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The Politics of Information

Problem Definition and the Course of Public Policy in America

Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones

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Chicago

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Political Science

How does the government decide what’s a problem and what isn’t? Like individuals, Congress is subject to the “paradox of search.” If policy makers don’t look for problems, they won’t find those that need to be addressed. But if they carry out a thorough search, they will almost certainly find new problems— and with the definition of each new problem comes the possibility of creating a program to address it.

With *The Politics of Attention,* leading policy scholars Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones demonstrated the central role attention plays in how governments prioritize problems. Now, with *The Politics of Information*, they turn the focus to the problem-detection process itself, showing how the growth or contraction of government is closely related to how it searches for information and how, as an organization, it analyzes its findings. Better search processes that incorporate more diverse viewpoints lead to more intensive policy-making activity. Similarly, limiting search processes leads to declines in policy-making. At the same time, the authors find little evidence that the factors usually thought to be responsible for government expansion—partisan control, changes in presidential leadership, and shifts in public opinion—can be systematically related to the patterns they observe.

“Baumgartner and Jones provide insights regarding the reshaping of American governance that are truly invaluable to our understanding of the political process. There is no doubt this book will be widely cited for both its theoretical innovations and its empirical insights.”—E. Scott Adler, University of Colorado, Boulder

“Baumgartner and Jones have done it again! *The Politics of Information* is yet another pathbreaking study from the authors. This time the focus is on the development of American government, but both the theoretical approach and the empirical analysis deserves attention well beyond. Scholars of public policy and comparative politics also have a lot to learn from the book.”—Christoffer Green-Pedersen, Aarhus University, Denmark

“*The Politics of Information* illuminates the vast landscape of the national policy-making process. The analysis of the broadening and thickening dimensions of government growth is especially noteworthy.”—Morris P. Fiorina, Stanford University

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