

The Speech from the Throne: Dataset & Code Revisions

As the UK Policy Agendas Project (www.policyagendas.org.uk) has proceeded, minor adjustments and re-calibrations have been made to our original dataset(s), in addition to extension of the time frame. For the most part these changes have concerned the original dataset which was compiled using the US Policy Agendas codebook.¹ Since then, a UK-specific codebook has been developed by Will Jennings and Shaun Bevan, with input from the project coders and with guidance from Frank Baumgartner and other colleagues in the Comparative Agendas Project.

This technical note details the history of changes in the UK Policy Agendas Project codebook and is intended to enable replication of our analysis by other scholars. It links particular versions of the codebook/data to published outputs of the project. Each of the publications arising from the project has a corresponding dataset that is available for replication purposes either through the project website or upon request from the project leaders. For original research, the most up-to-date version of the dataset should be used and is also available on the project website.

The text of the Speech from the Throne was coded at the quasi-sentence level. A quasi-sentence (or policy statement) constitutes an expression of a single policy idea or issue while not necessarily a complete sentence (see Volkens 2002).² Generally this unit of analysis is identifiable from the use of punctuation and conjunctions. The transcripts of the Speech from the Throne were blind-coded by two researchers first to ascertain whether each quasi-sentence contained any policy content and then to assign a major topic code and sub-topic code to the quasi-sentence. This procedure led to ninety per cent inter-coder agreement for most years. The coders resolved remaining differences through discussion and the project leaders made the final decision in the few cases where coders could not agree. This coding procedure generates the longest known data series of executive and legislative attention in the UK: one hundred and one speeches from the date of the first Parliament Act in 1911 right up to 2008. This data consists of 6,402 quasi-sentences, spanning four monarchs, eighteen prime ministers and twenty-nine ministries over this ninety-eight year period.

¹ The original coding of the Speech from the Throne was funded by a British Academy small grant awarded to Peter John, 'The Policy Priorities of UK Governments: a Content Analysis of King's and Queen's speeches, 1945-2005'.

² Volkens, Andrea. 2002. *Manifesto Coding Instructions. Discussion Paper FS III 02-201*. Berlin: WZB.

Dataset 1.0: The Speech from the Throne, 1940-2005 [Release: 2009]

The original dataset of the policy content of the Speech from the Throne used the US Policy Agendas codebook.³ It also used two major topic codes from the US Policy Agendas codebook for the New York Times, i.e. State and Local Government Administration (24) and Arts and Entertainment (28).

Notes:

For the original coding of the Speech from the Throne, the text of the 1950 speech could not be found so the Prorogation Speech of the subsequent year was used as a substitute.

Corresponding publications:

Peter John and Will Jennings. (In Press). 'Punctuations and Turning Points in British Politics: the Policy Agenda of the Queen's Speech, 1940-2005', *British Journal of Political Science*.

Dataset 1.1: The Speech from the Throne, 1940-2005 [Release: 2009]

This revised version of the dataset recodes the two major topic codes from the US Policy Agendas codebook for the New York Times. State and Local Government Administration (24) is recoded under Government Operations as 'Intergovernmental Relations (Local Government and Local Authorities)' (2001). In addition, Water authorities had been coded under the 24 major topic code, and were reassigned to 'Water Resources Development and Research (Water Authorities)' (2104). Arts and Entertainment (28) is recoded under 'Arts and Humanities (Culture)' (609).

In addition, the dataset recoded Immigration and Refugee Issues (530) under a new sub-topic (230), with the same name and description under major topic 2. The major topic name was subsequently renamed "Civil Rights, Minority Issues (*Immigration), and Civil Liberties" and major topic 5 was renamed "Labour and Employment". This revision is consistent with coding policies in Denmark, Spain and the Netherlands.

A new sub-topic code, 'North America and North Atlantic Ocean (United States of America, Canada)' (1930) was created within the International Affairs and Foreign Policy topic to refer to relations with the U.S. and Canada.

Corresponding publications:

Will Jennings and Peter John. (2009). 'The Dynamics of Political Attention: Public Opinion and the Queen's Speech in the United Kingdom.' *American Journal of Political Science* 53(4): 838-854.

³ <http://www.policyagendas.org/codebooks/topicindex.html>

Dataset 2.0: The Speech from the Throne, 1911-2008 [Release: 2010]

This extended and revised the Speech from the Throne dataset.⁴ It adds data from 1911 to 1939 and from 2006 to 2008. It also makes a number of revisions to coding policy and is complemented by an adapted version of the UK codebook complete with UK-specific examples and UK-recodings.

Changes to the dataset are listed below.

