



#EmpoweringRenters

# Security and Agency in the Irish Private Rental Sector

Dr. Michael Byrne

Dr. Rachel McArdle



IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL  
An Chomhairle um Thaighde in Éirinn



## BACKGROUND: POLICY REFORM AND ENFORCEMENT

Significant reforms of both security of  
tenure and rent regulation

But core issues of security and  
affordability remain

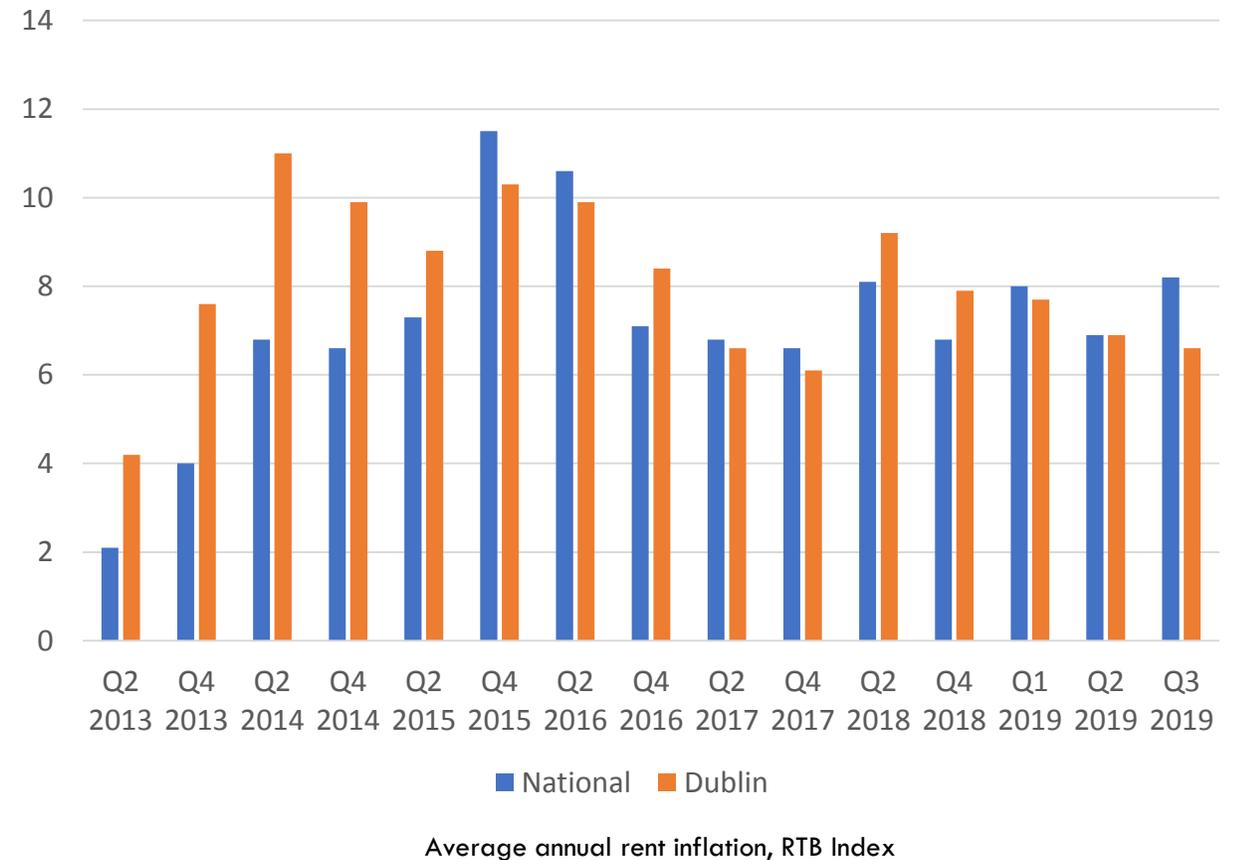
#EmpoweringRenters



# BACKGROUND: POLICY REFORM AND ENFORCEMENT

Tenant-led policy enforcement regime may be undermined by limited security of tenure

#EmpoweringRenters



# CONCEPTUALISING SECURITY

From security of tenure to 'secure occupancy' (Hulse and Milligan, 2014)

Secure occupancy: across dimensions (de jure, de facto) and domains (legislative, market, cultural)

Social & economic capital: tenant experiences differ in terms of income levels, gender, family status, migration status, race/ethnicity (Verstraete and Moris, 2019; Grotti et al., 2018)

#EmpoweringRenters

# RESEARCH DESIGN

	Number	Proportion
Total sample size	24	
Non-Irish born	13	54%
Female	14	58%
Male	10	42%
Parent	11	46%
Lone parent	5	20%
HAP or rent subsidy recipient	17	71%
Average tenancy duration	2.2 years	

