Names | A Journal of Onomastics
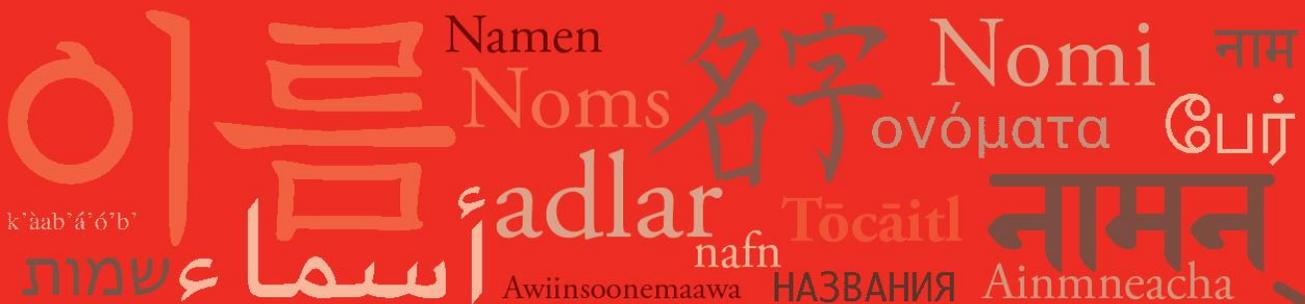
Name of the Year Report 2025

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Introduction

On Thursday, the 8th of January 2026, the American Name Society held its annual meeting for the 2025 Name of the Year (NoY) vote. Reflecting the great diversity of name types, the NoY deliberations comprise six different onomastic categories: (1) personal names (names of groups or individuals, including nicknames, given names, surnames, or a combination thereof); (2) place names (names or nicknames of any real geographic location such as rivers, lakes, mountains, streets, buildings, regions, countries, etc.); (3) brand names (names of commercial products, companies, services, and businesses, organizations, both profit and non-profit); (4) e-names (names of online platforms, websites, and movements, as well as hashtags, usernames, digital games, realities, etc.); (5) artistic and literary names (names of fictional persons, places, or institutions, in any written, oral, or visual medium such as the titles of art or musical works, books, plays, TV programs, movies, games, etc.); and (6) miscellaneous for those names that do not fit any of the above-mentioned categories.

For each of these categories, nominations are taken throughout the year from the general public, members of the American Name Society, and the international onomastic community. During the NoY meeting, nominations may also be taken directly from the floor from attendees. Once the allocated period for selecting nominations ends, the relative merits of each entry are discussed at length. In particular, the names are assessed for their relative degree of morphological and/or orthographic innovation and complexity; demonstrated and projected degree of lexical productivity; rates of usage and recognition; and referential significance for the year of nomination. The relative popularity or infamy of the onomastic referents is not, however, a point of consideration. While the application of this rule has always been a matter of ANS policy, the wisdom of this traditional restriction is especially salient in times of social upheaval and political strife.

After the relative onomastic strengths and weaknesses of each nomination are discussed, a vote is then taken by secret ballot. The nomination which receives the clear majority of the votes cast is designated the category winner. In those cases where this threshold is not reached, the nominations that receive the highest share of votes are selected for run-off elections until such time that a clear winner or set of winners emerges. After the winners of the above-mentioned onomastic categories have been selected, a final election is held for the overall Name of the Year. The initial set of contenders comprises the category winners. In addition, nominations may be accepted from the floor. After the nomination period is terminated, each of the candidates is once again carefully discussed. Voting by secret ballot is then held, until a final overall NoY winner is determined. For this year's NoY session, the elections were conducted by ANS President, Dr. Brandon Simonson. ANS Immediate Past President and current Name of the Year Coordinator Laurel Sutton moderated the committee session. This report presents a summary of the committee deliberations and provides insights into this year's winners.

Personal Names

In total, there were nine different names nominated for personal name of the year. In alphabetical order, these nominations were (1) *Charlie Kirk* (the name of US American right-wing political activist, and public speaker who was assassinated in September 2025); (2) *D4vd* (the moniker for US American singer/songwriter David Anthony Burke, who became the subject of a murder investigation when the body of 14-year-girl, Celeste Rivas Hernandez was found inside a car registered to the artist); (3) Elon (the first name of the controversial South African-born tech moghul Elon Reeve Musk); (4) *Epstein* (the surname of US American financier, international human trafficker, and prolific serial child rapist, Jeffrey Edward Epstein); (5) *Kennedy* (the surname of the famous Irish-American political family dynasty in the US); (6) *Pope Leo XIV* (the name selected by Robert Francis Prevost, the first US American born clergyman selected to become the papal head of the Catholic Church and the sovereign of Vatican City)[1]; (7) *Luigi Mangione* (the name of accused killer of Brian Thompson, CEO of United Healthcare); (8) *Sydney Sweeney* (the name of US American actress who modelled for American Eagle's highly controversial jean campaign); and (9) *Zohran Mamdani* (the name of US American Democratic politician and current Mayor of New York City). The heated controversies which surrounded many of the persons whose names appear on this list highlight the perspicacity of limiting the selection criteria to onomastic factors. That focus also helped to separate out those nominations that had clearly been suggested primarily, if not exclusively, because of the prominence of their name-bearer in public discourse. Once these nominations were weeded out, the committee was able to focus its attention on nominations that had other onomastic factors to their credit. An excellent example here is the surname *Epstein*.

