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Experience of male and female parliamentarians during martial law in Ukraine

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List of Abbreviations

AFU — Armed Forces of Ukraine

CEA — Central Executive Agencies

IDP — Internally Displaced People

LDA — Latent Dirichlet Allocation

MFA — Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine

MP — Member of Parliament

NGO — Non-governmental organization

OSCE — Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

PACE — Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

TF-IDF — Term Frequency-Inverse Document Frequency

TIC — Temporary Investigative Commission

VRU — Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

Opening statement

The full-scale war that Ukraine is experiencing has created significant challenges for the functioning of the state and its democratic institutions. Members of the Verkhovna Rada have demonstrated extraordinary resilience, ensuring the sustainability and functionality of state institutions even in the most difficult conditions. Of course, this statement does not encompass all MPs without exception, as some of them have either abandoned their duties, fled the country, or even become traitors to the country. However, the work of the overwhelming majority of MPs allowed the Verkhovna Rada to preserve the legitimacy and democratic principles of the decision-making system.

This study allows us to look at parliamentary activity through differences in human experiences, in particular, to consider the unique experiences of male and female MPs, which, in our opinion, is an important tool for a deeper understanding of the specifics of the Verkhovna Rada's work in wartime. The gender aspect allows a better understanding of Verkhovna Rada's work in terms of individual personal stories at a crucial moment for Ukraine and the different impact of extraordinary circumstances on the lives and work of people in the heart of Ukrainian democracy. It is important to note that female MPs have played an important role in parliamentary diplomacy, supporting international cooperation and advocacy in favor of Ukraine when men could not leave the country due to martial law restrictions.

As MPs themselves say, the continuation of the work and preservation of the institutional capacities of the Verkhovna Rada is one of the main achievements of the 9th convocation. In fact, opinions in and around the Parliament are quite unanimous in this regard. Having gathered at 8 am on 24 February, MPs approved the Presidential Decree "On the Introduction of Martial Law in Ukraine" by 300 votes. Three hundred votes are the level of support required to amend the Constitution, one of the highest thresholds of support. Since 24 February, each vote in the session hall has repeatedly confirmed the existence of the required majority. This means that the arguments about the Verkhovna Rada's inability to make decisions were just the enemy's disinformation, and that most MPs did not flee abroad.

The results of this study allow us to identify and evaluate new formal and informal parliamentary practices and to gain a deeper understanding of the diverse personal experiences of male and female parliamentarians. These experiences, including the challenges and solutions found, will be an important source of information for male and female parliamentarians around the world in today's turbulent environment.

Although this study focuses primarily on the experience of male and female MPs in emergency situations, it would be wrong and unfair not to acknowledge the important contribution of the staff of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, who ensured the functioning of the Parliament at the most critical moments.

Summary

Key Changes in Parliamentary Activities During the Full-Scale War

With the onset of the full-scale war, the Ukrainian Parliament had to quickly adapt to new realities. Sessions of the Verkhovna Rada became continuous, allowing for prompt decision-making. Open sessions were closed to the press due to security concerns, reducing transparency. The Conciliation Council took on new responsibilities, not only coordinating the agenda but also discussing key initiatives at the level of faction and committee leaders, significantly accelerating the legislative process. In the first days of the war, critical decisions were rapidly adopted, including the imposition of martial law and mobilization.

The Impact of Full-scale War on Lawmaking

Legislative priorities shifted to focus on security, defense, and European integration. The number of initiatives adopted during the first six months of the full-scale invasion reached record levels (229 laws), with the share of security-related laws rising from 2.5% to 11.4%. Notably, the legislative activity of female MPs in security and defense also changed. Prior to the full-scale invasion (since the start of the IX convocation), 22 "female" legislative initiatives were registered (25.2% of all MP bills in the security sector), none of which were adopted. After the invasion, female MPs registered 49 "female" bills (21.7% of all in the security sector), with 12 adopted (29.2% of all approved and 24.5% of "female" initiatives). In comparison, 29 "male" draft laws were adopted (16.4% of all registered "male" initiatives registered after the invasion).

Parliamentary Diplomacy During the Full-Scale War

The role of parliamentary diplomacy has significantly increased. Previously seen as "optional" (or even perceived by some as "parliamentary tourism"), it has now become a key tool for supporting Ukraine's international image, advocating its interests, and conducting awareness campaigns. At the onset of the invasion, female MPs led international delegations and played a prominent role in interparliamentary cooperation. However, in 2022, border crossing for all MPs was restricted and heavily bureaucratized. As a result, some MPs faced difficulties crossing the border, complicating their participation in international events.

Parliamentary Oversight

Parliament's oversight function weakened significantly in the initial years of the war. The "Question Hour with the Government" did not take place until 2024. Some central executive bodies ignored MP inquiries, and the invasion increased the dominance of the executive branch, further limiting parliamentary oversight. Some functions were taken over by the Conciliation Council and temporary investigative commissions. In 2024, oversight began to recover, particularly with the resumption of the "Question Hour with the Government." However, this remains the weakest area of parliamentary activity.

The Image of MPs in the Media During the Full-Scale War

An analysis of media publications about MPs revealed no unified image of parliamentarians. Three main images emerged for both female and male MPs. Female MPs were depicted as professionals/experts or controversial figures. Media often emphasized their appearance and personal lives, which was not the case for male MPs. Male MPs were portrayed as professionals, military figures, or, conversely, scandalous and corrupt politicians. Notably, no depictions of female MPs as corrupt were found. Overall, the tone of media coverage remains critical, fostering distrust in Parliament and negatively affecting MPs' motivation.

Based on the results of the study, we identified positive and negative practices for preserving the democratic process and effectively adapting the Parliament to the conditions of the full-scale war. To identify positive and negative practices, we focused on the positions of male and female MPs and the trends repeated in the answers of male and female respondents.

Positive practices and solutions

1. **A single continuous session of the Parliament**. Changing the format of the Verkhovna Rada's work to allow for prompt meetings to adopt key prepared decisions.
2. **Optimizing the work of the Conciliation Board**. Changing the mechanism of the legislative process so that faction representatives and committee heads could quickly and consensually agree on decisions before voting in the parliamentary hall.
3. **Strengthening parliamentary diplomacy**. The change in the perception of parliamentary diplomacy allowed male and female MPs to strengthen international support and establish new contacts to protect Ukraine's interests.
4. **Common international rhetoric**. MPs from both the mono-majority and the opposition forces realized the importance of a common international rhetoric. A common position in the international arena is what parliamentarians and other government officials are trying to achieve.
5. **Strengthening the role of central executive authorities in the legislative process**. Involving additional expert examination in the legislative process and building decisions on the needs of the Defense Forces.
6. **Strengthening gender equality**. Increasing the role of female MPs in the Parliament and parliamentary diplomacy, abandoning the "traditional" distribution of legislative topics.
7. **Using social media to communicate with voters**. This helped keep in touch with voters during the restrictions on physical meetings due to the full-scale war.

Negative practices and solutions

1. **Restrictions on access to parliamentary sittings** reduced the ability of journalists and the public to cover the work of the Verkhovna Rada and made it more difficult for MPs to communicate with voters. The long-term existence of such restrictions could have negatively impacted the credibility of the Parliament.

2. **The weakening of Parliament's subjectivity** caused by restrictions on access to information (due to security measures) and the further strengthening of the role of the Presidential Office (including in the legislative process) reduced Parliament's ability to exercise its oversight function and influence the content of decisions.

3. **Ignoring personal security risks**. MPs (and Secretariat staff) faced additional risks to their lives and health. This problem was not systemically addressed at the institutional level (neither in advance nor during the full-scale invasion), which poses risks to the continuity of the Verkhovna Rada's work.

4. **The return of political struggle to parliamentary life with negative manifestations in the work of parliamentary delegations**. Despite the awareness of the need for a unified position in the international arena, the political struggle remains an influential factor (except for the first months of the full-scale invasion). Its consequences are the inability to achieve full unity in rhetoric, uneven involvement of MPs from different factions in parliamentary delegations, and conflicts within delegations. These three factors pose reputational risks for Ukraine in the perception of our international partners.

5. **Lack of systemic communication in parliamentary diplomacy**. The absence of an established practice of transferring developments and agreements between different iterations of parliamentary delegations (which arises both from political struggle and the lack of a well-established briefing system) may lead to a decrease in the effectiveness of diplomatic activities.

6. **Gender restrictions in the activities of female MPs**. Despite improvements in gender equality, the security and defense sector remains rather closed to female MPs. The full-scale war has affected the personal lives of all MPs. However, there is a consensus that a significant number of female MPs face much greater challenges in balancing their professional duties and personal lives.

Methodology

Goal: To study the professional activities of MPs during martial law, the impact of the war on their work and everyday life, and how the media cover the image of parliamentarians in the field of security and defense.

Methods: The study used quantitative and qualitative methods. The desk study included an analysis of legislation and policies related to gender equality in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, as well as an analysis of foreign studies. Within the empirical part of the study, 14 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted (9 with female MPs and 5 with male MPs). The interviewed MPs were representatives of four parliamentary factions (seven from the mono-majority and seven from the opposition factions). Interviews were analyzed using the open coding method, which allowed us to identify the main features of the coverage and perception of the activities of MPs.

A report on the legislative work of MPs was prepared as part of the study. The total number of analyzed regulatory acts (draft laws and draft resolutions) was 5,509 documents (of which 816 were adopted). We analyzed the involvement of female MPs in the development of legal acts depending on the gender of the first signatories. We identified women's draft laws, which were all initiatives where the first signatory was a female MP. Accordingly, if the first signatory was a man, it was a men's draft law.

The report on monitoring the image of male and female MPs in the media was prepared using quantitative and qualitative methods. The monitoring covered the period from 24 February 2022 to 10 June 2024, which allowed us to analyze the media coverage of MPs in the context of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. 61 files on 13 female MPs and 48 files on 12 male MPs were selected for the analysis. To analyze the media coverage, we used sentiment analysis with the help of the R language using the afinn and bing dictionaries. This method allows automatically determining the emotional coloring of a text by assessing its positive, negative or neutral nature. We also used the Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic modeling method to automatically identify the main topics in texts. The algorithm analyzed the frequency of word usage in the texts and allowed us to identify key topics that dominate the coverage of male and female MPs' activities in the security and defense sector. We used open-source content analysis for a detailed study of the news texts. Important fragments of texts were coded to identify key images and trends in media coverage.

Limitations of the study

The study included 14 interviews with representatives of four parliamentary factions. Nine female and five male MPs were interviewed. Accordingly, this number of interviews may not have covered all possible experiences of male and female MPs during the full-scale war. It should also be borne in mind that MPs are a hard-to-reach group, so study results may reflect MPs who are more active, willing to talk, and involved in professional activities, which may also lead to distortion of the data.

As part of the monitoring of legislative initiatives, all draft laws registered by MPs during the 9th convocation were considered, but the analysis was based solely on statistical data and technical characteristics of draft laws, excluding their content and quality *(See Annex 1 for more information on the monitoring of legislative activity)*.

As part of the study of MPs' images in the media, 25 male and female MPs were considered, which is not enough for a representative generalization to the entire Parliament *(See Annex 1 for more information on monitoring the image of MPs in the media)*. The methodology for selecting articles was based on the reputation of media outlets rather than their popularity, which could have led to a sample bias. In addition, the analysis was limited to publications on media websites, without covering other media channels, such as TV or Telegram channels, which does not provide a complete picture of the image of MPs in the society.

1 Personal experience of male and female MPs at the beginning of a full-scale war

With the start of the full-scale invasion, male and female MPs were forced to adapt quickly to the new conditions. Most of them emphasized shock and fear but also stressed the importance of unity in this difficult period. Most of the interviewed male and female MPs noted that they had not been warned about the invasion, which caused similar stress to most Ukrainians in the first days. Some MPs, both male and female, were aware that a full-scale war would begin, which made it easier and faster for them to adapt to the new conditions. In particular, MPs noted that they were ready to take up arms to defend Kyiv or participate in territorial defense. The respondents noted that they were actively involved in organizing humanitarian aid and supporting the military in Kyiv, as Russian troops were near the city. Despite considerable stress and uncertainty, MPs gathered in the Verkhovna Rada on 24 February to make the necessary decisions to adapt to the war, including introducing martial law and starting mobilization.

The outbreak of the full-scale invasion completely changed the schedule and pace of MPs' work. In addition to performing their functions as MPs and keeping their families together, volunteering, delivering humanitarian aid, and supporting the AFU and territorial defense units became additional burdens. MPs, like most Ukrainian citizens, experienced an increased level of stress caused by the direct threat to their lives and the lives of their families. Some MPs received offers of evacuation from Ukraine in the first days. For both men and women MPs, one of the main sources of stress was worrying about their families, namely their parents and children. However, it is worth noting that the challenges faced by MPs in this area differed significantly. MPs noted that their families had moved to the western regions of Ukraine or abroad, which significantly affected their private lives. Some female MPs faced the dilemma of how to combine the role of mother and MP. As a result of the closure of the borders, female MPs could not send their children to safety with their husbands and could not take their children out on their own due to the need to fulfill their duties as MPs. **In the event of a full-scale invasion, it was planned to evacuate the Verkhovna Rada and MPs from Kyiv to a safer location. Nevertheless, on 24 February, more than 300 MPs gathered in the Verkhovna Rada and made the necessary decisions**. The refusal to leave the capital and the official building of the Verkhovna Rada was a symbolic act that demonstrated the resilience and capacity of one of the state's most important institutions.

> *"Of course, it was impossible to talk about any personal life at that time. We were worried about our families and tried to protect them as much as possible. But everyone was in place; everyone was working either here [in the districts] or in Kyiv or was on business trips to hotter spots", — male MP.*

The conflict between their maternal role and professional responsibilities became a major source of stress for women MPs. In such circumstances, they had to look for other ways to transport their families to safe places. Another challenge specific to female MPs was the mobilization of their husbands, which added to their stress. Some MPs also acknowledged that it was harder for women MPs to balance all their responsibilities in the first months of the invasion.

> *"And of course, when you are a mother and when you have a child, especially a minor one, you definitely worry about them very much", — male MP.*

> *"I believe that women showed themselves to be absolutely equal [to male MPs], despite the fact that many of them also play the role of wives and mothers, and they still did not go abroad and said, 'Oh, I have children, I went abroad because I resigned my mandate'", — female MP.*

Consequences for the lives of MPs

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the workload in the Verkhovna Rada has increased significantly, and this has become a challenge for both male and female MPs. Parliamentarians noted that the work had become more intense, often resulting in severe emotional and physical fatigue. Some respondents noted that in the first days of the full-scale war, the need for interviews and comments to foreign media increased significantly. MPs argued that during that period, there was no separation of topics. In particular, it was impossible to distinguish between "male" and "female" topics, as everyone had to communicate common messages. However, in the subsequent period, female MPs noted that they commented on the hostilities much less than male MPs. **An additional burden for women MPs was the need to engage in parliamentary diplomacy, which they took over almost entirely in the first months of 2022**, as male MPs could not leave the country. MPs noted that parliamentary delegations consisted almost entirely of female MPs in the first months of the invasion.

> *"Initially, you could technically go abroad, but these days were not included in your salary. For me personally, it is also important because I live on my salary, and if you go abroad [...] every trip abroad now is not just a one-day trip, but you just lose your salary, which was not okay for me", — female MP.*

Volunteering became one of the key areas of activity for MPs during the war. Some MPs took over the organization of the supply of ammunition and equipment for the military, often being directly involved in the logistical processes. MPs were also involved in providing humanitarian aid and catering for the military. MPs also noted active participation in volunteering in the form of donations. Some MPs also noted an increase in expenses related to their work as MPs and volunteering, which worsened their financial situation. Further travel restrictions for all MPs were introduced by Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 69 of 27 January 2023. Unlike women who are not civil servants, female MPs cannot

cross the border without appropriate permits. Women MPs noted that after some time, the rules were changed so that women MPs could cross the border with their minor children. However, some female MPs saw this decision as discriminatory, as only women MPs with young children could cross the border. In addition, it is worth noting that, regardless of the circumstances, MPs cannot receive official leave during martial law and the continuous session of the Verkhovna Rada.

> *"Everyone either donates or volunteers or travels to take care of specific units. Those who can do so take care of entire brigades and battalions — all this is determined by the willingness to give a significant part of their time, the very ability to accumulate money, find the necessary things that the AFU need today, and perform this work", — female MP.*

Gender stereotypes and prejudices

The 9th convocation of the Verkhovna Rada has 85 female MPs, which is about 21% of all MPs.[1] This number of female MPs is the highest in the history of the Verkhovna Rada. Recently, the topic of gender equality in the Verkhovna Rada has been developing; in particular, this convocation ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, known as the Istanbul Convention, in 2022. According to some female MPs, **despite the desire for equality, gender stereotypes and prejudices remain an obstacle to women's full participation in parliamentary activities**. Some female MPs point out that they are often perceived through the prism of gender stereotypes, and this negatively affects their professional effectiveness.

> *"Well, to be honest, no one does it openly because everyone already knows what gender equality is. I am very careful with this, although there have been cases when some MPs allowed themselves to say something about women in their statements, you know, my colleagues will tell you this, but there is still something unspoken, called the background", — female MP.*

The 9th convocation of the Verkhovna Rada is the second to be elected to Parliament with voluntary gender quotas (party lists must comprise 30% of women). A new Electoral Code was adopted in 2019, which set mandatory quotas for political parties at 40%. The expert community assesses gender quotas differently. Some believe they are an important step toward gender equality, while others consider them discriminatory. They artificially increase the number of female parliamentarians on party lists rather than addressing existing discrimination. As Armenia's experience shows, gender quotas are a fairly effective tool for increasing the representation of women in Parliament (36% of the Parliament is women). Female respondents to our study also noted positive results of the introduced gender quotas in Ukraine and called it an important step towards achieving gender equality in the Verkhovna Rada.

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1 The constitutional number of MPs in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine is 450. However, due to the occupation of some territories since 2014 and the resignation of some MPs, the actual composition of the Parliament of the 9th convocation is 400 (as of 22 November 2024).

There is no unanimous position among the interviewed MPs on the existence of gender biases and restrictions in their professional activities: both men and women spoke about the presence and absence of gender differences that affect their work. However, **some MPs noted that the situation with the use of gender biases and stereotypes was getting better over time**. Although open gender discrimination in the Parliament is now rare, MPs note that covert sexism remains a problem. **Such biases may manifest in private communication or during closed meetings and include inappropriate comments, diminutive language, direct insults using gender stereotypes, and others**. It should be noted that from the description of the female MPs, this is similar to "benevolent sexism."[2] Such manifestations are less visible but have a profound impact on the working climate. Some female MPs complain about the hidden irony or tone of their male colleagues' comments, which in turn demonstrate the devaluation of their contributions. Certain gender differences are also noted in the fields of legislation and diplomacy.

> *"You know, we've run into a problem with the head of the committee. And I have the impression that he communicates with me in such a tone, in such a paralinguistic way, as if he thinks I am some kind of a fool. And he doesn't even understand that it looks discriminatory. [...] He doesn't understand why this [amendments to the draft law] is needed. He thinks it is some kind of woman's stuff, you know? He doesn't say it, but it just slips through some paralinguistic things or some phrases that it can't be like that, and it's just complete nonsense", — female MP.*

If we look at the studies on the Parliaments of Israel, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, we can see that the position on gender restrictions for female parliamentarians in the security and defense sector is quite strong *(For more details, see Annex 4)*. There are significantly fewer women in the relevant committees in the studied countries, and there is a widespread perception of female parliamentarians in the framework of "traditional" gender roles, which also limits women's access to security and defense activities in these countries. Some female respondents stated that **there are also informal practices in the Verkhovna Rada that only men can hold leadership positions in certain committees related to security and defense**. Such positions are considered male-dominated, which limits opportunities for women. This leads to a "glass ceiling" where women may face impenetrable barriers in their career growth. It is worth noting that many female MPs spoke about greater restrictions related to the security sector. Male and female MPs have differences in their perception of the reality of these difficulties for female MPs. In their opinion, female MPs' initiatives are perceived less favorably by men in the security sector and **require much longer to build a reputation among representatives of the Armed Forces and the Ministry of Defense in order to communicate adequately**.

> *"Well, I think this is a sector [of security and defense] that needs a woman to constantly prove that she can understand it because all generals are not ready to listen to her right away, not ready to hear her right away", — female MP.*

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2 Benevolent sexism refers to subjectively positive attitudes and behaviors toward women that, while seemingly well-intentioned, reinforce traditional gender roles and perpetuate gender inequality. Examples include beliefs that women are more nurturing or morally superior to men, or that they need men's protection. These attitudes, though often perceived as complimentary, can limit women's opportunities and maintain systemic disparities.

The main methods of counteracting gender bias expressed verbally in the Verkhovna Rada are publicity and direct confrontation. It is believed that **openly expressing dissatisfaction and comments to colleagues promptly stops the manifestations of prejudice**. In addition, public discussion and social media remain an effective tool for putting pressure on colleagues. It is also worth noting that cooperation among female MPs and the risk of public accusations of gender discrimination are mostly effective methods of reducing manifestations of prejudice.

> *"I would say that compared to five years ago, the progress [in gender equality in the Parliament] is obvious. They [MPs] are afraid to say certain things because they will get it; if someone says something, it can become public, and so on", — female MP.*

2 Impact of the full-scale war on openness and transparency of Parliament

The work of the Parliament changed significantly with the outbreak of the full-scale invasion. The situation required a quick response and adaptation to an environment in which security and privacy became priorities and normal democratic processes were subject to certain restrictions. MPs note that the full-scale invasion created additional challenges, in particular in terms of effective engagement with voters and maintaining public confidence.

In the first days of the full-scale invasion, **the Verkhovna Rada started one continuous session, which could convene at any time**. This was introduced to respond promptly to the challenges of the started invasion. One of the key changed aspects was the system of the Conciliation Board. In the pre-war period, this board served to discuss and agree on the agenda by faction and group heads with the public and journalists present. **This format of the Conciliation Board was often criticized, as it was, in fact, a platform for making political statements to voters** and, as a result, ineffective. In the report on the visit to Ukraine of European Parliament's Needs Assessment Mission led by Pat Cox[3], the Conciliation Board was described as a "political reality show".[4] Nowadays, the Conciliation Board has become more important. According to respondents, **the Conciliation Board, which included faction and group heads as well as heads of individual committees, considered all the required draft laws in the first months of the full-scale invasion**. In addition to agreeing on the agenda, **the texts of the draft laws and possible amendments were also discussed, and decisions were made on collective support for the selected draft laws**. Male and female respondents noted that the Conciliation Board often met online rather than offline. Decisions were made with maximum efficiency within the Conciliation Board. Voting for the draft laws agreed upon at the board meeting was also quick, with the meeting itself taking about thirty minutes in the Verkhovna Rada hall. MPs describe **this format of work as much more intensive**, particularly for the heads of factions, groups, and committees. It also involved compromise, as it included the positions of both the mono-majority and opposition factions.

3 Former President of the European Parliament.

4 Report and Roadmap for Internal Reform and Institutional Capacity Building of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine prepared by the European Parliament Needs Assessment Mission chaired by Pat Cox, President of the European Parliament 2002–2004.

