5 Blame Games in Switzerland

The German blame games covered in the previous chapter featured interactions between opponents and incumbents that were more heated and oftentimes more consequential than those in the UK political system, even in the absence of strong public feedback. The Swiss blame games in this chapter will reveal yet another type of blame game interaction.

5.1 The Youth Offender Therapy Controversy (CARLOS)

The distant-salient youth offender therapy (CARLOS) controversy is about a costly therapy setting for a repeat juvenile offender, which led to a heated blame game for the justice minister of the canton of Zurich. Conservative right parties accused the minister of tolerating a soft, 'leftish' legal practice.[1]

Policy Struggle

In 2011, a repeat juvenile offender, referred to in the media as 'Carlos', committed a knife attack in Zurich that nearly killed another adolescent. The conviction for this knife attack was the last in a series of thirty-four convictions. Having exhausted all other available sanctions to no avail, and following an expert opinion, Carlos was placed in a special therapy setting where he lived 24/7 with a personal custodian. These settings are supposed to reintegrate youth offenders into society and teach them to live a responsible life. The setting was the first successful measure ever tried on Carlos and there were no major incidents for more than a year. In August 2013, Swiss National Television broadcasted a film about the youth advocate directly responsible for Carlos. The film drew heavily on his most prominent case at that time – the therapy setting for Carlos. Although the setting was portrayed as a success, the film revealed many delicate details. For example, it disclosed information about the Thai boxing training that

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Carlos attended to learn to accept authority, as well as the monthly costs of the therapy, totaling almost 30,000 Swiss Francs. Two days later, on August 27, the largest tabloid in Switzerland ran the story, portraying the setting as a shocking and scandalous example of lax legal practice and an utter waste of taxpayer money. The front-page story triggered a process of scandalization during which media outlets attempted to outdo one another to uncover new details about the setting, many of which were factually incorrect or misrepresented.[2]

For conservative right parties, the CARLOS controversy was a welcome opportunity to attack one of their bête noire policies, the Swiss juvenile justice policy. The latter deviates from outdated concepts of youth offenders as ordinary criminals whose misdeeds must be punished and atoned for. Its primary goals are the protection, education, and the (re)integration of young offenders into society (Aebersold, 2011). The juvenile justice policy is a national policy that must be implemented and applied by the cantons. Youth advocates can usually choose from appropriate measures in a problem-oriented way, without being dependent on the authorization of the upper youth advocate in each case.[3] While this approach allowed for the prescription of a successful therapy setting in the CARLOS case, the latter was interpreted quite differently by the public when the media reported on its details. Opponents were able to frame the expensive therapy setting as a blatant instance of policy failure and accused the justice minister, a politician of the Green Party, of tolerating a soft, leftish legal practice and of wasting taxpayer money.

Blame Game Interactions

As a reaction to public and political outrage, the cantonal authorities quickly terminated the therapy setting and returned Carlos to a closed institution.[4] After trying to ride out the blame for almost two weeks and muzzling the youth advocate, the latter's superior, the senior youth advocate, and the justice minister held a press conference to explain their handling of the controversy. During the press conference, they admitted to minor mistakes concerning cost control and presented some quick fixes intended to improve the oversight of youth advocates. However, their main strategic move was to blame the youth advocate and to deflect all responsibility onto him while claiming to be utterly uninvolved in the case and uninformed of the details. "Adventurous care

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regimes" like the one for Carlos would be prohibited from now on.[5] The tough stance toward the youth advocate was subsequently reinforced by the minister during press interviews, where he explicitly presented himself as a strong leader and continued to blame the youth advocate, whose dismissal was not necessary because he was due to retire in any case. He claimed that "This can't be true!" was his first reaction to the film, and that he "would have cut 'Carlos's' allowance" had he been in charge.[6] Despite the termination of the setting and the dismissal of the youth advocate, blame pressure continued by the Swiss People's Party (SVP), the right-conservative party, which, in Switzerland's proportional voting system, is the strongest party, both at the national level and in the canton of Zurich in terms of voter share. At the national level, the SVP submitted a parliamentary motion to tighten the juvenile justice policy and at the cantonal level, it called for a parliamentary inquiry commission that would have granted the cantonal parliament far-reaching rights to further investigate the controversy.[7]

In February 2014, the abrupt termination of the therapy setting boomeranged to the justice minister. Legal experts had begun to criticize cantonal authorities for terminating the setting due to media and political pressure and portrayed this step as a strategic, but unlawful, move to calm the media. In response to this criticism, the Swiss Federal Court issued a ruling that the termination of the therapy setting had indeed been unlawful, prompting the cantonal authorities to immediately reinstate the setting.[8] When the cantonal parliament subsequently debated the controversy in April 2014, nearly all parties blamed the minister for his lack of leadership and his unlawful move.[9] Backed by two commission reports, all parties pressed for organizational changes and tighter and less opaque responsibility structures. The SVP and the BDP (a small right-conservative party) repeated their criticism of the expensive therapy setting, blamed the minister for tolerating a soft, leftish legal practice, and advised him to resign. Moreover, they tried to convince other parties of the necessity for a parliamentary inquiry commission. The justice minister's Green Party and the SP (Social Democrats) conceded that there had been mistakes made in the treatment of Carlos. However, they opposed a parliamentary inquiry commission, defended the juvenile justice policy, and accused the conservative-right parties of inflating the controversy. The CVP (the Christian-democratic party) and the FDP (the liberal party) took an in-between stance. They were more critical toward the minister than the

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Green Party and the SP, but they also supported the juvenile justice policy and ultimately opposed a parliamentary inquiry commission. In his parliamentary response, the minister was a bit self-critical and reinforced his intention to implement the recommendations made in the two commission reports but continued to deflect responsibility onto the administrative level.[10]

Consequences of the Blame Game

While the parliamentary vote against an inquiry commission finally terminated the blame game surrounding the CARLOS controversy, the justice minister could not escape its consequences. He was voted out of office in the April 2015 cantonal elections.[11] Although the national parliament vetoed the SVP's motion to tighten the juvenile justice policy, there were significant organizational adaptations at the cantonal level that curtailed the autonomy of youth advocates regarding costs and the choice of therapy measures. The blame game also led to significant changes in the application of the juvenile justice policy. Data on the choice of therapy measures and statements by youth advocates suggest that the juvenile justice policy was applied more strictly in the aftermath of the blame game in order to provide opponents and the media with as few blaming opportunities as possible (Hinterleitner, 2018).

