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**Article**

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## **Naming and War in Modern Germany**

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### **Abstract**

This paper analyzes naming behavior in Germany in the context of rapid social change. It begins with an overview of general developments in naming in Germany over the last one hundred years, based on data from the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP), which supplies us with almost 45,000 datasets. The paper focuses on the periods of World War II and the Cold War since we conclude that general developments in naming were disrupted by these two phenomena. Wartime brings accelerated social change in its wake and people react to this social change—often on an apparently individual level. Here, our findings are in accordance with established sociological theories.

JEL Classification: J19, P59, Y8

Keywords: Naming, World War II, Cold War, Germany, SOEP

## 1 Introduction

According to sociologist Max Weber (1978), naming a baby is a social act. The social impact involved makes naming a complex decision, and one not only determined by mere individual taste. People are always embedded in intellectual, cultural, and political frameworks which shape the overall mood of a social environment, or the characteristics of a society at a certain point in time, a phenomenon known as *Zeitgeist* (Hillmann 1989; Berger and Le Mens 2009). The *Zeitgeist* works through the integration of parents into social circles and relevant peer groups, and what is considered in vogue among these then affects parents' actions and choices in turn. As sociologist Georg Simmel states: "... fashion on the one hand signifies union with those in the same class, the uniformity of a circle characterized by it, and, *uno actu*, the exclusion of all other groups." (Simmel 1901: 291). Similarly, the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu emphasizes the *habitus*, a remnant of social background, which cannot be easily concealed and reveals membership of a certain group (Bourdieu 1982). On a micro (individual) level, people develop their own individual preferences and aim at achieving distinction and exceptionality. One way of doing so is by, for example, giving their children unique names. The manifestation of what we call the modern world is inextricably linked with releasing people from inherited and often inflexible social constraints. In other words, there is a correlation between people's individualized actions and the social circumstances they live in.

The twentieth century can be characterized as a century of modernization and significant social change. German society also underwent these processes and, after World War II and the Cold War, finally developed into a modern, democratic, secular, and free society with a clear emphasis on Western individualism. If given names (as individual actions) are sensitive

to the social environment and societal setting they are embedded in, an empirical examination of naming behavior over time should be able to trace social changes in individual naming behavior.

The present paper is structured as follows: first, we will briefly describe our database and the methods employed. Then, we will give an overview of naming behavior in Germany over the course of approximately 100 years. Here, we will focus on tracing social change in name choices. In particular, we will show that name choices became less traditional and more individualized over time. We refer to this as innovative naming. Finally, we will focus on the question of whether or not times of accelerated social change, namely during World War II and at the high noon of the Cold War, two pivotal events in modern German history, had an impact on naming behavior in Germany.

## **2 The Database and Methods**

The database employed is the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP) (Wagner et al. 2007).<sup>1</sup> SOEP was established in 1984 and is now one of the world's biggest and longest running representative longitudinal surveys of private households. SOEP data provides broad information about individuals and households concerning their material life situations as well as intangible assets. Due to the richness of the data, SOEP is one of the most renowned panel studies and is frequently used for analyses of social and/or societal trends. In a SOEP interview, given names are recorded as part of the information collected in the study. They therefore qualify as a subject for empirical analysis.<sup>2</sup>

For our analyses, we employed data on individuals born between 1888 and 2007. People with an immigrant background are also surveyed in the SOEP, but have been excluded from our analyses because they often tend to choose names used only in their country of origin rather than common German names (Gerhards and Hans 2009). The data encompasses 44,577 individuals, 49 percent of whom are male and 51 percent female. These individuals have 2,000 different names overall—1,195 female and 805 male names.

For analytical purposes, the names were coded according to their regional heritage and cultural-historical roots (Huschka et al. 2009). Each name was given a code denoting its region of origin, with the most prominent regional name types being of German, Nordic, Slavic, Romanic, and English language origin. Additionally, up to three codes were given to indicate the cultural-historical heritage of a name. Another technical note is of utmost importance: many given names can be spelled in different ways. For instance, the German name *Klaus* can be written with a ‘K’ or a ‘C,’ but the pronunciation is identical. It is quite common in Germany to use several spelling variations of the same name (e.g., *Claus—Klaus, Marlis—Marlies*). Since respondents’ names are recorded by the interviewer, the spelling might sometimes be dependent on the interviewer’s choice. Of course, variations in spelling a name can mark individual tastes, but it is not possible to analyze this using the data at hand. We decided to deal with such uncertain variance by standardization. This was achieved by inspecting every name that is included in the SOEP. For a detailed description of the coding and standardization procedure, see Huschka et al. (2005).

