

# FIFA WORLD CUP 2026 PRE TOURNAMENT ASSESSMENT

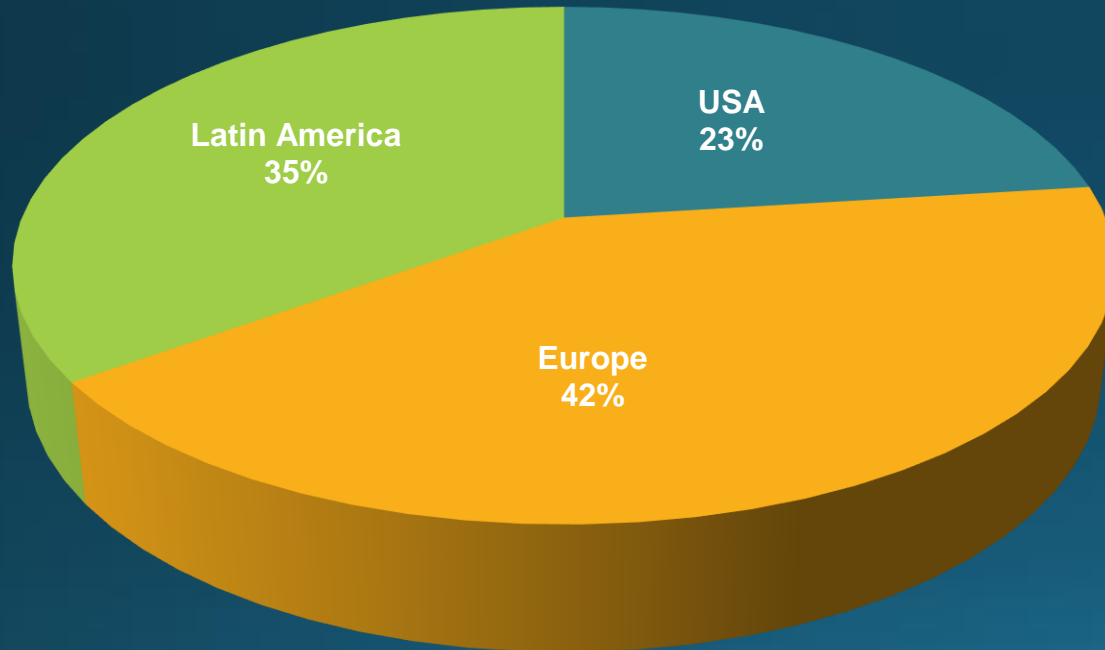


# Methodology

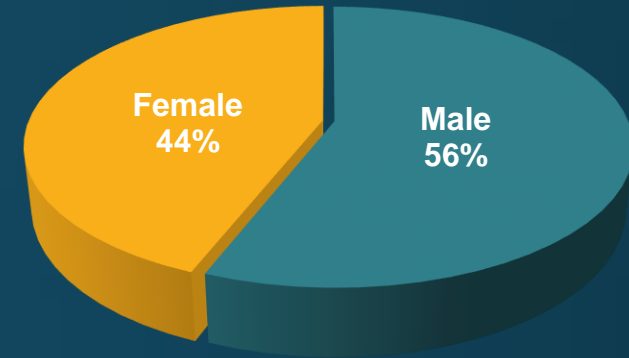
- ROS Research conducted an exploratory survey to probe international attitudes and opinions about the FIFA 2026 World Cup.
- Participants were members of ROS Research's proprietary panel who were invited via email to complete a self-administered survey.
- Sample specifications:
  - General population for all countries in the American and European continents
    - Age 18+
    - Must be interested in the FIFA World Cup
    - Except for the United States, no ethnicity or age quotas were observed
- Data were analyzed in aggregate across key variables, primarily geography and player recognition. Relevant findings are presented throughout the report where appropriate.

