Europeans & the World Cup

FREE Football Research in an Enlarged Europe

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results extracted from:
FREE Project (Football Research in an Enlarged Europe):
“Football in the European Public Opinion Survey”

A survey coordinated for Europe by Céline Bracq at BVA (France)

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What is FREE (Football Research in an Enlarged Europe) ?

An innovative academic research project

FREE – Football Research in an Enlarged Europe – is an innovative research project which gathers academics from 8 different European countries. The research by these experts covers a wide field in the social sciences: history, political science, sociology and anthropology. The central question of the project is: "To what extent does football contribute to the development of a European identity?". Indeed, there are very few events where European citizens can simultaneously assert their national identity and their belonging to Europe. Football offers such occasions, through the European club competitions (Champions' League, Europa League) or the national team competitions (Euro and World Cup). What does this mean for the citizens?

The FREE project studies this question through 6 research teams: the history of European football competitions, the memory of football in Europe, the recent feminisation of football, identities and the public sphere that football generates, and the game's governance.

The FREE project lasts three years (2012-2015) and is coordinated by the Center for European Integration at ESSCA School of Management (Angers, Paris, Budapest, Shanghai) which co-funded the study on which all the universities of the FREE network collaborated: Københavns Universitet (DK), Loughborough University (UK), Middle East Technical University (TK), Universitat de València (ES), Universität Stuttgart (DE), Universität Wien (AT), Université de Franche-Comté (FR), Adam Mickiewicz University (PL).

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http://www.free-project.eu

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Survey's methodology

Data Collection

Survey conducted by phone in December 2013 among a sample of Europeans residing in the following countries:

Sample

Sample of **7 245 Europeans representative of the population aged 15 or more distributed as follows:**

Austria: 812
Germany: 803
Denmark: 802
Spain: 800
France: 808
Italy: 800
Poland: 810
United Kingdom: 794
Turkey: 816

The representativity of the sample is guaranteed by the use of the quota method applied to gender and age. Depending on the country, additional variables (occupation, income, degree, region, size of the agglomeration) were added.

Each of the country was adjusted based on the weight of its population in the total.

What is the « Big-5 » ?

The five « major » countries in European football

The “Big-5” is an expression often used among media pundits and which is also regularly used as a category of analysis in research on this sport in Europe.

The 5 countries of the “Big-5” share these characteristics:

- They are the 5 European countries that won the World Cup:
  - Italy: 4 (1934,1938,1982, 2006)
  - Germany: 3 (1954, 1974, 1990)
  - England: 1 (1966)
  - France: 1 (1998)
  - Spain: 1 (2010)

- These five countries also have the five biggest markets for football among UEFA members.

- Until recently, the leagues of these five countries (Bundesliga, Liga BBVA, Ligue 1, Barclays Premier League, Serie A Tim) were also the first five according to UEFA rankings (France is now 6, behind Portugal)

- All the big-5 countries have all qualified for the FIFA World Cup in Brazil.
- The 4 other countries in this survey (Austria, Denmark, Turkey, Poland) have not qualified.

Synthesis of the main results (1/3)

A clear interest for the World Cup in qualified countries... & Denmark!

The World Cup attracts large interest in qualified countries

In all of the countries that qualified (the “Big-5”), a majority of the population will be watching the World Cup. The proportion is extremely high in Germany (82%) and at its lowest in Italy (54%) where the interest in football in general seems to have declined following the corruption scandals of 2006. The other three countries have figures around the 65% mark (63-67%).

A comparative lack of interest in qualified countries that did not qualify, except in Denmark

Apart from Denmark (68%), where the figure is interestingly high, less than half of the population in the non-qualified countries are planning to watch the event in Brazil. The World Cup might attract viewers from across the world but the link for the citizens of a given country seems to be primarily with their own team than with the competition as such. It is therefore good news for the organisers that the five main football markets in Europe (« the Big-5 ») qualified!

