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## Selected areas of female MPs presence in the Polish Sejm in 1991–2018 – quantitative aspects

**Abstract:** The article analyzes representation of women in the Polish Parliament (Sejm) in 1991–2018, a period which corresponds to 8 terms of office. The analysis excludes the Sejm of the 10<sup>th</sup> term of office (1989–1991) due to the specific nature of the election and a different mode of its operation in the period concerned. Areas of activity and female MP participation were defined based on documents that regulate the working of the Sejm. The hypothesis assumes that main bodies and institutions of the legislative branch (Presidium, Marshal, parliamentary committees) show a disparity between the number of male and female MPs. Another hypothesis is that women are more active in committees that deal with issues stereotypically associated with women, such education and health. The study involved document and statistical analyses to compare data pertaining to the activity of male and female MPs. Research materials comprise data available at [sejm.gov.pl](http://sejm.gov.pl) (archives of eight terms of office). It is worth emphasizing that the website is a reliable source of information. A large part of resources has been digitized which facilitates access to research materials.

**Key words:** women in politics, political activity of women, Sejm, women in the Sejm, parliamentary committees

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### Areas of MPs activity

According to Art. 13 of the Act of 9 May 1996 on Exercising the Mandate of Deputy or Senator, “A duty of a Deputy and a Senator is to be present and active during meetings of the Sejm and Senate, as well as the National Assembly, and their bodies to which they have been appointed.” (Ustawa..., Art. 13).

Art. 14 defines rights of an MP while performing his/her duties. These include:

- “1) right to express his/her position and put forward motions regarding matters discussed by the Sejm and its bodies,
- 2) elect and be elected to bodies of the Sejm,
- 3) request the Presidium to make the Sejm and parliamentary committee consider a specific matter,
- 4) request a parliamentary committee to examine a specific matter,
- 5) participate in MP legislative and regulatory initiatives and in processing of draft laws and resolutions of the Sejm,
- 6) take part in discussions on matters dealt with by the Sejm or parliamentary committees,
- 7) request information and raise questions.” (Ustawa..., Art. 14).

According to Art. 9 of the Sejm Regulations of 30 July 1992, Sejm’s bodies include the following: Marshal, Presidium, Council of Elders, and parliamentary committees. As

regards women representation, the analysis focused on the Presidium and committees. To a large extent, the composition of the Council of Elders corresponds to that of the Presidium. Apart from regular members, it includes chairs or deputy chairs of particular clubs and representatives of caucuses, referred to in Art. 8.5. The Council may also include representatives of parliamentary clubs, provided they act on behalf of at least 15 MPs, and representatives of caucuses who became deputies to the Sejm based on a separate candidate list. The main goal of the Council of Elders is to ensure “collaboration between clubs on matters related to the functioning of the Sejm.” (Uchwała..., Art. 14). In the period concerned, the Council of Elders included only those women who were also members of the Presidium.

MPs main activity concentrates on interventions during plenary sessions of the Sejm. MPs may also ask questions for elucidation. Art. 4 of the Regulations defines also other possible MP control measures: request for information, general questions and specific questions about current affairs.<sup>1</sup>

Pieces of legislation are disused by standing and *ad hoc* parliamentary committees. MPs declare their interest in working for specific committees. Each MP may be a member of maximum two standing committees. Each committee has a chair and his/her deputies. Committee work is usually led by MP of the most extensive parliamentary experience.

### **Women presiding or working in Sejm bodies**

The Presidium is the most important governing body of the Sejm. It consists of the Marshal and vice marshals. The head of the Sejm Chancellery participates in Presidium sessions playing an advisory role. Presidium competences, referred to in Art. 12 of the Regulations, include the development of the work plan for the Sejm after consulting the Council of Elders, determining of “parliamentary weeks,” interpretation of the Regulations after consulting the Committee of Regulations and MP Affairs, defining rules for scientific consulting and expert opinions, MP legal affairs, filing issues to be discussed by other parliamentary committees, and proving opinions on matters brought to the attention of the Presidium by the Marshal. The number of vice-marshals has not been defined by the law and it usually depends on the number of MP clubs – one vice-marshal per each parliamentary club.

