

*Blaming vs. Blaming:
The Effect of Blame Games during the
Dutch Avian Flu*

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Abstract

Managing a crisis is more than just taking operational measures to control the crisis. It also includes facing political and public disgruntlement. During most crises, there is a need to hold someone responsible for what has happened. Blame will be assigned whether it is deserved or not. Since blame may very well lead to resignation, actors will do their best to avoid getting blamed. One person's successful blame response, however, can be another person's downfall. So how do blame responses of various actors influence the actor who is mainly in charge of managing the crisis? And what is the effect of this main actor's actions in terms of blame response and operational measures when incidents continue to occur thereby showing that the crisis is far from over? In this paper, the effect of five variables (the operational response of the main and other actors, the blame response of the main and other actors, and the occurrence of incidents) on the main actor's blame level will be investigated using the Dutch avian flu crisis.

Introduction¹

Managing a crisis is more than just taking operational measures to control the crisis. It also includes facing political and public disgruntlement. During most crises, there is a need to hold someone responsible for what has happened. Blame will be assigned whether it is deserved or not. However, since blame may very well lead to resignation, actors will do their best to avoid getting blamed. Their response to getting blamed can vary from 'we know nothing about it' to blaming someone else or actually accepting blame. But what are the effects of these blame responses? Do they actually result in lower blame levels? And to what extent are blame levels influenced by other actors' blame responses?

In this paper, the effects of five variables on blame levels are investigated: the operational response of the main and other actors, the blame response of the main and other actors, and the occurrence of incidents. Following the work of Hood et al. (2009), the effect of blame responses on the blame allocated to a minister and its ministry are investigated. Since the minister and its ministry are usually not the only actors involved in the management of a crisis, the blame responses of other involved actors will be taken into account. Moreover, since new incidents might fuel the crisis, it is important to determine the effect of the occurrence of new incidents on the blame level (Resodihardjo, 2009a). The same goes for operational measures. It is of the utmost importance for crisis managers to show that they are in control (cf. McConnell, 2003; Resodihardjo, 2006). Announcing operational measures can be one way to show this control. However, whether the public and other actors take this as a sign of being in control can be doubted – especially if continuing incidents show that the crisis managers are not in control of the crisis at all. This raises the question to what extent the taking of operational measures results in lower blame levels.

In order to investigate the effects of these variables on the blame level of a minister and its ministry, the outbreak of avian flu in the Netherlands in 2003 was selected as a case study. The case allows the researcher to focus on a main actor responsible for managing the crisis (the Minister and Ministry of Agriculture) while at the same time containing multiple actors who tried to shift blame to one another as

¹ The author would like to thank Maarten Gerearts, Dorine van de Lustgraaf, Dineke Meijers, Josien de Reuver, Anne Walraven, and Wouter Zantinga for their help in creating the Dutch avian flu dataset.

things went seriously wrong in the managing of the avian flu – most notably the many errors made in the killing and disposal of the birds. In addition, various actors took numerous operational measures to deal with the crisis. These measures did not always prove to be effective as incidents continued to occur. In short, the outbreak of avian flu is an interesting case to determine to what extent blame responses, incidents, and operational measures influence the blame level of the minister and its ministry. Following an outline of the theory and how the research was conducted, the avian flu will be described and analyzed using regression analyses.

Blame games and blame response – a theoretical outline

There is quite a collection of literature on how to deal with blame. The authors who focus on these so-called blame games often prescribe what one should do when facing blame. But what do these blame games entail? In this section, blame and possible blame responses will be described and the assumptions regarding the five variables of this research (blame response by the main actor; blame response by other actors; incidents; operational measures by the main actor; and operational measures by other actors) will be made explicit.

Credit and blame

Weaver (1986) was one of the first authors to point out that politicians will do anything to avoid blame – including not claiming any credit for any policy change since accepting credit now could lead to blame in the future when the policy fails. In order to avoid any blame in the future, politicians have multiple strategies at their disposal. Weaver mentions, for example, the option of redefining the problem so it becomes less controversial; the possibility of letting someone else make the decision; or spread the responsibility for a decision over as many politicians as possible (Weaver, 1986: 384-389). Hood (2002) explains how delegation of responsibilities to, for example, agencies might help to deflect blame in the future. However, these strategies are not always successful in which case politicians still need to face blame. But how can they respond to blame?

Blame responses

Actors, including politicians, have many blame responses at their disposal. They could opt for denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing the offensiveness of the event, take corrective action or show mortification (Benoit, 1997: 179). Denying not only entails the denial of the crisis actually happening (Coombs, 1998: 180), but also the denial that you did not do anything (simple denial) and the denial that it was not you but someone else who was responsible for what happened (shifting blame) (Benoit, 1997: 179). The evasion of responsibility-strategy consists of claiming either to have been provoked in taking this action or to have acted on limited information. In order to deflect responsibility actors can also claim that the event was either an accident or that the organization's intentions were good (Benoit, 1997: 179). Reducing the offensiveness of the event can be achieved by, for instance, attacking the accuser (Coombs, 1998: 180), compensating or reimbursing victims, bolstering (i.e. stressing the organization's good traits) or minimizing the event itself or its consequences (Benoit, 1997: 179; cf. McGraw, 1990; McGraw, 1991; Bovens et al., 1999; Brinson and Benoit, 1999; Ihlen, 2002; Coombs, 2007: 137-147).

Authors often suggest which strategy to follow in which situation. On the one hand, Brändström and Kuipers (2003) show that the construction of blame depends on the way a political crisis is framed. If a crisis can be framed as incidental, blame can be either attributed to a scapegoat (in the case of a low-level actor failure) or to an organization as a whole (in the case of organizational mishap). If, however, the crisis is not framed as incidental but as symptomatic, blame will shift upwards to the higher-level actors in which case blame is either attributed to the policy makers or to the policy sector as a whole. Combs (1998) on the other hand provides the reader with a figure in which he makes clear that depending on the level of personal control over the event, actors can choose strategies ranging from defensive (in case of weak personal control) to accommodative (in case of strong personal control).

In their recently published article, Hood et al. (2009) add the idea of sequential blame responses to the mix. In their view, actors will start their blame response by denying that there is a problem. If that no longer suffices, actors will first opt for a problem admission without taking any responsibility before admitting that there is a problem and that they are responsible for it. Within each category, the authors discern three subcategories of blame responses – each blame response is stronger than the one before (see table 1 for an overview).

[Insert table 1 around here]

The general idea within the blame response literature is that a proper blame response will result in lower blame levels. However, one actor's proper response is the other actor's downfall. It is therefore important to take all actors' blame responses into account when trying to discern how blame response affected someone's blame level.

In addition, someone's blame level might be positively affected by operational measures taken to end the crisis. These measures might be perceived by the public and the other actors involved as the crisis manager being in control. Consequently, the way they talk about the crisis manager's will become less negative (or at least not more negative).² The continuing occurrence of incidents, however, will signal to the public and other actors involved that the crisis manager is still not able to control the crisis. Consequently, the crisis will deepen and the blame attributed to the crisis manager will increase.

