Does Alphabetical Order Offer an Unfair Advantage in 401(k) Options?

Though suspected for a while, a new bias in 401(k) investing—"alphabeticity bias"—has been confirmed by a recent paper in the academic journal *The Financial Review*, as reported by *Pensions & Investments*. Investments that appear higher up on alphabetically listed lineups are what participants select the most. The bias exists regardless of the length of the lineup, surfacing even in plans with fewer than 10 fund choices.

Study sponsors expressed surprise at the magnitude of the bias: Funds that appear at the top of the list receive roughly a 20% higher allocation than those that appear at the bottom.

Since at least 2007, most plan lineups are typically organized by asset class, which are then alphabetized (there is no word whether the order advantages Alternatives). Two ideas proposed by the study: that sponsors and record keepers list investments options in ascending order by expense ratio or by the level of fund volatility.

**Economic Releases vs. Consensus (week of 1/20)**

- **Existing Home Sales (Dec):** 5.54M vs. 5.43M
- **Initial Jobless Claims:** 211K vs. 215K

**Economic Releases (week of 1/27)**

- **New Home Sales (1/27):**
- **FOMC Announcement (1/29):**
- **GDP (1/30):**

**WEEKLY HEADLINES**

**MARKET PULSE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONTH-TO-DATE</th>
<th>As of 1/24/2020</th>
<th>YEAR-TO-DATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VALUE</td>
<td>CORE</td>
<td>GROWTH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LARGE</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>2.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MID</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>1.66</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMALL</td>
<td>-2.21</td>
<td>-0.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The **Nontraditional Bond** category contains funds that pursue strategies divergent in one or more ways from conventional practice in the broader bond-fund universe. **Multialternative** funds offer investors exposure to several different alternative investment tactics. Funds in this category have a majority of their assets exposed to alternative strategies. **Bear Market** funds dedicate a majority of the fund’s assets to equities. Most of the portfolio is dedicated to short stock positions in an attempt to take advantage of anticipated market or stock declines. **Managed Futures** funds primarily trade liquid global futures, options, swaps, and foreign exchange contracts, both listed and over-the-counter. **Commodities Broad-basket portfolios** can invest in a diversified basket of commodity goods including but not limited to grains, minerals, metals, livestock, cotton, oils, sugar, coffee, and cocoa. **Commodities Precious Metals** can invest in precious metals such as gold, silver, platinum, and palladium. **Energy Limited Partnership** strategies invest a significant amount of their portfolio in energy master limited partnerships, also known as MLPs. **Multicurrency** portfolios invest in multiple currencies through the use of short-term money market instruments; derivative instruments including and not limited to forward currency contracts, index swaps, and options; and cash deposits. **Market Neutral** funds attempt to reduce systematic risk created by factors such as exposures to sectors, market-cap ranges, investment styles, currencies, and/or countries. **Real Estate** portfolios invest primarily in real estate investment trusts of various types. REITs are companies that develop and manage real estate properties. **Convertible-bond portfolios** are designed to offer some of the capital-appreciation potential of stock portfolios while also supplying some of the safety and yield of bond portfolios. **Options-based** funds use options as a central component of their investment strategies. **Long-Short Credit** funds seek to profit from changes in the credit conditions of individual bond issuers and credit markets segments represented by credit indexes. **Long-Short Equity** funds hold sizeable stakes in both long and short positions in equities, exchange traded funds, and related derivatives.

**Definitions and Disclosures**

The **S&P 500 Index** is considered generally representative of the U.S. equity market. The **MSCI World Index** is considered generally representative of the market for developed market equities. The **MSCI Emerging Markets Index** is a free float-adjusted market capitalization index cited as a measure of the performance of emerging market equities. The **MSCI ACWI Index** is a free float-adjusted market capitalization weighted index that is designed to measure the equity market performance of developed and emerging markets. The **MSCI EAFE Index (Europe, Australasia, Far East)** is a free float-adjusted market capitalization index that is designed to measure the equity market performance of developed markets, excluding the US & Canada. The **Russell 3000 Index** measures the performance of 3,000 publicly held US companies based on total market capitalization, which represents approximately 98% of the investable US equity market. The **Russell 2000 Index** measures the performance of the small-cap segment of the U.S. equity universe and includes approximately 2000 of the smallest securities based on a combination of their market cap and current index membership. The **Russell Midcap Index** measures the performance of the mid-cap segment of the U.S. equity universe and includes approximately 800 of the smallest securities based on a combination of their market cap and current index membership. The **Russell 3000 Index** is comprised of long-term government and investment-grade corporate debt securities and is generally considered representative of the performance of the broad U.S. bond market. The **ICE BofA Global 300 Cpi Index (VG00)** is a SUSD/Local-denominated unmanged index generally indicative of the overall global convertible market. The **ICE BofA All U.S. Convertibles Index (VXAO)** is comprised of approximately 700 issues of only convertible bonds and preferreeds of all qualities. Source ICE Data Indices, LLC, used with permission. ICE permits use of the ICE BofA Indices and related data on an ‘as is’ basis, makes no warranties regarding same, does not guarantee the suitability, quality, accuracy, timeliness, and/or completeness of the ICE BofA Indices or data included in, related to, or derived therefrom, assumes no liability in connection with the use of the foregoing and does not sponsor, endorse or recommend Calamos Advisors LLC or any of its products or services.

**Oil - West Texas Intermediate (WTI - Cushing):** A crude stream produced in Texas and southern Oklahoma which serves as a reference or “marker” for pricing a number of other crude streams and which is traded in the domestic spot market at Cushing, Oklahoma. **Gasoline:** Weighted average based on sampling of approximately 900 retail outlets, 8:00AM Monday. The price represents self-service unless only full-service is available and includes all taxes. **Gold - Gold Fixings Price:** The fixings are an open process at which market participants can transact business on the basis of a single quoted price. Orders can be changed throughout the proceedings as the price is moved higher and lower until such time as buyers’ and sellers’ orders are satisfied and the price is said to be ‘fixed’. Orders executed at the fixings are conducted as principal-to-principal transactions between the client and the dealer through whom the order is placed.

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