
AGENDA BUILDING AND SETTING IN A REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN: INVESTIGATING THE FLOW OF ARGUMENTS AMONG CAMPAIGNERS, THE MEDIA, AND THE PUBLIC

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This study tests second-level agenda-building and -setting effects in the course of a referendum campaign. Personal standardized interviews with forty-seven different campaign managers and a content analysis of campaign material are linked to a content analysis of TV and newspaper coverage and a three-wave public opinion survey. The results demonstrate the dynamic flow of arguments in the agenda-building and -setting process: top-down from the campaigners to the news media and the public.

For both agenda setting and agenda building, mass communication scholars have accumulated convincing evidence over the years, covering numerous issues in many countries, for all types of news media, for local elections and national elections, and also during more quiescent political times.¹ In addition to this impressive corpus of research, there are some gaps waiting for scholarly attention. To begin with, there are few studies exploring how agenda building and agenda setting work together during a single campaign or election.² Put differently, while we know that agenda setting and agenda building work, we lack a holistic picture of how the policy agenda finds its way to the media agenda, and, finally, to the public agenda.

Second, classic agenda-setting and agenda-building research has examined candidate salience in election campaigns or issue salience in local, national, and international settings. However, we have a rather limited knowledge about these processes for *referendum campaigns*. Third, there are hardly any studies using standardized interviews with campaigners to measure candidate agendas. Fourth, and last, agenda-setting research is dominated by cross-sectional studies. These designs

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have provided rich insights, with real-world data, and have gathered convincing evidence for both agenda setting and agenda building. However, cross-sectional studies cannot portray the dynamics of a campaign over time. To address these four research gaps, this paper reports a study on a referendum campaign in Switzerland.

First- and Second-level Agenda Setting. Research over the past thirty-five years has supported the transferral of media issue salience to public salience. This process, however, is not universal, as a plethora of limiting and contributing variables qualify the effect.³ Among these, media reliance is central to predicting agenda-setting processes.⁴ Media reliance is the extent to which a certain medium is important to information acquisition. As Tsfaty has put it, “[i]f audiences are active and critical toward news [...] they may resist the agenda offered by the media.”⁵ In fact, some studies have shown smaller or non-significant effects when media reliance is low.⁶

Instead of examining an agenda of issues, second-level agenda setting investigates an agenda of attributes, that is, the way in which an issue is contextualized or framed.⁷ These attributes can be sub-issues or specific aspects of issues, such as issue arguments (cognitive attributes). Furthermore, the second level of agenda setting also incorporates specific evaluations or journalistic assessments of issues (affective attributes).⁸

Several studies have supported this theorizing. McCombs and others found a positive correlation between the media agenda and the voter agenda for cognitive and affective object attributes.⁹ Golan and Wanta documented second-level effects in an analysis of the 2000 presidential primary in New Hampshire.¹⁰ Kim, Scheufele, and Shanahan found similar effects for a local issue.¹¹

More recent studies reported first- and second-level agenda-setting effects of political ads on public opinion,¹² affective second-level effects of nonverbal visual information about candidates,¹³ and various agenda-setting effects for young voters.¹⁴ In addition to those field studies, there is also experimental evidence for the transferral of attribute salience.¹⁵

First- and Second-level Agenda Building. Apart from the transferral of issue or object salience to the public, scholars have studied influences on news media agendas, a type of research that Lang and Lang called agenda building.¹⁶ Gandy was one of the first to suggest going “beyond agenda setting to determine who sets the media agenda, how and for what purpose it is set, and with what impact on the distribution of power and values in society.”¹⁷ Weaver, McCombs, and Shaw identify three major sources that exert an influence on the media agenda: (a) influential news sources, such as the president or political elites; (b) other elite media sources (intermedia agenda setting); and (c) social norms and traditions of journalism.¹⁸

Traditionally, studies investigating the agenda-building process of political elites have relied on news releases. For instance, Turk showed that state government news releases can increase the public salience of

