

# Women's attitudes towards abortion-rights movement in Poland: the role of sexism and right-wing authoritarianism

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**ABSTRACT:** The present study was inspired by the mass anti-government demonstrations organized by women after the further tightening of abortion laws in Poland. As a result, salient social polarization emerged with a clear-cut division between those who contested marches against the near-total abortion ban and those who supported them. In female participants (N = 291), we examined the role of two forms of sexism and right-wing authoritarianism in predicting an attitude towards the abortion-rights movement. In line with the hypotheses, the results showed that right-wing authoritarianism was responsible for the relationship between sexism and attitudes toward the abortion-rights movement. Benevolent and hostile sexism was negatively related to the attitudes toward the abortion rights movement, but this relationship was partly explained by right-wing authoritarianism. Our findings suggest that targeting right-wing authoritarianism might be crucial for changing the beliefs underlying both forms of sexism and attitudes toward the abortion movement. It seems particularly important for benevolent sexism still mistaken for protection rather than an ideology patronizing women and preserving gender inequality.

**KEYWORDS:** sexism, right-wing authoritarianism, abortion-rights movement, abortion, abortion ban



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Among European countries, Poland has one of the strictest abortion laws (European Abortion Policies Atlas, 2024) that have been gradually tightened due to the conservative movement's pressure and the right-wing government supporting these restrictive claims. Under the 1993 Act on Family Planning, Human Embryo Protection, and Conditions of Legal Pregnancy Termination, abortion in Poland was permitted only under three circumstances: when the pregnancy results from rape or incest, when the woman's life or health is at serious risk, or in case of fetal genetic distortion. This new law contradicted the previous one, which was one of the most liberal abortion laws in Europe. Since then, abortion rights have remained a focal point of feminist discourse and activism (Korolczuk et al., 2018). Despite over a million signatures being gathered to initiate a referendum on the permissibility of abortion, the authorities at the time did not proceed with organizing it. The ensuing public debate reinforced the myth of the so-called "abortion compromise," referring to the notion that the law enacted in 1993 was broadly accepted by the majority of society. The women's rights movement to liberalize abortion legislation intensified activities and has become more visible in the public sphere (Broniarczyk, 2023; Desperak, 2010).

A key year for the abortion debate in Poland was 2016. Almost five months after the victory of the Law and Justice Party in the 2015 elections, two opposing projects were submitted to the Polish Parliament for consideration. The first citizens' initiative "Stop Abortion", was supported by the conservative right-wing movement requesting a near-total abortion ban. In the alternative initiative "Save Women", elective abortion (for financial or personal reasons) until the 12th week of pregnancy was proposed, along with free access to contraception or over-the-counter emergency contraceptive pills. While the 'Stop Abortion' initiative was accepted for further proceeding by the Polish Parliament, the 'Save Women' project was rejected. That was the beginning of the first wave of massive protests against abortion restrictions, such as Black Monday on October 3, 2016, which the All-Poland Women's Strike organized. On this day, over 200,000 people participated in protests and pickets in 142 cities and towns across Poland, while another 500,000 wore black to show solidarity (Szczygielska, 2019). Enough to say that in 2016, the highest rate of reported participation in strikes or demonstrations in 28 years was recorded (CBOS 2017). Due to the mass mobilization of the black protest, the vote on the bill was blocked. However, it was not the sole effect of the Women's Strike in Poland. It catalyzed activism in other countries, forming a grassroots for the international movement known as the "International Women's Strike", which brought together people in over 54 countries (Szczygielska, 2019).

The debate surrounding abortion rights was analyzed within a broader framework of struggles over "gender" (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022). The authors draw on Mouffe's (2018) concept of the Populist Moment, which captures the global conflict between ultraconser-

vative and progressive forces over gender equality and sexuality. Right-wing parties and movements often position themselves as the authentic voice of the majority, portraying liberal elites as imposing external values that threaten traditional norms and the social order. Graff and Korolczuk (2022) view the Black Protests in Poland, alongside feminist mobilizations in countries such as Argentina, Italy, Spain, and Ireland, as responses to the ascendancy of right-wing populism, reaction to the ultraconservative populism. In this context, they introduce the concept of “populist feminism”, reflecting a new feminist articulation of “the people”. In this context, women who protest against the abortion ban might be seen as “ordinary women” who represent not only their own particular interests. Therefore, the Black Protest—and the transnational feminist movement that emerged—constructed a broader social subjectivity of the “feminist people” as an opposition to the right-wing populist view of so-called “ordinary people” (Gunnarsson Payne, 2018).

The second wave of the mass anti-government demonstrations took place on October 22, 2020, as a result of the further tightening of abortion laws. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, thousands of people decided to protest against the abortion judgment passed by the Polish Constitutional Tribunal, dominated by delegates of the Law and Justice Party, which stated that abortion due to a high probability of a fatal or life-limiting fetal anomaly is contrary to the Polish Constitution. Thus, not only did elective abortion become impossible, but also termination for medical reasons was restricted to two circumstances, i.e., when a woman’s life is in danger and when the pregnancy results from an unlawful act such as rape or incest. While the first circumstance has not been contested yet, at least by the right-wing press, the second has been widely discussed and questioned (Koralewska & Zielińska, 2022), which might constitute an attempt at changing social attitudes towards a further-reaching abortion ban. The decision of the Constitutional Tribunal practically eliminated the possibility of legal abortion in Poland because almost all terminations of pregnancy were caused by severe and irreversible fetal defects (Puls Medycyny, 2020).

