The Agenda-Setting Effect of Focusing Events: A Case Study of the Church Restitutions Issue[1]

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The Agenda-Setting Effect of Focusing Events: A Case Study of the Church Restitutions Issue. We examine the role of media coverage of events in the process of public agenda setting. We define focusing events according to Kingdon (1995) as events that call attention to problems and issues. Scholars have introduced several typologies of media coverage in the long tradition of agenda-setting research. However, no previous work has examined the differing effects of news items exclusively in terms of (a) issues, (b) a focusing event, and (c) both an issue and a respective focusing event. Our research question is: "Does a focusing event strengthen the effect of a news item by setting the personal agendas of members of the public?"

To answer the question, we chose the cognitive portrait research design and used individual data to study the issue (see the Acapulco typology, McCombs 2004) of Church property restitutions in the Czech Republic. Our focusing event is the St. Vitus Cathedral trial. We use data from a weekly panel survey of the events deemed most important by respondents between April and May 2008. We combine these panel data with the results of a content analysis that monitored the total number of news items referring to Church restitutions and the St. Vitus Cathedral trial (Vinopal 2009).

Our results show that the coverage of a focusing event has a significant positive effect on setting the respective issue as a personal agenda, but the coverage of a focusing event is unable to influence the agenda-setting process on its own. A focusing event must be contextualized (i.e., mentioned in the same text as the issue) to affect a recipient's personal agenda. We suggest carefully distinguishing between the coverage of mere issues and contextualized coverage of a respective focusing event in future agenda-setting research.
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This paper concentrates on the role that focusing events play in the agenda-setting process. In particular, we explore how the frequency of news items that mention a related focusing event influences respondents' personal agendas. The role of focusing events is commonly featured in studies of policy-agenda setting (see Kingdon 1995; Birkland 1997; Birkland 2007) or media agenda-setting processes (e.g. Dearing and Rogers 1996). However, the role of focusing events in the process of public-agenda setting has not been studied thoroughly. The sole exception is Kwansah-Aidoo (2003), although he did not investigate the effect of the coverage of focusing events. Because media

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coverage generally influences the public's preferences regarding issues, we think it is necessary to know if the issues on the public agenda are set by focusing events or by issues alone. This study opens up an important theoretical question that has significant methodological and practical implications.

We first briefly outline the concept of agenda setting. We then define and describe the development of the concept of focusing events. Unlike its restricted variant, our definition of focusing events is not limited to crises (see Birkland 1997). We believe that news items that target a particular focusing event put more successfully issues on the personal agendas of individual members of the public, in contrast to those that mention the particular issue but do not refer to the focusing event.

We decided to test this hypothesis on *Church property restitutions* in the Czech Republic as the issue and *St. Vitus Cathedral property rights* as the focusing event. We believe this issue merits study because it has remained unresolved since 1989 (i.e., the fall of the Communist regime) and has repeatedly caused sociopolitical discord whenever governments have tried to resolve it. St. Vitus Cathedral is located in Prague Castle and is considered a symbol of Czech identity.

We used panel data to map the development of respondents' preferences concerning the most important events between April and May 2008. We combined these panel data with the results of a content analysis to daily monitor the frequency of news items about Church property restitutions and the trial of St. Vitus Cathedral. We demonstrate that the effect of news items concerning Church property restitutions is stronger if they simultaneously refer to the focusing event.

The Agenda-Setting Theory and Focusing Events

Agenda setting
Agenda-setting theory describes a process by which society defines its priorities by striving to establish a consensus about which issues need to be solved first. It is only logical that society first allocates means to priority issues. Cobb and Elder defined an "issue" as a "conflict between two or more identifiable groups over procedural or substantive matters relating to the distribution of positions or resources" (1983: 32 quoted according to Dearing and Rogers 1996: 2).

All issues are ultimately controversial because conflicts are discernible on three levels: whether the issue exists at all, whether it ought to be resolved, and how it should be resolved. However, not every conflict becomes an issue. To become an issue, a conflict must be identified as such, and a solution is required (Dearing and Rogers 1996).

A set of issues sorted according to their significance is called an "agenda." An agenda transforms when a particular problem is solved, when it is no longer as pressing as it was when it entered the agenda, when society becomes accustomed to it (and therefore no longer considers it urgent), or when other problems arise that are even more urgent and to which resources need to be allocated. An agenda is a concept that not only applies only to society as a whole but also to various subsystems (Dearing and Rogers 1996). If we were to break the system into small parts, the smallest part would be individuals, who have their own "personal agendas" (McLeod et al. (1974) 1991). Subsystems attempt to either resolve priority issues by using their own resources or by trying to promote their agenda as society's agenda.

Agenda-setting theory applies to three key subsystems: the media, the public, and politics. All three have their own agendas, interlinked through dense networks. These three agendas are also influenced by events taking place in the real (i.e., not mediated) world, by the actors' personal experiences, and by interpersonal communication. The theory identifies key individual subsystems and describes how their mutual influence creates a consensus about which issues should be responded to. Hence, the theory segments the media system into particular types of groups (and it does the same with the political system). The public is divided into groups according to their approach to various agendas: an *attentive public* is one segment of the public (people who follow a broad range of issues and who like to discuss them), *attention groups* (concentrated on only one type of issue), and a *mass public* (which does not focus its attention on any particular issue but might, very briefly, concentrate its attention on an issue targeted by the media) (Dearing and Rogers 1996; Cobb and Ross 1997). We will concentrate on the relationship between the public and the media by considering the media and the public as one unit. Therefore, we do not break down these subsystems any further.

Nevertheless, it is still necessary to explain how agenda-setting theory predicts where a particular issue will be placed on the media's or the public's agenda. The intensity of the attention to a particular issue is a common denominator that defines the position of an issue on any kind of agenda. The *media agenda* is usually defined as the number of news items devoted to a particular issue. *Public attention* is usually defined as the proportion of people who consider the issue currently one of the most important issues (Dearing and Rogers 1996). Studies that use microlevel data (such as the present study) also refer to the *personal agenda*: the agenda of a particular individual reflecting the public issues that he or she considers important (Kalvas 2009; Rosůlek 2011). This study will be based on the latter definition (for further details on methodology, please see section "Data and Variables").

