# Presentation Title: Setting the Agenda

Slide 1:  
Setting the Agenda  
Problems, Group Theory, Agenda Setting, Political Power, and Strategies for Inducing Policy Change  
POSC 315 - Dr. David P. Adams - Fall 2023

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Slide 2:  
Problems  
Condition or Problem?  
Condition: something for which very little can be done.  
Problem: something that policy can address  
Over time, conditions can become problems.  
Problems  
The Social Construction of Problems  
Social Construction  
: the process by which people define reality, influenced by the political context and the actions of political actors.  
Social Construction of Problems  
: the process of defining problems and "selling" a broad population on the definition.  
Problems  
The Social Construction of Problems  
We use  
symbols  
,  
numbers  
, and  
stories  
to define problems.  
Symbols  
: words, phrases, or images that evoke a particular meaning or set of meanings.  
Numbers  
: statistics, data, and other numerical information that can be used to define a problem.  
Stories  
: narratives that can be used to define a problem.  
Conspiracy theories and horror stories usually lack evidence but are very powerful.  
Causal stories: explain the causes of a problem.

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Slide 3:

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Slide 4:  
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Causal stories: explain the causes of a problem.

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Slide 7:  
Group Theory  
The group that successfully describes a problem will also be the one that defines solutions to it.  
Group Theory  
Groups promote their issues and fight to keep others off the agenda.  
Two Theories of Groups  
Pluralism  
:  
Many groups compete in a relatively  
open  
political system.  
Policy is the outcome of this competition.  
Elitism  
:  
Policymaking is dominated by the most educated, wealthiest, and most powerful groups.  
Policy is the outcome of the competition between these groups.

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Slide 8:

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Slide 9:  
Group Theory  
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Slide 12:  
The Agenda  
The  
agenda  
is the list of things being discussed and sometimes acted upon by a political body, the news media, or the public at large.  
Other Agenda Definitions  
An underlying ideological plan.  
A collection of public problems that come to the  
attention  
of members of the public and their governmental officials. These include the related:  
causes  
symbols  
solutions  
and other matters that are the focus of attention.  
A concrete list of bills before a legislature.  
Other Agenda Definitions  
A  
series of beliefs  
about the  
existence  
and  
magnitude  
of problems and how they should be addressed by the government, the private sector, nonprofit organizations, or through joint action by some or all of these actors.  
Other Agenda Definitions  
A  
series of beliefs  
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Hidden agendas  
reflect the American value of distrusting government and the belief that government officials and other actors are not always honest about their true intentions.  
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Slide 19:  
Agenda Setting  
Agendas exist all levels of government: every community and government has a  
collection of issues  
that are available for discussion and action.  
Agenda Setting  
Agenda setting is the process by which problems and alternative solutions gain or lose public and elite attention.  
Agenda Setting  
The activities of various actors and groups that cause issues to gain or lose  
attention  
are called  
agenda-setting  
.  
Political power  
is used to keep ideas and issues on or off the agenda.

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Slide 20:

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Slide 24:  
Agenda Competition  
There are too many possible problems and possible solutions that no one society or government can address.  
The competition for attention is fierce.  
Substantial competition for a very limited agenda space.  
Agenda Competition  
Defining a problem involves considerable:  
difficulty,  
competition among groups vying for their preferred solutions, and  
possible controversy and conflict.