> *"And all decisions on what would be considered in the Verkhovna Rada were made in this chat of the Conciliation Board members, but it was not only decisions on what was being approved, it was decisions on what needed to be communicated to the Government", — female MP.*

> *"And then there was such a maximum concentration of our efforts when we worked for days online, in the format of conciliation, to pass all the draft laws that we had to vote on", — female MP.*

MPs identify two periods of work of the Verkhovna Rada during the full-scale invasion. The first is the first months after the invasion, and the second is from around May 2024 to the present day. With the outbreak of the full-scale war, **the Verkhovna Rada united around national interests, and political disputes were put on the back burner**. However, according to many MPs, this unity did not last long. In the first months of the war, in particular February and April 2022, the Parliament worked in unprecedented coordination. MPs noted that this period saw a significant rise in the sense of unity and common purpose. **Most decisions were made unanimously or with minimal debate, as national survival was at stake**. However, since May 2022, when the first wave of shock had passed, political contradictions have begun to return. MPs, especially those from the opposition, note that **political confrontation between the mono-majority and the opposition has returned to its state before the full-scale invasion**. This has significantly affected and, in fact, eliminated the consensus decision-making that existed before, but the return to previous practices has allowed MPs to promote their own initiatives more, which was almost impossible when working through the Conciliation Board.

> *"Parliament de facto worked in the mode of a coalition of unity when decisions were actually made by consensus", — male MP.*

> *"After April 2022, as politics returned, unfortunately, the Verkhovna Rada moved away from this sense of complete unity", — male MP.*

One of the most tangible changes for the Parliament was its closed nature and limited access for journalists to its sessions. **In the pre-war period, journalists were able to observe the work of MPs, which certainly influenced the behavior and rhetoric of the MPs**. However, due to security threats, the presence of media representatives is significantly limited now, which some MPs believe is a necessary step. Some MPs point out that **the closed nature of the Parliament has its positive aspects, especially in terms of maintaining confidentiality and avoiding leaks of important information**. These MPs believe that the new format of work allows for prompt decision-making while maintaining data security. Some parliamentarians agree with this view but also emphasize that a complete rejection of communication with the media could negatively affect voters' trust in the legislative branch. On the other hand, a significant number of MPs, especially those from the opposition, emphasize that the secrecy of the Parliament contributes to the growth of distrust in society. **MPs point to the possibility of using the new format as a means of control and pressure from the Presidential Office, which, according to them, seeks to increase its influence on the work of the Verkhovna Rada** and avoid public discussion of controversial issues.

Some MPs point out that, in fact, the **existing information restrictions (such as the absence of session broadcasts and the lack of journalists in the parliamentary**

corridors) do not make sense from a security standpoint. First of all, this position exists because some MPs have a pro-Russian position and may transmit data on the date and time of the Verkhovna Rada's meetings to Russia. Second, as a reaction to the information closure of the VRU, some MPs started to broadcast live on social media, which also effectively removes the meaning of information restrictions for security reasons.

> *"There is no live broadcasting, which is understandable, but I can hardly support the idea of continuing, say, not covering the activities of the Verkhovna Rada, not allowing journalists to enter the press box; I mean, they were allowed, but only on the third floor, from my point of view, this is a bit of a half-measure", — female MP.*

MPs from opposition forces also note the existence of restrictions in the information sphere. Thus, respondents feel some discrimination from the media, which, with the full-scale invasion, became less inclined to cover the position of the opposition forces. It was noted that some female MPs gave more interviews and comments to foreign media than to Ukrainian ones. In addition, MPs claimed that there was currently limited access to the Single Telethon, which mostly invited and quoted representatives of the mono-majority. According to respondents, such restrictions have a negative impact on the work with voters, as the main source of communication is MPs' social media rather than interviews and broadcasts.

3 The impact of full-scale war on lawmaking

Since the start of the full-scale invasion, the legislative activity and promotion of own initiatives process in the Verkhovna Rada have significantly changed. Lawmakers focused on security, defense and European integration, which became key priorities in wartime. At the same time, new challenges and factors emerged that affect the effectiveness of lawmaking.

Factors affecting the promotion of own initiatives

Despite changes in lawmaking priorities, **factors such as the initiative's topic/field and relevance and the author's political affiliation still play the main role in promoting draft laws**. The distribution of the importance of these two factors differs in the positions of male and female MPs. The opposition is more inclined to consider the second factor decisive, while representatives of the mono-majority prefer the first one. MPs note that **today's priority topics are defense, the economy, and support for the armed forces**. If a draft law relates to these areas, it has a better chance of being considered and passed.

> *"As a member of the [name of political faction], in fact, none of my initiatives related to the security and defense sector that should have passed through our committee, [I] either did not see my draft laws on the agenda and could not include them, or there was one initiative, as well as a legal conflict that needed to be resolved, but it was discussed without a decision [by the committee], i.e., it was also put on the back burner", — female MP.*

An MP's reputation and expertise also play an important role in promoting initiatives. Some MPs note that **their draft laws are supported by the recognition of their expertise in certain areas, especially if they have experience in relevant committees** or work with international organizations. According to some female MPs, gender can influence the process of adopting draft laws, but this influence is not always obvious. Women often face prejudice from their male colleagues, especially in the security and defense sectors, which are traditionally considered male-dominated. However, solidarity among female MPs makes the promotion of some draft laws more effective.

> *"It all depends on the individual, the first author", — female MP.*

> *"Political affiliation, reputation, maybe not even expertise, just reputation [are the most important factors in promoting draft laws]. And gender is at the bottom of the list [in terms of influence on promoting draft laws] […] [The first initiator] has no influence at all", — female MP.*

Change in the role of central executive authorities

One of the new realities of the lawmaking process is the **need to coordinate draft laws with central authorities, such as the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff, in the security and defense sectors**. Some MPs explain that in times of war, it is important to coordinate all defense-related decisions to ensure national security. Such coordination ensures that legislative initiatives do not contradict the overall strategy of the state.

However, MPs note that this requirement sometimes leads to negative consequences when considering important draft laws. For example, **the need for approval of initiatives by central authorities can significantly limit the ability to promote their own draft laws**, especially if they are submitted by opposition MPs or deal with sensitive topics. Some MPs believe that such an approval system gives the executive undue influence over the lawmaking process and can be used to block initiatives that do not meet the Government's political interests.

There is a diversity of opinions among MPs on the need for approval of draft laws by the central governmental authorities. Some believe that this helps ensure that legislative initiatives are consistent with the national strategy, avoid chaos under martial law, and be examined additionally. Others believe that such a system weakens the independence of the Verkhovna Rada and makes it hostage to the executive branch. Some MPs expressed concern that the approval by central authorities is used to promote only draft laws favorable to the Government while alternative initiatives are ignored or stalled.

> *"It would be better not to turn into a committee that is exclusively dependent on the CEAs, the Ministry of Defense, and the General Staff. This is wrong. It distorts the whole understanding that in a parliamentary-presidential republic, legislative initiatives or legislative changes are not introduced for a particular head of a CEA to approve them", — female MP.*

> *"That's why there is a huge amount of approvals [by CEA] on this issue in order not to cause disaster. Because this case [the security and defense sector] is, let's say, very important because tens, hundreds, thousands of lives are at stake", — male MP.*

One of the main risks associated with the need for approval from central authorities is the possible restriction of the freedom of legislative initiative. MPs point out that during martial law, it is often impossible for them to promote their own draft laws if the proposals do not align with those of the executive branch. This creates a situation where much of the legislative work is reduced to adapting Government initiatives.

> *"Of course, the legislation should be somehow synchronized with what is happening, so the position of the relevant Ministry [Ministry of Defense], the Government as a whole, and the General Staff on draft laws related to the war is critical now", — male MP.*

MPs perceive the Government's draft laws to be of lower quality[5] because they are much less involved in their formulation and also feel helpless and demotivated to consider such draft laws. This perception of draft laws of the General Staff and the Ministry of Defense is caused by a combination of factors. First, CEA rarely involves MPs at the early stages of drafting because they do not trust them enough. This is explained by the widespread leak of information about draft laws on social media. Second, the CEAs have undergone various stages of formulating, editing, and discussing draft laws. Thus, they are reluctant and sometimes lack time, to repeat this process with the involvement of MPs. At the same time, CEAs have a much greater capacity to develop draft laws. Third, the much greater influence of the CEAs that currently exists should be taken into account, which makes it difficult for MPs themselves to push through their own amendments to government draft laws.

> *"We recommend that the Ministry [of Defense] coordinate its project with the relevant committee and hear the position of the MPs before registering the legislative initiative. They [the Ministry of Defense] sometimes listen to us. In communication, I can't say that everything is completely bad, you can say so with a solid three out of five", — female MP.*

The perception of draft laws prepared by central executive authorities as being of lower quality is not only a consequence of the limited involvement of members of Parliament in their development but also reflects a deeper institutional transformation that has been taking place in the Ukrainian parliamentary process since 2016. It was at that time, following the presentation of the Roadmap for Reforming the Verkhovna Rada led by Pat Cox and the subsequent adoption of the corresponding parliamentary resolution, that a shift began toward strengthening Government centrality in policy formation, legislative initiation, and decision-making. One of the key issues highlighted by the authors of the Roadmap was excessive individual lawmaking, which they characterized as a "legislative tsunami." In response, the document recommended introducing limitations on the consideration of legislative initiatives submitted by MPs[6] — both through changes in procedural rules and by reorienting parliamentary culture.

This course was maintained in the 9th convocation of the Verkhovna Rada, particularly through the work of the Working Group on Parliamentary Reform chaired by First Deputy Speaker Oleksandr Korniienko[7]. Within this trajectory, the Government has been gaining increasing influence over the formation of the legislative agenda. As a result, the lack of MP involvement in the early stages of government initiative development, the unwillingness of CEAs to re-discuss documents already processed within the executive branch, and the limited capacity of MPs to introduce amendments to such draft laws are fewer indicators of ineffective cooperation than signs of a structural shift in the architecture of decision-making.

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5 It is important to note that the issue of the quality of legislative initiatives (both parliamentary and governmental), particularly in terms of legislative drafting technique and proper expert-analytical support, is regularly raised by both the initiators of legislation and the expert community.

6 Report and Roadmap on Internal Reform and Capacity-Building for the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine.

7 Recommendations for Internal Reform and Institutional Capacity Building of the Parliament.

The main fields of lawmaking before the full-scale war

From the beginning of the 9th convocation (29 August 2019) to 15 May 2024, MPs submitted 5,469 registered draft laws and proposals from the President of Ukraine. Of these, 776 documents were adopted (of which 717 were signed by the President). As shown in *Annex 1*, 3,459 parliamentary draft laws, 20 presidential proposals, and 2 draft codes were registered from the 9th convocation until 24 February 2022. Of these, 431 documents were adopted. Since the beginning of the convocation, most legislative initiatives have been registered in economic policy and the fewest (not counting international treaties) in humanitarian policy. The security and defense sector ranks sixth by the number of draft laws (out of seven).

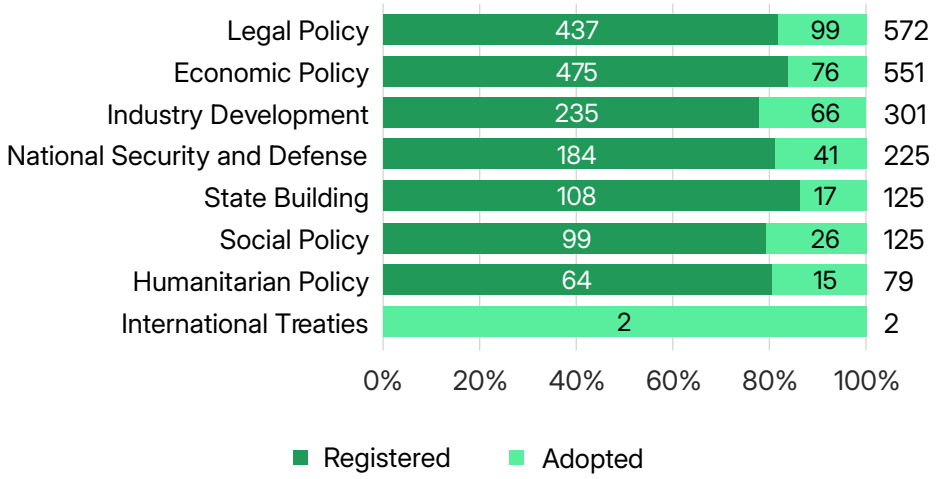

Diagram 3.1. *Distribution of draft laws by sectors*

Data analysis shows that most legislative initiatives before 24 February 2022 concerned economic policy, legal policy, and sectoral development. According to MPs' interviews, one of the priorities before the full-scale invasion was also to achieve European standards in the legal sphere and fight against corruption.

In terms of gender, female MPs registered draft laws more often in the **social** (46% of all in the social policy) and **humanitarian** (38.1% of all in the humanitarian policy) spheres and least often in the areas of **state building** (20.8% of all in the state building) and **legal policy** (19% of all in the legal policy). This can be explained both by the "traditional" distribution of spheres of influence and by the personal priorities of the female MPs, who often focused on these issues.

Main fields of lawmaking after the start of the full-scale war

Legislative priorities changed after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Lawmakers quickly shifted their focus to adopting laws directly related to national security and defense. From the beginning of the full-scale war on 24 February 2022 to 15 May 2024, male and female MPs registered 1,980 draft laws, 342 draft laws were adopted. Most draft laws were registered and adopted in the areas of legal policy, economic policy, and sectoral development. **The security and defense sector moved from sixth to fourth place in terms of the number of draft laws**. Among all the initiatives registered after February 2022 and before May 2024, 388 women's draft laws were included, which is 19.5% of the total number of parliamentary draft laws for this period.

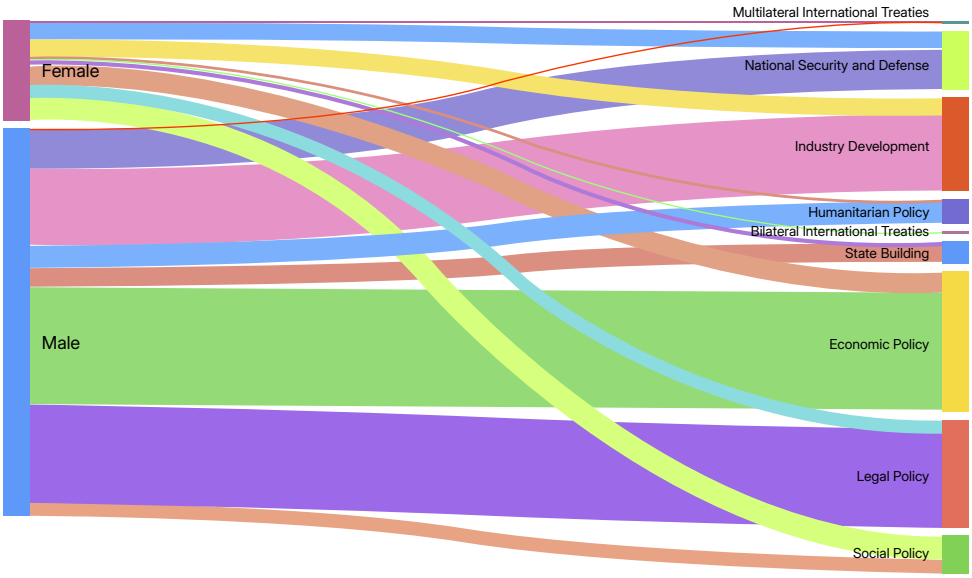

Diagram 3.2. *The distribution of registered women's and men's draft laws by sector from 24 February 2022 to 15 May 2024*

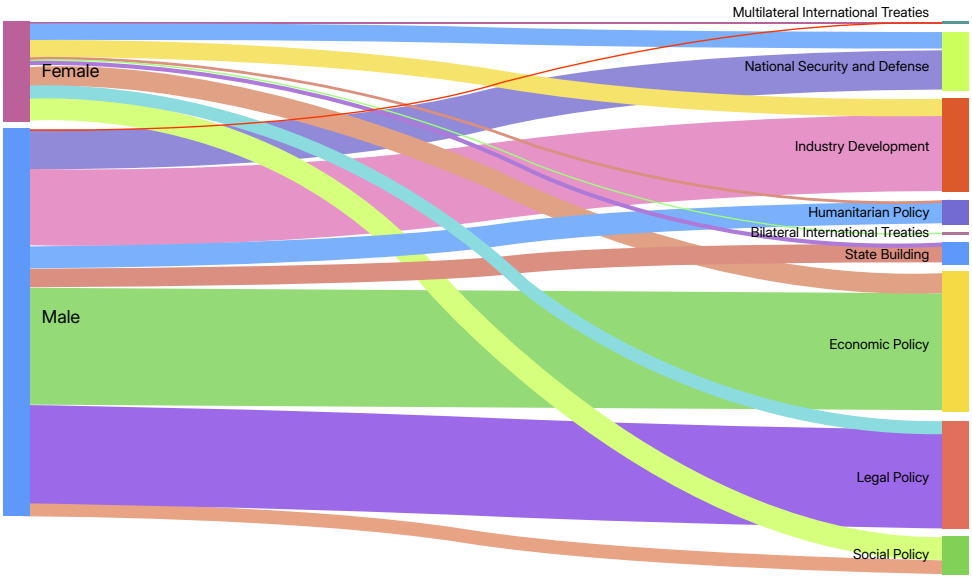

Diagram 3.3. *The distribution of adopted women's and men's draft laws by sector from 24 February 2022 to 15 May 2024*

Much emphasis was placed on European integration issues. After Ukraine received the status of an EU candidate (7th session of the VRU), the Verkhovna Rada actively worked on adapting legislation to European standards.

> *"Of course, things that have changed significantly are obviously logical; there are a lot of laws on defense, plus it is less noticeable, but in fact, in terms of legislative work, a very large part of the work is European integration", — female MP.*

The role of the security and defense sector in legislative activity has increased significantly since the start of the full-scale war. Prior to February 2022, 4% of adopted laws related to

this sector, while from the beginning of the invasion until May 15, 2024, this figure rose to 12%. Despite this considerable growth, the security and defense sector is not the largest in terms of its share in overall legislative activity. This partially contradicts the positions of certain MPs who claim that this sector is the main one. There are several reasons for this. First, the factor of subjective perception plays an important role: draft laws related to the war typically carry a higher emotional weight, concern matters of vital importance, are perceived as more significant, and thus as more numerous. Second, this study did not evaluate the amount of time spent on processing draft laws or the scope of the work involved — it is possible that the security and defense sector, despite its relatively small share among all adopted decisions, requires the greatest time investment from MPs, experts, and secretariats.

Female MPs played an important role in promoting initiatives related to the protection of human rights and social support for war victims. At the same time, according to female MPs, the security and defense sector has traditionally remained more closed to women's initiatives, which created additional challenges for female MPs trying to implement changes in this area. However, according to respondents, it was after the start of the full-scale invasion that a shift occurred: women's initiatives in the security and defense sector were considered and even adopted more often, which indicates that women are adapting and increasing their role in the legislative process under critical conditions. Looking at the data on the adoption of draft laws (first signatory — a woman), 22 women's draft laws (25.2% of all security draft laws) were registered before the full-scale invasion. None of them were adopted. After the start of the full-scale invasion, 49 women's draft laws (21.7% of all security-related draft laws) were registered, and 12 (29.2% of all adopted draft laws and 24.5% of women's draft laws) were adopted. Due to the relevance of the topic, such differences may result from an increase in the number of draft laws.

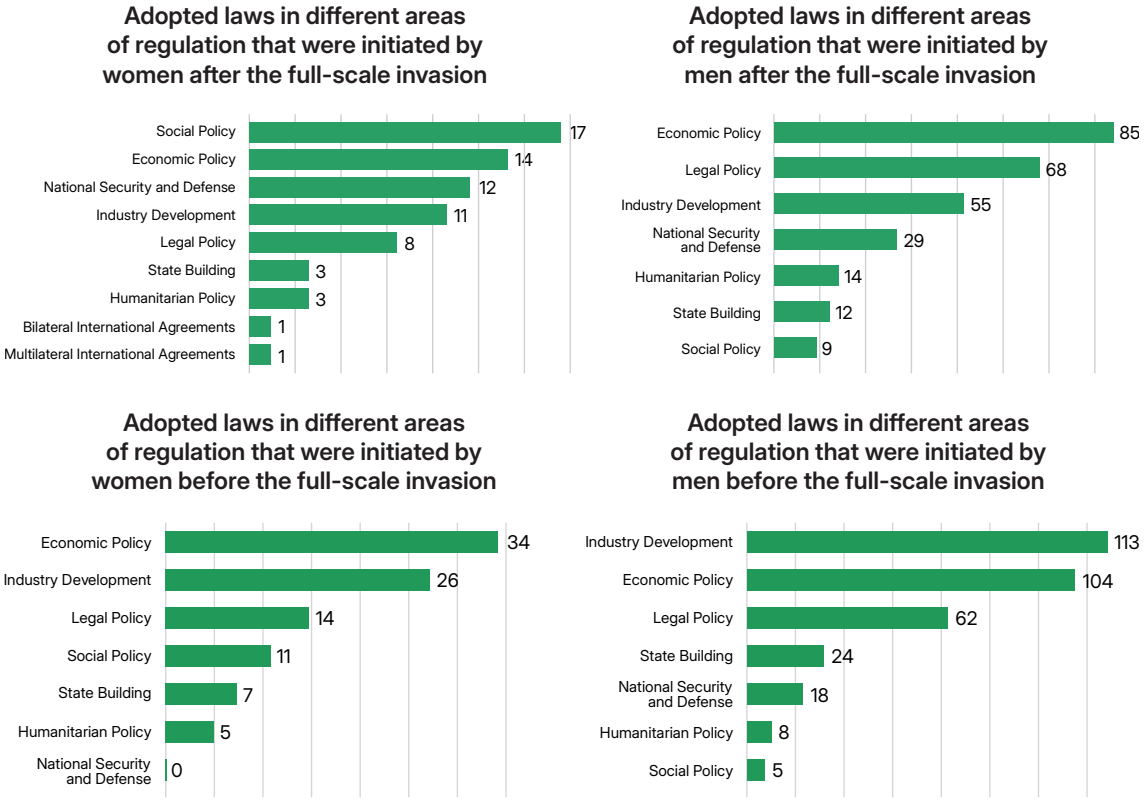

Diagram 3.4. *Share of adopted "women's" and "men's" draft laws by sector before and after the full-scale invasion*

Hidden legislative work

Since the start of the full-scale invasion, approaches to legislative work have changed significantly, in particular for MPs in the opposition. According to interviews with MPs, the promotion of draft laws has become more difficult during the war due to political and procedural restrictions. One key feature was the opposition's covert work, which required new tactics to pass initiatives in the Verkhovna Rada.

In particular, opposition MPs often have to negotiate with representatives of the majority to promote their initiatives. In many cases, the success of a draft law depends not on its content but on who its first signatory is. MPs note that if the initiator is a representative of the mono-majority with a good reputation, the chances of successful adoption increase many-fold. Therefore, the opposition sometimes uses the tactic of involving colleagues from the mono-majority as co-initiators, which allows for the advancement of important draft laws.

> *"Okay, even if I am supported by all their [mono-majority] representatives, who have influence in their faction, as co-authors, maybe I have a chance to see this initiative in the Rada hall", — female MP.*

Another strategy is to work together with NGOs and volunteers, which allows creating additional pressure on the mono-majority. MPs acknowledge that without support from civil society, their initiatives often remain unconsidered.

> *"We managed to push it through back then because I was working on it closely with volunteers, NGOs, combat medics, and there was a lot of pressure from them, which I just kind of [...] was in support of this draft law", — female MP.*

Differences by gender

According to the analyzed legislative initiatives *(see Annex 1 for details)*, female MPs are the first signatories of almost every third draft law in the Verkhovna Rada. In particular, they initiated 26.3% of the total number of registered draft laws (1,442 out of 5,437) for the entire period of the 9th convocation. However, men continue to dominate in the number of adopted draft laws: 21.5% of adopted laws were registered by women. Accordingly, it can be concluded that, in terms of law adoption overall, gender differences are minor.

