Food for (Political) Thought*: Political Inferences from Apolitical Cues and their Social Consequences in Italy

Abstract: US-based research showed that individuals rely on apolitical cues, like cars or clothes, to form expectations about others' political preferences. This article uses the concept of 'politicultural linking' — producing inferences about others from the perceived alignment between apolitical and political preferences — observing this behavior in Italy, a multi-party European context, through a survey vignette experiment on food preferences. We find that respondents associate vegan/ethnic foods with the political left and carnivore foods with the right. Moreover, ideological self-placement, news media exposure, and cultural consumption are associated with respondents' willingness to do politicultural linking. Finally, we observe that this behavior affects the propensity to interact and converse with others, with implications for social distance and political polarization dynamics.

Introduction

Imagine Max is at a party. Alex, a loose acquaintance of Max, approaches him, starting an 'am-I-right' cheap chat complaining about the right-wing government. Max now possesses an important piece of information to infer Alex's political ideology, and he could decide to start a conversation disclosing his political views or changing the subject.

Few people would kill the pleasant mood of a social gathering by starting a conflictual political conversation, so Alex must have good reasons to believe Max shares, at least partially, his views. But what led Alex to this assumption? He could have thought that being at the same party, having common friends, and being the same age, gender, and from the same city, Max was likely to be politically compatible. But Alex may also have used different clues to infer Max's political preferences. He could have looked at the bright color of Max's shirt, the way he wears his long beard or the fact that he chose to fill his plate with Korean-Mexican vegan tapas instead of chicken wings and bacon strips.

Research established that individuals indeed use cues such as preferences for certain TV shows, music, drinks, sports, and brands, to infer others' partisanship, ideology, or issue positions when explicit information about these is not available (Carlson & Settle, 2022; Deichert, 2019; Hiaeshutter-Rice et al., 2023; Lee, 2021; Settle, 2018). Moreover, individuals adjust their behavior and propensity to interact with others according to the content of these inferences (Carlson & Settle, 2022; Lee, 2021). Yet, only a few studies observed this behavior outside the US (see for example Ouellet & Tremblay-Antoine, 2024).

This stream of research has extensively documented the attributes triggering these inferences (Deichert, 2019; Ouellet & Tremblay-Antoine, 2024) - with conservatives inferred to be

pickup-driving black coffee-drinkers and liberals inferred to be electric car-driving latte-drinkers-, but no study has yet systematically investigated the personal characteristics predicting a higher personal propensity to engage in these inferences, and therefore to perceive political and apolitical traits as intrinsically associated. Finally, the behavioral consequences of these political inferences and their relevance to the dynamics of social distance and political polarization have been severely overlooked (for a notable exception see Lee, 2021), especially outside the U.S.

In this study, we fill these gaps by conducting an original survey vignette experiment in Italy to investigate the content, determinants, and consequences of political inferences from apolitical cues, a manifestation of what we will indicate as 'politicultural linking' (PL).

Our survey experiment asks participants to guess the political preferences of a person from different food choices - veganism, carnivorism, ethnic, and traditional – to test whether these are significantly perceived as associated with political preferences (i.e. the content of PL). Moreover, we investigate the characteristics associated with the prototypical 'politicultural linker' identifying the predictors of this behavior. Finally, we delve into the consequences of PL observing its association with the propensity to interact and discuss politics with others.

We conducted our study in Italy: an unstable multi-party European context, where party labels, leaders, and positions are quite unstable over time, as well as the strategic alliances among them (Emanuele & Chiaramonte, 2020). Moreover, while in the US partisanship and ideology are strongly sorted (Lelkes, 2016), in Italy we witness both major parties explicitly refusing any ideological placement on the left-right spectrum – such as the Five Star Movement (Cavazza et al., 2022) - and others merging multiple ideological heritages – such

as the Democratic Party, incorporating both the communist and the Christian democratic heritages (Ceron & Negri, 2017). The fluidity of its party system and the complicated intertwining of ideology and partisanship make Italy a challenging context to test the external validity of results found in the US and motivate the observation of both inferences based on ideology (i.e. left vs right) and partisanship (i.e. party choice), enriching a stream of research that has hitherto mostly focused on the latter (see Scaduto, 2024).

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

Introducing Politicultural Linking

The present work specifically deals with inferences about political ideology and partisanship based on observed food consumption choices. To study these, we use the concept of 'politicultural linking' (PL), defined as 'the production of inferences about others' political or apolitical characteristics based on the [perceived] association between these' (Scaduto, 2024). The main contribution of this conceptualization is arguing that inferences between political traits (e.g.: partisanship, ideology, issue positions, candidate preferences) and apolitical traits (e.g.: sociodemographic traits, personality traits, lifestyle preferences) are the manifestation of an individual tendency to perceive political and apolitical attributes as associated.

Given this definition, PL encompasses both political inferences from apolitical cues (e.g.: inferring that a pick-up driver is a conservative) and apolitical inferences from political cues (e.g.: assuming a left-winger practices yoga). However, our investigation will deal with political inferences from apolitical cues and will focus on two specific manifestations of PL: inferences about either ideology (*Ideological PL*) or partisanship (*Partisan PL*) from food preferences.

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PL adds a series of additional features to previous conceptualizations (see Scaduto, 2024). It extends the idea of political stereotyping (Ahler & Sood, 2018; Busby et al., 2021) by accounting for alternative inferential strategies, like projection (e.g.: assuming that someone sharing my partisan affiliation will share my food tastes as well) and counter-projection (e.g.: assuming that an out-partisan will not share my food tastes). Most importantly for our scopes, it explicitly includes lifestyle preferences - so far neglected by other conceptualizations (Busby et al., 2021; Myers, 2023) - as one of the possible apolitical objects of the inference. It also incorporates the concepts of 'partisan cultural stereotypes' (Deichert, 2019), 'everyday partisan stereotypes' (Lee, 2021), and 'politically sorted content' (Settle, 2018). Yet, these latter concepts focus on the content of the inferences (e.g.: electric cars are perceived as a signal of progessivism while pickups as a signal of conservatism) and are used in studies mapping the shared ideological or partisan perceptions of certain apolitical items. PL instead explicitly frames the production process of these inferences. To further clarify this distinction, consider this example. Inferring one's political preferences from the cars they drive is something that, expecially in the US context, is very common because of the shared ideological perceptions around pickups and Priuses (Hetherington & Weiler, 2018; Lee, 2021). Performing the same inferences from one's name (Carlson & Settle, 2022) is a way less common behavior. Studies using the concepts of 'partisan cultural stereotypes' and 'everyday partisan stereotypes' explore how much certain items drive ideological or partisan perceptions. Yet, it might be interesting to also observe which kinds of people, and under which circumstances, engage in cars or name-based inferences, therefore focusing on the possible explanations behind the behavior of PL. This behavioral focus is contemplated by the definition of PL, allowing us to test hypotheses regarding the personal characteristics predicting it.

Where do associations between political and apolitical traits originate from?

Where do the mental associations on which PL is based originate from? We now outline five mechanisms potentially engendering the associations between political and apolitical traits.

