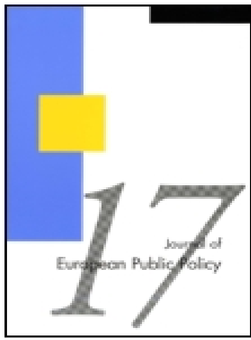

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Journal of European Public Policy

ISSN: 1350-1763 (Print) 1466-4429 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rjpp20

Crisis exploitation: political and policy impacts of framing contests

Arjen Boin , Paul 't Hart & Allan McConnell

To cite this article: Arjen Boin , Paul 't Hart & Allan McConnell (2009) Crisis exploitation: political and policy impacts of framing contests, Journal of European Public Policy, 16:1, 81-106, DOI: 10.1080/13501760802453221

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760802453221

Published online: 04 Dec 2008.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 11342

View related articles

Citing articles: 215 View citing articles

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=rjpp20

Journal of European Public Policy 16:1 January 2009: 81–106

Crisis exploitation: political and policy impacts of framing contests

Arjen Boin, Paul 't Hart and Allan McConnell

ABSTRACT When societies are confronted with major, disruptive emergencies, the fate of politicians and public policies hangs in the balance. Both government actors and their critics will try to escape blame for their occurrence, consolidate/strengthen their political capital, and advance/defend the policies they stand for. Crises thus generate framing contests to interpret events, their causes, and the responsibilities and lessons involved in ways that suit their political purposes and visions of future policy directions. This article dissects these processes and articulates foundations for a theory of crisis exploitation. Drawing on 15 cases of crisis-induced framing contests, we identify potentially crucial factors that may explain both the political (effects on incumbent office-holders/institutions) and policy (effects on programs) impacts of crises.

KEY WORDS Crisis exploitation; crisis management; framing contests; policy reform.

THE SHADOWS THAT CRISES CAST

Crises, disasters and political scandals often cast long shadows on the polities in which they occur (Birkland 1997, 2006; Baumgartner and Jones 1993, 2002; Lomborg 2004; Posner 2004). The sense of threat and uncertainty that they induce may profoundly impact people's understanding of the world around them. The occurrence of a large-scale emergency or the widespread use of the emotive labels such as 'crisis,' 'scandal' or 'fiasco' to denote a particular state of affairs or trend in the public domain implies a 'dislocation' of hitherto dominant social, political or administrative discourses (Wagner-Pacifici 1986, 1994; Howarth *et al.* 2000). When a crisis delegitimizes the power and authority relationships that these discourses underpin, structural change is desired and expected by many (cf. Klein 2007).

Such change can happen, but not necessarily so. In fact, the dynamics and outcomes of crisis episodes are hard to predict. For example, the German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder miraculously emerged as the winner of the national elections following his well-performed role as the nation's symbolic 'crisis manager' during the riverine floods in 2002, yet the Spanish prime minister suffered a stunning electoral loss in the immediate aftermath of the Madrid train bombings of 2004. President George W. Bush saw his hitherto

Journal of European Public Policy
ISSN 1350-1763 print; 1466-4429 online © 2009 Taylor & Francis
http://www.informaworld.com/journals
DOI: 10.1080/13501760802453221

modest approval ratings soar in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, but an already unpopular Bush administration further lost prestige in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Likewise, public institutions can be affected quite differently in the aftermath of critical events: some take a public beating and are forced to reform (the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) following the *Challenger* and *Columbia* shuttle disasters); some weather the political storm (the Belgian gendarmerie following its spectacular failure to effectively police the 1985 European Cup Final at the Heysel stadium in Brussels), others become symbolic of heroic public service (the New York City Fire Department after 9/11).

The same goes for public policies and programs. Gun control policy in Australia was rapidly and drastically tightened after the 1996 Port Arthur massacre in Tasmania. Legislation banning 'dangerous dogs' was rapidly enacted in the United Kingdom following a few fatal biting incidents (Lodge and Hood 2002). And 9/11 produced a world-wide cascade of national policy reforms in areas such as policing, immigration, data protection, criminal law – for good or bad (cf. Klein 2007; Wolf 2007). Yet in other cases, big emergencies may trigger big investigations and temporarily jolt political agendas but in the end do not result in major policy changes at all.

What explains these different outcomes? Most scholars writing about the nexus between crises, disasters and public policy note their potential agenda-setting effects, but have not developed explanations for their contingent nature and their variable impacts (Primo and Cobb 2003; Birkland 2006). The emerging literature on blame management has only just begun to address the mechanisms determining the fate of office-holders in the wake of major disturbances and scandals (Hood *et al.* 2007). This literature suggests, as does our empirical case research, that the process of crisis exploitation may help to explain the variance in outcomes. It appears that disruptions of societal routines and expectations open up political space for actors inside and outside government to redefine issues, propose policy innovations and organizational reforms, gain popularity and strike at opponents. They create political opportunity windows for advocacy groups challenging established policies, newly incumbent office-holders and other potential change agents (Keeler 1993; Birkland 2006; Klein 2007).

We propose that the aftermath of a crisis and its outcomes can be usefully understood in terms of 'frame contests' between the various actors that seek to exploit this crisis-induced opportunity space (cf. Alink *et al.* 2001).[1] Crises typically generate a contest between frames and counter-frames concerning the nature and severity of a crisis, its causes, the responsibility for its occurrence or escalation, and implications for the future. Contestants manipulate, strategize and fight to have their frame accepted as the dominant narrative ('t Hart 1993; Tarrow 1994; Brändström and Kuipers 2003; De Vries 2004; see also Stone 2001). They seek to 'exploit' the disruption of 'governance as usual' that emergencies and disturbances entail: to defend and strengthen their positions and

authority, to attract or deflect public attention, to get rid of old policies or sow the seeds of new ones (Keeler 1993).[2] As we know from garbage can theory, political actors scan their horizons for 'problems' in order to promote their own preferred 'solutions,' and may seek to appropriate critical incidents of various kinds for precisely that purpose (Kingdon 2003). When a particular 'crisis narrative' takes hold, it can be an important force for non-incremental changes in policy fields otherwise stabilized by the forces of path dependence, inheritance, and veto-playing (Hay 2002; Kuipers 2006; Klein 2007).

This article attempts to formulate a theory of *crisis exploitation*, which we define as *the purposeful utilization of crisis-type rhetoric to significantly alter levels of political support for public office-holders and public policies.*[3] We seek to open the 'black box' of post-crisis politicking, in an effort to account for both the political impact (effects on incumbent office-holders/governments) and the policy impacts (effects on program content and delivery modes) of crises and disasters. Hence the theory's dependent variables are twofold: the nature and depth of changes in political support for key public office-holders and/or agencies; and the nature and degree of policy change in the wake of an emergency/disturbance.[4] Its triggers, i.e. independent variables, are the occurrence and public reporting of non-routine, disruptive incidents or trends. These vary from big and immediate disasters to more subtle, contested 'creeping crises' in areas such as health care, public safety and public security (cf. Rosenthal *et al.* 1989, *et al.* 2001; Drennan and McConnell 2007). And its centerpiece, the intermediate variables, is presented in what follows below.

Before we proceed, a methodological caveat is in order. Ours is an explorative, theory-building venture. Our argument builds on the findings from 15 in-depth case studies on the politics of crisis management (case summaries can be found on Paul 't Hart's website http://polsc.anu.edu.au/staff/hart/research.htm). In other words, the cases were there before the theory was; they were *not* selected to provide a test of it. We did use a most-similar case design, sampling cases which all featured a high degree of political activity and conflict in the wake of a series of 'on the ground' events whose reporting in the mass media triggered public perceptions of these events as a crisis. The variation of political and policy outcomes that we encountered generated the research question and provided the impetus to think more systematically about the interplay of institutional and behavioral factors that could account for this variation.