CBOS (2020) surveys indicated that in the initial weeks following the announcement of the Constitutional Tribunal, approximately 2.5 million adult Poles—equivalent to 8% of respondents—participated in the demonstrations. It is important to note that minors also participated in the protests, suggesting that the total percentage of participants was likely higher. This level of participation was markedly greater compared to the declared involvement in the 2016 Black Protests, during which only 3% of adult Poles reported participation. Additionally, the protests in 2020 garnered the support of nearly two-thirds of respondents (63%); 32% were against them. Podemski (2023) notes that the protests in 2020 were an expression of accumulated emotions related to the actions of the PiS government in the sphere of public life. This is evidenced by the manifest of the All-Poland Women’s Strike under the telling name “We mean everything” (in Polish: “Nam chodzi o wszystko”).

The Constitutional Tribunal's ruling elicited intense anger and fear among the respondents (Jaśko, 2021). This decision has also had further consequences in the context of medical practices, such as making decisions related to abortion due to fear of criminal or professional liability, an increase in the number of cases of using the conscience clause, which has limited the availability of procedures even in cases that remain legal (Amnesty International, 2021, 2022; Krajewska, 2022). However, these mass protests did not bring the expected results. In early 2021, following the publication of the Constitutional Tribunal's ruling, the intensity of the protests diminished considerably. According to a survey conducted in February 2021, support for the abortion rights movement (ARM) was expressed by 52.9% of respondents, while 24% of respondents were against it (Rzeczpospolita, 2021). Despite initial anger, a strong sense of injustice, the feeling of being involved in something significant, and strong identification with a group of protesters (Jaśko, 2021; Szóstakowski & Besta, 2024), people became convinced that further action would have no effect. Kotnarowski (2023), drawing on data from three rounds of the European Social Survey (2016, 2018, and 2022), contends that while Polish citizens have become increasingly engaged with politics, their perceived influence over political decisions has steadily declined. This effect is consistent with our knowledge about psychological mechanisms leading to collective efficacy, engagement, and withdrawal from collective actions (van Zomeren et al., 2004).

In December 2023, the government changed due to democratic elections, and the right-wing parties lost the majority in the Polish Parliament. However, the liberalization of abortion legislation has not even been addressed by the parliament, causing frustration among those who supported the new government in hopes of repealing the abortion ban. While it evokes disappointment, the reasons why the postulates of ARM have not yet been fulfilled reflect the complicated political and institutional situation in Poland. More specifically, the legislative process is complex due to the dominance of judges in Poland's Constitutional Tribunal appointed during the PiS government. Additionally, members of the ruling coalition hold differing views on liberalizing abortion law, posing a potential threat to coalition stability. As a result, the government prioritizes other policy areas where consensus is easier to achieve. Consequently, no legislation on abortion liberalization is currently being processed in the Polish Parliament, and the demands of ARM remain unmet.

This study aimed to find what may contribute to the attitudes of women towards ARM in Poland after the Constitutional Tribunal's abortion judgment. Since ARM is declared to fight for women's rights, including the legalization of abortion, we were interested in what factors are responsible for contesting this movement by women. We focused on two interrelated variables (Christopher & Mull, 2006; Hellmer, Stenson, & Jylhä, 2018), both considered more as the social attitudes' dimensions than personality features (Duckitt, 2001; Glick & Fiske, 1997), i.e., right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and ambivalent sexist attitudes (benevolent and hostile) of women towards their gender.

### 1.1. AMBIVALENT SEXISM AND RIGHT-WING AUTHORITARIANISM

According to the ambivalent sexism theory, sexism is a multifaceted construct combining plainly negative and ostensibly positive attitudes referring to both men and women (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001a), albeit until now, most research has focused on sexist attitudes towards women. Hostile sexism (HS) manifests in overt antipathy towards women based upon an inflexible generalization of all women as inferior, just as the traditional conception of prejudice assumes (Allport, 1954; Glick & Fiske, 2001a). Hostile sexists perceive women as a threat to male power, and therefore, they actively prevent women from succeeding in any gender roles other than traditional ones (Glick & Fiske, 1997), approve of the gender income gap (Connor & Fiske, 2019), and offer reward for women's adherence to conventional gender roles (Glick & Fiske, 2001a). The core of benevolent sexism (BS) is patronizing women due to their fragility, requiring protection, affection, and provision from men. Such chivalrous and prosocial behaviors of benevolent men proceed as long as women conform to the communal and domestic gender roles and can easily become overt resentment against women if they challenge male power and patriarchal social structure (Sibley et al., 2007). Indeed, the content of both HS and BS includes women's subordinate status and male dominance in a benevolent form framed with paternalistic protectiveness as more subtle or even likable as compared to overt prejudice underlying hostile sexism. To sum up, both forms of sexism equally contribute to the justification of patriarchy by rewarding women for embracing traditional femininity in the case of benevolent sexism and penalizing women who deviate from gender stereotypes in the case of hostile sexism (Connor & Fiske, 2019, p. 23).

Men across different cultures and nations share sexism, and the level of HS and BS correlated positively with national indices of gender inequality (Glick et al., 2004; Sibley, Wilson, & Duckitt, 2007). Also, women endorse sexism (Gul & Kupfer, 2019), especially its benevolent form (Becker, 2010). The rate of sexist attitudes among women towards their gender is associated with the level of sexism manifested by men (Sibley et al., 2007). More precisely, in countries with high levels of HS held by men, women endorse BS since it offers conditional protectiveness, which can counterbalance the prevalence of HS (Glick & Fiske, 2001b). It is worth adding that sometimes BS is not even recognized as a form of sexism by women and men due to its likable manifestation (Barretto & Ellemers, 2005) and endorsement of romantic beliefs associated with heterosexual intimacy (Bohner et al., 2010; Scarlet et al., 2012). Also, HS, which contradicts female interest paradoxically, was supported by women against norm-deviant women who disobeyed traditional gender roles (Backer, 2010), and gender itself turned out to be a minor predictor of sexist attitudes as compared to ideologies or religion (Roets et al., 2012; Van Assche et al., 2019). Sexism must be rooted in larger belief systems rather than exist on its own (Mikołajczak & Pietrzak, 2014) because it requires an ideological framework legitimiz-



ing gender inequalities arising from it.

