Road safety determinants: do institutions matter?

Abstract

Road safety is a global health problem and its severity in developing countries highlights the need for research to address its causes. We explore the effect of institutional variables on road safety, redressing the literature’s failure to consider political institutions as road safety determinants. Specifically, we analyze the effect on traffic accidents and fatalities of different political regimes, electoral rules and forms of government and we control for other factors. By drawing on an international sample of countries taken over a long time-span, we find that democratic institutions are associated with better road safety. The beneficial effects of democratization become apparent after about four years in countries undergoing a regime transition and are also discernible in established democracies that are consolidating their political institutions. Finally, our results suggest that road safety can be characterized as a local public good and that its provision is greater in parliamentary systems.