



# Sexism and Attitudes Toward Policy Spending in Australia and the United States

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Sexist attitudes influence a wide range of political behaviors, including support for explicitly gendered policies like gender quotas. But we know much less about how sexism might broadly shape policy preferences. We argue that some policy domains are implicitly associated with being pro-women or pro-men because of gender socialization, gender segregation in the workforce, and differences in policy preferences in the general population and among political elites. As (hostile) sexists view women as inherently undeserving, making illegitimate claims on government, and getting ahead at the expense of men, we hypothesize that they will oppose policies associated with women, while supporting “male” policies such as defense and law enforcement. We test our hypothesis using the 2019 Australian Election Study and 2018 US Cooperative Congressional Study. We find similar patterns of policy preferences, wherein those holding sexist attitudes (net of other attitudes and demographic characteristics) want to cut funding for pro-women policies like social services, education, and health, while they approve of increased funding for law enforcement and defense.

**Keywords:** sexism, policy attitudes, government spending, gender, surveys, Australia, United States

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## INTRODUCTION

Gender role socialization theory argues that girls are socialized to prefer (and excel at) caring and interpersonal skills, while boys are socialized to have stronger leadership skills (Eagly and Koenig, 2006). Translating into adulthood, these gender roles shape the career choices that individuals make (Diekmann et al., 2010) and the expectations about the relative traits of men and women (Eagly, 2007). These population-level gender roles then influence how men and women make political decisions, so that women in the general population support policies that help others and are in the ethos of care at higher rates than men (Diekmann and Schneider, 2010; Lizotte, 2019).

Socialized perceptions of individuals' strengths and weaknesses may therefore translate into expectations about the policy strengths of women in political office (Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993), including that women are better suited to policy responsibilities such as children, education, and welfare. Extensive research finds evidence of gender stereotyping of political candidates and leaders, with consequences for electoral outcomes (Bauer, 2015, 2017; Holman et al., 2016, 2019). Additionally, women in political office become experts on making policy in these areas, both through their own interest and because of expectations placed upon them by party leaders and voters (Krook and O'Brien, 2012; Holman, 2014; Lazarus and Steigerwalt, 2018; Homola, 2021). As a result of these population level and political factors, issues like education and welfare are firmly feminized in public opinion.

In this article, we draw on gender role socialization and the feminization of policy domains to theorize that “women’s policies” represent a threat to the gendered system orientation (Azevedo et al., 2017) of citizens with sexist views. While previous studies have compared men and women’s gendered perceptions of politicians, leaders, and policies, this study instead looks at the relationship between (specifically hostile) sexist attitudes and those gendered perceptions. Specifically, we hypothesize that sexism negatively predicts support for government spending in policy areas “owned” by women—through gender stereotypes, gender differences in attitudes in the general population, and the actions of women in office and party leaders. Just as sexist individuals may disapprove of women leaders, so too will they disapprove of policies that they perceive as benefiting women. We test this theory using comparable measures of support for policy expenditure in two representative datasets: the 2018 Cooperative Congressional Elections Study in the United States and the 2019 Australian Election Study.

Across both cases, we find significant evidence that sexist attitudes are correlated with opposition to increased expenditure on any policy considered pro-women, even when controlling for gender, race, partisan affiliation, socio-economic status, and religion. Those who hold sexist attitudes do support funding increases in some areas though: law enforcement and national defense, or policy areas seen as pro-men and associated with masculinity. Despite a variety of political differences across the countries, the results are remarkably similar in both the United States and Australia. Our results build on work by scholars who have called for a deeper understanding of the ways that gendered attitudes shape political engagement and policy preferences, above and beyond the role of gender (Huddy and Willmann, 2018; Cassese and Barnes, 2019; Cassese, 2020).

## POLICY PREFERENCES AND HOSTILE SEXISM

Preferences for government policy priorities are shaped by multidimensional factors: partisan identity (Bolsen et al., 2014), self-interest (Compton and Lipsmeyer, 2019), sociotropic concerns (Mansfield and Mutz, 2009), and ideology (Linos and West, 2003). The ideological explanation emphasizes that individuals’ beliefs about the role of government and the relative importance of government and private forces comprise a general worldview, which dictates attitudes on specific policies or government expenditure. While ideology is regularly included as a core determinant of policy preferences, research rarely considers how both ideology and policies (as well as partisan identity, and the prioritization of self or community) are deeply gendered.

Gendered attitudes underpin a variety of political experiences and preferences. Here, we look explicitly at sexism, a key system-justifying belief that enables people to explain and defend inequalities between women and men (Jost and Kay, 2005). In turn, system justification theory helps individuals justify policy positions that reinforce inequalities between groups and preserve the status quo. The most explicit manifestation of sexist attitudes

in political psychology is “hostile sexism” (Glick and Fiske, 2001; Cassese and Barnes, 2019): the “antipathy toward women who are viewed as usurping men’s power” (Glick and Fiske, 1996, p. 109). For hostile sexists, women seek advancement at the expense of men, and should therefore be viewed as untrustworthy, power-seeking, and manipulative (Glick and Fiske, 1996; Glick, 2019). Furthermore, women make illegitimate claims on government to advance their position beyond their innate capacities. At the extreme end, hostile sexists believe women do not deserve equal footing in society and that discrimination against them is justifiable (Glick, 2019).

These attitudes can predict a wide range of political behaviors, including perceptions of political scandals (Barnes et al., 2020), responses to electoral campaign strategies (Cassese and Holman, 2018), and vote choice in the 2016 American presidential election (Bock et al., 2017; Frasure-Yokley, 2018; Schaffner et al., 2018; Cassese and Barnes, 2019; Glick, 2019), 2019 Australian election (Beauregard, 2021), and 2019 British general election (de Geus et al., 2021). Additional work has shown that sexism shapes views of explicitly gendered policies like gender quotas (Beauregard and Sheppard, 2021), but also opposition to policies that are perceived to be a threat to the status quo such as climate policy (Benegal and Holman, 2021). We extend this literature by arguing that hostile sexist attitudes underpin respondents’ views of which policy areas deserve funding, and which do not. Since hostile sexists view women as undeserving, as making illegitimate claims on government, and making gains at the expense of men, we hypothesize that they will reject policies that are typically considered feminine and could be perceived as disturbing the gendered status quo and support policies considered masculine and that maintain the status quo.

Hostile sexism is just one dimension of sexist views present in the public; many people also hold benevolent sexist views, which are rooted in the separate social roles that men and women occupy in society (Glick and Fiske, 1996; Glick, 2019). Benevolent sexists view women as needing protecting and men as the natural providers of that protection. Research on the effects of benevolent sexism on political attitudes and behaviors are much more mixed: benevolent sexists were not more likely to support Trump in 2016 or Boris Johnson in 2019 (de Geus et al., 2021). In this paper, we focus on hostile sexism for both theoretical and methodological reasons (which we discuss throughout the paper). The next section reviews how some public policies are gendered and describes the mechanisms through which hostile sexist attitudes affect policy attitudes.

