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Women Leaders in the Baltic States: Untying the Double-Bind

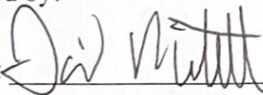Elena G. Roe
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Women Leaders in the Baltic States: Untying the Double-Bind
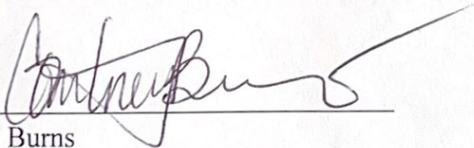
By

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ABSTRACT: Across the post-Soviet region, but particularly in the Baltic states, women executives have gained power in greater numbers and at higher rates than many other regions in the world. This defies existing literature, as these states maintain conservative gender stereotypes while also facing a major security threat from Russia close to their borders. This thesis posits that the increase in women within Baltic legislatures across time creates a political pipeline, or a pool of qualified candidates that makes the election of women to executive power more likely. This is not the only factor, however, as the influence of NATO as a guarantor of Baltic security cannot be understated. Thus, this research finds evidence that NATO's Article V has provided a security guarantee for the Baltic states, which has resulted in a consensus around security policy. This removes security as a major issue in elections, and lessens the burden of proving security competence from women leaders - an area which often aggravates the effect of stereotypes. If this security consensus is disrupted, however, women face an altered double-bind scenario in which they must balance the maintenance of a positive relationship with NATO/the U.S. while fulfilling their cultural role as women, tied deeply to national survival and independence. Estonia and Lithuania are selected as case studies, which culminate in an examination of current Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas and Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte.

Introduction

  In January of 2021, the small Baltic republic of Estonia saw its first female Prime Minister with the President's approval of 43-year-old Kaja Kallas. After a long road, including a failed attempt at forming a coalition government in 2019 and the scandalous resignation of her predecessor, Kallas' Reform party had finally secured the alliances they needed to take control of parliament. Despite becoming the first woman to ever hold the office of head of government in Estonia, Kallas did not stand alone; this moment had been building for decades, and across the region, women had been amassing political power and influence worthy of their respective highest offices.

  Much like Prime Minister Kallas, women have been elected across the post-Soviet region in high numbers in the decades since the wave of democratization in the early 1990s. Women are currently Presidents or Prime Ministers in Moldova, Estonia, Kosovo, Hungary, Lithuania, Slovakia, Georgia, and Serbia; women have previously served in these high offices in Romania, Estonia, Poland, Latvia, Croatia, Slovenia, Kosovo, Slovakia, Lithuania, Moldova, and Ukraine. This era of women in power began as early as 2005 with the election of Yulia Tymoshenko as Prime Minister of Ukraine, and has continued to increase exponentially across the region with the onset of the 2010s (CIA World Factbook, 2023). This has occurred despite the fact that conservative views on gender roles become consistent in the post-Soviet period (PEW Research, 2018). This is notable especially in government participation; as World Values Survey results from 2010-2014 indicate, high percentages of post-Soviet citizens responded that they "strongly agree" or "agree" with the statement that "men make better political leaders than women do" (World Values Survey, 2015). For example, 48.9% of Estonians agreed or strongly agreed that men make better political leaders, compared to only 19.4% of Americans (World Values Survey,

2015). And yet, the election of women presidents and prime ministers continues to remain a consistent occurrence in the region.

In particular, the development of women as executives is interesting in the Baltic states, as women face yet another barrier to entry in leadership beyond general stereotypes: an ongoing security crisis from the Russian Federation. Russia has presented a major challenge, if not a consistent threat to the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania since long before the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine made fears of war in Europe a reality. After 50 years under Soviet rule, over a million ethnic Russians are estimated to still reside in the region. With the pretext for President Putin's invasion of Ukraine resting on the grounds of "protecting" ethnic Russians and rebuilding the Russian empire, the Baltic states have demonstrated anxieties that he will not stop at invading one former Soviet territory (Ellyatt, 2022). Additionally, Russia has maintained gray zone operations (economic coercion, disinformation and propaganda campaigns, cyber warfare, and covert military incursions) within the region. These developments have certainly impacted the attitudes of experts and Baltic citizens alike, as former NATO General Richard Shirreff warned that a Russian invasion of the Baltics could be likely (Szumi, 2022). Further, a Washington Post survey asked Baltic citizens what they perceived to be the greatest threat to their nation; most Estonians (71%) and Lithuanians (66%) identified Russia as the most significant threat (Clem and Herron, 2022).

This perceived threat alongside the presence of women in the highest seat of government sits directly at odds with the findings of many scholars, whose results indicate that citizens broadly prefer men in charge during times of crisis, and particularly find male government officials to be more competent when dealing with issues of military and security (Lawless, 2004; Kang and Kim, 2020). Security in the Baltic states is unique, however, due to the nature of

democratization and international engagement that has been integral to the state building process. Across the post-Soviet region, but particularly the Baltic states, the process of integration into Western institutions was swift - within the span of a decade, states that had been occupied by the USSR since the World War II era had democratized to the standard of accession to the European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The degree of power and influence that each organization plays in Baltic security is left open to exploration. The European Union certainly has an effect on Baltic security, as directives are issued from the European Parliament to each member state regarding unified policy. However, NATO is unique in the sense that its physical defense capabilities contribute greatly to the security of member states, especially considering the impact of Article V and collective security as a strong deterrent to attacks on member states. As such, this paper seeks to address the specific effects of NATO as a U.S.-led, collective security organization on gender stereotypes as they relate to women executives in the Baltic states. Primary interest rests in their ability to gain and maintain power in young states with unique historical memory and cultural perceptions of gender roles.

The still steady increase of women as executives in the post-Soviet region raises a host of questions, especially in regards to the conditions of democratization and internationalization that have shaped the political context in which they operate. NATO's Article V, guaranteeing the principle of collective defense (attack one, attack all), is an undeniable source of security for the Baltic states; as small nations with even smaller standing militaries, the "worst case" of a physical Russian invasion finds a short list of defensive options. The principle of collective defense is critical to the defense strategies of Baltic nations, as this study will address in detail. This is an important distinction when dissecting the effects of institutions, particularly

institutions such as NATO whose sole purpose is security and defense, on gender roles within Baltic nations.

The highly gendered nature of security presents a source of criticism from constituents and colleagues for women in positions of executive power. The current body of literature suggests that women must act more masculine or hawkish in regards to masculinized issues (such as military and finance) in order to avoid accusations of being incompetent. They may, however, still experience criticism for violating gender stereotypes, and role incongruence suggests that many perceive women as generally incompetent in the realm of masculinized security (Lawless, 2004; Kang and Kim, 2020). Yet, more and more women occupy executive positions, leading nations in the midst of security crisis. This research seeks to address the development of women's increasing representation alongside security threat, international influence, and intense regional and cultural gender stereotypes. How has Baltic membership in NATO influenced gender stereotypes on women leaders, particularly in reference to the gaining and maintaining of executive power? Does the security guarantee established by Article V affect decision-making and policy of women leaders? Are gendered perceptions relating to competency and power influenced by an outside source of security and its relational priorities?

This paper argues that the influence of NATO is crucial to the decision-making, rhetorical choices, and perceptions of women leaders in the Baltic states. Over the course of democratization, women have slowly increased their representation within the legislature and executive, engaging with these issues and gradually increasing the pool of qualified candidates for office. I posit that Baltic accession to NATO over time cannot be divorced from the accession of women to power, and plays a dominating role in security discourse - or rather, that women have risen to power in the context of limited security discourse as a result of NATO's status as a

security guarantor. NATO's presence as a masculinized institution offers a method of circumventing the role incongruence that often bars women from gaining and maintaining executive power, even with the help of a political pipeline. Baltic states "export" much of their security reassurance to a larger entity, offering women leaders an opportunity to partially lift the burden of role incongruence created by security as a "masculine" area. I posit that the security guarantee provided by Article V of NATO has created a consensus in terms of security policy and related public opinion in the Baltics. This dramatically affects the role of the executive in terms of perceived security responsibility; their influence on foreign and security policy remains, yet their contribution is largely to a collaborative form of security that is widely accepted with little to no debate regarding alternatives. This altered function substantially decreases the criticism they receive. As long as these women executives maintain positive, collaborative relations with NATO, their peers and constituents will look to NATO as the masculinized security entity needed for confidence during crisis, and the gendered effects of security and political consequences of role incongruence will be substantially minimized during their elections and time in office.

In order to test this assertion, I engage with process tracing as a form of analysis, conducting case studies on Estonia and Lithuania. I trace the historical democratic transitions of these nations, as well as interactions between the state and NATO in order to examine the ways in which women have utilized both of these variables to gain and maintain more consistent power and influence within their nations, eventually culminating in their rise to executive power. I situate this research within the framework of the political double-bind, which indicates that women in positions of power face greater pressure than their male counterparts.

I argue that this research is critical to conduct in reference to the limited amount of studies currently being conducted in regards to women in post-communist Europe, as well as the geopolitical context. Not only is there sparse research on women as executives in general, but the Baltic states are almost untouched within feminist circles of international politics. There is currently a growing body of literature surrounding the double-bind cross-nationally, but little to no research that examines the ways in which the double-bind changes regionally. Context, be it cultural, historical, or otherwise, is crucial to the development of stereotypes; in the post-colonial space that is the Eastern European region, no one is asking these questions, even in reference to geopolitical realities that may change perceptions. As these post-Soviet women continue to gain traction in what is becoming a region-defining crisis in opposition to Russia's increased aggression, understanding the ways in which domestic challenges define international action for these women in power is crucial.

Gender, Representation, and Baltic Transition

As women's representation has increased in the years since democratic transition in the Baltic states, it is crucial to examine the development of women's roles in the development of new governments, as well as the impact of these roles in defining stereotypes and representation. Under communism, Soviet women experienced high levels of political participation due to the egalitarian rhetoric of communism, which centered largely around women's liberation as a necessary objective for full class liberation (Racioppi and O'Sullivan, 1995). This representation was largely for show, however, characterized as "emancipation from above" rather than a success of grassroots organizing. There was thus substantial numerical representation of women in Soviet political spheres, but not substantive, genuine representation, and these women were often

known as "milkmaid politicians", or politicians for show (Racioppi and O'Sullivan, 1995; Waylan 1994).

Women also quickly grew tired of the increased burden of domestic work and labor force participation, which can be characterized as triple the amount of work with limited additional benefit (Henderson and Jeydel, 2007). As Tolstaya (1990) notes of Soviet women, Slavic culture maintains a long history of differing views on gender dynamics. From Russian folk tales in which women played the competent heroes and men the hapless fools, to the intricacies of 20th century geopolitics, Slavic women had long been both the soul and the backbone of their society (Tolstaya 1990). Expected under communism to shoulder the burdens of managing home and family, as well as participating in the labor force and fulfilling their responsibility to Party and class liberation, women ultimately kept the nation afloat during and after the mobilization of men during the Second World War (Schuster 1971). Post-communist women in the 1990s were entrenched in an entirely different set of historical, cultural, and lived perspectives on gender equality than their Western counterparts. Women did not *feel* emancipated under the communist system; Bulgarian women noted that it was "difficult to carry three watermelons under one arm", referring to the triple burden they shared (Petrova, 1993; LaFont, 2001). Therefore, the post-communist break from the Soviet Union was unique in that women were largely uninterested in the promises of Western feminism (Henderson and Jeydel, 2007; Tolstaya, 1990). As Waylan (1994) argues, "the family and the private sphere were often seen as a haven from the demands and interference of the state and a site of resistance, a place of autonomy and creativity in the absence of a full-fledged civil society" (23).

Wary of the dangers of any ideology, women participated in democratic revolutions in large numbers, but always with the general goal of overthrowing the regime. They did not

mobilize as women, but rather as citizens, as many pertinent "women's issues" had long been subverted by Soviet ideology (Henderson and Jeydel, 2007). The result was the relatively minor impact of women's movements on democratization in these nations, and in the years following the collapse of the USSR, women's rights and participation declined significantly (Waylen, 1994). Independent women's movements were not permitted by law in the later years of the USSR, despite the liberalizing policies of glasnost and perestroika. Due to the fact that women's communist liberation was achieved via class-centric policies from above rather than protest from below, Soviet women had no historical tradition of grassroots organizing to utilize to their advantage, and were thus incapable of organizing in the volume and substance needed to fully influence the transition (Waylen, 1994; Moluyneux, 1990; Einhorn, 1991).

As is often the case for regimes transitioning from communist/socialist to capitalist systems, women bore the brunt of the economic blow during market transition. The "first fired and last to be rehired", women were relegated into low-opportunity working positions with little space for advancement. They also lost a breadth of social benefits, pushed to have more children with fewer resources (Henderson and Jeydel, 2007; Waylan, 2004; LaFont, 2001). In the process of transitioning to democracy, post-Soviet women once again bore the brunt of rebuilding their respective states, yet were not able to mobilize or take advantage of the opportunities of democratic transition to influence the policies of the new regime.

There have been positive developments, however, as after roughly a decade of transition, women in post-communist states have risen from occupying seats in parliament to holding executive power across the board. The World Bank reports that the proportion of women elected to parliament in Estonia has increased from 11% in 1997 to almost 30% in the last several years (Figure 2); similarly in Lithuania, numbers have increased substantially with the advent of the

21st century (Figure 1). Despite blows to women's rights, post-Soviet women have found themselves gaining traction, and have consequently continued to develop unconventional, or non-Western, definitions of "women's issues" (Henderson and Jeydel, 2007).

Overall, the existing literature on women in periods of transition fails to account for an initial substantial increase in representation since the fall of the USSR, as women have ultimately been adversely affected by democratization and did not utilize the instability of revolution to gain their representative foothold. Instead, the process of transition, particularly in the Baltics, has *gradually* created a pool of women gaining representation in the legislature. Despite the markedly different ideas of gender roles and stereotypes that may stand in their way, these women have utilized their new democracies to gain substantive representation over time, rather than instantaneous representation from above. This creates a larger pool of potential executives, in accordance with the principle of the political pipeline. There are, however, further conditions that may affect the ways in which these aspiring executives overcome prevailing stereotypes. The following section will address the current body of research, which directly addresses the ways in which stereotypes affect women leaders in the executive cross-nationally, but leaves room for inquiry on the regional level.

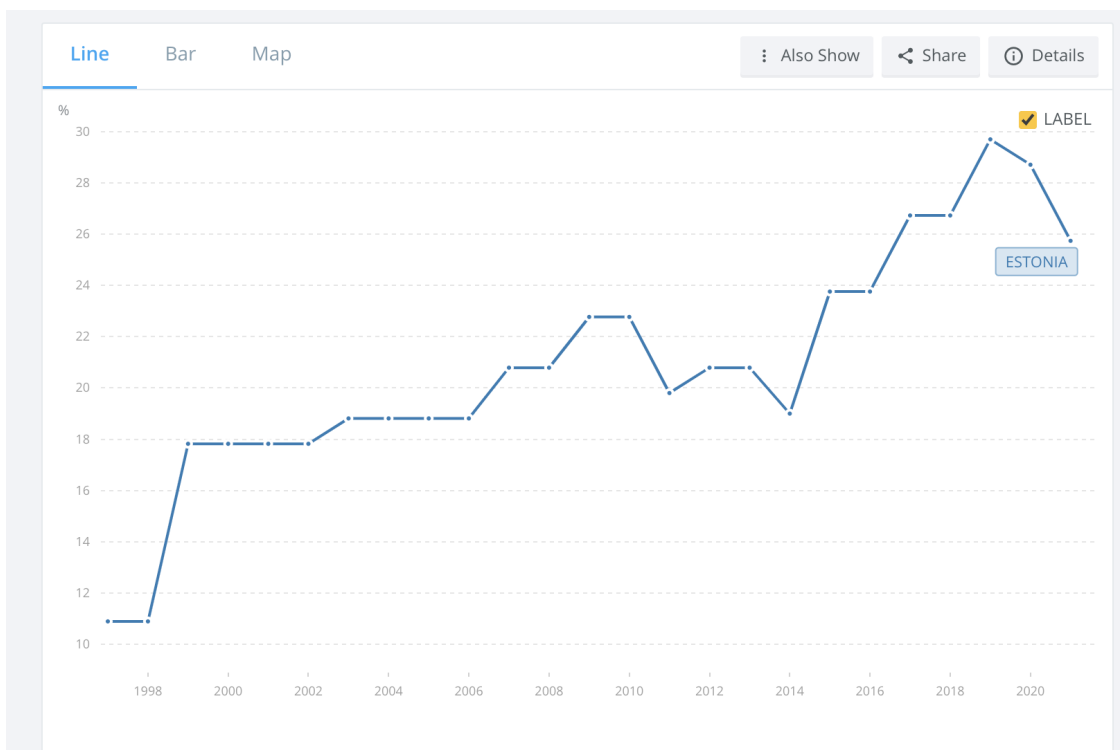Figure 1. Levels of Women's Parliamentary Representation in Lithuania.

Figure 2. Levels of Women's Parliamentary Representation in Estonia.

Gender Stereotypes, Executive Leadership, and the Double Bind

Recent research delves into the dynamics and effects of the increased amounts of women who reach the peak of political power, serving as presidents and prime ministers - though more serve as the latter than the former (Jalalzai, 2013). As women are increasingly elected to their nations' highest offices in all regions of the world, research on the ways in which gender, power, and the executive intersect has expanded - largely by means of studying the impact of gender stereotypes. Within global society, men and women are consistently ascribed traits and role-specific behaviors that define gendered societal expectations (Yates and Hughes, 2017). Women are typically ascribed traits of nurturing, caring, compassion, and emotionality, expected to accept responsibility for the healing and well-being of their community (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Conversely, men retain association to stereotypically masculine traits - rationality, competition, assertiveness, and aggressiveness. The latter traits are agentic in nature, prerequisites for individuality, independence, and accomplishment; as such, masculine traits more closely align with perceptions of a strong leader, and populations have a more difficult time associating women with leadership (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

This often leads to assumptions of competence (or incompetence) in political leadership depending on gender. As executives, women are directly beholden to the impact of gender stereotypes, particularly when pursuing election to the highest office in their respective nations. These women must balance their appeal as leaders in a masculine sense, as well as their ascribed role as women, and thus must more deftly navigate gender stereotypes than their male counterparts (Eagly and Karau 2002; Heilman and Okimoto 2007; Okimoto and Brescoll 2010).

