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FROM STEREOTYPES TO STATISTICS: APPLIED DATA SCIENCE FOR REDUCING THE GENDER GAP IN NATIONAL SECURITY

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Annotation. *This article examines the gender gap in national security institutions as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by both structural inequalities and discursive biases. While gender equality is increasingly recognized as a factor contributing to organizational effectiveness and institutional legitimacy, significant disparities persist, particularly at higher hierarchical levels. The study addresses how structural factors and public discourse interact in sustaining gender inequality within the security sector. The research applies a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative analysis of survey data (N = 128) from defense, law enforcement, and internal security institutions with computational discourse analysis of 148 media publications (2019–2024). The findings reveal statistically significant vertical gender segregation: women are less likely to occupy leadership positions and experience slower career progression. Gender remains a significant predictor of leadership attainment even after controlling for professional variables. Women also report greater exposure to stereotypical evaluations and limited access to informal professional networks, indicating persistent informal organizational barriers. Discourse analysis shows that women are more frequently represented as exceptional or defined by personal characteristics, whereas men are portrayed in neutral, professional terms. This symbolic "markedness" reinforces gendered perceptions of competence and normalizes male dominance in leadership roles. Topic modeling further identifies a distinct discursive cluster that frames women as a separate category, emphasizing challenges and gender-specific narratives. By integrating structural and discourse data, the study demonstrates a consistent association between institutional inequalities and patterns of public representation. The findings suggest that structural and symbolic factors operate as interconnected mechanisms sustaining gender inequality. The study contributes to the field by introducing an integrated analytical framework that combines data science methods with gender and discourse analysis in the context of national security, offering both theoretical insight and practical implications for policy and institutional reform.*

Keywords: *gender gap, national security, mixed-methods research, discourse analysis, structural inequality, gender representation*

Introduction

Gender equality in national security institutions is increasingly recognized not only as a matter of human rights but also as a factor contributing to organizational effectiveness and institutional resilience. Research shows that gender diversity is associated with improved decision-making, innovation, and institutional legitimacy (Krause, Krause, and Bränfors 2018; Hoogendoorn et al. 2013; Miller and Segal 2019). These findings highlight the importance of gender diversity for strengthening decision-making quality and institutional credibility in the security sector. Empirical studies also reveal that formal gender equality policies often have limited impact on transforming organizational culture in hierarchical and traditionally "male-dominated" structures, as entrenched structural and cultural barriers require comprehensive approaches rather than purely declarative commitments (Baker et al. 2025). As research shows, security and military institutions are often characterized by gendered organizational cultures in which masculine norms and stereotypes dominate, limiting women's integration and career opportunities (Carreiras 2006, 45–52).

The scholarly literature further emphasizes that gender gaps are sustained not only by structural factors, but also by symbolic and discursive practices, including stereotypical

representations, framing devices, and implicit biases (Eagly and Heilman 2016). Research grounded in natural language processing (NLP) demonstrates that such biases can be systematically identified in media and public communication texts, enabling a shift from normative assessment toward data-driven analysis (Hovy and Spruit 2016).

Public discourse surrounding women's roles in the security sector may reproduce traditional gender role patterns that become embedded in institutional culture. Although research on gender representation and media bias has expanded in recent years, there remains a lack of integrated studies combining statistical analysis of institutional data with automated discourse analysis in the context of national security. Despite these benefits, gender disparities persist in national security institutions, particularly at higher hierarchical levels.

The core problem is that the gender gap is sustained not only by structural factors (e.g., unequal career opportunities, lack of mentorship), but also by deeper symbolic and discursive mechanisms, including stereotypes, implicit biases, and representations in public discourse (Eagly and Heilman 2016; Baker et al. 2025). Moreover, existing gender equality policies are often declarative and insufficiently effective in transforming organizational culture in hierarchical institutions (Baker et al. 2025). This issue aligns with recent research showing that formal gender equality policies do not necessarily lead to real changes in power structures and may sometimes function as symbolic measures that mask persistent inequality (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2022).

However, there is a lack of integrated studies that simultaneously analyze institutional (structural) data and public discourse, making it unclear how these factors interact in sustaining gender inequality in the national security sector (Hovy and Spruit 2016; Creswell and Plano Clark 2018). Thus, the gender gap in national security institutions persists as a result of interconnected structural disparities and discursive biases, yet their interaction and impact on organizational effectiveness and the implementation of gender equality remain insufficiently explored. **The research question** addressed in this study is: how do structural factors and discursive biases interact in sustaining the gender gap in national security institutions?

