

Respected individuals: How state representatives wield outsize influence in international organizations^{*}

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ABSTRACT

States invest considerable resources in the design of international organizations, including their voting rules and decision-making procedures. Yet we know surprisingly little about the individuals representing member-states in international institutions—about how, and under what conditions, they matter. In this article, I examine the micro-foundations of state action by studying the behavior of state delegates in international organizations without neglecting the structural constraints they face in their everyday work. I review key psychological and social-environmental features of successful negotiators, as identified by an interdisciplinary literature on negotiation. To assess which of those apply to state representatives in global governance, I have conducted semi-structured interviews with former members of the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) decision-making body, its Executive Board. Based on the analysis of these interviews, I develop the concept of 'respected individuals'—state representatives who enjoy a particular standing and impact in decision-making. Their influence and prestige depend on two conditions: first, autonomy vis-à-vis their home authorities; and second, relevant expertise, social, and negotiation skills. This concept plausibly extends to other international institutions and has important implications for practitioners regarding a potential trade-off between rotating representation on governing bodies and influence. Taken together, I show how to combine institutional- and individual-level features to advance our understanding of decision-making in international affairs.

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1. INTRODUCTION

States participating in international organizations expect to benefit from direct representation in the day-to-day operations of these institutions and, consequently, invest considerable resources to secure a seat on the respective governing bodies (Asatryan and Havlik 2020; Kaja and Werker 2010; Malan 2018). Far from reflecting states' interest in structuring the decision-making procedures, scholarship on the actual decision-making is relatively scarce, though. Instead, scholars of international relations predominantly explain international organizations' outputs and outcomes as a function of state-, institutional-, or structural-level attributes, such as states' material resources, voting power, or their position in the international system. To be sure, there has recently been a 'marked behavioral move in the study of international organizations' (Stone 2013, 122) which emphasizes states' informal governance in international politics. But ultimately, it is state representatives—as individuals—who express their states' preferences, deliberate over policy matters, and formally take decisions (Federo and Saz-Carranza 2018). These representatives differ considerably in their mandate, educational background, and experience (Asatryan and Havlik 2020)—and presumably, their behavior. All of which raises the following question: What are the conditions under which state representatives matter for decision-making of international organizations?

To understand state representatives' influence—'a causal relation between an actor's preferences regarding an outcome and the outcome itself' (Nagel 1975, 29)—I introduce an interdisciplinary literature on negotiation to the study of international organizations. Negotiators' interests, priorities, and strategies are, accordingly, shaped by psychological attributes (e.g., cognitive biases, motivations) and social-environmental factors (e.g., power, gender) (Brett and Thompson 2016; Thompson, Wang, and Gunia 2010).

Empirically, I assess which of these attributes apply to state delegates in governing bodies of international organizations by drawing on 25 semi-structured interviews with former members of the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Executive Board, its decision-making body overseeing the day-to-day operations. The IMF, as a key organization underpinning the world economic order and one of the most powerful international financial institution (for a recent review, see Forster, Stubbs, and Kentikelenis 2022; Stone 2011), lends itself to explore whether, and how, individuals shape organizational decisions. At the same time, the Fund is representative of other international

organizations in terms of decision-making procedures: A large number of international financial institutions—the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the African Development Bank, and many others (Martinez-Diaz 2009)—likewise use a weighted voting system with single- and multi-country constituencies, meet in camera, and have a resident board.

Based on the analysis of these interviews, I develop the concept of ‘respected individuals’ which describes negotiators who (are perceived to) wield outsize influence. Their impact depends on two conditions: First, greater autonomy from their home authorities (e.g., by virtue of facing conflicting interests from stakeholders) empowers representatives to speak with a more independent voice. Second, relevant expertise, social, and negotiation skills augment state representatives’ bargaining position vis-à-vis other delegates, staff, and management of international organizations because they speak an organization’s language and are better equipped to manufacture a consensus among different political actors. Such delegates that are relatively independent and possess the relevant skills become respected individuals in boardrooms with greater influence on discussions than their formal voting power would imply.

These findings illustrate the usefulness of studying the individuals involved in everyday decision-making and governance of international organizations: they help us examine variation in organizational decisions where state-, institutional-, and structural-level features are constant. The concept of respected individuals suggests one way how the ‘first image’ matters—extending an emerging literature on the influence of leaders (e.g., Copelovitch and Rickard 2021; Schuette 2021), diplomats (Sending, Pouliot, and Neumann 2015), staff (Nair 2020), and elites in international affairs (Krcmaric, Nelson, and Roberts 2020). In doing so, my work complements research on states’ structural power (e.g., Clark and Dolan 2021; Vreeland 2019). Of course, state representatives are not always important or consequential; I argue we can better understand when they matter if we consider how, exactly, they are embedded in institutional structures.

In addition, my work speaks to debates on the power of the weak. In the IMF, borrowing countries are organized in multi-country constituencies, which offers their representatives increased room for independent behavior. By contrast, delegates from powerful member-states hold single-country chairs in governing boards and are thus subject to a higher degree of political control from their authorities (Martinez-Diaz 2009). The view that these non-material resources are especially useful for weak states

mirrors recent work on global tax governance, where negotiators from low-income countries achieved their preferences by drawing on their expertise and professional networks (Hearson, Christensen, and Randriamanalina 2022).

For practitioners, my findings reveal a potential conflict between representation and influence. Several chairs rotate the position of IMF Executive Director among multiple constituents. Similarly, three of the ten non-permanent seats in the UN Security Council are allocated to African states; these have established institutional rules to divide the positions amongst four African regions (Carnegie and Mikulaschek 2020). My work hints at the cost of such rotation rules and draws attention to the benefits of representatives' tenure in the Fund and multilateral negotiations.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. After reviewing the predominant approaches to decision-making in international organizations in Section 2, I assess the usefulness of the interdisciplinary literature on negotiation for understanding the behavior of state representatives. In Section 3, I describe the case selection, methodology, and sample of my empirical work. Subsequently, I present the results of my analysis of the interviews (Section 4) and theorize the action of state representatives by developing the concept of 'respected individuals' (Section 5). The final section concludes by laying out avenues for future research and discussing the implications for theory and practitioners.

