Payoffs to Contestants on U.S. Reality Television Game Shows, 1976-2025

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Abstract. Via this study, I measured the payoffs offered to and received by contestants on U.S. game shows and reality competitions from 1976 through 2025. From a frame of 1,181 U.S. versions built from Wikipedia listings, I randomly drew versions within category and decade until 10 eligible versions were accepted or none remained; 81 were accepted and 287 seasons were recorded from cited sources. For game shows, the measure was the advertised top prize in cash, an offer rather than a record of payment; for reality competitions, it was the amount paid to the winner. Values are expressed in 2024 dollars under the Consumer Price Index (CPI-U) and the BLS research series R-CPI-U-RS, and the results show that, in 2024 dollars (CPI-U), the weighted median game-show top prize rose from about $24,000 in 1976-85 to $1.35 million in 2006-15 and was $289,000 in 2016-25. The median amount paid to reality winners fell from about $402,000 in 1996-2005 to $125,000 in 2016-25; no earlier reality season has a documented payment. Within-show trends in these measures have 95 percent confidence intervals that include zero and depend on two or three long-running series. The measures were documented for 83 of 144 game-show seasons and 52 of 143 reality seasons, and more than half of the values rest only on Wikipedia, fan wikis, listings, or fan sites. The results describe documented shows and should be read within those limits.

1. Introduction

This study asks what payoffs were offered to and received by contestants on reality television game shows in the United States from 1976 through 2025, in nominal terms and after inflation adjustment, and how those payoffs compare across the period.

The term "reality television game shows" is used broadly. It covers traditional game shows, where prizes are won within an episode, and reality competitions, where a fixed group of contestants competes across a season for a grand prize. The two are classified by a written rule (Section 3.2) and analyzed separately, because their prizes are not the same kind of payment.

No hypothesis was stated before the work began. The sampling design, payoff measures, and analysis plan were fixed before full data collection began; the remaining analysis details were settled after collection ended but before any payoff values were totaled or

compared. Every value used rests on a cited source, and every count and estimate reported here was produced by script from the recorded data.

The study is limited to versions broadcast in the United States. Each version's market of origin is recorded, so that formats first broadcast elsewhere remain visible, but international versions are not analyzed. The profitability of the companies that produce the shows is outside the study's scope.

2. Related literature

2.1 Game shows in economic research

Game shows have served economists as natural experiments in decision-making in the face of risk. Post, van den Assem, Baltussen and Thaler (2008) analyze *Deal or No Deal* and cite earlier work on *Card Sharks* (Gertner, 1993), *Jeopardy!* (Metrick, 1995), a lottery game show (Hersch & McDougall, 1997), and *Lingo* (Beetsma & Schotman, 2001). Tenorio and Cason (2002) use 141 tapings of *The Price Is Right* to study contestants' choices. Both examine how contestants decide, not how prize levels changed over time.

2.2 Prize levels over time

A literature search was run under a protocol recorded in advance, with fixed search terms, effort limits, and source-type labels. It found no peer-reviewed or government study of game show or reality competition prize levels over time; however, similar comparisons appear in journalism and other popular sources. Nguyen (2023) tabulates the initial, inflation-adjusted, and current prizes of eight reality competitions but does not state an index or base period. Lawler (n.d.) compares the $1 million top prizes of five shows with their 2024 equivalents using the BLS inflation calculator. Carberry (2025) expresses *Jeopardy!* clue values and winnings in constant dollars using the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers. Dehnart (2021) reports that prize increases are rare in reality competitions. Each covers a few shows, and their methods differ or are only partially stated.

Outside television, a state agency has assessed fixed statutory amounts against sector-specific price indexes rather than the general CPI (New Mexico Workers' Compensation Administration, 2023). This study uses the general indexes described in Section 4.2. None of these sources is used for any price-level finding.

2.3 Method literature

The Bureau of Labor Statistics publishes a research series, the R-CPI-U-RS, that estimates CPI-U inflation from 1978 onward under current methods (Stewart & Reed, 1999; BLS, 2026a). The choice of deflator depends on the question asked (Short, n.d.). Recipients may value goods below their cost (Waldfogel, 1993), which, by analogy, bears on non-cash prizes. Chalaby (2012, 2015) describes international trade in television formats, which produces versions of one show in many countries, and this is background for the market-of-origin field.

3. Data

3.1 Unit of observation

The unit is the season of a U.S. version of a show, assigned to the calendar year of its premiere. For a show without producer-defined seasons, the unit is the set of episodes broadcast in one calendar year. Where rules or prizes changed within a season, the value in force at the premiere is used.

3.2 Classification

Each version is tested against two descriptions. Under Test A, a fixed set of contestants competes across a season, with elimination or a cumulative standing, and a grand prize is awarded at the end of the season. Under Test B, prizes are decided and awarded within an episode or across consecutive episodes, with returning contestants playing the same game without season-long elimination. A version meeting only Test A is a reality competition; one meeting only Test B is a game show; one meeting both or neither is a hybrid. No hybrid season entered the sample.

Several readings of these tests were settled during the pilot. In-episode prizes inside a season-long competition do not make it a game show. Players who enter only to replace eliminated players do not break Test A. A talent tournament with new contestants each week is a game show. A contract whose pay depends on later performance, or a job won as the season prize, counts as a non-cash prize with no stated value. Appearance pay that is not a named prize is not a payoff.

