

RANKING BAD: THE CHEMISTRY OF RANKED-CHOICE VOTING

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Abstract

Crowder-Meyer et al. (2023) found that in U.S. ranked-choice voting (RCV) elections, Black, Asian, and Hispanic candidates consistently faced electoral disadvantages regardless of the informational context. Extending their approach to a Canadian setting, this study employs a conjoint experimental design to examine whether providing party labels can mitigate biases that hinder the electoral prospects of BIPOC candidates in a hypothetical Canadian RCV election scenario. Our findings indicate that, absent partisan cues, BIPOC candidates experience marked penalties, with voters across the political spectrum engaging in negative partisanship and affinity voting. Yet, when party affiliations are introduced, these disadvantages largely vanish. While our results are limited by a small, non-representative sample, they offer preliminary evidence that partisan cues may help counteract racial bias in Canadian RCV contexts. Together, these insights highlight the critical role of information availability and point toward future research on how electoral reforms and voter education might foster more equitable representation.

Introduction

The extent and quality of information available to voters can profoundly influence their electoral choices. High-information elections—characterized by campaigns featuring well-known candidates, clear party affiliations, and ample media coverage—provide voters with a broad array of political cues to guide their decision-making (Crowder-Meyer et al. 2023, 3; McDermott 1997, 271). Even so, voters do not always adhere strictly to policy considerations. Negative partisanship, for instance, can drive them to vote against perceived adversaries rather than wholeheartedly supporting ideologically aligned candidates (Medeiros & Noël 2013). Nevertheless, high-information environments are thought to encourage a more deliberate “System 2” reasoning process, wherein voters carefully weigh available data before casting their ballots (Alvarez et al. 2018, 1013; Kahneman 2011, 27).

By contrast, municipal elections typically present low-information environments. Because familiar party labels and detailed policy information are frequently absent (Alvarez et al. 2018, 1013-14; McGregor et al. 2017, 137), voters may rely more heavily on racial cues—a reliance that can manifest in affinity voting, where voters favour candidates who share their ethnic background (Bird et al. 2016, 359; Fraga & Hassell 2020; Blackman & Jackson 2019). Similarly, these environments can amplify biases against racial outgroup candidates, skewing electoral fairness and representation (Kirkland & Coppock 2017, 575; Sigelman et al. 1995, 28-29; Terkildsen 1993). Amongst scholars, these realities have raised pressing questions about the potential of electoral reforms to mitigate or exacerbate such biases (Crowder-Meyer et al. 2023).

RCV is one reform that has attracted considerable attention. In several U.S. municipal contexts, RCV requires voters to rank candidates in order of preference rather than selecting a single name (Santucci 2021, 344-45). Advocates suggest that RCV might temper the influence of

racial bias and partisan hostility in settings with ample political information, broadening the range of viable candidates and encouraging more inclusive representation (Tolbert & Kuznetsova 2021). However, others argue that the complexity and cognitive load of RCV, particularly when voters lack reliable cues, may paradoxically intensify reliance on heuristics—efficient cognitive shortcuts used to simplify challenging decisions (Dancey & Sheagley 2012, 312)—and reinforce voters’ pre-existing biases (Crowder-Meyer et al. 2018, 510). Whether RCV can enhance candidate diversity and reduce racial bias thus remains an open question.

To explore this issue, Crowder-Meyer et al. (2023) conducted an experimental study comparing RCV to standard single-choice plurality rule, engaging nearly two thousand respondents to test whether the format could diminish the racial biases disadvantaging Black, Asian, and Hispanic candidates. Their findings revealed a stubborn persistence of these biases: neither RCV’s ranking mechanism nor the inclusion of party affiliations substantially improved outcomes for candidates of colour, who consistently fared worse than their White counterparts. Seemingly, this pattern conforms to the observable resilience of voters’ perceptual biases and heuristic-driven behaviour in the American electoral context (Chirco & Buchanan 2023; Bejarano et al. 2020).

