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## **Female Leadership in Small States: A study of the relationship between size and women in politics**

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## **Female Leadership in Small States**

a study of the relationship between size and women in politics



# Universiteit Leiden

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Small States in World Politics

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## Introduction

The number of states, specifically small states, has since the end of the Second World War considerably increased allowing the number of United Nations' member states to go from 51 in 1945 to 193 today (Corbett et al., 2019, p. 652). While most scholars of international relations have been focusing on large states and their role in world politics, small states have gained some influence on particular topics, such as climate change, in the recent decades. Scholars are thus more and more interested in considering those states and their impacts on international relations in their studies (Neumann et al., 2006, p. 3). Moreover, as Panke acknowledges in her paper, most international institutions follow a one-state, one-vote principle giving all states the same power when voting and giving an opinion (2012, p. 313). Thus, as Neumann et al. argue in their paper, small states are now too important to be ignored (2006, p. 3). When studying such states, some researchers choose to investigate the influence small states have on international relations while other academics study the particularities of domestic affairs in small states and concentrate their work on how smallness affects political and societal aspects of these states (Srebrnik, 2004, p. 329).

However, one aspect of domestic affairs that tends to be forgotten is women and the roles they have in small states' politics. As in larger states, the role of women within those societies is constantly challenged. As well as having their role within the community being questioned most of the time because of traditional gender roles, the place of women in politics is permanently restricted (Bauer et al., 2011, p. 179). One of the positions that is still very limited for women is state leader. Moreover, not only female leaders have been absent from politics, academic literature on women as heads of state or government has also been insufficient, if not nonexistent (Jalalzai, 2017, p. 257). Since World War II, only about 70 women have been chief executives, meaning either heads of state or heads of government (Bauer et al., 2011, p. 175). Nonetheless, although the number of women in politics is very limited, there has been an increase of women as state leaders since the 1990s with three out of four of the 70 women chief executives since 1945, being heads of state or government between 1990 and now (Bauer et al., 2011, p. 175).

In this paper, thanks to a nested research mixing both qualitative and quantitative analyses, I focus on female leadership in small states with a particular interest on how smallness impacts women's place. Moreover, due to the increasing percentage of women in politics, especially at the highest level of politics which is the state leader, as well as the

evolving number of small states and their developing influence combined with the lack of literature on the subject, it is thus relevant to research on that subject.

### Theoretical framework

#### *Small states, democracy and women*

One of the oldest debates in political science has been the one that links the size of a state and its type of political system. Most of the time, this debate has been focused on democracy and smallness (Anckar, 2008, p. 433). Indeed, as Srebrnik states in his article, already in Ancient Greece, thinkers argued that in order to be emancipated from tyrannical rulers, a *polis* or a city needed to be small (Srebrnik, 2004, p. 329). Historically, the debate does not end in Greece. Indeed, during the *siècle des Lumières*, or the Enlightenment, philosophers such as Montesquieu and Rousseau thought that democratic values such as equality, participation or dedication to the common good were to be found in small states (Srebrnik, 2004, p. 329). In addition, the reason why the focus of international scholars has stopped being on small states and what smallness could bring to democracy is because of the increase of big and powerful states since the 19th century and thus the decreased influence of small states (Srebrnik, 2004, p. 338). However, the focus of international relations scholars now tends to focus back on smallness (Baldacchino et al., 2020, p. 2).

One of the reasons why democracy is so present in small states is due to the highly personalized politics (Veenendaal, 2018, pp. 393-394). Indeed, as recent scholars and Ancient Greek thinkers have argued, smallness allows people to know and to understand each other leading to a more personalized system (Srebrnik, 2004, p. 329). In this type of state, the population and the political elite interact at different levels and personal relations between them are easier to be established as well as to be preserved compared to social interactions between politicians and civilians in larger states. This informal model of community makes the limit between politics and private life rather unclear (Veenendaal, 2018, pp. 397-398). Furthermore, the fact that people know each other leads to voters being closer to politicians which limits authoritarianism. Social connections are thus a way to avoid the use of brutality and abuse by politicians in seeking more power (Corbett et al., 2017, p. 35). Smallness stimulates democratic behaviours leading to small states being stable democracies.

While smallness supports and facilitates democracy, democracy encourages women to be more represented in politics (Beckwith, 2012, p. 182). In order to increase women's representation in politics, democracies have used various methods. One of the tools that democracies, especially the Nordic countries, used early on is gender quotas for legislative candidates in order to have a better parity within parliaments (Philips, 1998, p. 224). It is also clear that democratization processes, the transition to democracy, allowed women if not to have more important roles, to be represented in politics and to improve their place in that arena (Tripp, 2001, p. 143). In addition, in certain countries, democratization led to multipartism which enabled the rise of new women's associations that have fought for opening politics to women. These associations use lobby to improve women's roles in politics as well as seeking for constitutional and legislative changes that would benefit women (Tripp, 2001, p. 143).

