



Contrasting between Focusing, Real-world and Significant Events in Agenda-Setting: Introducing a New Typology of “Anchor” Events

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Abstract

The focusing event theory has been substantially formed by contributions of John Kingdon by offering a somewhat broader definition of focusing events through the prism of his multiple streams theory, and Thomas Birkland, who introduced better precision by listing a number of basic characteristics of focusing events (e.g. using the example of 9/11 terrorist attacks as a focusing event, as in Birkland 2004). These major contributions notwithstanding, there still seems to be a strikingly persistent absence of clarity in defining the notion of “focusing events” within the agenda-setting stage of the policy process, and a lack of a general typology of related significant, or key events. Even somewhat more disturbing is that, inspired by Birkland’s notion of focusing events, a number of subsequent scholars attempted to develop this theory, unintentionally further conflating the meaning of focusing events.

Thus, it is important not only to more clearly define focusing events but also to develop an operationalizable typology of a broader set of related anchor events as applied to agenda-setting. It is precisely these two issues that form the analytical essence and contributions this paper aims to achieve. The focusing event theory has become increasingly vital to explain a wide range of social and policy-related events, e.g. 9/11, large-scale earthquakes, major healthcare reforms in a given jurisdiction etc.

Keywords: Focusing events; Streams theory; Healthcare; Policy-related events

Introduction

In a series of his pioneering works, John Kingdon [1-4] articulated the notion of focusing events that was analyzed through the prism of the multiple streams framework. John Kingdon [4,5] believes agenda change is driven by changing indicators of problems that spur debates, and focusing events, defined as sudden shocks that lead to greater attention and possible change. A focusing event should open a window of opportunity for bringing an issue onto agenda (ibid.). However, there are two major aspects that require clarification. First, as suggested by Howlett et al. [6], what exactly a “stream” includes remains incomplete. Second, while Kingdon refers to focusing events as “sudden shocks” implying a large degree of magnitude, he also describes these as a “little push” [4,5]. Then Birkland [7] uses the notion of “focusing events” to denote the following characteristics: “sudden, relatively rare, can be reasonably defined as harmful or revealing the possibility of potentially greater future harms”. He also analyzes the 9/11 terrorist attack as a case study, referring to it as a “historical focusing event” [1]. Similarly, King and Zeng [8] raise the notion of rare events applied to international relations, which include wars, revolutions, mass-scale economic depressions and shocks. It is important to contrast these definitions: an event that is sudden and relatively rare may not be exactly the same as historically unprecedented. Although Birkland’s interpretation of focusing events and King and Zeng’s reference to rare events possess greater clarity vis-à-vis Kingdon’s [3,4], it still suffers from limited operation ability, if not from merely persistent confusion and possible conflation of meaning.

Based on an extensive literature review, there appears to be a striking absence of clarity in 1) defining the notion of “focusing events” [1,2,7] as applied to the agenda-setting stage of the policy process; and 2) lack of a typology of related significant, or key events, generally. Although Birkland’s contribution to the focusing event theory is substantial and undeniable, it is the persistent lack of clarity in the definition of a focusing event that appears to have caused further conflation in its meaning in subsequent scholarly works. Specifically, questions such as what exactly relatively rare means and how huge the magnitude of a certain (focusing) event must be remain elusive.

Contrasting J. Kingdon’s and T. Birkland’s Notions of Focusing Events

As briefly outlined above, there appears to be a wide range of scholars referring to somewhat interrelated notions of “focusing events”, “important events”, “rare events”, “key events” etc. as applied to the agenda-setting stage of the policy process. Nonetheless, it is primarily John Kingdon and Thomas Birkland who devoted their most profound pioneering attention with attempts in defining and operationalizing the notion of focusing events. Both scholars recognize the importance of focusing events. Kingdon first contrasted so-called sudden events, which “simply bowl over everything standing in the way of prominence on the agenda” [4] with more-nuanced focusing events, as being more subtle including policymakers’ personal experiences with personal matters, i.e. disease [9]. Moreover, according to Kingdon, the notion of focusing events embraces powerful symbols, i.e. a senior woman in New Orleans protecting herself from rain with a US flag in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which tend to amplify “something already taking place”, or a specific focusing event [9]. While