A contrasted relationship with the national team

Football is about emotions, but Europeans experience different type of reactions to the results of their national team. Reactions in case of defeat and victory show there are three groups of countries: with 87% of citizens who are proud when their national team wins a game, and 56% sad or upset when their national team loses, Turkey leads a group of 3 very passionate football countries (including Denmark and Spain) where the people react strongly to both victory and defeat – no doubt in case of a qualification, a very large majority of Turks and Danes would have watched the World Cup. The inclusion of Denmark may lead to a revision of some stereotypes about Scandinavian character.

The UK and France make up a group where above 60% of proud and 43-44% of sad/upset citizens: attachment to the National team remains high and is relatively balanced.
A third group shows a more moderate, less passionate, relationship to their national team: in Italy, Austria, Germany, and Poland only 53-57% of the population is positively affected by victory; and less than 35% is negatively affected by a defeat. This figure sinks to a very significant low of 12% in Germany and Austria! This is 4,5 times less than in Turkey and 3 to 3,5 times less than all the other countries.

Synthesis of the main results (2/3)

Expectations for the World Cup

The optimists: Spain, Germany, Italy

In Spain, Germany and Italy, at least half of the population expects the national team to reach the semi-finals (51-72%). Ruling champions (and current twice holders of the European championship too), the population of **Spain** has, understandably, and despite an arguably ageing team, the highest expectations of victory (58%).
Italy may have the population less inclined to watch the World Cup, but they are very optimistic nonetheless (46%) – this may have to do with the good results of the national team which only lost to eventual winnes Spain in the last two competitions: final of Euro 2012 and semifinal of the Confederations Cup 2013. Italy is also one of the biggest competitors in international football with 4 World Cup titles, the latest in 2006.
The population of **Germany** has similar expectations (45% of the population see their team – finalist in 2002, third-placed in 2006 as well as 2010, and arguably now fully mature – win the World Cup).

The pessimists: France, United Kingdom

Two countries are at the completely opposite end of the spectrum: France and the United Kingdom. In **France,** only 22% of the population sees their team at least in the semifinal, yet 21% see a victory in the World Cup! This reflects the poor results of the French team since 2002 (with the exception of the World Cup final in 2006), especially the first round defeats in both 2008 and 2010, including the national drama that followed the events in South-Africa. The results may have slightly improved (defeat against eventual winners Spain in the second round of Euro 2012) and the team may include rising stars in Pogba, Varana or Sakho, but it may look unlikely to provide results before the Euro on home soil in 2016.

In the **United Kingdom,** 13% of the population sees their team at least in the semifinals and 11% sees it as winners. Poor past results are likely to be the main explanation: England won in 1966 on home soil, but apart from a semifinal in 1990, has had a mostly lackluster record in the World Cup. Also, most of the English "golden generation" of Beckham etc. has retired or is ageing and their expected successors (Rooney, or the currently injured Walcott) have not made an impact at international level yet.

Synthesis of the main results (3/3)

Europeans see Brazil as firm favourites, Spain and Germany as challengers

Similar forecasts across Europe

Apart from Austria, the European population in all the countries surveyed see Brazil as the winner of the World Cup: they have home soil advantage, and with the likes of Thiago Silva, David Luiz, Neymar stars in every line from defense to attack. Crucially, Brazil also have major players in every Big-5 countries, and in most clubs, which undoubtedly helps their popularity throughout Europe. Almost half the Big-5 population (41%) sees Brazil as the eventual winners. Next but very far in the rankings are Spain and Germany with similar results (16% and 14%) which are on every podium, except in Italy.

The different result in Austria might be interpreted as a result of cultural proximity: Germany comes first, ahead of Brazil. Only in Italy does the population not see Germany as a top-three favourite: they put their own team of Italy on the second step instead.

European sympathies

Brazil might be on top of every forecast to win the World Cup, but they are not the team most Europeans like or declare to feel sympathy for. Among the population of the 'Big-5' football countries, it is European national football teams with which people declare an affinity: Spain tops the ranking, followed by Germany and Italy. These 3 countries are the European national teams with the greatest number final victories in the World Cup and Euro. These three countries have also, together with England, dominated club football since the 1950s.

