IDEAS AND THE PRESIDENT’S AGENDA

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Abstract

of

IDEAS AND THE PRESIDENT’S AGENDA

by

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Studies conducted on presidential agenda setting have alluded to the important role that ideas can play in the process. However, this aspect of the process has gone largely undeveloped. This study draws on ideational theory to develop a framework for studying the role of ideas in the presidential agenda setting process and applies the framework in a case study of President Jimmy Carter’s energy policy. The data for this study is drawn from interviews with presidential staff, government documents, periodicals, peer reviewed articles, and presidential speeches. The study offers a detailed illustration of the causal role that ideas can play in the presidential agenda setting process.
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Chapter 1

THE PRESIDENT’S AGENDA

Defining the President’s Agenda

The agenda is perhaps the most important component of the political process for three primary reasons. As Schattschnider argued, some issues are organized into politics while others are organized out (Schattschnider, 1960). The issues that are “organized in” at any given time comprise the agenda. Therefore, the agenda determines whether a given issue will even be considered. Additionally, the agenda defines the boundaries of political deliberation by establishing the alternatives to be considered for addressing an issue (Kingdon, 2003). Consider a panel deliberating two alternatives pertaining to the issue of military spending, one to increase military spending, and one to maintain its current levels. Those interested in decreasing military spending will not be heard. Finally, the agenda can also affect both the perceived and actual importance of an issue. Placing an issue at the top of an agenda affords it a greater chance of being perceived as more important, thereby increasing the probability that more resources will be allotted to dealing with it, most notably time (Light, 1999).

But what exactly is “the agenda”? A review of the literature yields many different definitions. Consider the following sample:

“The agenda, as I conceive of it, is the list of subjects or problems to which government officials, and people outside of government closely associated with those officials, are paying some serious attention at any given time.” (Kingdon, 3, 2003)

“The political agenda may be defined as the set of problems and policy proposals being seriously debated by the
attentive public and by policy makers, and the terms of that debate, defined as the set of assumptions and rationales that link problems with policy proposals.” (Sinclair, 1985)

“I conceptualize agenda setting as the initial part of the legislative process. It encapsulates the placement of policy proposals into the legislative process. The agenda as conceptualized here can only be set by members of Congress or the president……I do not define agenda as the set of issues and initiatives being considered by the members of the Washington community, but as the set of concrete legislative proposals that have been thoroughly thought through and explicitly offered by the president or members of congress.” (Taylor, 1998)

These definitions are emblematic of the discord exhibited in the literature as it pertains to defining “the agenda.” At one end of this small sampling is Kingdon’s definition focusing on issues. At the other end is Taylor’s definition, which focuses on policy proposals. Meanwhile, Sinclair combines issues and proposals with the arguments that bind them together in conceptualizing the agenda. Such distinctions are important as they can lead the research and observations in different directions and ultimately affect the outcomes of a study.

The differences are due in large part to the fact that agendas exist in many dimensions and are indeed pervasive throughout all parts of government (Kingdon, 2003). In the broadest sense, the agenda is referred to as “systemic” and is typically described as being comprised of the issues that are receiving the most attention from the government and the public. By contrast, scholars often refer to the “institutional agenda” when referring to the issues that are receiving the most attention from just government officials. In a sense, agendas can also be viewed hierarchically. In this respect, there are
overarching issues, such as energy, with sub level issues, such as coal, which can be broken down even further. Additionally, there are varying venues within which these issues are addressed. For example, the House of Representatives has Committees and Sub Committees. As a result, a researcher’s vantage point, or focus, will ultimately influence their definition of “the agenda.”

This study focuses on the president’s agenda. In perhaps the most comprehensive study of presidential agendas conducted to date, Paul Light defines the president’s agenda as follows:

“The president’s agenda is perhaps best understood as a signal. It indicates what the president believes to be the most important issues facing his administration. It identifies what the president considers to be the most appropriate alternatives for solving the problems. It identifies what the president deems to be the highest priorities. Thus, every agenda item (1) addresses an issue; (2) involves a specific alternative; (3) has some priority in the domestic queue.”

Light’s inclusion of “a specific alternative” in his definition of the president’s agenda opens the door for some debate. Should alternatives be considered when discussing agenda setting? Or, is the study of agenda setting only concerned with issues? Kingdon offers an argument that can serve as a focal point in this debate. Kingdon points out that the term “agenda setting” refers to both issues and alternatives in most of the agenda literature. He argues that combining the two obscures our understanding of the agenda setting process as different factors are at play in each. For example, the actors and mechanisms involved in getting an issue on to the agenda may differ from the actors and mechanisms involved in getting an alternative attached to an issue and thereby on to the
agenda.

However, Light argues that alternative selection is the most important step, and the most difficult task, in the president’s domestic agenda process. Additionally, alternative selection is perhaps the most important component of agenda setting as it pertains to any power structure (Schattschnieder, 1960). If alternative selection is not studied in terms of the agenda setting process, then there can be no true understanding of power within the process. As Bachrach and Baratz argued, the ability of an actor to limit the consideration of issues or alternatives to only those that are innocuous to its interests is an important aspect of power. It is inevitable for an issue to be on an agenda at some level within the agenda hierarchy at some point in time. The “hidden power,” as Bachrach and Baratz refer to it, is most at play in the alternative selection process. This is the point at which interests face the prospect of noxious circumstances.

Studying alternatives in the context of the agenda setting process is clearly warranted and Light’s definition of the presidential agenda will therefore be utilized here. It is therefore prudent to point out that studying alternatives in the agenda setting process typically requires case studies as aggregate studies may not be able to provide full understanding of the differing nuances involved with each issue (Peake, 2001). Hence, Jimmy Carter’s experience with the issue of energy has been selected.

However, why should the President be the sole actor of focus? After all, the President is just one of many actors with the capability of getting an issue onto an agenda. Additionally, he typically accepts major concessions to ensure passage of his proposed alternatives (Barrett, 2007 and Eshbaugh-Soha, 2005). The simple answer is
that by and large, the president is considered by many to be the single most important actor in the national agenda setting process (Kingdon, Neustadt, Baumgartner and Jones, Peak 2001). The president is a major player in getting issues on to the systemic agenda. Additionally the president plays a major role in establishing the parameters of debate by offering concrete alternatives, or guidance in formulating the alternatives. As such, a very wide body of literature has been devoted to studying the president’s agenda. This research can be divided in to four major categories: 1) Presidents in relation to other institutions, 2) Presidential powers, 3) Studies on particular issues and 4) Comprehensive studies on the president’s agenda.

Presidential Agenda Setting Literature

Presidents in Relation to Other Institutions

A wide body of literature is devoted to studying the complex relationship between the president’s agenda and the agendas of other institutions in the political system, including Congress, the Supreme Court, the media, and the public. In this literature, there is an insinuation that the president’s ability to control his own agenda is in part contingent upon his ability to control the agendas of other actors in the political system. The less control he has over them, the more control they have over him, not only in his choice of issues, but also in his choice of action. But how does the president achieve control? Richard Neustadt (1964) asserts that presidential prestige, or popularity, is a central source of presidential power. As evidence, presidential approval ratings have been demonstrated to be positively correlated with the president’s legislative success in Congress (Edwards, 1976). In addition, popular presidents have exhibited a greater
positive correlation between presidential attention to an issue and public awareness of the issue. Meanwhile, both popular and unpopular presidents have demonstrated greater resilience to changing their own agenda to meet the popular demands of the public and other institutions (Manza and Cook 2002, Canes-Wrone and Shotts, 2004), while presidents with average popularity have been shown to be more likely to adopt popular policy positions (Canes-Wrone and Shotts, 2004). Furthermore, popular presidents are more likely to advance agendas that contain more major and long term policy items regardless of their party affiliation (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2005). Finally, presidents have been shown to focus on foreign policy issues in the face of low approval ratings (Andrade and Young, 1996).

There are many factors that can potentially influence approval ratings that are outside the president’s control, such as international events or private sector economic crises (Edwards, 1976). There are also factors that the president can control. For example, mixed results have been reported by scholars who have studied the effect of certain presidential activities on presidential popularity. President’s have been found to achieve short lived increases in popularity by engaging in political drama, such as traveling to other nations or staging speeches (MacKuen, 1983). However, other studies have found that major speeches have a positive impact, foreign travel has a neutral impact, and domestic trips have a negative impact (Brace and Hinckley, 1992).

Overall, the literature supports the notion that presidential prestige, or popularity, affords the president greater latitude in controlling his agenda, and in many cases,
influencing the agendas of other actors within the political system. However, the degree to which the president can control his own popularity remains uncertain.

The Media

There is conflicting evidence on the influence of the media over the president’s agenda. Many studies conclude that the media exerts great influence over the presidential agenda. Rogers and Dearing (1996) concluded that there is evidence that the media has direct influence on the policy agendas of elite decision makers. For example, investigative journalism can often shed light on issues in a way that dramatically increases salience, thereby forcing them on to the agendas of elite decision makers (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). Additionally, the media can influence the public’s perception of the importance of a given issue by devoting more, or less, coverage to it (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). In response, presidents may move the issue up, or down, as a priority on their agenda. Furthermore, multiple studies have found that presidents react to media coverage on foreign policy and global events most of the time (Edwards and Wood, 1999, and Wood and Peake, 1998). Finally, it has also been shown that the president is responsive to the media on salient issues, foreign or domestic (Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake, 2005).

Findings of media influence are questioned on several grounds. Baumgartner and Jones find that media coverage does indeed respond to governmental and official concerns. This finding suggests at least a two way street. However, Light, whose study focused strictly on domestic policy, found that the media was the least important source of ideas for the president’s agenda of any of the eight sources he studied. Edwards and
Wood (1999) back this assertion up by finding that presidents enjoy greater latitude on setting the domestic agenda and focusing the attention of other actors on their chosen issues. Additionally, Kingdon (2003) found that the media often covers issues that are not considered important by Washingtonians and that they often do not cover issues that are considered important by Washingtonians (Kingdon, 2003). Similarly, other studies have found that relying on media coverage to describe the important agenda items would only expose the tip of the iceberg (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993). These findings suggest that the president’s agenda is comprised of many more issues than are being covered by the media at any given time. Therefore, the discord may be the result of perspective. Those studying the issue from the media’s perspective may be missing two important factors. First, they may be neglecting the total number of issues on the president’s agenda at any given time. The percentage of these issues that are also being covered by the media may be relatively small. Second, it is possible that many of the issues being covered by the media would have made their way to the president’s agenda even without media coverage.

The Public

The public has also been widely studied with respect to its influence over the president’s agenda. Light found that presidents continuously monitor public opinion as a means of generating agenda issues. Other researchers have sought to hone in on specifics. For example, in the area of foreign policy, the public has been found to have influence over the president’s agenda when it comes to highly salient issues (Wood and Peake, 1999). Additionally, presidents have been found to be much more responsive to public
opinion when reelection is approaching and they need to generate electoral support (Canes-Wrone, Shotts, 2004, Yates, and Whitford, 2005). In times of divided government, presidents have been shown to strategically select issues based on public perceptions of their political party’s ability to deal with them, referred to as “party owned issues.” For example, despite the fact that less than 10% of the public viewed national security as an important issue, President Reagan made it a major agenda issue because the public gave Republicans an overwhelming 28 point advantage on the issue (Cummins, 2010). Finally, presidents have even been shown to exhibit more liberal positions as public opinion leans in that direction (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson, 2002).

While public influence over the president’s agenda is important, the president’s influence over the public’s agenda is perhaps equally so. The more control the president has over the agendas of other actors, the more control he has over his own. In this regard, the president has been shown to influence the institutional agenda by making public appeals on issues for which he holds a publically popular position (Canes-Wrone, 2001). On foreign policy issues, the president has been shown to have far greater success in getting issues on the public’s agenda when it comes to less salient issues versus salient issues (Peake, 2001). Additionally, Behr and Ivengar (1985) found that presidential speeches devoted to the issue of energy or inflation resulted in a significant increase in public attention to these issues while speeches devoted to unemployment had no measurable effect. Moreover, Jeffrey Cohen found that the mere mention of an issue in the State of the Union Address (SOTU) is associated with increased public attention to
the issue as measured by the Gallup Poll’s Most Important Problem Series. This indicates that presidents need not rely on substantive arguments to effect public attention.

However, later studies have revealed that the SOTU’s influence over public opinion has diminished with proliferation of cable television and alternative media choices (Young and Perkins, 2005).