Focusing events

The literature gives a clear definition of *focusing events*: events that "call attention to the problem" (Kingdon 1995: 94-95; similarly Birkland 2007: 74; Birkland and Nath 2000: 276; Birkland 2004a: 180; Birkland 2004b: 343; Birkland 1998: 53), regardless of whether such events are recent. Kingdon (1995) discussed two basic variants of focusing events: personal experiences obtained by policymakers and the impact of powerful symbols. Kingdon's aim was to identify which mechanisms influence policies and political decision-making. A politician with personal experience of an issue is much more likely to pay attention to it than a politician without such experience. The event that was experienced may therefore be seen as a focusing event. Powerful symbols, according to Kingdon (1995: 97-98), "catch on and have important focusing effects because they capture in a nutshell some sort of reality that people already sense in a vaguer, more diffuse way."

If we focus on members of the public, the concept of a focusing event will be enriched by members' personal experience, the study of which dates to Funkhouser's classic study (1973). The concept of a focusing event will be further enriched by events related to strong symbols. To date, there have been only two studies of such focusing events (Kwansah-Aidoo 2003; Walker and Waterman 2008). However, no study has investigated what effect the intensity of media coverage of events related to strong symbols has on the introduction of an issue onto personal or public agendas.

The principle according to which focusing events influence the public and the personal agenda-setting processes corresponds to the principle that governs the policy-agenda setting: catastrophic events, personal experience, and symbols draw attention to issues related to the event (Kingdon 1995). We believe that media reports of such events will strongly capture recipients' attention. If attention paid to a particular issue increases, the chances increase that a particular person (and consequently the public) will consider the issue important. For this reason, we can assume that a news item that refers to a focusing event will help put the issue on the personal agenda.

Kingdon also pointed out that symbols reduce the abstract and complex character of issues. Yagade and Dozier (1990) argued that it is easier for the media to set the public agenda through concrete issues that people can imagine the consequences of. It is much harder to assess the consequences of abstract issues, which is why it is more difficult for such issues to get on the public agenda. Focusing events have the capacity to reduce the abstractness of issues and their complexity, which is why we believe that news items that refer to such events will have more influence on the agenda-setting process.

Regardless of whether focusing events operate through a capacity to make the related issue less abstract and complex or by drawing more attention to the issue, we can formulate the following hypothesis:

H_1: News items that refer to the focusing event have a greater capacity to put an issue on personal agendas than news items that talk about the issue but do not refer to the relevant focusing event.

We examine the issue of Church property restitutions in relation to a focusing event; namely, the St. Vitus Cathedral trial. At the time of the questionnaire collection, this issue has attracted the Czech public's attention for 16 years. This dispute also represents what is fundamentally at the heart of the Church property restitution problem in the Czech Republic (see Kalvas et al. 2012), which the media was focusing at the time we conducted our survey. Consequently, we cannot determine which of the two principles prevails in the assessment of this particular focusing event (i.e., whether it is the capacity to attract the public's attention in a stronger way or to reduce the abstractness and complexity of the issue). Two aspects of the St. Vitus Cathedral trial are relevant here. First, it attracts the public's attention (as we demonstrate in this paper), and second, it is a very powerful symbol with the capacity to make a complex issue easier to understand.

In the next section, we describe in more detail how the particular issue and focusing event that we have chosen present us with a very unusual opportunity: it is possible to write about the event (the Cathedral trial) without mentioning the issue (Church property restitutions), which an analysis of media content proves. This gives us the unusual opportunity to test whether a news item referring to a focusing event has an independent effect or whether a reference to the event only strengthens the effect of referring to a particular issue. We assume that news items referring to the focusing event have an independent net effect. We are unaware of any theory that postulates or justifies the necessity of explicitly referring to an issue in order for a focusing event to serve its function. Our claim is that referring to a focusing event has an autonomous effect, which should be supported by the following evidence: news items that refer to the Cathedral and do not mention Church property restitutions will be both substantively and statistically significant.

H_2: News items referring to a focusing event help to put the issue on the personal agenda, even when they do not explicitly refer to the particular issue.

The Story of Church Property Restitutions in the Czech Republic between 1990 and 2008

Before describing and explaining the data used to test our hypotheses, it is necessary to provide some background to the issue that we are concentrating on here: the case of the restitution of Church property in the Czech Republic.[3]

This issue of the restitution of Church property is related (both thematically and chronologically) to the problem of the property rights surrounding St. Vitus Cathedral (representing the aforementioned focusing event). The dispute over Church property restitutions has been a recurring theme in the Czech Republic since November 1989. The restitution is part of the State's effort to redress the wrongdoings of the Communist regime (property seized by the regime has also been restituted to natural persons) (cf. Šmídová 2007).

Prior to the founding of the Czech Republic in 1993, following the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, the Federal Parliament introduced a Church Restitution Bill, which failed at that time to pass by several votes. Another attempt to settle the issue was made in 1996/1997. The Czech government offered to implement a free-of-charge transfer of specified real estate to Churches and ecclesiastical legal entities, but the Social Democratic opposition blocked it.

The period between 1997 and 2007 was characterized by episodic attempts to solve the problem. In 2004, the so-called *Řečická call* was issued, in which the mayors of 43 municipalities demanded the situation be solved, because law did not permit them to properly maintain the former Church property.[4] In 2005, a coalition committee drafted an agreement to settle Church property restitutions by paying the churches an annual rent over the next fifty years.

On January 23, 2008, the government approved a bill prepared by the Ministry of Culture that sought to resolve the problem of Church property restitutions. The bill laid stipulated a process whereby the churches and State would gradually separate over the next twenty years. It proposed a settlement of the property issues between the churches and the State by returning or providing financial compensation for all seized property. The churches were entitled to property and land to the value of 51 billion Czech crowns. The bill also defined exceptions, mainly buildings that were determined by law as exempt from restitution claims. However, the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic did not pass this bill either (the session of

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[3] The Church Restitutions Bill has always sought to reclaim all property that churches owned, at least partially, from 25th February 1948 to 1st January 1990. In the Czech context, the Church restitutions, however, are primarily associated with the Catholic Church. This is due mainly to the fact that 98% of all restitution claims (including the St. Vitus Cathedral issue) are related to the Catholic Church.

[4] According to paragraph 29 of Act 229/1991 Coll., the municipalities do not have the right to manage former Church property.

April 29, 2008 was suspended and adjourned). The Chamber of Deputies submitted the bill for review and comments. On April 27, 2009, the committee recommended that the bill be rejected (Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic 2009).

The case of St. Vitus Cathedral is an event that has drawn the public's attention to the case of Church property restitutions; the source of which is a 1954 government decree which deemed that the Cathedral "belongs to all the Czechoslovak people."

