National Library of Canada
Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

Canadian Theses Service
Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

## NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

## AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.

NL-339 (r. 88/04) c

Canada

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

# A LESS THAN PERFECT PROCESS: MEDIA POLITICIAN RELATIONS IN AGENDA-SETTING

BY

MIKE NICKEL

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTERS OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL 1991

National Library of Canada
Pibliothèque nationale du Canada

Canadian Theses Service
Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-315-70073-4

Canada

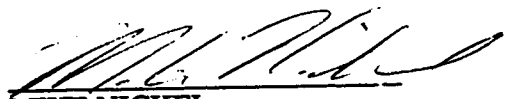
UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

RELEASE FORM

| | |
|---|---|
| **NAME OF AUTHOR:** | MIKE NICKEL |
| **TITLE OF THESIS:** | A LESS THAN PERFECT PROCESS: MEDIA POLITICIAN RELATIONS IN AGENDA-SETTING |
| **DEGREE:** | MASTER OF ARTS |
| **YEAR THIS DEGREE GRANTED:** | 1991 |

PERMISSION IS HEREBY GRANTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA LIBRARY TO REPRODUCE SINGLE COPIES OF THIS THESIS AND TO LEND OR SELL SUCH COPIES FOR PRIVATE, SCHOLARLY OR SCIENTIFIC PURPOSES ONLY.

THE AUTHOR RESERVES OTHER PUBLICATION AND OTHER RIGHTS IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE COPYRIGHT IN THE THESIS, AND EXCEPT AS HEREINBEFORE PROVIDED NEITHER THE THESIS NOR ANY SUBSTANTIAL PORTION THEREOF MAY BE REPRINTED OR OTHERWISE REPRORDUCED IN ANY MATERIAL FORM WHATEVER WITHOUT THE AUTHOR'S PRIOR WRITTEN PERMISSION.



MIKE NICKEL
RR 1 SOUTH EDMONTON
T6H 4N6
ALBERTA, CANADA

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

THE UNDERSIGNED CERTIFY THAT THEY HAVE READ, AND RECOMMEND TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH FOR ACCEPTANCE, A THESIS ENTITLED A LESS THAN PERFECT PROCESS: MEDIA POLITICIAN REL. .TIONS IN AGENDA-SETTING

SUBMITTED BY MIKE NICKEL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTERS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

JP. JOHNSTON

DR. LINDA TRIMBLE

DR. MIKE W. GILLESPIE

DATE: Aug. 28, 1991

## Abstract

The focus of this study is to determine in what ways the agenda of political elites affects the agenda of the mass media, positively or negatively, and, by extension, how the hidden political agenda of the mass media affects the agenda of the political elite. This study examines the transmission of political information and the active component of the message. Specifically, this study is concerned with the attitudes and opinions held by the journalists and editors of the Alberta media and by the politicians they cover at the provincial legislature. Two broad surveys, one to examine the positions of the politicians and the other those of the media, were conducted, addressing such questions as journalistic function, their attitudes towards each other, and personal biographical information. Thirty journalists in the province of Alberta and thirty politicians from the Alberta Legislature were interviewed.

The study demonstrates that the media and politicians are engaged in an agenda-setting game and exposes the degree to which the rules of the game favour the media. The media do influence political behaviour and, to a lesser extent, politicians do influence media behaviour. The process is dynamic and no one group is in sole control of the process. A particularly important finding is that the media present a global perspective with respect to the public agenda. Agenda-setting in Alberta is like the battlefield; the media and politicians negotiate not only over what the public will finally consume but also what influences will be brought to bear on the public's perception of reality. The struggle over what constitutes news and how it is presented is indicated by the fact that both participants have described activities that are intended to improve their advantage.

To this end the study concludes that media-politicians relations should be re-examined in a institutional context that takes into account of how market forces and business operations of the media effect the every day creation of public perception.

**Acknowledgments**

First I would like to thank all the journalists and politicians who gave their time to participate in the survey. Their comments were frank and open and without them this study could not have taken place. Next, I would like to thank my thesis committee for their efforts in improving my work. A very special thank-you goes to my advisor, professor Johnston, who, after three months of being phoned at seven o'clock each morning still willingly provided the pivotal guidance for the completion of this project. Special thanks go also to Mike Evans, Scott Day, and Marc Leduc, fellow students who, made critical comments that helped my thesis take the form here presented. Finally, I would like to thank Mike Wychopen, Glen Kautz, and all the members of the men's fraternity , Delta Kappa Epsilon, who gave me the encouragement and support I needed to finish the daunting task within the time frame I had set.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 7.6 Issue ranking of thirteen policy fields table D: Government public vs. Opposition public 115

Get your facts first, and then you can distort 'em as you please.
Mark Twain

A journalist is a grumbler, a censurer, a giver of advice, a regent of Sovereigns, a tutor of nations. Four hostile newspapers are more to be feared than a thousand bayonets.
Napoleon Bonaparte

## Chapter One: Introduction

Napoleon Bonaparte was not only a military genius; he was also an astute observer of the privileged relationship between the press and the people. Because the media insist that they are a objective institution, functioning as a disseminator of demonstrable fact there has been little critical scholarship on the nature of this relationship in the Canadian context. The reality is that any transmission of so-called truth is subject to interpretation and to the prejudices of those who report it. The gathering, evaluation, organization and subsequent reporting of information is in itself an editorial activity. Walter Lippman says that media are "a flashlight rather than a mirror at the world," and while his contention may be true, it begs the further question: "who is holding the flashlight?"[1]

If the illumination of political activity is not a random process, how does the character of the press influence the intensity, direction and utility of the beam of journalistic light? The three players in the political news-reporting process are the political elite (elected representatives, party organizations and support networks), the public-at-large, and the mass media (print and electronic media), all of whom are engaged in a synergisitic relationship. Each player interacts with the others reactively and proactively, influencing one another in a complex and often misunderstood manner. The focus of this study is to determine in what ways the agenda of political elites affects the agenda of the mass media, positively or negatively, and, by extension, how the hidden political agenda of the mass media affects the agenda of the political elite. This study examines the transmission of political information and the active component of the message.

Specifically, this study is concerned with the attitudes and opinions held by the journalists and editors of the Alberta media and by the politicians they cover at the

provincial legislature. Two broad surveys, one to examine the positions of the politicians and the other those of the media, were conducted, addressing such questions as journalistic function, their attitudes towards each other, and personal biographical information. It is hoped that a useful descriptive analysis of the perceptual orientation and demographic construction of both groups towards the question of agenda setting as a whole can be derived.

Using a model provided by Edwin Black we can see three broad relationships that we can examine in regard to agenda-setting. Black's model is particularly useful as it provides a general frame to identify the actors in the process where agenda setting takes place. This model also allows us to examine the major relationships we might want to study. There are three actors: the political elites, the media, and the public. There are three important relationships linking these actors:

1) **Media and the Public Agenda** - Here, we are concerned with how the media are influenced by popular concerns and trends within the consumer population, and conversely how the media influences public opinion by either telling people what to think or what to think about

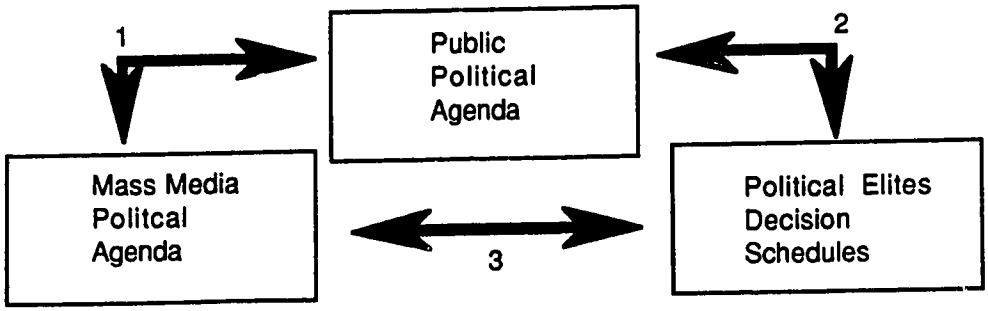
2) **The Public Agenda and Political Elite Decision Schedule** - This centers on how the public in a liberal democracy influences the political elites to adopt certain decision schedules; conversely, how are these decision schedules manipulated by political elites to influence public opinion.

3) **Media and Political Elites** - Finally, we need to consider how media priorities and agendas alter and manipulate elite decision schedules and their presentation to the public at large, and conversely how political elites react toward and influence the media in carrying out the task of message transmission.

Building on earlier work done by this author, this study is focused on the third relationship of the model. It is important to critcally analyze the process by which media priorities and agendas in a liberal democracy alter and manipulate elite decision schedules

and their presentation to the public-at-large. These manipulations affect not only what political matters receive attention in a liberal democracy, but also how those matters are addressed by acceptable options. Similarly, it is equally important to clarify the process by which politicians manipulate the mass media. In three words, their focus is "message transferal effectiveness."

**Figure 1.0 Media interaction model** [2]




My study will investigate the relationship between politicians and journalists on the provincial political scene in regards to the news. This relationship, once understood, should provide information on the extent to which agenda-setting occurs in Alberta. A major concern is to determine who controls the political agenda: the politicians or the mass media? Another focus of the study centers on exactly how the relationship between the mass media and politicians is actually defined. How does each view the other? How do they help and how do they hinder one another in their respective roles? What is the actual influence of one medium over another, one party over another? Answers to these questions should clarify the relationship between the mass media and the political elite and how that relationship is viewed by either group. This information will provide all those involved with a better understanding of the political system.

This study is situated in Alberta which is very fortunate for several reasons. First, Alberta has the second largest press gallery in the country, next to the House of Commons, and a relatively healthy media establishment. This presents some obvious advantages for

the type of study I wish to conduct. The size and nature of the media establishment in Alberta allow for a relatively large group of journalists to be sampled from all media, representing various relationships with political actors. For example, with four major daily papers and five television stations operating within the province's two major cities, I was able to gather a greater number of perspectives than would be possible if Edmonton and Calgary were one paper/station towns.

Another advantage arising from conducting this study in Alberta relates to the province's status within Confederation. Alberta, for some time, has played an important role, economically and politically, within the nation as a whole. The Alberta government is a significant actor on the national scene, drawing attention from the national media. This would suggest that the relationship between the Alberta government and the media is not only a long-standing one, but also complex and rich in experience. I believe that both politicians and journalists will be attuned to their roles within the system and therefore, will be able to provide valuable information on agenda-setting relationships.

Particular aspects of the politician-press relationship in Alberta make it unique, and therefore important to study . There appears to be a strained relationship between Alberta's journalists and its provincial politicians. For some time, accusations have been voiced by Alberta journalists about the "bunker mentality" of the provincial government and its leadership.[3] In turn, provincial politicians have complained about the acute negativism of the press and/or its lack of fair coverage in respect to covering provincial political activities. The tense relationship between the press and provincial politicians will make for an important context, as one group will reflect upon the other's role in the system and how they help or hinder the democratic process.

Another particularly unique aspect of the context for this study is the changing political landscape within the province. The apparent passing of the Conservative old guard, the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, a renewed provincial Liberal party, and the rise of the federal Reform party in the province all provide an important back drop.

## Political Marketing and Academic Perspectives

To help provide a frame in which to study the politician-media relationship one can find many useful applications in the field of political marketing. Political marketing is the application of marketing theory and techniques in the political arena.[4] The current level of sophistication in the political process, the proliferation of information systems, and their potential impact on the behavior of the public-at-large make it particularly useful to examine the effectiveness of marketing concepts in political life. Both politicians and journalists have increasingly come to understand political life in terms of economics. Both groups speak of the electorate as consumers, and conduct cost benefit analyses of political/media strategies and motivations based on economic considerations . A political marketing perspective provides a useful orientation to frame this study as respondents use market terms to understand their relationship. Using the steps of the marketing process it is possible to identify and quantify critical variables in the political environment.[5] In essence, this study analyzes market opportunities. Neuman writes...

> One of the fundamental purposes of doing [this kind of] research is to enable candidates to identify opportunities that exist for him/her in the political market place... This type of research calls for the candidate to understand the market place, which in this case would be the voter. [6]

Of course, as stated above, the focus of this study is not on the voter but on the translation of the political message by the "keeper of the flashlight," the journalist, and on identifying what the politician wants that spotlight to illuminate and what he/she wants to remain in the shadows.

At present, most political candidates and elected politicians are themselves fumbling in the dark in terms of their understanding of the media. They tend for the most part, to characterize journalists as mystifying adversaries. When one considers the commitment of time and effort and the expense a candidate invests in achieving his/her policy goals, it is

patently obvious he/she should want to ensure that an effective message reaches the electorate through the media. Possession of a media map, figuratively speaking, would assist a candidate in attracting media attention and directing it in his/her best interests.

From an academic perspective, the issue of agenda-setting in Canada relies heavily on American literature. Very little literature has been produced in Canada on the actual empirical content of the interaction between political elites and the mass media. What little indigenous literature does exist on the subject of the Canadian media is essentially biographical or historical in scope, or is rooted firmly in communications literature and theory. Nothing at all similar has been attempted with the Alberta media and political establishment. Relying on scholarship that has an American focus has obvious limitations in a Canadian context. The nuances peculiar to Canadian institutions and journalistic practice are virtually ignored. The literature that provides a useful basis for this study will be further discussed in the literature review. Because of the shortage of applicable Canadian scholarship, any information regarding the relationship of the media and the political elite constitutes a meaningful contribution to Canadian political studies.

## The Study Objectives

The focus of this study is to determine in what ways the agenda of the political elite affects the agenda of the mass media and conversely, how the political agenda of the mass media affects the agenda of the political elite. It is necessary, however, to acknowledge certain assumptions at the outset, some of which may be obvious, but also others which are less so, and all of which influence the design of the study.

First is the blanket assertion that there is a direct causal relationship between media activity and public opinion. That is, the media, electronic and print, influence public opinion. This is strongly supported by the literature on the subject. Second is the assumption that there is a direct relationship between the media and the decision schedules of the political elite. That is, the media's influence on public opinion often affects the

conduct of the political elite who, naturally, wish to maintain a high positive public profile. This is also strongly supported by the literature.

Black explains:

> ...publishing activity leads individuals and governments to act politically in ways which they would not do otherwise. This may be immediate or cumulative, direct or indirect, specific or non-decision, and agreement spoken or unspoken.[7]

Third, this study assumes that some activities of the politician shape news reporting and coverage habits of the media establishment. As the media affects governments politically, so too can the politician affect the media journalistically. This assumption is well documented during election campaigns and high profile periods in government (for example sitting of parliament) but it is not well documented for the day-to-day operations of government. This study will examine the fuzzy relationship between the media and political establishments where a daily struggle ensues over public perception.

These assumptions clarified, it is possible to address more specifically the composition of the surveys that were submitted to the provincial media and political establishments. Information successfully obtained should result in a meaningful resource bank on the provincial media and political establishments. The study was designed to assess exactly who represents these establishments, how they relate to each other, and which group is really in control of the political agenda. Does the presentation of the news influence decision-makers' perceptions of the general public's views regarding the importance of an issue? Do the news media influence policy- makers beliefs that policy action is necessary, and if so, to what degree? Can politicians effectively manage the news and the perception of the importance of a particular issue? How much influence do journalists really exert through their news stories and how much corporate interference really exists in the news establishment?

## The Study: Method

As mentioned above, there was little secondary data upon which to draw to base the survey or with which to compare it in the Canadian context, so this study collected its own primary data. There were two surveys: one survey for the media, one survey for the politicians. All those reporters, editors, and publishers covering the legislative beat on an on-going basis were eligible to be surveyed for the media sample. All those politicians who sit in the Alberta Legislative Assembly were eligible to participate in the political survey. The political survey attempted to solicit as many government ministers, and official opposition members as possible because they tend to be more exposed to the media than the average back bencher. The total sample size for both surveys was sixty. The sample, when broken down, consisted of thirty politicians (fifteen from the government and fifteen from the opposition) and thirty journalists (ten print, ten radio, and ten television jounalists).

The survey procedure consisted of face-to-face interviews. The survey was introduced as a project for a Political Science thesis project at the University of Alberta. The subjects were informed about the nature of the study, the character of the survey, and the expectations of the author regarding their time and resource commitment. The structure of the surveys did not preclude voluntary contributions by the subjects of information not directly solicited by the questions.Personal interviewing was selected to maximize the responsiveness of the subjects and to permit unstructured responses not otherwise accommodated.

The media survey queried journalists about the the following issues: the role of government and media in informing the public, frequency and degree of editorial changes, external efficacy scale, problems related to covering political activity, helpful tendencies of politicians, degree of corporate influence in the news gathering process, three most important issues facing the province, memberships to non-political organizations, ideological placement, and the level of media and political influence over mutual behavior.

Journalists were asked to rank thirteen broad policy fields in government (the deficit, the environment, agriculture, energy, social services, labour relations, federal-provincial relations, senate reform, taxation, education, constitution and economic diversification) according to their assessment of the public's priorizing of those policy areas and, secondly, their own personal priorities. Demographic information was also obtained through the survey.

Politicians were asked about: the role of government and media in informing the public, media viewing habits, problems working with the media, helpful tendencies of the media, three most important issues facing the province, memberships to non-political organizations, ideological placement and the Alberta media establishment, objectivity rankings of various news outlets, and the level of media and political influence over mutual behavior. Politicians , like journalists, were asked to rank thirteen broad policy fields in government according to public opinion and for themselves.

A number of open-ended questions and Likert scales were used in the survey to evaluate broader, less objective questions. Where the number of categories was large (i.e. issue ranking questions) cue cards were presented to respondents and they were asked to rank them in the order of their preference after all cards had been viewed. Questions requiring a written answer were also employed where a Likert scale was used to evaluate a particular question: media influence scale, politician influence scale, ideological reference scale for themselves and the media establishment, outlet objectivity rankings.

The actual interviews were conducted October 1 to November, 30 1990. Interviews averaged about forty-five minutes. Generally, the study was well received by all those who participated. I was asked several times to show some identification by both politicians and journalists to ensure that I was who I claimed to be (this I did as a matter of courtesy). Most opposition politicians and journalists were very willing to participate while most government politicians were pressured to fit me into their schedules. Most cabinet ministers could give only thirty minutes for an interview. Due to time limitations,some

government politicians were a little rushed to complete some of the survey's tasks , yet when I got into the interview with the respondent I found that they would often expand the interview to accomodate me.

The first phase of the analysis consisted of strictly descriptive statistics. Inferential statistics or hypothesis testing is not useful at this stage. Cross-tabulations and question matrices were used to provide a clear picture of what the respondents indicated and some of the more interesting relationships among them.

It is important to note that several obvious variables were not included in the analysis. These include gender, education, occupation, and urban/rural media split with regard to media location. Gender was not included because there were not enough females contained in either the politician or journalist sample to make for sufficient breakdowns. Therefore, in order to protect the identity of those female respondents who did participate, I chose not to include this variable. For similar reasons, an urban/rural analysis would have also been fruitless because only the major cities have sufficiently large media establishments to have regular dealings with politicians at the legislature. The rural media were simply not present in sufficient numbers to warrant such analysis. As for the omission of education and respondents previous occupation, both variables were an oversight on my part and I take full responsibility for the short fall in my study that this may have caused.

## Notes

(1) Walter Lippman. *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), p. 32

(2) Edwin Black. *Politics and the News* (Toronto: Butterworths Group, 1982), p. 189

(3) Mike Nickel. *Survey of Alberta Legislative Press Gallery* . Unpublished paper at the Universtiy of Alberta, 1989

(4) Gary Mauser. *Political Marketing: An Approach to Campaign Strategy.* (Yale University: Praeger Scientific, 1983) p.12

(5) Ibid., pp. 12-13

(6) Ibid., p. 14

(7) Black, pp. 180-181

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

Many studies can be cited to suggest that the media tend to construct a necessarily limited version of news events in their presentation of the news for public consumption. It has been suggested that this pattern of news reporting is unavoidable.[1] Political scientists who have scrutinized the media's role in the political process suggest that the news media establishment itself influences the ranking of governmental objectives concerning social, economic, and political issues. This influence is less a deliberate, than a coincidental result of media practice, but the implicit scale of values accompanying the formal structure of the media establishment and their synergistic relationship with the public result in tangible effects in the broader political system. Compelling evidence culled from history demonstrates that the liberal-democratic system adapts remarkably well to new circumstances. A society in which the media are the main source of public information also requires that the media, even if begrudgingly, admit an implicit political aspect into their daily activity. The media do not initiate policy review or determine intentionally what constitute social problems in the larger context; instead, the very nature of their role in society causes public attention to be focused in similar directions — the media are, after all, the public's primary news source concerning political affairs.[2] In effect, the media become the voices not only of the public as an undifferentiated collective, but also of concerned citizens, special interest groups, the individual politician, and the government. As the information source of both the electorate and their elected officials, the media have a profound effect on the political process.[3]

To understand "agenda-setting," one first must understand the important role the media plays in the political process. Modern politics cannot function without the public discourse of which the media are the vehicle. The media "mediate" between the political apparatus and the public through a system of information transfer. The exchange of political information between the public and its elected officials is an integral element of a democratic system. Agenda-setting, then, is largely influenced by the social impact of

mass communication.[4] In a large, technocratic society, governments cannot always communicate directly with the public and therefore depend heavily on media institutions to facilitate political communication.[5]

It is equally important to stress that the press is not simply a neutral transmitter but is also the interpreter of the information it transmits. The press determine what news deserves coverage and what does not. All available reports are assessed for relative value before publication or broadcast and up to 75% of all potential news stories are never communicated to the public-at-large. In the jargon, this is called the "gate-keeping" effect of the media. Similarly, all stories selected do not receive equal treatment, even when they are published or broadcast. The length of a story (in time or column inches) and its prominence (lead or secondary story in the broadcast; front, back or inside pages) all influence a story's effect once it has reached the public.[6]

The scale, complexity, and rapid succession of events in the contemporary world have heightened the need for the media to be specialized, professional organizations that interpret and disseminate information on a huge scale within a compressed timetable. These circumstances produce a competition between the media and the "newsmakers" — those politicians whose activities generate "political" news — to assess what, exactly, is newsworthy and how it should be interpreted, packaged, and transmitted for public consumption. The media do more than simply amplify political messages to increase their audibility. Instead, they have become active participants in the political process, analyzing, interpreting and critiquing the messages they carry. Political hopefuls depend on the mass media to reach the voter in election campaigns and daily political life. Citizens rely on the same channel to make their opinions known to politicians, recognizing that this is not the only available method to insure they shall be heard but, in all probability, the most efficient.[7]

Marshall McLuhan said "the medium is the message," suggesting that the means of transmission shapes the message by packaging it in particular ways. In his examination of television's portrayal of reality, Richard Harris writes:

> Reality does not come neatly packaged in 2 or 3 minute lengths nor is history filled with perversities, contradictions, ragged edges... TV is a story-telling medium. It abhors ambiguities, ragged edges, and unresolved issues... The effect all too frequently is to impose upon events or situations a preconceived form that alters reality, heightening one aspect at the expense of another for the sake of a more compelling story, blocking out complications that get in the way of the narrative.[8]

The news media organize and structure the world for their consumers. The routine structuring of social and political reality influences the public agenda of issues by which the public organizes and structures its participation in politics.[9] The ability of the media to frame audience cognitions and effectively alter prior attitudes is labeled the "agenda-setting function of the press" by academics in communications and political behaviour research.[10]

This study is not so much concerned with how agenda-setting occurs as with what its implications are for the political process. As noted below in this chapter, media/politician agenda-setting has moved over the years from being seen as an insignificant influence on the process, to a powerful political phenomena. To this end this study follows a vein similar to that of David Taras who, in his book *The News Makers (1990)*, contends the following:

> This book contends that, while the media and politicians each have different goals, each can only accomplish their goals with the help of the other. It is a battle over who will control the public agenda and, ultimately, who will shape public opinion. The news that Canadians receive is dependent to a considerable degree on how this contest for power is conducted.[11]

Without adopting any one approach, Taras runs through several models that attempt to explain the news process and its implications on the political process. It would be advantageous for this study to go through several of the more relevant models to provide a theoretical foundation for the rest of the study.

The first model discussed by Taras is the Mirror Model. This model contends that the news mirrors reality and that it shows issues, events , and people as they exist objectively. Therefore, journalists are, in a sense, holding a mirror to the world. This mirror reflects back the reality of everyday life which is reported to the general public. This view is widely accepted among the journalistic community.[12] Journalists are " to provide a truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day's events in a context that gives them meaning", which is the primary requirement in fulfilling the ideal of journalistic responsibility.[13]

A variation of the Mirror Model is the Distorted Mirror Model. This model contends that "journalists and their news organizations are not passive, neutral reflectors of reality but active agents that distort the reflection in some way."[14] Events in the real world are transformed to fit journalistic needs and criteria for the reporters and their organizations. Proponents of this model have discussed several reasons why the news mirror is distorted: a mirror reflects the power of the people who own it, a mirror is driven by audience demand, a mirror is shaped by the organizational demands of the individual news organizations, a mirror is shaped by the inter-play between the news occurance and the journalist.[15]

A third model is the Audience Model. In this approach the news is selected and packaged according to audience demands. These audience demands place entertainment values as paramount. Although individual journalists may not be aware of who their audience is, they still must work within news frames that have been constructed to appeal to it.

> The result is often a slick packaging, stories that are punchy and dramatic, and journalists (at least on television) chosen for their good looks or home-spun appeal rather than their education or insights. Stories are short to fit the perceived attention spans of the audience and have heros and villains, winners and losers, so that issues and events can be personalized and made more understandable to readers and viewers.[16]

Here,the lowest common denominator in the sense of the message conveyed is presented by the medium in an effort to attract the largest possible audience

A fourth model is the Political Model. This model sees the journalist central to the news. In this approach the journalist is believed to operate with enough independence so that the digging for facts and writing of a story is mainly in his/her control. In their daily battle for access and information, journalists need sources on whom they can depend.[17] These sources are usually politicians, government officials, or the people close to those in power. Journalists articulate their stories so that they speak or write through these sources; moreover, the use of sources confers legitimacy on what is being reported.[18] News is largely the result of negotiations between journalists and whoever their sources are at the time.

In examining some of the more relevant models in media/politician agenda-setting, it is appropriate to review some of the seminal works on agenda-setting to investigate the position that agenda-setting research has reached to date.

## Agenda-Setting Research, Methods and Critique

Agenda-setting research could be said to have begun as early as 1922. In his work "The World Outside and Pictures in Our Heads," Walter Lippman wrote that journalists "point a flashlight rather than a mirror at the world."[19] Lippman states that newspaper audiences receive highly selective glimpses rather than a thorough representation of the political scene from news reports. As Lippman claims, the media cannot perform the function of providing complete public enlightenment that democratic theory suggests (and, ostensibly, requires) because the media cannot present purely objective truth. Foregoing a larger (and largely fruitless in this context) philosphical discussion of the nature of truth, it can be successfully demonstrated simply that "news" is subject to obvious subjective influences. The simple accumulation of potential news events and the pressures of the modern media establishment creates a diachotomy that cannot be

resolved.The quickened pace of news production necessarily demands the exclusion or emphasis of some information.[20]

Empirical research into mass communication effects (as opposed to critical theorizing) effectively began in the 1930s in the United States. This research responded to the rise of fascism abroad and the emergence of radio at home. The focus of research at this time was concerned about the possible effects that mass communication and political propaganda could have on their audience.

In *The Peoples' Choice* (1948), a study of voting behavior in the 1940 U.S. presidential election, Paul Lazarsfeld and his colleagues argued that the media simply strengthened existing predispositions in the minds of the news consumer. In their study *Voting* (1954), Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson and William Mcphee suggested that the political agenda put forward by the medias which is interpreted through, or confronted by critical interpersonal sources of influence, would be unlikely to affect electoral response.[21] Lazarsfeld's later research continued to examine this finding by focusing on another aspect of the agenda-setting effect of the media. He concluded that people who become best informed through exposure to the media are frequently found to be among the most influential in the public sphere.[22] In other words, the "critical interpersonal sources of influence" of the studies he performed with Berelson and Mcphee were none other than people well-informed through the media. People export the media to a larger audience through conversation, indirectly transmitting the media message to people who normally would be oblivious to it.[23] The effect of this conversation is minimized, however, because the recipients in these situations are not neutral receptors of information and tend to have their own interpretation of events. Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Mcphee argued that a two-step pattern of information diffusion takes place: information from media sources is disseminated indirectly to the electorate by "opinion leaders"; those individuals attentive to the media who relay the information they have gathered to their social circle through interpersonal modes of communication.

A later study by Lazarsfeld on American print media demonstrates that only half of the readers studied paid any attention to front page news stories concerning a particular campaign. Since these stories reached only those voters who were most interested in the campaign (and who tended to be partisan voters already), the media's effect was minimal.[24] This study also suggested that the media have a minimal effect on undecided voters.

