

Multiple First Names in the Netherlands (1760–2014)

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Although in Europe the custom to choose more than one name for a child first arose in the early Renaissance in Italy, its popularity reached the Netherlands only in the eighteenth century. On the basis of a high-coverage sample of the birth and name information for 26 million individuals from 1760 until 2014, the preference for multiple first names in the Netherlands has been studied, both annually and geographically. With the exception of recent years, religion has played a dominant role in name choices, including the number of names. Protestants only started to adopt double names in the nineteenth century, while Catholics increasingly chose three names, many including *Maria* (but only during a period of 50 years in the mid-twentieth century for boys). A tax proposal in 1915 on the number of names not only demonstrates the effect of financial cost on naming, but also the consistency of parents' name choices concerning their children. Whereas during previous centuries the changes were gradual, preferences varied rapidly over the last 50 years.

KEYWORDS: first names, Netherlands, history, geography, gender.

Introduction

The choice to give a child more than one first name has a long history. The custom is likely to have started in Italy in the early Renaissance, first being adopted by the elite in the larger cities and later in the more rural areas (Wilson, 1998). In fourteenth-century Florence two first names were already quite common, both among the elite and in lower social circles. The fashion reached the border regions of France, as well as its aristocracy, in the late-sixteenth century but spread more widely in the seventeenth. England was even slower in its introduction of the practice: by 1800 only 10 % of the population had more than one name and even among the elite double names were rare (Mitterauer, 1993). In the Netherlands, Ebeling (1993), on the basis of a review of case studies in several places across the country, assessed that more than one name was rarely given before the

seventeenth century. The same observation was made for the southern part of the duchy of Brabant, now in Belgium, for which Cloet (1986) found that only 3 % of boys and 7 % of girls received two names at that time. During the eighteenth century this quickly increased to 31 % and 52 %, respectively.

Whereas the choice of multiple first names may be seen as an expression of wide and historic familial relationships, especially by the elite, in religious circles multiple names were seen as frivolous. At the Council of Trent (1545–1563) the Roman Catholic Church prescribed a maximum of two names for devout Christians (Cloet, 1986) while, in Protestant areas, more names were also not in vogue. In the eighteenth century, the practice of choosing multiple names was mainly limited to Catholic communities in the south of the Netherlands, as Ebeling (1993) mentions a slower proliferation of multiple first names in the (Protestant) northern areas.

In the nineteenth century, the choice of multiple first names spread quickly in the Netherlands, especially in the second half of that century. Comparable findings are reported for Germany by Becke (1972). In one northeast German area, the number of first names increased regularly during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, from one to three names on average. In the southwestern German town of Trier, the increase started earlier but at a slower pace, reaching two names on average by the beginning of World War I, with no differences between boys and girls.

For this gender factor, mixed results have been reported from various sources. Ebeling (1993) mentions examples of places in the Netherlands where girls got more names than boys (never the reverse) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but cannot conclude that this was a widespread phenomenon. Foulon and Poulain (1984) found no difference between the sexes in the southern Belgium community of Tournai in the period 1821–1860. But, almost a century earlier, in nearby Colfontaine, a significant difference between boys and girls was found (Bougard, 1984). In more recent times, Cloet (1986) reports for Belgian Brabant that 80 % of both boys and girls had three names in 1940. According to Kremer (1986), in the German town of Ahaus, the rare triple names given during the eighteenth century almost exclusively went to girls, while in the area of Ottenstein a significant difference between the adoption of double names for boys (55 %) and girls (66.7 %) was found for the period 1776–1800.

Modern naming in the Netherlands has been investigated by Gerritzen (1998), who studied samples from the 1947 census (84,000 individuals) and a questionnaire from 1995 (3,146 children under four years of age). She observed a distinct difference between the southern provinces (Zeeland, and the Catholic provinces of Noord-Brabant and Limburg) and the rest of the country, which has a Protestant majority. In the south, over half of the children received more than one name, with a shift from two to three names in recent times. In the northern provinces, more than half of the older population had one first name, with an increasing preference for two names. She found no major differences in the percentages of multiple names for boys and girls.

Although in the whole of Western Europe name laws became more liberal at the end of the twentieth century, in 1969, Belgian civil servants were still told to warn parents that too many names would hinder their child in life, due to the increased probability of clerical errors (van den Broeck and van Poucke, 1969). Nowadays, several countries still have explicit restrictions on the number of names allowed; for example, three names in Argentina and Finland, and only two names in Spain.

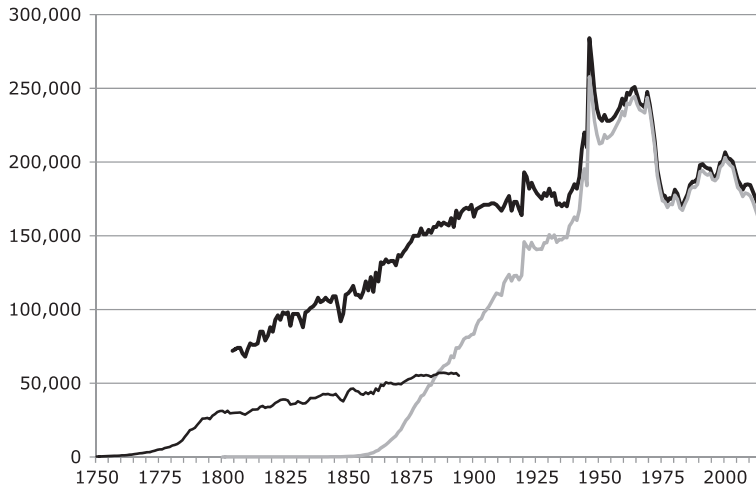


FIGURE 1 Number of births per year according to Statistics Netherlands (thick black line), the sample from the Civil Registration (gray), and the sample deduced from marriage certificates (thin black).