Thanks to the shocking number, longevity, and depravity of the crimes perpetrated by this sex offender, as well as the international fame, wealth, and power of those who served as his criminal co-conspirators, legal protectors, and social associates, *Epstein* has not only dominated the international news. The surname has also become highly stigmatized with connotations of corruption and sexual perversion. The pejoration of *Epstein* has become so great that simply having one's name appear in a conjunction with it can result in public suspicion and formal investigation by the law enforcement community.[2] The negative repercussions are not limited to those whose name appears in conjunction with the convicted sex offender. As a recent article in *Rolling Stone* revealed, life has also been difficult for those who just happen to have the same birth name of the prolific pedophilic predator (Klee 2025). As one New Jersey resident disclosed in his interview with *Rolling Stone*, he is often attacked, both offline and online, by strangers who assume that he is intentionally using the name *Jeffrey Epstein* to offend or injure others. Another Jeffery Epstein interviewee ruefully predicted that the stigma attached to this name will "never go away". As he explains, the long-term damage is due not only due to the heinous crimes committed by his onomastic look alike, but also to the present administration's continued refusal to release all of its case records. This procrastination or cover-up has, in his opinion, only helped to fuel the public's interest in this story and hatred of the surname. The notoriety of Jeffery Epstein's crimes is so great that it is now possible to refer to him through his last name alone. Considering the large number of violent criminals, this odious onomastic achievement is one that only a few names have reached (e.g. *Bundy, Dahmer, Manson,* and *Kemper)*.

According to Urban Dictionary, a crowd-sourced online dictionary of English slang, the surname has also produced new forms such as "to pull an Epstein" which means to have sex with underage minors; and "to be epsteined" which is used to describe someone being murdered to stop them from sharing potentially incriminating information. In standard US American English, *Epstein* has been productive. It has been used, for example, to name other entities associated with the criminal investigation. Three excellent examples are the *Epstein Files, the Epstein Library* (the US Department of Justice's online repository for the Epstein Files); and *the Epstein Files Transparency Act* which demanded that the all government documents "relating to Jeffrey Epstein" be made "publicly available in a searchable and downloadable format" (Public Law 119–38).[3] As of the writing of this report, the US government is still in violation of the Epstein Files Transparency Act. As Kentucky Senator Thomas Massie charged, one month after the almost unanimous passage of the Act, "Attorney General [Pam] Bondi is making illegal redactions and withholding key documents that would implicate associates of Epstein". (Gregorian 2026, para. 3). California Senator Ro Khanna agrees and charges that the Department of Justice's continued "refusal to follow the law" is "an obstruction of justice" (Gregorian 2026, para. 4). If this lack of compliance continues, the surname *Epstein* may soon take on additional connotations (e.g., "political cover-up", "conspiracy", "governmental corruption").

A similarly complex and compelling nomination was *Zohran Mamdani* [zoh-RAHN mam-DAH-nee]. As with the other candidates in this category, this name was also extremely common in the public discourse. The high frequency of the name was not merely a function of the fact that the name-bearer was a candidate for the New York City mayor's office. As an African-born Muslim Asian-American, the politician's name also reflects the leader's unique personal heritage within the NY political establishment. According to statistics gathered by Axios, in 2021, only 0.9% of elected US officials self-identified as Asian-American or Pacific Islander (AAPI), "despite AAPIs accounting for 6.1% of the population" (Chen 2021, para 1). The disturbing demographic disparity is even greater when one considers that out of the 4.5 million US Americans with Indian heritage (US Census 2020), just a handful have been elected to the mayor's office. By the same token, only six of the 535 member of the 119th US Congress are Indian American: Ami Bera, Ro Khana, Raja Krishnamoorthi, Pramila Jaypal, Shri Thanedar, and Suhas Subramanyam (Times of India, 2025a). Based on data compiled by Pew, the numbers for representatives of Muslim faith is even more dismal. In the table below, the denominational breakdown for the 119th Congress and the adult population of the US is given (Diamant 2025).

Table: 1: Religious Denominations of Members of the 119th US Congress

Religion	Members of 119th Congress		US Adults
	Number	%	%
Buddhist	3	0.6	1
Christian	461	86.7	62
Hindu	4	0.8	1
Jewish	32	6.0	2
Muslim	4	0.8	1
No Answer	21	3.9	2
Other	1	0.2	3
Unaffiliated	3	0.6	28
Unitarian Universalist	3	0.6	<1
Total	**532**	**100**	**100**

Note: Statistics Taken from the Pew Series, "Faith on the Hill" (Diamant 2025). In this table, "Other" includes "Humanist".

