

Censorship, industry structure, and creativity: evidence from the Catholic inquisition in Renaissance Venice

by Stefano Comino | Università di Udine

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We examine the effects of the book censorship implemented by the Catholic inquisition on printing outcomes in Renaissance Venice. The Venetian press experienced minimum censorship until 1547, when a sudden change in the balance of European power led to a new relationship between the Republic of Venice and the Papal State. We collect detailed information on indexes of prohibited books and publication activities by the main printers active in Venice during the 1500s. We use these data to construct treatment and comparison groups based on the specialization of each printer in transgressive publications before the inquisition. Differences-in-differences regressions show that censorship had a significant impact on publication levels and industry structure, with the firms more heavily targeted by the inquisition losing market shares to those less affected by censorship. These effects appear long lasting and associated to changes in survival and entry patterns. We also show that censorship led to a change in the direction of publishing, with printers more affected by the inquisition shifting away from vernacular literature and becoming more reluctant to publish new and contemporary authors. These findings support the idea that censorship may have dynamic effects on the structure, evolution, and creativity of industries.