

Describe your research process: specifically, the methods and strategies you learned or developed to access the information you needed for your work.

The essential question I sought to answer in my research project was why OECD donor states continued to tie their foreign aid despite having publicly committed to do away with the practice and existing evidence pointing to the negative effects of tied aid on economic development in recipient countries. Accordingly, I conducted a review of the literature to first uncover why donor states tie aid at all. The first step in this process involved conducting a web search for links to news articles, think pieces, abstracts and books with general information on cases of tied aid and its impact. Rather than citing information directly from these initial sources, I looked for references to academic papers, books, or data in these pieces and then utilized the library's subject guide databases to retrieve the referenced material. Through this process, I was able to source the first pieces of academic research used in my literature review. As I perused these initial sources on tie aid, I narrowed my literature review focus to more specific research on the economic and political motivations for aid tying. In doing so, I took greater advantage of the library's research databases, utilizing resources such as ProQuest and World Political Science Abstracts to find material on my specified topic. With each database, I employed multiple search techniques to find relevant material such as experimenting with key terms from "tied aid" to "politics and aid", "united foreign aid" and then "OECD donor aid policy" to increase my response rate. Additionally, I searched for sources noted in the bibliographies of academic articles I read which allowed me to find other studies relevant to my research question.

While analyzing sources on my subject of interest, I sometimes found that scholars held opposing views on what were key the driving forces behind a donor country's decision to tie aid. For example, some scholars argue that the economic returns domestically from tied aid are a key motivator for donor states to tie their foreign aid, while others disagree positing that the economic returns would not be high enough to warrant aid tying since foreign aid expenditures

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constitute a marginal portion of GDP for many OECD donors¹. In light of this, I included both viewpoints in my paper, acknowledging the opposing perspectives that existed in order to accurately convey the state of the literature on my subject. Through engaging in this research process, I was able to craft a literature review that was instrumental in building the case for my own research contribution which sought to assess the role of domestic special interests in influencing tied aid practices and policies of OECD donor states.

In addition to the literature review, I also sourced information, in particular quantitative data, to test my research hypothesis. At the initial stage of my research project, I had intended to study the impact of intrastate or domestic politics on the nature of food aid policy among OECD donor states. However, upon evaluating the data on food aid, I encountered very little variation in the data as the US was overwhelmingly the largest supplier of food aid among major OECD donors. In light of this finding along with some preliminary research I had done on tied aid in general, I adjusted my research focus to examine overall tied aid practices and policy. Here there was greater variation among donors, forming the basis of a stronger research question. After defining the measures of the key variables I sought to analyze to test my hypothesis, I worked with university library specialist Juri Stratford along with OECD statisticians from the Washington D.C. office to source the corresponding tied aid data of interest in my study. During this process, I employed and strengthened my data coding and statistical analysis skills, utilizing the Excel data analysis toolkit software to test the validity of my hypothesis.

¹ Jepma, C. J. 1991. "The Tying of Aid." *Washington, DC: Development Centre of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development*.
Clay, E., Geddes, M., Luisa, N. and te Velde, D. 2008. "The Developmental Effectiveness of Untied Aid: Evaluation of The Implementation of The Paris Declaration and Of The 2001 DAC Recommendation on Untying ODA To The LDCs, Phase I Report." *Copenhagen*.
Nowak-Lehmann, D., Martinez-Zarzoso, I. and Klasen, S. 2008. "Aid and Trade: A Donor's Perspective." Discussion Paper 171, *Ibero-America Institute of Economic Research, Göttingen*.
Wagner, D. 2003. "Aid and Trade: An Empirical Study." *Journal of the Japanese and International Economics*, 17 (2), pp. 153–173.

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The information and data collection process while an interesting experience, was not without its challenges. Throughout the process, I faced obstacles in sourcing the data I needed to test my hypothesis. These obstacles mainly stemmed from having limited access to data sources, or incomplete datasets which significantly reduced the size of my sample and impacted the validity of my results. In other cases, I needed to develop alternate measures for my variables because there was no data available that corresponded to my initial measures. From these obstacles, I was exposed to the challenge of learning how to use the data available however limited, to answer a given research question.

In all, I have come to appreciate the vital role that creativity, persistence, and problem solving play in the academic research process. This experience has informed my understanding of what the research process looks like in the social sciences and reaffirmed my plans to pursue a graduate degree in public policy in the future. It has also deepened my understanding of how crucial the collection of accurate and complete data is to the production of scientifically sound and statistically robust research.