
Mohammed, the nation's (secret) favourite name

According to the official version, Oliver is recognised today as the most common name for baby boys. But the official version is disguising the truth.

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In fact, in all its various spellings, Mohammed is now the favourite name for newborn boys in England and Wales.



Mohammed's popularity was 'symbolic of Britain's diversity', said Dr Justin Gest author of *Apart: Alienated and Engaged Muslims in the West* Photo: ALAMY

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Although Oliver has overtaken Jack after 14 years, when variations of the Islamic Prophet's name were included it came top for the first time, given to 7,515 boys, compared with 7,364 Olivers.

Even without variant spellings, Mohammed was the most common boy's name in the West Midlands and the fourth most popular in London. In the South West, however, it ranked 145th. It was 16th overall.

Its popularity was "symbolic of Britain's diversity", said Dr Justin Gest, an academic at Harvard and the London School of Economics, and author of *Apart: Alienated and Engaged Muslims in the West*.

"Where we had many Johns and Jacks we also have plenty of Mohammeds now."

The figures, from the Office for National Statistics, showed that there were 3,300 boys named Mohammed, 2,162 called Muhammad, 1,073 Mohammads and 980 called either Muhammed, Mohamed, Mohamad, Muhamed or Mohammod.

Experts said the development reflected the name's overwhelming popularity among British Muslims rather than any "explosion" in the British Muslim population.

The figures, for 2009, showed the name had grown substantially in popularity in recent years, coming second the previous year once variants were included.

Muslims see Mohammed as "a paragon of excellence" and seek to emulate his life and follow his guidance, making the name an obvious choice for parents, Dr Gest said.

The figures also heralded the dawn of the age of Olives.

Olivia remained in first place for baby girls, chosen for 5,201, while Oliver was first for boys under the ONS rules, which count spelling variations as separate names.

Justine Roberts, co-founder of Mumsnet, suggested that the continuing popularity of television chef Jamie Oliver – who frequently extols the virtues of olive oil – could be to blame.

"I imagine that Oliver is partly to do with Jamie," she said. "He is a god to us mothers. Jack has had his day. There comes a time when people think 'I don't want my child to be the person who is the same as four others'."

"Parents obsess about names. It feels like a big responsibility. You have to be aware of initials and nicknames and of your child being teased."

The figures confirmed a revival in traditional names too, with Stanley, Austin, Frederick and Arthur replacing Blake, Jay, Corey and Zak in the top 100 for boys.

For girls, Evie has risen 157 places over the past 10 years to number 10, while Ruby has jumped 91 places to number two. Maisie was the highest climber inside the top 100, up 29 places to 34, while Alisha, Keira and Libby all fell.

Perhaps reflecting a political swing, 1,378 boys were named Cameron. Just 14 were called Gordon, the same as the number named simply Baby.

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