As for the areas where female MPs work, they most often initiate draft laws in the fields of social policy, legal policy, and sectoral development. In particular, 285 draft laws were registered in the field of sectoral development and 202 in legal policy, while women submitted only 79 initiatives in the field of security and defense. For comparison, men are more active in the areas of legal policy, state building, and sectoral development.

The share of registered "women's" and "men's" draft laws from MP's draft laws

Field	Before the start of the full-scale war		After the start of the full-scale war (till 15.05.2024)	
	"Women's" draft laws	"Men's" draft laws	"Women's" draft laws	"Men's" draft laws
Overall	30%	70%	21.9%	78.1%
Economic policy	27.4%	72.6%	15.6%	84.4%

Legal policy	21.9%	78.1%	15.6%	84.4%
Sectoral development	30%	70%	21.2%	78.8%
Humanitarian policy	44%	56%	29.1%	70.9%
State building	24.3%	75.7%	16.6%	83.4%
Social policy	59.5%	40.5%	45.6%	54.4%
Security and defense	25.3%	74.7%	24.5%	75.5%

The ratio of adopted to registered "women's" and "men's" draft laws

Field	Before the start of the full-scale war		After the start of the full-scale war (till 15.05.2024)	
	"Women's" draft laws	"Men's" draft laws	"Women's" draft laws	"Men's" draft laws
Overall	9%	13.6%	18%	17.1%
Economic policy	10.6%	12.2%	16.2%	18.2%
Legal policy	8.1%	10%	9%	14%
Sectoral development	11.8%	22%	12.8%	23.2%
Humanitarian policy	9.4%	12%	13%	26%
State building	12.7%	14%	16.6%	11.2%
Social policy	5.3%	3.5%	29.8%	13.2%
Security and defense	0%	27.7%	24.5%	16.4%

It is worth noting the significantly higher percentage of adopted women's draft laws in the security sector, while studies of parliamentary activity in Israel, Georgia and Azerbaijan noted that female parliamentarians had much more limited access to this sector. Although we do not have similar statistics on the percentage of women's draft laws passed in these countries, the significantly higher percentage of such draft laws in Ukraine may indicate an improvement in the situation with gender equality in the security and defense sector in Ukraine.

Adopted draft laws by gender of the first initiator and sector since the start of the full-scale invasion

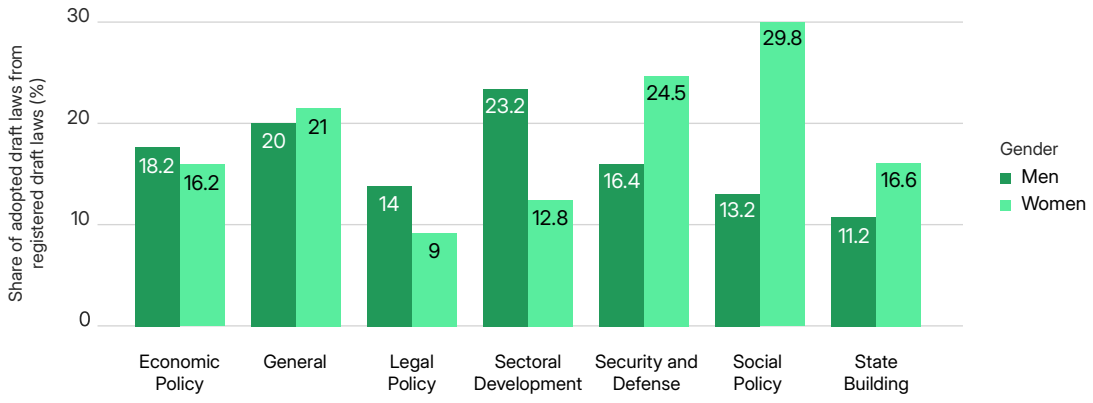

Diagram 3.5. *The share of "women's" and "men's" draft laws adopted by sector since the beginning of the full-scale invasion*

See *Annex 1* for detailed information on the monitoring of legislative activity.

Female MPs are also more likely to choose coalition and cooperation strategies to promote their draft laws. They note that their initiatives have a better chance of being supported if they involve representatives of different factions. Respondents also noted that promoting gender equality initiatives is easier for female MPs, which may also be explained by the fact that female MPs are more likely to address this topic in their draft laws.

4 Oversight function in a full-scale war

There are different positions regarding the oversight function of the Ukrainian Parliament. Some believe that the oversight function has improved, others believe that it has deteriorated, and the third opinion is that there have been almost no changes at all. Based on the respondents' opinions, the general consensus is that implementing the oversight function can be represented as a parabola. Before the full-scale invasion, it was assessed as more effective than after the start of the invasion. Also, most of the MPs say that the oversight function is improving for various reasons in 2024. MPs acknowledge that although mechanisms for oversight of the Government existed, they did not always work properly. **One of the main factors behind the effectiveness of the oversight function, both before the invasion and in 2022-2024, is the involvement and willingness of the relevant minister to cooperate with the VRU committees**.

MPs have two opposing opinions about the state of the Verkhovna Rada's oversight function during the war. One group of parliamentarians believes that the oversight function has improved, especially in the security sector, due to the creation of new investigative commissions and the mainstreaming of this topic. They argue that the **increase in the number of temporary investigative commissions (TICs) in the defense and security sector shows that the Parliament has begun to play a more active role in overseeing the Government**. The number of Temporary Special and Temporary Investigative Commissions has indeed increased during the period of the full-scale war (as of 2024). However, the effectiveness of the mechanisms available to these commissions is rather questionable due to a number of challenges. In particular, the legislative framework remains fragmented, and temporary commissions often lack both sufficient powers and the resources necessary for effective investigations. Limitations in the procedural documentation of evidence, lack of expert support, and the absence of a unified reporting structure reduce the quality and impact of their work[8]. Moreover, representatives of the executive branch often ignore the commissions' inquiries or provide only formal responses, while there is effectively no mechanism to monitor the implementation of their recommendations. As a result, despite the formal strengthening of parliamentary oversight, its actual effectiveness remains limited. The reasons for this increased attention differ. While some MPs say that the reason for increased oversight and the creation of TICs is a return to the oversight function, others believe that

8 Temporary Commissions in the Parliament: Oversight without the Ability to Influence.

the main reason is the need to imitate oversight, particularly for Ukraine's partners, rather than the actual oversight of the Government's actions.

> *"It seems to me that the number of temporary investigative commissions increased during the full-scale invasion. I have no information, but it is true", — male MP.*

A group of MPs from opposition factions expresses another opinion, stressing that the oversight function has disappeared since the beginning of the war. They note that **the Parliament only formally approves decisions made by the Government without proper debate and oversight**. This is supported by arguments such as the lack of skills of parliamentarians in the oversight function, resistance from central authorities and restrictions imposed during wartime.

> *"Parliament simply functioned as a supplement to the state organism", — female MP.*

Technical changes in the oversight function

With the commencement of the full-scale invasion, the function of parliamentary oversight underwent significant changes. The performance of the control function was partially adopted by the Conciliation Board[9]. After the start of the full-scale invasion, **"An Hour of Questions to the Government of Ukraine"** virtually disappeared, and MPs noted that this was not a specific decision of MPs but rather the unwillingness of other government officials to provide the VRU with opportunities for oversight. The legal absence of "An Hour of Questions to the Government of Ukraine" was explained by following the Rules of Procedure of the Verkhovna Rada. According to the law, this event takes place on Fridays from 10 to 11 a.m. However, due to changes in the format of the VRU's work, there were no meetings on Fridays. The changes also affected the technical aspect of communication with the executive branch. MPs were forced to interact more actively with ministries and other government agencies through digital channels, but even here, they encountered difficulties: **government agencies often ignored requests under the guise of martial law or classified information**.

Key topics and challenges of the oversight function

The shift in priorities during the war led to a change in the topics on which the Verkhovna Rada's oversight function focused. In the first months of the war, the main focus was on security, defense, and arms supplies. One example was the creation of a special commission to oversee the use of Western military aid, which helped Ukraine demonstrate transparency and efficiency in using resources for its international partners. At the same time, MPs have faced serious challenges in fulfilling their oversight function. In particular, because a large amount of information was classified, many issues remained outside the scope of parliamentary oversight. According to parliamentarians, even non-security-related issues are often denied information on the basis of martial law.

9 Military Parliamentarism: Features of the Work of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine under Martial Law.

> *"In my opinion, it [the oversight function] has deteriorated because a lot of it is used for reasons of secrecy to withhold information, to provide incomplete information, to ignore MPs' inquiries and appeals. The rights and powers of MPs to access the relevant places are neglected, etc", — male MP.*

MPs, mainly from the opposition, cited the lack of professionalism of MPs of the 9th convocation as one of the biggest challenges to implementing the oversight function. Thus, MPs noted that some of the Verkhovna Rada's MPs do not have sufficient experience and understanding of the sense of the oversight function. According to MPs from the opposition forces, one of the main arguments for the lack of competence is that representatives of the mono-majority do not understand the possibility of overseeing government officials who are representatives of their political force.

The attitude of central executive authorities toward the Parliament

MPs name a certain "resistance" from the public authorities as one of the key challenges for performing the oversight function. As in the case of legislative activities, the role of the authorities has increased significantly since the full-scale invasion. Respondents noted that after the full-scale invasion began, **government officials could, for a long time, refuse or ignore summonses to appear before VRU's committees to report. Such a mechanism of parliamentary control as MPs' inquiries is described as completely ineffective at this stage**. MPs may either receive generalized, low-quality answers or no answers at all. Some parliamentarians point out that ministries often invoke martial law as a reason for refusing to provide information, even when the request concerns topics that are not related to defense issues. This creates the impression that the Government is deliberately restricting access to information to avoid parliamentary oversight. A similar situation was described in the context of communication and requests to local authorities, state-owned companies, and others. De facto, **the effectiveness of the oversight function (excluding TICs) depends on two main elements: the persistence of committees, in particular their heads, and the willingness of representatives of individual ministries to cooperate**.

> *"The Government has become an even bigger appendage of Bankova [Street] than the Parliament", — female MP.*

> *"Again, due to the fact that many of these positions are classified, so, of course, it is impossible to fully exercise parliamentary oversight here", — male MP.*

The oversight function as a symbol of the loss of the Parliament's subjectivity

When discussing the oversight function of the Parliament, MPs, describing challenges in the oversight function, in particular the actions of the central authorities, came to the conclusion that the Verkhovna Rada is currently losing its own subjectivity. Due to factors such as the need for support from CEAs in decision-making, limited control over budgetary funding in the security and defense sector, cases of other authorities ignoring MPs, and the inability to oversee government officials, **the role of the Verkhovna Rada is sometimes reduced to formal adoption of decisions developed by other legislative initiative entities**. The position that MPs cannot fully oversee the representatives of their own political force in the Government significantly changes the balance of power and the system of checks and balances.

"Parliamentary oversight has undoubtedly changed. At the beginning of the war, we slowly gave up excessive oversight powers, in particular, in our committee on weapons procurement schemes, so that the Ministry of Defense could do this more quickly, although we are already seeing certain negative consequences, including in terms of the corruption component", — male MP.

"There are no meetings on Fridays. But the rules of procedure say that "An Hour of Guestions to the Government of Ukraine" is held only on Fridays", — female MP.

"To put it mildly, the answers of the Cabinet of Ministers do not disregard the MPs but refuse to provide full answers to questions", — female MP.

Despite the existing challenges, **there is a significant improvement in the implementation of the oversight function in 2024**. First, they returned **"An Hour of Questions to the Government of Ukraine," which is one of the main oversight mechanisms**. Second, in 2024, **the Verkhovna Rada established a number of temporary investigative commissions, which, according to MPs, demonstrates a positive movement in the field of parliamentary oversight**. MPs also noted easier cooperation with the Government within the committee meetings.

It is worth noting that although the "An Hour of Questions to the Government" has been reinstated, its regularity is rather doubtful, as from 2023 to April 2025, it took place only 20 times (once in 2023, thirteen times in 2024, and six times in 2025). Overall, the effectiveness of this mechanism is debatable. Before the full-scale invasion, it was one of the most effective existing oversight tools. However, the "An hour of questions to the Government of Ukraine" may now sometimes serve more as a platform for political statements rather than for government accountability to Parliament.

The partial revival of the "An Hour of Questions to the Government" and the increase in the number of investigative commissions demonstrate Parliament's attempts to strengthe its oversight function — a function that is not the strongest side of the Verkhovna Rada. Actions aimed at carrying out parliamentary oversight may be more focused on creating the appearance of control for Ukraine's international partners rather than implementing effective oversight.

"In other words, the committee is the same, but due to the change of the minister, the nature of the relationship has changed, and obviously, the performance of the oversight function has also [deteriorated]. But in general, I think that, on average, MPs have begun to understand a little bit what the oversight function is", — female MP.

5 Impact of the full-scale war on voter outreach

Prior to the full-scale war, voter outreach was more structured and included regular receptions, open meetings, public events, and committee receptions. For many MPs, personal communication with voters was an important part of their work, helping them better understand local needs.

However, with the outbreak of the war, personal presence in many regions became impossible due to security restrictions and hostilities. **In many frontline regions or in the occupied territories, physical meetings were suspended, and MPs' reception offices, some of which were located in dangerous areas, were damaged or destroyed**. As a result, many MPs were forced to switch to online formats. Accordingly, they do much of their work via email, official websites, and social media.

> *"I would like to say that many of my colleagues in the constituencies have had their offices bombed and destroyed. How do they get out of this situation? You need to ask them because I am not a majoritarian, but I have seen photos of these reception offices that were destroyed in Kharkiv or Kropyvnytskyi", — female MP.*

It is worth noting that **the COVID-19 pandemic prepared MPs for the new conditions of remote work, which proved useful during the full-scale war**. Due to restrictions on physical contact caused by the pandemic, MPs were forced to find alternative forms of communication with voters. This included using online tools, holding remote receptions, expanding their presence on social media, and mastering digital communication platforms. Thus, the war has not become a completely new reality in the technical aspect of communication, and the COVID-19 experience has made adaptation to the new conditions more comfortable.

> *"Some MPs hold [meetings with voters], especially those who have constituencies and work with constituencies, but now everything has mostly gone digital. That is, there is virtually no personal work, receptions, and stuff like that. Everything is great with answers, and everything works with inquiries. Everything has become very digitalized, distanced, but the kind of thing we used to have, when you come to a region and have a [physical] meeting there, is rare", — male MP.*

Key topics in voter outreach

Prior to the full-scale invasion, the main topics discussed with voters were socio-economic issues, including pensions, utilities, salary increases, and assistance in obtaining health services. Now, due to the war, the topics of voters' appeals have changed significantly since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. After the start of the full-scale invasion, the main focus was on issues directly related to the war. The most common topics are:

Helping the military and protecting their rights: MPs often receive appeals from relatives of servicemembers who need legal protection or assistance in solving social and health issues. Many appeals concern violations of the military's rights and conflicts with territorial recruitment centers or service conditions. These issues require a deep understanding of the legal aspects and additional resources to resolve them.

> *"There are more appeals from citizens, and it has become more difficult to process them. Many of them are related to the military, and someone's rights are being violated in a military unit. And it's almost impossible to have any influence on this because it's a closed system and so on", — female MP.*

> *"Voters reach to me, as an MP, mainly on issues that relate to military service, receiving deferrals, receiving some kind of legal, professional assistance, and communication issues", — male MP.*

Humanitarian assistance to IDPs: IDPs make up a significant proportion of appeals to MPs, as they need social support, housing, and employment. In addition, access to health and educational services is a significant problem for families who were forced to change their place of residence. MPs often become intermediaries between IDPs and local authorities, helping to resolve organizational issues.

Psychological and medical rehabilitation of the military: Military families and servicepersons need support after returning from the frontline. Psychological assistance is becoming particularly relevant, as many servicepersons face post-traumatic disorders and need specialized rehabilitation. MPs often receive requests for organizing such assistance, as government programs do not always cover these needs.

> *"An obvious topic is helping the army, helping servicepersons protect their rights. And in a very broad sense. From the arbitrariness of the territorial recruitment centers to issues in the service, from various violations of rights [...] The humanitarian block has also expanded in terms of helping residents of the affected regions and internally displaced persons", — male MP.*

Voter outreach challenges

In addition to changes in the needs of voters, the main challenge is the difficulty of accessing voters in the frontline areas and in the occupied territories. Some MPs have lost the ability to communicate directly with voters due to the loss of communication or the destruction of infrastructure in their constituencies. This limits their ability to provide assistance and to receive up-to-date information about the voters' needs in these areas. Furthermore, without face-to-face meetings, voters often have difficulty establishing trust, which makes it difficult for MPs to work effectively.

Another voter outreach challenge is the lack of information. This challenge is not related to the needs of voters but to communication with them. MPs identified two dimensions of this challenge. The first, more typical for the opposition, is the perception that it is impossible to communicate with voters through the media. As noted earlier, **some MPs believe that there are hidden restrictions on access to TV channels, including the Single Telethon and news outlets**. In the opinion of these MPs, these are manifestations of political struggle in Ukraine. The second challenge is the feeling that disclosing the performance results of individual MPs or political forces in constituencies or the country as a whole is inappropriate. In the MPs' opinion, **active publication of positive performance results is perceived as preparation for elections rather than actions for the benefit of society**. This situation is typical not only for MPs but also for community-level politicians.

> *"There is no possibility now to gather some kind of audience [in the constituencies], to talk to people and so on because any such gathering is already perceived as if you are preparing for the elections. Although you should be ready for elections all the time. [...] I call it fulfilling the volunteer function of an MP of Ukraine. You do everything you can do, but now it seems to me that it has a more hidden form", — female MP.*

> *"According to the current legislation, we do not have the right to hold any events or meetings as we used to do before, organize some events, whether for significant events or public holidays. So, now communication is limited to the possibility of receiving people or to electronic means of communication, whether messengers or e-mail, in this way", — female MP.*

It is important to note that the complication of access to voters affects the quality of the representative function. MPs emphasize that direct communication allowed them to better understand the real needs of voters and protect their interests in the Parliament. In the current environment, when offline meetings are almost impossible, they are forced to rely on electronic communication, which is not always effective enough to understand the problems in depth.

6 Impact of the full-scale war on parliamentary diplomacy

Parliamentary diplomacy in Ukraine was largely non-systemic and unstructured prior to the full-scale invasion. Its value was limited, as many **MPs perceived international travel as an opportunity for personal recreation or to pursue their own business interests**[10] rather than as a strategic tool for promoting national interests. The formation of parliamentary friendship groups was often based on the business interests of individual MPs, who preferred to cooperate with countries that could benefit their personal businesses. There were numerous cases of MPs abusing their status by using official business trips for private purposes[11]. **This logic continued, partially increasing bureaucratic control and travel restrictions after the start of the full-scale invasion**. Overall, prior to the full-scale invasion, parliamentary diplomacy in Ukraine was largely supportive, aimed at maintaining existing diplomatic relations and establishing contacts in narrow areas of cooperation, such as the economy or regional issues.

> *"You see, the friendship group was formed at the beginning of the term in 2019. At that time, MPs, many MPs, chose friendship groups that depended on their interest in doing business with these countries, developing their own business or having their own business interests with these countries", — female MP.*

Since February 2022, **the situation has changed dramatically, and parliamentary diplomacy has become extremely important for Ukraine**. Parliamentary diplomacy has become one of the main platforms for communication about Ukraine and the full-scale war. As noted by respondents, in the first year of the full-scale war, **parliamentary diplomacy was on the rise, as the topic of the war in Ukraine was very relevant, and most politicians from other countries were ready to actively engage in discussions and support**. After the start of the invasion, Ukrainian MPs began to establish new ties with those countries with which they had not previously had any inter-parliamentary interaction. Discussions focused, in particular, on obtaining military assistance, putting sanctions pressure on Russia, and engaging international organizations to support Ukraine. Parliamentary diplomacy

10 The USA, Monaco and the Emirates: Where MPs Want to Go "for Experience".

11 "Servant of the People" Kunytskyi Went on a 5-Day Business Trip to Israel and Returned 3 Weeks Later, Having "Appeared" in Florida — "Schemes".

became one of the key tools in the struggle for the support of Western partners, which required a prompt response and a clear strategy.

> *"It [parliamentary diplomacy] became super active. You have to understand that we entered the war after COVID-19. During the two years of COVID-19, we didn't really go anywhere. No one went anywhere, no one talked to anyone", — female MP.*

With the start of the full-scale invasion, it became necessary to rethink the approach to diplomacy. If **earlier, it had been a voluntary activity of MPs, it became a necessity with the start of the full-scale invasion**. Accordingly, there was a need to coordinate the rhetoric and main ideas of Ukrainian delegations. While before the full-scale invasion, there was no unity among MPs in their theses, now all MPs, both from the mono-majority and the opposition factions, say that **all those involved had common rhetoric in support of Ukraine and opposition to Russia**. However, there may have been differences in thematic issues. MPs from different parties continue to express their readiness to promote common ideas in the international arena. **A significant innovation in parliamentary diplomacy is the obligation to get key messages** from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), which MPs are now required to have for their international trips[12]. This innovation ensures the consistency of positions promoted on international platforms. These messages specify what MPs should say, what main ideas they should voice, and what support they should ask for. This approach minimizes the risk of using international visits to promote their own political interests. However, it is worth noting that all MPs mentioned that **despite the existence of the MFA's key messages, they can promote their own topics and ideas of their choice without restrictions**.

> *"We were warned quite harshly in the faction that if we are conducting any negotiations, or any negotiations with government officials, with officials of other countries, we should use the recommendations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs", — male MP.*

> *"It's horrible! MPs have to take recommendations from the MFA for their international trips. It's actually a great thing, and it's the right thing to do", — female MP.*

Of course, an important change in parliamentary diplomacy has been the topics communicated. **Before the full-scale invasion, it was mainly economic and European integration issues**, after the invasion began, the **main topics were various aspects of support for Ukraine**. The main work within the framework of parliamentary diplomacy was to negotiate arms supplies, sanctions pressure, and humanitarian support. The return of Ukrainian children and the dissemination of information about Russia's war crimes in Ukraine were also important aspects. Over time, the issue of European integration has also become relevant again.

With the declaration of martial law in Ukraine, male MPs could not travel abroad for parliamentary diplomacy. Accordingly, female MPs, who had previously been quite actively involved in interparliamentary cooperation, took on a much greater role. **While before the full-scale invasion, female MPs made up about half of the delegations, they almost**

12 MPs Now Need to Get "Theses" from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on What to Say to the World: A Document.

independently led this area of work after the invasion began. Respondents were very positive about this period and described it as very effective.

