



Department SEMINARS

"Understanding Opposition to
Immigration: News Media and
Emotions"

SIMONE QUERCIA

University of Verona

THURSDAY, 1st JUNE 2023
12:15 PM

Seminar Room Bruguier Pacini, DEM



A B S T R A C T

How does the media influence attitudes towards immigration? Using online survey experiments in Italy, we randomly expose participants to real news stories about crimes committed by immigrants. Relative to a control group exposed to a neutral news, we find that the crime news significantly increases opposition to immigration, notably in terms of support for more restrictive immigration policy. While posterior beliefs about immigrant criminality rates remain unaffected, participants self-report a strong emotional reaction to the news, especially an increase in fear.

Using mediation analysis, we show that the intensity of emotions is the main driver of the attitudinal effect of crime news. We further show that the exposure to news stories reporting more violent crimes (sexual assault versus petty theft) causes greater backlash against immigration. These results are consistent with a theoretical framework in which the emotional reaction to shocking news increases risk aversion, leading participants to overweight dangerous outcomes when forming their attitudes towards immigration. They also point to the important role of emotions in shaping the effects of the news coverage of immigration.

For information: pietro.battiston@unipi.it

