# Sexism as a Predictor of Political Attitudes and Voting Behaviour. A Systematic Review

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**Abstract**

The election of Donald Trump in 2016 inspired sudden interest in the association between voters' sexism and voting behaviour. Existing research shows that sexism may be a stronger predictor of political attitudes and voting behaviour than a voter's gender. To what extent do the findings from the US presidential elections apply to other contexts and research questions? To answer this question, we present a systematic review of studies focusing on sexism as a predictor of political attitudes and voting behaviour. In two databases (Scopus and Web of Science), we identify 97 relevant studies, including 42 on the 2016 US presidential elections. The review shows that particularly modern and hostile sexism played a role in Trump's election. However, few other research questions have been answered with similar certainty. Our review discovers gaps in the literature and proposes further directions for this growing research field. To enable future comparative research, we discuss best practices for measuring sexism and show the variety of ways in which sexism is operationalized.

**Keywords** ambivalent sexism, modern sexism, political attitudes, voting behaviour

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# 1 Introduction

In the recent years, gender and gender equality have become key factors shaping political competition (Abou-Chadi, Breyer, and Gessler 2021). The election of Donald Trump in 2016 inspired sudden interest in sexism as a predictor of political attitudes and voting behaviour. The literature suggests that the 'sexism gap' in voting may be even more relevant than the 'gender gap' (Hanley 2021). Some recent papers have found that sexism plays an important role not only in Trump's success but also in the surge of far-right parties (Anduiza and Rico 2024), and predicts attitudes towards abortion (Baker, McClelland, and Jozkowski 2022) and ethnic minorities (McMahon and Kahn 2018), among other outcomes.

The aim of this paper is to take stock of this quickly growing literature and identify its current limits. We present a systematic literature review of 97 quantitative studies, which use surveys to investigate respondents' sexism as a predictor of political attitudes and voting behaviour. We follow the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Moher et al. 2009) and aim at reproducibility of the process.

This review clarifies what questions are asked and where the answers are sought. We start with a presentation of the theoretical concepts of sexism and their respective expected consequences. We show that most studies focus on the US. The most robust results reflect the association between the hostile or modern sexism and vote for far-right candidates or opposition to female candidates and gender equality policies. Then, we summarize the findings and proposed mechanisms behind the associations of sexism with political attitudes and voting behaviour. We provide a list of countries, datasets, concepts, and items used in each paper in Supplementary Material table (Gulczyński 2025). In Supplementary Material section 1, we show that scholars use a large variety of

measures and we discuss the operationalization choices. In the Conclusions, we identify best practices and gaps in the literature, and propose directions for future research.

## 2 Theoretical background

What is sexism and how do we measure it? Many studies included in this review refer to the early Attitudes toward Women Scale (AWS) (Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp 1973). It aimed at measuring attitudes from "the most traditional" to "the most contemporary, profeminist." However, the literature clearly distinguishes sexism from attitudes toward women or traditional gender attitudes (e.g., Bock, Byrd-Craven, and Burkley 2017). Sexism is understood as "attitudes related to potential prejudice toward the opposite sex" and gender attitudes are "attitudes related to what are perceived as acceptable gender roles or gender expression" (Christley 2022). Sexism is also different from gender stereotypes (descriptive beliefs about characteristics and behaviours) in that it includes both descriptive and prescriptive beliefs about and attitudes toward women's (and men's) characteristics and behaviours, and the treatment of women (and men) (Swim and Campbell 2003). Sexism toward women is usually more common among men, heterosexuals and people with less education (Cowie, Greaves, and Sibley 2019; Bareket and Fiske 2023). The current operationalization of sexism relies on three sets of scales that were simultaneously developed in response to the changing social reality: modern sexism, neosexism, and ambivalent sexism (see Table 1 for examples of items).

As overt expressions of prejudice became less acceptable, scholars developed new scales. By analogy to modern racism (McConahay 1986) scale, modern sexism contains three parts: "denial of continued discrimination, antagonism toward women's demands, and lack of support for policies designed to help women" (Swim et al. 1995). Thus, instead of prescription (what women's roles should be in the society), modern sexism focuses on the

Table 1: Examples of items for the main sexism concepts.

| Concept | Item |
|---|---|
| **Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI)** | |
| **Benevolent Sexism** | |
| Protective Paternalism | Women should be cherished and protected by men. |
| Complementary Gender Differentiation | Women have a superior moral sensibility. |
| Heterosexual Intimacy | Men are incomplete without women. |
| **Hostile Sexism** | |
| | Women seek to gain power by getting control over men. |
| | Women exaggerate problems (they have) at work. |
| **Ambivalence toward Men Inventory (AMI)** | |
| **Benevolent Sexism** | |
| Maternalism | Men are mainly useful to provide financial security for women. |
| Complementary Gender Differentiation | Men are less likely to fall apart in emergencies than women are. |
| Heterosexual Intimacy | A woman will never be truly fulfilled in life if she doesn't have a committed, long-term relationship with a man. |
| **Hostile Sexism** | |
| Resentment of Paternalism | Men will always fight to have greater control in society than women. |
| Compensatory Gender Differentiation | When it comes down to it, most men are really like children. |
| Heterosexual Hostility | Most men sexually harass women, even if only in subtle ways, once they are in a position of power over them. |
| **Modern Sexism** | |
| Denial of Continuing Discrimination | Discrimination against women is no longer a problem in [the country]. |
| Antagonism toward Women's Demands | It is easy to understand the anger of women's groups in [the country]. |
| Resentment about Special Favors for Women | It is rare to see women treated in a sexist manner in the media. |
| **Neosexism** | |
| | Discrimination against women in the labor force is no longer a problem in [the country]. |
| | Women's requests in terms of equality between the sexes are simply exaggerated. |
| | Due to social pressures, firms frequently have to hire underqualified women. |

perception of women's current situation.