Lawless (2004) finds that while many studies show that men and women fare similarly in elections, this outcome varies based on the political context surrounding contested electoral issues. For example, in the United States, citizens typically prefer men's leadership traits to women's, and deem them more competent or desirable when issues of national security and military action are a significant perceived threat (Lawless 2004). Essentially, women running for office face the problem of role incongruence, in which citizens have a more difficult time perceiving them as effective leaders in the sense of fulfilling masculine expectations, particularly when they are faced with masculinized or militarized issues (Eagly & Karau 2002, Lawless 2004). Additionally, Kang and Kim (2020) find that cross-nationally, individuals prefer men in charge during times of crisis, while Jalalzai (2013) finds that citizens may prefer women as leaders in the wake of crisis. This supports a 2008 Pew Research poll that found that US citizens believed women in politics were more suited to engage with healthcare and education policy, while men were better suited to deal with crime and national security.

As a result of the perception that women leaders are more suited to specific, non-masculinized issues, a gendered structure known as the political double-bind emerges (Caprioli and Boyer, 2001; Koch and Fulton, 2011; Teele, Kalla, and Rosenbluth, 2018; Burns and Kattelman, 2017; Burns and Murdie, 2018). The double-bind asserts that due to the belief that women are better suited to some issues than others, they are faced with a balancing act. Burns and Murdie (2018) argue that women must act masculine in the international arena to be taken seriously as a leader, while remaining more feminine in the domestic arena to maintain gender roles. This presents a particular challenge when women engage with issues such as military or security, as they are expected to act more masculine in order to avoid this role incongruence. The double-bind has impacted women cross-nationally, however, the current

literature fails to take into account regional differences. For example, I posit that the Baltic region may present altered gendered pressures for women leaders.

So, despite stereotypes and the double-bind as roadblocks, why do women rise to power? Jalalzai (2013) finds that women are far more likely to find electoral success in dual executive systems, or nations where executive power is split between the President and Prime Minister. This is largely due to the perception that a) prime ministerial power is more collaborative as head of the legislature, and b) the entire responsibility of executive power is not placed upon one leader - or one woman. Thus, women often serve as Prime Ministers alongside male presidents. This applies to the Baltic case, although it is important to note that Prime Ministers in the Baltic states are the chief executives, which is not always the case in dual systems. More importantly to the Baltic states, having a pool of eligible candidates for executive candidacy is also important.

While older research established the principle of "if she runs, she wins", more recent studies have found that women must be substantially more qualified - and often, overqualified - for their intended positions than their male counterparts (Thomsen and King, 2020; Dolan, Deckman, and Swers, 2021). Referred to as the "political pipeline", women are more likely to be elected if there are a substantial number of highly qualified female candidates in the legislature or other lower-level positions. These conditions are overall critical to the likelihood of women to be elected to executive positions, but highlight the remaining conditions of inequality in executive positions, as women still only occupy 7% of executive seats worldwide (Jalalzai, 2013). The reality of womens' electoral hopes is much closer to "sometimes she'll run, and under the right circumstances, maybe she'll win". Jalalzai (2014) comments on the pipeline in an Eastern European context, stating that:

"The political pipeline shapes women's chances. Women's rise in legislative institutions in the 1990s may partly explain women's gains in presidencies and prime ministerships in the 2000s. Women executives often obtain extensive legislative experience before entering office, although they also regularly first access politics through activist movements. Such combined experiences appear unique to women. While activism offers important opportunities to women in Eastern Europe, it may also constitute an additional stage in the path to power" (591).

Having considered the importance of the political pipeline to the rise in post-Soviet women executives, another consideration for the contextual functioning of stereotypes lies not within nations' borders, but on an international level. There are international factors that distinctly affect processes of government and policy-making, directly impacting the ways in which women must engage with this policy. Bennett (1991) discusses the concept of policy convergence under the influence of IGOs, a principle broadly defined as "the tendencies of societies to grow more alike, to develop similarities in structures, processes, and performances" (215). In terms of regional integration, this process is often viewed as a result of significant influence of regional and international organizations. Cao (2009) discusses this influence in economic terms, but finds that IGOs can "coerce" their member states into adopting specific policies, and that these organizations can have a significant causal effect on changes in policy within member states. This assertion holds true for security policy as well, especially in reference to NATO. Edmunds (2003) argues that NATO enlargement has had a substantial impact on the processes of security policy-making and military reform within new member states. Thus, when women are in the process of gaining power or in positions of power, international pressure from IGOs has a significant impact on the context of role incongruence and stereotypes. The following

section will further detail the role of NATO in the Baltics in terms of security crisis, and will utilize the assumptions presented in this literature regarding the influence of IOs on domestic policy-making.

NATO and Security Crisis

One cannot discuss democratic transition and its effect on women in the Baltics without addressing the interrelated influence of Russian militarism and the response of global governance institutions, particularly the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). With the fall of the Soviet Union, the European political landscape changed overnight, as former Soviet republics and members of the Warsaw Pact quickly became allies with the West. The promises of these alliances were great in terms of development and security, and thus many of these nations, including the Baltics, were quick to implement the necessary economic and political reforms to participate in Western-led global governance and security efforts (Urbelis, 2003; Praks, 2015). While joining NATO had seemed relatively impossible at the dawn of democracy, the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Baltic and Eastern European states opened the door for these reforms, and ultimately, allowed these nations to convince the West of their determination to liberalize (Vilnius, 2003). A wave of post-communist states, including all three Baltic states, joined NATO in March of 2004, both cementing their alliances with the West and drastically altering the state of security policy within each nation (NATO, 2004).

Even in the years prior to the Baltic states' accession to NATO, security debates became less focused on individual national goals, and more about the ultimate objective of NATO membership. The pursuit of accession united political parties and elites in terms of security concerns, and was viewed largely as the most effective means of establishing sustainable and

defensible independence from Russia (Urbelis, 2003; Corum, 2013). While membership in NATO was associated as much with security as it was with Western prosperity in the early 2000s, the decades since have brought a Russian-centric view of Baltic security. While the Baltic states are by no means monolithic in these views, the vast majority of individuals view Russia as the most significant security threat to their nations (Clem and Herron, 2022). The desire to fully escape Russian occupation and to effectively establish a firm national identity was perhaps the most important priority for the Baltic states at the point of independence, and remains as such. The desire to utilize the collective security provided by NATO's Article V has been one of the most important facets of Baltic state-building. Both a motivating factor, and eventually a means of furthering liberalization, the nature of democratization within the Baltic states has been driven largely by the influence of NATO as a source of security.

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania alike have followed this condition with a significant commitment to and alignment with NATO strategy and policy. Three of the very few nations to strive to meet the target of contributing 2% of domestic GDP to funding NATO, these nations have consistently supported the security initiatives of NATO, and in particular, the United States (Urbelis, 2003; Corum, 2013). Support for NATO has remained consistent throughout these nations, even through the US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan; support for the U.S. is almost synonymous, as the U.S. remains NATO's most dominant security power by far, and U.S. relations are crucial in Baltic foreign and security policy (Urbelis, 2003; Corum, 2013). In tandem, the security threat posed by Russia has only increased. The Russian Federation's "Russki Mir", or "Russian World" policy dictates that the Russian foreign policy mission is that of protecting ethnic Russians, defined broadly as Russian native-speakers, across the world (Praks, 2015). In practice, this policy serves as a crude justification for Russian interference, and

even invasion, of any post-Soviet or post-imperial state in which ethnic Russians reside. This presents a particular issue for the Baltic states, which contain high populations of Russian speakers (Praks, 2015). Additionally, Russia's utilization of cyber warfare within the Baltics and invasions of Crimea and Ukraine have done little to bolster confidence that the Soviet successor state will refrain from attempting to invade Baltic territory (Corum, 2013; Praks, 2015). This has created an even more significant emphasis on NATO as a source of security, and has carried both Baltic support of and reliance on NATO through to the present day.

Ultimately, NATO as an organization continues to heavily influence the security and defense policies of the Baltic nations. Despite the fact that these nations joined NATO and the European Union in the same year, and each international institution does hold heavy influence over the political conditions of each nation, NATO is unique in that Article V of its charter ensures collective security. Additionally, in regards to the relationship between NATO, the EU, and security, perception certainly matters. I posit that while directives coming directly from the structure of the European Union have a tangible impact on present-day policy decisions related to security, the perception of NATO functioning as a guarantor of security is what truly makes a difference in regards to how security stability is internalized by citizens and voters. Stereotypes and their effects rely on patterns of socialization; the same follows for the Baltics and their constituencies in reference to international forms of security. For the Baltic States citizens' perceptions of security, as long as their leaders support and trust NATO while also advocating for their own needs within the organization, they maintain a globalized, U.S.-backed military defense against Russian aggression. This condition of democratization and, in reality, perception of leadership, has significant implications for women as executives in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

Women, Security, and Executive Leadership

As established in the preceding review of the literature and circumstances regarding gender stereotypes, women & statebuilding, and the role of NATO in the Baltics, these states present a particularly unique case when attempting to apply orthodox theoretical frameworks to explain the rise of women as executives. More specifically, the rise of women to the highest seat of political power certainly cannot be explained by a lack of stereotypes, as gender stereotypes are perhaps even more intense in these nations than in many Western nations (Henderson and Jeydel, 2007; World Values Survey, 2015). The general applicability of societal gender stereotypes does in fact exist, as women are still susceptible to role incongruence, but this reality is compounded by a harsh return to values of family and the home in the vacuum created by the fall of communism (Henderson and Jeydel, 2007). Women have, across the board, both chosen to and been expected to exist in the home, fulfilling traditional stereotypes of what the role of women "should be".

There are several exceptions to this rule, as many women in Baltic nations have chosen to involve themselves in politics in the transitional years. This increase in representation, however, cannot be attributed to women's mobilization throughout democratic transition, as grassroots organizing failed to make strides to influence the new regime (Henderson and Jeydel, 2007). Women did not mobilize for women's issues, nor did they gain substantial representation at the advent of statehood. What factors, then, can explain the ability of women in the Baltic states to rise to the apex of power in the midst of conservatism and security crisis?

I posit that the gradual entrance of women into the political pipeline is crucial to establishing a qualified pool of potential executive candidates, especially as the nature of representation has changed from representation in name only to substantive representation upon

gaining statehood (Henderson and Jeydel, 2007). Purely from a data-based standpoint, there has been a substantial increase in women's representation over the course of steady democratization in the Baltic states (Figures 1 and 2). While this representation was not instantaneous and may not focus explicitly on the furthering of women's issues within legislatures, it is still substantive representation in contrast to the "milkmaid politicians" of years past. This creates a numerically larger pool of potential candidates, increasing the likelihood that women will be elected to higher positions after gaining qualifications in lower positions. However, this is not enough to fully explain women's executive success.

I argue that the role of NATO in defining the defense strategy of Baltic nations is the most important piece of the puzzle in explaining the ability of Baltic women to overcome stereotypes. While the security crisis experienced by all three Baltic states due to the threat of Russian military action would ordinarily indicate a further distaste for women in positions of power due to role incongruence, both from other political leaders (Post and Sen, 2020) and from constituents (Kang and Kim, 2020; Schwartz and Blair, 2020), I argue that the state of Baltic security has actually presented a destabilization of traditional stereotypes surrounding masculinized security. Since the nature of statebuilding and transition in the Baltics lended itself to increased interdependence with NATO for security concerns, I argue that the *perception* of a shifting military and security responsibility from squarely upon the shoulders of the executive to a collaboration between the executive and an international institution allows women to largely avoid the trap of role incongruence. Where women would otherwise need to prove themselves as masculine arbiters of hawkish security, the double-bind is altered by the influence of NATO. Women no longer need to prove themselves as more masculine or more qualified to strengthen

the state - rather, their responsibility becomes to maintain the status quo of positive relations with the influential, masculinized IO that holds more sway over security than any domestic process.

Since militarized issues, particularly international security concerns, are highly masculinized, they often present a barrier to entry for women entering executive positions as commander in chief, particularly in times of security crisis and heightened anxiety. As a result, the political double-bind would interpret the highly tumultuous security crisis in the Baltics by assuming that women would have a substantially more difficult time gaining and maintaining executive office unless they relied upon highly masculinized, hawkish rhetoric and policy (Burns and Kattelman, 2017). The need to prove themselves as masculine enough to handle military crises would present role incongruence, and thus decreased popularity/the gendered assumption of incompetence (Ridgeway, 2001). However, given the fact that NATO has been a unifying force for security debates and decision-making in the Baltics not only since the fall of the USSR, but for nearly the entire duration of their existence as states, Baltic executives face substantially less pressure to prove competence in navigating national security. The governmental consensus considers their economic and political support of NATO to be a highly effective form of security governance, as NATO is the only organization with the guarantee of collective defense, and thus the strongest form of security crisis management. In this context, the ability of NATO to influence domestic security policy and processes is clear - NATO's guarantee is so powerful, the organization becomes highly influential in both policy-making and public perceptions of security governance (Edmunds, 2003; Cao, 2009). As stated in a NATO Individual Fellowship report on Baltic Security:

"The decision to apply for NATO membership was approved by the majority of citizens of the Baltic states and in effect **resolved the Baltic states' major security policy**

dilemma at a stroke. Since this time internal clashes over defence policy have decreased

significantly. Indeed, since 1994, arguments over security have ceased to be about its

fundamental goals, [and] more over how best to reach the agreed objective of NATO

membership" (Urbelis, 2003; 45).

In simpler terms, while Baltic executives must still make security decisions, NATO's

Article V and the key influence of the United States as a security partner provides a security

guarantee, minimizing the effects of the Russian security threat on the perception of the chief

executive. Perceptions of voting citizens on this issue are perhaps even more important than the

actual function of policy-making. Directives on security policy from the EU most significantly

influence day-to-day policy making and execution, as the structure of the EU includes this form

of collective policymaking. NATO has no such structure, but the existence of a strong, militarily

hegemonic security organization including most of the West is a powerful image in opposition to

Russia.

The Baltics are, crucially, aware of the fact that in the event of a Russian invasion,

domestic defense would be the first at the border; individual nations' militaries and

infrastructures would be charged with slowing down a potential invasion, allowing

NATO/international troops time to deploy (Milevski, 2022). But due to the small size of any

Baltic defense in opposition to a Russian force (especially one comparable to the 180,000 troops

at the Ukrainian border), NATO is important for both the function and perception of security in

the Baltics. Thus, while a female executive cannot completely rely on institutions, the ways in

which these women leaders engage with NATO significantly influences, if not defines citizens'

perception of their security competence. This form of security governance still involves

decision-making, but a long-held status quo of collaboration with a masculinized NATO/U.S.

hegemon lessens the effect of role incongruence on said decision-making; in essence, women leaders in the Baltics face a much different field of security than in other nations. As a result, these women face a responsibility to maintain positive foreign relations with the U.S. and continue the status-quo of a collaborative relationship with NATO, and do not solely shoulder the ultimate burden of security.

Hypothesis: The constant presence of NATO as a security guarantee for Baltic countries has led to both a security consensus regarding NATO's importance and altered gendered expectations on the executive. As an increased pool of qualified women candidates have entered the political pipeline over time, the success of women executives depends much less on their security acumen or specific security qualifications, and much more on their ability to fulfill the status quo of positive, collaborative NATO relations, which functions as a security guarantee in both function and perception.

Research Design

The methodology of this project rests on process tracing as a qualitative approach to case study analysis. Process tracing "is an analytic tool for drawing descriptive and causal inferences from diagnostic pieces of evidence— often understood as part of a temporal sequence of events or phenomena" (Collier, 2011). This methodological structure seeks to describe series of events across time, finding diagnostic evidence in interpreting patterns in processes and events. I thus utilize a chronology and analysis of the historical process of democratic transition in the specific case of two Baltic nations, Estonia and Lithuania, as well as the trajectory of women as political leaders within these nations.

By observing these events across time through historical analysis and the detail case study analysis provides, I connect the described conceptual and theoretical frameworks with the dynamics of women's leadership in these specific states, demonstrating the ways in which stereotypes, security crises, the influence of NATO on perception and policy, or other currently unknown factors have influenced women as leaders. Primary source analysis, data sets over time, rhetorical analysis, and public opinion data will play major roles in this kind of historical tracking.

These case studies will ultimately arrive at the election of Kaja Kallas and Ingrida Šimonytė, the current Prime Ministers (and chief executives) of Estonia and Lithuania, respectively. These nations are appropriate for case study selection due to their crucial similarities, particularly in that both currently have a woman as sitting chief executive, and that both nations' citizenries have similar perceptions of Russia as a security threat. Both Baltic nations have accumulated a history of increasing representation of women in government alongside a multitude of national crises. The nations differ, however, in their stories of gaining independence from the USSR, as well as the makeup of their populations. While only 5% of Lithuanians are ethnically Russian, close to 30% of Estonians identify this way, presenting an interesting divergence in the perception of crisis and the ways in which this may impact leadership.

Additionally, while Estonia's Prime Minister has substantially more power than the President, including in matters of foreign policy and security, Lithuania maintains a much more split system, in that while the PM is the chief executive, her role has historically held an emphasis on domestic policy, while the President handles foreign policy. Individuals deviate from this structure in practice, but both constitutional mandate and practical actions matter in

terms of dissecting perceptions of women in power. Examining these governments and their histories in the context of their current positions will aid in highlighting cross-national differences in terms of gender and security, as well as regional similarities between women's political successes and failures.

Case Study: Estonia

Introduction and Background

Throughout the course of the 2019 Estonian Parliamentary elections, security was markedly not a consideration for voters in selecting a candidate (Toots, 2019). This is the consensus of scholars, journalists, and politicians throughout the Estonian political sphere, and throughout current Prime Minister Kaja Kallas' campaign, the domination of domestic politics is clear. Kallas won upwards of 20,000 votes, the most of any candidate, and the Reform Party, which she has led since 2018, secured the largest percentage of votes with 29% (VOA News, 2019). It appeared to be a return to former glory for the party which had led in either majority or coalition format from 2005-2016, but this time, with a woman at the helm. Kallas has been cited as one of, if not the most successful party leaders since her father, Siim Kallas, led Reform twenty years ago (Pantel, 2023). In an environment set on traditional gender roles and threatened by a "one-world" Russia, what has been the secret to Kallas' success? In order to understand these conditions, it is necessary to retrace Estonia's steps up until this point - steps which track through security threat, the rise of women in democratic politics, and a national consensus around NATO as a functional security guarantor as the thread that ties these factors together.

