International Coverage, Foreign Policy, and National Image: Exploring the Complexities of Media Coverage, Public Opinion, and Presidential Agenda

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This study employs first- and second-level agenda-setting to investigate how media salience, public opinion, and policy agendas influence the perceptions of foreign countries in the United States. Triangulation of research methods allowed examination of media coverage, public opinion and presidential public papers. Results indicate that salience promotes awareness of inflated significance for foreign countries named in U.S. media. The study identified a strong relationship between the foreign country salience in media coverage and in presidential public papers. The hypothesis for agenda-setting effects of policy agenda on public agenda was not supported. Regarding second-level agenda-setting effects, a correlation was found to exist among a negative tone in news coverage, presidential public papers, and public opinion. In contrast, no correlation was identified pertinent to the positive valence in the three agendas.

Compared with domestic news coverage, international reports in the U.S. media have diminished in frequency since the late 1980s (Utley, 1997). Additionally, an imbalance of visibility and valence in international news coverage exists for various geographic regions of the world. Because only a limited number of Americans have had the opportunity to establish direct contact with foreign countries and citizens of those countries, international reports in the mass media can potentially exert a stronger influence on U.S. public perceptions of foreign nations than other domestic sources.

Agenda-setting theory suggests that mass media serve as one of the key sources for public perception of important issues in the United States. Issue salience is a central concept in agenda-setting research (McCombs, 2005). A great amount of research has examined the agenda-setting role of media in

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public opinion. In these studies, healthcare, same-sex marriage, gun control, and unemployment have been among the most popular public issues in the United States. In the last few decades, empirical examinations of agenda-setting theory have been tied to political communication (Carroll, 2004). However, few attempts have been made to extend the central theoretical idea of agenda-setting to other contexts, such as business and international news coverage.

Indeed, Weaver (2008) noted the possibility of broadening research topics or "objects" in agenda-setting research by stating that "the unit of analysis on each agenda is an object" (p.148). An "object" can refer to a public issue, a political candidate, a corporation, even a nation. For example, Wanta, Golan, and Lee (2004) extended traditional agenda-setting "objects" to foreign countries by investigating the relationship between the broadcast media agenda and public opinion. Despite its significant contribution of extending the agenda-setting approach to the world of international affairs, the limitation of Wanta et al.'s study is that it examined only the relationship between the media and public agendas. The present study focuses not only on foreign countries as the primary unit of analysis, but also includes policy agenda, a critical component in forming the triangulated relationship of media agenda, public agenda, and policy agenda (Dearing & Rogers, 1996).

Cook et al. (1983) suggested that researchers may limit empirical inquiries into the examination of the impact of the media and policy on public opinion because "the normative wheels of democracy begin to roll and the public pressures elected officials who, being responsive, consequently set to work to change policies and programs" (Cook et al., p.18). Researchers may instinctually conclude that policymakers respond to the pressures of both the mass media and public opinion; however, it is unclear whether this seemingly linear process actually occurs. This study examines whether a triangular relationship exists among the three agendas. On the basis of first- and second-level agenda-setting theory, this study will employ content analysis to investigate: (1) the triangular relationship of the visibility of foreign countries in media coverage, the salience of these countries in U.S. public opinion, and the prominence of these countries in the policy agenda (first-level agenda setting); and (2) the impact of the favorability of news coverage and presidential public papers on the public perception of the countries (second-level agenda-setting). Since foreign affairs coverage is considered a new frontier for agenda-setting, this study seeks to extend agenda-setting, not only to a new domain (national image), but also to a new level, which includes policy agenda.