The most straightforward mechanism is just the observation of an alignment between political and apolitical traits. Several studies observed this alignment in multiple fields, from music to movies, art, humor, and food (Carney et al., 2008; DellaPosta et al., 2015; Hetherington & Weiler, 2018; Rogers, 2022; Schoenmueller et al., 2023)[1]. Individuals observe and extract meaning from attributes they see co-occurring in people (Cerulo et al., 2021; Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996), generating 'social classificatory schemes' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 175). The observation of co-occurrences forms and strengthens the mental association between the co-occurring objects, a process that has been called 'semantic cognition' (Goldberg & Stein, 2018) or the 'nonconscious detection of covariation' (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996, p. 244).

Yet, the path from observation to associations may not be straightforward. Goldberg and Stein (2018, p. 906) claimed that 'humans are biased to impute associations in others' behaviors even when such associations are merely random noise'. Moreover, the observation is influenced by cognitive schemes (Hogg & Reid, 2006) and social relationships (Cowan & Baldassarri, 2018). Bordalo and colleagues (2016) also suggest that rather than at the correlations per se, we often look at how certain correlations distinguish one group from

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[1] Notably, this alignment, labeled as 'lifestyle politics' (DellaPosta et al., 2015), 'preference polarization' (Schoenmueller et al., 2023), or 'politicultural sorting' (Rogers, 2022), has also been observed in Italy (Cavazza & Corbetta, 2016), a fact further motivating our empirical investigation. A discussion on the possible causes of this alignment falls beyond the scope of our work. We refer the interested reader to the works of DellaPosta and colleagues (2015) and Mutz and Rao (2018).

other relevant groups, an idea stemming from Kahneman and Tversky's representativeness heuristic (1972; see also Ahler & Sood, 2022 for a discussion applied to political associations). For example, most voters of the Green Party may not love ethnic cuisine, but if they are over-represented among ethnic cuisine lovers, an association could nonetheless arise.

The second mechanism concerns the fact that the consumption of a cultural item may be interpreted as a politically motivated choice (i.e., an act of political consumerism, Micheletti, 2003), signaling support for an issue position, which is then associated with a political party - or ideology - through associative issue ownership (Walgrave et al., 2012). For example, as we will discuss, being vegan could be interpreted as an act of political consumerism signaling support for environmental issues (Raggiotto et al., 2018), that can be associated with left-wing parties (Walgrave et al., 2012).

The third mechanism concerns the role of the media in the formation of collective meaning and in structuring collective stereotypes. Therefore, associations can also arise from media representations of political groups, such as partisans or ideologues (Rahn & Cramer, 1996). Media outlets emphasize partisan differences in terms of sociodemographic traits and lifestyle preferences giving more relevance to more extreme, consistent, and polarized politicians and partisans (Levendusky, 2023; see also Trepte & Loy, 2017 for a discussion based on Social Identity Theory). Consistently, news media exposure may lead to bigger misperceptions regarding out-partisans' traits (Ahler & Sood, 2018). Moreover, the success of infotainment programs, mixing political and cultural elements and making extensive use of partisan cultural stereotypes (Deichert, 2019), could contribute to structuring the associations between political and apolitical traits. For example, in satirical shows in Italy Five-Star Movement supporters are often depicted as dressed informally, while Go Italy supporters are

depicted wearing suits (TerzoSegreto, 2015). Exposure to such representations could engender an association between outfits and voting preferences.

Associations can originate from observing political élites' cultural preferences or cultural élites political leanings too, using élites as the embodiment of mental prototypes (Ahler & Sood, 2022; Deichert, 2019). For example, Taylor Swift's endorsement of a Democratic candidate led the American public to associate being a 'Swiftie' with Democratic partisanship (Deichert, 2019). Moreover, social media displays of 'gastropopulism' (Demuru, 2021) by right-wing politicians, as we will argue, may contribute to strengthening the association between traditional food preferences and conservatism. This constitutes our fourth mechanism.

Finally, we should also consider the role of projection, namely using one's own co-occurrence to structure the associations through which inferences are produced. As Ames (2004, p. 341) stated: 'When I find a new acquaintance shares my love for an obscure comedian, I may extend myself as a template and assume he also shares my political view'. If someone is both a meat-lover and a conservative, they could project conservatism to people sharing their taste for meat.

There are therefore at least five ways through which mental associations are engendered. Yet, this does not necessarily lead to using these associations to produce inferences. As suggested by studies on political discussion, cultural preferences may work as a device for *signaling* (MacKuen, 1990) and *detecting* (Carlson & Settle, 2022) political preferences, just like Bourdieu (1984) suggested they worked for social class. Carlson and Settle (2022, p. 82) explained that such propensity is not evenly spread: 'the benefits of signalling [political

preferences] depend on the individual's tolerance for talking about politics, the distribution of political views in the environment, and on the ability or desire of others to interpret signals of varying ambiguity'. Some people just want to avoid political interactions, particularly if they expect these interactions to be conflictual (Carlson & Settle, 2022; Cowan & Baldassarri, 2018; MacKuen, 1990). Accordingly, they may resort to every cue available to *detect* others' political preferences, from clothes (Deichert, 2019) to cars (Lee, 2021) or even names (Carlson & Settle, 2022). As we will show, food preferences fully belong in this list.

Food as a Field of Cultural Consumption

We observe PL on food preferences for two reasons. First, the abundance of evidence observing the alignment between food and political preferences across multiple contexts and disciplines. Among others, it has been observed by sociologists in Finland (Purhonen & Heikkilä, 2017), psychologists in Italy (Guidetti et al., 2022, 2023), and marketing scholars in the US (Buechner et al., 2022). Second, food consumption is universal and uniformly spread, therefore we expect most people to possess similar knowledge regarding food. We focus on two dimensions that research suggests to be associated with political preferences: the vegan/carnivore and traditional/ethnic dimensions.

Veganism is associated with environmentalism (Raggiotto et al., 2018) and the ownership of environmental issues in most national contexts belongs to left-wing parties (Walgrave et al., 2012). Notably, in Italy, both the associations between veganism and environmentalism (Raggiotto et al., 2018) and the ownership of left-wing parties of environmental issues (Biancalana & Ladini, 2022) have been observed, therefore, based on the associative issue ownership mechanism, we state the following hypothesis.

H1a: Vegan food preferences are associated with left-wing ideology and a preference for left-wing parties.

On the other hand, carnism was observed to correlate with conservatism (Dhont & Hodson, 2014; Rosenfeld et al., 2023), with right-wing authoritarians holding more negative opinions about vegans (Judge & Wilson, 2019; MacInnis & Hodson, 2017; Monteiro et al., 2017). This would favor the observation of an alignment and subsequently engender associations through direct observation. Moreover, multiple studies have highlighted the frequent display of meat-based dishes in Matteo Salvini's online communications (Demuru, 2021; Stagi et al., 2022), which would favor associations through the observation of political élites (the fourth mechanism). This leads us to the following hypothesis.

H1b: Carnivore food preferences are associated with right-wing ideology and a preference for right-wing parties.

