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Thou shalt not fear:

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Abstract

Does prosocial television reduce safety concerns? Using daily municipal-level data before and after broadcasts of the Polish crime drama *Ojciec Mateusz* (Father Matthew), we exploit distance from Sandomierz, the town where the show is set, as a source of variation in the psychological salience of the broadcast. Reported safety concerns decline near Sandomierz the day after a broadcast, with the effect fading with distance. The effect is driven by low-violence episodes and police-substantiated reports, consistent with the show's prosocial content improving actual safety.

JEL Classification: K42, L82

Keywords: Media, Prosocial Television, Safety Concerns

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1 Introduction

Does media shape safety concerns? The literature documents that exposure to news coverage of crime can inflate fear (Mastrorocco and Minale, 2018; Velásquez *et al.*, 2020) and alter criminal-justice sentencing (Ash and Poyker, 2024), while a growing body of work examines how entertainment television influences actual crime rates (Chiou and Lopez, 2010; Friehe *et al.*, 2018; Lindo *et al.*, 2022). Yet whether prosocial media, broadly defined as content that portrays cooperative, altruistic, or community-oriented behavior, can reduce safety concerns remains an open question.

In this letter, we examine whether a prosocial crime drama can lower safety concerns in regions closer to the city where it is set. We study *Ojciec Mateusz* (Father Matthew), a long-running crime drama on Polish public television in which a Catholic priest solves crimes through community trust and moral persuasion. The show is set in Sandomierz, a small city in southeastern Poland, which is strongly associated with the show. We combine two sources of variation. First, we define the time of treatment as the day after each new episode airs. Second, we exploit the distance from each municipality to Sandomierz as a measure of the show’s psychological salience. We validate this proxy with Google Trends data, which shows that search interest related to *Ojciec Mateusz* declines with distance from the town. We estimate Poisson pseudo-maximum-likelihood regressions on a municipality-by-day panel of over 4.5 million observations covering all 99 episodes that premiered between 2020 and 2023.

The results show that reported safety concerns decline near Sandomierz on the day after a new episode airs, with the magnitude fading with distance. At 50 km from Sandomierz, total reports fall by about 3 percent relative to the median-distance municipality (256 km from Sandomierz). The decline is concentrated after low-violence episodes with a reduction of about 6 percent. High-violence episodes produce no comparable decline. Furthermore, the decline is concentrated in police-substantiated reports rather than in unconfirmed or prank submissions. The findings are consistent with improved public safety resulting from behavioral changes induced by moral priming.

This paper contributes to different strands of the literature. We add to research on media and crime (Chiou and Lopez, 2010; Dahl and DellaVigna, 2009; Lindo *et al.*, 2022; Ash and Poyker, 2024; Mastrorocco and Ornaghi, 2025; Ang, 2023) and the broader literature on the social and economic impact of entertainment television (La Ferrara *et al.*, 2012; Jensen and Oster, 2009; Kearney and Levine, 2015; Durante *et al.*, 2019; Dione *et al.*, 2026; Nocito *et al.*, 2023; Yang *et al.*, 2025). We also contribute to a growing body of work on perception of crime and safety, which has documented its relationship with housing markets (Buonanno *et al.*, 2013), news content (Mastrorocco and Minale, 2018; Velásquez *et al.*, 2020), police proximity (Montolio and Planells-Struse, 2015), and immigration (Nunziata, 2015; Ajzenman *et al.*, 2023). Relative to that work, our outcome is an administrative measure of citizen reporting of safety concerns rather than a survey of perceived safety. To our knowledge, we provide the first evidence that entertainment television can shape safety concerns, showing that a prosocial crime drama can lower them in the region where it is filmed.

