FOR WOMEN BY WOMEN:
a comparative analysis of women political leaders’
stances on women’s issues

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Abstract

While many women sit in legislative assemblies, women political leaders have historically been a rare occurrence. Many expect these women to actively promote policies that benefit women when they reach the highest political office. The purpose of this thesis is to examine what women heads of government say and do regarding “women’s issues”.

My focus is on how women’s paths to power affect their behaviour in office, and in particular: how does dynastic background shape a woman political leader’s stance on women’s issues? To answer this research question, I develop two hypotheses. I expect to see that dynastic women to a lesser degree pursue politics that are considered beneficial to women, and that they promote, either through speech or action, women’s issues less than their non-dynastic counterparts. I also expect that differences between dynastic and non-dynastic women are larger in conservative societies than in progressive societies.

To test these hypotheses, I use an MSSD approach to two comparative case analyses with one dynastic and one non-dynastic woman in each set of cases. The first comparison is between the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the Republic of Korea (South Korea), where Taiwan’s Tsai Ing-wen is non-dynastic and South Korean Park Geun-hye is dynastic. The second comparison is between Norway and Iceland, where Norway’s Erna Solberg is the non-dynastic case and Iceland’s Katrín Jakobsdóttir is considered dynastic.

I find that all four women have passed some woman-friendly policies, but the Nordic leaders are better at promoting women’s issues than the Asian leaders. The Asia comparison supports the theoretical expectation that dynastic leaders pursue less woman-friendly policies than non-dynastic leaders. For the Nordic comparison, I had expected a weaker difference, but find no difference.

Without looking at further cases, however, it is hard to know whether these findings can be generalised. I end with a discussion about some of the limitations of this study and possible avenues for future research.
Acknowledgements

Writing these words marks the end of nearly five years as a student. I am left with a lot of memories – good, bad and the in between, and it is with mixed feelings I leave the safety of student life and step into “proper” adulthood.

Writing this thesis has not been easy. It is by far my biggest academic work, and the addition of a global pandemic on top of that has made it extra challenging. Like most other students, my day-to-day life has been heavily affected, and as a result, most of this thesis was written in the comforts of my home in Suldal, far away from campus, the library and fellow students.

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To my dad.

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Introduction

From our very own Erna Solberg to Germany’s Angela Merkel, Denmark’s Mette Frederiksen and New Zealand’s Jacinda Ardern: in the year 2021, there is perhaps no surprise that a woman sits in the highest political office. More women than ever before now sit in legislative assemblies across the globe (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2020), and even in relatively conservative states scoring low on the equality index, there are instances of high representation of women legislators.

In reality, women political leaders have historically been a rare occurrence (Jalazai and Krook 2010: 5). The first woman head of government was Sirimavo Bandaranaike, who in 1960 became Sri Lanka’s prime minister. Bandaranaike entered politics after her husband and then prime minister, Solomon Bandaranaike, was murdered the year before. The first woman president came to power in 1974, when Argentinian Isabel Péron, then vice president, came to power after the president (also her husband) died while in office, although the first democratically elected president came with Iceland’s Vigdis Finnbogadóttir in 1980. In the first few decades after the 1960s, there were relatively few women political leaders but after 1990 came a dramatic change. Between the 1980s and 1990s, the number of political leaders who were women nearly quadrupled (Jalazai and Krook 2010: 6)

Presidency or prime ministership has long been considered “masculine” positions. Despite being women, many leaders have shown masculine, rather than feminine, leadership traits. For example, United Kingdom’s Margaret Thatcher and Israel’s Golda Meir showed (through the Falkland Wars and Israel/Palestine dispute respectively) that women can be aggressive leaders (Horowitz, Stam and Ellis 2015: 176-177). Other women have been at the forefront in the fight for gender equality. Take Gro Harlem Brundtland, for example, who during her second term as Norwegian prime minister from 1986 to 1989 became globally known for her “women’s government”. This was the first time less than 60% of government ministers were men, as 8 of 18 ministers were women (44%). New Zealand’s current prime minister Jacinda Ardern has also become known for her “motherly” leadership style (Curtin 2018). Ardern is not only the second
PM after Benazir Bhutto to give birth while in office, but she has also made a point out of hugging people in public and fronts a more feminine way of conducting politics.

This thesis aims to examine what women leaders say and do regarding “women’s issues”. For many, promoting women’s issues and women’s rights, as well as publicly showing support for women, is an important aspect of being a woman politician. This thesis analyses both specific woman-friendly policies (to be defined) and discusses how women political leaders promote women’s issues while in office. In particular, I am interested in how women’s paths to power might shape how they address such issues. One of these paths is through familial ties, and I aim to establish if there are any differences in policy impact and how women’s issues are promoted by dynastic and non-dynastic women.

There are several paths to power for women political leaders. Political system often plays a role, as does party ideology. Studies from Europe and Latin America show that left-leaning governments are more likely to nominate women for cabinet positions, although European women prime ministers are more likely to come from centre-right parties (O’Brien & Reyer-Housholder 2020: 8-9). Women are also more likely to be appointed to leadership positions when an organisation experiences a crisis. This is true both for CEOs and political leaders and is referred to as the “glass cliff effect” (Jalazai 2008; Jalazai and Rincker 2018; O’Brien & Reyer-Housholder 2020: 10). Instead of breaking «the glass ceiling», women are instead pushed to a glass cliff in situations where risk of failure is high. O’Brien & Reyer-Housholder (2020) argue that the process through which women come to power may affect policy outcomes.

There are also more informal routes, such as being part of a political family (Jalazai 2010; Jalazai 2016; Folke, Rickne & Smith; O’Brien & Reyer-Housholder 2020: 9), which has been especially important in Asia (Thompson 2002). Dynastic politicians refer to those politicians belonging to a family where two or more family members are involved (or have been involved) in politics. These family members can be connected through blood, e.g. parents or grandparents, or through marriage (Dal Bó et al. 2009; Smith 2012). To have such a dynastic relation has shown to be an important entrance ticket to leadership positions for women, and those with dynastic
connections seem to have a stronger position compared to non-dynastic politicians (Jalazai 2013; Thompson 2002). This connection is an advantage in both developing and industrial countries (Dal Bó, Dal Bó & Snyder 2009; Jalazai 2013; Jalazai and Rincker 2018; Labonne, Parsa & Querubín 2019; Folke, Rickne & Smith 2020).

The research question is as follows:

*How does a dynastic background shape women political leaders’ stances on women’s issues?*

Based on existing literature, I develop two hypotheses. I expect to see that dynastic women pursue less woman-friendly policies and promote women’s issues less than non-dynastic women. I also expect that the differences between dynastic and non-dynastic women will be larger in conservative societies compared to progressive societies.

To test the hypotheses, I conduct two comparative case analyses. The first comparison is between the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the Republic of Korea (South Korea), where Taiwanese Tsai Ing-wen is non-dynastic and South Korean Park Geun-hye is dynastic. In the second comparison, I analyse Norway and Iceland, where Norway’s Erna Solberg and Iceland’s Katrín Jakobsdóttir are considered non-dynastic and dynastic respectively.

The Asia comparison supports the theoretical expectation that dynastic leaders pursue less woman-friendly policies than non-dynastic leaders, but there is no difference in the Nordic comparison. I find that all four women have passed some woman-friendly policies, but the Nordic leaders are better at promoting women’s issues than the Asian leaders.

This thesis begins with a theoretical section where I define important terms such as women’s issues and political dynasty. In the methods chapter I explain how I use a most-similar systems design to select cases, as well as how I operationalise the term women’s issues, followed by two empirical chapters where I analyse the two sets of cases. I end with a discussion about some of the limitations of this study and possible avenues for future research.
Theory

Much of the work on women in politics has been on the share of women in legislative assemblies. The following section tackles the existing literature on women’s issues, women political leaders and political dynasties, and gives a working definition for the analyses.

What are women’s issues?

“Women’s issues” is a fuzzy term and can refer to a number of topics, ranging from sexual and reproductive rights, violence against women and woman-friendly social policies, to media portrayal of girls and women, maternity leave and economic issues such as gender pay and investing gaps.

The topics listed above are usually the main issues for activist groups, and even national and local activists often have an international focus where global issues, e.g. human trafficking and labour exploitation are highlighted (for a Norwegian example, see Norsk Kvinnesaksforening 2021). In a similar vein, a recent 2020 report coming out of King’s College London’s Global Institute for Women’s Leadership defined women’s interests as issues that primarily impact women. The report highlights the following issues: reproductive rights and women’s sexual health (e.g. abortion), violence against women, and family and childcare (e.g. parental leave). The latter tends to be a priority in Western states, particularly in Europe (Cowper-Coles 2020: 63-64). There are also other issues that women prioritise, such as education and environmental issues. UN Women, United Nation’s organisation dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, also highlight a wide variety of priority areas that they deem fundamental to gender equality (UN Women 2020): leadership and political participation; economic empowerment; ending violence against women; WPS (the women peace and security agenda); humanitarian action; governance and national planning; youth; women and girls with disabilities; the sustainable development agenda, and finally: HIV and AIDS.
If you stop five random women on the street and ask them what they believe is the most important political issue for women, you might get five completely different answers. Some dispute the idea that women have a “common agenda” (Wängnerud 2009: 53, Weldon 2011: 441, Celis et al. 2014: 150). A common argument is that women’s expressed interests have varied both in groups and over time (Weldon 2011: 442), and that different organisations focus on different policy areas. Women will not necessarily automatically ally with other women, and a good example of this can be found in the United States. Results from a 2018 survey conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute on a variety of issues including sexual harassment, abortion rights and access to contraceptives, show that the differences often lie in party affiliation. Among women respondents, 25% of Republican voters and 51% of Democratic voters answered that workplace sexual harassment is a serious issue. 48% of Republican women, compared to 14% Democrat women, said they would consider voting for a candidate accused of sexual harassment. Women Democrats ranked gender equality as a top political priority, whereas Republican women ranked it close to the bottom (PRRI 2018).

While some might say it is positive that certain issues with gender discrepancies are highlighted, others argue that there is no such thing as “women’s issues” and that all political issues are women’s issues (Jung et. al 2018; Women’s Environment & Development Organization 2020). The argument is that while there are certain areas where women and men are affected differently, e.g. wars and armed conflicts, it does not necessarily mean that the topic is less relevant for the other group. Bjertén-Günther (2018) argues that talking about women’s politics separately from other politics maintains the distinction that certain issues that are important to women are not important to men.

There is, in fact, convincing evidence that there are certain issues across the globe that affect men and women disparately, and that women and men do care about different issues. Interests and political preferences can also be affected by societal and cultural factors (Wängnerud 2009: 53), as well as age, ethnicity and race, or sexual orientation (Celis et al. 2014: 167). A woman living in the countryside in a developing country can have completely different policy preferences and interests than a Norwegian woman born and raised in Oslo. The variety of what might include
in the definition can depend on context, although the literature shows some broad consensus in priority areas such as violence against women and reproductive health (Cowper-Coles 2020: 59).

Since the term women’s issues has become a buzzword without a concrete definition (Rubin 2018), defining exactly what women’s issues are has shown to be difficult. I take a leaf out of the Global Institute for Women’s Leadership’s book and define women’s issues in wide terms, as political policies or societal issues that primarily affect women or directly relate to their well-being. When analysing a woman head of government’s stance on women’s issues, I choose to organise the term in three ways: the legal policies that are considered beneficial to women because they address or seek to rectify inequalities I will refer to as woman-friendly policies. Publicly speaking out for women’s rights or talking about women’s issues I refer to as public promotion, and symbol-heavy actions where women’s issues are promoted through action rather than speech, e.g. appointing women government ministers, I will refer to as indirect promotion.

To sum up this discussion: the literature shows that women’s issues can encompass a number of things. It can refer to specific policies targeted to improve gender equality, certain issues women care about, as well as symbolic actions taken to promote these issues. Women’s issues can differ from country to country and may be affected by societal and cultural factors (Wångnerud 2009; Celis et al. 2014: 167) – different women care about different things. A rigid definition including a specific set of issues may not be productive, and I instead give a general and wide definition of women’s issues: it is any political policy or societal issue that directly relate to the well-being of women. I also organise the term into three strands: legal rights and policies that are considered woman-friendly, public promotion and indirect promotion.