Part of a wave of new democracies established as the Soviet Union began to crumble, Estonia gained independence in 1991 alongside the other two Baltic countries. The new

government was established through peaceful means, with the vast majority of the Estonian-speaking population in support of complete separation from the USSR (Raun 2004). After five decades of Soviet occupation, this new Estonia would face a variety of challenges in the race to "catch up" with the West, from governmental transition to economic restructuring to a near-constant security threat from their Russian neighbors. Even still, Estonia is considered a highly successful example of post-Soviet democratic transition - a transition which has hinged largely on the phasing out of Russian influence over the course of the 1990s, followed by their swift accession to the European Union and NATO in 2004 (Raun 2004).

Like the other Baltic states, Estonia's desire to cement itself in the Western world cannot be divorced from Russia's overarching presence, both geographically and in terms of spheres of influence. Estonia represents a special case even among the Baltics, as 25% of the current Estonian population is ethnically Russian, with an even higher percentage of 33% in the early 2000s (Crowther and Matonyte, 2007; Boffey, 2022). Decades of ethnic tensions and collective historical memory within Estonia's borders provide important context for both the Russian security threat and national gender roles. Ultimately, it is this unique dynamic that has created the political conditions for a heavy emphasis on NATO as a source of security and Western identity, and Estonia's female politicians have long been entrenched in pro-NATO policymaking.

Security Threat

For a democratic Estonia, Russia has always been a security threat. This much is made clear when tracing the process of nationwide democratization, as well as Estonian attitudes and the state of ethnic affairs. Immediately upon political separation from the USSR, Russian troops remained in the country, and the large population of ethnic Russians showed significant

discontent with the new Estonian government. Under Soviet rule, an effort to make Estonia a solidified part of the Union caused an increase of ethnic Russians (defined regionally as those to whom the Russian language is their mother tongue) from 26,000, or 2.7% of the population, to 602,000, or 39% (Upadhyay, 2017). In 1992, the new Estonian government adopted the Citizenship Law of 1938, a relic of a pre-Soviet independent Estonia. This law designated citizens of Estonia as only those residents and their descendants who had been legal Estonians on June 16th, 1940, prior to Soviet occupation. Naturalization required five years of residence and working knowledge of Estonian - after five decades of Russian being used as the official, or rather colonial, language (Taagepera, 1991; Upadhyay, 2017). The language requirement presented an obstacle for those Soviet-settled Russians who had not learned Estonian (Taagepera, 1991). Despite the governmental expectations that many of these individuals would emigrate, many individuals remained that did not meet the language requirement for citizenship. Thus, nearly 50% of the Estonian nation was stateless at the beginning of 1999, and therefore could not vote (Raun, 2004).

In pursuit of Russian military withdrawal, Estonia granted special privileges for retired Russian officers; in pursuit of EU and OSCE approval after their citizenship laws fell under heavy criticism, these laws were made less harsh and programs were offered to allow Russian-speakers to learn Estonian. According to the OSCE, EU regulations did relieve tensions between Estonia and Russia, and the 7,600 reported Russian troops remaining in Estonia reached a withdrawal agreement in 1994 (Yamamoto, 2017). Nevertheless, the ethnic divide between the eastern region of Estonia and the rest of the nation has never dissipated. This separates the nation from its relatively homogeneous Baltic neighbors and provides an added layer to the geographical security threat from Russia (Raun, 2004; Upadhyay, 2017; Yamamoto, 2017).

Narva, the city at the center of Estonia's Russian-speaking region, has remained at "the centre of Estonian geopolitical discourse" (Yamamoto, 2017) for decades. Sitting close to the Russian border, Narva has been the site of joint Estonian/NATO military demonstrations, and represents an often-dissenting ethnic minority. As Upadhyay (2017; 168) argues:

"Stateless and Russian citizens living in Estonia lament the loss of citizenship and political opportunities following independence and are resentful of their marginalization and "othering" in the new legal and constitutional setup. Thus, Russian nationalist discourse resonates among the minorities particularly in the borderlands. In an arrangement where they are denied any consequential political engagement within the system, their alienation along with strong attachments across the border creates challenges for the Estonian State, the EU's and NATO activities".

Similarly to Donbas in Ukraine, Narva is a symbol of a region in which many seek better relations with Moscow - and which Moscow, under the Russian "one world" policy, would not be hesitant to annex if NATO's retribution were not a consideration (Ellyatt, 2022). This policy fundamentally rests on the "protection" of ethnic Russians through the Russian state; thus, with the highest percentage of ethnic Russians within their borders *and* the closest geographical proximity to Russia, it is reasonable to assert that Estonia bears the greatest risk of external invasion among the Baltic states. Ethnic relations have intensified an already consistent Russian security crisis in Estonia, as evidenced by violent protests regarding the issue in Tallinn in 2007, as well as increased NATO activity in the Narva region since 2016 (Upadhyay, 2017). Controversial citizenship and language laws have also established a history of tension between Estonian and Russian ethnic factions in a political sense, which becomes important when considering the influence of far-right Estonian nationalism in the present day. Estonia's

democratic transition has thus been unique in that it has been defined by a looming Russian threat from both inside and outside its borders, having also been the victim of one of the first Russian cyberattacks in 2007 (Ottis, 2007; McGuinness, 2017). The result has been twofold: an emphasis on nationality as an organizing principle, as well as a fast-track to EU and NATO accession as a means of ensuring security.

Nationalism, Security, and Gender

The intersection of ethnic identity and security crisis has been crucial in the development of gender roles in Estonia, which very much impact the experiences of Estonian women in politics. Koobak (2018) notes that feminism in Estonia, like in many Central and Eastern European nations, does not have a centralized focus. When many Estonians think of the word "feminism", an image is brought to light of "bra-burners" circa the Miss America protests of 1988. Even in academic circles, there is caution around feminism as an ideology, as it is largely seen as a Western issue impacting middle to upper class white women. While this perception may be somewhat warped, it is in keeping with a historical Estonian experience that cannot be separated from the ways in which gender roles and stereotypes have developed (Koobak, 2018).

Prior to Soviet occupation, Estonia's gender relations were similar to that of many other Slavic nations: women exercised power in the home, associated with domesticity. The "Estonian woman" was silent and strong, entirely competent but aware of her role as the secondary sex (Kaskla, 2003). The Soviet constitution established *de jure* gender equality, pushing women into the workforce and establishing women's liberation as official doctrine, but as was the case across the bloc, this was not effective in practice. Women had access to higher education, but scarcely used it due to their inability to pursue higher positions. In government, even "milkmaid

politicians" (Henderson and Jeydel, 2007) were few and far between, as less than a third of the Soviet legislature was made up of women (Kaskla, 2003; Henderson and Jeydel, 2007).

Many Estonians viewed Soviet doctrine as the imposition of another society's nationalism, and this certainly applied to gender as democratic transition approached. Raun (2001) notes that "If anything, the Soviet era merely reinforced the traditional male dominance in Estonian society, and change was slow to come in the 1990s" (2001; 35). Nationalism played a large role in the Estonian independence movement, but did not specifically liberate women (Kaskla, 2003; Henderson and Jeydel, 2007). Gendered nationalist rhetoric, designed to cultivate commonality across a national experience while constructing gendered roles within it (Enloe, 2013), quickly shifted away from Soviet norms. Work was freedom for Estonian men, rather than a necessary evil for Soviet men. This work was made possible by Estonian women taking their place in the home, and "remembering" their duty to hearth and family (Kaskla, 2003). In this sense, Kaskla (2003) argues that Estonian values are that of their women. National restructuring involved a restructuring of gender roles and stereotypes, and the Estonian woman and Soviet woman became necessary foils.

This context serves several points: first, that Estonian gender roles are heavily based in national identity. This national identity connects deeply with security and the Estonian desire to separate from the USSR; thus, women's role in democratic transition was the adoption of a symbolic role in the establishment of identity (Koobak, 2018). Similarly to many other nationalist movements, women became important in their roles as homemakers and in reproduction of the nation's youth (Kaskla, 2003; Enloe, 2013). Estonian gender dynamics do not lend themselves to the entrance of women into political circles. Stereotypes are conservative in nature, and women did not mobilize during transition (Koobak, 2018). And yet, Estonia has

found itself with its first female President serving from 2016-2021, as well as its first female

Prime Minister elected in 2021. In a male dominated society, women have gradually gained more

and more traction in cementing themselves as the arbiters of Estonian identity - and the

progression has much to do not only with Estonia's desire to join the West, but particularly in the

role of NATO as a defender of that national identity.

Estonian Women and NATO - A Timeline or a Pipeline?

In the context of a security crisis in both the borderlands and beyond, as well as a fervent

desire to cement a non-Soviet Estonian identity, the Estonian government has engaged heavily in

democratization efforts through international institutions. Along the way, however, women have

increased their leadership, particularly as collective security has become more of a governmental

priority. After much debate throughout the 1990s, the government eventually transitioned to the

view that membership with the EU and NATO as the best possible way to achieve security and

identity, and the nation's legislative and political history heavily reflects this reality (Urbelis,

2003; Mockute, 2008; Corum, 2013; Yamamoto, 2017). This ultimately resulted in a moderate

security consensus, as many Estonian constituents and members of government believe that

NATO is a guarantor of Estonian security - however, Estonia's political sphere - particularly the

influence of party politics and Estonian nationalism - has complicated this consensus, leading to

challenges over time and with the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The earliest efforts of the Riigikogu, the Estonian Parliament, involved the imposition of

capitalistic systems and basic democratic overhaul, with the legislature publicly citing the main

goal of the 7th Riigikogu (1992-1995) as that of establishing and enforcing the new Constitution.

The 8th Riigikogu (1995-1999) focused largely on ensuring the gradual withdrawal of Russian

troops as agreed in 1994, as well as preparing the nation for accession to the European Union.

During this time, representation of women in the Riigikogu increased from 12 women in 1992

(11.5%) and 1995 to 18 women in 1999 (17%) (Raun 2001, World Bank), beginning a rise in

women's parliamentary representation that seems to occur in tandem with the rise of NATO as

the dominant priority in Estonian conversations regarding security.

A 1995 report states that Estonia had much difficulty in establishing their defense policy.

The young nation's legislature had difficulty in conceptualizing multifaceted security, instead

making broad statements like "security is our sovereignty" and speaking solely on topics of

physical military force (Haab, 1995). Much of the government's security focus rested on building

up a national defense force in order to deter attack, particularly under the more intensely

male-dominated parliament (Haab, 1995). A gradual turn towards the West and its institutions

came to fruition in 2002, under the 9th Riigikogu, led by Siim Kallas and the Reform Party. The

Estonian Parliament passed the 2002 Peacetime National Defense Act, which thoroughly outlines

Estonian security policy and designated powers. The document is headed with four indicators of

purpose, with the final point reading "The Republic of Estonia develops international

cooperation and may join agreements and alliances serving military or defence purposes in order

to achieve the national defence goals" (Riigikogu Archive). Russian troops had finally

withdrawn from the country, allowing Estonia the opportunity to pursue NATO accession

without fear of immediate retaliation. The Act is a clear designation of intent to join, moving

from investing solely in their standing military to a joint domestic and NATO-based defense,

especially in regards to Estonia's small population, which stands currently at 1.3 million (World

Population Review, 2023). Notably, the Act was passed under Prime Minister Siim Kallas

(current PM Kaja Kallas' father) whose foreign minister was Kristiina Ojuland, the first woman

at her post. In the years that followed, NATO gained more and more significance within Estonian governance - as did women. In 2004, Estonia joined NATO, and Ene Ergma was elected the first female President of the legislature. The 11th and 12th iterations saw Ergma re-elected twice, as well as Kristiina Ojuland and Laine Randjarv serving as Vice Presidents of the legislature. Women continued to gain not only representation within the general legislative body, but rose to leadership positions as Cabinet ministers and senior Parliament leaders (Riigikogu Archive).

Women's role in developing a NATO-centered defense has been crucial, particularly in establishing a legislative pipeline for women to higher positions of power as the security crisis has worsened. Estonia experienced a cyber attack (more aptly described as a cyber siege) in 2007, during which the Russian government limited Estonian access to cyber services and information over the course of 22 days (Ottis, 2007). Estonia then deepened their relationship with NATO by establishing firm policy goals at the Lisbon Summit in 2010, addressing a wider variety of issues including "both conventional and emerging threats (ballistic missiles, cyber security, access to global goods and resources, and energy security)" (Republic of Estonia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).

In 2014, the security crisis reached a new high upon Russia's invasion of Crimea, seen by the Baltic states as a bold indicator of President Putin's willingness to act upon the "one-world" policy. Then-Prime Minister Taavi Roivas indicated that the government was "seeing lots of activities that have not been there a year ago, which demonstrates that the presence of NATO allies in all NATO territories is very much needed" (Maigre, 2015; 17). For a nation which had already staked its security interests on NATO's collective defense guarantee, a double-down was in order: in the European Parliament and beyond, Estonia's representatives indicated that NATO needed to ramp up defenses, and "must be able to implement all three of the

fundamental assignments outlined in its 2010 Strategic Concept: collective defense, crisis-management and cooperative security" (Maigre, 2015; 20). Estonia would continue to advocate for all NATO allies to contribute the target 2% GDP to funding the alliance, a message which has been consistent across time. As per the World Bank, the rise of women continued within the legislature, and in 2019, Estonia elected Kersti Kalljulaid as its first woman President. Kalljulaid's election provides a culmination of the political pipeline as it pertains to the subsequent election of Kaja Kallas to the Prime Ministerial seat; the fact that a woman was elected to the Presidency, symbolic as it may have been, directly opens a door for a higher likelihood of a woman being elected as Chief Executive. This pipeline is especially important as according to Toots (2019), there is a long Estonian tradition of leaving security politics out of legislative and executive elections. While there is no specification as to when this tradition started, it can be expected that by the time of Kalljulaid's election (but more likely, long before), women in politics did not have to navigate stereotypes surrounding gender and security in order to gain election. I posit that this is due to a security consensus perpetuated by NATO's influence, which intertwines with the political pipeline as described above. NATO has served as a guiding principle for policy-making and party politics, but more importantly, has removed security as a popular issue that women must navigate in order to gain power at legislative or executive levels.

This timeline tells an interesting story, namely that it seems women politicians and NATO have risen to the highest priority in tandem across three decades of Estonian independence. Independently of any security concerns, there is clear evidence that women have gained power over time in the Estonian legislature, allowing for the cracking of the senior/ministerial glass ceiling and allowing women to rise to higher positions, eventually culminating in a pool of qualified candidates more likely to take the executive seat (Dolan, Deckman, and Swers, 2021).

This addresses the question of the political pipeline's existence, but a potential explanation for this existence is found when considering the gradual increase in support for NATO over time. While this progression may only immediately show correlation rather than causation, it becomes more compelling when considering both the state of Estonian gender mainstreaming under the European Union, as well as the nature of party politics in Estonia.

Women and Party Politics: Explanations for the Pipeline

While strides have been taken to promote gender equality on a national scale, such as the passing of the Gender Equality Act in 2004, Estonia's legislative gender mainstreaming policy is minimal at best. Estonia has never adopted gender quotas such as those found in other EU nations, in either the public or private sectors (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022; Gender Quotas Database, 2023). There is currently a Riigikogu Women's Union, consisting of 13 women MPs focused on issues such as the gender pay gap and gender-based violence. This union was not established until 2017, however, and constitutes more of a result of women's representation rather than a cause (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022). The absence of any substantive policy, EU-based or otherwise, to further women's representation in the Riigikogu indicates the importance of other nation-specific factors. Context around party politics provides a potential explanation for the intersection of gender and security, specifically demonstrating the crucial nature of widespread support for NATO in Estonian politics in the election of women to positions of high political power.

In Estonia, there are currently five major political factions: The Estonian Reform Party, Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE), Estonian Centre Party Faction, Isamaa Faction, and the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Reform dominated the political sphere from 2005-2016;

led by Siim Kallas in 2002-03, Reform has consistently been the most pro-NATO party in the

Riigikogu, and was a crucial player in the development of the democratic government. Early on,

women gained the most traction in the Reform Party. Both Ojuland and Randjarv were Reform

representatives, and women have had success within the party since, including Prime Minister

Kaja Kallas. Currently, 13 of the 27 women in the Riigikogu (48%) are from the Reform Party.

Historically, women have had the most success in Reform, but Ene Ergma was a member of the

Pro Patria Union (now Isamaa), which dominated the political sphere in the 1990s (Isamaa,

2022). While Reform has been the most notably pro-NATO, it is important to note that support

for NATO across most parties has only increased since the nation's accession to the institution,

and this is reflected widely in party platforms and public opinion.

As of 2000, 54% of the Estonian population supported NATO membership; as of 2016,

89% of the population showed support for the alliance (EstonianWorld, 2016). While numbers

vary greatly among ethnic Estonians and ethnic Russians, 75% of Estonians agreed that

membership in NATO is "the most important security guarantee" for the nation (EstonianWorld,

2016). As of 2022, "Estonians most commonly consider Estonia's NATO membership to be the

country's primary security guarantee — 70 percent of respondents, up 9 percentage points on

year. 69 percent of the population also believes that troops serving in NATO Battlegroup Estonia

make it safer to live in Estonia" (ERR News, 2022). The majority of Estonia's political parties

reflect this opinion; while some parties vary in their support of increased domestic military

spending, Centre, Isamaa, the SDP, and Reform have long supported NATO involvement, with

Reform being the most pro-Western and openly neoliberal (Riigikogu Archive). The notable

political exception to this rule, however, is the Conservative People's Party, or EKRE.

Established in 2012, the EKRE constitutes the rise of the far-right in Estonia, and is known for

being highly critical of Estonia's reliance upon NATO (Riigikogu Archive). Only 3 of the

women in the Riigikogu represent the EKRE; to put this in perspective with the overall party

makeup, 13 of 34 Reform MPs are women, while 3 of 19 EKRE MPs are women (38% Reform,

15% EKRE). The Centre Party currently houses 7 women out of 23 members (30%); 1 out of 11

Isamaa members are women (0.9%), and 3 out of 9 members of the SDP are women (33%).

