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HANS-BERND BROSIUS and GABRIEL WEIMANN

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Who Sets the Agenda?: *Agenda-Setting as a Two-Step Flow*

This study examines four models of a two-step flow of the agenda-setting process, highlighting the role played by certain individuals (early recognizers) in mediating between the public and the media. The data sets contained coding of news items on the major German television networks from 1990 to 1993 and 28 surveys conducted in West and East Germany between September 1990 and December 1992, sampling over 1,000 individuals in each survey to study the public agenda. The findings highlight the role of early recognizers, not only in identifying emerging issues in the media and diffusing them among the public but also in affecting the media agenda. The study's important contribution lies in identifying the flow of issues from the public to the media and within the public, thus reviving, to some extent, the notion of the two-step flow of communication.

The present study attempts to integrate two research traditions, the agenda-setting process approach and the study of personal influence and influential individuals. The potential bridging of these two traditions in mass communication research may lead to a better understanding of the flow of issues, concerns, and themes between the mass media and the public, as well as within the public. Thus we follow the call to "seek to bring in interpersonal networks into the 'agenda-setting' hypothesis as a key intervening variable between the media system and the individual" (Ball-Rokeach, 1985, p. 502).

The Agenda of Agenda-Setting Research

Research on the agenda-setting process of the mass media stems directly from the notion suggested by Cohen (1963) that the mass media "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stun-

ningly successful in telling its readers *what to think about*" (p. 13). In other words, even though the media may not be very successful in telling us what opinions to hold, they are often quite effective in telling us what to have opinions about (or what *not* to think about). This idea led to an impressive empirical effort to study media agendas, public agendas, and the relationships between them (for updated reviews of research on agenda-setting see Brosius, 1994; McCombs, Einsiedel, & Weaver, 1991; McCombs & Shaw, 1993; Protest & McCombs, 1991; Rogers & Dearing, 1988). In fact, Rogers, Dearing, and Bregman (1993) identified more than 200 articles about agenda-setting in the social science literature since the publication of McCombs and Shaw's (1972) seminal work. Based on Rogers and Dearing's (1988) review, nine different types of agenda-setting processes can be identified. These types, numbered 1 to 9, are presented in Table 1.

Most agenda-setting studies have focused on the effects of media agendas on the agendas of the public and decision makers, as well as the public's effect on decision makers (i.e., Types 4, 7, and 8). One reason for this preferred direction, as Rogers and Dearing (1988) argue, relates to the persistent debate on media effects.¹

More recently, the intramedia direction has been investigated (namely, Type 1; see, for example, Kepplinger, Donsbach, Brosius, & Staab, 1986; Mathes & Pfetsch, 1991; Reese & Danielan, 1989). By contrast, very little attention has been paid to the flow from the public to the media and within the public (Types 2 and 5), although several studies provide empirical evidence of the public's ability to affect the media agenda (Brosius & Kepplinger, 1990; Schenk & Roessler, 1994; Siune & Borre, 1975; Smith 1987a, 1987b; Wanta, 1989).

The agenda-setting tradition, mostly based on aggregate data (media coverage, public opinion surveys), often overlooked the individual-and-personal-network level of analysis. There are several encouraging indications of the significant role of interpersonal communication in the agenda-setting process. Shaw (1976) found individual differences in following media agendas based on the individual's information-seeking and communicative behavior. McLeod, Becker, and Byrnes (1974) suggested that interpersonal communication may play a greater role late in political campaigns, when newspapers decline as an agenda-setting source. Hong and Shemer (1976) argued that interpersonal communication is an intervening variable between media and personal agendas, which, under varying conditions, may either facilitate or reduce the importance of the media's effects on the personal agenda. Atwood, Sohn, and Sohn (1978), examining *community discussion* as a dependent variable, found that newspapers influenced what people talked

Table 1
Typology of Agenda-Setting Processes

Affected Agenda	Agenda Source:		
	Media	Public	Decision Makers
Media agenda	1	2	3
Public agenda	4	5	6
Decision makers' agenda	7	8	9

about but were not the only source of topics. Erbring, Goldenberg, and Miller (1980) found that interpersonal communication was essential to help people make sense of news media content, increasing issue salience for newly presented topics.

