



# PROGRAMMING INEQUALITY:

## Gender representation on Canadian country radio (2005-2019)

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### Highlights

- Explores representation of men, women and male-female ensembles on Canadian country format radio over a 15-year period from 1 January 2005 to 31 December 2019.
- Finds that male artists – especially *non-Canadian men* – are privileged on the Canadian format at all levels of programming: more unique artists, more unique songs, more airplay throughout the 24-hour cycle, and more chart-topping singles.
- Discovers that Black, Indigenous, Musicians of colour are drastically underrepresented: women of colour are nearly absent.



### Problem

In [May 2015](#), a consultant for country radio revealed a decades' long practice of limiting space for songs by female artists to just 13-15% of station playlists. His words sparked immediate debate within the industry, drawing attention to the growing inequalities on country format radio. Most discussions have centered on US country radio, with limited attention to the growing imbalance north of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel.

Governed by the federal [Broadcasting Act](#) (1968, 1991), programmers of the the Canadian format are required by law to program 35% Canadian content, as defined by the [MAPL system](#). With an interest in learning more about programming practices on the format, this study explores gender and racial representation through data-driven analysis of radio reports.



### Method

A dataset of 319,369 records was curated from the 780 weekly airplay reports generated by Mediabase between 1 January 2005 and 31 December 2019. A prosopography of the 1,309 unique artists was curated and the data files were joined to enable data-driven analysis of the reports.

The study aims to answer several interrelated questions:

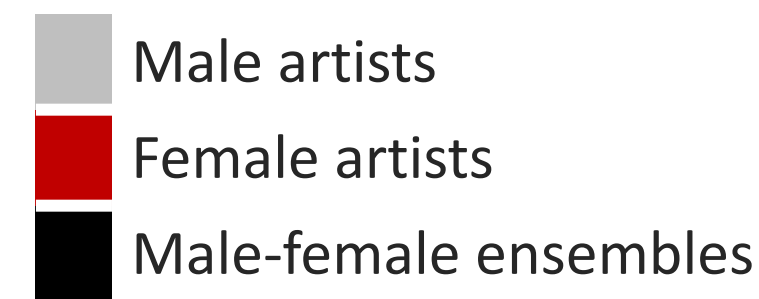
1. Does the number of songs by male artists exceed those by female artists on Canadian country format radio, as they do in [the USA](#)?
2. How often are songs by women programmed and at what time of day?
3. How does this programming impact contention on weekly airplay charts?

The geographic origins of the artists are considered at each level of analysis in order to facilitate a deeper understanding of the impact of the *Broadcasting Act's* Canadian content requirements on representation.