Kingdon seems to lump together the propagation of a symbol and a focusing event, Birkland and DeYoung 2013 generally agree on the importance of the notion of focusing events, noting specifically that it is crucial to make a distinction between the symbol and the event itself. Furthermore, as Birkland and DeYoung also note, Kingdon includes both sudden and political events (i.e. social protests) into the notion of focusing events, which confuses the contribution of political mobilization in the politics stream with issue description in the problem stream. Put differently, it is important to differentiate between sudden focusing events on the one hand and purposefully designed events, on the other.

Thus, though Kingdon is largely viewed as a pioneer of focusing event theory, it is Birkland who seems to have developed a more nuanced understanding of this type of events in agenda-setting. In his book, Birkland [7] developed the following specific characteristics of focusing events: “sudden, relatively rare, can be reasonably defined as harmful or revealing the possibility of potentially greater future harms”. He also analyzes the 9/11 terrorist attack as a case study, referring to it as a “historical focusing event” [1]. Let’s contrast these definitions: an event that is sudden and relatively rare may not be necessarily equated to being historically unprecedented. Although Birkland’s interpretation of focusing events possesses greater clarity vis-à-vis Kingdon’s (1995; 2003) [3,4], it still suffers from limited operation ability. Questions such as what exactly relatively rare is and how widespread the harm caused must be to qualify as a focusing event, persistently remain unanswered.

An Analysis of T. Birkland’s Refined Publications

Inspired by Thomas Birkland’s original publications [1,7], a number of scholars attempted to refine the notion of focusing events. For instance, Wood [10] notes that while existing literature largely referred to focusing events as huge-magnitude, or catastrophic events, other functions had been neglected. Using the case of the 1988 master settlement agreement (MSA) reached by tobacco industry players and the states as an atypical example of focusing events, he suggests that the renewed notion of focusing events should also embrace tipping events, or consolidating events whereby an event leads to increased attention to the issue that already exists, in contrast to dramatic or large-scale events (e.g. Downs 1972 referring to dramatic series of events, or Ungar 1992 referring to dramatic real-world events) [11] that constitute focusing events. However, such a conflation of tipping and focusing events is problematic. First, tipping events, or tipping points, largely do not happen as rare as focusing events. Take the example of MSA [10]. For instance, in the period 1994-2006 there were four major events that exerted certain impact on the US tobacco industry players [12]. First, there was the leakage of Brown and Williamson (BW) documents in 1994 when thousands of pages containing sensitive information were leaked from BW Tobacco company, which included, among other aspects, research findings that confirmed nicotine’s addictive power and other health hazards caused as a result of smoking tobacco. Second, the 1994 Minnesota case against tobacco companies, when four US states-Minnesota, Mississippi, Florida and Texas-filed lawsuits against tobacco firms to seek compensation for tobacco-caused illnesses. Specifically, the companies involved were required to set two depositories to store millions of case-related papers and ensure public access for 10 years. Third, the MSA settlement took place, as Wood [11] describes in sufficient detail. And then, in 2006 US district judge G. Kessler ruled that a number of tobacco firms breached the Racketeer influenced

corrupt organization (RICO) Act, thus providing inaccurate information to the public about smoking hazards for long. The firms are now required to provide public access to case-related documents through 2021 [12]. Second, as already suggested by Wood, tipping events do not exert nearly as huge the magnitude as focusing events do. It is precisely for these two primary reasons that tipping and focusing events should be treated as distinct (sub-) types of a broader umbrella of related anchor events (see below).

