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You have done a very nice job of considering the ethical issues and suggesting potential solutions.

This case takes place in the state of Rondonia, Brazil, where World Bank funds have been distributed to disadvantaged groups of people, including indigenous peoples, farmers, and rubber tappers. A researcher wants to find out if these funds have had an impact on the local political scene. The researcher has voting data, publically available on the internet, which would serve as the dependent variable in the study. The independent variable would be the amount of money that the various disadvantaged groups received from the World Bank. Although the documents are to be publicly accessible, they are held by a government entity that can take measures to prevent outsiders from accessing them. These measures include bribery and delays in service. Because the information in these documents may affect the government directly, officials are likely to block access to those whom they deem potentially threatening. In order to access the documents, the researcher must work with a network of individuals who likely have a stake in the outcome of the study. Thus, to get data for the study's independent variable, the researcher must keep back any inclination that the results may potentially be harmful to the government; this includes information about the dependent variable.

Sentence?

The central ethical issue in this scenario is whether ^{or} not either intentionally withholding or lying about the elements or the purposes of a research project by a researcher in order to further the research process. For the researcher here, the question is whether or not it is ^{acceptable} ~~alright~~ to be dishonest with people in his or her research area in order to get information that he or she needs and to which he ~~are you certain in this case?~~ or she is lawfully entitled. Since information from the World Bank should be public, assumingly this was a stipulation for the local government to take the money in the first place, the researcher's intentions for the information should not be relevant. The local government is also facing an ethical issue regarding their responsibility as a recipient of World Bank funding. Withholding public information makes them guilty of a definite ethical violation.

The stake holders in this case are the researcher, the local government, and the local people who received, or should have received funds from the World Bank. If the researcher does not gain access to the documents, the project cannot be completed as planned due to the lack of an independent variable. The government's stake might be serious, as the researcher's findings could be potentially harmful to their establishment. The local people who were the supposed recipients of the World Bank Funding are also at stake in this situation. Illicit connections to the government may have led to corruption and funds being distributed unfairly. That is, some parties who were to be funded may have gone empty handed due to funds being appropriated to government cronies, or those with connections.

The consequences for the researcher, if he or she does not get access to the documents, are lost time and lack of potential career advancement. If he or she has been funded to conduct this project and comes up with no data, and thus no results, the project might appear to have been a failure and might set the researcher back in terms of getting future grants and or assistantships. The potential consequences for the government are quite severe, the gravest of which is losing political power. In addition, if it is proven that the government has misappropriated funds, or pocketed World Bank money, there could be serious consequences, both from outraged locals and from the World Bank. Locals could attempt an insurrection and the World Bank could cut funding in the future. Consequences for local parties also exist. If funds were misappropriated, those who missed out on funding might have the opportunity to make a claim and obtain something. However, those who received more than their share might face negative consequences. Again, exposing corruption might hinder the likelihood of receiving future World Bank money, or bring about whatever punishment the World Bank has put in place to control for the appropriate use of funds.

Each party at stake in this case also has obligations. The researcher, as a scholar, has the obligation to be objective and to avoid bias wherever possible. In strict moral terms, telling the truth is

a night and day issue. Lying about one's intentions is always wrong, despite the potential outcomes. However, since the documents in question are technically public information, the researcher has no ethical obligation to be upfront with his or her intentions, due to the fact that he or she has the right to view these documents for any reason, and the government has no business in deciding who can see them and why. Therefore, refusal by the researcher to state his or her intentions is not an ethical violation, but being untruthful about it is. Obviously, the government is obliged to present the documents when asked since they are public information. Intentionally delaying the process and demanding bribes are definite ethical violations on the part of the government.

Chances are, if the government is willing to engage in bribery or withhold public documents for any reason, the character of this organization is presumably in question. However, in basic moral terms, the researcher should ask him or herself: "do two wrongs ever really make a right?" The answer is no, and the researcher should realize that he or she is committing an ethical violation when lying in order to make getting the documents easier. How serious a violation this actually is may be debatable, but it surely is not as bad as withholding public information. Nonetheless, it is never morally right to lie in order to expedite one's research process.

The alternative options the researcher possesses are limited, but some avenues do exist for dealing with the situation. For example, the researcher could notify the World Bank about the local government's lack of cooperation, thus bringing unwanted attention to the situation. The government might bow under such threats and decide to take its chances with the researcher, rather than with the source of the funding. The researcher could also presumably interview local groups and get some data on how the funds were dispersed. Depending on how effective this procedure turns out to be, the researcher might gather enough data to use for the independent variable and still conduct his or her

project. The researcher could also consider using another methodology to study these issues, one that does not depend on the government's approval.

An academic researcher has the responsibility to be ethical and objective. Researchers should always do the moral thing, or at the very least, avoid violating ethics. In this scenario the researcher should try to get as far as he or she can without meeting a situation in which he or she is asked to divulge the study's dependent variable. If asked to state this information, the researcher should either say what it is, or refuse to comment. If problems persist, the researcher should remind those in power of their ethical obligations. At this time, the researcher could make the government officials aware that he or she could report their lack of cooperation in his or her findings, and point out that the government's ethical violation would become known to the World Bank.

*depending on the nature of the governing body,
this might be dangerous for the researcher.*