3.3 Sampling frame

The frame lists 1,181 U.S. versions and 4,307 version-years. It was built by script from Wikipedia's "List of American game shows" and, for reality competitions, from Wikipedia's category "American reality competition television series" and its subcategories, screened by rules recorded in advance. Both are crowd-sourced, and the list states that it is incomplete. Duplicate listings were merged, three confirmed dating errors were corrected, and the end year of every version listed as still running was checked against a current source; 10 could not be settled and were kept through 2025. Each version's category in the frame is provisional, taken from the list section or category in which it appears; the actual category was established at screening.

3.4 Sample design

Versions were drawn at random within strata defined by provisional category and the 10-year block (1976-85, 1986-95, 1996-2005, 2006-15, 2016-25) of the version's first season in the window. Within each stratum, we drew versions in random order (seed 20261112) until we accepted 10 or exhausted the stratum, and we recorded every season of an accepted version from 1976 to 2025. We skipped a drawn version if no cited source showed a first-run U.S. broadcast, if it was ineligible, if its actual category differed from the stratum's, or if we could not establish its eligibility, or its category within the search limits. Screening and season listing were each limited to two searches and three page fetches per version. When a version had more than 20 listed seasons, we randomly selected 10; this applied to *Hollywood Squares*, *Wheel of Fortune* (syndicated), and *Dancing with the Stars*. A pilot of three units per stratum, completed on November 17, 2026, tested the protocol and informed the choice of payoff measures.

Table 1 shows the results. Of 146 versions screened, 81 were accepted, and 287 seasons were recorded. The reality stratum for 1976-85 had no eligible version, and the 1986-95 stratum had one (*Road Rules*).

Table 1. Versions screened and accepted, seasons recorded, and seasons with the primary payoff measure documented, by stratum

Category	Stratum (first season)	Versions screened	Versions accepted	Seasons recorded	Primary measure documented
Game show	1976-1985	10	10	52	23
Game show	1986-1995	18	10	26	10
Game show	1996-2005	17	10	16	8

Category	Stratum (first season)	Versions screened	Versions accepted	Seasons recorded	Primary measure documented
Game show	2006-2015	23	10	15	11
Game show	2016-2025	19	10	35	31
Reality competition	1976-1985	8	0	0	0
Reality competition	1986-1995	7	1	14	1
Reality competition	1996-2005	12	10	58	27
Reality competition	2006-2015	13	10	46	19
Reality competition	2016-2025	19	10	25	5

3.5 Variables

For each season, the records hold the show, version, network or platform, premiere date and season number; the category and its source; the edition type (regular or special, as billed) and contestant type; the market of origin and target market; and each payoff measure with the source of it and source type. The payoff measures are the advertised top prize, the amount paid to the winner, total prizes awarded, and the average per contestant, each in cash alone and in cash plus non-cash prizes of stated value. A measure counts as documented when at least one cited source found within the search limits states it. All payoffs are recorded before tax.

4. Methods

4.1 Payoff measures

The pilot was meant to choose, for each category, the measure documented for the most seasons, subject to a minimum coverage. No measure met that minimum, so the authors chose the measures directly and confirmed them. For game shows, the primary measure is the advertised top cash prize: an offer, not a record of what was paid. For reality competitions, it is the cash amount paid to the winner. Each is also reported with non-

cash prizes added at their stated value, and for comparisons between the two categories, the advertised top cash prize serves as a shared measure, recorded the same way for both.

One number per season was read from the recorded source quotations and checked against them by script. A stated maximum ("up to") is taken as stated. A prize shared by a winning team is the team total where a total is stated; where only a per-person amount is stated, that amount is used and flagged. When sources disagree, an official or press source is preferred over an encyclopedia, and an encyclopedia over a fan wiki. Totals that could be added up from episode records are not computed.

4.2 Inflation adjustment

Values are expressed in 2024 dollars:

$$V(2024) = V(t) \times I(2024) / I(t)$$

where V is the payoff, t is the season's premiere year, and I is the annual average price index. Two indexes are used side by side, with neither treated as primary: the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (1982-84 = 100) and the R-CPI-U-RS research series (December 1977 = 100), which applies current methods to past years and begins in 1978. Both were read from BLS files current as of 2026 (BLS, n.d.; BLS, 2026a). Because BLS did not collect October 2025 prices (BLS, 2026b), the CPI-U index average for 2025 rests on 11 months; for the R-CPI-U-RS, the published 2025 average is used. The index values are in the Appendix.

4.3 Weights

The inverse of its selection probability weights each season: one divided by the share of the stratum's frame that was screened and, for the three versions whose seasons were subsampled, divided again by the share of that version's seasons recorded. A stratum screened in full has a sampling rate of one.

4.4 Estimation

For each category and 10-year block, the weighted median and interquartile range of each measure are reported, in nominal dollars and in 2024 dollars under each index. The weighted quantile is the smallest value at which the cumulative weight reaches the required share. Blocks follow each season's premiere year.

Change within shows is estimated by a weighted least-squares regression of the logarithm of the payoff on the premiere year, with a separate intercept for each version. The sample is versions with the measure documented in two or more years. Standard errors are clustered by version, and confidence intervals use the t distribution with one fewer degree of freedom than the number of versions. The slope is reported as a percentage change per year. Because a few long-running versions supply most of the within-show variation, these estimates are reported as descriptive, together with a check that drops one version at a time (Section 5.2).