In all the surveyed countries, Brazil is among the three most 'liked' football nations, but with relatively low results (4-12%) except in Turkey where Brazil comes first with 20%. Spain is the only country where two non-European teams (Brazil, Argentina) are the most liked by their population. Cultural proximity is the main explanation.

Note on the margins of error

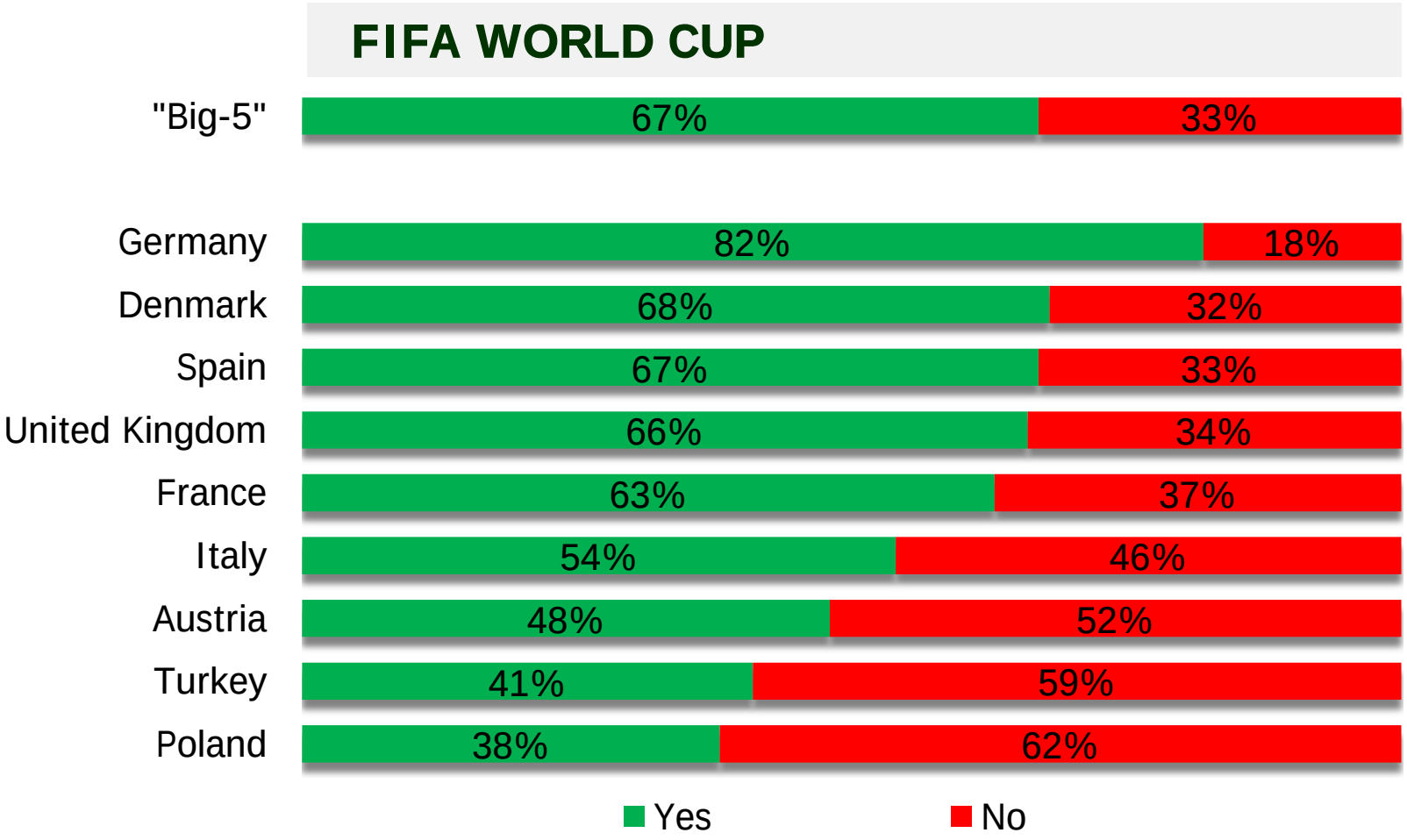
As in every quantitative study, this one presents results which are subject to the margins of error inherent to statistical laws. The table here below presents these margin of errors based on the result obtained and the size of the sample taken into account.

