1 | *Governing after crisis*

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The politics of crisis management: an introduction

In all societies, life as usual is punctuated from time to time by critical episodes marked by a sense of threat and uncertainty that shatters people's understanding of the world around them. We refer to these episodes in terms of crisis.

Crises are triggered in a variety of ways; for example, by natural forces (earthquakes, hurricanes, torrential rains, ice storms, epidemics and the like) or by the deliberate acts of 'others' ('enemies') inside or outside that society (international conflict and war, terrorist attacks, large-scale disturbances). But they may also find their roots in malfunctions of a society's sociotechnical and political administrative systems (infrastructure breakdowns, industrial accidents, economic busts and political scandals).

Some crises affect communities as a whole (think of floods or volcanic eruptions), others directly threaten only a few members of the community, but their occurrence is widely publicised and evokes incomprehension, indignation or fear in many others (child pornography rings, police corruption, bombing campaigns). Yet the very occurrence of critical episodes casts doubt on the adequacy of the people, institutions and practices that are supposed to either prevent such destructive impacts from happening or mitigate the impact if they do hit.

We define 'crises' as episodic breakdowns of familiar symbolic frameworks that legitimate the pre-existing sociopolitical order ('t Hart 1993). In an anthropological sense, crises can be conceived of as bundles of real and present dangers, ills or evils that defy widely held beliefs that such things must not and cannot happen 'here'. Crises are by definition extraordinary in kind and/or scope, testing the resilience of a society and exposing the shortcomings of its leaders and public institutions (Drennan and McConnell 2007).

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When a crisis pervades a community, it creates a relentless array of challenges for citizens and rulers alike. In this volume, we concentrate on the latter. Faced with a crisis, politicians and public officials have to deal with the immediate threat or damage inflicted, but they also have to come to terms with the vulnerabilities revealed and the public disaffection this may evoke. A list of recent crises – think of the 9/11 attacks, the Madrid and London bombings, the Asian tsunami and Hurricane Katrina – suggests how hard it can be to meet these challenges. Hitherto undiscovered or neglected drawbacks of existing institutions, policies and practices sometimes become painfully obvious. As a consequence, leaders and officials at all levels of government often struggle to cope.

Crises tend to cast long shadows on the polities in which they occur. Public officeholders face pressures from the media, the public, legislatures and sometimes the courts to recount how a crisis could have occurred, to account for their response, and to explain how they propose to deal with its impact. When the crisis in question is widely held to have been unforeseeable and uncontrollable, the amount of explaining and excusing they have to do is relatively limited. But when there is a widespread perception that the threat could have been foreseen and possibly avoided altogether, or that the official response after its occurrence was substandard, political leaders and officials may end up in troubled waters.

Indeed, many political leaders have seen their careers damaged if not terminated in the face of perceived failures in crisis management. Among twentieth-century UK prime ministers alone, Chamberlain, Eden and Callaghan all saw their periods in office cut short in the wake of crises they were alleged to have mismanaged. Yet crises may give birth to heroes as well as villains among public policy makers. The public reputations or political careers of some leaders have been bolstered by handling a crisis successfully (New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani after 9/11 being the most noteworthy recent example) or deftly creating and politically exploiting one. An example of the latter is Australian Prime Minister John Howard's use of the 'children overboard crisis' during the 2001 Australian election campaign. It involved allegations by the PM and his advisors that asylum seekers headed for Australia had thrown their children from a vessel into the sea in order to force a rescue of the children and their parents. Howard's vilification of these individuals and the creation of a sense of crisis paved the way for his

Liberal Party's election victory and a tougher immigration policy (Marr and Wilkinson 2004).

The effects of crises on public policies and institutions display the same kind of variation. The events of 9/11 exacted a tragic human toll from the New York police and fire departments, but at the same time the many tales of selfless sacrifice and bravery spilled over into a strongly enhanced reputation of both agencies. By contrast, the CIA and other intelligence agencies were quickly criticised for not cooperating effectively in preventing the attacks. Some crises are followed – quite naturally it seems – by investigations and promises of reform aimed at improving policies and institutions that have proven vulnerable under pressure. The 9/11 attacks resulted in an overhaul of the U.S. intelligence sector and created a major ripple effect in security policy throughout most of the western world, which continues to this very day. Yet, as we shall see in this volume, the opposite may also occur: some crises are absorbed politically without major policy changes or reorganisations. Such cases merely confirm what many students of public administration and political science take as conventional wisdom: given the deep institutionalisation of rules, practices, budgets and communities of stakeholders, it is often extremely hard to change established policies and institutions radically – even if they fail miserably (cf. Lindblom 1959; Rose and Davies 1994; Wilsford 2001; Kuipers 2006).

How can these differences in outcome be explained? This volume inquires into precisely this issue and examines the political fates of public leaders, policies and institutions in the wake of crises. The main puzzle that occupies all its authors is that some crises have marked political consequences and trigger major policy or institutional changes, whereas others bolster the precrisis status quo. To explore these issues, the chapters in this book offer in-depth examinations of 'crisis politics' in a number of recent cases. In these cases, the political dimension of crisis management is present from the outset, but it continues to affect leaders, policies and institutions well after the operational phases of crisis management have ended.

Background and aims

Crises have been the subject of considerable academic study. Once a disjointed, segmented set of niches within the social sciences, such

writings have expanded in volume and gained in coherence follow-
ing major funding boosts in the wake of the 9/11 attacks.[1] By and
large, comparative research has taught us how different types of crises
incubate and escalate. It has identified the challenges they pose to gov-
ernments and citizens and described how political-administrative elites
respond to them.