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state agencies in subsequent media coverage.¹⁹ In a study of a political campaign, Kaid demonstrated that newspapers incorporated candidate news releases exactly as they were disseminated.²⁰ Wanta et al. found that the agenda of issues presented by several presidents in the State of the Union address influenced the subsequent national press agenda.²¹ Beyond first-level agenda building, other studies have investigated how issue attributes put forth by elites have found their way into media coverage (second-level agenda building). Huckins, for instance, investigated the building of the media agenda by an influential interest group that succeeded in setting the media agenda between 1992 and 1994.²² More recent studies found additional evidence for online intermedia agenda setting,²³ effects of media coverage on the candidate agenda,²⁴ and effects of the public agenda on the media agenda.²⁵

Taken together, there is convincing evidence for agenda setting and agenda building, both at the issue and at the attribute levels. However, fewer studies have tracked the full flow of issue or attribute salience from political elites to the news media and then to the public. Exceptions are: first, a study by Kiouisis et al. that investigated the building of the print media agenda by candidates in the 2002 Florida gubernatorial election, and the setting of the public agenda by the media;²⁶ second, a study by Kiouisis, Popescu, and Mitrook that investigated the same linkages among press releases of twenty-eight U.S. companies, media coverage of the key issues, and public opinion in 2005;²⁷ and third, Tan and Weaver's longitudinal study of agendas of the media, Congress, and the public.

Argument Agenda Setting in Referendum Campaigns. There is a large body of literature investigating (second-level) agenda-building and agenda-setting effects. However, little is known about how these processes work for referendum campaigns. The study of campaign effects has focused predominantly on elections. Moreover, most of the research has been conducted in the United States.

But why do referendum campaigns matter in the study of agenda setting and building, and why are they special? In referendum campaigns, several parties, NGOs, and other organizations form strategic camps, with, in most instances, one "camp" opposing the referendum and one camp supporting it. The camps are usually created by forming naturally predictable, pragmatic, or even "strange" strategic alliances. Thus, political parties are not the only actors involved in a campaign. In some campaigns, parties make up only a minority of involved actors, as citizens' interest groups, churches, or NGOs can play a decisive role. This makes referendums less predictable than regular elections. As de Vreese states, "while longer-term factors such as partisanship or ideology have been found to be important in national elections, the short-term impact of campaign strategies and tactics can make a substantial difference in determining referendum outcomes."²⁸ More important, and contrary to regular democratic elections, no specific candidates appear exclusively in the debate, simply because no candidates are voted for. Thus, voters cannot take candidate cues, such as candidate images, as heuristics for their judgment.²⁹ The crucial difference, therefore, is that

the campaign debate is centered on specific arguments, in favor of or opposing the referendum. Each camp tries to promote its arguments in the debate, and the camp with the most salient and thus most compelling arguments wins the referendum.

In agenda-setting terminology, those arguments can be interpreted as cognitive issue attributes.³⁰ Argument salience in a referendum debate can thus be regarded as second-level agenda setting.³¹ Basically, each camp tries to establish its arguments in media coverage. The higher the correlation between the arguments of one camp and the corresponding arguments in the media coverage, the higher the second-level agenda-building function of that camp. Likewise, the higher the correspondence between the arguments in the media and the public salience of those arguments, the higher the second-level agenda-setting effect.

It is important to note that the arguments are conveyed by the media; typically, direct camp communication of arguments to the public is limited. Following this line of reasoning, it is clear that media reliance becomes a crucial variable in the agenda-setting process. When citizens do not rely on the media, agenda-setting effects are unlikely to occur. Thus, we can assume that media reliance is a crucial moderator for (second-level) agenda-setting effects.

