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Environmental patriarchy in a small democracy: Women politicians' experiences of patriarchy in Manx politics.

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Abstract: The Isle of Man is a small European democracy with very close ties to the United Kingdom. Despite in 1881 becoming the first jurisdiction to allow women to vote in national elections, throughout the twentieth century women have been substantially underrepresented in the Manx parliament, Tynwald. Drawing on constitutional documents and original qualitative interviews, this paper argues that two long standing environmental factors posing a challenge to more equal representation – the social and built environments – have been joined in the 21st century by a third: the online environment. All three are shaped by the characteristics of the Isle of Man as a small democracy. These key features, in particular intimacy, capacity, and the lack of strong party institutionalisation, are not shared with the UK; but are shared with other small democracies. This detailed study of the Isle of Man, then, can contribute to understanding of women and politics in small democracies.

Keywords: built environment, environment, Isle of Man, political representation, small jurisdiction, social media, women

Introduction

The Isle of Man is a small European democracy. It is a Crown Dependency with very substantial autonomy, going far beyond that of the devolved parts of the United Kingdom (Torrance, 2023). The centre of the modern Manx constitution is Tynwald, the Parliament of the Isle of Man. Tynwald is a tricameral legislature composed of two sets of legislators who also sit together as a third chamber. It is responsible for the overwhelming majority of Manx legislation, and executive government is drawn from, and responsible to, it. Since the 1960s power has increasingly vested in one chamber, the elected House of Keys, which is the focus of this paper. (For gender and the second chamber, see Edge, 2024.) The House of Keys is composed of twenty-four directly elected Members of the House of Keys (MHKs). Since 2016, MHKs have been elected in twelve, two-member constituencies, with each voter having two votes. These are very small constituencies, with a population of around 7,000 each.

In 1881, the Isle of Man became the first jurisdiction to grant women the right to vote in general elections (Belchem, 2000 at 88). One often overlooked feature of the Manx journey to suffrage is that, although the Keys are an ancient part of the Manx constitution, it was not until 1866 that it was an elected assembly, albeit one with a limited male suffrage. As Fyson observes "In 1881 the whole business of elections was still a new phenomenon, unencumbered by tradition" (Fyson, 2016 at 242-3). Universal suffrage followed in 1919, giving men and women over the age of 21 the right to vote, and – for the first time - the right to stand for election (House of Keys Election Act 1919). Between 1919 and 2024, 23 women served as Members of the House of Keys, 13 of whom were first elected between 2003 and 2021. The number of women in the Keys at any one time varied over the course of the twentieth century from none to a maximum of four between 1974 and 1976. At the general election in 2016, five women were elected to the House of Keys for the first time. In the general election of 2021, ten members of the House of Keys were women, meaning that 41.6% of Members were now women.

In this paper, we consider the environment in which these women operated, and continue to operate. We argue that the 20th century left a patriarchal legacy in terms of both the social environment, and the built environment. Although the former has receded, probably through a combination of cultural change and an established critical mass of women MHKs, the latter remains a significant issue. These environmental factors have been joined by a 21st century environmental challenge: the impact of social media on women in Manx electoral politics, or considering becoming involved.

We draw upon a range of sources to understand this environment. Rich documentary sources are available, including electoral data since 1919, and the verbatim transcripts of debates in Tynwald for the same period. We supplemented these with new socio-legal data. We draw on a series of semi-structured interviews with women who have lived experience of sitting as an MHK. In total 11 interviews were undertaken. Given limited numbers of women who have experience of sitting in the Keys, this represents a sample that is well placed to represent the diversity among the experiences of women MHKs – indeed, our interviews encompassed nearly half of all women who have ever sat in Tynwald. Interviews were conducted on the Isle of Man by Mackie utilising a semi-structured approach. This approach enabled participants to play a significant role in framing the encounter. This was important as the analysis approach we have employed focused on an ethnographically informed critical discourse analysis. That is to say, that the analysis focused on the individual narratives of participants attempting to draw out the richness of their experiences and paying particular attention to the meanings which they attached to these experiences (Hoffding and Martiny, 2016; Black, Gustafsson, Larsson & Bertero, 2011; Crouch and McKenzie, 2006). To avoid jigsaw identification, we refer to the same respondents with multiple identifiers throughout this paper: for instance #1 may be a unique identifier to a facet or quote from one of our respondents, while #23 may be a unique identifier to a different facet from the same respondent, or a different respondent. The link between identifier and respondent is tracked on our confidential research data archive. We also held two focus groups on the Isle of Man – one with friends and families of women MHKs to better understand the context in which they operated; and the other with women who had seriously considered running, but had decided against it.