The bulk of this research focuses on the managerial dimension of
coping with crises: prevention and preparedness measures, critical deci-
sion making during emergency response operations, coordination of
operational services, communication with the general public, and deal-
ing with the mass media. It tends to concentrate on the functional chal-
lenges of adapting public organisations and networks to the extreme
conditions that major emergencies impose. It has resulted in policy
principles for risk assessment and contingency planning as well as in
experiential rules and guidelines for designing and running command
centres, fostering interorganisational collaboration, informing the pub-
lic, and managing media relations.[2]

In contrast, the more strategic, political dimension of crisis manage-
ment has received much less attention. Insofar as crisis studies deal
with the broader political ramifications of crises, they tend to concen-
trate on the intergovernmental and interorganisational conflicts that
often emerge in the course of large-scale, high-speed, high-stakes crisis
response operations (Rosenthal et al. 1991; Schneider 1995). Much less
research effort has been devoted in the crisis management literature to
the wider impact of crises on political officeholders, governments and
their policies (cf. Birkland 1997, 2004, 2006; Kurtz 2004).[3]

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[1] A wide variety of sources exists. For a first overview of the subject, we
recommend Brecher (1993); Rosenthal et al. (1989; 2001); George (1993);
Farazmand (2001); Seeger et al. (2003); Boin et al. (2005) and Rodriguez et al.
(2006).

[2] Most of the 'how to manage a crisis' texts are not specifically oriented to the
public sector. They tend to be focused either on the private sector or are
cross-sectoral. Examples include Coombs (1999); Fink (2002); Regester and
Larkin (2002) and Curtin et al. (2005).

[3] Important exceptions include the social-psychological literature on collective
trauma and posttraumatic stress; the sociological and development studies
literatures on postdisaster reconstruction of stricken communities; urban
planning literature on disaster recovery; and the emerging international relations
literature on conflict termination and the implementation of peace agreements.
Useful sources include Herman (1997); Pyszczynski et al. (2002); Fortna (2004);
Wirth (2004); Neal (2005); Tumarkin (2005) and Vale and Campanella (2005).

This volume aims to redress this omission. It brings together a set of recent, high-profile crisis cases that in various ways directly challenged existing public policies and institutions as well as the careers of the politicians and public managers in charge of them. Each case chapter presents a particular analytical perspective on various aspects of the larger puzzle of crisis politics and probes its plausibility in applying it to the case(s) studied. Compared and synthesised in the final chapter, these various perspectives offer the beginnings of an analytical toolkit that may be used to understand the (differential) nature and impact of the politics of crisis management.

In pursuing these aims, this introductory chapter opens up the 'black box' of crisis politics. We do so by focusing on crisis-induced processes of accountability and learning. When public officeholders have to explain their actions and look toward the future in dialogue with public forums that have the capacity to significantly affect their own fortunes, they cannot help but confront, and try to shape, the political impact of a crisis. Their efforts in these venues are constrained by stakeholders and opposition forces who seek support for their definition of the causes of crisis as well as their judgements on the effectiveness of the crisis response. It is in these forums that the politics of crisis plays out in full force, determining to a considerable degree the future of leaders, policies and institutions.

We proceed in this introductory chapter as follows. First, we discuss the distinct challenges that crises pose to political – administrative elites, public policies and institutions. We then explore the characteristics of crisis-induced accountability and learning processes, particularly their permeation by investigating, politicking, blaming and manoeuvering. We also identify a range of crisis outcomes with regard to the fates of political leaders, public policies and public institutions. Third, we identify a number of situational and contextual factors that, theory suggests, shape the course and outcomes of these crisis-induced processes. We end this chapter with a brief introduction to the case study chapters and an explanation of our selection of these cases.

Crisis-induced governance challenges

When we study societal responses to crises, we must differentiate between two levels of analysis. At the *operational level*, we find the people who directly experience and respond to a critical contingency:

emergency operators, middle-level public officials, expert advisers, victims and volunteers. At the *strategic level*, we find political and administrative officeholders (both inside and outside the 'core executive') who are expected to concentrate on the larger institutional, political and social ramifications of the crisis. This level also includes people and forums who are permanently engaged in critically scrutinising and influencing elite behaviour: parliamentarians, watchdog agencies, journalists and interest/lobby groups. The focus in this volume lies exclusively on the latter.

When they are confronted with crisis, public leaders and agencies face three distinct challenges. First, there is the actual emergency response: this has to come quickly, effectively and with due consideration for the often extremely complicated logistical, institutional and psychosocial conditions that prevail. This dimension of crisis management has received the bulk of the attention in the disaster and emergency management literatures, so we shall not discuss it any further (see e.g. Rosenthal et al. 1989, 2001; Rodríguez et al. 2006).

Second, in today's age of high-speed and global mass communication, a crisis necessitates immediate and comprehensive public information and communication activities. Simply put: governments need to tell people what is going on, what might happen next and what it means to them. Failure to do so in a timely and authoritative fashion opens up a Pandora's box of journalistic and web-based speculation, rumour, suspicion and allegations that can easily inflame public opinion and sour the political climate, even as emergency operations are still under way. Several case studies in this volume demonstrate how governments may lose – and other political stakeholders may gain – control of the 'definition of the situation'.