2 Background, data, and empirical framework

Ojciec Mateusz has aired on TVP1, Poland’s main public television channel, since 2008. In 2022, *Ojciec Mateusz* had an average viewership of 2.12 million viewers, making it one of the most-watched series on Polish public television (Statista, 2024). During our sample period 2020-2023, 99 new episodes from seasons 23 through 30 were broadcast, premiering on Thursday or Friday evenings at approximately 8:45 pm. For each municipality, we compute the geodesic distance from its geographic centroid to Sandomierz, setting a floor of 1 km to permit logarithmic transformation. Figure 1 shows the resulting spatial distribution. We use distance from Sandomierz as a proxy for the psychological salience of the show.¹ Figure A1 in the Online Appendix provides supporting evidence from Google Trends. Searches related to *Ojciec Mateusz* are more frequent in places closer to Sandomierz, consistent with the town serving as a geographic focal point for viewers’

¹A similar logic underlies Yang *et al.* (2025), who show that the effects of *Ramayan*, an Indian TV series, are stronger in localities closer to pilgrimage sites associated with the narrative.

identification with the show. This pattern supports our use of distance to Sandomierz as a proxy for psychological salience.

The central narrative feature of the show is its protagonist, a Catholic priest who solves crimes through community trust and moral persuasion rather than violence. Yet some episodes depict violent crimes, including murders and shootings. To explore heterogeneity in episode content, we construct a violence intensity measure for each episode using plot summaries from Polish Wikipedia. Specifically, we compute violence density as the share of violence-related words in each summary, ensuring that longer summaries are not mechanically scored higher. We then standardize this measure by subtracting the mean and dividing by the standard deviation, so that each episode’s score reflects how far its violence content deviates from the average episode. Episodes scoring above the median are classified as high-violence.

To measure safety concerns, we use daily municipality-level safety-concern reports from the KMZB (*Krajowa Mapa Zagrożeń Bezpieczeństwa*, National Map of Safety Concerns), a police-administered citizen reporting system covering all of Poland. Through this police-run platform, citizens can anonymously flag safety concerns related, for example, to vandalism, traffic, or drinking alcohol in prohibited areas. We do not observe when the underlying event occurred. However, since our outcome is the safety concern itself, the date on which the report was filed best captures its timing. The platform is not intended as a substitute for the emergency phone number, but as a complement to it. To ensure that the reporting system does not divert police resources from urgent tasks, police have five days to verify each report and take measures if necessary. Each report is classified by police as *confirmed* (substantiated by investigation as a genuine safety risk), *unconfirmed* (deemed unsubstantiated), or *joke/mistake* (prank or erroneous) (National Police Headquarters, 2017). We observe daily counts of total, confirmed, unconfirmed, and joke reports for each of 3,081 municipalities over 2020 to 2023, which yields 4,501,341 municipality by day observations. Summary statistics for all variables are reported in Table A1 in the Online Appendix.

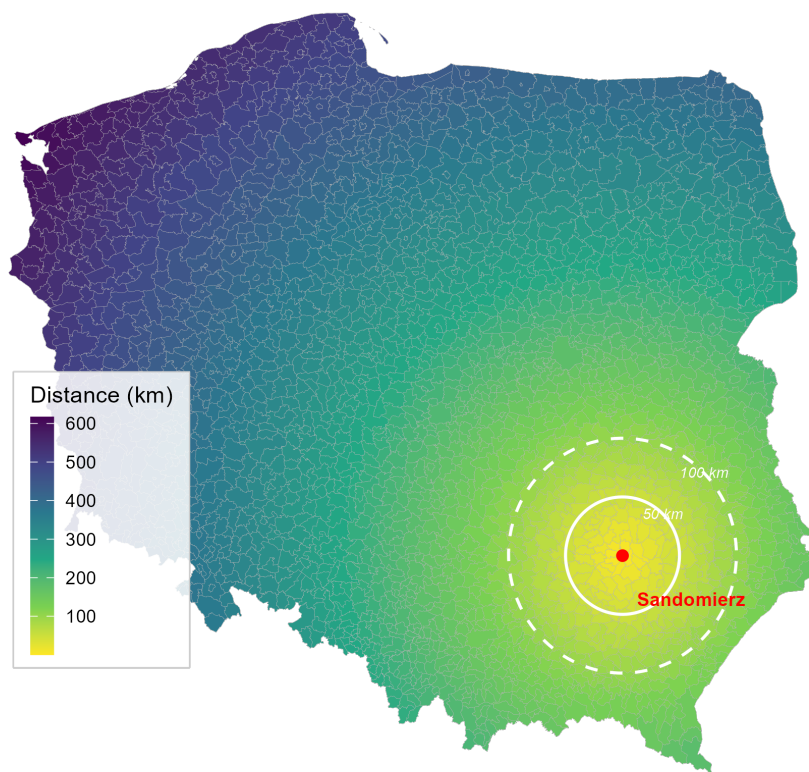


Figure 1: DISTANCE TO SANDOMIERZ

Notes: Geodesic distance (km) from each municipality centroid to Sandomierz, the on-screen setting of *Ojciec Mateusz*. The solid white circle marks the 50 km radius; the dashed white circle marks the 100 km radius.