Context-Sensitive Analysis of Blame Game Interactions

It is baffling that the justice minister did not try to defend the therapy setting, despite ample opportunities to do so. The setting had proved to be the first successful therapy measure tried on Carlos and was no more expensive than therapy in a closed institution. Moreover, a successful therapy setting would have greatly reduced the likelihood of follow-up costs. Instead of referring to these arguments, the justice minister always acted as if he could fully sympathize with public outrage: first by hastily terminating the setting, and later by deflecting blame onto the youth advocate. Strong public feedback and personalized attacks by opponents can account for the minister's blame-management approach.

Issue Characteristics

Media coverage suggests that there was very strong public feedback to the CARLOS controversy. Both quality outlets and tabloids reported

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on it intensively. All media outlets adopted a scandalized tone and went on about the details of the therapy setting, as a media analysis of the controversy suggests. Even quality outlets adopted a very scandalizing and emotional tone when reporting on Carlos' 'luxury treatment' and quibbled over its details. For example, even quality outlets reported that Carlos preferred beef over cheaper types of meat and that he had used an Armani deodorant during the therapy setting (Schranz, 2015). This style of coverage clearly struck a chord with the public. Some journalists later indicated that they had been surprised by the intensity and tone of the comments to their articles.[12] In recent years, acts of violence committed by juveniles in Switzerland frequently attracted public attention and sparked calls for a zero-tolerance approach to them, thereby increasing the salience of the youth crime topic in public discourse (Urwyler & Nett, 2012, pp. 20–25). However, high salience does not imply that the mass public is properly informed about the functioning of the juvenile justice policy. In a country like Switzerland, which has a very low juvenile crime rate, the juvenile justice policy is very distant to most people's daily lives. Juvenile crime is mostly perceived through the media (Urwyler & Nett, 2012, p. 22). By placing Carlos in a 'luxurious' therapy setting instead of in jail, the juvenile justice policy appeared to treat youth offenders as victims rather than as ordinary criminals, thus adopting a positive connotation of policy targets (Schneider & Ingram, 1993).

This allowed opponents to portray the state's approach to fighting crime and ensuring public order as too lax. They urged incumbents to reverse course by tightening their grip on juvenile offenders and on the youth advocates that were too soft on them. One can clearly see how both the distance and the salience of the controversy allowed opponents to convincingly make this claim. On the one hand, distance allowed opponents to portray juvenile crime as a rampant problem that was allegedly a threat to public security.[13] On the other hand, the salience of juvenile crime allowed for the adoption of an 'enough is enough' rhetoric that compared the treatment of Carlos with earlier instances of soft, leftish legal practice, which the state could no longer afford.[14]

The blame management of incumbents suggests that they considered the CARLOS controversy to be very tricky and perilous due to strong public feedback. They deflected responsibility onto the administrative level and adopted ad hoc measures that signaled their willingness to

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keep 'freewheeling' bureaucrats in check. Despite the clear opportunity to defend the therapy setting as the right choice in this particular case, the justice minister only lightly defended it in public. Instead, he was anxious to cultivate his image as a strongman who understood the public's outrage.[15] The senior youth advocate later remarked that he and the minister had considered the controversy about the therapy setting as 'not communicable'. The minister later added: "The media could never have been stopped!"[16] Overall, there are clear signs that strong public feedback, and the attacks by opponents that built on it, significantly constrained the incumbent's blame-management approach.

Institutional Factors

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Swiss political system has a consensus government that represents (almost) all parties. Therefore, there is no fixed opposition that acts as the parliamentary opponent in a blame game. Instead, an issue-specific opposition constitutes itself anew every time a controversy occurs. There were three camps during the blame game about the CARLOS controversy. The first, the SVP and the BDP acted as opponents who wanted a tighter juvenile justice policy, a parliamentary inquiry commission, and the justice minister's resignation. The second, the Green Party and the SP opposed all these requests. Third, the FDP and the CVP acted as 'middle' parties that got something out of both opponents' and supporters' argumentations. They agreed with opponents that the executive had failed in the particular case and that organizational adaptations were needed. However, they opposed changes to the policy and a parliamentary inquiry commission. While opponents constantly blamed the justice minister for the controversy, they did not spare the supporting parties for tolerating a soft, leftish legal practice, for not putting more pressure on the justice minister, and for not supporting a parliamentary inquiry commission to further examine the controversy. The SVP also tried to discredit the middle course that moderate parties followed by stressing that the organizational adaptations in the wake of the controversy were not enough. Political incumbents benefited from the fact that the three camps held different views on what constituted an adequate policy response to the CARLOS controversy. The middle parties' position, requesting organizational adaptations but opposing a parliamentary inquiry commission, allowed the justice minister to end the blame game

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without appearing insensitive to the requests held by the parliamentary majority.

During the blame game, the justice minister was forced to endure a raft of personalized attacks. For the Swiss political system, this is quite uncommon since individual councilors are usually not promising targets for opponents. Councilors are protected by the collegiality principle, which stipulates that they decide and speak with one voice, but also that they are collectively responsible for any controversies that occur within one of the seven departments (Vatter, 2016, p. 236). At the same time, however, opponents can single out individual councilors as the political principals of their departments (Vatter, 2016, p. 238). Since the blame about the CARLOS controversy was situated at the cantonal level, where – unlike at the federal level – councilors are directly elected by the public, opponents saw the chance to damage an important Green Party politician. They associated the councilor with his party's soft stance on youth crime and even (indirectly) urged him to resign. The justice minister could thus not hide behind the council but had to actively engage in blame management. His desire to appear as a strongman must also be interpreted as an attempt to liberate himself from personalized blame attacks that portrayed him as too soft on youth crime.

Against this background, the rather low direct government involvement in youth crime policy did not carry too much weight. The justice minister had already exposed himself quite early in the blame game when he took the leading role in a joint press conference with the upper youth advocate.[17] This clearly associated him with the controversy and thereby encouraged media outlets and opponents to focus their attention and attacks on the justice minister. Both strong public feedback and personalized blame attacks thus explain why the minister frantically engaged in blame management and committed to significant organizational adaptations (see Table 8 for a schematic assessment of the theoretical expectations).