In an initial step in our analyses, we examine the cumulative appearance of different types of names within specific periods of time. What types of names were chosen in each period? What are the features of the names chosen in terms of their heritage? And how did these

choices fit in with the general *Zeitgeist*? Our analysis went further, however. In a second step, we focus on the concentration of names because some are always more popular than others. A common phenomenon, also valid for other countries (Tucker 2001; Tucker 2002; Eshel 2001), is that a significant share of individuals share a handful of names. According to our own calculations for Germany, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the ten most popular names were chosen for about 24 percent of the population. With almost a quarter of newborn babies being given one of these ten names, this is indeed a significant concentration. How has this changed over time? Changes must be expected since individualistic tendencies can be observed in many areas of life. It has become increasingly desirable to be considered unique and special, something propagated by the fashion and lifestyle industry (Schenk 2010). As Simmel notes regarding the importance of distinction, “[t]he more objective our view of life has become in the last centuries, the more it has stripped the picture of nature of all subjective and anthropomorphic elements, and the more sharply has the conception of individual personality become defined.” (Simmel 1901: 292). He goes on to explain: “because the differences in our standards of life have become so much more strongly accentuated, for the more numerous and the more sharply drawn these differences are, the greater the opportunities for emphasizing them at every turn.” (Ibid: 294).

In order to analyze the changes in the name concentration, we sought a simple measure. Hence, we employed the ‘Herfindahl-Hirschman Index’, abbreviated to HHI (Hirschman 1964; Kelly 1981). The HHI is normally used in economics to study the market concentration of firms. Applied to name distributions, HHI tells us the following: If many people share very few names, the concentration of names—and thus the HHI measure—is very high. If the names are distributed more evenly amongst the people, the HHI measure is low. A low

concentration of names can be interpreted as an indication of individualization processes in a society.

For purposes of our analyses, we grouped our sample into cohorts according to birth year. We had to group several birth years because even a voluminous sample like SOEP has too few observations to fully represent reality in a valid manner for every single birth year. From a statistical point of view, it is crucial that the cohorts are of (approximately) the same size due to a phenomenon known as the Large Number of Rare Events (LNRE) zone which affects statistics when analyzing such distributions (Huschka and Wagner 2010).<sup>3</sup> An LRNE distribution is “characterized by the presence of large numbers of words with very low probabilities of occurrence.” (Baayen 2001: 54-55). In order to deal with this in a statistically appropriate way, we applied a simple solution: we just ensured that the comparison groups were of approximately the same size and so the LNRE effect was the same in every cohort. It is possible to make sample sizes equal by randomly drawing the same number of observations from our cohorts. However, if a cohort has too many individual cases, we would have to “delete” this information, which would mean a loss of statistical power of our analyses. Therefore, we decided to use a different approach: we simply adjusted our sample along the birth years of the respondents and divided our sample into 22 groups, allowing them to cover slightly different spans of birth years. For better understanding, we label these groups as cohorts, although the term (birth) cohort normally covers a span of 10 years.

One more remark concerning our cohorts: the older a cohort is, the greater the difficulties posed by selectivity. The act of naming is carried out at the beginning of an individual’s life. However, the cohort of people who were, for example, 60 years old in 1984, when the SOEP survey was started, does not accurately represent the original cohort of the birth year 1924

since some cohort members were already deceased and, therefore, could obviously not be surveyed in 1984 or later. We know from the literature that there is an inherent social bias in dying early (Himmelreicher et al. 2008). Particularly during the periods in question, (German) men had a greater probability of dying early than women because many were killed during the war. Also, in modern societies, people with a lower social status tend to die earlier (ibid: 274). This may undermine the representativeness of the original birth cohorts and, consequently, naming habits in these cohorts. This, however, applies to all studies relating to cross-sections of populations.

Finally, we have to point out another problem when analyzing naming over time in Germany: the Nazi regime actively influenced naming behavior by law (e.g., Laversuch 2010; Wolffsohn and Brechenmacher 1999). As early as 1935, an edict was issued forcing Jews to carry Jewish names. This measure stigmatized Jews further by and through their name (Wolffsohn and Brechenmacher 1999). At the same time, these names were off-limits for other groups in society. As a means of concealing their heritage or preferences, people of that time may have chosen names other than they would have done under more liberal political circumstances. Moreover, people's chances of surviving the holocaust might have been influenced by their given name (Laversuch 2010: 230).

### **Analyses: the Big Picture**

First of all, German naming throughout the approximately last hundred years was anything but constant. This can be seen from Figure 1. The horizontal axis shows the years of birth



covered by the 22 cohorts, while the vertical axis displays the shares of the different name types in percent.