Lasorsa and Wanta (1990) looked at nonmedia sources of information in the creation and maintenance of issue salience. They found that interpersonal communication interfered with media agenda conformity, but fairly modestly. They concluded that "before the interplay between personal, interpersonal, and media experience in creating issue salience is fully understood much careful work remains to be done" (p. 813). Indeed, 2 years later, Wanta and Wu (1992) conducted a study on the impact of interpersonal communication on issue salience, comparing media sources with personal sources. Their study revealed that interpersonal communication could enhance agenda-setting effects when the discussions dealt with issues covered in the media. In this case, interpersonal communication reinforced media messages. But interpersonal communication can compete with media agenda-setting when the discussions deal with issues that have received little coverage in the media. Similar conclusions were reached by Weaver, Zhu, and Willnat (1992), who highlighted the "bridging function" of interpersonal communication in agenda-setting: interpersonally communicated information was found to affect perceptions of the drug abuse issue more than any other source (e.g., television, newspapers).

However, despite the revealed impact of personal communication, there has been no attempt to identify those individuals (if there be such) who are the personal mediators between media and personal agendas. One promising direction involves the tradition of opinion leadership research. Although this tradition has emphasized the role played by certain individuals in the flow of mass communication, it has never been related to the notion of agenda-setting (two exceptions were Weimann, 1994, and Weimann & Brosius, 1994, both applying a scale identifying influential individuals with their role in the agenda-setting process).

The Two-Step Flow of Agenda-Setting

The notion of an *active audience* is not a novel one. In fact, one can trace the idea from the turn of the century. One of the first Chicago school writers to make a mark on the study of social influence was Robert E. Park (1904/1972), who presented social influence as involving an alternation between excitable, suggestible crowds and rational, discursive publics. He was followed by his student, Herbert Blumer, whose differentiation and definitions of group, crowd, and public highlighted the role of discourse within the audience. Blumer (1939a, 1939b) argued that the public tends to form around an issue or case in public life, and its primary purpose is to advance an interest or opinion and thus to achieve a change. Blumer provided an explicit framework in which the media audience constitutes a new form of collectivity, the mass, which he differentiated from older social forms. During the 1940s and 1950s, the notion of atomistic and passive media audiences was further challenged by researchers (e.g., Friedson, 1953; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Lasswell, 1948; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948; Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1948; Turner & Killian, 1972). Blumer (1971) also pointed to another dimension of the active audience: the stepwise process of the emergence of social issues. He used the term *emergence* to describe the initial stage of society's recognition of a social problem. Various actors, among them the mass media, as well as certain individuals and groups, play various roles at this initial stage. However, Blumer never specified their relative contribution to the emergence of an issue. Blumer's further steps in the resolution of a social problem—legitimization, mobilization, official plan of action, and implementation—also afford the media a general publicizing role, but more explicit functioning still needs to be outlined (Edelstein, 1988, p. 523).

Another important dimension of the flow of communication is the notion of interpersonal networks: "The individual, being situated in interpersonal networks, is necessarily affected by the foci of network discourse . . . the agenda of interpersonal discourse is, to some degree, shaped by the message foci of the media system" (Ball-Rokeach, 1985, p. 502). The existence and activity of certain individuals, the *opinion leaders*, should not be regarded as replacing the role of interpersonal networks but, in fact, as reemphasizing the role of the group and interpersonal contacts. It is through social discourse, personal contacts, and social networks that these more active individuals can collect, diffuse, filter, and promote the flow of information. The media thus become part of the environment in which these active individuals function. Their activity (discourse and monitoring) cannot be understood simply as a

function of their individual characteristics. They are embedded in organizational (formal and informal) discourse settings attuned to social interests, social positions, and social networks. As Weimann (1994) revealed in his review of hundreds of opinion leadership studies, the central network position of these influentials, their significantly higher number of social ties and contacts, and their active participation in public discourse are all common characteristics of these influentials, regardless of domain or interest area.