2. STRUCTURE AND INDIVIDUALS IN DECISION-MAKING

States invest considerable resources to ensure that the decision-making procedures of international organizations, such as voting rules and the distribution of voting shares, reflect their interests (Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal 2001). Indeed, international organizations operating in diverse issue areas and of different size and age—including the Global Environment Fund, the European Atomic Energy Agency, the International Coffee Organization, and the Asian Development Bank (Blake and Payton 2015; Martinez-Diaz 2009)—use weighted voting that favors selected member-states. This structures both formal and informal interactions of state representatives, staff, and management and gives rise to the 'shadow of hierarchy' (Scharpf 1997); it thereby allows states, as principals, to retain control over international organizations' decisions and outcomes even in the absence of voting (Blake and Payton 2015; Hawkins et al. 2006). In the World Bank, for example, the U.S. may exercise an indirect, or structural form of power, where staff anticipate American preferences (Clark and Dolan

2021). In the IMF, too, the U.S. can effectively veto important decisions even though the institution rarely takes votes (Stone 2011). Taken together, such rationalist scholarship infers the often-unobservable decision-making processes by considering state-, institutional-, or structural-level factors: e.g., the U.S. may achieve its preferences due to its resources, veto power in an organization, or its unique position in the global system, respectively. Less powerful states can also influence organizational decisions, primarily by trading temporary influence in geopolitics (e.g., Dreher, Sturm, and Vreeland 2009) or by building coalitions to increase their voting power to a meaningful level (Schneider 2011; Schneider and Tobin 2013).

While useful to understand the action of states that engage in cost-benefit calculations, these studies fail to account for organizational decisions shaped by normative developments or socialization (e.g., Nielson, Tierney, and Weaver 2006). For example, the European Union's Committee of Permanent Representatives has fostered an organizational culture where individuals are committed to 'mutual responsiveness and collectively legitimate arguments' in decision-making (Lewis 2005, 39). Outcomes are therefore not driven simply by the interests of (powerful) states, but by representatives who trust each other. Socialization also allows negotiators—regardless of their states' resources or position in an organization—to learn an organization's language and, thus, become more effective. Debates about the institutionalization of capital account liberalization in the IMF illustrate this: In the mid-1990s, state representatives from borrowing countries were able to overcome opposition from powerful Western states to uphold the possibility for capital controls, by relying on persuasion and their technical expertise to build coalitions (Kentikelenis and Seabrooke 2017).

Neither approach fully allows for the (potential) influence of state representative as individuals. On the one hand, the rationalist work that tends to emphasize the influence of powerful member-states treats representatives simply as state delegates—without considering potentially conflicting interests or independent behavior. This is likely a simplification. For example, permanent representatives of the UN are more attuned to the bureaucracy than political actors of the same nationality (owing to different incentives and socialisation) and consequently tend to speak differently (Gray and Baturo 2021). Constructivist work, on the other hand, emphasizes normative behavior and group dynamics and thereby assumes that individuals of different nationalities, backgrounds, and skills respond to a given set of organizational incentives or socialization pressures in a uniform manner.

By contrast, scholarship on institutional bargaining and negotiation takes individual-level, autonomous behavior as its starting premise. In particular, scholars of negotiation—drawing on insights from psychology, behavioral economics, political science, and communication studies—have studied the attributes of successful negotiators for more than five decades (Brett and Thompson 2016; Thompson, Wang, and Gunia 2010). The result is a broad literature that tends to organize determinants of negotiators’ interests, priorities, and strategies into two groups: psychological and social-environmental attributes (e.g., Brett and Thompson 2016). As discussed, scholarship on decision-making in international organizations has thus far neglected these individual-level attributes.¹ I present new empirical evidence from interviews below; here, I discuss these factors and their potential applicability to state representatives in international organizations theoretically.

First, *psychological factors* help us understand how individuals process information and perceive negotiations. They include cognitions and biases, trust, personality, motivation, and emotions. Cognitions and biases interfere with both laypersons’ and experts’ decision-making (Kahneman 2011; Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky 1982). One such bias is negotiation myopia, describing ways in which negotiators fail to see advantageous outcomes (Foster, Mansbridge, and Martin 2013). For instance, the fixed-pie bias keeps people from sharing information with each other because they expect a zero-sum game; this makes it more difficult to create value for all parties involved. However, mutual trust can remedy this bias because it facilitates information sharing and may increase the scope of negotiation success (Brett and Thompson 2016, 73; Kong, Dirks, and Ferrin 2014). In governing bodies of international organizations, state representatives frequently meet and do so face-to-face, both strengthening trust in the counterparty (Holmes 2013).² With regard to personality and motivation, it is difficult to generalize to international organizations. On the one hand, state representatives (particularly from powerful member-states) may be motivated by their national interests (Vreeland 2019). On the other hand, state delegates in international organizations may exhibit cooperative

¹ Multilateral negotiations have certainly received considerable academic attention (e.g., Narlikar 2013; Odell 2000). However, the bulk of such work focuses on powerful states and emerging economies. More importantly, these studies neither theorize nor empirically investigate the role of individuals involved in negotiations, but treat them merely as state delegates.

² However, distrust among state representatives, once arisen, could also persist because of the repeated nature of interactions. This is due to ‘affective looping’: trust and distrust are likely to shape state representatives’ perception of the evidence and counterparty in a self-confirming manner (Jones 2019).

behavior to solve collective action problems. Such personality similarity is conducive to reaching agreements faster (Wilson et al. 2016). In addition, negotiations in international organizations are characterized by technical expertise rather than emotional behavior—likely a reflection of their technocratic staff (Momani 2005).