Art. 10.1 of the Regulations defines obligations of the Marshal. The list of all eighteen obligations includes: representation of the Sejm, convening meetings, chairing sessions of the Sejm, monitoring of working and timely proceeding of the Sejm and its bodies. The Marshal leads the working of the Presidium and chairs its sessions, as well as calls and chairs meetings of the Council of Elders. He/she initiates the processing of legislative initiatives, draft resolutions, and motions put forward by state bodies after consulting the Presidium, as well as initiates the processing of petitions filed with the Sejm and documents related to Poland’s membership in the European Union. He also represents the Sejm. According to Marek Zubik such an exposed position of the Marshal

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<sup>1</sup> Moreover, according to Art. 194 of the Sejm Regulations, “A club or a group of at least 15 MPs have the right to file a motion requesting a member of the Council of Ministers to report on current affairs.”

justifies his/her description as the “second most important person in the country” (Zubik, 2003, p. 80).

During the first, third and fourth terms of office, there was no woman in the Presidium of the Sejm, whereas during the second term, Olga Krzyżanowska for the second time was appointed vice-marshal of the Sejm (first time in Sejm of 10<sup>th</sup> term). During the 5<sup>th</sup> term of office, female MP Genowefa Wiśniowska (Samoobrona), was the vice marshal from 9 May 2006 to 4 November 2007, whereas during the 6<sup>th</sup> term, Ewa Kierzkowska (PSL) was a member of the Presidium (18 June 2009–7 November 2011). During the 7<sup>th</sup> term of office, two women Wanda Nowicka (Ruch Palikota) and Elżbieta Radziszewska (PO) held the position of vice marshals. During the same 7<sup>th</sup> term, for the first time in the history of the Sejm, women also presided. The first was Ewa Kopacz (8 November 2011–22 September 2014) and then Małgorzata Kidawa-Błońska (25 June 2015–11 November 2015). During the 8<sup>th</sup> term, 5 female vice marshals included Małgorzata Kidawa-Błońska (PO), Barbara Dolniak (Nowoczesna), Beata Mazurek (PiS), who held that position in 11 January 2018–26 May 2019 (replaced Joachim Brudziński) and Małgorzata Gosiewska, who replaced Beata Mazurek on 12 June 2019, since the latter was elected to the European Parliament. At the end of the term, after Marek Kuchciński resigned, the position of the Marshal was taken over by Elżbieta Witek who acted as the marshal for 3 months (9 August–11 November).

In the period of 28 years, three women presided the Polish Sejm who headed its operation for about 3 years in total. During the same period, 13 male MPs were Marshals. There were 9 female vice marshals as opposed to 38 male ones. This is a vivid disparity to the disadvantage of female MPs and their access to government bodies and functions that can provide an opportunity to influence the working of the Sejm.

### **Activity of women in standing committees**

According to Art. 17 of the Sejm Regulations, parliamentary committees are established to process matters discussed by the Sejm and express their opinion on issues brought to the attention of all MPs by the Sejm, Marshal or the Presidium. The committees also exercise control as defined by the Constitution and acts of parliament. A detailed list of activities has been defined in Art. 151.1 of the Regulations.

Apart from standing committees, and there are 28 committees in the Sejm of the 8<sup>th</sup> term of office (full list in Art. 18.1 of Regulations), the Sejm may appoint ad hoc committees (Art. 19), and an investigation committee (Art. 19a).