Congress

Excluding the president, Congress is perhaps the most influential agenda setter in terms of the systemic agenda. Paul Light’s study found that Congress was the single biggest source of ideas for the president’s agenda. Specifically, presidential staffers and the president communicate directly with congressional staff and congressional leaders to determine the issues of greatest importance to congress and then select from among those issues to pursue as part of the president’s agenda. Matthew Eshbaugh-Soha argues that the president’s first consideration in agenda setting is the congressional makeup. He finds that presidents, regardless of their party affiliation, will advance agendas with major and long-term policies when working with a more liberal congress. Others have shown that presidents are seemingly forced to make foreign policy issues a part of their agenda during periods in which they are exhibiting little influence over congress. It has also been shown that Senate and House leaders have been setting an increasingly larger portion of the domestic agenda than the president since the 1950s (Taylor, 1998). Despite this robust body of research that shows considerable Congressional influence on the presidential agenda setting process, there are a few findings to the contrary. Some studies have found that congress has very little influence over the president’s agenda (Wood and
Peake 1998 and Woods and Edwards 1999). Even with these studies, it appears as though Congress at least serves as a major source for presidential agenda issues and possible alternative blueprints. This is logical given the nature and duties of the institution. In a sense, congress can serve as an issue and alternative incubator and library.

The Supreme Court

It has been argued that Supreme Court actions can reverberate throughout society, igniting interests to take action, which in turn focuses public attention and forces an issue on to the systemic agenda (Flemming, Bohte, Wood, 1997). However, the Supreme Court has received little attention in agenda setting research. Paul Light makes no mention of the Supreme Court in his work on presidential agenda setting. Other studies have concluded that the Supreme Court has no effect on the president’s agenda (Wood and Peake 1998 and Woods and Edwards 1999). Yet other studies have found that the court may be more effective at bringing issues to prominence than changing preferences about them (Franklin and Kosaki, 1989). The Court’s influence in this regard may be dependent on the effects of the ruling in any given case. Decisions that redistribute political power and benefits have been found to have a sustaining influence on issue attention as groups mobilize to protect their interests. By contrast, decisions that do not have such an impact have been found to result in temporary or no increase in issue attention (Flemming, Bohte, Wood, 1997). While these findings warrant further research to be conducted on the influence of the Supreme Court over the president’s agenda, the research conducted to date establishes that the Supreme Court’s influence is rather negligible.
Executive Mechanisms

While the interplay between the president and other institutions has been the focus of most of the presidential agenda setting research, there are researchers who assert that the president is capable of accomplishing many goals without ever getting involved in this interplay, and largely outside of anyone’s attention. These researchers argue that as the executive branch has grown, so to have the powers of the president to effect change via executive and administrative orders. Presidents have been shown to accomplish substantive goals through the use of executive orders (Mayer, Kenneth, 1999). For example, in 2003, during the height of the predatory lending crisis, an executive order led the OCC to invoke a clause from the 1863 National Bank Act to issue formal opinions preempting all state predatory lending laws (Spitzer, 2008). To add further credence to this argument, the sheer volume of these actions has been demonstrated to be quite immense. For example, 560 laws were passed during the relatively busy 106th congress, while during the same period the executive branch produced over 157,000 pages of new rules and regulations administratively (Durant, Robert, 2009).

Interestingly, these actions fall largely outside of the scope of the presidential agenda setting research. Some would argue that they should not be considered agenda issues as they do not constitute items that are receiving maximum presidential support and resources (Light, 1999). However, it is possible that they are not receiving such attention because they can be easily accomplished behind the scenes. In this sense, the issues may be no less important to the president, and no less impactful on the political
system. Settling this debate is outside the scope of this paper, but clearly future research should focus on reconciling these differences and studying this aspect of presidential agendas.

Issues

To date, a large number of studies have found differences in presidential agenda processes and influence depending on the nature or subject matter of the issue. As previously mentioned, presidents have been shown to select “party owned” issues during times of unified government and trespass on the opposing party’s “owned issues” during times of unified government (Cummins, Jeff, 2010). Furthermore, Presidents have been found to exert their greatest influence over the systemic agenda when dealing with major domestic policy issues, as defined by Gormley’s Salience Categorization (Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake, 2004). However, presidents have far more systemic agenda success with less salient foreign policy issues and typically react to media pressure on major foreign policy issues (Peake, 2001, Edwards and Wood, 1999, and Wood and Peake, 1998). Additionally, evidence suggests that there is a reciprocal relationship between the president’s agenda and the public’s agenda on foreign policy (Quaile Hill, 1998). However, a one-way relationship, with the president influencing the public, has been exhibited on civil rights issues (Quaile Hill 1998). On economic issues, presidents have been found to be largely responsive to media coverage (Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake, 2005).
Studies Focused on the Entire Process

It is clear that the presidential agenda setting process is quite complex. There are many variables to consider in the struggle that ensues between the president and various institutions of government as they vie for limited systemic agenda space and the ability to control their own agendas. Meanwhile, constantly evolving political and social systems are also affecting changes in the presidential agenda setting process. To date there has been only one study that has tackled the explanation of the entire presidential agenda setting process.

Paul Light conducted perhaps the most comprehensive and widely cited study on the president’s domestic agenda. He held interviews with 128 staff members and researched OMB records to evaluate the presidential agenda setting process. He observes that presidents, like all political actors, have goals that include reelection, historical achievement, and the enactment of “good” policy. To achieve these goals the president must rely on various resources that can either assist or hinder him in his quest. The most important resources are time, information, expertise, energy, and political capital. All decisions regarding the domestic agenda are measured against these resources.

Issues are selected based in part on their perceived capability to contribute to one of the aforementioned presidential goals. Eight potential issue sources were studied with Congress, the public, crises, and the president and his staff found to be the main sources of issue generation. An issue is only pursued if an alternative is available to deal with it. There are several tools at the president’s disposal in this regard, ranging from a veto to a
full-blown large-scale program. In selecting from amongst these tools, presidents
evaluate the costs of any given alternative against their political capital and select a
course of action that best meets their needs at the time.

In conceptualizing the presidential agenda setting process, Light considers three
major concepts of decision making that have been associated with presidential decision
making over the last 30 years. First, the “rational actor” model requires a comprehensive
analysis of the options available and a determination of their costs and benefits. The
option chosen is the one determined to be most profitable. Second, the “behavioral theory
of the firm” describes a dynamic decision making process in which coalitions develop
within the organization and vie for their chosen viewpoint. Typically, the final decision is
the one that leaves no actor greatly unsatisfied. Third, the “garbage can model” describes
a fluid decision-making process in which independent streams of problems, solutions,
participants, and energy interact in a sort of organized anarchy. Decisions are made in
many different ways depending on the interactions of the streams.

Light observes that all three models are at play at some point, but argues that the
presidential agenda setting process most resembles the “behavioral model” developed by
Cyert and March in their 1963 analysis of the business firm. The executive branch lacks
the time, information, and expertise required by the rational actor model and it lacks the
time, and energy for the garbage can model. Additionally, the garbage can model does
not capture the goal-oriented nature of the presidency, nor does it account for levels of
information, expertise, and presidential involvement exhibited in the presidency.
The behavioral model captures two of the primary processes that Light observed in his extensive study. First, groups of coalitions develop within the executive branch. These coalitions may evolve around any number of issues or viewpoints. Second, the decision making process tends to fluctuate between two activities: bargaining and domination. In action, the coalitions will vie to get their issue or alternative on to the agenda. To do so, they will either bargain with the others, or dominate the others to achieve the goal. Most commonly, bargaining tends to happen early in a presidency and domination tends to take over later. Light often repeats that all actors and coalitions are striving to achieve the same goals: reelection, historical achievement, and good policy.

Conclusion

Light’s analysis reveals the major processes at work and many of the nuances that transpire between the various actors involved. Between it and the rest of the literature, we have achieved a robust understanding of the presidential agenda setting process. However, we are still left with gaping questions. Why is one issue chosen over another? Why is one alternative chosen over another? The literature examined thus far has several answers, but still leaves these questions unanswered in many circumstances. First, “focus events” or major crises can certainly force issues on to the agenda. However, not all issues get to the agenda because they are focusing events. Second, choices may be the result of constraints created by low capital, such as when the president chooses to concentrate on foreign policy because of low legislative influence. However, we are still left wondering why a president would choose one particular foreign policy issue and corresponding alternative over others. Third, presidents may choose issues because they
possess a publicly popular position on the issue, or are perceived as being highly capable of handling the issue. However, presidents certainly hold many publicly popular positions and are perceived to be highly capable of handling many issues. They would not have become president otherwise. So why do they choose one issue and corresponding alternative over others? Fourth, choices may be the result of an analysis that determined they provided the highest benefit at the least cost. If this is the case, then how could coalitions within the president’s staff, all with the same goals, possess such opposing stances on the same subjects? Fifth, choices may be the result of one coalition within the executive branch overpowering another, or possessing the stance that satisfied all goals to some degree. Again, we are left contemplating why coalitions with the same goals would have such opposing positions on the same topic.

Additional considerations are necessary to thoroughly answer these questions. This paper does not contend that the work conducted to date is incorrect, rather that it is incomplete. In fact, this paper will not only utilize Light’s definition of the president’s agenda, it will also build upon his fundamental decision making framework. Light identifies two of the president’s goals as “historical achievement” and “good policy.” As Light points out, both are subjective considerations. Historical achievement requires speculation on future considerations. Good policy is based on ideology, or the president’s idea of what constitutes good policy. However, both of these considerations go largely undeveloped in Light’s work. To answer these questions and extend the current body of research, this paper will argue that ideas play a causal role in the agenda setting process. To do so, it will draw upon ideational research to explain how ideas are causal in the
policy making process and apply some of the fundamental approaches of ideational research to the presidential agenda setting process. Furthermore, this study will utilize an ideational typology created by John Campbell as the basis for an ideational model of presidential agenda setting. New concepts will be developed and added to Campbell’s typology in order to address the unique nature of a singular decision making body such as the presidency.
Chapter 2

IDEAS

The role of ideas in social and political life has been debated by historians and philosophers for thousands of years. In the last 150 years, ideational explanations were common at one point, but then went largely unnoticed for quite some time as other explanatory models, such as institutionalism and rational actor models, dominated the debate. Ideational research has experienced resurgence in the last 25 years as the ability of more dominant models to explain various aspects of political change and policymaking processes has come in to question. For example, many researchers contended that these models left many questions unanswered in the case of political change at the end of the cold war (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993). Ideational theories and concepts are now being commonly applied in international relations studies. For example, ideational theories are commonly applied in comparative political studies. Researchers will, for example, compare how the same idea, economic theories for example, affects policy outcomes in different countries (Hall, 1989). Furthermore, ideational theories are being incorporated into existing theories to add to our understanding of the policy making process (Anderson, 2008). The next section of this paper will discuss the treatment of ideas in both systemic and presidential agenda setting research. This will be followed by a review of pertinent ideational literature. Finally, this literature will be built upon to develop a model that can be incorporated into Light’s description of the presidential agenda setting process.
Ideas in the Systemic and Presidential Agenda Setting Literature

Researchers studying systemic agenda setting have argued that ideas play an important role in the process. For example, Baumgartner and Jones argue that ideas play a role in the establishment and destruction of policy monopolies. Additionally, Kingdon argues that focusing too much on factors like power, influence, pressure, and strategy causes researchers to miss a great deal of what is pertinent in governmental decision-making. In his view, existing ideas, as well as the lack of them, can play a role in getting things onto, and off of, the agenda.

Baumgartner and Jones integrate the study of policy subsystems with agenda setting models. They assert that the primary goal of politically motivated groups and individuals is to establish a monopoly over both the understanding of issues important to the group, and the institutions that deal with them. Specialists and experts on an issue will create policy images by simplifying complex issues in terms of powerful supporting ideas that are generally connected to a core political value that can be easily communicated through image, rhetoric, and symbolism. The “political values” that are cited by Baumgartner and Jones include economic growth, progress, participation, patriotism, independence from foreign domination, and fairness. They argue that these political values are concepts that “no one taken seriously in the political system can contest.” If a group is able to convince people that their activities support these values, then they have a good chance at establishing a policy monopoly. They define policy monopolies as powerful institutional structures that limit access to the policymaking process, otherwise
known as policy whirlpools, subsystem politics, or iron triangles. In this sense, ideas play a role in the genesis of policy monopolies and governmental institutions and in turn, the ideas continue to play a role in shaping policy via the institutions.

Ideas are also prevalent in bringing down policy monopolies as they serve as the means to contesting policy images currently viewed in a positive light. Baumgartner and Jones assert that political leaders seeking to achieve their goals compete to define a policy’s image. Therefore, issue understanding changes over time. Changes in the policy image may result in the issue being taken up in new venues. So image changes can effect whether or not an issue will rise in agenda prominence. Typically, a group that is negatively affected by the outcomes of a policy monopoly will seek to cast the issue in a different policy image. If successful, this new image will fall under the scope of a different subsystem, or create an entirely new institution. The issue will be taken up on the agenda, which can result in further exposure, perhaps bringing even more groups into the fold. This is a process referred to by Baumgartner and Jones as “positive feedback”. In this sense, there is a symbiotic relationship between ideas and institutions in the policymaking and agenda setting processes.