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Slide 28:  
Levels of the Agenda  
There are four levels of the agenda:  
Agenda Universe  
: the collection of all possible issues.  
Levels of the Agenda  
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Agenda Universe  
: the collection of all possible issues.  
Systemic agenda  
: the collection of issues perceived by the public, media, and government members as meriting public attention and governmental action.  
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There are four levels of the agenda:  
Agenda Universe  
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Systemic agenda  
: the collection of issues perceived by the public, media, and government members as meriting public attention and governmental action.  
Institutional agenda  
: the collection of issues that are up for active and serious consideration by a governmental body.  
Decision agenda  
: the collection of issues that are actually acted upon by a governmental body.  
Levels of the Agenda  
These levels exist in multiple phase spaces.  
We can think of multiple levels of the agenda for each of the following:  
The public  
The media  
The government  
The courts  
The bureaucracy  
The President  
The Congress  
The Supreme Court  
The states  
The local governments  
Each of these levels has its own agenda universe, systemic, institutional, and decision agendas.  
Levels of the Agenda  
A  
genda Universe  
The  
agenda universe  
is the collection of all possible issues.  
Any possible idea that could every be considered by a government or society, at any time and in any place, is part of the agenda universe.  
Levels of the Agenda  
The Systemic Agenda  
The  
systemic agenda  
is the collection of issues perceived by the public, media, and government members as meriting public attention and governmental action.  
Any issue, problem, or idea that could possibly considered by participants in each political system as long as it doesn't fall outside well-established norms and values.  
Levels of the Agenda  
The boundary between the  
systemic agenda  
and the  
agenda universe  
is the  
gatekeeping  
function of the media, government, and other actors.  
This boundary is not static. From time to time, the boundaries can change regarding what is or is not considered acceptable for government action.  
The Systemic Agenda  
Levels of the Agenda  
The Institutional Agenda  
The  
institutional agenda  
is the collection of issues that are up for active and serious consideration by a governmental body.  
These issues are receiving serious  
attention  
from the government and the public.  
Levels of the Agenda  
The Institutional Agenda  
Only a limited number of issues and problems reach the  
institutional agenda  
.  
The  
institutional agenda  
is a subset of the  
systemic agenda  
.  
Limited attention and resources mean that only a small number of issues can be considered at any one time.  
In legislative bodies, the committee structure helps to expand the carrying capacity of the agenda—the division of labor effect.  
Levels of the Agenda  
The Decision Agenda  
The  
decision agenda  
is the collection of issues that are actually acted upon by a governmental body.  
The  
decision agenda  
is a subset of the  
institutional agenda  
.  
These are items that are up for a vote or a decision by a governmental body.

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Slide 29:

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Slide 30:  
Levels of the Agenda  
There are four levels of the agenda:  
Agenda Universe  
: the collection of all possible issues.

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Slide 31:  
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Agenda Universe  
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Each of these levels has its own agenda universe, systemic, institutional, and decision agendas.

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Slide 35:  
Levels of the Agenda  
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genda Universe  
The  
agenda universe  
is the collection of all possible issues.  
Any possible idea that could every be considered by a government or society, at any time and in any place, is part of the agenda universe.

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Levels of the Agenda  
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systemic agenda  
is the collection of issues perceived by the public, media, and government members as meriting public attention and governmental action.  
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The Systemic Agenda

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Slide 41:  
Agenda Setting  
Conflict Expansion  
Conflict Expansion  
is the key goal of many interest groups, and it can move items from the  
systemic agenda  
to the  
institutional agenda  
or from the  
institutional agenda  
to the  
decision agenda  
and vice versa.  
Conflict is greatest at the  
decision agenda  
level.  
A decision reached at one level or branch of government may trigger or expand the conflict at another level or branch of government.  
Agenda Setting  
Attention Matters!  
Attention sets the policy agenda  
Priorities often determine where attention is placed.  
Major events often shift priorities and attention allocation.  
Agenda Setting  
Attention Complications  
We live in a world of  
imperfect  
and  
costly  
information. Those who can persuade and use their power to get attention can shape the agenda.  
Attention bottlenecks occur when there is too much information, forcing us to focus on some things while ignoring others.  
Agenda Setting  
Attention Expansion  
Indicators  
When the numbers or statistics look bad, the problem is more likely to get attention.  
e.g., unemployment, inflation, crime, etc.  
These indicators become  
symbols  
of the problem.  
Agenda Setting  
Attention Expansion  
Focusing Events  
A major event that draws attention to a problem.  
Attention can spike in the agenda space when a major event occurs, forcing policymakers, the media, and the public to focus on the issue.  
e.g., 9/11, the Challenger explosion, the BP oil spill, etc.  
Some groups take advantage of these events to push their own agendas.

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Slide 42:

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Attention Matters!  
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Slide 48:  
Political Power and Groups  
Political power is the ability to get things done in a political system.  
Political Power and Groups  
Losing Groups  
Losing Groups  
are those who are unable to get their issues on the agenda or to get their preferred solutions adopted.  
They have two ways to expand the scope of the conflict:  
Use symbols to change the nature of the policy debate, induce sympathy, and gain support.  
Appeal to a higher level or another branch of government.  
Political Power and Groups  
Winning Groups  
Winning Groups  
are those that can get their issues on the agenda and adopt their preferred solutions.  
They have a  
policy monopoly  
over an issue.  
They reinforce their own symbols and narratives.  
They use their power to keep other groups off the agenda.  
They keep public attention directed away from their policy preferences.