5.2 The Corporate Tax Reform Controversy (TAX)

The proximate-nonsalient corporate tax reform controversy (TAX) case is about a corporate tax reform (hereafter CTR) adopted in 2008, which led to unexpectedly high tax losses for the government. The SP blamed the Federal Council for rating company interests higher

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Table 8 *Assessment of theoretical expectations in the CARLOS case*

	Explanatory factor(s)	Expectation	Assessment
Opponents	Political interaction structure (fragmented/ consolidated opposition)	E1: Fragmented opponents, consisting of more than one party, are less successful in crafting a cohesive blame-generating strategy during the blame game than consolidated opponents.	Confirmed. Opponents do not secure a majority for their policy demands since the middle camp opposes them.
	Institutionalized accountability structures (conventions of resignation)	E3: Opponents facing extensive conventions of resignation concentrate their blaming more on the incumbent politician than opponents facing restrictive conventions, who can only blame administrative actors.	Rejected. At the cantonal level, the direct election of councilors invites opponents to attack them despite basically nonexistent conventions of resignation.
	Institutional policy characteristics (direct government involvement)	E5: Opponents are better able to blame a controversy on incumbents if the latter are directly involved than when the controversy is far removed from incumbents.	Rejected. The incumbent deliberately associates himself with the controversy, allowing opponents to involve the incumbent despite originally low direct government involvement.
	Distant-salient controversy	E7: Opponents strongly invest in blame generation on the occasion of a distant-salient controversy and attempt to damage incumbents on moral grounds.	Confirmed. Opponents strongly invest in blame generation and attempt to damage the incumbent on moral grounds (by blaming him for violating norms of justice).

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Table 8 (*cont.*)

	Explanatory factor(s)	Expectation	Assessment
Incumbents	Political interaction structure (loyal/critical governing majority)	E2: Incumbents that receive support from their party(ies) are more successful in reframing a controversy than incumbents that confront criticism from their own ranks.	Not testable. As a consensus body, the Cantonal Council tries to avoid any party affiliations during the blame game. However, it aligns with the position of the middle camp.
	Institutionalized accountability structures (conventions of resignation)	E4: Incumbent politicians that must comply with extensive conventions of resignation have greater difficulty defending themselves during a blame game than politicians that must comply with restricted conventions.	Rejected. At the cantonal level, the direct election of councilors turns them into blame targets despite basically nonexistent conventions of resignation.
	Institutional policy characteristics (direct government involvement)	E6: Incumbents are better able to deflect blame for a controversy onto administrative actors if they are not directly involved in the controversy rather than if they are involved.	Rejected. By deliberately associating with the controversy, the incumbent renders his blame-deflection attempts incredible.
	Distant-salient controversy	E8: Incumbents take a distant-salient controversy very seriously and confront it by engaging in blame deflection and symbolic activism.	Confirmed. The incumbent takes the controversy very seriously and confronts it by engaging in blame deflection and activism.

than the interests of the hard-working and tax-paying public. Despite strong resistance from conservative parties, the SP's blame-generation attempts secured it an advantage in the policy struggle about corporate taxation in Switzerland.

Policy Struggle

As a "small state in world markets" (Katzenstein, 1985), Switzerland is traditionally anxious to create an adequate business environment for domestic and foreign companies. While corporate taxation is seen as an important means of creating an adequate business environment, it is also an important source of revenue for the government. This makes corporate taxation a contested policy instrument every time changing economic and political circumstances, such as updated Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) standards, or a new Europen Union law, force Switzerland to adapt its corporate tax regime.

In the 1990s, Switzerland adopted a major CTR that sought to improve tax conditions for holding companies. This reform was already considered insufficient at the time of its adoption. Another reform was needed to abolish Switzerland's system of double taxation of dividends. Therefore, another reform process was launched at the turn of the millennium. During the Vernehmlassung, the consultative process during which political actors and stakeholders are able to comment on the planned CTR, the reform received broad support from conservative parties and the economic sector (Sager et al., 2017).[18] The SP, the CVP, and the Green Party criticized the reform, stating that it would provoke 'random tax giveaways' to corporations and that it was not designed in a revenue-neutral way.[19] They feared that tax losses due to the CTR would force the government to reduce social welfare expenditures. Conservative parties retorted that these concerns were unfounded since the Federal Council, Switzerland's collective executive government consisting of seven councilors, estimated that tax losses would only amount to 365–455 million Swiss Francs annually. When the CTR was adopted in 2007, the SP initiated a facultative referendum to give voters the last word about its adoption.[20] In 2008, voters accepted the CTR by a very slight margin of 50.5 percent.

Three years later, in March 2011, when several large companies declared tax-free dividends on the basis of the CTR, it became clear

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that tax losses were much larger than predicted by the Federal Council during the consultative process and the referendum campaign. The main reason for this was that the tax exemptions included in the CTR had been made retroactive, that is, companies could not only use them on commercial activities from 2008 on, but also on activities going back to 1997.[21]

Blame Game Interactions

Since the so-called retroactivity clause had not been an issue of debate during the consultative process and the referendum campaign, the SP took up the issue. It accused the Federal Council of having violated the principle of voting liberty, which states that the opinion-formation process leading to a vote must be based on correct and unbiased information provided by the executive.[22] The SP feared tax losses of more than 10 billion Swiss Francs over the next ten to fifteen years. The finance department, headed by the councilor Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf, admitted that revenue losses would be higher than estimated back in 2007/2008. Despite the higher than expected tax losses, the councilor rejected calls to amend the CTR. She justified her stance by highlighting the importance of legal certainty for companies: "It is particularly important that our legal system remains predictable. Confidence in the reliability of our legislation is an important [international] asset." Moreover, she carefully alluded to parliament's responsibility to discuss the reform proposals during the consultative procedure.[23] Unsatisfied with this response, the SP maintained blame pressure in the following weeks and requested an extraordinary session of the National Council, the lower house of the Swiss parliament.[24]

During this session,[25] held on April 12, 2011, the SP repeated its criticism and formulated a concrete demand: The Federal Council should either repeat the referendum or amend the CTR to compensate for the unexpected tax losses. As one SP politician put it, "[t]here has been a serious failure on the part of the Federal Council and the administration. The people voted on the wrong basis. That is unacceptable!"[26] The Green Party blamed the Federal Council and the finance department for not properly informing the electorate and for valuing economic interests over democratic principles. The SVP and the FDP supported the CTR and attacked the opponent camp for inflating expected tax losses and for its 'communist agenda': "Above all,

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however, the SP is not at all interested in this corporate tax reform: the SP is interested in implementing its party program. As we all know, it wants to overcome capitalism."[27] The supporting camp further argued that the CTR addressed important tax issues and was decisive for Switzerland's economic prosperity, stressed the importance of legal certainty, and largely avoided a discussion about voting liberty. The CVP and the BDP adopted a middle position. They criticized the executive for the controversy but also stressed the importance of legal certainty. The councilor was apt to confront the controversy in a problem-oriented way. She admitted that the voting guide had been incomplete and explained why, in her view, the referendum should not be repeated: "Democracy is only possible within the framework of the rule of law. I do not want democracy to be played off against the rule of law; it is a balancing of interests." However, she suggested that it was still possible to make amendments to the CTR in order to limit further tax losses: "I have shown you the possibilities of doing something in commercial law or tax law, if you want to."[28] The BDP, Widmer-Schlumpf's party, initially indicated that it would support amendments to the CTR. However, overall, the SVP, the FDP, the CVP, and the BDP, which together constituted a comfortable parliamentary majority, rejected the demands of the SP and the Green Party.