Special editions, such as celebrity seasons, are reported separately, and payoffs to someone other than the contestant, such as a charity, are excluded from the main measure. A sensitivity analysis restricts the sample to series whose contestants are members of the public, coded from the recorded contestant field. A discount on non-cash prizes was planned but not applied because no cited basis for one was gathered. No hypothesis tests are reported.

5. Results

5.1 Payoff levels by decade

The median advertised top prize on game shows rose from about $24,000 in 1976-85 to about $1.35 million in 2006-15 (in 2024 dollars), then fell back to about $289,000 in 2016-25 (Figure 1). In nominal terms, the medians were $5,000, $25,000, $100,000, $1,000,000, and $250,000. The spread within each decade widens after 1995: in 2016-25, the middle half of seasons ran from about $24,000 to $1.28 million.

Game shows: median advertised top prize peaked in 2006-2015

Cash only, 2024 dollars (CPI-U). Dot = weighted median; line = middle half of seasons. Log scale.

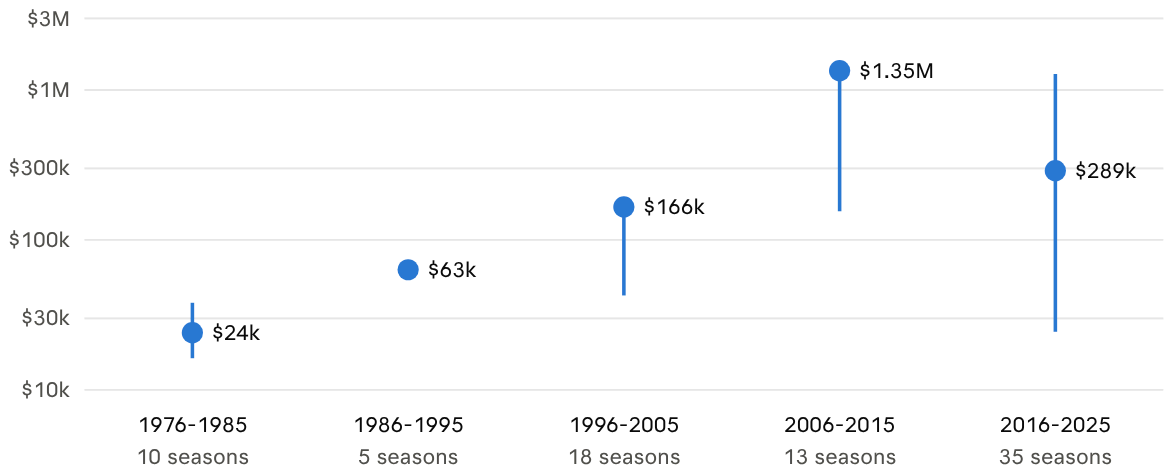

Figure 1. Source: study data, analysis results v3 (weighted medians, 81 game-show seasons).

For reality competitions, no season premiering before 1996 has a documented amount paid to the winner. The median fell from about $402,000 in 1996-2005 to $331,000 in 2006-15 and $125,000 in 2016-25, in 2024 dollars (Figure 2). In nominal terms, it was $250,000 in each of the first two decades and $100,000 in the last.

Reality competitions: median amount paid to the winner fell after 2005

Cash only, 2024 dollars (CPI-U). Dot = weighted median; line = middle half. Log scale. None documented before 1996.

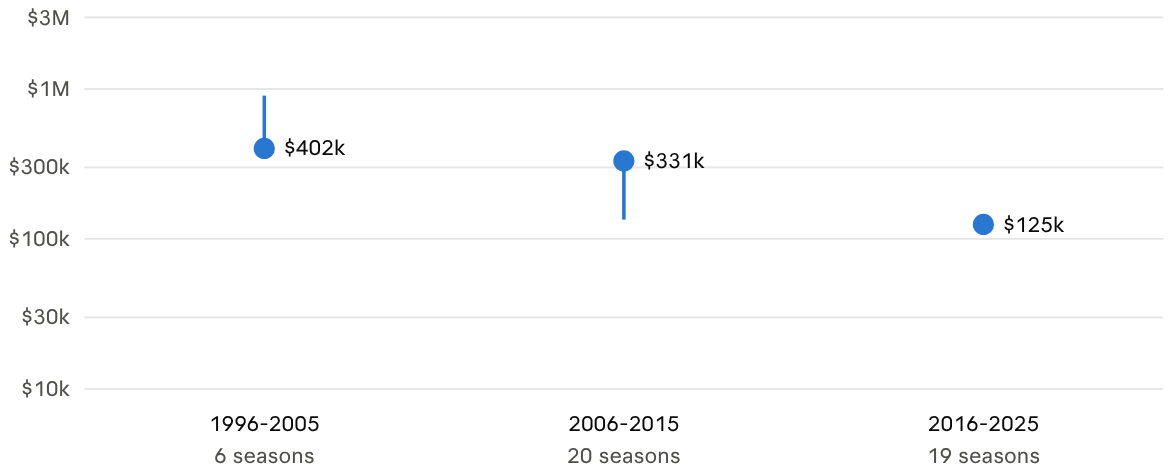

Figure 2. Source: study data, analysis results v3 (weighted medians, 45 reality seasons).