Tenant interviews Dublin (16), Galway (6), Cork (2)

Adviser interviews (6)

Focus on tenants experiencing and attempting to address an issue

Rent subsidy recipients over-represented

Focus on small scale landlords directly managing property

Prior to new RTB enforcement powers

# SELECTED FINDINGS

1. Fear of conflict
2. Fear of tenancy termination
3. Market context
4. Landlord selectivity and discrimination

# FEAR OF CONFLICT

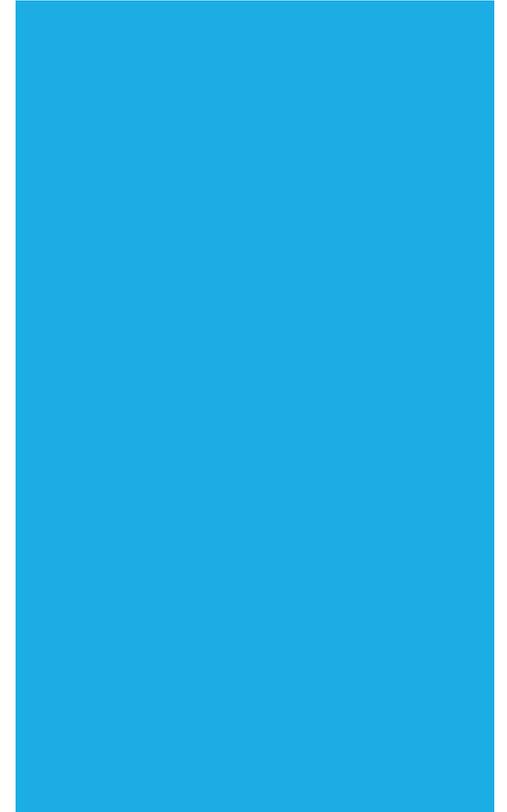
“I could contact Threshold and maybe the RTB, bring it up as an issue...But I'd just be afraid of causing conflict.”  
(Alan, 22, Galway)

“I'm nervous of him knocking on the door and what he's going to do. Like, he did threaten to take over the property if I didn't move in three months ... But I know I can call the guards if it comes to that... But I just don't know how nasty it's going to get” (Sara, 36, Irish-born, Dublin).

# FEAR OF CONFLICT

Interviewer: Do you feel at home in your current place [since conflict with landlord]?

Interviewee: No, definitely not. No, we just go there to put our head down basically. Yeah, we just come and go and put our head down... it's not home (Aoife, 45, Dublin).



”

“So I had to put up with that because, as I say, you know, there wasn't any other options there, you know, even though I kept looking [for another property]. But there wasn't any other options, like. So, I mean, it's like you complain, but you complain and you're going to kick yourself a little bit, you know? Because, like, if you complain too much then you go out [of the property], you know?” (Lucia, 41, lone-parent, EU-born, Cork).



“Yeah, because, like, I'm on the disability, you know, after the accident. So with that money I cannot find anything else. That was the problem. I was afraid to report him to RTB”. (Pawel, 40, EU-born, Dublin)

## FEAR OF TENANCY TERMINATION

# MARKET CONDITIONS

“I mean, before, you went to see a house or a flat and then you thought about it and then you agree to either rent it or not. Now you’re begging. You are begging. You are begging to be housed” (Lucia, 41, Cork).

“[T]here’s so many people now looking for places that we’re easily replaceable, you know...” (Maria, 32, Irish-born, Dublin).

“You apply. You have to passively wait to be contacted for a viewing. Then when you go for the viewing, you get handed a form... you have to sit back and basically wait for them to go, ‘I’ll pick that person’... You have to sit there passively and wait. You’ve no control over the situation” (James, 52, Irish-born, Dublin).

# DISCRIMINATION AND LANDLORD SELECTIVITY

“We were kind of panicking. You know, one child. All these [property listings], you know, no pets, no children. That’s usual when you are searching apartment, you know. So you already felt your options were limited” (Igor, 37, Dublin).

“They organise kind of interviews for people interested in the property and in order to pass the interview—you know, there could be like fifty or eighty or even a hundred people turn up for an interview, you know ... And whoever gets the property is a person who earns the most, you know, has no children and no pets ... because landlords, they want to see your payslips, you know, this kind of stuff” (Lisa, 34, EU-bon, Galway).

#EmpoweringRenters

# THE LANDLORD- TENANT RELATION

Security plays out in a social relationship between landlord and tenant

This relationship is a highly asymmetrical power relationship (see Soaita and McKee, 2018; Chisholm et al., 2020)

The power dynamics of this relationship are central in tenants' experience of insecurity and constraints on tenants' agency

# KEY CONCLUSIONS

Strengthen security of tenure to protect tenants, ensure the effectiveness of policy and create a culture of compliance

Policy should recognise the power relationship between landlord and tenant