The neosexism scale by Tougas et al. (1995) is based on the same idea, with goal of identifying a form of sexism that better predicts political attitudes. They define neosexism as a "manifestation of a conflict between egalitarian values and residual negative feelings toward women," in contrast with the old-fashioned sexism ("a prejudicial attitude or discriminatory behaviour based on the presumed inferiority or difference of women as a group (Cameron 1977, p. 340)"). Even though Campbell, Schellenberg, and Senn (1997) found neosexism to have better internal reliability, stronger gender differences, and predict political attitudes better, neosexism has been used in only one later study (Calvert, Evans, and Pathak 2022). Similarly, we do not find any study using the "old-fashioned" sexism scales by Rombough and Ventimiglia (1981) or Swim et al. (1995).

While modern sexism and neosexism "focus on current gender-related political issues," Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) was designed to measure egalitarianism and traditionalism directly (Glick and Fiske 1996). ASI consists of two scales of 11 items each: benevolent and hostile sexism. Glick and Fiske (1996) regard sexism as "a special case of prejudice marked by a deep ambivalence, rather than a uniform antipathy, toward women." Unlike the modern sexism and neosexism scales, ASI assumes that ambivalent attitudes toward women are based on the traditional relations between women and men and their interdependence, i.e., men's structural power and women's dyadic power, rather than on the reaction toward recent egalitarian movements and social changes. The idea behind benevolent sexism was that some people may be sexist, while still having a positive attitude toward women or hold positive stereotypes about women. While hostile sexism reflects the competition for dominance between women and men, benevolent sexism "facilitates cooperation through its appeal to both men and women because it allows men to enjoy a privileged position while maintaining a positive image as women's protectors." (Bareket

and Fiske 2023). Both types of sexism help to restrict social roles and maintain the gendered hierarchy.

The benevolent and hostile sexism are theoretically based on three dimensions: paternalism (protective and dominative, respectively), gender differentiation (complementary and competitive), and heterosexual intimacy and hostility. Glick and Fiske (1996) find that hostile sexism is unidimensional, but benevolent sexism should be interpreted as consisting of those three dimensions.

Importantly, Glick and Fiske (1999) almost simultaneously constructed the Ambivalence toward Men Inventory (AMI). AMI resembles ASI in that it includes hostile and benevolent attitudes toward men. Although benevolence toward men has a similar background as hostile sexism (i.e., positive attitudes toward men and negative toward women), and both of them are similar to benevolent sexism in that they justify the male dominance, AMI offers additional information. Glick and Fiske (1999) interpret hostility toward men (net from its correlation with benevolence toward men) as resentment of patriarchy, i.e., an opposition to male dominance, which should not be correlated with the remaining three measures.

So far, we have discussed measures and concepts based on survey responses. Some recent studies call them 'explicit sexism' and compare with 'implicit sexism' understood as an unconscious bias against women. The latter is measured with evaluative priming (Calvert, Evans, and Pathak 2022), Implicit Association Test (IAT, Gothreau, Arceneaux, and Friesen 2022) or Go/No-Go Association Task (GNAT, Britzman and Mehić-Parker 2023), which rely on the rapidness of respondent's reaction. Importantly, Britzman and Mehić-Parker (2023) differentiate between benevolent and hostile implicit sexism.

The operationalization of sexism rarely repeats across studies. "The discipline appears to have not settled on how to best measure such attitudes" (Schaffner 2022a), which has

recently led to advanced methodological debates (e.g., Archer and Clifford 2022; Gothreau, Arceneaux, and Friesen 2022; Holman 2023; Oceno, Valentino, and Wayne 2023; Schaffner 2022a). The Supplementary Material table presents items used to measure sexism in each of the studies covered by this review and the main findings of each study (Gulczyński 2025). We summarize and discuss the variety of operationalization decisions in Supplementary Material section 1, including the choice of concepts and scale construction.

