

Messi or Ronaldo? NTU study finds your political views may influence your answer



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International survey links footballer preference to political views, self-esteem, and news consumption

Whether you're Team Lionel Messi or Team Cristiano Ronaldo may reveal more than just your football preference.

A new [international study](#) led by researchers from Nanyang Technological University (NTU) Singapore found that people's favourite football star may be linked to their political ideology, self-esteem and even the way they consume news.

The online survey, which involved 10,661 respondents from 26 countries, found that people who identified as politically liberal were more likely to favour Messi, while those with more conservative views tended to prefer Ronaldo.

According to the researchers, the findings suggest that political identity may shape cultural preferences in ways people may not immediately realise.

Messi and Ronaldo's public images may appeal to different values

The study was led by Associate Professor Saifuddin Ahmed from NTU's Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information.

He said the two football icons project very different public personas, which may explain why they attract different groups of supporters.



Image adapted from leomessi, cristiano on Instagram.

“Messi is commonly associated with a quieter, team-oriented image, while Ronaldo is known for openly expressing his ambition and celebrating individual achievement,” Assoc Professor Saifuddin explained.

The professor added that people may naturally gravitate towards the player whose public image best reflects their own values and worldview.

He added that while similar links between politics and cultural preferences have previously been studied mainly in the United States, the latest findings suggest the phenomenon may extend to many other societies.

Rather than being limited to political issues, people's ideological beliefs may increasingly influence everyday choices and preferences in popular culture.

Short-form video users and people with higher self-esteem tended to favour Ronaldo

Beyond political ideology, the researchers also examined whether personality traits and media habits were associated with player preference.

They found that respondents who consumed more news through short-form video platforms such as TikTok and Instagram were more likely to favour Ronaldo.



Source: cristiano on Instagram

One possible explanation is Ronaldo's enormous presence on visually driven social media platforms, where his carefully curated public image is frequently showcased.

Researchers also found that respondents with higher self-esteem tended to rate Ronaldo more favourably.

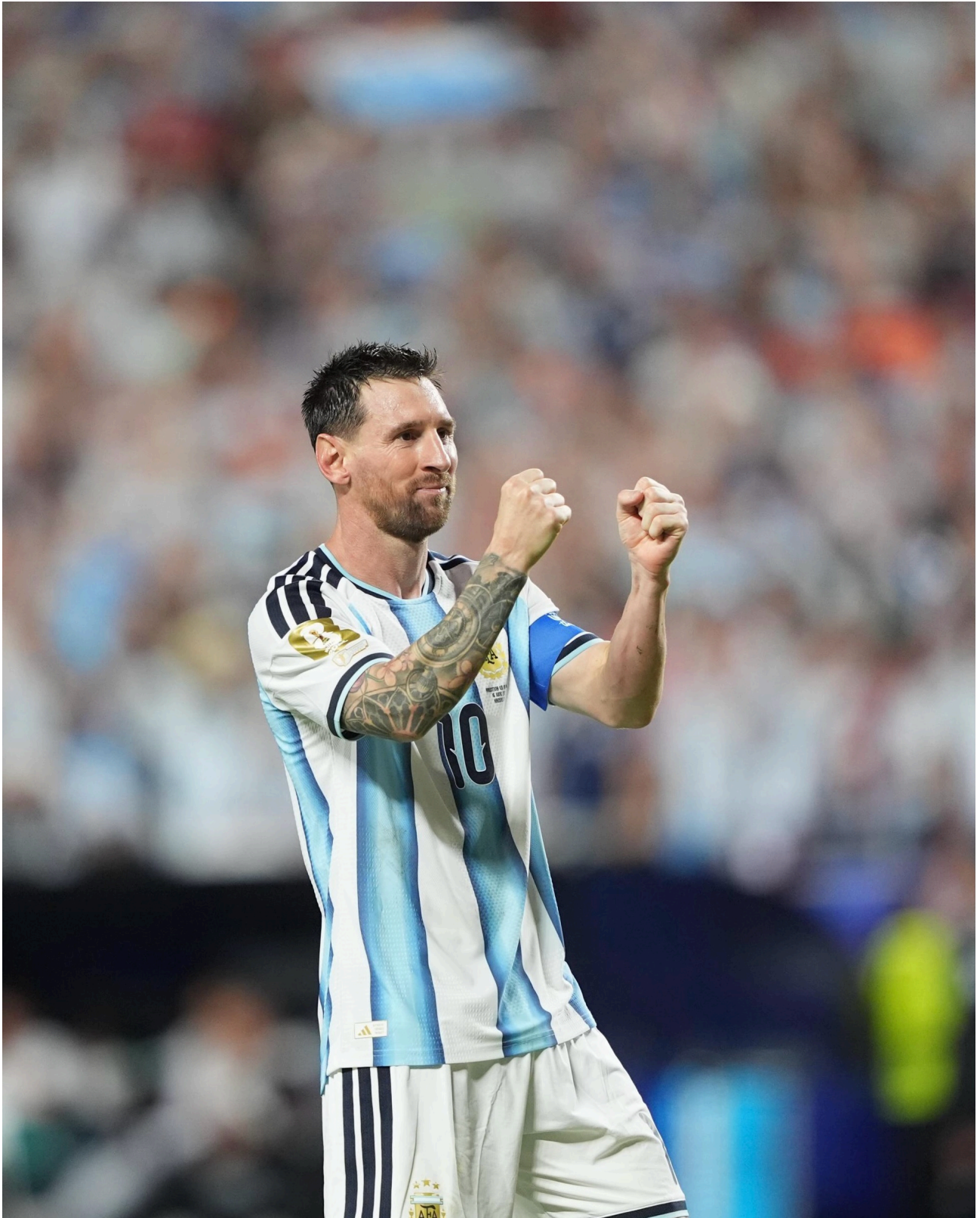
They suggested this could be linked to self-affirmation, with people who view themselves positively identifying more strongly with public figures who embody confidence, achievement and excellence.

“People may want to present themselves as modest, but that does not mean they identify most strongly with modest public figures,” Assoc Professor Saifuddin said.

Singapore among countries that preferred Ronaldo

The survey also found noticeable differences in player preference across countries.

Respondents in 11 countries, including Singapore, gave Ronaldo higher ratings than Messi on average.



Source: leomessi on Instagram

Meanwhile, respondents in eight countries — including Argentina, several Western European nations, the United States, Canada and South Korea — favoured Messi overall.

South Korea recorded the strongest relative preference for Messi, even ahead of Argentina. However, researchers noted this was mainly because Ronaldo received particularly low ratings there rather than Messi receiving exceptionally high scores.

The researchers suggested this could be partly due to lingering disappointment over a 2019 exhibition match in Seoul, where Ronaldo did not play despite being promoted as the event's main attraction.



Source: beIN SPORTS

The remaining seven countries surveyed showed no statistically significant preference for either player.

Interestingly, researchers found no connection between a country's FIFA ranking and whether its respondents preferred Messi or Ronaldo.

The study's country-level results also could not be explained by respondent's loyalty towards a player from their country.

The team plans to continue studying why the relationship between political ideology and football preference changes with age, as well as how social media exposure may shape people's perceptions of public figures and interact with their political values.

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