
Exposure to politicized media and prejudice against immigrants in Italy: Identifying its impact and psychological mediators

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Politics play a pivotal role in shaping the modern media. The political parallelism of the media differs from country to country and is known to be high in Italy. Therefore, an Italian sample of 244 females and 178 males (M age = 33.6, SD = 13.3) was gathered investigating the link between exposure to right- and left-wing oriented media and people's prejudice towards immigrants. As expected, results indicated that exposure to right-wing oriented media (both newspapers and newscasts) correlated positively with levels of prejudice, even when controlling for people's political orientation, their direct contact with immigrants, and the level of prejudice of their socializing agents. In a similar model, exposure to left-wing oriented newspapers correlated negatively with people's prejudice. Finally, a set of mediation models showed which psychological processes lie at the basis of these links: fear of crime, the endorsement of norms of non-discrimination and biased perceptions of the frequency with which immigrants commit crimes showed to mediate the relation between politicized media and prejudice.

Politics are a central defining element of modern media (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). No media today can be literally considered politically neutral. Independently, research (see Mutz & Goldman, 2010, for a review) has shown that the media play a pivotal role in forming and maintaining stereotypes and prejudice towards racial/ethnic minorities (e.g., Latinos and Blacks in the US and various immigrant groups in Europe). Merging these two lines of research, the present study investigates the specific link between exposure to left- and right-wing media and people's prejudice towards immigrants in Italy. While a lot of research has focused on the role of individual's political orientation on prejudice (see Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski & Sulloway, 2003,

for a review), no research to date has analyzed whether politicized media still influ-

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ence people's prejudice towards racial/ethnic minorities even when the political affiliation of its audience is controlled for. In this way, the current research wants to unravel the psychological variables through which politicized media exert their influence over and above the political orientation of its viewers.

1. The role of media exposure on prejudice

An abundant amount of research has indicated that the mass media influence prejudice (for a recent review, see Mutz & Goldman, 2010). Crime news in the US often over-represents members of ethnic minorities as lawbreakers, and under-represents them as victims of a crime (e.g., Dixon & Linz, 2000). Similarly, when the crime news stories of two local newspapers in Italy were analyzed, they were found to over-represent immigrants as offenders and under-represent them as victims by comparison with objective crime statistics (Di Nicola & Caneppele, 2004).

On the whole, these findings give the impression that television, newscasts, and newspapers make immigrant minorities conspicuous to the public opinion mainly associating them to the domain of violence, threat and illegality. It comes as no surprise then that several studies have demonstrated that media exposure has a direct negative influence on how members of minority groups are represented (e.g., Dixon, 2008; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Mastro, Lapinski, Kopacz & Behm-Morawitz, 2009; Ramasubramanian & Oliver, 2007). Dixon (2008), for example, showed that frequent exposure to network news increases the stereotypical representation of African Americans as poor and intimidating, and intensifies the endorsement of racist attitudes.

Still, only a few empirical efforts have looked at the specific influence of exposure to left- and right-wing oriented political media on people's prejudice. A notable exception stems from a study conducted by Lubbers, Scheepers and Vermeer (2000) in the Netherlands. Comparing Dutch people's exposure to a more conservative and a more liberal national newspaper and a well-read local newspaper, their results indicated that exposure to the more conservative newspaper significantly increased the perception of ethnic minorities as a threat. Still, they only compared exposure to a single newspaper of each kind (liberal vs. conservative) making it hard to disentangle whether the reported results were caused by the political orientation of the newspaper or the result of some unique characteristics of these newspapers.

Therefore, the present study will compare left- and right-wing newspapers and television news more systematically. In line with the results of Lubbers et al. (2000), we expect that exposure to right-wing media will have a stronger negative influence on people's prejudice towards immigrants. In the next paragraphs, we will explain why.

2. Mediators of the exposure to right-wing media on prejudice

Prejudice consists of affective (e.g., ingroup favoritism, intergroup emotions), sociocultural (e.g., norms, institutional laws) and cognitive (e.g., categorization, stereotyping) facets (Dovidio, Glick & Rudman, 2005). Here, we assume that the psychological processes that effect each of these three levels explained the expected relationship between exposure to right-wing media and prejudice to immigrants.

2.1. Fear of crime

In the first place, we will focus on an affective component, that is, fear of crime. All news media dedicate some space or time to crime news, but important differences exist. Researchers of the *European Observatory on Security* (Rapporto Osservatorio Europeo sulla Sicurezza, 2010) confronted the main Italian television news programs in the last semester of 2010. While more right-wing oriented news programs were responsible for 66.8% of the total amount of crime news items, news programs with a more left-wing orientation took only 12.7% for their account. Similar results were reported in other research (Morcellini, Binotto, Bruno & Lai, 2009) and they clearly reveal a difference in agenda setting (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 1997) for right- and left-wing oriented media, with the former dedicating more importance and centrality to crime news compared to the latter.

