

Messi or Ronaldo? Study links preference to political leanings

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FC Barcelona's Lionel Messi, right, in action with Juventus' Cristiano Ronaldo on Dec. 8, 2020 / Reuters-Yonhap

The choice between Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo may reveal more than just a fan's favorite football star. It could also reflect their political leanings and psychological traits, a new study suggests.

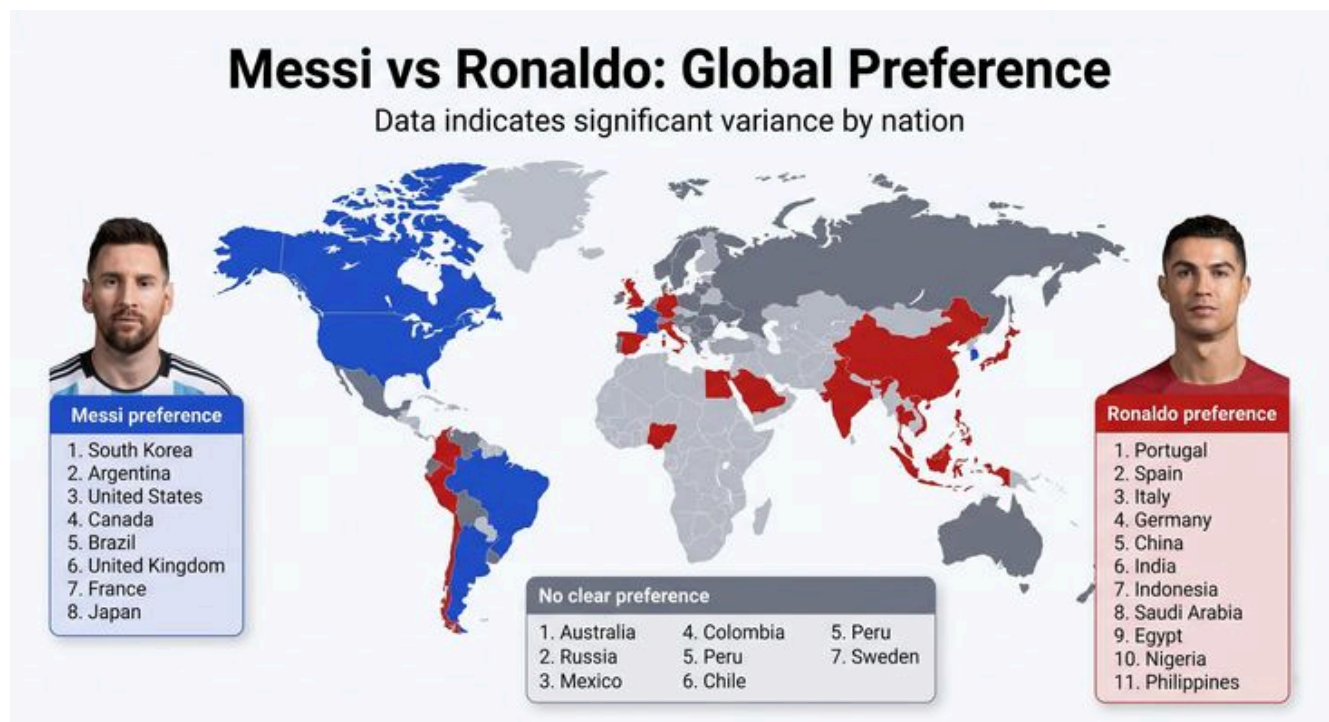
A research team led by Saifuddin Ahmed at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore analyzed the relationship between football star preferences and individual values. The preprint study, recently posted on the SSRN repository, surveyed 10,661 adults across 26 countries.

The study has yet to undergo peer review, and the team plans to conduct follow-up research to analyze the specific causes behind these associations.

In the preprint study, researchers asked participants whether they preferred Messi or Ronaldo and assessed their political leanings as liberal or conservative. The team also evaluated various factors, including age, self-esteem and news consumption habits.

Across all 26 countries, liberal respondents tended to favor Messi, while conservative respondents tended to favor Ronaldo. This association was strongest among younger generations and weakened with age.

At the country level, respondents favored Ronaldo in 11 nations and preferred Messi in eight, including Korea. The remaining seven countries showed no clear preference between the two athletes.



An image generated by artificial intelligence

The researchers also confirmed distinct differences in media usage and psychological profiles. Participants who consumed news on TikTok and Instagram tended to favor Ronaldo. Similarly, respondents with higher self-esteem were more likely to prefer Ronaldo.

Ahmed said the divergent public images of the two athletes play a significant role in this ideological split.

"Messi is commonly associated with a quieter, team-oriented image, while Ronaldo is perceived as an individual who is openly ambitious and displays personal achievement," Ahmed said. "People can be attracted to public figures who align better with their own values".

The researchers emphasized that the findings indicate football star preferences go beyond simple tastes and that they can be directly connected to an individual's political and psychological characteristics.

This article from Kormedi.com, Korea's top health care and medical portal, is translated by a generative AI system and edited by The Korea Times.