Second, *social-environmental factors* describe contextual variables; they encompass the effects of power and status, reputation and relationship, gender, and culture on negotiators. The economic view of power is based on the quality of a negotiator's outside options, or 'Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement' (BATNA) (Fisher, Ury, and Patton 2011). This is consistent with the structuralist view of how international organizations operate: For instance, the U.S. is able to effect change in the IMF because it can reasonably threaten to go it alone in extraordinary cases (Stone 2011). By contrast, the social view of power is based on personal qualities of negotiators, such as status or respect (Magee and Galinsky 2008). One aspect contributing to status, reputation, and relationship in international organizations is the experience of state representatives—itsself associated with a greater likelihood of negotiation success (Neale and Bazerman 1983). Finally, variation in state representatives' education, gender, and culture, may impact upon decision-making.

In short, psychological and socio-environmental factors combine to drive individuals' ability to navigate negotiations and achieve their preferences (or the preferences of their home countries). To date, it is relatively unclear which of these help us explain everyday decision-making of international organizations. Next, I present my research design to address this lacuna by empirically studying the behavior and traits of state delegates in the IMF's Executive Board.

3. CASE SELECTION, SAMPLE, AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 CASE SELECTION

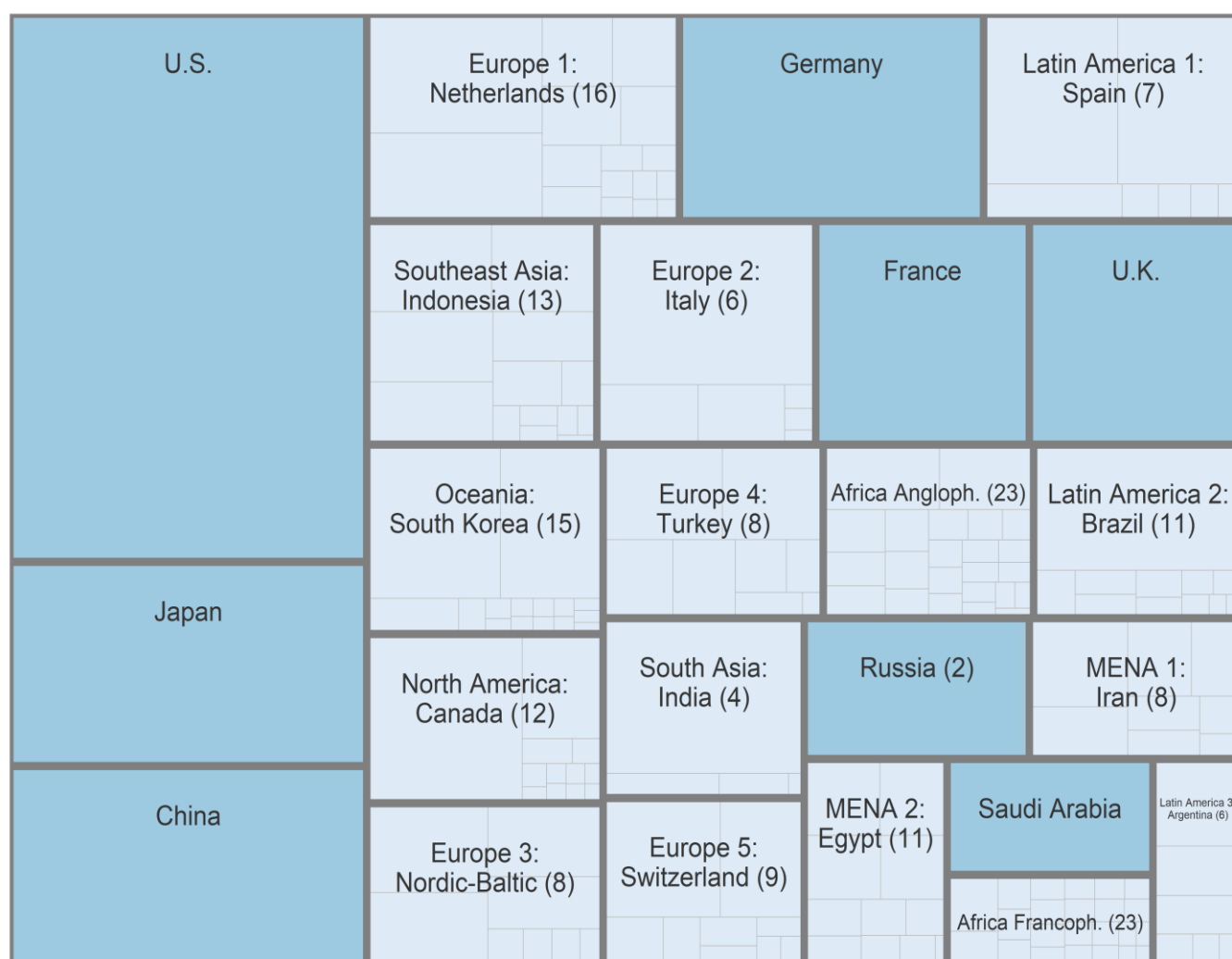
The IMF is ideally suited to understand how these psychological and social-environmental factors, and the role of state representatives, contribute to the decisions of international organizations. The decision-making procedures of the IMF are representative of many other international organizations, particularly international financial institutions: including weighted voting shares and a commitment to consensus-based decision-making (IMF 2017; Martinez-Diaz 2009). At the same time, the IMF is exceptional with

regard to outcomes. The decisions of the Fund—financial support, technical assistance, terms of lending programs—are highly consequential for global economic governance, let alone for borrowing countries (e.g., Babb and Kentikelenis 2018; Forster, Stubbs, and Kentikelenis 2022).