**What do women heads of government do?**

Academic work on women political leaders has mainly focused on women’s paths to the highest political office, rather than on policy outcomes. Initial studies on these areas have yielded mixed results, but generally, women political leaders and ministers appear less likely to prioritise

There is evidence that women legislators promote gender equality and woman-friendly policies more than men. Research on women in executive positions, however, does not have consistent conclusions (O’Brien & Reyer-Housholder 2020: 11). Some women pursue change, while others conform to or strengthen the status quo (O’Brien & Reyer-Housholder 2020: 12). This could be because of constraints such as political or societal contexts, as well as institutional factors (Cowper-Coles 2020: 68-75). Both O’Brien & Reyer-Housholder and Wängnerud highlight time in office as well. Not only is it unrealistic for new representatives to wield much influence (Wängnerud 2009: 60), challenging the status quo is a long-term project, rather than a short-term one (O’Brien & Reyer-Housholder 2020: 13).

As for differences between men and women who are political leaders: can we expect them to behave the same in office? While literature on women at the highest political level is lacking, previous studies from both developing and industrial countries suggest that there are differences between men and women’s policy preferences (Khan 2017: 42, 45-46). Men and women live different lives, they have different jobs and a different set of experiences. In sum, they have different identities (Chattopadhyay & Duflo 2004: 1411; Khan 2017: 42; Chira 2018), which can be formed by factors such as gender, marital status, motherhood, as well as ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status and party affiliation. This view is also supported by Labonne, Parsa & Querubín, who in their study from India show that women lawmakers from lower castes are more likely to support policies that are beneficial to women compared to women from higher castes (2019: 19).

Findings from villages in India, Indonesia and Sub-Saharan Africa indicate that women are more likely to care about issues relating to water, whereas men are more likely to care about roads and infrastructure (Khan 2017: 42-43). This, Khan (2017) argues, relates to the division of labour and that people will care more about the issues close to their areas of responsibility. It is
therefore important to not only look at the actual differences, but also the processes through which these preferences are formed (2017: 47).

Chattopadhyay and Duflo’s (2004) findings are similar to Khan’s. Through a natural experiment in India, they studied if and how gender quotas affect policymaking. Since the 1990s, one third of leadership positions in Indian village councils have been randomly assigned to women. In women-led village councils, women’s preferences were reflected in policy outcomes. In the case of India, women were also more concerned with water-related issues and men more concerned with infrastructure. This is because it is usually the women’s role to provide the family with water, whereas men more often leave the villages in search of work and are therefore in need of better roads. These results indicate that gender may play a role in policymaking (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004: 1411). Results from these studies also indicate that under a gender quotas system, women leaders will invest more in public goods close to women’s preferences (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004: 1440) and that women who win their seats through gender quotas are more likely to support woman-friendly politics or act in line with women’s wishes (Chattopadhyay & Duflo 2004; Khan 2017; Labonne, Pars & Querubín 2019).

Studies show that gendered differences in political attitudes and preferences are present in western democratic states as well (Wängnerud 2009: 62). Women are more liberal in their ideology, they are more left-leaning and view new policies, such as environmental politics, more positively (Jalazai 2004: 88-89; Wängnerud 2009: 62). Women are generally more open to social policy, generally more sceptical of pornography and there is more support for gender quotas. Empirical evidence from American lawmakers in 2004 support this argument, especially when it comes to social welfare policies, and these gendered differences can also be found within the different political parties.

The literature suggests that women are more woman-friendly than men, but in contrast with the wide variety of issues highlighted by women’s rights activists, political parties and women representatives often concentrate on fewer issues on their policy platforms (Celis et al. 2014: 167-168). Although some women politicians make it a point to promote women’s issues,
oftentimes party ideology takes precedence over personal preferences, even if they are expressed feminists (Wängnerud 2009: 62; Celis et al. 2014: 167). Gender differences are especially apparent in issues that are not central to the political parties’ politics (Wängnerud 2009: 62-63; Celis et al. 2014: 167). This shows again that party politics is important and constrains which policies the woman representative chooses to pursue. Other constraining factors are the politician’s institutional position (how close to power are they?), and how long they have held their role. A newly elected representative has less opportunity to influence and push through their preferred policies (Wängnerud 2009: 60).

The dynastic link

The focus of this thesis is on women political leaders’ stances on women’s issues. One explanation for variation in how these women behave could lie in their pathway to power. Entering the highest political office through dynastic channels is one such way to power, and scholarly work shows that a dynastic relation has been an important entrance ticket to leadership positions for women, especially in Asia (Thompson 2002). Geys and Smith (2017) argue that dynastic politicians are especially constrained, not only by institutional factors but also by family politics, which may affect policy outcomes.

A political dynasty, also known as a political family, refers to a family where two or more members are involved in politics. These family members can be related through both blood and marriage and can stretch across generations. Dynastic relationships can be quite hard to map out due to variations in levels of family relations and positions of power (Smith 2012). A dynastic politician is therefore said to be a politician with a family member who previously held the same political office, e.g. presidency, prime ministership, or member of parliament (Dal Bó et al. 2009; Asako et al. 2015: 5; Jalazai and Rincker 2018: 60; Smith 2012: 4-5). Smith (2012) uses the term legacy MP instead. According to Smith’s definition, a legacy candidate becomes a legacy MP when he or she wins a seat in parliament. A political dynasty will then be established if a family has two or more legacy MPs on the national level. This is a more liberal position than Hess (2016),
who in the US context defined a political dynasty as “any family that has had at least four members, in the same name, elected to federal office” (Hess 2016).

Political dynasties are found across a wide array of political systems and contexts, e.g. in Japan (Fukai & Fukui 1992; Asako et al. 2015), the Philippines (Querubin 2011) and the United States (Dal Bó et al. 2009; Feinstein 2010). Political dynasties can be found both in democratic states with free and fair elections and in authoritarian regimes, such as the Kim family in North Korea.

Previous literature on this subject has focused on how political dynasties arise and persist. Dal Bó et al. (2009) and Querubin (2011) have studied the causal effect the duration of a sitting period has on the probability of having a family member in politics in the future. Across different contexts, all the studies find similar results: the longer the politician keeps their seat, the higher the probability of starting a political dynasty. Feinstein (2010) and Asako et al. (2015), in their studies from the USA and Japan respectively, conclude that politicians with dynastic connections, compared with non-dynastic politicians, are more likely to be elected in national elections when other individual characteristics have been controlled for. This is due to accumulated political capital through name brand recognition, political training, and affiliation with and access to established political networks (Dal Bó et al. 2009; Feinstein 2010).

Jalazai and Rincker (2018) go even further in their definition of a dynastic politician. They argue that, because power can be exercised in many ways, the family members do not have to inherit the same seat. A recent example of a low-level dynastic politician is Belarusian Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who in the 2020 presidential elections took over her activist husband’s candidature after he was arrested. They include both the nuclear family, as well as extended family in this definition in three levels of power (Jalazai and Rincker 2018: 57):

1) high level (president or prime minister)
2) mid-level (members of parliament, cabinet ministers)
3) low level (regional and local politics, bureaucrats, activists)
My definition of dynastic woman political leader largely follows Jalazai and Rincker’s definition and includes the two highest levels of power. I define it as a woman head of government (prime minister or president, depending on political system) with a member of her nuclear family (partner, children, siblings, parents or grandparents) who previously held the role of prime minister, president, cabinet minister or member of parliament. This definition excludes politicians with successors but no predecessors.

**Why pathway to power might matter**

Previous studies show that having a dynastic link is an important entrance ticket to leadership positions for women, and this advantage is apparent in both developing and industrial countries (Dal Bó, Dal Bó & Snyder 2009; Jalazai 2013; Jalazai and Rincker 2018; Labonne, Parsa & Querubín 2019; Folke, Rickne & Smith 2020). Those with dynastic connections seem to be better positioned to win political offices, compared to non-dynastic women (Jalazai 2013; Thompson 2002).

While men do enjoy the advantages of belonging to a political family (e.g. through name brand recognition, political training and established networks), they are more likely to reach executive office and are less dependent on family relations (Dal Bo et al. 2009; Jalazai and Rincker 2018: 69). Women are, in many ways, political newcomers. Dynastic seniors of high quality, meaning they have a good reputation and are generally considered to be “good” politicians, are therefore used to gather information about the new candidate and consequently evaluate women candidates. Folke, Rickne and Smith’s study of Ireland and Sweden indicate that this is not the case for men (2020: 24; 34). Socioeconomic groups such as women, but also other minorities, depend on signalling via dynastic seniors who are already considered insiders in the political arena. The selectorate (political parties and voters) does not want the risk associated with completely unknown candidates (Folke et al. 2020: 34). This risk can be reduced if they belong to a political family (ibid 2020: 5).
Findings indicate that family ties play a bigger role in more traditional and conservative societies where family is important than in more individualistic post-industrial societies – typically where women are not present in politics (Jalazai 2013; Jalazai and Rincker 2018: 57; Baturo & Gray 2018: 695). The dynastic relation is less important the longer the woman has been active in politics, as well as in more established democracies where female suffrage is fully institutionalised (Baturo & Gray 2018: 695, 699-700; Folke, Rickne & Smith 2020:24). Jalazai (2013) argues that women dynastic politicians come to power only when absolutely necessary. Jalazai refers to this as “proxy-women”, meaning low-educated women who are only supposed to temporarily hold power until an appropriate male member can take over. Folke, Rickne and Smith, however, do not find empirical support for this (2020: 24-25).

Results from studies on political consequences of dynasties have not yielded a conclusive answer (Geys & Smith 2017: 450-451). In terms of economic growth, Besley and Reynal-Quorel (2017) in their study of what they refer to as hereditary leaders between 1874 and 2004, conclude that an increase in economic growth only happens when executive constraints are weak (ibid 2017: 18). Daniele and Vertier (2018), who use data on Italian dynastic mayors, find no differences in policymaking in terms of spending. Rather, dynastic politicians typically differ more from non-dynastic politicians in electoral performance (Daniele and Vertier 2018: 35).

Tusalem and Pe-Aguirre use the Philippine experience to show that provinces dominated by political families are less likely to experience good governance when it comes to the allocation of public goods. They argue that dynamic persistence over time preserves the status quo, and there is therefore a lack of reform-oriented policies (Tusalem and Pe-Aguirre 2013). Similarly, Geys and Smith (2017) argue that dynastic politicians may be even more constrained than non-dynastic politicians due to their families, which leads to less change in policies after dynastic succession (Geys & Smith 2017: 452).

As for women with dynastic ties, I have not been able to identify any studies focusing specifically on the dynastic effect on women politicians’ policymaking. While there are no studies of women,
we can draw on insights from the discussed literature to develop hypotheses about how the behaviour of women political leaders may be affected by their dynastic ties.

First, findings show that continued dynastic persistence preserves the status quo and lacks reform, as argued by Tusalem and Pe-Aguirre (2013). At the same time, Geys and Smith (2017) point out that dynastic politicians are constrained by family politics, and as mentioned in the section about women’s political preferences, women politicians in general face restrictions such as party politics. This suggests that a dynastic woman political leader has to face two sets of restrictions, both from family and political parties. Empirically I expect to see that dynastic women political leaders propose or pass less woman-friendly policies than non-dynastic women and that they publicly and indirectly promote women’s issues less.

**Hypothesis 1:** *Dynastic women political leaders face more constraints than non-dynastic women and are therefore less likely to pursue woman-friendly policies and promote women’s issues*

My second hypothesis concerns variation among dynastic women specifically. The literature shows that dynastic ties play a bigger role in more conservative and traditional societies where family is important and where women generally are not part of political life (Jalazai 2013; Jalazai and Rincker 2018: 57; Baturo & Gray 2018: 695). Empirically I expect the difference between dynastic and non-dynastic leaders to be larger in more conservative contexts than in liberal or progressive contexts.

**Hypothesis 2:** *In conservative social contexts where family ties are important, dynastic women are more constrained, than dynastic women in progressive cultures*
Methodology

The purpose of this thesis is to examine women political leaders and if and how a dynastic background affects their stances on women’s issues, not only in terms of specific policy outcomes, but also their attitudes through speech and action. I have previously defined women’s issues as any political policy or societal issue that directly relate to the well-being of women. This definition is two-folded: the political aspect I refer to as woman-friendly policies, and the promotional aspect I refer to as public and indirect promotion.

In the previous section I also specified two hypotheses that I seek to test, and I have chosen to do two sets of comparative case studies to test these. There are three main reasons for my choice of this research design: the way the research question is phrased, issues with coding the data for more than four cases, as well as the limited sample pool.

