

Partisanship, blame avoidance behaviours and voter reactions to allegations of political misconduct[☆]

Nanna Lauritz Schönhage^{a,b,*}, Benny Geys^c

^a Cluster of Excellence on 'The Politics of Inequality', University of Konstanz, Universitätsstraße 10, 78457 Konstanz, Germany

^b Department of Sociology and Political Science, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, PO Box 8900, Torgarden, 7491 Trondheim, Norway

^c Department of Economics, Norwegian Business School (BI), Kong Christian Frederiks Plass 5, 5006 Bergen, Norway

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Accounts
Blame avoidance
Partisanship
Survey experiment

ABSTRACT

Politicians often engage in blame avoidance behaviours in order to evade electoral punishment following allegations of misconduct. A key question concerns the (in)effectiveness of such behaviours in mitigating voter opinions about the alleged misconduct and the appropriate punishment. In this article, we examine how this (in)effectiveness may be shaped by: (1) the characteristics of blame avoidance behaviours, and (2) voters' partisan (mis)alignment with the alleged offender. We address this question using a between-subject survey experiment among a sample of Norwegian citizens ($N = 1996$). Our main findings suggest that blame avoidance behaviours can be effective in mitigating voters' assessment of the alleged misconduct and of the punishment the politician should face. This is particularly true when it concerns politicians from respondents' most-preferred party, and among left-wing voters. These findings help explain when and why scandals may (fail to) affect politicians' electoral fortunes.

1. Introduction

The literature investigating the electoral impact of political scandals shows that scandal-tainted politicians can witness very different electoral consequences. Several reasons have been advanced for this observation, including partisan bias (Anderson and Tverdova, 2003; Anduiza et al., 2013; Chang and Kerr, 2017; Funck and McCabe, 2022), politicians' race or attractiveness (Funk, 1996; Stockemer and Praino, 2019), voters' social networks and prior beliefs (Pavão, 2018; Arias et al., 2022), the multidimensionality of voters' calculus (Klašnja and Tucker, 2013; Hainmueller et al., 2014), or the presence of clientelist exchange relationships (Bøttkjær and Justesen, 2021). We contribute to this literature starting from the observation that politicians often seek to minimize the implications of scandals or allegations of misconduct through blame avoidance behaviours (Weaver, 1986; McGraw, 1990, 1991; Hood, 2011). This involves politicians giving an 'account' of

events that seeks to shape voters' impressions in a way that can turn the tide of blame (Scott and Lyman, 1968; Hood et al., 2016). Our central argument is that politicians' accounts are a critical piece of the accountability puzzle, and help explain when and why politicians can (not) get away with murder. This advances our understanding of (the lack of) electoral accountability in the aftermath of a scandal.

Clearly, all blame avoidance behaviours may not be equally effective in affecting public opinion. Previous research indeed suggests that some 'accounts' work better than others in the context of policy decisions and reforms (McGraw, 1990, 1991; Wenzelburger and Hörisch, 2016). Some evidence also suggests that certain blame avoidance behaviours can backfire on politicians (Hood et al., 2016). Our article extends this line of research by assessing whether (or not) similar findings arise in the case of political scandals and allegations of misconduct (rather than policy outcomes and reforms). Furthermore, we take inspiration from research indicating that real-world scandal responses often display

[☆] We gratefully acknowledge all respondents for their time, FWO Vlaanderen for financial support (grant nr. G000218N), as well as insightful feedback from two anonymous referees, Ivar Gaasland, Elisabeth Ivarsflaten, Paul Sniderman, Florence So, Endre Tvinnereim, and participants at the 'Intra- and inter-party conflict' workshop (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin), the 2022 EPSA Conference, the 2022 DIGSSCORE Summer seminar, and Brownbag seminars at Universität Konstanz and BI Bergen. The project received a positive advice from the Ethical Committee for Social Sciences and Humanities at Vrije Universiteit Brussel on 24 November 2020 (reference nr. ECHW_226), and the experimental design was pre-registered at the AEA RCT Registry.

* Corresponding author. Department of Sociology and Political Science, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, PO Box 8900, Torgarden, 7491 Trondheim, Norway.

E-mail addresses: nanna@schonhage.no, nannalauritz@gmail.com (N.L. Schönhage), Benny.Geys@bi.no (B. Geys).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2023.102742>

Received 28 March 2023; Received in revised form 20 December 2023; Accepted 22 December 2023

Available online 5 January 2024

0261-3794/© 2023 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

partisan biases (Anderson and Tverdova, 2003; Anduiza et al., 2013; Chang and Kerr, 2017; Solaz et al., 2019), and assess whether and how the (lack of) effectiveness of blame avoidance behaviours depends on voters' partisan (mis)alignment with the alleged offender. From a theoretical perspective, partisanship can have a substantial impact on how people perceive, process, and interpret political events (Blais et al., 2010; Bisgaard, 2019; Arias et al., 2022; Schönhage and Geys, 2022, 2023). Given long-standing suspicions regarding potential asymmetries in the resulting partisan bias by individuals' partisan leaning (McClosky and Chong, 1985; Ditto et al., 2019), this need not materialize equally among left- and right-wing voters. We therefore also verify whether voters who identify with left- or right-wing parties are more or less prone to the influence of partisanship.

Our empirical analysis rests on a 2×5 between-subject survey experiment fielded during the 19th wave of the Norwegian Citizen Panel in November 2020 ($N = 1996$). Respondents were assigned to vignettes describing a hypothetical, but realistic, case involving a politician alleged to have handed in false travel expense claims for fictitious trips.¹ The vignette contains two sources of experimental variation. The first specifies whether the accused politician is from the respondent's most or least preferred party (i.e. in-group/out-group treatment), which allows us to investigate the role of partisanship. The second relates to the politician's blame avoidance behaviour, which is formulated based on media reports about politicians' reactions to real-world financial scandals. Respondents are then asked to evaluate the gravity of the alleged misconduct, how believable the politician's account is (if provided), and what consequences the politician should face (i.e. pay back the money, resign from his position, expulsion from his position, or legal prosecution). This allows us to capture the (in)effectiveness of distinct blame avoidance behaviours in terms of their (in)ability to mitigate adverse voter responses.

Our study offers two main contributions. First, extant work builds on both observational and experimental designs to explore when and why politicians are (not) held accountable for misconduct (Vivyan et al., 2012; Bøttkjær and Justesen, 2021; Rajan and Pao, 2022). While this literature explores a variety of mechanisms, we are the first to study the effect of a politician's *account* of this wrongdoing using an experimental design. This offers novel insights into how politicians may mitigate the electoral implications of misconduct allegations. Second, voters often appear to apply weaker sanctions to 'in-party' politicians involved in a scandal (Anderson and Tverdova, 2003; Anduiza et al., 2013; Chang and Kerr, 2017; Funck and McCabe, 2022). Our analysis connects the literature on such partisan biases to the literature on politicians' blame avoidance behaviour (Weaver, 1986; McGraw, 1990, 1991; Hood, 2011). This allows evaluating whether partisan leniency for politician misconduct is driven in part by a partisan bias in how voters respond to politicians' accounts of their (alleged) misconduct.

2. Theoretical framework

In a classic contribution on the politics of blame avoidance, Weaver (1986, p. 371) argues that "politicians are motivated primarily by the desire to avoid blame for unpopular actions". A vast theoretical as well as empirical literature has subsequently illustrated that politicians may rely on various anticipatory and reactive blame avoidance strategies (Weaver, 1986; Hinterleitner, 2020). The former are built into the institutional structures of the governance system and aim to obscure blame attributions (Kevins and Vis, 2023), while the latter are employed after negative outcomes have materialized and aim to turn the tide of blame (Hinterleitner and Sager, 2017). Such reactive strategies – which

¹ Norway has witnessed several such scandals in recent years involving politicians across the left-right spectrum (Hegnar, 2020). To maximize the realism of our vignette, its phrasing is adapted from newspaper articles about these real-world cases (more details below).

are the focus of our analysis – generally entail a framing or presentational challenge: e.g., (re)interpreting events and their causes, reframing meanings constructing narrative distinctions, or shifting blame onto others (Scott and Lyman 1968; Weaver, 1986; Hood, 2011; Schönhage et al., 2023).

Building on path-breaking research in the sociology of interpersonal relationships (Scott and Lyman, 1968), reactive blame avoidance strategies have traditionally been classified into two broad categories (McGraw, 1990, 1991; Bolkan and Daly, 2009; Hansson, 2015). The first category – often referred to as 'excuses' – entails acceptance of the fact that the offence was bad, but a refusal to accept responsibility. Several strategies have been identified within this broad umbrella, such as individuals bringing forward claims of mitigating circumstances or pleading ignorance of the rules (Scott and Lyman, 1968; McGraw, 1990). The second category – 'justifications' – involves acceptance of responsibility, but a denial that the offence was bad. This again covers a broad range of strategies. For instance, Scott and Lyman (1968) and McGraw (1990) include references to peers engaging in similar conduct or placing one's actions against the benefits created for relevant social groups (for more details, see Online Appendix C).²

Given the wide range of potential strategies within each category, it should not be surprising that all excuses and justifications are unlikely to be equally successful and effective. In the context of policy decisions, McGraw (1990, 1991) illustrates that claims of mitigating circumstances (a form of 'excuse') as well as highlighting specific benefits to a target audience (a form of 'justification') can be particularly effective. In contrast, excuses involving pleas of ignorance and attempts at responsibility diffusion appear ineffective in a policy context. Using observational data on scandals ranging from sexual harassment to corruption, Hood et al. (2016) suggest that responsibility denials can at times lead to *higher* blame attributions – seemingly adding fuel to the fire. This is also reflected in Wenzelburger and Hörsch's (2016) finding that the applicability and quality of the framing strategy can have a considerable influence on its effectiveness in cases of social policy reform.

A natural question is then whether similar findings arise in the case of political scandals and allegations of misconduct (rather than policy outcomes and reforms). Our analysis therefore first of all evaluates whether – and, if so, to what extent – politicians' accounts of the alleged wrongdoing are able to mitigate voter responses to these allegations. We are thereby particularly interested in whether or not certain types of accounts – whether excuses or justifications – are better able to achieve this aim than others. In the absence of clear predictions arising from previous research, our initial presumption here will simply be:

Hypothesis 1. Certain types of blame avoidance strategies can help politicians mitigate the implications of misconduct allegations.

Partisanship can be expected to act as a filter in the process described above. One reason is that partisanship distorts information processing and influences how individuals interpret facts (Blais et al., 2010; Bisgaard, 2019; Schönhage and Geys, 2022, 2023). As a result of such partisan motivated reasoning, voters' opinion formation is guided towards conclusions compatible with their political predispositions (Taber and Lodge, 2006; Blais et al., 2016). An alternative reason is that citizens hold prior beliefs about politicians' likelihood of misconduct, and these priors tend to favour their preferred party (Arias et al., 2022). Partisanship then matters because informing voters about politicians' misconduct – and any accounts thereof – only affects their (posterior) beliefs if the information is at odds with their priors. In both cases, voters are expected to be more willing to ignore bad behaviour by politicians of their preferred party. Such a moderating role of partisanship is

² An alternative typology is offered by Hood (2011) and Hood et al. (2009, 2016), which differentiates between problem denial, responsibility denial and responsibility admission.

frequently observed in studies of voter responses to political scandals. Anduiza et al. (2013) and Blais et al. (2016), for instance, find evidence of partisan biases that affect citizen perceptions of corruption, while Anderson and Tverdova (2003) find weaker electoral implications of corruption among supporters of the incumbent government.

We argue that such partisan leniency in voter responses to politicians' misconduct may derive at least in part from voters' partisan responses to the accounts offered by politicians regarding this misconduct. Whether instigated by partisan motivated reasoning or partisan priors, voters may be more likely to honour the accounts of politicians from their preferred party relative to politicians from another party. This proposition is consistent with Bisgaard's (2019, p. 824) recent finding that partisan loyalties induce the "selective attribution of credit and blame", and leads to our second hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2. Blame avoidance strategies are more effective in mitigating the implications of misconduct allegations among voters favouring the politician's party.

Our discussion thus far implicitly assumes that partisanship affects voter responses to blame avoidance behaviours equally on both sides of the ideological aisle. This assumption may not be warranted. Research in (political) psychology has hypothesized that conservatives on the right of the political spectrum may be more sensitive to in-group bias. The reason is that conservatism is linked to personal dispositions including resistance to change, low levels of openness, and valuation of group loyalty. Each of these may make conservatives more likely to resist novel and/or threatening information challenging their predefined political affinities (Ditto et al., 2019). Others, however, maintain that no political leaning holds a monopoly on bias since ideologues of any persuasion will be susceptible to motivated reasoning in favour of their in-group (McClosky and Chong, 1985). Finally, one could make the argument that the "self-image of the (American) left as a persecuted minority" (McClosky and Chong, 1985, p. 329) buttresses in-group identity strength, since conflictual relations with an out-group often strengthen in-group ties (McLauchlin and Pearlman, 2012; De Jaegher, 2021). This may therefore strengthen partisan self-delusion on the left side of the ideological aisle.

This discussion leads to our final hypothesis, which we formulate as a null hypothesis in the absence of a clear directional expectation. In our view, it remains an empirical question which side of the political spectrum is on average more or less prone to partisan influences:

Hypothesis 3. Partisan leniency is independent of individuals' left-right position.

