

Politicultural Linking: Inferences between the Political and the Apolitical. A Literature Review

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Some anecdotes 1/2

- ▶ October 2020: the NYT publishes this quiz

THE UPSHOT

The New York Times

LOG IN



TheUpshot

Quiz: Can You Tell a 'Trump' Fridge From a 'Biden' Fridge?

By [John Keefe](#) Oct. 27, 2020

- ▶ Accuracy was 52%. Not much more than a coin flip.

- ▶ In March 2023, an Italian MP declared that "We [right-wingers] love good food and wine, while the left loves insects and drugs!"

Ambrosi (Fdl): "Noi amiamo il buon cibo e vino, la sinistra gli insetti e le droghe. Ecco perché sono una tipa di destra"

di Valeria Forgnone



▲ La deputata di Fdl, Alessia Ambrosi

Anecdotes like these signal that **people possess associations between political and apolitical traits**, and use these associations to make sense of social reality. What we saw are examples of:

- ▶ **Political inferences from apolitical traits ($A \Rightarrow P$)**
 - ▶ I see what someone has in their fridge and I infer their partisanship based on that
- ▶ **Apolitical inferences from political traits ($P \Rightarrow A$)**
 - ▶ I am aware of one's (leftist) ideology and I infer his preference for eating insects based on that.

The union of these two behaviors form what I call **Politicultural Linking (PCL)**

A step back...

- ▶ What are “**political traits**”?
 - ▶ “Traits unambiguously signaling membership to a political group”
 - ▶ For our purposes, political groups are groups characterized by a shared (positive or negative) ideology, partisanship, position on political issues, vote choice, or support for political candidates
- ▶ What are “**apolitical traits**”?
 - ▶ Everything that does not fit the definition of “political”. In particular, 4 subcategories.
 1. **Sociodemographic traits** (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, and social class).
 2. **Psychological traits:** personality or moral traits (e.g. friendliness, generosity, compassion”)
 3. **Lifestyle traits** concern preferences regarding lifestyles and within cultural fields (e.g. food, cars, sports, music, and fashion)
 4. **Others:** everything that does not fit above

What relates political and apolitical traits?

► Alignment

- "A situation where political and apolitical traits show significant co-occurrence, ending up being correlated".
- For example, evidence regarding the fact that liberals are more interested in electric cars and basketball (Hetherington & Weiler, 2018; Praet et al., 2021), are more open to new experiences (Vecchione et al., 2011), or more often belong to sexual minorities (Ahler & Sood, 2018) constitute evidence of alignments.

► Associations

- "The set of one's perceived alignments".
- For example, perceiving drinking lattes and being left-wing as correlated constitutes an association.

Associations are at the base of the inferential mechanisms engendering PCL

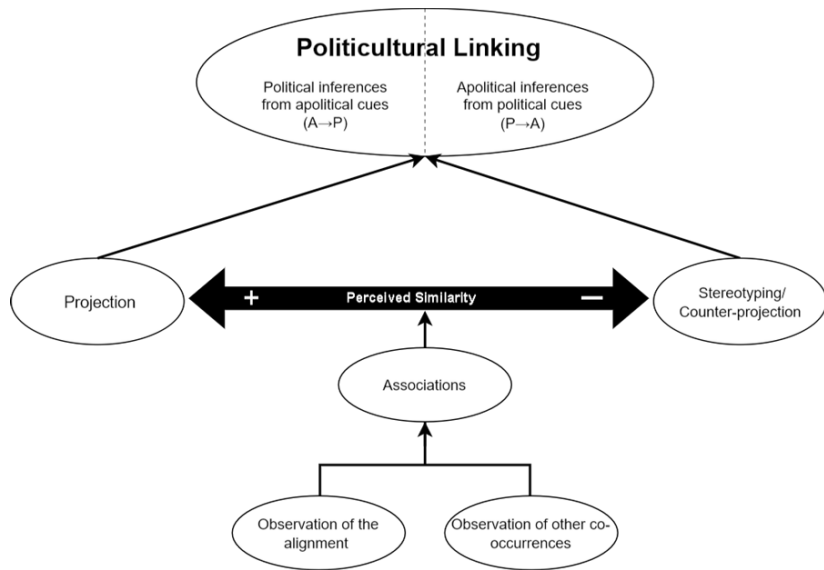
Where do associations come from?

- ▶ Previous literature suggested some potential mechanisms engendering the associations:
 - ▶ **Observing actual alignments** (e.g. I observe that most of the conservatives I know buy groceries at Carrefour)
 - ▶ **Perceiving certain correlations to be more salient** (e.g: representativeness heuristic: both lib and cons are not particularly likely to love Fast & Furious movies, but cons are more likely than libs.
 - ▶ **Observing élites** (prototypes embodiment!)
 - ▶ **Media representations**

The inferential mechanisms

- ▶ **Projection:** inferential strategy through which the subject attributes to the target their own mental states (Ames, 2004)".
- ▶ **Counter-projection:** inferential strategy through which the subject attributes to the target the opposite of their own mental states (Denning & Hodges, 2022).
- ▶ **Stereotyping:** stereotypes can be conceptualized as "*associative networks of linked attributes*" (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996, p. 240). Associations can be conceived as the building blocks of the associative network around political traits.
- ▶ According to theories in psychology (SCM; Ames, 2004), **perceived similarity** with the target of the inference moderates the selection of the inferential strategy.