The literature indicates that certain areas attract female MPs in particular. These include healthcare, education and culture, whereas others are stereotypically male spheres. The latter include military affairs, administration and finance. While analyzing tiers of the legislative branch, the BEIS typology is used to distinguish Basic Functions, such as foreign affairs, defense and justice, and economic functions, e.g. finance, trade, industry, and agriculture. The third group includes infrastructure, transport, communications, environment and telecommunications. Finally, we should mention social affairs which, among other things, include social care, education, science, culture, and sport (Koźbiał, 2016). Women are least represented in the first group of functions and rather

poorly represented in the second group, whereas they enjoy the strongest position in the fourth area. While analyzing the composition of particular committees, we can examine whether the stereotypical female representation is also reflected in the Polish Sejm.

During its first term of office, the strongest female MP representation (ca 25%) was in commissions responsible for healthcare, national education, technological advancement and social policy. No female MP could be found in committees dealing with justice, national defense, as well as youth, physical culture and sport. In all of fifteen committees, female MPs had minimal representation ranging between 1 and 3.

In the second term of office, women were represented in the Committee of External Economic Relations, Spatial Policy Committee, Committee of Building and Housing, Committee of National and Ethnic Minorities, Committee of Ownership Transformation, Committee of Agriculture and Food Economy, and the Committee of National Defense. As it was previously, the largest number of female MPs was in the Committee of Education, Science and Technological Advancement and the Committee of Social Policy.

In the Sejm of the third term of office, women were represented in the Committee of Education, Science and Technological Advancement, Committee of Ethics, Committee of Social Policy, Committee of Healthcare, Committee of Family, and the Committee of Culture and Media. The lowest female representation could be found in the Committee of Public Finance, Committee of Administration and Internal Affairs, Committee of Physical Culture and Tourism, Committee for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises; Committee for State Control, and the Committee of Local Government and Regional Policy.

During the fourth term of office, female MPs prevailed in the Committee of Gender Equality. They had nearly 50% representation in committees dealing with education, social policy and health. No female MPs could be found in the Committee for Special Services and the Committee of Physical Culture and Sport, and a minimal representation in the Committee of Local Government and Regional Policy.

Almost identical gender proportions were in committees operating during the 5<sup>th</sup> term of office, with slight alterations only. The group of typically “female committees” was extended with the Committee for Contact with Poles Abroad. Moreover, the representation of women increased to 33% in the Committee of Public Finance.

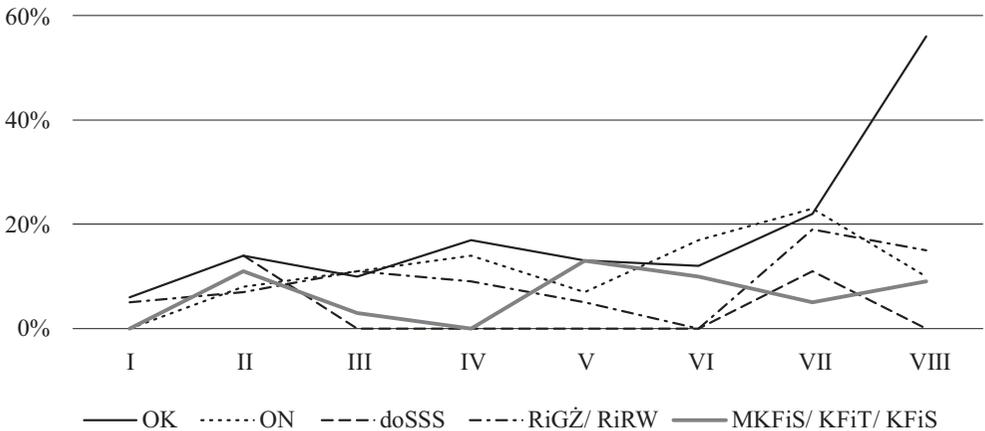
In the Sejm of the sixth term of office, gender proportions changed in committees previously dominated by male MPs, e.g. the Committee of Regional Government and Regional Policy (37%). Apart from the Committee for Special Services and the Committee for Agriculture Development, another committee with not female representation was the newly established Committee of Innovation and New Technologies.