## GENDERED PERCEPTIONS OF POLICIES AND HOSTILE SEXISM

Gender role socialization theorizes that children are differentially socialized through internal and external rewards and punishments: girls are encouraged to develop interpersonal skills, to be more caring, and to engage in interpersonal smoothing, while boys are more commonly socialized to have leadership skills, to be more assertive and aggressive, and to be more inwardly concerned (Eagly, 1987; Eagly and Karau, 2002;

Schneider and Bos, 2019). These gender roles translate into expectations, or gender stereotypes, which tend to associate adult women with being more caring and compassionate while men are more aggressive and decisive. Accordingly, these have been linked with perceptions of women being better at caring work (such as being teachers or nurses) and men at work requiring physical abilities or leadership (Eagly, 1987; Eagly and Karau, 2002).

These gender stereotypes have carried on to the political arena where policies are often seen as either feminine or masculine. Generally, policy areas that concerns the public sphere are deemed to be masculine (construction and public work, correctional service/police, defense, military and national/public security, enterprise, and transport) and policy areas associated with the private sphere are considered feminine (children and family, education, and health and social welfare) (Herrnson et al., 2003; Krook and O'Brien, 2012). This gendered division of policy areas can be observed both at the elite and individual level.

## Gendered Behaviors Among Women Elites

At the elite level, gender differences in expertise and authority align with gender roles in society. By way of example, women promoted to political executives have disproportionately been appointed to portfolio areas reflecting traditional stereotypes (Davis, 1997; Reynolds, 1999; Siaroff, 2000; Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson, 2005; Krook and O'Brien, 2012; Barnes and O'Brien, 2018). Women cabinet ministers or secretaries are more commonly assigned to health, social welfare, education, family, and culture responsibilities while men are more often responsible for economic affairs, defense, employment, and the budget. Furthermore, when women are assigned to typically male executive roles such as finance or defense, it is often (ostensibly, at least) to help a government reverse public perceptions of corruption or malfeasance—what has been called a “housekeeping” role (Armstrong et al., 2021).

The same phenomenon exists at sub-executive levels. Research on parliamentary committee finds gender differences in membership that follow gender stereotypes of labor division (Heath et al., 2005; Barnes, 2014; Bolzendahl, 2014; Pansardi and Vercesi, 2017; Goodwin et al., 2021). For instance, Coffé et al. (2019) find that women are overrepresented on parliamentary committees examining feminized issues such as health and family while men are overrepresented on committees overseeing foreign affairs and defense. These gender differences may reflect MPs' individual preferences, or women MPs might strategically specialize in policy areas less favored by men as a way of gaining access to parliamentary committees. However, similar differences also occur in electoral campaigns where women are more likely to talk about social policy issues than men (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2017), and in the legislature once elected (Bäck and Debus, 2019).

These patterns can be accelerated and encouraged by the behaviors of parties themselves, which engage in strategic action to attract voters by focusing on policies that give them a comparative advantage (Ondercin, 2017; Holman and Kalmoe, 2021). Indeed, parties on the left elevate women's issues on their party platforms, elite communication, committee appointments,

and votes (Holman and Kalmoe, 2021; Coffé et al., 2019; Espirito-Santo et al., 2020). Over time, parties on the right have engaged in strategic action to try to attract women voters by supporting issues like gender quotas and putting women on party tickets, but these have not generally been accompanied by concrete policy action on women's issues (Weeks et al., 2022). The actions of parties, particularly on the left, to focus on issues associated with women's concerns, then attract women as voters, reinforcing these patterns (Ondercin, 2017, 2018; Homola, 2019).

Overall, this literature finds that gendered divisions of labor in political work are both persistent across time (although some evidence suggests that it is slowly declining in advanced democracies) and in executive, legislative, and campaign contexts. The presence of women in politics can prompt citizens to think about appropriate roles for women in their society, in turn cuing gendered responses to survey questions on political attitudes (Atkeson, 2003; Morgan and Buice, 2013). Further, female politicians' perceptions of gendered expertise may discourage them from speaking on masculine-coded policy areas and risk any associated criticism for failing to conform to gendered expectations or for not “staying in their lane” (Atkinson et al., 2022).

## Gendered Perceptions of Policy Competencies

When politicians behave in ways that both create and perpetuate gendered norms around policy domains, citizens are more likely to perceive those domains as gendered, and then to reward or punish those politicians for how they perform in policy areas that align with their gender. American voters perceive women candidates as more qualified to deal with traditionally-defined female issues relating to the private sphere, and men as more competent to deal with public sphere related policies (Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993; Sanbonmatsu, 2002; Fridkin and Kenney, 2009; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan, 2009).

However, research outside the United States has found less delineation between feminine and masculine policy areas (Devroe and Wauters, 2018; Lefkofridi et al., 2019). In Australia, Carson et al. (2019) even find that women are perceived to be more competent than men at both military and health care issues, but this has so far proven an outlier in the field. Bauer (2020) finds that female candidates emphasizing typical female issues such as education, health care, and welfare have better leadership evaluations generally: female candidates engaging with typically feminine identified issues send the signal that they are representing women's interests in a traditionally male arena. Alternatively, voters punish female candidates when they are perceived as not advancing women's issues or when they lack feminine traits (Cassese and Holman, 2018). When women politicians fail in feminized policy domains—their “home turf”—they lose votes (Roberts and Utych, 2022).

Further, voters who hold traditional views on gender (e.g., “gender essentialists”) are more likely to punish political candidates who engage in issues outside of their gendered domains (Swigger and Meyer, 2019). Gender essentialism is the tendency to believe traditional gender differences are natural,

intrinsic, and immutable factors. While gender essentialism is different than hostile sexism, Swigger and Meyer (2019)'s findings indicate that respondent gender is not sufficient in understanding hostility toward politicians who cross into counter-gender policy areas; attitudes toward men and women and their roles in society are more useful predictors of subsequent evaluations of those politicians.

## Gender Gaps in Policy Preferences

Beyond the perceived competencies of men and women politicians, men and women voters regularly report differences in policy salience and preferred policy outcomes (regardless of the gender of the politician delivering a policy). Women are commonly more likely to support government expenditure in feminized issue domains such as welfare, health, and childcare (Schlesinger and Heldman, 2001; Gidengil et al., 2003; Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Huddy et al., 2008; Barnes and Cassese, 2017). On the other hand, men are more supportive of the military use of force (Lizotte, 2017, 2019). Feminist actors have successfully leveraged gender gaps in public opinion and issue salience to frame certain issues as “women’s issues” and focus public attention accordingly (Campbell, 2016; Yildirim, 2021). This approach has seen policy success in domains such as welfare spending and childcare reforms, with women voters persuaded to support policies across partisan boundaries.

