
ADVANCING AGENDA-SETTING THEORY: THE COMPARATIVE STRENGTH AND NEW CONTINGENT CONDITIONS OF THE TWO LEVELS OF AGENDA-SETTING EFFECTS

By H. Denis Wu and Renita Coleman

Survey and content analysis data from the 2004 presidential election were used to examine relative strength of first- and second-level agenda setting. Second-level candidate attributes exert a stronger agenda-setting influence on the public than does the salience of issues. More striking is the difference in effect sizes on voting intention. Respondents' perception of candidates' traits has a stronger agenda-setting effect and is a better predictor of voting intention than candidates' issues stance. Additionally, a new contingent condition for second-level effects was confirmed: negative information has more power to transfer the media's agenda of candidate attributes to the public.



Since the seminal study of agenda setting by McCombs and Shaw,¹ hundreds of empirical studies have delved into its different dimensions. At first, agenda setting was primarily concerned with establishing a first-level link, then with generalizing it to other countries and contexts. Next came discovery of contingent conditions under which it operated, such as need for orientation and obtrusiveness of issues. When the second level of agenda setting was proposed, research continued in a similar fashion: confirming the phenomenon, generalizing, and discovering contingent conditions. With these effects now firmly established and some understanding of how, when, and why they take place, scholars have turned their attention toward looking at first- and second-level effects in tandem to see how they influence each other.²

The study reported here turns to different questions in the same vein: whether first- or second-level agenda setting exerts stronger effects on the public, which level is a better prime of voting intention, and whether negative attribute agendas are more potent than their positive counterparts. The last part of our inquiry posits a new contingent condition at the second level, the effect of negative information.

This study also is concerned with the three elements in the hierarchy of effects, including cognition, affect, and behavior.³ The theoretical

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foundation upon which this inquiry was based is broader and, therefore, the results could be applicable to other types of objects beyond issues. In this study we examine whether the amount of coverage of issues—the first level—or the attributes of the candidates—the second level—has a greater impact on its respective public agenda and voting behavior using the same dataset. Little research looks concurrently at the influence of attribute salience, object salience, and public attitudes in the same study. Even less frequently is the third component incorporated—i.e., behavioral intention. This study begins by probing whether media coverage of issues or attributes has a stronger effect, and how that affects voting behavior. It then explores a proposed new contingent condition of second-level agenda setting—the influence of negative information.

Literature Review

Agenda-setting Theory. Agenda setting is the phenomenon of the mass media selecting certain issues and portraying them frequently and prominently, which leads people to perceive those issues as more important than others. For more than thirty years, the main concept in agenda-setting theory has been the transfer of issue salience, or how media emphasis of certain issues raises their importance for the public.⁴ Hundreds of studies have documented this process of media coverage influencing the perceived importance of issues for the public.⁵ First-level agenda setting focuses on the amount of coverage of an issue, suggesting that the media decide what issues the public will be aware of. Although numerous studies confirming effects at the first level would lead us to assume this has occurred, we present it as a hypothesis as the foundation for the main questions in this study; without a first-level effect, there is no point in considering other hypotheses:

H1: The prominent issues portrayed in the media are significantly correlated with the issues people consider most important.

Second-level Agenda Setting. After first-level agenda-setting effects were established, researchers began to explore a “second level” of agenda setting that examines the influence of attribute salience, or the properties, qualities, and characteristics that describe objects or people in the news⁶ and the tone of those attributes.⁷ The attributes of second-level agenda setting are divided into two dimensions: substantive and affective. The substantive dimension is concerned with things such as personality, ideology, and fitness for office about a candidate, or inflation versus unemployment on the issue of the economy. The affective dimension focuses on the emotional qualities of those attributes—whether the tone of those substantive attributes is positive, negative, or neutral. So, coverage of a candidate’s leadership ability (substantive dimension) can be positive, negative, or neutral (affective dimension), just as coverage of unemployment (substantive dimension) can be positive, negative, or neutral (affective dimension).⁸ Second-level agenda setting posits that the attributes of an object, such as the traits and characteristics of a political figure, are trans-

ferred from the media to the public in much the same way as the salience of issues.⁹ As in first-level research, second-level findings show that attributes of political candidates and issues emphasized in news coverage become the attributes emphasized by voters. We also offer the basic agenda-setting hypotheses about second-level effects for each candidate:

H2a: John Kerry's traits portrayed in the media will be significantly correlated to people's perceptions.