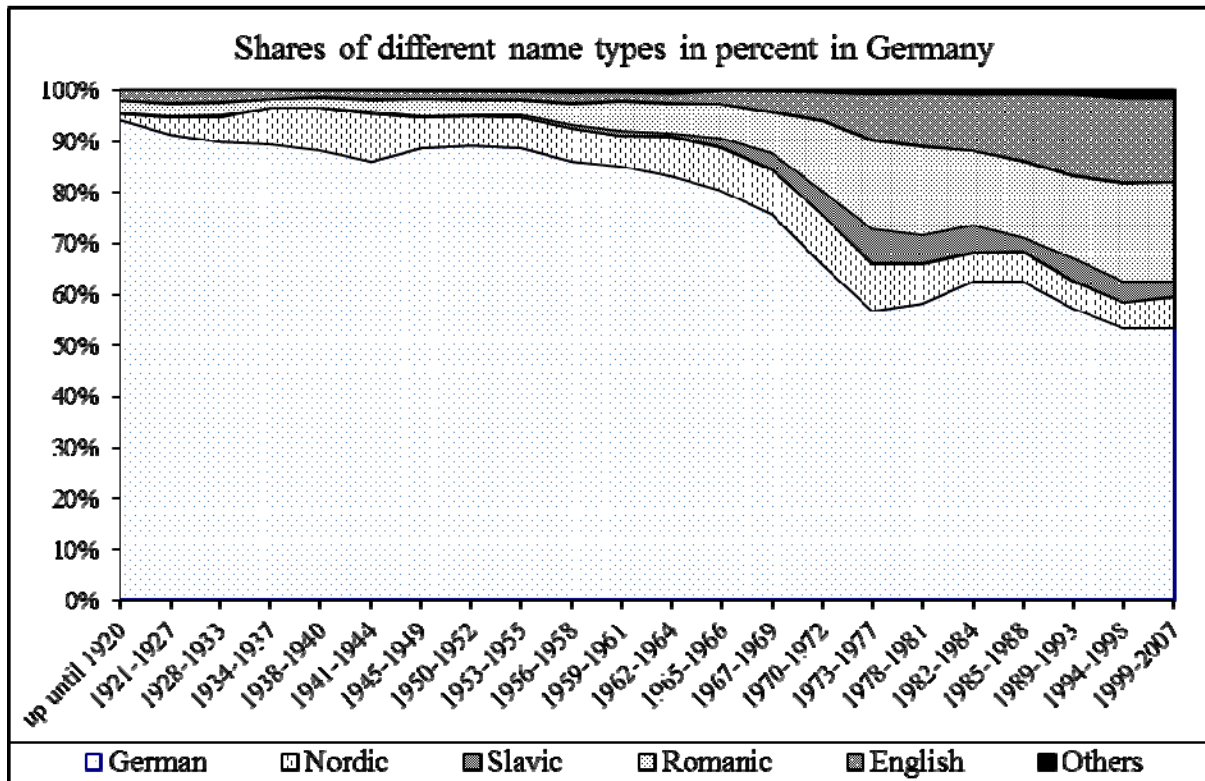


Figure 1: Shares of different name types in Germany in percent of 22 groups of approx. the same size (groupings are based on year of birth)  
Source: SOEP, own calculations

Naturally, Germans had a preference for names with a German heritage at all times.

However, the strong affinity to German names declined over time in favor of name types of Nordic, Romanic, and English language origin. Up to this point, we follow Gerhards and Hans's (2009) hypothesis that people normally opt for names that are linguistically close to their own mother tongue. Further, they state, foreign names are only chosen if they match the respective cultural heritage. This argument is also supported by our findings: exotic names, belonging to the category “others,” were of no significant importance at any time. However,

what can be observed is that a changing Zeitgeist has produced changing naming habits: people increasingly chose names associated with different cultural backgrounds. This signals that their own longstanding traditions have become obsolete.

When splitting our sample into men and women, we can observe considerable differences between the genders (Figure 2).

