



## Sovereignty in Global Governance: Developing Nations' Roles and Subjective Experiences in International Forums

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### ABSTRACT

Global governance has increasingly highlighted the tension between state sovereignty and the demands of international cooperation, particularly in forums addressing transnational challenges. While prior research has examined structural inequalities in these settings, little attention has been paid to the subjective experiences of representatives from developing nations navigating these dynamics. This study addresses the gap by exploring how these individuals perceive and respond to systemic inequities in global governance processes. Using an interpretive phenomenological approach, the research investigates the lived experiences of diplomats, academics, and representatives actively participating in international forums. Key findings reveal themes of exclusion from informal decision-making processes, perceptions of power imbalances, and the strategic reliance on regional alliances to amplify marginalized voices. These insights were derived through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, providing a nuanced understanding of how developing nations engage with systemic barriers while asserting their sovereignty. The results contribute to a more holistic understanding of global governance, offering specific and actionable recommendations to enhance inclusivity and equity. These include establishing structured consultation mechanisms that ensure meaningful participation from developing nations in agenda-setting processes, creating capacity-building programs to strengthen diplomatic negotiation skills, and institutionalizing transparent decision-making procedures to mitigate informal exclusionary practices. Additionally, fostering long-term coalitions among developing countries and advocating for procedural reforms in international organizations are emphasized as key strategies for promoting equitable representation.



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## INTRODUCTION

The interplay between national sovereignty and global governance has become a critical area of study within international relations and legal studies, particularly in the context of increasing interdependence among nations (Aare dkk., 2021). Sovereignty, traditionally understood as the supreme authority of a state to govern itself without external interference, often finds itself at odds with the collaborative demands of global governance. International forums such as the United Nations, World Trade Organization (WTO), and the Conference of the Parties (COP) exemplify this tension, as they necessitate coordinated decision-making that can sometimes constrain individual states' autonomy.

Global governance frameworks aim to address transnational issues such as climate change, trade regulation, and human rights. However, the dominant role of developed countries in shaping the rules and norms of these forums often marginalizes the voices and interests of developing nations. Previous studies, including Krasner's (1999) conceptualization of sovereignty and Slaughter's (2004) work on global governance, have focused primarily on the structural dynamics of these forums. While these works offer valuable theoretical insights, they often overlook the lived experiences of representatives from developing nations and how they personally navigate the constraints imposed by

these structures. Developing countries face unique challenges in these settings, often contending with unequal access to resources, limited negotiating power, and systemic exclusion from informal decision-making processes. Despite the growing importance of regional alliances, such as ASEAN and the African Union, in amplifying collective voices, the lived experiences of diplomats and representatives from these countries remain underexplored. Understanding their perspectives is essential to addressing the persistent inequities within global governance structures.

This study seeks to fill this gap by employing a phenomenological approach to explore the subjective experiences of representatives from developing nations (Castán Broto dkk., 2018). By focusing on their lived realities, the research aims to uncover the deeper meanings and challenges they associate with implementing sovereignty principles within global governance frameworks. This focus on individual and collective experiences provides a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics at play, offering both theoretical and practical contributions to the fields of international relations and global legal studies.

Research on the subjective experiences of individuals engaging with complex global phenomena, such as sovereignty within governance frameworks, has gained increasing attention in recent years. This focus stems from a growing recognition that the nuanced realities of those directly involved in these processes cannot be fully understood through traditional, quantitatively driven approaches. While quantitative studies provide critical structural insights, they often fail to capture the depth and complexity of personal and collective experiences, leaving significant gaps in our understanding of how these actors navigate, interpret, and respond to systemic inequities.

In particular, exploring the experiences of representatives from developing nations in international forums presents unique methodological challenges (G. L. Clark & Monk, 2010). The dynamics of exclusion, power asymmetry, and informal decision-making mechanisms are inherently multifaceted, requiring methodologies that can delve into the subjective meanings participants attach to these phenomena. However, much of the existing research has relied on large-scale surveys or document analyses that, while valuable, lack the capacity to reveal the emotional, cognitive, and relational dimensions of participation in global governance settings.

