

The President and Media in the Agenda-Setting Process: Who Sets the Policy Agenda?

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Abstract: This study explores one of the recurrent questions in agenda-setting studies: who sets policy agenda—political leaders or the media? A content analysis was conducted by coding the texts of six of President Clinton's State of the Union addresses and three networks' (ABC, CBS, and NBC) evening news broadcasts. The results do not provide strong evidence of a causal direction between the media agenda and president's agenda because both coefficients are statistically significant and similar in degree. This study suggests, however, there may be a variance among different media actors in their roles and involvement in the agenda-setting (building) process.

INTRODUCTION

Every day, many policy issues and perspectives compete with each other to achieve a policy agenda status and to attract favorable attention from political actors involved in the policy agenda-setting process, including interest groups, political leadership (i.e., president, legislature, government units), and the mass media (Anderson, 1990). As Anderson notes, the agenda-setting (building) process is a competitive process in which just a small portion of policy issues become policy agenda, and an even a smaller portion of them are actually adopted and implemented as public policy.

Many disciplines (political science, communications, public policy, and sociology) have studied the agenda-setting process as an initial stage in the public policy-making process. Special attention has been paid to the process, actors, and issues of the agenda-setting process. Political scientists are interested in the role of political leadership in the agenda-setting process, whereas communication scholars want to understand how the media agenda is formulated and determined in a political context. Scholars of public policy view the agenda-setting process in the larger context of the public policy-making process and have studied the agenda-setting process in specific policy areas (such as environmental policy and economic policy). Although each discipline highlights a unique element of the agenda-setting process, it appears there is an underlying consensus that political leaders and the mass media are the primary agenda setters in the policy-making process. However, a question still remains: Who sets policy agenda—political leaders or the media? And how is the agenda shaped?

Because the media is both directly and indirectly involved in the policy agenda-setting process, communications scholars have developed the *agenda-setting theory of mass communication*. The primary assumption for this theory is that one of the strongest effects of the media is to establish the issues or topics that

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the public talks about. After Bernard Cohen (1963) outlined the agenda-setting concept in his book *The American Public and Foreign Policy*, McCombs and Shaw (1972) introduced the agenda-setting concept and examined the agenda-setting function of the mass media. Later, the agenda-setting theme in mass communication has been empirically elaborated by McCombs (1976), Shaw (1977), and many others, becoming one of the research streams in the communications field.

Taking the media agenda as given, much of the previous research has focused simply on the status conferral by the media to the public. Among various studies, some scholars have started to investigate the power of information sources over the media agenda (Gilberg, Eyal, McCombs, & Nicholas, 1980; Light, 1991; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Wanta, Stephenson, Turk, & McCombs, 1989). Their underlying assumption is that the media conveys and reflects the issues raised by information sources (i.e., policymakers). To them, policy sources and policymakers set the policy agenda, and the media passively delivers it to the public.

Among many policy actors, the president is arguably considered to be the most influential policymaker in the United States. The president's role and his policy agenda have been an interesting topic for many scholars' scrutiny (Light, 1991). Understanding the president's agenda in terms of *issues, alternatives, and priorities*,¹⁾ Light (1991) attempts to examine the president's agendas and which of them is chosen out of many agendas.

Noting the importance and influence of the president's role in the policy agenda-setting process, this study attempts to examine the interaction between the president and the media. In particular, this study pays its attention to the president's State of the Union address (SUA), which is considered a very important source of the president's policy agenda. This study attempts to answer the following questions: (1) How does the president's agenda presented in the SUA shape the media agenda? (2) How does the media agenda affect the SUA's policy agenda? And (3) does the president have a "honeymoon" relationship with the media during the early years of his term? To answer these questions, we examine President Bill Clinton's six SUAs (1993-98) and the evening news broadcasts of ABC, CBS, and NBC for a two-month period of time (4 weeks before the SUA and another 4 weeks after the SUA).

