


## *Policy Controversies and Political Blame Games*

In modern, policy-heavy democracies, blame games about policy controversies are commonplace. Despite their ubiquity, blame games are notoriously difficult to study. This book elevates them to the place that they deserve in the study of politics and public policy. Blame games are microcosms of conflictual politics that yield unique insights into democracies under pressure. Based on an original framework and the comparison of fifteen blame games in the UK, Germany, Switzerland, and the USA, it exposes the institutionalized forms of conflict management that democracies have developed to manage policy controversies. Whether failed infrastructure projects, food scandals, security issues, or flawed policy reforms, democracies manage policy controversies in an idiosyncratic manner. This book is addressed not only to researchers and students interested in political conflict in the fields of political science, public policy, public administration, and political communication but to everyone concerned about the functioning of democracy in more conflictual times. This title is also available as Open Access on Cambridge Core.

MARKUS HINTERLEITNER is a postdoctoral researcher at Brown University's Watson Institute and is affiliated with the University of Bern's KPM Center for Public Management. He received his PhD from the University of Bern, Switzerland in 2018 and was a visiting scholar at the University of California, Berkeley during 2019. He is a leading scholar on political blame avoidance. His articles have been published in journals such as the *European Journal of Political Research*, *European Political Science Review*, *Policy Studies Journal*, *Journal of European Public Policy*, and the *Journal of Public Policy*.



## *Cambridge Studies in Comparative Public Policy*

The **Cambridge Studies in Comparative Public Policy** series was established to promote and disseminate comparative research in public policy. The objective of the series is to advance the understanding of public policies through the publication of the results of comparative research into the nature, dynamics and contexts of major policy challenges and responses to them. Works in the series will draw critical insights that enhance policy learning and are generalizable beyond specific policy contexts, sectors and time periods. Such works will also compare the development and application of public policy theory across institutional and cultural settings and examine how policy ideas, institutions and practices shape policies and their outcomes. Manuscripts comparing public policies in two or more cases as well as theoretically informed critical case studies which test more general theories are encouraged. Studies comparing policy development over time are also welcomed.

**General Editors:** M. Ramesh, *National University of Singapore*; Xun Wu, *Hong Kong University of Science and Technology*; Michael Howlett, *Simon Fraser University, British Columbia and National University of Singapore*

*In Defense of Pluralism: Policy Disagreement and Its Media Coverage* By  
Éric Montpetit

*Asia after the Developmental State: Disembedding Autonomy* Edited by  
Toby Carroll and Darryl S. L. Jarvis

*The Politics of Shale Gas in Eastern Europe: Energy Security, Contested  
Technologies and the Social Licence to Frack* By Andreas Goldthau  
*Healthy or Sick? Coevolution of Health Care and Public Health in  
a Comparative Perspective 2018* By Philipp Trein

*Policy Accumulation and the Democratic Responsiveness Trap* By  
Christian Adam, Steffen Hurka, Christoph Knill and Yves Steinebach

*Hyper-Active Governance: How Governments Manage the Politics of Expertise* By Matthew Wood

*Policy Consultancy in Comparative Perspective: Patterns, Nuances and Implications of the Contractor State* By Caspar van den Berg, Michael Howlett, Andrea Migone, Michael Howard, Frida Perner and Helen M. Gunter

*A Matter of Style? Organizational Agency in Global Public Policy* By Louisa Bayerlein, Christoph Knill and Yves Steinebach

*Policy Controversies and Political Blame Games* By Markus Hinterleitner

Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-1-108-81644-1 — Policy Controversies and Political Blame Games  
Markus Hinterleitner  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

# Policy Controversies and Political Blame Games

MARKUS HINTERLEITNER  
*Brown University*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
 978-1-108-81644-1 — Policy Controversies and Political Blame Games  
 Markus Hinterleitner  
 Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)



**CAMBRIDGE**  
 UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom  
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
 314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India  
 103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
 Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108816441](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108816441)

