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TRANSFORMATIONS IN GOVERNANCE

EUROPEAN BLAME GAMES

Where Does the Buck Stop?

Tim Heinkelmann-Wild, Berthold Rittberger,
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This book is the result of a long journey of joint research on European blame games. Our group of authors was brought together by the research project 'Public Responsibility Attribution in the EU', which was generously funded by the German Science Foundation (DFG). Over the past six years, we explored how the European public attributes responsibility for EU policy failures and the strategies governments employ to avoid blame directed at them. We found that the blame games about EU policy failures which unfolded in the public domain were more diverse than it was usually assumed in the literature. We learned that EU institutions were, at times, cast as scapegoats, member state governments as renegades, while also a lot of blame attributions were diffused among a generic and faceless target—'the EU', 'Brussels', or simply 'Europe'. To explain this diversity of blame attributions we analysed how the EU's institutional setting provides variable opportunities for political actors to attribute blame, thus critically shaping how European blame games unfold when policies fail. We also found, perhaps surprisingly, that the public vetting of blame attributions ensures that blame games tend to gravitate towards true responsibilities.

As much as politics in general is about blame attribution, political science is about credit attribution. Political scientists differ from politicians because blame attributions are rare (or at least they should be) and hence blame games are hardly ever played among political scientists. As political scientists, we do the opposite, we attribute credit and are thus playing credit games. Every time we refer to someone else's work, we attribute credit and, if things go well for us, we receive some credit to our own work in return. Our book on blame games in politics is thus, naturally, full of credit attributions to other political scientists and we want to start with attributing credit right away. This book would not have been possible without the invaluable support provided by Leander Avena, Juliane Glovania, Andrea Johanson, Louisa Klein-Bölting, Josef Lolacher, Helena Schwarzenbeck, Severin Süß, and Simon Zemp who helped us to identify and code hundreds of blame statements. Juliane Glovania, Louisa Klein-Bölting, and Josef Lolacher also became co-authors of individual chapters in this book. Marius Antonini, Paula Hofmann, Lessika Landao, and Doğa Sarı provided invaluable support in preparing the manuscript for publication.

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List of abbreviations

BUND	Friends of the Earth Germany
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CJEU	Court of Justice of the European Union
COP	Conference of the Parties
CSU	Christlich Soziale Union Deutschlands
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
ECB	European Central Bank
ECHA	European Chemicals Agency
EFSF	European Financial Stability Facility
EFSM	European Financial Stabilization Mechanism
EMA	European Medicines Agency
EP	European Parliament
ETS	Emissions Trading System
EU	European Union
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MS	member state
NDC	National Determined Contribution
NGO	non-governmental organization
OLP	Ordinary Legislative Procedure
OMT	Outright Monetary Transaction
TEC	Treaty Establishing the European Community
TEU	Treaty on European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
UE	Union européene
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WTO	World Trade Organization

1
Beyond blaming Europe

1.1 European blame games matter

Finger-pointing is ubiquitous in politics. Whenever there is dissatisfaction with a policy, political actors are quick to attribute blame to one another. In the European Union (EU), as in domestic politics, blame games abound, not least since the EU's politicization has increased public attention to the EU and its policies (Hutter et al. 2016; de Wilde and Zürn 2012) as well as to its policy failures (Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2020a; Schimmelfennig 2020). Examples include the EU's initially sluggish procurement of Covid-19 vaccines, the humanitarian disasters associated with the EU's asylum policy, or the socio-economic fallout created by the EU's austerity policy in the context of the euro crisis. As EU policies become politicized, policy failures become subject to heightened scrutiny in the public domain and European blame games ensue.

The multilevel structure of the EU implies that a multiplicity of actors is potentially involved in European blame games, including national governments, their domestic opposition, as well as the representatives of supranational or intergovernmental EU bodies. These actors have a wide variety of blame generation or blame avoidance strategies at their disposal (see, e.g. Weaver 1986). The long-lasting failure of the EU's external border control policy, which has left thousands of refugees dying in the Mediterranean, illustrates this point: Domestic opposition parties generated blame by highlighting that EU member-state governments were either doing too little to help refugees, or too much, thereby attracting additional refugees. National governments, in turn, sought to avoid blame by downplaying their own responsibility and by shifting blame onto the EU and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex, in particular (Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl 2020a). Representatives of the European Commission and Frontex alike typically responded by denying responsibility for themselves and shifted blame back onto member states and domestic authorities, claiming that Frontex was only following its mandate and that individual member states, such as Greece or Italy, were ultimately responsible for protecting their own borders.

As a result, no political actor clearly stands out as responsible for the loss of life in the Mediterranean, but blame diffuses in the public domain across the EU's member states and 'the EU' in general (Rittberger et al. 2017).

While it is worthwhile studying the blame generation and blame avoidance strategies that political actors employ in European blame games, political actors' use of different blame generation and avoidance strategies is not necessarily congruent with the blame games that become predominant in the European public. After all, the blame attributions that 'stick' with the European public ultimately define who is held accountable and hence who comes under pressure to accept responsibility for the policy failures that triggered the respective blame game. The blame game that sticks with the public affects which politicians or institutions may fall from public grace and thus impacts the public standing of individual politicians as well as political institutions.

The European blame games which stick with the public may also affect public support for both national governments and the EU because they affect whether governments can evade accountability for EU policy failures or not (Hobolt and Tilley 2014; Harteveld et al. 2018; Blok et al. 2022; Biten et al. 2023). The Commission's policy intervention in Hungary during the migration crisis is illustrative. Hungarian prime minister Victor Orbán, who blamed the Commission for overstepping its mandate by intervening in domestic affairs, successfully shored up domestic support for his 'war of independence' against Brussels, thereby undermining support for the Commission and the EU more generally (Schlipphak and Treib 2017). The consequences of blame games also became apparent in the case of the EU's controversial austerity policy during the financial crisis, which had provoked blame-shifting attempts from several member-state governments to the EU (Sommer 2020; Kriegmair et al. 2022). Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi even accused the EU of plotting against him by instrumentalizing austerity measures to oust him from office. Yet, he was unable to get out of the focus of the blame game and was ultimately forced to resign after tying the vote over austerity measures in the Italian parliament to a vote of confidence (Mackenzie 2014). The blame game that sticks thus defines who is publicly held accountable for EU policy failures and may face a loss in public support. Accordingly, the Commission has repeatedly complained that 'blaming "Brussels" for problems while taking credit for success at home, the lack of ownership of joint decisions and the habit of finger-pointing at others have already proved damaging' as 'citizens' trust in the EU has decreased' (European Commission 2017, 12).

In this book, we study the blame games that stick with the European public. We argue that blame games for EU policy failures tend to gravitate towards

true responsibilities. As blame attributions are exchanged by various actors in the public realm, they are vetted for their plausibility. Citizens learn about political actors' true responsibilities for EU policy failures and, in turn, political actors are constrained in the public blame attributions they can plausibly make. As a result of this public plausibility assessment of blame attributions, blame games gravitate towards those political actors that were *de jure* involved in enacting and *de facto* instrumental for the policy. Depending on which actors become the main target of public blame attributions, we distinguish three European blame games that can potentially stick in the European public: scapegoat games, renegade games, and diffusion games. In this introductory chapter, we first define these three European blame games: scapegoat games have supranational EU institutions as their main target; in renegade games, blame is directed at individual member-state governments; and in diffusion games, 'the EU' as a collective is the predominant blame target (Section 1.2). We then outline three conditions that affect which blame game sticks with the European public: the type of policy failure, the type of policy making, and the type of policy implementation (Section 1.3). Subsequently, we sketch our empirical strategy, which involves the analysis of ten cases of EU policy failures by studying blame attributions in their coverage in the European quality press (Section 1.4). We proceed by summarizing our contribution to the literature on European blame games (Section 1.5), before we conclude by providing a roadmap for the book (Section 1.6).

1.2 Three European blame games

Which blame games stick with the European public? We consider blame games as the exchange of public blame attributions, that is, public statements by political or societal actors that define a blame target to whom responsibility for a policy failure is attributed (Hood 2011, 6–7; Hinterleitner 2020, 5) and point to a broader narrative that justifies the public attribution of blame to this particular target (see Stone 1989; 2012; Jones et al. 2014). While it is often claimed that European blame games are mostly untargeted and thus diffuse (Hobolt and Tilley 2014), we identify three types of European blame games that can stick with the European public.[1]

Scapegoat games: When specific EU institutions, such as the Commission or the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), are blamed for a policy failure we speak of scapegoat games. In a scapegoat game, supranational EU institutions are typically characterized as 'unaccountable technocrats' whose 'undemocratic' nature sets them categorically apart from the 'democratically

elected' and 'accountable' governments that delegated competencies to them in the first place. By virtue of being depicted as an 'outsider', policy failures are construed as unavoidable: they are inherent in the scapegoat's character. The only way to prevent policy failures is to contain the scapegoat.[2] The EU's failure to purchase sufficient vaccine doses at an appropriate price at the onset of the Corona pandemic provides an example of a European scapegoat game. In the European public, the Commission was the main target of blame attributions for what was considered a failed vaccines procurement policy. This policy blunder was explained in the public domain by the Commission's relentless drive for self-aggrandizement, combined with its bureaucratic and 'sclerotic' approach (Wheeldon 2021).

Renegade games: Renegade games typically centre on specific member-state governments who are singled out as the main blame targets. As renegades, individual member-state governments are then characterized as violating shared community norms. In contrast to a scapegoat, a renegade's behaviour is considered as an aberration of a community member who has gone astray and must come to their senses, correct their mistake, and return to the community's fold. The failure to uphold basic tenets of the EU's migration and asylum acquis illustrates a European renegade game. Individual member states situated at the EU's external borders, such as Greece or Italy, were singled out in the public domain as responsible for the failure to ensure orderly asylum procedures. They were scolded in public for their misconduct and for acting against the community's legal acquis.

Diffusion games: In a diffusion game no specific political actor is singled out as the main blame target, but blame is typically diffused across a variety of different actors or attributed to rather amorphous collectives, such 'Brussels' or 'Europe'. Blame does not stick with a particular political actor—as in scapegoat or renegade games—but blame targets are characterized in an abstract, impersonal fashion. Not political actors, but faceless forces are considered as the main reason for a policy failure. European diffusion games give rise to fatalism as nothing can be done about the failure. The EU's sanctions against Russia's illegal invasion and subsequent annexation of Crimea in 2014 provide an example for a European diffusion game. While the sanctions imposed by the EU were widely criticized in the European public for being too limited and ineffective, the resulting blame game neither targeted specific member states nor EU institutions but 'the member states' as a collective and 'the EU' in general. In the absence of a specific actor who could clearly be identified as responsible, calls in the European public for more decisive actions by 'Europe' faded without consequences.

1.3 True responsibilities in European blame games

The main ambition in this book is to single out the conditions under which a particular blame game—a scapegoat game, renegade game, or diffusion game—becomes predominant in the European public. Owing to the complexity of EU policy making, it is often argued that clarity of responsibility is generally in short supply in the EU (Hobolt and Tilley 2014). We argue instead that the politicization of the EU has increased information about *true responsibilities*—that is, political actors' institutional (*de jure*) involvement as well as their causal (*de facto*) relevance—for EU policies in general and for EU policy failures in particular.[3] This process of information updating improves the clarity of responsibility in the EU. As citizens learn about true responsibilities for EU policy failures, political actors become constrained in the blame attributions they can plausibly make without jeopardizing their reputation among citizens. To the extent that EU policy failures are politicized, the blame games which unfold are not necessarily diffusion games, where responsibilities remain unclear, but may gravitate towards true responsibilities and thus result in either scapegoat or renegade games. Even in the EU, clarity of responsibility cannot be considered a constant but needs to be treated as a variable, which crucially affects the type of blame game we observe in instances of EU policy failures. We hold that three conditions shape both clarity of responsibility and true responsibilities and thus the blame games which unfold when EU policies fail: the policy failure condition, the policy-making condition, and the policy implementation condition.

Policy failure condition: Policy failures trigger European blame games because they imply that there is widespread public disappointment about a policy, which politicians seek to exploit and avoid. How do policy failures affect the type of blame game we can observe? Policy failures can occur at different stages of the policy cycle and the type of blame game that is likely to unfold depends on the type of policy failure that gives rise to the blame game. We distinguish between failures to act, failures to perform, and failures to comply. *Failures to act* imply that there is widespread agreement that an EU policy-making attempt has failed because one or several member-state governments decided to block it. Under such circumstances, responsibility for the policy failure is straightforward and we expect a renegade game to unfold, whereby the member state(s) blocking the policy in question will be the predominant blame target(s).[4] *Failures to comply* entail that one or more member states do not comply with an agreed EU policy. As in the case of failures to act, the responsibility for a failure to comply is typically

clear-cut, and one can expect a renegade game to ensue, which will target the non-complying member state(s). Finally, *failures to perform* imply that an agreed-upon policy is perceived to be inadequate for the problem it was meant to address. It is simply a 'bad' policy. In cases of failures to perform, we expect diffusion games to unfold when clarity of responsibility is lacking, that is, when policy making and policy implementation are complex. Yet, policy making and policy implementation are not always complex in the EU, for instance when supranational actors are chiefly responsible for policy decisions or when domestic actors are in charge of policy implementation.

Policy-making condition: The EU has a variety of policy-making procedures, which differ not only with regard to the responsibilities of various actors, but also with regard to the clarity of their respective responsibilities. We distinguish between three types of policy making. The clarity of responsibility is most pronounced when policy making is exercised by *supranational* EU institutions, for example, when the Commission wields policy-making prerogatives in external commercial relations or when the European Central Bank (ECB) sets interest rates in monetary policy. If policy making rests with a particular supranational actor, there is no lack of clarity of responsibility and blame games tend to target the politically responsible supranational actor, which likely leads to a scapegoat game. *Intergovernmental* policy making, by contrast, is dominated by member-state governments, acting through the Council or the European Council. The involvement of supranational actors, such as the Commission or the European Parliament (EP), or the possibilities for supranational adjudication through the CJEU are limited. With intergovernmental policy making, responsibilities may be less clear than with supranational policy making, but in the course of blame games, member states' true responsibilities for the respective policy failure are likely to become apparent. Therefore, we expect that renegade games will ensue and target those member-state governments that are deemed responsible for the failed policy. Finally, *shared policy making* in the EU is characterized by intergovernmental and supranational actors acting in concert, which dilutes the clarity of responsibility. The Community Method, which underpins the EU's main legislative policy-making procedure (the Ordinary Legislative Procedure), is a case in point: it involves the Commission, which holds the right of legislative initiative, governments in the Council, mostly deciding by qualified majority voting, and the EP as co-legislator. Moreover, the CJEU possesses adjudicatory competences. Since policy making is shared, responsibility for policy failures often remains unclear thus triggering diffusion games, at least when policy implementation is also shared among supranational and domestic actors.

Policy implementation condition: Whenever shared policy making undermines clarity of responsibility for EU policy failures, policy implementation becomes relevant for assigning blame. After all, implementing actors typically stand out from the set of political actors who have been involved in policy making. They are the ones who ultimately translate policy into action and are thus—compared to other policy makers—more visible in the public domain in instances of policy blunders. Thus, in cases of shared policy making, European blame games will gravitate towards those actors tasked with policy implementation. We distinguish three types of policy implementation: national, supranational, and shared. In cases of *national* implementation, domestic authorities are tasked with policy implementation. Their focality as implementers will direct public blame attributions towards them thereby triggering a renegade game. In cases of *supranational* implementation, EU actors such as the Commission or one of the numerous EU agencies are charged with implementation and are thus likely to attract the bulk of public blame attributions, thereby sparking a scapegoat game. In cases of *shared* implementation, when member states and EU actors are jointly responsible for policy implementation, public blame attributions will remain untargeted. As no policy maker and no policy implementer will become focal, a diffusion game will ensue.

Summarizing our theory, Figure 1.1 depicts the precise combinations of the above three conditions—policy failure, policy making, and policy implementation—that give rise to a particular blame game. In Chapters 3–5, we will elaborate upon each of these three conditions and their implications for the occurrence of particular blame games that stick with the European public. We will also probe these implications empirically with a set of controlled comparisons of policy failures.

1.4 Identifying European blame games

To probe our theory of European blame games, we study the blame games that are triggered by EU policy failures. In doing so, we consider policy failures not as 'inherent attributes of policy' (Bovens and 't Hart 2016, 654) but as social constructions (Kruck et al. 2018). What counts as a policy failure rests on explicit or implicit intersubjective agreement among social and political actors that a policy is deemed a disappointment. In this book, we study ten instances of EU policy failures, covering four different policy areas: foreign policy, environmental policy, fiscal policy, and migration policy. From each of these different policy areas, we selected similar cases that vary with
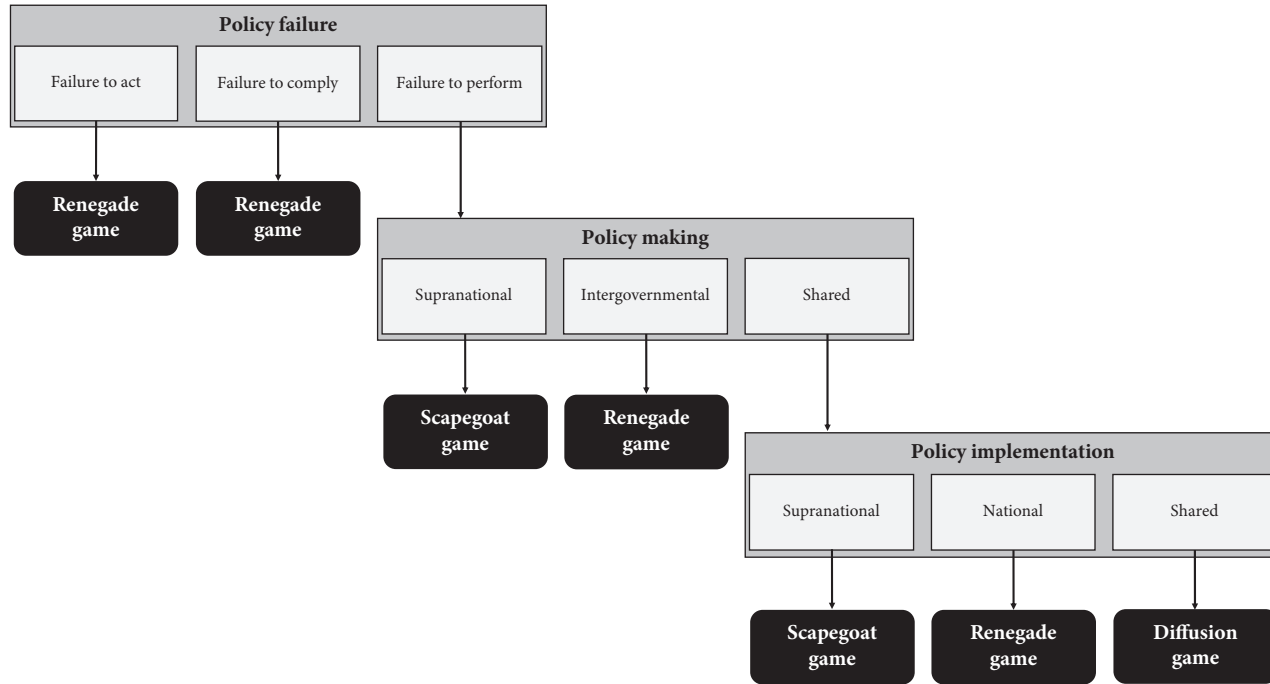
Figure 1.1 Explanatory framework

regard to the conditions that we expect to shape the kind of blame game that is predominant in the European public. By employing a series of controlled comparisons (see Przeworski and Teune 1982) we can assess whether the three conditions—the policy failure condition, the policy-making condition, and the policy implementation condition—affect the blame game that finds traction in the European public.

- In the area of *EU foreign policy*, we study the blame games that resulted from the EU's failure to find common ground on the question of intervening in the Libyan civil war in 2011 on the one hand, and the EU's failure to impose more far-reaching economic sanctions in response to Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 on the other hand.
- In the area of *EU environmental policy*, we compare the blame game triggered by the failure of the EU's Emission Trading System (ETS), launched in 2005, to meet the EU's commitments under the Kyoto Protocol, and the blame game driven by the EU's failure to comply with the 2015 Paris Agreement to combat climate change.
- In the area of *EU fiscal policy*, we study two blame games that were triggered by the highly controversial EU policies geared towards fiscal stabilization of highly indebted eurozone countries during the eurocrisis. We compare the blame game that revolved around the European lending programme with the blame game on the European bond buying programme.
- In the field of *EU migration policy*, we compare the blame games in four instances of EU policy failures: the EU's ill-functioning European asylum policy or Dublin System, the role of Frontex before and after its reform in 2015 in the context of the EU's management of its external borders and the humanitarian disasters associated with it; and the EU's policy of welfare entitlements related to the freedom of movement principle, which was criticized for allegedly incentivizing 'welfare migration' and 'social tourism'.

To identify the blame games that become predominant in the European pubic in these ten cases of EU policy failures, we study the blame attributions that are reported in the European news media, that is, public statements by political or societal actors that (1) define a blame target to whom responsibility for a policy failure is attributed, and that (2) point to a broader narrative that justifies the public attribution of blame and entails a characterization of the actor considered to be responsible for the respective policy failure, a plot which contains the reasons for their failure, and a broader moral which indicates

how to avoid the failure in the future (see Stone 1989; 2012; Jones et al. 2014). We analyse the public blame attributions by various actors—politicians, journalists, intellectuals, experts, etc.—in the coverage of these policy failures in the European quality press. For each EU policy failure, we identify public blame attributions in two newspapers—one liberal-progressive leaning and one conservative leaning—in four different countries: the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* for Germany, *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* for France, *Der Standard* and *Die Presse* for Austria, and *The Guardian* and *The Times* for the United Kingdom. Analysing the blame targets and blame narratives which are predominantly reported enables us to identify the blame game that gains traction in the European public for each instance of EU policy failure.

1.5 Contribution to the literature

This book speaks to a fast-growing literature on European blame games. Early contributions emphasize that—owing to its institutional complexity— the EU provides an ideal institutional architecture to satisfy member states' desire to avoid blame in cases of policy failures. For instance, Moravcsik suggests that EU member-state governments 'have grown adept at claiming credit and shifting blame' because the EU's policy-making procedures are 'permitting executives to scapegoat their foreign counterparts' as well as supranational officials who 'offer an even more inviting scapegoat' (Moravcsik 1994, 23–24). Similarly, Tallberg claims that 'the blame for policy failures [. . .] can be shifted onto the supranational institutions' such as the Commission and the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) and that 'the supranational institutions are ideal scapegoats for unpopular policy developments in the EU' (Tallberg 2002a, 27). As citizens lack knowledge about responsibilities for EU policies, political actors are unconstrained in employing their preferred blame avoidance strategies (Meyer 1999). For some, the prospect of blame avoidance opportunities is considered an important motivation for member-state governments to transfer responsibilities to the EU in the first place (Vaubel 1986; Moravcsik 1994; Hood and Rothstein 2001; Tallberg 2002a; Thatcher and Stone Sweet 2002).

A more recent strand of literature explores the strategies political actors employ in European blame games. These studies are often informed by scholarship on blame avoidance in domestic politics (Boin et al. 2009; Mortensen 2012; Hood et al. 2016; Hinterleitner and Sager 2017). Contributions to this strand analyse the blame avoidance strategies adopted by

member-state governments (Hobolt and Tilley 2014; Schlipphak and Treib 2017; Hansson 2019; Schimmelfennig 2020) as well as supranational EU institutions (Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl 2020b; Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl 2020a). They find that actors responsible for EU policy failures try to shift blame onto other political actors (Gerhards et al. 2009; Sommer et al. 2016; Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2020b; Traber et al. 2020) and that governments seek to obfuscate blame and thus try 'to muddy the waters of responsibility, to diffuse the blame, and [. . .] to make responsibility so opaque and shared that no one can be blamed' (Hobolt and Tilley 2014, 117; see also, Rauh et al. 2020; Hunter et al. 2021; Kriegmair 2023). Other contributions demonstrate how governments can prepare the ground for European blame games by purposefully choosing institutional venues that facilitate blame avoidance (Daugbjerg and Swinbank 2007; Hood 2011; Novak 2013; Schneider 2020; Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2023). Some studies also examine how political actors generate blame in the EU, either by simply highlighting EU policy failures (Traber et al. 2020; Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2020a) or by attributing blame for policy failures directly to their opponents (Gerhards et al. 2009; Vasilopoulou et al. 2014; Ladi and Tsagkroni 2019).

Another recent strand of literature explicates an implicit assumption in much of the literature on blame strategies in the EU: political actors are able to attribute blame opportunistically to the most convenient blame target because citizens lack an understanding of true responsibilities in EU policy making. Drawing on insights from other multilevel governance systems (Anderson 2006; Arceneaux 2006; Cutler 2004; Cutler 2008; Maestas et al. 2008; Malhotra and Kuo 2008; Johns 2011), contributions to this strand show that the multi-stage process of policy making in the EU, which often cuts across multiple levels and differs from one issue to the other, renders EU policy making too complex for ordinary citizens to assess true responsibilities (Hobolt and Tilley 2014; Wilson and Hobolt 2015; León et al. 2018). For instance, Hobolt and Tilly find that citizens tend to consider both EU institutions and EU member states equally in charge of EU policy making irrespective of true responsibilities (Hobolt and Tilley 2014). Rather than being informed by true responsibilities, individual citizens' responsibility assessments are found to be random or defined by their pre-existing biases (Wilson and Hobolt 2015; León et al. 2018; de Vries 2018). Due to citizens' lack of knowledge, contributions to this strand suggest that political actors are generally able to avoid blame for EU policy failures. For instance, studies show that citizens can be manipulated by political actors' blame avoidance strategies (Kumlin 2011; Maier, Adam, and Maier, 2012; Schlipphak et al. 2023). Citizens are also found to be unable to hold specific political actors

responsible for EU policies in the context of elections (Hobolt and Tilley 2014; Lobo and Lewis-Beck 2012; Lobo and Pannico 2020).

Taken together, these strands of literature reaffirm that—owing to its complexity—blame attributions for EU policy failures will usually remain untargeted and thus diffuse. Since clarity of responsibility is in short supply and eschews citizens' ability to assess true responsibilities, political actors are unconstrained and thus can adopt their preferred blame attribution strategies (Gerhards et al. 2009; Hood 2011; Hobolt and Tilley 2014; León et al. 2018). According to Christopher Hood, the complexities of the EU constitute 'the non plus ultra for blame avoidance architecture' because 'there are ample possibilities for every major player in the structure to blame every other' (Hood 2011, 122). The resulting cacophony of blame attributions is commonly assumed to promote what we call diffusion games. As Hood summarizes, the 'institutional complexities of the European Union [. . .] have the convenient property of diffusing blame' (Hood 2011, 83). As blame does not gravitate towards true responsibilities, the literature also claims that European blame games undermine political accountability, thereby driving the EU's 'accountability deficit' (Hobolt and Tilley 2014, 141; see also, Schmidt 2006, 270–271; Papadopoulos 2010, 1039).

This book advances our understanding of European blame games in three important ways: First, while the literature on blame games in the EU suggests that blame attributions tend to be untargeted and diffuse, we argue that diffusion games are only one type of European blame game. We introduce a typology encompassing three blame games, each of which focuses on a distinct target and points to a specific narrative. In scapegoat games, EU institutions, such as the Commission, are singled out as an 'outsider' and become the main target of public blame attributions. In renegade games, individual EU member states are the predominant target, whose conduct has led them astray from the path of commonly held EU norms. Finally, in diffusion games, blame attributions tend to be impersonal and directed at generic actor collectives, such as 'the EU' or 'Brussels'. We conceptualize these types of European blame games—scapegoat, renegade, and diffusion games—in detail and show their prevalence in EU politics across different policy areas.

Second, against the widely held presumption that clarity of responsibility is in short supply in the EU, we argue that it is a variable condition. We claim that once EU policy failures become politicized, a public plausibility assessment of political actors' blame attributions sets in, which helps citizens to learn about true responsibilities and thus constrains political actors' blame attribution strategies. Whether or not this will allow European blame games to gravitate towards true responsibilities depends on three conditions that

affect clarity of responsibility and thus whether scapegoat games, renegade games, or diffusion games stick with the European public: the policy failure condition, the policy-making condition, and the policy implementation condition.

Finally, from a normative perspective, we hold that European blame games can—under certain conditions—be conducive to political accountability in the EU. While blame games are usually negatively connoted because they are considered detrimental to political accountability, our findings allow us to qualify this claim and be cautiously optimistic. We find that European blame games can actually put pressure on actors who were truly responsible for policy failures to face political scrutiny. Our analysis of European blame games enables us to assess the correspondence between the main blame targets and those actors responsible for a respective policy failure—and therefore how 'good' or 'bad' European blame games are for political accountability. While diffusion games are always detrimental to political accountability in the EU as no political actor becomes focal in the public domain, scapegoat and renegade games usually focus on at least some of the actors responsible for EU policy failures, and thereby help improve political accountability.

1.6 Plan of the book

This book aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of European blame games. In particular, it seeks to understand the conditions under which a particular blame game—a renegade, scapegoat or diffusion game—finds traction in the European public. In Chapter 2 we conceptualize and operationalize European blame games. We first introduce our conception of the public as the sphere where public blame attributions for EU policy failures are exchanged and where their plausibility is assessed. We then define and describe the three types of blame games according to their distinct blame targets and their concomitant blame narratives. We also present our research strategy to identify the European blame game that becomes predominant in the public domain. We detect predominant blame games—the main targets and their associated narratives—by analysing the coverage of policy failures in the European quality press.

The subsequent three chapters theoretically develop and empirically assess the three conditions which we expect to affect whether scapegoat games, renegade games, or diffusion games stick with the European public: the type of policy failure, the type of policy making, and the type of policy implementation. Chapter 3 starts out by developing the *policy failure hypothesis*

by conceptualizing three types of EU policy failures—failures to perform, failures to act, and failures to comply—and spells out the theoretical considerations that lead us to expect that they are associated with different types of blame games. We then probe the policy failure hypothesis in two pair-wise comparisons of different policy failures in the areas of EU foreign policy and EU environmental policy. The two pair-wise comparisons corroborate our expectation that true responsibility in cases of failures to act as well as failures to comply tends to rest with specific member-state governments, and thus triggers renegade games. By contrast, true responsibilities in cases of failures to perform tend to be less straightforward owing to the often-complex processes of EU policy making, which triggers diffusion games.

In Chapter 4 we build on and add to our insights from the previous chapter and suggest that policy making in the EU is not always complex. We develop the *policy-making hypothesis* by differentiating between policy-making processes in the EU—intergovernmental, supranational, and shared policy making—that affect clarity of responsibility and thus the type of blame game that ensues. We probe the plausibility of the policy-making hypothesis in two pair-wise comparisons of EU fiscal stabilization policies and EU migration policies. The two case comparisons corroborate our expectation that supranational and intergovernmental policy making improve the clarity of responsibility and thus trigger scapegoat and renegade games respectively. Conversely, shared policy making, such as the Community Method, whereby member states and supranational institutions share policy-making power, tend to give rise to diffusion games.

Chapter 5 builds on the previous two chapters and stipulates that even in cases of shared policy making in the EU, clarity of responsibility is not necessarily wanting. According to the *policy implementation hypothesis* clarity of responsibility then depends on whether policies are implemented by EU actors, national actors, or jointly by them. We probe the plausibility of the policy implementation hypothesis by means of a three-way comparison of EU migration policy failures, which allows us to vary the different forms of policy implementation. The case comparison corroborates our expectation that even when policy making is shared and thus complex, blame games can gravitate towards (partially) responsible actors, that is, when either individual member states or supranational EU institutions are charged with policy implementation.

Chapter 6 summarizes our findings and contributions to scholarship on blame games in the EU. First, we summarize the evidence that, in fact, all three types of European blame games unfolded in the ten cases of EU policy failures. Second, we show how our findings support our theoretical claim that

blame games tend to gravitate towards those political actors with true responsibilities. Third, we evaluate our findings in terms of political accountability and derive design implications for the EU to increase clarity of responsibility.

Endnotes

1. While there is arguably no single European public sphere, EU policy failures are debated in member states' publics, which are—owing to their increasing Europeanization—not isolated but intersecting (Koopmans and Statham 2010a; Risse 2015a). When we speak of a predominant blame game in the European public, we thus imply that one type of blame game 'sticks' in the Europeanized publics across EU member states.
2. Supranational actors can be publicly cast as scapegoats, irrespective of whether they are actually responsible for a failed policy or not. This deviates from the general understanding of a scapegoat who is blamed for failures they are actually not responsible for.
3. Our definition of *de jure* and *de facto* responsibility parallels the notion of functional responsibility, capturing political actors' formal competences in a policy area, as well as causal responsibility, depicting political actors' impact on a policy that failed (Iyengar 1989; Rudolph 2006; Hobolt and Tilley 2014, 10).
4. When we refer to failures to act, we do expressly not refer to EU institutions' failure to act on their treaty obligations. Our argument is that policy failures trigger a demand for the EU to act to address the problem in question. While it is reasonable to assume that EU institutions have strong incentives to propose European policy solutions for policy failures, this may not necessarily be the case with individual member states.

2

European blame games

A public plausibility assessment

2.1 Introduction

While EU policies are much more contested today than they were some decades ago, the EU also wields much more authority (Börzel 2005; Hooghe and Marks 2009; Leuffen et al. 2022). EU authority is no longer limited to establishing a common market, but extends to issue areas such as social policy, environmental policy, monetary and fiscal policy, internal security, and taxation policy. Member states no longer exercise unilateral control over most policy decisions because they have delegated and pooled decision-making authority at the EU level. The deepening and expansion of authority has politicized the EU (de Wilde and Zürn 2012; de Wilde et al. 2016; Hutter et al. 2016) and thus increased the stakes of EU policies in and for the European public. The EU's mounting authority has become a social reality (Wilde et al. 2019), which both EU supporters and sceptics have come to acknowledge.

From its own purview, the EU's increase in authority can be considered a mixed blessing. While it provides the EU with the tools to address pertinent policy problems, it also drives public expectations with regard to the EU's ability to solve these problems (Hill 1993; Toje 2008). The more authority the EU commands, the more it is confronted with citizens' expectations for effective problem-solving (Schmitter 1969). To the extent that the EU can live up to these expectations, the EU's authority is reinforced (Scharpf 2002). But just as any other polity, the EU does not always live up to public expectations. In cases of policy failures, citizens' expectations are disappointed which, in turn, invariably triggers blame games in the public sphere, which carry the potential to undermine the EU's authority.

With heightened politicization comes a more attentive public and more blame games are likely to ensue in cases of EU policy failures. If citizens took no interest in EU policy failures, politicians would have no incentives

to undermine their opponents or deflect from their own shortcomings in the public domain. As public attention to the EU and its policies grows, incentives for political actors to play European blame games increase as well. Political actors can seize the opportunity of politicized EU policy failures to attribute blame to their opponents, who then need to actively avoid blame in the public sphere by, for instance, shifting blame onto others.

Growing expectations towards the EU and its increasing politicization explain why European blame games have become ubiquitous in European politics. In this chapter, we conceptualize blame games as exchanges of public blame attributions for EU policy failures. In Section 2.2 we introduce our understanding of the public as the stage where blame attributions are voiced and their plausibility is assessed by various political and societal actors. In Section 2.3 we define blame games and distinguish three different types of European blame games—scapegoat games, renegade games, and diffusion games—which are characterized by their distinct blame targets and their concomitant blame narratives. We present our strategy to analyse European blame games empirically in Section 2.4. Section 2.5 provides a summary.

2.2 The public vetting of blame attributions

Blame games are inherently public. Without citizens as an audience, socio-political actors would have few incentives to generate or avoid blame for policy failures on the public stage. It is on the public stage that political and social actors exchange blame attributions in order to shape citizens' views about who is to blame for policy failures. Despite its obvious relevance, the literature on European blame games assigns only a marginal role to the *public* (see also Section 1.5). One main strand in this literature depicts the relationship between political actors and the public essentially as a one-way-street. Political actors employ blame avoidance strategies or blame generation strategies to manipulate citizens' views about who is responsible for EU policy failures (Gerhards et al. 2009; Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl 2020b; Sommer 2020; Traber et al. 2020). Another strand of literature on European blame games highlights citizens' allocation of blame in the EU. Drawing on public opinion polls, this literature finds that citizens' blame attributions hardly ever target those actors who are in fact responsible (Hobolt and Tilley 2014; Wilson and Hobolt 2015; León et al. 2018). It also demonstrates that citizens' views about who should be held responsible for EU policy failures are

shaped by political actors' blame strategies (Kumlin 2011; Maier et al. 2012; Schlipphak et al. 2023). What these strands of literature have in common is the presumption of a malleable public that is susceptible to the blame strategies employed by politicians.

While these two strands of the literature have greatly improved our understanding of European blame games, we consider their—implicit, if not explicit—assumption of the public as a mere aggregation of citizens' views which can easily be manipulated highly problematic. Instead, we conceive of the public as a stage—or sphere—where competing political and social actors can promote their political views, and where their competition allows citizens, as the audience, to form their own views (Habermas 2008; Goffman 2008). The public is also the stage where political actors' blame attributions are critically assessed for their plausibility, not only because they compete with other political actors' conflicting blame attributions, but also because they are critically evaluated by other actors, including civil society actors, business associations, experts, and journalists.[1] The public thus functions as a marketplace of ideas where competing blame attributions are vetted for their plausibility (Neidhardt 1994; Koopmans and Statham 2010a; Risse 2015a; Hinterleitner 2020). This public plausibility assessment of political actors' blame attributions works via two interrelated mechanisms. First, it allows citizens to learn about political actors' true responsibilities, that is, their institutional (*de jure*) involvement in as well as their causal (*de facto*) relevance for a failed policy. Second, to the extent that citizens learn about true responsibilities this constrains the blame strategies political actors can adopt without endangering their reputation among citizens as trustworthy actors. These two mechanisms, the learning mechanism and the constraining mechanism, improve the clarity of responsibility for EU policy failures.

Learning mechanism: The public plausibility assessment of political actors' blame attributions helps citizens—the audience of blame games—to learn about who is to blame for a given EU policy failure.[2] Since blame games unfold in public, citizens have access to information to make up their mind about who they consider to be responsible for a given EU policy failure (Wilson and Hobolt 2015; Goldberg et al. 2022; Kriegmair et al. 2022; Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2023). In fact, it is the public exchange of blame attributions and their plausibility assessment by a variety of political and societal actors in the public domain that enables citizens to learn who is responsible for an EU policy failure. To the extent that blame attributions are put to a public plausibility assessment, citizens gain information not only about the respective policy failure itself, but also about the

political actors who can plausibly be considered responsible. This process of information updating does not imply that citizens will always be able to assess true responsibilities for EU policy failures; they will, however, gain information to dismiss unduly implausible blame attributions. In other words, the plausibility assessment of political actors' blame attributions in the public domain helps citizens learn about plausible and implausible blame attributions, thereby improving the clarity of responsibility for EU policy failures.[3]

Constraining mechanism: The public plausibility assessment is a learning mechanism for citizens and, at the same time, a constraining mechanism for political actors, because it delimits the range of blame strategies political actors can employ to blame others and to avoid blame for themselves. As citizens learn about true responsibilities, political actors cannot attribute blame simply as they consider politically opportune. As the learning mechanism kicks in and the clarity of responsibility is improving, blame attributions the public deems implausible carry little prospect of gaining public traction, because they deviate (too far) from true responsibilities.[4] Moreover, employing blame attributions that cannot stand the public plausibility assessment are likely to harm the political actors' reputation among citizens as trustworthy political actors (Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2020a; Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl 2020a; 2020b). Confronted with citizens who learn about the responsibilities for a given EU policy failure, putative blame senders have an incentive to keep their blame attributions sufficiently plausible to maintain the 'illusion of objectivity' (Kunda 1990, 482–483) and preserve their reputation of trustworthiness (Hood 2011, 160).[5] The constraining mechanism can work via two processes. Political actors can either *anticipate* that the public will learn about true responsibilities and they adjust their blame strategies accordingly from the onset of blame games; or political actors are *updating* their information about citizens' knowledge about true responsibilities as blame games unfold over time and the public is learning about true responsibilities. This distinction is important: if the updating mechanism was at work, blame attributions should converge on a particular blame game as time unfolds. Conversely, if political actors can correctly anticipate that the public will learn about true responsibilities, blame attribution patterns should display no meaningful temporal variation.