Agenda-Setting Process and Agenda Setters

Dearing and Rogers have provided a definition of the agenda-setting process and summarized the nature of agenda-setting studies:

The agenda setting process is an ongoing competition among issue proponents to gain the attention of media professional, the public, and policy elites. Agenda

1) For more details, see Light's *The President's Agenda: Domestic Policy Choice from Kennedy to Reagan* (1991).

setting offers an explanation of why information about certain issues, and not other issues, is available to the public in a democracy; how public opinion is shaped; and why certain issues are addressed through policy actions while other issues are not. The study of agenda setting is the study of social change and of social stability. (Dearing & Rogers, 1996, p. 12).

In their comprehensive review of traditional research and related policy agenda-setting studies, Rogers and Dearing (1988) subdivide the agenda-setting process into three components: media agenda setting, public agenda setting, and policy agenda setting. They conclude that (1) "[t]he media influences the public agenda," (2) "the media agenda seems to have direct, sometimes strong, influence upon policy agenda," and the media indirectly influences policy as well because (3) "the public agenda, once set by, or reflected by, the media agenda, influences the policy agenda" (Rogers & Dearing, 1988, p. 57980). This study incorporated many agenda-setting studies into its framework, focusing on the powerful influence of the media on public opinion.

Largely speaking, there are three streams of thoughts in mass communication regarding the agenda-setting role of the media and news sources (i.e., the president): (1) the media as a passive agenda setter; (2) the media as a coagenda setter; and (3) the media as a proactive agenda setter. The first perspective views the media as having only a passive role in the agenda-setting process and as simply contributing to the agenda-building (cooperative and interactive) process. In other words, the media is not a primary and active agenda setter. It tends to passively resound the policy agenda expressed by major news sources rather than proactively develop its own news agenda in a society. Studying the media agenda, several scholars have examined the influence of news sources (i.e., the president or government agencies) on the media agenda. Studying the public information offices of six states and the news content of the eight major dailies in Louisiana, Turk (1986) found that the agenda of the news releases provided by the government agencies substantially influenced and shaped the news agenda. From the power-balance perspective, Reese (1991) also examined the power of sources acting on news content. He argued that "elite sources" are more likely to influence the media agenda than individuals or public interest groups.

The second perspective is that the media and policy actors jointly set and build the policy agenda in an interactive mode. This perspective views that the media and policymakers as *agenda builders* (emphasis on cooperative and interactive role) rather than agenda setters (emphasis on independent roles). For example, Cobb and Elder (1972) saw the source-media relationship as the agenda-building process wherein the press and other institutions interact with each other and create the issues of public concern. In a study of the local agenda-building process, Weaver and Elliot suggested that "a prominent news source can have a major influence on the subsequent media agenda, but the selective processes and news judgments of journalists also play a significant part in shap-

ing this agenda" (1985, p. 94).

The last perspective pays attention to the autonomy and independent power of mass communication in selecting policy agenda. This perspective views the medianot necessarily as a passive actor, but as an independent agenda setter. Incorporating the previous studies, Shoemaker and Reese (1996) analyzed the factors that influence media content, with the five levels of analysis: the individual level, the routine level, the organizational level, the extramedia level, and the ideological level. Suggesting the degree of influence of each level within the hierarchical model, they conclude that the ideological level is the most powerful influence on media content, and others are subsumed into the ideological level.

Overall, previous research seems to suggest that there are multiple actors involved in the agenda-setting process. The actors are interactive and interdependent in their power dynamics. It appears there is a wide gamut of views with respect to the independent and autonomous role of the media in the agenda-setting process.

The next section will discuss the president's role and his position in the agenda-setting process.