Influential individuals as agenda-setters have been studied by Weimann and Brosius (1994), who used the Strength of Personality (SP) scale to identify influential individuals. This scale was developed by Noelle-Neumann (1983), who tested numerous questionnaire items related to self-perceived personal influence. These early scales were tested and refined after years of pretest with national samples in Germany. The SP scale was established after a factorial reduction of a 34-item questionnaire administered to a representative sample of 3,542 residents of then West Germany. The final version of the scale includes 10 items. External validity of the SP scale was established using samples from Germany, Israel, and the United States (Weimann, 1991, 1994). Thus Weimann (1991) applied the SP scale to a social network that was mapped by its communication links, personal positions, and flow of information and influence. These three variables were highly correlated with the SP measure: a correlation coefficient of $r = .54$ was found between number of communication links in the entire network and the SP measure. Individuals with high SP scores were better linked to other individuals in their community and especially to others in their social group. Finally, the SP scale was found to predict communicative and influential behavior.

Weimann and Brosius (1994) in Germany and Weimann (1994) in Israel attempted to relate the SP scale to the agenda-setting process. Their database in Germany, containing about 12,000 respondents, was subjected to statistical analysis controlling for location (East or West Germany), time (six surveys), public issues (14 issues included in at least five surveys), and personal characteristics (SP scale and other variables). The results of their studies, both in Israel and in Germany, show that high SP individuals differ from others in their personal agendas and that they identify emerging public issues faster than others. However, although the findings could only highlight the fact that certain individuals, identified by the SP scale, were the early recognizers of emerging issues and themes, their role in shaping media and/or public agendas is still to be determined. It is important to note that for the purposes of presentation, we will refer to the high SP individuals as *early recognizers*, although their functioning as such is to be tested and measured by the empirical data presented here.

Consequently, there are only four possible models of the two-step flow that highlight the potential functions of the early recognizers (i.e., only the models in which early recognizers precede either the general public or the media):

Model 1: The Classical Two-Step Flow

Media Agenda → Early Recognizers → Public Agenda

Model 2: The Reverse Two-Step Flow

Public Agenda → Early Recognizers → Media Agenda

Model 3: Initiating the Classical Agenda-Setting Process

Early Recognizers → Media Agenda → Public Agenda

Model 4: Initiating the Reverse Agenda-Setting Process

Early Recognizers → Public Agenda → Media Agenda

The first two models suggest that certain individuals serve as mediators between the media agenda and the public agenda. The next two models describe early recognizers as initiators of an agenda-setting process. Taken together, these models agree on differentiation within the public and the importance of certain individuals in the process. However, Model 1 presents their role as transmitting and diffusing media agendas to the public, as in the classical conceptualization of the two-step flow of communication by Lazarsfeld and his colleagues (Katz, 1957; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Lazarsfeld et al., 1948; Lazarsfeld & Menzel, 1963). Model 2 suggests that the public's emerging interests and issues flow to the media through the early recognizers (whose function is articulation). Thus, in Model 2, certain individuals serve the media as sources to identify the emerging interests and issues of the vast public. Models 3 and 4 suggest that the early recognizers are those who initiate the agenda-setting process. Model 3 suggests that early recognizers initiate the classical agenda-setting process in which the media influence the public agenda. Model 4 suggests that early recognizers initiate a reverse agenda-setting process in which the public influences the media agenda.

The present study attempts to answer three questions related to the above models:

1. Which role do the early recognizers play in the agenda-setting process?
2. In which direction does the agenda-setting process flow?
3. To what extent are the above dependent upon the issue/theme involved?

Method

Two data sets were used. The first is the German television news archive of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, which monitors, codes, and stores all the news items on the major German television networks on a regular basis. The coding is performed by a team of experienced coders. New coders must go through an extensive training program before actual coding. From 1990 to 1993, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung collected data on 118,432 news items. The news broadcasts included were *Tagesschau* (on the ARD network, every evening at 8:00 pm), *Tagesthemen* (ARD, 10:30 pm), *Bilder des Tages* (RTL, 6:45 pm), and *SAT1-Blick* (SAT1, 7:00 pm). The items were coded according to the date, time, station, main issues, secondary issue, and actors involved. Altogether 15 main issues (for example, domestic policy or elections) and 227 more specific secondary issues (for example, under the main issue of domestic policy, secondary issues may include terrorist attacks or transportation) were differentiated. Each entry also contained a short summary of the content of the item.