We estimate Poisson pseudo-maximum-likelihood using the following equation:

$$E[y_{mt}] = \exp(\beta \cdot \text{PostBC}_t \times \log(\text{dist}_m) + \gamma \cdot \log(\text{dist}_m) + \alpha_v + \delta_t),$$

where y_{mt} is the daily count of safety-concern reports in municipality m on date t , PostBC_t is an indicator that equals one on the day after a new episode is broadcast, α_v is a voivodeship (state) fixed effect, and δ_t is a date fixed effect. The date fixed effects absorb PostBC_t directly. Identification of the broadcast effect, therefore, comes from variation in the post-broadcast response across municipalities at different distances from Sandomierz. Standard errors are clustered at the municipality level.

3 Results

Table 1 reports the main estimates by report category. Panel A presents the pooled distance gradient, the rate at which reported safety concerns change with distance from Sandomierz after the broadcast, across all 99 episodes. The coefficient on the interaction between post-broadcast and log distance is positive and statistically significant at the 10 percent level for total reports, and is similar in magnitude but not statistically significant for confirmed reports. A positive coefficient implies that the number of reports increases with distance, or equivalently, that municipalities closer to Sandomierz witness fewer reports following a broadcast. A municipality 50 km from Sandomierz experiences about 3 percent fewer total reports than the median-distance municipality at 256 km.² Unconfirmed and prank reports show no significant change.

Panel B decomposes the distance gradient by episode violence content. The low-violence gradient is positive and significant at the 5 percent level for both total and confirmed reports, implying about 6 percent fewer reports at 50 km relative to the median-distance municipality after the broadcast of a low-violence episode.³ The coefficient on the triple

²The implied percentage change at distance d relative to the median-distance municipality (256 km) is computed as $100 \times (\exp(\hat{\beta} \times (\ln d - \ln 256)) - 1)$. At $d = 50$, with $\ln 50 - \ln 256 \approx -1.63$, the Panel A estimate of $\hat{\beta} = 0.020$ yields $100 \times (\exp(0.020 \times (-1.63)) - 1) \approx -3.2$ percent.

³Applying the same formula as in Panel A with the low-violence gradient of 0.038 yields ≈ -6 percent.

interaction with the high-violence indicator is negative and significant at the 10 percent level for both categories, largely offsetting the low-violence gradient. The implied gradient for high-violence episodes is therefore close to zero and statistically insignificant for all report categories. Unconfirmed and prank reports show no significant gradient regardless of episode type.

Since the effect is driven by low-violence episodes, we take a closer look at the distance gradient for this subsample. Figure 2 plots the implied effect from Table 1 against distance for each of the three report categories and for the total number of reports. The total and confirmed gradients nearly overlap, which shows that confirmed reports drive the total effect. The dashed lines mark the boundaries of the 95% confidence interval for confirmed reports, showing that while the point estimate decreases with distance to Sandomierz, it is consistently statistically significantly different from zero. Unconfirmed reports, by contrast, show a flat and statistically insignificant gradient close to zero. Joke reports exhibit large point estimates but are never statistically significant, as their wide confidence intervals reflect the lower frequency of this report type.

