Notes

How Political Systems Manage Their Policy Controversies

1. I did not conduct interviews with blame game actors because I am primarily interested in what blame game participants say and do during the actual blame game. To know what they think would certainly be interesting, but it is not a necessary requirement for the analysis of blame game interactions and their consequences. Moreover, I suspect that interview data would be useless for the most part as interviewees are driven by a very strong urge for social desirability when it comes to explaining their roles and actions during a blame game. Another reason against noncontemporaneous interviews is that memories on tactical issues are likely to fade quickly and that these memories are more likely to be influenced by outcomes than by what calculations interviewees were making at the time (Berry, 2002).

2. This is why I opted against counting the number of newspaper articles during a blame game. The second reason for a qualitative assessment is its flexibility, meaning that salience and proximity can be determined and compared across very different policy controversies.

3. UK newspapers: The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, The Sun; German newspapers: Die Welt, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Bild; Swiss newspapers: Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Tages-Anzeiger, Blick; US newspapers: The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, USA Today. I retrieved relevant articles from these newspapers mainly via the Factiva database. I used several controversy-specific keywords in each case to identify all relevant articles in the newspapers selected (see Table A2 in the Appendix). The time span during which I searched for articles starts significantly before the start of the blame game and extends beyond the end of blame game interactions until articles related to the blame game could no longer be found (the concrete time span varies considerably from case to case). Moreover, I occasionally consulted newspaper articles from other outlets in case they could provide further insights into a case.

4. Considering these different newspapers also controls for political parallelism, that is, for a situation in which only one political camp shows strong interest in a controversy while other camps largely ignore
it, and for poor reporting by journalists; two aspects of media coverage that may distort and misrepresent the relationship between blame game actors and the public.

5. While considering social media would have been interesting, I opted against it for practical reasons. Analyzing social media would have been very challenging because of social media bubbles (and only possible for blame games that occurred after 2008–2010 – Twitter, Facebook, and so on only became widely used around that time). The analysis of television would also have been interesting because it would have allowed me to better assess politicians’ attitudes toward a blame game (which is not only expressed in public statements but also in facial expressions and gestures). However, I argue that the detailed consideration of print media allows for a sufficiently clear picture of blame game actors’ attitudes.

**Blame Games in the Political Sphere**

1. From here on, I will simply refer to them as ‘blame games’.

2. Of course, this does not preclude the possibility that certain blame game (inter)actions change institutions in the longer run, for example, by eroding conventions (see Hall, 2016). I will discuss this possibility in the concluding chapter.

3. In my framework, policies influence blame games in two ways. First, as part of the institutional landscape, they emit incentives and constraints on the actors in a blame game. Second, they have interpretive effects on mass publics (Pierson, 1993), which will be accounted for in the section on issue characteristics.

4. In Switzerland, the executive consists of a collective government of seven federal councilors (the ‘Federal Council’), each of which heads a department.

5. The public is thus exposed to two distortions when it comes to watching a blame game: the communication attempts by blame game actors and their reproduction by the media (Iyengar, 1990).

6. While journalists are trained to construct scandal narratives, I argue that their leeway in influencing the public’s stance (or feedback) is constrained by issue characteristics. As both watchdog and scandalization machine, the media intensively covers policy controversies that are either very severe or have significant scandalization potential (both of these aspects significantly depend on issue characteristics).

7. The phenomenon of political parallelism has to be considered when assessing the general public’s reaction to a blame game. If one considered only one quality outlet, there would be the danger of either over- or under-stating public feedback (see Section 1.4).
Blame Games in the UK

1. E.g., the media reported about a father who killed himself and his four children after receiving a high payment request from the CSA. A member from an anti-CSA movement claimed that this incident, while tragic and sad, was not unusual: “There are bound to be tragic cases because of the complete and utter incompetence of the CSA.” See “Debts drove father to kill himself and children,” The Independent, December 19, 1995.


14. The National Audit Office is an independent parliamentary body that audits government departments.


27. The Transport Committee is a parliamentary body that scrutinizes the Department for Transport.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
42. Ibid., p. 5.
47. This is in stark contrast to The Sun’s coverage of the CSA controversy. In 2006 alone (a year that saw intensive blame game interactions), it published fifty-two articles on the CSA controversy.
66. National Audit Office, “The Millennium Dome,” November 9, 2000. According to this report, the main problems were flawed management,
considerable overestimation of ticket sales, and exhibits that did not live up to ‘massaged’ expectations.

67. Each of the examined outlets published several hundred articles on the Dome – much more than on the CSA and METRONET controversies combined (which lasted longer than the blame game about the Dome).


71. Consider, e.g., “… it would be terrible if it started draining cash away from other, much better, causes,” ibid.


83. “PM rejects call to sack health chief over Mid-Staffs scandal: PM says targets of Labour ministers were to blame; Opposition accuses him of trying to politicise tragedy,” The Guardian, March 7, 2013; “PM: NHS Deaths Labour’s Fault,” The Sun, March 7, 2013.