Regarding the traditional-ethnic dimension, conservatives have been observed to show higher levels of food neophobia (Guidetti et al., 2022) - the reluctance to eat unfamiliar food -, to be less able to overcome it (Guidetti et al., 2023), and to prefer food consumption experiences perceived as 'local' rather than 'global' (Buechner et al., 2022; Purhonen & Heikkilä, 2017). This is consistent with research in political psychology showing that left-wing political ideology correlates with openness to new experiences in multiple contexts, including Italy (Vecchione et al., 2011).

Notably, both evidence on the relationship between food neophobia and political ideology (Guidetti et al., 2022, 2023) and between openness to new experiences and left-wing ideology

(Caprara et al., 2006; Vecchione et al., 2011) have been collected in the Italian context, favoring the direct observation of correlations. In addition, the political debate about migration in Italy aligns with the ideological left-right division (Magistro & Wittstock, 2021), possibly shaping the perceptions of people engaging in 'globally'- rather than 'locally'-framed activities through associative issue ownership. Finally, studies again showed the tendency of right-wing populists, particularly in Italy, to display a strong preference for traditional cuisine, and loathe foreign dishes (Demuru, 2021; Stagi et al., 2022), again favoring associations through the observation of political élites. This leads us to the following hypotheses:

H1c: Ethnic food preferences are associated with left-wing political ideology and a preference for left-wing parties.

H1d: Traditional food preferences are associated with right-wing political ideology and a preference for right-wing parties.

Detecting the Detecter: Who is the Politicultural Linker?

Once assessed whether individuals engage in PL in the field of food, we also aim to assess if 'the ability or desire to interpret signals of varying ambiguity' (MacKuen, 1990, p. 81; also cited in Carlson & Settle, 2022, p. 82) to detect political preferences are indeed associated with certain individual characteristics. This section discusses which characteristics we build our hypotheses around.

To detect political preferences from cultural preferences, it is necessary to recognize partisanship and ideology as valid categories through which social actors can be sorted (Trepte & Loy, 2017). Consider the five mechanisms outlined previously explaining how

associations may arise. People refusing ideological self-placement will deem ideology as less salient, therefore the observation, memorization, and retrieval of correlations are hindered by their reduced interest in gathering information about others' ideological preferences. Moreover, since the subject has no ideology to project, they cannot use their own co-occurrences to produce associations between political and cultural preferences, hindering projection.

Italy has been described as a strongly ideologically polarized country (Dalton, 2021) where ideology drives group consciousness and cognitive schemes (Vegetti & Širinić, 2019). Simultaneously, however, Italy witnessed a significant decline in people's willingness to express an ideological identity (Azzolini et al., 2023), leading to a situation where 'social representations of left and right in politics remain alive, but they are not well' (Cavazza et al., 2022, p. 14). Such heterogeneity leads to a convenient context for our investigation, leading us to our second hypothesis.

H2: People placing themselves on the left-right ideological dimension are more willing to infer others' political preferences from their food consumption choices compared with people who refuse to place themselves[2].

Notwithstanding the instability of the party context, partisanship has nonetheless been observed to work as a social identity in Italy (Bankert et al., 2023). Partisans are interested in categorizing people as in-group/out-group members (Huddy, 2001), to limit interactions with the out-group. People with high levels of affective polarization are stronger partisans and thus possess bigger misperceptions regarding out-partisans (Ahler & Sood, 2018), which leads to expecting interactions with them to be unpleasant (Renström et al., 2021). Loathing out-partisans implies recognizing implicitly the social meaning of partisan affiliation thus, for

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[2] In the preregistration ideological placement was considered a control variable.

specular reasons as those depicted previously for ideology, we expect affective polarization to structure the associations fostering the mechanisms of observation of correlations and social projection. Compared with a wide set of other countries, Italy has been observed to be significantly above the average level of AP computed cross-nationally (Torcal & Comellas, 2022). This leads us to our third hypothesis.

H3: People showing higher levels of affective polarization are more willing to infer others' ideology and party preferences from their food consumption choices.

We expect news media exposure to structure associations through most of the mechanisms outlined in our framework. First, trivially, high exposure to news media implies higher exposure to those kinds of partisan news channels and infotainment programs emphasizing apolitical partisan differences (Levendusky, 2023), as previously discussed. Moreover, news media exposure makes people more aware of the preferences of political élites. High exposure to news media is also associated with the ability to connect issues with parties (Kleinnijenhuis & Walter, 2014), thus favoring associative issue ownership. Finally, it has also been shown to be connected with bigger misperceptions regarding out-partisans' apolitical traits and, more generally, with affective polarization (Ahler & Sood, 2018; Padró-Solanet & Balcells, 2022), therefore facilitating the observation of correlations. This leads us to our fourth hypothesis.

H4: People showing higher exposure to news media are more willing to infer others' ideology and party preferences from their food consumption choices.

Finally, we should also consider the role of cultural consumption. Higher levels of cultural consumption lead to greater knowledge of the specific characteristics of cultural items, broadening the possibility of using those as signals. This process could unfold through different mechanisms: first, when cultural items are inherently political, their consumption

can signal support for a specific issue. Knowing that Lady Gaga's songs support homosexual relationships allows one to use 'liking Lady Gaga' to infer 'support for LGBTQ+ issues' and thus 'left-wing ideology', coherently with the associative issue ownership mechanism. Knowing the content of Lady Gaga's songs - trivially associated with cultural consumption - is a necessary condition to perform such inferences. Second, awareness regarding the political composition of consumers associated with a cultural subfield allows the observation of correlations. For example, people who like movies directed by Wes Anderson have been observed to lean toward the political left (Rawlings & Childress, 2023) but to be aware of this, one needs to go watch 'Grand Budapest Hotel' at the movie theater and eavesdrop on the conversations in the queue. Third, knowing a singer's (cultural élite) political preferences could affect associations similarly to knowing a politician's (political élite) music tastes, as we discussed in the case of Taylor Swift (Deichert, 2019). Finally, higher levels of cultural consumption could be associated with greater exposure to stereotypical representations of partisans and cultural élites portrayed in the media, contributing to structure associations through media exposure. People do not need to be political junkies to watch 'Saturday Night Live' or 'Modern Family', but by doing it, they will be exposed to such representations. This leads us to our fifth hypothesis.

H5: People showing higher levels of cultural consumption are more willing to infer others' ideology and party preferences from their food consumption choices.

The Social Consequences of Politicultural Linking

Overall, cross-group interactions are expected to generate anxiety, and the usual response is to avoid them (Stephan, 2014). This holds for political discussions, especially for conflict-avoidant, socially anxious, or politically unengaged people (Carlson & Settle, 2022). Whether the motivations reside in affective polarization (Renström et al., 2021), the willingness to

avoid conflicts overall (Carlson & Settle, 2022; Cowan & Baldassarri, 2018), misperceptions regarding the political out-group (Ahler & Sood, 2018; Lee, 2021), lack of interest, or fear of appearing ignorant (Klar & Krupnikov, 2016), PL could be used as a tool to perform a quick selection of the people to keep socially close or distant (Lee, 2021).