Statistics like those presented above put the historic election of Mamdani into the necessary sociocultural context. The newly elected mayor is the only son of the Oscar-nominated filmmaker Mira Nair and anthropology professor Mahmood Mamdani. While both of Zohran Mamdani's parents were born in India, the NYC mayor himself was born in Uganda, and raised in New York from the age of seven. According to investigative reporting by the Times of India (2025b), the politician's first name means "the first star in the sky" and was chosen by his mother for its "quiet symbolism". Mamdani's middle name, *Kwame*, was bestowed to him by his father. A supporter of pan-African unity, the professor took his inspiration from Kwame Nkrumah, the first Prime Minister of Ghana (Times of India 2025b). The Gujarati family surname *Mamdani* is quite common amongst Khoja Muslims. It roughly the equivalent of *Mohammadan*, a Muslim name for followers of the Prophet Muhammad (Mohamed 2025). Taken all together, the mayor's full name reflects both his own multicultural heritage and that of the dynamic city he was elected to represent. However, during this acrimonious period in which the values of multiculturalism and diversity have been under blistering and sustained attack, it comes as no surprise that the new mayor's name became a lightning rod during the run-up to the elections. White House Press Secretary, Karoline Leavitt, for example, disparagingly referred to the mayoral nominee as *Zamdani*, *Zimdami,* and *Jamdani* in front of a room of journalists, domestic and foreign (Mahdawi 2025; Sengupta 2025; Sun-Woo 2025). In reaction to competitors repeatedly mispronouncing and/or misspelling Mamdani's name, a viral Tiktok/meme campaign was started under the slogan "Say His Name Right". As much onomastic research has shown, this form of verbal aggression is frequently used to denigrate and discredit, humiliate and harm others. The feelings of frustration and indignation were felt far beyond the geopolitical confines of the Big Apple. The onomastic saga also made international news. In India, for example, much coverage was given to a poignant moment on MSNBC news, when Anand Giridharadas, a journalist of Indian heritage, corrected former New York Governor Andrew Cuomo after he repeatedly mispronounced Mamdani's name as *Mandami*. If Cuomo wants to represent a city as large and diverse as New York, Giridharadas explained, he should take the time to show leadership and respect by getting people's "names right" (Times of India 2025c). *The Chosun Daily*, an English-language newspaper published in North Korea, also reported on the relentless face-threatening verbal acts (Sun-woo 2025). In Great Britain, with large Asian and African communities, the constant flubbing of Mamdani's name was broadly covered in the media with mounting incredulity. In a *Guardian* article provocatively entitled "If a Four-Year-Old can Pronounce a Name Correctly, So Can A Politician", a British journalist opined: "When someone's name is repeatedly botched, we shouldn't give the perpetrators the benefit of the doubt" (Mahdawi 2025, para 1). As these examples show, butchering the minority candidate's name did strike a nerve—but not the one which Mamdani's detractors had hoped for. Importantly, the international media was not exclusively focused on the onomastic insult, but also on the name-bearer's reaction. Instead of excusing or ignoring these acts of discrimination, Mamdani faced the bastardizations of his name head-on. Throughout the campaign, he and his team worked tirelessly to encourage members of the general public to learn how to say his name correctly. He also did not sway from confronting those who intentionally disrespected his name, identity, and heritage. As he proudly explained in an interview with the *New York Times*, "mocking or deliberately distorting someone's name signals they are not an 'insider'". (Sun-woo 2025, para 5). As a result of this discussion, the production of his name, be it correct or incorrect, became much more than a question of etiquette; it became a means of expressing one's socio-political position in polarized public discourse. At the same time, the discussion over the name brought to the forefront the real personal, social, and societal damage name prejudice and discrimination can cause. For all of these reasons, the name *Zohran Mamdani* received 38.89% of the vote and was selected as Personal Name of the Year. The surname *Epstein* took second place with 27.78%. The fact that these two nominations were able to garner 66.67% of all the votes cast in a field of nine contenders speaks to the strength of these two anthroponyms.

Place Names

The following five names were nominated for the Place Name category: (1) *Alligator Alcatraz* (the label of US American immigration detention center located in Southern Florida); (2) *Gulf of America* (the newly assigned name for the oceanic basin of the Atlantic Ocean); (3) *The Kennedy Center* (the original name of the national cultural center of the US); (4) *Mount McKinley* (the reinstated governmental moniker of highest mountain peak in North America) [4]; and (5) The *Louvre* (the name of the famous Parisian art museum which became the site of a spectacular crime scene involving the daytime theft of eight pieces of France's most treasured crown jewels which experts estimate are worth 102 million US dollars)[5]. As with the personal names category, the majority of the nominations for place name of the year were prominent features of public debate in 2025.

For that reason, this factor did not prove particularly useful in separating the wheat from the chaff. What did, however, become a decisive factor in the selection process were the language policies involved in the development and use of these nominations. Take, for example, *Alligator Alcatraz*. Situated in the Big Cypress National Preserve, this detention center gains the first part of its name from prevalence of alligators in the surrounding swamp lands. As Florida State Attorney General James Uthmeier boasted in a social media posting: "You don't need to invest that much in the perimeter. If people get out, there's not much waiting for them other than alligators and pythons" (Barría & Fojo 2025, para 5).

According to human rights organizations, the real threat to detainees sent to Alligator Alcatraz is not the wildlife outside of the facility, but rather the inhumane conditions found inside its walls. Investigations by the American Civil Liberties Union have confirmed an disturbing assortment of abuses. These include maggots in the imprisoned migrants' food; little or no access to shower facilities or clean drinking water; unprotected exposure to extremes in temperature, dangerous weather, and disease-carrying mosquitoes (ACLU 2026). Amnesty International has similarly uncovered evidence that torture and enforced disappearances are regular occurrences in the Florida facility.[6] Without doubt, this facility certainly seems to be living up to its onomastic predecessor. The second part of this name comes from the infamous Californian prison that was touted to be escape proof thanks to its location in the shark-infested waters of the San Francisco Bay. According to information released by the US Federal Bureau of Prisons, the name *Alcatraz* came from *Alcatraces,* the name originally given to the bay island by Spanish explorer Juan Manuel de Ayala in 1775. Approximately a hundred years after de Ayala's expedition, the island was being used by the US government to hold military prisoners. By borrowing the name of that notorious California prison, the name of the Florida institution effectively communicates the policies and practices of the facility. Moreover, by prefacing *Alcatraz* with the name of one of the largest, most feared, and iconic predators of the Everglades, the compound also signifies that the facility belongs to Florida. This strategy leaves room communicative space for the designation of other facilities based on the Alcatraz model. One could just imagine, for example, the introduction of a *Grizzly Alcatraz* in Montana, *Rattlesnake Alcatraz* in North Carolina, or a *Scorpion Alcatraz* in Arizona.