The combination of public opinion polling and the numbers of women within Estonian

political parties tell a story: women have had similar success across multiple parties, but

particularly those that support NATO. I posit that Reform's early support for NATO is related to

the rise in women within that particular party, but as support for NATO has increased over time,

there is a substantially larger percentage of women within parties that contribute to the continual

funding of and cooperation with NATO. This becomes clearer when considering the path to

election for Kaja Kallas; though her road to the Prime Ministership was highly complicated, the

absence of security as a point of contention within Estonian electoral politics aligns directly with

mass popular support for the institution.

Security Consensus and the Election of Kaja Kallas

The unfolding of the Estonian Parliamentary Elections in 2019 fully animates the nature

of the interaction between party politics and security in Estonia, particularly to the benefit of

Kaja Kallas. The Centre Party, led by Prime Minister Juri Ratas, held incumbency, having taken

power from Reform for the first time since 2005. Reform hoped to take back power as the

opposition. Isamaa and the SDP constituted the other small percentages required for Centre's

coalition, while the eurosceptic EKRE hoped to increase its popularity. The results were as

follows: Reform took 29% of the vote, Centre took 23%, EKRE took 18% (up from 9% in the

previous election), Isamaa took 11.4%, and the SDP took 9.8%. Thus the question remains: in such a contentious political situation, with security concerns abounding, amid the rise of the far-right, and within the context of conservative political values, why was Kaja Kallas able to overcome a popular incumbent to become the first woman to win her parliamentary election, securing the most votes of any candidate?

I argue that the political pipeline and widespread consensus of NATO's security guarantee created the perfect storm, removing the burden of security from solely the executive. The entrance of qualified women candidates into the pipeline was bolstered by NATO-centric policy, but also provided the basic conditions for women's potential executive election. The security guarantee then created a security consensus, by which the issue of security was removed from political discourse; thus, gendered stereotypes involving security have been phased out of political perception. This allowed Kallas, as well as the Estonian populace, to focus on domestic issues. As security was not a consideration for Estonian voters in 2019 when electing a candidate, Kallas was able to avoid the role incongruence and gendered criticism typically leveled at women leaders regarding security. As the far-right party has gained more influence since her election, however, Kallas has been more openly criticized through a gendered lens of security. EKRE has put pressure on Kallas to ramp up domestic security and decrease reliance on alliances. This alternative shakes the security consensus, and relies on more traditional double-bind criticism as well as nationalistic rhetoric to re-introduce stereotypes and gendered criticism, which pushes Kallas to change her own rhetoric rather than relying on the status-quo to avoid criticism.

With public opinion on NATO being established as remarkably high within Estonia, as well as the high levels of support for NATO expressed within the Reform Party's platform, it is

clear that among Kallas' potential voter base, there is a consensus that NATO is the most

important aspect of security for Estonia. Despite the clear threat from Russia, the most important

issues within the election were domestic in nature. As Ann Toots notes in her analysis of the

elections,

> "The 2019 election campaign did not have pervasive themes that would make it possible
>
> to clearly distinguish between the party platforms. From time to time some issues popped
>
> up, but did not remain at the forefront for long. Three general features can be highlighted,
>
> however: (i) domestic issues, including "saving" the country and Estonian culture, are
>
> central. (ii) foreign policy issues (EU after Brexit, relations with Russia, climate change)
>
> are **very marginal**; (iii) domestic policy debates moved from initial substantive debates
>
> to simplistic populist promises of higher benefits and better services, accompanied by tax
>
> cuts" (Toots 2019, p. 6)

Toots' analysis is supported by evidence from Estonian and international journalism

across the course of the elections. According to a report from the BBC, the "major issues" were

as follows: "Reform and Centre campaigned on tax changes, the former to help job creation and

the latter to boost state revenues; Estonia's Russian minority, who make up a quarter of the

population, were also a key issue in the campaign. The Centre party wants to maintain the joint

Estonian- and Russian-language school system - something both Reform and EKRE plan to

abolish. Both Centre and Reform strongly back EU and NATO membership" (BBC, 2019). This

basic summary of major issues establishes Centre and Reform as the two major parties, while

also establishing that both strongly support NATO membership. In combination with public

opinion data showing that Estonians believe that NATO is the greatest security guarantee, the

fact that both of the major parties strongly support the continuation of membership and

cooperation supports the assertion that security was a relative non-issue across the course of the election. In fact, an ICDS report directly after the election states that it has long been customary in Estonia to "leave matters of foreign and security policy out of the electoral contest. Foreign and defence policy is run by **an underlying societal consensus** and overseen by civil servants, parliamentarians and government" (Kuusik, 2019).

News outlets also reported that Centre Party leader (and then-Prime Minister) Juri Ratas made statements supporting NATO throughout the course of the election cycle - but notably not attached to his campaign. On the 15th anniversary of Estonia's accession to NATO, Prime Minister Ratas stated that "Forty years ago, we were forced to look at the world standing behind Nato's protective shield as something desirable and unattainable. In 2004, when we, along with several co-labourers in the same fate became members of both Nato and the European Union, there was a great moment of unification" (BBC, 2019). His defense minister, Juri Luik, was also quoted as saying that "In light of acts of aggression by Russia, it is not difficult to imagine what would happen to us if we were not in NATO" (BBC, 2019). Here, the two highest-power individuals guiding defense in Estonia establish not only the unifying power of NATO in regards to the West, but also the crucial nature of NATO in fending off the Russian threat. It is clear from these statements that NATO is crucial to Estonian defense, and that the security crisis from Russia is still alive and well, and yet this was not a campaign event. Kallas, on the other hand, did not directly discuss NATO, despite the widely-known fact that her party has long-supported the institution.

Across Kallas' election cycle, there is limited reporting on her direct statements regarding security - and this makes sense in reference to the non-consequential nature of security established in the election. However, one of her stands related to the matter is her assertion that

she would be unwilling to form a coalition with the EKRE - the only party that is not pro-NATO (Impact News, 2018). In fact, neither of the two major parties were willing to negotiate with the EKRE leading up to the election, with Kallas noting that "Today all parties understood that EKRE cannot be taken seriously as a real partner in government" and Ratas stating that he would "find it 'impossible' to work with EKRE in a coalition government" (Impact News, 2018). The EKRE has built a reputation on controversy in recent years, with inflammatory language, criticisms, and even assaults on Parliament members. The party and its members have specifically targeted Kallas; "A Facebook account used to issue death and rape threats against Reform leader Kaja Kallas is almost exclusively pro-Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE)" (Postimees). EKRE leader, Martin Helme, directly critiqued Kallas' policies during the election. In a 2019 Op Ed, Helme writes:

> "Kaja Kallas loves to repeat that for the sake of Estonian security we must never again stand alone. Right. But in the Reform Party's view, this means total submission and absolute reliance on allies' support and muscles, instead of purposefully and considerately building up our own defence capabilities. Or is someone imagining that a state, which is dependent on allies' goodwill, can still make independent decisions? In the Reform Party's view, relying on allies means giving up Estonian sovereignty to the European Commission and big states of NATO" (BBC, 2019).

This statement by Helme serves several purposes; first, it establishes a perception by the far-right that even in the relative absence of documented pro-NATO statements by Kallas, the perception of the Reform Party's unwavering support for NATO among constituents and competitors is clear. Helme also draws a direct contrast between the values of the EKRE and Reform - EKRE wants to build up independent military capability in accordance with their

Estonian nationalist views, while Reform relies on the "muscles" of allies. This nationalist rhetoric deviates from the long-standing perception that NATO ensures Estonian strength and security. Helme attempts to paint Kallas as weak or feminized by demonizing alliances and the liberal international order. Despite the fact that the alliance with NATO is widely supported, Helme presents an alternative to the security consensus that attempts to flip this perception, utilizing stereotypes and nationalism to tear down Kallas' political stances. His statement establishes the basis of a tricky situation for Kallas in regards to her following of the pro-NATO status quo. With the introduction of the far-right and Estonian nationalism into the political mainstream, long-standing norms have been challenged. Despite the inconsequential nature of this issue for Kallas in gaining power, Helme's criticism would foreshadow a balancing act on Kallas' part once in power.

This statement serves to support my hypothesis, however, as Helme's perception of Estonia "exporting" security not only exists, but is presumably seen as negative by a relatively low (albeit rising) percentage of the population. In combination with the statistic that upwards of 80% of the Estonian population supports NATO, with upwards of 60% considering it a security guarantee, Helme's claim establishes a dissenting minority that clarifies the opinion of the majority. In essence, the majority of Estonia has long operated under the consensus that security is guaranteed by NATO, and resources should be distributed as such; politicians do not campaign on security, and despite EKRE's reintroduction of security on the part of the far-right, his position did not receive enough support to make any major difference in outcome.

In fact, Estonian citizens typically look elsewhere for their perception of security and safety. An Estonian press summary from October of 2020 reads as follows:

"The leading daily newspaper Postimees writes in its editorial that never before have Estonians so keenly followed the US presidential election as this year. The newspaper continues that Estonians are doing it because of security policy and the USA's leading role in NATO. Postimees says it is very important for Estonia to know whether it can trust its allies. The newspaper adds NATO is the most important thing for Estonia. Postimees says that Estonia should be able to work together with the USA no matter who wins the election" (Postimees, 2020).

This excerpt highlights an interesting pull within Estonian politics: that rather than being concerned with the minutiae of security as established by their domestic executive, Estonians often look to differences in U.S. administrations to determine the state and future of security dynamics. In essence, the influence of the United States as the leader of NATO directly removes the burden of security from the shoulders of Estonia's executive in the perception of their constituents; rather, there is a noted exporting of certain elements of security capability and responsibility to a larger, international, notably masculinized institution. This opens the door for the election of women executives through a minimization of role incongruence, removing the nearly impossible burden of proving masculinized security competence while also maintaining femininity. As domestic responsibility for national security decreases, the influence of the double-bind on perceptions of women leaders decreases, significantly impacting women's paths to power.

Kallas During and After Election: Popularity, Stereotypes, and Roadblocks to Power

A skilled politician and renowned leader in her own right, Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas has arguably surpassed her father's fame. Kallas joined the Reform Party in 2010, and was quickly elected to Parliament in 2011. Kallas went on to serve in the European Parliament from 2014-2018 while also acting as the party's Vice Chairman, before returning to the Riigikogu in 2018 to lead the Reform Party (Penu, 2016; Reform Website). During the course of the 2019 Estonian elections, Kallas campaigned specifically on the Reform values of technological innovation & cybersecurity, better pensions for the elderly, the reduction of taxes, and support for families (Riigikogu, 2023). In the absence of pressure to demonstrate security qualifications or navigate role incongruence, Kallas was able to campaign on many issues that are not typically beholden to the restrictions of the double-bind. In fact, Kallas' background was a non-issue for voters. Another report by BBC Monitoring Europe notes that "The rise in the Reform Party's popularity which began in late 2017 relates to the likely new chairperson of the party… Kaja Kallas has always been a very popular person in all polls… The talk about Kaja Kallas's lack of leadership experience has not swayed the voters much" (BBC 2018).

This does not mean that Kallas has not faced stereotypes as a result of her gender within Estonia, however. Quoted for the EU in 2016, Kallas noted that "Working as an attorney-at-law, I did not face many more obstacles than men. Nobody asked whose daughter I was. Politics is a different story. Looking for a new Minister of Foreign Affairs, the media stressed female candidates' family ties, but not those of the male candidates. I remember exactly how, when I started my political career, my older colleagues strongly recommended that I should not deal with women's issues" (Penu, 2016). Consistently a strong voice for her party, Kallas openly criticized many of her colleagues during another corruption case, and former Financial Minister Jürgen Ligi responded that in most political reunions, "her beautiful eyes have usually been

above her closed mouth" (Penu, 2016). Kallas has herself confirmed the double-bind she has

faced, noting that "it seems that in order to be taken seriously you need to hide your femininity. I

do not think that is the road to follow" (Penu, 2016). In regards to the election, Kallas told

Euronews that "When I was in the European Parliament, I didn't think about my gender when

debating… when I came back to Estonia, I felt I was judged quite a lot… gender became an

issue" (Euronews, 2019). She also mentioned that she received advice including to dress in

trousers, cut her hair, be more aggressive, and speak in a lower voice, which to Kallas, "sounded

like: 'be more masculine'. So I was wondering, it might be, that (since) the leaders of our country

have been mostly male, that people may think there's something wrong with me because I'm

different. But there's nothing wrong with me, I'm just a different gender" (Euronews, 2019). But

having received this criticism, her popularity maintained strength throughout the elections,

culminating in her winning a record number of votes for herself and her party (Toots, 2019).

Despite her election by popular vote, Kallas did not immediately take her place as Prime

Minister of Estonia. Unable to form a coalition government with either the Centre Party or

widely condemned EKRE, Kallas was functionally pushed out when Centre and the EKRE

formed a governing coalition. Centre received massive amounts of pushback from the general

public for forming a coalition with the EKRE; widely viewed as a sacrificing of liberal values for

the sake of a power grab, the coalition was largely a disaster (Turp-Balazs, 2021). The EKRE

attempted to change the constitution to define marriage as between a man and a woman and

made frequent attacks on foreigners. Most famously, leader Martin Helme was forced to

apologize after calling Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin a "sales girl", suggested Estonia's

gay couples should "move to Sweden", and "call[ed] a recent election that brought a

female-dominated government to power in neighboring Lithuania 'rigged' and the work of 'the deep state'" (Turp-Balazs, 2021).

Ultimately, it was a combination of outrage regarding the EKRE and allegations of corruption that brought the coalition down, allowing Kallas to step in. President Kersti Kalljulaid, who was a frequent target for the EKRE herself, called on Kallas to form a new coalition, and she succeeded in negotiating with Centre to form the new government (Turp-Balazs, 2021). It is important to note Kallas' roadblocks, particularly with the involvement of the far-right in Estonian politics. Over the course of her Prime Ministership, Kallas has faced a wide range of challenges; coming into office in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, quickly followed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Kallas has battled both massive world crises as well as the criticism of the far-right. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, this battle between liberal Reform and nationalist EKRE has only grown more vitriolic - and for the first time, security has become a hot topic in Estonian politics. The BTI Project comments on the effect of EKRE's role in the governing coalition:

> "The main tenets of Estonian foreign policy – strong integration into the European Union and NATO, and strong international ties – remain intact. However, the inclusion of the "anti-globalist" EKRE in the governing coalition complicated the country's international position somewhat. Although the EKRE's eurosceptic stance has become more moderate, the party has never shied away from showing its disdain for the European Union's powers and advocacy of Western liberal values" (BTI Project, 2023).

Markedly different from her relative non-attention to security during her election, Kallas' in-office track record of security-related statements after the invasion is direct and clear: NATO must increase its strength and capabilities in order to ensure Baltic security, and European allies

must put their full support into the institution. After Russia's invasion, Estonia was the first NATO country to demand a no-fly zone be put in place, showing direct and unwavering support (Carbonaro, 2022). Since then, Kallas has gained international recognition for remaining one of NATO's strongest supporters, as well as one of Putin's most hard-hitting critics (Cliffe, 2022). Dubbed "Europe's New Iron Lady" (Truc, 2022), Kallas made a speech to the European Parliament just two weeks after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

In her address, Kallas clearly demonstrates a cognizance of gendered expectations, which she neatly navigates, as well as a nuanced emphasis on NATO as a major source of security. Kallas opens, however, with an emphasized picture of national history through her own life: her own mother was sent to Siberia with her family as an infant when the Soviets first occupied Estonia, and it was a jar of milk from a stranger that kept her mother alive on the journey (EuroParl). This is an anecdote that Kallas uses often in interviews and public statements, drawing on her own familial experience with life in Estonia under Soviet occupation to demonstrate the degree to which Estonia's population maintains a grounded fear of Russian action - tied directly to a deep desire for independence and national identity. A summation of the attitude with which Kallas addresses the now widely-accepted notion that the rest of the world has long hesitated to heed Estonia's warnings about their neighbor reads as such:

> "So you could say we Estonians have some experience in being deported and fleeing wars. And we also have some experience with Russia, which we have been trying to share with the European Union since we joined. It was 78 years ago today when the Red Army bombed my home city Tallinn to the ground. But my mother, the same baby who took her first trip abroad to Siberia, always taught me that it was impolite to say I told you so" (EuroParl).

Kallas' stance on security is both direct and detailed. At the beginning of her speech, she directly relates the international (masculinized) issue of Ukrainian security to a domestic (feminized) Estonian experience. She does so in a way that calls out the international sphere for a long history of inaction in regards to Russia, potentially violating gender stereotypes in her directness, but follows with another cheeky anecdote from her mother - one she has used in multiple interviews since. This includes an interview with the New Statesman, in which this was her response to the direct question of whether the Ukrainian invasion constituted a twisted vindication (Cliffe, 2022). Kallas continues on to frame the Ukrainian crisis from a humanitarian perspective. She *initially* avoids direct mention of military deaths, troops, or the more masculinized aspects of international conflict, instead focusing on the domestic experience which she knows and sees:

> "Putin's war is an act of raw military aggression against an independent and sovereign country that wants nothing more than to fulfill its own European dream. The aim is to terrorize civilians. We have seen it before in Grozny, we have seen it in Aleppo. Kindergartens, hospitals, residential buildings are targeted, in contravention of international humanitarian law" (EuroParl).

Kallas could not have gained such a notable international reputation as a hard-hitting Iron Lady without addressing security, presumably breaking the standards of the double-bind and opening herself to criticism. When she does turn to security, she does it from the lens of the party and perspective that accompanied her and other women into power in her country:

> "Turning to defence. Our decisions of last week to use the European Peace Facility to assist Ukraine are but the first step toward strengthening our continental security. We must transform our deterrent posture into a defence plan.

I am mindful that not all European Members are NATO allies. When my father was leading the Estonian negotiations to join NATO, he was often asked 'why do you need this? Russia does not pose a threat anymore'. Well, we knew our neighbour then and we also know our neighbour now. I can only be grateful to the decision to join the defence alliance, but being part of the alliance also comes with obligations.