3. Experimental design

To assess the hypotheses derived in the previous section, we fielded a 2×5 factorial survey experiment during the 19th wave of the Norwegian Citizen Panel in November 2020.³ This online citizen panel is administered by the University of Bergen and is contacted on average twice a year for a survey of approximately 15 min. The 19th wave achieved an overall response rate of 76.8%, and the section containing our experiment received 1996 responses. These respondents were randomly assigned to a vignette describing a hypothetical situation

³ The project – including the formulation of our main expectations and experimental research design – received a positive advice from the Ethical Committee at [removed for anonymity] on 24 November 2020 (reference: ECHW.226). The experimental design was pre-registered at the AEA RCT Registry (see Online Appendix D). This pre-registration plan included our overall research aim, experimental research design, and primary outcome(s) of interest, and we did not deviate from these aspects in our work. Yet, since our main research aim lay in an exploratory comparison of distinct blame avoidance behaviours, the pre-registration did not include the exact formulation of our hypotheses or a detailed pre-analysis plan.

involving allegations of misconduct by an un-named, male politician. In order to maximize the realism and validity of our scenario, the type of scandal – i.e. travel expense reimbursement claims for fictitious trips – matches events involving several politicians from parties across the political spectrum in Norway in recent years (Hegnar, 2020). Furthermore, our phrasing of the vignette is adapted from newspaper articles appearing in 2018 and 2019 about these real-world cases, which further buttresses its credibility and recognisability to respondents (See Online Appendix C for an overview of the source material for our vignette).

As depicted in Fig. 1, two sources of experimental variation were integrated into this vignette in a between-subject research design. The first source of experimental variation relates to the *content* of politician's accounts (relevant for hypothesis 1), and builds on the typology originally developed by Scott and Lyman (1968).⁴ Beside a control group where no blame avoidance behaviour is mentioned, we include four distinct blame avoidance behaviours. These include a plea of ignorance (i.e. an 'unintentional administrative error due to the complicated travel expense system'; henceforth referred to as 'system'), a claim about mitigating circumstances (i.e. 'necessary to make up for money spent in connection with his position'; henceforth 'funds'), a strategic shift in the context of comparison (i.e. 'work is worth much more than the sum of the travel bills'; henceforth 'worth'), and pointing out other relevant actors taking similar actions (i.e. 'common practice among predecessors, which remains the norm to this day'; henceforth 'common'). As discussed in Online Appendix C, the former two are best viewed as 'excuses', while the latter two constitute 'justifications'. The exact formulation of each blame avoidance strategy presented in the vignettes is based on real-world reactions from politicians involved in scandals as documented in mass media outlets (see Online Appendix C for details). All five treatments are presented with equal probability.

The second source of experimental variation relates to partisanship (relevant for hypotheses 2 and 3). This is implemented by drawing the party affiliation of our politician with equal probability from respondents' answers to two questions posed earlier in the survey (though *not* immediately before the vignette). The first question asks "Which political party do you feel closest to?", while the second asks "Which political party do you feel furthest from?". In both cases, respondents can indicate any of the nine main political parties in Norway. Answers to the first question are treated as the respondent's political 'in-group', while answers to the second question are treated as reflecting the respondent's political 'out-group' (Budesheim et al., 1996; Greene, 1999). Although the vignette mentions actual party names, our analysis compares in-group versus out-group responses to retain sufficient power. Naturally, this implies that our analysis includes only those respondents with a self-professed most and least preferred party. From that perspective, it is important to observe that less than two percent of respondents failed to answer these questions.⁵

Using squared brackets and slashes to highlight the various treatments, the complete vignette is phrased as follows (translated from the original Norwegian):⁶

"Please consider the following hypothetical situation:

Last week, various media revealed that a parliamentary representative for [Name of most preferred party / name of least preferred party] has allegedly requested reimbursement of thousands of Norwegian kroner for

⁴ McGraw (1990, 1991) translated the conceptual framework of Scott and Lyman (1968) to a political setting, and remains the most commonly used benchmark to this day. Online Appendix C offers an overview of the McGraw (1990, 1991) framework, and how it was adapted for the survey experiment.

⁵ We exclude five respondents indicating the same political party as their most and least preferred party.

⁶ The control group did not receive information about any interview response by the fictitious politician. Hence, they were only shown the first paragraph of the vignette.

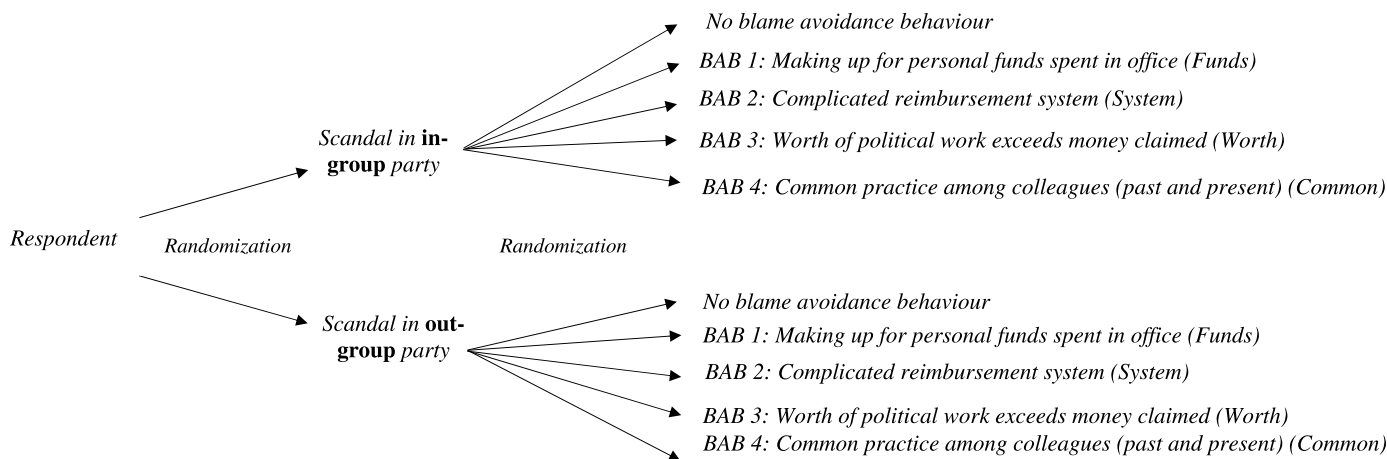


Fig. 1. Experimental design

Note: Respondents were randomly allocated to the in-/out-group party treatment (with equal probability) and to treatments differing in the type of blame avoidance behaviour (with equal probability). They first saw the vignette relevant to their treatment, and were subsequently asked to evaluate the misconduct and the explanation offered by the politician. Finally, respondent could indicate whether the politician should face consequences and, if so, which type of consequences (i.e. paying back the money, resigning from their position, being expelled from their position, or being prosecuted in a court of law).

a number of trips that never took place. This behaviour would have extended over several months. The politician is alleged to have reported several visits to the party’s local and regional departments around the country in connection with his position as parliamentary representative, but sources deny that he visited during this period.

In an interview, the politician replied that [it was necessary to use such travel expenses to make up for money he had spent in connection with his position / this was an unintentional administrative error due to the complicated travel expense system / his work, and what he provides to his constituents, is worth much more than the sum of his travel bills / he was told by his predecessors that this was common practice and remained the norm to this day].”

Immediately following the vignette, respondents were asked three questions. The first asked respondents to evaluate the gravity of the alleged misconduct, and builds on previous work by Anduiza et al. (2013): “How do you assess the politician’s behaviour?”. Responses are recorded on a seven-point scale from 1 (“very unproblematic”) to 7 (“very problematic”). The second question follows (Smith et al., 2005) in asking the respondents in the treated groups how they perceive the believability of the provided explanation: “How do you assess the politician’s explanation for his behaviour?” Answers are coded from 1 (“very believable”) to 7 (“very unbelievable”). Finally, since we are interested in whether blame avoidance behaviours can mitigate voter retribution for political misconduct, we asked: “Do you think the politician’s actions deserve consequences? If so, what type of consequences?” We offered five options of distinct severity (in randomized order): “there should not be any consequences”, “the politician should pay the money back”, “the politician should resign from his position/office”, “the politician should be expelled from the party”, and “the politician should be prosecuted in a court of law”. Respondents could express agreement to multiple answer options.

The complete experimental design is provided in Online Appendix B. Summary statistics and balance tests are provided in Online Appendix Tables A.1 and A.2. These tests indicate no significant differences in the treatment groups along any of the individual-level background characteristics available to us, which highlights a successful random allocation across our treatments. The overall survey sample is also broadly representative of the Norwegian population in terms of gender and regions, although we observe (as with most online survey panels) a slight overrepresentation of older and better educated respondents (Online Appendix Table A.3). Finally, note that each blame avoidance treatment on average contains just under 400 respondents, which offers ample power

to detect even small effect sizes. Power tests indicate that our analysis can detect an effect size on the indicator variables capturing the scandal’s consequences of approximately 10 percentage points (setting a significance level of 5% and a power of 80%). For the seven-point scales of the assessment and evaluation variables, we can detect an effect size of approximately 0.22 under the same conditions.

4. Results

4.1. Effect of blame avoidance strategies

We start our results discussion by evaluating which blame avoidance behaviours best enable a politician to mitigate any negative implications of scandal allegations (hypothesis 1). Panel I of Fig. 2 displays the point estimates (with 95% confidence intervals) of ordered logistic models using respondents’ evaluation of the gravity of the alleged misconduct (Assessment) as the dependent variable. This variable is measured on a seven-point scale where higher numbers imply that the politician’s conduct is deemed more problematic. The model includes indicator variables for our four BAB accounts (with the control group – whose average is displayed by the vertical line – as the omitted reference category). Panel I of Fig. 2 thus displays whether the responses across experimental treatments are statistically significantly different (full details in Online Appendix Table A.4 – without control variables – and Online Appendix Table A.5 – with control variables for individual-level background variables).⁷ Panel II provides a similar analysis using the assessment by voters of the believability of the politician’s account of his actions as dependent variable (again measured on a seven-point scale).

Our results in Panel I of Fig. 2 indicate that respondents’ evaluation of the gravity of the alleged misconduct is statistically significantly

⁷ We also estimated the model using OLS and performed difference-in-means t-tests, which provided very similar results. Still, given the highly skewed nature of the response distributions on our dependent variable, one might worry that standard significance tests cannot be trusted for the OLS model (since these assume normality of the error term, which will be violated with a heavily skewed dependent variable). To address this, we also looked at kernel density plots and performed Kruskal-Wallis equality of population rank tests (see Online Appendix Figure A1). The latter is a non-parametric approach to evaluate whether two (or more) samples share the same distribution and do not impose any distributional assumptions on the data. The results of these various robustness checks are qualitatively similar to those reported in the main text, and do not affect any of the inferences drawn.

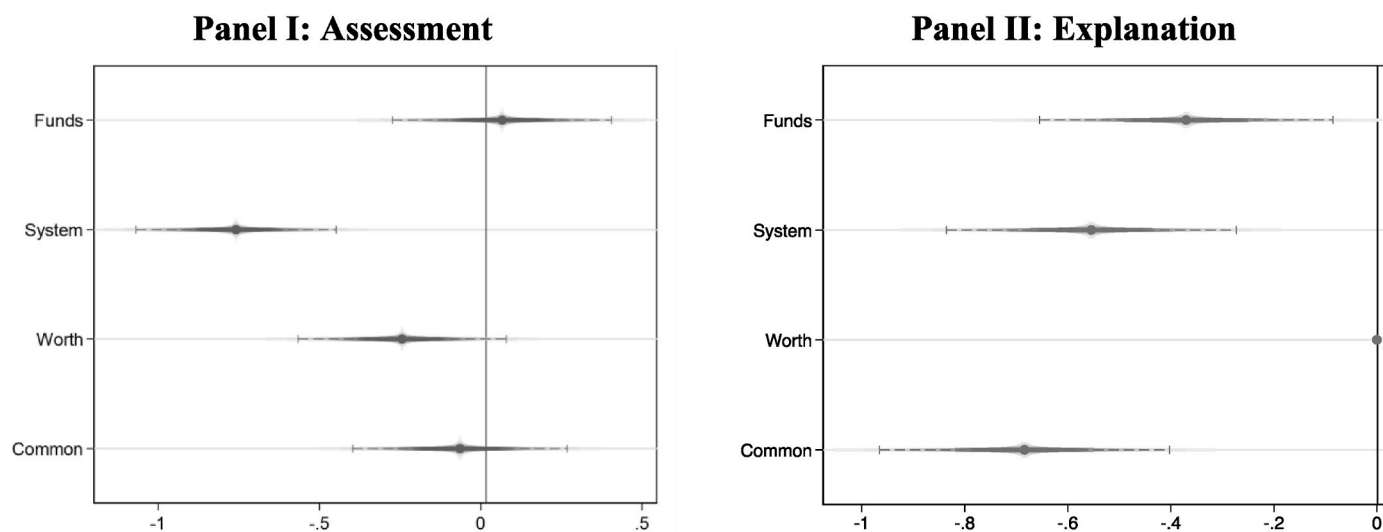


Fig. 2. Effects of Blame Avoidance Behaviours on Assessment (left) and Explanation (right)

Note: The figure displays ordered logistic regression coefficients (with 95% confidence intervals). In Panel I, the dependent variable is respondents' answer to the question "How do you assess the politician's behaviour?" (*Assessment*; coded 1 "very unproblematic" to 7 "very problematic"). In Panel II, the dependent variable is respondents' answer to the question "How do you assess the politician's explanation for his behaviour?" (*Explanation* coded 1 "very believable" to 7 "very unbelievable"). The Blame Avoidance treatments relate to the 'necessity to make up for money spent in connection with his position' (*Funds*), an 'unintentional administrative error due to the complicated travel expense system' (*System*), the indication that 'work is worth much more than the sum of his travel bills' (*Worth*) and a statement that it is 'common practice among predecessors' (*Common*). The excluded reference category in Panel I is the control group, while it is the 'Worth' treatment in Panel II (since the control group did not receive this question; see main text). The vertical line displays the mean response in the excluded reference group.

reduced (relative to the control group) *only* where the politician's account refers to an administrative error caused by the complicated expense reimbursement system ('system') – effectively a plea of ignorance. This goes against the findings in McGraw (1990), where pleas of ignorance are found to be ineffective in a policy setting. One possible explanation for this difference may be that in a policy setting pleas of ignorance signal a lack of legitimacy and professional capacity (McGraw, 1990). This is not the case when politicians respond to allegations of misconduct, where a credible plea of ignorance may rather work to signal the unintentional nature of the misconduct and make the excuse more legitimate in the respondent's mind. The fact that respondents tended to find the 'system' account among the more believable accounts in our experimental design (see Panel II of Fig. 2) reinforces this line of argument (we return to this below).

