Ranking Bad: The Chemistry of Ranked-Choice Voting

Michael Cowan
Supervised by: Renan Levine[1]
[1]Department of Political Science, University of Toronto Scarborough
Department of Psychology, University of Toronto Scarborough

Introduction

We assess the extent to which support for candidates varies across racial and ethnic lines in a hypothetical RCV election scenario, to ascertain if the inclusion of partisan cues can effectively counteract biases against Black, Asian, and Indigenous candidates – applying the methodology of Crowder-Meyer et al. (2023) to the Canadian context.

In **low-information election settings** – e.g., Toronto city council elections – voters lack explicit party affiliations and detailed knowledge about candidates.[4]

This dearth of information biases voters' decision-making processes, leading them to **simplify complex decisions by making choices based on superficial factors** – for example, a candidate's race, gender, or ethnicity – rather than the substantive evaluation of candidates' policies.[3]

Crowder-Meyer et al. (2023) revealed that **BIPOC candidates** – specifically, Black, Asian, and Hispanic candidates – **consistently faced disadvantages regardless of the voting format** – highlighting the resilience of voter biases and heuristic tendencies even when partisanship information is available. [2] **Will Canadians behave similarly?**

Research Questions & Hypotheses

Research Questions:
1. How does RCV impact voter support for candidates from different racial and ethnic groups in Canada?
2. Do partisan cues mitigate biases against BIPOC/minority candidates?
3. Does political membership contribute to negative partisanship?

Hypotheses:
- **H1:** Canadian voters are less likely to support BIPOC candidates than White candidates – consistent with voter biases found in Crowder-Meyer et al. (2023).

Figure 1. **Comparison of American vs. Canadian Respondents.**

- **H2:** Providing partisanship labels to voters reduces racial biases in candidate support.

Figure 2. **No-Label vs. Label Condition.**

- **H3: Conservative voters** are more likely than Liberals to **exhibit negative partisanship** in their subsequent rankings (2nd/3rd/4th) on an RCV ballot.

Self-identified **Conservative** Voter

- Here the voter makes **ideologically-consistent** ranking decisions.
- Here the voter *forgoes* ideology via **negative partisanship**.

Figure 3. **Assessing Negative Partisanship.**

Methods
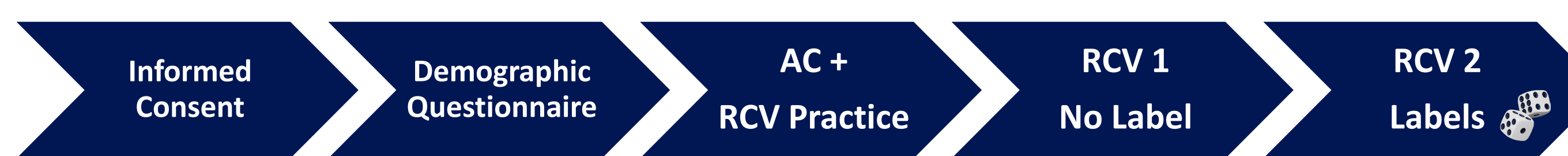
Survey Experiment: Non-probability Convenience Sample
- Voting-eligible adults (N = 137; males = 62, females = 73, non-binary = 2)
- Ages: 18-24 (51), 25-34 (28), 35-44 (25), 45-54 (17), 55-64 (7), 65+ (6), *undisclosed* (3)

