



## Introduction

- One reason default effects occur is because DMs interpret defaults as recommendations, sometimes called the “endorsement” mechanism (McKenzie et al., 2006; Jachimowicz et al., 2019).
- Default effects are typically measured by comparing choices in an Option A default condition to choices in an Option B default condition. This masks a potential asymmetry: one default may affect choice more than the other.
- Studies that have included forced-choice conditions suggest that this asymmetry may be commonplace (e.g., Johnson and Goldstein, 2003; Pichert and Katsikopoulos, 2008).
- **Asymmetry may occur when defaulting into one option conveys a new endorsement by running counter to DMs' expectations, while the other option may convey little or no new information.**

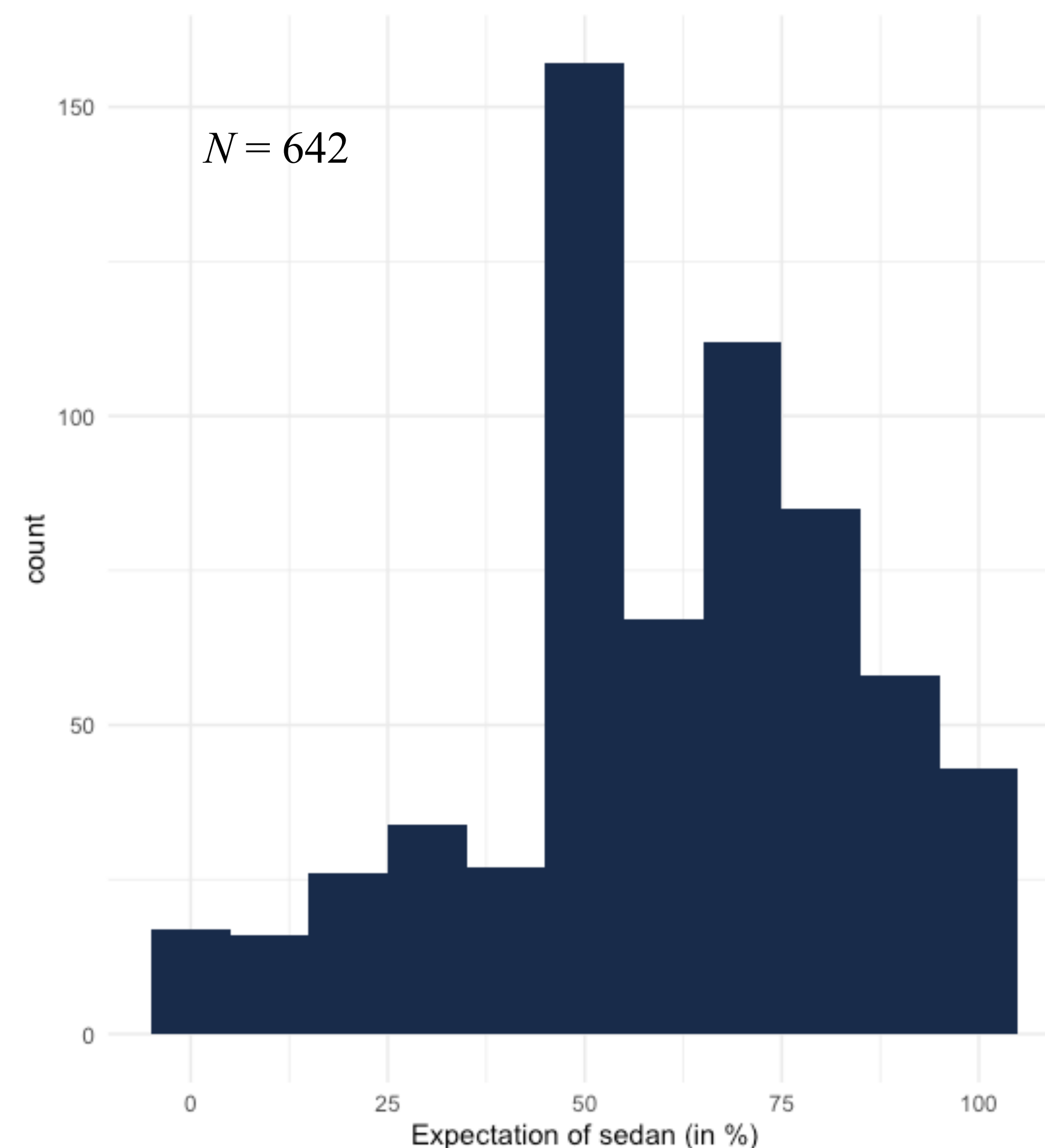
## Research Questions

**Q1:** Do people hold expectations about which option will be set as a default in a given scenario?

**Q2:** If so, do defaults result in larger effects relative to forced choice when they are the *unexpected* default?

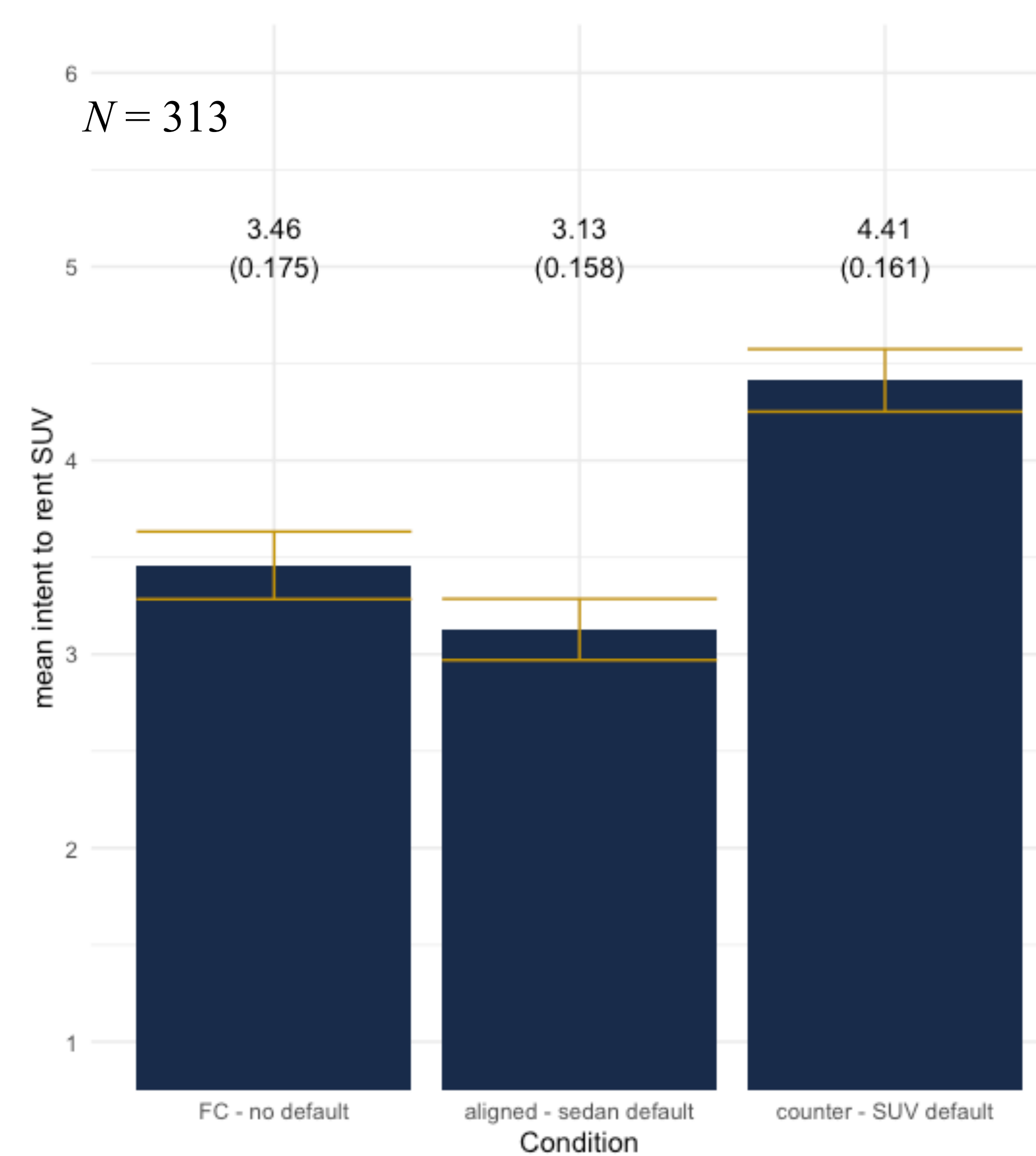
## Expectation Pre-test

- 642 student Ps were asked to imagine arriving at a vehicle rental company that offered either sedans or small SUVs
- Ps were asked for their best estimate of the probability the rental company had set each type of vehicle as the default. Responses were forced to sum to 100% and options were counterbalanced.
- Mean expectation for receiving a sedan was greater than 50% in a one-sample t-test ( $t(641) = 11.79, p < .001, \bar{x}_{\text{sedan}} = 61.1\%$ )
- **Ps generally expect the sedan to be the default**



## Methods

- Using the same vignette as the pre-test, 313 Ps on Prolific were asked to imagine arriving at a rental company that offered either sedan or small SUVs
- Ps were randomly assigned to one of three conditions:
  - No default (FC)