When selecting an appropriate research design, it is important to keep the research question in mind (Yin 2003: 3-5). The research question for this thesis, “how does a dynastic background shape women political leaders’ stances on women’s issues?”, asks how rather than if. This question calls for a deep exploration of the subject, and I have chosen to do a case study of qualitative nature. This allows me to analyse the research question and the empirical data in depth. I also wish to study qualitative characteristics that are difficult to code for a large-N study, such as the woman-friendly actions these women take and how they promote women’s issues through speech. Lastly, women political leaders have been a relatively rare occurrence compared to men, and there are not enough cases for a feasible statistical analysis that will result in variation. These arguments put together show that a qualitative research design is the best option to answer the research question.

To test the first hypothesis, I need to compare the behaviour of a dynastic woman leader with a non-dynastic woman leader. To test the second hypothesis, I need variation across social and cultural contexts. I therefore chose to analyse two sets of cases. Each of these cases will have a dynastic and non-dynastic woman. One set of cases will be located in a liberal or progressive culture, and one set will be located in a conservative or traditionalist culture.
To rule out as many competing explanations as possible, I will employ a most-similar systems design (MSSD). In its purest form, the cases used in this method are similar in all respects, except for the one variable of interest. For this thesis it is whether or not the political leader has a dynastic background. This method is often used in studies where the research question is based on the sentence “Does X affect Y?” (Anckar 2008: 395), which is the case for this thesis. The application of MSSD can be both strict, meaning all variables, except the one of interest, should be similar, or loose, when the researcher chooses to study countries that appear to be as similar as possible without systematically matching the relevant variables (Anckar 2008: 380). Based on a limited pool of cases to choose from, I use a looser application of MSSD, where cases are matched based on similar geographical location, political system, as well as cultural heritage.

**Selecting the cases**

To select leaders to study, I created an overview of the women who have served as either president and/or prime minister, and if they qualify as dynastic or not. The following section tackles case selection based on this list and the MSSD.

Since my focus is on these women politician’s impact on not only symbolic issues but also policies, I narrow down the list of women to those who influence policy decisions, meaning heads of government. This generally means presidents in presidential systems and prime ministers (henceforth PMs) in parliamentary systems (or their equivalent, e.g. chancellor in German). In many semi-presidential states, e.g. Ireland, as well as in constitutional monarchies, there is a clear differentiation between the head of state and the head of government, with heads of government wielding the most influence on policy decisions. In other states power is split between the president and PM, such as in Lithuania, where traditionally the head of state (president) handles foreign policy and the head of government is responsible for domestic policy. This was taken into account when I created this list.
This overview of women political leaders was informed by Torild Skard’s comprehensive book *Women of Power* (2014), Farida Jalazai’s book *Shattered, Cracked, or Firmly Intact? Women and the Executive Glass Ceiling Worldwide* (2013), as well as Zarate’s Political Collections, an online biography of political leaders since 1996 managed by the Barcelona Centre of International Affairs. In cases of missing information on dynastic connections, I have used information from government websites and global news sources such as BBC News and the New York Times. The following tables contain name, country, period in office and role, as well as dynastic relation. The criteria for inclusion in this overview follow Jalazai and Rincker’s (2018) definition of a dynastic woman political leader: a president or PM with a familial relationship at the two highest levels of power, meaning previous presidents, PMs, MPs and cabinet ministers.

I discard the lowest level of Jalazai and Rincker’s three-tier definition, as lower levels of power and relations are not always publicly known. There is a higher probability that closer connections at a high power level, such as having a former president in the family, are public knowledge. When discarding the lowest level of power, I acknowledge that the number of cases of dynastic women political leaders will be smaller. In return, the categorisation of these women into “dynastic” and “non-dynastic” will be more accurate. The closer the familial relation and the higher the level of power, the bigger the political capital and any dynastic advantage will be, so this narrowed-down definition will be more fruitful for this study.

I narrow down the time period to 2010-2020, which includes those who came to power before 2010 and left office between 2011-2020 (or are still currently serving). Those who left office in 2010 have not been included. This allows for a bigger case pool than limiting to only currently sitting women presidents or PMs and keeps the analysis recent. It also makes it easier to access relevant information and data needed for the analysis.

In this period, there have been 44 women serving either as president or prime minister, 14 of which are currently serving in office. These women have all been categorised into five regions to capture cultural variation: Europe, Asia, the Americas, Africa and Oceania. The Asian region also includes Israel, Turkey and Kyrgyzstan, and the Americas refer to North, South and Central
America, as well as the Caribbean Islands. 21 of these women are European (47.5%), 7 are Asian (16%), 7 come from the Americas (16%), another 6 are from Africa (13.5%), and finally, there are 3 in Oceania (7%). Out of these 44 women, only 9 are dynastic (20.5%). Most are in Asia, where 5 out of 7 have dynastic ties (71.5%). The Americas follow with 2 dynastic women (28.5%), then Europe and Africa follow with 1 each (5% and 17% respectively). Oceania has no leader with dynastic ties.

Tables 1 to 5 show the full list of women heads of government (or de facto leaders of the executive branch) with the names highlighted in blue indicating those who currently hold office in their respective countries per December 31, 2020. In cases of dynastic relation, the familial tie has been noted. This list does not include interim or acting heads of state or government.

Table 1: Europe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Dynastic</th>
<th>Relation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angela Merkel</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2005-</td>
<td>Chancellor</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir</td>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>2009-2013</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jadranka Kosor</td>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>2009-2011</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mari Kiviniemi</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iveta Radičová</td>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>2010-2012</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helle Thorning-Schmidt</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>2011-2015</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alenka Bratušek</td>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erna Solberg</td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>2013-</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laimdota Straujuma</td>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>2014-2016</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewa Kopacz</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beata Maria Szydło</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>2015-2017</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theresa May</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>2016-2019</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Helle Thorning-Schmidt is not considered dynastic, however her father-in-law, Neil Kinnock, was both Leader of the Labour Party and Leader of the Opposition in the UK from 1983-1992. Her husband, Stephen Kinnock, was elected MP for Labour in 2015.
2 Ewa Kopacz' husband unsuccessfully stood for parliament in the 1980s.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Dynastic</th>
<th>Relation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ana Brnabić</td>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>2017-</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katrín Jakobsdóttir</td>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>2017-</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Grandfather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viorica Dăncilă</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>2018-2019</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brigitte Bierlein</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>2019-2020</td>
<td>Chancellor</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maia Sandu</td>
<td>Moldova</td>
<td>2019-2019</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mette Frederiksen</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>2019-</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophie Wilmès</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>2019-2020</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanna Marin</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>2019-</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingrida Šimonytė</td>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>2020-</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Asia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Dynastic</th>
<th>Relation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheikh Hasina</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>1996-2001; 2009-</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pratibha Patil</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>2007-2012</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roza Otunbayeva</td>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yingluck Shinawatra</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>2011-2014</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Father and maternal grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td></td>
<td>2013-2017</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park Geun-hye</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>2013-2017</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aung San Suu Kyi</td>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>2016-</td>
<td>State Counsellor</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsai Ing-wen</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>2016-</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 Park Geun-Hye was impeached in 2017 following corruption charges
4 Aung San Suu Kyi was still State Counsellor on December 31, 2020, but was arrested following a military coup in February 2021
5 Taiwan does have a PM who is considered head of government, but the relationship has changed throughout the years, and the constitution is unclear on who has more power. Shen (2014) calls Taiwan a presidentialised semi-presidential system. She was ranked 37th most powerful woman in the world by Forbes in 2020
### Table 3: Americas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Dynastic</th>
<th>Relation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michelle Bachelet</td>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>2006-2010; 2014-2018</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portia Simpson-Miller</td>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>2006-2007; 2012-2016</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cristina Fernández de Kirchner</td>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>2007-2015</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura Chinchilla</td>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>2010-2014</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamla Persad-Bissessar</td>
<td>Tobago</td>
<td>2010-2015</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dilma Rousseff⁶</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>2011-2016</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia Mottley</td>
<td>Barbados</td>
<td>2018-</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4: Africa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Dynastic</th>
<th>Relation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ellen Johnson Sirleaf</td>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>2006-2018</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cissé Mariam Kaidama Sidibé</td>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joyce Banda</td>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>2012-2014</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aminata Touré</td>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saara Kuugongelwa</td>
<td>Namibia</td>
<td>2015-</td>
<td>PM⁷</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose Christiane Raponda</td>
<td>Gabon</td>
<td>2020-</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁶ Dilma Rousseff was impeached in 2016
⁷ While the President of Namibia is titled both Head of State and Head of Government, the PM is also «leader of government»
Table 5: Oceania

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Dynastic</th>
<th>Relation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julia Gillard</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>2010-2013</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilda Heine</td>
<td>Marshall Islands</td>
<td>2016-2020</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacinda Ardern</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>2017-</td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When choosing cases to compare in an MSSD, the matched cases are ideally similar in all but one variable (Anckar 2008: 389), which for this thesis is a dynastic relation. However, as previously mentioned, the sample pool of cases is limited due to the simple fact that there historically have not been that many women presidents or PMs. I select the cases based on a set of criteria that are necessary to test my hypotheses. Each set of cases should be as similar as possible regarding geographical location, political system as well as cultural heritage, and each set must also have one dynastic woman and one non-dynastic woman leader.

The cases that fit these requirements are Taiwan’s Tsai Ing-wen and South Korea’s Park Geun-hye for the first set in Asia, and Iceland’s Katrín Jakobsdóttir and Norway’s Erna Solberg for the second set in Europe. The Nordic countries generally score high in gender equality rankings, and gender equality policies and laws have been integrated with the welfare state (Niemi 2018). Taiwan and South Korea in East Asia share Confucian roots and are still considered gender traditional, hierarchical and patriarchal (Chao 2011).

Taiwan and South Korea in East Asia are both semi-presidential systems, with Park Geun-hye having clear dynastic ties to her father, former president Park Cheung-hee, who served five consecutive terms from 1961-1979. Tsai Ing-wen is considered non-dynastic. In Northern Europe, Katrín Jakobsdóttir comes from a family of many prominent people in Icelandic politics, academia and literature. Jakobsdóttir is the granddaughter of former MP Sigurður S. Thoroddsen and great-granddaughter of politician and judge Skúli Thoroddsen. In Norway, Erna Solberg is considered

8 While not considered dynastic, Jacina Ardern’s father is a former high-ranking police officer and currently a diplomat for New Zealand
non-dynastic. While Iceland is a semi-presidential democracy, the prime minister is head of government and exercises executive authority, which is the same case for the Norwegian constitutional monarchy.

While there is some overlap in the timeline as to when these women held office, they were mostly elected in different years. Three out of four women are currently serving, with South Korea’s Park Geun-hye having left office due to a corruption scandal in 2017. Considering this, I will only analyse these women’s first period in office.

Using these two sets of cases, Tsai Ing-wen and Park Geun-hye in Asia, and Erna Solberg and Katrín Jakobsdóttir in the Nordic region, enables me to test both of my hypotheses.

**Collecting and analysing data**

Deciding on the best way to measure a vague term such as “women’s issues” is difficult but can be done in various ways. I operationalise the term by setting indicators, which allows for a more reliable measurement. This operationalisation also guides the data collection by helping me recognise women’s issues when I see them.

I previously defined women’s issues as specific policies or societal issues that directly relate to the well-being of women. I refer to specific policies that address inequalities as woman-friendly policies. Political leaders are often restricted by party ideology or institutional constraints, so I also want to look at how these women promote women’s issues. I use three categories to measure both political impact and promotion of women’s issues:

1. **Policy impact** – were any woman-friendly policies passed by the legislature while a woman political leader was in office?

While exactly what women’s issues entail and what women care about can differ across different contexts, there are several recurring issues (Cowper-Coles 2020; UN Women 2020) which are
objectively about physical women’s issues and gender gap issues. Thus, this indicator has two categories:

a. Physical women’s issues, by looking specifically at violence against women and sexual and reproductive rights
b. Gender gap issues, by looking specifically at gender pay gap and parental leave

Policies that don’t fit into these categories I code as “social policy” or “legal rights”. To measure this, I will use data collected by the World Bank, Womanstats and Refworld. Where the World Bank’s *Women, Business, and the Law* data set contains data on legislation related to gender and economic opportunity, the Womanstats database includes national legislation on domestic and sexual violence. Refworld is an archive by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, that hosts legal information and policy documents relating to UNHCR’s mandate. By using these databases I can identify when any woman-friendly changes in legislation took place and see if any occur while a woman served as head of government.