Given these disparities and following cultivation theory (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1986), it becomes likely to expect that people who are mainly exposed to right-wing oriented media will report more fear of crime compared to those who are mainly exposed to left-wing oriented media. To the extent that fear of crime is likely to increase perceptions of uncertainty and a general perception that one is living in a violent and dangerous place, we also expect that fear of crime will be positively related with the expression of prejudice towards immigrants. Subjective uncertainty (e.g., Hogg, 2000) and a general sense of threat (Greenberg, Solomon & Pyszczynski, 1997; Mirisola et al., in press; Vaes & Wicklund, 2002), even when they are not directly related to the outgroup at hand, have shown to increase prejudice to a variety of groups. Therefore, we will measure fear of crime, i.e. the likelihood of being a victim of criminal conduct (Vieno, Roccato & Russo, 2013), and expect it to mediate the effect of exposure to right-wing oriented media on prejudice against immigrants.

2.2. Judgmental biases: Overestimation of the role of immigrants in criminal episodes

A second mechanism expected to mediate the link between the media and prejudice against immigrants originates from the cognitive factors underlying the formation

of prejudice and stereotypes. According to the theory of illusory correlations (Hamilton & Gifford, 1976), when infrequent and distinctive events are paired together, perceivers tend to overestimate the co-occurrence of these events. Immigrants are a minority group and are frequently described in relation with violent crimes. In Italy, more than two thirds of the times (76.2%) immigrants get cited in the media, they are either mentioned as perpetrators or as victims of a crime (Morcellini et al., 2009). Again, disparities exist between right-wing and left-wing oriented media. An archival study that analyzed the main Italian television news programs in the first semester of 2008 (Morcellini et al., 2009), revealed that right-wing oriented media reported almost 1 ($M = .96$) immigrant-related criminal episode a day, while the more left-wing oriented news programs dedicated about half as much airtime to similar episodes ($M = .56$). It is interesting to underline, that both kinds of news programs dedicated about equal amounts of time to immigrant-related news that was not crime related ($M = .31$ and $M = .35$ for right- and left-wing oriented news programs respectively).

Similar disparities can be found in politicized newspapers. Binotto (2005) compared the local news sections (i.e., Rome) of the three most important (in terms of diffusion) newspapers covering the full political landscape. Again, the more right-wing oriented newspaper (*Il Giornale*) published clearly more articles on immigrant-related crime ($M = 5.41$ every 100 articles) compared to the left-wing (*La Repubblica*, $M = 2.78$ every 100 articles) and the politically neutral newspaper (*Corriere della Sera*, $M = 3.39$ every 100 articles).

Taken together, these data suggest that right-wing oriented media tend to emphasize the link between immigrants and crime likely increasing the extent to which its audience will overestimate the role of immigrants in criminal episodes. Therefore, we will measure people's crime estimates and the extent to which they think they are perpetrated by immigrants or Italians. We predict that the overestimation of crimes that is perpetrated by immigrants will mediate the effect of biased media exposure on prejudice against immigrants.

2.3. The norm of non-discrimination

A final mediator that can account for the link between media exposure and prejudice is the weakening of the norm of non-discrimination. Nowadays, most people tend to share a social norm that condemns discriminatory behavior and negative attitudes to minority groups (e.g. Falomir-Pichastor, Munoz-Rojas, Invernizzi & Mugny, 2004). Social norms regulate our behavior; in this case by putting pressure on individuals avoiding them to express their prejudicial attitudes (Crandall, Eshleman & O'Brien, 2002).

At the same time, we expect that the more the media expects a biased representation of immigrants and their involvement in criminal behavior, the more exposure

to these types of media will decrease the perceived value people attribute to the norm of non-discrimination. Indeed, creating a consistent link between the presence of immigrants in a certain country and their involvement in criminal endeavors, might justify the expression of prejudice given that they constitute a threat to the host society. In line with this idea, Falomir-Pichastor et al. (2004) showed that the activation of an anti-discriminatory norm only reduced discrimination against foreigners when they were seen as unthreatening. Based on this initial evidence, we predict that a weakening belief in the norm of non-discrimination mediates the positive relationship between exposure to right-wing oriented media and prejudice against immigrants.

3. Determinants of prejudice

To study the link between people's level of exposure to politicized media and their level of prejudice towards immigrants, it is important to control for individuals' political orientation. Moreover, three central determinants of prejudice that characterize the individual and his or her beliefs were controlled for allowing to underline the unique role of an external influence like the media on the expression of people's prejudice towards immigrants. In this way, the present study aimed to show that mass media exposure explains a unique portion of the variance in people's attitudes towards immigrants controlling for some of the most important and well-known determinants of prejudice.

Firstly, people's prejudice are formed and depend in part on their contact with significant others, such as partners, friends, and extended family. The level of prejudice of these socializing agents (Aboud, 2005; Sinclair, Dunn & Lowery, 2005) will directly influence ours. Intergroup contact with members of various minorities has shown to be another important determinant of prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) demonstrating that in general outgroup contact reduces prejudice. Finally, people's political ideology (Whitley, 1999) has shown to shape their prejudice suggesting that conservative and more right-wing oriented people are more strongly prejudiced against minority outgroup members than liberal and more left-wing oriented voters.