Building on these insights, our study extends Crowder-Meyer et al.’s (2023) research into a Canadian setting, a context characterized by distinct demographic patterns—including a proportionally smaller Black population than the U.S. (Black & Erickson 2006, 544)—a longstanding history of discrimination against Indigenous communities (Beauvais 2021; Canadian Public Health Association 2018; Gismondi 2017), and a marked scarcity of municipal election research (McGregor et al. 2016, 311). We employ a similar conjoint experimental design to examine whether introducing party labels can counteract the penalties BIPOC candidates face

in hypothetical Canadian RCV elections. Moreover, we probe whether subsequent rankings—that is to say, those beyond first-choice selections—might reveal latent negative partisanship that would remain undetected in a simpler electoral format. Ultimately, Canada provides a compelling context for investigating how voter preferences may differ from those observed in the American electorate.

Central to our inquiry are the following questions:

- How does RCV influence Canadian voter support for BIPOC candidates?
- Can partisan cues impact voter biases against BIPOC candidates in Canada?
- Does the ideological orientation of Canadian voters manifest as negative partisanship in their ranking choices?

Hypotheses

To scrutinize whether racial biases influence voter support for BIPOC candidates and whether partisan cues can attenuate these biases, we examine the following hypotheses:

- **H1:** Canadian voters are less likely to support BIPOC candidates than White candidates—consistent with American voters’ preferences observed in Crowder-Meyer et al. (2023).
- **H2:** Providing partisan labels to voters will decrease the candidate preference gap between White and BIPOC candidates.
- **H3:** Canadian Conservative voters will exhibit a higher tendency towards negative partisanship than Liberal voters—as evidenced by their secondary rankings diverging from their ideological preferences.

The objectives of this study are twofold. First, by partially replicating and extending Crowder-Meyer et al. (2023) in a Canadian context, we seek to equip electoral candidates,

strategists, and policymakers with actionable insights to address voter biases—ultimately fostering more equitable democratic participation. Second, although political scientists have significantly advanced research transparency through rigorous documentation and reproducible computational methods, a scarcity of replication efforts continues to hinder the validation and expansion of empirical knowledge (Brodeur et al. 2024). Accordingly, this study represents a modest yet purposeful contribution toward making political science a more self-correcting discipline, thereby enhancing the reliability of its scientific contributions.

Methods

To investigate how ranked-choice elections might shape voter preferences for candidates from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds in a Canadian context, we utilized a conjoint experimental survey administered online via Qualtrics (see Table 1). In this experiment, candidate attributes—race and partisanship—were systematically varied within a simulated municipal election scenario to assess how different types of information affect electoral support across demographic lines.

Table 1

Conjoint Design Set Up: Qualtrics Sample, February 2024

Attribute	Possible Values
Electoral Rule	Ranked-Choice Voting
Race	White, Black, Indigenous, Asian
Gender	Female
Partisanship	Nothing, NDP, Liberal, Conservative, PPC

Note. Notable refinements to Crowder-Meyer et al. (2023) methodologies: respondents participated in only RCV election scenarios, with candidate gender limited to “Female.” Candidate partisan affiliation was adjusted to encompass Canadian political parties—those best reflecting sequential steps on the left-right ideological spectrum. The “Hispanic” candidate race was replaced by “Indigenous” to reflect Canada’s demography and historical context.

Ethics

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the University of Toronto's Social Sciences, Humanities and Education REB (RIS Human Protocol Number 46013).

Sample

Employing a convenience sampling method—reflective of the study's pragmatic constraints—we initially engaged 218 Canadian respondents. Web links and QR codes were distributed by word-of-mouth across the University of Toronto Scarborough campus—primarily within the Political Science, Psychology, and Statistics departments. Participants were encouraged to share the survey with their broader social networks. The survey was also promoted in person at high-traffic public spaces near the primary recruiter (e.g., North York Centre, Fairview Mall, Centerpoint Mall) to diversify the respondent pool. Upon completing the survey, participants could enter a draw for one of five \$25 Amazon gift cards as an honorarium.