Third, perhaps the most daunting strategic challenges for public policy makers occur well after the immediate response operations have dwindled or settled into orderly patterns.[4] In the weeks and months (and occasionally even years) after the operational crisis response has subsided, public leaders may find themselves still preoccupied with managing the 'fallout' of the crisis: searching for resources to pay for damages, fighting judicial battles, coping with the onslaught of

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[4] For an early statement, see Rosenthal et al. (1994). For further explorations, consult 't Hart and Boin (2001).

criticism that it has evoked, but also exploiting the possibilities a crisis offers. Several case studies in this volume focus on this third set of crisis-induced governance challenges.

Crises and politics

Crises have a way of becoming politicised rather quickly. Some actors perceive a threat to their ways of working, policies and legitimacy, yet others relish the prospect of change. Political, bureaucratic, economic and other special interests do not automatically pull together and give up their self-interest just because a crisis has occurred. They engage in a struggle to produce a dominant interpretation of the implications of the crisis. The sheer intensity of these struggles tends to produce unpredictable twists and turns in the crisis-induced fates of politicians, policies and institutions alike.

As stated, this politicisation tends to evolve around two core processes. One is accountability. This relates to officeholders rendering account (in public forums) of their actions prior to and following a crisis. Where these accounts are debated, judgement is passed and possible sanctions administered (Bovens 2007). The other is learning, defined here as the evaluation and redesigning of institutions, policies and practices with a view to improving their future fungibility (Rose and Davies 1994).

Accountability is mainly about looking back and judging the performance of people; lesson drawing is more about looking forward and improving the performance of structures and arrangements. Even though learning is thus logically distinct from accountability, they may overlap in political practice. Accountability forums such as parliaments often take an explicit interest in drawing lessons for the future.

The arenas in which accountability and learning play out offer stakeholders a wide variety of opportunities to gain support for their definition of the crisis (and their envisioned solutions). The dynamics of interactions in (and between) these venues determine to a large extent the fates of leaders, public policies and public institutions.

Accountability and learning are often, if only implicitly, viewed as mechanisms for social catharsis. In liberal societies based on principles of openness and democratic control of executive power, the practices and discourses of crisis-induced scrutiny and questioning are seen as a

crucial part of a recovery and healing process. Although this is some-times clearly the case, many crises nevertheless linger on for years – only to erupt once again in different guises.

Catharsis can thus prove elusive. The process of looking forward is hindered because the process of looking back turns out to be inconclu-sive and contested. This can happen in a variety of ways. The media may sense that there is more to the story than has come out so far and thus continue to dig around for new revelations. Official investigations may extend the time frame, leading to protracted political uncertainty and sometimes breeding further investigations. Also, political stale-mates and bloodletting may prompt an atmosphere of enduring bitter-ness, while victims and other stakeholders may go public (or go to the courts) with allegations of government negligence or wrongdoing.

Crises do have dynamic potential to prompt change. By destabilising the veracity and legitimacy of existing policies, goals and institutions as well as threatening the security and rewards obtained by relevant actors and stakeholders, they provide 'windows of opportunity' for reform (Birkland 1997; Kingdon 2003). Crisis-induced reforms may be a matter of intelligent reflection and experimentation resulting from the embracing of new ideas. However, things can be much more pro-saic. Change may be the product of sheer political necessity: embattled policy makers under critical scrutiny after an extreme event forced to make symbolic gestures. Likewise, policy change may occur when crises prompt a shift in the balance of power between various coalitions of stakeholders who are engaged in ongoing struggles about particular policies and programs (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993).

Crisis does not produce politics in a linear fashion. In particular, processes of accountability and learning do not automatically produce societal and political consensus on the evaluation of the past or the way forward. In crisis politics, we tend to find a spectrum of stances and responses. At one end, there are those who categorically advocate a change of leaders and policies. At the other end, we find leaders and their supporters determined to ride out the storm as well as staunch supporters of existing policies and institutions. Therefore an initial consensus on the need for accountability and learning in the wake of crisis is easily fractured by argument and debate over the specific forms that accountability and learning processes should take.

In order to pave the way for the case studies in this book, we now introduce the concepts of accountability and learning processes

in somewhat greater detail. We will not attempt here to provide a definitive account of the complexities and contradictions of crisis and postcrisis periods. Rather, we try to identify aspects of crisis-induced accountability and lesson-drawing processes that appear to affect in a significant manner the outcomes of a crisis.

Crisis-induced accountability: leaders and blame games

The concept of public accountability is subject to considerable debate about 'ideals' of public accountability and how accountability regimes operate in practice (Mulgan 2003). In liberal democracies, accountability regimes are designed to make political decision makers answerable for their actions to public forums. These forums possess certain powers – formal and informal – to interrogate, debate with and sanction political decision makers.[5] In the emotionally charged context of crisis-induced turmoil and grief, accountability is rarely a routine, ritualistic exercise, as it sometimes is for governments that enjoy stable majorities in otherwise peaceful and prosperous democracies. Typical accountability questions in crisis-induced politics include: What happened? Who and what caused this to happen? Who is responsible? Who should be sanctioned?

Such questions and the search for answers are typically played out through an array of official inquiries, investigative journalism, political 'dirt' digging, parliamentary questions, legal investigations, victim and family campaigns, as well as lobby group interventions. Scrutiny often calls into question long-standing policies, the working of public institutions and the performance of political and bureaucratic leaders.

We picture crisis-induced accountability processes as arenas in which politicians and stakeholders struggle over causes and blame ('t Hart 1993; Boin et al. 2005). The right to question, criticise and seek responses is part of the fabric of pluralistic, liberal democratic regimes. In this context, it is almost naïve to expect some kind of societal synergy amidst crisis-induced accountability processes. Given their positions, interests and ideas, all actors involved in accountability processes will use a variety of strategies to argue their case and apportion blame. We refer to this particular and rather pervasive characteristic in terms of the 'blame game' (Brändström and Kuipers 2003).