4. The present research

In their seminal work, Hallin and Mancini (2004) compared media systems in 18 Western countries providing a systematic and applicable analysis of the relationship between media and politics in the Western world. Media and politics are most clearly intertwined in the Mediterranean model that can be found in countries such as Greece, Spain, Portugal, France and Italy. In these countries, the media market

has a low circulation of newspapers that mostly take a clear political stance. Political parallelism tends to be high and journalism is oriented towards political commentary rather than being purely information-oriented. The state in these countries strongly intervenes and subsidizes both the printed and visual media directly allowing political parties to use the media to exert their influence.

Given its specific politicized media landscape, the current study was conducted in Italy. The political logic has always played a primary role in the organization and the content of the Italian media (Legnante, 2006; Mancini, 2000). Such a background will allow us to distinguish both visual and printed media outlets according to their political orientation and determine how they are linked with people's prejudice towards immigrants in Italy. Specifically, newspapers were differentiated on the basis of a classification that was proposed by Vergani (2009) at the time the research was conducted. This classification is based on the amount of funding the various newspapers receive from right- or left-wing political organizations, and on the declared political orientation of their chief editor. As a result, *Il Giornale*, *Il Tempo*, *La Padania*, and *Libero* among others were considered right-wing newspapers, while *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, *Il Manifesto*, *L'Unità*, and *La Repubblica* were classified as left-wing newspapers. For a full list, we refer to the blog post of Vergani (2009) that can be found online.

The main Italian newscasts were classified using a different strategy. The main national television networks in Italy are either public (*RAI: TG1, TG2, TG3*) or private (*Mediaset and LA7*). *Mediaset*, that broadcasts three big networks (*Rete4, Canale5 and Italia1*), is in the hands of the Berlusconi family. Here, the link between politics and media is very direct given that Berlusconi is the leader of the main center right party and was the Italian prime minister during the time we conducted the present study. The political orientation of the other television newscasts was derived combining the input from a study that analyzed the viewer's political orientation during the elections of 2008 (Itanes, 2008) and the political orientation of the editors of the newscasts at the time of our research. On the basis of this analysis, all the news programs of Mediaset (*TG4, TG5, and StudioAperto*) and the *TG1* were counted as right-wing oriented newscasts, instead *TG3* and *TGLA7* were counted as left-wing oriented newscasts. The data for *TG2* were ambiguous. Therefore, we refrained from assigning a political label to this newscast and did not analyze exposure to *TG2* in the current study.

5. Method

5.1. Participants

An on-line questionnaire was conducted using SurveyMonkey software and was answered by 593 respondents. Participants who answered all the questions (75%),

were more than 18 years old (99.3%), and were born (98.3%) and still living in Italy (98.5%), were selected for further analyses. The resulting sample consisted of 419 participants, 242 females and 177 males, with ages ranging from 19 to 83 years old ($M = 33.58$, $SD = 13.26$); 82% lived in the north of Italy and the remaining 18% lived in the south of the country. Only 2.6% had the lowest level of formal education (primary school), 36.3% had finished their secondary education, 52.3% had a university degree, and 8.8% received a postgraduate education. The whole sample's political orientation was close to the mid-point ($M = 7.24$, $SD = 4.02$ on a scale ranging from 1 = «*extreme left wing*» to 16 = «*extreme right wing*»).

5.2. Procedure

The survey was accessible online from the 15 October 2009 and remained accessible for a whole year. It was promoted by means of a specially created website, an account on Facebook, advertisements in blogs, discussion forums, a university institutional website, public associations (e.g., the Elderly Association), and businesses (e.g., a bank).

At the beginning of the survey, participants were asked to provide demographic information (e.g., age, gender, nationality, place of origin (North vs. Center vs. South of Italy) and mother tongue), while their political orientation was only requested at the very end of the questionnaire. All the other measures were presented in random order across participants.

5.3. Measures

Media exposure. For both newspapers and newscasts, the frequency of exposure was assessed separately on a 7-point scale (from 1 = *never* to 7 = *several times a day*). Participants also had to indicate which newspapers they read, or which television newscasts they watched, e.g. «In the list below, tick the newspapers (newscasts) you prefer to read (watch) (*maximum 3*)». Then, for each of the media sources (right-wing newspapers and newscasts, left-wing newspapers and newscasts, and neutral newspapers), exposure indices were calculated from the product of the frequency of exposure multiplied by the specific type of media involved.

