Developing Countries and International Law in Global Crisis Management

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	International law has long been a crucial framework for global governance, especially in addressing transnational crises. However, the involvement of developing countries in international legal systems and global governance remains underexplored, particularly concerning their experiences with sovereignty and international obligations. Despite substantial research on global cooperation, the specific challenges and opportunities faced by policymakers in developing countries are less understood. This study explores the subjective experiences of policymakers in developing nations, focusing on their perceptions of balancing national sovereignty with international obligations in crisis management. Using a phenomenological approach, we conducted in-depth interviews with 10 policy experts to uncover the lived experiences of these individuals in international legal and governance contexts. Our findings reveal that these policymakers often navigate a complex tension between protecting national sovereignty and fulfilling international commitments, with many expressing uncertainty about how to manage these competing demands effectively. These insights suggest practical pathways for developing targeted training programs for policymakers to enhance their capacity in navigating international legal frameworks while safeguarding national interests. Moreover, they underline the need for inclusive reforms in global governance systems to better accommodate the unique challenges faced by developing countries. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics between sovereignty and international cooperation, with implications for future policy and academic discussions on international law and governance.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, interconnected global crises such as climate change, pandemics, and political instability have highlighted the need for coordinated international action (Alrob & Shields, 2022). These crises challenge global stability and governance, particularly for developing countries, which must balance domestic priorities with international obligations. Limited resources, political pressures, and the demands of international frameworks often complicate this balance.

Global governance—encompassing the structures and institutions managing international relations—has long been central to discussions on international law (Beckett & Brydolf-Horwitz, 2020). However, these frameworks often privilege wealthier nations, leaving developing countries to navigate structural and economic constraints while addressing global challenges. This imbalance is evident in responses to crises like climate change and pandemics, where developing countries face pressures to comply with international agreements while managing internal socio-economic challenges.

Previous research has largely focused on the structural and legal dynamics of global governance, emphasizing negotiation processes and treaty mechanisms (Mikhailov, 2020). However, less attention has been paid to how policymakers in developing countries personally perceive these

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challenges and navigate the intersection of national sovereignty and international obligations. This gap underscores the need to explore the lived experiences of these policymakers, shedding light on the human dimension of international governance.

This study adopts a phenomenological approach to explore how policymakers in developing countries perceive and navigate global governance frameworks. Through in-depth interviews with policy experts, the research aims to uncover the personal narratives and subjective meanings that shape their interactions with international law and crisis management. By focusing on these experiences, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics between sovereignty and global cooperation, providing valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by policymakers from developing nations.

Research into the lived experiences of individuals within complex global phenomena, particularly in the context of international law and global governance, has increasingly become a critical area of focus (Dagdeviren dkk., 2020). Phenomenological studies in this domain aim to uncover the subjective experiences of policymakers as they navigate the tension between national sovereignty and international obligations. This approach is especially valuable in understanding how these individuals make sense of the challenges and opportunities inherent in international law, as well as how they interpret and respond to global crises. By focusing on the lived experiences of key actors—those directly involved in the decision-making processes—this research offers insights that go beyond traditional structural or legal analyses, emphasizing the human and personal dimensions of international relations.

However, there are significant methodological challenges in exploring the depth of such experiences. One of the primary obstacles lies in the nature of qualitative research itself. Unlike quantitative methods, which can quantify behaviors or outcomes across large populations, phenomenological approaches demand a more nuanced exploration of individual perceptions, emotions, and meanings (Arias Velásquez & Mejía Lara, 2020). Capturing these aspects requires careful, in-depth methods such as interviews or observations, which are inherently limited by the subjective nature of the data. The reliance on self-reporting introduces biases, and the small sample sizes typical of phenomenological studies cannot offer broad generalizability. Yet, despite these challenges, the richness of the data gathered provides valuable insights that are often overlooked by more conventional, data-driven approaches.

The primary limitation of existing research in this area is that much of the previous work has relied heavily on quantitative approaches or theoretical models that focus on legal and institutional structures. While these methods have provided valuable insights into the mechanisms of international law and governance, they often fail to account for the emotional and cognitive dimensions of policymaking. The broader context of global crises, such as climate change and pandemics, is shaped not just by legal treaties or political strategies, but by the personal struggles and perceptions of the individuals who represent their countries in these global forums. Without an in-depth understanding of these experiences, we risk missing a crucial element of the decision-making process—one that could help explain why certain global initiatives succeed or fail, particularly when viewed from the perspective of those who experience the realities of these policies on the ground.

