



POLITICAL ANIMAL

By Kevin Drum

April 13, 2006

In the blogosphere

Print Archives



The Emerging Environmental Majority

There's a thaw in relations between greens and hunters. It could heat up big-time over global warming.

By Christina Larson



Who's who in Washington's scandal investigations.

White Hats vs. Black Hats

By T.A. Frank and Zachary Roth



Not as Lame as You Think

Democrats learn the art of opposition.

By Amy Sullivan

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NEWS & OPINION FROM OUR CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Timothy Noah: Limbaugh to Judgment. 05/03/06

Joshua Green: The new

ALPHABETICAL TYRANNY....Matt Yglesias has complained about this before for obvious today Alex Tabarrok reports that alphabetical privilege is real — **in the world of economics, any**

A **new paper** (free, working version, Winter 06, JEP) demonstrates that...faculty mem top departments with surnames beginning with letters earlier in the alphabet are substantially more likely to be tenured, be fellows of the Econometrics Society, and even Nobel prizes (let's see, Arrow, Buchanan Coase...hmmm). No such effects are found in psychology where the alphabetical norm is not followed.

The "alphabetical norm" is the rule that coauthors on a paper are listed alphabetically, which re alphabetically privileged authors getting citation credits (everyone else is "et al"). The paper de the effects of this rule was written by Liran Einav and some other guy.

Is the same true in the blogosphere, where blogrolls are often arranged alphabetically? There's project just waiting to happen here!

—Kevin Drum 1:46 PM [Permalink](#) | [Trackbacks](#) | [Comments \(73\)](#)

Comments

Well of course Yglesias would whine about it...

Posted by: [Ethan](#) on April 13, 2006 at 1:49 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Planning on changing your name to 1Drum?

Posted by: [moderleft](#) on April 13, 2006 at 1:51 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Huh.

If this effect is proven, expect to see an entire generation of economics papers written by name: "Aaasmith, Aaaajohnson, etc." And then, a generation of papers evaluating the cost and benefit one's own name vs. changing one's name, changing one's name multiple times, modeling name processes, etc.

This isn't a research project waiting to happen, it's an entire research area of specialty!

war over Wal Mart.
05/03/06

Posted by: [theorajones](#) on April 13, 2006 at 1:54 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

James Fallows: E-mail Out
of Every Plug. 05/03/06

What this really means is that some guy whose name begins with Z has already written the paper all our problems forever. But nobody will ever read it.

Michelle Cottle: the
benefits of an extra wife.
05/03/06

Posted by: [craigie](#) on April 13, 2006 at 1:55 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Mickey Kaus: Joe's Not-
So-Klein Idea. 05/02/06

Shouldn't we get Horowitz to investigate the correlation between the alphabetically advantaged Liberalism? Perhaps that's the underlying cause of the threat he sees in academia.

Jon Meacham on the
culture wars. 05/01/06

Posted by: [JimBob](#) on April 13, 2006 at 1:55 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Jonathan Rowe: Family
Planning Bush Style.
04/30/06

If you are a nerdy academic man, and you change your name to Aardvark, then women looking are going to find you much more attractive. Something to think about...

Joe Nocera: Computer
CARE Packages. 04/30/06

Posted by: [craigie](#) on April 13, 2006 at 1:57 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Timothy Noah: Judicial
Watch v. Judicial Watch.
04/28/06

DUH.

Michael Kinsley: Tax the
Windfall. 04/28/06

Academics are just now figuring this out?????

Michelle Cottle: Don't
believe the Tony Snow
hype. 04/28/06

Blue collar Americans have known this for years. Just check the phone book.

Walter Shapiro: Twilight
Zone in the briefing room.
04/27/06

Look at all the entries for APlumbing, AAPlumbing, AAARooter, A+ Tree Trimming, etc.

Timothy Noah: Apronym
Watch: Tony Snow.
04/26/06

Are the "academic elites" all that bright?

Jonathan Alter: What
President Bush Can Learn
From FDR. 04/26/06

Posted by: [Frequency Kenneth](#) on April 13, 2006 at 1:57 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

David Segal: Grief and
Glamour an Odd Mix at
United 93 Debut.
04/26/06

Why on earth would paper authors be arranged alphabetically, rather than in order of how much contributed to the paper? I've never heard of such a thing in the sciences. Why would economic names occur later in alphabetical order agree to such an inane system?

Mickey Kaus: Let's Not Get
'Comprehensive.'
04/26/06

Posted by: [KCinDC](#) on April 13, 2006 at 2:00 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Walter Shapiro: Running
scared in Ohio. 04/24/06

Leeat, that other guy, is actually a woman.