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Slide 49:

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Slide 53:  
Three Types of Political Power  
Coercive Power  
Blocking Power  
Quiescence or Powerlessness  
Three Types of Political Power  
Coercive Power  
Coercive Power  
is the ability to force someone to do something they would not otherwise do.  
e.g., the police, the military, etc.  
Coercive power is the most obvious form of power, but it is  
not  
the most common form of power in a democracy.  
Easy to use in a totalitarian regime, but not in a democracy.  
Three Types of Political Power  
Blocking Power  
Blocking Power  
is the ability to prevent someone from doing something they would otherwise do.  
e.g., the filibuster, the veto, etc.  
Blocking power is the most common form of power in a democracy.  
It is the power to  
say "no" to someone else's agenda.  
keep an issue off the agenda.  
keep an issue from being decided.  
keep an issue from being implemented.  
Three Types of Political Power  
Blocking Power  
Blocking Power  
is reflective of our biased system: it is easier to block than to act.  
Some issues are allowed to come to the fore while others are deemed unworthy of consideration.  
Even with an even playing field, there are vastly more powerful teams.  
Three Types of Political Power  
Quiescence or Powerlessness  
Quiescence or Powerlessness  
is the inability to get one's issues on the agenda or to adopt one's preferred solutions.  
e.g., the poor, the homeless, etc.  
Quiescence is the most common form of powerlessness in a democracy.  
People attempt but fail to influence the policy process, so they give up.  
Has lasting generational effects.

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Three Types of Political Power  
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Slide 59:  
Blocked? Strategies for Inducing Policy Change  
Kindgon's Three Streams and the Window of Opportunity Model  
Sabatier's Advocacy Coalition Framework  
Kindgon's Three Streams and the Window of Opportunity Model  
Problem Stream  
: the collection of problems that the public and policymakers perceive as meriting public attention and governmental action.  
Kindgon's Three Streams and the Window of Opportunity Model  
Problem Stream  
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: the collection of policy proposals that the public and policymakers perceive as meriting public attention and governmental action.  
Kindgon's Three Streams and the Window of Opportunity Model  
Problem Stream  
: the collection of problems that the public and policymakers perceive as meriting public attention and governmental action.  
Policy Stream  
: the collection of policy proposals that the public and policymakers perceive as meriting public attention and governmental action.  
Politics Stream  
: the collection of political factors that the public and policymakers perceive as meriting public attention and governmental action.  
Kindgon's Three Streams and the Window of Opportunity Model  
These "streams" come together at an opportune moment when attention is high or negative, creating a window of opportunity for policy change.  
Window of Opportunity  
: the convergence of the problem stream, the policy stream, and the politics stream.  
Policy Entrepreneurs  
: individuals who are able to take advantage of the window of opportunity to push their preferred solutions.  
Sabatier's Advocacy Coalition Framework  
Advocacy Coalition  
: a collection of individuals and groups who share a common set of policy beliefs and who seek to influence policymakers.  
Because of elites and policy monopolies, groups often come together to advance policy preferences (i.e., strength in numbers)  
Sabatier's Advocacy Coalition Framework  
Coalitions come together based on similar beliefs and values.  
Policy Beliefs  
: the fundamental beliefs that define the policy preferences of an advocacy coalition.  
Policy Core Beliefs  
are often based on deeply held values and beliefs.  
Coalitions venue shop to find the best place to advance their policy preferences.

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Slide 60:

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Slide 61:  
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Kindgon's Three Streams and the Window of Opportunity Model  
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Coalitions venue shop to find the best place to advance their policy preferences.

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Slide 68:  
The Policy Agenda Recap  
Problems are socially constructed.  
Groups compete to define problems and solutions.  
The agenda is the list of things being discussed and sometimes acted upon by a political body, the news media, or the public at large.  
Agenda setting is the process by which problems and alternative solutions gain or lose public and elite attention.  
The Policy Agenda Recap  
Political power is the ability to get things done in a political system.  
There are three types of political power: coercive power, blocking power, and quiescence or powerlessness.  
We discussed two models for inducing policy change: Kingdon's three streams and the window of opportunity model and Sabatier's advocacy coalition framework.

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Slide 69:

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Slide 70:  
The Policy Agenda Recap  
Problems are socially constructed.  
Groups compete to define problems and solutions.  
The agenda is the list of things being discussed and sometimes acted upon by a political body, the news media, or the public at large.  
Agenda setting is the process by which problems and alternative solutions gain or lose public and elite attention.

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Slide 71:  
The Policy Agenda Recap  
Political power is the ability to get things done in a political system.  
There are three types of political power: coercive power, blocking power, and quiescence or powerlessness.  
We discussed two models for inducing policy change: Kingdon's three streams and the window of opportunity model and Sabatier's advocacy coalition framework.

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Slide 72:  
Next Time  
Policy Types

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