



THE UNIVERSITY  
of NORTH CAROLINA  
at CHAPEL HILL

**POLI 718, Agenda-Setting  
Spring 2017, Tuesdays, 3:30–6:30pm  
Hamilton Hall 351**

---

Prof. Frank R. Baumgartner

313 Hamilton Hall, phone 962-0414

[Frankb@unc.edu](mailto:Frankb@unc.edu)

Web site: <http://www.unc.edu/~fbaum/>

Office hours: M, W 10-11 am, T 2-3 pm and by appointment

---

This class will focus on theoretical approaches and empirical applications to the study of agenda-setting in American and comparative perspective. We will begin in the 1950s and go to the current literature, covering a wide range of methodological approaches. We will pay special attention to punctuated equilibrium and the policy agendas project and the movement of the literature from a focus on power, to agenda-setting, to decision-making and policy change more generally. We will not cover everything, and indeed there will be important elements of the literature that we will not have time to address. Therefore you should also look at the supplemental reading list on the class web page; this is a good place to start for an introduction to other literatures that we could easily have included here. Term papers may be related to these supplemental topics or to the readings covered in class, depending on your interests. Note that much of this research links to research on framing, and I teach another class on that, so it is not covered here.

Much of this class relates to my own research agenda. Rather than shy away from that as I do in many classes, this one addresses and reviews much of my own research and that of my collaborators. In particular, we will read a lot of things that stem from the US-based Policy Agendas Project and its sister projects in various other countries: the Comparative Agendas Project. Take some time to become familiar with these projects by looking at the web site: [www.comparativeagendas.net](http://www.comparativeagendas.net). If you are interested in doing empirical analysis for your term paper, feel free to use these resources, and I can also help make contacts with project leaders in other countries if there might be additional data not yet made available through a public web site. The agendas project is a work in continual progress and development so if you are interested in getting involved there are many opportunities.

As someone interested in agenda-setting should do, I often pay attention to issues that seem to be on the cusp of the agenda. Two such issues at the moment are campus sexual violence, and racial disparities in policing, or even mass incarceration more generally. I will encourage each of you to think about these running examples throughout the semester as we go through the readings. Neither sexual assault, nor racial bias in policing, nor mass incarceration, unfortunately, is new. So, what does it take to bring such issues to the attention of government leaders? How do the issues get framed? Who fights back? Note that in these cases, no one “defends” sexual assault or biased policing, and yet the status quo is powerful for other reasons. What are the roles of material resources, partisanship, and other factors? By following these two particular cases, and talking about them in class, we can try to bring the theories in touch with reality. These issues may also provide good term paper ideas for some of you. Of course, you may have other issues

that interest you. A rising one, not yet really there, is whether male circumcision is a human rights violation. You can think of others if you pay attention. We should try to take time each week to talk about how current examples from the real world of politics illustrate the theories we are discussing, or contradict them. So this is one of those political science classes where we can also talk about politics and public policy: fun!

Students may be at different stages of their graduate training and come from different departments and disciplines, and therefore may benefit from writing different types of term papers. These might be empirical article-style projects drawing from data analysis from the US or a comparative agendas project. Or they might focus on the development of a research design / article / dissertation / MA thesis idea. These may be qualitative or quantitative approaches, US-based or comparative. I particularly encourage papers that seek to identify a gap in the literature and make a proposal to fill it. As you will see, agenda-setting is related to many other areas of political science (not to mention sociology, communications, law, psychology, and economics), but the literature has developed somewhat in isolation. Therefore, I would particularly appreciate papers that find paradoxes or contradictions between the agendas literature on some topic and another approach to the same topic, and seek to explain the cause of them, or, better, to propose a resolution of the paradox. Further, as you will see, much of the recent literature on agenda-setting relies on a model of human decision making within governments that has never been subjected to direct observational tests. That is, for example, we don't know how many elements of a situation actual government decision makers consider when making decisions. In the literature, we hypothesize that this is a small number, but we really don't know what the number is. So there are lots of areas in the literature we are going to review this semester where a smart graduate student could design an original research project and make a real impact. So I encourage all kinds of term paper projects, from gleam-in-the-eye proposals to very focused methods pieces, and everything in between.