# Sample Distribution

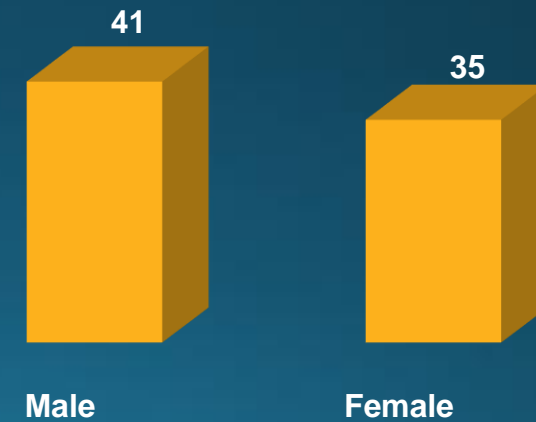
## Region



## Gender



## Average Age



# Topline findings

- **While still relevant, soccer no longer seems to be “the world’s most popular sport.”**
  - **American sports and leagues top international consumer’s preferences in terms of interest.**
  - **Also, American fans have embraced soccer and show strong enthusiasm towards it. A few possible explanations are:**
    - **Hosting one of the most commercially and culturally successful tournaments in football history (USA ‘94) gave American fans a taste of the sport’s passion and excitement.**
    - **Having a thriving national league that has showcased international stars such as England’s David Beckham, Sweden’s Zlatan Ibrahimović, and Spain’s David Villa, among others.**
      - **Lionel Messi, arguably the world’s most famous soccer player, currently plays for Inter Miami.**

# Topline findings

- **In addition, American sports have gained significant traction internationally and developed major fanbases.**
  - **Almost half of European respondents demonstrated a high interest in the NBA.**
    - **Top European talents like Arvydas Sabonis and Toni Kukoč paved the way in the mid 90s for current stars like Victor Wembanyama, Nikola Jokić, and Giannis Antetokounmpo, among others.**
  - **While Latin American fans interest in baseball is not surprising given that the region is a hotbed for talent, European fans seem to be opening to America's pastime.**
    - **MLB exhibition games held in London in the past few years seem to have had the desired effect of sparking interest in Europe.**
- **Fan engagement with the FIFA World Cup is exceptionally strong, positioning this edition of the tournament to be one of the most successful based on fans' stated intentions to participate and engage.**
  - **Nine in every ten fans expect to watch the Final.**
  - **For most aspects of the tournament, Latin American fans were the ones driving engagement and enthusiasm.**
    - **They were also more eager than American and European respondents in spending money in memorabilia and attendance to games.**

# Topline findings

- **Expectations match early forecasts.**
  - **While predicting a winner is inherently uncertain, fan's preferences and expert picks closely mirror each other.**
    - **Spain surfaced as the favorite team to hoist the World Cup.**
      - **Other perennial favorites like Argentina, France, and England are also considered heavy favorites to win the tournament.**
    - **The United States' somewhat inflated expectations were mostly driven by American fans enthusiasm rather than global consensus.**
- **Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo continue to define soccer stardom.**
  - **Despite lower-than-expected overall recognition of the top soccer talents in the world, Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo were by far the most recognized players.**
    - **In addition to being statistically tied as the most recognized players, there were also no significant differences in terms of perceptions between the two players.**