Thus, I study state representatives in the IMF’s governing body, the Executive Board (EB).³ The EB meets two to three times per week, and is composed of 24 Directors representing the 190 member-states, the Managing Director (or one of their Deputies) who chairs meetings, and key representatives from IMF staff and other international organizations. The largest shareholders elect their own representative, whereas the other countries form constituencies. Figure 1 depicts the organization of countries in chairs in the EB (as per January 2022). Each labeled quadrant represents one of the 24 chairs—single-country constituencies are colored in dark blue, whereas multi-country constituencies are drawn in light blue—and the relative size of each quadrant represents the voting power of the respective chair. Currently, the three constituencies with the most voting power are the U.S. (16.50%), Japan (6.14%), and China (6.08%). For multi-country constituencies, the constituent countries are drawn inside the quadrants, with their size again proportional to their voting share. The label of multi-country constituencies describes the primary geographical orientation of its members; countries mentioned are the biggest shareholder and/or traditionally elect the Executive Director; and the number in parentheses refers to the number of countries within a given constituency. For example, the constituency ‘Latin America 1: Spain (7)’ (top-right corner) is composed of seven countries, all of which except Spain are in Latin America—Mexico; Colombia; Guatemala; Costa Rica; El Salvador; and Honduras. Spain is the largest shareholder with 1.92% of the Fund’s total votes, with Mexico (1.80%) in close second. In the four-country constituency of South Asia (third position in the penultimate row)—including India (2.63%), Bangladesh (0.24%), Sri Lanka (0.14%), and Nepal (0.03%)—the Executive Director is regularly an Indian citizen, reflecting the distribution of votes.

³ The highest decision-making authority of the IMF is the Board of Governors, comprising finance ministers or central bankers from all member-states. The Governors meet biannually and are responsible for major decisions, like amending the founding treaty. However, the Governors have delegated extensive decision-making authorities over day-to-day operations to the Executive Board.

Figure 1. Constituencies and voting power in the IMF's Executive Board



Notes: Each quadrant with bold grey borders represents one of the 24 chairs in the IMF's Executive Board. Dark blue quadrants represent single-country constituencies (+ Russia, which shares its seat with Syria, which has negligible voting power); light-blue quadrants describe multi-country constituencies and the primary geographic location of their constituents; the biggest shareholder and/or the country that traditionally sends the Executive Director; and the number of constituent members in parentheses. The size of each quadrant is proportional to the voting share in the IMF.

Source: IMF (2022)

Chairs differ in geographic, linguistic, and cultural heterogeneity. For instance, the Nordic-Baltic constituency is very homogenous, comprising the eight Nordic and Baltic European countries. They are also known for their democratic decision-making and rotate their positions of Executive Director and Alternate Executive Director according to a pre-determined schedule. By contrast, the constituency of Switzerland (1.17%) is relatively diverse, including Poland (0.84%); Kazakhstan (0.26%); Serbia (0.16%); Uzbekistan (0.14%); Azerbaijan (0.11%), Turkmenistan (0.08%), Kyrgyz Republic (0.06%), and Tajikistan (0.06%). This is a result of vote-buying by Switzerland, which regularly rewards the other constituents with higher aid (Vreeland 2011). Almost all member-states from Sub-Saharan Africa belong

to one of two chairs due to their shared colonial past and language spoken: Both the Anglophone and Francophone African chair have 23 members, making these the largest chairs in terms of constituents. Constituencies in the EB are thus differently organized, and this variation suggests that structural features may impact upon representatives' behavior. To examine this conjecture, I have spoken to 25 former state representatives.

3.2 INTERVIEWS

Interviews allow researchers, as outsiders, to uncover the behavior and motivations of individuals in international organizations (Heucher, Liese, and Schettler 2018)—for example, recent applications include the study of staffing decisions of international organizations (Seabrooke and Sending 2019), organizational learning (Christian 2021), or states' motivations in using particular organizational structures (Reinsberg 2017). To understand how state representatives act in governing boards, I asked former EB members to share with me their experience regarding representation, decision-making, and effective negotiation.

The study involved the analysis of 25 semi-structured interviews with state representatives of the IMF's Executive Board. After creating a list of more than 300 state representatives that served on the Executive Board between 1995 and 2020 as well as hundreds of names from the attendance sheets of the official Executive Board Minutes, I searched their contact details online (e.g., from LinkedIn profiles, current employers, or personal websites).⁴ In the end, I was able to contact 69 of them; 29 replied, and 25 accepted my request. Interviews lasted between 35 and 80 minutes. They were all conducted virtually and on condition of anonymity. Interviews were recorded—subject to permission by the speakers—and transcribed afterwards using software and manual coding.

As displayed in Table 1, the state representatives I spoke to vary in terms of formal rank, constituency, and experience. Interviewees served at the Board from as early as the late 1980s and until as recently as 2021. The experts represented both single-country constituencies—such as the U.S., Japan, France, or the U.K.—but also multi-country constituencies from Europe, Latin America, Southeast-Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, or the Middle East. The interviewees therefore spoke on behalf of both creditor and

⁴ If Board members with public profiles differ significantly from state representatives without online presence, the results from the interviews may be biased. However, I have no reason to think this is the case.

borrower countries. Some of these individuals went on to represent their authorities in the governing bodies of intergovernmental organizations working on finance, trade, and health issues. As a result, I believe the interviewees to be representative of IMF Executive Board members in particular, and governing bodies of international organizations more broadly.

Table 1. Summary statistics of interviewees

<i>Rank (highest position held)</i>	
Executive Director	13
Alternate Executive Director	8
Temporary Alternate Executive Director (Senior Advisor or Advisor)	4
<i>Constituency</i>	
Single-country constituency	6
Multi-country constituency	19
<i>Number of years with the IMF</i>	
<5 years	10
5-10 years	5
>10 years	10
<i>Gender</i>	
Men	22
Women	3
Total	25

Notes: Number of years with the IMF refers to the total number of years working in the Fund, including stints at the Executive Board, on staff, management, or the IMF's Independent Evaluation Office.

4. INTERVIEWS WITH IMF STATE REPRESENTATIVES

Drawing on these interviews, I discuss four aspects of IMF decision-making. First, I demonstrate that Executive Board members acknowledge that negotiations and interaction take place in the shadow of hierarchy. Second, I discuss when and how representatives can speak relatively independent. Third, I review the skillset that effective Board members have. Finally, I show how these individual characteristics translate into (perceived) influence in the Board.