We run several falsification and robustness tests. First, we replace the distance to Sandomierz with three placebo towns of similar population in different regions of Poland: Nowy Targ (south), Koło (central), and Gryfice (northwest). Panel A in Table A2 in the Online Appendix shows that none of the placebo cities yields a statistically significant point estimate. As a suggestive check on timing, we also replace the post-broadcast indicator with day-before and two days after indicators. Panel B shows that only the day-after coefficient is significant, consistent with a response tied to the broadcast itself. However, due to the weekly schedule of broadcasts, we cannot fully reject the possibility of a longer-term effect.⁴ Finally, Table A3 in the Online Appendix reports Conley standard errors at different thresholds (Conley, 1999, 2008). Our coefficient of interest, if anything,

⁴Because the show airs weekly, the days before one broadcast are also days after previous ones so leads effectively also capture lags, which makes the classical event-study design infeasible. Our design, therefore, identifies the immediate effect of a broadcast, but we cannot interpret this as evidence that the effect lasts only one day. Furthermore, our treatment is limited to premieres of new episodes on TVP1, which has by far the largest audience. Earlier episodes are rebroadcast irregularly, on different days and channels, to much smaller audiences. These rebroadcasts, however, if anything, bias our result towards zero.

Table 1: POST-BROADCAST SAFETY CONCERNS

	Report category			
	Total	Conf.	Unconf.	Joke
<i>Panel A: Pooled effect (99 episodes)</i>				
PostBC $\times$ log(dist)	0.020* (0.012)	0.017 (0.013)	0.005 (0.011)	0.096 (0.078)
<i>Panel B: Violence-content decomposition</i>				
PostBC $\times$ log(dist)	0.038** (0.017)	0.036** (0.017)	0.009 (0.015)	0.142 (0.093)
PostBC $\times$ HighViol $\times$ log(dist)	-0.035* (0.019)	-0.038* (0.021)	-0.008 (0.019)	-0.099 (0.089)
<i>Implied gradient, low-violence</i>	+0.038**	+0.036**	+0.009	+0.142
<i>Implied gradient, high-violence</i>	+0.003	-0.002	+0.001	+0.043
Observations	4,501,341			

Notes: Panel A reports the PostBC $\times$ log(dist) coefficient for all 99 episodes of *Ojciec Mateusz*. Panel B decomposes the gradient by episode violence content. HighViol is the binary indicator from a median split of the keyword-based violence-density score over all 99 episodes. The low-violence gradient is the coefficient on PostBC $\times$ log(dist); the high-violence gradient is the sum of PostBC $\times$ log(dist) and PostBC $\times$ HighViol $\times$ log(dist). All specifications include voivodeship and date fixed effects. Standard errors clustered by municipality in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

