (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Cohen 1995, 1997; Downs 1972; Kingdon 1984; Light 1991). Persuading others to focus on presidential priorities is of primary importance in presidential leadership and influence (Neustadt 1960). The traditional model of agenda setting suggests Presidents are influential—indeed the most influential—agenda setters in national government (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Kingdon 1984; Neustadt 1960). There is also a tendency for Presidents to dominate foreign policy, particularly relative to Congress (Peterson 1994). Enhanced diplomatic

NOTE: An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1999 meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association meetings, Chicago. I thank George Edwards and Dan Wood for their encouragement and advice while working on previous drafts of this research. Generous financial support from the Center for Presidential Studies in the Bush School of Public Service at Texas A&M University greatly aided in the data collection. I also thank Karl DeRouen, Neal Jesse, Curtis Peet, Wayne Steger and several anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

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and military powers of the Presidency suggest that Presidents may have their greatest agenda setting influence in foreign policy.

Presidential success and power in the policy process is likely to increase if the President is able to influence congressional, media, and public attention to issues. Whether or not Presidents are successful in doing so is an empirical question, one that has been ignored by systematic study until recently. Recent study treats the President's agenda as an independent variable, without examining how the President's agenda is developed (Steger 1997). It is quite possible that the President's agenda is influenced by external factors, including attention to issues by Congress and the media, or important political events (Light 1991). In essence, explaining the President's agenda is as relevant to the question of agenda setting as the influence of the President's agenda. If the President's own priorities are shaped by media and congressional attention to issues, can he in turn influence the agendas of the media and Congress?

Two recent articles (Edwards and Wood 1999; Wood and Peake 1998) challenge the traditional model of presidential predominance in agenda setting, suggesting that Presidents are inherently weak agenda setters due to the reactive nature of the office. Wood and Peake examine presidential and media attention to foreign policy over time and find that Presidents are responsive to media attention rather than leading media attention to foreign policy. Edwards and Wood (1999) expand this examination of presidential agenda setting to include domestic issues and find only marginal influence by the President. Both studies rely on examinations of highly salient, important foreign policy issues, in particular, Soviet-U.S. relations and the Arab-Israeli crisis from 1984 to 1994.

I extend the analysis to other foreign policy issues to determine whether the counterintuitive results hold beyond these interesting, but exceptional, cases. The results reported below, while not supporting the traditional model *per se*, suggest that the President can be an effective agenda setter in foreign policy. Whether or not the President is successful appears to be dependent upon issue related variables, including the salience of an issue, its relative importance to U.S. national security or survival, and the degree of freedom Presidents have to put forth an independent agenda given the international system. In addition, Presidents that have distinct foreign policy priorities are more successful agenda setters.

AGENDA SETTING DYNAMICS

This study rests on two important theoretical assumptions. The first assumption involves the critical nature of events in determining institutional attention for most issues in foreign policy. Events provide exogenous disturbances to the equilibrium of institutional attention, forcing presidential, media, and congressional attention to shift to related issues (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Wood and Peake 1998). Events provide competition for the President, influencing where the media and Congress focus their attention. Secondly, the President can

only attend to so many issues at any given time and attention to one issue necessitates inattention to another issue. Presidents must choose between issues in the face of time and information constraints. These time constraints increase the importance of critical events, which force the President to attend to related issues at the cost of attention to other issues. Presidents are forced into a reactive mode when establishing their foreign policy agendas.

EXPANDING THE ANALYSIS OF FOREIGN POLICY

Wood and Peake (1998) and Edwards and Wood (1999) focus their analysis on highly salient, crisis-oriented issues. This focus, while providing important insights into the success of presidential agenda setting, may reduce practical generalizations we can make from their findings. Ripley and Franklin (1991) argue that foreign policy comes in many forms. It is likely that presidential influence will vary depending on the issue. Edwards and Wood (1999) clearly show this with their findings of increased presidential influence in domestic issues. A useful extension of this work would be to examine the President's agenda setting capabilities using a wider variety of issues and then compare to previous results. For this purpose, I focus my analysis on foreign policy issues not addressed by the two previous articles: Central America, the Caribbean, foreign aid and foreign trade. Central America and the Caribbean are arguably less important politically for the President,¹ and are certainly less critical to U.S. security than Soviet relations or the Arab-Israeli conflict. Aid and trade, on the other hand, while important politically, often involve structural issues that require the President to work closely with Congress (Lindsey 1994; Ripley and Franklin 1991).

Aid and trade are less tied to ongoing international events than other foreign policy issues. If events provide competition for the President and increase the power of the media in agenda setting, it is quite plausible that issues unrelated to exogenous events provide the President greater room to influence the agenda. One of the primary roles of the media is reporting on and interpreting international events for the American public (Graber 1997). Without exogenous international events determining the agenda, the role of the media may be relegated to reporting on conflict between the branches in Washington or covering the President. Therefore, I expect less influence by the media in foreign aid and trade, and greater influence by the President and Congress.

