

News Review



MRS CARTLEDGE

What you need in a crisis: a woman in charge?



Angela Merkel
Germany



Tsai Ing-wen
Taiwan



Jacinda Ardern
New Zealand



Erna Solberg
Norway



Sanna Marin
Finland



Katrín Jakobsdóttir
Iceland



In a crisis, is a woman leader more effective?

- It is certainly one of the most striking factors that seems to be shared by the countries that are responding best to the coronavirus pandemic.
- While countries such as the UK and the US have struggled to test enough of their citizens during the coronavirus pandemic, other nations are leading by example.
- Germany has successfully carried out half a million tests a week. Almost half of the Germans to contract Covid-19 have already recovered from the disease.
- In Iceland, coronavirus tests have been carried out on more than 10% of the entire population. The death rate there is below 0.5% – more than 20 times lower than that being recorded in the UK and Italy.

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- Other Scandinavian nations, like Denmark, Norway, and Finland, have also seen fewer cases and higher testing rates than many other countries.
- In the small, east-Asian nation of Taiwan, over a hundred political measures were enacted as soon as news of the coronavirus broke. The country is now in a position to donate 10 million face masks to Europe and the US.

What do all of the above countries have in common?

- Strikingly, they have all elected female leaders.
- This has led many to suggest that in a time of a real crisis, such as the coronavirus pandemic, women make better presidents, chancellors, and prime ministers.
- It is first and foremost a simple question of competence. As Guardian columnist Arwa Mahdawi points out, in societies traditionally dominated by men, *“women generally have to be better in order to become leaders [...and] you have to be twice as good as a man in order to be taken half as seriously”*.



So, in a crisis, is a woman leader more effective?

- **Yes.**
- Women who get to the top in highly competitive fields, such as politics, are likely to be hugely gifted.
- Intellectually, they will have to be more powerful than their peers.
- In addition, they will be better team players.
- During a health crisis, where governments rely on persuading people to stay at home and not to lose hope, it helps to have the gift of empathy and, therefore, the ability to communicate well.



So, in a crisis, is a woman leader more effective?

- **No.**
- The qualities that have made the leaders of countries like New Zealand and Denmark so popular during this crisis could still be embodied by men.
- Humility and helpfulness do not belong exclusively to women.
- The fact that the countries listed above are all relatively wealthy democracies could have a lot more of a bearing on their successful response than the gender of their leaders.