Jonathan Alter reviews
*The Man Who Invented
Fidel* by Anthony DePalma.
04/24/06

Not that anyone cares... :-)

Posted by: [Commenterlein](#) on April 13, 2006 at 2:00 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Robert Worth: What brings
Iraq's elite to Baghdad's
last, longstanding social
clubs? 04/24/06

So, when is this blog going to become "Animal, Political"?

Posted by: [S Ra](#) on April 13, 2006 at 2:02 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Mickey Kaus: Special
Hillary-centric Edition.
04/24/06

KCinDC:

From Joshua Micah
Marshall's Talking Points
Memo:
Okay, this one will go a

**As an economist who (like everyone else) is using that system I can tell you that the answer is r
It gets you around having to figure out who has done how much work on a paper, and it preven**

little deep in the weeds.
 But bear with me because I think it'll shed a bit of light on the amount of due diligence the Department of Homeland Security did on Shirlington Limo -- the company now implicated in the Wilkes-Cunningham hooker scandal -- before awarding them a \$21 million contract for limo and shuttle services for DHS employees....
 05/04/06

games from occurring.

Keep in mind that econ papers have many fewer authors than papers in the lab sciences (who s anyone in the lab), and that only people who have made very substantial contributions are sup listed as authors.

Posted by: [Commenterlein](#) on April 13, 2006 at 2:04 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Lieran Einav and some other guy.

Hilarious.

Posted by: [objectfunk](#) on April 13, 2006 at 2:04 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

My surname's in the middle of the alphabet, so I don't care either way.

But can we bring an end to first-name, middle-initial tyranny? Hardly anyone who knows me e my first name!

In this computer era, you'd think it ought to be a snap to customize online forms so they could do first-initial, middle-name. But apparently not.

Posted by: [RT](#) on April 13, 2006 at 2:06 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Authors in my field (paleontology/geology) are arranged in order of contribution, and et al. cor first author's name in the text of the paper if there are three or more authors. So the person get credit is generally the person who did the most work. Unless they're a graduate student but tha other topic *S*

Posted by: [Paul](#) on April 13, 2006 at 2:08 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Frequency Kenneth.

Do the yellow pages list AA Plumbing, et. al, or AA Plumbing, Carver Plumbing, Johnson Plum Simpson Plumbing, and Walter Plumbing?

Do blue collar Americans always call the first name in the book? Or are they smarter than you t

Posted by: [Matt](#) on April 13, 2006 at 2:10 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Hey RT,

Got the exact same problem, last name in the middle of the alphabet. And I go by middle name first name.

Posted by: [Dr. Morpheus](#) on April 13, 2006 at 2:11 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

I totally agree . . .

aa

Posted by: [aaron aardvark](#) on April 13, 2006 at 2:11 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Convinced me!

Posted by: [aCal aGal](#) on April 13, 2006 at 2:15 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

I just don't collaborate with old fashioned folks at the beginning of the alphabet.

Posted by: [toast](#) on April 13, 2006 at 2:18 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Does this rule cause any ethnic discrimination??

Why don't they go by age? The ignored young would eventually become the recognized old.

Posted by: [Andrea](#) on April 13, 2006 at 2:18 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

I think the blogrolls should be ordered by most recently rolled ... the link you've added most recent should be first, next-most-recent second, etc.

That way new discoveries get the attention they deserve, and old standbys are still linked, but not buried down. Maybe some links could be flagged as "favorites" or "important" and get reserved spots at the top. The best place for these would be a separate blogroll altogether.

Not that anyone ever uses blogrolls for anything anyway. The more relevant thing is what blogs get linked to by the bigger bloggers. Firedoglake rose from obscurity by posting a lot and getting linked to a lot by Atrios et al.

Heh, "Atrios et al" :)

Posted by: [Adam Piontek](#) on April 13, 2006 at 2:21 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Body and Soul is the only blog I know that actually has them listed in reverse alphabetical order. I guess to give more attention to zyzyvas - a blog name that someone should jump on quickly!

Posted by: [tarylcbot](#) on April 13, 2006 at 2:23 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Actually we usually defer to people that are within a year or two of being considered for tenure. They're working their asses off anyway and the 65 year old co-authors are usually more worried about their life's work in print before they kick the bucket than about whether they get their name referenced in the times.

Some old guys do insist on being first so that their work on a subject can be easily looked up in chronological progression.

Posted by: [toast](#) on April 13, 2006 at 2:23 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Yes, alphabetical tyranny is bad, bad, bad!

--Z

Posted by: [Zeno](#) on April 13, 2006 at 2:37 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Hey, Washington Monthly seems to be doing alright for itself.