# Topline findings

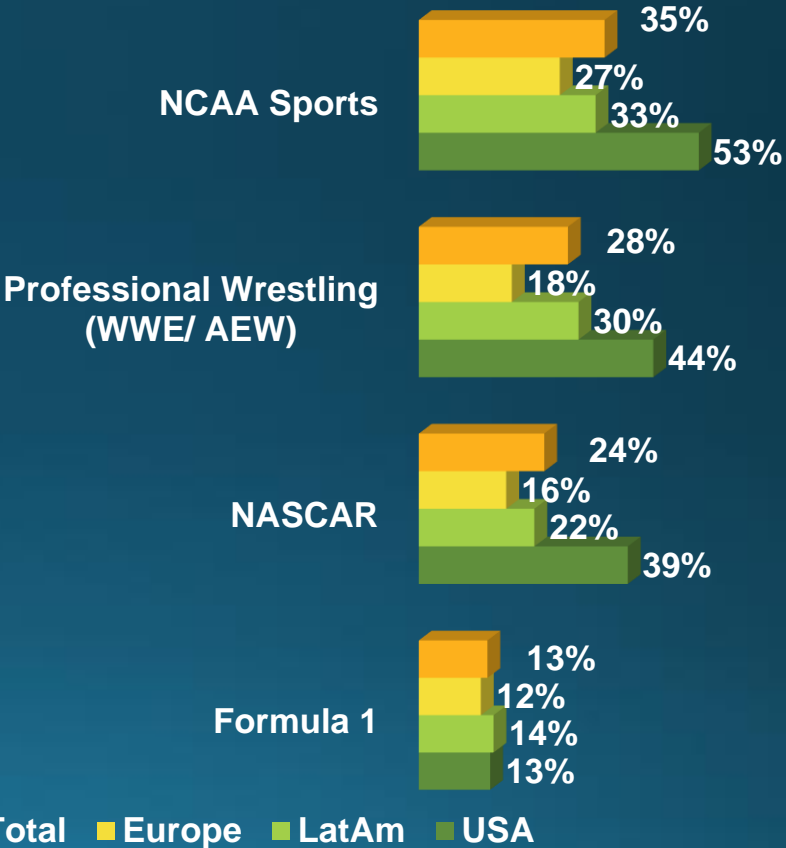
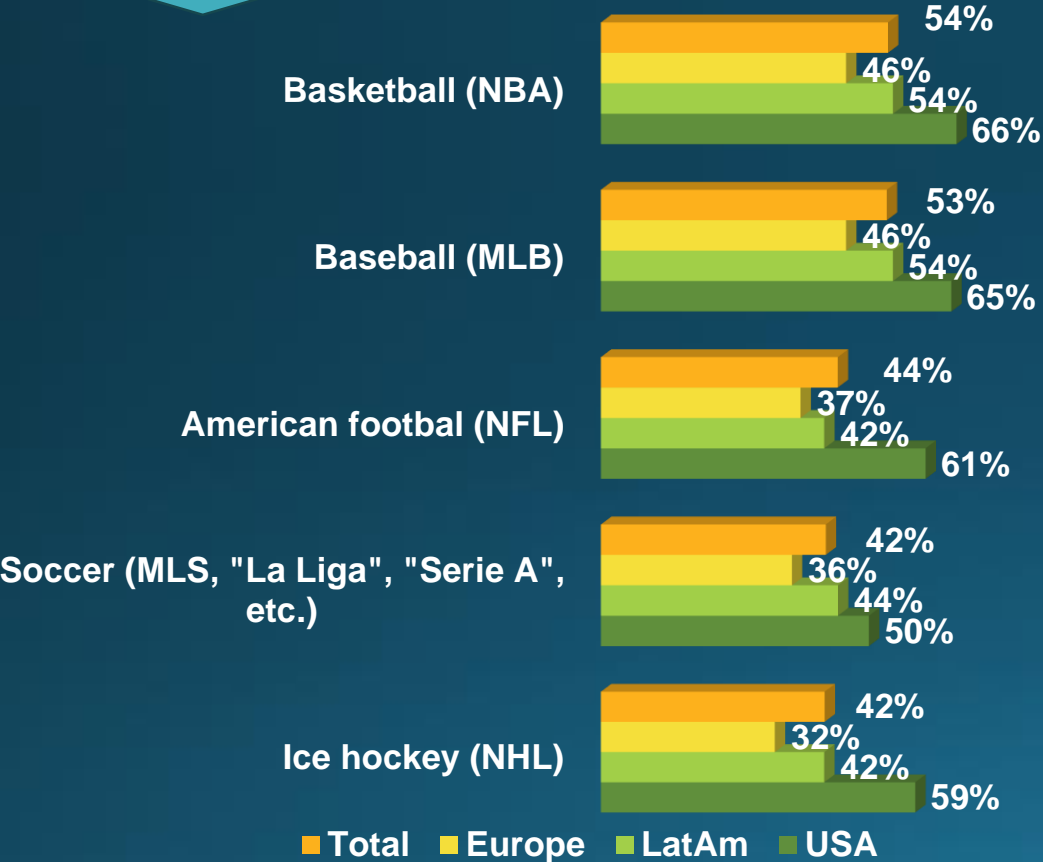
- **Star power brings money.**
  - **Despite the lower-than-expected player recognition, it was clear that they all are marketable and can generate successful partnerships.**
    - **Sporting goods was by far the best product category endorsement for these athletes, with fashion and accessories coming in a distant second place.**
      - **Lionel Messi edged Cristiano Ronaldo as the best spokesperson for sporting goods while Cristiano Ronaldo was considered the best fit for fashion and accessories.**
      - **On the other hand, France's Kylian Mbappé was considered the most suitable athlete for automotive sponsorship opportunities.**

# Implications

- **Global tribalism is an undeniable reality. Sports offer a unique platform to engage audiences worldwide, foster connections across cultures, and build lasting loyalties for both teams and brands.**
- **Successful sporting events must deliver more than elite competition; they must also create an outstanding fan experience that resonates before, during, and after the event.**
- **Maintaining engagement requires a presence across multiple consumer touchpoints and platforms, ensuring audiences remain connected, invested, and attentive.**
- **Elite athletes and strong athlete-brand partnerships carry significant commercial value. The right ambassador can elevate brand perception, expand reach, and drive growth, while a poor fit can lead to prolonged reputational and public relations challenges.**

Interest in professional sports leagues was largely driven by American fans, with the NBA and MLB attracting the greatest attention. Although soccer trailed basketball and baseball in popularity among U.S. audiences, it still garnered a higher level of interest than expected.