During the seventh term of office, male MPs prevailed in the Committee of Physical Culture, Sport and Tourism, Committee of State Treasury, Committee of Innovation and New Technologies, and the Committee for Special Services. The contrary situation was in committees responsible for education, social policy, and MP ethics. The most gender balanced was the Committee for Petitions (53% of female MPs) and the Committee of Social Policy and Family (51%). In comparison to previous terms, we may conclude that the gender proportions improved. Firstly, the number of committees where women accounted for at least 40% of members or near 40% increased to 10. Secondly, there was no committee comprising male MPs only.

The trend observed during the seventh term of office continued during the eighth term. Although no female MP was in the Committee for Special Services, but in other seven committees, female representation varied between 45% and 67% (for more details regarding composition of all standing committees see B. Pająk-Patkowska, 2019).

The comparison of the committee composition in 1991–2018 shows that female representation in committees grew proportionally to the number of female MPs in the Sejm. However, the gender stereotype has not changed much as regards committees considered to be more of female or male type. During every term of office examined, the largest number of female MPs could be found in committees dealing with education, social policy, ethics and culture and media, whereas women were the least represented in committees responsible for special services, agriculture, administration and internal affairs, foreign policy and national defense. The situation improved in the Committee of Justice and the Committee of Public Finance where the number of female MPs increased.

**Chart 1. Parliamentary committees of 1<sup>st</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> term of office with the lowest number of female MPs**

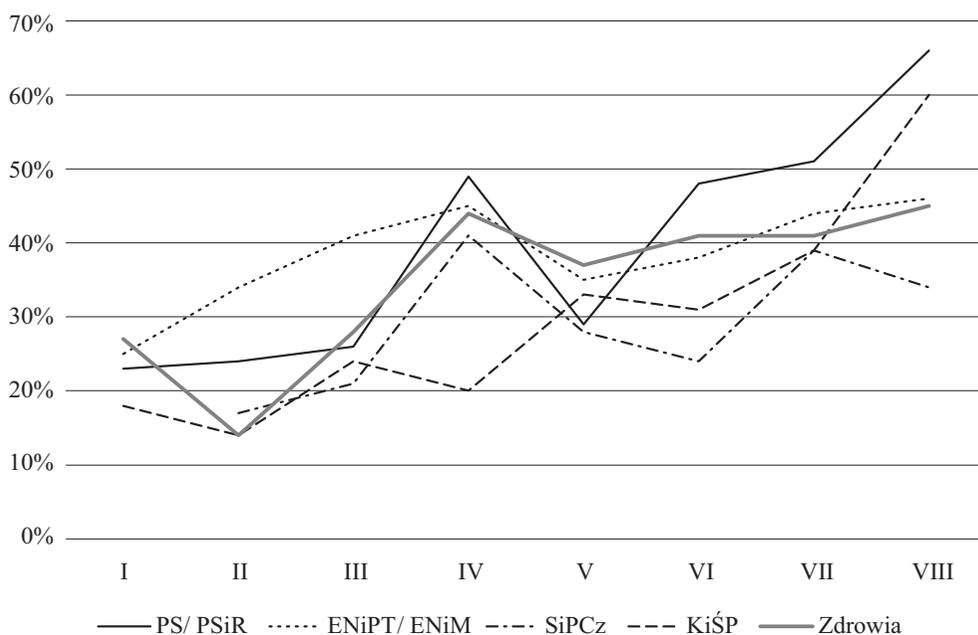


OK – Constitutional Liability; ON – National Defense; doSSS – Special Services; RiGŻ/RiRW – Agriculture and Food Economy/Agriculture and Rural Development; MKFiS/KFiT/KFiS – Youth, Physical Culture and Sport/Physical Culture and Tourism/Physical Culture and Sport.

Source: Author.