Assignments will include short discussion papers due from each student seven times throughout the semester, or about every two weeks. I will use peer pressure and informal suggestions to ensure that each week about half of you write one of these papers and are therefore prepared to lead the discussion on various topics each week. I will distribute discussion topics / paper assignments each week in class for the following week's discussion, and these will serve as an agenda for the seminar, and help guide your focus as you do the readings. The one-page (single spaced) papers are due by email attachment by noon on the day of class. I will grade these on a 0/1/2 scale. If you get a zero you can do it again. One means you did a good description but I did not see enough original contribution. Two means you not only described accurately but you gave a creative insight that was useful. Make sure you try to do that in all your papers.

Discussion and active participation are fundamental. Note that it counts for 15 percent of the grade, and I will not necessarily assign participation grades only within a narrow B+ to A range. It is fine to come to class not having understood something, as long as you come with those questions and ask them. If it becomes clear that any students have come to class without having done the readings, I will ask them to leave. (On the other hand, if some crisis prevented you from doing one of the readings, and you let me know in advance, that is fine.)

It is impossible to do well in a graduate term paper by starting at the last minute, so I have a number of interim assignments (weeks 4, 7, and 10) designed to keep you on track throughout the semester. I will also grade these 0/1/2 on a similar scale as above. If you don't get at least 3 scores of 1 or above, you cannot receive a grade of H in the class. These also allow me to give you feedback along the way to push your project to a higher level. You will be pleasantly surprised what a good term paper you can do if you work on it regularly rather than all in a rush at the last second. (It may become a habit, who knows!)

Grades will be calculated according to this formula:

Participation	15
7 one-page assignments, equally weighted	35
3 Term paper draft assignments	see text above
Term paper	45
Total	100

Books for purchase: (Sorry. You will thank me in about three years, though.)

1. Baumgartner, Frank R., and Bryan D. Jones. 2009. *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (older editions ok)
2. Baumgartner, Frank R., and Bryan D. Jones. 2015. *The Politics of Information*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
3. Boydston, Amber E. 2013. *Making the News: Politics, the Media, and Agenda Setting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
4. Dagan, David, and Steven M. Teles. 2016. *Prison Break: Why Conservatives Turned Against Mass Incarceration*. New York: Oxford University Press.
5. Gaventa, John. 1980. *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
6. Green-Pedersen, Christoffer, and Stefaan Walgrave, eds. 2014. *Agenda Setting, Policies, and Political Systems: A Comparative Approach*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
7. Grossman, Matt. 2014. *Artists of the Possible: Governing Networks and American Policy Change since 1945*. New York: Oxford University Press.
8. Jones, Bryan D. 1994. *Reconceiving Decision-Making in Democratic Politics: Attention, Choice, and Public Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
9. Jones, Bryan D., and Frank R. Baumgartner. 2005. *The Politics of Attention: How Government Prioritizes Problems*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
10. Kingdon, John W. 1995. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. 2d ed. New York: HarperCollins. (older editions are fine as well)
11. Martin, Isaac William. 2013. *Rich People's Movements: Grassroots Campaigns to Untax the One Percent*. New York: Oxford University Press.
12. McCombs, Maxwell. 2014. *Setting the Agenda: The Mass Media and Public Opinion*. Cambridge (UK): Polity Press.
13. Scheve, Kenneth, and David Stasavage. 2016. *Taxing the Rich: A History of Fiscal Fairness in the United States and Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

All the required readings beyond these books should be on the class web site.

**Disabilities:** Please let me know in the first two weeks of class if you need any accommodation for a disability. No problem. But don't delay in letting me know.

**Academic Honesty:** Study together but make sure the work you hand in is your own.

**Effort:** Don't come to class unprepared to participate.

**Intimidation Factor:** I'm the author of a lot of the work discussed here. That can either be a cause not to critique and discuss, or an opportunity to engage with a person who is active in the field. I have thick skin and welcome criticism, discussion, and challenges. So feel free!

**Computers and cell phones:** Turn them off, period. Pay attention to the discussion. Bring paper copies of the readings, and a pad and pen to take notes.

### Weekly assignments and calendar

All the readings are required. It's fine not to understand parts of the readings. In that case, come with questions. Ideally, write those questions down and bring a list. Also, bring paper copies of the readings so that you can refer to them during class discussion. E-readers are ok.

