# Referencing Source Material in Economics and Avoiding Plagiarism

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March 8, 2001

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To students: What follows is an excerpt from a paper-in-progress, entitled "Aid, Taxation and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa," by Christopher Adam and myself.[1] It gives some examples of how to reference the ideas and data of others in an Economics term paper. As this example shows, economists frequently draw heavily on the ideas of others in building their own arguments. *The purpose of references is to make it clear to the reader which ideas/interpretations/data in your paper rely directly on the work of others.* Failure to do this constitutes a type of cheating known as *plagiarism*. Plagiarism is a serious offense against your fellow students, whose work will be evaluated along with yours. It is a serious offense against your sources, whose work you are stealing without attribution. Finally, it is a serious offense against academia, because the advancement of knowledge requires that your readers be given enough information to dispute your arguments using all of the materials you used. For these reasons, *any student caught plagiarizing will fail this course and suffer whatever additional penalties are imposed by the College Judicial Committee, including suspension or expulsion*.

The good news is that plagiarism is very easy to avoid. See the examples below, and the explanations given. You'll see that the excerpt does not include any references from websites, journalistic sources, or unpublished papers. Websites can be referenced using a footnote and giving the full address of the site (and of course enclosing any directly quoted material in quotes). Journalistic sources are just like other published material; if the author is identified, you can list the reference in your text as Bernstein (1998), and then in your references have Bernstein, J. (1998), "The Glass-Steagall Act," *New York Times*, February 14; if the author is not identified, just give the title and source in the text (e.g., "The Glass-Steagall Act," *New York Times*, February 14, 1998), and also include this in the references, in alphabetical order of the article title. Unpublished papers should be referenced just as other papers, e.g., Smith (1997) in the text and then, in the references: Smith, R. (1997), "Prohibition was a Bomb," unpublished paper, Swarthmore College, March.

Ephemeral sources, such as unpublished public lectures or private scholarly correspondence, should be referenced when they contribute materially to your own argument. This can be done either in the text ("As T. Jones demonstrated in his Ec 1 lecture, …") or in footnotes (Jones, T., Public lecture, Swarthmore College, January 5, 2001; or "These data were provided by S. Tranh of the World Bank."). You may draw broadly on my own lectures or on class discussion without attribution, except where specific data are concerned or where your own judgement favors attribution.

To be on the safe side, there's a simple rule: **whenever you are in doubt, provide your reference**.

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[1] [Note added March 2001:] The excerpt is from a 1998 working paper. The final paper appeared in *Economics and Politics* 11(3), November, 1999, pp. 225-253.

**2.4 Autocracy and growth**

The two-period model employed here is not designed to capture the evolution of relations between government and the private sector in a repeated setting. However, Olson (1994) argues that in systems of personal rule the seriousness of the predation problem depends on the planning horizon of the leader **[<-- this is Olson's idea, not ours, so we must reference him]**. Leaders with long horizons internalize the collective interest in economic growth; those with short horizons sacrifice the collective interest to maximize their short-term rents **[<-- this fleshes out Olson's idea in our own words]**. With a number of African leaders enjoying long periods in power, this would seem to suggest that the model used in this section overstates the conflict of interest. There are, however, several reasons for rejecting this concern. First, and most clearly, while short horizons exacerbate the underlying conflict of interest (most dramatically in the case of time consistency problems), the conflict itself is rooted in the political economy and persists even if leaders have infinite horizons. Second, even with the notional protection of single-party political structures and other constraints on domestic political contestability, executive transitions in Africa have been violent and frequent (Sandbrook (1986), Alesina and Perotti (1994)) **[<-- this fact is not generally known, so reference is needed to where the evidence can be found]**. A high *ex ante* probability of transition, even if tenure is long-lived *ex post*, reduces the leader's effective planning horizon, particularly when transitions force incumbents into a position of economic exile (or death) rather than returning them to a normal civilian life. A third and final reason why long horizons may fail to rescue development-oriented behavior in systems of personal rule is that leaders face a tradeoff between their own tenure in office and the overall performance of the economy. Very poor performance is to be avoided, since it increases the probability of a coup; but very successful performance may reduce collective action problems in the private sector, create countervailing centers of economic power, and speed institutional innovations that in the absence of external security threats would eventually repudiate or eviscerate personal rule. Thus Diamond, *et al* (1990) observe that:

> "...the most common and in the long run the most important effect of rapid socioeconomic development under authoritarian rule has been to generate pressures and create social structural conditions more conducive to

democracy..."[page 19]. **[<-- there was no better way of saying this, so we chose to include the exact quote, enclosed in quotation marks, and the page number, rather than paraphrase the quote and give the reference.]**

A similar tension emerges if causality goes from institutional developments to growth, rather than the reverse. Collier (1991), for example, argues that agencies of restraint like a free press and an independent central bank (or, in principle, conditional aid) contribute to growth by placing limits on predation **[<-- this argument about agencies of restraint is Collier's, not ours, so we reference him; but the sentences preceding and following that sentence contain our own ideas/interpretations]**. Non-representative leaders may therefore actively oppose the development of such agencies, even if they are in the public interest.

These observations would appear to strengthen rather than weaken the tension between non-representative rule and growth that is central to our analytical model. They also bring out an important distinction between external and internal threats in such systems. As we noted above, a greater externally-driven revenue imperative can transform the policy choices of a non-representative leader into those of a 'developmental state', as the common interest in secure borders overcomes a distributional conflict of interest that would otherwise undercut growth. But the opposite seems likely to hold if the primary threats are to the tenure or autonomy of incumbent leaders. These drive a wedge between the general interest and that of the incumbent group, which now acquires an interest in opposing developments that would undercut its own flexibility and longevity.

This rationalization of distortionary policy choices suggests a link with what political scientists identify as a central conundrum of economic reform in Africa: what incentives do incumbent regimes have to reverse economic policies that they themselves had implemented and had not chosen voluntarily to change (e.g., Bates (1981), Gordon (1987)) **[<-- this conundrum is not our idea; in fact we have already attributed it to 'political scientists'. A 'typical' reference or two is needed to back this up.]**? The government's ambivalence reflects the tension between the gains accruing from reforms, which may solve the government's commitment problems, and the costs of increased contestability on the other. The major policy reforms of the 1990s, more so than the reforms of the 1980s, have as a common feature the substantial removal of discretion in tax and tax-like policies. Thus policies of exchange rate unification, trade liberalization, financial liberalization, privatization and in particular the support for competitive elections, all undermine the scope for executive discretion, improving the capacity to commit to policy measures, but at the cost of making the political system more contestable **[<-- we don't give a source for the 'major policy reforms of the 1990s' because their broad features are uncontroversial and well known to the audience]**. The immediate result may be partial, fitful implementation and an increase in the uncertainty faced by the private sector.[2]

## References


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[2] Bates (1981) suggests that the partial implementation of programs of reform reflects the fact that incumbent rulers will only seek to implement reforms up to the point that the marginal gain (additional resources) equals the marginal cost (constraints on autonomy). **[This footnote is not necessary; it fleshes out the point made in the text. However, in the process of doing this it introduces a line of reasoning that itself needs to be referenced to Bates.]**