# Study reveals how UK individuals project political views onto fictional characters



Research from the University of Southampton has revealed a notable trend in how individuals in the UK project their political views onto fictional characters. According to the study, popular characters such as Harry Potter, Spider-Man, and Gandalf are believed by many to align with their own political views, while characters like Darth Vader, Cruella de Vil, and Joffrey Baratheon are perceived as supporters of opposing parties.

Dr Stuart Turnbull-Dugarte, leading the research team, expressed concern that this projection of personal biases is contributing to the increasing political polarisation within society. Speaking to The Irish News, Dr Turnbull-Dugarte stated, “If we see ‘villains’ as belonging to the other side, then we also tend to associate more and more negative attributes with that group." He further noted that such mental associations could render individuals more susceptible to misinformation that affirms their pre-existing biases regarding different political factions.

In the study, researchers surveyed 3,200 participants across the UK and US, where they were prompted to consider which political party various fictional characters, drawn from popular franchises including Marvel, Disney, and Harry Potter, would likely support. In the UK, respondents were asked whether characters would lean towards Labour or Conservative, while in the US, the choice was between Democrat and Republican.

The findings indicated that individuals were 20% more likely to associate heroes with their own political affiliation rather than with that of villains. Conversely, respondents were also 20% more inclined to assume a villain would vote for a party rival to their own.

Additionally, the study encompassed a second experiment involving 1,600 UK participants who were presented with two contrasting narratives about a local councillor—one depicting charitable behaviour and the other featuring corrupt actions. The results demonstrated a significant misinterpretation of the councillor’s political affiliation; approximately one in six individuals mistakenly remembered which party the councillor belonged to, showing a marked propensity to associate the "good" politician with their own party and the "bad" politician with the opposing one.

Dr Turnbull-Dugarte elaborated on these findings, suggesting that while people view heroes as potential members of their group, they acknowledge that some might not fit that mould. In contrast, there is a tendency to categorically assign villains to the opposition. He noted, “In a context where polarisation is high, projection appears to be more about defining who we are not, than who we are.” This perspective seemed particularly strong among individuals with heightened political identities, with those on the political left demonstrating a stronger inclination to view heroes as aligned with their beliefs compared to their right-leaning counterparts.

The research has been published in the journal Political Science Research and Method, highlighting an evolving understanding of how personal biases can shape perceptions of fictional narratives and real-world political dynamics.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://phys.org/news/2025-03-harry-potter-votes-fictional-heroes.html> - This article supports the claim that people in the UK and US tend to project their political views onto fictional characters, believing heroes like Harry Potter align with their own views and villains like Darth Vader with opposing parties.
* <https://phys.org/news/2025-03-harry-potter-votes-fictional-heroes.html> - It also corroborates Dr. Stuart Turnbull-Dugarte's concern about how this projection contributes to political polarization by associating villains with negative attributes and increasing susceptibility to misinformation.
* <https://phys.org/news/2025-03-harry-potter-votes-fictional-heroes.html> - The article further explains the study's methodology, involving surveys of 3,200 participants across the UK and US, and the findings that people are more likely to associate heroes with their own party and villains with the opposing party.
* <https://phys.org/news/2025-03-harry-potter-votes-fictional-heroes.html> - Additionally, it discusses the second experiment involving 1,600 UK participants and their tendency to misinterpret a councillor's political affiliation based on their actions, aligning 'good' politicians with their own party and 'bad' ones with the opposition.
* <https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/486635/1/Stephen_Edwards_Doctoral_Thesis_PDFA.pdf> - This thesis from the University of Southampton explores the role of sympathy in fiction, which indirectly relates to how people engage with fictional characters and project their political views onto them.
* <https://www.southampton.ac.uk/courses/modules/phil6059> - This module overview from the University of Southampton discusses the nature of fiction and our engagement with it, which is relevant to understanding why people project political views onto fictional characters.