Next, Best [13] specifically analyzed why a single newspaper’s staff may at some time portray an issue as a social problem, i.e. homelessness, requiring urgent action, while sometimes it does so in a different manner. Best attempted to find whether events in the case of high-profile murders in Denver were actor-promoted events (APEs) or non-actor promoted events (NAPEs), and found that newspapers tended to problematize personal decisions to remain homeless rather than investigate the systemic causes of homelessness as a social problem [9]. Contrary to previous research, APEs turned out to more likely to challenge the status quo. These analyses still appear problematic. Although this scholar attempted to analyze high-profile murder events in Denver through the prism of Birkland’s notion of focusing events, this hardly fits the broad criteria Birkland introduced with regard to his notion of focusing events. Particularly, Best [13] uses seven murders of homelessness in 1999 for her analysis, although according to Birkland’s criteria, a focusing event must be relatively rare.

Questions such as “what is exactly relatively rare?” and “how much harm must be caused to qualify as a focusing event?” remain unanswered. To bring further complexity, Baumgartner et al. [14] refer to “focusing events” as “important events”; and Shackley and Evar [15] as “key” events. Ungar [16] argues that for a social issue, such as environmental and nuclear threats, to command attention requires (dramatic) “real-world” events that serve as impetus for developing “social scares”.

Thus, it is important not only to more clearly define focusing events but also to develop an operationalizable typology of a broader set of related anchor events as applied to the agenda-setting stage of the policy cycle. It is precisely these two issues that form the analytical essence of this paper.

Introducing the New Typology of “Anchor” Events

Given the persistent ambiguity and a striking lack of clear operationalization of the term, it is unsurprising to observe unintentional confluence of its use. For example, as mentioned earlier, Best [13] contrasted APEs versus NAPEs based on Birkland’s notion of focusing events, while apparently violating the frequency dimension criteria. Liu et al. [17] refer to focusing events in the context of climate change to include a whole array of scandals, trials, protests, international agreements, creating new institutions, and science discoveries. Similarly confusing is Daw et al. [18], where they refer to focusing events through the prism of major health reforms. An obvious question to ask is whether the historically significant 9/11 event [1] and “health reform” [18] are really viewed as equal or comparable in terms of magnitude levels? Similarly, Wood’s [10] reference to tipping events, such as the MSA agreement in the case of US tobacco industry, as a special type of focusing events is apparently inaccurate. Instead, both the MSA agreement [10] and major health reforms [18] should be viewed as distinctly tipping events, as contrasted to focusing events per

se (Table 1). The frequency of the occurrence of and degrees of magnitude of these different types of events are key indicators.

Based on the above, the following is suggested. First, in an effort to provide common terminology, all the above-mentioned concepts should be grouped into the generic notion of "anchor" events in agenda-setting. Second, rank these "anchor" events into the following subgroups for better operationalization (Table 1):

- Mega- or super-focusing events (happen every 100+years), e.g. rare avalanches, huge-devastation and/or wider-reach earthquakes (i.e. with magnitude 9.5 and above, and impacting more than a single jurisdiction); genocide; world wars, massive economic depressions [8] etc.

- Focusing events [1,7] (happen every 20-100 years), e.g. devastating hurricanes, earthquakes, terror acts.
- Significant, or important, "anchoring" events that happen every 10-20 years, e.g. opening of a new agency [17], a high-profile international agreement, landmark discovery etc.
- Cyclical (anchoring) events, every 4-10 years, including important conferences on climate change; agreements; published reports e.g. every 5 years; and scandals.
- Moderately anchoring events (2-3 years), including regular conferences, published reports, round tables, ministerial talks etc., as well as some of "unexpected" events.
- Annual events, including transparency international reports.

Categories of New Typology	Corresponding Notions in Existing Literature of Agenda-Setting
Mega- or super-focusing events (every 100+ years)	Focusing events; rare events; dramatic "real-world" events; dramatic series of events; unexpected events; APEs and NAPEs [1,3,4,7-9,11,13,16]
Focusing events (every 20-100 years)	
Significant, or important, "anchoring" events (every 10-20 years)	"Important" events; "key" events Shackley and Evar; "real-world" events; focusing events; trigger events; APEs and NAPEs; tipping events; dramatic series of events; unexpected events; attention-grabbing events[2,3,9-11,13-17,]
Cyclical (anchoring) events (every 4-10 years)	
Moderately anchoring events (every 2-3 years)	"Important" events; "real-world" events; trigger events; unexpected events (Weaver and Choi 2014); attention-grabbing events; tipping events; APEs and NAPEs [9,10,13,14,16]
Annual events (once a year)	
Source: The author's own analytical work	

Table 1: The new typology of "anchoring" events at the agenda-setting stage.