Previous historical studies all relied on an analysis of limited data sets. Although they confirm a general tendency towards an increasing number of first names over the centuries, which spread from southern to northern Europe, regional and local differences were observed in the investigated samples. This article surpasses limitations in sample size across geography and time for the Netherlands and reports on the number of first names of males and females over the 250-year period 1760–2014, based on a significant sample of the total annual number of births before 1945 and an almost full population sample thereafter. Because religion was not available in our data, and with its expected influence on name choices in mind, we also studied the data at the provincial level, since provinces differ distinctly in religious composition. Besides the number of names, the specific names chosen in initial and following positions were researched as well, with some focus on *Maria* and special larger name combinations.

Data

Two data sources have been used. The first is the Civil Registration, from which we received a full population data selection in 2014 (for those who have Dutch nationality, were living in the Netherlands, and were alive in or after 1994, the start of digitized registration). The available fields for each person's record were the full first name, place and date of birth, and identification number. In addition to this information, the first names and place and date of birth of the parents were also available and their identification numbers if they were still alive in 1994. Although most of these people were born in the twentieth century, the parental information allowed for the reconstruction of parents as individuals (as they could be mentioned with several children) in cases where they died before 1994 and had no identification number. This extended the sample to about 1860 with a total of 21 million individuals. In Figure 1 we present the number of births per

year, in absolute numbers since 1805, as presented by Statistics Netherlands, and the number in the sample from the digitized Civil Registration. Although the latter sample becomes less complete going back in time, the coverage is still over 25 % for 1880. We assume that this sample — homogeneously drawn from the population although limited to those with offspring — is representative for our purpose of studying first names.

As a second source, we used historical marriage certificates from the vital registration. These have been digitized for the period 1811–1922 in the *Genlias* project (the *Genlias* marriage certificates can be consulted online at www.wiewaswie.nl) and contained about 85 % of all marriages at the time of our selection in December 2011. Most provinces had a complete data set, but part of the data from the provinces of North and South Holland were still being processed. Each full official first name(s) and surname of the bride and groom were available. Their age (or date of birth) and place of birth were less complete, and the availability of these fields could vary between provinces (due to differences in the digitization protocol). In all, sufficient information was available for 4.6 million individuals. From the age at marriage and the date of marriage the year of birth was estimated. The coverage was about 37 % of all births from 1800 onwards (see Figure 1), but we should keep in mind that infant mortality affected over 25 % of all children born, and not all individuals married and remained in the Netherlands. Since persons who married from 1811 onwards could have been born in the eighteenth century, the sample of births extended to 1760, although males then became heavily overrepresented in our sample. The sample was not deduplicated for remarriage, as it was expected that the distribution of the number of first names would not depend on an individual's number of marriages.

Results

Variation over time

Figure 2 shows the percentage of Dutch boys and girls who received one, two, three, or four or more first names between 1760 and 2014. We have chosen to show the overlap between the data set of the marriage certificates and Civil Registration between 1870 and 1890. The fit is reasonable, given the different sample origins and data selection processes. The slight difference is likely to be the result of a relative underrepresentation of the southern provinces of Limburg and Noord-Brabant because, for these provinces, the information on the year of birth on the marriage certificates was only partially digitized.

The differences between boys and girls are small, with virtually none at all before 1860 and after 1970. Even in the time in-between those years, girls received only slightly more names than boys. As we shall see in the next section, this could be explained by the preference of parents to choose the same number of names for all of their children, irrespective of gender. This result puts in perspective the impression of more names for girls in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Ebeling, 1993) and is consistent with the observations of Gerritzen (1998) concerning modern Dutch naming.

Whereas, in the second half of the eighteenth century, a single first name was heavily dominant, there was an increasing popularity for two and three names over the whole period up to 1945 (with the exception of the peak around 1916). Between both World Wars the popularity of three names increased even more rapidly at the expense of the percentage of two names.

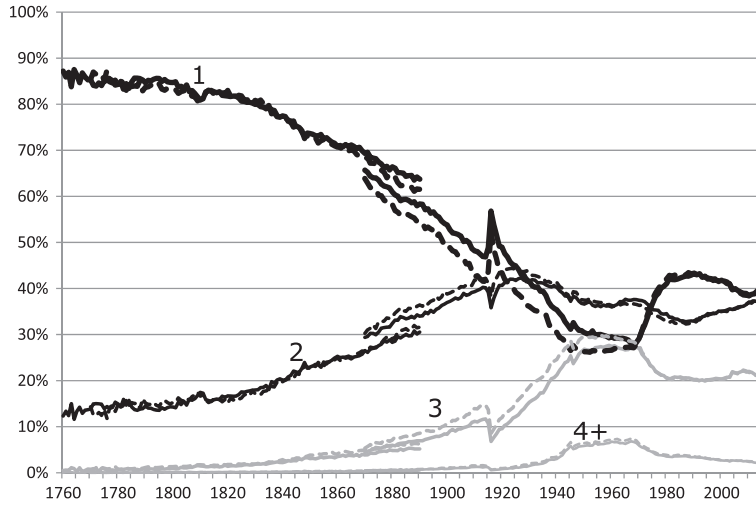


FIGURE 2 Percentages of children in the Netherlands with one (thick black line), two (thin black), three (gray), or four or more (gray) first names per year of birth, 1760–2014, separately for boys (solid) and girls (dashed).