Sociologists have traditionally studied social distance as the behavioral reactions to negative attitudes toward certain people or groups (Bogardus, 1947), such as discomfort in having out-group members as neighbors, close friends, or in-laws. Recently, affective polarization scholars have used these behavioral manifestations as either a measure or a consequence of affective polarization (Druckman & Levendusky, 2019; Iyengar et al., 2012; Kekkonen et al., 2022), showing how the propensity to socially distance from the political outgroup seems to measure a separate facet of polarization from the emotional component expressed by feelings thermometers. Accordingly, studies suggested an association between the propensity to engage in political inferences and the willingness to socially distance (Lee, 2021). Inferring someone to be an out-partisan based on apolitical cues significantly decreases the willingness to have the target of the inference as a colleague, friend, or family member[3] (Lee, 2021). Moreover, the more severe the misperceptions of the apolitical traits of the political out-groups, the greater the tendency to socially distance from them (Ahler & Sood, 2018).

Observing people deciding to distance themselves from others based on PL would lead us to expect self-reinforcing dynamics in the processes of political polarization. According to the 'Oil-spill model' (DellaPosta, 2020), polarization unfolds by leading political opinions to align with a broader set of preferences, spilling over to cultural fields. If associations between political and cultural preferences arise through observation of correlations, these associations

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[3] Notably, these questions recall the original social distance scale proposed by Bogardus (1933).

could then be used to select politically similar companions through PL. However, if political and cultural preferences are indeed aligned, co-ideologues and co-partisans are already more likely to share cultural preferences, thus PL would generate fewer cross-group contacts (e.g., a vegan left-winger would only decide to interact with vegans, expecting them to be politically compatible as well), inhibiting exposure to diversity, subsequently fostering the alignment in a self-fulfilling fashion.

Moreover, avoiding cross-group conversations increases the negative animus toward the political out-group (Levendusky & Stecula, 2023). Thus, observing the social consequences of PL is crucial to understanding the processes that may lead 'false polarization' to become a self-fulfilling prophecy (Jost et al., 2022). This leads us to our last two hypotheses:

H6: People are less prone to engage in personal interaction with individuals they infer to belong to a different political group based on apolitical cues.

H7: People hold more negative expectations regarding political conversations with individuals they infer to belong to a different ideological or partisan group based on apolitical cues.

Research design, data and methods

The choice to focus on the Italian case

We conducted our experiment on a representative sample of Italian respondents for theoretical and methodological reasons.

Theoretically, much of the research on political and apolitical traits has focused on the U.S. (see Scaduto, 2024), which limits the generalizability of findings. Italy, with its volatile multi-party system (Ceron & Negri, 2017) and coalitions that blur ideological boundaries

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(Emanuele & Chiaramonte, 2020), offers an interesting contrast. Despite ongoing affective polarization (Torcal & Comellas, 2022), Italians have become less willing to express clear ideological identities (Azzolini et al., 2023). Thus, while left-right political categories persist, their meaning has shifted, with apolitical features likely playing a role (Cavazza et al., 2022).

Additionally, Italy allows us to ground our hypotheses not in the void, but in previous studies. Key research has already linked political and apolitical traits in Italy (Cavazza & Corbetta, 2016), including studies on food preferences and political ideologies (Guidetti et al., 2022, 2023), veganism and environmentalism (Raggiotto et al., 2018), and the correlation between right-wing populism and traditional cuisine (Demuru, 2021; Stagi et al., 2022).

Methodologically, understanding political preferences alongside consumption choices requires more than language—it demands cultural awareness. For instance, offering a dish like *risotto allo zafferano* could suggest regional political biases (e.g., Lombardy, historically right-leaning). Thus, the authors' familiarity with Italy's cultural and political context justifies the choice of Italy for this study.

Experimental setting and dependent variables

We tested our hypotheses through a pre-registered survey experiment conducted in April 2023 in Italy (N=1092) through the opt-in panel 'Pollstar'. Quotas were applied to reach representativeness in gender, age, and geographical residence with the Italian population. Respondents were exposed to a vignette describing a situation where a person orders a fixed-price menu in a restaurant. The experimental stimulus concerns the menu selected. Five menus have been randomly assigned: basic (control group), vegan, carnivorous, ethnic, and traditional. The vignette is reported in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1 HERE (See section 11 or Figures file)

We asked respondents where they would place the person on a 7-point ideological scale ranging from extreme-left to extreme-right, or to say 'I don't know', and to indicate which among the 7 major Italian parties the character would vote for, or to say 'I don't know'. Respondents were also asked on a 5-point Likert scale how likely they are to (1) accept the character's invitation to have coffee together and (2) expect a political conversation with the character to be a pleasant experience.

To test H1a-H1d, we used the answers to the question regarding the ideological position of the character with 'I don't know' recoded as missing.

To test H2-H5, the answers on the inferred partisanship and ideology of the character have been recoded into two dummy variables, *Partisan PL* and *Ideological PL*, with 0 representing 'I don't know' and 1 representing any other answer. Therefore, these two dummy variables are equal to 1 when the respondent performs PL and 0 when they refuse to do so.

To test H6-H7, we recoded the answers regarding the likelihood of having coffee and expectations on the pleasantry of a political conversation with the character into two ordinal variables - *Interaction* and *Conversation* - with three categories (*Likely, Neither Likely nor Unlikely, Unlikely*).

Independent and control variables

Regarding the predictors of PL, we test H2 through respondents' ideological self-placement. We operationalize it in two ways. *Located* equals 1 if the respondent places themselves anywhere on the ideological spectrum, 0 if they instead refuse such a placement, answering

they would be placed 'nowhere'. *Ideology* is a categorical variable with four levels: *Nowhere, Left, Center, Right*.

H3 is tested through *Affective Polarization,* operationalized through Wagner's (2021; but see also Torcal & Comellas, 2022) 'spread-of-score' index, namely a standard deviation around the mean of the feeling thermometer scores toward the seven major Italian parties (see Supplementary Information (from now on, Supplementary Information) section 2.3.1).

High news exposure equals one when respondents reported spending, on a normal day, at least ten minutes watching, reading, or listening to political and current affairs news, and 0 otherwise. We use this variable to test H4.

Finally, we test H5 through the *Cultural consumption* index. We computed this index by averaging the responses regarding the frequency of engaging in four cultural activities (going to the cinema, practicing an artistic activity, attending a live performance, visiting a cultural site) over the last year. For each activity, respondents could report engaging in them every day (recoded as 4), at least once a week (3), at least once a month (2), at least once in the last year (1), never in the last year (recoded as 0), or to not remember (0). The four items scaled well on a single dimension (Cronbach's alpha=.79), justifying the construction of such an index.

To test the hypotheses referring to the consequences of PL (H6-H7), we first used *Ideological PL* as the main independent variable to observe if being a politicultural linker is associated with the willingness to interact/converse overall. Then, we focused on the subgroup of our sample that places themselves either on the left (0-4) or the right (6-10) of the political spectrum and has performed ideological PL placing the character either on the left or the right. For this sub-sample, we defined the variable *Perceived Out-group* as a dummy variable

which equals 1 if respondents place the character in the vignette on the opposite side of the political spectrum (e.g., the respondent places themselves on the left and the character on the right), zero when they place the character on their same side.