Posted by: [scarshapedstar](#) on April 13, 2006 at 2:37 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

RT,

My surname's in the middle of the alphabet, so I don't care either way.

Heh heh. Tripp Davenport sez "You just keep on thinking that way!"

Posted by: [Tripp](#) on April 13, 2006 at 2:40 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Another economist here - Commenterlein has this exactly right, the protocol is to avoid ugly pr squables over how much work each author contributed. And it does do that. It wouldn't matter despite this known practice, first authorship still means something in the profession.

As an economist with a surname initial in the middle of the alphabet, I am typically last author regardless of my contribution. I have repeatedly joked that I am going to start only working wit who have names further down the alphabet. Or adopt a hyphenated last name with my partner: name first, which begins with 'B'.

Posted by: [DC economist](#) on April 13, 2006 at 2:50 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

The paper demonstrating the effect was written by Liran Einav and some other guy.

snicker

Posted by: [Ringo](#) on April 13, 2006 at 3:02 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Damn.

5 generations prior in my Scandinavian heritage, when it was decided to change from the tradit name of Anderson to Olson (patrilineal naming wasn't the tradition until then), I apparently gc

Posted by: [Erik](#) on April 13, 2006 at 3:04 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Mystery and SciFi authors have been on to it for some time. Since most bookstores shelve alph author, you pick a nom de plume that the browsers will see first.

Posted by: [snoey](#) on April 13, 2006 at 3:14 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

I've never understood why most blogs have alphabetical blogrolls. Most blogging software will blogroll in random order - seems fair to me.

Mine are random and in some cases grab a random # from the overall list so its not so damn lo they're all that useful anyway to my 3 readers (hi Mom!)

Posted by: [MB](#) on April 13, 2006 at 3:16 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

i hear the C's are planning to produce WMD. if we act now, we can prevent them from killing u
of A's and B's in their deranged quest to impose their own sadistic brand of alphabetic tyranny

Posted by: [cleek](#) on April 13, 2006 at 3:18 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Erik,

No lie. You went from great windows to a shrew on "Little House on the Prarie."

Posted by: [Tripp](#) on April 13, 2006 at 3:20 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

I smell some cat blogging, and it's only Thursday!

Yglesias, what a putz. He should stick to making crappy pop music.

Posted by: [Jeff II](#) on April 13, 2006 at 3:24 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Heh. Friggin dumbass economists. Only those dolts, far from being a part of any scientific ende
base authorship listing alphabetically.

Here's a suggestion for those screwball economists. Since you call economics the "dismal scienc
NOT a science by any stretch of the imagination...it is masturbation and guessing) I suggest yo
the sciences. Base your authorship listing on who did most of the work for the current paper. If
clear, then you *alternate*. On *this* paper your name is first (or anchor) while on the *next* paper,
collaborator is first (or anchor).

See how simple that is? Leave it to an economist to make something simple into something stu

Posted by: [Praedor Atrebatas](#) on April 13, 2006 at 3:32 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

RT, I'm with you - I go by my middle name (my dad was John F. for 38 years before I was even
everyday life I'm Wes F., and in more formal situations I'm J. Wesley F... of course, to most pla
forms, I end up as John W. F., which has been known to confuse letter carriers and switchboar

As far as blogrolls, my last name is pretty high alphabetically, but my blog's name ("Walk-in Br
toward the bottom. So that's an issue unto itself.

WF

Posted by: [Wes F. in North Adams](#) on April 13, 2006 at 3:50 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Seems easy enough. Convert to Islam, take an Arabic name, make sure that your new surname
front of it, and proceed to reap the benefits!

Posted by: [MJ Memphis](#) on April 13, 2006 at 3:51 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Another phenomenon that may contribute to blog popularity is the mechanism by which frequ
sites are remembered. In the case of this site, "washingtonmonthly.com" and "washingtonpost.
with the same string; very few other sites begin this way. I wonder if the fact that visiting

washingtonpost.com pulls up washingtonmonthly.com increases traffic to the latter. (And the c
sure, I guess - for a few!)

Posted by: [Sam Wang](#) on April 13, 2006 at 3:52 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Commentarlein argues that alphabetizing authors "gets you around having to figure out who ha
much work on a paper, and it prevents ugly power games from occurring."

But of all the disciplines in the world, should economists be the ones who could provide a ratio
assessing who has done how much work? If they can't even figure out who wrote a certain pape
anyone else think that they contents are of any interest?