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[5] These forums include parliaments, auditors, courts and mass media.

Although it has never been easy for leaders to deal with this scrutiny (and manage a crisis at the same time), several often-noted trends suggest that it may be getting harder. Three trends in particular have the potential to open the accountability arena to more stakeholders and complicate the prospects for leaders to emerge as winners from these blame games.

A first trend is the transformation of the media industry. The number of media representatives and the speed with which they bring their reports to their audiences has exploded since the 1980s and especially since the advent of the Internet. Some suggest that this increased competitiveness has fueled a more aggressive approach toward public leaders (Sabato 2000). The upshot of these developments is that crisis response and crisis politics have almost become prime television events in and of themselves. This does little to prevent their politicisation in terms of a 'heroes and villains' morality tale (Wagner-Pacifici 1986).

A second trend consists of the changing attitudes of the modern citizen. Despite the array of public sector institutions and policies focused on regulating risks and promoting safety and well-being, citizens appear more fearful than ever before (Clarke 2005; Furedi 2005). The visibility in the modern media of crises and tragedy from around the globe (beamed into our living rooms and readily accessed from our PCs), coupled with the newsworthiness of the 'discourse of fear' (Altheide 2002), has heightened anxiety and feelings of vulnerability. The modern citizen has less tolerance of glitches and failure – they remind him or her that worse may be to come. Leaders engaged in the tough task of managing risk and responding to crises are less liable to be praised when they perform well and more liable to be vilified when mistakes are made (Bovens and 't Hart 1996; Beck 1999).

A third trend is the strengthened position of citizens and families affected by crises and disaster. The availability of the Internet, coupled with the newsworthiness of long-term interrogation of government, offers previously marginal citizens' groups more opportunities to keep the memory of the events and the issues they raised alive and in the public realm (Cohen 2001; Edkins 2003; Attwood 2005; Kofman–Bos et al. 2005). Victims' associations often turn out to be tenacious and resourceful lobbyists for influence over crisis-induced policy-making processes and decisions. These voices add to the general crisis-induced clamour for political accountability and fuel arguments that leaders

should atone for mistakes made, change policies or, in extreme cases, relinquish political office.

Crises and the fates of political leaders

One of the most interesting and enduring features of crisis-induced accountability politics is that the line between political winners and losers is such a fine one. In this book, we seek to explore why some leaders end up on the 'good' side whereas others find their career terminated by a crisis. We may, in fact, recognise three distinct outcomes for leaders.

First, there is *elite reinvigoration*. Leaders find their electoral position and general stature enhanced after a crisis, either because they and their governments are seen to have done well prior to and during the crisis or because they accept, in a timely and graceful fashion, responsibility for mistakes made.

Second, there is *elite damage*. A crisis and its aftermath may undermine political credibility and cause a downturn in political fortunes (or even a complete downfall). Examples of political casualties are many, including French Defence Minister Charles Hernu after his role in the attack on Greenpeace's *Rainbow Warrior* and North Ossetian Interior Minister Kazbek Dzantiev after the Beslan school siege. On an even grander scale, the entire Dutch government resigned in 2002 after a report stating that the government could have done more to prevent the slaughter by Serb forces of over 7500 adults and children in the UN safe haven of Srebrenica.

A final outcome is *elite escape*, where the crisis makes little or no immediate difference, melting into a complex world of other, more salient issues. In recent years, for example, Australian Prime Minister John Howard has managed to emerge unscathed in opinion polls and electoral contests from a string of crises focused around his government's policies on refugees, immigration and detention. Whether leaders can permanently escape damage remains to be seen. In some cases, their crisis performance is later reassessed in light of new failures.

Crisis-induced learning: rhetoric, policies and institutions

The aftermath of most crises is rife with the rhetoric of learning (Drennan and McConnell 2007). Crises tend to expose political and

societal shortcomings, so these episodes typically evoke a widely felt determination to do better in the future: 'we must ensure that this does not happen again'. Lessons must be formulated and implemented, most people would agree. However, both the formulation and the bureaucratic implementation of crisis lessons tend to be highly problematic.

Organisations are typically bad learners (Stern 1997), but some manage to do well. So-called high-reliability organisations (HROs) have a particularly well-developed capacity for lesson drawing. In these organisations, matters of security and safety are either the number one priority or part of the raison d'être of the organisation (LaPorte 1996; Weick and Sutcliffe 2001). Their systems and cultures are ingrained with the preemption of errors, systematic adjustments, learning in the event of tragedy and a deeper 'deuterolearning' (i.e. learning how to learn) (Argyris and Schön 1996). These organisations have both the capacity to 'puzzle' (find out what went wrong, work out what new initiatives are required) and the capacity to 'power' (bring about change) (Boin et al. 2005). Alas, most public organisations do not qualify as HROs.

Most learning prompted by crisis may actually occur outside organisational walls.[6] One would expect political learning to get to the heart of 'what went wrong' and to ensure that 'the facts' become available to inform decisions about what should be done in order to ensure that a similar crisis does not happen again (or if it does, we are better prepared and better able to manage it). The outcome should (in theory) clear up mystery and speculation surrounding the crisis, replacing them with impartiality and rigour. One would expect political investigators to draw on science and the law where relevant – epitomes of impartiality and modernity (Giddens 1990).