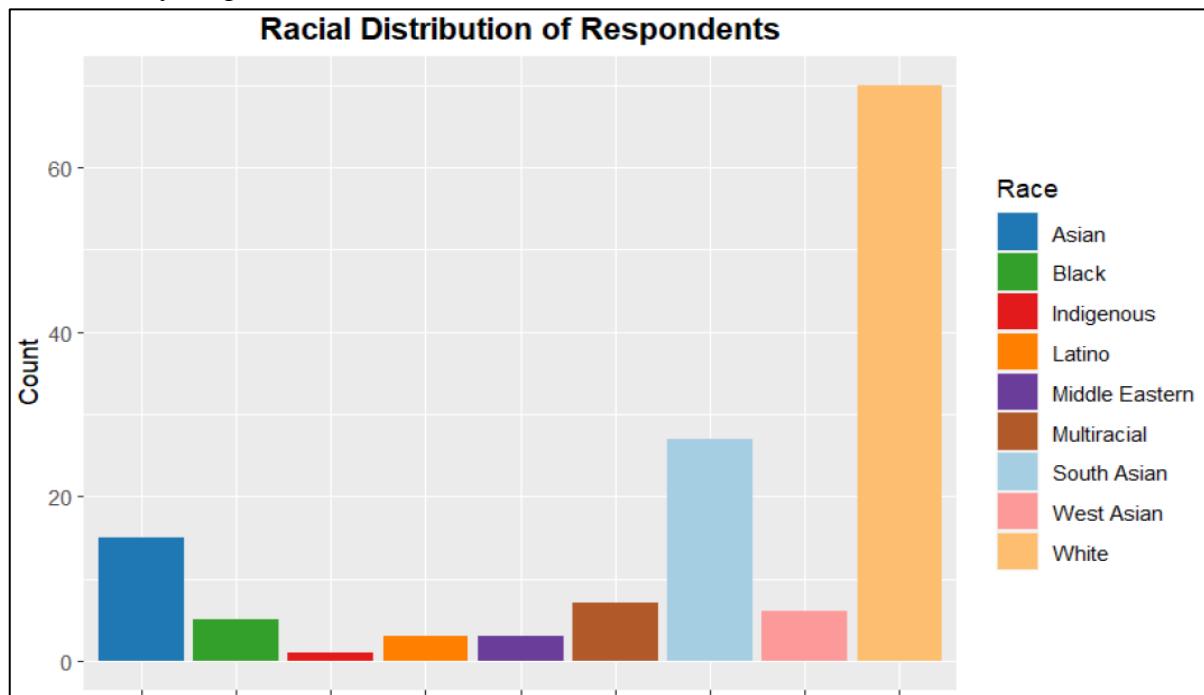
Pre-Processing

The initial respondent pool of 218 was reduced to an effective sample size of 137 voting-eligible adults after excluding those with incomplete experimental responses ($n = 48$), failed attention checks ($n = 4$), or ineligibility to vote in Canadian elections ($n = 29$). Consequently, the final study cohort comprised 62 males, 73 females, and two non-binary individuals, with participants ages 18 to 65 years and older ($M_{age} = 34.96$, see Table 2). Approximately 92% of participants resided in Ontario. Notably, the study cohort included sufficient numbers of self-identified Conservatives ($n = 42$) and Liberals ($n = 42$) to examine negative partisanship dynamics (H3).

Although our survey's demographic categories aligned with ethnic identification patterns from the Canadian Census (Statistics Canada 2023), the sample's racial distribution did not reflect the full diversity of the Canadian electorate (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Bar Chart of Respondent Race



Note. Demographic identifiers in this study align with the categorizations utilized by Crowder-Meyer et al. (2023). Specifically, the “Asian” category includes Chinese, Filipino, Korean, and Japanese ethnicities. Similarly, “Middle Eastern” and “Arab” designations have been merged. Notably, the Canadian Census indicates the following demographic composition: White (69.8%), South Asian (7.1%), Indigenous (5%), Chinese (4.7%), Black (4.3%), Filipino (2.6%), Arab (1.9%), Latin American (1.6%), Southeast Asian (1.1%), West Asian (1%), Korean (0.6%), Japanese (0.3%), and Multiracial/Other, excluding Métis (3.2%) (Statistics Canada, 2023).