- In previous versions of the dataset, references to 'estimates for the public services...' were coded as non-policy statements (0). This version of the dataset recodes these as the general subtopic of Government Operations (2000).
- The revised dataset recodes references to fisheries, which were previously coded under species protection (709) or general agriculture (400) are now coded under a new sub-topic code, 'Fisheries and Fishing' (408), within the Agriculture (4) major topic.
- References to general animal welfare such as livestock or domestic pets, had also been coded under species protection (709) were recoded under a new sub-topic code, 'Animal Welfare' (406), within the Agriculture (4) major topic.
- Pension schemes, strikes and other profession-specific labour activities were re-coded under their specific topic. For example, pensions for government employees were recoded from 'Employee Benefits' (503) to 'Government Employee Benefits, Civil Service Issues' (2004). Strikes by coal miners were recoded from 'Employee Relations and Labour Unions' (504) to 'Coal' (805). However, general strikes are still coded under 504, while general pension issues are still coded under 503.
- Water issues were further recoded, distinguishing between the management of water resources by water authorities (2104) and drinking water safety and supply (701).
- Road traffic issues, previously coded as general transport issues (1000) were recoded under 'Truck and Automobile Transportation and Safety' (1006).
- References to statute law revisions, repeals and continuations, coded under 1200 and 1204 are re-coded under 'Executive-Legislative Relations and

⁴ From September 2008, the UK Policy Agendas Project was funded through a grant award from the Economic and Social Research Council, 'Legislative Policy Agendas in the UK' (ESRC Reference RES-062-23-0872) as part of a European Science Foundation (ESF) EUROCORES European Collaborative Research Projects (ECRP) application, 'The Politics of Attention: West European politics and agenda-setting in times of change', project led by Professor Stefaan Walgrave, University of Antwerp.

Administrative Issues, Powers of the House of Lords and the House of Commons, Parliamentary Operations' (2011).

- Distinct from the United States, where the original Policy Agendas Codebook was developed, the UK has experienced domestic as well as international terrorism (and historically has encountered terrorism within its colonial territories). Because of this, and because policy responses to international and domestic terrorism are often linked, a single code was created that encompasses both types of terrorism (1627: 'Domestic and International Terrorism'). This was included under the Defence major topic (16) because terrorist issues are broadly conceived as security issues. References to international terrorism, previously coded as 1927 were recoded as 1627.
- The troubles in Northern Ireland were consistently recoded from the 'Riots and Crime Prevention (Public Order)' (1211) code to 'Domestic and International Terrorism' (1627).
- A new sub-topic, 'The Monarchy, Royal Family Issues, and British Nobility' (2031) was created within the Government Operations (20) major topic.
- In the US version of the Policy Agendas Codebook, there is a sub-topic within Government Operations (20) that refers to Watergate. This version of the dataset adds a new subtopic, 'Prime Ministerial or Ministerial Scandals and Resignations' (2032) that creates a code for political scandals in the UK.
- The dataset recoded combined land purchase and territorial issue, which had been coded under several different areas – including Government Operations (20), Territorial Issues (2105) and International Affairs (19) – as 'Public Lands, Water Management, Colonial and Territorial Issues' (2100) as all government land purchases are public lands.
- This version of the dataset also revised coding of colonial and commonwealth territories, both historic and currently. The revised codes correspond to the territorial status of the country at the date of the Speech, not the status at the present time. This leads to re-coding of Australia and Canada under the 2105 sub-topic, as they are commonwealth countries with the Queen as head of state. The rule for coding of UK territories is that full independence from the UK is required for coding under the relevant sub-topic from the International Affairs and Foreign Policy (19) major-topic. However, the 19XX topic is applied if references to the country refer to a general international issue or their relations with other countries, not the UK.

Notes:

- The text of the 1950 QS was found and recoded to replace the Prorogation Speech.

- The revised dataset adds the Speech from the Throne for 1948, which was a special short session of Parliament. It also includes Speeches from the Throne for other short sessions (1921 and 1922). Researchers using this data should consider whether inclusion of these short sessions is relevant to their analysis.

Corresponding publications:

Will Jennings, Shaun Bevan and Peter John. (In Press). 'The Agenda of British Government: the Speech from the Throne, 1911-2008', *Political Studies*.

Dataset Variable Codebook

ID: Counting variable for quasi-sentence (unique identifier).

Sentence_Number: Counting variable within each Speech from the Throne.

Quasi-Sentence: Counting variable of quasi-sentences within each Speech from the Throne.

Text: Text of the sentence associated with each Sentence_Number (this is repeated where there are multiple quasi-sentences within a sentence).

Policy: Dichotomous variable, coded 1 if the quasi-sentence is a policy statement and 0 if it is a non-policy statement.

Major_Topic: Policy Agendas major topic code of the quasi-sentence.

Sub_Topic: Policy Agendas sub-topic code of the quasi-sentence.

Executive_Agenda: Dichotomous variable, coded 1 if the quasi-sentence is part of the executive section of the speech and 0 if it is part of the legislative section (see Jennings, Bevan and John, forthcoming).

Year: Indicates the calendar year in which the speech occurred.

Speech_Year: Counting variable from the first speech in 1911 to the last speech in the dataset in 2008, by speech from 1 to 101.

Date: The date on which the Speech from the Throne was given in Parliament (DD/MM/YYYY)

When using the dataset please use the citation: Will Jennings, Shaun Bevan and Peter John. (n.d.). 'The Agenda of British Government: the Speech from the Throne, 1911-2008', forthcoming in *Political Studies*.