

Occupational Gender Composition and Gender Backlash Attitudes

Cross-National Evidence from ESS Round 11

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Gender Backlash - ESS 11

“In parallel to calls for increased gender equality, a counter wave of mobilisation against gender equality has appeared in the public discourse. Conservative, authoritarian and populist voices in many democracies are now contesting the equal participation of men and women in society under the auspices of a “war on gender ideology” (Graff 2014).”

ESS, 2020, Question Module Design Template Module Title: Gender in Contemporary Europe: Rethinking Equality and the Backlash Module Authors: Susan Banducci, Amy Alexander, Hilde Coffe, Marta Fraile, Jessica Fortin-Rittberger

Glick & Fiske (1997)

Sexism is not a single phenomenon — it is **ambivalent**: composed of two distinct but co-existing attitudinal orientations toward women.

Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (1997). Hostile and Benevolent Sexism. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 21(1), 119–135.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1997.tb00104.x>

Two Faces of Sexism

HOSTILE SEXISM

Maintaining Male Dominance

Openly **antagonistic attitudes** aimed at preserving men's advantaged status. Views women as a threat and relies on negative generalisations to maintain control over power and resources.

→ *Negative stereotyping · Resentment of women's gains · Paternalistic control*

BENEVOLENT SEXISM

Infantilisation & Protective Framing

Attitudes that **infantilise women** under the guise of goodwill — framing them as in need of protection and care. Despite appearing benign, this orientation confines women to a passive, fragile, and dependent role.

→ *Protective paternalism · Idealisation · Complementary gender differentiation*

Dejours (2018)

Virility is a “a discourse that calibrates all behaviours, attitudes, and conducts in relation to a virility/femininity gri.” (pg. 5).

“defensive ideology of virility between men, which had up to that point allowed him to cope with the psychic pressures of his work.” (pg. 25)

Dejours, Christophe. *Psychopathology of work: Clinical observations*. Routledge, 2018.

Virility as Collective Defence

DEFINITION

A socially constructed masculine norm

In male-dominated occupations, virility functions as a **collective psychological defence**: a shared norm that compels workers to suppress and deny vulnerability, pain, fear, and suffering.

MECHANISMS

Three interlocking dynamics

Endurance of hardship — suffering is reframed as proof of toughness. **Contempt for the weak** — those who show distress are stigmatised. **Coercion to conform** — the viril code is enforced through peer pressure and ridicule.

LINK TO THIS STUDY

When women enter male-dominated occupations, viril norms are threatened. This paper hypothesises that the resulting defensiveness manifests as heightened **hostile sexism and resistance to equality policies** — a structural source of gender backlash.

Research Question

Whether occupational gender composition — specifically, working in a male-dominated occupation — is associated with more pronounced gender backlash attitudes among men in Ireland compared to Europe.

Hypotheses

Men in heavily male-dominated occupations will score higher on sexism and express lower support for gender equality policies.

Data & Method

European Social Survey



- Cross-national survey, every 2 years since 2002
- Representative samples aged 15+, open access
- Focus: Ireland (ESS R11, 2023) — male, employed sample
- Rotating module: Gender in contemporary Europe: rethinking inequality and the backlash

