



## Uncommon names are increasing globally: Reflecting an increase in uniqueness-seeking and individualism

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Aoyama Gakuin University

### Highlights

- Associate Professor Yuji Ogihara of Aoyama Gakuin University reviews empirical studies that examined temporal changes in the frequency of (un)common names.
- Accumulated evidence has demonstrated that uncommon names increased over time in many nations: Germany, the U.S., the U.K., France, Japan, China, and Indonesia. All the nations that were examined have shown an increase in uncommon names. Thus, the phenomenon is observed more generally, not locally in some limited nations.
- This increase in uncommon names reflects broader sociocultural changes toward greater emphasis on individuality and distinction from others.

### Abstract of Press Release

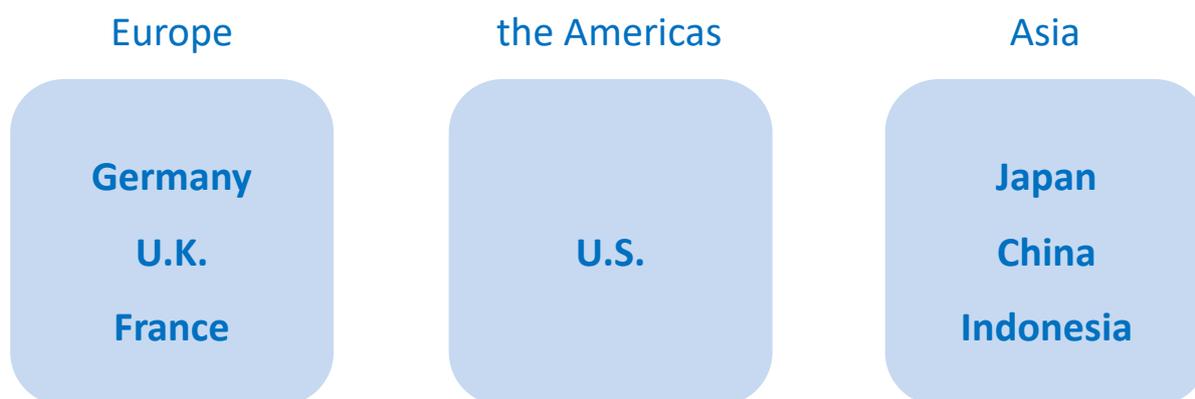
Associate Professor Yuji Ogihara of Aoyama Gakuin University reviews empirical studies examining temporal changes in the frequency of (un)common first names and demonstrates that uncommon names increased over time in many nations: Germany, the U.S., the U.K., France, Japan, China, and Indonesia (Figure 1). He reveals that an increase in uncommon names is observed more generally, not locally in some limited nations.

Previous research has shown that uncommon names are increasing in some nations. However, these findings have been reported separately by nation, making it unclear whether the phenomenon is observed more globally or more locally in some limited nations.

Therefore, he reviews empirical studies that examine temporal changes in the frequency of (un)common names. In addition, he summarizes the information of research on (un)common names and naming behaviors for uniqueness, including study periods, indicators, and sample characteristics.

Accumulated evidence has demonstrated that uncommon names increased over time in Germany, the U.S., the U.K., France, Japan, China, and Indonesia. Moreover, this trend has been found in diverse cultural zones: European, American, and Asian cultures. Therefore, giving uncommon names is a more global trend. This increase in uncommon names reflects broader sociocultural changes toward greater emphasis on individuality and distinction from others, contributing not only to our understanding of naming practices but also to a deeper understanding of society and culture.

These findings were published on 25th November, 2025 in the international journal *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* (<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-025-06156-1>).



## Uncommon names are increasing globally.

Ogihara (2025). *HSSC*.

Figure 1. Summary of results

### Background

Previous research has shown that uncommon first names are increasing in some nations. However, these findings have been reported separately by nation, making it unclear whether the phenomenon is observed more globally or more locally in some limited nations. Moreover, one of the reasons the findings had not been summarized is that the previous studies were presented separately in various academic disciplines. For example, the articles were published in journals of psychology, sociology, linguistics, demography (population studies), area studies, behavioral science, and interdisciplinary.

Therefore, Associate Professor Ogihara reviews empirical studies that examined temporal changes in the frequency of (un)common names, connecting many academic disciplines that investigated names and naming behaviors separately. In addition, he summarizes the information of research on (un)common names and naming behaviors for uniqueness, including study periods, indicators, and sample characteristics.

### Results

Accumulated evidence has demonstrated that uncommon names increased over time in many nations: Germany, the U.S., the U.K., France, Japan, China, and Indonesia (Table 1). All the nations that were examined have shown an increase in uncommon names. Thus, the phenomenon is observed more generally, not locally in some limited nations. Moreover, this trend has been found in diverse cultural zones: European, American, and Asian cultures. Therefore, giving uncommon names is a more global trend.

This increase in uncommon names reflects broader sociocultural changes toward greater emphasis on individuality and distinction from others, contributing not only to our understanding of naming practices but also to a deeper understanding of society and culture.

Table 1. Excerpt from “Summary of empirical studies examining historical changes in common/uncommon names”

Nation	Article	Period (years)
Germany	Gerhards & Hackenbroch (2000)	1894–1994 (101)
The United States	Twenge et al. (2010)	1880–2007 (128)
	Twenge et al. (2016)	2004–2015 (12)
The United Kingdom	Bush et al. (2018)	1996–2016 (21)
	Bush (2020)	1838–2014 (177)
France	Mignot (2022)	1800–2019 (220)
Japan	Ogihara et al. (2015)	2004–2013 (10)
	Ogihara (2021a)	2004–2018 (15)
	Ogihara (2022)	2004–2018 (15)
	Ogihara & Ito (2022)	1979–2018 (40)
China	Cai et al. (2018)	1950–2009 (60)
	Bao et al. (2021)	1920–2005 (86)
Indonesia	Kuipers & Askuri (2017)	1911–2010 (100)

This study has two limitations. First, in some studies, the representativeness of the samples was not sufficient. Thus, it is desirable to conduct further investigation to increase the representativeness of the samples. Second, existing literature has investigated historical changes in the rates of uncommon names in many nations. However, future research should examine whether the increase in uncommon names is observed in other nations as well. This is especially true for cultures other than European, American and Asian cultures.

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Aoyama Gakuin, founded on the legacy of three schools established by American Christian missionaries, marked its 150th anniversary in 2024. For a century and a half, we have been committed to developing servant leaders—individuals who act with purpose, humility, and a deep sense of responsibility to others.

Aoyama Gakuin University is a comprehensive institution with 11 faculties and 27 departments. Rooted in a tradition of honoring diversity and encouraging collaboration across disciplines, we continually advance the quality of our research and education. As a community dedicated to serving God and people and contributing to society, we strive to evolve with the demands of our time and to define what a forward-looking university should be.

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