Finally, some limitations of the typology should be highlighted. First, it can be challenging to accurately classify certain events into a specific category. While annually published Transparency International reports are relatively straightforward, certain trigger events might involve a more careful analysis, especially considering limitations in terms of a time span analyzed. In other words, an accurate classification of trigger events, for instance, into "focusing events" versus "significant anchoring events", or "cyclical events" categories may require looking beyond the study's time span into a longer-term historical progression of these triggering events to identify their frequency. Second, and more importantly, this typology assumes relatively stable historical frequency trajectories. Thus, it becomes challenging to precisely categorize events that have recently begun to occur more frequently than in the past. A good example is two recent earthquakes (with 5.1 and 5.8 magnitude) in Korea [19], which triggered concerns over nuclear safety with some media reporting on growing frequencies of tremors felt over the past few years [20]. Another relevant example is the recently growing trends in the number of tipping points observed in climate change, e.g. in the case of Amazon forestry through increased frequency of drought and flood in the region [21]. Taking these limitations into account, nonetheless, the new typology not only offers a coherent classification of a broader set of focusing and anchoring, as well as key and important events into an overall umbrella with an attempt to better operationalize such events within agenda-setting, but also aims to better operationalize the notion of focusing events.

The Applicability of the Typology to Policy Issues: Comparing Corruption Agenda-Setting in Italy Versus Spain

Dyussenov [22] applies a new issue attention mega-cycle model, based on parallel academia and online public and media cycles, to corruption issues across eight countries and finds that academia anticipates internet-driven (public and media) attention cycles in the contexts of Canada, Italy, and Spain, with 3-year predictive power of academia found in Italian context and 2 year power in Canada and Spain. Among the three success cases, content analysis of Italy and Spain is carried out, as both nations share geographical similarities (as part of continental Europe) and being member-states of the European Union. The content analysis focuses on 2013, as this year demonstrates the peak of internet-driven cycles for both nations (ibid).

The Factiva search of "corruption AND Italy" for the year 2013 (01.01.2013 to 31.12.2013) returns the total of 997 results ranked by relevance. This includes 830 publications, 92 pictures, 67 Dow Jones pieces, and 8 web news. Out of the total search results, the first 100 pieces were screened of which 94 were included into analysis, while the other 6 pieces were deemed irrelevant. Out of 94 pieces analyzed, 53 (nearly identical) pieces were about each of different cardinals arriving to attend a prayer in the Vatican in early March 2013 (see Appendix 1 for details). All the 53 pieces mention the cardinals' interest in seeking more details on alleged corruption in the Vatican.

The content analysis of Italian context reveals a variety of “anchoring” and “focusing” events in setting the corruption agenda in Italy as of 2013. As Table 2 demonstrates, the Italian context witnesses three major focusing events as of 2013, including the global financial and Euro crises, and the Tangentopoli scandal case that erupted in the early 1990s, resulting in a prison sentence for former prime-minister Craxi, who never served it as he exiled to Tunisia. An important “anchoring” event is related to the Microsoft scandal. It is placed in this category since corruption scandals involving foreign corporations in

Italy appear to be relatively rare phenomena (hence roughly every 10-20 years), while scandals that involve the unethical behavior of Italian companies both domestically and internationally tend to occur more frequently. Political scandals involving former and acting political figures occur even more often, hence moderately anchoring events. Finally, Transparency International and Economic Forum reports are published annually, which also tend to attract media attention.