The two price indexes give nearly the same results after 1995, within 1 percent. They differ more in the earlier decades: for game shows in 1976-85, the R-CPI-U-RS median is 8 percent below the CPI-U median for cash alone and 16 percent below it with non-cash prizes, partly because the research index cannot be applied to 1976 and 1977 and those

seasons drop out. Adding non-cash prizes with a stated value gives a smaller, different set of seasons, because a season whose non-cash prize has no stated value is left out of that measure. On that basis, the game-show medians after 1995 are lower, and the reality medians are similar or higher. All figures, under both indexes and with non-cash prizes, are in Tables A2 and A3 of the Appendix. Several decades rest on a few seasons: five for game shows in 1986-95 and six for reality competitions in 1996-2005.

5.2 Change within shows

Within shows, the estimated change in the game-show top prize is +7.6 percent a year in nominal terms (95% confidence interval -1.7 to +17.9; 16 versions) and +4.3 percent a year in 2024 dollars (-5.5 to +15.1). For the amount paid to reality winners, it is -3.5 percent a year in nominal terms (-10.1 to +3.5; 6 versions) and -5.7 percent in 2024 dollars (-12.4 to +1.5). Every interval includes zero.

These estimates should be read as descriptive. A version helps determine a within-show slope only if its payoff changed across the years observed, and many versions in the sample ran for a few years with an unchanged prize: 7 of the 16 game-show versions and 4 of the 6 reality versions never changed their value. The long runs of *Hollywood Squares* and *Wheel of Fortune* supply 54 and 43 percent of the information behind the game-show slope, and *The Mole* supplies 61 percent of the reality slope. Leaving out one of these shows changes the estimate sharply (Figure 3). Without *Hollywood Squares*, the nominal game-show slope is +13.4 percent a year; without *Wheel of Fortune*, it is +2.7 percent; without *The Mole*, the reality slope turns positive at +1.5 percent. Unweighted estimates, and estimates that weight each version equally, were of roughly the same size to the main ones: +5.0 and +4.1 percent a year for game shows, and -4.2 and -5.1 percent for reality competitions, in nominal terms.

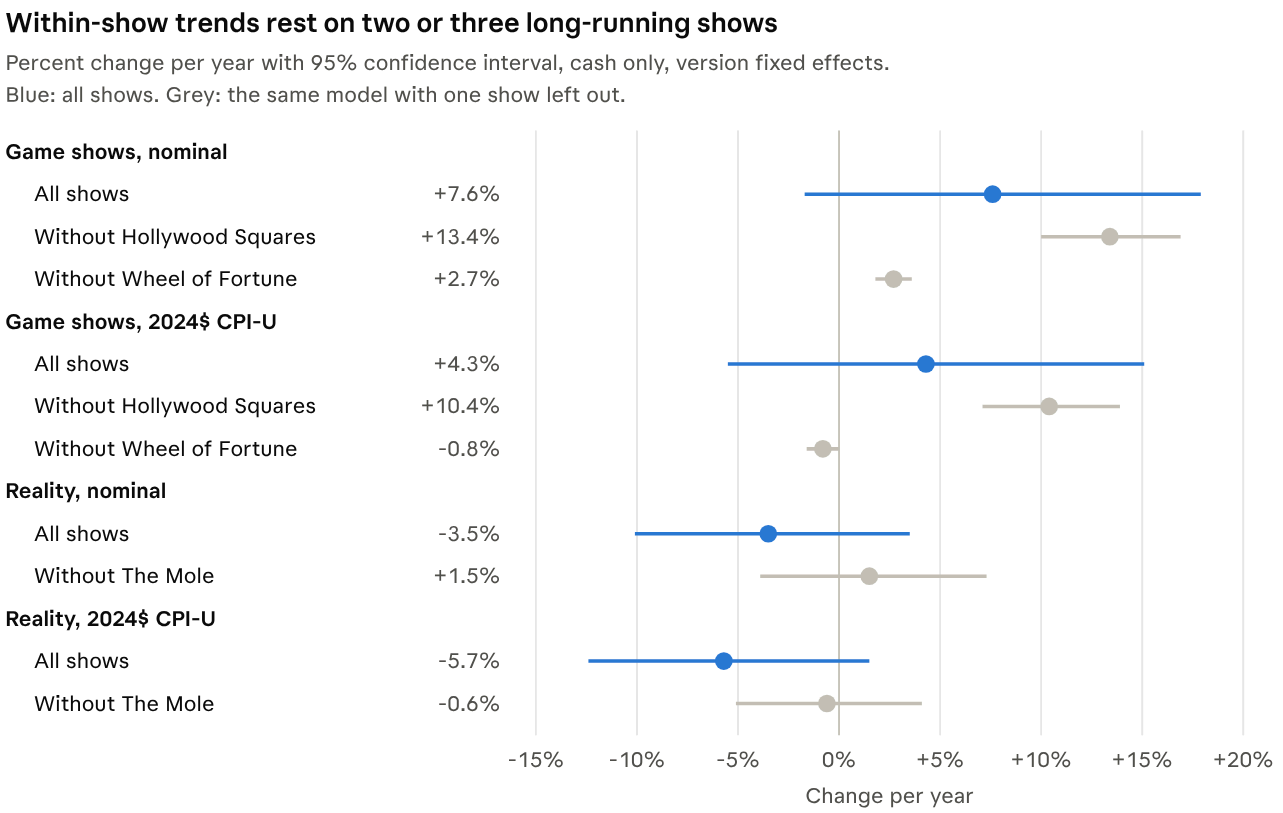

Figure 3. Source: study data, analysis results v3 and the leave-one-version-out check (16 game-show versions, 6 reality versions).