Literature Review
National Image

Within the context of globalization, national image has become unprecedentedly crucial for governments of countries and cities (Anholt, 2008), whereas national image is a complex concept. It is also referred to as "nation branding" and is often associated with public diplomacy, international perception, and international relations. Boulding (1956) conceptualized national image as "the total cognitive, affective, and evaluative structure of the behavioral unit, or its internal view of itself and its universe" (pp. 120–121). Wang (2006) suggested a nation's reputation consisted of the "collective judgments of a foreign country's image and character" (p. 91). Many scholars also conceptualized nation branding as a form of soft power (e.g., Potter, 2009). The concern of national image not only lies in the

academic disciplines, but has also been noted by many popular authors including Simon Anholt. In a series of continuing publications and speaking engagements, Anholt addresses some of the practical aspects of establishing a national image or "nation branding". For example, Anholt (2008) suggested a country's reputation could be analogized to a company or product's brand image.

Many countries undertake the practice managing their national image. For example, the Chinese government has undertaken a number of proactive steps in the past to improve the country's national image. In 1991 the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) established an Overseas Propaganda Department to directly confront attacks on China's national image. Since its founding, the department has published a series of white papers to address issues concerning human rights and Tibet (Wang, 2003). Another example can be found in a study analyzing Saudi Arabia's national image. After Saudi Arabia's image was damaged due to its connection with terrorists after 9/11, the country launched a multimillion repair campaign to restore a positive national image (Zhang & Benoit, 2004). The campaign employed a number of tactics, including paid spots on U.S. media outlets, foreign speaking engagements, and even polling the American public regarding popular opinions of the country. Results from the study indicated that while the measures employed were not completely effective, the country made minor repairs to its national image regarding a portion of the negative criticisms.

It is worth recognizing that national image is not solely dependent upon media reports or policy speeches, but is also associated with a country's products and services (Tang & Li, 2010). Wang (2006) noted that corporations appeared to play an important role in nation branding. In turn, an enhanced national image may provide a more favorable environment for tourism, international trade, the international job market, and political relations (Anholt, 2008).

First-Level Agenda-Setting

A legacy of agenda-setting scholars, including Lipmann, as intellectual father of agenda-setting and author of *Public Opinion* (1922), Cohen (1963) as vanguard of media role identification, and McCombs and Shaw (1972) as instigators of the groundbreaking Chapel Hill study, have laid the foundation for examining the relationship between the media and the public. The key postulate of agenda-setting is that, "the news media exert significant influence on our perceptions of . . . the most salient issues of the day" (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009, p. 1). McCombs and Shaw (1972) concluded their study in the context of the 1968 U.S. presidential campaign. In the study, undecided voters were asked to list the most important issues at that time. A content analysis was then conducted analyzing the importance of the issues in nine media sources. The results, which laid the foundation for future agenda-setting research, illustrated that a strong correlation existed between the ranking of media salience and the voters' agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Since the McCombs and Shaw study, agenda-setting theory has attracted a great deal of interest from researchers, with many embracing the idea that the media agenda holds considerable sway on the public agenda. Past studies extended the scope of topics addressed by agenda-setting to include issues such as illegal drugs, same-sex marriage, gun control, and unemployment (McCombs, 2005). A significant

portion of these studies employed comparative methods analyzing media content with public opinion and survey results (Shaw & McCombs, 1977).

Generally, the primary methodological approach to agenda-setting has been content analysis and survey design. However, experimental studies have also offered solid support for a causal relationship between the media and the public agenda at the individual level (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). The causal relationship indicates that media coverage can indeed influence how people think about issues in a laboratory setting. Through these methodologies, researchers have identified three ways that the media agenda shapes public opinion: manipulating public salience of issues through the amount of coverage (agenda-setting), transmitting attributes or sub-issues that comprise the issues to the public (second-level agenda-setting), and priming (Seaver, 1998).

Although agenda-setting theory has been investigated widely in the political communication field, few attempts have been made to test the theory in other contexts. Carroll and McCombs (2003) argued that the central idea of agenda-setting fits equally well in the field of business communication. In their analysis, major corporations were categorized as research "objects." The findings supported agenda-setting effects of business news on the public's opinions about these corporations. Similarly, employing a triangulation of research methods, Kiousis, Popescu, and Mitrook (2007) found empirical evidence of the effects of media coverage and public relations efforts on corporate reputation. In addition, Wanta et al. (2004) made an attempt to translate the agenda-setting theory from its primary area in public affairs to the domain of foreign countries. These studies demonstrate the flexibility and versatility of first-level agenda-setting to address a wide range of issues. Additionally, second-level agenda-setting can provide even greater insights.