Besides, despite the existence of pretty clear procedural approaches in the sciences (in bioscien
the first author did the core research and wrote the paper, the last author paid for the research,
in between contributed a proprietary reagent or did some experiments), vicious power games o
placement still happen ("You can't use my transgenic mouse unless I'm second, not third autho

Posted by: [PQuincy](#) on April 13, 2006 at 3:53 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Q: "Are the "academic elites" all that bright?"

Posted by: Frequency Kenneth on April 13, 2006 at 1:57

A: No.

You are just now figuring this out?

Posted by: [smartalek](#) on April 13, 2006 at 3:59 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Find a paper-copy of your local yellow pages, pick a category and look at the crazy-ass names b
have taken in order to float to the top of the list (i.e. AAAAAA++++ Ardvark Plumbing).

Posted by: [Roxanne](#) on April 13, 2006 at 4:11 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Are the "academic elites" all that bright?

Most academics aren't any kind of general-purpose "elites", except in the fevered imagination c
intellectuals.

That being said, there is an important distinction between observing that something seems to b
reacting to that impression, and demonstrating that it is empirically true, quantifying it, etc., as
science.

For every paper you find demonstrating something that seems obvious like this, you can find o
demonstrating something just as contrary to common intuition as this is in line with such intui
scientists (including social scientists) didn't investigate phenomena because there was a widely
popular intuition, well, we'd miss out on a lot of times where we've found popular beliefs to be

Posted by: [cmdicely](#) on April 13, 2006 at 4:15 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Kenneth, one of the functions that academics serve is to subject old-wives tales and other folk v
discipline of rigorous analysis. It has been "said" that having one's name in the beginning of the

an advantage, but only academics take the time to evaluate whether this statement is correct and how great the effect is.

Wow, you've really got a bug up your ass about people who think and measure and analyze for : you?

Posted by: [Constantine](#) on April 13, 2006 at 4:15 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Under Communism, we will all have the same last name, and this problem will go away.

Next issue please!

Posted by: [craigie](#) on April 13, 2006 at 4:36 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

We need technology to list our blogroll in the order that they last linked to our blog. If people w that lucrative Balloon Juice traffic they better share the love...

Posted by: [Tim F](#) on April 13, 2006 at 4:43 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

(Somewhat related) question: When y'all read a WaMo comment section, do you read the first i comments, flyover the middle portion, and read the last few comments?

Just curious.

Posted by: [grape_crush](#) on April 13, 2006 at 4:48 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

*Under Communism, we will all have the same last name, and this problem will go away. Nex
Posted by: craigie*

And Australian communist academics will all the same first name: Bruce!

Posted by: [Jeff II](#) on April 13, 2006 at 4:51 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

So what's the problem?

Posted by: [Aaron Aaron](#) on April 13, 2006 at 4:53 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

So what's the problem?

Posted by: Aaron Aaron on April 13, 2006 at 4:53 PM

Don't know, Aaron.

Posted by: [Aadam Aadam](#) on April 13, 2006 at 4:57 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Aaron Aaron on April 13, 2006 at 4:53 PM:

So what's the problem?

Just because something doesn't affect *you* doesn't mean that it isn't a problem...*sniff!*

Posted by: [Zoey Zylewski](#) on April 13, 2006 at 5:01 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Dr. Henri Delthe never did get the recognition he deserved for his contribution to the [Alpher-B paper](#).

Posted by: [derek](#) on April 13, 2006 at 5:05 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Here is another.

Lawyers get a special line to enter court and plea, but defendants who defend themselves get 1 privelidge.

Posted by: [Matt](#) on April 13, 2006 at 5:08 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Yet another reason for economists to adopt pseudonyms like "Anonymous".

Posted by: [alex](#) on April 13, 2006 at 5:43 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

I understand avoiding arguments over who contributed more, but why would the alphabetically surrender to the ridiculous alphabetical system? If you can't decide who contributed more, arr names in random order. Even an economist should be able to see that the alphabetical method unfair.

Posted by: [KCinDC](#) on April 13, 2006 at 5:47 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

How many guys called Zweiback ever made it big? On the other hand you have Hank Aaron, Bu

Posted by: [Hedley Lamarr](#) on April 13, 2006 at 5:48 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

alex on April 13, 2006 at 5:43 PM:

Yet another reason for economists to adopt pseudonyms like "Anonymous".

You mean, like, other than being *economists*?

Posted by: [grape_crush](#) on April 13, 2006 at 5:50 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

grape_crush: *You mean, like, other than being economists?*

Yeah, not that that reason isn't more than enough.

Posted by: [alex](#) on April 13, 2006 at 5:59 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Oh, man! Could this post *be* more of an entrapment for smart-asses?

You know, Yglesias could go with a different initial vowel for his surname ---if he wanted to...

