The politics of attention: competition between social problem

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VERY PRELIMINARY AND UNCOMPLETE

Abstract

Building on sociological and political science evidences this paper investigates how social groups compete against each other in order to win government attention. It highlights the two stage competition facing any social problem in order to gain government attention. With a simple economic model it describes this two-stage competition and how the two stages interact with each other. Although it is a preliminary model, we are able to show that the fiercer the competition between issue, the wider the gap in attention will be between social problem that have great population support and those whose support from the population is lower. Overall, we find that the two key criteria determining government attention are the resources available to the organization committed to the social problem, and the support from the general population.

1 Introduction

Social movements are defined as grouping of individuals or organizations focusing on one specific political or social issue. The environmental movement is one of those. In the US, it is the biggest and longest running among all other social movement with an estimated 20-30 million members (Brulle, 2008). Thus one shall expect that this movement had and still have great political impact. Using econometric tools, sociologists have estimated the political impact of many social movements. In a meta analysis Amenta, Caren, Chiarello and Su (2010) gathered the results of 45 articles analyzing 54 social movements and published in the top four sociological journals and in the top movement specialty journal between 2001 and 2009. Their goal was to assess whever or not a movement had great political consequences. Among these 45 papers, 6 focused on the environmental movement in the US. The lesson from this review is that overall, the environmental movement had modest/weak political consequences (see Amenta, Caren, Chiarello and Su, 2010). The details of this impact will be given in the literature review.

We are then left with a puzzle: how the largest social movement in the US had such a low political impact? This paper propose one possible solution. It argues that it is the competition between social problem that lead to this result. Indeed, movements compete for political attention. All have very good reasons to be adressed, yet only a few gets what they want. It is this process that this paper aims at describing. To do so, we build a simple economic model where social problems are endowed with resources (activists), compete in a first stage to gain support from the population and in a second stage compete for government attention. The result of this competition determine the resources the government engage in solving each social problem. Even in its simplify version, this model highlights this competition process and allows us to derive a set of results in line with the empirical evidences. We find that the key variables determining the success of a movement in a very competitive setting are its available resources and the popularity of the social problem in the population. This result, among with the less important ones shall be revised and refined in a more sophisticated version of the model. Extensions possibilities are described in the extension section.

The rest of the paper goes as follow: in the next section discusses the literature on social movement with a multidisciplinary approach. Finding from sociology, political science and economics are presented, from both theoretical and empirical point of view. Section 3 then present the model in its simplified version and present the results. Section 4 discusses the extensions and section 5 concludes.

2   Literature review

In a 1972's article, Downs (1972) theorized that public attitudes and position toward most of social movements where driven by an "issue-attention cycle". In a nutshell, this means that a social problem is first largely unknown to general public. It only concerns a limited part of the population and then, for some reason, most of public attention is focused on it. However, after a short-time period, the problem gradually fades away from the center of public attention. Downs illustrated his point with the case of the environmental movement. Indeed at that time the environmental movement was on the rise, with the creation of multiples organizations charged of regulating environmental hazards (such as the EPA, founded in 1970). His article illustrates well the pattern of public attention for many social movements, however it has little says on why a given social movement might suddenly becomes a top-of-mind issue. It only mentions that "as a result of some dramatic series of events (like the ghetto riots in 1965 to 1967), or for other reasons, the public suddenly becomes both aware of and alarmed about the evils of a particular problem" (Downs, p.39, 1972). Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) filled this blank when they modeled a process of rise and fall of social problems. Their key input is to treat public attention as a scare resource, it is allocated through a fierce competition between social problems in a "system of public arenas" (Hilgartner and Bosk, p.55, 1988). Such public arenas are the news media, NGOs, political campaign organizations, books

dealing with social issues, private foundations... Social problems are framed and grow in these arenas. They compete there both to enter and to remain on the public agenda. Selection principles that influence which problems will most likely be addressed are at work in these arenas. Such principles are the intensity of the competition, the need for drama and novelty, the danger of saturation, political biases...