4.1 DEBATES IN THE SHADOW OF HIERARCHY

In 1946, the IMF Executive Board decided that the chair of debates (the Managing Director or one of their four Deputies) would identify the ‘sense of the meeting’ as the basis for decision-making (IMF 2017). The Fund thus rarely takes votes and relies on crafting a consensus instead—like many other organizations (Martinez-Diaz 2009). However, in a recent survey by the IMF’s Independent Evaluation Office (IEO), Executive Directors acknowledge that deliberations take place in the ‘shadow of voting power’ (IEO 2018). Indeed, all my interviewees emphasized the role of the unequal distribution of votes before, during, and after meetings:⁵

“In the end, it’s a bit deceptive to say consensus. Informally, the Secretary is marking it down (...) he sits next to the MD [Managing Director, the Chair] in the Board meetings, and literally counts the votes. It’s not like we don’t have a vote. When they say there is consensus, that is, well, technically speaking it is consensus. But if the U.S. says no in cases when you need a qualified majority, you’re not gonna do it.”

The efforts of borrowing countries and emerging market economies—particularly Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS)—to reform IMF governance and the distribution of voting shares are further evidence for the importance of formal power in discussions (Woods and Lombardi 2006). Dissatisfied with the status quo, emerging economies have also attempted to reduce their dependence on Western states by setting up competing institutions (Nogueira Batista Jr. 2022). The case of China is also illustrative: despite its gradually increasing voting power in the IMF, it pursues its preferences in multiple venues simultaneously (Ferdinand and Wang 2013). During my interviews, one representative from the BRICS was particularly critical of the Fund’s governance:⁶

“(...) we, the emerging markets and the BRICS in particular, never had any illusions about the importance of increasing the voting shares of our countries, because we cannot rely on this consensus-based decision-making to represent our interests fully. I think the major point to be stressed here is that the Bretton Woods institutions, despite all that has happened in the last 70 years, they still carry the weight, the marks, the way they were born as institutions of a North Atlantic pact, between the United States and the European countries fundamentally.”

The U.S., in addition to its voting power (currently, 16.5%), benefits from the location of the IMF offices in Washington D.C., its national representation in Fund management (e.g., the Deputy Managing Director is traditionally an American), and its capacity to review staff documents before formal and

⁵ Interview #4, July 2021

⁶ Interview #6, August 2021

informal meetings. In principle, European-led chairs rival the U.S. in terms of voting power (Germany, France, the U.K., and the Italian-led chair alone amount to 17.5%) and the Managing Director is traditionally a European citizen. Further, the European chairs regularly coordinate their approach to Executive Board meetings. Nonetheless, most interviewees felt Europe does not regularly function as an effective unit and if so, mostly in terms of blocking proposals rather than initiating change.

In short, the position of the U.S. in the institution and the voting power of selected European states creates the shadow of hierarchy implied by structural accounts of international organizations. As discussed in the next section, however, certain individuals can nevertheless move relatively freely in these structures.

4.2 INDEPENDENCE FROM HOME AUTHORITIES

IMF Executive Directors play a dual role, irrespective of their authorities' voting power. On the one hand, they are delegates to the Fund and thus represent the interests of the institution as a whole. On the other hand, they are representing their home authorities, one or multiple countries. All interviewees recognized this dual role—'wearing two hats'—but emphasized, to different degrees, that their loyalty lie with their home country.

Powerful member-states with a high voting share elect their own representative in single-country chairs—the U.S., Japan, China, Germany, France, the U.K., and Saudi Arabia (until recently, Russia, which now shares a seat with Syria). Yet precisely due to their prominent role in the Fund, delegates from powerful member-states often lack independence—they typically receive instructions from their capitals, especially on issues of geopolitical importance to their home countries. One former Executive Director of the U.K. summarized this as follows:⁷

“On big issues, (...) the big programs (...), there would be a lot of analysis and discussion within Whitehall and the Bank of England about what the U.K. position should be. I mean, essentially, we had instructions. We were told ‘you will support this’—we were given some discretion in the sense of being able to negotiate informally with staff and with other Board members and Management.”

⁷ Interview #10, October 2021

Representatives from developing countries shared this view of powerful member-states' representation and (lack of) independence, e.g.:⁸

"I think as a single-country constituency, my colleagues from the U.S. or France or Germany or others, actually would certainly have to align with whatever their authorities decide. Why? Because at the end of the day, once they give all the information to the authorities and the authorities make their decision, they just have to support it, even if it's different from their personal view."

Of course, this is not to say that Executive Directors from single-country constituencies do not have any independence at all. Particularly on low-profile issues, these representatives may be able to selectively inform their capitals/authorities of the issues at stake and frame those discussions held in their capitals, thereby also shaping their countries' positions in the Fund.

The remaining 16 Executive Directors chair multi-country constituencies. As depicted in Figure 1, these constituencies vary in size, from as little as four countries (India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan) to a maximum of 23 countries (the Francophone African and Anglophone African chairs). In addition, some of these constituencies comprise of borrowing countries only or a mix with creditor countries. Both size and composition of a constituency has implications for state representatives' autonomy from their home authorities. For example, one interviewee leading a European multi-country constituency described their work as follows:⁹

"(...) it also gave me more leeway that I wasn't in a single constituency, because I could tell [my] authorities when they were very adamant on a certain point: 'Yes, but I have to take into account the view of the others.' That gave me a little more leeway which some of the single-country constituencies did not have. So I felt privileged."

Several Executive Directors echoed this view. One former representative from the Francophone African constituency said:¹⁰

"(...) you as the Executive Director, your role is to try to give as much information as possible, and try to work with the authorities to come to a consensus view. How you do it is, you try to see what's best for the whole group—you as the Executive Director, because you know better than others, because you have all the information from the Board and the other views. (...) I think if you know what's the best view for the

⁸ Interview #15, December 2021

⁹ Interview #5, August 2021

¹⁰ Interview #15

whole group, you could try to convince all the Governors to share that view, so that [they] can support it.”