H2b: George Bush's traits portrayed in the media will be significantly correlated to people's perceptions.

Hierarchy of Effects Theory. The hierarchy of effects theory concerns three components: knowledge, attitudes, and behavior.¹⁰ This sequence has been called "learn, feel, do."¹¹ Looking at agenda setting through the lens of the hierarchy of effects, the first level corresponds to an issue or figure gaining the public's attention and then the public learning about it. The second level of agenda setting represents the affinity dimension, that is, when people form impressions of a person or issue based on its attributes.¹² In the hierarchy of effects theory, the focus is on the ordering of these three elements. The classic, cognitive model involves first learning about something new, then forming an attitude toward it, and finally taking a behavioral action such as buying the product, adopting an innovation, or voting for a candidate.¹³ But studies¹⁴ have shown variations in the order. In fact, six permutations are possible. Previous research has already established the parameters and conditions that predict which of the hierarchy of effects models will be used. Therefore, we are not particularly concerned with the *sequence* but rather with the *strength* of the first two components of these models—knowledge and attitudes—on the behavioral outcome, voting. In other words, we seek to determine not which came first, but which has a stronger effect: cognition about issues (first level) or feelings about attributes (second level). The fact that we chose a cross-sectional survey as the study method for gauging public opinion—instead of a longitudinal survey or experiment—limited us to the sequence of the stimuli that respondents were actually exposed to in that election. Moreover, we suspected that issue cognition and affect toward candidates can be truly intertwined in voters' minds in ways that would prohibit researchers from unveiling the real sequence of their influences on voting.

No studies we could find have examined this question, but the work of Kioussis and McCombs¹⁵ gives us an initial hint at what we might expect in our comparison of the relative impact of first- and second-level agenda setting. Their findings support the idea that the second level, or affective attitude agenda, might be expected to exert a stronger influence. The correlations between media and public salience, or first-level effects, were weaker with a median of .58, than between media salience and strength of public attitudes, or second-level effects, with a median of .81 and .70 on two separate measures. The authors say, "This is surprising given the common view" of the impact of cognitions

and attitudes in the hierarchy of effects.¹⁶ They conclude that “there is little support for the traditional model of the hierarchy of effects that perceived public salience mediates the relationship between media salience and attitude strength” but found strong evidence for the attitude model that specifies “the relationship between media salience and public salience is mediated by attitude strength.”¹⁷

Other works that looked at the two levels separately also give us some basis for generalizable statements about the strength of effects. While none of these studies of first-level effects can be directly compared to the studies of second-level effects because they use different data, their general findings represent a pattern that we may assume also exists within first- and second-level studies of the same data. In general, the correlations between the media agenda and the public agenda at the first level of the transfer of issue salience show weaker correlations than the correlations of second-level transfer of attribute salience. For instance, the first-level correlation during the 1976 presidential primaries was .63.¹⁸ In a look at the civil rights issue between 1954 and 1976 using twenty-seven Gallup polls,¹⁹ the correlation between media content and public opinion was .71. In Spain in 1995, comparisons of the public agenda with local news coverage²⁰ showed correlations ranging from .66, .72, and .90. But correlations as high as .90 are not the norm. The public and media agendas correlated between .48 and .80 in Buenos Aires leading up to the election.²¹ In a study of public opinion trends during the 1960s,²² there was a correlation of .78 between the patterns of news coverage and the public’s perception of what were the most important issues. Finally, a meta-analysis²³ of ninety empirical agenda-setting studies found a mean correlation of .53 at the first level, with most about six points above or below the mean.