Newsworthiness and the President

The president is arguably the single most influential actor in American politics. The president's policy agenda is constantly changing and evolving depending on his or her political values and philosophies, social issues (e.g., gun control issue after the Columbine shooting incident), interest groups, partisan politics, and the media agenda. The president is considered the primary agenda setter because he enjoys abundant policy resources and unique constitutional power. As Rozell stated,

The president has advantages in communicating the administration point of view: the president can command public attention almost anytime that he wants to; the media cover almost everything that he does on a daily basis; he has the staff and communications technology needed to reach the public. (1996, p. 8)

In particular, the public, both in and outside government, experiences the presidential presence through the eyes and ears of the media. The relationship between the president and the media is symbiotic. Radio, television, magazines, and newspapers provide regular coverage of the president's public activities. No other individual in the American government receives as much time and space in the news. The reason the president gets so much attention from the media is that he is considered the most newsworthy figure.

However, only events that are deemed newsworthy by a reporter or editor will become news. Numerous studies have tried to reveal much about the process by which news editors and news workers decide how much emphasis to give each topic that might be covered in the news. In *Deciding What's News*, Gans (1979) argued that professional practices and conventions decide what is news. With

those practices and conventions, journalists determine which events are newsworthy and decisions are made about how and how prominently to report events.

Shoemaker and Reese found that "news judgment is the ability to evaluate stories based on agreed-upon news values, which provide yardsticks of newsworthiness, and constitute an audience-oriented routine" (1996, p. 111). Although the criteria of newsworthiness may slightly differ among studies, Shoemaker, Danielian, and Brendlinger (1991) compiled a list of newsworthy characteristics, and they introduced the "deviance" dimensions as a measure of the newsworthiness. They verified that the degree of deviance played an important role in deciding what is news. These categories of news judgment have been important indicators in determining whom to cover, as well as the types of issues or events to include in the news.

The President's Policy Agenda in the State of the Union Address

The SUA has strong and symbolic implications for the president's policy agenda and policy priorities (Light, 1991). According to Campbell and Jamieson, the SUA also reaffirms the president's policy consistency "by displaying the presidents as symbolic head of state, by responding to the discourse of past presidents, and by creating and sustaining a national identity" (1990, p. 215). The SUA is customarily designed to articulate a sense of national identity and purpose and draws much of the interest of American citizens.

Studying four SUAs of three different presidents to determine the issues covered by the news media before and after the addresses, Wanta et al. (1989) hypothesized that the agenda presented in the president's SUAs influence the subsequent agenda of the policy issues in the media. Their study showed mixed findings about how the president's agenda sets the media agenda. Their findings indicate that Presidents Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan (1982, during his first term) influenced subsequent media coverage through their SUAs, whereas Presidents Jimmy Carter's and Reagan's (1985, during his second term) policy agendas set forth in their SUAs were apparently influenced by prior media coverage. In two out of four instances, they argued that the media seems to have influenced the president's agenda.

Who Sets Policy Agenda?

Presidential rhetoric plays a crucial role in modern politics. The presidential rhetoric has been defined as the president's art of using symbols (Campbell, 1982). The use of symbols in political language is considered important for presidents' political lives because it can have an impact on public opinion. For example, thanks to his rhetoric, President Reagan was able to succeed at setting the national agenda (Rowland & Payne, 1984). The president now spends a substantial portion of his time appealing to the public through press conferences, speeches, and public appearances (Hart, 1984; Kernell, 1997). As the president spends more time in public activities, the media's political role increases dramatically because media coverage influences public opinion. Among other rhetoric, the SUA, in particular, conveys its importance to the American public. The pur-

pose of the address is to mobilize political support and to shape public dialogues on specific political issues. As a clear and well-designed presidential rhetoric, the SUA is more likely to influence the subsequent media agenda.

The media has been a powerful guardian of political norms because the public believes the media can monitor and check the wrongdoings of the government. There has long been a question of how the media, in combination with other political factors, influences American politics. It is true that people are increasingly dependent on the mass media for their versions of reality (Baran & Davis, 1995). As society grows more complex, opportunities for firsthand experience with social and political institutions decrease. Accordingly, mass media becomes the public's primary source of information about politics. Many of the previous agenda-setting studies show that the media is successful in telling the public what to think about, or even what to think.