Posted by: [Toby Petzold](#) on April 13, 2006 at 6:02 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Hmmm, do you think "Aardvark And Big Time Patriot" would be better than just "Big Time Pat call me the number one anteater from the United States of Anteaters..."

Posted by: [Big Time Patriot](#) on April 13, 2006 at 6:32 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

All of my names are in the middle to end of the alphabet. Same with my blog's name. When I look for a plumber, I avoid AAAAPlumbing, the first listing in the book. Anyone who shouts and waves at me and says "I am, Alice Aardvark the Plumber -- I've dropped my original last name (Zinnser) because I want it now!" -- well, you're just not my type. On the other hand I have confidence in DeL Galbraith, Galbraith, Sawicky, and Stiglitz.

Posted by: [PW](#) on April 13, 2006 at 7:03 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Despite several comments from scientists, the discussion still has not captured how we do it in the biomedical research field. The last author is the senior author and is generally the lab chief (the one who raised the money through a grant), the next to last might be the head of another lab with a lesser contribution. The first author is the one who did the work, and is generally a graduate student. After the first they follow in order of contribution. So in a long author list those about 60-70% of the authors down generally contribute the least.

Posted by: [M. L. Dodson](#) on April 13, 2006 at 7:52 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

"I understand avoiding arguments over who contributed more, but why would the alphabetical system surrender to the ridiculous alphabetical system?"

Because the alphabetically earlier people occupy the positions of power. Put your name first on a name like Zip and you are instantly crushed by The Man! :)

Posted by: [jeff](#) on April 13, 2006 at 8:07 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Heh, in biology it is kind of funny. In some cases it looks better for the head of the lab to be last so they will put somebody else (a technician or something) as first author even if they did the work.

Posted by: [jeff](#) on April 13, 2006 at 8:14 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

I was in the Army back the palmy days when no one was particularly mad at anyone else--never fired in anger. Anyway, the point is that in those days you wanted to be in the Third Squad. Recruit compulsory volunteers from the First Squad, then the Second Squad. Then they'd turn around with the Fourth Squad. Third got overlooked.

A corollary of the rule that three o'clock is not a good time to start anything, either am or pm.

Posted by: [Buce](#) on April 13, 2006 at 9:24 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Can't really say I put much stock in anything brought to my attention by a blog in the "W's".

Posted by: [steve duncan](#) on April 14, 2006 at 9:16 AM | [PERMALINK](#)

I teach a science class, and every time I hand back exams, I do so in reverse alphabetical order. A small act to balance out a lifetime of injustice for the Wallaces and Youngs of the world.

And I'm changing the name of my blog from "Carpe Datum" to "aaaaaaaaaaaaCarpe Datum" if on a blogroll.

Posted by: [Observer](#) on April 14, 2006 at 10:04 AM | [PERMALINK](#)

When I was coaching youth baseball I set the batting order to be alphabetical order. That way I had to remember one order all season.

For fairness I rotated the starting batter for every game. The player who was next to bat after the previous game was the leadoff hitter in the next game.

Thus if batter 7 made the final out in a game then batter 8 was the starting batter in the next game.

Surprisingly this method produced just as good of hitting results as when I would spend hours trying out the optimal order with the players I had.

Under 6th grade or so I don't think the players are consistent enough to really determine an optimal order.

So Observer you need to do more than just reverse order. I suggest a gaussian distribution. (grin)

Posted by: [Tripp](#) on April 14, 2006 at 10:39 AM | [PERMALINK](#)

Interesting parallel you draw with the blogs. Could this be why my blog, You Forgot Poland!, is

No cracks about my writing, please. :D

Posted by: [mags](#) on April 14, 2006 at 11:07 AM | [PERMALINK](#)

Mr 7th grade teacher, Miss Van Vechten, would hand out graded papers in reverse alphabetical order for a lifetime of this stuff.

Posted by: [DonBoy](#) on April 14, 2006 at 12:47 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Yep, I have suffered alphabetical discrimination my whole life, and I grew up with lots and lots of it when I was a child.

Posted by: [Yancey Ward](#) on April 14, 2006 at 2:50 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Add Gary Becker to that list

Posted by: [hmm](#) on April 15, 2006 at 12:28 AM | [PERMALINK](#)

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Posted by: [534543](#) on April 15, 2006 at 9:04 AM | [PERMALINK](#)

Mystery and SciFi authors have been on to it for some time. Since most bookstores shelve alpha author. you pick a nom de plume that the browsers will see first.

Posted by: [YOP](#) on April 15, 2006 at 12:27 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

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Abu Aardvark

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