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WEEK IN IDEAS | APRIL 16, 2011

Week in Ideas

By CHRISTOPHER SHEA



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A study of parole decisions in Israel indicates that if the judge hadn't taken a food break recently, the petitioner stood a greater chance of losing.

Law

Beware of Hungry Judges

A study of parole decisions in Israel indicates that if the judge hadn't taken a food break recently, the petitioner stood a greater chance of losing.

Researchers looked at 1,112 rulings involving requests for parole (or for changes of incarceration terms) presented to eight judges. They heard cases daily, interrupting for a morning snack and lunch.

The odds of an inmate receiving a favorable decision started at 65%, first thing in the morning, then steadily dropped until the snack break. If the judge heard eight cases in the morning, the average success rate for the last one was 25%. If the judge heard 12 cases, the average success rate for the final one was 0%. Favorable rulings popped back up to 65% when the judge returned, then slid again until lunchtime. The same pattern appeared post-lunch.

The authors could find no other factors that might explain the pattern beyond the hearing's timing, relative to the food breaks. They had no direct measure of the judges' mood.

"Extraneous Factors in Judicial Decisions," Shai Danziger, Jonathan Levav, and Liora Avnaim-Pesso, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (April 12)



Associated Press

Women may be more effective than men as members of the U.S. House of Representatives.

Government

Congresswomen's Clout

Women may be more effective than men as members of the U.S. House of Representatives, a study says.

The researchers hypothesized that women who attain political office must overcome a bias against female politicians and were perhaps especially talented and hard-working. (Self-selection could play a part: Merely adequate female candidates might decide not to run.) As a measure of political ability, researchers

examined how much federal money congressmen and congresswomen steered to their home districts.

The study tracked where some \$20.8 trillion in domestic spending went from 1984 to 2004. Researchers excluded entitlements, because lawmakers have little say in where that money goes (and the database they used did not include military spending).

In all, there were 8,307 yearly observations involving male congressmen and 828 involving females. The average woman brought 9% more money to her district than the average man. For the typical district, that means electing a woman brought an annual bonus of \$49 million.

The effect was strongest in politically conservative districts.

"The Jackie (and Jill) Robinson Effect: Why Do Congresswomen Outperform Congressmen?" Sarah F. Anzia and Christopher R. Berry, American Journal of Political Science (forthcoming)



Getty Images

The presence of flowers in a room made women much more likely to say yes to a date request.

Relationships

The Flower Effect

Ladies, is it really this easy?

The presence of flowers in a room made women much more likely to say yes to a date request, a study found.

Researchers first invited several dozen undergraduate women into a room, one at a time, and asked them to form an impression of a man whom they watched in a video. In half the cases, vases filled with roses, French marigolds and daisies were placed around the room; in the other half, the vases were empty. With flowers, the women rated the man in the video somewhat higher on physical attractiveness and date-worthiness than without.

A series of women were then brought into a room, with or without flowers, and again told they would be asked about their perceptions of a video. This time, an attractive man watched the same video in an adjacent room, and the two were brought together to discuss it. A researcher made excuses to leave the room twice, and the man asked for the subject's phone number. In the

no-flowers condition, she said yes 50% of the time. With flowers, the proportion shot up to 81%.

"Say It With Flowers': The Effect of Flowers on Mating Attractiveness and Behavior," Nicolas Guéguen, Social Influence (2011, Issue 2)

Politics

Where the Protesters Went

Why did the antiwar movement evaporate even as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan continued? Many antiwar Democrats saw the election of President Barack Obama as a sufficient victory and withdrew from the streets, a paper finds.

Researchers conducted 5,398 surveys at 27 antiwar protests from January 2007 through December 2009. The largest protest during that period occurred on Jan. 27, 2007, drawing over 100,000, by the researchers' count. By October 2009, protests were drawing mere hundreds.

Over that period, as numbers dwindled, the proportion of protesters who identified themselves as Democrats dropped to roughly 20% from more than 50%. (The balance identified with no party or, less often, a third party, and the proportion of third-party activists grew over time.)

Both the Democratic Party—specifically, President Obama—and the antiwar movement gained advantages from their interaction, the researchers argue. But post-election, protesters who did not identify as Democrats paid more attention to policy continuities than did Democrats. The researchers also cited psychological findings that people are more motivated by threat and loss (here, the threat of a Republican win at the polls) than by potential gains (following through on policy changes).

"The Partisan Dynamics of Contention: Demobilization of the Antiwar Movement in the United States, 2007-2009," Michael T. Heaney and Fabio Rojas, Mobilization (March)

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