

UKRAINIAN PRISON SYSTEM:

EVOLUTION AND WAR-TIME ADAPTATION
(1991—2026)

Dmytro Yagunov

Riga, April 8–9, 2026



UKRAINIAN PRISON SYSTEM: EVOLUTION AND WAR-TIME ADAPTATION (1991–2026)

Dmytro Yagunov

Attorney at Law, D.Sc. in Political Science, Ph.D. in Public Administration,
MSSc in Criminal Justice, Associate Professor, Merited Lawyer of Ukraine

Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen (Tübingen, Germany),

Vasyl Stus Donetsk National University (Vinnytsia, Ukraine)



EBERHARD KARLS
UNIVERSITÄT
TÜBINGEN



OVERVIEW OF POLICY MODULATIONS (1991–PRESENT)



Vassal-Bureaucratic Military (1991–1998)



Transitional Bureaucratic Military (1998–1999)



Autonomous Traditional-Bureaucratic (1999–2015)

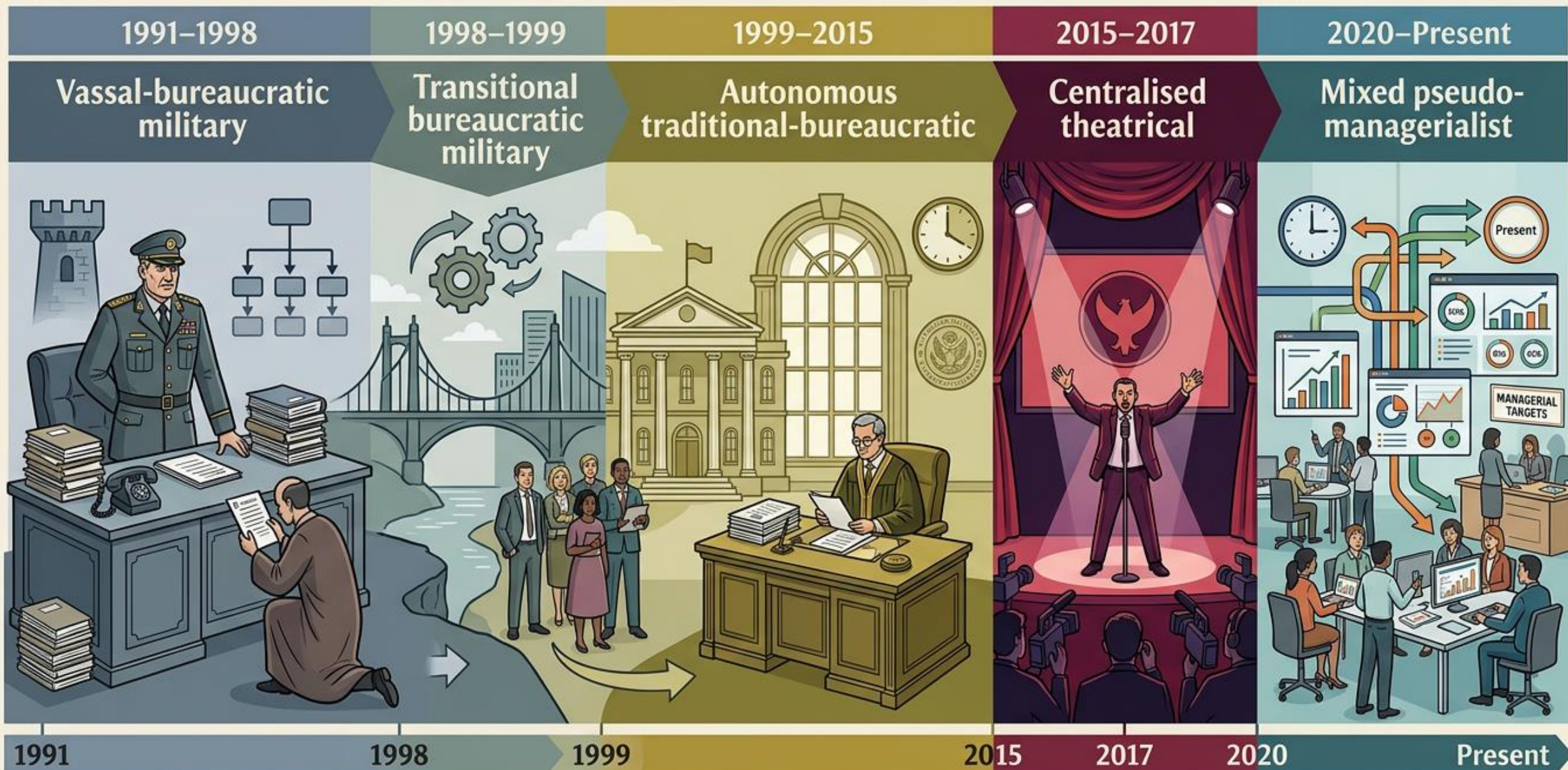


Centralised Theatrical (2015–2017)



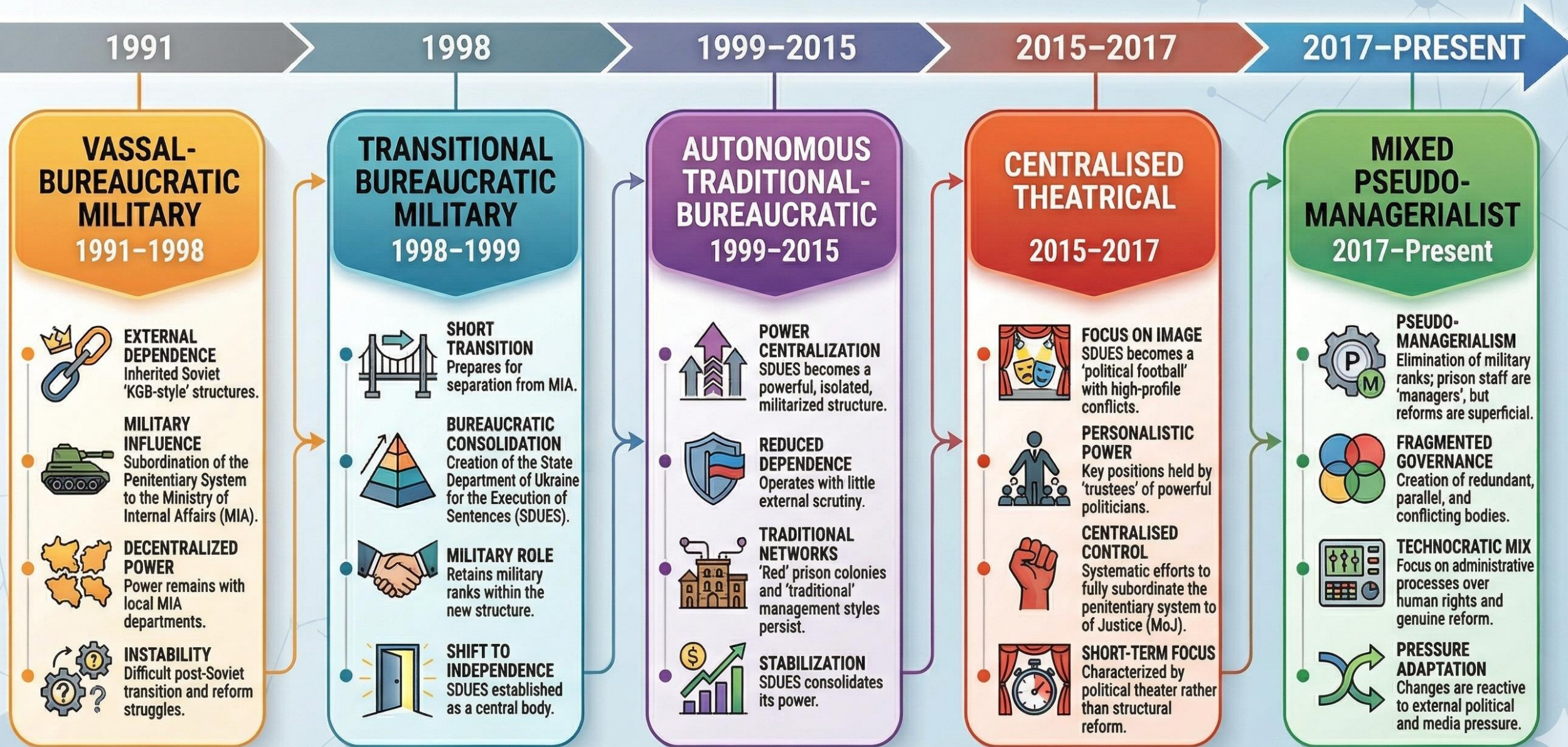
Mixed Pseudo-Managerialist (2017–Present)

OVERVIEW OF POLICY MODULATIONS (1991–PRESENT)



OVERVIEW OF UKRAINIAN PRISON POLICY MODULATIONS (1991–PRESENT)

Based on the analysis of Ukrainian Prison Policy by Yagunov (2024).



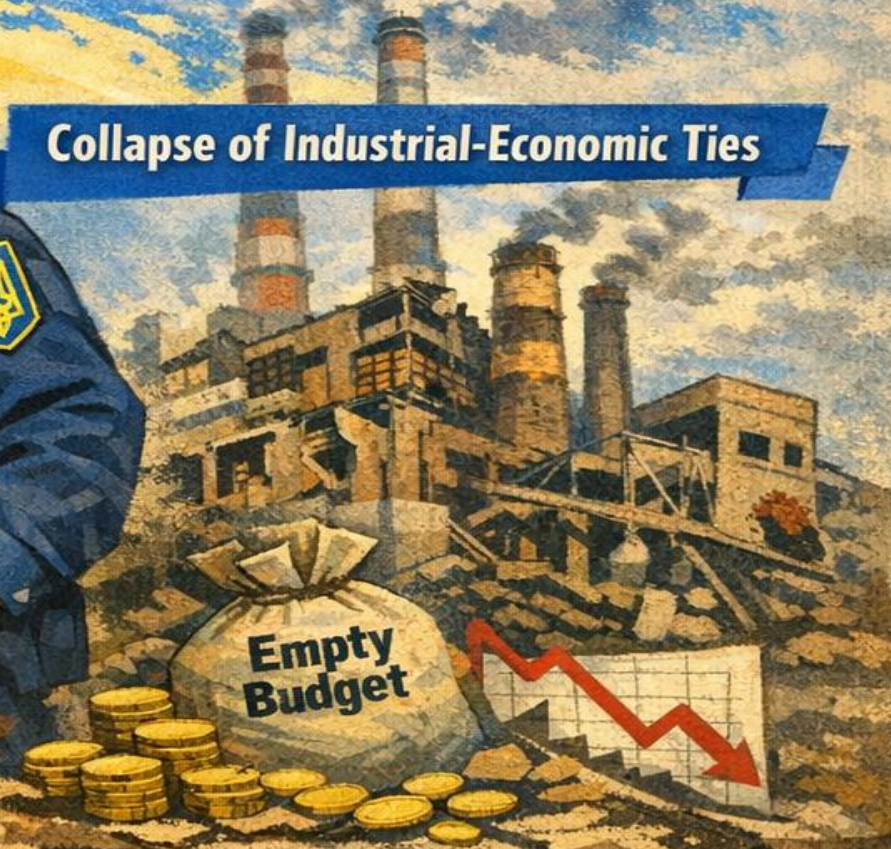
VASSAL-BUREAUCRATIC MILITARY MODULATION (1991–1998)



**Subordination to the
Ministry of Internal Affairs (Police)**

**Marginalised
“Vassal” Status**

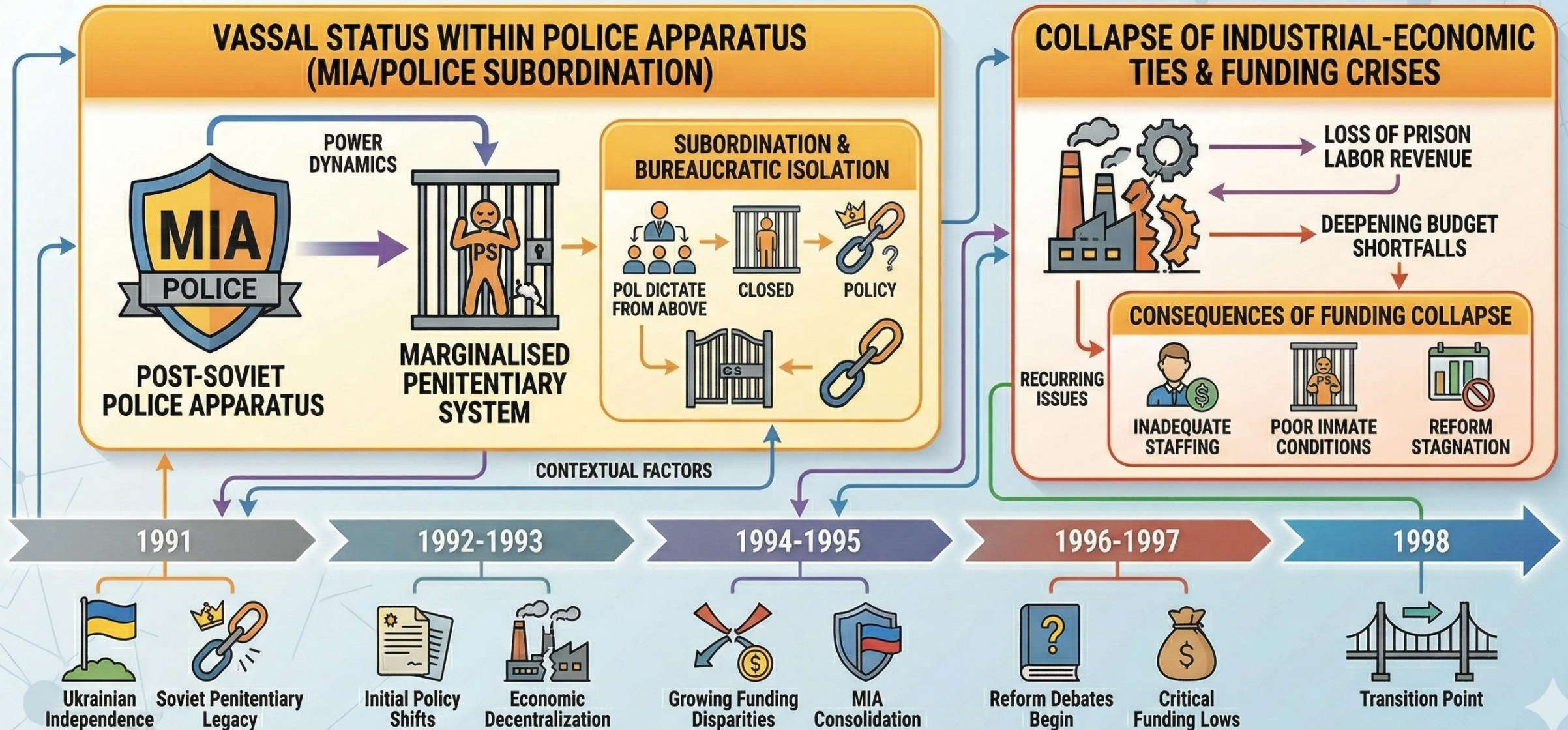
Collapse of Industrial-Economic Ties



LEADING TO FUNDING CRISES

VASSAL-BUREAUCRATIC MILITARY MODULATION (1991–1998) - Detailed Analysis

A schematic model of post-Soviet penitentiary policy as defined by Yagunov (2024)



