

Eurovision Voting Patterns

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In 1956, the European Broadcasting Union hosted a new song contest in Switzerland for the first time, called the Grand Prix de la Chanson or the Eurovision Song Contest. Since then, there has been an annual Eurovision Contest 66 times, making it the longest-running television program according to Guinness World Records. It is based on the Italian San Remo contest, with the difference that the competitors come from different European countries. Initially, only seven countries competed; now, Eurovision has entries from 52 countries. During its long run time, there frequently have been disputes, discussions, and apparent biases in the voting process. Using visualization, this paper will examine how much influences other than song likability impact the votes for a specific song.

Each country that wants to compete submits an original song to the competition. The song can either be in their language or a different language. Because Eurovision now has so many participants, two semi-finals have been implemented. Only the top ten of each semi-final compete then in the final competition. Additionally to those top 20 winners, the so-called big five countries go automatically into the final. Germany, Italy, France, Spain, and the UK are these countries. They are the highest-paying members of the European Broadcasting Union. After all the competitors have performed, the voting takes place. The process is the same for the semi-finals as well as the final. The voters are not allowed to vote for their own country. Fifty percent of the votes come from the public audience, and another fifty percent come from a board of judges who are all

music industry members from a voting country. The show's presenters call on each country, which then announces points from one to 12 points for the 12 songs they liked the best. The public votes are collected after the judges' votes are in, which usually changes the entire ranking once more.

In the 66 years Eurovision has taken place, there has been a fair share of controversy due to conflict between or dependencies of countries, songs with explosive texts, or singers with controversial backgrounds. For example, Israel's contributions to Eurovision have led to a few controversies over the years. Though not a European country, Israel is part of the European Broadcasting Union and is therefore allowed to participate since 1973. The year before, at the 1972 Munich Olympics, Palestinian terrorists had killed 11 team members of the Israeli Olympic Team. As a result, Israel's contender needed to be protected with armed guards throughout the contest. Most recently, when Israel hosted Eurovision in 2019, there were discussions around a possible boycott because of Israel's aggression toward Palestinians. Although eventually, no boycott happened, the Icelandic participants waved flags in support of Palestine and the LGBT community during their song. Controversies were also generated from former USSR countries. These countries were not in Eurovision until 1991, since before 1991, these countries were part of the USSR and didn't exist as individual entities. Even before the recent war, Russia's and Ukraine's relationship conflicted. In the 2016 Eurovision, the Ukrainian singer Jamal performed a song called "1944". This song referenced the deportation of Crimean Tatars under Stalin, during which eight thousand Ukrainian people were killed; many more died afterward. Eurovision usually avoids songs with specific political meanings and had the song

originally under review for its political undertone. This ultimately was overturned, and Ukraine even won the 2016 competition. Ukraine won again in 2022. It is unclear if voters wanted to show their support for the country or if the song won because it was so appealing. In 2009, Georgia applied to participate in the competition with the song "We Do Not Wanna Put In." This song was disqualified as it had political undertones; Eurovision 2009 took place in Russia. Understanding Europe's history and politics makes it interesting whether the song voting data reflects the countries' friendships or lack thereof.

The data used for the visualizations shown in Figures 1- 4 was pulled from a Eurovision Song Contest Database. It stores data about past wins, voting numbers, and participation. Fig 1 shows, in a heat map, how often past winners of Eurovision have won.

As can be seen, Ireland and Sweden have won the most times. Even though it needs to be considered that some countries have been in Eurovision for a shorter amount of time than others, it is still interesting to see that some long-time participants have not won often. For example, Germany has been in Eurovision for over 50 years with only two wins