The 2% of GDP defence spending target must become an absolute minimum requirement. Estonia decided this already 10 years ago…

Let me say here clearly that as we strengthen European defence, we need to work hand-in-hand with NATO. Time after time we have agreed that a stronger Europe means a stronger NATO, just as a stronger NATO implies a stronger European defence. I look forward to a third joint declaration between the EU and NATO on the matter" (EuroParl).

This excerpt provides crucial insight into both the extent to which Estonian security has and continues to rest on the ability of NATO to uphold its commitment to effective collective defense, as well as Kallas' own direct rhetoric that emphasizes this point. Especially in addressing the fact that not all EU members are NATO allies *alongside* a reference to Estonia's knowledge of their neighbor from the very inception of their government, Kallas is appealing to the European Union to step up in terms of security - directly through NATO. She establishes that Estonia has a long-standing history of contributing 2% GDP to NATO, honing in on the fact that this has long constituted Estonia's most effective form of defense, while imploring members of the other most relevant neoliberal institution to uphold their vow to defense. Kallas is intentional in her support of a partnership between Estonia and NATO - she does not rest the entirety of Estonia's defense on NATO, but instead ties an Estonia that wishes to be stronger to a NATO in need of improvement. She does not violate gender stereotypes by seeming too violent or

hard-lined in her response, instead avoiding the effect of security-focused gender stereotypes on herself as the executive. She is hard-lined in her opposition of Russia, but the collaboration between herself and a masculinized institution is critical to working around stereotypes regarding security.

Kallas has continued this strategy over the course of her tenure since the invasion, giving multiple interviews in which she calls for a strengthened NATO, a more security-focused EU, and direct outcomes from the 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid (Martin, 2022; Cliffe, 2022; Tamkivi, 2022). A recent NATO publication both quotes Kallas and vindicates the Estonian perspective, citing her stance that "NATO's current posture would not be sufficient to repel a Russian attack, and that the Baltic states would have to rely on being 'liberated' by reinforcements from Germany, Poland and other European countries (Hurt, 2022). If Russia were to invade, Estonia does not have nearly the standing military force required to repel an attack. As such, the Baltics expect NATO to build on commitments made at the 2016 Warsaw Summit, and Kallas has been a strong voice in demanding this improvement for the sake of her country's security (Hurt, 2022).

In an interview with Invest in Estonia, Kallas doubles down, stating that "The bully [Russia] might want to bully you, but cannot do it if you have strong friends. That's why we have been following the principle from the 1990s that we will never be alone again. We have (strong) friends everywhere, we are in NATO and the EU, and we are stronger together." Additionally, when discussing her perceived success of the Madrid Summit, she said that "NATO has proven to be a successful defense alliance because being in NATO - no NATO country has ever been attacked. And I can totally understand those countries, because if we wouldn't be in NATO right now, we would be living through some really dark times, and we are not because we are in

NATO" (Martin, 2022). This stance tracks with the series of events at Madrid. Reports state that the "Baltics came in swinging", with Kallas requesting one brigade for each Baltic state, to be expanded to two later on. NATO responded by committing "to fulfilling Baltic expectations on reinforcements; the existing battalion-sized enhanced forward presence battlegroups will each be expanded to brigade-size. This aligns with Kallas' envisioned first step (Milevski, 2022). Kallas' statements are not empty words; policy action follows critique and high-set expectations.

Despite her growing domestic and international popularity, Kallas has faced her fair share of infighting and criticism, as the coalition she formed in 2021 fell apart in June of 2022. The Centre Party, whose electorate is largely made up of Russian-speakers living in Estonia, had experienced declining popularity as a result of the leading Reform Party's condemnation and pro-NATO rhetoric. While Centre has deviated from a previously pro-Moscow stance, their voter base drove a rift between governing parties, and Kallas was forced to resign before being asked to form a new coalition (Truc, 2022). Even in the wake of this collapse, Kallas made the priority of her new government clear: working with NATO to ensure Estonian security (Peseckyte, 2022). Her pro-NATO stance has not exempted her from criticism or stereotypes, but she has pressed on in this same vein with success.

In addressing Russia's war in Ukraine, one of the most widely-known security crises of the moment, Kallas offers a masterclass in rhetorical gender-bending (Genovese, 2013). Prior to Russia's invasion and the rise of the far-right, she did not need to address security - the status quo was clear, driven by her party, and widely accepted. When faced with an entirely new set of political circumstances, however, she has risen to the challenge on both a domestic and international level. She appeals to an Estonian national history that has long depended on the preservation of domestic national identity, citing her own experience with feminized

humanitarian concerns and emphasizing her commitment to Estonia as a nation. She continues to push for a stronger NATO, fulfilling her commitments to her nation's security, but is able to avoid damning gender stereotypes by doing so in a way that both affirms a strong Estonian identity and calls on other nations to take action. She does not escape the double-bind, but instead navigates a more contextual, organization-based version of the double-bind that demands her to balance the international with the domestic - the alliance with the nation. She must account for the feminine by reaffirming her national identity, but ultimately frees herself from critique by emphasizing her partnership with the masculine NATO. The response from the EKRE is what gives these choices context; it is largely the criticism leveled by the party that has shoved a wedge into the security consensus, forcing Kallas' hand in balancing nation and alliance.

EKRE's platform has long been a ramping up of action designed to increase domestic capability. The Baltic News Service reported in December of 2022 that the EKRE's new defense plan "calls for establishing an independent defense capability on a scale that must prevent a repeat of the country's occupation and a silent surrender", and that "the party considers it necessary to build up a national defense structure that enables military victory, in the place of the current so-called affordable national defense" (Baltic News Service, 2022). EKRE also criticized Kallas on Estonia's most recent independence day on February 24th, 2023, which happened to be the one year anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. NATO Chief Jens Stolenberg and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen were in attendance alongside Prime Minister Kallas at the annual military parade in Tallinn; all three leaders gave remarks voicing their support for Ukraine and Estonia's continued opposition to Russian militarism (Armstrong, 2023). For the partnership between the Estonian government and NATO, it was a gesture of solidarity and continued defense on behalf of all vulnerable post-Soviet territories. For the

far-right, it was an opportunity to signal that Kallas had sold out to the West, sacrificing Estonian identity for a broadly European/U.S. centric one (Deutsche Welle, 2023).

EKRE has long condemned a perceived lack of sovereignty in Estonia's membership in the EU and NATO, and has criticized Kallas' every move in her broad support of NATO and Ukraine. According to a Bloomberg piece, "EKRE has in turn accused Kallas of "warmongering" and supporting Ukraine at the expense of Estonian voters. Campaigning on the slogan "Let's Save Estonia," the party has demanded a halt to weapons deliveries and an influx of Ukrainian war refugees. It's also assailed the prime minister for Estonia's 19.4% inflation last year, among the highest in the EU" (Bloomberg, 2023). EKRE has also accused Kallas of leaving Estonia "defenseless" by sending weapons to Ukraine in conjunction with NATO (Bloomberg, 2023). It is within this context - the rise of Estonian nationalism alongside historical nationalistic gendered expectations, the persistence of the status quo in maintaining relations with NATO and the U.S., and the urgency and public attention to Russia's invasion - that Kallas must engage with security in a nuanced fashion, balancing Estonian identity and independence with critical, popular alliances. She must balance gendered criticism on security (and, interestingly, the masculine issue of finance) for the first time as a result of the concurrent invasion and rise of the far-right - a challenger to the consensus that NATO is a security guarantee.

Looking to Kallas' second round of elections in March of 2023, her fight was much different than the first time around; while security consensus made defense a relative non-issue in her first election, she needed to navigate the double-bind as security became an issue post-invasion. Speeches including and similar to the statements cited above became her campaign - her hard-lined stance on Russia and dedication to Estonia shone through, as she campaigned heavily on national security and economic issues including the rise of the cost of

living (both masculinized issues) (Duxbury, 2023; Tanner, 2023). Despite a hot contest with the

far-right, Kallas still emerged victorious, affirming the public's resonance with her balanced

messaging. Reform walked away with 32% of the overall vote, an increase from Kallas'

performance in 2019, while EKRE emerged with 16%, surpassing Centre's result of 15%

(Tanner, 2023). Clearly, the Estonian public at large supports Kallas' engagement with Western

institutions and alliances in her pursuit of protecting Estonia; the influence of NATO still seems

to have an impact on her perception as a leader, removing some of the burden of ultimate

decision-making and minimizing widespread gendered criticism. The far-right, in the context of

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, has changed this field substantially.

Kallas' public opinion has increased since the invasion (Figure 3), but EKRE has

capitalized on the active threat from Russia to condemn multilateral security efforts. While

EKRE still constitutes a small percentage of voter support, the security consensus has been

shaken by nationalistic rhetoric and double-bind centered criticism from the far-right. As the

security consensus is challenged, Kallas is faced with an altered double-bind. Within the confines

of this situation, she must balance her ability to appeal to nationalistic (and inherently gendered)

perceptions of domestic sovereignty, as well as the wishes of much of her constituency in regards

to NATO. In response to EKRE's criticism, she has noted that "we are now doing much more on

our own and with our allies to ensure our security. We have raised our defense spending to a

historically high level. The defense spending of Estonia in 2023 will exceed one billion euros

with 2.85 per cent of the GDP. In 2022, we allocated an additional, more than €1.2 billion, to

military defense" (Academy of Liberalism, 2023). Kallas has had to adjust her strategy to play

both sides of a security debate, rather than remaining in the position of being able to rely on a

consensus; she has even utilized this wording herself, stating that "consensus is key" in

reorganizing Estonia's security strategy. Despite having won her election in March, Kallas has still been "derided as a 'war princess'" throughout the conflict in Ukraine (Academy of Liberalism, 2023). Putting Kallas' own rhetoric in conversation with criticism from EKRE and other sources, it is clear that the security consensus is dissolving in Estonia due to both the public nature of the war in Ukraine and the influence of the far-right. As such, Kallas is susceptible to role incongruence and criticism of her policies and decision-making, in a way that did not emerge prior to the development of a changed ideological and geopolitical landscape.

Fortunately, Kallas has been ready and able to adjust to this changing landscape, but the results could be different for women in the future, especially as Kallas has been one of the names in circulation for the replacement of Stoltenberg as Secretary General of NATO. Should Kallas move on to a new position, how will the rise of the far-right and a challenge to the security consensus established via party politics in Estonia affect the rise of women to the executive? How will EKRE's influence in the new legislature affect Kallas' ability to conduct security policy, and will the influence of NATO as both a security guarantor and a stereotype shifter change alongside a more physical than perceived Russian threat?
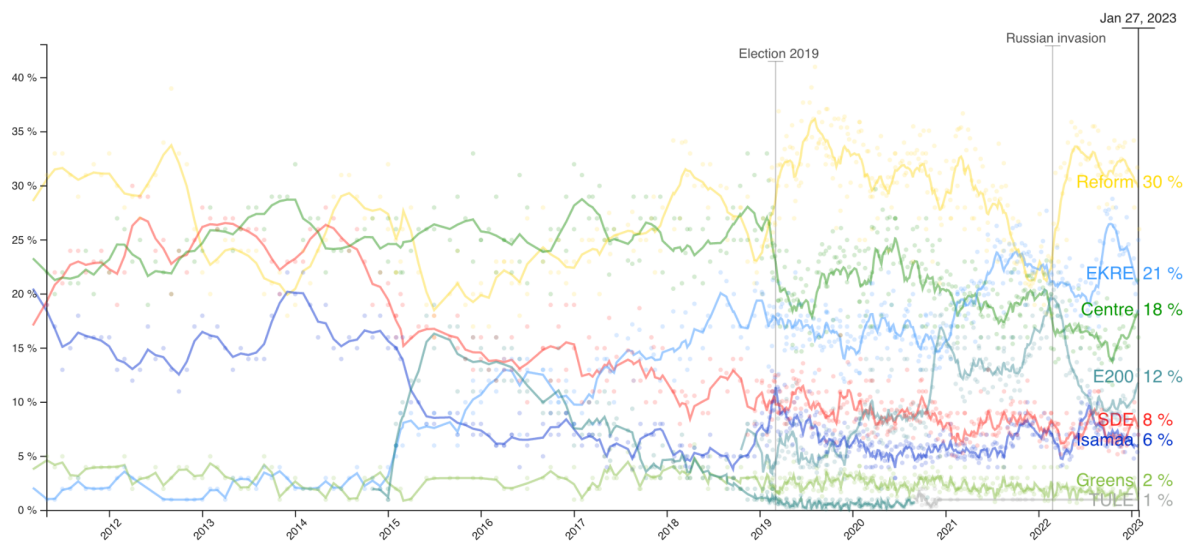
Figure 3. Estonian Public Opinion Polling by party, 2012-2023. Politico, 2023.

Case Study: Lithuania

Introduction and Background

"Down to Earth, unostentatious, and unassuming". These words, used to describe current Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte, also comment on the nature of Lithuanian affairs (Van Leeuwen, 2022). Taking power as Prime Minister in 2020, Simonyte's journey to the office was complicated - dissimilarly to Kallas, not because of a coalition deal, but because she had previously aspired to the office of the President. Having lost the Presidential election to Gitanas Nauseda in 2019, Simonyte maintained good relations with her opponent, going on to lead her party to parliamentary victory in 2020. Simonyte's presidential campaign did lean rhetorically on issues of security, but largely, her stances on foreign policy did not differ substantially from her opponents. Simonyte's failure in the presidential elections but widespread success in her pursuit of prime minister can be attributed to a very specific set of conditions in Lithuania, including the political pipeline, which critically includes former President Dalia Grybauskaite, the bureaucratic nature of security politics, and a long-established consensus among political parties and constituents alike that NATO membership is synonymous with guaranteed security. It is critical to note that, in contrast to Estonia, Lithuania's split of power between the President and Prime Minister has historically been that of foreign and domestic policy spheres, respectively, but I posit that this is not enough to explain the dynamics of Simonyte's rise to the Prime Ministership rather than the Presidency. Additionally, Simonyte's outward comments regarding foreign policy have contributed to a sense that her role in shaping security policy is still substantial, if lesser than that of her presidential counterpart.

After a period of twenty years of independence, Lithuania was invaded and occupied by Soviet forces in 1940 (Norkus and Ambrulevičiūtė, 2021). Led by the Sajudis independence movement, Lithuania proclaimed its independence from the USSR in 1990, becoming the first Soviet republic to do so (U.S. State Department, 2007). Being the first nation to declare independence and establish a provisional government, Lithuania is widely credited for initiating the collapse of the Soviet empire (Norkus and Ambrulevičiūtė, 2021). The intensity of the Lithuanian anti-communist movement and the hard-lined nature of the Soviet response prevented a purely peaceful transition, as the Red Army attacked the Vilnius TV tower in January 1991. The attack killed 14 civilians and injured 700 (U.S. State Department, 2007; Smidchens, 2016). Despite the Soviet crackdown, the "Singing Revolution" remained decidedly nonviolent, and avoiding a "civilian bloodbath", Soviet forces' efforts fizzled out as their government collapsed (Smidchens, 2016).

The newly established Lithuanian Parliament, the Seimas, spent the period of 1992-1995 adopting and implementing the new constitution. Lithuania is comprised of mostly ethnic Lithuanians, with a small Russian minority, and thus their efforts in terms of security have not formed around conceptions of internal threat. Despite this, however, Lithuania began their efforts to establish a framework of defense in opposition to Russian threat very early on in their independence (Gricius and Paulauskas, 2002; Urbelis, 2007). Similarly to Estonia, it has become the consensus over time within Lithuanian national policy that NATO is the most substantial guarantor of Lithuanian security (U.S. State Department, 2007). Despite this through-line between the two Baltic cases, the conditions of both the pipeline of women into positions of power, the powers of each executive office, and the nature of electoral rhetoric paints a slightly different picture for women executives in Lithuania.

Security Threat

In terms of security threat from Russia, Lithuania's situation provides a slight contrast from Estonia's geopolitical situation. While ethnic tensions have largely defined Estonian geopolitics, culminating in a substantial perceived threat from Russia's "one-world" policy and restrictive immigration laws, Lithuania is much more homogenous in terms of ethnic population. Constituting only 6% of the Lithuanian population (PEW Research), some ethnic Russians living in Lithuania do currently make up a group of separatists near the Russian territory of Kaliningrad, but their numbers are small. Druskininkai, a town of about 12,000, holds more geopolitical significance in the case of a potential invasion by Russia, as "the worry is that in a conflict with the West, Russia could sweep into the corridor simultaneously from the east and the west, severing the European Union's Baltic countries from their allies to the south" (Karnitschnig, 2022). These concerns are largely recent, however, and have arisen mostly in response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. These renewed fears have led to dialogue surrounding the role of the territory and the geographical implications of present-day invasion, but without substantive fears of the role of these separatists. Historically, Lithuania's perception of security threat from Russia arises from a history of Soviet occupation and influence throughout democratization, without the addition of significant ethnic tensions as exist in Estonia.

Urbelis (2007) comments extensively on the external nature of Lithuania's perceived threat from Russia, stating that at the nation's inception in the early 1990s, members of the Lithuanian government "thought that Russia would remain hostile and would try to re-establish its control over the Baltic States. The Western countries would support Lithuania but not sacrifice their vital interest for the sake of small Baltic countries" (Urbelis, 2007). Urbelis

continues on to note that "security debates and the perception of threats have been especially influenced by the period of almost fifty years of being part of the Soviet Union. It has been noted that the experience of Sovietization was to have a profound impact upon the security aspirations and perceptions of the emergent Baltic political elites in the late 1980s". Particularly, the USSR/Russian Federation has historically been perceived as "the main threat to their sovereignty and territorial integrity" (Urbelis, 2007).

Additionally, similarly to Estonia, large numbers of Soviet troops remained within Lithuania's borders after independence. The removal of these troops was a major foreign policy concern for the new government, and their removal was finally negotiated in 1993 (Urbelis, 2007). Thus, while Lithuanian security may be slightly less complicated in the context of ethnic tensions, including a minimization of initial tensions in the absence of controversial immigration policy (source)), Lithuanian historical memory has remained strong over time. The combination of memories of violent occupation and violent response to revolution have maintained Russia's status as the primary threat to Lithuanian security.