Initially, *Alligator Alcatraz* was simply an informal nickname coined by Florida's Attorney General. The facility's initial official name was actually *South Florida Detention Center*. However, it did not take long for *Alligator Alcatraz* to catch on for language users on both sides of the polarized political spectrum. For public supporters of such detention centers, the use of the alliterating colloquialism for an official institution may have been positively seen as refreshingly innovative and humorous. For those on the opposite side of the political divide, this nomenclature was considered as just one more example of the grotesque insensitivity and base cruelty of the current administration's immigration policies.[7] Thus, for very different reasons, both supporters and critics of the facility readily adopted *Alligator Alcatraz*. In a statement issued by James Redfern, a spokesperson for Florida's State Attorney's Office, today, this nickname is now the official designation for the facility (Bridges 2025).

While the controversy surrounding *Alligator Alcatraz* was primarily, though by no means exclusively, confined to the United States, the other major contender for 2025 Place Name of the Year made international waves. Pursuant to 43 U.S.C. 364 through 364f, the Secretary of the Interior was ordered to replace the name *Gulf of Mexico* with *Gulf of America*.[8] The fact that this replacement does not feature *America**s*** but *America* is important. While the simple addition of a word-final "s" would have allowed the new name to reference other nations that share the body of water, *America* was chosen by the current administration to singularly reference the United States of America. Aside from the practice of using *America* as a synonym for the US, which would be the equivalent of using *France* to refer to the whole of the European continent, by proclaiming that the Gulf is in the exclusive possession of the United States, this onomastic declaration has been received by some as a major geopolitical provocation.

The chauvinism of this language policy is not restricted to the composition of the nomenclature. Also sparking widespread ire is the underlying expectation that *Gulf of America* be implemented by all other nations. The introduction of this toponymic declaration would seem to ignore the fact that the leader of one nation does not have the legal authority to dictate language policies of other sovereign nations. This ignorance undoubtedly explains in part the ridicule and resistance which this name change ordinance has encountered outside of the United States. Even within the US, however, this onomastic declaration has met with pushback for a number of intersecting reasons. Chief among them was the administration's apparent failure or refusal to follow established international protocols for proposing a name change to international organizations responsible for ensuring the standardization topographical nomenclature. These include the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) and the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO). Another potential reason for resistance to *Gulf of America* is the administration's reactions to those who did not comply with the ordinance. The White House announced, for example, that it would ban the Associated Press from the Oval Office and Air Force One for its continued use of *Gulf of Mexico* (Stelter 2025)

Ironically, the use of governmental punishments and threats to force linguistic change seldom has the desired effect. More often than not, acts of punitive prescriptivism have just the opposite effect. History is filled with examples of repressive top-down language policies that fail from the bottom-up. Even amongst

supporters of the current administration, there has been some resistance to adopting *Gulf of America*. In these circle, this reticence would seem to be more a function of economics rather than politics. For medium- and small-scale entrepreneurs who have registered businesses, services, and products that feature *Gulf of Mexico*, the dictated name change can be costly. As one Miami resident and gift shop owner explained, she is all for anything that shows pride in the USA, but adopting *Gulf of America* would mean she "would have to change a lot of T-shirt designs". (Bush and Clifton 2025, para. 8). One solution for those feeling caught in the middle is simply to use both names, the *Gulf of Mexico* and the *Gulf of America*, in tandem. Considering the fact that the 47th President just laughingly indicated that his personal favorite for the body of water is actual- ly the *Gulf of Trump*, the naming controversy may be far from over (Howell 2026, paras 3−4).

After discussing all of the above factors, it was agreed that there were many sound onomastic reasons to support each of the nominations made for this category. However, after the discussion period ended and the votes were tallied, one nominee emerged as the hands-down winner. Earning a remarkable 66.67% of the votes cast, the nomination *Gulf of America* won for the 2025 Place Name of the Year. Coming in at a distant second place, with 22.22%, was *Alligator Alcatraz*.

Brand Name of the Year

For this category, a total of five different nominations were received: (1) *Anthropic* (the name of an AI re- search company); (2) *Gemini* (the label for an online community platform, originally used by gamers); (3) *Labubu* (a commercial name for a series of plush toys and associated product line); (4) *PBS* [Public Broad- casting Service] (the official name of the US American public broadcasting network); and (5) *Sora* (the product name for an OpenAI model). Indicative of the current times, this year's nominees came largely from the virtual world of artificial intelligence. The reason is clear. For better or for worse, AI innovations have been responsible for generating an ever-growing number of household brand names. (e.g., *ChatGPT, DeepSeek, Perplexity, Grok, Saner, Suno*). Nevertheless, even when combined, these nominations received less than 10% of the total votes cast. Instead, the one brand name nomination that received the most votes was not from the world of bots and bytes. With a whopping 85.71% of the vote, the undisputed winner was *Labubu,* the name of a huggable, lovable, slightly creepy plush toy.[9] The dominance of *Labubu* is quite simple. More than any other nominee, it possessed all of the qualities desired of a brand name. It is original, distinct, and maddeningly memorable, as well as being oddly pleasing to the ear and remarkably easy to pronounce and spell—all factors that are extremely beneficial when trying to encourage consumers to recognize, remem- ber, identify, and ultimately buy a product. And buy they did. Since its introduction, the popularity and revenues of the product have continued to grow by leaps and bounds. This upward trend is illustrated in the charming bar chart created by Annette Choi and Matt Stiles of CNN (2025).
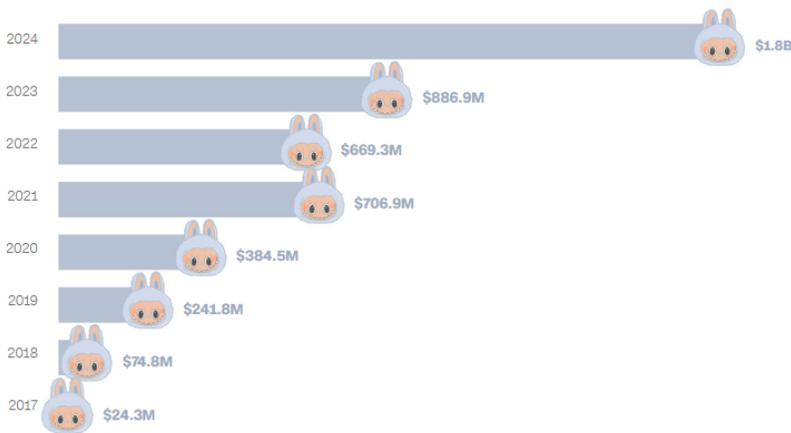