In foreign aid, Congress and the President share responsibility, with Congress jealously guarding its turf (Hinckley 1994). Trade issues are also politically relevant to Congress, despite indications that Congress delegates trade authority to the executive (O'Halloran 1993). By focusing only on crisis-oriented issues

¹ Presidents tend to mention the Soviet Union and the Middle East extensively in their State of the Union addresses, while focusing on other issues less often.

that are usually addressed outside of the legislative process, previous research may underestimate the influence of Congress (Lindsay 1994).

Issues examined here are less salient than issues studied previously.² High salience hinders the President's capacity to affect the agenda. If Congress and the media consistently attend to an issue (due to its high salience), it is less likely that activity by the President designed to increase the salience of an issue will have as noticeable an effect compared to an issue that is less salient. Moderate to low salience issues may provide the President opportunities to noticeably affect congressional or media attention. Lower salience decreases the competition Presidents receive from the media, possibly increasing the President's influence in relation to other agenda setters. Salience is also tied to the political importance of an issue. Increased political importance leads to high salience over time for an issue among the media, the people, and Congress, so the President is not without competition to influence the agenda. Congress and the media attend to highly salient issues regardless of the President's agenda.

Finally, issues such as the Soviet Union and the Arab-Israeli conflict create difficult problems for the President, limiting the President's practical options. The Caribbean and Central America are less difficult to handle due to the relative ease with which U.S. Presidents can affect world events in our backyard. Due to the proximity and lack of military power of Central American and Caribbean nations, relative to the USSR and the nations involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict, it is easier and less risky for a U.S. President to undertake high-profile actions in those areas, and thus affect the attention paid them by the media and Congress. The President's agenda setting capacity in relation to the media and Congress may be in part endogenous to the President's willingness and capacity to undertake the types of activities that tend to attract the attention of the media and Congress. We need only look to recent invasions of Grenada, Panama, and Haiti for confirmation.

² Cohen (1995, 1997) and Iyengar and Kinder (1987) measured salience with answers to the following Gallup poll question: What is the most important problem facing the nation today? Another strategy is to use the amount of media attention related to an issue (Iyengar and Kinder 1987). I compare the salience of the issues included here with the salience of issues in previous work using the average amount of TV news attention per week devoted to each issue. The averages are: Soviet Union—17 min/week, Arab-Israel—17 min/week, Bosnia—14 min/week, Central America—8 min/week, Caribbean—5 min/week, Trade—5 min/week, Aid—6 min/week. The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press keeps track of the stories that are followed "very closely" by their poll respondents. Using 10 percent of the respondents following a related story "very closely" as a threshold, we can determine the relative salience of issues in terms of public attention. The number of news stories that qualify above the arbitrary threshold (from 1986 through 1995) are: Soviet Union—25 stories (total of 554 percent, when percentages are added), Arab-Israel—14 stories (377), Bosnia—18 stories (321), Central America—7 stories (188), Caribbean—6 stories (154), Trade—5 stories (114), Aid—0 stories. Source: <http://www.people-press.org/database.htm>.

In sum, the four issues examined below are less salient over time, less politically vital, and offer Presidents greater independence from international contexts that constrain their decision making (events and the viability of intervention) than previously studied issues. Due to these distinct differences, we might expect to find greater presidential influence in foreign policy agenda setting.

METHODS

The statistical approach I adopt takes into account both presidential influence and presidential responsiveness. I employ Vector Autoregression (VAR) methods in order to test for potential reciprocal agenda setting relationships (see Freeman, Williams, and Lin 1989; Simms 1980). Specifically, I examine weekly presidential, media, and congressional attention to the four foreign policy issues from 1984 to 1995.³ The foreign policy agenda is defined as the set of issues that the President, Congress, and the media are paying attention to over time. When the President discusses aid to the Contras, Central America is on the President's agenda. When Congress holds hearings on the trade deficit with Japan, foreign trade is on the congressional agenda. Finally, when the media broadcast stories on Cuban and Haitian refugees, the Caribbean is on the media's agenda. Refer to the Appendix for measurement explanations (see note 3).

