

MIND THE GAP? LINKS BETWEEN POLICY AND ACADEMIC RESEARCH OF FOREIGN AID

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Despite the integral importance of foreign aid research in International Relations (IR) and International Political Economy (IPE),² few attempts have been made to assess the opportunities and existing patterns of linkages between policy and IR research communities in the subfield of foreign aid. To shed some light on this question, I analyze the linkages between these communities on several dimensions. My analysis is based on the premise that some demand for closer linkages exists, at least on the side of academic researchers. Data from the 2011 and 2014 Teaching, Research and International Policy (TRIP) survey of IR scholars in the United States and 19 other countries demonstrates a general interest in establishing greater links between academics and policy makers. As Table 1 shows, across subfields in IR almost 23 percent of scholars favor tighter links with the policy community, and only 1 percent of IR scholars do not want to get involved with the policy-making process to begin with.³ Within the subfield of foreign aid (respondents who identified development either as their primary or secondary field of interest), 37 percent of scholars favor more links, and only 0.8 percent do not want to get involved with the policy-making process. The demand for linkages is greater among development scholars than among scholars of the two major subfields, IPE (24.8 percent) and International Security (31.7 percent).⁴ Almost 30 percent of foreign aid scholars believe that policy relevance and current events should primarily motivate research in the discipline,⁵ and over half of respondents have changed their research topics based on major events in world affairs in an effort to make their research more relevant to policy-makers.⁶

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² According to the TRIP Faculty Survey (2014) and the TRIP Journal Article Data base, over 10% of all IR research is conducted in the area of development and foreign aid. Only research on international trade has a larger share (see also Pepinsky and Steinberg in this volume).

³ Question FSQG 924 and Question FSQG 1110_329, TRIP Faculty Survey 2011.

⁴ Note, I exclude responses of foreign aid scholars from IPE respondents to avoid double counting.

⁵ Question FSQG 621, TRIP Faculty Survey 2011.

⁶ Question QG 260, TRIP Faculty Survey 2014.

Table 1: Demand for Links Between Policy Makers and Academia

	<i>Overall</i>	<i>Development</i>	<i>Other IPE</i>	<i>Security</i>
<i>Favor more links</i>	22.6%	37%	24.8%	26.4%
<i>Favor not getting involved</i>	1.1%	0.8%	1.6%	0.7%
<i>Policy Research Motivation (normative)</i>	28.7%	28.7%	27%	28%
<i>Major World Events</i>	54%	58%	51%	61%

Source: TRIP Faculty Survey, 2011 and 2014

Given the demand for greater linkages between policy and research in the field of foreign aid, one would expect the gap between scholars and practitioners to be relatively small. I analyze the extent of this gap from a historical perspective. Similar to other chapters in this volume that address areas of IPE research (e.g. Pevehouse and Mansfield; Pepinsky and Steinberg), I find that economists overwhelmingly dominate the nexus between scholars and policymakers in the subfield of foreign aid, even though changing interests among practitioners have provided ample opportunities for political scientists to provide an individual contribution to foreign aid policies and practices. At the same time, I find that foreign aid scholars have been more effective in influencing development policies, at least recently, particularly when compared to international trade and finance.

I discuss why this gap exists, and why the gap may have narrowed in recent years. I make extensive use of the *TRIP Journal Article Database* as well as the *TRIP Faculty Surveys* of 2011 and 2014 (Peterson et al. 2013; Maliniak et al. 2011). In addition, I analyze the existence of additional formal and informal networks and interactions between the policy and academic worlds in the subfield of foreign aid. I find that IR scholars have much more influence on development policies through these alternative channels. Finally, I trace the history of *AidData*—a research consortium that has provided new data on development finance and has tried to increase the linkages between academic scholars and practitioners—as a case study to

analyze some of the opportunities and challenges for IR scholars in the realm of development finance.

My findings are mixed. Whereas IR scholars increasingly use approaches and methods that are relevant for policymakers and practitioners in foreign aid agencies—that is, opportunities for greater linkages are abound—historically, broad policy trends largely correlate with works by economists. There appear to be two main reasons for this outcome. First, whereas political scientists increasingly use sophisticated methods in their foreign aid research, they tend to be regarded as ‘economists light.’ Second, research areas in which political scientists have a comparative advantage—questions related to the politics of foreign aid allocation, power relationships, and democratic governance—have been less interesting to policy makers and practitioners. The closest links between IR academia and the policy community exist when it concerns the broad strategic questions—i.e., why, how, and where should aid be provided; when is foreign aid effective for economic and human development—but less so when it comes to the basic operational questions—i.e., how to implement the foreign aid policies technically. Finally, much of the existing gap can be explained by the conflicting incentive structures and time/place constraints facing scholars who want to become more active in the policymaking process.