Some investigations and reports have been well respected and have been able to uncover credible and substantial information regarding the causes and handling of crises. They have been accompanied by sensible recommendations for improvement (e.g. the Scarman report of the 1981 Brixton riots, the McClellan inquiry into the 1998 Sydney water crisis and Lord Justice Taylor's report on the 1989 Hillsborough disaster) and various investigations into 'creeping crises', such as miscarriages of justice involving the 'Guildford Four', the 'Birmingham

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[6] Then there are purpose-built organisations, such as the U.S. Transportation Board, which exist to examine the causes of crises in their policy domain.

Six' and aboriginal deaths in custody in Australia. One of the best examples may be the 9/11 report (Parker and Dekker, this volume).

Such celebrated investigations are, however, hardly the norm. In fact, crises rarely give rise to clear lessons that are at the same time widely supported by all relevant policy makers and stakeholders. Rather, the complex relationships between societal, organisational and individual factors that are said to have produced a crisis – whether framed as a tragedy, scandal, fiasco or a mere 'incident' – are often disputed (Bovens and 't Hart 1996; Thompson 2000; Butler and Drakeford 2003; Garrard and Newell 2006). Disputes and manoeuvring typically come to the fore in investigative forums and lesson-drawing exercises.

Complexity is added when we consider that 'more' learning is not always better learning. A surfeit of inquiries may inhibit learning because it allows competing coalitions to converge around a particular inquiry that most accords with their own views. In the *Exxon Valdez* case, for example, aspects of the disaster were investigated by fifteen Congressional committees and subcommittees (Kurtz 2004). Likewise, the garbled response to the crash of a Dutch military plane at an airport base in Eindhoven in 1996 triggered thirteen official investigations and multiple court proceedings (Rijpma and Van Duin 2001).

Whereas many stakeholders have the luxury of being outside government and can argue forthrightly for policy reforms and organisational changes, government and policy makers are rarely in the position to do so. They are typically stuck between competing imperatives in a 'mission impossible' (Boin and 't Hart 2003). On the one hand, there is the imperative to 'do something' and show willingness to learn through initiation of reforms that will make society better prepared to anticipate, mitigate and cope with crisis in the future. On the other, there is the imperative to reassure that, in essence, the system as it stands (and for which they carry responsibility) is robust.

This perennial tension between restoration and reform looms large during the aftermath of most crises. The political language of leaders tends to emphasise thorough inquiry, the need to learn lessons and the necessity of renewal. In practice, however, these same leaders lean heavily towards the status quo. After 9/11, President George W. Bush promised that every possible lesson would be learned, yet in practice he attempted to thwart the establishing of the inquiry and then the investigation itself (Parker and Dekker, this volume).

Crisis and the fates of policies and institutions

Processes of learning unleashed by crisis can have different impacts. They may lead to mere fine-tuning of current policies. They may, in contrast, produce sweeping changes to programs and organisations. Or they may alter nothing at all. Some sweeping changes announced in the wake of a crisis prove to be all rhetoric and no follow-up, while others have enduring effects on rules, practices and the commitment of public resources (March and Olsen 1975). The rhetoric of reform may dominate the limelight of media coverage and political debate while the 'real learning' takes place in the professional realm – even if it proceeds at a much slower pace than the rhetoric suggests (Van Duin 1992; Lodge and Hood 2002).

We discern three ways in which to characterise the effects of crises on pre-existing policies and institutions. Our approach is inspired by a number of typologies that disaggregate reform into degrees of change rather than conceiving it as a one-dimensional phenomenon (cf. Hall 1993; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993; Rose and Davies 1994). There is considerable commonality in these approaches, and we aim at parsimony and sharpening the focus in terms of crisis and disaster.[7] These three categories involve an element of subjectivity. A value judgement will always be required on the significance of any particular change. Nevertheless, the categories are sufficiently broad and differentiated enough to make robust judgements on where each of our cases can be located.

Fine tuning is the instrumental and incremental adaptation of policies and practices without any challenge to core political values. In this volume, we will see several cases of postcrisis change being limited essentially to modest adaptations of policy, procedures and practices (such as NASA after the *Challenger* disaster and Swedish counterterrorism preparedness after the Stockholm embassy seizure).

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[7] We do not include here the Rose and Davies (1994) contention that symbolic gestures to change (without any procedural or policy change) can have a pacifying effect and alter people's perception of the 'problem'. Such attempts at societal reassurance are indeed an integral part of crisis management (Edelman 1977; 't Hart 1993), but our interest here is primarily on the extent to which policies, procedures and institutions become reformed in response to crisis and disaster.

Policy reform occurs when important policy principles and institutional values, which are difficult to change under normal circumstances, become subject to fundamental adaptation. In this book, an example of crisis-induced reform is the aftermath of the Dutroux crisis in Belgium, which brought structural redesign of a criminal justice sector that had long defied such efforts (Staelraeve and 't Hart, this volume).

Finally, a *paradigm shift* occurs when entire policies, organisations or even fundamental normative aspects of a political system become subject to abdication. However, such occurrences are rare. A classic example is Britain's near bankruptcy in 1976, which led to a jettisoning of long-held Keynesian beliefs and policies (commitment to full employment, public expenditures as a means of avoiding recession). The new paradigm featured 'monetarism', public sector cutbacks and the seeds of free market change (Hall 1993). A potentially classic case may be – again – the 9/11 crisis, which has brought an entirely new concept of homeland security. Ironically, the failings of FEMA in its response to Hurricane Katrina have proved a challenge to this fledgling paradigm.

