

The Agenda-Setting Impact of Major Presidential TV Addresses

JEFFREY S. PEAKE and MATTHEW ESHBAUGH-SOHA

The ability to set the national agenda is an important power of the modern presidency. Policy-specific, nationally televised speeches provide presidents with the best rhetorical opportunity to set the national agenda; however, research on presidential agenda setting has not systematically explored their effects. Although the conventional understanding of presidential agenda setting suggests that presidents should be able to focus media attention through televised addresses, research paints a mixed picture of the president's ability to do so. We answer the following questions: Are televised presidential speeches effective in increasing news coverage of presidential priorities? And what explains the likelihood that a national address will significantly increase media attention? We find that 35% of the president's national addresses across four policy areas increase media attention in the shortterm, with only 10% of the speeches in our sample increasing media attention beyond the month of the speech. We also find that the likelihood that a national address will increase media attention hinges on previous media attention, public concern, and, to a lesser extent, the president's approval ratings.

Keywords agenda-setting, presidents and media, presidential news, presidential television

Agenda setting, or the influence over the attention given policy issues by other institutions, is perhaps the most important source of presidential power. By setting the agenda, presidents can influence the priorities of government, the media, and the American people. Conventional wisdom holds that presidents are effective agenda-setters, who influence the salience of issues (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Kingdon, 1984). Presidents, the argument goes, are uniquely situated to affect the national agenda, including what Congress addresses (Edwards & Barrett, 2000; Neustadt, 1960) and the issues considered important by the American public (Cohen, 1995, 1997). Recent research, however, has challenged the claim that presidents set agendas so readily, at least through their public speeches (Edwards, 2003; Edwards & Wood, 1999; Wood & Peake, 1998; Young & Perkins, 2005). Given its importance as a linkage institution between presidents and the public and its role in influencing that national policy agenda, it is a natural extension of presidential agenda-setting research to focus on the relationship between the press

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A previous version of this article was presented at the 2003 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association in Philadelphia. The authors thank Yuanliang Wang for research assistance in collecting the data. Name ordering is not indicative of contribution.

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and presidency. Do presidents regularly influence what American media cover? Or, are the media driven by other motives that lead them to resist presidential efforts to affect their coverage?

Presidents have a number of tools to use as they attempt to manage the news media (Maltese, 1994). These include indirect efforts, such as putting out the line of the day, coordinating news within the executive branch, opinion polling and market research, and providing services for the press as mundane as travel arrangements and as critical as interview opportunities (Bennett, 2003, pp. 146–149). Presidents also have a number of tools to directly affect what the news media cover. They routinely hold press conferences (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2003; Hager & Sullivan, 1994), travel abroad and domestically (Brace & Hinckley, 1992), and make policy statements to affect the coverage they receive. Perhaps the president's greatest resource to affect news coverage is the national address, given the spectacle that accompanies a much-anticipated speech (Miroff, 1990). Here, presidents typically gain a sizable prime-time audience and the attention of the national media (Edwards, 2003, p. 130). But research has not ascertained whether and to what extent the president's national addresses affect media attention.

We systematically examine the agenda-setting effects of issue-specific national addresses. We test two competing explanations for what should affect media attention to the president's priority issues: presidential news management through a national address or media efforts to control its own news coverage, premised on the economics of news. We use impact assessment methods to analyze the effects of 40 presidential speeches on media attention to the economy, energy policy, drugs, and Central America, across six presidential administrations from 1969–2000. We show that televised presidential addresses are limited in their impact on media attention. Moreover, contextual and media variables condition the likelihood that a presidential speech will significantly affect media attention. Ultimately, our results paint a mixed picture of presidential agenda setting through national speeches. Presidents have, at times, influenced what the media cover through the use of televised speeches. However, our results demonstrate that the agenda-setting effects are short-lived and not as common as suggested by conventional wisdom.

Presidential Agenda Setting Through Televised Addresses

The president's ability to affect the policy agenda, defined as those issues to which political institutions give serious consideration and devote substantial attention (Edwards & Wood, 1999), is debatable. Agenda leadership by presidents hinges on their ability to increase the focus of other institutions, the media in particular, on presidential priorities. Yet, research on presidential agenda setting and media attention offers political scientists a discouraging picture of presidential influence. Although excellent reasons suggest presidents should influence what media cover, recent systematic analyses examining the relationship between what presidents say and what the media cover largely conclude that presidents are responsive to the press (e.g., Edwards & Wood, 1999). We begin by underscoring why presidents attempt to influence the media in the first place, and then discuss the frequency with which presidents have been able to influence media attention through their nationally televised addresses and the impact that media themselves have on attention to policy issues.

Why Presidents Attempt to Influence the News Media

Presidents have many reasons for attempting to influence the news media. By affecting what the media cover, presidents may prime the public to evaluate them on favorable

issues (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990). Of course, affecting media attention is not always an end, in itself. Presidents ultimately hope to affect the public's attention to issues through their high-profile speeches, which may be useful in affecting congressional attention to their policy priorities (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2006; Kernell, 1993) or improving their approval ratings (Ragsdale, 1984). But because the media influence which issues the public considers to be important (Behr & Iyengar, 1985; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Iyengar & Simon, 1993), as well as the public's familiarity with policy matters (Page & Shapiro, 1992, pp. 12–13), it is the media that presidents must affect first. Whereas much previous research has focused on the direct effects of presidential rhetoric on the public's agenda (Cohen, 1995, 1997; Lawrence, 2004; Rottinghaus, 2006; Young & Perkins, 2005), we emphasize the importance of presidents first influencing media coverage of their policy priorities. Understanding more accurately this relationship should help us ascertain when and how presidents are most influential as agenda-setters. This first step is the focus of our article.

Presidential Agenda Setting

Scholars have long considered presidents to be effective agenda-setters, with some studies concluding that presidents are the most important agenda-setters among national political actors (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Kingdon, 1984). Presidents hold two important advantages in agenda setting. First, others in government and among the public look to presidents for leadership. Neustadt (1960, p. 7) expressed this point of view when he wrote, "Congressmen need an agenda from outside, something with high status to respond to or react against. What provides it better than the program of the President?" Because others look to the president for leadership, Baumgartner and Jones (1993, p. 241) hold that the president is well situated to expand the scope of conflict surrounding an issue. This gives presidents the ability to thrust an issue onto the national agenda by focusing on it to the exclusion of other issues. Attention by the president, given their argument, can be decisive in focusing the attention of all actors in the political system, including the media, on an issue.

Second, modern presidents have the "bully pulpit" and regularly make news through their speeches and policy pronouncements. Other political institutions—Congress, the courts, and state governments—are unable to compete with presidential news making. The White House provides the major source of information on politics for the news media (Ansolabehere, Behr, & Iyengar, 1993), and the public appetite is high for presidential news when compared to news of others in government (Gans, 1980; Graber, 2006). Given the demand for presidential leadership in agenda setting, presidents, through news management (Maltese, 1994), seek to influence the agenda by affecting what makes the nightly news (Grossman & Kumar, 1981; Rozell, 1996; Smoller, 1990). Despite these efforts by the White House, little is known about their impact on media attention to policy issues following a nationally televised address.

Recent studies on presidential agenda setting demonstrate that presidential attention to issues has only limited effects on media coverage. Instead, presidents appear largely responsive to media attention on a range of domestic, economic, and foreign policy issues (Edwards & Wood, 1999; Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2005; Wood & Peake, 1998), even though presidential influence may vary across issues and presidencies (Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2004; Peake, 2001). These results may be biased against finding influence, nevertheless, because they do not differentiate between speeches before local and national audiences, even though media devote more attention to national addresses, which are by

their nature more newsworthy than speeches that presidents deliver before local or partisan audiences.