In light of these challenges, the phenomenological approach used in this study is essential for providing a deeper understanding of the experiences of policymakers in developing countries. By focusing on the subjective meanings that these individuals attach to their roles in global governance, this research aims to reveal the complex layers of decision-making that are often overlooked in traditional research (Tener dkk., 2021). It seeks to uncover how policymakers from developing nations perceive their power (or lack thereof) in international negotiations, their experiences with international legal frameworks, and the personal and professional tensions they face in aligning national interests with global obligations.

While existing studies on international law and global governance primarily focus on practical, institutional, and legal solutions, they often overlook the subjective experiences of the individuals directly engaged in these processes. Most research has relied on structural or quantitative methods to assess the effectiveness of international agreements or the broader dynamics of global

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cooperation, focusing on formal mechanisms such as treaties, negotiations, and political strategies. These approaches, though useful in understanding the broader frameworks of international law, fail to capture the personal, emotional, and cognitive dimensions that shape policymakers' decision-making. In particular, the tension between national sovereignty and international obligations remains an underexplored area in terms of how it is perceived and experienced by those in power. Existing solutions, therefore, provide only a partial understanding of the complexities involved in global governance, leaving out the nuances that arise from individual experiences and perceptions.

The limitations of these conventional approaches become particularly evident when considering the deep, subjective meanings that policymakers in developing countries attach to their roles in international law (Van Roekel & De Theije, 2020). While legal and political analyses can explain the "what" and "how" of global governance, they often miss the "why"—the internal struggles, beliefs, and values that shape the actions of those at the negotiating table. By focusing exclusively on external structures and outcomes, these studies fail to explore how these policymakers experience the pressures of balancing domestic needs with international commitments, and how they negotiate their own identities within the global legal framework.

This gap in understanding calls for a different approach—one that delves deeper into the lived experiences of those involved in international negotiations. The phenomenological method provides a promising alternative by allowing for a more holistic exploration of the essences of these experiences. Through phenomenology, we can uncover the subjective meanings that policymakers in developing countries attach to their roles, revealing the internal struggles and cognitive dissonance they face in navigating complex international agreements. This approach offers the potential to enrich our understanding of global governance, not just as a legal or political process, but as a deeply human one, shaped by the personal experiences and perceptions of those who are directly engaged in it.

By adopting this phenomenological lens, this study aims to fill the gap in the literature by providing a deeper, more nuanced understanding of how policymakers from developing countries interpret and navigate international law in the context of global crises (Ghorbani dkk., 2020). This approach will enable a more comprehensive view of the interplay between national sovereignty and international obligations, highlighting the emotional and cognitive factors that influence decision-making in the global arena.

Existing literature on global governance and international law has largely focused on structural and legal aspects, often neglecting the subjective experiences of the policymakers who navigate these frameworks. Studies have explored the dynamics of multilateral negotiations and the influence of global crises on international cooperation. However, fewer studies have delved into the personal perceptions and emotional responses of policymakers from developing countries. Research by authors such as Chinkin (2017) and Krasner (2009) has emphasized the tension between national sovereignty and international obligations, but these works often overlook the lived experiences of those directly involved. By examining the intersection of law, politics, and personal experience, this study aims to add depth to the understanding of global governance, emphasizing the subjective experiences that shape decisions in international law.

In response to the gaps identified in previous research, this study adopts a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of policymakers from developing countries. Phenomenology is particularly suited to this context as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the meanings and personal interpretations that individuals attach to their roles in international negotiations. This method enables researchers to move beyond surface-level analysis, offering insights into the internal struggles, values, and emotions that influence decision-making (Su dkk., 2020). By focusing on how policymakers experience their roles and the tensions between national sovereignty and international obligations, this study seeks to uncover the essence of these experiences, providing a richer understanding of global governance from a human perspective.