One of the status-legitimizing ideologies that has been explored as a source of sexism is right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) (Auction & Jackson, 2019). RWA is a conservative ideology promoting coercive and punitive forms of social control, submission to authority, and respect for traditional values as the course for security in the world perceived as a source of threat (Altemeyer, 1981; Radkiewicz, 2016). Also, religiosity, with its clear-cut boundaries of what should be perceived as conventional or deviant, is strongly and positively related to RWA (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Assche et al., 2019). As advocates of maintaining social cohesion and traditional values, people high on RWA express hostility towards ingroup members who violate conventional order and gender roles (Christopher & Mull, 2006; Duckitt, 2001). Previous research showed that although RWA was associated with both components of ambivalent sexism, it predicted benevolent sexism most of all (Christopher & Mull, 2006; Sibley et al., 2007). Since RWA refers to the need to maintain traditional values, BS, with its paternalistic protectiveness, guarantees such a “natural order” in which chivalrous men support fragile women.

## 1.2. SEXISM, RIGHT-WING AUTHORITARIANISM, AND ABORTION ATTITUDES

According to advocates of sexism, abortion is regarded as a decision that contradicts traditional women's gender roles, and the rejection of motherhood has been perceived as a denial of womanhood (Patev et al., 2019). This standpoint is additionally strengthened in Poland by the Catholic Church, considered a dominant cultural institution, and the view of an ideal woman who is a housewife, mother, and caregiver has become pervasive even among non-Catholics (Mikołajczak & Pietrzak, 2015). Previous research showed that religiosity strongly contributed to the support of the abortion ban in Poland (Jonason, Zajenkowski, Szymaniak, & Leniarska, 2022), and additionally, high sexism increased abortion stigmatizing attitudes since abortion decisions violated a sexist ideal of women as caring and nurturing mothers (Patev et al., 2019). When it comes to forms of sexism, HS was negatively related to elective abortion, but no relationship was found with the approval of abortion for medical and legal reasons. However, BS negatively predicted support for abortion regardless of the reason (Huang, Osborne, Sibley & Davies, 2014; Osborne & Davis, 2012). Thus, hostile sexists restricted women's abortion rights in circumstances that challenged male dominance, giving women decision-making autonomy, while benevolent sexists opposed even lifesaving terminations because abortion for any reason contradicted the traditional gender role with motherhood at its core. This standpoint in the case of people who score high on BS might be additionally strengthened in Poland by the anti-abortion discourse in the right-wing press. In public debate, abortion is discussed not only in terms of “killing the unborn”, but also demands “protecting women” and “preserving culture and nation” have been raised, which explicitly correspond to the BS framework (Koralewska & Zielińska, 2022). Namely, restricted access to abortion

enables vulnerable women to make the right decision about their “unborn child” without being pressured by others, which in turn protects their mental well-being. Further, the idea of abortion liberalization has been presented as a threat to the Polish culture and tradition based on Catholic foundations promoting traditional gender roles, which the feminist movement might disrupt as it is focused on Western values. This anti-abortion rationale combines the need for collective security and traditional order corresponding to BS with the need for social cohesion and adherence to conventional values exposed by RWA.

## 2. CURRENT STUDY

The current study aims to test the role of right-wing authoritarianism in explaining the relationship between two forms of sexism and women’s attitudes toward the ongoing abortion rights movement in Poland. The data were collected after the abortion judgment of the Polish Constitutional Tribunal, which evoked extreme feelings such as anger and frustration in pro-choice groups, as well as enthusiasm and delight in pro-life advocates. It is important to stress that this research was conducted after the outburst of social protests reported by the media daily, which contributed to intense social polarization. As a result, opinions about the ARM, abortion demands of this movement, and female gender roles became possibly more clear-cut and salient in Polish society. Thus, we caught the extraordinary moment enabling us to extend our understanding of how RWA and ambivalent sexism operate in the face of conflict within a polarized society. Importantly, we focused on the attitudes of women towards ARM organized by other women because of the further abortion ban, but not on the abortion attitude itself. Thus, we measured reactions to an assertive group of women demanding abortion rights, who manifested agentic behaviors, put into question the traditional gender role and paternalistic structure, and evoked salient social polarization. All social consequences caused by ARM seem to be crucial from the perspective of the ambivalent sexism theory and right-wing authoritarianism. Importantly, we decided to resign from straightforwardly expressed beliefs about this movement. Cognition and affect, considered components of an attitude towards objects or phenomena that are topical or controversial, become highly correlated because people frequently think about, debate, and discuss them (Breckler & Wiggins, 1989). Hence, we measured the attitudes toward ARM as (1) the degree of perceived similarity between the ARM standpoint and one’s point of view and (2) the temperature of feelings toward the ARM. Thus, the higher degree of perceived similarity and the higher the temperature of feelings reflected a more positive general attitude toward ARM (an attitude consistent with ARM).