Even so, only limited scholarship finds support for a direct impact of national addresses on media attention. Lawrence (2004) finds a modest, positive impact, but only with State of the Union addresses. Others, such as Wanta, Stephenson, Turk, and McCombs (1989), report mixed results on the effects of four separate State of the Union addresses. Whereas Nixon's 1970 address apparently led the media's agenda, Carter's 1978 and Reagan's 1985 addresses were largely responsive to previous media attention to issues. Reagan's 1982 address had no effect in either direction. One study that examined an issue-specific national address shows that media attention increased substantially in the wake of Bush's speech in 1989 on the drug war (Jones, 1994), but "other issues soon crowded the drug issue out of the headlines" (Purvis, 2001, p. 83). Even though this existing research shows that presidents cannot consistently expand the scope of conflict with their speeches, we know little about the impact that national addresses have on media attention. Moreover, the literature does not offer a theoretical argument for why presidents have limited, or at best sporadic, influence over the media.

Media as an Obstacle to Presidential Leadership

The nature of the news media is likely to limit the president's ability to affect media attention to his policy priorities. Primarily, American media are fickle, lack "staying power" (Downs, 1972; Kingdon, 1984, p. 62), and have in recent years tended to focus more on "soft news" while devoting less attention to policy-related "hard news" (Bennett, 2003). American media, it is well documented, are primarily motivated by economics. Massive conglomerates own today's major media and the news is developed with an eye towards ratings, costs, and profit maximization (Bagdikian, 1997; Hamilton, 2004; Underwood, 1993). Deciding what is news is the primary power of the prestige media (Gans, 1980), and when economics, guided primarily by audience demand and the costs of coverage, dominate newsroom decision making, presidential news may suffer as the news media focus on issues unrelated to the president's policy agenda.

If presidents are unable to sustain media attention on issues through their national addresses, it may be because the public does not demand extensive and sustained coverage of presidential politics. Recent research shows indeed that the audience of televised presidential addresses has been dwindling in recent years, as cable television has decreased the size of the president's captive audience (Baum & Kernell, 1999). This, in turn, has limited the effects of State of the Union addresses on public opinion (Young & Perkins, 2005). More importantly, since fewer among the public tune in to watch presidential addresses, the media may see the addresses as less newsworthy, perhaps leading to a negligible impact of the president's address on subsequent press coverage of issues related to the address. Presidential addresses will receive coverage in the short term, because they are media events and are, by definition, newsworthy. Yet, their effects beyond the news surrounding the immediate event are likely limited because economic-minded media look for stories that will draw public interest. As a result of the limited time devoted to "hard news" by profit-seeking media, the president faces even more competition to be considered newsworthy.

Presidents may also find it difficult to influence media attention through their national addresses due to two characteristics of agenda setting. First, a fundamental tenet of agenda-setting theory is that attention space is limited (Jones, 1994; Jones & Baumgartner, 2005, p. 20). Issues compete for media attention via a process Wood and

Peake (1998) label the “economy of attention.” Here, unforeseen events, often exogenous to the political system, turn media attention to issues unrelated to the president’s priorities, making it difficult for the president to influence what is on the news. Second, attention to issues is inertial, whereby previous media attention often influences current attention (Edwards & Wood, 1999). Presidents must overcome this inertia to set the media’s agenda. For these reasons, presidential influence over the issues the national media cover may be limited.

Hypotheses

Below, we test the following presidential agenda-setting hypothesis: *Nationally televised policy addresses lead to substantial impacts on media attention to related issues.* Because presidents seek to expand the scope of conflict surrounding an issue by going on national television, we maintain that a national address has an agenda-setting impact on the news media when it increases media attention to an issue. Agenda-setting effects can be short or long term. If presidents have difficulty sustaining media attention on issues important to their policy agenda, even nationally televised speeches that increase media attention will do so primarily in the short term. To be sure, even short-term effects are important, given that our tests below rely upon monthly data.

Our discussion of the underlying economic motivations of modern media points to an alternative hypothesis: Media attention to policy issues is primarily determined by context, exogenous events, and previous media attention, in particular, and not the president. This hypothesis leads us to expect minimal, or largely negligible, effects on media attention by presidential addresses. Media attention to national political issues is largely inertial (Edwards & Wood, 1999), responsive to events exogenous to the system (Wood & Peake, 1998) and the policy-related context—for example, high unemployment or a stock market crash place economic issues on the agenda irrespective of presidential speechmaking (Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2005). Economically driven media are unlikely, therefore, to shift their attention to presidential priorities in response to a televised address in the absence of audience demand. Rather, contextual factors, including previous media attention driven by events, may be primary causes of news coverage of policy issues, as well as the inertia provided by past decisions on what is newsworthy and profitable.

When Speeches Are Likely to Increase Media Attention

Along with determining which addresses, if any, increase media attention to policy issues, we are also interested in those factors that predict which of these addresses have increased media attention. Conditions related to the policy and political contexts should be primary determinants of whether or not a nationally televised address increases news media attention to issues. If the likelihood of a president delivering a nationally televised address is largely determined by context, then presidents are not in a strategically advantageous position to affect the media’s agenda through a nationally televised address. This indicates that presidents must take advantage of conditions that promote presidential influence over the media through their national addresses.

Circumstances, many of which are largely beyond the president’s control, influence the issues media cover and the president’s ability to increase media attention. Simply, media will respond to events that are newsworthy to satisfy consumer demand for these stories even before a president may have time to address them. Most foreign policy events, for instance, typically arise on the world stage prior to being a presidential priority,

thereby limiting the president's effect on media attention to foreign policy issues (Peake, 2001; Wood & Peake, 1998). A declining economy is usually covered by the media already, limiting presidential efforts to increase attention to the issue (Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2005). As a result, presidents often find themselves responding to what the media cover, rather than leading it (Edwards & Wood, 1999; Wood & Peake, 1998). Although previous media attention to an issue will likely limit any presidential influence over media coverage of the issue, a lack of previous media coverage to the issue provides an opportunity for leadership and probable impact on news coverage. As with President Clinton and health care in 1993, presidents can in limited instances act as policy entrepreneurs and raise awareness of an issue previously uncovered by the news media (Edwards & Wood, 1999). Overall, we hypothesize that previous media attention of an issue decreases the likelihood that a presidential address will increase media attention to the president's policy priorities.

Public demand for presidential attention to an issue may also affect whether an address increases media attention to an issue. When the president delivers an address on a topic the public is concerned about, there is a clear motivation for media to cater to the public as a consumer of television news. For example, an economy in decline may increase public demand for news on the economy, providing profit incentives for the media to attend to the issue. Although the public generally tunes out presidential addresses, high public concern for an issue may not only encourage the public to watch the president's address, it may also encourage the media to continue its coverage of the policy—and what the president is doing to satisfy the public's concern about the issue—after the president's address. As such, high public concern about an issue increases the likelihood that a presidential address on the issue will increase media attention to the president's policy priorities.

The president's approval ratings may shape the context of media coverage of a president's national address. On the one hand, an unpopular president will be less likely to use national addresses as effective agenda-setting tools. Much like a poor economy might distract the media from the president's agenda, so too may an unpopular president distract the media from the topics of his own national addresses, as his low approval ratings may be more newsworthy than his policy agenda (see Groeling & Kernell, 1998). On the other hand, popular presidents should use the bully pulpit more effectively (Cohen, 1995; Edwards, 1989). Moreover, demand for presidential news should be greater when approval ratings are high, providing an economic incentive for the media to cover the president's policies. As a result, higher approval ratings increase the likelihood that a presidential address will increase media attention to the president's policy priorities.

The larger time dynamics of the modern presidency may also affect the propensity for a national address to increase media attention. Indeed, it is likely that recent presidents have systematically less impact on media attention than earlier presidents given the rise of cable television and the end of the "Golden Age" of presidential television (Baum & Kernell, 1999; Young & Perkins, 2005) and the more recent rise of soft news and competition among the media outlined above. Simply, the rise of cable television has altered the incentives of network news media to maintain or at least slow the decline in their ratings. For this reason, network news may focus less on the president's policy priorities and more on soft news topics (health, "news you can use," or entertainment) in any given newscast, so that the age of cable television decreases the likelihood that a national address will increase media attention to the president's policy priorities.

Timing may also matter, in two different ways. First, it is possible that presidential priorities during the first year, as expressed through televised addresses, generate greater

buzz in Washington as policymakers, and those who cover them, look to the new president for policy leadership. It follows that media attention to the president's addresses and priorities may be higher during a president's first year in office, as the new president's policies are novel to the public and, therefore, more newsworthy. Thus, the first year in a president's term increases the likelihood that a presidential address will increase media attention to the president's policy priorities. Second, we control for the time of day at which the president delivers his address. This is consistent with Baum and Kernell's (1999) suggestion that the 9 p.m. time slot should have the largest possible audience. If the public is more likely to watch speeches during prime time, then the media may be more inclined to cover them and the issues related to the speech.