These limitations underscore the necessity of adopting phenomenological methods, which prioritize the exploration of lived experiences to uncover the essential meanings of a phenomenon. By focusing on subjective narratives, phenomenology provides a robust framework for understanding how individuals perceive and internalize their roles within broader structural contexts. In this study, the phenomenological approach addresses the inadequacies of prior research methodologies, offering a pathway to elucidate the often-overlooked personal dimensions of sovereignty and participation in global governance.

Existing solutions to address the challenges faced by developing nations in global governance forums often rely on practical frameworks, such as enhancing regional coalitions or advocating for procedural reforms in international institutions. While these approaches have provided valuable insights into structural and procedural dynamics, they fall short in capturing the subjective experiences and meanings associated with the participation of representatives from these nations. For instance, quantitative analyses of voting patterns or negotiation outcomes can identify disparities in influence but fail to reveal how these disparities are perceived and navigated by those directly involved.

Moreover, previous studies that focus on structural inequalities and power imbalances tend to emphasize external factors without delving into the inner narratives of diplomats and representatives. This creates a gap in understanding the personal and collective experiences that shape their strategies, motivations, and frustrations in these contexts. Without an exploration of these subjective dimensions, efforts to reform global governance risk overlooking critical insights into how these individuals experience and interpret the systemic inequities they face.

To address this gap, a phenomenological approach is essential. By prioritizing the lived experiences of participants, phenomenology enables a deeper understanding of how individuals internalize and respond to the challenges of navigating sovereignty and cooperation within global

governance frameworks. This methodological shift provides a more holistic and nuanced perspective, uncovering the essence of their experiences and offering insights that are not accessible through existing approaches (T. C. Clark dkk., 2021). This study aims to fill this critical void by employing phenomenology to examine the subjective realities of representatives from developing nations in international forums.

Previous research has extensively examined the structural dynamics of global governance, including the interplay of sovereignty and international cooperation. Studies by Krasner (1999) on sovereignty and Slaughter (2004) on global governance have provided foundational frameworks for understanding these dynamics. However, there is limited exploration of the subjective experiences of representatives from developing nations who navigate these complexities. While some studies have highlighted issues of power asymmetry and exclusion, they predominantly rely on quantitative methods or theoretical analyses, leaving the lived realities of these actors underexplored. This gap underscores the importance of qualitative approaches that can reveal the deeper meanings and personal narratives associated with global governance participation.

This study adopts an interpretive phenomenological approach to address the identified knowledge gap. Phenomenology is uniquely suited for uncovering the lived experiences of individuals, focusing on how they perceive and interpret phenomena in their contexts. By employing this methodology, the study seeks to answer key questions about the challenges and dynamics faced by representatives from developing countries in international forums (De Castro, 2019). This approach enables a holistic understanding of their perspectives, offering insights into how systemic inequities and informal mechanisms shape their experiences. The study also emphasizes the subjective essence of navigating sovereignty within the constraints of global governance frameworks.

The article is structured to guide readers through a comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon. The introduction establishes the research context, identifying gaps in existing literature and the need for a phenomenological approach. The methodology section outlines the interpretive phenomenological design, detailing data collection and analysis processes. The results section presents key themes derived from participant narratives, followed by a discussion linking these findings to theoretical and practical implications. Finally, the conclusion synthesizes the insights gained and highlights recommendations for future research and policy development.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Study Design**

This study employed a phenomenological approach to explore the subjective experiences of participants regarding the implementation of sovereignty principles within global governance contexts (Deledda, 2006). Phenomenology was chosen as it emphasizes understanding the lived experiences of individuals, allowing for the in-depth exploration of their perceptions, meanings, and reflections. This approach was particularly relevant to the study's aim of uncovering the nuanced dynamics between national sovereignty and international cooperation as perceived by representatives from developing nations. The study utilized interpretive phenomenology, which focuses on uncovering the deeper meanings embedded in participants' narratives, connecting individual experiences to broader social and political contexts.