Contact. Consistently with previous research (Voci & Hewstone, 2003), we asked participants to report both the quantity and the quality of their contact with immigrants. Specifically, participants indicated (on a scale ranging from 0 = *none* to 3 = *more than five*) how many social relationships they had with immigrants as friends, colleagues, acquaintances, romantic relationships, and neighbors, $\alpha = .71$, 95% CI [.65, .75]. On three items, they also judged to what extent their contact with immigrants in general has been pleasurable, positive, and negative (reverse scored)

on a scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *totally*, $\alpha = .87$, 95% CI [.83, .90]. A *contact index* was obtained multiplying the sum of the quantitative measure with the mean of the qualitative measure, so that higher values indicated greater amounts of positive contact with immigrants.

Prejudice among socializing agents. On a 7-point scale (1 = *none at all* to 7 = *very strong*) participants reported the level of prejudice of significant others (i.e. partner, close friends, mother, father, and close relatives) towards immigrants, $\alpha = .85$, 95% CI [.82, .87]. We also asked participants to judge the quality of each of these relationships on a scale ranging from 1 = *completely negative* to 7 = *completely positive*, $\alpha = .75$, 95% CI [.69, .80]. A prejudice index of participants' *socializing agents* was obtained by taking the mean of the products between the quality of each close relationship and the corresponding level of prejudice. Higher values on this index indicated that participants had good, intimate relationships with people who were prejudiced.

Norm of non-discrimination. We asked participants to what extent they agreed with the existence of a social norm that condemns discriminatory actions or speech by scoring two statements («People who speak, write or do anything offensive to immigrants should be legally condemned» and «It is important to support people in denouncing all prejudicial attitudes to immigrants voiced by newspapers, radio and television networks») on a scale ranging from 1 = *disagree completely* to 7 = *agree completely*, $\alpha = .87$, 95% CI [.84, .89].

Fear of crime. In line with Jackson's work (2004), fear of crime was measured considering participants' crime-related worries, their perceived risk of being a crime victim, and their perception of control over such an event. This last measure was unrelated to the former two and was therefore not further analyzed. The worry subscale measured respondents' frequency with which they had worried about becoming a victim of any of six major crimes during the previous month (1 = *never* to 7 = *several times a day*), $\alpha = .85$, 95% CI [.82, .88]. The perceived probability subscale indicated how likely participants felt that they could become a victim of each of these six crimes during the next 12 months (1 = *definitely not going to happen/0%* to 20 = *certain to happen/100%*), $\alpha = .91$, 95% CI [.90, .93]. Because the two subscales correlated closely ($r = .62$), the *fear of crime* index averaged both subscales.

Crime estimates. Participants were asked to indicate the percentage of Italians and immigrants that committed different types of crime. These judgments were interdependent because the sum of the Italian and immigrant criminals had to be 100. The estimates were provided for seven major crimes (e.g., robbery, harassment, verbal abuse, homicide). An index of the *crime estimates* was calculated by averaging the percentage of immigrants that were believed to commit the different types of crime, $\alpha = .93$, 95% CI [.91, .94].

Prejudice. The level of prejudice against immigrants was measured using the Italian version (Manganelli & Volpato, 2001) of the Subtle and Blatant Prejudice Scale (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). The subtle ($\alpha = .85$, 95% CI [.82, .87]) and

blatant ($\alpha = .87$, 95% CI [.84, .88]) subscales correlated closely ($r = .83$), and were therefore averaged in a single *prejudice* index.

5.4. Plan of analyses

The patterns of the relationships identified in the different proposed models were examined using path analysis in the R program (R Development Core Team, 2011), using the «LAVAAN» package (Rosseel, 2011) and a single observed score for each construct tested in the models. Path coefficients were estimated using the maximum likelihood method.

To evaluate the model's goodness of fit, we considered the R^2 of each endogenous variable, the Total R^2 (i.e., Total Coefficient of Determination, TCD) that measures the joint effect of the model variables on the endogenous variables, (Bollen, 1989; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996), the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC, Akaike, 1974), the AIC difference between models (ΔAIC) and relative likelihood (l). In order to determine whether the media had an independent effect on prejudice over and above other well-known causes, the ΔAIC were calculated considering the Model 2 (including the demographic and other causes) as the baseline model (see Table 2). Otherwise, in the mediation models, the ΔAIC were compared with the model including the media of interest without the mediators (Models 3a-3e). Finally, we computed the relative likelihood for each model (as suggested by Burnham, Anderson & Huyvaert, 2011):

$$l = \exp(\Delta AIC/2)$$

This index of relative likelihood provides a formal measure of the strength of evidence of each of the tested models allowing us to select the best model that is supported by the data. Specifically, this index allows formulating evidentiary statements such as, model 3d is 33 times better supported by our data than model 2 (see Table 2).

6. Results

6.1. Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviations, correlations, and range) of all the measured variables are shown in Table 1. Exposure to all media sources (apart from neutral newspapers) showed small to moderate correlations with prejudice against immigrants. On the one hand, prejudice correlated negatively with participants' exposure to left-wing newspapers and newscasts. On the other hand, participants' levels of prejudice against immigrants was positively linked with their exposure to right-wing newspapers and newscasts.