Data

We test if specific presidential speeches increase media attention, as measured by television news coverage. The dependent variables in the analyses include monthly counts of television news stories shown on the nightly news programs of the three broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) for four issue areas: the economy, energy policy, drugs, and Central America.¹ Our source for these data is the Vanderbilt Television News Archive. Information regarding data collection procedures, including key words used in the content coding, is available in Appendix A. The measures tap media attention devoted to each issue over time and provide a precise enough time series to isolate impacts of nationally televised presidential speeches.²

We analyze policy speeches over four issue areas that represent the breadth of issues in which presidents have delivered prime-time addresses in order to directly influence public policy since 1969. The domestic issue addressed most often on television by presidents is the economy. Each president in our study addressed the economy at least twice during his term; Reagan addressed the economy 10 times (8 came during his first 2 years). We also analyze speeches related to energy policy, which became salient during the 1970s and was a significant part of the agendas of the Nixon, Ford, and Carter presidencies. Economic and energy policy represent issues presidents are expected to deal with, especially when crises (recessions or energy shortages) draw attention to these issues. Additionally, we analyze the two speeches on drug policy (Reagan in 1986 and Bush in 1989), as well as several speeches on U.S. policy in Central America during the 1970s and 1980s (Carter and Reagan). Illegal drugs and Central America represent policies of choice for presidents. Although they may be responses, in some degree to crises, presidents are not expected to focus on these concerns as they are with economic issues.³

Our primary independent variables are the nationally televised presidential addresses. A complete list of the addresses, along with a brief description of each, is provided in Appendix B. Where theoretically appropriate, we also include control variables such as economic indicators, other key events related to the issues (e.g., Arab oil embargo for energy policy), as well as events that might draw attention away from an issue (e.g., Iran taking U.S. hostages in 1980). The controls serve to represent the broader political context, which may affect media coverage independent of presidential efforts. The state of the economy is an important control variable in two ways. First, the state of the economy should cause media attention to the economy. In other words, as unemployment or other objective economic indicators worsen, media may increase their coverage of these conditions before the president has an opportunity to address them with a national address on the economy.⁴ Second, the state of the economy, given its significance, may affect the coverage received by other issues, so we also include unemployment as a control in the

analyses of other policies. Finally, we control for presidential approval in each impact assessment model⁵ (see Appendix C).

We use many of the same variables to assess the likelihood that a presidential speech will increase media attention. Our dependent variable is based on statistically significant positive coefficients in our impact assessment analyses. If significant at $p < .05$, that speech is coded as having an impact, with a one or zero otherwise. Independent variables include media attention and public concern (as measured using Gallup's Most Important Problem survey at the point closest to the time of the address) to the speech's policy topic,⁶ and whether or not the speech was delivered at 8 or 9 p.m. We code first-year addresses as those given during the first year of a president's term (including the first 12 months of President Ford's term). We also examine whether the era of cable television (coded as 1 for all speeches in 1988 and after) has decreased presidential influence over the news media (see Appendix C). This provides a proxy for changes in the media environment identified by Baum and Kernell (1999), among others (see Bennett, 2003).

At times, presidential speeches may be part of a series of national addresses on an issue to which presidents may return again in a national address. If presidents follow this strategy, as Reagan did in 1981 regarding his tax and spending cuts, we may have two speeches in one month. Because our unit of analysis is the month, we have no statistical way to determine which speech is the driving force behind an impact. Theoretically, the initial address should have the most pronounced impact because the national address should place the issue on the agenda, causing a burst in media attention unlikely to be caused by a follow-up address; follow-up addresses may only maintain an issue's level of media attention. For these reasons, we assume that the effects in a month are from the first address when there are two speeches in one month.⁷

Methods

Box-Tiao impact assessment techniques allow us to assess the impact that individual speeches have on media attention to the various issue areas (Box & Tiao, 1975). The specific models follow from the following general equation: $Y_t = f(I_t) + N_t$, where Y_t = monthly media attention to the economy, energy, drugs, or Central America; I_t = intervention events (such as presidential speeches) at time t ; and N_t = noise model for stochastic components.

Impact assessment models are parsimonious and advantageous to modeling theoretically relevant events that may affect the direction and magnitude of a time series. Moreover, they are very conservative. The interventions can only be influential after controlling for the history or noise components of the time series. Because we have identified hypotheses prior to identification of the time series, we can surmise a high likelihood that the intervention produced the change in the dependent variable. Spuriousness in a statistically significant relationship is unlikely in this quasi-experimental design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). If we conclude that a speech in a month, for example, has an impact on media attention to a policy area, it is highly improbable that another factor would have caused an identical shift. Our series are sufficiently long to account for the history of each dependent variable and determine if the president's speech had a short-term impact on media attention to the four policy areas (see McCleary & Hay, 1980). All series are stationary, according to Augmented Dickey Fuller test results (Appendix D).

An additional analysis explores the impact of several independent variables on the likelihood of a presidential address having increased media attention. We use logistic

regression for this model because the dependent variable is binary—whether or not the address had increased media attention in our impact assessment models.

Findings

We have argued that presidents' best opportunities to influence media attention of several policy areas hinge on nationally televised addresses. In this section, we examine four policy areas—the economy, energy, drugs, and Central America—to demonstrate if and when presidents can significantly increase media attention through major speeches. Next, we explore what factors increase the likelihood that a presidential speech will increase media attention.

Economic Policy

According to our results in Table 1, presidents have modest influence over media attention to the economy through their nationally televised addresses. Many of these speeches have had short-term effects. President Carter's October 1978 speech, for example, increased by about 44 the number of stories devoted to the economy during October, while two of Reagan's addresses (in October 1982 and May 1985) increased media coverage during the month of the address, by about 32 news stories each. Bill Clinton's economic addresses in February during his first year in office also garnered an initial burst of about 36 news stories.

Other speeches had longer-term effects. Reagan's famous "going public" address in February 1981 increased media attention to the economy by about 75 the month of the address, and a long-term impact constituting an asymptotic change of about, 1,490 additional news stories over a 25-month period.⁸ It should be noted, however, that his follow-up addresses later in 1981 had no demonstrable effect on media attention (the coefficients are negative, but insignificant). This is likely because Reagan so successfully affected media attention to the economy with this February speech (see Figure 1). Carter's 1980 speech had a sustained impact (note the significant decay parameter indicating a long-term impact), as well, of about 264 more stories on the economy over a 5-month period after the speech. This amounts to about 75 additional stories per month, a sizeable increase of 151% over the average media attention to the economy for the entire time series.⁹ In addition, Bush's September 1990 address had a sustained impact, with an increase of about 61 news stories in the first month and a sustained impact for several months thereafter.