POST-SOVIET TRANSITION CRISES (EARLY 1990s)



Lack of Budgetary Funding
+ Rising Crime Rates

Crackdown on Crime

Harsh Policies & Repression



Massive Expansion of the Penal System

Prison Population Surge

116,000 INMATES
In 1990

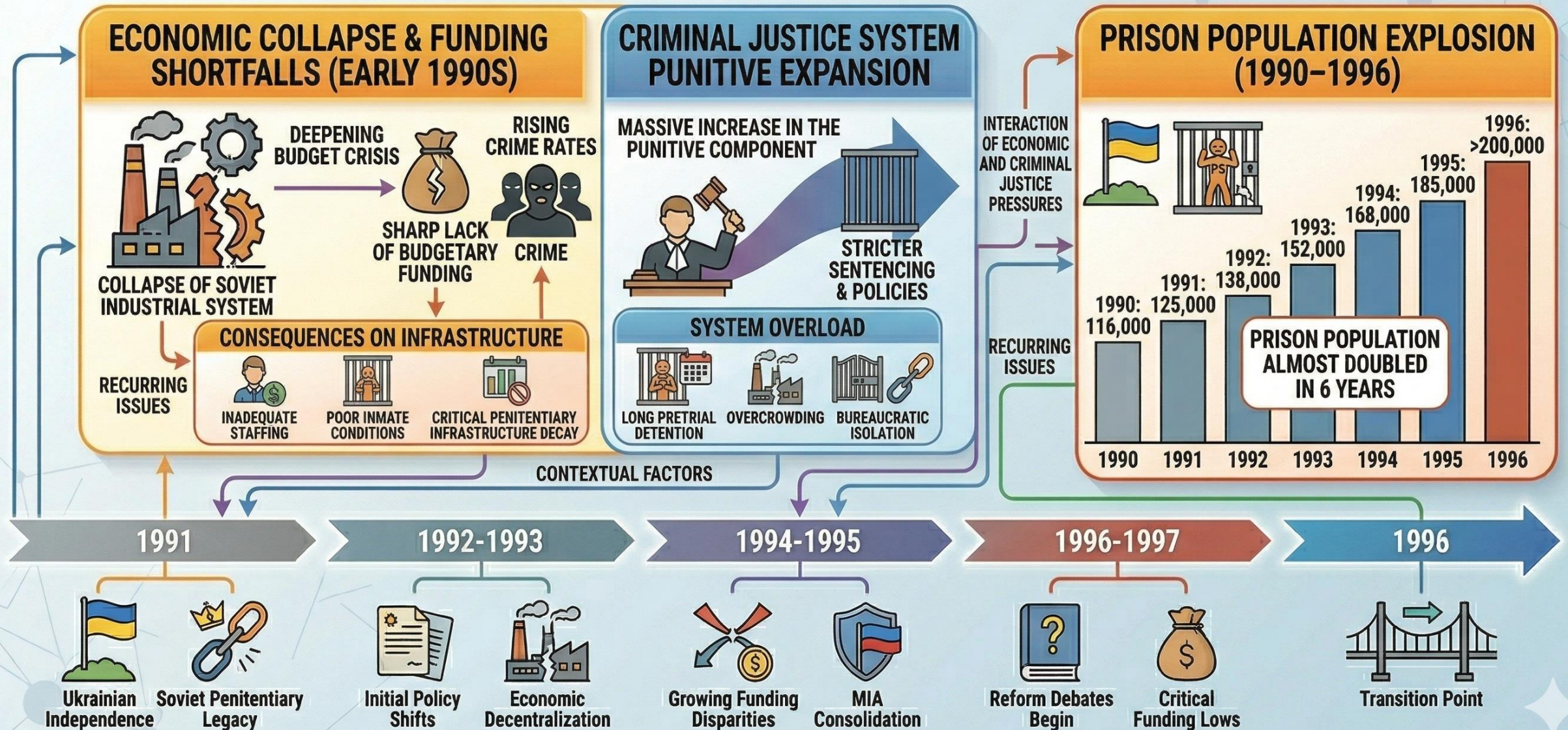


Over 200,000
INMATES by 1996



POST-SOVIET TRANSITION CRISES (EARLY 1990S) - Key Drivers and Prison Population Explosion

Based on the analysis of post-Soviet Ukrainian policy dynamics (Yagunov, 2024)





TRANSITIONAL BUREAUCRATIC MILITARY MODULATION (1998–1999)

**ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT FOR
THE EXECUTION OF PUNISHMENTS**

**TEMPORARY CONTINUED SUBORDINATION
TO NATIONAL POLICE AGENCY**



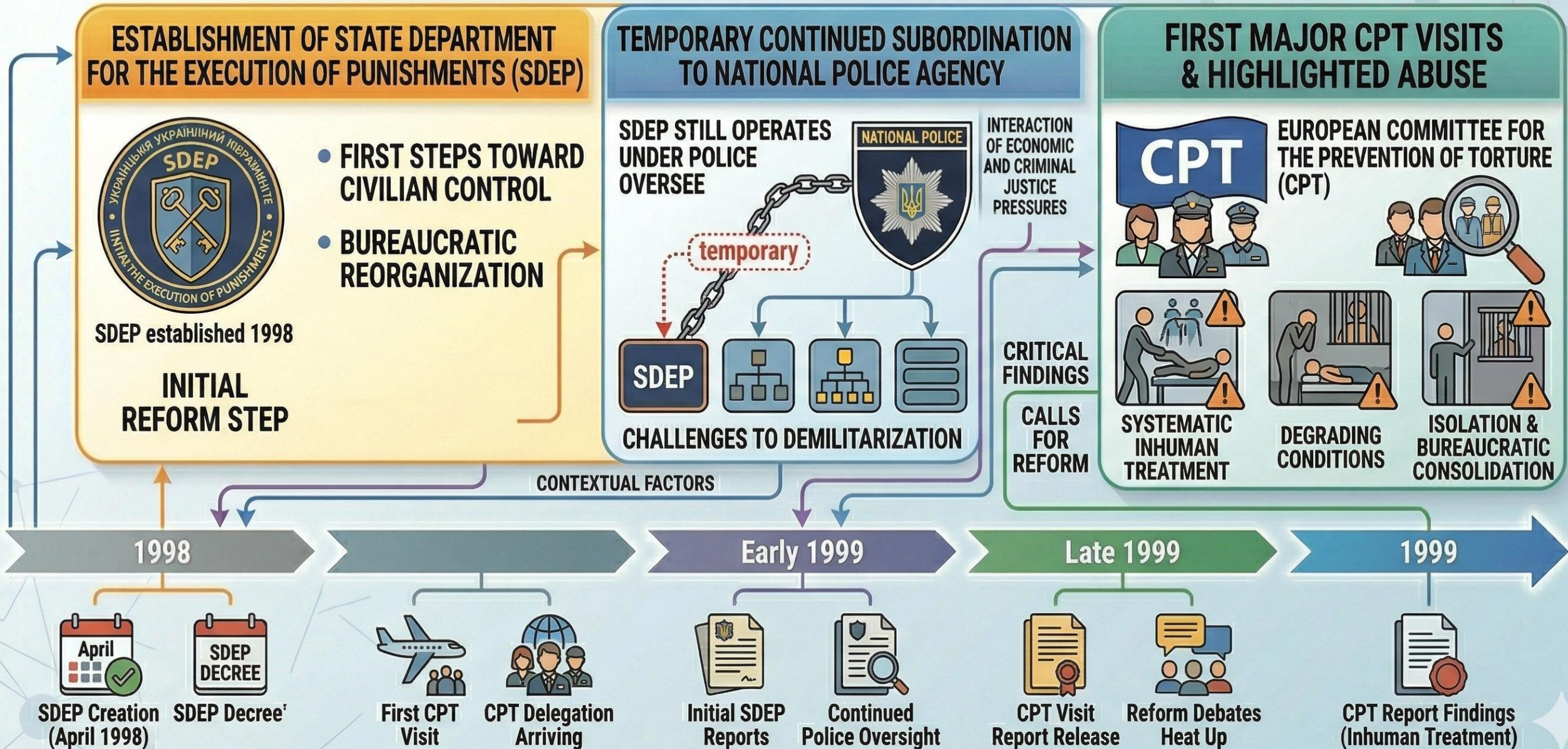
CPT REPORTS REVEAL ABUSE

**SYSTEMATIC INHUMAN AND
DEGRADING TREATMENT**



TRANSITIONAL BUREAUCRATIC MILITARY MODULATION (1998–1999) - Key Drivers and Prison Population Stability

Based on the analysis of post-Soviet Ukrainian policy dynamics (Yagunov, 2024)



1998 CAPACITY CRISIS (CPT FINDINGS)

SIZOs (Remand Centers)



44,000 Detainees
for 34,000 Places

Colonies (Prisoners)



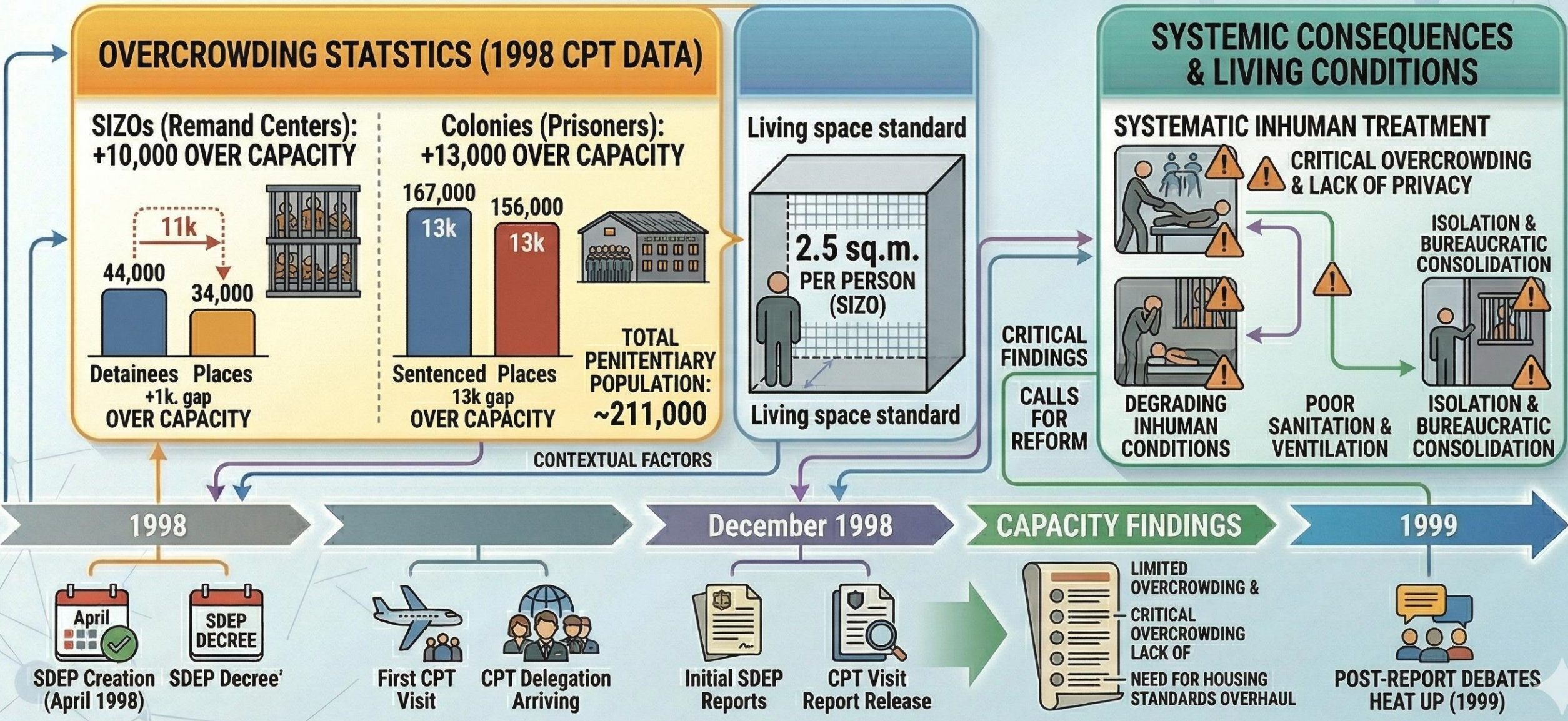
167,000 Sentenced
for 156,000 Places

Living Space Standard: Only 2.5 sq.m. per person in SIZOs



1998 CAPACITY CRISIS (CPT FINDINGS) - Critical Analysis of SIZO and Colony Conditions

Based on the analysis of post-Soviet Ukrainian policy dynamics (Yagunov, 2024)