2024	$1.8B
2023	$886.9M
2022	$669.3M
2021	$706.9M
2020	$384.5M
2019	$241.8M
2018	$74.8M
2017	$24.3M

Figure 1: Global Revenue of Labubu Producer, Pop Mart, from 2017 to 2024

As the international sales trend shows, the success of the Labubu brand is by no means confined to Asian markets. Around the world, Labubu products are a hot commodity. This global success story is in part attributable to the fact that the brandname seems to translate extremely well across languages, cultures, and pocketbooks. This international onomastic appeal is no accident. Labubu creator, the artist/illustrator Kasing Lung, has a deeply multicultural multilingual background himself.

Born in Hong-Kong, at the age of seven, Lung moved to the Netherlands where he became obsessed with Scandinavian fairy folk. As Lung explains: "Labubu was born from my fascination with Nordic mythology and European folklore, which I was surrounded by while growing up in the Netherlands". (Graves 2025, para 8). In 2015, he created an illustrated book called "The Monsters Trilogy". One set of fairy characters featured in the story was a tribe of female elves called the "Labubus" (Kim 2025). After publishing his book, Lung released a line of toys based on this story's characters. The toys were only moderately successful. In 2019, however, the dolls caught the eye of executives at Pop Mart; and, as the saying goes, the rest of history. Today, Lung is a multimillionaire, and the CEO of Pop Mart is listed by *Forbes* as being the 10th wealthiest person in China at the tender age of 38 (Wang 2025). The market power of this global cultural icon is also reflected in its onomastic prowess. The internet is filled with sites devoted to help new Labubu parents name their little ones.

Table 2: Suggested Names for Labubus from Popular Naming Websites

	Parade	The Bump	WikiHow	Good Life Bean	cleverlynames.com
1	Bambi	Coco	Matcha	Mochi	BubuSpark
2	Snugglepuff	Baba	Gizmo	Toto	LoloMunch
3	Raindrop	Love	Cocoa	Momo	ZippyBoo
4	Haze	Sisi	Fang	Boba	NunuPop
5	Munchmuffin	Serenity	Diablo	Lulu	KikiSnap
6	Zonkles	Zizi	Babadook	Yaya	JibJap
7	Pinkie Pie	Hope	Suki	Skippy	Puffypip
8	Squibbles	Dada	Ember	Mafu	SnuggleBit
9	Tink	Fortune	Cirrus	Riri	WinkyBun
10	Mopsyboo	Duoduo	Amaya	Zuzu	GummyLoo

Sources: Parade (McMurrin 2025); WikiHow (Gbenle & Minyar 2026) Goodlifebean (goodlifebean.com 2026); and cleverlynames (Alice 2025).

Aside from setting off a tsunami of reduplicating personal names for the planet's growing population of Labubus, the brand name itself has also generated new vocabulary. For example, a *lafufu, lagogo lababa,* and *lapoopoo* are all names for fake or faux Labubu (Hawkins 2025). As sweet as this nomenclature may sound, the facts associated with them is anything but. Given the global popularity of Labubus and their comparatively limited supply, fans and collectors have shown a willingness to pay outrageous prices. In a Sotheby's auction in May 2025, a Three Wise Labubu sold for $28,300 and a month later, in a Chinese auction house, a life-sized Labubu sold for $150,000 (Roeloffs 2025). When you consider how much collectors are willing to pay for an old (sorry, "vintage") pair of sneakers, according to some money experts like Lori Verderame, Labubus might well be an excellent financial investment (Roeloeffs 2025). Predictably, such positive projections have helped to spark the interest of criminals as well as collectors. To help stem the world's rising lafufu flow, "Last year, China's Supreme People's Procuratorate reported prosecuting 21,404 individuals for producing and selling counterfeit and substandard goods". (Yang & He 2025, para 26.) Of course, only time will tell whether or not Labubus will continue to have the same commercial or cultural interest. But for 2025, it is clear that the brandname reigned supreme.