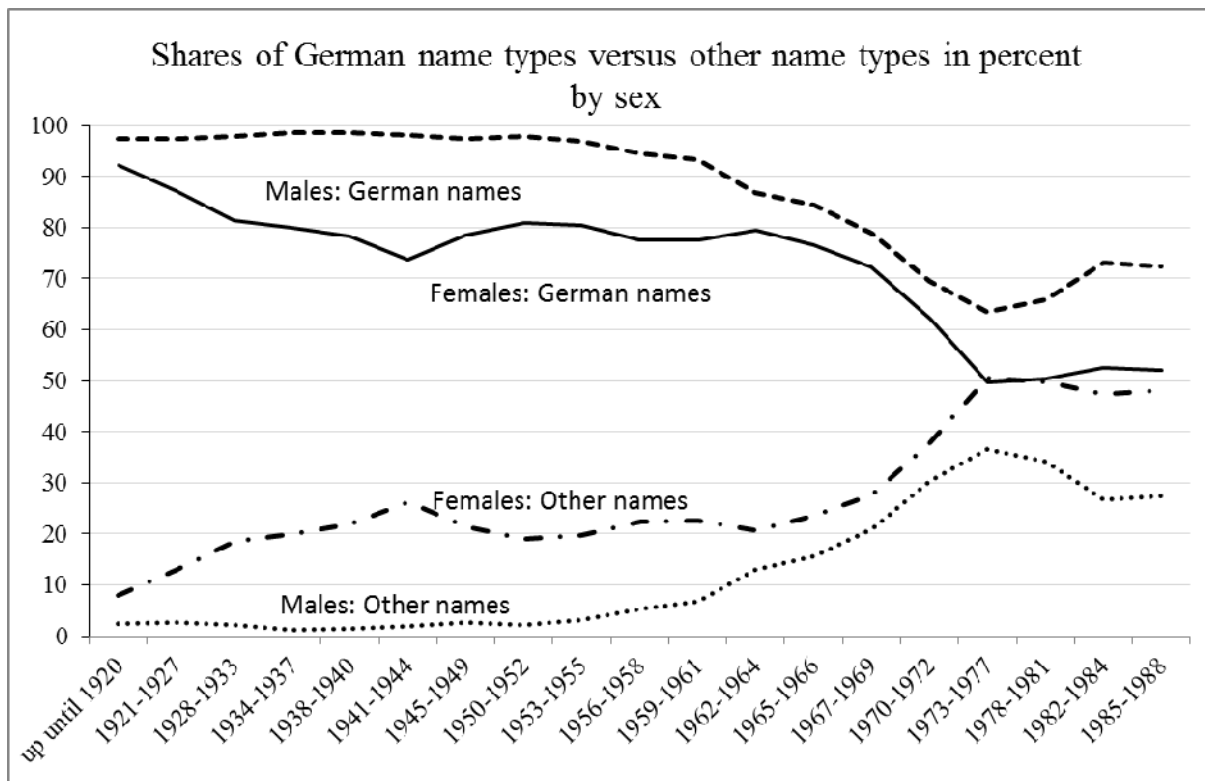


Figure 2: Differences between men and women: Shares of German name types versus other name types in percent for 19 groups of approx. the same size (groupings are based on year of birth)

Source: SOEP, own calculations

At any given point in time, parents have tended to favor traditional German names for their baby boys, whereas the name types of choice for baby girls have been much more innovative and open-minded in contrast. How can this gender bias be interpreted? On the one hand, it

may signal a different value orientation when naming boys and girls. Sons were seen as the heirs, and thus parents acted more traditionally, whereas naming girls was considered to be a potential playground for testing innovative choices. This innovativeness may also be regarded as frivolous since naming a girl was considered less important. The different patterns for male and female names are still found on different levels today. It is an interesting finding that the gender bias stabilized but did not entirely vanish over time.

Analyzing the cultural heritage of given names is only a part of the picture. An increased affinity towards new and often foreign names is not necessarily a sign of more individualization. A new or even exotic name gaining popularity with a large number of parents is not a definite sign of social change. A change in fashion does not necessarily entail a higher freedom of choice. Only if new names diffuse widely and affect larger parts of the population, can we speak of individualized naming behavior. Consequently, we pay greater attention to the concentration of names.

In the long run, the general trend to be observed in Figure 3 is a decline in the concentration of names— with some ups and downs. Thus, over time, parents increasingly tend to choose distinct names. Whereas in our first cohort, the ten most prominent names covered about 24 percent of the German population, the concentration was only about 16 percent in the late 1980s. This result goes hand in hand with changing societal values and norms: individualism and distinction became more important to people over time. However, the concentration of names at any given point is higher for males than for females. Again, we observe a more traditional naming behavior when it comes to naming boys rather than girls.



### 3 Third Reich and World War II

As seen above, it is worth taking a closer look at certain points in time, especially at those which triggered rapid social change. The relatively short period between 1920 and 1949 covers two major turning points, a world war and the division of a country. We can certainly speak of rapid social change: initially, the newly established Weimar Republic prospered economically during the “golden twenties” or “roaring twenties”. Politically, it was torn and it lacked stability. The decade of relative affluence found its sudden end in the worldwide economic crisis in 1929. Now, even more so, political tensions were accompanied by economic woes, which resulted in the irrevocable dissolution of the Republic and the rise of the Nazi regime. The Nazis officially seized power in 1933 and only six years later led Europe and, ultimately, the world into World War II. Another six years later, in 1945, Nazi Germany was defeated, occupied, and divided by allied forces. The years that followed saw the beginning of the economic reconstruction of West Germany, but the political tensions culminated in division into a Western democratic state and an Eastern Socialist one. Due to the fact that the two German states played a central role in the Cold War, people on both sides were increasingly isolated from each other. The division was cast in concrete with the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, which made the border between the divided states impenetrable for almost 30 years.

How did all this affect naming in Germany? As shown above, the majority of babies were given German names. However, even at the beginning of the twentieth century, the name pool, especially for girls, included a number of non-German names, albeit relatively few. During the era known as the “golden twenties”, German female names began to decline in popularity in favor of Nordic name types, and, to a lesser extent, name types of Romanic and

English language origin. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, when political leadership was seized by the Nazis, this frail development was disrupted and the share of German names stabilized. Young parents tended not to choose foreign but German—and therefore more traditional—names. Moreover, the probability of babies being given an English or Romanic name was even lower for those born in the mid-1930s. This can be seen as an immediate effect of the *Zeitgeist* of the time on naming behavior.

