Social media utilization by Italian municipalities and their impact on local policy and political outcomes

Roberto Bonfatti (UNIPD)
Duccio Gamannossi degl'Innocenti (UNIPD)
Peng Ge (UNIPD)
Edoardo Grillo (UNIPD)
Orestis Troumpounis (UNIPD)

Bologna, November 27 2023

Project overview

- Collect data on social media (Facebook + Instagram) activity by all Italian municipalities (institutional pages) and main mayoral contestants since early 2010s.

- Two main types of data:
  - Post-level Crowdtangle data including post content and activity (likes and number of comments).
  - Original survey-data on capacity to engage in social media by Italian municipalities, and main features of their use.

- Main objectives:
  - Answer several political economy research questions.
  - Contribute a number of indicators on social media engagement by municipalities/local politicians to AMELIA.

Some possible research questions

- Do mayors highjack the municipalities' institutional pages for own political goals?

- Do local politicians keep campaign promises?

- How does the type of electoral rule ($>$ or $<$ than 15000 inhabitants) affect social media communication by local policitians?
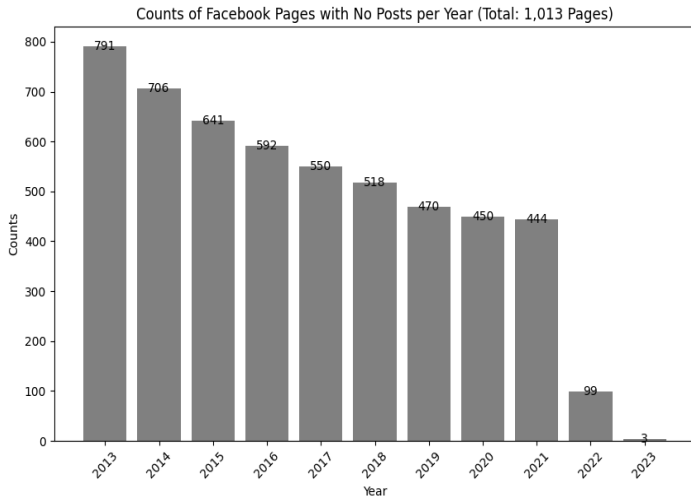
CONTRIBUTION TO AMELIA

- Indicators on:
  - Social media engagement by municipalities and mayoral contestants, over the last 10 years.
  - Content of municipalities' and politicians' social media activity, over the last 10 years.

- Indictors are based on original analysis of Crowdtangle data + original survey data produced by us.

PROGRESS SO FAR

- Successfully recruited two new colleagues at UNIPD:
  - Duccio Gammannossi degl'Innocenti (RTDA, started March 1 2023)
  - Peng Ge (2+1 year post-doc, started July 1 2023).

- Developed an AI-based code to automatically identify the Facebook pages of 8000+ Italian municipalities
  - Can be easily adapted to Instagram
  - Can be extended to identify politician?s accounts (up to 30000 pages!).

- For about 1000 largest municipalities, downloaded post data from Crowdtangle.

Progress so far

Counts of Facebook Pages with No Posts per Year (Total: 1,013 Pages)

PROGRESS SO FAR

Average Number of Posts per Quarter (Total Number of Posts / Number of Active Institutional Pages)

Next steps

- Download post data for remaining municipalities, start content analysis.

- In parallel, develop survey of municipalities about their social media activity (to be run in 2024).

- Launch data collection of mayoral contestants' Facebook pages.