The study contributes to the literature by integrating structural statistical analysis with computational discourse analysis in the context of national security. By combining these approaches, it conceptualizes the gender gap as a multi-layered phenomenon shaped by both institutional and symbolic mechanisms.

The findings provide an empirical basis for improving gender inclusion policies in national security institutions. They highlight the importance of addressing both structural inequalities and symbolic representations in organizational practices and communication strategies.

Research object – The gender gap in national security institutions as a combination of structural disproportions and discursive biases.

Research aim – To analyze the relationship between structural gender disparities and public discourse representations in national security institutions.

Research objectives:

1. To analyze gender distribution across positions, career opportunities, and experienced barriers;
2. To assess the representation of women in the public sphere and its relationship with gender disproportions in security institutions.

Research methods. The study is based on a mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative statistical analysis and computational discourse analysis. Such a methodological approach enables the gender gap in national security institutions to be analyzed as a

multidimensional phenomenon encompassing both structural disparities and symbolic discursive mechanisms (Creswell and Plano Clark 2018).

The analysis of scientific literature is applied at two levels: (1) to develop the theoretical framework and conceptual apparatus of the study, and (2) to interpret the empirical findings by contextualizing them within existing research and theoretical insights.

The empirical study employs both quantitative and computational discourse analysis methods. Quantitative data were collected through an anonymous survey (N = 128), covering three segments of the national security sector: defense, law enforcement, and internal security institutions. The study included institutions of different levels and functions responsible for national defense, public order, and internal security. The sample was formed using non-probability purposive and convenience sampling, targeting employees of the national security sector. The survey was distributed electronically through professional networks and institutional communication channels. Due to the applied sampling strategy, potential sampling bias exists; therefore, the results are interpreted cautiously as indicative rather than representative of the entire population.

The analysis includes dependent variables (position level, holding managerial positions, and career progression duration), the independent variable (gender), and control variables (work experience and education). Subjective career barriers are also assessed using a Likert scale (stereotypes, informal networks, mentorship, and work–life balance). The Likert-type scale used in the study was developed based on previous empirical research on stereotypes, organizational barriers, and access to professional networks (e.g., Baker et al. 2025; Eagly and Heilman 2016). The internal consistency of the scale was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient ($\alpha \approx 0.78$), indicating acceptable reliability. Data analysis was conducted using statistical software (SPSS). The statistical analysis includes descriptive methods (proportions, means) and inferential methods. The relationship between gender and position level was assessed using the chi-square (χ^2) test, differences in career progression were analyzed using Student's t-test, and the effect of gender on the likelihood of holding managerial positions was evaluated using logistic regression analysis while controlling for other variables. Additionally, correlation analysis was applied to assess relationships between perceived barriers and career progression.

Public discourse analysis is conducted using natural language processing (NLP) methods. A corpus of 148 publications from national media outlets and institutional communication sources (2019–2024) was compiled. Publications were selected using purposive sampling based on keywords related to national security and gender. The corpus was analyzed using NLP techniques, including keyword analysis, collocation analysis, and topic modeling. Keyword analysis identifies the most frequently associated terms related to gender representation, collocation analysis reveals typical linguistic contexts, and topic modeling identifies dominant discourse themes. These methods enable the identification of latent linguistic biases and the assessment of how gender roles are constructed in public discourse within the national security context.

Results triangulation was applied by comparing structural indicators (position disproportions, differences in career progression) with the findings of the discourse analysis. This approach allows for linking micro-level discursive patterns with macro-level structural inequalities, providing a more comprehensive explanation of the gender gap. The analysis examined whether the intensity of stereotypical narratives is associated with higher levels of structural gender inequality. This integrated methodological model allows the gender gap in national security institutions to be understood as a multi-layered phenomenon encompassing both organizational structure and the symbolic public sphere.

By triangulating quantitative and discourse data, it was found that institutions with greater disproportions in leadership positions also exhibited a higher prevalence of stereotypical or exceptionality-framed narratives in public discourse. Although the study does not allow for establishing causal relationships, the findings indicate a consistent association between structural indicators and symbolic representations. The results confirm that the gender gap in national security institutions manifests both through statistically significant career disparities and through discursive patterns of women's representation. Structural and symbolic factors operate as interconnected mechanisms sustaining organizational inequality.