Taking this tentative explanation at face value for a moment, we split the sample between respondents expressing high or low belief in the politicians' account. This extension of our analysis suggests that all four blame avoidance accounts reduce respondents' evaluation of the gravity of the alleged misconduct among voters believing the offered account, but not among those expressing disbelief (full details in Online Appendix Table A.6). These results could indicate that honouring *any* account offered by politicians requires this account to be believable (Pennington and Schlenker, 1999; Hood et al., 2016). Nonetheless, proper care is required in the interpretation of these auxiliary models since conditioning on believing the treatment information likely introduces post-treatment bias. Indeed, conditioning on a post-treatment variable can ruin the randomization of the experimental treatments, which creates a risk that the experimental groups no longer have equivalent potential outcomes (Coppock, 2019). As a result, our analysis here could suffer from (post-treatment) bias of unknown magnitude or direction (Montgomery et al., 2018; Aronow et al., 2019). Hence, we urge caution in putting too much weight on these auxiliary findings.

In Fig. 3, we turn to the consequences voters deem appropriate in light of the politician's misconduct. Each block of lines displays the share of respondents agreeing that the politician should pay the money back (*Pay Back*), resign from his position (*Resign*), be expelled from the

party (*Expel*) or be prosecuted in a court of law (*Prosecute*) under each of our blame avoidance treatments.⁸ We assess the statistical significance of any differences in respondent shares between the control group (represented by the grey bar) and the four remaining blame avoidance strategies (represented by the dotted lines) using difference-in-means t-tests (indicated using asterisks in Fig. 3). The results in Fig. 3 indicate that blame avoidance behaviours consistently *reduce* public support for resignation ($p < 0.05$ for all but one of the blame avoidance strategies), expulsion and prosecution ($p < 0.01$ only for the treatment referring to the complicated expense reimbursement system) – as compared to the control group. Further supporting our findings in Fig. 2, all the observed effects are once again strongest (from a statistical and substantive perspective) for the 'system' account, which entails blaming the complicated expense reimbursement system (i.e. pleading ignorance).

4.2. Discussion: the role of credibility and intent

Overall, Figs. 2 and 3 highlight that the 'system' account appears most effective in our setting – even though the 'common' and 'funds' accounts are also deemed more believable than the 'worth' treatment (which is deemed least credible by our respondents; see Panel II of Fig. 2). Reversely, the 'worth' account – where the politician claims that their work is worth more than the value of the financial misconduct – does *not* stand out as the least effective strategy despite having the lowest credibility rating in our setting. This suggests a need to look beyond the basic notion of believability when trying to explain the (lack of) effectiveness of politicians' accounts of alleged misconduct, and account also for what the observer finds acceptable given the circumstances (Bolkan and Daly, 2009). From this perspective, it is important to observe that the accounts used in our experiment can be viewed as

⁸ We exclude the answer 'no consequences' due to the very low number of respondents choosing this option (less than 1%). This is most likely related to the obviously illegal nature of the alleged misconduct in our vignette. We return to this in our conclusion.

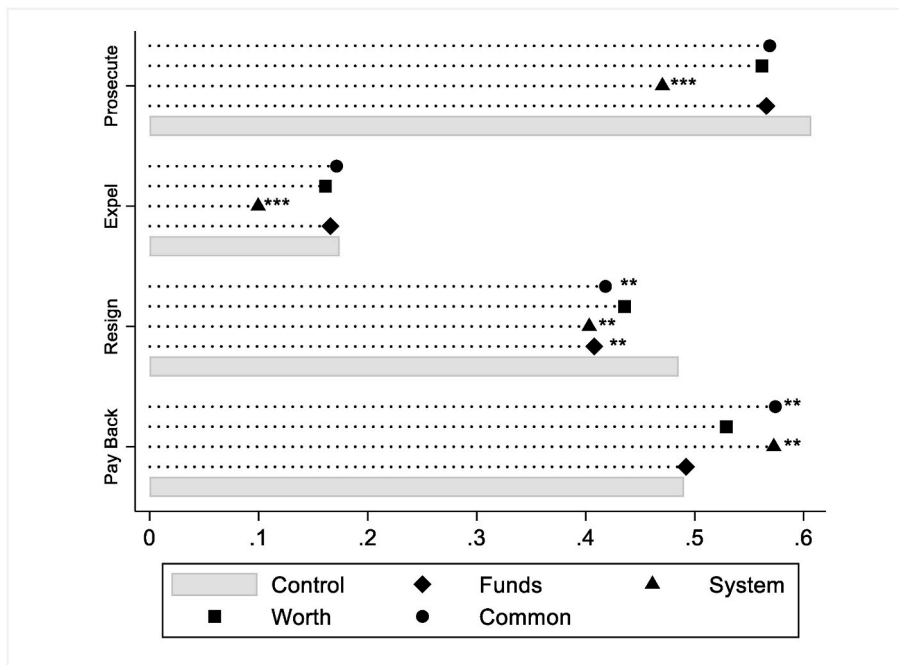


Fig. 3. Effects of Blame Avoidance Behaviours on Consequences

Note: The figure shows the share of respondents choosing the indicated answer option under the question “Do you think the politician’s actions deserve consequences?”. Answer options include ‘the politician should pay the money back’, ‘the politician should resign from his position/office’, ‘the politician should be expelled from the party’, and ‘the politician should be prosecuted in a court of law’. The Blame Avoidance treatments relate to the ‘necessity to make up for money spent in connection with his position’ (Funds), an ‘unintentional administrative error due to the complicated travel expense system’ (System), the indication that ‘work is worth much more than the sum of his travel bills’ (Worth) and a statement that it is ‘common practice among predecessors’ (Common). ***, ** and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level relative to the control group using a difference-in-means t-test.

offering a signal about the likely intentional versus accidental nature of the alleged misconduct. For instance, the excuse that one’s actions are ‘common practice’ among colleagues does little to suggest an accidental mistake (Husak, 1996), while the same is true when attempting to justify alleged (financial) misconduct by referring to the value of one’s work (Hill, 2013). This may limit the effectiveness of such accounts since research in psychology and crisis management has illustrated that intentional actions carry a greater negative affect for stakeholders than accidental errors (Gonzales, 1992; Coombs and Schmidt, 2000; Coombs, 2007). As a result, intentional misconduct would be expected to trigger stronger retribution than accidental misconduct.

Building on such insights, our findings lead to the conjecture that blame attribution might be mitigated only when politicians facing misconduct allegations offer an account that is both credibility and signalling a lack of intent. In our setting, this implies that excuses claiming ignorance of the rules may help undermine the development of negative affect in respondents (being both credible and accidental), while attempts to justify one’s behaviour by denying that it is problematic would remain less effective by signalling intentional actions and a lack of remorse (Coombs and Schmidt, 2000; Hood et al., 2009). Lacking credibility or a suggestion of intentional actions can be expected to make an account less effective (possibly, though not necessarily, further weakened when the account is deficient along both dimensions). The line of argument leads to the two-by-two matrix displayed in Table 1,

Table 1
Effectiveness of blame avoidance strategies.

		Believability/credibility	
		Low	High
Intention/Accidental	Intentional	Highly ineffective	Ineffective
	Accidental	Ineffective	Effective

and further exploration of these dimensions constitutes an important avenue for further research (including comparatively across countries to assess any context-dependence).

4.3. Moderating role of partisanship

Hypothesis 2 suggests that voters more readily respond to blame avoidance behaviours when there is partisan alignment between them and the alleged offender. Figs. 4 and 5 evaluate this proposition by looking at how partisanship affects voters’ response to the account politicians provide about their misconduct – effectively replicating Fig. 2 (Panel I) and 3 for the in-group (light-grey) and out-group (dark grey) treatments.

The results in Fig. 4 show at best marginal differences in how blame avoidance behaviours influence respondents’ assessment of the severity of the alleged offence across the in-group and out-group treatments. It should be noted, however, that robustness checks using kernel density plots, Kruskal-Wallis equality of population rank tests (Online Appendix Figure A2), and OLS regressions (Online Appendix Figure A3 and Online Appendix Table A.7) all suggest that respondents’ evaluation of the gravity of the alleged misconduct declines significantly more when it concerns the respondents’ political in-group for accounts based on the complicated reimbursement system. Hence, overall, we uncover some support for hypothesis 2, though this is not robust across all empirical strategies and is limited to only one of our four blame avoidance accounts. Moving to potential partisan differences in the effectiveness of blame avoidance strategies in Fig. 5, we observe that partisanship does not exclusively benefit in-party politicians. Some blame avoidance behaviours are found to significantly benefit out-group politicians, specifically when it comes to calls for their resignation after allegations of misconduct ($p < 0.1$ in all cases, compared to the control group). This is a surprising result at odds with hypothesis 2. Yet, in the case of respondents’ support for expulsion and prosecution, blame avoidance

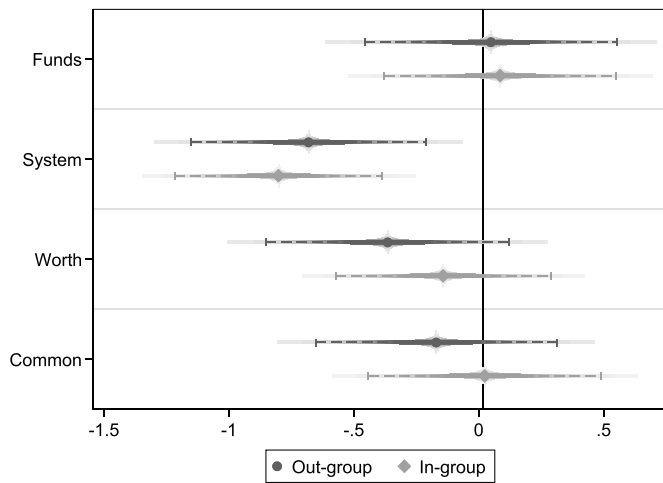


Fig. 4. Effects of Blame Avoidance Behaviours by Partisan (Mis)alignment
 Note: The figure displays ordered logistic regression coefficients (with 95% confidence intervals) where the dependent variable is respondents' answer to the question "How do you assess the politician's behaviour?" (*Assessment*; coded 1 "very unproblematic" to 7 "very problematic"). The Blame Avoidance treatments relate to the 'necessity to make up for money spent in connection with his position' (*Funds*), an 'unintentional administrative error due to the complicated travel expense system' (*System*), the indication that 'work is worth much more than the sum of his travel bills' (*Worth*) and a statement that it is 'common practice among predecessors' (*Common*). The control group is the excluded reference category, and the vertical line displays the mean response in the control group. The light- and dark-grey plots show the in-group and out-group treatments, respectively. See Online Appendix Table A.7 for the corresponding OLS results.

behaviours do afford a statistically significant benefit to in-group politicians (in line with [hypothesis 2](#)). Taken together, these findings could reflect a belief that out-group perpetrators should not be allowed to resign *themselves* (which reflects a proactive decision by the individual), but rather should be expelled (which reflects a punishment by an external actor). These findings arise, as before, predominantly for accounts involving the complicated reimbursement system.

Online Appendix [Figure A4](#) offers a closer look at this in-group versus out-group comparison for the different punishments in our experiment. This illustrates that voters are significantly more likely to support prosecution of out-group politicians (relative to in-group politicians) under three of our four blame avoidance strategies: complicated reimbursement system ($p < 0.05$), the worth of the politician's work ($p < 0.1$), and common practice among colleagues ($p < 0.05$). Overall, therefore, we find at best mixed results with respect to [hypothesis 2](#). It would appear that blame avoidance strategies are particularly beneficial to shield *in-group* politicians from harsher punishments (i.e. expulsion and prosecution), while offering *out-group* politicians at least some shelter from less extreme consequences (i.e. calls for resignation). A key lesson from our analysis thus is that partisan bias may not always work as we expect.

