Respected individuals: when state representatives wield outsize influence in international organizations

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1 Selection of interviewees, interview guide, and methodology

To examine when state representatives in the IMF Executive Board (EB) are able to wield outsize influence, I have conducted semi-structured interviews with former members of the EB. In this document, I briefly discuss four challenges common to this research method: a) access; b) ethics and confidentiality; c) power dynamics; and d) data analysis and use in the final work (Albaret and Deas, 2023, 83).

First, to identify potential interviewees, I created a list of more than 300 delegates who served on the Board between 1995 and 2020 and collected hundreds of additional names from the attendance sheets of the official Executive Board Minutes. Then, I searched online for their contact details (e.g., by visiting LinkedIn profiles, current employers, or personal websites).[1] I was able to contact 74 of them; 31 replied, and 26 accepted my request. In contacting individuals, I took an 'organizational perspective' (Heucher, Liese and Schettler, 2018), i.e., I was trying to interview state representatives such that they cover the breadth of the EB and not the view of any particular member-state. As discussed in the main body of the manuscript, I believe my sample of interviewees to be representative of EB members in particular, and governing bodies of international organizations more generally.

Second, and as described in the manuscript, all interview partners gave informed consent. A few of the former EB members allowed me to use their name in my research, but most spoke to me on condition of anonymity. To maintain consistency, I have therefore opted against using any names and I was very careful in not disclosing any information that would allow individuals to be identified. Subject to permission from the speakers, interviews were recorded and transcribed afterwards.

Third, I considered potential power imbalances when designing the interview guide. The semi-structured interviews typically covered three aspects of IMF governance and decision-

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[1]If Board members with public profiles differ systematically from state representatives without online presence, the results from the interviews may be biased. However, I have no indication that this is the case.

making: representation; the role of individuals in everyday interactions; and formal and informal decision-making. Table 1 lists the interview guide, organized to follow the structure of the material as presented in the manuscript, rather than reflecting the process of the interview (which differed depending on the respondents' position in the Executive Board and their comments). Best practices of conducting interviews (e.g., Aberbach and Rockman, 2002; Albaret and Deas, 2023; Peabody, Hammond, Torcom, Brown, Thompson and Kolodny, 1990) informed my interview guide, notably, I asked open-ended questions that are relatively focused but neutral and I situated the questions in interviewees' experience in the Executive Board. To this end, I conducted some background research about state representatives' education, their constituency, participation in formal sessions as recorded in the official transcripts of the IMF, and major decisions on policies and lending programs during their stint at the EB. Not only did this allow me to tailor the interview to an individual, it also helped me demonstrate my expertise on the IMF. Overall, I therefore experienced power imbalances very rarely in my interviews. As a means of pilot study, I also discussed the interview guide with two colleagues.

Fourth, to code the interviews, I first grouped responses as they pertained to questions of representation; to the role of individuals; or to the decision-making dynamics themselves. In doing so, I distinguished between information that refers to an interviewee or their constituency and those where the state representative was sharing their view about other constituencies and EB members. This distinction is important to understand the perception of state representatives, staff, and management, and it is also reflected in the results section.

Table 1: Interview guide (selected questions)

Representation and independence

Who do you represent at the Board? What are the primary interests that Executive Directors represent in the Board?
How would you deal with potentially competing interests within your constituency?
How are Executive Directors elected/appointed in your constituency?

Role of individuals

What makes an Executive Board member effective?
How important are individual characteristics in IMF negotiations?
How do you interact with other Executive Directors and staff, and to what end?

Formal and informal decision-making

How important are voting shares in everyday decision-making of the Fund?
How important are the formal Executive Board meetings in decision-making of the Fund?
What strategies do you use to pursue your preferences?
Do you coordinate your behavior with other state representatives?

For the analysis of the interviews, I examined the transcripts with a view of understanding the potential for outsize influence of state representatives and implicitly drew on two types of responses: manifest items, which involved direct responses to particular questions (e.g., if an interviewee told me that they 'primarily represent the interests of my capitals' when asked about representation) and latent items, which included responses that were not explicitly called for (e.g., when an interviewee told me that they lamented the decision of countries to send 'unqualified' people to the EB) (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002).

Finally, while the coding of interviews was largely shaped by the dominant view of decision-making as articulated in scholarship on the political economy of international organizations, I was careful in allowing for 'new ideas and insights—the serendipity factor' (Peabody et al., 1990, 454)—during the analysis. In fact, the title and label 'respected individuals' is inspired by the EB members interviewed.

References

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