For the learning and constraining mechanisms to operate, we cannot simply conceive of the public to reflect the aggregate of citizens' views, which can be easily manipulated by political actors' blame attribution strategies. Instead, we have to conceive of the public as a stage where citizens learn about who can
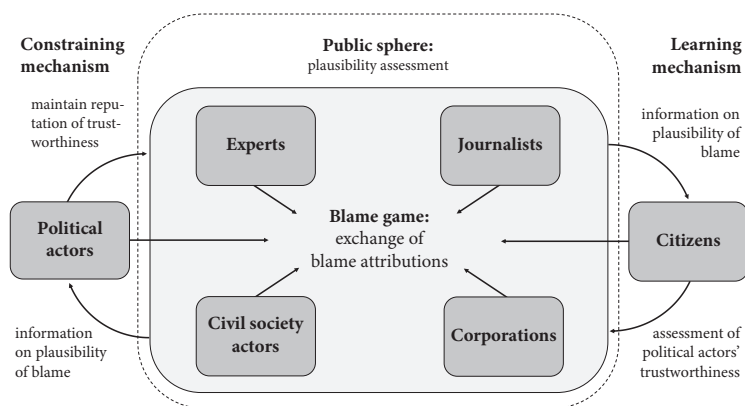
Figure 2.1 The public assessment of the plausibility of blame attributions

be plausibly held responsible for EU policy failures, which in turn constrains political actors' blame attribution strategies (see also, Steenbergen et al. 2007; Hinterleitner 2020, 31–39). Figure 2.1 illustrates these interrelated processes at work in European blame games.

To the extent that this plausibility assessment takes place in the public domain and clarifies responsibilities for EU policy failures, clarity of responsibility is no longer a constant but becomes a variable. The public plausibility assessment will not always discern true responsibilities. Sometimes true responsibilities are too complex to be clarified in the public domain. Yet, if the public plausibility assessment can clarify true responsibilities, public blame games will gravitate towards targeting those actors that are truly responsible, that is, those who have been *de jure* involved and *de facto* instrumental for the respective policy failure. While we do not expect the public plausibility assessment and the related learning and constraining effects to weed out all blame attributions that deviate from true responsibilities, we do expect that implausible blame attributions will yield to blame attributions that are more plausible as they approximate true responsibilities. The bulk of public blame attributions should gravitate towards true responsibilities, thus making those blame games stick that are directed at those actors who in fact have been responsible for the respective policy failure.

The existence of a (unified) *European* public sphere that has similar effects on public discourse—and thus also on blame games—as the public sphere in democratic states has been questioned for a long time (Kielmansegg 1994). For instance, Sara Hobolt and James Tilley diagnose a 'public sphere deficit in Europe' (Hobolt and Tilley 2014, 71). While the public exchange of political and social actors' views is unrestricted within and across the EU's

member states (albeit with few exceptions), the communicative preconditions for this public exchange to occur at the EU-level do not match those of its (democratic) member states: newspapers and news programmes are mostly nationally organized and thus provide most space to an exchange of views among national political and societal actors rather than to a trans-European exchange of views (Kantner 2004; Beus 2010; Gerhards and Hans 2012; Risse 2015b). While this may well hamper the public plausibility assessment of political actors' blame attributions, the lack of a trans-European exchange of views does not prevent such an assessment from taking place. After all, in most EU member states the domestic exchange of views in the public sphere is sufficiently open to allow for a plausibility assessment of political actors' blame attributions about EU policy failures. Because of the EU's politicization, the EU and its policies receive heightened attention in domestic publics. Hence, the days are gone when blame attributions for EU policy failures remained uncontested in the publics of its member states (Roose et al. 2017).[6] Moreover, the public spheres of EU member states have become more Europeanized (see, e.g. Koopmans and Erbe 2004; Trenz 2004; Koopmans and Pfetsch 2006; van de Steeg 2006; Koopmans 2007; Pfetsch 2008; Pfetsch et al. 2008; Koopmans and Statham 2010a; Risse 2010; 2015a). As a consequence, public assessments of blame attributions for EU policy failures are increasingly becoming a trans-European undertaking. After all, actors in the public spheres of EU member states do not assess the plausibility of blame attributions in isolation but observe the plausibility assessments in other member states or even intervene in their plausibility assessment. This is especially true for supranational European actors, such as the Commission, and transnational civil society actors, such as Fridays for Future or Attac. In these cases, the plausibility assessment becomes a trans-European debate in which speakers refer to each other on a trans-European scale.

There may thus not be a unified European public sphere, yet the politicization of the EU and the Europeanization of its member states' public spheres has rendered the plausibility assessment of public blame attributions for EU policy failures an increasingly trans-European undertaking. In cases of EU policy failures, this improves the clarity of responsibility. While it will not ensure that actors with true responsibility will always be detected, the public plausibility assessment makes it possible that citizens learn about true responsibilities, thereby putting constraints on political actors' blame attributions. Through these two mechanisms—the learning and constraining mechanisms—blame attributions thus gravitate towards true responsibilities and the predominant blame game will stick in the public.[7]

In the EU, true responsibilities are often *de jure* shared by member-state governments and supranational institutions, as they jointly engage in policy making and policy implementation; true responsibilities may be *de facto* shared as member-state governments and supranational institutions, such as the Commission, often jointly promote EU policies. Yet, individual member-state governments may also be *de jure* responsible for policy failures, for instance, when they use their veto power to block policies or when they fail to comply with agreed-upon policies. Individual member states may also be *de facto* responsible, for instance, when they are powerful enough to push through a policy against other governments' resistance. Finally, supranational EU institutions can be responsible for EU policy failures as they wield increasing *de jure* powers of policy making and policy implementation; and they are often also *de facto* responsible when they have been instrumental for an EU policy which subsequently failed. This begs the question what are the blame games that are typically played when they gravitate towards these actors with true responsibilities?

2.3 Three types of European blame games

Blame games are constituted by the public exchange of blame attributions. Yet, when attributing blame, social and political actors do not only point fingers at blame targets, they also hint at broader narratives that justify why they point their fingers to specific blame targets. To single out specific types of European blame games we employ two criteria. First, we look at the main *target* of public blame attributions. Who gets the blame? Is the EU targeted as a collective, is blame directed at specific supranational EU institutions, or do specific member-state governments receive the bulk of blame attributions? Identifying the main target of blame attributions provides us with a first indication of the particular blame game that gets associated with a policy failure. When blame attributions predominantly target supranational institutions, this points towards a scapegoat game; when individual member-state governments are the main blame target, this suggests a renegade game; where the EU is blamed as a collective, this points towards a diffusion game. The second criterion for identifying blame games is the occurrence of distinct blame *narratives* that are associated with blame attribution patterns. Blame narratives are sense-making devices, imbuing blame attributions with social meaning (see Stone 1989; 2012). Narratives help making sense of blame attributions by offering a

coherent story which connects the character of the blameworthy actor with a plot detailing why they have become targets of blame attributions, and a 'moral of the story' that offers a lesson for the future (see Jones et al. 2014). One important element of blame narratives is that they typically entail constructions of an out-group—those who are to be blamed for the respective policy failure—which is separated from an in-group—those who would have enacted better policies. Blame narratives thus involve attempts at 'othering', a process whereby notions of the self are constructed in interplay with others (Rumelili 2004; Diez 2005; Berenskötter and Nymalm 2021; Hagström et al. 2022). The three European blame games that we identify—scapegoat, renegade, and diffusion games—thus differ not only with regard to the main blame target, they also reflect different narrative constructions of the 'other'.

2.3.1 The scapegoat game

Scapegoat games involve a particularly strong narrative construction of othering. The blame target—the scapegoat—is characterized as an outsider who does not belong to the relevant in-group. A scapegoat is hence characterized as a stranger with dubious character. This characterization of the scapegoat is, for instance, nicely captured in the strained relationship between the 'master' and the 'unfaithful servant', who is always on the cusp of betraying the master and who acts according to their own whims. According to the plot of a scapegoat game, owing to the dubious character of the blame target, blunders committed by the scapegoat are not only bound to happen, they are inadvertent because of moral corruption, opportunism, and incompetence. Scapegoats tend to mess things up because they do not know better. They lack the moral orientation, the values needed, and the competence to do what is right. The moral of the story thus is that one should not have trusted the scapegoat in the past and must not trust them now and in the future. To avoid future misbehaviour one cannot count on a change of character, because a scapegoat remains an outsider, a stranger. What can be changed are behavioural controls. For instance, reliable monitoring and stricter enforcement can keep scapegoats' behaviour in check. Just as the unfaithful servant remains a problem for their master, the scapegoat will always remain a stranger to the in-group.

Supranational EU institutions, such as the Commission, the CJEU, or the ECB often become targets of blame attributions, which are then accompanied by a scapegoat narrative. After all, it is easy to portray these EU

institutions as outsiders, which are different from the member state governments. For example, the Commission may be portrayed as an 'unaccountable' and therefore 'undemocratic' institution, which is categorically different from democratically elected governments which are accountable to voters. This characterization can be accompanied with a plot according to which democratically accountable governments are deemed morally superior to the 'unaccountable technocrats' who are aloof from voters' concerns. According to this plot, it is typical for 'unaccountable bureaucrats' to take decisions that run against the interests of voters; it is typical for unelected technocrats to believe that rules solve most policy problems; and it is typical for self-declared champions of EU integration to uncritically pursue an integrationist agenda. Scapegoat games in the EU should therefore be replete with stereotypes that highlight the categorical difference between the 'accountable' member-state governments, representing the citizens on the one hand, and 'unaccountable' EU institutions, representing nothing but their own interests on the other hand. Being categorically different, supranational EU institutions also face an intrinsic difficulty in correcting their failures and are prone to repeat them. Hence, the moral of the scapegoat narrative is that supranational EU institutions need to be placed under strict controls or, in instances of grave transgressions, their authority must be rescinded to avoid failures from occurring again in the future.[8]

The failure of the EU's policy on welfare entitlements for EU citizens, which we discuss in Chapter 4, constitutes an example of a European scapegoat game. The EU's policy of welfare entitlements for EU citizens in their country of residence was widely criticized for allegedly encouraging 'social tourism'[9] and 'poverty migration'.[10] In the European public, the Commission was considered a culprit for promoting what was considered an excessive interpretation of the EU's freedom of movement principle. In public blame attributions, the Commission was characterized as 'too technocratic'[11] and its 'over-bureaucratization'[12] and 'detached denialism'[13] were said to make the Commission unresponsive to the concerns of citizens and member states alike. Due to its flawed character, the Commission was said to be fundamentally hard-wired to follow a strict legal and economic rationale prone to neglect citizens' concerns. With its technocratic resolve, 'the Commission is pouring oil on the fire of the debate on labour migration'.[14] The moral of this scapegoat game is that the Commission's policy must be circumvented or even disregarded and its authority curtailed. In the European public, calls for the Commission to face 'tough resistance'[15] and demands for the 'removal of competences'[16] were widely voiced.

2.3.2 The renegade game

Unlike in scapegoat games where blame targets are cast as outsiders, renegade games conceive of the culprit as an insider who acts as if they were an outsider. The renegade is singled out for making a grave mistake, for betrayal, or for disloyalty, but the key is that the renegade is still considered to be part of the in-group. Compared to the scapegoat, who is an outsider and acts as an outsider, the renegade game involves a weaker form of othering, because a renegade only acts as if they were an outsider, while their status as member of the in-group is not put into question. The plot is that the renegade 'deviates from the right path' even though they 'should have known better' as a member of the in-group. By disregarding the in-group's common interests, values, or norms, they become renegades, who made themselves outsiders of their own choosing. While renegades set themselves apart through their own misconduct, renegade games also reaffirm a renegade's place amongst the members of the in-group. Blaming a renegade is an act of shaming, which places the renegade's behaviour—not the renegade themself—outside the bounds of the in-group. It also puts social pressure on the renegade to change course and return to the in-group by aligning their behaviour with that of its members. Thus, the moral of a renegade game is that the deviant actor can always return to 'their' in-group by correcting their behaviour. After all, the renegade, even when they act against their group, continues to be a member of it, albeit one that has gone astray. The renegade must refocus on who they 'really' are and to whom they belong. The parable of the 'lost child' and the 'forgiving parent' captures the essence of the renegade narrative.

Renegade games should unfold when specific member-state governments become the predominant target of European blame games. At least when they are not systematically and lastingly deviating from what the in-group wants, it is difficult to portray member states as outsiders and thus construct them as scapegoats. They will be rather characterized as renegades whose behaviour contradicts their role-identity as a member of the in-group. Their behaviour will thus be cast as violation of the in-group's values and norms. Their misbehaviour will be publicly criticized and they will be shamed; but the plot is that their failure is only a behavioural aberration. The moral, in turn, is that they need to understand that their own misbehaviour makes them behave like an outsider. They can redeem themselves and 'come round' to who they really are by correcting their behaviour to be again fully reintegrated into the community of loyal EU member states to which they ultimately belong.

The EU's failure to respond to Muammar Gaddafi's onslaught against Libyan opposition groups in 2011 constitutes an example of a European

renegade game (see Chapter 3). The EU's inaction was heavily criticized in the European public and Germany was identified as the main culprit. Germany's 'no' to a no-fly zone over Libya led to a characterization of Germany as a renegade that had isolated itself from its European partners. The German government was blamed for its 'isolationist stubbornness and self-righteousness',[17] because it defected from a common European position. Yet, despite its 'Sonderweg',[18] Germany was still considered an important partner in the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy and its deviant behaviour was publicly rationalized with reference to its past as initiator of two World Wars. Regardless of this understanding, Germany was called upon in the European public to come to its senses and consider the broader consequences of its deviant behaviour. After all, 'Berlin divides the EU foreign policy'[19] and it risks 'the end of the common foreign policy'[20] because the 'defection of Germany from any consensus crippled the EU before it could get to its feet'.[21]

2.3.3 The diffusion game

The lack of a specific culprit is central to a diffusion game. Unlike in the scapegoat or renegade game, blame is not pinpointed at a particular inside or outside actor but tends to target a rather unspecified group of actors, irrespective of their insider or outsider status. Since the group blamed remains rather opaque, othering processes remain weaker compared with scapegoat or renegade games. In diffusion games, the characterization of the blame target is rather unspecific. The culprit is characterized as a generic actor collective or even as a system or structure, which renders the character of the target impersonal and faceless. According to the main plot of a diffusion game, not the behaviour of specific actors but faceless actor collectives or structures are the main reason why a policy fails. Policy failures are hence the product of a Kafkaesque environment or systemic forces that are beyond actors' control. Policy failures may, for instance, be portrayed as the unintended consequences of social, political, or economic structures that have been created by an unspecified group of actors which may even have had good intentions. Individual actors in diffusion games can be portrayed as mere 'puppets of the system'. It is not their fault when things go wrong, but the fault of the system. There are also no clear remedies. The moral of diffusion games is that the system is broken and that there is no easy fix. Rather than drawing lessons for improvement, diffusion games beget fatalism: 'There is nothing we can do.' As blame diffuses or even evaporates, so does responsibility for changing the broken system.

When the responsibility for policy failures is not attributed to specific member states or specific EU institutions in European blame games but to generic targets such as 'Brussels', 'the member states', 'the EU', or 'Europe', this indicates the presence of a diffusion game. In diffusion games these targets are not really characterized but often remain faceless. They are not portrayed as positive or negative characters with particular qualities—morals, values, competences—that are specific to them. Instead, they are depicted as impersonal entities that cannot really be held accountable for the policy failures they produce. The plot is that these faceless and systemic forces are the main reason for the respective policy failure. Therefore, no specific actors in 'Brussels' can be blamed. Moreover, as none of the actors is expected to be able to change the system, the moral of European diffusion games is typically quite defeatist. Absent a specific agent who can bring about change, the postulate that 'Europe' should do better and fix the broken system appears futile.

An example for a European diffusion game constitutes the case of the EU's failed emission trading scheme (ETS), which will be elaborated upon in Chapter 3. The ETS was widely regarded as a disappointment in the European public as it failed to effectively limit carbon emissions. Neither specific EU institutions involved in its design, nor specific member states, such as Germany or Poland, which were reluctant or even opposed to accepting high carbon prices, were singled out as culprits. Public blame attributions were mainly targeted at unspecific and impersonal entities, such as 'the EU',[22] 'the EU member states',[23] 'Europe',[24] or 'Brussels'.[25] The sources of the policy failure are generally located beyond the control of individual policymakers: 'the market',[26] a 'design flaw',[27] or unforeseen circumstances, such as an economic recession or even the weather,[28] are at fault so that nothing can really be done about it. Consequently, calls in the European public for rectifying a failure point at features of the system that require reform, but rarely mention the agents who should fix the system.

2.4 Analysing European blame games

To assess the type of blame game that sticks with the European public (and thus becomes predominant), we study the blame attributions reported in the European news media (see, e.g. Gerhards et al. 2009; Rittberger et al. 2017; Bach and Wegrich 2019). Looking at blame attributions for EU policy failures in media coverage—rather than isolated strategic exchanges between

political actors—allows us to identify the blame game that is predominant in the public. More specifically, by analysing blame attributions in the news media, we can detect the blame *targets* and blame *narratives* that are predominantly reported and thus identify the blame games that stick with the European public.

To study media coverage of EU policy failures, we focus on the quality press because of its lead media function in European countries and because it is generally considered a good proxy for capturing the general public's mood (Koopmans 2007; Koopmans and Statham 2010a; Dolezal et al. 2016; Risse 2015a). More specifically, we analyse the coverage of selected EU policy failures in the quality press in four different countries: Germany, France, Austria, and the United Kingdom. Even though the public spheres in these countries are Europeanized and allow for a politically unrestricted exchange of blame attributions, they are arguably not fully representative of the European public at large. Still, these four countries differ in important dimensions, such as domestic support for Eurosceptic positions or their relative influence on shaping European policies. For each of the four countries, we analyse one progressive-leaning and one conservative-leaning newspaper. For Germany we selected the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, for France *Le Monde*[29] and *Le Figaro*, for Austria *Der Standard* and *Die Presse*, and for the United Kingdom *The Guardian* and *The Times*. To identify the predominant blame games in our ten cases of EU policy failures, we searched for public blame attributions reported in the quality press. To identify articles covering the selected policy failures, we engaged in keyword searches of digital newspaper archives, such as *LexisNexis* and *Factiva* (see Appendix A.1). In the relevant articles we then looked for statements which attribute blame for the respective failure. Statements were coded as blame attributions if they (1) define a blame target, that is, a named actor to whom responsibility for the policy failure is attributed; and if they (2) point at a broader narrative that justifies blame attributions. The distinct pattern of predominant blame targets as well as the predominant blame narrative enable us to discriminate between scapegoat, renegade, and diffusion games.

In operational terms, we assess the predominant blame game via a two-step process (see Appendix A.2). In a first step, we determine the dominant *blame target* by counting the number of blame attributions for an EU policy failure across different types of targets. We distinguish between blame statements that target specific supranational EU institutions, such as the Commission or the CJEU, and statements that attribute blame more generically to 'Brussels' or 'the EU' as a whole. Moreover, we distinguish between blame attributions
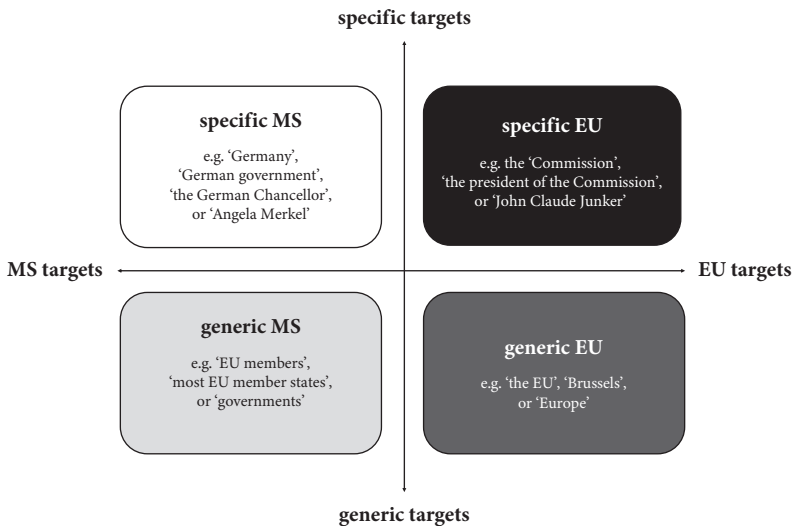
Figure 2.2 Targets of public blame attributions in European blame games

that target specifically named EU member states or their governments, and statements that attribute blame more generically to 'the member states' as a collective. Figure 2.2 summarizes the four types of targets in European blame games.

Based on the blame attribution statements coded for a particular case of EU policy failure, the following conditions must be met for a particular *blame target* to be predominant and hence for a particular blame game to ensue:

- We have an indication of a *scapegoat game* when the share of blame attribution statements targeting specific EU actors is dominant, that is, when it is the most frequent category of blame statements. At the same time, the combined share of blame attribution statements directed at specific EU actors and to the EU in general must exceed 50 per cent of all blame attributions.
- We have an indication of a *renegade game* when the share of blame attribution statements directed at specific member states is dominant, that is, when it is the most frequent category of blame attributions. At the same time, the combined share of blame attribution statements directed at specific member states and the EU membership more generally exceeds 50 per cent of all blame attribution statements.
- We have an indication of a *diffusion game* when not specific actors (i.e. neither specific EU actors as in scapegoat games nor specific member states as in renegade games) are the prime target of public blame

attributions. The dominant type of public blame attributions is thus generic, either targeting the EU as whole or EU member states as a whole.

As a second step, we assess if the blame attributions directed at the predominant target are associated with a particular *blame narrative*.

- We speak of *scapegoat games* when the targeted supranational EU institutions are characterized as strangers to the in-group (character), whose failure stems from an intrinsic behavioural pattern (plot), and who must in turn be punished to contain the damage (moral).
- We speak of *renegade games* when the targeted member state(s) are characterized as deviant members of the in-group (character), whose failure is considered a behavioural aberration from the in-group's accepted norms (plot), and who must be shamed so as to align their behaviour with that of the in-group (moral).
- We speak of *diffusion games* when the generic targets of blame attributions are characterized in an impersonal way (character) and the failure is depicted as the effect of structural forces (plot) about which nothing that can be done (moral).

Overall, each of the three blame games possess a unique empirical 'fingerprint', which are highlighted in Table 2.1. Only when a particular dominant *blame target* coincides with a particular *blame narrative* can we be confident that the respective blame game is, in fact, predominant. The co-occurrence of blame target and blame narrative sets a very high bar for identifying a specific game as predominant. When we observe all indications of one of the three blame games in a case of EU policy failure, we can be almost certain that the observed blame game can indeed be subsumed under this type.

Finally, for the ensuing empirical analyses of the blame games that stick in the public domain in Chapters 3–5, we look at blame attributions in the aggregate. We adopt such a *static* approach to analyse blame games, since our empirical chapters are first and foremost interested in the particular blame game that sticks in instances of EU policy failures. Yet, we are aware that our theoretical mechanisms—the learning and constraining mechanism—emphasize *dynamic* processes, that is, an updating of information about true responsibilities, which potentially affects patterns of blame attributions over time. To probe the dynamic dimension of our theory, in Chapter 6 we re-analyse our data by periodizing blame attributions. This thus allows us to

Table 2.1 Operationalizing European blame games

		Scapegoat game	Renegade game	Diffusion game
Blame target	Who is to blame?	• Most frequent target: specific EU institutions	• Most frequent target: specific member states	• Most frequent target: generic target
Blame narrative	How is the culprit characterized? (character)	• Stranger, member of the out-group • Dubious character	• Member of the in-group • Deviant character	• Faceless system • Impersonal character
	Why did the target commit the failure? (plot)	• Failure as an intrinsic pattern	• Failure as an aberration	• Failure as an effect of the system
	How can the failure be corrected? (moral)	• Punishment: scapegoat must be contained	• Shaming: renegade must come to their senses	• Fatalism: nothing can be done

empirically unpack the constraining mechanism and hence to assess if blame attributions converge on a predominant blame game over time.

2.5 Summary

In this chapter we conceptualized blame games as exchanges of public blame attributions in the public realm. Unlike the existing literature on European blame games, we do not conceive of the public as the mere aggregate of citizens' views, easily manipulable by political actors' blame attribution strategies. Instead, we understand the public as a stage where political actors' blame strategies and citizens' views about who should be held responsible for a given EU policy failure affect each other. In the public sphere blame attributions are publicly exchanged as well as critically examined by a variety of political and social actors, weeding out implausible blame attributions and thereby improving the clarity of responsibility. Over time, the bulk of public blame attributions will gravitate towards the actors truly responsible for a particular policy failure. Public blame attributions can gravitate towards specific EU institutions, resulting in scapegoat games, specific member states,

leading to renegade games, or 'the EU' as a whole, engendering diffusion games. Each of these blame games is characterized by its distinct blame target as well as its concomitant blame narrative. By studying the blame targets and blame narratives that are predominantly reported in the European quality press we can identify which blame game sticks in the European public.

Under what conditions do scapegoat games, renegade games, or diffusion games become the predominant blame game in the European public? In the subsequent Chapters 3–5, we will introduce three conditions, which help us to explain when and why a particular blame game will stick in the European public in different instances of EU policy failures. The first condition we probe is the *policy failure* condition (Chapter 3). We argue that different types of policy failures—failures to act, failures to comply, and failures to perform—will unleash different types of blame games: the plausibility assessment of public blame attributions will be at work to identify true responsibilities. We argue and subsequently demonstrate that this works well for failures to act and failures to comply, whereas the plausibility assessment of public blame attributions for failures to perform remains indeterminate. To identify the blame games that ensue in instances of performance failures, we introduce the second condition, the *policy-making* condition (Chapter 4). We argue that the EU's different policy-making procedures affect the plausibility assessment of public blame attributions differentially, because the clarity of responsibility varies with each policy-making procedure. While performance failures associated with supranational policy making and intergovernmental policy making renders supranational EU institutions and member states the focal targets of blame attributions, leading to scapegoat games or renegade games respectively, shared policy making, which involves member states and EU institutions, dilutes the clarity of responsibility and complicates the plausibility assessment of public blame attributions, which hence remain untargeted and diffuse. It is for these instances—when shared policy making undermines the clarity of responsibility for EU policy failures—that we introduce the third condition, the *policy implementation* condition (Chapter 5). The presence of national or supranational implementing actors improves the clarity of responsibility: they become focal in the plausibility assessment of public blame attributions and allow for blame games to be targeted at either supranational EU institutions (scapegoat games) or national authorities respectively (renegade games). Only when policy implementation is shared among supranational and domestic actors will true responsibilities remain opaque and the predominant blame game is likely to be a diffusion

game. The ensuing Chapters 3–5 will explain and empirically assess in detail how these three conditions relate to the clarity of responsibility as well as true responsibilities—the baseline for the public plausibility assessment—and thereby shape which blame game becomes predominant in the European public.

Endnotes

1. On the actors constituting the public see, for example, Koopmans and Pfetsch (2006); Koopmans (2007); Pfetsch (2008); Pfetsch et al. (2008); Koopmans (2010); Koopmans et al. (2010); Koopmans and Statham (2010b); Pfetsch et al. (2010); Statham (2010); Bennett et al. (2015); Pfetsch and Heft (2015); Risse (2015b). Note that our data source to assess public blame games is the 'quality press' in selected European countries. We are thus aware that the 'publicness' of the public, as construed here, is rather selective in terms of speakers and of audiences (see Risse 2015b).
2. For the public as source of information see, for example, Luhmann (1971); Risse (2015b); Follesdal (2015). With regard to the EU, several studies have explored how media coverage of EU policies impacts public attitudes (see, e.g. Semetko et al. 2003; Vreese and Boomgaarden 2006; Maier and Rittberger 2008; Vries et al. 2011; Marquart et al. 2019).
3. Similar mechanisms of information updating have been suggested and assessed in contributions on blame games in other multilevel systems as well as in domestic politics (see, e.g. Rudolph 2003a; 2003b; Arceneaux 2006; Mortensen 2013a; Mortensen 2016; Cutler 2017; Hinterleitner 2020, 35; 2022, 19).
4. For an understanding of the public sphere as the court of public opinion see, for example, Habermas (2008); Risse (2015b).
5. The importance of (perceived) trustworthiness for political actors is underlined by studies that find cueing strategies ineffective if their source is not considered credible (Hovland and Weiss 1951; Druckman 2001; Lupia and McCubbins 2003; Hobolt et al. 2013; Grimmer et al. 2014).
6. The public's attention to the EU will be particularly strong in cases of EU policy failures due to the prevalent negativity bias (Rozin and Royzman 2001; Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Tversky and Kahneman 1986).
7. When we speak of a predominant blame game in the European public, we thus imply that one type of blame game sticks in the Europeanized publics across EU member states. We thus use 'European public' and 'Europeanized publics' interchangeably.
8. We wish to re-emphasize that supranational actors can be publicly cast as scapegoats, irrespective if they are actually responsible for a particular policy failure or not. Our usage of the term thus deviates from the understanding of a scapegoat who is blamed for failures they are actually not responsible for.
9. Michael Laczynski, 2014. 'Freizügigkeit: Osteuropa gegen Großbritannien', *Die Presse*, 25 February 2014. Translation by the authors.
10. Joachim Jahn, 2013. 'Wir sind am Beginn einer neuen Migrationswelle', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1 December 2013. Citing the CDU domestic policy spokesman, Hans-Peter Uhl. Translation by the authors.

11. Michael Laczynski, 2013. 'Anekdoten statt Statistiken zum EU-Sozialtourismus', *Die Presse*, 7 June 2013. Citing the deputy group leader of the European People's Party in the EP, CSU MEP Manfred Weber. Translation by the authors.

12. R. Ross-Mann, and M. Szymanski, 2014. 'CSU will harten Wahlkampf gegen die AfD führen', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 1 October 2014. Citing the chairwoman of the parliamentary state group of the CSU, Gerda Hasselfeldt. Translation by the authors.

13. *Die Presse*, 2013. 'Arbeitsmarkt: Die EU hat den Kern des Problems nicht begriffen', *Die Presse*, 30 December 2013. Translation by the authors.

14. *Die Presse*, 2014. 'Fordert Brüssel Sozialleistungen für alle EU-Ausländer?' *Die Presse*, 11 January 2014. Translation by the authors.

15. *Die Presse*, 2014. 'Fordert Brüssel Sozialleistungen für alle EU-Ausländer?' *Die Presse*, 11 January 2014. Citing the CSU Secretary General Andreas Scheuer. Translation by the authors.

16. Michael Laczynski, 2013. 'Kein Wohngeld für EU-Ausländer', *Die Presse*, 28 November 2013. Translation by the authors.

17. *Der Standard*, 2011. 'Aus Kommentaren internationaler Tageszeitungen zur militärischen Intervention in Libyen', *Der Standard*, 21 March 2011. Translation by the authors.

18. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2011. 'Die Libyen-Krise ist nicht das Ende europäischer Verteidigungspolitik', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1 April 2011. Citing Laurent Wauquiez, the French Minister for Europe. Translation by the authors.

19. Wolfgang Böhm, 2011. 'Berlin spaltet europäische Außenpolitik', *Die Presse*, 2 September 2011. Translation by the authors.

20. Wolfgang Böhm, 2011. 'Berlin spaltet europäische Außenpolitik', *Die Presse*, 2 September 2011. Translation by the authors.

21. George Walden, 2011. 'Europe has flunked its first foreign policy test', *The Times*, 29 March 2011.

22. Michael Bauchmüller, and Thomas Kirchner, 2017. 'Der Dreh mit den Zertifikaten', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 10 October 2017. Translation by the authors.

23. Karl Gaulhofer, 2017. 'Ein Requiem auf Europas CO2 Handel', *Die Presse*, 2 March 2017. Translation by the authors.

24. *The Sunday Times*, 2013. 'The day Europe killed Kyoto', *The Sunday Times*, 21 April 2013.

25. Carl Mortished, 2008. 'EU split over plan to levy import tax on polluters', *The Times*, 8 January 2008.

26. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2012. 'Überangebot lässt Preis für CO2-Zertifikate abstürzen', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 17 April 2012. Translation by the authors.

27. *Der Standard*, 2018. 'Was nach dem Brexit passiert', *Der Standard*, 8 August 2018. Translation by the authors.

28. Hervé Kempf, 2011. 'En Europe, le prix de la tonne de carbone s'effondre', *Le Monde*, 6 December 2011. Translation by the authors.

29. Since we could not access the archive of *Le Monde* for the EU Border Control II case (see Chapter 5), we instead analysed the coverage of the policy failure in *La Libération*, which is a similarly liberal-progressive French quality newspaper.

3

The policy failure hypothesis

with Juliane Glovania and Louisa Klein-Bölting

3.1 Introduction

Which blame game sticks in the European public when EU policies fail? The literature on blame games in the EU generally suggests that EU politics is dominated by the diffusion of blame (Gerhards et al. 2009; Hood 2011; Rauh et al. 2020). As the main reason for the assumed prevalence of diffusion games in EU politics, the literature typically refers to the limited clarity of responsibility in the multilevel and multi-stage process of policy making in the EU (Hobolt and Tilley 2014; Wilson and Hobolt 2015; León et al. 2018). Since the EU's policy-making procedures are considered too complex for ordinary citizens to comprehend, political actors can choose the blame avoidance and blame generation strategies that they consider politically most opportune for their objectives. As a result, public blame attributions will likely run in circles, leading to diffusion games where blame is spread across numerous actors involved in EU policy making and thus no specific actor emerges as the dominant target of blame attributions.

We argue, by contrast, that even when EU policy-making procedures are complex, clarity of responsibility is not necessarily lacking. We suggest that the type of policy failure affects clarity of responsibility and thus the blame game that becomes predominant in the European public. More specifically, we expect that failures to perform are associated with diffusion games whereas failures to act, as well as failures to comply, give rise to renegade games. In Section 3.2, we develop this policy failure hypothesis theoretically, before testing its plausibility by comparing policy failures that gave rise to blame games in two pair-wise comparisons of similar EU policy failures. To this end, in Section 3.3 we compare the blame game that was triggered by the EU's failure to act in the 2011 Libyan crisis with the blame game that followed the performance failure of EU sanctions against Russia following Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014. In Section 3.4, we compare the blame

game that was triggered by the performance failure of the EU's Emissions Trading System (ETS), which was meant to implement the Kyoto Protocol, with the blame game that unfolded as a consequence of compliance failures with the EU's policies to implement the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Section 3.4 summarizes our results.

3.2 The policy failure condition

Blame games are triggered by policy failures. We consider EU policies as failures when there is widespread public disappointment that the EU is unable to address a problem it is expected to solve. Depending on the stage of the policy cycle in which the disappointment arises, we distinguish three types of EU policy failures. First, we observe failures to act where the EU disappoints public expectations because it proves unable to enact policies which are geared to solve the respective problem. The EU's inability to deploy an oil embargo against Russia due to its war of aggression against the Ukraine in 2022 serves as an example (Kolb 2022). Second, failures to perform occur where the EU is able to enact a policy but disappoints public expectations because the policy is inadequate to solve the problem at hand. For example, the EU's border control policies implemented by Frontex constitute a performance failure as they failed to prevent (or even contributed to) the death of thousands of migrants in the Mediterranean (Rittberger et al. 2017). Third, we refer to compliance failures where the EU has enacted a policy that is considered adequate to solve the respective problem but disappoints public expectations as it fails to be put into practice. For instance, member states' disregard of the EU's Stability and Growth Pact constitute compliance failures (Kriegmair et al. 2022).

   Our policy failure hypothesis suggests that the type of policy failure affects the clarity of responsibility and thus the blame games that are played in the European public. To the extent that EU policy failures are politicized, a public plausibility assessment of blame attributions sets in. This plausibility assessment helps citizens to learn about true responsibilities for EU policy failures which, in turn, constrains political actors' blame attributions. Yet, we acknowledge that this assessment does not always automatically allow for the identification of those actors who are truly responsible for the respective policy failure. Whether the learning and constraining mechanisms trigger blame games that gravitate towards true responsibilities depends on how easy or difficult it is to assess true responsibilities. When responsibility is difficult to assess, diffusion games are likely to prevail, but when responsibility is

comparatively easy to assess blame games will target the actors who were indeed responsible for the respective policy failure. Therefore, we expect renegade games when member states are responsible in cases of failures to act as well as in cases of failures to comply, but diffusion games in cases of performance failures—at least when responsibility is difficult to assess.

3.2.1 Failures to act

In cases of failures to act, we expect renegade games in which individual member states become the main target of public blame attributions. When the EU is unable to enact policies to address the problems it is expected to tackle, actors that block EU decision-making will become the main target of public blame attributions. After all, they could have allowed the EU to act. Actors with an ability to block decisions are usually individual member states. Supranational EU institutions rarely have the *de facto* or *de jure* power to block decisions (with the exception of the Commission's monopoly to initiate legislation). Member states can block decisions either by leveraging their veto in the (European) Council, whenever decisions have to be taken by unanimity, or by mobilizing blocking minorities in the Council of Ministers, whenever qualified majority voting applies (Tsebelis 2002). Therefore, it is the member states—rather than the EU—that are usually to blame when EU policies are not just deficient as is the case with failures to perform, but blocked as is the case with failures to act (Hobolt and Wratil 2020).

As member states' responsibility for failures to act is thus usually obvious, it is likewise easy for citizens to learn about true responsibilities, once the public plausibility assessment of political actors' blame attributions sets in. The member state blocking a policy might still try to shift or obfuscate blame, but others in the public domain will likely rebut these blame avoidance attempts. At the least, the member states which wanted a policy to pass will usually go public and name or shame the blocking member state (Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl 2020). Moreover, their blame attributions will be confirmed by more neutral observers such as experts, journalists, or intellectuals, which, in turn, allows citizens to learn about the blocking member state's true responsibility for the policy failure in question (Zangl et al. 2024).

As citizens learn about true responsibilities, political actors' public responsibility attributions are constrained (Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2020a; Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl 2020). Even the blocking member states, which have a particular strong incentive to shift or obfuscate blame, need

to be cautious in applying the blame attribution strategies that are most politically opportune. The more citizens learn about true responsibilities for the EU's failure to act, the more member-state governments responsible for blocking a decision run the risk that their blame avoidance strategies will backfire and tarnish their reputation as trustworthy actors. The more they draw on these blame avoidance strategies the more they will become renegades that are isolated within the EU. All that blocking member states can do is defend their decision to obstruct the policy others were prepared to pass. Yet, if they do, they accept—implicitly if not explicitly—their responsibility for the EU failure to act. They are thus likely to become the main target of a *renegade game*.

3.2.2 Failures to perform

In cases of performance failures, one would generally expect the blame game in the public domain to gravitate towards targeting the responsible policy makers. After all, they could have enacted better policies to solve the problem they are meant to tackle. However, to the extent that policy making is shared, and thus complex in the EU, the public plausibility assessment of political actors' blame attributions may not always be able to clarify true responsibilities. Hence, we rather expect diffusion games in cases of failures to perform.

The responsibilities for performance failures are particularly difficult to assess in the EU. EU policy making is often pooled among member states in intergovernmental bodies or even shared amongst supranational and intergovernmental bodies. It is thus difficult to single out specific actors responsible for a particular performance failure. Moreover, to pin down true responsibilities, it is not enough to comprehend the EU's *de jure* policy-making procedures, which can vary from issue to issue, but it is also necessary to uncover individual political actors' *de facto* impact on the failed policy. To this end, one has to know which actors pushed for the policy that has failed to solve the problem it was meant to address (Hobolt and Tilley 2014; Wilson and Hobolt 2015; León et al. 2018).