#### *Small conservative states and women*

Even though small states tend to be democratic, they also maintain conservative societal and political aspects. Indeed, in certain cases, smallness encourages conservative societies (Veenendaal, 2015, p. 335). Most of the small states that are still considered as conservative are monarchies or states with a traditional political system, such as dukedoms or principalities (Sutton et al., 1993, p. 586). In other words, small states tend to be more conservative than larger states, due to the fact that smallness allows the type of leadership to be traditional. In addition, small states, especially small island states, are quite traditional partly because their smallness enables tradition and customs, such as local dialect, to be highly supported by the population (Sutton et al., 1993, p. 584). One reason for small states to be conservative is that smallness brings personalized politics that leads to individuals having the possibility of becoming very powerful (Veenendaal, 2015, p. 335).

While institutional factors are not enough to explain why women are less politically represented in certain states than others, cultural factors, namely conservative and traditional views on gender roles, are partly responsible for women being still very absent from politics (Norris, 2001, p. 129). This is partly due to conservatives who, in certain countries, argue that women's interest in politics is a threat to the family as a central concept within a society (Franceschet, 2001, p. 224). In addition, religious institutions, by their influential cultural force, have an impact on women's representation and participation in politics. Known for

their conservative and traditional moral values, religious institutions limit the place of women within the political arena (Franceschet, 2001, p. 225). Conservatism is thus a factor that leads to women being politically underrepresented in some states.

### *Female leaders*

Women's underrepresentation in power culminates in state leadership position. According to Reynolds, the executive branch of a country's political sphere is the most complicated branch for women to have access (1999, p. 572). Watson et al. argue that the highest political roles, such as heads of state or government, are the most gendered positions, meaning that gender roles in that case are very influential (2005, p. 56). Here, the society is used to having men filling those jobs. Due to this perception concerning gender roles, women in such positions as well as their ability and capacity to take on the responsibilities are constantly questioned. The challenged capacities are the understanding and knowledge on how a country works, being able to take important decisions or being tough enough (Watson et al., 2005, p. 56). In this way, women becoming state leaders has been, and still is, a slower process than women in parliament or in cabinet (Bauer et al., pp. 1-2).

Furthermore, according to Genovese, it is most likely to find women as state leaders in secular states and in democracies (1993, pp. 211-219). Along these lines, substantial phenomena such as the transition to democracy allows more women to have access to the highest political positions (Bauer et al., 2011, p. 8). However, it is important to highlight the fact that the sole concept of democracy does not increase the number of women in politics. Indeed, the elements that allow women to fill the highest jobs, naming state leaders, are the acceptance by social and cultural rules to have a woman as a head of government as well as the nation being used to have women in such powerful positions (Reynolds, 1999, p. 572). Thus, states that already are democracies or the ones that are becoming one, have more chances to have women in high and powerful political positions. However, this is not due to the simple fact of being a democracy but rather a consequence of new democratic customs on social and cultural aspects of society.

### Research puzzle

This research aims to contribute to the study of small states in world politics and more particularly the domestic affairs and social aspects of such states. Indeed, this research

focuses on the sex of the leaders, specifically women as leaders in small countries. Even though the literature on female leaders is rather limited, when it comes to studying the sex of state leaders, scholars tend to focus on large states such as Great Britain or Germany. In this scholarship, small states are once again forgotten. Thus, as it focuses on female leadership in small states, this research is relevant due to the lack of academic literature on the sex of leaders in those states. In addition, the impact the size of a state can have on females having access to the highest level in politics has been relatively omitted. That is why I am asking the research question: how does the size of states influence the likelihood of female leadership ?

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, small states tend, due different factors, to be both more democratic as well as more conservative than larger states. Here the size of the state is thus the cause of such differences between large and small countries. In other words, the size of a state could impact domestic affairs. In both cases, it can be assumed that these differences to larger states lead to changes within social and political spheres or, on the contrary, to maintain internal aspects of the political life of such states. In this way, society due to its democratic or conservative aspects might evolve towards a more diversified and open-minded community or it might stay in an extremely traditional and conservative mold. Along these lines, two hypotheses can be formulated. The first one being that as small states are more democratic than larger states, these small states would have more females as leaders than in larger states. Indeed, democracies tend to have more women in the political arena than other types of states. Nevertheless, small states are not only more democratic than larger states but also tend to be more conservative. This brings the second hypothesis which is due to their conservative thoughts and traditional societies, small states would have less females as leaders than bigger states. In most traditional communities, women tend to be on the margin of society. What is more, in conservative societies, as traditional thoughts are prominent and influential when it comes to social aspects, it has an impact on the place of women, especially in politics. To give more clarity to the hypothesis, it is possible to present them as :