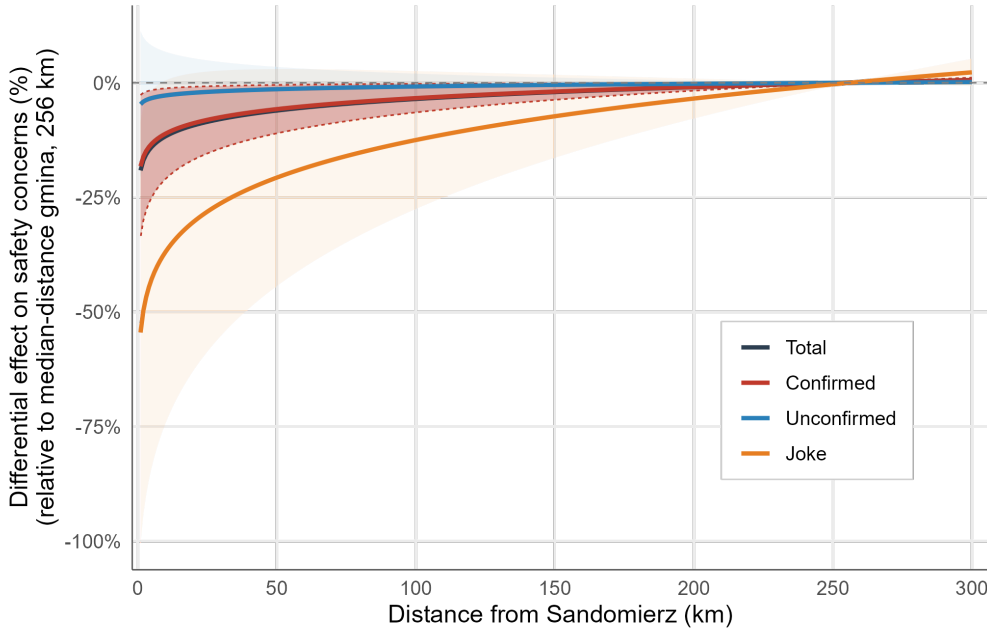


Figure 2: POST-BROADCAST SAFETY CONCERNS BY DISTANCE FROM SANDOMIERZ

Notes: The figure plots the implied differential effect on reported safety concerns from Table 1 relative to the median-distance municipality (256 km), computed as $100 \times (\exp(\hat{\beta}(\log d - \log 256)) - 1)$. The sample is restricted to low-violence episodes. Solid lines show total (black), confirmed (red), unconfirmed (blue), and joke (orange) reports; shaded areas are 95% confidence intervals.

gains significance, suggesting that our baseline results are conservative.

4 Discussion and concluding remarks

This paper provides the first evidence that a prosocial entertainment broadcast can lower reported safety concerns near its on-screen setting. Reported safety concerns decline by about 6 percent the day after a low-violence episode of *Ojciec Mateusz* airs, with the effect fading with distance from Sandomierz. The results are consistent with improved public safety resulting from behavioral changes induced by moral priming. The effect is driven by police-substantiated reports rather than unconfirmed or prank submissions. A shift in perceptions (such as an increase of crime salience or fear) would produce a decline primarily in unconfirmed reports, which have not been validated by the police as real threats and are therefore most sensitive to such changes. A change in trust in the police is also unlikely to be the main driver of the observed results. Trust usually takes a long time

to build up (Engle-Warnick and Slonim, 2006), whereas we observe the decrease in the safety reports on the next day after the broadcast. However, we cannot fully rule out a change in reporting thresholds. Viewers who become less inclined to report minor concerns may stop filing some reports that the police would have confirmed. Incapacitation effect is unlikely, as it would operate on the broadcast evening rather than the following day, and after both low- and high-violence episodes. At the same time, we cannot exclude longer-run changes in reporting behavior or perceptions. In particular, repeated exposure to morally relevant entertainment can increase the salience of moral considerations (Eden *et al.*, 2014). Our research design, however, does not allow us to identify such longer-run effects. Overall, our results point to improved public safety through the prosocial content of *Ojciec Mateusz* and suggest that entertainment television can complement traditional policing.