# Sports draw worldwide excitement and interest...



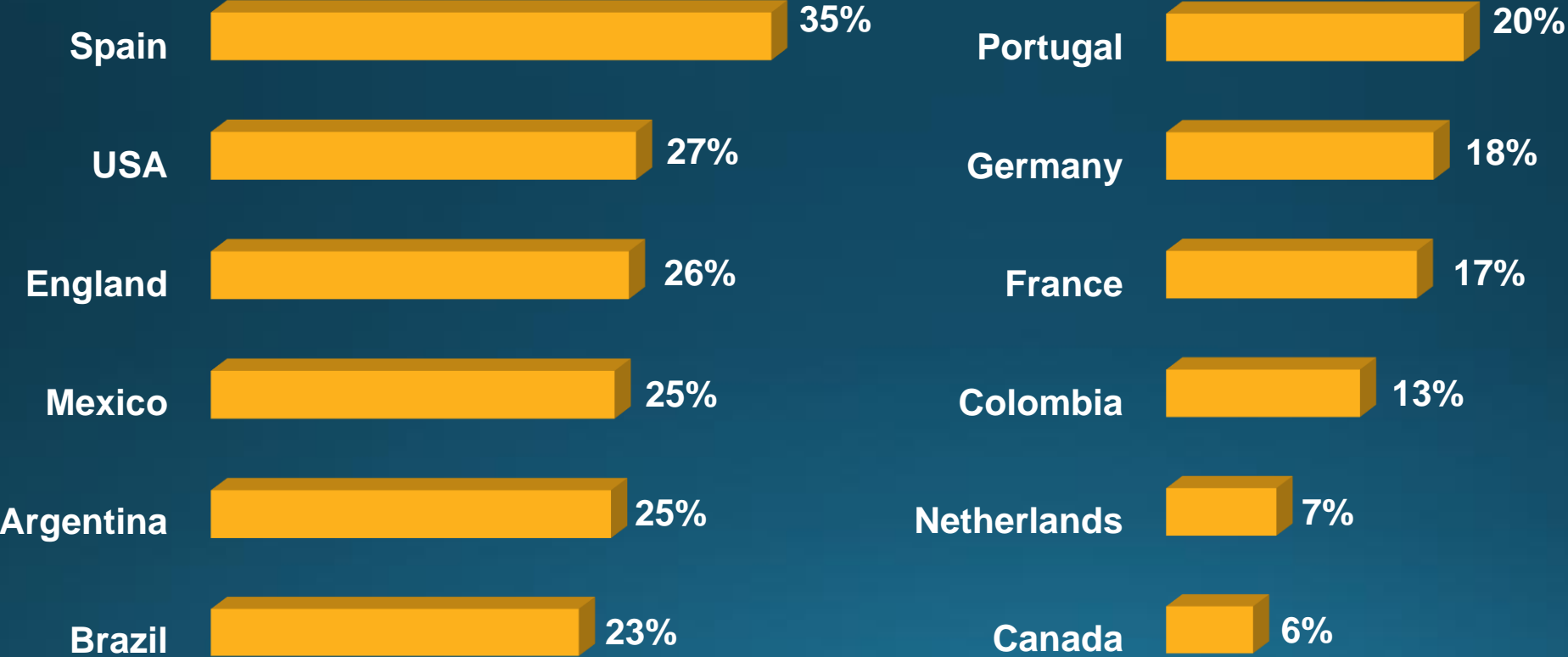
# ...and the FIFA World Cup promises to be a high engagement event.