Nevertheless, I also detect a recent trend towards an increased involvement of IR scholars in development policy and practice. Most of these interactions originate from the increasing interest among practitioners in questions that concern the political dimension of development finance. This may have opened a niche for political scientists to exert influence. I also show that the increasing utilization of similar data sets, as well as expanding formal and informal networks, have led to increasing interactions among policymakers, other practitioners, economists, and political scientists. AidData has played an important role in brokering these interactions, but it is also an illustrative example for existing obstacles. In particular, the experience of AidData supports my findings that: (a) linkages are greatest when the interests of policymakers and scholars converge, both in terms of methods and research questions; (b) political scientists’ influence is still very much based on their potential methodological contribution (they sell themselves as quasi-economists); and (c) the main obstacles persist—different incentive structures and time/space constraints oftentimes preclude successful

cooperation amongst scholars and practitioners, and it is doubtful that the incentive structures will converge any time soon.

1.A BRIEF HISTORY OF FOREIGN AID IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

This section provides a brief historical overview of the impact that academic research has had on foreign aid policies, and vice versa. I focus on one of the major discussions in that field and analyze the extent to which IR research has contributed to policy solutions on this topic, where this information is available.⁷ One of the most salient and controversial questions in development policy is whether, and what type of, foreign aid is effective in generating positive development outcomes in recipient countries. This question has received major attention in scholarly work and lies at the forefront of foreign aid policy. The history of foreign aid since the end of World War II is characterized by the adoption of a number of oftent competing policy paradigms that were believed to provide effective economic and social development, and the lack of clarity about which paradigm (if any) serves best in promoting effective economic development triggered significant academic interest. Economists, who analyze the effect of foreign aid on economic growth, largely dominated this debate. The findings have been mixed, with some scholars finding a positive relationship between foreign aid and economic growth (Hansen and Tarp 2000, 2001; Lensink and White 2001; Moreira 2005; Sachs 2006; Arndt et al. 2010; Brukner 2011; Galiani et al. 2014), some finding no relationship (Boone 1996; Burnside and Dollar 2000; Rajan and Subramanian 2008),⁸ and some finding a negative relationship (Svensson 2000a, 2000b; Braeutigam and Knack 2004; Easterly 2006; Moss et al. 2006; Djankov et al. 2008; Easterly and Pfuetze 2008; Knack 2009; Moyo 2009). One of the main implications is that foreign aid can be effective, but that certain conditions limit foreign aid effectiveness. This, in turn, increased policymakers' interests in the conditions under which foreign aid is effective.

Much of the early debate on this question focused on the economic and political conditions in

⁷ There are a number of detailed literature reviews that provide an in-depth account of the state of the literature (Hansen and Tarp 2000; Clemens et al. 2004; Addison et al. 2005; Radelet 2006; Doucouliagos and Paldam 2008, 2009; Wright and Winters 2010).

⁸ Note, however, Clemens et al. (2014) find that the studies with no results are oftentimes fragile to model specifications, and after some adjustments to model specification, the effect of foreign aid on economic growth becomes significant.

recipient countries.⁹ It was the World Bank that induced a paradigmatic shift in foreign aid policies and research with its 1998 report. Based on a study by Dollar and Pritchett, the report led to the seminal article by Burnside and Dollar (2000), which found that foreign aid could foster economic growth under the condition that recipient countries pursued “good” economic policies. As a consequence, an increasing number of donors announced they would make good governance a central consideration in their foreign aid policies. Yet, despite increasing efforts of policymakers and practitioners to focus foreign aid allocation on countries with good governance in hopes of fostering economic development in the developing world, academic research has not unequivocally established that foreign aid in well-governed countries is more effective (Boone 1996; Svensson 1999; Easterly et al. 2004; Wright 2007).

The 2000s witnessed increasing calls and attempts to move development finance towards a partnership approach between donors and recipients. In the World Bank, the shift was evident with the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, in which the World Bank indicated the importance of a give-and-take approach to development. One of the strategies to implement this new approach emphasizes community driven development (CDDs). CDDs are based on the notion that politicians sometimes exploit foreign aid to maximize their survival in power (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2007; Kono and Montiola 2009; Ahmed 2010; Licht 2010; Labonne 2011; Cruz and Schneider 2015). They either capture foreign aid resources to conduct patronage spending (Jackson and Rosberg 1984; van de Walle 2001, 2003; Golden 2003; Jablonski 2012), or if that is not possible, replace their local budget resources with foreign aid and use the local budget to spend for electoral purposes. The fungibility of foreign aid is particularly problematic as recipient governments tend to spend these resources for electoral purposes or shift them to other sectors that may inhibit economic growth (Collier and Hoeffler 2007). Cruz and Schneider (2015) note another troubling relationship. They show that incumbents whose municipalities receive foreign aid projects are more likely to be reelected even if they had no influence over how the foreign aid or the local budget was allocated. They can claim credit for receiving a foreign aid project even if credit is undeserved.

⁹ Other researchers have focused on the donor perspective. Many IR scholars have contributed to this body of research, but the debate is more prominent in academic circles and less prominent in policy circles, so I do not discuss it here in detail.