On December 30, 1992, the Religious Fund (Náboženská matice[5]) filed a lawsuit against the State. The first ruling came on December 19, 1994. The Prague 1 District Court ruled that the Cathedral belongs to the Catholic Church. A series of legal wranglings ensued, at the end of which, on January 31, 2007, the Supreme Court threw out the previous rulings of both the Prague 1 District Court and the Prague Municipal Court (both had ruled that the Cathedral belongs to the Church) and the case returned to the District Court. On April 24, 2007, the State assumed ownership of the Cathedral and litigation continued until January 24, 2008, when representatives of the Catholic Church and Prague Castle signed a contract on joint usage of St. Vitus Cathedral.[6] Ever since the first lawsuit over the Cathedral was filed in 1992, the media coverage of this issue has overlapped with the issue of the unfinished settlement of property-related problems between the State and the Church. The attention the media have paid to Church property restitutions significantly overlaps with their attention to the Cathedral trial during the period under observation (April/May 2008).

Although the dispute over the Cathedral has ended, the problem of Church restitutions remains unresolved. In 2008, the government failed to pass a bill on the restitution of Church property in the parliament. For the next two years, the issue of restitution was marginalized in politics and the media. This changed in 2010 when a right-wing government made it part of the coalition agreement. In 2012, there was another attempt to pass the bill on Church property in the parliament. Because this study explores the dispute over the Cathedral in terms of a focusing event, we only analyzed data until 2008, when the Cathedral was still part of the public agenda.

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[5] The Religious Fund (Náboženská matice) was founded during the reforms carried out by Joseph II, Holy Roman Emperor, in the late eighteenth century. Its aim was to serve as a trust into which assets from abolished monasteries were shifted. During the Communist era, the Náboženská matice organization facilitated the transfer of confiscated Church assets to the State. This practice was contested after 1989 and the act of transfer was declared legally invalid (Svoboda 2007). By this definition of the situation, Church institutions had not legally had their assets taken from them, and this legal opinion formed the basis of Nabozenska matice's lawsuit over ownership of St Vitus Cathedral.

[6] The litigation continued. On April 30, 2008, the Prague Municipal Court upheld the ruling of the Prague I District Court that St. Vitus Cathedral and its adjacent property belongs to the State. That decision was final, but the Czech Catholic Church then appealed to the Supreme Court.

We believe that this focusing event represents all three dimensions of the Church property restitutions issue that were under consideration by the media during the period in which we analyzed our data. Kalvas et al. (2012) revealed the following three dimensions of the Church restitutions issue: the Church felt morally entitled to have its property returned, politicking, and the dispute over what criteria should be applied to make decisions about what property to return and about what sum should be paid for the property that would not be restituted to the Church.

The dispute over the Cathedral integrates various views on Church restitutions that are otherwise isolated: whether the Church has the moral right to seek the return of the Cathedral, which is not just perceived as a place of worship but also as a cultural monument of great public (not only religious) value; the dispute over the Cathedral has been politicized and the strategic steps taken by both parties (Church and State) have been discussed; and discussions of the criteria that would enable or exclude the return of the Cathedral.

Data and Variables

The data analyzed in this study is from several sources: a panel survey carried out by the Public Opinion Research Center (CVVM) as part of the *Public and Media Agenda* project; a quantitative media content analysis by the InnoVatio (commissioned by the CVVM); and our content analysis (using the same texts as InnoVatio). The CVVM survey provided data on how often the respondents mentioned Church property restitutions as an important event concerning society and the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The media analysis provided data on the media coverage of the theme of Church property restitutions and the St. Vitus Cathedral trial.

We use nonweighted data for this study. The panel survey covered 658 citizens of the Czech Republic over the age of 18. The data covered 12 weeks (April 20, 2008 – July 6, 2008). The sample of respondents was acquired by mixed sampling techniques (for more detail, see Appendix 6). Respondents were asked to fill in a questionnaire every Sunday over the course of the 12 weeks and return it by mail. The questionnaire included a question asking what two events the respondents considered "the most important nationwide events."[7] We then constructed a dichotomous variable based on the answers to that question, "**restitutions on personal agenda,**" which were equal to 1 if the respondent said, in the relevant wave of polling, that he or she considered the "St. Vitus Cathedral" or 'Church restitutions' one of the most important recent

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[7] The exact wording of the question in Czech was as follows: „Jaké dvě celospolečenské události z poslední doby považujete Vy osobně za nejvýznamnější? Vypište je, prosím v pořadí podle důležitosti, kterou jim přikládáte."

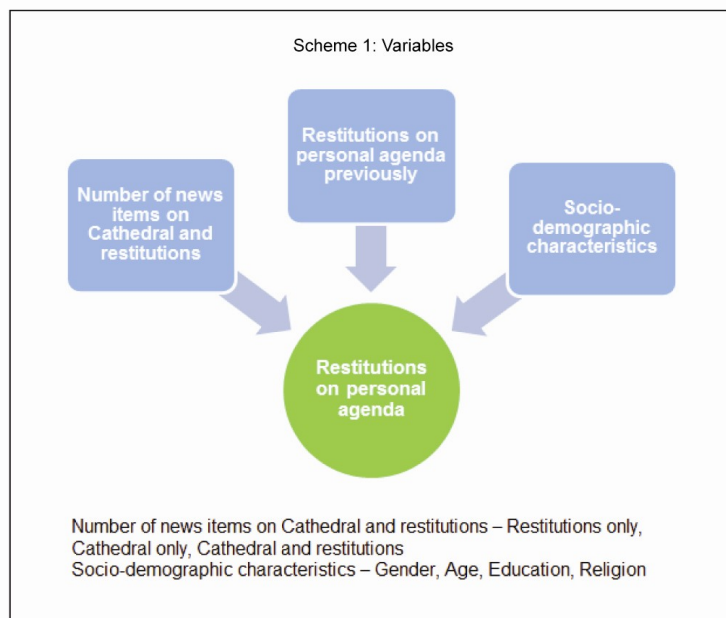events; otherwise they were equal to 0. This was our dependent variable for all the analysis presented here.

