



**DOWN TO EARTH**

**Katrín Jakobsdóttir**

Iceland's 42-year-old prime minister gets real about closing the pay gap, going carbon neutral, and being a mother.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BALDUR KRISTJÁNS

**THERE IS AN** otherworldly vista in Iceland where, at the intersection of Europe and North America, the country's first parliament used to meet. In this sublime place, two above-ground tectonic plates come together so you can actually touch a piece of both continents at the same time. This, as Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir so eloquently puts it, is a reflection of the nation she governs.

"Of course, we have a lot of resemblance to our Nordic partners," she says. "But we have always been a little bit different because we're so far out in the Atlantic between Europe and North America."

But despite Iceland's physical isolation from the rest of the world, Jakobsdóttir's influence on today's political climate has only grown since she took office in November 2017. The mother of three is unquestionably popular among her constituents, described by her staff as "low-key," and as knowledgeable about carbon emissions as she is about crime fiction. She's

well as fair and transferrable parental leave policies. Precedence, she explains, had been set by the Women's List, an all-female national political party founded in 1983.

"That really changed the opinion of the other, more traditional parties," she says. "Often we see [these kinds of] radical measures really have a great influence on every sector." And with one of the world's highest rates of female participation in the labor market, Jakobsdóttir points out, the civil and economic benefits that Iceland has derived from gender reform provide further argument for equality beyond the obvious demand for a just society.

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While the Women's List dissolved in the late '90s, the momentum to prioritize equal rights and opportunities for

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also a 42-year-old world leader and a stalwart environmentalist barreling for carbon neutrality in 2040. Her policies on topics like climate change and gender equality reach far beyond Iceland's population of 340,000 and are reshaping the worldwide conversation on leadership, representation, and human rights.

While Jakobsdóttir's gender is often a celebrated piece of her political identity, for the young parliamentarian, it signals a need for change—especially considering that of her 40 predecessors, only one was a woman. "We have so many women of different ages who are ready to participate and do important things in politics, so I think political parties need to take on that responsibility," she says, in hopes of redefining the global role of female leadership as part of her own ambitiously progressive, national political agenda. This comes at a time when, in the wake of Hillary Clinton's presidential defeat here in the United States, a record number of women are now running for office with the intent to shift the balance of power in Washington D.C. Jakobsdóttir is a metaphorical geyser, if you will, whose feminist activism is heating up—and about to erupt across the international political scene.

But feminism was already a layman's term in Iceland when Jakobsdóttir became head of its left-led coalition government—in fact, she says her career as a both parliamentarian and mother wouldn't have been possible without the welfare system providing access to locally run school programs, as

men and women did not quell. There is now gender quota legislation to ensure women are fairly represented on company boards, and Jakobsdóttir's administration is implementing a pay standard so that by 2022, men and women in public institutions and in private companies over a certain size are receiving comparable salaries for comparable work.

But inclusion, while at the core of Jakobsdóttir's democracy, remains a challenge. She wants to focus on providing immigrant women, for example, with access to education, and has increased police force funding to improve processes dealing with sexual violence—a result of the stories that came out of the #MeToo movement. The movement was also an opportunity for the mother and former teacher to address questions of harassment and power imbalance with her 12-year-old son, the oldest of her children. These kinds of conversations don't just promote an openness around topics of gender and sexuality from an early age, she says, but makes the discussion less difficult—particularly for men—in the future. It's this role as mother that shapes Jakobsdóttir as a politician, not only in envisioning, but fighting for the world she wants to see for her three sons. This is the kind of perspective that makes her a uniquely powerful world leader.

"It's ok to be a woman in politics and not try to become a man. People try to become like men... because the system was created by men," she says. "But my experience is that sometimes it's very good to do things differently."

BY AMANDA RANDONE



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