The game-show slope with non-cash prizes added has a narrow interval (+2.2 percent a year, 1.6 to 2.9), but 98 percent of its information comes from *Hollywood Squares* alone, so the interval is not a meaningful measure of uncertainty. The full set of estimates is in Table A4.

5.3 Game shows and reality competitions compared

On the shared measure, the advertised top prize in cash, the median reality grand prize was higher than the median game-show top prize in 1996-2005, about $402,000 against $166,000 in 2024 dollars. In the two later decades, the order reversed: about $146,000 against $1.35 million in 2006-15, and $131,000 against $289,000 in 2016-25 (Figure 4). The top prize is documented for 83 of 144 game-show seasons and 88 of 143 reality seasons.

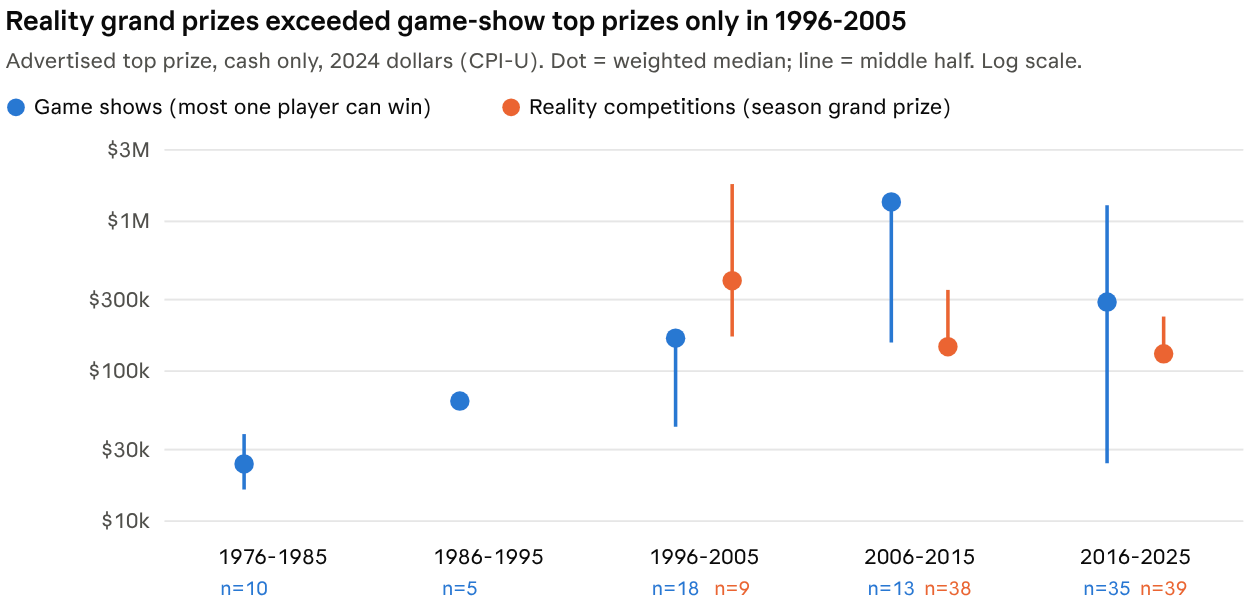

Figure 4. Source: study data, cross-category comparison v2 (81 game-show and 86 reality seasons).

The comparison sets two different things side by side. A game show's top prize is the most one player can win, usually within an episode; a reality competition's is the grand prize for a whole season. The reality figures also lean on a few long-running series: *The Biggest Loser* and *Ink Master* supply 35 of the 86 reality seasons in the comparison, and *Exatlón Estados Unidos* another 10. One reality season was left out because the record states only a prize per mission, not a total (*Road Rules*, 2007); one special edition is reported separately, and one prize paid to a charity was excluded from the main figures.

5.4 Special editions, sensitivity and reliance on readings

Two special editions entered the sample, both celebrity seasons of *The Mole*: the winners were paid $233,000 in 2003 and $222,000 in 2004, in nominal terms. Two seasons of *It Takes a Church* (2014 and 2015) awarded $10,000 to a party other than the contestant. These four seasons are excluded from the main figures.

Restricting the sample to series whose contestants are members of the public leaves 8 game-show series (26 seasons) where the records say so directly, or 13 series (35 seasons) when contestant types inferred from the records are added. The nominal game-show medians in the first four decades are the same as in the full sample. In 2016-25, they rest on 4 and 10 seasons and reach $1,000,000 and $200,000 in nominal terms, compared with $250,000 in the full sample. The analysis cannot be run for reality competitions: the sources rarely state who the contestants are, and only one series qualifies even when the study's own readings of the records are added.

Of the 131 seasons in the main analysis, 29 rest on a reading that needed judgment or on a weak source. Examples include a stated maximum for a prize pool built up over a season, a per-person amount with no team total, and the first of two stated values. The data files flag each.