FRAMING CONTESTS

To a considerable extent, emergencies, disturbances and other forms of social crisis are all in the eye of the beholder. Following the classic Thomas theorem ('if men define their situations as real, they are real in their consequences'), it is not the events on the ground, but their public perception and interpretation that determine their potential impact on political office-holders and public policy. Accordingly, we define crises as *events or developments widely perceived by members of relevant communities to constitute urgent threats to core community*

values and structures. Notwithstanding that, it is essential to note that no set of events or developments is likely to be perceived fully uniformly by the members of a community. Perceptions of crisis are likely to vary not just among communities – societies experience different types of disturbances and have different types and levels of vulnerability and resilience – but also within them, reflecting the different biases of stakeholders as a result of their different values, positions and responsibilities. These differential perceptions and indeed accounts of a crisis constitute the stuff of crisis exploitation, as will be detailed below.

Figure 1 offers a stylized representation of the constructed nature of 'crises.' Confronted with one and the same set of events – an earthquake, a case of collective corruption in the public service, a shooting spree, a child dying of parental abuse – actors may adopt fundamentally different postures. We distinguish here between:

1. denial that the events in question represent more than an *unfortunate incident*, and thus a predisposition to downplay the idea that they should have any political or policy repercussions whatsoever;
2. deeming the events to be a *critical threat* to the collective good embodied in the status quo that existed before these events came to light, and thus a predisposition to defend the agents (incumbent office-holders) and tools (existing policies and organizational practices) of that status quo against criticism;
3. deeming the events to be a *critical opportunity* to expose deficiencies in the status quo ex ante, and hence a predisposition to pinpoint blameworthy

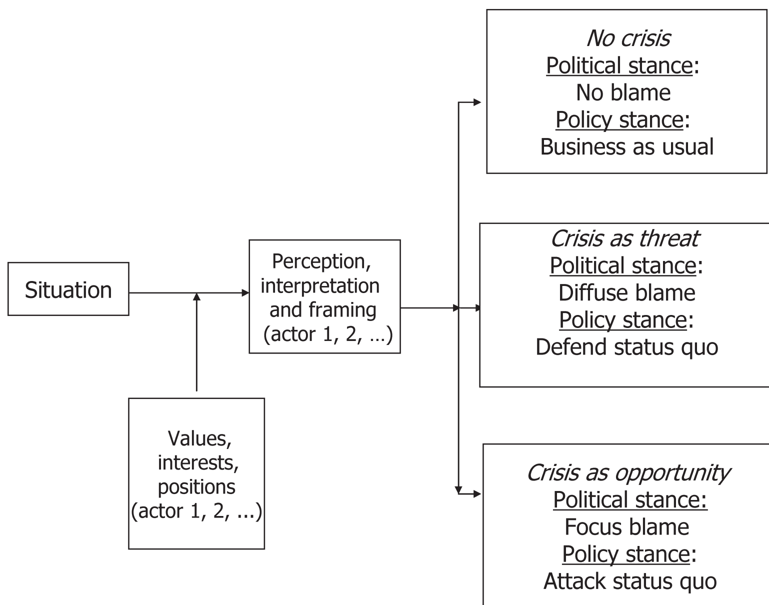

Figure 1 Crises as framing contests

behavior by status quo agents and dysfunctional policies and organizations, in order to mobilize support for their removal or substantive alteration.

Not so long ago, type-1 or type-2 representations of incidents and disasters were likely to dominate and scholarly interest focused on the 'solidarity impulses' and 'altruistic communities' that these events tended to generate (Barton 1969). Most disasters entered collective memory as an 'Act of God,' defying explanation, redress and guilt (Rosenthal 1998). They were treated as incomprehensible events that tested and defeated available administrative and political repertoires of prevention and response. After these events that few people (if any) were able to fathom (let alone plan for), bewilderment and sorrow gave rise to an urgent need to move on and rebuild a state of order (see Rozario 2005).

Even natural disaster experts agree that times have changed (Quarantelli 1998; Steinberg 2000; Perry and Quarantelli 2005). In today's risk society, disasters typically evoke nagging questions that spell trouble for incumbent leaders: why did they not see this coming? We have seen this before, so why didn't they know what to do this time? Almost invariably, post-mortem activities bring to light that there had been multiple, albeit scattered and sometimes ambiguous, hunches, signals and warnings about growing vulnerabilities and threats along the lines of the scenario that actually transpired. These were evidently not acted upon effectively, and much of the political controversy in the aftermath of the once 'incomprehensible' crisis focuses on the question of why no action was taken. And so type-3 ways of perceiving and framing the events have gained potential currency.

The first framing contest: ripple or crisis?

Figure 1 implies that there are two types of framing contest at play in the wake of any set of unscheduled events. The first centers around the *significance* of the events: are they within or outside our 'zone of indifference' (Barnard 1938; cf. Romzek and Dubnick 1987) and our standard collective coping repertoires? Are they 'big and bad' for the community at hand (the Gore view of climate change); bad but not really big (the nuclear industry's view of the nuclear waste problem); only big but not really all that bad (the Stern report view of global warming), or neither (the Dutch view on recreational drug consumption)? At stake in this significance contest is the agenda status of the issues raised by the events: will they be seen as top priority (however temporary that may turn out to be), or is it considered safe to ignore them altogether or deal with them in routine, piecemeal fashion?

Clearly, proponents of type-1 frames argue to *minimize* event significance, proponents of type-2 frames are more likely to *acknowledge* event significance, and proponents of type-3 frames are most likely to *maximize* event significance. The political risk of adhering to a type-1 frame is to be accused of 'blindness,' 'passivity' and 'rigidity;' the political risk of type-3 frames is to come across as

'alarmist' or 'opportunistic.' Both can be accused of being divorced from reality, if not of outright lying. Equally clearly, a true sense of crisis can be said to exist in a political and policy sense only when there are sufficient credible, audible voices and seemingly self-evident facts and images underpinning the idea that what is going on is indeed *big*, *bad* and moreover *urgent* (Rosenthal *et al.* 1989). If this is not the case, denials or otherwise comparatively benign and complacent definitions of the situation are likely to prevail.

Crisis framing in cases other than major disasters, huge outbursts of violence and the like is therefore a political challenge of considerable magnitude. Many unscheduled events and latent risks are fundamentally ambiguous, leaving considerable space for type-1 denials. Companies that see their share prices fall have no reason to claim that these depreciations reflect underlying problems in corporate strategy and/or management. In fact, many big companies as well as public organizations are on record as systematically neglecting and genuinely underestimating their own latent vulnerabilities (Slatter 1984; Mitroff and Pauchant 1990; Turner and Pidgeon 1997).

Take an example. A director of a child protection agency will not self-evidently treat the violent death of one of her agency's young clients as a major event. In her business, 'shit happens' and child protection professionals have to live with the reality that not every endangered child can be saved. Even if two die within one week, this could still be explained away as a statistical aberration, for example, as coincidence. But there is a point at which a type-1 reaction, however well-entrenched, becomes cognitively or politically unsustainable; for example, if an unusually high number of children die in a given short space of time, or even if only one child dies in particularly gruesome circumstances, or if reports emerge about one hitherto unnoticed fatality that contain facts or allegations compromising the child protection agency's performance of its custodial role.

This tipping point, however, is never fixed or readily recognizable, because it is a function of a constellation of variable situational, historical, cultural and political forces (cf. Axelrod and Cohen 2000). The only generalization that might apply here has been captured by Rosenthal (1988) who argued that the greater the sense of invulnerability in a society, the more likely that relatively minor disturbances will have major destabilizing effects. In contrast, societies with a well-developed 'disaster subculture' or organizations with a resilient 'safety culture' have learned to live with adversity and have developed cultural and organizational coping resources.

