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Great news for Cameron Diaz

Surprising insights from the social sciences

By [Kevin Lewis](#)

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Because President Obama is a lawyer and his mother had a commonly male first name (Stanley), he might appreciate this study out of Clemson. The authors calculated the “masculinity” of every first name in South Carolina as the fraction of registered voters with that name who were male. Then, they compared the average masculinity of female voters’ names to the average masculinity of female judges’ names in the state. While the average masculinity of female voters’ names was 0.026, the value for female judges’ names was 0.084. The authors estimate that changing a girl’s name from “Sue” to “Kelly” increased her odds of becoming a judge by 5 percent, but changing her name to “Cameron” increased her odds by a factor of three.

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Coffey, B. & McLaughlin, P., “Do Masculine Names Help Female Lawyers Become Judges? Evidence from South Carolina,” American Law and Economics Review (Spring 2009).

Terrorism works, to a point

Does terrorism work? A new analysis by economists in Israel suggests that it does. By comparing the political survey responses of Jewish Israelis in various districts to the recent intensity of terror attacks in those same districts, the economists were able to estimate the effect of terrorism - apart from other factors - on political attitudes. Up to a certain point, attacks made it more likely that Israelis would support territorial concessions, a Palestinian state, and have a favorable opinion of Arabs, while making it less likely that they would identify themselves as right-wing. Nevertheless, they found, the terror attacks had diminishing returns. And too much terrorism in one area was counter-productive, turning the population against the causes the terrorists sought to further.

Gould, E. & Klor, E., “Does Terrorism Work?” The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (June 2009).

Insurance makes you fat

Higher rates of obesity (and its associated ailments) have been blamed for some of the growth in health care costs. Obviously, junk food and sedentary lifestyles