Statistical Model⁴

Using VAR, I am able to determine the relationships guiding institutional attention without imposing restrictions upon the parameters of the system, as more conventional structural equation methods require. VAR can be viewed as a multivariate extension of the Granger (1969) approach to causal inference. Each dependent variable is regressed on lagged values of itself, as well as lagged values of the other dependent variables in the system. The method provides an excellent control for history, by taking into account several lags of all of the endogenous variables in the system. I determined lag lengths empirically using methods based on Simms (1980). Relationships are evaluated by conducting joint hypothesis tests for the blocks of lags associated with each variable.⁵

³ The time frame of the study is chosen due to the availability of the PANDA events data set. See the Appendix for further discussion. The Appendix is available online at: http://J_Peake.tripod.com/research/Pres_Agenda_Appendix.htm

⁴ For a more complete discussion of the use of VAR and this approach see Edwards and Wood (1999). The models were estimated using WinRats, version 3.2.

⁵ In VAR, coefficient estimates are useless in determining the relationships between the variables in the system, thus VAR relies on Granger F-tests to determine causality. Moving average response (MAR) rates track out simulations of the system. MAR involves introducing a shock to a variable in the system and tracking out movements in the other variables using the VAR estimates for computing a forecast. Shocking a variable means increasing the independent series by one standard

The VAR model is essentially a series of regression equations where each endogenous variable in the system is set equal to lagged values of all of the other variables in the system. Since events in this particular analysis are a priori exogenous, the events variable is only included as an explanatory variable, with no lags (for the Caribbean and Central America issues).⁶ Institutional attention is modeled separately for each of the four issues.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the Granger Exogeneity F-tests for the determinants of institutional attention to the Caribbean, Central America, foreign aid, and trade. The results indicate that public presidential attention to all four of the issues Granger cause media attention. The F-tests for presidential attention causing media attention to the Caribbean, foreign aid, and trade are statistically significant at the .05 level. Presidential attention to Central America approaches standard levels of significance and is significant at the .1 level. Presidential attention has a significant impact on media attention even when controlling for competing international events, congressional attention, and previous media attention to the issues. The clearest finding of previous research was the inability of Presidents to affect media attention.

Granger F-tests provide only an indication of whether or not a significant causal relationship exists between two variables in the VAR. Moving Average Response tells us the direction of the relationship and forecasts the length of institutional responses. Figures 1 through 4 show the moving average responses for the four issues. Confidence bands at the .95 level are shown in each graph. The figures are organized so that responses to increases in presidential attention are shown in the first column of graphs. The responses by the media to shifts in presidential attention are positive and last for two to three weeks for all four of the issues.⁷ For the Caribbean and Central America (Figures 1 and 2), the media's

deviation and estimating the impact the increase has on the other series in the system (Wood and Peake 1998).

⁶ The analysis does not provide a variable to represent corresponding exogenous events for foreign aid and trade. It is difficult to define a list of international events that are *exogenous* to the American system that should influence attention to aid and trade. Certainly, there are events *endogenous* to the President or Congress, including various trade meetings that the President attends. The effects of these events are accounted for in the measures of presidential and congressional attention. Aid and trade are similar to the domestic issues Edwards and Wood (1999) examine. While events are probably important in determining attention to health care, education and in particular crime, the authors do not include an exogenous events variable. It is worth noting that Edwards and Wood found greater presidential influence in their domestic issues, and they attribute this result to the fewer "inertial forces" in domestic policy that are inherent in foreign policy (in other words, fewer exogenous events). Similar logic can be applied to aid and trade.

⁷ Moving average responses are sensitive to variable ordering (however, the F-tests are not). By convention, variable ordering is decided based on exogeneity as determined by the Granger F-tests. Variables which prove exogenous are placed first. In this analysis, joint causality makes the decision

≡ TABLE 1.
GRANGER EXOGENEITY F-TESTS FOR INSTITUTIONAL ATTENTION TO
FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES

Independent Variable	Caribbean	Central America	Foreign Aid	Foreign Trade	Dependent Variable
President	6.701***	2.014*	2.763**	45.94***	Media
Media	26.46***	7.113***	11.48***	9.362***	
Congress	1.454	1.454	0.724	1.382	
International Events	12.54***	13.403***	N/A	N/A	
President	4.672***	2.956**	1.752	1.991	Congress
Media	4.483***	1.668*	0.492	2.095	
Congress	3.652***	13.578***	32.77***	22.91***	
International Events	5.02***	4.314***	N/A	N/A	
President	10.80***	7.559***	15.142***	48.42***	President
Media	16.16***	2.599*	2.629*	1.856	
Congress	5.678***	3.364***	3.404**	0.181	
International Events	6.13***	7.23***	N/A	N/A	