Kingdon’s agenda setting model is comprised of three “streams”, problems, alternatives, and politics. He argues that these three streams must be viewed separately in order to gain full understanding of the agenda setting process as they all have different mechanisms driving them. Policy change occurs when the three streams intersect. Problems, or issues, can gain prominence on an agenda by one of three primary means. First, systematic indicators, which are the result of routine data collection, can reveal the
existence of a problem. For example, an increase in highway deaths may draw attention to transportation safety issues. Second, focusing events, or crises, may bring attention to an issue. For example, a major flood could bring attention to levy preparedness. Third, feedback regarding the operation of existing programs can result in increased attention to a problem. For example, reports may come back that a program is not working as planned, propelling the problem on to the agenda. Ideas also have a role in the problem stream. Kingdon refers to this role as “problem definition.” He asserts that conditions only become problems when people decide they want to do something about them. This decision is determined by perceptions or interpretations of the condition. It may be possible to define any given condition in several different ways, and how the condition is defined can determine whether it is given agenda space. Kingdon also argues that values have a role in problem definition. People with differing values can perceive conditions differently based on those values.

For Kingdon, the policy stream is perhaps the stream where ideas are most important. The policy stream is comprised of policy communities, which are made up of experts such as interest group analysts, academics, congressional and committee staffers, and researchers. Kingdon portrays many of them as belief and idea driven rather than interest driven. Policy communities can get caught up in the ideas that the members find interesting at a given point in time. To the extent that the communities get caught up in intellectual fads, attention to subjects will rise and fall. The members of the community will debate and refine the ideas. The ideas will diffuse through a policy community and ultimately arrive at a tipping point, securing the attention of the majority of the
community. At this point policy based on the idea becomes eminent. One of the primary conditions for this to occur is that the idea must be compatible with values of the community members.

Finally, the political stream is comprised of the public mood, interest groups, election results, the ideological makeup of Congress, and changes in the administration. There is only an implicit role for ideas in this stream as defined by Kingdon. Policy communities and politicians will pay very close attention to the public mood, which is essentially the dominant thread of ideas, or beliefs, being exhibited among the electorate. Additionally, it could be said that ideas play a role vis a vis the ideological make up of Congress and the executive branch to the extent that ideology directs policy decisions.

For Kingdon, ideas are an integral component of the decision making process as he argues that, “Both the substance of the ideas and political pressure are often important in moving some subjects into prominence and keeping other subjects low on the agenda.” He asserts that researchers miss a great deal when they focus only on concepts like power, and influence. Additionally, Kingdon argues that agenda prominence is far less contingent on the origin of an idea than it is on the receptivity to ideas of a given type within government. Ideas, he says, are integral to decision making in government.

The treatment of ideas within the systemic agenda setting literature provides some credence to the argument that ideas should be developed more thoroughly in the presidential agenda setting literature. The works of Kingdon, and Baumgartner and Jones on the systemic agenda both include ideas as important components of the agenda setting process. Both make it clear that the agenda setting process hinges and the ability of actors
to frame their issues and alternatives in ways that connect with fundamental values. Additionally, Kingdon’s policy stream is essentially a network of idea exchange from which the substance of policy evolves. However, neither work develops ideas to the degree prevalent within the ideational theory literature. Neither treats ideas as a causal factor. Additionally, the term “ideas” goes largely undefined, and is loosely used in both works, often, but not always, referring to both issues and alternatives, as opposed to concepts that effect the perception of issues and the formation of alternatives.

Ideas are undoubtedly distinct from both issues and alternatives. Just as Kingdon argues for the distinction between problems and alternatives, so should ideas be treated as distinct from issues and alternatives. In a general sense, alternatives tend to be based on ideas. For example, single payer is an idea for addressing the issue of healthcare. Developing an alternative based on this idea can result in any number of possible outcomes. Indeed, of the multitude of single payer healthcare systems in use throughout the world, one would be hard pressed to find any two that are the same. Additionally, single payer is not the sole province of healthcare. As an idea it can be, and has been, extended as a solution to various other types of insurance issues.

The presidential agenda setting literature pays far less attention to the role of ideas. In fact, Light calls ideology “a forgotten category in presidential research.” Instead, presidential agenda setting research focuses more on the rational actor approach. In this narrative, the president is driven more by material concerns, and constrained by resource availability. For example, in much of the literature the primary concern of the president when setting the agenda is contended to be reelection. Resources include such things as
time, expertise, and political capital, which hinges in part on public opinion (Light, 1999). Studies have asserted that presidents will tailor their agendas in ways incongruent with what might otherwise be expected in terms of their political ideology. For example, in seeking to achieve their goals, presidents might choose large government programs, or become more liberal despite their otherwise conservative ideologies (Light, 1999, and Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson, 2002).

In the vast majority of the presidential agenda setting literature “ideas” go completely undefined. As a result, the term is often used as a synonym for issues and alternatives. For example, in Light’s chapter titled “The Source of Ideas” the term is used to describe both issues and alternatives that are under consideration for inclusion on the presidential agenda. Ideas are also used to fill gaps in the explanatory frameworks offered by presidential researchers. Presidents are depicted as having to compromise between what they ideally want and what they can get given the various constraints they face. Statements like, “This is not to say that ideology and partisanship are unimportant in the domestic agenda; they are significant factors in the choice of issues and alternatives” are made, but then go completely unexplained (Light, 1999).

Despite this, the literature on presidential agenda setting is not entirely bereft of the notion that ideas play an important role in presidential agenda setting. For example, in his discussion of “good policy”, one of the primary presidential objectives, Light contends that ideology plays a large role in the selection of alternatives and issues. Additionally, Barbara Sinclair includes “the assumptions and rationales that link policy problems with proposals” in her definition of the president’s agenda. She argues that
controlling the terms of debate is a major factor in the agenda setting process as a whole. For presidents, controlling the terms of debate translates into greater success in advancing their agendas. Therefore, she asserts, understanding how these assumptions and rationales change over time is important to understanding the president’s agenda. This line of reasoning suggests that presidents are at times capable of defining the ideas, which Sinclair refers to as “assumptions and rationales,” upon which policymaking is based. President’s who are successful in this regard could ultimately be defining the parameters of debate for several administrations to come.

The research conducted for this paper found one study focusing solely on the impact of ideas on the presidential policy making process. Colin Dueck studied the impact of ideas on President George W Bush’s foreign policy before and after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Dueck concedes that international conditions indeed result in pressures that can trigger change. However, he contends that constraints on time and information create uncertainty that forces decision makers to turn to preconceived beliefs for guidance. These “preconceived beliefs” are referred to in the ideational literature as “belief systems”, “ideational codes”, “policy paradigms”, or “policy ideas”. Dueck refers to them as “strategic ideas” when they pertain to foreign policy strategies.

Nations will persistently adhere to the tenets of a strategic idea until it is disproven, perhaps by some external shock, or until regime change within the nation ushers in a set of decision makers with a fundamentally different ideology. Dueck observes that both of these scenarios transpired with the Bush administration resulting in two significant changes in strategic ideas. Originally, the Bush administration
transitioned America from Clinton’s liberal internationalist approach to a strategy of realism more congruent with the Bush administration’s political ideology. Then, in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the administration transitioned to a strategy of American primacy. These strategies differ greatly in the guidance they provide, and the outcomes bear proof of that. Dueck traces these decisions to the “influence of distinctive policy ideas, as promoted by leading state officials.”

By tracing the ideas to various officials within the administration, Dueck’s description of the process is in line with Light’s behavioral model of presidential agenda setting in which coalitions develop, and bargain and/or dominate in the decision making process. During Bush’s campaign and in the first months of his presidency it was the coalition led by Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell, and Richard Haas vying for a strategy of realism that was having the most impact. The administration was urging the pull back of some troops stationed abroad and the use of the American military only when it served American interests. The terrorist attacks provided the external shock upon which the coalition vying for American primacy would build its case. The administration could have drawn from many ideas in determining its future foreign policy direction. However, many key officials within the administration, including Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Armitage, John Bolton, and Elliot Abrams, were long time proponents of the primacy strategy and were ready at hand to lobby for the implementation of their strategic plan. It was adopted and ultimately provided the guidance that led to the war in Iraq.
Dueck’s study represents an important advancement in our understanding of presidential agenda setting. While it does not focus on the agenda per se, it nonetheless signifies the power that ideas have in guiding the action of the executive branch and thereby affecting agenda decisions. The processes described also bear similarities to Light’s behavioral model of presidential agenda setting. However, it is important to note that Light’s study was focused only on domestic agenda setting while Dueck’s study was conducted on foreign policy. It would therefore be unwise to administer Dueck’s findings to presidential domestic agenda setting as the factors at play in these two policy arenas differ greatly.

Toward an Ideational Model of Presidential Agenda Setting

In the most basic sense, ideas are beliefs held by individuals (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993). There is debate within the ideational literature as to the role of ideas in the realm of politics. On one side of the debate are those who contend that beliefs are the central element to all research and that interests are endogenous to interaction. Known as reflectivists, they argue that language, culture, and history constrain individuals’ ability to understand and act on objective events (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993). They stand in stark contrast to theorists known as rationalists who contend that interests are exogenous to interaction. Rationalists view interests as a given, prior to any beliefs held by individuals (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993). The other side of the debate within the ideational literature as to the role of ideas falls between the reflectivist and rationalist arguments. Theorists on this side of the debate contend that both interests and ideas matter. Known as constructivists, they accept the rationality premise, but contend that the
actions taken by human beings depend largely on the substantive quality of the ideas available at any given time (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993).

This paper takes a constructivist approach to presidential agenda setting. It accepts as a given that a president’s desire for reelection and historical legacy are exogenous interests that guide presidential action. It also accepts that presidents reason rationally when considering constraints imposed by the availability, or lack thereof, of various resources such as time, political capital, and budgets. Finally, it accepts that presidents are susceptible to pressure from outside interests and institutions that may be pressing for actions that are contrary to the desires of the president. However, this paper also contends that actions taken by presidents are guided by the ideas available to them at any given time. Ideas can be the catalysts behind an issue’s rise to agenda prominence. Ideas can also be used as guidance in the formulation of policy. But how are ideas defined in order to apply them to a model explaining presidential agenda setting? And how can ideas be shown as causal?

One of the early criticisms of ideational research was that it did not offer a framework that clearly defined what was meant by “ideas” (Campbell, 2002). Various researchers have since addressed this deficiency. In the broadest sense, ideas are beliefs held by individuals. These beliefs become important when they are shared by large numbers of people and have implications for human action. Topically, beliefs have a broad range, from general moral principals to agreement on an application of scientific knowledge (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993). As a result, a broad spectrum of differentiation and definitions has emerged from the research.
Perhaps one of the most widely cited works offering a definition of ideas was conducted by Goldstein and Keohane. They define three types of beliefs: worldviews, principled beliefs, and causal beliefs. Worldviews are the most powerful and stable. These are beliefs deeply rooted in, and sometimes across, cultures that evoke deep emotions and loyalties. Worldviews are often taken for granted and include concepts such as the belief that order must be determined by the nation state. As such, they are best studied historically or comparatively across cultures. Principled beliefs are normative in nature and serve to distinguish right from wrong. They often find their roots in worldviews and serve as bridges between worldviews and particular policy conclusions. However, differing opinions as to their defining characteristics and policy implications are always present. “The right to free speech,” “slavery is wrong,” and “abortion is murder” are all examples of principled beliefs. Finally, causal beliefs are typically derived from consensus among scientific, political, or social elites as to a cause and effect relationship having policy implications. Free market economic ideas, and the connection made between ozone depletion and CFCs are examples of causal beliefs. Of the three types of ideas, causal beliefs tend to be the most frequent to change and are therefore the easiest to attribute to policy change (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993).

While the definitions provided by Goldstein and Keohane are indeed useful, they do not capture all of the nuances and intricacies of the presidential agenda setting process. To assist in this endeavor, this paper will make use of a typology developed by John Campbell. In an effort to define the nature of ideas, Campbell draws on historical and organizational institutionalism to offer a typology of ideas that identifies four distinct
idea types based on four structural distinctions. At the structural level, ideas are (1) cognitive or (2) normative, and (3) explicit arguments or (4) underlying assumptions in policy debates. As underlying assumptions, ideas can be taken for granted and remain in the background of policy debates. As explicit arguments, they can be articulated by political elites and be openly debated. At the cognitive level, ideas describe and offer a theoretical analysis of cause and effect relationships. While at the normative level, ideas consist of values and attitudes. Combining the four structural types on a grid yields four distinct idea types that Campbell defines as paradigms, public sentiments, programs, and frames.

