

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
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A Formal Model of Social Blame

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Abstract

Politicians are constantly subject to instances of public blaming and their behavior is constantly affected by it. Although blame is extensively explored by psychologists and political scientists, the current body of literature lacks a unifying framework that incorporates personal-level blame attribution into a macro-level explanation of the formation of social blame – a framework that enables an analysis of the social and political conditions which alter the intensity and personal focus of blame attributions.

This work attempts to bridge this theoretical gap by asking what structural links shape the relationship between social blame-makers and blame-takers. To provide a possible answer, we present a formal model of political blame attribution that captures how individual blame attribution is transformed into a notion of aggregate blame, relying on previous psychological descriptive models of blame formation. Following this, we use the model to explore a possible connection between two central political science constructs – institutional design and social cleavages – and the way social blame is shaped. For this purpose we introduce concepts of coherence and agreement, and provide formal measures for these concepts based on our definitions of social blame. This typology then serves as a potential guideline for future research.