In instances where denial is no longer a credible option, debates about responsibility, blame and policy implications take a different turn depending upon which causal story about the nature and genesis of unscheduled events comes to prevail: the type-2 notion of well-meaning policy-makers not being informed about looming vulnerabilities and threats (in which case blame goes down the hierarchy and outside the organization); or the type-3 notion of a top brass unwilling to address the growing risk brought to their attention (in which case blame attribution moves upward and to the centre). The same applies to

cases where the official response to a clearly exogenous incident or development is widely perceived as being slow, disorganized, or insensitive to the needs of the stricken community.

For example, after Hurricane Katrina both the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the White House took a terrible public beating: not so much because they had failed to prevent the levee break (although the federal government was certainly blamed by state and local authorities for having long neglected the flood defenses in the region), but primarily because the disaster evoked an image of total disarray at the very heart of the government's much vaunted post-9/11 crisis management machinery (cf. Garnett and Kouzmin 2007). Likewise, its tardy and seemingly indifferent response to the fate of thousands of its citizens victimized by the 2005 tsunami created political problems for the Swedish cabinet (Brändström *et al.* 2008). An official investigation revealed clear evidence that the need to build and maintain crisis response capacity at the cabinet level had not been given the priority it deserved. Moreover, clumsy attempts by both the prime minister and the foreign minister to deflect blame for the slow response compounded their problems. Not only did they fail to instigate quick and effective crisis operations, their limited grasp of the symbolic dimensions of the tsunami predicament was painfully exposed.

The second framing contest: incident or symptom?

When denial is not or no longer an option, the main emphasis in the framing contest centers on *causality*: who or what drives the course of events? At stake in the causality contest are two main dependent variables of this theory: the political fortunes of office-holders and the future of the currently existing set of policies, programs and organizations in the domain in which the crisis has materialized.

In their study of policy fiascos, Bovens and 't Hart (1996: 129) argue that 'to explain is to blame.' Causal frames that emphasize factors deemed to be foreseeable and controllable by a particular set of policy-makers serve to 'endogenize' accountability; such frames focus blame on identifiable individuals and the policies that they embody. Frames that 'exogenize' accountability serve to get policy-makers 'off the hook' and leave existing policies intact. These frames refer to forces of nature or 'outgroups' of various kinds (Islamic radicals; hard-core 'anarchists' in otherwise peaceful protest movements; greedy corporate managers; freak human errors of technical designers or low-level operators). They point to either unforeseeability (the Boxing Day tsunami from the perspective of state and local officials in Indonesia, Thailand or Sri Lanka) or uncontrollability (an economic recession allegedly brought about by a global slump pervading an otherwise well-managed economy). In the latter case, for example, some might argue that the central bank did not loosen monetary policy soon enough, or that the government was complacent in riding a boom period based on a limited and therefore vulnerable mix of export assets.

But more often than not, they provide enough loopholes for blame diffusion across the 'many hands' that more often than not make up complex contemporary governance arrangements (Bovens 1998).

In terms of Figure 1, proponents of type-2 frames typically seek to exogenize a crisis. Their storyline is: 'yes, this is big, bad and urgent, but this is not *our* doing; all of us need to unite to cope with this unfortunate tragedy' (or, depending on the kind of crisis, 'with this terrible adversary'). In contrast, proponents of type-3 frames typically seek to endogenize a crisis, arguing: 'this is big, bad and urgent, and it is so because the people and programs that govern us have failed us and need to be replaced.'

FROM CRISIS FRAMING TO CRISIS EXPLOITATION

In any polity, major disturbances tend to give rise to conflicting interpretations, reflecting the existing plurality of values and interests, as well as the 'scripted competition' between governments and oppositions. Proponents of these conflicting frames maneuver, debate, and negotiate to try and ensure that their frame prevails, i.e. become widely accepted by public opinion, and enjoy majority support in relevant formal political arenas 'processing' the crisis (cf. Stone 2001). Any theory of crisis exploitation therefore needs to capture not just the emergence of frames, but how the clash between them produces particular types of *political* and *policy* consequences.

The political crisis exploitation game

We therefore distinguish analytically between two spheres of crisis exploitation. The *political* 'game' centers around the clash between government and opposition (both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary). The *policy* 'game' involves the clash between proponents of the regulatory and administrative status quo, and advocates for change. The defenders of the status quo often, but not necessarily, include responsible political executives (heads of government, ministers, the European Commission), their political allies in and outside parliament, departmental officials, and operational agency managers. Depending on country, system and situation, the second group may include oppositional politicians, extra-parliamentary opposition, critical journalists, community watchdog or interest groups and, in some cases, victims and their spokespersons or lawyers.

In the *political* game (see Figure 2), oppositional forces will have to decide whether they can blame incumbent office-holders for the occurrence of the crisis. If they find that they have a case to make, they will have to decide whether they want to use it to call for the wholesale removal of those office-holders, or whether to stop short of that and merely use the crisis to undermine their authority by damaging their reputations. In contrast, office-holders must choose between rejecting, deflecting or diffusing responsibility for the crisis, or accepting it wholly or partially. Figure 2 depicts this as a simple game matrix, juxtaposing

Critics **Incumbents**	Absolve blame	Focus blame
Accept responsibility	*I. Blame minimization:* Elite escape likely	*II. Blame acceptance:* Elite damage likely
Deny responsibility	*III. Blame avoidance:* Elite escape likely	*IV. Blame showdown:* Elite damage, escape, rejuvenation all possible

Figure 2 Crisis exploitation (I): the political game

the strategic choices that office-holders and their critics will encounter in the politics of the post-crisis phase. It predicts the outcomes of the debate about accountability and blame that follows from particular configurations of political strategies.

All other things being equal, box II is the clearly preferred outcome for opposition forces. But they will have to consider that the likelihood of incumbents simply absorbing responsibility for crises appears to be small (in fact this occurred in only one of our 15 cases). And so they have to weigh the odds in the lower half of the figure. They can stop short of seeking wholesale removal of office-holders and push for a tactical victory (box III), but at the risk of ending up in their least favorable box I: letting the government off the hook entirely (this happens when incumbents do opt for pre-emptive blame absorption and get away with ritual promises to do better next time around). Box IV depicts an indeterminate scenario, which is most likely to evolve into a protracted and intensely politicized process of crisis investigation, reinvestigation, spin and counterspin. It is impossible to tell who will prevail in such a – potentially epic – struggle. Interestingly, 8 out of 15 cases in our set witnessed precisely this kind of 'blame showdown.'

The calculus for *office-holders* involves a similar political trade-off: fighting to come away unscathed (or even gain credit; for example, for allegedly wise or heroic crisis response leadership) or pragmatically accepting whole or partial responsibility for alleged errors of omission or commission in the run-up to the crisis or during the response to it. If we assume government leaders first and foremost value their own political survival, boxes I and III are clearly their preferred outcome. Yet, they too have to consider the likelihood of their opponents assuming the conciliatory posture that these two boxes presuppose. Depending on their assessment of the opposition's determination and ability to inflict major damage on them or not, they may consider proactively accepting responsibility, and come out looking strong, fair and self-reflective. If, however, they make the much more likely assessment that the opposition is going to scream and holler, they are better off opting for a blame avoidance strategy, if only to avoid their worst case scenario (box II). They may still lose badly at the end of the protracted blame struggle that is then most likely to ensue

(box IV). Yet, as incumbent government they may have confidence in their heresthetic abilities (cf. Riker 1986) to manipulate (delay, speed up, displace, reframe) the crisis investigation and accountability process.

In sum, this matrix exercise suggests that, *ceteris paribus*, box IV is the most likely shape that crisis-induced politics will take. Box I belongs more to the realm of accountability idealism than to the world of practice, leaving us with a toss-up between boxes II and III as the asymmetric, low to medium likelihood alternatives.

