

Land Property Rights, Cadasters and Economic Growth:
A Cross-Country Panel 1000-2015 CE

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Since the transition to agricultural production, property rights to land have been a key institution for economic development. Clearly defined land rights provide economic agents with secure returns on investment, reduce the resources needed to defend one’s land, facilitate land market transactions and increase access to credit. However, comparative research on how these formal rights in land evolved across the world, and their importance for economic growth, has so far been lacking. In this paper, we present a novel data set on the emergence of state-administered cadasters (i.e. centralized land records) for 159 countries over the last millennium. We also analyze empirically the association between the development of cadastral institutions and long-run economic growth in a panel of countries. Our findings demonstrate a substantive positive effect of the introduction of cadasters on modern economic development, supporting a theoretical claim that states with more developed property rights to land also have experienced higher levels of economic growth.