Campbell asserts that the four ideas types each exert a unique set of pressures on the policy making process. Paradigms are cognitive, underlying, ontological, and theoretical assumptions about how things work. They are rarely discussed openly and are in a sense taken as given. They serve to constrain the range of solutions that will be considered by rendering illogical any solution that does not fit the paradigm. When solutions fit the paradigm, decision makers often view them as obvious choices.

Public sentiments are also underlying, but they are normative beliefs held by large segments of the public. Public sentiments are broad based assumptions about what is desirable or not. Due to their broad based nature, assumptions about one issue can contradict assumptions about another. Policy makers will try to measure public sentiment with political polling and consider the results when making their policy decisions. The results can sometimes serve to reinforce the policy makers own beliefs, thereby constraining the range of options to be considered. On the other hand, when the results
oppose the policy maker’s beliefs, they can expand the range of options to be considered. Policy makers can also draw on public sentiment for support and mobilize it toward their own ends (Campbell, 1998). Along the same lines, policy makers can also attempt to frame their goals in ways consistent with public sentiment.

Frames are groupings of ideas that serve as justification of, and support for, particular policies or programs. They typically draw on the normative cultural and theoretical aspects of public sentiments as a means to gaining public support, or assuring the public that the policy in question is in line with their normative views. Framing is where interests and ideas play a very close role with one another in the policy making process. Interests will publicly debate their frames with one another, each playing off the other in an attempt to convince the public that their view more closely identifies with public sentiment. Several case studies have shown that policies have been repeatedly thwarted until a frame that connected with public sentiment was figured out and adopted. Along the same lines, issues and polices can remain unconsidered until a strong frame is developed for them (Campbell, 1998).

Programmatic ideas are cognitive, explicit arguments specifying cause and effect relationships and prescribing a precise course of action. They are technical, professional ideas that are often presented in policy briefs and position papers. Policy makers like them because they provide road maps, and the simpler and easier they are to understand, the greater the chances of being adopted. Additionally, the better the program fits with paradigms, and public sentiment, the greater its chances of adoption. Therefore, policy adoption is ultimately dependent on the meshing of various sets of ideas.
Campbell’s typology provides an excellent starting point for building a typology of ideas applicable to presidential agenda setting as it defines three implicit but undeveloped concepts found throughout the presidential agenda setting literature. First, presidents are regularly involved in gauging public sentiment and, as the literature review revealed, making policy and agenda changes as a result. Second, presidents are always engaged in framing and they often consider a frame’s potential for public support as part of the agenda decision-making process. Third, programmatic ideas are in essence what Light refers to as “alternatives.”

Campbell’s typology is also useful in that it identifies major concepts in the systemic agenda setting literature that are also applicable to presidential agenda setting. Framing as described by Campbell is very similar to what Baumgartner and Jones refer to as “policy images.” In both cases, issues or proposals are tied to unquestionable political values such as economic growth, individual liberty, or national security in an effort to gain broad support. In addition to frames, paradigms and programmatic ideas are also important concepts. Both are implicit in Kingdon’s policy stream of experts and specialists who share highly technical information about cause and effect relationships that serve as the basis for formulating policy. Both Kingdon and Baumgartner and Jones assert that such concepts can sometimes be left undisclosed due to their highly complex nature, or serve as explicit arguments to gain policy support.

In order to achieve a full understanding of how ideas impact presidential agenda setting, Campbell’s model must be expanded and slightly altered. Specifically, this paper seeks to determine how ideas can effect the selection of issues and alternatives in a single
institution of government led by a single powerful executive. Frames are perfect for explaining presidential attempts at gaining broad support and may have a role in the issue and alternative selection process. Public sentiment is perfect for describing the executive branch’s consideration of public opinion and support. Programmatic ideas are perfect for describing the impact of ideas in the selection and formation of alternatives. However, paradigms, as described by Campbell are too broad to capture the nuances involved with the selection of specific issues and alternatives. For example, explaining the importance of an issue in terms of the broadly accepted economic theories of the day is not adequate. Therefore, this study will alter paradigms in to “issue paradigms.” Issue paradigms are defined as underlying assumptions that reside in the cognitive background about how a specific issue works. In addition to this alteration, there is an addition to Campbell’s model. This addition is called a “trigger idea” and is similar to causal ideas as defined by Goldstein and Keohane. Issues can rise to agenda prominence within the executive branch by many avenues. This paper contends that one of these avenues is a trigger idea, a belief in a single and succinct idea held by the executive that serves as a powerful catalyst to the president’s desire to take action. These ideas describe a cause and effect relationship that frames the understanding of an issue.

To summarize, the model proposed here to explain the impact of ideas on presidential agenda setting includes issue paradigms, trigger ideas, programmatic ideas, public sentiments, and frames. With the model defined, the next task is to demonstrate that ideas can indeed be causal.
Showing Ideas as Causal

The treatment of ideas as causal forces affecting the policy making process is criticized on several grounds. First, critics argue that ideas are “epiphenomenal”. They are only symptomatic of a system in which rational actors are the causal root of social and political change (Campbell, 2002). Rational actors are believed to correctly anticipate the consequences and outcomes of their actions as they seek to maximize profits, benefits, status, power, or some other goal. In this sense, ideas are merely a tool created or seized upon by rational actors as a means to achieving their goals. They are objective responses to objective interpretations of real world events. Ideas would not be advanced were it not for goal seeking rational actors. Second, critics contend that ideational theorists are unable to prove that a causal link exists between ideas and policy outcomes (Campbell, 2002). Questions are raised, such as: How do major shifts in worldviews and cognitive paradigms come about? Where does world culture come from, who creates it and how is it advanced? How do paradigms constrain the policy makers’ perceptions of their options when so many policy paradigms are available at any given time? Of course, the critics’ answer to all of these questions focuses on the role of the rational actor or the institution. Third, critics argue that even if a causal link could be established, it would only be able to show that ideas were but one of many facets that are unquantifiable in terms of how much they actually mattered (Campbell, 2002). Fourth, critics argue that by relying on the public statements of the political actors being studied, ideational studies are speculative at best as one can never know if these public statements are indeed true or
just disingenuous maneuvers by rational actors masking their true intentions in an effort
to gain broad political support (Padamsee, 2009).

The first two criticisms are closely related to one another. It is important to note
that some ideational theorists dismiss these first two criticisms altogether by contending
that an objective context does not exist, everything is subjective, and therefore the
interpretation of ideas is the only concern that need be undertaken (Parsons, 2002).
Others argue that merely specifying “an interest” requires an idea about what is desirable
in the first place (Wendt, 1999). In this sense, rational actors are constrained in defining
what is in their interest by the very nature of the dominant ideas of their time. However,
other ideational theorists counter these criticisms on several grounds. First, they contend
that through “process tracing” a researcher can trace the objective conditions at play to
show that they alone cannot explain the political outcomes and therefore conclude that
ideas played an integral role (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993). Second, comparative studies
have revealed that similar interests, facing similar objective circumstances, take differing
action based on differing ideas (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993). Third, ideational theorists
illustrate how ideas often cut across interests. This cross cutting can unite conflicting
interests in some cases, and divide coalitions with shared goals in other cases. In such
cases, individual beliefs can be isolated in contrast to objective responses with greater
clarity (Parsons, 2002).

In response to the third criticism, Goldstein and Keohane assert that the causal
capacity of ideas can be observed through careful consideration of descriptive and causal
inferences. Researchers can make “evidentiary inferences” in which pertinent documents
and reports are studied and inferences about the role of ideas in determining outcomes are attached probabilities. Additionally, “descriptive inferences” can be used to make distinctions between random and systematic aspects of behavior. They can also be used to assess the “extent to which self-reported behavior and observed behavior reflect beliefs” (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993). Of course, this brings up the fourth major criticism of ideational theory; it relies on the public statements of rational actors who often frame things differently in public, thereby concealing the private reasons for taking specific actions. In this case, Goldstein and Keohane argue that the researcher must consider and account for the possibility that the available documents and reports from which causal inferences are being drawn may have alternative explanations. Others argue that even if actors are revealing something other than their true intentions, we are at least able to understand what the actor believes the public’s position to be (Schonberg, 2007). Finally, some researchers contend that all actors genuinely believe that their policy positions are justifiable and are apt to seize the opportunity to defend and promote them legitimately in public (Schonberg, 2007, Dueck, 2004).

One key question emanating from this debate regarding the causality of ideas lies in understanding how they affect policy. Goldstein and Keohane identify three causal pathways via which ideas can affect policy. First, ideas can serve as roadmaps. This pathway is created by the need of individuals to reconcile the causal relationships between their goal and the available strategies to reach the goal. Once the individual determines a belief in a causal link, it becomes a roadmap for action that limits choice to actions in line with the belief. The belief logically excludes conflicting actions. Second,
ideas can contribute to outcomes in the absence of a unique equilibrium. Ideas can affect the strategic interactions between various participants in any given policy area. In this sense, ideas can serve to unite or divide groups, and ultimately affect outcomes as a result. Finally, when ideas are embedded in institutions, they can serve to specify policy in the absence of innovation. Ideas can be institutionalized in many ways. Policy subsystems, norms, rules, and regulatory frameworks are all examples of institutionalized ideas. In this case, ideas take root and shape policy for long periods.

Another key question emanating from the debate regarding the causality of ideas lies in *demonstrating* how ideas affect policy. Campbell (2002) suggests identifying the actors seeking influence with their ideas, identifying the conditions under which the actors would have more or less influence, and understanding how political discourse affects the degree to which ideas are translated into practice in the policy making process. The goal is to trace how specific actors carried ideas into the policy making arena and used them effectively. This is accomplished by incorporating a “phenomenology.” Researchers must take account of the actual words that the policy makers use publicly and privately, when possible, to justify their positions (Schonberg, 2007).

With these arguments to bear, and in order to demonstrate the causality of ideas in the presidential agenda setting process, this study will seek to accomplish the following tasks: 1) Establish a correlation between belief and policy within the executive branch; 2) Identify a causal pathway; 3) Identify the external factors that may have come in to play in determining that path and consider their influence over the observed outcome.
Conclusion

Both the systemic agenda setting literature and the presidential agenda setting literature identify that ideas matter in the agenda setting process. However, ideas remain an undeveloped component of presidential agenda setting. Drawing on ideational theory, a framework guided by Paul Light’s definition of the presidential agenda has been developed. This framework is comprised of five components: issue paradigms, trigger ideas, frames, and programmatic ideas. This framework will be applied to a case study of presidential agenda setting, Jimmy Carter’s energy policy. Each of the five components will be developed in this context. The causality of ideas will be illustrated by 1) Establishing a correlation between belief and policy within the executive branch; 2) Identifying a causal pathway; 3) Identifying the external factors that may have come in to play in determining that path and considering their influence over the observed outcome.
Chapter 3

CASE STUDY: JIMMY CARTER’S ENERGY POLICY

The decision to comprehensively address the energy issue was made within the first two weeks of Carter’s presidency. The decision to take up the issue went largely unchallenged within the administration (Eizenstat, 1982). The first National Energy Plan (NEP1) was developed under a closed-door process. None of the departments that would be affected by NEP1 were let in on the process. The final document was not released to other agencies until two to three weeks before it was made public (Eizenstat, 1982).

While there were meetings and seminars held with community leaders from throughout the country, the input had no real impact on the final bill (Campagna, 1995). Interest groups were left out of the drafting process entirely (McDonald, 1981) while very few members of congress were afforded very minimum levels of access (Eizenstat, 1982). There was dissent within the administration over this approach (Eizenstat, 1982), but those advocating the closed-door process won out. Applying this account to Light’s Behavioral Model indicates that the process was one of “domination.” A coalition dominated both the issue and alternative selection processes. But why was this particular issue chosen over others? And why did they choose a particular set of alternatives over others?

The Energy Paradigm

Perhaps the most powerful component of the energy paradigm is energy’s connection to the economy. Positive “economic growth” is one of the most salient and unquestionable underlying values in American society (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993).
During the 1970s, the dominant energy paradigm perceived energy to be the single most important driver of economic growth (Reddy, 2000). Speaking in 1973, Nobel Prize winning economist E.F. Schumacher called energy “not just another commodity, but the precondition of all commodities, a basic factor equal with air, water, and earth” (Sovacool and Brown, 2007). This conceptualization of energy’s role in the economy had been persistent since at least the dawn of the industrial revolution (Flavin and Dunn, 1999). In the most simplistic sense, the idea contends that development is measured by GDP growth, and GDP growth is reliant on increased energy consumption.