We might therefore expect a “backlash effect” among voters with hostile sexist attitudes, as greater public framing and perception of certain issues as benefiting women makes those issues particularly salient. Policy advocated by feminist actors (Celis and Childs, 2020) should be perceived as disrupting the male-dominated status quo and as such should be opposed by hostile sexists. Furthermore, the greater support for some policy issues by women than men should indicate to hostile sexists that these policies are unworthy of government action and government engaging on this policy can only occur at the expense of the interests and priorities of men.

One caveat in the discussion of policy preferences is that few existing measures constrain preferences to be revenue-neutral (Barnes et al., 2021). Survey questions rarely force respondents to choose to increase funding in some policy areas while reducing it in others, so there is nothing to stop an individual from reporting a preference for increased expenditure across all domains. Other measures take a more expressive approach, asking respondents to name (or choose from within a list) the most important issues facing them personally or the country in general. We might conceptualize these different approaches as occupying a spectrum “embracing complexity of budget decision-making” to “measuring top-of-mind responses to different types of policy.” We currently have little sense of how gendered policy preferences might be conditional on the complexity of the measure, although Barnes et al. (2021) find that women and men have very similar views on which policies deserve more and less funding (in a revenue-neutral context) compared with earlier findings that (in unconstrained measures) women are more likely to prefer more government spending across both “male” and “female” domains (e.g., Gidengil et al., 2003).

Overall, the extant literature provides ample evidence that many public policies are gendered—that is, commonly associated with one gender or the other, by both political elites and ordinary citizens. This gendered differentiation of government actions tends to reflect stereotypes about the division of the public and private sphere. However, it is important to note that the gender differences identified above are tendencies. Men (and women, respectively) can and do support typically feminine (masculine) policies and/or engage across “gender lines.” Gendered policy division patterns are the broader picture and are reflected in the division of labor among elected representatives, the stereotypes citizens use to assess politicians and their expertise, and the policy preferences of women and men. In turn, these patterns should signal to hostile sexists that feminine policy areas should be opposed while masculine policy priorities should be supported.

*Individuals with high levels of hostile sexism will be more likely to support increasing funding for men’s issue policies and decrease funding for women’s issue policies.*

## DATA AND METHODS

To evaluate our hypothesis on the relationship between sexist attitudes and policy preferences, we rely on the 2018 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) and the 2019 Australian Election Study (AES). The CCES uses online sampling from YouGov panels, advertisements, and other survey draws to collect political attitudes from a nationally representative sample of 60,000 respondents in its 2018 survey. The AES is sampled *via* the Geo-Coded National Address Frame, a national register of Australian addresses, and surveys completed either online (push-to-web) or *via* hardcopy questionnaire. The 2019 survey received 2179 responses with an effective response rate of 42.1%. Both datasets contain similar measures of sexist attitudes and policy support. The inclusion of data from both the United States and Australia allows to compare the relationship between sexist attitudes and policy preferences in a context where sexism is cued (United States) to a context where sexism plays a much less visible role (Australia). Cassese and Barnes (2019) argue that the election of Donald Trump in 2016 introduced an explicit gendered dynamic into the election and that this campaign context can explain why sexist attitudes matter to understand vote choice in 2016, but not in 2012. On the other hand, the 2019 (and the previous 2016). Australian election did not feature any comparable degree of gendered dynamics. Leaders of both major political parties were men, and gender issues were not especially salient throughout the campaign. However, sexism in Australian politics does remain salient among some voters following the leadership of Julia Gillard from 2010 to 2013 (Beauregard, 2021). Without direct measures of perceived policy competencies, we focus exclusively on respondents’ policy preferences in this study.

## Spending Preferences

We use very similarly worded questions from the 2018 CCES and the 2019 AES to measure spending preferences among Americans and Australians. Using the 2018 Cooperative Congressional Elections Study (CCES), we look at responses to the question, “State legislatures must make choices when making spending

decisions on important state programs. How would you like your legislature to spend money on each of the five areas below? Greatly increase; Slightly increase, Maintain; Slightly decrease; Greatly decrease.” As discussed, this measure does not constrain the respondent to revenue-neutrality but does provide a simple and easily understandable measure of expressive policy preferences. The five policy areas include: Education, Welfare, Healthcare, Transportation/Infrastructure, and Law Enforcement. The order of policies was randomized for each respondent. Among the areas, we categorize welfare, education, and healthcare as feminine issues areas, while law enforcement is a traditional masculine area (Lizotte, 2019); we are agnostic as to the gendered nature of infrastructure and transportation. **Table 1** provides the spending priorities of Americans about these areas: across all respondents, increased education spending attracts the most support, while welfare spending is the least popular.

To evaluate policy preferences, we use 10 questions from the AES asking respondents: “Should there be more or less public expenditure in the following area? (1) Health; (2) Education; (3) Unemployment benefits; (4) Defense; (5) Old-age pensions; (6) Business and industry; (7) Police and law enforcement; (8) The National Disability Insurance Scheme; (9) Public transport and infrastructure; and (10) Child care.” The order of policy (1) through (10) was randomized for each respondent. The response frame included: (1) Much more than now; (2) Somewhat more than now; (3) The same as now; (4) Somewhat less than now; and (5) Much less than now. Among the 10 policy areas, defense, police and law enforcement, and business and industry can be classified as masculine areas (Krook and O’Brien, 2012). Health, education, unemployment benefits, old-age pensions, the National Disability Insurance Scheme, and childcare are considered feminine policy areas. Again, we are agnostic about public transport and infrastructure.

**Table 2** displays the spending preferences of Australians in the 2019 election. Most respondents favor increasing spending for health, education, old-age pensions, public transport and infrastructure, and police and law enforcement. A plurality of respondents favors spending to remain the same for the National Disability Insurance Scheme, childcare, and unemployment benefits while a majority of respondents want spending to remain at the same level for business and industry.

## Sexism

Both surveys ask questions aimed at tapping into hostile sexist views; we focus on measuring hostile sexism because we have clear theoretical expectations for how hostile sexism should relate to views on funding by policy arena and we have comparable measures across surveys in the two countries. We use two questions from the CCES to evaluate sexist attitudes: “Feminists are making entirely reasonable demands of men” (reverse coded) and “When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against.” **Table 3** shows that responses to both questions are distributed evenly across all five categories; slightly more respondents display hostile sexist responses than not. We combine the two questions into a single index of the averaged response to the questions for subsequent regression analyses. These

two questions are highly correlated (0.43) and hang together well (alpha 0.7059) in a single measure. Main results from the paper are replicated with individual sexism measures (see **Appendix B**).