2. Public promotion - how does the woman political leader talk about women’s issues in the public arena?

By analysing transcripts of public speeches, interviews or social media posts, I will get an indication of if and how the woman political leader talks about women’s issues in public. Speeches, remarks and statements are published on official government websites, and I filter documents by using relevant search terms such as “women”, “gender” and “equality”. I use targeted Google searches to identify relevant articles and social media posts by filtering search results to within the relevant date range (first term in office), e.g. “search term + before:YYYY-MM-DD” and “search term + after: YYYY-MM-DD”.

3. Indirect promotion - how does the woman political leader indirectly promote or highlight gender inequality

Certain actions are symbol-heavy and in support of (or against) women’s interests, even if they do not come through direct speech. By analysing media reports and news articles, I will get an indication of how the woman political leader indirectly promotes women’s issues, e.g. by
appointing women ministers and women executives in public sector organisations or by surrounding herself with women advisors. It can also be about softer, more traditionally “feminine” ways of conducting politics, such as Jacinda Ardern and her habit of hugging people in greeting rather than with a handshake.

**Limitations of the study**

Here I will briefly reflect on issues related to the measurement validity and reliability of my main measures, as well as the overall internal and external validity of my study. I address these concerns by being explicit in my approach. Through the first part of this thesis, I have attempted to be as transparent as possible regarding theoretical background, the purpose of the study, research design and case selection.

To address the quality of measures, I use the methodology chapter to outline how I have operationalised the term women’s issues and explain how I have collected the data so that the term can be measured accurately. This is especially important due to the vagueness of the term women’s issues. I describe the process of data collection by listing the search terms used in Oria and Google Scholar (see appendix for list of search terms) and share which databases I have used, as well as how I made targeted searches on Google to identify relevant articles. I also describe how I have operationalised “women’s issues” by setting the three indicators (political impact, public promotion and indirect promotion) that form the basis of my analysis. This transparency and sharing of search terms and the indicators used in the analysis opens for other researchers to use the same tools to later replicate the study, and therefore raises the reliability.

While I have attempted to reduce the risk of selection bias when selecting cases, the small sample size of woman political leaders has proven to be a challenge. A clear limitation of this study is the case selection, as I did not control for ideology. While working with the empirical data, it became apparent that party ideology was a clear confounder that might be dragging the results. In future studies, it would be key to make sure to compare women on a similar ideological spectrum.
Another weakness for the internal validity of this study is that three out of four countries (Iceland, South Korea and Taiwan) have an official language I don’t speak. While my conversational level and basic reading skills in Korean allows me to read shorter news articles, I am unable to analyse official documents and use them in a comparative setting. The data I use is therefore limited to what I can find in Norwegian and English, meaning I might have missed out on important empirical data. Occasionally I have used translation programs, but these translations are usually not 100% accurate.

As for the external validity of this study, that is perhaps its greatest weakness. Jacobsen (2015) argues that the possibility to generalise the findings depends on, among other things, how many cases have been analysed, as well as how they were selected. The bigger the study, the greater basis of generalisation. In this study, I have attempted to increase the possibility of generalisation through systematically selecting cases by using the most-similar systems design approach, as well as comparing two sets of cases in two different geographical, political and cultural settings. In comparative studies, the aim is to find basic patterns or tendencies in social phenomena, but the external validity of an MSSD is still weak. The ideal cases for an MSSD approach are similar in all but one variable, but this ideal selection of cases is near impossible to achieve when the cases in question are countries that each have their own unique historical, political and societal backgrounds. Even when countries share similar backgrounds, the small number of differences could explain the outcome, rather than the specific variable of interest – in this instance dynastic ties – I am studying. Thus, the findings of this study may give indications on patterns, but it’s difficult to generalise across all cases.
The Asia Comparison: Republic of Korea (South Korea) and Republic of China (Taiwan). A Comparison of Park Geun-Hye and Tsai Ing-Wen’s Stances on Women’s Issues

The Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the Republic of China (Taiwan) share many similarities, such as having a Confucian society through Chinese influence, a Japanese colonial legacy, and post-war geopolitics. In both South Korea and Taiwan, the president is elected directly through democratic elections. The president then goes on to appoint the prime minister. In South Korea, the president is the head of state and government, while the PM is the deputy head of government, whereas in Taiwan the PM (called the premier) is head of government. Several scholars point out that the Taiwanese constitution is rather vague when it comes to the power dynamic between the president and the premier and that this relationship has changed over time. Shen (2014) calls Taiwan a “presidentialised semi-presidential system”, where the premier is head of government, but the president appoints the premier without parliament approval and has the power to remove them at will. Shen argues that Taiwan has a strong president where the president is the leader of the executive system whether the president’s party is in majority or not (Shen 2014: 166-167). While the focus of this analysis is heads of government, who normally have the most influence over the executive branch, instances where the division of power is not so black and white also needs to be taken into account. Considering Shen’s arguments of a presidentialised semi-presidential system, the Taiwanese president is thus eligible for analysis.

Both Korea and Taiwan have a traditional culture when it comes to gender (Chao 2011), and it was not until the 2010s both states saw their first women leaders. South Korean Park Geun-hye was elected the first woman president in South Korea in December 2012, and Taiwan’s Tsai Ing-wen followed in 2016. Before this, South Korea had a woman prime minister in Han Myeong-sook from April 2006 to March 2007, and Taiwan a woman vice president in Lü Hsiu-lien, who was elected in 2000. Since Tsai is still a sitting president, the period of analysis is limited to the first term of presidency, and for Tsai, this is May 2016-May 2020. Park, following charges related to influence peddling, was impeached by the National Assembly on December 9, 2016, but was
not removed from office until March 2017, when the Constitutional Court upheld the impeachment. The period of study for Park is therefore February 2013-March 2017.

Both women served as leaders of their respective political parties for several years before being elected, but otherwise started their political careers in vastly different ways. Park is the daughter of Park Chung-hee, who in 1961 led a military coup (known as the May 16 coup) to become South Korea’s third president. Park Chung-hee’s presidency was, and continues to be, controversial. On one hand, he led a war-torn Korea through enormous economic growth, on the other hand, Park’s rule was authoritarian and his government oppressed labour unions and suppressed wages, changed the constitution to extend his presidency and the paralysed National Assembly (Lee 2017: 382-383). When Park Geun-hye’s mother, Yuk Young-soo, was killed during an attempted assassination on her husband in 1974, Park took on the role of ceremonial First Lady at age 22. Five years after the death of his wife, in 1979, Park Chung-hee was assassinated, leading Park Geun-hye to leave the public eye. In 1998, Park re-entered politics and won the local by-elections for the city of Daegu, one of the most conservative provinces in Korea (Mun 2015: 253). While Park lacked political experience, was single and a woman, meaning she departed from the traditional woman’s role of caring for her family, she was regarded as a legitimate heir of Park Chung-hee, who still had support in the region (Lee 2017: 246). In 2004, her political party, the conservative Grand National Party (GNP), sought to impeach the progressive president Roh Moo-hyun but ultimately failed, leading the party to lose its popularity. In 2007, Park lost the bid to become her party’s presidential candidate. She was appointed leader of the GNP in 2011, which she renamed the Saenuri Party (literally ‘New Frontier’)\(^9\). Under a new name and new leadership, Park secured 121 out of 299 National Assembly seats (Lee 2017: 383). By the time Park was elected president in 2012, she had served five terms in parliament (Mun 2015: 251) and was elected by a majority rather than plurality, the first presidential candidate to achieve this since 1987 (Lee 2017: 377).

\(^9\) Korean political parties often rename themselves to shed bad reputations, e.g. after election losses. This was the fourth time the conservative party had changed its name since 1987 (Choi 2017)
Throughout her political career, Park continued to publicly emphasise her familial ties. In her 2007 autobiography, she wrote that she had been “tuned to politics” at a young age and that she went through a natural political socialisation as a member of the first family (Lee 2017: 385). She used her father’s legacy and his old slogans such as “let’s live well” to appeal to the conservative voter block and was often referred to as “her father’s daughter” rather than a woman (Doucette 2017: 853). While she inherited strong regional networks and conservative support, her father’s undemocratic legacy was used against her, especially by her opponent Moon Jae-in (now the current president), who is a human rights lawyer (Lee 2017: 377-378).

Park was also criticised as unable to relate to women because she was privileged, single and childless – so unlike the “regular” Korean woman – and was termed “princess” by the media (Lee 2017: 383; 385). During the presidential campaign, she had portrayed herself to be a selfless, sacrificing woman president, a “healer of broken hearts” (ibid: 383), and even used footage of a 2006 knife attack during local elections to prove her point, to show how much she had sacrificed for the cause (Shin 2018: 78). While Park’s election victory was significant in light of a deeply Confucian society that emphasises strict social hierarchy and patriarchy, the most important election issue was national security vis-à-vis North Korea, rather than gender discrimination. Foreign relations with North Korea are a major part of South Korean politics and is, along with the presidency itself, considered a masculine area (Jalazai 2008: 209, Lee and Jalazai 2017: 600). Public opinion polls deemed her competent in “masculine” areas, which was further supported by her conservative background and her uniformed visit to the Demilitarized Zone on the North/South border (Lee 2017: 384; Shin 2018: 79). At the same time, Park was perceived to be weak in “feminine” issues, e.g. social welfare, during the election campaign. In response, she pushed women-friendly issues such as tackling sexual violence and promised to recruit more women in government positions and to provide more public-funded childcare services for working women (Lee 2017: 384).

Park’s ascension to the highest political office in Korea follows a pattern across Asia of women politicians with obvious dynastic ties. When Taiwan’s Tsai Ing-wen first ran for presidency in 2012 she was unique; not only was she the first woman presidential candidate in Taiwan, she also came
from a non-political family. While Tsai lost the 2012 election, she enjoyed a landslide victory in the following 2016 election, making her the first woman Taiwanese president, and the first Asian woman president without dynastic ties.

Tsai is a former professor of law with a specialty in international trade. Before joining the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in 2004, Tsai held several high-profile jobs in politics for the Kuomintang (KMT), the Chinese Nationalist Party. In 1998 she served as a negotiator for the KMT when Taiwan negotiated WTO membership (Lee 2021: 5). At the time, Taiwan was under a one-party rule that banned other political parties. While Taiwan has a traditional cultural and gender society, it stood out in the Asian region as it already had a relatively high gender representation in the legislature due to gender quotas, a system set up as early as 1946 following the declaration of Republic of China Constitution (Tseng 2018: 86; 88). Much like Park Geun-hye, Tsai also had to defend her status as a single woman during the 2012 elections, with some opposition politicians questioning her sexual orientation. Tsai responded to this in a public statement: “there is nothing wrong with any gender, sexual orientation or marital status. Nobody has the right to question another [on this]” (Chao 2011) and stated that she would work to “eliminate gender discrimination” in Taiwan (ibid 2011).

During her first presidential bid in 2012, Tsai did not present herself as a potential “first woman president” until local women’s movement groups pushed this narrative, nor did she promise any significant changes in gender equality legislation (Lee 2021: 2; 7). In the 2016 campaign, Tsai successfully targeted young voters rather than women specifically, and appealed to this group as an “academic who loves cats and supports gay rights” (Horowitz 2016). This resulted in a voter turnout of 75% among those between ages 20-39, compared to the 66% in overall turnout. Nearly 90% of young voters voted for Tsai (Lee 2021: 8). With her landslide victory, many expected her to actively promote gay rights, gender equality and women’s issues. The year before, in October 2015, Tsai shared a video on her Facebook page in support of the annual gay parade in Taipei, stating that “in front of love, everybody is equal. I am Tsai Ing-wen. I support marriage equality” (Tseng 2018: 91). Marriage equality, in addition to the economy and cross-strait issues, were
among the biggest issues during the election, which Tsai won with 56% of the votes (Lee 2021: 5).

**Policy impact**

With both Park and Tsai showing support for gender equality and women’s issues either before or during the election campaigns, did they pass any women-friendly legislation while in office?

Policy impact refers to, as outlined in the methodology chapter, specific policies that address gender inequality or the well-being of women, e.g. violence against women and reproductive and sexual rights, as well as gender gap issues such as the gender pay gap and parental leave. While gathering data, I could not find any law changes regarding physical women’s issues such as abortion or gender violence.