In the Sejm of the 1<sup>st</sup> term of office, 4 women were chairs of parliamentary committees. These included Olga Krzyżanowska, the chair of the Committee for Regulations and MP Affairs, Teresa Liszcz who led the Legislative Committee, Elżbieta Seferowicz the chair of the Committee of Health, and Grażyna Staniszevska was the chair the Committee of Ownership Transformation. There were also female deputy chairs: Anna Bańkowska (Committee of Social Policy), Anna Knysok (Committee of Health), Zofia Kowalczyk (Committee of Social Policy), Halina Nowina-Konopka (Committee of Education, Science and Technological Advancement), Iwona Zakrzewska (Committee of Retail and Services), Wiesława Ziółkowska (Committee of Economic Policy, Budget and Finance).

**Chart 2. Parliamentary committees of 1<sup>st</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> term of office with the highest number of female MPs**



PS/PSiR – Social Policy/Social and Family Policy; ENiPT/ENiM – Education, Science and Technological Advancement/Education, Science and Youth; Health; SiPCz – Justice and Human Rights; KiŚP – Culture and Media.

**Source:** Author.

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> term of office, we witnessed a decrease in the number of female committee chairs. The only female chair was Wiesława Ziółkowska who previously was a deputy chair of the same committee twice, i.e. the Committee of Economic Policy, Budget and Finance. There were also 6 female deputy chairs, two in the Committee of Agriculture and Food Economy: Maria Stolzman and Zofia Grzebisz-Nowicka, one in the Committee for Special Services (Lucyna Pietrzyk), Committee of Social Policy (Krystyna Sienkiewicz), Committee of Economic System and Industry (Janina Kraus), and the Committee of Education, Science and Technological Advancement (Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka).

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> term of office, there were two female chairs of parliamentary committees: Barbara Imiołczyk (Committee of Local Government and Regional Policy) and Grażyna Staniszevska (Committee of Education, Science and Youth). At the same time, the number of deputy chairs increased to eight. Two in the Committee of Family (Jolanta Banach, Barbara Frączek), Janina Kraus in the Committee of Economy, Olga Krzyżanowska in the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Krystyna Łybacka in the Committee of Education, Science and Youth, Katarzyna Piekarska in the Committee of Competition and Consumer Protection, Elżbieta Radziszewska in the Committee of Communications with Poles Abroad, and Ewa Tomaszewska in the Committee of Social Policy.

During the 4<sup>th</sup> term, the number of female chairs increased to five. These included Anna Bańkowska (Committee of Social Policy and Family), Barbara Błońska-Fajfrowska (Committee of Health), Teresa Jaształ (Committee of Gender Equality), Katarzyna Piekarska (Committee of Justice and Human Rights), and Genowefa Wiśniowska (Committee of National and Ethnic Minorities). The number of female deputy chairs doubled (16). They included Danuta Ciborowska (Committee of Regulations and MP Affairs), Maria Gajecka-Bożek (Committee of Health), Zyta Gilowska (Committee of Finance), Danuta Grabowska and Teresa Jaształ (Committee of Education, Science and Youth), Krystyna Herman (Committee of Gender Equality), Elżbieta Łukacijewska (Committee of Gender Equality), Alicja Murowicz and Anna Sobecka (Committee of Social Policy and Family), Maria Irena Nowacka (Committee of Justice and Human Rights), Elżbieta Piela Mielczarek (Committee of Infrastructure), Teresa Piotrowska (Committee of State Control), Sylwia Pusz (Committee for European Union Affairs), Elżbieta Romero (Committee of Public Finance), Izabella Sierakowska (Committee of National Defense), and Iwona Śledzińska-Katarasińska (Committee of Culture and Media).

