

## Using the SSA Website to Investigate Baby Naming Practices

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### Background

This module is designed for a 75-minute workshop for undergraduate students. I have used it in a summer bridge program that I co-directed and in an honors course on power, identity, and naming taught by a colleague. It demonstrates how to use an interactive website tool to analyze data collected by the Social Security Administration on baby names. This assignment also highlights the distinction between demographic composition and rates. It assumes that students have a laptop computer with internet access. The slides that accompany this workshop can be found at [RPubs](#). Ideally, I would put the assessment in google forms so that the students could see the aggregated responses to the assessments in real time.

### Pre-Assignment Assessment: What is this showing?

*Mark all that apply*

- The percent of girls named Jayla who fall into different racial/ethnic groups
- The percent of girls in each racial/ethnic group who are named Jayla
- The rate at which girls in different racial/ethnic groups are named Jayla
- The racial/ethnic composition of girls named Jayla

### Learning Goals

- You will use an interactive website tool to determine:
  - the sex composition of babies with a particular name
  - the rates at which boys and girls are given that name
  - state variation in the rank of a name of your choice
- You will interpret analyses.
- You will see the advantages and disadvantages of using an interactive website tool.

### What do you think?

- What is the distinction between the concepts of sex and gender?

- How do you measure the popularity of a particular name in 2023?

- What percent of babies named Taylor in the 1990s were classified as male on their birth certificate? Give your best estimate.

- What percent of babies classified as male on their birth certificate in 2023 were named Taylor? Give your best estimate.

Exercise 1: [Sex Composition of Babies Named Taylor](#)

- What percent of babies named Taylor in the 1990s were classified as male?
- Under Select Decade enter **1990s** and click **Go**
- Search for Taylor to find the numbers of boys and girls with this name.
- Calculate the percent of babies named Taylor who were classified as male. Also calculate the percent classified as female.

Exercise 2: [Rates at Which Boys and Girls are Named Taylor](#)

- Under Popularity of a Name
  - Enter Taylor for Name
  - Enter **1900 & later** for Years
  - Under Sex associated with name choose **Male**
  - Click **Go**
- What percent of boys born in 2023 were named Taylor?

Exercise 3: [State Variation in Baby Naming](#)

- Under Top 100 names for a selected State and year of birth, enter the requested information for a hypothetical person (e.g., yourself or a family member) and click **Go**.
- Is their name on a list for the Top 100 names?
- Under Top 5 names by State for a selected year of birth, enter the same year of birth as in the previous step.
- Is the name of your hypothetical person on these lists? If so, for what states is their name ranked highest?

Post-Assignment Assessment: What is this showing?

*Mark all that apply*

- a. The percent of boys named Mateo who fall into different racial/ethnic groups
- b. The percent of boys in each racial/ethnic group who are named Mateo
- c. The rate at which boys in different racial/ethnic groups are named Mateo
- d. The racial/ethnic composition of boys named Mateo

Discussion

- Were the results for Exercise 1 (% of babies named Taylor who are male) and Exercise 2 (% of boys born in 2023 who were named Taylor) consistent with your expectations?

- What do you think are the limitations of the SSA interactive tool?