

roughly three times as likely to transition into such arrangements after a job loss, and that 76 percent to 80 percent of these involuntary temp workers desire permanent jobs. In contrast, 80 percent of those Americans who find themselves in the alternative workforce as freelancers and independent contractors value the flexibility and agency they gain by doing so.

Yet challenges abound for the 16 percent of the U.S. workforce engaged in alternative work arrangements. “The way our labor laws are written,” Katz explains, “a lot of issues... arise from the use of freelancers and contractors.” He cites Uber as a popular example of a company that has resisted calling drivers “employees,” because doing so would give them collective-bargaining rights; instead, all Uber drivers are independent contractors. “There are cases in which Uber *and* drivers

would both be better off if they could pool for some kind of insurance,” he points out, “but the current legal environment means it makes no sense for Uber to want to do that.” To rectify the situation, Katz envisions the government supporting a portable-benefits system that would allow workers to pay into a fund for necessities like health insurance or retirement benefits, regardless of how an employer classified them.

His recent research has left Katz somewhat skeptical about the potential to reduce inequality in the United States. Employers are placing an ever higher premium on education, he says, and those with college degrees are almost certain to earn more, enjoy more job security, and have steadier access to benefits than someone with a high-school diploma, regardless of location. As one palliative measure, he calls for

a more generous earned-income tax credit to expand the safety net for Americans who currently reap fewer of its benefits, such as young people without dependent children or older workers whose children have left home. “We’re trying to test whether [making] work pay will help make work for more people,” he says, referring to a related survey he is currently conducting among low-income Americans in New York City and Atlanta. But expanding the earned-income tax credit alone is insufficient to even the playing field for all workers. The real challenge, Katz says, lies in finding ways to make alternative work engagements higher paid and more meaningful. ~OSET BABÜR

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**Faced with many candidates from the same party, as in the 2016 Republican primary, voters tend to choose celebrities.**

or not is heavily influenced by the electoral system.

The general assumption among political scientists, he stated, has been that name recognition matters only in “low information elections,” in which voters know or care little to nothing about candidates’

policy platforms. The idea is that if voters are concerned about candidates’ stands on the issues, or their incumbency or ideology, they won’t cast their vote based on “a simple cue like mere recognition. But we know from extensive studies in psychology and decision theory,” Reeves said, that people don’t always use the most relevant information to make decisions. In certain circumstances, they gravitate toward the *least* intellectually demanding approach.

Because individuals experience a kind of cognitive overload when faced with many choices that are hard to tell apart, Reeves hypothesized that when many candidates from the same party are running against each other, mere recognition would be more likely to affect the outcome of elections. Faced with a plethora of indistinguishable choices, many voters may abstain; those who

## EIGHT IS ENOUGH

# Star Power in Politics

**W**HY DO PEOPLE vote for celebrities? When surveyed, voters say that they prefer elected representatives who are *not* famous for reasons unrelated to politics. Yet actors, sports figures, TV commentators, and authors, for example, frequently win elections. Because nothing is more fundamental to democracy than casting a vote, the question of how voters choose among candidates—and the extent to which name recognition influences that choice—is both important and poorly understood, says Justin Reeves, a postdoctoral

fellow in the program on U.S.–Japan relations at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs (WCFA).

Candidates often “dedicate considerable resources to getting their names out in public using flyers, yard signs, and stickers”—outreach that is “often totally devoid of policy content,” said Reeves, who has written about electoral reform in advanced democracies, and is currently studying the causes and consequences of celebrity engagement in politics. In a lecture this spring, he argued that even such simple name recognition can, in fact, boost support for a candidate—but whether it does

do vote may be influenced by name recognition or even irrelevant details such as ballot order. If his theory is true, one reason to care about it, he said, is that such circumstances occur frequently in U.S. primaries (the 2016 Republican presidential slate, for example), and are even more common in countries such as Japan, Finland, Brazil, and Greece, where electoral rules can lead to elections with slates of 50 to 200 candidates.

Using data from Japan spanning from 1962 to 2013, Reeves found that when celebrities ran for seats in the upper house in national legislative elections (which have high levels of intraparty competition), they won *more than half* the time. But in elections for the same office run at the local (prefectural) level, which are held under different electoral rules involving fewer candidates and greater competition between parties, celebrities won less than a third of the time. When surveyed, Japanese voters overwhelmingly reject celebrities in the abstract, so the data, Reeves said, suggest “a disconnect between what voters say they want and what they end up doing in the voting booth.” Electoral rules that lead to large numbers of candidates

## “Even a modest increase in cognitive demand can influence the way people make ballot decisions.”

from a single party, Reeves argued, create the conditions that favor the famous—thus “leading to outcomes that are at odds with voters’ own stated preferences.”

To see if his findings would hold up in other democracies with long ballots of like-minded candidates, Reeves analyzed election data from Finland from 2003 to 2011. There, too, he found that celebrity candidates enjoyed a significant advantage in a crowded field. He then tried an experiment, asking Japanese survey subjects to participate in a hypothetical election in which all the candidates came from the party they most frequently supported. One group received a ballot with just three candidates, including one celebrity. The second group received a ballot with nine names, including one celebrity. For each candidate, Reeves supplied a photograph and educational and occupational background information. In his two corresponding control groups, he replaced the celebrity with a different name and face,

but identical background information.

Celebrity status, he found, did not influence the results on the short ballots. But on the long ballots, celebrities not only did better than all their opponents, they received triple the support of their control-group counterparts with identical backgrounds. And among the voters, Reeves found no differences by gender, age, and levels of education, income, and political engagement in people’s willingness to support celebrity candidates. “This suggests,” he said, “that even a modest increase in cognitive demand can influence the way many people—not just those who are less politically sophisticated—make ballot decisions.” And it suggests that, in democracies around the world, electoral reforms that allow voters to choose among smaller numbers of candidates might lead to more thoughtful outcomes.

—JONATHAN SHAW

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