TABLE 1. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations (and N) between all the variables studied

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Left-wing newspapers	-	-.20 (419)	-.06 (419)	-.40 (419)	.34 (419)	.26 (419)	-.24 (419)	-.48 (419)	.27 (419)	-.20 (419)	-.34 (419)	-.45 (419)
2. Right-wing newspapers		-	.10 (419)	.21 (419)	-.13 (419)	-.14 (419)	.21 (419)	.34 (419)	-.22 (419)	.25 (419)	.22 (419)	.35 (419)
3. Neutral newspapers			-	.13 (419)	.02 (419)	.09 (419)	-.05 (419)	.14 (419)	-.07 (419)	-.04 (419)	.04 (419)	.04 (419)
4. Right-wing newscasts				-	-.39 (419)	-.12 (419)	.25 (419)	.40 (419)	-.11 (419)	.25 (419)	.35 (419)	.38 (419)
5. Left-wing newscasts					-	.07 (419)	-.26 (419)	-.36 (419)	.13 (419)	-.09 (419)	-.20 (419)	-.27 (419)
6. Contact						-	-.14 (419)	-.26 (419)	.19 (419)	-.10 (419)	-.18 (419)	-.38 (419)
7. Prej. Socializing agents							-	.34 (419)	-.24 (419)	.17 (419)	.31 (419)	.44 (419)
8. Political orientation								-	-.38 (419)	.24 (419)	.48 (419)	.70 (419)
9. Norm of non-discrimination									-	-.25 (419)	-.38 (419)	-.52 (419)
10. Fear of crime										-	.30 (419)	.35 (419)
11. Crime estimates											-	.62 (419)
12. Prejudice												-
<i>M</i>	3.66	.93	3.61	4.57	3.47	20.12	18.33	7.24	5.28	9.67	45.54	3.27
<i>SD</i>	4.34	2.48	4.02	4.74	4.04	18.69	8.08	4.02	1.50	3.14	17.15	1.08
<i>Range</i>	(0-21)	(0-21)	(0-21)	(0-21)	(0-14)	(0-105)	(1-49)	(1-16)	(1-7)	(1-13.5)	(1-100)	(1-7)

TABLE 2. Model comparison by R^2 , $adj R^2$, Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), Delta-AIC (calculated in relations to the second model), and the relative likelihood for each model (l)

	n	R^2	$adj R^2$	df	AIC	ΔAIC	l
Model 0: Null model	419	0	0	2	1254.66	-355.14	
Model 1: Gender, Age, Education, Place of Origin	419	0.08	0.07	7	1228.00	-329.47	
Model 2: Model 1 + Political or. + Contact with Imm. + Prej. Soc. Ag.	419	0.59	0.58	10	899.52	0	1
Model 3-a: Model 2 + Right-wing newspapers	419	0.59	0.58	11	895.73	3.79	6.67
Model 3-b: Model 2 + Left-wing newspapers	419	0.59	0.58	11	896.72	2.80	4.07
Model 3-c: Model 2 + Neutral newspapers	419	0.59	0.58	11	901.44	-1.92	0.38
Model 3-d: Model 2 + Right-wing newscasts	419	0.60	0.59	11	892.53	6.99	33.03
Model 3-e: Model 2 + Left-wing newscasts	419	0.59	0.58	11	901.42	-1.90	0.39

6.2. The effect of media exposure on prejudice after adjusting for direct contact and the prejudice of socializing agents

A series of path analyses assessed whether participants' exposure to different kinds of media correlated with their prejudice against immigrants irrespective of the well-known effects of their direct contact with immigrants, their political orientation, and the level of prejudice of their socializing agents. All reported parameters in all models were standardized. In Model 1, demographic variables were entered to account for the individual differences in participants' levels of prejudice relating to: participants' gender ($b = -.009, p = .782$), place of origin ($b_{north-center} = -.012, p = .705$; $b_{north-south} = -.084, p = .009$), level of formal education ($b = -.098, p = .003$), and age ($b = .022, p = .510$). In Model 2 (see Table 2 for the summary of the improvement of the models), political orientation ($b = .534, p < .001$), participant's direct contact with immigrants ($b = -.209, p < .001$) and the level of prejudice of socializing agents ($b = .212, p < .001$) proved to be significant predictors of participants' prejudice against immigrants.

In the third model, each of the previously presented media indices were added to the regression model (Model 3-a to 3-e). A significant positive relation between prejudice ($b = .082, p = .016$) and exposure to right-wing newspapers and right-wing newscasts ($b = .104, p = .003$) emerged, whereas exposure to left-wing newspapers showed a negative relation with prejudice ($b = -.083, p = .028$), accounting both for a significant increment of the goodness of fit of the model (see Table 2, Model 3-a, Model 3-d, and Model 3-b respectively). Adding exposure to neutral newspapers and left-wing newscasts (see Table 2, Model 3-c and 3-e respectively) to the equation did not ameliorate the model, nor was this variable significantly linked to prejudice.