Sexist attitudes among Australians are measured with an abbreviated version of the hostile sexism scale developed by (Glick and Fiske, 1996). The AES includes three questions from this scale: “Please say whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with each of these statements (1) Many women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist; (2) Women fail to appreciate what men do for them; and (3) Women seek to gain power by getting control over men.” All three questions are correlated with each other and were combined in a single index of the averaged response to the questions (alpha 0.8303). Main results from the paper are replicated with individual sexism measures (see **Appendix B**). **Table 4** presents the distribution of answers for all three sexism questions and demonstrates that more than 40% of Australian respondents agree or strongly agree that women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist. This is followed by over 18% of Australians who agree with the statement that women seek to gain power by getting control over men and 17% of respondents who agree that women fail to appreciate what men do for them. Across the three questions, Australian respondents demonstrate less hostile sexism than 2018 American respondents.

Finally, a series of control variables are used in the analyses with efforts to standardize across the two datasets as much as possible. The control variables include gender (Women = 1), age, annual household income (categorical), education (categorical), partisanship (Democratic = 1 in US; Labor = 1 in Australia; others = 0), and religion (Catholic, Evangelical, not religious, others). In the United States, we control for race.

## RESULTS

To start, we examine the bivariate relationships between sexism and spending preferences through correlations and linear fit lines, presenting the US data in the left-hand pane and the Australian data in the right-hand pane. Given that we have expectations for sexism to be associated with preferences for decreased spending in some areas and increased spending in others, we separate out women’s issue areas (left) and men’s issue areas (right). We have no strong a priori expectations for the gendered nature of infrastructure and transportation; some research would suggest that women in office prioritize the funding of issues like education and social services at the expense of infrastructure (e.g., Barnes et al., 2021) and men hold the overwhelming majority of jobs in this area (Barnes and Holman, 2021). This might produce the expectations that this area will be associated with men’s issues and sexism will be positively correlated with the area. However, given that transportation is a public good and the AES asks about “public” transportation, we might expect that this policy area would be seen as expanding the size of government and as a form of wealth transfer, thus grouping it with women’s issues. We thus are agnostic about the direction of the effect for attitudes about spending on

**TABLE 1** | Spending priorities in US, CCES 2018.

	Greatly increase	Slightly increase	Maintain	Slightly decrease	Greatly decrease
Education	42	28	22	4	3
Healthcare	38	27	24	5	4
Infrastructure/transportation	32	37	29	3	1
Law enforcement	22	33	35	5	3
Welfare	15	16	36	19	12

Cell entries are percentages of all respondents. Shaded cells indicate modal responses.

**TABLE 2** | Spending preferences in Australia, AES 2019.

	Much more	Somewhat more	Same	Somewhat less	Much less
Health	33	45	21	1	1
Education	28	42	26	2	1
Old-age pensions	24	44	27	3	2
Public transport and infrastructure	22	39	34	3	2
Police and law enforcement	17	37	39	5	2
The National Disability Insurance Scheme	17	30	44	6	3
Childcare	14	28	42	11	5
Unemployment benefits	10	22	42	19	8
Defense	8	22	49	13	8
Business and industry	7	20	52	15	5

Cell entries are percentages of all respondents. Shaded cells indicate modal responses.

**TABLE 3** | Sexist attitudes in US, CCES 2018.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree
Feminist reasonable—reverse	21	21	22	17	19
Women complain	18	18	28	25	11

Cell entries are percentages of all respondents.

**TABLE 4** | Sexist attitudes in Australia, AES 2019.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree
Women interpret innocent remarks as being sexist	10	17	30	32	11
Women fail to appreciate what men do	22	25	35	13	4
Women seek to gain power over men	22	27	33	15	4

Cell entries are percentages.

infrastructure and transportation, but generally group it with men’s issues in the results that we present.

Looking first at the bivariate relationship between spending and sexism for women’s issues in the United States (see **Figure 1**), we see a strong, consistent, negative relationship, with preferences for spending on welfare, education, and health decreasing as an individual’s sexist preferences increase in the United States. With men’s issues, however, we see a different

pattern. Spending preferences on police fit with our expectations, but infrastructure does not.

We see very similar patterns when we look at the bivariate relationships among Australians, as displayed in **Figure 2**. Overall, we see consistent patterns: sexism is associated with decreased preferences for spending on women’s issues and increased spending on men’s issues. Again, however, we find exceptions: pensions do not follow this pattern,

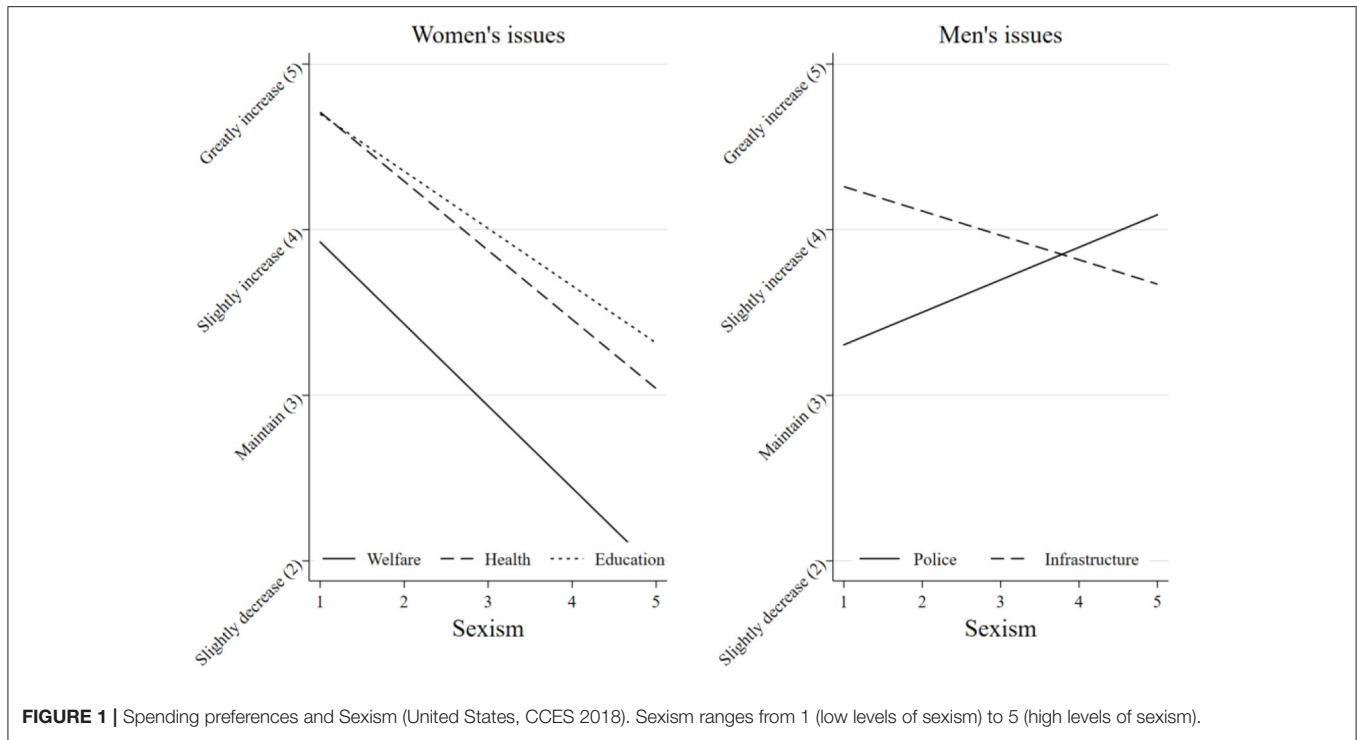


FIGURE 1 | Spending preferences and Sexism (United States, CCES 2018). Sexism ranges from 1 (low levels of sexism) to 5 (high levels of sexism).