Presidential influence over media attention to economic issues is neither consistent nor typical, however. Out of 27 major presidential addresses on the economy from 1969–2000 modeled in Table 1, only 9 speeches had a statistically significant positive impact on media attention to the economy, and 6 of the 9 had only short-term impacts that disappeared by the next month. In other words, presidents have only increased media attention to the economy using their best available tool—the national address—a third of the time. This is not a ringing endorsement for presidential influence over the media's agenda for a policy area that is vital to political success.¹⁰ Moreover, broad and enduring factors such as the economy's health (represented here by monthly unemployment) and presidential approval affect media attention to the economy, lending support to the alternative hypothesis. The positive relationship between unemployment and media attention demonstrates the proclivity of the media to focus on the economy when it is doing poorly. The inverse relationship between presidential approval ratings and media attention to the economy is

Table 1
Impact of nationally televised presidential speeches on monthly TV news attention
to economic policy, 1969–2000

| | Parameter estimate | SE | <i>t</i> statistic |
|--|--------------------|-------|--------------------|
| Nixon 6/70, ω_{01} | 7.31 | 17.37 | 0.42 |
| Nixon 8/71, ω_{02} | 16.59 | 18.56 | 0.89 |
| Nixon 9/71, ω_{03} | -8.49 | 19.38 | -0.42 |
| Nixon 10/71, ω_{04} | 43.84* | 18.60 | 2.36 |
| Nixon 7/74, ω_{05} | -18.32 | 17.86 | -1.03 |
| Ford 10/74, ω_{06} | 2.95 | 17.53 | 0.17 |
| Ford 1/75, ω_{07} | 28.81 | 17.57 | 1.64 |
| Ford 3/75, ω_{08} | -21.18 | 17.51 | -1.21 |
| Ford 10/75, ω_{09} | 66.80* | 17.41 | 3.84 |
| Carter 10/78, ω_{10} | 43.58* | 17.49 | 2.49 |
| Carter 3/80, ω_{11} | 79.34* | 18.79 | 4.22 |
| Carter 3/80, δ_{11} | 0.70* | 0.15 | 4.68 |
| Reagan 2/81, ω_{12} | 74.61* | 14.70 | 5.08 |
| Reagan 2/81, δ_{12} | 0.96* | 0.02 | 47.01 |
| Reagan 4/81, ω_{13} | -22.17 | 17.81 | -1.24 |
| Reagan 7/81, ω_{14} | -26.85 | 17.44 | -1.54 |
| Reagan 9/81, ω_{15} | -13.97 | 17.87 | -0.78 |
| Reagan 4/82, ω_{16} | 3.32 | 17.41 | 0.19 |
| Reagan 8/82, ω_{17} | 26.46 | 17.50 | 1.52 |
| Reagan 10/82, ω_{18} | 32.27* | 17.67 | 1.83 |
| Reagan 4/85, ω_{19} | 20.96 | 18.29 | 1.15 |
| Reagan 5/85, ω_{20} | 32.61* | 18.24 | 1.79 |
| Bush 9/90, ω_{21} | 60.90* | 15.40 | 3.95 |
| Bush 9/90, δ_{21} | 0.95* | 0.02 | 40.63 |
| Bush 10/90, ω_{22} | -30.78* | 17.85 | -1.72 |
| Bush 6/92, ω_{23} | -16.99 | 17.46 | -0.97 |
| Clinton 2/93, ω_{24} | 36.18* | 17.39 | 2.08 |
| Clinton 8/93, ω_{25} | -15.89 | 17.37 | -0.91 |
| Clinton 12/94, ω_{26} | -7.20 | 17.35 | -0.41 |
| Clinton 6/95, ω_{27} | 9.81 | 17.37 | 0.56 |
| Presidential approval | -0.33* | 0.18 | -1.85 |
| Unemployment | 4.07* | 2.36 | 1.73 |
| AR1 | 0.71* | 0.07 | 9.87 |
| MA1 | -0.29* | 0.97 | -3.02 |
| MA 18 | 0.18* | 0.05 | 3.39 |
| Constant | 32.11* | 17.79 | 1.80 |
| Mean of dependent variable | 49.80 | | |
| SE of estimate | 19.21 | | |
| $Q(36)$ (critical $\chi^2 \approx 46.97$) | 35.82 | | |
| <i>N</i> | 384 | | |

Note. All speeches are pulse functions. ω indicates the short-term (same month) effect of the president's speech, with the parameter estimate reflecting the estimated number of stories increased in the month of the speech. δ , or the decay parameter, indicates the long-term effect (where significant), and reflects the rate at which the initial increase in stories decays toward a new, post-intervention mean. We do not find a long-term impact, nor include a decay parameter, when one is not statistically significant. Although unusual, the MA | 18 | is properly included, according to Box-Jenkins analysis of this time series.

* $p < .05$, one-tailed.

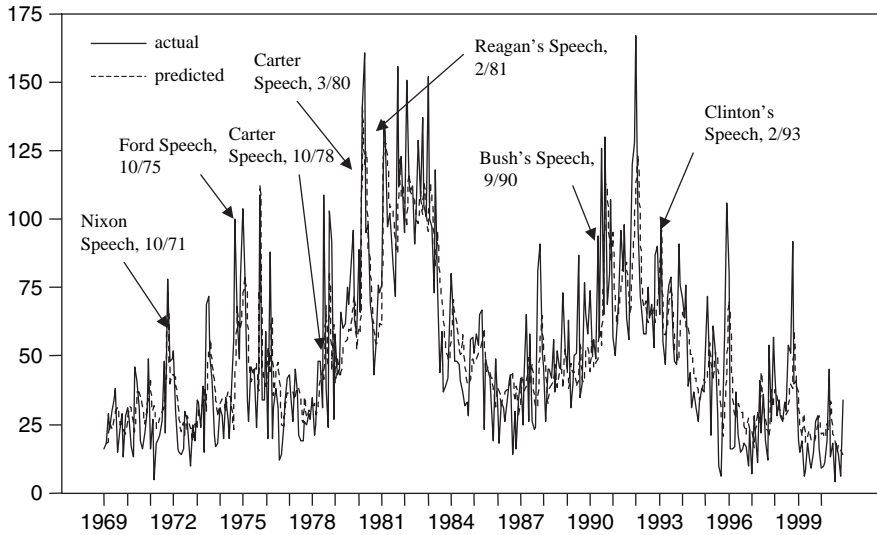


Figure 1. Media attention to the economy.

also consistent with the media’s tendency to focus on negative news (Bennett, 2003), which leads to increased coverage of the economy when the president is less popular (Groeling & Kernell, 1998). Media attention to the economy is also inertial, as indicated by the autoregressive properties in the model.

Energy Policy

The analysis presented in Table 2 (see also Figure 2) models the effects of presidential addresses on television news coverage of energy, after controlling for significant events related to energy (see Appendix C for a description of these events), unemployment, presidential approval, and the monthly price of oil. As with economic policy, presidents have had some influence using the national address to affect media attention to energy issues, primarily in the short term. President Ford’s first energy speech in January 1975 generated an estimated 32 additional news stories on energy during the month of the address. President Carter’s initial energy speeches (he delivered two addresses) in April of 1977 also increased media attention to energy issues in the short term. President Nixon’s two speeches in November of 1973 had the only long-term impact. His speeches led to an estimated 179 additional network news stories on energy during November 1973, with continued coverage in the following months. This holds even after controlling for the Arab oil embargo to which Nixon responded.

Despite these agenda-setting effects, in only 3 of the 6 cases did the president’s speech on energy increase television news attention.¹¹ Furthermore, previous media attention to energy issues, which was markedly high prior to most of the speeches examined, is largely determinative of current media attention to energy issues, as represented by the auto-regressive coefficient. Circumstances also appear to matter, as the oil embargo increased media coverage of energy, while the Iranian hostage crisis distracted the media, as expected, but its coefficient is only significant at the $p < .1$ level. The results lend mixed

Table 2
Impact of nationally televised presidential speeches on monthly TV news attention to energy policy, 1969–1983

| | Parameter estimate | SE | <i>t</i> statistic |
|--|--------------------|-------|--------------------|
| Nixon 11/73, ω_{01} | 178.85* | 17.87 | 10.01 |
| Nixon 11/73, δ_{01} | 0.83* | 0.06 | 14.63 |
| Ford 1/75, ω_{02} | 31.63* | 13.95 | 2.27 |
| Ford 5/75, ω_{03} | -7.62 | 13.70 | -0.56 |
| Carter 4/77, ω_{04} | 30.23* | 13.57 | 2.23 |
| Carter 11/77, ω_{05} | -6.50 | 13.58 | -0.48 |
| Carter 4/79, ω_{06} | -20.18 | 13.62 | -1.48 |
| Arab oil embargo | 22.11* | 13.29 | 1.65 |
| Iran hostage crisis | -19.82 | 12.87 | -1.56 |
| Price of oil | 0.71 | 0.91 | 0.78 |
| Presidential approval | -0.12 | 0.24 | -0.50 |
| Unemployment | 1.27 | 3.92 | 0.32 |
| AR1 | 0.85* | 0.05 | 17.06 |
| Constant | 14.39 | 38.24 | 0.37 |
| Mean of dependent variable | 34.50 | | |
| SE of estimate | 17.66 | | |
| $Q(36)$ (critical $\chi^2 \approx 46.97$) | 27.73 | | |
| <i>N</i> | 180 | | |

Note. All speeches are pulse functions. ω indicates the short-term (same month) effect of the president's speech, with the parameter estimate reflecting the estimated number of stories increased in the month of the speech.