THE PEAK OF INCARCERATION (2000)

Ukraine reached a critical maximum of nearly

220,000 INMATES

Incarceration Rate:

443

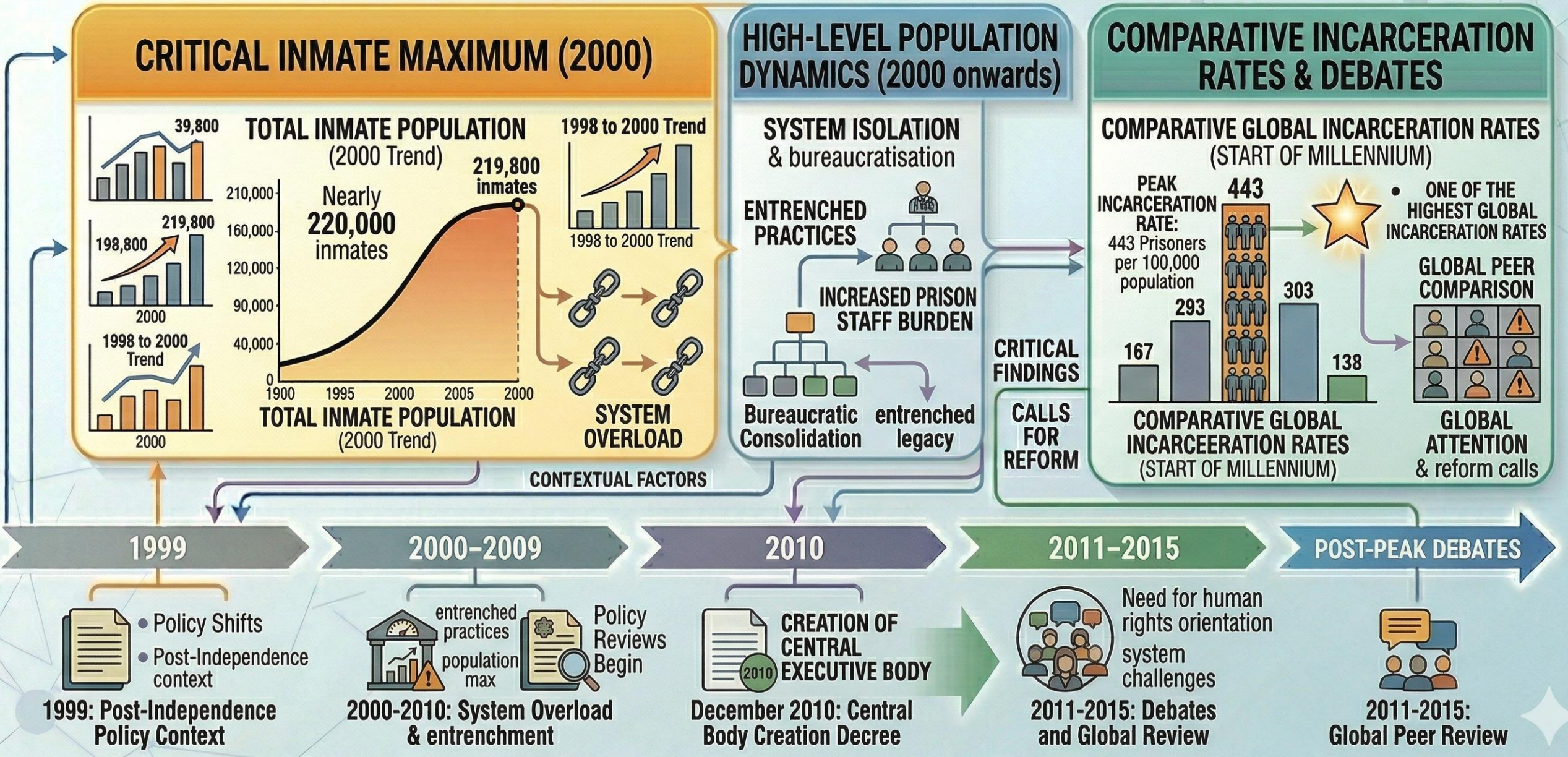
 prisoners per
100,000 population

One of the highest incarceration rates globally
at the start of the millennium.



THE PEAK OF INCARCERATION (2000) - Detailed Analysis of Inmate Numbers and Population Rates

Based on the analysis of post-Soviet Ukrainian policy dynamics (Yagunov, 2024)



CENTRALISED THEATRICAL MODULATION (2015-2017)

Liquidation of the **State Penitentiary Service** in **2016**



Functions Transferred to the **Ministry of Justice**

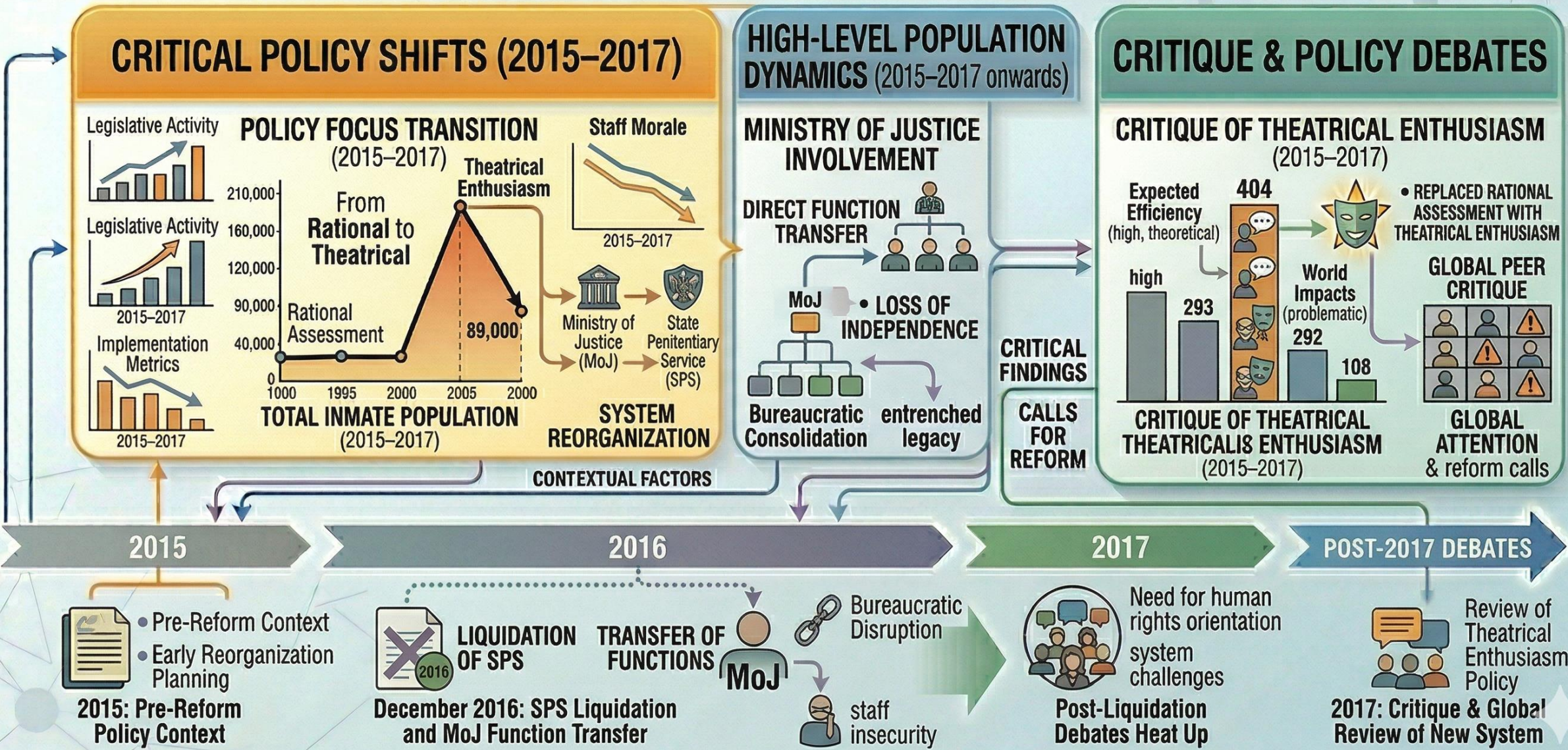


Criticized for Replacing Rational Assessment
with **"Theatrical Enthusiasm"**



CENTRALISED THEATRICAL MODULATION (2015–2017) - Analysis of Policy Transformation

Based on the analysis of post-Soviet Ukrainian policy dynamics (Yagunov, 2024)



FAILURES OF THE 2016 REFORM

Absence of a preparatory concept, strategy, or financial action plan



Attempted creation of “Prison Investigators” later declared unconstitutional

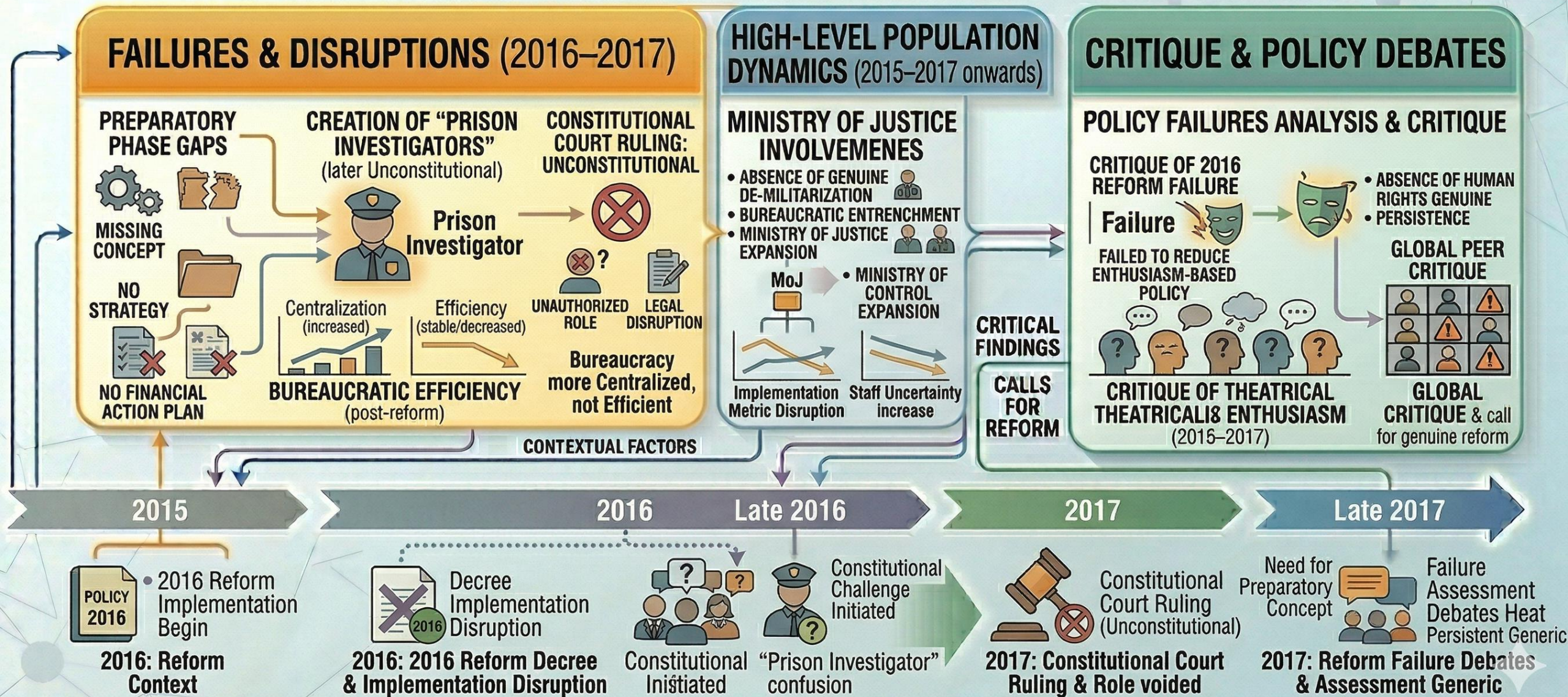


Bureaucracy became more centralized rather than more efficient



FAILURES OF THE 2016 REFORM (2016–2017) - Analysis of Post-Reform Disruption

Based on the analysis of post-Soviet Ukrainian policy dynamics (Yagunov, 2024)