Methods

In order to establish the effect of the five aforementioned variables, it is important to measure (a) the blame level; (b) the blame response of actors involved; (c) the announcement of operational measures; and (d) the occurrence of incidents. Hood et al.'s article was used as a starting point to create a codebook (Resodihardjo, 2009b) to code newspaper articles published in *De Telegraaf* (populist), the *NRC Handelsblad* (right wing), and *De Volkskrant* (left wing). For each article, it was determined which government actors were mentioned. For each government actor, a number of variables were coded including blame level, blame response, and operational response. Blame

² Another frequently mentioned action taken to show the public that the crisis managers are in control is the announcement of an inquiry (Resodihardjo, 2006, 2009a). However, since this action is already incorporated in blame response B1, it is not taken into account when it comes to the variable operational measures to deal with the crisis. To make clear that measures to deal with the political fall out of the crisis are not taken into account in this variable, the variable is labeled operational measures.

level was not only assessed by what newspapers said but also by what other actors said within the newspaper (in contrast to the UK, Dutch newspapers are less vocal in expressing their opinion so merely coding what the media said would have resulted in extremely low blame levels) using Hood et al.'s blame barometer as shown in table 2. The blame response as described in table 1 was used to categorize the actor's response. Two coders independently coded the same article and then compared their findings. Overall agreement reliability was 93%.

[Insert table 2 around here]

In this paper, four different actors are investigated: (1) all agricultural actors; (2) the Minister of Agriculture and his ministry; (3) agricultural agencies; and (4) non-agricultural actors (see table 3 for an overview of the actors). By focusing on these four actors, it is possible to determine how blame games by agricultural actors affected non-agricultural actors and vice versa. At the same time, it is possible to see whether there was any blame game going on between the main agricultural actor (the minister and his ministry) and the agricultural agencies that implemented the measures and to determine to what extent these blame games affected their respective blame levels.

[Insert table 3 around here]

Taking the four different actors into account, the dataset was then recoded to create a dataset where for each day, it was determine who was blamed, who took which actions (operational or blame-wise), and whether incidents occurred. Recoding the incidents was the easiest since it only required counting the number of separate/new incidents mentioned in the newspapers. Recoding the other variables took some more work. The blame level for each of the four actors was calculated by taking the average blame attributed to each actor per day. For each actor, it was determined whether they took any operational measures or not. Since each actor consists of multiple 'sub-actors', the blame response was recoded as follows. Per day, each sub-actor can contribute to multiple blame responses, but they can only contribute once to each blame response. So if the minister's blame response was to blame someone else and this was reported in various newspapers that day, the reaction was only mentioned once in the recoded dataset. However, since each actor consists of multiple sub-actors, it is possible for multiple sub-actors to have the same blame response. In that case, each sub-actor can contribute once to the blame response-variable. Consider, for instance, when two different agencies use a counter attack, then A3 for agricultural agencies for that day will be 2. This same logic was used to create a directionality-dataset in order to see who was blaming whom. For each day, it was determined whether any of the actors used the B2-response (i.e. the blame others-response) and if so who they blamed.

Using these recoded datasets, OLS regressions were run to see to what extent the different variables affect the blame level of the various actors using either Excel or STATA. First, regressions were run to determine how the incidents, operational responses, and blame responses of agricultural actors and non-agricultural actors affected the blame level of agricultural and non-agricultural actors. Second, the same was done, but this time focusing on the minister and ministry and the agricultural agencies. The third and fourth set of regression models focus on blame directionality (who blames whom). The third set of regression models focuses on agricultural actors

and non-agricultural actors, while the fourth set makes a distinction between the minister and ministry; agricultural agencies; and non-agricultural actors. For all four sets, two types of regressions were run: one which included the blame level of the previous day and one that does not. This was done to determine to what extent the blame level of the previous day affects the blame level of the next day. None of the models are time-lagged (i.e. where blame responses of the previous day are used to see what their effect is on the blame level on the next day). It would not make sense to build in a time-lag in the models because the newspapers consist of a mix of morning (*De Telegraaf* and *Volkscrant*) and evening (*NRC Handelsblad*) newspapers. This means that they already influence each other and that people who attribute any blame level have already been influenced by what has been published earlier.

Avian flu

On 28 February 2003, government actors became aware that a lot of animals were dying at poultry farms. Within a couple of hours, the decision was made to restrict transport in a 10 km area around the farms with the high death rate. Moreover, two other restrictive measures were taken: gathering poultry was no longer allowed within the whole country and export of poultry and breeding eggs was prohibited. On 2 March 2003, the first lab results showed that the deaths were caused by the avian flu. Despite the fact that it would take at least two weeks to get the official lab confirmation, the Minister of Agriculture and his ministry decided to start fighting the disease using the then existing crisis management plans. Based on those plans, poultry within a 1 km radius of the infected farms would be cleared (i.e. killed and destroyed), transport was restricted within a radius of at least 10 km, and farms within a 3 km radius would be inspected to see if animals there were infected as well.³

Though the initial crisis response was strong and in line with then existing ideas of how to deal with such a disease, it would take six months before the avian flu was eradicated. It would take till 22 August 2003, before the Minister of Agriculture could end all restrictive measures (Berenschot, 2004: 12). In the meantime, Minister Veerman faced a difficult situation as outbreak after outbreak occurred, signalling very clearly to the public that the virus was not under control. Not only was the virus spreading, the minister also had to deal with various problems concerning the measures taken to deal with the crisis. People, for instance, were ignoring the various restrictions put in place to assure that the virus could not spread⁴ or were hiding their poultry because they did not want to see their pet chicken killed (Berenschot, 2004: 11, 95-9). Moreover, it was necessary to clear the areas as fast as possible. Yet, there was no good way to achieve this aim so the Ministry of Agriculture was forced to experiment before finally getting to a method which seemed to work reasonably well (PVE, 2003: 10; Berenschot, 2004: 56, 67-9). Not only was the method of killing unsure, there was also lack of personnel to clear the farms. Consequently, untrained asylum seekers were hired as temps to kill and destroy the poultry (Berenschot, 2004: 70-1). However, because they were untrained, clearing the farms took longer than

³ TK, 2002-2003, 28 807, no. 1: 1-2.