According to these results, we proceeded by testing the theoretical mediational models for the following predictors: right-wing newspapers, left-wing newspapers, and right-wing newscasts.

Testing the mediational model for exposure to right-wing newspapers. Figure 1a shows the model tested with the estimated parameters (non-significant paths are represented with a broken line). The control variables were added to the model and their role in predicting people's prejudice was controlled for. The squared multiple correlations (R^2) for each of the endogenous variables indicate that the model accounts for a significant portion of the variance in the study variables, i.e. 4.7% of the variance in the belief in the norm of non-discrimination, 6.4% in fear of crime, 4.7% in the crime estimates, and 61.0% in the level of prejudice. The TCD was 0.56 ($\Delta AIC = 104.33$).

In the tested model, the direct effect of right-wing newspapers on participants' prejudice was not significant, while the indirect effect (through all the mediators) was. Right-wing newspapers, therefore, indirectly increased participants' prejudice through its effect on fear of crime ($b = .034, p = .001$), immigrant-related crime es-

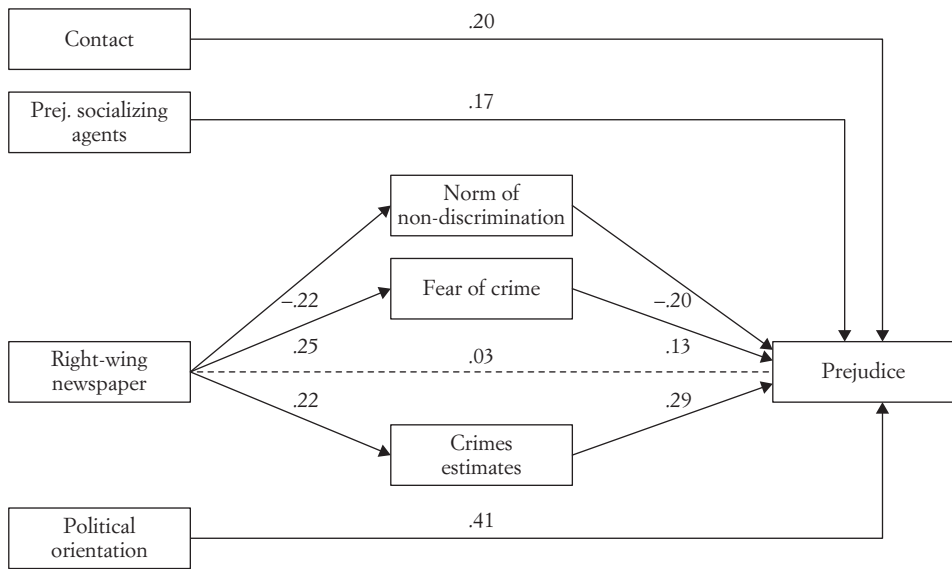


FIG. 1A. *Exposure to right-wing newspapers.*

timates ($b = .063, p < .001$), and belief in the norm of non-discrimination ($b = .043, p < .001$).

Testing the mediational model for exposure to left-wing newspapers. Figure 1b shows the model tested with the estimated parameters. The squared multiple correlations for the endogenous variables indicate that the model accounts for a significant portion of the variance in the study variables, i.e. 7.1% of the variance in the belief in the norm of non-discrimination, 4.0% in fear of crime, 11.8% in the crime estimates, and 63.1% in the level of prejudice. The TCD was 0.59 ($\Delta AIC = 106.60$).

As for right-wing newspapers, the effect of left-wing newspapers was completely mediated through its effect on fear of crime ($b = -.027, p = .002$), immigrant-related crime estimates ($b = -.096, p < .001$), and belief in the norm of non-discrimination ($b = -.052, p < .001$).

Testing the mediational model for exposure to right-wing newscasts. Figure 1c shows the model tested with the estimated parameters. The squared multiple correlations for the endogenous variables indicate that the model accounts for a significant portion of the variance in the study variables, i.e. 1.1% of the variance in the belief in the norm of non-discrimination, 6.4% in fear of crime, 11.9% in the crime estimates, and 61.7% in the level of prejudice. The TCD was 0.58 ($\Delta AIC = 103.82$).

As for the preceding models, the effect of right-wing newscasts resulted to be completely mediated through its effect on fear of crime ($b = .033, p = .001$), immigrant-related crime estimates ($b = .095, p < .001$), and belief in the norm of non-discrimination ($b = .022, p = .037$).