Extends key study of Crowder-Meyer et al. (2023) to Canada by adapting survey language and demographic measures from *Canadian Election Study*.
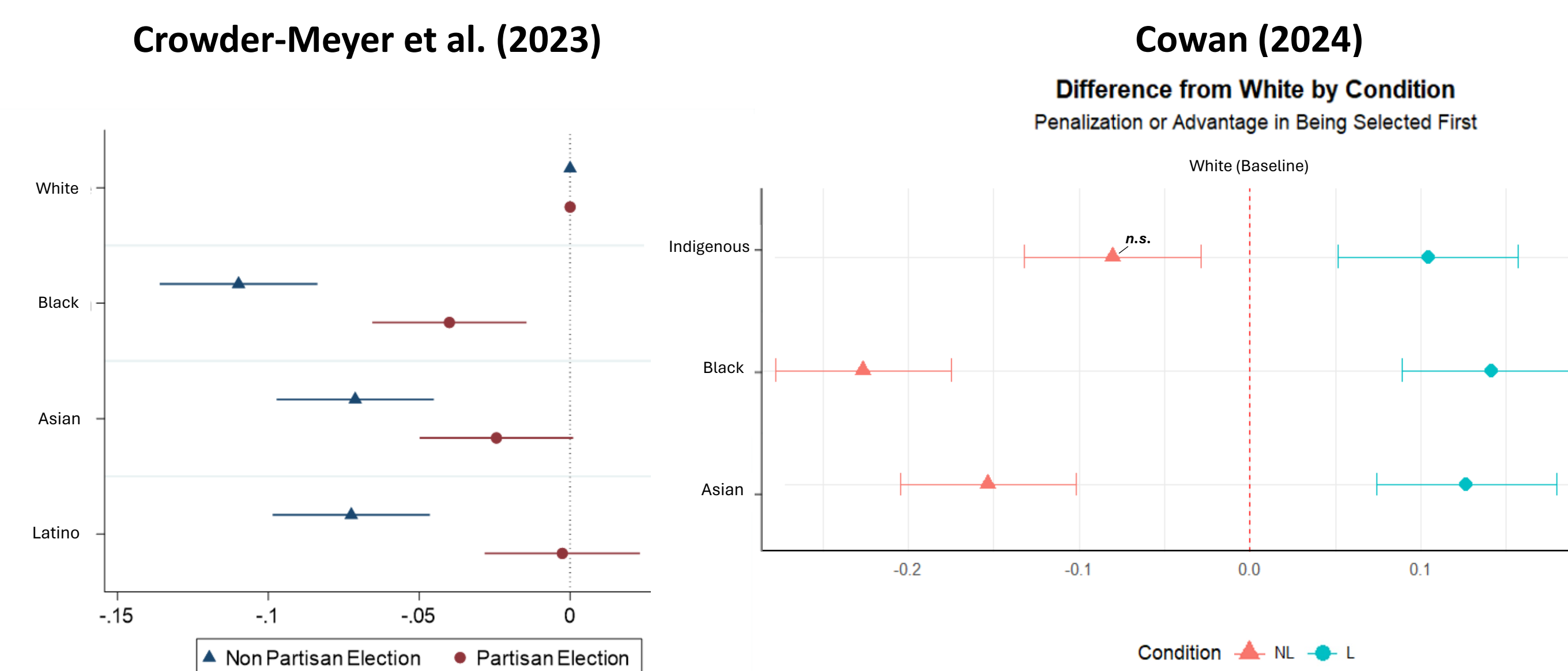

IVs:
- Candidate names (x4), Partisanship information (x4).

DV:
- **Candidate selection:** selection likelihood via AMCE; **relative position** in the rankings.