Another powerful component of the energy paradigm is energy’s connection to national security. National security represents another unquestionable underlying value in American society (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993). Part of what connects energy to national security is its role in economic growth to the extent that a nation’s economic standing relative to other nations affords it more latitude in negotiations, and of course the ability to afford a modern and technologically advanced military. In addition, the ability to even mobilize modern military operations requires energy, most notably oil. This connection was solidified during World War 2 when energy shortages plagued the United States at home, and hampered Germany’s military operations abroad (Vietor, 1984). It was at this time that Interior Secretary Harold Ickes solidified the policy view that energy, and most notably oil, was a strategic concern and access to it was a matter of national security (Stagliano, 2001).

The belief that energy is a matter of national security is a contributing factor to another component of the dominant paradigm of the 1970s, that the government has a
duty to be engaged in energy matters (Stagliano, 2001 and Vietor, 1984). Another factor contributing to this belief is a lack of trust, harbored by both politicians and the public, in the private energy industry’s ability to handle the issue honestly. This lack of trust is the result of two factors. First, the industry has been exposed as untrustworthy on several occasions. For example, the Federal Trade Commission found the oil industry guilty of colluding to control global oil supplies and prices in 1950. Second, there was a widely held belief that energy markets were fundamentally uncompetitive (Stagliano, 2001 and Vietor, 1984).

Perhaps the most fundamental component of the dominant energy paradigm of the 1970s was the idea that meeting the energy demands of modern society was reliant on fossil fuels that were abundant enough to last for the foreseeable future. Prior to the 18th century, biomass, and human or animal physical energy were the only sources of energy. By 1870, fossil fuels had taken over as the leading source of energy, primarily in the form of coal at first, and later transitioning to oil and natural gas as the largest contributors (Dossi and Grazzi, 2006). In the 1970s, nuclear, hydro, wind, and solar power were viewed as too risky, too costly, or simply incapable of providing the volume of energy required. According to the Federal Energy Information Administration, fossil fuels contributed over 80% of America’s energy in 1975 and it was widely believed that they could continue to do so for over a century (Anonymous, Business Week, 1975).

This component of the paradigm is buttressed by another, the belief that transitioning to new forms of energy would require unrealistically long lead times and capital expenditures (Vietor, 1984). This is an important component of the paradigm as it
sets a boundary for policy makers. Even if one wishes to transition away from fossil fuels, the transition cannot be immediate and must include plans for fossil fuels in the interim.

These five ideas comprised the dominant energy “issue paradigm” leading up to Jimmy Carter’s presidency. By connecting so convincingly to so many of the nation’s most important political values, this issue paradigm was extremely powerful. Challenging energy’s role in economic growth or national security would have proved impossible. Additionally, the strong belief in fossil fuels was a component of the paradigm that restricted available alternatives.

Public Sentiment

As Campbell asserts, public sentiment can be measured by public opinion polling and is often found to be discordant. Public sentiment on energy in the 1970s was indeed quite discordant. While polls taken between 1976 and early 1977 reveal that between 72% and 82% of those polled perceived the energy problem as somewhat serious to very serious (Farhar, Wels, Unseld, and Burns, 1979), a closer look at the data reveals a more complex situation. First, while the public certainly perceived the issue to be serious, they did not believe it to be among the most serious issues facing the nation. In fact, between January of 1976 and January of 1977, energy registered as “Not at all mentioned” in Gallup’s Most Important Problem polling series (Ahrari, 1987). Second, polling data revealed great discord in the public with regard to the nature of the perceived problem as well as the solution to deal with it. For example, large numbers of respondents believed that the crisis was contrived for economic or political purposes, as opposed to being real
and based on genuine shortages. Some respondents blamed the government and others blamed industry.

Surveys regarding conservation and alternative sources of energy were also discordant. For example, while people seemed to believe that conservation could have a positive impact, they also believed that they were already conserving. Additionally, surveys revealed that the public was opposed to price increases, taxes, or restrictive measures such as rationing as means to encouraging conservation. While less than 1% of the population had purchased solar energy systems, public attitudes toward solar energy was very favorable. However, public knowledge regarding the costs and benefits of the systems was very low (Farhar, Wels, Unseld, and Burns, 1979).

Views on conventional energy resources were also discordant. A majority of the public believed that oil and natural gas would play an increasingly smaller role in national energy supplies. While a plurality of the public thought that oil imports should be reduced, a large minority thought they should be increased. However, allowing price increases as an incentive for oil companies to secure greater supplies was overwhelmingly opposed. At the same time, the public was also in favor of deregulation as incentive to increase supply. Meanwhile, coal was viewed favorably as a replacement because of its domestic availability and low cost. However, large majorities were deeply concerned about the resulting effects of strip-mining, and air pollution. Finally, the public was relatively optimistic about nuclear energy. They expected it to be less expensive, and appreciated that it would help reduce oil imports and air pollution. However, very large
majorities maintained environmental concerns over waste disposal and radioactivity (Farhar, Wels, Unseld, and Burns, 1979).

It is very likely that the Carter administration was not aware of every aspect of public sentiment presented here. However, they were certainly aware that the public was skeptical as to the reality of the energy shortages and tended to side with the idea that they were manufactured by oil companies or the government (Carter, 1982). Given the discord of public opinion on the issue, it is difficult to argue that a case can be made for it having any impact on the process. More than likely, public sentiment in this case would be viewed more as an obstacle than a constraint on policy decisions. The goals would be to add clarity to the issue, and convince the public of the legitimacy of the shortages, which is exactly what Carter knew he would have to do (Carter, 1982). Interestingly, and certainly unbeknownst to the Carter administration, public opinion has been found by researchers to respond very well to elite discourse on energy issues (Smith, 2002).

Framing

While the energy paradigm presented many opportunities for developing a strong frame, the public sentiment presented many challenges. The issue was already strongly connected to economic growth, and national security. However, it was also perceived as a contrived issue by large portions of the population. Additionally, the public had contradictory understandings of how best to deal with the issue. Despite this, framing did not prevent the Carter administration from dealing with the issue and they were able to develop a strong and successful frame.
The Carter administration drew on all aspects of the dominant energy paradigm in framing the issue, but it focused primarily on economic growth, and national security. As Carter put it, failure to act would result in “an economic, political, and social crisis that will threaten our free institutions” (Carter, 1977). The issue was attached to the economy by arguing that the nation’s transportation system would be crippled and factories be forced to close resulting in massive layoffs. The global competition for energy would cause inflation to rise rapidly. Additionally, the nation’s national security would be at risk as it would be force to acquiesce on some levels to foreign powers in control of energy resources. Finally, the administration framed the issue as one of supply as opposed to being contrived by corporate or government interests.

The Carter administration also utilized several arguments in framing the alternatives. First, it was advertised that every special interest group in Washington D.C. would attack the policy, the implication being that it must be good if special interests dislike it. Second, it was framed as an issue for which there were no other alternatives available to adequately deal with the problem (Carter 1977). Third, it was argued that it all could be accomplished without much effort or sacrifice in the standard of living on the part of the citizenry. To illustrate this, the administration pointed out that Western Europe used far less energy per capita, but enjoyed the same standard of living as America (Fairlie, 1977). Finally, the administration framed the issue as one of shared sacrifice by all Americans. This frame was represented by perhaps the most iconic phrase of Carter’s presidency, “the moral equivalent of war.” The president argued that this effort would be
like a war in that the nation needed to unify against a common enemy, only in this case, the nation would be united in building as opposed to destroying (Carter, 1977).

Research for this study was unable to locate details regarding the deliberations that took place within the administration over framing the energy issue the first time it was taken up. Therefore, conclusions regarding the role that framing played in the agenda setting process cannot be made. However, including a framing component in the model has merit here, and for future research. In relation to this study, it provides clues as to the beliefs of the Carter administration, as well as to what the Carter administration perceived the beliefs of the public to be. In relation to future research, frames should always be included for, as ideational theorists argue, the ability of actors to build a strong frame can play a role in the issue and alternative selection processes. Furthermore, it can be assumed that in this case, framing did not prevent the issue from being selected.

Selecting Energy as an Issue

Objective Factors

Researchers of presidential agenda setting have argued that issues can make their way to the presidential agenda for several reasons. First, an issue may get on to the agenda because it was a campaign promise that the president is following through with (Fishel, 1985). Second, it could be selected due to electoral concerns. Presidents might view the issue and their stance on it as having great potential for positively impacting their chances for reelection or for strengthening their political party’s chances in the next election (Light, 1993, Canes-Wrone, Shotts, 2004, Yates and Whitford, 2005, Cummins, 2010). Third, issues can get forced on to the agenda as the result of some focusing event.
(Jones and Strahan, 1985), or interest group pressure (Peterson, 1992). Considering each of these objective causes in the context of President Carter’s decision to make energy a major agenda issue with a large-scale program addressing it, reveals that none of them provide adequate explanation for the decision.

Energy was a not an important issue in the 1976 presidential campaign. The public showed little interest in the issue and it was overshadowed by the recession of 1975, tax reform, and welfare reform (Barrow, 1998). Stuart Eizenstat, Carter’s Chief Domestic Policy Advisor, called energy, “an extremely minor issue in the campaign” (Eizenstat, 1982). During the campaign, Carter loosely advocated more use of coal, increased conservation, the creation of a Department of Energy, and increased efficiency standards for automobiles and appliances. He also committed to never abolishing price controls on oil. But energy was so overlooked in the public debate that Eizenstadt recommended that Carter advocate the phased price deregulation of natural gas as a means of wooing support in gas producing states. This action highlighted energy’s lack of importance in the campaign as energy price deregulation was not a popular stance with much of the Democratic base. It was believed that such policies would lead to price gouging by industry, and have a negative impact on the working poor. Despite this, Carter’s pledge to deregulate gas prices went largely unnoticed, and was not debated within the larger context of the campaign (Barrow, 1998).

Private discussions regarding energy policy were also limited during the campaign. Carter was reported to have met with Ralph Nader, a man for whom Carter has a great deal of respect, to discuss the ills of nuclear power as Nader viewed them. He had
also made private promises to the Governors of Oklahoma and Texas that he would deregulate natural gas prices. Finally, he assured energy executives, such as Shearon Harris of Carolina Power and Light, that he would solve the nation’s energy problems, although he did not provide specifics. Even these private discussions were minimal both in terms of number and substance (Barrow, 1998).

Scholars such as Jeff Fishel might argue that these factors regarding energy in the Carter presidential campaign are sufficient to explain energy’s place on the presidential agenda. However, Fishel’s argument regarding campaign promises contends that campaign promises lead to action, not necessarily agenda space. Action is defined as any number of possibilities, from symbolic mentions of the issue to major policy action. Meanwhile, Paul Light found that campaigns were not a major source of agenda items. Considering the two arguments together, the agenda space given to energy cannot be fully explained by the presidential campaign. Furthermore, the fact that Carter did the exact opposite of what he promised on natural gas and oil, and fell far short of expectations on nuclear energy and automobile efficiency standards decreases the explanatory power of this objective factor.

A quick glance at public polling data might lead some to contend that the energy issue was taken up for electoral concerns. Polls taken between 1976 and early 1977 reveal that between 72% and 82% of those polled perceived the energy problem as somewhat serious to very serious (Farhar, Wels, Unseld, and Burns, 1979). However, a closer look at the data reveals circumstances that are more complex. First, while the public certainly perceived the issue to be serious, they did not believe it to be among the
most serious issues facing the nation. In fact, between January of 1976 and January of 1977, energy registered as “Not at all mentioned” in Gallup’s Most Important Problem polling series (Ahrari, 1987). Second, polling data revealed great discord in the public with regard to the nature of the perceived problem as well as the solution to deal with it. For example, large numbers of respondents believed that the crisis was contrived for economic or political purposes, as opposed to being real and based on genuine shortages, a fact that the Carter administration knew they would be contending with (Carter, 1982 and Eizenstat, 1982). Also, no conclusions could be drawn from surveys regarding the efficacy of conservation as a solution. While people seemed to believe that conservation could have an impact, they also believed that they were already conserving (Farhar, Wels, Unseld, and Burns, 1979).

To compound matters, politically, energy is an extremely complex issue especially when taken as a whole. There are several different sources of energy. For each source, there are several different interests involved in the production and delivery process, and many others who are affected by the resulting consequences whether they are environmental or economic. These interests are spread throughout the country, which results in the regional splintering of congress (Barrow, 1998 and Vietor, 1984), and the public (Farhar, Wels, Unseld, and Burns, 1979). Paul Light calls energy a “constituentless issue.” By doing so, Light means to accentuate the fact that in relation to the national electoral concerns of the president, there is no single large coalition that supports a comprehensive energy package. There are smaller groups that are interested in aspects relevant to them, such as environmental or industry groups, but building a
coalition of support for a comprehensive plan is highly unlikely. The evidence reveals that the Administration certainly considered public opinion on energy policy. However, it does not fully explain why energy would be selected as a major agenda item.