Sample size	Interval confidence of 95% according to the score					
	5 or 95%	10 or 90%	20 or 80%	30 or 70%	40 or 60%	50%
100	4,4	6,0	8,0	9,2	9,8	10,0
200	3,1	4,2	5,7	6,5	6,9	7,1
300	2,5	3,5	4,6	5,3	5,7	5,8
400	2,2	3,0	4,0	4,6	4,9	5,0
500	1,9	2,7	3,6	4,1	4,4	4,5
600	1,8	2,4	3,3	3,7	4,0	4,1
700	1,6	2,3	3,0	3,5	3,7	3,8
800	1,5	2,1	2,8	3,2	3,5	3,5
900	1,4	2,0	2,6	3,0	3,2	3,3
1 000	1,4	1,8	2,5	2,8	3,0	3,1
2 000	1,0	1,3	1,8	2,1	2,2	2,2
4 000	0,7	0,9	1,3	1,5	1,6	1,6
6 000	0,6	0,8	1,1	1,3	1,4	1,4
10 000	0,4	0,6	0,8	0,9	0,9	1,0

Reading example: In the case of a sample of 1 000 people, for a percentage obtained in the poll of 20%, the margin of error is 2,5. The result therefore has 95% chances of being between 17,5% and 22,5%

Following the FIFA World Cup in Europe

Do you follow men's football at the competitive levels I will read now?



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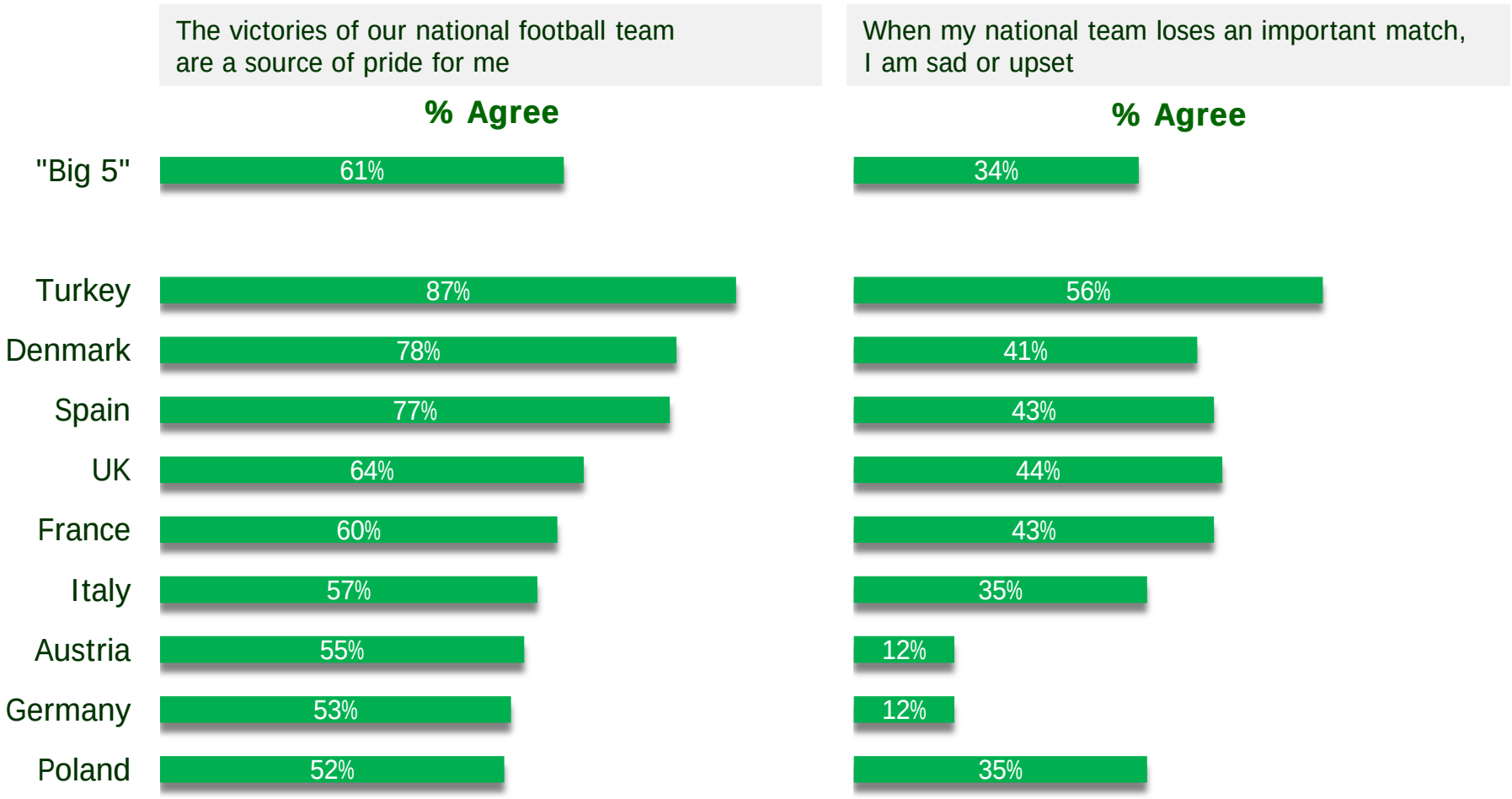
Impact of the victory or defeat of the National Team