Artistic and Literary Name of the Year

Historically, this category has been a mainstay for names of characters featured in best-selling books. This year was very different, however. The 2025 nominations for this category were (1) *bbno$* (the moniker of a popular Canadian rapper and the name of his 7th studio album); (2) *Coldplay* (the mysterious name of the British alternative rock band); (3) *Eleven* (the assigned name of the leading female protagonist in *Stranger Things*); (4) *Heated Rivalry* (the title of a Canadian sports romance tv series); (5) *KPop Demon Hunters* (the title of a Netflix animated movie); and (6) *Stranger Things* (the title of a Netflix SciFi tv series); and (7)

Wicked for Good (the title of the sequel to, *Wicked*, the musical fantasy film based on the 1939 classic *Wizard of Oz*).[10] As this set shows, instead of the book world, the majority of this year's nominations came from music and/or television. After initial discussion, two major front runners quickly emerged for this category. The first of these was *Coldplay*. The reason for this nomination was not the novelty of the band's name[11] but rather the fact that the musical moniker made an unusual grammatical leap as it began to be used by some speakers as a verb meaning "to coldplay someone" and a predicate adjective "to be coldplayed". The impetus for these additional parts of speech came in July 2025, after two people attending a Coldplay concert were captured by a kiss cam as they enjoyed an intimate embrace. Mortified, the scarlet lovers immediately tried to hide from the camera's view. The reaction of Coldplay's lead singer, Chris Martin, was to snicker and pronounce to the jeering audience that the two must have been caught having an affair. A concert-goer's clip of the incident went viral once it was discovered that the love birds were indeed married [. . .] only not to one another. That scandal, or *Coldplaygate* as it was sometimes called, resulted in *Coldplay* being used to describe the act of being caught or catching someone in the act of doing something illicit. Helping to drive this lexico-syntactic expansion was in all likelihood the pre-existing expressions "to play someone" and "to get played" which refer to tricking or deceiving someone or being on the receiving end of someone else's deception. As interesting as this grammatical development was, as the committee agreed, it appears to have been exceedingly short lived. As public interest in the kisscam scandal waned, so too did the new verbal forms. For this reason, *Coldplay* only received 23.08% of the total vote, earning it second place.

In first place: *Eleven*. The literary onomastic significance of this Netflix charactonym lies in the dual genesis and development of the protagonist and her name. Initially, the character is assigned the name "11" which corresponds to the number she was given while being subjected to a clandestine series of deadly scientific experiments. Upon her escape from the secret laboratory, she ceases to be labelled by a numeral, and adopts instead the autonym "*Eleven*". She is then given the affectionate nickname *El* by her new found friends and adopted family. Once she becomes a teenager, she summons up the courage to discover more about the secret trials she was subjected to. That journey leads to her realizing that the only way to save both herself and those she loves is to confront her arch-enemy. She then learns that he too was a victim of the sadistic studies. In fact, he was the very first one. As such, he was assigned the name "1". With the help of her friends and family, Eleven prevails. Thus, the *Stranger Things* charactonym *Eleven* powerfully reflects the main character's movement from 1 to 1 (i.e., 11).

Despite the relative rarity of numerals being used as personal names for children in the US, there is some preliminary evidence that name *Eleven* may be enjoying limited popularity as a baby name. According to data secured from the US Social Security Administration by parenting magazine *The Bump*, *Eleven* is currently ranked 11,169th for babies born in the USA. In the graph below, the changing rank of *Eleven* as a baby name is presented over the past eight years, starting with the year the first season of *Stranger Things* began in the US.
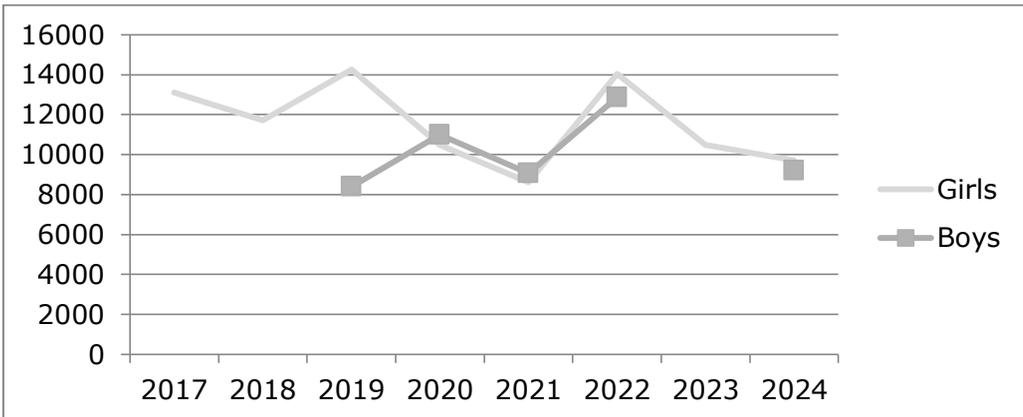

Figure 2: Popularity of *Eleven* for Male and Female Children Born in the US

Interestingly, as can be seen in the chart above, *Eleven* appears to be more popular as a baby name for boys than for girls, despite the fact of the female gender of its *Stranger Things* literary name-sake. It is also important to mention that the record-breaking success of the Netflix series did not result in the name reaching

the list of top 1,000 names in the US. Thus, *Eleven,* at least for the time being, appears to be a niche name. That having been said, the very fact that this unusual name appears at all amongst the top 15,000 names given in the US is, however, remarkable. Its appearance is a reflection of just how much these series is loved. Between December 22 and 28, a total of 34.5 million views were recorded for Season 5, making it the most watched title of the Christmas season in Netflix history (Hailu 2025). This historic viewership alone earned both *Eleven* and *Stranger Things* a spot on the final list of contenders for literary name of the year.[11]

The fact that both names came from the same source is not at all unusual for NoY competitions. In some years, it was the name of the entire production that won out (e.g., *Encanto* [2022], *Squid Games* [2021], *Schitt's Creek* [2020], *Hamilton* [2016], *Downtown Abbey* [2012])[12]; and in other years, it has been the name of a prominent character that emerged as the winner (e.g., *Baby Yoda* [2019]; *Rey, Finn, and Poe* [2015]; and *Elsa* [2014]). This year, it was the charactonym *Eleven* that won, garnering no less than 53.94% of the selection committee's votes.