These quotations illustrate two sources of autonomy for state representatives from multi-country constituencies—one strategic, one substantive. First, such Executive Directors can cite potentially conflicting views among the multiple constituents to increase their independence. Second, Executive Directors may have access to more information than their home authorities on a particular policy or country, and are thus given more leeway. The latter is particularly likely for smaller countries which often lack the knowledge of issues discussed at the IMF. In these chairs, rather than information and instructions flowing from the capitals to the IMF (as tends to be the case in single-country constituencies), IMF Executive Directors provide their authorities with key information and advice.

4.3 EXPERTISE, SOCIAL, AND NEGOTIATION SKILLS

To the extent that rationalist scholarship examines decision-making itself, states are often seen as trading favors and building coalitions to achieve their preferences (e.g., Schneider 2011; Schneider and Tobin 2013). All interviewees did indeed identify coordination as an important strategy in their daily work. The most powerful member-states have a lot of resources at their disposal, which they use to do ‘a lot of outreach.’¹¹ Some of this coordination is also institutionalized. For example, the chairs with EU member-states coordinate regularly through a host of different venues, such as the Economic and Financial Committee (EFC) and its permanent sub-committee on the IMF (SCIMF) in Brussels, in addition to meetings amongst the representatives in Washington, DC (De Ryck 2019, 3).

By contrast, exchanges of views and coordination among Executive Directors from borrowing countries occurs more on an ad hoc basis, and it is therefore more subject to individual-level attributes:¹²

“[Coordination] is very much determined by the decision of the individuals concerned. And therefore, it also hinges very much on the character of those individuals. Are they cooperative? Do they see eye to eye? Do they harbor any kind of resentment or any such thing like that? I never saw it, but you know, because it’s individuals, there’s no institutional framework that would make it [coordination] happen.”

Personality thus matters for the behavior and effectiveness of state representatives. So do skills and expertise. One interviewee felt a discussion could be limited ‘if someone wouldn’t feel confident in their

¹¹ Interview #3, July 2021

¹² Interview #2, July 2021

language skills¹³, but most speakers highlighted experience and technical expertise as the most important attributes of negotiators:

“(…) I was at the Board for five years, but I worked as staff for 11 years before. So I was familiar with how things work.”¹⁴

“And if you’re a long-time member of the Board, you’re becoming, say, a person that can somehow push things that challenge staff. The best example was a long-time member from Austria. He was sometimes a kind of nuclear option, because he was very experienced, and he was a good speaker, good English.”¹⁵

Conversely, a number of interviewees lamented the choices of some countries by electing unqualified people to the IMF Executive Board (and other international organizations):

“I don’t want to be harsh, but I cannot resist. Many Executive Directors do not have the expertise. (...) The Fund is an extremely complex institution. If the ED or his office do not have the technical expertise to challenge staff and Management, they can ignore you. If you try to make a point which is not technically sound, you lose your credibility. So, in addition to the term of the Board, Executive Board members, the whole office—the ED and their staff—need to be experts in the sense that they know things and can challenge staff about the technical aspects of a proposal.”¹⁶

“You see, one problem in the Fund is that, unfortunately, many countries (...) use very poorly the positions they have. Instead of sending technically prepared people (...) they send persons with political connections and little technical preparation. And this harms the functioning of the Executive Board because the level of preparedness of the officials in the Board (...) is not always satisfactory. I was pretty lucky on the whole because I had a good team, but this is a problem that was felt at the Fund, but also at the World Bank, and the IDB.”¹⁷

Experience and expertise thus closely relate to each other. Again, this sentiment was shared by representatives from both creditor and borrowing countries. The technical expertise is important for state representatives to build coalitions and convince other chairs, but arguably even more so when they speak to staff:¹⁸

“Now to be successful, you have to understand these issues, be technically proficient in these issues. Of course, you need to be able to speak the language of the technocrats, sit with a staff member and discuss

¹³ Interview #3

¹⁴ Interview #14, November 2021

¹⁵ Interview #13, November 2021

¹⁶ Interview #12, November 2021

¹⁷ Interview #6

¹⁸ Interview #22, April 2022

a program and tell them: ‘Well, what you are insisting here is not feasible in this country. The fiscal adjustment would not work.’ So, you have to have a minimal understanding of how these things work.”

Most interviewees would thus draw attention to the benefits of longer tenure at the Fund, as it tends to be associated with greater technical expertise, a more in-depth understanding of the IMF’s decision-making process (e.g., the role of informal consultations vis-à-vis formal Executive Board meetings), and closer interactions with other Board members and staff:

“(…) wherever there is a discussion, that discussion will really only be exercised in the judgement of each Board member based on the weight of the analytical argument and evidence that someone presents. And there, there is an argument to be made for the longevity of the Board members where they are representing borrowing countries, because they build up a rapport, and they build up a credibility (...) with the larger shareholders and creditor countries, and doing that allows for a certain more degrees of freedom to have a discourse that ends with an outcome where there is a discretion that can be exercised.”¹⁹

“[O]n the governance of the Board, experience has shown that having an Executive Director coming for two years to the Board is a joke, is simply a joke. Why? Because by the time he or she gets used to the work of the Fund, they have to move and put someone else on the Board. I think (...) there must be acceptance, that at least the term of the Board should be higher than two years. (...) Because it allows them to gain expertise and experience in the Board. This is how you impose your view and people recognize you.”²⁰

In sum, effective EB members rely at least on three related traits. They draw on their experience and expertise to understand Fund decision-making. In addition, their social skills allow them to build networks within the offices of the Fund—people they can approach if they need support. Ultimately, they secure the support from other chairs, staff, and management through their negotiation skills, enabling them to take different perspectives and frame issues in a way that they resonate with other actors.

4.4 TRANSLATING INDEPENDENCE AND EXPERIENCE INTO INFLUENCE

The demonstrated independence and expertise can, together, translate into individual influence of Executive Directors because these delegates speak the ‘language of the Fund.’ In further consequence, these characteristics may allow state representatives to wield outsize influence—as one representative from a single-country constituency observed:²¹

¹⁹ Interview #2

²⁰ Interview #12

²¹ Interview #10

“Some EDs were more respected than others. (...) I think it’s fair to say that when one of the more respected EDs, even though they had maybe miniscule voting power, spoke at the Board, people tended to listen more. Therefore, it was, to some extent, your personal kudos, your personal status, that made you more influential. I definitely think there was an element of that.”