Research Ethics. The study was conducted in accordance with the fundamental ethical principles of social science research. In the quantitative component, data were collected through an anonymous survey, ensuring respondent confidentiality and the protection of personal data. Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and the nature of data usage. The collected data were used exclusively for scientific purposes and analyzed in an aggregated form, without linking them to specific individuals or institutions.

In the discourse analysis, publicly available textual data (media publications) were used; therefore, no privacy or data protection principles were violated. Efforts were made to minimize interpretive bias during the analysis, and the results are presented in accordance with the principles of academic objectivity and responsibility.

Research Limitations. The study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. The survey sample (N = 128) is relatively small; therefore, the findings cannot be directly generalized to the entire national security sector without further large-scale studies. The quantitative analysis allows for the identification of statistical relationships between variables but does not enable strong causal inferences regarding the mechanisms underlying the gender gap. Although regression analysis controls for certain structural factors, it cannot fully capture all organizational and cultural processes.

The discourse analysis, while based on computational NLP methods, enables the identification of linguistic patterns and biases but does not allow for the direct assessment of their impact on organizational decision-making or individual career outcomes. Moreover, the analyzed corpus (148 publications) represents only a portion of public discourse and may not capture the full diversity of communication.

The applied mixed-methods design allows for the identification of associations between structural and discursive factors; however, it does not permit the establishment of clear causal relationships between them. Despite these limitations, the study provides a consistent and empirically grounded basis for future, more comprehensive research.

Quantitative results: gender distribution, career opportunities, and barriers

The empirical analysis is based on data from an anonymous survey (N = 128) collected across three segments of national security institutions: defense, law enforcement, and internal security. The sample included 58 women (45%) and 70 men (55%), with an average length of service of 9.6 years (SD = 4.8), indicating that the study captures a relatively experienced group of employees.

Further analysis identified vertical gender segregation within the organizational structure. Women are more likely to occupy lower-level positions, whereas men are more prevalent in higher-level and leadership roles (see Table 1). Only 17% of women (10 out of 58) hold higher-level positions, compared to 36% of men (25 out of 70), indicating a significant vertical gender disparity. These differences suggest the presence of a potential "glass ceiling" effect. Such

findings may be explained by the fact that security institutions function as gendered organizations in which traditional masculine norms shape career opportunities (Carreiras 2006). The chi-square (χ^2) test revealed a statistically significant relationship between gender and position level ($\chi^2(2) = 7.26$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that the distribution of positions is not gender-neutral.

The identified vertical gender segregation is consistent with previous research showing that women tend to be concentrated in lower-level positions, while their representation in higher organizational tiers remains limited (Baker et al. 2025). Such structural disproportions are often explained not only by formal selection criteria but also by informal organizational culture factors that constrain women's career advancement.

Table 1. Gender Distribution by Position Level (N = 128)

Position Level	Women (n)	Women (%)	Men (n)	Men (%)	Total (n)	Total (%)
Lower	28	48.3%	20	28.6%	48	37.5%
Middle	20	34.5%	25	35.7%	45	35.2%
Higher	10	17.2%	25	35.7%	35	27.3%
Total	58	100%	70	100%	128	100%

Table 1 shows a clear overrepresentation of men in higher-level positions and a concentration of women in lower-level roles. The analysis of career progression revealed statistically significant gender differences. It was found that women's career trajectories are slower than those of men, with a longer average time to first promotion for women ($p < 0.05$). These differences may be explained not only by formal career criteria but also by unequal task allocation within organizations, which over time shapes different patterns of professional experience and career opportunities (Wessendorf and Pichler 2025, 8–12). Additionally, these disparities can be interpreted within a broader context in which gender inequality is formed at earlier stages—through educational choices and career interests influenced by stereotypical gender norms (Chaffee, Plante, and Binette-Laporte 2025; Getik and Meier 2025).

The findings also show that women are less likely to occupy leadership positions, indicating both horizontal and vertical gender segregation within the organizational structure. To assess whether these differences could be explained by objective professional factors, logistic regression analysis was applied. The model demonstrated that gender remains a statistically significant predictor (OR = 0.52; $p < 0.05$), even when controlling for length of service, education. Although education was included as a control variable in the analysis, its effect was not statistically significant. Thus, women have a lower likelihood of holding managerial positions than men, regardless of their professional characteristics.

