The Role of Personal Experiences and Media Narratives on Preferences and Beliefs: Evidence from a Longitudinal Survey

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Do large events bring us together or drive us apart? Does media consumption affect this process? What role does factual information play?

**Data**

- **Survey data (panel):**
  - 7 waves between April and October 2020
  - 1,440 U.S. citizens from the AmeriSpeak panel (same as the GSS one)
- **Questions:**
  - Policy preferences and voting intentions
  - News consumption: preferred news sources and quantity
  - Institutional trust (in line with the GSS questions, on a 5-point likert scale)
  - Policy preferences (in line with GSS questions, on a 4-point likert scale)
  - Covid-19 related temporary policy preferences (on a 5-point likert scale)
  - Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on employment status, income and health (own, family and friends)
- **Data on Covid-19 cases and deaths at the county level (NY times)**
- **Weekly percentage variations in consumer expenditures with respect to the first week of January 2020, adjusted seasonally ( Opportunlty Insights)**
- **Media slant for news sources ( Allsides.com)**

**Motivation I: Shocks vs Media- Policy preferences and institutional trust**

\[ Y_{ic} = \alpha + N_i \beta + X_i \beta + S_i \theta_1 + Z_i \theta_2 + Y_i \gamma + \epsilon_{ic} \]

**Conclusions**

- Large-scale crises such as COVID-19 can induce changes in policy preferences, trust in institutions, and beliefs.
- Consuming partisan media has a comparatively stronger effect than direct or indirect negative experience with the crisis.
- Political polarization on policy preferences and institutional trust can be explained by a gap in the perception of the gravity of the crisis, driven primarily by those consuming predominantly partisan news.
- Exposing respondents to the same source of information reduced this gap but didn’t alter the judgment on how public authorities handled the crisis.

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