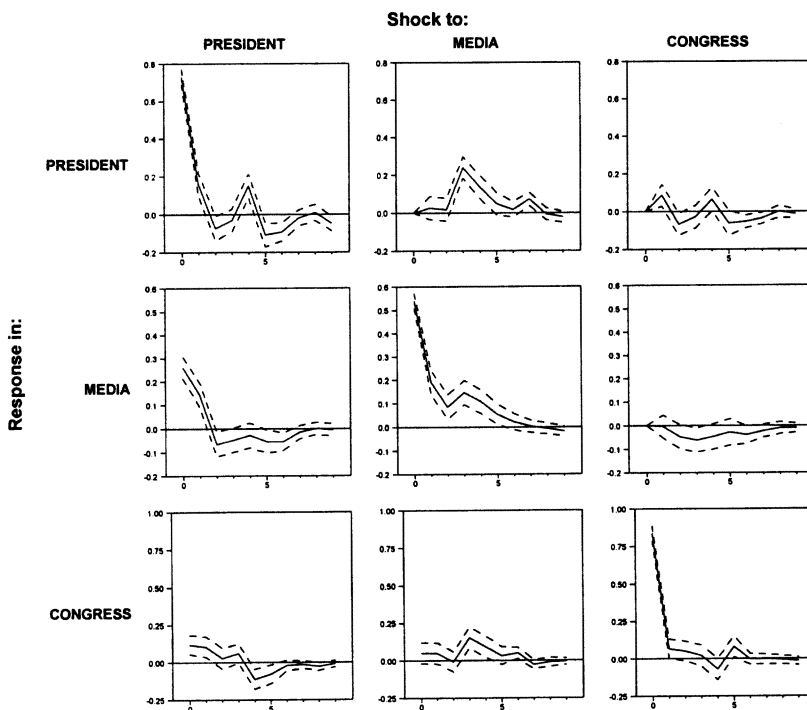
Note: ***p < .01, **p < .05, *p < .1. Events at lag 0 are included as an exogenous variable to control for the contemporaneous effects of events. The N is 520 for the Aid series (1/84-12/93), and 624 for the Trade series (1/84-12/95). Both aid and trade VARs contain 4 lags. The N is 591 in the Caribbean and Central America series (1/84-4/95) and the VARs contain 5 and 7 weeks of lags respectively. The different Ns are due to data availability, on both the presidential statements data and the events data. The values entered for International Events are T-statistics.

response to the President amounts to about three tenths of a standard deviation response in the first week, with an overall cumulative response of about half of a standard deviation. The relationship is clearest in foreign trade (Figure 4), where a shock to presidential attention leads to nearly 1.2 standard deviations cumulative increase in media attention in the following weeks. Without events determining the international context, presidential influence on the media increases.

The middle section of Table 1 shows the Granger F-tests for the determinants of congressional attention. Edwards and Wood (1999) found no systematic presidential influence on congressional attention. The results presented here indicate that presidential attention systematically influences congressional attention to the Caribbean and Central America. Looking at the F-tests, we see that they are statistically significant for presidential attention. However a relationship

of which variables to place first more problematic. In all cases, the reported moving average responses use the following order: President, media, Congress. I placed the President first because the President has a significant influence in most cases according to the F-tests. I changed the order to check for changes in the direction of the relationship and found none.