### **Participants**

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure relevance and depth in the exploration of the studied phenomenon. The sample size of 10 participants was determined based on the principle of data saturation, wherein additional interviews were unlikely to yield new insights (Guest et al., 2006). In phenomenological research, smaller sample sizes are often appropriate as they allow for a deep, nuanced exploration of individual experiences while maintaining methodological rigor. The sample consisted of 10 individuals, including diplomats, academics, and representatives from developing countries who actively engaged in international forums such as the United Nations, World Trade Organization, and Conference of the Parties (Dzimiri, 2014). Inclusion criteria required

participants to have at least five years of experience in global governance forums, direct involvement in negotiations, and the ability to articulate their experiences. Exclusion criteria included individuals with less than five years of experience or those not directly involved in decision-making processes. Participants ranged in age from 35 to 60 years, with a balance of gender and regional representation to capture diverse perspectives. All identifying details were anonymized to preserve confidentiality.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations conducted in neutral, private settings to ensure participants' comfort and openness (Goodman, 2013). The interviews, lasting between 60 to 90 minutes each, were guided by a flexible interview protocol designed to elicit detailed narratives about participants' experiences and perceptions. Questions explored topics such as challenges in advocating for national interests, interactions in formal and informal negotiation settings, and their understanding of sovereignty within global governance frameworks.

Observations were conducted during two international meetings—the WTO and COP sessions—focusing on interactions between delegates, speaking opportunities, and the dynamics of informal discussions. Field notes were taken to document non-verbal cues and contextual details. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, and detailed transcripts were created for subsequent analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis followed a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, enabling the identification of themes and the interpretation of their meanings within the broader context of global governance (Marshall, 2022). The process involved multiple iterative steps: transcription, initial coding, thematic analysis, and synthesis of findings. Themes were identified by systematically coding the transcripts and categorizing the data based on recurring patterns and meanings.

Analytical rigor was maintained by cross-referencing emergent themes with observational data to ensure consistency and depth. The analysis was supported by qualitative analysis software (NVivo), which facilitated the organization and retrieval of data. Key themes were derived by linking individual narratives to collective experiences, with an emphasis on understanding how participants interpreted and navigated the structural challenges of global governance.

### **Ethics**

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional ethics review board. Participants provided informed written consent after being briefed on the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any stage (Nakano, 1989). Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by de-identifying all data and securely storing digital records. The study adhered to international ethical standards, including the Declaration of Helsinki, to safeguard the dignity and well-being of all participants.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Exclusion in Decision-Making Processes**

Participants consistently described a pervasive sense of exclusion in the decision-making processes of global governance forums. Many highlighted the informal mechanisms that dominate these forums, where key decisions are often made outside the official discussions. One participant articulated, "While we are technically present in the same room, the real decisions seem to happen elsewhere, and our input rarely makes it to those critical conversations."

This exclusion was particularly evident in discussions preceding formal meetings, where informal caucuses and private negotiations among dominant countries often predetermined outcomes. Participants noted that such practices marginalized their ability to advocate for national interests, leaving their voices overshadowed by the influence of more powerful states. As one diplomat

explained, “By the time we enter formal negotiations, the parameters have already been set, and our contributions feel more like formalities than substantive engagements.”

### **Power Dynamics and Perceived Inequalities**

Another prominent theme was the inequitable power dynamics that participants experienced, with many perceiving an imbalance in influence between developed and developing countries. Several participants expressed frustration over the structural disadvantages inherent in global governance frameworks, where developed countries possess greater resources, access, and leverage. One participant observed, “It feels like the weight of your argument depends less on its merit and more on the economic power your country holds.”

