

Rebel Attacks Against Energy Infrastructure and Electoral Contestation: A Case Study of Colombia

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Do the leftist guerrilla groups in Colombia – Las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) and Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional (ELN) – use attacks on energy infrastructure to influence political as well as economic outcomes? On its face, the rebel groups, ELN and FARC, achieve two main objectives (albeit through varying mechanisms) by attacking energy infrastructure: one financial and one political. The broad financial objective is to extract revenue through extortion or predation of resources to fund additional rebel activities. The broad political objective may be to undermine the legitimacy of the Colombian government and military by disrupting government supported capitalist activities that the rebels perceive as exploitative (resource extraction), by deterring would-be voters through intimidation, or by creating complacency among would-be voters about the legitimacy of the democratic process. Our preliminary results show an increase in attacks on energy infrastructure leading up to elections, providing evidence of a political as well as financial motivation to attack these infrastructures.