In a September 2006 national referendum, Swiss citizens accepted a new asylum law suggesting harsher measures to prevent abuses by asylum seekers and to avoid social tension (68% voted in favor). The referendum was launched by the left, which tried to fight a tightening of the asylum law that a center-right coalition had established in the parliament. The main battle line was between two camps, one favoring the law (i.e., pro-tightening asylum policy), and one against the new asylum law (i.e., against tightening of asylum policy). The camps included not only political parties, but also a large number of other mobilized organizations, e.g., organizations that support refugees and foreigners, religious organizations, business interest associations, and some domain-specific organizations defending the Swiss national tradition.³²

Taken together, forty-seven different organizations were mobilized in this referendum, thirty-two in the camp opposing a tightening of the asylum law (contra camp), and fifteen in the camp that favored a tightening (pro camp).³³ All those organizations actively joined the debate, launching a campaign trying to establish their arguments in the media and to the public. This constellation demonstrates how referendum campaigns are multifaceted and unique. How agenda setting works in a referendum campaign is, therefore, a hitherto unresolved and very pressing research question.

In order to answer this question, we have, first, measured the agenda of all forty-seven campaign organizations involved in the campaign. More specifically, we used two operationalizations: standardized interviews with the campaign manager of each organization and a content analysis of campaign material (e.g., press releases). Second, we conducted an extensive content analysis of relevant media coverage of the cam-

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paign. Third, we gathered public opinion data in a three-wave panel study.

With these data, the major aim of this paper is to analyze the flow of arguments from both camps to media coverage, and from media coverage to the public. Based on previous research in agenda building, we assume there is a significant correlation of campaign arguments with salient arguments in the media. As one of the first studies in this area, we use two operationalizations of the campaigners' agenda: campaign manager interviews and content analysis of campaign material. Thus,

H1: The salience of arguments in interviews with key campaigners (**H1a**) and the salience of arguments in campaign material (**H1b**) will be positively related to the salience of arguments in media coverage.

There are no theoretical grounds driving hypotheses about which camp is more successful in distributing its agenda. Thus,

RQ1: How do the pro camp and the contra camp differ in shaping the media agenda of campaign arguments?

The second hypothesis concerns second-level agenda setting. Salient arguments in the media should also be salient arguments for the public. However, based on previous research, it can be expected that this relationship holds true only when the public relies on the mass media. When there is no media reliance, media salience and public salience are thought to be weakly related. This leads us to the following hypothesis.

H2: There will be a stronger correlation between salience of arguments in media coverage and public argument salience for citizens with high media reliance compared to citizens with low media reliance.

Methods

At the heart of our analysis, we have chosen the seven key arguments of the debate (see Table 1). Those key arguments were selected through examination of news releases and previous parliamentary debates. Asylum policy is not a new issue, so selecting the key arguments from past debates and previous material was deemed appropriate. In order to measure the salience of those arguments, all measures were applied exactly the same way in all data sources.

Interviews with Elite Campaigners. The relevant campaign organizations were identified based on parliamentary debates, voting recommendations, previous media coverage, and campaigners' Web sites. By doing so, forty-seven relevant political parties and organizations were identified. For each organization, we conducted a standardized interview with the campaign manager. All campaign managers agreed to participate, which is not unusual in small countries such as Switzerland. Personal interviews were conducted (and recorded on tape) by two

trained scholars, before the June 2006 referendum vote. The average duration of an interview was sixty minutes. Thirty-two organizations belong in the contra camp and fifteen in the pro camp. This difference in camp size is due to the fact that the contra organizations came from more diverse backgrounds.³⁴

As the central variable, argument salience was measured by asking how important each of the seven arguments (see Table 1) was for the respective organization (1 = very unimportant to 5 = very important). Each argument was presented to the campaigners in exactly the same wording as presented in the public opinion survey and measured in content analysis.

Campaign Materials. We analyzed all campaign materials put forth by all involved organizations throughout the campaign from early June 2006 to the end of September 2006. Campaign materials were press releases, speeches from media conferences, and public statements by the organizations. Materials were collected by asking the campaigners for all official and non-official documents. As all campaigners agreed to do so, we have a full population of all materials. A total of $N = 264$ documents was gathered including seventy-two press releases, thirty-three public statements, sixty internal campaign strategy documents that were sent by the organizations, twenty-two flyers and leaflets, and seventy-seven other campaign documents. These strategic documents were distributed and available throughout the campaign. Thus, and in contrast to the analysis of media content, no time periods were defined. The sample was divided into materials from the pro camp ($n = 68$) and the contra camp ($n = 196$). The salience of all seven campaign arguments was measured by coding whether or not an argument was present in these materials (a dichotomous measure). Coding was done together with the media content, as detailed below.