The main law change in Taiwan was the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Taiwan, which came into effect on May 17, 2019 (Law Library of Congress 2019). Since 2000, same-sex marriage bills have been put forward on several occasions by Tsai’s political party, which has a long-standing relationship with local feminist and women’s movements (Lee 2021: 5). This bill, while it benefits all genders, can be considered woman-friendly as it directly improves the legal rights of women and woman-identifying individuals. In 2016, more neutral kinship terms, such as parents and spouse, were added to the Civil Code, which is a collection of Taiwanese laws. These terms were to be used along with traditional terms such as father and mother, and husband and wife. More neutral wording was also used in adoption requirements, and sexual orientation would no longer be used as a criterion for adoption (Tseng 2018: 90). In 2017, the Judicial Yuan, the highest judicial organ, ruled that discrimination against same-sex couples was against the Constitution. This sparked a big debate, especially split between generations and between conservative church camps and liberal rights supporters (Tseng 2018: 91). Interestingly, some leftist queer writers, drawing on Marxist ideas, argued against any law change, as they saw marriage as an institution serving only the state and capitalism and as an oppressor of women (Tseng 2018: 90). The debate continued throughout 2018, when a referendum was held simultaneously to local elections.
the 10 referendum question pertained to gay issues, and when asked if they agreed that the Civil Code should define marriage as the union between a man and a woman, over 7.6 million voted yes, against 2.9 million votes no (Lee 2021: 6). Many interpreted the results of the referendum as an outright rejection of same-sex marriage (Taipei Times 2018), but the bill ("Act for Implementation of Judicial Yuan 748") was still passed by the Legislative Yuan. The new law went into effect on May 17, 2019 and granted gay couples the right to marry (Law Library of Congress 2019). This made Taiwan the first country in Asia to pass a marriage equality bill.

Despite the bill being passed while a woman held presidency, Tsai received much criticism for her perceived inactivity. Some argued that she had withdrawn the great support she had previously shown and that the win was unrelated to Tsai. All revisions of the Civil Code were drafted by legislators and women and gender groups without much input from the government, and some felt disappointed that Tsai had not pushed the amendment more (Tseng 2018: 91; 96). To this, a spokesperson responded that she “respects the autonomy of the Congress” (ibid: 92). Tsai did, however, publish a tweet in the support on May 17, 2019, the day the bill came into effect:

On May 17th, 2019 in #Taiwan, #LoveWon. We took a big step towards true equality, and made Taiwan a better country

Tsai Ing-wen (2019)

Another clear example of a woman-friendly policy (but did not receive as much public attention) was the easement of restriction on the naturalisation process of foreign spouses (Taiwan News 2016). Since the 1990s, there has been an increasing number of marriage migrants, for the most part from Southeast Asian countries and mainland China. These people, mainly women, are a marginalised group as they generally have a lower education level and are poorer than their Taiwanese husbands (Tseng 2018: 92-93). These women struggled to acquire citizenship as they had to meet certain requirements for financial proof, despite many of them not working. They were also unable to apply for naturalisation after the end of the marriage unless they had minor children with Taiwanese citizens (Taiwan News 2016; Tseng 2018: 94). After the 2016 Nationality
Act amendment other proofs of economic capability, such as employment letters, are accepted, and it is no longer required for the applicant to renounce their citizenship in their home country (National Immigration Agency 2020). Lin Li-Chan, a KMT lawmaker and the first immigrant to be elected as a member of the Legislative Yuan, stated: “it is a wonderful gift to these female immigrants in Taiwan” (Taiwan News 2016). However, Tsai has also received criticism in this case, as the changes can be attributed to women’s pressure groups as well as the need for Taiwan’s government to comply with the international community – the United Nations in particular has urged for more protection of immigrants’ rights (Tseng 2018: 95). Another criticism of the law amendment is that while it is now easier for immigrants to become Taiwanese citizens, it fails to address the unequal citizenship rights between native Taiwanese and naturalised immigrants (ibid: 96).

In South Korea, a number of legislative acts addressing gender inequality came after the democratisation in the late 1980s, such as the Sexual Equality Employment Act of 1987, the Punishment of Sexual Violence and Protection of the Victim Act of 1993 and the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Protection of the Victim Act of 1997. However, the country continued to struggle with gender inequality. This was especially true for the division of labour, and there were several economic policies that promoted men as breadwinners. There was also a systematic discrimination through compulsory conscription for men, which upon completion gave them extra points in employment tests and job interviews, leading women to be disproportionately recruited into low-paying jobs (Mun 2015: 247-249). Even today, women in Korea earn about 35% less than men, which is the largest gap among OECD countries (OECD 2021). Many women are expected to quit working when they get married to raise children, and to only return to part-time work when the children are older (Ryan 2014).

As a legislator, Park proposed 15 bills as main sponsor, none of which relate to women’s issues whereas the majority of women legislators who served at the same time did. The expectations of Park changing this pattern as president were not high (Lee and Jalazai 2017: 602-603). However, Park did pursue social policies that increased the ratio of working women through the creation of “jobs with flexible work schedules” as well as more part-time positions (ibid 2015: 31
Up to 16,500 part-time jobs were created, and the number of employment service centres for women increased from 130 to 200 between 2013 and 2017. These measures were heavily criticised by feminist women’s groups, who argued that it was a bad idea to try and improve job security by creating temporary and precarious jobs (Mun 2015: 262). Per 2013, only 37.6% of working women, compared to 62.4% of working men held permanent regular jobs (National Assembly Research Service 2013: 3). By only creating part-time positions and jobs with “flexible work schedules”, it raised expectations for women to both work and take part in housework and care for the family, as is often the case in Confucian societies such as South Korea. This calls into question whether the policy was implemented to address gender inequality in labour division or to temporarily fix the employment rate.

The only new gender-related legislation to pass under Park was the Child Support Enforcement Act (enacted on March 2014), which provided support for disadvantaged single-parent families (CEDAW 2015). In 2019 there were around 20,000 single-parent households in South Korea, most of which are single mothers (KOSIS 2019). This is a socio-economic group that is especially vulnerable and stigmatised in Korean society (Choi, Byoun and Kim 2020). Park increased spending on public day care programs to almost double that of previous conservative governments, but at the same time also expanded on home day care subsidies. While women’s organisations welcomed support for single mothers, they also criticised the home day care subsidies, arguing that they would hinder career-interrupted women’s re-entry into the workforce (Lee and Jalazai 2017: 607).

The majority of the woman-friendly policies of Park’s administration can be traced back to previous progressive governments, e.g. Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2008), who expanded on a number of social welfare policies before following conservative governments reduced spending again (Lee and Jalazai 2017: 602-606). For example, Park’s government expanded on parental leave for men both by increasing the budget and lowering the eligibility criteria, but the paid paternity leave was only increased from three to five days (Lee and Jalazai 2017: 609).
As Cho Sun-hee, a representative of a regional branch of the Korean Women's Associations United (KWAU) stated to SBJ News in 2014: “although the female president was elected, women’s social status seems to have improved merely on the surface as only the image of women was enhanced” (Mun 2015: 267).

### Woman-friendly policies in South Korea 2013-2017

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Policy</th>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Expanded paternity leave</td>
<td>Gender gap issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Policies to increase number of working women</td>
<td>Social policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Child Support Enforcement Act to provide support for single-parent families</td>
<td>Social policy</td>
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### Woman-friendly policies in Taiwan 2016-2020

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Policy</th>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Easement of naturalisation process for foreign spouses</td>
<td>Legal rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Same-sex marriage bill</td>
<td>Legal rights</td>
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### Public promotion

Public promotion refers to talking publicly about women’s issues and showing support for them, either through speeches, interviews or social media posts. I searched for information through targeted Google searches, but very little information about Park publicly promoting women’s issues showed up. It is clear that this is a rarely used method of promoting women’s issues for Park during her presidency. Tsai publicly promoted women’s issues more than Park did, however most of the cases where Tsai address these issues take place after the 2020 election, which is after the period of study.

Most of Tsai’s support for women’s issues comes through social media. Tsai is especially active on Twitter, and as of May 2021, Tsai has 1.5 million followers on this social media platform. Tsai
Ing-wen did, as previously mentioned, show support for the same-sex marriage law through a Twitter post on May 17, 2019, the day it came into effect. Tsai also posted about the World Bank’s 2019 Women, Business and the Law report, which noted that Taiwan was one of only six countries to remove all restrictions on women’s employment. This law amendment came in 2015 (The World Bank 2021), which is before Tsai was elected president and thus cannot be attributed to her. Tsai still commented on this achievement by posting on Twitter:

In the latest @WorldBank report on Women, Business & the Law 2019, #Taiwan is ranked as top tier among 187 economies & is one of the 6 countries where all job restrictions on women have been removed. I believe that every woman should be given the right to pursue her aspirations

Tsai Ing-wen (2019)

Tsai also gave an interview to the Worldwide Association of Women Journalists and Writers in 2018. In response to whether she is “[...] also fighting for gender equality in the future, Taiwan or in the world”, Tsai replied: “Yes, I would definitely fight for that”, but also went on to say that Taiwan’s society had already “done a wonderful thing” to accept a woman leader as president and commander in chief of the military (Office of the President, Republic of China 2018). Tsai later referenced this interview in a Twitter post highlighting the previously mentioned 2019 Woman, Business and the Law report where Taiwan ranked “top tier among 187 economies” (Tsai 2019) by posting a picture with the following quote from the interview:

Women should not accept anything as fate. We just have to do what we want to do and achieve what we can achieve

Tsai Ing-wen (2019)

Tsai attended the 2017 International Women’s Day opening event, and later participated in the 2019 Pacific Women Leaders’ Coalition Conference, where she expressed hope to work with allies in the region to achieve gender equality (Office of the President, Republic of China (Taiwan) 2021). Tsai also attended the 4th World Conference of Women’s Shelters in November 2019. During her remark, Tsai stated that “women are truly the backbone of Taiwanese society” and
promised that, “in the future, we will continue to work with our partners around the world to foster global gender quality” (Tsai 2019).

South Korea’s Park Geun-hye, on the other hand, has not promoted women’s issues much during her presidency. Park did launch a campaign soon after taking office in 2013 to “root out the four social evils” – bullying, domestic violence, sexual assault and food contamination – but did not provide specific steps she would take to do so (Chug and Kwon 2013; BBC 2014).

Park’s administration has received criticism from both local and foreign press for being uncommunicative, and for rarely giving interviews (Yoo 2014; Moon 2016). Park preferred to rule by presidential veto, and by not providing interviews she was rarely questioned directly by the press about her decisions (Doucette 2017: 854). In Park’s self-written inauguration speech, she did not highlight women’s issues, except to mention the word “women” once in the context of social security: “[…] to make a safe society where women, the disabled and anyone else may live without worries” (Park 2013). This is a big contrast to previous progressive presidents who in their inaugural speeches declared to “abolish the wall of sexism” and to “pursue gender equality” (Mun 2015: 260).

**Indirect promotion**

In the immediate period after entering the office, both Park and Tsai received criticism for not including more women in their cabinets. In Park’s first cabinet, only two women ministers were appointed, and when she appointed a Supreme Court judge, all five candidates were men (Doucette 2017: 854). During the election campaign, Park promised to increase the number of women representatives in the administration, as well as the ratio of women employed in the public sector. The Minister of Family and Gender Equality announced that the ratio of women in government committees would be increased from 25.5% in 2013 to 40% by 2017, even if around half of high-ranking civil servants had already been women since the early 2000s (Mun 2015: 261-262). After the election, none of the 12 appointed senior presidential advisers were women.
(Associated Press 2013). Park did, however, keep a close woman confidante, Choi Soon-sil. Choi was the daughter of Choi Tea-min, who founded the religious cult Yongsegyo, and who was a close friend of her father. This relationship would ultimately lead to outrage and large students protests when it in 2016 became known that Choi’s daughter had received expensive gifts from Samsung and other conglomerate companies (called chaebols), as well as a free ride to Ewha University, South Korea’s most prestigious women’s university. Park was impeached on corruption charges and convicted of leaking state secrets to Choi, who was also sentenced for influence-peddling (Doucette 2017: 855). Park currently serves a 24-year prison sentence.