Average Marginal Components Effects (AMCE): The increase in the population probability that a profile would be chosen if the component (race/partisanship) was changed.
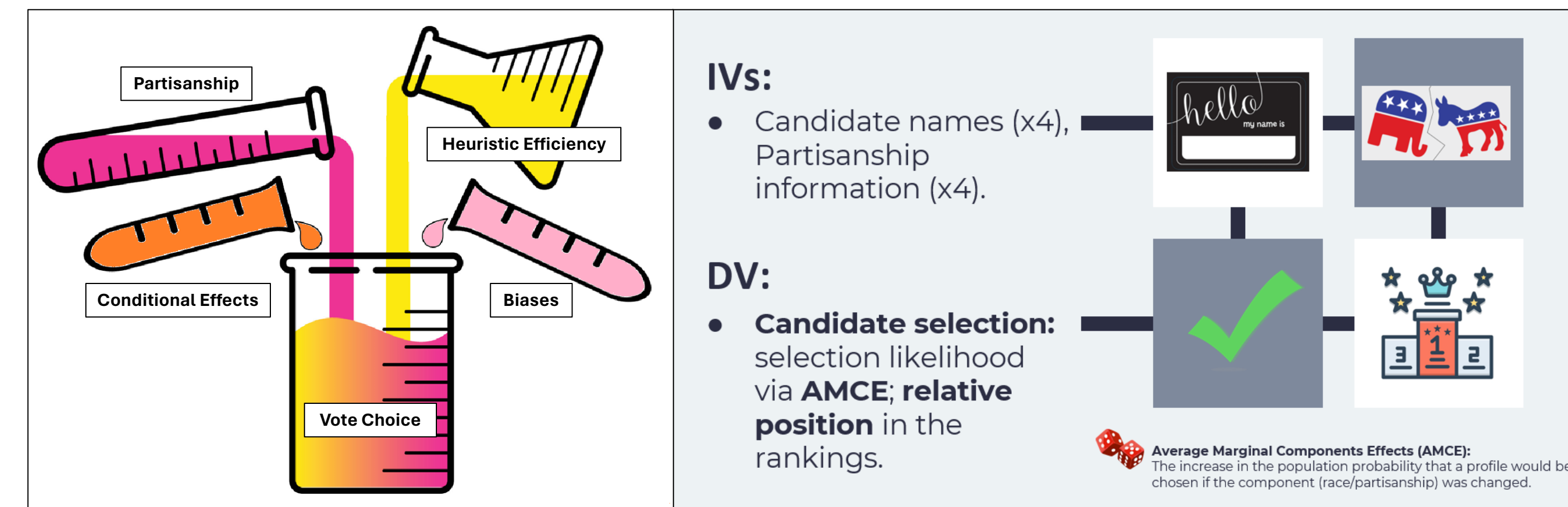
- **Short Indigenous Resentment Scale**[1]: series of four questions gauging resentment.

- **Online Survey via Qualtrics:** average completion time = 15 min.

Informed Consent	Demographic Questionnaire	AC + RCV Practice	RCV 1 No Label	RCV 2 Labels

Results & Analyses

Crowder-Meyer et al. (2023)

Cowan (2024)

- BIPOC candidates are **penalized** in Non-Partisan elections.
- Although **party labels help**, penalization **persists**.

- *Most* BIPOC candidates are **penalized** in Non-Partisan elections (**H1**).
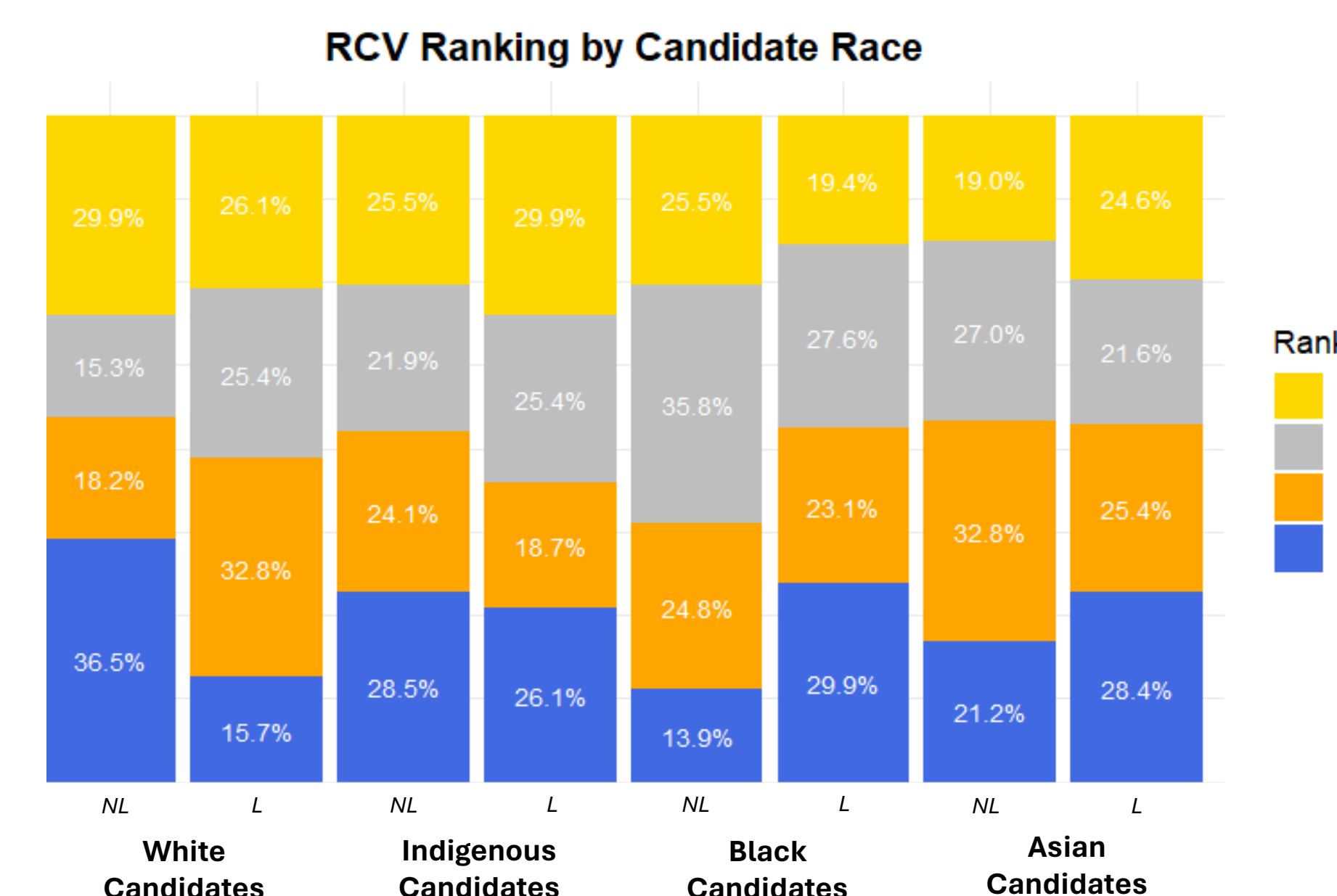- **This penalization disappears** when party labels are introduced (**H2**).