- H<sub>1</sub> : As small states tend to be more democratic than large states, small states would have more female leaders than large states.
- H<sub>2</sub> : As small states tend to be more conservative than large states, small states would have fewer female leaders than large states



## Conceptualization and operationalization

### *Sex or gender ?*

The term sex usually refers to internal and external biological sexual attributes and does not include social aspects of life (Bereni et al., 2012, pp. 34-39). Indeed, when studying the social aspects of life, scholars and intellectuals tend to use the term gender, which can be defined as the state of being female or male according to social expectations (Posey, 2016, p. 96). Nonetheless, this definition that comprehends gender as a binary concept is being increasingly criticized and debated as Bereni et al. would argue; gender rather than being binary, is a spectrum with more possibilities than just men and women (2012, pp. 43-54). In this way, the proper term to use in this thesis would be gender, as sex does not incorporate social facts of people. However, due to the current literature as well as the policies that most countries have taken when it comes to gender and sex, sex is the most used term as well as the best understood in academic literature on international relations and in the political world. It is also important to highlight that sex is not limited to a dyadic model, with only two sexes; male and female but with the possibility of external and/or internal sexual characteristics that does not allow to categorize them into the binarity of sexes (Bereni et al., 2012, p. 37). What is more, during the quantitative analysis, due to the lack of introduction of such situations when studying political science and in academic literature, I study the relation between the size of a state and the sex of its leaders with sex referring only to male and female. Moreover, during the qualitative analysis, as I look at different laws and non-academic articles that concern a specific case, gender as a spectrum is also used.

### *Size as a concept*

The relevant meaning of the size of a state is linked to its population. Categorizing a state as small can be done by various approaches; using the population is one of them (Panke, 2012, pp. 314-315). The term small state is here referring to an entity that is a United Nations (UN) member state which has a population of under 1.5 million inhabitants (Veenendaal, 2015, p. 394). According to the World Bank 2019 population data, out of the 193 UN member states, 45 states can be thus considered as small states (World Bank, 2019).

## *Leaders*

In the context of the present research, the term leader is quite ambiguous as it could refer to both head of government and head of state. However, as a clear and concise definition is needed, the term leader will refer exclusively to the head of government. Head of government can be defined as the individual that is responsible for the government as well as chairing the ministers (Byrd, 2018). Depending on the political system of the state, the head of government can be elected or appointed. The head of government is preferred to the head of state due to the political system of some of the concerned states as well as the role of the head of state in those countries. Indeed, as many small states are part of the Commonwealth, the head of state is H.M. Elizabeth II and thus many of these countries would have had the same head of state for the past 69 years. In that case, using the head of state would not be relevant for studying the relationship between the sex of the leaders and the size of the states. However, it is important to highlight that in some cases, due to the political system of states, the head of government is the same as the head of state. Moreover, some heads of government came back into office. Such situations are excluded from the research. Each head of government, whether they did one or more terms, are counted only one time. The reason for this is that as the thesis focuses on the sex of the state leaders, which in all studied cases did not change between their different terms, counting more than one time the same leader would not provide relevant data.

## Research design

In order to answer the research question, I will conduct a nested analysis. This means that the research will focus both on a large-N case study, with N being the number of cases and on one single case study. Acknowledging Lieberman's paper on nested analysis, the study will be divided in two parts; the first one focuses on quantitative analysis and the second one on qualitative analysis (2005, pp. 435-452). Furthermore, as the second part of the research is a single case study, I will select the case based on the results of the quantitative analysis (Lieberman, 2005, p. 440).

## *Large-N study*

For the first part of the analysis, which is quantitative, the focus is on states that are considered as small which means states with a population of less than 1.5 million inhabitants; 45 states are included (World Bank, 2019). Even though the study focuses on small states and the sex of their leaders, in order to answer the research question and to reach meaningful conclusions on the relationship between the size of a state and the sex of its leader, it is also important to look at large states to compare them. Within the United Nations, there are 193 member states with 148 countries that have a population of more than 1.5 million inhabitants (World Bank, 2019). In this research, I thus look at those 45 small and 148 large states. In addition, to better understand the relation between the size of a country and the sex of its leader, I focus on the period 1980 and 2020. Indeed, according to Reynolds, since the 1980s, the wave of democratic transitions has led to an increase of the number of women in politics (1999, p. 572). Thus, looking at the period where women's participation started to be meaningful will add relevance and more data to the research.

### *Single case study*

The single case study will employ a qualitative method. According to Halperin et al., two different methods are possible when qualitatively analysing the data; content and discourse analysis (2017, p. 344). Due to the fact that content analysis is the systematic analysis of texts that can be either official or personal documents and that most sources for this qualitative part are textual sources, mostly official, doing a content analysis makes more sense. The case selected for the single case study will be subsequently announced.