In the following weeks, the SP, and to a lesser degree the Green Party, pulled out all the stops to reach their policy demands. They requested a ruling from the Federal Court over whether to repeat the referendum, asked for a parliamentary inquiry, and tried to win a majority in support of making amendments to the CTR in both chambers of parliament. However, all these attempts were blocked. The Federal Court criticized the Federal Council but opted against a repetition of the referendum. The conservative majority in both chambers and in the audit committee, where the decision about an inquiry is made, blocked all of the opponent camp's motions and requests.

While the blame game about the CTR controversy was effectively over, the SP already began to raise the stakes for the next policy struggle. Over the course of several years, the Federal Council had been preparing the next CTR that would comply with OECD standards. The OECD requested that Switzerland abolish tax privileges for foreign corporations. In order to avoid alienating the latter, the Federal Council intended to combine those reforms with tax privileges elsewhere. The SP linked these reform plans with the CTR controversy and

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gave the conservative majority a choice of either agreeing to compensation measures up front or facing another referendum on the new reform.[29] Initially, this strategy seemed to pay off. In order to limit tax losses, the Council of States, the smaller chamber of Switzerland's federal parliament, wanted to draft a more 'defensive' reform, which it expected would have a higher likelihood of being accepted by the electorate in case the SP opted for a referendum.[30] However, the conservative majority did not buckle under the pressure from the SP and finally rejected the adoption of compensation measures in March 2013.

Consequences of the Blame Game

While resignations in response to the controversy had never been an issue of debate, the policy consequences resulting from the blame game about the CTR controversy are remarkable. During the controversy, the conservative majority blocked all attempts by the SP to limit tax losses through amendments. However, there were important indirect consequences. The SP challenged the new reform through a referendum in February 2017 and won it by a large margin: 59.1 percent of voters rejected the new reform. With a 45.2 percent turnout, this referendum's turnout was significantly higher than the one about the CTR (37.7 percent). During the referendum campaign, the SP made frequent reference to the CTR, while conservative parties spoke exclusively of a 'tax reform' instead of a corporate tax reform in order to decouple the new reform from the CTR.[31]

Context-Sensitive Analysis of Blame Game Interactions

A context-sensitive analysis shows that opponents had a very hard time achieving immediate policy change due to moderate public feedback and their inability to pull middle parties onto their side. However, high direct government involvement in the controversy allowed opponents to anchor the impression that the Federal Council had 'played foul' with regard to the CTR into public memory and that its promises, and that of conservative parties, about negligible tax losses due to the new reforms, could not be trusted. As the clear success of the referendum suggests, blame generation in the wake of the CTR controversy benefited opponents in the next round of the policy struggle about corporate taxation in Switzerland.

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Issue Characteristics

The controversy about the CTR attracted consistent and problem-centered coverage from quality outlets, and less, although also more biting, coverage from tabloids. The complex and technical nature of this controversy limited public feedback. All media outlets spent considerable energy explaining the complex issues at the root of the tax losses to the public. Corporate taxation is traditionally a nonsalient rather obscure policy area that does not arouse public emotions. The weak interest in the CTR can also be deduced from the very low turnout to the first referendum in 2008. With only a 37.7 percent voter participation, the referendum had the second-lowest turnout of the twenty-seven referendums held during the 48th legislative period from 2007 to 2011. Exit polls further show that voters struggled with the obscurity of the CTR.[32]

Nevertheless, the significant tax losses associated with the controversy are likely to have struck a chord with the public. Opponents used the losses to activate considerations of self-interest. They argued that the Federal Council had betrayed the people ('a gigantic scam') by not properly informing them about the implications of the CTR and that the support camp valued company interests higher than the interests of the hard-working and tax-paying public.[33] These claims resonated widely in the media, which frequently referred to the CTR controversy as a 'billion franc debacle' or a 'fudge reform'. The Federal Council, in response, took the CTR controversy seriously. It admitted that mistakes had been made, and it later expressed its willingness to explore opportunities for reducing tax losses. At the same time, however, the Federal Council and the support camp attempted to dispel opponents' claims of personal relevance. They argued that tax losses would be much smaller than those alleged by opponents and that the whole public would benefit from the CTR through rising corporate tax income and the creation of new jobs.

Institutional Factors

Switzerland's political interaction structure played an important role in blame game interactions. Parties' attempts to position themselves in relation to the controversy resulted in three camps: an opponent camp, consisting of the SP and the Green Party, which wanted the referendum repeated or the CTR amended; a support camp, consisting of the SVP and the FDP, which opposed both of these demands; and a middle

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camp, consisting of the CVP and the BDP, which opposed a repetition of the referendum but, at least initially, was not wholly against amendments to the CTR. This constellation of viewpoints made opponents concentrate their attacks and claims on other parties. In order to get its motions through parliament, they had to draw the middle camp to their side. They did so by discrediting the support camp for its uncompromising stance and reminded it of the SVP's often used 'take the people seriously' slogan: "Those who take the people seriously will ensure a repetition of the referendum and agree with our motion today. It is especially the SVP's duty to do so. What is its slogan again? 'The people, the people, the people! The people are always right.'"[34] While there were also attacks on the Federal Council, they were more moderate and less aggressive. Opponents' strong focus on the support and middle camps allowed the Federal Council to remain largely out of blame game interactions and to adopt a problem-centered stance toward the controversy. Like in the CARLOS case, political incumbents aligned with the position of the middle camp, opposing the repetition of the referendum but expressing their willingness to explore possibilities of amending the CTR.

The collegiality principle was another factor that allowed the Federal Council to remain in the background and to only adopt a reduced blame-management approach. During the blame game, opponents only addressed their criticism to the Federal Council as a whole. Widmer-Schlumpf, the councilor of the finance department, was never personally attacked. Another factor that could have benefited the councilor was the fact that the CTR had been drafted before her time in office. In the media, the SP temporarily referred to the controversy as the 'Merz-lie', linking the controversy to Hans-Rudolf Merz, Widmer-Schlumpf's predecessor. It cannot be assessed whether the SP would have ignored the collegiality principle and openly attacked Merz had he still been in office.