Because the answer given in one wave of polling could influence the answer given in the next wave of polling, we defined "**restitutions on personal agenda previously**" as equal to 1 if the respondent said that Church restitutions or the Cathedral were an important topic in the previous wave of polling; otherwise, they were equal to 0. For table frequencies of the variable "**restitutions on personal agenda**" and "**restitutions on personal agenda previously**," see Appendix No. 1.[8]

Next, we explain why we used a joint variable that combines mentions of Church property restitutions and the Cathedral trial. Although the initial coding key carefully differentiated mentions of Church property restitutions and the Cathedral trial, the former was directly mentioned only 19 times (9%) in the original (untreated) data, whereas Church restitutions were mentioned 184 times (91%). This is a considerable disparity. It stems from the fact that in the mental image respondents had developed the two causes overlapped. For this reason, we created a variable that aggregates them.

We should note here that all the analysis described below was also carried out using a dependent variable constructed solely on the basis of respondents' indications of Church property restitutions as important (and not taking into account answers in which respondents said the Cathedral trial was important). The results of this analysis do not differ from the results that we present in this paper.

Regarding the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, we took into account the following: gender, age, education, and religion. Respondents provided this information in the first wave of the polling only, so these variables remained constant across the periods. For the frequency of individual socio-demographic variables, see Appendix No. 2. For a detailed description, see Appendix No. 4.

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[8] We decided to work with the "previous mentions of restitutions" variable as we chose to adopt the methodological approach recommended by relevant literature on the use of a panel data analysis. Allison (Allison 1999: chapter 8, p. 183, etc.), for example, explained the methodological procedures appropriate for the kind of research we conducted by modeling the incidence of the binary variable in the second polling, while controlling for the incidence in the first polling by using other co-variables measured on the individual level. The "previous mentions of restitution" variable absorbs the influence of media items before the first wave of polling and the individual previous inclinations of the respondents. Thanks to these techniques, we were able to model a trend that resembles/represents the function of media influence. That is, the likelihood that the respondent would abandon the issue (if he or she considered it important in the previous polling wave) or would accept the issue (if he or she did not consider it important in the previous wave of polling). The approach we used (including the previous mention of the issue as an explanatory variable that helps to explain the actual stating of the issue) corresponds with the most frequently used agenda-setting research methodology that works with panel data (Shehata 2010; Matthes 2008; Shaw and McCombs 1977). The only exception we know of is (Kiousis and McDevitt 2008), which used a different strategy for data analysis. The four mentioned surveys are the only ones that have used panel data to study agenda-setting processes (see Kalvas and Kreidl 2007).

Scheme 1: Variables

Number of news items on Cathedral and restitutions – Restitutions only, Cathedral only, Cathedral and restitutions
Socio-demographic characteristics – Gender, Age, Education, Religion

The variables describing the frequency of news items on Church property restitutions were derived from the content analysis carried out by the InnoVatio, who gathered data from the following media: Blesk, Hospodářské noviny, Lidové noviny, MF Dnes and Právo (national daily papers), Čro 1 Radiožurnál, Impuls (radio broadcasters), and ČT1, TV Prima, and TV Nova (prime-time TV news) between March 24, 2008 and July 14, 2008. We also monitored daily the number of news items in the "Church property restitutions" and "Church and State relationship" categories. However, as the St. Vitus Cathedral trial is not, *sensu stricto*, part of the Church restitutions issue, we could not consider it to be about the relationship between the Church and the State. Therefore, we complemented the content analysis carried out by InnoVatio with our own survey. We searched the ANNOPRESS archives for all news items (in the same media outlets used by InnoVatio) dealing with the Cathedral trial issue and supplemented the data with frequencies for relevant days. In cases in which news items focusing on the Cathedral trial also covered Church property restitutions, we coded them separately. In this way, we were able to track the total number of news items, as well as their precise character (news items covering only Church property restitutions, news items covering

only the Cathedral trial, and news items covering both Church property restitutions and the Cathedral trial). We analyzed 240 news items.

The "media in total" variable assigns to each data entry (i.e., to each respondent in the particular polling wave) the number of news items on Church property restitutions, the Church/State relationship, or the St. Vitus cathedral within the 7 days preceding the day on which the respondent completed the questionnaire. We chose this interval because Wanta and Hu (1994) demonstrated that the agenda-setting effect could be visible as soon as within one week in the case of national TV news. The effect is slower for other media. For example, it is as much as eight weeks for weekly journals.

Scheme 2: Total (Catheral U Restitutions)

CO – Cathedral only
RO – Restitutions only,
CR – Cathedral and restitutions
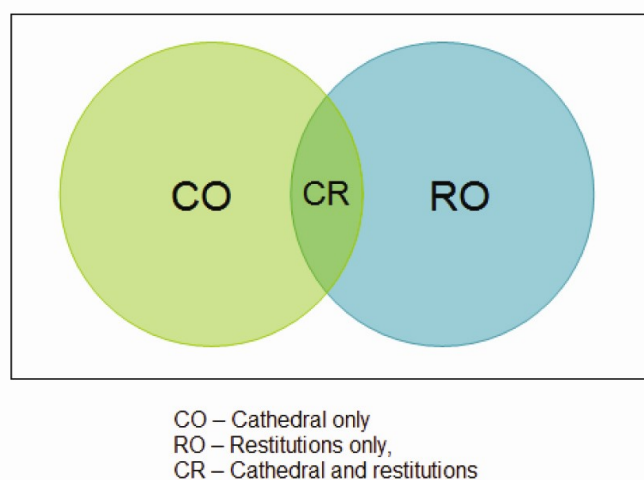
In the main section of the analysis, we also break down the "media in total" variable into three variables, which represent the number of news items that refer solely to restitutions ("restitutions only"), solely to the Cathedral ("Cathedral Only"), or to both ("Cathedral and restitutions"). The "restitutions only" variable assigned to each respondent in each wave of polling a precise number of news items that covered only the *issue* itself (Church restitutions) within the seven days preceding completion of the questionnaire. The "Cathedral only" variable assigned to each respondent in each wave of polling a precise number of news items exclusively covering the Cathedral trial within the seven days preceding completion of the questionnaire. The last variable ("Cathedral and restitutions") assigned to each respondent in each wave of polling a precise number of news items covering both Church property restitutions and the Cathedral trial within the seven days preceding completion of the questionnaire. When for a selected respondent within a particular wave

of polling we summed up the values of the "restitutions only," "Cathedral only," and "Cathedral and restitutions" variables, we obtained the value of the "media in total" variable.

We only used the results of the second to sixth wave of the panel survey in the analysis. The first wave was disqualified because, logically, it did not include the "previous mentions of restitutions" control variable. Therefore, we used the answers from the first wave of polling to construct the value of this variable for use with data from the second wave of polling. The results of the seventh to twelfth waves of polling were not used because when they were carried out the time had passed in which the media had been devoting considerable space to Church property restitutions and the St. Vitus Cathedral trial. This was logically accompanied by a decline in readers' interest in this issue.