### Research methods and techniques

#### *Variables*

The relevant variables for the quantitative analysis are the state size and the percentage of female leaders in each state between 1980 and 2020 - meaning the percentage of females that have been heads of government in that period of time. The first variable has two categories; small and large. Here the size depends on the population; small refers to a state with a population of less than 1.5 million and large means a state with a population of more than 1.5 million inhabitants. The variable `Small_state` which refers to the size of states is nominal. In the case of size, there is not a natural order between small and large; the

categories are equivalent. Arithmetic is also not possible in that case as no equation can be made out of this first variable. The variable FemaleLeader, containing the percentage of female leaders in a given state, is a ratio variable. Arithmetic is possible for that variable and has a meaningful 0 (Field, 2013, p. 11). It is also important to mention that the independent variable (IV) is the size of a state and the dependent variable (DV) is the percentage of female leaders in each state between 1980 and 2020.

### *Dataset*

To answer the research question and to analyze the relationship between the size of a state and the sex of its head of government, and to possibly formulate a causal relationship between these two variables, I created a dataset. I collected data myself from both primary sources and secondary sources, namely existing databases. The reason why I made my own dataset is that such a dataset, which included the variable size of a state and the percentage of female leaders in every state between 1980 and 2020, did not exist. Even though I was only going to use the variables FemaleLeader and Small\_state for my quantitative analysis, the dataset includes five variables in total to give more clarity to the research as well as to help me analyse the two relevant variables (Appendix B). The first variable is StateName and adds the name of each case, as each case is one state. The names have been found on the page member states of the United Nations website (United Nations, 2021). The second and third are closely linked; FemaleLeader and MaleLeader which are the percentages of both female and male leaders in every state in a 40 years period. The data for FemaleLeader comes from the Women's Power Index made by the Council on Foreign Relations (2021). For the variable MaleLeader, the data comes from the leader list of Rulers, Elections and Irregular Governance Dataset (2021). The fourth one is PopulationSize that adds the total population for each state according to the World Bank (2019). Finally, the fifth variable is Small\_state that allows the differentiation between small and large states.

Small\_state was created through computing the variable on SPSS from the PopulationSize variable, attributing the value 1 for states with a population of less than 1.5 million and 0 for states with a population of more than 1.5 million inhabitants. In addition, in the dataset the percentage of both female and male leaders have been added after calculation. In order to calculate these percentages for each UN member state, the total number of heads of government and the number of female heads of government were collected. Then, to obtain the number of male heads of government, the number of female leaders has been

removed from the total number of leaders. Then the percentages were calculated. The exact equation is following this paragraph. For these variables, the percentages are rounded to the 0.1.

Equation to calculate the percentages of female and male leaders for one state

- Number of female leaders during that period x 100 / number total of leaders during that period = percentage of female state leaders in that state between 1980 and 2020
- Number of male leaders during that period x 100 / number total of leaders during that period = percentage of male state leaders in that state between 1980 and 2020

There are some differences between the data available for each state. One reason for these differences is the political systems that are inherently different between the 193 UN member states. The first variation is due to the period used for the dataset. For certain states, the data on heads of government are not necessarily from 1980. Indeed, in some cases, the current political system is not as old as 1980. Furthermore, the data for the population are from the year 2019, except for one country; Eritrea (World Bank, 2019). The World Bank only mentioned the population of 2011.

*Statistical analysis*

In order to find out how the size of a state influences the likelihood of female leadership and to verify one of the two hypotheses, I conducted a t-test that helped me compare the means of percentages of female leaders in small and large states in the past 40 years. As the independent variable is categorical with two groups, namely large and small, and the dependent variable is continuous, the suitable test is an independent sample t-test. The objective of this test is the comparison of the means of two different groups.

Data analysis of the quantitative research

*Results*

After conducting an independent t-test on SPSS, I obtained some results that help me answer the research question (Appendix A). In the following table, some information can be identified. The first important information is the means of percentage of female leaders in

both small and large states. In the case of small states, 1,9% of leaders were females between 1980 and 2020 and 4,8% of leaders were females in large states in this period of 40 years. Here, the mean percentage of female leaders in large states is thus higher than the mean percentage of female leaders in small states. Thanks to the standard deviation, we learn that for small states with SD = 4,6, cases deviate from the mean by 4,6 percentage points on average whereas for large states with SD = 7,9, we learn that cases deviate from the mean by 7,9 percentage points on average. Most scores of small states tend to be closer to their mean than large states to their average, which says that the mean of small states more accurately represents the sample data of small states than the mean of large states representing the sample data of large states.

