Democratization and the development of mass media

Project outline

The research project, which is part of a larger one funded by the Italian Ministry of Education, studies the inter-relationships between mass media and politics using new data on 19th-century British newspaper markets. The project has two major goals. First, to test how media market structure affects political reporting and the spread of disinformation. Second, to understand the role of mass media in a fledgling democracy. To meet these goals, we will construct a new annual dataset of local newspapers in the United Kingdom between 1833 and 1914. Newspaper directories provide information on the number, type, cost, ownership, and political leaning of newspapers in each area, allowing us to identify media market structure - at this time, newspapers were the only form of mass media. We will investigate newspaper content using the British Library Newspaper Archive. The newspaper data will then be linked to a rich set of political and sociodemographic variables using existing datasets. These variables will include population, occupational structure, local and national election results, and the texts of speeches by Members of Parliament (MPs). We will then use this data to test how newspaper market structure affects reporting quality, partisanship, and the provision of disinformation; how media shape the response to democratic reform; and how democratic reform shaped newspaper markets.

Program of Activities:

The candidate's role will involve data collection, data management, data analysis, and literature search/review. In particular, they will assist in building new measures of newspaper characteristics and content using newspaper directories and archives, and also use archival materials to construct other local area measures. They will work to combine datasets together for research analysis, and then undertake preliminary analysis tasks (data exploration, data visualization, tabulation, etc). In the later stages of the project they will assist with regression analysis, text analysis, and produce outputs for research dissemination activities. Candidates will be expected to use STATA, Excel extensively, and may also be required to use R and Python. Pre-existing familiarity with these tools is preferable. The working language will be English, knowledge of Italian is not required.

Please contact Jonathan Chapman (jonathan.chapman@unibo.it) with any questions about the position.