

Abstract: “The IMF failure that wasn’t. Risk ignorance during the European debt crisis,”
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-The general context of this study is the austerity policies implemented after the 2008 financial crisis and their consequences on state finances and the citizenry. This study shows that the failure of the IMF programs for Greece can be understood as an instance of “risk ignorance.” Ignorance is not the opposite of knowledge; it is a strategic mode of action from experts adjusting their diagnostics to larger concerns. The frame of risk ignorance is useful to understand how the production of expertise is shaped by powerful actors outside the world of science. It suggests that experts can often find themselves under significant pressure to deviate from their scientific routines to justify and certify controversial policies, *even if they do not wholeheartedly believe in their utility*. Drawing on thousands of pages of IMF documents and internal reports, my key finding is to show that IMF experts had significant doubts that austerity policies would solve Greece’s financial woes but were ultimately under pressure to ignore these doubts because of external pressures from European states, in particular France and Germany. I also show that a significant portion of IMF reports was copied and pasted from EU reports. Plagiarism was a method for the IMF to erase traces of doubts and conflicts from the public stage and project public consensus with EU institutions.

-The broader conclusion of this paper is to show that the production of reliable expertise is not always the ultimate goal of international organizations and the groups of experts working within them. This insight is key to understand the rising distrust towards expertise among scholars and in the citizenry as a whole. The frame of risk ignorance is not restricted to finance but applies as well to other contexts of evidence-based policymaking. In the social sciences, a new wave of studies has showed that health experts are often pressured to certify dangerous products (e.g. tobacco products, glyphosate) as safe to leave them unregulated. In this debate about the role of expertise in financial crises or public health disasters, blaming the experts misses important problems and fails to identify the real culprits. Ultimately, this article calls for more investigation of the controversial relations of power between lawmakers and experts to better understand the practical contexts in which experts manufacture their diagnostics.