⁴ *De Volkskrant* (7-4-2003) 'Vogelpest; boeren, slachters en handelaren zwaar getroffen', p.3. *NRC Handelsblad* (8-4-2003) 'Veerman verwijt pluimveesector onzorgvuldigheid', p.1. *NRC Handelsblad* (8-4-2003) 'Meer ruimingen kalkoenbedrijven', p.1. *De Volkskrant* (8-4-2003) 'Tien miljoen dieren afmaken, ik lig er wakker van', p.5.

usual (PVE, 2003: 10; Berenschot, 2004: 80-1).⁵ Moreover, even though the Minister and junior Minister of Health had clearly stated that anyone who worked with infected animals had to take a flu shot as well as anti-viral medicines (because this variant of the avian flu could jump from birds to humans), not everyone did so which resulted in the death of a vet⁶ (however see Bot, 2003 and Berenschot, 2004: 10-11 for a more nuanced view). And if that was not enough, the minister had to do his job while he was working in an outgoing coalition government, i.e. a coalition government waiting to be replaced by the new coalition government. From 22 January (elections) till 27 May 2003 (new coalition government installed), he was a minister in an outgoing coalition government. From 27 May onwards, he was the Minister of Agriculture in the new coalition government.⁷

All this formed the backdrop of the political games where blame was either attributed or shifted to other actors (see figure 1 for blame attributed to the agricultural actors and the non-agricultural actors and figure 2 for the blame attributed to the Minister and Ministry of Agriculture and to agricultural agencies). Members of Parliament (MPs) and the poultry sector, for instance, claimed that minister Veerman was too careful and he should have installed a 3 km clearing zone around each infected farm instead of the 1 km zone⁸ (PVE, 2003: 7; Berenschot, 2004: 75). The junior Minister of Health was adamant that the Ministry of Health was not to blame for the death of the vet since the policy to take a flu shot as well as anti-viral medications had been clearly publicized.⁹ Both Ministries of Agriculture and Defence blamed the local police in causing the delay in military assistance¹⁰ while Minister Veerman also blamed humans and especially the poultry sector for spreading the virus.¹¹ In short, various actors played the blame game. The question rises whether that resulted in lower or higher blame levels. This question will be answered in the next section.

[Insert figures 1 and 2 around here]

Blame games

⁵ TK, 2002-2003, 28 807, no. 40: 3. In addition, the newspapers were most explicit (compared to official reports) in mentioning what went wrong during the clearing of the farms because of the use of untrained personnel. In *NRC Handelsblad*, for example, a spokesperson of the Dutch Agricultural and Horticultural Organization (LTO) said that the use of untrained personnel in clearing farms had resulted in excesses. "Clearers did not abide hygiene requirements, they fought each other, played soccer with dead chickens, threw dead chickens to one another and stood on the dead chickens because 'then they would make additional sounds'" (*NRC Handelsblad* (12-7-2003) 'Excessen bij het ruimen van pluimvee; Voetbal met dode kippen', p. 3.).

⁶ *NRC Handelsblad* (22-4-2003) 'Verwarring na dood arts door vogelpest; Verschillende interpretaties richtlijn', p.1.

⁷ Elections had been held on 22 January 2003 following the fall of the Balkenende I coalition government. The Balkenende II coalition government became active on 27 May 2003 (<http://www.parlement.com/9291000/modulesf/gagaj2gp> checked on 27 October 2009).

⁸ See for example TK, 2002-2003, 28 807, no. 32.

⁹ *NRC Handelsblad* (22-4-2003) 'Verwarring na dood arts door vogelpest; Verschillende interpretaties richtlijn', p.1.

¹⁰ *NRC Handelsblad* (10-4-2003) 'Militairen weer te laat', p.9.

¹¹ *De Volkskrant* (7-4-2003) 'Vogelpest; boeren, slachters en handelaren zwaar getroffen', p.3. *NRC Handelsblad* (8-4-2003) 'Veerman verwijt pluimveesector onzorgvuldigheid', p.1. *NRC Handelsblad* (8-4-2003) 'Meer ruiming kalkoenbedrijven', p.1. *De Volkskrant* (8-4-2003) 'Tien miljoen dieren afmaken, ik lig er wakker van', p.5.

Ideally, what you would like to see is that any blame response or operational response you undertake will result in the lowering (-) of your blame level. If other actors conduct any blame response, you hope that their response either does not influence your blame level or at least does not influence your blame level negatively (+) since that would result in an increase in your own blame level. Conversely, you do hope that your blame responses will result in an increase in your opponent's blame level (+). But does this actually happen in reality? In this section, the effects of incidents, operational measures, and blame responses are investigated.

Agriculture vs. non-agriculture

Four models are listed in table 4. Two of these models (1a and 1b) look at how the variables affect the blame level of all agricultural actors combined, whereas models 2a and 2b focus on the non-agricultural actors' blame level. There is not much difference between models 1a and 1b. In both cases, the R^2 is around 30-31% – which means that around 30% of the variance can be explained by these models – and the same variables influence the agricultural actors' blame level. However, the P-values in model 1a are slightly better than in model 1b, so in this analysis, model 1a will be used. In contrast, model 2b will be used to determine what affects the non-agricultural actors' blame level. Not only because the R^2 is higher (54% compared to 50% in model 2a) but also because more variables have an effect in model 2b than in model 2a.

[Insert table 4 around here]

So, looking at model 1a, what do we see? First of all, the occurrence of incidents actually decreases the blame level. A possible explanation for this could be that once incidents do happen, most of the attention in the media is on the incidents themselves or the measures taken to deal with these new incidents. In other words, there is hardly any blaming going on. Following a new outbreak on 14 March 2003, for example, newspapers talked about the outbreak¹², a description of the poultry sector and the effects of the crisis measures on the sector as well as the food supply in supermarkets¹³, and the operational measures taken to deal with the avian flu.¹⁴ The last time an incident occurred (3 May 2003) as well as the time an incident occurred halfway between the first (1 March 2003) and the last incident (3 May 2003) yielded similar results. Another outbreak on 31 March 2003 resulted in articles on the new outbreak¹⁵, the disgruntlement that rare birds needed to be killed as well¹⁶, and the need for additional inspection to avoid animal cruelty while clearing the farms.¹⁷ Articles published on 3 May 2003 addressed the outbreak¹⁸, the summary proceedings

¹² *De Telegraaf* (14-3-2003) 'Antistoffen gevonden bij pluimveebedrijf Brabant', p. ?

¹³ *De Volkskrant* (14-3-2003) 'En weer vijf miljoen eieren voor de berg; De winkels in het hele land worden gewoon bevoorrad', p. 3.

¹⁴ *De Volkskrant* (14-3-2003) 'Pluimvee in Nederland moet "op het hok" blijven', p.1; *NRC Handelsblad* (14-3-2003) "'Ophokplicht" voor pluimvee in heel Nederland', p. 1.

¹⁵ *De Telegraaf* (31-3-2003) 'Kippenpest breidt zich nog altijd uit', p.?.; *NRC Handelsblad* (31-3-2003) 'Vogelpest breidt zich verder uit', p. 1.

¹⁶ *De Telegraaf* (31-3-2003) 'Lot van siervogels in handen rechter', p. ?

¹⁷ *NRC Handelsblad* (31-3-2003) 'Ruimingen onafhankelijk geïnspecteerd; Vogelpest breidt zich uit', p. 1.

¹⁸ *De Volkskrant* (3-5-2003) 'Nu ook besmet bedrijf in de Brabantse Peel; Weer twee extra bedrijven verdacht, na zes dagen zonder nieuwe gevallen van vogelpest', p. 2.; *NRC Handelsblad* (3-5-2003) 'Nieuwe verdenking vogelpest "domper"', p. 3.

started by a married couple who opposed the killing of their pet chickens¹⁹, the effect of the clearing on the Valley where it all started (and where the biggest part of the poultry sector is located) and the possibility to start farming again²⁰, and the emotional effect the clearing has on farmers.²¹ Though blaming did go on, the low level of blaming could possibly be attributed to the fact that the articles were mostly focussed on the new outbreak, the operational measures, and how this affected farmers.