However being at the center of the public attention is not a necessary condition for the social problem to be treated. Moreover, as Downs (1972) emphasized, when public attention starts shifting away from the social issue, the problem is still largely unresolved. Thus the next question concerns the consequences of those social movement. This question have mobilized a great number of social scientists over the last decades (see Amenta, Caren, Chiarello and Su, 2010). In Amenta, Caren, Chiarello and Su (2010) the environmental movement was analyzed 6 times among the 45 articles reviewed. Although none of these papers concluded that the environmental movement had no political impact, the results differ when it comes to assessing the intensity of the influence[1]. Thus it seems that the environmental movement is not as powerful as it appears.

A glimpse of the competition process between social issue can be found in Baumgartner and Mahoney (2002). They looked at hearings topics in the US Congress over the twentieth century, they note that over that period Congress have shifted its attention from old, traditional issues (Defense, Economic policy ...) to new types of issues (Environmental issues, Health policy...) and that both type of issues competed for attention. Although some of these new topics are not related to any particular social movement some of them were associated to important social movements during the post-World War Two period (Environment, Social Welfare, Civil Rights,...). At the beginning of the period, hearings in Congress related to the Environment represented less than 0.5% of total hearings while at the end of the period, in the beginning of the 1990's, they represented between 6 and 7% of total hearings (see Baumgartner and Mahoney, 2002, figure 6.A). Thus we see that nevertheless, the environmental movement gained some political attention. The details of this relationship between government attention and the environmental movement are explained below.

Agnone (2007) looked at the relationship between the annual number of US federal laws passed by Congress favorable to the goals of the environmental movement and environmental movement activities from 1957 to 1997. His first result is that there is a positive significant relationship between protest activities and the passage of environmental law. This implies that for an environmental law to be passed, one simply need environmental NGOs to organize demonstrations, marches or any other activity that raises the salience of the environmental issue. As common sense suggest, he also find a positive relation between public opinion toward environmental issues and the passage of environmental law. A more subtle result concerns the interaction between environmental protests and public opinion. Indeed the core of his investigation is to test

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[1]One paper claim that it had a strong influence, two suggest that the influence was modest while three studies argue that the influence was weak. See Amenta, Caren, Chiarello and Su (2010), Table 1 for more details.

his *amplification hypothesis* which posit that the effect of public opinion on public policy on a specific issue is greater when it is accompanied by an increase in the number of protest related to that issue. Thus he wants to investigate whether or not environmental protests and public opinion are complements or substitutes. This interaction is positive and significant for the Environmental movement meaning that when public opinion and protest are at high levels, their joint impact on policy change is far greater than what they could reach is each existed without the other. In a nutshell: protests increases the salience of public opinion in the eyes of policy makers. Another result is that pro-environmental legislation are more likely to be passed under a Democratic government. This is the *Political Opportunities* hypothesis, it simply posit that a law on a specific issue is more likely to be passed under a friendly government. Since the environmental movement is identified as a left movement, pro-environmental laws should be more likely to be voted under a left government. Not surprisingly, environmental laws are also more likely to pass on election years.

Olzak and Soule (2009) conducted the same kind of analysis as Agnone (2007) yet they came up with some different results. While the previous studies seemed to revealed a direct effect of environmental protest on environmental legislation, this studies weaken this result. It suggest that instead of being direct, environmental protest have only an indirect effect on environmental legislation. The way the mechanism goes is the following: protests have a direct, positive, significant effect on Congress hearings and not on the passage of environmental laws. However there is a positive significant relationship between Congressional hearings and the passage of environmental legislation. The more Congress debate about an issue, the more likely it will legislate it. Thus protests affect environmental legislation only through the positive effect they have of Congressional hearings. The authors find the same positive relationship between election years and the passage of environmental laws as Agnone (2007). However, they find a negative impact of previous environmental legislation on the current probability of passage of environmental legislation. This is consistent with the view that the Environment is not the only problem politicians are facing. Thus once a law is passed, policy makers move to another issue until the Environment becomes once again a top-of-mind problem. In a nutshell, environmental protests impact the agenda-setting stage of environmental legislation, but they do not directly impact further stages of the political process.