Some researchers have asserted that the energy issue was forced on to the agenda by the natural gas shortages that afflicted the Northeastern United States during the bitter winter of 1976-1977 (Campagna, 1995 and Barrow, 1998). Jimmy Carter came to office in the middle of one of the bitterest winters in America’s history. Snow had fallen in Miami. Ice on the Mississippi River had halted barge traffic. Nearly 80 percent of the schools in Carter’s home state of Georgia were closed due to weather conditions. Demand for natural gas was so high that Georgia’s industrial consumers were without access to it.

The situation was actually caused by a 1954 law that capped the price of natural gas when transported over state lines. The result was that energy companies in producer states kept their product in state where it could be sold at any price. This left the consuming states as a customer of last resort (Carter, 1982). The situation led to the enactment of an emergency natural gas pricing bill just two weeks after Carter’s inauguration, which gave the president broad, powers to swiftly address the issue. As mentioned previously, energy is an extremely complex issue when taken as a whole. It is highly unlikely that the administration would choose to take on the entire issue due to a problem with one of the issues many subsets. In essence, the natural gas bill solved the immediate crisis at hand. The energy issue could have been dropped entirely at that point (Eizenstat, 1982).
Another possible way that an issue can get forced on to the agenda is via pressure from external interests. Carter had been in office for only a few short weeks when he announced that his administration would be delivering a comprehensive national energy plan within 90 days. As mentioned previously, Carter did indeed discuss the issue during the campaign and had made a handful of promises. However, none of these warranted undertaking a comprehensive plan dealing with an issue as divisive as energy. It is documented that Carter also met with several individuals who discussed energy policy within weeks of his inauguration. These people included Senator Henry Jackson, the Chair of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, S. David Freeman of the Ford Foundation, Omi Walden, director of the Georgia Office of Energy Resources, Ralph Nader, political activist, and Admiral Hyman Rickover, Carter’s former commanding officer in the Navy (Barrow, 1998). Carter also recognized the pressure that was being applied by various actors in the international community. The United States was the only major industrial nation without a comprehensive energy policy. It was not only the world’s largest consumer, but it consumed the most energy per capita. Other nations had to compete with the United States on the open market for energy resources that were sold at artificially low prices to American consumers (Carter, 1982).

While, Light’s study found that interest group pressure was the least common source of issue ideas, certainly such meetings and “pressure” from interested parties do play a role in the decision making process. In this particular case, external pressure from interested parties is the most convincing external factor contributing to the selection of energy as a major agenda issue. However, the president is being approached with many
issues from many different interests. And the international community has any number of
concerns at any given time. The questions that remain are: Why did the president choose
energy over other issues? Why did he choose to address it comprehensively? And why
did he choose the particular alternatives he chose over the many others available to
address the issue? Taken as a whole, the objective conditions (campaign promises,
electoral considerations, focusing events, and interest group pressures) do not adequately
explain Carter’s decision to make energy a major agenda issue.

The Trigger Idea

Jimmy Carter’s agenda decisions regarding energy were greatly influenced by the
idea of fossil fuel depletion. The belief was that fossil fuel resources, most notably oil
and natural gas, were finite and in danger of being depleted soon, which would result in
unprecedented shocks to the nation and the world. In his televised address to the nation
on April 18, 1977, Carter made the following statements:

“Tonight I want to have an unpleasant discussion with you about a problem
unprecedented in our history. With the exception of preventing war, this is
the greatest challenge our country will face during our lifetimes. The energy
crisis has not yet overwhelmed us, but it will if we do not act quickly.”

“The oil and natural gas we rely on for 75 percent of our energy are running
out. In spite of increased effort, domestic production has been dropping
steadily at about six percent a year. Imports have doubled in the last five
years. Our nation's independence of economic and political action is
becoming increasingly constrained. Unless profound changes are made to
lower oil consumption, we now believe that early in the 1980s the world will
be demanding more oil that it can produce.”

“World consumption of oil is still going up. If it were possible to keep it
rising during the 1970s and 1980s by 5 percent a year as it has in the past, we
could use up all the proven reserves of oil in the entire world by the end of
the next decade.”
“Each new inventory of world oil reserves has been more disturbing than the last. World oil production can probably keep going up for another six or eight years. But some time in the 1980s it can't go up much more. Demand will overtake production. We have no choice about that.”

Additionally, Carter cites two fundamental problems with energy in his first memoir. First, “available supplies of oil and natural gas would not be able to meet the growing demand for energy.” Second, America’s reliance on foreign sources of energy was constraining its foreign policy decisions (Carter, 1982). It is important to note that the second problem fundamentally relies on the first. Finally, the National Energy Plan introduced to congress on April 29, 1977 opened with the following statement: “The diagnosis of the U.S. energy crisis is quite simple: demand for energy is increasing, while supplies of oil and natural gas are diminishing.”

These ideas were not just shared in public as a framing technique or as a diversionary technique to mask Carter’s true intentions. Carter also shared these beliefs in his private conversations with staff and it was well known that he genuinely believed in this idea. For example, according to Lynn Coleman, General Council of the Department of Energy, “It was the view of the Carter administration that we were running out of oil and gas” (Coleman, 1994). James Schlesinger, Secretary of Energy, stated that Carter believed that “the world would run out of not only crude oil in particular, but all fossil fuels”, an idea with which Schlesinger agreed. Schlesinger also asserts that from his very first conversation with Carter, presumably during the campaign, he exhibited “a degree of moral enthusiasm” on the issue of energy, which Schlesinger attributed to the influence
of Admiral Hyman Rickover (Schlesinger, 1982), Carter’s former commanding officer in the Navy and a man whom Carter called “one of the most influential forces in his development as a young man” (Carter, 1982).

The idea that the world would eventually run out of oil had been around since the earliest days of the industry. In 1885, the State Geologist of Pennsylvania warned that oil was a temporary phenomenon that would cease to exist within a lifetime (Yergin, 1991). However, new discoveries, long sustained periods of energy gluts, and lack of any scientific backing left the idea in relative obscurity. So when Marion King Hubbert, a geoscientist working at the Shell research lab in Houston, TX, published his theory in 1956 on the impending peak of global oil production, it was met with wide skepticism, as were other theories and papers contending the like. At the time, most experts believed that US crude oil production would peak in the next 100 years. Hubbert’s model contended that US oil production would peak in 1970 at roughly 3 billion bbl per year, and decline to 1 billion bbl per year by the year 2000.

One year after the publication of Hubbert’s article, Admiral Hyman Rickover delivered a speech to the Scientific Assembly of the Minnesota State Medical association in which he clearly defined his belief in the finite nature of fossil fuels and the dire consequences that would befall the nation if it did not act immediately. Rickover cited that “many studies have been made in the last few years, seeking to discover accurate information on fossil-fuel reserves and foreseeable fuel needs.” He was troubled by the wide-ranging estimates between how soon and how long it would take demand to outstrip supply. This concern was rooted in his belief that available energy resources and
consumption rates are positively correlated with national strength and standards of living, and at the time America was the world’s single largest energy consumer in both total and per capita terms. He echoed Hubbert’s predictions by asserting that fossil fuel reserves recoverable at less than half of the cost being paid at that time would run out sometime between the years 2000 and 2050. He chided the automobile as the “most ravenous devourer of fossil fuels” and called for city planning that considered and planned for reduced automobile use (Rickover, 1957). Rickover was a man of powerful conviction and steadfast beliefs. Considering the relationship he had with Carter and the number of times they met it is certain that they discussed the energy issue in this context.

By the mid 1970s, Hubbert’s model was gaining widespread notoriety and being credited with predicting what appeared to be a peak in US oil production in 1970 (Anonymous Business Week, 1975). While the idea that fossil fuel supplies were abundant enough to meet demand well into the future was still dominant, it was facing a formidable challenge in the 1970s. In addition to the attention that Hubbert’s model was receiving, there were a number of studies that portrayed similar circumstances. For example, in 1975 the National Academy of Sciences issued a report asserting that “recoverable resources of oil and gas in the U.S. are considerably smaller than indicated by figures currently accepted by U.S. government circles” (Anonymous, Business Week, 1975). In addition, more popular studies like S David Freeman’s A Time To Choose (1972) and Donnell Meadows’ The Limits to Growth (1972) considered the prospect of finite fossil fuels.
The idea that fossil fuels are finite and that supplies could be reaching their limits in the near term had been bouncing around within the community of experts for over 20 years when Carter took office. The oil shocks and reduction in American oil output experienced in the 1970s served to foment the debate. It is possible that Carter was exposed to these ideas early on while serving under Admiral Rickover in the Navy. Regardless, Carter’s strong and vocalized belief in the idea that finite fossil fuels would run out sooner than later certainly had an impact on his decision to make energy a major agenda issue. Ideational theory helps to understand the dynamics.

Thus far, two aspects of ideational theory have been developed. First, “process tracing” has been conducted. The objective variables of campaign promises, electoral considerations, focusing events, and interest group pressure have been considered and determined to be insufficient in explaining why Carter would select to comprehensively deal with such a divisive and publicly misunderstood issue as energy. Second, a “phenomenology” has been incorporated. The actual words and explanations of the relative actors have been used to demonstrate a belief in an idea. However, two major concerns are left to be addressed. First, it is possible that Carter’s personal environmental interests are in fact the root cause of both his belief in the peak of fossil fuels and his decision to deal comprehensively with energy. Both his campaign staff and his administration staff included several committed environmentalists. Additionally, Carter himself was known to have a keen interest in environmental issues and was described by Schlesinger as a “convinced environmentalist” (Schlesinger, 1982). Second, even if it is accepted that Carter’s belief in the peak of fossil fuels was responsible for getting energy
on to the agenda, it must still be explained how it affected the alternative selection process to demonstrate the extent of its effect on the presidential agenda setting process. To address the first concern, the cross cutting nature of the idea will be demonstrated in order to isolate it from the objective interest. The second issue will be addressed by demonstrating the causal pathway as a roadmap that served to limit choices to only those compatible with the belief.

One of the more fascinating aspects of the debate over finite fossil fuel reserves is the way in which it cuts across interests with conflicting goals. At the time of Carter’s presidency, the majority of the studies questioning the abundance of fossil fuels focused mostly on a grim outlook for oil and natural gas. Today this debate is commonly referred to as the “Peak Oil” debate. The term “Peak” is actually a reference to Hubbert’s model, which cast oil discovery, extraction, and decline as a bell shaped curve. The debate has certainly shifted over the years, but the focus here will be on the perceptions and realities of the debate during Carter’s time as president.

At the time, the depletion debate cut across interests on several different levels. First, it divided environmentalists. There were those who subscribed to the idea and used it as an argument in favor of transitioning to clean renewable energy and a decentralized energy system (Freeman, 1972). There were also those who subscribed to it and used it as an argument in favor of living what they perceived to be a less wasteful and less consumption oriented life (Greider and Smith, 1977). On the opposite side of the issue, there were those who contended that the idea was contrived by industry to press for opening more national land to drilling operations (Hornblower, 1978). In addition, Ralph
Nader argued on Meet the Press that there was no energy supply crisis, only an “energy monopoly crisis” (Anonymous, New York Times, 1977). There was also concern that increasing the cost of gasoline, through either taxes or price deregulation, in order to deal with the perceived energy crisis would lead to increased consumption of less expensive leaded gas that would cause higher rates of pollution (Anonymous, Oil and Gas, 1978).

Second, it divided oil industry interests and experts. In response to a 1975 National Academy of Science report raising claims that US oil production had peaked, Wilson M. Laird, then chairman of the American Petroleum Institute's committee on exploration, argued that government estimates of available oil reserves in the United States were overly optimistic. J. E. Finley, then a vice-president for Continental Oil Co. said, "The truth is we can't bring on new production fast enough to avoid being dependent on other sources." (Anonymous, Business Week, 1975). In addition, Schlesinger asserted in 1977 that the major oil companies had been complaining for over a decade that oil was running out (Greider and Smith, 1977). By contrast, oilman and geologist Richard Gonzalez assert that these assertions had been made since the 1920s and had never proven true, arguing that higher prices result in the development of new technologies that are able to recover oil that was previously unrecoverable (Anonymous, Business Week, 1975). In 1977, Mobil Oil ran a national ad campaign stating, “We’d like to challenge those who say we have to live with a long term shortage of energy.” The ad went on to assert that from the standpoint of resource availability, there was no reason that America should be considering lifestyle changes or limitations on energy growth (Greider and Smith, 1977). There was so much discord reported among experts, credible organizations, and
government officials concerning the issue of depletion that it led researcher M.E. Ahari to conclude that “a systematic presentation is impossible” (Ahari, 1987).