These insights on the political capture of foreign aid resources have become an important topic in discussions among policy-makers. For example, World Bank research and policy focuses increasingly on the political capture of World Bank loans and grants (Platteau and Gaspart 2003; Kaufman et al. 2009; Khemani 2010; Hasnain and Matsuda 2011). CDDs aim to establish ownership in order to overcome elite capture. CDD implies that foreign aid resources are given directly to communities in recipient countries. The communities participate in the development and management of the project to ensure that: (a) the project is most appropriate for the actual development needs and fits with existing local conditions; (b) local individuals are able to monitor individual behavior and enforce the project rules; and (c) individual recipients take ownership of the projects thereby making them self-sustainable in the long-term (Platteau and Gaspart 2005). The World Bank has been at the forefront of the movement towards CDDs. It made CDDs an integral part of its Comprehensive Development Framework (World Development Report 2000/2001), which led to an increase of CDD funding from about \$325 million in 1996 to about \$2 billion in 2003 (Mansuri and Rao 2003; Platteau and Gaspart 2005). Of course, this shift in strategy did not come without problems. In particular, CDDs are more vulnerable to elite capture because local power groups find it easier to collude and evade the control of national and international level institutions. Local politicians are also much more likely to use the poor quality information environment to exploit the projects to ensure their political survival (Bardhan 2002). Platteau and Gaspart (2005) argue that CDDs can only be effective in reaching their goals if local beneficiaries are empowered enough to prevent elite capture. This view is now represented in many discussions of World Bank operational staff when deciding how to implement particular CDDs on the local level.

In sum, looking at the broad strategic questions underlying foreign aid policies, the trends and interest of policymakers and students of foreign development aid have correlated over time. In some cases, policy developments spurred research interest in certain topics. In other cases, new research findings changed the broad strategies that policymakers pursued. Arguably, the greatest impact that academic research has had on policymakers (including academic conducted by researchers employed in the policy world) has been the work on good governance and more generally the conditions under which foreign aid is effective. More

recently, scholars became interested in analyzing the micro-level aspects in addition to the macro-relationships of foreign aid, thereby renewing interest in analyzing questions of design, management, and effectiveness on the project level. Research in this area is sparse, however, even though it appears to be of great importance to policymakers.

What about the impact that IR scholars have had on development policy and practice? At least over the last couple of decades, economists and political scientists have largely worked in concert in the field of development finance. In fact, much of the work builds on efforts in the other disciplines, and we see an increasing number of collaborations across the two fields. The history of the foreign aid field therefore builds on both disciplines, and the relatively positive conclusions about the linkages between academia and policy world owe to these interrelationships. My conclusion about the existing linkages between academia and policy world in IR is much less positive. Many of the linkages described above have been among economists and policymakers. This is not surprising given that foreign aid policy used to be an economic policy where policymakers rarely took political factors into consideration. As I will show below, many policymakers and academic consultants have degrees in economics or public policy. In addition, the discussion above suggests that policymakers have been more interested in the questions that economists tend to address—in particular, is aid effective—than in the questions that political scientists tend to address—how is foreign aid allocated; what are the politics of foreign aid in donor and recipient countries.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the literature review suggests that political science work may have become more relevant over the last two decades. As the World Bank and other development institutions have become more concerned with the politics of development, the opportunities for IR scholars have increased. Political scientists have contributed a large number of well-known studies about the domestic politics of donor countries and foreign aid allocation, as well as the politics of international development institutions.

¹⁰ I have no conclusive evidence as of why policymakers are less likely to make use of this research. One explanation is that policymakers are well aware of the political and strategic biases foreign aid allocation exhibits. Even to the extent that they care about sustainable economic or social development, few political science studies provide guidance as to how to use their results on the politics of foreign aid to improve development finance in practice. Whereas much of that literature is therefore better suited for understanding why foreign aid is allocated in a certain way, more recent work (as discussed below) focuses on topics and methods that are important to guide foreign aid practice and policy. The discussion of political capture is only one example of many. For another example, Dietrich et al. (2015) show how foreign aid projects can increase legitimacy of donors, a topic that is highly relevant for practitioners.

2. HAS IR RESEARCH BECOME MORE ATTRACTIVE TO POLICY MAKERS?

The historical trends suggest that economists have traditionally dominated policymaking (and they still do), but the increasing interest in questions of recipient governance and politics may have opened a niche for political scientists to contribute to the policy and practice of development. According to the results of the TRIP Faculty Survey, development research is on par with other IPE research in terms of its impact on foreign policy.¹¹ One important question is whether IR scholars use methodological approaches that make their work accessible to policymakers.

There is not much information about the methods that policymakers in development finance find most compelling, but most policymakers have a background in economics or public policy, so I assume that they value positivist work. There is a large body of important qualitative work, but recently we have witnessed a move towards large-scale quantitative analyses as well as experiments. The TRIP Faculty Survey finds that scholars in the development field are more likely to find quantitative and qualitative research useful to policy practitioners than scholars in other fields, notably other IPE or International Security scholars (see Table 2).¹² In fact, in my interviews with AidData and USAID staff I found that the greatest demand for consultants occurs when conducting quantitative and qualitative work. Interestingly, most controversies arise over the question of whether randomized control trials (RCTs) are valuable.