However, there is one period over which the environmental movement seems to have a greater impact. It is during election years. This phenomenon is observed in both Agnone (2007) and Olzak & Soule (2009), it has also been deeply investigated in List & Sturm (2006) and Conconi et al (2012). Both investigated the voting behavior of US politicians over issues related to the environment. Both papers emphasize that US politicians facing reelections have much greater probabilities to vote in favor of environmental legislation than when they do not have reelection concerns. Both papers also developed theoretical models explaining such pandering behavior. Both make the useful distinction between primary issue and secondary issue. The former encompasses political decisions that have a big impact over a large portion of the population (fiscal policy, economic policy...) while the later are issues that have a big impact over a minor share of population but a

weak impact over the population as a whole. Such issues are very specific and typically environmental problems are among them. The main insights from both models is that electoral incentives push politicians to take decisions that are against their personal preferences in order to secure their position in office. This is because if they don't, they would jeopardize their chances of reelection. Thus environmental issues have to be politically strong enough to force politicians to vote in favor of environmental legislation. A similar result is found over voting patterns of US senator over the gun control issue (Bouton et al, 2013). Moreover they model the impact of a partisan organization communicating about behavior of politician over the issue they are concerned with. The model predict that when such organization exists, the pandering behavior of politicians is magnified and thus the legislation is more likely to go as the organization wants.

The papers cited above have the same weakness which is that they don't consider that there are other secondary that compete for political attention. In a spirit close to this paper, Passarelli & Tabellini (2013) formulated a general theory of how political unrest influences public policy. They treat protests and riots as equally relevant forms of political participation in democracies. Their assumption is that such forms of participation are caused by emotions. Specifically the feeling of being treated unfairly fuel the motivation of participating in such events and encourage individuals to take costly actions to manifest their discontentment. The economy is divided in N sectors/groups. Each individual in each group are assumed to have the same policy preferences, that is the same reference point of what is perceived to be a fair policy. However each individual unilaterally trades costs and benefit of participating or not to a riot. The government is assumed to be benevolent and political unrest causes a real loss of social welfare. It will therefore aim at maximizing the gross welfare net of losses due to riots and protests. In this framework the most influential groups are the ones that have the greater ability to inflict social costs, that a greater ability to mobilize their members and that feel more aggrieved (because they are more threatening). However, groups does not necessarily compete agains each other as the policy dimension is unique in their model. Finally, Yu (2005) upgraded the common agency framework of Grossman & Helpman (1992) to allow interest groups to influence the preferences of the population(indirect influence) on top of letting groups directly competing for government attention. He highlights the complementarity of the two kinds of efforts and show that a group with limited resources (such as environmental organizations) might overcome powerful groups (industry groups) if they are good enought at influencing the population preferences. The same kind of comments done for List & Sturm (2006) and Conconi et al (2012) apply here, as it does not take into account the competition that environmental groups might face against say feminism or anti-war groups.

We build our model on the papers discussed above, we will consider an economy in which a benevolent government will aim at maximizing the welfare of its citizens over one period, thus unlike List & Sturm (2006) and Conconi et al (2012) we won't focus on reelection incentives. Instead we focus on how a benevolent government would priorize over issue when it faces multiple demands for political change and has limited resources. These demands will comes from groups groups

exogenously endowed with resources that they will have to allocate between direct and indirect effort to gain political attention.