Media Content. The content analysis ($N = 3,314$) started in early June 2006 and ended with the last CATI-interview of the third panel wave at the end of September 2006. The unit of analysis was the argument. Five TV formats of both German- and French-speaking television in Switzerland were sampled, including prime-time news formats. All news items were sampled that dealt with the asylum law in particular or asylum policy in general. The sample of print media included both elite and non-elite media sources of the German and the French parts of Switzerland.³⁵

In order to measure argument salience, whether an argument was present or not in news coverage was coded (a dichotomous measure). We did not code how important this argument was within a news item. The reasoning is that the more an argument is present in news coverage, the higher is its salience in the news media. Coding of media content and campaign materials was performed by four trained graduate students fluent in both languages. As a reliability check revealed, average agreement for all coders was sufficient.³⁶

The sample was divided into three periods: the first ranged from the beginning of the content analysis to the first wave of the panel survey; the second was from the first to second wave of the survey; and the

third ranged from the second wave of the survey to the last interview of the third panel wave. An indicator of argument salience was construed for all three periods: the total number of a particular argument's mentions in each period in relation to the number of all arguments of that period. The more often an argument was mentioned, the higher its salience.

Panel Survey. The three-wave panel survey was conducted by means of RDD computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI). A global polling company programmed the questionnaire, pretested the study, and performed all interviews of a representative national survey for the German- and French-speaking parts of Switzerland. The first wave covered 1,725 interviews in July 2006 (52.2% female, age $M = 48.51$, $sd = 17.11$). The second wave took place in August 2006 with 1,415 persons participating again. The third wave took place shortly after the referendum with 1,049 persons participating again.

For each argument, argument awareness, as a basic measure of salience, was assessed by the question: "Have you ever heard the following argument?" (1 = yes, 0 = no). The arguments were applied in exactly the same way in all data sources. To measure media reliance, participants were asked: "How important is the following media source for you in order to get informed about politics such as the asylum law?" (1 = very unimportant to 5 = very important). This question was asked with respect to TV and newspaper. The answers were summed up to form an overall index of media reliance (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.726$). The idea underlying this index was that people who regard news media as very important have generally high media reliance.³⁷ The sample was split in two groups by means of a median split. As a control, political orientation was measured on a 10-point scale by asking individuals to place themselves on the scale from left-wing to right-wing (1 = left, 10 = right).

Data Analysis. We have four data sets, and for all four data sets, we have measured the same seven arguments. Combining those data sets requires using a statistical technique that can be applied to all data sets at the same time. As common in many agenda-setting studies, we have chosen rank-order correlations (Spearman's ρ) as the chief statistical test. This technique is the only one that allows a combination of all data sets. The logic is intuitive: The seven arguments were ranked according to their salience in all four data sets. For the interviews with campaign organizations and for the content analysis of their campaign output, a rank order of all seven arguments was calculated for the pro and the contra camp respectively (i.e., both camps rated all arguments). For the content analysis of news media, a rank order of arguments was calculated for all three phases. Likewise, we calculated a rank order for every panel wave, and for respondents with high and low media reliance.