5.5 Sources behind the values

Each recorded value cites one or more works. Sorting the works into types and taking the strongest type cited for each value shows how much of the record rests on official or press material (Figure 5). Wikipedia is the most common strongest source in all three groups: 41 of 83 game-show top prizes, 40 of 52 reality amounts paid, and 86 of 100 reality top prizes. Official pages and network press releases back 12 game-show values and one value in each reality group. Journalism is the strongest source for 27 game-show values, 9 reality amounts paid, and 8 reality top prizes.

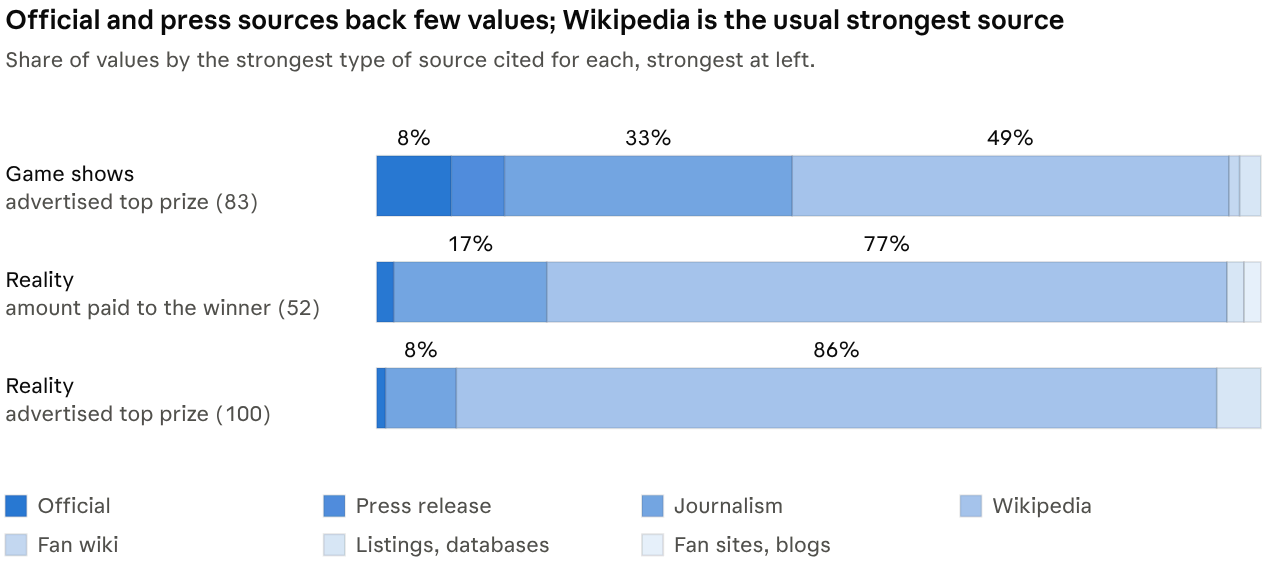

Figure 5. Source: study data, source types of primary-measure values v2. Each value is counted once, under the strongest type of work cited for it.

Counted another way, 44 of the 83 game-show values, 42 of the 52 reality amounts paid, and 91 of the 100 reality top prizes rest only on Wikipedia, fan wikis, listings, or fan sites. The study's fixed list of name patterns assigned the types, and the order of strength (official, press, journalism, Wikipedia, fan wiki, listings, fan sites) is the study's own and open to review.

6. Limitations

The sampling frame was built from crowdsourced lists that state they are incomplete. Poorly documented shows, often local or older ones, are more likely to be missing from the frame and more likely to be skipped at screening because their eligibility could not be established within the search limits. The results therefore describe documented shows, not every show broadcast in the period.

A measure counts as documented only when a source found within fixed search limits states it. The primary measure was found for 83 of 144 game-show seasons and 52 of 143 reality seasons, and the remaining seasons are absent from the results. No reality season premiering before 1996 has a documented amount paid to the winner, and several decades rest on fewer than ten seasons. Collection for a season stopped once a measure was documented, so disagreement between sources was found only incidentally. Most values rest on Wikipedia or other secondary sources (Section 5.5), and 29 of the 131 seasons in the main analysis rest on a judgment-based reading or a weak source.

The game-show measure is an advertised offer, not a record of payment, and a top prize may rarely or never have been won. All values are before tax. Non-cash prizes are taken at their stated value, which may be more than a winner could realize in cash. Seasons are assigned to their premiere year for inflation adjustment, although prizes may be paid later or in installments. The 2025 CPI-U average omits October 2025, and the R-CPI-U-RS cannot be applied to 1976 and 1977.

The within-show estimates depend on two or three long-running shows (Section 5.2) and are descriptive. The comparison across categories sets an offer to one player against a grand prize for a whole season, and its reality seasons are concentrated in a few series. Sources rarely state contestant type, which limits the sensitivity analysis to a few game-show series. The weighting of seasons within strata and the classification of sources by type involved judgments made during the study; each is recorded in the project file.

