

Data narrative “Institutional moral hazard in the regulation of unemployment”

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Data abstract

The project *Institutional Moral Hazard in the Regulation of Unemployment* is a qualitative research that focused on federal-state/regional relations regarding unemployment insurance, social assistance and active labor market policies (together ‘the regulation of unemployment’) in the United States and Belgium. Three categories of primary data are collected: 1) interviews, 2) policy-documents, and 3) descriptive statistics. Taken together, the data forms the empirical basis of an analysis of behavior of governmental actors in the regulation of unemployment, their underlying motivations and their perceptions regarding the behavior of other governmental actors in the regulation of unemployment.

Data collection strategy

The respondents are selected on their knowledge and/or involvement in UI, TANF and reemployment policies at the federal and/or state/regional level. There are three types of interviewees: 1) politicians, 2) civil servants, and 3) independent experts. ‘Politicians’ include current and former members of federal and state/regional legislatures, current and former members of state/regional executives and staffers, among which are individuals that work(ed) in organizations that represent all state governments. ‘Civil servants’ include current and former policy-makers in relevant federal and state/regional agencies and departments, both at the appointed and career level. Finally, ‘independent experts’ include individuals from think-tanks, the academic world and relevant stakeholder or lobby-groups – ‘independent’ in this sense means ‘non-governmental’. The interviewees represent various political views, but also explicit nonpartisan organizations.

The two most important selection criteria for respondents are experience and (former) position. For ‘politicians’ this includes, but is not limited to, participation in relevant subcommittees, sponsorship of major bills and/or (in the case of Belgium) members of political parties that are

appointed minister of a relevant department and their staffers. For ‘civil servants’ this includes, but is not limited to, individuals working in a relevant department or agency on the design and reforms of policies, evaluation of policies and/or serving as point of contact between different levels of government. ‘Independent experts’ are selected from universities, think-tanks, lobby organizations and/or stakeholder groups based on their research output regarding the design of policies, the evaluation of policies and/or federal-state relations in the regulation of unemployment.¹ Respondents were predominantly approached through an email message that mentioned the research interest, the consent form, some example questions and background information regarding the researcher. Some interviewees were recommended (and introduced) by other interviewees.

The interviews were mostly conducted face-to-face, but if scheduling did not allow for an in-person interview, they were conducted over telephone or Skype. The method of interviewing was ‘semi-structured’. The researcher developed an interview template in advance, somewhat tailored to the category of interviewee, which details broad areas of interests, specific questions and possible follow-ups. Although the intention was to cover all of the questions with all of the interviewees, this method explicitly allows for flexibility in terms of the ordering of the questions and how thorough each question would be addressed (or not). All interview templates are available through QDR (no permission is needed to download).

Interviewees were asked to read and sign a consent form which informed them of the research interests and his/her rights. The consent form is available through QDR (no permission is needed to download). Most interviewees allowed for the interview to be recorded. During all interviews, the researcher also made notes. When an interview was not recorded, an interview report was made based on the recollection of the researcher and the aforementioned notes. Both the transcripts and the interview reports were then coded with the use of NVIVO software for further analysis. The codebook and a visual representation of the coding scheme are also available through QDR (no permission is needed to download).

¹ It should be noted that not every interviewee can be neatly placed into one category. Some interviewees have held multiple positions and/or positions that span across these categories. For example, in Belgium, unions have formal policy-making and policy implementing responsibilities regarding unemployment insurance. Interviewees from these institutions can be considered as somewhat of a hybrid between ‘independent experts’ and ‘civil servants’.

The policy-documents used in this research are mostly in the public record. This includes: reports, research and evaluations, speeches, legislation and minutes of debates. These were collected from relevant governmental departments and agencies, auditors and legislatures through desk research, given (or referred to) by interviewees and through libraries if no online copy were available. In several cases, copyright applied. In those cases the depositor and QDR have obtained permission by the copyright holder.

The descriptive statistics used in this research are subdivided over three categories 1) expenditures on relevant policies, 2) caseloads of relevant benefit schemes and 3) governmental accountability indicators. These statistics are collected from both independent research institutions and governmental departments.

Data organization & access

The interviews are organized in three different types of files: recordings, transcripts and interview reports. The recordings are only available to the researcher and will not be shared with anyone. Transcripts and the interview reports are thoroughly anonymized (see below). Anonymized transcripts and reports are available upon request through QDR under strict conditions. For the majority of transcripts/reports, secondary users interested in obtaining those files should provide evidence of their institutional affiliation, a brief research plan for their use of the requested file/s and a statement that they are not likely to know the possible interviewees whose transcripts they are requesting and are not going to make efforts to re-identify them. Contact information and research/teaching plans for all researchers granted access to the data will be forwarded to the original depositor to allow for follow up communication. In a handful of instances, the respondents themselves will need to be contacted to ask for consent before the release of their transcript – this is in accordance with the wishes of those respondents and the agreement they made with the depositor.

All transcripts are anonymized: any direct identifiers, such as the interviewee's name, the title of their current or former position(s), and descriptions of the interviewee's career path are redacted and replaced with a placeholder (e.g. a mention of a job title is replaced by "[position]"). Furthermore, indirect identifiers such as the names and/or job titles of colleagues and acquaintances, the titles of work they might have published, the name of the organization they work for are also often redacted and replaced with a placeholder (e.g. a mention of direct colleague is replaced by "[individual 1]"). To ensure the anonymity of the interviewee, the

depositor will be consulted regarding the risks associated with a request. Any requesters that may have some affiliation and/or be able to deduce the identity will be denied access. In this project the need for anonymization can differ based on the contents of the interview (e.g. the level of sensitivity of what is being discussed), the interviewee (e.g. has the interviewee expressed any concern about being identified) and how easy it is for a piece of information to lead to the identification of an interviewee (e.g. a reference to a very large organization with thousands of employees as an employer carries a different weight than when it concerns a very small organization). The level of rigor with which indirect identifiers are redacted, is based on these considerations. A small number of interviewees specifically requested not to be quoted in any way without permission. In those cases the interviewee will be asked to provide consent in every individual application.²

All relevant policy-documents that inform the research, including those not explicitly referenced in any of the academic outputs that are part of this project, are made available through QDR (no permission is needed to download).

All relevant descriptive statistics that inform the research, including those not explicitly referenced in any of the academic outputs that are part of this project, are made available through QDR (no permission is needed to download). These are organized in excel files which contain a number of different sheets. The first sheet of every excel file lists the data and gives sources (including hyperlinks when possible) for every indicator.

² As detailed in the inventory file, requests to view these particular files should be made through email to the author directly (chrisluigies@protonmail.com) not through QDR. The author will then consult the respondents on a case by case basis. Approval for any request is contingent on the reaction of the relevant respondent.