For Lazarfeld et. al., the overriding goal of their research was to study the effects of political propaganda on mass audiences. They found little to be concerned about which might suggest the necessity of regulating the press . Media messages function through individuals who, because of established predispositions, mute media effects. These initial works began a stream of research in the later 1950's and early 1960's that argues that the media has little effect on the agenda of mass publics.

This proposition was expanded and qualified by Joseph Klapper (*The Effects of Mass Communicaton*, 1960). Klapper states that mass communication ordinarily does not serve as a "necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects, but rather functions among and through a nexus of mediating factors and influences."[25] These mediating factors function typically to render mass communication as a *contributory agent*, not the sole agent, in a process of reinforcing pre-existing conditions. Klapper designated his hypothesis the "law of minimal consequences", which represents the pre-eminent postion of the early students of agenda-setting through the media. Similar studies suggest that mass media have little effect on the setting of the public agenda or on public opinion.[26]

Further evidence is presented by V. O. Key that the stimulus-response model of the power of the press was weak, even contradictory.[27] He examined the link between the mass media's selection and presentation of political news and the set of issues being discussed by the general public. Key reviewed the research on the impact of the mass media with regard to media usage, the credibility accorded the media, and a number of other variables such as political participation, degree of education, and recall of campaign

information by the voter. Key reintroduces Lazarfeld's two-step communication model and states that interpersonal communication and group membership blunts the influence of the mass media on the electorate.[28]

Unable to demonstrate any direct link between the press and the public agenda, the proponents of the school of minimal effect disregard the notion of the media's significant political impact yet do not entirely negate its influence. Bernard Cohen states that the press

> ... is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time telling people what to think but is stunningly successful in telling readers what to think about.[29]

This conceptual law of minimal consequences takes on important ramifications regarding media activity. Early studies into media influence focused on the cognitive alteration and the indirect effect of the media. This school of thought understands the media to be a source of important opinion *reinforcement* through selective exposure and selective perception. In other words, people are likely to suppress dissonant messages while preferentially selecting information that favors their current position.[30]

The notion of minimal effects was directly challenged in the 1970's and early 1980's by new evidence emerging on the academic scene which heralded a significant change in the understanding of the relationship between the press, politicians, and the public. The first challenge was issued by Donald Shaw and Maxwell McCombs in their 1968 *Chapel Hill Study* which examined information transmission by studying what people actually learned from news stories rather than focusing on such nebulous concepts as attitude change.[31] McCombs and Shaw looked at local and national media coverage of a number of issues in the 1968 American presidential election, including public welfare, civil rights, fiscal policy, foreign policy, and the war in Vietnam. They measured the prominence of these issues in the public mind in an aggregate form from a sample of local

voters. Their results showed significant rank order correlations between media coverage and the actual ordering of issues by the general public and argued that this was evidence of agenda-setting. They did not, however, claim to have shown a causality because the numbers in their sample were too small.[32]

In a later study Shaw and McCombs established that the media increase the attention paid to politics every four years concurrent with presidential elections.[33] Among undecided voters, they demonstrated a close relationship between the political issues favored by the media and the issues that voters viewed as crucial to the election outcome.[34] Voters (at least undecided voters) paid some attention to all political information presented by the media regardless of the origin of its transmission.[35] This finding directly contradicted the basic concept of filtered exposure and selective perception presented in earlier studies.

Shaw and McCombs established a stream of research which suggests that the mass media are an important factor in the transfer of political information and that they play a *significant* role in determining what issues become important to the electorate.[36] It was widely accepted in the 1970's that Shaw and McCombs had demonstrated a strong positive relationship between the emphasis given in the mass communication of particular issues and the salience of those issues to the audience.[37] Their work represents a shift in agenda-setting research to the cognitive, long-term implications of daily exposure to journalism.[38] One aspect of this new examination of mass communication has been the discovery that the audience not only learns facts about public affairs but also learns how much importance should be attached to those learned facts due, almost entirely, to the emphasis placed upon them by the media.[39] The work of Shaw and McCombs on agenda-setting asserts that the audience consuming the information presented acquires a kind of issue priorization from the news media that is similar in weight to that presented by the media outlet.[40]

Following Shaw and McCombs, a large body of evidence has accumulated since 1972 that proposes journalists play a significant, if not key, role in altering and shaping the

public's perceptions in their daily routine of selecting and reporting the news.[41] Iyengar and Kinder argue that they decisively prove the hypothesis of the media's involvement in agenda-setting: "by attending to some problems and ignoring others, television news shapes American political priorities."[42] These effects are, however, still somewhat limited because the audience has a limited memory (often forgetting last month's news) and often distrusts the reliability of today's news. They assert that "when television news focuses on a problem, the public's priorities are altered and altered again as television news moves on to something new."[43]

Early political theory on the subject of agenda-setting asked two questions: why do people attend to the news media and to which message elements are they most responsive?[44] Empirical studies on agenda-setting are found primarily in political communication and focus on elections and the mass media audience interface, not on individuals, groups or institutions. The bulk of later research focuses on those issues that are placed before the general public and uses cross sectional designs to describe the public agenda. These are followed up with content analysis to describe medium coverage.[45]

Research in agenda-setting today has progressed significantly beyond the early studies mentioned above; it can select a single issue at a single point in time or across a long period of time; it can track a number of issues across time as they affect a single individual or mass publics, or any combination of the above. Agenda-setting research can be very dynamic. Three broad topic fields exist in the realm of political agenda-setting: public issues, political candidates, and the political process as a whole.[46] Current agenda-setting research follows several basic revisions of the original agenda-setting hypotheses:

1) The basic hypothesis — does the media lead public opinion or is it the other way around? — has been far more critically examined.

2) The influence of real world cues — the media and the public respond to a third variable which might be considered real world events which arise independently.

3) Medium effects — different mediums have different agenda-setting effects. Most studies examined the effects of print journalism in contrast to televison (the print usually referred to being daily newspapers).
4) Audience factors — some studies examined agenda-setting patterns for different demographic and behavioral categories to attempt to define which people are most likely to be influenced by the media.
5) Types of issues — different issues have unique agenda-setting dynamics which operate on an individual pattern, such as the distinction made above between obtrusive and inobtrusive issues.

The case for re-examining the agenda-setting question and mass communication effects can be made as follows. First, the argument which suggests the media has no measurable effects is naive and moderated considerably from earlier assertions knowing what we know about human learning.[47] Second, a critical analysis of the methods and research models used for earlier studies needs re-examination in order to more acccurately interpret the findings.

The first treatments of agenda-setting were designed to measure short-term changes occurring at the individual level, concentrating on the key concept of attitude alteration.[48] These studies attempted to establish a direct correlation between media coverage and public opinion by comparing the frequency with which specific issues arose in the news and in the minds of the general public.[49] This approach did not take into account such variables as personal experience, group perspective, or real world conditions. These factors, clearly influential, can vary with regard to both individuals and the passage of time.[50] According to McQuail (1981), early researchers in agenda-setting should not have looked for broad-based media effects but for more localized impacts in response to particular media events, and for the responses of special sub-groups to selected stimuli.[51] McQuail adds that early researchers might have also looked for media impact not within a context of beliefs but with regard to the profile of issues. This would suggest at least a partial or indirect effect.[52]

Like McQuail , Michael MacKuen points out in his review of David Fan's work, *Prediction of Public Opinion From the Mass Media* (1988), that the early studies

proposing minimal effect were laboratory experiments based on short time spans and could not be applied with any confidence.[53] He raised two intuitive objections to designs of this kind. First, he suggests that the short time duration of the earlier studies precludes the accumulation of minor minimal consequences that might produce measurable effects in the long run. Second, he suggests minimal effects may be important in the aggregate, affecting one in ten voters sufficiently to produce an overall affect like a "landslide" in an election.[54]

These early studies also possess methodological problems. Audience opinions and attitudes on a given issue are, for all intents and purposes, randomly scattered in any group of media users due to the different mediums and their disparate usage. This randomness renders a great deal of the regression analysis by early researchers inconclusive.[55]

Another criticism of earlier studies is that the research emphasis of these works tended to be narrowly focused on certain types of political experience. That is to say, they were based primarily on election periods, and most of those elections were national. The difficulty is that these contests are unique and attract high levels of media attention.[56] Earlier studies do not address the day-to-day influence of the media on the general public. In the Canadian context, this particular terrain of agenda-setting research is still very much uncharted. Recent American literature, such as the studies in aggregate long term effects by Fan or Kinder, begin to fill the gap.

The "minimal effect" model of the 1960's is disputed because it assumes an inherent passivity in the reception of political messages in the mass media.[57] Instead of asking what mass communication does to people, the new approach of the 1980's asks what people do with mass communication. The new theories on agenda-setting effects attempt to redress many of the limitations of studies done in the 1960's and 1970's. The early literature tends to treat the effects of the different media as if they were the all same.[58] The obvious problem is that the results from one level of analysis may not be appropriate for another. Nor is it always appropriate to treat the mass media as an independent variable (in terms of a given research strategy) at the level it is applied.[59] Contextual and

situational factors may bear very strongly on the impact of mass communication on agenda-setting.[60] Very little was then known, for example, about how sensitive mass communication effects are to political culture, economic conditions, and other such factors.

A serious criticism of old and new literature on agenda-setting is that most of it is approached entirely in reference to the receiver of the message and never the sender. Little to nothing is known about how the sender's prejudices might shape mass communication. The prejudices of politicians and media shape the message for public consumption. This message, once consumed, creates a perception in the public mind.

> Perception becomes reality; it is necessary, if a policy is to be judged good, that a good perception of it be created. The important question, the battleground then becomes — who creates the perception?[61]

The media do not solely control the process from which perceptions are created. Politicians are active participants in the process; the media and the politicians interact with each other to get their final product to their audiences. It is the politician's objective to forward his own political agenda. It is the media's objective to report on that political agenda and other goings-on in the world. Journalists themselves are also members of the public, albeit more expert than the persons to whom they report. They too have prejudices which filter their impressions of events and are responsible for the way in which they select the facts they report. The interaction between media and politicians on the field of perceptual creation is not always a collaboration of congenial partners. What is at stake is the subjective truth the public comes to perceive as reality. As Cook states

> ...any model of the political communication process must be interactive rather t han unidirectional from source through medium to public. We cannot make simple interpretations of political effects upon the news or of the media's effect upon politics. The two are so intertwined that it is preferable to study, first, the news media's interactions with political actors, including the perspectives from both the political and the journalistic spheres in the process, and, second, the effects that t hose interactions and negotiations have on the kind of news that appears and the the kind of politics and policies that are hereby encouraged.[62]

The informal and formal rules that govern the relationship between politicians and journalists should be examined to attempt to measure the relative influence each possesses in the creation of the news.[63] It is to this element of the battleground of perception that this study turns its attention.

My study addresses several criticisms of the literature raised in this paper. First, the Alberta media and political establishment is examined between elections in their every day environment. Second, I am more interested in the study of the message sender than the receiver. Third, the examination of the data will be both aggregate and separate with regard to the respective mediums and political affiliations (government vs. opposition), in order to evaluate them for individual effects. Fourth, and most importantly, this study examines the official and unofficial relationships between journalists and politicians in the creation of the news. In this manner I hope to arrive at conclusions that other works have neglected and to make a valuable contribution to a neglected aspect of agenda-setting study.

## Politicians and Journalists: Their roles and the rules of the game

The struggle over public perception is usually fought between two combatants: the press and politicians. The relationship of the mass media and politicians is relatively straightforward. Politicians acknowledge the impact and importance of mass communication on public opinion and, presumably, pay close attention to political coverage and editorial views in the nation's press. In this manner the media influence politics.[64] The media, on the other hand, only partly control the time-frame for major political events and announcements. They are subject to deadlines and must generate interesting stories for publication or broadcast. The exchange is mutual — each body tries to effectively manipulate the other.[65]

Many observers seem to believe that the mass media set the public agenda and define problems on a continuous, day-to-day basis, and that political parties and politicians respond to the consensus view put forward by the press. To these observers, party networks cannot compete with the media for the attention of the electorate. They presume

the general public believes what it sees and hears in the nation's press and that politicians know this and fear it.[66] This is the true power of the mass media.[67] The mass media, then, becomes problematic for political players because it is not a direct conduit of clear messages between them and the public.

> The media do more than merely reflect what others are doing. They are, of necessity, highly selectequally favour all issues and all individuals. Far from providing an unfiltered conduit for political sources, journalists raise their own questions and pick and choose among the responses to establish an angle, find a lead, juxtapose different bits of information and finish a satisfying account . . Moreover, journalists' notions of quality are reinforced within the news organization by superiors and peers who provide far more feedback than does the dimly glimpsed audience.[68]

In general, the media do not transmit all the news they have available to them; there is a process of selection which affects the interpretation of events. Not only does the media establishment largely describe events of the political world as its editors view them, it also picks and chooses which events are, in their view, important.[69] What the media menu presents for consumption is an implicit act of agenda-setting. Both the media and politicians realize that they are engaged in a two-way relationship and that both parties try to use one another in a game of mutual influence. The media exert influence through the active choice of certain issues for emphasis in the news, their presentation, explicit and implicit editorial comment and, though less often recognized, by choosing what issues or facts are omitted.[70] Siegel writes that media priorities and their presentation to the general public are "indexed by [the] day-by-day pattern of selection and display of the news become over time the priorities of the public."[71]

Politicians often complain about the media's transmission of news. The most general complaint leveled against the media is that they are excessively critical and tend to focus on the negative aspects of everything they report.[72] Politicians accuse the media of a lack of depth; suggesting they emphasize attacks, counter-attacks, failures of leadership, colour and action, and the horse-race aspect of elections.

> [Politicians] believe that newspapers should set more audacious goals. . . assure the responsibility of finding and publishing what the public should know rather than seeking to satisfy the lowest common denominator of popular demand as determined by market studies and advertising surveys.[73]

The media argue that negativism is not a new-found but traditional calling which is dictated more by constraints on the activity of news reporting than anything else.[74] For example, Canadian journalists complain that to cover anything other than Question Period in the operations of Parliament demands an excessive amount of time and effort and is therefore too difficult to follow or make interesting for the average news consumer.[75]

Another problem in the politicians' view is the structure of the modern media. Pack journalism shapes media reports of politicians and political events. The first academic treatment of pack journalism was by Timothy Crouse who called it "herd" or "fuselage" journalism. Trapped inside a bus or plane, journalists compare notes day after day. All are fed the same pool of information, the same daily handout, the same speech , the same political event.[76] Crouse argues that campaign journalism is essentially pack journalism even if the "pack" is not a single unit: all press outlets use the national wire services, all press outlets cover the same events.[77] This can be a disadvantage for the press as well because it makes it difficult for them to distinguish themselves from their competition. On the other hand, members of the pack may conspire to treat politicians in a specific manner which confers upon them considerable power.[78]

Another journalistic phenomenon of the modern technological age is pool reporting: one reporter goes and reports on an event in person when it is not feasible to send several reporters. The information gathered is then forwarded to a pool of reporters at "headquarters" to be processed into news.[79] Journalistic practices of pool reporting are denied strongly by the media establishment, yet the fact remains that it is forced upon them, especially in large cities where resources are constantly strained to cover several important events.[80] One interpretation of pool reporting is that it is a method whereby the media establishment protects itself against the possible misinterpretation of facts by individual

journalists — but more often than not the media are forced into pool arrangements by circumstance.[81]

In the constant search for news, members of the media tend to feed on one another's stories and work in an endless circle, creating, in effect, a larger type of pool reporting.[82] Print media are usually the primary information and data collectors and provide a factual base for all news media.[83] Newspaper reporters, privileged by their medium, are able to go into greater detail in their stories than radio or television reporters. Sonderlund argues that television journalism, much more than the other mediums, seems to have lost control to politicians and political media managers who use the tool of accessibility as a negotiating chip bargained in exchanged for some control over what will and what will not be aired. The visual element is crucial to television and TV journalists are consistently subject to negotiation for it.

The most recent work on the Canadian media establishment by Peter Desbarats, *Guide to Canadian News Media* (1990), puts into perspective the broader problems in the media. He reveals many of the nuances of the Canadian media establishment that are often missed . Desbarats argues that the role of the press in a capitalist society is not to inform but to profit.[84] Yet the freedom of the press is integral to the democratic process and its freedom is often subject to unacknowledged hindrances that have more to do with accounting than reporting.

Media critics like Desbarats argue that, in market-based economies, increasing corporate concentration of ownership has affected the media's realization of its theoretical function. Critics state that advertising values dominate the news rather than ideas of journalistic integrity.[85] Large media corporations appoint CEO's sympathetic to the corporate culture which leads to a dramatic increase in superficial material attractive to advertisers which will increase profit.[86]

Shady practices, though uncommon, do exist. Some media agents have staged events when the genuine one did not occur or was not captured by the camera.

Unscrupulous reporters may also practice deceptio: that is leaving the camera running to capture their subjects off-guard. These contraventions of good form illustrate the conflict between corporate objectives and the aims of ethical journalism.[87] The fact of the matter is that both publishers and journalists want the largest possible audience for their particular product. Journalist are well aware of the fact that the news must be interesting *and* entertaining as well as practical and relevant. What they also realize is that free-enterprise ownership and public ownership of the media in a market based economy permits unprecedented freedom from political interference as opposed to the curtailment or direct manipulation of the media demonstrated in totalitarian regimes.[88] The media business on the other hand, has its own objective — to make a profit. This emphasizes quick dirty news and negative coverage that can shock and attract attention.[89]

The economics of mass circulation newspaper publishing and popular broadcasting tend to undermine thoughtful, complex news reporting.[90] Story selection is most influenced by the availability of resources, time, and money, determining not only which stories are covered, but the amount or degree of attention they receive.[91] Desbarats writes

> ... [J]ournalists sometimes go to elaborate lengths to show that they are investigators on behalf of the public eye. This much is demanded by their working ideology. However, the private eye usually looks no further than what a source says in an interview.[92]

The lack of resources leads journalists to rely heavily on official government agencies and other "available" opinions as their primary sources of information. That information, in turn, becomes the basic subject matter of the news. The result is not necessarily critical analysis of public policy or political events and, in fact, is often a superficial examination of the day's events. Another aspect of news reporting tied to concepts, depth, and critical analysis, is the notion of objectivity .The ideal of objectivity is fixed in the minds of journalists and readers alike as the guiding principal of proper news reporting.[93] Objectivity is intended to encourage fairness and balance but the true state of the journalistic

art is that there is a great lack of research support for journalists which has profound effects on objectivity (Desbarats calls it "appalling").[94]

So far I have discussed only one of the two groups in which this study is interested. It is well documented that politicians are not helpless victims of the media. There are many theories as to what motivates politicians to act as they do but there are none I could find in the context of agenda-setting research. The exception to this is Sonderlund who argues, as mentioned above, that politicians manipulate the media for short-term political gain. The discussion by Sonderlund is not well developed and needs further explanation. This is a gap I hope my study can address in its conclusions. However, there is information available on how politicians work within the media establishment to meet their objectives.

Politicians manipulate the media by feeding the industry what it is looking for.[95] Politicians know that the media need a story, and they know the media need to make the story interesting and relevant. For example, knowing that journalists are looking for the same qualities in the news, politicians, especially during elections, stage events to meet press deadlines. This is to ensure that little editing can be done for the evening report . Politicians manipulate television to their advantage. Politicians can address people directly (though this option is usually reserved for presidents and prime ministers, who can request network television time for important announcements). The most common technique exploited is to severely limit the amount of information released under the assumption that the less information the press is fed, the less it can report incorrectly or analyze critically.[96] The essential point is that the media are not in sole control of the process.

> Instead, the process of newsmaking is the result of what I have elsewhere termed the negotiation of newsworthiness — the constant implicit negotiations between political sources and journalists. Each side controls important resources since news is expected to be both important and interesting. Politicians dictate conditions and rules of access and designate certain events and issues as important by providing an arena for them; journalists decide whether something is interesting enough to cover.[97]

Politicians and governments help establish an agenda by telling the press what issues are important. By attempting to set the agenda of which issues are for public consumption, politicians not only speak about what they consider to be important issues but also what they believe the public wants to hear.[98] Political agencies try to circumvent the media and establish a public agenda by conveying a sense of which issues should matter to the public and which should not.(99)

**Summary**

In conclusion, I argue that the media organize and impart a great deal of factual data about political affairs and political events. To date, there is considerable evidence that the media have important effects on setting the public agenda and on the public's interpretation of events concerning this agenda. In turn, I will show that the politician is an active participant in the shaping of that same media message and warrants equal attention in the field of agenda-setting. Having examined the environment in which agenda-setting takes place, and having summarized the available literature, it is appropriate at this point to turn to the findings of this study.

## Notes

(1) Denis McQuail, , "The Influence and Effects of Mass Media: Media Power in Politics" ed. Doris A. Graber, *Congressional Quarterly Inc.* (1984), p.43.

(2) Ibid., p.45

(3) Ibid., p.48

(4) Maxwell McCombs "The Agenda-Setting Approach" in Don Nimmo and Keith Sanders, eds., *Handbook of Poltical Communication* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1981), p.121

(5) Ibid., p.160

(6) Jennings Bryat and Dolf Zillman . *Perspectives on Media Effects* (New Jersy: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc., 1986), p.4

(7) Walter C. Soderlund, et. al.. *Media and Elections in Canada* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada Limited, 1984), p.21

(8) Richard Harris. *A Cognitive Pschology of Mass Communication* (New Jersy: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 1989), p.138

(9) McQuail, p.6

(10) McQuail, p.4

(11) David Taras. *The Newsmakers: The media's influence on Canadian politics* . (Scarborough Ontario: Nelson Canada, 1990), p.26

(12) Ibid., p.5

(13) Ibid., p.7

(14) Ibid., p.7

(15) Ibid., p.7

(16) Ibid., p.16

(17) Ibid., p.24

(18) Ibid., p.24

(19) Walter Lippman. *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), p.364

(20) Ibid., p. 32

(21) Paul Lazarfeld, Paul Berelson, and William McPhee. *Personal Influence* (Illinois: Glencoe Free Press, 1965), p.359.

(22) Ibid., p.359

(23) Ibid., p.359

(24) Paul Lazarfeld, Paul Berelson, and William McPhee. *Voting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), pp.138-139.

(25) Joseph Klapper. *The Effects of Mass Communication* (Illinois: Glencoe Free Press, 1960), p.8

(26) Ibid., p.8

(27) V.O. Key Jr.. *Public Opinion and American Democracy* (New York: Kropf Inc., 1961), p. 184

(28) Ibid., p. 37

(29) Bernard Cohen . *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Princeton:Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 13

(30) Klapper, p.8

(31) Donald Shaw and MaxwellMcCombs. *The Emergence of American Political I ssues*. (St. Paul: West Publishing Company, 1977) pg. 9

(32) Ibid., p. 10

(33) Ibid., p. 11

(34) Ibid., pp. 12-13

(35) Ibid., p. 19

(36) Ibid., p. 20

(37) Ibid., p. 29

(38) Bryant and Zillman, p. xiv

(39) Ibid., p.3

(40) Ibid., p.4

(41) Ibid., p.3

(42) Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder. *News That Matters* (Chicago:The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p.33

(43) Ibid., p. 23

(44) Maxwell McCombs "The Agenda-Setting Approach" in Don Nimmo and Keith Sanders, eds., *Handbook of Poltical Communication* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1981), p. 137

(45) Ibid., p.122

(46) Ibid., p.135

(47) McQuail, p. 39

(48) McQuail, p. 39

(49) Lutz Erbring and Edie Goldenberg. "Front Page News and Real World Cues: A New Look at Agenda Setting by the Media" in *American Journal of Political Science* , vol. 24 no.1 (Feb. 1980), p. 18

(50) Ibid., p. 18

(51) Wagner, p. 409

(52) Wagner, p. 409

(53) Book Review of Predictions of Public Opinion from the Mass Media by Micheal Mackuen in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol.54 (1990), p.194

(54) Ibid., p.194

(55) Wagner, p. 411

(56) Mauser, Gary. *Political Marketing: An Approach to Campaign Strategy*. (Yale University: Praeger Scientific, 1983) p. 219

(57) Ibid., p. 220

(58) Ibid., p. 221

(59) Ibid., p. 225

(60) Ibid., p. 226

(61) Desbarats, p. 139

(62) Timothy E. Cook. "Thinking of the News Media as Political Institution." Paper prepared for delivery at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, August 1990, p. 7

(63) Ibid., p. 15

(64) Arthur Siegel. *Politics and the Media in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw Hill Ryerson Limited,1983), p. 15

(65) Ibid., p. 15

(66) M.J. Robinson and A. Kohut. "Believability and the Press" in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol.52 (1988), p. 175

(67) Ibid., p. 188

(68) Cook, p. 6

(69) Siegel, p. 10

(70) Siegel, pp. 14-15

(71) Siegel, p. 35

(72) Walter C. Soderlund, et. al.*Media and Elections in Canada* (Toronto:Holt , Rinehart and Winston of Canada Limited, 1984), p. 18

(73) Desbarats, p. 90

(74) Walter C. Soderlund, et. al.*Media and Elections in Canada* (Toronto:Holt , Rinehart and Winston of Canada Limited, 1984), p. 130

(75) Desbarats, p. 133

(76) Timothy Crouse. *The Boys on the Bus* (New York: Ballatine Books, 1973), pp. 7-8

(77) Ibid., p. 15

(78) Ibid., p. 196

(79) Ibid., p. 29

(80) John Hohenberg. *The Proffessional Journalist:A Guide to the Practices and Priciples of the News Media*, 3 ed.(New York: Holt, Rinehert, and Winston Inc.,1973), p. 321

(81) Ibid., p. 321

(82) Desbarats, p. 112

(83) Desbarats, p. 113

(84) Desbarats, p. 55

(85) Desbarats, p. 70

(86) Desbarats, p. 71

(87) Desbarats, p. 113

(88) Desbarats, p. 114

(89) Desbarats, p. 115

(90) Desbarats, p. 135

(91) Desbarats, p. 111

(92) Desbarats, p. 112

(93) Desbarats, p. 117

(94) Desbarats, p. 121

(95) Linda Frum. *The News Makers: Behind the Camera's with Canada's Top TV Journalists* (Toronto:Key Porter Books, 1990), pp. 14-15

(96) Desbarats, p. 139

(97) Cook, p. 7

(98) Harris, p. 164

(99) Harris, p. 167

## Chapter Three: Demographics

The first task of this study is to examine the demographic composition of the media and politician samples. Questions presented to both groups were intended to determine personal and professional histories so as to provide important background for the analysis in subsequent chapters, as well as to reveal unpredicted, but significant, relationships that arose out of survey responses. A total sample of thirty politicians and thirty journalists was achieved. A total of fifteen government and fifteen opposition members composed the politician sample. All fifteen government members interviewed were Progressive Conservative cabinet ministers. As mentioned in the sample design, only cabinet ministers were selected because it was assumed they had more experience with the media in their day-to-day roles. The opposition sample included ten New Democrats and five Liberals. A total of ten radio, ten print, and ten television journalists were interviewed. A total of eighteen reporters were interviewed as well as twelve persons in management positions, i.e. editors, producers, and publishers.

Before examining the actual data, it is prudent to explain which demographic variables were used, how these variables were calculated, the rationale behind their use, and how these variables are to be presented in the context of this paper.The first demographic variable examined was age. Age is a particularly important variable in the context of this study as significant differences between any two groups can suggest different histories, perspectives, and social standing.

The second demographic variable sought was the number of years in their present occupation. This variable assesses the degree of involvement of each group with their profession and with one another in an effort to assess their experiences. For the media, it is a relatively simple task to ask how long have they been in their profession. Again, like the age variable, it is measured in years in the profession to the date of 1990. For politicians, the case is not as simple. The fact is that years in office does not preclude participation in a significant political capacity outside of elected office. For example, it is

the case that some cabinet ministers have previously been executive assistant to a minister or that some provincial politicians have been active at other political levels before being elected to the provincial legislature. This means they have had experience outside their present occupation that has contributed to their perception of the media. Even with this limitation underscored, however, the information solicited by this variable is of sufficient importance to be reported in the context of this work. Similar to the method used to assess journalists, years in occupation for politicians were measured in years accumulated in office as an MLA which, for this study, is the date of first election.

The third demographic variable presented in this chapter is the numbr of non-political memberships held. Either group was asked to assess the number of non-political memberships which they made use of on a regular basis. Such memberships could include a health club, charitable organizations, a community league and the like. It was hoped that an assessment of an individual's involvement in the community without regard to their occupation could be judged. It seems reasonable that both groups should have a high degree of community involvment because both are heavily dependent on the public in their professional capacities. A direct comparison of the number of such memberships should permit an assessment of the extent to which these networks operate, especially if significant differences exist.