The only exception in this development was the use of Nordic names. The share of Nordic names increased slightly during the late 1930s and World War II. Again, this applies to boys to a much lower degree than to girls. Nordic names seemed to have been attractive to parents for some reason. Bearing in mind that Nordic myths often deal with strength, courage, and bravery, it may be that Nordic names were associated with such attributes. With the imminence of World War II, these were desirable virtues for the Nazi regime—as an expression of solidarity, for women, too. Wolffsohn and Brechenmacher took this one step further: they argue that Nordic names were basically burdened by the Nazi aura and should therefore be added to the list of ideologized Germanic names (1999: 242). Since the combined share of Nordic and German names increased when the Nazis gained power, this may be interpreted in accordance with Wolffsohn and Brechenmacher's theory. Alternatively, the attraction of Nordic names may be explained as superficial conformity in order to avoid hostility but with an emphasis on choosing specifically non-German names. And since Nordic names were accepted by the Nazi leaders, they became an alternative for expectant parents. On the basis of distinct name choices found in our sample, we assume the second interpretation is more likely, although we have no concrete proof to support this hypothesis.

The most impressive result of our study relates to 1943, the year of the Battle of Stalingrad, which is widely regarded as a turning point in World War II. After 1943, the share of German names and to a lesser extent, even the share of Romanic and Slavic name types increase, whereas the share of Nordic names decreases.<sup>4</sup> This development also continues in the years following the war. The increasingly popular choice of familiar first names may be viewed as a coping strategy during uncertain times that helped give people some sense of security and a point of reference in everyday life. This allusion to German history and culture is an example of German sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf's fundamental social ties theory: social ties offer support and orientation in a society undergoing rapid change (Dahrendorf 1979; Bohle et al. 1997). Following his hypothesis, we argue that traditional names may be regarded as mechanisms to strengthen fundamental social ties. And indeed we have found anecdotal evidence that the names of fathers, brothers, and uncles who died on the front lines were chosen for newborn babies—a strategy to fortify family ties during hard times.

The aforementioned developments substantiate the hypothesis that naming is influenced by *Zeitgeist* and social change, especially in periods of rapid upheaval, such as wartime. When the concentration of names rises during wartime and people settle for very common names, this may be interpreted as a means of endurance by reverting to time-honored naming traditions. The choice of familiar names in a dictatorship could also be interpreted as a form of pre-emptive conformity: by avoiding unusual or foreign names, unwanted attention from a hostile regime could be diverted.

In general, the overall concentration of names rose under the dictatorship in Germany. This result is consistent with the aforementioned findings concerning more traditional naming.

## Short-Lived Role Models—Lasting Names

Not only the shares of name types and the examination of the concentration of names can help to identify social changes. Particularly in times of broad social upheaval, certain distinct names may also mark changes in the *Zeitgeist*. While some people might have tried to conceal their heritage by using non-stigmatized names, others possibly expressed their political opinion in naming. The use of (certain) German names may be regarded as an expression of support for the regime (Wolffsohn and Brechenmacher 1999) as well as a possible commitment to German culture. We tested our data set for the popularity of names of German Nazi leaders. Moreover, we looked for empirical evidence confirming that certain names were shunned after the war, due to their popularity with the old regime.

Certainly, the most prominent name associated with World War II is that of *Adolf* (Hitler). The name *Adolf* experienced a rise in popularity from the late 1920s to late 1930s, although it was never popular enough to penetrate the top name rankings. Nevertheless, the name did become more popular, which was obviously linked to the rise of the Nazi regime. Moreover, after 1940, the popularity of the name *Adolf* fell sharply and was seldom given to newborn babies. Again, we assume that this development is strongly linked to the public figure of *Adolf Hitler* and that he is responsible for the stigmatization of this name. This is a specific example of social change being reflected in naming.

From a statistical point of view, we have to point out that individual years in our sample are not fully comparable since the number of cases differs for each year. For example, for the birth year 1940, our data set contains about twice as many cases as for the year 1932. Insofar, the results presented have to be regarded as illustrations with only limited statistical representativeness. Nevertheless, our empirical findings are in accordance with the analysis



by Wolffsohn and Brechenmacher (1999). When grouping the years according to our previously defined cohorts, we obtain a similar result: the name *Adolf* was part of the repertoire of common names in Germany, right from the beginning of our observation time span, with a clear increase in popularity from the late 1920s to 1940. After this point, the name was generally shunned by Germans.

Another name of potential interest is *Hermann* (Göring, a then popular Nazi leader). The name *Hermann* was common throughout the 1920s, but steadily lost its appeal. A revival in the 1940s made *Hermann* considerably more popular than in the 1920s. However, the name *Hermann* was still frequently given to male babies after World War II and although its popularity decreased, it did so only gradually. It was by no means as stigmatized as the aforementioned name *Adolf* following World War II. Instead, we assume that the name merely went out of style. Nevertheless, the surprising upswing prior to World War II might be connected to the politician, and therefore, to the *Zeitgeist* at that time.

The name *Heinrich* (Himmler, a rather unpopular Nazi leader) was quite prevalent throughout the 1920s and after World War I. But from the beginning of the mid-1930s, the name experienced a decrease in popularity—with the exception (but not statistically significant) only of the birth years 1940 and 1944. Due to the fact that the popularity of the name also diminished rather gradually, we conclude that *Heinrich*, too, was not stigmatized after World War II.