* $p < .05$, one-tailed.

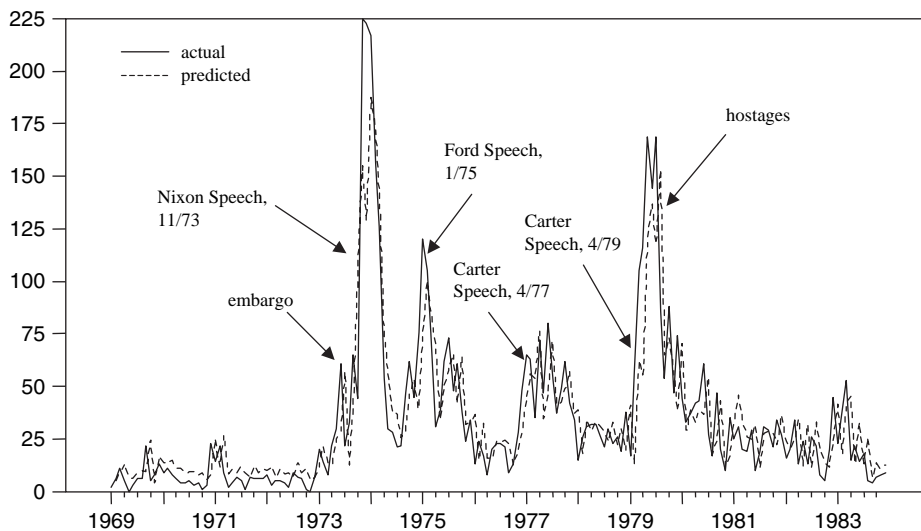


Figure 2. Media attention to energy.

support for the presidential agenda-setting hypotheses, and, like economic addresses, circumstances and previous media attention are critically important, supporting the alternative hypothesis.

Drugs

Only two major speeches, one each during the Reagan and Bush administrations, were made on the topic of the drug war (Table 3 and Figure 3). Reagan, at the behest of First Lady Nancy Reagan’s “Just Say No” program, addressed the nation on drug abuse in 1986. President Bush also advocated increased federal involvement in the crackdown on illegal drugs in his 1989 address. Bush’s address on the drug war increased the number of network news stories on drugs by 77, a 400% increase over the time series average. Reagan’s speech had no significant impact, suggesting mixed results for presidential agenda leadership over drug policy through televised addresses.

Central America

Presidents delivered a handful of national addresses on Central America as U.S. relations with Central American nations became increasingly important during the 1970s and 1980s. Again, these addresses had mixed and primarily short-lived agenda-setting effects, according to Table 4 (see also Figure 4). And much like the other policy areas, media attention to Central America displays inertial qualities and presidents have had limited success affecting news stories related to Central America through televised addresses.

Although Reagan’s initial attempt in April 1983 to expand the scope of conflict and build support for his efforts to aid the Nicaraguan contras failed, his March 1986 speech

Table 3
Impact of nationally televised presidential speeches on monthly TV news attention to drug policy, 1977–1992

| | Parameter estimate | SE | t statistic |
|--|--------------------|-------|-------------|
| Reagan 9/86 ω_{01} | 13.20 | 11.23 | 1.18 |
| Bush 9/89, ω_{02} | 77.00* | 11.12 | 6.92 |
| Presidential approval | 0.19 | 0.18 | 1.09 |
| Unemployment | -2.69 | 2.05 | -1.31 |
| AR1 | 0.63* | 0.06 | 10.25 |
| SAR1 | -0.19* | 0.08 | -2.41 |
| MA 5 | 0.19* | 0.08 | 2.40 |
| Constant | 29.43 | 18.95 | 1.55 |
| Mean of dependent variable | 21.46 | | |
| SE of estimate | 13.43 | | |
| $Q(36)$ (critical $\chi^2 \approx 46.97$) | 31.27 | | |
| N | 192 | | |

Note. Both speeches are pulse functions. ω indicates the short-term (same month) effect of the president’s speech, with the parameter estimate reflecting the estimated number of stories increased in the month of the speech.

* $p < .05$, one-tailed.

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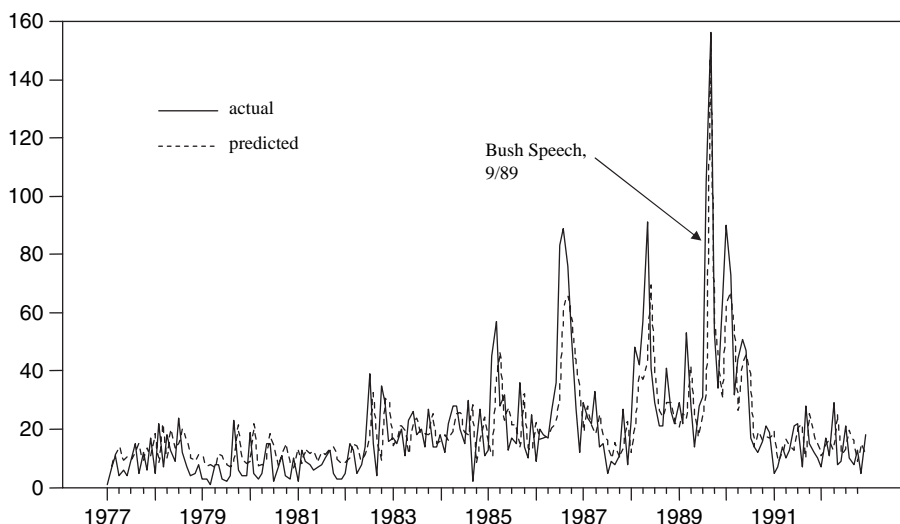


Figure 3. Media attention to drugs.

Table 4
Impact of nationally televised presidential speeches on monthly TV news attention to Central America, 1977–1992

| | Parameter estimate | SE | <i>t</i> statistic |
|--|--------------------|-------|--------------------|
| Carter 2/78, ω_{01} | 11.31 | 21.90 | 0.52 |
| Reagan 4/83, ω_{02} | -14.48 | 21.95 | -0.57 |
| Reagan 5/84, ω_{03} | 21.46 | 22.01 | 0.98 |
| Reagan 3/86, ω_{04} | 69.61* | 21.95 | 3.17 |
| Reagan 6/86, ω_{05} | 29.58 | 22.07 | 1.35 |
| Reagan 2/88, ω_{06} | -42.54* | 21.95 | -1.94 |
| Panama invasion, 12/89, ω_{07} | 81.66* | 25.89 | 3.15 |
| Panama invasion 12/89, δ_{07} | 0.58* | 0.26 | 2.23 |
| Iran-Contra hearings, ω_{08} | 77.59* | 18.61 | 4.17 |
| Presidential approval | 0.03 | 0.31 | 0.09 |
| Unemployment rate | -0.42 | 3.34 | -0.13 |
| AR1 | 0.57* | 0.06 | 9.08 |
| Constant | 31.80 | 31.56 | 1.01 |
| Mean of dependent variable | 33.27 | | |
| SE of estimate | 25.21 | | |
| $Q(36)$ (critical $\chi^2 \approx 46.97$) | 43.44 | | |
| <i>N</i> | 191 | | |

* $p < .05$, one-tailed.

Note. All speeches are pulse functions. ω indicates the short-term effect of the president's speech, with the parameter estimate reflecting the estimated number of stories increased in the month of the speech. δ , or the decay parameter, indicates the long-term effect (where significant), and reflects the rate at which the initial increase in stories decays toward a new, post-intervention mean. We do not find a long-term impact, nor include a decay parameter, when one is not statistically significant.