4.4. Heterogeneity by left-right partisan affiliation

[Hypothesis 3](#) relates to potential partisan differences in voters' sensitivity of the influence of partisanship when making political evaluations. In one of the first studies addressing this question, [Ditto et al. \(2019, p.273\)](#) show "equal levels of partisan bias in liberals and conservatives". [Fig. 6](#) evaluates this proposition in our setting by looking at any difference in responses across blame avoidance treatments by respondents' partisan leaning – effectively replicating [Fig. 4](#) for subsets of respondents leaning towards a certain party: i.e. left-wing respondents in the left-hand panel ($N = 820$) and right-wing respondents in the right-hand panel ($N = 611$). See Online Appendix [Table A.9](#) for the

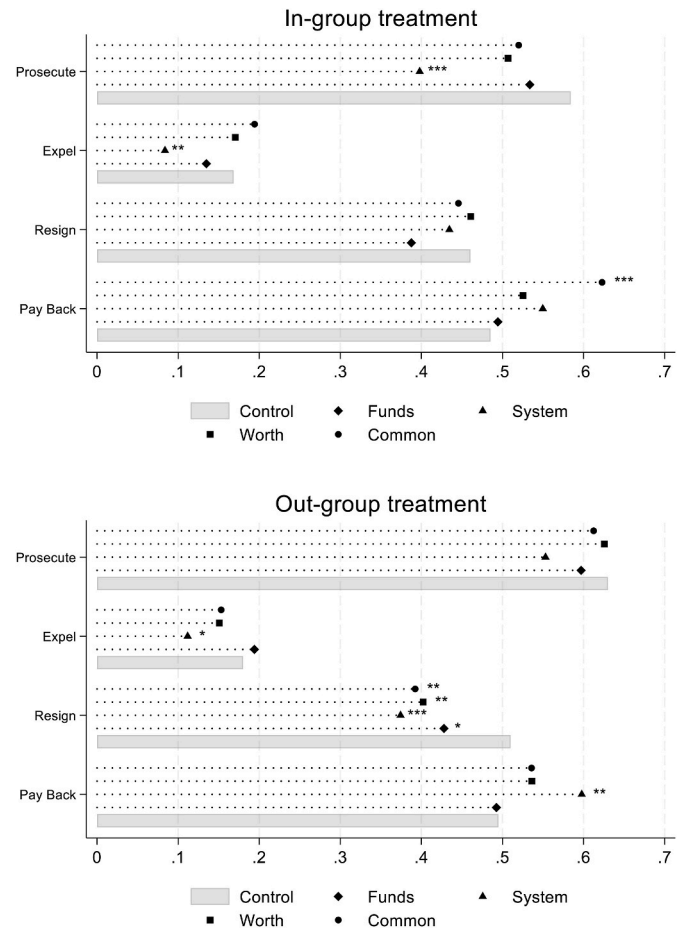


Fig. 5. Effects of Blame Avoidance Behaviours by Partisan (Mis)alignment
 Note: The figure shows the share of respondents choosing the indicated answer option under the question "Do you think the politician's actions deserve consequences?". Answer options include 'there should be no consequences' (*NoConseq*), 'the politician should pay the money back' (*PayBack*), 'the politician should resign from his position/office' (*Resign*), 'the politician should be expelled from the party' (*Expel*), and 'the politician should be prosecuted in a court of law' (*Prosecute*). The Blame Avoidance treatments relate to the 'necessity to make up for money spent in connection with his position' (*Funds*), an 'unintentional administrative error due to the complicated travel expense system' (*System*), the indication that 'work is worth much more than the sum of his travel bills' (*Worth*) and a statement that it is 'common practice among predecessors' (*Common*). The top- and bottom panels show the in-group and out-group treatments, respectively. ***, ** and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level relative to the control group using a difference-in-means *t*-test.

corresponding regression results.

For right-wing respondents, we find no statistically significant differences across blame avoidance treatments – independent of whether it concerns the respondent's most- or least-preferred party. For left-wing respondents, we find that pointing to the complicated reimbursement system ('system') has a statistically significant dampening effect ($p < 0.05$) on respondents' assessment of the offence when the accused politician is member of respondent's most-preferred party (i.e. in-group treatment), but *not* when the accused politician is member of respondent's least-preferred party (i.e. out-group treatment). Online Appendix [Table A.8](#) indicates similar findings looking at the consequences that are deemed warranted by the politician's misconduct. That is, we never find statistically significant differences between evaluations of the respondent's most- or least-preferred party among right-wing respondents. Yet, significant in-group – but not out-group – effects are observed among left-wing respondents for the reimbursement, expulsion

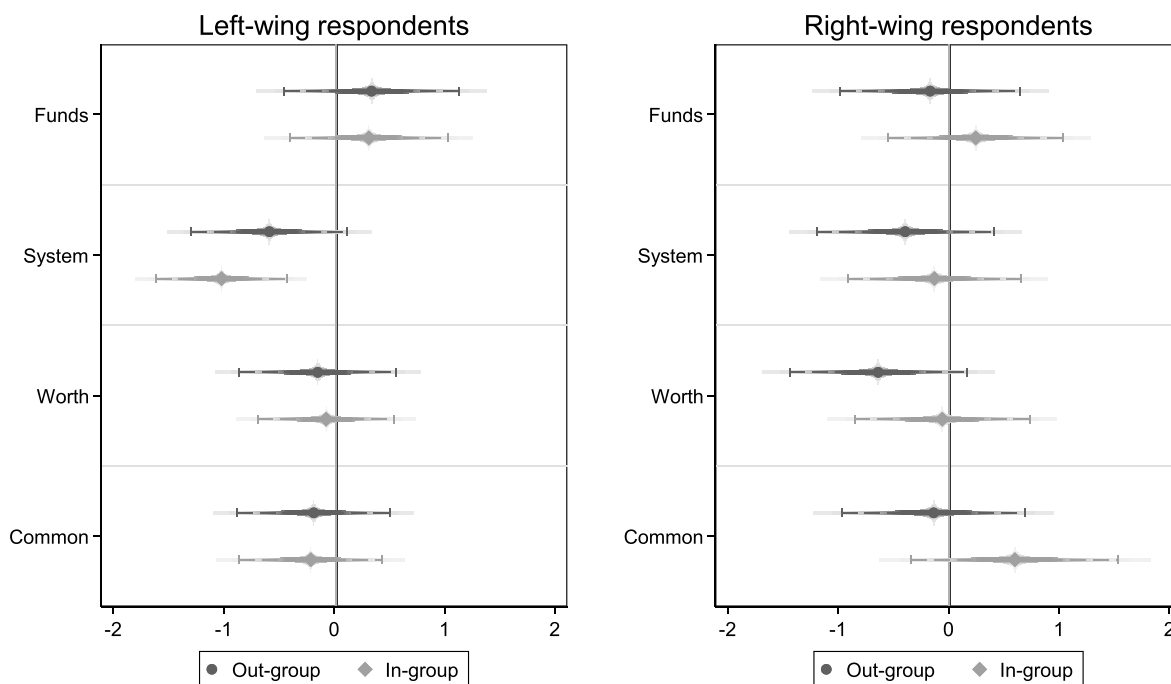


Fig. 6. Heterogeneity across Respondents' Partisan Leaning

Note: The figure displays ordered logistic regression coefficients (with 95% confidence intervals) where the dependent variable is respondents' answer to the question "How do you assess the politician's behaviour?" (*Assessment*; coded 1 "very unproblematic" to 7 "very problematic"). The Blame Avoidance treatments relate to the 'necessity to make up for money spent in connection with his position' (*Funds*), an 'unintentional administrative error due to the complicated travel expense system' (*System*), the indication that 'work is worth much more than the sum of his travel bills' (*Worth*) and a statement that it is 'common practice among predecessors' (*Common*). The control group is the excluded reference category, and the vertical line displays the mean response in the control group. The left-hand (right-hand) panels include only respondents favouring left-wing (right-wing) parties. We follow [Fiva et al. \(2021\)](#) in coding the red party (Rødt), the socialist left party (Sosialistisk Venstreparti), the labour party (Arbeiderpartiet) and the green party (Miljøpartiet de Grønne) as left. The conservative party (Høyre) and the progress party (Fremskrittspartiet) are coded as right. See Online Appendix [Table A9](#) for the corresponding regression results.

and prosecution punishments.⁹ While proper care is due when interpreting these findings in light of Norway's multi-party system, they suggest that in our setting left-wing individuals on average appear slightly more prone to partisan influences than right-wing individuals. We thus reject our third hypothesis claiming that partisan leniency would be independent of individuals' left-right position.

5. Conclusion

Politicians commonly respond to allegations of misconduct or poor policy performance by giving their account of the events at hand. These accounts aim to insulate them from potential blame, and, ideally, avoid popular retribution on Election Day ([Weaver, 1986](#); [McGraw, 1990, 1991](#); [Hood, 2011](#); [Hinterleitner and Sager, 2017](#); [Hinterleitner, 2020](#)). While numerous contributions have discussed the nature, types and characteristics of such blame avoidance strategies, less is known about how voters react to them. This article addresses this research gap by offering survey-experimental evidence on *i*) voters' reactions to distinct blame avoidance strategies employed by politicians facing allegations of misconduct, and *ii*) the role of partisan biases in such reactions.

Our findings show that some blame avoidance behaviours can mitigate voters' assessment of the alleged misconduct – as well as of the need and nature of any punishment. We also find some evidence that

politicians' accounts tend to be more influential among a party's supporters. Such a partisan bias in how voters respond to politicians' accounts of alleged misconduct is important in light of earlier studies showing strong partisan bias in the electoral retribution of politicians involved in scandals ([Anderson and Tverdova, 2003](#); [Anduiza et al., 2013](#); [Chang and Kerr, 2017](#); [Solaz et al., 2019](#)). Hence, our findings suggest that partisan bias observed in electoral responses to scandals may at least in part reflect partisan bias in voters' reaction to the accounts offered by the involved politicians. To the best of our knowledge, no direct empirical verification of this implied causal pathway – i.e. from scandals to (lack of) electoral retribution *via* voters' responses to politicians' blame avoidance behaviours – has thus far been brought forward in the literature. Future work should assess this causal path.

While experimental research designs such as ours offer the possibility of strong causal inferences, they naturally also come with downsides. A key limitation is our reliance on a hypothetical scenario, which – by stripping away much of the context within which real-world judgements are made – may limit the generalizability of our results. Although we try to address this by exploiting real-world descriptions in our as-realistic-as-possible vignette, we naturally cannot account for all potentially relevant aspects of a given case in a short vignette. Further research thus is required into whether our findings generalize to different types of scandals and misconduct (including those not as obviously illegal as ours), or to similar scandals arising in other contexts. A conjoint experiment might be useful in this respect since it would allow exploiting more sources of variation within the research design ([Hainmueller et al., 2014](#)). Furthermore, our vignette describes only one response by the involved politician. Within any real-world political scandal, voters would likely become exposed to several articles in the news, as well as to a sequence of blame avoidance strategies. This raises important avenues for future work. For instance, are blame avoidance

⁹ The analysis for respondents favoring centrist parties is shown in Online Appendix [Figure A5](#) (and Online Appendix [Table A.10](#)). The results suggest that blame avoidance accounts significantly affect their assessment of the offence across the in-group and out-group treatments, and support for paying back the obtained funds in the out-group treatment. Still, it should be noted that these results are more difficult to interpret since these individuals' out-group can refer to both left-wing or right-wing parties.

strategies more effective when politicians consistently stick to the ‘same story’, and does this repeated exposure increase the credibility of accounts (Dechêne et al., 2010)? Is there a benefit to ‘diversifying’ across multiple strategies? Do responses to blame avoidance behaviours differ depending on how frequently other politicians have previously used them (e.g., due to an ‘excuse fatigue’ effect)? Finally, our scenario necessarily abstracts from any opinion the voter may have previously formed about the (lack of) decency, honesty, or trustworthiness of the accused politician (Hinterleitner and Sager, 2017). This, unfortunately, is extremely difficult to manipulate credibly in experimental research designs, and calls for research designs that can exploit *within*-subject variation in assessments of the same politician.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Nanna Lauritz Schönhage: Conceptualization, Data curation,

Appendix E. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2023.102742>.

Appendix A

A.1 Descriptive statistics and balance tests

Online Appendix [Table A1](#) provides summary statistics for our treatment variables, dependent variables as well as six individual-level background characteristics available to us for the entire sample (i.e. gender, nationality, education level, birth decade, income level and region of residence). The top rows in [Table A1](#) confirm that the various treatments were allocated with equal probability since we have 50% respondents for the in-group/out-group treatments and 20% respondents for each blame avoidance treatment (remember that we fielded four blame avoidance behaviours and a control group). The random allocation of these treatments is verified in Online Appendix [Table A2](#), which reports the p-value of Kruskal-Wallis equality-of-populations rank tests. We find no significant differences in the treatment groups along our six main individual-level background characteristics. For a smaller subset of our sample ($N \approx 500\text{--}1700$), we also have access to indicators of political interest, left-right self-placement, satisfaction with democracy and confidence in politicians. Our treatments are balanced along these political dimensions as well (see bottom half of Online Appendix [Table A2](#)).¹⁰

The middle panel of [Table A1](#) indicates that our respondents on average find the allegations expressed in our vignette very problematic, and the politician’s account of the alleged misconduct very unbelievable (N is lower here as our control group did not receive such an account; see above). This is also reflected in the fact that almost none of our respondents believes that the alleged misconduct should stay without consequences. Roughly half of our respondents indicate that the politician should return the money and be prosecuted for his behaviour in a court of law, while 43% indicate that the politician should resign from the party. In contrast, only 16% think the politician should be expelled from the party for his misconduct, which may reflect that our vignette covers *allegations* of misconduct rather than, say, proven misconduct. Importantly, there remains substantial variation in these expressed opinions across respondents. Taken together, these observations validate that our description tackles a source of political misconduct of relevance and importance to our respondents, and that respondents may react to this alleged misconduct – as well as the politician’s account of these events – in different ways. It is this variation that we analyse below.

