Measuring the accuracy of lifestyle-based judgments on political affiliation

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Can we infer a person's voting preferences from their lifestyle choices? Are certain characteristics, such as the type of car you drive or leisure activities, really associated with different political parties?

The answer seems to be yes, according to a study published in the *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* by Catherine Ouellet, a professor in the Department of Political Science at Université de Montréal. Her study shows that we're generally very good at guessing the political preferences of others based solely on lifestyle cues.

In the first part of the study, participants were asked to select lifestyle and sociodemographic attributes that they believed corresponded to supporters of three different Quebec political parties. To assess the accuracy of these judgments, Ouellet then examined the actual relationship between these attributes and voting choices in the 2022 Quebec general election based on data collected using Datagotchi, an app that she co-created.

Ouellet's analysis looked at three political parties: the right-wing Conservative Party of Quebec, the left-wing Québec Solidaire and the more centrist Quebec Liberal Party.

The indicators: Pickup trucks, lattes, museums

Ouellet's results suggest that driving a pickup, practicing outdoor motorized sports and hunting are the attributes most likely to make people think you are a Conservative Party of Quebec supporter. Drinking lattes instead of filter coffee has the opposite effect. Interestingly, the lifestyle profile of actual Conservative Party of Quebec supporters, based on the Datagotchi data, is similar to that of people who don't vote.

At the other end of the political spectrum, visiting museums and galleries is the best predictor of voting for Québec Solidaire. Here there was a particularly strong convergence between peoples' stereotypes and real-life correlations.

The typical Quebec Liberal Party supporter seems harder to stereotype. With the exception of motorized sports, none of the lifestyle attributes studied was strongly associated with Liberal voters.

"These findings show that some lifestyle attributes allow us to draw conclusions that often turn out to be true," Ouellet commented.

A basic human tendency

There is no obvious connection between drinking lattes and voting for a left-wing party, so why is there actually a link between lifestyle and political leanings?

Ouellet believes it's because of psychosocial factors: "We know that people tend to associate with people who are similar to them, who share common characteristics such as language, culture, values, musical preferences, socio-demographic background and so on," she said. "This tends to have a self-reinforcing social influence effect: when you spend a lot of time with some people, you end up developing a similar vision of the world."

According to Ouellet, this convergence creates micro-level groups composed of people who think in more or less the same way, including their political attitudes and preferences.

Ouellet also notes that in today's social media-dominated world, where "ideological and affective polarization is deepening," the link between lifestyle and politics seems to be growing stronger.

She hopes to explore this connection in other cultures, such as the United States and Japan.

 More information: Catherine Ouellet et al, Stereotypes and

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