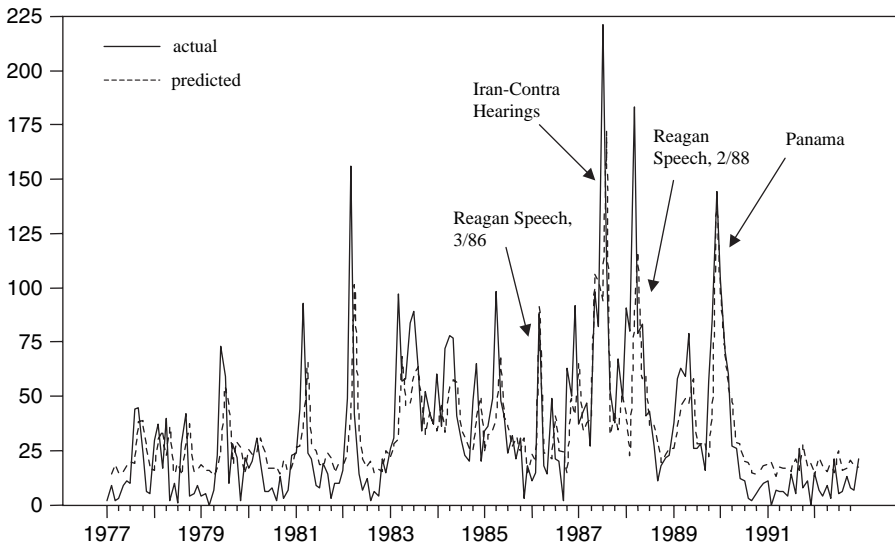


Figure 4. Media attention to Central America.

led to nearly 70 more network news stories on Central America. What is more telling, perhaps, is that congressional hearings on the Iran-Contra scandal during 1987 significantly increased media attention to Central American issues, providing support for the hypothesis that media focus less on policy requests, but rather on misdeeds within the White House.¹² Two other efforts at agenda setting on Central American issues proved limited, as well. Despite President Carter's efforts to rally support for ratification of the Panama Canal treaties, his address in February 1978 did not increase media attention. The Panama invasion, ordered by President Bush in December 1989, had a substantial positive impact on media coverage of the region. But this agenda-setting effect should not be attributed to Bush's address to the nation on the invasion, but rather to the invasion itself. The large impact suggests another avenue by which the president can affect media coverage of issues: using force abroad (see DeRouen & Peake, 2002).

What Affects the Likelihood That an Address Will Increase Media Attention?

Presidents have increased media attention to their policy priorities with a handful of speeches. We have hypothesized that presidential approval, first-year speeches, a lack of prior media attention, and high public concern for these policy issues should all increase the likelihood of an agenda-setting effect. We measure the dependent variables as having an agenda-setting impact (coded as one and zero otherwise) when a speech had a statistically significant (at $p < .05$) and positive impact on media attention in the impact assessment analyses. Table 5 presents logit results for those factors that affect the likelihood of an agenda-setting impact for all 40 addresses and, separately, for the 27 economic speeches.

Increasing media attention through televised addresses is largely a function of the political and policy contexts in which the speech is given. This is especially the case when we focus on economic addresses. Presidents who deliver a national address on the economy when their approval ratings are high are more likely to increase media attention to the economy. To illustrate, the model estimates that the change in probability of increasing

Table 5
Logistic regression predicting success of a televised speech in significantly impacting television news coverage, 1969–2000

| Independent variable | Expected direction | All televised speeches | | All televised economic speeches | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------|---------------|
| | | Coefficient (SE) | z (Ap) | Coefficient (SE) | z (Ap) |
| Presidential approval | + | 0.05 (0.04) | 1.20 | 0.32* (0.15) | 2.10 (+0.40) |
| Previous media coverage | – | –0.036* (0.016) | –2.20 (–0.47) | –0.103* (–0.05) | –2.08 (–0.51) |
| Public concern for issue | + | 0.033* (0.018) | 1.85 (+0.43) | 0.17* (0.07) | 2.22 (+0.43) |
| First-year address | + | 1.18 (0.89) | 1.33 | –1.92 (1.93) | –0.99 |
| Misery index | | — | — | 0.38 (0.28) | 1.38 |
| Prime-time address | + | –0.75 (1.03) | –0.73 | –2.43 (2.17) | –1.12 |
| Age of cable TV | – | 0.09 (1.01) | 0.09 | 1.68 (2.43) | 0.69 |
| Constant | | –2.59 (2.11) | –1.23 | –24.42* (10.67) | –2.29 |
| N | | 40 | | 27 | |
| Log-likelihood | | –20.31 | | –8.86 | |
| Likelihood ratio χ^2 (sig.) | | 11.18 (.08) | | 16.67 (.02) | |
| Percentage modal category | | 35.0 | | 33.3 | |
| Pseudo R^2 | | 0.22 | | 0.48 | |

Note. The dependent variable is success, coded 1 when a speech impacts media coverage positively and significantly, and 0 otherwise. The baseline probability of success is calculated while holding all variables at their mean (within-sample) values, or zero if a dummy variable. The change in probability, Δp , reflects the increase in probability of success when the independent variable (X) is set at one standard deviation above its (within-sample) mean, while all other variables are held at their mean values, or zero if a dummy variable.

* $p < .05$, one-tailed.

media attention to the economy is $+0.40$ when a president with an approval rating of 60% delivers an economic address. The effects of approval, although positive, are statistically insignificant in our analysis of the success of all addresses.

The clearest and most significant findings in Table 5 concern existing media attention and public concern. On the one hand, existing media attention diminishes the likelihood of an agenda-setting effect. When the media are already reporting on an issue (previous stories = 98, or 103 for economic speeches), the estimated probability of a national address increasing media attention is sharply reduced. The estimated change in probability is -0.51 for economic speeches and -0.47 among all speeches in the analysis. On the other hand, public concern increases the likelihood of presidential influence, as hypothesized. When the public is highly concerned about an issue (Gallup MIP = 75%), a national address is more likely to increase media attention to that issue; the probability of an agenda-setting impact increases by $.43$. When the president delivers an address on a topic the public is concerned about, there is a clear motivation for the media to cater to the public as a consumer of television news and to increase their attention to a president's priorities. To illustrate, a first-year president with a 60% approval rating who delivers an address on an issue with which the public is concerned (MIP = 55%) and that is already being covered by the news media (previous stories = 98) can expect a probability of affecting media attention at $.48$, whereas a similarly situated president who addresses the nation when the public is relatively unconcerned (MIP = 15%) can expect a $.20$ probability of increasing media attention.¹³ Interestingly, presidents delivered an economic address when public concern for the economy did not rate as the number one issue just 5 out of 27 times. In each case, the speech did not affect media attention.

Other than taking advantage of political circumstances that favor influence (e.g., high approval ratings and public concern), presidents do not have much leverage to increase the impact of a national address on media attention. First-year addresses were no more likely to be influential than addresses during other years in a term, once approval, previous media attention, and public concern for an issue were taken into account. Moreover, delivering the address in prime time does not increase the likelihood of an agenda-setting effect,¹⁴ and our control for the era of cable television has no impact on the likelihood that a nationally televised address increases media attention to the president's priorities.

Discussion and Conclusion

Despite being the best opportunity for presidents to increase media attention to their policies, presidents' nationally televised addresses have a mixed and limited impact on television news coverage. Although showing that 35% (14 out of 40) of speeches do affect media attention to issues is respectable, particularly when compared with other political institutions that are much less newsworthy than the presidency, our results indicate that presidents are not the agenda-setters portrayed by conventional wisdom. Indeed, our results suggest that several factors outside of the president's direct control, such as previous media attention and public concern, drive the agenda-setting effects of national addresses and what explains those effects. Even though presidents may have unique authority to focus the attention of the nation, there are serious limits to their ability to do so through nationally televised addresses. This does not bode well for presidents who might wish to rely on their nationally televised speeches to increase media attention to a policy area, expand the scope of conflict, and improve their chances for influence, whether in Congress or over the public at

large. Presidents simply cannot dictate the media's agenda through speeches when media are driven by factors besides presidential priorities.

