

MAPPING THE MEDIA IN THE AMERICAS

Media and Democracy in the Americas

Today in the Western Hemisphere media play an increasingly important role in transmitting information that citizens in a democratic society require to make informed decisions. Citizens receive information about candidates and election logistics, are informed of public services and government policy, and learn about current events in their communities, countries and the world, all from the media.

Ultimately, the media serve a public function that is indispensable for democracy. While this poses challenges to developed democracies, it is particularly significant in countries where weak governance structures and limited resources make it difficult to support and protect a fair, balanced and diverse media sector.

In some cases, governments' inability to support media from the national budget or to adopt and enforce regulations governing media conduct leaves private money as the main source of media financing and the market as the regulator.

In other cases, partisan politics, electoral pressures and the pursuit of power can motivate government actors to make

questionable decisions that can potentially challenge the ability of the media to play their crucial role of informing citizens, providing accountability and fostering informed debate and discussion. Creating an environment that promotes and enables the media to fulfill the functions required in a democratic society is an ongoing process and one that is impossible without information and analysis about the media industry and its interaction with other social and political variables. Despite this need, however, there continues to be an absence of accurate information about the media in many countries throughout the Americas. Little is publicly known about the ownership structure of the media, the impact of media messaging on the vote, or the effect of media concentration and its potential threat to the diversity of ideas, freedom of expression and access to information.

The Mapping the Media Project

The Mapping the Media in the Americas project was launched in 2004 in an effort to foster transparency around the role and connection of media and democracy and provide basic information necessary to further investigate these important issues. The project set out to map the location, coverage and ownership

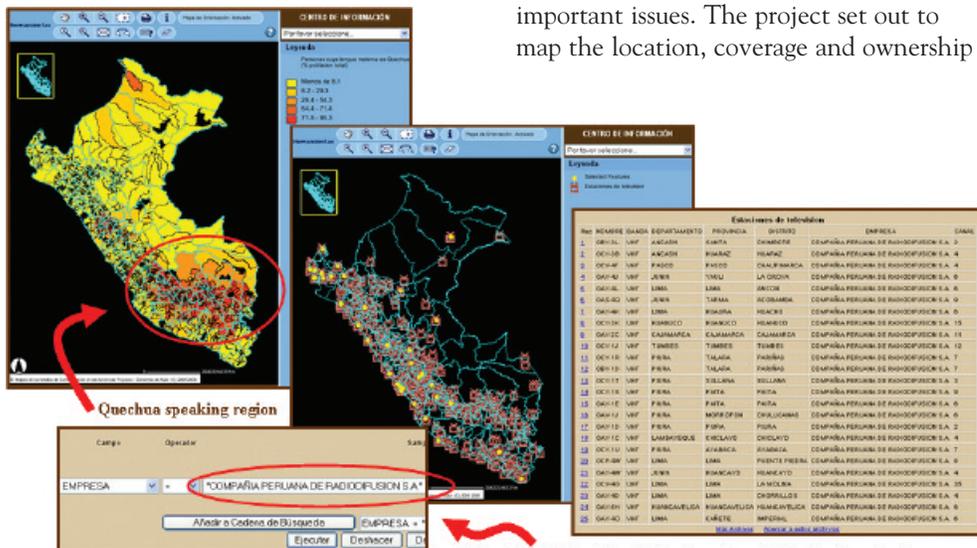
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structure of the media (television, radio, cable and print media) in 12 countries in the Western Hemisphere, along with key complementary information on election results, political finance and demographics. Since then, maps of Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay have been created and are now available at www.mediamap.info.

12 Interactive, Web-Based Maps

The Mapping the Media initiative uses Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and cutting-edge software to bring together previously unconnected, and often not public, databases of media, electoral and socio-demographic information. While electronic lists of the media exist in most countries, this is the first time that media broadcast towers and distribution centers in 12 countries have been located on maps especially designed for public use and available at a single website. These maps represent an important advance for government transparency and access to information in the Americas, providing a source of information required to undertake investigation into important issues related to media and its relationship with democratic politics.

Specifically, the maps illustrate where media outlets are located, provide indicators of coverage and ownership, and illustrate the demographic profile of the electoral constituencies they reach. This information helps citizens identify correlations between media distribution, wealth, literacy, language, electoral participation, and voting outcomes in the 12 mapped countries. Electoral, media and census data can be projected onto the same map, providing context and allowing users to visualize possible relationships and patterns within the datasets.



This national television station doesn't reach the Quechua Region

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A Tool for Change: Applications for Research and Policy

The maps feature a variety of tools and functions that can help support research and analysis. Once a data layer has been selected, a click on the map will identify visible features, providing detailed information and figures on newspaper circulation, media ownership, votes per district and amounts of money spent on campaign finance by political candidates, where available. Users can explore the maps by zooming in on certain areas for detail and panning the map to move quickly from one area to another. Features can also be identified by region using the

USER GUIDE AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Instructions for using the maps are available on the website at www.mediamap.info including a complete user guide. For technical assistance, contact mediamap@ucalgary.ca.

The maps are an evolving tool and easily can be enriched with new data. To help update the maps, contribute new datasets or documents, contact mediamap@focal.ca.

MAP FUNCTIONS

- Layer datasets to correlate and cross different variables
- Zoom in and out on a country's regions and cities
- Take screenshots of the maps and import them into other documents
- Conduct queries for refined searches, sorting and displaying results by variable
- Download media, electoral and demographic databases to Excel
- Access reports, analysis and links to laws and regulations pertaining to media, elections and political finance in each country, and view lists of media, journalists and other civil society organizations

selection tool. Datasets can be layered and crossed for an at-a-glance illustration of the connections between different aspects of media, politics and society. With the query function, users can perform refined searches and sort results.

Screenshots of the maps can be used for the production of publications, presentations and educational materials. Each country map also features a section with country reports, links to laws and regulations pertaining to media, elections and political finance, and lists of media, jour-

nalists and other civil society organizations.

The maps can be used by media professionals in their efforts to increase transparency and understanding around media as well as for gaining insight on distribution markets. The combination of geographical, statistical and qualitative information can help telecommunications experts assess the performance of national regulatory frameworks, compare with other countries' systems and inform policy development to ensure fairness in access to media sources. Likewise, academics and students can use the media maps to conduct studies of the impact of advertising on voting patterns, the effects of campaign finance laws and other themes. The studies can then inform policies and stakeholders.

Political parties can use the maps to help plan their campaign and outreach strategies. Knowing which media reach which voters, they can invest their scarce campaign dollars wisely and reduce unnecessary spending on the media. Nongovernmental organizations can use the maps to promote voter participation and target groups who face barriers to voting and areas where participation levels traditionally have been low. Using sociodemographic characteristics (literacy, language, etc.) and data on media coverage, the maps can help identify such groups and be used to support targeted electoral messaging during campaigns.

Project Partners



FOCAL is an independent, nongovernmental organization based in Ottawa, Canada, dedicated to deepening and strengthening Canada's relations in Latin America through policy discussion and analysis.

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The Latin American Research Center at the University of Calgary brings together researchers from diverse disciplines and faculties to collaborate on research relevant to the academic, business, government and global communities, including public policy research.

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The Instituto Prensa y Sociedad (IPYS), based in Lima, Peru, fosters debate around the role of the media, monitors press freedom and access to information in Latin America and supports investigative journalism.

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