During the post-war period — 1945–1970 — the ratio between the percentages of number of names was stable, with two names on top at 37 %, one and three names roughly equal at 28 %, and four names or more at 7 %, which is the maximum popularity reached in the last two and a half centuries. After 1970, with big socio-cultural changes including a new and free name law and more social freedom for parents to choose names according to fashion, a single first name regained popularity. In 2014 a single name at 39 % was about as popular as two names, with a 38 % share, while three names accounted for 20 % of the children; only 2 % were given more names.

A tax on first names

The unexpected change in 1916 is remarkable and shows a sudden increase in the popularity of single first names. This is the result of a bill proposed by the minister of finance at the end of 1915 to introduce a tax on the number (and total length) of first names, as one of a series of taxes proposed to solve budget problems related to World War I (Schaap, 2013). The argument was that more than one name signaled a level of prosperity of the parents which could be taxed (see the explanatory memorandum that accompanied the bill (Handelingen der Staten-Generaal, 1915–1916)). If parents chose to give a child a single name there was no cost, but more names were taxed progressively depending on income. Details were prescribed such as that composite names or names with more than 12 characters would count as two names. The proposal raised a lot of debate and was especially heavily opposed by the Catholic part of the population and those who valued naming traditions. In 1918, as World War I came to an end, the proposal was withdrawn and never came into force. Therefore, its effect on the number of first names is all the more surprising. Parents clearly anticipated the cost of the names of future children and chose fewer names, even before the tax was applied. But when it became clear that

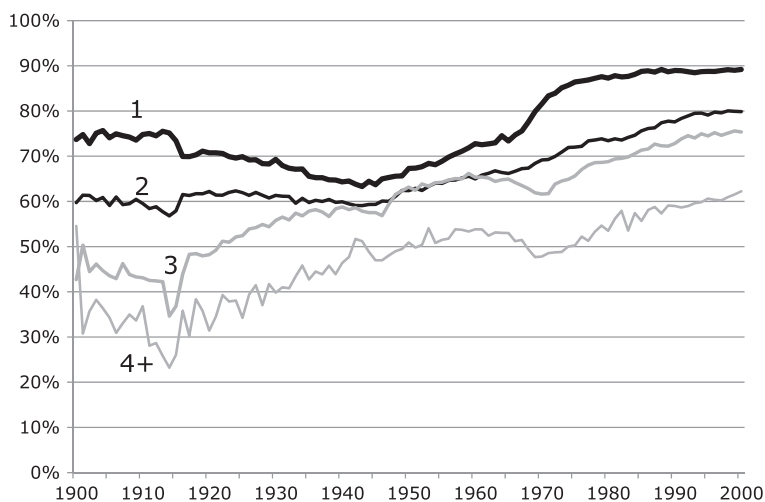


FIGURE 3 Percentages of later-born children with the same number of first names as an earlier-born child in the same family, 1900–2000.

there would not be a name tax, the effect still continued for several decades. This is likely related to the consistency parents aim at when naming their children. Parents wish to treat children equally and feel that they should be given comparable names in terms of type and number. Presumably, parents who had their first child between 1916 and 1918, and chose to give only one name for prospective financial reasons, followed this decision for subsequent children even when the name tax proposal was withdrawn. The decay shown in Figure 2 then expresses the effect of the number of completed families in this group.

To underpin this assumption, we studied the number of names given to children in the same family. First we selected siblings as children with the same mother, and picked the first two children (not necessarily the first-born children as our sample is incomplete for older data). For these children we computed the percentage of later-born children with the same number of first names as the earlier-born child. This was done per year of birth of the earlier-born child over the period 1900–2000. The results are shown in Figure 3.

If the choice of the number of names of the earlier-born and later-born child is unrelated, the percentages in Figure 3 should follow the lines on the graph shown in Figure 2. They considerably exceed these percentages, however, with a factor of 1.5–2 for one and two names and much higher factors for three and four or more names. This indeed indicates a preference of parents to keep the number of first names the same across all their children, a preference which is consistent over time.

Geographical variation

The Netherlands has 11 historical provinces, whose borders have hardly changed during the reviewed period. These provinces have their own identities in terms of historical development, population, religion, and language or dialect, and demonstrate different preferences for first names including their number. Before 1970, the major geographical division in the choice of first names was between traditional Dutch names in the

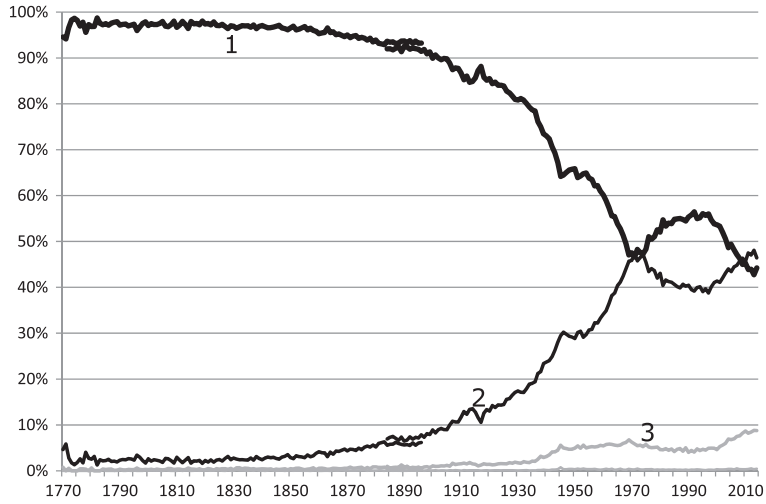


FIGURE 4 Percentages of multiple names in the northern — Protestant — province of Friesland.

