

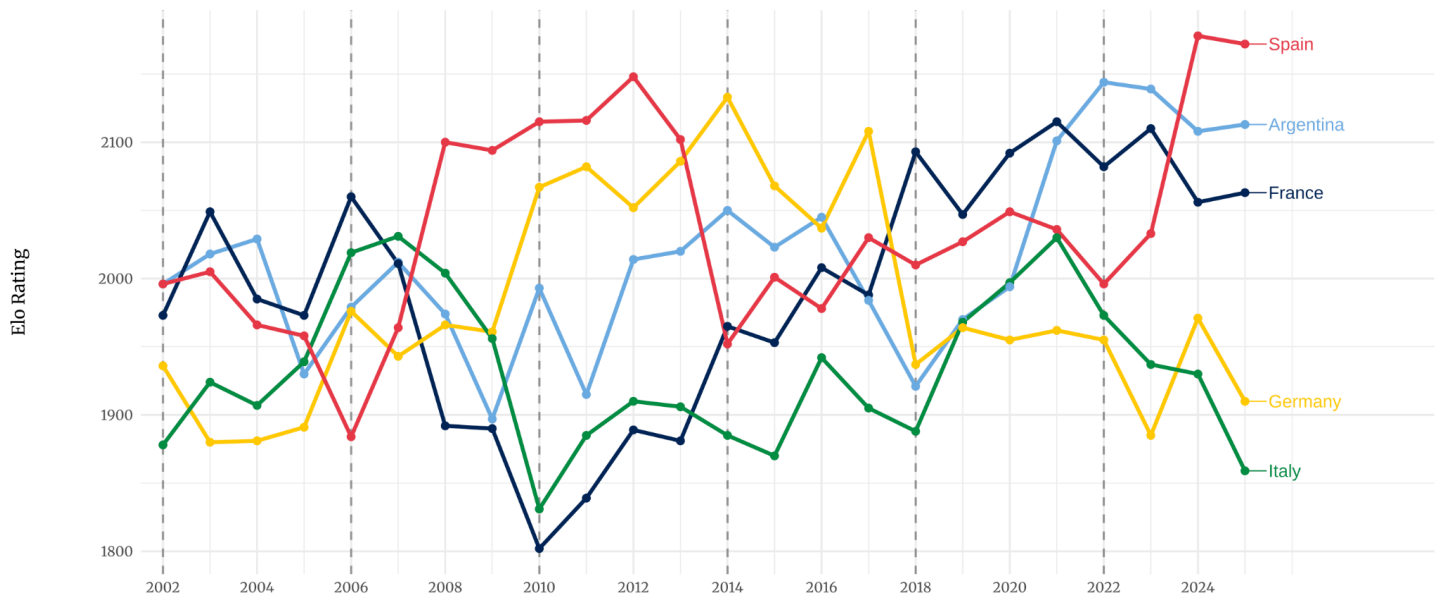
Historical Trends Vs. Today's Contenders

This document presents graphical evidence highlighting Elo rating trends prior to teams winning the World Cup and compares those trends to those of today's contenders.

Historical World Cup Winners

Elo Rating Trajectories of World Cup Winners

How champions evolved from 2002 to 2025



Source: World Football Elo Ratings (eloratings.net)