Finally, across the different models, we control for the number of parties known by the respondent (*Party knowledge* – namely the number of parties for which a feeling thermometer score was given rather than selecting 'I don't know'), interest in politics, and socio-demographic traits - age, gender, area of residence, possession of a university degree, perceived social position, and city dimension. In models of groups c and d (see Table 2), we also control for the 'Big Five' personality traits - agreeableness, extraversion, openness to new experiences, conscientiousness, and neuroticism (recorded and manipulated through the I-TIPI battery as done by Chiorri et al. 2015) - given their role in predicting the propensity to interact and engage in a political conversation with others (Gerber et al., 2012).

<center>*TABLE 1 HERE (See section 10)*</center>

More details on questions and recoding of the variables discussed are available in Supplementary Information 2.

Methods and Model Specifications

To investigate the content and directions of PL (H1a-H1d), we report descriptive tables concerning the distribution of the ideological collocation of the character of the vignette as inferred by the respondent. Additionally, we test the significance of our results through Mann-Whitney U tests and t-tests (see Supplementary Information 3).

The remaining hypotheses (H2-H7) are tested through regression models. We divided these models into four groups, whether the dependent variable is *Partisan PL* (group a)*, Ideological PL* (group b), *Interaction* (group c), or *Conversation* (group d).

In detail, to identify the characteristics of the prototypical 'politicultural linker' (H2-H5), we estimated binary logistic regressions (models 1a-6a/1b-6b). To look at the consequences of PL (H6-H7), we first estimated ordinal logistic regressions on the whole sample to explore the association between *Ideological PL* and *Interaction/Conversation* (models 1c-3c/1d-3d). While these models allow us to exploit the numerosity of the whole sample, they are unable to test directional expectations. Thus, to directionally test H6 and H7, we restricted our analysis to the subsample of respondents (N=385) satisfying two conditions: having self-placed themselves either on the left (0-4) or on the right (6-10) of the ideological spectrum and having done *Ideological PL* placing the character either on the left or the right. The suitability of this subsample for our analyses resides in the fact that each respondent is assumed to have a clearly defined ideological and partisan in-group and out-group. On this sub-sample, we estimated ordinal logistic regressions to observe the associations between *Perceived Out-group* and *Interaction/Conversation* (models 4c/4d). The variables included in each model are summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2 HERE (See Section 10)

Results

You are what you eat: content and direction of politicultural linking

This subsection presents the results related to H1a-H1d, according to which preferences for ethnic and vegan food are associated with left-wing ideology, while traditional and carnivore food preferences are associated with the right. Notably, in Table 3, we displayed the distribution of the ideological collocation of the character of the vignette as inferred by the

respondent. We tested the significance of our results through Mann-Whitney U tests and t-tests (see Supplementary Information 3).

TABLE 3 HERE (See Section 10)

Consistent with H1a and H1c, vegan and ethnic menus are significantly associated with the political left, both with reference to the control group (as confirmed by the Mann-Whitney U tests) and to the political center (as shown by t-tests). Moreover, the association of the meat menu with the political right holds in all our tests, supporting H1b. Contrary to H1d, traditional food preferences are perceived as associated neither with the left nor the right, with the distribution concentrated toward the center of the political spectrum. This could suggest that, in Italy, traditional food preferences are associated with national identity, which transcends ideological and party-based associations. Finally, the control group is slightly skewed to the ideological left, yet both the mode and the median fall at the center of the spectrum.

Notice that our sample is divided into two groups: slightly more than half engaged in ideological PL based solely on information related to food choices (55.4%), while the remaining part declined to do so (44.6%).[4] All experimental groups have a percentage of politicultural linkers above 50%.

Respondents engaging in PL have been asked to answer an open-ended question regarding the motivations underlying their behavior. After removing blank, null, and unintelligible

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[4] Respondents refusing to engage in PL were asked why they refused. The answers support the validity of our operationalization of PL. Details are provided in Supplementary Information 1.1.

answers (e.g., 'Null', '...', 'xtbr'), two coders separately classified each answer according to a simple codebook made of five categories, with one of them ('Stereotype or other associations') further subdivided into four subcategories. The codebook was primarily defined ex-ante based on the literature and insights from the pilot study. However, it was flexible enough to accommodate ex-post categories inductively derived after reviewing the relatively small number of responses (491). The two coders agreed on more than 95% of the classifications. Cases in which the coders were discordant were dropped from the analyses. This left us with a set of 472 comments[5]. Descriptive results on each category, along with the category definition and examples from real answers are reported in Table 4.

TABLE 4 HERE (See Section 10)

Most reasons reported for PL deal with stereotypes or other associations. Stereotypes around personality are particularly relevant, followed by answers referring explicitly to the food characteristics without further elaboration.

A relevant portion of the reasons reported deals with policy issues (19.6%). Projection seems to play a minor role, with only 3.6% of respondents referring to it. Yet, 13.3% of respondents explicitly mentioned some kind of 'gut feeling', which may suggest projection is more relevant than what was explicitly reported. Finally, 4.4% of comments were classified as 'other', not falling under any of the previous categories.

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[5] 640 respondents engaged in ideological or partisan PL, 491 of them provided an intelligible answer to the open question.

To sum up, we successfully observed PL in the field of food in Italy. Moreover, vegan and ethnic eaters are perceived as left-wingers, while meat-eaters as right-wingers. We showed evidence supporting that these perceptions can explicitly arise from stereotypical associations, projection, and connections with political issues.

Ideologue, Cultured, and Informed: Portrait of the Politicultural Linker

In this subsection, we present results related to H2-H5, investigating which individual characteristics are associated with the willingness to do PL. To present results, we report the average marginal effects (AMEs) of models 2a/2b in Figure 2.[6] Regression tables are available in Supplementary Information 4.

FIGURE 2 HERE (See section 11 or Figures file)

As we can see, self-collocation on the left-right dimension is significantly and positively associated with a higher willingness to do both partisan and ideological PL, supporting H2. People placing themselves on the left-right spectrum are predicted to be 21% more likely to engage in partisan PL and 24% more likely to engage in ideological PL.

Affective polarization fails to reach significance, possibly because thermometer-based indexes better grasp attitudes towards political élites than everyday partisans (Druckman & Levendusky, 2019). Yet, our analyses do not support H3.

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[6] The effects of the independent variables do not change significantly in the other models. The only exception is for model 4a, where affective polarization is significant but news exposure, cultural consumption, and ideological collocation are omitted. For details, see Supplementary Information 4.

The effect of news exposure is significant, supporting H4. People spending more than 10 minutes daily consuming political news are 10% more likely to do partisan and ideological PL, even controlling for political interest and the number of parties known.

Moving to cultural consumption, people not participating in any cultural activity in the last year have a 50% chance of doing PL, but this probability grows by more than 10 percentage points with every unit increase on the cultural consumption index (see also Supplementary Information 4.2). This provides support to H5.

Regarding control variables: PL is more likely among people with higher party knowledge and self-perceived social position, but also among the lower educated and southern Italians.