E-Names

In total, seven different names were in the running in this category heat: (1) *#3E* (the hashtag name that stands for the social media call to action to "**e**nd impunity, **e**nd autogenocide**, end** oligarchy"; (2) *#Booktok* (the name for a popular tiktok book club); (3) *Claude* (the brandname of an Anthropic AI model); (4) *dumb masculinity* (a synonymous name for "toxic masculinity"); (5) *Gen Beta* [Generation Beta] (the name for the generation after "Generation Alpha"); (6) *Jessica* (a meme persona); and (7) *Sora* (the commercial name given to an OpenAI model). Here again, the discussion of the relative merits for each submission speedily narrowed the field to two top contenders. In alphabetical order, the first of these was *#Booktok*. This formation of this onomastic compound mirrored the way in which this movement has brought together the non-virtual world of books and the virtual realm of TikTok. The utilization of the increasingly productive suffix "–tok" was found especially interesting in this word-formation. Since the 1970s, language users have used the suffix "-gate" to coin the names scandals subsequent to Watergate. Today, language users have severed "tik" from "tok" to create a suffix used to name various sub-communities on the social media platform. Other tok names include *FitTok* for sports enthusiasts, *CookTok* for foodies, and *QueerTok* for LGBTQ+ community members. It will be interesting to see if "–tok" affixation continues to be productive, if and when the platform Tiktok declines in popularity and/or use in the same way that "–gate" has continued to be used, despite the fact that the significance of the Watergate Hotel is no longer a part of many language-users' collective memory.

The same question may be posed for *Claude*. The name-sake of Anthropic's AI model was Claude El-wood Shannon (1916–2001), a US American mathematician and computer scientist who is celebrated throughout the tech world as a pioneer of the information age (Soni & Goodman 2017). For those at home in the world of computation, *Claude* is an obvious honorific which can easily be decoded. For everyone else, the main reason why this name may stand out is that it breaks with a norm of giving new AI technology female attributes. As many researchers have long noted, the voices, images, and names (e.g., *Alexa, Bixby, Clara, Cortana, Siri,*) given to digital products are overwhelmingly female and stereotypically so (Kaplan 2024; Nadeem, Abedin, & Marjanovic 2020; Hood 2019; Ni Loideain & Adams 2018; Steele 2018). According to the AI Now Institute of New York University, the reason for this trend is the preponderance of men in the AI industry (Institute for Policy Studies and Media Development 2024). This gender imbalance, combined with the tendency of male innovators to name their discoveries after females (real or imagined), appears to have contributed this naming pattern. The fact that, in the US, *Claude* is more commonly given to male children, makes this name choice rather unusual. After reviewing the all of the above arguments, these attributes were enough to help *Claude* secure the win, with 58.33% of the vote. The nomination *#booktok* came in a distant second with 25.00% of the committee vote.

Miscellaneous Names

Five nominations were considered for this category: (1) *No Kings* (the name of the US protest movement against authoritarian rule); (2) *Donroe Doctrine* (a nickname given to the version of the foreign policy practiced by the current presidency); (3) *Antifa* [Anti-Fascist Action] (the acronym of the left-wing activist group dedicated to combatting Fascism); and (4) *Kavanagh Stop* (the name assigned to the illegal law enforcement practice of detaining persons based on their perceived ethnoracial identity). All of the candidates for this category came from the field of government and politics; and many represent a contentious point of law. An

excellent example is *Kavanaugh Stop*. This name was developed after a particularly controversial US Supreme Court ruling which vacated a lower-court's order to bar US immigration agents from detaining individuals on the basis of appearance or language choice. Justice Kavanaugh's support of this practice of ethnoracial profiling was the impetus behind this onomastic coin. Elora Mukherjee, the Director of Columbia Law School's Immigrants' Rights Clinic, explains that the name "offers a useful colloquial shorthand for the devastating and predictable harms that individuals and communities are facing" (Wise 2025, para 6). Lithwick and Stern agree: "Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection promptly seized upon his opinion as a license to stop any Hispanic person on the basis of race—often with excessive, even sadistic force". (2025 b, para 1). Evidence of these assertions can be seen in the brutal ICE attacks in US cities that have resulted in the injuries and deaths of immigrants and US citizens alike. Notably, in a US Supreme Court decision to limit the presidential use of the National Guard in US cities, Justice Kavanaugh wrote a concurrent opinion. In footnote 4, he wrote that "The Fourth Amendment requires that immigration stops must be based on reasonable suspicion of illegal presence [. . .] on probable cause [. . . and] officers must not make interior immigration stops or arrests based on race or ethnicity" (Epps 2025). During the committee discussion, it was roundly agreed that *Kavanaugh Stop* had become a well-recognized term in US legal circles. However, outside of this specialized field of discourse, this name appears to be used much less often than the term "racial profiling".