Six female chairs acted during the 5<sup>th</sup> term of office. Ewa Kopacz headed the Committee of Health, Aleksandra Natalii-Świat, the Committee of Public Finance, Teresa Piotrowska, the Committee of State Control, Anna Sobecka, the Committee of Family and Human Rights, Krystyna Szumilas, the Committee of Education, Science and Youth, and Iwona Śledzińska-Katarasińska the Committee of Culture and Media. The number of deputy chairs stayed relatively high. There were seventeen of them, including Grażyna Ciemniak (Committee of EU Affairs), Małgorzata Gosiewska (Committee of Social Policy), Ewa Janik, Małgorzata Stryjska, Jolanta Szczypińska (Committee of Health), Elżbieta Łukacijewska (Committee for Communication with Poles Abroad), Krystyna Łybacka and Teresa Nowak (Committee of Education, Science and Youth), Halina Molka (Committee of Culture and Media), Małgorzata Ostrowska (Committee of Economy), Julia Pitera (Committee of Justice and Human Rights), Elżbieta Radziszewska (Committee of Family and Women's Affairs), Renata Rochnowska (Committee of Public Finance), Krystyna Skowrońska (Committee of Regulations and MP Affairs), Jadwiga Wiśniewska (Committee of State Control), Jadwiga Zakrzewska (Committee of National Defense) and Maria Zuba (Committee of Labour).

During the 6<sup>th</sup> term, only two women acted as committee chairs: Elżbieta Jakubiak in the Committee of Physical Culture, Sport and Tourism, and Iwona Śledzińska-Katarasińska in the Committee of Culture and Media. The number of deputy chairs slightly increased to eighteen: Urszula Augustyn (Committee of Education, Science and Youth), Anna Bańkowska, Joanna Kluzik-Rostkowska, Magdalena Kochan (Committee of Social Policy), Barbara Bartuś (Committee of Regulations and MP Affairs), Anita Błochowiak (Committee of Public Finance), Beata Bublewicz (Committee of Physical Culture, Sport and Tourism), Joanna Fabisiak (Committee for Communication with Poles Abroad), Beata Kempa (Committee of Justice and Human Rights), Izabela Kloc (Committee of Local Government and Regional Policy), Elżbieta Kruk (Committee of Culture and Media), Teresa Piotrowska (Committee of State Control), Stanisława Prządka (Committee of Administration and Internal Affairs), Halina Rozpondek (Committee of Local

Government and Regional Affairs), Krystyna Skowrońska and Beata Szydło (Committee of Public Finance), Jadwiga Zakrzewska (Committee of National Defense) and Renata Zaremba (Committee of State Treasury).

During the 7<sup>th</sup> term of office, six women chaired parliamentary committees: Brygida Kolenda-Łabuś (Committee of Petitions), Agnieszka Pomaska (Committee of European Union), Stanisława Prządka (Committee of Justice and Human Rights), Krystyna Skowrońska (Committee of Finance), Iwona Śledzińska-Katarasińska (Committee of Culture and Media), and Elżbieta Witek (Committee of MP Ethics). The number of deputy chairs increased to 26.

During the 8<sup>th</sup> term of office, eight women headed parliamentary committees: Dorota Arciszewska-Mielewcyk (Committee of Maritime Economy and Inland Shipping), Iwona Arent (Committee of Constitutional Liability), Bożena Borys-Szopa (Committee of Social Policy and Family), Izabela Kloc (Committee for European Union Affairs), Elżbieta Kruk (Committee of Culture and Media), Danuta Pietraszewska (Committee of National and Ethnic Minorities), Anna Schmidt-Rodziewicz (Committee of Communication with Poles Abroad), Małgorzata Zwiercan (Committee of Senior Citizen Policy). The number of female deputy chairs increased again to 32.

During the 1<sup>st</sup> term of office of the Sejm, the percentage of female chairs in standing committees increased by 8% to drop to 4% in the following term of office. Since the 3<sup>rd</sup> term of office, we have witnessed a steady increase in the number of female committee chairs, except for one drop during the 6<sup>th</sup> term. During the current term of office, women have been chairing nearly 1/3 of all committees (28%), and there is a similar percentage of female deputy chairs. It is worth noting that female MPs headed not only committees dealing with affairs stereotypically associated with women but also typical male committees (Committee of Ownership Transformation, Committee of Economy, Budget and Finance). Interestingly, some the female MPs headed committees where female representation was poor, e.g. the Committee of Justice, Committee of Physical Culture, Sport and Tourism, Committee of Local Government, and the Committee for Special Services. During the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> terms, the number of female chairs and deputy chairs significantly increased. Types of committees with female chairs vary and are not limited to committees dealing with typically female issues (1/3 of deputy chairs represent such areas).