Table 2: Usefulness of Methodological Approaches to Policy Practitioners

	<i>Overall</i>	<i>Development</i>	<i>Other IPE</i>	<i>Security</i>
<i>Quantitative</i>	70%	83%	76%	71%
<i>Qualitative</i>	91%	94%	89%	92%

Source: TRIP Faculty Survey 2014

¹¹ Question QG 421, TRIP Faculty Survey 2014. About 10% of respondents believe that IPE and development are issue areas in which IR research had the largest impact on foreign policy (about 18% name the issue area of Security).

¹² Question QG 159, TRIP Faculty Survey 2014.

Table 3 demonstrates that IR scholars still overwhelmingly use qualitative analysis in their research (60 percent).¹³ Quantitative analyses are conducted by only 14 percent of foreign aid scholars and experiments by only 0.6 percent of foreign aid scholars.¹⁴ Although I cannot compare whether the methodologies used by IR scholars are consistent with policymakers' and policy staffs' preferences, almost 80 percent of IR scholars apply methodological approaches that are frequently used by practitioners and researchers in foreign aid agencies as well.

Table 3: Methods in IR Research

	<i>Overall</i>	<i>Development</i>	<i>Other IPE</i>	<i>Security</i>
<i>Quantitative</i>	14%	14%	29%	18%
<i>Qualitative</i>	60%	63%	56%	61%
<i>Experiments</i>	0.6%	0.6%	0.2%	0.4%

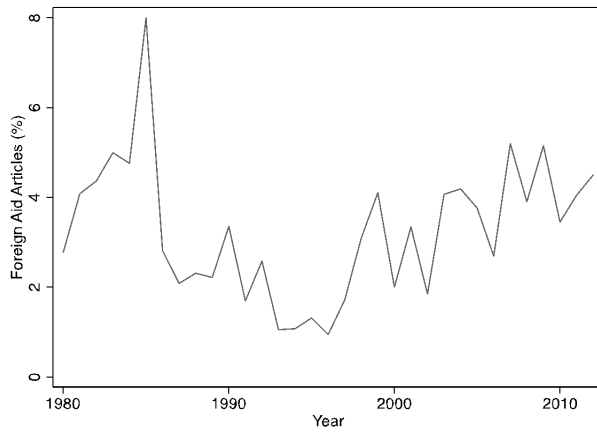
Source: TRIP Faculty Survey, 2011

In addition to the data provided by the TRIP Faculty Survey, the TRIP journal database provides information on the type of research employed. Figure 1 graphs the share of foreign aid articles published annually between 1980 and 2012. Whereas the raw data depict some trends (such as the increase in the relative number of foreign aid articles published in the early 1980s and the stark drop in 1986), these trends do not represent significant shifts in research on foreign aid aside from an increase in consistency with which foreign aid articles have been published in these journals in the last five years.

Figure 1: Foreign Aid Articles in International Relations, 1980-2012

¹³ Question QG 104, TRIP Faculty Survey 2014.

¹⁴ It should be noted that more recent work has increased its focus on experiments, so we may see a change in these numbers in the coming years.



Source: TRIP Journal Article Database, Version 2.0

Table 4: Methods in IR Research

	<i>All IR</i>	<i>Foreign Aid</i>	<i>Other IPE</i>	<i>Security</i>
<i>Positive Epistemology</i>	82%	94%	91%	86%
<i>Contemporary Timeframe</i>	62%	88%	75%	58%
<i>Qualitative</i>	34%	36%	42%	34%
<i>Quantitative</i>	37%	60%	46%	37%
<i>Experimental</i>	3%	0.4%	0.8%	2%
<i>Policy Prescription</i>	9%	9%	3%	15%
<i>Policy Analysis</i>	4%	5%	1%	6%

Source: TRIP Journal Article Database, Version 2.0

Table 4 takes a closer look at the share of articles in important IR subfields (and IR in general) that use positivist epistemology, quantitative analysis, a contemporary time frame, qualitative analysis, experiments, policy prescriptions, and policy analyses.¹⁵ With the exception of

¹⁵ Information about issue areas was only available for all IR, other IPE, and Security. To identify foreign aid articles, I referred to the substantive focus of articles. In all data on IPE, I removed articles/scholars that are

qualitative analyses, research on foreign aid differs from other IR research in significant ways. First, whereas a large percentage (82 percent) of IR research uses a positivist epistemology, articles that address questions of foreign aid are significantly more likely to employ a positivist epistemology (94 percent). This share trumps other IPE research, as well as research in the field of security. Foreign aid research is also more likely to employ a contemporary timeframe, qualitative and quantitative analyses, and policy analysis than other IR research. The largest difference between the foreign aid subfield and other subfields in IR is the extent to which quantitative analyses are utilized. Whereas non-foreign aid focused research uses quantitative analyses in about 37 percent of the cases, in foreign aid research the number is about 60 percent. This is particularly interesting given the significantly lower numbers in the TRIP Faculty survey (only 14 percent of foreign aid scholars claim to use quantitative methods, but these may be the ones who get published in the top IR journals).