Our data provides no evidence that the names *Joseph* (Goebbels, an unpopular Nazi leader) or *Eva* (Braun, Hitler's mistress) were negatively connoted after World War II. They neither experienced a rise in popularity during the war nor became popular later.

We conclude that names such as *Hermann*, which simply went out of style, were linked to German culture whereas the choice of the name *Adolf* indicated ideological agreement. It is therefore worth looking at particular individual names as well as name types.

#### **4 Cold War**

It is not only hot wars<sup>5</sup>, that are exceptional life situations greatly affecting people's lives and actions as shown above. Political tensions that do not result in military action between countries can also produce uncertainties (see, for example, Schoirer 2010). Germany played a central role in the Cold War between the superpowers. In the following section, we will focus on naming in Germany during this distinct situation.

After World War II, Germany was divided into the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). As a result of this political division, both German states were subject to obligations from both superpowers from the very outset—even before their official establishment. West Germany was connected to the USA and East Germany to the USSR. Relations between these superpowers were tense.

The former two parts of Germany share the same language and cultural and historical roots. From a scientific point of view, the division may be regarded as a kind of natural experiment. What happens when a country is divided and transformed according to an external ideology? How does such an artificial setting affect peoples' choices and tastes, including name choices?

It is important to mention that the legal regulation of naming stayed the same in both parts of Germany. The regulation of naming in Germany does not consist of actual laws. The

procedure in both parts of the country, also during Germany's division, has always been for parents to 'apply' to register the names of their children at the local registrar's office.

'Common' names are registered without any problems. When it comes to name innovations, the individual registrar is free to decide according to general guidelines whether the new name can be registered or not. An example of such general guidelines (adhered to in both East and West Germany) is: "Das Kind hat ein Recht darauf, nicht mit einem anstößigen, lächerlichen oder sonst wie unpassenden Vornamen belastet zu werden, der ihm die Selbstidentifikation erschweren oder zu herabsetzenden Reaktionen seiner Umwelt Anlass geben könnte." (The child has a right not to be burdened with a name which is offensive, ridiculous, or in any other way inappropriate, and which could impede his/her self-identification or give cause for disparaging reactions from those around him/her.)

(Dudenredaktion 2001). It was thus mainly left up to the registrar whether to accept a name or not. When asked whether East German registrars prevented the registration of western-sounding names, such as those adopted from American actors or singers, Gabriele Rodriguez, one of the leading name experts from the Namenberatungsstelle Leipzig (the highest conciliation authority for controversial name issues) replied that this prejudicial treatment would have been most likely prior to the significant liberalization that took place in the 1980s—in particular during the 1960s (see Huschka et al. 2009).

In order to examine emerging differences in naming in both German states, we will analyze the two former German states separately. In the following section, we pay attention to the distribution of names.

## The General Picture

After 1945 both German states display similar naming patterns in terms of declining shares of German names during their division. However, this trend stagnates during the 1970s; it is even regressive by the 1980s. Moreover, despite the shared general trend, there are differences between the two German states.

In both post-war German states, a decline in German names in favor of Nordic and Romanic names can be observed. Concerning the alternative name choices, Western and Eastern parents shared the same tastes concerning name types. Differences can only be seen in specific name choices and the varying popularity of certain individual names in the two states (Huschka et al. 2009). The decline of German (and thus Christian) names in favor of foreign names, many of them English, was steeper in the East than in West Germany up until the late 1970s. We interpret this as an effect of state-enforced secularization in East Germany (Meulemann 2009) and as a means of silent opposition to the socialist dictatorship at the same time (Huschka et al. 2009).

## West German Developments

In the trans-Atlantic oriented West Germany, innovation in naming increased from the late 1950s onwards, while traditional naming decreased with the exception of the 1980s (Figure 4). The rise of less traditional naming behavior coincides with the beginning of societal developments associated with the *Wirtschaftswunder* (German economic miracle). This period of prosperity and stability was strongly associated with the American way of life

regarding culture and goods, and the facilitation of innovation— apparently also in naming children. Nevertheless, this development occurred gradually and steadily.