To better represent these results, we computed from model 2a the probability of doing partisan PL of two 'prototypical' kinds of people: the 'political junkie' - a person that self-places ideologically, is highly exposed to news media, is highly cultured, has a medium-high self-perceived social position, and lives in a big city -, and the 'apolitical' - that has been defined complementarily. All other variables have been set to their averages. According to model 2a, the political junkie has a 91% chance of doing partisan PL, while the apolitical has only a 2.8% chance.

Team Tofu vs Bacon Buddies: going from Inferences to Decisions

In this subsection, we start by exploring the association between PL and social interactions in the whole sample (Figure 3). Then, being interested in directional expectations on out-group/in-group dynamics (H6-H7), we focus on the subsample described in the methods section to observe the consequences of PL on the propensity to interact with members of the political out-group (H6) and expectations on the pleasantry of a political conversation with

them (H7) (Figure 4). We report the predicted values for the DVs with different values of our relevant IVs in the different ordinal logistic regression models. Regression tables are available in Supplementary Information 4.

FIGURE 3 HERE (See section 11 or Figures file)

Figure 3 plots the predicted values for the three levels of *Interaction* and *Conversation* when respondents did ideological PL (circle) or did not (triangle) for models 3c/3d. Overall, these results show that performing PL is significantly associated with an increase in the propensity to accept an invitation for a coffee with the character, but not with expecting a pleasant political conversation. Specifically, ideological PL is associated with a 13% increase in the probability of being 'Likely' or 'Very Likely' to accept the invitation for a coffee and a 5.5% decrease in the probability of being 'Unlikely' or 'Very Unlikely'. Although the differences in the predicted values are not significant at the 95% confidence level, we note that the predicted probabilities for *Conversation* among people who did and did not engage in ideological PL follow a similar pattern to those regarding *Interaction*.

As for control variables, particularly relevant are the effects of agreeableness and extraversion. We refer the interested reader to Supplementary Information 4 for a discussion. We also control for news exposure, cultural consumption, affective polarization, party knowledge, and interest in politics. Among these, only news exposure reached statistical significance in the model for *Interaction*, while interest in politics and cultural consumption reached significance for *Conversation*. Controlling for these variables accounts for a possible confounding effect of political variables on the relationship between PL and the willingness

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to interact or expectations on a political conversation with others. PL seems to affect *Interaction* independently of the variables associated with it in models of groups a/b.

Figure 4 refers to models 4c/4d on the subsample of respondents previously described and allows us to test the directional expectations as stated in H6 and H7. Notably, we expect interactions and political conversations with inferred members of the political out-group based on PL to be perceived by the respondents as likely to be more unpleasant and anxiety-inducing (Stephan, 2014), and therefore less likely.

FIGURE 4 HERE (See section 11 or Figures file)

Figure 4 shows the predicted probability of different levels of *Interaction* and *Conversation* for people who perceive the character in the vignette to be part of the same ideological group they place themselves in and those who perceive the character to be part of the opposite group. Despite the N reduction, the magnitude of the effects is particularly strong for what concerns *Conversation*. People perceiving the character as part of the in-group are 20 percentage points more prone to say that they deem 'Likely' or 'Very Likely' that discussing politics with the character will be pleasant, and 15 percentage points less prone to deem it 'Unlikely' or 'Very Unlikely'. The effects for *Interaction* are somewhat smaller, but the difference in the propensity of being 'Likely' or 'Very Likely' to interact with the character is 15 percentage points and reaches 95% statistical significance.

We may reconcile this last evidence with the fact that PL increases the likelihood of interacting with others overall, as shown in Figure 3, by taking into account the role of projection. People in our sample are more likely to expect the character in the vignette to be

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politically similar (rather than dissimilar) to them, regardless of the experimental group in which they are placed, as it is possible to appreciate in additional analyses available in Supplementary Information 4.4. Accordingly, in the subsample used for models 4c/4d, respondents are 10% more likely to perceive the character as in-group rather than out-group.

In conclusion, H6 and H7 are supported. PL is positively associated with respondents' choices regarding the people they interact with overall, but when people perceive the character to be part of an adversarial ideological group (the ideological group they placed themselves in), they reduce (increase) their likelihood of engaging with them and their expectations regarding the pleasantry of a political conversation.

Discussion and Conclusion

"Right-wing people: lovers of traditions, good food, a glass of Italian wine, decorum, order and security.
Left-wing people: bug flours lovers, defaceers of monuments, fans of free drugs and squatting.
That's why I'm a right-wing person!" (Forgnone, 2023)

A Brothers of Italy MP published the above-reported tweet in March 2023. The tweet immediately went viral, reaching 1.6 million views. The existence and success of this tweet show a few things. First, how widely recognized is the association between food preferences and political ideologies in Italy, so much that an MP uses these as traits defining one's political identity. Second, that political élites often exploit associations like these to portray themselves consistently to the public. Other examples of this can be found in the Instagram posts displaying the Leagues' leader Matteo Salvini at a barbecue (Stagi et al., 2022), or a tabloid interview with Democratic Party secretary Elly Schlein discussing their alternative fashion and music tastes (Campus, 2023), or in the indignation that Daniela Santanché

showed toward a recipe considered an insult to the Italian culinary tradition (Milano, 2024). Alignments between politics and culture generate associations that are to be met by the élites to be perceived as politically consistent (Hiaeshutter-Rice et al., 2023). But since such associations might also be engendered by the observations of élite behaviors, these end up strengthening stereotypes even more. The associative link between politics and culture further solidifies, with relevant societal consequences.

In this study, we first discussed the concept of PL and the mechanisms possibly engendering it, namely the observation of correlations (1), associative issue ownership (2), observation of élites (3), media representations (4), and projection (5). We then provided evidence of PL in the field of food in Italy - an understudied multi-party European context - through a survey vignette experiment. More than half of our sample is willing to infer the ideological/partisan lining of others based solely on their food consumption choices and, consistently with our hypotheses, ethnic and vegan food preferences are associated with the political left, while meaty food preferences are associated with the right. We failed to provide evidence of the association between traditional foods and right-wing ideology, possibly because national identity overshadows partisan and ideological identification in Italy. The design of this study, relying on randomization, allowed us to provide strong evidence of a causal connection between observing others' food preferences and inferring their political preferences.

Second, we found that people placing themselves in the left-right spectrum, more exposed to news media, and with higher levels of cultural consumption are more prone to do PL. We failed to show an association between affective polarization and PL. We believe further research should not discard affective polarization as relevant for PL but should resort to alternative measures to shed light on whether our null finding is due to the measurement

strategy adopted. Promising results in this regard have already been found in upcoming research (Goovaerts et al., 2024), showing that indeed there is a statistical association between PL and affective polarization, but more research is needed in order to uncover the eventual causal relationship between the two. More generally, we call for more research on the possible causes and consequences of affective polarization in the southern European multi-party context. While the Spanish case, for example, has been thoroughly addressed by a special issue of South European Society and Politics (see Torcal & Comellas, 2022) we believe the Italian case in particular deserves more attention.

Third, we observed that PL is associated with a change in the likelihood of interacting with others and expectations regarding the pleasantry of political conversations with them. Notably, politicultural linkers are more likely to interact with those inferred to be part of the ideological in-group compared with those inferred to be out-group members.