Top two box summary	Total	Europe	LatAm	USA
Watch the final	88%	86%	94%	86%
Watch the games where my favorite team(s) plays	79%	78%	83%	75%
Watch the games where my home country team plays	77%	78%	79%	70%
Watch only the games where the best teams play	68%	65%	76%	60%
Watch every game I can	67%	65%	78%	57%
Go to a viewing party hosted by a friend or relative	67%	65%	73%	63%
Go to a bar/ pub to watch a game	65%	61%	71%	63%
Place a bet on the outcome of one or more games	62%	62%	72%	46%
Host viewing party at my house	60%	58%	71%	46%
Buy any merchandise/ memorabilia	56%	54%	65%	46%
Watch a live game at one of the venues	54%	55%	58%	46%

Soccer fans around the world are expected to engage with the event in numerous ways. Among them, Latin American fans are the most enthusiastic about maximizing their experience, especially through premium and paid opportunities that can involve significant expenditures.

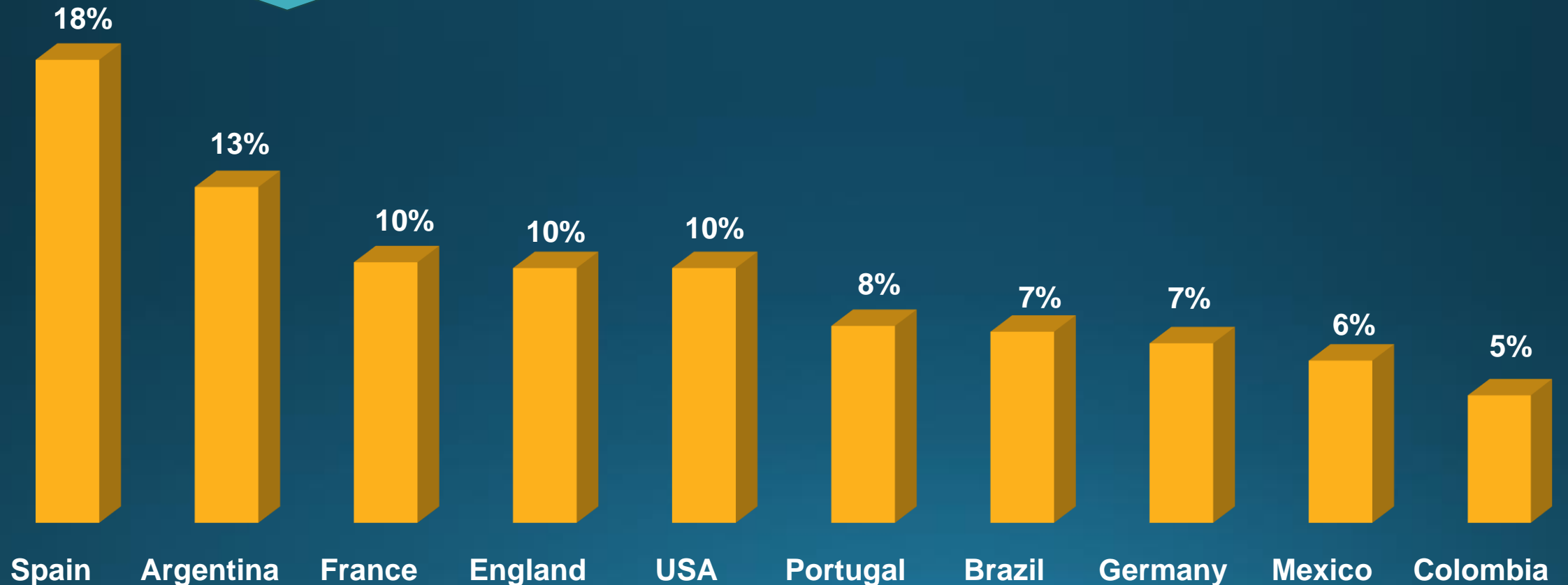
# It's OK to like more than one...

Spain attracted the biggest fanbase, with the U.S. unexpectedly coming in second place. Former champions Germany and France ranked considerably lower.



... but at the end, there can only be one.

Spain and Argentina ranked as the top contenders to win the World Cup, with France, England, and the USA statistically deadlocked in third place.