The policy crisis exploitation game

Figure 3 depicts the structure of the main conflicts over policy that crises induce between status-quo and change-oriented players. The latter have to decide whether they feel that the crisis has created the need and the opportunity to press for a wholesale overturning of the policy's ideological and/or intellectual underpinnings (e.g. a paradigm shift; Hall 1993), or whether to momentarily content themselves with advocating more incremental changes. The former have to gauge the degree of destabilization and delegitimation of existing policies that the crisis narratives floating around have evoked among experts, stakeholders and mass publics alike. Based on that assessment, status-quo players may ask themselves whether they have the arguments and the clout to openly resist any change of policy advocated by inquiries or change advocates, or whether some form of accommodating gesture ('learning the lessons') is necessary. As Hall (1993) and Sabatier (1999) have each argued, policy-makers may be well prepared to change their beliefs and practices with regard to technical, instrumental, 'non-core' aspects of a policy, but they are much less likely to 'surrender' their core beliefs; for example, the heart of the policy paradigm.

Depending on these two sets of actors' calculations and the power balance that emerges between them in the course of the crisis episode, four types of outcome may result. When both parties play hardball, a protracted stalemate or a major paradigm shift is most likely, depending on each party's ability to form a winning coalition (box I). Incremental change is, not surprisingly,

Change advocates / **Status-quo players**	Press for policy paradigm shift	Press for incremental reform
Resist policy change	I: policy stalemate *or* politically imposed paradigm shift	II: policy stalemate *or* politically imposed incremental adjustment
Contain policy Change	III: major and swift rhetorical/symbolic change; more incremental substantive change	IV: negotiated incremental adjustment

Figure 3 Crisis exploitation (II): the policy game

the most likely outcome in most of the other configurations, but there are important nuances between them that may bear upon the long-term stability of the outcome: a set of incremental adjustments, imposed by a more powerful change coalition (box II), is less likely to persist than a negotiated package between parties both prepared to settle pragmatically (box IV). In box III, the way out of a potential conundrum is found in an inherently unstable mixture of rhetoric and symbols suggesting major shifts (to placate change advocates) and a reality of much less far-reaching substantive changes (to satisfy the status-quo players).

As with the political crisis exploitation game, this game matrix depicts a stylized, simplified picture, but its versatility as an analytical tool can be enhanced if one uses it in a dynamic fashion in an in-depth case study; for example, by tracking shifts in key actors' stances and political resources, as new events unfold during the crisis process as a result of press revelations, publication of inquiry findings, decisions made by actors in other jurisdictions on the same issue, and so on.

DO CRISES MATTER? POLITICAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF CRISES COMPARED

Let us now examine, albeit in a tentative, inductive fashion, the case study findings (see the online Appendix for an overview) in light of the theoretical framework introduced above. First, we document how the cases examined pan out on the dependent variables, i.e. political and policy impacts respectively.

Political implications

In Table 1 we have classified the political effects of crises on office-holders in three categories: elite damage (e.g. focused blame), elite escape (e.g. diffused or displaced blame) and elite rejuvenation (e.g. praise and support instead of blame).

Elite damage occurs when political careers, aspirations and reputations take a sharp downturn following crisis-induced political blame games. Outgoing Spanish Prime Minister Aznar's conservative party paid a heavy price when he continued to insist that the Basque terrorist group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) was behind the Madrid train bombings, even though police investigations were quickly pointing towards Muslim radicals. Aznar's party lost the elections.

In other cases, leaders suffered only temporary damage to their public standing and political strength. The sharp and immediate edge of challenges to legitimacy blurred over the longer term, as they mingled with public judgements on the merits of new proposals, the advent of new issues, and the media's inevitable quest for new political stories. How fast this can happen was demonstrated by Ray Nagin's re-election as mayor of New Orleans, within a year of suffering

Table 1 Crisis effects on office-holders and policies/institutions: 15 cases compared

Case	*Effects on key political office-holders*	*Category and strength of leadership outcomes*	*Effects on policies/ institutions*	*Levels of learning/policy change*
Spain – 11/3 attacks	Election loss, prime minister's party	Elite damage***	Withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq (pre-crisis electoral commitment by then opposition party)	Core and deep core/paradigm shift
Germany – Elbe floods	Election win, governing coalition/Chancellor	Elite rejuvenation **	National civil protection agency founded	Secondary/administrative, not policy change
Sweden – tsunami	Reputation loss, prime minister and foreign minister	Elite damage**	Major upgrade of central government crisis-coping capacities	Secondary/administrative, not policy change
Finland – tsunami	Prime minister admission of 'government shortcomings'	Elite escape	No major institutional effects	Secondary/administrative, not policy change
Norway – tsunami	Foreign minister and prime minister admission of errors	Elite escape	Government proposes major overhaul of crisis response system	Secondary/administrative, not policy change
US – 9/11 attacks	Surge in presidential and mayorial popularity	Elite rejuvenation***	Major security policy and institutional reform	Core and deep core/paradigm shift
Belgium – Dutroux	Large drop in government's public support; massive public marches nationwide; two ministerial resignations	Elite damage***	Major police reform	Core and deep core/policy stalemate, but administrative reorganization
Belgium – dioxin	Ministerial resignations; election loss, government parties	Elite damage*	Agenda-setting	Secondary/incremental policy adjustment

US – Katrina	Large drop in presidential support (in longer term); resignation of agency chief executive	Elite damage **	Overhaul of policy and practices across sectors such as health, employment and emergency planning	Core and secondary (across multiple policy sectors)/policy adjustment + major administrative change
US – Challenger crash	Removal of key NASA administrators	Elite damage*	Major overhaul of Space Shuttle Program management and safety practices	Secondary/administrative, not policy change
US – Columbia crash	Some reorganization of staff	Elite escape	Space shuttle is officially retired in the near future	Secondary/hastening of program termination
Sweden – embassy seizure	None	Elite escape	Agenda-setting; no immediate policy change	Secondary/policy stalemate
Australia – Sydney water	Resignation of two agency senior executives but increase in support for Premier and his government	Elite rejuvenation*	New water quality authority created; increased political control over water sector; upgrading of sectoral crisis management capacities	Secondary/incremental policy adjustment + administrative change
Canada – Walkerton water	Some damage to Premier and his neo-liberal reform agenda	Elite damage*	Major changes in water management legislation, and regulatory oversight practices	Core and secondary/major policy adjustment and administrative reorganization
Israel – hall collapse	None	Elite escape	No policy change despite commission report urging major restructuring	None/policy stalemate

Notes: asterisks indicate the intensity of the effects. * = low, ** = medium, *** = high.

intense criticism of his crisis management performance during and after the onslaught of Hurricane Katrina.

Some leaders not only escape damage, they actually benefit from their crisis performance. The most compelling recent example of *elite reinvigoration* concerns New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani: written off by most prior to 9/11, but a national hero and presidential hopeful in its wake (but see Barrett and Collins (2006) for a critical account). In Germany, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder scraped by in the 2002 election – after having trailed his opponent in the polls for weeks – on the wings of his 'caring leader' performance during the Elbe floods that coincided with the election campaign. Whilst in the case of Giuliani his personal 'take charge' attitude was rewarded, Schröder reaped the political benefits of the crisis by a strategy of symbolic reassurance that he was doing what he could to sort out the chaos, while other levels of the governmental system dealt with the operational challenges of the disaster.