Gender Roles in Lithuania

Similarly to dynamics surrounding gender in Estonia, the study of women and feminism in Lithuania is both young and controversial. Beginning with the Soviet context, gender roles were also "equalized" by law - therefore, any conversation or debates surrounding gender dynamics constituted anti-party rhetoric until the imposition of glasnost under Gorbachev. The consequences of a lack of these conversations very much resulted in a "bottling up" of conservative values and sexism in Lithuanian gender dynamics. As Gruodis asserts in a 1993 piece commenting on the state of women's studies in Lithuania:

"After half a century of alleged equality it has suddenly become clear that, according to popular opinion, politics is not for women (the percentage of women in the Lithuanian Parliament dropped from 12 to 8 percent in the October 1992 elections); that women are ill suited for most prestigious professions (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has an open policy of not even considering women for the diplomatic corps), are poorly paid for the jobs they have, and are the first to lose their jobs; and that deep in their hearts the majority of both men and women in Lithuania feel that women's proper place is in the home" (175).

This resurgence of conservative values post-liberation establishes the stereotypes that still affect Lithuania today, especially in the sense that there is a very similar attitude towards Western feminism as exists in Estonia. The shaping of gender awareness in the West, having been shaped largely by movements surrounding individual freedoms, holds a completely different connotation and purpose than what gendered dynamics arise in Lithuania. Rather than being shaped by conceptions of individual liberation, Lithuania's priorities rest in the national liberation from Soviet oppression (Gruodis, 1993). The nation superseding the individual as a means of national survival is integral to Lithuanian identity, as is the case in Estonia as well. There is very much the same tie of women to the home in a nationalistic sense; when prompted, a young Lithuanian woman asked: "'I would like to know how to resolve the conflict between [women's role in the] family and society, that is, how is a woman to be a good mother and at the same time have some kind of occupation in society, in such a way that she would not neglect her responsibilities to either one?'" (Gruodis, 1993; 179). Societal perception of women is not necessarily that their roles are solely due to a kind of natural order - while this perception remains, it is compounded by the sense that women's identities as homemakers and childrearers are tied explicitly to the

state and the survival of the Lithuanian nation. This ties not only to Enloe's discussion of women

and nationalism (Enloe, 2013), but also to the conception of women's identities being tied to the

prevention of an imperial threat. In the context of security threat, the fact that the role of women

is so integral to nationalism and independence movements entrenches stereotypes, while driving

a wedge between Western feminism and Lithuanian experience. The cultural difference is plain,

and establishes a field of stereotypes that cannot be fully fleshed out through the lens of

traditional, Western ideas of feminism and women's liberation (Gruodis, 1993).

In terms of the effects of this gendered dynamic on politics, Budryte (2010) engages in an

analysis of women's effect on national historic memory by studying former women deportees

who were members of the Seimas - the Lithuanian legislature - from 2004-2008, who were

re-elected for a second term (Vincé Vaidevuté Margevičiené and Vida Marija Cigrejiené of the

ruling Homeland Union- Christian Democrat coalition, and Dalia Teišerskyté of the Liberals).

Described as "agents of memory", these women have brought their individual trauma to the

forefront of their political activism, substantially influencing national historical memory (2010).

Budryte states that in the context of Baltic collective trauma, a focus on women's stories of

deportation and repression can directly associate women with the collective state - that "women

are strategically positioned as carriers of the collective's honor and shame" while "embody[ing]

and symboliz[ing] the collective and carry[ing] greater responsibility for transgressing group

boundaries, both symbolically and materially" (Budryte 2010, 336). As Budryte ultimately

concludes, women's experience as deportees, or representations of collective trauma, often

becomes integral to their political identity, even more so than their gender. The women Budryte

interviewed specifically downplayed the role of gender in politics, instead focusing on their

stories as a form of empowerment and connection to national liberation. In this sense, what

makes Lithuanian (or more generally, Baltic) gender dynamics operate uniquely in political practice is the pre-existing prioritization of the independent state over gender identity, seen as individual. Women in particular, beholden to the collective and to the survival of the state in the face of imperial (Russian) threat, often draw upon their connections to this national identity when establishing their own. Due to the impact not only of stereotypes, but of cultural difference, the woman and the nation are irrevocably linked, and as politicians, often continually reassure their constituents of their commitment to the state via feminized experiences with national trauma (family relations, deaths of children, etc.) in order to affirm their gender roles and gendered commitment to cultural preservation (Budryte, 2010). This not only affirms Prime Minister Kallas' rhetorical use of familial ties to national identity and collective memory, but establishes a firm link between Lithuanian (and broadly post-Soviet) women and the roles they are expected to play in a post-colonial space, especially while the imperial successor state remains a threat. I posit that this intentional drawing upon of collective memory by women politicians works in overdrive, especially in comparison to male politicians - women tie themselves to the nation in order to affirm their security priorities, but also to reaffirm their identity as women, associated with the collective state rather than pursuit of individual power.

Political Pipeline and Development of Defense Policy

The development of defense policy in Lithuania is straightforward in that it outlines a quick progression towards and maintenance of political consensus in regards to security, particularly considering NATO as a source of defense. Lithuanian women politicians played a major role in this process, but even more so than Estonia, the influence of NATO as a security guarantee contributed heavily to the focus of the nation on domestic political issues -

particularly, in times when the security crisis is more perceived or historical rather than characterized by active military mobilization.

Beginning with the process of Lithuanian democratization and state-building in 1991-1992, the provisional government faced difficulty in developing a military framework. None of the Baltic states had standing militaries prior to independence, and thus Lithuania faced a challenge in developing security capabilities "from scratch" rather than engaging in reform efforts (Gricius and Paulauskas, 2002). The constitution establishes the shared duties of the Seimas, led by the Prime Minister, and the President/Cabinet in ensuring security. Duties afforded to the Seimas included the ability to impose martial law, declare mobilization, and to decide on the use of the armed forces for the defense of the homeland against external threats or for the implementation of international commitments. The State Defense Council, consisting of the President, the Prime Minister, the Chairman of the Parliament (Seimas), the Minister of National Defense, and the Commander of the Armed Forces are ultimately responsible for all major defense decisions, and Article 140 of the Constitution "clearly and unambiguously establishes the direct accountability of the government, the Minister of National Defense, and the Commander of Armed Forces to the parliament for the management of the armed forces of Lithuania" (Gricius and Paulauskas, 2002). In practice, particularly in modern day, the President is perceived as having more power over military and foreign policy than the Prime Minister, although the Prime Minister still maintains security responsibilities. According to the 2020 Freedom House report, Lithuania's Prime Minister maintains central executive authority. Thus, when discussing Lithuanian executives' influence on security, this study acknowledges the central differences between Estonia and Lithuania's executive structures - Prime Minister Kallas has more perceived authority over security than Prime Minister Simonyte. For this reason, a

section is given to the discussion of security in regards to former Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaite, but as this paper goes on to establish, Simonyte still engages with and has a responsibility to uphold security in terms of both policy and rhetoric.

After an initial effort by the Supreme Council to establish a framework for defense and accountability, security in Lithuania remained relatively vague in nature, with the Sixth Seimas (1992-1996) focusing largely on economic policy (Seimas Archive, 2023). In 1996, the Seventh Seimas (1996-2000) passed the Law on the Basics of National Security, beginning a series of legislative actions that moved the Seimas gradually towards NATO and EU ascension (Gricius and Paulauskas, 2002). Despite the admittedly "basic" nature of this policy, which established governmental responsibility for domestic security functions, Jusys and Sadauskas wrote in 1996:

> "The embrace of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization ("NATO") and the European Union ("EU" or "European Union")... are the unchallenged top priorities and ultimate goals of sovereign Lithuania. Irrespective of what political parties and personalities ruled the independent state, Lithuania has continuously declared these goals, and eagerly anticipates the launch of negotiations with the European Union, most likely in early 1998. It would be hard to find a country that has a more genuine desire, or a more eager readiness, to enter NATO and the European Union than Lithuania" (1639).

This short excerpt capitalizes on two major pieces of Lithuanian security perspective in the mid-1990s: first, that the nation decided strikingly early in their state building process that NATO and the EU, or Western integration as a whole, would be the top priority of new policy. Russian troops had only recently exited the nation's borders, and already, Lithuania was pushing towards ascension. Secondly, and most notably, every political party and leader was in support of NATO membership as a guarantee of security. Quotes from elites at the time support a

"common-sense" conception of alliance-based security; "Lithuanian officials have been repeatedly asked by non-Lithuanian citizens, especially current members of the Commonwealth of Independent States ("CIS"), about Lithuania's motivation for membership in NATO. Most of these questions are often colored with undisguised dissent or, at least, a cool attitude" (Jusys and Sadauskas, 1996; 1640). To paraphrase this reasoning, a history of invasion and the recent Russian extraction created an intense desire for security and sovereignty in the new Lithuanian nation. Lithuanians saw Western integration through inclusion in international organizations and alliances as "the best way to secure Lithuanian statehood, proceed with reforms, and make our own contribution to the building of a new Europe… instead of passively observing the transition of the continent as an outsider" (Jusys and Sadauskas, 1996; 1640). Glylys corroborates these priorities, stating that "membership in NATO continues to be Lithuania's major security objective" (1996, #). Additionally, the Lithuanian Mission to NATO was established in August of 1997, indicating an early commitment to collective security (Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

Thus, it becomes clear when examining Lithuania's process of statebuilding that Western integration, specifically through NATO and the EU, was universally understood within government at the nation's inception, beginning with the first and second official Parliaments post-independence. Lithuania continued to push forward pro-NATO policy at the turn of the century, culminating in the 2000 Military Defense Strategy, which "established democratic civilian control of the LAF as one of four fundamental principles of Lithuanian defense policy, along with deterrence, total and unconditional defense, and *Euro-Atlantic solidarity with regard to collective defense"* (Gricius and Paulauskas, 2002).

Throughout this time period, the population of women MPs in the Seimas began to rise, jumping from 11 women members in 1998 to 18 from 1999-2002 (Figure 2). While specific information as to the number of women in each political party is not available, these women did align with the rest of the Seimas in pursuing a pro-NATO security policy, and many of those who rose to leadership positions were active in crafting security policy. For example, Rasa Jukneviciene became Deputy Chairman of the Seimas in 1999. She concurrently served on the Committee on National Security and Defense, the Commission of NATO Affairs, and as the Head of the Seimas Delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (Seimas Archive). Jukneviciene would go on to serve as Lithuania's Minister of Defense in 2008, the first and only woman to do so. Milda Petrauskiene and Romualda Kšanienė, among other women MPs, would also serve on the Committee on National Security and Defense from 2004-2008, and Vilija Verteliene and Roma Žakaitiene served on the Commission of NATO Affairs throughout the same term (Seimas Archive).

The trajectory of women in the Seimas relates to my hypothesis regarding the political pipeline, in that across time, the number of women within the Seimas increases the likelihood of women being elected to higher positions of power. Unlike in Estonia, party politics and platforms had very little to do with women's rise to power in Lithuania because all parties were on the same page in regards to security policy. Rather, a widespread consensus on security across parties better characterizes the nature of women's involvement in defense policy. Women contributed to the development of and engagement in pro-NATO security policy as members of the Seimas, but did so largely as a consequence of homogenous opinion within the legislative body. Women MPs supported NATO, but this stance was not more common among women. Women did, however, did serve in high level capacities on security committees and as leaders

within the body related to their security experience. Similarly to Estonia, there are no national gender quotas in Lithuania that would suggest an influence on this progression - only one party, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) utilizes gender quotas (Gender Quotas Database, 2022). Additionally, while gender mainstreaming has occurred in Lithuania, there is no parliamentary body that directly addresses issues of gender beyond a general Human Rights Committee, and there is no women's caucus within the Seimas (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022).

The concept of a consensus on security is crucial to the development of Lithuania's security policy over the last several decades, and consequently, the higher likelihood of womens' election to the executive. Urbelis contributes to this conversation alongside Jusys and Sadauskas, stating in 2007 that "Political consensus remains, until now, the dominant feature of the Lithuanian security discourse" (197). All major Lithuanian political parties signed a 2001 agreement on the Lithuanian defense policy, which was renewed in 2004. In the same year, the U.S. State Department published a briefing that reads as follows:

> "Lithuania, a relatively new member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), fully endorses the concept of "collective defense." National policy recognizes the primacy of NATO as the **guarantor of security** in Europe. The goal of Lithuania's defense policy is to create a military that can contribute to international missions through the NATO alliance, the UN, and other groups, and to continue to integrate Lithuania into Western defense structures (State Dept, 2007).

Urbelis continues his discussion of security consensus in Lithuania by discussing public opinion alongside that of political elites and parties, noting specifically that "The public opinion polls show that the general public agrees also with major security and defense policy objectives. Such a broad consensus could be explained by the prevailing elitism of security and defense discourse.

In Lithuania, security and defense remain 'high politics' that rarely draws the attention of the general public" (Urbelis, 2007; 197). This very much mirrors the state of Estonian politics today, referencing the current electoral practice of keeping security and international affairs out of electoral processes; in Lithuania, this culture is both similar and perhaps more cemented, leading Urbelis to assert that "the disappearance of major military threats or aggression by force allowed Lithuanian citizens to concentrate on other issues rather than defense" (2007, 197). Public opinion on the matter depended both on whether there was an active NATO military engagement (i.e., a dip in support for NATO during the Kosovo crisis), and the governments' ability to easily boost public opinion due to general disinterest in security (Urbelis, 2007). Urbelis doubles down on this assertion by utilizing public opinion, stating that "According to public opinion polls from 23 categories of interest, defence occupies only 22 place" (197). Gricius and Paulauskas add to this vision of public perception, noting that Lithuanian NGOs and government actions contributed to a favorable attitude towards security institutions, and that "two-thirds of the population support[ed] Lithuania's NATO membership bid" at the time (2002; 46).

By the time NATO accepted Lithuania's membership bid in 2004, the body was largely cemented as a perceived guarantor of Lithuanian security. The pipeline of women in the Seimas would increase throughout the process of and directly after accession, especially as women began to occupy important positions within security policy-making and implementation. The documented consensus around NATO (and, more broadly, Western integration) as the keystone of maintaining sovereignty continued to strengthen due to the public's general disinterest in security policy; despite an ongoing security crisis, the public and their legislators were largely unified in their support of NATO and a desire to disassociate from Eastern/Soviet identity (Jusys and Sadauskas, 1996; Urbelis, 2007). NATO's presence allowed Lithuania to focus on other

domestic issues rather than the looming security threat, which not only allowed for greater

domestic growth, but eliminated the security aspect of the double-bind for aspiring women

leaders. Public opinion surrounding NATO was positive, and NATO remained a U.S.-led,

masculinized guarantor of Lithuanian security; women did not need to prove their competence in

security to succeed in Lithuania. Rather, they joined the ranks of a legislature that was without

debate on the matter. Lithuanian cooperation with NATO would continue from 2004-2008; the

nation joined other allies in providing support to the U.S. in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2005, and

actively participated in each NATO Summit (Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

　　　In terms of perceived security threat, there is limited polling at the time of NATO

accession that would directly suggest a causal relationship between Russian security threat and

pursuit of NATO membership. Perhaps, an alternative explanation would involve NATO

accession simply as a symptom of broader Westernization, and this may very well be the case; I

posit, however, several key points in response to this possibility. First and foremost, while

Lithuania is larger than Estonia, a population of 2.8 million (World Bank, 2023) does not lend

itself to an independently sufficient domestic defense force; NATO forces are key to Lithuanian

defense, and have been in accordance with policy and perception. Secondly, modern polling

suggests that Lithuanians do see Russia as the primary threat to sovereignty, as studies indicate

that Lithuanians felt a heightened sense of insecurity following Russia's invasion of Crimea

(Gečienė-Janulionė, 2018; Janušauskienė, 2019). Gečienė-Janulionė's study did indicate that,

two years removed from the Crimean annexation, Lithuanians felt substantially more "safe than

unsafe", reaffirming the historical trajectory of Lithuanian security threat perception depending

on the existence of an active threat; a minimized geographical proximity could provide an

explanation for this phenomenon. Most importantly, however, the intent behind Lithuania joining

NATO is ultimately less important than the effects. Whether Lithuania joined NATO because of security threat or Westernization, the result of a security consensus and a firm, status quo collaboration between Lithuania, NATO, and the U.S. has affected and will continue to influence gender stereotypes on women leaders. A lack of interest in security from the general population, compounded by a solid agreement from policy-makers on the matter functionally eliminates security from electoral contest and critiques of women maintaining power - so long as they maintain this status quo. This brings this study to a key chronological point in both the pipeline of women leaders in Lithuania and the development of NATO as a source of security: the election of President Dalia Grybauskaite.

Dalia Grybauskaite, Iron Lady

Elected in 2009 as the first and only woman to serve as President of Lithuania, Dalia Grybauskaite's strong anti-Russian platform and series of hard-lined foreign policy decisions earned her the title of "Iron Lady". A former minister of finance (current Prime Minister Simonyte became renowned for her time in the same position), Grybauskaite's first campaign was not necessarily one of note despite the historic nature of her election. Park (2016) notes that the 2009 Lithuanian Presidential election was "the dullest since the office of the president was re-established", and that Grybauskaite stood out as the only one of seven candidates that was of "presidential caliber". Most importantly, in the context of both Lithuanian security consensus and the 2008-2009 financial crisis, voters were largely focused on domestic economic policy rather than foreign policy and security. While finance is still a masculinized issue area, Grybauskaite distanced herself from the ex-communist party and ran as an independent, emphasizing her financial expertise, or established qualifications that would lend themselves to success within the confines of the double-bind (Park, 2016). The manner of Grybauskaite's election aligns closely

with the nature of the political pipeline and security consensus in Lithuania; the de-emphasis of security within Lithuanian politics alongside a financial crisis led to a focus on domestic politics, opening the door for Grybauskaite's presidency.