The fourth and final variable presented in this chapter consists of two ideological placement scales. Using a left-right gradient, ranging from plus four on the right and -4 on the left, journalists and politicians were asked to rate the Alberta media establishment ideologically. Politicians were also asked to do rate themselves ideologically on the same scale. These scales will demonstrate how each group views the other in terms of their political orientation. Subsequent breakdowns of this data will provide important information for analysis that will bear fruit later in the study.

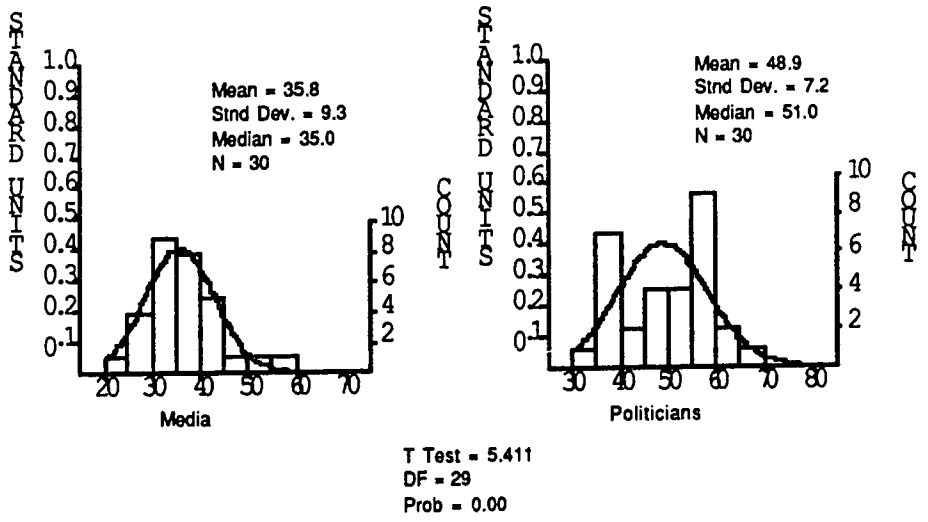
There was no attempt to determine place of birth because almost all of the politicians were born in Alberta and almost all of the journalists were born outside Alberta. To be

more specific than this would identify the respondents involved. For similar reasons, there are no breakdowns of the opposition into its two party affiliations in the legislature, Liberal and New Democrat.

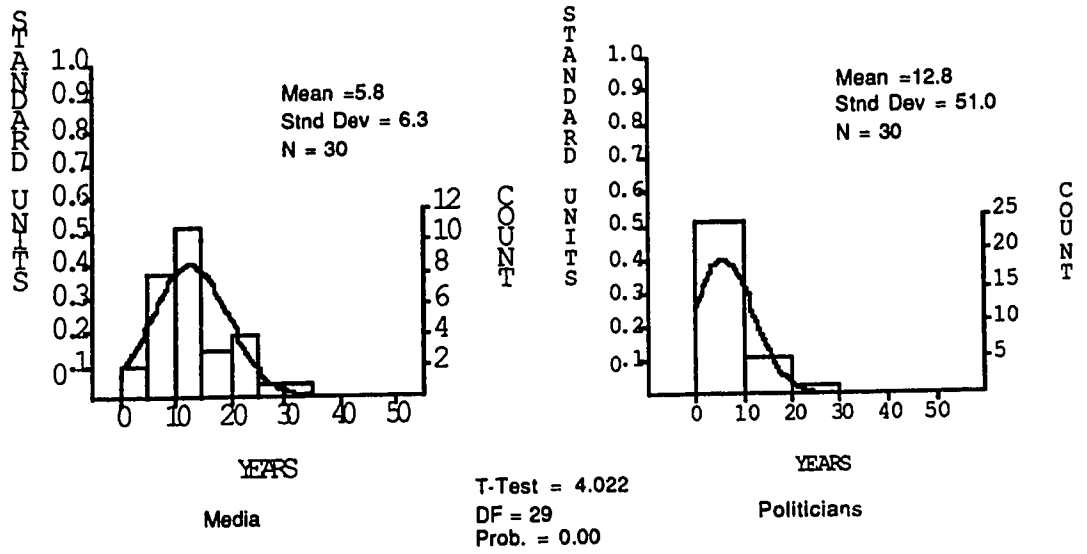
Throughout the study, summary statistics will be rounded to one decimal place and frequency will presented instead of percentages due to the small N sizes. Histograms presented will be arrayed with appropriate descriptive statistics and a superimposed normal distribution will be provided for comparison. In addition to frequency counts, histograms will also be accompanied by a proportion-per-standard unit measure, which represents a probability density scale for distributions having a standard deviation of one. It is not the proportion of the sample in each bar but the standardized sample deviation that is printed in order to make histograms with different number of cases comparable. T-tests will also be provided to show how different selected distributions are different recognizing that violations of normality will often apply.

**Figure 3.0 - Politician and media sample histograms and summary statistics for age, years in profession, and number of non-political memberships**

(a) Age

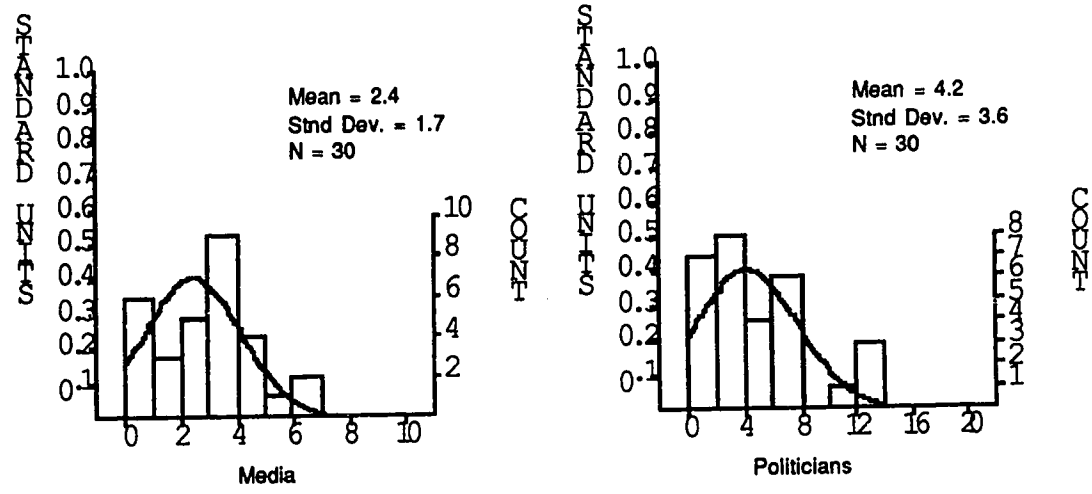


(b) Years in profession




T-Test = 4.022
DF = 29
Prob. = 0.00

(c) Number of non-political memberships*




T-Test = 20.27
DF = 29
Prob = 0.052

* Please note: Politicians are measured by years they have sat in the legislature while journalists are
measured in years as professional journalists.

Politicians average about forty-nine years in age, have been in political office at the legislature for six years and hold approximately four non-political memberships. Journalists average aproximately thirty-six years of age, have been employed in journalism for thirteen years, and average two non-political memberships. When the two groups are directly compared, it is evident that politicians are generally older than the journalists who cover them but have considerably less experience in their respective profession. The age difference will have important implications in the perception of roles each plays in the political process and will be elaborated upon later in this next chapter and the next. Politicians hold almost twice the non-political memberships that journalists do. This would suggest that politicians in general have greater community involvement than their journalistic counterparts. One would expect that politicians have a high degree of involvement in the community because this is the source of their electoral support. A high degree of community involvement provides access to resources to build electoral support and to maintain that support through feedback from the community. Although we cannot tell from the data collectd for this study whether or not these two groups are above or below the norm for people in their profession it is interesting nonetheless to be able to compare the samples with one another.

**Figure 3.1 - Frequencies for age, years in office, and number of non-political memberships by party**

| | Government | Opposition |
|---|---|---|
| (a) Age in years | | |
| 21-25 | 0 | 0 |
| 26-35 | 0 | 2 |
| 36-45 | 2 | 6 |
| 46-55 | 7 | 5 |
| 56-65+ | 6 | 2 |
| Total | 15 | 15 |
| Mean = | 53.0 | 44.9 |
| Median = | 52.0 | 45.0 |
| Stnd Dev. = | 6.5 | 10.0 |
| Range = | 38-61 | 33-65 |

(b) Years in office

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1-5 | 9 | 15 |
| 6-10 | 0 | 6 |
| 11-15 | 2 | 0 |
| 16-25 | 3 | 0 |
| 26-35 | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 15 | 15 |
| Mean = | 8.9 | 2.8 |
| Median = | 8.0 | 2.0 |
| Stnd Dev. = | 8.0 | 1.0 |
| Range = | 2-25 | 2.0 |

(c) Number of non-political memberships

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| None | 3 | 3 |
| 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 2 | 2 | 1 |
| 3 | 2 | 3 |
| 4 | 1 | 2 |
| 5 | 0 | 1 |
| 6 | 5 | 0 |
| 7 | 0 | 1 |
| 10 | 0 | 1 |
| 12 | 1 | 2 |
| Total | 15 | 15 |
| Mean = | 4.0 | 4.4 |
| Median = | 2.0 | 2.0 |
| Stnd Dev. = | 3.2 | 4.1 |
| Range = | 0-12 | 0-12 |

**Figure 3.2 - Frequencies for age, years in office, and number of non-political memberships by medium**

| | Print | Television | Radio |
|---|---|---|---|
| (a) Age in years | | | |
| 21-25 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 26-35 | 3 | 5 | 7 |
| 36-45 | 6 | 4 | 2 |
| 46-55 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 56-65 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 66-75 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Mean = | 38.1 | 36.7 | 32.6 |
| Median = | 38.0 | 35.0 | 32.5 |
| Stnd Dev. = | 7.1 | 8.4 | 5.2 |
| Range = | 28-54 | 28-55 | 24-41 |

(b) Years in office

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1-5 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| 6-10 | 3 | 3 | 5 |
| 11-15 | 2 | 4 | 3 |
| 16-25 | 4 | 1 | 0 |
| 26-35 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Mean = | 16.9 | 12.9 | 8.8 |
| Median = | 13.0 | 11.0 | 9.5 |
| Stnd Dev. = | 8.0 | 6.7 | 3.8 |
| Range = | 8-33 | 5-27 | 3-15 |

(c) Number of non-political memberships

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| None | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 2 | 2 | 3 | 0 |
| 3 | 1 | 3 | 5 |
| 4 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 6 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Mean = | 2.1 | 2.2 | 3.0 |
| Median = | 2.0 | 2.0 | 3.0 |
| Stnd Dev. = | 1.9 | 1.8 | 1.6 |
| Range = | 0-5 | 0-6 | 0-6 |

Government members average about fifty-three years of age, have been in elected provincial office for about nine years and hold four non-political memberships. Opposition members average about forty-five years of age, have three years in elected provincial office and hold four non-political memberships. A direct comparison of these two groups illustrates a large difference with regard to duration of political service. The cabinet minister's relationship with the press is a long standing one and most cabinet ministers have a rich history of interaction with the press.

The first implication of this finding is that cabinet ministers are well aware of the press and the role it plays not only in general provincial political affairs, but, more importantly, in their own particular realm of interests. A considerable amount of "baggage" is carried by a cabinet minister in her/his view of the media establishment which was

accumulated through impressions formed of the media before she/he entered the cabinet. This impression may be based on personal experience inside or outside government spheres. Conversely, the media carry baggage too in their views of the government when they enter the media and carry out their duties. This baggage sets important parameters on the government-media relationship. This study intends to gather a description of this baggage and so it is to the study's advantage to know the depth of the respondents' experience. The experience once revealed will impart on the study an impression of events that have transpired not only in recent times but a historical understanding of the media/politician interaction as well. This relationship will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter.

The second implication is that opposition members do not generally have the same amount of experience as cabinet ministers. Even within opposition groups there exists a disparity of experience between the more recently elected Liberals and the New Democrats (who generally have several more seasoned provincial politicians). Apart from the fact that opposition members have a different relationship with the media than the government, the facts remain that they have never been in government and that they have not been in their roles as the opposition for very long. As with cabinet ministers, the degree of experience in their role as opposition sets important parameters on their relationship with the press. Keeping in mind that each of these groups has an agenda that they wish, implicitly or explicitly, to promote, the less experienced opposition groups may not be as skillful in manipulating the press as the government. Indeed, it may be the case that the media manipulates the opposition more easily than the government. It will be important to clarify the implications of this relationship later in the study, as they provide important clues to understanding the relationship between politicians and the media.

The media have a very different profile than the politicians. Print journalists average thirty-eight years in age, television thirty-seven years and radio thirty-three years. Print journalists average seveteen years in their profession, television thirteen years, and

radio nine years. Journalists in all three media hold two non-political memberships, on average. Given the relatively high levels of experience of the journalists who cover provincial politics, it would be safe to say that there are no novices in the press gallery, at least in this province. If the media is broken down into the news reporter and news manager (editor, producer or publisher) categories, we find that journalists average thirty-two years of age, have about nine years of experience in their jobs, and hold about two and a half non-political memberships. In contrast, editors, producers, publishers and the like are, on average, fifty-five years old,possess eighteen years experience in their positions, and also hold two and a half non-political memberships

Just as implications for the study arise out of the difference between politicians' experience in office, so too are there implications for the study due to the difference in journalists' experience. Print journalists, having the most experience, may be less manipulated by political action than, say, those in radio. As stated above, there are no novices covering provincial politics, which makes this hypothesis less likely, but it is important to consider the possibility nonetheless.

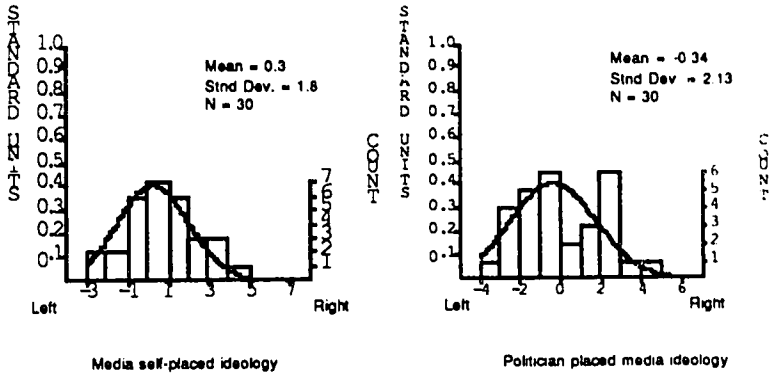
As a rule, cabinet ministers are considerably older than the journalists who cover them. In the case of radio journalists there is a twenty year gap. Opposition groups are closer to the ages of the journalists. An important consideration is whether there are any relevant differences between cabinet ministers and the media due to this age gap. Given the age difference, it can be argued that most cabinet ministers have moved through a different set of historical circumstances than the journalists who cover them. Each may have different values and priorities because of this fact. For example ,the more seasoned politician can remember what the media was like in the 1960s and 1970s, when media relations were much different than they are today.

A gap also exists between journalists and government members in terms of years working in their present day capacities. There is an even larger gap for the opposition parties. This gap is especially acute between newspaper journalists, who have eight years

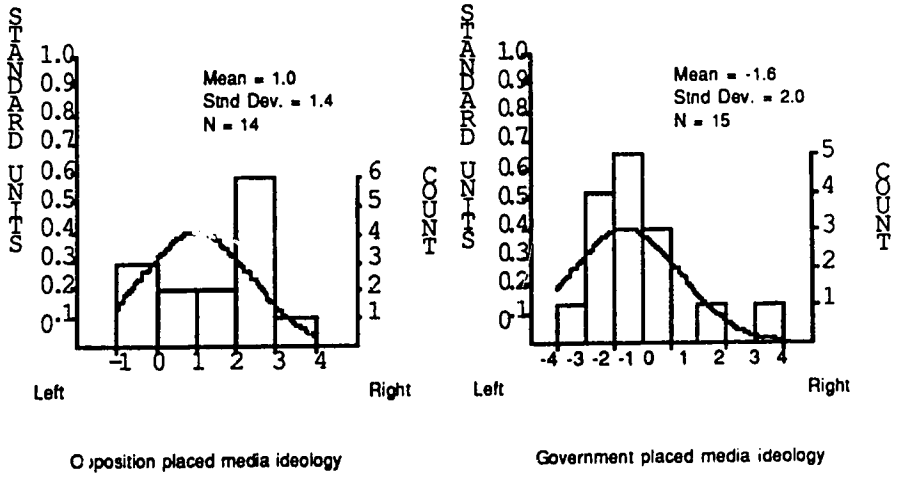
more experience in their profession than government members and fourteen years over opposition members. This suggests that politicians have had less experience in dealing with the press than the press has had dealing with politicians. This is not, however, to suggest in any way that the politicians are inexperienced in dealing with their jobs or with the press. For example, in the government sample, politicians are very experienced politically, averaging eight years in their present elective offices which translates into almost two complete terms as an elected member. It should also be remembered that all those in the government sample are cabinet ministers and represent a high skill level in their political roles. What can be suggested, at least at the level of the day-to-day operations in their professions, is that journalists have had more experience in their particular professional roles than the present-day government and opposition members. While this has important implications for the day-to-day operations at the legislature, as mentioned earlier, we cannot say that one group may have more experience in the broader field of politics than the other. It will be important to examine the day-to-day process of the legislature to ascertain if this difference in professional experience has any significant implications.

**Figure 3.3 Ideological placement of the media by politicians and political subgroups**

(a) Media ideology placed by group




(b) Media ideology placed by goverment and opposition politicians




Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test
Two Sided Probablity
Media vs. Government = 0.00
Media vs. Opposition = 0.167
Government vs. Opposition = 0.00

Both the media and politicians were asked to put themselves on an ideological scale representing a general left-right spectrum. Politicians were also asked to assess the ideological placement of the media establishment. Politicians view the press as leaning slightly left of centre, as an institution, giving them a rating of -0.34, while the press view themselves as slightly right of centre and rate themselves at 0.30. Dividing the politician sample into the government and opposition sub-groups, it can be shown that a difference exists between the perceived ideological placement these two groups have about the media establishment. Depending where the politician is on the political spectrum, she/he perceives the media to oppose them ideologically. When broken into their party subgroupings, the government has a self-perceived ideological rating of 1.5 to the "right" and the opposition a self-perceived ideological rating of -1.8. In turn, opposition groups place the media establishment at 1.0 while government places them at -1.6.

Reporters placed themselves at an ideological rating of 0.39 while news managers presented a rating of 0.2 .It is important to note that the ideological placement of none of the parties concerned is on the extreme end of the scale; they all rate themselves relatively close to the zero, or neutral mark.

Ideology is an important explanatory variable for political activities. When agenda-setting occurs in Alberta by the media, it would not likely be ideologically motivated. This is self-evident in the relative neutrality of the ideological position of the media in the determination of both the politicians and the media themselves. Government politicians do diverge quite a bit from the media's self-placement but are cancelled out by opposition group ratings. It seems the media pleases neither the government or the opposition. Assessing motivations is particularly relevant for agenda-setting. Part of the definition of ideology is to identify political right and wrong so as to furnish a guide for action. If a journalist was prone to strong ideological tendencies, it would likely be reflected in her/his reporting. And, by extension, if it is true that what is read in the nation's press becomes the priorities of the public, the journalists' ideological slant (assuming a high degree of

public consumption) has important implications for agenda-setting in the system. This slant is seen to get in the way of the ideal of objective reporting of the facts. Politicians, on the other hand, are supposed to be ideological by their very nature and the notion of an ideological slant by the media is a common complaint often aired by politicians; but at the Alberta provincial level it seems to be without significant substance, by admission of both groups.

**Summary**

In this section we have discussed certain demographic factors that have important implications for agenda-setting in the province. I have argued that the differences in age and tenure are important considerations for this study. I have also argued that ideological explanations for perceived differences in agenda-setting are weak in the Alberta context. These implications are meant

to guide us in further investigation. In the next section we examine how the media and politicians have come to understand the roles each plays in the political system with regards to duties in informing the public.

## Chapter Four: Role Expectations

How do politicians and media perceive their respective roles with regard to informing the public? In this chapter the focus is on normative behaviour that politicians and journalists are expected to follow, the rules or ideas which govern how people should or should not behave in particular situations, formal for example, press conferences, interviews, etc.) ,or otherwise.[1] The focus for discussion in this case is the manner in which the roles of politicians and journalists should be performed, independently of the individuals who embody the roles. Among the aspects of the relationship between media and political elites that will be considered is the impact on each players performance according to pre-existing standards and how the understanding of these roles may differ depending on the exchange of information, previous interaction, and each other's expectations.

To understand roles is to understand expectations. Performing a role well, whether in the political arena or not, is to behave according to expectations associated with that role. As a critic,understanding what politicians and journalists expect of one another goes a long way to enhance the understanding of media-government relations in the province. Improved knowledge of expectations will assist in establishing important parameters according to which such relations take place.

To investigate the question of roles, both politicians and journalists were asked to evaluate how they perceive the political system and their place in it. Emphasis was placed on the aspects of each group's responsibility for informing the public. What should each be doing to help the public understand politics in the province? Are role functions fluid and, if so, what are the implications of changes in the relationship for each group? Answers to these questions will provide a broad picture of how each group understands its role in informing the public on matters of provincial politics. This information is summarized in the following pages.

Both groups were also asked to explain why the message/information the public receives from the politician and the media is different. Answers to this question permitted the motivations of either group to be interpreted so as to assess the expectations they had of one another. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly for our purposes, both groups were asked whose information/message is of greatest importance. This gives us some preliminary clues about the extent of influence each may wield in the agenda-setting process in the province. The perception of who controls the information/message the public receives will have important implications for agenda-setting within the province, and the options pursued by each entity.

**Role perception**

There are four areas of examination: the media's assessment of the politicians' role, media's assessment of their own role, the politicians' assessment of the media role, and the politicians' assessment of their own role. It is important to stress at the outset that opinions on what role ought to be played, and even what role is currently played by the various groups, are far from unanimous. However, general themes make themselves evident and it is to these we turn our attention. It is also important to specify that when I speak of the government, at least in this section, I speak of the government and the opposition as a single unit (unless mentioned otherwise).

The media perspective appears to be that, while acknowledging some secrecy is necessary in order to effectively govern, the government's role in informing the public is to do two basic things. First, the government is to do as much of its business in public as possible, keeping secrecy of its activities to a minimum. Second, as much as possible, the government must be straight-forward and honest about its business . Both of these expectations are founded on the idea that people have a right to know what their elected officials are doing on their behalf and the notion that full disclosure facilitates an educated response to the government's performance.

According to the media, the role of government is to inform the public about their agenda for legislative action. The government should explain honestly its agenda, its implementation of the agenda, and efforts that apply to meeting that agenda. The media position is that government should make everything public, no matter how insignificant, unless the broader security of a person or society is likely to be compromised. A politician's prime concern should be to transmit the party's complete message on the policies and accomplishments of the government and to fully present the party's activities. It is the obligation of the government to make sure that information is fairly disseminated. The government must also be accessible to the public, making direct contact with the citizens through tours, town hall meetings and the like, in order to gather feedback. The media position is that elected officials must maintain a balance between political desires and public requirements, ensuring that they run a fair and balanced communication program. What is a fair and balanced communication program? That is unclear. None of the media stipulated their requirements in concrete terms, except for the abstract principles of openness and honesty. Current government practice is to announce an initiative, then issue a press release, followed by a media availability session.

The media, to according their perspective of their own role, are responsible, in theory, for reporting the facts regarding government initiatives by putting forth the information in a clear, concise manner that allows the public to form their own opinions on issues. This understanding suggests the media act as a messenger and confers upon them the responsibility to provide accurate information that assists in public decision-making. The press, of course, does this with good intentions as a "public service." In performing this service, the media act in the public interest. Part of this obligation is to determine whether the government is being responsible in its duties. The media examine the government's agenda in detail and put it in context. This is accomplished by providing the history behind the story, reporting "expert" commentary, and subjecting both the government's position and that of anyone else who comments on the story to critical

scrutiny. Ideal journalists should question and confirm everything they cover, ensuring that so-called newsmakers are consistent and stand up to scrutiny.

The media know their role is an important one: they are the conduit of political debate. They also know that it is their obligation to get information to the public about politics in a fair and balanced manner so it may be understood and properly assessed. This means the reporter must understand government initiatives, ask the opposition for another point of view, inform the community about the anticipated impact of the initiative, and present an intelligent, concise analysis for public consumption.

The media role is, therefore, not only to communicate factual information, but also to provide analysis and interpretation. The media argue that it is not enough to simply report the facts. How policy affects the community and society raises basic questions that go beyond the simple facts and are critical to complete coverage of any given story.

The press also believes that it has an obligation to serve an adversarial role in its relations with governments. It seeks out the angles to the issues that the politician does not want publicized. This information might damage the government in the eyes of the public, but the press feels that it is necessary because politicians outline only the beneficial aspects of their policy initiatives. The media argue that politicians fail to put what they are doing into context. For example, when a government initiative is announced, it is released in a packaged form—it sounds and looks good. The media's job is, in part, to assess whether the initiative is a resuscitated old program or something truly innovative. Can the program be justified as filling a genuine need? How much is it going to cost and what impact will it have on the community? What do other people think? What are the pros and cons?

Journalists know that it is not the media's role to simply oppose the government, or anyone else for that matter. Instead, the press must be critical of both government *and* opposition groups, sniffing out their hidden agendas. The press must give a fair hearing to the debate surrounding issues so that informed choices can be made. Most journalists would acknowledge that they are not the opposition and do give government politicians

their due in an effort to balance the story. Most journalists argue that they do not slant a story toward one viewpoint or the other.

The government's view of its proper role differs slightly from that provided by the media. The government agrees with the media view that it is responsible for the formulation and implementation of policy in a Westminster style of government. It is the obligation of the government to communicate through public statements, through legislation, explanatory notes and the like to make the public understand its activities. Politicians state that many of the government's obligations are directed toward helping the public understand how larger structures operate, primarily in less controversial areas, such as explaining governmental and departmental structure, as well as such day-to-day functions as the filling out of government forms and the like .

The opposition have a slightly different twist than the government in their interpretation of their role in the political process. In order to demonstrate their own merits in contrast to the ruling party, the opposition parties seek to promote their own agenda. Opposition groups most generally do not see eye-to-eye with the ruling party on particular policy initiatives. However, an opposition group's understanding of the government's role in the system differs little from that of the ruling party. Both the opposition parties and the ruling party agree on what a government should be doing in the abstract with regard to its role and the media. The opposition parties differ from the ruling party only to the extent that they would like all matters made public. Their reasons are obvious. Opposition groups feel that the more open a government is, the easier it would be to criticize and the easier it would be to defeat at the next election. This is rationalized by citing the people's right to know what their government is doing.

Politicians believe their role is to look at issues, deal with them in the most objective way possible and inform the media so they, in turn, can inform the public they are serving. Politicians believe the media's primary responsibility is to educate the public and all politicians agree that the media have a good deal of power to do just that. The

government and opposition want the public informed about the issues. All politicians believe in the freedom of the press as a basic principle, but they are always concerned about bias in the media. According to politicians, the media's role is to transmit information objectively. If the media have a problem with a politician's activities, they can take the politician to task on the editorial page. Politicians state that there is no room for opinion in news reporting. The government is responsible for seeing that proper information is available to the media, who are prime carriers of news. Politicians recognize that the media provide a communication conduit and are essential players in the political game. Politicians also recognize that the news reporting process is not perfect. More seasoned politicians would admit that you have to take the good days with the bad when it comes to news reporting.

Both politicians and members of the media agree that the roles they have played in the past have changed dramatically. The media argue that twenty years ago they reported all the information provided by the government. Now, its members keep a clear eye on politicians themselves. The media still inform the public in a general way, but their "watchdog" role is something new. The watchdog role, a particular aspect of investigative reporting, has led to an interpretative role in news reporting, one that is distinct from the opinion columns, where commentary and interpretation are provided for the readers in presenting explanations as to why politicians are doing what they are doing. The interpretative role played by the media stems from assessing its historical context. As a reporter tries to understand and separate the facts of a story, certain aspects of that story will be judged as relevant and other aspects irrelevant. This requires making decisions on what should or should not be covered, how it is to be covered, and what the general impression of the story should be . These matters involve more than just reporting the facts.

This assessment is supported by politicians. Politicians argue that the formerly traditional role of simply reporting events has been replaced by investigative journalism.