Furthermore, we discarded observations from respondents who did not fill in their personal data, those who did not respond in all five polling waves, and those who did not stick to the survey calendar.[9] The number of news items (the "media in total," "Cathedral only," and "Cathedral and restitutions" variables) were assigned to respondents according to the day the questionnaire was completed. Having made the above-mentioned adjustments to the sample, we were left with 369 observations.[10] Therefore, both the original and the final sample were unrepresentative (see Appendix 6).

Method and Results of the Analysis

Analytical strategy
The use of a group of four variables ("media in total," "restitutions only," "Cathedral only," and "Cathedral and restitutions") allowed us to adopt the following analytical strategy. In models computed with the "Total media" variable, the coefficient would correspond to the average effect of one news item on Church property restitutions or the Cathedral trial issue published within seven days preceding the polling.

If we only used the group of three variables (that represent in fact a decomposition of the "media in total" variable), the coefficients would

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[9] In order to be able to keep as many observations as possible, we decided that we would consider a questionnaire acceptable even if it was completed on a Friday, Saturday, or Monday (instead of a Sunday).

[10] This means that we used 56.1% of respondents out of the original file of 658 respondents. Appendix No. 2 shows the structure of the original file does not significantly differ from the structure of the reduced file (the most important difference is the growth of the 52 – 71 age group by 4.2 percentage points, from 37.8% to 42%).
The differences in other categories were approximately 3 percentage points. The size of the original file left in the final file was not unusually small because we required respondents to participate in all waves of polling. Shetata's study (2010), for example, used 46.6% of the original 2161-respondent file, even though his criteria were much less strict than ours: respondents completed the questionnaires with the help of an interviewer and the criterion was that they participate in three waves of polling only (and, moreover, at any moment during the 10 – 19 days during which these data were gathered during the three-wave period).

correspond to effects triggered by individual types of news items: those covering the issue and the focusing event, those covering Church restitutions only, or those covering the Cathedral trial only.

The substantive, as well as the statistical, significance of the effect of the "media in total" variable helped us conduct a rough test of the agenda-setting hypothesis: if this effect was statistically insignificant, it indicated that the agenda-setting hypothesis is not applicable to the Church restitutions issue at the respondent level.

In the case of statistical or substantive insignificance, we used aggregated data to confirm or refute the validity of this hypothesis at the public level. Our analysis confirms that the 'media in total' variable was both statistically and substantively significant (see Table 1). It was therefore unnecessary to carry out the aggregated-data test (if significance was proved on individual data, it could be proved on aggregated data as well). Nevertheless, it is still relevant to ask whether all news items contribute to the creation of this effect in the same way.

The data shows several possible variants. First, all three variables ("restitutions only," "Cathedral only," and "Cathedral and restitutions") could have the same effect: this would mean that it does not matter whether the news items covered the issue or the focusing event. Second, the "restitutions only" and the "Cathedral and restitutions" variables are significant (and, ideally, their value is identical): this would mean that only news items covering the issue itself have a certain effect and that it is unnecessary to study whether the focusing event has been covered. Third, the "Cathedral only" and "Cathedral and restitutions" variables are significant (and, again, ideally, their value is identical): this would mean that the real effect is gained only by covering the focusing event, not by covering the issue itself. Lastly, only the "Cathedral and restitutions" variable is significant. This would mean that those news items that not only refer to the issue but also refer to the focusing event solely exert an influence. In other words, neither the coverage of the focusing event nor the coverage of the problem has the capacity to influence the public on its own: their effect does not become apparent unless they are covered together in a single news item.

If two or three variables were statistically significant (possibilities 1, 2, 3) and the intensity of their effect differs, we would have 16 possible configurations. Space does not permit us to describe all these variants in detail, but if any of the 16 constellations appears in our data, we will of course discuss it.

It may turn out that (5) the "restitutions only" and "Cathedral only" joint variables are significant, that (6) the "Cathedral only" variable alone is significant, or that (7) the "restitutions only" variable alone is significant. We have not anticipated any interpretation for such a result because we assume that

the news items either have a positive effect (enhancing the acceptance of the problem on the personal agenda) or zero effect (having no effect on the respondent). There is no reason to assume that news items referring to both the issue and the focusing event would not be influential. In cases in which the issue or the focusing event exercises no influence on the respondents, there is no reason to assume that this would negate the influence of the second characteristic, which alone would have an influence. Consequently, we believe that no relevant theoretical conclusion could be drawn from such results. They could only serve as evidence of practical mistakes in our research.

We used multilevel regression models with a dichotomous dependent variable to analyze our multilevel-structure panel data. Our data included 369 respondents who completed all five questionnaires—1845 observations (person-weeks).

Respondents and their characteristics represent stable macrocontexts, in which answers are given within particular waves of polling. Answers, along with the development of media content (transforming each week), represent microlevel observations. It is important to point out that the answers given by a particular respondent across the timespan of the survey were very similar to the answers given by various respondents. Multilevel models have the capacity, unlike classical linear or logistic regression, to take this similarity into consideration, which means that coefficients and, especially, standard error may be estimated more precisely (Kalvas et al. 2009).

Because multilevel modeling methods are not yet fully established, we followed Allison's advice (1999: chapter 8) by combining several methods (each of which has different advantages and disadvantages). To model the influence our macro and microvariables had on the odds that a particular respondent would have Church restitutions on his or her personal agenda, we used the population-averaged models and conditional logistic regression (some studies e.g. (Kalvas et al. 2009) refer to conditional logistic regression as a fixed-effects model). The conditional logistic regression is a convenient statistical tool for our type of analysis because it explains the variability of the dependent variable solely through microlevel variables that change over time. This means that it controls for the influence of all observed and unobserved characteristics of respondents that remain identical throughout the entire panel survey (such as their willingness to participate in a survey). The problem with this tool, however, is that it only uses the data of respondents for whom the value of the dependent variable changed during polling. This means that a conditional logistic regression omits respondents that always or never include Church restitutions in their personal agendas. In contrast, the marginal model treats the data in an effective way. However, there is a risk of bias in the latter from the possible influence of unobserved variables (Kalvas et al. 2009).

In the next section, we present and interpret the results obtained through both modeling methods. All calculations were made with the STATA 12.1 statistical program ("xtlogit" command). In the case of population-averaged models, we used the correction of first-order auto-correlation ("corr (ar1)" option).