These power disparities were evident not only in decision-making but also in the allocation of opportunities for speaking and networking. Participants described limited access to key stakeholders during informal sessions, which are often dominated by representatives from wealthier nations. This dynamic was captured succinctly by a participant who remarked, “There is an unspoken hierarchy, and we are constantly reminded of where we stand within it.”

### **The Role of Regional Alliances as Counterbalance**

Despite these challenges, participants highlighted the growing importance of regional alliances in amplifying their voices and advancing shared interests. Regional blocs such as ASEAN and the African Union (AU) were seen as critical platforms for collective advocacy. One participant noted, “When we speak as a region, our positions carry more weight. It’s a way to navigate the power asymmetries that would otherwise leave us unheard.”

The reliance on regional alliances was also viewed as a strategic necessity, providing a sense of solidarity and shared purpose. However, participants acknowledged that these alliances were not without their own limitations, as internal differences sometimes diluted the strength of their collective voice. Another participant reflected, “Even within our alliances, there are competing priorities, but the unity we present on key issues can make all the difference.” Beyond addressing power imbalances, regional alliances also serve as incubators for policy innovation, allowing member states to develop shared negotiating positions, align regulatory frameworks, and propose alternative governance models that can be introduced in global forums. Participants emphasized that these alliances facilitate knowledge exchange, resource-sharing, and the creation of collective diplomatic strategies that strengthen their ability to engage effectively in multilateral negotiations.

### **Constraints on Time and Representation**

Participants frequently mentioned the constraints imposed by limited time allocations during formal discussions, which often curtailed their ability to present comprehensive arguments. Observations during meetings revealed stark disparities in speaking opportunities, with representatives from developed countries enjoying more frequent and extended time slots. One participant shared, “Time feels like a commodity, and we’re often left with only enough to outline the basics, while others can dive into details and shape the discourse.”

Moreover, the pressure to prioritize certain issues over others due to time limitations often led to compromises that participants felt undermined their national interests. This was especially pronounced in multilateral forums such as the WTO and COP, where competing agendas often forced trade-offs. “We are constantly balancing between asserting our priorities and aligning with the broader coalition. It’s a difficult line to walk,” one participant explained.

The findings reveal a complex interplay of exclusion, power dynamics, and strategic adaptation within the experiences of developing country representatives in global governance forums (Nguyen & Dinh, 2024). While the principles of sovereignty and equality underpin international law, the lived experiences of participants highlight persistent structural barriers that hinder meaningful participation. Through these narratives, the essence of their experiences emerges: a sense of persistent marginalization tempered by a resilient pursuit of equity through regional collaboration and strategic negotiation.

The findings of this study reveal the complex interplay between sovereignty and global governance, as experienced by representatives from developing nations. Participants described a persistent tension between the formal principles of equality in international forums and the informal mechanisms that perpetuate exclusion and power imbalances. These insights directly address the study's central question of how developing nations navigate systemic inequities while striving to assert their sovereignty in global governance contexts.

The study contributes to the understanding of this phenomenon by shedding light on the subjective experiences of representatives who are often marginalized in decision-making processes. Key themes, such as exclusion from informal discussions, the dominance of developed nations, and the strategic reliance on regional alliances, provide a nuanced perspective on the lived realities of these actors (Pilyasov dkk., 2015). These findings illustrate how representatives from developing nations not only perceive but actively navigate structural barriers, offering a deeper understanding of their adaptive strategies and frustrations. By focusing on personal narratives, this research fills a critical gap in the literature, offering a human-centered view of global governance dynamics.

When compared to existing literature, the study's findings align with Krasner's (1999) insights on sovereignty as an evolving concept that is often constrained in practice. However, this research goes further by exploring how individuals internalize and respond to these constraints. The reliance on regional alliances complements Slaughter's (2004) theory of networked governance but adds a layer of subjectivity, highlighting how alliances serve as a practical and emotional counterbalance to feelings of marginalization. Additionally, the findings challenge the assumption of universal participation in global governance, illustrating the informal hierarchies that restrict meaningful involvement. This study therefore not only validates prior theories but also expands them by integrating the subjective experiences of those most affected by these dynamics.