Figure 4. **Stacked Bar Chart of NL/L Rankings.**

Exploratory Analyses

Influence of Respondent Demographics & Ideologies:
- **Affinity Voting:** Favouring candidates of a similar ethnic background.[2]
- Crowder-Meyer et. al (2023) found that racial bias in candidate selection was primarily driven by **white respondents with moderate to conservative ideologies**.[2]
- We test these findings – in the *No Label* condition – via Logistic Regression.

Logistic Regression – No Label:
- Self-identified **White Conservative voters** were found to have **significantly higher odds of ranking White candidates as their first choice** ($p < .01$).
- No significant difference was found in the odds of self-identified **Asian voters** preferring Asian candidates as their first choice ($p = .582$).
- Self-identified **Black voters** were found to have **significantly higher odds of ranking Black candidates as their first choice** ($p < .05$).

Ultimately, we find <u>some</u> evidence of **Affinity Voting** within our sample.

Discussion & Limitations

RCV Analysis – Effect size:
- Our OLS regression produced an **Adjusted R-squared** of **0.0324** (unreported by original study authors).[2]

(H3) Negative Partisanship:
- Demonstrated by approximately **25% of Conservative and Liberal respondents**.
- No significant difference in engaging in negative partisanship by self-identified Conservatives/Liberals.

Small Sample Characteristics:
- Our sample did not conform to *Census Canada* demographics (e.g., age, ethnicity).