Owing to these complexities, any assessment of the plausibility of public blame attributions is prone to leave some room for conflicting interpretations (Rittberger et al. 2017; Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2023). While this assessment may clarify the set of political actors who are plausible blame targets as they have been involved in policy making, it will not always help citizens to learn about individual actors' impact on the failed policy and thus to identify true

responsibilities. As different blame attributions can withstand the public's plausibility assessment, citizens will sometimes merely learn that different actors can be considered plausible blame targets. Therefore, they will often find it comparatively hard to single out the specific actors responsible for performance failures. Even in the face of a substantive public plausibility assessment, citizens may remain receptive for blame attributions that deviate at least partially from true responsibilities.

Hence, political actors face—relatively speaking—fewer constraints when attributing blame for performance failures. As citizens struggle to pinpoint true responsibilities, some room remains for political actors to attribute blame in a way that is politically most opportune for them. Even when their blame attributions deviate partially from true responsibilities, the risk of jeopardizing their reputation as trustworthy actors may appear acceptable. Those political actors responsible may thus still try to avoid blame by shifting it onto other political actors, or by obfuscating their responsibility by blaming the EU collectively (Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2020a; Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl 2020). When shifting blame to each other, blame attributions run in circles. For instance, member states may blame EU institutions, such as the Commission, which may in turn shift blame back to the member states, leading to a cacophony of blame attributions. Governments may also choose to obfuscate blame, by attributing blame to the EU as a whole or to its membership collective. For instance, they may blame the protracted compromises decision-making usually requires among EU member states. Taken together, EU performance failures may sometimes—but not always—propel *diffusion games* where no specific actor becomes the main target of public blame attributions.

3.2.3 Failures to comply

When EU policies fail to tackle a problem because they are not complied with, the non-compliant actors will become the main targets of public blame attributions. In principle, the non-compliant actors could be individual member states or individual EU institutions. In practice, it is typically member states who disregard EU policies. EU institutions are rarely the addressees of EU policies and if they are, they usually comply with these policies. After all, it is in their institutional self-interest to do so. By contrast, member states are usually the addressees of EU policies and they often have an incentive to disregard them. Moreover, as states typically retain operative capacities, the EU also needs to rely on member states for policy implementation. Therefore,

it is typically member states' responsibility to ensure compliance with EU policies. Thus, no matter whether they are themselves the addressees of EU policies or whether non-state actors are the ultimate addressees of EU policies, the member states are the ones responsible in cases of compliance failures (Tallberg 2002b; Falkner et al. 2004; Börzel et al. 2010; Zürn and Joerges 2011; Treib 2014; Börzel 2021). As a result, in instances of compliance failures, public blame attributions are predominantly directed at individual member states, which gives rise to renegade games.

As member states' responsibility for failures to comply is usually obvious, it is easy for citizens to learn about true responsibilities, once the public plausibility assessment of political actors' blame attributions sets in. Even though non-complying member states might try to shift or obfuscate blame, others in the public domain will rebut these attempts and highlight true responsibilities. To avoid the risk of being blamed for tolerating the non-compliant behaviour of others, complying member states are likely to blame the non-compliant member state. A fortiori, this should apply to EU institutions, such as the Commission. As 'guardian of the treaties' the Commission can initiate infringement proceedings against non-compliant member states (Börzel et al. 2012). Other compliance constituents, such as interest groups, experts, journalists, or intellectuals, may also help citizens to learn about true responsibilities for the respective failure to comply (Kriegmair et al. 2022).

Owing to citizens' ability to learn about responsibilities for compliance failures, the non-complying member states' blame avoidance opportunities are severely constrained (Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2020a; Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl 2020). They cannot simply shift or obfuscate blame, as this would tarnish their reputation as trustworthy actors not only in the EU and amongst its fellow member states, but also among citizens in Europe. The only politically viable strategy non-compliant member states are left with is to criticize the policy they are violating (Schlipphak and Treib 2017). While this may indeed moderate blame attributions, it also entails the—implicit, if not explicit—acceptance of their own responsibility for the respective EU compliance failure. In cases of compliance failures, public attention is thus drawn to the non-complying member state rather than the EU or other member states who comply with the policy at stake. The ensuing blame game will thus gravitate towards a *renegade game* in which non-compliant member states become the main target of public blame attributions.

Overall, the *policy failure hypothesis* leads us to expect that failures to act as well as failures to comply will give rise to renegade games, whereas performance failures will lead to diffusion games. To evaluate the empirical
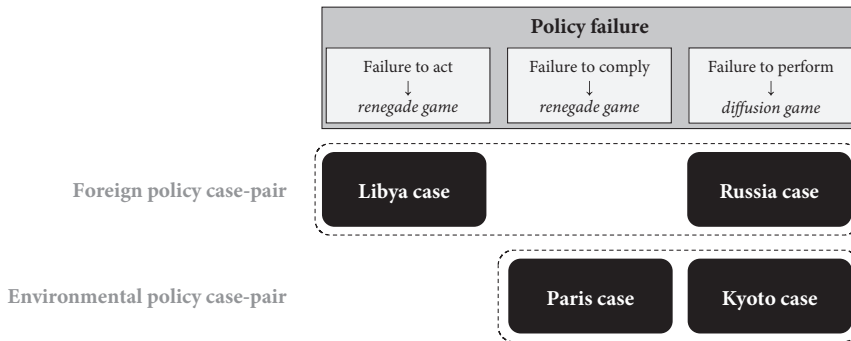
Figure 3.1 The policy failure hypothesis

plausibility of our policy failure hypothesis, in the remainder of this chapter, we focus on the blame games that emerged in the European public in two case-pairs of similar policy failures, one case-pair covering the EU's foreign and security policy and the second case-pair in the field of EU environmental policy (see Figure 3.1).

3.3 EU foreign policy failures

To assess the empirical plausibility of the policy failure hypothesis, we first compare the blame games that were triggered by two EU foreign policy failures, the EU's failure to act in the Libya case and its failure to perform in the Russia case.

The failure to act in the Libya case: In 2011 Libya's dictator Muammar Gaddafi employed military force against domestic opposition groups and the wider population. While the United Nations authorized a humanitarian intervention, the EU failed to agree on a substantive, perhaps even military contribution (Fitzpatrick 2018; Brattberg 2011; Fabbrini and Sergio 2014, 184f.).[1] The EU's inaction disappointed public expectations that it would be able and willing to protect the Libyan population against a despotic leader.[2] In fact, the EU's lack of a common policy—its failure to act—was heavily criticized in the European public. The complaint was that 'Europe does not speak with one voice, and it doesn't act—even though [. . .] everything happens on its doorstep.'[3] The EU was considered to have merely 'stood on the sidelines' and was showing 'inactivity in the face of a crisis with obvious security implications for the Union's member states, at a time the US administration was desperate for its European partners to take the lead' (Menon 2011, 75). Moreover, accounts in the public criticized 'the failure of the EU [. . .] to

back a French and British plan for a no-fly zone'[4] as a 'mistake' which risks a 'crisis' of the EU's common foreign and security policy.[5]

The failure to perform in the Russia case: In 2014 Russia illegally annexed Crimea from Ukraine and illegally supported pro-Russian forces to destabilize Eastern Ukraine. In this case, the EU did not fail to act, as it did in the Libya case, but employed a multiple-step sanctions regime (Smith 2016, 129; Gehring et al. 2017, 727; European Council and Council of the European Union 2019). The EU's sanctions regime, however, disappointed public expectations.[6] On the one hand, EU sanctions were criticized for being too soft to force Russia authorities to stop its invasion of Ukraine. From this perspective, EU sanctions were 'toothless'[7] and 'did not bring about the expected results. The situation has not improved, there is no de-escalation in sight'.[8] On the other hand, EU sanctions were criticized for being too harsh to swallow for the European economy and for risking an escalation with Russia. In this view, the EU was 'shooting itself in the foot'[9] and 'brought us closer to an escalation of threats'.[10] Either way, the sanctions were widely considered a performance failure.

We selected both cases to assess the policy failure hypothesis through a comparison that conforms to the logic of a most-similar-case design (Przeworski and Teune 1982, 32–33). The cases differ with regard to the type of policy failure, but they share a number of characteristics, thus allowing us to isolate the effect of failure type (the independent variable) on the type of blame game (the dependent variable), while controlling for potentially confounding variables. More specifically, the two cases do not only belong to the same policy field, namely, the EU's foreign and security policy, they are also similar on a number of other dimensions. First, they address similar issues. Both cases take issue with military operations in the EU's neighbourhood. Second, EU policy making is similar. Both cases were subject to the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) which in principle limits decision-making authority to the Council; yet the Commission was also involved by providing aid for Libyan civil society and by preparing targeted sanctions against the Russian invasion of Ukraine.[11] Finally, the cases come with similar levels of public attention. Both cases—the Libya and the Russia case—were widely discussed in the European public.

At the same time, the type of policy failure varies across the two cases. In the Libya case, blame was exchanged for a *failure to act* as the main criticism in the public domain was that the EU failed to formulate an adequate response to Ghaddafi's atrocities against his own population. Hence, following our policy failure hypothesis we expect a *renegade game* in this case. In contrast, the blame game in the Russia case was triggered by a *failure to perform*. Not

the EU's response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine per se, but its sanctions regime was criticized on substantive terms for being either too weak or too strong in substance. For our theoretical expectation to be borne out, we should thus observe a *diffusion game*. Table 3.1 summarizes the observable implications in both cases.

To assess the expectation of our policy failure hypothesis that a diffusion game will unfold in the Russia case (as a failure to perform) and that a renegade game will develop in the Libya case (as a failure to act), we engage in content analysis of news coverage in the European media. To delimit our cases temporally, we begin with our analysis at the point where the respective failures have been publicly discussed for the first time, that is, 15 February 2011, in the Libya case and 17 March 2014, in the Russia case. We then analysed the coverage of the two EU foreign policy failures for the period of one year. To identify relevant articles in the selected newspapers, we conducted a keyword search in the digital newspaper archive *Factiva*, using the same case-specific search string across all newspapers.[12] We identified 964 articles, which we then reviewed manually to sort out duplicates as well as articles that did not address the respective policy failure. In the resulting sample of 235 articles, we identified 297 statements that amounted to public blame attributions—100 in the Libya case, 197 in the Russia case. For each blame statement, we not only coded the respective blame target—that is, whether blame is attributed to the EU or its members and whether this

Table 3.1 Observable implications in the EU foreign policy case-pair

	Libya case (failure to act) ↓ Renegade game	Russia case (failure to perform) ↓ Diffusion game
Target: Who is to blame?	• Most frequent target: specific member states	• Most frequent target: generic target
Character: How is the culprit characterized?	• Member of the in-group • Deviant character	• Faceless system • Impersonal character
Plot: Why did the target commit the failure?	• Failure as an aberration	• Failure as an effect of the system
Moral: How can the failure be corrected?	• Shaming: renegade must come to their senses	• Fatalism: nothing can be done

is done in a specific or in a rather generic manner—but we also studied the blame narratives in which these statements were embedded.

3.3.1 The Libya case: a renegade game

According to the policy failure hypothesis, renegade games will be predominant in the European public for EU failures to act. In the Libya case, we thus expect the brunt of the blame to be directed towards those individual member states who hindered the EU arriving at a meaningful policy to stop the atrocities of Gaddafi's regime.

Our analysis of public blame attributions indicates that the predominant blame game in the Libya case indeed amounts to a *renegade game*. The most frequent *target* of public blame attributions are specific member states (57 out of 100), rather than specific EU actors (5 out of 100), as in scapegoat games, or generic targets such as 'the EU' (31 out of 100) or 'the member states' (7 out of 100), as we would expect in diffusion games (see Figure 3.2).

Moreover, the narrative in which the blame attributions that target specific member states are embedded also conforms to the narrative elements typical of a renegade game. Germany, which was most prominently blamed for the failure to act in the Libya case, was indeed *characterized* as a renegade. The European press in general—and the German press in particular—highlighted that with its 'no' to a no-fly zone in Libya, Germany has isolated itself from its

Figure 3.2 Blame targets in the Libya case (n=100)

Note: Following our operationalization, this distribution of blame statements indicates a renegade game because: (1) statements attributing individual member states are the most frequent (57 per cent), and (2) together with blame statements directed at the member states in general (7 per cent) they amount to more than 50 per cent of all the blame attributions coded in this case. We find distributions that conform to this operationalization not only in the aggregate of the media coverage across the four countries selected for the analysis, but also in three out of four individual countries, with the United Kingdom being the only exception (see Appendix, Table A.12).

European partners. The German 'go it alone approach' and its concomitant 'isolation' among its EU partners were a *Leitmotiv* in the press coverage of the EU's failure to act in Libya.[13] It is criticized in this narrative that Germany was the 'only' country among its partners to refuse the no-fly zone.[14] The European press also questions Germany's loyalty to and solidarity with its European partners. For instance, the European press wonders whether 'arguments such as a joint EU position did not play a role' for the German position on a no-fly zone in Libya[15] and states that 'Germany's affront against its European and American partners reveals nothing less than isolationist stubbornness and self-righteousness.'[16] It is even feared that Germany's defection from a joint European policy might be 'the symptom of a regresion into a national-pacifist bigotry.'[17]

While German self-isolation—and thus the German role as a renegade—is described in the press as a pattern of a German 'Sonderweg', rather than just an isolated instance, the main *plot* of this narrative is still that of a renegade rather than a scapegoat game. After all, there is some understanding in the press that 'in Germany there has always been this 'Sonderweg' with regard to the use of force in international politics'[18] which is explained by its history as initiator of two World Wars. Yet, by highlighting Germany's militaristic past as the main reason for its inability to support military action and the concomitant self-isolation among its European partners, the German 'Sonderweg' is also portrayed as a problematic limitation for supporting the use of force in international politics. This 'Sonderweg' is thus not treated as an inherent pattern of a dubious German character, but rather as an understandable aberration of an actor who is ultimately considered a member of the in-group.

Owing to its deviation from the European consensus, the *moral* of the public narrative is that Germany must eventually re-think its 'Sonderweg' approach and take into account the broader consequences of its deviant behaviour. In the public sphere, Germany was not only blamed for preventing a joint EU policy on Libya, it was also shamed for undermining the EU's CFSP more generally. The press repeatedly highlighted that 'Berlin divides EU foreign policy' and that it risks 'the end of the common foreign policy',[19] because the 'defection of Germany from any consensus crippled the EU before it could get to its feet.'[20] Germany's behaviour was also shamed because it put the country in the 'bad company' of Russia and China who opposed a Libya intervention.[21] *Die Presse* from Austria indicated with sarcasm that 'Germany found itself as the only EU country not in the company of its Western allies, but in the company of matadors of democracy and human rights such as Russia and China.'[22]

Overall, the Libya case bears out that an individual member state—Germany—was the main target of public blame attributions. In the ensuing narrative Germany is characterized as a renegade that remains, despite its deviant behaviour, a European partner (characterization). Germany's 'Sonderweg' is portrayed as an aberration, which can be understood as being driven by its unique militaristic past and thus limited to the use of military force (plot). Ultimately Germany needs to come to its senses and understand the broader consequences of its deviant behaviour for the CFSP of the EU (moral).

3.3.2 The Russia case: a diffusion game

Our policy failure hypothesis leads us to expect that a diffusion game will prevail in the European public in instances of EU performance failures. In the Russia case, we thus expect the targets of blame attributions for the EU's inadequate response to the annexation of Crimea to be mainly diffuse and thus spread across member states and EU institutions.

Our analysis of public blame attributions in the Russia case reveals that the predominant blame game in this case was indeed a *diffusion game*. The most frequent *targets* in the Russia case were generic entities. The bulk of public blame attributions were rather unspecified, predominantly targeting 'the EU' as a whole (105 out of 197) or the EU member states as a collective (20 out of 197), rather than specific EU member states (62 out of 197), as is typical for renegade games, or specific EU actors (10 out of 197), as is typical for scapegoat games (see Figure 3.3). Instead of targeting specific actors, most blame attributions for the EU's failure to perform in the Russia case are generic, targeting 'the EU',[23] 'the European countries',[24] 'the member states' or the 'European leaders',[25] the (European) politicians,[26] 'the union', or 'the community',[27] or even more generically 'Brussels',[28] and 'Europe'.[29]

The narrative that comes with the predominant public blame attributions also points at a diffusion game. 'The EU' as the main target of blame attributions in the Russia case is *characterized* as an impersonal system. The EU does not even appear as an agent that could have acted differently, but as a system in which structural forces are responsible for the deficiencies of the EU sanctions against Russia. There is no single actor to blame for the deficient sanctions against Russia, but a divided Europe that is in disagreement about 'how to respond to Russia'.[30] It is highlighted that 'different countries in the EU have different views on sanctions'.[31]

generic targets: 63% (125)

53% (105)	10% (20)	31% (62)	5% (10)

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

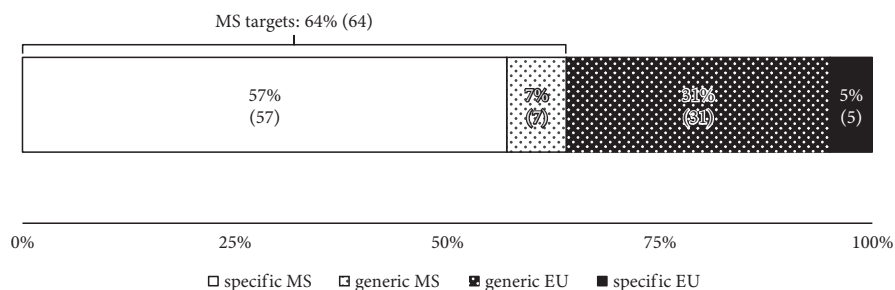■ generic EU   □ generic MS   □ specific MS   ■ specific EU
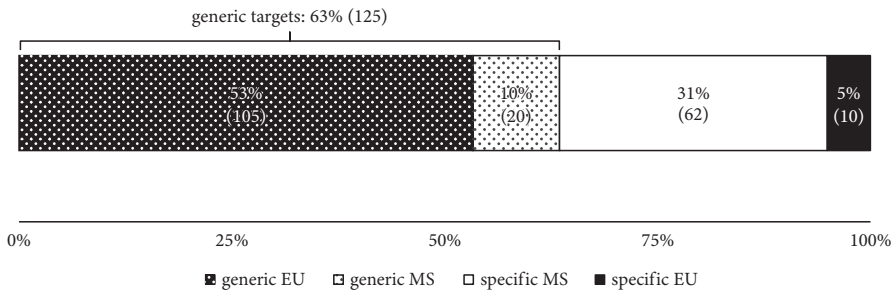
Figure 3.3 Blame targets in the Russia case (n=197)

Note: Following our operationalization, this distribution of blame statements indicates a diffusion game because neither specific member states nor specific EU actors are the most frequent targets of public blame attributions. Instead, (1) statements attributing blame to the EU as a whole are the most frequent (53 per cent), and (2) together with blame attributions targeting the member states as a collective (10 per cent) they amount to more than 50 per cent of all blame statements that were coded in this case. We find distributions that conform to this operationalization not only in the aggregate of the media coverage across the four countries selected for the analysis, but also in three out of the four individual countries with the United Kingdom being the only exception (see Appendix, Table A.13).

The main *plot* in this narrative thus is that 'divisions' are to blame and not the actors who created these divisions in the first place. By highlighting 'divisions within Europe' the press also indicates its understanding of the difficulties for the EU in agreeing on sanctions which would hurt Russia more effectively. The press engages in, or reports on, a cool-tempered analysis that the EU's 'struggle to agree on sanctions demonstrates the strenuous effort to turn twenty eight national interests into a unified and convincing policy'.[32] It is also highlighted in the press that differential economic dependencies vis-à-vis Russia exhibited by different EU member states explain why the EU has difficulties agreeing on a set of more effective sanctions.[33] More often than not, the differential positions on sanctions by the member states, which then translate into deficient EU sanctions against Russia, are thus not openly criticized, but rather explained by differences in economic ties to Russia.[34] The press explains that 'in principle, all EU countries are prepared to accept sanctions, but they prefer sanctions which create low costs for their own economies'[35] and thus compromise on a set of sanctions that does not hurt any EU member state and is thus having little impact on Russia.[36]

The *moral* in this narrative also conforms to what we expect for diffusion games as it insinuates, rather fatalistically, that nothing much can be done about the deficient sanction regime. After all, as is typical for EU policy making, 'the result is usually a compromise'[37] and 'something is better than having nothing.'[38] If there are demands for more far-reaching sanctions in the European press at all, these are not directed at specific member states

that opposed far-reaching sanctions or at EU actors, such as the Commission, who could push for tougher sanctions, but at 'the EU' as a whole. It is, for instance, reported that Ukrainian president Petro Poroschenko asked 'the EU to engage in a tougher bearing on Moscow'[39] and UK prime minister David Cameron demanded that 'Europe must be willing to pursue further tough measures if Russia does not change course'.[40]

Overall, the Russia case bears out generic entities, such as 'the EU', 'the member states', and 'Europe' as the main target of public blame attributions as well as the respective narrative of a diffusion game. Rather than attributing the policy failure to a particular actor or set of actors, blame is de-agentified (characterization). The cause of the policy failure is depicted to be beyond the control of individual member states but is structurally rooted in 'divisions' that result from different economic ties to Russia (plot). As the EU's sanction policy is thus a necessary compromise, demands for enacting a more encompassing sanctions regime are rather scarce and if they occur, they are rarely directed at specific agents (moral).

In sum, the comparison of public blame attributions in the Russia and Libya cases (see Figure 3.4) lends support to the policy failure hypothesis. The EU's failure to act in the Libya case triggered a renegade game where public
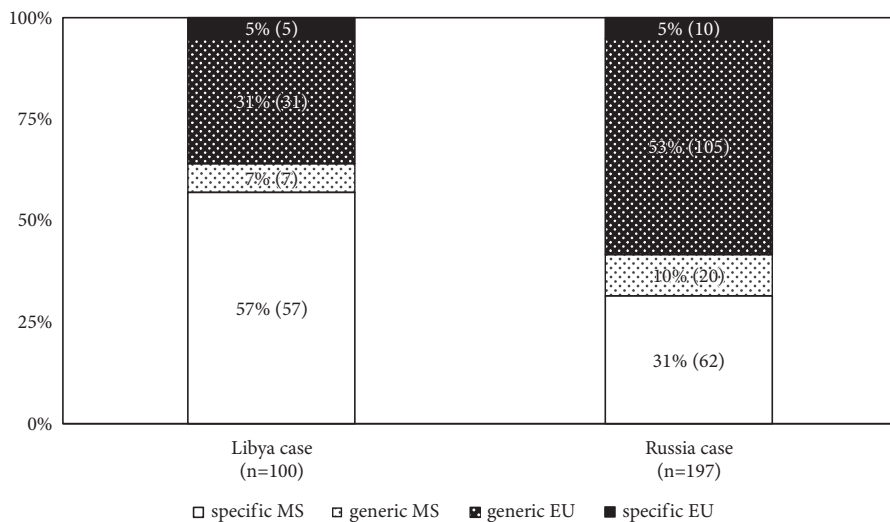
Figure 3.4 Blame targets in the EU foreign policy case-pair

Note: A chi-square test indicates that the difference of public blame attributions across the Russia and the Libya case is not random. The null hypothesis of a random distribution can be rejected on the 99 per cent confidence level (see Appendix, Table A.6). We also find the difference between the cases not only in the aggregate across countries, but also for three out of the four countries selected for the analysis with the United Kingdom being the only exception (see Appendix, Tables A.12 and A.13).

blame attributions tend to target specific member states, while the EU's failure to perform in the Russia case gave rise to a diffusion game where blame remains largely unspecified since responsibility is chiefly attributed to 'the EU' as a whole.

3.4 EU environmental policy failures

For the comparison of EU environmental policy failures, we selected the EU's failure to perform in the case of the Kyoto Protocol and the EU's failure to comply in the case of the Paris Agreement.

The failure to perform in the Kyoto case: The EU introduced an ETS in 2003 as its most important 'cap-and-trade' measure to meet the carbon reduction targets agreed upon in the Kyoto Protocol from 1997. The ETS was widely regarded a failure, because it did not perform as well as intended. In the European public, the ETS lead to widespread disappointment as it turned out to be rather ineffective in reducing carbon emissions. It was widely criticized for an oversupply of emissions certificates, which resulted in carbon prices at times dropping to zero, as the following description in *The Times* illustrates: 'Meant to inflict pain on polluters by requiring them to buy permits for every ton of carbon dioxide they produce [. . .] the market has proven messy, complicated, and dysfunctional. A glut of CO_2 permits has led to a collapse of more than 90% in the carbon price.'[41] The failure is similarly described in *Die Presse*: 'The idea of making businesses pay for every ton of CO_2 they emit to foster sustainable investments, sounds good. But it did not work out.'[42] The ETS is therefore frequently depicted in the press as 'firing blanks',[43] 'very sick',[44] 'broken',[45] 'completely useless',[46] a 'toothless tiger',[47] or simply 'deficient'.[48] Whereas the EU received some credit for having introduced the ETS, its poor performance was heavily criticized.

The failure to comply in the Paris case: The EU ratified the 2015 Paris Agreement in October 2016 with the paramount goal to limit the global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels. Upon ratification, this goal became legally binding for the member states and required them to adopt National Determined Contribution (NDC) plans mapping out their paths to achieve the declared objectives by 2030 (Schwarte 2021). Whereas this requirement was widely accepted in the public sphere, the member states were heavily criticized for falling short of putting in place the respective national measures. They were criticized for their failure to comply with their EU commitments. There was widespread disappointment in the public domain that member states not only showed 'little action',[49] but

even 'reluctance'[50] to adopt adequate NDC plans on the one hand and to implement them on the other hand. Their 'failure [. . .] to commit to a goal of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050'[51] was highlighted as was their failure to 'take the strong policy action needed to deliver the necessary change'[52] to live up to the rules adopted by the EU to implement the Paris Agreement.

We selected these two cases according to the logic of a most-similar-case design. While the two cases differ with regard to the type of policy failure, they share a number of characteristics, thus allowing us to isolate the effect of failure type (the independent variable) on the type of blame game (the dependent variable) while controlling for potentially confounding variables. Both cases belong to the same policy field—EU environmental policy—and share similarities on additional dimensions. First, both cases relate to the EU's efforts to bring its members' carbon emissions in conformity with international commitments. Second, policy making in both cases was similar since, following a proposal by the European Commission, the Council and the European Parliament shared decision-making authority.[53] The two cases also come with similar levels of public attention as they were widely discussed in the public domain of EU member states.

While the two cases thus share numerous similarities, they vary with regard to the type of policy failure: The blame game in the Kyoto case was triggered by a *failure to perform*. The main criticism in this case was that the ETS was substantively flawed because it failed to attain the desired results. Consequently, our policy failure hypothesis leads us to expect a *diffusion game* in the Kyoto case. In the Paris case, blame was exchanged because of a *failure to comply*. Not the EU's climate goals but the failure to live up to these goals was criticized in the European public. For our theoretical expectation to be borne out, we should thus also observe a *renegade game*. Table 3.2 summarizes the observable implications in both cases.

To assess the expectation of our policy failure hypothesis that a diffusion game will unfold in the Kyoto case (because of a failure to perform) and that a renegade game will develop in the Paris case (because of a failure to comply), we conduct a content analysis of the news coverage in the European quality press. In both cases, we begin our analysis at the point in time when public criticism of the respective policy failures started to build up, that is, 1 January 2008 in the Kyoto protocol case (i.e. the start of the second programme phase of the ETS) and 5 October 2016 in the Paris Agreement case (i.e. the ratification of the accord by the EU). We analysed the coverage of the two EU environmental policy failures until 1 June 2020. We identified 704 articles through keyword search in the digital newspaper archive *Factiva* using

Table 3.2 Observable implications in the EU environmental policy case-pair

	Kyoto case (failure to perform) ↓ Diffusion game	Paris case (failure to comply) ↓ Renegade game
Target: Who is to blame?	• Most frequent target: generic target	• Most frequent target: specific member states
Character: How is the culprit characterized?	• Faceless system • Impersonal character	• Member of the in-group • Deviant character
Plot: Why did the target commit the failure?	• Failure as an effect of the system	• Failure as an aberration
Moral: How can the failure be corrected?	• Fatalism: nothing can be done	• Shaming: renegade must come to their senses

the same case-specific search string across all newspapers.[54] After reviewing them manually to sort out duplicates as well as articles that did not address the respective policy failure, we arrived at a sample of 162 articles, in which we identified 277 blame attribution statements: 147 for the Kyoto case, and 130 for the Paris case. For each blame attribution statement, we coded the respective blame target and we analysed the predominant blame narrative.

3.4.1 The Kyoto case: a diffusion game

According to our policy failure hypothesis, diffusion games will prevail in the European public for EU performance failures. In the Kyoto case, we therefore expect the targets of blame attributions for the EU's failed policy to curb carbon emissions in line with the Kyoto Protocol to be mainly diffuse and hence spread across member states and EU institutions.

In line with our policy failure hypothesis, our analysis of public blame attributions in the Kyoto case reveals a *diffusion game*. The *target* of the bulk of public blame attributions remains generic. The overwhelming number of blame attributions is directed at 'the EU' as a whole (110 out of 147) and some also target 'the member states' (3 out of 147), while only a tiny fraction of blame attributions targets specific member states (21 out of 147), as is typical for renegade games, or specific EU actors (13 out of 147), as is

typical for scapegoat games (see Figure 3.5). Neither EU institutions, such as
the Commission or the European Parliament, nor individual member states
(e.g. Germany and Poland were reluctant to accept high carbon prices) were
singled out as the main blame targets. Rather, blame is assigned generically
to 'the European Union,'[55] 'the EU,'[56] 'Brussels,'[57] or 'Europe.'[58]

The predominant blame narrative also corroborates our expectation of a
diffusion game. The EU as the main target of public blame attributions is
mostly *characterized* as a rather impersonal system without much agency.
Instead of characterizing the EU as an actor whose emission trading policy
has failed, the press mostly engages in rather mechanical explanations as to
why this policy is flawed. The failure is attributed to impersonal forces, such
as 'the market', 'the scheme', or 'the system.'[59]

The *plot* thus is that these faceless forces—'the market', 'the scheme', or
'the system'—are the main reason for the policy failure. The policy failure
is explained by reference to unintended consequences as well as unexpected
circumstances that are beyond political control. Instead of highlighting polit-
ical actors' role in making the flawed policy, the press merely describes why
the ETS does not perform as expected. The European press reports that
'there were too many certificates on the market'[60] and that 'there have been
errors in setting the allowance levels.'[61] It engages in detailed descriptions of
supply-and-demand dynamics of the carbon market. The failure of the ETS is
frequently explained by a 'lack of demand and an excess of supply.'[62] This, in
turn, is explained by 'the economic recession' which has 'a depressive effect:

Figure 3.5 Blame targets in the Kyoto case (n=147)

Note: Following our operationalization, this distribution of blame statements indicates a diffusion
game because neither specific member states nor specific EU actors are the most frequent targets of
public blame attributions. Instead, (1) statements attributing blame to the EU as a whole are the
most frequent (75 per cent) and (2) together with blame attributions targeting the member states as
a collective (2 per cent) they amount to more than 50 per cent of all blame statements that were
coded in this case. We find distributions that conform to this operationalization not only in the
aggregate of the media coverage across the four countries selected for the analysis, but also in each
of these countries individually (see Appendix, Table A.14).

industry emits less, so it needs fewer permits'.[63] Therefore, 'the European market for CO_2 emission quotas [. . .] is no longer playing its role'.[64] Not a political decision, but 'the scheme' is criticized 'for allowing member states to hand out free carbon permits and for issuing too many permits, resulting in a low price for carbon pollution'.[65] The policy failure is thus depicted as caused by a 'design flaw',[66] 'the design of the system',[67] or 'gaps'[68] in the carbon market.

Owing to the absence of political actors who can correct the failure in the ETS failure narrative, the *moral* of this diffusion game is rather fatalistic. On the one hand, it is stressed that a system overhaul is required to fix the ETS. The press calls for a 'repair',[69] a 'quick therapy',[70] and to 'revive the machine'.[71] On the other hand, these calls appear futile as no specific actor is mentioned to enact system change. If at all, demands remain unspecific, simply stating that the 'solution to all these problems would be a European one'.[72] Fatalism becomes obvious when the press naively requires 'let's learn from the failure of the quota market'[73] without any specification of the lessons learned and the actors who could enact them.

Overall, the Kyoto case bears out our expectation that in cases of performance failures diffusion games unfold in which generic entities, such as 'the EU', 'Europe', and 'Brussels' become the main target of public blame attributions. The concomitant narrative characterizes culprits as faceless forces, such as the market or the system (characterization). These faceless forces as well as unintended consequences and unforeseeable circumstance beyond the control of policy makers are seen as the reason for the policy failure (plot). Consequently, suggestions for rectifying the failure point at features of the system that require reform, but rarely mention the agents that should fix the system (moral).

3.4.2 The Paris case: a renegade game

Our policy failure hypothesis suggests that in cases of compliance failures a renegade game will become the predominant blame game in the European public. In the Paris case, we thus expect most of the public blame attributions to target those member states, which did not reach the carbon emission targets set by the EU to implement the Paris Agreement.

In line with this expectation, our analysis of public blame attributions in the Paris case points at the predominance of a *renegade game*. The *target* of most blame attributions are specific member states (69 out of 130) while blame attributions to generic targets such as 'the EU' as whole (19 out of 130)

or 'the member states' in general (26 out of 130), as is typical for diffusion games, or to specific EU actors (16 out of 130), as is typical for scapegoat games, are much less prevalent (see Figure 3.6). Rather than being unspecific and untargeted, public blame statements tend to be clearly targeted at those specific member states that were considered responsible for the compliance failure. These member states were singled out from the rest of the EU's membership and its institutions as the main culprits of the failure to live up to the EU's commitments as part of the Paris Agreement. While numerous member states are considered renegades (in contrast to the renegade game in the Libya case), blame attributions usually focus on one specific country at a time (in clear contrast to the diffusion games in the Russia case or the Kyoto case). Countries singled out in the European press for the failure to comply with the Paris Agreement include Austria,[74] Germany,[75] France,[76] Ireland,[77] the Netherlands,[78] Spain,[79] Greece,[80] the United Kingdom,[81] Cyprus,[82] Malta,[83] Estonia,[84] the Czech Republic,[85] Poland,[86] and Hungary.[87]

The narrative that comes with the blame attributions that target specific member states also points to a renegade game. The targeted member states are mostly *characterized* as renegades that break away from European ambitions to combat global warming. In the European press, the EU is considered 'a leader on the environment'[88] and 'poster child for combating climate change'[89] with the goal to become 'the first climate-neutral "continent" by 2050'.[90] When member states fail to live up to these European aspirations, they are criticized as renegades betraying this common European goal. While
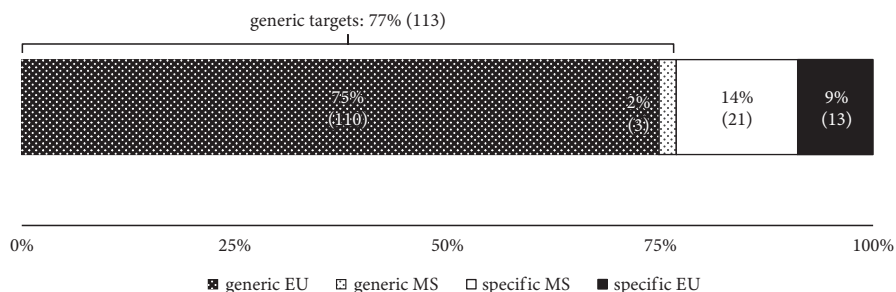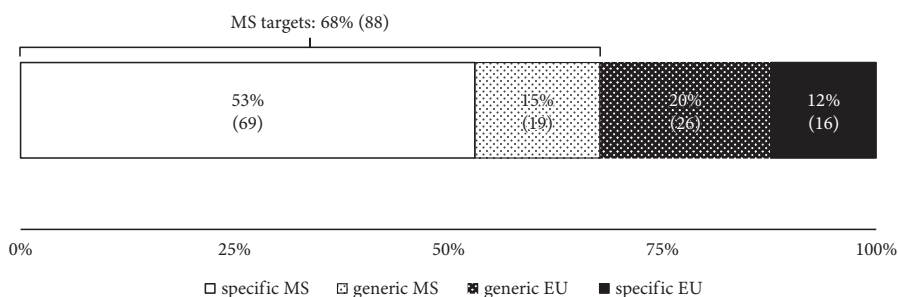

Figure 3.6 Blame targets in the Paris case (n=130)

Note: Following our operationalization, this distribution of blame statements indicates a renegade game because: (1) statements targeting individual member states are most frequent (53 per cent), and (2) together with blame statements directed at the member states as a whole (15 per cent) they amount to more than 50 per cent of all the blame attributions that were coded in this case. We find distributions that conform to this operationalization not only in the aggregate of the media coverage across the four countries selected for the analysis, but also in each of these countries individually (see Appendix, Table A.15).

the majority of member states is 'advanced'[91] and wants the EU to 'lead by example',[92] 'reluctant' laggards[93] fall short of European ambitions.[94]

The French government is, for instance, characterized as renegade because it deviates from EU climate ambitions. The European press criticizes that 'Paris suffers from a gap between its words and its deeds, due to the delay in meeting its climate objectives'.[95] Due to its 'irresponsible' behaviour,[96] the French government is said to have 'lost credibility'[97] and 'moral authority'[98] as a 'climate champion'.[99] Also the German government receives blame for its failure to live up to the EU's climate objectives because of 'little action'.[100] The press thus emphasizes that 'Germany is not a role model'[101] in combating climate change. Again, charges of hypocrisy are widespread in the European press: 'Although the Germans talk about environmental protection more than almost anyone else in the world, they emit more carbon dioxide in relation to the size of the country than almost anyone else.'[102] By falling short of European climate ambitions, renegades isolate themselves from other member states and the EU as a whole. For instance, the press reports that Poland, Estonia, Hungary, and the Czech Republic deviated from 'the vast majority'[103] of member states which supported a common goal of carbon neutrality under the Paris Agreement.

The reason for their betrayal of 'climate Europe'—so the *plot* of the renegade game in the Paris case goes—is selfishness, expressed through particularistic economic interests. While renegades are considered members of the European community, their selfish behaviour has led them to 'leave the right path'. In short, 'national egoisms are blocking climate Europe'.[104] France's lack of ambition is attributed to the resistance of French coal workers who are afraid of losing their jobs due to stricter climate policies.[105] Germany's failure to live up to European climate goals is explained by a 'fear of competitive disadvantages for its domestic industry'.[106] And the divergence of Poland, Estonia, Hungary, and the Czech Republic from the common European path on combating climate change is reportedly caused by their continued interest in coal-mining.[107] Not systemic forces or structural divisions (as in the diffusion games in the Kyoto case and the Russia case) but national egoisms led renegades to depart from European climate goals. The deviant member states are still recognized in the European press as members of the community and their way back to 'climate Europe' remains always open. After all, it is generally accepted that 'we could do better'.[108]

The *morale* of the renegade game in the Paris case therefore is that deviant members must 'come to their senses' and 'return to the right path'. The renegades' deviant behaviour is shamed for undermining the European climate ambitions and the EU's reputation across the globe. For instance, the

Polish government is called out for seeking 'special treatment' and 'special requests'.[109] In the European press, renegades' deviant behaviour is generally depicted as a 'blow to the EU's standing',[110] 'threatening a Europe that intends to continue to play a pioneering role',[111] and as risking 'the end of European leadership on climate'.[112] It is even claimed in the European public that 'the credibility of developed countries is at stake'.[113] By stepping up their efforts, the delinquent states should be able to return to the community. This becomes clear in calls on specific countries in the European press to correct course and step up their efforts to combat climate change. It is for instance demanded that Germany 'should finally fulfill its commitments'[114] or that France 'must implement ambitious national policies [. . .] in order to regain credibility with its neighbours'.[115] The moral of the narrative thus emphasizes that renegades can—and must—return to the community if they correct their behaviour.

Overall, the Paris case bears out individual member states as the main target of public blame attributions and the respective narrative of a renegade game. Despite their selfish behaviour, the specific member states singled out in the blame game are still portrayed as members of the community (characterization). Their deviant behaviour is portrayed as an aberration, which can be understood in terms of national economic interests (plot). As the EU's leadership in climate change is at stake, the deviant members need to come to their senses and return to the right path of jointly combatting global warming (moral).