> *"Well, look, for some time, when men were basically banned from traveling abroad more than women, there were more female MPs in diplomacy. And here, you have to bow low because female MPs have accomplished many things. I know a lot of them who worked effectively [...] now I think that, in principle, it has leveled out a little bit, but still, I believe that female MPs are working more at the level of parliamentary diplomacy today", — male MP.*

Despite the restrictions on men traveling abroad, **there were several scandals where MPs left Ukraine for personal purposes, using diplomacy as a cover**. In response to such actions by individual parliamentarians, the Cabinet of Ministers issued a resolution imposing stricter restrictions on all civil servants, male and female, in crossing the border. According to MPs, **it significantly complicated the implementation of parliamentary diplomacy as the process of traveling abroad became more formalized and bureaucratic**. Currently, MPs need an invitation from other parties to interparliamentary cooperation, permission from the Chair of the Verkhovna Rada, and a key message from the MFA. Most MPs dislike this restriction because, **first, it undermines the subjectivity of the Verkhovna Rada — some even consider it illegal — and second, it significantly complicates the implementation of parliamentary diplomacy**. With the introduction of additional restrictions, the role of female MPs in diplomacy partially diminished, as equal restrictions were introduced for all parliamentarians. It is worth noting that not all MPs accept the new role of parliamentary diplomacy. Respondents noted that some of their colleagues still perceive delegations as a holiday, and the workload is distributed unequally within the delegation.

> *"Today, you can only engage in parliamentary diplomacy if you have a formal reason to do so. You can't just go and do parliamentary diplomacy somewhere in Thailand or the Maldives. I think this is the right decision because, unfortunately, our colleagues have often abused such things, and it cannot be justified under martial law", — male MP.*

As female MPs note, they were actively involved in parliamentary diplomacy even before the invasion. There is an opinion among some MPs that female MPs in the 9th convocation of the Verkhovna Rada are more involved in parliamentary diplomacy not only because of their own motivation but also because of their greater training and competence in this area. Female MPs noted that the main factors contributing to the almost equal gender distribution in the delegations were (1) higher motivation for such activities, (2) experience of cooperation with international organizations and (3) a higher percentage of English language skills among female MPs. In interviews, female MPs noted that they also took their duties within the framework of parliamentary diplomacy more seriously than some male MPs.

> *"They [female MPs], on the average level, purely statistically, are better educated, have more international experience and better English", — female MP.*

> *"I wanted to be involved in international activities in the Committee. Otherwise, I would not have joined this Committee [...] I am happy that although, unfortunately, there is a war, the vector I am passionate about has become a priority now", — female MP.*

Challenges in parliamentary diplomacy

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, Ukrainian MPs have faced severe restrictions on traveling abroad, which the Government has imposed under martial law. This has created serious challenges for parliamentary diplomacy, as every trip now requires permission from the Speaker of the Parliament and relevant committees. The process of obtaining permits has become so complicated that some MPs simply refuse to participate in international events because they cannot obtain the necessary documents in a timely manner.

According to some opposition MPs, **the most important factors affecting the possibility of opposition politicians joining the delegation are expertise and loyalty or non-confrontational nature**. Some MPs from opposition forces and the mono-majority face discrimination in their ability to travel abroad, which is artificially complicated by obtaining permission. As a result, delegations often include those who are "safe" in terms of loyalty, which can lead to a loss of expertise in the delegation. MPs from the opposition believe that they are less often involved in international delegations, even if they have considerable experience and knowledge in the relevant areas.

The selective involvement of MPs in parliamentary delegations may have a negative impact on the overall image of Ukraine in the international arena, as Western partners expect to see representatives of different political forces to get an objective picture of the situation in the country. When delegations are not formed with equal access for all factions and groups, this negatively affects the reputation of the delegation and the image of democracy in Ukraine in general. According to interviews with MPs from the opposition, the possibility of traveling abroad is often used as an instrument of political pressure. In particular, **obtaining a travel permit may depend on the MPs' willingness to support the Government's initiatives**. The importance of equal involvement of both male and female MPs in interparliamentary cooperation is a positive practice for building longer-term cooperation, as demonstrated by foreign studies.[13]

> *"The current communication and exchange of views between parliamentarians [of different countries] affect the decision-making of governments and partner countries. And any desire, and in this case a specific action, to limit it [parliamentary diplomacy] will have negative consequences [...] The absence of opposition representatives in the delegation is such a negative wake-up call for the entire delegation", — female MP.*

Another problem that significantly complicates parliamentary diplomacy is transport restrictions and financial costs associated with business trips. According to interviews, **some MPs point out that even if they have permission to travel, trips can become financially burdensome, as transport and accommodation costs are rarely reimbursed by the state**. MPs often have to find funding on their own or seek assistance from international organizations. In addition, due to the unstable situation at the border and logistical constraints[14], planning trips can be a real challenge. Some MPs are forced to cancel international meetings due to excessive delays in paperwork and difficulties in organizing travel.

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13 Governing Well after War: How Improving Female Representation Prolongs Post-Conflict Peace.

14 One of the significant logistics constraints in the period 2023–2024 is the blockade of the Ukrainian-Polish border protesters from Poland.

> *"I've had stories where they signed a business trip after my train was leaving, and I didn't get on that train because I didn't know if I was going to leave, and you have to take tickets for another train immediately", — female MP.*

With the full-scale war unleashed, the requirements for coordination between different parliamentary delegations have increased significantly. Amid these challenges, new tools have been introduced in parliamentary diplomacy, such as obligatory key messages from the MFA[15], which are intended to ensure consistency in the speeches of Ukrainian delegations abroad. However, the interviews show that **the lack of consistency and proper communication between delegations remains a major problem**. MPs note that even after important meetings, information about the approved agreements is not always passed on to other members of the Parliament or subsequent delegations. This can lead to the loss of important information and inefficient use of international contacts. **The lack of coherent communication also makes it difficult to achieve goals and promote unified messages in the international arena**. Another important problem is that some MPs are not sufficiently prepared for international missions. The lack of systemic training means that some delegates do not always understand how to properly convey Ukraine's position or establish long-term contacts with foreign partners.

Interestingly, as noted by female MPs, one of the mechanisms for easing border crossing restrictions concerns allowing women MPs to travel abroad with their children, particularly for leisure purposes. This mechanism is viewed ambiguously depending on whether the MP has children, as it is perceived by some as discriminatory towards female MPs who do not have children. Another group of female MPs points out that unmarried women or those without children find it easier to participate in international trips, as they can organize travel without needing to account for additional family obligations. At the same time, for those with children, the challenge of arranging childcare during business trips arises.

> *"Then they made a small easing in case a female MP travels with a child, I mean, if there is no one to take the child to rest except me", — female MP.*

There is no consensus among MPs on whether topics are divided between women and men in parliamentary diplomacy. Some MPs believe that there is no such division of topics as such; all topics are communicated by MPs regardless of their gender. It is noted that the **greater role is played by MPs' expertise in a particular topic, as well as the relevance of the topic in communication between Ukraine and those countries where MPs have more established relations**. It is worth noting that the majority of respondents held this position at the beginning of the full-scale invasion when female MPs mostly carried out parliamentary diplomacy.

Some MPs believe that there is a division of topics into those where male MPs are more involved and those where female MPs are more active. Some female MPs note that women are more likely to use soft power strategies in negotiations. **They are more effective in dealing with humanitarian issues, such as support for internally displaced persons, forced migrants, human rights protection, and the repatriation of Ukrainian children abducted by Russia**. At the same time, men are more likely to focus on military assistance and defense cooperation, which indicates a certain division of topics by gender. The posi-

15 MPs Now Need to Get "Theses" from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on What to Say to the World: A Document.

tions of male respondents almost completely align with those of the female MPs. MPs note that **although all parliamentarians are involved in advocacy for military assistance, in practice, these issues remain more in the area of responsibility of male MPs**. This can be explained by the traditional greater involvement of men in the security and defense sector, on the one hand, and by social stereotypes about gender roles, on the other.

> *"We all say that Ukraine should receive as much weapons and support as possible and become a member of the EU and NATO. Russia should be sanctioned, and assets located abroad should be seized. We all speak abroad within this broad framework", — male MP.*

> *"Indeed, there are topics that are much better perceived if communicated by women. The abduction of Ukrainian children, of course, sounds more powerful when a woman speaks about it. When we talk about the topic of military weapons, when a man who served speaks, it is perceived [better]. This is probably different information than from a woman", — male MP.*

At the same time, when it comes to war crimes and advocating for the return of Ukrainian prisoners, both female and male MPs work on an equal footing. All parliamentarians are actively involved in communicating with international organizations to document Russia's war crimes, collect testimonies, and lobby for support for international investigations.

7 Images of female and male MPs in the context of war

To examine the image of MPs in society in more detail, we analyzed the texts of Ukrainian media about MPs *(see Annex 2 for more details)*. Our goal was to determine which images of MPs are shown in the media. For this purpose, we used sentiment analysis, topic modeling, and qualitative content analysis.

The media play a key role in shaping the image of MPs. A large proportion of media outlets focus on sensationalism and scandals, which can create a distorted perception of parliamentary activity. For example, if an MP actively submits draft laws but receives no media coverage, their work remains invisible to the public. In contrast, any scandal or careless remark immediately becomes a subject of media attention, contributing to the reinforcement of a negative image of the MP.

Statistical analysis of the sentiment analysis[16] results shows that there is no significant difference in the emotional tone of media coverage between female and male MPs. For both groups, the overall sentiment is negative. Within each group, however, there is a wide range[17] of results. **This may indicate a greater polarization in the media portrayal of female politicians, where some receive very positive coverage and others very negative**. Moreover, in both groups, there are individual MPs who receive particularly negative media attention, which strongly affects the average sentiment score for each group *(More on the results of the sentiment analysis — Annex 2)*. Respondents themselves agree with these findings when reflecting on their public image. According to MPs, **their negative public image stems from the fact that both society and the media tend to perceive MPs as a homogenous group without recognizing individual differences or merits**. All parliamentarians are associated with negative stereotypes, which are shaped by isolated incidents that receive widespread media coverage. **This image does not always reflect reality, as even those MPs who work actively and achieve significant results remain largely unnoticed due to the lack of media support**.

> *"Unfortunately, the majority of people in society identify the Parliament with a few MPs whom people know best", — male MP.*

16 Analysis of emotional color of the text.

17 The difference between the lowest and the highest results.

> *"It's better not to get to know someone, not to say that they are an MP, because the attitude changes immediately. Right away. You can have a normal conversation with a person, but as soon as you say where you work, that's it", — female MP.*

According to the results of the topic modeling, we can trace the main thematic differences in articles about MPs. **The topics related to the activities of female MPs cover both national defense issues and social and humanitarian aspects**. In particular, the media often portray female MPs as experts in the military sphere, which emphasizes their competence in security issues. Important topics include demobilization, social support for the military, education, and humanitarian initiatives. The results of this approach indicate the gradual destruction of traditional gender stereotypes in a society where women were rarely associated with military and security policy. The presence of female MPs in defense and military mobilization issues indicates a change in public perception of women as influential and competent actors in the security sector.

> *"There are signs of the security sector being closed off [to women], but thanks to the phenomenon of Maryana Bezuhla, that has been reduced to zero. I can say that [some female MPs], at the very beginning, wanted to join the Defense Committee, but it was hard to get in. In particular, there were comments like 'you haven't served.' As if all the men there had served. But now, I would say, this has almost been reduced to nothing. Because one of the key voices on national security and war is [...] Maryana", — male MP.*

The analysis of the **LDA modeling results shows that the media image of a female MP in Ukraine's security sector revolves around several main topics, particularly international cooperation, lawmaking, the military, anti-corruption, law enforcement, and regional security**. Considerable attention is paid to defense, mobilization, and cooperation with NATO, reflecting the current situation in the country's security sector. The thematic diversity of articles about male MPs is less pronounced than that of female MPs. The analysis of topics shows that male MPs in the security sector are more often mentioned in the context of lawmaking (topics such as "law," "project," and "committee"), international cooperation ("NATO" and "agreements"), and military issues. This may indicate that male MPs are perceived as leading players in shaping the state's security policy. Interestingly, corruption issues and investigations are also present among the topics, which may indicate the media's attention to their professional ethics and transparency. In addition, the presence of topics related to cybersecurity and information warfare indicates that male MPs actively shape policy in these new security areas. Interestingly, demobilization and social issues stand out for female MPs, which may indicate that they are perceived as politicians who focus on the soft aspects of security policy. On the contrary, the topics of cybersecurity and law enforcement are more pronounced for male MPs, which may indicate that they are perceived as experts in harder aspects of security *(see Annex 2 for more details)*.

An analysis of the content of media materials on the activities of female MPs in the security sector in Ukraine reveals **three key components of their image** that are actively shaped in the public space, namely focus on **professionalism**, focus on **scandalousness, and increased attention to their personal lives**. Professionalism is a key component in covering female MPs' activities. It encompasses their competence in national security, and the

media often cite their speeches and legislative initiatives, including their participation in committees and working groups, such as the creation of commissions to oversee military aid. Considerable attention is also paid to their international activities, where they actively promote Ukraine's interests at various forums and conferences, such as the PACE or the Munich Security Conference. The publications detail the past professional experience, education, and career path of female MPs, creating an image of highly skilled security professionals. The participation of some of them in hostilities and volunteering is highlighted, which adds additional credibility and weight to their image in defense matters.

Scandalousness and incompetence are other prominent components of the media coverage of female MPs, which creates a rather ambiguous impression. Often, **publications focus on controversial statements or initiatives that cause public outcry and highlight conflicts, which in turn casts doubt on their professionalism**. The activities of female MPs are often criticized, with emphasis placed on their alleged incompetence and unsuccessful legislative work, which is portrayed as ill-conceived or even redundant. Additionally, the media actively cover conflicts between female MPs and other political figures, emphasizing their alleged tendency to engage in tense interactions and verbal altercations. This creates an image of them as sources of conflict in the political environment.

> *"And usually, where do they learn about it? From scandals. And everyone thinks that the whole Parliament is about scandals", — female MP.*

> *"Corruption, leisure, and lifestyle affect the formation [of the image]. It irritates people, and living abroad does too [irritates]", — female MP.*

Although not an independent image, attention to the personal lives of female MPs is actively manifested in the media discourse and reflects gender stereotypes about women in politics. **The media often focus on their marital status, romantic relationships, or the birth of children, distracting them from their professional activities and creating the impression that personal life is no less important than work**. Considerable emphasis is also placed on appearance and style of clothing, which contributes to the objectification of women and shifts the focus from their professional achievements to external attributes. Moreover, some publications cast doubt on the subjectivity of female MPs, implying that their statements or decisions result from the influence of outsiders rather than their own initiative, which undermines their independence and professionalism. Such heightened attention to personal life, family (including parents and husbands), and appearance is a manifestation of stereotypical media coverage of women, which foreign studies confirm. This may create additional barriers to the perception of female MPs as serious political figures and security experts. **It is important to note that the balance between these three components differs for various female MPs. Some are mostly covered through the prism of professionalism, while others are more often mentioned in the context of scandals or personal life**. This heterogeneity of coverage may reflect both real differences in the activities and behavior of female MPs and certain media biases or preferences. **Female MPs also note that their professional achievements are often overlooked, with attention instead focused on external attributes such as appearance or personal life**. For example, some female MPs feel that the media are more concerned with the cost of their clothing than with their professional accomplishments, which significantly affects public perceptions of women in politics.

> *"A handbag worth that many thousand euros, well, a pendant worth that much, and the total price of your dress code. That's all they write about. They don't write about the things that a person does", — female MP.*

> *"Everyone hates us. Regardless of [our] gender",— female MP.*

An analysis of the media coverage of male MPs' activities in the security sector reveals **three key components of their image, which are professionalism, authority, and scandalousness**. Professionalism is the dominant characteristic in the media portrait of male MPs. **It is manifested through active participation in lawmaking, work in specialized committees on national security and defense, as well as through expert comments on the situation at the frontline and the country's defense strategies**. The media often emphasize male MPs' competence in the security sector, their ability to analyze complex geopolitical situations, and their ability to propose effective solutions. It is important to note that the professionalism of male MPs is significantly enhanced by their military experience. **Participation in combat operations, service in the Armed Forces, or work in the security forces before being elected to the Parliament significantly increases the credibility of their expert examination and decisions**. This creates the image of politicians who not only theoretically understand security issues but also have practical experience in solving them.

The credibility of male MPs is the second important component of their image in the media. **It is formed on the basis of their professional activities but also includes personal qualities and reputation**. The media often portray male MPs as influential figures whose opinions carry weight not only in Ukraine but also on the international stage. This is manifested, inter alia, through the portrayal of MPs' participation in meetings, particularly on armed forces issues. The media highlight male MPs' personal qualities, such as patriotism, responsibility, and willingness to sacrifice for the country, which plays a significant role in building their credibility. The media often emphasize these traits, especially in male MPs who combine parliamentary work with military service or volunteering. Such a presentation creates an image of politicians who not only talk but also act, which significantly increases their credibility in the eyes of the public.

Scandalousness as a component of the image or a separate image of male MPs **is different from the image of female MPs. The media quite often cover cases when male MPs become subjects of journalistic investigations or official checks**. This may relate to issues such as non-declaration of property, excessive spending during the war, links with suspicious persons, or other offenses. Such reports can significantly affect the reputation of individual politicians and undermine their credibility. At the same time, it is worth noting that scandalous aspects usually concern a limited number of male MPs and do not dominate the overall media discourse about the MPs in question in the security sector. It is interesting to note that the personal lives of male MPs are rarely covered and only in relation to a limited number of individuals. When personal aspects are mentioned in the media, they are often linked to the male MPs' professional activities.

> *"I think there are nuances here. It seems to me that most corruption scandals have been linked to male MPs. And they are more likely to be blamed, well, objectively", — female MP.*

> *"Unfortunately, after the return of this policy, as usual, the attempts to re-launch this image of parliamentarians as something underdeveloped, ineffective, self-serving and selfish have returned", — male MP.*

There are gender differences in the media coverage of the activities of male and female MPs in the security sector of Ukraine: scandalousness of male MPs is more often related to corruption investigations, while it mostly concerns interpersonal conflicts for female MPs, which creates an image of less competent politicians. A significant difference is the attention paid to the personal lives of female MPs, including their family relationships, as opposed to male MPs, as well as the emphasis on the appearance of female MPs. This difference in coverage creates unequal conditions for the perception of politicians of different genders. Male MPs are more often presented as independent security experts, while the image of female MPs can be blurred by excessive attention to their personal lives, families, or existing conflicts. It is important to note that despite the fact that only some female MPs are portrayed by the media as conflict-prone, this may extend to the image of other female MPs in the public perception.

> *"It seems to me that this is the main thing that needs to be done so that people understand that MPs are different, their contribution is different, and their approach to work is different. And look at the details, not just say that everyone is an arsehole", — female MP.*

Media publications, in the opinion of MPs, are one of the key factors in determining how the public sees male and female MPs. According to our monitoring, **the media often portrays MPs negatively, but this is not true for all MPs**. There are significant differences between the way MPs are portrayed in the media and the way politicians see them. Some female MPs mentioned a rather increased attention to their personal lives and appearance. At the same time, our monitoring shows that professional activity is one of the most important topics for both female and male MPs. It is also worth noting that **media monitoring does not confirm the hypothesis of MPs that there is a single image of male and female MPs, at least in the media**. While a number of features described above for male and female MPs were highlighted, monitoring results confirm the importance of the media presence of individual MPs who become the faces of the Parliament, as mentioned by MPs.

> *"This eternal pursuit of scandals, clickbait, and so on is also part of their [the media's] responsibility for the perception of MPs", — male MP.*

Despite the fact that the media produce different images of both male and female MPs, it is difficult to talk about the dominance or influence of such images in society. In interpreting the image of MPs in society, one should also take into account the factors of memory of previous convocations, perception and understanding of the Parliament's performance, and the actions of individual MPs. It is worth remembering that the emotional coloring is rather negative, and the content of the articles often also contains negative or critical statements about the activities of male and female MPs. This confirms the respondents' position that the image of MPs in society is highly disliked and negative.

8 The main positive and negative practices of the Verkhovna Rada during the full-scale war

We analyzed interviews with MPs in detail to identify positive and negative practices that emerged during the full-scale invasion. Special attention was paid to identifying specific actions and initiatives that had both a positive and negative impact on the efficiency of the Parliament and crisis management, in the opinion of MPs. The key aspect was to distinguish trends that were repeated in the respondents' answers. We looked at the MPs' assessment of these practices, their impact on the Parliament's adaptation to the conditions of full-scale war, and the preservation of the democratic process.

Positive practices and solutions

A single continuous session of the Parliament

One of the key changes in the work of the Verkhovna Rada after the commencement of the full-scale invasion was the introduction of a continuous session format. This decision enabled it to respond quickly to challenges related to the security and defense of the state. This work format allowed for quick and important decisions regarding mobilization, the introduction of martial law, and ensuring the state's defense capability. According to MPs, this approach significantly increased the efficiency of the legislative process in a crisis situation where time is crucial and reduced real risks to MPs' lives. The MPs could meet at any time to adopt urgent laws, which allowed them to maintain a high level of organization and promptness in responding to external threats.

Optimizing the work of the Conciliation Board

The work of the Conciliation Board was optimized during the war, which helped speed up the adoption of legislative initiatives. Instead of the traditional lengthy discussions in the parliamentary hall and committees, the Conciliation Board meetings were held in an accelerated and closed format, allowing for prompt decision-making. MPs note that the period of work with the active use of the Conciliation Board was effective and recall it as an unprecedented unification of all political forces, as the positions and comments of both the mono-majority and the opposition were taken into account and decisions were made by consensus. In addition, modern communication formats such as chats and online meetings were used, which greatly facilitated the process in the face of threats to the lives of MPs.

The Conciliation Board, which consisted of representatives of the highest positions within Parliament, also took over part of the oversight function that ordinary MPs could not perform.

Strengthening parliamentary diplomacy

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, many Ukrainian parliamentarians have rethought the importance of parliamentary diplomacy. It has become an important platform for promoting support for Ukraine and advocating for the decisions required from partners. MPs used their increased interest in the events in Ukraine to strengthen existing contacts and build new ties with other states.

Common international rhetoric

MPs from both the mono-majority and the opposition forces realized the importance of a common international rhetoric. A unified position on the international stage is what parliamentarians and other government officials are trying to achieve in order to promote Ukraine's interests on the global stage. The adoption of unified key messages for all delegations helped harmonize the positions promoted on international platforms and focus efforts on key issues such as arms supplies, sanctions pressure on Russia, and support for Ukraine at the level of international organizations.

Strengthening the role of central executive authorities in the legislative process

During wartime, the Verkhovna Rada began cooperating more actively with central executive authorities, including the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff. Strengthening the role of these public authorities in the legislative process helped bring additional expertise to the decision-making system and facilitated the development of decisions based on the needs of the Defense Forces. The involvement of CEAs in the legislative process is positive not only in terms of developing a government-centric model of legislative activity but also because CEAs have a much greater capacity to process and develop new draft laws. This helps ensure that legislative initiatives are consistent with the national security strategy. Despite potential deteriorations in the parliamentary process, the active involvement of central authorities contributed to a more rapid response and adaptation of legislation to the needs of the Defense Forces.

Improving gender equality

The 9th convocation has the largest number of female MPs since Ukraine's independence. Since the outbreak of full-scale war, the role of women in Ukrainian political life has increased. An important achievement was the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, which promotes the protection of women's rights and combating gender-based violence. Female MPs played a key role in parliamentary diplomacy, which was almost entirely their responsibility for a certain period. Our analysis of legislative activity *(see Annex 1 for details)* shows that in some areas, women's draft laws are adopted in equal or greater proportions than men's. All these factors indicate an increase in gender equality within the Ukrainian Parliament.

Using social media to communicate with voters

Prior to the full-scale invasion, the role of social media as a tool for communication between politicians and the public increased significantly in the context of COVID-19. With

limited access to offline meetings with voters due to Russia's full-scale invasion, the best practices in the field of communication during the COVID-19 period continued to be used and developed. This approach allows for keeping in touch with people, especially in conditions of limited access to media and physical meetings due to martial law.