Perhaps the most interesting cross cutting observed on the depletion issue was exhibited by Carter himself. The single most important issue during the presidential campaign was the economy (Eizenstat, 1982). As a Democrat, Carter ran on a Blue Collar/Working Class/Middle Class platform and given his track record, it is fair to say that he was an advocate of middle class causes. However, so deep was his concern for the depletion issue, that he would go on to include a standby tax on gasoline that would be triggered if Americans exceeded annual consumption targets. This connection will be developed further in the next section, but it is poignant here. The measure called for a distribution back to the poorest of Americans, but its impact on the middle class was undeniable and it was chided by consumer advocates. This measure put him at odds with political allies such as Ralph Nader and other consumer groups. In addition, many of the alternatives that Carter went on to advocate, such as the Energy Mobilization Board, were decried by even the most mainstream of environmental groups.

Another interesting facet of cross cutting exhibited by the depletion idea was the connection it seemed to create between Jimmy Carter and James Schlesinger, Carter’s point man on energy who was ultimately nominated and confirmed to be the first Secretary of Energy. Schlesinger was a self identified Conservative and Republican (Schlesinger, 1982). He had held several positions in the executive branch under Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. He was dismissed as Secretary of Defense by Ford and reports reveal a rather strained relationship (Glastris, 1987). He was contacted by Carter during
the campaign in 1976 to discuss foreign relations issues. By several accounts, Carter was impressed by Schlesinger’s intelligence and knowledge, and the two hit it off so well, that Carter was determined to have him in the executive branch in some capacity (Glastris, 1987 and Barrow, 1998). One obvious option was Secretary of Defense. However, the two had opposing views on foreign relations, Schlesinger being more of a realist and Carter more of a neoliberal. The other obvious option was in some capacity with energy as Schlesinger had served as the head of the Atomic Energy Agency. However, Carter was largely opposed to nuclear energy while Schlesinger was highly supportive. Carter believed in government regulation of the energy industry while Schlesinger was strongly in favor of free markets. Carter was deeply concerned about environmental issues as they related to energy while Schlesinger, although not negligent, was more concerned about securing energy resources. Despite all of their disagreements on the issues, the two shared a firm belief in the idea of depletion (Carter 1982 and Schlesinger 1982).

The idea that fossil fuel depletion posed an immediate risk cut across interests in many ways, and even united some with otherwise opposing interests. These observations serve to help isolate the idea from the objective interests. In doing so, the observations reveal that the idea of depletion had an exogenous effect on the interaction of interests. In essence, many interests who would not have otherwise desired to deal with the questions raised by the idea were forced to do so by its prevalence within the communities in which they interacted. At the same time, the observations also reveal that interests matter too. As the idea was interpreted differently, it led to a variety of arguments and corresponding action designed to achieve the goals of the actors involved. For the Carter administration,
this idea was a catalyst in deciding to pursue a comprehensive energy policy as part of the presidential agenda.

The Programmatic Idea

The first National Energy Plan (NEP1) introduced by the Carter administration was the result of a process that relied solely on administration input alone (Schlesinger, 1982). Shortly before Carter’s energy address on February 2, 1977, he and Schlesinger agreed on a set of principles that would govern the process, and the alternatives (Barrow, 1998). The process was to adhere to two main principles. First, it was to be conducted in secret to keep bureaucratic, public, and corporate interests from influencing the direction of policy. Second, it was to be completed in ninety days.

In determining the alternatives, the foundation of the plan was to rest on the rationale that because the world was running out of oil and gas, America needed to transition from an era reliant on cheap and abundant energy sources, to an era of less abundant and more expensive energy. Several principles would be followed in order to accomplish this transition without encountering economic or political shocks. First, conservation and efficiency were to be the cornerstones of the plan. Second, the policy was to be comprehensive as opposed to piecemeal in order to ensure the certainty and stability required by producers and consumers in making investment decisions. Third, reducing oil imports would be a top concern in order to avoid supply interruptions in the short term and capacity limitations in the long term. Fourth, energy resources currently available in abundance domestically would be substituted for those in short supply. Fifth, energy procurement would be balanced with environmental stewardship even if it meant
increased costs or limited options. Sixth, the use of unconventional energy sources would be expanded in order to assist the transition in the short term and to ensure economic and political stability in the face of long-term fossil fuel depletion. Seventh, society should begin to value energy at its replacement cost. Lastly, the costs and benefits should be fairly shared amongst producers and consumers.

“Conservation” was the programmatic idea relied upon for the vast majority of NEP1’s substantive initiatives. In all, there were 133 initiatives in NEP1. Going through each of them individually to illustrate their connection to Conservation is outside the scope of this study and many readers may disagree that Conservation was the programmatic idea that guided NEP1. In fact, many critics at the time questioned this very notion. For example, critics charged that NEP1’s call for a massive expansion in coal extraction and use was anathema to the principles of conservation due to the inevitable environmental degradation and air pollution (Cockburn and Ridgeway, 1977). However, such arguments misrepresent the true nature of Conservation as a programmatic idea in American politics in the late 1970s. The term is often used to mean a reduction of consumption, or environmental preservation. A brief look at the history of Conservation as a programmatic idea in America reveals a different understanding.

America’s relationship with the environment has gone through many transitions over the years. However, within varying degrees between two extremes, there has always been at least some semblance of debate between those who believed in dominion and those who believe in naturalism. During the colonial period, there was not so much of a debate as there was a clash of civilizations. The European colonists believed largely in
dominion over the environment while the Native Americans took a more ecological approach. While the Native Americans viewed the colonists as wasteful, many historians argue that both cultures actually exploited the environment in order to suit their needs and to the extent of their technological ability (Kline, 1997). From the 1700s to 1800s, the government promoted expansion westward, which included large-scale exploitations of the environment for speculation, rail, cattle, and lumber operations. This period also saw a renewed interest in nature most notably from authors Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau.

In late 1800s to early 1900s, a plentitude of technological advancements spawned the second industrial revolution. During this period, exploitation of the environment took place at an increasingly faster pace, and the consequences of industrial economic growth were more prominent and visible. The public, most notably social, political and economic elites, began to express an interest in nature and its beauty and the first national parks were established. During this period, the modern debate between dominion and naturalists really took root. Those espousing the dominion position drew on Social Darwinism and the “gospel of success.” Society was viewed as a natural condition in which the strongest survived, and success, as measured by hard work, material wealth, and conquering rivals, was viewed as divine. In this sense, nature was nothing more than a commodity whose worth was measured by the end product (Kline, 1997). By contrast, preservationists believed in living a simpler, less consumption-oriented life, and most importantly leaving nature as pristine as possible (Kline, 1977).
Between these two arose the conservationists who believed in a regulated exploitation of nature that came to be called “right use.” In the early 1890s Gifford Pinchot, a graduate of Yale, attended a forestry school in France as one did not yet exist in the United States. By 1905, he was appointed to head the newly established US Forest Service. He immediately set out to solve what he viewed as the central problem, “the use of the earth for the good of man.” Pinchot believed that both public and commercial interests pertaining to the forests could be achieved through planned and regulated use. To accomplish this, Pinchot surrounded himself with scientific experts who set out to scientifically determine the best use of land and resources (Kline, 1997). This technocratic approach to balancing public interests with commercial interests as they pertained to the environment became institutionalized throughout government. For the next 50 to 60 years the ideas remained relatively stable and the debates continued along similar lines. However, preservationists, while still active, were drowned out in the debate as the American public was more concerned with economic growth and seemingly willing to pay the environmental expenses as they understood them (Kline, 1997).

Then, in the 1960s to 1970s, a counterculture developed in which environmental concerns were an important component. This became a powerful force in bringing environmental issues back to the forefront of American discourse. In 1962, the book *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson played a large role in bringing attention to the environmental and public health consequences of modern industry. Many other authors had written about such issues beginning in the mid 1950s, but Carson’s work was perhaps the first to gain widespread attention. Shortly after *Silent Spring*’s publication, Herbert
Marcuse, a theoretician and university professor, published *One-Dimensional Man*. In it, Marcuse chided what he viewed as a militarized, consumption and waste oriented society stuck in a positive feedback loop of increasing euphoria on the part of the citizenry at the expense of increasing destruction of the natural world (Gottlieb, 1993). Marcuse was also active in public demonstration and organization, and is considered to be the “Father of the New Left,” a political movement whose ideas were emblematic of the counterculture movement that would ultimately have some impact on the meaning of Conservation as a programmatic idea.

By the late 1960s, a New Left environmentalist position began to take shape (Gottlieb, 1993). They viewed industry as the central component in the generation of environmental hazards. For example, one of their pamphlets read, “Where There’s Pollution, There’s Profit.” They also believed that ecological politics and liberation politics were mutually dependent on one another. However, the movement was quite diffuse as was the counterculture movement as a whole. While many engaged in public demonstration, political activism, and community organizing, many others sought out alternative institutions and a new way of living in the form of communes.

The first Earth Day in 1970 marked a shifting point for the environmental aspect of the counterculture. The movement had successfully brought widespread attention to environmental issues and in September, 1969 Senator Gaylord Nelson of Washington became the first to call for a “National Teach-in on the Crisis of the Environment.” Teach-in was a term coined by the New Left to describe an event at which people gathered to exchange information and ideas regarding one or many topics (Gottlieb,
1993). As interest in such an event swelled, organizers started taking steps to make it happen and the first Earth Day was scheduled for April 22, 1970. It was to be an all-inclusive event, with members of the movement, industry, and government participating. The event created divisions in the counterculture between those who supported the idea as a means to enacting substantive policy change and those, including the New Left and some of the established protectionist groups like the Sierra Club, who were highly suspicious that the event would turn in to a rejection of their methods and ideas and subsume the movement within the technocratic conservationism that was the status quo (Gottleib, 1993). The media gave the event a tremendous amount of attention. The frame that began to take hold was that environmental problems were problems that could be fixed if all groups worked together (Gottleib, 1993).

The suspicions of the New Left regarding Earth Day were confirmed over the next decade. Their more radical stance was rejected and the group and its ideas faded into relative obscurity. Meanwhile, a more mainstream movement comprised of legal, science, economic, engineering, and public health professionals began to flourish. They were fostered in part by set of federal regulatory policies and institutions that came to be in the first half of the 1970s. The National Environmental Policy Act, the Clean Air Act, and the Environmental Protection Agency were among a complex web of environmental regulations and institutions that encouraged a technocratic approach to environmental issues (Gottleib, 1993). Essentially, within the halls of government the old programmatic policy of conservation with its goal of putting the earth to work for the good of man, now incorporated an environmentalist aspect that used science to justify or condemn various
activities. Meanwhile, groups outside the government were engaged in similar practices aimed at achieving what they viewed as being best for the public and the environment.

Energy conservation as it had come to be perceived in the 1970s within the community of policy experts and professionals included waste reduction accomplished through efficiency mechanisms and price increases, regulated natural resource exploitation to ensure minimal damage to the environment, a pessimistic outlook for nuclear energy based on cost and containment issues, and expansion of alternative sources of renewable energy. Each of NEP1’s components emanated from these basic guiding principles. Numerous incentives and penalties designed to result in increased efficiency were included. A change in the regulations governing natural gas prices designed to increase prices in order to discourage wasteful consumption and encourage better interstate distribution was included. Massive expansion of coal production and use was encouraged along with environmental standards and regulations aimed at minimizing the harm to the environment. Nuclear power was included with an emphasis on safer technologies such as light water reactors, while riskier breeder reactors that relied on plutonium were to be curtailed. The use, research, and development of renewable resources were encouraged as a means to reducing fossil fuel consumption, both present and future. Conservation as perceived by the federal policy community in the 1970s was indeed the programmatic idea upon which the vast majority of NEP1 was based.
Causality

Considering the trigger idea, programmatic idea, and issue paradigm together provides perspective on the causal role of ideas in the presidential agenda setting process by revealing the roadmap for action that the ideas enabled. While addressing each of the 133 initiatives that comprised NEP1 is outside the scope of this study, a consideration of the actual arguments made by the administration verifies these pathways.

“The diagnosis of the US energy crisis is quite simple: demand for energy is increasing while supplies of oil and natural gas are diminishing. Unless the US makes a timely adjustment before world oil becomes very scarce and very expensive in the 1980s, the nation’s economic security and the American way of life will be gravely endangered” (NEP1, 1977).