  - Sedan default (aligned with most expectations)
  - SUV default (counter to most expectations)
- Ps were asked to report their intent to rent either vehicle on a six-point scale



## Results

- By comparing choices in the sedan default condition with choices in the the SUV default condition, we find a standard default effect ( $t(246) = 5.81, p < .001, d = .73, 95\% \text{ CI } [.48, .99]$ )
- When comparing to FC condition, there is a significant effect of SUV default ( $p < .001$ ), but no effect of sedan default ( $p = .15$ ) in a simple linear regression, resulting in an “asymmetric” default effect
- When mean of FC (3.46) is subtracted from responses in default conditions to get a measure of *mean difference from FC*, a t-test reveals a highly significant difference on the differences ( $t(215) = 2.71, p < .001$ )

## Conclusions

- In a hypothetical scenario, participants had strong, directional expectations about which option would be set as the default.
- When separate participants were shown the same scenario but informed they were being defaulted into various options, **the default only significantly affected choice when it was counter to the participants' expectations. This may be because unexpected defaults convey more information to DMs than expected defaults.**

## References

1 - Jachimowicz, J. M., Duncan, S., Weber, E. U., & Johnson, E. J. (2019). When and why defaults influence decisions: A meta-analysis of default effects. *Behavioural Public Policy*, 3(2), 159-186.

2 - Johnson, E. J., & Goldstein, D. (2003). Do defaults save lives?. *Science*, 302(5649), 1338-1339.

3 - McKenzie, C. R. M., Liersch, M. J., & Finkelstein, S. R. (2006). Recommendations implicit in policy defaults. *Psychological Science*, 17(5), 414-420.

4 - Pichert, D., & Katsikopoulos, K. V. (2008). Green defaults: Information presentation and pro-environmental behaviour. *Journal of environmental psychology*, 28(1), 63-73.