Table 2

Age Cohorts of Respondents

Age Range	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Undisclosed
Count	51	28	52	17	7	6	3

Note. This table delineates the distribution of survey respondents across various age cohorts. The “Undisclosed” category represents participants who opted not to reveal their age.

Procedures

To ensure methodological alignment with Crowder-Meyer et al. (2023) and adapt to the Canadian electoral landscape, we adjusted our survey's language and demographic classifications to mirror those outlined in the Canadian Election Study (CES; Stephenson et al. 2022)—deviating from the original study design only as necessary. In further consideration of Canada's population demography and long history of discrimination against Indigenous communities, we replaced the “Hispanic” category—the fourth racial category for candidates present in the original study—with “Indigenous” candidates. Likewise, we integrated the Beauvais' (2021) Short Indigenous Resentment Scale into the questionnaire—a measure designed to assess Canadian perspectives on Indigenous rights and concerns—which prompted respondents to indicate their agreement with four statements derived from the CES (e.g., “Aboriginals are getting too demanding in their push for land rights”).

At the survey's outset, respondents completed an informed consent process establishing the ethical guidelines and requirements for study participation and withdrawal. Subsequently, qualified participants provided standard demographic details and disclosed their political affiliations. Prior to the experimental portion, we assessed participants' perspectives on race, gender, and feminism—maintaining fidelity to the survey structure and content utilized by Crowder-Meyer et al. (2023).

Anticipating participants' unfamiliarity with RCV—due to its limited application in Canada—we presented respondents with comprehensive visual slides to familiarize voters with the ranked-choice mechanism. Subsequently, we assessed respondents' comprehension of the election format with a preliminary RCV exercise—specifically, by asking participants to rank four candidates in an order specified by a prompt—to ensure voters were comfortable with

Qualtrics' ranking procedures and ready for the experimental tasks (all participants in our sample correctly ranked the candidates during the comprehension task).

During the experimental phase, participants assumed the role of voters in a hypothetical municipal election, tasked with ranking four female candidates for local governmental positions (i.e., Mayor, city councillor). Specifically, candidates' names—appearing via the random assignment of two name sets—reflected distinct racial characteristics. Participants encountered either the first or second name set absent party affiliation (“No-Label” condition, see Figure 2), followed by the latter set introducing candidates in a “Label” condition, wherein candidates' party affiliations were randomized. Adapted from Crowder-Meyer et al. (2023), these scenarios simulated the strategic decision-making inherent to RCV by varying the presence of partisan information and the composition of candidate name sets (see Table 4).

Figure 2

Experimental Ranked-Choice Election: No-Label Condition

You are now voting in an Ranked-Choice Voting election for City Council. The candidate who receives a majority of the votes will win:				
Amy Stone				
Michelle Wu				
Keisha Richardson				
Kateri Littlebear				
Remember, because this is a RCV election, your vote will be redistributed from your first to your second (then third, then fourth) choice candidate if your first (then second, then third) choice candidate does not get enough votes from other voters to proceed to the next round of vote counting.				
Please rank the candidates:				
Michelle Wu	○	○	○	○
Keisha Richardson	○	○	○	○
Kateri Littlebear	○	○	○	○
Amy Stone	○	○	○	○

Note. Initially, participants were prompted to rank four candidates in the “No-Label” condition—in either a mayoral or city council (randomized) RCV election. One of two name sets is randomly presented. Subsequently, the “Label” condition appears with the alternative name set and election type (e.g., city council follows mayoral or vice versa). In the Label condition, candidates' party affiliation is present (e.g., “Amy Stone is affiliated with the Liberal party”).