Table 1

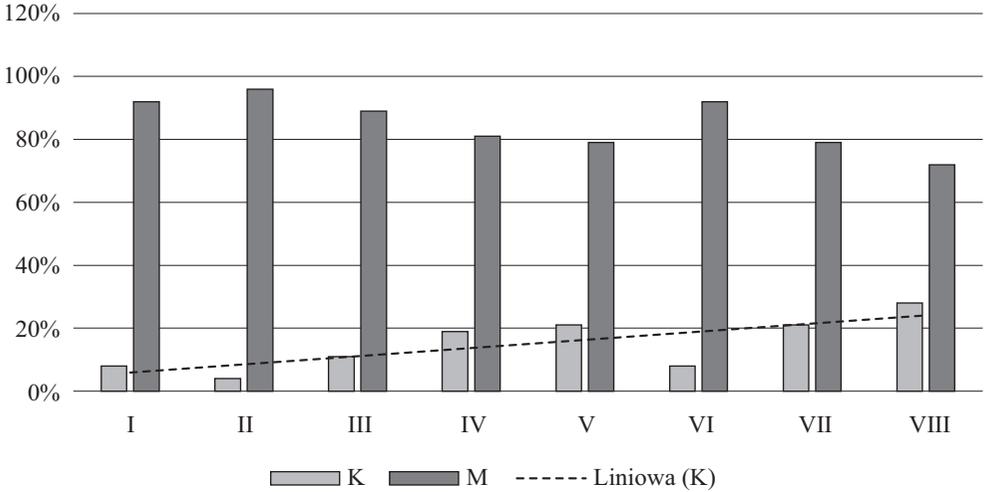
**Male and female MPs as chairs of standing committees**

Chair	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>
F	8%	4%	11%	19%	21%	8%	21%	28%
M	92%	96%	89%	81%	79%	92%	79%	72%
<b>Deputy chair</b>								
F	8%	8%	9%	20%	19%	21%	24%	29%
M	92%	92%	91%	80%	81%	79%	76%	71%

Source: Author, based on Parliament Archives.

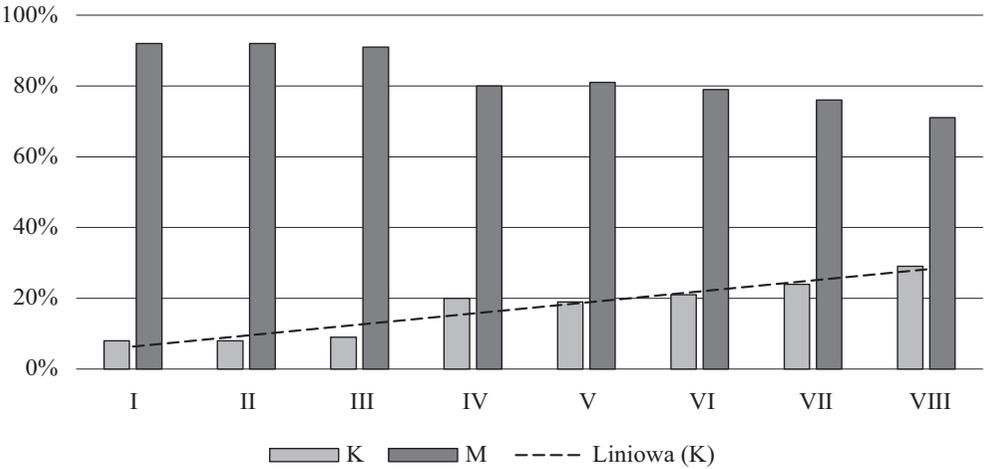
Two charts shown below indicate the disparity in male and female chairs and deputy chairs in standing committees.

