

The 2026 World Cup

Sports and Conflict

METHODOLOGY

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How an Adversary Pair Is Defined

A potential adversary pair is counted at a World Cup if, in that year, it meets any one of four factors:

- 1. Armed conflict:** One state directly uses armed force against the other's territory, forces, or assets; who is targeted sets the pair, not where the ordnance lands. From the *Correlates of War Militarized Interstate Disputes* data at the use-of-force level, with major cases checked against UCDP/PRIO and its 25 battle-death threshold.
- 2. Severed relations:** Diplomatic ties formally cut or absent amid hostility. From the [Correlates of War Diplomatic Exchange data](#), which scores representation from ambassador down to none.
- 3. Territorial dispute:** A live or militarized dispute over territory, not a dormant claim. From the International Crisis Behavior Project, with the claim documented by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) or United Nations.
- 4. Divided nation:** Two partitioned halves of one nation under armistice or mutual non-recognition.

The four are drawn from the standard interstate-conflict datasets—[Correlates of War](#), [UCDP/PRIO](#), and the [International Crisis Behavior Project](#)—and legal records, with specific cases corroborated by ICJ data and secondary sources.

Pre-2026 Pairing Definitions

ARMED CONFLICT

- **Argentina v. England, Argentina v. Scotland, and Argentina v. Northern Ireland, 1982:** The Falklands War ran from April to June 1982 and ended on the eve of the tournament. Argentina's belligerent was the United Kingdom, so all three UK home nations in the field qualify as armed-conflict pairs with Argentina.

SEVERED RELATIONS

- **Israel v. Morocco, 1970:** The two countries had no diplomatic relations, due to wider Arab-Israeli conflict.
- **Argentina v. England, 1986:** Relations were cut after the Falklands War and not restored until 1990.

- **Morocco v. Algeria, 1986:** Relations severed from 1976 to 1988 over Western Sahara.
- **Iran v. United States, 1998, 2006, 2014, and 2022:** No diplomatic relations since 1980. The pair appears only in these editions because the two did not both qualify in 2002, 2010, or 2018. The pairing is classified as armed conflict in 2026.
- **Iran v. Saudi Arabia, 2018 and 2022:** Relations were severed from 2016 to 2023. The pairing is classified as armed conflict in 2026.

TERRITORIAL DISPUTE

- **Germany v. Czechoslovakia, 1938:** The militarized Sudetenland crisis put the two in an active territorial dispute in the months before the Munich Agreement that September.
- **Cameroon v. Nigeria, 1994:** The two were locked in a militarized dispute over the Bakassi Peninsula.

DIVIDED NATION

- **East Germany v. West Germany, 1974:** This was the only World Cup meeting of the two German states.
- **North Korea v. South Korea, 2010:** The two Koreas remained divided under the 1953 Korean Armistice.