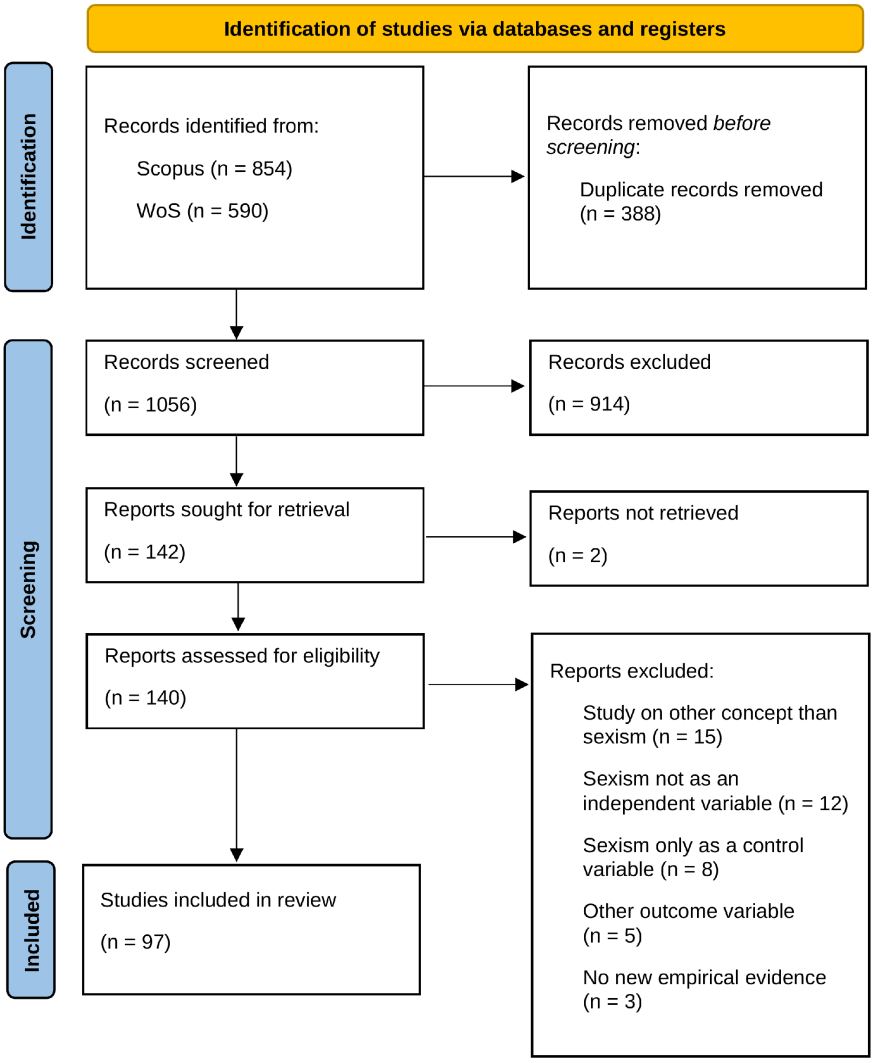
# 3 Method

We searched for records that include words 'sexism' or 'sexist' and one of the following: political attitudes, political values, political orientation, political behaviour, political preferences, political, policy or party preferences, party choice, vote, election or candidate in their title, abstract or keywords (see Supplementary Material section 2 for the exact search terms).

We conducted the search on 11th February 2024 and updated it on 4th March. We found 854 publications in Scopus and 590 in Web of Science. After the removal of duplicates (in Zotero), 1056 unique publications remained for screening. We analysed titles and abstracts to identify quantitative studies based on surveys that used sexism as predictors of political attitudes or voting behaviour. We excluded papers that used other types of data or focused on other settings than political attitudes and voting behaviour such as, for instance, support for female leaders at work. We did not exclude any papers based on language. 142 publications passed this stage. We could not access 2 studies despite reaching out to the authors.

We analysed full texts of the remaining 140 publications. At this stage, we excluded 43 studies (Figure 1). In 15 of them the gender-related concept under study was not sexism, 12 studied only correlates, means or predictors of sexism, 8 used sexism only as a control

Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram. Template from Page et al. (2021).



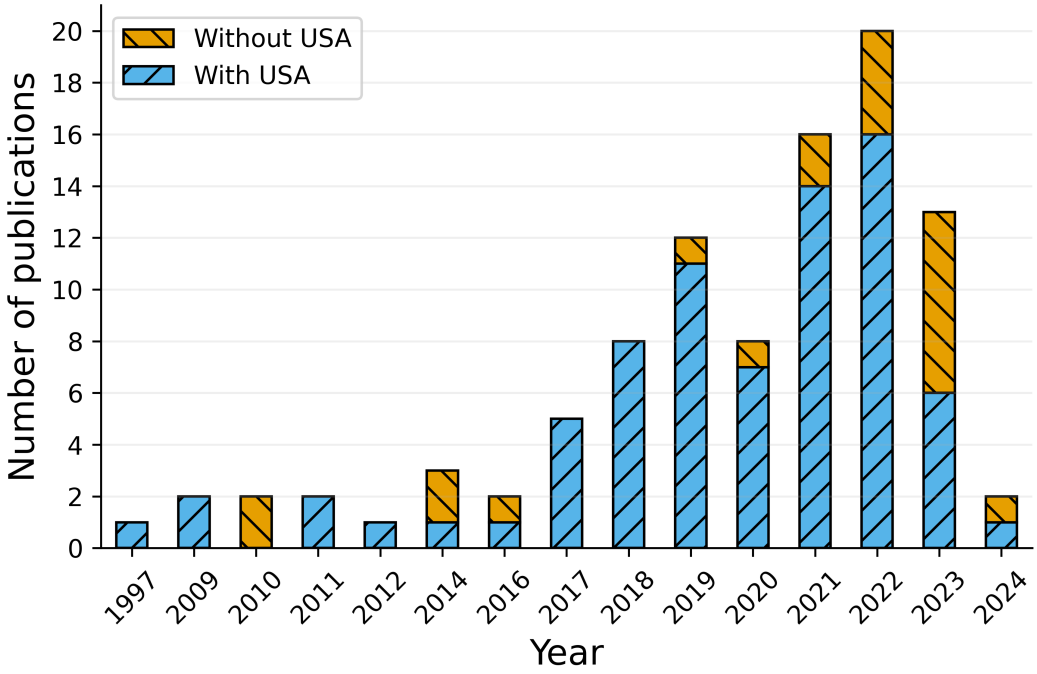

variable, 5 did not have any relevant outcome variable, and 3 did not present any new empirical evidence.

The remaining 97 papers were published in peer-reviewed journals (including 1 in Russian and 1 in Spanish). We extracted information on: country under study, date of the study, type of elections (if applicable), dependent variables, sexism concepts, survey items used to measure sexism, main findings, and theoretical mechanisms proposed to link sexism with the outcome variables (if relevant). We present the full list of studies and extracted information in Supplementary Material table (Gulczyński 2025).