Negative practices and solutions

Restrictions on access to parliamentary sessions

One of the most controversial practices was the significant restriction of access of journalists and the public to the Verkhovna Rada's sessions and information about its activities. Measures aimed at ensuring security and confidentiality led to a significant decrease in the transparency of the Verkhovna Rada. This, in turn, negatively affected voter confidence, in some cases leading to rumors that the Parliament had ceased to function, further fuelling public distrust. In addition, restricting access to the VRU was ineffective in terms of security, as some MPs actively informed the public about the work and sessions of the Verkhovna Rada, sometimes in real-time.

Weakening of the Parliament's subjectivity

The weakening of Parliament's subjectivity caused by restrictions on access to information (due to security measures) and the further strengthening of the role of the Presidential Office (including in the legislative process) reduced Parliament's ability to exercise its oversight function and influence the content of decisions. We have already mentioned that the increased weight of the CEAs in the legislative process is positive. However, in the second function of the Parliament — the oversight function — the growing influence of the CEAs is a negative development, as it disrupts the existing system of checks and balances. Using the restrictions on access to information, the authorities, not only at the central level, began to ignore MPs in their attempts to exercise the oversight function. This was manifested until 2024 in the absence of "An Hour of Questions to the Government of Ukraine" and is still manifested in ignoring MPs' requests, thus destroying this tool.

Ignoring personal security risks

MPs, as well as employees of the Verkhovna Rada Secretariat, faced additional risks to their lives and health. This concerns the lack of a bomb shelter in the Verkhovna Rada building or anywhere close to it. This problem was not systemically addressed at the institutional level (neither in advance nor during the full-scale invasion), which poses risks to the continuity of the Verkhovna Rada's work.

The return of political struggle to parliamentary life with negative manifestations in the work of parliamentary delegations

Despite the significant development of parliamentary diplomacy and the awareness of the need for a unified position in the international arena, the political struggle remains an influential factor (except for the first months of the full-scale invasion). Its consequences are the inability to achieve full unity in rhetoric, uneven involvement of MPs from different factions in parliamentary delegations, and conflicts within delegations. These three factors pose reputational risks for Ukraine in the perception of our international partners.

Lack of systemic communication in parliamentary diplomacy

The absence of an established practice of transferring developments and agreements between different iterations of parliamentary delegations (which arises both from political struggle and the lack of a well-established briefing system) may lead to a decrease in the effectiveness of diplomatic activities. Some MPs may reach agreements with partners but fail to inform their successors about them, which may require repeated negotiations.

Gender restrictions in the activities of female MPs

The full-scale war has affected the personal lives of all MPs. However, there is a consensus that a significant number of female MPs face much greater challenges in balancing their professional duties and personal lives. This was particularly evident in the early days of the war, when most MPs, like other Ukrainian citizens, needed to protect their families. However, for instance, the wives of male MPs could leave with their children, while male MPs would remain in Ukraine and perform their duties. Female MPs with children could not send them with their husbands, as their husbands could not cross the border, and in some cases, were mobilized to the Defense Forces. Accordingly, this created a significant additional burden for female MPs.

Annex 1

Report on monitoring MPs' legislative initiatives for the period of work of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 9th convocation

Methodology

As of 15 May 2024, MPs had registered 9,360 legislative initiatives since the beginning of the 9th convocation. By legislative initiatives of MPs, we mean draft laws (5,437), presidential proposals (32 documents) and draft codes (two documents).

In addition, to analyze the participation of MPs in the work of temporary special and temporary investigative commissions (and thus assess their contribution to the implementation of the Parliament's oversight function) and delegations, we collected resolutions on the establishment of the relevant structures. So, the total number of analyzed legal acts (draft laws and draft resolutions) amounted to 5,509 documents (of which 816 were adopted).

We analyzed the involvement of female MPs in the development of legal acts in three ways. First of all, we identified **women's draft laws**, which were all initiatives where the first signatory was a female MP. Accordingly, if the first signatory was a man, it was a **men's draft law**. We also analyzed draft laws by **the number of women** among the signatories of draft laws.

Total number of draft laws

Thus, the total number of registered draft laws since the beginning of the 9th convocation has reached 5,437. Of these, 776 documents were adopted (of which 717 were signed by the President). Since the beginning of the convocation, most legislative initiatives have been registered in economic policy and the fewest in humanitarian policy. The security and defense sector ranks sixth by the number of draft laws (out of seven).

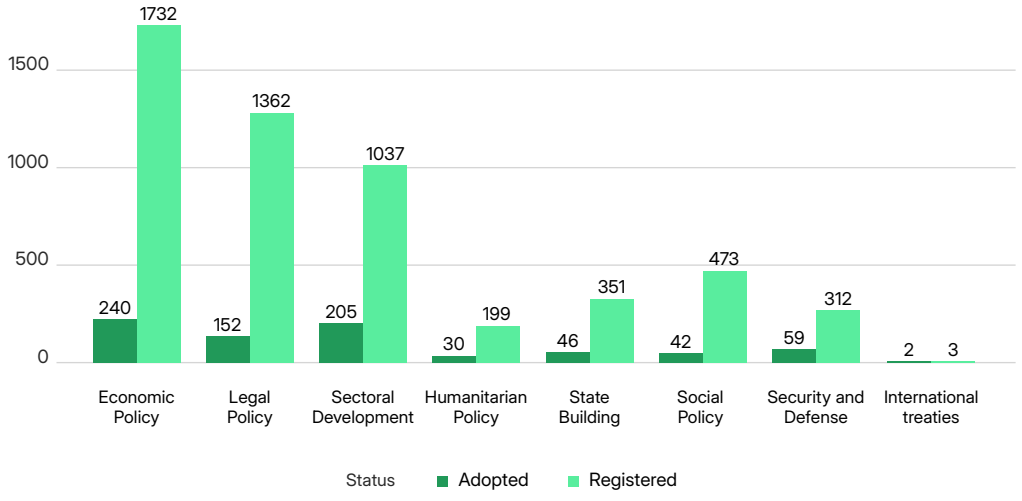

Diagram 1. *Total number of registered and adopted draft laws by sector*

From the beginning of the full-scale war on 24 February 2022, 1,980 draft laws were registered in the VRU, of which 342 were adopted. Most draft laws were registered and adopted in the areas of legal policy, economic policy, and sectoral development. The security and defense sector moved from sixth to fourth place in terms of the number of draft laws.

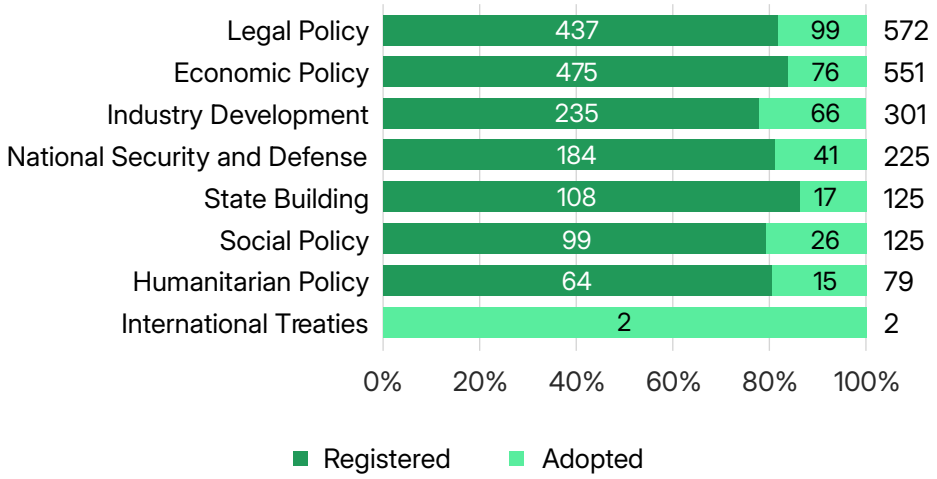

Diagram 2. *The number of registered and adopted draft laws by sector after the commencement of full-scale war from 24 February 2022 to 15 May 2024*

Involvement of female MPs in the process of developing and adopting legislative initiatives

Overall, almost every third draft law in the Verkhovna Rada is initiated by a woman. Thus, female MPs were the first signatories in 1,442 draft laws (26.3% of the total), while men were the first signatories in 4,027 draft laws (73.6% of the total).

Laws where men are the first initiators are adopted by the VRU almost four times more often. Thus, the Parliament adopted 167 women's draft laws, which is 22% of the total number of adopted draft laws and 3% of the total number of registered draft laws. Instead, 609 draft laws were adopted, with the first initiator being a male MP, which is 78% of the total number of adopted draft laws and 11% of the total number of registered draft laws. If we look at the percentage of adopted women's draft laws out of the total number of women's registered draft laws, this value is 11.6%, while the percentage of men's draft laws is 15.1%.

Both male and female MPs most often initiate draft laws in the field of economic policy. As for other areas, female MPs are more likely to initiate draft laws in the fields of sectoral development, social policy, and legal policy — they were the first signatories of more than two hundred draft laws in these areas. Men are the most active in registering draft laws in the areas of legal policy, sectoral development, and state building.

Over the entire period of the 9th convocation, the security and defense sector was not a top priority for either male or female MPs. However, for female MPs, the security and defense sector is generally the last in terms of the number of initiated draft laws compared to other sectors, while it is the fifth for male MPs. Female MPs registered draft laws more often in the social (46% of all in the social policy) and humanitarian (38.1% of all in the humanitarian policy) spheres and least often in the areas of state building (20.8% of all in the state building) and legal policy (19% of all in the legal policy). This trend has continued since

the start of the full-scale invasion. Between 24 February 2022 and 15 May 2024, female MPs registered 45.6% of all social policy draft laws and 29.1% of all humanitarian policy draft laws. Women MPs registered the lowest number of draft laws in the areas of state building (14.4%), legal policy (15.5%), and economy (15.6%).

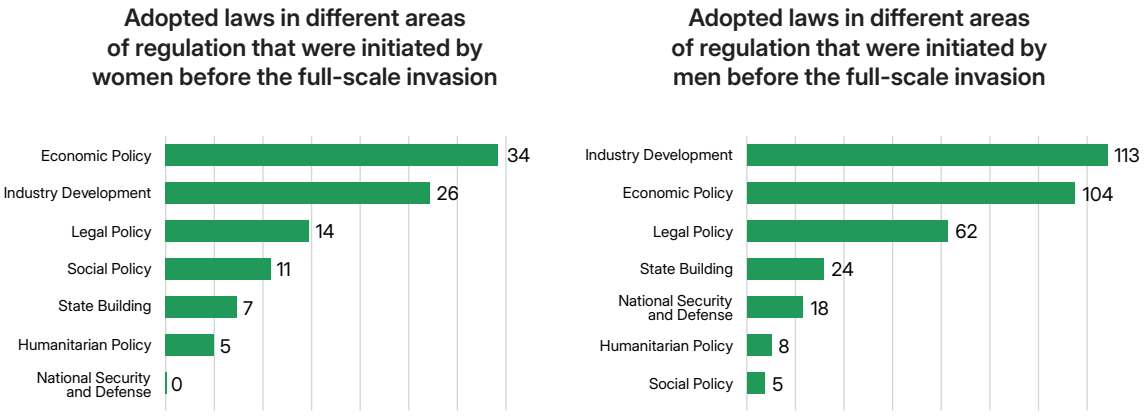

Diagram 3. *Breakdown of adopted "women's" and "men's" draft laws by sector before the* ***full-scale invasion***

If we examine the draft laws adopted, we can see that most women's and men's draft laws were adopted in the areas of economic policy and sectoral development. In contrast, in the security and defense sector, the number of draft laws initiated by male MPs was four times higher than that initiated by female MPs.

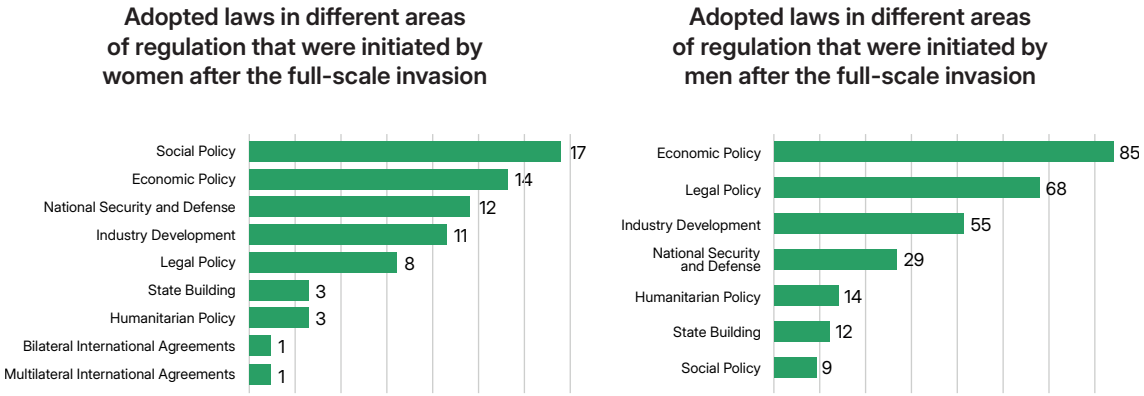

Diagram 4. *Breakdown of "women's" and "men's" draft laws by sector after the* ***start of the full-scale invasion***

Note: *For women, the security and defense sector moved from the last to the 4th place in terms of the number of registered legislative initiatives and to the 3rd place out of 5 among the adopted ones. For men, security and defense moved from 5th to 4th place in terms of the number of registered and remained 4th among the adopted draft laws.*

The number of women's draft laws after the start of the full-scale invasion and until 15 May 2024 was 388, which is 19.6% of the total number of draft laws registered after the start of the full-scale invasion and 7% of the total number for the entire period of the convocation. Since the commencement of the full-scale invasion, 18% of women's draft laws (out of all registered women's draft laws) have been adopted. This figure is 17.1% for male MPs. A lower percentage of women's draft laws (out of the total number of women's draft laws in a sector)

compared to men's draft laws is observed in the areas of economy (16.2% of women's draft laws vs. 18.2% of men's draft laws), legal policy (9% of women's draft laws vs. 14% of men's draft laws) and sectoral development (12.8% of women's draft laws vs. 23.2% of men's draft laws). A higher percentage of adopted women's draft laws (out of registered women's draft laws) than men's draft laws is in the areas of state building (16.6% of women's draft laws vs. 11.2% of men's draft laws), social policy (29.8% of women's draft laws vs. 13.2% of men's draft laws), and security (29.5% of women's draft laws vs. 16.4% of men's draft laws). In the area of security and defense, 22 women's draft laws (25.2% of all parliamentary draft laws in this area) were registered before the full-scale invasion (since the beginning of the 9th convocation). None of them were adopted. After the start of the full-scale invasion and until 15 May 2024, female MPs registered 49 women's draft laws (21.7% of all security-related draft laws) and adopted 12 (29.2% of all adopted draft laws and 24.5% of women's draft laws). There were 29 men's draft laws (16.4% of all registered men's draft laws).

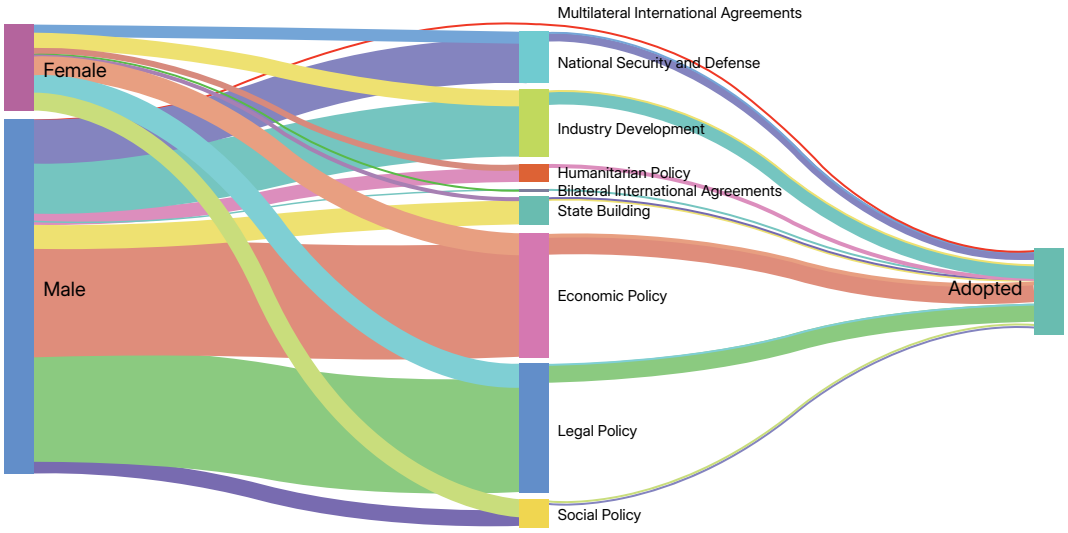

Diagram 5. *The share of adopted "women's" and "men's" draft laws from the registered "women's" and "men's" draft laws by sector after the start of the full-scale invasion until 15 May 2024*

Number of women's laws by session:

1st session — 19 women's draft laws

2nd session — 154 women's draft laws

3rd session — 273 women's draft laws

4th session — 206 women's draft laws

5th session — 223 women's draft laws

6th session — 165 women's draft laws

7th session — 140 women's draft laws

8th session — 70 women's draft laws

9th session — 98 women's draft laws

10th session — 52 women's draft laws

11th session — 42 women's draft laws

Method 2. Number of women among initiators of draft laws

The analysis of the number of women among initiators of draft laws allows for assessing the level of women's involvement in the lawmaking process and their influence on the adoption of laws in various areas.

Breakdown by sector

The analysis shows that the number of women among the initiators of draft laws varies depending on the area of legislation. The highest average number of female initiators per draft law is observed in the areas of humanitarian policy (3.53), security and defense (3.07), and sectoral development (2.63). The lowest share of women initiators was recorded in the fields of legal policy (2.02) and economic policy (2.21).

Interestingly, the number of women initiators in adopted laws is much higher. The highest average number of women per draft law among the initiators of adopted laws is observed in the areas of social policy (7.33), security and defense (5.34), and state building (5.43). There were changes in the distribution of women initiators by sector after 24 February 2022. The average number of women initiators increased in humanitarian policy (to 4.10) and social policy (to 3.67) but decreased in legal policy (to 1.80).

If we look at the share of female MPs by sector before the full-scale invasion, the sectors with the highest percentage of female MPs among the initiators are humanitarian policy (31%) and social policy (25.4%). The lowest percentage of initiating female MPs before the invasion was in the areas of security and defense (20.4%), state building (21.4%) and legal policy (21.5%). For the period from 24 February 2022 to 15 May 2024, the highest percentage of female MPs can be seen in the areas of social (31.3%) and humanitarian (30.8%) policy. The lowest percentage of women among the initiators is in the areas of legal (16%) policy and state building (14.9%). These results coincide with the respective consideration of women's draft laws.

Dynamics after the start of the full-scale invasion

In the laws passed since the start of the full-scale invasion, the average number of women initiators per draft law has increased significantly in the areas of social policy (8.04) and security and defense (5.90).

The highest share of women in the draft laws adopted by 24 February 2022 can be seen in the areas of humanitarian (32.6%) and social (29.2%) policies. The lowest share during this period can be seen in the areas of legal policy (19%) and security and defense (22.3%). After the start of the full-scale invasion and until 15 May, the highest percentage of women in the adopted draft laws was in social (37.7%) and humanitarian (36.4%) policies, while the lowest percentage remained in legal policy (13%) and state building (22.6%). The share of women in the security and defense draft laws adopted after 24 February 2022 was 30%.

Influence of the share of women on the passage of draft laws

The analysis showed a positive correlation between the number of women among the initiators and the speed of passage of draft laws. In particular, the 1% increase in the share of women is due to the decrease in the time it takes to pass a draft law by about 0.83 days.

Furthermore, logistic regression showed that an increase in the number of women among the initiators has a positive impact on the likelihood of passing a draft law. Each additional female initiator increases the chances of passing a draft law by about 10.5% (exp (0.10029) ≈ 1.105). This result may arise not only because of the number of female MPs among the draft law initiators but also because of the general tendency that the greater the number of MPs among the initiators, the greater the likelihood of passing the draft law.

Conclusions

The analysis of the number of women among the initiators of draft laws shows a significant variation depending on the area of legislation. The role of female MPs in social policy and the humanitarian sphere is particularly noticeable. It is important to note that the participation of female MPs in the lawmaking process has a positive impact on the speed of passage and the likelihood of draft laws being adopted. This data demonstrates the importance of women's involvement in the legislative process and their significant contribution to shaping Ukraine's legislative policy, especially in critical areas during martial law.

Annex 2

Studying the image of MPs from the security sector in the media

Methodology

The methodology of studying the image of MPs in Ukraine's security sector in the media was based on a developed strategy for selecting both male and female MPs and news stories about them. The timeframe of the study encompassed the period from 24 February 2022 to 10 June 2024, which allowed us to analyze media coverage in the context of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. A total of 61 files about 13 female MPs and 48 files about 12 male MPs were selected. An important aspect was to ensure representation of both the coalition (Servant of the People) and opposition factions. MPs were selected based on the following criteria:

- membership in the Verkhovna Rada committees on national security, defense, and intelligence and on law enforcement;
- chairmanship of other committees;
- participation in temporary special and investigative commissions in the field of national security;
- leadership of factions;
- remaining in the AFU after 24 February 2022.

The criteria for selecting news for the study covered a wide range of topics, including the professional activities of MPs (developing and adopting draft laws, activities of temporary committees, and working trips), their personal lives (family events, leaves, leisure, etc.), scandals involving them and assessments of their performance by other MPs, civil society activists and the military. The analysis also included profiles, coverage of MPs' trips to the frontline, and their volunteering. In the process of selecting media materials, we focused on those media outlets that were recognized as trustworthy by the Institute of Mass Information, while regional media publications were not included in the analysis. For further sentiment analysis and topic modeling, all publications were translated into English.

The sentiment analysis was conducted in R using the validated dictionaries for sentiment analysis, namely afinn and bing. Sentiment analysis is a natural language processing tool used to automatically determine the emotional coloring of the text. This method allows for assessing the author's attitude towards the subject of discussion by identifying positive, negative, or neutral sentiments in the textual material. In the context of studying the image of MPs in the security sector of Ukraine, which is disseminated by the media, sentiment analysis plays a key role in understanding the overall tone of media coverage. Sentiment analysis includes several stages:

- first, the text is broken down into individual elements (words or phrases),
- each element is assigned a certain emotionality score,

- based on these scores, the overall sentiment of the text is determined.

Sentiment analysis is necessary for an objective assessment of female MPs' perceptions in the media. It allows for the identification of hidden trends and biases in the coverage of their activities. This, in turn, provides valuable information for understanding the public perception of women's role in Ukraine's security sector and can serve as a basis for further research and development of communication strategies.

Topic modeling based on the creation of a Latent Dirichlet Allocation model is a machine-learning method used to identify hidden thematic structures in texts. This method allows for automatically identifying the main topics discussed in media materials when studying the image of male and female MPs in Ukraine's security sector in the media. Topic modeling includes several stages:

- First, the texts undergo pre-processing, including tokenization (unification of words) and removal of stop words.
- The LDA algorithm analyzes the frequency and co-occurrence of words in documents, assuming that each document consists of a mixture of topics and each topic is characterized by a set of words.
- The model optimizes the distribution of topics in documents and words in topics until it reaches a stable state.