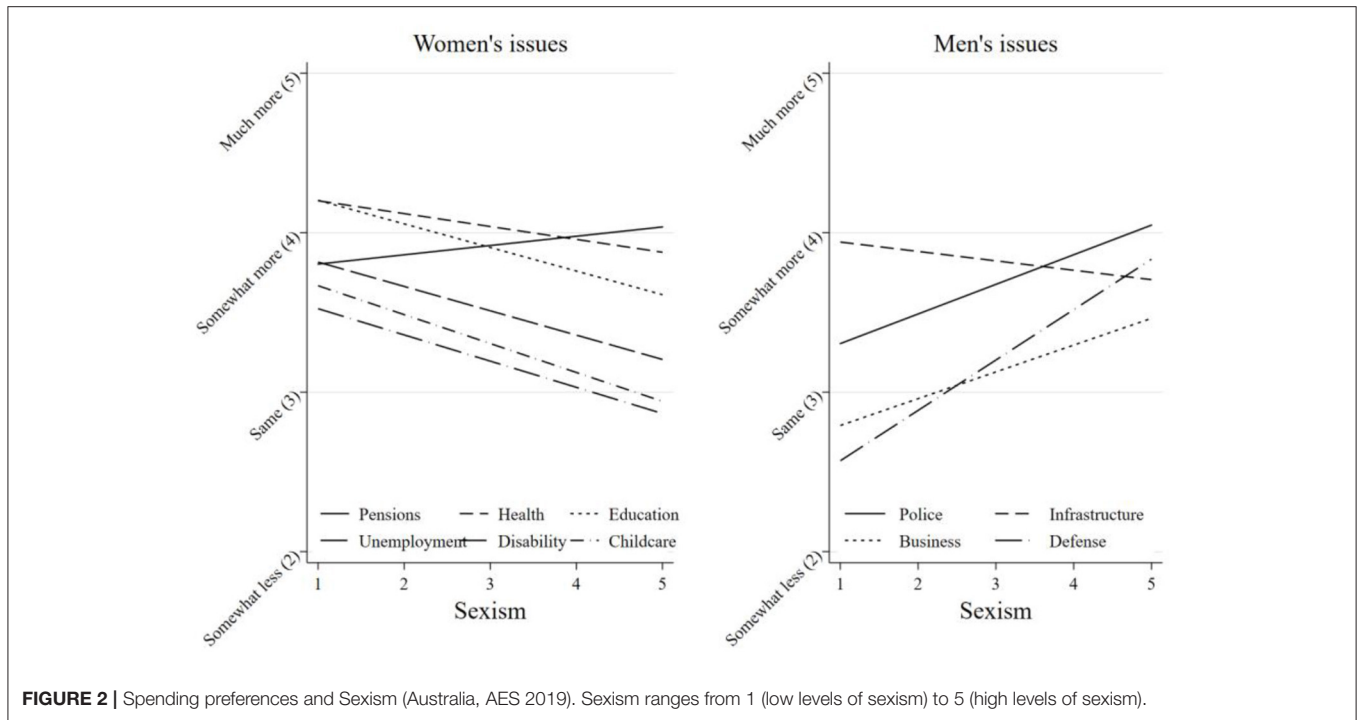


FIGURE 2 | Spending preferences and Sexism (Australia, AES 2019). Sexism ranges from 1 (low levels of sexism) to 5 (high levels of sexism).

with sexism positively correlated with the issue, even as it falls somewhat under the “women’s issue” umbrella. And, again, like we found in the United States, we see that infrastructure is not positively correlated with sexism, but instead negatively correlated.

### Multivariate Models

We next present multivariate models chronologically and start with the United States with the 2018 CCES results (Table 5), estimating each model of support for decreased or increased spending on welfare, health care, education, law

**TABLE 5 |** Hostile sexism and preferences for state spending, CCES 2018.

	Welfare	Health	Education	Police	Infrastructure
Sexism	-0.54*** (0.01)	-0.49*** (0.01)	-0.41*** (0.01)	0.26*** (0.01)	-0.19*** (0.01)
Female	-0.06*** (0.02)	0.24*** (0.02)	0.26*** (0.02)	0.46*** (0.02)	-0.36*** (0.02)
Age	-0.20*** (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	-0.14*** (0.01)	0.38*** (0.01)	0.29*** (0.01)
Education	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.13*** (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.18*** (0.01)	0.11*** (0.01)
Income	-0.37*** (0.01)	-0.26*** (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)
Democrat	1.27*** (0.02)	1.26*** (0.02)	0.94*** (0.02)	-0.27*** (0.02)	0.50*** (0.02)
Born Again	0.23*** (0.03)	0.07* (0.03)	-0.04 (0.03)	0.41*** (0.03)	-0.18*** (0.03)
Catholic	-0.25*** (0.03)	-0.13*** (0.03)	-0.14*** (0.03)	0.30*** (0.03)	-0.09*** (0.03)
Evangelical	-0.41*** (0.04)	-0.22*** (0.04)	0.03 (0.04)	-0.06 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.04)
Not Religious	-0.11*** (0.02)	0.03 (0.03)	0.05* (0.03)	-0.10*** (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)
Other Relig	0.14*** (0.03)	0.00 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)	0.05^ (0.03)	0.00 (0.03)
White	-0.15*** (0.02)	-0.14*** (0.02)	-0.22*** (0.02)	-0.08*** (0.02)	-0.08*** (0.02)
Cut 1	-3.43*** (0.05)	-4.56*** (0.05)	-4.75*** (0.05)	-2.79*** (0.05)	-5.22*** (0.06)
Cut 2	-2.27*** (0.05)	-3.60*** (0.05)	-3.86*** (0.05)	-1.66*** (0.05)	-4.04*** (0.05)
Cut 3	-0.22*** (0.04)	-1.69*** (0.05)	-1.85*** (0.05)	0.73*** (0.04)	-1.50*** (0.04)
Cut 4	1.11*** (0.04)	-0.28*** (0.05)	-0.47*** (0.05)	2.34*** (0.05)	0.11** (0.04)
Observations	46,534	46,526	46,497	46,469	46,486
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.12	0.11	0.08	0.05	0.03