3 Model

3.1 Basic set-up

Consider a static economy consisting of N independent groups/social problems, indexed by i. This economy is populated by n individuals. The population is divided in two categories: a share α is said to be "activists" while its counterpart $1 - \alpha$ is called the "passive" population. Activists are committed to one and only one social problem and the share of activist committed to the social problem j is denoted $\alpha^j \geq 0$ with $\sum_{j=1}^{N} \alpha^j = \alpha$. Activists want to maximize the weight allocated to their issue by the regulator. In order to do so they can either make the population sensitive to their cause or make their group salient in the eyes of the government. To do so, we assume that one leader among each group decides for all and strategically allocates[2] a stock of effort $E^j(\alpha^j)$, which is assumed to be a strictly increasing function of the share of activists committed to the problem j. The two types of efforts are labeled in the following way: e_e^j is assumed to be group's j effort in providing information about problem i to the share $1 - \alpha$ of the population[3]. On the other hand e_s^j refers to group's j effort to make problem j salient in the eyes of the regulator. The regulator, observing the preferences of the population and the salience of each social problem, strategically allocates an exogenous stock of policy W in order to maximize the total welfare of the population. Specifically, let $\sum_{j=1}^{N} \lambda^j V^j(w^j, \theta)$ be the standard Benthamite social welfare function where λ^j is the weight assigned by the regulator to problem j after observing both the preferences of the population and the salience of the issue. The timing of the game is described in figure 1.
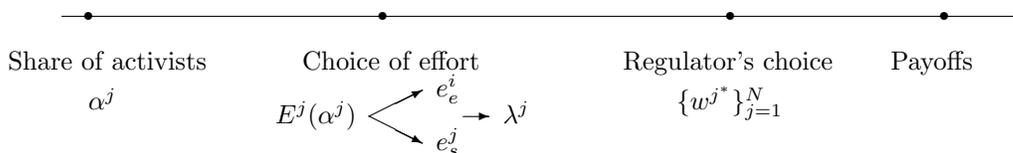
| Share of activists | Choice of effort | Regulator's choice | Payoffs |

$$E^j(\alpha^j) \begin{array}{c} \nearrow \ e_e^i \\ \searrow \ e_s^j \end{array} \rightarrow \lambda^j \qquad \{w^{j^*}\}_{j=1}^{N}$$

Figure 1: Timeline

Let ρ^{ij} be the preferences of individual i for the social problem j. Each individual has thus a vector of preferences ρ^i of dimension $(N * 1)$. At the beginning of the game we assume that each element of this vector is equal to 0 regardless of the individual. It is simply assumed that ρ^{ij} is an increasing function of e_e^i. Therefore each organization "educates" the

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[2]We thus get rid of the collective action problem

[3]It is implicitly assumed that activists from other groups are not affected by this effort

population. Moreover we assume that each effort made by each organization is public knowledge, formally:

$$\rho^{ij} = \begin{cases} v(e_e^i) + \varepsilon^{ij} & \text{if } v(e_e^i) + \varepsilon^{ij} \geq 0 \\ 0 & \text{if } v(e_e^i) + \varepsilon^{ij} < 0 \end{cases}$$

With $v(e_e^i)$ being an increasing, concave function in e_e^i and ε^{ij} i.i.d$\sim U[a^j, b^j], \forall i \in n$ with $a^j, b^j \in \mathbb{R}$. The noise is then the same across all individual for the same social problem, yet its support may differs from one problem to another, that is we can have $a^j \neq a^k$ and $b^j \neq b^k$ for some $j \neq k \in N^4$. The noise term stands for the popularity of the issue, a popular issue will have a higher expected value of the noise than a less popular one. Typically, any social issue dealing with high moral values will tend to have a high expected value, such problems may be related to child care, environmental issues... The second kind of action that organization j might undertake in order to increase the weight the government puts on problem j is making it salient or more visible. Formally, the salience of issue j is defined as:

$$s^j(e_s^j, j_s^{-j}) = \frac{\psi(e_s^j)}{\sum_{k=1}^N \psi(e_s^k)} \in [0, 1].$$