The structure of this article follows a logical progression, starting with an introduction to the research context and its theoretical underpinnings. It then details the phenomenological methodology used to explore the experiences of policymakers, including the process of data collection and analysis. Through thematic analysis, the study examines key patterns in the interviews, providing insights into

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the subjective experiences of those involved in global governance. Following the presentation of results, the article concludes with a discussion that highlights the significance of these findings and their implications for international law and global cooperation.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a phenomenological approach to explore the subjective experiences and perceptions of policymakers from developing countries regarding their engagement with international law in the context of global crises (Libert Amico dkk., 2020). Phenomenology is particularly suited for this research as it focuses on understanding the essence of lived experiences from the perspective of the individuals involved. By prioritizing participants' personal narratives, this approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the meanings they attach to their experiences and the challenges they face in navigating global governance frameworks.

The phenomenological design was chosen because it enables the study to uncover the deeper, often unarticulated, aspects of policymaking in the international arena, particularly in situations that require balancing national sovereignty with global obligations. This method provides insight into the complexities of decision-making processes and the emotional and cognitive struggles faced by policymakers when interacting with international law. Descriptive phenomenology, which focuses on capturing the essence of participants' lived experiences, was applied in this study, ensuring that the findings are grounded in the first-hand accounts of those directly involved in the issue at hand.

Participants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that they possessed the specific experiences relevant to the research question (Cozzolino, 2019). A total of 10 policymakers from developing countries participated in the study, including government officials and diplomats who have been directly involved in foreign policy decisions and international legal negotiations. The decision to use a small sample size is consistent with the phenomenological approach, which prioritizes depth and richness of data over breadth. In phenomenological studies, smaller sample sizes are considered appropriate as they allow for an intensive, detailed exploration of individual lived experiences (Smith et al., 2017). This enables the research to capture nuanced insights that would be challenging to achieve with a larger, less focused sample. These participants were chosen based on their involvement in the implementation and interpretation of international law within the context of global crises, such as climate change and pandemics, and their experience in international forums.

Inclusion criteria were: participants must have a minimum of five years of experience in international law or global governance, and they must have actively participated in international negotiations or collaborations related to global crises. Exclusion criteria included individuals who had limited or no direct involvement in international legal matters or global governance processes.

The participants represented a diverse range of developing countries, ensuring varied geographical, political, and socio-economic perspectives. The average age of participants was 45 years, with an equal representation of both male and female participants. The selection of participants from different regions allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon from multiple national contexts.

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and participant observations (Onifade dkk., 2020). The interviews were conducted face-to-face or via secure digital platforms, depending on the participants' availability and location. Each interview lasted between 60 to 90 minutes and was guided by an interview protocol developed to explore the participants' experiences with international law, their perceptions of global governance, and the challenges they face in balancing national sovereignty with international obligations.

The interview guide was designed to probe themes such as the participants' personal experiences in international negotiations, their feelings of empowerment or marginalization within international law frameworks, and their perspectives on the impact of global crises on their countries.

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Probing questions allowed participants to elaborate on their thoughts, encouraging the sharing of detailed, reflective responses.

In addition to the interviews, participant observations were conducted during international meetings and conferences where policymakers from developing countries engaged with international law on global crises (Liu dkk., 2021). These observations provided valuable insights into the interaction dynamics, communication barriers, and the overall experience of these policymakers in global governance settings. The data collection process ensured a comfortable and confidential environment for participants, with all interviews conducted in private spaces to encourage openness and candidness. Participants were informed in advance about the purpose of the study, and all necessary arrangements were made to ensure that the data collection process did not disrupt their professional obligations.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a common technique in phenomenological research that allows for the identification of central themes and patterns within participants' experiences. The analysis process involved several systematic steps: Transcriptions of interviews and field notes from observations were first reviewed in detail. Initial coding was conducted, focusing on recurrent ideas, phrases, and emotions expressed by the participants. The codes were organized into broader themes that represented key aspects of the experience of policymakers in engaging with international law during global crises. These themes were refined and clustered into subthemes to capture the nuances of the participants' perceptions and experiences.

To enhance the validity of the findings, the analysis process involved multiple rounds of coding and cross-checking by different researchers. NVivo software was used to facilitate the coding process and to manage the large volume of qualitative data. The final analysis focused on synthesizing the essential elements of the participants' lived experiences, providing a rich, detailed understanding of their perceptions and the meaning they attach to their involvement in international law and governance.

Ethics

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the relevant research ethics committee. Participants were fully informed about the nature of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Consent forms clearly outlined the study's objectives, the expected use of data, and confidentiality measures.