Furthermore, our cases suggest that *elite escape* can be possible not only on the wings of inquiry reports that spread blame around by emphasizing the complex, multifaceted nature of the causes of crisis, but also by incumbents proactively absorbing blame by 'taking responsibility' in a timely, non-coerced fashion. The Norwegian foreign minister and the Finnish prime minister publicly admitted government errors and took responsibility for them in the wake of their governments' bungled Tsunami responses. They ended up avoiding political flak, whereas their Swedish counterparts received the full brunt as they persisted in the (unconvincing) use of blame diffusion and blame displacement strategies.

Our tentative conclusion is that there are no iron-clad strategies that enhance the chance of political survival in the wake of crises (see also Hood *et al.* 2007). Conspicuous losers – Spanish Prime Minister Aznar and Stoiber (Schröder's main competitor in the 2002 'flood elections') – displayed rather different styles of blame management behavior. Those who might argue that Stoiber lost because he did not do what is expected of an opposition leader (blaming the government for the floods and criticizing it for shortcomings in flood response) would have a hard time explaining how the Spanish socialist leader Zapatero led his party to electoral success in the wake of the Madrid bombings.

Policy implications

In the right-hand side of Table 1, we adopt Sabatier's (1999) oft-used taxonomy to ascertain the degree of crisis-induced *policy change* in our cases.[5] It distinguishes between three levels of depth of change in the beliefs that underlie and drive policies ('deep core', 'core' and 'secondary aspects').

Turning to our own case evidence, Table 1 indicates that *some* degree of policy change is likely in the wake of a crisis. Only 2 of our 15 cases (the collapse of a banquet hall in Jerusalem and the Finland tsunami case) showed a complete absence of change. In most others, secondary (e.g. technical, instrumental adjustments in regulation and implementation practices) changes were made – if

nothing else to demonstrate government commitment to taking the 'lessons of crisis' seriously and show resolve. In a more limited number of cases, major (core, deep core) changes were made. All this fits neatly with the notion that deep core reforms are hard to accomplish (Hall 1993; cf. Heyse *et al.* 2006).

As predicted by the game matrices, the mere occurrence of an emergency and/or the prevalence of crisis discourse in a polity do(es) not guarantee that major policy changes will be made. In most cases, the changes made were relatively minor in kind, although often there were large numbers of them being enacted at the same time, often in response to 'shopping lists' of technical recommendations put forward by inquiry reports. And in two cases there was no change at all.

We should note that some policy changes were primarily government-driven: players within bureaucracy, governing coalition or sub-national governments harbored type-3 crisis frames and seized the opportunity to accomplish changes they had been contemplating for a long time (Keeler 1993). In other cases, governments felt forced by critics and/or by inquiry findings to adapt policy. Sometimes, changes were made quickly and without much debate; for example, 'knee-jerk' reforms (Lodge and Hood 2002) or symbolic reforms (statements of moral intent that are not followed up by concrete deployment of resources and policy instruments; see Rose and Davies 1994).

SHAPING CRISIS EXPLOITATION: CASE STUDY INFERENCES

Having documented the observable political and policy impacts of the crises studied, we now draw on our case evidence to derive some inductive inferences about the factors that may have shaped the crisis exploitation games that produced these results. We discern four such factors. In the 15 cases examined here, crisis exploitation politics was acted out principally in two arenas: the *mass media* and *official inquiries*. What happens there affects greatly which, if any, binding conclusions will be drawn in the more formal post-crisis encounters between executives and legislatures. In addition, we have observed that the course and outcomes of crises are also influenced by *situational* (the nature of the disturbance or emergency that triggers the crisis) and *contextual* factors (how crises are situated in political time).

Framing contests in the media arena

Mass media play a crucial role in the framing contest that ensues in the wake of a crisis (cf. Seeger *et al.* 2003; Ulmer *et al.* 2007). The media are not just a backdrop against which crisis actors operate, they constitute a prime arena in which incumbents and critics, status-quo players and change advocates have to perform to obtain or preserve political clout. Crisis actors need to convince news-makers to pay attention to their particular crisis frame, and, if possible, support it.

The cases studied here suggest that, as Edelman (1977) predicted, incumbent elites can be quite effective in 'selling' their frame to the media. But they also show that office-holders can fail miserably in this regard, or succumb under the pressure of suitably dramatized counter-frames advanced by well-organized oppositional coalitions. The most interesting example of this contrast is President Bush's differential framing performance during the aftermaths of 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. Bush succeeded magnificently during the first, but he lost badly after Katrina hit Louisiana and Mississippi (Preston 2008). Note that, in the former, Bush took the stance of a change advocate, whereas, in the latter, he acted as a status-quo player.

Another interesting case was the fight between Prime Minister Aznar and opposition leader Zapatero who tried to impose their diametrically opposing views on the causes of the Madrid bombings on the Spanish public, which was readying itself to vote several days later. Again the status-quo player lost, the change advocate won. Aznar lost (while leading in the polls up to the day of the bombings), mostly because he could not convince the public that ETA had perpetrated the bombings and consequently was open to charges of deliberately misleading the public as to the real, to him politically inconvenient, culprit, namely Al Qaeda.

The crisis communication literature argues that a proactive, professional media performance enhances an actor's credibility; reactive and disorganized crisis communication can do the reverse (Fearn-Banks 2007; Ulmer *et al.* 2007). Lying, understating or denying obvious problems, and promising relief without delivering undermine an actor's credibility (Boin *et al.* 2005). And in this perspective the degree to which the media's crisis reporting and commentary align with the frames put forward by a particular political actor depends upon the credibility of that actor's crisis communication.

The rival interpretation is that the media pursue their own agenda in crisis reporting (see Streitmatter 1997), and that the crisis communication performance by any of the actors matters less than the degree to which the color of the frame they put forward fits with the pre-existing biases of the main media outlets. The content analysis of media coverage in three countries (Finland, Norway and Sweden) which saw their nationals victimized by the Asian tsunami provides some support for the idea that the selection and tone of media reporting may also matter (Brändström *et al.* 2008). How willing the media are to apportion blame directly to individual office-holders appears especially relevant, even if the direct causes are (in this case quite literally) far removed from them (Hearit 2006). It follows logically from our analysis in section 3 that the more the media's crisis reporting and commentary emphasize exogenous interpretations of a crisis, the less likely it is that government actors will suffer negative political consequences in its aftermath; the more it emphasizes endogenous ones, the more likely they will.

We should note that these inferences provide a rival interpretation to those arguing that already popular leaders (parties, governments) are more likely to emerge as the crisis heroes, or will at least be spared from being publicly

branded its villains. This interpretation discounts the role of clever and not so clever crisis communication strategies of actors, and argues that crises intensify but generally do not suddenly change the tone of media reporting about the chief actors involved (Wilkins 1987; Wilkins *et al.* 1989; Seeger *et al.* 2003). Hence, a radical formulation of this interpretation would be that the thrust of media reporting and opinion of an actor's behavior in relation to crisis episodes correlates highly with its pre-crisis reporting and opinion about that actor, regardless of that actor's specific crisis communication behavior. It should be noted that, within our set of cases, the Bush 2001 and Schröder cases do not support this contention.

Framing contests in the inquiry arena

The initiation of a commission of inquiry creates a new venue that all actors in the post-crisis phase will seek to explore (Jones and Baumgartner 2005). Office-holders may seek to boost or salvage their image by embracing an investigation and its outcomes. Crisis victims and regime critics often seek to further escalate the crisis. In the great majority of our cases, a commission was initiated sooner or later after the crisis. However, the role that these inquiries played in determining the outcome of the crises varies quite dramatically. In some cases (9/11 and the Shuttle disasters), the reports proved all important. In other cases (Katrina, Jerusalem banquet hall collapse), these reports played a less determinate role. Our cases suggest that the outcome has something to do with the way the inquiry process is managed.