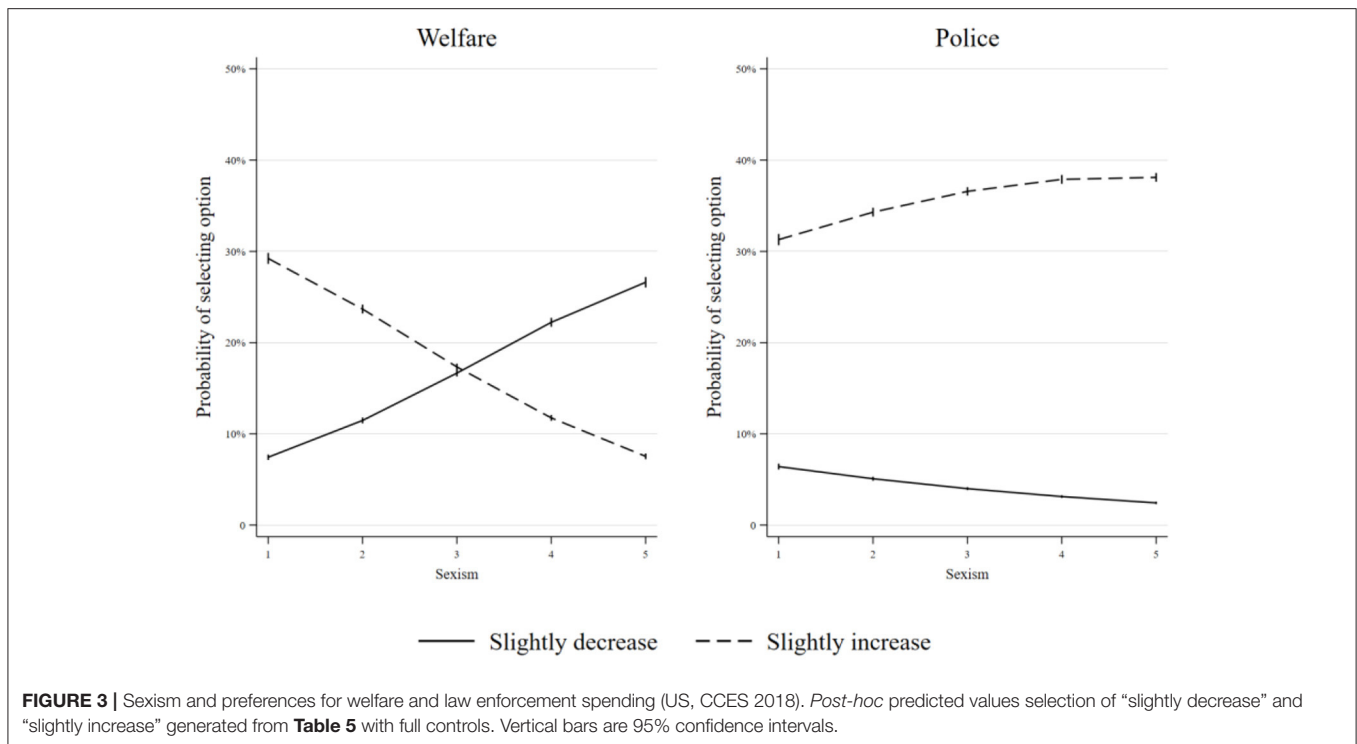
Ordinal logistical regression. Standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable: five-point scale from greatly decrease (1) to greatly increase (5). ^p < 0.10, \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001.

enforcement, and transportation/infrastructure as an ordinal logistic regression. As expected, we find that hostile sexist attitudes are associated with support for reducing state spending on welfare, health care, and education and increasing spending on law enforcement. Interestingly, we see a continuation of the pattern on infrastructure: we find significant negative effects for transportation / infrastructure, a policy domain where we were agnostic about the effects of sexism. As we previously note, it may be that sexists associated a larger state and more spending *generally* with women’s issues; we also see that the explained variance on the infrastructure model is much lower than the other models, suggesting different explanatory variables for spending on infrastructure.

To provide an example of the substantive effects of sexism on policy attitudes, we next use post-estimation predicted

probabilities to examine the average level of support for funding change across the spectrum of sexist attitudes in **Figure 3**. We estimate how the distribution of selecting “slightly decrease” and “slightly increase” as response options varies by individual sexist attitudes and plot those effects, with vertical bars indicating confidence intervals. We find substantively large, counter directional trends for the effect on sexism on attitudes about welfare: among those with low levels of sexism, there is a 29% probability of selecting the option “slightly increase” but only an 8% probability of selecting “slightly decrease.” In comparison, among those with high levels of sexism, we see almost exactly the reverse pattern: a 7% probability of selecting the slightly increase option and a 27% probability of selecting the slightly decrease. In comparison, sexism shapes views toward policing but with very different overall patterns: the probability of selecting “slightly





increase” improves from 31 to 37% as individuals increase in sexism, and slightly decrease declines from 6 to 2%. In short, sexism is associated with much larger swings in preferences for the women’s issue compared to the men’s issue.

We next examine these multivariate relationships in Australia using ordinal logistical regression models. As expected, Australian respondents with high levels of hostile sexism are significantly less likely to favor increasing spending for women-friendly policy areas such as education, unemployment benefits, the National Disability Insurance Scheme, and childcare (**Table 6**) as well as policy areas associated with men (such as defense and police) and those areas where we are agnostic toward the effects (such as infrastructure); these results are presented in **Table 7**. We do identify surprising findings, starting with the non-significant relationship between sexist attitudes and preferences for health spending, aged pensions, and business and industry. Most research on gendered policy areas is from the United States; one possibility for these findings is that these policy areas are not associated with a particular gender in Australia. For example, health may be perceived as a comparatively neutral policy due to the presence of universal government-provided healthcare.

Among the masculine policy areas included in **Table 6**, hostile sexist attitudes are significantly associated with preferences for increased spending on defense and police and law enforcement, supporting our hypothesis. Sexist respondents’ preferences for decreased spending for public transport and infrastructure are interesting. We were agnostic to the gendering of these areas with a weak expectation that sexist orientations should lead to preference for increased spending. We do not find this: sexism

is associated with reduced preferences for spending. A possible explanation for the results in **Table 6** might be that the questions in the AES include the words “public transport.” Public transport might be associated in the mind of respondents with welfare types of programs involving government spending that tend to benefit women. In this sense, taking the bus or train to go to work as opposed to using your car might be perceived as feminine (Benegal and Holman, 2021). Consequently, respondents holding sexist attitudes favor less spending on such government services.