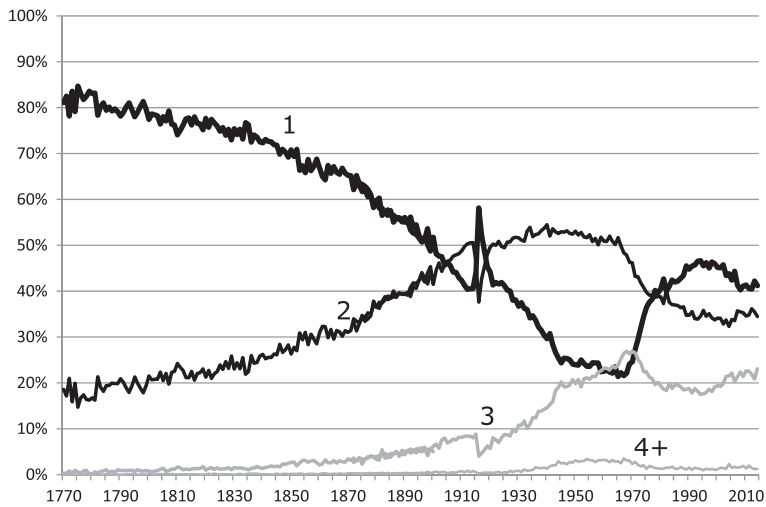


FIGURE 5 Percentages of multiple names in the western province of Zeeland.

Protestant north and Latinized names in the Catholic south, related to the ceasefire line of 1609 during the partly religion-based war of independence with Spain. Although after 1970 naming became fashion oriented at the expense of traditional naming, the new preferences that arose still had a visible relationship to the religious division of the country (Bloothoof et al., 2004; Bloothoof and Groot, 2008).

The number of names also shows this north-south division. In Figures 4–6 we present the share of the number of first names for the provinces of Friesland (very much representative of the northern provinces of Groningen and Drenthe), Zeeland (representative

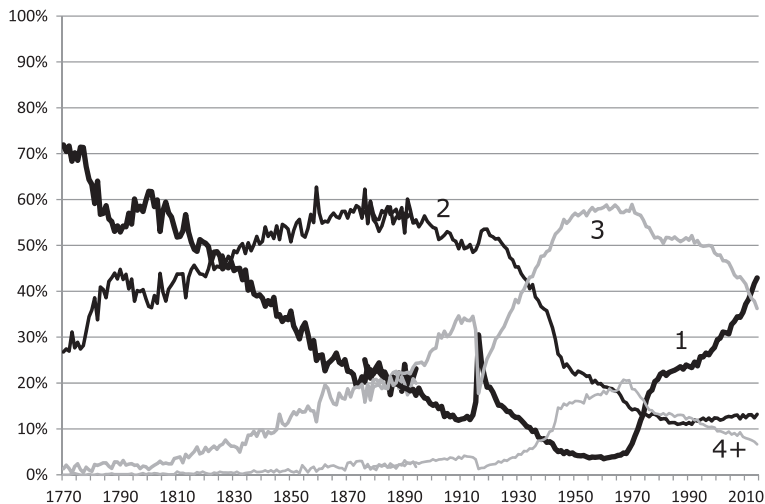


FIGURE 6 Percentages of multiple names in the southern — Catholic — province of Limburg.

of the middle and west of the country), and Limburg (which represents the southern province of Noord-Brabant as well). See Figure 7 for their locations.

Friesland is a rural province, with strong regional traditions, as also expressed by its own language and distinctive name inventory. In Friesland, and more generally in rural Protestant areas, the single first name long remained the dominant form (Figure 4). The decline started only in the late-nineteenth century and continued until 1970, with a small revival thereafter. As a result there is little effect seen from the proposed name tax in 1916. Two names became the major alternative and, in 2014, both types were almost equally popular with 44 % and 46 % of new births, respectively. Only 8.8 % of children now receive three names in Friesland.

The results for the province of Zeeland (Figure 5) are very similar to the average result for the Netherlands as a whole (Figure 2), and can be considered to be an average between the results for its Protestant former islands and the Catholic Zeeuws-Flanders on the Belgium border. For the southern and Catholic province of Limburg (Figure 6) we see an ongoing decline in the percentage having a single first name from 1770 onwards (a decline that presumably started earlier), which continued to only 3.5 % around 1960. This is in line with Ebeling's (1993) observations that multiple names came into fashion from the south in the eighteenth century, and with findings for the nearby Belgian Brabant (Cloet, 1986). Whereas two names were the initial alternative choice of parents, the popularity of three names grew equally and became the most popular choice after 1934. The maximum was reached in the period 1945–1970 when almost 60 % of children born received three names, followed by a decline to the advantage of a single name which overtook in 2011. The geographical differences can be put forward in more detail if we map the percentage of triple first names by municipality for the period 1989–2014.