**Table 1. Female leadership in small states group statistics**

	Small state	N	Mean	Std. deviation
Female leaders	0	148	4,773	7,9339
	1	45	1,916	4,6142

*Note : the means and standard deviations have been rounded to the first number after the coma.*

In the following table, Sig. corresponds to the p-value of Levene's test and shows .000. This means that  $p < 0.001$ , making Levene's test significant, suggesting that the assumption of homogeneity of variances has been violated (Field, 2013, p. 374). The variance of female leaders in small states is then significantly different than the variance of female leaders in large states. I then look at the statistics in the line of equal variances not assumed in the table. In addition, the column t refers to the computed test statistic, df is the degrees of freedom and Sig. (2-tailed) corresponds to the given test statistic and degrees of freedom.

**Table 2. Independent Samples Test of FemaleLeader by Small\_states**

		Levene's test	t-test for equality of means		
		Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2 - tailed)
FemaleLeader	Equal variances assumed	.000	2,298	191	0,023
	Equal variances not assumed		3,015	127,762	0,003

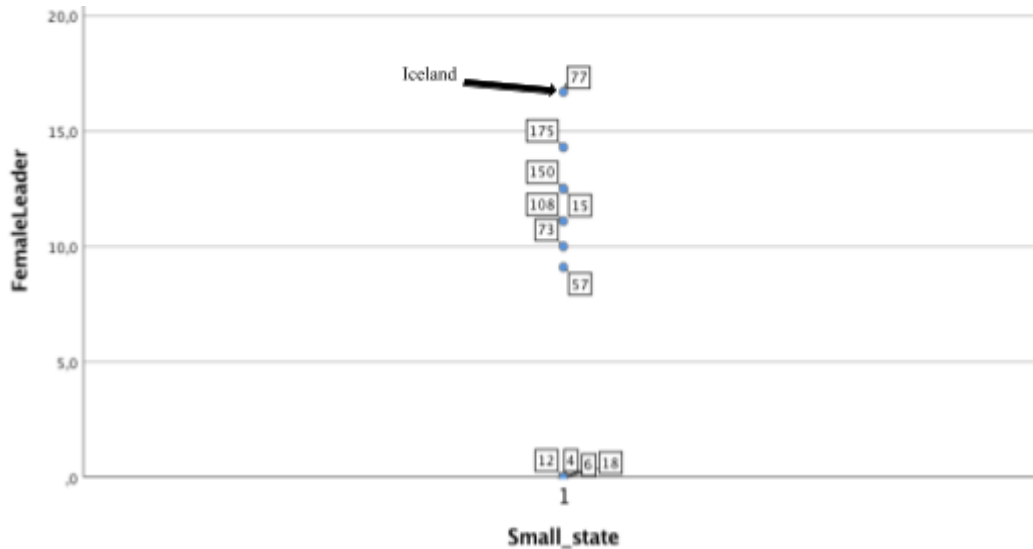
The assumption of normality has been verified (Appendix D). An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the percentages of female leaders in small and large states. There was a significant difference in the scores for small states ( $M = 1,916$ ,  $SD = 4,6142$ ) and large states ( $M = 4,773$ ,  $SD = 7,9339$ );  $t(127,762) = 2,298$ ,  $p = 0,003$ . These results indicate that small states tend to have fewer females as state leaders than large states. According to the independent sample t-test, small states have, on average, less females as state leaders than large states. In this way, the hypothesis  $H_2$ , namely small states being more conservative than large states, these states would have fewer female leaders than small states, can be verified.

#### Case selection for the qualitative analysis

According to Lieberman, when conducting a nested analysis, the case selection of the small-N or single case study should be made after and depending on the results of the large-N case study (2005, p. 440). He argued that depending on what the results bring to the research, for instance whether or not they verify the hypothesis, the selection for the qualitative analysis should be made on what still needs to be answered. He then mentions that when the results are relevant to the research method, the qualitative research should follow a model-testing small-N analysis (Lieberman, 2005, p. 442). As the results of the quantitative analysis are relevant, I will thus follow this method. Lieberman also argued that a researcher can choose between selecting a case randomly or deliberately depending on their needs (2005, pp. 446-448). Here I deliberately choose a case that is deviant in order to show how a small state can still have women as state leaders and be different from other small states in average. The following figure is a scatter plot of the variables FemaleLeader by Small\_state. It shows how one particular state, Iceland, is deviant when it comes to women as state leaders

for the past 40 years. As Iceland is the state number 77 in the dataset, its number in the scatterplot is thus highlighted (Appendix C).

**Figure 1. Scatter Plot of FemaleLeader by Small\_state**



Choosing the case of Iceland is supported by the fact that Iceland is for the 12th time considered by the World Economic Forum as the most gender-equal country in the world (World Economic Forum, 2021). Even though on average, small states tend to have fewer female leaders than large states, in certain cases small states tend to have an important representation of women at the highest political level such as Iceland that had 2 women as heads of government out of 12 in the period 1980-2020 which represents 16,7% of Icelandic heads of government in those 40 years (Vogelstein et al., 2021). The case of Iceland is an exception compared to most, if not all, small states. I will then look at why Iceland, as a small state, is so different from other conservative small states in order to confirm the second hypothesis H<sub>2</sub>.