They complain that the investigative role is overly adversarial and challenges to a fault. Politicians have no trouble answering questions about their position on policies, but believe that the final judgment on that position should be made by the public and not by the media: news reporting should not colour public opinion, but should inform it by providing facts. Politicians argue that there was a time-lag in news reporting in the past—an event would happen and then the story would be reported on the next day or week. Today, things are different. The media's new watchdog role often puts them ahead of what events and, with today's new information technology, reporting is almost instantaneous instead of after the fact. Thus politicians argue that the new, technologically driven journalism sometimes creates news, instead of waiting for it to happ.

Mass media effects are immediate and [illegible]pe. There is a television in every home, providing images of events as they happ[illegible]i that has a tremendous impact. This has been the major change for politicians. Now, as never before, the politician has to contend with the immediacy and impact of the mass media. The role of government communication has changed because of television and the explosion of information available to the modern day media consumer. Politicians do not just communicate a decision or issue any more: they provide a whole package of images to support it. People see events as they happen and confront politicians "face-to-face" on their television screens. Under the influence of the new media watchdog role, the politician and the political process are under constant scrutiny from the media.

**A difference in information**

Why does the message/information the public is presented with by journalists and politicians differ? Both agree that the government's role is to create and implement policy and the media's role is to report on those activities. However, both groups also agree that it is not just a simple matter of governing and reporting. What occurs in a particular political event and what is said to occur in media reports all too often becomes a contentious issue between the media and politicians. An important consideration behind this

phenomenon concerns how each group understands the other's motivations. For example, understanding how a politician see's his role andthat of the media in a news conference may dictate his actions and the judgments he assesses to the activities of his journalistic counterparts.

As stated earlier, motivations are an integral part of understanding why roles are played the way they are. Motivations not only tell us what is expected to happen, but provide clues to interpreting the "baggage" of what has happened in the past. A person's motivation is not created out of thin air, but is instead part of a process of social learning. In this case, the process of learning the one another's motivation comes from the particular experiences each group has had with the news reporting process. As they participate in this process, each group comes to understand the activities of the other and the reasons for their behaviour. We have already pointed out that the investigative aspect of contemporary journalism puts out more than the facts concerning wholly political events for public consumption. Both groups recognize that this was not the typical role of journalists twenty years ago. Each also feels that the motivations of either of the parties have not changed fundamentally. As one journalist stated, "...politicians are here to explain their party's policy so that people [would want to] re-elect him." whereas a politician claimed that, " Journalists only want to cover the political crashes."

The media argue that it is not in a politician's nature to tell the whole truth. Politicians have certain objectives and are there to sell what they think is most likely to ensure personal success. First among their objectives is re-election. Politicians stress what they choose, particularly what is beneficial for their personal postion or that of their political party. Politicians rarely want to deal with bad news about themselves or their party unless forced to do so. The media argue that the main motivation of politicians is political opportunism. Governments encourage their policies to be viewed through rose-coloured glasses. Their intent is to generate as much positive coverage as possible and to limit the negative criticism. The opposition is constantly trying to embarrass the

Government and generate as much positive coverage presenting themselves as an alternative. The media see messages from politicians as no more than reflections of their vested interest in their continued political existence. The media think politicians expect them to function as the "magic bullet", transmitting their agenda to the public. But this is not the case; the media, especially in political reporting, are not a direct conduit to the public only—they also serve to put events into their proper context. Journalists feel that politicians simply do not want restrictions placed upon them by being held accountable to past decisions. Politicians are thought to want the press to look at issues in isolation, whereas members of the media feel they must look at things in the context of the past, present and future. On the other hand, the media recognize their obligation to deliver a politician's message. This obligation forces the media to report what is happening in the province. The media cannot filter politicians out of an article, because they may be the focus, but they can make known that politicians may not be entirely open about their actions.

A journalist's duty, according to the media, is to question the politician's perceived wisdom, provide some analysis, present it in an intelligent context and present an interesting story. The media are sceptical of politicians' motives and tend to look for negative aspects to any given story automatically. They rationalize this stance by claiming that they are given a candy-coated picture to begin with and, therefore, must look at the negative side in order to get at the truth. As one journalist stated, " Politicians won't tell you that they are doing a poor job, its not in their job description." Most journalists stated that sometimes the story will be very close to what a politician has said and sometimes it may be very far removed. The degree to which a news story reflects a politician's message depends on a number of factors which I will discuss in the chapter on news consumption when it can be dealt with in a more rigourous fashion.

Politicians see the press from a similarly sceptical postion. Politicians argue that the media are driven less by public interest than they are by business interests. Politicians

argue that the media only cover the crashes in politics, accentuating the negative and trivial aspects of an issue because they are more easily marketed for public consumption. This alleged practice appeals to the public's most prurient motivations and does little to better inform them on larger issues. By adopting this practice, the press presents a distorted view of what really happens. Politicians see the media as sensationalizing issues to stir up conflict, even if there is only a hint of scandal. For example, one politician asked "Is the public well served by the press if everyone knows the square footage of the Gettys' house in Stettler?" Politicians feel this kind of reporting, the manufacture of news, is done to heighten the consumers' interest and to maximize profit.

Both the ruling and opposition parties agree that it is hard to get anything of substance communicated through the media. Notwithstanding that politicians feel the press is always looking for scandal, they also understand that there are economic limitations to what issues the media can cover and how effectively they can do so. The media's resources are limited. There are only so many reporters available and there is only so much space or time that can be given to a given issue. The result is that only small "clips" of news are gathered and reported. The problem the politicians cite is that the likelihood of these clips being taken out of context is very high. Given the impact of mass communication, the potential damage done to both the politician and the public is a considerable risk. Politicians seem to feel that the reporting of political affairs in the province lacks appropriate objectivity

**Message propriety**

Whose information or message prevails in the end? Any discussion of roles played in agenda-setting must include a subjective view of who ultimately controls the content and transmission of the information/message in the final analysis. The respondents were asked who has the most control over the information/message, the politicians, who usually originate the information/message, or the media, because they interpret and transmit the message? Where do members of the public fit as consumers of the message? The answers

to these questions provide a preliminary picture of what agenda-setting in the province looks like. The is no general agreement among members of the media as to who "owns" information being commented upon.

Journalists generally take one of three positions with respect to control of the information/message. One group sees the media as in control of the message. The medium in question has the final say of what is reported and what is not. It also has the final say on how matters are reported and the prominence a given story receives. The medium chooses the facts and the final outcome depends primarily on reporters working within the medium. If interpreted in the strictest copyright terms, the information belongs to the medium. The second perspective interprets the message as public property. The public elects the politicians. The public also buys the newspapers and magazines, listens to radio, and watches television. As profit-oriented institutions, the media cannot survive without the public's patronage. Nor can politicians survive without public acceptance of their authority. Each group's final review is based on its performance as perceived by the public, and therefore the public remains the final arbiter. The third viewpoint argues that news cannot be interpreted in any strict legal or macroscopic sense. Instead, the story's content is more important than its final proprietary association. It is argued that a story's content is much more open to the influence of external factors than most readers realize. The content of any given story is determined by a combination of these different sources of influence, only one of which is the politician's original message.

The final story, therefore, does not belong strictly to any one source or agent. Any given political story is a mixture of three components: the government's message (as they are the prompter), the opposition's message, and then the reporter's message (looking closely at the priorities placed on the various elements of the story and how it is put together). The result is that one day the government's message may be the overriding component and on the next day not. It all depends on what the reporter and the editor think. As one journalist stated, "Its the facts presented by the government, cross

referenced by the facts presented by the opposition leaving the reporter to choose what to leave in [and]what to leave out, focusing on what is salient for the public." It is noteworthy that only one journalist said that, in the final analysis the information belongs to the politician.

Most politicians would agree that the message the public receives in the end is a mixed bag, containing information they supply and information added by the media. The operative word for politicians is "filter". The media picks what it thinks is newsworthy, sometimes leaving the politician wondering whether they were all at the same news conference. Generally, the most that politicians feel they can do is ask the media to be fair, knowing in advance that the media will never be completely lacking in bias. The point is that politicians feel they have to work within the prescribed media format instead of the other way around. Politicians know they may originate a message but that which aspects of that message are used for the news and in what context are matters largely out of their hands. As one politician stated, " It is pretty damm hard to get your message out in fifteen second clips, ... if they pick that clip at all." There were several politicians who agreed with the other two perspectives, but they were clearly in the minority. Politicians, in general, do not feel that they have any firm control over a story once it has been given to the press.

The first thing that strikes the observer when examining the relationship between politicians and journalists is their mutual scepticism about one another. Neither expect the other to fufill their public role well. As journalists see it, politicians cannot help but be selective. According to politicians, market restraints make it impossible for the media to be wholly objective. The result is the perception of a process that is considerably less than perfect . Both groups assume the other to be rational in pursuing its objectives and in its desire to maximize returns at every opportunity. The question remains is this always the case. Could an experienced journalist in this province recognize a sincere politician if she or he objectively existed? Could a politician find a particular story that accurately provides

*all* the facts about the issue? Given the skepticism prevalent in the system, the answer to either question would very likely be "no."

Another important element is the role changes that have occurred in the system over time. The media watchdog role, perceived to have originated in the past twenty years, has escaped the politician's control. It used to be that the press reported all of the government's apartment activities and nothing else. Reporting at this time was understood in the more literal sense of "reporting the facts." Today, the press assume their responsibility is to keep politicians in check by ensuring they are fulfilling their elected responsibilities. Politicians see the press as running rampant, selectively informing the public about political events , with little to keep them in check beyond the liability laws.

Both these points have important implications for agenda-setting between politicians and the media. The power relationship between politicians and journalists is felt by both groups to be imbalanced in the favour of the media. However, we cannot conclude that the press sets the political agenda. All politicians stated that, once they release a story to the press, they have little or no control over its content or final form. It could be the case, therefore, that politicians may act with little or no regard for what the media report. The only problem with this suggestion is that politicians do not operate in a vacuum. Once press reports are circulated, the public's reaction could force the politician to act in a manner not originally intended. The effect is not direct, but proceeds indirectly through public consumption of the information/message which then causes the politician to react. This point will be developed further in later chapters.

## Summary

In this chapter I have described the norms that politicians and journalists are expected to follow with respect to transmission of information about public affairs to the citizenry. This description allows us to understand the expectations of each participant in this process. These expectations set, I have argued, important parameters on what agenda-setting takes place, several of which are noteworthy. First, there exist mutually low

expectations about how either group will perform its role. These low expectations stem from a cynical interpretation of the motivations of the other. Second, the media's role has changed from that of strictly reporting the news to that of serving as a watchdog on behalf of the general public. Third, politicians feel they have little control over the content and form of their message once it has been transmitted to the media. To help us further understand the relationship between politicians and the media we now turn our attention to the problems each has with respect to the other in the news process.

## Notes

(1) Carol Barner-Barry and Robert Rosenwein. *Psychological Perspectives On Politics* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1985), p.20

## Chapter Five: Problems

The emphasis in this chapter is on how politicians and journalists view one another's role with regard to distributing information to the public. Both groups have definite ideas about whether or not they are helped or hindered in their respective efforts to do their jobs effectively by the other group. This chapter examines the special problems cited by politicians and journalists that have an impact on their ability to perform their respective occupations. An adequate understanding of the working relationship of the participants will help us to understand exactly how each player manipulates, or attempts to manipulate, the other. This should provide important information with which to evaluate the agenda-setting process as it relates to the players in that process.

Both politicians and journalists were asked in the survey to describe helpful or problematic behaviour with regard to their professional relationship. The question asked of politicians dealt with particular problems experienced with any of the media; journalists were asked if they had any particular problems with the government or the two opposition groups. In a separate question, both groups were asked to enumerate helpful behaviour. To examine the purported problems in the press-politician relationship is really to examine the grievances of each party. Open-ended responses were encouraged to permit a more comprehensive analysis of the relationship.

### Problems with politicians

The most often heard complaint about government politicians from journalists concerns their lack of access. All of the journalists interviewed felt there was a serious problem with the lack of access to government politicians. Journalists feel that the Premier and most cabinet ministers refuse to discuss issues of the day in a frank and open manner unless under very controlled circumstances or if they should happen to be caught unprepared by reporters in the hallway. Journalists acknowledge that the government sends out news releases and faxes but maintain that obtaining an interview with its representatives is not merely difficult but next to impossible. A common practice at the

Legislature is to sit outside a minister's office and wait for her/him to emerge to answer questions. Waiting periods of two and a half hours or more are not uncommon. Most of the time, ministers will only deal with reporters in a formal news conference or a scrum in the hallway. Journalists complain that they must always pursue their stories at their subjects'convenience, rather than the other way around, which gives the politicians the opportunity to control the encounter. Premier Getty, in particular, was described as extremely hard to contact and interview. Some journalists with experience in other provinces say that the degree of Getty's inaccessibility is unique for a premier in the country as a whole. Most ministers have set up an elaborate screening process that filters unwanted press inquiries through office or departmental staff. Journalists argue that department communication officers, the minister's executive assistant and even ministerial secretaries act as a shield, sometimes blatantly lying about the minister's whereabouts. Some journalists have called this kind of media management "nothing more than pest control." The critical problem from the journalisitic perspective, in general, is that political reporting is a lot like covering sports—you need the actors in order to survive.

Another media grievance concerns the government's use of members of the media to leak information selectively. Information is generally leaked to reporters who will give the government a favourable review, not questioning the information they receive. Though this observation must be qualified, it suggests an ideological affinity between the government and particular media outlets that is occasionally exploited to their mutual advantage. Unfortunately, from the perspective of the excluded media parties, they are kept in the dark on certain issues for reasons that relate more to political inclination than professional standards. As one journalist stated, " I hate it when they play favorites, it just smacks of biased reporting."

Finally, the most alarming problem cited involves blatant threats to pull advertising business from an outlet or the receipt of abusive letters by media staff from politicians. These can lead to serious consequences for the politician, the media outlet, and the reporter.

These are not regular or frequent occurrences, but they were nonetheless mentioned as having occurred on occasion. For example, off-the-record threats have been made by some government politicians to withhold advertising from certain outlets if their reporting on the government did not improve. As one journalist stated, " Threats have been made but nothing has materialized ... yet."

The government is noted also for putting up physical roadblocks to limit accessibility. For Question Period the legislative press gallery sit in the media balcony. When Question Period is finished, journalists have to run down the back stairs to get to the politicians for individual questioning. Politicians can easily avoid the press because of the distance the press must travel. There is a shorter route but it remains closed at present for the convenience of the politicians. In another case, the speaker's office roped off areas in the hallway where reporters were not permitted to stand. On this occasion, the ropes were set up following the Principal Group failure, which was a rather ugly episode for the government and was potentially damaging to a number of government members. These ropes were later removed, causing many journalists to observe that there was no real reason for the ropes to be there in the first place.

Accessibility is not the only issue of contention between journalists and government politicians. Politicians also exploit media deadlines to their advantage when making unpopular announcements. One journalist wagered that 75% of the announcements concerning major bank collapses in the province were made at 6:00 p.m. the Friday before a long weekend. Journalists say that announcing bad news at such times takes advantage of their deadlines since the news cannot be included in the evening's press reports. Such a strategy also takes advantage of the fact that voters are often away for the weekend and that ministers are not in their offices until the following week. By the time follow-up coverage can be pursued, the news item has become less timely or urgent. Journalists note that members of the Government can disappear with amazing success when they want to do so and that there is nothing that journalists can do about it. Another ministerial tactic is to make

major announcements away from the Legislative Assembly. This tactic keeps politicians from confronting reporters from the legislative press gallery who are more familiar with the background issues and can ask tougher questions. Premier Getty's announcement of the Stettler by-election in his bid for re-election following his personal defeat in the 1989 general election provides an excellent example. The announcement was made in Calgary and so was distanced from the reporters at the legislature in Edmonton.

The press also observe that good politicians know how the press operates and use this knowledge to their advantage. For example, politicians use certain rhetorical devices as tools to obstruct questioning or avoid answering questions. They use technical jargon about an issue that neither confirms nor denies a journalist's inquiries, deliberately create ambiguities by use of their vocabulary, employ "run-on" sentences that make quotes difficult, or avoid using any facts, speaking instead in vague generalities. All these tactics affect a journalist's ability to effectively cover the news.

The result of these government manipulations has led journalists to think that a level of paranoia exists within the government ministers that closes them off to any reasonable scrutiny. Reporters noted that for the government, everything seems to be "top secret." Part of the problem, some journalists think, is that ministers consider reporters to be biased against the government and so resent being grilled by them. Most journalists feel that ministers believe they won't be fairly treated by the media, so they place a shield over their activities to protect themselves.

Journalists descriptions of the government range from "uncooperative" to "anal retentive." They argue that the worst thing the government could do if it wanted to encourage good relations is simply to ignore the media because, while the government may hold all the high cards in the game of running the province, the media hold the high cards in the game of communicating the government's game to the citizens of the province. As one journalist stated, "Thank the stars in the end we hold the camera and not the politicians." Journalists argue that the government reacts to the media in an adversarial fashion more

than is warranted. They agree that some tension must exist but not the present level. Instead of being deliberately obstructionist, politicians could communicate with journalists on a more cordial basis and be more cooperative generally. To some journalists it is just a matter of professional courtesy for ministers to return their phone calls. On the converse, however, cordiality can also be taken too far; some reporters adopt an obsequious manner toward ministers in order to gain access or other favors. There is a great danger in political reporting that journalists can be co-opted by cultivating their relationship with politicians. Members of the media feel they must be careful not to get too close. This leaves journalists to argue that there should be "conflict" on friendly and mutually respectful terms with the reasonable expectation of an occasional "slam."

Journalists also have a problem with the accessibility to opposition politicians. Ironically, the problem with the opposition is that they are too accessible to reporters. The New Democrats, in particular, behave antithetically to the government, bending over backwards to be available. Phone the New Democrats and a journalist can usually get a reply within the hour. It is the opposition's job to see that the media gets their message because they need the media to be able to reach their electorate and promote themselves as an alternative to the government. Therefore, they are very available and very forthright with their statements (this will be discussed more fully in the next chapter).

Not only do the New Democrats react to a story immediately, it is generally felt that they have people who are better able to express the party's opinion. They know the value of providing information and have become masters at getting coverage. Where old New Democrats used to cry "Social injustice! Please someone listen," many journalists feel that today they have learned how to read and more subtly react to the media agenda. This is perhaps a reflection of their seasoned status as the Official Opposition, acquired over the past several years in this province. Some journalists feel the New Democrats' research is also far better than it was before at uncovering legitimate and newsworthy issues instead of just developing and propounding ideology.

However, there are also some serious problems encountered with the opposition. One journalist stated that phoning the opposition is like calling "dial-a-slam." In trying to attract media attention, the opposition sometimes calls too many news conferences. This tends to erode reporters' interest in attending opposition press conferences. Also, their message generally carries an obvious anti-government bias. According to the media, the opposition's message consists of saying "it is bad because—." The opposition reacts to circumstances with such predictability that journalists feel they often know in advance precisely what to expect. Morover, their representatives have adopted a stereotyped responses: the Opposition Leader Ray Martin is always "shocked and appalled at the government" and Laurence Decore of the Liberals is always "outraged at fiscal irresponsibility." As one journalist stated, "...you already know what is going to come out of their mouth when they first open it."

Having only recently been elected to the legislature, the Liberal members do not have the same experience in media relations as the New Democrats. Journalists see the Liberals as always being behind on important issues, taking too much time to respond to a contentious issue, and generally not being on top of things. Journalists note that the Liberals wait up to two days after an event or story is broken to schedule a news conference about it. By then, the story is often no longer timely. When the Liberals do call a news conference most journalists report that they focus their comments on issues that no one cares about. In this respect, the Liberal news conferences share the same characteristic as the New Democrat news conferences: they are called too often about nothing. Members of the Liberal caucus are also noted for refusing interviews and not returning phone calls.

It is important to emphasize that not all politicians can be painted with the same brush. Some cabinet ministers are extremely helpful to reporters: they return phone calls, provide background information and make themselves available for comment. The media are willing to consider something as simple as stopping in the hallway and giving a comment a demonstration of helpfulness. Some oppostion members to endeavour to

facilitate the process. Good politicians alert reporters to upcoming issues and give them helpful background information. One journalist stated that, when he was Minister of Energy in the Lougheed cabinet, Premier Getty was very good at assisting journalists, in direct contrast to his behaviour today.

Several journalists noted that an unanticipated source of information is government backbenchers because they enjoy talking to the media and sometimes leak information about happenings in Cabinet and the like. Leaks from departmental sources, which actually do come in the famous unmarked brown envelope, also provide useful information about government activities—but this is not the general rule.

Journalists note that opposition groups will often do basic research for a journalists if asked or ask specific questions in Question Period on behalf of the journalists knowing that they will get coverage. The New Democrats, in particular, also have come up with investigative commissions generate news due to the quality and depth of their research.

**Problems with the media**

Just as the media is concerned about what they cover, the politicians are concerned about how they are covered. Television, for example, tends to emphasize intangible elements, often at the expense of straight information. People have a tougher time remembering what someone has said on television than in the print media and the effect is that politicians leave an impression rather than a substantive position behind in the viewer's mind. Politicians are also less able to ensure the correct communication of what they are saying on television because there is not an opportunity for response and its effect is more immediate, and visceral, than the press.

The real challenge presented by television to politicians is to convey their message in a dramatic fashion while also providing an interesting visual element. Television, politicians say, communicates style more than content. Therefore, a politician must have a good visual and emotional delivery to get a clip. This fact, politicians argue, detracts from the overall message. All too often politicians are caught by the media while running from

one place to another and are not prepared to make a statement, making a poor impression on the viewer. As one politician stated, " You never get the full story from television, it's not in the mediums ability to give the full story ...it can only give pictures." Another problem is that television, by its nature, demands short concise answers. Politicians feel that issues require a more complicated response than a fifteen second news clip will allow. Politicians are forced to make short, pithy statements—politics by epigram— because television reporters want the whole story condensed. Television reduces an issue or position to a short sound byte and many politicians stated that translating their business into this kind of package is not as easy as it sounds.

The fifteen second clip has led to some scathing commentary from both government and opposition politicians. Politicians know that they may spend many minutes with a television reporter and that the reporter can use any part of that conversation for their newscast. Comments that are taken for the news cast are often presented out of context. All answers to a question have to be condensed to fit television's confined format. This is not necessarily what is in the best interests of the story or the politician. Politicians are never sure how their comments will be used in a story, whose comments will be broadcast next to theirs, where the story will appear in the newscast or if their comments will be reported at all. Politicians claim the "clip" makes it impossible to communicate anything of substance over television because its coverage is superficial and cannot possibly treat the whole story adequately. Instead, the clip chosen by television broadcasters is often chosen because it is the most sensational or controversial and will attract viewers.

Radio, like television, also uses clips of electronic information for their newscasts but, unlike its counterpart, it is met with a far more favorable review. Politicians agreed that radio, like television, is short and tends to emphasize the spectacular because of its format. Commercial radio newscasts, especially, are down to one or two minutes and possess little depth in their analysis of events. Radio, also like television, can take a clip out of context because radio coverage is pretty brief and fast moving. But, unlike

television, many politicians feel that radio is the most objective medium on the hard news. On any given story, radio is genrally believed to be the medium that performs best, when given the facts, in treating a story fairly. Radio is also the most immediate medium—they tape a story and it is broadcast in the next hour. Radio talk shows are especially well-liked by politicians because they allow a mechanism for debate. Radio talk shows also permit the politician to get her/his point across without editorial comment.

In general, radio clips are not manipulated as much as television clips, giving the politician a better opportunity to present the intended message . Another advantage of radio news for the politician is that it is broadcast every hour. Because of the highly responsive nature of their medium, radio reporters are keener to get their stories and to get them right. The angle on a given story also changes every hour, so radio reporters must stay current. This element led to the only complaint registered by politicians about radio: the "shelf life" of a story is very short and carries little or no effect into the next day.

Radio, although the preferred medium, is also the least used because it is less effective in many ways. Many politicians feel that the electorate do not receive any political messages from the radio anymore because of the pervasiveness of television. As one politician stated, " ... radio is dead next to television in terms of political impact." On the other hand, a great number of politicians felt they did not do enough radio and should endeavor to do more in the future.

Print media, unlike its electronic counterparts, can treat news with greater depth. Newspapers are not confined in their treatment of a story by time but by the physical space available on the page. The print media also have larger research staffs and better resources and are more likely to break original news stories. These facts lead many opposition politicians to separate print from its electronic counterparts, suggesting that the detail of its coverage and its investigative initiatives are generally good. Cabinet ministers generally do not agree with this assessment.

Complaints about the print media resemble those about its electronic counterparts in that it is accused of taking quotes out of context. The print media, however, have unique problems of their own. A common caveat of politicians is that the editor who writes the headline, which is often as eye-catching and sexy as possible, often selects something that has little or nothing to do with the story. The headline is meant to grab the reader's attention and so usually emphasizes the adversarial and sensational aspects of the issue, creating the wrong impression. Another problem, mentioned in passing in the last chapter, is that print media edit stories, causing further contextual problems. Both opposition and government politicians note that you are not always assured of coverage with the print media. A politician can spend hours briefing a reporter or editorial board on an issues and receive only a few lines of ink. Politicians argue that for the amount of time invested in the print media there is often little political benefit. Opposition groups especially tend to feel this way. As one politician stated, "You can spend several hours with a journalist and give him all the detail he wants and all you get for it is a couple of lines on the back pages."

A unique problem that was discovered by this study was the case of rural print media bias. Opposition politicians cited several incidents where smaller community newspapers slanted a story or refused to cover events contrary to the political point of view of the outlet. These cases range from editorial boards refusing to print a letter to the editor, to refusing coverage because the opposition group did not advertise in the outlet. Opposition groups feel it is difficult to reach rural voters because the rural media establishment has a conservative bias. Another pressure on rural papers is financial; their audience, which in rural Alberta is predominantly conservative, can refuse to read a paper that does not reflect their political preference. It was also mentioned that some rural papers are good to opposition groups: they are so happy to have anybody speak to them that they print the politician's statements verbatim. Opposition politicians noted that these "problems" do not exist in the larger cities.

Politicians argue, as has been cited in the "Roles" chapter, that the media have changed the method of reporting their activities. The media now expects their leaders to be articulate, good looking, and well dressed; in short, to possess "star qualities". However, some politicians are of the opinion that matters have come full circle and that there is now such a thing as being too smooth. The media have precipitated a leadership debate or conflict-oriented emphasis to news reporting, with little or no consideration of the common everyday aspects of politics. Any particular political news story is described by politicians as "fact wrapped up in a couple bits of controversy." But, it is in the day-to-day business of government that politicians argue the real work is going on. A good example of the media's predisposition concerns their coverage of Question Period. Politicians point out that at 2:30 p.m. the media balcony is full, but when question period is over a at 3:30 p.m. the gallery is empty. Politicians state that Question Period is not a true reflection of what happens at the Legislature, that a lot of excellent debate happens outside this time slot which is never covered. On this issue, politicians say that covering conflict is easy and that its only purpose is to sell whatever the particular media outlet is peddling. As one politician stated, "Covering crashes is easy, you have all the surface facts you need to make a good story which all editors approve of because it sells papers."

The press conference is cited as another good example of the media's hunger for conflict. A politician makes an announcement and opens the floor to questions. Reporters ask the first one or two questions on the topic of the conference out of politeness to the politician, such as "how much is this initiative going to cost?" Once they have dispensed with a polite line of questioning, the following questions asked happen to reflect whatever is on the reporters' minds. Many questions asked at news conferences have nothing to do with the subject matter of the conference. Politicians argue that they never know the ground rules going in. .

This illustrates a rather acute problem that politicians have with journalists. Many politicians stated they strongly resent a reporter coming into the office with the story

already written. The journalist has a story in mind, has already interviewed the opposition, and then they come to the politician concerned for the sake of "including" their comment. The problem is that the pitch of the story has already been set in advance. This pitch causes the media to prompt politicians into biased answers by asking loaded questions. Several politician argue that reporters get their marching orders from their editors and are instructed to ask questions the outlet is interested in not reporting what the government is doing. At this point, politicians argue, the press has moved to the front, creating news and not reporting it. As one politicians noted, " I have walked into news conferences knowing that they were going to ask me questions that had nothing to do with what I had wanted to talk about. Instead they asked me about the latest scandal trying to make me the spokesperson for it. If that's not trying to make the news at my expense then I don't know what is." This pressure from the media does not have to be overt. A camera or tape recorder left running, or a phrase left dangling can leave the politician grasping to know to what else the reporter wants a response. The temptation is to say anything because the opportunity to address the media is rarely presented, especially for opposition politicians who need the media attention.

