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Lionel Messi or Cristiano Ronaldo? Choosing between the two players reveals fans' political views: what research says

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June 22, 2026

Researchers at Nanyang Technological University have reportedly found a correlation between the choice of two football legends and the political orientation of their respective fans.



Tell me which footballer you support, and I'll tell you your political leanings. The rivalry between **Cristiano Ronaldo** and **Lionel Messi** is a historic rivalry between two world-class players [that has lasted for almost 20 years](#) , but it seems to be played out not only on the football pitch: according to a recent study by the [Nanyang Technological University](#) of Singapore, the preference between the two players (who are in better form than ever at the [2026 World Cup](#) , which is currently being played in the United States, Mexico, and Canada) reveals the **political leanings of their respective fans** .

A choice that reflects the public image of the two, as explained by **Saifuddin Ahmed** , researcher at the University of Singapore and lead author of the study, given that the two footballers display completely opposite character traits and personal values: as the researcher maintains, the Argentine Messi ([who will play against Austria today, June 22nd](#) ,

at the Dallas Stadium) is in fact **calmer and more team-oriented** , while Cristiano Ronaldo ([Portugal will play tomorrow, June 23rd, against Uzbekistan](#)) has been known for his **strongly individualistic and ambitious spirit** since his first steps in professional football . It is precisely with these different facets that fans around the world can identify, even from a **political and ideological** point of view .

Details of the Singapore study

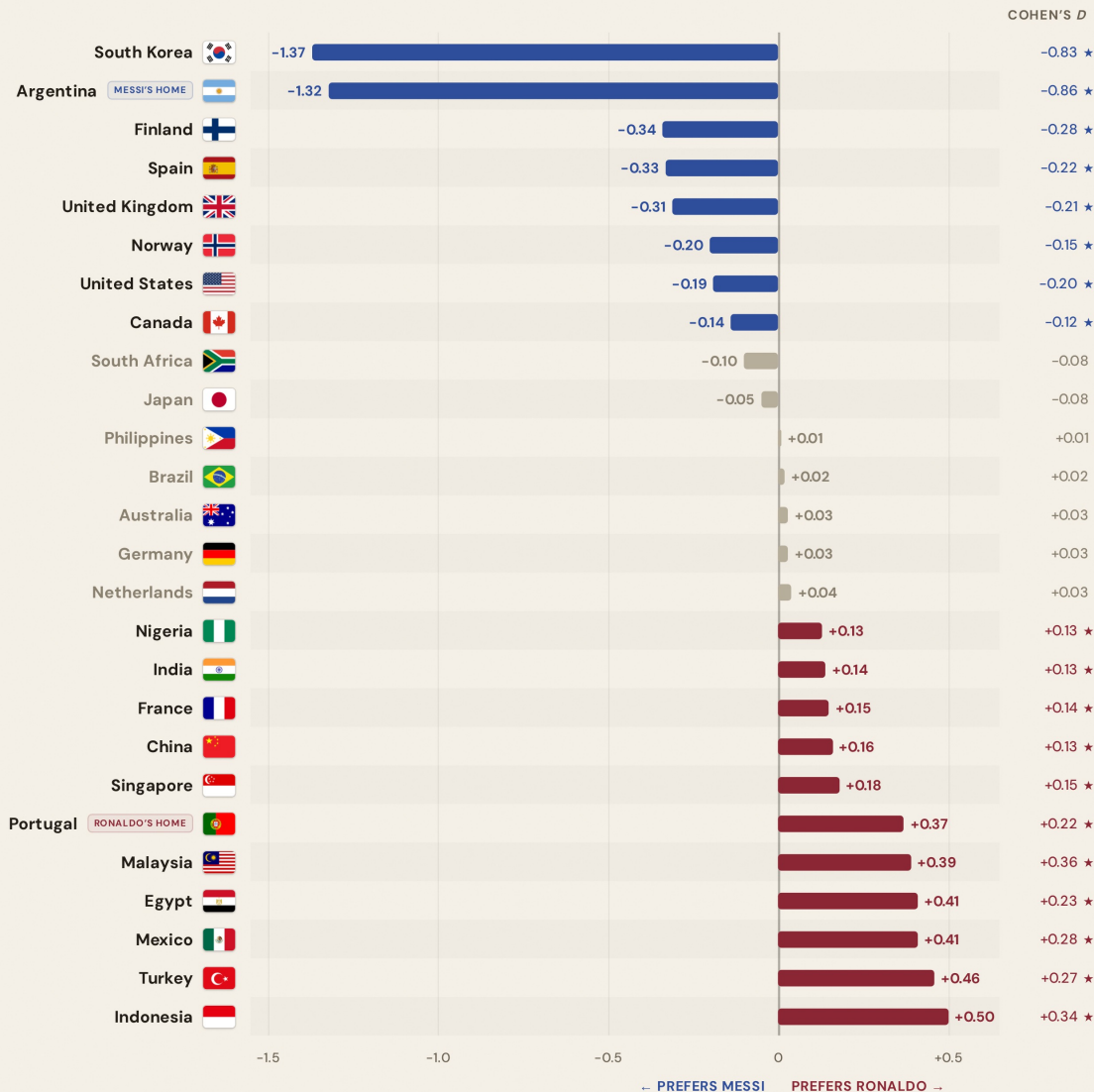
The Singapore study was conducted on **10,661 volunteers** from **26 different nations** : fans from 11 different countries preferred **Cristiano Ronaldo** (Indonesia, Turkey, and Mexico, while "his" Portugal was a little less convinced), while eight nations expressed a preference for **Lionel Messi** (like "his" Argentina, South Korea, and Finland). In the middle, seven "neutral" nations remained (including countries like **Japan** , **Brazil** , and **Germany**), which did not openly support either player. Italy was not included in the study.