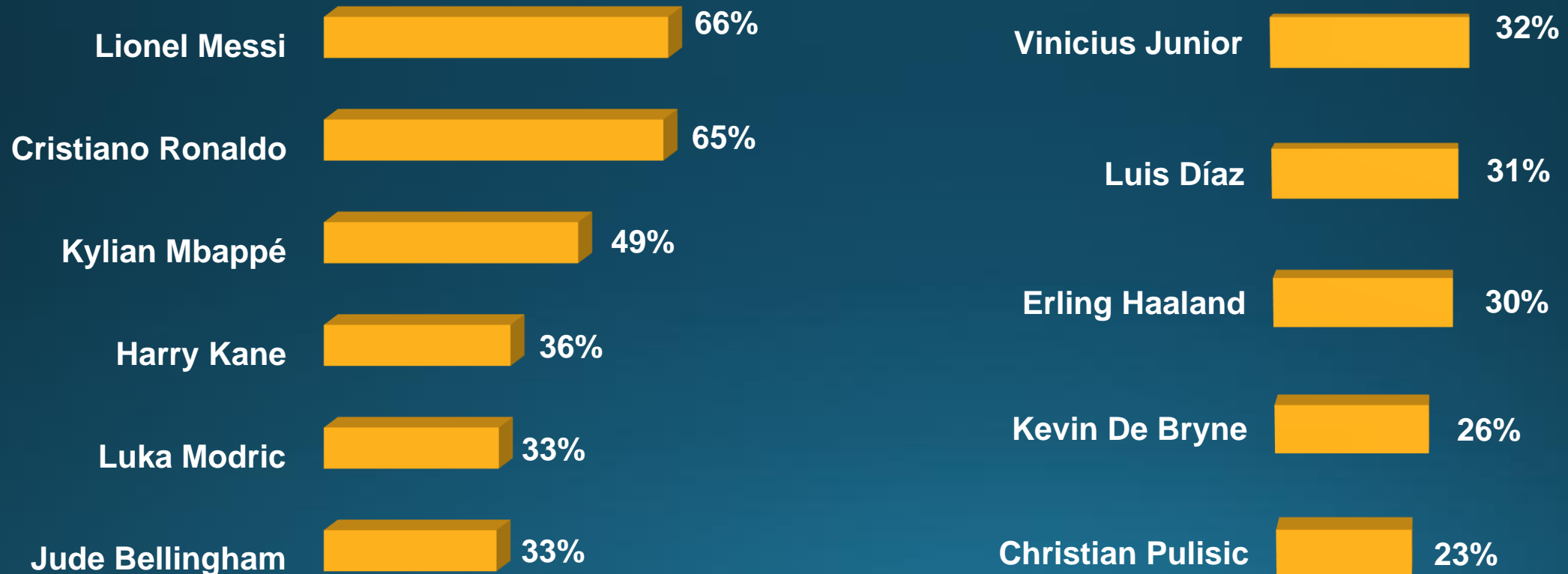
# ...despite regional preferences and perceptions.

	Total	Europe	LatAm	USA
Spain	18%	23%	12%	17%
Argentina	13%	11%	17%	10%
France	10%	12%	10%	7%
USA	10%	4%	3%	31%
England	10%	16%	4%	6%
Portugal	8%	6%	10%	7%
Brazil	7%	4%	8%	13%
Germany	7%	11%	5%	2%
Mexico	6%	4%	12%	1%

One in four European respondents predict Spain will win the World Cup, while expectations of an Argentina victory are mostly driven by fans in Latin America. Optimism about a U.S. triumph comes almost exclusively from American fans.

# Greatness garners recognition...

Argentina's Lionel Messi and Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo were the most recognized players, with roughly two-thirds of respondents familiar with them. In comparison, Kylian Mbappé of France ranked a distant third, with recognition from fewer than half of those surveyed.