Crisis politics and crisis outcomes

In this book, we view crises through the lens of politics. We explore the political dimensions of crises, which begin at the acute phase but spill over into the postcrisis aftermath. We study how crisis politics – the cogitation of competing definitions or frames on what happened prior to and during a crisis and what this means for officeholders and governance patterns alike – creates new 'futures' for a society and its leaders.

To a certain extent, *strategies* of blaming and framing play an important role in shaping the aftermath of crises (Brändström and Kuipers 2003). Actors may seek to (1) depict an event as a violation (or otherwise) of core values, (2) portray the crisis as a stand-alone disturbance or one that is symptomatic of deeper policy/systemic failure and (3) construct blame as being concentrated with certain actors or dispersed among a complex network of actors. Indeed, the growth throughout the western world of agencies positioned at 'arm's length' to national government has made the blame game somewhat easier for politicians,

allowing for a structural hiving off of responsibility and blame (Flinders and Smith 1999).

Political elites can use a variety of tools and techniques to shape the debate (Elliot and McGuiness 2002; Toft and Reynolds 2005). These include:

- Avoiding a public inquiry
- Restricting the terms of reference of an inquiry
- Choosing a chairperson and members with views sympathetic to the government
- Refusing to give evidence; refusing to divulge certain information or giving evidence only under certain conditions
- Intervening to discredit an ongoing investigation
- Using official statistics to retrospectively downplay the impact of a crisis
- Utilising and strengthening existing procedures and norms in order to suppress criticism

Such strategies are not guaranteed to work in favour of the elites who deploy them. Much depends on how the nature and implications of crises become framed in public and professional debates. Much also depends on which potential lessons attract the support of powerful coalitions inside and outside government and which do not. The battle over crisis frames unfolds in the arenas in which learning and accountability take place. In a liberal democracy, many actors can join this battle. Those who manage to gain the most support for their definition of the situation and the solutions that accompany it will have the most leverage in determining the fate of political leaders, public policies and public institutions.

Situational and contextual factors

Crisis-induced accountability and learning processes, coupled with elite strategies, do not play out in a vacuum. Crises occur in sociohistorical *situations* that can enable but more often than not limit the scope for elite manoeuvring and constrain the ability to frame the depth of the crisis, its causes, who or what should be blamed and longer-term implications.

We detect two situational factors of particular importance. First, the *scope and nature of the crisis* plays a role. Crises do not arrive

in exactly the same way nor do they have the same resonance. Some types of crises may provide more room for stakeholders to forward an alternative frame than others. Each crisis may therefore be expected to cast a different shadow on the polity in which it occurs. In this book, we distinguish three crisis types (Boin et al. 2005).

Incomprehensible crises are in a class of their own and have frame-breaking qualities (such as 9/11, the Asian tsunami or the devastation of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina). In such cases, sheer bewilderment leaves considerable political space for actors to frame the crisis in particular ways. *Mismanaged crises* are characterised by failures (actual and alleged) within governmental/bureaucratic machines. They can raise the stakes because they act as a magnet for all those media, party political and other interests who seek to capitalise on the opportunity to expose (apparent) weaknesses in the legitimacy or capacities of political elites and senior public officials. *Agenda-setting crises* 'hit a nerve' and expose wider social vulnerabilities and fears (the 1968 student riots in Paris, 1979 nuclear accident at Three Mile Island, 1981 Brixton riots in London). Typically, they lead to reflexes and reflections beyond the specific incident itself to a questioning of the vulnerability of an entire policy domain and beyond (Three Mile Island, for example, opened up a wider debate on U.S. reliance on nuclear power).

In crises where it is immediately obvious that exogenous factors play a pivotal part (e.g. volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, mudslides, floods and tsunamis; or foreign hooligans, radical demonstrators and terrorists), it is relatively easy for government actors to make authoritative statements about what happened and why. However, for crises where it appears that endogenous factors such as operator errors, political negligence, and organisational rule bending have been at work (e.g. technological accidents such as Bhopal, space shuttle *Challenger*, Chernobyl and prison riots), governments will find it harder to allay public doubts, which may create an interpretive vacuum for other, often critical voices to fill (see Staelraeve and 't Hart, this volume).

Second, the *historic record* of leaders, policies and institutions must play a role. A firm body of theoretical and empirical findings supports the claim that public policies and time-honoured institutions tend to be change-resistant. Over time, their proven worth has turned them into receptacles of resources (funding, support, trust). Even if a crisis demonstrates their 'unfitness' in the face of new threats, many

stakeholders will not find it easy to divest. In a similar vein, we may assume that a proven track record can provide leaders with a 'credit line' that protects them, at least to some degree, from the impact of opposition criticism in the wake of crisis.

Contextual factors impinge upon postcrisis politics as well. Of particular importance is the *timing* of crises and the way in which they disturb ongoing patterns of governance, politics and organisational life. For example, a crisis may hit at a crucial point in the electoral cycle, such as immediately after an election, when a new leader is enjoying a 'honeymoon' period that may enable him or her to use the crisis as an opportunity to assert authority, galvanise support and appear statesmanlike. However, if a crisis appears just prior to an election (Staelraeve and 't Hart; Olmeda, this volume), the stakes are higher. Politicisation and an intensification of blame games seem increasingly likely as a result.