Because the media dominates the public's lives, politicians also rely on the media to sell their agendas to the public and to obtain political support. Consequently, public opinion polls have become ingrained in the culture of politics in Washington. It is known that President Bush was keenly sensitive to poll results, and President Clinton also integrated polls into his policy decision-making apparatus. In accordance with the media's perceived role as a voice of public opinion, the president takes advantage of the media in understanding social issues and identifying policy agenda (Davis, 1992, p. 198200). The media also can alter the agenda that the president sets because the media has the ability to raise issues independently.

The SUA clearly represents the president's policy priorities or emphasis. However, the president's agenda may be affected by other variables, such as public concern for a particular issue or the amount of media coverage of an issue. The president often leans on the media as a way of measuring the public opinion. The foregoing discussion raises competing research hypotheses with respect to the agenda-setting process and actors:

Hypothesis 1a: The president's agenda in the SUA influences the subsequent media agenda.

Hypothesis 1b: The media agenda influences the president's agenda in the SUA.

The Honeymoon Effect

Presidents begin their terms as popular figures, both for the media and the public. Many journalists express a special interest in the new president even before the inauguration because everything regarding the new president, such as policy proposals, personal character, family background, or leadership style, is newsworthy.

Journalists have described this special relationship as the "honeymoon effect." Although the president is always newsworthy, during the first term, especially in the first year, the president is considered more newsworthy. The new president tends to embrace changes or reforms, trying to clear up the legacies or mistakes

of the previous president. For example, President Clinton reiterated the terms "change," "reform," and "reinventing government" at the beginning of his governance. In his first term, the president gets a lot of favorable (at least neutral) press coverage. According to Davis (1992), media coverage of the president is generally positive because the White House makes an effort to manage the news. He also points out that the first year of a new administration is very important in the image-making process of the new president because the president seeks support for his administration's proposals. In terms of the relationship between the media and the new president during this honeymoon period, both parties are trying to establish a favorable relationship with the other. Although it has been argued that President Clinton never felt that he got much of a traditional honeymoon during his first term (Barnes, 1996), the basic assumption about the relationship still holds true. The foregoing discussion proposes the following hypothesis on the honeymoon effect:

Hypothesis 2: There will be a greater degree of interaction between the media agenda and the president's agenda during the first years of president's term than in later years.

DATA AND METHODS

Previous studies in this stream of research (Campbell and Jamieson, 1990; Gilberg et al., 1980; Wanta et al., 1989;) adopted similar research to test the influence of the presidential agenda on subsequent media coverage. Unlike the previous studies, which examined only one SUA from each president's term, this study examines six of President Clinton's SUAs between 1993 and 1998 to test two proposed hypotheses (the relationship between the president's agenda and the media agenda, and the honeymoon effect) in a more comprehensive and systemic manner.

To examine the president's policy agenda and the media's policy agenda, the study performs a content analysis by coding the texts of the president's SUAs and three networks' (ABC, CBS, and NBC) evening news broadcasts. To examine the influence of the media agenda on the president's agenda and the influence of the president's agenda on the media agenda, the media agenda (three networks' agendas) was coded separately for the pre-SUA period (4 weeks) and the post-SUA period (4 weeks).

For the president's SUAs, the amount of space (number of lines) devoted to each policy issue in the address was coded. The SUA texts obtained through the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents have the same format and contain the same number of words in each line. The content analyses of SUAs identified 13 policy agendas in 1993, 11 agendas in 1994, 11 agendas in 1995, 13 agendas in 1996, 14 agendas in 1997, and 15 agendas in 1998.