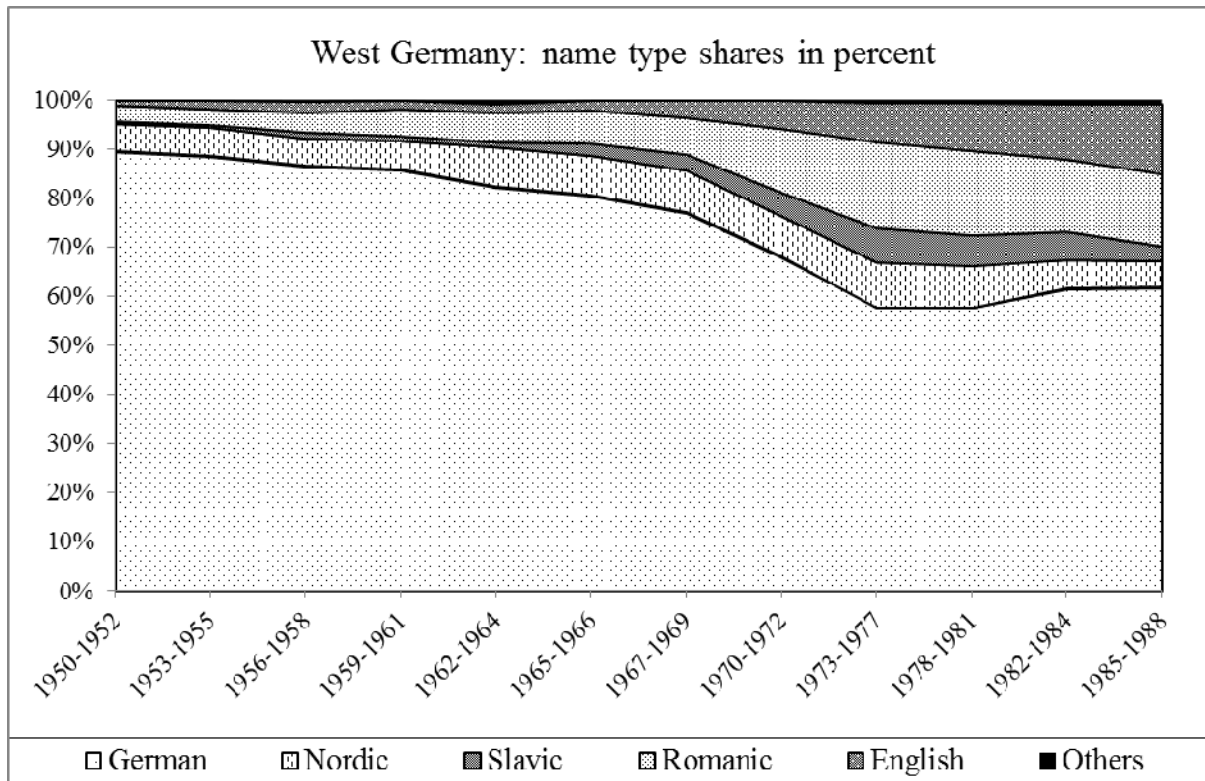


Figure 4: Name type shares in percent of 12 groups of approx. the same size (groupings are based on year of birth) for West Germany  
Source: SOEP, own calculations

However, as of the late 1960s, innovative naming became more pronounced. This accelerated change coincides with an overall societal value shift emerging from the student movement around this time. Thus, the innovation in naming is determined by the Zeitgeist of that period and reflects the striving for values beyond materialism. Apart from the differences in level, both sexes display similar patterns.

## East German Developments

Before the East German state was founded in 1949 as part of the Soviet Empire, the majority of parents living in that part of Germany had very similar tastes to their West German counterparts. From the late 1950s on, parents began to choose more foreign names, with the exception of the early 1960s (Figure 5).