As another simple illustration of the patterns that we see in the data, we again use post-estimation predicted probabilities to examine the average level of support for funding change across the spectrum of sexist attitudes (**Figure 4**). We focus on the probability that an individual selected either of the mild preference options: “Slightly less” and “Slightly more.” We see a crossing and substantively large substantive effects for the spending preferences on the woman’s issue (unemployment benefits) in a pattern that looks remarkably similar to the US data. Here, we also observe an interesting pattern in the policing question, where the effect of sexism is substantively larger in shaping the probability of selecting the “somewhat more” option. Here, the probability of selecting “somewhat less” declines from 7 to 2%, but “somewhat more” increases from 31 to 44% across the sexism measure.

## CONCLUSION

The findings presented above support our hypotheses regarding the relationship between sexist attitudes and policy spending

**TABLE 6** | Hostile sexism and preferences for spending on women's issues, AES 2019.

	Health	Education	Unemployment benefits	Old-age pensions	The national disability insurance scheme	Child care
Sexism	-0.07 (0.05)	-0.25*** (0.05)	-0.28*** (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)	-0.24*** (0.05)	-0.19*** (0.05)
Female	0.34*** (0.09)	0.04 (0.09)	-0.03 (0.09)	0.43*** (0.09)	0.30** (0.09)	0.25** (0.09)
Age	-0.08 (0.05)	-0.19*** (0.05)	0.28*** (0.05)	0.29*** (0.05)	-0.04 (0.05)	-0.24*** (0.05)
Education	-0.23*** (0.05)	-0.05 (0.05)	0.03 (0.05)	-0.23*** (0.05)	-0.10* (0.05)	-0.12* (0.05)
Income	-0.12* (0.05)	-0.06 (0.05)	-0.54*** (0.05)	-0.27*** (0.05)	-0.15** (0.05)	-0.06 (0.05)
Labor	0.67*** (0.10)	0.57*** (0.10)	0.63*** (0.10)	0.17^ (0.10)	0.52*** (0.10)	0.34*** (0.10)
Catholic	0.02 (0.14)	-0.21 (0.14)	-0.03 (0.14)	0.04 (0.14)	0.06 (0.14)	0.07 (0.14)
Evangelical	-0.55* (0.26)	-0.27 (0.25)	-0.57* (0.26)	-0.04 (0.26)	-0.46^ (0.26)	-0.04 (0.26)
Not Religious	0.04 (0.13)	0.04 (0.12)	0.36** (0.12)	0.10 (0.12)	0.07 (0.13)	0.14 (0.12)
Other Religion	0.02 (0.16)	0.19 (0.16)	0.07 (0.16)	-0.17 (0.16)	0.39* (0.16)	0.15 (0.16)
Cut 1	-5.91*** (0.52)	-5.63*** (0.36)	-3.53*** (0.21)	-4.33*** (0.28)	-3.84*** (0.23)	-3.03*** (0.21)
Cut 2	-4.31*** (0.29)	-4.02*** (0.23)	-1.82*** (0.19)	-3.05*** (0.22)	-2.52*** (0.20)	-1.79*** (0.19)
Cut 3	-0.97*** (0.19)	-1.36*** (0.19)	0.17 (0.19)	-0.61** (0.19)	-0.09 (0.19)	0.30 (0.19)
Cut 4	1.03*** (0.19)	0.59** (0.19)	1.76*** (0.20)	1.40*** (0.19)	1.45*** (0.19)	1.93*** (0.20)
Observations	1,861	1,867	1,861	1,862	1,864	1,861
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.03	0.03	0.05	0.04	0.02	0.02

Ordinal logistical regression. Standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable is preference that public expenditure in area much less than now (1), somewhat less than now (2), the same as now (3), somewhat more than now (4), and much more than now (5). ^ $p < 0.10$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

preferences. Specifically, we hypothesized that individuals displaying hostile sexist attitudes should be less supportive of public policy considered feminine, and more supportive of masculinized public policies compare individuals that disagree with sexist attitudes. We find significant evidence that sexist attitudes are correlated with rejection of spending on welfare policies including health education, childcare and disability insurance, even when controlling for gender, race, partisan affiliation, socio-economic status, and religion. On the other hand, sexist attitudes are significantly associated with preferences for greater spending on police, law enforcement, and defense. We explain these findings by arguing that some public policies are “owned” by women, through gender stereotypes, gender differences in attitudes in the general population, and the actions of women in office and party leaders. As hostile sexism is associated with beliefs that women are undeserving and are making illegitimate claims on government, and that any gain achieved by women will be at the expense of men, sexist

individuals believe that feminine policy areas are similarly undeserving, illegitimate, and take away from more worthy masculine policy areas. We find support for this argument with public opinion data from the 2018 Cooperative Congressional Elections Study in the United States and the 2019 Australian Election Study.

The findings present here help resolve one of the central challenges of understanding the role of sexism in modern politics. Our approach accounts for the presence of hostile sexism across gender divides (Beauregard and Sheppard, 2021) and gets closer to uncovering a mechanism that explains why gendered assessments of “suitable” political work for men and women politicians persist, even as we become more used to seeing women in power (Atkinson, 2020; Hargrave and Blumenau, 2021). Indeed, the increased presence of women politicians responsible and discussing welfare, health, family, and childcare policies might lead hostile sexist individuals to view these policy areas as unworthy of government action, as taking resources

**TABLE 7** | Hostile sexism and preferences for spending on men's issues, AES 2019.

	Police and law enforcement	Defense	Business and industry	Public transport/infrastructure
Sexism	0.27*** (0.05)	0.46*** (0.05)	0.01 (0.05)	-0.22*** (0.05)
Female	0.23* (0.09)	0.33*** (0.09)	-0.16^ (0.09)	-0.57*** (0.09)
Age	0.29*** (0.05)	0.27*** (0.05)	0.09^ (0.05)	0.14** (0.05)
Education	-0.31*** (0.05)	-0.10* (0.05)	-0.08 (0.05)	0.01 (0.05)
Income	-0.08 (0.05)	-0.14** (0.05)	-0.10* (0.05)	-0.01 (0.05)
Labor	-0.02 (0.10)	-0.03 (0.10)	-0.16 (0.10)	0.19^ (0.10)
Catholic	-0.02 (0.14)	0.01 (0.14)	0.14 (0.14)	0.15 (0.14)
Evangelical	0.21 (0.25)	0.29 (0.25)	-0.77** (0.26)	-0.24 (0.27)
Not Religious	-0.39** (0.12)	-0.60*** (0.13)	-0.21^ (0.13)	0.30* (0.12)
Other Religion	-0.50** (0.17)	-0.93*** (0.17)	-0.20 (0.17)	0.15 (0.16)
Cut 1	-3.74*** (0.25)	-1.72*** (0.20)	-3.05*** (0.21)	-5.30*** (0.29)
Cut 2	-2.23*** (0.20)	-0.51** (0.19)	-1.53*** (0.20)	-3.79*** (0.22)
Cut 3	0.36^ (0.19)	1.98*** (0.20)	0.89*** (0.19)	-1.22*** (0.19)
Cut 4	2.28*** (0.20)	3.52*** (0.21)	2.39*** (0.20)	0.55** (0.19)
Observations	1,865	1,862	1,857	1,863
Pseudo $R^2$	0.05	0.06	0.01	0.02