### Research methods and sources

As previously mentioned, the qualitative study employs content analysis. To conduct this analysis, I first look at the major dates and steps that improved women's place in the Icelandic society as well as allowing women to have a more prominent role in politics. These dates help with understanding the context and give an idea of when Iceland actually started to work on gender equality which could help explaining why this small Nordic island is so



different from most small states. The second part of the analysis and probably the most important part is the analysis of the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights Irrespective of Gender which is the law on which Iceland's gender equality is based (Government of Iceland, 2021). The third part concerns the other laws and acts that the Icelandic parliament and government passed which might be less important than the previously mentioned Act but nonetheless had an undeniable impact on the society. In the last part, I direct my study on the formation of the parliament to see to what extent women are represented at the legislative level. These four parts help me understand how Iceland is not conservative and performs well when it comes to having women as state leaders.

I used various types of sources. An important part of the sources came either from the government of Iceland website or the Althingi, the Icelandic parliament website. I worked with official translations of acts directly available on the English version of the Icelandic government website (2021) as well as looking at the configuration of the Parliament accessible on its English version website (Althingi, 2021). I also look at articles from international newspapers such as the French *Le Monde* or the British *BBC News*. Finally, I use information found on the Council of Foreign Relations, an American think tank specialized in analysing world politics (2021) and data on Iceland and gender equality from the global network of women in politics Women Political Leaders (2014).

### Data analysis of the qualitative research

#### *Important dates*

As it is previously mentioned, Iceland is doing very well in closing the gap of gender inequality (World Economic Forum, 2021). Of course this is closely related to having women as heads of government; as when there is a will to implement gender equality, women are more represented in politics. The small island has been doing great concerning this issue for a long time, as equality between men and women was already a debated issue in the middle of the 19th century (Women Political Leaders, 2014). The first year that is interesting to use is 1850 as it is the year during which Iceland instated equal inheritance for men and women. Acknowledging this, it is clear that Iceland had an interest in parity fairly early on. The second dates are more related with politics, both at a local and national levels (Women Political Leaders, 2014). In 1908, women were allowed to hold local offices and to be elected

in city councils. Seven years later, in 1915, women over 40 could vote nationally. Then, in 1920 all women could vote at a national level (Women Political Leaders, 2014). Being able to vote or to be elected helped women have a voice at the political level. Compared to other states, especially small states, it was early as Iceland was one of the 10 first countries to allow women to vote (Barreto, 2019). Furthermore, even though their voice was not as important and influential as men's voice, Icelandic women have been present in politics which empower representation for next generations. To add to this argument, in 1922, the first woman, Ingibjörg H. Bjarnason was elected and sat in the Icelandic parliament (Althingi, 2021). This last year marks the end of the first period of gender equality related changes for the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries. Moreover, it is important to mention that Iceland was not independent until 1918 and not a republic until 1944. Knowing this, some could argue that the early dates stated in this paragraph are not the results of Icelandic people nor can it be used to explain the interest the small island has on gender equality. However, I would argue that it is still relevant to mention these early dates to give context to the current situation.

The second part of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries also saw Icelandic women becoming more present in politics and in society in general. In 1957, Hulda Jakobsdóttir was elected as the mayor of Kópavogur, becoming the first Icelandic female mayor (Women Political Leader, 2014). 13 years later, in 1970, Auður Auðuns became minister of justice and church and was thus the first woman as a Cabinet Minister in Iceland (Women Political Leaders, 2014). In addition, 1980 can probably be considered as the most important date for women representation in Icelandic politics. Indeed, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir was elected, with universal suffrage, as head of state, becoming not only the first woman President in Iceland but first woman president in the world (Women Political Leader, 2014). She was elected on June 29th, 1980 and stayed in office for 16 years, a total of 4 terms until 1996. The fact that Vigdís Finnbogadóttir was only the fourth president of the Republic of Iceland and was re-elected four times helped a lot with representation, enabling women to have a better access to the political arena, sometimes even at a high political level (Women Political Leaders, 2014). October 24th, 1975 and October 24th, 2016 are two dates that are also interesting to study. On the first one, 90% of Icelandic women went on strike in order to denounce the pay gap between genders and to show how much women could actually contribute to the economy (Smith, 2016). 31 years later, on the same day, most Icelandic women stopped working at 14:38, considered as the exact time at which women are not paid anymore compared to men's salaries (Charrel, 2018). Rather than dealing with formal political participation, these two dates are important instances of activism (Ekman et al.,

2012, p. 295). Here, not only formal political representation is important but also women's place in the society as a whole. It is also important to mention that the fact that Iceland is small actually helped with the mobilization of its population, specifically women, during these strikes (Chabas, 2018).