FAILURES OF THE 2016 REFORM



Absence of a preparatory concept, strategy, or financial action plan



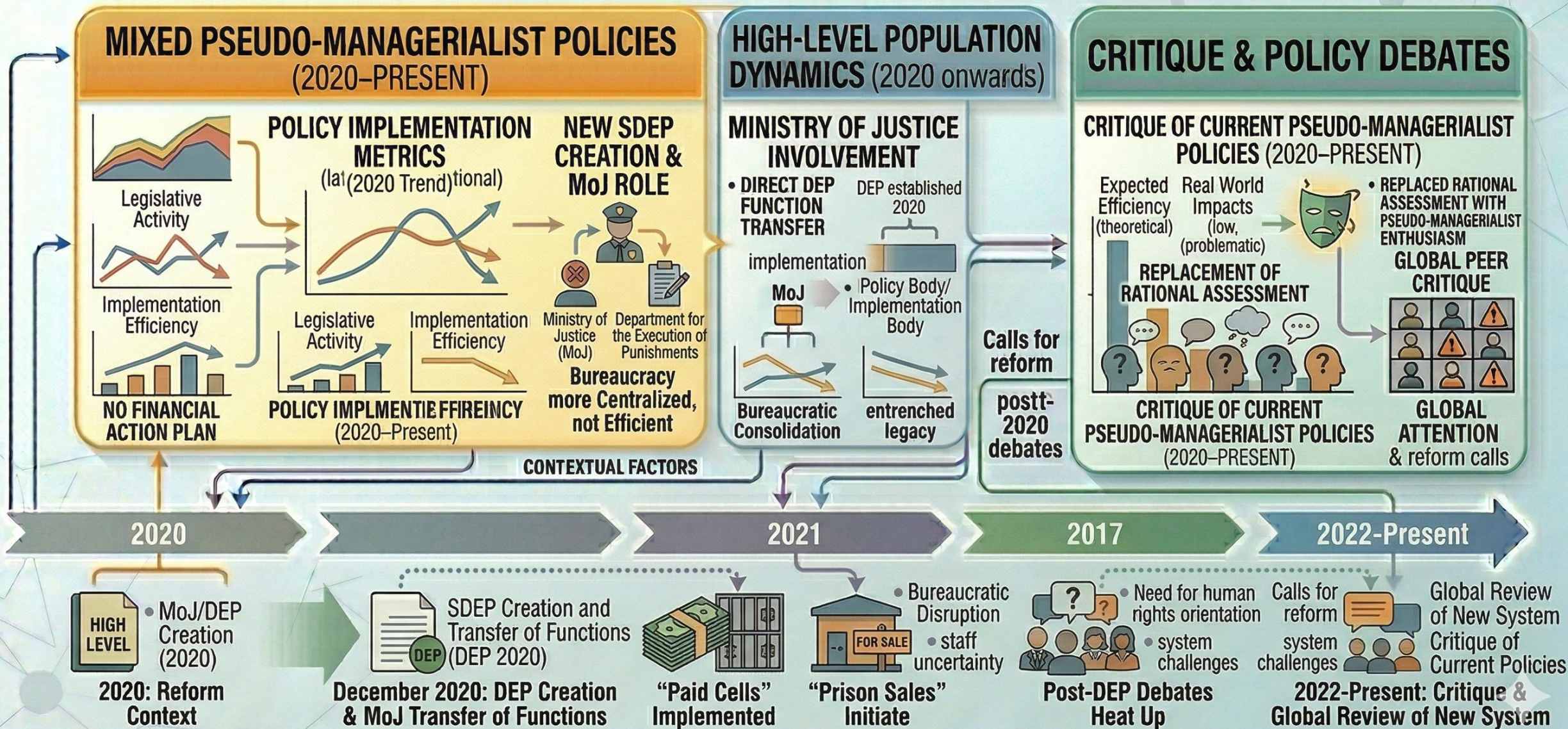
Attempted creation of “prison investigators” later declared unconstitutional



Bureaucracy became more centralised rather than more efficient

MIXED PSEUDO-MANAGERIALIST MODULATION (2020-PRESENT) - Analysis of Policy Transformation

Based on the analysis of post-Soviet Ukrainian policy dynamics (Yagunov, 2024)



MIXED PSEUDO-MANAGERIALIST MODULATION

(2020—PRESENT)



Creation of the Department for the Execution of Punishments
within the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine



Introduction of controversial **“Paid Cells”**
in Pre-Trial Prisons



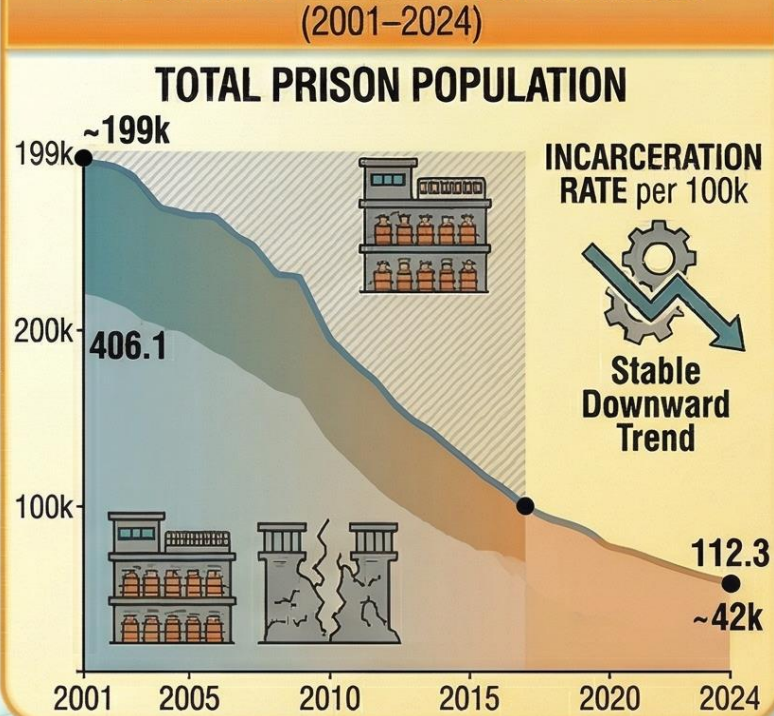
The **“Big Prison Sale”**:

Privatisation efforts criticised for lack of economic
documentation

PRISON POPULATION DYNAMICS (2001–2024) - Trend Analysis & System Impact

A data-driven schematic of historical population trends and operational challenges based on Ministry of Justice and UNODC analysis (Yagunov, 2024)

HISTORICAL TREND VISUALIZATION (2001–2024)

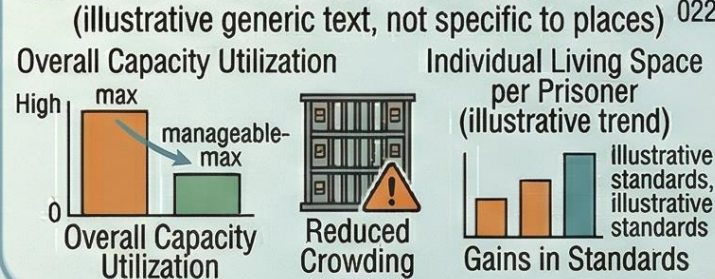


KEY POPULATION METRICS & IMPACT (2001–2024)

POPULATION BREAKDOWN SHIFT (2001 vs. 2024)

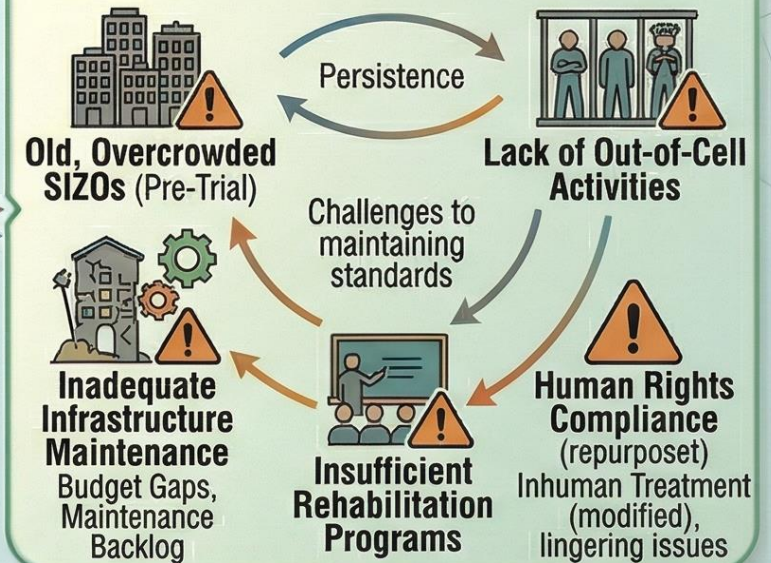
Convicted Prisoners	24,171 (95%)	17.5%	Gavel/Sentence
Pre-Trial Detainees	12,778 (98%)	22.5%	Holding Cell
Other/Remand	13,57%	15.5%	

COMPARATIVE SYSTEM CAPACITY GAINS (illustrative generic text, not specific to places) 022



SYSTEM MAINTENANCE & STANDARDS CHALLENGES

SUCCESS IN REDUCING POPULATION VS. VS. PERSISTENT SYSTEM CHALLENGES

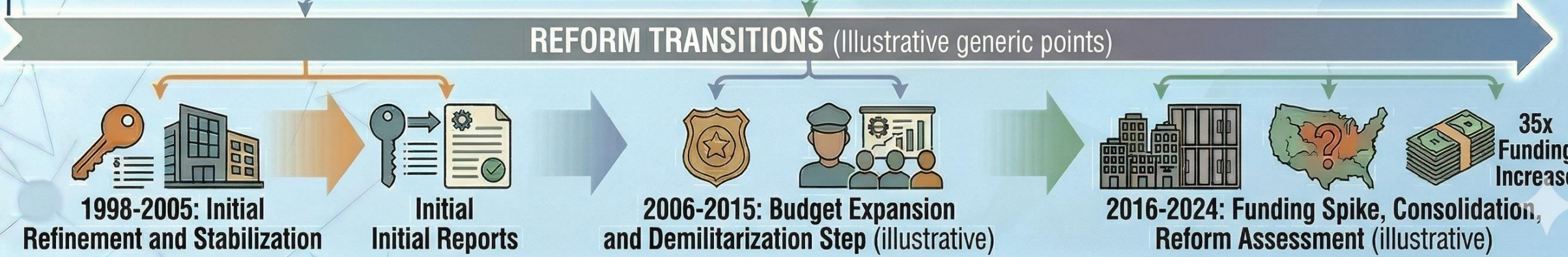
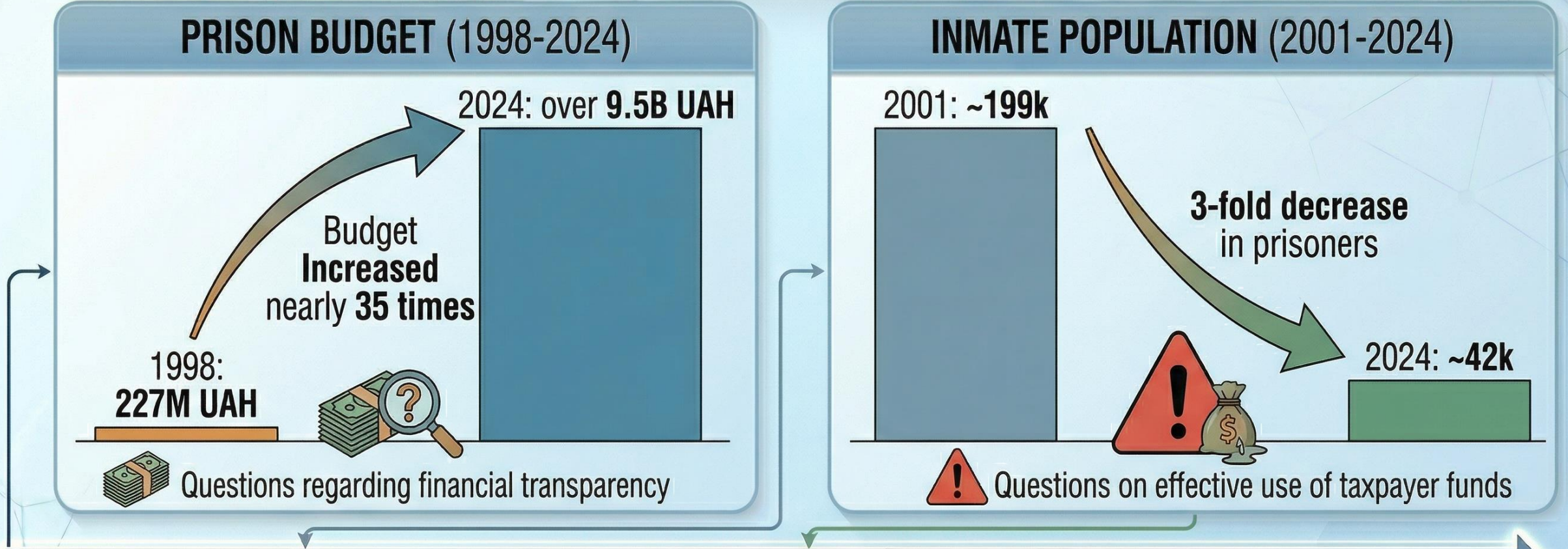


TIMELINE SUMMARY OF MAJOR SHIFTS (Illustrative generic points, not specific events)



FUNDING VS. EFFICIENCY (THE PARADOX) - Simplier Analysis of Budget and Inmate Trends (1998-2024)

Based on the analysis of post-Soviet Ukrainian policy dynamics (Yagunov, 2024) disdesigned based on Ministry of Justice and UNODC analysis (Yagunov, 2024)

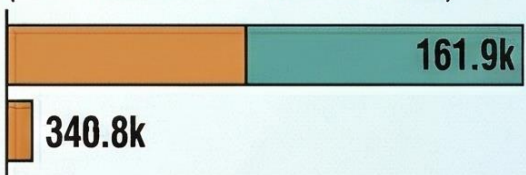


MORTALITY AND SUICIDE TRENDS - Detailed Analysis of Inmate Numbers and Population Rates

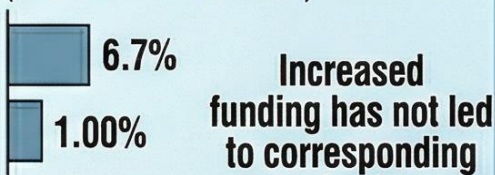
Based on the analysis of post-Soviet Ukrainian policy dynamics (Yagunov, 2026) - A Detailed Review

PRISONER MORTALITY (2001-2023)

PRISONER MORTALITY (2001)
(total number - illustrative max)

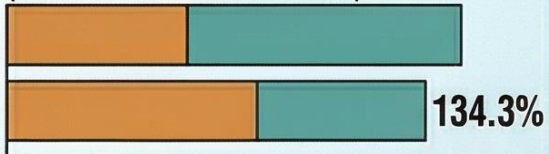


RELATIVE MORTALITY RATE (2001)
(rate illustrative - low)

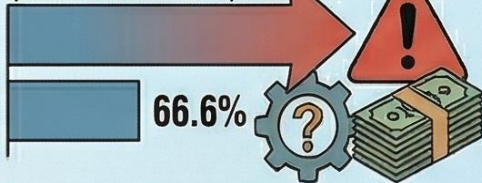


Increased funding has not led to corresponding reduction

PRISONER MORTALITY (2021-2023)
(total number illustrative)



