

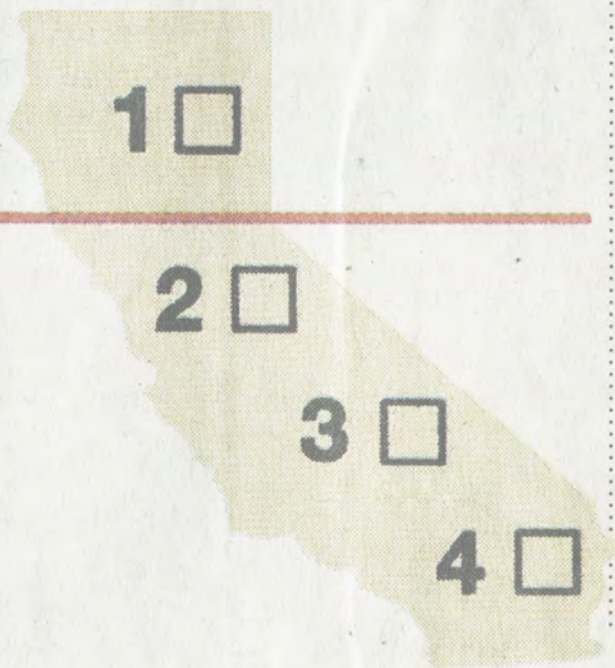
IDEAS MARKET

WEEK IN IDEAS: CHRISTOPHER SHEA

POLITICAL SCIENCE

The First Shall Be First

About 10% of city-council and



school-board officials elected in recent years in California owe their jobs to being listed first on the ballot, a study finds.

Ballot order surely affects voters' choices elsewhere, too, but the researchers chose California because the state randomizes the order in which names appear on ballots. If order alone didn't matter, winners should emerge in equal proportions from every spot.

That wasn't the case, researchers found, as they looked at nearly 8,000 local elections, from 1995 to 2008. Another find: Candidates in the middle of the ballot were disad-

vantaged by the placement.

Given the unfair advantage, you'd expect politicians who won from the No. 1 spot to be weaker than average. Indeed, the researchers confirmed that they were more likely than other officeholders to lose their seat in the next election.

"On the Causes and Consequences of Ballot Order Effects," Marc Meredith and Yuval Salant, Political Behavior (forthcoming)

► See more from Christopher Shea at the Ideas Market blog, blogs.wsj.com/ideas-market.