This chapter uses statistical techniques to assess whether there is evidence that Africa’s slave trades had a detrimental impact on long-term economic development. This is done by first constructing estimates of the number of slaves taken from each region of Africa between 1400 and 1900. The estimates are constructed by combining data on the number of slaves shipped from African ports with data from historical records reporting the ethnic identities of slaves taken from Africa. Using the constructed data, it shown that the parts of the continent from which the largest number of slaves were taken in the past are the parts of the continent that are the poorest today. This relationship is found to be extremely robust. It remains even when other important determinants of economic development are taken into account. This relationship can be interpreted a number of ways. One interpretation is that it shows that the slave trades had an adverse effect on Africa’s long-term economic development. An alternative interpretation, however, is that the parts of Africa from which the largest number of slaves were taken in the past were initially the least developed. And because these characteristics persist today, these parts of Africa continue to be the least developed. Therefore, we observe that the parts of Africa that exported many slaves in the past are also poor today, even though the slave trades did not cause these areas to become underdeveloped. This alternative explanation is tested in the data by examining whether it was in fact the initially least developed parts of Africa that exported the greatest number of slave. Consistent with the historical evidence, the data suggest that the parts of Africa that were initially the most developed, not the least developed, supplied the largest number of slaves. This evidence provide strong evidence against the second interpretation, and instead supports the first interpretation. It is also shown that additional statistical tests, using instrumental variables, also provides additional support for the slave trades having a causal adverse effect on economic development within Africa.
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