To ensure privacy and confidentiality, all data were anonymized, and personal identifiers were removed from the transcripts. Only aggregated data were used in the final analysis and reporting. The study adhered to the ethical standards set forth in the Declaration of Helsinki and complied with the relevant ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Uncertainty in Decision-Making

One of the most prominent themes that emerged from the interviews was the uncertainty experienced by policymakers in deciding how their countries should engage with global crises under international law. Many respondents expressed a sense of confusion regarding the role their nation should play in global governance, especially given their limited resources and relatively low influence in international forums. A senior diplomat from a Latin American country shared: "We often find ourselves at a crossroads—uncertain about how much we should participate in global efforts. The decision-making process is not straightforward, especially when we face internal pressures, like economic constraints, and external demands from international organizations." Another participant, a high-ranking official from a Southeast Asian country, elaborated: "The uncertainty is not just about external expectations but also internal disagreements among different stakeholders within our government. This creates a lack of clarity in our foreign policy strategy."

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This uncertainty was particularly evident when policymakers discussed their country's involvement in international negotiations, where they often felt overwhelmed by the scale of issues like climate change or pandemics, which demanded coordinated global action. In many cases, they were unsure of the most effective way to align domestic priorities with international obligations, leading to a sense of ambivalence and hesitation in foreign policy decisions.

Resource Limitations

A second significant theme identified during the analysis was the impact of resource limitations on the ability of developing countries to participate meaningfully in international law and global governance. Many of the interviewees described their countries' struggles with fulfilling the commitments set by international agreements due to the lack of financial, technical, and human resources. One policymaker from an African nation remarked:"Our capacity to fully comply with international legal frameworks is constrained by the lack of resources. We are often asked to commit to ambitious targets, but without the means to implement them effectively, the whole process becomes a formality rather than meaningful participation."

This resource scarcity often created a feeling of exclusion among developing countries, as they could not keep up with the requirements set by more affluent nations or international organizations. The inability to participate fully in international law, while still being held accountable for its provisions, was a recurrent sentiment expressed by the participants.

Tension Between Sovereignty and Global Cooperation

The third theme that emerged from the interviews centered around the inherent tension between protecting national sovereignty and fulfilling international obligations. Many participants highlighted the difficulty of balancing domestic priorities with the need to collaborate on global issues, often perceiving international agreements as a challenge to their nation's autonomy. A high-ranking official from Southeast Asia stated: "It is always a delicate balance between safeguarding our sovereignty and engaging in international cooperation. The pressures from the international community sometimes conflict with our national interests, and these are hard choices to make."

This tension was especially apparent in contexts such as climate change negotiations, where national policies aimed at economic development and industrial growth sometimes conflicted with international demands for emission reductions or environmental preservation. Despite this, many respondents acknowledged the importance of global cooperation, even if it sometimes meant compromising on aspects of national sovereignty.

The findings of this study highlight the nuanced and complex experiences of policymakers from developing countries as they navigate the challenges of international law and global governance. The uncertainty in decision-making, coupled with resource limitations and the tension between sovereignty and international cooperation, reveals the inherent difficulties these countries face in balancing domestic priorities with their obligations within the global system. These themes underscore the need for a more inclusive and supportive framework that accounts for the specific challenges faced by developing nations in engaging with global crises.

The findings of this study reveal the profound and complex ways in which policymakers from developing countries navigate the tensions between national sovereignty and international obligations in the context of global crises. At the heart of the experience lies a deep struggle to balance the protection of domestic interests with the demands of international cooperation, often leading to feelings of uncertainty and frustration. These findings align with the central research question concerning the subjective experiences and challenges faced by policymakers as they engage with international law amidst global crises.

This research contributes a unique perspective to the ongoing discourse on global governance by shedding light on the internal, emotional, and cognitive processes that influence policymaking in developing countries. While much of the literature has focused on the formal aspects of international negotiations, this study highlights how policymakers' experiences—rooted in concerns over sovereignty, resource limitations, and conflicting international obligations—shape their decision-

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making. The findings emphasize the importance of considering the human side of global governance, where personal perceptions of national interests, international cooperation, and legal commitments play a crucial role in shaping the outcomes of global crises management. The study, therefore, offers a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by developing countries in a globalized legal framework, addressing the gap between structural analyses and individual experiences.