Whereas the foreign aid academic research methodology is conducive to policy applications and in line with research that is done by researchers in the policy world, much depends on the particular content of scholarly contributions. Whereas much of the political science and economics literatures (at least until recently) have focused on large-scale quantitative analyses at the national or international level (i.e., the strategic or big picture side), policymakers are often interested in the operational and technical aspects of development aid. Policy-based research often focuses on particular countries, time periods, or even projects to analyze what has happened and what can be learned from particular instances. Policymakers are particularly interested, too, in policy evaluation and prescription, and these are the fields where foreign aid research by IR scholars does not particularly distinguish itself from other research. Only about 3 percent of articles in IR (0.4 percent in foreign aid articles) use experiments, only about 4 percent of articles analyze policies (5 percent in foreign aid research), and only about 9 percent of articles even prescribe any type of policies. These are the type of analyses where security research is much closer to what policymakers are interested in.¹⁶

identified as foreign aid in order to avoid double counting.

¹⁶ Of course, looking at some of the current research articles presented at IR workshops and conferences, one would expect to see more experimental publications in the future. Another drawback of the current analysis is that the dataset focuses on the twelve leading journals in political science and IR. This does not include journals such as *Foreign Affairs* or *World Development*, where one would expect to see much more policy-focused work.

3.FORMAL AND INFORMAL INTERACTIONS

In this section, I analyze the formal and informal interactions between academia and policy communities. There are several important insights to be gained. First, many bilateral, regional, and multilateral donors have made their data more easily available to researchers. This increases the likelihood that academics use data that are relevant to policymakers, thereby increasing the opportunities for linkages. One notable example is the Creditor Reporting System (CRS). To allow for better information and monitoring of each donor's foreign aid allocations as well as the donors' movements towards the common aid goals, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) established a system to collect statistical data on aid spending. CRS provides a centralized database for foreign aid flows from its 22 members states as well as a number of multilateral aid agencies, and it has been the source of many academic and policy studies on foreign aid.

Another important example is the World Bank's *Open Data Initiative*. Then World Bank President, Robert Zoellick, started the initiative in 2010 to provide public access to more than 7,000(?) data sets that were previously unavailable or available only to governments and individual researchers.¹⁷ The World Bank has moved towards greater transparency since the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. With the *Open Data Initiative* the organization shifted from a "positive list" of limited materials available to a "negative list," in which all materials not on the list would be available for the public (Weaver and Peratsakis 2014). This policy shift was a radical step away from the Bank's reputation as a very secretive and non-transparent organization. The *Open Data Initiative* includes the publication of data collected by the International Evaluation Group (IEG), which evaluates the activities of the institutions of the World Bank Group (including the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development, the International Development Agency, the International Finance Corporation, and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency). The IEG has built up a data set that includes project-level performance evaluations across the history of the World Bank. This data set has become publicly available only recently, but academic researchers believe it to be a valuable contribution towards a better understanding of foreign aid effectiveness. By 2012, the

Comment [1]: Is the correct number? An approximation?

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¹⁷ <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/03/business/global/03world.html?pagewanted=all> (last accessed: July 2, 2014).

World Bank's documents and reports database was visited more than 4.5 million times and received more than 795,000 downloads (Weaver and Peratsakis 2014).

Second, there are increasing linkages between researchers in policy institutions, such as the World Bank or USAID, and researchers at academic institutions. A number of policy-based researchers have published in IR journals, and co-authorships between policy-based researchers and academic researchers take place frequently. Both communities participate in common workshops and conferences. The Political Economy of International Organizations (PEIO) workshop is an example of such a network. European and American economists and political scientists organize the PEIO workshop as an interdisciplinary event. I analyzed the programs of the workshops going back to 2008 and found that the two-day workshop included at least three scholars from the policy community in each year (2014 is the exception, where only one scholar from the World Bank participated). In some years, the number of policy-based participants was as high as ten participants.¹⁸

Third, whereas the switch from academia to policy, and vice versa, is not seamless, there are examples of such careers. An increasing number of academic researchers also seek and receive short-term consulting jobs at foreign aid institutions such as USAID or the World Bank. Most consultancy jobs are still filled with economists (David Collier and Steven Radelet are two famous examples), but there appears to be a trend toward hiring political scientists for consulting jobs where political issues are concerned. James Robinson who is a Professor of Government at Harvard University has repeatedly consulted for the World Bank about the political economy of development. Nicholas Sambasis, a Professor at Yale University, was previously hired as a consultant and economist at the World Bank. Michael Doyle, well-known for his work on the liberal democratic peace and Professor of Political Science at Columbia University, has been the chair of the UN Democracy Fund and was a member of the External Research Advisory Committee of the UNHCR, as well as the Advisory Committee of the Lessons-Learned Unit of the Department of Peace-Keeping Operations at the UN. Pippa Norris, Lecturer in Comparative Politics at the Harvard Kennedy School, has served as the Director of Democratic Governance at UNDP and as a consultant to

¹⁸ Of course, PEIO may represent a special case. The participation of practitioners is much lower in pure political science conferences, such as the International Political Economy Society (IPES) conference.

the UN, OSCE, IDEA, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, NED, and UNDP. Other prominent political scientists who have worked for the World Bank and other IOs are Miles Kahler, Beth Simmons, Joseph Grieco, Ngaire Woods, and David Leblang.

