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The Multi-level Blame Game – Shifting the Blame for EU Migration Policies

Tim Heinkelmann-Wild and Bernhard Zangl

Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich

tim.heinkelmann-wild@gsi.lmu.de

Abstract

Who blames who in multi-level blame games? Existing research either focusses on policy-makers' preferences or the opportunities offered by the institutional structures in which they operate. As these two strands of literature barely refer to each other, we theoretically develop and empirically assess an integrated model of blame shifting in multi-level governance system. In line with the first strand, we assume that policy-makers have a preference for shifting blame onto actors on a different level. In line with the second strand, we suppose that the opportunities for doing so depend on policy-makers' own institutional responsibility. We check the plausibility of our integrated model by examining policy-makers' blame attributions in three cases of contested European Union (EU) migration policies: border control, asylum, and welfare entitlements. We find that our integrated model fares better in explaining blame shifting in these cases than the isolated models.

Keywords: blame shifting; European Union; migration policies; multi-level governance systems; public responsibility attribution; blame avoidance; accountability.