Study Design:
- **Order-effects**: large battery of racially-charged questions appear prior to RCV trials.
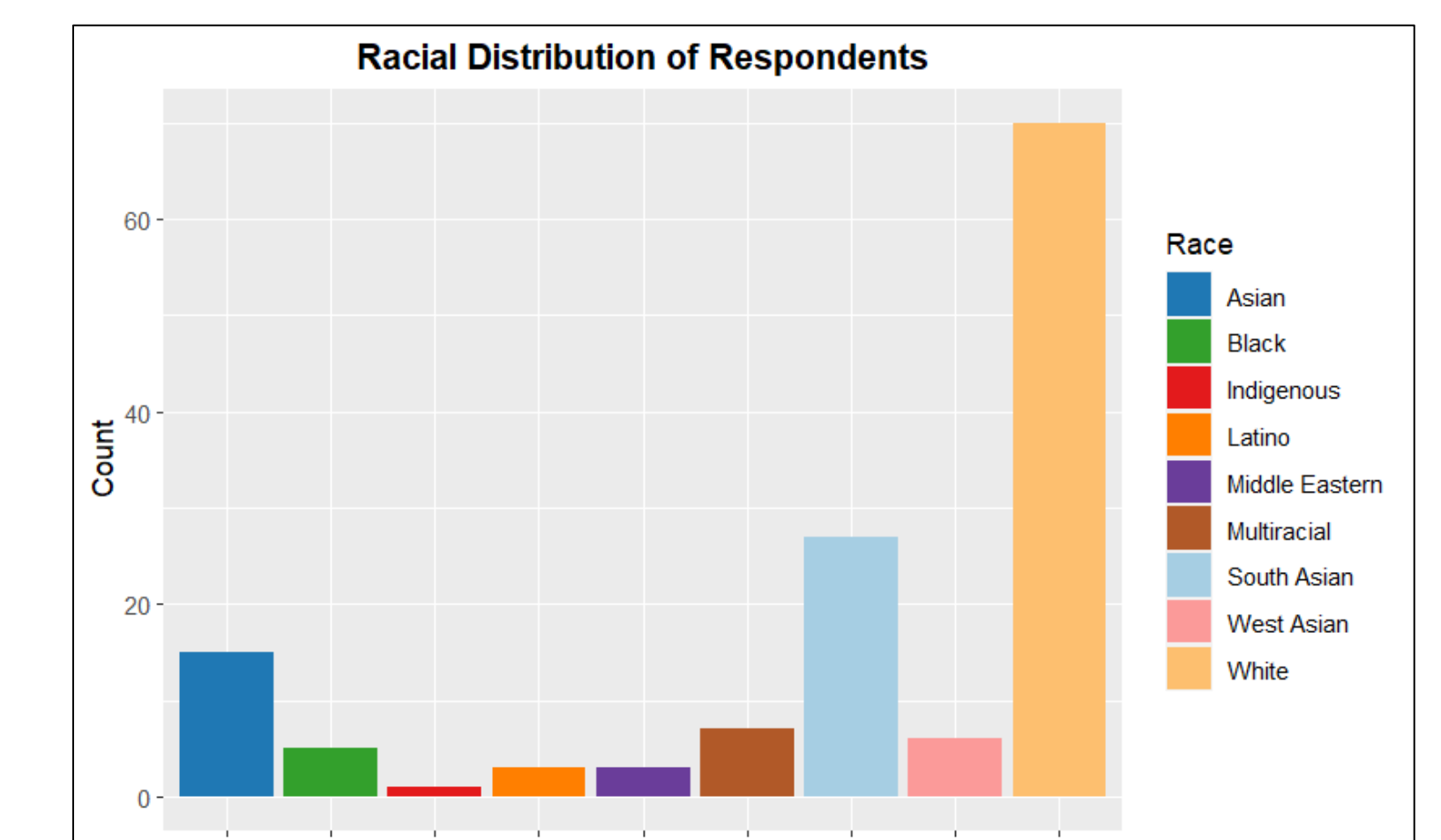- **Attrition**: 93 participants (missingness/AC failure).

Figure 5. **Bar Chart of Respondent Race.**

Implications

- Our findings *speculatively* suggest that the quantity and quality of information available to voters could shape the Canadian electorate's preferences at the ballots.

- A well-funded, truly *representative* study could deepen our understanding of how racial biases and partisanship influence the election prospects of BIPOC candidates. In the interim, our replication effort serves as a proof of concept intended to spark future endeavours.

References

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2. Crowder-Meyer, M., Gadarian, S. K., & Trounstine, J. (2023). Ranking candidates in local elections: Neither panacea nor catastrophe for candidates of color. *Journal of Experimental Political Science, 42*, 509–530. https://doi.org/10.1017/xps.2023.6
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4. McGregor, R. M., Moore, A., Jackson, S., Bird, K., & Stephenson, L. B. (2017). Why so few women and minorities in local politics?: Incumbency and affinity voting in low information elections. *Representation, 53*(2), 135–152. https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2017.1354909

Acknowledgements & Contact