

Malaria and the historical roots of land inequality. Evidence from Italian municipality

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Abstract

This paper investigates the historical role of endemic diseases in shaping land distribution, exploiting historical data on Italian municipalities. We build a reach database on malaria presence and land distribution in the early twentieth century, in Italy. In order to address endogeneity issue, the paper uses several types of malaria suitability index and a RDD approach, which exploit 500 years of temperature and rainfall history. Evidence shows that in malarial areas land inequality is higher. Further, results show that the effect of malaria on land distribution is in place only in areas that are highly suitable for crops production. The paper sheds light on the mechanism through which malaria affects land inequality.