**Chart 3. Female and male chairs of standing committees**



Source: Author, based on Parliament Archives.

**Chart 4. Female and male deputy chairs of standing committees**



Source: Author, based on Parliament Archives.

### Summary

The analysis of the selected areas of MP activity has confirmed all of the hypotheses. According to the first hypothesis, during the period concerned women had a poor representation in the Presidium, the governing body of the Sejm, and rarely headed parliamentary committees. In the period of 28 years, the position of the Marshal (Speaker) was occupied by a woman only three times and the Deputy Marshal 9 times. They chaired standing committees in the Parliament less frequently than male MPs

(15% on average during eight terms), and the same applies to the position of a deputy chair (slightly over 17%). The second hypothesis has also been confirmed, since female MPs were more frequently members of committees responsible for matters typically associated with women. Interestingly, female MPs also chaired some committees dominated by their male counterparts. As regards the two bodies, the Presidium and standing committees, data examined show gradual changes towards a stronger female representation. It might be linked to a growing number of female MPs in the Polish Parliament in general. This seems to be a sluggish but gradual process, especially after the adoption of the Gender Equality Act. In the Sejm of the 8<sup>th</sup> term of office (the last analyzed in the article), female MPs accounted for 27% of all deputies, whereas in 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> terms 10–13% only. The number of female MPs in the Sejm of the 9<sup>th</sup> term slightly exceeded 29%, which makes Poland ranked 54<sup>th</sup> in the world. During the current term of office, the position of the Marshal is held by Ms. Elżbieta Witek which makes Poland 55<sup>th</sup> in the global ranking (19.7%) of countries where female MPs chair parliaments (data applies to both lower and upper chambers of parliament, following: *Kobiety w polityce. Statystyki...*).

It is worth emphasizing that the presence of women in governing bodies of the Sejm strengthens their influence on its functioning and has a symbolic dimension. Women attract more media coverage when they chair the Presidium and act as Marshals of the Sejm. This facilitates changes in the awareness among members of the electorate (Renzetti, Curran, 2005, Dziemba, 2009, Klimowicz, Pacześniak, Wiktorska-Święcka, 2009, Piontek, 2016).

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**Wybrane obszary aktywności kobiet w Sejmie RP w latach 1991-2018 – aspekt ilościowy****Streszczenie**

Celem artykułu jest analiza aktywności kobiet w polskim Sejmie w okresie pomiędzy 1991 a 2018 rokiem, co obejmuje 8 kadencji. Z analiz wyłączono działalność Sejmu X kadencji (1989–1991), ze względu na specyfikę wyborów, jak i odmienny sposób funkcjonowania sejmu w tym okresie. W oparciu o dokumenty regulujące pracę Sejmu, określone zostały możliwe pola aktywności w tym organie oraz udział w nich kobiet. Przyjęto hipotezę zakładającą, że w organach władzy czy miejscach gwarantujących do niej większy dostęp (Prezydium Sejmu, pełnienie funkcji Marszałka Sejmu, przewodniczenie komisjom sejmowym) występuje dysproporcja pomiędzy posłami i posłankami. Założono również, że kobiety są bardziej aktywne w tych komisjach, które zajmują się obszarami stereotypowo przypisywanymi kobietom, takimi jak edukacja czy zdrowie. Zastosowano metodę analizy dokumentów oraz metodę statystyczną w celu porównania danych dotyczących aktywności posłów i posłanek. Materiał badawczy stanowiły dane dostępne na stronie sejm.gov.pl (archiwum ośmiu kadencji). Warto podkreślić, że strona ta stanowi wiarygodne źródło danych, wiele zasobów zostało już zdigitalizowanych, co znacznie ułatwia dostęp do materiału badawczego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kobiety w polityce, aktywność polityczna kobiet, Sejm, kobiety w Sejmie, komisje sejmowe