The result is a set of topics, where each topic is represented by a list of the most characteristic words. Topic modeling is necessary for systematising and summarizing large amounts of textual information, which allows for identifying key areas of discussion in the media around male and female MPs in the security sector.

Qualitative content analysis using open coding is a research method that allows for an in-depth study of the content of textual materials. In the context of studying the image of MPs in Ukraine's security sector in the media, this method is used to identify key images and patterns in media reports. The process involved reading the texts, highlighting significant fragments, and assigning them codes that reflect their essence. These codes are then grouped into broader categories, which allows for the identification of main topics and sub-topics in the coverage of the activities of MPs. Open coding was chosen to allow for a more flexible consideration of differences between male and female MPs and differences within groups.

Limitations of the study

The study of the image of MPs from the security sector of Ukraine in the media has certain limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the results. First, the sample of 25 MPs (13 female and 12 male) cannot be considered representative of all MPs of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. This limits the possibility of extrapolating the results to a broader context.

The different levels of media exposure of the selected MPs are a significant factor affecting the study's results. Some of them have a much greater presence in the media space, which leads to an uneven distribution of the quantity and quality of materials. This may cause distortion of the results, especially in the context of sentiment analysis and qualitative

content analysis. For some MPs, only factual materials are available, while others appear in emotionally colored publications, which may create an imbalance in the overall picture.

The methodology of selecting articles, which focuses on the first search results, also imposes certain limitations. This approach may lead to sample bias, as the selected media outlets are noted for their compliance with journalistic standards, which is not related to their popularity. Less popular, regional, or alternative sources of information are not taken into account in the study. This may lead to an incomplete or one-sided image of MPs.

It is worth noting that the study covers only a certain segment of the media space, namely, media publications on their own websites. The analysis excludes television, print media, social media, and Telegram channels, which may mean that a significant part of the information field remains outside the scope of the study. This may lead to an incomplete reflection of the image of MPs that is formed in society through various communication channels. The results obtained regarding the thematic distribution and focus of media attention on certain aspects of MPs' activities may not reflect the full picture of their media presence and may not be representative of the entire spectrum of their activities and media coverage.

Keyword analysis

The analysis of keywords related to female MPs in the security sector reveals a picture of their image in the media. This analysis is based on the top 10 keywords for each of the 13 female MPs, which allows us to identify the main topics and tone of coverage of their activities.

First, it is worth noting that there is a significant variety of keywords, which indicates a wide range of topics related to the activities of women MPs. However, several main thematic clusters can be identified. One of the most prominent is the cluster related to conflicts and criticism. Words such as "criticize," "accuse," "conflict," "scandal," and "outrage" are often used in the context of covering women MPs' activities. This may indicate that their work is often covered through the prism of confrontation and disputes, which may be typical for political discourse in general or may be specific to the portrayal of particular female MPs. At the same time, there is also a positive cluster that includes the words "celebrate," "optimism," "love," and "comfort." This indicates that the activities of female MPs are also covered in the context of achievements, support, and positive changes.

It is important to note the presence of words related to security issues, such as "war," "destruction," "crime," and "threat," which corresponds to the focus of the study on the security sector. This indicates that female MPs are actively involved in discussing and resolving national security issues. There are also words related to legislative activity and reforms: "justice," "ensure," "improve," "solve," and "be responsible." This emphasizes the important role of female MPs in the legislative process and their participation in reforming the country. The presence of words related to personal qualities and emotions is interesting, for instance, "hatred," "fear," "envy," and "happiness." This may indicate that the media often focus not only on the professional activities of female MPs but also on their personal qualities and emotional reactions.

The analysis of keywords related to the image of MPs in Ukraine's security sector in the media reveals a multifaceted picture of their activities and public perception. Legislative work is central to the image of MPs, which is reflected in words related to regulatory functions and decision-making processes. Terms such as "prohibit," "cancel," "allow," and "require" indicate active involvement in security policymaking.

Security issues hold a special place in the coverage of MPs' activities. Keywords "war," "attack," "combat," and "defenders" are directly related to the military sphere and the protection of national interests. This emphasizes the importance of the role of MPs in shaping the national security strategy and responding to current challenges.

The public activity of MPs in the security sector also plays a significant role in shaping their image. The words "welcome," "invite," "thank," and "share" indicate active communication with the public and positive interaction. At the same time, the terms "condemn," "disrespect," and "complain" indicate a critical aspect of their public activities, possibly related to responding to security challenges or expressing disagreement with certain decisions or policies.

However, the image of MPs is not limited only to positive aspects. The presence of such words as "crime," "fine," "prison," and "lawsuit" may indicate that MPs are involved in criminal cases or investigations. Further results of the content analysis show that the analyzed articles contain accusations against MPs rather than descriptions of their legislative work.

The emotional coloring of keywords also plays an important role in shaping the image of MPs. The presence of both positive ("love," "pride," and "happiness") and negative ("outrage," "rage," and "terrible") emotional terms indicates the ambiguity of the public perception of their activities. This may be due to the complexity and often controversial nature of decisions made in the security sector.

The assessment of MPs' performance is also reflected in the keywords. The terms "increase," "effective," and "progress" indicate positive developments and successes in their work. On the other hand, the words "loss," "ineffective," and "problem" indicate difficulties and challenges faced by MPs in the security sector.

In general, the keyword analysis shows that the image of MPs from the security sector in the media is complex and multidimensional. It covers a wide range of activities — from lawmaking and addressing national security issues to public communication and crisis response. The ambiguity in the perception of their work reflects the complexity of tasks faced by MPs in the security sector and the high expectations of society regarding the effectiveness of their activities. The analysis of keywords related to the image of MPs in Ukraine's security sector in the media reveals a multifaceted picture of their activities and public perception.

A common feature for both groups is the wide range of topics covered by the keywords. This demonstrates the diversity of aspects of MPs' work in the security sector.

- Security is a central topic for both male and female MPs, and this is underlined by the use of words such as "war," "attack," "combat," and "threat." This indicates that both groups are actively involved in addressing national security and defense issues.
- Legislative activity is also a common topic, reflected in words related to reforms, improvement of legislation, and decision-making. This underlines the key role of MPs in shaping the country's security policy.
- The emotional coloring of keywords is present in the descriptions of both groups, which indicates the ambiguity of the public perception of their activities. The presence of both positive and negative emotional terms indicates the complexity and often controversial nature of security decisions.

- Public engagement and communication with the public are also common features, reflected in words related to interaction, criticism, and response to public issues.

However, there are also some differences in the coverage of the activities of male and female MPs. For female MPs, more attention is paid to personal qualities and emotional reactions, as evidenced by the words "hatred," "fear," "envy," and "happiness." This may indicate that the media tend to focus on female MPs' professional activities and personal qualities.

Male MPs are more likely to be characterized by words related to criminal cases and investigations, such as "crime," "fine," and "prison." This may indicate that the media pay more attention to possible offenses or legislative initiatives in the field of criminal law among male MPs.

In general, the analysis shows that the images of MPs in the security sector of Ukraine have much in common in terms of coverage of their professional activities but differ in some aspects of personal and legal nature. This may reflect both real differences in their activities and certain gender stereotypes in the media coverage of politicians. It is important to note that these differences may affect the public perception of the role and effectiveness of male and female MPs in Ukraine's security sector.

Sentiment analysis

Sentiment analysis of articles about female MPs using the afinn dictionary

Within our study of the image of women MPs in Ukraine's security sector in the media, we conducted a sentiment analysis of articles about 13 women MPs using the afinn dictionary. This method allows for assessing the emotional coloring of texts about each of the female MPs and identifying general trends in the coverage of their activities.

The afinn dictionary has its own specifics, which consist in assigning a numerical value to each word, reflecting its emotional coloring. The values range from -5 to 5. This allows us to determine the general tone of the article and highlight specific words and phrases that have the greatest impact on shaping the image of female MPs in the media.

The analysis showed a significant variation in the values of sentiment for different female MPs. The highest and lowest values demonstrate how differently the activities of individual female politicians in the security sector can be perceived. This discrepancy may be due to both objective factors (e.g., different political positions and participation in high-profile events) and subjective media coverage.

The average sentiment value for all analyzed articles is -0.147, which indicates a slight shift toward negative coverage. However, when we consider the Term Frequency-Inverse Document Frequency (TF-IDF) value for calculating sentiment, the average value is closer to neutral: -0.0002676. This indicates that when we consider the importance and uniqueness of words in the context of the entire corpus of texts, the overall tone of coverage of female MPs' activities becomes more balanced.

The results of the sentiment analysis of words related to the activities of female MPs in the security sector of Ukraine revealed significant differences in the emotional coloring of the texts. The most positive words, such as "agree," "be responsible," "reward," "benefit," "good," "like," "ability," "confident," and "preserve" indicate a high assessment of the activities of

some female MPs, emphasizing their ability to make important decisions, responsibility, achievements, commitment and support from society. These words form a positive image, associating female MPs with success, positive influence, and useful actions.

On the other hand, the words with the lowest sentiment, such as "criticize," "outrage," "chant," "problem," "leave," "conflict," "hate," "accuse," "condemn," and "hunger," reflect critical or negative aspects of the coverage of their activities. These words focus on conflicts, problems, accusations, scandals, and discontent, which may significantly affect the public perception of female MPs. The negative connotation of such words reinforces the negative tone of the coverage, which may be due to objective difficulties in their work or the media's subjective approach to their actions.

Sentiment analysis of articles about female MPs using the bing dictionary

To analyze the image of female MPs in Ukraine's security sector in the media, we used the bing dictionary to analyze articles about 13 female MPs. This method allows for assessing the emotional coloring of texts about each of the female MPs and identifying general trends in the coverage of their activities. Unlike the afinn dictionary, which assigns a numerical value to each word that reflects its emotional coloring, the bing dictionary classifies words as positive or negative (or -1, 0 or 1). This allows assessing the overall emotional tone of the text based on the frequency of positive and negative words.

The analysis showed a significant variation in the values of sentiment for different female MPs. The average values of sentiment for all analyzed articles are -0.2005, which indicates a shift towards negative coverage. This means that, on average, there are more negative words in the texts than positive ones, which creates a generally negative image of female MPs in the media. For example, the sentiment value for a female MP 1 is -88, which is the lowest value and indicates the most negative coverage of her activities. Female MPs 3 and 10, on the contrary, have the highest positive values (16 and 20, respectively), which indicates a positive perception of their performance. Other female MPs have mixed values: some, such as female MPs 6 and 11, have slightly positive values (10 and 9, respectively), while others, such as female MPs 2 and 4, have negative values (-29 and -12, respectively).

The results change significantly when we take into account the Term Frequency-Inverse Document Frequency value when calculating sentiment. This method takes into account the frequency of word occurrences in texts and their uniqueness in the context of the entire corpus of texts, allowing us to assess the importance of each word more accurately. The average value of the sentiment with TF-IDF is -0.0007011, which is close to neutral. This indicates that when we consider the importance and uniqueness of words in the context of the entire corpus of texts, the overall tone of coverage of female MPs' activities becomes more balanced.

The values of sentiment with TF-IDF vary for different female MPs. For instance, the sentiment value for female MP 1 is 0.194, which is the highest positive value among all the analyzed female MPs. The sentiment value for female MP 3 is -1.16, which is the lowest and indicates the most negative coverage of her activities. Other female MPs have mixed values: some, such as female MPs 5 and 10, have slightly positive values (-0.0167 and 0.0379, respectively), while others, such as female MPs 2 and 4, have negative values (-0.404 and -0.328, respectively).

The analysis of the most positive and negative words allows us to better understand the emotional coloring of articles about female MPs in the security sector. The most commonly

used positive words are "intelligence," "reform," "work," "law," "support," "free," "success," "influential," "peace," and "strength," which creates a positive image of female MPs, focusing on their professional achievements, moral qualities and impact on society. For example, the words "reform" and "support" reflect the efforts of female MPs to improve legislation and protect citizens' rights. The words "peace" and "strength" emphasize their role in ensuring security and stability.

On the other hand, the analysis of negative words revealed such frequently used terms as "criticism," "loss," "problem," "conflict," "accusation," "scandal," "corruption," "crime," "aggression," and "threat." These words create a negative image, emphasizing the difficulties faced by female MPs and the criticism directed at their activities. For example, the words "corruption" and "scandal" have negative associations with political activity, while "aggression" and "threat" focus on conflict situations and the dangers they pose.

Sentiment analysis of articles about male MPs using the afinn dictionary

Within our study of the image of male MPs in Ukraine's security sector in the media, we conducted a sentiment analysis of articles about 12 male MPs using the afinn dictionary.

Looking at the data obtained, we can identify certain trends and patterns. Male MP number 1 has the highest sentiment score, 64, which indicates predominantly positive media coverage of his activities. At the opposite end of the spectrum is male MP 3, who scored the lowest at -71. This indicates a much more negative perception of this politician in the media. The average sentiment value for all MPs is -0.1985, indicating a slight overall tendency towards negative coverage. However, when the TF-IDF values are considered when calculating the sentiment, the average shifts to -0.005355, which is almost neutral. This may indicate that when taking into account the importance and frequency of words, the overall picture becomes more balanced. It is interesting to note that when using the method with TF-IDF, the distribution of sentiment changes. For example, male MP 1, who had the highest score in the simple sentiment analysis, retains a positive score but with a lower value of 0.194. At the same time, male MP 3 remains in the lowest position with a score of -1.16.

The analysis of the words with the highest and lowest sentiment provides an additional dimension for understanding the image of MPs in the security sector of Ukraine in the media. Positive words are often associated with support, approval, and positive qualities. For example, the words "benefit," "good," "glory," "congratulate," "support," and "admire" indicate recognition of achievements and positive attitudes towards male MPs.

Negative words, on the other hand, reflect problems, conflicts, and negative aspects of the work. Words such as "shortage," "exclusion," "abandonment," "struggle," "lack," and "fight" indicate the difficulties and challenges that male MPs face in their work.

It is interesting to note that some words are repeated in the lists of different MPs, which may indicate general trends in the coverage of their activities. For example, the word "authority" appears as a positive word for several male MPs, which may indicate an emphasis on their power and influence. At the same time, the word "crime" is often found among the negative ones, which may indicate problems with the law or accusations of unlawful actions.

Words related to emotions and personal qualities also appear frequently in the lists. Positive words include "love," "smart," and "bravery," while negative words include "outrage," "enrage,"

and "rage." This may indicate that the media pay attention to MPs' professional qualities, as well as their personal characteristics and emotional impact on society.

It is worth noting that words related to the legal system and crime are present, both in a positive and negative context. This may indicate the importance of law and order issues in the activities of MPs in the security sector.

Sentiment analysis of articles about male MPs using the bing dictionary

As part of studying the image of male MPs in Ukraine's security sector in the media, we conducted a sentiment analysis of articles about 12 male MPs also using the bing dictionary.

The results of the analysis showed significant variability in the sentiment of articles about different male MPs. The average sentiment value for all MPs was -0.1339, which indicates a slight overall negative bias in the coverage of their activities. However, when the TF-IDF value was considered for calculating sentiment, the average value was closer to neutral, at -0.002353. This indicates a more balanced coverage when considering the importance of individual words in the context. The highest positive sentiment values were recorded for male MPs 1 (26) and 5 (10), which may indicate predominantly positive media coverage of their activities. On the contrary, the lowest negative values were observed for male MPs 2 (-40) and 3 (-34), which indicates that the media are critical of their work. When considering TF-IDF, the picture changes slightly. Male MP 1 (0.0798) retains the highest positive values, but male MP 10 (0.0444) also stands out. The lowest TF-IDF values remain for male MPs 2 (-0.662) and 3 (-0.232), which confirms the consistently negative coverage of their activities. It is interesting to note that the consideration of TF-IDF changed the polarity of sentiment for some male MPs. For example, male MP 9 has a positive sentiment value (4) without TF-IDF but a negative one (-0.0134) with it. This emphasizes the importance of contextual analysis when assessing the media image of male MPs.

Consideration of the words with the highest and lowest sentiment in the context of studying the image of MPs in the security sector of Ukraine in the media allows us to better understand the nature of their coverage and public perception. Among the words with the highest positive sentiment are "intelligence," "victory," "support," "reform," and "patriotic." This indicates that MPs are often presented as intelligent, successful, and loyal to their country. The presence of the words "approval," "trust," and "respect" indicates a certain level of trust and respect for these politicians. The words "work" and "innovation" emphasize their active work and desire for change.

On the other hand, the words with the lowest sentiment include "corruption," "criminal," "suspicion," and "violation." This may indicate that the media are critical of certain aspects of MPs' activities, particularly the integrity and legality of their actions. The words "reforms" and "progress" in the positive spectrum contrast with "loss" and "decline" in the negative spectrum, which may indicate different assessments of the MPs' effectiveness in implementing changes.

The presence of the words "ethical" and "honest" among the positive terms, along with "corruption" and "suspicion" among the negative ones, underlines the importance of ethics and integrity in the perception of MPs. This may indicate an increased public attention to the moral aspect of politicians' activities in the security sector.

In general, the results of the sentiment analysis show a diversity in the coverage of MPs' activities in the security sector of Ukraine, with a tendency towards a slight negative bias.

This may reflect the media's critical approach to assessing parliamentarians' work in this important area and indicate the need for a deeper analysis of the factors that influence the formation of MPs' media image.

Summary of the sentiment analysis

The statistical analysis of the results of the sentiment analysis shows that there is no significant difference in the sentiment of the coverage of MPs. The average values of sentiment for both groups are slightly negative but close to neutral. For female MPs, the average value is -0.147 (or -0.0002676 with TF-IDF), and for male MPs, -0.1985 (or -0.005355 with TF-IDF). The results of the Mann-Whitney U test confirm the absence of a statistically significant difference between these indicators, which indicates that the media coverage of the activities of politicians of both genders is relatively equal.

However, a closer look reveals some nuances. For example, the range of sentiment values for female MPs (-144 to 48) is wider than for male MPs (-71 to 64). This may indicate a greater polarisation in the coverage of female politicians, where individual women MPs receive either very positive or very negative coverage.

When analyzing the factors that may influence the difference in sentiment, it is worth considering the context of politicians' activities. The security sector is traditionally considered a male sphere, so women's participation in it may cause additional media attention, both positive and negative, which can be seen in the large variation in sentiment. In addition, personal qualities, communication style, and specific political decisions may have a greater impact on sentiment than gender. Gender aspects of negative coverage also deserve attention.

In terms of the highest and lowest scores, the highest score for female MPs is 48, and the lowest is -144. For male MPs, these figures are 64 and -71, respectively. These extreme values may be related to specific events or decisions that cause a strong media reaction. Looking at the main positive and negative words used in the coverage of the activities of MPs, we can identify some interesting differences and potential manifestations of gender discrimination. The most common positive words for female MPs are "intelligence," "reform," "work," "law," "support," "free," "success," "influential," "peace," and "strength." These words emphasize the professional qualities and achievements of female politicians. For male MPs, positive words include "intelligence," "victory," "support," "reform," and "patriotism," which also emphasize professional aspects. However, some differences are worth noting. Words related to the emotional sphere and interpersonal relations, such as "support," are used more often for female MPs. This may indicate certain gender stereotypes, where women are more often associated with empathy and cooperation. As for negative words, "criticism," "loss," "problem," "conflict," "accusation," "scandal," "corruption," "crime," "aggression," and "threat" are often used for female MPs. Negative words are similar for male MPs: "corruption," "crime," "suspicion," and "violation."

It is also observed that words related to leadership and authority are less likely to be used for female MPs. They are more often associated with male politicians. This may reflect the positioning of male MPs as leaders. However, it should be taken into account that women hold fewer leadership positions in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. In general, the results of the analysis show a relatively balanced coverage of male and female MPs in the security sector of Ukraine but also indicate the need for further research into the nuances of gender aspects in the media representation of politicians using other methods.

Topic modeling

The LDA topic modeling conducted to study the image of the Ukrainian female MP in the media revealed 18 topics, of which 10 unique areas can be identified. This analysis allows for an understanding of how the media cover female MP's activities and which aspects of her work attract the most attention.

The unique topics include the following:

1. Political activities (Topics 1, 2 and 15): This topic covers aspects of the work of MPs, particularly in the context of the Verkhovna Rada. Keywords include "head," "people," "servant," "faction," "Rada," "Verkhovna," and "committee," which indicate legislative and representative activities.
2. Military and defense (Topics 3, 5 and 13): This topic focuses on military issues, in particular, the activities of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Keywords: "military unit," "defense," "force," "weapon," "Energoatom," and "unit."
3. Legislation and public administration (Topics 4, 6, and 11): This topic covers the processes of drafting and adopting laws, as well as issues of public administration. Keywords: "law," "draft," "state," "scientific," "mobilization," and "anthem."
4. Economic issues (Topic 5): This topic deals with financial aspects, including budget and expenditure. Keywords: "hryvnia," "thousand," and "year."
5. Church and religious issues (Topic 7): This topic focuses on religious aspects and their interaction with the state. Keywords: "church," "priest," "UOC," and "funeral."
6. Education and science (Topics 6 and 8): This topic covers education and research. Keywords: "scientific," "educational," "university," and "graduate."
7. International relations (Topics 2 and 9): This topic deals with foreign policy and international relations. Keywords: "NATO," "delegation," "international," "world," and "abroad."
8. Gender issues and women's military service (Topic 12): This topic focuses on gender equality issues in the military. Keywords: "woman," "uniform," "military," and "convenience."
9. Demobilization and social issues (Topic 14): This topic covers the transition of military personnel to civilian life. Keywords: "child," "return," "demobilization," and "fund."
10. Anti-corruption activities (Topic 16): This topic focuses on combating corruption. Keywords: "corruption," "anti," "research," and "report."

The results of the topic modeling reveal an interesting picture of the representation of female MPs in the security sector of Ukraine. The diversity of topics covering their activities indicates a decrease in the influence of traditional gender stereotypes in the coverage of women in politics, especially in the security sector. The considerable attention to their work in the military and defense issues demonstrates that the media perceive female MPs as competent experts in this sector. This may indicate a gradual change in public perception of the role of women in the security and defense sector.

In general, the media image of a female MP in Ukraine's security sector is multifaceted and complex, going beyond traditional gender expectations. This may indicate gradual

changes in the public perception of women's roles in politics and the security sector. However, to fully understand the gender aspects of this image, a comparative analysis with the coverage of male MPs' activities in this area is needed. Such an analysis could reveal whether there are differences in the focus and tone of coverage depending on the gender of the politician and how this affects the perception of their competence and effectiveness in the national security sector.

The results of LDA topic modeling for the study of the image of a Ukrainian MP from the security sector in the media revealed 15 topics, among which several unique focus areas can be distinguished.

1. The first unique topic (Topic 1) concerns international relations and security, in particular NATO. The keywords include "NATO," "security," "alliance," and "defense," which indicates that the discussion concerns Ukraine's cooperation with the Alliance and strengthening national security.
2. The second important topic (Topic 2) is related to legislative activity and the work of the Parliament. The words "law," "draft," "committee," "party," "Rada," and "Verkhovna" indicate the legislative work of MPs, especially in the context of security and defense.
3. The topic of corruption and the fight against it (Topic 3) also stands out. The keywords "corruption," "property," "ownership," and "investigation" indicate discussions of property declarations, investigations, and anti-corruption measures.
4. The military topic (Topics 4, 5, and 10) is one of the central ones. The words "military," "defense," "force," "weapons," and "mobilization" indicate a focus on defense capability, mobilization and the armed forces.
5. The topic of law enforcement (Topics 6 and 14) includes the words "law," "police," "law enforcement agencies," and "crime," which indicates a discussion of law and order and combating crime.
6. The topic of cybersecurity (Topic 9) can be separately distinguished, where the words "cyber," "bot," and "network" appear, which reflects the relevance of information security issues.
7. The regional topic (Topic 15) is focused on the southern regions of Ukraine. The words "Kherson," "Mykolaiv," and "south" indicate a discussion of the situation in this region, possibly in the context of military operations and counteroffensives.
8. Economic issues (Topic 9) are also present, as evidenced by the words "UAH," "future," and "victory," which may refer to financing the security and defense sector.
9. The topic of transport accidents (Topic 8), using the words "accident," "car," "ambulance," and "traffic," seems less relevant to the overall security context but may refer to individual incidents involving MPs.