A.2 Additional results

Formal analysis, Methodology, Visualization, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing. **Benny Geys:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Methodology, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The authors do not have permission to share data.

¹⁰ This is confirmed when estimating a series of logistic regression models with our treatment variables as dependent variable and individual-level background (and political) characteristics as the explanatory variables. Tests for the joint significance of all explanatory variables included in these models consistently fail to reach statistical significance at conventional levels (full details available upon request).

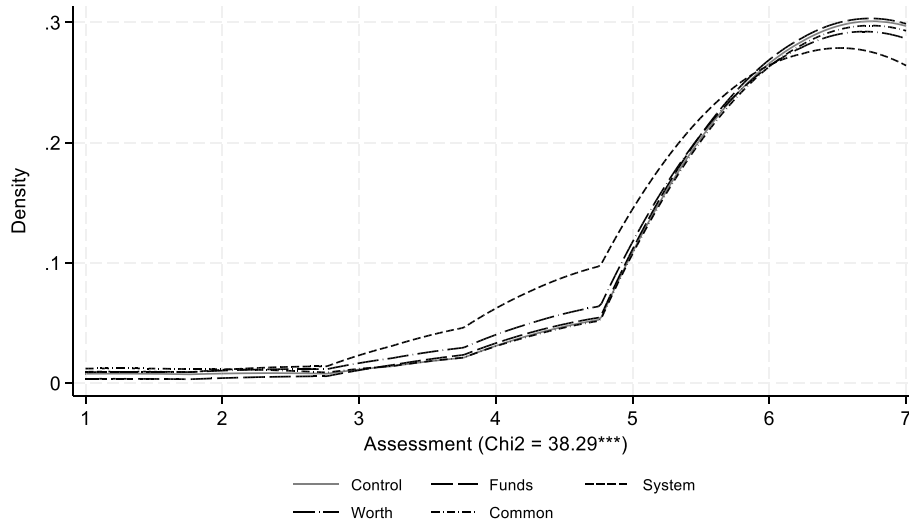


Fig. A.1. Kernel density plots and Kruskal-Wallis equality-of-populations rank test.

Note: The figure displays a kernel density plot for respondents' answers to the question "How do you assess the politician's behaviour?" (*Assessment*; coded 1 "very unproblematic" to 7 "very problematic"). The five Blame Avoidance treatments relate to the 'necessity to make up for money spent in connection with his position' (*Funds*), an 'unintentional administrative error due to the complicated travel expense system' (*System*), the indication that 'work is worth much more than the sum of his travel bills' (*Worth*) and a statement that it is 'common practice among predecessors' (*Common*). ***, ** and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level, respectively, using Kruskal-Wallis equality-of-populations rank tests.

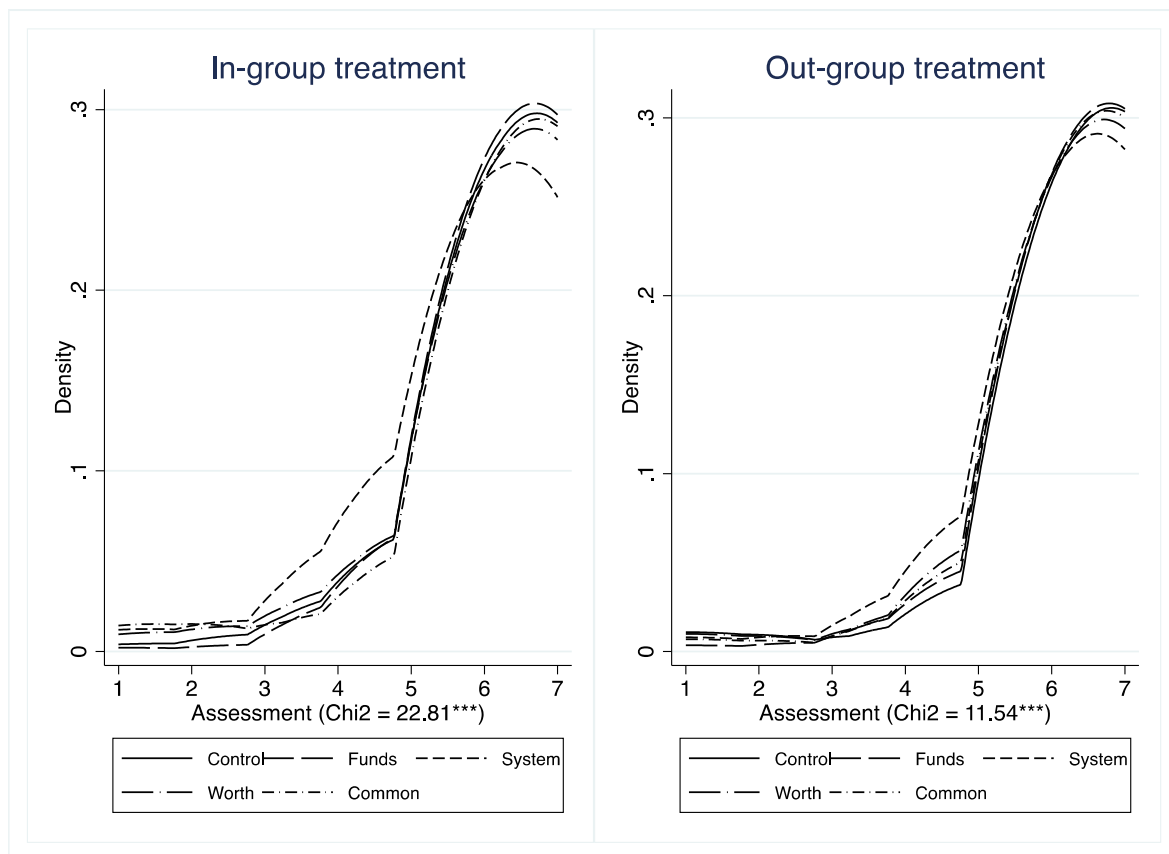


Fig. A.2. Kernel density plots and Kruskal-Wallis test by partisan (mis)alignment.

Note: The figure displays kernel density plots for respondents' answers to the question "How do you assess the politician's behaviour?" (*Assessment*; coded 1 "very unproblematic" to 7 "very problematic"). The left- and right-hand diagram show the in-group and out-group treatments, respectively. The five Blame Avoidance treatments relate to the 'necessity to make up for money spent in connection with his position' (*Funds*), an 'unintentional administrative error due to the complicated travel expense system' (*System*), the indication that 'work is worth much more than the sum of his travel

bills' (*Worth*) and a statement that it is 'common practice among predecessors' (*Common*). ***, ** and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level, respectively, using Kruskal-Wallis equality-of-populations rank tests.

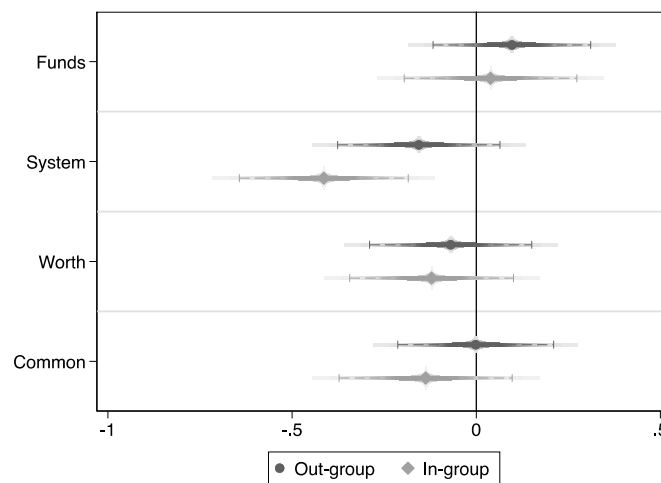


Fig. A.3. Partisan effects on scandal assessment *within* a given Blame Avoidance Treatment.

Note: The figure displays OLS regression coefficients (with 95% confidence intervals) where the dependent variable is respondents' answer to the question "How do you assess the politician's behaviour?" (*Assessment*; coded 1 "very unproblematic" to 7 "very problematic"). The Blame Avoidance treatments relate to the 'necessity to make up for money spent in connection with his position' (*Funds*), an 'unintentional administrative error due to the complicated travel expense system' (*System*), the indication that 'work is worth much more than the sum of his travel bills' (*Worth*) and a statement that it is 'common practice among predecessors' (*Common*). The control group is the excluded reference category, and the vertical line displays the mean response in the control group. The light- and dark-grey plots show the in-group and out-group treatments, respectively. See Online Appendix Table A.7 for the corresponding OLS results.

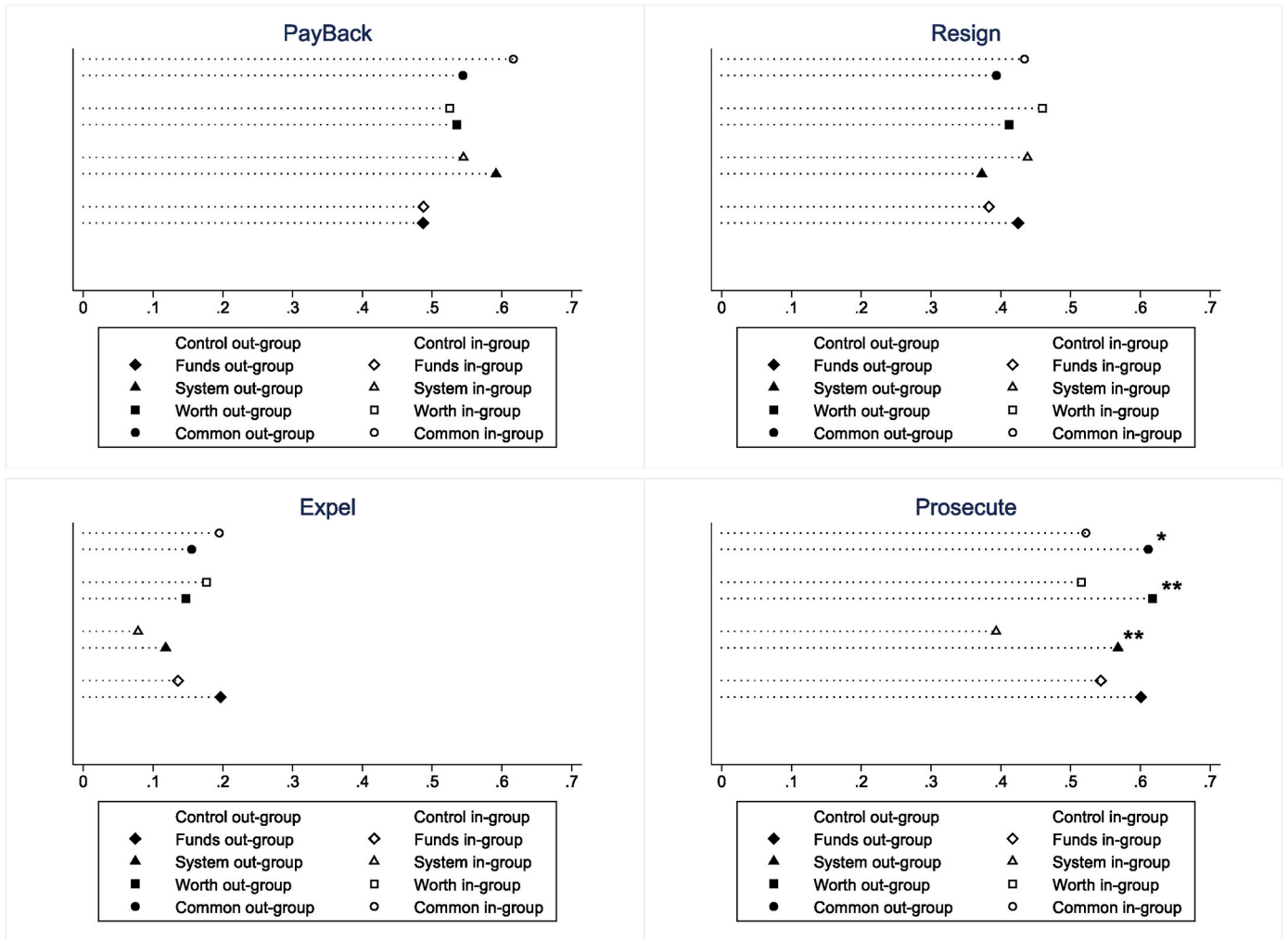


Fig. A.4. Effect of Blame Avoidance Treatment on Punishments by Partisanship.