In each country

Would you please state how much you agree or disagree with the following statements?



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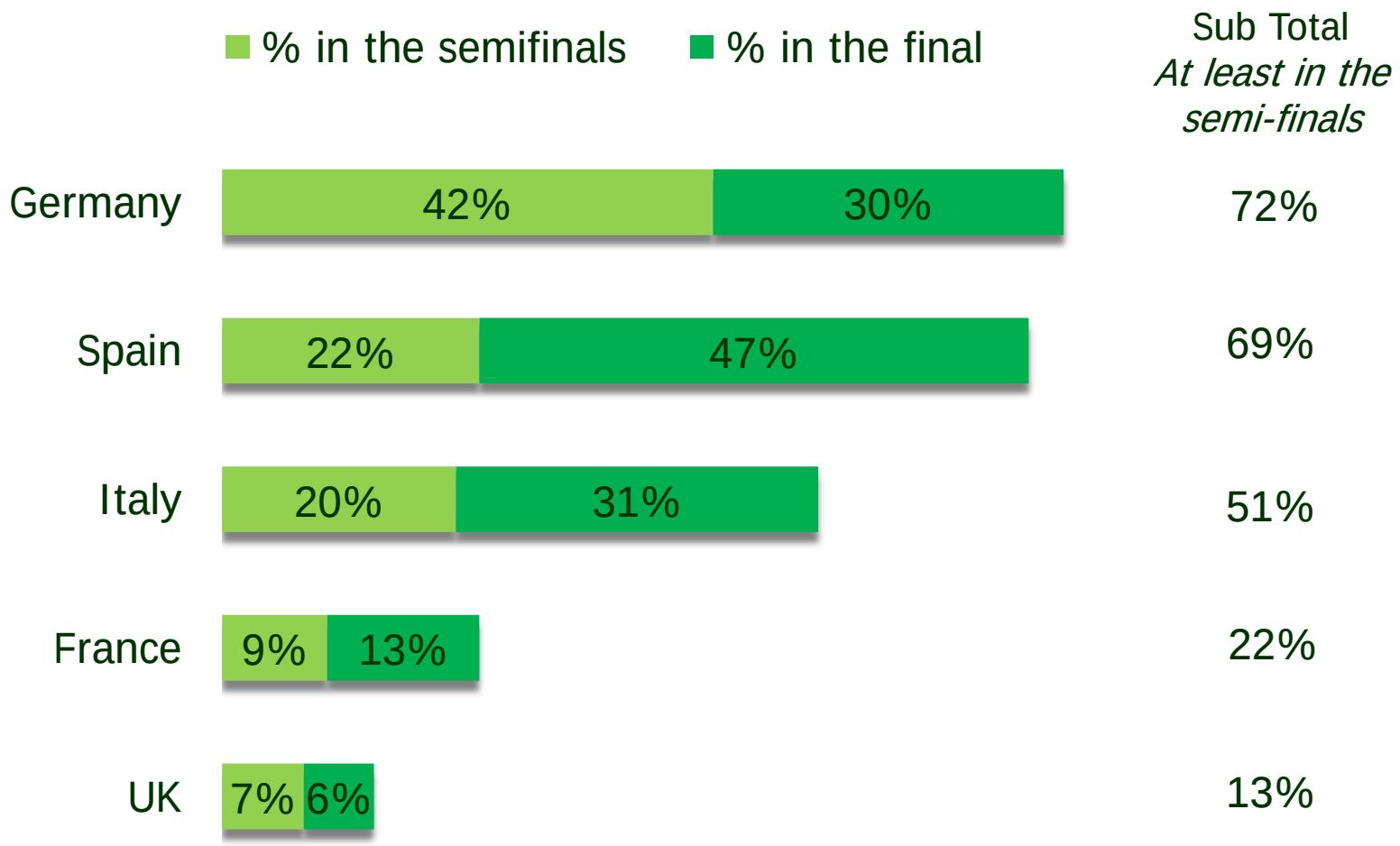
Prediction of level reached by the National team at the World Cup