Results

Hypotheses Tests. We hypothesized a significant correlation between the arguments in the campaign interviews (**H1a**), campaign materials (**H1b**), and argument salience in the media. The order of argu-

TABLE 1
Rank Order of Arguments for All Agendas

Argument	Argument		Argument		Argument		Argument		Argument	
Campaign	Campaign		Media		Public		Saliency		Saliency	
Saliency	Saliency		Saliency		Saliency		Saliency		Saliency	
(Interviews)	(Content Analysis of Campaign Materials)		(Content Analysis of News Media)		(Panel Survey)					
Arguments	Pro	Con	Pro	Con	W ₀₋₁	W ₁₋₂	W ₂₋₃	W ₁	W ₂	W ₃
A ₁	1	4	1	3	3	3	2	2	1	1
A ₂	3	1	2	2	1	1	1	4	4	2
A ₃	2	5	3	6	2	2	3	5	5	5
A ₄	4	6	6	7	4	4	4	3	3	3
A ₅	5	2	4	1	5	5	5.5 ¹	6	6	6
A ₆	6.5 ¹	7	5	4	6	6	5.5 ¹	1	2	4
A ₇	6.5 ¹	3	7	6	7	7	7	7	7	7

Note: W = Panel Wave, A₁ = The abuse of asylum policy must be stopped, A₂ = The humanitarian tradition of Switzerland must be maintained, A₃ = The execution of asylum politics must be more efficient, A₄ = Switzerland is too attractive for asylum seekers, A₅ = The rights of asylum seekers have to be protected, A₆ = There are already too many foreigners in Switzerland, A₇ = Foreign people contribute to the social and cultural quality of Switzerland;¹ if two arguments had the same saliency value, they were not ordered but given the mid-rank.

Values with the same magnitude are said to be tied. Taking the mid-rank is generally recommended in the statistical literature; see Jean Dickinson Gibbons and Subhabrata Chakraborti, *Non-parametric Statistical Inference* (New York: CRC Press, 2003), 194-95.

ments for all involved actors is depicted in Table 1. Table 2 shows the rank-order correlations (interviews and campaign materials) for the pro camp, the contra camp, and for all three time periods. As can be seen, there is no significant correlation between the salient arguments of the contra camp and argument saliency in the media, nor for the interview data nor for the campaign material data. In other words, the contra camp did not succeed in establishing its arguments in news coverage. In contrast, we can find a significant correlation between the pro camp arguments and the saliency of those arguments in the media, both for the interview and the campaign material data. This relationship is significant for all three waves. Answering **RQ1**, we can generally demonstrate a second-level agenda-building effect for the pro camp; however, the voices of the contra camp remained largely unheard. Thus, **H1a** and **H1b** can be confirmed only for the pro camp.

TABLE 2

Correlations between Campaign Argument Salience (Interviews and Campaign Material) and Media Argument Salience

	Argument Media Salience Wave 1	Argument Media Salience Wave 2	Argument Media Salience Wave 3
Interview Argument Salience Pro Camp	.85**	.79*	.85**
Interview Argument Salience Contra Camp	.29	.11	.23
Campaign Material Argument Salience Pro Camp	.78*	.75*	.84**
Campaign Material Argument Salience Contra Camp	.20	.09	.24

Note: * $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$.

In our second hypothesis, we expected a significant relationship between argument salience in the media and public argument salience, especially for individuals with high media reliance. Confirming our assumption, there is no significant correlation between the two agendas for people who have reported low media reliance. Put differently, the salient arguments of low-reliance individuals did not correspond to the salient arguments in the media throughout the whole campaign. As Table 3 reveals, there is a significant correlation between media salience and public salience for high-reliance individuals. However, this relationship does evolve in the course of the campaign. There is a steady rise in correlations from wave one to wave three; only at wave three, however, do these correlations reach statistical significance. Obviously, the cumulated exposure to media content in the course of the whole campaign led to this significant second-level agenda-setting effect. To interpret this finding, keep in mind that we have measured the extent to which audience members have heard of an argument. In wave one, only a small part of the public had heard those arguments, and, therefore, the correlation between media salience and public salience is rather low. By the time of wave three, however, repeated exposure to salient arguments in mass media reporting ensured a high salience of the arguments on the public agenda.