Such results are consistent with research showing that formal gender equality measures may coexist with persistent informal power mechanisms (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2022, 63–66), and that even formally meritocratic organizations may exhibit systemic biases influencing career decisions (Castilla 2008, 1481–1485). The findings further suggest that the observed differences are not solely the result of structural factors but may also be related to informal

organizational mechanisms, such as stereotypical evaluations of competence, limited access to decision-making networks, and lower visibility of career opportunities.

These results align with research on gender and leadership demonstrating that stereotypical competence evaluations can systematically reduce women's chances of attaining leadership positions, even when professional qualifications are equivalent (Eagly and Heilman 2016). This indicates that organizational decision-making processes may be influenced by implicit biases.

Subjective career barriers were assessed using a reliable Likert scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.78$). The analysis of subjective barriers revealed statistically significant gender differences across several key dimensions. Women reported significantly higher levels of experienced stereotypes than men ($M_{women} = 3.8$; $M_{men} = 2.9$; $t = 3.45$; $p < 0.01$), as well as more limited access to informal professional networks ($M_{women} = 3.5$; $M_{men} = 2.8$; $t = 2.67$; $p < 0.05$). These findings indicate that women are more likely to encounter informal organizational constraints that may affect their career opportunities. The results are consistent with research showing that organizational culture and gender role norms are key factors shaping women's experiences and opportunities in military and security institutions (Carreiras 2006), and align with recent studies demonstrating that access to professional networks is one of the most important determinants of women's career advancement, while limited integration into influential networks can systematically reduce their chances of attaining leadership positions (van Hinsberg et al. 2025, 9–10).

A tendency was also observed for women to evaluate mentorship availability ($M_{women} = 2.9$; $M_{men} = 3.3$; $t = -1.98$; $p = 0.051$) and work–family balance opportunities ($M_{women} = 2.7$; $M_{men} = 3.1$; $t = -1.85$; $p = 0.067$) less favorably, although these differences did not reach statistical significance. Nevertheless, the direction of these differences suggests a systematically less favorable experience for women within the organizational environment. These findings are consistent with empirical research emphasizing that informal mechanisms—such as limited access to professional networks and stereotypical evaluations—are among the key drivers of gender inequality in organizations (Baker et al. 2025). This indicates that organizational inequality is shaped not only through formal decisions but also through everyday social practices.

Additionally, correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive relationship between perceived cultural barriers and longer career progression duration ($r = 0.34$; $p < 0.01$). These results suggest that subjectively experienced stereotypes and organizational constraints may have a tangible impact on career trajectories.

Overall, the findings indicate that the gender gap in national security institutions is sustained by both structural and informal cultural mechanisms, including stereotypes and limited access to professional networks.

Discourse analysis: representation of women in the public sphere and its relationship with gender disparities

In the second stage, public discourse on the role of women in the security sector is analyzed. A thematic corpus of 148 publications was compiled, covering national news portals over the period 2019–2024. Natural language processing (NLP) methods are applied, including keyword and collocation analysis, as well as topic modeling. This methodological approach enables the systematic identification of implicit linguistic biases in large-scale textual data (Hovy and Spruit 2016), while recent research suggests that algorithmic and discursive mechanisms jointly shape patterns of gender representation in digital media (Sonni 2025). The

analysis examines whether semantic frames associated with traditional gender roles dominate the representation of women.

The analysis of the 148-publication corpus revealed systematic differences in the representation of women. Keyword and collocation analysis showed that, in the context of women, lexicon related to exceptionality and gender issues appears significantly more frequently (e.g., more than twice as often as in the context of men), including expressions such as "first woman," "one of the few," "female representative," "gender equality issue," and "inspiring example." Additionally, more frequent collocations were identified linking women to personal traits or emotional dimensions, such as "brave," "empathetic," "balancing service and family," and "motherhood and career." In contrast, representations of men were dominated by neutral, function-oriented professional terms, such as "officer," "commander," "expert," "operation leader," "strategic decision," and "competence," without explicit gender marking. In male representations, there was almost no emphasis on exceptionality or family status.

These differences indicate a pattern of discursive "markedness," in which women's participation in the security sector is presented as atypical or exceptional, while men are constructed as the normative professional category. Such representation corresponds to the "normative category" effect described in discourse analysis literature, where the dominant group (in this case, men) is presented as the neutral standard, while the minority group is marked and requires additional explanation (Gill 2007). These findings are consistent with recent corpus-based discourse analysis studies showing that women in media discourse are often constructed as weaker or exceptional, thereby reproducing existing gender power structures (Yangxia and Mengdan 2025).