In hypothesis 1, we predicted that HS would be negatively related to the attitudes consistent with ARM, but RWA would explain this relationship. In hypothesis 2, we predicted that the same would be true for BS and that the attitudes were consistent with the ARM relationship. It should be noted, however, that we did not imply any causal relationship

among the variables, but we tested the confounding effect of RWA (Meinert, 2012). Adjustment for the confounder (RWA) provides an undistorted estimate of the relationship between two other variables (sexism and the ARM attitudes) because a confounder is a variable related to two factors of interest that falsely obscures or accentuates the relationship (McKinnon, Krull, & Lockwood, 2000). Sexism (HS and BS) is grounded in beliefs that women as an inferior group should not have the high status and power as men do, which contradicts pro-choice autonomous beliefs formulated by ARM and suggests a negative correlation. However, the relationship between sexism and ARM attitudes could be, in fact, a byproduct of a more general status-legitimizing ideology, that is, RWA. Although RWA, with its endorsement of conservative order, was previously related to sexism, it has hardly been of interest in the research on abortion attitudes. To our knowledge, until now, RWA was tested as the mechanism through which HS contributed to negative abortion attitudes (Patev et al., 2019). The research, however, tested the mediating role of HS on RWA in the relationship between sexual disgust and disapproval of abortion, and no attention was paid to the function of RWA in the relationship between BS and abortion attitudes. Interestingly, sexual disgust manifested as feelings of repulsion toward certain sexual acts or sexual fluids not only correlated strongly and positively with RWA and HS but also contributed positively to abortion stigmatizing attitudes. This suggests that the starting point for dehumanizing attitudes toward women who have sought abortion is a generally hostile stance toward sexuality combined with sexist and right-wing authoritarian beliefs.

To sum up, in this study, we tested RWA as the confounding factor in the relationships between both forms of sexism and the attitudes consistent with the abortion rights movement organized after the further tightening of anti-abortion laws in Poland.

### 3. MATERIALS AND METHOD

#### 3.1. PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

Participants ( $N = 291$ ) who identified themselves as women aged from 18 to 79 years old ( $M = 26.09$ ,  $SD = 8.38$ ) took part in an anonymous online survey. Apriori power estimation indicated that a sample of 208 participants would allow achieving statistical power = .80 ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) to detect a significant but weak relationship ( $f^2 = 0.03$ ) using multivariate linear regression with four predictors. Participants were recruited through social media advertisement and were all volunteers (did not receive any form of payment for their participation). Women were primarily residents of large (over 500.000 inhabitants) and medium-sized cities (between 100.000 and 500.000 inhabitants), 54%. Among the participants were also women living in smaller urban areas (between 10.000 and 100.000 inhabitants), 21%, small towns (below 10.000 inhabitants) and countryside, 25%. Women mainly were emerging adults (between 18 and 24 years old), 60%, and young adults (between 25 and 34 years old), 30%. Women aged 35 and 44 and more were less prevalent in the sample, 6% and 5%, respectively. Although most women lived in large cities regard-



less of age, the proportion of women living in the countryside and large cities differed by age,  $\chi^2 = 11.73$ ,  $p = .019$ . Among the youngest age group (below 25 years old,  $N = 174$ ), more women than expected lived in villages and smaller towns, and fewer than expected resided in large cities (47%). Older women (35 and older,  $N = 33$ ) lived less often than expected in the countryside and smaller towns and more often than expected in large cities (76%). Thus, the young women group was more diverse with regard to the place of residence, but the older group consisted mainly of large city residents.

## MEASURES

3.2.1. Sexism. The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Polish adaptation, Mikołajczak & Pietrzak, 2014) was administered to measure HS and BS. This is a 22-item inventory including an equal number of items referring to both forms of sexism. Example items are “Women seek to gain power by getting control over me” for HS and “A good woman should be set on a pedestal by her man” for BS. ASI scale was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). For the current sample, Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  was .94 for the HS scale and .88 for the BS scale. We also replicated the factorial structure of the ASI using confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) and the maximum likelihood (ML) estimation method. The results are shown in the Appendix (Table 4), indicating that the two-factor model fits well with the data.

3.2.2. Right-wing authoritarianism. RWA (Altemeyer, 1981) was measured by 20 items selected from the original 30-item RWA scale, which was based on the version prepared by Duckitt (Duckitt, 200; Duckitt & Fisher, 2003; Polish adaptation, Radkiewicz, 2016). An example item is “What our country needs is a tough, harsh dose of law and order”. Participants indicated their responses using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  for the RWA scale in this study was .89. Confirmatory Factor Analysis was performed with the maximum likelihood (ML) estimation method to define whether the one-factor model showed adequate fit to the data. The results are presented in Appendix (Table 3). Although the goodness of fit indexes of the model is acceptable, one needs to stress that factor loading for item 9 on the RWA construct is not statistically significant. This suggests that item 9, referring to the attitude toward the death penalty, is not a strong and unique indicator of right-wing authoritarianism. Simultaneously, the values of factor loadings for items 7, 16, and 17 are below acceptable levels, even though they are statistically significant.

3.2.3. Attitudes consistent with ARM. Participants rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much) to what extent they agreed with the statements: “I have a similar viewpoint to people involved in ARM”; “I have a similar life experience to people involved in ARM”; “I identify with people involved in ARM”. The factor loadings for three items on the cognitive aspect of attitude toward RWA were high

(Appendix, Table 5). The aggregated responses constituted the cognitive component of the attitude (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .85$ ). A similar measure was previously used to capture the attitudes towards people with disability (Timms et al., 1997) and as an indirect measure of bias toward ingroup and outgroup with perceived similarity as its indicator (Aberson & Howanski, 2002). The affective component was measured using a thermometer scale ranging from "0" (cold feelings indicating negative attitude) to "100" (warm feelings indicating positive attitude). Participants were asked to label their feelings toward ARM on a 10-point thermometer scale.

#### 4. FINDINGS

Analysis of descriptive statistics indicated that the distribution of all variables was skewed and different from the normal distribution (Komogorow-Smirnow and Shapiro-Wilk tests were conducted, all  $p$ 's < .001). The right-skewness ranging between 0.66 and 1.06 was observed for both types of sexism and RWA. The left-skewed distribution (-.67, -1.04) was noted for both measures of the attitudes consistent with ARM. This indicated that most responses were below the arithmetic mean of the scale for sexism and RWA but above the mean for the attitudes toward ARM. Women who were responders in this study mainly represented positive attitudes toward ARM and relatively low sexism and RWA. The non-normal distribution is generally a condition for non-parametrical tests use. However, the skewness and kurtosis values of the measures were small, between 0.04 and +1.06, and the sample was large enough to test Gaussian models (Knief & Forstmeier, 2021)—Pearson correlation and linear regression.

