Baumgartner, Poli 718, Agenda-Setting, Spring 2014

Questions for Week 11.

Readings: *The President's Legislative Policy Agenda, 1789-2002.*

1. In Chapter 1 he defines the President's agenda as "the list of problems, issues, and policies to which the president has committed some attention and resources" (pp. 20-21). He then distinguishes among rhetorical, administrative, and legislative. The focus here, of course, is on this last agenda. Discuss how he defines it, and measures it. How clear is the measurement?

2. In chapter 2 he distinguishes between a process approach and a comparison approach to studying agendas. This is similar to what I referred to previously as process model and a variance model. Statistical comparisons are typically variance models, but we use them to make inferences about process. Process models study the temporal sequence and development of the process directly, as in a qualitative case study. Cohen is unusual in taking this distinction seriously. Discuss the value of it.

3. He proposes a theory of anticipated reactions that suggests that presidents try not to submit proposals that have no chance of passage; therefore the presidential agenda is endogenous to the legislative context. But, what is the cost to a president of seeing a proposal fail? Are there times when a president might like to be defeated publicly? More generally, are there times when policy actors knowingly make proposals they know are going to be defeated? What is the motivation for that? Are some actors more likely than the president to do so?

4. Is Figure 4.1 for real? Maybe it is an artifact of better data sources.

5. Look at Figure 5.1 and compare to *The Politics of Information*. What does it imply that the presidential agenda is more diverse? Compare to Figure 5.6 and 5.8, showing increased attention to domestic policy initiatives. What explains these trends? Why do they matter?

6. Findings show that the more they propose, the higher percentage of success they have. Why? This seems counter-intuitive. At the same time, during divided government, they propose fewer things, as they know they have a lower chance of winning. Discuss.

7. Throughout this book, Cohen uses the best practices in terms of careful attention to statistical problems (such as time-series multicollinearity, common when things are trending upwards as many of his variables do). He presents models with many control variables and many interaction terms. How well does he convince you that he has appropriately taken into account the relevant factors?

8. Cohen, like all empirical scholars, is stuck with his measures, as he discusses in the conclusion. For example, he does not know about, or does not analyze in a systematic manner, proposals that were considered but never made. How does this empirical limitation reduce the impact of his work? What does this study tell us, for sure? What does it not tell us? Give some prominent examples of each.