To mark even more how Iceland is actually advanced in gender-related issues, the Church of Iceland is likewise progressive when it comes to gender parity (Ic. Women are represented and welcome within the religious institution. Indeed, in 2012 Agnes M. Sigurðardóttir was elected bishop and was the first woman in such a position (Iceland Review, 2012). The fact that even religious institutions, considered to be excessively conservative compared to other social environments, are working to improve women's place in religion, emphasizes how good Iceland is doing party-wised. This clearly marks how different Iceland is from other small states. Indeed, while in most of them, the reason why women do not have a place at the higher level of politics is the extent to which they are conservative, in Iceland, even in the most conservative religious places women are represented.

#### *Acts as the basis of gender equality*

Both the Icelandic government and parliament have been working on normalizing gender equality (Women Political Leaders, 2014). In order to achieve that, they shaped different laws and acts to make sure gender equality is legally binding. The first important law is the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men, voted in the parliament in 2008, that became the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights Irrespective of Gender, evolving on different subjects as well as recognizing the non-binarity of gender (Government of Iceland, 2021). This act is basically the legal basis of gender equality in Iceland. Indeed, the primary goals of this act is to first establish and then maintain, at every level of society, equal rights and opportunities between all genders as well as to counter gender-based discrimination. The purposes stated in chapter 1, article 1 of the law are followed by numerous processes that would help the achievement of the goals (Government of Iceland, 2021). Some of these processes are closely related to politics and the place of women in governmental institutions. The processes important for political representation are numerous. The first one, point a, is to make sure that all genders have the same influence in the society. The point c takes a narrow road as it focuses on the improvement of women opportunities within the community (Government of Iceland, 2021). In addition, working to oppose

traditional and stereotyped gender roles would allow both men and women to be welcomed in every part of the society and to cancel all socially constructed barriers that keep women away from powerful ranks. Advocating for the promotion of gender-neutral classification of working activities is also a point that is important when discussing women's place in politics. This can be achieved thanks to the points f and h that respectively concentrate on improving education and research on gender equality and gender studies (Government of Iceland, 2021). Adding to the goals and processes of the Act, gender equality has in Iceland some institutional and physical support. This Act introduces different committees, councils and directorates in order to assist and strengthen the processes established (Government of Iceland, 2021). Having such a prominent law that structures the entire society, at every level, around gender equality plays an enormous role in Iceland not being conservative on gender-related issues.

The preceding paragraph can also find support in the Act of the Administration of Matters concerning Equality that introduces the roles and goals of certain equality-related institutions such as the Directorate of Equality and the Equality Complaints Committee (Government of Iceland, 2021). This Act has been instituted to list and settle the different tasks, the numerous procedures, namely the appointment of the members of the different institutions as well as establishing the powers and limitations of these committees (Government of Iceland, 2021). For instance, as mentioned in the article 4 of the Act, the role of the Directorate of Equality is to make sure that the equality-related acts are being correctly implemented and to advise Ministries and different levels of authority on parity (Government of Iceland, 2021). In addition to this, as stated in the article 8 the role of the Equality Complaints Committee is to take care of parity-related complaints made by different parties (Government of Iceland, 2021). I would argue that this law on equality-related administration helps to give legitimacy to gender equality in Iceland which is a good way to maintain and build parity. As mentioned above, this part of Icelandic politics is one of the steps that enabled Iceland to be progressive and thus allowed women to become heads of government. This leads Iceland to be an outlier compared to other small states when it comes to gender equality, especially female representation at the state leader level.

### *Women in parliament*

Looking at the formation of the parliament is also a way to show how well women are represented in Icelandic politics. In the period 2016-2017, the Althingi almost reached

complete equality as 47,6% of its members were women (Althingi, 2021). Moreover, since 1999, at least 30% of members of parliament (MPs) were women with this percentage evolving every election. In 2017, 24 women were elected as members of parliament and now make up for 38% of the total number of MPs (Althingi, 2021). Considering that the percentage of women in parliament is relatively high compared to the average percentage of women in parliament in small states which is 20,9%, it can also explain that having more females in national politics in general helps with being more progressive and having more females as heads of government (Vogelstein et al., 2021).

Acknowledging Lieberman's paper, during a nested analysis a single case study adds context and information to the research (2004, pp. 442-446). As the results of the quantitative part verify hypothesis 2 stating that small states because of their conservative aspects tend to have fewer women as heads of government than large states, it is interesting to study a deviant case, namely Iceland, to see why it is not conservative. Within this small island, there is a will to challenge every part of the society to make sure that the whole community moves toward gender equality. This struggle is both a cause and an effect of not being conservative. Indeed, step by step, Iceland has been working to close the gender inequality gap using different means and processes. It follows the mechanism of a snowball effect. Indeed, the Nordic state first allowed women to vote and to hold offices at a local level, then at a national level. Later on, specifically thanks to women who fought for their rights during strikes and political mobilization, the Iceland government established acts and laws gender equality-related supporting the teaching of and research on gender and equality studies. Thanks to that, women are further represented in every part of society enabling them to have a better access to positions of power such as heads of government. Finally, by implementing such objectives the entire Icelandic culture embraces gender parity making the country far less conservative than other small states.

