

Law and Norms: Experimental Evidence

Professor Daniele Nosenzo (Aarhus University)

Laws affect behaviour not only through deterrence but also through their “expressive power”, i.e., their ability to shape the social norms of a society. In a series of papers, we develop a theoretical model showing that the expressive power of law emerges naturally within a framework where individuals care about the social reputation they derive from behavior. Using incentivized vignette experiments, we introduce a novel methodology to empirically investigate the law’s expressive power. We show clear evidence that the law exerts such power in line with theoretical predictions. We then extend our analysis to investigate whether the law’s expressive power differs by gender or race, and in the presence of individuals who belong to different “cultural groups”, for example natives and migrants who live under the same set of rules but may hold different attitudes towards the same type of behavior.