Categories of New Typology	Matching Examples from Italian Context
Mega- or super-focusing events (every 100+ years)	None
Focusing events (every 20-100 years)	Financial crisis (5 mentions); Euro crisis (1); Tangentopoli (Bribes Ville) scandal (2)
Significant, or important, "anchoring" events (every 10-20 years)	Microsoft scandal (1)
Cyclical (anchoring) events (every 4-10 years)	Sapiem and ENI (oil corporate lobby scandals involving paying bribes in Algeria, 4 mentions each); Finmeccanica (corporate lobby scandals, with sale of war helicopters to India, 14 mentions); and elections (10);
Moderately anchoring events (every 2-3 years)	Vatican scandals (4); Mario Monti (3); Berlusconi (5); Prodi (2)
Annual events (once a year)	Transparency international reports (1); "Intelligence on the World, Europe, and Italy" economic forum (1)

Source: The author's own analytical work

Table 2: Classification of “anchoring” and “focusing” events in Italian context.

The Factiva search for Spain over the same time span returns 1368 results, including 886 publications, 106 Dow Jones pieces, 366 pictures, and 2 multimedia files. Out of the total 1,368 results for Spain, the first 61 pieces were screened, of which 60 were included into an analytic sample. Appendix 2 includes the content of Spain-related pieces selected for analysis.

The content analysis of Spain, similar to the Italian case, reveals various “anchoring” and “focusing” events. Both make relatively frequent references to the financial crisis (5 mentions in Italy, 9 mentions in Spain in 2013). Both demonstrate the sporadic occurrence of corporate lobby scandals. There are, however, a number of important distinctions. First, the intensity of corporate influence on

Italian politics appears to be higher than in the case of Spain. The number of mentions indicating lobbying activities of the oil industry (ENI and Saipem) and defense (Finmeccanica) is significantly higher than the influence of individual businessmen in Spain. Second, while Spain-based corporations tend to sporadically attract public attention, Italy-based corporations appear not only to draw attention to their unethical behavior domestically but also on the international arena. Next, within the important anchoring event category, the Italian case witnesses the presence of US Microsoft, while Spain demonstrates its own domestically produced Barcenas affair. Luis Barcenas, former treasurer of the ruling People's Party, is believed to have used the slush fund to pay party leaders in 1990-2009.

Categories of New Typology	Matching Examples from Spain Context
Mega- or super-focusing events (every 100+ years)	None
Focusing events (every 20-100 years)	Financial and economic crisis (9 mentions)
Significant, or important, "anchoring" events (every 10-20 years)	The Barcenas affair (3 mentions)
Cyclical (anchoring) events (every 4-10 years)	Corporate lobby scandals (5 mentions), incl. the Juan Rosell case (2), Correa (1), Perez (1), and Crespo (1).
Moderately anchoring events (every 2-3 years)	King and royal family (6 mentions)

Annual events (once a year)	Transparency International reports (2); Unemployment issues (7); criticism of Prime-minister Rajoy and accused corruption (27)
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Table 3: Classification of “anchoring” and “focusing” events in the context of Spain.

The case of Spain is interesting due to other reasons, as well. While the variety of corporate scandals collectively received 5 mentions in 2013, the King and royal family alone attracted 6 mentions. However, it is the acting prime-minister Rajoy who seems to cause greatest havoc in the public outcry for urgent reform.

The comparative analysis of “anchoring” and “focusing” events reveals certain interesting patterns. First, the Italy case shows three focusing events, including the global financial crisis, the (regional) Euro crisis, and the Tangentopoli scandal (Table 3). This is somewhat similar to the case of Spain, with frequent mentions of the financial crisis, and yet no reference to the Euro crisis. The Microsoft scandal is placed into an important anchoring event category within Italian context, built on the assumption that large-scale corruption scandals that involve foreign companies in Italy occur relatively rarely, i.e. every 10-20 years. On the other hand, scandals involving Italian companies take place more often, while scandals with former and acting Italian political figures are observed even on a more regular basis (thus placed as moderately anchoring events). Finally, Transparency International and Economic Forum reports are viewed as annual anchoring events.

