

In Light of Democracy and Corruption: Institutional Determinants of Electricity Provision

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A large strand of previous research argues that democratic regimes provide more public goods and services than authoritarian regimes. Since political leaders are held accountable to the citizens in fair and regular elections, this literature argues, it creates strong incentives among political leaders to deliver broadly demanded public services. Indeed, long-lasting democratic institutions have been found to matter for, among other things, the universal provision of reliable electricity.

In this article we revisit this finding, suggesting that the effect of democracy on electricity provision is moderated by the quality of institutions shaping the implementation of public policies. We test the hypothesis positing the interaction effect between democracy and corruption using cross-national data on the share of population living in unlit areas. Our dependent variable is the percentage of the population living in unlit area, based on high-resolution satellite images capturing the concentration of outdoor lights around the globe. We use fractional logistic regression to estimate the relationship between democracy experience and the proportion of the population living in unlit areas.

The results show that democracy is associated with a higher electrification rate only in low-corrupt contexts. When corruption is widespread, democratic experience is not correlated with higher rates of electrification. These findings show that the effect of democratic institutions is conditional on the quality of the institutions that shape policy implementation. Our article thus provides a more nuanced understanding of the impact of democratic institutions on electricity provision.

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