Results

We estimated nine models (for an assessment of the suitability of the statistical measures and detailed characteristics, see Table 2 below). Table 1 summarizes the values of the estimated effects for all nine models. The first three models explored what influence the "media in total" variable had on the inclusion of Church restitution in the respondents' personal agendas. Model 1 is a conditional logistic regression, Model 2 is the population-averaged model that checks the influence of the macrolevel variable "media in total," and Model 3 is a population-averaged model checking the influence of both "media in total" and microvariables ("gender," "age," "education," and "religion"). These models did not directly test any of our hypotheses, but they gave us a framework for analyzing the influence of the number of news items, which we could use when comparing our data. They also represent a basic tool for testing the validity of the agenda-setting hypothesis.

All three models supported the agenda-setting hypothesis: the chances that the particular respondent has Church property restitutions on his or her personal agenda increases with each news item covering the issue or the focusing event. This finding was consistent for both methods of parameter assessment, when controlling for personal characteristics and when controlling for answers in the previous wave of polling. The data thus showed that the media significantly influence how the Church property restitutions become part of respondents' personal agendas.

Next, we discuss the size of the effect measured in Models 1, 2, and 3. The 0.05 (or, eventually, 0.04 or 0.03) logit means that if 14 (or, eventually, 18 or 23) news items on the Church property restitutions issue appeared in the media within the last seven days, the chance that a person would cite Church property restitutions as an important event will double (logit $0.7 = 0.05 * 14$ resp. $0.72 = 0.04 * 18$, resp. $0.69 = 0.03 * 23$). These (or higher) were the values produced by media exposure during the third, fourth, and sixth polling waves (see Appendix 3). During the second and fifth wave of polling, the media coverage had a statistically significant effect, which, however, was not substantively significant because in these periods the media did not feature enough news items that would be able to at least double the chance that the Church property restitutions would become part of the respondents' personal agendas.

Table 1: **Estimated coefficients and (standard errors) of multilevel models concerning the inclusions of Church property restitutions in personal agendas**

	Model 1 (CL)	Model 2 (PA)	Model 3 (PA)	Model 4 (CL)	Model 5 (PA)	Model 6 (PA)	Model 7 (CL)	Model 8 (PA)	Model 9 (PA)
Number of news items in the preceding 7 days									
Media in total	0.05*** (0.004)	0.03*** (0.003)	0.04*** (0.003)						
Restitutions only				0.04*** (0.006)	0.01* (0.004)	0.01** (0.004)	0.03*** (0.007)	0.01 (0.005)	0.01* (0.005)
Cathedral and restitutions				0.15*** (0.017)	0.17*** (0.014)	0.18*** (0.015)	0.29* (0.117)	0.24* (0.096)	0.23* (0.097)
Cathedral only							-0.15 (0.118)	-0.07 (0.079)	-0.06 (0.097)
Restitutions on personal agenda previously	-3.25*** (0.339)	-2.26*** (0.418)	-2.27*** (0.359)	-2.84*** (0.368)	-0.00 (0.274)	-0.82** (0.306)	-2.89*** (0.372)	-0.03 (0.275)	-0.82** (0.305)
Respondent's gender									
Man			0.22 (0.187)			0.21 (0.180)			0.21 (0.180)
Woman (reference category)									
Respondent's age									
18 – 30			-1.80*** (0.364)			-1.68*** (0.349)			-1.67*** (0.349)
31 – 51			-1.19*** (0.205)			-1.13*** (0.199)			-1.13*** (0.198)
52 – 71 (reference category)									
72 – 92			0.08 (0.314)			0.15 (0.299)			0.15 (0.299)
Respondent's education									
Basic			-1.14* (0.575)			-1.18* (0.565)			-1.17* (0.564)
Vocational school			-0.19 (0.201)			-0.17 (0.194)			-0.17 (0.194)
Secondary school (reference category)									
University			0.21 (0.241)			0.22 (0.231)			0.22 (0.231)
Respondent's religion									
Christian			0.47** (0.177)			0.46** (0.171)			0.46** (0.171)
Other (reference category)									
Constant		-3.42*** (0.182)	-3.23*** (0.248)		-3.48*** (0.192)	-3.27*** (0.251)		-3.51*** (0.198)	-3.30*** (0.256)
N_{macro}	170	369	369	170	369	369	170	369	369
(N_{micro})	(850)	(1845)	(1845)	(850)	(1845)	(1845)	(850)	(1845)	(1845)

Note: * p <.05; ** p <.01; *** p <.001.

We now come to the core of our analysis. The first hypothesis was tested in Models 4 – 6. (Model 4 is a conditional logit model, Models 5 and 6 are population-averaged models). Through these models, using the "restitutions only" and the "Cathedral and restitutions" variables, we tested whether the

effect of news items covering the researched issue was strengthened by also covering the focusing event. In other words, we tested whether the news item on the Church property restitutions had a stronger effect in cases where it also covered the St. Vitus Cathedral trial.

Table 1 shows that both of these variables were statistically and substantively significant for all three models. It is possible to statistically demonstrate that the effect of the "Cathedral and restitutions" variable is, depending on the given model, 2.4 to 9.3 times stronger than the effect of the "restitutions only" variable.[11] This difference in the effects is substantively significant as well: the impact of media coverage doubles if a minimum of 7 news items in the case of Model 4 (or 5 items in the case of Models 5 and 6) contain both a reference to the restitutions issue and to the Cathedral trial. The frequency with which these news items occurred was observed during the third and fourth waves of polling. The other waves recorded such a low frequency of news items referring to both Church property restitutions and the Cathedral trial that any substantively significant effect was impossible.

Models 7 – 9 (Model 7 is a conditional logit model, Models 8 and 9 are population-averaged models) add the "Cathedral only" variable to Models 4 – 6, respectively, to test the second hypothesis, in which we explored whether a news item covering only the focusing event (rather than covering the issue itself) had an effect. Models 7 – 9 monitored whether the coefficient of the "Cathedral only" variable was substantive and statistically significant and whether, having been added to Models 4 – 6, these would significantly improve. If the effect of the "Cathedral only" variable was significant and Models 4 – 6 demonstrably improved as a result of its effect, it would prove that even news items that cover only the Cathedral trial might also help increase the chance that an issue is included in someone's personal agenda.