DOI: 10.1017/9781108860116

© Markus Hinterleitner 2020

This work is in copyright. It is subject to statutory exceptions and to the provisions of relevant licensing agreements; with the exception of the Creative Commons version the link for which is provided below, no reproduction of any part of this work may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

An online version of this work is published at [doi.org/10.1017/9781108860116](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108860116) under a Creative Commons Open Access license CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 which permits re-use, distribution and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial purposes providing appropriate credit to the original work is given. You may not distribute derivative works without permission. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

All versions of this work may contain content reproduced under license from third parties. Permission to reproduce this third-party content must be obtained from these third-parties directly. When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI 10.1017/9781108860116

First published 2020  
 First paperback edition 2023

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data*

Names: Hinterleitner, Markus, 1987– author.

Title: Policy controversies and political blame games / Markus Hinterleitner.

Description: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, [2020] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020002781 (print) | LCCN 2020002782 (ebook) | ISBN 9781108494861 (hardback) | ISBN 9781108860116 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Political culture – Western countries – Case studies. | Government accountability – Western countries – Case studies. | Blame – Political aspects – Western countries – Case studies. | Crisis management in government – Western countries – Case studies. | Political planning – Western countries – Case studies. | Opposition (Political science) – Western countries – Case studies. | Democracy – Western countries – Case studies. | Comparative government. | Western countries – Politics and government.

Classification: LCCJA75.7 .H555 2020 (print) | LCCJA75.7 (ebook) | DDC 306.209182/1–dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020002781>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020002782>

ISBN 978-1-108-49486-1 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-108-81644-1 Paperback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>List of Tables</i>	x
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xiii
1 How Political Systems Manage Their Policy Controversies	1
1.1 Setting the Scene: When Political Systems ‘Heat Up’ to Address the Controversial	2
1.2 Political Systems and Their Peculiar Ways of Managing Policy Controversies	6
1.3 Goals and Outline of the Book	7
1.4 Strategy of Inquiry	10
2 Blame Games in the Political Sphere	18
2.1 More Than Routine Political Business: Blame Games as Distinct Political Events	19
2.2 A Theoretical Framework for the Analysis of Blame Games	24
3 Blame Games in the UK	40
3.1 The Child Support Agency Operation Controversy (CSA)	40
3.2 The London Underground Renovation Controversy (METRONET)	47
3.3 The Millennium Dome Controversy (DOME)	56
3.4 The UK Blame Game Style	66
4 Blame Games in Germany	73
4.1 The National Socialist Underground Investigation Controversy (NSU)	73
4.2 The Berlin Airport Construction Controversy (BER)	79
4.3 The Drone Procurement Controversy (DRONE)	88
4.4 The German Blame Game Style	97

viii	<i>Contents</i>
5	Blame Games in Switzerland 108
5.1	The Youth Offender Therapy Controversy (CARLOS) 108
5.2	The Corporate Tax Reform Controversy (TAX) 114
5.3	The National Exposition Controversy (EXPO) 123
5.4	The Swiss Blame Game Style 130
6	Mapping the Influence of Institutional Factors 139
6.1	Political Interaction Structure 141
6.2	Institutionalized Accountability Structures 141
6.3	Institutional Policy Characteristics 142
7	Mapping the Influence of Issue Characteristics 145
7.1	Distant-Salient Blame Games 145
7.2	Proximate-Nonsalient Blame Games 152
7.3	Distant-Nonsalient Blame Games 160
7.4	Issue Characteristics and Their Influence on Blame Game Interactions 168
8	A Typological Theory of Blame Games and Their Consequences 176
8.1	Constructing a Typological Theory 177
8.2	Political Systems and How They Manage Policy Controversies 180
9	Blame Games and Their Implications for Politics and Democracy under Pressure 185
9.1	What This Book Has to Say about Blame Games 185
9.2	The Study of Blame Games and Its Wider Implications 198
	<i>Appendix</i> 206
	<i>Notes</i> 217
	<i>References</i> 234
	<i>Index</i> 245