RELATIVE MORTALITY RATE
(rate illustrative)



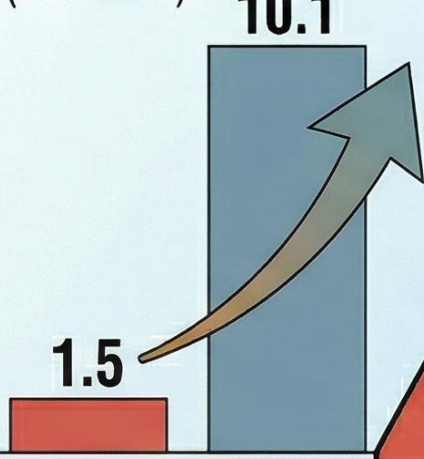
Deaths generic



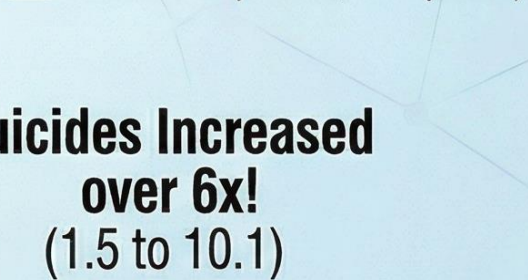
Disease burden generic

PRISONER SUICIDES (2001-2021)

SUICIDES per 10,000 (2001)
(illustrative)



SUICIDES per 10,000 (2021)



Suicides Increased over 6x!
(1.5 to 10.1)



Challenges to mental health care, generic



Stress, Isolation generic
Lingering mental health challenges generic

MORTALITY/SUICIDE TRENDS TIMELINE SUMMARY (2001-2023)



2001-2005: Initial Policy Stabilization
Initial reports, lower generic rates illustrative



2006-2015: Policy Consolidation and Entrenchment
Centralization, varying generic data, illustrative



2016-2023: Conflict and Recent Spike (Illustrative)
Spike in suicides and generic deaths, illustrative

Persistent questions on data and causes,

PRISON CRIME INDICATORS

RELATIVE CRIME RATE (2009-2019)



Relative crime rate increased 4-fold between 2009 and 2019

POST-2016 REFORMS & MANAGEMENT



DATA UNDERESTIMATION CONCERNS

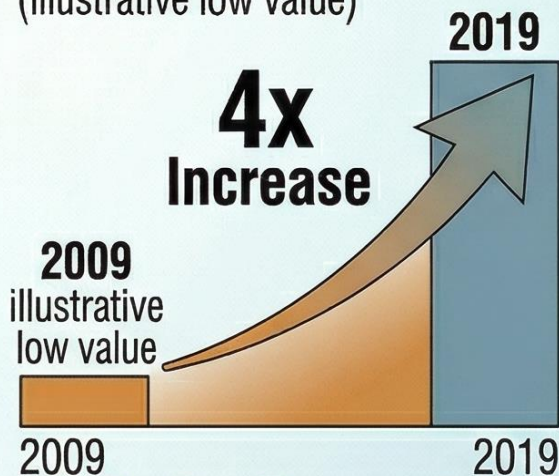


PRISON CRIME INDICATORS - Simpler Analysis of Prison Crime Rates (Yagunov, 2024)

Based on the analysis of Ukrainian prison policy (Yagunov, 2024) - A Detailed Review

RELATIVE PRISON CRIME RATE (2009-2019)

RELATIVE PRISON CRIME RATE (2009-2019)
(illustrative low value)



Increased funding
has not led to
corresponding
reduction in crime



State Management
Imbalances generic → Linger-
ing data challenges generic

INTERNAL CRIME DATA CONCERNS

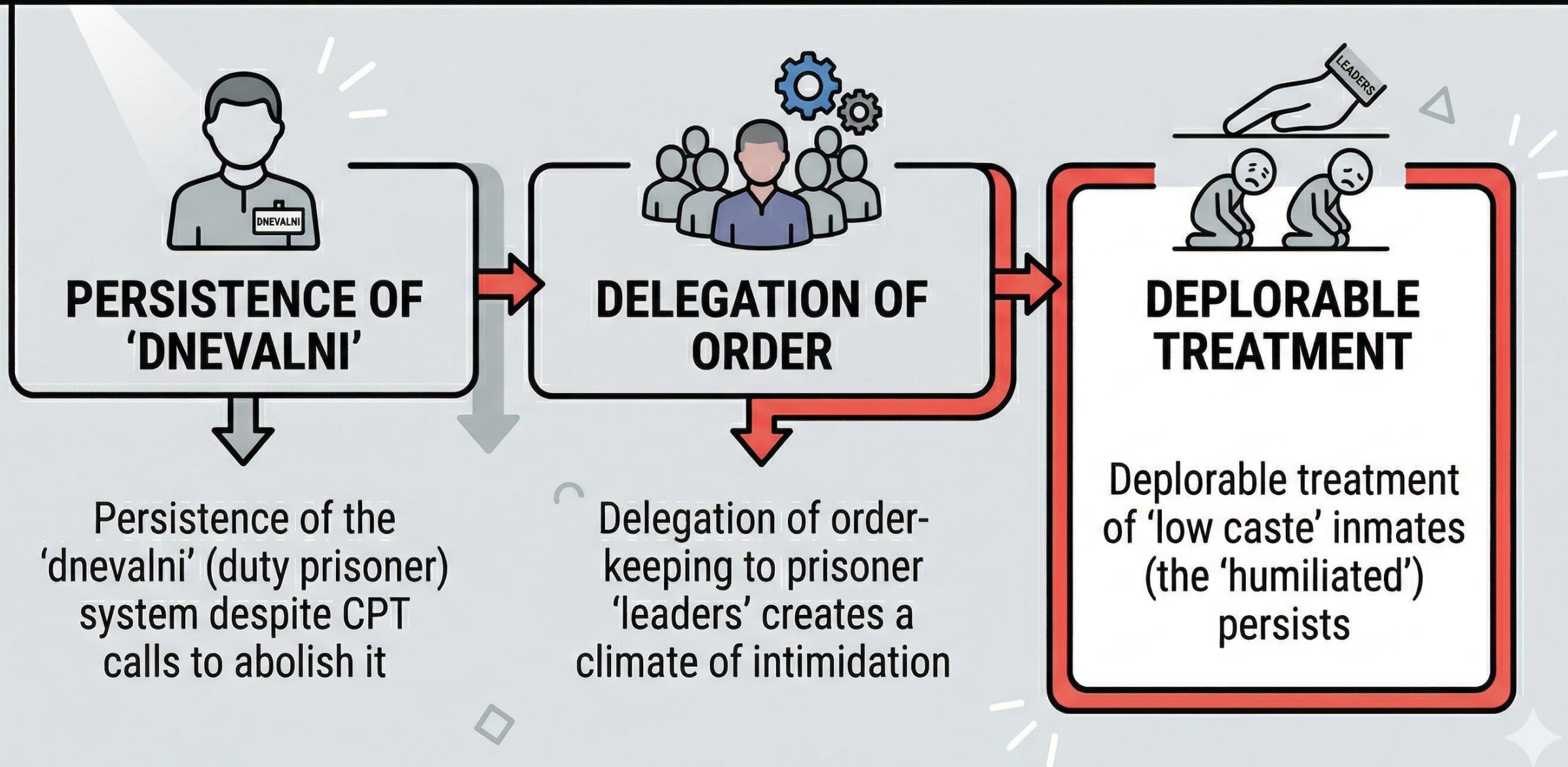
REPORTED vs. ESTIMATED CRIME ESTIMATED CRIME RATE
(illustrative generic trends) (illustrative, not specific)



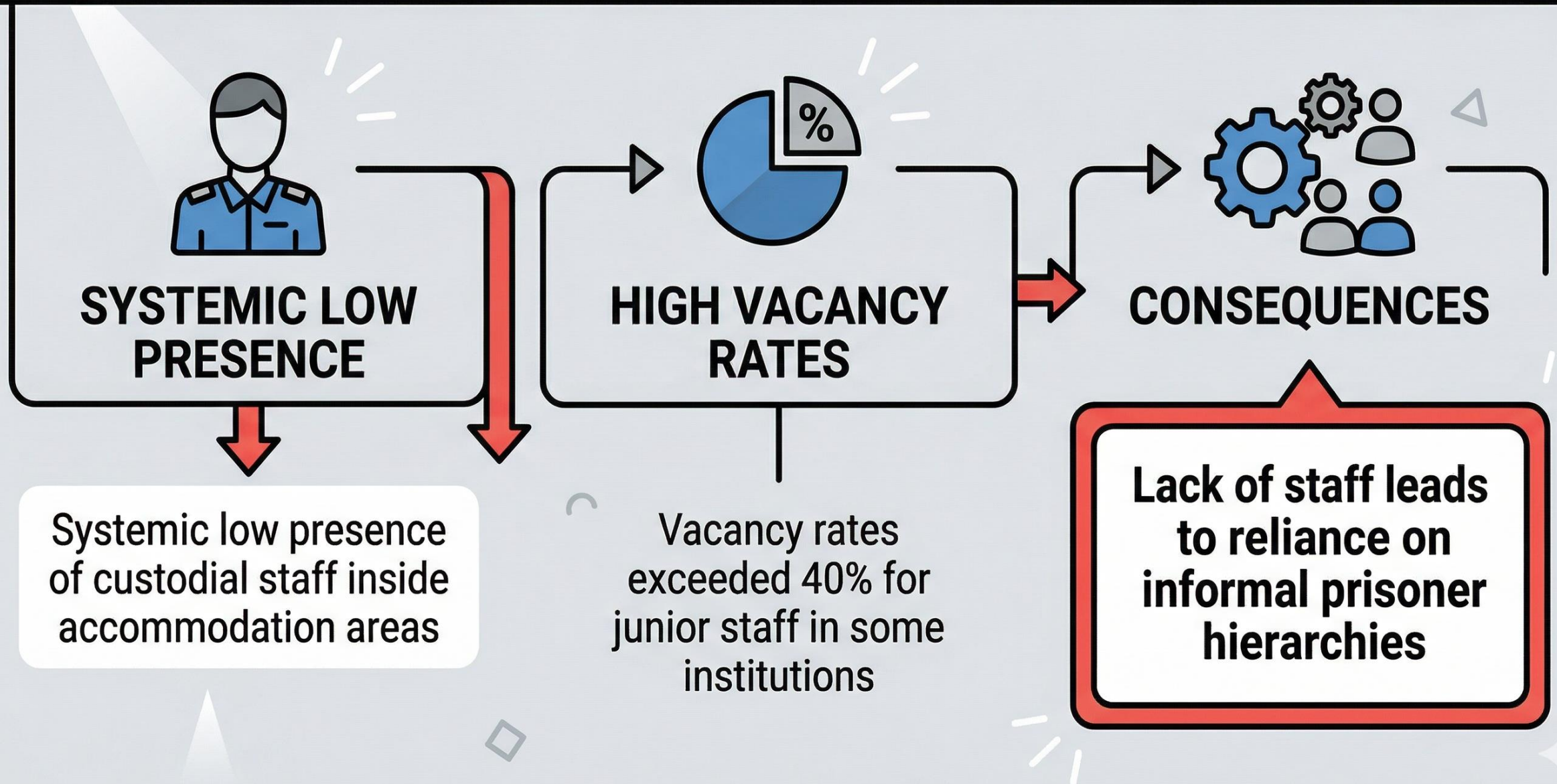
PRISON CRIME TRENDS TIMELINE SUMMARY (2009-2019)



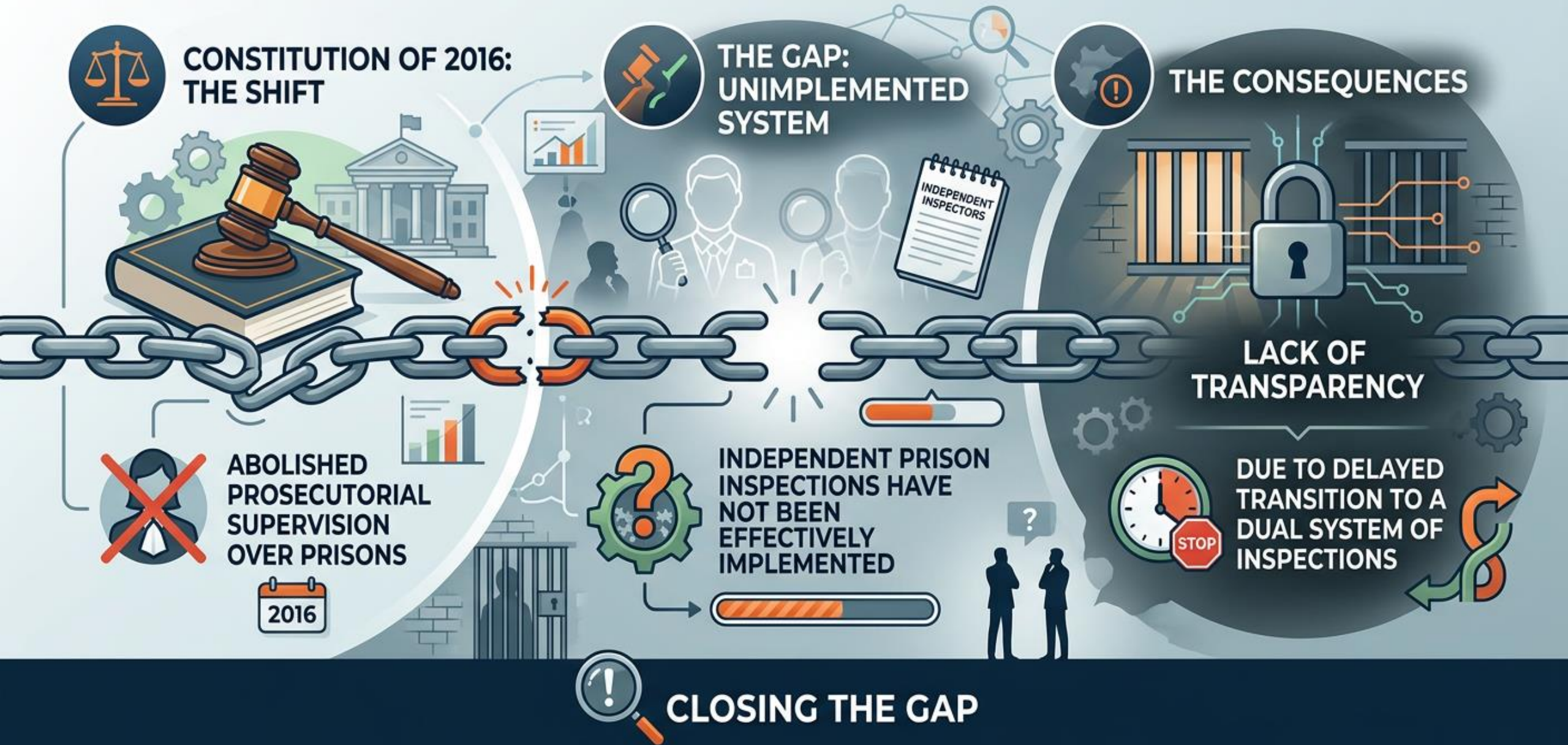
INFORMAL HIERARCHIES AND “DUTY PRISONERS”



STAFFING AND VACANCY CRISES



PRISON INSPECTIONS – A MISSING LINK



IMPACTS OF THE 2022 INVASION

Full-scale invasion triggered a logistical, legal, and humanitarian collapse.

