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Constitutional Rules as Determinants of Social Infrastructure*

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Abstract:

A sizable literature has established the positive impact of social infrastructure on economic development, but the determinants of social infrastructure itself have yet to be fully explored. Competing theories suggest a variety of political institutions as driving forces of social infrastructure, but the empirical literature has been hampered by the small set of available proxies, many of which are broadly defined. We leverage a new, comprehensive dataset that codes political institutions directly from countries' constitutions. By employing a statistical methodology that is designed to juxtapose candidate regressors associated with many competing theories, we test each individual political institution's effect on social infrastructure. Our results show that constitutional rules pertaining to executive constraints as well as to the structure of electoral systems are crucial for the development of high-quality social infrastructure. We also find that the determinants of social infrastructure are much more fundamental than previously thought: not only the general structure of electoral systems matter, but also highly detailed aspects such as limits on campaign contributions and the freedom to form parties. Moreover, the granularity of our data allows us to highlight the profound effect of basic human rights on social infrastructure, a dimension which has not been explored in the literature to date.

JEL Codes: O47, D72, E60, H00

Keywords: Constitutions, Institutions, Social Infrastructure, Bayesian Model Averaging

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