In general, politicians argue that journalists disregard the older idea of off-the-record comments; thus they must be wary at all times of what they say. Some reporters still offer off-the-record sessions but most politicians say they cannot trust reporters. When the press does get the facts wrong, a politician should be able to demand a retraction. In the case of the print media, at least, politicians argue that the printed retraction usually does not receive the same prominence as the original story when it was first printed. In fact, politicians argue that retractions are hardly noticed by the electorate and that the damage has already been done.

Politicians feel that the press must be held responsible for the accuracy of what they report. It seems today, especially, that anything that happens in the private or public life of a politician is news, no matter what the consequences. Journalists argue that if an event,

public or otherwise, negatively affects a politician's ability to govern, it should be important news. Politicians want to know who decided this and what gives the press the right to intrude into the private lives of public officials? What limitations are imposed on press reports besides the rather broad libel laws and the conduct of the individual outlet?

This debate strongly affects the process of agenda-setting. A summary of the actual complaints of the two groups suggests the media's problems are primarily due to the difficulty of access to the newsmakers, while politicians' problems lie with news content. In the final analysis, the politicians' problem is far more serious than the media's. The media will write the story whether or not they get access to the politician. If the politician does not like the content of a given news story, there is little that can be done about it unless there are grounds for legal action. A description of this relationship demonstrates that the press, though influenced by the quality and quantity of the information they receive, possesses the final say as to what information is transmitted to the public. The politician has no control. It is admitted that a journalist, because of deadlines, may not be able to verify a politician's facts or figures as closely as might be preferred. The point is that if they are unsure about those facts or figures, they should question their validity and perhaps not use them at all.

There are several broad implications of the fact that the media are the final arbiters of the political message. First, the media are more likely to influence the public agenda than the politician. The media filter what they want from a politician's message. The actual clip selected, the method of its presentation, the opposition's response and the placement of a report within a broadcast or edition of the newspaper are all outside the politician's scope of influence. Second, the press has moved in front of the news, creating it instead of waiting for it to happen. This has caused some rather acute problems for politicians asked to deal with matters they did not originally intend to deal with and represents an important aspect of the media's influence. Creating a story where none existed previously means that the politician has no control over the initiative to gather the

information or its subsequent review by editorial boards. The politician's agenda is changed by the fact they have to deal with issues beyond their initial intentions. Third, politicians have lost control of the day-to-day information distribution process. Opposition groups know they depend heavily on the media to get their message out and operate more closely to the media's schedule than does the government. It has been argued that a great deal of the political activity that an opposition group performs at the legislature is to generate press coverage. This coverage is necessary to keep the party in the forefront of the voters' minds and to demonstrate they are a good choice to form the next government. The government, as much as it is struggling to control the information flow by restricting access, also cannot help but be restricted by the news reporting process. That restriction may be having their news conferences wrestled from their control or a having to deal with a headline that obscures and sensationalizes the issue at hand. The fact remains that the press will continue to operate whether or not it has the full story. It will continue to report on the government's activities regardless of whether there was a press conference or not. The politician who wishes to communicate a political agenda must be satisfied that their message will be part of the news while completely unsure of how that message will be presented.

Perhaps the most interesting finding is the importance of structure in agenda-setting. Part of the purpose of this study is to examine the informal and formal rules that govern the relationship between politicians and journalists to measure the relative power each has in the creation of the news and, by extension, the impact they may have on the public agenda. The power that one player has over the other has been measured almost exclusively by structural factors. All the criticisms of government politicians can be reduced to the government's attempt at information control. These attempts have been strictly structural and informal. That is, government politicians who know how the press operates use the news-gathering process to their advantage. These acts of manipulation are

indirect because the government has not opted for any permanent, formal legislation to alter media behavior.

The problem faced by politicians is not so much a lack of coverage as it is that the form that coverage may take is beyond their control. The media tend to emphasize the controversial and sensational aspects of a story. Even the individual journalist, however, has little choice in the final presentation of a story. For example, media reports must be capsulized. This is done to keep the consumer's attention which is, according to the media, short and finite. This restriction means that reporters keep the message simple and direct, leaving themselves open to the politicians' to accusation that the press disregards the substance of the issues it covers. The restrictions of the market economy force the media to report provincial political affairs in the particular manner they do.

If the media move outside of the restrictions imposed by the market system, they argue, the consumer can either adapt or, more likely, stop using the outlet. The media suggest that the consumer, who has many information sources available -one of the indirect results of a market-based economy, would rather opt for a change of media outlet than face the difficult adaptation of consuming longer, more complex information. The consumer wants to be informed in the least painful manner and the media must comply. To do otherwise is to court bankruptcy. These market restrictions are more important than any ideological "contamination." Even public entities like the CBC, that should be somewhat immune to the vicissitudes of the consumer market, suffer market pressure. All private media outlets strive for rating points in order to attract advertising dollars. A CBC editor interviewed stated that they strive for rating points fundementally in order to justify the tax dollars spent for the station's continued operation.

**Summary**

In this section I have argued that agenda-setting effects do exists in the day-to-day workings between the press and politicians. I understand this to be the case from the participants' own descriptions. The greatest influence behind the agenda-setting function

lies mostly with the press because it determines the final form of the message presented to the public. Politicians determine the subject matter for discussion in any given political report, but it is the press that determines how that subject matter is presented and what the final message on that subject matter will be. Also, at certain times the press moves in front of what is the news and creates stories without the involvement of the politicians themselves. The structure of this relationship is strongly determined by market pressures which have overriding implications on the agenda-setting process. Next, to understand the dynamics of this qualitative discussion, it is necessary to examine how politicians use the news and how that same news is produced.

## Chapter Six: News consumption and evaluation

In the last chapter we discussed what problems politicians and the media have with regards to the gathering and generation of news. This only covers one aspect of the relationship between politicians and the media. We also need to examine the consumption of the media coverage of political matters by politicians themselves and the effect that has on the agenda-setting process. This is an important link in the chain that measures the press and its effects. This next chapter consists of two parts: the first discusses the daily media consumption of government and opposition politicians; the second details the extent of editorial change a given story undergoes before it is published and the implications of the media operating in a market economy. In the second section I will also examine corporate influences in the news covering process as expressed by the journalists who experience them as well as the level of objectivity in news coverage as interpreted by politicians. These [illegible] of the process should, taken together, allow us to make general conclu[illegible] the nature of the process within which agenda-setting is takes place.

The first subject examined in this chapter is the consumption of news by politicians. Examining the media a politician relies on and the extent of that reliance will help us understand the relationship between the media and the political elite. This will be measured in the frequencies of media sources consumed by a politician. (Unfortunately, it is outside of the scope of this study to examine quantitatively the media's consumption of information put forth by politicians, which is the other side of the relationship.)

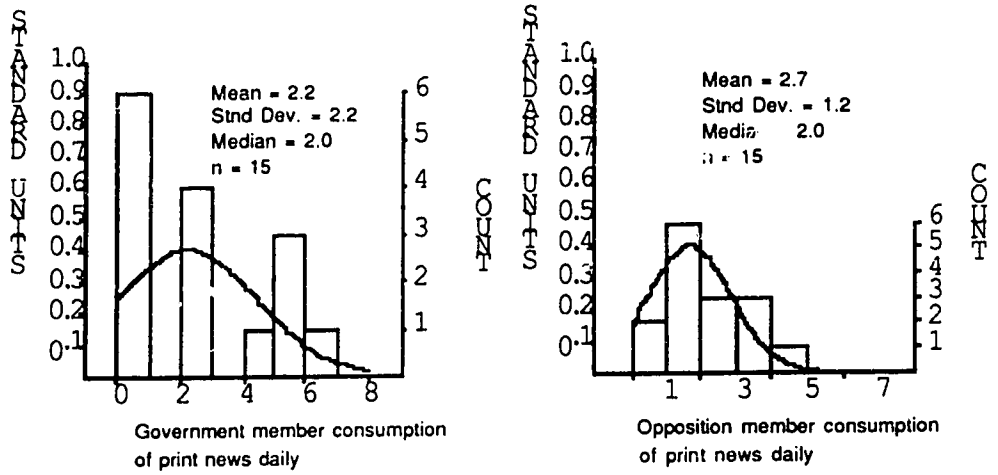
The second subject examined is the extent of editorial change a story is subject to before it is broadcast or printed. This will help us to understand whose message politicians are consuming and the nature of the message's construction. Editorial changes are an important influence on a story's final form and, as a result, its final agenda-setting effect. Journalists were asked to indicate on a Likert-type scale, ranging from one to five with one representing "insignificant" and five representing "significant", the effect of editorial changes on a story's overall message once submitted to the editor.

The third subject in this chapter also used a Likert-type scale to test just how much influence journalists feel they are subject to from corporate headquarters and to what degree business ideology interferes with their daily activity. All journalists were asked to rate five position statements on a scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." These statements all focus on certain aspects of the news gathering process that are said to interfere with objective news reporting. Responses were assigned scores ranging from negative two for "strongly disagree" to positive two for "strongly agree" to yield an index score for each statement. This index score would have a possible maximum score on each statement of plus or minus thirty due to the sample size.

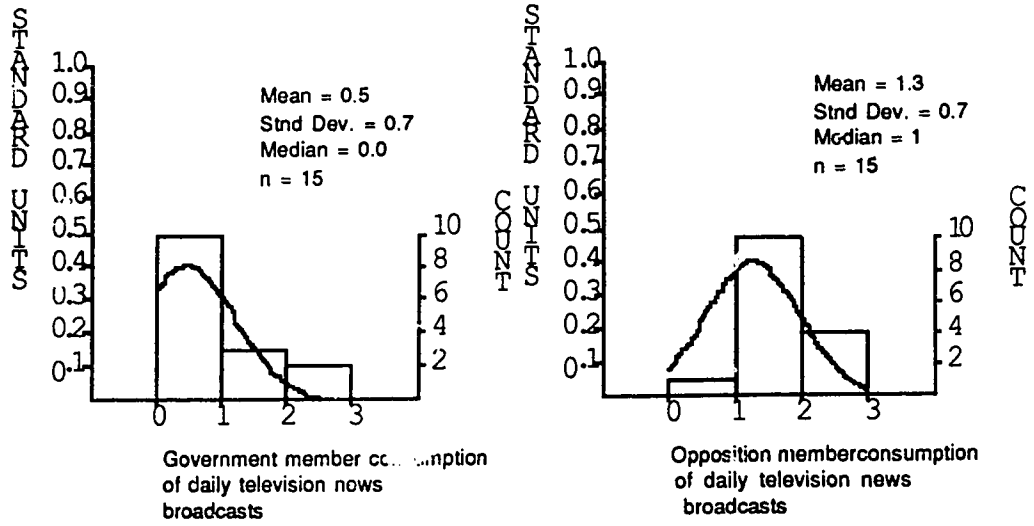
The fourth subject measured in this chapter was the degree to which politicians felt the quality of news reporting on provincial affairs provided by twenty-six different media outlets was appropriate. Measuring the relative objectivity of news outlets in the province, as it is perceived subjectively, allows us to understand how politicians interpret the severity of media bias. The outlets rated were randomly selected and totalled eight television stations, eight print outlets and ten radio stations throughout the province. Politicians were asked to rate each outlet's relative objectivity in provincial political news reporting on a five-point scale ranging from "very biased" to "very objective." If the politician was unfamiliar with the outlet or did not feel confident about giving a rating, the option to leave the item blank was presented. Again, these scales were presented to the respondent in written form as part of a paper and pencil task used to improve the efficiency of the data collection. A weighted average was determined for each media out

**Table 6.0 Daily media consumption by politicians***

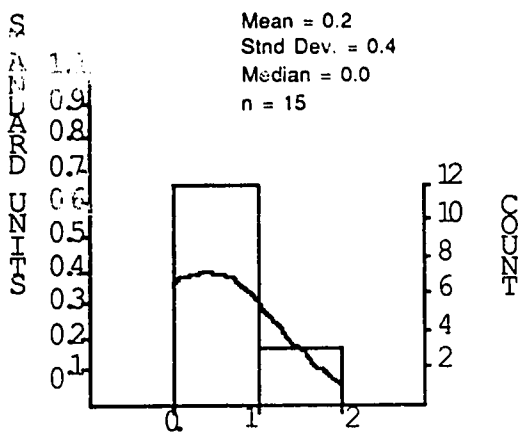
(a) Print news source consumption, by political group



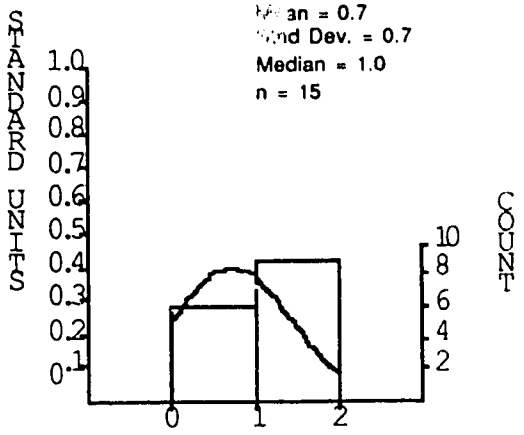

(b) Television news broadcast consumption, by political group



(c) Radio news broadcast consumption, by political group

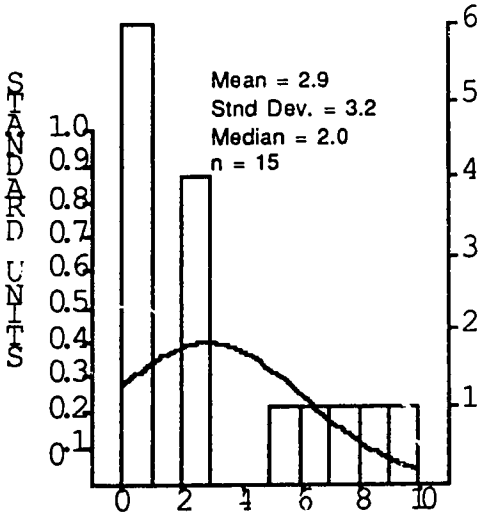



Government member daily radio news broadcast consumption

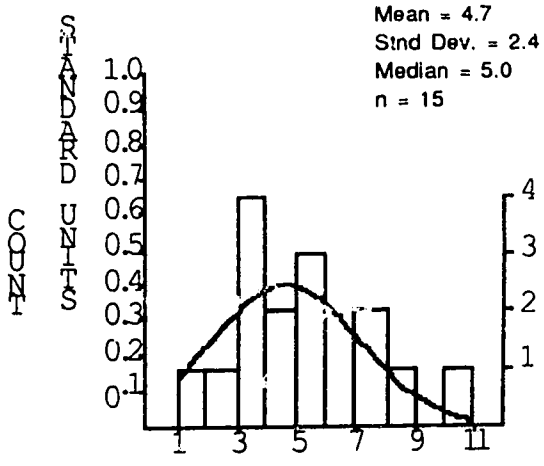



Opposition member daily radio news broadcast consumption

(d) Total new source consumption, by political group




Total media sources consumed by individual government members




Total media sources consumed by individual opposition members

*Please Note : Media consumption is based on the daily outlets attended to personally; this does not count for a clipping service in house or otherwise.

## Politicians and news consumption

Politicians were asked how they monitored the news on a regular basis. Media consumption was assessed with reference to the politician's "personal daily review" of news outlets. Personal daily review of independent news media was measured in order to avoid the interparty discrepancy of resources for such activities. Every politician at the Legislature has access to some sort of review of the province's media, be it a departmental paper clipping service or an in-house review by caucus research staff. The count measured in this section does not include any special interest group newsletters received, such as the Alberta Doctors' Association Newsletter.

On average, politicians read two papers daily, watch one television newscast and listen to less than one full radio broadcast. The print media is the most attended to medium. Urban MLAs usually read the two dailies from the city they represent. MLAs from rural constituencies generally read the two dailies from whichever of the two cities is geographically closer to their riding. All opposition members read at least one paper and several claim to read four or five daily. Something less than half of the government sample, six of fifteen politicians interviewed, do not read the newspapers at all. Almost all opposition members watch at least one television newscast (fourteen of fifteen of those opposition politicians interviewed) and some of them watch up to three programs a day. Ten out fifteen cabinet ministers said they watch no television newscasts. Radio is the least attended to medium: only nine of the fifteen opposition politicians and three of the fifteen government politicians report listening to one or more radio broadcasts daily.

Opposition members pay more attention to the media than government ministers if their testimony, measured by total consumption, is reliable. An interesting finding is that a third of the cabinet ministers interviewed said they paid no attention to media reports at all and, as a group, ministers only paid attention to two of three media sources. The reasons they cite are twofold. Firstly, cabinet ministers say that the pressures of their office do not

allow them spare time to watch television or listen to radio news, which are broadcast at fixed hours. Newspapers are much more convenient because they can be read when time allows. Secondly, several government politicians stated they have outrightly refused to pay attention to media reports because of the alleged bias against the government continued in them. Opposition members watch, listen, and read the media reports at a rate more than twice that of their government counterparts, monitoring almost five sources.

Nonetheless, each group, government and opposition, relies heavily on the media to transfer important bits of information about their activities to the public and to keep themselves informed about other political activities at home and abroad. Opposition members, like government members, want be informed as to what issues are currently salient at the provincial level, as well as to be informed about the political activity of other players in the system. This, however, is where the similarities end. While both groups are struggling to publicize their agenda through the media, one wants to remain in power and the other wants to succeed to the government. Each is trying to win public support to meet their objectives and the main conduit to acquire public support is, by default, the media. No other mechanism, party or otherwise, can more effectively and efficiently communicate to the public about political affairs in the province than the media establishment. Politicians know that, in a democracy, a politically unrestrained press will exist whether they like it or not.

Opposition politicians are concerned about media reports on their performance for different reasons than the government. For the opposition, the official critics of the government in a parliamentary democracy, the media take on a particular importance in their day-to-day operations. An excellent example of the opposition-media relationship is provided in Question Period at the provincial legislature.

> For the New Democratic Official Opposition each morning during session, preparation for Oral Question Period starts as the caucus researchers roll out of their beds and listen to the first newscast of the day. The caucus cannot afford a clipping service, so it is up to each MLA and researcher to be aware of the media response to previous questions, and keep an eye out for new

> issues. The research director and the four researchers have glanced at the *Edmonton Journal* and *Sun* newspapers before they sit down to the daily research meeting at 8:30 a.m. to prepare a tentative Question Period line-up which the research director suggests to caucus executive later in the morning.[1]

As critics, opposition members read, watch, or listen to the media not only out of general interest, but also to look for comments by a cabinet minister or incidents in the province that fall within the scope of their policy areas. The MLA and caucus researchers for the opposition assess ministerial and media responses in the previous day's news reports, especially in regard to the questions they have raised that day in order to judge if they merit further attention.

Question Period is, in theory, meant to air criticisms of government policy on matters of the day for constructive debate. In reality, the objective of Question Period is for the opposition parties to make the government look as bad as possible by providing strong and sometimes sensational criticisms of its performance. These sensational attacks on government policy are usually designed to generate news coverage in order to convey to the public that the opposition would provide better government. For the opposition, the media serve several important functions. First they serve as a source of information on which to base their attacks in Question Period. Second, the media act as a means of conveying the impressions the opposition parties wish to generate for public consumption. Thrid, the media act as a barometer that guages opposition performance in Question Period by providing coverage of that performance. All three provide incentives for close monitoring c

> ...main thing that any political party has to do, and particularly an opposition party, is to get the message out to the folks, to tell people what it is that party stands for, what kind of different version of government that party represents. ... Question Period offers (the opposition) an opportunity to get into news stories in a big way either initiating stories, or by putting our "spin" on stories the media are going to cover anyway.[2]

Most opposition members feel that any coverage is good coverage and Question Period is a prime forum to get it. Any media exposure for the opposition can be considered favourable, unless the report is very wrong or makes them look very bad. Good coverage for the opposition consists of getting the media to accurately depict the message they are attempting to put forward . The opposition is especially concerned about how stories generated at the Legislature are presented in the media, noting the "angle" or "spin" the media have made an element of their coverage (angle or spin refers to the overall message of the story). Bad coverage is not getting any attention at all or having a story credited to some other group. If television or radio coverage were to be assessed for favourability by the opposition, the criteria would be duration of the segment and position in the newscast to determine success. For print media, the important aspect is placement within the paper and the size of the story.

In essence, media coverage is the barometer of success for the opposition. One opposition MLA said that a question often asked by his colleagues about comments his party made about the government is, "Were there cameras there?" In fact, the opposition, facing limited resources, relies heavily on the media to provide access to the public. Not having the high profile available to government members, the opposition need somehow to communicate to the electorate that they are doing their jobs and that their policies provide a good alternative to the status quo.

Because of this dependency, relaltions with the media in the day-to day operations of the opposition are conducted more often than not according to rules established by the media.

This reliance on the media means opposition activities in Question Period are constructed to be media events. In other words, this interaction provides a prime example of the media-political elite relationship and agenda setting. There exists a basic information response function between opposition and the media in day-to-day politics. The press provides the information in a report and the opposition responds to that report. The example of Question Period shows that the opposition use media reports to priorize their

short-term strategies in the Legislative Assembly. What is currently "hot" in the news is the topic for their attacks on the government the next day, whether the issue was originally presented by the opposition or it is one to which they simply react because it was presented in the press. This strategy assists them in forming the "shadow" government. Media priorities directly affect opposition priorities, both inside and outside of the Assembly.

According to the government politicians interviewed, the media focus on issues that are negative for the government. When a report catches their attention, such aspects as its fairness, accuracy and critical balance are of paramount importance to them. If a press report quotes an apparently outrageous statement from a particular source, corroboration of the claim is needed to ensure it is factually based. For them, the final measure of a story is its particular bias.

The government does not have to worry about getting enough coverage. Unlike the opposition, the government controls the distribution of information about its affairs and determines when to release information and what is suitable to be released. This is not a strict rule, however, as leaks and other mishaps happen on a regular basis that throw the government into a damage control spin. Also, unlike the opposition, the government has the considerable public resources of the provincial civil service and the high profile afforded the government to help them communicate their message to the public through non-media sources such as advertisements, information pamphlets and the like. The government's main concern with regard to the media is how it is covered. A government politician, commenting on his own press conferences, said, "on the areas that I know about, I look to see if the media is carrying the same story I gave them, to see if we were both there." A problem does exist between some cabinet ministers and the media because some of those particular ministers do not pay attention to any of the news presented by the media. Instead, these cabinet ministers rely on other sources of information, such as their Department or their constituents.

All politicians feed from the same media pool of information. Politicians also contribute to this information pool through their activities as politicians and then read about themselves the next day. They all depend heavily on the media to gather information for them from outside their immediate sphere of influence and to get their own message distributed to the public. As I have stated, the media do not always work to the advantage of the politician and often are perceived to work against them. To corroborate this claim, the reader is referred back to the demographic section where it was reported that politicians generally feel the media oppose them ideologically, no matter where either party is placed on the political spectrum. This pool of information, of course, is far from complete because the media do not report on all the activities of government. However, because of their reliance on the media for information concerning policy, public response and political confrontation, political elites remain open to its agenda-setting influence. Opposition parties are more likely to suffer this effect because they have fewer resources to draw upon than the government.

## Evaluation

What politicians and the public consume as news is not the reporter's sole responsibility. The process of news reporting is not so simple as the story's arrival at the medium and its immediate transmission directly to the consuming public. Instead, it is subjected to a screening process that can alter its overall message from the author's original intentions. Editing is an important aspect of the news process and represents a critical component in the production of news. The process of reporting and editing provides important clues to the nature of the media beast. Editorial changes to a news story illustrate where the authority lies in the media establishment and how that establishment can influence a story. If the final news product has important agenda-setting effects upon the public and politicians, then it follows that to understand these effects, it is necessary to understand how the product is packaged.

The likelihood that changes, however small, are made by an editor is dependent on the medium and the experience of the reporter. For example, radio reporters felt that there is a very good chance that what is broadcast accurately reflects the reporter's own opinion. Editing in radio will quite frequently change a story but the reporter still seems to have considerable control over its content. Most changes are grammatical. The most common editing involves changes in wording that may be awkward or clumsy and changes to remove factual errors. The length of a report is the critical consideration in radio, so the reporter must keep all reports to thirty seconds or less while still communicating essential information. The idea is to keep the report short and simple, so it sticks in the listener's mind yet conserves time for other programming. If the editor needs a report cut down in time, the wording of particular sentences in the story may be questioned to assess their importance for the story. The most common change is to add emphasis in a story, to introduce a change in the wording to give the story more force or to update a previous story as new information presents itself. There is considerable pressure on radio reporters to update their stories every hour and they are driven to find a fresh angle each time. Radio reporters also have less time than the other two media reporters to prepare their reports or provide significant background information. This makes covering complex issues extremely difficult.

Television reporting, despite being electronic, is unlike radio reporting. For technical reasons, radio reporting is a one person operation; television, on the other hand, is very much a team effort involving a whole crew of technical support personnel. Television producers, like radio producers, want the story to be understood, so they may clean up a script. Although changes reported by television reporters are rare, all stories are subject to a double-check system to vet a script for factual errors. A typical change may involve correcting a reporter with an incorrect figure or having the reporter who writes the lead change it for the anchor. The story's "write-up" may need to be clarified or

shortened. More often than not, editing is for legal or length reasons and changes to a story are to make it a more effective piece of television.

The print media finds itself in an enviable position in comparison to the other two media. Print jounalists can go much further in detail and depth in their reporting, since a magazine or newspaper can devote space to stories which permits greater analysis. The reporter writes the most important, newsworthy aspects of a story in the first paragraph, using various "reader-grabbing" tricks to focus attention on the "lead"— usually the first twenty-six words. If the reporter files a story that, in the opinion of the editor, lacks a "catchy lead," the editor will substitute one for the original lead. A common problem in the newspaper business occurs when a headline writer takes a step or two beyond the story and sensationilizes or wrongly protrays the story's message by using a headline that creates an incorrect impression. Editorial changes to a story also depend on where the story is placed. If it is to be placed on the front page, the story may be edited to give it more reader appeal. The more prominent the news story, the more likely it is to be edited. In most instances, a story may not be changed in factual content at all, but it is quite likely that some words will be cut or sentences will be restructured to clarify a point.

Another limitation imposed on the print media is physical space. As there is only so much space per page, it is a function of editing to make a story fit the allotted space . Therefore, stories must be weighed for importance and edited accordingly. Minor changes to achieve a reduction in length are common: for example, the news desk may combine two or three stories into one, cutting out words to produce a single message.

**Figure 6.1 Extent of Editorial Changes to a news story overall message, by medium**

(a) Frequencies

| | Print | TV | Radio | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1- Insignificant | 4 | 4 | 5 | 13 |
| 2 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 12 |
| 3 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 5 - Significant | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| TOTAL | 10 | 10 | 10 | 30 |

(b) Summary statistics for extent of editorial changes to a news story, by medium

| | Papers | Television | Radio | Total mediums averaged |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Editorial Changes | | | | |
| Mean. | 1.6 | 2.0 | 1.8 | 1.8 |
| Stnd dev. | 0.5 | 1.0 | 0.9 | 0.8 |
| Median | 2.0 | 2.0 | 1.5 | 2.0 |

Journalists and editors were asked to rate the magnitude of the typical alterations that are imposed upon a story after it is delivered to the editor's desk. A Likert scale was used with a range between one and five where one represents "insignificant" changes and five represents "significant" changes. All three mediums were in strong agreement as they reported that most editorial changes to a story ranged from insignificant to somewhat insignificant; twenty-five out of thirty of the all the values given by journalists ranged between one and two on the scale.

Most changes suggested by editors were small ones. The priority given was to checking a story for context, balance, accuracy, fairness and importance. A key role of editing is to protect the publication against legal actions for libel. Editing also gives a story more "spin" to make it more appealing to the consumer. Editors to do not edit simply to verify facts but also to make sure all those facts are presented in their proper context and to ensure that they will be interpreted correctly.

Does a structural editing, or changing the length of a story, substantially affect its message? Even though the media claim that few significant changes to a story's overall

message occur due to editing, most politicians would not accept that assessment. Members of the media argue that structural changes in a story are done to conserve space and maintain the attention of the consumer. Politicians argue there is strong danger that even when the facts are accurately reported, the context still can be lost. For example, newspapers will typically use only the first dozen paragraphs of a story coming from a wire service, leaving out some detail to the story. This could present a false picture if the story is not presented in its entirety. What is presented in a newspaper as a politician's "quote" is often actually the product of the editorial process and could give the wrong interpretation about what was actually said. Similarly, a story can be twisted by a peculiar headline or a deleted or shortened paragraph, even though the original information was not changed at all.