## Conclusion

While in international relations, small states are constantly forgotten, it is interesting to see how the size of a state, specifically smallness, can affect the likelihood of having women as heads of government. As it is mentioned in the theoretical framework, small states tend to be both more democratic and conservative than large states. This would suggest that two situations are possible; on one hand, small states tend to have more women as state

leaders than large states as they are more democratic and on the other hand, small states have fewer women as heads of government due to their conservative views. These two possibilities are the two hypotheses of the thesis,  $H_1$  and  $H_2$ . Thanks to a statistical test,  $H_2$  has been verified. Indeed, the percentage mean of female heads of government in small states is 1,9% whereas the percentage mean of female heads of government in large states is 4,8%. It then indicates that as small states tend to be more conservative than large states, small states have less female leaders than large states. To answer the research question, it is clear that the size of a state has an impact on the likelihood of having women as state leaders, with smallness being a factor that hinders female political representation. However, even though most small states are behind when it comes to women as heads of government and gender equality, one small island, Iceland, is particularly in advance concerning parity related issues. Indeed, thanks to different processes and methods that completely changed Icelandic culture concerning gender equality, Iceland is nowadays the leader concerning gender equality. However, as Iceland is deviant compared to other small states as it is not conservative, the findings for this state cannot be generalized to other states.

Even though the choice has been made to only refer to heads of government when writing about leaders and not including heads of state, it is important to mention that for certain countries that did not have women as heads of government actually had female heads of state that were elected or appointed. This could have slightly changed the statistics. Furthermore, this paper is limited in its failure to recognize the current patriarchal system as the main reason why women are still underrepresented in politics. It is also unsuccessful to highlight the extent to which Icelandic women fought for their rights and how they changed the culture to be able to access power positions. Nonetheless, this thesis has some societal relevance because as well as highlighting the differences between women in politics in small and large states, it points out how low the representation of women at the highest political level is. Both percentage means being under 5%, it indicates that only less than 5% of the heads of government between 1980 and 2020 in the world were women. Furthermore, this is only on average and does not mean that every country even had a woman as state leader. For now, 137 countries representing 70% of the UN member states never had a woman as head of government, or at least not for the past 40 years.

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Appendices :

**Appendix A. SPSS output 1 : Independent sample t-test**

➔ **T-Test**

Group Statistics					
	Small_state	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
FemaleLeader	0	148	4,773	7,9339	,6522
	1	45	1,916	4,6142	,6878

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
FemaleLeader	Equal variances assumed	17,754	,000	2,298	191	,023	2,8574	1,2434	,4049	5,3100
	Equal variances not assumed			3,015	127,762	,003	2,8574	,9479	,9819	4,7330

**Appendix B. SPSS dataset 1 : Variable names and the 5 first cases**

	StateName	FemaleLeader	MaleLeader	PopulationSize	Small_state
1	Afghanistan	,0	100,0	38041750	0
2	Albania	,0	100,0	2854190	0
3	Algeria	,0	100,0	43053050	0
4	Andorra	,0	100,0	77140	1
5	Angola	,0	100,0	31825290	0

**Appendix C. SPSS dataset 2 : Iceland highlighted**

74	Haiti	9,1	90,9	11263770	0
75	Honduras	,0	100,0	9746120	0
76	Hungary	,0	100,0	9771140	0
77	Iceland	16,7	83,3	360560	1
78	India	9,1	90,9	1366417750	0
79	Indonesia	16,7	83,3	270265570	0

**Appendix D. SPSS output 2 : Assumption of normality verified**

## Descriptives

Small_state		Statistic	Std. Error		
FemaleLeader	0	Mean	4,773	,6522	
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	3,484	
			Upper Bound	6,062	
		5% Trimmed Mean	3,796		
		Median	,000		
		Variance	62,947		
		Std. Deviation	7,9339		
		Minimum	,0		
		Maximum	30,0		
		Range	30,0		
		Interquartile Range	9,1		
		Skewness	1,602	,199	
		Kurtosis	1,580	,396	
			1	Mean	1,916
95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound			,529	
	Upper Bound			3,302	
5% Trimmed Mean	1,286				
Median	,000				
Variance	21,290				
Std. Deviation	4,6142				
Minimum	,0				
Maximum	16,7				
Range	16,7				
Interquartile Range	,0				
Skewness	2,157			,354	
Kurtosis	3,161			,695	