Prisoners' dependence on the state turned war challenges into existential threats.



Chaos: Supply Shortages & Security Threats



System was structurally unready for mass evacuation despite 2014 experience.



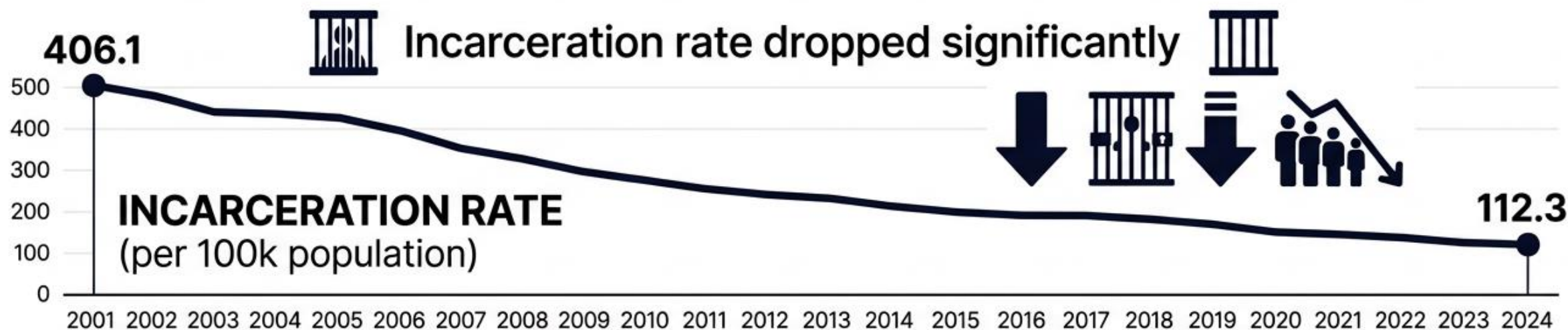
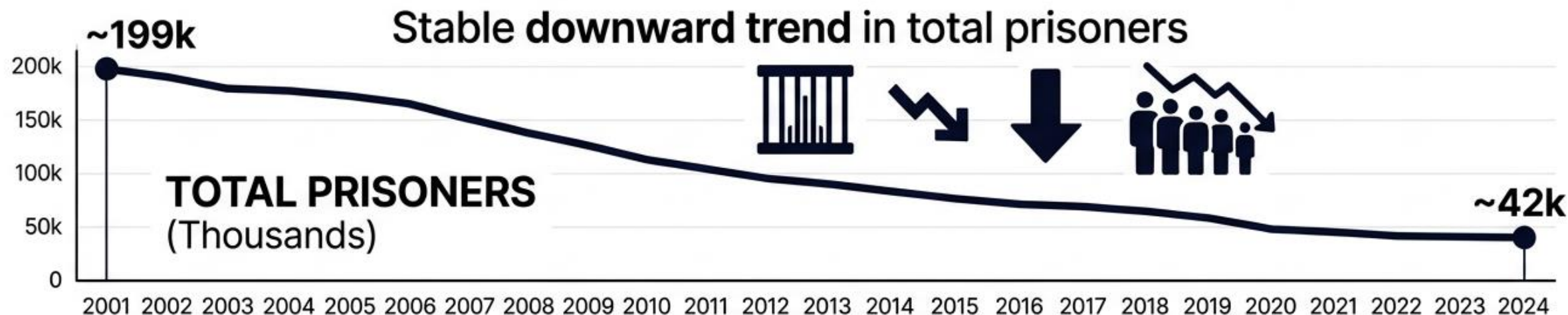
SEVERE RISKS TO INMATES' LIVES



DECEMBER 2024

						1	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	X	10	11	
X	13	14	15	16	17	18		
X	20	21	22	23	24	25		
26	27	28	29	30	30			

PRISON POPULATION DYNAMICS (2001-2024)



**SUCCESS IN REDUCING POPULATION
BUT CHALLENGES IN MAINTAINING STANDARDS**

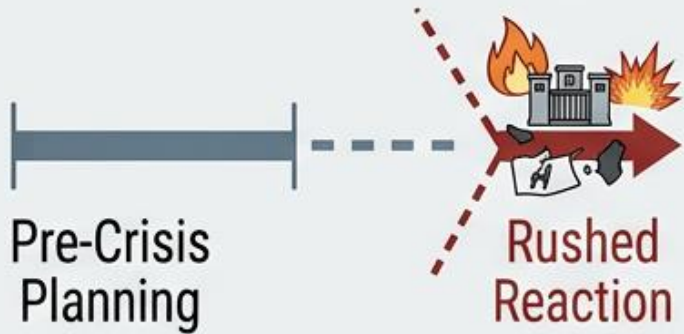


LOGISTICAL COLLAPSE: EVACUATION FAILURES (March 2022)

1. ABSENCE OF PRE-APPROVED PROCEDURES



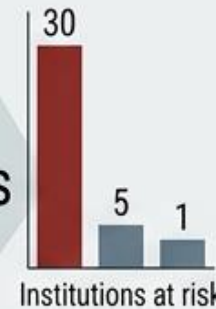
Lack of standardized protocols for mass prison evacuations



2. PRISONS IN DIRECT FIRE ZONES



Approximately **30 institutions** were in direct fire zones by mid-March 2022



3. LACK OF TRANSPORT & PREPARED SITES



Lack of specialized transport



Unprepared sites in rear regions



THE OCCUPIED ZONE

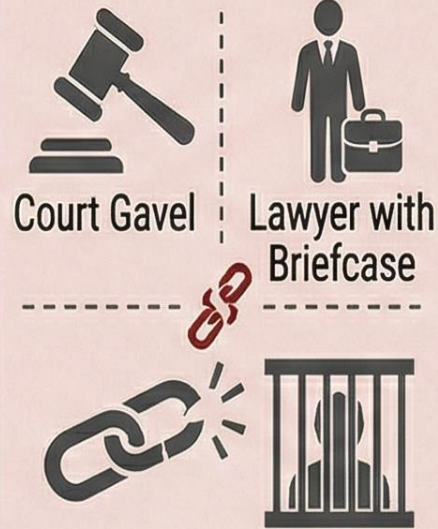
PRISONERS' STATUS SEPARATION



Complete severing of
convict's legal field from
UKRAINE'S JURISDICTION

No mechanism
to "conserve"
convict status

CONNECTION SEVERANCE



Severed connections with
UA Courts & Lawyers.
No legal representation

PAROLE RENDERED IMPOSSIBLE

UA Parole Process



- Lack of recognized UA officials
- Inability to assess inmates
- Unrecognized occupying procedures

OCCUPYING POWER
(e.g., Russian Federation
Administration)

New Unrecognized
Courts

**UNRECOGNIZED
& ILLEGAL**

New Prison
Regulations

**UNRECOGNIZED
& ILLEGAL**

CONSEQUENCES FOR PRISONERS

- Arbitrary Detention
- Human Rights Violations
- Loss of Hope & Reintegration Path

**UKRAINE
LEGAL SYSTEM**
(Kyiv, etc.)



Judiciary

Disconnected
Disconnected



Correctional
Services

Access
Denied

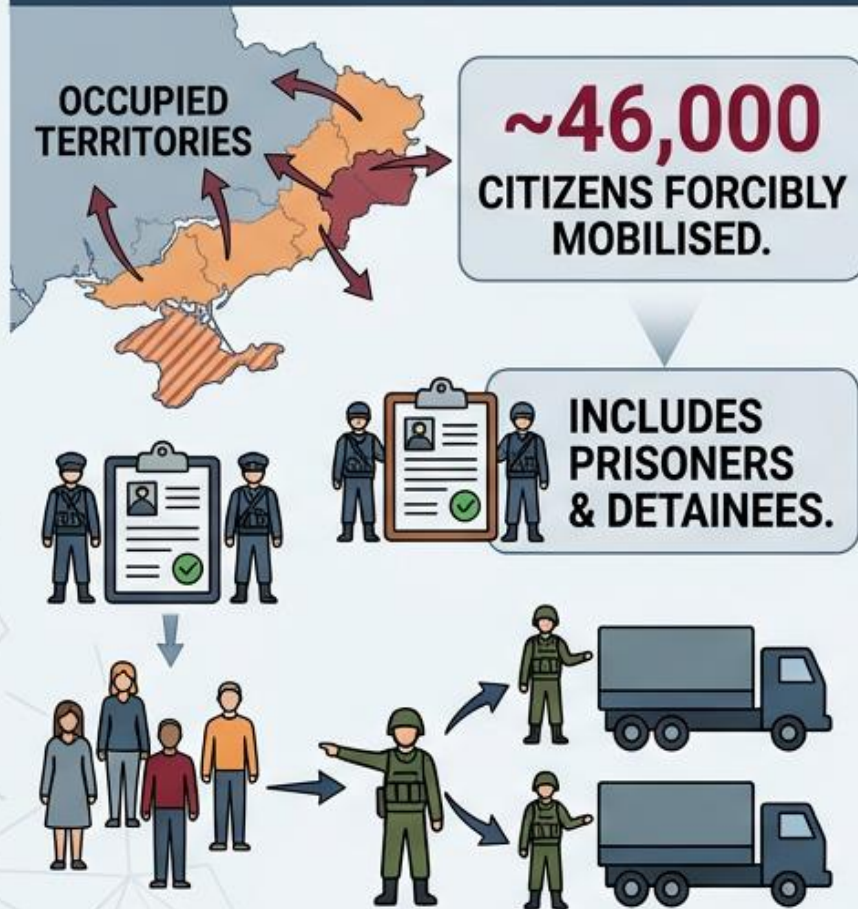


Legal Aid

Access
Disconnected

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN OCCUPIED UKRAINE: FORCED MOBILISATION & DEPORTATION (ACADEMIC SCHEME)

FORCED MOBILISATION FROM OCCUPIED AREAS



CONSCRIPTION AGAINST WILL

DEPORTATION AND ILL-TREATMENT OF PRISONERS



MISTREATMENT IN RUSSIAN FACILITIES

UN CONFIRMATION OF POW DEATHS



THE 2024 MOBILISATION LAW (LAW №11079-1) - KEY PROVISIONS

Permits mobilisation of convicts on a voluntary basis in exchange for parole

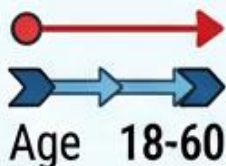


Eligible convicts can **choose** to serve in the military, leading to potential **parole upon completion** of service.