All journalists would agree that once a story is completed it should present all the important aspects of the issue. A story should be balanced in its perspective, attempting to present equally all sides of the argument. A common problem is that a story may not have enough balance: for example, there may be too much opposition information and no response obtained from the minister or the government. What should be done? The reason stories lack balance is often the absence of comment from the government politician concerned. The phrase "the minister was not available for comment" is inserted and the editors must to decide on the efficacy of printing the story. Today, it seems that the decision is to run the story more often than not and then give the politician sufficient opportunity to respond in a separate article, if need be. This points to a major concern about the media in terms of what they are willing to cover. The politician wants more detail in stories. The media argue that this detail is not economically possible, given their resources, and that it is not desirable since the consumer is generally not interested in greater detail.

**Figure 6.2 Journalist's assessment of corporate influence scale in the news process**

a) Advertising values have come to dominate the news process.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

| -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | TOTAL | SCORE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 1 | 30 | -22/30 |

b) In their drive for profits, large media corporations have come to dominate the media industry in a negative fashion.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

| -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | TOTAL | SCORE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | 2 | 10 | 6 | 5 | 30 | 0/30 |

c) There has been an increase in superficial material reporting by the news process.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

| -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | TOTAL | SCORE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | 2 | 5 | 9 | 10 | 30 | +19/30 |

d) Overall there is too much corporate interference with the management of the news process.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

| -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | TOTAL | SCORE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 28 | -21/28 |

e) Overall there is too much internal political interference with the management of the news process.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

| -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | TOTAL | SCORE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | 10 | 2 | 7 | 3 | 30 | -13/30 |

In the chapters concerning roles and problems, politicians described the media as being market motivated and focused on conflict and sensation to meet their corporate objectives. Politicians accuse the media of peddling the sensational to promote their product. Driven by profit in a market economy, the media look for the exceptional or the controversial to entice the reader. Journalists argue that it is not up to the politicians to determine what is news or what interests the public. Instead, they claim, the public is the final arbiter of what is deemed acceptable or not by choosing a particular media product.

As explained in the introduction to this chapter, position statements were presented to journalists and they were asked to rate the degree of influence on a scale of one to five—one suggesting stongly disagree and five strongly agree. The results are presented in table 6.2. Position statements A, D, and E suggest journalists disagree that there exists important advertising, internal or corporate influence in the news process with scores of -22, -13, and -21 respectively. Position statement B is exactly at the zero point with a large number of respondents opting for the neutral value on the merits of media concentration. Position statement B is the only statement receiving a positive value at +19, supporting the view that there has been an increase in superficial material reported by the news media.

Journalists seem to agree that advertising values do not dominate the news process or, alternatively, that they do not view this as a serious problem (neutral scores). There also seems to be a relative consensus that there has not been excessive corporate interference in the management of news gathering and reporting. These are "positive" assessments in terms of the integrity and independence of the news reporting process. On the other hand, a clear majority of journalists think that there has been an increase in reporting superficial matters and fully one-third of them report holding that view strongly. Views about excessive internal political interference in the news gathering process are split: one-third think there is too much political interference and another three-fifths disagree—many of them strongly—with that claim. Finally, the journalist sample was quite sharply split on the impact of coporate concentration. Almost forty percent agree that such profit-oriented

concentration has had a negative impact; almost half of this group hold that view strongly. In contrast, another thirty percent of the group disagree with that statement and over three-fourths of that group strongly rejecting the statement.

Many journalists argued that position statement B on corporate concentration was difficult to answer. A majority of journalists stated that they agreed that an increase in corporate concentration has occured in the industry, resulting in large media conglomerates, but claimed that this concentration is not necessarily bad. Journalists argued that the large media corporations have permitted greater freedom when producing the news because the larger organizations they the resources to survive any storm that may arise. Having a chain of papers to exchange information from the local to the national level and deeper financial pockets means that the larger corporation allows a greater variety of quality news coverage.

On the surface these results provide no clear argument that market considerations have a fundamental impact on the news collection process. But how can this argument be reconciled with position statement C, the response to which indicated the majority of journalists sampled felt there has been an increase in the amount of superficial material reported by the news media? Perhaps the journalists' reponses to the corporate influence scale are good evidence to support the *structural* implications of the consolidation of the news media and its affects on agenda-setting. The effect of the market on news reporting may not take the form of directives from corporate headquarters regarding the substance of news coverage; instead, it may take on more subtle forms. Individual journalists do not feel direct pressure from their publishers. Instead, journalists are subject to structural influences which may alter a story because of the nature of their particular medium and, more importantly, simply as a result of the level of public tolerance. The length of a print story is determined by the public's willingness to finish reading it, perhaps even more so than by space restrictions in the paper. And it must be remembered that all stories compete with advertising for the reader's attention. This conceivable impact is not generated out of some ideological motivation, but is structural in origin. Stories are written in a particular

fashion because of the indirect effects of the market they serve, the public. Most stories lack depth and tend to emphasize the sensational because they must grab the consumer's attention, be entertaining, and fit into the medium's limited space or time resources. These are structural obstacles that are the natural result of the media as a business enterprise.

Market forces come to bear when stories are produced for a consuming public. One journalist said, "give them what they want, not what they need." All media consumers suffer from what has been termed by the media industry as the "time deficit phenomenon." There is neither the will nor the time on the part of the consumer to pay attention to all the sources of information available. In order to maximize their market share, this "time deficit" forces the media to condense and capsulize stories to maintain consumer interest. This limitation has profound effects on what issues are reported and how they are reported. Too often, the context of a story is lost and events are trivialized. However, there are limits to market explanations of media behaviour. There are genuine concerns outside the market, concerns that are engaged as the media establishment realizes its legitimate obligation to educate the public. What cannot be escaped are the structural limitations that shape any given story. Unfortunately, the marketing of news designed to accomodate the "lowest common denominator" frustrates the process.

**Figure 6.3 Media objectivity ratings by politicians**

| | Television | Print | Radio | All Mediums |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Government (n=15) | 3.3 | 3.0 | 3.3 | 3.2 |
| Opposition (n=15) | 3.5 | 2.9 | 3.5 | 3.2 |
| All Politicians (N=30) | 3.4 | 2.9 | 3.4 | 3.2 |

After examining some of the limitations that are placed on political reporting, an assessment of the politician's perception of news media objectivity is useful. As was explained in the beginning of this chapter politicians were asked to rate each outlet's relative objectivity in provincial political news reporting on a five-point scale ranging from "very biased" (which equaled one) to "very objective" (which equaled five) The results of this

line of questioning demonstrate a relative neutrality in the ratings given to media outlets: none of the scores for the three media range far from a mid-point score of three. Politicians cited radio as the most objective followed by television, and then print. Government politicians rate radio as slightly more objective than television, with the print media a close third; opposition politicians rate television as the most objective, followed by radio, and then print. On the surface this would suggest that politicians, in general, have few problems with the objectivity of the province's media. However, summary statistics can obscure differences revealed by individual observations that may expose some important points for consideration. To address this concern, the next table presents all the media outlets reviewed by politicians, listing the average rating given each outlet by the two sub-groups of and the combined group.

**Figure 6.4 Individual outlet objectivty ratings by politicians***

| | Government | (n) | Opposition | (n) | Politicians | n= |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Television** | | | | | | |
| Edmonton | | | | | | |
| A) ITV(channel 13) | 3.67 | (15) | 3.36 | (14) | 3.52 | (29) |
| B) CFRN (channel 3) | 3.67 | (15) | 3.71 | (14) | 3.69 | (29) |
| C) CBC English (channel 5) | 2.53 | (15) | 3.28 | (14) | 2.89 | (29) |
| D) CBC French (channel 11) | NA | | 4.00 | (1) | 4.00 | (1) |
| Calgary | | | | | | |
| E) CFCA (channel 7) | 3.60 | (5) | 3.67 | (3) | 3.62 | (8) |
| F) CFCN (channel 4) | 3.45 | (11) | 3.80 | (5) | 3.56 | (16) |
| G) CBC (channel 9) | 2.86 | (7) | 3.00 | (2) | 2.87 | (9) |
| H) CKRD (channel 6) | 3.20 | (5) | 3.50 | (4) | 3.33 | (9) |
| **Print** | | | | | | |
| I) Edmonton Journal | 2.47 | (15) | 3.73 | (15) | 3.10 | (30) |
| J) Edmonton Sun | 2.67 | (15) | 2.53 | (15) | 2.60 | (30) |
| K) Calgary Herald | 2.93 | (14) | 3.23 | (13) | 3.07 | (27) |
| L) Calgary Sun | 3.43 | (14) | 2.54 | (11) | 3.04 | (25) |
| M) Lethbridge Herald | 3.10 | (10) | 3.14 | (7) | 3.12 | (17) |
| N) Medicine Hat News | 3.67 | (6) | 3.28 | (7) | 3.46 | (13) |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| O) Red Deer Advocate | 3.33 | (6) | 3.00 | (5) | 3.18 | (11) |
| P) Alberta/Western Report | 3.23 | (13) | 1.45 | (11) | 2.41 | (24) |
| **Radio** | | | | | | |
| Calgary | | | | | | |
| Q) CFCA 960 | 3.67 | (6) | NA | | 3.67 | (6) |
| R) CFCN 1060 | 3.57 | (7) | NA | | 3.57 | (7) |
| S) CHFM 95.9 | 3.67 | (3) | 4.00 | (1) | 3.75 | (4) |
| T) CKRY- FM 105.1 | 3.67 | (3) | NA | | 3.67 | (3) |
| U) CBC (FM) 90.9 | 2.71 | (7) | 3.80 | (5) | 3.17 | (12) |
| Edmonton | | | | | | |
| V) CBC (AM) 740 | 2.60 | (15) | 3.46 | (13) | 3.00 | (28) |
| W) CFRN 1260 | 3.73 | (11) | 3.33 | (9) | 3.55 | (20) |
| X) CHQT 880 | 3.70 | (10) | 3.37 | (8) | 3.56 | (18) |
| Y) CISN 103.9 | 3.50 | (8) | 3.62 | (8) | 3.56 | (16) |
| Z) CKNG 92.5 | 3.67 | (3) | 3.00 | (4) | 3.28 | (7) |

*Please Note: NA=No Score Applicable

First, the majority of outlets still rank in relatively neutral positions but there are exceptions and subtle differences do show. Government politicians generally rate private television better than their public counterparts. This also holds true for their assessment of radio stations. The major urban dailies also are rated lower than their secondary urban counterparts, such as those in Medicine Hat or Lethbridge (this most likely due to their small n size). Opposition groups tend to rate all media outlets in relatively neutral numbers, except the *Edmonton Sun* and the *Alberta Report*. The overall neutral ratings on objectivity may point to the fact that any particular medium is generally as good as another. But, given the complaints and concerns of the politicians about objectivity, there could be more behind the picture than is revealed by these ratings.

A different focus would be to move from the outlet to the individual story and its presentation. Depending on the reporter, the editor, and the resources given to a story's p resentation, structural factors do have important effects on a story's final content. As discussed in earlier chapters, this content has profound effects on what politicians

perceive to be objective reporting of the facts. For example, print sources may generally get lower scores than television or radio in terms of their objectivity because of the written word. Print media present a story in tabulated form, to be read and reviewed virtually at will. This kind of review of the news is possible with radio or television but it is obviously more difficult to do so, considering the technology and time required. (Reviewing a number of stories from a particular outlet allows greater scrutiny of its presentation and objectivity than is allowed than with other media.) The print media are typically subject to greater scrutiny and, hence, receive poorer ratings. It is worth noting, though, that the print medium was the one most used by politicians and radio was the least consulted news medium. Yet the print medium generally has the poorest objectivity ratings and radio the highest.

## Summary

This chapter has examined several important aspects of the agenda-setting process as it applies to relations between politicians and journalists. The first focuses item of scrutiny was how politicians use the press as an information pool to which they contribute by their daily activities and to which they react when reviewing press reports about those activites. I have argued that an agenda-setting media-response function exists, especially for the opposition, at least in terms of adjusting their short term priorities. A description of the nature of the media through which all political reporting is "filtered" followed. This filter, the editing process of the media establishment, places important structural constraints on what is and is not reported, how it is reported, and the potential impact of the report. I have also offered what I consider to be important supportive evidence that structural influences have more to do with determining the form of a story than ideological or political factors, and that these structural influences are critical to understanding not only media behavior, but the affect on the agenda-setting phenomenon once the story is released to the public. It must be admitted that market forces manifest themselves in news reporting, placing critical limitations on any given political story. Finally, it was

demonstrated the the province's politicians assign a relatively neutral value to the in-province media outlets. I contend that this supports the conclusion that individual stories are seen by the political elites to be biased rather than any particular outlet being considered overtly biased. This would further my argument on reporting structure and its effect. In the next chapter, the extent of influences that politicians and the media experience in their realtionship and the actual agenda contents of either group will be examined.

## Notes

(1) Leslie Geran. *Question Period: Strategies, Procedures, and Preparation of Alberta's Legislature Grows Up*, paper presented as requirement for the Alberta Legislative Intership Program June 1990, p. 9

(2) Ibid., p. 24

## Chapter Seven: Policy Agendas

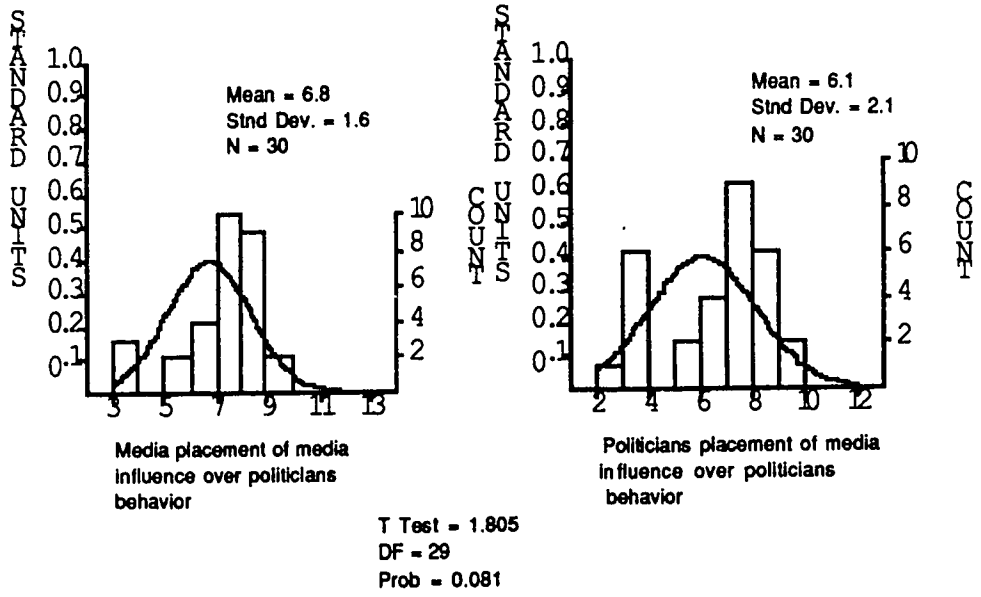
In the last several chapters I have discussed the existence and nature of agenda-setting between politicians and journalists. Although these discussions have been exclusively in qualitative terms, they provide strong evidence that, at the very least, a perception of agenda-setting exists and is shared by Alberta's provincial politicians and journalists. In this chapter I make a quantitative assessment of the degree of influence of either party in the agenda-setting process. The first section will discuss the degree of influence over the process that each group, journalists and politicians, assigns to the other. As well, this study in agenda-setting would be incomplete without an examination of the actual agendas of politicians and journalists. In this chapter, I will examine the actual contents of the policy agendas of each group and what they think is on the public agenda.

It is assumed, as was stated in the introduction, that "someone" sets the agenda. The focus in the first part of this chapter is to determine who that "someone" is. Each group was asked to assess how much influence they felt they have over the other and how much they are influenced by the other. This scale goes right to the heart of the study by assessing the perception of influence exerted by either group. Using a Likert scale ranging with values between zero and ten—zero represents "no influence" and ten represents "determines." Each respondent was asked to evaluate the level of influence the media have over political behavior, and, conversely, how much influence politicians' have over media behavior. Each respondent was asked to assess the broader provincial system rather than just individual circumstances. This was done for two reasons. First, this type of evaluation allows all the respondents to provide ratings regardless of their personal relationship to the media. Second, this type of evaluation provides stronger evidence of how the system operates as a whole than measuring individual responses to agenda-setting. These scales were presented in written form to the respondent as part of a "paper and pencil" task in order to improve the efficiency of the questionnaire.

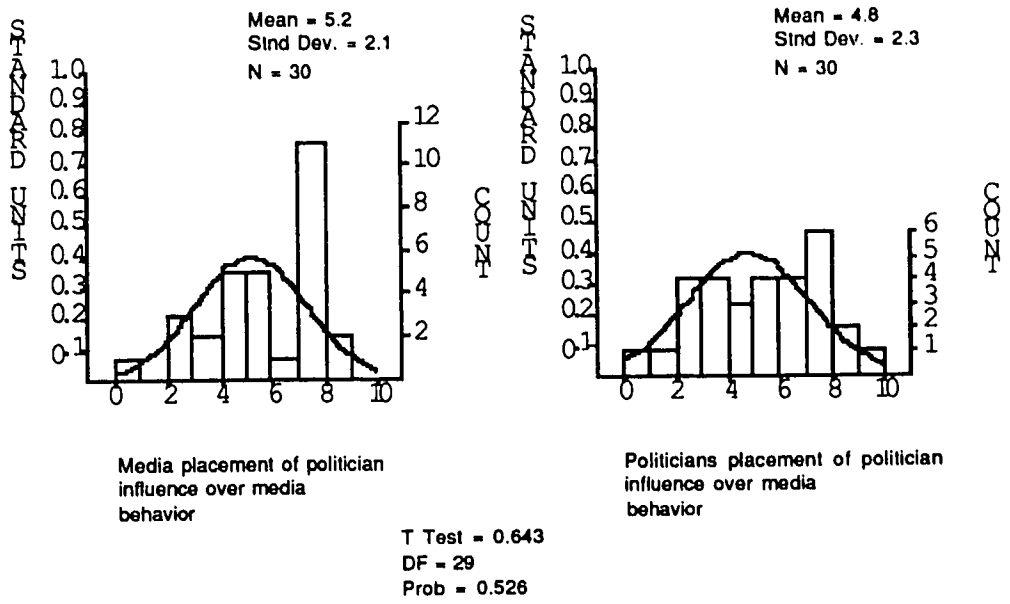
To investigate the question of agenda content, the members of each group were asked to organize thirteen broad government policy fields as viewed by the public and as viewed personally according to an abstract priority ranking. The issue fields presented were: the deficit, the environment, agriculture, energy, social services, labour relations, federal-provincial relations, senate reform, taxation, education, constitution reform and economic diversification. The public agenda was understood to mean that of the Alberta electorate as a single unit. In the case of politicians, personal ranks were determined irrespective of party affiliation and party policy. The thirteen policy fields were presented on cue cards in a randomly ordered stack. Respondents were asked to place the cards out in front of them so as to view all the cards clearly before ranking. No equal value assessments were permitted; that is, respondents were to produce "complete" priority ranking.

**Figure 7.0 Degree of influence over media and politician beahvior**

(a) Media placement of influence over behavior



(b) Politicians placement of influence




## Assessment of influence

For this study, politicians and journalists were asked to assess how much they influence one another. Perhaps the crucial aspect of this task is the firm implication that influence *is* perceived to be exerted. Half of the members of the media group rated the degree of influence that the media have over politicians at seven or higher on the scale employed (mean = 6.8, Stnd dev. = 1.6), and the politicians' influence over the media somewhat low— at five on the scale ( mean = 5.2, Stnd dev. = 2.1). Politicians tended to agree with the media's assessment. They, as a group, assess media influence over their own behavior at the same level with a median rating of seven. (The average rating here is 6.1, with a standard deviation of 2.1) Similarly, half of them rate their own influence over the media no higher than five on the scale (mean = 4.8, Stnd dev. = 2.3). It should be noted that there is marginally a greater variation in the ratings of politicians' influence over

the media than the media's influence over politicians, perhaps indicating greater agreement among respondents with regard to the latter assessment.

These findings are supported further by breaking down the politician and media groups into their natural subgroupings. If the politicians are divided into Government and Opposition subgroups, we find their average ratings of media influence over politicians are 5.8 and 6.4 respectively. Similarly, Government's and Opposition's average ratings of political influence over media behavior are 4.2 and 5.3 respectively. The media breakdowns for print, television, and radio indicating media influence over politicians are 7.0, 6.3 and 7.0 respectively, and the values for political influence over each medium are 4.2, 5.2 and 6.2. These breakdowns will be subjected to further analysis below.

We can derive several conclusions from these numbers. First, this data is good evidence that politicians and media perceive that they are engaged in an agenda-setting game. The values given by both politicians and journalists range far enough from the zero point of "no influence" to clearly show that both groups view the other as having important effects over behavior. These influence ratings are also of a sufficient magnitude to suggest that neither group perceives itself to be immune from the manipulations of the other even though the media do appear to have the upper hand. Neither group can be said to exclusively control the other's agenda.

These findings also support earlier observations made about the perception of an unequal (or asymetric) power relationship between politicians and the media (see chapters four and five). In the discussion of role perceptions, I noted a reported inequality in power attributed to the two groups. Interviews with members of each group indicated that the press was perceived to be favoured in that respect. We should not find be surprised to find the same impression reflected in ratings of the degree of influence each group is believed to exercise over the other.

The data support the descriptions of the different roles the government and opposition play. In the chapter on news consumption and evaluation, I noted that the

government paid less attention to the media (in terms of a politician's daily consumption) relative to the opposition largely because the government members do not have to worry about receiving coverage; instead they are more concerned with *how* they are covered.The lower ratings of media influence given by government members are consistent with this earlier observation, as are the higher ratings given by members of the opposition, reflecting their greater desire and need for media coverage.

The data also support the qualitative findings presented in the earlier chapter on the problems that exist in the relationship between politicians and the media. There, I argued that the media have greater influence over public opinion than politicians. The data would suggest that much of what the media does when informing the public is left to the media to determine and, as a result, lesser influence is attributed to politicians. Also, I argued earlier that politicians have lost control of the day-to-day information release process at the Legislature. The data also support this finding by showing that the media is perceived to have the greater influence of the two groups, an assymmetry recognized by the members of both groups.

Even though the number of respondents in each group is small, I will venture some conclusions. First, print journalists rate political influence over their medium lower than do members of the other media; radio journalists give politicians the highest ratings. These numbers could reflect the level of attention given by each medium to a story in terms of depth and time. The print media has the greatest latitude of the three media in terms of the space and time given to any particular story. Radio, on the other hand, has the least time and, as a result, suffers greater pressures from such factors as hourly deadlines. It can be argued that the greater the space for a story, the greater the ability of the journalist to deal effectively with a politician's manipulations.

Another possible explanation of the different ratings of political influence experienced by the three mediums may be that the style of presentation has profound effects on the degree of perceived influence. Print media depend on the written word and have a

greater ability to assess and manipulate information than say, television, which depends largely on making visual presentations. For a politician it is easier to control the presentation of events in a radio broadcast— for example, on a talkshow or in a television interview—than to control the presentation in newspapers since print journalists have more opportunity to analyse and interpret political events. It was reported in chapter five that politicians prefer radio of the three media and that preference could reflect positively on this argument.

**Agenda**

If agenda-setting takes place between politicians and journalists, it would be helpful to be able to identify the agenda that is presumed to influence the other party. It is expected that politicians have a particular set of issues in mind when they are elected. When politicians form the government it is assumed that they have a vision of society and wish to enact policies in accord with that vision. This remains one of the prime motivations for participating in politics. Therefore, it is important to understand what politicians view as their own issues priorities and how they view the issue priorities of the public. What is not clear is whether a media perspective on issues exists for individual reasons or in accord with what they see as public priorities. Charting the content of the media agenda becomes a very important task for several reasons. First, next to politicians themselves, journalists are the best informed citizens regarding the daily activities of government. They are experts and their personal views on what should and should not be government priorities are of particular interest. Second, journalism is concerned with informing the public but, as was noted in earlier chapters, not all the information received is passed on to the consumer. Therefore, news must be priorized for public consumption. Journalists' assumptions about public priorities will be reflected in news reporting. The question is: do the media have a better sense of the public's priorities than politicians?

To begin, some comments are warranted about the kinds of statistical techniques used in the analysis of the priority ranking data. Two techniques were used: the Friedman

two-way analysis of variance and the Kendall coefficient of concordance. Each procedure was run on the personal and public rankings for the media and politicians as general groups. Then, politician rankings were broken down into the subgroups of government and opposition. The Friedman test reveals whether or not there are any global differences in the ranking of the groups by analyzing their sum ranks.

To assist in understanding the procedure, assume a situation where three respondents have ranked three issues and that the respondents' rankings are in full agreement. If everyone ranked the three items in the same order, there would be full consensus. Then the column totals would be simply N times the rank (i.e. N x 1, N x 2, N x 3). The Friedman test results show that the probability of this occurring randomly is slight, at best, given a chi-squared distribution. Therefore, we can determine a group perspective on the ranking of these three issues by the respondents.

Example #1 of fictitious random issue ranking-

| | Issue 1 | Issue 2 | Issue 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Respondent 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Respondent 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Respondent 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Column Total | 3 | 6 | 9 |

Friedman Test Statistic = 6.00
Kendall Coefficient of Concordance = 1.00
Prob. = 0.05

Now assume another example where three respondents assigned ranks to three different issues in a random fashion. The sum ranks in this case would be equal. The Friedman test tells us on balance if sum ranks differ significantly from one another. If the sum ranks are essentially the same, as in the example below, the Friedman statistic is very low and is not significant given a chi-squared probability distribution. This would mean there is no global outlook by the group.

Example #2 of ficticious non-random issue ranking-

| | Issue 1 | Issue 2 | Issue 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Respondent 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| Respondent 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| Respondent 3 | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| Column Total | 6 | 6 | 6 |

Friedman Test Statistic = 0.50
Kendall Coefficient of Concordance = 0.083
Prob. = 0.779

Kendall's coefficient of concordance is used in conjunction with the Friedman test. This coefficient is useful in assessing the relative agreement among rankings given by respondents. This coefficient ranges between zero and one. Looking back at the earlier example, where there is no internal agreement among the respondents on how the issues are to be ranked, a very low value for the coefficient, near zero, will result. Conversely, if the rank orderings assigned by the respondents on the issues are essentially the same, the expectation would be for a value closer to one. Kendall's coefficient of concordance can also be easily converted to an average Spearman's Rho which provides the average rank-order correlation across all pairs of respondents. The conversion formula is presented below:

Figure 7.1

Spearmans Rho Average = kW-1/k-1

where,

k = Sets of rankings

W = Kendall's coefficient of concordance

One difficulty with the Friedman test is that the measure is global. In the issue ranking there may be global differences suggesting that a significant but unquantified result exists. The problem is that there may be ties between the issue ranks internally which the Friedman test will pass over. In a group, priorities on subsets of policy rankings could be identical and would not be detected. The test suggests that, in general, the column totals

(hence, average rank) for the given policies differ significantly *overall*.. This can happen even though any pair (or sets of pairs) are effectively "tied," that is, assigned equal values, in rated priority. To solve this problem, I used a Wlicoxon matched-pairs signed-rank test, which tests which item in a pair is ranked "greater than" the other, to determine the difference between any pair and to rank these differences in terms of their absolute magnitude.[1] Using alpha = 0.1, an assignment of internal priorities can be made by assessing if agreement exists in the ranks across the paired comparison of policy areas. If respondents do not agree (a probability less than 0.1) on the ranking of any two or more issues, then the policy fields for the purposes of this study are tied and no consensus exists as to their proper ordering (ties are noted on the Table 7A-D by the joining lines which denote groupings of tied policy fields, this is to say that at our level of analysis distinct rankings could not be found).[2]

**Figure 7.2 Issue ordinal ranking correlations**

| | Media Personal vs. Media Public | Politician Personal vs. Politician Public |
|---|---|---|
| Agriculture | 0.532 | 0.593 |
| Constitution | 0.369 | 0.464 |
| Deficit | 0.574 | 0.694 |
| Economic Diversification | 0.452 | 0.238 |
| Education | 0.028 | 0.326 |
| Energy | 0.733 | 0.529 |
| Environment | 0.439 | 0.566 |
| Federal-Provincial Relations | 0.494 | 0.308 |
| Health Care | 0.410 | 0.244 |
| Labour Relations | 0.594 | 0.645 |
| Senate Reform | 0.425 | 0.271 |
| Social Services | 0.523 | 0.436 |
| Taxation | 0.133 | 0.589 |
| Speamans avg. | 0.439 | 0.454 |

Using Spearman correlations, the first agenda assessement examines how closely either group's personal rankings were to the public agenda. These values represent the

correlations between the respondent's own personal priorities and what the respondent believes are the policy priorities of the public. In Table 7.2 the correlations show varying degrees of agreement between each group's personal ranking of policy fields and that of the public. Notable exceptions for the media are the issues of education and taxation which have very low correlations. The same low Rho values should also be noted for politician's correlations on the issues of economic diversification, federal- provincial realtions, health care, and Senate reform. In general, the data suggest that both groups think that they are well tuned to the public agenda due to some of the substantial Rho values. This fact is significant since both groups to one extent or another represent the general population: the politician is an elected official and the journalists is an investigator of sorts working on the public's behalf.