Implications for Policy Practitioners and Academia

The evolving theory of focusing events entails important implications both to policy makers and academia. First, with regard to the importance of focusing event theory to academia, these events appear to play a vital role in the policy cycle due to their influence in setting policy agenda [1,3,4,7,23]. As suggested earlier, first Kingdon [2-4] and then Birkland [1,7] set the ground for academic discourse on the role of focusing events in agenda-setting. Furthermore, in an analysis of the role of focusing events in setting policy agendas in the context of the European Council, Alexandrova [23] notes the importance of focusing events although only a limited number of potential focusing events appear on European policy agenda. In particular, she notes that the agenda-setting likelihood of focusing events increases if these are manmade incidents (as contrasted to natural disasters), events with greater numbers of fatalities caused, and crises that occur in (EU) neighboring nations. On the other hand, a higher degree of competition that exists between potential focusing events (vis-à-vis effective or actual focusing events) tends to minimize the window of opportunities for gaining access onto agenda (Ibid.). Thus, the distinction between potential and effective focusing events seems vital, since the transformation from the former to the latter is subject to specific conditions as related to the European agenda-setting context. Finally, the new (more generic) typology of anchor events is suggested here as an attempt to point to the further evolution of focusing event theory and its scholarly significance. As this paper suggests, there is still a need to better operationalize the notion of focusing events and to develop a broader typology of anchor events.

Next, in their thought-provoking work Liu et al. [17], using the findings of interviews among local policy elites across some of US Gulf Coast areas, analyze agenda-setting on environmental and resource management issues at the local government level in the US with the focus on attention attractors which include problem indicators,

focusing events, feedback, and budget considerations. When measured the relative strength of each attention attractor, the authors found budgetary considerations to be the most critical factor in influencing agenda-setting processes at the local policymaking level, with 46% of respondents, while 42% of interviewees pointed to the importance of feedback mechanisms in agenda-setting (Ibid.). On the other hand, only 8.5% of those interviewed raised the importance of focusing events as attention attractors (Figure 1). However, there are a number of vital caveats here. First, the focus of Liu et al.’s study is on agenda-setting at the local policymaking level, while the majority of studies analyzed look into the national and/or federal level. Thus, the findings of this particular study, though raising important aspects such as comparing and contrasting focusing events with other types of attention attractors, cannot and should not be generalized onto the national level. Second, as the authors concede, “we understand that the agenda dynamics and processes at the local level are far more complex than presented here”; and the sampling method they employed “was not systematically random” but instead was based on a snowballing technique (Ibid.). The third important reservation is that by using the interview method, the authors can only collect data on perceived importance of attention attractors among select actors rather than objective assessments that could be achieved, for instance, by using online research methods certain limitations notwithstanding. Finally, the study focuses on two policy issues—the environment and resource management—thus presenting yet another limitation (Figure 1).

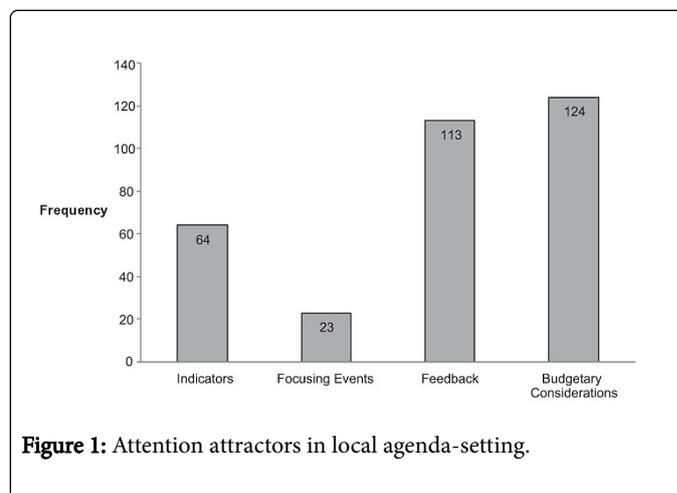


Figure 1: Attention attractors in local agenda-setting.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, Liu et al. [17] study entails certain implications to policy makers, in addition to academia. It is important to know what factors may lead to an increased likelihood for an issue to gain prominence into agenda-setting. Although this study suggests a lower degree of significance of focusing events as compared to other types of attention attractors, in other policy domains and/or other jurisdictions the role of focusing events might be more pronounced. Furthermore, Birkland [1] clearly demonstrates the impact of 9/11 on US federal policymaking, which again raises implications to policy practitioners in terms of the magnitude such events might entail for agenda-setting in areas such as aviation safety.