In Taiwan’s dual executive system, the president appoints the premier (PM), and the premier appoints the cabinet members. Despite this, it was Tsai who took the brunt of the criticism when the first cabinet after the 2016 election was announced: only 4 out of 40 members were women, a historic low. This constitutes to only 10%, compared to 28.5% under KMT predecessor Ma (Lee 2021: 9). This sparked protests against the new cabinet (Strong 2016), and 14 women’s and gender groups signed a petition against the imbalance of gender in the cabinet (Tseng 2018: 87). These women’s groups felt particularly upset, as the DDP had previously contributed greatly to gender development and participation in politics and had also been the first party to adopt a gender quota system (Tseng 2018: 88). Women’s groups were worried that Tsai would not appoint women into public offices to make a point and to prove that she is truly gender-neutral (Tseng 2018: 87-88; Lee 2021: 9). Tsai responded to the criticism by saying that the appearance of a woman president might not lead to immediate improvements in gender equality, but apologised for “letting everybody down” and that she promised to “take good care of gender issues in her decision-making in the future” (Strong 2016).

Tsai did make one appointment of particular importance by inviting Audrey Tang to join the executive Yuan as minister without portfolio for digital affairs in 2016. Her responsibility is for the digital economy and open government. Tang is a self-made software developer, civic hacker and transparency advocate. An independent and self-proclaimed anarchist, she is not only the youngest minister but also the first transgender minister in Taiwan (Lodwijckx 2020). I consider this a particularly symbol-heavy action.
In South Korea, an issue that has defined much of the country’s relationship with Japan is the so-called “comfort women”, an issue that has also come under scrutiny under Park’s presidency. This term refers to the Asian women who during the Japanese colonial era were conscripted into sexual slavery by the Japanese military. Scholars disagree on how many women were taken, and figures range from a conservative 70,000 to over 200,000 (Jonsson 2019). An estimated 80% of the women taken were Korean, and The Korea Times named this issue the “biggest diplomatic dispute” between Korea and Japan (2014).

An accord on December 28, 2015 between the two countries headed by Park and Japan’s Shinzo Abe marked a diplomatic landmark on the issue of comfort women (Arrington 2016). Earlier that year, Park had called for a resolution to the dispute (BBC 2015). The settlement included an official apology and over 1 billion yen (approximately 8.3 million USD at the time) to the newly established Reconciliation and Healing Foundation, as well as an agreement that neither party would criticise the other over the issue (Arrington 2016). I consider this a negative indirect promotion of women’s issues. While the summit was publicly known, the topic of discussion was not announced beforehand, and Park spoke very little before and after the meeting about the comfort women. The settlement renewed public debate about the issue, with many showing support for the victims. There were public protests in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul, as well as the Consulate in Busan (Arrington 2016; Gale 2016). Civic groups who support the comfort women refused to accept the deal and established their own foundation called the Justice and Remembrance Foundation. One of the victims said in a statement to the BBC that she had not been consulted in the discussions: “I wonder whether the talks took place with the victims really in mind. We’re not after the money. If the Japanese committed their sins, they should offer direct official government compensation” (BBC 2015).

The most politically sensitive issue was the statue of a comfort woman that was relocated to the front of the Japanese Consulate in Busan. The statue, depicting a young girl in a traditional hanbok costume, was first removed by local authorities, which caused outrage across the country (Shin 2017). Tokyo responded by recalling its ambassador in protest. In true Park Geun-hye style, Park said very little about the controversy, although the United States welcomed the agreement
through a statement from the White House: “we believe this comprehensive resolution is an important gesture of healing and reconciliation” and “The United States applauds [...] two of our most important allies for having the courage and vision to forge a lasting settlement to this difficult issue” (BBC 2015).

The issue came under scrutiny again after the impeachment of Park, where it was revealed that the Park administration kept part of the comfort women agreement secret, for example that both parties agreed to stop using the term “sexual slavery” and that the agreement called for a detailed plan to remove the comfort women statues located in Korea (Jung 2015; Gale 2016). In 2018, under new president Moon Jae-in, Korea would eventually pull back from the agreement and shut down the Japanese-backed foundation. The issue has by no means been resolved, as in January 2021, the Seoul Central District Court ordered the Japanese Government to pay each of the living victims 100 million Korean won each. The Japanese Government rejected this ruling by arguing that they have already fulfilled their part of the 2015 agreement (Shin 2021).

Park’s approach to the 2015 agreement by not consulting some of the remaining victims, the lack of response during the height of the controversy, as well as the White House’s congratulatory statement in the wake of the agreement show that Park was perhaps more concerned with repairing the festering relationship between Japan and South Korea than the well-being of the victims. The United States, a country that relies on good relations in the region in regard to North Korea, had also pressured for a solution, which may explain some of Park’s actions.

**Discussion**

Both the South Korean and Taiwanese governments under Park and Tsai respectively have passed some woman-friendly legislation. Tsai’s government introduced the same-sex marriage bill, making Taiwan the first Asian country to legalise same-sex marriage. Park, too, did make improvements for women, especially when it came to childcare. The Child Support Enforcement Act of 2014 provided support for disadvantaged single-parent families, most of which consist of
single mothers, a heavily stigmatised and vulnerable group. Overall, Park’s policies were mainly expansions on already-existing policies, and while they were more liberal than other conservative governments, they were less so than previous progressive governments.

Tsai did better than Park in both public and indirect promotion of women’s issues. Park very rarely spoke about women and gender issues and fell short in arguably one of the most sensitive diplomatic issues in modern Korea: the so-called comfort women. Tsai has been more open with her support of women’s issues, especially on Twitter, and even appointed Audrey Tang as minister without portfolio. With this appointment, Tang became the first transgendered minister in Taiwan.

From these findings, the first research expectation, that dynastic women political leaders are less likely than non-dynastic women to pursue woman-friendly policies, seem to ring true. An important thing to note is that both Park and Tsai’s parties had a legislative majority during their first terms. During both the South Korean 2012 and the Taiwan 2016 presidential elections, legislative elections were held simultaneously. Park’s Saenuri Party won a majority of 152 out of 151 needed (BBC 2012), and Tsai’s DDP won 68 out of 57 required seats (2016). This means that neither Park nor Tsai needed cabinet members affiliated with other parties to balance a coalition and that there was room for both Park and Tsai to push through woman-friendly policies. However, as Wängnerud (2009) and Celis et al. (2014) have argued, oftentimes party ideology takes precedence over personal preferences, even if they have expressed themselves as champions for women’s rights.

Tsai’s willingness to promote women’s issues could, of course, come from her personal beliefs, but the DDP has a long-standing relationship with both feminist and women’s organisations and civic groups, as they were both in opposition to KMT (the Chinese Nationalist Party). This relationship spans back to the democratisation-process in the early 1990s (Shim 2018). In Korea, Park has also largely kept to party politics, meaning conservatism, which is known for its Confucian traditionalist roots, anti-communism, and a strong national defence program. Park had
an expressed pro-America stance, and stressed the importance of a strong alliance against North Korea (The White House 2013).

Another aspect to consider when discussing Tsai’s relative success on women’s issues is that Taiwan, even before Tsai came to power, was considered “the place to be a woman in politics” (Sui 2016). At the time, Taiwan was the most gender-equal country in Asia, ranking 5th on the Gender Inequality Index out of 155 countries in 2013 and 2014 and performing better than the OECD average (Executive Yuan, Taiwan 2016: 1). In 2019 Taiwan ranked 6th globally and number 1 in Asia. The same year, 39.8% of legislators in parliament were women (Executive Yuan, Taiwan 2020: 5), although this high number can be attributed to gender quotas. In comparison, South Korea has never reached 20% representation for women in parliament (IPU 2021). And while civic groups in Taiwan have had a closer relationship with DDP than KMT, it’s difficult to argue that the KMT was ever anti-women. It was, after all, the KMT that adopted gender quotas in 1946, and it was a KMT-led centre-right coalition that in 2004 formed the Female Legislators Alliance to promote women’s welfare in parliament, as well as sponsor important woman-friendly bills (Shim 2018: 5). All this considered, it’s not far-fetched to say that Taiwan was several steps ahead of South Korea in terms of gender equality and that society may have been more ready to accept radical changes such as the legalisation of same-sex marriage.

Wängnerud (2009: 60) also argues that newly elected representatives have less opportunity to influence and push through their preferred policies, and this might be true for political leaders as well. While we won’t know if Park would have pushed for more woman-friendly policies in a second term due to her impeachment, it seems as if Tsai has been more outspoken on women’s issues following her 2020 re-election. She published several posts on Twitter in support of International Women’s Day in 2020 and 2021, including a 1-minute video address where she stated that “our government is taking action to lead the way in breaking down gender stereotypes and realizing gender equality” (Tsai 2021). Tsai also spoke at the “Feel No Fear” forum arranged by the Ministry of Health and Welfare in celebration of International Women’s Day in 2021 (Office of the President, Republic of China (Taiwan) 2021), and Taiwan’s 2021-2024
Open Government National Action Plan highlights increasing “gender- and ethnic group- inclusive dialogue” as a key policy goal (Gender Equality Committee of the Executive Yuan 2021).

While both leaders enjoyed a majority in parliament and were relatively free to pursue their own policies without needing to appease other political parties, it is hard to firmly conclude that any policy impact is due to a dynastic characteristic, rather than party politics and societal contexts.

To sum up, both Park and Tsai have made some improvements on policies related to women but have also received criticism for making temporarily fixes (in Park’s case) and lack of actual contribution in the policy-making process (Tsai). When it comes to both public and indirect promotion of women’s issues, Tsai has been much more outspoken and supportive than Park, who was known for her uncommunicativeness with both local and foreign press. Under Tsai, Taiwan has seen more radical changes, especially with the legislation of same-sex marriage.

For this analysis, it seems reasonable to conclude that the dynastic Park Geun-hye, who legitimised her rise to power on the memory of her father, was more concerned with foreign relations and pursued less woman-friendly policies than the non-dynastic Tsai Ing-wen.
The Nordic Comparison: Norway and Iceland. A Comparison of Erna Solberg and Katrín Jakobsdóttir’s Stances on Women's Issues

In the Nordic region, Iceland and Norway, much like Taiwan and South Korea, have a shared history, and similar political systems. Both countries are unicameral parliamentary systems, but where Iceland is a constitutional republic, Norway is a constitutional monarchy. In Iceland, the president is elected directly through popular a vote. Following a parliamentary election, the president gives the leader of a political party the authority to form a cabinet, usually beginning with the leader of the largest party. If unsuccessful, the president will ask another party leader to form a government (Government of Iceland 2021). The president is head of state and has limited powers. As all bills must be signed by the president, he or she does have the power to effectively veto bills, however this has only happened on three occasions (Government of Iceland 2021). Executive power is exercised by the government, headed by the PM. As Iceland has a multiple party system, coalition governments are common. Norway’s constitutional monarchy has the monarch as head of state, which is largely a ceremonial role. The PM exercises executive power, and similarly to Iceland, the Norwegian multiparty system means that minority coalitions are common (Regjeringen 2017).

In 2013, Norwegian Erna Solberg became the second woman PM of Norway (after Gro Harlem Brundtland, who served three terms as PM in the 1980s and 1990s for Labour). Solberg entered politics during her university years, where she was the leader of the students’ chapter of Høyre, the Conservative Party (Riches and Palmowski 2021). Solberg was a member of the Bergen City Council before she even graduated university and was later elected to parliament in 1989. She served as a cabinet minister in 2001, and in 2004 she was elected leader of the Conservative Party. Her party won the 2013 parliamentary elections, and Solberg went on to lead a right-of-centre minority coalition government with Fremskrittpartiet, the Progress Party (Regjeringen 2017). After 8 years of a Labour-led government, this meant a shift of politics to the right, based on tax cuts, fiscal control, increased immigration control and more conservative social policies.
Solberg was re-elected to another four-year term in the autumn of 2017. The focus of this analysis will be her first term as PM from September 2013 to September 2017.

Iceland’s Katrín Jakobsdóttir is also the second woman PM of her country, after Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir (2009-2013), who was also the first openly LGBTQ head of government in the world. Jakobsdóttir was also heavily involved in politics during her university years, but unlike Solberg, she comes from a family of prominent members of Icelandic society, including academics, poets and politicians. While none of her parents were involved in national-level politics, Jakobsdóttir is the granddaughter of MP Sigurður S. Thoroddsen, the great-granddaughter of MP and judge Skúli Thoroddsen, and the grand-niece of MP Katrín Thoroddsen. About her political affiliations, she said in a 2018 interview that “I’m a left-wing person. My parents were left-wing; my grandparents were left-wing. So there’s a strong left-wing tradition in my family” (Nichols 2018). Unlike other women political leaders with dynastic ties, e.g. Park Geun-hye, Jakobsdóttir has not focused on familial ties during her political career.