Whereas real-world RCV elections do not typically require a complete ranking of all candidates—allowing for partial rankings that could result in plurality-like outcomes—our

survey was encoded with a Qualtrics “forced-choice decision” mandating participants rank all four candidates presented. This choice, motivated by research suggesting candidates of colour might encounter systemic secondary biases in RCV systems (Crowder-Meyer et al. 2023), enabled the exploration of negative partisanship dynamics within our sample.

Consistent with research indicating that voters infer race from distinctive names rather than other attributes—e.g., socioeconomic status (Butler & Homola 2017)—we selected names for candidates that were indicative of their race, drawing from Crowder-Meyer et al.’s (2023) validated list (see Table 4). As per the original study, Asian candidate surnames indicated their ethnicity, whereas first names signalled Black candidates’ ethnicity. To ensure our novel Indigenous name combinations signalled ethnicity accurately, we consulted with an Indigenous political science scholar at the University of Toronto Scarborough, who guided us on appropriate first name-surname combinations that would appear “obviously Indigenous” to respondents (C. Cowie, personal communication, January 17, 2024).

Consistent with Crowder-Meyer et al. (2023), our primary outcome of interest was the probability that a candidate, characterized by specific attributes—i.e., race (No Label and Label conditions) and partisanship (Label condition)—is “selected” as the primary choice (1st) by participants. Secondarily, we operationalize negative partisanship as instances where Conservative voters ranked the Liberal candidate in the last position (4th), and vice versa, due to the closer ideological distance between these parties compared to other selection options (e.g., the Liberal party represents an ideologically closer option to Conservatives than the NDP party).

Table 3*Party Labels for RCV Candidates*

Condition	Party Affiliation			
No-Label	None			
Label	NDP	Liberal	Conservative	PPC

Note. The Label condition displayed candidates' affiliation with a single political party (randomized). The chosen parties best reflect sequential steps on the left-right ideological spectrum (from NDP to PPC).

Table 4*Candidate Names*

Name Set	Name	Gender	First Name	Surname
Set 1	Asian	Female	Julie	Chang
	Black	Female	Latoya	Butler
	Indigenous	Female	Winona	Yellowfeather
	White	Female	Wendy	Burns
Set 2	Asian	Female	Michelle	Wu
	Black	Female	Keisha	Richardson
	Indigenous	Female	Kateri	Littlebear
	White	Female	Amy	Stone

Note. This table details the names presented to participants in each election task. Given our time and resource constraints, we presented participants with a shortened list of female-only candidate options.

Results

RCV Elections

We conducted an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis to examine the effects of predictors on candidate selection, utilizing the R statistical software package—adopting the exact methodology outlined by Crowder-Meyer et al. (2023). Specifically, by utilizing the OLS

coefficients to produce the Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCE)—that is to say, quantifying the influence of altering attributes (all else being equal) on selection probability—our analyses reveal the impact of candidate attributes on selection likelihood (see Figure 3).

No-Label Condition

In our experiment’s low-information “No-Label” condition, we found that most BIPOC candidates are subject to notable penalization—aligning with our original hypothesis (H1). Specifically, Asian candidates were less likely to be selected as the primary choice, suffering a selection penalization of approximately 15.3 percentage points compared to their White counterparts ($\beta = -0.15328, p < .05$). Comparatively, Black candidates experienced a more pronounced penalization, having a 22.6 percentage point reduction in the likelihood of being ranked first ($\beta = -0.22628, p < .05$). By contrast, Indigenous candidates experienced a small, statistically insignificant penalty ($\beta = -0.08029, p = 0.11964$).

Though our coefficients are much larger than those found in Crowder-Meyer et al. (2023)—a likely product of small sample size dynamics—the patterns observed among Canadian voters mirror those identified in the original study’s analysis of the American electorate (see Figure 3): Black candidates were about 11 percentage points less likely to be ranked first compared to White candidates, while Asian candidates experienced a reduction of approximately 7 percentage points.