Edelman (1977: 103) argued long ago that the 'skeptical search for truth is bound before long to collide with established norms and authority.' One might expect that crisis inquiries would lend ample illustration to this dictum. But out of 15 crisis cases only the 9/11 commission was confronted with overt and persistent attempts by the incumbent elites to prevent, obstruct and 'shape' its work. In most others, incumbent authorities may or may not have wanted to do so, but were politically unable to (as, in the end, the Bush administration proved to be). These crises put so much public and political pressure on governments to open up and have the record examined that they could do little to resist that push. Parker and Dekker put it effectively when they observe:

> To publicly oppose and block the creation of an independent commission would have made the administration part of the problem of resolving questions about what went wrong on September 11. Doing so would have been associated with inaction and obstructionism, while publicly endorsing the commission was emblematic of leadership and the possibility of resolution and renewal.
>
> (Parker and Decker 2008: 273)

Most governments studied here chose the default option. They tried to prevent the inquiry from being run in the adversarial, politicized legislative arena (only

the Belgian government had to acquiesce to parliamentary investigations in the wake of the Dutroux child abduction and dioxin food poisoning scandals). The vast majority were conducted by blue-ribbon commissions or senior lawyers. However, their findings were by no means devoid of critical statements about the government's own role. Still, office-holders appear to operate on the assumption that an expert-led (as opposed to a parliamentary) inquiry is less likely to turn into a political witch-hunt, reasoning that expert-driven inquiries tend to go for policy substance, not for political skulls. And so they did in the cases studied here: whilst their tone was grave, their focus was mostly on regulatory, managerial and cultural factors. Questions about political responsibility were usually hinted at but seldom addressed in an up-front manner – experts and lawyers deferred to parliaments and legislatures to make those judgements. Hence, *ceteris paribus*, crises investigated by expert commissions appear less likely to result in political fatalities.

Situational factors and actor propensities

A crucial factor affecting the dynamics and outcomes of crisis exploitation games appears to be the nature of the crisis at hand. Some events are apparently so compelling that the scope for 'meaning making' through purposeful framing is rather constricted. For example, it was obviously hard to deny that no serious errors had been made when a second NASA space shuttle failed, or when it transpired that convicted child molester and rapist Marc Dutroux was not quickly and methodically investigated when children started disappearing in Belgium.

But it was not so obvious who was at fault when a group of fanatical and well-organized terrorists successfully used hitherto unprecedented methods to attack the United States mainland, or when a spate of bad weather upstream caused massive riverine flooding in Germany. To create a politically dominant view of those latter crises as being a product of avoidable policy failures required a lot more 'framing work'. The Bush administration and the Schröder government enjoyed a wider scope for defensive maneuvers than the NASA administrators and Belgian police/judicial authorities did. It thus appears possible that the scope and dimension of a crisis can impose, at least temporarily, a symbolic script that prescribes national solidarity rather than political backbiting.

Some crises hit at the heart of existing policy domains, exposing deficiencies in regulatory or service-delivery arrangements (Alink *et al.* 2001). As a consequence, they provide a major opportunity for issue advocates to raise the salience of the issue domain and reshape its hitherto dominant problem definitions and policy mixes. In the 2000 Walkerton water crisis, for instance, corruption on the part of local operatives soon became secondary to the context that allowed it to happen: public sector cutbacks, lax regulation and Canadian Premier Mike Harris's 'Common Sense Revolution.' Consequently, the crisis became a focus for opposition forces to cohere against the neo-liberal Harris government and its attitude to the environment and regulation (Snider 2004).

From the point of view of status-quo players, these agenda-setting crises lend themselves more readily to 'compartmentalization' through expert committees making recommendations for policy reform and organizational renewal within the confines of the policy community at hand. This is intended to depoliticize the issues, and remove them from the front stage of mainstream politics – at least for the time being. To be sure, the policy aftermath of agenda-setting crises may at times throw up perplexing political questions – about the future of nuclear power plants, for example – but it is less likely to put into question the competence and legitimacy of the (centre of) government and its crisis management capacities.

Temporal factors and actor propensities

The Belgian government dealt with the dioxin crisis weeks before national elections. The 2004 Madrid bombings occurred only a few days prior to national elections. President Bush had only been in office for nine months when he faced 11 September 2001. This brings us to another set of factors that can enable and constrain crisis exploitation strategies: temporal factors. They take two forms.

First, crises are discrete episodes in ongoing political and bureaucratic processes. Therefore, the timing of their occurrence in relation to the ongoing rhythms of governance and organizational life may matter greatly. The contrast between the relatively intense, protracted yet politically not highly consequential Swedish post-tsunami politics and the dramatic, immediate German and Spanish crisis-induced electoral reversals of fortune is illuminating in this regard. The location of crises in political time provides different actors with particular incentives to inflate or deflate issues of responsibility and blame. On balance, the cases studied suggest that the closer a crisis hits to the (anticipated) time of a forthcoming election, the more likely that crisis exploitation attempts to change advocates will be successful, and thus the higher the likelihood of elite damage, policy reform and institutional change.

Second, our cases alert us to the fact that crises occur at different points in the political careers of the key protagonists. The cases suggest that long-time government leaders are much more likely to adopt defensive postures than newly incumbent leaders, whose personal record is not likely to be at stake in post-crisis inquiries, and who in fact may welcome these as a way of putting distance between themselves and their predecessors' regime and policies. President Bush demonstrated much less inclination to reform in the wake of Hurricane Katrina than he did after 9/11. The Swedish Prime Minister Persson had been in office for six years when the tsunami crisis hit. Reform was forced upon his administration. The Finnish premier, recently elected, had less trouble accepting responsibility for the response to the Asian tsunami, and in doing so nipped a looming political crisis in the bud.

To be sure, doctrines of ministerial responsibility in parliamentary systems presuppose that the office-holder is held responsible even for the behavior of

his predecessors. However, in political practice, personal non-involvement in crises or fiascos is usually enough to get novice office-holders off the hook, particularly when they themselves champion the cause of far-reaching investigation and sweeping reform. Hence, we surmise that, *ceteris paribus*, the shorter an actor's incumbency at the time of crisis occurrence, the lower the likelihood that of elite damage, yet the higher the likelihood that he is willing to consider making major policy change in the wake of a crisis.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article, we attempted to identify the factors that shape the relation between crisis exploitation attempts and the political as well as policy impacts of crises. While it is clear that contextual factors limit the room for elite strategizing, our case studies also show that crisis exploitation strategies matter. Skillful office-holders can manage to politically 'contain' crises, and thereby insulate themselves and their colleagues from sanctions and reputation losses. Likwise, skillful status-quo players can weather the storm of destabilization that crisis inquiries unleash, and effectively protect their policy commitments from pressures for radical change. But we have seen that oppositional forces sometimes successfully attempt to politicize crises in their efforts to weaken or remove their office-holding rivals, and that change advocates may manage to exploit crises to discredit and dismantle well-entrenched policies and institutions. The case evidence also suggests that several recurrent 'circumstantial' conditions impinge on the choice and implementation of exploitation strategies.

In sum, it appears that incumbents are more likely to successfully survive the *political* game of crisis exploitation if: (a) they have a good stock of pre-crisis political capital with key media actors; (b) they cogently and proactively communicate their crisis frames; (c) they have not been in office very long; (d) there is a predominant view that the crisis had exogenous causes; and (e) they manage to have an 'expert' commission as the main locus of official inquiry into the crisis. In contrast, oppositional forces are more likely to gain the upper hand when: (a) the crisis is widely perceived to have endogenous causes; (b) incumbents have spent a long time in office; (c) incumbents have recently been getting a good deal of 'bad press'; and (d) they manage to instigate or capitalize upon a 'political' (non-expert) inquiry.