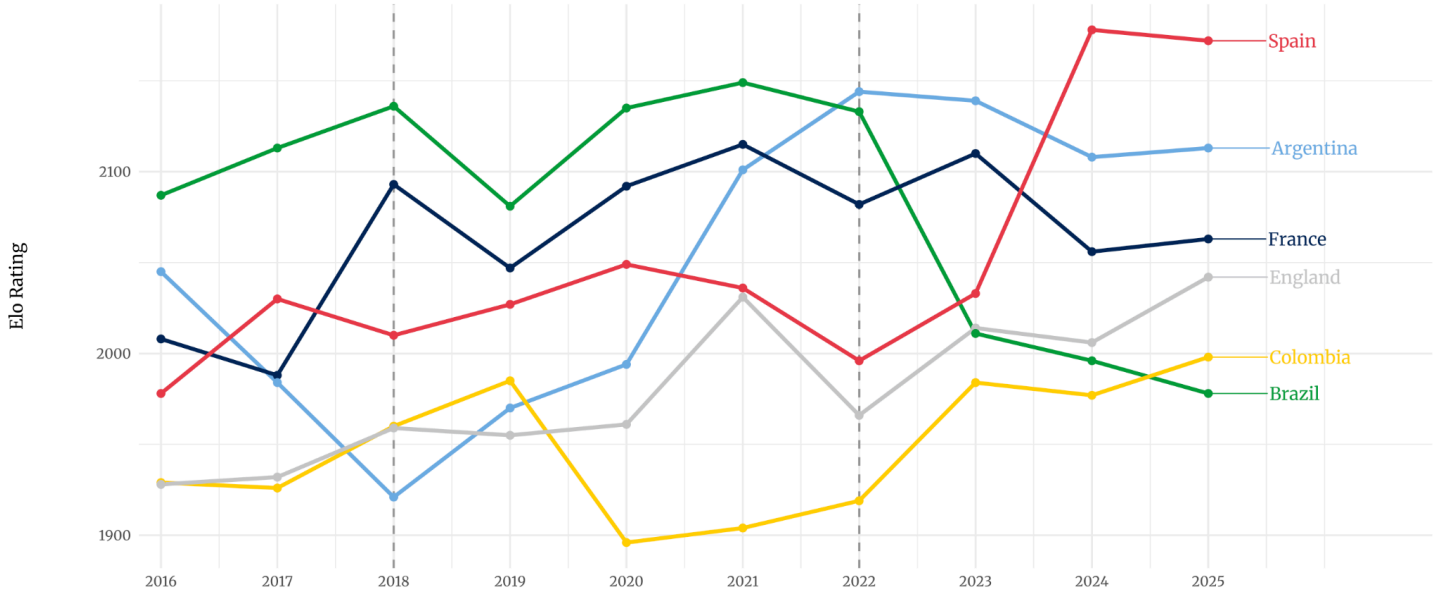
Historically, World Cup winners have followed a repeatable pattern: a sustained rise in Elo rating leading into the tournament, followed by a peak during the competition itself. Teams like Spain, Germany, France, and Argentina all gained roughly 180-210 Elo points before making their championship run and entered the World Cup at or near their highest level of play.

Italy stands out as the exception. From 1998 to 2001, they remained relatively stable between an Elo rating of 1920 and 2020, before dropping to 1878 in 2002. Rather than accelerating into the tournament, their path was defined by recovery, gradually returning toward their previous level by 2005. Even then, they entered the World Cup without the same dominance compared to other champions, as several teams ranked ahead of them. Their title run did not follow the typical model of pre-tournament peak, but instead showed that a team can still win by finding its highest level of play at exactly the right moment.

Today's World Cup Contenders

The 2026 Contender Baseline

Elo rating trajectories for the six strongest teams entering 2026



Source: World Football Elo Ratings (eloratings.net)

Among the current contenders, Spain fits the traditional World Cup model most closely. Their trajectory reflects sustained growth paired with an already elite level of play, requiring only a final conversion into a tournament peak. Between 2022 and 2025, Spain has added 176 Elo points, placing them directly within the historical range of past champions. Like Spain (2010), Germany (2014), France (2018), and Argentina (2022), they are already in championship form; they are just waiting to peak at the right moment.

Colombia and England follow a different path, one that more closely resembles Italy's 2006 run. Both teams are improving, but neither has fully reached the dominant pre-tournament profile seen in most recent champions. Colombia has gained 102 Elo points since 2020, while England has added 76 since 2022, signalling progress without clear separation from the field. Italy's success came not from overwhelming momentum but from timely execution and resilience against top competition. This path is more difficult, but not impossible, requiring continued growth and a perfectly timed peak during the tournament.

Conclusion

When looking across the current contenders, each team presents a viable path to victory, although each path is significantly different. Brazil stands out as the most volatile case. Since 2021, they have lost 171 Elo points, a sharp decline that suggests they aren't currently in winning form. Still, Brazil's talent ceiling is extremely high, and their history shows they are consistent competitors, making them difficult to count out.

Argentina and France represent sustained excellence without upward momentum. Argentina has won three consecutive major international tournaments, including the 2022 World Cup, and has maintained a high Elo rating throughout. However, their trajectory has begun to level off, lacking the clear upward push typically associated with a tournament peak. France finds itself in a similar position, consistently performing at an elite level but trending slightly downward, highlighted by their semi-final loss in the 2024 Euros. Both teams remain capable of winning, but neither currently reflects the accelerating form seen in past champions.

Columbia and England offer the opposite profile: rising teams with momentum but without full validation at the highest level. Colombia has gained 102 Elo points since 2020, while England has added 76 2022, signaling steady improvement. Both reached their respective continental finals but fell short, suggesting they are close but not yet complete. Their path resembles Italy's 2006 run, where success depended not on pre-tournament dominance, but on resilience and perfectly timed execution.

Spain stands apart as the team that most closely fits the historical model. Ranked number one in Elo, gaining 176 points since 2022, and coming off a Euro 2024 victory, Spain combines trajectory, level, and validation. They have already been stress-tested and proven their ability to perform at the highest level. The remaining question is not whether they are good enough, but whether they can convert that sustained form into a peak during the tournament.