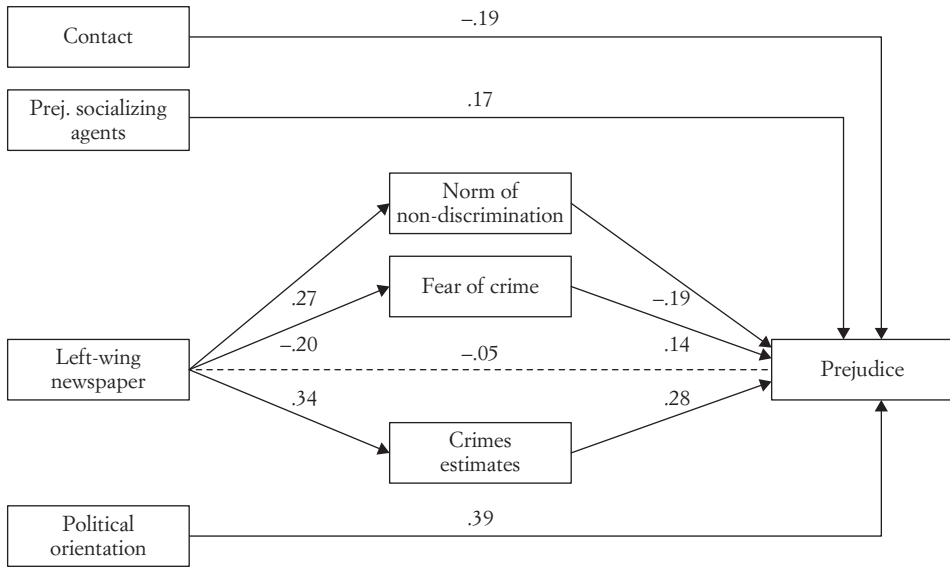


FIG. 1B. *Exposure to left-wing newspapers.*

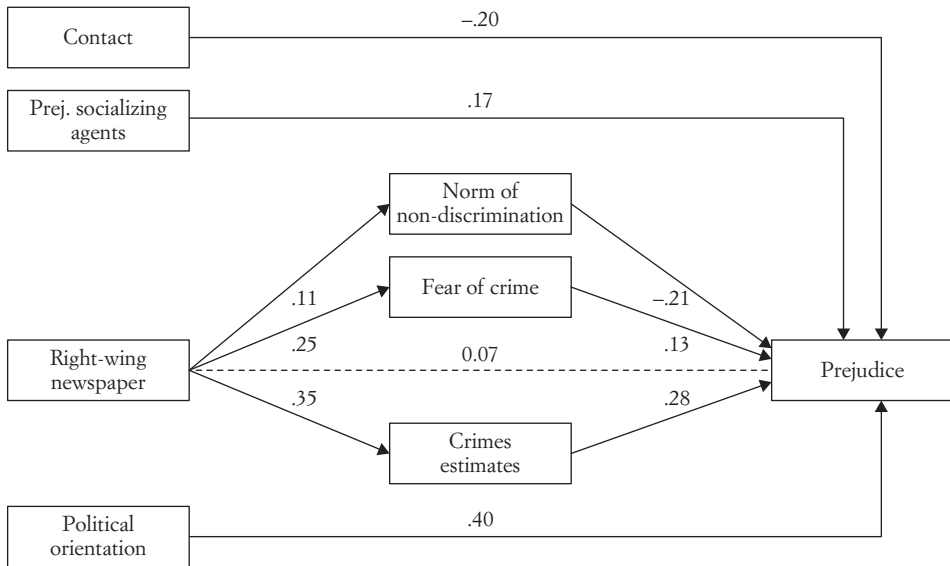


FIG. 1C. *Exposure to right-wing newscasts.*

FIG. 1. *Standardized parameters estimated in the model to test the direct and indirect effects of the various media sources on prejudice (statistically non-significant paths are shown with a broken line).*

7. Discussion

While an abundant amount of research has analyzed the effect on prejudice of people's political ideology (e.g., Jost et al., 2003), on the one hand, and media exposure (e.g., Mutz & Goldman, 2010), on the other hand, hardly any research investigated the link between exposure to politicized media and prejudice towards racial/ethnic minorities when the political ideology of its audience is controlled for. Therefore, the present research investigated the specific link between exposure to left- and right-wing media and people's prejudice towards immigrants in Italy.

As expected, our results indicated that exposure to right-wing media (both newspapers and newscasts) was related to an increase of negative prejudice towards immigrants. This relation showed to be significant when controlling for people's political orientation, the level of prejudice of their socializing agents and their direct contact with immigrants. To our knowledge, no such analysis has been reported in the literature before, allowing us to demonstrate that certain types of media not only explain a significant amount of variance in people's prejudice towards immigrants, they do so irrespective of some of the most important known determinants of intergroup attitudes.

Some specific links between these variables are worth highlighting. While direct contact with immigrants is positively related with people's prejudice, exposure to right-wing media that likely provides a certain type of indirect contact with these populations shows a negative link with people's intergroup attitudes. The media represent a form of parasocial contact (Giles, 2002; Horton & Wohl, 1956) that when providing a negative image of racial/ethnic minorities exacerbates prejudice towards them.

People's exposure to left-wing oriented media showed a mixed pattern of results. Whereas reading left-wing newspapers related negatively with people's prejudicial attitudes towards immigrants, exposure to left-wing newscasts did not show any significant effects. In a similar vein, exposure to neutral newspapers did not show any significant relation with prejudice towards immigrants. These results suggest that exposure to certain types of media might have a positive effect on intergroup relations reducing people's prejudice. Given that in all these analyses people's political orientation was controlled for, these data seem to suggest that there is something in the way these newspapers portray immigrants that shifts people's prejudice in one way or the other direction. A closer look at the mediation models showed to be informative in this regard.