By comparison, *No Kings* is a name that has entered the lexicon of millions of language users. The prominence of this name is due in no small measure to the organized peaceful protest it names. Since its start on June 14, 2025, this movement has grown dramatically in size and momentum. According to information provided on the official No Kings website, just four months after its official launch, seven million Americans joined ca. 2,700 events across all 50 states. Even under the threat of physical attack by masked officials, US American residents across the nation turned out in historic numbers to exercise their Constitutionally guaranteed right of peaceful protest, motivated by the same revolutionary spirit upon which the nation was founded. As the No Kings website asserts: "this country does not belong to kings, dictators, or tyrants" but is for and of the people. The tripartite rallying cry is simple: "No Thrones. No Crowns. No Kings". Therefore, *No Kings* is not merely descriptive, but is exhortative. As such, the protest movement has expanded well beyond the geographical confines of the United States. Large-scale demonstrations have been held in major cities throughout Europe—for example, even in countries that have a monarchy (e.g., Spain and the UK) (AFP with Euractiv 2025). In those countries, however, the name of these protests was often modified from *No Kings* to *No Dictators* or *No Tyrants*. Whatever the exact noun used, the underlying linguistic form and pragmatic meaning remain the same: namely, rejection [negation] + agent of institutionalized oppression [common noun]. Taken together *No Kings* was found to exhibit a remarkable degree of usage, recognizability, and timeliness, and illocutionary force—all this despite (or perhaps because of) its relatively simplistic structure. As a result, *No Kings* earned 58.33% of the committee vote, making it Miscellaneous Name of the Year 2025. Its next closest contender, *Kavanagh Stop,* gathered an equally impressive 41.66%.

Overall Name of the Year

As per ANS custom, each of the category winners automatically became a contender for the Overall Name of the Year. Once again, these names were (1) *Claude*; (2) *Eleven*; (3) *Gulf of America*; (4) *Kavanaugh Stop*; (5) *Labubu*; (6) *No Kings*; and (7) *Zohran Mamdani*. The primary question asked during the deliberation process was which of these names best encapsulated the year 2025. After the votes were collected, one name dominated. In reverse order, from the least to the most votes achieved, the results of the secret ballot were as follows. Tied for last place were *Zohran Mamdani* and *Labubu*. Third place was shared was by *Kavanaugh Stop, Claude, and Eleven*, with each name earning 8.33% of the vote. In second place was *Gulf of America* which was selected by 16.67% of the committee. The remaining 58.33% was given to *No Kings*, making it the official 2025 Name of the Year. An oral report of these results was presented by ANS Past President and current Name of the Year Coordinator, Laurel Sutton, during the Linguistic Society of America's annual Word of the Year Meeting.

Notes

[1] It has been reported that he selected this name "in homage to Pope Leo XIII". The 256th Pope of the Catholic Church, whose Pontificate lasted from 1878 to 1903, is widely celebrated today for his efforts to modernize the Church and promote the importance of social activism to Catholicism. Through his autonym, the newly appointed Pontiff announced to the world his intentions to take up the challenge of "renewing the Catholic Church and contending with modern challenges to human dignity, justice, and labor" (Glatz 2025). As Pope Leo XIV explained in the Apostolic Exhortation Dilexi Te: "Love for the Lord, then, is one with love for the poor [. . .] The condition of the poor is a cry that, throughout human history, constantly challenges our lives, societies, political and economic systems, and not least, the Church. On the wounded faces of the poor, we see the suffering of the innocent and, therefore, the suffering of Christ himself" (Chapter one).

[2] Given the criminal's propensity for hobnobbing with the rich and famous, the appearance of a VIP's name in conjunction with Jeffery Epstein's is not in and of itself evidence of criminal culpability. However, as the public has slowly learned through the maddeningly slow release of the so-called "Epstein Files", he was certainly not alone in his illegal actions. The files have placed a glaring spotlight on the abuses of several prominent figures. Examples include Woody Allen, Jean-Luc Brunel, Bill Clinton, Michael Jackson, Donald Trump, and Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, all persons accused and/or convicted of sex crimes. For more on these and other persons named in the Epstein Files, see (Ewe & Burga 2025).

[3] Interested readers can find the released materials in the Epstein Library of the Department of Justice (https://www.justice.gov/epstein).

[4] In 2015, *Denali*, the original Indigenous name for this majestic geographic feature, was selected as place name of the year. For a full report, see (Evan 2015).

[5] For images of the breathtaking jewels that were stolen, see (Marshall 2025; Phillips 2025)

[6] Criticism of the project also comes from local Indigenous communities such as the Miccosukee Tribe and environmental activists who explain that the construction will have a devastating impact upon the Everglades' delicate ecological system (Amnesty International 2025; Zipp 2025; Zendebrouh 2026).

[7] Amongst some critics, *Alligator Alcatraz* has been replaced by another extremely provocative moniker to express their outrage, *Alligator Auschwitz* (Bridge 2025).

[8] To celebrate this name change, the White House announced that February 9 would officially become Gulf of America Day. The actual order can be read here: https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/gulf-of-america-day-2025/.

[9] With its almost unanimous win, *Labubu* also received the highest proportion of votes given to any name nominated made in across all five of the different name categories.

[10] *Wicked for Good* was taken as a nomination from the floor. According to the onomastician who nominated it, for viewers in the know, this name is a clever, two-tiered word-play. On one level, the name mirrors the storyline about the wicked witch. In the original *Wizard of Oz*, this green character was the antagonist. In the movie, she is an altruistic figure who acts for the good of others. On another level, by adding the phrase "for good" to *Wicked*, the sequel's name gently tells its loyal fans that this film will be the last: after this one, Wicked will be over, for good.

[11] The name of the band reportedly comes from a Philip Horky poem called "Cold Play" (Gomes & Craig 2025).

[12] By comparison, the name *Heated Rivalry* has been conspicuous for its relative absence, despite an impressive global audience. According to the onomastician who nominated it, the miniseries is commonly referred to as "the show about the gay hockey players". From a purely onomastic point of view, this circumlocution is most unfortunate when one considers how much time most likely went into devising the name *Heated Rivalry*—a perfect descriptor for the main characters' complex relationship as ardent competitors on the ice and passionate lovers off it. Sadly, in too many spaces around the world, there is still love that dare not speak its name.

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Notes on the Contributor

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