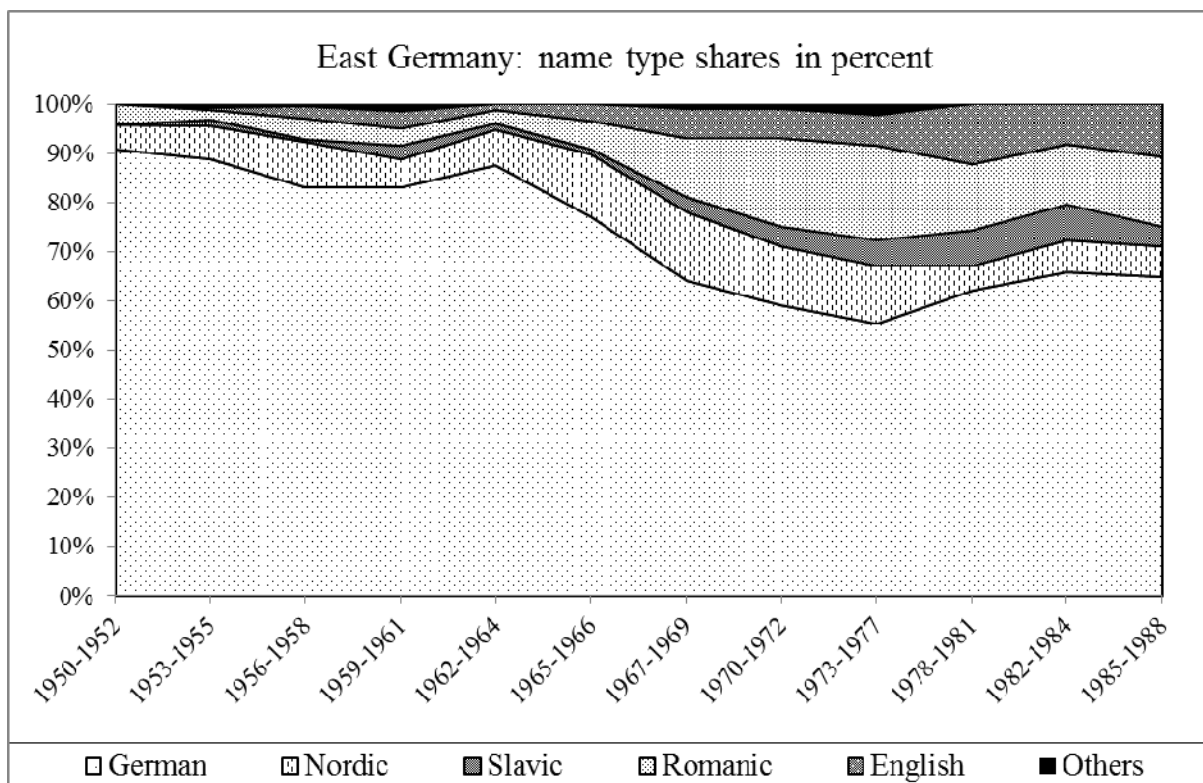


Figure 5: Name type shares in percent of 12 groups of approx. the same size (groupings are based on year of birth) for East Germany

Source: SOEP, own calculations

A rather rapid decline in German names followed after the mid-1960s for about a decade.

Subsequently, in the late 1970s, for about another decade, traditional naming gained

momentum—especially for boys. These changes in naming mirror the political developments

in East Germany very accurately. Especially in the early stages of the division of Germany,

the Soviet occupation force and the ideology implemented from above were viewed with suspicion, and naming was more traditional. Then, in 1953, a national uprising in the German Democratic Republic against the leaders of the ruling communist party because of their ignorance of the working class desiderata was suppressed, and martial law was announced by the Soviets. Some years later, in 1961, the Berlin Wall was erected. Both events marked a culmination of preceding circumstances, were milestones of the Cold War, and times of rapid societal change. The change in naming behavior might again indicate that traditional naming served as a fundamental social tie: the use of familiar names served as a sanctuary of stability and can certainly be viewed as ligatures in Dahrendorf's sense, that is, profound cultural binding and anchoring (Dahrendorf 1979: 51). On a side note, Slavic, i.e., Russian names were never popular in East Germany.

In the 1980s, the share of German names rose in the East (as it did in West Germany). During this decade, the economically fatal aftermath of the Cold War began to become evident in East Germany. In the era of Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost policies (mid-1980s), which gradually relaxed the existing political tensions, the share of German names began to fall in East (and West) Germany again. We assume that the original rise in the 1980s was induced by a feeling of uncertainty which arose when there was a stalemate between both of the main players in the Cold War. Then, under Gorbachev's policy shift, both sides began to readapt. This development was also manifested in the choice of given names as described above.

We also analyzed the sexes separately. What we found is that when it comes to female names, the early 1960s were a time of recurring traditionalism. This may reflect the official pronouncement of the importance of women, especially in the labor force, as proclaimed by

East Germany's leaders (Brockmann 1999). This development towards a (virtual) empowerment of women was unique to East Germany.

## **5 Conclusion**

Our analysis has shown that traditional values lost their importance for name choices over time. In the long run, German parents chose fewer German names in favor of more foreign names. At first, Nordic names rose in popularity, followed later by Romanic and then English names. In accordance with societal changes, German parents seem to have felt less obliged to choose traditional names over time.

We also discovered a decline in the concentration of names, which demonstrates an increased variation in naming. This may be interpreted as a desire for more distinction. Since “segregation by means of differences in clothing, manners, taste, etc., is expedient only where the danger of absorption and obliteration exists, as is the case among highly civilized nations.” (Simmel 1901), naming also reflects processes of modernization, particularly the importance of individualization. Young parents increasingly make use of their opportunity to make free choices.

Moreover, the patterns we observed are valid for both sexes, with the exception that female names normally exhibited fewer ties to tradition at an earlier point in time.

We proved that naming is in fact influenced by the *Zeitgeist* and reflects societal developments, especially in periods of rapid social change. On the one hand, the general trends in naming were disrupted by World War II. We interpret these findings as a mechanism of reassurance and a means of stabilizing social ties during times of uncertainty.



The affinity towards foreign names is lower than in times of economic or political security, for boys even more so than for girls.

On the other hand, in times of redemocratization, stability, and economic welfare, parents became more individualized. Our overall findings lead us to the conclusion that social change in Germany can also be traced in the choice of names: names are indicators of social change.

## Notes

- 1) For further information, please see  
[http://www.diw.de/sixcms/detail.php?id=diw\\_02.c.221178.en](http://www.diw.de/sixcms/detail.php?id=diw_02.c.221178.en)
- 2) Given names are not part of the scientific use files and are accessible only at DIW Berlin under certain restrictions. For more information on this, see Wagner et al. (2007) and Huschka et al. (2009).
- 3) For a mathematical explanation, see Baayen (2001).
- 4) Concerning Nordic names, see also Wolffsohn and Brechenmacher (1999: 242).
- 5) Our distinction between different types of war is based on the media sciences approach. “Hot war” is defined as the organized, open use of considerable military force and arms to resolve a political conflict between at least two declared parties, while the term “cold war” refers to conflict without (armed) military intervention (e.g., Platzdasch 2006).

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