In contrast, studies that looked at second-level effects tend to find correlations close to the high end and almost never as low as the lowest in first-level studies. For example, the valence of media coverage and candidate attributes and the valence of audience descriptions of the candidates, a second-level effect, in the 1996 Spanish elections²⁴ yielded a median correlation of .72. In Minneapolis, the correspondence between the media’s presentation of the economy and the salience of specific economic problems among the public was .81.²⁵ For an environmental issue in Indiana, the degree of correspondence was .71 between the local newspaper’s presentation and the public’s views on the development of a large man-made lake.²⁶ In Japan, the correspondence between Tokyo residents’ concerns and coverage of two major dailies in the months leading up to the United Nations’ 1992 conference on the environment was .78.²⁷ All these second-level correlations are similar to the highest correlations at the first level; none reaches the lowest levels or even the mean level of .53 in meta-analysis of the first-level effects. Therefore, we posit:

H3: Of the two levels of agenda-setting effects, the second level of attribute agenda setting will be stronger.

Priming Behavior. For the third element in the hierarchy of effects, behavior, we examine voting intention. Studies of the priming hypothesis

have suggested that the issues the media pay most attention to provide the criteria for how political leaders are evaluated, and this influences voting. For example, if the media report frequently on the economy, then leaders will be evaluated based on their performance on that issue and the public will vote accordingly. Valence, the evaluative dimension of the second level, plays an important part. If reports about the economy are mostly positive, people will hold positive attitudes about leaders; if reports are primarily negative, public attitudes will be negative.²⁸

Another focus of priming research is how media attention to political leaders themselves, rather than just to issues, affects public attitudes. Much research shows that if the traits and characteristics of political leaders are covered positively, public attitudes will be positive; if leaders are covered negatively, attitudes will correspond.²⁹ McCombs, Lopez-Escobar, and Llamas³⁰ found correspondence between the valence of the media agenda of candidate attributes and the valence of the voter agenda of candidate attributes was a median .72. Thus, we predict:

H4: Both first and second levels of perceived agendas will be significantly correlated with people's voting intention.

Theory of Affective Intelligence. Finally, we propose a new contingent condition of second-level attribute agenda setting based on a relatively new theory that links negative information to political judgment, the theory of affective intelligence.³¹ This theory argues that emotions are critical in getting people to pay attention to politics, and that people use emotions, particularly negative ones, to think deeply about their political views. Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen³² concluded that "emotions enhance citizen rationality," noting that this is opposite of conventional thinking that says emotions cloud judgment, causing people to act irrationally rather than leading them to more thoughtful decision making. Marcus in his 2002 book went further, saying, "[o]ur emotional faculties work more in harmony with our capacity to be rational than in antagonism to it."³³ The affective intelligence theory is supported with numerous studies over fifteen years showing specific negative emotions led to arousal, which stimulated cognition that resulted in considered judgment. One such study found effects based on candidates' personal qualities.

There is already evidence in agenda setting that supports negative information's predominant influence. Mutz argues that "salience and direction coincide" for some issues and negative news leads people to think certain issues are more problematic.³⁴ In one study, positive coverage of a nation had no influence on public perceptions, but negative coverage led audiences to think more negatively about the nation.³⁵ In another study,³⁶ negatively framed coverage of the economy was a significant predictor of consumer expectations about the economy, but positively framed coverage was not. There also is evidence that negative information plays a greater role in voting behavior.³⁷ Individuals rely on

negative information more than positive information in shaping impressions of others.³⁸ We propose that negative information is a contingent condition that can lead to more powerful agenda-setting effects at the second level than positive information:

H5: The negative traits of candidates portrayed in the media are more strongly correlated with people's perception than are the positive traits.

Method

This study, as most research that examines agenda-setting effects, consists of two parts: a content analysis of news and a public opinion survey.

Content Analysis. The news content in the sample came from two major newspapers in two adjacent southern cities, and three networks and two major cable channels—the evening news programs of ABC, CBS, NBC, “NewsNight with Aaron Brown” on CNN, and “The Fox Report” on Fox News. All the newscasts were recorded and newspapers purchased from Labor Day to Election Day 2004. Dates in the sample period were randomly drawn until two constructed weeks—i.e., two Mondays, two Tuesdays, and so forth—were chosen. A total of 310 print and broadcast stories was analyzed.