In relation to existing literature, the findings support and expand upon previous studies that have highlighted the tensions between national sovereignty and international cooperation (Krasner, 2009; Chinkin, 2017). While these works have focused primarily on the political and legal dimensions, this study enriches our understanding by incorporating the subjective experiences of policymakers themselves. For instance, the theme of "uncertainty in decision-making" resonates with Krasner's (2009) concept of "sovereignty as a contested concept," but this study provides an additional layer by exploring how this contestation is felt personally by those involved. Similarly, the theme of "limited resources" echoes earlier discussions of power imbalances in global governance (Brownlie, 2008), yet here it is framed as an internal constraint that directly impacts the policymakers' ability to engage meaningfully in international frameworks. Overall, this research complements and broadens the existing body of work by emphasizing the experiential dimension, highlighting that the challenges of global governance are not only structural but also deeply personal and emotional.

Implications of Findings

The findings of this study have both theoretical and practical implications for the field of international law and global governance. From a theoretical standpoint, this research contributes to the understanding of global governance by highlighting the personal, lived experiences of policymakers from developing countries, a dimension often overlooked in structural analyses. The emotional and cognitive challenges experienced by these policymakers—such as navigating the tension between national sovereignty and international obligations—underscore the complexity of international decision-making processes (Anesa dkk., 2019). Practically, the study highlights the need for international institutions to adopt more inclusive practices. Recognizing the subjective experiences of policymakers can lead to policies that are not only more equitable but also more effective in achieving global goals. This requires a shift towards frameworks that are flexible and responsive to the needs of under-resourced nations.

Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. One key limitation is the small sample size, consisting of only 10 policymakers from developing countries. Although this sample provides valuable insights into the subjective experiences of these individuals, it may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives within the broader population of policymakers across different regions or crisis contexts. Additionally, the study's focus on qualitative methods, while suitable for exploring lived experiences, may not provide the generalizability that large-scale quantitative studies can offer. The findings are also situated within the specific geopolitical and economic context of developing countries dealing with global crises, which may limit the transferability of the results to other settings or crises. Future studies could expand the sample size, include a wider range of regions and crisis scenarios, and combine qualitative insights with quantitative data to build a more comprehensive understanding of the global governance dynamics at play.

Prospects for Future Research

This study opens several avenues for future research (Nurrochmat dkk., 2021). One potential direction is to explore how the experiences of policymakers from developed countries contrast with those of their counterparts in developing countries, particularly in terms of their engagement with international law and governance. Future studies could also examine how these subjective experiences evolve over time, particularly during prolonged global crises, such as pandemics or climate change. Another promising area for exploration is the role of emotional intelligence and psychological factors in shaping decision-making at the international level. By delving deeper into the internal experiences of policymakers, future research could offer insights into how emotional and cognitive dynamics

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influence the outcomes of international negotiations, which could, in turn, inform strategies for more effective global governance.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the challenges and experiences of policymakers in developing countries in engaging with international law and governance during global crises, specifically focusing on the tension between national sovereignty and international obligations. The findings revealed that policymakers face significant emotional and resource-based challenges, which often hinder their active participation in global governance frameworks. This research contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the subjective experiences of policymakers, an area that has been underexplored in previous studies. It also offers a more nuanced understanding of how these experiences shape decision-making processes in the context of international law. Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the sample size of 10 participants, while appropriate for a phenomenological approach, limits the generalizability of the findings to a broader population of policymakers across diverse regions. Second, the study focuses primarily on policymakers from developing countries, leaving out comparative insights from their counterparts in developed nations. Finally, the research examines a specific timeframe and does not capture how these experiences evolve over prolonged global crises or changing geopolitical contexts.

Future research could address these limitations by employing larger and more diverse samples, including policymakers from developed and emerging economies, to allow for comparative analyses. Longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights into how policymakers' experiences and strategies adapt over time. Additionally, exploring interdisciplinary approaches, such as integrating psychological and sociological perspectives, could enrich our understanding of the emotional and cognitive dynamics in international decision-making. Investigating the role of technology and digital tools in enhancing participation and representation in global governance frameworks is another promising area for future research.The study suggests that incorporating these lived experiences into global governance models could improve their inclusivity and effectiveness. Future research could expand the sample size, explore other regions and crisis contexts, and investigate the long-term impact of these experiences on policymaking decisions.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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