Additional Analyses. We looked at the stability of public salience. For individuals with high media reliance, the stability of argument salience from wave one to wave three is rather low and not significant ($\rho = .51$, n.s.). However, there is a high stability of argument salience

TABLE 3

Correlations between Media Argument Saliency and Public Argument Saliency for Individuals with High and Low Media Reliance

	High Media Reliance			Low Media Reliance		
	Argument	Argument	Argument	Argument	Argument	Argument
	Public	Public	Public	Public	Public	Public
	Saliency	Saliency	Saliency	Saliency	Saliency	Saliency
	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
Argument Media Saliency Wave 1	.07	.25	.79*	-.21	.07	.00
Argument Media Saliency Wave 2	.21	.32	.82**	-.31	.00	-.14
Argument Media Saliency Wave 3	.29	.47	.92**	-.16	.18	.07

Note: * $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$.

from wave one to wave three for respondents with low media reliance ($\rho = .89, p < .001$). In other words, people with high media reliance were more volatile compared to people with low media reliance.

In order to understand the full flow of arguments, we have also examined the relationship between argument saliency for the pro and the contra camp and public argument saliency (see Table 4). For interview and campaign material data sets, there is no correspondence between argument saliency of both campaign camps and public saliency for citizens with low media reliance.³⁸ Obviously, individuals with low media reliance were not interested in the asylum law, so their agenda did not correspond to the media and the campaigners' agenda. However, for the pro camp, we can find a significant correlation for individuals with high media reliance: There is a rise in correlations from wave one to wave three. This means that, at wave three, the argument agenda of the pro camp significantly corresponds to public saliency of arguments. Of course, this does not mean that there is a direct effect from the campaign to the public. In contrast, this result illustrates that the arguments put forth by the pro camp were successfully implemented in media coverage, and finally reached the public. Consequently, the pro camp succeeded with the fundamental goal of every campaigner: to steer media attention and to impose a dominant argumentation on the audience.

TABLE 4

Correlations between Campaign Camp Argument Salience and Public Argument Salience for Individuals with High and Low Media Reliance

	High Media Reliance			Low Media Reliance		
	Argument Public Salience	Argument Public Salience	Argument Public Salience	Argument Public Salience	Argument Public Salience	Argument Public Salience
	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
Interview Argument Salience	.11	.40	.83**	.02	.29	.27
Pro Camp Interview Argument Salience	-.50	-.36	.00	.64	.64	.64
Campaign Material Interview Argument Salience	.32	.39	.75*	.14	.43	.46
Pro Camp Campaign Material Interview Argument Salience	.04	.05	.09	.40	.45	.64

Note: ** $p < .001$.

Still the question remains: Why did the contra camp not succeed in imposing its agenda of arguments? It seems reasonable to assume that the contra camp did, at least, reach its own partisans. Therefore, we have divided the survey sample into the political left (which is expected to be contra) and the political right (which is expected to be pro) by our political orientation measure. Interestingly, there is no correspondence between the arguments of the contra camp (interview data) and the arguments of political left respondents (wave three, $\rho = -.07$, n.s.). Less surprising, there is also no correlation between contra camp argument salience and right wing respondents ($\rho = .25$, n.s.). In contrast, there is a correlation between argument salience of the pro camp and right wing respondents ($\rho = .70$, $p < .05$), and, again, no significant correlation

between pro camp argument salience and left-wing respondents ($\rho = .38$, n.s.). The campaign material data yield similar results. This means that, while the pro camp has reached its own partisans, the contra camp failed to bring out its argument agenda to its own disciples.

As a factual matter, referendum campaigns are about arguments. The flow of arguments from political elites to the media and to the public will be decisive for the campaign outcome. This study tested the impact of second-level agenda setting and building in a referendum campaign. It was shown that the proponents of the asylum law did succeed in bringing their argumentation into news coverage, which, in turn, increased public salience for their agenda. The results also show that the mass media have no direct or uniform effect on all audience members. In fact, only those individuals who relied heavily on the mass media for political information were influenced by salient media arguments. Individuals with low media reliance have in effect kept their "eyes and ears shut," and, therefore, the campaign yielded no effects whatsoever for this group.