# 4 Quantitative results

The 2016 US election resulted in a sudden increase of interest in sexism as a predictor of political attitudes and voting behaviour. A female candidate ran for president for the first time, and her competitor expressed sexist attitudes. The American National Election Study (ANES) of 2016 included a battery of items on hostile and modern sexism. Cooperative (Congressional) Election Study (CCES) followed with questions on sexism asked in 2018, providing further data on the US politics. In consequence, although only 13 studies in this review were published until 2016, 84 studies appeared after 2016 (Figure 2). In total, 39 studies focus on Donald Trump or otherwise on the presidential elections of 2016.

Figure 2: Numbers of publications included in the review by year of publication.




Furthermore, 75 papers study USA only, followed by New Zealand (3), Australia, Canada, Spain and UK (2 each). Only 3 publications use data from more than one country. Lodders and Weldon (2019) compare Germany, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland;

Beauregard, Holman, and Sheppard (2022) study Australia and USA; and Shortell and Valdini (2023) study Poland and Thailand. Other countries appear only once in single-country studies: Brazil, Catalonia, Chile, Italy, Japan, Korea, Russia, and Sweden. The focus on USA is largely driven by data availability. To measure sexism, 57 publications use original surveys, 26 studies use ANES and 10 studies use CCES. Only 3 studies use a panel survey, i.e., several data points on each respondent (Anduiza and Rico 2024; Huang et al. 2016; Sibley and Perry 2010).

The concept of hostile sexism was used in 61 publications, followed by benevolent and modern sexism with 37 publications each. Among them, 36 papers study both hostile and benevolent sexism (i.e., ambivalent sexism), 12 study modern and benevolent sexism, and only 3 use the three kinds of sexism as explanatory variables. Furthermore, 5 studies do not specify what kind of sexism they measure, 4 studies use a single joint measure of ambivalent sexism (instead of or along hostile and benevolent sexism), 4 studies measure implicit sexism, 2 use traditional sexism, and 2 use neosexism. Finally, 1 study uses Separate Sphere Ideology "as an alternative measure of sexism" (Bai 2021) and 1 study introduces the concepts of politically and domestically defined sexism (Bracic, Israel-Trummel, and Shortle 2019).

Only 2 studies included in the review use the Ambivalence toward Men Inventory (AMI). A likely reason was that the original scale did not include the word "sexism." So, we carried out another search with "ambivalen* toward men" instead of "sexis*" and did not find any additional publication relating AMI with political attitudes or behaviour.

# 5 What does sexism predict and why?

## 5.1 US presidential elections

Out of 97 studies in this review, 39 focus on Trump or the 2016 US presidential election due to the salience of sexism and the availability of nationally representative surveys with items from sexism scales (ANES and CCES). The main theoretical explanation for the electoral relevance of sexist attitudes is the increased salience of gender due to women running for an office (Dwyer et al. 2009), which is a challenge to the status quo (Barnello, Bitecofer, and Kidd 2019). This effect was likely reinforced by Trump's sexist or paternalist rhetoric (e.g., Frasure-Yokley 2018; Schaffner, Macwilliams, and Nteta 2018).

The literature leaves no doubt that voters' sexism played an important role in Trump's success. Most studies find that voters high in hostile (Blair 2017; Bock, Byrd-Craven, and Burkley 2017; Monteith and Hildebrand 2020; Oceno, Valentino, and Wayne 2023; Ratliff et al. 2019; Schaffner 2022b; Schaffner, Macwilliams, and Nteta 2018) or modern sexism (Godbole, Malvar, and Valian 2019; Lytle et al. 2018; Monteith and Hildebrand 2020; Pahlke, Bigler, and Patterson 2018; Setzler and Yanus 2018; Valentino, Wayne, and Oceno 2018) were more likely to vote for or be favourable toward Trump (or against Clinton). Similar measures –such as "politically defined sexism," ambivalent sexism or attitudes toward gender roles (Bracic, Israel-Trummel, and Shortle 2019; Blair 2017; Bock, Byrd-Craven, and Burkley 2017; Hanley 2021)– also show a positive association with support for Trump although not necessarily among non-voters (Medenica and Fowler 2021).

Glick (2019) expected that not only hostile, but also benevolent sexism should predict support for Trump because both attitudes "stem from male dominance." Indeed, Cassidy and Krendl (2019) find weaker opposition to Trump among benevolent sexists, but only in two small samples of students. Yet, most studies show that benevolent sexism did not

explain voting behaviour and attitudes in that election, after controlling for hostile sexism (Blair 2017; Bock, Byrd-Craven, and Burkley 2017; Monteith and Hildebrand 2020; Ratliff et al. 2019; Shook et al. 2020). If benevolent sexism had any impact, it was positive for Clinton in terms of favourability (Glick 2019) and competence evaluation (Cassidy and Krendl 2019). Cassese and Holman (2019) show that benevolent sexists reacted to Trump's hostile sexism with more support for Clinton.

The studies on the effects of sexism in earlier US presidential elections vary in their conclusions. According to Valentino, Wayne, and Oceno (2018), "modern sexism did not predict vote for Democratic candidates before Clinton." Yet, others find positive effects of sexism on voting for Romney (Simas and Bumgardner 2017, measuring denial of discrimination, and Calvert, Evans, and Pathak 2022, measuring neosexism). In a small local survey with full ASI scale Spencer (2021) finds significant effects of benevolent sexism in 2008 and 2012 and of hostile sexism in 2016 and 2020. Dwyer et al. (2009) did not find evidence for any relationship between modern sexism and evaluations of Barack Obama and Sarah Palin. In turn, benevolent and hostile sexism was positively associated with support for Palin because she obeyed traditional gender roles, while hostile sexism was negatively associated with voting for Clinton because she challenged the traditional roles (Gervais and Hillard 2011). Clinton's support in 2012 was particularly strongly related to modern sexism, due to a strong support from people low in modern sexism (McThomas and Tesler 2016). Interestingly, Tate (2014) finds that support for Barack Obama and Joe Biden against John McCain and Sarah Palin in 2008 was predicted by the "resentment of paternalism" (hostile attitudes toward men net of benevolent attitudes toward men) in a student sample, which she interprets as a desire to change the status quo. Although implicit sexism is a significant factor, the role of explicit sexism may be larger (Calvert, Evans, and Pathak 2022).