Second-Level Agenda-Setting

While the main dependent variable of first-level agenda-setting is the salience of various issues on both the public agenda and the media agenda (Dearing & Rogers, 1996), second-level agenda-setting focuses on the attributes of each object (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009). Due to the limited capacity of media formats and journalistic biases, some of the attributes of an issue are selected and reported more saliently while others are ignored (Weaver, 2008). According to McCombs and Reynolds (2009), second-level agenda-setting is considered as "the influence of attribute agendas in the news on the public's attribute agenda" (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009, p. 6). Wanta et al. (2004) argued that second-level agenda-setting works on a micro level: "[Second-level agenda-setting] implies a deeper, more thorough processing of information in media content. . . . It investigates the transmission of attributes of actors in the news from media coverage of these attributes to the public's recall of the same attributes" (pp. 364–365).

A substantial body of evidence has been offered by prior research to support second-level agenda-setting, a great proportion of which has been collected through analyzing the attributes of presidential candidates during campaigns (Golan & Wanta, 2001; Kim & McCombs, 2007; McCombs, Lopez-Escobar, & Llamas, 2000). For example, Golan, Kiousis, and McDaniel (2007) conducted a study analyzing the 2004 presidential election. The findings supported the hypothesis that a positive relationship

existed between the salience of attributes in political campaigns and the attribute salience of issues in public opinion. Therefore, as suggested by Golan and Wanta (2001), "the mass media's coverage of candidates or campaigns can sometimes shape voter perceptions concerning the object's attributes" (p. 249).

Researchers suggest that there are two components of attributes: affective descriptions and cognitive descriptions (McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar, & Rey, 1997; McCombs & Reynolds, 2009). Affective descriptions are related to valences or tones expressed in the discussion of an object, while cognitive descriptions are associated with the information that describes an issue in the agenda (McCombs et al., 1997; McCombs & Reynolds, 2009). The present study focuses on the assessment of the affective dimension of second-level agenda-setting, specifically the positive, negative, and neutral tones in media and policy agenda, as well as the favorability of foreign countries in the public agenda. Therefore, it is necessary to review the literature on the effects of the media on public opinion.

News of Foreign Affairs and Its Effects on Public Agenda

Prior research has found that international media coverage has an agenda-setting effect on public opinion regarding foreign nations (McNelly & Izcaray, 1986; Salwen & Matera, 1992). For example, Semetko, Brzinski, Weaver, and Willnat (1992) analyzed U.S. television news over a six-month period. A strong relationship was found between the visibility of foreign countries in the media and public opinion. In addition, more recent studies examining a triangulation of media, public opinion, and U.S. foreign policy have found connections between the salience of foreign affairs in the media and in public opinion (Kiousis & Wu, 2008).

Other than salience, a foreign country's positive or negative image in the U.S. media can also exert considerable influence on public attitudes toward that country (McNelly & Izcaray, 1986). For example, Wanta and his colleagues (2004) examined whether U.S. news coverage of foreign nations was able to influence perceptions of other nations, and whether valence (positive or negative) in news reports had an influence on evaluations of the countries. They found that increased negative coverage of a nation resulted in more negative attitudes toward the country. Kiousis and Wu (2008) also found that media coverage was associated with U.S. public attitudes toward foreign countries. Specifically, the U.S. public formed greater negative perceptions of a country due to increased negative media coverage.