The unit of analysis was the story. Coded items included date, newspaper/TV channel, main and secondary news topics, and nine image categories for both candidates. These image categories were derived from the existing literature³⁹ and the frequently mentioned attributes in the news. They included appearance, leadership and charisma, integrity, qualification for office, consistency on issues, knowledge, intelligence, speaking ability, and care and compassion. Coders also judged valence using an average reader's perspective. Two trained undergraduate students independently coded the news stories after acceptable intercoder reliability was reached on 15% of the sample; using Holsti's formula, all items reached perfect reliabilities except for the secondary news topic (83%), Bush's image (96%), and Kerry's image (94%).

Survey. The survey was conducted by a university-associated polling center in the week before the 2004 election day. These two metropolitan areas also corresponded to the two major media markets of the southern cities where the two newspapers circulate, all three networks have local affiliates, and the two cable news channels are widely available. Random-digit dialing reached 615 people for a 41% cooperation rate.⁴⁰ The majority of the respondents were female (63%) and white (74%). Despite being “in the right direction,” both these demographics differed slightly from the state's overall population (51% were females and 64% whites)⁴¹ and were slightly older.

The survey asked respondents to name the three most important problems facing the country.⁴² Respondents also were probed on their views of both candidates' traits, which corresponded to the attributes coded in the news stories for a second-level measure using five-point Likert scales.⁴³ Open-ended questions⁴⁴ were categorized for both first-

TABLE 1
Correlations between Media and Voter Agendas

First-level Correlation ($n = 30$)	.516**	
Second-level Correlation ($n = 9$)	Bush -.072	Kerry .668*

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

and second-level analyses. Respondents also were asked which candidate they would vote for if the election were held that day. Media use questions and demographics included race, gender, education, household income, political party, and ideology.

Females constituted 63% of the respondents; 74% were white and 20% were African American. The median age was 47; median education level was "some college or vocational school," with average household income of \$40,000-\$49,000. The majority of respondents (41%) were Republican, 33% considered themselves Democrats, and almost 21% identified as independents. We can be reasonably certain that the respondents saw or read at least some of the content studied because respondents reported that they watched one of the TV news shows or read one of the two newspapers for an average of 4.77 days in the previous week.

H1 examined the association between prominent issue coverage and voters' assessment of issues: the first-level agenda-setting effect. The correlation is positive and statistically significant ($r = .516, p = .004$). Therefore, the first hypothesis is supported (see Table 1).

H2 posits that the media portrayals of Bush's and Kerry's attributes will result in the public adopting those same attributes. In order to test the second hypothesis, respondents' assessments of both candidates were tallied and averaged for each of the nine trait categories. The relationship was positive and significant, but only for Kerry ($r = .668, p = .049$). Coverage of Bush's image was not statistically associated with his image ($r = -.072, p = .854$). The hypothesis of a second-level agenda-setting effect was only partially supported.

H3 stated that of the two levels of agenda-setting effects, the second-level of attribute agenda setting will be stronger. If we look only at Kerry, who had the only statistically significant second-level effect, the value for the first-level correlation coefficient (.516) is smaller than the value of the correlation coefficient for the second-level (.668), indicating that the press was more effective in transferring its agenda of candidate images than in transferring its agenda of issues. For Bush, there was no significant second-level agenda-setting effect. The third hypothesis was partially supported, only for Kerry and not for Bush.

Results

H4 examined the relationship between both levels of agendas and voting preference. We used respondents' first two answers to the open-ended questions about each candidate's stance on the issues that fell into one of the thirty covered issue categories. These were dummy-coded and tallied for each candidate, then used as the variable for respondents' perceived issue agendas for that candidate.⁴⁵ Respondents' intention to vote for either Bush or Kerry was also dummy-coded. The correlations between first-level agenda setting and voting intention were significant and positive for both candidates (Bush: $r = .182, p < .001$; Kerry: $r = .373, p < .001$). The second part of the hypothesis, concerning the relationship between second-level agenda setting and voting preference, was also supported for both candidates (see Table 2). Voters' assessments of each candidate's traits were positively related to their intention to vote for that candidate (Bush: $r = .854, p < .001$; Kerry: $r = .705, p < .001$).