Furthermore, presidents cannot rely solely upon national addresses to lead the media and, therefore, the public. This is especially significant when the likelihood that a televised address will increase media attention appears largely determined by circumstances outside the White House's control. The best advice we can offer a president seeking to affect media through a televised address is to take advantage of favorable circumstances. If successful leadership of the media is as uncommon as our analysis suggests, then the "permanent campaign," of which televised addresses are a part, does not clearly promote opportunities for presidential governance. Edwards (2003) asks, "Why doesn't the public hear the president's messages?" Our answer has focused on presidents' inability to regularly affect media coverage of issues addressed by presidents on national television. Ultimately, the president's public leadership may be limited because the presidency must rely upon an independent, economic-driven media to communicate with the public. At the very least, presidents cannot count on their national speeches to affect the media's agenda. At worst, Reagan's success influencing the media in 1981 was an aberration of circumstance (e.g., high popularity, early during the first term, an issue high in public concern), not a typical example of presidential power.

The limitations of nationally televised addresses need not be a detriment to presidential agenda setting, nonetheless. Presidents already rely upon the news media to transmit their messages to the American public; they may simply need to combine a national address with a strategy of sustained policy attention. By maintaining their focus on an issue after a national address, the media may be more likely to cover the president's policy over several months. Only then do we expect public attention to increase and, perhaps, congressional responsiveness as well. To sustain media attention over the long term, presidents may rely on multiple national addresses, a strategy used by the Reagan administration with economic policy during 1981. In each of the four instances we examined where presidents delivered two addresses in the same month, we found the series of addresses significantly altered attention by the media. This strategy should be used sparingly, however, because if televised addresses on the same topic become commonplace, they will lack the newsworthiness that makes them a strategy worth pursuing in the first place (see Edwards, 1989). Alternatively, presidents may adopt a strategy of appeals through domestic travel and local media, as President George W. Bush did with his Social Security reform program (see Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2006). Either way, presidents must still take advantage of opportunities provided in a media-driven contextual environment.

Despite our contribution, much research is needed to fully understand the president's influence over news media. Because we equate agenda setting with issue attention, our research—along with most other studies of agenda setting—has not tackled the important question of issue framing. Although presidents may not consistently increase media attention to broad policy issues, they may affect the way in which the media frame their stories related to the issue or the overall tone of news coverage related to the issue. If the president is able to increase the percentage of stories devoted to a particular topic in a specific way, then media coverage has been influenced, even if the absolute number of stories devoted to a policy does not increase. In other words, a president who wishes to frame taxes in a different light would only be credited with affecting media coverage according to our and other studies if the number of stories devoted to the economy increases. If presidents are able to consistently frame how the media cover economic issues, then clearly studies that emphasize the amount of

attention as we do will underestimate the effects that presidents have on the media. Future analyses should focus on the framing effects of presidential speeches. Finally, it is probable that presidents, in seeking to affect media attention to their priorities, consider public demand, current circumstances, and an issue's salience before placing it on their own agenda and delivering an address. This responsiveness, then, could be the key to presidential success in terms of agenda setting. Testing these propositions provides the basis for our future research agenda.

Notes

1. Some have suggested that daily or weekly measures of media attention might be a better measure of media coverage than monthly attention. Yet, we think that monthly measures are theoretically appropriate for our purposes. We assume that a televised address will receive coverage in the national news, at least the day of or day after an address. What is important for presidential leadership—given our argument that presidents do not influence media as an end in itself—is whether or not the president's address sustains news coverage well after the address. In other words, to have a meaningful impact on the media's agenda, to expand the scope of conflict and involve the public and Congress, the president must increase coverage for a substantial period of time.

2. Previous studies have used similar measures of the media's agenda. Wood and Peake (1998) and Edwards and Wood (1999) used weekly counts of minutes devoted by TV news to the issues they examined for about a 10-year period. We count stories instead of minutes, which enabled us to code more data over a longer period of time. The two measures have a Pearson's r of .77 ($p < .01$) for economic issues (from 1981–1984). One drawback to using the Vanderbilt archives is that we are only counting broadcast television news stories, not cable television news stories. Although cable news stories are available in the archive, counting CNN and Fox stories is not possible across our entire time frame (1969–2000).

3. We examine the economy because it is important to presidential governance and is the most commonly addressed domestic issue by presidents over the time period. Drugs are included as an issue because previous research has examined the effects of Bush's 1989 address (Jones, 1994), while Central America is included to provide a foreign policy issue of significance that was addressed repeatedly by administrations over the time period. Of course, we only analyze Central America addresses where the president is addressing the policy, not responding to scandal (Reagan delivered several televised addresses on the Iran-Contra scandal in 1986 and 1987). Finally, we include energy policy given its importance during the earlier stages of our time period. We do not analyze speeches on foreign policies dealing with the Soviet Union, Vietnam, or national security issues beyond the speeches on Central America. We do not examine the Vietnam War, for instance, because the Vanderbilt archive begins in 1968. Despite these restrictions, our analysis covers 15 of Reagan's 19 addresses that involved actual policy proposals and 5 of Clinton's 6 policy-specific addresses (Edwards, 2003, Tables 6.3 and 6.4).

4. We control for the monthly price of oil in our energy model for similar reasons: Increases in the price of oil, which might cause the president to deliver a national address, may have already resulted in increased media coverage of energy, precluding presidential influence.

5. It is possible that approval ratings and economic indicators are highly correlated, as the state of the economy affects presidential approval ratings. According to monthly data from 1969 through 2000, Pearson's r between approval and unemployment is $-.30$ ($p < .01$), and r between approval and inflation is $-.09$ ($p < .05$), whereas the correlation between unemployment and inflation is $.01$. Although the first two correlations are statistically significant, the correlations are not high enough to present a problem of multicollinearity in our statistical models.

6. We model current public concern because it captures the concept we are measuring: current public demand for news on the topic. Using monthly Gallup survey data to measure public concern is problematic because the data are often unavailable during the month of the address. A similar

problem arises when always using a lagged monthly measure, because the most recent survey may have occurred several months before the speech, making it less valid than a survey conducted the month of the president's speech.

7. It is also possible that end-of-the-month address effects could be muted because we model the impact of a presidential address on media attention in the month the president delivers the address. A national address on April 27 is more likely to affect media attention for the month of May than April. Fortunately, a significant delta coefficient accounts for the duration of an impact on any presidential address and will pick up any impact that a speech at the end of a month may have on media attention. To be sure of this, we also modeled the impact of each end-of-the-month speech on the subsequent month's media attention, which produced no statistically significant or different effects.

8. This may seem like a long time, unless one examines Figure 1 closely. One may observe that both Reagan's February 1981 addresses and Bush's September 1990 speech began a sustained level of attention by the media that did not taper off until roughly 2 years after each speech.

9. Note that this effect is independent of the state of the economy, as unemployment is controlled for in the model.

10. One could take issue with this general conclusion by suggesting that Reagan's continued focus maintained attention to the economy during 1981. If we exclude the follow-up addresses in 1981 that may have maintained attention, the percentage of successes would increase to 38 (9 of 24).

11. It is worth noting that two of the three instances where presidents significantly increased media coverage of energy consisted of two televised addresses in the same month.

12. Reagan also delivered four televised addresses on the scandal in the wake of its discovery in 1986, bringing to nine, his number of televised addresses on topics related to Central America.

13. The estimated probabilities are calculated using the `mfx` command in STATA 9.0.

14. We also tried a dummy variable for 9 p.m. addresses alone, which had no effect on our results.

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Appendix A: Measuring Media Attention

To measure the media's agenda (the attention media give to the various issues), we rely upon the *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, available online at <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/>. We used the following sets of keywords and counted the number of stories devoted to each issue per month for the indicated time periods. We read the abstracts to ensure that the keyword search results were valid. About one third of the stories that resulted from each search were invalid and not counted as part of the time series. Invalid stories were stories that appeared due to the keyword search but clearly were not within the bounds of the particular issue being searched. For example, the keyword "trade" (economic policy) might bring up a story on a Major League Baseball player trade. Intercoder reliability checks were conducted on sample years from different series, resulting in Pearson's *r* statistics ranging from .93 to .96. The time periods vary due to the variation in presidential agendas and requirements for the number of time points before and after the analyzed interventions (presidential speeches).

| Economic policy (1969–2000) | Energy policy (1969–1983) | Illicit drugs (1977–1992) | Central America (1977–1992) |
|--|---|--|---|
| economy OR inflation OR employment OR debt OR deficit OR budget OR trade | energy OR oil OR natural gas OR OPEC OR nuclear power OR gasoline OR petroleum | drug* OR narcotic* OR cocaine OR opium OR marijuana OR heroin NOT FDA | Guatemala* OR Belize OR Hondura* OR Salvador* OR Nicaragua* OR Costa Rica* OR Panama* OR Contra* OR Sandinista* |