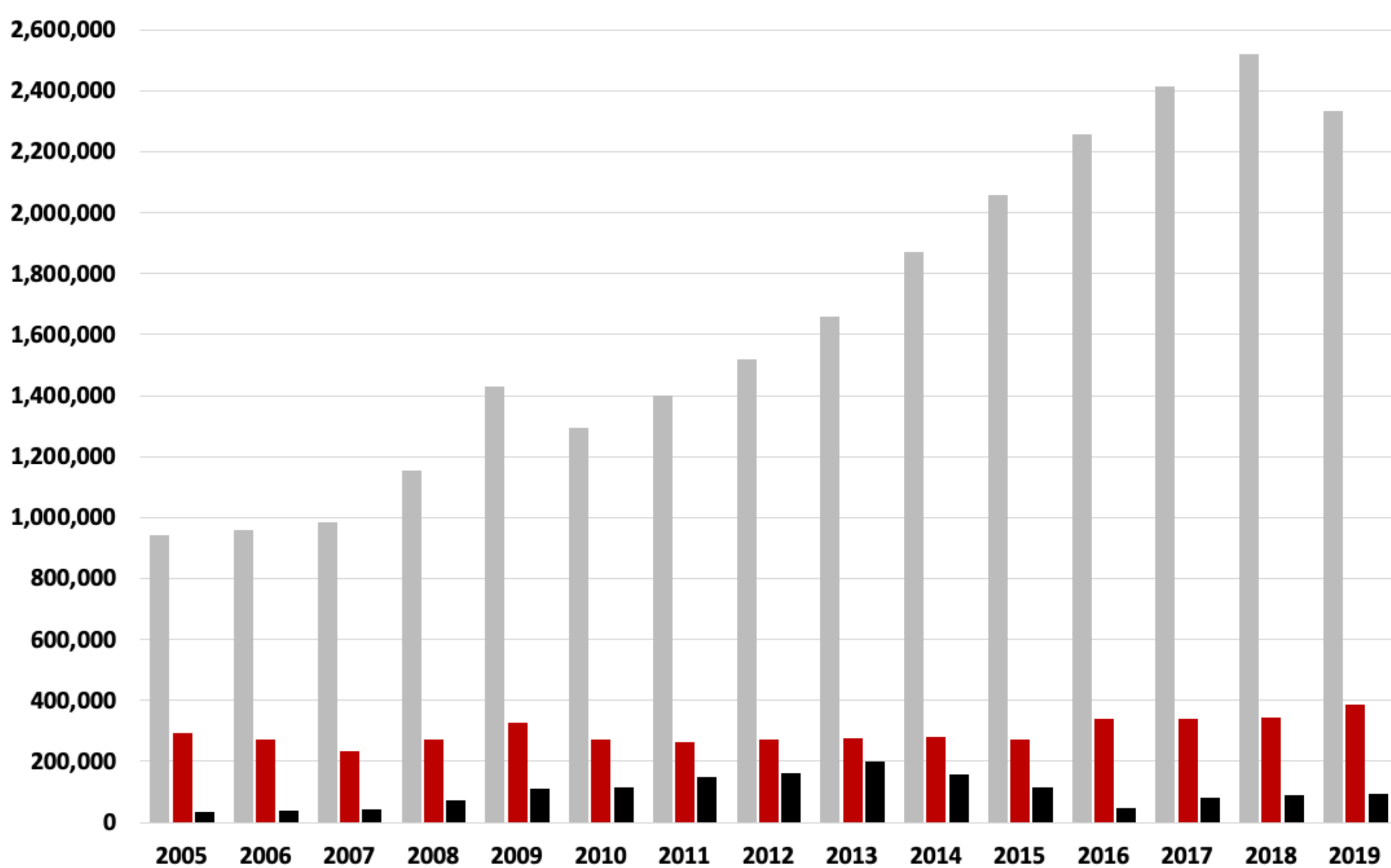
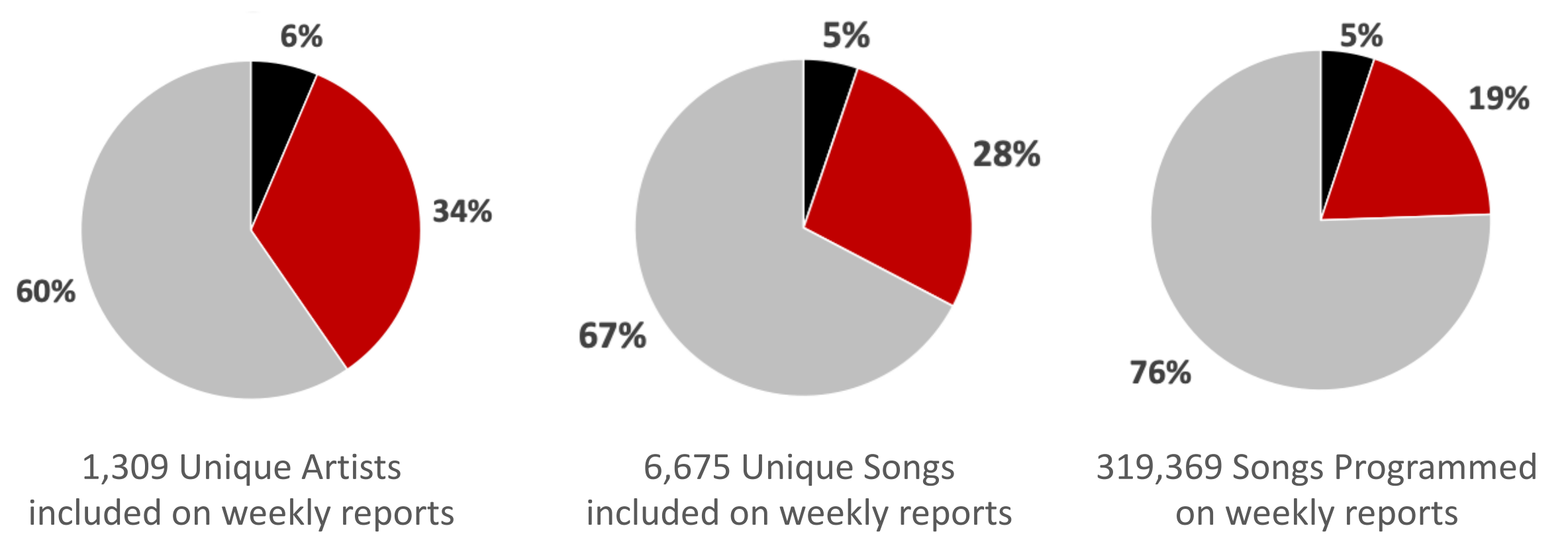
### Findings