H5 posits that the negative traits of candidates portrayed in the media are correlated more with people's perceptions than are their positive traits. Data on the candidate attributes from the survey and the media content were coded into positive and negative dimensions. The Pearson correlation coefficient between negative coverage and negative assessment for Kerry is statistically significant and much larger ($r = .693, p = .039$) than the non-significant correlation between positive coverage and positive assessment for him ($r = .160, p = .681$). In line with our hypotheses, both correlation coefficients for Bush are negative and also not statistically significant. Once again, this hypothesis is only supported for Kerry and not for Bush, indicating a limited second-level agenda-setting effect for Bush.

Discussion

We found a significant but moderate first-level agenda-setting effect. At the second level, the agenda-setting effect was stronger for one candidate: a correlation of .668 between the media's portrayal of Kerry's traits and the public's perceived attributes about him. The finding of second-level effects for Kerry but not for Bush may be explained by one of the contingent conditions of agenda setting: need for orientation. In the 2004 presidential race, Bush was already a household name for most Americans while Kerry was relatively unknown to residents of the state studied. These respondents would be presumed to have a greater need for orientation about Kerry. Therefore, it makes sense that a second-level effect occurred only for the lesser-known candidate. In other words, this finding could be due to people's unfamiliarity with a candidate being a mediating condition of second-level agenda setting.

Need for orientation describes differences in people's distinct desires for varied information in order to understand a new environment or situation.⁴⁶ McCombs gave an example especially prescient for this study when he described a primary election where there may be many relatively unknown candidates as a situation when people's need for orientation is heightened.⁴⁷ Matthes further delineated three kinds of needs for orientation: issues, facts, and journalistic evaluations.⁴⁸ Need for orientation has been found at the first-level of agenda setting but has not been studied at the second level.

TABLE 2

Correlations between Perceived Agendas and Voter Support (n = 615)

	Support for Bush	Support for Kerry
First-level Agenda	.182***	.373***
Second-level Agenda	.854***	.705***

*** $p < .001$.

We believe this could explain our failure to find a second-level effect for Bush. Citizens already were familiar with President Bush in 2004, so the image agenda-setting effect was not significant.⁴⁹

However, for Kerry, the press exerted a significant impact on people's perception of him. Bush had been a staple of American media coverage during his four-year term in the Oval Office, including heightened interest into his personality and character traits through high-profile events such as 9/11 and the war in Iraq. The relevance of such events and issues makes it likely that people paid attention to Bush on both his stance on issues and to his character traits.

The same cannot be said for Kerry. Outside of his home state of Massachusetts—this study was conducted in a southern state—citizens are likely to have only heard of Kerry as one among many candidates vying for the Democratic nomination and media coverage during the primary campaigns. Competition from others with similar name recognition such as Howard Dean, the front-runner at the outset, retired four-star Gen. Wesley Clark, and North Carolina Sen. John Edwards made Kerry a relatively unfamiliar candidate to citizens of this southern state. Facing the prospect of changing leaders in the midst of a war on terror, voters would undoubtedly experience a need for more information about Kerry. Because humans tend to focus less on information they already know and are more attentive to new messages,⁵⁰ people would be expected to pay particularly close attention to information about Kerry more than to information about Bush; that is, they experience a need for orientation with Kerry.

Few previous studies⁵¹ that discovered second-level agenda-setting effects in elections have taken the need for orientation into consideration, nor did this study. However, this should be done in future research. Need for orientation is a well-established condition in the first-level studies of the transfer of issue salience, but this election between a well-known incumbent and a relative newcomer demonstrates that second-level effects also could have been affected by a need for orientation. Because the two levels of agenda setting involve very different kinds of cognitive processing, it cannot be assumed that contingent conditions apply equally to both levels. In this study, we surmise that the need for orientation may affect the transfer of attributes from the media to the public, and that it is even more conceptually fruitful to have discovered its impact on the second-level than on the first-level.