Label Condition

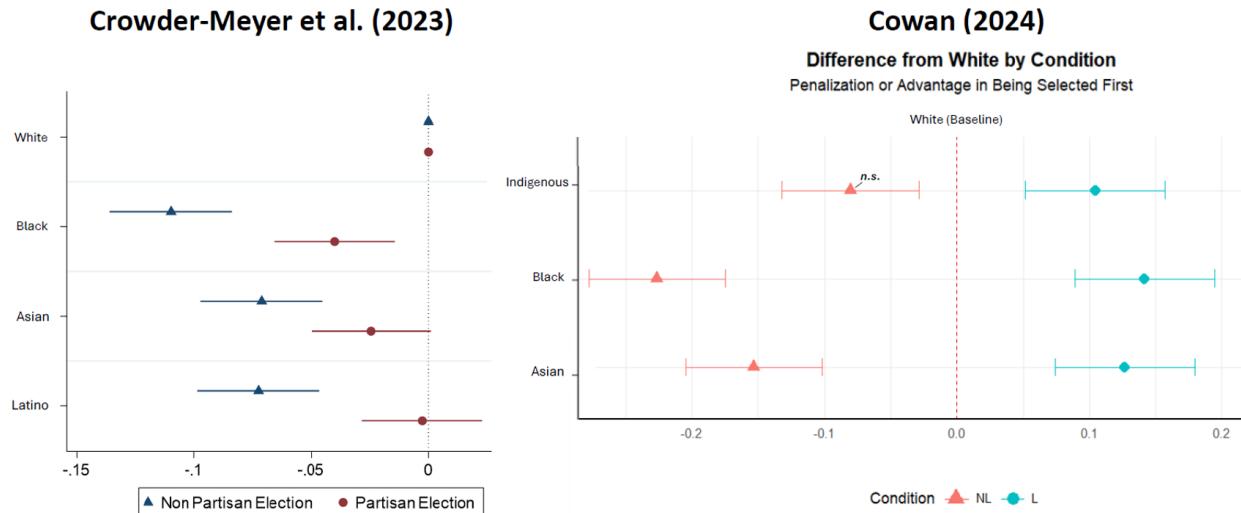
In the high-information “Label” condition, we introduced a relevant political cue—party labels (see Table 3)—to examine their potential to redirect voter focus away from racial cues (H2).

Our OLS regression results revealed a notable shift in ranking likelihood (see Figure 3):

Asian candidates experienced a positive adjustment ($\beta = 0.12687, p < .05$), indicating an increased likelihood of being selected as the first choice by approximately 12.7 percentage points relative to White candidates. Similarly, Black candidates gained a 14.2 percentage point increase improvement in selection likelihood ($\beta = 0.14179, p < .05$). Likewise, Indigenous candidates also benefitted from the introduction of party labels, gaining a 10.4 percentage point improvement in their selection likelihood compared to their White opponents ($\beta = 0.10448, p < .05$).

Figure 3

Comparison of Studies' AMCE by Candidate Selection



Note. The x-axis values display the AMCE of race/race-partisanship on candidate selection: “the increase [or decrease] in population probability that a profile would be chosen if the component was changed” (Crowder-Meyer et al., 2023). Noticeably, in the original study, BIPOC candidates were penalized in both partisan and non-partisan elections (though party labels help). In the present study, BIPOC candidates show penalization (Indigenous not statistically significant), but these effects are neutralized in the presence of party labels. Instead, in the Label condition, BIPOC membership is presented as advantageous compared to White ethnicity. Adapted from Crowder-Meyer et al. (2023).

These findings starkly contrast the disadvantages observed under the No-Label condition and those reported by the original study authors (despite the similar directionality of effects). Whereas Crowder-Meyer et al. (2023) found that Black and Asian candidates’ disadvantage penalties were reduced but still persisted when partisan cues were introduced, our results suggest

that such cues effectively eliminate the penalization of BIPOC candidates in our sample. This shift indicates that Canadian voters may lean heavily on party labels as a crucial heuristic, diminishing racial biases’ role in favour of more politically relevant information.