Appendix B: Nationally Televised Addresses Included in the Study, 1969–2000

| President | Topic | Date and time | Speech title |
|----------------------|----------------|---------------------|---|
| Nixon | Economy | 6/17/70, 12 p.m. | Address to Nation on Economic Policy |
| Nixon | Economy | 8/15/71, 9 p.m. | Address to Nation Outlining a New Economic Policy |
| Nixon | Economy | 9/9/71, 12:30 p.m. | Address to Congress on Stabilization of the Economy |
| Nixon* | Economy | 10/7/71, 7:30 p.m. | Address to Nation on the Economic Stabilization Program |
| Nixon | Economy | 7/25/74, 4:30 p.m. | Address to Nation About inflation and the Economy |
| Ford | Economy | 10/8/74, 4 p.m. | Address to Congress on the Economy |
| Ford* | Economy/energy | 1/13/75, 9 p.m. | Address to Nation on Energy and Economic Programs |
| Ford | Economy | 3/29/75, 7:30 p.m. | Address to Nation Upon Signing the Tax Reduction |
| Ford* | Economy | 10/6/75, 8 p.m. | Address to Nation on Federal Tax and Spending |
| Carter* | Economy | 10/24/78, 10 p.m. | Address to Nation on Anti-Inflation Program |
| Carter* | Economy | 3/14/80, 4:30 pm | Address to Nation on Anti-Inflation Program |
| Reagan* [^] | Economy | 2/5 & 18/81, 9 p.m. | Address to Nation on the Economy; Economic Recovery Program |
| Reagan | Economy | 4/28/81, 9 p.m. | Address to Congress on Economic Recovery Program |
| Reagan | Economy | 7/27/81, 8 p.m. | Address to Nation on Federal Tax Reduction Legislation |
| Reagan | Economy | 9/24/81, 9 p.m. | Address to Nation on the Program for Economic Recovery |
| Reagan | Economy | 4/29/82, 8 p.m. | Address to Nation on the FY 1983 Federal Budget |
| Reagan | Economy | 8/16/82, 8 p.m. | Address to Nation on Federal Tax and Budget Legislation |
| Reagan* | Economy | 10/13/82, 7:30 p.m. | Address to Nation on the Economy |
| Reagan | Economy | 4/24/85, 8 p.m. | Address to Nation on the Budget and Deficit Reduction |
| Reagan* | Economy | 5/28/85, 8 p.m. | Address to the Nation on Tax Reform |
| Bush* | Economy | 9/11/90, 9 p.m. | Address to Congress on the Gulf Crisis and Budget Deficit |

(Continued)

Appendix B
(Continued)

| President | Topic | Date and time | Speech title |
|-----------|------------|-------------------------|---|
| Bush | Economy | 10/2/90, 9 p.m. | Address to Nation on the Federal Budget Agreement |
| Bush | Economy | 6/10/92, 4 p.m. | Address to Nation on the Balanced Budget Amendment |
| Clinton* | Economy | 2/15 & 17/93, 9 p.m. | Addresses to Nation and Congress on the Economic Program |
| Clinton | Economy | 8/13/93, 8 p.m. | Address to Nation on the Economic Program |
| Clinton | Economy | 6/14/94, 9 p.m. | Address to Nation on Middle Class Bill of Rights (Tax Cuts) |
| Clinton | Economy | 6/13/95, 9 pm | Address to Nation on the Plan to Balance the Budget |
| Nixon* | Energy | 11/7 & 25/73, 7:30 p.m. | Address to Nation on the Energy Shortage & Policy |
| Ford | Energy | 5/27/75, 8:30 p.m. | Address to Nation on Energy Problems |
| Carter* | Energy | 4/18 & 20/77, 8, 9 p.m. | Address to Nation on the Energy Problem |
| Carter | Energy | 11/8/77, 9 p.m. | Address to Nation on the National Energy Plan |
| Carter | Energy | 4/5/79, 9 p.m. | Address to Nation on Energy |
| Reagan | Drugs | 9/14/86, 8 p.m. | Address (w/ First Lady) to Nation on Drug Abuse |
| Bush* | Drugs | 9/5/89, 9 p.m. | Address to Nation on the National Drug Control Strategy |
| Carter | C. America | 2/1/78, 9 p.m. | Address to Nation on the Panama Canal Treaties |
| Reagan | C. America | 4/27/83, 8 p.m. | Address to Congress on Central America |
| Reagan | C. America | 5/9/84, 8 p.m. | Address to Nation on the U.S. Policy in Central America |
| Reagan* | C. America | 3/16/86, 8 p.m. | Address to Nation on the Situation in Nicaragua |
| Reagan | C. America | 6/14/86, 8 p.m. | Address to Nation on Assistance to Nicaraguan Contras |
| Reagan | C. America | 2/2/88, 8 p.m. | Address to Nation on Aid to Nicaragua (cable only) |

Note. The total number of speeches is 44. We explore the effects of 40 speeches in the analysis. The January 1975 Ford speech is analyzed twice, both as an energy and economic speech. Four of the total 44 speeches (indicated by a ^) occurred during the same month as another speech on the same topic and are therefore not analyzed separately, as their effects cannot be differentiated.

*Speech had a statistically significant *positive* impact on media attention to the issue at $p < .05$, one-tailed.

Appendix C: List of Policy-Specific Events and Other Control Variables

| Variable | Coding scheme and source |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Presidential approval | Monthly average percentage of respondents who approve of the president’s job performance (Gallup) |
| Unemployment | Monthly unemployment rate at time of address |
| Arab oil embargo | Step function coded 1 between October 1973 and March 1974, 0 otherwise |
| Iran hostage crisis | Step function coded 1 between November 1979 and January 1981, 0 otherwise |
| Price of oil | Monthly price of a barrel of oil in nominal U.S. dollars |
| Iran-Contra hearings | Step function coded 1 between May and August 1987, 0 otherwise |
| Panama invasion | Pulse function coded 1 for December 1989, 0 otherwise |
| Variables in success models | |
| Previous media coverage | Number of stories on the network news (ABC, CBS, NBC) during the month previous to the address (Vanderbilt Television News Archive) |
| Public concern for an issue | Percentage of the public stating the issue is the “most important problem,” according to the Gallup poll during the month of the speech, or when unavailable, the closest previous month; for Central America, concern for foreign policy is used as data are not disaggregated by region |
| First-year address | Coded 1 for addresses given in the first calendar year of a presidential term (or first 12 months for President Ford) |
| Misery index | Quarterly measure—the sum of unemployment and inflation included in model for economic addresses |
| Prime-time address | Dummy variable coded 1 for a speech delivered at 8 or 9 p.m. Eastern Standard Time |
| Age of cable TV | Dummy variable coded as 1 for all speeches 1988 and after |

Note. The monthly price of oil is in nominal U.S. dollars. It is the “refiner acquisition cost of imported crude oil” provided by the United States Department of Energy (<http://www.eia.doe.gov>).

Appendix D: Augmented Dickey-Fuller Tests for Unit Roots

| | Minimum AIC at lag | No constant or trend | Constant only | Constant with trend |
|-----------------|--------------------|----------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Economy | 9 | -0.96 | -2.26 | -2.25 |
| Energy | 2 | -2.49 | -4.43 | -4.43 |
| Drugs | 5 | -0.80 | -3.49 | -3.84 |
| Central America | 1 | -1.51 | -5.41 | -5.42 |

Note. The null hypothesis for the augmented Dickey-Fuller unit root test is that the series are integrated. Critical values (at $p = .05$) for the ADF test are: no constant or trend, -1.95; constant only, -2.88; and constant with trend, -3.43. These results suggest that the media attention to the economy time series is nonstationary. Yet, ADF tests lack statistical power. A review of the correlograms reveals that our estimation produces white noise. Moreover, differencing the economy time series produces a non-invertible moving average, so we do not difference the series. We also check correlograms to confirm that no other series require differencing.