In 2003, Jakobsdóttir became the Deputy Chairperson for the political party the Left Green Movement (LGM), and Chairperson in 2013. LGM focuses on democratic socialist values, feminism and environmentalism, increased democracy and direct involvement, as well as opposing NATO and EU involvement (The Icelandic Web Archive 2021). Jakobsdóttir has been a member of the Althing, the Icelandic Parliament, for Reykjavik North constituency since 2007. After the 2017 parliamentary election, Jakobsdóttir was asked to form a coalition government. The first negotiation with three other parties was unsuccessful, so she then sought a three-party coalition with the liberal-conservative Independence Party and the centre-right Progressive Party. Jakobsdóttir’s first government is a majority government. Jakobsdóttir is still in office, with the next Icelandic parliamentary election taking place in September 2021. The period of analysis is limited to October 2017-March 2021.
Policy impact

The Nordic countries always score high in gender equality rankings, and gender equality policies and law have been integrated with the welfare state (Niemi 2018). In the case of Norway, the country has already ratified all the human rights treaties and the international conference agreements, which together provide the basis for anti-gender discrimination laws. The most important is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, and the Norwegian government regularly reports to the CEDAW committee on the status of women (Gender in Norway 2021).

The main law change during Solberg’s first term as PM came with the new Equality and Anti-Discrimination Law, which passed in June 2017, and came into effect on January 1, 2018. The legislation aimed to combine the four already-existing laws – the Gender Equality Act, the Ethnic Discrimination Act, the Disability Act, and the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Act – into one uniform anti-discrimination law with gender-neutral terms. The beginnings of this streamlined law stems from 2006, when then-MP Solberg, along with Olemic Thommesen and André Oktay Dahl proposed a general anti-discrimination law, but the proposal was later scrapped (Regjeringen 2015: 11). A universal anti-discrimination law was also part of the Conservative Party’s campaign manifesto leading up to the 2013 elections (Høyre 2013: 89). The law change was proposed again when Solberg became PM, and in 2017 the Conservative Party, Progress Party and Centre all voted in favour of the law (Stortinget 2017).

The Norwegian Gender Equality Commission had previously called for legal framework that would strengthen protections for individual, structural and intersectional gender discrimination (Hellum 2017: 211; Hellum and Strand 2017), which resulted in this new law, in addition to a new Anti-Discrimination Ombud (ADO) and Anti-Discrimination Tribunal (ADT). This law also introduced written complaints and repealed the Ombud’s power to handle individual complaints and address structural discrimination (Hellum 2017: 211). While the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Law was meant to be a simpler and more effective anti-discrimination regime, the reform received much criticism from women’s organisations, labour unions and legal experts in the equality and anti-discrimination field (Hellum and Strand 2017). In sum, critics argued that
the reform would weaken the position of individuals, especially those within vulnerable or marginalised groups, such as immigrant women who do not speak or write Norwegian (Hellum 2017: 213-214; Hellum and Strand 2017). Professor of Law Anne Hellum (2017: 212) argued that instead of extending the high protection standards for women in the original Gender Equality Act to the other three anti-discrimination acts, lower standards were instead applied to women. In a similar line, the Parliament passed a bill that weakened employers’ duty to take proactive measures on gender equality in the workplace (Hellum 2017: 212; Regjeringen 2017b). Fewer employers, especially in smaller companies, would be required to submit yearly gender equality reports, and the duty to report was replaced with voluntary agreements.

Perhaps the most inflamed women-related issue in this period was the discussions on the “reservasjonsretten” – the right for GP doctors to be conscientious objectors and reserve themselves from referring women to have an abortion or contraceptives. Solberg’s Conservative Party has a history of wanting to tighten abortion laws, which has been a part of their party manifesto since 2001 (Glomnes and Tjershaugen 2013). During the Conservative Party’s national conference in the spring of 2013, just months before the election, there were heated discussions on whether or not serious illnesses in the foetus should be a qualifying criterion of self-determined abortion after 12 weeks. Solberg supported a more restrictive approach, but the party ultimately voted against Solberg (Glomnes and Tjershaugen 2013). The issue of reservation rights for GPs came up during government alliance negotiations between the Christian Democratic Party and Liberal Party. It was especially the Christian Democrats who pushed the law amendment (Regjeringen 2014), which led to mass criticism. During the 2014 International Women’s Day marches (a day which is generally politicised in Norway), an estimated 10-15.000 people marched in Oslo under the main parole “No to reservation rights for doctors” (Ervik 2014). Solberg called these protests “a little special” (in a negative connotation), and the deputy leader of the Christian Democratic Party said it was “egoistic”, “sad and embarrassing” (Kaski 2016). After the protests, the bill was not sent to hearing, with the Minister of Health and Care Services, Bent Høie, putting forward a new proposal that women would not need a referral from GPs at all to have an abortion (Sørenes 2014).
An example of a more woman-friendly law is the historical 2016 law on gender self-declaration. This law made it easier for individuals who identify as women to self-declare legal gender. Before, transgenders had to go through mandatory psychiatric evaluations and sterilisation surgeries for them to be legally recognised as their desired gender (Knight 2016). Many gender and LGBTQ organisations, civic groups and scholars welcomed the law change, but some noted that the law only acknowledges two legal genders, and does not provide the social nor the legal acceptance for those who don’t identify within these frames (Frøjd 2016).

In 2014, Norway also made amendments in the Conscription Act, meaning that women born in 1997 or later were now also encompassed in conscription. Up until 2014, military service for women was voluntary in peacetime. The new law came into force on January 1, 2015, and this made Norway the first European country and NATO member to implement conscription for both men and women (Womanstats 2020). Then-Defence Minister Ine Eriksen Søreide (Conservative Party) was the driving force of the amendment, with Solberg stating that “I was never very involved in this particular issue, but you could say that Ine [Eriksen Søreide] won that fight within the party. I also think it’s good that we have conscription for all in Norway” (Braathen 2016).

Some women’s rights organisations, e.g. Norsk Kvinnesaksforening, protested the amendment because they consider anti-militarism and disarmament as important women’s issues. I still consider this a woman-friendly policy because those who complete initial military training (“førstepangstjeneste”) are eligible to receive additional credits or points (“tilleggspoeng”), which can be helpful when applying to university. As long as Norway has conscription rather than fully voluntary military service, women and men should be treated equal by the law.

Iceland is by many considered the “best place to be a woman” (Wyeth 2021). It has ranked number one 12 years in a row in the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index Ranking (World Economic Forum 2019; Hutt 2019), making it the most equal society since 2009. The 2021 report ranked Finland as number two, followed by Norway, New Zealand and Sweden. With a ranking this high, it’s natural to ask – what more can be done? But Iceland under Jakobsdóttir has made several policy contributions that can be considered beneficial to women.
On January 1, 2018, Iceland became the first country in the world to enact a law that makes it illegal to pay men more than women (Womanstats 2020). Both public and private employers with 25 or more full-time employees must obtain government certifications of equal pay policies or face fines (Jacobo 2018). The government has committed to closing the gender pay gap by 2022, with Jakobsdóttir stating, "I hope that some day we will reach a gender equality, but I'm also very aware that it's very deep rooted. It's an ongoing fight" (CNN 2018), and that “closing the [gender] pay gap is doable. We have said that we are going to implement the equal-pay standard in five years” (Nichols 2018). Iceland also made legal amendments that made it easier for women to access credit (Woman Business and the Law Database 2020).

Abortion rights were also discussed in Iceland, with a liberal amendment passed in 2019. The new abortion bill legalises the termination of pregnancy within the first 22 weeks, regardless of circumstance. The time limit is the same as before the amendment, but previously a woman who wanted to terminate her pregnancy after week 16 required approval from a committee. This decision is now fully self-determined. Minister of Health Svardís Svarsdóttir (Left Green Movement) proposed the bill, and the law was passed with 40 votes in favour and 18 against. The law officially went into effect on September 2, 2019 (Ćirić 2019; Fontaine 2019). Jakobsdóttir openly supported the bill, and before casting her vote, she stated:

This bill is a step toward increasing the liberty of women in this country, and I whole-heartedly support it and would, myself, have supported having no time limit. But I consider this bill a certain compromise of attitudes, and I will support it because I consider it an immense progressive step toward individual liberty

Katrín Jakobsdóttir 2019 (Hafstað 2019)
**Woman-friendly policies in Norway 2013-2017**

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*Note that the law aimed to be a gender-neutral anti-discrimination law, which some argue was not beneficial to women

**Woman-friendly policies in Iceland 2017-2021**

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<td>2019</td>
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**Public promotion**

Both Solberg and Jakobsdóttir have made speeches and remarks referring to women’s rights or gender equality. Between 2014 and 2017 Solberg referenced the term “women’s rights” in 33 speeches or statements in English, including at UN General Assemblies, Security Council meetings and other international conferences (Office of the Prime Minister 2021). When searching similar and related terms in the Norwegian archive, the number is even higher. In her opening address at the Women’s Conference in 2015, Solberg specifically addressed girls’ education and that women are overly represented in the public health sector, urging more girls to pursue STEM degrees\(^\text{10}\) (Solberg 2015). Solberg has also co-written opinion pieces on women’s issues published in international news outlets. One example of this is a co-authored article titled “The

\(^{10}\) Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
Global Financing Facility: country investments for every woman, adolescent, and child”, published in July 2015 in The Lances, a peer-reviewed general medical journal. Here the authors state that “healthy women, children and adolescents are the foundations of robust economies and resilient societies. They are our smartest investments” (Desalegn, Solberg and Kim 2015). In 2016, the Norwegian government also launched the “Freedom, empowerment and opportunities – Action Plan for Women’s Rights and Gender Equality in Foreign and Development Policy 2016-2020”, where the Government vows to reverse setbacks in the area of women’s rights by implementing a gendered approach to the whole Foreign Service (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016) – although such an action plan has been implemented in previous governments as well.

In Iceland, Katrín Jakobsdóttir is an expressed feminist, and has said that “[...] I think I spend 100% of my time talking about gender equality” (Lindahl 2019):

I bring gender equality to the table no matter what I am talking about. You have to do this. You have to talk about gender equality when talking with the trade unions, or with employers, or when talking about the climate. Gender equality is not something to hide away!

Katrín Jakobsdóttir 2019 (Lindahl 2019).

Jakobsdóttir is also a chair of Council of Women World Leaders (CWL), a network of former and current women presidents and PMs. Much like Solberg, Jakobsdóttir has also delivered numerous speeches and remarks highlighting women’s issues. At an event at the 74th UN General Assembly, UN Women and the CWL came together to support the Generation Equality campaign, where Jakobsdóttir stated that, “when we talk about representation in leadership, it’s very important to remember that imparity of leadership is a testament to our failures” (UN Women 2019). As previously mentioned, fully removing the gender pay gap is a particular goal that the Icelandic government is working towards. Jakobsdóttir highlighted this issue by participating in a nationwide equal pay walk-out, where women left their workplaces at 2:55 pm, the equivalent of
working 74% of an 8-hour workday (Sigurdardottir 2018). This can also be considered as a symbol-heavy action that promotes gender gap issues.

Jakobsdóttir has shown support for the #metoo movement, which was also prominent in Iceland. Despite being ranked number 1 in the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index Ranking 12 years in a row, Iceland still struggles with violence against women, especially domestic and intimate-partner violence, sexual harassment and abuse. Globally, 38% of murders of women are committed by a male partner, but in Iceland, this figure is 50% (Jónasdóttir et al. 2020). The Icelandic justice system is often highly suspicious towards victims of these abuses (Jóelsdóttir and Wyeth 2020), and the negative trend of domestic violence has continued with the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Sexual assault is also a prominent issue: a 2018 survey revealed that 1 out of 4 women in Iceland have been raped or sexually assaulted (University of Iceland 2018), compared to Europe’s overall statistics of 1 out 10 women (Jóelsdóttir and Wyeth 2020). In 2017, a group of more than 600 women politicians made allegations of sexual harassments in the Icelandic parliament, with one MP accusing male MPs of deliberately “leering at female peers to humiliate and unnerve” (Coleman and Morgan 2017). In 2021, nine women sued the Icelandic State before the European Court of Human Rights for dropping sexual assault cases and violating their rights to a fair trial – in Iceland, only about 17% of reported rape cases go to trial (Ćirić 2021). Critics argue that the justice system uses the requirement of a high burden of proof to cover for male violence and that there is an ingrained culture of suspicion towards women where courts have a tendency to ignore, and in some cases punish, mothers who report child abuse by fathers. This is slightly ironic in that it is the result of a justice system that strictly follows the concept of equal parental responsibility (Jóelsdóttir and Wyeth 2020; Wyeth 2021).