Negative Partisanship

To evaluate Hypothesis 3 (H3)—that is, the notion that Conservative voters might rank Liberal candidates as their least-desired choice (and vice versa)—we used Fisher’s Exact Test (suitable for small frequency tables) on self-identified Conservative ($n = 42$) and Liberal ($n = 42$) voters. Around 25% in each group placed their rival party candidate in the 4th position, resulting in a non-significant finding (odds ratio ~ 1.144 , $p = 1.00$). While this suggests no discernible difference in negative partisanship between Conservatives and Liberals, it may also reflect limitations stemming from our smaller sample.

Affinity Voting

In an extension of our core analyses, we explored the phenomenon of affinity voting within our sample—specifically, a voter’s propensity to favour candidates sharing their racial or ethnic background (Bird et al. 2016). The original study authors discerned that racial bias in candidate selection predominantly manifested among White respondents—especially those with moderate to conservative ideologies—surmising that these biases could stem from in-group affinity, racial animus, or the perception that candidates of colour are “ideologically liberal” (Crowder-Meyer et al. 2023). Thus, we ran a logistic regression on participant racial subgroups of the No-Label condition to test these dynamics within our dataset.

Our logistic regression revealed that self-identified White conservative voters ($n = 42$) exhibited a statistically significant preference for White candidates as their primary choice ($\beta = 1.1638$, $p < .05$). This finding suggests a strong influence of racial affinity on their voting

behaviour, echoing Crowder-Meyer et al.'s (2023) anticipated patterns of affinity voting.

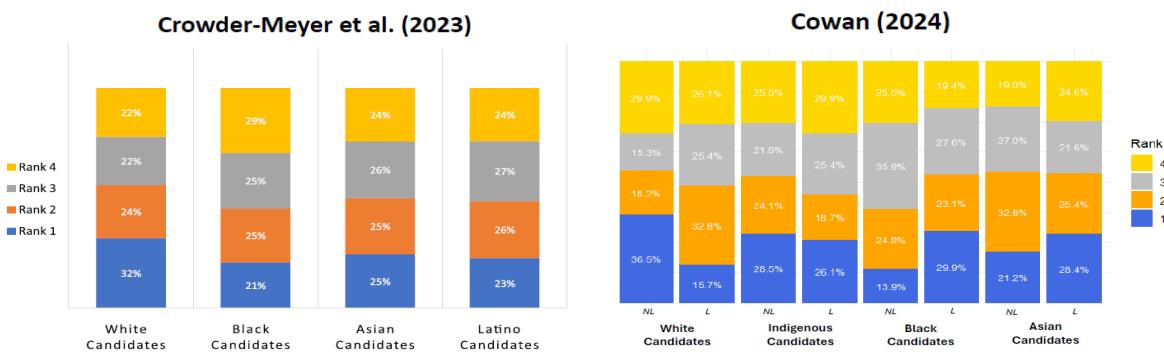
Interestingly, when assessing the broader group of White participants in our sample ($n = 70$), the regression coefficient revealed an insubstantial influence on their predilection for White candidates ($\beta = 0.1833, p = .6062$).

Conversely, the expected patterns of ethnic solidarity did not hold for self-identified Asian voters within our sample ($n = 15$). Our analysis found no significant affinity effect among this group ($\beta = 0.3442, p = .582$), suggesting a more complex interplay of factors shaping their electoral preferences. However, we interpret this finding cautiously due to the small sample size.

Finally, a pattern of affinity voting emerged among self-identified Black voters, who demonstrated a higher likelihood of selecting Black candidates as their first choice ($p < .05$). Though Crowder-Meyer et al. (2023) suggest this pattern underscores the salience of racial identity in the electoral decisions of Black voters—likely reflecting a desire for representation and policy interests that resonate with their community's needs—our findings should be interpreted with caution given our small sample size ($n = 5$).