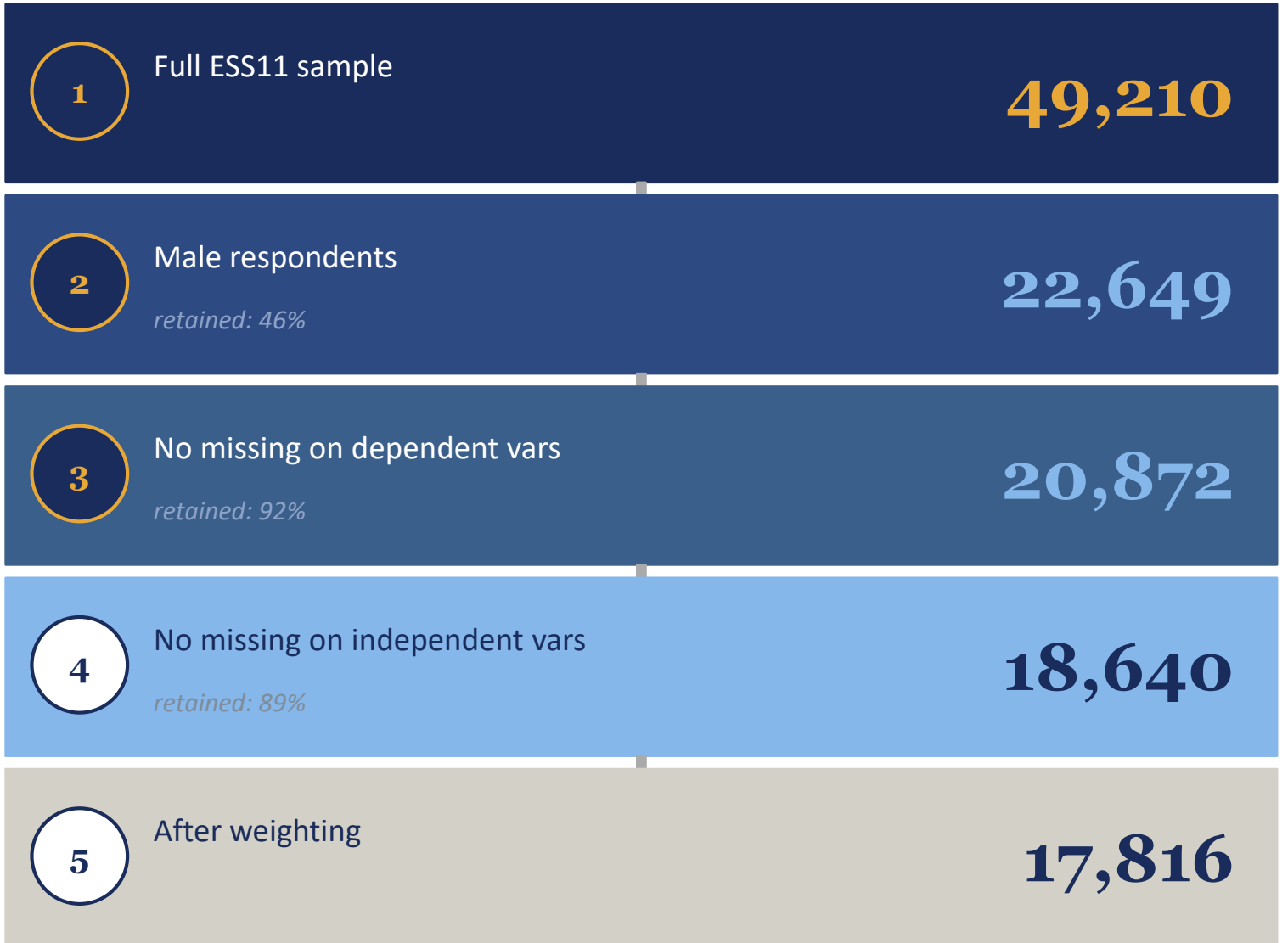
Models

- Ordinal regression
- **Independent variable:** Male dominated jobs
- **Controls:** age, gender, location, education, class
- Post-stratification weight (anweight)
- Listwise

ESS Round 11 (2023)

29 countries included in ESS11. Sample restricted to **male respondents** in paid employment, with valid responses on all dependent and independent variables.

Sample



Retention % = proportion retained relative to previous step. Weighting applies ESS post-stratification weight (pspwght).