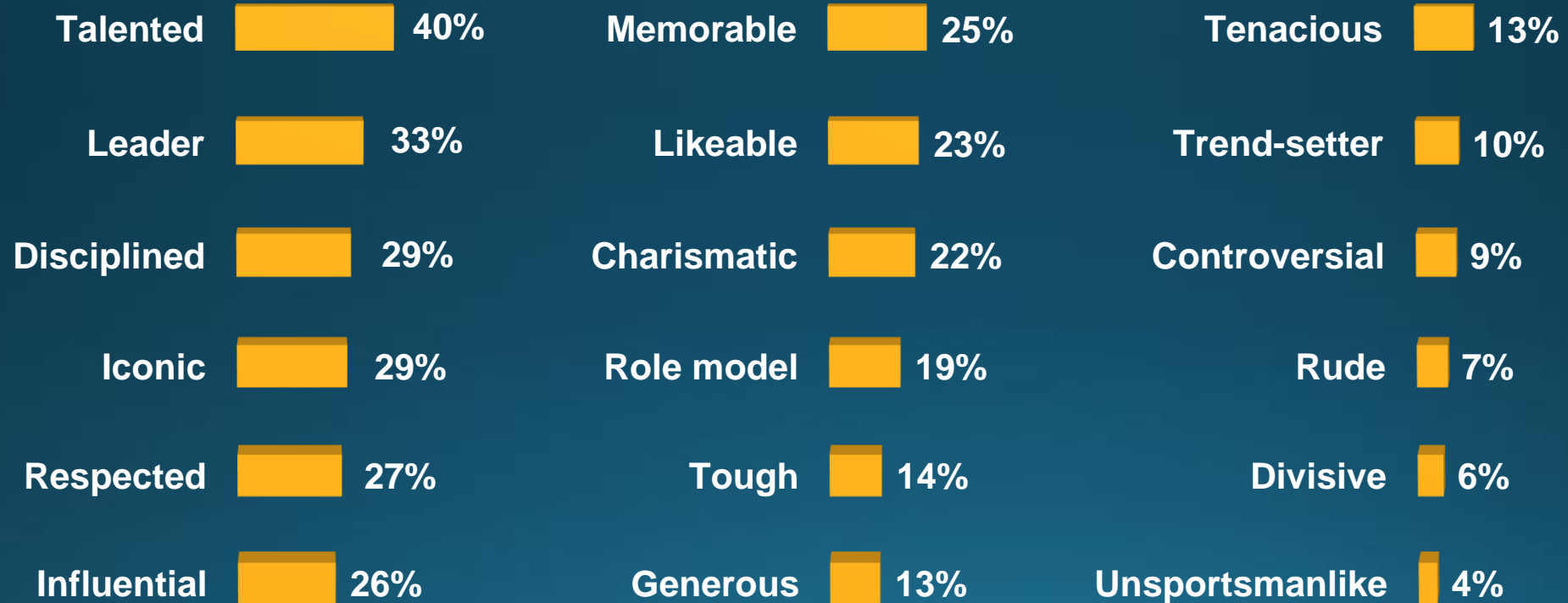
# ...but being local also helps.

	Total	Europe	LatAm	USA
Lionel Messi	66%	66%	68%	63%
Cristiano Ronaldo	65%	64%	62%	70%
Kylian Mbappé	49%	52%	50%	41%
Harry Kane	36%	46%	28%	30%
Luka Modric	33%	37%	29%	34%
Jude Bellingham	33%	44%	26%	23%
Vinicius Junior	32%	33%	36%	26%
Luis Díaz	31%	29%	40%	20%
Erling Haaland	30%	35%	29%	20%
Kevin De Bruyne	26%	30%	26%	18%

Recognition of these players was largely concentrated within their home regions. Much of Luis Díaz's recognition, for example, came from fans in Latin America. Among the European players, recognition was generally strongest among respondents from their own region, with Cristiano Ronaldo being the notable exception.

# Effort and discipline pay off.

The attributes associated with these players largely emphasize their skill in the game, the commitment necessary to achieve elite status, and the rewards that result from sustained peak performance.



# The GOAT debate is still not settled...



Cristiano Ronaldo holds a slight advantage over Messi in areas tied to raw ability, determination, and leadership. Conversely, Messi edges Ronaldo in attributes connected to his legacy and influence within the sport of soccer.

■ L. Messi

■ C. Ronaldo

Which of the following words do you associate with [player]?  
Base: Random to each player

# ...but something definitely is.

	Total	Lionel Messi	Cristiano Ronaldo	Christian Pulisic	Erling Haaland	Harry Kane	Jude Bellingham	Kevin De Bruyne	Kylian Mbappé	Luis Díaz	Luka Modric	Vinicius Junior
Sporting goods	61%	71%	67%	50%	35%	59%	52%	42%	58%	61%	70%	57%
Fashion & accessories	32%	32%	43%	22%	20%	22%	24%	26%	36%	29%	33%	30%
Automobile	20%	18%	16%	22%	15%	19%	12%	21%	30%	25%	21%	27%
Non-alcoholic beverages	18%	15%	27%	11%	30%	22%	9%	21%	9%	14%	21%	17%
Mobile electronics	16%	15%	14%	0%	10%	16%	18%	26%	15%	21%	12%	30%
Alcoholic beverages	15%	9%	11%	39%	25%	16%	18%	5%	17%	21%	12%	13%

Sporting goods was the category offering the best fit for all these players, with fashion and accessories coming in a distant second place.