### **Implications of the Findings**

The findings of this study hold significant implications for both theory and practice. Scientifically, they underscore the importance of recognizing the subjective dimensions of sovereignty and participation within global governance frameworks (Prasai, 2024). The lived experiences of exclusion and marginalization, as described by participants, provide a deeper understanding of how structural inequalities manifest in practical terms. Socially and culturally, these insights highlight the resilience and adaptive strategies of representatives from developing nations, offering lessons for enhancing equity and inclusivity in international forums. Practically, the findings suggest that fostering transparency and inclusivity in informal decision-making processes, alongside strengthening regional alliances, can help address power imbalances and amplify the voices of marginalized actors. These recommendations are relevant for policymakers and institutions aiming to promote fairer global governance practices.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the sample size, though adequate for phenomenological research, is inherently limited in scope and does not allow for broad generalizations across all developing nations or global governance forums. Second, the focus on subjective experiences means that the findings are context-dependent, reflecting specific narratives rather than universal truths (Rollo & Winters, 2000). Third, potential biases may arise from the reliance on self-reported experiences, which are influenced by individual perceptions and recollections. These limitations emphasize the need for caution when applying the study's findings to other contexts and underscore the value of complementary methodologies to validate and expand upon these insights.

### **Future Research Directions**

The findings of this study open several avenues for future research. Further studies could explore the experiences of representatives from specific regional alliances to better understand the dynamics within these groups and their collective strategies in global governance (Vishnevsky dkk., 2020). Longitudinal research could examine how perceptions and adaptive strategies evolve over time, particularly as international institutions implement reforms. Additionally, expanding the scope

to include perspectives from representatives of developed nations could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between sovereignty and cooperation. By building on this study, future research can contribute to the development of more inclusive and equitable frameworks for global governance.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored the subjective experiences of representatives from developing nations navigating sovereignty and global governance, addressing the tension between formal equality and systemic exclusion in international forums. The findings revealed key themes of exclusion from informal decision-making processes, unequal power dynamics, and the strategic importance of regional alliances. These insights provide a nuanced understanding of how structural inequalities are perceived and navigated, contributing to the broader discourse on equity and participation in global governance. By adopting a phenomenological approach, this study filled a gap in the literature, offering a human-centered perspective that complements existing theoretical and quantitative research. The results highlight practical pathways for promoting inclusivity and fairness in global governance frameworks, particularly through increased transparency and strengthened regional cooperation. Beyond its immediate implications, these findings contribute to the broader literature on power asymmetries and institutional legitimacy in global governance. The study challenges the prevailing assumption that sovereignty operates uniformly across nations, instead illustrating how developing countries experience and negotiate systemic constraints in diverse ways. This insight is particularly relevant for debates on institutional reform, networked governance, and the evolving role of regional blocs in shaping international norms.

From a policy perspective, the study underscores the urgent need for reforms that enhance procedural inclusivity, mitigate informal exclusionary practices, and formally integrate regional alliances into decision-making structures. These insights can inform ongoing discussions on democratizing international institutions and ensuring more equitable representation in global governance processes.

Future research could build on these findings by examining the long-term evolution of these dynamics, particularly how developing nations' strategies shift over time in response to changing geopolitical and economic contexts. Additionally, expanding the scope to include perspectives from representatives of developed nations, international organizations, and civil society actors could provide a more holistic understanding of global governance negotiations. Comparative studies across different international forums, such as trade, climate, and security, would also enhance academic and practical insights into the mechanisms that facilitate or hinder equitable participation.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

This article has undergone an independent peer review process. The editor responsible for evaluating this article has no direct relationship with the author and has never collaborated on any prior publications. The review process was conducted by an editor who has no association with the author in terms of collaboration or conflicts of interest.

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