

A clue to your political leanings: Ronaldo or Messi? The answer could say something about you

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Indication of political preference

Ronaldo or Messi? The answer could say something about you.

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Few would dispute that Cristiano Ronaldo (left) and Lionel Messi have shaped football in the 21st century like almost no other duo. (Photo: imago sportfotodienst)

Whether Messi or Ronaldo is the greater footballer is a topic of frequent public and private debate. A recent study has reached a surprising conclusion: a preference for one of the two could be an indicator of one's political leanings.

They are the undisputed football superstars of the 21st century so far: Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi. The 2026 World Cup will be the sixth for both of them. And opinions are still divided on who is actually the better player. A new study shows that which one you prefer could reveal something about your political views.

Researchers at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore surveyed more than 10,000 people from 26 countries to determine whether a preference for Messi or Ronaldo reflects political leanings. The study has so far only been published as a [preprint](#) and has therefore not yet been peer-reviewed.

The result of the worldwide survey: People who considered themselves more left-leaning were more likely to prefer the Argentinian Messi. Those who considered themselves more conservative were more likely to be fans of the Portuguese Ronaldo. The correlation was strongest among younger respondents and weakened considerably in later adulthood, the research team emphasizes.

Who do German citizens prefer?

In eleven countries, including Turkey and France, Ronaldo was rated more positively on average, with the biggest difference in Indonesia. Messi fared better in eight countries, including the USA, Norway, and Spain – the biggest difference being in Argentina and South Korea. In seven countries, including Germany, the researchers could not find a statistically significant preference for either of the two superstars.

According to the study, the results suggest that political identity may be linked to cultural preferences that ultimately have less to do with politics: "Messi and Ronaldo convey distinctly different public personas," explains study leader Saifuddin Ahmed in a [statement](#). Messi is more often associated with a calmer, team-oriented image, while Ronaldo is known for openly expressing his ambition and celebrating individual achievements. "People may be more attracted to the player whose public image aligns with their general values," Ahmed suggests.

TikTok users prefer Ronaldo

What the researchers also noticed was that people who primarily consume news via platforms like TikTok and Instagram also tended to support Ronaldo. One reason for this, the researchers suggest, could be his strong presence on social media. Respondents with higher self-esteem were also more likely to be Ronaldo fans. A possible explanation for this, according to the study, is that people with higher self-esteem are more likely to identify with dominant public figures.

The online survey was conducted between April and May 2026. Respondents rated Messi and Ronaldo independently on a seven-point likeability scale. The researchers involved next plan to investigate why the relationship between political ideology and player preference differs depending on age.

Source: ntv.de, kst