While there were no personalized attacks on the councilor, the Federal Council could not completely steer clear of criticism for its role during the policy reform process. This was due to its clearly discernible direct involvement in the policy controversy. The Federal Council authorizes the voting guide and is responsible for the estimates and projections made by the federal administration. Direct government involvement allowed opponents to accuse the Federal Council of foul play because it allegedly violated the principle of voting liberty. The

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Federal Council saw its blame deflection possibilities constrained. Blaming the federal administration for an issue for which the political responsibility clearly lay with the Federal Council would have appeared incredible. However, since there were no hefty or personalized attacks, this constraint did not overly affect the Federal Council (see Table 9 for a schematic assessment of the theoretical expectations).

5.3 The National Exposition Controversy (EXPO)

The distant-nonsalient national exposition (EXPO) controversy is about a contested Swiss national exposition held in 2002. Until its delayed opening, the Federal Council repeatedly requested additional financing from the parliament in order to avoid the cancellation of the exposition. Despite receiving criticism on the occasion of these requests, the Federal Council received the funds and followed through with the exposition.[35]

Policy Struggle

In the 1990s, a political discussion began about holding a new national exposition in Switzerland. After several cantons and cities submitted their applications to host it, the Federal Council decided to hold the exposition (hereafter Expo.02) in the region of the three lakes of Neuchâtel, Biel, and Murten in 2001.[36] After deciding on the location, the Federal Council requested a detailed feasibility study from the Verein Landesausstellung (hereafter Verein), an association of regional actors responsible for the planning, construction, and operation of Expo.02. This feasibility study concluded that it was possible to hold Expo.02 in the three-lakes region and that the financial contribution required from the federal state would amount to 170 million Swiss Francs.[37]

When approving the feasibility study at the end of 1996, the Federal Council reduced the federal contribution to 130 million Swiss Francs. This reduced federal contribution can be explained by the dilemma the Federal Council found itself in when deciding about Expo.02. On the one hand, there was a broad public and political majority that wanted the Federal Council to endorse Expo.02. On the other hand, the Federal Council faced a tight federal budget, general skepticism toward huge statist interventions, and a public that, for the most part, opposed a

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Table 9 *Assessment of theoretical expectations in the TAX case*

	Explanatory factor(s)	Expectation	Assessment
Opponents	Political interaction structure (fragmented/ consolidated opposition)	E1: Fragmented opponents, consisting of more than one party, are less successful in crafting a cohesive blame-generating strategy during the blame game than consolidated opponents.	Confirmed. Opponents do not secure a majority for their policy demands since the middle camp opposes them.
	Institutionalized accountability structures (conventions of resignation)	E3: Opponents facing extensive conventions of resignation concentrate their blaming more on the incumbent politician than opponents facing restrictive conventions, who can only blame administrative actors.	Partly confirmed. The collegiality principle, together with the fact that the reform had been adopted under the incumbent's predecessor, restrains opponents from blaming the councilor.
	Institutional policy characteristics (direct government involvement)	E5: Opponents are better able to blame a controversy on incumbents if the latter are directly involved than when the controversy is far removed from incumbents.	Confirmed. Direct government involvement allows opponents to criticize the Federal Council.
	Proximate-nonsalient controversy	E9: Opponents invest considerably in blame generation on the occasion of a proximate-nonsalient controversy and try to activate considerations of self-interest among the public.	Confirmed. Opponents invest considerably in blame generation and seek to activate considerations of self-interest.

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Incumbents	Political interaction structure (loyal/critical governing majority)	E2: Incumbents that receive support from their party(ies) are more successful in reframing a controversy than incumbents that confront criticism from their own ranks.	Not testable. As a consensus body, the Federal Council attempts to avoid any party affiliations during the blame game. However, the Federal Council aligns with the middle camp.
	Institutionalized accountability structures (conventions of resignation)	E4: Incumbent politicians that must comply with extensive conventions of resignation have greater difficulty defending themselves during a blame game than politicians that must comply with restricted conventions.	Partly confirmed. Principle of collective responsibility spares councilor from personalized attacks. The fact that the reform was adopted under the incumbent's predecessor could have also played a role.
	Institutional policy characteristics (direct government involvement)	E6: Incumbents are better able to deflect blame for a controversy onto administrative actors if they are not directly involved in the controversy rather than if they are involved.	Not testable. Direct government involvement should have rendered deflection implausible but is not necessary due to lack of personalized attacks.
	Proximate-nonsalient controversy	E10: Incumbents take a proximate-nonsalient controversy seriously and address it by mainly adopting reframing strategies and forms of activism.	Confirmed. Incumbent takes the controversy seriously, engages in reframing and signals its willingness for activism (although this is blocked by the support camp).

large federal contribution.[38] Given Switzerland's far-reaching direct democratic rights, which can effectively be used as veto-instruments, it became plausible for the Federal Council to find a middle ground by decreasing the expected federal contribution to 130 million Swiss Francs. When justifying this amount, the Federal Council publicly announced that there would be no further contributions.[39]

In the summer of 1999, it became clear that Expo.02 could not be carried out with the initial federal contribution of 130 million Swiss Francs. Until its opening in May 2002, Expo.02 had to be saved from the brink of failure several times. The parliament rubber-stamped a total of five additional financing requests from the Federal Council. In the end, the total federal contribution amounted to 928 million Swiss Francs. The main reasons for the cost increases were management problems at the Verein and an overestimation of the potential private sponsorship. Within the Verein, there were many local actors who did not dispose of sufficient experience to plan, organize, and implement such a complex project. Moreover, the Federal Council never questioned the statements made by the Verein about the private sponsorship potential of the exposition, even though the amount of private contributions would ultimately determine the financing deficit the Federal Council would have to cover.[40]

Blame Game Interactions

From August 1999 on, the media and politicians from the four major parties in the National Council, the right-conservative SVP, the FDP, the CVP, and the SP, began to criticize the Federal Council's passivity in regard to the management problems at the Verein. They urged the Federal Council to assume political responsibility for Expo.02, to install new management at the Verein, and to postpone the exposition.[41] The Federal Council took these requests seriously.[42] It postponed the exposition to 2002 and implemented a new management structure. In order to ensure its smooth preparation, it asked the parliament for an additional loan of 250 million Swiss Francs. To justify this request, the Federal Council made hard stipulations to the Verein. It tied additional financing to a cost moratorium until the parliament would make a decision about the loan and forced the Verein to adopt several cost-saving measures. The Federal Council attacked the Verein for its poor management but framed Expo.02 as an important project whose termination would be an embarrassment