Variables

Dependent · Independent · Controls

D	Hostile sexism How often women seek to gain power by getting control over men 1 2 3 4 5 1 = Never · 5 = Always			
	Benevolent sexism Women should be protected by men Reversed 1 2 3 4 5 1 = Agree strongly · 5 = Disagree strongly (recoded)			
I	Occupational gender composition (Gndr_Occ) Binary indicator derived from ISCO-08 major group: coded 1 (male-dominated) if men constitute more than 50% of the occupational workforce, 0 (female-dominated) otherwise. 0 Female-dominated 1 Male-dominated			
C	Age Continuous (years)			
	Education Years of schooling			
	Location 0 = Rural · 1 = Urban			
	Sector 0 = Public · 1 = Private			
	Social Class (Erikson-Goldthorpe schema) Higher-grade service (ref) Lower service class Dummy Skilled working class Dummy Unskilled working class Dummy			

Models

Model	Sample	Outcome
1	Full sample, men only	Hostile sexism
2	Full sample, men only	Benevolent sexism
3	Ireland, men only	Hostile sexism
4	Ireland, men only	Benevolent sexism

Occupational segregation

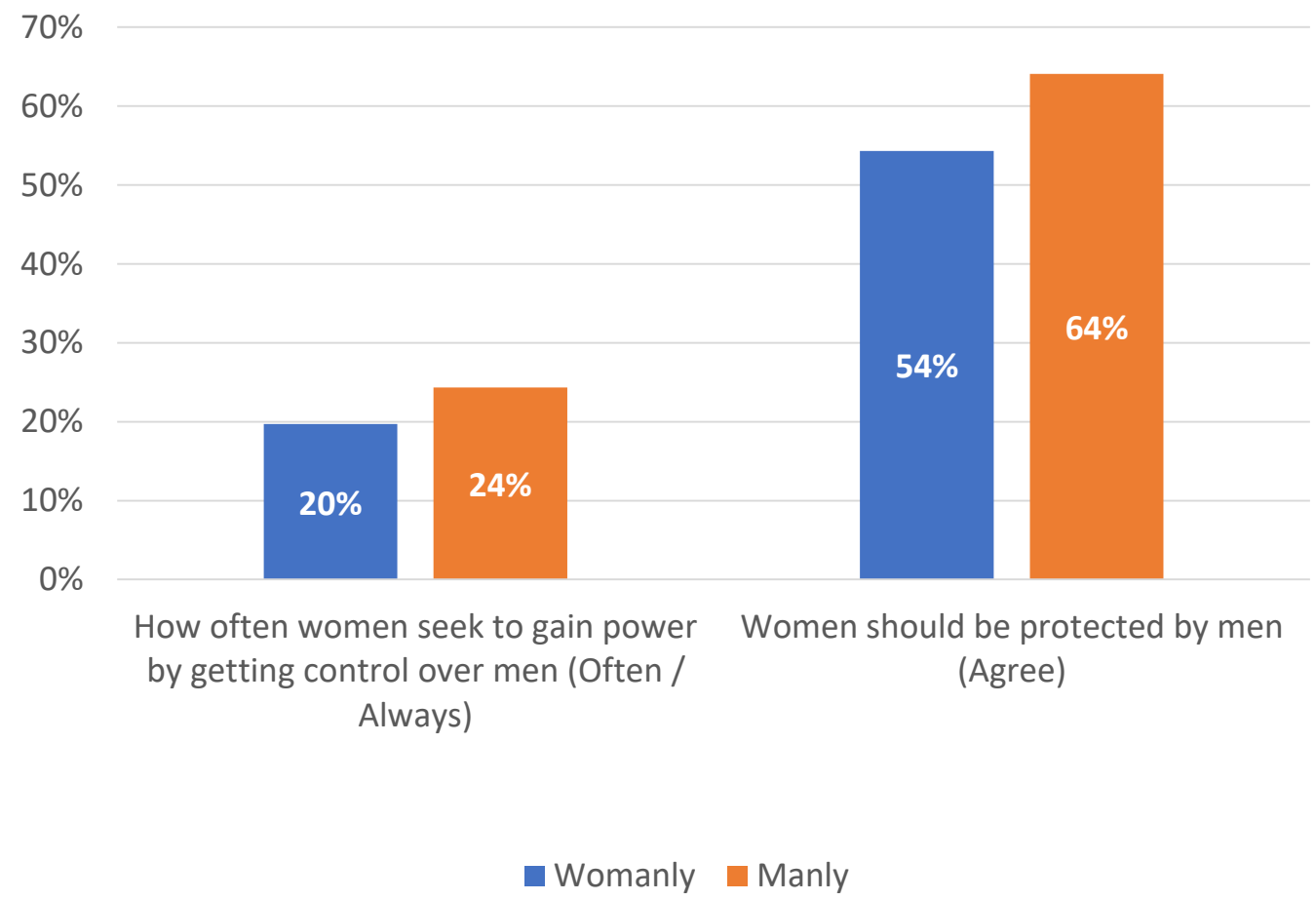
ESS 11 Gender & Occupation



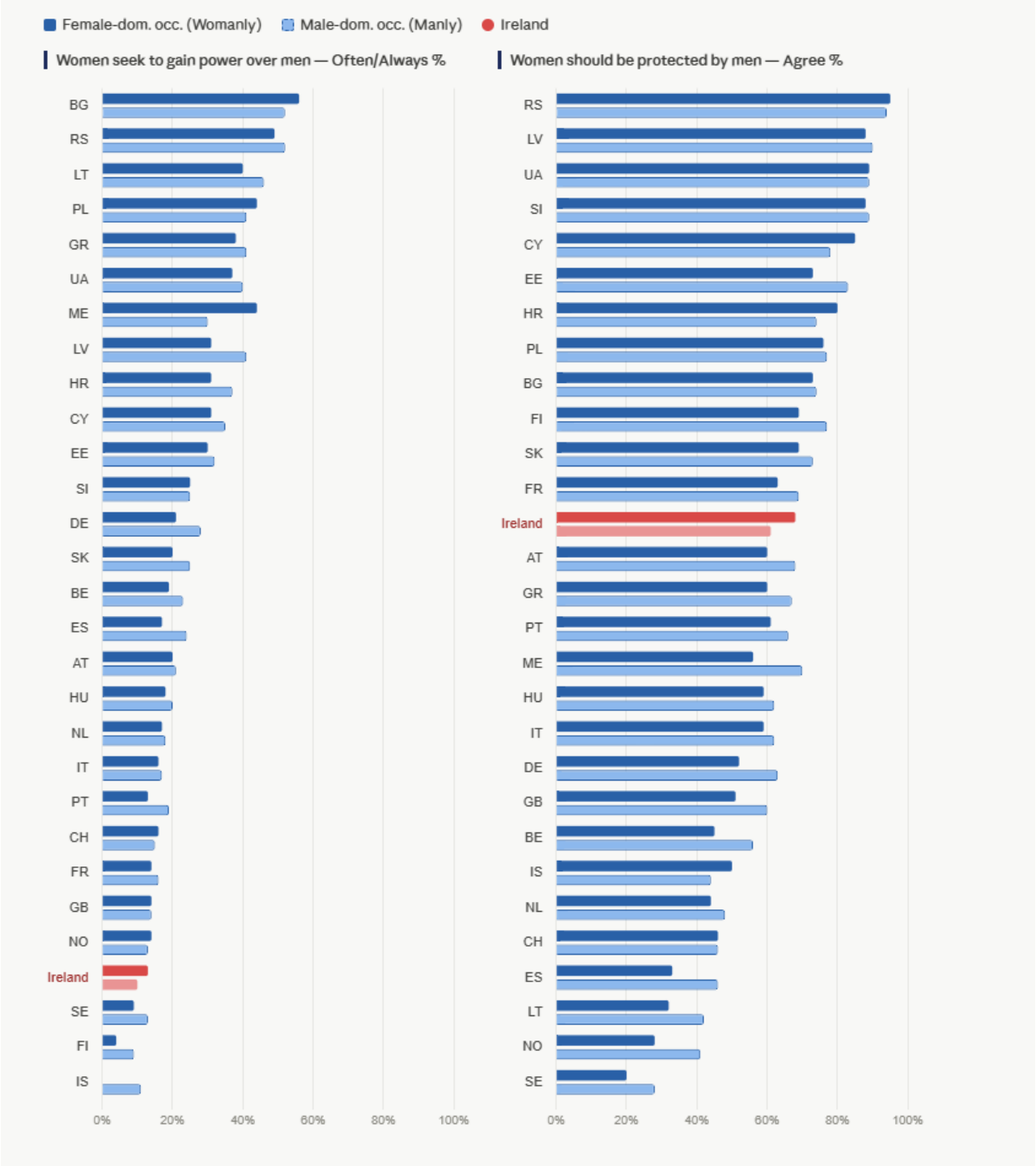
Adapted from:

2021, OECD, Man Enough?
Measuring Masculine Norms
to Promote Women's
Empowerment

Hostile and Benevolent Sexism & Occupations - Male



Hostile and Benevolent Sexism & Occupations - Male



Ordinal Logistic Regression Results

Male respondents in paid employment · ESS Round 11 · Weighted (anweight) · Ireland = reference category

Predictor	Model 1 Full · Hostile	Model 2 Full · Benevolent	Model 3 Ireland · Hostile	Model 4 Ireland · Benevolent
	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)
Key predictor				
Gndr_Occ (manly = 1)	.045 (.031)	.118*** (.030)	.002 (.362)	−.347 (.347)
Controls				
Age	.005*** (.001)	.007*** (.001)	.005 (.010)	.004 (.010)
Education (years)	−.025*** (.004)	−.059*** (.004)	−.058 (.049)	−.044 (.047)
Urban (city = 1)	−.022 (.032)	−.109*** (.031)	.528 (.354)	.102 (.333)
Private sector (= 1)	.196*** (.037)	.167*** (.036)	−.234 (.432)	.079 (.411)
Social class (ref: higher-grade service)				
Lower service class	.072 (.045)	.059 (.044)	.023 (.519)	−.014 (.497)
Skilled working class	.006 (.037)	.293*** (.036)	.137 (.429)	−.036 (.409)
Unskilled working class	.087* (.044)	.399*** (.043)	.170 (.498)	−.320 (.473)
Model fit				
N (weighted)	17,816	17,816	150	150
Nagelkerke R ²	.077	.168	.037	.019
Model χ^2 (df)	1296.1 (36)***	3047.3 (36)***	5.1 (8)	2.7 (8)
Country FE	Yes (IE=ref)	Yes (IE=ref)	No	No

Note. Ordered logistic regression (PLUM, logit link). *** $p < .001$ * $p < .05$. SE in parentheses. Country dummies in Models 1–2 omitted for brevity. Higher values = stronger sexist endorsement.

Key Findings

Ordinal logistic regression · Male respondents · ESS Round 11

Full sample (N = 17,816)

Hostile sexism — not significant

Gndr_Occ $B = .045, SE = .031, p = .152$

Men in male-dominated occupations do not show higher hostile sexism once controls are applied. Occupational gender composition alone does not drive overt antagonism.

Benevolent sexism — significant ***

Gndr_Occ $B = .118, SE = .030, p < .001$

Men in male-dominated occupations are significantly more likely to endorse paternalistic, protective attitudes toward women — consistent with gender status threat theory. The threat manifests as infantilisation, not overt hostility.

Ireland only (N = 150, exploratory)

Hostile sexism — not significant

Gndr_Occ $B = .002, SE = .362, p = .996$

No significant effect. Wide standard errors reflect limited statistical power. Results should be treated as inconclusive rather than negative.

Benevolent sexism — not significant

Gndr_Occ $B = -.347, SE = .347, p = .317$

Coefficient is in the unexpected direction but non-significant. Model fit is poor ($\chi^2(8) = 2.7, p = .954$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .019$). Ireland-only analysis is underpowered and should be reported as exploratory.

Controls (full sample): Age (+), Education (–), Urban (–, benevolent only), Private sector (+), Unskilled class (+) — all significant at $p < .001$ or $p < .05$.

Partial support for hypothesis: Occupational gender composition predicts **benevolent** but not hostile sexism among men across 24 European countries. Ireland-specific findings remain inconclusive due to small N.

Thank You

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