Results of correlation analysis indicated the negative relationship between RWA and both measures of the attitude towards ARM (similarity and thermometer). Also, HS and BS were negatively related to both measures of the attitude toward ARM. Because the thermometer index and similarity index were highly correlated,  $r = .82$ ,  $p < .001$ , and showed similar correlations with RWA and sexism scales, the measures were standardized and aggregated to form one measure of the attitudes consistent with ARM. It should also be noted that age was negatively related to HS and RWA (older women scored lower on RWA and HS) and positively related to the attitudes consistent with ARM. Zero-order Pearson's correlations between study variables, means, and standard deviations are presented in Table 1.

To test for potential non-linear relationships between age and study variables, we additionally conducted an analysis of variance with age as a 3-category variable (women under 25 years old,  $N = 174$ , women between 25 and 34 years old,  $N = 84$ , and women being at least 35 years old,  $N = 33$ ). Results indicated age differences in HS,  $F(2,290) = 4.25$ ,  $p = .015$ , RWA,  $F(2,290) = 5.28$ ,  $p = .006$ , and aggregated attitudes consistent with ARM,  $F(2,290) = 8.98$ ,  $p < .001$ . The post hoc test with Bonferroni correction showed that older women (35 years old and older) had lower HS and RWA and more positive atti-

tudes toward ARM than two younger groups (women below 35 years old and below 25 years old), all  $p$ 's < .029. There were no differences between younger women—the group below 25 and below 35 years old.

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	26.09	8.38	-					
2. Hostile sexism	2.21	1.05	-.12*	-				
3. Benevolent sexism	2.11	0.80	-0.00	.66***	-			
4. RWA	2.34	0.82	-.17**	.75***	.65***	-		
5. ARM similarity	3.41	1.16	.24***	-.62***	-.40***	-.75***	-	
6. ARM temperature	68.62	30.25	.19***	-.60***	-.46***	-.75***	.81***	-
7. ARM aggregated	0.00	0.95	.23***	-.64***	-.45***	-.79***	.95***	.95***

Note. RWA= right-wing authoritarianism; ARM= the abortion-rights movement \* $p$ <.05; \*\*  $p$ <.01; \*\*\*  $p$ <.001

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations between study variables

Note. RWA= right-wing authoritarianism; ARM= the abortion-rights movement \* $p$ <.05; \*\*  $p$ <.01; \*\*\*  $p$ <.001

#### 4.1. HYPOTHESIS TESTING

The hypotheses were tested using SPSS ordinary least-squares linear regression. The first model included both types of sexism and age as predictors of RWA, and in the second model, sexism and age were entered as predictors of attitudes consistent with ARM; in the third model, RWA was added as a predictor of the attitudes consistent with ARM. All predictors were centered around the mean. Coefficients for the models are presented in Table 2.

Results of the first model indicated that even when both types of sexism were introduced together and age was also controlled, all variables were still significant predictors of RWA. Results of the third model indicated that although the relationship between HS and the attitudes towards ARM remained significant and negative when RWA was controlled for, the confounding effect of RWA was significant and responsible for 70.4 % of the total effect,  $B = -.37$ ,  $SE = .045$ , 95% CI [-0.46; -0.28], standardized effect = -.41. However, the effect of BS on the attitudes consistent with ARM was not significant, when HS was included in the model 2, but became significant when RWA was added to the model 3. Thus, in this case, RWA operated as a suppressor (Conger, 1974) because statistical

removal of a confounding effect due to RWA ( $B = -.24$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ , 95% CI  $[-0.35; -0.15]$ , standardized coefficient =  $-.21$ ) increased the magnitude of the relationship between the BS and ARM attitudes and also changed the sign of the relationship from positive to negative.

Models/Variables	B	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	95% CI	<i>r<sub>p</sub></i>
<b>Model 1 predicting RWA</b>						
HS	0.44	0.04	11.25	< .001	[0.76;1.28]	.55
BS	0.29	0.05	5.86	< .001	[0.20;0.39]	.29
Age	-0.01	0.01	-2.78	.006	[-0.02; -0.01]	-.10
<b>Model 2 predicting ARM</b>						
HS	-0.53	0.05	-9.77	< .001	[-0.63; -0.42]	-.58
BS	-0.08	0.07	-1.20	.232	[-0.22;0.05]	-.07
Age	0.02	0.01	3.55	< .001	[0.01;0.03]	.16
<b>Model 3 predicting ARM</b>						
HS	-0.16	0.05	-3.04	.003	[-0.26; -0.06]	-.17
BS	0.17	0.06	2.83	.005	[0.05;0.28]	.14
Age	0.01	0.01	2.30	.022	[0.01;0.02]	.08
RWA	-0.85	0.07	-13.04	< .001	[-0.98; -0.72]	-.74

Table 2. Coefficients for the models predicting RWA and the attitudes toward ARM

## 5. DISCUSSION

In the current study, we focused on the role of sexism and right-wing authoritarianism in predicting the attitude toward the ongoing abortion rights movement after the tightening of the abortion law in Poland. Two hypotheses were tested, which stated that HS (hypothesis 1) and BS (hypothesis 2) would be negatively related to attitudes consistent with ARM, but RWA would explain these relationships. Our predictions were confirmed, as RWA confounded the aforementioned relationships. Interestingly, however, direct effects (when RWA was accounted for) of two forms of sexism on the attitude towards ARM were different in sign, negative in the case of hostile sexism, and positive with regard to benevolent sexism. Moreover, controlling for RWA diminished the strength of the association between HS and attitude toward ARM but increased the strength of the relationship between BS and the attitude toward ARM compared to the situation when only HS was controlled for. Benevolent sexism was negatively related to the attitudes towards ARM in zero-order correlations analysis. However, when benevolent sexism was cleared of the hostile sexism component, its role in predicting the ARM attitudes disap-

peared. Further, removing the variance related to RWA from the BS construct allowed for the positive relationship between BS and the attitudes toward ARM because benevolent sexism, without its ideological foundation and hostile component, could no longer be considered sexism. What is left could probably resemble a social norm of politeness or related constructs.