To sum up, our analysis of public blame attributions in the Paris and the Kyoto cases (see Figure 3.7) lends plausibility to our policy failure hypothesis: the performance failure in the Kyoto case triggered a diffusion game where blame was mostly attributed to the EU at large, whereas the failure to comply in the Paris case translated into a renegade game, in which individual non-compliant member states were the main blame targets.

3.5 Summary

In this chapter we developed the policy failure hypothesis which claims that performance failures will gravitate towards diffusion games whereas failures to act and failures to comply will give rise to renegade games. We argued that in cases of EU policy failures a public plausibility assessment of political actors' blame attributions sets in which then helps citizens to learn about true responsibilities and constrains political actors' blame avoidance and generation strategies. Whether the learning and constraining mechanisms promote blame games that gravitate towards true responsibilities depends on how easy
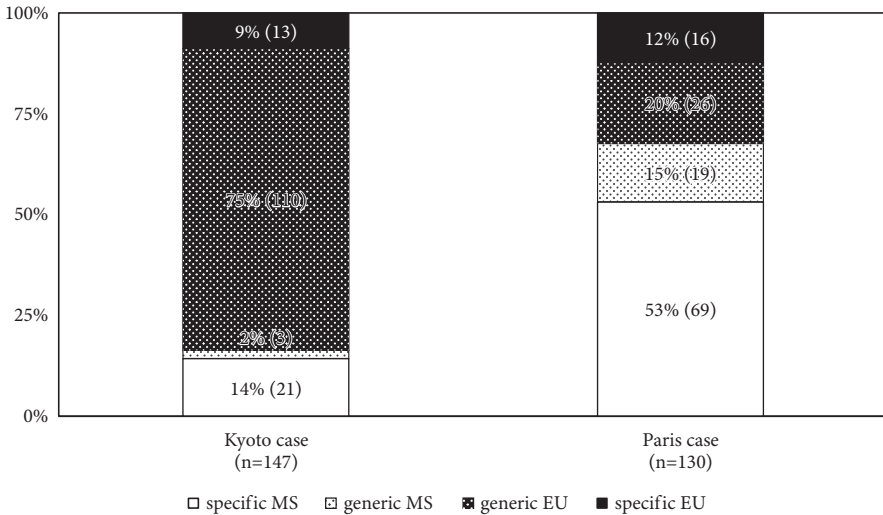
Figure 3.7 Blame targets in the EU environmental policy case-pair

Note: A chi-square test shows that the difference of public blame attributions across the Paris and the Kyoto case is not random. The null hypothesis of a random distribution can be rejected on the 99 per cent confidence level (see Appendix, Table A.7). We find the difference between the cases not only in the aggregate across countries, but also for each country individually (see Appendix, Tables A.14 and A.15).

or difficult it is to assess true responsibilities. When responsibility is easy to assess, blame games will target the actors who were indeed responsible for the respective policy failure. When responsibility is difficult to assess, diffusion games prevail. Therefore, we expect renegade games when member states are responsible in cases of failures to act as well as in cases of failures to comply, but diffusion games in cases of performance failures.

The comparison of blame games that resulted from the four EU policy failures discussed in this chapter lends support to this policy failure hypothesis (see Table 3.3). The two performance failures in the Russia case and the Kyoto case triggered diffusion games, while the failure to act in the Libya case and the failure to comply in the Paris case produced renegade games. This is supported not only by our analysis of the main blame targets in the four cases, but also by the analysis of the public narratives in these cases.

In this chapter we assumed that performance failures are associated with diffusion games when responsibilities are difficult to assess. We have not yet discussed the blame games that may arise in cases of performance failures in which responsibilities for policy making are more straightforward. Therefore, the subsequent chapter will discuss the conditions under which performance failures will lend themselves towards either diffusion games, renegade games, or scapegoat games.

Table 3.3 Summary of the two case-comparisons

	EU foreign policy case-pair		EU environmental policy case-pair	
	Libya case (failure to act) ↓ **Renegade game**	**Russia case** (failure to perform) ↓ **Diffusion game**	**Kyoto case** (failure to perform) ↓ **Diffusion game**	**Paris case** (failure to comply) ↓ **Renegade game**
Target: Who is to blame?	Specific member state (most prominently Germany)	'The EU' as a whole	'The EU' as a whole	Specific member state
Character: How is the culprit characterized?	Germany isolates itself among its EU partners; German 'Sonderweg'	EU remains a faceless and internally divided entity	EU controlled by faceless forces, such as 'the market'	Member states fall short of their own environmental ambitions
Plot: Why did the target commit the failure?	German militaristic past as reason for 'Sonderweg'	internal 'divisions' as reasons for insufficient sanctions	'market failure' or 'design flaws' as reason for poor performance	national economic interests as reason for non-compliance
Moral: How can the failure be corrected?	Germany must become an ordinary state in the European security community	sanctions always require compromise; nothing can be done	no agent is specified to enact required system overhaul; nothing can be done	Member states must live up to their climate ambitions to return to 'climate Europe'

Endnotes

1. The EU levied economic sanctions and later also granted humanitarian aid (Koenig 2011, 22; Fitzpatrick 2018). Since an UNSC Resolution was in place, which was seen to authorize a military intervention, the public perceived the EU's (non-)actions as a failure to act. The EU's policy was seen as 'a rather limited compromise' (Kroll 2015, 77). When France and the United Kingdom, alongside the United States and several other countries, engaged in a military operation, they were explicitly not operating within an EU framework (Menon 2011, 75; Fitzpatrick 2018).

2. The failure to act was discussed by scholars (see, e.g. Menon 2011, 75; Brattberg 2011) as well as in the wider public (see, e.g. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2011). 'Libyen braucht keine militärische Hilfe: Der französische Außenminister Alain Juppé über

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3. Horst Bacia, 2011. 'Von wegen "Stunde Europas": Abschied von der Idee einer gemeinsamen EU-Außenpolitik.' *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 30 April 2011. Translation by the authors.

4. Chris McGreal, and B. Simon Tisdall, 2011. 'Road to Benghazi beckons for Gaddafi as Libyan rebels retreat under rain of rockets: Arab League call for no-fly zone to paralysed west Clinton prepares to meet revolutionary council', *The Guardian*, 14 March 2011.

5. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2011. 'Frankreich freut und ärgert sich: Juppé und die Resolution', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 19 March 2011. Translation by the authors.

6. See Walter Baier, 2014. 'Putin-Besuch: Der Konfrontation folgt Krieg', *Der Standard*, 1 July 2014. *Der Standard*, 2014. 'Kritik an EU-Sanktionen', *Der Standard*, 31 July 2014. Berthold Kohler, 2014. 'Putins Krieg', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 29 August 2014. *The Guardian*, 2014. 'Leading Article: Russia sanctions: Dangers of a new cold war', *The Guardian*, 31 July 2014.

7. Ewen MacAskill, Shaun Walker, and Dan Roberts, 2014. 'US and EU retaliate over Crimea with targeted sanctions', *The Guardian*, 18 March 2014. Citing Kathleen Brooks, research director at Forex.

8. Christian Ultsch, 2014. 'Europa muss wieder christlicher werden', *Die Presse*, 18 October 2014. Citing Hungary's foreign minister Péter Szijjártó. Translation by the authors.

9. Tom Kington, 2015. 'Sanctions at risk as Russia gains ally', *The Times*, 27 January 2015. Citing the Greek politician, Alexis Tsipras.

10. Nikolaus Piper, 2014. 'Problem Putin; Auch wenn es für die Exportnation Deutschland schwierig ist: Russlands Aggression in der Ukraine darf nicht folgenlos bleiben. Sanktionen sind auch wirtschaftspolitisch richtig', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 3 May 2014. Translation by the authors.

11. While any military action on the part of the EU against Libya would have to be approved by the Council, the sanctions that were adopted were decided by the Council in its Decision 2011/137/CFSP of 28 February 2011, according to Art. 29 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), as well as Council Regulation (EU) No. 204/2011 of 2 March 2011 according to Art. 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union following a joint proposal from the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Commission. In the period of analysis, Decision 2011/137/CFSP was amended by the Council through Council Implementing Decisions 2011/156/CFSP, 2011/175/CFSP, 2011/236/CFSP, 2011/300/CFSP, 2011/345/CFSP, 2011/500/CFSP, 2011/521/CFSP, and 2011/543/CFSP as well as Council Decisions 2011/178/CFSP, 2011/332/CFSP, 2011/625/CFSP, 2011/729/CFSP, and 2011/867/CFSP; Council Regulation (EU) No. 204/2011 was amended by Council

Implementing Regulations No. 288/2011, No. 360/2011, No. 502/2011, No. 573/2011, No. 804/2011, No. 872/2011, No. 925/2011, and No. 941/2011 as well as Council Regulations No. 296/2011, No. 965/2011, No. 1139/2011, and No. 1360/2011. The European Commission provided aid to Libya by means of the new Support to Partnership, Reform, and Inclusive Growth programme (SPRING), a new Civil Society Facility, as well as a set of new bilateral agreements (Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with Agreements on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance). Finally, The EUFOR Libya, a military operation to support humanitarian assistance operations was prepared but not implemented (Behr 2012). The EU's sanctions against Russia were decided by the Council in its Decision 2014/145/CFSP of 17 March 2014 according to Art. 29 TEU. It was amended in the period of analysis by Council Implementing Decisions 2014/151/CFSP and 2014/238/CFSP as well as Council Decisions 2014/265/CFSP, 2014/308/CFSP, 2014/455/CFSP, 2014/475/CFSP, 2014/499/CFSP, 2014/508/CFSP, 2014/658/CFSP, 2014/801/CFSP, 2014/855/CFSP, 2015/241/CFSP, and 2015/432/CFSP. The European Commission was also involved in the EU's response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine by, for instance, preparing broader economic and trade sanctions that could be imposed if Russia further destabilized Ukraine (European Council 2023).

12. For the coverage of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* we had to draw on the newspaper's own online archive.

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24. Daniel Brössler, 2014. 'Blechen und bluten', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 24 July 2014. Translation by the authors.

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26. For example, András Szigetvari, 2014. 'Ein paar Hintertüren für Moskau', *Der Standard*, 31 July 2014. Translation by the authors.

27. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2014. 'Osteuropa fürchtet Eiszeit aus Russland', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 27 August 2014. Translation by the authors.

28. For example, Nikolaus Piper, 2014. 'Problem Putin; Auch wenn es für die Exportnation Deutschland schwierig ist: Russlands Aggression in der Ukraine darf nicht folgenlos bleiben. Sanktionen sind auch wirtschaftspolitisch richtig', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 3 May 2014. Translation by the authors. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 2014. 'Putin hält Friedensplan für gescheitert; Der Angriff der ukrainischen Armee auf Separatisten hat die letzte Hoffnung auf eine diplomatische Lösung zerstört, sagt Russlands Präsident. Obama und Merkel drohen mit weiteren Sanktionen', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 3 May 2014. Translation by the authors.

29. George Soros, 2014. 'Aufgewacht, Europa!' *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 October 2014. Translation by the authors.

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31. Andrew Sparrow, 2015. 'Cameron says UK to send military advisers to Ukraine: Politics Live blog', *The Guardian*, 24 February 2015.

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4

The policy-making hypothesis

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we argued that responsibility attributions are straightforward when a policy failure constitutes a failure to act or a failure to comply. When individual member states can be easily singled out for causing a policy failure, we observe renegade games, as in the failure to act in Libya or the failure of member states to comply with the Paris Agreement. Conversely, when an enacted policy fails to achieve its objectives, responsibility attributions for this performance failure are more complicated. After all, failures to perform beg the question who has enacted the policy in the first place. In the EU, this question is often particularly difficult to answer, not only because the respective policy has been made in the (more or less distant) past, but also because EU policy making tends to be complex, involving a multiplicity of actors and decision-making rules. Therefore, the clarity of responsibility is muddled and blame attributions should be rather diffuse.

In this chapter, we unpack the nexus between policy-making complexity and blame attributions in the EU. Even though policy-making complexity tends to obfuscate responsibility attributions, we argue that policy-making complexity is not a constant condition but a variable condition. This is because the adoption of policies in the EU follows different policy-making procedures, which involve different sets of rules about the actors involved and the decision-rules they must follow. Depending on the type of policy-making procedure, the complexity of policy making, and hence the clarity of responsibility, varies. In the area of monetary policy, for instance, policy making is supranational and thus highly centralized, because it rests exclusively with the ECB. Policy-making processes of this kind, where decision-making rests with a particular supranational actor, increase clarity of responsibility and enable citizens to learn about true responsibilities for EU policy failures. This, in turn, constrains political actors' blame attributions. Consequently, when policy failures occur in instances of supranational policy

making, blame attributions should target supranational policy makers and likely lead to scapegoat games. Compared with supranational policy making, clarity of responsibility is more opaque in instances of intergovernmental policy making, as in EU security and defence policy, because it involves the entirety of EU member-state governments. Yet, the politicization of policy failures sheds light on putatively opaque policy-making processes in the Council, which improves clarity of responsibility. For instance, the actual power structure inside the Council—member states considered to hold outsized influence—is likely to receive ample attention in the public sphere when a policy is highly controversial. The public thus learns about true responsibilities and will, in turn, disqualify implausible blame attributions, which then constrains political actors' blame attribution opportunities. When policy making is intergovernmental, we therefore expect that blame attributions focus on powerful member states and likely lead to renegade games. Finally, where policy making is a shared among different EU actors, as is the case in the Ordinary Legislative Procedure (OLP), clarity of responsibility is wanting. The complexity of the policy-making process complicates an assessment of the plausibility of public blame attributions. Citizens have difficulties learning about true responsibilities and will find it hard to single out the specific actors they consider responsible. Policy makers, in turn, face little constraint in their blame attribution behaviour. The low clarity of responsibility in shared policy-making processes should thus lead to diffusion games.

This chapter is organized as follows. In Section 4.2 we develop our argument of how different EU policy-making procedures shape European blame games. We assess the policy-making hypothesis in two pair-wise comparisons of policy failures. Section 4.3 compares two instances of fiscal policy failures: while financial assistance measures—the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) and the European Financial Stabilization Mechanism (EFSM)—that were introduced via intergovernmental policy making should trigger a renegade game, the ECB's sovereign bonds programme—a case of supranational policy making—should lead to a scapegoat game. Section 4.4 explores two cases of migration policy failures. For the EU's failed external border control policy—an instance of shared policy making—we expect a diffusion game. We contrast this case with the discussion about welfare entitlements in the context of the EU's free movement policy, where policy making is predominantly shaped by Commission enforcement actions and the CJEU's case law (supranational policy making), which should result in a scapegoat game.

4.2 The policy-making condition

EU policy making is often highly complex. The initiation, adoption, and enforcement of EU legislation requires coordination and agreement amongst supranational and intergovernmental institutions. According to the Community Method, which finds its contemporary expression in the OLP, the Commission initiates EU legislation, the Council and the EP are co-equal legislators and can both amend and ultimately decide on the final piece of EU legislation. Moreover, the Commission plays an important role in monitoring compliance and enforcing EU legislation law and the CJEU adjudicates infringements. Studies show that the complexity of policy making in the EU's multilevel governance systems obfuscates clarity of individual policy makers' responsibility (Hobolt and Tilley 2014; Wilson and Hobolt 2015; León et al. 2018) and they suggest that blurred responsibility leaves political actors relatively unconstrained to assign blame to their preferred targets (Gerhards et al. 2009; Hobolt and Tilley 2014; Sommer 2019; Traber et al. 2020). This line of reasoning suggests a cacophony of blame attributions, where blame is ultimately collectivized in the public domain and directed to the EU as a whole. The existing literature thus leads us to expects that blame games in the EU should be predominantly diffusion games.

While complex policy-making processes tend to impede clarity of responsibility, we argue that not all policy making in the EU is as complex as the Community Method. In the EU, policy-making modes vary across and within policy areas (Börzel 2005; Leuffen et al. 2022). The mode of policy making—and hence clarity of responsibility in the EU—is thus not a constant, but a variable condition. Different policy-making procedures imply the involvement of different actors, which in turn affects clarity of responsibility.

In the EU, we can broadly distinguish between three different modes of policy making. First, we refer to supranational policy making when policy making is firmly in the hands of a supranational institution. For instance, in areas such as monetary policy or competition policy, the EU possesses exclusive competences and EU institutions, the ECB and the Commission respectively, are the central decision-makers. Second, intergovernmental policy-making processes are dominated by the EU's member states acting through the Council (of Ministers) or the European Council. Supranational EU bodies, like the Commission or the EP, possess no or only a limited role in decision-making. For instance, decisions on CFSP missions are intergovernmental in nature: member states decide by unanimity. Third, and as highlighted above, shared policy making involves different EU institutions

together with the member states acting collectively through the Council. EU legislation adopted through the OLP, which applies, amongst others, to the regulation of the EU's internal market and its flanking policies, is a case in point.

According to our policy-making hypothesis, the mode of policy making affects clarity of responsibility and thus the blame games that occur in the European public. We expect that scapegoat games emerge from policy failures preceded by supranational policy making; intergovernmental policy making and subsequent policy failures should give rise to renegade games; and, lastly, diffusion games should result when policy failures emerge from shared policy making.

4.2.1 Supranational policy making

In instances of supranational policy making, decision-making processes are firmly in the hands of a supranational institution. This applies to policy areas such as monetary policy or competition policy, where EU institutions—the ECB and the Commission respectively—are the dominant decision-makers. Moreover, it is even argued that CJEU acts as an important *de facto* policy maker in its own right (see Stone Sweet 1999).[1] When policy making is dominated by a supranational actor, it should be easily identifiable for the public who is in charge. We know from domestic policy-making settings that citizens have at least some understanding with regard to what different levels of government do (Arceneaux 2006; Arceneaux and Stein 2006) and that citizens are able to identify settings where policy making predominantly occurs at one level of governance (León 2011; 2012).[2] The differences in clarity of responsibility across policy-making arrangements is well documented in the EU. If policy making is concentrated at one particular jurisdictional level, institutional responsibilities tend to be clearer than if policy making occurs across different levels of jurisdictions (Rittberger et al. 2017). If policy making is thus concentrated at one jurisdictional level, it becomes more difficult for policy makers to shift responsibility for policy failures onto other levels (Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2020a; Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl 2020a). Furthermore, supranational institutions, such as the Commission, the ECB, or the CJEU, are corporate actors that act and appear as unitary actors in the public realm (Scharpf 1997). Despite internal divisions among Commissioners or in the ECB's Presidium over the best course of action, once a decision is taken all members assume collective responsibility for the

respective decision. The principles of collective responsibility prescribes that the individual members of the respective supranational institution are held responsible for the actions and decisions of the institution as a whole. Supranational policy making is thus conductive for clarifying responsibilities and the public can rather easily identify who is in charge and hence who is the culprit in an instance of a failed policy.

As we argued in Chapter 2, blame games about failed policies activate processes of information updating among actors in the public (Kriegmair et al. 2022; Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2023). We conceive of this process of information updating as a public plausibility assessment, whereby actors in the public *learn* about true responsibilities for policy failures and, as consequence, will disqualify implausible blame attributions. Blame attributions targeting actors which were not directly involved in policy making should thus be crowded out in the blame game, because they are either not taken up in the public sphere or they are being actively rebuffed. In this way, citizens learn about true responsibilities when a policy failure becomes politicized.

As citizens learn about true responsibilities, political actors' public responsibility attributions become increasingly *constrained*. Claims about political responsibility need to be plausible in order to resonate in the public sphere, otherwise they risk rebuttal (Hood 2011, 146). Anticipating this risk, policy makers are limited in their blame attributions by the institutional context (Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2020a; Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl 2020a; 2020b). Supranational actors with an incentive to shift or obfuscate blame thus need to be cautious not to damage their reputation as trustworthy actors by issuing implausible blame attributions that can be easily rebuffed in the public sphere. Overall, when policies decided by supranational policy making fail, supranational decision-makers are likely to become the main targets of blame attributions, thereby resulting in *scapegoat games*.

4.2.2 Intergovernmental policy making

Member states dominate intergovernmental policy-making processes, for example, by acting through the Council (of Ministers) or the European Council. EU institutions, such as the Commission or the EP, possess no or only a limited role in decision-making. In contrast to supranational policy making, we posit that intergovernmental policy-making processes are more complex and thus pose a challenge to clarity of responsibility. While supranational institutions act as corporate actors, the Council acts more like a collective actor, whose members are not bound by the principle of collective

responsibility and whose main task is to find compromise amongst the (diverse) preferences of its member-state governments (see Scharpf 1997). The literature highlights, however, that the Council's informal consensual culture can impede the public from identifying individual member states' positions (Novak 2013; Schneider 2020), allowing individual member states to hide behind a collective decision and thus evade responsibility (Hobolt and Tilley 2014). In instances of highly politicized policy failures, this characterization of Council decision-making may not hold. The politicization of EU policy failures sheds light on otherwise opaque policy-making processes in the Council. Once a blame game about a policy failure sets in, a public plausibility assessment of blame attributions commences and dissects Council decision-making processes: disagreement amongst the member states is brought in the open, as is the power structure differentiating more influential from less influential governments in the Council, both of which are likely to receive ample attention in news reporting. To the extent that one or a few members of a collective actor control resources that are critical for collective action, such as certain material capacities, they hold outsized influence over policy outcomes (despite the unanimity rule). This implies, in turn, that member states' control and use of such resources to influence collective decision-making affect clarity of responsibility: Their outsized influence in Council decision-making means they effectively 'stick their head out'.

Intergovernmental policy making in which one or a few member states wield *de facto* power should therefore allow the public to identify the culprit(s) once a policy failure becomes politicized. It is easy for citizens to *learn* about true responsibilities once the public plausibility assessment of political actors' blame attributions sets in and implausible blame attributions are disqualified. Powerful member states might still try to shift or obfuscate blame, but others in the public domain will rebut these blame avoidance attempts. Member states who were opposed to a failed policy from the onset may hold back from targeting others in their blame attributions, since they are reliant on their cooperation in other policy-making endeavours (Novak 2013; Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl 2020a). Yet, other, politically neutral actors such as experts, journalists, or intellectuals, will point out power differentials and diverging opinions amongst member states. This helps citizens to learn about the true responsibilities in cases of intergovernmental policy making.

At the same time, political actors' public responsibility attributions are *constrained* once the public plausibility assessment sets in. Even the powerful member states with a strong incentive to avoid blame by obfuscating or shifting blame to others need to be cautious as implausible blame attributions are

likely to backfire. In fact, they are caught between a rock and a hard place: the more citizens learn about member states' *de facto* responsibility, the more these governments risk tarnishing their reputation as trustworthy actors with implausible blame attributions. Yet, if powerful member states defend their policy-making decision, they accept—implicitly if not explicitly—their responsibility for the EU policy failure. When policies decided through intergovernmental policy making fail, powerful member states which have promoted the respective policy are thus likely to become focal in the public, which should lead to *renegade games.*

4.2.3 Shared policy making

Processes of shared policy making involve both supranational EU institutions as well as the member states acting collectively through the Council. In the EU, the OLP is the quintessential legislative instrument of shared policy making, whereby the Commission proposes a policy, and the EP and the Council co-decide in a complex multi-stage process on the final legislation. Compared to intergovernmental policy making, the OLP is complex not simply because it adds two more actors—namely Commission and Parliament—but also because these actors differ markedly not only in their policy-making roles but also in their representational roles. The addition of the Commission and the Parliament adds complexity, because it comes with a differentiation of policy-making roles. The policy-making roles of member-state governments (as main decision makers) differ from the role of the Commission (which needs to propose policy), which in turn differs from the role of the EP (as co-decision maker). In addition, Commission and Parliament also differ markedly in their representational roles, with the members of the EP representing the European citizenry, governments in the Council representing their respective member states, and the Commission's treaty-assigned role is to represent an over-arching European interest. The presence of actors with different policy-making and representational roles thus adds an extra layer of complexity to an already protracted multi-actor and multi-stage process of EU policy making.

Instances of shared policy making have increased markedly over time. While they initially covered mainly the internal market and its flanking policies, such as environmental or health and safety protection, the OLP now covers a vast array of EU policies, including the EU's economic governance, energy, transport, immigration, and asylum policies. Joint policy making of this kind is complex and eschews clarity of responsibility. When performance

failures occur under shared policy making, it is difficult for the public to single out a particular actor to be held responsible for the respective policy failure. When policy making is shared, we thus follow the literature that claims that clarity of responsibility is generally difficult to assess in EU policy making (Hobolt and Tilley 2014; Wilson and Hobolt 2015; León et al. 2018).

When it comes to blame attributions and their plausibility in the public, the complexity of shared policy-making processes thus leaves ample room for conflicting responsibility judgements that can pass a public plausibility assessment. Citizens will therefore have a hard time *learning* about true responsibilities. Since different blame attributions can stand the public plausibility assessment, citizens will mainly learn that many actors can be plausibly blamed for the failed policy. This implies, in turn, that political actors face rather few *constraints* when attributing blame in instances of shared policy making. As a variety of blame attributions pass a public plausibility assessment, political actors can attribute blame as they consider politically opportune. Even the political actors involved in shared policy-making processes can plausibly avoid blame by shifting blame onto others involved in the process, or by obfuscating their responsibility by blaming 'the EU' as a whole. This rather unconstrained exchange of blame attributions in instances of shared policy making is likely to trigger *diffusion games* where no specific actor becomes the main target of blame attributions in the European public.

In sum, the *policy-making hypothesis* leads us to expect that clarity of responsibility varies across the three different modes of policy making—supranational, intergovernmental, and shared—and leads to different EU blame games. When performance failures ensue from supranational policy making, the resulting blame games are likely to be scapegoat games. Conversely, when policy making is intergovernmental, EU performance failures likely give rise to renegade games. Finally, shared policy making will trigger diffusion games. To evaluate the empirical plausibility of our policy-making hypothesis, we subsequently study the blame games that emerged in the European public in two pair-wise comparisons of similar policy failures in EU fiscal stabilization policy and in the field of EU migration policy (see Figure 4.1).

4.3 EU fiscal stabilization policy failures

In this section, we probe the expectations of our policy-making hypothesis in two cases of blame games triggered by the EU's *fiscal stabilization policy.*
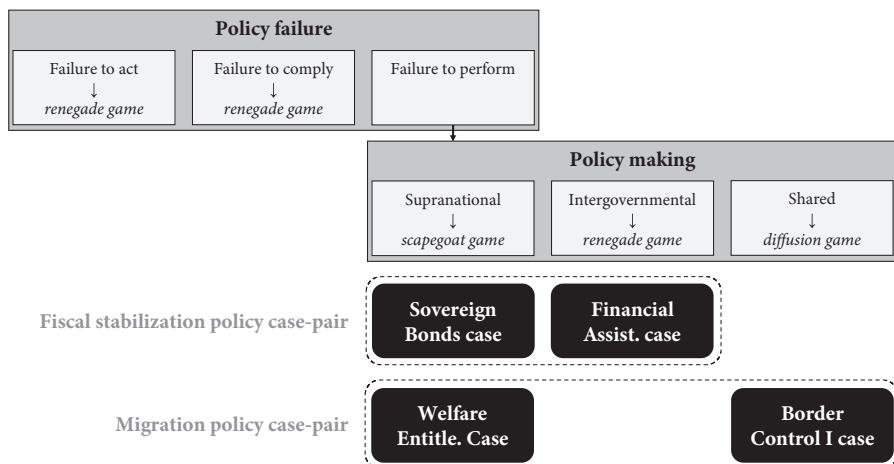
Figure 4.1   The policy-making hypothesis

During the financial crisis, the EU enacted different instruments to fiscally stabilize several eurozone countries with unsustainable debt burdens. We selected two highly controversial policies from this policy area, which have been widely regarded as performance failures.

The Financial Assistance case: In 2010, EU member states adopted the EFSM and the EFSF to stabilize eurozone countries with unsustainable debt burdens (these two mechanisms were subsequently replaced by the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) in 2012). With a lending capacity of 500 billion euro, these new facilities were designed to provide financial assistance depending on strict loan conditionality negotiated between the debtor country and the European Commission and the ECB (Gocaj and Meunier 2013; Henning 2017). The introduction and operation of these financial assistance instruments received widespread criticism in the public. Rather than providing a solution for countries on the verge of a sovereign default, the EU's financial assistance measures were said to lead to a further destabilization of the eurozone.[3] For some, the promise of financial assistance would create problems of moral hazard, because indebted countries 'can hope for an eventual bailout',[4] which would diminish the loan recipients' reform willingness and effort.[5] As a consequence, financial markets and investors displayed continued anxiety about the effectiveness of such measures.[6] Other voices claimed 'that the cure may be worse than the disease'.[7] The strict conditionality requirements attached to the loans would render economic recovery more difficult for the highly indebted states[8] and give rise to social unrest because of

the socio-economic hardship they generate.[9] Overall, there was a widespread sense that 'too little' was done 'too late'.[10]

The Sovereign Bonds case: With the volume of the EU's financial assistance facilities being limited and their effects being called into question, there was strong political pressure for additional measures to secure the fiscal and financial viability of the eurozone. In 2012, the ECB launched the Outright Monetary Transaction (OMT) programme, whereby the bank would purchase sovereign debt of eurozone countries experiencing difficulties to ease their refinancing costs (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2016; Henning 2017). While the ECB claimed that its sovereign bonds policy was covered by its mandate, it received widespread public criticism for overstepping its mandate by engaging in monetary financing,[11] by flouting the no bail-out provisions,[12] and thus dissolving the line between monetary and fiscal policy.[13] As a result of indirectly shifting financial burdens onto other eurozone countries, the very independence of the ECB was considered to be at stake.[14] Another criticism in the public was that the ECB's actions were not effective:[15] ECB president 'Draghi is all gong and no dinner',[16] the ECB was able to buy 'a little time, but it did not really work',[17] and most of the countries whose bonds the ECB purchased still required financial assistance through the ESM.[18]

We selected these two cases to assess the policy-making hypothesis following the logic of a most-similar-case design (Przeworski and Teune 1982, 32–33). We carefully constructed the comparison to ensure that the cases share similar characteristics to account for potentially confounding variables. Both cases constitute critical instruments in the EU's attempt at crisis management: their main objective was to prevent sovereign debt crises that beset several eurozone member states from causing a broader crisis of the common currency. Both cases thus address not only a similar problem, they are also similar since both were surrounded with intense controversy and public criticism, including legal challenges before domestic highest courts and the CJEU. Finally, both cases are similar since they were widely conceived as performance failures, triggering a long and steady stream of blame attributions. These similarities in the two cases help us ensure that neither the kind of policy failure type nor the particular policy issue predefines the blame game.

At the same time, the two cases differ with regard to the type of policy making and thus allow us to assess whether this variation affects the type of blame game we observe in each case. In the Financial Assistance case, policy making was *intergovernmental*. The EFSF and EFSM were established by a group of member states led by Germany (Schimmelfennig 2014). Both facilities share a similar decision-making process through which they were created: all decisions pertaining to the adoption of the EFSM[19] and EFSF,[20] as

well as the granting of loans and credit lines were based on intergovernmental policy-making processes. For our theoretical expectation to be borne out, we should observe a *renegade game.*

In the Sovereign Bonds case, policy making was decidedly *supranational.* The decision for the OMT programme was taken unilaterally by the ECB. In late July 2012, ECB president Mario Draghi announced 'whatever it takes' to preserve the euro (European Central Bank 2012) and the ECB's Governing Council then declared its intention to launch the OMT programme in early August 2012. According to ECB president Mario Draghi, it was fully within the bank's prerogatives to take this decision (Draghi 2012). The OMT programme effectively turned the ECB into a lender of last resort for crisis-struck eurozone countries (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2016). The programme is thus a clear-cut example of *supranational* policy making, which exclusively rests with the ECB.[21] Following the launch of the sovereign bonds programme, we expect the blame for the EU's fiscal stabilization policy to focus on the ECB in a *scapegoat game.* Table 4.1 summarizes the observable implications for each case.

To assess the expectations of our policy-making hypothesis, we engage in content analysis of news coverage in the European media. We started our analysis when the respective policies were introduced, that is, in May 2010 in the Financial Assistance case (i.e. the decision to establish the EFSM) and in

Table 4.1 Observable implications in the EU fiscal stabilization policy case-pair

	Financial Assistance case (intergovernmental policy making) ↓ **Renegade game**	**Sovereign Bonds case** (supranational policy making) ↓ **Scapegoat game**
Target: Who is to blame?	• Most frequent target: specific member states	• Most frequent target: specific EU institutions
Character: How is the culprit characterized?	• Member of the in-group • Deviant character	• Stranger, member of the out-group • Dubious character
Plot: Why did the target commit the failure?	• Failure as an aberration	• Failure as an intrinsic pattern
Moral: How can the failure be corrected?	• Shaming: renegade must come to their senses	• Punishment: scapegoat must be contained

July 2012 in the Sovereign Bonds case (i.e. ECB president Mario Draghi's 'whatever it takes' speech). We then analysed the coverage of the two EU fiscal stabilization policy failures for the period of one year. In our sample of 152 articles, we identified 250 statements that amounted to public blame attributions—155 in the financial case, 95 in the sovereign debt case. For each blame statement, we coded the respective blame target—that is, whether blame is attributed to the EU or its members and whether this is done in a specific or in a rather generic manner—and we studied the respective blame narratives.

4.3.1 The Financial Assistance case: a renegade game

According to the policy-making hypothesis, intergovernmental policy making should give way to renegade games when a policy is considered a performance failure. In the blame game that ensued from the establishment of the EFSF and EFSM in 2010, we therefore expect powerful member states to become the main blame targets.

Our analysis of public responsibility attributions supports our expectation that the blame game in the Financial Assistance case is a renegade game. The data in Figure 4.2 show that blame directed at specific member states makes up the largest share of blame statements (61 out of 155). This category exceeds the share of blame statements directed at specific EU institutions,
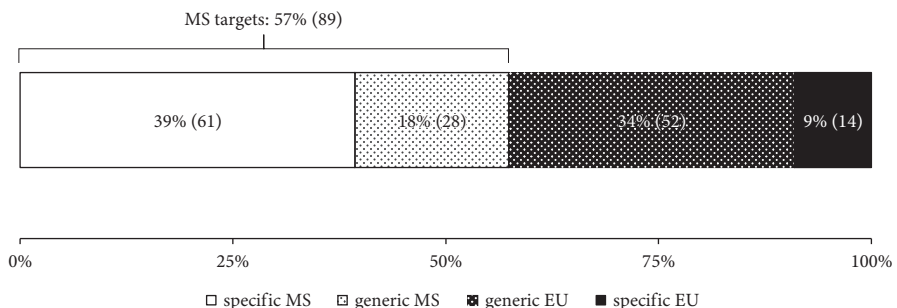
Figure 4.2 Blame targets in the Financial Assistance case (n=155)

Note: Following our operationalization, this distribution of blame statements indicates a renegade game because (1) statements targeting individual member states are the most frequent (39 per cent), and (2) together with blame statements directed at the member-state collective (18 per cent) they amount to more than 50 per cent of all the blame attributions that were coded in this case. Disaggregating the data by country, we find distributions that conform to this operationalization only in the media coverage in Germany. While the distribution of blame statements in Austria is different, the distributions in France and the United Kingdom are not far from meeting the criteria defined in our operationalization (see Appendix, Table A.16).

which would be indicative of a scapegoat game (14 out of 155). Moreover, generic references to either the member states (28 out of 155) or the EU in general (52 out of 155) represent smaller shares of blame attribution statements. Germany and, to a lesser extent, France are the two countries whose governments are singled out as the main culprits. The vast majority of blame attributions directed at specific member states targets either Germany or France, or both states (55 out of 61). Overall, more than 50 per cent of blame statements are directed at EU member states—either in general or at specific countries. This pattern is thus indicative of a renegade game.

Moreover, the blame narrative corresponds to a renegade game. In the public, the German government is widely *characterized* as acting selfishly and treating its fellow member states like a bully.[22] For instance, the German government is accused of outright selfishness, sowing doubt about debtor countries' capacity for effective reforms, only to increase the attractiveness of its own government-issued bonds.[23] Germany is equally said to lack solidarity, since by curbing government spending and thus domestic demand, the export sectors in debtor countries are negatively affected, which impedes their ability to rebound economically.[24] Moreover, the German government's proposals for conditional assistance vis-à-vis the debtor states are described as 'imposed' and even 'ferocious'.[25] Overall, there is a perception that the German government does not listen and is aggressively pursuing the logic that what is best for Germany is best for Europe: 'There is a German prescription out there. It's to turn the Eurozone into a big Germany. The Germans think everyone should run their economies like the Germans do.'[26] While there is thus no doubt that Germany is an essential member of the in-group, owing to its political and economic weight, the government's behaviour is clearly cast as deviant from what would be in the in-group's best interest.

In line with the *plot* of a renegade game, the German government's behaviour is widely criticized precisely because it is considered to possess the leverage to lead a way out of the crisis. Yet, it disappoints expectations[27] as it fails to provide the necessary leadership, together with France:[28] Germany is 'recoiling from its role as the architect of Europe'.[29] Instead, the German government's aberrant behaviour is accounted for as trying to please its own domestic audiences and bailing out its own banks.[30] Germany's selfishness and lack of leadership and the frustration that ensues amongst the member states most affected by the crisis underpins the narrative plot about rescue efforts failing because of the government's navel-gazing behaviour. In the German public, there is also a widespread sense of disappointment with the government's policy, albeit for different reasons: the alleged violation of the no bail-out clause and the ensuing collectivization of debt are considered anathema amongst broad circles in the German public.[31]

Germany's perceived 'character deficit' and disappointing behaviour in the eyes of the European public also points to the *moral* that ensues from the renegade narrative. As a powerful member of the community, Germany can and should play a critical role in overcoming the crisis. Hence the bitterness, frustration, and disappointment voiced by many of the other community members. At the same time, they (indirectly) call upon the German government to resume its role as leader, anchor, and architect of Europe, a role that it has seemingly given up on.[32] One commentary even draws the parallel between the German government's failure to 'repair the eurozone' and the 'failure to agree military action towards Libya',[33] thus highlighting that hopes for Germany to end its aberrations may yet be rather dim.

Overall, specific member-state governments—specially the German government—are the main recipients of public blame attributions in the Financial Assistance case. In the ensuing narrative, Germany is characterized as a renegade that attempts to impose its policies onto others (characterization). Germany's unwillingness to show solidarity with other member states is especially problematic, as the press ascribes a leading role within the EU to Germany, which it is unwilling to fulfil (plot). Consequently, the expectation or hope is that Germany will eventually accept its leading role in the resolution of the fiscal debt crisis (moral).

4.3.2 The Sovereign Bonds case: a scapegoat game

Our analysis of public blame attributions in the Sovereign Bonds case supports our expectation that instances of supranational policy making should trigger a scapegoat game. The *target* of the largest share of blame attributions are specific EU institutions, most prominently the ECB (36 out of 95). This category exceeds the share of blame statements directed at specific member states (17 out of 95), which would indicate a renegade game. It also exceeds the generic references directed at the EU (25 out of 95) and the member states (17 out of 95) (see Figure 4.3). Rather than being unspecific and untargeted, public blame statements were clearly directed at supranational EU institutions, most prominently the ECB, which is cast as the predominant culprit for the failed policy (33 out 95). In line with the policy-making hypothesis, the distribution of blame statements is thus indicative of a scapegoat game.