In examining a country's national image in the media, two dimensions have been frequently included: visibility and valence (Manheim & Albritton, 1984). Visibility refers to the total amount of media coverage that a country receives from the media, while valence refers to whether a country is portrayed unfavorably or favorably in the media. These two dimensions combine to form the overall national image of a country. As such, a negative national image results from negative valence and low visibility, while a positive national image results from positive valence and high visibility (Manheim & Albritton, 1984). In agenda-setting studies, visibility of a country in the media is likely to be identified in first-level agenda-setting research as determined by news frequency, while the valence of a country can be identified in second-level agenda-setting research as determined by the positive or negative framing of the news story.

The Intersections of Media Agenda, Public Agenda, and Policy Agenda

Although studies in the area of agenda-setting have generally aimed to establish links between media coverage and public opinion, the effect of another variable, the policy agenda, is also worthy of exploration. Although there is little doubt that a complex relationship exists among the media agenda, policy agenda, and public opinion, there appears to be only a small number of empirical studies examining policy agenda (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). Dearing and Rogers suggest that the combination of the three agendas provides a much more comprehensive view of agenda-setting. A number of studies have started to analyze the three agendas to address the complex issue of agenda-setting (Turk, 1986). For example, Mohamed and Gunter (2009) examined the role of agenda-setting in Egypt. They analyzed the influences of the media agenda and the public agenda with regard to the government's newspaper agenda. Results from the study revealed that the independently run media had a greater influence on public opinion than the government agenda. This finding suggests that although a positive relationship exists between the media agenda and public opinion, a governmental policy agenda expressed through a media outlet may be ineffective in moderating the public agenda.

McCombs and Shaw (1972) first recognized that the media does influence public policy through agenda-setting. Agenda-setting outlines the impact of the mass media on the public and its ability to shape policy by calling the public's attention to certain issues that are considered more important than others (McCombs, 2005). These issues, in turn, become relevant to policymakers when they have captured the attention of the public or the mass media. Although this process appears straightforward, studies examining the relationship between the media and policy agendas have found contrasting results regarding which one influences the other (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). Over the years, many studies have found that the media has been successful in influencing policy agenda on various topics, including AIDS (Rogers, Dearing, & Chang, 1991), education (Brewer & McCombs, 1996), and drunk driving (Yanovitsky, 2001).

Dearing and Rogers (1996) noted that policy agenda is a direct outcome of both the media agenda and the public agenda. Policy agenda-setting examines the relationship between the media and policy. As pointed out by McCombs (1997), significant and concrete issues have the potential to cross from the media agenda into the policy agenda. In addition, McCombs suggested that second-level agenda-setting could influence the policy agenda, not through the distribution of the media, but through interactions between journalists and politicians.

A large amount of literature has examined the role that the president of the United States plays in influencing public opinion (Cohen, 1997). Dearing and Rogers (1996) stated, "The U.S. president can put an issue on the national agenda just by giving a talk about it" (p. 75). Although it is without doubt that the president does indeed influence policy agenda, this process is little understood (Edwards & Wood, 1999). This knowledge gap is confirmed with the relative infrequency of presidential agenda studies and inconsistencies of findings. Cohen (1997) argued that the media "have been able to force an external set of priorities on foreign-policy makers" (p. 10). Edwards and Wood (1999) found that the president mainly reacts to changes in the media attention and world events instead of setting the agenda.

Overall, the inconsistency of findings examining the presidential agenda still leaves many questions unanswered. The structure of media and policy relations has been a complicated one (Bennett & Paletz, 1994). It is clear that the president has influence on the media concerning high priority issues relative to political campaigns, but a lower influence concerning other issues. However, on nonpolitical issues, it appears that the media has a greater influence on the president than the president has on the media. These findings indicate that further research is necessary to identify how the president successfully leads the media agenda, how the media influences the president on certain issues, and how the two agendas interact with public agenda.

In considering first-level agenda-setting and literature reviewed above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H_1:   The salience of the countries in public opinion is positively related to the salience of the countries in the media coverage.

H_2:   The salience of countries in presidential public papers is positively related to the perceived salience of countries in public opinion.

H_3:   The salience of countries in the media coverage is positively related to the salience of countries in presidential public papers.

