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From Fossil Fuels to Renewables: The Role of Electricity Storage*

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Abstract

Electricity storage represents a solution to curb emissions by enabling more use of intermittent renewable energy. Our goal is to empirically analyze the determinants of innovation in electricity storage and its role in fostering technological innovations in renewable and conventional electricity generation. Using a global firm-level data set of electricity patents from 1963 to 2011, we find that better electricity storage promotes innovation not only in renewable energy but also in conventional technologies. Specifically, our estimates show that an additional storage patent increases the probability to apply for patents in renewable energy and efficiencyimproving fossil fuel technologies two years from now by 1.09% and 0.65%, respectively. This implies that improved electricity storage technologies can boost the energy efficiency of conventional, fossil fuel-fired power plants as well as increase the use of renewable electricity. Thus, the ability of electricity storage to curb carbon emissions depends on: the competitiveness of renewable energy against conventional electricity generation, and conventional power generation mix as storage increases fossil-fuel efficiency and reduces ramping costs.

Keywords: Electricity storage; Innovation; Electricity; Directed technical change. JEL Classification Codes: O3, O4, O5, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5

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