The policy agendas mentioned by President Clinton in 1993 were jobs, budget, health care, welfare, education, crime, campaign reform, tax, world peace and American leadership, trade, environment, social security, and child care. The policy agendas mentioned in 1994 were jobs, budget, health care, welfare, educa-

tion, crime, tax, world peace and American leadership, trade, environment, and science and technology. The agendas for 1995 were jobs, budget, health care, welfare, crime, campaign reform, tax, world peace and American leadership, trade, illegal immigration, and teenagers. The 1996 agendas were jobs, budget, health care, welfare, education, crime, world peace and American leadership, environment, illegal immigration, teenagers, and tobacco. The issues mentioned in 1997 were jobs, budget, health care, welfare, education, crime, campaign reform, world peace and American leadership, trade, environment, science and technology, tobacco, child care, and drugs. The 1998 SUA agendas were jobs, budget, health care, welfare, education, crime, campaign reform, world peace and American leadership, trade, environment, science and technology, tobacco, IRS reform, social security, and child care.

Regarding the media agenda, the study examined all news stories of the evening news broadcasts of ABC, CBS, and NBC, obtained from the Vanderbilt Archives Abstract for an 8-week period (4 weeks before the SUA and 4 weeks after the SUA). The purpose of designing pre- and post-SUA content analyses is to detect the direction of influence between the president's SUA agenda and the media agenda as well as to test our hypotheses.

The time frames for the media agenda are described more specifically in the following:

- 28 days of coverage of the issues prior to the SUA
- 3 days of synchronous coverage the day prior to the address, the day of the president's appearance before Congress to deliver the address, and the day immediately following the address
- 28 days of coverage of the issues subsequent to the address
- Key periods for testing the hypotheses were 28 days before the address and 28 days after the address.

To collect the data, six of President Clinton's SUAs (1993-98) and 1,062 news transcripts from the three major networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) were coded and analyzed to identify the relationship between the president's agenda and the media agenda. To calculate intercoder reliability, two coders coded all of the SUAs and 15% of the transcripts from each network. For two coders, Scott's pi was 0.94 for the president's agenda and 0.86 for the media agenda. To test our hypotheses, this study simply examined correlations between the president's agenda in the SUAs and the pre- and post-SUA media agenda. If the correlation between the pre-SUA media agenda and the president's agenda in the SUAs is much larger than the correlation between the post-SUA media agenda and the president's SUA agenda, the influence of the media agenda over the president's agenda can be interpreted as greater than that of the president's agenda over the media agenda.

RESULTS

Table 1 gives the Pearson's correlation coefficients used to measure the relationship between the media agenda and the president's agenda. There were significant and strong relationships between the pre-SUA media agenda and the president's agenda ($r = 0.56$) and between the post-SUA media agenda and the president's agenda ($r = 0.59$). However, the analysis does not provide strong evidence on the causal direction because both coefficients were statistically significant and similar in degree. Even though the results cannot show a clear causal direction of influence between the media and the president in the agenda-setting process, it may be fair to say that both hypotheses (1a and 1b) are largely supported to some extent. However, it also should be noted that the interpretation needs to be cautiously done. It is not clear that the coefficient for the relationship between the pre-SUA media agenda and the president's agenda reflects a true relationship between the two because the pre-SUA media agenda and the post-SUA media agenda are highly correlated with each other. It may be that the media covers similar agendas all the time based on its news judgments, without a clear link with the president's agenda. For more analyses, the data were broken into subdata sets by network.

Table 1. Pearson Correlation Coefficients for President Clinton's agenda and network agenda

Variables	2.	3.	4.
1. Total presidential agenda _a	.56* (19)	.71*** (19)	.59*** (19)
2. Pre-address total network agenda _b	—	.90*** (19)	.99*** (19)
3. Synchronous total network agenda _c		—	.89*** (19)
4. Post-address total network agenda _d			—

a. Total presidential agenda was created by combining 6 years of presidential agendas identified in 6 years of the president's addresses. In coding the president's agenda each year, issues were categorized in terms of their presence in each address, and the number of lines for each issue was counted.

b. Total pre-address network agenda was created by combining 6 years of the pre-address network agenda in congruence with the president agenda. The number of lines for each issue was counted.

c. Total synchronous network agenda was created by combining 6 years of the synchronous network agenda. The number of lines for each issue was counted.