The LDA modeling results show that the media image of a Ukrainian MP from the security sector revolves around several key aspects: international cooperation, lawmaking, military issues, anti-corruption, law enforcement, and regional security. Special attention is paid to defense, mobilization, and cooperation with NATO, reflecting the current security situation in Ukraine.

The topic analysis shows that male MPs in the security sector are most often mentioned in the context of lawmaking (topics related to "law," "draft," and "committee"), international cooperation (NATO, international treaties), and military issues. This may indicate that male MPs are perceived as key figures in shaping the state's security policy. Notably, topics related to corruption and investigations are also present in the modeling results. This may indicate that the media pay attention to MPs' professional activities, integrity, and transparency. Interestingly, the topics include issues related to cybersecurity and information warfare. This reflects the growing importance of these aspects in the modern world and may indicate that male MPs are actively involved in policy formulation in these new security areas. In summary, the LDA modeling results show that the image of a Ukrainian MP from the security sector in the media is multifaceted, covering a wide range of issues from lawmaking to international cooperation.

Common to both groups are topics related to political activities, lawmaking, military and defense, international relations, economic issues, and anti-corruption activities. This suggests that the media generally form an image of MPs as active participants in political processes focused on key aspects of national security.

However, a deeper analysis reveals significant gender differences in the coverage. The image of female MPs is more multifaceted and diverse. The media portray them not only as security experts but also as experts in a wide range of issues, including education, science, and religious aspects. On the other hand, the image of male MPs in the media are more focused on traditional aspects of security and defense.

Interestingly, demobilization and social issues stand out for female MPs, which may indicate that they are perceived as politicians who focus on the soft aspects of security policy. On the contrary, the topics of cybersecurity and law enforcement are more pronounced for male MPs, which may indicate that they are perceived as experts in harder aspects of security.

Content analysis

Content analysis of articles about female MPs

The content analysis of articles about female MPs in the security sector reveals three main components of their image in the media: professionalism, scandalousness, and attention to their personal lives.

1. Professionalism:

This component is the most significant in the coverage of female MPs' activities. It covers several aspects:

a) Professional activity and competence: The media often quote speeches of female MPs on national security and defense issues. Their legislative initiatives and participation in committees and working groups are covered. For example, it is described how a female MP initiated the establishment of a commission to control the use of weapons provided to Ukraine.

b) International activities: Considerable attention is paid to the participation of female MPs in international forums and meetings with foreign colleagues. Their role in promo-

ting Ukraine's interests in the international arena is emphasized. In particular, speeches at PACE meetings or participation in the Munich Security Conference are mentioned.

c) Professional biography: The media provide detailed coverage of the MPs' previous experience, education, and career path. This creates an image of skilled professionals with the appropriate background to work in the security sector.

d) Military experience: Some female MPs are particularly emphasized for having participated in combat or war-related volunteering. This adds special weight and authority in security and defense matters to their image.

2. Scandalousness and incompetence:

This component often attracts considerable media attention, creating an ambiguous image of female MPs:

a) Scandals: This section covers controversial statements or initiatives of female MPs that resonate with society. For example, the media often present statements that portray some female MPs as the source of scandalous statements that contribute to conflicts within society. Such statements contribute to the image of less professionalism of female MPs, as they focus on regular conflicts.

b) Criticism of activities: The media often criticize women MPs' activities. Therefore, most publications concern the professional activities of female MPs, but these activities are often assessed negatively. In some publications, female MPs are shown to be incompetent, and their proposals are considered unnecessary or underdeveloped. It should also be noted that the media often quote experts who negatively characterize the professional activities of women MPs.

c) Conflicts: The media often report on conflicts between female MPs and their colleagues or representatives of other branches of power. Verbal altercations and mutual accusations are described, which may create an image of women politicians as sources of tension.

3. Attention to privacy:

Attention to personal life is not a full-fledged image, but it manifests significantly in the two described above. This component reflects certain gender stereotypes in covering women politicians:

A. Personal life: The media often focus on the marital status of female MPs, their romantic relationships and the birth of children. This approach may distract attention from professional activities and create the impression that a female MP's personal life is no less important than her work.

B. Appearance: There are statements about the appearance of female MPs and their style of dress. This may lead to the objectification of women in politics and shift the focus from their professional qualities to external attributes.

C. Lack of subjectivity: Some publications contain theses that question the existence of subjectivity for some female MPs. This lack of subjectivity is expressed in doubts that the theses and proposals of women MPs are their own and not provided to them by their "supervisors."

Such heightened attention to personal life, family (including parents and husbands), and appearance is a manifestation of stereotypical media coverage of women, which foreign studies confirm. This may create additional barriers to the perception of female MPs as serious political figures and security experts. It is important to note that the balance between these three components differs for various female MPs. Some are mostly covered through the prism of professionalism, while others are more often mentioned in the context of scandals or personal life. This heterogeneity of coverage may reflect both real differences in the activities and behavior of female MPs and certain media biases or preferences.

In general, the analysis shows that the image of female MPs in the security sector in the Ukrainian media is complex and multifaceted. Despite the significant attention paid to their professional activities, there are still elements of stereotypical coverage that may affect the public perception of female politicians. This points to the need for further work on balanced and unbiased coverage of women in politics and security.

Content analysis of articles about male MPs

An analysis of the media coverage of male MPs' activities in the security sector reveals three key components of their image: professionalism, authority, and scandalousness.

Professionalism is the dominant characteristic in the media portrait of male MPs. It is manifested through active participation in lawmaking, work in specialized committees on national security and defense, as well as through expert comments on the situation at the frontline and the country's defense strategies. The media often emphasize male MPs' competence in the security sector, their ability to analyze complex geopolitical situations, and their ability to propose effective solutions. It is important to note that the professionalism of male MPs is significantly enhanced by their military experience. Participation in combat operations, service in the Armed Forces, or work in the security forces before being elected to the Parliament significantly increases the credibility of their expert examination and decisions. This creates the image of politicians who not only theoretically understand security issues but also have practical experience in solving them.

The credibility of male MPs is the second important component of their image in the media. It is formed on the basis of their professional activities but also includes personal qualities and reputation. The media often portray male MPs as influential figures whose opinions carry weight not only in Ukraine but also on the international stage. This is manifested, inter alia, through the portrayal of MPs' participation in meetings, particularly on armed forces issues. The media highlight male MPs' personal qualities, such as patriotism, responsibility, and willingness to sacrifice for the country, which plays a significant role in building their credibility. The media often emphasize these traits, especially in male MPs who combine parliamentary work with military service or volunteering. Such a presentation creates an image of politicians who not only talk but also act, which significantly increases their credibility in the eyes of the public.

Scandalousness in the image of male MPs, whether as a component of the image or a separate image, is different from that of female MPs. The media quite often cover cases when MPs become subjects of journalistic investigations or official checks. This may relate to issues such as non-declaration of property, excessive spending during the war, links with suspicious persons, or other offenses. Such reports can significantly affect the reputation of individual politicians and undermine their credibility. At the same time, it is worth noting that scandalous aspects usually concern a limited number of male MPs and do not

dominate the overall media discourse about the MPs in question in the security sector. It is interesting to note that the personal lives of male MPs are rarely covered and only in relation to a limited number of individuals. When personal aspects are mentioned in the media, they are often linked to the male MPs' professional activities.

Comparison of images

There are both commonalities and significant differences in the media coverage of male and female MPs in the security sector of Ukraine. Both groups share the emphasis on professionalism, which is manifested in their coverage of legislative activities, participation in specialized committees, and participation in international events. Both groups are also characterized by attention to their military experience, which significantly increases their credibility in security matters.

However, there are also significant differences that reflect deep-rooted gender stereotypes. The scandalousness of male and female MPs is covered differently: male MPs are more often the subject of journalistic or anti-corruption investigations, thus creating a negative image. In contrast, when looking at the images of female MPs created by the media, scandalousness is more often associated with interpersonal conflicts and criticism of their activities, which creates an image of more conflictual and less competent individuals.

A significant difference is the attention to their personal lives. The coverage of female MPs mentions their family ties, especially their husbands and parents, much more often. This is a clear manifestation of gender stereotypes when female politicians continue to be perceived through the prism of their family roles. This approach is not typical for male MPs — their personal lives are rarely mentioned and mostly in the context of their dedication to work. Another feature of the coverage of female MPs is the attention to their appearance, which is also a manifestation of gender stereotypes and may distract from their professional activities.

This difference in coverage creates unequal conditions for the perception of politicians of different genders. Male MPs are more often presented as independent security experts, while the image of female MPs can be blurred by excessive attention to their personal lives, families, or existing conflicts. It is important to note that despite the fact that only some female MPs are portrayed by the media as conflict-prone, this may extend to the image of other female MPs in the public perception. It is worth noting that male MPs are more often positioned as security authorities. However, this may be due to gender stereotypes and the fact that more MPs have experience in the Armed Forces. This approach of the media may influence the perception of competence and authority of female politicians in the security sector.

Conclusions

1. Main results

1. Keyword and sentiment analysis:

Study results showed that the media portray images of female and male MPs as related to key topics such as security, legislative activity, and international relations. However, despite the general similarity of topics, there are some differences in the emphasis placed on personal qualities and professional achievements.

A comparison of the average sentiment values for both groups showed no significant differences in the media coverage of female and male MPs. Although both groups have somewhat negative sentiment scores, the values are close to neutral, indicating generally balanced coverage. According to the Mann-Whitney U test, there is no statistically significant difference between the indicators. However, the range of sentimental values for female MPs (-144 to 48) is wider than for male MPs (-71 to 64). This may indicate that female politicians in the media more often become the objects of negative media attention. Personal qualities, communication style, and specific political decisions seem to have a greater impact on sentiment than gender. In particular, differences were found in the use of positive and negative words for female and male MPs. Words related to the emotional sphere and interpersonal relationships are more often used for women. Instead, negative words about male MPs are more related to their professional activities and possible abuse of power. Potential manifestations of gender discrimination can be seen in the way words related to emotionality and leadership are used.

2. LDA modeling

The LDA modeling showed that the media cover the activities of female and male MPs in different aspects but with certain differences in emphasis and thematic distribution. For female MPs, 18 topics were identified, 10 of which are unique. The main topics relate to political activities, military and defense, legislation, and economic issues. Among the unique topics related to women MPs, the issues of education, science, religion, gender, and military service of women stand out. These results demonstrate the diversity of topics related to female MPs' media activities. They are presented as experts not only in security but also in a wider range of socially important topics. There is an important emphasis on demobilization and social issues, which may reflect attention to the soft aspects of security.

A total of 15 topics were identified for male MPs, of which 9 are unique. The main topics also include international relations and security, legislative activities, and the fight against corruption. However, among the topics unique to MPs are cybersecurity, law enforcement, and regional security, particularly in the southern regions of Ukraine, etc. This distribution of topics is rather narrow, which may indicate that articles about male MPs focus on the security sector.

Comparing the two groups, it can be concluded that although the media cover topics common to female and male MPs, such as political activity, lawmaking, military, international relations, and the economy, their images differ significantly. The activities of female MPs are portrayed in a variety of topics, including those that go beyond traditional security. In contrast, the image of male MPs is more focused exclusively on the security sector, with an emphasis on certain sub-topics such as cybersecurity and law enforcement.

3. Qualitative content analysis

The qualitative content analysis revealed that the images of female and male MPs in the media are largely shaped around three main features but with significant differences.

For female MPs, the main features are professionalism, scandalousness, and attention to their personal lives. Professionalism is manifested in the coverage of their legislative initiatives, participation in committees, and international activities. At the same time, however, scandalousness is often emphasized, with the media focusing on controversial statements, criticism of their activities and conflicts with colleagues. Major attention is also paid

to the personal lives of female MPs, with a focus on their marital status and appearance, which may detract from their perception as professionals. Their subjectivity, i.e., their ability to make decisions and act independently, is often questioned.

For male MPs, the main characteristics are professionalism, credibility and scandalousness. Professionalism is expressed through an emphasis on their lawmaking activities, expert commentary and military experience. Authoritativeness is emphasized by portraying them as influential figures who demonstrate patriotism and willingness to sacrifice. Scandalousness is also present, but less pronounced than for female MPs, and is mostly related to journalistic investigations and corruption issues. At the same time, male MPs' personal lives are mentioned less frequently and mostly in the context of their professional activities.

The overall conclusion is that both groups share an emphasis on professionalism, but the images differ considerably. Female MPs are more often portrayed through the prism of their personal lives and appearance, which indicates the existence of gender stereotypes. In contrast, male MPs are presented as independent experts on security issues. Scandalousness is also covered differently: for male MPs, it is more related to corruption scandals, while for female MPs, it is related to interpersonal conflicts. In general, the media representation of security policymakers in Ukraine reflects the existence of gender stereotypes that influence the public image of female and male MPs.

2. Differences between men and women

- More attention is paid to the personal lives, appearance, and family ties of female MPs.
- Male MPs are more often presented as authority figures in the security sector.
- Female MPs are scandalized by interpersonal conflicts, while male MPs are scandalized by corruption scandals.
- There is a greater variety of topics in the coverage of female MPs' activities.
- MPs are more often perceived as experts in hard aspects of security (cybersecurity and law enforcement).

3. Combining the results of three approaches

The results of three approaches to the analysis — keyword analysis, LDA modeling, and qualitative content analysis — demonstrate consistency in the coverage of male and female MPs in the security sector. All three methods confirm that the main topics for both groups are security, legislative activities, and international relations. This is evident through keywords, thematic modeling, and content analysis, which together provide a complete picture of media images.

According to the sentiment and content analyzes, the coverage's overall tone remains somewhat negative but close to neutral. The coverage includes both positive and negative aspects, which indicates that there are different images of male and female MPs. A greater diversity of topics, which is typical for female MPs, is revealed both in the keyword analysis and in the LDA modeling, where gender-related topics appear. The content analysis confirms this, showing a wider range of aspects in the coverage of female MPs.

Gender differences in coverage are clearly visible in all three methods. The keyword analysis shows a greater focus on female MPs' personal qualities, while the content analysis deepens these findings by demonstrating increased attention to their personal lives and appearances.

Professionalism as a key characteristic is present in all three approaches. This is manifested in terms related to professional activities, topics of lawmaking and expert examination, and the overall image of both groups. Both groups share a military theme, which highlights the importance of this aspect for male MPs in the security sector. International affairs and economic issues appear consistently in all three approaches, underlining their importance in the security context. Corruption and investigations are more pronounced for male MPs, which creates a certain negative aspect of their image. At the same time, the emotionality of the coverage of female MPs, which is characteristic of keywords and content analysis, may affect the perception of their professionalism.

LDA modeling and content analysis show that male MPs are more often perceived as experts in traditional aspects of security, while female MPs are portrayed as more versatile professionals. All three approaches confirm the existence of gender stereotypes in the coverage, especially in relation to female MPs. This is manifested in the increased attention to their personal lives and appearance, while authority is more often associated with male MPs due to their military experience.

In general, the results of the three approaches indicate that there is no single image for male and female MPs. Instead, several distinctive images and features can be identified separately for female and male MPs, with certain gender differences affecting the perception of their competence and effectiveness.

Defining the images of male and female MPs

At first glance, the images of male and female MPs are quite similar; they include both positive and negative characteristics. However, the analysis shows that the media do not portray a truly unified image of female and male MPs. A number of important features influence the perception of seemingly similar images. It is also impossible to say that there is a single image for both female and male MPs, which demonstrates the range of sentiment values for both groups. The images of female MPs include elements of professionalism and incompetence, and their activities cover a wide range of topics, not limited to security issues. There are also certain gender peculiarities that influence the overall image of female MPs, perhaps even more than the dichotomy of professionalism and incompetence. The image of male MPs is not homogeneous either. Despite the greater focus on professional activities, mainly in the security sector, there are additional components of the images.

Images of female MPs

1. Female expert/professional:

The first image of female MPs is that of an expert, and the media mostly portray them through the prism of their activities, which include various aspects of public policy. Unlike the image of a male MP, their image is not limited to competence in security and international politics but extends to other areas of public policy, such as social policy, education, and religion. When portraying such an image of female MPs, their professional achievements and professional biographies, which demonstrate their authority in the topic of the article, are often listed. In addition, female MPs on whom this image is based are often quoted in the media, and most publications are related to their professional activities.

2. Conflict-prone and incompetent person:

The second image of female MPs in the media is of a conflict-prone, incompetent person. This image is more emotionally charged than the previous one. Female MPs around whom this image is built are also often mentioned in articles about their professional activities, but the media's assessment of these activities, which was determined by content analysis, is much more negative. In such articles, the media often contrast the positions of female MPs and experts in a certain policy area or present their own opinion, which is opposite to the position of women MPs. This creates the image of the incompetence of female MPs. The second component of this image is scandalousness or conflictual behavior, which can be traced in media publications about some female MPs using sentiment analysis and context analysis. Such publications mostly refer to ambiguous or aggressive statements of female MPs towards other people, conflicts, etc. One component of this image of female MPs is their irresponsible attitude toward work and activities that are assessed as meaningless or harmful.

Peculiarities of the image of female MPs:

Although the images are opposite each other, there are features of portraying female MPs that are common to the majority. First and foremost, it is the focus on the personal lives of MPs and their appearance. Some of the selected publications (publications were selected based on the search engine ranking) deal exclusively with the components of these two categories, such as marriage, the female MPs' parents, or their clothes. In their interviews, female MPs also noted that the media paid considerable attention to their appearance rather than their professional activities. It is also interesting that publications about female MPs mention their children more often than publications about male MPs. Such peculiarities are indicative of gender discrimination, as the topics of male MPs' relationships or appearance were not found in our study. The sentiment analysis results also support the hypothesis that gender influences publications, as articles about female MPs contain more words that convey emotions.

Images of male MPs

1. Male expert/professional:

The image of an expert male MP is similar to that of an expert female MP in many ways. The portrayal of such MPs is characterized by references to their biographies and achievements in their work in articles. The main areas of activity of male MPs under consideration are security issues, their specialization in cybersecurity, law enforcement, and international activities. The publications about male MPs around whom this image is built mostly relate exclusively to their professional activities. It is important to note that MPs with this image are more likely to comment on the situation in the war zone.

2. Military:

The second image that emerged from the analyzed publications about male MPs is the image of the military/defender. This image includes those male MPs who are or were members of the AFU. This characteristic is central to the image of these MPs and is mentioned in all publications about them. This image has many similarities with the previous one. Male MPs, on the basis of whom this image is created, are portrayed as authoritative and responsible politicians. This image also includes references to their personal lives, in particular in the context of combining military service and family, which is a feature of this image.

3. Scandalous figure:

The third image of male MPs in the media is a scandalous figure; however, this scandalousness is different from that of female MPs. Whereas the image of female MPs is based on incompetence and conflictual behavior, the image of male MPs includes suspicions of corruption, unethical behavior, etc. Thus, male MPs included in this section may be suspected by the media of corruption, failure to declare property, ties to Russia, or involvement in criminal investigations. To a lesser extent, this image also reflects the incompetence of male MPs, which is also reflected in media publications. It is important to note that this image of a male MP can be quite widespread, as evidenced by the low level of trust in the Parliament. The prevalence of this image in the media and public perception was also noted by the male MPs themselves.

Annex 3

Regulatory legal framework for gender equality in the Parliament

General. Legislation in the field of gender equality is generally characterized by a lack of regulation. It mainly contains general provisions that declare discrimination inadmissible, the need for equal and fair treatment of each gender (and, if considering progressive trends, each gender), the prohibition of gender segregation, etc. On the one hand, this enables the interpretation of anti-discrimination norms and principles very freely and broadly and thus avoids being limited by the restrictive provisions of the law. On the other hand, it sometimes lacks specificity in understanding the whole range of norms designed to implement the national gender policy.

The regulatory legal framework designed to regulate gender equality in the Parliament can be divided into 2 categories: legislation on gender parity and acts on the status of MPs. It is important to remember that Ukrainian legislation is a unified and integrated system. Therefore, the provisions of different laws in a similar (or identical) area should be considered complementary.

Legislation in the field of gender equality. The regulatory legal framework for gender parity includes several acts designed to regulate the relevant issues. These acts contain more general norms and principles than specific, clear, and detailed regulations.

National Legislation. The basis of the national gender policy is laid down in the Basic Law. According to Article 24, all citizens of Ukraine shall have equal constitutional rights and freedoms. This provision also declares that there can be no privileges or restrictions based on various grounds, including gender. Article 24(3) goes into some detail on how equality of rights between men and women is implemented. First, women shall be provided with equal opportunities with men in social, political, and cultural activities, education and vocational training, work, and remuneration. This article also regulates issues related to motherhood. The state shall establish legal protection and financial and moral support (this also includes paid leave and other benefits for pregnant women).[18]

The gender-specific law, namely the *Law of Ukraine "On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men"* of 8 September 2005, describes the provisions of the Constitution in more detail. Article 3 of this act sets out the main areas of the state gender policy. Let us consider some of them. First of all, it is aimed at promoting gender equality and preventing gender-based discrimination. These provisions are norms and principles and set the general vector of state policy. The law recommends using positive acts, although it does not clearly define how and within what framework this should be done. Particularly important is the clause on ensuring equal participation of women and men in making socially important decisions. This provision applies to female parliamentarians in particular. It is also important to consider this provision in the context of the security and defense

18 Constitution of Ukraine.

sector as an element of communication with international partners (on whom Ukraine is now highly dependent).

Article 6 of the Law prohibits any form of gender-based discrimination.

Section II of the Law provides a list of bodies that must ensure gender equality in Ukraine and their powers to achieve this goal. It is important to note that the VRU is mentioned first in this list.

Article 15 prescribes procedures for ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men in the electoral process. This lays the foundation for further balanced representation of women in the national Parliament, access to decision-making, and the security and defense sector itself.[19]

National legislation in the field of gender equality consists of a number of other regulatory legal acts, among which it is important to mention:

- *Law of Ukraine "On the Principles of Preventing, and Combating Discrimination in Ukraine"* of 6 September 2012.[20]
- Legislation in the field of occupational safety and health.
- *Decree of the President of Ukraine "On the National Human Rights Strategy"* of 24 March 2021.[21]
- *Decree of the President of Ukraine "On the Sustainable Development Goals of Ukraine until 2030"* of 30 September 2019.[22]
- *Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine "On Approving the State Strategy for Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men until 2030 and Approval of the Operational Plan for Its Implementation for 2022-2024"* No. 752-r of 12 August 2022.[23]
- *Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine "On Approving the National Action Plan for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security until to 2025"* No. 1544-p of 28 October 2020.[24]
- Other acts of national legislation.[25]

International acts. International legislation in the field of gender equality consists of a large number of acts. Most are not specialized but regulate a wide range of social relations, including gender equality. Therefore, in most cases, they contain only general norms and principles.

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19 Law of Ukraine "On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men".