**Week 1, Jan. 17, 2017. Introductions and discussion, no readings.**

**Week 2. Jan. 24. Where things started: Power, Conflict Expansion, Agenda-Denial**

1. Dahl, Robert A. 1957. The Concept of Power. *Behavioral Science* 2: 201–15.
2. Schattschneider, E.E. 1957. Intensity, Visibility, Direction, and Scope. *American Political Science Review* 51: 933–42.
3. Bachrach, Peter and Morton Baratz. 1962. The Two Faces of Power. *American Political Science Review* 56: 947–52.
4. Riker, William H. 1964. Some Ambiguities in the Notion of Power. *American Political Science Review* 58: 341–9.
5. Walker, Jack L., Jr. 1966. A Critique of the Elitist Theory of Democracy. *American Political Science Review* 60: 285–95, 391–92.
6. Dahl, Robert A. 1966. Further Reflections on "The Elitist Theory of Democracy." *American Political Science Review* 60: 296–305.
7. Roger Cobb and Charles D. Elder. 1971. The Politics of Agenda-Building: An Alternate Perspective for Modern Democratic Theory. *Journal of Politics* 33: 892-915.
8. Downs, Anthony. 1972. Up and Down with Ecology: The Issue Attention Cycle. *Public Interest* 28: 38–50.
9. Cobb, Roger W., Jeannie Keith-Ross, and Marc Howard Ross. 1976. Agenda Building as a Comparative Political Process. *American Political Science Review* 70: 126–38.
10. Walker, Jack L., Jr. 1977. Setting the Agenda in the U.S. Senate: A Theory of Problem Selection. *British Journal of Political Science* 7: 423–45.

**Week 3, Jan. 31. Generating Powerlessness as the Ultimate Power**

1. Gaventa, John. 1980. *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press

**Week 4. Feb 7. Ambiguity, Choice under Complexity, and Multiple Streams**

1. Kingdon, John W. 1995. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. 2d. ed. New York: HarperCollins. (earlier 1984 edition also ok)
2. Cohen, Michael, James G. March, and Johan P. Olsen. 1972. A Garbage Can Theory of Organizational Choice. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 17: 1–25.

**Due in class: One-page single spaced memo** explaining your proposed term-paper project. It should explain the puzzle you want to explore and your approach. If you have some ideas about the relevant literature, please include. Give as much detail as you can at this point. If you are deciding between two possible topics, give me two memos; that is fine. These can be short; 1-3 pages.

**Week 5, Feb. 14. Punctuated Equilibrium, Positive Feedback, Images and Venues**

1. Baumgartner, Frank R., and Bryan D. Jones. 2009 [1993]. *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (either edition is ok)
2. Eldredge, Niles, and Stephen J. Gould. 1985 [1972]. Punctuated Equilibria: An Alternative to Phyletic Gradualism. In Niles Eldredge, *Time Frames: The Evolution of Punctuated Equilibrium*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, Appendix, pp. 193–223. [Originally published in Thomas J. M. Schopf, ed., *Models in Paleobiology*. San Francisco: Freeman, Cooper, pp. 82–115]

**Week 6, Feb. 21. Developing a Model of Choice based on Attention**

1. Jones, Bryan D. 1994. *Reconceiving Decision-Making in Democratic Politics: Attention, Choice, and Public Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
2. Simon, Herbert A. 1985. Human Nature in Politics: The Dialogue of Psychology with Political Science. *American Political Science Review* 79: 293–304.

**Week 7, Feb. 28. Attention, Information, Cognition, and the Distributional Approach**

1. Jones, Bryan D., and Frank R. Baumgartner. 2005. *The Politics of Attention: How Government Prioritizes Problems*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
2. Baumgartner, Frank R., Christian Breunig, Christoffer Green-Pedersen, Bryan D. Jones, Peter B. Mortensen, Michiel Neytemans, and Stefaan Walgrave. 2009. Punctuated Equilibrium in Comparative Perspective. *American Journal of Political Science* 53, 3 (July): 602–19.
3. Jones, Bryan D., Frank R. Baumgartner, Christian Breunig, Christopher Wlezien, Stuart Soroka, Martial Foucault, Abel François, Christoffer Green-Pedersen, Peter John, Chris Koski, Peter B. Mortensen, Frédéric Varone, and Stefaan Walgrave. 2009. A General Empirical Law for Public Budgets: A Comparative Analysis. *American Journal of Political Science* 53, 4 (October): 855–73.