What explains these patterns? Female politicians may be punished by sexist voters because they violate traditional gender roles. For hostile sexists, the reason is the "disdain for an already established, agentic woman" (Bock, Byrd-Craven, and Burkley 2017) combined with a perception that they are less electable (Franks 2021). Furthermore, women's sex is not congruent with the stereotypical image of leaders (Barnello, Bitecofer, and Kidd 2019; Godbole, Malvar, and Valian 2019): while Palin was not a stereotypical leader, Clinton was not stereotypically feminine (Gervais and Hillard 2011). Although Clinton did not obey traditional gender roles, Trump's attacks on her may have activated protective paternalism among benevolent sexists (Cassese and Holman 2019).

Modern sexists may perceive Clinton's career "as a result of riding her husband's coattails." (McThomas and Tesler 2016). They are also less likely to vote for Biden when reminded of Harris (Filindra and Fagan 2022). However, a similar effect of attitudes on traditional gender roles and modern sexism has been found for the choice between Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump (Long, Dawe, and Suhay 2022), which suggests that Clinton's sex and gender role congruence is not the sole factor driving the effects of sexism. Voters high in modern sexism also expressed more negative age stereotypes about Clinton because women are perceived as older earlier than men, and negative stereotypes about ageing may increase the impact of sexism (Lytle et al. 2018). Similar to hostile sexism (Cassese and Holman 2019), modern sexism mobilised voters (Maxwell 2021), via anger rather than fear (Valentino, Wayne, and Oceno 2018). The effects of modern sexism on support for Trump was higher among voters who believed in the American civil religion (Hickel and Murphy 2022). However, people low in modern sexism (i.e., perceiving discrimination of women as a serious problem) are likely to "view Clinton as a member of an oppressed group," particularly after Trump's negative campaign (Pahlke, Bigler, and Patterson 2018). Ferguson et al. (2020) estimate that, in the general elections, Trump may have lost

more votes due to modern sexism than he gained.

The impact of sexism varies by race and education, but not so much by gender. Hostile and modern sexism were significant predictors of support for Trump vote among white voters (Bracic, Israel-Trummel, and Shortle 2019; Cassese and Barnes 2019; Frasure-Yokley 2018; Hanley 2021; Schaffner, Macwilliams, and Nteta 2018), both in South and non-South states (Maxwell 2021), but not among Latinxs or women of colour (Frasure-Yokley 2018; Hickel and Deckman 2022). Hanley (2021) finds that sexism is more relevant among college educated than less educated whites. Cassese and Barnes (2019) claim that Trump's increased support among white women without college education may have stemmed from their higher levels of hostile sexism and lack of perceived discrimination. They interpret sexism as a belief justifying systemic inequalities (Benegal and Holman 2021; Cassese and Barnes 2019). The effects of sexism were similar among men and women (Hanley 2021; Setzler and Yanus 2018) or even stronger among women (Cassese and Barnes 2019; Glick 2019; Lemi 2022). Knuckey (2019) finds stronger effects of traditional sexism among women and of modern sexism among men.

Studies consistently show that (modern) sexism did not substantially influence the support for Trump in primary elections (Buyuker et al. 2021; Ferguson et al. 2020; Long, Dawe, and Suhay 2022; Maxwell 2021). As right-leaning voters had many other reasons to support Trump, hostile sexism mattered more among left-leaning voters (Rothwell, Hodson, and Prusaczyk 2019). Hostile sexism decreased probability of voting for female candidates and their perceived electability in Democratic primaries (Franks 2021), including Clinton against Bernie Sanders, but not against Obama (Long, Dawe, and Suhay 2022).

Sexism remained influential as a predictor of support for Trump in later elections (Godbole et al. 2022), but also had a negative effect on voter's evaluation of Elizabeth Warren and Kamala Harris (Filindra, Kaplan, and Buyuker 2021; Nelson 2021; Schaffner

2022a), and, more generally, female candidates in primary elections (Utych 2021).

## 5.2 Women in politics

Some conclusions based on the 2016 US presidential election can be extended to voters' candidate preferences in parliamentary and congressional elections. Hostile and modern sexism predict lower favorability of fictional female candidates (Winter 2023) and worse evaluation of real female candidates (Nelson 2021). This finding is easy to explain: hostile and modern sexism are defined and measured by attitudes to women who seek power and women's political demands. According to Ditonto (2019), voters high in modern sexism are less likely to vote for women because they seek less information about them. This is particularly important because female candidates may be also less covered by media (Lytle et al. 2018). Media coverage influences perceptions of female candidates in complex ways, depending on voter's level of sexism. Voters with moderate levels of hostile sexism (but not benevolent or extreme hostile sexism) react to negative media coverage with greater warmth and competence evaluations of female candidates because the coverage confirms their prior beliefs (Schlehofer et al. 2011). Furthermore, hostile sexism is negatively associated with the perception of women's electability, which may encourage voters to choose male candidates (Britzman and Mehić-Parker 2023; Franks 2021; Nelson 2021). Similarly, benevolent (sexist) attitudes toward men correlate positively with preference for male candidates. However, hostile attitudes toward men do not (Russo, Rutto, and Mosso 2014).

