

# The Politics of Herding Cats

When Congressional Leaders Fail

Legislative Politics and Policy Making series

In *The Politics of Herding Cats*, John Lovett looks at the relationship between media, Congress, and public policy, showing that leaders in Congress under normal circumstances control public policy on issue areas due to their status both within Congress and in the media by and large. When issue coverage on topics increases in media, however, other members seize on the opportunities to engage in the issue and shift public policy away from leader desires. As more members engage and more groups become involved, leaders lose the ability to control the process and are more likely to have problems actually getting public policy enacted. Lovett look at this phenomenon using newspaper coverage in the Washington Post over a 40-year period, both in terms of general analysis as well as individual case studies exploring agricultural subsidies (a low coverage topic), immigration (a changing coverage topic), and health care (a high coverage topic). As coverage increases, the amount leaders can control in the process decreases. Only under extreme circumstances, as seen in the Affordable Care Act, can leaders get anything done at all. *The Politics of Herding Cats* would be useful for those who wish to better understand the relationship between the media and Congress. It will also be useful to those who want to understand the relationship between actors in government and how the media has influenced American politics, as well as how individual members of Congress can go against party leaders on major issues.

**John Lovett** is Visiting Assistant Professor of Politics and International Affairs at Wake Forest University.

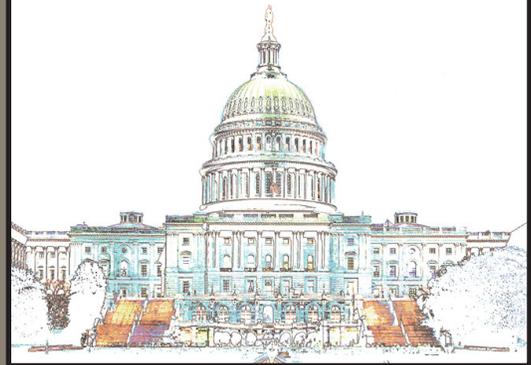
“Using extensive quantitative data on media attention and legislative activity coupled with detailed case studies of major issues, Lovett very persuasively demonstrates that increased public attention opens opportunities for members to reshape issue politics and complicate the leaders’ cat-herding responsibilities.”

—Scott R. Meinke, Bucknell University

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LEADERS FAIL

John Lovett



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