In each country

According to you, which level of competition do you think your country could reach during the 2014 FIFA Football World Cup Brazil?



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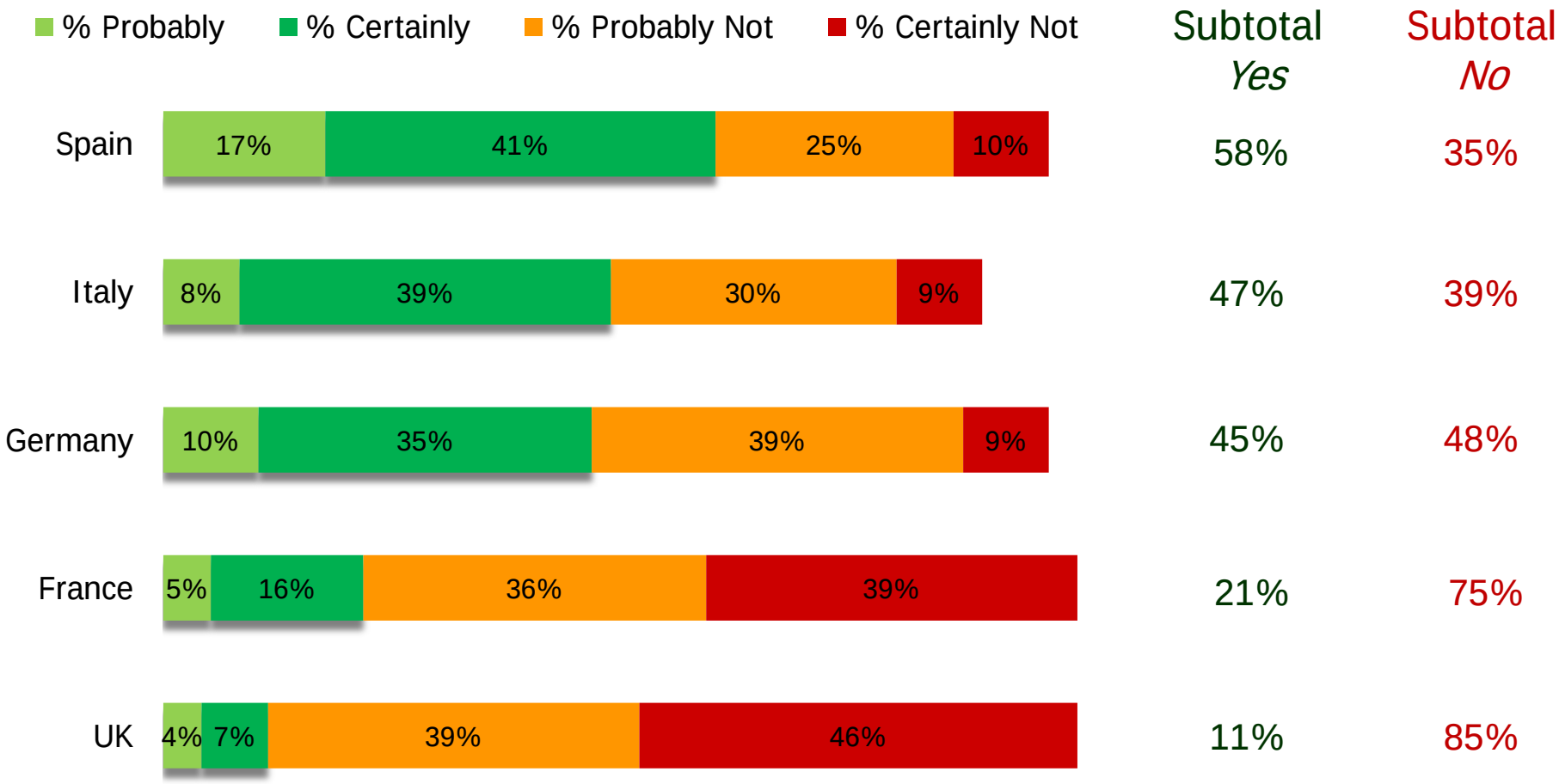
Prediction of victory for the National Team

In each country

Do you think your country is going to win the 2014 FIFA Football World Cup Brazil?