By means of the Catholic preference for three names, Figure 7 clearly shows the old Catholic/Protestant dividing line running from the southwest to the middle of the eastern

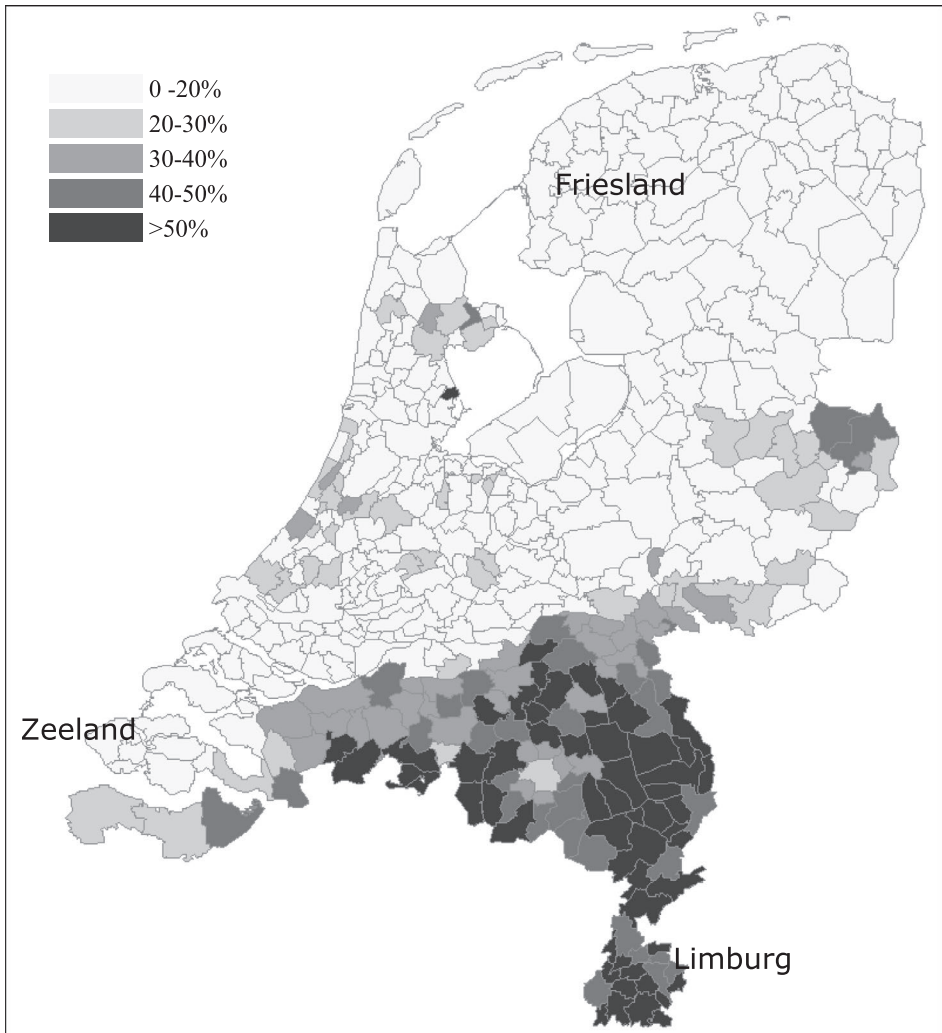


FIGURE 7 Children born between 1985 and 2014 with a triple first name as a share of all children, by municipality.

part of the country. The Catholic areas of Twente in the east and scattered Catholic municipalities in the west stand out as well.

Popular multiple names

Looking deeper into the patterns of naming with regard to multiple names, we also studied the names chosen to be placed in different positions. According to naming traditions, the initial first name would be the name of one of the grandparents. As a result, it is to be expected that the name inventory of initial first names would be stable until the second half of the twentieth century when parents started to follow their own preferences

TABLE 1
TOP 10 FIRST MALE NAMES CONSISTING OF TWO OR THREE NAMES IN THE PERIOD 1989–2014. THE FIRST COLUMN REFLECTS THE MOST POPULAR TRADITIONAL NAMES FROM BEFORE 1950. NON-TRADITIONAL NAMES ARE PRESENTED IN BOLD

	1925–1950 Traditional First Names	1989–2014 Double Names	1989–2014 Triple Names
1	<i>Johannes</i>	<i>Jan Willem</i>	<i>Petrus Johannes Maria</i>
2	<i>Jan</i>	<i>Gerrit Jan</i>	Thomas <i>Johannes Maria</i>
3	<i>Cornelis</i>	<i>Hendrik Jan</i>	Rick <i>Johannes Maria</i>
4	<i>Hendrik</i>	<i>Johannes Cornelis</i>	<i>Johannes Cornelis Maria</i>
5	<i>Willem</i>	<i>Jan Hendrik</i>	Bart <i>Johannes Maria</i>
6	<i>Petrus</i>	<i>Cornelis Johannes</i>	<i>Johannes Wilhelmus Maria</i>
7	<i>Pieter</i>	Thomas <i>Johannes</i>	Tim <i>Johannes Maria</i>
8	<i>Wilhelmus</i>	<i>Jan Cornelis</i>	<i>Johannes Jacobus Maria</i>
9	<i>Gerrit</i>	Mohamed Amine	<i>Johannes Adrianus Maria</i>
10	<i>Jacobus</i>	<i>Willem Jan</i>	<i>Cornelis Johannes Maria</i>

TABLE 2
TOP 10 FIRST FEMALE NAMES CONSISTING OF TWO OR THREE NAMES. THE FIRST COLUMN REFLECTS THE MOST POPULAR TRADITIONAL NAMES FROM BEFORE 1950. NON-TRADITIONAL NAMES ARE PRESENTED IN BOLD

