POLS 541
Fall 2006
Prof. Baumgartner

Questions for Week 9, Nov 2.

Readings: *Politics of Attention*.

1. The book is based on a model of cognition. Is that model sufficiently explained? What more detail might one want to see? What is the main point of the model as it is explained?

2. We argue that the same limits that affect an individual also affect institutions. Explain why this might not be true. After all, institutions can have a division of labor. They can simultaneously pay attention to many more things than a person can. A city government can both pick up the trash and build schools, even while also holding elections and operating a housing department and putting out fires. All this they do while the police department is arresting people, the museums are operating, the airport functions, the snow gets removed, and the mayor supports the baseball team. So perhaps the cognitive limitations we describe don't apply to large organizations with a division of labor.

3. What about a one-policy-at-a-time research design? In a few places, we go through individual public policies and attempt to show the linkage (or lack thereof) between the severity of the problem and the nature of the response. Discuss that research approach and how far one could push it. Obviously we go in a different direction, but focus here on the value of that approach to the same set of questions.

4. Download the simulation software from the web page for this book and play around with it. Explain how it works. Discuss its implications.

5. We say that social inputs, since there are jillions of them, must be Normally distributed in terms of their changes over time. Challenge that.

6. Figure 4.14 summarizes the book and the entire approach. Later, we present similar data based on other presentations. Chapter 7 for example presents a number of more precise tests for punctuations. Discuss.

7. This book follows directly from Agendas and Instability but it takes the analysis to a different level. Is this an improvement or a step backward? Is more complicated better? Is bigger better?