

Baumgartner, Poli 718, Agenda-Setting, Spring 2014

Questions for week 2, on the classics:

Take one of the books listed below and explain their fundamental approach to agendas. According to the author, what is the key problem in political agendas? Are they satisfied or concerned with the democratic implications of how the agenda is set? What is their methodological approach to the question? What testable / researchable ideas come out of their research?

1. Truman, David B. 1951. *The Governmental Process: Political Interests and Public Opinion*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
2. Hunter, Floyd. 1953. *Community Power Structure*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. [Also published in 1963 by Anchor Books, Garden City NY.]
3. Mills, C. Wright. 1956. *The Power Elite*. New York: Oxford University Press.
4. Dahl, Robert A. 1961. *Who Governs?* New Haven: Yale University Press.
5. Polsby, Nelson W. 1963. *Community Power and Political Theory*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
6. Crenson, Matthew A. 1971. *The Unpolitics of Air Pollution*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
7. Gaventa, John. 1980. *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Questions for class discussion based on readings of Bachrach and Baratz, Walker-Dahl, Schattschnieder, Downs, Cobb Ross and Ross, Walker:

1. Bachrach and Baratz make one of those arguments that everyone dutifully cites, then ignores. In fact, their article is the number one most cited article in the entire history of the APSR. Come to class with a few paragraphs each a proposal of how to design a study of the “second face” of power.
2. Walker did not really focus on Dahl in his initial article, but Dahl sure took it personal. Discuss the tone of that exchange, and the value of such things in the profession.
3. Walker’s argument in some ways is that elite-pluralism, or what Dahl has called “polyarchy” is not really very deeply democratic. Discuss.
4. Is there any value in studying political science if we cannot measure power? Or is there a way to measure power that these authors did not find? Or is there value in political science even if we cannot measure such a basic variable?
5. What are the routes to agenda-access described by Cobb, Ross, and Ross? Is their set of models complete? What are the difficulties in applying this perspective? Can it be used as a guide for research? What routes are likely to be most common?
6. Downs was dead wrong: The environment never went away as a political problem. Evaluate the importance of this article in light of this. Why is his point still influential?

7. Discuss the methods developed by Walker in his 1977 article. Why were these not picked up more systematically by others? Or have they been? Can they be done more easily now, given electronic searches of various databases? How hard would it be to replicate his study today? Could you do it in an afternoon? A week?
8. Schattschneider introduced the idea of conflict-expansion, and most authors here discuss how issues rise to the agenda, often as a result of a conflict-expansion strategy. (Cobb et al. are most explicit on this point.) But for each actor interested in expanding a conflict there are others interested in containing the conflict. Discuss the major arguments in the readings that relate to strategies of issue-containment. Is agenda-denial a good topic of study? What about the competitive nature of agenda-setting? How should we study this process, as the eventual salience of an issue is not determined unilaterally by any given actor, though many may attempt to influence it?
9. Schattschneider does not explain HOW conflicts get expanded or restricted. What literature focuses on that? Does Schattschneider give much information on how one might predict how widely a given conflict will expand, or in other words who will win the battle over the scope of the debate?