	1925–1950 Traditional First Names	1989–2014 Double Names	1989–2014 Triple Names
1	<i>Maria</i>	<i>Johanna Maria</i>	Sanne <i>Johanna Maria</i>
2	<i>Johanna</i>	<i>Anna Maria</i>	Anne <i>Johanna Maria</i>
3	<i>Anna</i>	<i>Maria Johanna</i>	<i>Elisabeth Johanna Maria</i>
4	<i>Cornelia</i>	Lisa <i>Maria</i>	Anouk <i>Johanna Maria</i>
5	<i>Wilhelmina</i>	<i>Elisabeth Maria</i>	Kim <i>Johanna Maria</i>
6	<i>Elisabeth</i>	Eva <i>Maria</i>	Sophie <i>Anna Maria</i>
7	<i>Catharina</i>	Anne <i>Maria</i>	Lisa <i>Johanna Maria</i>
8	<i>Hendrika</i>	<i>Maria Elisabeth</i>	<i>Cornelia Johanna Maria</i>
9	<i>Adriana</i>	Emma Sophie	Laura <i>Johanna Maria</i>
10	<i>Petronella</i>	Julia <i>Maria</i>	Eva <i>Johanna Maria</i>

and fashion came into play. For subsequent names the parental freedom could have been greater in the past. To study this, we analyzed the most popular multiple name combinations. As a reference for traditional names, we used the 10 most popular first names in the Netherlands in the period 1925–1950, separately for males and females. In Tables 1 and 2 we present them together with the top 10 double and triple first names in the recent period 1989–2014. For males, we see a mixture of Latinized (Catholic) and non-Latinized versions of the same names (*Johannes* — *Jan*, *Wilhelmus* — *Willem*, and *Petrus* — *Pieter*). Even in this recent period, most of the top double and triple names are composed of combinations of traditional names. But whereas the double names mostly have a traditional Protestant flavor, the triple names are all typical Catholic choices as they have Latinized middle names and end with *Maria*. In some cases the initial name is a fashionable modern choice and likely not the name of a grandparent. As the set of modern names is much larger than the set of traditional names, popular modern names individually have far fewer name bearers in comparison to popular names in the past. Even though the number of parents choosing traditional names has decreased rapidly, they still outnumber their modern competitors in multiple name combinations that are spread over many more alternatives. This explains why, for double and triple names, traditional choices are still on top. But this trend will not last long as we can see from name

combinations such as *Rick Johannes Maria*, in which the initial name *Rick* is a modern choice, followed by a traditional name, presumably from a grandfather *Johannes*, while *Maria* still dominates the triple name in final position. Note that *Thomas* is a modern choice in the Netherlands and will rarely represent the name of a grandfather. The wave of immigration in the 1960s and 1970s means that typical combinations have been joined in the top 10 of double names by *Mohamed Amine*.

A slightly different pattern can be seen in Table 2 for female names. The top 10 traditional first names consists of names in the Latinized form which are predominantly used by Catholics, and do not show the traditional Dutch names characterized by the diminutive *-tje* (*Johanna* — *Jantje*, *Anna* — *Antje*, and *Cornelia* — *Neeltje*) chosen by Protestants. The latter does not show up either in the double and triple top names lists, which demonstrate dominant Catholic multiple name choices through the presence of *Maria*. For females, modern names are also moving into the top 10 where the initial position is concerned. This effect is stronger than for males.

An example of the influence of regional religious customs in naming can be found in triple names during the period 1825–1850. During this period, over 90 % of men with three names in the Netherlands were born in the province of Limburg. More than half of these (56 out of the top 100) had either *Hubertus* (Latinized form) or *Hubert* (traditional Dutch form) as a third name. They were most likely named after the early missionary saint and last bishop of Maastricht (655–727) (Gerritzen, 2006). In the twentieth century, the name continued to be a regional favorite, although its importance waned. Local popularity of a name can be seen elsewhere as well. In German Ahaus near the Dutch border, *Johan* was used as the first name in male double names in up to 80 % of cases in Ahaus during 1650–1811. Similarly for women, the name *Anna* was the first part of female double names in over 50 % of cases during the eighteenth century (Kremer, 1986).

The geographical reverse of this example is the name *Jan*. While during the nineteenth century this was a very common male name for both the Catholic south (the first name for 7.1 % of all boys born) and the Protestant north (9.7 %), the distribution changes when we look at *Jan* in the non-initial position. This occurs in significant numbers for the north (2.5 % of all boys with more than one name have *Jan* as the last one), but features at a much lower rate in the south (0.4 %). Multiple names ending with *Jan* are also far more likely to be double names rather than triple names. From the 100 most common name combinations with *Jan* as the last name, 96 are double names. Where a triple name most frequently means the child is born in the south and has *Maria* as a third name, a double name, one of which is *Jan*, strongly suggests that the person is from the north of the country.

Going beyond three names, parents have a lot of freedom to choose names. Whereas Ockeley (1994, p.67) records complaints in Belgium in the middle of the twentieth century that “these days poor people easily give four or five names to their children in order to pretend they are part of the elite,” the group of children with four or more names in the Netherlands is rather limited, never rising above 7 %. In this group, there are some rather long names in the Dutch registry. In 1960, one boy received 12 names (of apostles and evangelists) while, in 1981, one girl was given 15 first names, including three male ones. But the Dutch record holder is a man born in 1977 with 19 names: *Jhesu Immacolato Cuore di Maria Johannes Bernardus Carolus Magnus Augustus Aegidius*

Jacobus Exuperius Hermes Marcus Nicola Eric Etienne Genevieve Mars Castor Casimir (counting *Immacolato Cuore di Maria* (“The immaculate heart of Maria”) as one name).