84. “Failing hospitals to be named and shamed but patient groups say move is not enough,” The Guardian, March 27, 2013.


87. “PM rejects call to sack health chief over Mid-Staffs scandal: PM says targets of Labour ministers were to blame; Opposition accuses him of trying to politicise tragedy,” *The Guardian*, March 7, 2013.

**Blame Games in Germany**

6. Ibid.

18. I examined this case from a different perspective in Hinterleitner (2019).


37. These advantages are particularly visible in a committee meeting on May 18, 2012, Abgeordnetenhaus Berlin, Ausschuss für Bauen, Wohnen und Verkehr.
46. “Germany’s defense minister evades blame,” Deutsche Welle, August 1, 2013.
47. “‘Euro Hawk’: De Maizières startet den Frontalangriff,” Der Spiegel, July 31, 2013.
50. Surveys by the Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, which track the popularity of German ministers, allow for a clear assessment of changes in the minister’s popularity during the blame game. See Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, Politikbarometer 2013. www.forschungsgruppe.de.
61. Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany, Art. 44.
70. Deutscher Bundestag, Plenarprotokoll 14/239, p. 23845.
71. See esp. Deutscher Bundestag, Plenarprotokoll 14/239, p. 23840.

Blame Games in Switzerland

1. Parts of this section are based on Hinterleitner (2018).
11. Political experts and the justice minister himself saw the CARLOS controversy as the reason for this outcome.
17. One can only speculate about this deliberate exposure. In Chapter 9, I discuss the implications of ‘irrational’ behavior for our understanding of blame games.
20. In Switzerland’s system of direct democracy, citizens can call referendums on laws passed by parliament.
To disseminate this information, the Federal Council authorizes and sends a voting guide to the public. The voting guide for the referendum on the CTR did not contain information on the revenue implications of the retroactivity clause.


“SP befürchtet Steuerausfälle in Milliardenhöhe,” Tages-Anzeiger, March 8, 2011.


Ibid., 602.

Statement by an SVP politician, ibid., 604.

Ibid., 613.


“Steuerrreform für die Volksseele; Der Ständerat will mit einer defensiven Reform der Firmenbesteuerung einen Absturz an der Urne verhindern,” Neue Zürcher Zeitung, May 31, 2016.


E.g., National Council 2011, ibid., 601.


Parts of this section are based on Hinterleitner (2019). I also thank Tobias Arnold for interesting insights into the EXPO controversy.

The project was still named Expo.01 until the delay of the exposition from 2001 to 2002.


**Mapping the Influence of Issue Characteristics**

1. This causes me to infer that there was strong public feedback to the VHA controversy. This is a precondition for the later examination of whether opponents and incumbents behaved similarly to the actors in the three in-depth case studies (which also exhibited strong public feedback).
15. In this case, the VA secretary refrained from treating the waiting list manipulations as a systematic problem until the inquiry results were in.
27. Media outlets had covered the controversy in a detailed, mainly problem-centered way. Moreover, polls suggest that there was rather moderate feedback to the controversy (see, e.g., “For some seniors, vaccine not a political issue,” *USA Today*, October 19, 2004; “Poll: Confidence in FDA still strong despite blunders,” *USA Today*, November 24, 2004). The reason for moderate public feedback may be that most people underestimate their susceptibility to the flu and misconceive the benefits of flu shots due to cognitive biases when observing their proximate environment (Chen and Stevens, 2017). Moderate public feedback makes the FLU controversy an adequate case for testing and refining the claims about opponent and incumbent behavior derived from the three in-depth cases.
41. The media coverage on the SOLYNDRA controversy was mainly problem-centered. While the corruption allegations drew significant attention and The Wall Street Journal ranted about ‘interventionism’ during the blame game, media outlets were in consensus that Republicans had indecently inflated the issue (see, e.g., “The Solyndra ‘panic’: One company’s failure should not deter robust public investments in clean energy,” The New York Times, September 25, 2011, or Paul Krugman’s statement about the controversy: “Haven’t written about this. But it is indeed a terrible scandal, because the private sector never ever puts money into ventures that end up failing,” quoted in The New York Times, September 25, 2011). Overall, this leads me to conclude that public feedback to this controversy, as suggested by its low salience and distance to the everyday life of citizens, was indeed low. Therefore, the SOLYNDRA case can be used to test and refine the claims about opponent and incumbent behavior derived from the three in-depth cases.
43. In some political systems, opponents can seek to free themselves from this constraint by pushing the controversy into inquiry procedures that regularly produce occasions for generating blame.

**A Typological Theory of Blame Games and Their Consequences**

1. The test cases cannot be used for the construction of the typological theory. In the test cases, I did not look at both the influence of
institutional factors and issue characteristics on blame game interactions and, therefore, cannot interpret interaction effects between these groups of explanatory factors.

2. More specifically, they represent combinations of variables.

Blame Games and Their Implications for Politics and Democracy under Pressure