≡ FIGURE 1.
MOVING AVERAGE RESPONSE FOR THE CARIBBEAN

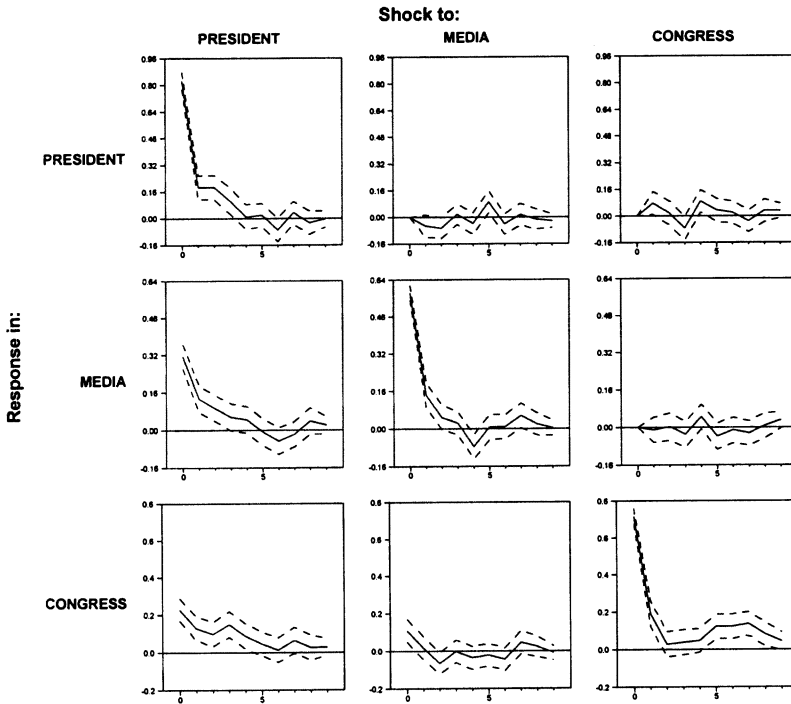


Note: Media is weekly minutes of evening network television news coverage of Caribbean issues (from the *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*). President is the weekly number of paragraphs devoted to the Caribbean in the *Public Papers of the President*. Congress is the weekly number of columns devoted to the Caribbean in the *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*. Each chart represents the response by the row variable over 10 weeks to a one-standard-deviation shock in the column variable. One standard deviation is 8.59 paragraphs for the President, 14.73 minutes for the media, and 1.18 columns for Congress. The time frame is from the first week in 1984 through April 1995.

in aid and trade does not appear to exist (neither F-test is significant). The moving average responses in Figures 1 through 4 are consistent with the Granger results. All of the relationships are positive, with the clearest presidential effect on Congress shown in the Caribbean and Central America. A shock to presidential attention to Central America leads to a positive response in congressional attention over the next several weeks.

The third section of Table 1 shows the Granger F-tests for the determinants of presidential attention. As we would expect, presidential attention is inertial in all four issues and events are important in determining when Pres-

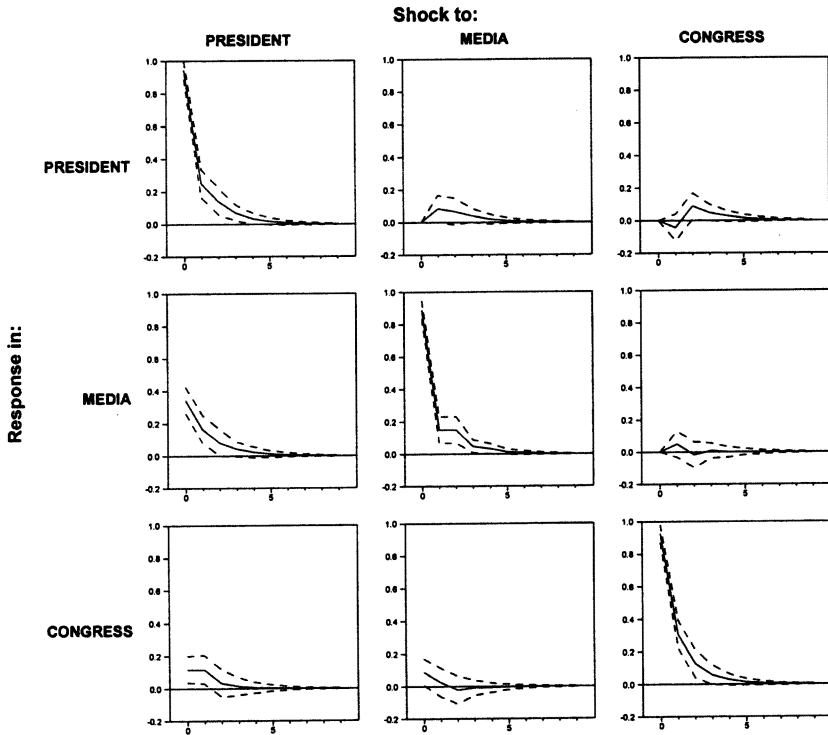
≡ FIGURE 2.
MOVING AVERAGE RESPONSE FOR CENTRAL AMERICA



Note: Media is weekly minutes of evening network television news coverage of Central American issues (from the *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*). President is the weekly number of paragraphs devoted to Central America in the *Public Papers of the President*. Congress is the weekly number of columns devoted to Central America in the *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*. Each chart represents the response by the row variable over 10 weeks to a one-standard-deviation shock in the column variable. One standard deviation is 10.64 paragraphs for the President, 20.33 minutes for the media, and 4.10 columns for Congress. The time frame is from the first week in 1984 through April 1995.

idents shift their public attention to the Caribbean and Central America. More interestingly, however, is the degree to which the President responds to changes in media attention. In only one of the cases (the Caribbean) does media attention prove a highly significant determinant of presidential attention (the F-test is statistically significant at .01 level). In two other issues (Central America and foreign aid), media attention has a marginal statistical influence, with F-tests significant at the .1 level. The relationship does not materialize in the case of foreign trade. The MAR figures indicate only minor responses by the President to the media. However, when the ordering of the