The second data set for the present analysis was 28 surveys conducted in West Germany and 27 surveys conducted in East Germany between September 1990 and December 1992, each sampling more than 1,000 individuals. The surveys, conducted by one of the major German public opinion research institutes, the Allensbach Institut für Demoskopie, sampled the German national population about once a month, using face-to-face interviews. The questionnaires included the SP scale (10 items with total weighted scores ranging from 75 to 149), sociodemographic variables (age, sex, education, income, etc.), personal characteristics (political interest, amount of television exposure), and the dependent variable, issue importance, measured by a question on "the issues which worry you personally these days" (ranked on a 3-point scale from 0 = *not at all* to 3 = *very much*).² Each survey covered an average of 25 issues, changing from month to month according to shifts in public interests. Thus certain issues appeared only once or twice whereas others were frequently included. The data were categorized according to location (East and West Germany), the issues, and the SP scale: the upper 10% on this scale were classified as *influentials* (or potential early recognizers) and compared with the rest of the public.

The two data sets were merged on a monthly basis (28 time points). In the surveys, only five issues appeared frequently enough for the purposes of time-series analysis. These were unemployment, prices, criminality, relations between the two parts of Germany, and the problem of foreigners and

asylum seekers coming to Germany. These five issues made up only a small number of the issues that emerged during this period, although they were the most consistent and prominent issues. Thus the following analysis and interpretations relate to the notion of two-step flow of agenda-setting only within the scope of these five prominent issues. For these five issues, we counted the monthly number of television news items using the following procedure: First, we used the categorization of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung for main and secondary issues to identify those news items related to the five issues. Then, we validated the categorization by checking the short text describing each news story and deleting the irrelevant items.

According to our selection procedure, a total of 16,361 news items dealing with one of the five issues were selected. Thus, for each time point, we had the number of reports on the issue and the individual ranking of this issue's importance.³

The resulting time-series for each issue, more than 28 time points including both the survey results and the television coverage, permits the use of regression-based time-series analysis and testing for causality. The data were aggregated on a monthly basis due to the fact that the public opinion surveys were conducted only monthly. Although the agenda-setting effects may occur within less than a month's time lag, our database is limited by the monthly frequency of the surveys. This does not indicate that agenda-setting effects occur only within a 1-month lag. The process may require only days or weeks. However, our database, comprising monthly surveys, allows only for the use of monthly time lags; thus the results may conceal more powerful effects within the month. The number of 28 time points does not allow for the conventional Box-Jenkins procedures, which require at least 50 data points. We therefore applied the Granger Analysis of Causality (see Catalano, Dooley, & Jackson, 1983; Freeman, 1983; Granger, 1969), an analytical procedure developed to test causality in time-series. This procedure is based on the following rationale: The present public agenda can be partly explained by the past public agenda; without any external influence, people will think today what they thought yesterday. Statistically, this means that most of the variance in the present public agenda can be explained by the past agenda. Only if the series of the present public agenda is influenced by an external factor (such as television coverage) is an additional amount of variance explained by this external factor.

Methodologically, this can be accomplished by comparing two regression equations. In the first equation, present public agenda (y) is predicted only by past agenda (during the 3 months prior to each time point).⁴

$$y(t) = b_1 y(t-1) + b_2 y(t-2) + b_3 y(t-3) + u(t).$$

In the second equation past media coverage (x) is added to the analysis:

$$y(t) = b_1 y(t-1) + b_2 y(t-2) + b_3 y(t-3) + c_1 x(t-1) + c_2 x(t-2) + c_3 x(t-3) + u(t).$$

Both equations result in R^2 values (explained variance), and the differences between them can be tested statistically. If the second equation produces significantly higher values of explained variance, one can conclude that the external factor (e.g., television coverage) exerts a causal effect on present public agenda. However, one must also check for the reverse effect (present media agenda is affected by past public agenda). To eliminate effects caused by trends in both media and public series, the residuals of the time-fitted series were used.

Results

Table 2 presents the data regarding the television reports and the public's ratings of the five issues.

The television reports focused more on the East-West issue (9,628 items) than on other issues. This was mainly because our study period covered the time following the reunification of Germany (on October 3, 1990). Comparison of the four television news broadcasts reveals high similarity in their issue salience. However, as Table 2 indicates, the public's ratings differed from the television coverage. Although little of the latter was given to the prices issue (only 359 items), the German public rated this issue as more important than the highly reported issue of East-West relations (lowest public ratings). There are significant differences between East and West Germans; the East Germans worried more about crime and unemployment, whereas the West Germans considered the issue of prices the most important. Significant but moderate differences were found between the early recognizers and the rest of the public for the overall study period. This may call into question our initial labeling of the *influentials* as early recognizers. However, this finding may well be the result of the nature of zero-order correlation (same time points). Only a systematic time-series analysis can identify the true nature of the relationships between the agendas across time.