Where $\psi : \mathbb{R}^+ \to \mathbb{R}^+$ is a strictly concave function, ensuring us an interior solution. This kind of action stands for the protests, marches, press release... They are actions purely aimed at increasing government's attention. The government combines both observations to construct the weight that it puts on each problem. Let $\lambda^j(\rho^j, s^j)$ be the weight that the regulator assigns to problem j, where ρ^j is the expectation of the preferences of the population for the problem j and s^j is its salience. To illustrate our results in the simplest manner, let 's assume:

$$\lambda^j = s^j \rho^j$$

This specification imply complementarity between public opinion and salience, as Agnone (2007) found. We now need to precise the specific $V^j(w^j, \theta^j)$ function. We assume it has the following quadratic form:

$$V^j(w^j, \theta) = -(w^j - \theta^j)^2$$

Where θ^j represents the severity of issue j. The higher it is, the more it requires resources to be solved. Thus problems are not necessarily equals in severity, below we highlight how problems which have different optimal levels of policy may still get the same level of political resources depending in the actions of their organizations. The objective function of the regulator is simply to maximize the following problem:

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[4]For simplicity we assume that the spread is the same for all social problem, that is: $b^k - a^k = b^j - a^j, \forall k, j \in N$

$$\max_{\{w^j\}_{j=1}^N} \lambda^j V^j(w^j,\theta)$$
$$\text{subject to } \sum_{j=1}^N w^j \leq W$$

On the other hand each organization wants to maximize the following program:

$$\max_{e_e^j, e_s^j} \lambda^j = \rho^j s^j(e_s^j, j_s^{-j})$$
$$\text{subject to } e_e^j + e_s^j \leq E^j(\alpha^j)$$

Notice that in this version of the model, individuals have little influence on the decision taken, possible solutions are discussed in the extension section. The subgame perfect equilibrium is solved by backward induction.

3.2 Government's problem

Taking the program of the regulator, first order condition from the Lagrangian maximization program give the optimal level of resource allocation across social problem:

$$-2\lambda^j(w^{j^*} - \theta^j) = \lambda$$
$$\Leftrightarrow w^{j^*} = \theta^j - \frac{\lambda}{2\lambda^j}, \forall j \in N$$

Where λ is the Lagrange multiplier associated to the resource constraint of the government. Some interesting comments may be done on this simple expression of w^{j^*}. First of all, there is no reason to believe that the allocation is egalitarian, as each allocation is increasing in what we call the severity of the issue (θ^j). If there were no resource constraint and no social activity, then we should have perfect equality between w^{j^*} and θ^j, however this optimal level is never achieved as soon as the resource constraint is binding. Moreover, the optimal allocation is decreasing in the severity of the resource constraint, thus this yields the obvious interpretation that the poorer you are, the farther away from equilibrium are your policies. However, the weight that the government puts on problem j lowers this budget constraint effect. Indeed w^{j^*} is an increasing function of λ^j. In fact a difference in severity between to issues, say $\theta^j > \theta^k$, can still result in the same allocation as long as the following equality is verified:

$$\triangle\theta = \frac{\lambda}{2}\left(\frac{1}{\lambda^j} - \frac{1}{\lambda^k}\right) > 0$$

Where $\triangle\theta = \theta^j - \theta^k$. Therefore, a difference of allocation between two issues may not be due to a difference in the severity of those issues. One should note that the impact of the budget constraint and the weight are complements[5]therefore the relevance of the weight will be stronger in cases where the budget to be shared is low.

[5]Indeed: $\frac{\partial^2 w^{j^*}}{\partial\lambda\partial\lambda^j} = \frac{1}{2\lambda^{j^2}} > 0$

3.3 The direct and indirect competition for attention

We focus now on the real interest of the model, that is the optimal decision that organizations have to take in order to maximize their visibility. The first order conditions of the j organization program yields the following condition:

$$\frac{\partial \lambda^j}{\partial i} = \lambda, \text{for } i = \{e_e^j, e_s^j\}$$

Where λ is the Lagrangian multiplier associated to the resource constraint faced by the organization j. Without surprise the optimal allocation of effort is the one that provide perfect equality in marginal increase of the objective regardless of the type of effort, which imply the two following conditions:

$$v'(e_e^{j^*}) = \frac{\lambda}{s^{j^*}}$$

Obviously, the first thing to notice from this first relationship is that effort for increasing population awareness about problem j is increasing as the organization has more resources[6]. An increase in salience is also translated into an increase of awareness effort.