Eligibility Criteria



Must have **<3 years** remaining on sentence



Aged **18-60**



Fit health-wise
(subject to medical evaluation)

Exclusions



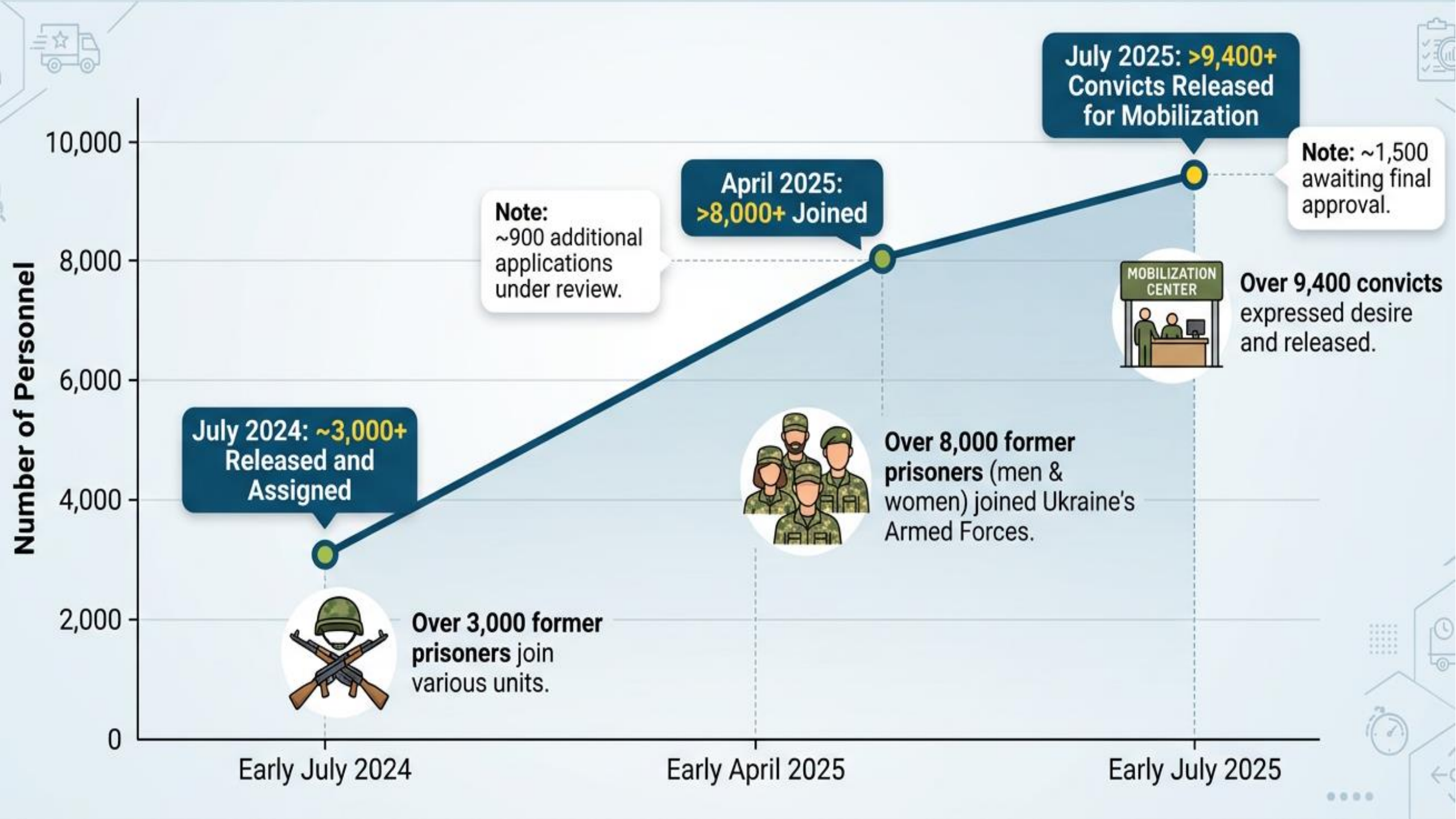
Crimes against national security



Sexual violence



Cruel premeditated murders





SCALE OF INMATE MOBILISATION



1. OVER 10,000+ CONVICTS JOINED AFU (By October 2025)



10,000+



OCTOBER 2025



CONVICTS TRANSITIONING
TO MILITARY SERVICE

2. FULL SOLDIER STATUS & COMBATANT BENEFITS



OFFICIAL
SOLDIER
STATUS



COMBATANT
BENEFITS



EQUAL PAY &
ALLOWANCES



HEALTHCARE
ACCESS



SOCIAL
SUPPORT



3. CONCERNS REGARDING INTEGRATION & AWOL RATES



REGULAR
SOLDIERS



INMATE
RECRUITS



REGULAR
SOLDIERS

INMATE
RECRUITS

INTEGRATION
CHALLENGES



(General Military)

UN OBSERVATIONS ON TORTURE AND POWs



CONCERNS OVER ALLEGATIONS
OF **ILL-TREATMENT OF
RUSSIAN POWs**
BY UKRAINIAN FORCES
IN TRANSIT SITES



NEED FOR MANDATORY
AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDING
OF ALL INTERROGATIONS

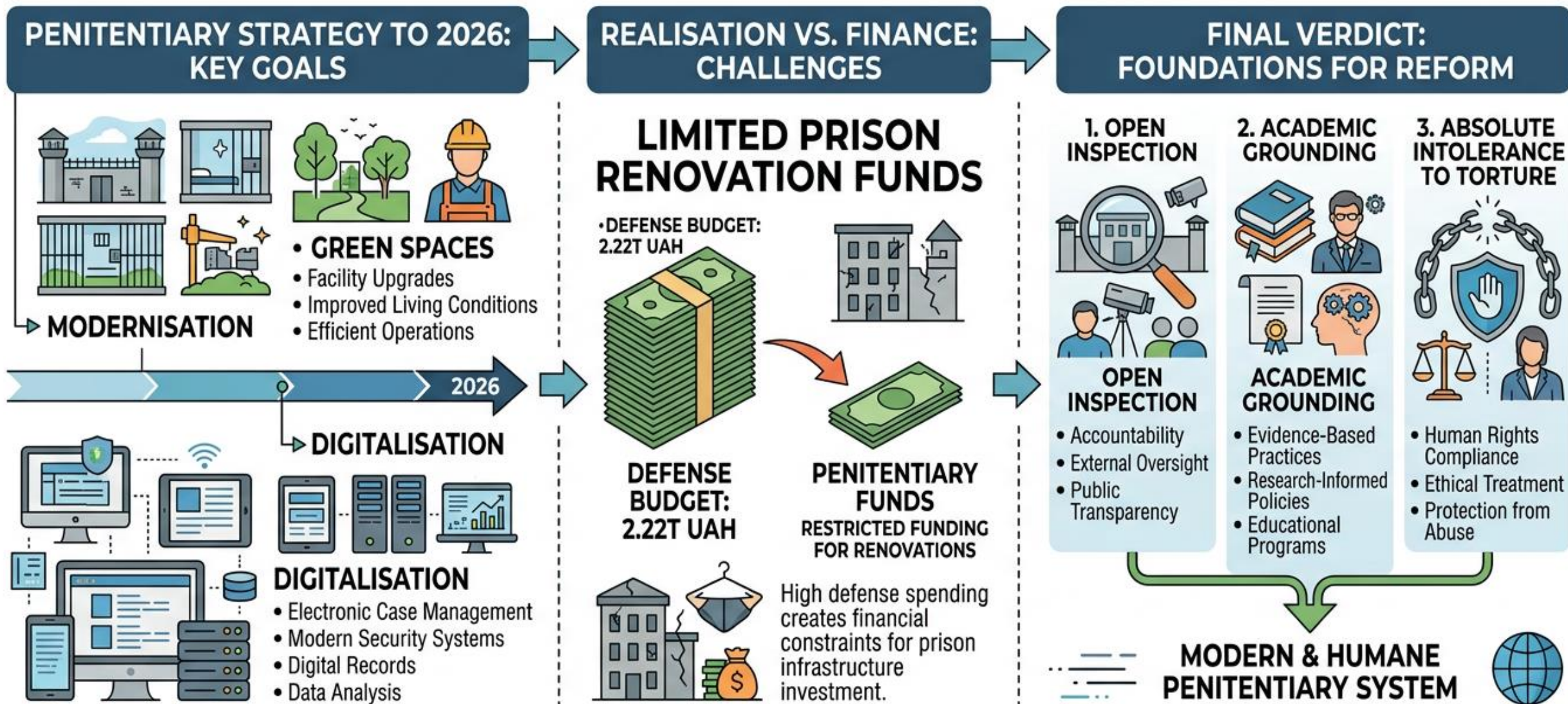


UKRAINE'S COMMITMENT
TO INVESTIGATING
20 CASES
OF ALLEGED **WAR CRIMES**
BY ITS OWN FORCES



Information based on UN reports

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE STRATEGY: PENITENTIARY SYSTEM REFORM

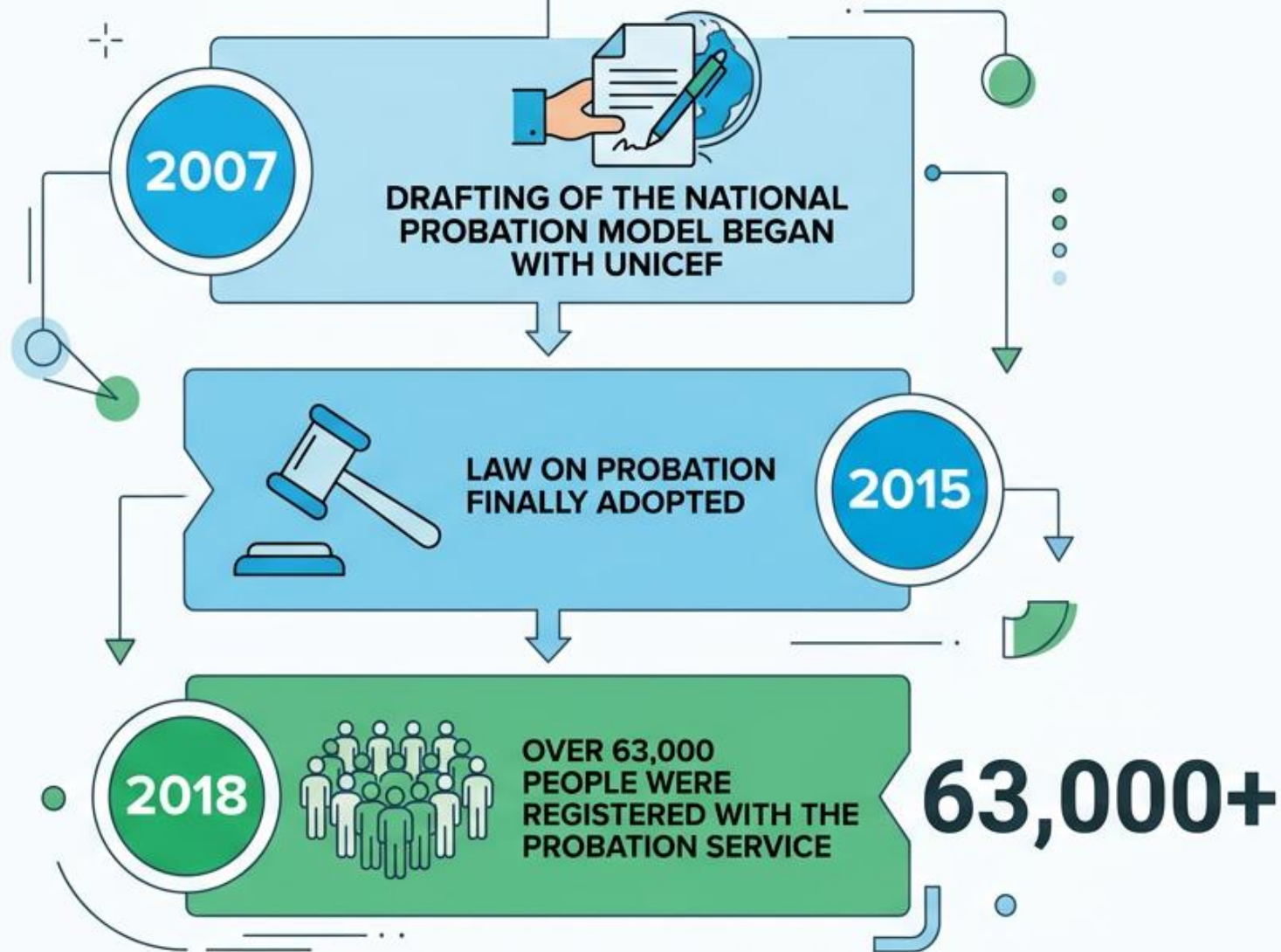


STUCK IN TRANSIT

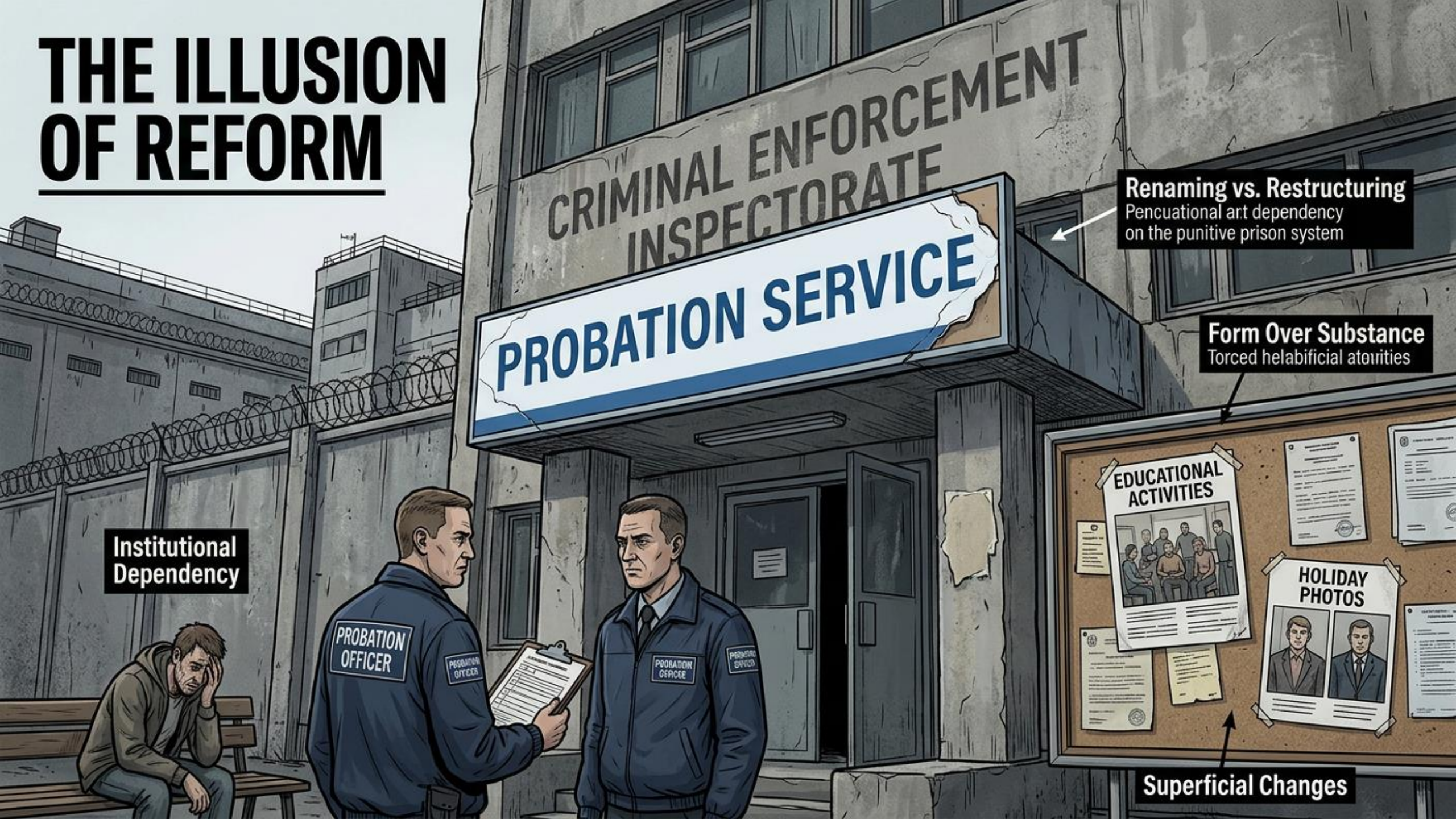
Ukrainian Probation Between Punitive Supervision and Rehabilitation Services