However the decrease in blame level following the occurrence of incidents is not the only unexpected outcome of the regression analysis. The regression shows that when agricultural actors use blame responses (A3, B1, and C1), their blame level actually increases. Moreover, when non-agricultural actors only offer some account of what went wrong (C1-response), the blame level of the agricultural actors declined. This last effect is probably the result of the response itself. Since the response focuses on telling what went wrong (and not on who caused the problems), there is not a lot of blame attributed to the other actors, which, consequently, will result in the lowering of their blame level.

Model 2b provides us with an almost similar picture. Though the non-agricultural actors' blame level was not affected by the incidents, it was affected by the operational response of the agricultural actors. The most likely explanation for this outcome is that a lot went wrong in the implementation of these measures. Sometimes agricultural agencies were responsible, but sometimes not. The Tax Office, for instance, made the mistake of using a false name and providing asylum seekers a group social security number so that they could help clearing poultry farms.²² Moreover, the Ministry of Finance issued the statement that either the Ministry of Social Affairs or CWI had made the mistake of supplying labour permits to a group as a whole.²³ Other mistakes often referred to the use of the military. Soldiers were supposed to guard the borders of areas meant to be cleared, but it took quite some time before the soldiers were at their designation.²⁴ So mistakes made during the implementation of policy and operational measures probably resulted in an increase in the blame level of the non-agricultural actors. However, non-agricultural actors were not the only ones to make mistakes. There were, for example, lots of problems when it came to killing the birds. If operational response had such an impact on non-agricultural actors, we should see something similar happening when we take a look at the different agricultural actors (see next subsection).

In addition, the non-agricultural actors' own blame responses had a negative effect on their blame level (A1, A2, B2), while the agricultural actors' blame response either had a negative (B1) or a positive (B3) effect on the non-agricultural actors' blame level. In addition, the blame level of the previous day had a significant effect on the blame level of the next day (P-value of 0.008).

Agriculture vs. agriculture

¹⁹ *De Telegraaf* (3-5-2003) 'Kort geding tegen Staat om afmaken hobbykippen', p. ?

²⁰ *De Volkskrant* (3-5-2003) "'Straks gaan we aan de kip ten onder"; "De Gelderse Vallei is opgebouwd met kippenmest"', p. 2.

²¹ *De Volkskrant* (3-5-2003) 'Praatgroepen voor getroffen kippenboeren', p. 2.

²² *De Volkskrant* (12-7-2003) 'Financiën hekelst truc belasting met 'F. Vogelpest'', p.3.

²³ *NRC Handelsblad* (12-7-2003) 'Excessen bij het ruimen van pluimvee; voetbal met dode kippen', p.3.

²⁴ *NRC Handelsblad* (10-4-2003) 'Militairen weer te laat', p.9.

So what happens if we take a closer look at the various agricultural actors? Do we see similar results or different results? Table 5 provides us with four models. Model 1a and 1b explain the influence of the various variables on the blame level of the Minister and Ministry of Agriculture, whereas model 2a and 2b focus on the blame level of agricultural agencies. Model 1a and 1b are not that different from each other. Model 1a gives a slightly better result (R^2 is 30% and P-values are just a bit better than in model 1b), so model 1a will be used in this analysis. Model 2a and 2b do not differ that much from each other as well. In this analysis, model 2a will be used. Even though model 2a's R^2 is slightly lower than the R^2 in 2b (0.3143 and 0.3145 respectively), the P-values in model 2a are slightly better.

[Insert table 5 around here]

To start with, neither incidents nor operational measures nor blame level of the previous day influenced the blame level of the actors. So what did influence their blame level?

Model 1a confirms the previous findings that one's own blame responses can have a negative effect on one's own blame level. When the Minister or Ministry of Agriculture denied responsibility and opened a counterattack (A3); had an open stance on who was responsible (B1); or only gave an explanation without accepting any accountability (C1), this negatively affected their blame level.

The same can be seen in model 2a. Whenever agricultural agencies denied while at the same time attacked someone else (A3), their blame level increased (by 3.6 with a P-value of 0.001). At the same, whenever non-agricultural actors were denying that there was a crisis (A1) or were acknowledging some (but not all) responsibility (B3), the blame level of agricultural agencies went up. But when non-agricultural actors were using blame response C2 (i.e. the institutional action-taking response), then this resulted in an extreme decrease of the agricultural agencies' blame level (-4.97 with a P-value of 0.009).

The above analysis has shown that in most instances, and contrary to what the theory states, one's own blame responses can actually result in an increase of one's own blame level. Moreover, your blame response can actually result in a decrease of your opponent's blame level – though in some instances it did result in an increase of the opponent's blame level. But what about the most talked about blame response: blaming someone else? Does that help to shift the blame away from you?

The use of scapegoats

Government actors did occasionally try to shift the blame to someone else (see appendix 2 for details). Interestingly though, they often shifted the blame to outsiders; it was the vet's own fault that he died because he had not complied with the Ministry's directive to take anti-viral medication²⁵; or the poultry sector was to blame for the spreading of the disease because they did not adhere to transport embargos.²⁶ At the end of the crisis, non-agricultural actors were blaming other non-agricultural actors as it became known that some incorrect procedures were followed in managing the crisis. The Ministry of Finance, for instance, stated that either the Ministry of Social Affairs or CWI (Unemployment Office) had made the mistake of supplying

²⁵ *NRC Handelsblad* (22-4-2003) 'Verwarring na dood arts door vogelpest; Verschillende interpretaties richtlijn', p.1. For a detailed account of what really happened, see Bot, 2003.

²⁶ See for example *De Volkskrant* (5-4-2003) 'Tekort aan eieren dreigt door virus', p.3.

labour permits to a group of asylum seekers as a whole (Berenschot, 2004: 71).²⁷ These asylum seekers were hired as temps to kill the birds. The Ministry of Finance was quick to point out that the Tax Office should not have used a false name (F. Vogelpest) and a group social security number to let asylum seekers work.²⁸

So did the use of scapegoats result in lower blame levels for those who were trying to shift the blame? The answer is unequivocally no. In the various regression models,²⁹ the R^2 is low (ranging from 0.006 to 0.16) and the P-value is high (the highest being 0.98). In those rare cases where the P-value is low combined with a relatively high R^2 , the coefficient is positive. This means that the use of scapegoats actually led to an increase in blame level of the one using this tactic (see tables 6 and 7). In this case, whenever non-agricultural actors blamed other non-agricultural actors or other non-governmental actors, the non-agricultural actors' blame level increased.

[Insert tables 6 and 7 around here]

Conclusion

The avian flu case clearly debunks a couple of assumptions within the crisis management and blame game literature. First of all, the occurrence of incidents which would normally fuel the crisis hardly has an influence on actors' blame level. Moreover, if it does have an influence, this influence is contrary to our expectations: the blame level actually decreases following incidents. This might be the result of newspapers focusing on the new outbreak as well as the operational measures taken to deal with the crisis.