Despite this emphasis during the campaign cycle, Grybauskaite's time in office marked a notable shift towards a focus on security - as well as a run-in with the effects of the political double-bind. Immediately after her election, Grybauskaite signaled that her foreign policy would be notably different from that of her predecessor, Valdas Adamkus. Adamkus' foreign policy rested directly along the lines of the security consensus - open support for the U.S. and NATO, as well as positive relations and democracy-building within the region. Grybauskaite, however, made it clear that "Russia-phobic tendencies would be terminated", and that Adamkus' policy of "befriending beggars" - such as Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova - would be "re-evaluated" (Park, 2016). Grybauskaite quickly turned towards an EU-centric foreign policy, becoming the first Lithuanian president to assert that the U.S. and NATO would not be the center of Lithuanian foreign policy (Park, 2016). Relations with the U.S. began to decline within a year, as Grybauskaite both criticized New START and declined an invitation from President Obama to a 2010 dinner with Central European heads of state. Criticism of Grybauskaite came quickly:

> "Even the international media thought that such behavior '[c]oming from a country roughly one-hundredth America's size, […] showed a startling self-confidence, even by Lithuanian standards.' It was not the country, but rather Grybauskaite, who was demonstrating such self-confidence… Some analysts even claimed that her actions signaled that Lithuania's loyalty to the U.S. was being replaced by loyalty to Brussels" (Park, 2016).

Grybauskaite's continuation of direct, assertive policy towards the U.S. and NATO continued throughout much of her first term. In a 2011 interview, she stated that "you have to be a strict and loud partner if you want to be heard in the conversation" (Park, 2016). Moving into 2012 and 2013, she repeatedly took credit for U.S. and NATO foreign policy moves that favored the Baltic states. Her heavy criticism and "self-confidence angered the White House, but it also suggested that she overestimated her influence on great power politics" (Park, 2016). Not only did Grybauskaite's aggressive foreign policy threaten Lithuania's relationship with a key security partner, but it opened the president to a slew of criticism domestically:

> "[Grybauskaite] has been characterized as controlling and arrogant, while also being criticized for caring more about poll ratings than presenting concrete initiatives and a coherent vision. Moreover, she has faced criticism for foreign policy mistakes and for losing strategic partners in neighboring countries" (Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė, 2014).

By April of 2012, public opinion polling showed that only 27.1% of Lithuanians responded that Grybauskaite "best represented their interests" (15 Min EN, 2012). Additionally, according to Park (2016), "given the pattern that was established from 2009-2013, it was doubtful that Grybauskaite would change her style, rhetoric, or views about the U.S. and NATO or that the U.S.-Lithuania relationship would become cordial any time soon". This created a major issue for both Lithuanian security and for Grybauskaite's perception as a leader - however, this would soon change with Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014.

While many Lithuanians did not initially mind Grybauskaite's assertive leadership style (Park, 2016), the re-aggravation of the Russian security threat would force the president to change her tune. Upon Russia's invasion, "fears [were] growing that Russia will try to destabilize the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia - all members of NATO and the European

Union - which have small armed forces and Russian speaking minorities" (Reuters, 2014). This also aligns with existing literature that suggests the substantial increase in perception of security threat in Lithuania when there is active military aggression by Russia (Gečienė-Janulionė, 2018; Janušauskienė, 2019). According to Park (2016), Grybauskaite began to understand that Lithuania's small military could not withstand a Russian invasion without U.S. and NATO support (widely understood to be synonymous), and was forced to make a "u-turn" in regards to her "anti-American predisposition". She quickly changed her policy on defense, advocating for more spending, and began to strongly oppose Russia and President Putin, reverting to policy much closer to that of her predecessor. Park (2016) makes a critical point when applying this development to the function of the double-bind and the security guarantee in Lithuania:

> "Grybauskaite's criticism of Russia put her in a stronger political position, and her approval ratings spiked to new highs. Given new geopolitical realities, the anti-Russia platform proved to be indispensable for her re-election in 2014. Ironically, a president who came to power promising to "liberate" Lithuania from its dependence on the U.S. and NATO now finds that her close relationship with them is **key to her political success and Lithuania's security**".

As Park notes, after a bold switch to pro-NATO and pro-U.S. foreign policy, Grybauskaite became the first Lithuanian president to win a consecutive second term (Reuters, 2014). She did so on an anti-Russia policy, emphasizing support of the U.S. and NATO, but in a way that once again aligned with the historical Lithuanian consensus on security (and, notably, within the 2014 window that the Crimean invasion was still active). Thus, due to Grybauskaite falling into line with universally supported security policy, the door opened for yet another election defined by domestic issues despite a much more active security threat. Hot topics

included domestic as well as EU-related issues, and while Grybauskaite faced a much more packed field in her second election, she was still successful, winning 57.9% of the vote (Reuters, 2014). Grybauskaite's second term was thus defined by open cooperation with the U.S. and NATO, both in the wake of Crimea and as a result of much higher approval ratings with this kind of tried and true foreign policy (Park, 2016).

Grybauskaite's experience as president of Lithuania is crucial to understanding the critical nature of NATO to the functioning of the double-bind. According to double-bind literature, Grybauskaite would face extra pressure in regards to her security decisions, suggesting that she would need to be more aggressive and hawkish on an individual country level in order to qualify herself as a competent decision-maker. While she did face a slew of gendered criticism regarding her more confident (or masculine) approach to security and foreign policy, as would be expected, the majority of the pressure on Grybauskaite was not to take aggressive action, but rather to follow a set status quo and defer largely to the power of NATO and the U.S. The most important aspect of Grybauskaite's role, as perceived by the Lithuanian public, was not to engage in a detailed series of individual security decisions. Rather, her most important contribution to Lithuanian security in the face of an active threat was improving and maintaining relations with the U.S. and NATO, her masculinized security guarantors. Lithuanian leaders are not forced to prove security competency to the same degree as other nations when security decisions have become normalized, unified, and largely detached from any varying opinions of the electorate. By following the trajectory of 20 years of pro-NATO security policy, Grybauskaite was able to "export" the expertise that many other women leaders are expected to demonstrate - in fact, her attempt to develop this expertise was widely condemned. NATO became the masculine leader needed to satisfy security concerns, and this allowed Lithuanian citizens to continue their

electoral focus on domestic issues. This directly opened the door for higher ratings and re-election for Grybauskaite upon her decision to return to the status quo; her support of the U.S. and NATO allowed her to work within an altered double-bind, becoming successful not only by standards for women, but by all standards for Lithuanian politicians. The effects of her decision-making not only cemented the NATO security guarantee in Lithuania, but set a unique set of conditions for Ingrida Simonyte's slightly unconventional rise to the executive.

The Pitfalls and Successes of Ingrida Simonyte

In 2019, Ingrida Simonyte ran for President of Lithuania and lost. In examining the facts surrounding this election, however, several factors emerge: firstly, that the security consensus remained consistent in the race to replace President Grybauskaite, and secondly, that gender and security may have had little to do with Simonyte's loss. In fact, gender and security more likely had a positive effect on her performance in the 2020 parliamentary elections, in which she led the Homeland Union to victory and became Lithuania's second female Prime Minister.

The three main candidates in the 2019 presidential elections were incumbent Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis, economist Gitanas Nausedas, and member of the Homeland Union Ingrida Simonyte. Skvernelis, a member of the then-ruling Farmers and Greens Party, had been widely criticized for his inability to reach across party lines (Reuters, 2019). Nausedas was a newcomer to politics, and Simonyte was known for her role as finance minister in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, in which the Lithuanian economy shrank by 15% (EuroNews, 2019; VanLeeuwen, 2022). Despite the relative success of her tenure in restoring the Lithuanian economy, Simonyte's two major sources of dissent were her experience and her party ties. Her cuts to citizen pensions during the crisis stirred much controversy (Gotev, 2019). Additionally, Lithuania has a long political tradition of electing independent presidents who can "rise above"

the fray of party politics, as political parties are generally distrusted institutions among voters (Gotev, 2019; Matamoros, 2019). Thus, after Skvernelis conceded defeat during the first round of voting, the door was opened for a politically "uncorrupted", independent Nausedas to win in a run-off against Simonyte (Gotev, 2019; Reuters, 2019; Matamoros, 2019). Nausedas would take 72% of the vote, while Simonyte took 28% in the runoff election (Reuters, 2019). Ultimately, analysts attributed Simonyte's loss not to any lapse in policy, but to Nauseda's ability to market himself as the "catch-all candidate", appealing to a wider base of voters (Matamoros, 2019). However, given the reasoning for Simonyte's loss, the outcome of the presidential election matters far less than the actual campaign that each candidate ran, which would set the stage for Simonyte's election to the Prime Ministership.

Much like the past cycles, the 2019 presidential elections were largely dominated by domestic politics, including "economic and social issues" (Welscher and Chalupa, 2019), as well as "voter anger over economic inequality and corruption" (Radio Free Europe, 2019). This reality emerged despite the fact that the Lithuanian president deals more heavily with foreign policy than domestic issues, yet neither Simonyte or Nauseda shied away from sharing their stances on security. Interestingly enough, their platforms were largely the same. Both remained largely committed to the status quo established by Grybauskaite in her second term, as Gotev reports:

> "The policy that Grybauskaite helped establish during her two-term, 10-year tenure, as a
> firm cornerstone of Lithuania's position in Europe will remain virtually unchanged,
> leading candidates have said. Simonyte and Nauseda are close to one another on
> boosting Lithuania's defence capabilities and share a positive view of the EU, even if
> some scepticism on further integration is voiced. Domestically, the contenders - despite

being seen as close or at least favourable to business - vow to improve social security

policies" (Gotev, 2019).

In televised debates, both of the candidates openly and strongly supported both EU and NATO

membership (Welscher and Chalupa, 2019), and in her presentation of her official presidential

platform, Simonyte "said NATO is the main guarantor of Lithuanian security, while Poland

remains an important partner" (LRT, 2019). Simonyte also noted an intention to "strengthen

immunity to informational and cultural influences coming from the East, but also to pay attention

to ethnic minorities" (LRT, 2019). In these statements, Simonyte encapsulates the continued

nature of simultaneous security threat and consensus, signaling her understanding of common

Lithuanian security concerns and her intention to remain true to the policy status quo set by

Grybauskaite. Nauseda remained on similar footing, advocating for "strengthening relations with

Poland in the trade, economic, energy and socio-cultural sphere in order to reduce dependence on

Russia", while also arguing that "Lithuania's position in NATO should be strengthened, and more

broadly remain[ing] a pro-Western candidate" (Business Monitor Online, 2019). It is also

important to note that, in contrast to Estonia, Lithuanians issued a collective dissent towards

populism sweeping the European continent by choosing two pro-EU candidates (Gotev, 2019).

This highlights a major difference between Estonia and Lithuania: without a far-right party to

challenge the security consensus, the status-quo remains in place and available for presidential

candidates. The reasoning behind the absence of a far-right challenger relates directly to the

differing ethnic makeup of Lithuania:

"Ethnic minorities account for only a few percent of the population of this homogeneous

state, are clearly concentrated in specific cities and regions, and are much better

integrated with the Lithuanian majority, so the narrative blaming them entirely for

Lithuania's internal problems never had any real chance of success after 1991"

(Kulbaczewska-Figat, 2020).

It remains clear that while Simonyte did not win the presidential election, there is not substantial evidence that she lost due to the effects of the double-bind. A situational particularity of Lithuanian politics favoring apolitical candidates played a much stronger role in her loss, which still maintains evidence for the effect of security consensus on the double-bind in Lithuania. Seeing as there was no functional difference in foreign and security policy between the two centre-right candidates (Gotev, 2019), there is an argument to be made that Simonyte fell into the trap of the double-bind - that despite her qualifications, role incongruence in regards to security on account of her gender may have been a factor. When considering the effects of the security consensus, however, and the agreement among analysts and historical literature that security was not a major issue in the 2019 presidential elections, I maintain that Simonyte did not lose due to any lapse in security policy or inability to overcome role incongruence. Public opinion polling in Lithuania also supports this claim, as PEW Research (2020) found that 77% of Lithuanians held a favorable view of NATO in 2019 (up from 59% in 2009). The status quo was still working for the Lithuanian public. Security was not a factor - nor would it play a large role in her resulting parliamentary success.
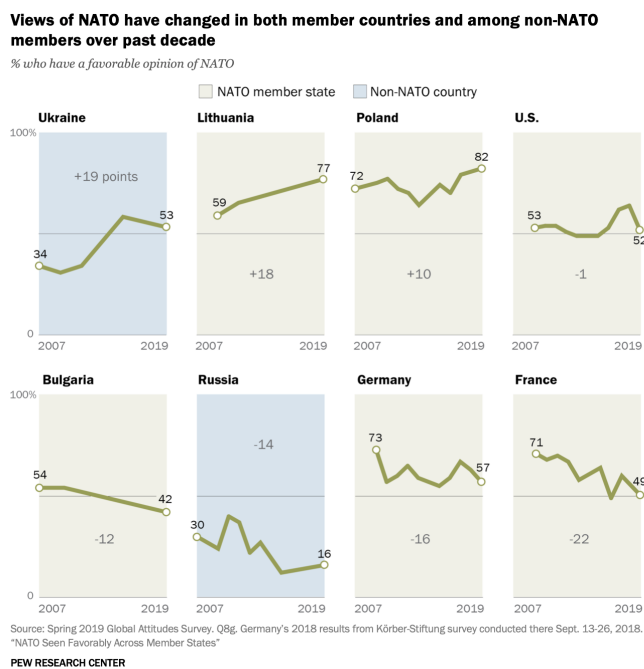

Figure 4. Views of NATO among member and non-member countries. PEW Research, 2020

In a 2019 news article, AFP quotes 42-year-old Lithuanian taxi driver Laurynas Mazuolis: "Simonyte has a human face. She isn't talking through her hat" (Gotev, 2019). This perception of Simonyte encapsulates much of her popularity among Lithuanian voters. Simonyte is socially liberal, a former financial expert, an academic, a supporter of same-sex partnerships in a predominantly Catholic nation, a known Metallica fan, widely popular on social media, and commands great appeal for younger voters despite her membership in the conservative party (Gotev, 2019; others). In the 2020 parliamentary elections, these are just a few of the attributes of her campaign that voters were able to focus on rather than her gender in relation to her stance on security. The result? Simonyte's Homeland Union won 25.7% of the seats, with the Farmers and the Greens winning 18.1%. The Labor Party won 9.8%, the Social Democratic party won 9.6%, the Freedom Party won 9.5%, the Liberal Movement won 7%, and several other parties filled in the final seats.

Issues in the 2020 election were largely overshadowed by COVID-19, an area in which the ruling government was criticized for a lackluster response. Simonyte led this charge, once again in a race against Skvernelis, coming down hard on the former Prime Minister for his response to the public health crisis. In regards to COVID-19, many voters saw Simonyte's experience as finance minister during the economic crisis as an asset, with AFP quoting a 33-year-old Lithuanian woman as saying "I believe she would deal with the situation better than current authorities, due to her values and critical thinking. She is tough but also seeks dialogue" (Newstex Blogs International Business Times Australia, 2020). Simonyte spent the campaign pledging to "accelerate the economy's modernisation from a cheap labor model to higher-value manufacturing", emphasizing her financial crisis management skills in the context of COVID-19's broader economic implications. Skvernelis was more popular with rural and

low-income voters, campaigning on promises of reducing income inequality and increasing pensions for the elderly. Once again, according to Estonian and international media:

> "All major parties share a pro-EU and NATO platform, and they all back Vilnius's drive to rally support within the EU for neighboring Belarus's democratic opposition after the disputed presidential election there. "Only minor adjustments and tweaks are likely in EU and foreign policy, as there is broad and solid consensus concerning its main guidelines," Vilnius university professor Kestutis Girnius told AFP" (Newstex Blogs International Business Times Australia, 2020).

Given the nature of the election between the two main contenders for Prime Minister, as well as the established principle of maintaining the security status quo & the domestic emphasis of the Seimas, the conditions of the 2020 parliamentary elections were particularly opportune for Simonyte to secure victory. Her expertise and established political & financial experience, which had been disadvantageous during the presidential election, appealed to voters in the context of more party-based politics and the COVID-19 crisis; unconcerned with security, voters focused on the domestic issues that mattered most to them, ultimately choosing Simonyte without the pressure of role incongruence. The weight of the double-bind lessened for other women leaders as well. Simonyte was immediately able to form a coalition with the Liberal Movement and the Freedom Party, led by Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen and Aušrinė Armonaitė. The Prime Minister is in good company, at the helm of an all-female led coalition (BNS, 2020).

My hypothesis certainly holds water when examining Lithuania. NATO's established influence allows Lithuania to "export" many of the pressures of physical and symbolic security, focusing on domestic issues that are far less likely to implicate women leaders in the effects of the double-bind. Dalia Grybauskaite's experience with mass criticism upon breaking this status

quo demonstrates clearly that women leaders are not immune to stereotypes - in fact, their ability

to avoid gender-based role incongruence in terms of security rests upon their maintenance of

established positive relations with the U.S. and NATO. Public opinion also strongly supports the

perception that the U.S. and NATO are the true guarantors and most influential actors in

Lithuanian security; PEW Research finds that in the event of a Russian attack, 57% of

Lithuanians believe that the U.S. would utilize military force, in comparison to only 51% who

believe domestic forces should (Figure 5). This cements the image

of the U.S. as a masculinized figurehead of security, removing the

burden of security competence from the Lithuanian executive. In a

state of security crisis, Lithuanians still appear to prefer a man in

power - but that "man" is in power on a global stage rather than in

their own nation. In comparison to Estonia, there is evidence that

the consensus on security is similar but more firmly established, as

party politics do not seem to have an effect on the state of security

and the executive. Lithuanians prefer non-partisan Presidents who

uphold the security status quo, and in electing Prime Ministers,

focus on domestic politics, as pro-NATO stances are shared across

all parties in near lock-step.
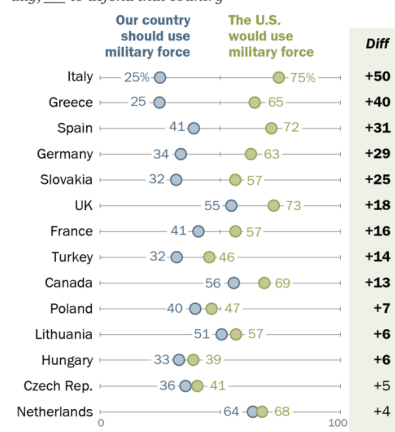
Figure 5. Opinions of NATO publics on defense. PEW Research, 2020.

