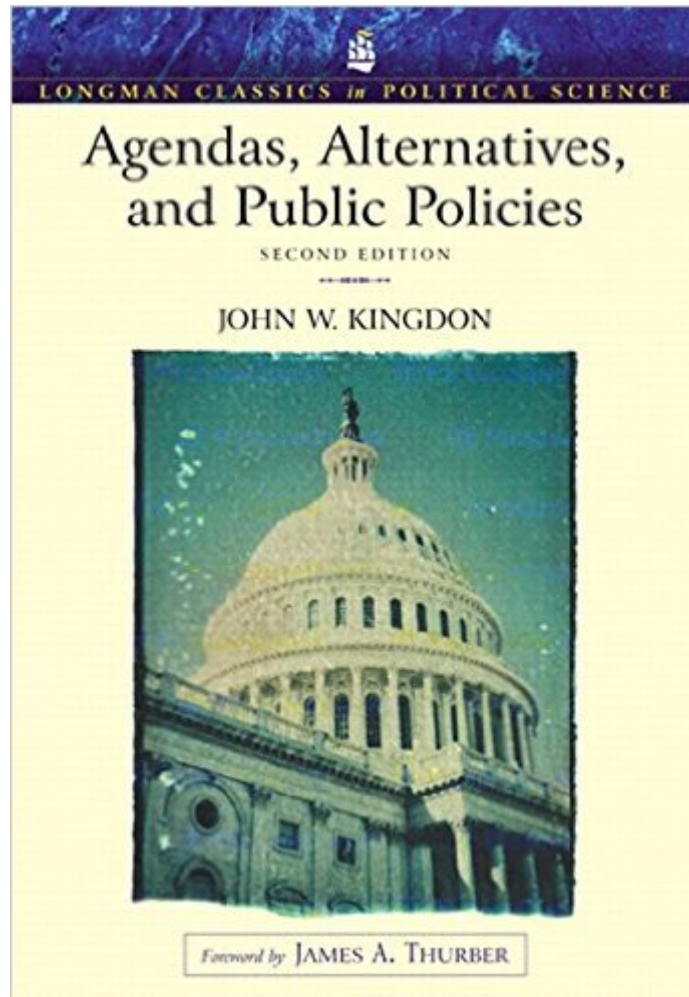


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Agendas, Alternatives, And Public Policies, 2nd Edition (Longman Classics In Political Science)



Synopsis

Re-issued as part of the "Longman Classics in Political Science" series, Kingdon's renowned work features a new Foreword exploring the book's historical and enduring contributions. Kingdon's landmark work on agenda setting and policy formation is now offered in a Longman Classics Edition. This enduring work of original research, drawn from interviews with people in the U.S. federal government over the course of four years, examines the questions of how issues get to be issues for legislators. The book grapples with the questions: How do subjects come to officials' attention? How are the alternatives from which they choose generated? How is the governmental agenda set? Why does an idea's time come when it does? Hailed as one of the finest books about public policy-making, and winner of the 1994 Aaron Wildavsky Award, this book's rich detail and engaging prose make it a text that both students and instructors will savor.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Agenda setting, in the world of politics, is when a problem becomes identified as an issue that calls for government attention, discussion, and--possibly--decision making. This book is one of the most important works on agenda-setting. John Kingdon has stated that: Political events flow along according to their own dynamics and their own rules. Participants perceive swings in national mood, elections bring new administrations to power and new partisan or ideological distributions to Congress, and interest groups of various descriptions press (or fail to press) their demands on government. The author sees three streams that must come together for an issue to be placed on

the agenda--a political stream (just noted above), a policy stream (in which some policy proposal emerges as "best"), and a problem stream (a problem develops that people label as important). If they come together and if the window of opportunity for success is there, then the issue can become an agenda item. If the streams do not come together, agenda placement is unsuccessful--as with President Clinton's health care plan. That plan had two of three requirements in place. One, the political stream was supportive. A new President had been elected with his party having a majority in both houses of Congress; furthermore, Clinton outlined as a campaign issue support for a more ambitious health care program for Americans. The confluence of these two factors produced something like a "mandate" for change. Two, the problem stream saw health care bubbling up toward the top. That is, increasingly, people seemed to define health care as a serious problem about which something had to be done. Nonetheless, no major initiative emerged to be fully considered.

Kingdon attempts to explain two steps in the policy process: (a) why some issues are placed on the policy agenda while others are not, and (b) why some policy options - out of many alternatives - are considered and selected while others are not. Like Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972) Kingdon contends that multiple, independent "streams" flow through the policy process. The streams consist of (1) problems, (2) policy proposals, and (3) political events (pg. 92). Kingdon contends that the agenda - "subjects that are getting attention" - arise from the problems and politics streams (21). In regards to problems, Kingdon argues that indicators, focusing events, and feedback bring problems to the attention of government officials. Problems do not only gain attention and rise on the governmental agenda, but they can also fade away as conditions change or interest wanes. Political events - changes in public mood, partisan and ideological shifts, administration changes, etc. - also shape the agenda. Under various political conditions, some issues will prove important, while others will not. Furthermore, actors play a role in shaping the agenda. Visible participants - politicians, the media, parties, etc. - are most influential in setting the agenda. They are in positions to bring issues to light. The policy stream is primarily concerned with generating alternatives, i.e. a set of conceivable government actions. The policy stream is occupied by "hidden participants," i.e. bureaucrats, academics, congressional staffers, etc. These "hidden participants" generate many alternatives, often before a problem emerges. Within this group of "hidden participants" ideas are bounced around regarding a particular policy area.

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