It is difficult to get a complete list of such moonlighters and in-and-outers. According to the TRIP Faculty Survey, about 17 percent of IR scholars (23 percent of development scholars) have engaged in paid consultation with government agencies (the numbers are higher for nonpaid consultation with 30.4 percent and 34.5 percent, respectively).

Table 3: Consultation by IR Scholars

	<i>Overall</i>	<i>Development</i>	<i>Other IPE</i>	<i>Security</i>
<i>Paid Consultation</i>	17%	22.8%	19.5%	25.1%
<i>No Paid Consultation</i>	30.4%	34.5%	34.7%	33.2%

Source: TRIP Faculty Survey, 2011

Donor agencies also are becoming increasingly aware of the potential contribution of political scientists for development finance, at least when it comes to issues of democratic governance (see also my discussion of AidData below). The Center for Democracy, Human Rights and Governance, which is a sub-division of the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Conflict at USAID, for example, has an explicit mandate to increase the number of political scientists advising USAID. The Center focuses on independent and rigorous impact evaluations of USAID projects, using RCTs. Of the RCTs that are currently in the field for the Center, there are a number of political scientists involved across different projects (e.g. Kate Baldwin, Marcatan Humphrey, Eric Wibbels, Dan Posner, Altin Illirjani, Aaron Abbarno, Guy Grossman, Jonathan Rodden, Noam Lupu, Eddy Malesky, and Matthew Winters). In addition, the Bureau has given more resources for academic projects in political science. Some examples are a project on theories of democratic backsliding by Ellen Lust, social movements in the Middle East by James Fowler and Zachary Steinert-Threlkeld, and political development in South Africa by Clark Gibson and Karen Ferree.

Whereas the mission of the Center itself seems promising, the interest in hiring IR scholars at

USAID is mainly limited to this Center. From my interviews with USAID staff, it appears that economists still are dominant in providing policy consultancy at the agency. The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Conflict is small compared to other bureaus, such as the Bureau of Agriculture and Food, or the Bureau of Education. In 2012, the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights and Conflict had a staff size of 502. Compare this to the Bureau of Africa, which had a staff size of 2083. Another discouraging trend is the declining budget for the Center, due to the decreasing budget for USAID overall. Whereas the Bureaus that operate within the President's Initiative have a relatively steady budget, the Center, which is not part of the initiative and therefore works on the basis of discretionary funding, is more prone to budget fluctuation.

In sum, the formal and informal interactions between IR scholars and the policy community largely support my previous results. Opportunities for linkages exist, and IR scholars are likely to engage with the policy community as long as they study questions that policy makers find relevant to their foreign aid policies. These opportunities are still rare, however, because (a) policy makers largely have not embraced the importance of power relationships as well as domestic and international politics of foreign aid, and (b) IR scholars largely have not embraced the policy world's demand for particular research topics (and if they do, they fail to market them effectively). I will discuss some of the potential reasons for these differences below, but before I do so I want to elaborate on one other dimension where the policy world has increased its linkages with IR scholars, arguably very successfully.

4. THE AIDDATA INITIATIVE

The increasing trend towards analyzing particular aspects of foreign aid and the shortcomings in the existing system of recording and providing data on foreign aid allocations have led a team of researchers at the College of William & Mary to launch projects to collect more data on development finance. I provide a detailed account of the AidData initiative to analyze how this has led to a shift in how policy-makers and IR scholars interact. The projects' initial goal was to collect more fine-grained data—in particular, on the project level—than existed before, expand on the availability of data, and provide information on the functional sectors in which the projects fall. Since then, however, AidData has expanded dramatically to include a large range of other data-collection efforts that led to ever increasing links with the policy

community. By now, many of AidData's projects are co-funded by development finance institutions, such as the World Bank and USAID, as well as by recipient governments in developing governments.¹⁹

The CRS database has provided the subfield of foreign aid with a potential advantage over other subfields in terms of the gaps between policy world and academia—both sides have the opportunity to study similar questions with the same publicly available data—the database is limited in many aspects. The sectoral-level data in the CRS database is incomplete, and the categorization into functional sectors is sometimes ambiguous and problematic for the research questions that academic scholars seek to address. In addition, the CRS reports foreign aid flows from traditional bilateral donors as well as a few regional and multilateral aid agencies. Overall, it reports a development finance value of \$2.6 billion. AidData augmented the CRS data by adding non-OECD donor states (e.g. Saudi Arabia or Kuwait) and institutions. It further organizes the data on the project level, which allows a clear assignment of sector and activity codes (AidData expanded the OECD sector codes to 717 AidData purpose and activity codes).