$$s'(e_s^{j^*}, e_s^{-j^*}) = \frac{\lambda}{v(e_e^{j^*}) + \frac{a^j + b^j}{2}}$$

Since the $s()$ function is strictly concave[7] the relationship between the resource constraint and optimal salience effort is just the same as for the awareness effort. Thus more resources simply mean more of the two types of efforts. However an interesting thing can be said about this second relationship: one can see that the higher the expected value of the noise $(\frac{a^j + b^j}{2})$, the higher will be the effort in salience. Thus the organization strategically internalize the noise when it makes the allocation of efforts. Therefore, we should expect higher efforts in salience for issues that are popular (high expected value of the noise) whereas for issues that less popular, organization will first spend more efforts in making the population sensitive to the issue[8].

Remember that the available stock of efforts an organization have is an increasing function of its share of activist. That is that, for a given fraction of activists in the population (α), there is a fixed upper bound on the resources available to each problem ($E(\alpha)$). Thus the more there are social problems, the lower are the share of activists committed to social

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[6]A decrease in λ translates into a decrease of $v'(e_e^{j^*})$, due to the concavity of the $v()$ function, this means that optimal effort is higher

[7]$s'(e_s^{j^*}, e_s^{-j^*}) = \frac{\psi'(e^{j^*}) \sum_{k \neq j} \psi(e^{k^*})}{(\sum \psi(e^{j^*})^2} > 0$ and $s''(e_s^{j^*}, e_s^{-j^*}) = \frac{\sum_{k \neq j} \psi(e^{k^*})[\psi''(e^{j^*}) \sum \psi(e^{j^*}) - \psi'(e^{j^*})^2]}{(\sum \psi(e^{j^*}))^3} < 0$

[8]In fact this difference in noise may compensate a difference in resources between two social problem. Say problem j has less resources than problem k but that $\mathbb{E}[\varepsilon^j] > \mathbb{E}[\varepsilon^k]$ (assuming $\mathbb{E}[\varepsilon^k] = 0$ for simplicity). Then λ^j may still be higher than λ^k if the following condition is satisfied: $\mathbb{E}[\varepsilon^j] \geq \frac{s^{k^*}}{s^{j^*}} v^{k^*} - v^{j^*}$

problem j, and the lower are its resources[9]. Thus as the number of social problem rises, we expect that only the most popular will be seriously addressed by the government ($w^{j^*} \to \theta^j$), whereas others will receive limited attention. Thus the popularity of any problem becomes more and more a crucial factor of the attention the government gives to it as the number of social problem rise.

Before giving a taste of the possible extension of this model we first summarize the findings of this section: The political influence of groups is mainly due to the amount of resources they have in the first place. The bigger is the number of activist committed to problem j, the more political influence group j will have. We add to this very intuitive result the fact that the difference between an influential group and a non influential group will be stronger in cases where the regulator is short of resources and tends to damper as the regulator has a deeper pocket.

The weight that problem j has in the government maximization problem is also greatly due to its proper nature, that is the popularity of social problem j. Without surprises, the more popular an issue is, the greater its chances are to have bigger weight than less popular issues. Moreover, a popular issue will require less awareness effort since the population is already concerned by this issue. This allows the organization to shift its allocation of effort toward more salience efforts which increases the attention the government gives to the problem. We described above how the popularity of the issue becomes more and more important in determining the attention as there is greater competition among social problems. These very simplistic results are due to simplifying assumptions made when building the model, in the following section we address the potential extensions that can be done in order to improve its relevance.

