

Messi or Ronaldo? The choice may depend on political beliefs: research

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An international survey conducted by experts at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore sought to understand the reasons behind the preference for the Argentina or Portugal captain. The research involved over 10,000 participants from 26 countries: here's what they found.

Messi or Cristiano Ronaldo? This is one of the questions that most divides football fans. And to understand why people choose one over the other, research comes to the rescue. According to an international survey conducted by experts at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, the preference for the Argentina or Portugal captain "could be linked to one's political orientation."

A survey with over 10,000 participants

The online survey, conducted among over 10,000 participants from 26 countries, according [to the University of Singapore's website](#) , found that people who identify as "more liberal" tend to prefer Messi, while those who identify as "more conservative" tend to prefer Ronaldo. However, the researchers specify, "this relationship is stronger among younger participants and weakens significantly with advancing age."



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What emerged from the survey

Analyzing the survey data, it was found that at the national level, participants in 11 countries, including Singapore, expressed an average more favorable opinion of Ronaldo. However, participants in eight other countries preferred Messi, while in seven countries there was no statistically clear preference between the two players. "The significance of the findings goes beyond football," explained Professor Saifuddin Ahmed of NTU's Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, who coordinated the study. The findings, the experts further reported, suggest that "political identity may be associated with cultural preferences that seemingly have little to do with politics itself." According to Saifuddin, in this sense, "Messi and Ronaldo project markedly different public images." The Argentine is "commonly associated with a more reserved and team-oriented image, while Ronaldo is known for openly expressing his ambition and celebrating individual success." Based on this assumption, then, fans "may be more attracted to the player whose public image aligns with their broader values."

Other factors linked to the preference for Messi or Ronaldo

But there are other interesting findings worth highlighting. The researchers also examined whether other personal characteristics of the survey participants, such as self-esteem, as well as habits related to the use of certain social media, were associated with a preference for one player over another. It emerged, in this regard, that respondents who obtained more information via platforms like TikTok and Instagram tended to prefer Ronaldo. One possible explanation, according to the researchers, could be linked to Ronaldo's evident presence on social media platforms, where users can more frequently encounter his "carefully constructed" public image. Participants with high self-esteem were also more likely to prefer Ronaldo. For the researchers, this result "is consistent with research on self-affirmation." One possible explanation is that people with higher self-esteem "may be more inclined to identify with ambitious and dominant public figures, whose successes reinforce their positive self-image."

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