

From the Oscars to the Nobel Prize, winners need to choose their friends wisely

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Being friends with an award juror can increase a person's chance of being nominated but decrease their chances of being selected as the victor, according to new research published in the *Academy of*

Management Journal.

The Oscars, the Grammys, and even the Nobel Prize, all peer-judged competitions, are often criticised for the decisions of their jurors; some people go as far as making accusations of bias, partisanship and even cronyism.

In 2010, Quentin Tarantino was infamously accused of favouritism after he led a Venice Film Festival [jury](#) which awarded the prize for Best Picture to his former partner, created a new lifetime-achievement [award](#) for his mentor Monte Hellman and graced a long-time friend with two prizes, one of which was the award for Best Director.

Defending himself to an outraged Italian press, Tarantino claimed that "a friend on a jury is your worst enemy as they would be too embarrassed to give you a prize"—a lesson he said Mr Hellman taught him in 1992.

The paradox so aptly defined in Tarantino's statement to the press led researchers, Simone Ferriani from Cass Business School, Erik Aadland from BI Norwegian Business School and Gino Cattani from New York University Stern School, to question how social relationships affect reward allocation choices in peer-based evaluative settings.

Combining statistical analysis of eight years' of decision making data from the most prestigious Norwegian advertising industry competition with industry member interviews, researchers sought to understand how relationships between jurors and entrants affect competition results.

Three relationship dynamics were used to understand how jurors' decisions are influenced.

Direct ties

the extent to which jury members tend to favour candidates with whom

they have worked in the past.

Reciprocity

the extent to which jury members tend to favour candidates from whom they have themselves been favoured in the past.

Cliquishness

the extent to which jury members tend to favour candidates who are part of the same network clique as the jury members.

The researchers, found that while all three dynamics can improve a candidate's chance of receiving an honourable mention, only reciprocity boosts their chances of being the victor.

"Having a direct tie to, or being a part of the same clique as, an award juror can help candidates be shortlisted or nominated but then actually prevent them winning," Dr. Ferriani said.

"This, we believe, is because people in charge of granting prestigious honors may be driven by self-serving relational interests, as much as the genuine desire to signal their moral integrity and deflect potential inauthenticity concerns away.

"Because awards are tremendous drivers of value—film festival awards may increase box office sales, literary prizes can open doors to exclusive publishers and academic awards may secure more research grants—understanding how relationships influence the way they are allocated is particularly important, especially amidst calls for transparency in public life.

"These findings should invite some healthy cynicism among those who still have unconditional faith in the universalistic principles that are supposed to inspire meritocratic institutions, but should also come as

hopeful news to those who have long lost that faith."

The paper 'Friends, Gifts, and Cliques: Social Proximity and Recognition in Peer-Based Tournament Rituals' is published in the *Academy of Management Journal*.

More information: Erik Aadland et al, Friends, Gifts, and Cliques: Social Proximity and Recognition in Peer-Based Tournament Rituals, *Academy of Management Journal* (2018). [DOI: 10.5465/amj.2016.0437](https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2016.0437)

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