This latter point may have substantial implications. If, as we showed, cultural preferences are associated with political preferences and are then used to select individuals to interact with, this will likely generate fewer cross-group contacts, fueling social distance, political polarization, and misperceptions about the political out-group through self-reinforcing dynamics, with consequences for the quality of the democratic process (Levendusky & Stecula, 2023; Torcal & Carty, 2022). MacKuen (1990) talked about a world where the color of one's collar inadvertently signaled their partisan affiliations: blue-collar workers were assumed to be Democrats and white-collar workers to be Republicans. People used these assumptions to decide whether to interact with others or not. While today some authors suggest that social class, and therefore the color of one's collar, may not be, in contexts such as Italy, an unambiguous predictor of political preferences anymore (Cavazza & Corbetta,

2015, 2016), this does not mean that outfits, diets, and other cultural preferences do not carry with them certain inadvertent political meanings. As we showed, these assumptions can affect contact between people and prevent exposure to cross-cutting conversations. The result of these dynamics could be a fragmented society, unable to find that common ground, namely those shared attributes, based on which social distance can be shortened and political polarization can be mitigated (Balietti et al., 2021; Górski et al., 2023).

This study is not free from limitations. First, we observed PL exclusively in the field of food. We suggest further research should study PL in other fields, such as music, movies, art, or sports. Second, while our survey experiment captures the causal association between food choice and respondent classification, it does not allow us to observe the underlying mental processes, which remain within a 'black box'—a common limitation of randomized and survey experiments. Further research may benefit from adopting multi-method approaches, incorporating qualitative techniques like in-depth interviews and focus groups to more effectively explore the mechanisms behind PL. For example, the differences in the role of perceived similarity and subsequent projection (Ames, 2004) deserve further attention. Third, and relatedly, our design allows us to make causal claims regarding the direction of PL induced by the randomized food preferences but limits us to test our theoretical expectations on the relationships between individual characteristics and the actual behavior of PL, and between PL itself and its possible social consequences through correlations. Fourth, the simplification involved in the use of a vignette could overestimate the role of the available information compared with real-life situations, where individuals are simultaneously exposed to a plurality of cues. While showing that half of our respondents are willing to infer others' ideological and partisan preferences solely based on their food choices provides strong

evidence of the role played by apolitical cues, further research should try to disentangle the

effect of different apolitical cues on PL, for example, through conjoint experiments.

Biographical statements

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Authors' contribution statement

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Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors report no conflict of interest

Preregistration of the study, data, and replications

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Tables

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of the variables in the sample.

Variable	*Median (IQR)/n (%)*	Variable	*Median (IQR)/n (%)*
Partisan PL=1	610 (55.9%)	*Aff. pol*	2.4 (1.3, 3.3)
Ideological PL=1	605 (55.4%)	*Ideologically located*	
Interaction=1	743 (68.0%)	*Not located*	230 (21.1%)
Conversation=1	653 (59.8%)	*Located*	862 (78.9%)
# Parties known		*Ideology*	
0	19 (1.7%)	*Center*	281 (25.7%)
1	2 (0.2%)	*Nowhere*	230 (21.1%)
2	3 (0.3%)	*Right*	315 (28.8%)
3	5 (0.5%)	*Left*	266 (24.4%)
4	4 (0.4%)	*Sex*	
5	20 (1.8%)	*Male*	531 (48.6%)
6	38 (3.5%)	*Female*	561 (51.4%)
7	1,001 (91.7%)	*Age*	48 (38, 59)
Political interest		*Macroarea*	
Low	397 (36.4%)	*Center*	300 (27.5%)

High	695 (63.6%)	North	415 (38.0%)
News Exposure		South	377 (34.5%)
Low	304 (27.8%)	Education	
High	788 (72.2%)	Low	680 (62.3%)
Index of cult. cons	1.0 (0.5, 1.5)	High	412 (37.7%)
Conscientiousness	3.0 (2.5, 3.5)	Size of the city	
Openness	2.0 (2.0, 2.5)	Small	710 (65.0%)
Agreeableness	3.0 (2.0, 3.5)	Big	382 (35.0%)
Extraversion	2.0 (1.0, 2.5)	Placement on 0-10 social scale	6.5 (6.0, 8.0)
Neuroticism	1.5 (1.0, 2.0)	Perceived Out-group	177 (45.4%)*

*This variable has been defined only on a subgroup of the sample (N=385), namely the portion that has done ideological PL (excluding those who perceived the character as centrist) and placed themselves either on the left (0-4) or on the right (6-10) of the ideological spectrum (N=385)

Table 2 Variables included in each model.

IV \ Model	1a/1b	2a/2b	3a/3b	4a/4b	5a/5b	6a/6b	1c/1d	2c/2d	3c/3d	4c/4d
Ideology	■							■	■	
Located		■	■							
High News Exposure	■	■		■					■	
Cultural Consumption	■	■			■				■	
Affective Polarization	■	■				■			■	
Party Knowledge	■	■	■	■					■	
Interest in politics	■	■	■	■	■	■			■	
Socio-demographics	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Personality traits (Big Fives)								■	■	■
Ideological PL							■	■	■	
Perceived Out-group										■

Table 3 Ideological placement of the character among the experimental groups.[7]

Group	N (%)	Ideological PL (%)	Distribution[a]
Control	224 (20.5%)	127 (56.7%)	
Vegan	227 (20.7%)	137 (60,4%)	
Meat	212 (19.4%)	114 (53.8%)	
Ethnic	215 (19.7%)	111 (51.6%)	
Traditional	214 (19.6%)	116 (54.2%)	
Total	1092 (100%)	605 (55.4%)	
[a] Among those who did Ideological PL			

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[7] An analogous table for partisan PL is available in Supplementary Information 3.

Table 4: Results of the manual coding of open answers

Category	Definition	Example	Number of cases (%)
Stereotype other associations (4 sub-categories)	Mentions some kind of stereotypical association (see below)	See below	283 (59.56%)
Projection	Explicitly refers to having performed projection	*'Is the same menu I would have chosen'*	17 (3.58%)
Issue	Mentions political and policy issues	*'Vegan people usually care a lot about the environment'*	91 (19.16%)
Gut	Mentions concepts such as 'instinct', 'gut feelings', 'sensations' or similar.	*'It is an intuitive thing, it has no rational basis'*	63 (13.26%)
Other	Anything that does not fit into other categories	*'So many things should be said about this…'*	21 (4.42%)

Subcategories of 'Stereotype or other associations'

Category	Definition	Example	Number of cases
Economic	Mentions economic conditions	*'Because they are eating things that everyone can afford'*	26 (9.06%)
Food	Mentions food characteristics	*'The chosen menu abundant in calories makes me imagine they lean to the right'*	98 (34.15%)
Personality	Mentions personality or attitudes	*'Person with little personality. who follows the herd'*	154 (53.65%)
Regional	Mentions Italian regions/macroregions	*'Typical menu of northern Italy'*	9 (3.14%)