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to Switzerland. The councilor heading the economic department and responsible for overseeing Expo.02, Pascal Couchepin, took a tough stance. He called the additional loan a 'limited debacle' and framed the management problems at the Verein as a 'salutary crisis', which finally allowed the Federal Council to intervene and to sort out the problems with Expo.02. He claimed that "before the debacle, we couldn't intervene; we only had the chance to trust the people [at the Verein]. Unfortunately, in June we had to find out that the matter was not progressing. And then I honestly wished for a crisis, I wished for a crisis to get down to the root of the trouble."[43]

While these steps allowed the Federal Council to mute criticism for some time, it quickly turned out that the additional 250 million Swiss Francs was not enough. As mentioned earlier, the Federal Council had to ask parliament for additional money at irregular intervals until the opening of Expo.02. Each time, the Federal Council reassured the parliament that the respective contribution was needed due to unexpected developments, that it would be the last one, and that it was vital in order to save a great project from the brink of failure. These financing approvals were accompanied by an increasingly outraged parliament. The Federal Council was explicitly accused of presenting the parliament with an overmodest financing request while already covertly preparing the next one. For example, a CVP politician claimed that for "me it is also clear: Whoever said A must also say B – I only hope that we don't have to go through the whole alphabet!"[44] The SVP, in particular, the (much smaller) Green Party, and later also the CVP, withheld their approval for new federal contributions. However, the other major parties grudgingly gave their approval, knowing well that the latter was needed to prevent the grounding of Expo.02 shortly before its opening.[45] When Expo.02 finally opened its doors in May 2002 and developed into a huge success, criticism about the significant extra costs quickly dissipated.

Consequences of the Blame Game

The blame game surrounding the EXPO controversy did not produce significant consequences. Personnel changes only occurred at the level of the Verein. Despite a bold intervention in response to multi-partisan pressure early on in the blame game, the Federal Council went ahead

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with Expo.02 by securing parliamentary approval for five additional financing requests.

Context-Sensitive Analysis of Blame Game Interactions

The relative ease with which the Federal Council secured parliamentary approval is quite surprising. Despite a clear and openly voiced promise to keep public expenditure for Expo.02 at a very low level, by its opening, the Federal Council had been granted contributions totaling more than seven times the initial amount requested. Weak public feedback to the cost increases, fragmentation among parties, the collegiality principle, and low direct government involvement all worked to create a situation that allowed the Federal Council to secure the financing of the project.

Issue Characteristics

The first factor that benefited the Federal Council was weak public feedback to the cost increases. While there was consistent coverage of Expo.02, especially in quality outlets, most of this coverage concentrated on artistic and organizational aspects. The tone of coverage was always very problem-centered. Throughout the blame game, the media exhibited a positive stance toward the project, despite recurrent cost overruns. Even the economic-liberal *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, from which a more skeptical stance toward an over expensive public project could well have been expected, described Expo.02 in a sympathetic and not too critical way.[46] Cultural policy is generally a low-salience policy area that usually only reaches a minority of the public. In Switzerland, cultural policy is especially uncontested since it is widely accepted as an instrument for creating a common national identity across language barriers and cultural differences (Bijl-Schwab, 2017). Expo.02 was no exception in this regard. Polls show that the public generally viewed the exposition favorably, while not attaching too much importance to it either.[47] Moreover, the additional financing requested by the Federal Council appeared comparatively minor as it was done in a step-wise manner (see Hinterleitner, 2019 on this 'salami tactics' aspect). Therefore, opponents could neither emotionalize the controversy nor activate considerations of self-interest. They solely urged the Federal Council to assume responsibility as the political patron of the exposition. Even during the acute crisis phase, the parties that had begun

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opposing the project made problem-based claims. While they criticized the Federal Council for wasting public money, this criticism remained very general and cynical. When reacting to these allegations, the Federal Council adopted a self-confident stance and primarily applied reframing and blame-deflection strategies. The councilor, Couchepin, could speak of a 'salutary crisis' and act as a strongman in relation to the Verein; a stance he could have hardly adopted in the face of stronger public feedback.

Institutional Factors

There are two different constellations of actors in the course of the Expo.02 blame game. At first, all major parties urged the Federal Council to assume political responsibility. However, during the later phase of the blame game, the major parties divided into two camps: one that was willing to embrace the possibility of grounding Expo.02 and another camp that was not willing to take responsibility for a last-minute cancellation. This division detracted blame from the Federal Council to some degree as the parties in both camps began to direct their attention toward each other. The support camp blamed the opponent camp for its uncompromising and irresponsible stance, while the opponent camp accused the support camp of being blackmailed by the Federal Council.[48]

Another factor that benefited the Federal Council, and Councilor Couchepin in particular, was the collegiality principle. While Couchepin was occasionally addressed personally during parliamentary debates, the opponent camp did not single him out in their attacks. Blame was predominantly directed at the Federal Council as an institution. Finally, the Federal Council and Councilor Couchepin benefited from low direct involvement in the organization of Expo.02. Cultural policy in Switzerland is traditionally very decentralized and is primarily the task of cantons and communes (Bijl-Schwab, 2017). During the blame game surrounding Expo.02, the Verein was the actor that attracted most of the media attention and criticism from political parties. Its distance from the Verein, and the latter's autonomy in the organization of the exposition, allowed the Federal Council to credibly deflect responsibility for management problems and additional financing requests. By adopting the narrative of the salutary crisis and expressing its satisfaction over the opportunity to finally intervene at the Verein, the Federal Council indirectly suggested that beforehand its

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hands had been tied. Later on, when arguing that a particular financing request should suffice to save the project, the Federal Council frequently added that it had to trust the information provided by the Verein. Overall, the Verein was an ideal scapegoat that allowed the Federal Council to maintain the pretense that it was not originally responsible for the cost increases (see Table 10 for a schematic assessment of the theoretical expectations).

5.4 The Swiss Blame Game Style

In this section, I compare the CARLOS, TAX, and EXPO cases and subsequently examine a test case to derive robust and generalizable insights into the Swiss blame game style.