Timing may also be crucial in terms of the point in leadership careers or a government's wider societal and party standing when a crisis hits (Drennan and McConnell 2007). A prime minister, president or premier whose position as party leader is vulnerable because of a lack of support or even the threat of support being withdrawn, is likely to find his or her vulnerability heightened when a crisis hits. Amid questioning of causes, response and longer-term implications, a crisis allows internal party critics to challenge the leader's fitness to lead the party. Irish Taoiseach (prime minister) Charles Haughey and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher both lost office as a consequence of dwindling party support coupled with crisis (financial and wire tapping for Haughey and the poll tax for Thatcher), which prompted leadership challenges. Likewise, if support for a governing party is declining in opinion polls and among influential stakeholders, a crisis may accelerate the problems for leaders because it provides political space for critics to raise serious questions about fitness to govern. In 2003, when severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) arrived in Hong Kong, the government was already weak and the subject of popular protests. Its SARS response evoked heavy criticism in an inquiry set up by the Hong Kong Legislative Council. Only a few days after the report was published in July 2004, Health Minister Yeoh Eng-Kiong resigned – a sacrificial move intended to ease wider public discontent.

The opposite also applies. If a crisis hits at a time when a leader or government has strong support, incumbents are less liable to come

under attack and may be able to exploit the crisis to their advantage. The incoming Australian Labor government led by Bob Hawke was able to exploit news about a budget deficit blowout on the eve of its election into office to dramatise the outgoing Liberal government's economic mismanagement and political untrustworthiness (by hiding the figures during the campaign) and gain political space to renege on some of its campaign promises (Goldfinch and 't Hart 2003).

The *mass media* constitutes an additional contextual factor. Apart from the changes in the media landscape (noted above), it is clear that the media are part and parcel of the crisis aftermath. They provide the venue, without which postcrisis political contestation, crisis exploitation and blame gaming could not occur (cf. Baumgartner and Jones 1993). Media reports echo and sometimes amplify or cast serious doubts upon the 'crisis frames' that political leaders, public executives and other stakeholders defend. Their neutrality is often doubted, sometimes justifiably so. Investigative reporting or editorial agendas can easily become a crisis catalyst. When public attention is squarely focused on the crisis story, media reporting can hurt and boost political and bureaucratic reputations, particularly if the various competing media organisations tell more or less the same story and voice the same opinions.

These are merely provisional conjectures. They are derived from the literature on policy and institutional reform and the voluminous body of leadership research. How these factors play out in times of crises (and their aftermaths) remains to be studied, which is exactly what we will do in the remainder of this volume – examining case studies to explore the role of these and possibly alternative factors that shape the course and outcomes of crisis politics.

This volume: design and overview

This volume seeks to enhance our understanding of crisis-induced politics in terms of leadership fates, policy change and institutional adaptation. The case studies explore how these fates play out in a variety of contexts. In this final section, we introduce the cases of this book. The case authors were free to choose which particular aspects of crisis and postcrisis politics to focus on and to employ any analytical perspective they deemed suitable as long as they explicitly addressed the core objective of this volume: to elucidate crisis-induced political

processes of accountability and learning and their impact on leaders, public policies and institutions.

We introduced different logics of comparison throughout the volume. First, we explicitly selected the authors because their work entailed (pairwise or trichotomous) case comparison within the space of their own chapters. These comparisons are designed to highlight and explain analytically salient similarities and differences in crisis-induced accountability and learning processes (as explained further below). Second, we have paired various chapters to exploit the comparative potential they entailed (i.e. by addressing similar aspects of crisis politics in different national or situational contexts). In the final chapter, we shall revisit both types of comparisons set up throughout this volume, and extract their analytical yield.

Part I of this volume contains case studies of *crisis-induced accountability processes*. The case studies in this part show how public leaders have been held to account following crises, how they behave in that process and the political implications which crisis-induced accountability has had for them and their governments. It starts with three linked chapters.

Chapter 2 by Thomas Preston deals with the Bush administration's response to Hurricane Katrina. He focuses particularly on Bush's handling of the mounting criticism of the allegedly inadequate prevention, preparedness and response policies of governments at all levels, including the president himself. Preston employs his pre-existing theory (Preston 2001) about presidential leadership style to explain the nature – and weaknesses – of the management by the Bush administration of the political fallout created by this disaster.

Next are two cases where, just as in the Katrina case, the accountability process starts and intensifies not after but in parallel to the operational response to the crisis. However, in contrast to the U.S. case, in these two cases the nexus between crisis politics and electoral politics is immediate and direct, given the fact that both critical episodes occurred shortly before national parliamentary elections were held.

Chapter 3, by José Olmeda, examines the immediate aftermath of the Madrid bombings (March 2004), when Prime Minister José María Aznar's blaming of Basque terrorist group ETA backfired on his party just a few days before national elections. Amid a welter of blaming and counter-blaming, Aznar's actions helped create an opportunity for the Spanish Socialist Party opposition to score a wholly unexpected

victory. Olmeda explains this remarkable outcome by conceptualising the crisis as a 'framing contest' between politically opposed groups, both seeking to shape public images of the event in ways that suited their political needs. Olmeda argues that the credibility of the government's account was effectively undermined by a combination of its own rigid insistence on its version in the face of mounting evidence from the operational level that alternative scenarios (Al-Qaeda) were getting more likely by the hour and its critics' energetic dramatisation of a 'counterframe' through the contemporary tool of 'flash mobs' (cf. Tarrow 1994).