Based on the logic of second-level agenda-setting, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H_4:   The valence (positive and negative) of the countries in media coverage is positively related to the attitudes toward the countries in public opinion.

H_5:   There is a positive relationship between the tone of presidential addresses and media coverage about a country.

H_6:   A positive relationship exists between the tone of presidential addresses regarding countries and the public's attitude toward a country.

Method

In this study, three types of data were analyzed: public opinion survey data, media content data, and policy data. The time period for data collection was determined by two factors: (1) the source of the public opinion data, and (2) the suggested time lags for agenda-setting research. The present study employed the Chicago Council's *Global Views Survey* (2010) for the public opinion data, which was administered between June 11 and June 22, 2010. Considering that the standard time lags for agenda-setting research range from one week to nine months (Wanta et al., 2004), this study employed a time lag of six months, which was between the beginning of the year and the day before the public opinion survey was conducted. Therefore, we collected the media agenda and policy agenda data between January 1 and June 10, 2010.

Public Agenda

The data for perceived importance and attitude toward foreign countries were collected from the Chicago Council's *Global Views Survey* (2010) of 2,717 respondents. Surveys from this organization have been employed in prior research focusing on international relations and therefore have established concurrent validity (Wanta, et al., 2004). Two questions were taken from the *Global Views Survey* to address the importance and attitudes toward foreign countries: "How important do you think the following country is to the United States?" and "What is your feeling toward the country?" To answer the first question, respondents were given a list of countries and asked to evaluate the role each country played. The higher the score a country received, the more important the public perceived that country. To answer the second question, respondents were asked to rate their feelings toward these countries on a thermometer scale, ranging from 0 (unfavorable) to 100 (favorable). The higher the score a country received on the scale, the more favorably the U.S. public felt about that country.

Media Agenda

To analyze the media agenda, a search of the *Lexis-Nexis* database was conducted using *The New York Times* as a source and country names as keywords. *The New York Times* was selected because of its notoriety as an elite American newspaper and its influence in the agenda-setting process on public opinion (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). In addition, it devotes a greater proportion of space to foreign news than other leading U.S. newspapers and is the newspaper most cited by policy makers (ibid.).

The 15 countries selected for inclusion in this study were based on a list in the Chicago Council's *Global Views Survey* (2010): Brazil, China, Germany, Great Britain, India, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Pakistan, and Turkey. A sample frame selected from January 1 to June 10, 2010, yielded 1,382 news stories. The unit of analysis was each news story.

Policy Agenda

As mentioned in the literature, for decades public opinion research has recognized the importance of the president in setting policy agenda (Huntington, 1965; Kingdon, 2003). The White House expends a great deal of capital in attempting to direct the media's attention on relevant issues (Edwards & Wayne, 1999). It should be no surprise then that scholars have cited the president as the leading agenda-setter in the United States (McCombs, 2005). Both Cohen (1995) and Hill (1998) noted that while the president does influence the public's perception of an issue's importance, it is unknown whether the issues manipulated by the president hold a dominant role in actual policy matters due to the often sensitive nature of foreign affairs. Therefore, this study is evaluating the influence of the president's rhetoric on the public's perception of the importance of an issue rather than an issue's true importance in actual foreign affairs.

Considering the theoretical position detailed above, the policy agenda was constructed by searching the *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, indexed by the American Presidency

Project, using the same country keywords identified in the *Global Views Survey*. A sample frame selected from January 1 to June 10, 2010, yielded 449 documents containing the countries included in the study sample. The unit of analysis was each paragraph in which the country appeared.

Coding Instrument

Two categories were employed in this study: (1) salience, or the total amount of news stories and paragraphs for each country, and (2) the valence of these countries as depicted in *The New York Times* and the presidential public papers.