Simonyte and Russian Aggression

The first several years of Simonyte's term have been defined by crisis, beginning with

COVID-19 and moving into Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In considering the current state of

Lithuanian security, Simonyte's governance, and what this means for other women leaders, the

far-right populism that has plagued Estonia - and has fundamentally shifted the ways in which Prime Minister Kallas engages with security - seems to be less of a factor than the necessity of maintaining relations with the U.S. on key foreign policy issues, as well as improving cooperation with NATO in reference to Russia's current war in Ukraine. Simonyte has taken a similar stance to the other Baltic states when discussing the Russian invasion; in a 2022 interview with the Atlantic Council, Simonyte took a strong stance against Putin and the Russian government. She expressed her belief that any country can become democratic, with Lithuania as a prime example, and emphasized the value of Western integration after Soviet occupation. Her language mirrors that of Estonian Prime Minister Kallas very closely - the Baltics had long warned the West about Russia, and they had not listened. She balances this assertion with the same kind of "unassuming" attitude characteristic of herself and her identity of a Lithuanian woman. She expressed no joy in this twisted vindication, emphasizing that Russia has been a threat in the Baltics for twenty years; the security crisis was "not new" (Atlantic Council, 2022). Here, Simonyte affirms a continual security crisis in hindsight. While she does so during an active threat, which indicates heightened concern for her populace, there is value in this statement in regards to perception. From her point of view, and presumably, that of her voters, Russia is a threat to be countered. Her stance on Russia is immovable, as she noted that the only acceptable outcome of the invasion is one that is acceptable to Ukraine. Anything else is "an encouragement to Russia", whom she believes must be condemned and checked by the international community.

This stance is very much a continuation of the anti-Russian status quo that has remained popular in Lithuania, and similarly to Prime Minister Kallas, Simonyte's popularity spiked in the wake of the Russian invasion (albeit, not as substantially as her Estonian counterpart)

(POLITICO, 2023). Simonyte also maintained a commitment to U.S. relations, meeting with U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris in December of 2022. Their meeting "commemorated the 100 years of diplomatic relations between the United States and Lithuania and reaffirmed our ironclad commitment to NATO's Article 5. The Vice President thanked Lithuania for hosting U.S. forces and reiterated the U.S. commitment to maintain a persistent rotational U.S. military presence in Lithuania and its other Baltic neighbors" (The White House, 2022). At this juncture, with the lack of any substantial support for a far-right challenger in the country, it does not seem likely that Lithuania's security stance will change any time soon; Simonyte does not engage in an intricate balancing act or a substantive change in strategy, instead continuing the same anti-Russia stance that has always been her platform. She has called on international courts to prosecute Russia for war crimes, and been very open about Lithuania's own experience with "Russia's bullying (Sciences Po, 2022), and has made her commitments to NATO clear. According to the same Atlantic Council interview,

> "Šimonytė said her country was quick to splurge on security and defense in the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, as well as cry foul about Moscow's troop buildup ahead of its February invasion of Ukraine. She hopes the Alliance will use its upcoming summit in Madrid to rethink how to send 'a very clear signal that NATO is absolutely serious about its members'" (2022).

Ultimately, Simonyte's position is unique in the sense that she is not the ultimate authority on security, but has been perhaps even more vocal regarding her criticism of Russia than her presidential counterpart. Not having quite gained the acclaim of an "Iron Lady", her statements and strong anti-Russia stance have not met much criticism within her own nation - they very much follow the rhetoric with which women leaders such as Dalia Grybauskaite have

found success during past crisis situations. Lithuanian security consensus is still strong, as there is currently no group outwardly supporting (or gaining support) for the assertion that Lithuania is too dependent on alliances. The security consensus continues to work in Simonyte's favor, as she is able to engage openly with and wholeheartedly support the long-held alliances that have guaranteed Lithuania's security since its inception. The next presidential and parliamentary elections in Lithuania are not until 2024, and while several parties remain in relative lockstep in terms of public opinion at the moment, only time will tell as to whether Simonyte's rhetoric and experience will continue to resonate with the Lithuanian public in the coming year.
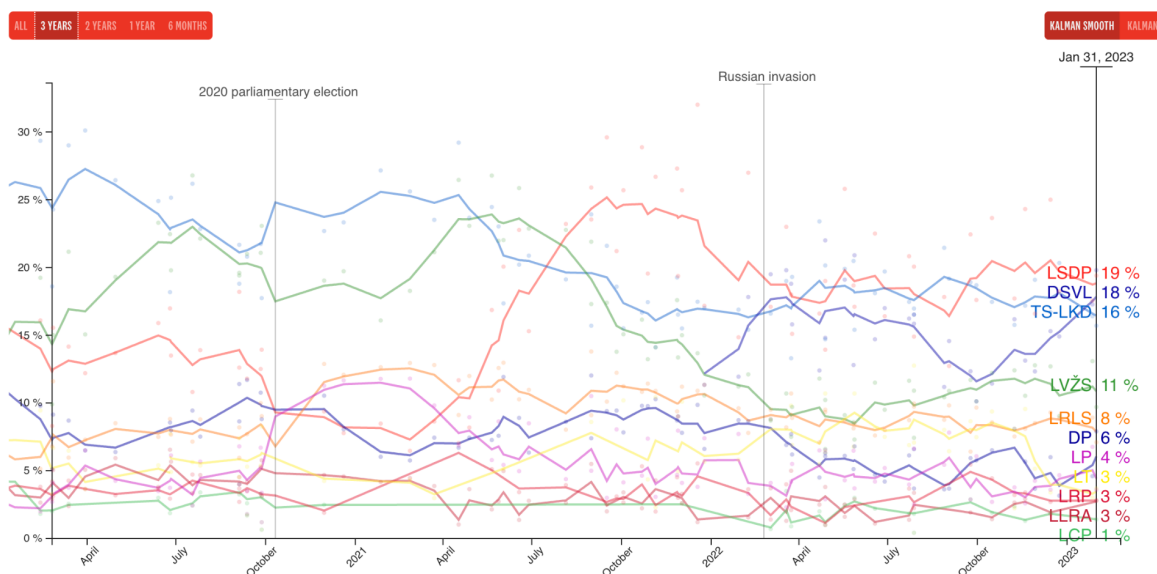

Figure 6. Political opinion of Lithuanian public by party. POLITICO, 2023.

Comparisons - Estonia and Lithuania

In drawing conclusions from the evidence gathered across time, the influence of NATO on gender stereotypes and women leaders in the Baltic states is substantial. Despite differences between Estonia and Lithuania in terms of party politics, executive power sharing, geographical

proximity to Russia, ethnic makeup, and the degree to which security threat is perceived, NATO's influence over time has led to a security consensus in the Baltic states. Defined in a sentence, NATO is seen as a guarantor of security, hand-in-hand with the United States. This does not mean that Baltic executives do not make security decisions, to be clear. Baltic executives are still building up and commanding domestic defense forces, commissioning new weapons, and contributing to independent defense. However, as public opinion and the development of defense policy over years of state-building has shown, there is a sense of overwhelming agreement within the Baltic states that NATO is the largest and most important piece of the Baltic security puzzle.

In both nations examined, NATO is perceived as a security guarantor, and functionally acts as such in many ways. This perception and reality has historically eliminated security as an issue in elections, as pro-NATO parties have either dominated the political scene, or all parties have been in agreement as to what security policy should look like. Women legislators have both contributed to and benefitted from this dynamic, with women's political pipeline creating a pool of qualified candidates to be elected as executive. Once these women are in office, the state of the security consensus functionally determines their relationship with security and the double-bind. Should the security consensus remain intact and unchallenged, women are successful if they maintain the status-quo, and risk consequences should they take the masculine action of challenging the masculine security guarantor. If the security consensus cracks, however, the double-bind does have effects on women in power, albeit in a culturally specific, altered way within the Baltics. Women face heightened criticism, and must engage in a rhetorical balancing act, emphasizing partnership with NATO while also maintaining their gendered role within the context of national identity and historical memory. Ultimately, NATO's influence in the Baltics

offers paths to success for women outside the bounds of traditional security double-binds; security consensus removes extra pressure regarding security, and a lack of consensus results in a needed balance of duty to country and international organization rather than hawkish military policy.

I found extensive evidence to support my hypothesis in several key areas. I first found evidence for the existence and influence of the political pipeline in both Estonia and Lithuania. With the absence of substantial gender mainstreaming efforts or gender quotas in either Estonia or Lithuania, this progression appears to be closely tied with the development of NATO-centric policy; women have contributed to this policy in the face of stereotypes in both nations, and this contribution has furthered both a larger pool of executive candidates and the development of security as a non-issue electorally. Additionally, I found evidence that when security is a non-issue, women do not face more pressure in positions of power to demonstrate extensive defense experience or hawkish security policy, as the double-bind would suggest. With NATO backing, women are able to bypass gendered expectations typically related to security competence. Women have not gained power in the Baltics due to any lapse in stereotypes or security threat - rather, they have done so because the state of the security consensus has long rendered security a non-issue in national elections, both presidential and parliamentary. The evidence for a security consensus in both Estonia and Lithuania is clear, and the fact that security has been functionally removed as a consideration for constituents within elections due largely to NATO's influence is critical. In essence, the security consensus results in little to no criticism or extra pressure on women leaders in regards to security decision-making or perceived competence.

In Estonia, this manifests in intense security threat combined with party politics leading to the eventual establishment of a security consensus. This has taken the form of both a cultural tradition of leaving security out of elections, as well as the fact that the Reform party (the most pro-NATO historically) has dominated the political field in the decades since accession. A pipeline of qualified women, many of them in Reform, has contributed to this development; with less pressure to demonstrate security competence in a legislative setting, women have risen in the ranks in the Riigikogu, leading to a higher likelihood of women being elected to the executive. In practice for women leaders (including Kaja Kallas in her first campaign), this lessens the effect of stereotypes, as candidates need not address security issues while campaigning; the population expects these relations to stay the same, and so long as women leaders follow this pattern, pressure is substantially reduced to show any kind of security experience.

In Lithuania, I also found evidence to support a security consensus, but in a more simplistic fashion. Party politics has not played as substantial a role in the development of the consensus, but the agreement that NATO plays a major role in Lithuanian security has been firm for some time now. A consistent contribution of 2% GDP, open support for NATO initiatives, and ultimately, a unanimous agreement among all major political parties that NATO is the best way to maintain Lithuanian security all serve to indicate more than passive support for NATO from Lithuania. The effect has been a staunch security consensus, untouched even by the party politics that have defined Estonia's relationship with political pipeline and accession. Women gained representation in the legislature, including in leadership positions related to security, defense, and NATO, regardless of party. Difference in security policy has not existed in any substantial or documented manner in Lithuania, and as such, security has remained an unchallenged non-issue.

For Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte, this has remained true both through her election and her term as PM in a way that it has not remained consistent for Prime Minister Kallas. While running for President in 2019, both Simonyte and her opponent discussed security, but maintained similar platforms. Despite her loss, the election hinged on more domestic issues and a Lithuanian preference for non-partisan newcomers, and role incongruence likely did not have an impact on the outcome - especially in the absence of an active military threat. During her election to the Prime Ministership, the de-emphasis on security remained consistent, and her financial background was considered a major asset in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. While I cannot account for her success in another masculinized issue such as finance, what remains clear is that security was not a determining factor in selecting a candidate for Lithuanian voters, minimizing or eliminating pressure for Simonyte (and other women) to demonstrate extra qualifications or fight extra pressure in their roles.

Notably, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has led to heightened fears of invasion and a more acute perception of security threat in Lithuania, but Simonyte's approach to security has not changed substantially. There is a higher sense of urgency, but Simonyte has not faced criticism from a far-right party domestically, as none exists independently, largely due to Lithuania's homogeneous ethnic makeup. As such, the security consensus has been maintained in Lithuania throughout the war in Ukraine, and Simonyte has not engaged in overtly hawkish or aggressive rhetorical maneuvering; nor has she balanced her anti-Russia, pro-NATO stance with the use of ties to her gendered national identity as Kallas has consistently done. Rather, the Lithuanian public has maintained support for NATO's security guarantee, allowing Simonyte to maintain power and popularity so long as she maintains the status-quo of positive U.S. relationship and a productive NATO partnership.

Perhaps the most important case for the rigidity of the Lithuanian security consensus is the impact that challenging this consensus had on the tenure of former President Dalia Grybauskaite; her case both supports my hypothesis and introduces a significant variable I did not initially account for. Upon challenging U.S. relations and turning more towards the EU than NATO, Grybauskaite received severe criticism internationally and domestically, from peers and constituents alike. Her role as the executive was to maintain the status quo, and once she began to change security policy and threaten the state of the security guarantee, every manner of gendered criticism was leveled at the president. Once Russia invaded Crimea, she was forced to change her tune - and was promptly revived with increased approval ratings and election to a second term. It seems that the security consensus only protects women leaders from role incongruence should they stay within the lines of that consensus.

This introduces a concept I did not expect going into this study. The role of the United States as the leader of NATO has emerged as very important to the maintenance of the security consensus and its effects on women leaders. If women executives challenge the guarantee of security that NATO and the U.S. provide, they risk severe political consequences. Should they follow the status-quo, however, they engage in tried-and-true policy that is both feminized relative to a masculine institution and accepted by the majority of the constituency. Thus, the immovable position of the security consensus in Lithuania has led to a reduction of role incongruence for women leaders, who have not needed to navigate the double-bind so long as they maintain a strong relationship with the U.S. and NATO.

There are several other factors which I did not predict upon beginning this project, including Lithuania's relationship to the security threat and the impact of the far-right in Estonia. These are perhaps the most substantial differences between the two nations. Lithuania has a

noted absence of a large ethnic minority, as well as a larger geographical distance between their border and Russia's main territory (though Kaliningrad remains a perceived strategic threat). There is more room to debate whether Lithuania's accession to and participation in NATO is due to genuine security concerns or merely the process of Westernization more broadly, especially given the fact that Lithuanian public opinion data suggests that the security threat is most keenly felt only during an active military threat. The implications of this are minor in terms of altering my conclusions, but certainly show a complication in perceived threat that may impact the perception of women leaders in currently unknown ways. In Estonia, however, the security threat has consistently been felt across time; this relates directly to the influence of a Russian ethnic minority, which has in turn contributed to the rise of the far-right in domestic politics.

As an ethnically diverse nation with a rich history of national and historical trauma coupled with cultural erasure, Estonian nationalism has begun to challenge the security consensus in Estonia. While EKRE has not pulled a substantial majority of the vote, their inclusion in the 2019 governmental coalition that superseded Kallas' victory elevated their party and its highly controversial leadership, giving a platform not only to racist, sexist, homophobic, and otherwise discriminatory comments, but to criticism of Reform's reliance on NATO alliances to ensure security. Since Kallas has been in power, this small but growing group has advocated for a minimization of relations with the U.S. and NATO, and has specifically pushed for an expansion of the Estonian Defense Force, the halt of Estonian weapons sent to Ukraine, and for Estonia to cease taking Ukrainian refugees. The Russian invasion of Ukraine certainly reanimated fears of invasion in Estonia, but it is specifically the way in which EKRE has used the crisis to criticize multilateral and collective security based efforts that has opened Kallas to criticism. Certainly, Kallas would still be an open critic of Moscow if EKRE did not exist.

However, the push by the party that, as of March 2023, occupies the second-most seats in the Riigikogu to draw back from alliances and pull support for Ukraine has pushed Kallas directly into the ties of the double-bind.

I did not predict that nationalism would have this much of an impact on the security consensus, but this unexpected consideration does develop my theory further than my initial hypothesis. Kallas' relationship with a shaken consensus pushes her into more substantial gendered criticism that she must navigate. However, instead of dealing with a traditional double-bind situation in which she is only expected to act hawkish in terms of her own military might, she must emphasize the role of NATO as well as her country's own developing domestic strength to fulfill an altered masculinized role. This sheds light on a potential regional difference in terms of the functioning of the double-bind. Even if the security consensus is challenged and women leaders are opened up to gendered criticism, their experience in responding to said criticism is different in that they must balance their own national identity and power with that of a masculinized institution. In a situation where constituencies see the outcome of U.S. elections as more consequential to their security than their domestic elections, the field of perception and role incongruence is dramatically altered. In the Baltic states, we are seeing a new kind of double-bind in which the executive and a larger institution are perceived as sharing the role of security. When the burden of security decisions on a broader scale are "exported" to the masculinized U.S. and NATO, women leaders are faced with a different set of responsibilities and a different set of gendered expectations. Does the influence of NATO, even in the absence of a protective security consensus, open pathways to success for women leaders in the context of major crises such as the invasion of Ukraine? With the overwhelming re-election of Kaja Kallas in 2023, I argue that it does.

Looking Forward

Looking to the future of women leaders' relationship with security in the Baltic states, several factors remain open to exploration. First and foremost, an analysis of the political pipeline, NATO-based security policy, and the state of security consensus relative to women leaders in Latvia is needed for a fuller understanding of the situation. Ultimately, however, what this study has described is an alteration to existing double-bind literature that is specific to the culturally-specific gender stereotypes and democratization process in the Baltic states. The influence of NATO is likely keenly felt in the Baltic specifically due to the fact that, as described, Baltic democracies and militaries were built functionally from scratch in the last three decades. An expansion of this research into other post-Soviet states would likely glean differing insights, as different states maintained differing levels of autonomy and had different levels of pre-established political and military bureaucracy upon the fall of the USSR. Regardless, the effects of the security consensus on gender stereotypes and women executives that I have posited above are sure to continue in development as the security crisis continues in the context of Putin's war. In Estonia, the influence of the far-right on Kallas' maintenance of power is still in development. Despite having won her election, Kallas has yet to form a ruling coalition - and as the party with the second-most number of seats, EKRE will be integral to whether Kallas is able to secure the majority she needs to keep the Prime Ministership.

In Lithuania, Simonyte's pro-NATO stance is unlikely to change, but should she run for Prime Minister or President in 2024, national security may be an issue for the first time in a long time; should an alliance-skeptic challenger emerge, Simonyte's relationship with the security consensus may change, leading to a double-bind situation. In any case, the Baltic states present a gendered security situation to watch; the role of leading women in one of the most geopolitically

important regions of the world in reference to the war in Ukraine will remain critical as the

conflict continues to unfold. Will these ladies, dubbed "Iron" or otherwise, have continued

success in the executive sphere, opening the door for other women to take their place? More

broadly, could the NATO-centric dynamic in the Baltics signal a changing relationship between

women leaders and security, especially in nations to whom Article V is necessary for defense?

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