d. Total post-address network agenda was created by combining 6 years of the

post-address network agenda. The number of lines for each issue was counted.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

Table 2 provides Pearson's correlation coefficients that indicate specific relationships between each network and the presidential agenda. For all networks, the relationships between the pre-SUA media agenda and the president's agenda and between the post-SUA media agenda and the president's agenda were statistically significant. Although the statistical results from the ABC sample were similar to the results from the aggregate data, the results from CBS and NBC showed opposite directions of influence to each other. The coefficient of the post-SUA CBS agenda with the president's agenda ($r = 0.98$) was much greater than that of pre-SUA CBS agenda ($r = 0.58$), and the opposite was true of NBC ($r = 0.98$). In other words, CBS was a passive policy agenda carrier seemingly influenced by the president's agenda, whereas NBC was an active agenda setter and arguably seemed to influence the president's agenda to a greater extent than the other networks.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Coefficients for the President's Agenda and Three Network Agendas

Time Period	Network Agendas		
	ABC	CBS	NBC
Pre-address	.54*** (19)	.58*** (19)	.98*** (19)
Synchronous with address	.76*** (19)	.95*** (19)	.82*** (19)
Post-address	.58*** (19)	.98*** (19)	.59*** (19)

*** $p < .001$.

Table 3 provides Pearson's correlation coefficients for the president's agenda and total network agenda between 1993 and 1998. Surprisingly, the 1993 and 1997 data failed to show any relationship between the president's agenda and the media agenda. The statistics reject hypothesis 2 and suggest the honeymoon effect does not exist. This concurs with President Clinton's claim that he did not have a traditional honeymoon period (Barnes, 1996). This is probably because there is less cooperation and consistency between the media agenda and the president's agenda during the first year of two terms. It suggests that the media and President Clinton may not have a good understanding of the other's policy agenda and expectations at the beginning of each term, but then started to build a cooperative and harmonious relationship.

The 1994 and the 1995 data supported hypothesis 1a, showing that the president's agenda influenced the media agenda (1994 post-SUA media agenda, $r = 0.54$; 1995 post-SUA media agenda, $r = 0.88$). The 1996 data revealed a somewhat higher correlation coefficient for the post-SUA media agenda ($r = 0.64$) than for the pre-SUA ($r = 0.57$) media agenda. In the 1998 data, the correlation coefficient for the pre-SUA ($r = 0.72$) was higher than that for the post-SUA ($r = 0.64$). Again, the causal relationship between the media agenda and the president's agenda was not clearly identified.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Coefficients for the President's Agenda and Total Network Agenda

Networks		Networks	
1993		1996	
Pre-address	.17	Pre-address	.57*
Synchronous	.52*	Synchronous	.24
Post-address	.10	Post-address	.64***
1994		1997	
Pre-address	.38	Pre-address	.30
Synchronous	.83***	Synchronous	.48*
Post-address	.54*	Post-address	.22
1995		1998	
Pre-address	.39	Pre-address	.72***
Synchronous	.56*	Synchronous	.38
Post-address	.88***	Post-address	.64***

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

Table 4 shows Pearson's correlation coefficients for the president's agenda and the three network media agendas between 1993 and 1998. This table basically provides the same information given in Table 3.

Table 4. Pearson Correlation Coefficients for the President's Agenda and Each Network Agenda

	ABC	CBS	NBC
1993			
Pre-address	.10	.15	.30
Synchronous	.46*	.43	.55*
Post-address	.05	.18	.05
1994			
Pre-address	.31	.41	.36
Synchronous	.91***	.74***	.69***
Post-address	.44	.50*	.66***
1995			
Pre-address	.43	.42	.29
Synchronous	.69***	.32	.51*
Post-address	.50*	.53*	.42
1996			
Pre-address	.57*	.56*	.59***
Synchronous	.16	.32	.61***
Post-address	.61***	.64***	.61***
1997			
Pre-address	.34	.32	.16
Synchronous	.67***	.33	.31
Post-address	.24	.20	.18
1998			
Pre-address	.79***	.64***	.69***
Synchronous	.30	.42	.39
Post-address	.66***	.66***	.58***