The first release of the AidData database in 2008 (Version 1.92) reported an overall value of development finance of \$4.3 billion (both in constant 2000 US dollars); that is almost twice the amount reported in the CRS database (Tierney et al. 2011). With these data, AidData not only enhanced research and practitioners' knowledge about many specific aspects of development finance (the "who," "what," "when," and "where" questions); it also provided new insights into questions that are at the very heart of development (the "why" and "how" questions). The data are ever-expanding, with new projects and donors entering the database. For example, recent data collection and provision efforts include the geo-coding of project-level data as well as the collection of project-level data that allows researchers and practitioners to study the long-term impact of development efforts. Most of the recent data collection efforts aim to provide improved information to both practitioners and academic researchers who evaluate and test theories relevant to many questions of development. With

¹⁹ I am very grateful to Brad Parks, Co-executive director of AidData, Samantha Custer, Director of Policy and Communications at AidData, as well as Mike Tierney, Lab Director at the AidData Center for Development Policy for their willingness to answer all my questions about AidData.

the inclusion of the new donors into the database, for example, AidData allows both the academic and policy world to analyze the behavior of emerging new donors such as China or India (Manning 2006; Woods 2008; Dreher and Fuchs 2011; Dreher et al. 2011). In addition, the collection of data on institutional development at the project-level will provide policymakers with the ability to study the long-term impacts of their projects; a question that has not been studied in depth before.

Already, it is possible to see the fruits of this massive effort. An increasing number of researchers use the common data sets, making comparisons and applications across analyses easier. AidData encourages researchers to post their results in various formats such as policy briefs, articles and books, and research and working papers. There is no way to assess whether these publications influence foreign aid policies, but they reflect the marketing strategies that policymakers in the field of development told me would be most effective (Knack et al. 2011; Easterly and Williamson 2011). The data collection project that has influenced linkages between academia and policy makers most significantly appears to be AidData's geo-coding project. AidData's *Center for Development Policy* provides geo-spatial data to enable the development community to target, coordinate, and evaluate aid more effectively. The Center works with USAID and other international development agencies and governments. The Center encourages scholars "to conduct cutting-edge research on development issues that will support evidence-based policy and program decisions by practitioners."²⁰ Since launching this project in 2010, AidData has grown to over 60 full-time staff members who are active around the world in governments, think tanks, civil society organizations, and universities. In 2010, AidData started a partnership with the World Bank to geo-code all project activities on a local level in an effort to improve targeting, coordination, and evaluation. Recipient governments quickly became interested in geo-referencing foreign aid projects from a variety of sources in their countries. In an unusual move, the Malawi government gave AidData complete access to its non-public government aid management system, and AidData geo-referenced all projects on the subnational level. The results have had a huge impact on the policy discussion about what constitutes effective coordination of development finance efforts. This led to the creation of a trust fund at the World Bank, the so-called open aid partnership, to geo-reference local aid projects. Finance ministers in developing countries around the world expressed interest in

²⁰ <http://aiddata.org/aiddata-research-consortium> (last accessed: July 2, 2014).

participating. AidData was able to secure commitment from these governments to provide access to their aid management systems and thereby increase the transparency of foreign development finance. By 2014, AidData had geo-coded 15 countries. The geo-coding is successful, domestically and internationally, and demand is increasing in the developing world. Partly as a consequence, AidData has evolved from an initiative that was driven by academic researchers to an interdisciplinary powerhouse where researchers from various different subfields, policy-makers, and practitioners work together.

With the provision of the database and the initiatives summarized above, AidData has made a substantial contribution towards a deeper engagement between foreign aid scholars and practitioners. AidData sees itself as a broker between researchers and the policy community, which is interested in the type of data collection and analysis that AidData offers. The linkages between policy and academia exist on several dimensions, with varying strengths. First, the greatest success in establishing linkages has been AidData's ability to connect the policy world with academic researchers to help them address particular questions or problems. Second, the success of AidData as an organization has allowed it to share some of its profits in the form of research funding for research scholars who use innovative methodologies to study development finance. Third, AidData is less fixated on academic discipline, and more on methodology. They do not sell researchers as "economists" or "political scientists," but as academic scholars who are able to solve particular problems--that is, have the necessary methodological skills necessary to study a particular question. The fact that AidData initiators have come from various subfields (including political science, economics, and sociology) has allowed them to tap into a number of different networks. Finally, AidData has had an indirect impact on the linkages between political scientists and policymakers because the two groups use similar data.