To sum up, women who endorse benevolent sexism are strongly motivated to adhere to the traditional woman's gender role and accept their subordinate position in favor of male dominance. Not surprisingly, women who shared benevolent sexist attitudes manifested negative beliefs about the abortion-rights movement in this study. This was, however, primarily due to the correlation between hostile and benevolent sexism because when the former was controlled, the relationship between benevolent sexism and the attitudes consistent with ARM became insignificant. The rationale underlying this result is that benevolent sexism is not recognized as a form of sexism equally responsible for justifying a patriarchal social system as hostile sexism (Barretto & Ellemers, 2005). On the other hand, hostile sexism, with its openly expressed resentment against women, is, as our study showed, a form of primary sexism. Struggling with it, women may identify benevolent sexism with positive consequences such as protection, affection, interest, and provision, particularly when feeling insecure or anxious (Cross & Overall, 2018).

It is also worth noting that we included two measures of attitudes in our study: a thermometer measure of the affective component and a perception of similarity for the cognitive component. Although emotion and cognition are the components of an attitude which might be distinguished from each other (Petty et al., 2003) and are characterized by different accessibility and salience (Hofstede & Janssen, 1998; Van den Berg, Manstead, Van der Pligt, & Wigboldus, 2006), our study indicated that both components were highly related to each other and showed similar pattern of relationships with RWA and sexism.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning the result showing that with age, women identified to a lesser extent with the convictions manifesting approval of hostile sexism and right-wing authoritarianism. At first glance, it could be surprising. However, one needs to indicate that also among supporters of the Confederation party in Poland, which underlines endorsement for right-wing authoritarianism and adherence to traditional gender roles, young people dominate, either men or women (CEBOS, 2021). This suggests that younger individuals may be more likely to embrace such ideologies, particularly when facing perceived threats such as economic instability or general insecurity (Jost et al., 2003). Older women often have a more stable financial and professional situation, which makes them more resistant to ideologies that justify their lower position in the social structure. This stability may empower them to challenge or reject beliefs that perpetuate inequality, which is undoubtedly strengthened by the broader perspective gained through life experience. Although it sounds intriguing, one must note that the older participants in our sample were primarily residents of large cities and were very fluent in using social



media, which was used for collecting the data. This factor could also have influenced our results, as their exposure to attitudes dominated in cities may have shaped their RWA and HS scores differently than older adults in more traditional communities. Therefore, this result must be interpreted cautiously, and further research is needed with the more diverse female sample in terms of age, place of residence, and education.

In sum, our results showed that both forms of sexism predict negative attitudes towards ARM, but hostile sexism is more basic or even primal to benevolent sexism, which, devoid of hostility, changes its sexist nature. Moreover, we indicated that sexism acquires its meaning through RWA, but RWA is not the only factor explaining the sexism–attitude relationship, as the relationship between hostile sexism and attitudes is also independent of RWA.

## 6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Our study had several limitations. The data were collected during the ongoing massive protests in a strongly polarized society against an ideologized socio-political background. The social circumstances of collecting the data may be the strength of this study, providing a fascinating insight into how sexism and right-wing authoritarianism operate under the conditions of a social conflict when abortion rights are contested. However, a substantial portion of the variance in the attitude towards the abortion rights movement accounted for by sexism and right-wing authoritarianism may be, to some extent, a temporary effect resulting from social polarization. Future research is needed to test it in less conflicted social conditions. Moreover, the positive attitude towards the abortion rights movement did not inevitably mean the endorsement of abortion liberalization, which we did not control for in this study. Further research is needed, including the wide range of possible reasons for abortion justified or rejected by advocates of benevolent and hostile sexism. Finally, the sample was predominantly composed of young individuals, which limits the opportunity to generalize the results. Further research is needed to include a more diverse sample, extending beyond young residents of large cities.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

After Poland had introduced a highly restrictive abortion law, mass anti-government demonstrations spread throughout the country, polarizing society. This study was to identify underlying factors behind women's attitudes towards the abortion-rights movement after the abortion judgment introducing a near-total abortion ban in Poland. We focused on ambivalent sexism and right-wing authoritarianism, assuming their crucial role in predicting affective and cognitive components of women's attitudes towards the abortion-rights movement. In line with our expectations, both variables accounted for a substantial portion of the variance in the affective- and cognitive-based attitude toward ARM. However, right-wing authoritarianism explained this relationship, diminishing

the strength of the negative relationship between hostile sexism and the attitudes towards ARM and triggering a positive relationship between benevolent sexism and ARM attitudes. Thus, the crucial practical implication of our study refers to benevolent sexism, particularly how it is perceived by women who are not right-wing supporters, how much women recognize benevolent sexist statements as a form of prejudice, and whether they are conscious of the role of benevolent beliefs in patronizing them and preserving gender inequality. Our results suggest that when benevolent sexism is stripped of hostile sexism and right-wing ideology, it might be perceived differently than it is defined, more as an endorsement of caring or fighting for women, not as one of the causes responsible for a persisting unfair social structure with women as a subordinate group. This might be especially important in the case of Polish women. To understand this, one needs to mention that with regard to gender equality, Poland ranks 18th among the EU countries, and most inequalities result from the unequal division of domestic work, social activities, and power (Gender Equality Index, 2023). Importantly, to change this, we need to increase social awareness of what benevolent sexism relies on, what its source and role in maintaining unfair social structure are, and finally, how much benevolent sexism contradicts the women's rights movement.