Table 2. Most Frequent Keywords in the Representation of Women and Men

Category	Women's Context	Frequency (n)	Men's Context	Frequency (n)
Exceptionality	"first woman"	26	–	0
Rarity	"one of the few"	19	–	1
Gender-related framing	"women's representative"	22	–	0
Equality discourse	"gender equality issue"	17	–	0
Emotional traits	"empathetic," "brave"	28	–	6
Family role	"balancing family and service"	21	–	2
Professional neutrality	"officer," "expert"	18	"officer," "expert"	64
Competence	"competent"	12	"competent"	41

Quantitative keyword analysis showed that lexicon related to exceptionality appeared more than ten times more frequently in the context of women than in that of men (e.g., "first woman" – 26 cases, compared to 0 cases for men).

Topic modeling identified a distinct thematic cluster dominated by word combinations such as “first,” “female officer,” “challenges for women,” “inspiration for girls,” “balancing service and family,” “gender balance,” and “barriers.” This cluster functions as a separate discursive zone in which women’s participation in the security sector is presented as a specific phenomenon or social issue. In contrast, other clusters related to operational activities or strategic decision-making were semantically neutral and not marked in terms of gender, featuring terms such as “operation,” “leadership,” “decision-making,” “competence,” and “national security.” In these clusters, gender was not thematized at all.

For example, in a publication describing a leadership appointment, a man is presented as “appointed brigade commander with 20 years of experience,” whereas in an analogous text about a woman, the emphasis is placed on “the first woman appointed to the position of brigade commander,” often accompanied by references to her personal background or family role. This type of discursive structure not only reflects but may also reproduce gender inequality, as women’s participation is framed as an exception rather than the norm.

This distinction illustrates symbolic “markedness”: men’s participation is constructed as normative and does not require additional explanation, whereas women’s participation is presented as exceptional and socially noteworthy.

Table 3. Discursive Frames of Gender Representation (n / %)

Discourse Type	Women’s Representation (n / %)	Men’s Representation (n / %)
Professional (neutral)	42 (28%)	112 (76%)
Personal (emotional)	67 (45%)	18 (12%)
Exceptionality	58 (39%)	3 (2%)
Gender-related framing	61 (41%)	5 (3%)
Neutral (non-gendered)	29 (20%)	118 (80%)

The analysis also showed that emotional and personal representations accounted for approximately 45% of all cases in the context of women, compared to only about 12% in the case of men, indicating a systematic difference in discourse. These differences are consistent with research showing that women’s competence is often evaluated through stereotypical social roles rather than professional criteria (Eagly and Heilman 2016).

Public discourse functions not only as a reflection of reality but also as a mechanism shaping social expectations and legitimizing existing power relations (van Dijk 2015; Sonni 2025). The analysis revealed a systematic asymmetry in gender representation, where women are framed as exceptional and men as normative. The findings suggest that public discourse functions as a symbolic mechanism sustaining structural gender inequality.

Conclusions

The study reveals that the gender gap in national security institutions manifests as a systematic structural disparity: women are less likely to occupy higher-level and leadership positions, and their career progression is slower. Gender remains a statistically significant predictor of leadership attainment even after controlling for professional variables. In addition,

women report greater exposure to informal organizational barriers, including stereotypical evaluations and limited access to professional networks. These findings indicate that gender inequality is sustained not only by formal structural arrangements but also by everyday organizational practices embedded in institutional culture.

The analysis of public discourse demonstrates that women in the national security sector are systematically represented as "marked" actors, with emphasis placed on their gender, exceptionality, and personal characteristics, whereas men are portrayed as a neutral and normative professional category. This symbolic representation corresponds with the observed structural disparities and suggests that discursive biases and institutional inequalities operate as interconnected mechanisms. Public discourse not only reflects but also legitimizes and reproduces the gender gap, thereby reinforcing gendered perceptions of competence and leadership in national security institutions.

The findings suggest that reducing the gender gap in national security institutions requires addressing both structural and discursive mechanisms. Institutions should ensure transparent promotion systems, expand mentorship and networking opportunities, and reduce informal barriers affecting women's career advancement. At the same time, organizational communication should avoid gendered framing and promote gender-neutral representations of competence and leadership. Finally, integrating data-driven monitoring of both structural indicators and public discourse would enable institutions to identify hidden biases and improve the effectiveness of gender equality policies.

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