

Doing Political and Social Research

Week 1: Welcome and Introduction



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Electoral institutions and repression in dictatorships[☆]

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ABSTRACT

We argue that the relationship between authoritarian elections and repression depends on the electoral system in use. Proportional representation (PR) systems co-opt more heterogeneous political groups to contest and receive seats in the legislature and thus, dictators are less likely to use broad-based repression. Under plurality rules, by contrast, the regime has more incentives to mobilize turnout and deter collective action. Examining electoral systems from 1990 to 2010, we find that elections only reduce broad-based repression under PR systems, which are less commonly used in non-democracies. Our results highlight the importance of formal institutions in shaping political outcomes even in dictatorships.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Poverty alleviation and state building in peripheral areas: evidence from China

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Abstract

The literature suggests that the distributive allocations of local public goods help politicians secure support and thus contribute to political survival. We argue that the selective assignment of state-led infrastructure projects can bolster political control in peripheral areas by inducing the government's investment in essential administrative and security apparatus for project implementation and long-term state building. Drawing on a unique county-level dataset, we study the effects of poverty alleviation transfers in Xinjiang. We find that poverty alleviation was associated with significant increases in government spending on public management and security. In contrast, these alleviation transfers had a small and ambiguous effect on increasing agricultural production and reducing ethnic violence in the province. Our findings highlight the importance of comparing the capacity and welfare implications of distributive politics, as fiscal subsidies may change the actions of the leader's local agents more than altering the behaviors and attitudes of those who may benefit from these transfers.

Key words: Authoritarian regimes; China; distributive politics; poverty alleviation; state building



Criminal Politicians and Socioeconomic Development: Evidence from Rural India

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Abstract

Although it seems intuitively clear that candidate quality provides a critical pillar of democratic governance, the consequences of electing low-quality politicians remain unclear. Combining census data and election results, we conduct a regression discontinuity analysis to examine the socioeconomic effects of criminal politicians in India. We find that the election of state legislators with criminal charges can exacerbate household poverty in a village as household electrification and literacy rates both decrease when criminal candidates win close elections against non-criminal ones. In contrast, the presence of criminal politicians does not have a conclusive negative effect on the supply of local infrastructures, such as paved roads and power grids. These results highlight the importance of differentiating between different types of policy outcomes. Rent-seeking politicians will engage in local infrastructural projects, but they may pay little attention to these projects' contribution to poverty reduction.

Factors affecting household satisfaction with electricity supply in rural India

Michaël Aklin¹, Chao-yo Cheng², Johannes Urpelainen^{3*}, Karthik Ganesan⁴ and Abhishek Jain⁴

Electricity is an important component of socio-economic development, but most studies of household electricity access focus exclusively on the presence or absence of a connection. Here we reach beyond connectivity by examining the relationship between various dimensions of the quality of electricity supply and a household's subjective satisfaction with their electricity or lighting situation. Studying the results from a survey of 8,568 households in six large, energy-poor states from northern, central and eastern India, we find that household satisfaction responds strongly to the average hours of electricity available on a typical day. The positive effect of increasing the number of hours per day by one standard deviation on satisfaction is almost as large as that of electrifying a non-electrified household. These findings underscore the importance of moving from counting electricity connections to enhancing the quality of electricity supply.

*From Local to Upper Capture: The Chinese Experiment of Administrative Courts**

Chao Ma, Chao-Yo Cheng, and Haibo He

Abstract

For decades, it has remained difficult for Chinese citizens to challenge government decisions through administrative litigation, as local governments control the crucial fiscal and personnel resources of the courts. In 2014, the Supreme People's Court (SPC) announced the decision to allow the newly integrated railway transport courts (RTCs) to accept and hear administrative cases. Unlike the local people's courts (LPCs), the RTCs are under the direct administration of the provincial high courts. Drawing on a unique dataset of more than 238,000 first-instance judgment records between 2015 and 2019, we study whether the RTCs' incorporation into the adjudication of administrative cases has improved Chinese citizens' chances of winning their cases. Our multi-variate regression analysis shows that only at the primary level are the

Table 1 Contrasting qualitative and quantitative research

<i>Section</i>	<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Qualitative</i>	<i>Quantitative</i>
1	Approaches to explanation	Explain individual cases; "causes-of-effects" approach	Estimate average effect of independent variables; "effects-of-causes" approach
2	Conceptions of causation	Necessary and sufficient causes; mathematical logic	Correlational causes; probability/statistical theory
3	Multivariate explanations	INUS causation; occasional individual effects	Additive causation; occasional interaction terms
4	Equifinality	Core concept; few causal paths	Absent concept; implicitly large number of causal paths
5	Scope and generalization	Adopt a narrow scope to avoid causal heterogeneity	Adopt a broad scope to maximize statistical leverage and generalization
6	Case selection practices	Oriented toward positive cases on dependent variable; no (0,0,0) cases	Random selection (ideally) on independent variables; all cases analyzed
7	Weighting observations	Theory evaluation sensitive to individual observations; one misfit can have an important impact	All observations are a priori equally important; overall pattern of fit is crucial
8	Substantively important cases	Substantively important cases must be explained	Substantively important cases not given special attention
9	Lack of fit	Nonconforming cases are examined closely and explained	Nonsystematic causal factors are treated as error
10	Concepts and measurement	Concepts center of attention; error leads to concept revision	Measurement and indicators center of attention; error is modeled and/or new indicators identified