The purpose of this paper is to examine whether two Finnish newspapers, Helsingin Sanomat and Ilta-Sanomat, had an agenda-setting function over the party agendas of the largest five parties during the 2003 Finnish general election campaign: the Social Democratic, the Centre and the National Coalition Party, as well as the Green League and the Left Alliance. By applying quantitative content analytical research techniques, issue emphasis for both the party issue agendas as well as the respective press agendas was being determined.

The party election programmes were studied as the first and the official party agendas. The news bulletins published on the official party web-sites were analysed as the second and the so-called alternative party agendas, reflecting more the daily agenda-setting of the parties during the election campaign. The press agenda, on the other hand, consisted of the newspaper articles that mediated substantial issues in relation to the five parties within the most intensive period of the election campaigning.

The first results showed, that there were changes in the rank order of issues from the first to the second party agendas. Yet, it became interesting to see, whether the first party agendas (election programmes) or the second party agendas (web news) had come closer to the agenda that the two newspapers had set for them. By calculating the Pearson’s and Spearman’s rank order correlations it was analysed, how closely the five party agendas correlated with the press agendas.

The correlations increased from the election programmes to the web news and the press agenda for the Social Democratic and the Centre Party, as well as the Green League. The case was the opposite for the National Coalition Party whose correlations declined between the press agenda from the election programme to the web news. For the Left Alliance, the results were nearly likewise. This led to conclude that the three former parties had more willingly transformed their issue agendas to follow that of the press during the election campaign. Yet, to a certain extent, the press exercised agenda-setting function over their respective agendas.