The data-mining tool, [RapidMiner](#), was used to facilitate analysis of the 780 weekly reports downloaded from Mediabase. The following colour-scheme is observed here:



Male artists are privileged at every level of programming – from the number of unique artists with songs on radio, to the number of unique songs included on playlists, and finally to the number of times these songs are included on weekly playlists. Evaluating representation in this manner reveals that women and their songs are filtered out of radio when drilling deeper into the data.

The overwhelming majority of the artists (94.9%) played on Canadian country format radio are white, and they are responsible for 96.4% of the songs played. As a result, Black, Indigenous, Musicians of colour (especially women) are nearly absent from Canadian radio.



Looking at actual airplay (distribution of “spins”) enables us to evaluate how often songs are *heard* in daily programming. Over the course of this 15-year period, the number of spins increased 55%, corresponding to an increase in the number of reporting stations from 21 in 2005 to 36 by 2016. Taking the increase in the number of reporting stations into consideration, spins increase 22% (meaning 33% of the increase is due to the number of stations), with a 30.7% increase for songs by men, a 29.2% decrease in those for women, and a 40.5% increase for male female ensembles. By 2019, male artists received 85% of the annual spins, with 11% for female artists – most of whom are programmed in the overnights. Thus even though there are more spins for songs by women by 2019, the spins are spread across *more* stations, and decrease on individual reporting stations.