So what then, was the effect of operational measures? The assumption was that taking operational measures would be perceived by the public as being in control. Hence, blame level should decrease. In reality, operational response hardly mattered and when it did, it resulted in an increase of the blame level of non-agricultural actors. Since this increase was the result of the agricultural actors taking operational responses, a possible explanation for this finding could be that a lot went wrong during the implementation of these operational measures announced by agricultural actors. Since mistakes in the implementation of these measures were also made by agricultural agencies, one might assume that a similar effect could be discerned when taking a closer look at the agricultural agencies. However, neither minister and ministry nor agricultural agencies were affected by operational responses.

So basically, incidents hardly mattered and if they did, they decreased the blame level. Operational measures hardly mattered as well, and if they did, they increased the blame level. The analysis of the blame responses yielded similar unexpected outcomes.

In most of the cases where blame responses had an effect on blame level, this effect was contrary to what was expected. Actors' own blame responses often resulted in an increase of their blame level while decreasing the blame level of their opponent

²⁷ *NRC Handelsblad* (12-7-2003) 'Excessen bij het ruimen van pluimvee; voetbal met dode kippen', p.3.

²⁸ *De Volkskrant* (12-7-2003) 'Financiën hekelt truc belasting met 'F. Vogelpest'', p.3.

²⁹ The models contain only four scapegoat options since these were the only options used by the actors involved. These are Agricultural Minister & Ministry blame others; Agricultural agencies blame others (these two were sometimes combined in Agricultural actors blame others); Non-agricultural actors blame others; and Non-agricultural actors blame non-agricultural actors.

(with some notable exceptions). When focusing on the blame response mentioned most often in literature (the use of scapegoats), the same outcomes can be discerned. Using scapegoats results in an increase of one's own blame level. However, it is important to note here that the use of a scapegoat can be effective while the blame level does not decrease. After all, the whole idea behind using a scapegoat is to avoid being sacked or having to resign. If that goal can be achieved, even though everyone knows that you are using a scapegoat, the tactic was successful. Consider, for instance, Home Secretary Howard. When he was faced with a crisis as a result of high-profile escapes, he sacked Lewis, the Director General of the prison service. Everyone knew what he was up to and the criticism in both media and parliament reached a new high. Yet Howard did not have to resign in the end, showing that this tactic can be successful while generating lots of blame (Resodihardjo, 2009a: 132-136).

One thing is clear: blame games may not help decreasing the blame level attributed to you. On the contrary, the use of blame games can actually increase the blame level attributed to you as well as decreasing the blame level attributed to your opponent. True, these findings are based on a single case study so one can question to what extent these findings can be generalized. Nevertheless, the findings in this case are so strong (very high R^2 and extremely low P-value) that some of the basic assumptions within the literature on blame games need to be reconsidered. After all, authors work on the assumption that if certain blame response strategies are selected then the blame level will diminish (Coombs, 1998; Brändström and Kuipers, 2003) and this assumption may very well be untrue.

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Appendix 1 Abbreviations

AID	General Inspection Service (Algemene Inspectie Dienst)
CIDC	Central Veterinary Institute University of Wageningen (Centraal Veterinair Instituut Universiteit Wageningen)
CWI	Centre for Work and Income (Centrum voor Werk en Inkomen)
GD	Health Inspection for Animals (Gezondheidsdienst voor Dieren)
LTO	Dutch Agricultural and Horticultural Organization (LTO)
RIVM	Government Institute for Public Health and Environment (Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu)
SIOD	Social Intelligence and Searching Service (Sociale Inlichtingen- en Opsporingsdienst)
VWA	Food and Product Authority (Voedsel en Waren Autoriteit)
VROM	Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning, and Environment (Ministerie van Volkshuisvesting, Ruimtelijke Ordening en Milieu)

Appendix 2 Who blames whom

Date	Who	Whom	Blamed of what
5-3-2003	RIVM	Other	The reason why the virus could break out was the animal friendly way in which chickens were held at the farms. ³⁰
14-3-2003	AID	Other	Citizens who do not properly follow the policy. ³¹
21-3-2003	Minister of Agriculture	Other	Humans are the ones who are spreading around the virus. ³²
27-3-2003	Minister of Agriculture	Other	Visitor has spread the virus. ³³
28-3-2003	Minister of Agriculture	Other	Personal contacts or transport have caused the spreading of the virus. ³⁴
3-4-2003	AID	Other	Owners of hobby chickens want to prevent the removal of their chickens by ignoring the removal policy of hobby chickens. Their actions are just wrong. ³⁵
3-4-2003	Ministry of Agriculture	Other	Owners of hobby chickens want to prevent the removal of their chickens by ignoring the removal policy of hobby chickens. Their actions are just wrong. ³⁶
5-4-2003	Minister of Agriculture	Other	The virus is being spread by shoes and clothes. ³⁷
5-4-2003	Minister of Agriculture	Other	Poultry sector itself is the main cause for the spreading of the virus. ³⁸
5-4-2003	Minister of Agriculture	Other	Someone has not abided by the rules (virus has spread through car tires or shoes). ³⁹
7-4-2003	Ministry of Agriculture	Other	Humans are spreading the virus. ⁴⁰
8-4-2003	Minister of Agriculture	Other	Poultry sector responsible for spreading the virus. ⁴¹
8-4-2003	Minister of Agriculture	Other	Poultry sector responsible for spreading the virus. ⁴²
8-4-2003	Minister of Agriculture	Other	Poultry sector responsible for spreading the virus. ⁴³

³⁰ *De Volkskrant* (5-3-2003) 'Aan biologische eieren kleven ook gevaarlijke kanten; 'Vrije uitloop van kippen moet ter discussie', p.11.

³¹ *NRC Handelsblad* (14-3-2003) 'Ophokplicht' voor pluimvee in heel Nederland', p.1.

³² *De Volkskrant* (21-3-2003) 'Veerman vraagt pluimveehouders thuis te blijven', p.6.

³³ *De Volkskrant* (27-3-2002) 'Transport van levend pluimvee opnieuw verboden', p.6.

³⁴ *De Telegraaf* (28-3-2003) 'Vogelpest indammen via nieuwe bufferzone', p.?.

³⁵ *De Telegraaf* (3-4-2003) 'Kliklijn tegen loslopende kip', p.?.

³⁶ *De Telegraaf* (3-4-2003) 'Kliklijn tegen loslopende kip', p.?.

³⁷ *De Volkskrant* (5-4-2003) 'Leger ingezet tegen verspreiding vogelpest', p.1.

³⁸ *De Volkskrant* (5-4-2003) 'Tekort aan eieren dreigt door virus', p.3.

³⁹ *De Telegraaf* (5-4-2003) 'Algeheel verbod op vervoer van kippen', p.?.

⁴⁰ *De Volkskrant* (7-4-2003) 'Vogelpest; boeren, slachters en handelaren zwaar getroffen', p.3.

⁴¹ *NRC Handelsblad* (8-4-2003) 'Veerman verwijt pluimveesector onzorgvuldigheid', p.1.

