

Disentangling Voting Biases in the Eurovision Song Contest: An Empirical Analysis of Individual Biases in Peer Voting Systems

Abstract

The Eurovision Song Contest is one of the worldwide biggest live media events and the world's leading broadcast of an international music competition. The countries of the European Broadcasting Union participate by sending an artist (or a group of artists) to the contest and both expert juries and the television audience of all participating countries vote in a special ranking and points system to determine the eventual winner. A substantial list of media- and cultural-economics papers have empirically analysed the voting behaviour of juries (consisting of music industry professionals) and audience in order to identify voting biases because of cultural and political influences on the voting bodies. Due to limited data availability, this literature suffered from having to treat the national juries as a black-box even though they are composed of individuals with different demographic characteristics (age, gender, etc.) and expert background (industry managers, musicians, composers, music journalists, etc.). Our analysis benefits from utilizing new data about each individual member of the juries including their role within the jury (e.g. the chair person) as well as about their individual votes in the ESC. Therefore, for the first time, we are able to disentangle the voting behaviour of the juries and to track voting behaviour of individual jury members. Based upon a rich dataset including personal characteristics (gender, age, career/professional background, nationality, cultural heritage, etc.) of both jury members (voters) and performing artists in the contest (voting objects), we analyze whether increasing similarity between voter (jury member) and voting object (contest performer) correlates with upward biases in terms of awarded points. In doing so, we employ the concept of Mahalanobis' distance to measure similarity and employ modern econometric regression methods to derive our results. Inter alia, we identify conditions under which similarity of jury members with contestants leads to a pro-bias in voting (across different countries). Furthermore, our analysis shows that chair persons display less voting bias than other jury members (but still show bias) and we derive differentiated gender effects. Interestingly, the professional background of jury members also significantly influences the individual voting bias, for instance, experts with classical music background display significantly less bias than presenters of radio or television programs or music journalists. Altogether, our analysis allows to look beyond the hitherto dominating "country X is biased for/against country Y" conclusions and track voting biases on an individual level, based upon personal characteristics.

Keywords: media event, Eurovision Song Contest, voting bias, audience participation, peer voting systems, music, broadcasting, empirical methods of analysis.