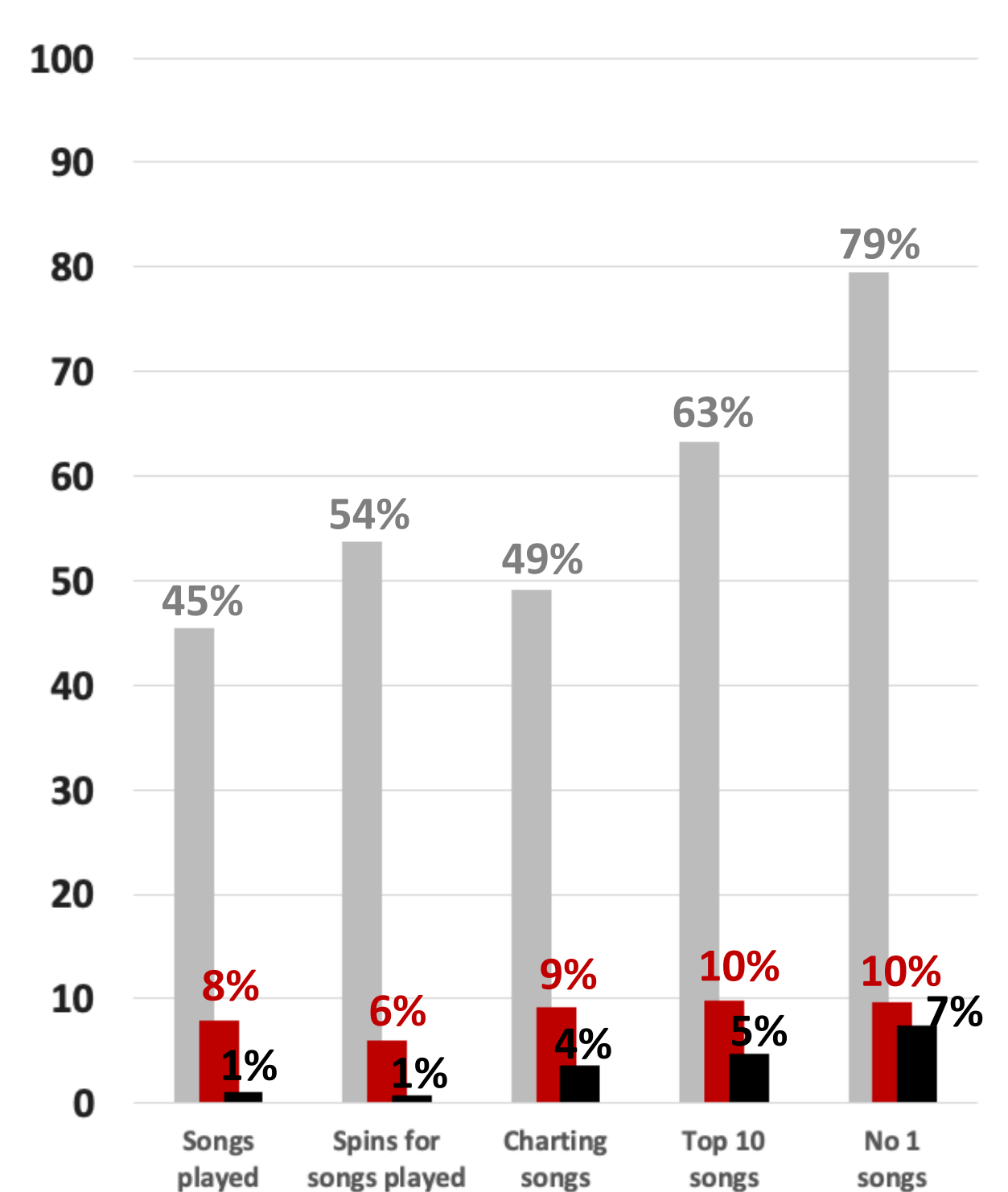
Given that there are so few songs by Black, Indigenous, Musicians of colour, it follows, then, that their songs often receive fewer spins than white artists. Even though there was an increase in spins for artists of colour, from less than 1% in 2005 to 8.3% by 2019, these spins have gone almost exclusively to songs by male artists.

Forty-four percent of the songs played on Canadian country format radio are by Canadian artists, but they receive just 38.2% of the airplay – just *slightly* more than the 35% Canadian content programming requirement.

