

What's in a Name? Mom and Dad's Political Preferences, Apparently.

Over the years, I've discovered that having the name Patience makes for an excellent conversation starter, as I frequently receive questions such as, "What's the story behind your name?" or "Why did your parents pick that name?" and the one that never ceases to amaze me, "You probably really hate your name, don't you?" Recently, my response to the question, "where did you get your name?" was not as *patient* as it could have been: "My parents gave it to me, where did you get yours?" I quipped.

Hearing frequent puns, questions, and assumptions about my name has left me with an interest in names in general, so I was intrigued when I recently came across a study arguing that it is possible to figure out a parent's political preferences based on their child's name. Sure, a name like Reagan or Kennedy could give some indication of a parent's voting record. A John Paul born in the 1980s probably has parents who are traditional Catholic, and the name Hillary [spiked](#) in popularity in the early years of the Clinton administration. But what about names like Liam, Ella, or Tucker? They aren't "political" names, so they don't say anything about a parent's politics, right?

But perhaps they do. [Researchers](#) at the University of Chicago believe that the prominent sounds in a child's name provide insight into the political leanings of their parents.

The research team, headed by Eric Oliver, wanted to find a way of studying if stylistic preferences were connected to politics, but wanted to find something that wouldn't be affected by other market forces. They settled on baby names. After all, people do not buy or sell baby names, nor is access

to a name affected by location or supply.

The study goes on to cite a decline in birth names that are associated with family-ties or historical conventions, placing aesthetic preferences in the forefront of factors that play a role in what name a parent chooses for their child. Combining California birth records and census data, the team searched for trends in ideological leanings and socio-economic status among parents based on the kinds of names they gave their children.

According to the findings, published in 2016, liberal leaning parents are more likely to select baby names in which softer sounds are prominent – such as L or M, or names beginning or ending with A. Conservative leaning parents, on the other hand, are more likely to choose names with hard letter sounds, such as T, D, or K. So, from the earlier examples, Liam and Ella are more likely to have liberal parents, and Tucker is more likely to have conservative parents.

If there is a link between political views and baby names, what causes this correlation? The study suggests possible factors such as status signaling, choosing hard or soft letter sounds to indicate education level, economic background, or innovativeness. Researchers also noted that names with prominent hard letter sounds often sound more masculine, whereas soft-letter sounds are more frequently used in feminine names. Is name choice a reflection of a parent's views of gender? Is it a reflection of values and character traits that a parent hopes their child will acquire? Perhaps names are chosen to help a child blend in or stand out in different settings?

Clearly, the factors that go into choosing a name are numerous and complex. Shortly after his initial findings, Oliver noted to the [Washington Post](#) that religious names tend to cross political lines, regardless of soft letter or hard letter prominence. Either way, the results of the study are interesting to think about. Are these findings consistent with

your experience? And if so, what do you think drives this trend?

Another interesting aside, Clarity Campaign created a tool where you can calculate if people who share your name lean more liberal or conservative. Check it out [here!](#)

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