In response to the revelations of the #metoo scandals, Jakobsdóttir said that she and Icelanders were “shocked” by the number of reported assaults:

Iceland has been (in the) top for gender equality globally for five years. We are considered to be a gender equality paradise, and then we had all these stories! Many women from theatre and politics came forward, but the most striking thing
was all the women with foreign backgrounds living in Iceland who experienced double discrimination.

Katrín Jakobsdóttir 2019 (Connolly 2019)

Jakobsdóttir and the Icelandic government hosted the first major international #metoo conference, a three-day event that took place in September 2019 in Reykjavik. On addressing the issue of domestic and sexual violence against women in Iceland, Jakobsdóttir said:

The movement revealed epidemic levels of sexual and gender-based harassment and abuse that women across society and the world are exposed to. We owe it to all those women, to the women who couldn’t speak up and to future generations, to create policies and push for transformative change, so that the realities unveiled by #MeToo will soon belong to the history books.

Katrín Jakobsdóttir 2019 (Lindahl 2019)

Neither Erna Solberg nor Katrín Jakobsdóttir have shied away from publicly supporting women’s rights and promoting women’s issues, both on national level and in the international arena. On International Women’s Day in 2020, Solberg and Jakobsdóttir released a joint opinion piece, along with the other Nordic PMs Mette Frederiksen (Denmark), Sanna Marin (Finland) and Stefan Löfven (Sweden). In this statement titled “We are committed to protecting women’s rights”, they mark the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and address issues such as violence against women, the #metoo movement, sexual and reproductive health, as well as reaffirming their governments’ commitment to a gender equal world (Government of Iceland 2020). Since both Solberg and Jakobsdóttir promote women’s issues on a regular basis, it is difficult to distinguish who performs better when it comes to public promotion.

**Indirect promotion**

Finding instances where Solberg and Jakobsdóttir have indirectly promoted women’s rights or women’s issues has been difficult because both women have been so public about their support.
One symbolic action both have taken is the appointment of cabinet members or government ministers. When Jakobsdóttir announced her cabinet in 2017, 4 out of 10 ministerial positions were given to women. In Solberg’s first cabinet, the gender balance was 50/50, with 9 ministerial positions going to men and 9 to women. Siv Jensen, the then-leader of the Progress Party became Minister of Finance, and Ine Eriksen Søreide was appointed Minister of Defence, both important positions within the cabinet. Solberg’s cabinet has been reshuffled several times, and in October 2017, after Solberg’s second electoral win, the Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Minister of Foreign Affairs were all women (Regjeringen 2017c), a first in Norwegian history. This is outside of the specific time frame I am analysing, but still worth noting.

Both Solberg and Jakobsdóttir have surrounded themselves with women advisors and state secretaries. Lísa Kristjánsdóttir, for example, has served as Jakobsdóttir’s political advisor since 2013, and when Solberg met Turkish President Erdogan at the 2017 G20 Summit, she brought with her Minister of Finance Siv Jensen and state secretary Ingvild Stub to meet a delegation of Turkish men (NTB 2017). Topics at this meeting included migration and the Syrian war, as well as women, with Solberg stating: “It’s important to take advantage of female talent” (ibid).

Since Solberg and Jakobsdóttir regularly speak about women’s issues publicly, there may be less opportunity for indirect promotion. In conclusion, both leaders have made cabinet and advisor appointments that are symbolically important for promoting women.

Discussion

Both the Icelandic and the Norwegian governments under Jakobsdóttir and Solberg respectively have passed woman-friendly policies, and both have actively publicly and indirectly promoted women’s issues. In 2018, Iceland became the first country in the world to make gender pay gap illegal and eased restrictions – which were relatively liberal to begin with – on abortion. Norway and Solberg introduced a historical law that made it easier for transgender women to self-declare legal gender and became the first European and NATO country to introduce conscription for both
men and women. On the flipside, Solberg’s government received some criticism for its new gender-neutral Equality and Anti-Discrimination Law and faced backlash during the discussions of introducing abortion reservation rights for GPs.

Both Solberg and Jakobsdóttir have been vocal when promoting women by giving speeches and statements, as well as attending international conferences relating to women’s issues. When they announced their first cabinets, Jakobsdóttir appointed 4 out of 10 ministerial positions to women (40%), and Solberg appointed 9 out of 18 to women (50%). Finding other events where Solberg and Jakobsdóttir have indirectly promoted women’s issues is difficult, because their support has always been expressed. One important event for Solberg that happened in 2018, which is after the period of focus for this analysis but still worth mentioning, is the official apology by the Norwegian government to “tyskerjentene”, the Norwegian girls who had relationships with German soldiers during WWII, and who were ostracised in the post-war period.

From the findings above it seems as if the first research expectation, that dynastic women political leaders are less likely than non-dynastic leaders to pursue woman-friendly policies, is not true. Jakobsdóttir, despite her dynastic ties to several MPs, is an expressed feminist and actively pursues woman-friendly policies such as eased restrictions on abortion and making the gender pay gap illegal. But again, it’s important to consider the context – if Jakobsdóttir’s statement of “I’m a left-wing person. My parents were left-wing; my grandparents were left-wing. So there’s a strong left-wing tradition in my family” (Nichols 2018) is accurate, then Jakobsdóttir also follows “family politics”.

Jakobsdóttir’s success can also be attributed to her leading a majority government, meaning it’s easier for her to push through her government’s agenda, but it’s important to note that the woman-friendly legislation passed in 2017/2018 were supported by both the ruling coalition, as well as the opposition (Jacobo 2018). O’Brien & Reyer-Housholder (2020: 2; 11) hypothesise that women legislators prioritise woman-friendly reforms more than women leaders, and the Icelandic parliament has since the late 1990s had over 30% representation of women in parliament. The year Jakobsdóttir came to power, the number dropped drastically from 47,6% in
October 2016 to 38.1% in October 2017 (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2021), possibly due to the revelations of sexual harassment in the Icelandic parliament.

Solberg certainly does not shy away from publicly promoting women’s issues, but arguably fall short on policy impact. Her first government in 2013 was a minority coalition government with the Progress Party and relied on support from the Liberal Party and the Christian Democratic Party. The Liberal Party and Progress Party both take a progressive approach on reproductive and sexual health (Liberal Party 2021; Progress Party 2021) and without the support of the majority of parliament, any bills such as the reservation right for GPs would not have passed if proposed. In the case of reservation rights for GPs, which was presented by Conservative Minister of Health Bent Høie, Solberg did show some support by stating, “we do not propose any weakening of the abortion law. The right of reservation, or the possibility of, does not weaken women’s right to abortion” (Skarvøy and Amundsen 2014). Four days later, however, Solberg published a Twitter post in response:

I am against the reservation right. We therefore propose a reservation option that presupposes that the woman’s right to [abortion] referral is secured

Erna Solberg (2014)

In issues regarding sexual health and reproductive rights, Solberg follows the political lines of the Conservative Party but takes an even more conservative approach than her party fellows. Just months before she became PM in 2013, Solberg voted in favour of more restrictions on abortion rights at the Conservative Party’s national conference (Glomnes and Tjershaugen 2013). In her second term as PM, Solberg voted against legalising egg donation at the 2018 Conservative Party’s national conference while the party voted in favour (Fossen and Bakke 2018). In 2019, Solberg led a four-party coalition government that managed to pass a historical amendment to the abortion law, which had not been touched since 1978 (Westrum-Rein, Rognsvåg and Senel 2019).

To summarise, Jakobsdóttir’s dynastic connection is, according to Jalazai and Rincker’s three-tier definition of a dynastic politician (2018: 57) of mid-level power (MPs and cabinet ministers). This
definition hypotheses that closer dynastic ties combined with a higher level of power means a bigger dynastic advantage. Despite being a member of a prominent family in Icelandic society with a dynastic relation to several MPs, Jakobsdóttir does not use this to her advantage nor legitimises her political presence based on her familial ties at all, and there seems to be little dynastic benefit or effect. Jakobsdóttir instead shares political values with her political party, the Left Green Movement, which is expressly democratic socialist, feminist and environmentalist (The Icelandic Web Archive 2021).

Wängnerud (2009: 62) and Celis et al. (2014: 167) argue that oftentimes party ideology takes precedence, and that seems to be the case for both Jakobsdóttir and Solberg. While Solberg has received more criticism than Jakobsdóttir when it comes to specific woman-friendly policies, the differences in policy outcomes is not that large. Considering that both Solberg and Jakobsdóttir have been great promoters of women’s issues at both national and international levels, it is reasonable to conclude that the expected differences between the dynastic and the non-dynastic leaders are not present for the Nordic comparison.
Concluding discussion

Based on existing literature, I expected to see that dynastic women pursue less woman-friendly policies and promote women’s issues less, both publicly and indirectly, compared to non-dynastic women. I also expected that the differences between dynastic and non-dynastic women leaders would be larger in conservative societies (East Asia) and that there would be less of a difference between dynastic and non-dynastic women leaders in progressive societies (Nordic region).

While the findings show that women leaders in the Nordic region do not necessarily pass more woman-friendly policies, they are arguably more progressive. The Nordic leaders also promote women’s issues more often than their East Asian counterparts.

There is a difference between the dynastic and non-dynastic women in the Asian comparison, which supports the first hypothesis. The hypothesis is true both in terms of woman-friendly policies, but also how they publicly and indirectly promote women’s issues. Park largely played on her dynastic roots and performed worse than Tsai on women’s issues. While the first hypothesis is not true for the Nordic comparison, this is in line with the second hypothesis, although I had expected a small gap even in the liberal context. Iceland under Jakobsdóttir arguably introduced policies that are more woman-friendly than Solberg, but they publicly and indirectly promoted women’s issues about the same and even promoted them together. It is difficult to differentiate their performances as a whole.

Previous literature finds that a dynastic relation is less important in more established democracies and in less conservative cultures where women have been active in political life longer (Jalazai 2013; Jalazai and Rincker 2018: 57; Baturo & Gray 2018: 695), and Jalazai and Rincker (2018) argue that a closer familial relation at a higher level of power means a bigger dynastic advantage, and therefore a larger dynastic effect. The Nordic region can be considered as more established democratically (Taiwan and South Korea both went through democratisation processes in the 1980s and 1990s), and women have been involved in political life longer. South Korea’s Park Geun-hye’s dynastic relation is also both closer and at a higher level of power compared to Iceland’s Katrín Jakobsdóttir (father at presidential level versus grandparent at MP
level). It is then to be expected that any dynastic effect would be smaller in the Nordic comparison than in the Asian comparison.

Still, it is hard to say the results of this study are due to any dynastic effects or because of already-existing societal and political contexts. For example, Tsai did promote women’s issues more than Park, but Taiwan was already considered a relatively woman-friendly society even before Tsai came to power, and a more woman-friendly society might be more “willing” to accept radical changes, such as the same sex-marriage bill, which was the first of its kind in Asia.

Another aspect to consider is party politics. Wängerud (2009: 60-63) and Celis et al. (2014: 167) have argued that party politics is important and constrains which policies are pursued. As both of the arguably “worst-performing” leaders when it comes to policy impact, Park and Solberg, are both Conservative politicians, and it is clear that I made a mistake during the case selection when I did not control for party ideology, which might have had a confounding effect on the results.

For this thesis, there is not enough data to claim that there is an overall effect, and I am unable to generalise findings. With so few cases it’s difficult to make causal inferences: while the Asia comparison clearly supports my theoretical expectations, the Nordic comparison does not. The question remains if this is because of any dynastic effect at all, or if it’s due to other factors, coincidences or due to my misstep during the case selection.

So, to answer the research question of how a dynastic background shape women political leaders’ stances on women’s issues – we don’t know yet. While my evidence does suggest that a dynastic background in some ways does shape women leaders’ stances on women’s issues, more research is needed. Future studies should include more cases in the analysis, and during the case selection, it would be important to take political ideology into consideration.
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Appendix

Search terms used on Oria, Google Scholar and on Google search (for news articles):

- [woman leader’s full name] + women / women’s issues
- [woman leader’s full name] + gender / gender politics / gender equality
- [woman leader’s full name] + feminism / feminist
- [country] + women / women’s issues
- [country] + gender / gender politics / gender equality
- [country] + feminism