According to the agenda-setting literature, salience was defined as the frequency of the nations being mentioned. Therefore, in this study, salience was operationalized as the frequency of news stories and paragraphs containing the 15 noted countries. Valence was operationalized based on the Wanta et al. (2004) coding scheme. Three dimensions of valence (positive, negative, and neutral) were coded. A country was coded as negative if it was "involved with activities that threaten the interest of United States or values that the United States wants to protect" (p. 370). For example, if an unstable country was planning to build nuclear weapons or was involved in activities violating human rights, it was coded negative. If a country was "involved with activities that are consistent with U.S. interests or values that the United States wants to promote" (p. 370), it was coded positive. For example, if a country dedicated itself to the activity of anti-terrorism, it was coded positive. A country was coded neutral when it exhibited a balance of both positive and negative or displayed indeterminate interests or values.

Intercoder Reliability

Stories such as editorials and opinion letters were excluded from the analysis. Coding was conducted by two trained coders. A simple random sample of 140 news stories (10% of the total sample) was examined in order to assess the intercoder reliability for the valence category in the media agenda. An additional simple random sample of 45 paragraphs (10% of the total sample) was examined to assess the intercoder reliability for the valence category of the presidential public papers content. Intercoder reliability was .84 and .81, respectively, using Krippendorff's alpha (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007).

Results

This study examined the effects of both first-level and second-level agenda- setting among the media agenda, public agenda, and policy agenda. To examine first-level agenda-setting effects, the researchers compared the salience of the 15 countries in *The New York Times*, the presidential public papers, and a public opinion survey. To examine second-level agenda-setting effects, the depiction of valence in both media and policy agendas and the public's attitude toward these countries were compared.

To test H_1 (that the salience of the countries in public opinion is positively related to the salience of the countries in the media coverage), a correlation analysis was conducted. Results showed that a significant correlation existed between the two variables ($r = .57$, $p < .05$). Therefore, the first hypothesis is supported. The results confirmed the first-level agenda-setting proposition that the more coverage a

nation received from the media, the more the public thought it was important to the United States. Table 1 depicts the total amount of news coverage that each country received and related "scores" from the public survey.

H₂, which predicted that the salience of countries in the presidential public papers was positively related to the importance of countries in public opinion, was not supported. References to a country in presidential speeches did not increase the perceived importance of that nation in public opinion.

H₃ proposed a positive relationship between the salience of countries in the presidential public papers and the media. As depicted in Table 1, results demonstrated strong support for this hypothesis (r = .81, p < .01). Therefore, a strong positive correlation exists between the media agenda and policy agenda.

Table 1. The Salience of the Countries in Media Agenda, Public Agenda, and Policy Agenda.

Country	News Frequency of the Countries	Importance of the Country in Public Opinion	Salience in Presidential Public Papers
China	331	54	92
Great Britain	88	52	3
Japan	79	40	18
Israel	80	33	48
Mexico	72	31	6
Saudi Arabia	8	30	1
Germany	54	27	18
Iraq	109	26	18
Russia	116	26	72
Iran	158	25	71
South Korea	27	21	14
Pakistan	118	19	33
India	75	19	44
Brazil	26	10	5
Turkey	41	10	6

Note. Salience in media agenda and public agenda: Pearson's correlation r = .57, p< .05. Salience in media agenda and policy agenda: Pearson's correlation r = .81, p< .01.

To test H_4, the researchers counted the positive and negative coverage that a country received between January 1 and June 10, 2010. Unlike previous research that analyzed only the frequency of positive and negative news coverage for foreign countries (Wanta et al., 2004), this study analyzed the percentages of positive and negative news stories. Because the total amount of news coverage varied by country, the percentage of news stories provided a better representation of salience for that country in relation to other countries. In contrast, raw frequencies are difficult interpret for a comparative analysis.

H_4 predicted that the valence of the countries in the media coverage was positively related to the attitudes toward the countries in public opinion. H_4 was partially supported. A correlation analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between negative coverage and the public's attitude toward the country ($r = -.53$, $p < .05$), suggesting that the more negative news coverage a foreign country received, the more negatively the public would perceive the nation. No correlation existed between positive coverage and the public's attitude. Positive valence of news coverage may not necessarily be a predictor of the public's attitude toward a country.