7. Conclusions

Over the fifty years studied, documented payoffs for the two kinds of shows followed different trajectories. The median advertised top prize on game shows, in 2024 dollars (CPI-U), rose from about $24,000 in 1976-85 to about $1.35 million in 2006-15 and then fell to about $289,000 in 2016-25. The median amount paid to reality winners fell in each documented decade, from about $402,000 in 1996-2005 to $125,000 in 2016-25. That fall

also appears in nominal dollars ($250,000 in each of the first two decades and $100,000 in the last), so it is not only an effect of inflation. After 1995, the choice between the CPI-U index and the R-CPI-U-RS changes the results by less than 1 percent.

These are medians across the shows on the air in each decade. Within a given show, prizes changed rarely: of the versions with the measure documented in two or more years, 7 of 16 game shows and 4 of 6 reality competitions kept the same value throughout, and the within-show trends in cash payoffs have confidence intervals that include zero. The movement in the decade medians may therefore reflect changes in the mix of shows as much as changes within individual shows; this study did not separate the two.

On the one measure recorded the same way for both kinds of show, the advertised top prize in cash, reality grand prizes were higher than game-show top prizes in 1996-2005 and lower in the two later decades. One is the most a single player can win, usually in one episode, and the other is the prize for a whole season, so the comparison describes the size of the advertised offers, not what contestants of each kind received.

The main constraint on these results is the record itself. We found the primary measure for a little more than half of game-show seasons and about a third of reality seasons. Official pages and network press releases were the strongest source for only 12 of 83 game-show values and one of 52 reality values, and no reality season before 1996 has a documented payment. Further work would gain most from sources this study could not reach within its search limits, such as network and producer archives, trade press, and payment records. Such records could also show how often advertised top prizes were actually won.

Use of an AI assistant

Claude, an AI model developed by Anthropic, served as a research assistant throughout the study. Under the recorded protocols, it ran the literature and source searches, recorded the season data with quotations from the sources, wrote the scripts that built the frame, drew the sample and produced every count, estimate, table and figure, and drafted the text of this paper. The author or someone acting on the author's behalf made decisions on the design, the measures, and the reading of individual records; where Claude proposed a method or a reading, the proposal and the decision are recorded in the project file with their dates. Statements about standard practice that Claude made from general knowledge, without a source, are marked as unverified there. The author is responsible for the content.

Data availability

The author holds the project file, season records, value files, price index table, and analysis scripts, which are available on request. Each figure and table names the result file from which it was produced.

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Appendix

Table A1. Price index annual averages and factors to 2024 dollars. CPI-U, 1982-84 = 100; R-CPI-U-RS, December 1977 = 100. Factor = 2024 index divided by that year's index.

Year	CPI-U	Factor	R-CPI-U-RS	Factor
1976	56.900	5.5130	n/a	n/a
1977	60.600	5.1764	n/a	n/a
1978	65.200	4.8112	104.400	4.4302

Year	CPI-U	Factor	R-CPI-U-RS	Factor
1979	72.600	4.3208	114.300	4.0465
1980	82.400	3.8069	127.100	3.6390
1981	90.900	3.4509	139.100	3.3250
1982	96.500	3.2507	147.500	3.1357
1983	99.600	3.1495	153.800	3.0072
1984	103.900	3.0191	160.200	2.8871
1985	107.600	2.9153	165.600	2.7929
1986	109.600	2.8621	168.400	2.7465
1987	113.600	2.7613	174.100	2.6566
1988	118.300	2.6516	180.500	2.5624
1989	124.000	2.5298	188.300	2.4562
1990	130.700	2.4001	197.600	2.3406
1991	136.200	2.3031	204.800	2.2584
1992	140.300	2.2358	209.900	2.2035
1993	144.500	2.1709	215.200	2.1492
1994	148.200	2.1167	219.700	2.1052
1995	152.400	2.0583	225.000	2.0556
1996	156.900	1.9993	231.000	2.0022
1997	160.500	1.9544	236.000	1.9598
1998	163.000	1.9245	239.200	1.9336
1999	166.600	1.8829	244.200	1.8940
2000	172.200	1.8217	252.500	1.8317
2001	177.100	1.7713	259.700	1.7809
2002	179.900	1.7437	263.800	1.7533
2003	184.000	1.7048	269.800	1.7143

Year	CPI-U	Factor	R-CPI-U-RS	Factor
2004	188.900	1.6606	277.000	1.6697
2005	195.300	1.6062	286.400	1.6149
2006	201.600	1.5560	295.700	1.5641
2007	207.342	1.5129	304.100	1.5209
2008	215.303	1.4570	315.800	1.4646
2009	214.537	1.4622	314.700	1.4697
2010	218.056	1.4386	319.800	1.4463
2011	224.939	1.3946	330.000	1.4015
2012	229.594	1.3663	336.900	1.3728
2013	232.957	1.3466	342.000	1.3524
2014	236.736	1.3251	347.700	1.3302
2015	237.017	1.3235	348.300	1.3279
2016	240.007	1.3070	352.800	1.3110
2017	245.120	1.2797	360.300	1.2837
2018	251.107	1.2492	369.100	1.2531
2019	255.657	1.2270	375.813	1.2307
2020	258.811	1.2120	380.755	1.2147
2021	270.970	1.1577	399.173	1.1587
2022	292.655	1.0719	431.460	1.0720
2023	304.702	1.0295	449.265	1.0295
2024	313.689	1.0000	462.511	1.0000
2025	321.943	0.9744	474.994	0.9737

Sources: CPI-U, BLS published annual averages (file historical-cpi-u-202610.xlsx); the 2025 average rests on 11 months. R-CPI-U-RS, annual averages from the BLS file r-cpi-u-rs-allitems.xlsx; the 2025 value is BLS's published average.

