

Electricity Access Is Spreading (Except in Venezuela)

Venezuela has recently experienced a wave of blackouts resulting from the ineptitude of Maduro's dictatorship, whose policies have led the country to the [most severe economic crisis](#) of its history.

The lack of access to electricity is having an unprecedented humanitarian impact on the Venezuelan population. Food is spoiling in unpowered refrigerators, looters are running rampant in unlit city streets, and hospital patients reliant on medical equipment that is now nonfunctional are [dying](#). While the current situation is particularly harsh, blackouts in Venezuela's socialist system have been [common for years](#).

Meanwhile in the rest of the world access to electricity has increased dramatically over the last three decades, largely thanks to developing countries opening up to global capitalism and free markets.

In a [recent article](#), *Our World in Data's* Hannah Ritchie and Max Roser show that the share of the world population with access to electricity has moved from 73 percent in 1990 to 85 percent in 2014. This means that the number of people without electricity has gone down by 500 million people despite the fact that world population has risen by 2 billion over the same period.

India is good example of this trend. In 1990, 57 percent of the population didn't enjoy access to electricity. By 2016, this number had fallen to 15 percent. These numbers are more impressive if we take into account that, between 1990 and 2016, the Indian population [increased](#) by an astonishing 53 percent or 470 million people.

We are so accustomed to electricity in our daily routines that we find it difficult to imagine life without it. There are almost too many ways to count in which electricity has improved the standards of living for billions of people over the last century: It has allowed for the mechanization of production, increasing productivity and wages. Similarly, it has improved health care in a number of important ways. For instance, without electricity, dialysis patients couldn't receive treatment, condemning them to certain death. Access to electricity also leads to higher literacy rates, as suggested by an [article](#) published in the prestigious academic journal *Energy Policy*.

It should be noted that there are still around one billion people who don't have access to electricity. Most of them live in Africa, the continent that has benefited the least from globalization and free markets. In 2016, 590 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa didn't have access to electricity, which represents 57 percent of the population.

The spectacular progress that has been made over the last decade suggests that the lack of access to electricity will be soon be a thing of the past across the globe. Of course, Venezuela is an exception, and a striking warning to the rest of the world. "What did socialists use before candles?" goes an old joke... "Electricity."

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