

The 1970 Draft Lottery

In November of 1969, with the Vietnam War raging, President Nixon signed an executive order to reinstitute the draft. In an attempt to expose male youth "fairly" to the risk of being drafted, the Selective Service held a lottery on December 1, 1969 to allocate birthdates at random. Men were then drafted in the order that their birthdays were drawn.

But was the lottery really random?



The selection process

- The order stipulated that the selection be a random process based on the birthdays of men born between January 1, 1944 and December 31, 1950.

The Selective Service placed the days of the year, including February 29, into 366 plastic capsules. These capsules were placed in a glass container, mixed, then drawn one at a time.



The selection process

- The first capsule drawn contained the date **September 14**. This date was assigned the **rank 1**.



The selection process



The second date drawn, **April 24**, was assigned **rank 2**, and so on.

Call into service by rank

- Those eligible for the draft who were born on September 14 (rank 1) would be the first selected to serve in Vietnam.
- Once all eligible men born on this date were inducted into the service, then the Selective Service would begin to induct men born on April 24 (rank 2), etc.

Note about the draft numbers

- It was estimated by the Pentagon that men with draft numbers 200 to 366, would escape the draft entirely. In fact, no man with a draft number higher than 195 was called to duty.



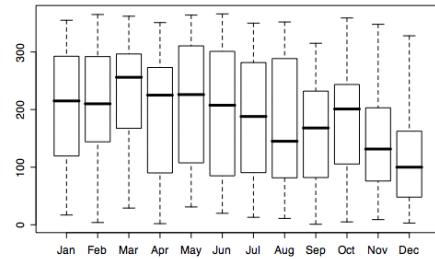
But was the lottery really random?

- To examine the "fairness" of the Selective Service's draft lottery, let's look at the distributions of lottery numbers on a month-by-month basis.

The data is publicly available on the internet. One source is the *Data and Story Library*. The draft lottery data is located at the following URL:

- <http://lib.stat.cmu.edu/DASL/Datafiles/DraftLottery.html>

What do you think?



The fairness of the draft lottery was immediately debated

- On January 4, 1970, the *New York Times* ran a long article, "Statisticians Charge Draft Lottery Was Not Random."
- **It made the point that those with birthdates later in the year seemed to have had more than their share of low lottery numbers and hence were more likely to be drafted.**