The narrative that comes with the predominant public blame attributions also points at a scapegoat game. In line with the *characterization* of a scapegoat game, the ECB is portrayed as an outsider, an institution that acts in disregard of the legal and political boundaries that define its mandate[34] and
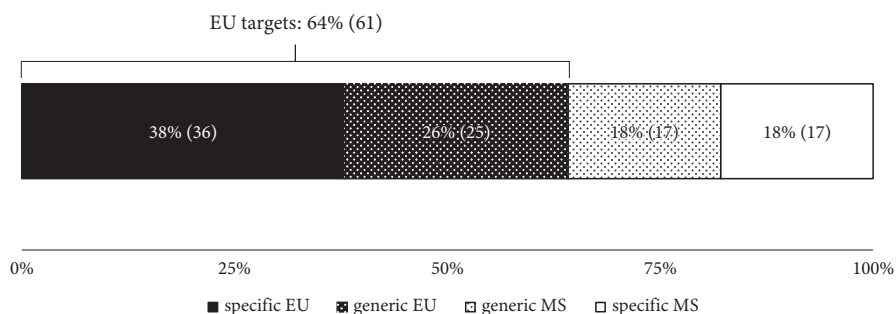
EU targets: 64% (61)

38% (36)	26% (25)	18% (17)	18% (17)

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

■ specific EU   ▨ generic EU   ▫ generic MS   ▫ specific MS

Figure 4.3 Blame targets in the Sovereign Bonds case (n=95)

Note: Following our operationalization, this distribution of blame statements indicates a scapegoat game because (1) statements targeting specific EU institutions are most frequent (38 per cent), and (2) together with blame statements directed at the EU in general (26 per cent) they amount to more than 50 per cent of all the blame attributions that were coded in this case. Disaggregating the data by country, we find distributions that conform to this operationalization only in the media coverage in Germany. While the distribution of blame statements in Austria still has some similarities, the distributions in France and the United Kingdom differ more substantively (see Appendix, Table A.17).

carries out its actions in a 'dogmatic'[35] and even 'repressive' manner that is reminiscent of 'command economy'-style bureaucracies.[36] The European press frequently refers to the ECB being overly audacious in bending existing rules, which is paired with an over-ambition that does not match the bank's actual capacities.

This characterization of an overly ambitious ECB taking on an improbable task also feeds into the *plot* to explain the failure of the sovereign bonds programme. The European press suggests that the ECB's disregard for the boundaries of its mandate came at the price of policy failure. By suggesting that 'he had a blueprint to save the euro', Mario Draghi 'was forced to admit he didn't actually have that much up his sleeve'.[37] Press reports indicate that its over-ambition made the bank impervious to the possibility that, in fact, it engaged in self-defeating behaviour. By imposing upon itself the impossible task to be the euro's saviour, the ECB made itself a 'prisoner of politics'.[38] According to the plot that emerges from the news reports, the bank risked paying a high price, overstepping its mandate, and thus jeopardizing its independence to deliver on this expectation. There are some tragic elements in the narrative for why the sovereign bonds programme was widely considered to be a failure. The press highlights that the ECB took on a momentous, even heroic task—saving the euro 'whatever it takes'—only to then fail because of its own character flaw: over-ambition. Now that the bank has committed itself to 'clean up' after the member states,[39] the bank finds itself embroiled in the game of politics, and bends rules and rhetoric to sustain the impression of its independence.

The *moral* of this scapegoat game is a call for outright punishment, calling the bank to order. There is a strong current, especially in the German public, to have the banks' actions reviewed (and ceased) by bringing cases before the German Constitutional Court and the CJEU.[40]

Overall, the blame game that ensues in the Sovereign Bonds case contains the key elements of a scapegoat game. Blame is mainly attributed to the ECB which acts in defiance of its mandate (characterization). In the scapegoat game, the ECB's disregard for its mandate directly leads to the policy failure, as the bank gets entangled in political conflicts (plot). Consequently, frequent calls for judicial review of the bank's actions can be found in the press (moral).

In sum, the analysis of the EU's fiscal stabilization case-pair supports our hypothesis that two different modes of policy making—intergovernmental and supranational policy making—triggered different kinds of blame games. Figure 4.4 juxtaposes the blame attributions in both cases and highlights their systematic differences. The variation we observe corroborates our theoretical expectation. The blame game ensuing from the Council's intergovernmental
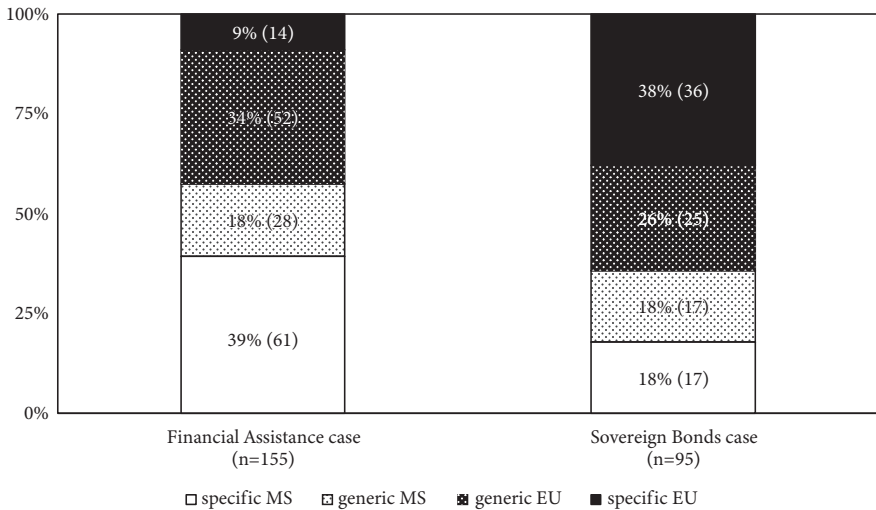
Figure 4.4 Blame targets in the EU fiscal stabilization case-pair

Note: A chi-square test indicates that the difference of public blame attributions across the Financial Assistance case and the Sovereign Bonds case is not random. The null hypothesis of a random distribution can be rejected on the 99 per cent confidence level (see Appendix, Table A.8). Disaggregating the data by country, we find this difference only in Germany. Nevertheless, we also find cross-case differences in France, Austria, and the United Kingdom that mostly point in the expected direction. In these countries the blame attributions targeting specific member states are higher in the Financial Assistance case than in the Sovereign Bonds case, while blame attributions targeting specific EU institutions are higher in the Sovereign Bonds case than in the Financial Assistance case (see Appendix, Tables A.16 and A.17).

financial assistance policy exhibited features of a renegade game, in which Germany was blamed for its unwillingness to accept its leading role within the EU and for its lack of solidarity with other member states. The sovereign bonds programme launched by the supranational ECB gave rise to a scapegoat game, in which the ECB's ambition and its disregard for the legal and political boundaries of its mandate set it up for failure.

4.4　EU migration policy failures

In this section, we probe the expectations of the policy-making hypothesis in two cases of blame games triggered by failures of EU migration policies. The first case concerns welfare entitlements for EU citizens, which has become a contentious issue in debates about the corollaries of the free movement principle. The second case pertains to the management of incoming migration and external border control.

The Welfare Entitlements case: The free movement principle is one of the bedrock principles of the EU's common market and enshrines EU citizens' right to move and reside freely irrespective of the exercise of an economic activity: EU citizens have the right to seek employment in any EU member state, to choose residence and to stay after the termination of their employment. They are entitled to equal access to employment opportunities, identical employment conditions, tax benefits, and welfare entitlements, such as maternity or child-raising allowance and student benefits (Blauberger and Schmidt 2014; Rittberger et al. 2017). This policy of welfare entitlements within the EU was heavily criticized in the European public as a policy failure because it was considered to encourage so-called 'welfare tourism', especially against the backdrop of EU enlargement. The application of 'free movement' would give European citizens a 'free choice of the most favourable social systems'.[41] The welfare systems of more wealthy member states would become 'a self-service store for Europeans who do not want to work'.[42] In the public, repeated warnings caution about 'social tourism',[43] 'social abuse and poverty migration',[44] a 'dangerous [. . .] Southeastern European mass rush for [. . .] welfare benefits',[45] 'EU-internal Hartz IV migration'.[46] As 'every community collapses if the burdens are permanently unequally distributed',[47] there is 'widespread concern among the population that the EU's fundamental right to free movement is causing an over-foreignization that could change and ultimately destroy their own homeland'.[48] Overall, there was a perception that the EU policy on welfare entitlements for EU nationals had overstretched

the principle of freedom of movement and incentivized an exploitation of generous welfaresystems.

The Border Control case: Since the removal of the EU's internal borders in the Schengen area in the 1990s, controlling irregular migration has become a transnational issue and the member states have joined efforts to manage incoming migration and control their external borders. They have established an EU agency, Frontex, to assist member states at the EU's external borders with these tasks (Niemann and Speyer 2018; Ekelund 2014). Frontex's tasks include the analysis of security risks, the manning of border control stations, and the management of incoming migration. The EU's border control policies have received ample criticism, especially when refugee numbers increased markedly following the events of the so-called Arab Spring. On the one hand, representatives of southern European member states were critical that the EU's border control policy left them to bear the heavy burden of managing incoming refugees alone.[49] On the other hand, some northern European countries were concerned that rescue missions in the Mediterranean would create an '"suction effect", encouraging human traffickers to increase the number of crossings'.[50] Above all, the thousands of deaths of refugees crossing the Mediterranean that Frontex missions and member-state authorities had failed to rescue are lamented in the public realm. For instance, the EU's Triton mission was criticized because its lack of funding and its limited mandate implied 'there would inevitably be more deaths'.[51] These shortcomings are often attributed to the objective of the policy to deter further migratory flows.[52] Overall, the policy was broadly considered to have failed to reach its proclaimed goals. Amnesty International even called the growing death toll in the Mediterranean 'the human cost of Fortress Europe',[53] while calling into question the effectiveness of the measures to discourage refugees making their way to the EU.

As with the EU fiscal stabilization case-pair, we selected both cases following the logic of a most-similar-case design so that the cases share similar characteristics that allow us to control for potentially confounding variables. First, both cases share the similar policy characteristics (migration policies) and are linked to the EU's principle of free movement: external border controls as well as welfare entitlements become salient for an organization which practices internal free movement. Second, both cases constitute performance failures, that is, the respective policies disappointed public expectations. Finally, limiting our analysis to the period before the so-called migration crisis, starting in summer 2015, ensures that the level of politicization of both migration policy failures is comparable.

As is imperative for most similar case designs, the cases differ with regard to the type of policy making (the independent variable) and thus allow us to assess whether this variation affects the type of blame game (the dependent variable) we observe in each case. In the Welfare Entitlements case, policy making was *supranational*. Traditionally, social and welfare policies are the prerogative of the member states, whereas the EU merely plays a subsidiary role. Yet, through its case law, the CJEU has repeatedly interfered with member-state legislation that limits welfare entitlements to its own citizens. Building on the principles of EU citizenship and non-discrimination, the Court has broadened citizens' access to member states' welfare systems by granting non-nationals access to non-contributory benefits and by broadening the groups of entitled persons beyond workers. While Court rulings are case-specific decisions, these rulings can have expansive effects over time, effectively restricting member states' room for legislation. On the one hand, where Court rulings based on the principles of EU citizenship and non-discrimination are treaty interpretations, countering these Court rulings requires Treaty change. Thus, the hands of the member states are effectively tied. On the other hand, where case law can be amended or altered via secondary legislation, the right of initiative rests with the Commission, which can decide whether or not to propose additional legislation (Blauberger and Schmidt 2014; 2017a; 2017b; Davis 2016). This means that supranational actors, namely the Commission and the Court, are in the driver's seat when it comes to bringing certain aspects of domestic social and welfare state policies in line with EU law. As policy making was thus supranational, we expect a *scapegoat game* to ensue in the context of the discussion about the perceived failure of the EU welfare entitlements policy.

By contrast, policy-making processes that pertain to Frontex and its mandate are complex interactions between member states and EU institutions and, as such, instances of *shared policy making*. While the member states initially established Frontex through an intergovernmental decision,[54] subsequent revisions and reforms were subject to joint decision-making of the Council and the EP.[55] Moreover, while Frontex can draw on its budget to finance joint operations, any increases have to be approved by the EU's budgetary authority, the Council and the EP (Monar 2014, 621). Therefore, we expect a *diffusion game* to unfold over the failure of the EU's border control policy. Table 4.2 summarizes the observable implications in both cases.

To assess the expectations of our policy-making hypothesis, we engage in content analysis of news coverage in the European media. Our analysis covers the period between 2009 and 2015: the period of investigation begins with the

Table 4.2 Observable implications in the EU migration policy case-pair

	Welfare Entitlements case (supranational policy making) ↓ Scapegoat game	Border Control case (shared policy making) ↓ Diffusion game
Target: Who is to blame?	• Most frequent target: specific EU institutions	• Most frequent target: generic target
Character: How is the culprit characterized?	• Stranger, member of the out-group • Dubious character	• Faceless system • Impersonal character
Plot: Why did the target commit the failure?	• Failure as an intrinsic pattern	• Failure as an effect of the system
Moral: How can the failure be corrected?	• Punishment: scapegoat must be contained	• Fatalism: nothing can be done

comprehensive application of free movement for Bulgarian and Romanian citizens[56] and ends prior to the onset of the so-called migration crisis in 2015. In our sample of 234 articles, we identified 190 statements that amounted to public blame attributions—77 in the Welfare Entitlements case, 113 in the Border Control case. For each blame statement, we coded the respective blame target—that is, whether blame is attributed to the EU or its members and whether this is done in a specific or in a rather generic manner—as well as the associated blame narratives.

4.4.1 The Welfare Entitlements case: a scapegoat game

Our policy-making hypothesis suggests that the failure of policies decided by supranational policy making will trigger scapegoat games. In the Welfare Entitlements case, we thus expect that blame attributions should be targeted at specific EU institutions, which are singled out and reproached for overstepping their mandate and acting against the common interest of the member states.

Our analysis of public blame attributions indicates that the predominant blame game was indeed a *scapegoat game*. By far the most frequent *targets* of blame attributions are specific EU institutions (38 out of 77), followed by generic blame attributions to the EU (21 out of 77), attributions to specific member states (17 out of 77) or member states in general (1 out of 77).

Overall, the vast majority of blame statements thus targets the EU, that is, either specific EU institutions or the EU generically (see Figure 4.5). The largest share of public blame statements is directed at individual EU institutions, most prominently the European Commission, which was considered the main culprit for promoting an allegedly excessive interpretation of the EU's freedom of movement principle, granting pan-European welfare entitlements, and thus encouraging 'welfare tourism' between the member states.

The predominant blame narrative also corroborates our expectation of a scapegoat game. As is typical for a scapegoat game, the *characterization* of the Commission in the public portrays the institution as a stubborn and detached technocracy, with a tendency towards 'regulatory frenzy and over-bureaucratization'.[57] Its actions are described as being 'too technocratic'.[58] Moreover, the Commission is depicted as being out of touch with ordinary citizens and is thus 'running ahead of actual developments'.[59] Its characterization is that of a detached organization, which 'skilfully ignores roaring discontent in European societies'.[60] The Commission's insistence that citizens' concerns are unwarranted and that allegations of welfare tourism come 'straight out of the beer-tent',[61] are characterized as 'harsh'[62] or 'angry'.[63] This 'detached denialism', which the Commission displays[64] is contrasted in the press with the member states, which are generally described as more responsive to citizens' concerns about the nexus between free movement and domestic welfare systems. The press repeatedly emphasizes that governments, as opposed to the Commission, share citizens' concerns.[65]

EU targets: 77% (59)

49% (38) | 27% (21) | 1% (1) | 22% (17)

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

■ specific EU   ▣ generic EU   ▢ generic MS   ▢ specific MS
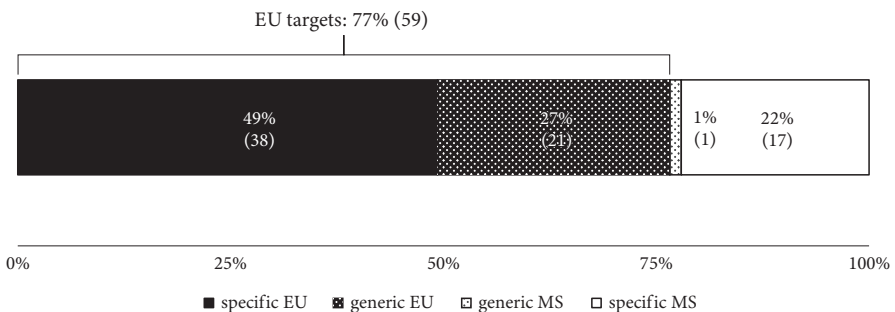
Figure 4.5 Blame targets in the Welfare Entitlements case (n=77)

Note: Following our operationalization, this distribution of blame statements indicates a scapegoat game because (1) statements targeting specific EU institutions are most frequent (49 per cent), and (2) together with blame statements directed at the EU in general (27 per cent) they amount to more than 50 per cent of all the blame attributions that were coded in this case. This distribution is, however, largely driven by the media coverage in Austria, because in Germany, France, and the United Kingdom the case was hardly covered in the media (see Appendix, Table A.18).

In the public realm, the characterization of the Commission as an outsider—a non-responsive and detached technocratic body—is also considered the main reason for a failed policy that is said to incentivize 'welfare tourism' in Europe. The main *plot* is that the Commission's obsession with economic and legal facts drives its neglect of citizens' concerns. Rather than listening to citizens' worries, the Commission is said to insist on economic rationality and facts. It is reported that the Commission is 'asking for evidence'[66] and argues that 'the newcomers pay more into the social systems of the host countries than they receive'.[67] Moreover, rather than listening to citizens, the Commission stubbornly follows legal facts. It is highlighted that the Commission claims that 'the existing rules are perfectly sufficient to prevent abuse'.[68] Its rule fetishism—reflected in its insistence that the 'freedom of movement is [. . .] sacrosanct'[69] and 'non-negotiable'[70]—is seen as the main reason for why the Commission 'has not grasped the core of the problem'.[71] Owing to its technocratic persistence the Commission is seen to be 'pouring oil on the fire of the debate on labour migration'[72] and thus 'freely contributed to [. . .] an immigration debate that is excessively emotive'.[73] The press thus depicts the Commission as a hard-wired technocracy, which privilege a legalistic and technocratic logic over responsiveness to citizens. The failed policy thus becomes the result of the actions of an outsider—the Commission—who follows a behavioural script, which is at odds with the concerns of the community the Commission is supposed to serve.

With the Commission unwilling and unable to correct its stance on 'welfare tourism', the *moral* of this scapegoat game is that the Commission's policy must be circumvented or even disregarded and its authority curtailed. In the press, some accounts stress that the Commission must be met with 'tough resistance'.[74] Demands include 'nationally determined entry quotas' and 'access restrictions'[75] or an intergovernmental 'understanding outside the EU'.[76] Other demands reported in the press ask for a 'halt to the EU's competence'[77] or even a 'retrieval of competences from Brussels'.[78] It is further stressed in the press that not the Commission, but 'the states are responsible for the continuation of the European success story'.[79]

Overall, the blame game that ensues in the welfare entitlements for EU citizens contains the key elements of a scapegoat game. Blame is mainly attributed to the Commission, which is portrayed as a detached bureaucracy (characterization), which is blind to citizen's concerns (plot). The moral of the scapegoat game is thus that the authority of the Commission should be curtailed.

4.4.2 The Border Control case: a diffusion game

Owing to shared policy making, which characterizes the Border Control case, we expect that neither specific member states nor specific EU institutions are the dominant blame targets, but generic entities, such as 'the EU' or 'the member states'.

Our analysis of public blame attributions indicates that the predominant blame game was indeed a *diffusion game*. The most frequent *target* of blame attributions are generic entities, such as 'the EU' as a whole (50 out of 114) or 'the member states' as a collective (26 out of 114). We find significantly lower shares of statements targeting specific EU member states (25 out of 114), as is typical for renegade games, or specific EU actors (13 out of 114), as is typical for scapegoat games (see Figure 4.6). Neither specific EU institutions, such as Frontex, nor specific member states became central targets in the blame game. Instead, blame is predominantly attributed to generic entities, such as 'the EU',[80] 'EU countries',[81] 'governments',[82] or 'the member states'.[83] Most notably, blame is widely targeted at 'Europe'.[84]

The predominant blame narrative also corroborates our expectation of a diffusion game. In a diffusion game, blame tends to be targeted at collective entities, who are often *characterized* as either abstract, unspecific, or faceless entities lacking agency. The EU is mostly referred to as a collective with internal divisions,[85] which leads to 'disarray'[86] in the EU's external border policy.
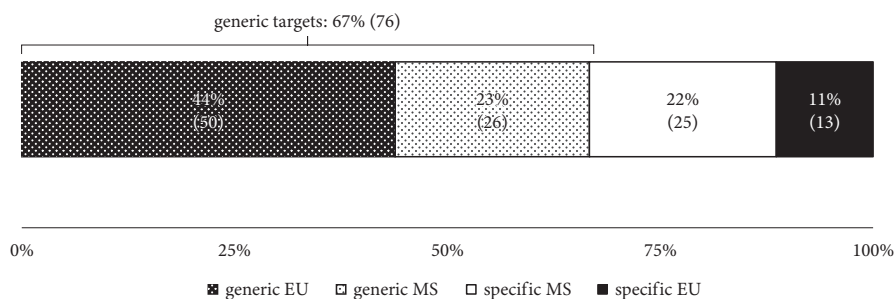
Figure 4.6 Blame targets in the Border Control case (n=114)

Note: Following our operationalization, this distribution of blame statements indicates a diffusion game because neither specific member states nor specific EU actors are the most frequent targets of public blame attributions. Instead, (1) statements attributing blame to the EU as a whole are most frequent (44 per cent) and (2) together with blame attributions targeting the member states as a collective (23 per cent) they amount to more than 50 per cent of all blame statements that were coded in this case. We find distributions that conform to this operationalization not only in the aggregate of the media coverage across the four countries selected for the analysis, but also in three out of the four countries with the United Kingdom being the only exception (see Appendix, Table A.19).

It is reported that the EU lacks a common 'European approach'[87] to address the incoming migration flows and to confront the rising number of deaths in the Mediterranean.[88] It is emphasized in the press that some member states feel 'abandoned'[89] and that these problems require European rather than national solutions.[90] Similarly, civil society organizations, such as Amnesty International criticize 'Europe's passiveness'[91] on the issue.

The *plot* of the diffusion game highlights that collective action on the part of the EU is undermined by internal divisions and national egoisms: 'There is little appetite among Europe's national governments for any surrender to Brussels of authority over immigration policies. With far-right anti-immigration parties on the rise across large parts of Europe, governments are also little inclined to shift to more open or generous policies.'[92] A lack of joint action is thus perceived as 'the direct product of European government propaganda against foreigners.'[93] As a consequence, the press reports that 'instead of working on a joint solution that could defuse the situation in the long term, member states are passing the buck to each other.'[94] The failed EU external border policy is, therefore, a result of internal divisions that result from incompatible domestic agendas. As a consequence, 'the EU' is seen at fault, because it lacks sufficient agency, and 'the member states' are seen at fault, because they are effectively enslaved to the kind of domestic politics, which is inimical to European solutions in matters of migration and refugee policy.

The *moral* of this diffusion game thus is that there seems to be little hope for improvement. Lowest common denominator solutions, such as enhancing the protection of the EU's external borders at land and sea could actually make things worse, by encouraging traffickers to increase the number of crossings.[95] In the press, the worry was expressed that 'good intentions of the Twenty-Eight' could 'lead to increased militarization, with the reinforcement of the resources of the European border surveillance agency Frontex and the tripling of Italian patrols in the Mediterranean.'[96] In consequence, refugees in the Mediterranean will continue to 'drown on the high seas, where they freeze to death in the chill that is the European refugee policy.'[97] France's former foreign minister and co-founder of Médiciens sans Frontières summarizes that 'Lampedusa is a metaphor for the EU['s external border policy]: there were once high hopes but there are no longer any expectations.'[98]

Overall, this blame game contains many of the key elements of a diffusion game. The EU in general and the member states as a collective are identified as the culprits of the failed EU external border policy. These generic targets are often portrayed as deeply divided entities (characterization), a trait
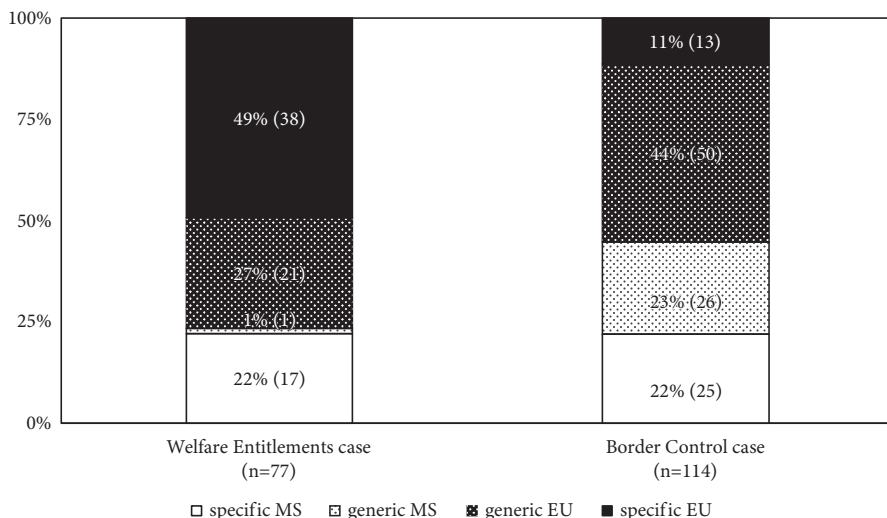
Figure 4.7 Blame targets in the migration policy case-pair

Note: A chi-square test indicates that the difference of public blame attributions across the Welfare Entitlements case and the Border Control case is not random. The null hypothesis of a random distribution can be rejected on the 99 per cent confidence level (see Appendix, Table A.9). Disaggregating the data by country, we were unable to study differences between the cases in individual countries, because the Welfare Entitlements case is almost exclusively covered in the Austrian press with very few blame statements reported in the German, French, and British press (see Appendix, Tables A.18 and A.19).

that condemns them to passivity (plot). There is little hope of remedying the situation, as the divisions within the EU are likely to remain (moral).

In sum, the analysis of the EU's migration policy case-pair confirmed our hypothesis that two different modes of policy making—shared and supranational policy making—triggered different kinds of blame games, that is, a diffusion and a scapegoat game respectively. Figure 4.7 shows that the pattern of blame attributions differs significantly in the two cases. The blame attribution patterns vary in line with our theoretical expectations.

4.5 Summary

In this chapter we unpacked how different modes of policy making affect clarity of responsibility and, thus, the blame games that emerge when policy failures take place. We argued that clarity of responsibility is not always limited in EU policy making. Once EU policy failures are politicized, a public plausibility assessment of political actors' blame attributions sets in that helps citizens to learn about true responsibilities and constrains political actors'

blame avoidance and generation strategies. The policy-making hypothesis claims that these learning and constraining mechanisms will promote blame games that gravitate towards true responsibilities in cases of supranational or intergovernmental policy making, where responsibilities of specific EU institutions or powerful member states are comparatively clear. We therefore expect scapegoat games and renegade games respectively. In contrast, in cases where member states and supranational EU institutions share responsibility for policy making, true responsibilities remain opaque and citizens' ability to learn about true responsibilities is thus circumscribed. Consequently, political actors' blame attributions will be less constrained, giving rise to diffusion games.

Our policy-making hypothesis is supported by the two pair-wise comparisons presented in this chapter (see Table 4.3). First, the EU's fiscal stabilization case-pair confirmed our expectation that instances of intergovernmental and supranational policy making trigger different kinds of blame games. In the intergovernmental Financial Assistance case, we found evidence for a renegade game, where especially Germany was blamed for its lack of solidarity with other member states, despite its potential to assume a leading role in the EU. In the Sovereign Bonds case, the OMT programme launched by the ECB gave rise to a scapegoat game, in which the bank's ambition and its disregard for the legal and political boundaries of its mandate set it up for widespread critique. The pattern we found in the Financial Assistance case differed visibly from that of the Sovereign Bonds case. Second, the analysis of the EU's migration policy case-pair confirmed our hypothesis that shared and supranational policy making trigger different kinds of blame games. The EU Welfare Entitlement case gave rise to a scapegoat game, owing to the Commission's technocratic approach, making it prone to ignore citizens' and member states' concerns and thus setting it up for failure. By contrast, the shared policy-making process in the EU Border Control case triggered a diffusion game, where EU leaders as a collective were blamed for failing to agree on a common EU policy because of what was conceived as insurmountable domestic antagonisms.

One important claim in this chapter is that processes of shared policy making lend themselves to diffusion games, because individual policy makers' responsibilities are difficult to disentangle. In the ensuing Chapter 5, we will qualify this argument. Political actors involved in adopting a policy are certainly prime targets for blame attributions when policies fail. Even in instance of shared policy making, where clarity of responsibility is in short supply, it is not a foregone conclusion that diffusion games necessarily ensue. We argue that the political actors in charge of policy implementation can transform

Table 4.3 Summary of the two case-comparisons

	EU fiscal stabilization policy case-pair		EU migration policy case-pair	
	Financial Assistance case (intergovernmental policy making) ↓ **Renegade game**	**Sovereign Bonds case** (supranational policy making) ↓ **Scapegoat game**	**Welfare Entitlements case** (supranational policy making) ↓ **Scapegoat game**	**Border Control case** (shared policy making) ↓ **Diffusion game**
Target: Who is to blame?	Specific member states (most prominently Germany)	Specific EU institutions (most prominently the ECB)	Specific EU institutions (most prominently the Commission)	'The EU' and the member states as a collective
Character: How is the culprit characterized?	Germany wants to impose its policies onto others	ECB acts in disregard of legal and political boundaries	The technocratic Commission is unresponsive to member states' concerns	Divisions among member states condemn the EU to passivity
Plot: Why did the target commit the failure?	Despite its potential to assume a leading role in the EU, Germany's selfish behaviour compounds a failing policy	The introduction of the OMT programme embroiled the ECB in the game of member-state politics and set it up for failure	Commission is fundamentally hard-wired to follow a strict legal and economic rationale which is prone to failure	Member states' divisions are the result of domestic politics that constrain governments' room for manoeuvre
Moral: How can the failure be corrected?	Calls for Germany to accept its leading role in the EU	Calls for judicial review of the ECB's actions	Calls to circumvent the Commission and restrict its competencies	No prospect for change as member states' antagonisms cannot be overcome

diffusion games in either scapegoat games, when supranational actors are the main implementers of a policy, or renegade games, when domestic actors are in charge of policy implementation. In the next chapter, we will explore

and probe the conditions under which cases of shared policy making will likely trigger diffusion games and the conditions under which they will be associated with either renegade games or scapegoat games.

Endnotes

1. Since the Court's rulings constitute an interpretation of the Treaties, the possibilities for legislative override are severely limited, which provides the Court with quasi-legislative prerogatives (Wasserfallen 2010). For instance, in the field of social welfare the CJEU has, over time, restricted member states' opportunities for excluding EU foreigners from welfare payments. As these rulings are based on Treaty interpretations, overriding them would require Treaty change. In this fashion, the Court has enacted its supranational policy-making authority as a *de facto* policy maker in the field of social policy (Blauberger and Schmidt 2017a; 2017b).

2. What is more, citizens do register shifts in political authority from one level of governance to another (Mortensen 2013b; 2013a), albeit this adjustment lags behind changes in the institutional set-up (León 2012). This observation holds in settings where one level of government commands policy-making authority, but less so when different levels of government share policy-making authority (León 2011; 2012). This understanding of multilevel structures has also been documented for international institutions, whose policy-making authority is distributed between member states and supranational bodies. Alcañiz and Hellwig (2011) found that in Latin America supranational policy-making authority wielded by international organizations, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), has an impact on public responsibility attributions for the policies enacted by these institutions. What is more, Hobolt and Tilley (2014) found that voters' responsibility attributions to the EU are sensitive to differences in EU authority in different policy fields. In sum, these findings suggest that the public is aware of differences in the policy-making processes in multilevel systems and that knowledge about these differences can shape citizens' responsibility attributions.

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5

The policy implementation hypothesis

with Josef Lolacher

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we unpacked how the EU's policy-making structure affects the clarity of responsibility and, thus, the blame games that unfold when EU policies fail. Policy-making complexity in the EU, we argued, is a variable condition and not a constant: When policy making is supranational and thus rests with corporate actors, such as the Commission or the ECB, attributions of responsibility tend to be straightforward and trigger scapegoat games whereby EU institutions are singled out as the culprits. When policy making is intergovernmental and thus rests with member-state governments, attributions of responsibility are also comparatively clear and trigger renegade games where specific member-state governments become the focus of public blame. Conversely, where policy-making authority is distributed among different actors, the clarity of responsibility is hampered. This is the case for shared policy making, most notably for the Community Method. Consequently, we expected diffusion games to become prevalent.

In this chapter, we qualify this latter claim. Whether shared policy-making structures trigger diffusion, scapegoat, or renegade games is conditioned by the type of policy implementation. We argue that when policy making is shared, the type of policy implementation becomes crucial for understanding the blame games that unfold when policies fail. The type of policy implementation affects the clarity of responsibility and, in turn, the public's plausibility assessment about who is to blame for a policy failure. If the responsibility for implementing a failed EU policy rests with a clearly identifiable actor, such as a member-state government or a particular EU institution, we expect either renegade games (when member states are implementing actors) or scapegoat games (when supranational EU actors are the main implementers). If, by contrast, the task of policy implementation is shared among national and EU actors, the clarity of responsibility will remain obfuscated, and blame for policy failures will diffuse.

In Section 5.2 we develop this policy implementation hypothesis in more detail by elaborating on the implications different types of policy implementation exert—in cases of shared policy making—on the attribution of blame for policy failures in the public. Section 5.3 provides a controlled comparison of three cases in the field of EU migration policy, in which we vary the type of policy implementation. We contrast the failure of the EU asylum system, an instance of national implementation, with two episodes of the EU's heavily criticized border control policy. We first look at the period from 2010 to 2015, where the implementation of the EU's external border control policy was shared between Frontex and member states' authorities. Second, we zoom into the period since 2016, when the type of implementation shifted towards supranational implementation following a reinforcement of the executive powers of Frontex. For each type of implementation, we probe the theoretical expectations by assessing the distribution of blame attributions and associated blame games and blame narratives.

5.2 The policy implementation condition

Implementation is the process whereby a policy that is adopted is put into action 'on the ground'. Implementing a policy is thus a critical step for solving the very problem a policy is meant to address. Implementation is hardly ever automatic, but typically requires actors to do the implementing. We distinguish three types of policy implementation, owing to the particular actor(s) that are the main implementers: The first type is national implementation, whereby member-state governments and their national administrations are required to put EU policies into practice. As EU legislation typically depends not only on member states to transpose an EU policy into national legislation, but also to subsequently implement the transposed legislation, national implementation is rather frequent in the EU. For instance, with regard to air pollution, the member states are required to enforce EU policies that limit the emission of air pollutants. The second type is supranational implementation, whereby supranational EU institutions, such as the European Commission, the ECB, or various EU agencies are in charge of on-the-ground implementation of EU policies. Examples of supranational implementation include the administration of the EU's regional and structural funds by the Commission or the European Medicines Agency (EMA), which is tasked to prepare authorization decisions for medicines. The third type of implementation is shared implementation, whereby supranational EU institutions and national administrations jointly implement EU policies.

For instance, the authorization of chemical products in the EU is a task that is shared between the Commission, national regulatory authorities, and the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA).

The policy implementation hypothesis suggests that the type of policy implementation shapes the blame games that are played in cases of EU policy failures. We hold that in cases of shared policy making, where responsibilities for policy making are hard to decipher, the respective implementing actors are likely to become the main targets of public blame attributions (Rittberger et al. 2017; Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2018; Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2023). Hence, even when the complexities of shared policy making hamper the clarity of responsibility, because none of the policy makers 'sticks out' as the most likely blame target, political actors cannot always attribute blame to the political opponent of their choice—as is characteristic for diffusion games. When this is the case, actors charged with policy implementation come into focus in the public domain and are therefore likely to become the main targets of public blame attributions.

Implementing actors typically 'stick out' from the set of political actors which have been involved in policy making. After all, they are the ones that ultimately translate policy into action and are thus—compared to other policy makers—much more visible in the public (Rittberger et al. 2017; Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2018; 2023). In addition, implementing actors usually have some discretion when they implement policies. To the extent that they could have prevented a policy failure by leveraging their discretion, they are indeed responsible, irrespective of their role as policy makers. In any case, once the public plausibility assessment of political actors' blame attributions has set in, implementing actors have difficulties distancing themselves from a policy that is considered a blunder. Owing to their inherent connection and temporal proximity to the failed policy, it is particularly easy for citizens to learn about an implementer's responsibility for a failed policy. Therefore, implementing actors should be particularly constrained to shift blame onto other actors. In the context of shared policy making, where true responsibilities are particularly difficult to assess, we therefore expect the type of policy implementation to shape the blame games that occur when EU policies fail.

5.2.1 National policy implementation

When member-state governments, that is, their national administrations, are tasked with the implementation of an EU policy, blame attributions for subsequent policy failures should conform to renegade games. As the

ones which implement a policy 'on the ground', domestic authorities clearly stand out from the multiple political actors which were actually responsible for the policy failure. Once the public plausibility assessment of political actors' blame attributions has set in, the heightened visibility of domestic implementing actors becomes a liability.

The public plausibility assessment might not allow citizens to identify those actors that are in fact responsible for the failed policy, that is, the multiplicity of policy makers in structures of shared policy making (see Chapter 4). Citizens might not be able to single out those actors which opposed potentially 'better' policy alternatives and thus supported a policy that is now deemed to be failing. After all, the complexities of shared policy making render such an assessment extremely difficult. Because of their visibility as implementing actors, citizens will almost certainly *learn* about the responsibilities of national governments which are now in charge of implementing the policy that is considered a failure (Rittberger et al. 2017; Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2018; 2023).

Member-state governments charged with implementation may, of course, try to shift blame onto others or seek to obfuscate their own responsibility. Owing to their heightened visibility as implementing actors, these blame avoidance attempts are unlikely to pass the public plausibility assessment. Implementing actors' blame avoidance attempts are hence also rather *constrained* (Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2020a; Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl 2020a). They cannot simply shift the blame or obfuscate their responsibility without putting their reputation as trustworthy political actors into jeopardy. This same constraint is much less problematic for other political actors, including those who have been involved in policy making: Since they are not acting as implementers of the failed policy, they are more likely to escape the public's plausibility assessment, because they are temporally and causally more 'remote' and hence less visible. These actors, in turn, have an incentive to shift blame onto implementing actors which are already the focus of public blame attributions, and they have the political opportunity to do so. They can be confident that blaming the implementer passes the public plausibility assessment without tarnishing their own reputation as trustworthy political actors. Thus, when a policy that fails requires national implementation, member-state governments' implementing authorities will typically become focal in the public responsibility assessment and the ensuing blame game is likely a *renegade game*.

5.2.2 Supranational policy implementation

When supranational actors are in charge of implementing an EU policy that was decided by shared policy making and is subsequently considered a policy failure, we expect blame attributions to take the form of scapegoat games. Like their domestic counterparts in instances of national implementation, the visibility of supranational implementers renders them plausible targets of public blame attributions. As they stand out from the set of political actors which have been involved in policy making, any public blame attribution targeting supranational implementers is likely to pass the public plausibility assessment of political actors' blame attributions. Their heightened visibility makes them plausible blame targets.

As argued in the previous section, the public plausibility assessment which sets in once political actors start playing blame games might not allow citizens to identify those actors that are in fact responsible for the failed policy. The complexities of shared policy making in the EU compound this challenge. But once the public plausibility assessment of political actors' blame attributions has set in, citizens will almost certainly *learn* that supranational actors can be considered at least partially responsible. While there might be less visible actors with equal (or even more) responsibility, citizens can easily understand that supranational actors that have been involved not only in the making of a failed policy but are also the main implementer of that failed policy are plausible blame targets. After all, as co-policy makers and sole implementers, they could have promoted better policies. Their visibility as implementers thus puts them in the limelight of public attention (Rittberger et al. 2017; Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2018; 2023).