“Because we are now running out of gas and oil, we must prepare quickly for a third change, to strict conservation and to the use of coal and permanent renewable energy sources, like solar power” (Carter, 4/18/1977).

“Expansion of US coal production and use is essential if the nation is to maintain economic growth, reduce oil imports, and have adequate supplies of natural gas for residential use” (NEP1, 1977).

“US Domestic oil production has been declining since 1970. New production from Alaska, the deep Outer Continental Shelf, and new recovery methods should reverse the decline, but will be unable to satisfy the projected growth in US demand. Other major additions to domestic oil supply are unlikely” (NEP1, 1977).

“America’s hope for energy to sustain economic growth beyond the year 2000 resets in large measure on the development of renewable and essentially inexhaustible sources of energy” (NEP1, 1977).
The belief that the world would soon face supply gaps of the oil and natural gas that America relied on for 75% of its energy needs coupled with the belief that this would be devastating for the economy, necessitated immediate comprehensive action. It is not possible for this action to rely on the expansion of oil and gas exploration or innovation for the obvious reason that it was believed the world was running out and America had reached peak production. Moreover, transitioning to alternative systems of energy supply not reliant on fossil fuels was not an option due to the belief that it would take far too long to achieve. Therefore, the risk of near term supply gaps necessitated the need to conserve what was available at the time. Additionally, the nation’s vast domestic coal resources had to be exploited immediately in order to maintain economic and political stability when the inevitable energy gaps came to fruition. Finally, because all fossil fuels are finite, a transition to renewable alternatives had to be undertaken. These pathways verify the effect that ideas had on the presidential agenda setting process by illustrating a direct link between the ideas and the policy, and revealing the manner in which they excluded other alternatives from consideration.

The Second Energy Decision

NEP1 was submitted to congress on April 20, 1977. After an arduous, protracted, and divisive battle, it was passed on October 15, 1978. There were some alterations and by one account the president got 65%-70% of what he had asked for (Eizenstat, 1982). However, the energy issue would continue to dominate the president’s agenda. There are conflicting explanations as to why this was the case. Some have asserted that the issue was forced on to the agenda by the Iranian revolution induced oil shortages (McCarty,
1994). The crisis did indeed constitute a focusing event. It ultimately led to unprecedented oil shortages that resulted in the highest oil prices to that date, and the specter of long lines of automobiles at American gas stations. State governors were addressing the issue and it was highly salient among the American public. However, while the crisis was certainly the reason that the issue received so much attention, it is not the reason that energy remained on the presidential agenda.

The issue remained on the presidential agenda for the same reasons it was there in the first place. According to Carter, he and Schlesinger met shortly after the passage of NEP1 to discuss its implementation. Schlesinger expressed his desire to resign. Carter refused the resignation, later explaining, “During the next year-1979-we would have to develop the second phase of our energy legislation, including oil price decontrol, taxation of the windfall profits, and the development of synthetic fuels.” He goes on to say, “After two years of struggle, I really hated to stir up the energy pot all over again, but the phased decontrol of oil prices was too important to be avoided.” He further alludes to the fact that the Iranian crisis occurred after the decision to pursue a second round of energy legislation had already been made (Carter, 1982). Carter’s presidential identity and the trigger idea continued to be the driving forces behind the selection of energy as an agenda issue. He pressed the issue not because he believed it would be politically expedient, or because a focusing event forced it upon him, but because he perceived it to be in the best interest of the nation and in line with his belief in comprehensive policy. At the same time, his perception of the public interest was driven by his belief that energy depletion was an immediate risk that would have a catastrophic impact on the nation.
Carter’s second thrust on energy was more ambitious than NEP1 in its calls for reduced energy consumption, reduced dependence on foreign oil, increased alternative energy development, and transitioning utilities from the use of oil to the use of coal. Some of the more prominent measures he called for were the creation of the Energy Mobilization Board, the Synthetic Fuels Corporation, and an oil price deregulation scheme. The Energy Mobilization Board was a government entity intended to fast track energy production projects deemed to be in the interest of national security. The Synthetic Fuels Corporation was a government run enterprise that would work with the private sector and act as an investment banker for synthetic fuel projects. Finally, the oil price deregulation scheme called for the phased deregulation of oil prices along with a windfall profits tax to be transferred to public use. This last item, oil price deregulation, was actually advanced by Carter under a presidential directive prior to the administration’s comprehensive plan commonly referred to as NEP2. The authority for the directive was granted by a 1975 law that enabled such actions to take place under crisis situations.

The causal pathways between the energy paradigm, the trigger idea, the programmatic idea, and the policies remained the same. The certainty of oil depletion required decreased consumption, a transition to replacement fossil fuels in the mid term, and a transition to alternative sources of energy in the long term. NEP2 offered a more specific timeline for these transitions. At all times, the goal was to encourage reduced consumption. Until 1985, the goal was to encourage increased domestic production of oil, to the extent that it could be, in order to lessen the nation’s dependence on imported oil.
This would benefit national security, and provide a transition period for the alternative fossil fuels to ramp up. This was the logic behind the oil price deregulation scheme. The increased prices due to global market forces would encourage domestic production while discouraging consumption. From 1985 to 2000, the nation would rely on the alternative fossil fuels that would result from the Energy Mobilization Board and the Synthetic Fuels Corporation. Beyond 2000, the nation would be well on its way to a complete transition to solar, geothermal, and other alternative forms of energy not reliant on fossil fuels (NEP2, 1979).

While there were clearly several similarities between the two energy thrusts, there were also some interesting differences. First, the alternative decision process that the administration utilized was much more open and inclusive. Carter and his White House team went in to the process with their desired alternatives already decided. However, rather than just presenting those alternatives in the form of a plan, they conducted meetings for many weeks with all of the interested governmental agencies. They also discussed the issues closely with members of congress. Finally, they worked with energy corporations on the issues of most concern to them, most notably the Synthetic Fuels Corporation (Eizenstat, 1982). While this process certainly opened the alternatives up to influences from outside the administration, the main objectives of Carter and his White House team remained intact (Carter, 1982 and Eizenstat1982).

The second interesting difference involved the framing of the issue. The framing of energy during NEP1 was discussed very little in the research conducted for this study. This may be due to two factors. First, NEP1 was drafted in what Light refers to as a
process of domination. Second, the energy issue was receiving little public attention at the time it was introduced. By contrast, framing during NEP2 was discussed extensively, relatively speaking. In fact, an entire book was written about the president’s keynote speech addressing the issue. Again, this may be due to two factors. First, NEP2 was drafted in what Light refers to as a bargaining process. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the energy issue was extremely salient due to the oil crisis at that time. Overall, the concepts and frames remained unchanged for NEP2. However, the keynote speech on the subject had unique aspects, and gained so much attention from both the administration and the public that it warrants special attention.

While the president was attending an economic summit in Japan, the energy crisis was causing turmoil at home. Long gas lines and skyrocketing prices had the public highly aroused. As a result, the president skipped a planned vacation in Hawaii and instead scheduled a major energy speech for July 5, 1979. The original course of action as recommended by Stuart Eizenstat, Carter’s senior domestic policy advisor, was to focus on the energy issue with laser like precision over the next three to four weeks using the same frame as they had been using all along as a means to convincing the public to support the next round of energy alternatives. However, on July 3, 1979 the president revisited a memo from Patrick Caddell, a pollster and political advisor to the president, which convinced him to cancel the planned speech, reevaluate the message, and schedule it anew at a later date (Carter, 1982). This set off what Eizenstat would later describe as “the most acrimonious debate by far that occurred in the four years of the administration” (Eizenstat, 1982).
Caddell’s memo included data on a poll that he had conducted along with his interpretation of the results. In Caddell’s view, the crisis that America was facing was not really about energy, or any one issue. Instead, the crisis was more psychological than material. In defining his argument, Caddell cited the work of Abraham Maslow, John Maynard Keynes, Christopher Lasch, James MacGregor Burns and others. Caddell argued that America had emerged from the 1960s as the world’s “first true leisure society.” With all of their lower level needs satisfied, Americans should be turning to “affection and belongingness” as their goals. However, it was up to America’s leaders to help guide them there. But assassinations and political scandals had led Americans to lose faith. As such, the populace lacked the ability to define their future. Therefore, they had lost faith in the future and had become narcissistic and selfish. He called on Carter to address these issues and lead the way by defining traditional values, individual responsibility, excellence in work, and moral and spiritual regeneration (Horowitz, 2005). In Caddell’s view, Carter should not have been addressing issues at all.

Vice President Walter Mondale and Eizenstat pleaded with the president to address the issue directly, frame it in the same way they had all along, and call on the public to support the proposals to be laid out in NEP2. In their view, energy was the only issue with which people were concerned. They viewed Cadell’s frame as one that blamed the American people for the situation the country was in. They believed that the speech should instead lay blame with government and the various institutions that controlled the energy system.
Ultimately, the debate led to a bargain on the framing of the issue. The speech would utilize Caddell’s ideas in framing the crisis in America and call for Americans to unite around the energy issue in support of Carter’s alternatives. Again, while framing in this case does not provide any revelations pertaining to the agenda setting process, it does reveal what the key players in the administration believed. Carter was sympathetic to Caddell’s analysis. He had read the works of Christopher Lasch, Daniel Bell, and Robert Bellah who questioned what they perceived as a moral, ethical, and spiritual quandary in America. He had also met with these scholars to discuss their theories (Horowitz, 2005).
Many studies have alluded to the importance of ideas in the presidential agenda setting process but very few have attempted to illustrate their affect. By drawing on the work of ideational theorists and applying it to existing theories of presidential agenda setting, this study offers such an illustration. Presidents are indeed driven to achieve electoral success. However, determining electoral success requires some notion of what will equate to electoral success, and may even rely on the ability to identify with core political values. Additionally, presidents are driven to achieve good policy and historical achievements (Light, 1993). However, these two goals are subjective and therefore require that ideas and beliefs be taken into account to understand the process. The ideational framework utilized for this study addresses these concerns, and leaves much room for future research.

In this case study issue paradigms, trigger ideas, and programmatic ideas all played a key role in President Jimmy Carter’s selection and treatment of the energy issue. The issue paradigm provided an explanation of both the importance of the issue and the constraints within which the administration would have to work. The trigger idea, fossil fuel depletion, explains why Carter would select energy over other possible issues to become the single most time consuming issue with which he would deal. The programmatic idea explains how the alternatives are determined. Conservation is not a policy; it is an idea upon which policies are based and it provides normative justification for policy proposals.
All of these ideas interacted to result in a clear causal pathway revealing the effect that ideas have on both issue and alternative selection. The legitimacy of the causal pathway was verified by tracing the history of the ideas and incorporating a “phenomenology” which traced the ideas to the actors involved. Finally, while the framing and public sentiment components did not necessarily reveal anything substantive about the agenda setting process in this case, they are vital components nonetheless.

Future studies should be focused on identifying cases in which the lack of a solid frame is identified during the presidential agenda setting process as a reason not to take up an issue. Such cases can illustrate the power of dominant paradigms in restricting otherwise important issues from being addressed. Similarly, future research should focus on cases in which the public is believed to have forced an issue on to the president’s agenda. Such cases might shed further light on the role of public sentiment.

Another possible area for future research is to apply this model to foreign policy cases to test if the same mechanisms are at work. Based on the research by Dueck, which studied the impact of ideas on President George W Bush’s foreign policy before and after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, one would suspect far different results. The Carter administration was bombarded by all facets of American society during the energy crisis in 1979. However, given that the administration had started with a more inclusive alternative process before the crisis hit, it is difficult to determine what, if any, effect this had. By contrast, the Bush administration seemed able to formulate its policies with relatively little interference from the rest of the political community. By testing such
cases within the same framework, researchers may be able to isolate which aspects of the framework are more powerful in domestic versus foreign policy cases and vice versa.

The effect of focusing events should also be studied using this framework. At the outset of this study, it was believed that it would be possible to examine the differences between the processes at play when an issue is selected as the result of a trigger idea, versus when an issue is forced on to the agenda by a focusing event. However, the research discovered that the decision to pursue energy a second time was still related to the same ideas. The process may be entirely different for focusing events. Certain components of the model may play more important roles than others. Additionally, some crises can shake the foundations of the dominant paradigms, which may result in the president having more freedom in selecting a course of action.

Finally, future research on the role of ideas in the presidential agenda setting process should focus on comparative studies. For example, comparing this case with the case of President Bill Clinton’s or Barrack Obama’s treatment of energy policy could enhance our understanding of the role of ideas by illustrating how different ideas affect the process at different times. Since Carter left office, the idea of global climate change and its connection to the energy issue have become far more pronounced. This may result in differing outcomes. Such studies would bolster the argument that ideas do indeed play a causal role in presidential agenda setting.
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