As far as the *policy* game of crisis exploitation is concerned, our tentative case comparison supports the prediction derived from Figure 3 that even in the wake of destabilizing crisis episodes, incremental rather than radical change is the name of the game in pluralistic polities. Our empirical evidence was insufficiently precise and longitudinal to test the related inference that there are different types of incremental changes, and that these may display important differences in terms of their political support and thus long-term stability. Yet overall, this study analytically underpins and demonstrates relatively clear empirical support for the findings of earlier studies, which suggest that crises

are not a sufficient condition for policy change to occur, in spite of popular notions to the contrary (Alink *et al.* 2001; Kuipers 2006; Resodihardjo 2006). Our findings thus cast further doubt on path dependency theory's reliance on 'critical junctures' as the 'deus ex machina' explanation for the incidence of changes in otherwise stable policy communities (Thelen 2004; Kay 2006).

Further study is needed in several areas. First, as stated, a more systematic and comprehensive test of the framework developed here is called for: do these game matrices 'work', and do the suggested conditioning forces and tentative generalizations discussed in section 4 withstand scrutiny? A good-sized population of cases will allow for statistical analysis that can uncover specific relations between crisis conditions, actor stances and strategies, and political, policy and institutional outcomes. Second, students of crisis exploitation should systematically explore the links and spill-over effects between the political and policy games: how are they structured in time, to what extent are stances in the political game used as bargaining chips in the policy game, and vice versa?

Third, future research may do well to differentiate not only between political and policy changes but to take a separate look at the institutional effects of crises; for example, on the organizational make-up and practices of polities and policy systems affected by them. We need to think of crisis outcomes in a multidimensional fashion: they can take on various combinations and varying degrees of political, policy and institutional change. These complexities and nuances in the dependent variables of crisis exploitation theory need to be captured more fully.

Fourth, a pivotal part of any attempt to ascertain policy as well as institutional effects of crises is to establish the difference between symbolic and substantive change (Rose and Davies 1994). Analysts need to establish systematically if the observed changes remained confined to the domain of rhetoric and intentions, or have in fact spilled over into tangible changes in allocation of resources and patterns of behavior. This is not to say that one is 'fake' and the other 'real.' Words and gestures that are given meaning (because they are embraced or contested) by crisis participants and mass publics can both fuel and quell crises, and thus be every bit as 'real' as budget cutbacks and agency terminations.

Fifth, this study clearly shows that one should not simply assume that incumbent office-holders will automatically be status-quo players, and their political opponents will be change advocates. Though in the *political* game of crisis exploitation, this will almost certainly be the case, in the *policy* game one might well encounter the reverse situation: radical office-holders seeking to 'hijack' the crisis to enact far-reaching changes, and oppositional forces seeking to preserve the policies of the past, however imperfect. For example, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks some of the greatest changes (the new Patriot Act; the Homeland Security department) were hailed as revolutionary reforms by incumbents, yet dismissed by some of their critics as symbolic

stopgaps that did little but reinforce the status quo, and by others as normatively dangerous departures from cherished principles of civil liberties. And so future students of crisis politics and policy reform need to empirically examine the rhetoric and behavior of all key actors in order to determine their strategic preferences, and not simply infer these preferences from their position in the political game of government versus opposition.

Our present, limited effort does show very clearly that when a crisis occurs, political leaders of both government and opposition have reason to be both fearful and hopeful. They may be fearful because crises can unleash public moods and political forces beyond their control, and appear to harbor strong incentives for many actors to start potentially damaging blame games. They can be hopeful because at the same time, and partly for the same reasons, quite a few political careers have actually been made or enhanced by smart and well-balanced crisis behavior – in the operational arena, but even more so in the symbolic domain of public 'meaning making' in times of collective uncertainty and despair.

It is important to understand the forces that shape the post-emergency phase of crises and the factors that may turn them into what we refer to as long-shadow crises. While a certain degree of politicization of crises is to be expected and may even be healthy for a democratic polity, intense and prolonged politicization actually compromise democratic accountability and systematic policy learning. A theory of crisis exploitation can help us to understand how and why these crucial differences of degree occur.

Biographical notes: Arjen Boin is Associate Professor at the Public Administration Institute, Louisiana State University, USA. Paul 't Hart is Professor, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University Canberra, Australia, and Utrecht School of Governance, Utrecht University, The Netherlands. Allan McConnell is Associate Professor of Public Policy, Department of Government and International Relations, University of Sydney, Australia.

Addresses for correspondence: Arjen Boin, Public Administration Institute, Louisiana State University, 1103B Patrick F. Taylor Hall, Baton Rouge, LA 70803, USA. email: boin@lsu.edu/Paul 't Hart, Political Science Program, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, Canberra ACT 0200, Australia. email: hart@coombs.anu.edu.au/Allan McConnell, Department of Government and International Relations, University of Sydney, Sydney NSW 2006, Australia. email: a.mcconnell@usyd.edu.au

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Bob Goodin, Lena Eriksson, John Aldrich, Kieran Healy, John Kane, Haig Patapan and four anonymous referees for their very useful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

NOTES

1 Our notion of frames follows that of Entman (1993: 52) who argues that '[t]o frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.'

2 Political actors may in fact even seek to semantically 'create' a sense of crisis in order to gain authority. As Edelman (1977: 47) observes with characteristic succinctness: 'Any regime that prides itself on crisis management is sure to find crises to manage.'

3 During the writing of this article, Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine* came out, which explicitly uses the term crisis exploitation too, but uses it as part of a more conspiratorial interpretation of crisis-induced politics and policy change, which suggests that only shadowy neo-liberal, big business and authoritarian political-bureaucratic elites are able to 'exploit' crises (see also Wolf 2007). In our study, perhaps based on a stronger belief in the still essentially pluralistic nature of politics in established democracies (our locus of analysis, whereas Klein looked at many developing nations), we leave open the possibility that both 'establishment' and its 'challengers' will try, and sometimes be able, to engage in successful crisis exploitation.

4 These dimensions can be tightly connected, as when the political demise of a key office-holder removes the main champion of a particular policy from the political scene. But in many cases the 'programmatic' (policy-focused) and 'political' (office-holders-focused) dimensions of policy evaluation and political accountability episodes appear to be completely unrelated. See Bovens *et al.* (2001).

5 It should be noted that the assessment was done in a relatively loose fashion; no formal content-analytic coding scheme or calculus was used. Hence our interpretation of these outcomes is heuristic rather than scientifically robust (although there was intersubjective agreement on the classifications among the three authors in applying the Sabatier typology).

REFERENCES

Alink, F., Boin, R.A. and 'tHart, P. (2001) 'Institutional crises and reforms in policy sectors: the case of refugee policy in Europe', *Journal of European Public Policy* 8(2): 286–306.

Axelrod, R. and Cohen, M.D. (2000) *Harnessing Complexity: Organizational Implications of a Scientific Frontier*, New York: Free Press.

Barnard, C.I. (1938) *The Functions of the Executive*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Barrett, W. and Collins, D. (2006) *Grand Illusion: The Untold Story of Rudy Giuliani and 9/11*, New York: HarperCollins.

Barton, A. (1969) *Communities in Disaster: A Sociological Analysis of Collective Stress Situations*, New York: Doubleday.