This study also examined the hierarchy of two levels of agenda-setting effects. Even though effects at both levels were discovered in the existing literature, few prior studies looked at the two levels together in order to compare their strength within the same study. We based our hypothesis on the pattern of correlation coefficients found in past studies and noticed that the second-level media agendas were associated more strongly with people's perceptions than the first-level agendas. We directly tested this and found that the power of attribute delivery by the media appears to be even more potent than the media's power of issue delivery. Again, this finding appears to be contingent upon high need for orientation and should also be tested in future research.

Another goal of this study was to examine the potential nexus between voting intention and the two levels of agenda setting, a potential impact few prior studies have looked at. As expected from previous priming research, we found that both levels of agenda setting are strongly correlated with support for candidate: first-level effects correlated with a coefficient of .182 for Bush and a coefficient of .373 for Kerry. At the second level, effects for Bush correlated with a coefficient of .854 and for Kerry at .705. All were significant at $p < .001$. The difference in effect size is even more striking here with attribute salience than the difference between first-level and second-level transfer of salience. Overall, respondents' perceptions toward candidates' traits appear to be a stronger predictor of voting intention than candidates' stances on issues.

The final goal was to investigate a new contingent condition we proposed for second-level agenda-setting effects, i.e., that negative information about a candidate's character and image in the media exerts a stronger influence on public attitude than does positive information. This hypothesis of negativity dominance also was supported—but contingent on the possibility of the need for orientation. For Kerry, the only candidate with a significant second-level agenda-setting effect due, we assume, partly to citizens' lack of prior knowledge about him, the association between his negative mediated attributes and public assessments was significant, but the counterpart correlation between the positive information and public perception was not significant.

This finding—derived from the affective intelligence theory—actually echoes the tendency toward a “negativity bias,”⁵² a phenomenon of stronger attitudinal and behavioral reactions toward negative stimuli than positive counterparts. The idea of a bias toward negative information is not new, but treating it as a contingent condition is uncommon. Numerous psychological studies of impression formation have shown that unfavorable information has more impact than favorable information;⁵³ we have taken that one step further to show that negative information also has more power to transfer the media's agenda of candidate attributes to the public.

Because of the locale of the surveyed state and the political inclination of the people in the South, our findings may or may not be generalized to the nation. In order to link media content with audience attitudes, it is necessary to study a relatively limited population.⁵⁴ Thus, in the interest of validity, we sacrificed national generalizability, as most agenda-setting research does.

This study offered several new theoretical advancements to agenda-setting theory and confirmed them with data from the 2004 presidential election. As predicted by the theories of affective intelligence and negativity bias, candidates' negative attributes were more significant than their positive counterparts in influencing the public. We posit a second contingent condition for the theory of agenda setting, that negative information is a stronger influence on second-level agenda-setting effects than positive information.

This study's main goal was to assess the relative hierarchy of the two levels of agenda-setting impacts. The findings suggest a stronger attribute-level association than the issue-level counterpart; in other words, the second level seems more potent than the first level. We further tapped into the relative impact of the two agenda-setting levels by looking at citizens' voting intention. The data analysis led us to conclude that while both levels of agendas—issue and attribute—are strongly correlated with voters' candidate preference, once again, the second level of agenda-setting effects seems a stronger factor in the decision-making process.

Kiousis and McCombs⁵⁵ viewed their discovery of stronger second-level effects than first-level ones as "surprising given the common view of the impact of cognitions and attitudes in the hierarchy of effects," but we do not. In fact, we see it as not only not surprising but expected that affect or feelings about the candidates' attributes would prevail in importance over rational, logical thought about the issues. Emotional responses have been shown to contribute to judgments of a candidate above and beyond party identification, and assessments of the candidate's character and issue position.⁵⁶ The theory of affective intelligence, which we used to support a negativity hypothesis, also argues that affect or emotion is critical in getting people to heed and to think about politics. Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen⁵⁷ concluded the opposite of Kiousis and McCombs,⁵⁸ stressing the usage of emotion in cognitive process. Their conclusions are supported with numerous studies—including one that found effects based on candidates' personal qualities—and by a recent book by Geer.⁵⁹ We submit that conventional wisdom about the superiority of cognitions over affect should be replaced with scientific evidence that shows this is not always the case.

