New research uncovers favoritism in order assignment
17 August 2022

An elusive behavior long overlooked by social scientists is order determination: In many types of competitions, the ranking of contestants is affected by the order in which they are evaluated, so placing a preferred contestant in a favorable spot in the order is a subtle way to boost their chances.

A recent paper in *Economic Inquiry* generates statistical methods of detecting this behavior and applies them to numerous contests, including primary elections in Texas and West Virginia. There, law requires the order that candidates are placed on the ballot to be randomly determined, but often this did not happen.

"In those elections, randomness was violated in many different ways," said author Darren Grant, Ph.D., an economics professor at Sam Houston State University. "Figuring out the reasons why was like being in a mystery novel. It often came down to some minor detail I had long overlooked."

In contrast, Grant found no violations of randomness in the TV show American Idol or in Powerball lottery drawings. "The thread connecting these three very different situations is that things are done in an order," said Grant. "So many things in life are like that. This research has wide applicability."


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