⁴² *NRC Handelsblad* (8-4-2003) 'Meer ruimingen kalkoenbedrijven', p.1.

Date	Who	Whom	Blamed of what
9-4-2003	Minister of Agriculture	Other	Poultry sector responsible for spreading the virus. ⁴⁴
9-4-2003	Minister of Agriculture	Other	Poultry sector responsible for spreading the virus. ⁴⁵
10-4-2003	Minister of Agriculture	Other	Poultry sector responsible for spreading the virus. ⁴⁶
10-4-2003	Ministry of Agriculture	Other	Delay in military assistance caused by local police. ⁴⁷
10-4-2003	Ministry of Defence	Other	Delay in military assistance caused by local police. ⁴⁸
12-4-2003	Minister of Agriculture	Other	Poultry sector responsible for the fact that chickens are now much more susceptible for virus. ⁴⁹
18-4-2003	Public Defence/DA	Other	Poultry sector responsible for spreading the virus. ⁵⁰
18-4-2003	Ministry of Justice	Other	Poultry sector responsible for spreading the virus. ⁵¹
18-4-2003	Public Defence/DA	Other	Poultry sector responsible for spreading the virus. ⁵²
22-4-2003	Junior Minister of Health	Other	Vet is responsible for his own death. ⁵³
17-6-2003	Minister of Agriculture	Other	Minister in favour of vaccination, but EU forced him to kill and remove all animals. ⁵⁴
12-7-2003	Ministry of Finance	Non-agricultural actor	IRS (Taxes) should not have used a false name (F. Vogelpest) and a group social security number to let asylum seekers work. ⁵⁵
12-7-2003	Ministry of Finance	Non-agricultural actor	Ministry of Social Affairs or CWI have made the mistake of supplying labour permits to a group as a whole. ⁵⁶

⁴³ *De Volkskrant* (8-4-2003) "Tien miljoen dieren afmaken, ik lig er wakker van", p.5.

⁴⁴ *De Volkskrant* (9-4-2003) 'Pvda: laat leger vogelpestgebied afgrenzen', p.4.

⁴⁵ *De Volkskrant* (9-4-2003) 'Virus mogelijk door laadploeg naar Limburg', p.4.

⁴⁶ *NRC Handelsblad* (10-4-2003) 'Voer mogelijke bron besmetting met vogelpest', p.9.

⁴⁷ *NRC Handelsblad* (10-4-2003) 'Militairen weer te laat', p.9.

⁴⁸ *NRC Handelsblad* (10-4-2003) 'Militairen weer te laat', p.9.

⁴⁹ *NRC Handelsblad* (12-4-2003) 'Pluimveesector moet zichzelf opnieuw uitvinden'; Minister Veerman over de structurele gevolgen van de vogelpest', p.8.

⁵⁰ *NRC Handelsblad* (18-4-2003) 'Houders van 'hobbykippen' tegen ruiming', p.1.

⁵¹ *De Volkskrant* (18-4-2003) 'Eiervervoerders beticht van nonchalance ; Vrachtauto vol 4-graneneieren reed 'per ongeluk' door de Gelderse Vallei', p.3.

⁵² *De Volkskrant* (18-4-2003) 'Eiervervoerders beticht van nonchalance ; Vrachtauto vol 4-graneneieren reed 'per ongeluk' door de Gelderse Vallei', p.3.

⁵³ *NRC Handelsblad* (22-4-2003) 'Verwarring na dood arts door vogelpest; Verschillende interpretaties richtlijn', p.1.

⁵⁴ *NRC Handelsblad* (17-6-2003) "Ruiming hobbykippen zinloos", p.3.

⁵⁵ *De Volkskrant* (12-7-2003) 'Financiën hekelt truc belasting met 'F. Vogelpest', p.3.

⁵⁶ *NRC Handelsblad* (12-7-2003) 'Excessen bij het ruimen van pluimvee; voetbal met dode kippen', p.3.

Table 1. Some basic strategic options for officeholders facing media firestorms:
Denial and admission of problem and responsibility

A: Problem Denial <i>PD</i>	B: Problem Admission but Responsibility Denial (<i>PA + RD</i>)	C: Problem and Responsibility Admission (<i>PA + RA</i>)
<i>A1.</i> Pure denial ('crisis, what crisis?')	<i>B1.</i> Open stance on who is responsible (announce or agree to investigation to determine who is responsible, without accepting responsibility)	<i>C1.</i> Explanation-only response, offering some account of what went wrong, but not accepting culpability
<i>A2.</i> Qualified denial (admission that there is some problem but denial that it is serious or significant, e.g. through justificatory arguments)	<i>B2.</i> Assert others to be responsible (blame victims, other agents, predecessors, successors, subordinates, superordinates, colleagues, etc.)	<i>C2.</i> Institutional actiontaking response, offering institutional apology, compensation, remedial action (e.g. dismissal or disciplining of subordinates)
<i>A3.</i> Denial plus counterattack (portrayal of critics as whingers, knockers, politically motivated etc., assertion that onus of proof rests on critics, threats of lawsuits, dismissals of moles and leakers, and other sanctions)	<i>B3.</i> Admission of some responsibility, but denial of major or ultimate responsibility (e.g. by offering 'wrong kind of snow' excuses or admission of only partial or 'technical' but not substantial responsibility)	<i>C3.</i> Admission of personal culpability (which may include resignation or an acknowledgement of error accompanied by an expression of determination to stay on and sort out the situation)

Source: Hood et al. (2009: 698).

Table 2 A 'Blame Barometer' Used for Coding Daily Media Stories

Level	General description	Salience	Stance of 'usual suspects' (habitual opponents)	Typical accountability calls on responsible officeholders
1. Very calm or fair	Favourable reactions (from low level of praise/favourable to high level of praise/favourable) from media, legislature and other forums	High and favourable or low and neutral	Muted	Either low or as objects of praise
2. Fairly calm	Broadly favourable, with criticisms in the form of 'background	Low and fairly neutral	Point scoring at fairly low level	Some calls for information or explanation

	noise' in isolated sources with limited coverage			
3. Mid-range	Mixed coverage, with criticisms given moderate attention in mainstream forums	Medium and mixed	Active, with limited criticism coming from neutrals and supporters too	Calls for serious inquiries, special debates etc. as well as explanations
4. Stormy	Largely negative points given substantial coverage in mainstream sources	Medium to high and mainly negative	Joined by nontrivial criticism from the ranks of normal loyalists	Calls for independent inquiries and remedies as well as explanations
5. Very stormy	Overwhelmingly negative points given saturation coverage, with 'legs' (that is, expectations of continuance)	High and negative	Overshadowed by critics drawn from normal loyalists and payroll supporters	Calls for resignations as well as remedies etc

Source: Hood et al. (2009: 718).