H_5 predicted that a positive relationship exists between the tone of presidential addresses on foreign countries and the public's attitude toward the country. H_5 was partially supported. A correlation analysis was conducted between the percentage of positive tone of occurrences and the public attitude score for the corresponding country. The result showed no correlations between positive tone of occurrences in presidential public papers and the public's attitude toward a country. However, the hypothesis for negative tone and attitude was supported.

As Table 2 illustrates, there was a significant negative correlation between the negative tone of a country in the presidential public papers and the public's attitude toward the country ($r = -.59$, $p < .05$). This analysis supports the hypothesis that the more negative the occurrences of a country in the presidential public papers, the more negatively the public perceives a foreign nation.

Table 2. Second-Level Agenda-Setting Influence in Country Valence.

Country	Valence in Media Agenda		Attitude in Public Agenda	Valence in Policy Agenda	
	Positive (%)	Negative (%)	Attitude score (0-100)	Positive (%)	Negative (%)
China	6.10	21.20	45	2.20	5.40
Great Britain	2.20	.00	73	33.30	.00
Japan	1.90	1	61	.00	.00
Israel	11.30	16.30	57	2.10	14.60
Mexico	.60	1.0	46	.00	6.30
Saudi Arabia	.00	.30	39	.00	.00
Germany	1.90	.00	63	.00	.00
Iraq	.00	6.40	34	.00	11.10
Russia	1.30	7.40	48	19.40	.00
Iran	.00	26.30	27	.00	95.80
South Korea	7.70	.30	52	.00	35.70
Pakistan	.00	9.60	35	3.00	36.40
India	2.60	.60	53	4.50	13.60
Brazil	.30	1.00	56	20	.00
Turkey	.30	.60	49	33.30	.00

Note. The Pearson's correlation between negative media coverage and public's attitudes is $r = -.53$, $p < .05$. The Pearson's correlation between negative media coverage and the negative tone in the presidential public papers is $r = .64$, $p < .01$. The Pearson's correlation between the negative tone in the presidential public papers and public's attitudes is $r = -.59$, $p < .05$.

H_6 sought to investigate the relationship between a country's attribute agenda in the presidential public papers and the media. The results were mixed. There was no correlation between the positive occurrences of a nation in the presidential public papers and the positive coverage in *The New York Times.* However, a positive relationship existed between the negative occurrences of a nation in the presidential public papers and the negative coverage in *The New York Times*. As Table 2 illustrates, a significant

positive correlation was found between negative media coverage and negative occurrences in the presidential public papers ($r = .64$, $p < .01$). Therefore, H$_6$ was partially supported.

Discussion

This study investigated three agendas: the media agenda as determined by coverage of foreign countries in *The New York Times*, the public agenda as determined by responses to a national survey, and the policy agenda as determined by the presidential public papers. The goal of this study was to examine if possible correlations existed in terms of salience and valence in the media agenda, public agenda, and policy agenda. Results demonstrated support for both first- and second-level agenda-setting effects.

Specifically, the findings of this study raise several interesting theoretical considerations regarding first- and second-level agenda-setting effects. Regarding first-level agenda-setting effects, we found support for the hypothesis that salience of the countries in the media leads to an increased perceived importance of foreign countries among the U.S. public. In addition, the positive relationship between salience of the countries in media coverage and in the presidential public papers was strong. This finding is consistent with previous studies examining the relationship between the policy agenda (i.e., the presidential agenda) and the media agenda (Edwards & Wood, 1999). These studies highlight a complex relationship between the president and the media agenda that may be influenced by latent variables not easily identified in a textual content analysis. However, our analysis failed to provide support for agenda-setting effects of policy agenda on public agenda.