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

The SUA has a unique position in American politics in terms of its wide coverage of the president's policy agenda and its symbolic function as a speech to the nation at the beginning of each year. This study has explored the relationship between the media agenda and presidential agenda by examining the president's agenda in the SUAs and the pre- and post-SUA media agenda. Unlike some of the previous studies, which examined only one SUA for each president, this study has attempted to delve into President Clinton's agenda in an

in-depth way by examining six SUAs during his two terms.

The data revealed interesting aspects of the relationship between the president's agenda and the media agenda during 1993-1998. Overall, there was a significant relationship between the media and presidential agenda, though the direction of influence between the president's agenda and the media agenda is not clear. One possible explanation for this result is that the media is likely to have been exposed through different occasions to most of the issues mentioned in SUAs. In other words, the media agenda may frequently be influenced by the presidential agenda as revealed in press conferences, presidential speeches, and other types of addresses. Because it has been shown that presidents have been able to influence the national agenda directly through televised press conferences and national speeches (Rutkus, 1979), the media could easily be influenced by the president's newsmakers throughout the year, not simply by the president's SUA agenda.

Interestingly, the correlations between the president's agenda and the media agenda in 1993 and 1997 were not statistically significant. This implies that the honeymoon effect was not explicit, at least for President Clinton. As President Clinton himself argued, this may be because he did not have a traditional honeymoon (Barnes, 1996). An alternative interpretation has to do with time. First, as Light (1991) argued, timing is an essential factor in the president's agenda. It may take substantial time to organize task forces, select agendas, draft alternatives, and pursue priorities. The president himself may not have enough time to organize or implement a national agenda during his first year. And the media may be not ready for the president's agenda during this period. Because of a lack of understanding and uncertainty, there is no harmonious relationship between the president's agenda and the media agenda. The same explanation can be applied to the second term because the president often makes some substantial changes and initiates a new agenda as he starts the second term.

Like some of the previous studies (Wanta et al., 1989), unfortunately this study does not give a clear answer to the question of who sets the agenda. However, this study makes a contribution to this area of study by exclusively examining one president's six SUAs. In addition, this study has attempted to provide a systematic and comprehensive feature for the relationship between the media agenda and the president's agenda by examining the president's agenda and the media agenda as a whole, as well as by investigating the president's agenda and the media agenda by year and by network.

The study also should be discussed in the larger context of the mediapresident relationship. Presidents and the mass media have always been interdependent and interactive. Presidents often try to control and take advantage of the media, and the media attempts to find out more from the president than he wants to tell. It is clear that the role of the media, both as an agenda setter and a public opinion shaper, has become more important. As Graber (1984) pointed out, the media often serves as the fourth branch of government, and many journalists are watchdogs over business and government. It appears that the president influences the media, and the media affects the president's agenda and often shapes it as

well. This study also suggests there may be a variance among different media actors in their roles and involvement in the agenda-setting (building) process. For example, our finding indicates that NBC's pre-SUA agenda seemed to affect the president's SUA agenda, whereas the president's agenda affected CBS's post-SUA agenda.

The relationships between journalists and policymakers are often symbiotic (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1981). As for journalists, the decline in resources for obtaining news information calls for a proactive collaboration with policymakers and information sources. Journalists more readily seek out policy partners because they need direct information from credible sources more quickly. For policymakers (i.e., the president), this trend will provide more opportunities to build a collaboration with and support from the media, whereas the media is also able to play a greater direct role in helping to set public policy agenda through its symbiotic relationship with policymakers. In the meantime, unfortunately, there is a danger that the public will be less involved in the public policy-making process. This leads us to revisit our original question and posit another question to be answered: Who *sets* and *should* set policy agenda?

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