Figure 4

Comparing RCV Ranking Proportions by Candidate Race



Note. Adapted from Crowder-Meyer et al. (2023). Figure 4 compares the distribution of rankings by candidate race in RCV elections.

Overall, these results provide some qualified support for Crowder-Meyer et al.'s (2023) observations about in-group voting dynamics. White conservative voters demonstrated a clear

preference for White candidates, while Asian and Black voters exhibited more varied or context-dependent patterns.

Discussion

Our findings suggest that even in Canada—a context featuring notable demographic and cultural differences from the U.S.—BIPOC candidates experience penalties when party cues are absent, mirroring U.S. patterns (Crowder-Meyer et al. 2023). However, once we introduced partisan labels, these penalties were effectively nullified. Voters appeared to rely heavily on party affiliation as a heuristic, offsetting the racial biases observed in the No-Label condition. While this outcome suggests that partisan cues can mitigate prejudice in an RCV setting, it also underlines the complexity of voter behaviour. The RCV mechanism alone is not sufficient to eliminate bias; the presence or absence of robust informational cues can amplify or counteract existing prejudices.

The phenomenon of affinity voting—particularly among White conservative voters in our sample—underscores the complex interplay between racial identity and political ideology. Meanwhile, our exploration of negative partisanship, though inconclusive, adds nuance to the debate on how Canadian voters construct their rankings. Taken together, these observations highlight the importance of further examining voter biases, especially given Canada’s unique demographic and political landscape.

These findings carry important policy implications. For policymakers and electoral reform advocates, the results underscore that RCV, on its own, may not guarantee equitable representation for BIPOC candidates if robust sources of information (such as party labels) are not readily available. However, where party labels or other relevant cues exist, they might act as a corrective, steering voters’ attention toward political platforms rather than racial heuristics.

This suggests that strategic communication efforts—such as voter guides, candidate debates, or formal partisan affiliations—could be deployed to enhance electoral fairness, particularly in lower-profile municipal races where information is scarce.

From a theoretical perspective, these results enrich our understanding of how negative partisanship and racial cues interact under RCV. While some scholars posit that RCV incentivizes more “thoughtful” voting, our study highlights that such benefits might be contingent on the presence of trustworthy informational signals. Accordingly, future research might explore whether different informational interventions—beyond party labels—could further mitigate or exacerbate voter biases. For instance, providing brief candidate biographies, endorsements from community leaders, or policy stances could help clarify candidate quality and reduce reliance on racial heuristics.

Despite these advances, our study has clear limitations. Chief among them is the reliance on a convenience sample—drawn primarily from Ontario and a university environment. The hypothetical nature of our RCV scenario, although patterned closely after Crowder-Meyer et al. (2023), may not perfectly capture real-world electoral complexity. Moreover, the relatively small sizes of certain racial subgroups restrict our ability to generalize about affinity voting and the universal efficacy of partisan cues. Future research incorporating larger, more representative samples—and potentially real-life RCV elections—could substantiate or refine our insights.

Comparing our results with those of Crowder-Meyer et al. (2023) highlights both persistent challenges and new possibilities within modern electoral systems. Although the original study concluded that RCV rules alone cannot eliminate racial penalties, our findings suggest that adding partisanship and other relevant cues in low-information elections might be a relatively straightforward means of promoting more inclusive outcomes.

Although our proof-of-concept remains small in scale and limited by sample composition, this research serves as an invitation for deeper investigations into how electoral frameworks, information dissemination, and voter biases intersect. While Crowder-Meyer et al. (2023) argue that RCV is “no clear remedy” for electing BIPOC candidates under a plurality system (15), replicating their study in Canada provides an additional data point in a broader conversation about bias, reform, and representation in electoral politics, while contributing towards the validation of experimental political science research.

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Appendix

Supplementary Materials

The complete code and survey instrument used in this study are publicly available at the following GitHub repository: https://github.com/mcowan38/thesis_ranking_bad_vote_choice. This repository includes all scripts and materials necessary to replicate the analyses and experimental design described in this thesis.