Note: The figures show the share of respondents choosing the indicated answer option under the question “Do you think the politician’s actions deserve consequences?”. Answer options include ‘there should be no consequences’ (which is excluded from the graph due to the low amount of respondents choosing this option), ‘the politician should pay the money back’ (*PayBack*), ‘the politician should resign from his position/office’ (*Resign*), ‘the politician should be expelled from the party’ (*Expel*), and ‘the politician should be prosecuted in a court of law’ (*Prosecute*). The Blame Avoidance treatments relate to the ‘necessity to make up for money spent in connection with his position’ (Funds), an ‘unintentional administrative error due to the complicated travel expense system’ (*System*), the indication that ‘work is worth much more than the sum of his travel bills’ (*Worth*) and a statement that it is ‘common practice among predecessors’ (*Common*). The in-group is reflected by the light grey bar and the hollow symbols and out-group is reflected by the darker bar and the black symbols, respectively. ***, ** and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level of the in-group relative to the out-group using a difference-in-means *t*-test.

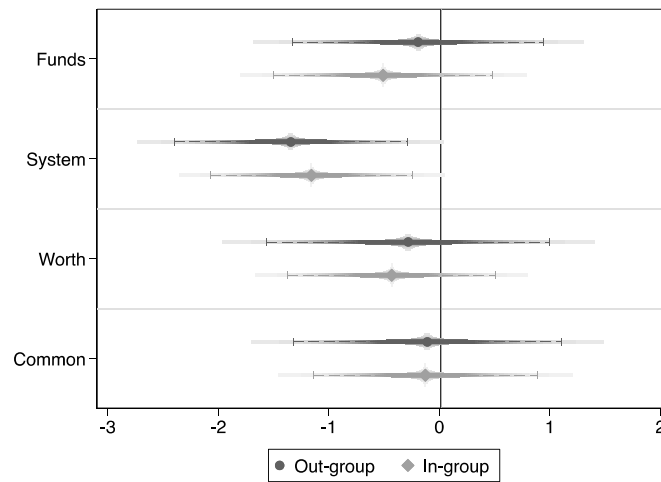


Fig. A.5. Heterogeneity across Respondents with a Centrist Partisan Leaning.

Note: The figure displays differences in the answer distribution across blame avoidance treatments for respondents leaning towards a certain party (i.e. left or right). We follow Fiva et al. (2021) in coding the liberal party (Venstre), the centre party (Senterpartiet) and the Christian Democratic party (Kristelig Folkeparti) as centrist. The dependent variable is explained in the note to Fig. 2.

Table A.1
Summary statistics

	N	Mean	St.Dev	Min	Max
<i>Treatment variables</i>					
In-group	1939	0.498	0.500	0	1
NoBAB	1944	0.207	0.405	0	1
Funds	1944	0.195	0.397	0	1
System	1944	0.193	0.395	0	1
Worth	1944	0.206	0.404	0	1
Common	1944	0.199	0.399	0	1
<i>Dependent variables</i>					
Assessment	1939	6.487	1.134	1	7
Explanation	1531	6.189	1.147	1	7
NoConseq	1936	0.008	0.088	0	1
PayBack	1936	0.531	0.499	0	1
Resign	1936	0.431	0.495	0	1
Expel	1936	0.155	0.362	0	1
Prosecute	1936	0.556	0.497	0	1
<i>Control variables</i>					
Male	1996	0.491	0.500	0	1
Nationality (1 = Norwegian)	1965	0.947	0.224	0	1
Education	1939	2.569	0.602	1	3
Birth decade	1996	4.047	1.520	1	6
Income	1956	2.511	1.015	1	4
Region	1996	3.008	1.541	1	6
Interest in politics	498	2.267	0.728	1	4
Left-right self-placement	1758	5.623	2.288	0	10
Satisfaction with democracy	1693	2.362	0.873	1	5
Confidence in politicians	1688	2.882	0.789	1	5

Note: 'In-group' equals 1 for respondents evaluating a politician of their most preferred party (0 for the least preferred party). NoBAB refers to our control group, which does not receive information about the politician's response to the allegations. Funds, System, Worth, and Common refer to the different types of blame avoidance behaviour (full details in the main text, including Fig. 1). Assessment captures respondents' answer to the question "How do you assess the politician's behaviour?" (coded from 1 "very unproblematic" to 7 "very problematic"). Explanation captures respondents' answer to the question "How do you assess the politician's explanation for his behaviour?" (coded from 1 "very believable" to 7 "very unbelievable"). The remaining dependent variables capture respondents' answers to the question "Do you think the politician's actions deserve consequences?". Answer options include 'there should be no consequences' (NoConseq), 'the politician should pay the money back' (PayBack), 'the politician should resign from his position/office' (Resign), 'the politician should be expelled from the party' (Expel), and 'the politician should be prosecuted in a court of law' (Prosecute).

Table A.2
Balancing checks

	Partisan treatment	Blame Avoidance treatments
Male	0.538	0.396
Nationality	0.302	0.542
Education	0.717	0.748
Birth decade	0.692	0.725
Income	0.660	0.757
Region	0.495	0.935
Interest in politics	0.964	0.689
Left-right self-placement	0.398	0.399
Satisfaction with democracy	0.573	0.380
Confidence in politicians	0.446	0.878

Note: The table displays the p-values of Kruskal-Wallis equality-of-populations rank tests, which compare the distribution of individual background characteristics across respondent samples in the different experimental treatments. Partisan treatment refers to respondents evaluating a politician of their most or least preferred party, while Blame Avoidance treatments refers to the experimental variation in terms of the blame avoidance strategies by the politicians in response to the allegations.

Table A0.3
Representativeness of the sample

	Sample respondents	SSB
Male	49.1%	49.96%
Nationality (Norwegian citizenship)	94.7%	88.7%
Education levels		
Primary and lower secondary school (Grunnskolenivå)	5.6%	24.8%
Secondary school (Vidergående skolenivå)	21.8%	36.9%
Tertiary vocational diploma (Fag skolenivå)	8.9%	3%
University/college (until 4 years)	28.2%	24.7%
University/college (more than 4 years)	24.5%	10.6%
Birth decade		
1990 or later (30 or younger)	8.7%	21.6%
1980–1989 (31–40)	10.7%	18.8%
1970–1979 (41–50)	15.8%	17.2%
1960–1969 (51–60)	23.4%	16.3%
1950–1959 (61–70)	23.6%	13.4%
1949 or earlier (71 or older)	17.6%	14.4%
Employment (sector)		
Public sector	39.7%	32%
Publicly owned enterprise	7.5%	4%
Private sector	56.7%	63.8%
Region (County)		
Oslo	16%	21.9%
Rogaland	9.8%	8.9%
Møre og Romsdal	3.7%	4.9%
Nordland	4.4%	4.4%
Viken	23.5%	23.2%
Innlandet	5.4%	6.8%
Vestfold og Telemark	7.2%	7.8%
Agder	4.3%	5.7%
Vestland	12.8%	11.8%
Trøndelag	8.5%	8.7%
Troms og Finnmark	4.1%	4.5%

Note: The table displays the percentage of respondents in the various groups, and the corresponding population statistic for 2020 from the Norwegian Statistical Bureau (SSB).

Table A.4
Effect of Blame Avoidance using (ordered) logistic regression models (no controls)

	(1) Assessment	(2) Explanation	(3) NoConseq	(4) PayBack	(5) Resign	(6) Expel	(7) Prosecute
Funds	0.0662 (0.173)	–	–0.867 (0.840)	0.00822 (0.143)	–0.313** (0.144)	–0.0591 (0.191)	–0.170 (0.145)
System	–0.758*** (0.158)	–0.184 (0.140)	–0.438 (0.734)	0.332** (0.145)	–0.332** (0.145)	–0.647*** (0.218)	–0.553*** (0.146)
Worth	–0.244 (0.164)	0.370** (0.145)	–0.911 (0.840)	0.156 (0.142)	–0.199 (0.142)	–0.0926 (0.190)	–0.186 (0.144)
Common	–0.0642 (0.170)	–0.314** (0.140)	–0.472 (0.734)	0.338** (0.143)	–0.271* (0.144)	–0.0189 (0.189)	–0.157 (0.145)
Observations	1939	1531	1936	1936	1936	1936	1936
Controls	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO

Note: The table display the coefficient estimates obtained from (ordered) logistic regression models. *Assessment* measures respondents' answer to the question "How do you assess the politician's behaviour?" (coded 1 "very unproblematic" to 7 "very problematic"). *Explanation* captures answers to the question "How do you assess the politician's explanation for his behaviour?" (coded 1 "very believable" to 7 "very unbelievable"). The remaining dependent variables capture answers to the question "Do you think the politician's actions deserve consequences?". Answer options include 'there should be no consequences' (*NoConseq*), 'the politician should pay the money back' (*PayBack*), 'the politician should resign from his position/office' (*Resign*), 'the politician should be expelled from the party' (*Expel*), and 'the politician should be prosecuted in a court of law' (*Prosecute*). *Funds*, *System*, *Worth*, and *Common* refer to the different types of blame avoidance behaviours, and are indicator variables equal to 1 if the respondent is exposed to the respective blame avoidance strategy (0 otherwise). The *control* group is our excluded reference category. ***, ** and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level, respectively.

Table A.5
Effect of Blame Avoidance using (ordered) logistic regression models (with controls)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Assessment	Explanation	PayBack	Resign	Expel	Prosecute
Funds	-0.0130 (0.182)	-	0.00783 (0.150)	-0.376** (0.151)	-0.114 (0.199)	-0.159 (0.156)
System	-0.781*** (0.168)	-0.113 (0.145)	0.371** (0.152)	-0.378** (0.152)	-0.657*** (0.224)	-0.560*** (0.157)
Worth	-0.252 (0.174)	0.446*** (0.150)	0.146 (0.149)	-0.232 (0.148)	-0.141 (0.196)	-0.208 (0.154)
Common	-0.00815 (0.180)	-0.230 (0.145)	0.331** (0.150)	-0.313** (0.149)	-0.0809 (0.195)	-0.174 (0.155)
Male	-0.152 (0.114)	0.168 (0.111)	0.00164 (0.102)	-0.117 (0.101)	0.457*** (0.139)	0.740*** (0.104)
Østlandet	-0.0270 (0.166)	-0.103 (0.156)	0.0519 (0.146)	0.153 (0.146)	-0.110 (0.187)	-0.456*** (0.153)
Sørlandet	4.07e-06 (0.286)	-0.126 (0.288)	0.145 (0.261)	0.314 (0.258)	-0.311 (0.366)	0.0785 (0.275)
Vestlandet	-0.121 (0.173)	-0.102 (0.163)	0.136 (0.153)	0.0861 (0.153)	-0.278 (0.201)	-0.495*** (0.160)
Trøndelag	0.267 (0.241)	0.131 (0.220)	0.285 (0.205)	0.158 (0.202)	-0.636** (0.296)	-0.710*** (0.209)
Nord-Norge	0.191 (0.239)	-0.0600 (0.218)	-0.0331 (0.204)	0.0383 (0.204)	-0.590** (0.297)	-0.469** (0.211)
Upper secondary	0.544** (0.227)	0.435* (0.245)	-0.0331 (0.223)	0.323 (0.232)	-0.133 (0.300)	0.256 (0.228)
University	0.854*** (0.228)	0.402* (0.241)	0.180 (0.220)	0.398* (0.230)	-0.0543 (0.294)	0.248 (0.226)
Birth 1950-1959	0.0469 (0.191)	0.148 (0.176)	0.0101 (0.152)	-0.205 (0.155)	-0.229 (0.205)	0.499*** (0.157)
Birth 1960-1969	-0.520*** (0.187)	-0.358** (0.174)	0.263* (0.157)	-0.0655 (0.159)	-0.417* (0.219)	0.341** (0.162)
Birth 1970-1979	-0.761*** (0.202)	-0.472** (0.188)	0.365** (0.172)	0.240 (0.173)	-0.0342 (0.229)	0.649*** (0.181)
Birth 1980-1989	-0.807*** (0.213)	-0.761*** (0.201)	1.048*** (0.198)	0.526*** (0.189)	0.0122 (0.249)	0.482** (0.195)
Birth 1990 or later	-1.189*** (0.217)	-0.932*** (0.216)	1.218*** (0.221)	0.594*** (0.206)	0.217 (0.266)	0.456** (0.210)
Nationality (1 = Norw.)	0.288 (0.225)	0.131 (0.222)	0.0341 (0.220)	0.108 (0.218)	-0.231 (0.283)	0.192 (0.224)
Income <500,000	0.0489 (0.160)	-0.126 (0.162)	0.204 (0.153)	0.163 (0.152)	0.269 (0.211)	-0.0379 (0.153)
Income 500,001-700000	0.290* (0.175)	0.222 (0.178)	0.164 (0.163)	0.153 (0.162)	0.0482 (0.229)	0.104 (0.164)
Income >700,001	0.760*** (0.214)	0.135 (0.203)	0.144 (0.185)	0.0999 (0.185)	0.152 (0.254)	0.682*** (0.192)
Observations	1863	1478	1860	1860	1860	1860
Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

Note: The table display the coefficient estimates obtained from (ordered) logistic regression models. *Assessment* measures respondents' answer to the question "How do you assess the politician's behaviour?" (coded 1 "very unproblematic" to 7 "very problematic"). *Explanation* captures answers to the question "How do you assess the politician's explanation for his behaviour?" (coded 1 "very believable" to 7 "very unbelievable"). The remaining dependent variables capture answers to the question "Do you think the politician's actions deserve consequences?". Answer options include 'there should be no consequences' (*NoConseq*), 'the politician should pay the money back' (*PayBack*), 'the politician should resign from his position/office' (*Resign*), 'the politician should be expelled from the party' (*Expel*), and 'the politician should be prosecuted in a court of law' (*Prosecute*). *Funds*, *System*, *Worth*, and *Common* refer to the different types of blame avoidance behaviours, and are indicator variables equal to 1 if the respondent is exposed to the respective blame avoidance strategy (0 otherwise). The *control* group is our excluded reference category. ***, ** and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level, respectively.