Moreover, as citizens learn about supranational actors' responsibilities for the respective policy failure, supranational actors that serve as the main implementers of the respective policy are *constrained* in their blame avoidance attempts (Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl 2020b; 2020a). As their heightened visibility makes them plausible blame targets, they cannot simply shift the blame onto other actors or obfuscate their own responsibility. If they were to do so, this could be easily understood as foul play, that is, a self-serving, opportunistic attempt to deflect from one's own responsibility. Other policy makers, such as member-state governments which are not serving as implementers and are thus less visible, do not face the same constraints and can thus direct blame at the supranational implementers. Overall, supranational implementing actors are likely to become the main target of public blame

attributions in cases of shared policy making. We, therefore, expect the blame game to conform to a *scapegoat game.*

5.2.3 Shared policy implementation

When governments and supranational actors share responsibility not only for policy making (see Chapter 4) but also for policy implementation, we expect blame attributions to conform to diffusion games. Shared implementation, like shared policy making, hampers clarity of responsibility, and, therefore, no specific political actor can be plausibly targeted for public blame attributions. In turn, the public exchange of blame attributions is likely to be directed at a variety of different actors and thus likely to end up in a diffusion game.

In cases where both policy making and policy implementation are shared between national and supranational actors, the public plausibility assessment is unlikely to steer public attention towards a particular actor. As no political actor sticks its head out, no one draws public attention (Rittberger et al. 2017; Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2018; 2023). The public plausibility assessment may still clarify the set of political actors that are plausible blame targets as they have been involved in either policy making or policy implementation (or both). Thus, even in instances of shared implementation, citizens will *learn* about true responsibilities and the clarity of responsibility is improving. But the set of plausible blame targets will still contain multiple political actors, rendering the assessment of true responsibilities problematic.

As a result, political actors' incentives and opportunities for attributing blame will remain rather *unconstrained.* The resulting blame game will thus not gravitate towards a specific blame target. Blame attributions will rather run in circles with both supranational actors and the national governments from EU member states blaming each other (Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2020a; Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl 2020a). In consequence, in instances of shared policy making *and* shared implementation, we should expect that policy failures lead to *diffusion games.*

Overall, the *policy implementation hypothesis* leads us to expect that, in cases of policy failures preceded by shared policy making, the implementing actor will become the focus of blame games. When supranational actors or national authorities are in charge of policy implementation, we expect scapegoat and renegade games respectively. Only when national and supranational actors share responsibility for both policy making and policy implementation, we expect diffusion games. To evaluate the empirical plausibility of our policy implementation hypothesis, we study three blame games in the field of EU migration policy (see Figure 5.1).
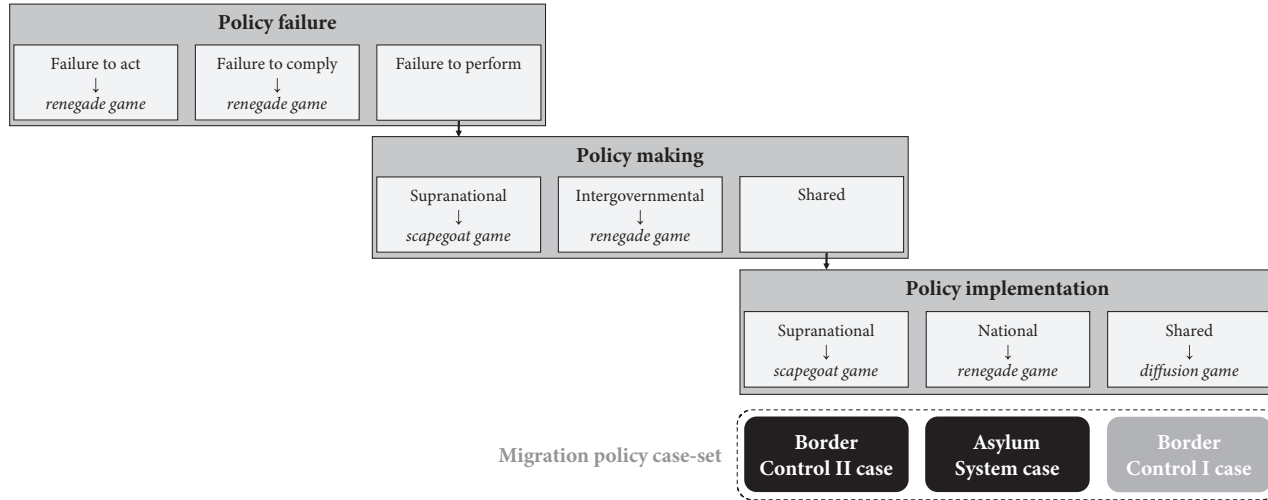
Figure 5.1 The policy implementation hypothesis

5.3 EU migration policy failures

To probe the policy implementation hypothesis that under the condition of shared policy making different types of policy implementation systematically affect the specific type of blame game in the European public, we compare three cases of EU migration policy failures that vary concerning the type of policy implementation.

EU failure in the Border Control I case: The EU agency Frontex was established in 2004 to assist member states in managing incoming migration and controlling their external borders (Ekelund 2014; Niemann and Speyer 2018). While member states remained responsible for their day-to-day border management, Frontex was tasked to assist member states operationally and coordinate joint operations to protect the EU's external borders (Lavenex 2015, 381).[1] In the period from 2010 to early 2015, the EU's border control policy was frequently criticized in the public. The main point of criticism pertained to the EU's inability to prevent the deaths of refugees trying to enter the EU via the Mediterranean route. For critics, EU border control operations contributed to the death of thousands of migrants who crossed the Mediterranean by doing either too little—as a result of their restricted mandate and limited resources—or by doing too much—by attracting migrants through their search and rescue efforts to take the dangerous route across the Mediterranean. Furthermore, it was claimed that the EU's border control policy would violate refugees' rights or tolerate such violations by national authorities.

EU failure in the Border Control II case: The EU's border control policy experienced a significant change in 2016 when Frontex assumed a plethora of new responsibilities and operational capacities in the wake of the migration crisis. In 2016 Frontex was renamed to European Border and Coast Guard Agency[2] and its rule-setting, monitoring, and enforcement tasks were considerably expanded (Regulation 2016/1624/EU). The 2016 reform has led to a significant expansion of the agency's operational powers, with Frontex outgrowing its support function and undeniably turning into an actor in its own right, fulfilling a regulatory, supervisory, and operational role (Bruycker 2016; Ferraro and Capitani 2016; Carrera et al. 2017; Scipioni 2018a). At the same time, the EU's border control policy, of which Frontex was now an ever more prominent player, continued to be heavily criticized. During this period, Frontex has been embroiled in various scandals, including pushbacks of asylum seekers and other human rights violations (Christides et al. 2021). Critics see Frontex at the centre of a 'rule of law crisis in European

border management' (Marin 2022) and as an organization that displays a considerable lack of adequate accountability and control mechanisms.

EU failure in the Asylum System case: The so-called Dublin System has long been a cornerstone of the EU's Common European Asylum System (CEAS). It defines common European standards and stipulates that those member states where an asylum seeker first enters the EU are responsible for administering asylum claims. From its outset, the Dublin System did not work the way it was intended, 'a fact made clear by the countless instances of dissatisfaction by member states noted in the press in the years surrounding its adoption' (Scipioni 2018b, 1364). One of the main charges brought against the Dublin System in the public is its lack of ensuring 'equitable redistribution' (Scipioni 2018b, 1364) of asylum seekers amongst the EU member states. Instead, the Dublin System leads to an overburdening of member states at the EU's external border, which are most likely to be 'first-arrival' states. Another critique pertained to the discrepancies in the treatment of asylum seekers despite the EU's declared goal to establish common minimum EU standards for the reception and treatment of asylum seekers. Overall, even before the migration crisis in 2015/16, the lack of solidarity amongst EU member states rendered the Dublin System increasingly unworkable and virtually unreformable, which was made painfully evident at the height of the migration crisis (see, e.g. Scipioni 2018b; Zaun 2018).

We selected these cases to assess the policy implementation hypothesis in a comparison that follows the logic of a most-similar-case design (Przeworski and Teune 1982, 32–33). The cases differ concerning the type of implementation, but they are similar concerning several characteristics, thus allowing us to isolate the effect of implementation type (the independent variable) on the type of blame game (the dependent variable) while controlling for potentially confounding variables. More specifically, the cases are similar in at least three important aspects. First, the cases are intimately linked to the EU principles of free movement across internal borders and the establishment of a common external border. Second, their underlying policy-making procedures are instances of shared policy making and thus similarly complex: the regulations establishing and transforming Frontex followed the Community Method and can thus be subsumed under the category of joint decision-making whereby the Commission proposes a policy which the EP jointly enacts with the Council.[3] Moreover, the legislative instruments governing the CEAS are either based on the Community Method[4] or a special provision adopted in the Treaty of Amsterdam in Art. 67, 1 (TEC), whereby the Council decides unanimously upon a Commission proposal while the EP is

consulted.[5] Finally, all three cases of EU policy failures were highly politicized. While politicization arguably increased during the migration crisis, peaking in the summer 2015, criticism of the EU's border control and asylum policies was already widespread before the height of the migration crisis in 2015. Refugee flows had increased considerably since 2010 as a result of violent conflicts in Northern Africa and the Middle East, making the member states located at the EU's external borders and at the intersection of migration routes focal points for the application of the Dublin System.

Taken together, the similarities between the cases enable us to control for confounding variables and to single out the effect of the independent variable which differs across the three cases. In the Border Control I case, EU member states and Frontex jointly implemented the EU's border control policy (Moses 2014, 606). The deployed corps in EU border control missions are composed of both agency staff and member-state officers who work under the command of the national authorities of the country hosting the operation. Frontex, in turn, is charged with coordinating joint missions as well as with monitoring and supervisory tasks to identify weak spots at the EU's external border. We, therefore, categorize this case as an instance of *shared implementation*, which should give rise to a *diffusion game*.

In the Border Control II case, the 2016 reform of Frontex has led to a significant expansion of the agency's operational powers, with Frontex outgrowing its support function and turning into an actor in its own right, fulfilling a regulatory, supervisory, and operational role (Bruycker 2016; Ferraro and Capitani 2016; Carrera et al. 2017; Scipioni 2018a). Its mandate and executive tasks were further strengthened in a second round of reforms in 2019 (Regulation 2019/1896/EU). As the authority to implement the EU's border control policy gradually shifted from member states and their national border and coast guards towards Frontex, we thus observe a movement towards *supranational implementation* and, in turn, expect the blame game to gravitate towards a *scapegoat game*.

The Asylum System case exhibits yet a different mode of policy implementation since first-arrival states are charged with processing asylum claims (Moses 2014, 607; Lavenex 2015, 381).[6] As individual member states are responsible for implementing the Dublin rules, this case represents an instance of *national implementation*. Therefore, we expect that the exchange of blame attributions in this case gravitate towards a *renegade game*. Table 5.1 provides an overview of the observable implications of our expectations for the ensuing empirical analysis.

Table 5.1 Observable implications in the EU migration policy case set

	Border Control I case (shared implementation) ↓ **Diffusion game**	Border Control II case (supranational implementation) ↓ **Scapegoat game**	Asylum System case (national implementation) ↓ **Renegade game**
Target: Who is to blame?	• Most frequent target: generic target	• Most frequent target: specific EU institutions	• Most frequent target: specific member states
Character: How is the culprit characterized?	• Faceless system • Impersonal character	• Stranger, member of the out-group • Dubious character	• Member of the in-group • Deviant character
Plot: Why did the target commit the failure?	• Failure as the effect of the system	• Failure as an intrinsic pattern	• Failure as an aberration
Moral: How can the failure be corrected?	• Fatalism: nothing can be done	• Punishment: scapegoat must be contained	• Shaming: renegade must come to their senses

Of these three selected cases, we already analysed the blame game in the Border Control I case in Chapter 4. For the purpose of this chapter, we draw on this case as a 'shadow case' (Soifer 2020). We already know from the analysis in Section 4.4.2 that our expectation that shared policy implementation leads to a diffusion game, which we derived from the policy implementation hypothesis, is borne out in this case (see also Figure 5.3 below). In this chapter, we contrast our findings from this ancillary case with the two other cases.

To assess the expectation derived from our policy implementation hypothesis that we should overserve a shift from a diffusion game to a scapegoat game over time as Frontex's independent authority increased, we provide a content analysis of blame attributions based on newspaper articles covering the EU border control policy failure for the period after the 2016 reform of Frontex. For all selected newspapers across the four countries under investigation, we identified 207 articles that were then manually reviewed for duplicates and irrelevant articles.[7] In those articles we identified 465 blame attribution statements.

Finally, to assess the expectation that a renegade game would unfold in the Asylum System case, we engage in a content analysis of the EU asylum policy failure's media coverage for the same period as the Border Control I case.[8] We identified 115 articles and coded a total of 188 statements that amounted to public blame attributions. For all blame statements we coded the respective blame target—that is, whether blame is attributed to the EU or its members and whether this is done in a specific or a rather diffuse manner—as well as the blame narratives in which these attributions are embedded.

5.3.1 The Border Control II case: a scapegoat game

According to our policy implementation hypothesis, we expect scapegoat games to be triggered by EU policy failures in instances of shared policy making and supranational implementation. In the Border Control II case, we thus expect a scapegoat game in which public blame attributions should predominantly target Frontex.

Our analysis of public blame attributions suggests that the blame game in the Border Control II case (2016–2022) amounts to a *scapegoat game*. The most common *target* of blame attributions are specific EU institutions, mostly Frontex (196 out of 465) while specific member states are less frequently targeted (170 out of 465), as is typical of renegade games. Blame attributions to generic targets, such as 'the EU' (72 out of 465) or 'the member states' as a collective (27 out of 465) are rather infrequent (see Figure 5.2). The comparatively high number of public blame attributions directed at member states reflects the fact that member states still play an important implementing role in the EU's border control policy. Still, it is important to note that when member states are blamed for the failure of the EU's border control policy in the period 2016–2022, Frontex is often considered co-responsible and blamed for 'complicity'[9] or 'direct participation'.[10]

Moreover, the blame narrative also suggests the prevalence of a scapegoat game. In the public, Frontex is *characterized* as an organization that is flawed at its very core. The rapid expansion of its mandate and operational capacities have made Frontex 'too big, too powerful, too unregulated'.[11] Frontex is said to exhibit a culture of 'opacity'[12] and 'a lack of transparency'.[13] For instance, it 'concealed close contacts and multiple meetings with major defense contractors'[14] and 'repeatedly met with people who were not listed in the EU's transparency register'.[15] It eschews accountability because 'its air and sea units routinely switch off the transponders'.[16] Frontex is not

EU targets: 58% (268)

| 42% (196) | 15% (72) | 6% (27) | 37% (170) |

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

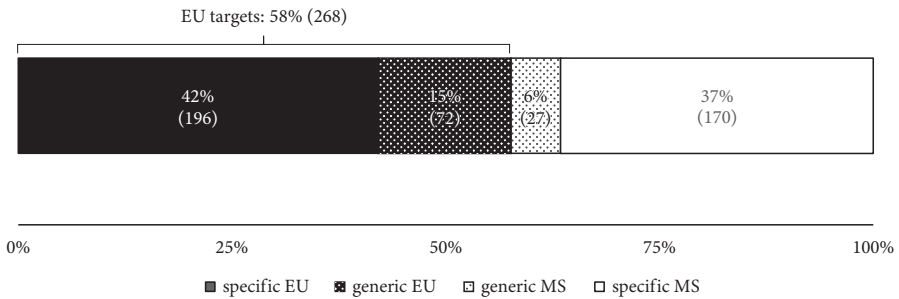■ specific EU   ▨ generic EU   ▢ generic MS   ▢ specific MS

Figure 5.2 Blame targets in the EU Border Control II case (n=465)

Note: Following our operationalization, this distribution of blame statements indicates a scapegoat because: (1) statements targeting specific EU institutions are most frequent (42 per cent), and (2) together with blame statements directed at 'the EU' as a whole (15 per cent) they amount to more than 50 per cent of all the blame attributions that were coded in this case. We find distributions that conform to this operationalization not only in the aggregate of the media coverage across the four countries selected for the analysis, but also in three out of four individual countries with the United Kingdom being the only exception (see Appendix, Table A.20).

only characterized as a secretive and non-transparent organization, its own leadership is considered 'autocratic and authoritarian',[17] 'heavy-handed and intimidating'[18] as well as prone to 'abrupt decisions'.[19] Reports about a deeply flawed and dysfunctional organization abound: Frontex exhibits 'harassment as well as bullying'[20] and 'a culture of fear'.[21]

Frontex's characterization as an uncontrolled and autocratic organization feeds into the main *plot* of a scapegoat game that policy failures are intrinsic to an organization as flawed and defunct as Frontex: 'Frontex operates at the cost of breaking the law'[22] and is prone to 'systematic human rights violations'.[23] The failure is no exception but 'part of a long trend in a policy designed to ensure that migrants are unable to cross the Mediterranean'.[24] The press explains the policy failure with reference to Frontex's internal governance. For instance, it is reported that 'the extended mandate of Frontex is inevitably accompanied by administrative difficulties'[25] and 'organizational failure',[26] such as 'a systematic failure of the agency's internal system for reporting human rights violations'.[27] Because the agency is so intrinsically flawed, it is also said to be unable to act upon wrongdoings and do what it is supposed to do. Even when 'new evidence [. . .] appears to contradict the EU agency',[28] 'Frontex has denied knowledge of, or involvement in, pushbacks'.[29] It is reported that Fabrice Leggeri, the former director of Frontex, 'denies the allegations'[30] or 'rejected criticism of Frontex'.[31] Instead of correcting policy failures, Frontex responded with more of the same: 'deliberately concealing'[32] and 'covering up'[33] policy failures and 'deceiving'[34] investigators: When the

evidence about Frontex's failure to assist refugees in distress became public, 'Frontex drew a lesson of its own: they switched off the transponders of planes to make the flights and the dying in the Mediterranean invisible'.[35] Frontex adopted a particularly cynical strategy, according to a Frontex official cited in the European press: 'The legal obligation to aid a vessel in distress does not apply to an unmanned aerial vehicle or UAV. You can avoid the politically fraught argument about who should take care of rescued migrants if you never rescue them in the first place. [. . .] If we are obliged to rescue those who ask us for help, the solution seems to be to ensure we cannot hear their request.'[36]

By enhancing the mandate and operational capacities of Frontex, member states have fed a beast over which they have lost control. With Frontex unwilling and unable to correct its own flaws and failures, the main *moral* of the scapegoat game is that the EU's border agency must be contained: 'Frontex cannot be part of the solution',[37] because Frontex is itself the problem. Hence, calls for stricter controls of the EU's border agency are voiced in public. The press highlights that 'one lesson' from the policy failure clearly is that 'the granting of additional competencies must be accompanied with corresponding controls'[38] and that Frontex's tasks should be 'scaled back instead of expanded'.[39] The press therefore applauded when the EP refused to grant discharge for the agency's 2019 budget as well as for withholding parts of its budget for 2022.[40] While some claims are more reformist and require that 'the agency now needs a fresh start',[41] 'a new culture with more sensitivity to reporting possible misconduct',[42] or 'personnel consequences'[43] the press holds that the problem is more systematic, for instance when it reports that 'there is no evidence that anything has changed under his [Leggeri's] interim successor'.[44] Instead of incremental reforms, calls in the European press demand systemic change towards a 'counter model':[45] a 'Frontex of human rights'.[46]

Overall, the Border Control II case (post 2016) bears out our expectation that supranational implementation is associated with scapegoat games when policies fail that have been enacted through shared EU policy making. With the strengthening of Frontex's competencies in 2016, Frontex became the main target of public blame attributions. We also observed the associated narrative of a *scapegoat game*: Frontex is characterized as an outsider in defiance of community norms, such as transparency and accountability (characterization). Due to its flawed character, Frontex has an ingrained tendency to disregard and circumvent rules and cover up misconduct (plot). In turn, demands that Frontex's actions must be more strictly controlled gain prominence in the public (moral).

5.3.2 The Asylum System case: a renegade game

According to our policy implementation hypothesis, renegade games should ensue when policy failures are accompanied with instances of national implementation. In the case of the failure of the EU's Dublin System, we thus expect blame attributions to be directed predominantly at member-state authorities.

Our analysis of public blame attributions indicates that the blame game in the Asylum System case constitutes a *renegade game.* The predominant *target* of blame attributions are specific member states (123 out of 188), whereas generic blame attributions, targeting 'the EU' (37 out of 188) or 'the member states' (23 out of 188), as is typical for diffusion games, are less frequent. Blame attributions to specific EU institutions (5 out of 188), as is typical for scapegoat games, are negligible (see Figure 5.3). The member states receiving most of the blame are so-called first-arrival states, mostly Greece and Italy, as well as 'transit states', that is, member states located on the main migration routes: 72 per cent (89 out of 123) of all blame attributions targeting specific member states are directed at a group of 'Southern states'. A minority of public blame attributions to specific member states, 28 per cent (34 out of 123), is directed at a group of 'Northern states', which includes France, Germany, and the United Kingdom.

In line with our conceptualization of the renegade game, those member states which become the main blame targets are *characterized* as culprits violating important community norms and, by doing so, jeopardizing their
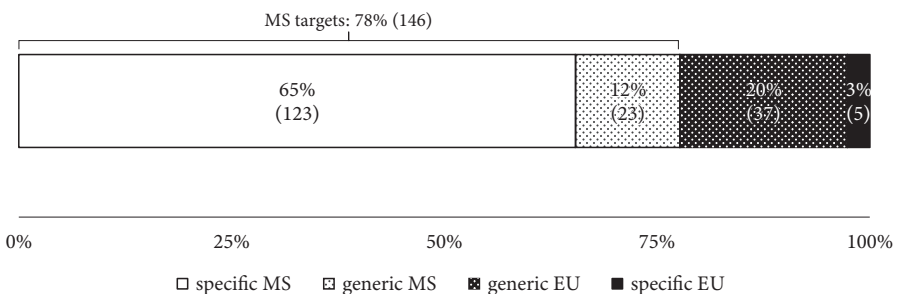

Figure 5.3 Blame targets in Asylum System case (n=188)

Note: Following our operationalization, this distribution of blame statements indicates a renegade game because (1) blame statements targeting individual member states are most frequent (65 per cent), and (2) together with blame statements directed at member states as a collective (12 per cent) they amount to more than 50 per cent of all the blame attributions that were coded in this case. Moreover, we find distributions that conform to our operationalization not only in the aggregate of the press coverage across the four countries selected for the analysis, but also in each of these countries individually (see Appendix, Table A.21).

loyalty to the community. Following the public exchange of blame attributions in the press, a cleavage among community members emerges, pitting 'Northern' member states against 'Southern' member states. The 'Southern states'—mainly Greece and Italy as first-arrival states—are *characterized* as renegades because of their widespread disregard of EU law. Greek and Italian authorities responsible for registering and processing asylum claims as well as for ensuring adequate reception conditions have been at the centre of the blame storm blowing from 'destination states' in the North: public accusations of human rights violations, inhumane conditions and even wanton violence inflicted by guards in refugee camps have led to widespread stigmatization of Greek authorities.[47] NGOs and the UN were among the first to demand that deportations of asylum seekers be stopped to Greece due to inhumane conditions[48] and disrespect for their rights.[49] The Greek asylum system is referred to as 'farcical'[50] and the dismal conditions in Greek refugee camps are considered inexcusable.[51] Italy, another first-arrival state, faced similar accusations: overly repressive legislation on illegal immigration[52] and a 'non-system of reception',[53] which leaves asylum seekers stranded on the streets or in 'unsanitary squats'[54] is hardly the standard to be expected from a law-abiding community member.

The narrative *plot* in this renegade game nevertheless expresses a certain understanding of the respective renegades' community-damaging behaviour: it is an aberration rather than a character trait. It is emphasized in the press that first-arrival states are simply overburdened by the influx of refugees. Their norm-disregarding behaviour—the non-registration and 'waving through' of refugees or the dismal reception conditions—is, at times, depicted as a consequence of being 'completely overwhelmed'[55] by the migratory movements. These community members simply do not have the necessary capacities and infrastructure to manage the influx.[56] A related plot line holds that the 'Southern' states have actually been abandoned by the rest of the community: a problem that should be the responsibility of all member states is off-loaded on a few, hard-hit community members.[57] It is due to 'Northern' states' egoism and their unwillingness for burden-sharing that the present system is not reformed: Northern states are often referred to as beneficiaries of the Dublin System and are blocking reform for self-serving reasons.[58] The ones whose behaviour is an aberration from the norm are thus the 'Northern' states and not the 'Southern' states.

The *moral* of this renegade narrative is more implicitly than explicitly highlighted in the public. 'Southern' states should make an effort to be good members of the community. They should stop disregarding EU law and return to following the rules. Interestingly, though, public attempts at

shaming aberrant member states are rare. What we find is that the press depicts the Southern states as victims of an unworkable system: It is the Dublin System, which incentivizes inhuman behaviour in first-arrival states, because it prioritises deterrence over the creation of humane reception conditions.[59] Therefore, the Northern states are also called upon to display solidarity with first-arrival states by accepting reforms of the Dublin system.[60] It is also highlighted that calls to reform the Dublin System to produce a fairer system of burden sharing have not least been blocked by Northern states.[61]

Overall, this case study corroborates our expectation that individual member states are the main target of public blame attributions when they are in charge of the implementation of a failed policy. The associated *renegade game* is reflected in blame attributions predominantly directed at member states. These attributions are, moreover, embedded in a narrative, which depicts the first-arrival states as violators of legal norms (characterization). In the public discourse, their deviant behaviour is rationalized by their disproportionate burden (plot). To redress this situation, 'destination' states would need to show more solidarity with the states at the EU's external borders; conversely, first-arrival states would need to demonstrate rule-abiding behaviour by not deliberately flouting the Dublin rules (moral).

In sum, our policy implementation hypothesis is not only corroborated by the results of the Asylum System case and the Border Control II case but also receives additional support by comparing them with a 'shadow case' (Soifer 2020), that is, the Border Control I case (see Figure 5.4). In the Border Control I shadow case, as shown in Chapter 4, the main target of public blame attributions indicates a diffusion game, because the bulk of blame attributions are directed at 'the EU' as a whole (50 out of 114) and at 'the member states' as a collective (26 out of 114) whilst blame attributions targeting specific EU member states (25 out of 114) or specific EU actors (13 out of 114) are in the minority. We further find the narrative elements of a diffusion game. Our observations in the Border Control I case thus confirm our expectation derived from the policy implementation hypothesis that shared policy implementation leads to a diffusion game.

Comparing our results in the Asylum System case with the Border Control I shadow case lends additional support to the policy implementation hypothesis. While the two cases share important commonalities, such as policy area, type of policy making, and period of analysis, the blame games clearly differ. The failure of the EU's asylum policy, which is implemented by member-state authorities, triggered a renegade game whereas we observed a diffusion game in the Border Control I case, where member-state authorities implement the
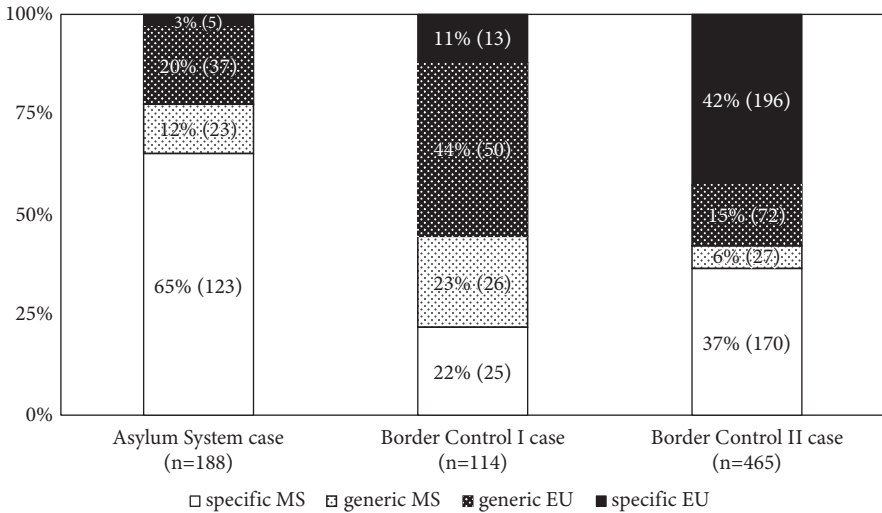
Figure 5.4   Blame targets in the three cases of EU migration policy failures

Note: A chi-square test indicates that the null hypothesis of a random distribution of public blame attributions between the Asylum System case and the Border Control I case can be rejected at the 99 per cent confidence level (see Appendix, Table A.10). Yet, according to another chi-square test, we cannot reject at a meaningful confidence level the null hypothesis that public blame attributions are randomly distributed across the two border control cases (see Appendix, Table A.11). Disaggregating the data by country, we find the same cross-case differences in blame attributions in three out of the four countries that we selected for the analysis with the United Kingdom being the only exception (see Appendix, Tables A.19, A.20, and A.21).

EU's border control policy jointly with Frontex. Moreover, our comparison of the Border Control I with the Border Control II case reveals a shift in blame games over time, which we can attribute to a change in the mode of implementation. After 2016, when Frontex's prerogatives were expanded, the shift from shared to supranational implementation is accompanied by a notable shift in blame attributions: while we observe a diffusion game prior to the 2016 reform, we observe a scapegoat game thereafter where blame attributions were specific and mostly targeted Frontex.

5.4 Summary

In this chapter, we developed the policy implementation hypothesis which posits that in cases of shared policy making, the type of policy implementation affects the type of blame games when EU policies fail. Where policy implementation rests with either individual member states or specific EU actors, they tend to become the focus in the public exchange of blame attributions. Far from being unconstrained, public blame attributions must

still pass the public plausibility assessment. Political actors are constrained in their blame avoidance and blame generation strategies as citizens learn about true responsibilities—at least of the respective implementing actors involved in the policy process. Hence, when either individual member states or supranational EU bodies are clearly charged with the implementation of politicized EU policies, renegade or scapegoat games are likely to occur. Only in instances where both policy making and policy implementation are shared between supranational and national actors, public blame attributions are unconstrained, typically triggering a diffusion game.

Our three-case comparison thus corroborates our expectation that, even when the clarity of responsibility is limited in EU policy making, European blame games for EU policy failures do not necessarily result in diffusion games (see Table 5.2). While we indeed observed a diffusion game in the Border Control I case where both policy making and policy implementation was shared between member states and EU actors, blame games gravitated towards those actors in charge of policy implementation in the Border Control II and the Asylum System case. In the Border Control II case, where Frontex emerged as a focal implementing actor, we detect a scapegoat

Table 5.2 Summary of the case-comparison

	Border Control I case (shared implementation) ↓ Diffusion game	Border Control II case (supranational implementation) ↓ Scapegoat game	Asylum System case (national implementation) ↓ Renegade game
Target: Who is to blame?	'The EU' and the member states as a collective	Specific EU institutions (most prominently Frontex)	Specific member states (most prominently first-arrival states)
Character: How is the culprit characterized?	Divisions among its member states condemn the EU to passivity	Frontex as secretive, non-transparent, and despotic organization	Member states as norm violators; disrespect for rules
Plot: Why did the target commit the failure?	Member states' divisions are the result of domestic politics that constrain governments' room for manoeuvre	Internal flaws lead to catastrophic policies and scandals	Overburdening of first-arrival states as a reason for the failure
Moral: How can the failure be corrected?	No prospect for change, as member states' antagonisms cannot be overcome	Calls for Frontex to be placed under stricter control	Calls for return to compliance (and show more solidarity)

game and in the Asylum System case, where member states implemented the Dublin rules, we identify a renegade game.

The empirical chapters have demonstrated that clarity of responsibility is far from absent in the EU. European blame games are not always diffuse but often gravitate towards (at least some of) the actors that were truly responsible for EU policy failures. The concluding chapter summarizes our results and discusses how our findings advance the debate on European blame games and the EU's political accountability more generally.

Endnotes

1. The United Kingdom and Ireland, despite their Schengen opt-outs, have been granted observatory status in Frontex's management board and were also involved in its operations (Monar 2014, 621).
2. From 2004 to 2015, the official name of Frontex was 'European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union'. The acronym 'Frontex', which refers to the French expression 'Frontières extérieures', has become a fixture in public and academic discourse and was therefore retained even after the renaming.
3. While Regulation 2007/2004/EC establishing Frontex as well as its amendment by Regulation 863/2007/EC was decided under the co-decision procedure, its amendment through Regulation 1168/2011/EU, the changes to its mandate introduced by Regulations 1052/2013/ EU and 656/2014/EU followed the Ordinary Legislative Procedure.
4. While Directive 2005/85/EC was decided under the co-decision procedure, 'Dublin III' (Regulation 604/2013/EU) as well as Directives 2011/95/EU, 2013/32/EU and 2013/33/EU followed the Ordinary Legislative Procedure.
5. Besides 'Dublin II' (Regulation 343/2003/EC), this was the case for the legislative procedures leading to the adoption of Directives 2003/9/EC and 2004/83/EC.
6. The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) was created in 2010 and has the following tasks: 'the facilitation of information exchange, the identification and transfer of best practices and the provision of support to Member states whose asylum and reception system are facing disproportionate pressures' (Monar 2014, 619; cf. Lavenex 2015, 381). Lacking operational capacities, the EASO only played a minor role in the period under investigation.
7. We drew on the digital newspaper archive *LexisNexis*. Only for the coverage of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* we drew on the newspaper's own online archive. Moreover, since we could not access the archive of *Le Monde* for the Border Control II case, we analysed the coverage of *La Liberation*, which is also a liberal-progressive French quality newspaper.
8. We again drew on the digital newspaper archive *LexisNexis* with the exception of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, which we sourced from the newspaper's own online archive.
9. Katy Fallon, 2020. 'EU Border Force "Complicit" in Illegal Campaign to Stop Refugees Landing', *The Guardian*, 24 October. See also, Björn Finke, 2022. 'Verstörende

Enthüllungen: Der Chef der Grenzschutzagentur Frontex tritt zurück', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 30 April; Anna Gabriel, 2022. 'System Frontex kollabiert', *Die Presse*, 30 April.

10. Katy Fallon, 2020. 'EU Border Force "Complicit" in Illegal Campaign to Stop Refugees Landing', *The Guardian*, 24 October. See also, Björn Finke, 2022. 'Verstörende Enthüllungen: Der Chef der Grenzschutzagentur Frontex tritt zurück', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 30 April; Anna Gabriel, 2022. 'System Frontex kollabiert', *Die Presse*, 30 April.

11. Thomas Kirchner, 2021. '"Zu groß, zu mächtig, zu unkontrolliert"', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 18 May. Translation by the authors.

12. Anna Gabriel, 2022. 'System Frontex kollabiert', *Die Presse*, 30 April. Translation by the authors.

13. Anna Gabriel, 2022. 'System Frontex kollabiert', *Die Presse*, 30 April. Translation by the authors. See also, Anna Gabriel, 2022. 'Weitere Vorwürfe gegen Frontex', *Die Presse*, 24 February.

14. Anna Gabriel, 2022. 'System Frontex kollabiert', *Die Presse*, 30 April. Translation by the authors.

15. Thomas Gutschker, 2021. 'Migrantenboote können abgefangen werden, wenn sie nicht in Not sind', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 17 February. Translation by the authors.

16. Katy Fallon, 2020. 'EU Border Force "Complicit" in Illegal Campaign to Stop Refugees Landing', *The Guardian*, 24 October.

17. Thomas Holl, 2022. 'Überfälliger Abgang', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 30 April. Translation by the authors.

18. Anna Gabriel, 2022. 'Weitere Vorwürfe gegen Frontex', *Die Presse*, 24 February. Citing former Frontex employees indirectly. Translation by the authors.

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21. Anna Gabriel, 2022. 'Weitere Vorwürfe gegen Frontex', *Die Presse*, 24 February. Citing former Frontex employees indirectly. Translation by the authors.

22. Thomas Kirchner, 2021. '"Zu groß, zu mächtig, zu unkontrolliert"', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 18 May. Translation by the authors.

23. Karoline Meta Beisel and Cathrin Kahlweit, 2022. 'Illegale Pushbacks: Ungarn soll Tausende Flüchtlinge ohne rechtmäßiges Verfahren abgeschoben haben', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 12 January. Translation by the authors.

24. Phil McDuff, 2019. 'Using Drones to Watch Refugees Drown Exposes the Inhumanity of Border Enforcement', *The Guardian*, 6 August.

25. Björn Finke, 2022. 'Verstörende Enthüllungen: Der Chef der Grenzschutzagentur Frontex tritt zurück', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 30 April. Citing the chairwoman of the EP's Frontex Scrutiny Working Group (FSWG), Lena Düpont (CDU). Translation by the authors. See also, Thomas Kirchner, 2021. '"Zu groß, zu mächtig, zu unkontrolliert"', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 18 May.

26. Thomas Holl, 2022. 'Überfälliger Abgang', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 30 April. Translation by the authors.

27. Katy Fallon, 2020. 'EU Border Force "Complicit" in Illegal Campaign to Stop Refugees Landing', *The Guardian*, 24 October. See also, Karoline Meta Beisel and Cathrin Kahlweit, 2022. 'Illegale Pushbacks: Ungarn soll Tausende Flüchtlinge ohne rechtmäßiges Verfahren abgeschoben haben', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 12 January; Kim Son Hoang, 2022. 'Frontex vertuschte Pushback nach Libyen. Laut Prüfbericht wurde eine interne Überprüfung eines Zwischenfalls auf hoher See verhindert', *Der Standard*, 14 October.

28. Katy Fallon, 2020. 'EU Border Force "Complicit" in Illegal Campaign to Stop Refugees Landing', *The Guardian*, 24 October.

29. Katy Fallon, 2020. 'EU Border Force "Complicit" in Illegal Campaign to Stop Refugees Landing', *The Guardian*, 24 October.

30. Thomas Kirchner, 2021. '"Zu groß, zu mächtig, zu unkontrolliert"', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 18 May. Translation by the authors.

31. Björn Finke, 2022. 'Verstörende Enthüllungen: Der Chef der Grenzschutzagentur Frontex tritt zurück', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 30 April. Translation by the authors.

32. Anna Gabriel, 2022. 'System Frontex kollabiert', *Die Presse*, 30 April. Translation by the authors.

33. Anna Gabriel, 2022. 'System Frontex kollabiert', *Die Presse*, 30 April. Translation by the authors.

34. Thomas Gutschker, 2021. 'Migrantenboote können abgefangen werden, wenn sie nicht in Not sind', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 17 February. Translation by the authors.

35. Heribert Prantl, 2020. 'Zweierlei Leben: "Es geht um Leben und Tod"', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 20 June. Translation by the authors.

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39. Thomas Kirchner, 2021. '"Zu groß, zu mächtig, zu unkontrolliert"', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 18 May. Citing Karl Kopp, European Advisor at Pro Asyl. Translation by the authors.

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46. Thomas Kirchner, 2021. '"Zu groß, zu mächtig, zu unkontrolliert"', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 18 May. Citing Karl Kopp, European Advisor at Pro Asyl. Translation by the authors.

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54. Harriet Grant and John Domokos, 2011. 'Refugee Crisis: Plight of the Migrants Who Are Caught in Rome by a Rule Signed in Dublin: Refugees Are Returned to the First EU Nation They Entered, Only to Sleep on the Streets', *The Guardian*, 8 October.

55. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 2011. 'Grenzen für Menschenrechte', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 11 April. Translation by the authors.

56. Jasper Von Altenbockum, 2014. 'Asyl in der EU: Wohin mit den Flüchtlingen?' *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 22 September.

57. Alexandra Geneste, 2010. 'Le rapporteur spécial de l'ONU contre la torture alerte sur le sort des immigrés sans papiers détenus en Grèce', *Le Monde*, 29 October; Harriet Grant and John Domokos, 2011. 'Front: Britain Accused of Shirking Duty on European Migration', *The Guardian*, 8 October; Thomas Kirchner, 2010. 'Griechenland ruft Europa gegen Flüchtlinge zu Hilfe', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 26 October; Kai Strittmatter, 2011. 'Griechenland droht Türkei mit Grenzzaun', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 3 January.

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6

The promise of European blame games

6.1 Introduction

European blame games have become a regular feature of EU politics. The EU's increasing policy-making authority, growing expectations directed towards the EU, and the concomitant politicization of its policies have increased the stakes of EU policy making—a precondition for European blame games to unfold. In this book we studied the different kinds of European blame games that resonate in the wider public. We understand blame games as exchanges of public blame attributions by political and social actors that assign responsibility for a policy failure to a distinct blame target and justify their blame attributions by employing a distinct blame narrative. Which blame games stick in the European public? What are the conditions under which a certain blame game finds traction in the European public? In answering these questions, our book advances our understanding of European blame games in three ways.