Baumgartner, F.R. and Jones, B.D. (1993) *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Baumgartner, F.R. and Jones, B.D. (eds) (2002) *Policy Dynamics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Birkland, T.A. (1997) *After Disaster: Agenda Setting, Public Policy and Focusing Events*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Birkland, T.A. (2006) *Lessons of Disaster: Policy Change After Catastrophic Events*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Boin, A., 't Hart, P., Stern, E. and Sundelius, B. (2005) *The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership Under Pressure*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bovens, M. (1998) *The Quest for Responsibility: Accountability and Citizenship in Complex Organizations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Bovens, M. and 't Hart, P. (1996) *Understanding Policy Fiascos*, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
Bovens, M., 't Hart, P. and Peters, B.G. (eds) (2001) *Success and Failure in Public Governance: A Comparative Analysis*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
Brändström, A. and Kuipers, S.L. (2003) 'From "normal incidents" to political crises: understanding the selective politicization of policy failures', *Government and Opposition* 38(3): 279–305.
Brändström, A., Kuipers, S. and Daléus, P. (2008) 'The politics of tsunami responses: comparing patterns of blame management in Scandinavia', in A. Boin, A. McConnell and P. 't Hart (eds), *Governing After Crisis: The Politics of Investigation, Accountability and Learning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 114–47.
De Vries, M. (2004) 'Framing crises: response patterns to explosions in fireworks factories', *Administration and Society* 36(5): 594–614.
Drennan, L.T. and McConnell, A. (2007) *Risk and Crisis Management in the Public Sector*, Abingdon: Routledge.
Edelman, M. (1977) *Political Language: Words That Succeed and Policies That Fail*, New York: Academic Press.
Entman, R. (1993) 'Framing: toward clarification of a fractured paradigm', *Journal of Communication* 43(4): 51–8.
Fearn-Banks, K. (2007) *Crisis Communications: A Case Book Approach* 3rd edn, Mahwaw, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
Garnett, J.L. and Kouzmin, A. (2007) 'Communicating throughout Katrina: competing and complementary conceptual lenses on crisis communication', *Public Administration Review* 67(1): 171–88.
Hall, P.A. (1993) 'Policy paradigms, social learning and the state: the case of economic policymaking in Britain', *Comparative Politics* 35(3): 275–96.
't Hart, P. (1993) 'Symbols, rituals and power: the lost dimensions of crisis management', *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management* 1(1): 36–50.
Hay, C. (2002) *Political Analysis*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Hearit, K.M. (2006) *Crisis Management by Apology*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
Heyse, L., Resodihardjo, S., Lantink, T. and Lettinga, B. (eds) (2006) *Reform in Europe: Breaking the Barriers in Government*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
Hood, C., Jennings, W., Hogwood, B. and Beeston, C. (2007) 'Fighting fires in testing times: exploring a staged response hypothesis for blame management in two exam fiasco cases', *CARR Discussion Paper 42*, London: Centre for Analysis of Risk and Regulation, London School of Economics.
Howarth, D., Norval, A.J. and Stavrakakis, Y. (eds) (2000) *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies and Social Change*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Jones, B.D. and Baumgartner, F.R. (2005) *The Politics of Attention: How Government Prioritizes Problems*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Kay, A. (2006) *The Dynamics of Public Policy*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
Keeler, J. (1993) 'Opening the window for reform: mandates, crises, and extraordinary policy-making', *Comparative Political Studies* 25(1): 433–86.
Kingdon, J. (2003) *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies* 2nd edn, New York: Longman.
Klein, N. (2007) *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, New York: Metropolitan Books.
Kuipers, S. (2006) *The Crisis Imperative: Crisis Rhetoric and Welfare State Reform in Belgium and the Netherlands in the Early 1990s*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Lodge, M. and Hood, C. (2002) 'Pavlovian policy responses to media feeding frenzies? Dangerous dogs regulation in comparative perspective', *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management* 10(1): 1–13.
Lomborg, B. (ed.) (2004) *Global Crises, Global Solutions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Mitroff, I.I. and Pauchant, T.C. (1990) *We're So Big and Powerful that Nothing Bad Can Happen to Us*, New York: Carol Publishing.
Parker, C.F. and Dekker, S. (2008) 'September 11 and postcrisis investigation: exploring the role and impact of the 9/11 Commission', in A. Boin, A. McConnell and P. 't Hart (eds), *Governing After Crisis: The Politics of Investigation, Accountability and Learning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Perry, R.W. and Quarantelli, E.L. (eds) (2005) *What is a Disaster? New Answers to Old Questions*, Philadelphia: Xlibris Press.
Posner, R.A. (2004) *Catastrophe: Risk and Response*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
Preston, T. (2008) 'Weathering the politics of responsibility and blame: the Bush administration and its response to hurricane Katrina', in A. Boin, A. McConnell and P. 't Hart (eds), *Governing After Crisis: The Politics of Investigation, Accountability and Learning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 33–61.
Primo, D.M. and Cobb, R.W. (2003) *The Plane Truth*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.
Quarantelli, E.L. (ed.) (1998) *What is a Disaster? Perspectives on the Question*, London: Routledge.
Resodihardjo, S. (2006) *Crisis and Change: Understanding Crisis-Reform Processes in Dutch and British Prison Services*, Amsterdam: Free University.
Riker, W.H. (1986) *The Art of Political Manipulation*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
Romzek, B.S. and Dubnick, M.J. (1987) 'Accountability in the public sector: lessons from the Challenger tragedy', *Public Administration Review* 47(3): 227–238.
Rose, R. and Davies, P. (1994) *Inheritance in Public Policy: Change Without Choice in Britain*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
Rosenthal, U. (1988) 'The vulnerability of the city', in L.J. Roborgh, R. Stough and A.J. Toonen (eds), *Public Infrastructure Revisited*, Indiana: Indiana University Press, pp. 1–21.
Rosenthal, U. (1998) 'Future disasters, future definitions', in E.L. Quarantelli (ed.), *What is a Disaster?: Perspectives on the Question*, London: Routledge, pp. 146–60.
Rosenthal, U., Boin, R.A. and Comfort, L.K. (eds) (2001) *Managing Crises: Threats, Dilemmas, Opportunities*, Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.
Rosenthal, U., Charles, M.T. and 't Hart, P. (eds) (1989) *Coping with Crisis: The Management of Disasters, Riots and Terrorism*, Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.
Rozario, K. (2005) 'Making progress: disaster narratives and the art of optimism in modern America', in L.J. Vale and T.J. Campanella (eds), *The Resilient City: How Modern Cities Recover from Disaster*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 27–54.
Sabatier, P.A. (ed.) (1999) *Theories of the Policy Process*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
Seeger, M.W., Sellnow, T.L. and Ulmer, R.R. (2003) *Communication and Organizational Crisis*, Westport, CT: Praeger.
Slatter, S. (1984) *Corporate Recovery: Successful Turnaround Strategies and Their Implementation*, London: Penguin Books.
Snider, L. (2004) 'Resisting neo-liberalism: the poisoned water disaster in Walkerton, Ontario', *Socio & Legal Studies* 13(2): 265–89.
Steinberg, T. (2000) *Acts of God: The History of Unnatural Disasters in America*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Stone, D. (2001) *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making* 2nd edn, New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
Streitmatter, R. (1997) *Mightier than the Sword: How the News Media Have Shaped American History*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
Tarrow, S. (1994) *Power in Movement*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Thelen, K. (2004) *How Institutions Evolve: The Political Economy of Skills in Germany, Britain, the United States, and Japan*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
Turner, B.A. and Pidgeon, N. (1997) *Man-Made Disasters* 2nd edn, London: Butterworth Heinemann.
Ulmer, R.R., Sellnow, T.L. and Seeger, M.W. (2007) *Effective Crisis Communication: Moving from Crisis to Opportunity*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
Wagner-Pacifici, R. (1986) *The Moro Morality Play: Terrorism as Social Drama*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Wagner-Pacifici, R. (1994) *Discourse and Destruction: The City of Philadelphia versus MOVE*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Wilkins, L. (1987) *Shared Vulnerability: The Media and American Perceptions of the Bhopal Disaster*, New York: Greenwood Press.
Wilkins, L., Walters, T. and Walters, L.M. (eds) (1989) *Bad Tidings: Communication and Catastrophe*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
Wolf, N. (2007) *The End of America: Letter of Warning to a Young Patriot*, Melbourne: Scribe.