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N°	Item	Factor Loadings (95%CI)
1.	Posłuszeństwo i szacunek dla autorytetów to najważniejsze wartości, jakich powinny nauczyć się dzieci. Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn	.452 [.381; .568]***
2.	To czego naprawdę potrzebuje nasz kraj zamiast „praw obywatelskich”, to solidna dawka prawdziwego prawa i porządku. What our country really needs instead of more “civil rights” is a good stiff dose of law and order.	.381 [.258; .627]***
3.	Właściwym kluczem do dobrego życia są dyscyplina i posłuszeństwo. The real keys to the “good life” are obedience and discipline	.511 [.693; .826]***
4.	Odwracanie się od tradycji pewnego dnia okaże się fatalne w skutkach. Turning away from tradition will one day prove to be fatal in its consequences	.763 [.717; .844]***
	Homoseksualiści i lesbijki są równie zdrowi i moralni, jak wszyscy inni. Gays and lesbians are just as healthy and moral as anyone else	.769 [.679; .828]**
	Przyzwoitość i posłuszeństwo wobec prawa są na dłuższą metę lepsze dla nas niż ciągle podważanie zasad, na których oparte jest nasze społeczeństwo. Decency and obedience to the law are, in the long run, better for us than constantly challenging the principles on which our society is based	.447 [.323; .555]**
5.	To, czego naprawdę potrzebuje nasz kraj, to silny, zdecydowany przywódca, który pokona zło i wskaże nam właściwą drogę. What our country really needs is a strong determined leader who will crush evil, and take us back to our true path	.216 [.078; .343]**
6.	Miejsce kobiety powinno być tam, gdzie ona sama zechce, aby było. Podległość kobiet wobec mężczyzn i oczekiwań społecznych to przeszłość. A “woman’s place” should be wherever she wants to be. The days when women are submissive to their husbands and social conventions belong strictly to the past.	.523 [.382; .643]**
7.	Nie ma takiej zbrodni, która usprawiedliwia aby stosowanie kary śmierci. There is no crime that justifies the use of the death penalty.	.039 [-.083; .168]
8.	Nie ma nic złego w przedmażeńskich stosunkach seksualnych There is nothing wrong with premarital sexual intercourse	.820 [.747; .876]**
9.	Jest ważne, aby na wszelkie sposoby chronić prawa osób o odmiennych, a nawet radykalnych poglądach. It is important to protect the rights of individuals with differing, even radical, views by all means possible	.285 [.154; .410]***
10.	To dobrze, że w dzisiejszych czasach młodzi ludzie mają większą wolność, aby tworzyć swoje własne zasady i protestować wobec rzeczy, które im się nie podobają. It’s good that nowadays young people have more freedom to create their own rules and protest against things they don’t like	.802 [.720; .861]**
11.	Ludzie powinni kierować się własnymi standardami w ocenianiu tego, co moralne i co niemoralne, a w mniejszym stopniu kierować się wskazaniem Biblii czy podobnych tradycyjnych tekstów. People should pay less attention to the Bible and the other old-fashioned forms of religious guidance, and instead develop their own personal standards of what is moral and immoral	.846 [.780; .893]***
12.	Stable związki homoseksualne powinny być traktowane na równi z małżeństwami. Stable homosexual relationships should be treated equally to marriages	.861 [.811; .903]***

13. Nie można powiedzieć, że jest jakiś jeden, właściwy sposób życia; każdy powinien żyć jak sam uważa za stosowne. One cannot say there is one right way to live; everyone should live as they see fit	.744 [.667; .803]**
14. Na osobach, które są w naszym kraju prawdziwymi autorytetami, można polegać, ponieważ odznaczają się wyższym poziomem inteligencji, są lepiej poinformowane i bardziej kompetentne niż reszta społeczeństwa. The people who are true authorities in our country can be relied upon because they possess a higher level of intelligence, are better informed, and are more competent than the rest of society	.235 [.105; .365]***
15. W naszym kraju jest wielu ludzi niemoralnych i bezwzględnych, którzy, kierując się swymi własnymi celami, chcą mu zaszkodzić. Władze powinny ich eliminować. There are many immoral and ruthless people in our country who, driven by their own goals, seek to harm it. The authorities should eliminate them	.150 [.025; .262]*
16. Nasz kraj potrzebuje ludzi myślących samodzielnie, którzy mają odwagę przeciwstawić się różnym tradycjom nawet wtedy, gdy może to irytować wiele osób. Our country needs people who think independently and have the courage to challenge various traditions, even if it may irritate many people.	.762 [.683; .823]***
17. Byłoby bardzo dobrze, gdyby odpowiednie władze zakazały rozpowszechniania czasopism, które publikują obrzydliwe i niecenzuralne rzeczy. It would be very good if the appropriate authorities banned the distribution of magazines that publish disgusting and obscene content.	.346 [.215; .463]***
18. Nie powinno się ściśle trzymać uświęconych zasad – należy próbować wielu różnych pomysłów i starać się o wiele różnych doświadczeń. One should not strictly adhere to sacred rules – it is important to try many different ideas and seek a variety of experiences.	.766 [.679; .826]**

Note: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; Goodness of fit indexes of the model:  $\chi^2(162)=435.39$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\chi^2/df=2.69$ ; CFI=.901; RMSEA=.076. This model fit indices were achieved after introducing modifications based on error covariance

Table 3. Right-wing authoritarianism items and their confirmatory factor loadings obtained in this sample