Table 1 shows that the "Cathedral only" variable was not significant in any of the models from either the substantive or the statistical point of view. Table 2 shows that when we added this variable, Models 4 – 6 do not significantly improve. The Wald chi^2 for Models 8 and 9 was even worse than for Models 5 and 6. These results lead us to reject the hypothesis that news items referring only to the focusing event could help put the issue on the recipient's personal agenda. News items that covered only the Cathedral trial did not demonstrably help to put the Church property restitutions on recipients' personal agendas.

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[11] Model 4: 2.4 * 'Restitutions only' < "Cathedral and restitutions" (chi^2=4.47, df=1, p=0.034)
Model 5: 9.3 * 'Restitutions only' < "Cathedral and restitutions" (chi^2=3.87, df=1, p=0.049)
Model 6: 7.3 * 'Restitutions only' < "Cathedral and restitutions" (chi^2=3.96, df=1, p=0.047)

Table 2: **Statistics of estimated multilevel models concerning the inclusions of Church property restitutions in personal agendas**

Indication and description of model	Wald chi^2/ LR chi^2	d.f.	N_{macro}	N_{micro}	p-value
	Test statistics				
M1: Media in total, previous answer (conditional logit)	274.4	2	170	850	< 0.001
M2: Media in total, previous answer (GEE)	153.3	2	369	1845	< 0.001
M3: Media in total, previous answer, characteristics of respondent (GEE)	192.2	10	369	1845	< 0.001
M4: Restitutions only, Cathedral and restitutions, previous answer (conditional logit)	283.9	3	170	850	< 0.001
M5: Restitutions only, Cathedral and restitutions, previous answer (GEE)	182.8	3	369	1845	< 0.001
M6: Restitutions only, Cathedral and restitutions, previous answer, characteristics of respondent (GEE)	221.9	11	369	1845	< 0.001
M7: Restitutions only, Cathedral and restitutions, Cathedral only, previous answer (conditional logit)	285.5	4	170	850	< 0.001
M8: Restitutions only, Cathedral and restitutions, Cathedral only, previous answer (GEE)	181.4	4	369	1845	< 0.001
M9: Restitutions only, Cathedral and restitutions, Cathedral only, previous answer, characteristics of respondent (GEE)	221.1	12	369	1845	< 0.001
Contrasts					
Extension with Restitutions only, and Cathedral and restitutions					
M4 – M1	9.5	1	170	850	= 0.002
M5 – M2	29.5	1	369	1845	< 0.001
M6 – M3	29.7	1	369	1845	< 0.001
Extension with Cathedral only					
M7 – M4	1.6	1	170	850	= 0.206
M8 – M5	-1.4	1	369	1845	= 1.000
M9 – M6	-0.8	1	369	1845	= 1.000
Extension with characteristics of respondent					
M3 – M2	38.9	8	369	1845	< 0.001
M6 – M5	39.1	8	369	1845	< 0.001
M9 – M8	39.7	8	369	1845	< 0.001

Note: Respondent's characteristics are: gender, age (3 dummy variables), religion (Christian or other), and education (3 dummy variables).

Conclusions and Discussion

The results produced by Models 4 – 6 fully support hypothesis 1: both the statistical and substantive significance of the "restitutions only" and the "Cathedral and restitutions" coefficients, and the statistical and substantive significance of the differences between their effects, match. Our analysis thus proves that the capacity of news items to set agendas for *issues* increases when

they cover a respective *focusing event* at the same time. Models 7 – 9 refute hypothesis no. 2 (positing that the "Cathedral only" variable has a significant effect). Models 4 – 6 are not improved by this variable. This part of the analysis proves that news items covering only a focusing event do not help to put a respective issue on a recipient's personal agenda.

We can therefore conclude that coverage of a focusing event influences the public only if news items also cover a respective issue. When the news item does not cover the issue, coverage of the focusing event has no impact on the likelihood that the issue will be on the personal agenda. A news item covering only the issue affects the public, and its effect multiplies in cases in which it also covers the focusing event.

How generalizable are our findings? We are not denying that the connection between the issue we concentrated on here (Church property restitutions) and the relevant focusing event (the St. Vitus Cathedral property rights trial) is somewhat loose. It would be hard to find another issue and a focusing event where the ties could be looser. Nonetheless, this evidence supports the assumption that referring to a focusing event intensifies the impact of news items that refer to a particular issue. If we are able to prove this connection for this particular issue and focusing event, it should then also exist in the case of focusing events that are much more tightly linked to a respective issue.

When we look at hypothesis 2 (regarding the impact of news items covering just the focusing event and not the relevant issue), we find the opposite situation, which indicates our hypothesis must be rejected. Generalization, however, is problematic in this case because the connection between Church property restitutions and the St. Vitus Cathedral trial is quite loose. At least in this instance, we know that such news items do not have the hypothesized impact. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that news items referring to an airplane crash, for example, would not help to put the issue of air transportation safety on the public agenda. The general validity of this hypothesis should be assessed by further research that would concentrate on focusing events that have a much tighter connection to the relevant issue.

The fact that our analysis demonstrates the strong role of the focusing event could also be because of the coincidence of certain historical circumstances in the Czech Republic in spring 2008. The parliamentary sessions during which the Church property restitutions bill was discussed overlapped with the period in which the Court handed down its final ruling that the Cathedral belongs to the State. The news about this clear conclusion of the case may have had a stronger effect than the news about the parliamentary sessions (which were ultimately postponed) and their unclear results. The differing effect of news items covering the focusing event could, therefore, be due to the importance of this particular event itself and may not be a general finding. A future research

project could concentrate on a comparison of a set of issues in various development phases and on relevant (more or less dramatic) focusing events.

Nevertheless, our results suggest that the coverage of issues should be carefully differentiated. If other researchers differentiate between the coverage of issues only, coverage of focusing events only, and contextualized coverage (both an issue and a focusing event in the same news item), it will produce more precise results, which is proven by the results in Tables 1 and 2. Confirmation of our present results by other studies could have considerable practical implications. Proponents of issues will know exactly how to shape media coverage, both of the issues themselves and of respective focusing events, with a view to stimulating public debate in a desired fashion. We conclude that this study opens up an important theoretical question that has serious methodological and practical implications.

