

From Germany to US (but not UK), Liam goes supersonic as top choice for boy's name

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Liam is set to become the new Kevin, researchers predict, as the name graduates from its Irish origins and rises up the rankings around the world.

Fewer Liams were born in Ireland last year (334) than in Germany (an estimated 3,800), Spain (962), Sweden (760), Belgium (575) and Switzerland (443). For American baby boys, Liam has been the most popular choice for three years running, with 20,502 in 2019 alone.

Liams are also on the rise in the baby name charts of Canada (third) and France (11th place in 2018), yet the trend has failed to catch on in England and Wales, where it has dropped from its peak in the mid-90s to 74th place.



▲ *The former Oasis singer, Liam Gallagher, may have helped the name*

“It’s rare for a name to rise from nowhere in different parts of the world at the same time, especially if it used to be confined to one country or language,” said Gabriele Rodriguez at Leipzig University’s centre for name research. “You could compare it to the popularity of Kevin, which went through a boom phase in the 90s and then became stigmatised as a ‘lower class’ name.” She said Liam “could eventually be headed that way”.

The cause of Liam-mania has been the subject of speculation. Oasis, fronted by Liam Gallagher, split up in 2009, while Irish actor Liam Neeson’s box office hit *Taken* premiered in 2008.

“Film and pop stars can have a delayed impact on naming patterns, as parents act on a subconscious affinity to names they developed in their teens,” said German naming

researcher Knud Bielefeld. The middle name most common for German Liams, his research has found, is Noel.

Carla Ribeiro from Frankfurt said she settled on the name Liam for her three-year-old after watching the 2016 Oasis documentary *Supersonic*. “I was never particularly into Britpop, but I walked out of the cinema and I just knew that Liam was the right choice.”

Linguists have observed a trend towards “global currency” names such as Liam, said Simone Berchtold Schiestl of the University of Zurich, where “euphony trumps meaning”. “Parents care less where a name comes from, and more that it sounds nice.”

Liam’s popularity could contain the seeds of its decline. “Once you know enough Kevins or Liams you dislike, that name can get unpopular very quickly,” said Rodriguez.

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