Note: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; Goodness of fit indexes of the model:  $\chi^2(162)=435.39$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\chi^2/df=2.69$ ; CFI=.901; RMSEA=.076. This model fit indices were achieved after introducing modifications based on error covariance

Hostile sexism		Benevolent Sexism	
N° Item	Factor Loadings (95%CI)	Item	Factor Loadings (95%CI)
1. Pod pretekstem równoupraw- nienia wiele kobiet zabiega o specjalne przywileje, takie jak faworyzująca polityka zatrud- nienia  Many women are actually seek- ing special favors, such as  hiring policies that favor them over men, under the guise of asking for „equality.”	.722 [.629; .795]***	1. Bez względu na swoje osią- gnięcia zawodowe, mężczyzna nie jest całością bez miłości kobiety  No matter how accomplished he is, a man is not truly com- plete as a person unless he has the love of a woman	.635 [.527; .726]**
2. Większość kobiet interpretuje niewinne uwagi lub zachowania jako seksistowskie.  Most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being  sexist	.656 [.569; .733]***	2. W razie katastrofy najpierw należy ratować kobiety, potem mężczyzn  In a disaster, women ought not necessarily to be rescued  before men	.492 [.368; .599]***
3. Kobiety zbyt łatwo się obrażają  Women are too easily offended.	.741 [.664; .809]***	3. Ludzie nie są naprawdę szczęśliwi, jeśli nie są w związku uczuciowym z osobą przeciwnej płci  People are often truly happy in life without being romanti- cally involved with a member of the other sex	.598 [.461; .707]**
4. Feministki dążą do tego, by kobiety miały większą władzę niż mężczyźni  Feminists are not seeking for women to have more power  than men	.853 [.801; .891]***	4. Wiele kobiet charaktery- zuje się czystością moralną, rzadko spotykaną u mężczyzn  Many women have a quality of purity that few men posses	.560 [.452; .658]***
5. Większość kobiet nie docenia w pełni tego, co robią dla nich mężczyźni.  Most women fail to appreciate fully all that men do for  them	.711 [.630; .781]***	5. Kobiety powinny być wielbione i chronione przez mężczyzn  Women should be cherished and protected by men	.706 [.609; .780]***
6. Przejmując kontrolę nad męż- czyznami, kobiety dążą do zdo- bycia władzy  Women seek to gain power by getting control over men.	.782 [.713; .842]***	6. Każdy mężczyzna powinien mieć partnerkę, którą adoruje  Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores	.745 [.663; .804]**
7. Kobiety wyolbrzymiają proble- my, które mają w pracy  Women exaggerate problems they have at work	.723 [.645; .787]***	7. Mężczyzna nie jest całością bez kobiety  Men are complete without women	.718 [.622; .788]**



8. Z chwilą, gdy kobieta zdobędzie już mężczyznę, zazwyczaj próbuje trzymać go „krótko”  Once a woman gets a man to commit to her, she usually tries to put him on a tight leash	.736 [.652; .801]**	8. Dobra żona powinna być stawiana na piedestale przez swojego męża  A good woman should be set on a pedestal by her man	.626 [.528; .708]***
9. Kiedy kobiety przegrywają z mężczyznami w uczciwej rywalizacji, zwykle narzekają, że są dyskryminowane  When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against	.821 [.751; .872]**	9. W porównaniu z mężczyznami kobiety wydają się mieć większą wrażliwość moralną  Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility	.488 [.366; .585]***
10. Wielu kobietom sprawia frajdę, gdy drażnią mężczyznę udając, że są dostępne seksualnie, a następnie odrzucając męskie zaloty  Many women enjoy teasing a man by pretending to be sexually available and then rejecting his advances.	.729 [.651; .791]***	10. Mężczyzna powinien być gotowy poświęcić własne dobro, by zapewnić utrzymanie bliskim kobietom  Men should be willing to sacrifice their own well being in order to provide financially for the women in their lives	.744 [.658; .808]***
11. Feministki stawiają nierozsądne żądania wobec mężczyzn  Feminists are making entirely reasonable demands of men.	.894 [.855; .921]**	11. W porównaniu z mężczyznami, kobiety mają bardziej wyrafinowany gust i poczucie dobrego smaku  Women, as compared to men, tend to have a more refined sense of culture and good taste	.538 [.425; .631]***

Note: \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; Goodness of fit indexes of the model:  $\chi^2(204)=488.53$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\chi^2/df=2.39$ ; CFI=.924; RMSEA=.069. This model fit indices were achieved after introducing modifications based on error covariance

Table 4. Items on hostile and benevolent sexism and their confirmatory factor loadings obtained in this sample

Note: \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; Goodness of fit indexes of the model:  $\chi^2(204)=488.53$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\chi^2/df=2.39$ ; CFI=.924; RMSEA=.069. This model fit indices were achieved after introducing modifications based on error covariance

N° Item	Factor Loadings (95%CI)
1. Mam podobny światopogląd co osoby zaangażowane w Strajk Kobiet I have a similar viewpoint to those involved in the Women's Strike	.896 [.843; .940]***
2. Moje doświadczenia życiowe są podobne do doświadczeń osób zaangażowanych w Strajk Kobiet My life experiences are similar to those of the people involved in the Women's Strike	.574 [.475; .663]***
3. Identyfikuję się z osobami, które zaangażowane są w Strajk Kobiet I identify with the people who are involved in the Women's Strike	.955 [.906; 1.001]***

Note: Due to the fact that the model has only one latent variable and three indicators fit indices typically used to define model fit are not applicable, and only factor loadings are reported.

Table 5. Items on cognitive aspects of attitudes toward the abortion rights movement

Note: due to the fact that the model has only one latent variable and three indicators fit indices typically used to define model fit are not applicable, and only factor loadings are reported.