*Figures*

1 The theoretical framework for the analysis of blame games	<i>page 25</i>
2 The relationship between the public and the blame game	34
3 Causal diagram of the typological theory	181



Tables

1	The blame games selected for analysis arranged within the compound research design	<i>page</i> 13
2	Assessment of theoretical expectations in the CSA case	48
3	Assessment of theoretical expectations in the METRONET case	57
4	Assessment of theoretical expectations in the DOME case	64
5	Assessment of theoretical expectations in the NSU case	80
6	Assessment of theoretical expectations in the BER case	89
7	Assessment of theoretical expectations in the DRONE case	98
8	Assessment of theoretical expectations in the CARLOS case	115
9	Assessment of theoretical expectations in the TAX case	124
10	Assessment of theoretical expectations in the EXPO case	131
11	Relationships between public feedback and blame game consequences	177

## *Acknowledgments*

I benefited from the encouragement and company of a wonderful team at the KPM Center for Public Management of the University of Bern while conducting the research for this book. During my time at Bern, I received generous funding from the Swiss National Science Foundation. Particular thanks go to David Kaufmann, Christian Rosser, and Eva Thomann, who accompanied me in my early steps as a social scientist and set examples of what a passion for the social sciences really means. Fritz Sager deserves special praise with regard to my research on blame games and my scientific trajectory in general. Enabler, teacher, encourager, and ironic ‘refrainer’ are just a few of the roles he flexibly adopted whenever necessary. In doing so, he was at least as judicious and ‘context-sensitive’ as the savvy politicians in the cases of this book. He was a wonderful PhD supervisor, and I thank him for supporting me along the way. Special thanks also go to R. Kent Weaver, my second PhD supervisor. Writing a book about blame games to be read by the pioneering scholar in the field was a motivating treat and a constant source of encouragement. Needless to say, his work, and that of Christopher Hood, constitutes the most important theoretical foundation for my work. Many thanks also go to Craig Parsons for a very inspiring discussion about the consensual foundations of contemporary political science. Chris Ansell supported and encouraged me during the review process. I also want to thank Derek Beach, Andy Bennett, and Benoît Rihoux, who provided me with precious advice on my work during my time as a PhD student. I would also like to thank Janine Gehrig Lux for her excellent proofreading. Many thanks also go to the series editors, Mike Howlett, M. Ramesh, and Xun Wu, and Joe Ng, Gemma Smith, and James Baker from Cambridge University Press for their excellent support during the revision and publication process. I am also grateful to the four anonymous reviewers for their extremely

helpful feedback. My greatest thanks go to Livia: for her relentless interest in this project, for the ingenuity with which she accompanied and fostered its evolution, and for simply everything. Finally, I want to thank my parents, Gabriele and Robert, who, with their love, support, and generosity, made this all possible. This book is dedicated to them.

# *Abbreviations*

BDP	Bürgerlich-Demokratische Partei [Conservative Democratic Party of Switzerland]
BER	Flughafen Berlin Brandenburg [Berlin Brandenburg Airport]
BMVEL	German Federal Ministry of Consumer Protection, Nutrition and Agriculture
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands [Christian Democratic Union of Germany]
CEO	chief executive officer
CHA	comparative-historical analysis
CSA	Child Support Agency
CTR	corporate tax reform
CVP	Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei [Christian Democratic People’s Party of Switzerland]
FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei [Free Democratic Party of Germany] FDP.Die Liberalen [Free Democratic Party of Switzerland]
HCT	health care targeting (system)
MOB	March on Bern (security controversy)
NHS	National Health Service
NSU	National Socialist Underground
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PFI	public finance initiative
PPP	public–private partnership
SP	Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz [Social Democratic Party of Switzerland]
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands [Social Democratic Party of Germany]

SVP	Schweizerische Volkspartei [Swiss People’s Party]
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
VA	(Department of) Veterans Affairs
VHA	Veterans Health Administration