Study of the Isle of Man as a small democracy is capable of informing academic and policy debate in other small democracies. We build on two important themes from this broader literature in the argument that follows.

The first is *intimacy*. As Corbett and Veenendaal (2018, p. 174) have argued in their review of thirty-nine small democracies around the world, this intimacy is a significant difference between small and large democracies:

> The sheer size of electorates in larger states means that political officeholders simply do not have the time and resources to communicate directly with all their constituents. By contrast, small states are able to overcome these limitations, albeit with varying effects.

This intimacy not only means that communication between politician and elector is direct, and unmediated, but impacts on the context of the communication. In small states actors recognise that they will interact over a long period of time in different relationships, and so must get along (Lowenthal, 1987). This may make it difficult to apply neutral bureaucratic rules, and to limit interactions to formal settings (Bray, 1991, pp. 20-21). The woman who represents her constituency in the Keys is also the woman who voters encounter at the shops, who constituents ask for updates over a family meal out, and whose children share classes with the children of their critics.

The second is *capacity*. There is a significant global literature on small island developing states (SIDS), including the role of women in politics (e.g. Romtohul, 2020). These are countries with a low per capita GDP. The Isle of Man does not fit into a construction of capacity purely as a function of wealth. The World Bank calculates GDP per capita as $80k for the Isle of Man, compared with $46k for the UK. By any global measure the Isle of Man is a wealthy jurisdiction. What the Isle of Man and a low GDP per capita small democracy like Kiribati ($1.6k) or Vanuatu ($3k) share is, however, a low absolute GDP, and limitations on the ability to benefit from economies of scale, hence capacity is an issue for many small democracies even if their per capita GDP is very healthy. In particular, small democracies will often not have sufficient demand for specialist services to sustain specialist capacity, and outsourcing to a larger state is common. There is also an internal aspect to limited capacity: roles and functions which in a larger democracy such as the UK would be divided between multiple actors are clumped together into a broad portfolio. For example, Tynwald's range of actions includes many matters that, in a state such as the UK, would be covered by local authorities.

The social environment

A key feature of the social environment for politicians in larger democracies is the social environment of their political party (Goyal, 2021; Ponce, Scarrow & Achury, 2020). As in some other small democracies, the overwhelming majority of MHKs, and candidates, have always been independents. This means that political life is intensely personal: personal impressions on and relationships with voters take the place of party affiliation; constituents have expectations of direct, unmediated, access to MHKs; and in the political workplace, with no party affiliations to rely upon, MHKs depend upon their individual relationships to advance their goals.

Voters

The very substantial underrepresentation of women in the Keys throughout the 20th century is not because women candidates were less likely than men to be elected. Instead, it reflects a deficit in the number of women who came forward as candidates. Would-be candidates clearly recognised the cost of deciding to run – both financial and emotional – and we would anticipate perceptions around voter's gendered expectations impacting on their assessment of the chances of success. Our interview participants saw patriarchal expectations amongst voters as an important reality which candidates in the 20th and, to a lesser extent, 21st century had to deal with. Voters sometimes had strong views about the proper gender of their representative, with a woman MHK being seen as a significant change for a constituency (#1).

One respondent outlined how some men felt uncomfortable voting for women because 'they don't want to hear a woman… representing them.' (#2) Contrastingly, another reflected that some people seemed excited by the prospect of being represented by a woman 'because they thought the men spent too much time talking mostly and not enough time achieving things' (#3).

A key site for encounters between Manx candidates and voters is the doorstep. In contrast to the situation in larger democracies such as the UK, there is an emphasis on candidates personally knocking on doors and discussing their candidacy with voters. A number of women recounted specific instances where they have felt uncomfortable while door-knocking. For example, one noted that "[t]here have been a couple of occasions where you go in [to the house of a voter] and you think it's quite — aggressive is the wrong word, but it's uncomfortable." (#4, also #5). Several participants noted that they had adopted strategies to manage their own safety such as sharing their locations via mobile phone. There was a general feeling among our respondents that this was not an issue that impacted men; indeed, that some male candidates were aware of a need to ensure women householders did not feel uncomfortable when they knocked (#6)

The marginalisation of parties on the Manx political scene also emphasises the personal, and some of our respondents saw personality as being more important than policies for a candidate (#7, #8). Views of personality are particularly prone to being formed through a gendered lens, with women candidates risking being seen as "too pushy" (#9). Some of our respondents reported male constituents interacting with them primarily as women, rather than as candidates, for instance in the use of informal gendered language (#10), criticism for not meeting gendered expectations around home making (#11, #12), or asking the candidate on a date (#13). As this suggests, at times the challenges that our participants felt they faced related more to confronting the gendered expectations of voters than it did to the deployment of particular political arguments.