The next step involved the analysis of the time-series of the agendas, applying the Granger analysis of causality. Using three agendas (television, early recognizers, and the public) for five items yielded 15 tests, or in fact,

Table 2
Television Reports and the Public's Ratings of Issues

	Number of TV Reports	Average Rating by			
		Early Recognizers		All Others	
		West	East	West	East
Unemployment	2,848	1.20*	2.30	1.28*	2.30
Prices	359	2.07	2.20	2.08	2.15
Criminality	1,373	1.99*	2.47*	1.95*	2.42*
East-West relations	9,628	1.18*	1.47*	1.11*	1.38*
Foreigners/asylum	2,153	2.00*	1.81*	1.91*	1.69*

Note. Means range on a scale from 0 = *not at all* to 3 = *very much*, over 28 surveys.

* Denotes a significant difference between early recognizers and all others, under the null hypothesis of no significant difference (*t* tests performed separately for West and East, $p < .05$).

30 regression equations. Tables 3 and 4 present the results of this analysis (conducted separately for East and West Germany).

Let us illustrate the reading of Table 3 by using the first example, the issue of unemployment. As the analysis of causality requires testing both directions, pairs of agendas were tested with each in turn playing the role of dependent variable and independent variable. For example, in the first row, the public agenda is tested as the dependent variable while the television agenda serves as the independent variable. The past public agenda was found to explain 35.1% of the present public agenda, whereas the addition of the television agenda contributed only 0.8% of explained variance, an insignificant contribution. We may conclude that with regard to the unemployment issue, television had little impact on the public agenda. However, when we look at the third pair in this table, we find that the public agenda was strongly influenced by the early recognizers: the past agenda of the early recognizers added 23.5% to the explained variance of the present public agenda, a statistically significant contribution. The strongest beta coefficient was found after 1 month, indicating that the time lag between the emergence (or decline) of this issue on the agenda of the early recognizers and of the public is 1 month or shorter.

Another interesting and significant effect was revealed when analyzing the time-series of other issues in West Germany. With regard to the issues of criminality and foreigners/asylum, we found significant contributions of the early recognizers when the television agenda served as the dependent variable. In the case of criminality, the past television agenda explained only 2.1% of the present variance, whereas the past agenda of the early recognizers added 32.9% of explained variance. The same pattern was found in the series

text continues on p. 575

Table 3
The Direction of the Agenda-Setting Process in West Germany (using Granger analysis)

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Percentage of Variance Explained by Past Dependent Variable	Percentage of Variance Explained by Past Independent Variable	Highest Beta (time lag)
Issue 1: Unemployment				
Public	Television	35.1*	0.8	—
Television	Public	20.8	4.4	—
Early recognizers	Television	44.3*	0.4	—
Television	Early recognizers	20.8	2.7	—
Public	Early recognizers	35.1*	23.5*	0.64 (1 month)
Early recognizers	Public	44.3*	18.3	—
Issue 2: Prices				
Public	Television	23.9	2.4	—
Television	Public	15.7	7.0	—
Early recognizers	Television	37.5*	1.4	—
Television	Early recognizers	15.7	1.3	—
Public	Early recognizers	23.9	1.7	—
Early recognizers	Public	37.5*	12.4	—
Issue 3: Criminality				
Public	Television	36.1*	21.6	—
Television	Public	2.1	12.4	—
Early recognizers	Television	12.1*	24.9	—
Television	Early recognizers	2.1	32.9*	0.55 (3 months)
Public	Early recognizers	36.1*	22.5	—
Early recognizers	Public	12.1	3.5	—

(continued)