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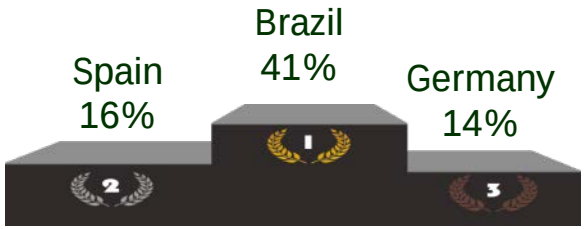
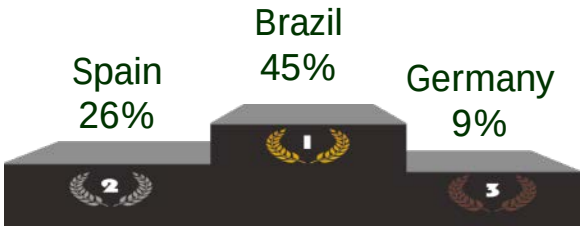
Prediction of victory at the World Cup

According to you, among the following countries, which one has the best chance to win the 2014 FIFA Football World Cup Brazil?

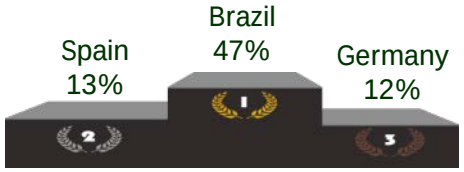
« Big 5 »