Political Interaction Structure

Swiss blame games exhibit a very peculiar basic form. With the political executive consisting of seven individual councilors, Switzerland has a government that represents all major parties. Therefore, the Federal Council does not face a classic opposition that would act as its natural opponent during a blame game. Instead, the cases reveal that usually only a fraction of the parties initially takes umbrage at a controversy and constitutes itself as the opponent during the ensuing blame game. Another fraction of the parties acts as the support camp that opposes the framing of the controversy and the demands of opponents. A third fraction serves as the middle camp, which takes a more moderate position vis à vis the controversy and the framing and demands coming from the other two camps. Like during routine politics (Vatter, 2016, p. 282), the camps and alliances that develop during a blame game are policy-specific. To be sure, some parties have their natural partners with regard to a particular controversy type and thus can start a blame game from the premise of a certain alliance pattern, but in the cases covered, there was still a lot of variation in camps and alliances.

The peculiar political interaction structure accounts for important blame game interactions. Due to the broad political responsiveness that the collective nature of the executive demands, it usually avoids openly allying with either supporters or opponents without having the support of the middle camp. Therefore, opponents can achieve their policy goals during a blame game by pulling the middle camp to their side.

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Table 10 *Assessment of theoretical expectations in the EXPO case*

	Explanatory factor(s)	Expectation	Assessment
Opponents	Political interaction structure (fragmented/ consolidated opposition)	E1: Fragmented opponents, consisting of more than one party, are less successful in crafting a cohesive blame-generating strategy during the blame game than consolidated opponents.	Confirmed. Opponents do not secure a majority for their policy demands.
	Institutionalized accountability structures (conventions of resignation)	E3: Opponents facing extensive conventions of resignation concentrate their blaming more on the incumbent politician than opponents facing restrictive conventions, who can only blame administrative actors.	Confirmed. The collegiality principle protects the councilor from personalized attacks.
	Institutional policy characteristics (direct government involvement)	E5: Opponents are better able to blame a controversy on incumbents if the latter are directly involved than when the controversy is far removed from incumbents.	Confirmed. During the blame game, the Verein takes center stage.
	Distant-nonsalient controversy	E11: Opponents do not invest much in blame generation on the occasion of a distant-nonsalient controversy.	Confirmed. Opponents do not invest much in blame generation.

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Table 10 (*cont.*)

	Explanatory factor(s)	Expectation	Assessment
Incumbents	Political interaction structure (loyal/critical governing majority)	E2: Incumbents that receive support from their party(ies) are more successful in reframing a controversy than incumbents that confront criticism from their own ranks.	Not testable. As a consensus body, the Federal Council tries to avoid any party affiliations during the blame game. However, the Federal Council receives cover from the support camp for its decision to go ahead with Expo.02.
	Institutionalized accountability structures (conventions of resignation)	E4: Incumbent politicians that must comply with extensive conventions of resignation have greater difficulty defending themselves during a blame game than politicians that must comply with restricted conventions.	Confirmed. The councilor benefits from the collegiality principle.
	Institutional policy characteristics (direct government involvement)	E6: Incumbents are better able to deflect blame for a controversy onto administrative actors if they are not directly involved in the controversy rather than if they are involved.	Confirmed. Low government involvement facilitates blame deflection.
	Distant-nonsalient controversy	E12: Incumbents do not take a distant-nonsalient controversy very seriously and only scarcely engage in blame management.	Partly confirmed. The political incumbent takes multiparty pressure seriously, but later, only scarcely engages in blame management.

This explains why opponents frequently concentrate their blaming efforts on the support camp. By discrediting the position of the support camp, they increase the likelihood that the middle camp will ally with them and not with the support camp. True to the motto, 'when two people quarrel, a third rejoices', political incumbents benefit from this peculiar type of party-centered blaming. The basic form of Swiss blame games puts political incumbents in a quite comfortable position since a significant share of the blame pressure generated by opponents is directed at the support or middle camp and not primarily at them. Moreover, because there are three camps during a blame game, there is a higher likelihood that a moderate request for policy change will be made by one of the parties. Political incumbents can act on moderate requests and thereby express their willingness to cooperate in addressing the controversy, while simultaneously rejecting more far-reaching demands.

Institutionalized Accountability Structures

The Swiss-specific collegiality principle presents another institutional factor that accounts for the comparatively low number of attacks directed at political incumbents. The collegiality principle implies that councilors are collectively responsible for controversies that concern one of the seven federal departments. Moreover, since the parliament cannot dismiss individual councilors from office outside of regular elections (Vatter, 2016, p. 236), it is highly unlikely that councilors will resign during a blame game. Almost absent conventions of resignation make councilors an unattractive target for opponents. It is possible for parties to criticize individual councilors due to their departmental responsibility, but as the TAX and EXPO cases suggest, most criticism is directed at the executive as an institution. Individual councilors are not singled out. The absence of personalized attacks allows incumbents to adopt a problem-centered stance and, for the most part, remain out of blame game interactions. However, the CARLOS case shows that there is a slightly different dynamic at the cantonal level, where councilors are directly elected by the public. This changes opponents' incentive structure since damaging the reputation of a councilor during a blame game can decrease his or her prospect for reelection. In the case of personalized attacks from opponents, incumbents may be forced to set aside their impartiality and more intensively engage in blame management.

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Institutional Policy Characteristics

Direct government involvement in a policy controversy is an important mediating factor in the Swiss political system. On the one hand, the degree of direct government involvement influences the ease with which opponents can establish a connection between incumbents and a policy controversy and whether they can credibly blame incumbents for it. On the other hand, the degree of government involvement influences whether political incumbents can add blame deflection to their strategy mix. While high direct involvement, like in the TAX and CARLOS cases, renders blame deflection incredible, low direct government involvement, like in the EXPO case, increases the likelihood that political incumbents can keep their distance from a controversy by deflecting blame onto the administrative level.

Test Case: March on Bern Security Controversy (MOB)

In this section, I test the findings against a fourth case to refine our understanding of Swiss blame games. The proximate-salient March on Bern security controversy (MOB) is about uncontained riots in the city of Bern in the run-up to the 2007 federal elections, which triggered a blame game in the city parliament. As a result, conservative parties urged the executive to abandon Bern's laissez-faire security policy.