With these observations about the relative strength of attribute agenda setting over issue agenda setting, and the introduction of a new contingent condition to the second level of the theory, we suggest a more complex theory that adds to our understanding of and our ability to predict agenda-setting effects toward political candidates.

Finally, we note that there is reason to think that the processes documented here apply beyond voters and elections. Indeed, just as the theoretical workings of agenda setting have been shown to apply beyond political campaigns, so is it likely that these processes are generalizable to non-election events and other concerns of public life such as the economy, environment, or health issues.

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34. Diana C. Mutz, *Impersonal Influence: How Perceptions of Mass Collectives Affect Political Attitudes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 71.

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37. Enriqueta Aragonés, "Negativity Effect and the Emergence of Ideologies," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 9 (2, 1997): 189-210.

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39. For example, Maxwell McCombs, Donald L. Shaw, and David Weaver, eds., *Communication and Democracy: Exploring the Intellectual Frontiers in Agenda-Setting Theory* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997).

40. Calculation of the cooperation rate follows the standard definitions of the American Association of Public Opinion Research.

41. The population statistics of the state were derived from the Census Bureau at www.census.gov.

42. The specific wording in the questionnaire is: "What do you think is the most important problem facing this country?"

43. The specific wording is: "I am going to read a list of words and phrases people use to describe politicians. Please tell me whether the word or phrase describes President George Bush/Senator John Kerry on a five-point scale where 5 is extremely well and 1 is not well at all."

44. The specific wording is: "What do you feel are the three most positive (or negative) characteristics of (President Bush or Senator Kerry)?" The respondents' original descriptions were coded based on the following categories: appearance, personality, leadership, integrity, qualification, consistency, knowledge, intelligence, speech performance, family and friends, and compassion.

45. Based on each respondent's answers to open-ended questions, a tally of issues perceived to be associated with each candidate was created. The tally of traits respondents used to describe each candidate also was created in the same way. Voting intention for either candidate was dummy-coded; therefore, the original categorical variable (which candidate the respondents would vote for) was transformed into two binary

variables, one for Bush and the other for Kerry.

46. Jörg Matthes, "The Need for Orientation Towards New Media: Revising and Validating a Classic Concept," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 18 (winter 2006): 422-44; Weaver et al., *Media Agenda Setting*.

47. McCombs, *Setting the Agenda*.

48. Matthes, "Need for Orientation."

49. A similar pattern—lower correlations for the incumbent than for the challenger—appears in the presidential race between Nixon and McGovern. See Thomas A. Bowers, "Candidate Advertising: The Agenda Is the Message," in *The Emergence of American Political Issues: The Agenda-Setting Function of the Press*, ed. Donald L. Shaw and Maxwell E. McCombs (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1977), 57.

50. Allyson L. Holbrook, Jon A. Krosnick, Penny S. Visser, Wendi L. Gardner, and John T. Cacioppo, "Attitudes toward Presidential Candidates and Political Parties: Initial Optimism, Inertial First Impressions, and a Focus on Flaws," *American Journal of Political Science* 45 (October 2001): 930-50.

51. E.g., McCombs, Lopez-Escobar, and Llamas, "Setting the Agenda of Attributes."

52. John T. Cacioppo, Wendi Gardner, and Gary G. Berntson, "Beyond Bipolar Conceptualizations and Measures: The Case of Attitudes and Evaluative Space," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 1 (1, 1997): 3-25.

53. Holbrook et al., "Attitudes toward Presidential Candidates."

54. Kim, Scheufele, and Shanahan, "Think about It This Way."

55. Kioussis and McCombs, "Agenda-Setting Effects and Attitude Strength," 50.

56. James Price Dillard and Anneloes Meijnders, "Persuasion and the Structure of Affect," in *The Persuasion Handbook: Developments in Theory and Practice*, ed. James Price Dillard and Michael Pfau (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 2002), 309-27.

57. Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen, *Affective Intelligence*.

58. Kioussis and McCombs, "Agenda-Setting Effects and Attitude Strength."

59. John G. Geer, *In Defense of Negativity: Attack Ads in Presidential Campaigns* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).