Table 3 Continued

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Percentage of Variance Explained by Past Dependent Variable	Percentage of Variance Explained by Past Independent Variable	Highest Beta (time lag)
Issue 4: East-West Relations				
Public	Television	18.3	16.8	—
Television	Public	21.0	13.7	—
Early recognizers	Television	8.4	23.3	—
Television	Early recognizers	21.0	10.1	—
Public	Early recognizers	18.3	0.9	—
Early recognizers	Public	8.4	3.9	—
Issue 5: Foreigners/Asylum				
Public	Television	31.0*	5.4	—
Television	Public	29.1	8.3	—
Early recognizers	Television	33.5*	18.4	—
Television	Early recognizers	29.1	28.8*	0.40 (2 months)
Public	Early recognizers	31.0*	10.0	—
Early recognizers	Public	33.5*	10.8	—

* $p > .05$

Table 4
The Direction of the Agenda-Setting Process in East Germany (using Granger analysis)

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Percentage of Variance Explained by Past Dependent Variable	Percentage of Variance Explained by Past Independent Variable	Highest Beta (time lag)
Issue 1: Unemployment				
Public	Television	15.0	6.5	—
Television	Public	20.8	18.8	—
Early recognizers	Television	33.8*	18.5	—
Television	Early recognizers	20.8	43.9*	0.65 (2 months)
Public	Early recognizers	15.0	6.9	—
Early recognizers	Public	33.8*	10.6	—
Issue 2: Prices				
Public	Television	37.3*	8.9	—
Television	Public	15.7	23.6	—
Early recognizers	Television	32.8*	8.6	—
Television	Early recognizers	15.7	15.1	—
Public	Early recognizers	37.3*	23.2	—
Early recognizers	Public	32.8*	2.3	—
Issue 3: Criminality				
Public	Television	66.3*	7.8	—
Television	Public	2.1	44.3*	0.40 (1 month)
Early recognizers	Television	43.1*	20.1	—
Television	Early recognizers	2.1	33.1*	0.69 (1 month)
Public	Early recognizers	66.3*	0.8	—
Early recognizers	Public	43.1	21.2	—

(continued)

Table 4 Continued

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Percentage of Variance Explained by Past Dependent Variable	Percentage of Variance Explained by Past Independent Variable	Highest Beta (time lag)
Issue 4: East-West Relations				
Public	Television	40.7*	1.4	—
Television	Public	21.0	5.1	—
Early recognizers	Television	60.1*	4.8	—
Television	Early recognizers	21.0	6.8	—
Public	Early recognizers	43.7*	11.5	—
Early recognizers	Public	60.1*	0.5	—
Issue 5: Foreigners/Asylum				
Public	Television	39.6*	13.4	—
Television	Public	29.1*	2.4	—
Early recognizers	Television	13.5	10.6	—
Television	Early recognizers	29.1	4.1	—
Public	Early recognizers	39.6*	21.7*	0.62 (3 months)
Early recognizers	Public	13.5	33.3*	0.84 (1 month)

* $p > .05$.

of foreigners/asylum issue: there was a significant contribution (28.8%) to the explained variance in the present television agenda by the past agenda of early recognizers. We may conclude at this stage that on certain issues, there is support for the third model, when the media pick up issues that were first identified by certain individuals, the early recognizers, as emerging issues.

In East Germany, a somewhat different pattern is found. Several studies have documented the difference in public opinion between the former East and West Germany. These studies suggest that in terms of interest, worries, attitudes, and agenda, the wall is still there. We analyzed the East German time-series of the three agendas, and the results are presented in Table 4.

In the East German series, five cases of significant causality were found. In three of them, early recognizers served as the cause: In the case of unemployment, they affected the media agenda (2 months later) with an added explained variance of 43.9%. The same effect was found with regard to the issue of criminality (added explained variance of 33.1%). In the series of the foreigners/asylum issue, the early recognizers influenced the public agenda (21.7% of added explained variance), but they themselves were found to be influenced by the past public agenda, so no clear direction of causality could be established. Finally, in East Germany, we found a single significant relationship when the public agenda influenced the media agenda (44.3% of added explained variance).

Discussion

The findings of the present study do not support any of the tested models exclusively. In fact, instead of a single-model solution, the analysis shows that all the four models may be true, depending on the timing and the issue. The flow of issues between the media and the public is found to be more complex than a one-step, one-direction flow (media to public). First, the public is not a monolithic and passive recipient of the media agenda. Within the public, there are certain individuals who are more active in identifying emerging issues and in diffusing them to the public or the media agenda. We used a relatively simple measure, the SP scale, to identify these individuals. Although this scale should be refined for the purposes of agenda-setting studies, it did provide an impressive identification of the early recognizers. Out of the eight cases where we found that the addition of the series of the independent variable contributed significantly to the explained variance of the dependent variable, in six equations it was the early recognizers who served as the independent variable (with their added explained variance averaging 34.3%). In fact, the average contribution of the early recognizers

in all the 60 equations exceeds those of the media agenda or the public agenda serving as dependent variables.