In practical terms, we have learned that the contra camp failed to communicate its agenda, as the media simply did not adopt it. In order to interpret this, we have to take into account the general political climate of Switzerland. Based on past referendums about asylum policy, the outcome of the referendum was rather predictable, a fact also acknowledged by both camps in our interviews. The pro camp generally expected to win, and told us so. For the contra camp, in contrast, some campaign planners admitted that they saw a minimal chance to win the vote. Nevertheless, they were heading the fight for reasons of public reputation, credibility, and fundamental values.³⁹ Keeping this in mind, we can speculate that the media favored the arguments of the winning side. It is also noteworthy that the contra camp did not even reach its own left-wing followers in the broad public.

Another aspect revealed in the interviews helps to explain our findings. In contrast to the opponents of a tighter asylum law, the strategy of the proponents was more efficient: They denied central arguments of their adversaries less often than did the opponents. For instance, the most important argument of the contra camp was the third most important argument for the pro camp. This argument of humanitarian tradition—arguably one of the key arguments *against* a tightening of asylum policy—was still used by the pro camp. In other words, the pro camp supported a tightening of the asylum law and at the same time, they also claimed that the humanitarian tradition of the country must be maintained. Thus, the pro camp *reframed* this argument in a way that citizens would not clearly recognize it as a contra argument. This gave the contra camp a much more powerful arsenal of arguments.⁴⁰

Beyond the specific context of the asylum law campaign, our study is unique in several aspects. First, we have conducted interviews with all relevant campaigners. These data were validated by a content analysis of all relevant campaign materials.

Discussion

Further, we jointly observed agenda building and agenda setting in a single study. Thus, we were able to track the dynamic success of the campaign over time. By conducting a panel survey, we could observe an increase in correlations among the agendas over a period of several months. This result supports the idea that real-world agenda-building and -setting effects have to be understood as cumulative, long-term effects.⁴¹

Notwithstanding the rich and methodologically demanding data, there are some drawbacks of the present study. To begin with, we have used rank-order correlations as the statistical procedure to observe agenda-building and -setting effects. Although this is the only way to jointly analyze these rich sets of data, more advanced data analytical techniques could be used, for example, if we looked at the combination of survey data and content analysis. We also have to be cautious in interpreting causal relationships. Although we find correlations between all sets of data, the time ordering for combined analysis of the campaigners' data and the media content is less clear than for media content and public opinion data. Furthermore, we have relied on tests of statistical significance, although we do not have random sampling in all data sets. Relying on absolute size of correlations for interpreting findings would seem somewhat arbitrary. Therefore, and for reasons of consistency, we have used significance testing.⁴²

Second, we have actually measured awareness of campaign arguments for the public opinion data. Although similar indicators have been successfully used in previous research,⁴³ the perceived importance of those arguments would have been a more valid indicator. Third, there were more contra campaigners than pro campaigners, and, thus, the measurement for the contra camp agenda might be more accurate than for the pro camp agenda. However, we have sampled all organizations involved in the campaign, so there was no reason to select some organizations over others.

Despite these limitations, we believe that such large-scale real-world studies have merit. Of course, a gain in external validity comes at a cost of internal validity. However, such data allow insights into the intertwined relationship between mass communication and society that are hard to accomplish otherwise. Therefore, a fruitful cross-fertilization would result from joining large-scale multi-method studies like the present one with smaller studies that can establish a causal link between agendas.

NOTES

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31. Since we have not measured attitudes toward the asylum issue, one could argue that we have done a first- rather than second-level agenda setting study. However, we have not measured the agendas on the issue level, but on the issue-attribute level. The debate arguments used here touch the question of how to think about the asylum issue. Thus, they are *cognitive* issue attributes. For instance, when arguments in favor of a tightening of the asylum policy are made salient, one frames this issue in terms of asylum abuse and misconduct. This view is in line with McCombs' understanding of framing: "people also frame objects, placing varying degrees of emphasis on the attributes of [...] public issues or other objects when they think or talk about them" (Maxwell McCombs, *Setting the Agenda: The Mass Media and Public Opinion* [Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004], 87).