Yet, a competition between a woman and a man does not itself activate (modern) sexism as a predictor of candidate preference; it must be made salient (Hayes and Lawless 2022). Although people with low levels of hostile or benevolent sexism are more likely to vote for female candidates in real elections in Canada, the effects are substantially small

(Gareau-Paquette et al. 2024). Furthermore, appealing to sexist voters may lead to larger electoral losses than gains, particularly for Democratic candidates (Ferguson et al. 2020; Hayes and Lawless 2022).

Furthermore, the relationship between voter's sexism and candidate favourability is not only driven by candidate's sex, but also their views (Long, Dawe, and Suhay 2022). Utych (2021) and Bai (2021) find that sexism is a negative predictor of favourability of both female and male Democratic or liberal candidates, even among Democratic voters only or controlling for party affiliation and ideology. In turn, benevolent sexism positively predicts favourability (on a scale of 0 to 100) not only of Trump and Romney, but also Sanders, Biden, Harris, and Elizabeth Warren (Schaffner 2022a). The effect of benevolent sexism is moderated by leadership styles: both women and men with masculine styles are favoured by voters high in benevolent sexism (Winter 2023).

Sexist views are important also beyond electoral campaigns. Hostile sexism influences the perceptions of legislator's communication in complex ways (Costa 2021). Voters high in hostile sexism are less likely to punish politicians accused of sexual misconduct (Costa et al. 2020; Longdon and Banducci 2023). However, hostile sexists are more likely to punish female than male candidates for sex scandals (Barnes, Beaulieu, and Saxton 2020). In contrast, benevolent sexists are less tolerant of sexual scandals, regardless of the candidate's sex, likely because of their "group-based expectations about purity and morality" (Barnes, Beaulieu, and Saxton 2020). Also, sexism does not predict reactions to corruption scandals of male or female fictitious candidates (Barnes, Beaulieu, and Saxton 2020). Yet, Lee (2023) finds that hostile (but not benevolent) sexism predicted negative retrospective evaluations of the Korean president after her impeachment for corruption.

In a study on female judges, Shortell and Valdini (2023) find that "people with high levels of hostile [but not benevolent] bias against women are more likely to view women

as the potential saviors of the democracy" in Thailand, but not in Poland. They theorise that benevolent sexists perceive women as weak and incapable, but hostile sexists believe in both women's innate predispositions and potential power to save democracy.

## 5.3 Party preferences

The conclusions described above focus on specific (real or fictitious) persons, but they can be extended to support for parties and social movements. For instance, the impact of hostile sexism for the Republican party operates to a large extent via voters' opinions on Trump (Schaffner 2022b). Hostile sexism gained importance in the 2018 US parliamentary elections because less sexist voters shifted from the Republican to the Democratic Party (Schaffner 2022b). "Higher levels of modern sexism increased turnout among Republicans while lower levels of modern sexism increased turnout among Democrats" (Kam and Archer 2021). Simas and Bumgardner (2017) hypothesize that men who deny discrimination against women (modern sexists) could punish the Democratic Party for focusing too much on issues that "were not even problems."

Sexism is politically relevant also beyond the US. Both level and increase in modern sexism are a key factor shaping the vote for the Spanish far-right party Vox (Anduiza and Rico 2024). Hostile (but not benevolent) sexism is also associated with voting for the British Conservative Party after controlling for other political attitudes. However, the relationship between sexism and support for Brexit changes over time (De Geus, Ralph-Morrow, and Shorrocks 2022). Beauregard (2021) finds that hostile sexism is positively associated with women's and men's support for National Party and, negatively, Greens, but is not related to voting for Labor or Liberal parties in Australia. Lodders and Weldon (2019) find that the willingness to give men priority when jobs are scarce (which they interpret as benevolent sexism) does not predict support for radical right

parties in Germany, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland when controlling for anti-immigrant sentiment and authoritarian values.

What explains these associations? Lodders and Weldon (2019) theorize that, for sexist women, radical right parties may confirm their identity; for men, they also respond to the fear of losing resources in consequence of gender equality policies. Far-right parties also use gender-related narratives to attack Islam and immigrants (Anduiza and Rico 2024). In the eyes of voters, issue ownership, masculine appeals and the defence of traditional hierarchies and lifestyles may build a masculine or feminine gender identity of a party in the eyes of voters, or simply attract voters with high levels of sexism (Beauregard 2021; De Geus, Ralph-Morrow, and Shorrocks 2022).

## 5.4 Policy preferences

Sexism explains not only attitudes towards candidates and parties, but also specific policies. However, many questions have been studied only in one country.

A literature review by Osborne et al. (2022) shows that benevolent sexism plays a crucial role in explaining opposition to abortion because benevolent sexism implies "the reverence and protection reserved for women who conform to traditional gender roles including fulfilling the role of a sacrificial mother." The role of hostile sexism is unclear and may operate through the general opposition toward feminist demands and women's violation of traditional gender roles (Osborne and Davies 2009). In a series of studies conducted in the US and New Zealand, Osborne and Davies (2012) find an effect of hostile sexism only for elective abortion, Huang et al. (2014) only for traumatic abortion, and Huang et al. (2016) do not find any relationship. However, without controlling for benevolent sexism both hostile (Cizmar and Kalkan 2023; Prusaczyk and Hodson 2018) and modern sexism (Baker, McClelland, and Jozkowski 2022; Gothreau, Arceneaux, and

Friesen 2022) predict opposition to abortion. Gothreau, Arceneaux, and Friesen (2022) find that hostile sexism generally predicts opposition to abortion, but benevolent sexism only among women.