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Appendix

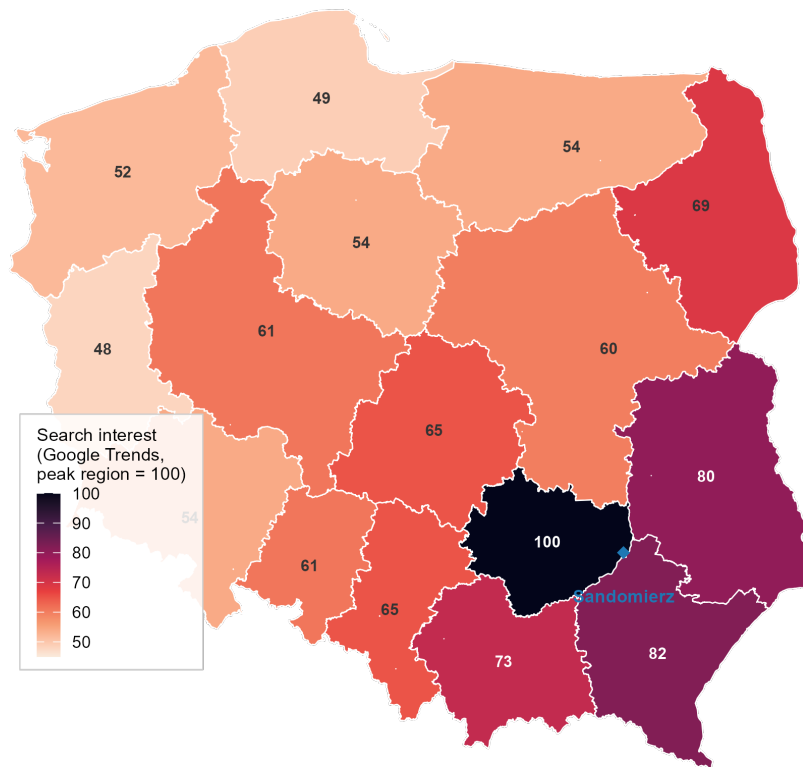


Figure A1: GOOGLE SEARCH INTENSITY FOR OJCIEC MATEUSZ

Notes: The map displays Google Trends search intensity for the topic of “Ojciec Mateusz” TV show (Father Matthew) across Polish voivodeships between May 23rd, 2021 and May 23rd, 2026 (last 5 years), normalized to a scale of 0–100, where 100 denotes the voivodeship with peak search activity. Unlike individual queries, Google Trends topics group all search queries related to the topic of “Ojciec Mateusz” TV show, allowing us to see the full picture on which voivodships express more interest in this TV show. Data source: Google Trends.

Table A1: SUMMARY STATISTICS
Panel A: TV Show Characteristics (2020–2023)

Total episodes aired	99
Broadcast days	99
Sample days	1,461 (full 2020–2023 period)
<i>Schedule:</i>	
P1 (Jan 2020–Feb 2021)	Thursdays
P2 (Mar 2021–Feb 2023)	Fridays
P3 (Mar 2023–Dec 2023)	Thursdays

Panel B: Safety Concerns Reports

	Total	Unconfirmed	Confirmed	Joke
Post-broadcast days ($N_{\text{days}} = 99$)	1,029	453	464	112
Other days ($N_{\text{days}} = 1,362$)	1,153	513	531	109

Panel C: Distance to Sandomierz

Min	0.2 km	municipalities < 50 km	87
Q1	151 km	municipalities < 100 km	362
Median	256 km	Total municipalities	3,081
Q3	379 km		
Max	617 km		

Notes: Panel A describes the broadcast schedule of *Ojciec Mateusz* on TVP1. Panel B reports summary statistics on safety concerns reports on post-broadcast days (the day after a new episode) versus other days in the full sample period. Total includes confirmed, unconfirmed, and joke/mistake reports. Panel C shows the distribution of geodesic distance from municipality centroids to Sandomierz.

Table A2: PLACEBO TESTS

	Report category			
	Total	Conf.	Unconf.	Joke
<i>Panel A: Location placebos</i>				
Sandomierz (actual)	0.020* (0.012)	0.017 (0.013)	0.005 (0.011)	0.096 (0.078)
Nowy Targ (S)	−0.002 (0.013)	0.004 (0.012)	−0.002 (0.010)	0.004 (0.070)
Koło (central)	−0.012 (0.009)	−0.012 (0.014)	−0.014 (0.010)	0.002 (0.036)
Gryfice (NW)	−0.012 (0.012)	−0.011 (0.014)	−0.017 (0.014)	−0.010 (0.082)
<i>Panel B: Timing placebos (distance to Sandomierz)</i>				
$d - 1$	−0.001 (0.008)	−0.002 (0.011)	0.000 (0.010)	0.006 (0.034)
$d + 1$	0.020* (0.012)	0.017 (0.013)	0.005 (0.011)	0.096 (0.078)
$d + 2$	−0.010 (0.015)	−0.014 (0.018)	−0.019 (0.014)	0.043 (0.098)

Notes: Panel A shows results in which each row replaces the distance to Sandomierz with the distance to an indicated city of similar population size. Panel B uses the distance to Sandomierz, with $d - 1$ and $d + 2$ as timing placebos. Standard errors clustered by municipality in parentheses.
 $*p < 0.10$, $**p < 0.05$, $***p < 0.01$.

Table A3: CONLEY SPATIAL STANDARD ERRORS

	Report category			
	Total	Conf.	Unconf.	Joke
Cluster (municipality)	0.020* (0.012)	0.017 (0.013)	0.005 (0.011)	0.096 (0.078)
Conley 25 km	0.020* (0.012)	0.017 (0.015)	0.005 (0.012)	0.096 (0.076)
Conley 50 km	0.020* (0.011)	0.017 (0.014)	0.005 (0.009)	0.096 (0.076)
Conley 100 km	0.020** (0.010)	0.017** (0.007)	0.005 (0.010)	0.096 (0.060)

Notes: The first row clusters standard errors at the municipality level. The second to fourth rows report Conley (1999, 2008) standard errors at the indicated thresholds. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.