The most frequent long male name combinations in the nineteenth century are those of the royal family: 76 boys in our sample were named *Willem Frederik George Lodewijk* (King Willem II, born in 1792), 141 named *Willem Alexander Paul Frederik Lodewijk* (King Willem III, born in 1817), and 11 named *Willem Nicolaas Alexander Frederik Karel Hendrik* (born in 1840, half-brother of the later Queen Wilhelmina and heir-apparent until his untimely death in 1879). These are the only combinations of four or more names that occur more than twice. This trend continued in the twentieth century with 148 girls in our sample named *Wilhelmina Helena Pauline* (or *Paulina*) *Maria* (Queen Wilhelmina born in 1880), the last of which was born in 1977, 15 years after the death of the then former queen. And 38 girls were named *Juliana Louise Emma Marie Wilhelmina* (Queen Juliana born in 1909).

Naming after a king or queen has been observed in many countries. It is often thought to be a factor not just in the popularity of individual names, but also in the increase in the number of first names (Wilson, 1998). The effect is dispersed during the life of the royal, with increased naming around birth, death, or coronation. During the German occupation of the Netherlands in World War II, naming after the royal family became a signal of protest. Children were given multiple names derived from those of the royal family. Eleven boys received the full first name of prince *Bernhard Leopold Frederik Everhard Julius Coert Karel Godfried Pieter* (husband of the then crown princess), and 12 the name *Bernhard Leopold*. Much more popular at the time of war were names for girls chosen as combinations of the first names of Queen *Wilhelmina*, her daughter *Juliana*, and her granddaughters *Beatrix*, *Irene*, and *Margriet*. The most frequent names of protest were *Beatrix Irene* (134), *Irene Beatrix* (73), *Wilhelmina Juliana* (60), *Wilhelmina Juliana Beatrix Irene* (44), *Wilhelmina Irene* (29), *Beatrix Irene Margriet* (21), and *Irene Beatrix Juliana Wilhelmina* (20). The meaning of *Irene* (peace) made that name the most popular royal name (occurring 523 times as a single name as well). The German occupiers did not like this expression of resistance and prohibited these combinations in 1942. After World War II, naming after the royal family was almost completely abandoned in favor of actors, singers, and media personalities.

Maria

The name *Maria* has a special position in the Catholic community. We studied this name for the largely Catholic province of Limburg. Figures 8 and 9 show the percentage of girls and boys that were given the name *Maria* in the initial, second, third, or fourth position (regardless of the total number of names). While *Maria* in the first position starts out as the most popular for 30–50 % of girls in the nineteenth century, it should be noted that only 3 % of girls had this as a single name, indicating that *Maria* was mainly popular in combination with other names (presumably from named grandparents and godparents). After a peak of having the name *Maria* in first position around 1870, it gradually became more popular to choose *Maria* for the last position in double or triple names. The total number of girls with *Maria* anywhere in their name stabilized at that time at around 60 % and remained constant until 1960. Thereafter the name followed the rapid decline of traditional names in general.

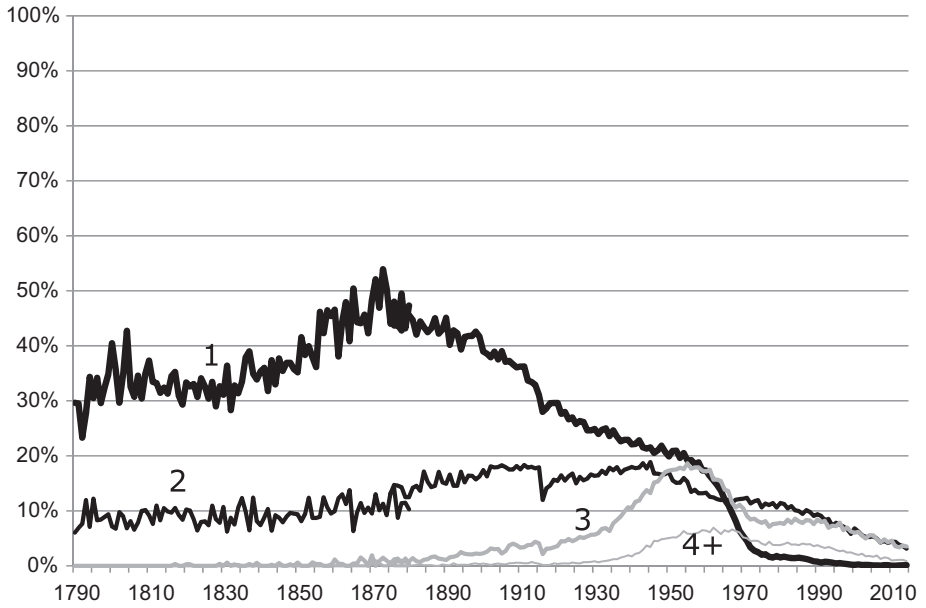


FIGURE 8 The percentage of girls given the name Maria in the initial, second, third, or later position in the province of Limburg.

