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Journal of Development Economics

Volume 82, Issue 2, March 2007, Pages 287-314

The political economy of public goods: Some evidence from India

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2006.04.005>

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Abstract

We are interested in how public goods get allocated by a centralized state. We use data on public goods and social structure from parliamentary constituencies in rural India to understand the allocation of these goods over the 1970s and 1980s. National policies and political agendas during this period emphasized universal access to basic amenities and financed a rapid expansion in rural infrastructure. We find evidence of considerable equalization in many of these facilities, reflecting perhaps the importance of these commitments. Among the historically disadvantaged social groups, those that mobilized themselves politically gained relative to the others. Measures of social heterogeneity that have been emphasized in the recent empirical literature on public goods are relevant but not overwhelming in their importance.



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JEL classification

H4; O2

Keywords

Political economy; Public goods; India

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