Some participants noted that they had experienced damage to their campaign materials such as the destruction of posters. This could be experienced by anyone engaged in politics. But some participants reflected a view that their materials had been targeted on a gendered basis with one noting that "Women's posters tended to be targeted for vandalism far more than men's posters." (#14) (see further, CPA (2022) at 11 and 14). This corresponds with broader research findings which have shown that women engaged in politics routinely experience heightened levels of hostility when compared to men in similar situations (see Pedersen, Petersen & Thau, 2025; Gorrell, Bakir, Roberts, Greenwood & Bontcheva, 2020; Bakir, Farrell & Bontcheva, 2024). One striking example came from a participant who felt that the manner in which the poster was destroyed portrayed them a somewhat demonic light: "they stuck holes through and put matches in the eyes so it burnt. It looks like a horrendous Halloweeny type poster." (#15)

Constituents

Another distinctive feature of Manx political life, and one with a significant impact on men as well, is the "always-on" nature of being an MHK. This was a recurrent theme across our interviews. Without a staff, and with a widely available home address, being an MHK was felt to be a 24/7 job (Edge, Mackie & Powell, 2025). As in other small democracies, Manx constituents expect and receive "direct and unfettered access to politicians" (Veenendaal, 2020). This is a manifestation of the intimacy commonly found across small democracies: the closeness of the connection between elected politicians and their constituents, without any

mediation of party structures, constituency based administrative layers, or strong local government structures, with their own representatives.

This comparative lack of boundaries can have a particular gendered impact. As one participant recounted: "I think it was only when the letters started arriving you thought, okay, somebody here is stood on my front doorstep and put this through, so …"(#16) This vulnerability extended outside of the home and into the workspace. One participant described an encounter at a political surgery where a male constituent ended up

> standing up shouting, shoving the table away, spit coming out, and just like the steam coming out the ears and pointing […] I did wonder if he's going to hit me […] But he got very, very angry, shoved the table, shouted and walked out. And after that we're never on our own in the room. (#17)

Fellow MHKs

Patriarchy and restrictive conceptions of gender were obvious, and pervasive, in the 20th century House of Keys, as illustrated by considering two important legislative reforms: allowing women to serve as jurors; and decriminalising consensual sex between men.

Although allowing Manx women to sit on juries was considered as early as 1920, following contemporaneous changes in the UK (see more broadly Choo and Hunter, 2018), the law was not changed until the Jury Act 1980. The issue had been considered by the Manx legislature repeatedly, and these debates illuminate how members of the legislature saw women in public life. Analysis of the official debates shows four substantive themes: (1) the unsubstitutionable domestic obligations of women, for instance literally getting the family dinner on the table (e.g. Crellin, HK 2.11. 1920). (2) women wishing to prioritise domestic duties over public life (e.g. Simcocks, HK 2.2.1965); (3) women needing protection from onerous duties, particularly in relation to hearing evidence in cases of a sexual nature (e.g. Deemster Cowley, LC 8.2.1949); (4) the construction of women's arguments for jury service as a minority voice by activist women (e.g. Bolton, LC 9.10.1979), particularly those committed to women's liberation (e.g. Kermeen, HK 24.10.1978).

These substantive themes are, themselves, reflective of patriarchal and infantilizing conceptualisations of women. Also illuminating is how these themes were discussed. In a chamber dominated by men, and frequently exclusively composed of men, much of the discussion was men talking about women. Inevitably the quotes which have aged least well have leapt out. Nonetheless, as markers of the sort of language that Manx parliamentarians were happy to use *on the public record* over a protracted period, they have some value.

We find emphasis on women's sexuality, both as desirers of men ("as in some cases they may be better than men, although they may be more easily swayed by the charms of counsel (laughter)" Deemster Cowley LC.8.3.1949) and as subjects of the male gaze ("There are a couple of amendments, one from Mr Simcocks who has a little variation about ladies of the right age. [A Member: What is the right age?] Young enough to be interesting, I think." Mr Matthews, HK 9.2.1965).