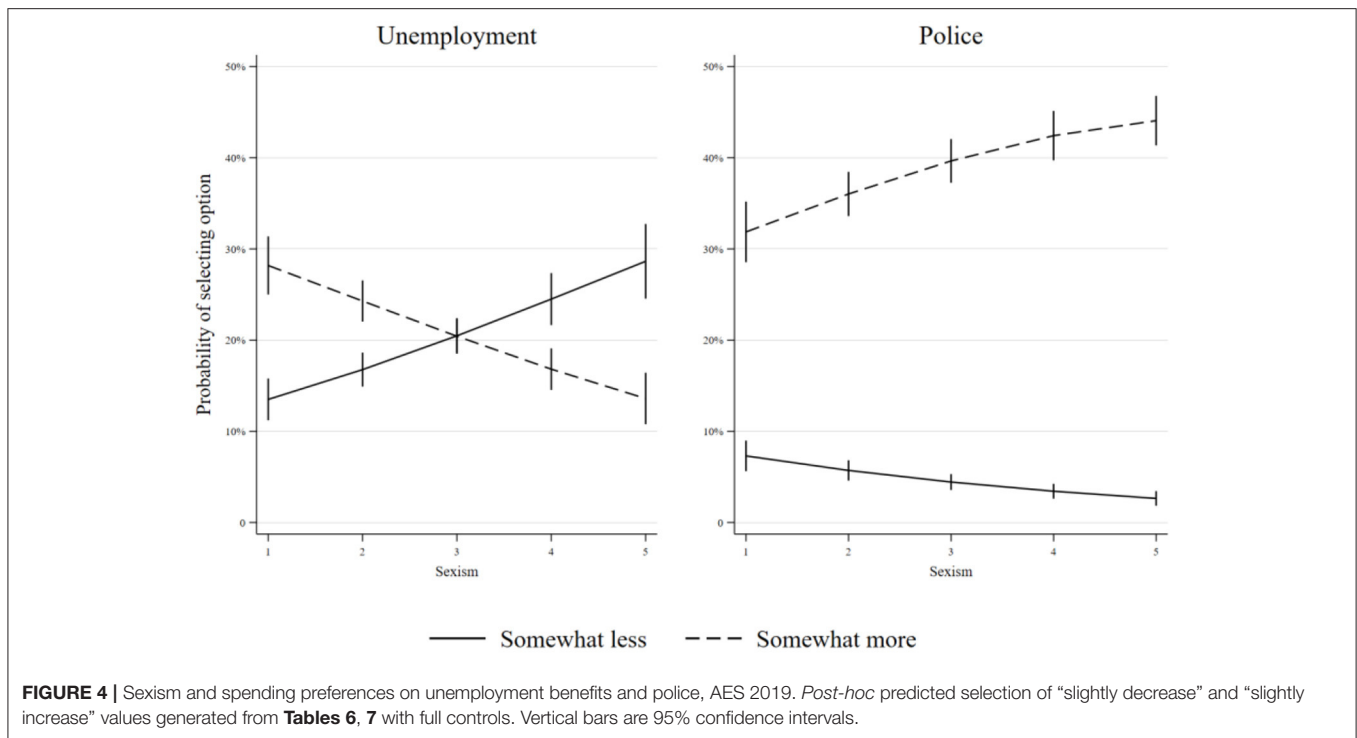
Ordinal logit regression. Standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable is preference that public expenditure in area much less than now (1), somewhat less than now (2), the same as now (3), somewhat more than now (4), and much more than now (5). ^ $p < 0.10$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

away from more deserving (male) policy area, and as being used by women to challenge the status quo, which in turn will lead hostile sexists to oppose resources for feminized policy areas. That women in government are more effective policy leaders (Holman et al., 2021; Homola, 2021) might accelerate backlash effects from sexists.

One of the consistent and surprising findings in our research is that infrastructure does not fit with our expectations as a “man’s issue” in either the United States or Australia. Here, more work is needed to understand attitudes about infrastructure spending in both countries and how it fits or does not fit with a gendered categorization scheme. Research on spending outcomes at the state and local level find that women’s representation (particularly women from specific backgrounds) is often associated with increased spending on women’s issues (Holman, 2014; Barnes et al., 2021), and decreased spending on infrastructure. Future research might consider the ways that attitudes about infrastructure map onto

more general preferences about the size of government and gendered associations.

Despite a variety of political differences across the countries, the results are remarkably similar in both the United States and Australia. As such, influence of sexism on political behavior does not necessarily need to be cued by election campaign dynamics or strategies—at least for policy preferences. This may set policy preferences apart from voting behavior for candidates (see Cassese and Holman, 2018). Arguably, gender and sexism were more of a direct concern in the United States than Australia in the last election in both countries. However, Australia did experience public debates concerning gender and sexism during and after the 2010–2013 prime ministership of Julia Gillard, and this may have ongoing effects on political attitudes. Our findings also present enlightening differences between the two countries, particularly on attitudes toward health spending. While American sexists prefer less spending on health, there is no significant relationship between sexist orientations and



spending preferences in Australia. This result might indicate that some policy areas can be delivered and framed in such ways as not to follow the typically feminine/private and masculine/public dichotomy. Finally, in both the United States and Australia, racism also shapes public opinion (Hutchings et al., 2021) but operates on an overlapping and varying structure from sexism (Banda and Cassese, 2021). Future research might evaluate how some policy arenas are both gendered and racialized (Benegal and Holman, 2021), thus shaping support for policies.

While the United States and Australia provide excellent comparative cases because of the similarities of the two countries, the nature of politics, service provision, and sexism in the countries also gives rise to questions about the applicability of these findings to other countries. Future research might examine the degree to which these relationships are present in countries with stronger welfare systems, pluralistic multi-party governing structures, or lower levels of sexism. Examining these relationships in New Zealand, Sweden, or Germany, for example, might tell us something about how politics shape the relationship between sexism and policy preferences. While scholars have documented the relationship between sexism and vote choice in the United States (Cassese and Barnes, 2019; Cassese and Holman, 2019), Australia (Beauregard, 2021), and the United Kingdom (de Geus et al., 2021), we

know much less about gender stereotypes, sexism, and policy preferences in other settings, including in the Global South. Future research might also consider the ways that policy preferences and sexism shape preferences for right-leaning parties, particularly in multi-party systems or those with more extremist parties.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data for both the CCES and the AES are open-access and can be freely downloaded. Further inquiries can be directed at the corresponding author.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

## SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpos.2022.892111/full#supplementary-material>

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