This level of respect can, in fact, be institutionalized. For example, the longest-serving Executive Director is traditionally designated as the ‘Dean of the Executive Board’ (Boughton 2001, 1039) and enjoys particular standing in the boardroom:²²

“At the time, I think the Belgium Chair (...) had his position for more than ten years, and he was seen as a veteran. And so his remarks would have some impact. This is also true for the Egyptian Chair. Because he was the longest-serving ED, he could have a strong impact on the course of discussion, because we knew that his capital also respected him. Board members have respect for these people and Fund staff pay attention. I would say that personality is added to the formal voting power.”

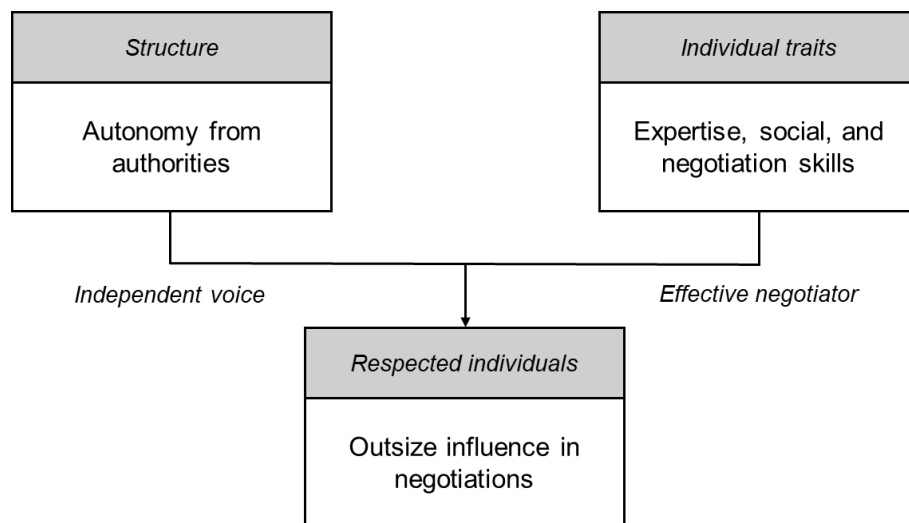
In summary, the interviewees acknowledged that the organization and culture of the Fund sets the framework in which they interact with each other on a daily basis. Structural features, such as the unequal distribution of voting shares and representation in the EB, constrain or facilitate independent behavior. Further, EB members vary in expertise, social habitus, and negotiation skills, all of which impacts upon their effectiveness and standing in the boardroom.

5. RESPECTED INDIVIDUALS IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

The interviewees highlighted that the micro-foundations of state action in governing bodies require us to consider both an organization’s structure and individuals—and their interaction. Based on the analysis of these interviews, I thus propose the framework depicted in Figure 2 to understand delegates in international organizations and multilateral negotiations. The concept of ‘respected individuals’ describes negotiators who wield outsize influence by leveraging their structural position and augmenting it with individual qualities. Their prestige and potential influence depend on two conditions: autonomy vis-à-vis their home authorities; and relevant expertise, social, and negotiation skills.

²² Interview #9, October 2021

Figure 2. Making respected individuals



Source: Author

The structure of international organizations determines the distribution of voting rights and voting rules. As discussed, states invest considerable resources to ensure that the institutional design reflects their priorities and preferences (Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal 2001). Powerful member-states can thus elect their own representatives in single-country chairs. These single-country directors, however, are more likely to be influenced by their governments and are subject to greater direct control from their authorities (Martinez-Diaz 2009). In negotiations, these constraints on individual agency can also be beneficial because counterparties know that these directors represent an entire government. By contrast, representatives in multi-country constituencies are more independent. On the one hand, they can act as if they face conflicting interests from their constituents—regardless of whether this is actually the case. On the other hand, they can increase their independence when they exploit the information asymmetry vis-à-vis their home authorities.

However, an independent voice on its own is not necessarily consequential. Other directors, staff, and management can ignore such individuals if their interventions are not convincing or do not conform to organizational norms. Thus, negotiators—in addition to being independent—need to demonstrate the relevant expertise, social, and negotiation skills to be able to persuade other chairs and staff, and to ultimately gain prestige in governing bodies of international organizations. At a time when international organizations increasingly hire consultants for their operations on the ground (Seabrooke and Sending 2019), state representatives familiar with the organizational culture and procedures become more important.

Together, these two conditions make respected individuals. In practice, who does this framework apply to? For the IMF, I argue it is particularly helpful to understand how weak states succeed or fail to achieve their preferences. As noted, representatives from weak states organized in multi-country constituencies can exploit this lack of formal power by increasing their autonomy. Coupled with an understanding of an organization's internal processes, these EB members may be able to effect change. By contrast, delegates from powerful member-states usually lack the autonomy from their principals because they are to follow relatively strict instructions. Indeed, independence might be counterproductive for them when they are not seen to represent their country and voting power. Conversely, if these individuals are not independent but successful negotiators, they are simply that, effective negotiators deemed to pursue the interests of their home authorities.

Over time, respected individuals may be able to formalize their standing in the boardroom by taking up certain roles. The appointment of the Dean of the Executive Board in the IMF is a case in point; in Table 2, I describe positions that are indicative of institutionalized respected individuals. These examples demonstrate that respected individuals are not exclusive to the IMF, but are likely to be found in other international organizations, too. In addition, the information highlights the complex interaction of structure and agency. I discussed the differential organization of chairs in the EB as one source of autonomy—single vis-à-vis multi-country constituencies—which facilitates the making of respected individuals. Such individuals may then be better able to institutionalize their standing, by taking on additional tasks such as chairing subcommittees. In turn, such work may extend their influence in boardroom discussion even further.