≡ FIGURE 3.
MOVING AVERAGE RESPONSE FOR FOREIGN AID

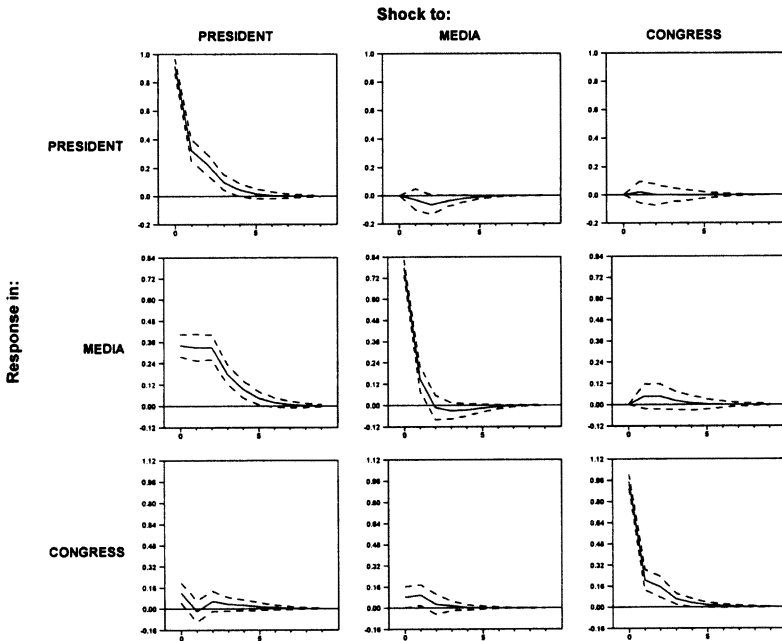


Note: Media is weekly minutes of evening network television news coverage of Foreign Aid (from the Vanderbilt Television News Archive). President is the weekly number of paragraphs devoted to the Foreign Aid in the *Public Papers of the President*. Congress is the weekly number of columns devoted to the Foreign Aid in the *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*. Each chart represents the response by the row variable over 10 weeks to a one-standard-deviation shock in the column variable. One standard deviation is 6.25 paragraphs for the President, 5.56 minutes for the media, and 4.97 columns for Congress. The time frame is from the first week in 1984 through the last week in 1993.

variables is changed, the MARs show that the response is significant for the Caribbean and Central America.⁸

⁸ This is expected, given the responsive nature of presidential attention found in foreign policy issues related to events. Also, Table 1 indicates the media is a significant determinant of presidential attention. By placing the media first in the ordering, the positive responses by the President (showing a joint causal relationship) become clearer in the MARs. I only report the one set of graphs for each issue due to space constraints.

≡ FIGURE 4.
MOVING AVERAGE RESPONSE FOR FOREIGN TRADE



Note: Media is weekly minutes of evening network television news coverage of Foreign Trade issues (from the *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*). President is the weekly number of paragraphs devoted to the Foreign Trade in the *Public Papers of the President*. Congress is the weekly number of columns devoted to the Foreign Trade in the *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*. Each chart represents the response by the row variable over 10 weeks to a one-standard-deviation shock in the column variable. One standard deviation is 16.69 paragraphs for the President, 8.81 minutes for the media, and 3.92 columns for Congress. The time frame is from the first week in 1984 through the last week in 1995.

Edwards and Wood (1999) found no systematic influence by Congress on the president's attention to U.S. Soviet relations or the Arab-Israeli conflict. In contrast, I find substantial congressional influence on the President. In three of the four issues (the Caribbean, Central America, and Foreign Aid), congressional attention Granger causes presidential attention. In each case, the F-tests are statistically significant at the .05 or .01 level. The moving average responses shown in Figures 1-4 suggest that the relationship may not be as robust at the F-tests indicate. However, when variable ordering is changed

placing Congress first, the responsiveness of the President to Congress in these issues is born out.⁹

I find that presidential attention significantly impacts media attention when issues are less salient. I also find a reciprocal relationship between the President's public attention and attention by Congress. Presidents are responsive to media and congressional attention. However, the relationship is not one way. While previous analysis was correct in stating that the President's agenda is often responsive, the results suggest that this responsiveness does not mean Presidents lack leadership capabilities in setting the foreign policy agenda. Apparently, the President's capacity to lead institutional attention depends on which foreign policy issues we look at.

ANALYSIS BY PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATION

When are Presidents most likely to have success influencing the foreign policy agenda? When Presidents prioritize certain issues, they increase the chances of focusing and sustaining media and congressional attention. Edwards and Wood (1999: 340) suggest "that when the President makes a special effort to lead, he may succeed" at influencing the agenda. With greater freedom to establish the agenda in less salient or nonevent-driven issues, Presidents have greater opportunity to act on their policy priorities and sustain media and congressional attention. Therefore, we might expect that Presidents who clearly establish foreign policy priorities related to an issue have greater influence on media and congressional attention than have Presidents with unclear priorities .