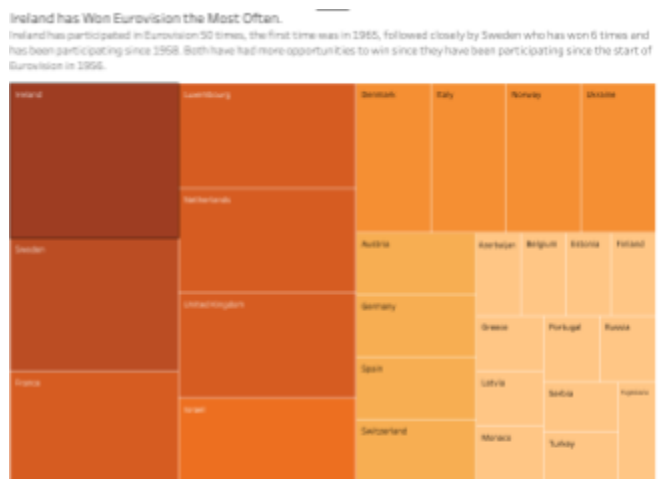


Fig 1. Eurovision Winning Statistics - dark colors reflect more wins

compared to Azerbaijan, which entered the competition in 2008 for the first time and won it in 2011. The second visualization looks at voting patterns and how often specific countries voted for their neighbors. Neighbor behavior is still a frequently discussed and

anticipated topic for Eurovision. There are 'buddy' states that consistently vote for each other, no matter the quality of a song's

contribution, but there are also countries that seem to never give points to specific neighbors.

From the visualization in Fig 2, it can be seen that from the 53 countries that have

participated, 34 of them gave a substantial

number of points to a neighboring country. The

Scandinavian countries all tend to give, on average, each other the most points; the same goes for the former USSR members, countries in central Europe, and the southeastern Balkan countries, which are all former Yugoslavia.

Looking closer at two of these clusters is interesting to see if there are, in fact, correlations. Starting with the Scandinavian cluster in Fig 3, on average, the country that received the most points from the other

Scandinavian countries is Sweden, then Australia,

Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, and Norway. Australia

and Estonia are outliers, but this can be explained by Estonia being a neighboring country of Finland.

Australia probably had the advantage of being exotic

and new to the competition. This Scandinavian

cluster, historically throughout Eurovision, voted for

each other most consistently. Interestingly, Austria rarely gives points to Germany, even though they are neighbors and speak the same language.



Fig.2 Map of countries that voted for their neighbor - darker colors show higher numbers



Fig.3 points from Scandinavian Countries

The fourth visual in Fig 4 looks closer at the former USSR cluster. Again, Russia receives the most points from other former USSR members, followed by Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Latvia.

Interestingly, most former USSR countries give Russia the most points considering their history together. According to a Pew

Research Center survey from 2017, the

former USSR Baltic countries, Estonia,

Latvia, and Lithuania, seem to display less

nostalgia towards the former Soviet Union than Georgia, Armenia, and Moldova,

consistently providing points to Russian contributions.

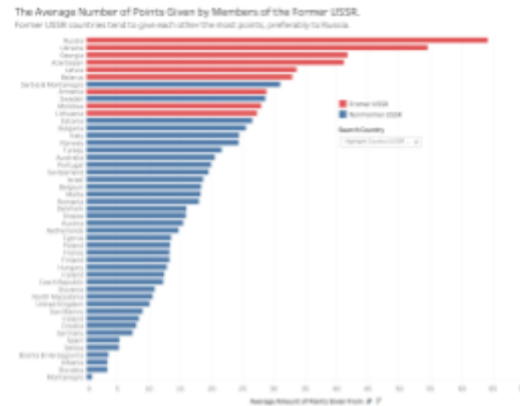


Fig.4 points former USSR members gave to other countries - red being the former USSR countries

For a closer look into the former USSR voting patterns and possible correlations with Russia's recent history, the fifth visual in Fig 5 concentrates on Russia's global popularity rate compared to the average amount of votes its song contribution received.

The global popularity rate is pulled from the Gallup World Poll Data. Although no clear correlation can be seen, there are clusters for specific years., e.g., there is an accumulation

for 2009-2011. At this time, Russia's popularity rate was between 25-30%, which

is relatively low in general but high for

Russia, and it received an average number of points of around 15, which is also low. Shortly

after, though, protests about fraudulent



Fig.5 Correlation of Russia's global popularity rate vs. average votes Russia received in Eurovision

elections in Russia broke out. As a result, Russia's popularity declined, but Russia was doing better than ever in Eurovision due to votes from former USSR members. Thus, these political issues do not negatively affect how these countries voted for Russia during Eurovision.

Overall, this shows that Eurovision seems influenced by what is happening in the world but that past historical relations have a more significant impact. It is evident from the voting patterns in the data that neighboring countries are more likely to vote for each other. Altogether, this does not have that big of an effect on the actual winner of the competition, probably due to the two-factor voting system. At least most of the time, people vote for their favorite song with a bit of influence coming from their country's relationships with other countries.

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