Table A.6
Effect of Blame Avoidance as a Function of Account Believability

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Full sample	Non-believers	Believers	Full sample	Non-believers	Believers
Funds	0.0662 (0.173)	0.602*** (0.211)	-0.972*** (0.232)	-0.0130 (0.182)	0.493** (0.220)	-0.993*** (0.245)
System	-0.758*** (0.158)	0.146 (0.195)	-2.251*** (0.208)	-0.781*** (0.168)	0.166 (0.207)	-2.302*** (0.224)
Worth	-0.244 (0.164)	0.320* (0.190)	-1.869*** (0.242)	-0.252 (0.174)	0.282 (0.200)	-1.868*** (0.255)
Common	-0.0642 (0.170)	0.640*** (0.219)	-1.053*** (0.212)	-0.00815 (0.180)	0.625*** (0.228)	-0.912*** (0.228)
Observations	1939	1530	811	1863	1470	772
Controls	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES

Note: The table display the coefficient estimates obtained from (ordered) logistic regression models. *Assessment* measures respondents' answers to the question "How do you assess the politician's behaviour?" (coded 1 "very unproblematic" to 7 "very problematic"). *Funds*, *System*, *Worth*, and *Common* refer to the different types of blame avoidance behaviours, and are indicator variables equal to 1 if the respondent is exposed to the respective blame avoidance strategy (0 otherwise). The *control* group is our excluded reference category. Columns (1) and (4) include the full sample of respondents. Columns (2) and (5) include only those respondents who have (serious) doubts about the account provided, while columns (3) and (6) include only voters who believe the offered account. This is measured using the question "How do you assess the politician's explanation for his behaviour?" (coded 1 "very believable" to 7 "very unbelievable"). The sample is split by respondents answering 6 or 7 (Columns (2) and (5)) and those answering 5 or less (Columns (3) and (6)). ***, ** and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level, respectively. Observe that this analysis warrants cautious interpretation as it likely suffers from post-treatment bias. Recent research indicates that the magnitude and direction of the post-treatment bias in these regression models remain unknown. This is because conditioning on post-treatment variables (i.e. believability) effectively disrupts the experiment by 'de-randomizing' the groups, such that they no longer have equivalent potential outcomes (further details in the main text).

Table A.7
Effects of Blame Avoidance Behaviours by Partisan (Mis)alignment

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Out-group	In-group	Out-group	In-group
Funds	0.0966 (0.109)	0.0388 (0.119)	0.0860 (0.136)	-0.0365 (0.144)
System	-0.156 (0.112)	-0.414*** (0.117)	-0.170 (0.140)	-0.432*** (0.140)
Worth	-0.0694 (0.112)	-0.121 (0.113)	-0.0721 (0.139)	-0.149 (0.138)
Common	-0.00154 (0.108)	-0.137 (0.120)	-0.0751 (0.134)	-0.0425 (0.143)
Observations	971	963	698	688
R-squared	0.006	0.018	0.084	0.080
Controls	NO	NO	YES	YES

Note: The table display the coefficient estimates obtained from OLS regression models. *Assessment* is the dependent variable and measures respondents' answer to the question "How do you assess the politician's behaviour?" (coded 1 "very unproblematic" to 7 "very problematic"). *Funds*, *System*, *Worth*, and *Common* refer to the different types of blame avoidance behaviours, and are indicator variables equal to 1 if the respondent is exposed to the respective blame avoidance strategy (0 otherwise). The *control* group is our excluded reference category. Columns (1) and (2) replicate the models for Fig. 4, whereas columns (3) and (4) replicate it including control variables. ***, ** and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level, respectively.

Table A.8
Heterogeneity across party preference

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Assessment	Explanation	PayBack	Resign	Expel	Prosecute
Left-party						
in-group treatment	21.03 *** (p = 0.00)	16.58 *** (p = 0.00)	11.90 *** (p = 0.01)	5.75 (p = 0.22)	7.66 * (p = 0.10)	12.35 ** (p = 0.01)
out-group treatment	6.42 (p = 0.17)	12.40 *** (p = 0.01)	7.38 (p = 0.12)	2.87 (p = 0.58)	2.94 (p = 0.57)	5.67 (p = 0.23)
Centrist party						
in-group treatment	8.55 * (p = 0.07)	5.59 (p = 0.13)	1.58 (p = 0.81)	0.30 (p = 0.99)	4.18 (p = 0.38)	3.14 (p = 0.53)
out-group treatment	11.40 ** (p = 0.02)	4.11 (p = 0.25)	7.98 * (p = 0.09)	7.38 (p = 0.12)	2.93 (p = 0.57)	0.51 (p = 0.97)
Rightist party						
in-group treatment	2.99 (p = 0.56)	2.08 (p = 0.56)	3.18 (p = 0.53)	0.68 (p = 0.95)	3.56 (p = 0.47)	6.11 (p = 0.19)
out-group treatment	3.02 (p = 0.55)	2.47 (p = 0.48)	5.91 (p = 0.21)	4.32 (p = 0.37)	6.22 (p = 0.18)	1.51 (p = 0.82)

Note: The table displays the Chi² test statistic (and its p-value between brackets) of Kruskal-Wallis equality-of-populations rank tests evaluating differences in the answer distribution across blame avoidance treatments for respondents in a given partisan treatment (in-group versus out-group) and leaning towards a certain party (i.e. left, centre or right). Dependent variables are explained in the notes to Figs. 2 and 3.

Table A.9
Heterogeneity by party preference

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Left		Centre		Right	
	Out-group	In-group	Out-group	In-group	Out-group	In-group
Funds	0.339 (0.404)	0.315 (0.366)	-0.193 (0.580)	-0.509 (0.504)	-0.166 (0.416)	0.247 (0.404)
System	-0.586 (0.360)	-1.020*** (0.302)	-1.345** (0.539)	-1.158** (0.467)	-0.393 (0.409)	-0.128 (0.400)
Worth	-0.148 (0.362)	-0.0717 (0.316)	-0.282 (0.654)	-0.432 (0.479)	-0.637 (0.409)	-0.0569 (0.404)
Common	-0.184 (0.353)	-0.211 (0.331)	-0.109 (0.619)	-0.127 (0.517)	-0.134 (0.423)	0.602 (0.478)
Observations	445	454	213	221	313	288
Controls	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO

Note: The table display the coefficient estimates obtained from ordered logistic regression models. *Assessment* is the dependent variable and measures respondents' answer to the question "How do you assess the politician's behaviour?" (coded 1 "very unproblematic" to 7 "very problematic"). *Funds*, *System*, *Worth*, and *Common* refer to the different types of blame avoidance behaviours, and are indicator variables equal to 1 if the respondent is exposed to the respective blame avoidance strategy (0 otherwise). The *control* group is our excluded reference category. ***, ** and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level, respectively.

Appendix B. Research design

Please consider the following hypothetical situation:

Last week, various media revealed that a parliamentary representative for [*Most preferred party/Least preferred party*] has allegedly requested reimbursement of thousands of Norwegian kroner for a number of trips that have never taken place. This is alleged to have gone on over several months. The politician is alleged to have reported several visits to the party's local and regional departments around the country in connection with his position as parliamentary representative, but sources deny that he has visited during this period.

Excuse 1	Excuse 2	Justification 1	Justification 2
- In an interview, the politician replied that it was necessary to use such travel expense claims in order to make up for money he had spent in connection to his duties.	In an interview, the politician replied that it was an unintentional administrative error when filling out the forms, due to the complicated travel expense system.	In an interview, the politician replied that his work, and what he means to his voters is worth more than the sum of the travel expense claims.	In an interview, the politician replied that he was told by his predecessors that this was common practice during their tenure, and had the impression that this was still the norm.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you assess the politicians' behaviour? (seven-point scale from 1 ("very unproblematic") to 7 ("very problematic")) • How do you assess the politician's explanation for his behaviour? (seven-point scale from 1 ("very believable") to 7 ("very unbelievable")) • Do you think the politician's actions deserve consequences? 			
No, there should not be any consequences for the politician			
Yes, the politician should pay the money back			
Yes, the politician should resign from their position/office			
Yes, the politician should be excluded from the party			
Yes, the politician should be prosecuted			

Appendix C. Research design source material

McGraw (1990, 1991) was the first to translate the conceptual framework developed by Scott and Lyman (1968) to a political setting. Figure C1 gives a visual presentation of our adaptation of the McGraw (1990, 1991) framework in preparation for the survey experiment (note that the specific lay-out on the left-hand side of Figure C1 is taken from McGraw, 1990). We started by collapsing some of the original categories into more general blame avoidance strategies. Then we searched traditional and online media sources for relevant and recent examples of politicians using these various strategies. Due to concerns of power and limited survey time in an experimental setting, some strategies were dropped from consideration at this point and we focused on those strategies where relevant, recent examples could be retrieved of politicians using them in interviews. The strategies retained are in boldface in Figure C1.

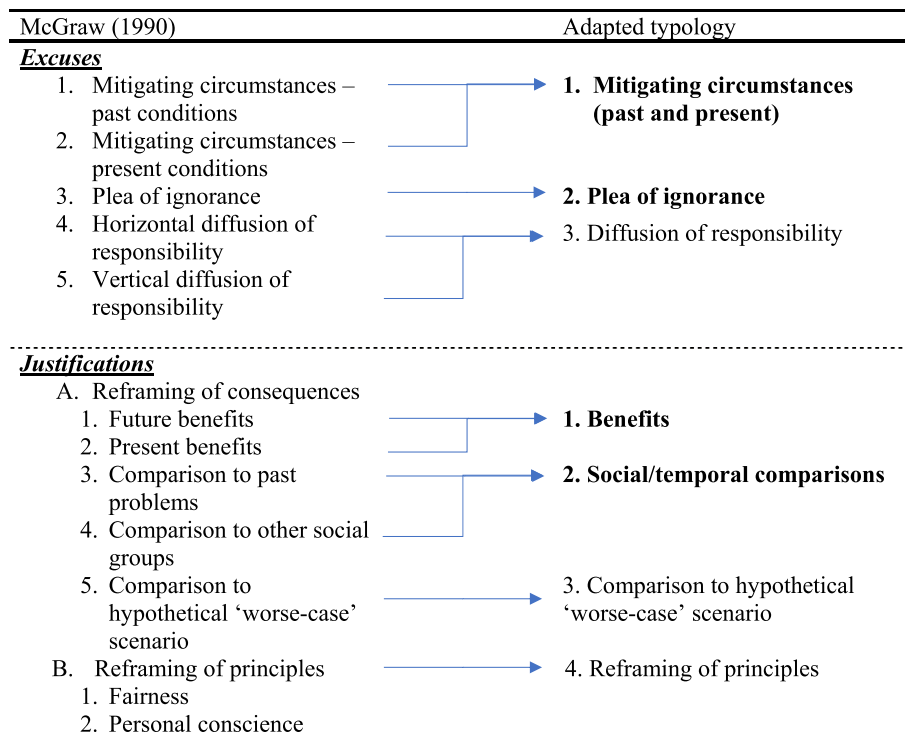


Fig. C.1. Adaptation of the McGraw framework.

Table C1 provides an overview of some of the real-world examples that inspired the formulation of our vignette. We should also note here that the travel expenses scandal at the heart of our vignette took place in Norway in 2018 and 2019, and centred around Mazyar Keshvari from the right-wing Progress Party (FrP) and Hege Haukeland Liadal from the left-of-centre Labour Party (AP). These politicians were active at the national level, and the allegations were discussed extensively in *Aftenposten*, the largest newspaper in Norway in terms of readership.