HISTORY AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PROBATION



THE ILLUSION OF REFORM



Renaming vs. Restructuring

Pencuational art dependency
on the punitive prison system

Form Over Substance

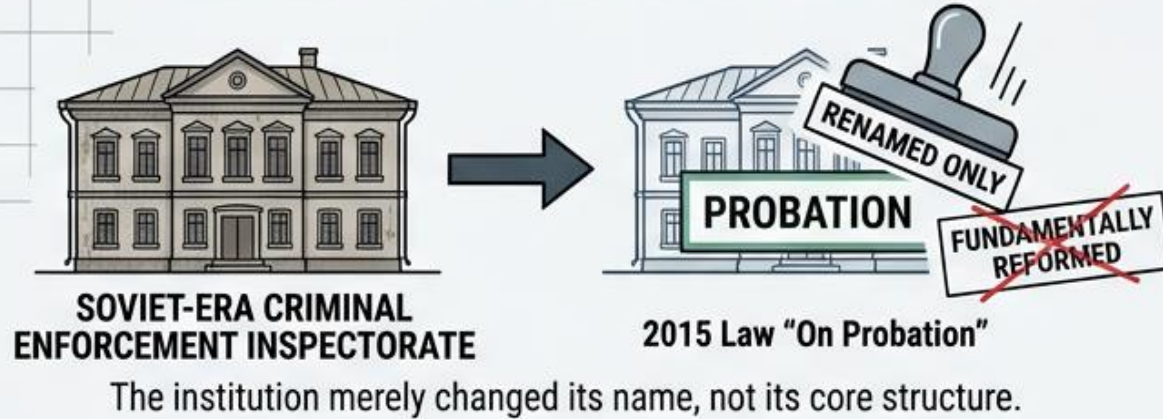
Torced helabifical atorities

**Institutional
Dependency**

Superficial Changes

THE ILLUSION OF REFORM

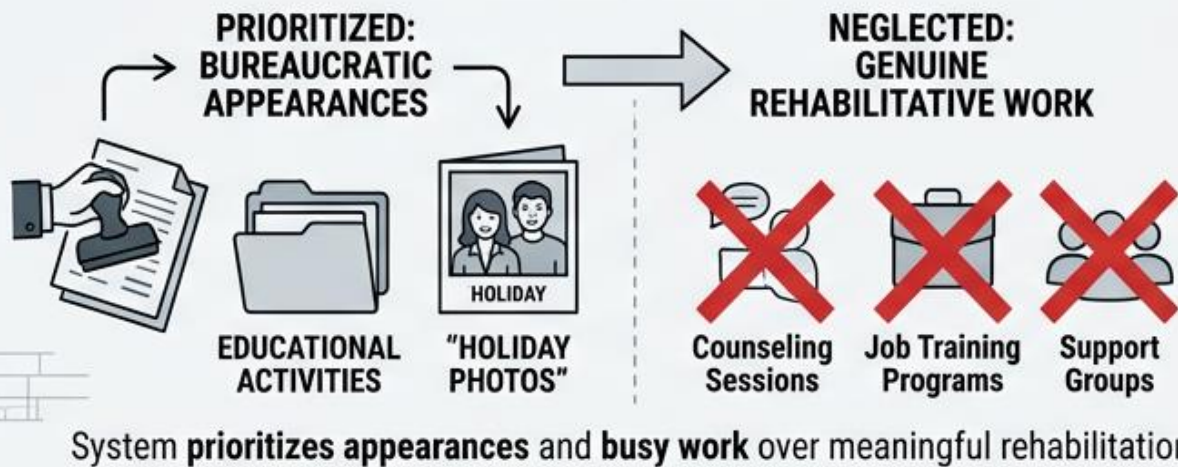
RENAMING vs. RESTRUCTURING



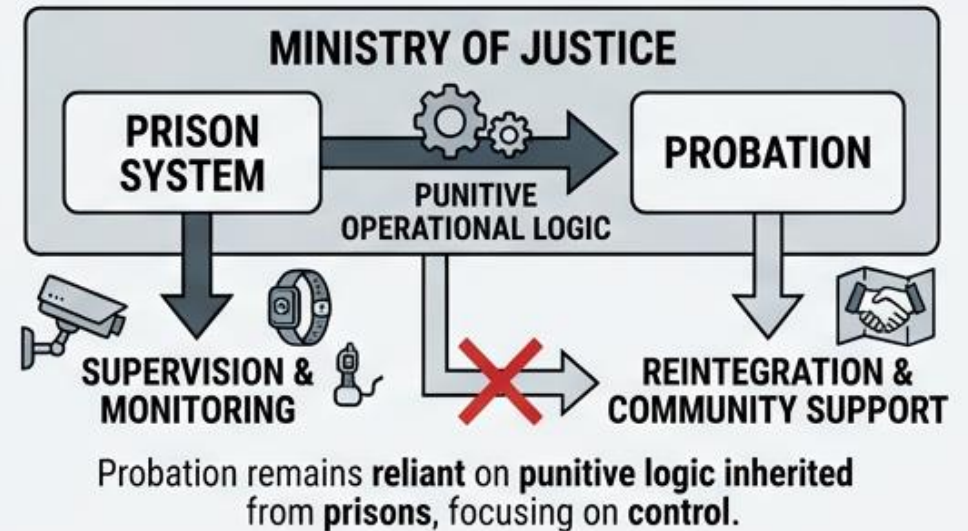
SUPERFICIAL CHANGES



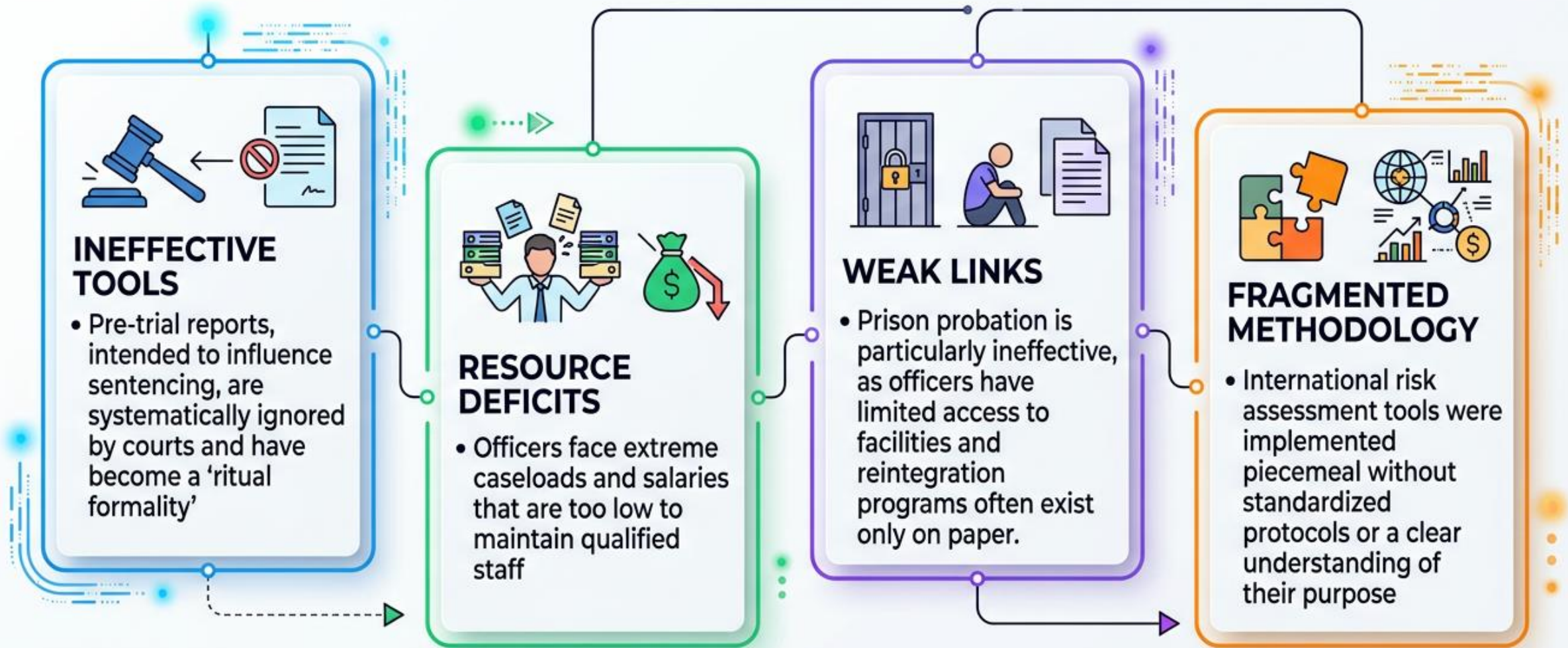
FORM OVER SUBSTANCE



INSTITUTIONAL DEPENDENCY



STRUCTURAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FAILURES



THE “**SELF-DECEPTION**” OF STATISTICS



- **Methodological Falsification:** The system claims a “**staggering**” success rate with only a **1–2% recidivism rate** among those currently under supervision



- The “**Sword of Damocles**”: Low crime rates during probation are driven by **fear of immediate imprisonment** rather than successful rehabilitation



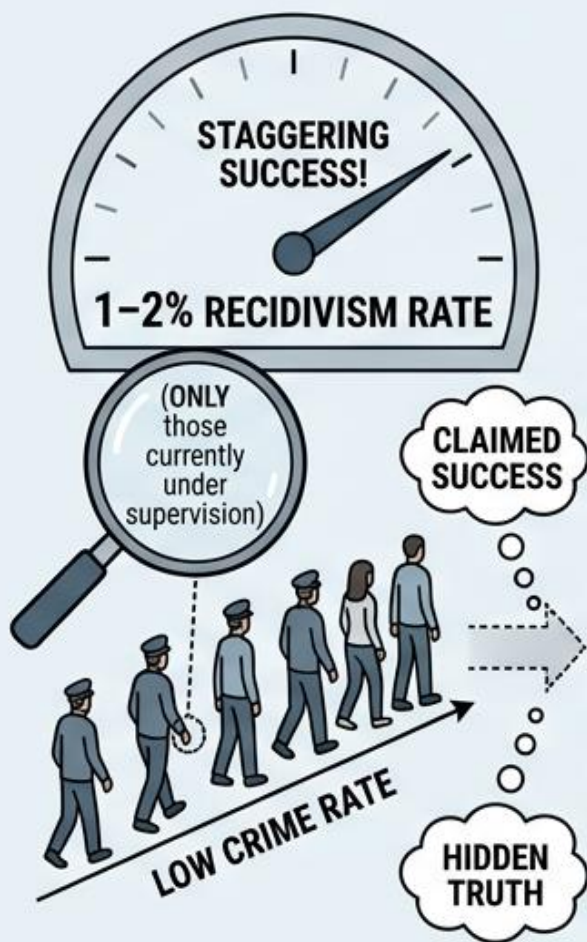
- **Lack of Long-term Auditing:** Unlike international standards that measure recidivism **3–5 years after supervision ends**, the Ukrainian system ignores post-probation outcomes to maintain “**attractive**” statistics



- **Evasion of Accountability:** The system avoids independent audits that would reveal its failure to meet fundamental rehabilitative goals

THE "SELF-DECEPTION" OF STATISTICS

Methodological Falsification



The "Sword of Damocles"



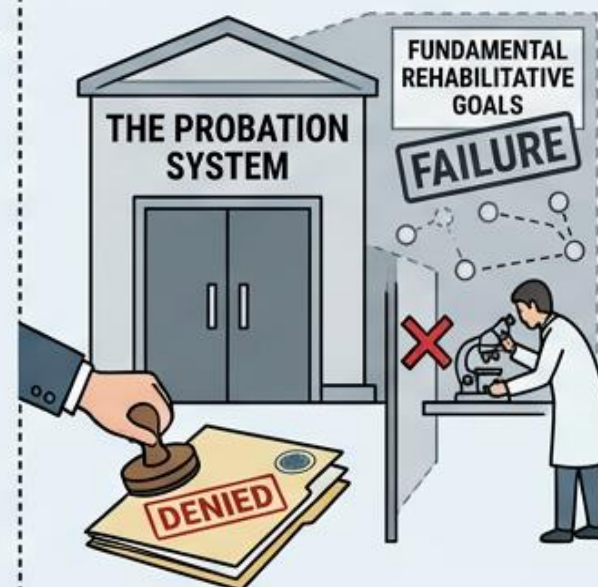
Low crime rates during probation driven by **fear of immediate imprisonment** rather than successful rehabilitation.

Lack of Long-term Auditing



Evasion of Accountability

The system avoids independent audits that would reveal its failure to meet fundamental rehabilitative goals.



INDEPENDENT AUDITS

The system **avoids independent audits** that would reveal its failure to meet fundamental rehabilitative goals.



Dr. Dmytro Yagunov

Attorney at Law, D.Sc. in Political Science,
Ph.D. in Public Administration,
MSSc in Criminal Justice,
Associate Professor, Merited Lawyer of Ukraine

Eberhard Karls University Tübingen

This presentation was prepared within the framework of the academic research programme at the University of Tübingen, supported by the Philipp Schwartz Initiative of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.



www.yagunov.in.ua



+38 068 176 76 26