First, we qualify the claim in the literature that European blame games are predominantly diffusion games, where blame attributions are generally untargeted and hence do not gravitate towards specific actors, such as particular domestic governments or supranational institutions. For most of the literature blame attributions in the EU are scattered across different targets (Moravcsik 1994; Gerhards et al. 2009; Sommer et al. 2016) or target diffuse actor categories, such as 'Europe' or 'the EU' (Hobolt and Tilley 2014; Rauh et al. 2020; Hunter et al. 2021). We demonstrate, by contrast, that diffusion games are not the only game in town. Besides diffusion games, we identify two additional blame games that gain traction in the European public: scapegoat games, where EU institutions, such as the Commission, become the main target of public blame attributions; and renegade games, where individual EU member states are the predominant target of public blame attributions. We introduce and conceptualize these three types of European blame games by highlighting their respective blame targets and associated blame narratives, and by showing their prevalence in EU politics across different policy areas.

Second, we take issue with the theoretical argument in the literature that diffusion games should be prevalent in EU politics because the complexity of EU policy making obscures clarity of responsibility (Hood 2011; Hobolt and Tilley 2014; Wilson and Hobolt 2015; León 2018): According to this logic, when a failed policy triggers a blame game, citizens will find it hard to assess true responsibilities because of the complexity of the policy-making process, while political actors exploit this situation by misrepresenting their responsibilities and by attributing blame in the most politically opportune fashion. We counter this 'anything goes' perspective characteristic of blame attribution patterns in diffusion games and hold that clarity of responsibility in the EU is a variable, not a constant. European blame games give rise to a plausibility assessment of public responsibility attributions that enables citizens to learn about true responsibilities while, at the same time, it constrains the kind of public blame attributions political actors may reasonably entertain. Through this plausibility assessment in the European public, discrepancies between political actors' blame attributions and their true responsibilities are likely to be exposed to the public. Since hypocrisy carries reputational costs, political actors cannot simply attribute blame as they please. Therefore, European blame games tend to gravitate towards true responsibilities: when supranational EU bodies are responsible for an EU policy failure, we are likely to observe scapegoat games and when individual member states are responsible, we will most likely find renegade games. Only under very specific conditions, that is, where clarity of responsibility is lacking because member-state governments and supranational EU institutions share policy-making and implementation prerogatives, we expect diffusion games to prevail.

Third, we challenge the widespread—implicit, if not explicit—notion in the literature that blame games are detrimental to political accountability (Schmidt 2006; Papadopoulos 2010; Hobolt and Tilley 2014). Blame games tend to be negatively connoted in general and, given its alleged lack of clarity of responsibility, in the EU in particular. According to the predominant view in the literature, political actors who carry actual responsibility for failed EU policies may almost always be able to shift the blame onto others. This renders effective political accountability difficult because putative account givers can obfuscate their own responsibility vis-à-vis account holders. Our analysis suggests, in contrast, that European blame games can positively contribute to political accountability in the EU. Since European blame games trigger an assessment of the plausibility of public blame attributions, citizens learn about actual responsibilities for policy failures, which in turn facilitates processes of political accountability. To the extent that blames games in EU politics gravitate towards renegade and scapegoat games, this

is good news for political accountability in the EU, while diffusion games are generally detrimental to the political accountability of policy making in the EU.

In the remainder of this concluding chapter, we outline the three contributions of our book in more detail. First, we summarize the findings from our analysis of the different European blame games in the ten cases of EU policy failures. Second, we discuss how these findings support our theoretical claim that blame games tend to gravitate towards those political actors with true responsibilities. Third, we discuss the implications of our findings for the EU's political accountability and derive three design principles geared towards promoting clarity of responsibility and thus political accountability in the EU.

6.2 European blame games: three instead of one

The ten cases of EU policy failures that we studied in this book clearly reveal that European blame games do not always come as diffusion games, as the literature would suggest (Gerhards et al. 2009; Hobolt and Tilley 2014; Rauh et al. 2020; Hunter et al. 2021). As we showed in the preceding chapters, we do identify diffusion games in three out of the ten cases studied in this book: in the case of the EU's failure to employ effective sanctions in reaction to Russia's annexation of Crimea, in the case of the EU's failure to enact a functioning carbon emission trading system to implement the Kyoto protocol, and in the case of the EU's failed border control policy, the bulk of public blame attributions remained rather untargeted. In each of these cases the overwhelming majority of public blame attributions did not target specific actors, such as the Commission or member-state governments, but rather generic actors, such as 'Europe' or the 'EU' as a whole (see Figure 6.1, column a).

Of the ten cases, seven instances of EU policy failures do not lend themselves to diffusion games, but trigger blame games that target specific actors. In these cases, the patterns of public blame attributions and the narratives that come with them clearly differ from those of diffusion games. In four of these seven cases we identified renegade games where the majority of public blame attributions target individual member states and their respective governments (see Figure 6.1, column b). The EU's failure to intervene in the civil war in Libya, the failure of the EU's asylum system, the EU's failure to implement the Paris Agreement on climate change, and the failure of the EU's financial assistance programmes during the euro crisis triggered renegade
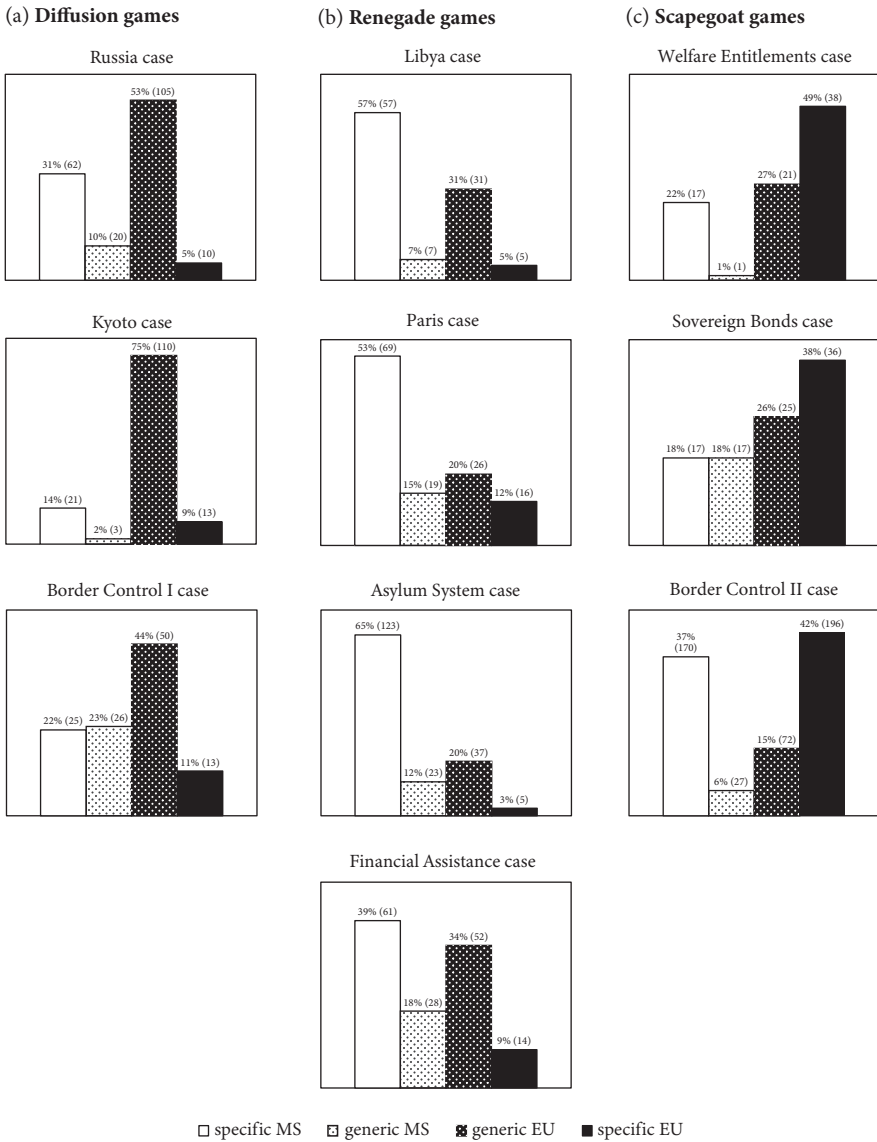
(a) **Diffusion games**   (b) **Renegade games**   (c) **Scapegoat games**

Figure 6.1 Overview of blame games

games where individual member states—especially powerful member states such as Germany—became the main blame target. Moreover, three of the seven cases with specific blame targets amount to scapegoat games where the majority of public blame attributions are not generically targeting the EU as a whole, but are much more specific, targeting supranational EU actors (see Figure 6.1, column c). The ECB becomes the main target of public blame

attributions in the Sovereign Bonds case, as does the Commission in the so-called Welfare Entitlements case and Frontex in the Border Control II case.

Moreover, not only do we see the distinct blame attribution patterns characteristic of renegade, scapegoat, and diffusion games, but we also observe that different blame games come with distinct blame narratives. In the three instances of the diffusion game—the Russia case, the Kyoto case, as well as the Border Control I case—we found that 'the EU', the main blame target, is characterized as a faceless system with an impersonal character and without clear character traits. The plot in this narrative is that the respective policy failures result from a systemic problem rather than the character traits of particular actors. The moral of this blame narrative is quite fatalistic: nothing (short of changing 'the system') can be done to avoid the system producing similar policy failures in the future. Notably, we find the same narrative elements of a diffusion game in policy areas as different as foreign policy, environmental policy, and migration policy.

In the seven cases which display the blame attribution patterns of either a scapegoat or a renegade game, we see public blame narratives that differ decidedly from the diffusion game narrative. In the three instances of scapegoat games—the Sovereign Bonds case, the Border Control II case, and the Welfare Entitlements case—we found narratives that clearly characterize the main blame targets—the ECB, Frontex, and the Commission—as 'dubious' and negatively connoted characters compared to the often-positive characterization of 'democratically accountable' and responsive EU member-state governments. According to the central plot in these scapegoat games, policy failures are bound to happen because these non-democratic actors are oblivious to citizens' concerns. The moral thus is that these supranational actors must be reined in or sanctioned to avoid similar policy failures in the future. We thus find the same narrative of a scapegoat game in policy areas as different as financial policy and migration policy as well as for EU actors as different as the ECB, Frontex, and the Commission.

Finally, the four instances of renegade games—the Libya case, the Financial Assistance case, the Paris case, and the Asylum System case—also follow a distinct narrative. Here the member states are the main blame targets and tend to be characterized as deviant, rather than dubious characters. In these renegade games, the main plot is that the behaviour that leads to a policy failure is an aberration of an otherwise respected member of the in-group, who must only come to their senses to avoid similar failures in the future. This narrative of a renegade game is the same across policy areas as different as foreign policy, financial policy, environmental policy, and migration policy.

The narrative is also the same regardless of the specific member states considered renegades in the respective cases, be it Germany in the Libya case or the Financial Assistance case; Poland in the Paris case; or Greece and Italy in the Asylum System case.

Overall, our analysis demonstrates that diffusion games are clearly not the only game in town when EU policy failures trigger European blame games. Contrary to what the literature leads us to believe, there are three distinct European blame games—not just one.

6.3 Clarity of responsibility: a variable, not a constant

In this book we challenge the widely held view in the literature that the EU's institutional environment allows political actors to attribute blame opportunistically to obscure their own responsibility (Hood 2011; Hobolt and Tilley 2014; Wilson and Hobolt 2015; León 2018). The ten cases of EU policy failures reveal that, despite the complexity of the EU's policy process and its associated lack of clarity of responsibility, European blame games do, in fact, often gravitate towards true responsibilities. Our findings lend support to our argument that the clarity of responsibility is a variable, insofar as political actors' public blame attributions are vetted for their plausibility in the European public and tend to gravitate towards true responsibilities. This implies that political actors cannot simply manipulate citizens' views about who is to blame for a policy failure according to what policy makers consider politically opportune; in the public sphere, political actors' own blame attributions become subject to a public plausibility assessment, which enables citizens to learn about true responsibilities for EU policy failures (*learning mechanism*), which, in turn, constrains political actors in their ability to misrepresent their own responsibility (*constraining mechanism*). To the extent that this public plausibility assessment clarifies true responsibilities, European blame games will gravitate towards the actors that have been *de jure* involved in the policy making and that have *de facto* supported the policy that subsequently failed.

Our theory does not claim that this public plausibility assessment always produces sufficient clarity of responsibility for blame games to (always) gravitate towards true responsibilities. When responsibility is difficult to assess, because policy making and/or policy implementation is shared between member states and supranational actors, diffusion games are likely to prevail. When responsibility is comparatively easy to assess, blame games will target the actors that were indeed responsible for the respective policy failure,

giving rise to renegade or scapegoat games. According to our theory, (the combination of) three conditions determine(s) how difficult responsibilities for EU policy failures are to assess and thus shape the blame games that are prevalent in cases of EU policy failures. The European blame games we studied in this book lend broad support to the respective hypotheses.

(1) Policy failure condition: The comparison of two pair-wise similar cases—the Kyoto and Paris cases on the one hand and the Russia and the Libya cases on the other hand—lends support to our hypothesis that the type of policy failure affects clarity of responsibility and thus the blame games that become prevalent (Chapter 3). The EU's failure to act in the Libya case triggered a renegade game where the brunt of the blame attributions is directed towards those member states who hindered the EU to arrive at a meaningful policy to stop the atrocities of the Gaddafi regime. The EU's failure to perform in the Russia case gave rise to a diffusion game where the blame for the insufficient sanctions policy against the Russian annexation of Crimea is chiefly attributed to 'the EU' as a whole. Moreover, the performance failure of the EU's ETS in the Kyoto case triggered a diffusion game where blame was mostly attributed to 'the EU' at large, whereas the failure to comply in the Paris case translated into a renegade game, which targeted those member states which failed to reach the carbon emission targets set by the EU to implement the Paris Agreement.

(2) Policy-making condition: Our comparison of two similar case-pairs— the Border Control I case and the Asylum System case on the one hand and the Financial Assistance case and the Sovereign bonds case on the other hand—lends support to the policy-making hypothesis (Chapter 4). In cases of performance failures, the type of policy making affects clarity of responsibility and thus the blame games that become prevalent in the European public realm. In the Sovereign Bonds case, supranational policy making triggered a scapegoat game, whereby blame attributions mostly targeted the ECB for violating the so-called no-bailout clause. In the Financial Assistance case, intergovernmental policy making led to a renegade game that targeted the member states which had championed the publicly contested lending policies of the EFSF/EFSM during the sovereign debt crisis. In the Welfare Entitlements case, it was again supranational policy making, which triggered a scapegoat game: public blame attributions targeted the Commission for allegedly enabling so-called 'welfare tourism'. In the Border Control I case, shared policy making came with a diffusion game where 'the EU' as a whole was blamed for its ill-conceived measures to control refugee flows.

(3) Policy implementation condition: Finally, the comparison of three additional similar cases lends plausibility to our policy implementation

hypothesis (Chapter 5). The hypothesis claims that, under conditions of shared policy making, the procedures for policy implementation will shape the blame games that become prevalent when EU policies fail. In fact, the comparison of the Border Control I, Border Control II, and the Asylum System cases corroborates the expectation that supranational implementation triggers scapegoat games and domestic implementation leads to renegade games. Only where implementation is shared between supranational and domestic actors do we expect to observe diffusion games. Indeed, we find a diffusion game in the Border Control I case where Frontex and domestic authorities jointly engage in border control; we find a scapegoat game after Frontex gained more supranational, operational competencies in the Border Control II case; we find a renegade game in the Asylum System case where the 'first arrival' states were blamed for not registering incoming refugees and where other states were blamed for refusing to share the burden of refugee flows with the 'first arrival' states.

Moreover, we were not only able to corroborate our theory using controlled comparisons of similar cases to probe the relevance of each of the three conditions individually; the ten cases taken together also lend support to our theoretical model which holds that the three conditions *individually* shape the blame games that become prevalent in cases of EU policy failures and that distinct *combinations* of conditions lead to a particular blame game. Figure 6.2 indicates that the blame games we studied conform to the theoretical model and can thus be explained by the respective combination of conditions that our theory specifies. The expectations hold at the case level and, in most instances, they also hold at the country-level, that is, for each of the countries for which we analysed blame attributions in the press (see Appendix A.2.3).

To evaluate the plausibility of our theoretical expectations about the blame games that stick in the European public, we adopted a static approach throughout this book by assessing the blame attributions for each case of EU policy failure in the aggregate. Yet, as we explained in Chapter 2, our theory is also inherently *dynamic*. It posits that blame games gravitate towards true responsibilities, because the public learns about true responsibilities, which in turn constrains political actors' blame attributions. In European blame games, political actors' public blame attributions are critically evaluated by myriad actors, including civil society actors, business associations, experts, and journalists. This public plausibility assessments help citizens learn where the true responsibilities lie for a given EU policy failure. At the same time, it also delimits political actors' blame attributions to plausible targets unless they want to risk their reputation for being trustworthy among citizens. This
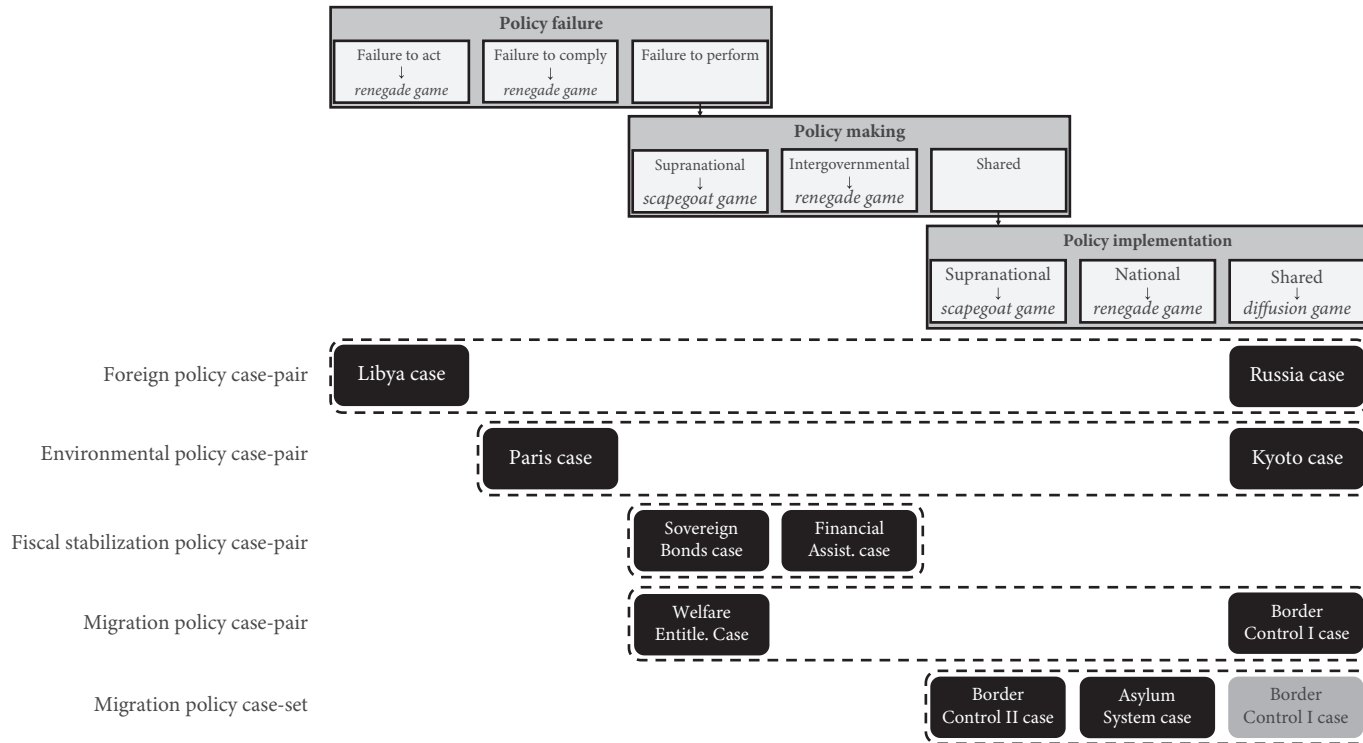
Policy failure

Failure to act ↓ *renegade game*	Failure to comply ↓ *renegade game*	Failure to perform

Policy making

Supranational ↓ *scapegoat game*	Intergovernmental ↓ *renegade game*	Shared

Policy implementation

Supranational ↓ *scapegoat game*	National ↓ *renegade game*	Shared ↓ *diffusion game*

Foreign policy case-pair — Libya case · Russia case

Environmental policy case-pair — Paris case · Kyoto case

Fiscal stabilization policy case-pair — Sovereign Bonds case · Financial Assist. case

Migration policy case-pair — Welfare Entitle. Case · Border Control I case

Migration policy case-set — Border Control II case · Asylum System case · Border Control I case

Figure 6.2 Assessing the theoretical model empirically

constraining mechanism can work via two processes. Political actors can either *anticipate* that the public will learn where the true responsibilities lie and they adjust their blame strategies accordingly from the onset of a blame game; or political actors *update* their information about citizens' knowledge about true responsibilities as blame games unfold over time and the public is learning about true responsibilities.

While both the updating and anticipation processes are theoretically possible, we have yet to explore empirically if either (or both) of these processes adequately capture the constraining mechanism. Fortunately, our data allows us to examine these processes empirically. If political actors *update* their beliefs over time, blame attributions should converge on a particular blame game as the blame game unfolds over time. By contrast, if political actors *anticipate* that citizens will eventually learn where the true responsibilities lie, blame attribution patterns should display no meaningful temporal variation. To explore these implications of our theoretical model, we ran a subsidiary analysis over time. More specifically, we divided the observations for each case into quartiles and calculated the share of blame attributions to the targets that our theory would expect to become prevalent in the respective blame games. Figure 6.3 depicts the results over time (the detailed results are reported in Appendix A.2.3).

The results are in line with our assumption that political actors *anticipate* that the public learns where the true responsibilities lie. In all ten cases, the blame game that is predominant in the first case quartile is also the theoretically postulated blame game. In all three instances of *diffusion games*, the share of generic blame attributions targeting 'the member states' or 'the EU' is well above 50 per cent in the first quartile. In all four cases of *renegade games*, more than half of the statements are generic or specify blame attributions to member states. And in the three *scapegoat games*, the share of blame attributions to the EU and its institutions exceeds 50 per cent (albeit only marginally in the Border Control II case). These results thus lend support to the argument that political actors anticipate that citizens learn about true responsibilities and assign blame in line with these true responsibilities to avoid losing credibility.

The results also lend support to our argument that political actors *update* their blame strategies as citizens learn where true responsibility lies as blame games unfold. We can substantiate this claim empirically, because—by and large—blame attributions become more accurate over time. In all three *scapegoat games*, we find a notable increase in the share of blame attributions aimed at the EU and its institutions from the first case quartile to the second case quartile. For instance, in the Sovereign Bonds case, the share of

statements assigning blame to EU targets increases from 63 per cent in the first quartile to 79 per cent in the second quartile (+17 percentage points). The increase over time is even more pronounced when focusing on attributions to specific EU actors. In the Sovereign Bonds case, for example, we observe a more-than-threefold increase in the share of blame attributions
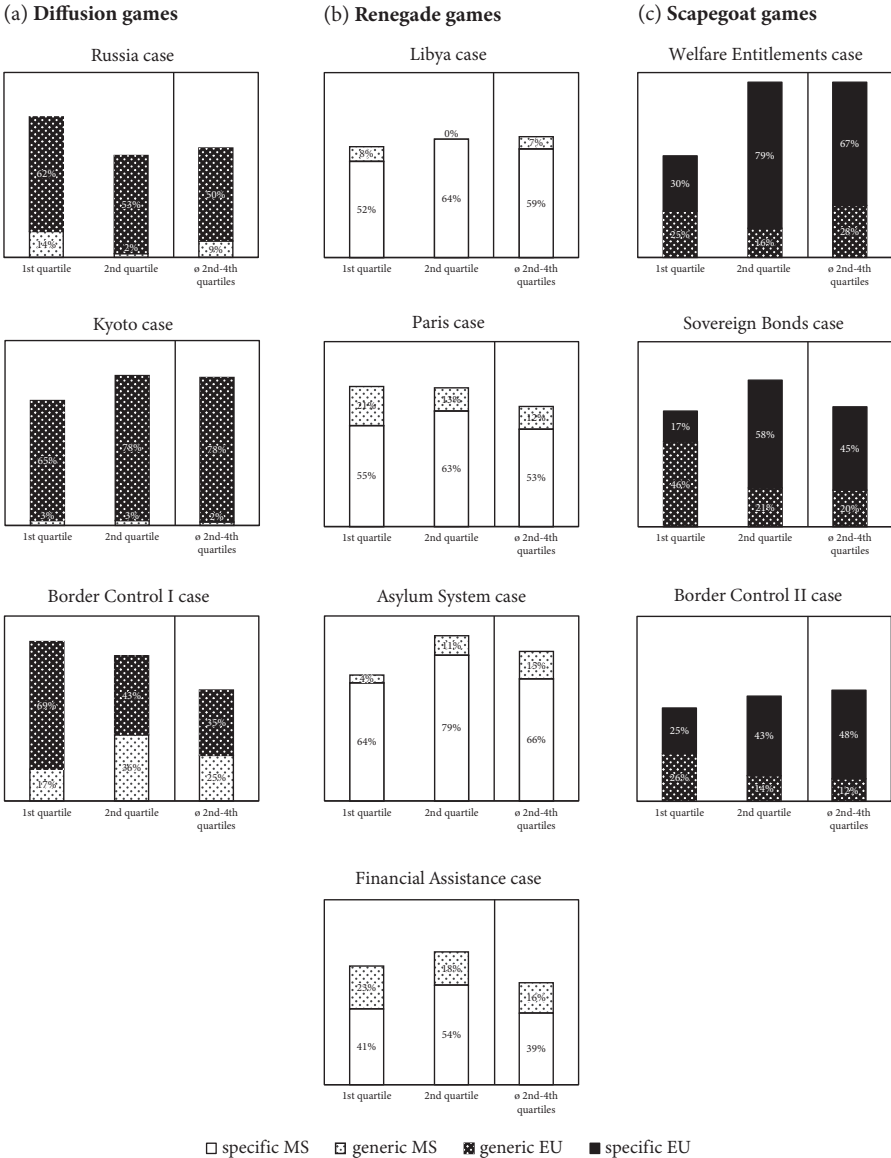

Figure 6.3 Exploring blame attributions over time (share of dominant blame attributions)

targeting specific EU institutions, first and foremost the ECB, from 17 per cent in the first quartile to 58 per cent in the second quartile (+42 percentage points).

We find the same pattern in all three cases when comparing the first case quartile with the subsequent quartiles. Again, the share of blame attributions aimed at the EU and its institutions jointly as well as to specific EU actors specifically increases over time. For instance, in the Welfare Entitlements case, blame to EU targets increases from 55 per cent in the first quartile to 84 per cent in the subsequent quartiles (+29 percentage points). We again find an increase over time when focusing on blame attributions to specific EU actors. In the Welfare Entitlements case, the share of specific EU targets more than doubles from 30 per cent in the first quartile to 67 per cent in the subsequent quartiles (+37 percentage points).

We observe a similar pattern for *renegade games*, where the share of blame attributions to member states increases from the first quartile to the second quartile in three out of four cases. For instance, the share of statements assigning blame to member state targets increases from 68 per cent in the first quartile to 89 per cent in the second quartile of the Asylum System case (+21 percentage points). Only in the Paris case do we find a slight decline of blame attributions to member states from 76 per cent to 75 per cent (−1 percentage point). Perhaps even more importantly, the share of statements attributing blame to specific member states increases in all four cases. For example, we find an increase of 13 percentage points from 41 per cent of blame statements targeting specific member states in the first quartile of the Financial Assistance case to 54 per cent in the second quartile.

The results are somewhat less clear-cut when we compare the first quartile with all subsequent quartiles. In two of our four renegade game cases, we observe an increase of blame attributions to member states (i.e. the Libya case and the Asylum System case). In the other two cases, blame attributions targeting member states become somewhat less prominent over time (i.e. the Paris case and the Financial Assistance case). One interpretation of these findings is that at the onset of a blame game, citizens experience a steep learning curve about true responsibilities and hence plausible blame targets. This learning curve should flatten over time. Moreover, as time passes, the likelihood that exogenous events give rise to alternative blame attributions also increases. For instance, over the course of the four years analysed in the Paris case, different events occurred that might have impacted the dynamic of the blame game, such as Conferences of the Parties (COP) or reports issued by the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Finally, in the three *diffusion games* the share of generic targets increases from the first to the second quartile in one out of three cases. Only in the Kyoto case do we observe an increase of blame attributions to generic targets from 68 per cent in the first quartile to 81 per cent in the second quartile (+14 percentage points). In the Russia cases and the Border Control I case, blame to generic targets even decreases over time. The pattern is similar when comparing the share of generic targets in the first with the other three quartiles. While this finding appears to contradict our expectation of an updating process over time, the absence of clear temporal trends makes sense in the case of diffusion games. Since assigning true responsibilities is complex in these cases, the public plausibility assessment did not constrain blame attributions and political actors were free to attribute blame opportunistically. For diffusion games, it is thus plausible that we see no systematic trend over time.

Taken together, our cross-case and within-case findings as well as our results on the level of individual countries and over time provide strong support for our key claim: political actors' blame attributions are vetted for their plausibility in the European public and blame games therefore tend to gravitate towards true responsibilities.

6.4 Political accountability: European blame games as a virtue, not a vice

Contrary to the widely held assumption that blame for policy failures tends to diffuse in the EU and hence hampers accountability (Schmidt 2006; Papadopoulos 2010; Hobolt and Tilley 2014), our findings imply that—under certain conditions—blame games can actually contribute to effectively hold political actors in the EU accountable for policy failures. Once EU policy failures are politicized and the public plausibility assessment of EU policy failures sets in, political actors that are *de jure* and *de facto* responsible cannot simply misrepresent their responsibility to avoid accountability. The public plausibility assessment helps citizens to learn about true responsibilities and it constrains political actors in their attempts to dodge their own responsibility. As a result, blame games gravitate towards true responsibilities and thus facilitate political accountability. Blame games thus constitute—despite their negative connotation—an important mechanism for political accountability (see also, Hinterleitner 2020, 203–204). Blame games that unfold in the European public sphere thereby promise to improve the accountability of the numerous, often unelected actors involved in EU policy making and implementation (Maggetti 2012; Greuter 2014).[1]

It must be stressed that not all three types of blame games provide equally sound political accountability mechanisms. While renegade games and scapegoat games promote accountability, diffusion games typically undermine political accountability. Since renegade and scapegoat games 'benefit' from clarity of responsibility and blame attributions and thus gravitate towards true responsibilities, they are conducive to political accountability. Eschewing clarity of responsibility, diffusion games, by contrast, do not provide the same political accountability mechanism. They collectivize responsibility, since they target abstract actor categories such as 'Europe', 'Brussels', or 'the EU' as a whole rather than specific actors, such as the Commission, the ECB, or individual EU member states and their governments. Diffusion games thus allow responsible actors to obscure their own responsibilities by hiding behind these abstract actor categories that address an actor collective rather than a specific actor with individual responsibility which could then be held accountable for a policy failure.

From a political accountability perspective, it is thus imperative to design EU policy processes in ways that are not susceptible to diffusion games. This has implications for the ongoing debates on reforms of the EU, 'The Conference of the Future of Europe' being the latest in a string of debates over the future of the EU.

(1) Transparency: The EU is often criticized for its lack of transparency (Schmidt and Wood 2019). Contemporary practices in EU policy making eschew rather than improve transparency and are thus to the detriment of the public's plausibility assessment (Rittberger and Goetz 2018). For example, the practice of secluded legislative *trilogues* between the Commission, the EP, and the Council in the OLP has been criticized for lacking transparency (see, e.g. Reh 2014; Brandsma 2019; Rosén and Stie 2022). Therefore, the Conference on the Future of Europe demands 'to improve transparency' in EU policy making (European Union 2022, 65). The Conference also requires that the EU should be made 'more understandable and accessible' (European Union 2022, 80), should 'develop educational programmes on the functioning of the EU' (European Union 2022, 65), and advance 'free, pluralistic and independent media' (European Union 2022, 80).

Our analysis of European blame games also suggests that transparency is of the utmost importance for political accountability in the EU. Without transparency, it seems almost impossible that European blame games can gravitate towards true responsibilities. After all, for the public plausibility assessment of political actors' blame attributions to work properly, it must be easy for citizens to acquire information about true responsibilities. Our analysis of European blame games suggests that a lack of transparency may

not be the main obstacle to political accountability in the EU. At least in seven out of ten cases of EU policy failures that we studied, blame games gravitated towards true responsibilities. This suggests that transparency in the EU suffices to hold politically responsible actors accountable for their policy blunders. Hence, pushing for even more transparency might not be as central to political accountability as current debates make us believe. After all, the virtue of transparency has its limits as information overload can also hamper effective political accountability.

(2) Simplicity: The EU is also often criticized for not being sufficiently representative, even though the OLP has become the dominant mode of policy making in the EU (Schmidt and Wood 2019). The Conference on the Future of Europe, for instance, demands that the powers of the EP must be further enhanced (European Union 2022, 81–82). According to the conclusions drawn by the Conference on the Future of Europe, 'participation and prior involvement of citizens' (European Union 2022, 79) should be improved and 'national, regional, local representatives, social partners and organized civil society' (European Union 2022, 83) be more involved in EU policy making.

Admittedly, enhancing the participatory opportunities for different actors can certainly foster representation. Yet, our analysis suggests that expanding the participation to more actors may actually harm political accountability. The more actors are involved in policy making, the harder the public plausibility assessment of public blame attributions becomes. The more responsibility for policy making is shared among multiple actors—supranational, governmental, and beyond—the less likely it is that blame games will gravitate towards true responsibilities. Our analysis shows that even under policy-making procedures where supranational and governmental actors are jointly responsible for EU policies, such as the OLP, true responsibilities are difficult to assess and thus prevent the kind of blame games that target all responsible actors. For political accountability, the simplicity of policy making is more important than expanding the scope of actor participation. For blame games to gravitate towards true responsibilities, policy making should be either clearly supranational or clearly intergovernmental. We thus agree with the Conference on the Future of Europe that 'the EU decision-making process should be based on a clearer and more understandable structure' (European Union 2022, 83). Yet, whereas the Conference mentions this only in passing, we emphasize that for political accountability the simplicity of policy making is absolutely crucial. Thus, to ensure both political accountability and democratic representativeness, the right balance must be struck between enhancing participatory democracy and simplicity (see also, León 2011).

(3) Congruence: Not only policy making, but also policy implementation is often shared among supranational and governmental actors in the EU. A growing number of EU agencies and administrative networks is increasingly assisting the Commission and member-state governments in implementing EU policies (Levi-Faur 2011; Egeberg and Trondal 2017; Martinsen and Goetz 2022). The Conference for the Future of Europe even calls for the inclusion of civil society actors in EU policy implementation (European Union 2022, 83). According to our analysis, clarity of responsibility for EU policy failures is undermined when policy implementation is shared by multiple actors. In these cases, the public plausibility assessment of political actors' blame attributions is hampered and blame games are unlikely to gravitate towards true responsibilities. Especially when policy making is also complex, this will usually give rise to diffusion games which are detrimental to political accountability.

Our analysis rather suggests that to ensure political accountability, policy implementation should be simple and in the same hands as policy making. To begin with, when either supranational actors or member-state governments are clearly in charge of policy implementation, their responsibilities are easier to detect, allowing blame games to gravitate towards those actors truly responsible for EU policy failures, thus holding them politically accountable. In this view, already the 'agentification' (Levi-Faur 2011) of complex EU administrative networks—putting EU agencies in the spotlight of policy implementation—would help political accountability. Moreover, our analysis also suggests that for reasons of political accountability, the actors responsible for EU policy making and policy implementation should be congruent. When supranational actors are the main policy makers, they should also be the main implementers and when national governments are the key policy makers, they should also have the task of policy implementation. Involving EU agencies in both policy making and policy implementation (rather than in just one stage of the policy process) would thus already help improve political accountability in the EU. This correspondence of policy making and policy implementation renders it more likely that blame games will gravitate towards true responsibilities and thus ensures that responsible actors can be held accountable. Too many cooks already spoil the broth but when policy making and policy implementation remain incongruent, it remains unclear who spoiled it.

Overall, it follows from our analysis that transparency is important to ensure political accountability. To improve political accountability in the EU, we must push for more simplicity of policy making and policy implementation. And we must ensure that—as far as possible—policy making

and policy implementation rest in the same hands. While these recommendations follow from our analysis, they might be difficult to realize in practice, as the ill-fated trajectory of the recommendations elaborated by the Conference on the Future of Europe woefully demonstrates. While there might be many reasons—benign and malign—for shared policy making or shared policy implementation, blame avoidance is certainly one of them. After all, member states have an incentive to design the EU's policy making and policy implementation procedures in ways to avoid renegade games. Conversely, supranational actors have an incentive to design procedures so that they can avoid scapegoat games. Therefore, it is likely that they can easily agree on setting up complex procedures of shared policy making and shared policy implementation that then propel diffusion games and thus harm political accountability. The institutional design of the European Semester is a case in point: numerous actors share (and actively dodge) responsibility for policy making and policy implementation, and, as a result, political accountability is diluted (Dawson 2015; Rittberger 2023). As supranational and governmental actors' blame avoidance imperatives might lead them to favor institutional complexity, it is all the more important that European civil society pushes for institutional simplicity and congruence of policy making and policy implementation.

Critics might argue that our approach in this book rests on a dated conception of the public, because it presumes that relevant actors in the public are interested in finding out about true—*de facto* and *de jure*—political responsibilities when policies fail. The vetting of blame attributions in the public sphere—our key mechanism in this book—suggests that blame attributions are, indeed, scrutinized for their factual validity and are rejected in the public if they are deemed implausible because they stray too far from the factual. Is this assumption still tenable in an emerging post-truth world characterized by misinformation, heightened political polarization, and fractionalized media landscapes (Lewandowsky et al. 2017)? In a post-truth world, public plausibility assessments of public blame attributions are unlikely to gravitate towards true responsibilities, because both the learning and constraining mechanisms will no longer ensure that blame attributions converge towards true responsibilities. In a post-truth world, what counts as factual is determined by one's own political tribe, reinforced through echo chambers on social media and a partisan news landscape. In a post-truth world, then, blame attributions will target whomever one's tribe considers their real enemy, irrespective of true responsibilities.

The findings in our book suggest that we are not in this world (yet). When policies fail, the public vetting process has been rather reliable in identifying

blame targets with actual responsibilities while relegating those that proved implausible. In future research, it is worth exploring how (changes in) political polarization and (variation of) media landscapes affect the plausibility assessment of public blame attributions. For instance, a highly polarized society with a fractionalized media landscape would constitute a particularly hard case for our theory. Admittedly, our focus on the quality press makes inroads of post-truth politics less likely because the quality press has, by definition, a disposition to discover what we refer to as true responsibilities in European blame games. Analysing alternative media sources and wider media environments in societies characterized by different degrees of polarization is thus a fruitful research endeavour to probe the robustness of our argument.

Endnote

1. Research on the negativity bias in human perception suggests that negatively evaluated events are associated with retaining more information (Reeves, Newhagen, Maibach, Basil, and Kurz 1991; Lang, Newhagen, and Reeves 1996). Citizens can thus be assumed to learn more about responsibilities in EU policy making and implementation from European blame games than from more neutral coverage (see also, Goldberg, Brosius, and Vreese 2022, 397).

Appendix

The Appendix presents additional information on the data and methods used in this book. It starts by outlining the data collection process (Section A.1) and then turns to the identification of the prevalent blame games (Section A.2).