3.4 Extensions

The first assumption that can easily be removed is the independence of problems. It seems more realistic to assume dependence between issues rather than the opposite. Indeed one might argue that if an individual have strong preferences for preserving biodiversity, it would make sense to admit that this level of preferences positively influence the preferences of this same individual for other "green" issues. We can define subset of problems, say "green" problems: $G \subset N$, which components are problems which have at least a positive relationship with another component of the subset. Such problems can be improving the share of green energy in the energy mix of a country, tackle CO_2 emissions, improving air quality... All those issue have the characteristic that if one gets more attention, then it has a positive externality on all the others. Preliminary work show that such dependence is easier to implement at the individual preferences stage. That is assuming a positive externality between awareness efforts of organization belonging to the subset G. For simplicity, let's assume that there is only one "leading" problem which influences all the others, call that problem j. Then it is easy to take account of the impact of j on the rest of the subset, let ρ^{ik} be the preference of individual i for social problem k, with

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[9]In fact, $N \to \infty$ imply $E(\alpha^j) \to 0$ (if $\alpha^j > 0, \forall j \in N$)

$k \in G$, then:

$$\rho^{ik} = v(e_e^k) + \varepsilon^{ik} + \beta^{jk} v(e_e^j)$$

With $1 > \beta^{jk} \geq 0$ reflecting the impact of the leading issue j on issue k. With this formulation, preliminary work shows that when organizations belonging to subset G cooperate as to maximize the sum of the expected values of individual preferences ($\sum_{j=1}^{G} \mathbb{E}[\rho^j]$), there is a shift of awareness efforts from the "passive" issues toward the leading issue, the strength of this shift is obviously a function of the β^{jk}. Issues with higher β^{jk} will shift more effort toward the issue k than issues with lower β^{jk}.

Another assumption would be to release the fully benevolent social planner hypothesis. That is allowing the government to have itself a distribution of preferences over issues. Such hypothesis would for sure ease of reinforce the competition for attention depending whether the government initially care or not about certain issues.

Just as important is allowing the individuals of the economy to be more active, indeed the share $1 - \alpha$ of the population is highly passive in this model. One solution would be to allow them to participate to the salience of the issues. Just as in Esteban & Ray (2011) or Passarelli & Tabellini (2013) in which individual actively participate to the salience of the cause they fight for. The result we shall have is that groups which easily mobilize their supporters should be given greater weight by the government, just as Passarelli & Tabellini (2013). However we should be able to enrich this result with our relationship between the awareness and salience efforts. Coming to the awareness efforts, the exposed relationship between effort and preferences shall be improved. In this model, it is implicitely assumed that all individuals are homogeneous in the sense that before the game starts they all share the same preferences for every social problems[10]. This could be solved by allowing individuals to have an initial distribution of preferences before the game starts.

The policy process itself is not satisfying, our model has the property that the regulator perfectly perceive and react to every social problem, however as Jones & Baumgartner (2005) empirically showed, governments exhibit a "bottleneck of attention", meaning that its attention is focused only on the most salient issues while minor issues are most of the time neglected. Moreover these same authors also showed how the political frictions linked to the US political process, lead to the *punctuated equilibrium hypothesis*. It states that political changes are mostly incremental, meaning that most of the time the government is not really reacting to signals calling for political change. However, sometimes the logic is reversed that is that government have a tendency for overeacting and thus invest a lot of resources in reacting to signals calling for political changes. Our model should take account of these frictions in policy responses.

Last, some policy, such as environmental policy, show real effect in the long term, therefore having a two period model would allow us to illustrate the tradeoff government faces between long term and short term social problems, and how

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[10]$\rho^{ij} = 0, \forall i \in n, \forall j \in N$

does organizations committed to those issues would maximze their attention.

All these extensions shall help building a more appropriate model which should refine our results.

4   Conclusion

This paper focuses on social movement, using sociological evidences it provides a general framework of how and why some social problems get full attention of the government whereas other get only limited attention. It provides a first explanation of the statement given by Amenta et al (2012) that the environmental movement had a modest/weak impact. The general idea developped in this paper is that the reason behind this weak impact is the fierce competition that social problem face between them. Thus, whereas the environmental movement had a modest impact, other movement were more succesful, such as the feminist movement or the civil right movement. Yet, there are plenty of other reasons that could explain the modest impact of the environmental movement, one of them is its weak presence inside the political process. Further research should look for other answers.

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