In foreign aid and Central America, Reagan made aid to the Nicaraguan Contras and anti-communist governments in Central America a foreign policy priority (Reagan 1990: 470-79). Reagan addressed the American public on national television three times on the issue in the last five years of his administration. President Bush proposed aid for Latin America in 1989 and prioritized an aid package to the former Soviet Union, which became one of President Bush's top foreign policy initiatives (Bush and Scrowcroft 1998).

In December of 1989, President Bush ordered the invasion of Panama. Following the invasion, the President addressed the nation on television. Clearly, when a President sends in troops, the issue becomes an administration priority. Uses of force, like the invasion of Panama, thrust an issue onto the policy agenda. President Clinton, on the other hand, did not make Central America a priority over the time period covered.¹⁰

⁹ Placing Congress first in the variable order results in positive presidential responses in the MARs in the Caribbean, Central America, and aid. In Central America a shock to congressional attention yields about a half of a standard deviation response by the President over a period of three weeks.

¹⁰ President Reagan averaged 6.5 paragraphs of attention to Central America per week, Bush averaged 5.4 per week, while Clinton averaged less than half of a paragraph per week.

Presidents Reagan and Bush paid very little public attention to the Caribbean over the time period studied. Reagan ordered the invasion of Grenada in 1983, however the invasion does not make the time period of analysis. From 1984 to 1989, Reagan averaged the least amount of attention to the Caribbean among the three Presidents. Bush's public attention to the Caribbean was slightly higher. Clinton, on the other hand, invaded Haiti, reestablished a democratic government on the troubled island, and occupied the island with American troops for a good portion of his administration. Clinton clearly prioritized the Caribbean issue, as evidenced by his higher attention to the issue in his public statements.

Both Presidents Bush and Clinton made foreign trade a priority, particularly with NAFTA, the General Agreements on Trade and Tariffs, Most Favored Nation status for newly emerging democracies and China, and extension of "fast track" authority for the President. The data suggest that both Bush and Clinton, on average, attended more heavily to trade than Reagan. Important trade initiatives were developed by Bush and Clinton, whereas most of the trade initiatives during Reagan's term in office originated with Congress and were blocked by the administration.¹¹

An indicator of presidential priorities is the degree of attention a President gives an issue during the State of the Union address (Cohen 1995, 1997; Hill 1998). Typically, Presidents list their domestic and foreign policy priorities during the address, urging Congress to pass legislation. Content analyses of State of the Union speeches correspond with the narrative discussion above. President Reagan prioritized aid to Central America, mentioning the issue at least twice in each speech, with an average of nine lines per speech. Reagan gave some attention to foreign trade in his addresses (seven total mentions over five years, for an average of four lines per speech), however most of his discussion was in opposition to restrictive trade laws moving their way through Congress. Reagan only mentioned the Caribbean once (1987). President Bush mentioned Central America in three of his four addresses, focusing most heavily on Panama in 1990. Bush mentioned trade three times in 1991, and NAFTA several times in 1992. Bush mentioned the Caribbean briefly once (in 1991), and addressed aid in three of his four addresses. President Clinton addressed trade in all three of his addresses, especially in 1993 and 1994 where he mentioned trade an average of four times. He mentioned the Caribbean twice in 1994 and 1995, and did not address Central America.

Given the above discussion, I expect to find Presidents that stress an issue as part of their policy agenda to have greater influence on media and congressional attention to the issue. In summary, I expect to find President Reagan to be most

¹¹ Most of these bills dealt with restricting trade in some way. Of the eight significant pieces of trade legislation before Congress from 1984 to 1989, Reagan supported only one, the 1988 Omnibus Trade Act (data from Edwards, Barrett, and Peake 1997).

influential in Central America and foreign aid, President Bush to be most influential in Central America, aid, and foreign trade, and President Clinton to be most influential in the Caribbean and foreign trade.

The data for aid are only available through 1993, therefore I can only compare Reagan and Bush. The VAR results by administration¹² indicate that Reagan's attention to aid had a significant impact on media attention, while Bush's attention had no apparent influence. Neither President significantly influenced congressional attention to aid. Reagan's success could possibly be attributed to his prioritization of aid issues, and his focus, through several nationally televised addresses, on the issue. Bush prioritized foreign aid to Russia, however, he did not stress the issue publicly as much as Reagan.

All three Presidents had a significant influence on media attention to trade. There are differences across Presidents when looking at congressional attention. Bush and Clinton appear to have had the greatest impact. The analysis suggests that Reagan's attention to trade was unimportant in determining congressional attention, while Bush's attention is a significant factor and Clinton's approaches statistical significance. The results coincide with our expectation that Reagan would be the least influential in trade policy given Bush and Clinton's prioritization of trade.