Next, as Alexandrova [23] finds, only specific types of potential focusing events appear to have strong agenda-setting influence in the EU context. Finally, the new typology of anchor events this paper presents should be quite useful. It ranks a wide array of possible focusing and related key events in terms of relative frequency, ranging from mega-focusing events (such as Birkland's 2004 notion of the historically unprecedented 9/11 event) [1] to moderately anchoring, and annual events. Further studies should look into the varying levels of presence of different categories of anchor events across several jurisdictions. For example, as this paper demonstrates in Section V, agenda-setting processes in Italian context exhibit a higher number of cyclical and moderately anchoring events than in Spain, while the intensity of annual events appears significantly higher in the context of Spain (Tables 2 and 3). Further scholarly works should confirm whether these observations hold true for 2013 only or are applicable to a longer time period.

Concluding Remarks

Over the last 30 years or so since the pioneering work of John Kingdon was published in 1984, focusing event discourse has progressed from being related to the three streams theory [4], to a more nuanced understanding of the variety of influences focusing events exert on policy communities, the nature of debate, and the content of ideas in various policy domains [9]. Furthermore, Thomas Birkland's contribution to focusing event theory has proven to be substantial, as evidenced by a growing number of scholars that well continue to further develop the notion of focusing events based on his original ideas (e.g. Best 2010, Wood 2006 as mentioned earlier; but also, see Fishman 1999 for his analysis of ValueJet flight 592 as an example of focusing events based on T. Birkland's definition) [10,13,24]. Finally, Alexandrova [23] distinguishes between potential and effective focusing events, noting that not all potential focusing events are likely to enter the agenda-setting prominence as applied to the context of the European Council but only those that meet specific characteristics, such as being manmade incidents, involving large numbers of deaths, or crises that occur in EU's neighboring nations. Other types of potential focusing events largely appear to be constrained by competition [23], the notion which often characterizes the nature of agenda-setting [25].

As the present paper suggests, there now appears to be the growing need for a better operationalization of the notion of focusing events specifically, and developing a typology of a broader notion of anchor events, generally as applied to the agenda-setting stage of the policy cycle process. The new typology outlined here appears well applicable to specific policy cases, e.g. corruption issues in the contexts of two European nations, Italy and Spain, as an example, but this could well apply to a plethora of other policy issues across different jurisdictions. However, it is also important to acknowledge certain limitations as mentioned earlier, i.e. the need to look beyond the time span under study to carefully classify an event into a relevant category of anchor events, and the difficulty to incorporate dynamic or changing historical frequency trajectories. Nevertheless, it should be hoped the new typology of anchor events would spur subsequent scholarly debates within agenda-setting, contributing to further developments in focusing event theory.

The focusing event theory well continues to evolve. First, as Liu et al. [26] study makes important observations and findings, scholars should empirically test the policy areas and conditions in which focusing events, as compared with other types of attention attractors, exert

predominant influence on agenda-setting processes across various jurisdictions. Second, as Birkland [1] demonstrates with regard to the 9/11 terrorist attack in the US, further studies should continue to analyze the impact of similar focusing events in terms of their magnitude of influence on various policies, e.g. the impact of major reforms on subsequent policy changes etc. Next, taking the approach Alexandrova [23] adopted in her study, further research should empirically establish what types of potential focusing events possess greater likelihood of gaining prominence at the agenda-setting stage of the policy process across different nations and contrasting the local versus national levels of government policymaking. Furthermore, as this paper suggests, further studies might analyze in greater detail the varying levels of categories of anchor events present in different jurisdictions.

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