Spain

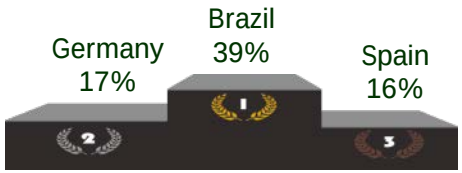


France



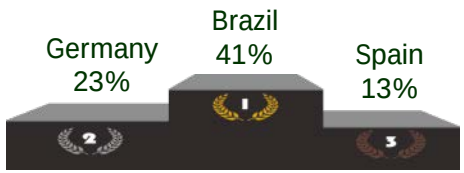
France is 4th with 7% of votes

United Kingdom

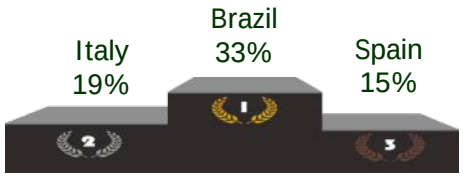


England is 7th with 2% of votes

Germany



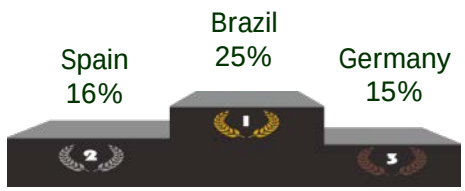
Italy



Austria

Denmark

Turkey



Poland

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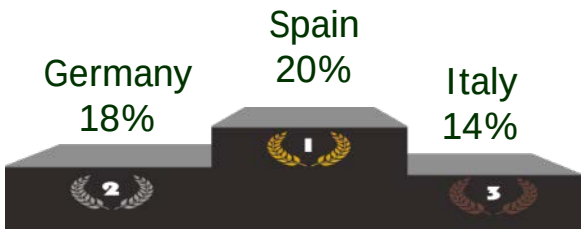
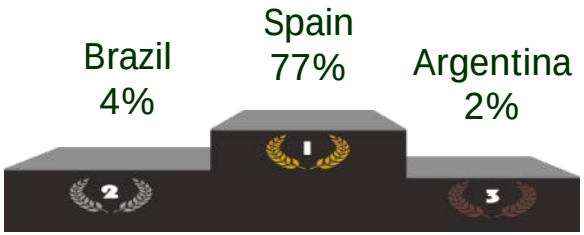
Favourite team playing the World Cup

And among the following national football teams, which one do you prefer?

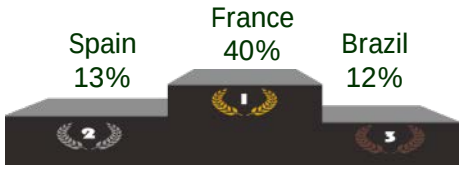
« Big 5 »



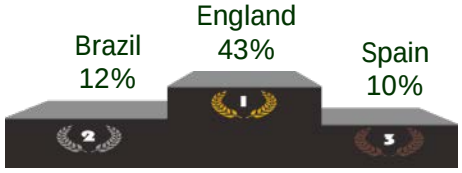
Spain



France

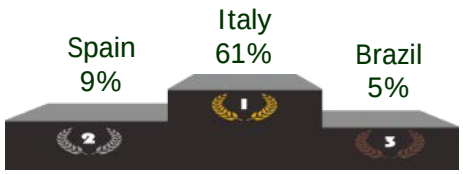


United Kingdom



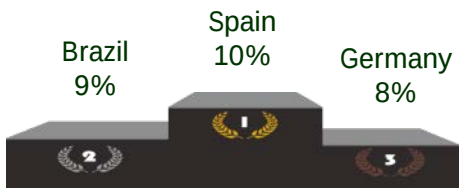
Germany

Italy

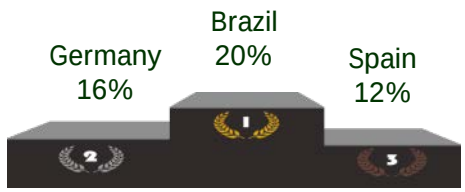


Austria

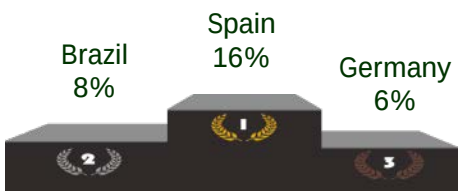
Denmark



Turkey



Poland



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