

# Agenda-Setting Theory

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Journalistic media may not be  
successful much of the time in telling  
people **what to think**, but it is  
stunningly successful in telling its  
readers **what to think about**

# Theoretical Claim and Mechanism

- Agenda setting refers to the process by which mass media present certain issues frequently and prominently, with large segments of the public then perceiving those issues as being more important than others
- Causal mechanism: More media attention → more important the issue is perceived to be



# Not a Diabolical Plan



Source



# Need for Orientation

- Audiences turn to journalistic media because they have a need for orientation
- Impacted by two elements:
  - **Relevance**
    - “Do I think this issue is personally or socially important to me?”
  - **Uncertainty**
    - “Do I feel I lack the information I need about this topic?”
- When both elements are high, agenda-setting effects are stronger
- Agenda-setting effects are not uniform or universal

# Intermedia Agenda Setting



Source



# A More Complex News Ecology



Source

# Key Takeaways

- The more media attention an issue receives, the more important audiences perceive that issue to be
- Framing theory shares some conceptual similarities with agenda-setting theory, but differs in that it connects coverage to attitude formation
- The magnitude of an agenda-setting effect depends on the context
- Journalistic media influence fellow journalistic actors, and can thus create a feedback loop.