Table A2. Game shows, advertised top prize: weighted median (interquartile range) by decade of premiere. Seasons = seasons with the measure documented; [n] denotes a smaller count where the R-CPI-U-RS cannot be applied to 1976-77.

Decade	Measure	Seasons	Nominal	2024$, CPI-U	2024$, R-CPI-U-RS
1976-1985	Cash only	10	$5,000 ($5,000-$10,000)	$24,056 ($16,253-$38,069)	$22,151 ($15,678-$36,390) [n=7]
1976-1985	Cash plus non-cash	6	$5,000 ($5,000-$25,000)	$24,056 ($21,604-$137,825)	$20,232 ($15,678-$22,151) [n=5]
1986-1995	Cash only	5	$25,000 ($25,000-$25,000)	$63,244 ($63,244-$69,034)	$61,406 ($61,406-$66,415)
1986-1995	Cash plus non-cash	1	$10,000 ($10,000-$10,000)	$28,621 ($28,621-$28,621)	$27,465 ($27,465-$27,465)
1996-2005	Cash only	18	$100,000 ($25,000-$100,000)	$166,061 ($42,621-$170,483)	$166,971 ($42,857-$171,427)
1996-2005	Cash plus non-cash	10	$63,500 ($8,000-$100,000)	$108,257 ($13,949-$170,483)	$108,856 ($14,026-$171,427)
2006-2015	Cash only	13	$1,000,000 ($100,000-$1,000,000)	$1,346,553 ($155,600-$1,456,965)	$1,352,371 ($156,412-$1,464,569)
2006-2015	Cash plus non-cash	10	$250,000 ($100,000-$1,000,000)	$336,638 ($139,455-$1,438,571)	$338,093 ($140,155-$1,446,251)
2016-2025	Cash only	35	$250,000 ($25,000-$1,000,000)	$289,413 ($24,359-$1,279,736)	$289,668 ($24,343-$1,283,683)
2016-2025	Cash plus non-cash	31	$100,000 ($25,000-$1,000,000)	$107,187 ($24,359-$1,071,873)	$107,197 ($24,343-$1,071,967)

Table A3. Reality competitions, amount paid to the winner: weighted median (interquartile range) by decade of premiere. No season before 1996 has this measure documented.

Decade	Measure	Seasons	Nominal	2024$, CPI-U	2024$, R-CPI-U-RS
1996-2005	Cash only	6	$250,000 ($250,000-$510,000)	$401,548 ($401,548-$903,339)	$403,728 ($403,728-$908,281)
1996-2005	Cash plus non-cash	7	$250,000 ($250,000-$510,000)	$415,152 ($401,548-$903,339)	$417,429 ($403,728-$908,281)
2006-2015	Cash only	20	$250,000 ($100,000-$250,000)	$331,265 ($134,655-$359,643)	$332,550 ($135,237-$361,563)

Decade	Measure	Seasons	Nominal	2024$, CPI-U	2024$, R-CPI-U-RS
2006-2015	Cash plus non-cash	17	$250,000 ($250,000-$420,000)	$378,227 ($348,638-$611,925)	$380,229 ($350,387-$615,119)
2016-2025	Cash only	19	$100,000 ($100,000-$101,500)	$124,922 ($108,795-$130,700)	$125,308 ($108,805-$131,097)
2016-2025	Cash plus non-cash	9	$200,000 ($100,000-$200,000)	$194,872 ($107,187-$205,899)	$194,744 ($107,197-$205,897)

Table A4. Change within shows: weighted least squares of log payoff on premiere year with version fixed effects; standard errors clustered by version. Sample: versions with the measure documented in two or more years.

Category	Measure	Prices	Versions	Seasons	Percent per year	95% interval
Game shows, top prize	Cash only	Nominal	16	66	+7.6	-1.7 to 17.9
Game shows, top prize	Cash only	2024$, CPI-U	16	66	+4.3	-5.5 to 15.1
Game shows, top prize	Cash only	2024$, R-CPI-U-RS	15	63	+5.2	-4.4 to 15.7
Game shows, top prize	Cash plus non-cash	Nominal	14	45	+2.2	1.6 to 2.9
Game shows, top prize	Cash plus non-cash	2024$, CPI-U	14	45	-1.2	-1.9 to -0.5
Game shows, top prize	Cash plus non-cash	2024$, R-CPI-U-RS	14	44	+0.4	-0.3 to 1.1
Reality, amount paid	Cash only	Nominal	6	40	-3.5	-10.1 to 3.5
Reality, amount paid	Cash only	2024$, CPI-U	6	40	-5.7	-12.4 to 1.5
Reality, amount paid	Cash only	2024$, R-CPI-U-RS	6	40	-5.7	-12.4 to 1.5
Reality, amount paid	Cash plus non-cash	Nominal	6	28	-5.1	-10.2 to 0.3
Reality, amount paid	Cash plus non-cash	2024$, CPI-U	6	28	-7.3	-12.6 to -1.7
Reality, amount paid	Cash plus non-cash	2024$, R-CPI-U-RS	6	28	-7.3	-12.6 to -1.7

Source for Tables A2- A4: analysis results v3; Table A1: index table v2.