In a similar way, protective paternalism (part of benevolent sexism) influences US respondents' attitudes toward policies on ethnic equality: "reading about violence increased men's desire to protect women, which was then associated with less support for policies that benefit minorities, but only for white men" (McMahon and Kahn 2018). However, Smilan-Goldstein (2023) confirms the relationship between benevolent sexism and immigration attitudes only for white women. Hostile or modern sexism also "predicts xenophobia among radical and moderate right-wing voters" in Sweden (Jylhä, Rydgren, and Strimling 2022).

Sexism may be also relevant for policies affecting sexual minorities. In Canada, hostile sexism predicts opposition to adoption by same-sex couples among women and men, and benevolent sexism only among women (Rye and Meaney 2010). More generally, in the US, neosexism, modern or hostile sexism is associated with more negative attitudes toward sexual minorities (Campbell, Schellenberg, and Senn 1997; Bills and Hayes 2022).

Furthermore, benevolent sexism positively predicts support for policies protecting women from pay discrimination, but also opposition toward special support for girls in sports (Schaffner 2022a). In contrast, Gothreau, Arceneaux, and Friesen (2022) find that "modern sexism, not hostile, is related to less support for equal pay and paid leave policies." Americans with high level of hostile (but not modern) sexism are more likely to perceive discrimination against women and men as a zero-sum game (Ruthig et al. 2017). A crisis may raise the stakes and increase the opposition of men with high levels of sexism to gender equality policies due to their individual self-interest considerations (Druckman and Sharrow 2020).

Studies from various countries show that people high in benevolent sexism do not endorse women's demands for gender equality, but they support gender quotas (Batista Pereira and Porto 2020, for Brazil), particularly men (Miura, McElwain, and Kaneko 2023, for Japan). In turn, modern sexism or denial of discrimination decreases support for quota in Japan and Catalonia (Miura, McElwain, and Kaneko 2023; Verge and Tormos 2023), although calling quotas a "positive action" can reduce this effect (Verge and Tormos 2023). Using data from New Zealand, Sibley and Perry (2010) argue that the effect of benevolent sexism on negative attitudes toward gender-related policies operates indirectly via hostile sexism, but, for women, benevolent sexism also directly and positively affects those attitudes. Hostile sexism is negatively associated with liberal feminist ideology or identification in the US and Chile (Russell, Oswald, and Cotter 2024; Obreque Oviedo and Cárdenas Castro 2023). It also legitimates opposition to gender equality policies in the US (Sibley and Perry 2010). Hostile and modern sexists are generally less supportive of government spending on feminine issue areas like social services, education, and health and more supportive in the cases of law enforcement and defence in the US and Australia (Barnes and Cassese 2017; Beauregard, Holman, and Sheppard 2022).

Sexism may be also related to less obvious policy attitudes. Benegal and Holman (2021) argue that both sexism and climate change denialism are system justifying beliefs, i.e., they serve individuals to justify inequality. They claim that climate policies pose a threat to the capitalist order and are perceived as disproportionately impacting men. They find an association between sexism and climate change denial and opposition to climate policy, which Schaffner (2022a) confirms for hostile and benevolent sexism. However, benevolent and hostile sexism also predict approval of the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel (even after controlling for partisanship, ideology, and gender) (Schaffner 2022a), which does not seem to have any clear theoretical link to gender attitudes. In

contrast, Filindra, Kaplan, and Buyuker (2021) find no relationship between sexism and, stereotypically masculine, gun ownership (and related attitudes). However, these findings are likely to be specific to the US context.

Thus, the research on gendered policies highlights the importance of separating various types of sexism and complexity of the causal chains. While benevolent sexism may increase support for gender equality policies, hostile or modern sexism are associated with opposition to such measures. Interestingly, sexist attitudes are sometimes explained by other sexist attitudes. For instance, although support for feminist claims and affirmative action is, by definition, part of modern sexism, Gothreau, Arceneaux, and Friesen (2022) study it as a consequence of modern sexism. Modern (Archer and Kam 2020) and hostile sexism (Gothreau, Arceneaux, and Friesen 2022) predict negative attitudes toward the #MeToo movement, while benevolent sexism predicts support for #MeToo (Gothreau, Arceneaux, and Friesen 2022). Similarly, for Batista Pereira and Porto (2020), perceptions of discrimination and support for women's demands is a dependent variable explained by hostile and benevolent sexism. Sibley and Perry (2010) build a model, in which benevolent sexism is predicted by hostile sexism.

# 6 Limitations

For transparency, we clarify several limitations of this study. First, scholars use concepts similar to sexism or even interpret the same items as representing other concepts, such as gender attitudes, beliefs, consciousness, egalitarianism, essentialism, prejudice, stereotypes, values, attitudes toward women, perceptions of women, misogyny, traditional versus egalitarian sex roles, gender backlash or resentment, experience of discrimination or sexual harassment, hegemonic masculinity, and fear of gender favouritism. Sometimes the word "sexism" is used when gender ideology is measured (e.g., García-Sánchez et al. 2022).

Some studies focus on parts of the sexism scales described above, e.g., perception or denial of discrimination. Sexism is also used as part of broader concepts, such as Rape Culture Inventory (Johnson et al. 2021). If a study uses another name instead of sexism, it is not included in this review, even though the measures may be similar or equal to some included studies.

Second, we limited our search for dependent variables to political attitudes and voting behaviour. We did not include studies on values or orientations that may have political implications, e.g., religiousness, racism or social dominance orientation. We are aware of studies on political behaviour beyond voting (e.g., Inguanzo, Zhang, and Gil de Zúñiga 2021 on online content generation; Swank 2020 on anti-abortion activism). The inclusion of all possible search terms (like mobilization, protest, donations, running in elections, etc.) would exponentially inflate the number of studies, which do not use similar methods. Scholars interested in other outcomes predicted by ambivalent sexism may consult the systematic review by Bareket and Fiske (2023) with extensive thematic appendices.