The early recognizers were found by this study not only to be those who identify emerging issues in the media and diffuse them to the public (as found by Weimann & Brosius, 1994) but also those who affect the media agenda. Of the six significant effects of the early recognizers, in four equations, their effect was on the media agenda, and in the two other equations, their effect was on the public agenda. It is possible that many of those early recognizers are indeed media gatekeepers and reporters, whose job, at least in part, is surveillance. They might be tied into social and organizational networks, in the course of their work, that allow them to follow closely the emergence of a social issue and transfer this knowledge to their news-gathering organizations.

Adding to the complexity is the variance across issues. A significant difference was found between the former East and West Germany in their public agendas. What was considered an important issue by East Germans was not rated the same way in West Germany, and the agendas' time-series varied differently in the two parts of the unified nation. The issues were also related to the form of the interaction among the three agendas (public, media, and early recognizers). We noted, for example, that with "new" issues (such as rising criminality in East and West Germany, unemployment in East Germany) the early recognizers affected the media agenda, whereas in the case of "old" issues (such as unemployment in West Germany), they had more effect on the public agenda. One possible explanation for the importance of early recognizers only in old issues is that new issues are often related to current events; thus all actors, including media, public, and early recognizers, react to these events so that no actor is leading the other.

However, our findings are far from conclusive: in most of the equations, there were no significant effects of the dependent variables. This may be attributed to the weaknesses of our databases: agenda-setting processes may often run faster than can be measured by our monthly aggregated data. If, for example, Model 1 (the classical two-step model) is correct, the data would have to show that one month's worth of media coverage influences early recognizers (in month No. 2), who then influence the public one month later (month No. 3). A better sequence of the time-series requires data obtained on a weekly or even daily basis. Moreover, our SP scale, originally developed and tested to identify the influentials, may need refining for the purpose of identifying early recognizers. An additional problem is the limited number of issues studied. Although there were numerous themes in both data sets (television news archives and public opinion surveys), the final list comprised only those that matched in both series and were frequent enough to be

subjected to a time-series analysis. Better compatibility between the categorization of the issues in the two databases would have enriched our findings, at least in terms of control over types of issues. Finally, because of the monthly aggregation, the present study tested only bivariate relationships among the three agendas and not multivariate, two-step flow relationships.

In conclusion, the important contribution of the present study is in directing the attention of future researchers to the neglected issues on the agenda of the agenda-setting researchers: (a) the flow of issues, themes, and concerns from the public to the media and (b) the flow within the public, highlighting the role of certain individuals who serve as mediators between the public and the media, thus to some extent reviving the notion of the two-step flow of communication.

Notes

1. "Why are scholars so fascinated by agenda-setting? The main reason for interest by mass communication scholars is because agenda-setting research appeared to offer an alternative approach to the scholarly search for direct media effect, which had seldom been found in early mass communication research" (Rogers & Dearing, 1988, p. 560). McCombs (1991) explained the appeal of the media-to-public direction of research in a similar vein:

Its initial empirical exploration was fortuitously timed. It came at that time in the history of mass communication research when disenchantment both with attitudes and opinions as dependent variables, and with the limited effects model as an adequate intellectual summary, was leading scholars to look elsewhere. (p. 121)

2. The question used in all 28 surveys was, "We would like to learn about the issues people worry about these days. Would you please use the cards to describe the issues that worry you personally these days" (ranked on a 3-point scale).

3. *Agenda* refers to the ranking of a certain issue within a list of issues. However, in longitudinal agenda-setting studies, agenda is traditionally conceived as the fluctuation of a single issue's importance and salience. Consequently, the analysis here involves a series of single-issue tests.

4. Although time lags of 3 months or more are hardly expected and difficult to explain within the agenda-setting framework, we extended the time span to a maximum of 3 months. The inclusion of longer time lags would also reduce the number of cases in the Granger analysis.

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