A.1 Data collection

To probe our theoretical claims, we analysed European blame games in ten cases of EU policy failures. As detailed in Chapter 1, the selected cases cover four different policy areas: foreign policy, environmental policy, fiscal policy, and migration policy. For each case, we analysed the coverage of two quality newspapers—one left-leaning and one right-leaning—in Austria, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Table A.1 provides an overview of the selected newspapers.

A.1.1 Identifying newspaper articles

To identify articles covering the EU policy failures of interest, we carried out keyword searches in digital newspaper archives.[1] Overall, we identified 2,421 articles through our keyword searches. All articles were reviewed manually to sort out duplicates as well as articles that did not address the respective policy or did not hint at any contestation of the policy. Table A.2 summarizes how we identified relevant newspaper articles.

A.1.2 Identifying blame statements

To assess the prevalent blame game in each case, we searched for public blame attributions reported in the collected articles. Blame statements identify a blame target, that is, an actor to whom responsibility for a specific policy failure is attributed. Overall, we coded 1,667 blame statements. For each blame statement we coded information on (1) the blame object, that

Table A.1 Newspaper selection

	Centre-left	Centre-right
Austria	*Der Standard*	*Die Presse*
Germany	*Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ)	*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ)
France	*Le Monde/La Libération*[a]	*Le Figaro*
United Kingdom	*The Guardian*	*The Times*

[a] For most cases, we analysed news coverage of the respective policy failures in *Le Monde*. Since we could not access the archive of *Le Monde* for the period of analysis pertaining to the Border Control II case, we analysed the coverage of a similarly liberal-progressive French quality newspaper, *La Libération*, instead.

Table A.2 Search strings for article collection

Source	Newspaper	Keywords	Period	Hits
Libya case				
Factiva	*The Guardian*	Libya AND (European Union OR EU) AND (Mistake OR Problem OR Critique OR Failure)	15.02.2011– 15.02.2012	53
Factiva	*The Times*	Libya AND (European Union OR EU) AND (Mistake OR Problem OR Critique OR Failure)	15.02.2011– 15.02.2012	30
Factiva	*Le Monde*	Libye ET (Union européenne OR UE) ET (erreur OR problème OR critique OR échec)	15.02.2011– 15.02.2012	75
Factiva	*Le Figaro*	Libye ET (Union européenne OR UE) ET (erreur OR problème OR critique OR échec)	15.02.2011– 15.02.2012	43
Factiva	*Süddeutsche Zeitung*	Libyen AND (Europäische Union OR EU) AND (Fehler OR Problem OR Kritik OR Scheitern)	15.02.2011– 15.02.2012	71
FAZ Archive	*Frankfurter Allgemeine*	Libyen AND (Europäische Union OR EU) AND (Fehler OR Problem OR Kritik OR Scheitern)	15.02.2011– 15.02.2012	79
Factiva	*Die Presse*	Libyen AND (Europäische Union OR EU) AND (Fehler OR Problem OR Kritik OR Scheitern)	15.02.2011– 15.02.2012	42
Factiva	*Der Standard*	Libyen AND (Europäische Union OR EU) AND (Fehler OR Problem OR Kritik OR Scheitern)	15.02.2011– 15.02.2012	32
Russia case				
Factiva	*The Guardian*	Russia AND Sanctions AND (European Union OR EU) AND (Mistake OR Problem OR Critique OR Failure)	17.03.2014– 17.03.2015	53
Factiva	*The Times*	Russia AND Sanctions AND (European Union OR EU) AND (Mistake OR Problem OR Critique OR Failure)	17.03.2014– 17.03.2015	36
Factiva	*Le Monde*	Russie ET sanctions ET (Union européen OR UE) ET (erreur OR problème OR critique OR échec)	17.03.2014– 17.03.2015	45
Factiva	*Le Figaro*	Russie AND sanctions AND (Union européen OR UE) AND (erreur OR problème OR critique OR échec)	17.03.2014– 17.03.2015	36
Factiva	*Süddeutsche Zeitung*	Russland AND Sanktionen AND (Europäische Union OR EU) AND (Fehler OR Problem OR Kritik OR Scheitern)	17.03.2014– 17.03.2015	100
FAZ Archive	*Frankfurter Allgemeine*	Russland AND Sanktionen AND (Europäische Union OR EU) AND (Fehler OR Problem OR Kritik OR Scheitern)	17.03.2014– 17.03.2015	101

Continued

Table A.2 *Continued*

Source	Newspaper	Keywords	Period	Hits
Factiva	*Die Presse*	Russland AND Sanktionen AND (Europäische Union OR EU) AND (Fehler OR Problem OR Kritik OR Scheitern)	17.03.2014– 17.03.2015	110
Factiva	*Der Standard*	Russland AND Sanktionen AND (Europäische Union OR EU) AND (Fehler OR Problem OR Kritik OR Scheitern)	17.03.2014– 17.03.2015	58
		Kyoto case		
Factiva	*The Guardian*	(EU OR European Union) AND (emission OR Kyoto Protocol OR emission trade) AND (fail OR oversupply)	01.01.2008– 01.06.2020	70
Factiva	*The Times*	(EU OR European Union) AND (emission OR Kyoto Protocol OR emission trade) AND (fail OR oversupply)	01.01.2008– 01.06.2020	65
Factiva	*Le Monde*	(UE OR Union Européenne)AND (droits à polluer OR permis de polluer OR protocole de Kyoto OR commerce des émissions OR marché des émissions OR quotas d'émission OR marché du carbone OR bourse du carbone OR ETS) AND (échec OR offre excédentaire OR surplus OR échou* OR faute OR problème)	01.01.2008_ 01.06.2020	58
Factiva	*Le Figaro*	(UE OR Union Européenne) AND (droits à polluer OR permis de polluer OR protocole de Kyoto OR commerce des émissions OR marché des émissions OR quotas d'émission OR marché du carbone OR bourse du carbone OR ETS) AND (échec OR offre excédentaire OR surplus OR échou* OR faute OR problème)	01.01.2008_ 01.06.2020	24
Factiva	*Süddeutsche Zeitung*	(EU OR Europäische Union) AND (Emissionen OR Kyoto Protokoll OR Emissionshandel) AND (Fehler OR Überangebot)	01.01.200_ 01.06.2020	64
FAZ Archive	*Frankfurter Allgemeine*	(EU OR Europäische Union) AND (Emissionen OR Kyoto Protokoll OR Emissionshandel) AND (Fehler OR Überangebot)	01.01.2008– 01.06.2020	84
Factiva	*Die Presse*	(EU OR Europäische Union) AND (Emissionen OR Kyoto Protokoll OR Emissionshandel) AND (Fehler OR Überangebot)	01.01.2008– 01.06.2020	16

Source	Newspaper	Keywords	Period	Hits
Factiva	*Der Standard*	(EU OR Europäische Union) AND (Emissionen OR Kyoto Protokoll OR Emissionshandel) AND (Fehler OR Überangebot)	01.01.2008–01.06.2020	19
		Paris case		
Factiva	*The Guardian*	(EU OR European Union) AND (Paris Agreement OR climate deal OR climate goals) AND (fail OR failure)	05.10.2016–01.06.2020	57
Factiva	*The Times*	(EU OR European Union) AND (Paris Agreement OR climate deal OR climate goals) AND (fail OR failure)	05.10.2016–01.06.2020	25
Factiva	*Le Monde*	(UE OR Union Européenne) AND (conférence de Paris OR COP OR accord de Paris OR accord* sur le climat OR régime climatique OR objectifs climatiques OR objectifs en matière de climat OR objectifs en matière climatique) AND (échec OR échou* OR faute OR problème OR faillite OR naufrage)	05.10.2016–01.06.2020	71
Factiva	*Le Figaro*	(UE OR Union Européenne) AND (conférence de Paris OR COP OR accord de Paris OR accord* sur le climat OR régime climatique OR objectifs climatiques OR objectifs en matière de climat OR objectifs en matière climatique) AND (échec OR échou* OR faute OR problème OR faillite OR naufrage)	05.10.2016–01.06.2020	20
Factiva	*Süddeutsche Zeitung*	(EU OR Europäische Union) AND (Paris Abkommen OR Klimaabkommen OR Klimaziele) AND (Fehler OR Scheitern)	05.10.2016–01.06.2020	18
FAZ Archive	*Frankfurter Allgemeine*	(EU OR Europäische Union) AND (Paris Abkommen OR Klimaabkommen OR Klimaziele) AND (Fehler OR Scheitern)	05.10.2016–01.06.2020	104
Factiva	*Die Presse*	(EU OR Europäische Union) AND (Paris Abkommen OR Klimaabkommen OR Klimaziele) AND (Fehler OR Scheitern)	05.10.2016–01.06.2020	14
Factiva	*Der Standard*	(EU OR Europäische Union) AND (Paris Abkommen OR Klimaabkommen OR Klimaziele) AND (Fehler OR Scheitern)	05.10.2016–01.06.2020	11
		Financial Assistance case		
Factiva	*The Guardian*	(bailout package OR bailout fund) AND (sovereign* OR public) AND debt* AND (fail* OR problem*)	01.05.2010–30.04.2011	18

Continued

Table A.2 *Continued*

Source	Newspaper	Keywords	Period	Hits
Factiva	*The Times*	(bailout package OR bailout fund) AND (sovereign∗ OR public) AND debt∗ AND (fail∗ OR problem∗)	01.05.2010–30.04.2011	22
Factiva	*Le Monde*	(fonds de sauvetage OR plan de sauvetage OR programme de sauvetage OR sauvetage financier) AND (dette∗ publique∗) AND (échec OR échou∗ OR problème OR crise)	01.05.2010–30.04.2011	13
Factiva	*Le Figaro*	(fonds de sauvetage OR plan de sauvetage OR programme de sauvetage OR sauvetage financier) AND (dette∗ publique∗) AND (échec OR échou∗ OR problème OR crise)	01.05.2010–30.04.2011	12
Factiva	*Süddeutsche Zeitung*	(Rettungsschirm OR Rettungsprogramm) AND Staatsschuld∗ AND (versag∗ OR Problem)	01.05.2010–30.04.2011	7
FAZ Archive	*Frankfurter Allgemeine*	(Rettungsschirm OR Rettungsprogramm) AND Staatsschuld∗ AND (versag∗ OR Problem)	01.05.2010–30.04.2011	9
Factiva	*Die Presse*	(Rettungsschirm OR Rettungsprogramm) AND Staatsschuld∗ AND (versag∗ OR Problem)	01.05.2010–30.04.2011	6
Factiva	*Der Standard*	(Rettungsschirm OR Rettungsprogramm) AND Staatsschuld∗ AND (versag∗ OR Problem)	01.05.2010–30.04.2011	2
Sovereign Bonds case				
Factiva	*The Guardian*	(bailout package OR bailout fund) AND (sovereign∗ OR public) AND debt∗ AND (fail∗ OR problem∗)	01.07.2012–30.06.2013	13
Factiva	*The Times*	(bailout package OR bailout fund) AND (sovereign∗ OR public) AND debt∗ AND (fail∗ OR problem∗)	01.07.2012–30.06.2013	6
Factiva	*Le Monde*	(fonds de sauvetage OR plan de sauvetage OR programme de sauvetage OR sauvetage financier) AND (dette∗ publique∗) AND (échec OR échou∗ OR problème OR crise)	01.07.2012–30.06.2013	6
Factiva	*Le Figaro*	(fonds de sauvetage OR plan de sauvetage OR programme de sauvetage OR sauvetage financier) AND (dette∗ publique∗) AND (échec OR échou∗ OR problème OR crise)	01.07.2012–30.06.2013	6

Source	Newspaper	Keywords	Period	Hits
Factiva	*Süddeutsche Zeitung*	(Rettungsschirm OR Rettungsprogramm) AND Staatsschuld∗ AND (versag∗ OR Problem)	01.07.2012–30.06.2013	10
FAZ Archive	*Frankfurter Allgemeine*	(Rettungsschirm OR Rettungsprogramm) AND Staatsschuld∗ AND (versag∗ OR Problem)	01.07.2012–30.06.2013	7
Factiva	*Die Presse*	(Rettungsschirm OR Rettungsprogramm) AND Staatsschuld∗ AND (versag∗ OR Problem)	01.07.2012–30.06.2013	9
Factiva	*Der Standard*	(Rettungsschirm OR Rettungsprogramm) AND Staatsschuld∗ AND (versag∗ OR Problem)	01.07.2012–30.06.2013	6
Welfare Entitlements case				
Factiva	*The Guardian*	Europe AND migration AND (welfare OR Services) AND abuse; last 5 years; no duplicates	20.02.2010–20.02.2015	14
Factiva	*The Times*	migration AND welfare AND freedom AND Europe; last 5 years; no duplicates	25.03.2010–25.03.2015	26
LexisNexis	*Le Monde*	migration AND aide sociale OR presentation sociale; last 5 years; no duplicates	17.02.2010–17.02.2015	16
LexisNexis	*Le Figaro*	migration AND aide sociale OR presentation sociale; last 5 years; no duplicates	17.02.2010–17.02.2015	8
SZ LibraryNet	*Süddeutsche Zeitung*	Sozialmissbrauch; supra-regional articles; last 5 years	01.01.2010–17.02.2015	22
FAZ Archive	*Frankfurter Allgemeine*	Einwanderung AND Sozialmissbrauch; supra-regional articles; last 5 years	01.01.2010–28.11.2014	11
Factiva	*Die Presse*	((Sozialtourismus OR Sozialmissbrauch) AND (Einwanderung OR Migration OR EU Bürger OR Ausländer))	01.01.2010–01.03.2015	34
Factiva	*Der Standard*	((Sozialtourismus OR Sozialmissbrauch) AND (Einwanderung OR Migration))	01.01.2010–01.03.2015	5
Asylum System case				
Factiva	*The Guardian*	asylum AND Europe AND Dublin; last 5 years; no duplicates	20.02.2010–20.02.2015	15
Factiva	*The Times*	asylum AND Europe AND Dublin; last 5 years; no duplicates	25.03.2010–25.03.2015	19
LexisNexis	*Le Monde*	asile AND Europe AND Dublin; last 5 years; no duplicates	17.02.2010–17.02.2015	31

Continued

Table A.2 *Continued*

Source	Newspaper	Keywords	Period	Hits
LexisNexis	*Le Figaro*	asile AND Europe AND Dublin; last 5 years; no duplicates	17.02.2010–17.02.2015	5
SZ LibraryNet	*Süddeutsche Zeitung*	Asyl, Dublin, Europa; last 5 years; supra-regional articles	01.01.2009–28.11.2014	24
FAZ Archive	*Frankfurter Allgemeine*	Asyl AND Dublin AND Europa; last 5 years	01.01.2010–28.11.2014	21
Factiva	*Die Presse*	(Asyl AND Dublin AND Europa AND Problem)	01.01.2010–01.03.2015	23
Factiva	*Der Standard*	(Asyl AND Dublin AND Europa AND Problem)	01.01.2010–01.03.2015	6
		Border Control I case		
Factiva	*The Guardian*	(refugee AND dead) AND (Europe OR Frontex); last 5 years; no duplicates	20.02.2010–20.02.2015	30
Factiva	*The Times*	refugee AND Frontex AND Europe; last 5 years; no duplicates	25.03.2010–25.03.2015	10
LexisNexis	*Le Monde*	réfugié AND mort AND Europe AND Frontex; last 5 years; no duplicates	17.02.2010–17.02.2015	22
LexisNexis	*Le Figaro*	réfugié AND mort AND Europe AND Frontex; last 5 years; no duplicates	17.02.2010–17.02.2015	7
SZ LibraryNet	*Süddeutsche Zeitung*	Flüchtling, Mittelmeer, Frontex; last 5 years; supra-regional articles	01.01.2009–28.11.2014	11
FAZ Archive	*Frankfurter Allgemeine*	Flüchtling AND Mittelmeer AND Frontex; last 5 years	01.01.2010–28.11.2014	10
Factiva	*Die Presse*	Flüchtling AND Mittelmeer AND Frontex	01.01.2010–01.03.2015	5
Factiva	*Der Standard*	Flüchtling AND Mittelmeer AND Frontex	01.01.2010–01.03.2015	3
		Border Control II case		
Factiva	*The Guardian*	refugee AND Frontex AND (tragedy OR distress OR fail∗ OR pushback)	14.09.2016–30.11.2022	32
Factiva	*The Times*	refugee AND Frontex AND (tragedy OR distress OR fail∗ OR pushback)	14.09.2016–30.11.2022	9
LexisNexis	*La Libération*	migrant∗ AND Frontex AND (tragédie OR détresse OR échec OR pushback)	14.09.2016–30.11.2022	15
Factive	*Le Figaro*	migrant∗ AND Frontex AND (tragédie OR détresse OR échec OR pushback)	14.09.2016–30.11.2022	21

Source	Newspaper	Keywords	Period	Hits
Factiva	*Süddeutsche Zeitung*	Flüchtling∗ AND Frontex AND (Tragödie OR Seenot OR Leid OR pushback)	14.09.2016–30.11.2022	51
FAZ Archive	*Frankfurter Allgemeine*	Flüchtling∗ AND Frontex AND (Tragödie OR Seenot OR Leid OR pushback)	14.09.2016–30.11.2022	43
Factiva	*Die Presse*	Flüchtling∗ AND Frontex AND (Tragödie OR Seenot OR Leid OR pushback)	14.09.2016–30.11.2022	22
Factiva	*Der Standard*	Flüchtling∗ AND Frontex AND (Tragödie OR Seenot OR Leid OR pushback)	14.09.2016–30.11.2022	14

is, a (past, current, or prospective) policy, which is characterized as a failure; (2) the blame sender, that is, the actor that attributes responsibility for an (actual or prospective) policy failure; (3) the blame target, to whom responsibility is attributed. When either the sender, the target, or the description of the object changed within a statement, we coded it as new blame statement. When statements included more than one sender or more than one target, they were also coded as separate statements. The senders and targets of attributions were coded at the most detailed level to collect as much information as possible. Targets were then assigned to one of the following four types of political actors to whom responsibility can be attributed:

- **MS specific:** This category comprises national actors, including national governments, federal ministries, parties in government as well as their representatives. Attributions to specific member states, such as 'Germany' or 'Italy' and 'Berlin' or 'Rome', as well as attributions to a subgroup of members were also coded as referring to specific member states.
- **MS generic:** This category comprises references to the EU's membership as a whole, for example, attributions to 'the member states', 'the members', but also to 'the Council' or 'the European Council'.
- **EU specific:** This category comprises attributions to specific supranational actors, such as the Commission, the EP, the ECB, or EU agencies as well as their representatives.
- **EU generic:** This category comprises generic references to the EU, like attributions to 'the EU', 'Brussels', or 'Europe'.

A.1.3 Assessing inter-coder reliability

Each coder was provided with a detailed codebook and received intensive coding training.[2] To ensure that coders were familiar with the cases they coded, we did not randomly assign articles to coders. To avoid coder-specific effects distorting the comparison, we defined a 'main coder' who coded most of the articles covering the cases of one case-pair. Thus, for the cases that we compare we draw on one and the same coder. Only in cases where the main coder did not have the required language skills (or was no longer available), we assigned an additional coder who then coded the same newspapers across the cases of the same case-pair. Thus coder-specific effects should not impair our case comparisons.[3] We also randomized the temporal order in which coders coded the articles of a particular case. Table A.3 provides an overview of coder assignments.

Table A.3 Assignment of cases to coders

	Austria		Germany		UK		France	
	Der Standard	*Die Presse*	SZ	FAZ	*The Guardian*	*The Times*	*Le Monde/ La Libération*	*Le Figaro*
Foreign policy case-pair								
Libya case	Coder 1	Coder 1	Coder 1	Coder 1	Coder 1	Coder 1	Coder 2	Coder 2
Russia case	Coder 1	Coder 1	Coder 1	Coder 1	Coder 1	Coder 1	Coder 2	Coder 2
Environmental policy case-pair								
Kyoto case	Coder 3	Coder 3	Coder 3	Coder 3	Coder 3	Coder 3	Coder 4	Coder 4
Paris case	Coder 3	Coder 3	Coder 3	Coder 3	Coder 3	Coder 3	Coder 4	Coder 4
Environmental policy case-pair								
Financial Assist. case	Coder 5	Coder 5	Coder 5	Coder 5	Coder 5	Coder 5	Coder 4	Coder 4
Sovereign Bonds case	Coder 5	Coder 5	Coder 5	Coder 5	Coder 5	Coder 5	Coder 4	Coder 4
Migration policy cases								
Welfare Entitl. case	Coder 3	Coder 3	Coder 6	Coder 6	Coder 7	Coder 7	Coder 7	Coder 7
Asylum System case	Coder 3	Coder 3	Coder 6	Coder 6	Coder 7	Coder 7	Coder 7	Coder 7
Border Control I case	Coder 3	Coder 3	Coder 6	Coder 6	Coder 7	Coder 6&7	Coder 7	Coder 7
Border Control II case	Coder 5	Coder 5	Coder 5	Coder 5	Coder 5	Coder 5	Coder 4	Coder 4

To assess inter-coder reliability, we carried out inter-coder tests. Two of our coders, Coder 1 and Coder 7, were unfortunately not available for an inter-coder test at the time of writing. We asked the remaining five coders to each code blame statements in twenty randomly selected articles from four of our cases: five each from the Libya case, the Russia case, the Financial Assistance case, and the Border Control II case.[4] We then assessed the agreement between the original codes of the main coder that we use in the book and the respective codes of the test coders. We focused on identifying relevant statements and analysed whether coders agreed on the coded blame statements. First, based on all sentences covering the respective EU policy failure, we calculated test coders' agreement about whether a sentence constitutes a blame statement. If the codes of the main coder and the respective test coders matched, that is, if they agreed that a sentence constitutes a blame statement or that a sentence is not a blame statement, we counted this sentence as an agreement. Second, we also analysed whether the assigned target codes of test coders were in agreement for those statements recognized as blame statements by both the original coder and the test coders.

Table A.4 indicates that inter-coder reliability is satisfactory. First, in most instances the test coders identified the same sentences as blame statements (or as an irrelevant statement) as the original coder. Agreement between the original code of the main coder and the test codes thus ranges between 90 per cent and 98 per cent. This is corroborated by calculating common reliability measures Kappa (Cohen 1960) and Pi (Scott 1955) which also indicate adequate inter-coder reliability. The results range from 'almost perfect' (0.81) to 'substantial' (0.79 and 0.62) to 'moderate' (0.53 and 0.49) (McHugh 2012). Moreover, when test coders and main coders identified the same statement, the test coders' assessment of the targets was almost always in agreement with the original code. The agreement on blame targets ranges between 88 per cent and 100 per cent. Overall, we are thus confident that our results are reliable.

Table A.4 Results of the inter-coder tests (agreement with main coder)

		Coder 2	Coder 3	Coder 4	Coder 5	Coder 6
Agreement at sentence-level (identification of blame statements)	Share	90%	96%	90%	98%	93%
	Cohen's Kappa	0.53	0.81	0.49	0.79	0.62
	Scott's Pi	0.53	0.81	0.49	0.79	0.62
Agreement on blame targets	Share	88%	97%	91%	100%	94%

A.2 Identifying the prevalent blame games

Based on the coded blame statements, we determine the prevalent blame game in a particular case by counting the number of blame attributions that target a specific type of actor. Table A.5 summarizes the operational criteria for identifying the prevalent blame game.

A.2.1 Statistical significance: Chi-square tests

To exclude that the differences in blame targets—and thus blame games—that we observe across cases is random, we conducted a number of Chi-square tests. For the respective cases that we selected for pair-wise comparisons, we thus test the null hypothesis that the differences with regard to the pattern of blame attributions are random. In each case-pair, we check whether the blame game we find in one of the cases differs significantly from the blame game

Table A.5 Operational criteria for identifying prevalent blame games

Scapegoat game	Renegade game	Diffusion game
• Most frequent target category: EU specific	• Most frequent target category: MS specific	• Most frequent target category: EU generic OR MS generic
• EU specific + EU generic > 50%	• MS specific + MS generic > 50%	• MS generic + EU generic > 50%

we observe in the other case. In doing so, we relied on all attributions to EU actors in cases of scapegoat games (EU specific + EU generic), in cases of renegade games on all attributions to member state actors (MS specific + MS generic), and in cases of diffusion games on all attributions to generic target categories (MS generic + EU generic) as criterion to differentiate the blame games. Overall, the Chi-square tests indicate that the differences in blame patterns across the cases that we compare are indeed not random. With regard to almost all case comparisons, the null hypothesis can be rejected with a confidence level of at least 99 per cent. Only in one case-pair (Border Control cases I and II), we cannot reject the null hypothesis with such a high level of confidence. The following section presents the Chi-square test for each case-pair.

Table A.6 shows that in the EU foreign policy case-pair, the observed and expected values for the Libya case, where we expected a renegade game, and the Russia case, where we did not expect a renegade game, deviate considerably from each other. The obtained chi-square value is 13.57 and implies that the null hypothesis can be rejected at the 0.001 level of significance (99.9 per cent confidence level).

Table A.7 shows that in the EU environmental policy case-pair, the observed and expected values for the Paris case, where we expected a renegade game, and the Kyoto case, where

Table A.6 Contingency table for the EU foreign policy case-pair

	Libya case		Russia case		Row totals
Blame to EU	36	(51)	115	(100)	151
Blame to MS	64	(49)	82	(97)	146
Column totals	100		197		297

Note: Expected values for a random distribution in brackets.

Table A.7 Contingency table for the EU environmental policy case-pair

	Paris case		Kyoto case		Row totals
Blame to EU	42	(77)	123	(88)	165
Blame to MS	88	(53)	24	(59)	112
Column totals	130		147		277

Note: Expected values for a random distribution in brackets.

we did not expect a renegade game, deviate considerably from each other. The obtained chi-square value is 73.71 and implies that the null hypothesis can be rejected at the 0.001 level of significance (99.9 per cent confidence level).

Table A.8 shows that in the EU fiscal stabilization policy case-pair, the observed and expected values for the financial assistance case, where we expected a renegade game, and the sovereign bonds case, where we did not expect a renegade game, deviate considerably from each other. The obtained chi-square value is 11.48 and implies that the null hypothesis can be rejected at the 0.001 level of significance (99.9 per cent confidence level).

Table A.9 shows that in the EU migration policy case-pair, the observed and expected values for the Welfare Entitlements case, where we expected a scapegoat game, and the Border Control I case, where we did not expect a scapegoat game, deviate from each other. The obtained chi-square value is 9.42 and implies that the null hypothesis can be rejected at the 0.01 level of significance (99 per cent confidence level).

Table A.10 shows that in the EU migration policy case-pair, the observed and expected values for the Asylum System case, where we expected a renegade game, and the Border Control I case, where we did not expect a renegade game, deviate considerably from each other. The obtained chi-square value is 32.81 and implies that the null hypothesis can be rejected at the 0.001 level of significance (99.9 per cent confidence level).

Table A.11 shows that in the EU migration policy case-pair, the observed and expected values for the Border Control II case, where we expected a scapegoat game, and the Border Control I case, where we did not expect a scapegoat game, do not differ significantly. The obtained chi-square value is 0.18 and means that the null hypothesis that differences with regard to blame targets are random cannot be rejected.

Table A.8 Contingency table for the EU fiscal stabilization policy case-pair

	Financial Assistance case		Sovereign Bonds case		Row totals
Blame to EU	66	(79)	61	(48)	127
Blame to MS	89	(76)	34	(47)	123
Column totals	155		95		250

Note: Expected values for a random distribution in brackets.

Table A.9 Contingency table for the Welfare Entitlements case and the Border Control I case

	Welfare Entitlements case		Border Control I case		Row totals
Blame to EU	59	(49)	63	(73)	122
Blame to MS	18	(28)	51	(41)	69
Column totals	77		114		191

Note: Expected values for a random distribution in brackets.

Table A.10 Contingency table for the Asylum System case and the Border Control I case

	Asylum System case		Border Control I case		Row totals
Blame to EU	42	(65)	63	(40)	105
Blame to MS	146	(123)	51	(74)	197
Column totals	188		114		302

Note: Expected values for a random distribution in brackets.

Table A.11 Contingency table for the Border Control I and the Border Control II cases

	Border Control I case		Border Control II case		Row totals
Blame to EU	63	(65)	268	(266)	331
Blame to MS	51	(49)	197	(199)	248
Column totals	114		465		579

Note: Expected values for a random distribution in brackets.

A.2.2 Robustness check: disaggregation at country level

To further increase confidence that the blame game that we identify in each case is not random, we probe whether we find the same blame game not only in the aggregate newspaper coverage across the four countries, but also in the newspaper coverage from each of the four countries separately (i.e. the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Austria). The results from disaggregating the data are mixed. In seven out of ten cases, we find in the majority of countries the same blame game in the majority of individual countries as in the aggregate newspaper coverage with the United Kingdom usually being an outlier. In three out of ten cases, however, we do not find the same blame game as in the aggregate newspaper coverage. In the Financial Assistance, Sovereign Bonds, and the Welfare Entitlements case, the blame games we observe across countries are not the same. With the exception of the United Kingdom, in those countries where the blame games deviates from our expectations, the respective policy failures provoked few blame statements and was thus obviously not highly politicized. For the disaggregated data, see Tables A.12–A.21.

Table A.12 shows that we find the expected renegade game in the Libya case in all countries except the United Kingdom where the dominant blame game is a diffusion game.

Table A.12 Blame attributions by country in the Libya case

	Germany		UK		France		Austria		Total
MS generic	8%	3	0%	0	13%	4	0%	0	7
MS specific	55%	21	38%	5	55%	17	78%	14	57
EU generic	37%	14	46%	6	23%	7	22%	4	31
EU specific	0%	0	15%	2	10%	3	0%	0	5
Total		38		13		31		18	100

Table A.13 shows that we find the expected diffusion game in the Russia case in all countries except the United Kingdom where the dominant blame game is a renegade game.

Table A.14 shows that we find the expected diffusion game in the Kyoto case in all countries.

Table A.15 shows that we find the expected renegade game in all countries.

Table A.16 shows that we find the expected renegade game in the Financial Assistance case only in Germany. The dominant blame game in the other countries was a diffusion game.

Table A.13   Blame attributions by country in the Russia case

	Germany		UK		France		Austria		Total
MS generic	13%	6	11%	4	7%	6	11%	4	20
MS specific	24%	11	44%	16	33%	27	23%	8	62
EU generic	53%	24	39%	14	54%	44	66%	23	105
EU specific	9%	4	6%	2	5%	4	0%	0	10
Total		45		36		81		35	197

Table A.14   Blame attributions by country in the Kyoto case

	Germany		UK		France		Austria		Total
MS generic	2%	1	0%	0	2%	1	6%	1	3
MS specific	2%	1	36%	8	15%	9	17%	3	21
EU generic	85%	41	59%	13	73%	43	72%	13	110
EU specific	10%	5	5%	1	10%	6	6%	1	13
Total		48		22		59		18	147

Table A.15   Blame attributions by country in the Paris case

	Germany		UK		France		Austria		Total
MS generic	37%	11	9%	3	8%	5	0%	0	19
MS specific	37%	11	55%	18	59%	36	67%	4	69
EU generic	23%	7	12%	4	21%	13	33%	2	26
EU specific	3%	1	24%	8	11%	7	0%	0	16
Total		30		33		61		6	130

Table A.16   Blame attributions by country in the Financial Assistance case

	Germany		UK		France		Austria		Total
MS generic	12%	3	17%	15	40%	10	0%	0	28
MS specific	62%	16	36%	32	36%	9	25%	4	61
EU generic	19%	5	38%	33	20%	5	56%	9	52
EU specific	8%	2	9%	8	4%	1	19%	3	14
Total		26		88		25		16	155

Table A.17 shows that we find the expected scapegoat game in the Sovereign Bonds case only in Germany. The dominant blame game was a diffusion game in Austria and France and (looks similar to) a renegade game in the United Kingdom.

Table A.18 shows that in the Welfare Entitlements case, the expected scapegoat game is predominantly observable in Austria, whereas the policy failure is hardly discussed in the other countries.

Table A.19 shows that we find the expected diffusion game in the Border Control I case in all countries except the United Kingdom where we observe a renegade game.

Table A.20 shows that we find the expected scapegoat game in the Border Control II case in all countries except the United Kingdom where we observe a renegade game.

Table A.21 shows that we find the expected renegade game in the Asylum System case in all countries.

Table A.17 Blame attributions by country in the Sovereign Bonds case

	Germany		UK		France		Austria		Total
MS generic	3%	1	7%	2	43%	6	38%	8	17
MS specific	9%	3	39%	11	7%	1	10%	2	17
EU generic	22%	7	32%	9	36%	5	19%	4	25
EU specific	66%	21	21%	6	14%	2	33%	7	36
Total		32		28		14		21	95

Table A.18 Blame attributions by country in the Welfare Entitlements case

	Germany		UK		France		Austria		Total
MS generic	0%	0	0%	0	–	0	2%	1	1
MS specific	0%	0	25%	2	–	0	23%	15	17
EU generic	67%	2	75%	6	–	0	20%	13	21
EU specific	33%	1	0%	0	–	0	56%	37	38
Total		3		8		0		66	77

Table A.19 Blame attributions by country in the Border Control I case

	Germany		UK		France		Austria		Total
MS generic	4%	1	18%	9	33%	11	71%	5	26
MS specific	13%	3	38%	19	9%	3	0%	0	25
EU generic	75%	18	30%	15	45%	15	29%	2	50
EU specific	8%	2	14%	7	12%	4	0%	0	13
Total		24		50		33		7	114

Table A.20 Blame attributions by country in the Border Control II case

	Germany		UK		France		Austria		Total
MS generic	7%	11	5%	6	4%	4	8%	6	27
MS specific	35%	55	48%	59	29%	30	33%	26	170
EU generic	10%	16	17%	21	27%	28	9%	7	72
EU specific	48%	77	30%	37	41%	43	50%	39	196
Total		159		123		105		79	465

Table A.21 Blame attributions by country in the Asylum System case

	Germany		UK		France		Austria		Total
MS generic	7%	4	5%	2	20%	10	17%	7	23
MS specific	65%	36	76%	31	57%	29	66%	27	123
EU generic	27%	15	20%	8	16%	8	15%	6	37
EU specific	0%	0	0%	0	8%	4	2%	1	5
Total		55		41		51		41	188

A.2.3 Analysis over time

Our main analyses focused on static outcomes since we are primarily interested in the predominant blame games in the European public. Yet, our theoretical argument is inherently dynamic and thus also yields expectations about patterns of blame attributions over time. More specifically, our theory assumes that political actors engaging in European blame games might *update* their beliefs about citizens' knowledge about true responsibilities for EU policy failures; and they might *anticipate* that citizens learn about trues responsibilities from the onset of a blame game. We explored the implications of these two mechanisms by zooming in on the temporal dimension of European blame games. We did so by dividing the observations for each case into quartiles. In all ten cases, we observe the expected blame game already in the first quartile (thus lending support to the anticipation mechanism). Moreover, we also find numerous indications that the expected blame attributions become more prevalent over time (thus lending support to the updating mechanism). Tables A.22–A.24 display our observations for case quartiles and whether the results meet the expectations derived from our theoretical model.

Table A.22 Blame attributions over time in diffusion games

		1st quartile	2nd quartile	3rd quartile	4th quartile	2nd-4th quartiles	Generic targets >50% already in 1st quartile	Share of diffuse targets increases from 1st to 2nd quartile	Share of diffuse targets increases from 1st to 2nd–4th quartiles
Russia case	**generic targets**	**76%**	**55%**	**69%**	**53%**	**59%**	✓	✗	✗
	MS generic	14%	2%	12%	12%	9%		(−20.9% points)	(−16.8% points)
	EU generic	62%	53%	57%	41%	50%			
	total	50	49	49	49	147			
Kyoto case	**generic targets**	**68%**	**81%**	**81%**	**78%**	**80%**	✓	✓	✓
	MS generic	3%	3%	0%	3%	2%		(+13.5% points)	(+12.4%)
	EU generic	65%	78%	81%	75%	78%			
	total	37	37	37	36	110			
Border Control I case	**generic targets**	**86%**	**79%**	**59%**	**43%**	**60%**	✓	✗	✗
	MS generic	17%	36%	24%	14%	25%		(−7.6% points)	(−26.2% points)
	EU generic	69%	43%	34%	29%	35%			
	total	29	28	29	28	85			

Table A.23 Blame attributions over time in renegade games

		1st quartile	2nd quartile	3rd quartile	4th quartile	2nd-4th quartiles	MS targets >50% already in 1st quartile	Share of MS targets increases from 1st to 2nd quartile	Share of sspecific MS targets increases from 1st to 2nd quartile	Share of MS targets increases from 1st to 2nd-4th quartiles	Share of specific MS targets increases from 1st to 2nd-4th quartiles
Libya case	**MS targets**	**60%**	**64%**	**68%**	**64%**	**65%**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	MS specific	52%	64%	56%	56%	59%		*Section 1.89*	(+12,0%-points)	(+5,3%-points)	(+6,7%-points)
	MS generic	8%	0%	12%	8%	7%		(+4.0% points)			
	total	25	25	25	25	75					
Paris case	**MS targets**	**76%**	**75%**	**73%**	**47%**	**65%**	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
	MS specific	55%	63%	52%	44%	53%		(−0% points)	(+8.0%-points)	(−10,8%-points)	(−2,0%-points)
	MS generic	21%	13%	21%	3%	12%					
	total	33	32	33	32	97					
Financial Assistance case	**MS targets**	**64%**	**72%**	**56%**	**37%**	**55%**	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
	MS specific	41%	54%	41%	21%	39%		(+7.7% points)	(+12.8% points)	(−8,9%-points)	-(2,2% points)
	MS generic	23%	18%	15%	16%	16%					
	total	39	39	39	38	116					
Asylum System case	**MS targets**	**68%**	**89%**	**74%**	**79%**	**81%**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	MS specific	64%	79%	53%	66%	66%		(+21.3% points)	(+14,9%-points)	(+12.8% points)	(+2,1%-points)
	MS generic	4%	11%	21%	13%	15%					
	total	47	47	47	47	141					

Table A.24 Blame attributions over time in scapegoat games

Scapegoat Games:		1st quartile	2nd quartile	vf3rd quartile	4th quartile	2nd-4th quartiles	EU targets >50% already in 1st quartile	Share of EU targets increases from 1st to 2nd quartile	Share of specific EU targets increases from 1st to 2nd quartile	Share of EU targets increases from 1st to 2nd-4th quartiles	Share of specific EU targets increases from 1st to 2nd-4th quartiles
Sovereign Bonds case	**EU targets**	**63%**	**79%**	**46%**	**70%**	**65%**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	EU specific	17%	58%	29%	48%	45%		(+16.7% points)	(+41,7%- points)	(+2,3%- points)	(+28,4%- points)
	EU generic	46%	21%	17%	22%	20%					
	total	24	24	24	23	71					
Welfare Entitlements case	**EU targets**	**55%**	**95%**	**79%**	**79%**	**84%**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	EU specific	30%	79%	68%	21%	67%		(+39.7% points)	(+48,9% points)	(+29,2% points)	(+36.7% points)
	EU generic	25%	16%	11%	58%	28%					
	total	20	19	19	19	57					
Border Control II case	**EU targets**	**50%**	**57%**	**60%**	**63%**	**60%**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	EU specific	25%	43%	50%	51%	48%		(+6.5% points)	(+18.3%- points)	(+9,6%- points)	(+23,2%- points)
	EU generic	26%	14%	10%	12%	12%					
	total	117	116	116	116	348					

Endnotes

1. To collect the articles from the relevant newspapers and for the relevant periods, we accessed various news archives. While we predominantly relied on *Factiva*, we employed alternative archives when the newspaper coverage we sought was not available through the *Factiva* archive.
2. The full codebook is available online: https://data.ub.uni-muenchen.de.
3. The Border Control II case is the only exception because it was coded at a later point in time. Still, the results of our inter-coder test make us confident that differences between coders did not drive our results across the Border Control I case and the Border Control II case.
4. Since Coder 5 was the main coder for two of the selected cases, namely, the Financial Assistance and the Border Control II case, we analysed only the agreement with the main coder for this test coder in the ten articles from the Libya and Russia case.

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