The results coincide with the expectation that Reagan and Bush had greater agenda influence for Central America than Clinton. Bush's attention to Central America Granger caused media attention, while Reagan's did not. It is highly possible that much of the relationship is explained by Bush's invasion of Panama. The data indicate that media attention to Central America spiked during the invasion. Bush created a media spectacle by invading Panama, while Reagan's TV addresses were less dramatic. Reagan significantly influenced congressional attention through his public statements on Central America (F-test significant at the .1 level), while Bush was unable to do so. Clinton's attention had no real effect on attention by Congress or the media.

The results clearly indicate that President Clinton's public attention had a statistically significant impact on media and congressional attention to the Caribbean. Clinton's attention Granger caused both media and congressional attention to the Caribbean. Bush's attention had no effect on either the media or Congress, while Reagan had a significant influence on Congress, but not the media.

DISCUSSION

Edwards and Wood (1999: 32) conclude their study by stating, "Most of the time Presidents react, responding primarily to fluctuations in attention by the

¹² The Granger F-tests for the by administration analysis are available online at: http://J_Peake.tripod.com/research/Pres_Agenda_table2.htm

media and, in the area of foreign policy, world events... Nevertheless, we find evidence that the President can act in an entrepreneurial fashion to focus the attention of others in the system. If an issue is not already part of ongoing media coverage or congressional hearings, the President may be able to set the agenda of the networks and Congress." Expanding the analysis to include less salient and non-event driven foreign policy issues suggests that agenda setting relationships change across foreign policy issues and within a foreign policy issue across time.

I am able to show that the President substantially impacts media and congressional attention to foreign policy issues. What matters is the salience of the issue, whether the issue relates to events, and whether or not international realities constrain the President's options considerably. Lower salience issues increase presidential opportunities to influence the agendas of other institutions. The Soviet Union and the Arab-Israeli conflict are highly salient issues, whereas Central America, the Caribbean, foreign aid, and foreign trade are less salient. Presidential statements have no systematic effect on media or congressional attention to the Soviet Union and the Arab-Israeli conflict (Edwards and Wood 1999), whereas the President significantly influences media attention to Central America, the Caribbean, aid, and trade, and congressional attention in Central America and the Caribbean. The Soviet Union and the Arab-Israeli conflict offer limits on what the President can do to impact the agenda. Intervention or broad policy shifts are less viable, and the President is limited to diplomatic initiatives, which are less dramatic and attract less attention. Presidents are not as constrained in other issues.

Events limit the President's own agenda forcing the President to pay attention to issues he might prefer to ignore. In the issues where events were included, the President is highly responsive. The relationships between the President and the media and the President and Congress are reciprocal. In issues where events are not as relevant, the relationships are mixed. In aid, the relationship between the President and the media appears reciprocal, whereas, in trade the President influences the media but not vice versa. In relation to Congress, the relationship is weak from the President to Congress in both issues, whereas the President responds to Congress in foreign aid but not trade.

Analyzing by administration suggests that those Presidents that make a substantial effort to focus attention on the less salient issues are more successful. By spending the political capital necessary for influence, Presidents can indeed be successful agenda setters. Successful Presidents go well beyond speaking on an issue publicly. Along with the public relations strategy, they initiate legislation in Congress (as Reagan did with Contra aid and Bush with NAFTA), or even initiate military invasions abroad (as Bush and Clinton did). While focused speeches attract a lot of attention, Presidents are likely to be more successful extending congressional and media attention through legislative strategies and more dramatic presidential activities abroad.

Recent challenges to the traditional model of agenda setting have expanded our understanding of the difficulties of presidential policymaking. Understanding that Presidents are often handicapped by the political and international context provides an explanation for why Presidents often become frustrated when trying to lead Congress and the American public in foreign policy. Nevertheless, I find evidence that the President can be successful in foreign policy agenda setting, focusing media and congressional attention by shifting his own agenda and prioritizing certain issues. The evidence suggests that success is not as common as the traditional model would have us believe. In order to be successful, Presidents must pick and choose their issues carefully, even in foreign policy. Presidents operate in a world of uncertainty, competing with other institutions for control of the policy agenda. Sometimes they are successful, other times they are not.

Many questions and concerns still exist for scholars to consider when examining the President's influence on the policy agenda. The data used in this analysis, as well as others, consist of crude counting measures, and the research program would benefit greatly from expanded data collection and disaggregation. For instance, many of the media sources are official (including the White House), yet counts of media stories and amount of coverage typically attribute the measure as the independent media agenda. This is a common problem when using media based measures, as noted recently by Woolley (2000). Future study should take into account media sources so attribution of causation can be more clearly assigned. It is also worth noting that a broad aggregate study, such as this one, misses many of the nuances of agenda setting involved in the various issues. More focused case studies on the topic would be a worthwhile contribution to the research program.

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