Chapter 4, by Evelyn Bytzek, provides a neat contrast to both the Katrina and Madrid cases by examining the aftermath of the 2002 Elbe floods in Germany, where Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's Social Democratic Party was rescued from electoral defeat partly as a result of his pre-eminence in the media in relation to his role as (symbolic) leader of the national crisis response. This remarkable turnaround effect – in the midst of an acute crisis the incumbent government comes back from behind in the polls to survive an election, with the opposite occurring in Madrid – was all the more noteworthy because disaster prevention and management in Germany's federal system are largely a responsibility of the states. Bytzek argues that it was not so much the operational ability of the Schröder government to 'do the right thing' in response to the crisis that made the difference. Rather it was its 'symbolic management' of the crisis – Schröder's statesmanlike demeanour and timely on-site visits. In this lies also the main contrast with Bush's political mismanagement of the Katrina crisis. Schröder did what Bush should have done, and reaped the rewards. We may speculate that Bush escaped electoral punishment only because Katrina came after rather than just before his re-election campaign.

The next two chapters are both comparative in their own right. They were designed to probe further into factors that may account for similarities and differences in crisis-induced accountability processes and their impact on leaders and governments. In Chapter 5, Annika Brändström, Sanneke Kuipers and Pär Daléus examine the aftermath of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami in Asia, concentrating on the experiences of Sweden, Finland and Norway. The differences between the cases are revealing. Three countries whose overall political structure and culture are highly similar and who were confronted with one and the same disaster, produced divergent outcomes. Swedish political elites got caught

up in a spiral of intensive criticism from the media and citizens (this criticism has since claimed various political and bureaucratic careers), whereas their Finnish and Norwegian counterparts fared much better. The chapter documents these differences and suggests that they were due mostly to the variety of postures adopted by the responsible ministers vis-à-vis critical media and inquisitive parliaments.

In Chapter 6, Sofie Staelraeve and Paul 't Hart focus on two Belgian parliamentary crisis investigations. These investigations dealt with the dioxin contamination in foodstuffs and a failure to capture the serial paedophile and child killer Marc Dutroux. The authors examine the design, conduct and impact of the two commissions of inquiry that were set up in response to these crises. Again, the tale is one of differences between cases that could have been expected to show similarities. Therefore, by way of contrast to the chapter by Brändström et al., Staelraeve and 't Hart argue that differences can be accounted for by the political context and timing of both inquiries, and indeed the (implicit but nevertheless strong) link between them. Elite behaviour was largely predisposed by the path-dependent nature and political timing of both crises. Consequently, semantic and symbolic room for manoeuvre was far more constrained than in the Scandinavian cases.

Part II of the volume contains case studies that focus principally on *crisis-induced dynamics of policy change and learning*. As we have argued above, a common line of thought is that crises are conducive to change: policy innovation and institutional reform. The first case study in this part finds exactly the opposite: a crisis that was not followed by significant change. Chapter 7, by Dan Hansén, analyses the political aftermath of the 1975 Stockholm embassy seizure. Using contemporary theories of policy dynamics he explains the apparent anomaly his case study throws up: an unprecedented terror event in Sweden, which, nevertheless, did not result in a major push forward or significant change in its hitherto embryonic and laconic counter-terrorism policy.

In Chapter 8, the theme of understanding the selective policy impact of crises is further analysed in a cross-national comparative case study by Robert Schwartz and Allan McConnell. They contrast the 2000 Walkerton (Ontario) water contamination crisis with the Jerusalem banquet hall collapse in 2001. The common denominator in the two cases is that in both instances, regulatory failure was identified in post-crisis inquiries as being a major causal factor in the crisis.

In Ontario, however, the eventual outcome was major regulatory reform, whereas such reform remained notably absent in the Israeli case. Schwartz and McConnell contrast and discuss these outcomes, placing particular emphasis on the contextual aspects of politics and culture in Canada and Israel.

The last two chapters deal with the politics of learning in the wake of truly traumatic and paradigm-shattering crises in the United States. In Chapter 9, Arjen Boin examines the long aftermath of the 1986 space shuttle *Challenger* disaster and NASA's ability to learn while balancing engineering philosophies with intuitive judgements on risk and safety. The *Columbia* disaster in 2003 and the subsequent investigation was a tragic test of NASA's learning capacity. Boin's analysis is particularly noteworthy for its challenging of the *Challenger* investigation by the Rogers Commission and the mismatch between its findings of 'what went wrong' and the recommendations it made.

Chapter 10, by Charles Parker and Sander Dekker, examines the aftermath of 9/11, perhaps the most shocking and unexpected experience in the western world since the Second World War. Their focus on the origins, politics and investigations of the 9/11 Commission and its major contribution tells us something beyond 9/11 itself – about the factors that determine the ability of crisis commissions to perform a symbolic galvanising function that is strong enough to overcome the forces of inertia and realpolitik, highlighted in the chapters by Hansén and Schwartz and McConnell.

The final chapter of this volume revisits the findings of the various case study clusters and reveals how crises cast their shadows over political systems. It shows that crisis investigators – whether parliamentarians, ad hoc commissions or institutionalised agencies – have exceptionally difficult tasks as they seek to apportion culpability and learn lessons. They must juggle a set of logistical, methodological and philosophical problems, yet facilitate societal 'closure' of the crisis by producing an authoritative account of it. Underneath, politics as usual is omnipresent, shaping and being shaped by these very investigations as well as other accountability processes (such as criminal investigations and court proceedings). We conclude the volume by offering a number of tentative propositions about the nature and significance of crisis-induced politics for further, more systematic study. Moreover, we suggest that while political actors inside and outside government are now acutely aware of the capacity of crises to alter political careers,

policy trajectories and institutional orders, political scientists would be wise to complement their traditional focus on governance and democracy 'as usual' with a rigorous probing of the politics of extreme events that 'punctuate' the normal rhythms of political life. We hope that this volume proves a modest step in this direction.

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