

Discrimination Towards International Students in the Ontario Rental Market

The Role of Ethnicity and Gender



Shannon Mahony, Rachel Calogero, Victoria Esses

Introduction

- Ontario faces a rental affordability crisis, creating a “landlord’s market”
- International students are often blamed for rising rents but are among the most vulnerable to discrimination
- Past research shows ethnic and gender discrimination in housing, but no causal evidence for international students

Methods

PILOT STUDY

- Determine which applicant names would most clearly signal ethnic origin to landlords for the relevant ethnicities – White or Arab.
- N = **66 Western University undergraduate** students
- Task: **Rate 44 names** for most likely ethnic background and ethnic typicality.

MAIN STUDY

- Created **8 applicant profiles** that varied by student status (international/domestic), ethnicity (Arab/White), and gender (male/female)
- Applied to apartment rental advertisements by email in Fall 2024
- N = **1,272 inquiries, 423 landlords in Toronto, London, & Windsor**
- N = **630 responses**
- Responses received from landlords were analyzed for the presence/absence of 9 content categories

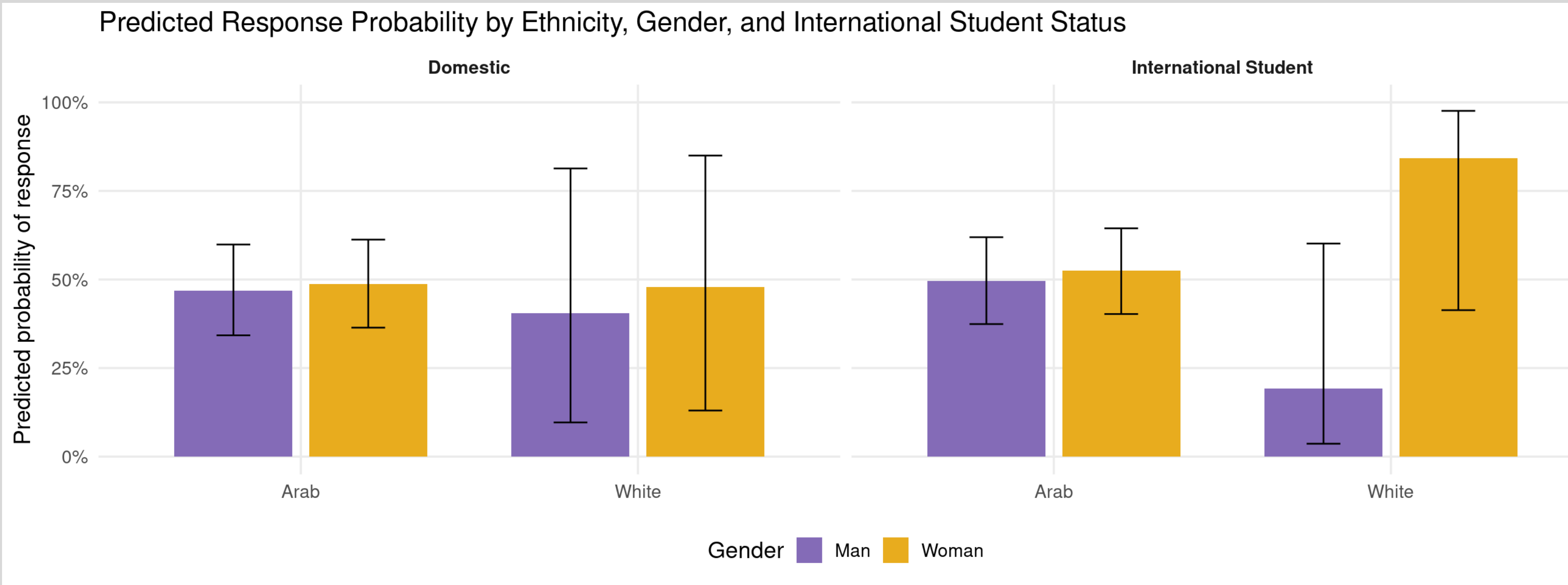
DATA ANALYSIS

- Logistic and multinomial **multilevel modelling** of landlord response and content categories.
- Predictors: student status, ethnicity, and gender.
Random intercept for landlords and random slope for ethnicity.

Objective

Do **landlords** in the **Ontario** rental market **respond differentially** (response rate and response content) to prospective tenants **based on** tenants’ **student status, ethnicity, and gender?**

Results



RESPONSE PROBABILITY

- Significant interactive effect of student status x ethnicity x gender such that White male international students were the most disadvantaged

RESPONSE CONTENT

- Most variation occurred between landlords (high ICCs) indicating response patterns reflected individual landlord style more than applicant identity
- Gender and ethnicity effects emerged: female applicants received more questions, Arab applicants received more follow-ups and ongoing contact

Discussion

RESPONSE PROBABILITY

- Landlord responses reflect identity-based discrimination in the initial stage of the rental process
- Intersectionality matters: patterns differ across student status x ethnicity x gender
- Some findings diverged from past research (e.g., Arabs not consistently disadvantaged) which may be due to methodology and student status
- Taste-based and statistical discrimination may play a role
- Stereotypes appear to be important to landlord decisions (e.g., women as homemakers, students are unruly)

RESPONSE CONTENT

- Inconsistent patterns of findings according to tenant identity
- Unclear whether content features indicate greater interest, scrutiny, or standardized procedures
- Bias may be more clear in content at later stages of the rental process

Conclusions

- Landlord responses in Ontario varied by intersecting applicant identities
- International students in Ontario experience intersectional rental discrimination
- Audit methods are valuable in capturing real-world landlord behaviour in the Canadian context