Many challenges remain. My interviews revealed that the basic challenges discussed above persist even in this environment. Whereas AidData has made great strides in bringing policymakers and academics together, interests and incentives diverge, and often both sides are dissatisfied. Political scientists are mainly interested in studying power relations--e.g., who gets foreign aid and why, but policymakers are more interested in questions of coordination and effectiveness. The most successful partnerships tend to be those where (a) the scholar does

not have a rigid research agenda and is willing to listen to policymakers, or (b) where the policymaker is open to important questions that typically may be overlooked in foreign aid agencies. Different incentive structures seem the most persistent obstacle (see, e.g., Parks and Stern 2014). The questions that are interesting to policy makers are not necessarily the research questions that allow tenure-track faculty to improve their chances for publication in top-tier journals.²¹ To make matters worse, policymakers often have difficulty articulating researchable questions, which can frustrate scholars. In addition, researchers often need two to five years to provide high-quality research results, but policymakers need results in three to six months. Nevertheless, AidData brokerage has been successful—particularly when questions are aligned and the increasing relationships also increased policymakers’ interest in understanding questions of political economy in those areas where political scientists should be able to contribute.

4.SUMMARY AND CHALLENGES

I paint a mixed picture of the interactions between the academic and the policy worlds in the area of foreign aid. On one hand, at least recently, there are more linkages between IR scholars and the policy community. My analysis reveals that these positive developments appear to result from: (a) the increasing transparency of foreign aid agencies coupled with AidData’s data efforts, which have increased the usability of academic research for policy purposes; (b) the increasing use of methodologies by IR scholars that are useful to study the questions that policymakers want to answer; (c) the increasing acknowledgment by practitioners that it is important to take politics and governance into account when designing effective development projects; and (d) the increasing willingness of IR scholars to focus their research on questions that may be more relevant to policymakers.

On the other hand, the analysis still reveals a sizeable gap between IR scholars and development policymakers. In many areas, economists dominate the linkages between academia and the policy world, and practitioners only recently have taken IR scholars more seriously. There is an increasing focus on quantitative and experimental work in IR, but the

²¹ In addition to different opinions about which questions are important, academic work often is difficult to digest for policymakers who have severe constraints on their time. It is not the aim of this chapter to provide a normative assessment of whether linkages are desired, but these differences in my view provide huge obstacles to closer linkages between the policy and academic communities.

current numbers do not indicate a great push towards these research methods. Two underlying obstacles to creating more linkages seem to stand out. The first challenge is the heterogeneity of interests about substance. There have been significant overlaps and interdependencies in the broad questions addressed when analyzing foreign aid, but beyond that IR scholars' and practitioners' interests have varied substantially. Whereas policymakers are often concerned about the operational level of their foreign aid projects, as well as the evaluation of development impact, political scientists are primarily concerned about the broader strategic context and the international and domestic politics of foreign aid. The political environment is clearly important to understand why foreign aid projects sometimes fail to achieve their desired results, but many policymakers shy away from addressing these issues for very practical reasons. From my own experience, World Bank operational staff are very well aware of the perverse political incentives that recipient country incumbents face when receiving foreign aid projects. Political scientists focus on the problems, but they do not provide many helpful insights for these problems.

To provide just one example of the practical challenges that aid agencies face, World Bank projects increasingly compete with Chinese foreign aid projects, and recipient country incumbents are less willing to accept a wide range of project conditions (or to be reprimanded for any corruption they participate in). The increasing competition decreases the donors' ability to design projects that maximize effectiveness, at least using more traditional strategies. Academic research can tell donors that projects will likely be unsuccessful if corruption is not circumvented, but academics have no answers (as of yet, at least) to how aid agencies should deal with some of these practical challenges. The debate is whether to withdraw the project if not all the conditions are met or corruption is detected, or whether the project is still more likely to improve the situation as compared to a situation in which no foreign aid is allocated (or allocated by another donor with less stringent requirements). In addition, practitioners usually face much more serious time constraints, which reduce their ability to engage with the newest research on some of the broader questions (i.e. how to design projects to maximize effectiveness) even if they wanted to. The new presidency has launched a move towards greater coordination of development projects within and across recipient countries, but the

time constraints drastically limit the value of academic research for operational staff.²²

Second, the policy community and the academic community still face different incentive structures in respect to the timing of research activities, as well as publication venues. While policymakers often address crises that need immediate attention, typical research projects take several years from beginning to the publication of first research output. The timing for academic research is justified by the value of valid and reliable results; however, it comes at the cost of not being timely enough to be of value to policymakers. This then also explains why the gap has been smallest when it comes to the broad strategies of how and where foreign aid is allocated, rather than questions about individual foreign aid projects. Many policy makers focus on particular regions and even projects, however, and are therefore interested in project-specific questions. To make an impact, IR scholars need to market their research more effectively through policy briefs and participation in think tanks. Such marketing would be likely to influence practitioners, but it also would put yet another time constraint on scholars, lowering incentives to engage with the policy community to begin with. Even if IR scholars were to translate their work into digestible blog posts or policy briefs, their influence would depend on their willingness to spend considerable time networking with the policy world.

²² In my interviews with USAID staff, I also heard that some practitioners question the usefulness of theoretically informed research to begin with, arguing that the field missions are a decade ahead of academia in terms of programming.