Comment on media / networks session

SSHA 2019 in Chicago
Session 04: Ideas, Language, and Media
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(Views and findings are those of the author, not the Bureau)

Presenters:

• Gianluca Russo
• Tianyi Wang
• Elisabeth Perlman

Gianluca Russo on radio reach and child names, U.S. 1920s-1940

- Notable, measured changes in naming patterns as radio reaches more people
- Toward established "white" names and known baseball players; response stronger for blacks and immigrants
  - Huge immigration/Great Migration up to 1920
  - Name gendering is "standardized" this way
- Very helpful to draw from information about the technology of radio
- And industry: radio NETWORKS cause this effect
- Does data on individuals predict radio use? (e.g. cost)

Russo on radio and child names

- Multiple new data sets here — hard work!

- I'm curious about ground conductivity
  - Is it related to why people would choose to live in a place?
  - How does it help radio transmission?
- What happens in regressions after dropping the most urban observations?
  - How different is that from the IV result?
- Does the effect hold only for baseball players?

Tianyi Wang: Telegraph's arrival 1844-52 increased presidential election turnout

- Tightly clearly written; each chart communicated a lot
- Telegraph links people, stimulates interest/confidence/ conversation/participation in national election issues
- Convincing ; can build on this
- Effect is sometimes small; 100-300 new voters in a rural county of 7000 people
  - What were rates of turnout? Did they converge with telegraph?
- Robustness test of effect on other periodicals was good; shows the effect is news not e.g. literacy

Reflections on "effective distance"

- Re "effective distance" — the behavioral variable here is time, not distance, right?
  - Coast is served by steamships, so is effective distance really by water not by rail?
  - How fast were the ships?
  - How fast did New Orleans get news?
    - (Compared to 1841: Boston 3 days; Cleveland 5 days; St Louis 9 days)
  - Advantage of distance it's measurable and consistent over time.
  - Telegraphs were not instantaneous, or zero-distance, actually

- And: the main voting issue might have been slavery (basically)
- Do we know if polarization of political support by region increased in this period? The telegraph could have sped that up.

Wondered about media institutions and telegraph

- How did telegraph change the newspapers institutionally?
  - (Aside from the observed changes in their text)
  - How many reporters did they have in DC? Were reporters very distinctive from one another
  - Did this change with the telegraph?
  - What messages were sent within newspapers by telegraph — a full story or just a few sentences?
  - Did reporters get orders from editors by telegraph? Or were there wire services basically?

Perlman with Honsowetz and Wang on railroads, telegraph, and U.S. bank startups

- New bank entry could be affected by railroad and telegraph access
- Spinning off from Atack, Jaremski, and Rousseau (2014)
  Counties that had a bank were more likely to get a railroad

  New banks tended to appear within two years after the railroad came through

  - Can expand predictor set to include telegraph access

  - Note tendency for industrial and commercial institutions to snap together in a location; like multiple equilibria with commercialization in different places

  - Much efficiency in agglomeration

  - In causal terms, that can be confusing — each thing predicts all the others

Overall

- These works are impressive
- Deeply empirical use of many/big data sets and GIS
- Can identify smallish effects precisely
  - In ways not possible before such advanced methods
- Very convincing
- They illuminate issues of general historical interest