Table C.1
Real-world examples and inspiration for vignette phrasing

1. Mitigating circumstances	2. Plea of ignorance	3. Benefits	4. Social/temporal comparisons
He “admitted that he ‘fiddled’ his expenses to make up for not being paid a salary.” (Beckford, 2009) “I averaged them out because of my total expenditure. I have spent all of my money, £200,000, being a peer, and I have claimed £150,000 back. I have claimed what I thought I could within the law. I have never done anything illegal in my life.” (BBC, 2011) “There has been no loss to the taxpayer as a result of any error of mine. In most of my years in parliament the costs I have incurred have been greater, and in some years much greater than the reimbursement I have received.” (Bury Times, 2010)	“Mr. Morley said the claim had been a ‘mistake’ due to ‘sloppy accounting’.” (BBC 2009a) “I was told by the fees office and by an individual whip that I could do this [...] If I’ve done anything wrong I’ve been naïve and I’ve listened to the wrong people.” (Murthy, 2009) “Lord Hanningfield maintained he was only sorry he had made a ‘mistake in filling out the forms’ and he did not apologize for over-claiming. He told the BBC’s Stewart White that he did not know he was doing wrong at the time. ‘I do accept now that I should have thought more about it and consulted people and taken advice and not filled in the forms as I did’.” (McGurran, 2011) “It was an ‘inadvertent administrative error’, he said and apologized [...] He said there had been ‘and inadvertent overlap in bill payments. This was entirely accidental’.” (BBC, 2009b) “She explains that scheduled trips were cancelled, and that she has delivered bills for the wrong dates. She adds that it can be difficult to understand the travel expense system, and that ‘some things are not always obvious’.” (Ekroll et al., 2019)	“And he boasted: ‘I give enormous value for money for my constituents, bringing millions of pounds into the local economy and public services.’” (Carlin, 2010)	“I was given the impression – more than that – I was given a very clear steer that this was the way of getting remuneration in the absence of salary,” he told a Sunday newspaper. “I was told you claim the full amount. I’m not saying anything about anybody else, but the impression I got was that if I didn’t do what people did, it would bring a bad light on somebody else.” (Beckford, 2009) “[...] had denied fraud, claiming that he had been told by a fellow peer that he was entitled to claim travel costs and an overnight allowance despite living in London.” (McSmith, 2011)

Appendix D. Pre-registration at AEA Registry

See full registration at: <https://www.socialscisearch.org/trials/6835>

References

- Anderson, C.J., Tverdova, Y.V., 2003. Corruption, political Allegiances and Attitudes toward government in Contemporary Democracies. *Am. J. Polit. Sci.* 47 (1), 91–109.
- Anduiza, E., Gallego, A., Muñoz, J., 2013. Turning a Blind Eye: experimental evidence of partisan bias in Attitudes toward corruption. *Comp. Polit. Stud.* 46 (12), 1664–1692.
- Arias, E., Larreguy, H., Marshall, J., Querubin, P., 2022. Priors rule: when do malfeasance revelations help or hurt incumbent parties? *J. Eur. Econ. Assoc.* 20 (4), 1433–1477.
- Aronow, P., Baron, J., Pinson, L., 2019. A note on dropping experimental subjects who fail a manipulation check. *Polit. Anal.* 27 (4), 572–589.
- Bisgaard, M., 2019. How Getting the facts right can fuel partisan-motivated reasoning. *Am. J. Polit. Sci.* 63 (4), 824–839.
- Blais, A., Gidengil, E., Fournier, P., Neville, N., Everitt, J., Kim, J., 2010. Political judgement, perceptions of facts and partisan effects. *Elect. Stud.* 29, 1–12.
- Blais, A., Gidengil, E., Kilibarda, A., 2016. Partisanship, information and perceptions of government corruption. *Int. J. Publ. Opin. Res.* 29 (1), 95–110.
- Bolkan, S., Daly, J.A., 2009. Organizational responses to consumer complaints: an examination of effective remediation tactics. *J. Appl. Commun. Res.* 37 (1), 21–39.
- Bøttkjær, L., Justesen, M.K., 2021. Why do voters support corrupt politicians? Experimental evidence from South Africa. *J. Polit.* 83 (2), 788–793.
- Budesheim, T.L., Houston, D.A., DePaola, S.J., 1996. Persuasiveness of in-group and out-group political messages: the case of negative political campaigning. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.* 70 (3), 523–534.
- Chang, Eric C.C., Kerr, Nicholas N., 2017. An Insider-outsider theory of popular Tolerance for corrupt politicians. *Governance* 30 (1), 67–84.
- Coombs, T., Schmidt, L., 2000. An empirical analysis of image Restoration: Texaco's racism crisis. *J. Publ. Relat. Res.* 12 (2), 163–178.
- Coombs, W.T., 2007. Protecting Organization Reputations during a crisis: the development and Application of situational crisis Communication theory. *Corp. Reput. Rev.* 10, 163–176.
- Coppock, A., 2019. Avoiding post-treatment bias in Audit experiments. *Journal of Experimental Political Science* 6 (1), 1–4.
- De Jaegher, K., 2021. Common-enemy effects: Multidisciplinary Antecedents and Economic perspectives. *J. Econ. Surv.* 35 (1), 3–33.
- Ditto, Peter H., Liu, Brittany S., Clark, Cory J., Wojcik, Sean P., Chen, Eric E., Grady, Rebecca H., Celniker, Jared B., Zinger, Joanne F., 2019. At least bias is bipartisan: a meta-analytic comparison of partisan bias in liberals and conservatives. *Perspect. Psychol. Sci.* 14 (2), 273–291.
- Dechêne, A., Stahl, C., Hansen, J., Wänke, M., 2010. The Truth about the Truth: a meta-analytic review of the Truth effect. *Pers. Soc. Psychol. Rev.* 14 (2), 238–257.
- Fiva, J.H., Geys, B., Heggedal, T.R., Sørensen, R.J., 2021. Political alignment and bureaucratic pay. *J. Publ. Adm. Res. Theor.* 31 (3), 596–615.
- Funck, A.S., McCabe, K.T., 2022. Partisanship, information, and the conditional effects of scandal on voting decisions. *Polit. Behav.* 44, 1389–1409.
- Funk, C.L., 1996. The impact of scandal on candidate evaluations: an experimental test of the role of candidate traits. *Polit. Behav.* 18, 1–24.
- Gonzales, M.H., 1992. A thousand Pardons: the effectiveness of Verbal Remedial tactics during account Episodes. *J. Lang. Soc. Psychol.* 11 (3), 133–151.
- Greene, S., 1999. Understanding party identification: a social identity approach. *Polit. Psychol.* 20 (2), 393–403.
- Hainmueller, J., Hopkins, D.J., Yamamoto, T., 2014. Causal inference in conjoint analysis: understanding multidimensional choices via stated preference experiments. *Polit. Anal.* 22 (1), 1–30.
- Hansson, S., 2015. Discursive strategies of blame avoidance in government: a framework for analysis. *Discourse Soc.* 26 (3), 297–322.
- Hegnar, T., 2020. Politikere Og Dobbeltlønn. *Finansavisen*. Last accessed on 3 March 2022 from: <https://finansavisen.no/leder/2020/02/18/7498986/politikere-og-dobbeltloenn>.
- Hill, L., 2013. Conceptions of political corruption in Ancient Athens and Rome. *Hist. Polit. Thought* 34 (4), 565–587.
- Hinterleitner, M., Sager, F., 2017. Anticipatory and reactive forms of blame avoidance: of foxes and lions. *European Political Science Review* 9 (4), 587–606.
- Hinterleitner, M., 2020. Policy Controversies and Political Blame Games. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Hood, C., 2011. The Blame Game: Spin, Bureaucracy and Self-Preservation in Government. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Hood, C., Jennings, W., Dixon, R., Hogwood, B., Beeston, C., 2009. Testing times: Exploring Staged responses and the impact of blame management strategies in two examination Fiasco cases. *Eur. J. Polit. Res.* 48 (6), 695–722.
- Hood, C., Jennings, W., Copeland, P., 2016. Blame avoidance in comparative perspective: Reactivity, Staged Retreat and Efficacy. *Publ. Adm.* 94 (2), 542–562.
- Husak, D., 1996. The but-Everyone-does-that Defense. *Publ. Aff. Q.* 10 (4), 307–334.
- Keivins, A., Vis, B., 2023. Do public Consultations reduce blame attribution? The impact of Consultation characteristics, gender, and gender Attitudes. *Political Behavior* Forthcoming.
- Klašnja, M., Tucker, J.A., 2013. The economy, corruption, and the vote: evidence from experiments in Sweden and Moldova. *Elect. Stud.* 32 (3), 536–543.
- McClosky, H., Chong, D., 1985. Similarities and differences between left-wing and right-wing Radicals. *Br. J. Polit. Sci.* 15 (3), 329–363.
- McGraw, K.M., 1990. Avoiding Blame: an experimental investigation of political excuses and justifications. *Br. J. Polit. Sci.* 20 (1), 119–131.
- McGraw, K.M., 1991. Managing blame: an experimental test of the effects of political accounts. *Am. Polit. Sci. Rev.* 85 (4), 1133–1157.
- McLauchlin, T., Pearlman, W., 2012. Out-group Conflict, in-group unity? Exploring the effect of Repression on Intra-movement Cooperation. *J. Conflict Resolut.* 56 (1), 41–66.
- Montgomery, J.M., Nyhan, B., Torres, M., 2018. How conditioning on Posttreatment variables can ruin your experiment and what to do about it. *Am. J. Polit. Sci.* 62, 760–775.
- Pavão, N., 2018. Corruption as the only option: the limits to electoral accountability. *J. Polit.* 80 (3), 996–1010.
- Pennington, J., Schlenker, B.R., 1999. Accountability for consequential decisions: justifying ethical judgments to audiences. *Pers. Soc. Psychol. Bull.* 25 (9), 1067–1081.
- Rajan, A., Pao, C., 2022. Who has room for error? The effects of political scandal for minority candidates. *Elect. Stud.* 77, 102460.
- Schönbage, N.L., Geys, B., 2022. Partisan bias in politicians' perception of scandals. *Party Polit.* 28 (4), 691–701.
- Schönbage, N.L., Geys, B., 2023. Politicians' reactions to scandals that damage the party brand. *Legis. Stud. Q.* 48 (2), 305–331.
- Schönbage, N.L., Bækgaard, M., Geys, B., 2023. The politics of distributing blame and credit: evidence from a survey experiment with Norwegian local politicians. *Eur. J. Polit. Res.* <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12610> forthcoming.
- Scott, M.B., Lyman, S.M., 1968. Accounts. *Am. Socio. Rev.* 33 (1), 46–62.
- Smith, E.S., Smith Powers, A., Suarez, G.A., 2005. If Bill Clinton were a woman: The effectiveness of male and female politicians' account strategies following alleged transgressions. *Political Psychology* 26 (1), 115–134.
- Solaz, H., De Vries, C.E., de Geus, R.A., 2019. In-group loyalty and the punishment of corruption. *Comp. Polit. Stud.* 52 (6), 896–926.
- Stockemer, D., Praino, R., 2019. The good, the bad and the ugly: do attractive politicians get a 'break' when they are involved in scandals? *Polit. Behav.* 41, 747–767.
- Taber, C.S., Lodge, M., 2006. Motivated skepticism and the evaluation of political beliefs. *Am. J. Polit. Sci.* 50 (3), 755–769.
- Vivyan, N., Wagner, M., Tarlov, J., 2012. Representative misconduct, voter perceptions and accountability: evidence from the 2009 House of Commons expenses scandal. *Elect. Stud.* 31 (4), 750–763.
- Weaver, R.K., 1986. The politics of blame avoidance. *J. Publ. Pol.* 6 (4), 371–398.
- Wenzelburger, G., Hörisch, F., 2016. Framing effects and comparative social policy reform: comparing blame avoidance evidence from two experiments. *J. Comp. Pol. Anal.: Research and Practice* 18 (2), 157–175.

References

- Beckford, M., 2009. Lord Clarke of Hampstead Admitted 'terrible Error': MP's Expenses. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopping/mps-expenses/6598921/Lord-Clarke-of-Hampstead-admitted-terrible-error-MPs-expenses.html>.
- BBC, 2009a. Brown Suspends Mortgage Claim MP. BBC News. Retrieved from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/8049096.stm.
- BBC, 2009b. Hoon Sorry for Expenses 'error'. BBC News. Retrieved from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/8078243.stm.
- BBC, 2011. Peerage 'left Tory Lord Hanningfield Out of Pocket'. BBC News. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-13431700>.
- Carlin, B., 2010. Expenses row MP Harry Cohen: I'm worth millions to my constituency. Daily Mail Online. Retrieved from: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1245612/Expenses-row-MP-Harry-Cohen-Im-worth-millions-constituency.html>.

- Bury Times, 2010. David Chaytor: 'A fair hearing is all I ask'. Bury Times, 11.02.2010. Retrieved from. <https://www.burytimes.co.uk/news/5000470.david-chaytor-a-fair-hearing-is-all-i-ask>.
- Ekroll, H.C., Ruud, S., Dahl, C.A., Kagge, G., Ringnes, T., 2018. Aftenposten avslører: FRP-profil leverte fiktive reiseregninger til stortinget. Aftenposten 17.10.18. Retrieved from. <https://www.aftenposten.no/norge/politikk/i/Rx0GR2/aftenpost-en-avsloerer-frp-profil-leverte-fiktive-reiseregninger-til-stortinget>.
- Ekroll, H.C., Dahl, C.A., Eggesvik, O., Thoresen, F., Ringnes, T., 2019. Ap-politiker Leverte Fiktive Reiseregninger Til Stortinget. *Aftenposten*, 09.04.2019. Retrieved from. <https://www.aftenposten.no/norge/politikk/i/1n6ApJ/aftenposten-avsloerer-ap-politiker-leverte-fiktive-reiseregninger-til-stortinget>.
- McGurran, D., 2011. Jailed Peer Lord Hanningfield Rues Expenses 'mistake'. BBC News. Retrieved from. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-15940286>.
- McSmith, A., 2011. Former Tory Peer Jailed for Expenses Fraud. *Independent*. Retrieved from. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/former-tory-peer-jailed-for-expenses-fraud-2291602.html>.
- Murthy, K.-G., 2009. Jim Devine and Expenses - THAT Interview with Channel 4 News. Retrieved from. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1CtTmsXb4>.
- Sculthorpe, T., 2016. Peer to be suspended for a SECOND time after being caught double claiming travel receipts six years after he was forced to repay £27,000 in wrongly claimed expenses. Daily Mail Online. Retrieved from. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3541836/Peer-suspended-SECOND-time-caught-double-claiming-travel-receipts-six-years-forced-repay-27-000-wrongly-claimed-expenses.html>.