Policy Struggle

On October 6, 2007, two weeks before the federal elections, the right-conservative SVP organized a grandiose preelection demonstration in the city of Bern. The left-green camp interpreted the demonstration as conservative provocation during a very heated and controversial electoral campaign. By calling it the 'March on Bern', the left-green camp likened the SVP demonstration to Mussolini's march on Rome in 1922. The municipal council (the executive government of the city of Bern) subsequently forbid an independent committee to organize a simultaneous counterdemonstration for security reasons. When the committee continued with the demonstration despite the prohibition, the municipal council, and with it the left-green camp, which constituted a majority in the city council (the parliament), tolerated this stance as part of the de-escalation strategy generally applied by the city of Bern police forces. The de-escalation strategy was prescribed to avoid clashes with demonstrators in the

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capital whenever possible. On the demonstration day, the counterdemonstration was taken over by the left-extremist group, 'Black Block', which eventually clashed with the SVP demonstration. The police was unable to prevent the clash nor contain the subsequent riots, which frightened the population of Switzerland's capital city, resulted in more than twenty injured, and caused widespread property damage. The riots attracted national and international media interest.[49] After the riots, it quickly became clear that the police had underestimated the threat of a clash and had thus been ill-prepared to manage the situation. In the opinion of the conservative parties, the riots were a consequence of a laissez-faire security policy that was unable to protect the public from extremists. Consequently, they claimed that an adequate response could only consist of much tougher demonstration regulations and the termination of Bern's de-escalation strategy.[50]

Blame Game Interactions

To emphasize their points of view in the ensuing debate in the city council on October 18, the SVP and the FDP largely blamed the left-green camp for having supported the counterdemonstration instead of clearly distancing themselves from left extremists: "Of all people, Daniele Jenni and his comrades-in-arms, who otherwise stand up at every opportunity for freedom of opinion and assembly and for the use of public space, are responsible for these riots."[51] They also criticized the executive for underestimating the concrete threat and for riding out the issue by commissioning a report. However, criticism toward the executive was much less pronounced than toward left-green parliamentarians and often only voiced indirectly. Opponents also refrained from personally attacking the security councilor. The only personalized attacks that occurred in this blame game were those directed toward individual parliamentarians from the left-green camp who had actively supported the counterdemonstration.[52]

The left-green camp squarely opposed the policy requests proposed by the conservative camp. Although self-critical to some degree, it mainly blamed the conservative camp for its provocation and claimed that it was co-responsible for the riots: "The politics of the SVP … laid the bad ground for the riots."[53] While carefully expressing regret about the executive government's decision not to authorize both demonstrations, the left-green camp's stance toward the executive was openly supportive. It endorsed the executive's move to thoroughly investigate the controversy

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before drawing conclusions and asked it to fend off hasty calls from conservatives to tighten demonstration regulations. The middle camp, consisting mainly of Cristian-democratic parties, assigned blame to both the conservative and the left-green camp, while also stressing the need for thorough investigations. However, there were also voices that asked for a harder hand from the executive.[54]

The municipal council was eager to express its regret over the riots, readily assumed political responsibility, and signaled its willingness to learn from its mistakes. It also justified its nonintervention into police matters and commissioned an inquiry report into the events. Moreover, it expressed the possibility for smaller changes to demonstration regulations. Overall, the executive was eager to take a neutral position, labeling itself as explicitly 'above party politics'.[55] After the parliamentary debate, the controversy flared up again briefly with the December 2007 publication of the report commissioned by the municipal council. It concluded that the passive role of the executive government created a leadership vacuum. This conclusion was greeted by the latter as a welcome learning opportunity.[56]

Consequences of the Blame Game

The blame game produced a special kind of personal consequence. Although opponents never requested the security councilor's resignation during the blame game, his own party, the FDP, did not nominate him again for the upcoming elections in January 2008. During and after the blame game, the conservative camp made several attempts to tighten existing demonstration regulations. However, the left-green parliamentary majority blocked all attempts to do so, including those that the municipal council had expressed its approval for.

Test of Preliminary Findings and Summary

In the following, I assess whether the political interaction structure, institutionalized accountability structures, and institutional policy characteristics influenced this blame game in ways congruent with the previous findings.

Political Interaction Structure

The blame game surrounding the MOB controversy has a basic form that is very similar to the three previously analyzed blame games. From

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the beginning, conservative parties constituted themselves as a controversy-specific opposition that requested policy change from the executive and the parliamentary majority. The left-green camp firmly opposed any policy change, and the middle camp took a more moderate stance. Overall, there were three camps among which the majority of blame game interactions occurred. The statements by parliamentarians during the blame game confirm that the majority of blame attacks focused on parties, not the executive. There is also clear evidence that the latter benefited from the blaming orientation of parties. Among the cacophony of interpretations of the controversy and suggestions for remedial action proposed by parties, the executive found explicit support for its chosen strategy. Meanwhile, it played for time and awaited the results of the commissioned report before reacting to the conservative camp's policy requests.

Institutionalized Accountability Structures

As in the TAX and EXPO cases, we can discern the strong influence of the collegiality principle. While the security councilor received substantial negative press, parliamentarians did not single him out during the blame game. Criticism was overwhelmingly directed at the executive as a whole. This allowed the councilor to adopt a rather neutral and problem-oriented stance during the blame game. The security councilor did not engage in much blame management. Nevertheless, the almost complete absence of personalized attacks on the security councilor may also have had to do with his party affiliation. Had the councilor, as in the CARLOS case, belonged to the left-green camp, more personalized attacks could have occurred. Overall, we can conclude that the collegiality principle is not an impermeable blame shield under all circumstances. At the cantonal level, or in the case of councilors' specific party affiliations, individualized criticism may occur.

Institutional Policy Characteristics

Another factor that benefited the executive was its low direct involvement in police matters. During the blame game, the executive government preferred to keep its distance from the controversy and repeatedly emphasized the important and widely accepted guiding principle of its nonintervention in operational matters. Although this strategy was criticized in the December report, it was accepted by large parts of

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parliament during the blame game and thus worked to avoid an overly strong association between the security councilor and the controversy.

Summary

The Swiss political system features blame games characterized by interparty conflict that largely spares the politically responsible executive from participating in blame game interactions. This is very different from the more government-opposition centered blame games that occur in parliamentary systems. Opponents cannot usually force incumbents to resign during a blame game. They can only attempt to reach their policy goals. To do so, they concentrate on forging a 'pressure majority' in parliament. A pressure majority, consisting of several parties that acknowledge the need for policy change in response to a controversy, brings opponents closer to their policy goals. Due to its collective and nonpartisan nature, the executive government is eager to express its cooperation with as many parties as possible and is thus unlikely to completely ignore the policy requests of a significant share of the party landscape. A pressure majority, therefore, greatly increases the likelihood that the executive will act in the interest of opponents. Interparty conflict creates a comfortable situation for political incumbents. They are less likely to be put under fire, do not have to engage in intensive blame management, and can assume a rather neutral role during a blame game. Taken together, the Swiss political system is conducive to producing rather unaggressive, problem-centered blame game interactions. These findings align with research on how the Swiss political system processes policy problems (Campbell & Hall, 2017). With its culture of social partnership, Switzerland has developed institutions that enable decision-makers to quickly address problems while keeping political conflict within bounds.

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