Table 2. Institutionalized respected individuals

<i>Position</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Organizations</i>
Dean of the Board of Executive Directors	The longest-serving Executive Director is appointed Dean of the Board. In this role, the Dean serves as ‘informal spokesperson’ for the board and chairs certain special meetings (Boughton 2001, 1039).	IMF, World Bank
Chairs of special-purpose subcommittees	State representatives may—often due to their expertise and experience—be selected to chair special-purpose subcommittees (Federo and Saz-Carranza 2018). In their role as chairs, such individuals have superior access to information and can broker compromises amongst delegates, thereby demonstrating and furthering their expertise, social, and negotiation skills.	United Nations, IMF, World Bank
Organizers of informal gatherings, retreats, and conferences	Management, staff, and state delegates regularly interact in informal settings. State representatives may be asked to organize such events, which allows them to strengthen their network and gain visibility.	IMF
Authors or editors of working papers	IMF Executive Board members may also, in exceptional circumstances, be asked to write working papers which build the basis for further discussion in the governing body. The topics often concern the authors’ expertise and or priorities (e.g., Mirakhor and Zaidi 2006)	IMF

Notes: Selected examples of positions and roles that indicate institutionalized respected individuals, but also possibly further their standing in an organization.

6. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Decision-making of international organizations is frequently explained in structural terms. For instance, powerful member-states favored by weighted voting can exert influence through both formal and informal means (Vreeland 2019), including the selection of international organizations’ leaders (Heinzel 2021), their operations (Kentikelenis and Babb 2019), and outcomes (e.g., Clark and Dolan 2021; Copelovitch 2010). I have argued, however, that this paints an incomplete picture and underestimates the role of state representatives. Instead, I proposed to study the individuals involved in these negotiations, including their priorities, interests, and strategies. An interdisciplinary literature on negotiation has long considered psychological and social-environmental factors that shape negotiation outcomes—largely neglected by studies in international relations to date. I discussed these individual-level attributes and assessed their usefulness for understanding the micro-foundations of state action in governing bodies by conducting interviews with former IMF Executive Board members. Based on the analysis of these interviews, I developed the concept of respected individuals: State representatives with

an interesting, and potentially consequential, voice in boardrooms due to their greater autonomy and expertise in everyday politics of international organizations.

This concept locates individuals' power in the interaction of an organization's structure and a negotiator's personal qualities. In doing so, it takes seriously the 'social view of power' (Brett and Thompson 2016; Magee and Galinsky 2008), without ignoring economic sources of power. Perhaps surprisingly, however, delegates from states with inferior economic resources are particularly suited to become respected individuals, rather than representatives of powerful member-states in international organizations. Theoretically, my work thus draws attention to the importance of distinguishing between state-, organization-, and individual-level attributes in international affairs, and their possible relations.

Before discussing the implications of this work, I encourage future work addressing the limitations of this study. In particular, I have developed the concept of respected individuals based on the analysis of my interviews—it therefore reflects state representatives' own perception of their behavior in these negotiations. Even though the interviewees presented a balanced view on whether they can shape IMF decisions, their responses could suffer from social desirability bias and overstate the importance of EB members. Thus, it is an empirical question if these characteristics—independence and expertise—truly matter. What policies or decisions can respected individuals influence? When is the shadow of hierarchy too large for state representatives to impact upon an organization's course of action?

Further, I have refrained from examining the sources of independence and expertise. The former question touches upon domestic politics and the processes by which board members are appointed or selected. To explore within-chair and within-country variation in the appointment of individuals to governing bodies of international organizations is a promising line of research. The latter question has to do with the skills that are highly valued in a specific setting. In the IMF, a background in economics certainly goes a long way in helping state representatives learn and speak the Fund's language (Momani 2005); in other international organizations, this may be different. The study of respected individuals must therefore be complemented with an examination of international organizations' culture (Weaver and Nelson 2016).

A final limitation is both conceptual and empirical. What does it mean if respected individuals are able to influence decision-making—for themselves, for their home authorities, for their constituency, and for the institution? My interviews indicate that delegates may aspire to become respected individuals

because influence and respect from their peers is an end in itself. Further, my analysis of the transcripts suggests that respected individuals cannot afford to pursue their authorities' and constituents' interests all the time; rather, they need to be regarded as taking a more holistic view on decisions. Thus, respected individuals may not necessarily be the best way for a country to attain material benefits—e.g., larger loans or more lenient lending terms from the Fund—but is possibly better seen as a source of prestige in international affairs. My research shows that respect does not only vary between, but also within countries, depending on the behavior and traits of state representatives in international organizations.

These limitations notwithstanding, I argue that to think of respected individuals will be useful beyond the IMF. As discussed above, many other international organizations similarly use weighted voting rules and organize their governing bodies in single- and multi-country constituencies (Martinez-Diaz 2009). Even in venues with one-country-one-vote regulations, relatively weaker states face important constraints, such as a lack of capacity. Respected individuals may be able to negotiate more effectively on behalf of their constituents. In addition, these findings may have important implications for negotiations more generally. For instance, conflicting expectations of 'appropriate behavior' of women in peace negotiations by national and international actors has largely constrained their room for maneuver (Schneiker 2021). My work would suggest that becoming respected individuals in these negotiations, by acting relatively independent of domestic pressures and demonstrating expertise in security issues, may help overcome this frustration.

For practitioners, the work points to an important trade-off between representation and influence. On the one hand, individuals with tenure can become respected individuals and shape discourse more than their voting share would imply. On the other hand, decreasing rotation to allow for longer tenure means that multi-country constituencies are unable to distribute their seat evenly among all their constituents. A greater focus on electing individuals with prior experience in the Fund to the position of Executive Director (e.g., former advisers and assistants) may allow weak states to get the best out of both worlds.

To be sure, state representatives are not always influential, but neglecting their behavior altogether is likely to result in an incomplete view of international organizations' decision-making—and one that is far removed from these individuals' experience in governing bodies.

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