A look from above [HQ Link]



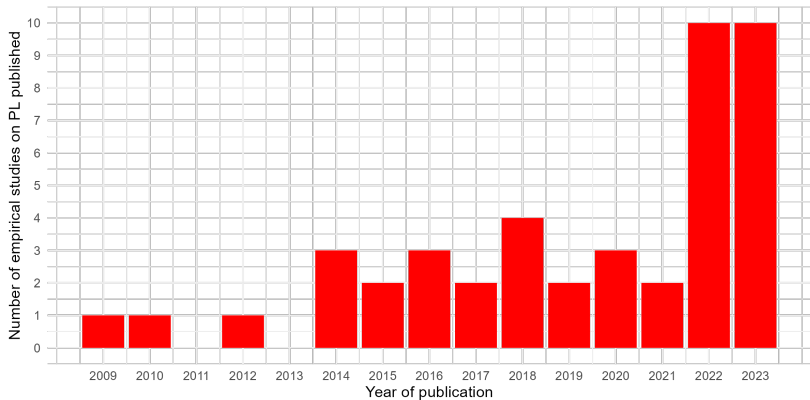
Reinventing the wheel?

Why is PCL different from previous conceptualizations?

1. **Broader:** PCL accounts for different inferential strategies (unlike "political stereotyping").
2. **Bidirectional:** PCL accounts for both possible directions of the inferences, treating them as arising from the same associations (unlike "political inferences...").
3. **Sharper:** PCL concerns inferences between political and apolitical. Thus excluding i.e. inferences on partisanship from issue positions
4. **Cooler:** it includes inferences dealing with lifestyle traits - neglected by other conceptualizations (see Busby et al., 2021)
5. **More flexible:** it does not limit its scope to inferences performed on a particular political group (ideologues, partisans, brexitters, anti-vaxxers...)

Reviewing the literature...

- ▶ I conducted a comprehensive (semi-systematic) literature review of the **empirical studies published (international journal or books) between 2009 and 2024** which the object of investigation fitted our definition of PCL (for details on the procedure followed, just ask).
- ▶ The procedure yielded **51 studies**



...and classifying it!

I classified these studies through 7 categories:

1. **Direction of the inference**

- ▶ $P \Rightarrow A, A \Rightarrow P$

2. **Target of the inference**

- ▶ Politicians, People

3. **Political trait**

- ▶ Partisanship, Ideology, Issue preferences. Some research also used vote choices, populism, support for political coalitions.

4. **Apolitical trait**

- ▶ Group, Identity, Lifestyle. Some research also used accents, names, and birthdays!

5. (Mentioned) **Type of inference**

- ▶ Stereotyping or Projection

6. **National context**

- ▶ US dominated

7. **Empirical strategy**

- ▶ Survey dominated

Quantitatively speaking

Category	Item	Value (%)
Direction	P2A	48
Direction	A2P	55
Target	Politicians	41
Target	People	57
Political trait	Partisanship	59
Political trait	Ideology	30
Political trait	Issues	11
Apolitical trait	Group	59
Apolitical trait	Identity	48
Apolitical trait	Lifestyle	14
Type of inference	Stereotyping	84
Type of inference	Projection	16
National context	US	77
National context	Non US	23
Empirical strategy	Survey	75
Empirical strategy	Non survey	25

Identifying the gaps 1/2

Gaps and **fruitful avenues** for future research:

1. All studies (but one) consider **only $P \Rightarrow A$ or $A \Rightarrow P$** .
Studies considering **both directions** at the same time are needed.
2. **Only people and politicians** employed as inferential targets.
No one ever used **the media** (third actor in the pol comm arena)!
 - ▶ Is a right-wing newspaper expected to publish more articles about football? Is a TV channel advertising fast foods perceived as more right-wing than one advertising whole foods markets?
3. Research **mainly focused on group and identity traits**.
The use of **lifestyle preferences** as the apolitical end of the inference is recent and **needs further exploration**.
 - ▶ Future research could observe the relative weights between apolitical subcategories engendering PCL and its consequences (group traits mostly ascribed, lifestyle traits willingly adopted).

Identifying the gaps 2/2

4. Most of the research **focuses on stereotypes**.
Future studies should **account both for stereotyping and projection**.
5. Research is **overwhelmingly US based**.
Other contexts should be studied!
 - ▶ In Europe, the NotLikeUs project is doing that. In Canada, the University of Montreal.
6. There's more than **just surveys!**
Field experiments to observe real-world contexts,
qualitative techniques to go deeper on the associations.
7. The effect of **different traits!**
Ascribed vs **adopted** traits
Visible vs **invisible** traits

- ▶ This work introduces **Politicultural Linking**: the union of political inferences from apolitical cues and apolitical inferences from political cues. I argue for its **relevance**, **distinctiveness**, and **usefulness** within the political science literature.
- ▶ I depict the **theoretical framework** around it and some of the **mechanisms possibly engendering PCL**.
- ▶ Then, I used this concept to **classify a set of 51 empirical studies** through different categories
- ▶ Through this classification, I found several **gaps** and suggested **fruitful avenues** for future research.

Thank you!

Thank you!

For further comments you can reach out at:
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