These correlations demonstrate that each group feels they are, to some degree, part of the public consciousness on these matters. There are two possible reason why this correlation might occur: either the respondents accurately perceive and reflect public priorities or they are "projecting" their own priorities on the public agenda. These correlations cannot be used to investigate the question of whose agenda is reflecting whose. This is mainly because the direction of causality cannot be determined. These correlations, although strong, are not perfect and so reflect some disagreement between the public and personal agendas of both groups.What we can say with some certainty is that both groups feel relatively close to their public counterparts as far as rankings the given priorities is concerned.

**Figure 7.3 Issue ranking of thirteen policy fields table A: media personal vs.politician personal**

Table A

| Media Personal | | Politician Personal | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Policy Area | Average Rank | Policy Area | Average Rank |
| Environment | 3.53 | Environment | 3.63 |
| Taxation | 3.67 | Deficit | 4.43 |
| Health | 4.50 | Taxation | 4.57 |
| Education | 4.53 | Economic Diversification | 5.13 |
| Deficit | 5.03 | Health | 5.17 |
| Social Services | 6.47 | Education | 5.23 |
| Economic Diversification | 7.40 | Social Services | 7.03 |
| Energy | 7.87 | Agriculture | 7.60 |
| Constitution | 8.83 | Energy | 8.47 |
| Federal-Provincial Relations | 9.37 | Federal-Provincial Relations | 9.77 |
| Senate Reform | 9.60 | Constitution | 9.83 |
| Agriculture | 9.87 | Senate Reform | 9.83 |
| Labour | 10.33 | Labour | 10.30 |
| Avg. Spearman's Rho = 0.366 | | Avg. Spearman's Rho = 0.399 | |
| Friedman Test Statistic = 149.49 | | Friedman Test Statistic = 140.29 | |
| Kendall Coefficient = 0.415 | | Kendall Coefficient = 0.390 | |
| Prob. = 0.000 | | Prob. = 0.00 | |

The first set of policy fields examined are the personal agendas for members of the media and politicians. Personal agendas rankings are meant to assess the relative agreement among members of a group on their opinion, as individuals, as to what should constitute the policy priorities of the government in their opinion. Table A shows that the members of each group systematically distinguish between policy areas in terms of priorities and that a relative degree of consensus (group perspective) exists in each group. To be more exact, it is safe to reject the null hypothesis that the thirteen policy fields ranked by both groups were a matter of chance (in terms of their column sum ranks) , and accept the alternative hypothesis that the rank totals differ significantly. Ties do exist on specific subsets of issue priorities for each group, however.

In order to facilitate a better understanding of the results, I will demonstrate how the tables should be read by using Table A . Table A shows that journalists see the

environment, taxation, health, education and the deficit as their personal top five issues to be adressed by the government. These policy fields are effectively "tied" as a group, as there is no consensus on priorization among them. This grouping is followed by a second cluster consisting of social services, economic diversification and energy, which are again tied. Finally, there is a third cluster of issues consisting of the constitution, federal-provincial relations, Senate reform, agriculture and labour, again with no agreement to their appropriate internal ranking.

Politicians' personal rankings are similar to those of the media in that their top priorities are the environment, the deficit, taxation, health, and education. In contrast to the media, economic diversification works its way into the top cluster with politicians. There are are a slight differences in the two rankings. First, for politicians, there exists a subcluster consisting of the environment, the deficit, and taxation within the top five issue priorities. The second grouping of issues by politicians are social services and agriculture, followed by energy, which stands alone as a separate area of concern. Like the media, politicians in general agree on the lowest ranked set of policy areas: federal-provincial relations, the constitution, Senate reform, and labour.

For both groups, media and government, there exists relative agreement among personal rankings of what should be the most pressing issues in government and what should be the least. Federal and national issues definitely take a back seat to the more regional or provincial orientated policy fields. There exists relative, although weak, agreement among the rankings within each group, given that the Kendall coefficient of concordance values are around 0.4 for both groups. As these are personal agendas, we might expect a low degree of consensus between individuals since people's individual priorities can differ greatly. Considering that each group is comprised of a diverse variety of people with respect to their political outlooks, personal history, and the like, the degree of agreement that exists between them is noteworthy. Given the journalists' diverse backgrounds, it is surprising to note the degree of relative agreement among them too. The

politician sample, composed of fifty percent Conservatives, thirty-four percent New Democrats, and sixteen percent Liberals, shows that all three parties taken together rank the top five and bottom four issues relatively the same as do the media, although the precise ranking in those groupings is unknown.

To investigate the differences between government and opposition politicians, the politician sample was broken down into the previously identified two subgroups and Friedman tests were run. The results are to be shown in Table B. They show that once the politician group is divided into government and opposition segments, the Kendall coefficient of concordance values rise reflecting greater within-group agreement in rankings—especially for government members.

**Figure 7.4 Issue ranking of thirteen policy fields table B: Government personal vs. Opposition personal**

Table B

| Government Personal | | Opposition Personal | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Policy Area | Average Rank | Policy Area | Average Rank |
| Deficit | 1.48 | Environment | 2.88 |
| Environment | 4.47 | Taxation | 4.13 |
| Education | 4.60 | Health | 4.27 |
| Taxation | 5.00 | Education | 5.07 |
| Economic Diversification | 5.40 | Social Services | 5.27 |
| Health | 6.07 | Economic Development | 5.67 |
| Agriculture | 7.33 | Deficit | 7.40 |
| Energy | 8.53 | Agriculture | 7.81 |
| Social Services | 8.80 | Energy | 8.40 |
| Senate Reform | 8.87 | Labour | 9.27 |
| Constitution | 9.40 | Federal-Provincial Relations | 9.80 |
| Federal-Provincial Relations | 9.73 | Constitution | 10.27 |
| Labour | 11.33 | Senate Reform | 10.80 |
| Avg. Spearman's Rho = 0.460 | | Avg. Spearman's Rho = 0.409 | |
| Friedman Test Statistic = 90.42 | | Friedman Test Statistic = 81.90 | |
| Kendall Coefficient = 0.502 | | Kendall Coefficient = 0.455 | |
| Prob. = 0.000 | | Prob. = 0.00 | |

The higher Kendall coefficient of concordance demonstrates that the variation between party perspectives is suppressing levels of agreement on a personal level for

politicians as a wider group. Government politicians hold a strong global outlook in their rankings, placing the deficit as their number one priority. Again, as in the general personal ranking of all politicians, federal and national issues take a back seat to more local and regional matters affecting the province. Opposition politicians give a much more confusing picture due, most likely, to the combination of ideologically opposed Liberals and New Democrats in the subsample. There is little differentiation in the top rankings but considerable chaining of the bottom rankings. Chaining refers to the occurance that issue "a" is not different from issue "b," and issue "b" is not different from issue "c," but issue "c" is different from issue "a." A kind of serial overlap occurs when contiguous items are not seen as distinctly different in their prioritiy but those one or two items removed from one another are distinct (i.e. one given clearly higher priority than the other). It would be difficult to argue that government and opposition politicians agree on a personal level as to what the priorities of the government should be.

Tables A and B demonstrate the personal rankings for politicians and journalists. These rankings are individual and, as stated earlier, are most likely reflect to some degree the diversity of the people sampled. In this study, what is more important is each group's interpretation of the public agenda. The public agenda fuels both these groups and is the binding link that brings them together. Understanding how politicians interpret the public agenda helps us to understand the motivation of the government and opposition parties when developing their agendas for future policy action or electoral strategy . For the media, the public agenda, as they interpret it, is the driving force behind their coverage. If the media are not offering coverage of issues the public expects, they will soon be out of business. Therefore, interpretations of the public agenda are critical to the survival of both groups.

**Figure 7.5 Issue ranking of thirteen policy fields table C: media public vs. politician public**

Table C

| Media Public | | Politician Public | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Policy Area | Average Rank | Policy Area | Average Rank |
| Taxation | 2.17 | Environment | 2.77 |
| Environment | 3.13 | Health | 2.93 |
| Health | 3.73 | Taxation | 4.03 |
| Education | 4.37 | Education | 4.17 |
| Deficit | 4.80 | Deficit | 5.07 |
| Social Services | 6.50 | Economic Diversification | 6.60 |
| Energy | 7.20 | Social Services | 7.40 |
| Economic Diversification | 8.70 | Energy | 8.00 |
| Senate Reform | 8.97 | Agriculture | 8.03 |
| Agriculture | 9.20 | Senate Reform | 9.33 |
| Labour | 10.30 | Labour | 10.77 |
| Constitution | 10.97 | Federal-Provincial Relations | 10.93 |
| Federal-Provincial Relations | 10.97 | Constitution | 10.97 |
| Avg. Spearman's Rho = 0.601 | | Avg. Spearman's Rho = 0.561 | |
| Friedman Test Statistic = 227.48 | | Friedman Test Statistic = 214 | |
| Kendall Coefficient = 0.632 | | Kendall Coefficient = 0.595 | |
| Prob. = 0.000 | | Prob. = 0.000 | |

Table C presents what politicians and journalists think is the public agenda. For both groups there is a global perspective, as the probability of these ranks occuring by chance is almost zero. There is greater agreement within the two groups as to what the public's priorities are than there was between their own personal priorities . This fact is evidenced by the Kendall coefficient of concordance—0.632 for journalists and 0.595 for politicians—while their personal rankings for the same issues showed Kendall's coefficient of concordance at 0.415 and 0.390 respectively. The top five issues for both groups remain the same: taxation, environment, health, education, and the deficit. The difference is that the media could not agree on the order of the top five issues. The politicians clearly stratified their priorities, with environment and health being the first cluster, taxation standing alone, followed by a sub-cluster made up of education and the deficit. It is clear that there is no consensus among government members on how to order those five issues

relative to one another. This trend is continued in the middle of the public rankings. Journalists rank equally social services, energy, economic diversification, senate reform and agriculture. This is followed by a third cluster at the bottom of the rankings of labour, the constitution, and federal-provincial relations. Politicians isolate economic diversification, followed by a cluster of social services and energy, then a cluster of agriculture and senate reform and, finally, labour, federal-provincial relations and the constitution form the bottom grouping.

In the personal rankings, it was shown that once the politician sample was divided into government and opposition sub-groups, some of the confusion in the data could be clarified to get a clearer picture of the priorities of each group. Table D uses the same approach with the same positive result.

**Figure 7.6 Issue ranking of thirteen policy fields table D: Government public vs. Opposition public**

Table D

| Government Public | | Opposition Public | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Policy Area | Average Rank | Policy Area | Average Rank |
| Deficit | 3.13 | Environment | 2.07 |
| Education | 3.20 | Health | 2.47 |
| Health | 3.40 | Taxation | 3.73 |
| Environment | 3.47 | Education | 5.13 |
| Taxation | 4.33 | Deficit | 7.00 |
| Economic Diversification | 6.00 | Economic Diversification | 7.20 |
| Social Services | 7.33 | Agriculture | 7.40 |
| Energy | 8.60 | Energy | 7.40 |
| Agriculture | 8.67 | Social Services | 7.47 |
| Senate | 10.27 | Senate Reform | 8.40 |
| Federal-Provincial Relations | 10.73 | Labour | 10.60 |
| Constitution | 10.93 | Constitution | 11.00 |
| Labour | 10.93 | Federal-Provincial Relations | 11.13 |
| Avg. Spearman's Rho = 0.654 | | Avg. Spearman's Rho = 0.557 | |
| Friedman Test Statistic = 122.58 | | Friedman Test Statistic = 106.44 | |
| Kendall Coefficient = 0.681 | | Kendall Coefficient = 0.591 | |
| Prob. = 0.000 | | Prob. = 0.00 | |

Both the opposition and the government show high degrees of agreement in their global and internal rankings of the issues. The government ranks their top issues as the deficit, education, health, environment, and taxation. These are the same five issues preferred by the media although their internal rankings of those issues is not known. The government, again, provided a better stratification of public issues than either the media or the opposition. When the politicians are divided, the Kendall coefficient of concordance shoots past the media rating to 0.618 while the opposition drops slightly to 0.591. Again, this is most likely a reflection of greater agreement amongst members of the same party for the government while, in the opposition sample, the mixture of Liberals and New Democrats created noise within the data,reflecting their different political stripes and perspectives and thus reducing Kendall's coefficient of concordance. The top three issues for the opposition are shared by the press and the government in a cluster of environment, health and taxation.

What is striking is the high level of agreement among individuals within the groups as well as between the groups themselves. There is remarkable agreement on what issues deserve priority attention and those that remain on the "back burner." There is some disagreement in the middle of the rankings with regard to the public but there is also considerable overlap and a number of equal value assignments, or ties, occurring, so the disagreement is most likely not a significant factor. Politicians do present a more coherent perspective than their journalistic counterparts. The government has the same top five issues as the media for their priorities yet the precise rankings within the group are unknown. I would argue that knowing the top five priority issues is sufficient to give us a picture of the views of the media and politicians without necessarily knowing their exact order. For the day-to-day operations of politicians and journalists, having a sense of the general priorities of the public is sufficient for their purposes. Governments and the media are multifaceted organizations capable of handling several important issues at the same time. It may be the fact that pressure from the public is more or less the same for all the

issues in these top rankings, in the aggregate sense, and that they are at a level of sufficient significance to suggest that the all have to be dealt with equally. The public is diverse, complex, and volatile, and to force a simple rank order on their desires may simplify the description of their preferences to a dangerous degree.

The purpose of this chapter was to investigate the nature and composition of personal and perceived public policy agendas for the media and politicians. As expected, a particular outlook for politicians on a personal and public level was revealed. This chapter also has shown that a personal outlook exists apart from the public agenda. How far an interpretation of the personal agenda can be extended into either group's activities is open to question. Both politicians and the media are under the constraint of public demand and it is that master they must serve. Personal agendas may come to bear when there is time and room for debate on issues before the public agenda has had time to congeal and the pressure for particular results increases. Whether it is in the editorial pages or in the caucus meeting, personal agendas could play a greater role outside times of crisis in determining with what either group might choose to deal. At the very least, personal agendas give the reader an idea about who these people identified only as "politician" or "reporter" really are and how, ideally, they want their government to operate. But this is distinct from the public agenda . In this regard, the views represented in public and personal agenda rankings of the fifteen cabinet ministers, which represent over half of the provincial cabinet, give a good indication of what are the priorities of this government are. The same kind of hypothesis can be proposed for the opposition.

The difference between the media's public and personal agenda rankings is greater than that displayed by politicians. One way to interpret this in the context of this study is to sugest that the difference between the two undermine the effectiveness of the individual reporter to influence the public agenda. It may be the case that the diversity of reporters as a group, reflected in their personal agendas, may reduce their individual impact, achieving a kind of blanket effect. Politicians can take advantage of this diversity by courting

journalists sympathetic to their policy initiatives and this may also reduce the media's contribution to the agenda-setting effect. These suggestions are not conclusive, however, as these policy fields represent perspectives on issue priorities, and tell nothing of the specific nature of particular issues. What the issues do tell us is what to expect in terms of output from either group, especially with regards to the public agenda.

## Summary

In this chapter I have argued that the media and politicians are engaged in an agenda-setting struggle. I have also confirmed several findings of earlier chapters. As for agenda content, politicians and the media have measurable perceptions of what the priorities of the government should be on a personal level distinct from what they perceive to be the public agenda. There exists a media outlook to these issues on a personal level and another that corresponds to what they imagine the public's priorities are. These agendas, although not in perfect agreement, do demonstrate a remarkable degree of congruence. There is no precise picture in any of groups to what the ranking of the middle issues should be. Journalists provided a less coherent policy agenda for the public than politicians but it is important to note that the media does have a global outlook on public expectations of its government. Although the source of these perceptions is undertermined, they remain an important basis for analyzing the policy and news outputs of politicians and the media

## Notes

(1) S. Siegel. *Nonparametric statisitcs for the behavioral sciences* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956), pp. 75-76

(2) Ibid., p. 239

> There is an island in the ocean where in 1914 a few Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Germans lived. No cables reaches that island, and the British mail steamer comes but once in sixty days. In September it had not yet come, and the islanders were still talking about the approaching trail of Madame Caillaux for the shooting of Gaston Calmette. It was, therefore, with more than ususal eagerness that the whole colony assembled at the quay on a day in mid-September to hear from the captain what the verdict had been. They learned that for over six weeks now those of them who were English and those of them who were French had been fighting in behalf of the sanctity of treaties against those of them who were Germans. For six strange weeks they had acted as if they were friends, when in fact they were enemies.[1]
>
> Walter Lippman
> *Public Opinion*

## Chapter Eight: Conclusions

Reality is subjective. Lippman's quote is sufficient proof of this point. The world around us and the events that shape our existence happen most often beyond our immediate environment and the way these events are defined in large part determines our response. Agenda-setting is about the creation of conditions through which to interpret the "facts" surrounding political events. Throughout this paper I have described and analyzed the media-politician relationship in the province of Alberta. This description has shown that both elites contribute greatly to the public's perception of political reality. The relationship between politicians and journalists should be considered like a battlefield, for which the control of public perception is the goal.[2] This may seem like an overly dramatic metaphor that is better suited for narrative colour than a clinical academic description of the effects of agenda-setting. I do not agree. The contest between politicians and journalists is a real one and so are the stakes in the contest. There are real winners and losers on the battlefield as careers are successful or not, governments rise to power and are defeated, mediums acquire and lose popular attention. Public perception is not a spontaneous eruption out of thin air and, in the end, it renders the final judgement on both politicians and the media. It is the news consuming masses, the electorate, that in one form or another determine a victor. Successful agenda-setting is at the heart of this contest.

I have divided this last chapter into three sections. The first will review the findings of earlier chapters. This will ease the reader into the second section which examines the media-politician relationship and the battle of perception . This discussion is aimed at interpreting the findings of this study and its broader implications for the political system. Lastly, it is advisable to propose areas for further research because this study presents many more questions than it answers.

The focus of this study was to determine in what ways the agenda of political elites affects the agenda of the mass media, positively or negatively, and, by extension, how the hidden political agenda of the mass media affects the agenda of the political elites. It was necessary to examine the formal and informal rules that govern the relationship between the media and the politicians that are the focus of their work. The study examined the active component of the message to determine who controls the political agenda in Alberta, how control is effected and maintained, and the implications of that control on the political system. Thirty provincial politicians and thirty journalists covering the Legislature were interviewed through two separate surveys, one for each group, with respect to the agenda-setting question in Alberta provincial affairs.

This author is not the first to write and explain that the news is a selective process. Academics and journalists alike have written about many aspects of the media which clearly demonstrate that the media cannot disseminate all the information it gathers and that they are under direct influence from politicians to alter their reports. Coversely, this study is not the first to examine how the media influences politicians and the workings of government.

This study is the first of its kind to study agenda-setting in Alberta. Also, this study is one of a select few in Canadian political science to empirically examine agenda-setting in the day-to-day operations of any Canadian government. Therefore, the value of this study is important not only to academics but also to participants in the media and political spheres who wish to better understand the relationship between the two parties.

It was established in the literature review that agenda-setting has critical implications for the modern democratic process. People learn a great about the world through the media's eyes. This process, which is most probably incidental, is unplanned and unconscious for the receiver and usually unintentional on the part of the sender.[3] People learn in an almost automatic fashion about their social environment and respond to the information that they acquire through the structures of that social environment. The mass media tell their consumers about different kinds of social experiences and the associated expectations in the sphere of work, family life, political behavior, and the like.[4] The nature of the media process selects and reinforces certain values and behaviors in terms of social experience.[5] The mass media may also order and structure the world they portray, whether in fiction or in the area of news documentary, because of the editorial aspect of the reporting process.[6] Stuart Hall said "If people's actions depend on the way situations are defined, the process of creating situational definitions—agenda building—becomes important."[7]

In the past, agenda-setting studies have focused on the media and its effects upon the public and its political representatives. What was not realized by past authors was that the media is not solely in control of the public information process. As Cook explained, any model for political communication must be interactive; simple interpretations of media effects on politicians, or conversely, political effects on the media , are probably insupportable because the nexus of influences is itself so complex. Each side controls important elements in the process: politicians control access to information and designate the importance of certain events; journalists decide if events are important enough to be considered news at all.[8] The result is Cook's "negotiation of newsworthiness" which selects and filters what news is actually presented to the public for its consumption.[9] To understand what the public has presented to it as "news", in part a reflection of their own interests, is to understand the public's conception of reality. Understanding how the news is generated should reveal, at least in part, how that public perception of reality is formed.

A sufficient examination of this topic cannot be undertaken without quantifying, in some degree, the players. It was discovered that there was a considerable difference in age between the two elites, political and media. Politicians are much older than their journalistic counterparts and, although not manifested in the later parts of the study, this finding may still have important implications for the agenda-setting process. Because they are older, politicians may have different value systems than the journalists who cover them because their formative years were subject to different temporal influences. Demographic analysis also demonstrated that the two groups differed with regard to experience in their respective professions quite significantly. In this case, the difference favored the journalists who, by and large, had been employed many more years in their profession than most politicians had been MLAs. At the very least, we can say there are no journalistic novices covering provincial politics. Also, we can safely suggest that journalists who cover provincial politicians are experienced and understand their relationship with the politicians they cover. Politicians, on the other hand, are much more difficult to assess. It was not possible to estimate how long an individual might have been an active participant in the political process before becoming an MLA. It was also discovered in the demographic section that determining an individual's ideological position cannot explain media action. It was demonstrated that no matter what assignation on the political spectrum was assessed, politicians viewed the media as opposing them ideologically, whether that meant placing the media to the right or to the left. This indicates that the media are pleasing no one with respect to an ideological approach in its reporting. The media, generally, placed themselves in a neutral position with respect to ideological values.

The fourth chapter, "Roles," continued the examination of agenda-setting by looking at expectations of behavior for both politicians and media held by each party. These normative standards of expected behavior indirectly illustrate the rules or ideas which govern how participants should or should not behave in particular situations, formal (that is, for example, press conferences, interviews, ) or otherwise.[10] Here the study focused

on the responsibilities of each party in informing the public, the similarity and differences between the political and media version of events, and which message the public finally receives through the news. It was discovered that politicians and media representatives both felt that journalistic styles of reporting had changed and that neither group felt the other performed their expected roles of informing the public well. Journalists tend to see politicians as short-sighted, political maximizers who do not act in the public interest. Politicians argued that the media had moved from "reporting the facts" to "interpreting" them and injecting another variable into the process. The media were seen as moving in front of the news and creating it rather than just "covering" any particular political event. The new style of investigative journalism has forced politicians into a defensive stance such that once they release any information they lose control to the press not only of its final form but its impact on the public as well. The majority of journalists and politicians stated that the information that the public finally receives has become the property of the outlet which distributed it.

In a similar vein, chapter five investigated the issue of problems journalists and politicians have with respect to the news reporting process. It was hoped to gather a description of how some of the formal and informal rules of the game affect the agenda-setting process. It was generally described by both groups that their problems were with the structural aspects of the process more than deliberate intent. It was shown that market forces have important implications for the agenda-setting process because these forces often determine the structure of the news finally received by the public. These problems, identified by the participants, suggest that the media are in a better position to affect public opinion than the politician and that the politician was described to have lost control of the day-to-day release of information to of the media.

To get a better quantitative understanding of how agenda-setting works, an analysis of news consumption and evaluation was undertaken. It was discovered in chapter six that all politicians feed off a large "information pool" and that different politicians use the media

in different ways. Opposition politicians are what might be described as "media dependent" because their activities at the Legislature are largely geared to acquiring press coverage and a stimulus-response function exists between the opposition and the media. Government politicians, on the other hand, are not quite the same media junkies as their opposition counterparts and concentrate on the tone of their coverage rather than simply being covered in the press. News was also examined to see what were the effects of editing and corporate influence. It was shown that the media does place a filter on the news but that the filter is more structural in nature and that market forces, although not direct or overt, do manifest themselves in the kind of stories that the public finally receives. These stories are selected versions of reality and only highlight the essential aspects of an event. These essential aspects are determined by a process of negotiation between journalists and their editors on what they perceive to be the public demands.

The final chapter demonstrates that the media and politicians are engaged in an agenda-setting game and exposes the degree to which the rules of the game favour the media. The media do influence political behaviour and, to a lesser extent, politicians do influence media behaviour. The process is dynamic and no one group is in sole control of the process. It was also shown that politicians and journalists possess personal agendas and a notion of what constitutes the public agenda. These agendas are global in their outlook and both groups are in relative agreement as to what are the most important and least important issues in government. A particularly important finding is that the media present a global perspective with respect to the public agenda. Both groups, politicians and media representatives, stated that they were in a relative degree of affiliation with the public, sharing common ideas the priorities in the political sphere. Also, both groups were found to have similar policy agendas, reflecting a tendency to value the same policy concerns for good government. This agenda similarity was indicated on both a personal level and on the level of each group's conception of the public agenda.

This study has determined that a perception of agenda-setting does operate in the day-to-day business of the Alberta provincial government and that the relationship between politicians and the media is rich and complex. This complexity and interdependency has profound impacts on how each constituent, consumers of the nations press, perceive and react to the world. Agenda-setting in Alberta is like the battlefield metaphor described in this chapter's introduction; the media and politicians negotiate not only over what the public will finally consume but also what influences will be brought to bear on the public's perception of reality. The struggle over what constitutes news and how it is presented is indicated by the fact that both participants have described activities that are intended to improve their advantage.

What politicians and other political observers do not understand is that the media is not an organ dominated by one ideological perspective or another that filters the type of news the public receives. Instead, the media is constrained by the public to respond to their demands and public pressures impose critical limitations on the media's activities. Politicians state that political news often does little justice to the complexity of the issues presented. They ask for more depth and balance so that all sides of the issue can be presented. The media claim that *total* balance and depth is not possible. Public attention for in-depth stories is limited and space for such stories is even more so.

The rule for political news coverage is to give the public what it wants, not what it needs and in a market-driven media establishment, this addage takes on life or death importance from a business standpoint. It is the public limitations of time and attention that alter the context of the news as consumers choose only to read so much, watch newscasts that have a particular format, or listen to radio news as "station breaks" between the music. The media can only give a story so much attention due to the fact their physical resources are finite and that the public desire for greater detail is limited.

One may point out that editorial policies exist for all media outlets and that this policy could slant or filter political reporting, refuting the idea that all political news is

consumer confined. The fact remains that editorial stances do exist and that these stances manifest themselves in the editorial sections of the media. But sections that contain editorial comment are identified as such and are openly admitted to be either the opinion of one person or the view of the outlet. Political news is meant to be factual, concrete, and objective, while "opinion" is accepted to be argumentative and dialectic in nature. If, as Stuart Hall points out, people's actions depend on their definitions of the world, then the definition of opinion versus news is also important, important enough that it is obvious that it would have different agenda-setting effects. People accept "opinion" as just that, and their treatment of it is far different than their responses to be "factual reporting." "Fact" is accepted to be the "objective" truth by the consuming public while "opinion" is an interpretation of events in terms of their impact on our lives. If "opinion" is confused with the fact, that is an entirely different matter.

It may be the case when it comes to the selection of facts that are reported in the news that biases of the journalist or editor may highlight one aspect of an event over another. The politician's complaint that journalists are "interpreting" the facts instead of "reporting" them reported in this study suggest that this does happen. But even this idea of how certain aspects of a political news story are highlighted must fit into the confines of the medium. It is not my contention to suggest a reporter cannot slant a story by selecting certain facts, highlighting the use of certain words, or create an impression with a sensational headline. It is my contention, however, that structural constraints have more impact on agenda-setting than does the political slant of the media or reporter in question. More often than not, slant, which is truly a matter of journalistic style, is determined by audience demands rather than the reporters or medium. The obvious differences between the *Financial Post* and the *Edmonton Sun* and their respective styles of reporting place them within the context of the audience each outlet is trying to attract. If news is about constructing perceptions of reality, then the general mannerisms and procedures used in the

news process are the forms for that foundation. These rules and procedures are market determined.

The media argue that they cover political events because they are news and that the public has a right to know about political events. This may be the rationale and the media goes about its task with good intentions. But these constraints force a selected version of reality as some information is omitted and other information is highlighted so as to make the most profit for the institution. It is a fact that the media all cover the same major news on any given day; all that differs is their treatment. It is also a fact that the procedures and organizations used to cover the news are the same. Inter-medium news organizations (wire services and press organizations) and news coverage differ by degree not by kind. The reality for the media is they must cover certain events and certain types of news. If they do not, they are inviting bankruptcy because consumers would no longer utilize that information source. As was pointed out earlier in this discussion, even public media corporations like the CBC, who should be somewhat insulated from the pressures of a market economy, try to make their news "entertaining" to its consumers as they try to obtain ratings points to justify their use of tax dollars. All media outlets feel the market pressures to perform the news according to consumer demands. As a service to the public, the media cannot help but serve.