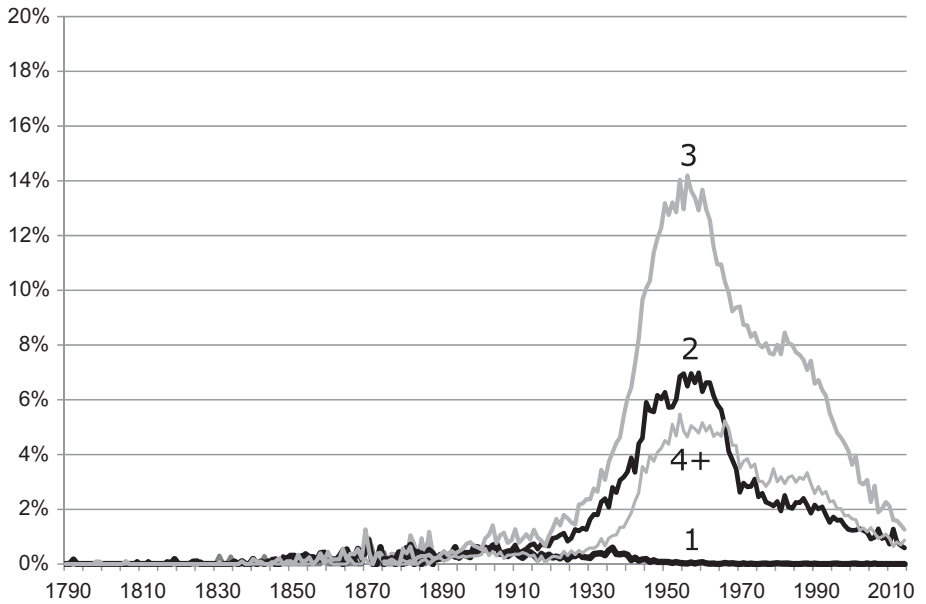


FIGURE 9 The percentage of boys given the name Maria in the second, third, or later position in the province of Limburg.

The special position of *Maria* also extends to boys exclusively in Catholic communities. This is a relatively new custom in the Netherlands (see Figure 9 for Limburg), only coming into wider usage around 1920 and peaking in the mid-1950s when about 25 % of boys had the name *Maria* in the second or later position. As an initial name for boys, *Maria* was only found in a handful of examples. The decrease came around the same time and is proportional to that seen for girls. As with multiple names in general, the popularity of naming a girl or boy *Maria* shows a development in time from southern to northern Europe. Le Mée (1984) found that in 1770 in northern Corsica the name *Maria* was very popular not only for women, with 45.8 % having *Maria* as a single name (10.5 %) or part of two names (35.6 %), but also for men, with 7.1 % having *Maria* as a second name.

Discussion

The introduction of multiple first names in Europe spread from the south to the north over many centuries. Its adoption outside the elite in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century was rather late, but comparable to surrounding countries. From slightly more than 12 % of the children who received more than one name in the middle of the eighteenth century it rose to 56 % by 1914. But there was a clear divergence between the Protestant north and the Catholic south, where the former stuck to a large extent to one first name until the twentieth century. There were no major differences in the number of names for boys and girls throughout the period we studied (1760–2014). We relate this to a parental preference to give children the same number of names, irrespective of their gender. The reaction to the unique proposal to raise a tax on the number of first names in 1916 confirms this, and shows that parents in the Netherlands were sensitive to the financial consequences of a name choice and were prepared to drop the names with less priority, such as *Maria*. This consistency in the same number of names for all children reflects the same tendency found in the preference of modern parents to choose the initial name of all of their children from a group of names with comparable linguistic and cultural associations (Bloothoof and Groot, 2008). Such name choices contribute to the social identity of the family. Also the elite expressed its identity throughout the ages by choosing a larger number of first names, with the royal family as an example, and probably inspired imitation by lower social classes. In our data, however, we did not have information on the social status of individuals and could not study this specific and small group or its influence.

The changes in the preferences for different numbers of names bear some relationship to changes in the popularity of individual names. In mainly Protestant regions, the late decrease in the choice of single names (see Figure 4) coincides with the decrease in the choice of traditional names — and both can be interpreted as an expression of abandoning traditions in general. For Catholic areas, the picture is more complex with an increasing preference for multiple names over several centuries, especially promoted by the popularity of *Maria*, but all within a traditional framework. The fashion to extend the names of boys with *Maria* is a typical mid-twentieth-century phenomenon in the Netherlands. Name changes, for instance at Confirmation, are not customary in the Netherlands and would only show in our data if requested through the courts.

Although, in both Protestant and Catholic circles, traditional naming after grandparents for the initial name was abandoned in the late-twentieth century, we observe that

traditional names still show up in the second or later position. It is likely that these are still the names of grandparents or godparents. The results suggest that 40 % of parents have fully abandoned naming after grandparents, instead choosing a single name for their children. They probably consider that in daily life this is the only name that will be used and do not care for more names as a religious or social statement. Another 40 % of parents preferred two names, partly to honor grandparents or godparents, while the remaining 20 % chose more names, including late admirers of *Maria*.

The data set we were able to use gives great insights into the changes in preferences for multiple names. Due to its size and high-level coverage it is not only possible to investigate developments from year to year, but also at various geographical aggregation levels. It then shows that preferences for the number of names can differ greatly across a country and over time. Averaging at too high a level would blur the actual underlying processes. For multiple names, preferences heavily depend on religion in the Netherlands (rather than on copying the fancies of the elite in order to reach a higher social status), and further study at the provincial and municipal levels could demonstrate this. With respect to time, the changes were gradual over the centuries, but over the last 100 years parental choices have varied rapidly and need further study in the range of less than a decade. In order to unravel these mechanisms in naming, the availability and analysis of big data have become indispensable for onomastics.

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