Third, the search terms were calibrated only to find papers written or containing an abstract or keywords in English. The databases do not cover many journals lacking international outreach. In this way, we may have omitted studies in other languages. Nevertheless, our literature review includes some papers written in other languages.

# 7 Conclusions

The reviewed literature shows that sexism is often a statistically significant and substantially relevant predictor of political attitudes and behaviour. However, each kind of sexism has its specific meaning. It is clear that sexism played a role in the 2016 US Presidential election. Voters high in hostile and modern sexism are more likely to support Donald Trump. They are also less likely to support female candidates and gender equality policies.

These findings can be extended to support for right-wing and far-right parties in Western democracies, but also specific and not directly gender-related issues like opposition to climate policies.

In contrast, high levels of benevolent sexism may increase support for female politicians attacked in the campaign and gender equality policies, but they negatively influence abortion attitudes because abortion is not consistent with the stereotypical mother's role. Single studies focus on yet different concepts of sexism and numerous other dependent variables. For them, further research is needed to draw conclusions with sufficient certainty.

The main gap in the reviewed research is its limited geographical coverage. Most of the existing studies focus on the US and international comparisons or studies beyond Western democracies are nearly missing (see Supplementary Material table (Gulczyński 2025) for exceptions). Evidence on some dependent variables, e.g., on the support for female candidates or gender equality policies, is quite robust, but not yet accumulated in other contexts. Comparative studies based on the recently published 11th wave of the European Social Survey (ESS) could tell us what triggers sexism as a relevant factor in political behaviour and under what conditions. This is particularly relevant in studies on political parties and policy preferences, for which the associations are not obvious. Furthermore, it is well known that gender values and gender gaps in voting have been changing from one generation to another. Yet, we have not found any study focusing on differences in the political relevance of sexism by age group. Although there are studies dividing voters by race or education, we have not found any study focusing on social class or the rural-urban divide.

The second gap in the research refers to the political relevance of benevolent sexism. We demonstrate that it has a unique predictive value, distinct from hostile and modern sexism. According to Bareket and Fiske (2023), benevolent and hostile sexism should be

always both included in the regression. However, as can be seen in Appendices 1 and 2, almost half of the studies include only one type of sexism or do not clarify, which type they attempt to measure.

In contrast, findings for hostile and modern sexism are often similar and the question remains how to disentangle these two concepts. More broadly, the relationship between sexism and other similar concepts is often unclear both in theory building, and in the interpretation of empirical results (see Supplementary Material section 1 for discussion). As Gothreau, Arceneaux, and Friesen (2022) notice: scholars should "carefully consider the scales they choose and the accompanying underlying attitudes about women (. . . ) [A]re the items measuring a form of sexism motivated by antipathy toward women, opposition to gender equality, a motivation to maintain existing gender relations, or ideas about the moral superiority and purity of women?" The different concepts should be compared and theoretically and empirically disentangled. Further studies should clarify where the mechanisms are common for various gender-related attitudes, and where they are unique to a specific type of sexism.

We show that the existent research has used a large variety of questions (most importantly, from ANES) that are often different from those proposed in the ESS. We believe our literature review and the Appendices 1 and 2 will help scholars in discussing the comparability of results. To enable further comparisons, authors should always provide all the details of their data (including the exact item wording and scales used) and justify their choice of items, concepts and theories. If only one part of the scale is used, it may be better to use a narrow term, for instance, "denial of discrimination" or "protective paternalism." In any case, scholars should clearly justify their focus on a specific type of sexism and relate their theory to the chosen concept and measures.

A novel literature stream that focuses on the operationalization and measurement

issues provides important recommendations for future studies, including choice of items and naming conventions, which we discussed in Supplementary Material section 1. Further methodological studies could also answer to what extent different subscales and wordings of questions are comparable (following Schaffner 2022a and Archer and Clifford 2022) and how sexism measures are affected by an (un)even or large number of responses (in line with Holman 2023).

Finally, some scholars suggest that the scales need an update. The concerns are related both to the measurement (Archer and Clifford 2022; Holman 2023; Schaffner 2022a), and to the meaning of the concepts (De Geus, Ralph-Morrow, and Shorrocks 2022). For instance, Baker, McClelland, and Jozkowski (2022) adapted the modern sexism scale so that "e.g., 'husbands and wives' was revised to 'men and women'" and Batista Pereira and Porto (2020) modify the ASI scale to the less educated respondents in a Latin American country. As we have shown, many studies use items that do not come from the original scales. The popular sexism scales were developed around 20 years after the AWS, which was considered outdated. Since then, almost 30 years have already passed. Gender quota and other affirmative policies have become common, and many gender gaps are much smaller now than in 1990s. Even more, some gender gaps reversed (e.g., in education attainment), while some policies discriminating against men (e.g., in unequal retirement age or military obligations) have not yet been abolished in many countries. It requires further debate whether the perception of women's discrimination is equivalent for old and young or urban and rural men. For instance, a young men may find it difficult to admit that women do not have equal opportunities if nowadays, on average, women are much more likely to get a college degree or migrate from rural to urban areas (Gulczyński 2023). So far, there are only two studies that use the Ambivalence toward Men Inventory, which can be interpreted as the other side of sexism. As Anduiza and Rico (2024) say,

"[a]lthough sexism can technically be directed toward both sexes, it is mostly directed toward women because of existing sexual hierarchies." However, the gendered reality is changing and we should consider whether benevolent and hostile attitudes toward men do not capture another relevant dimension of voters' attitudes.

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