Knowing how the news is created and the major influences upon its construction, we can begin to understand some of the broader implications of the process. The agenda-setting process between politicians and the media is less than perfect. No one side can be called the "winner" all the time. Each combatant positions themselves on the field, fighting for control of public perception and, depending on the mix of circumstances on a given day, a different winner will emerge. We could interpret the greater media influence over political behavior in two ways. First, the media have a greater direct effect on politicians' behaviour when politicians are interacting directly with journalists. This may be at a press conference or in an interview where they are face-to-face. Second, the media have greater

indirect effects over politicians through the public. Politicians, feeding off the information pool of press reports are constantly absorbed with their own coverage and the coverage of other politicians and events, judging press reports in terms of how they will effect their goals. Knowing that bad media coverage might cause public outcry alters their decision schedules. The media do have greater agenda-setting influence over the public in this regard than their political counterparts.

The media has important effects on how we perceive our political leaders and the nature of the implementation of politics in any modern democracy. The politician must accept the fact that in the day-to-day operation of politics it is the media who are the ally or foe, not events that surround political activity. It is the media that creates the reality in which political events are assessed and judged to be good or bad according to the public interest. Politicians know the power of the press to alter their affairs is great and largely out of their hands except in the rarer moments when they hold the advantage, as they do during elections. Politicians can manipulate the media to their advantage in so far as they can control the information the media receive. By controlling the flow of information, political elites can manipulate public opinion in their favour. The only times that the flow of information can be controlled, however, are when circumstances conspire such that the structural requirements of the news collection process inhibit detailed scrutiny of the information released due to time constraints—as is the case during election campaigns.

If it is admitted that the media alters the behavior of politicians and the public alike, and if their motivations for doing so are determined by the information market, then the media establishment would be better described as an institution with an agenda of its own and the myth that they are neutral arbiters of fact should be dispelled. It has been shown that the media, irrespective of the medium, possess procedures that come to affect society as a whole by altering what we consider the important issues of the day. Finally, it has been shown that the media do have a global agenda, although not as clearly defined as the

political agenda, and an understanding of what they consider to be the public's priorities in government.

If one accepts that the media is a separate institution in the political process with its own motivations and agendas, then it is important to look at some of the ramifications in the institutional context. What effect have the procedures of the media institution had on the political process? For example, what effect has the new style of investigative reporting had on politicians and the public at large? In this study I have demonstrated that politicians have had their influence reduced with respect to the news process as they become targets in this style of reporting. What is not clear in this study is how this change in the relationship between the press and the political elites has affected the public. It may be that the acute coverage of conflict and the sensationalization of events has undermined the public confidence in its leaders and institutions. If television viewers see only Question Period and the staged press events for the cameras, he might be left with the impression that all our political leaders do is scream and ridicule each other and that nothing constructive is accomplished in a parliamentary government. The media have created a perception of reality, though not intentionally, driven by the market forces which encourage the encapsulization of an event. This case may also be a self fulfilling prophecy because the public has become cynical about its political institutions and media coverage reinforces that view by opting to reflect the perceived reality which may not have been created by the media in the first place; nonetheless, because that view is current in the populace, the media may favour an approach that validates the opinions of its consumers.

Agenda-setting exists because of the imperfect relationship between politicians and journalists. This imperfection affects what and how the public views both establishments and the world at large. This imperfection exists because, like Lippman's flashlight, truth and reality are subjective constructs. As this flashlight shines on certain aspects of daily life, citizens only receive that selected glimpse of the world which creates an incomplete impression. Both politicians and the media respond not only to real world events but also

to how those real world events are described and understood by the public. This framework determines the acceptable approaches from which to address the issues in the news. This is where the power of agenda-setting lies: whoever controls the flashlight controls the illumination of the political agenda.

In closing, I would like to outline some major areas that are in need of further research. First, the concept of the media as a political institution, with its own particular procedures and an, as yet, undetermined nature, need to be more fully examined than this study permitted. It is my opinion that a renewed examination of the institutional approach to politician-media relations merits greater attention. Second, the day-to-day aspects of agenda-setting and their effects needs to be followed up with some content analysis to confirm, or disprove, the findings of this study and the work of others to determine exactly what aspects of political behaviour are recorded by journalists to compose the news. This study is limited in that it only "reports" the presence of agenda-setting by politicians and journalists. Content analysis would bring provide considerable weight to the conclusions of this study. Thirdly, the nation's media establishment must be examined with regard to the constraints under which it operates in a market economy. These constraints, the surface of which only has been scratched here, have profound effects on the public perceptions of reality which, in turn, have critical implications with regard to the political process.

## Notes

(1) Walter Lippman. *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), p. 3

(2) David Taras. *The Newsmakers: The media's influence on Canadian politics* (Scarborough Ontario: Nelson Canada, 1990), p. 26

(3) Denis McQuail, , "The Influence and Effects of Mass Media: Media Power in Politics" ed.Doris A. Graber, *Congressional Quarterly Inc.* (1984), p.42

(4) McQuail. p.42

(5) McQuail. p.42

(6) McQuail. p.43

(7) Stuart Hall. "The Rediscovery of Ideology: Return of the Repressed in Media Studies" in Michael Gurevitch et. al., eds., *Culture, Society and the Media* (London: Methuen, 1982). p. 69

(8) Timothy E. Cook. "Thinking of the News Media as Political Institution." Paper prepared for delivery at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, August 1990, p. 7

(9) Cook, p. 7

(10) Carol Barner-Barry and Robert Rosenwein. *Psychological Perspectives On Politics* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1985), p. 20

## Bibliography

*American National Election Study, 1984: Pre- and Post-Election Survey File.* Conducted by the Center for Political Studies of the Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan and the National Election Studies, under the overall direction of Warren E. Miller and ICPSR ed., Ann Arbor, Mich.: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, 1986.

Barner-Barry Carol and Robert Rosenwein. *Psychological Perspectives On Politics* New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1985).

Beniger, James. "Media Content as Social Inicators: The Greenfield Index of Agenda-Setting" in *Communications Research*, vol. 5 no.4 (Oct. 1978).

Benton M., Frazier P.J. "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media at Three Levels of Information Molding" in *Communication Research*, vol.3 (1976).

Berelson Benard, Paul Lazarsfeld and William McPhee. *Voting; a study of opinion formation in a presidential campaign* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954).

Berkowitz, Dan. "TV News Sources and News Channels: A study in Agenda-Building" in *Journalism Quarterly* , vol.64 (1987).

Black, Edwin. *Politics and the News* (Toronto: Butterworths Group, 1982).

Bryant, Jennings and Dolf Zillman . *Perspectives on Media Effects* (New Jersy: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc., 1986).

Cocking, Clive. *Following the Leaders: A Media Watchers Diary of the 1979 Campaign* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada Ltd., 1980).

Cook, F.L. and T.R. Tyler. "Media and Agenda Setting Effects on Public Interest Group Leaders: Policy Makers and Policy" in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 47 ( (1983).

Crouse, Timothy. *The Boys on the Bus* (New York: Ballatine Books, 1973).

Demers David, DennisCraff , Yang-HoChoi , Beth Pessin "Issue Obtrusiveness and the Agenda-Setting Effects of the National Network News" in *Communication Research*, vol. 16 no.6 (Dec.1989).

Desbarats, Peter. *Guide to Canadian News Media* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990).

Erbring, Lutz and Goldenberg, Edie. "Front Page News and Real World Cues:A New Look at Agenda Setting by the Media" in *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 24 no.1 (Feb. 1980).

Fan, David. Book Review of Predictions of Public Opinion from the Mass Media by Micheal Mackuen in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol.54. (1990).

Fletcher, Frederick J. "Palying the Game: The Mass Media and the 1979 Campaign in Howard Penniman ed., *Canada at the Polls, 1979 and 1980: A Study of the General Elections* (Washington: American Enterprise for Public Policy Research, 1981).

Fletcher, Frederick J. "The Mass-Media and the Selection of National Party Leaders:Some Explorations", in George Perlin ed., *Party Democracy in Canada: The Politics of National Party Conventions* (Scarborough: Prentice Hall Canada Inc., 1988).

Funkenhouser G.R. "The issues of the sixties: An exploratory study in the dynamics of public opinion" in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 37 (1973).

Frum, Linda. *The News Makers: Behind the Camera's with Canada's Top TV Journalists* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1990).

Hall, Stuart "The Rediscovery of Ideology: Return of the Repressed in Media Studies" in Micheal Gurevitch et. al., *Culture, Society and the Media* (London: Methuen, 1982).

Harris, Richard. *A Cognitive Pschology of Mass Communication* (New Jersy:Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 1989).

Herman, Edward and Noam Chomsky . *Manufacturing Consent:The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).

Hohenberg, *John The Professional Journalist:A Guide to the Practices and Principles of the News Media* , 3 ed.(New York: Holt, Rinehert, and Winston Inc.,1973).

Iyengar Shanto and Donald Kinder. *News That Matters* (Chicago:The University of Chicago Press, 1987).

Iyengar Shanto, Kinder Donald "Psychological Accounts of Agenda-Setting" in Kraus Sidney, Perloff Richard eds., *Mass Media and Political Thought: An Information Processing Approach* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publication Inc. ,1985).

Kennamer, David J. " How Media Use During A Campaign Affects the Intent to Vote" *Jouranlism Quarterly*, vol. 64 (Summer-Autumn 1987).

Kinder Donald, Shanto Iyengar and Mark Peters . "Experimental Demonstration of the Not So Minimal Consequences of Television News Programs" in *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 76 no.4 (Dec. 1982).

Lippman, Walter. *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922).

Lazarfeld Paul, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet. *The Peoples Choice*, (New York: Colombia University Press, 1948)

Lipond, Mary. *The Mass Media in Canada* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company Publishers, 1989).

McQuail, Denis, "The Influence and Effects of Mass Media. Media Power in Politics" ed.Doris A. Graber,*Congressional Quarterly Inc.* 1984.

McCombs, Maxwell "The Agenda-Setting Approach" in Don Nimmo and Keith Sanders eds., *Handbook of Poltical Communication* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1981).

Neuman, Russell W. "The Threshold of Public Attention" in *Public Opinion Quaterly*, vol. 54 no.2 (Summer 1990).

Page B., R. Sahpiro and G. Dempsey. "What Moves Public Opionion" in *American Journal of Political Science* , vol. 81 no.1 (March 1987).

Pollard, George "Canadian Newssworkers: A Cross-Media Analysis of Professional and Personal Attributes" in *Canadian Journal of Communication*, vol. 11 no. 3 (1985).

Robinson, M.J., Kohut, A. "Believability and the Press" in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol.52 (1988).

Siegel, Arthur. *Politics and the Media in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw Hill Ryerson Limited,1983).

Siegel, S. *Nonparametric statisitcs for the behavioral sciences* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956).

Soderlund, Walter C. et. al..*Media and Elections in Canada* (Toronto:Holt , Rinehart and Winston of Canada Limited, 1984).

Taras, David . *The Newsmakers: The media's influence on Canadian politics* . (Scarborough Ontario: Nelson Canada, 1990)

Tipton L.P, R.D. Haney and J.B.Basehart " Media agenda-setting in the city and statewide elections campaigns" in *Journalism Quarterly*, vol. 52 (1975).

Wagner, Joseph. "Media Do Make a Differnce:The Differential Impact of Mass Media in the 1976 Presidential Race" in *American Journal of Political Science*, vol.27 no.3 (August 1983).

Wagenberg Ronald, Souderlund Walter "The Effects of Chain Ownership on Editorial Coverage: The Case of the 1974 Canadain Federal Election" in*Candian J Journal of Political Science*, vol. 9 (Dec. 1976).

Weaver D., D. Graber, M. McCombs, C. Eyal. *Media Agenda-Setting in a Presedential Elelction:Issues, Images and Interests* (New York: Praeger, 1981).

## Appendix

Survey A: Media

My name is Mike Nickel and I am doing my master's thesis in political science at the University of Alberta. The purpose of my study is to investigate political agenda-setting in Alberta by examining the relationships between journalists and the politicians they cover. I will ask you some questions about your overall relationship and feelings you have about politicians, as well as some general questions about your-self. Answer the questions the best you can given your circumstances and if you do not want answer any of the questions please tell me and we will move on. Most of the survey is open for your comments as to get the most out of this interview, so please do not hold back any answers or questions you might have.

Is there anything else you would like to know before we start?

(1) Question #1 Media-Political Relationship

In general both the media and the government strive to inform the public about policy concerns and/or public affairs. In your opinion, what role does the media play in the process of informing the public? What role does the government play?

Do you think that the message the public gets from the media and politicians is the same? Why is that?

In the final analysis who's message is it?

(2) Question #2 Changes from Editors

In the day-to-day process of covering the news, once a news story is in, how likely is that story to be change by the editing and/or producing section of your medium?

Why is that? Can you think of any situation that might cause a story to be changed?

(3) Question #3 Extent of Editorial Changes

On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 representing insignificant and 5 representing significant, from your experience how would you rate the alterations in a average story's overall message by changes made from the editing and/or producing section of your medium?

1 2 3 4 5 DK

(4) Question #4 External Efficacy Scale

On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 representing strongly disagree and 5 representing strongly agree, how would you asses the following statements:

a) Current political institutions in this province do not allow for much citizen input.

1 2 3 4 5 DK

b) The length of time between elections doesn't make the government pay attention to what people think for very long.

1 2 3 4 5 DK

c) The legislative process in Alberta does not allow for much individual input.

1 2 3 4 5 DK

d) In Alberta the political process does not allow for much access by interest groups.

1 2 3 4 5 DK

f) Sometims politics and government seem so complicated that the average person can't really understand what's going on.

1 2 3 4 5 DK

(5) Question #5 Special Problems with Politicians

When trying to cover the news do you encounter any special problems when working with politicians in general, say the government for example?

Are there any particular examples that come to mind?

What about the NDP, do encounter any problems with them?

How about the Liberals, do they cause any particular problems
Do politicians do anything in particular that helps you in covering the news?

(6) Question #6 Corporate Influence

On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 representing strongly disagree and 5 representing strongly agree, how would you assess the following statements:

a) Advertising values have come to dominate the news process.

1 2 3 4 5 DK

b) In their drive for profits, large media corporations have come to dominate the media industry in a negative fashion.

1 2 3 4 5 DK

c) There has been an increase in superficial material reported by the news process.

1 2 3 4 5 DK

d) Overall there is to much corporate interference with the management of news process.

1 2 3 4 5 DK

e) Overall there is to much internal political interference with the management of the news process.

1 2 3 4 5 DK

(7) Question #7 Pencil and Paper Task

I am now going to present you with a list of questions that need to be filled out by hand in order for them to be answer them. Instead of me reading each one of them aloud I would like you to read each one separately and answer them.

(8) Question #8 Issue Ranking: Public

I am going to present you a list of several broad policy fields and I would like you to rank them, as in first, second, third and so on..., in terms of your understanding of the public's perceived importance in government.

(Issue fields On cue cards: the deficit, the environment, agriculture, energy, social services, labour relations, federal-provincial relations, senate reform, taxation, education, constitution, economic diversification)

(9) Question #9 Issue Ranking Personal

As an institution the media is to objectively evaluate the information that they receive. The media is best informed to do this evaluation due to their close proximity to the political process. I would like you to re-examine the broad policy fields you have just ranked for the public. I would now like you to re-rank those policy fields in terms of your priorities in government.

(Issue fields On cue cards: the deficit, the environment, agriculture, energy, social services, labour relations, federal-provincial relations, senate reform, taxation, education, constitution, economic diversification)

(10) Question #10 Most Pressing Provincial Problems

What do you feel are the three most important problems facing the province today?

(First mention) (Second mention) (Third mention)

(11) Question #11 Non-political Memberships

I would like to know something about the groups or organizations to which you may belong? Could you tell me if you hold any memberships to...

Non-political organizations: _____

How many: _____

(12) Occupation

Reporter _____ Print _____

Editor/Producer_____ Radio _____

Publisher _____ TV _____

(13) Gender

Male _____

Female _____

(14) Question 14 Years as a Journalists

How many years have you been a professional journalist? years: _____

(15) Question #15 Previous Occupation

If applicable what was your occupation before you were a journalist?

(16) Question #16 Age

What year were you born in? Date: _____

(17) Question #17 Place of Birth

Where were you born? Location:_____

Pencil and Paper Tasks: Media

A) In terms of your position, on a scale of 0 to 10, 0 representing no effect and 10 representing determines, evaluate how much overall influence the **media have over politicians' behavior. Please circle the appropriate number.**

NO EFFECT DETERMINES

B) In terms of your position, on a scale of 0 to 10, 0 representing no effect and 10 representing determines, evaluate how much overall influence **politicians' have over media behavior. Please circle the appropriate number.**

NO EFFECT DETERMINES

C) Below is a scale with several gradients representing right and left . I would like you to put yourself on this scale in terms of your perceived leanings towards politics. **Please circle the appropriate number.**

Survey B: Politician

My name is Mike Nickel and I am doing my master's thesis in political science at the University of Alberta. The purpose of my study is to investigate political agenda-setting in Alberta by examining the relationships between politicians and the journalists they must deal with. I will ask you some questions about your overall relationship and feelings you have about the media, as well as some general questions about your-self. Answer the questions the best you can given your circumstances and if you do not want answer any of the questions please tell me and we will move on. Most of the survey is open for your comments as to get the most out of this interview, so please do not hold back any answers or questions you might have.

Is there anything else you would like to know before we start?

(1) Question #1 Media-Political Relationship

In general both the media and the government strive to inform the public about policy concerns and/or public affairs. In your opinion, what role does the media play in the process of informing the public? W hat role does the government play?

Do you think that the message the public gets from the media and politicians is the same? Why is that?

In the final analysis who's message/information is it?

(2) Question #2 Media Viewing Habits

Does anyone regularly monitors the news for you? How is this done?

(3) Question #3 News Quality

When you or your staff monitor the news what exactly are you looking for? What aspects of coverage do you focus on? I.e.. Factual/slant

(4) Question #4 Aspects of News Coverage

What aspects of news coverage helps or hinders you job?

(5) Question #5 Special Problems with Media

When trying to get your message to the public do you encounter any special problems when working with the media in general, say television for example?

Are there any particular examples that come to mind?

What about the print media, do encounter any problems with them?

What about radio, do they cause any particular problems

Do the media do anything in particular that helps you in getting your message out ?

(6) Question #6 Pencil and Paper Task

I am now going to present you with a list of questions that need to be filled out by hand in order for them to be answer them. Instead of me reading each one of them aloud I would like you to read each one separately and answer them.

(7) Question #7 Issue Ranking: Public

I am going to present you a list of several broad policy fields and I would like you to rank them, as in first, second, third and so on..., in terms of your understanding of the public's perceived importance in government.

(Issue fields On cue cards: the deficit, the environment, agriculture, energy, social services, labour relations, federal-provincial relations, senate reform, taxation, education, constitution, economic diversification)

(8) Question #8 Issue Ranking Personal

I would like you to re-examine the broad policy fields you have just ranked for the public. I would now like you to re-rank those policy fields in terms of your priorities in government.

(Issue fields On cue cards: the deficit, the environment, agriculture, energy, social services, labour relations, federal-provincial relations, senate reform, taxation, education, constitution, economic diversification)

(9) Question #9 Most Pressing Provincial Problems

What do you feel are the three most important problems facing the province today?

(First mention) (Second mention) (Third mention)

(10) Question #10 Non-political Memberships

I would like to know something about the groups or organizations to which you may belong? Could you tell me if you hold any memberships to...

Non-political organizations: _____

How many: _____

Demographics

(11) Partisan Affiliation:

MLA. _____ Party: PC _____

Minister _____ NDP _____

Liberal _____

(12) Gender:

Male _____

Female _____

(13) Question #13 Years in the House

How many years have you sat in the legislative assembly? years: _____

(14) Question #14 Previous Occupation

What was your occupation before you were elected to the legislature?

(15) Question #15 Age

What year were you born in? Date: _____

(16) Question #16 Place of Birth

Where were you born? Location:_____

**Survey Code Book**

A) Media Survey

(1) Media case = MNUMBER

(2) Medium = MEDIUM
1- Newspaper
2- Television
3- Radio

(3) Occupation = JOB
1- Reporter
2- Editor/Producer or Publisher/ Owner

(4) Gender = SEX
1- Male
2- Female

(5) Years as a Journalists = YEARS

Length Measured in years

(6) Age = AGE

Length Measured in years

(7) Place of Birth = BIRTH
0- Alberta
1- Saskatchewan
2- Ontario
3- Quebec
4- Other
5- British Colombia
6- Manitoba
7- Newfoundland

(8) Number of Memberships Held to Non-political Organizations = MEMB

Frequency Mentioned

(9) Extent of Editorial Changes = EDIT
0- Did Not Answer/Don't Know
1- Insignificant
2- Some What Insignificant
3- Neutral
4- Some What Significant
5- Significant

(10) External Efficacy Scale
i) Current political institutions in this province do not allow for much citizen input. = EFFA
0- Did Not Answer/Don't Know
1- Strongly Disagree
2- Disagree
3- Neutral
4- Agree
5- Strongly Agree
ii) The length of time between elections doesn't make the government pay attention to what people think for very long. = EFFB
0-Did Not Answer/Don't Know
1- Strongly Disagree
2- Disagree
3- Neutral
4- Agree
5- Strongly Agree
iii) The legislative process in Alberta does not allow for much individual input.= EFFC
0-Did Not Answer/Don't Know
1- Strongly Disagree
2- Disagree
3- Neutral
4- Agree
5- Strongly Agree
iv) In Alberta the political process does not allow for much access by interest groups.= EFFD
0- Did Not Answer/Don't Know

1- Strongly Disagree
2- Disagree
3- Neutral
4- Agree
5- Strongly Agree

v) Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that the average person can't really understand what's going on. = EFFE

0- Did Not Answer/Don't Know
1- Strongly Disagree
2- Disagree
3- Neutral
4- Agree
5- Strongly Agree

(11) Question #6 Corporate Influence

i) Advertising values have come to dominate the news process. = CORPA

0- Did Not Answer/Don't Know
1- Strongly Disagree
2- Disagree
3- Neutral
4- Agree
5- Strongly Agree

ii) In their drive for profits, large media corporations have come to dominate the media industry in a negative fashion. = CORPB

0- Did Not Answer/Don't Know
1- Strongly Disagree
2- Disagree
3- Neutral
4- Agree
5- Strongly Agree

iii) There has been an increase in superficial material reported by the news process. = CORPC

0- Did Not Answer/Don't Know
1- Strongly Disagree
2- Disagree
3- Neutral
4- Agree
5- Strongly Agree

iv) Overall there is to much corporate interference with the management of news process. = CORPD

0- Did Not Answer/Don't Know
1- Strongly Disagree
2- Disagree
3- Neutral
4- Agree
5- Strongly Agree

v) Overall there is to much internal political interference with the management of the news process. = CORPE

0- Did Not Answer/Don't Know
1- Strongly Disagree
2- Disagree
3- Neutral
4- Agree
5- Strongly Agree

(12) Media Influence Over Politicians = MEDINF
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- No Effect
2- 2
3- 3
4- 4
5- 5
6- 6
7- 7
8- 8
9- 9
10- Determines

(13) Politician's Influence Over Media = POLINF
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- No Effect
2- 2
3- 3
4- 4
5- 5
6- 6
7- 7
8- 8
9- 9
10- Determines

(14) Media Self-perceived Ideology = MEDIDEO
(4)- Right 4
(3)- Right 3
(2)- Right 2
(1) Right 1
(0) Neutral
(-1) Left 1
(-2) Left 2
(-3) Left 3
(-4) Left 4

(15) Media's Most Important Problems Facing the Province = MEDPROB
Frequency of First Mention
Frequency of Second Mention
Frequency of Third Mention

B) Politician Survey

(1) Politician case = PNUMBER

(2) Party Affiliation = PARTY
1- Progressive Conservative
2- New Democratic Party/ Liberal

(3) Occupation = JOB
1- Minister
2- MLA

(4) Gender = SEX
1- Male
2- Female

(5) Years as a Politician = YEARS

Length Measured in years

(6) Age = AGE

Length Measured in years

(7) Place of Birth = BIRTH
0- Alberta
1- Saskatchewan
2- Ontario
3- Quebec
4- Other
5- British Colombia
6- Manitoba
7- Newfoundland

(8) Number of Memberships Held to Non-political Organizations = MEMB

Frequency Mentioned

(9) Objectivity Rankings of Media Outlets On News Coverage of Provincial Affairs
i) ITV (channel 13) = OBJA
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective
ii) CFRN (channel 3) = OBJB
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective
iii) CBC English (channel 5) = OBJC
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective
iv) CBC French (channel 11) = OBJD
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral

4- Some What Objective
5- Objective

v) CFCN (channel 2) = OBJE
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective

vi) CFCN (channel 4) = OBJF
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective

vii) CBRT (channel 9) = OBJG
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective

iix) CKRD (channel 6) = OBJH
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective

ix) Edmonton Journal = OBJI
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective

x) Edmonton Sun = OBJJ
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective

xi) Calgary Herald = OBJK
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective

xii) Calgary Sun = OBJL
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased

2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective

xiii) Lethbridge Herald = OBJM
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective

xiv) Medicine Hat News = OBJN
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective

xv) Red Deer Advocate = OBJO
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective

xvi) Alberta/Western Report = OBJP
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective

xvii) CFCA 960 Calgary = OBJQ
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective

xiix) CFCN 1060 Calgary = OBJR
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective

xix) CHFM 95.9 Calgary = OBJS
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective

xx) CKRY- FM 105.1 Calgary = OBJT

0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective

xxi) CBC (FM) 90.9 Calgary = OBJU
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective

xxii) CBC (AM) 740 Edmonton = OBJV
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective

xxiii) CFRN 1260 Edmonton = OBJW
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective

xxiv) CHQT 880 Edmonton = OBJX
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective

xxv) CISN 103.9 Edmonton = OBJY
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective

xxvi) CKNG 92.5 Edmonton = OBJZ
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- Very Biased
2- Some What Biased
3- Neutral
4- Some What Objective
5- Objective

(10) Media Influence Over Politicians = MEDINF
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- No Effect
2- 2
3- 3

4- 4
5- 5
6- 6
7- 7
8- 8
9- 9
10- Determines

(11) Politician's Influence Over Media = POLINF
0- Don't Know/ Did Not Answer
1- No Effect
2- 2
3- 3
4- 4
5- 5
6- 6
7- 7
8- 8
9- 9
10- Determines

(12) Politician Perception of Media Ideology = MEDIDEO
(4)- Right 4
(3)- Right 3
(2)- Right 2
(1) Right 1
(0) Neutral
(-1) Left 1
(-2) Left 2
(-3) Left 3
(-4) Left 4

(13) Politician Self-perceived Ideology = POLIDEO
(4)- Right 4
(3)- Right 3
(2)- Right 2
(1) Right 1
(0) Neutral
(-1) Left 1
(-2) Left 2
(-3) Left 3
(-4) Left 4

(14) Politician's Most Important Problems Facing the Province = POLPROB
Frequency of First Mention
Frequency of Second Mention
Frequency of Third Mention

C) Other Variables

(1) Number of newspapers read daily = PAPERS

(2) Number of television news broadcasts watched daily = TV

(3) Number of radio news broadcasts listen to daily = RADIO

(4) Total number of media outlets attended to daily = OUTLETS

(5) Television objectivity score on coverage of provincial affairs = TVRAT

(6) Newspaper objectivity score on coverage of provincial affairs = PAPERRAT

(7) Radio objectivity score on coverage of provincial affairs = RADIORAT

(8) Total objectivity score for all mediums on coverage of provincial affairs = TOTALRAT

D) Issue Ranking

(1) Issue ranking for agriculture = AGRI

(2) Issue ranking for the constitution = CONSTIT

(3) Issue ranking for the provincial deficit = DEFICIT

(4) Issue ranking for economic diversification = ECONDIV

(5) Issue ranking for education = EDC

(6) Issue ranking for energy = ENG

(7) Issue ranking for the environment = ENVIR

(8) Issue ranking for federal - provincial relations = FP

(9) Issue ranking for health care = HC

(10) Issue ranking for labour relations = LAB

(11) Issue ranking for senate reform = SENREF

(12) Issue ranking for social services = SOCSERV

(13) Issue ranking for taxation = TAXATION