

The Well-Oiled Machine: Multiparty Autocracies and the Effect of Oil on Electoral Competition

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Abstract

Building on theoretical insights from research on the rentier state, several studies have argued that oil hinders democracy. However, previous research on the rentier state has neglected the global surge of multiparty autocracies since the end of the Cold War. In this paper, we combine the literature on multiparty autocracy and the political economy of the rentier state to study how oil affects elections in non-democracies. As oil production creates substantial and nontransparent government revenue stream, we hypothesize that oil production has a negative effect on electoral competitiveness in multiparty autocracies. Using data on all multiparty elections held in the world in the period 1975-2010, our results confirm that oil strongly impedes electoral competitiveness in multiparty autocracies, but has no effect in democratic settings. This paper contributes to the burgeoning literature on democratization through elections and highlights how unfavorable economic structures impede the chances of elections leading to liberalization.

Introduction

Oil hinders democracy, this is a well-known and broadly supported thesis in the comparative politics literature (Ross 2001; Jensen and Wantchekon 2004; Smith 2004; Ulfelder 2007; Ross 2012). Nevertheless, although much research has been conducted on the stabilizing effect of oil on autocracy, little attention has been devoted to the institutional shift that radically transformed global authoritarianism in the third wave of democracy (Levitsky and Way 2010). Today, most autocracies arrange election (Hadenius and Teorell 2007). Multiparty elections, even in highly entrenched autocracies, may lead to regime instability and open up windows for political contestation (Bunce and Wolchik 2011),

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