Some factors may limit the president's influence on the public. Cohen (1995) noted that politics are rarely the concern of the public and everyday struggles limit the role of politics in people's lives. Cohen continues in stating that "the president must overcome this barrier to gain the mass public's attention" (p. 89). Our results demonstrated that the president might have a limited amount of influence on public opinion for some countries (China, Israel, Iran, and Russia), but not others (Great Britain, India, and Mexico). This finding partially supports Cohen's assertion concerning the president's influence on public opinion. Foreign countries are not highly represented in the media and could be categorized as non-obtrusive. Therefore, the president would have a more difficult time overcoming the lack of coverage combined with the public's unfamiliarity with lesser-known foreign countries. Further research is needed to identify other objects that contribute to the inconsistent findings between the president's influence and public opinion.

Regarding second-level agenda-setting effects, we found strong support for the hypothesis that a correlation exists among the negative tone in news coverage, presidential public papers, and public opinion. In contrast, no correlation was found regarding the positive valence in the three agendas. This result is consistent with previous research (Wanta et al., 2004) that has demonstrated the inadequacies of positive news coverage in influencing public opinion. This finding begs the question why negative coverage is more influential than positive coverage with regard to foreign affairs.

One possible explanation is the public's natural propensity for bad news. The phrase "bad news is good news" remains a pertinent reminder of the effect of bad news on public opinion. Consequently, the

media industry has long since recognized the public's fascination with negative news and, as a result, has exploited this disposition to increase profits. (Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006). For example, a study by Shoemaker, Danielian, and Brendlinger (1991) found that negative events were more likely to be reported by the U.S. media. Therefore, the value of negative news in the media industry as well as in evolutionary history may underpin the public's gravitation toward negatively themed public policy. To some degree, the promotion of negative news encourages ignoring positive events concerning foreign countries.

From an information processing point of view, previous research investigating the cognitive mechanisms of agenda-setting has shown that negative information generates stronger effects than positive information. Some scholars have argued that content characteristics (e.g., valence) were the primary moderators of agenda-setting effects (Miller, 2007). For example, Miller suggested that individuals who read content that arouses negative emotions were more likely to perceive an event as being more important than individuals who read content that did not arouse negative emotions. An early study by Carter, Stamm, and Heintz-Knowles (1992) found that individuals cited three main reasons for ranking an issue's importance in the political agenda: (a) the imposed threat, (b) the potential consequences, and (c) the perceived neglect of the issue. These reasons potentially highlight the influence of negative information on the cognitive process, mainly that negative events are more effective in arousing attention and affective responses than positive events.

Overall, this study is a necessary addition to the development of agenda-setting theory as it highlights the applicability of using foreign countries as "objects" that can be analyzed through multilevel agenda-setting theory. Additionally, this study offers a springboard for studies examining a country's national image and opens the door to future research to address the causal relationships that exist between agenda-setting and the U.S. public's perception of foreign countries.

Our findings support the postulate that the news media is a diplomatic device as powerful as formal policy statements. This conclusion can be observed in two ways. First, in terms of first-level agenda-setting, a nation's visibility in media, which is the total frequency of news in the media, is able to influence the public's perception of a country. Second, in terms of second-level agenda-setting, an attribute of a country, such as negative valence, is able to evoke negative attitudes toward the country. Subsequently, the triangulation of the media agenda, public agenda, and policy agenda raises several lines of inquiry. Trigger events may be responsible for propelling certain foreign countries into the media spotlight. Media coverage and current U.S. foreign policy may have an impact on how these countries are perceived by the public. In other words, media agenda and policy agenda have significant influence on public agenda in both first- and second-level agenda-setting.

While this study investigates *The New York Times'* coverage of foreign countries, further research is needed to analyze a wider range of media formats, such as broadcast and online news. A comparison of agenda-setting effects in different media types might also be an intriguing area to explore. It will be necessary to investigate more sub-dimensions of attribute agenda by examining the news topic, placement, and story length. As research in agenda-setting's influence on national image is in its infancy, this study has barely scratched the surface of this new branch of media research. Only through further investigation can scholars bring to light the media's influence on perceptions of foreign countries.

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