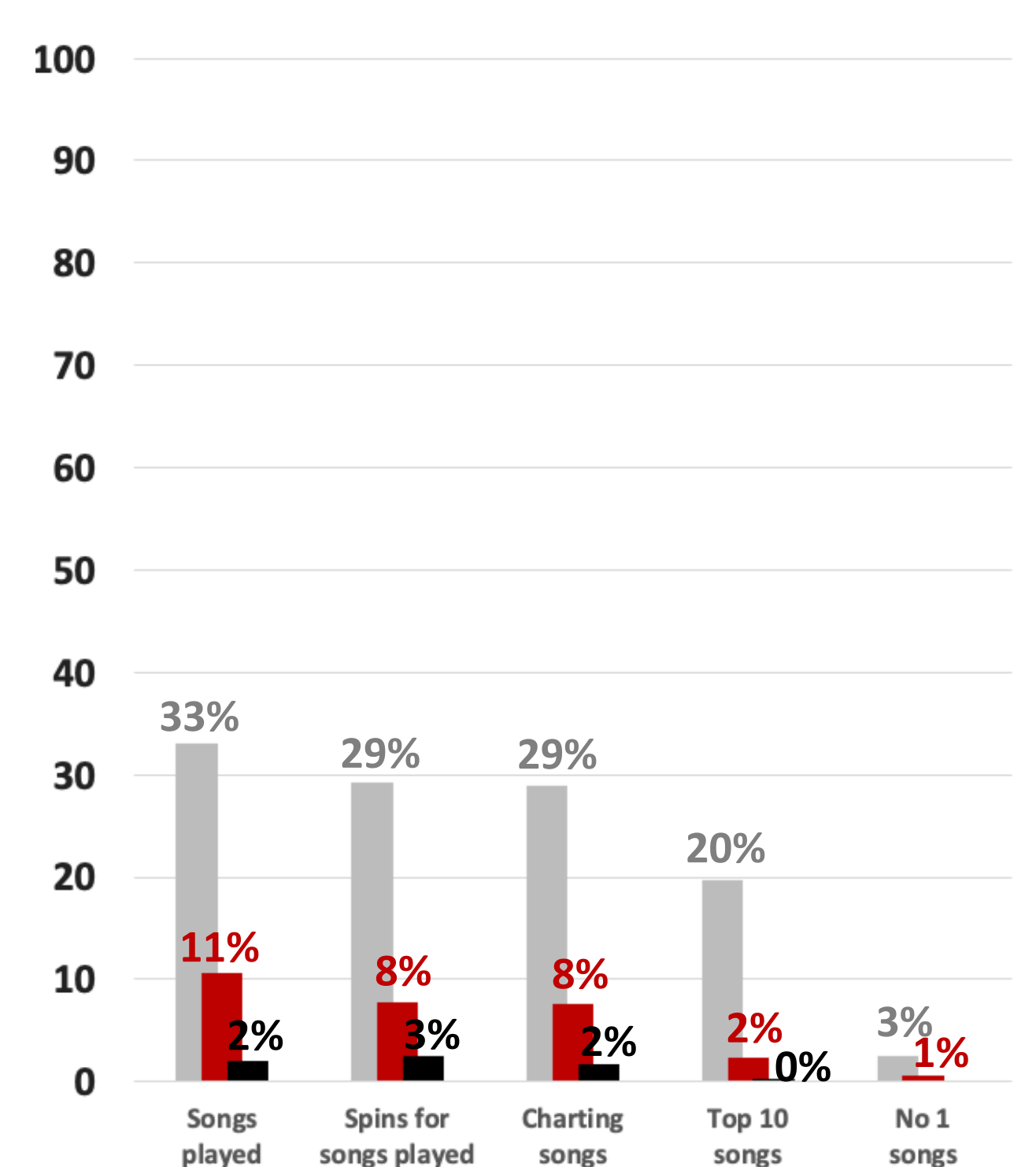
White, non-Canadian male artists are privileged on the format. They receive the most weekly airplay, which means that they chart the most songs, have the most Top 10 songs, and are responsible for most of the No. 1 songs.

Even though representation of *Canadian* women increases over the course of this period, all women are so drastically under-programmed that they are filtered out of the top positions of the weekly charts.

Just 14 Black, Indigenous, Musicians of colour have enough airplay throughout this period for their songs to be heard in daytime hours – only 4 of whom are women. As a result, artists of colour are underrepresented on the weekly charts and women are nearly erased from charting culture. A woman of colour has not charted in Canada since 2015.



Percentage of songs by *non-Canadians* artists played on Canadian country format radio, and their representation on Canadian airplay charts.



Percentage of songs by *Canadians* artists played on Canadian country format radio, and their representation on Canadian airplay charts.

This study highlights a feedback loop that has slowly eliminated opportunities (in the form of daily airplay) for female artists and gradually erases them from the industry's ecosystem. Women of colour are most impacted by this practice; with less than 1% of the overall airplay between January 2005 and December 2019, Black, Indigenous, Women of colour are erased from the Canadian format and have no opportunity for exposure. This type of gendered and racially motivated programming is culturally damaging and continues to perpetuate the white, male, heteronormative discourse that pervades country music's narrative and culture.

### Discussion



#### QUESTIONS?

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