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Appendix 1: **Number of respondents who include the restitutions of Church property in their personal agenda in the present or previous wave of polling (N=369)**

	2nd wave (25.-28.4.)	3rd wave (2.-5.5.)	4th wave (9.-12.5.)	5th wave (16.-19.5.)	6th wave (23.-26.5.)
Restitutions on personal agenda					
Number	20	121	39	8	15
Percentage	5.4 %	32.8	10.6	2.2	4.1
Restitutions on personal agenda previously					
Number	0	20	121	39	8
Percentage	0%	5.4	32.8	10.6	2.2

Appendix 2: **Respondents according to gender, age, education, and religion**

	Analyzed sample (N=369)		Original sample (N=658)	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Gender				
Men	123	33.3%	230	34.9%
Women	246	66.7	425	64.6
Unascertained	0	0.0	3	0.5
Age				
18 – 30	55	14.9	114	17.3
31 – 51	136	36.9	246	37.4
52 – 71	155	42.0	249	37.8
72 – 92	23	6.2	46	7.0
Unascertained	0	0.0	3	0.5
Education				
Basic	19	5.2	44	6.7
Vocational	128	34.7	232	35.3
Secondary school	155	42.0	277	42.1
University	67	18.2	102	15.5
Unascertained	0	0.0	3	0.5
Religion				
Christian	144	39.0	401	38.6
Others	225	61.0	254	60.9
Unascertained	0	0.0	3	0.5

Appendix 3: **Number of news items respondents were exposed to in the previous seven days, according to reference to the restitutions, reference to the Cathedral trial, and the precise date the questionnaire was completed**

Date	Cathedral only	Restitutions only	Cathedral and restitutions	Media in total
2nd wave				
25.4.2008	0	1	3	4
26.4.2008	0	3	3	6
27.4.2008	0	7	2	9
28.4.2008	0	8	2	10
3rd wave				
2.5.2008	11	38	9	58
3.5.2008	12	40	13	65
4.5.2008	12	40	14	66
5.5.2008	12	46	14	72
4th wave				
9.5.2008	2	69	8	79
10.5.2008	1	68	4	73
11.5.2008	1	69	4	74
12.5.2008	1	65	4	70
5th wave				
16.5.2008	0	15	1	16
17.5.2008	0	12	1	13
18.5.2008	0	7	0	7
19.5.2008	0	4	0	4
6th wave				
23.5.2008	0	22	0	22
24.5.2008	0	22	0	22
25.5.2008	0	24	0	24
26.5.2008	0	24	0	24

Appendix 4: **Detailed description of control variables**

Gender is a dichotomous variable. We created four **age** categories, which were defined on the basis of what periods in the history of the relationship between the Church and the State the respondents lived in and were therefore influenced by in terms of their responsiveness to the issue of Church property restitutions.

The oldest age group was 72 and over. These people were 12 years old (or more) at the time of the coup in 1948. The Communist coup was followed by a period of State terror and property confiscations that lasted through the 1950s and up to the late 1960s (when there was a slight thaw).

The second age group was comprised of people between the ages of 52 and 71 who were at least 12 years old in 1968. The third age group was comprised of people who were between the ages of 31 and 51 at the time of the survey. These people were at least 12 years old in 1989, which means they experienced (at age 12 or more) the beginning of the discussions about the restitution of seized Church property. The fourth and youngest age group was comprised of people aged 30 who did not reach the age of 12 until the 1990s.

As for the **education** variable, we also divided the sample into four categories according to the maximum level of education attained: elementary (basic) school,

vocational training, secondary school with a graduation certificate, and university degree. **Religion**, which in the original survey was divided into seven categories, was reduced for our study to a dichotomic variable of Christian faith or other. The "Christian faith" variant included respondents who declared they belonged to a Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox Church.

Appendix 5: **Interpretation of the results of the control variables**

Let us now examine the effect of the socio-demographic characteristics by referring to Models 3, 6, and 9 (all marginal models). We did not find any significant differences between men and women, but statistically significant differences were recorded (for all three models) when we sorted the data according to age. People in the two oldest age groups (age 72 and over; ages 52 – 71) include the Church property restitutions issue in their agenda at a similar rate, whereas in younger groups its presence falls sharply.

The chance that respondents in the 31 – 51 age group will cite (all other conditions remaining the same) Church property restitutions[12] as important is approximately three times lower than the chance of respondents in the reference category (age 52 – 71). The chance of the same for the youngest group (ages 18 – 30) is approximately five or six times lower.[13]

We can therefore state that the age factor (whether or not the respondent was at least 12 years old in 1968; i.e., was born before 1957) plays a crucial role. This means there is a 1/3 to 1/5 chance that a respondent born in 1957 or later will in spring 2008 consider Church property restitutions important.

When we sorted our data according to education, we found from the substantive perspective that only persons with an elementary education differed. Unlike the other groups, the chance that they will consider Church property restitutions important is 1/3 (there is a 1/3 likelihood that they will consider Church property restitutions important).[14] This substantive difference is also statistically significant. Another variable, religion, proved statistically significant for all three models, but this effect is not very substantively significant: there is approximately a 1.5 times higher chance that a person identifying as a Christian will consider the Church property restitutions important.[15]

Appendix 6: **Description of the sampling procedure**

The sample was originally constructed as a simple random sample and respondents were recruited in three waves from October 2007 to March 2008. The first wave of acquiring respondents was performed as a simple random sample, but only 190 respondents were obtained (a response rate of 24%). The second wave still used a random sampling procedure but was only applied in the areas where the interviewers reside (due to the demanding nature of the procedure). 331 respondents (a response rate

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[12] Logits: -1.19 (M3), -1.13 (M6) and -1.13 (M9).

[13] Logits: -1.80 (M3), -1.68 (M6) and -1.67 (M9).

[14] Logits: -1.14 (M3), -1.18 (M6) and -1.17 (M9).

[15] Logits: 0.47 (M3), 0.46 (M6) and 0.46 (M9).

of 54%) were obtained. The last wave corrected the socio-demographic bias of the sampled respondents. The age of the contacted persons was limited to a maximum of 65 years. The majority of respondents were recruited in the capital city Prague in this wave. The third wave acquired 232 respondents (a response rate of 45%). The final list of respondents was comprised of 753 individuals, but only 658 respondents participated in at least one panel wave. Some contacts refused to participate before the start of the panel survey, some refused to provide all of the basic socio-demographic characteristics, and some ignored the delivered panel survey questionnaires. For more detailed information on the construction of the panel, see Vinopal (2009).

Of the 658 respondents, males (by 13 percentage points), young people (age 18 – 30, by 7 percentage points), and people with only a basic education (by 14 percentage points) were underrepresented. Women (by 13 percentage points) and people with a secondary school degree (by 20 percentage points) were overrepresented. We are fully aware that the sample is not ideally representative, but we think, as per Vinopal (2009), that it is adequate for assessing the influence of media agendas on respondents' agendas.