Table 3. The four actors

Actor	Consists of
Agricultural actor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minister of Agriculture • Ministry of Agriculture • RVV • AID • VWA • Keuringsdienst van Waren • RIVM
Minister & Ministry of Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minister of Agriculture • Ministry of Agriculture
Agricultural agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RVV • AID • VWA • Keuringsdienst van Waren • RIVM
Non-agricultural actor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prime Minister • Ministry of Finance • Minister of Finance • Junior Minister of Finance • Tax Office • Ministry of Social Affairs • Minister of Social Affairs • CWI • Minister of Health

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Junior Minister of Health• Minister of Foreign Affairs• Ministry of Defence• Minister of Defence• Ministry of Justice• Public Defence/DA• VROM• SIOD• CIDC⁵⁷
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⁵⁷ Even though the CIDC is the national institute of avian flu (Berenschot, 2004: 6), it is not listed as an agricultural agency because it is part of the University of Wageningen (<http://www.cvi.wur.nl/NL/> checked on 27 October 2009) and not an agency of the Ministry of Agriculture. Consequently, it is listed as a non-agricultural actor.

Table 4 Agriculture vs. non-agriculture

Independent variables	Dependent variables: blame level all agricultural actors (models 1a and 1b) and blame level non-agricultural actors (models 2a and 2b)			
	Model 1a	Model 1b	Model 2a	Model 2b
Incidents	-.6650741 (0.024)	-.6550427 (0.033)	-0.20258 (0.252)	-0.22123 (0.214)
Operational response all agricultural actors	.3098158 (0.440)	0.484414 (0.346)	0.387563 (0.114)	0.602635 (0.046)
Operational response non-agricultural actors	.1764006 (0.770)	Dropped	0.22178 (0.545)	Dropped
A1 all agricultural actors	Dropped	-0.1729622 (0.777)	Dropped	-0.1559 (0.662)
A2 all agricultural actors	.2764116 (0.403)	0.2825025 (0.398)	-0.02594 (0.897)	-0.03236 (0.868)
A3 all agricultural actors	2.515784 (0.000)	2.560477 (0.000)	-0.17599 (0.633)	-0.0937 (0.794)
B1 all agricultural actors	1.097991 (0.022)	1.080109 (0.027)	0.419923 (0.146)	0.500588 (0.077)
B2 all agricultural actors	.2280303 (0.404)	0.2346107 (0.398)	0.018604 (0.911)	0.068995 (0.671)
B3 all agricultural actors	.0867669 (0.835)	0.0961085 (0.820)	-0.35292 (0.165)	-0.49916 (0.049)
C1 all agricultural actors	.4600919 (0.017)	0.4533215 (0.021)	0.059163 (0.607)	0.067216 (0.551)
C2 all agricultural actors	Dropped	Dropped	Dropped	Dropped
C3 all agricultural actors	.5662002 (0.619)	0.64688 (0.582)	-0.39333 (0.570)	-0.37306 (0.580)
A1 non-agricultural actors	.7952256 (0.303)	0.7830762 (0.316)	2.672361 (0.000)	2.726327 (0.000)
A2 non-agricultural actors	-.435853 (0.375)	-0.4496982 (0.366)	0.845845 (0.005)	0.872663 (0.003)
A3 non-agricultural actors	-.2555094 (0.843)	-0.2007974 (0.878)	-0.01887 (0.981)	-0.41444 (0.593)
B1 non-agricultural	-.3137457 (0.450)	-0.3135933 (0.455)	-0.31738 (0.210)	-0.35931 (0.145)

actors				
B2 non-agricultural actors	-0.1410899 (0.769)	-0.1362572 (0.779)	1.243546 (0.000)	1.294573 (0.000)
B3 non-agricultural actors	1.634034 (0.249)	1.635875 (0.253)	-0.59803 (0.486)	-0.96338 (0.255)
C1 non-agricultural actors	-0.9347326 (0.094)	-0.938399 (0.097)	-0.14318 (0.671)	-0.10364 (0.751)
C2 non-agricultural actors	-2.244289 (0.210)	-2.255832 (0.213)	-1.59617 (0.143)	-1.22931 (0.248)
C3 non-agricultural actors	Dropped	Dropped	Dropped	Dropped
Blame level previous day		-0.036175 (0.706)		0.2148 (0.008)
Intercept	.750883	0.7865785	0.175986	0.093703
R²	0.3082	0.304	0.5032	0.5419

Figures are coefficients. Figures in parentheses are P-values. Light-gray cells indicate P-values <0.05. Dark-gray cells indicate 0.05 < p < 0.10.

Table 5. Agriculture vs. agriculture

Independent variables	Dependent variables: blame level Minister & Ministry (models 1a and 1b) and blame level agricultural agencies (models 2a and 2b)			
	Model 1a	Model 1b	Model 2a	Model 2b
Incidents	-0.47424 (0.139)	-0.47383 (0.161)	-0.31559 (0.333)	-0.30282 (0.379)
Operational response Minister & Ministry	-0.14811 (0.301)	-0.15219 (0.295)	-0.01463 (0.920)	0.001414 (0.993)
Operational response agricultural agencies	0.822492 (0.290)	0.862293 (0.277)	0.002215 (0.998)	-0.06195 (0.940)
Operational response non-agricultural actors	0.500178 (0.350)	0.472162 (0.385)	0.330375 (0.544)	0.343033 (0.535)
A1 Minister & Ministry	-0.02439 (0.966)	-0.05708 (0.922)	0.253265 (0.664)	0.285285 (0.632)
A2 Minister & Ministry	0.334301 (0.338)	0.311759 (0.379)	0.262038 (0.460)	0.259504 (0.470)
A3 Minister & Ministry	2.821544 (0.000)	2.784552 (0.000)	-0.39182 (0.607)	-0.36252 (0.640)
B1 Minister & Ministry	1.012249 (0.065)	1.021734 (0.068)	-0.04779 (0.931)	-0.04387 (0.938)
B2 Minister & Ministry	0.377277 (0.280)	0.380693 (0.281)	-0.13806 (0.697)	-0.15084 (0.675)
B3 Minister & Ministry	0.297181 (0.531)	0.303214 (0.527)	0.425485 (0.379)	0.43767 (0.372)
C1 Minister & Ministry	0.597243 (0.013)	0.595809 (0.016)	0.218286 (0.366)	0.198986 (0.429)
C2 Minister & Ministry	Dropped	Dropped	Dropped	Dropped
C3 Minister & Ministry	0.68164 (0.560)	0.529806 (0.661)	-0.01381 (0.991)	-0.01724 (0.989)
A1 agricultural agencies	1.417601 (0.344)	1.474722 (0.331)	-0.65941 (0.665)	-0.74563 (0.632)
A2 agricultural agencies	-0.68814 (0.679)	-0.70976 (0.673)	1.62993 (0.337)	1.621802 (0.346)
A3 agricultural agencies	1.469653 (0.164)	1.262287 (0.259)	3.622817 (0.001)	3.636064 (0.001)
B1 agricultural agencies	Dropped	Dropped	Dropped	Dropped
B2 agricultural agencies	0.27166 (0.690)	0.229252 (0.741)	-0.41113 (0.554)	-0.40496 (0.566)
B3	0.662828	0.636444	0.105739	0.023896