20 Law of Ukraine "On the Principles of Preventing and Combating Discrimination in Ukraine".

21 Decree of the President of Ukraine "On the National Human Rights Strategy".

22 Decree of the President of Ukraine "On the Sustainable Development Goals of Ukraine until 2030".

23 Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine "On Approving the State Strategy for Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men until 2030 and Approval of the Operational Plan for Its Implementation for 2022-2024".

24 Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine "On Approving the National Action Plan for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security until to 2025".

25 National legislation on Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights *of 10 December 1948* provides the legal basis for the entire vector of human rights and freedoms. Article 2 of this act states that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as sex. Article 21 of this act also declares that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. This can also be interpreted in terms of equal access for women and men to leadership positions, including seats in Parliament and its constituent bodies.[26]

The *Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* (or, as it is also called, the European Convention on Human Rights) of 4 November 1950 continues the thought of the previous act and, in Article 14, prescribes prohibition of discrimination. "The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground [...]" including sex.[27]

The *United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* of 18 December 1979 already provides for a number of women's rights that should be equal to those of men. For instance, Article 3 enshrines that States Parties shall take in all fields, in particular in the political, all appropriate measures to ensure the full development and advancement of women. Moreover, Article 7 of this act calls on all States Parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, to ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies (i.e., to have the right to become a parliamentarian on an equal footing with men) and to participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof. Furthermore, Article 8 of the Convention stipulates that States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure to women, on equal terms with men and without any discrimination, the opportunity to represent their Governments at the international level. This, by the way, demonstrates that female representatives of the Parliament of Ukraine can speak on behalf of our country as part of diplomatic missions.[28]

It is also important to mention the *Discrimination (Employment and Occupation)* Convention No. 111 of 25 June 1958. As its title implies, it is designed to address gender-based issues and problems that may arise in the course of employment. For example, Article 1 of the Convention considers any distinction, exclusion, or preference made on the basis of a number of grounds, including sex, to be discrimination and, as a result, prohibits it. This should be interpreted as a prohibition, for example, of preventing female parliamentarians from holding certain positions because of their sex and biased attitudes towards them.[29]

There is a considerable number of other international acts that can indirectly regulate the issue of gender equality in general and in the Parliament in particular:

- *Convention on Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value No. 100 of 29 June 1951*[30];

26 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

27 Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

28 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

29 Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention.

30 Convention on Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value.

- *Convention concerning Equal Opportunities and Equal Treatment for Men and Women Workers: Workers with Family Responsibilities* No. 156 of 23 June 1981[31];
- *Maternity Protection Convention* No. 103 of 28 June 1952[32];
- Etc.

Legislation regulating the status of male and female parliamentarians. Ukrainian legislation regulates the status of an MP in just a few acts. It is important to note that all laws do not distinguish between male and female MPs, which could be considered gender segregation. Legislation only uses the term "MPs," which includes representatives of both sexes. This can be interpreted as proper implementation of the national gender policy.

The general framework for the activities and status of MPs originates from the *Constitution of Ukraine*. The content of all articles in Chapter IV, "Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine," is permeated by one overarching idea: rights and opportunities are guaranteed to all MPs, regardless of whether they are men or women. This means that female parliamentarians have equal access to levers of influence and equal opportunities for lawmaking and reform.

The *Law of Ukraine "On the Status of People's Deputy of Ukraine"* of 17 November 1992 is the specialized law that regulates the status of MPs in detail. Similarly to the provisions of the Basic Law, this law does not distinguish between male and female MPs. In other words, it also grants equal rights and opportunities to representatives of both sexes. For example, the provision of Article 1(4), "The state shall guarantee to provide MPs with the necessary conditions for the exercise of their parliamentary powers," can also be interpreted in the sense of previous acts, which leads us to believe that the state is obliged to ensure that female and male MPs have equal access to all powers and opportunities enshrined in national legislation. In support of this idea, we can cite the provisions of Articles 10-19, which guarantee specific rights of parliamentarians without reference to gender. Also, the provisions of Article 8, "Parliamentary Ethics," can be interpreted as prohibiting those forms of discrimination that do not fall under civil, administrative, or criminal liability (as evidenced by the scandals of careless or intentional statements made by certain male parliamentarians against their female colleagues), but can be interpreted as a violation of ethics.[33]

31 Convention concerning Equal Opportunities and Equal Treatment for Men and Women Workers: Workers with Family Responsibilities No. 156 of 23 June 1981.

32 Maternity Protection Convention.

33 Law of Ukraine "On the Status of People's Deputy of Ukraine".

Annex 4

Literature review on the experience of female MPs from other countries that have experienced war or are in a state of war

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation has affected the lives of tens of millions of Ukrainians. Almost every citizen of our country has been affected by the changes in their lives. If we analyze the studies that have examined the impact of the war on different groups of people (especially men and women), we can see that researchers emphasize different consequences for different groups studied. **OSCE studies show that war affects men and women differently[34]. Ukrainian analysts argue that it has its own consequences on the psyche[35], raises gender issues in the labor sphere[36], and has other destructive consequences[37].**

Researchers and politicians are increasingly interested in the role of women in politics, especially in the context of conflicts and post-conflict reconstruction. Over the past decades, the number of women in national Parliaments worldwide has significantly increased. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the average share of women in Parliaments has more than doubled, from 11.3% in 1995 to 24.9% in 2020[38]. This increase has been uneven across regions of the world, with the greatest progress in the Americas and Europe, while changes have been slower in Asia and parts of the Pacific[39].

Increased representation of women in Parliaments is associated with several factors, including the type of electoral system, political ideology of parties, social structures, and the introduction of gender quotas[40]. Studies show that proportional representation systems with party lists and large constituencies are more favorable to women's elections than majoritarian systems. In addition, left-wing and new left-wing political ideologies, party organizations, and links to external organizations significantly impact the number of women elected[41].

It is important to distinguish between descriptive representation (the number of women elected) and substantive representation (women's influence on parliamentary processes

34 Defence and Gender.

35 The Effect of War on People. Psyche and Character Changes under War Conditions.

36 The Impact of War on Women's Opportunities: Research Findings.

37 European Parliament Resolution "The Impact of the War against Ukraine on Women" 2022: Oveview.

38 Women in Parliament: 1995–2020.

39 Ibid.

40 Women in Parliaments: Descriptive and Substantive Representation.

41 Ibid.

and policy outcomes)[42]. While an increase in the number of women in Parliament is correlated with broader social gender equality, the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation is complex and context-specific.

Studies show that female parliamentarians often face a number of challenges in their work. These include patriarchal politics, socio-cultural barriers, low levels of education, and lack of political skills, as well as hostility and discrimination[43]. In some countries, especially in developing ones, female parliamentarians are often forced to follow the party agenda, ignoring women's issues[44].

However, despite progress, female parliamentarians still face numerous challenges. A study conducted in the Punjab Provincial Assembly (Pakistan) identified four main challenges, in particular: lack of political capacity (education, experience, and confidence), party discrimination, undemocratic parliamentary culture, and the separation of public and private spheres[45]. The evaluation of female parliamentarians' activities also revealed unclear goals, underutilization of women's potential, perception of women as second-class politicians, and lack of role models for women in politics[46].

These challenges are not limited to developing countries. Women parliamentarians face obstacles even in developed democracies. A study covering 72 countries at different income levels found that while increasing the share of women in Parliament has a positive impact on economic growth in all groups of countries, the impact of other factors, such as foreign direct investment and population growth, varies by country income[47]. This underscores the need to consider each country's specific context when developing policies to increase women's political participation.

However, despite these challenges, the presence of women in Parliament has a significant impact on political discourse and decision-making. A study conducted in five Western European Parliaments (Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom) found that women and men speak differently in Parliament, and these differences relate to both style and content[48]. Female MPs use the most feminine rhetoric on topics that are most relevant to women in society, and their rhetoric is directly related to issues that are important to women voters[49].

It is also important to consider how the presence of women in Parliament affects the behavior of their male colleagues. A study conducted in the German Bundestag showed that an increase in the share of female MPs does not lead to a positive spillover effect, i.e.,

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42 Women in Parliaments: Descriptive and Substantive Representation.

43 The Socio-Political Obstacles Behind the Scanty Political Participation of Women Parliamentarians.

44 Ibid.

45 Challenges & Appraisals: An In-Depth Examination of the Female Parliamentarians' Performance.

46 Ibid.

47 Gender in Armed Conflict and Peace Processes.

48 Distinctive Voices: Political Speech, Rhetoric, and the Substantive Representation of Women in European Parliaments.

49 Ibid.

men do not become more inclined to represent women's interests[50]. However, there is also no hostile rejection effect. Instead, a specialization effect was found: as the share of female MPs increases, men reduce the intensity of their representation of women's interests but do not stop doing so completely[51].

This is confirmed by a study conducted in the European Parliament. It was found that gender is not a statistically significant factor in the appointment of a committee chair.[52] Furthermore, women are more likely to be appointed as rapporteurs, both in general and for co-decision-making procedures[53]. This data suggests that the main gender inequality is not access to influential positions but the overall representation of women in the Parliament, which has not yet reached parity.

In the context of armed conflicts and post-conflict reconstruction, the role of women parliamentarians is becoming particularly important. Studies show that an increase in the share of female MPs has a positive impact on the duration of peace after conflicts, especially in more democratic states.[54] Legislatures with a higher proportion of women tend to spend more on social needs than on military ones, and higher female representation is associated with better perceptions of the quality of governance and trust in elites[55].

In addition, women often play an important role in peacekeeping processes and peacebuilding initiatives at the grassroots level.[56] It is important to note, however, that women's peacebuilding potential is not related to their biology but to their social experience.[57] Interestingly, internal armed conflicts, especially large-scale and protracted conflicts, may create political opportunities for women.[58] International organizations often play an important role in engaging women in the post-conflict political process, in particular through aid conditions aimed at including women.[59]

However, it is important to note that the effects of conflict differ by gender. While men are more likely to be direct victims of violence, women face higher rates of sexual violence and long-term consequences.[60] Therefore, the presence of women in Parliament is particularly important to address these specific issues. Studies also show that societies with greater gender equality tend to be more peaceful. This is reflected in a lower likelihood of involvement in international conflicts, a lower risk of internal armed conflict, and fewer human

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50 When Do Men Represent Women's Interests in Parliament? How the Presence of Women in Parliament Affects the Legislative Behavior of Male Politicians.

51 Ibid.

52 So Close but Still Too Far Away from Power? Unveiling Women's Careers in The European Parliament.

53 Ibid.

54 Governing Well after War: How Improving Female Representation Prolongs Post-Conflict Peace.

55 Ibid.

56 Gender in Armed Conflict and Peace Processes.

57 Ibid.

58 Armed Conflict, International Linkages, and Women's Parliamentary Representation in Developing Nations.

59 Ibid.

60 Gender, Peace and Armed Conflict.

rights violations.[61] In addition, gender equality is associated with more successful peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts.

It is also important to note the economic aspect of women's representation in Parliament. Research conducted in Europe and Central Asia has shown a positive and statistically significant impact of women's representation in Parliament on economic growth. It is estimated that a 10 percentage point increase in the share of women in Parliament leads to a 0.92 percentage point increase in GDP[62].

However, despite progress, women are still underrepresented in many regions and face social and economic barriers to full participation. Some countries, especially in the Pacific and Middle East regions, still have very low percentages of women in Parliament, and some have no women at all.[63] Further efforts are needed to overcome these challenges and accelerate progress towards gender parity in Parliaments. This includes policies to promote the recruitment of women by political parties, support for strong women's movements, and efforts to raise awareness and foster a gender-sensitive political culture[64].

Ukrainian female parliamentarians have also experienced changes in their lives since 24 February 2022. First, the war has affected them as citizens of Ukraine. Second, they play a special role as representatives of the legislature in Ukraine. This imposes special responsibilities on them and creates additional conditions that are directly affected by the introduction of martial law and active hostilities.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine is considered the largest war in Europe in the last 80 years.[65] Therefore, the experience of our female MPs is quite unique. Especially for civilized democratic states. No country in modern Europe has ever been involved in such a protracted and aggressive war in the 21st century. However, several states have been (or are currently) in military conflict with a neighboring country. The experience of each of them is unique in its own way and reflects certain peculiarities of female parliamentarians' activities in the context of a particular war.

Four countries, Israel, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, were considered in more detail as part of the study of international experience. These states were chosen because they are geographically close to Europe, have/had long and protracted armed conflicts, and still retain their sovereignty.

The **experience of Israeli female parliamentarians** is important for several reasons. First, according to some estimates, this state has been in a state of conflict for more than 100 years, so the long and constant impact of the war on the population's consciousness and national policy priorities is clearly visible. Second, it is one of the few developed countries[66] in the UN that is in a state of military conflict.

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61 Gender, Peace and Armed Conflict.

62 Does Representation of Women in Parliament Promote Economic Growth? Considering Evidence from Europe and Central Asia.

63 Women in Parliament: 1995–2020.

64 Ibid.

65 Foreign Experts on the War in Ukraine and its Prospects.

66 Main Types of Countries in the World.

Gilly Hartal and **Orna Sasson-Levy** studied public attitudes towards female parliamentarians in Israel. In their study **Women and the Israeli Military Culture: A Double-Edged Opportunity Structure**,[67] the authors concluded that women are underrepresented in the Israeli national Parliament for several reasons. The main one is that due to the constant existential threat from external enemies, the population has formed an image of a male or female parliamentarian. This person should be a military or a person with experience in the field of security and defense. According to Israeli society, this will help them develop a reliable and strong national policy and enable them to defend their territorial interests reliably. But the majority of the military are men. Researchers also argue that women face elitism in the military. This is why they cannot achieve sufficient results as military officers to have equal advantages in the political struggle with men for parliamentary seats. Other researchers have come to a similar conclusion. Among them are **Galia Golan** and **Tamar Hermann** in their study **Parliamentary Representation of Women — The Israeli Case**[68] and **Anat Saragusti in Women, Security and Israeli Politics — Going Backwards**.[69] As a result, the "face of national politics" remains predominantly male. If we believe the theory that representatives of different genders have different views on addressing problems, it turns out that defense and security policy does not change (neither for the better, nor for the worse), and relations with the enemy continue to be tense. For example, **Tamuz Avivi**, a former research assistant at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, studied the level of women's representation in Knesset committees.[70] He argues that women are underrepresented or absent from the committees that are considered the most important. It is still relatively rare for women parliamentarians to become committee chairs. **Naomi Chazan**, Former Deputy Speaker of the Knesset, argues in her study **Women in Israel: In Politics & Public Life**[71] that women parliamentarians have been less successful in addressing some important issues in finance and defense. However, there are several studies that have been analyzed and summarized by **Reut Itzkovitch-Malka** and **Chen Friedberg** in their article **Gendering security: The substantive representation of women in the Israeli Parliament**.[72] They argue that the growing participation of women in legislatures reduces conflict behavior and defense spending.

The **experience of Georgian parliamentarians** is important because it is one of the post-Soviet countries that has much in common with Ukraine. We have a common enemy who uses tactics to create "grey zones" and republics not recognized by the international community. This may have an impact on security and defense policy.

The **Role of Georgian Parliament in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations**[73] study published on the Agora website shows that the number of women in the Georgian Parliament has remained relatively stable throughout all convocations. Women parliamentarians make up about 10% of the total members of the Georgian legislature (18% as of 2024).

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67 Women and the Israeli Military Culture: A Double-Edged Opportunity Structure.

68 Parliamentary Representation of Women — The Israeli Case.

69 Women, Security and Israeli Politics — Going Backwards.

70 Female Representation in Israeli Politics.

71 Women in Israel: In Politics & Public Life.

72 Gendering Security: The Substantive Representation of Women in the Israeli Parliament.

73 The Role of the Georgian Parliament in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations.

Although they are underrepresented, according to the authors of the study, female MPs have always been active and have taken leading positions. But despite their activity, Georgian female parliamentarians do not participate in negotiations related to the military conflict between Georgia and Russia. **The Report of the Informal NVC Coalition for UPR of Georgia**[74] describes the country's policy on peace, security, and defense as "gender-blind." In particular, it is noted that the principle of gender equality is not ensured in the decision-making process in this area. The authors of the report believe that women were not adequately represented in conflict prevention processes, female parliamentarians were not involved in negotiations, and they did not contribute to peace and post-conflict reconstruction. The lack of women's representation in the Georgian Parliament and their weak contribution to defense and peacebuilding are explained by the so-called "glass ceiling," which refers to various barriers that prevent women from taking an active part in the life of the state, such as political participation. In its analytical material on Georgia, the **Women's International League for Peace and Freedom**[75] also argues that female parliamentarians are not sufficiently involved in the relevant areas. The authors of the report emphasize that Georgia has experienced 2 conflicts (the war in Abkhazia in 1992-1993 and the Russian-Georgian war in 2008), but women were largely excluded from peace processes. **Magda Lorena Cárdenas**, in her study **Women-to-Women Diplomacy in Georgia: A Peacebuilding Strategy in Frozen Conflict**,[76] proposes increasing women's representation in peace negotiations during military conflicts. The author also argues that women bring different perspectives on power relations and different values to the peacebuilding process. In analyzing peace and security issues, the **Government of Canada**[77] also emphasizes the need to involve women in the negotiation process in military conflicts. This is justified by the fact that, according to information provided by **UN Women**, women's participation in peacebuilding and addressing peace and security issues during military conflicts increases the likelihood that a peace agreement will last 15 years or more by 35%. Moreover, the above **Role of Georgian Parliament in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations** study emphasizes that the contribution of individual parliamentarians to peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts has little impact on the resolution of the situation. These should be systemic and consistent actions by the authorities as a whole. Special attention should be paid to the role of women in Parliaments in the context of frozen conflicts. A study conducted in Georgia found that women's organizations play an important role in facilitating inter-community dialogue and transforming conflict narratives.[78] They focus on empowering women and promoting gender equality as a precondition for peace, trying to create a bridge between formal and informal diplomacy. However, women's diplomacy faces challenges such as political barriers, differences in institutional frameworks between conflicting parties, and social attitudes toward the role of women.[79]

Nevertheless, this form of women's diplomacy shows that women's organizations can address not only soft issues but also hard security concerns[80].

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74 The Report of Informal NGO Coalition for UPR of Georgia.

75 Georgia.

76 Women-to-Women Diplomacy in Georgia: A Peacebuilding Strategy in Frozen Conflict.

77 Women in the Media: Agents of Peace in Georgia.

78 Women-to-Women Diplomacy in Georgia: A Peacebuilding Strategy in Frozen Conflict.

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid.

The experience of female parliamentarians from Azerbaijan and Armenia can be useful. These two countries were involved in a military conflict for several decades, which ended on 20 September 2023. Also, the representation of women in the national Parliaments of these countries is close to ours and the European one: 18% of the Azerbaijani Parliament is women[81], while 36% of the Armenian Parliament is women.[82] In addition, since the conflict has already ended, it is possible to trace the influence of female parliamentarians on achieving this result and their policy on post-conflict peacebuilding and peacekeeping.

A study of the Azerbaijani Parliament and women's activity in it, published by **the Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC)**[83], shows that female MPs are not generally sufficiently active as representatives of the legislature. They can also "follow the same path as other MPs," i.e., they do not take their own initiatives. They are almost inactive in terms of participation in national politics. They also do not raise issues faced by women. According to information provided by **Mejlis Info**, only one of the top 10 speakers in the Azerbaijani Parliament was a woman in 2021. In its analysis called **The Roles of Women in Democratisation and Peacebuilding: Memorandum presented by the Delegation of Azerbaijan**,[84] the **Council of Europe** emphasized the Baku Declaration of 1998, which paid special attention to the role of women in conflict prevention and resolution and peacebuilding. The document also makes recommendations to ensure that women are adequately represented at all levels of decision-making. It also makes suggestions for encouraging women's participation in post-conflict reconstruction processes. In their study **Listen to Her: Gendered Effects of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and Women's Priorities for Peace**,[85] **Jonelle Twum**, **Regina Jegorova-Askerova**, and **Anna Nemsitsveridze-Daniels** describe the impact of the so-called "militarization" on society and women. They argue that the image of women, their role in society, and their significance are viewed through the prism of "motherhood" and stereotypes about the distribution of roles. According to the authors, the ongoing and continuing conflicts reinforce these destructive perceptions.

Some studies and interviews demonstrate another potential negative impact of ongoing militarization. In an article by **Claudia Ditel**,[86] Saadat Abdullazada, an Azerbaijani activist, argues that most women in Azerbaijan want war. She describes and explains how a state of constant military conflict can have a destructive effect on the peacemaking views of the population. This position also challenges the classical notions of women's role in the security sector and the negotiation process. In the same article, another activist, Arpi Bekaryan, shared identical observations about Armenian women. "There was so much warmongering by women in Armenia [...] They would push men to fight." He also stressed that he had begun to hear more and more positions regarding the perception of women solely as "mothers who can give birth to more future soldiers."

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81 Proportion of Seats Held by Women in National Parliaments (%) — Azerbaijan.

82 Armenia.

83 Azerbaijani and Georgian Women in Azerbaijani and Georgian Parliaments — First and Second Independence.

84 The Roles of Women in Democratisation and Peacebuilding: Memorandum Presented by the Delegation of Azerbaijan.

85 Gendered Effects of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and Women's Priorities for Peace.

86 Armenia and Azerbaijan: Women Peacebuilders on the Post-Conflict Scenario.

In 2016, Armenian legislation introduced gender quotas for women, effective from 2021.[87] This state policy demonstrates that militarism does not have to be destructive to women. A study by the **UK Government** in the article **Women, Peace and Security in Action in Armenia**[88] shows that in recent years, Armenia has seen an increase in women's participation in various areas of governance, including Parliament. The authors believe that the quota system enshrined in the Electoral Code has largely contributed to the significant changes in women's political participation. The number of female parliamentarians more than tripled from 2012 to 2022, from 10.7% to 36%. This study confirms the above thesis.

Summary of the literature review

Over the past decades, the number of women in national Parliaments worldwide has significantly increased. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the average share of women in Parliaments has more than doubled, from 11.3% in 1995 to 24.9% in 2020.

Impact on society:

- Studies have shown a correlation between an increase in the share of women in Parliaments and GDP growth (0.92% for every 10% increase in the share of women).
- Women in Parliament tend to support decisions that improve the quality of governance, trust in elites, and social spending while reducing military spending.
- Women's participation in Parliaments in countries experiencing armed conflict reduces the likelihood of further escalation.
- International organizations often play an important role in engaging women in the post-conflict political process, in particular through aid conditions aimed at including women.

Israel:

- A country with a constant military conflict lasting more than 100 years is developing a specific political culture. The focus is on security and defense.
- Women face difficulties in accessing Parliament, as a political leader is expected to have military experience. Most of the military is male, which limits women's access to politics.
- Studies show that women in Israel are underrepresented in what are considered to be the most important parliamentary committees.

Georgia:

- Women make up about 18 percent of the Parliament but are largely excluded from decision-making in the security sector.
- The country's peace and security policy is described as "gender-blind," with female MPs hardly involved in security-related processes.

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87 Appointment of First Woman Prosecutor General Refocuses Attention on Women's Low Eepresentation in Government.

88 Women, Peace and Security in Action in Armenia.

Azerbaijan:

- Women's representation in Parliament is 18%. Despite this, the activity of women MPs remains low, and they mostly follow the general party agenda.
- Society remains highly militarized, reinforcing stereotypical perceptions of women's role in society as mothers.

Annex 5

List of Ukrainian media materials used to monitor the image of male and female MPs

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