**Annotated bibliography due.** This means you should have identified the key source material you are planning to use. You don't have to have read it all yet but you should have identified the likely suspects. A longer bibliography is better than a short one. No need for

extensive annotations, but rather just a list of readings organized by the topics that you plan to cover.

### **Week 8, Mar. 7. The Politics of Information; Catch-up on Cascade Models**

1. Baumgartner, Frank R., and Bryan D. Jones. 2015. *The Politics of Information*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
2. David, Paul A. 1985. Clio and the Economics of QWERTY. *American Economic Review* 75: 332–37.
3. Arthur, W. Brian. 1989. Competing Technologies, Increasing Returns, and Lock-in by Historical Events. *Economic Journal* 99 (394): 116–131.
4. Bikhchandani, Sushil, David Hirshleifer, and Ivo Welch. 1992. A Theory of Fads, Fashion, Custom, and Cultural Change as Informational Cascades. *Journal of Political Economy* 100: 992–1026.

Mar. 13-17 Spring Break

### **Week 9, Mar. 21. Comparative Studies**

1. Green-Pedersen, Christoffer, and Stefaan Walgrave, eds. 2014. *Agenda Setting, Policies, and Political Systems: A Comparative Approach*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

### **Week 10, Mar. 28. Mass Communications Approaches**

1. McCombs, Maxwell. 2014. *Setting the Agenda: The Mass Media and Public Opinion*. Cambridge (UK): Polity Press.
2. Wolfe, Michelle, Bryan D. Jones, and Frank R. Baumgartner. 2013. A Failure to Communicate: Agenda Setting in Media and Policy Studies. *Political Communication* 30, 2: 175–192.

**Detailed outline of paper due.** This should include a full structure, planned cites, methods, etc. The text need not be written but the structure should be complete, in outline form. You'll be surprised how easy it is to complete the paper if you have a complete outline in the proper order.

### **Week 11, Apr. 4. A Major Agenda / Framing Shift Happening Right Now; also a Theory of Entrepreneurs**

1. Dagan, David, and Steven M. Teles. 2016. *Prison Break: Why Conservatives Turned Against Mass Incarceration*. New York: Oxford University Press.

### **Week 12, Apr. 11. Wealth, Power, and Influence**

1. Martin, Isaac William. 2013. *Rich People's Movements: Grassroots Campaigns to Untax the One Percent*. New York: Oxford University Press.
2. Scheve, Kenneth, and David Stasavage. 2016. *Taxing the Rich: A History of Fiscal Fairness in the United States and Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

(Note: I will divide the class into two groups and each group will report and discuss one of these books.)

**Week 13, Apr. 18. A Return to the Study of Power and Influence**

1. Grossman, Matt. 2014. *Artists of the Possible: Governing Networks and American Policy Change since 1945*. New York: Oxford University Press.

**Week 14, Apr. 25. Course summary (Monday); A Theory of the Composition of the Front Page of the *New York Times* (Friday)**

Note: For this week I propose a one-hour meeting at our regular class time, plus a meeting on Friday April 28 with the author, our APRG speaker that week.

For Monday: come to class with an idea of an interesting but unanswered research question for a book-length / dissertation type project that stems from your readings this semester. Consider three factors and try to come up with research ideas that score high on each:

- A) How interesting or important is the idea? That is, how many people in the profession would care if you could answer this question? Would someone publish the results?
- B) How feasible is it to answer the question? What would it take, in terms of research and data collection, to do it?
- C) How motivated would you be to study it? Is it just too boring?

A good dissertation comes up cherries on all three items: it's important, feasible, and exciting (to you). Think of it as a Venn-diagram. There are plenty of things that are exciting, but not feasible, or feasible and important, but just not interesting enough to keep you motivated. It really has to be all three. Come with a one-pager on that topic and I'll ask you to present quickly what the ideas are. It can be an extension of your term paper, or an entirely different topic. But what I want is that you separately evaluate the three different dimensions and understand that a good project has to be strong on all three.

For Friday: be prepared to discuss Boydston's book, with the author and APRG speaker.

1. Boydston, Amber E. 2013. *Making the News: Politics, the Media, and Agenda Setting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

**Term papers due this week either Monday or Friday.**