32. Hanspeter Kriesi, Laurent Bernhard, and Regula Hänggeli, "Coalition Formation in Direct-Democratic Campaigns: A Case Study of the Vote on the Swiss Asylum Law," National Center of Competence in Research (NCCR) Working Paper No. 12 (February 2008).

33. The contra camp included the Social Democrats, the Greens, the

Forum for the Integration of Migrants, the Solidarité sans frontières, the Swiss Aid for Refugees, the Swiss Federation of Trade Unions, Amnesty International, the Catholic Church, the Protestant Church, the Swiss Red Cross, the Young Socialists, and others. On the other side, the pro camp gathered organizations such as all political parties of the moderate (FDP, CVP) and the populist right (SVP), the Federal Ministry of Justice and Police (EJPD), the Federal Office of Migration (BFM), the Swiss Employers' Association, the Association of Small Businesses and Trade, the Association for an Independent and Neutral Switzerland, the Liberal Party, and others; see Kriesi, Bernhard, and Hänggli, "Coalition Formation."

34. Kriesi, Bernhard, and Hänggli, "Coalition Formation."

35. The TV formats included Tagesschau, Arena, Le journal (19.30), SF Rundschau, TSR Infrarouge. The investigated newspapers included: *Blick*, *Sonntagsblick*, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, *NZZ am Sonntag*, *Tagesanzeiger*, *Sonntagszeitung*, *20 Minuten*, *Aargauer Zeitung*, *Basler Zeitung*, *Berner Zeitung*, *Neue Luzerner Zeitung*, *Die Südostschweiz*, *St. Galler Tagblatt*, *Le Matin*, *Le Temps*, *Tribune de Genève*, *24 heures*, *20 minutes*.

36. Scotts *pi*, a more conservative coefficient than Holsti's *R*, is .78 for argument 1, .76 for argument 2, .83 for argument 3, .89 for argument 4, .80 for argument 5, .79 for argument 6, and .85 for argument 7. There is no difference between media content data and campaign materials.

37. Though this measure seems somehow related to need for orientation, it refers to reliance on specific media sources, and not a general need to stay informed about an issue; see Matthes, "The Need for Orientation towards News Media."

38. However, for the low media reliance group, there are correlations of .64 with the arguments of the contra camp. These comparatively high correlations seem to be surprising given the non-significant media effects for the low media reliance group and the failure of the contra camp to communicate its agenda. However, since they are not statistically significant, we do not interpret these correlations. Without significance testing, there are no established standards for considering a rank-order correlation as "high"; thus, we would have no justification whatsoever about the relative importance of those correlations. Rank order correlations are a rather weak test of statistical relationship. Thus, we preferred to be conservative in interpreting them.

39. Kriesi, Bernhard, and Hänggli, "Coalition Formation."

40. Similar results had been obtained in early persuasion studies on the effects of one-sided versus two-sided communication and refutational versus non-refutational appeals. See Carl I. Hovland, Irving L. Janis, and Harold H. Kelley, *Communication and Persuasion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953); for positive/negative emphasis of arguments, see also affective second-level agenda setting: e.g., McCombs and Ghanem, "The Convergence of Agenda Setting and Framing."

41. See also Young Jun Son and David H. Weaver, "Another Look at What Moves Public Opinion: Media Agenda Setting and Polls in the 2000 U.S. Election," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 18 (summer 2006): 174-97.

42. There is also support for significance testing with apparent samples in the methodological literature. The key argument is that even apparent populations cannot be interpreted as deterministic, error-free data. Thus, significance testing may still be justified: see Kenneth A. Bollen, "Apparent and Nonapparent Significance Tests," *Sociological Methodology* 25 (1995): 459-68.

43. e.g., Marc Benton and P. Kean Frazier, "The Agenda-Setting Function of the Mass Media at Three Levels of 'Information Holding,'" *Communication Research* 3 (3, 1976): 261-74; William F. DeGeorge, "Conceptualization and Measurement of Audience Agenda," in *Mass Communication Review*, vol. 2, ed. G. Cleveland Wilhoit and Harold DeBock (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1981), 219-24.