Focusing on the affective, socio-cultural and cognitive aspects of prejudice, we tested whether people's fear of crime, their belief in the norm of non-discrimination, and their estimates of immigrants' involvement in crimes mediated the relationship between media exposure and prejudice. Overall, our data confirmed the importance of these processes. Especially when looking at the influence of right-wing media, our results confirmed that the negative relation of media exposure on prejudice was fully

mediated by these psychological processes. Not only were all the indirect, mediational paths significant, also the direct link between exposure to right-wing oriented media and prejudice disappeared (see Figure 1a and 1c). As such, our data propose that right-wing oriented media affect prejudice towards immigrants by increasing people's fear of being victim of a crime, undermining their belief in the norm of non-discrimination, and amplifying their estimates of how many immigrants commit crimes. The choice of news items can indirectly transmit social messages and opinions, as amply demonstrated by research on agenda setting (e.g. McCombs et al., 1997). Right-wing oriented media give more importance to crime news in general and to ethnic crimes in particular (Binotto, 2005; Morcellini et al., 2009; Rapporto Osservatorio Europeo sulla Sicurezza [*Report of the European Observatory on Security*], 2010), creating the impression that people live in a dangerous world, with a lot of foreign criminals justifying the expression of prejudice towards immigrants in general.

Exposure to left-wing newspapers coincides with the exact opposite of the pattern of results seen for exposure to right-wing newspapers. Also here, the mediators fully accounted for the direct effect of exposure to left-wing newspapers on people's levels of prejudice. These data give some hope that media influences can be positive as well. It is important to underline, however, that these positive effects did not generalize to left-wing newscasts possibly because slower media, like newspapers, can dedicate more time and space to provide background information about immigration, emphasizing their economic, educational and cultural value.

7.1. Limits and future research

Our present study clearly shows that the link between media exposure and prejudice against immigrants changes as a function of the political orientation of the media. However, the current study only presents cross-sectional data preventing us from making any causal inferences on the role of media exposure in determining prejudice. Therefore, we cannot exclude that the reported relations between politicized media and prejudice are caused by people's tendency to expose themselves to those media sources that confirm their ideas and beliefs. In addition, the present findings cannot provide a definitive answer on the specific content and media characteristics that cause the above-reported divergent effects of exposure to politicized media on prejudice. Experimental research is needed to overcome these limitations, directly manipulating characteristics of the media such as the amount of space or time dedicated to reporting crimes in general or ethnic-related crime in particular.

It is important to underline that the present data have been collected in a specific geographic region (Italy) and time frame (2009-2010) and that any generalizations to other context should be done with care. Italy is a Mediterranean country that is marked by a polarized pluralist media model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) in which political parallelism tends to be high. Still, political divides change over time

meaning that the political categories of newspapers and newscasts that are proposed in the current paper need to be updated over time. At the same time, journalism is never completely politically neutral and media outlets in other countries that pertain to a more liberal media model are politicized as well (e.g., the conservative *Fox News* in the US, or the more progressive *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in Germany). These data might be relevant in these contexts as well, showing that exposure to more conservative or right-wing oriented media is linked with heightened prejudice towards racial/ethnic minorities.

The current findings suggest that the negative impact of the media on people's prejudice is mostly the responsibility of exposure to right-wing oriented media. One of the reasons that might lie at the basis of this relation is that right-wing media portray immigrants often relating them with criminal behavior. Future research might therefore look more carefully to the differences with which media of different political backgrounds report about immigration analyzing the language they use, the emphasis they put and the imagery they convey. In this respect, the current data contribute to the debate on the roles and responsibilities of the media in creating and maintaining biased perceptions of racial/ethnic minorities.

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Exposure to politicized media and prejudice against immigrants in Italy: Identifying its impact and psychological mediators

Politics play a pivotal role in shaping the modern media. The political parallelism of the media differs from country to country and is known to be high in Italy. Therefore, an Italian sample of 244 females and 178 males ($M\ age = 33.6, SD = 13.3$) was gathered investigating the link between exposure to right- and left-wing oriented media and people's prejudice towards immigrants. As expected, results indicated that exposure to right-wing oriented media (both newspapers and newscasts) correlated positively with levels of prejudice, even when controlling for people's political orientation, their direct contact with immigrants, and the level of prejudice of their socializing agents. In a similar model, exposure to left-wing oriented newspapers correlated negatively with people's prejudice. Finally, a set of mediation models showed which psychological processes lie at the basis of these links: fear of crime, the endorsement of norms of non-discrimination and biased perceptions of the frequency with which immigrants commit crimes showed to mediate the relation between politicized media and prejudice.

Keywords: prejudice, media exposure, politicized media, immigrants, fear of crime.

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