agricultural agencies	(0.571)	(0.593)	(0.929)	(0.984)
C1 agricultural agencies	0.092653 (0.913)	0.159313 (0.854)	-0.57453 (0.508)	-0.57631 (0.512)
C2 agricultural agencies	Dropped	Dropped	Dropped	Dropped
C3 agricultural agencies	Dropped	Dropped	Dropped	Dropped
A1 non-agricultural actors	0.047666 (0.952)	0.076636 (0.924)	2.761711 (0.001)	2.779886 (0.001)
A2 non-agricultural actors	-0.4655 (0.354)	-0.45581 (0.370)	-0.33973 (0.506)	-0.31958 (0.539)
A3 non-agricultural actors	-0.42818 (0.748)	-0.48834 (0.718)	-0.20996 (0.877)	-0.222 (0.872)
B1 non-agricultural actors	-0.1471 (0.740)	-0.14542 (0.746)	-0.01277 (0.977)	-0.01768 (0.969)
B2 non-agricultural actors	-0.0393 (0.937)	-0.05193 (0.918)	-0.3350008 (0.512)	-0.32215 (0.534)
B3 non-agricultural actors	0.056744 (0.969)	0.1211 (0.935)	2.648001 (0.077)	2.617853 (0.085)
C1 non-agricultural actors	-0.82764 (0.200)	-0.83739 (0.200)	-0.58337 (0.374)	-0.55863 (0.402)
C2 non-agricultural actors	-0.31736 (0.862)	-0.37014 (0.842)	-4.96179 (0.009)	-4.94068 (0.010)
C3 non-agricultural actors	Dropped	Dropped	Dropped	Dropped
Blame level previous day		0.065421 (0.542)		0.042 (0.683)
Intercept	0.678456	0.628221	0.391816	0.362522
R²	0.3006	0.2988	0.3143	0.3145

Figures are coefficients. Figures in parentheses are P-values. Light-gray cells indicate P-values <0.05. Dark-gray cells indicate 0.05<p<0.10.

Table 6. Regression on the use of scapegoats when agriculture is a single actor

Independent variables	Dependent variables: blame level agricultural actors (models 1a and 1b) or non-agricultural actors (models 2a and 2b)			
	Model 1a	Model 1b	Model 2a	Model 2b
Agricultural actors blame others	0.209788 (0.451163)	0.193161 (0.491869)	-0.09066 (-0.45837)	-0.07649 (0.680303)
Non-agricultural actors blame others	-0.08108 (0.863701)	-0.08899 (0.851339)	1.156459 (0.000384)	1.186248 (0.000272)
Non-agricultural actors blame non-agricultural actors	0.351859 (0.756889)	0.358513 (0.753957)	1.272691 (0.096071)	1.100575 (0.151851)
Blame level previous day		0.03687 (0.712084)		0.149256 (0.110218)
Intercept	0.981474	0.956386	0.310643	0.258875
R ²	0.006353	0.007303	0.135721	0.157222

Figures are coefficients. Figures in parentheses are P-values. Light-gray cells indicate P-values <0.05. Dark-gray cells indicate 0.05 < p < 0.10.

Table 7. Regression on the use of scapegoats when agriculture consists of two actors (Minister & Ministry vs. agencies)

Independent variables	Dependent variables: blame level agricultural Minister & Ministry (models 1a and 1b) agricultural agencies (models 2a and 2b) or non-agricultural actors (models 3a and 3b)					
	Model 1a	Model 1b	Model 2a	Model 2b	Model 3a	Model 3b
Agricultural Minister & Ministry blame others	0.322963 (0.301358)	0.324725 (0.297983)	-0.02625 (0.934536)	-0.03079 (0.924106)	-0.05794 (0.790895)	-0.05392 (0.804529)
Agricultural agencies blame others	0.101702 (0.873488)	-0.01997 (0.975223)	-0.49207 (0.453068)	-0.49474 (0.456306)	-0.20803 (0.642341)	-0.15797 (0.724131)
Non-agricultural actors blame others	0.137009 (0.763698)	0.091153 (0.841485)	-0.32513 (0.487028)	-0.32662 (0.489901)	1.145531 (0.000501)	1.178453 (0.000349)
Non-agricultural actors blame non-agricultural actors	-0.90175 (0.408222)	-0.7914 (0.468352)	1.499179 (0.181156)	1.493734 (0.186684)	1.272661 (0.09758)	1.101738 (0.153403)
Blame level previous day		0.132393 (0.187084)		0.00253 (0.9797)		0.148209 (0.115)
Intercept	0.901755	0.791401	0.500821	0.505001	0.310672	0.259282

R²	0.020763	0.03736	0.028377	0.028554	0.136429	0.157561
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Figures are coefficients. Figures in parentheses are P-values. Light-gray cells indicate P-values <0.05. Dark-gray cells indicate 0.05 < p < 0.10.

Figure 1 Blame attributed to agricultural and non-agricultural actors

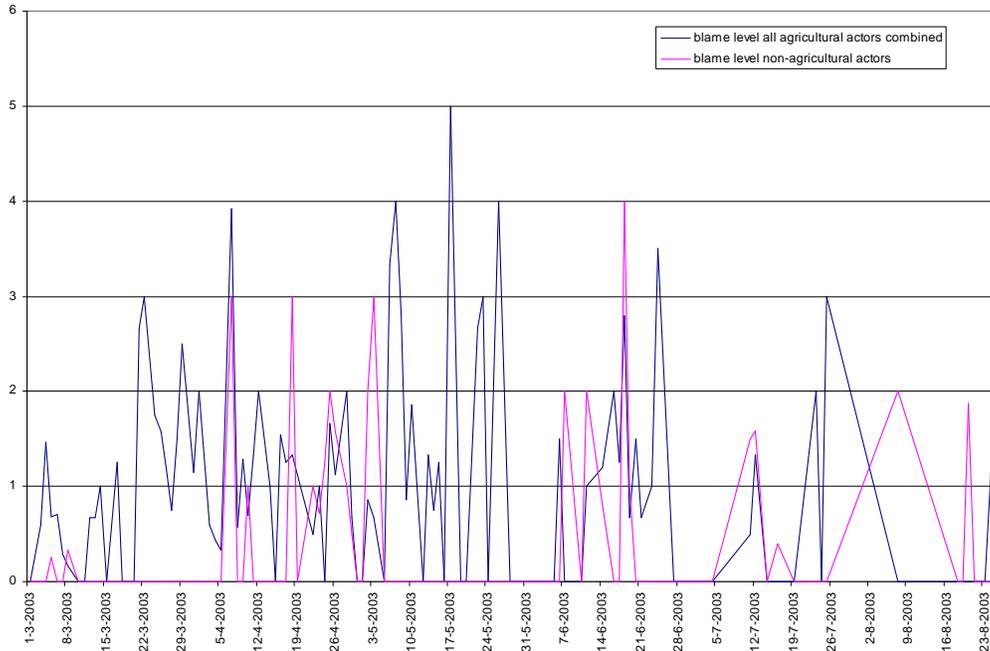


Figure 2 Blame attributed to the Minister and Ministry of Agriculture and to agricultural agencies