Figures

Figure 1

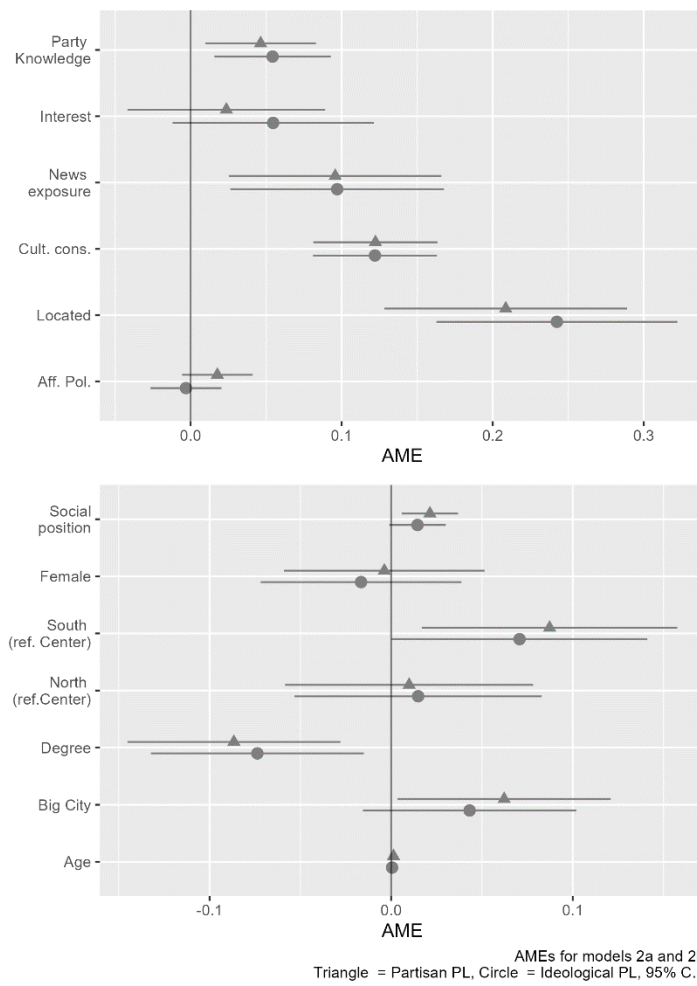|	
Static portion	*"Imagine you are having lunch at a restaurant offering five menus at a fixed price of 20 euros. Each menu includes a first course, a second course, and a side dish. The five menus are:* **Basic menu**: *pasta with tomato sauce, baked flounder, and mixed salad.* **Vegan menu**: *farro and quinoa salad, grilled tofu, and sautéed kale.* **Meat menu**: *charcuterie board, grilled sausage, and baked potatoes with crispy bacon.* **Traditional menu**: *trenette pasta with Ligurian pesto, eggplant parmigiana, and sautéed chicory with fava beans.* **Ethnic menu**: *noodles in broth, moussaka, and frijoles with guacamole.* *As you think about which one to choose, you hear the person sitting at the table next to yours choosing the:*
Experimental stimulus	[Randomly repeats one of the menus reported above]

Figure 2

AMEs for models 2a and 2b
Triangle = Partisan PL, Circle = Ideological PL, 95% C.I.

Figure 3

Triangle = did not do ideological PL
Circle = did ideology PL
Predicted values for models 3c and 3d

Figure 4

Triangle = perceived ideological in-group
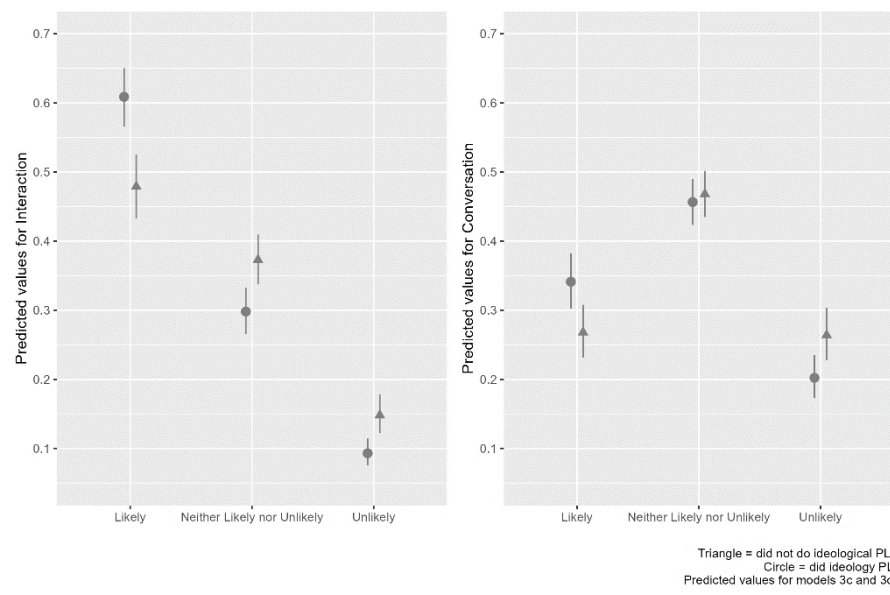Circle = perceived ideological out-group
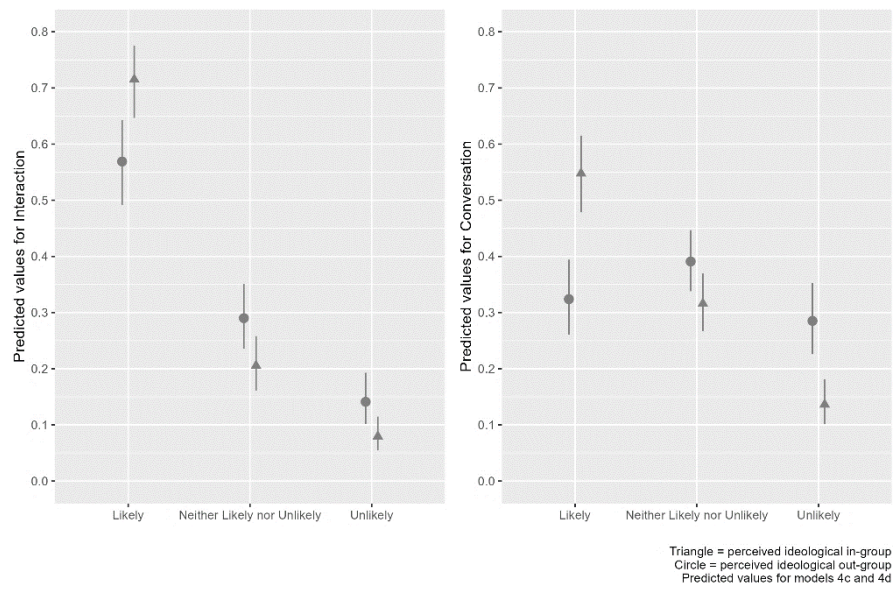Predicted values for models 4c and 4d

Figure Captions

- **Fig.1** The experimental vignette

- **Fig.2** AMEs of the independent variables on partisan and ideological PL

- **Fig.3** Predicted probabilities for the likelihood of interacting with the character (Interaction – left panel) and the expectations on political conversations (Conversation – right panel) for people who did and did not PL

- **Fig.4** Predicted probabilities of Interaction (left panel) and Conversation (right panel) according to the perceptions of the character ideological group.