Messi or Ronaldo?

How 26 countries lean

Each respondent rated both players from 1 to 7. Bars show the country-average within-person difference (Ronaldo – Messi): left means a country leans Messi, right means it leans Ronaldo. Countries are ranked from the strongest Messi lean to the strongest Ronaldo lean.

■ Leans Messi ■ Leans Ronaldo ■ No significant difference ★ Significant after correction



How to read this: values are mean rating differences on a 7-point favourability scale. Significance from paired-samples t-tests within each country, Benjamini–Hochberg false-discovery-rate correction across all 26 tests (★ = $p < .05$; grey = not significant). Fielded April–May 2026 via quota-sampled online panels balanced to national age and gender. 19 of 26 countries differ significantly.

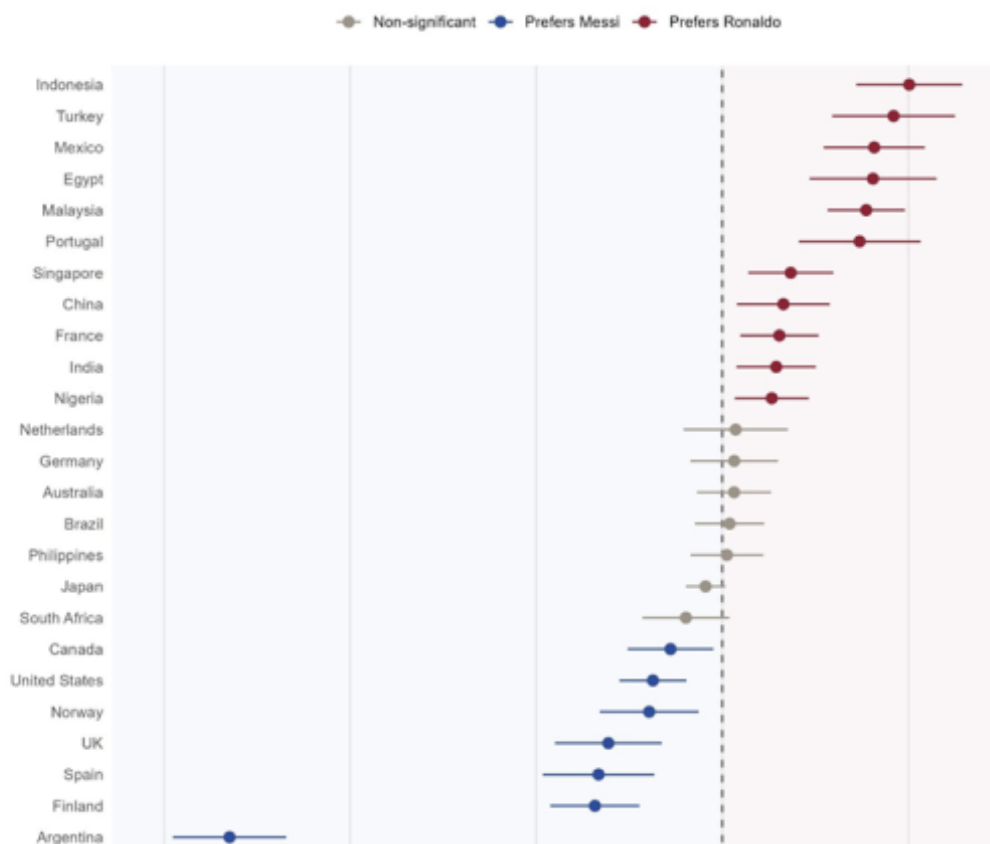
Visit: <https://goatdebate.study>

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Nanyang Technological
University, Singapore

Source: Nanyang Technological University

But above all, the study's results would highlight two opposing political positions on the part of the respective fans: those who chose Cristiano Ronaldo would display (on average) a **more conservative position**, while those who prefer Messi would generally tend toward

more progressive ideas . The correlation between preference for the player and the relative political orientation would play out entirely on the **age of the fans** , becoming especially evident among the youngest, and then progressively weakening among older fans.



Preferences for Lionel Messi (in blue) and Cristiano Ronaldo (in red)

But the **relationship with the mass media** also seems to play a significant role: study participants who get their daily news from social networks like **TikTok** or **Instagram** tend to favor Ronaldo. This choice could be largely driven by the **Portuguese player's strong social media presence** .

Last but not least, **self-esteem** plays a major role in the decision: the most self-confident fans tend to choose Ronaldo, in what seems to be a **psychological projection of their own personality** . A phenomenon Ahmed himself explains, stating: "People may want to appear modest, but that doesn't mean they strongly identify with modest public figures. Those with higher self-esteem may instead gravitate toward someone who embodies excellence , self **-confidence** , and **success** . All qualities they might see reflected in themselves."

June 22, 2026

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