We find assumptions related to supposed limitations of women's intellect, for example:

> It has often been held that women do not have logical minds and that they are prey to intuition and hunches. Be that as it may, I am prepared to believe that if they desire to assume this duty, they could discharge it as capably as men do [rebutted with] … as long as they cannot change their minds every five minutes (Mr Bolton and Mr Irving, TC 28.4.1959)

There are also references to brain size:

> although anatomists have said that the average size of a man's brain is larger than that of a woman, nevertheless, I think some have used their brains, at least to the extent of the average man (Mr McFee, TC 28.4.1959).

We also find references to the irresponsibility of women who depart from gender norms:

> There appear to me to be too many rather vociferous women who want to wear the trousers without accepting the responsibility of wearing the trousers and that is the reason this Bill has come before us. (Mr Bolton, LC 29.3.1965)

As well as to the ungovernability of women:

> Irrespective of what this Hon. Chamber may decide, ladies are and always will be a law unto themselves. (Mr Radcliffe, HK 14.11.1978)

One of the key figures in the passing of the 1980 Act was Mrs Hanson. In one of her speeches, she does not only capture her views of the issues raised by fellow members of Tynwald, but also evokes her experience as the sole woman in the House of Keys arguing for full equality in relation to jury service:

> It is quite true, as Dr. Mann has said, that there is a very strong suspicion in the Island that the reason that this Jury Bill report has not come before this House before now is because men in this hon. Court, and a woman — I had better not say that — (laughter and interruptions)—are against the natural right of women to serve on a jury. I am amazed that some hon. members think that women are forgetful. Women are not stupid. (Laughter.) I am sure the women of this Island would take great exception to some of the remarks which have been made that women are forgetful, they have got to stand over a stove. They do not know when it is time to go out or when it is time to come in. (Laughter.) They are too tired or they cannot find their way to Ramsey courthouse to get an excusal. (Laughter.) Really, I am amazed to hear all this. I just cannot get over it, I really am appalled … What about the women who are defendants in the court? Would a man like to go to court and sit and be judged by a jury of all women? … Mr. Radcliffe, hon. member for Ayre, I have spoken about your opinion of women: that they are not very mentally alert, that they cannot remember things and they have to be reminded. (Laughter.) I would hate to be a lady from Ayre if the member representing them thinks that they are feeble. (Laughter). (Mrs Hanson, HK 22.5.1979)

A later area for controversy was the passage of legislation to decriminalise sex between men – considerably later than in England and Wales. It had become clear from the early 1980s that the absolute prohibition of sexual activity between men in the Sexual Offences Act 1967 was in breach of the European Convention. From 1987 there were numerous debates relating to a proposed updating of the 1967 Act. Despite this, there was significant opposition to the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Tynwald and it took five years and two Select Committees before the Sexual Offences Bill was finally passed in 1992.

There were two women in the House of Keys for most of this period: Hazel Hannan, who supported the decriminalisation of homosexuality, and Julia Delaney (who stood down in 1991), who did not. Hannan was one of two MHKs who supported decriminalisation throughout the debate. The other was Allan Bell, who himself is gay. The debate illuminates the way in which women politicians were perceived by their peers, and how women MHKs negotiated being woman parliamentarians in a male-dominated environment.

We find that women politicians were seen as women first and politicians second. Hannan is frequently scolded for holding a position that clearly sits against patriarchal notions of femininity:

> She really is the limit. How a mother, a wife and mother, can embrace these acts is really beyond me (HK 27.03.1991)

She is also addressed in ways which infantilize her and seek to invalidate her position:

> Perhaps the hon. member for Peel might learn something if she actually listened when other people are speaking (HK 23.04.1991)

and

> Just because you do not get your way in something you do not go off like a spoilt child and vote against it" (HK 07.05.1991).

When Hannan and Delaney engage with each other on a point of disagreement, their discussion is demeaned. On one occasion, the Speaker interjects with "Right, ladies" and this is followed by laughter in the chamber. Delaney responds with "I do not wish to be associated with her [Hannan's] attitudes." The Speaker then entreats them to "just concentrate on what we are doing and try and avoid starting these little battles." Another MHK, Phil Kermode, steps in to address Delaney, "Oh, scratch her eyes out!", which is again followed by laughter. Delaney responds "No, I do not scratch eyes out. I stand on my own two feet, as any other member here" (HK 01.05.1991). Kermode used the same language against Hannan in 1989.

The use of such tropes aimed at parliamentarians as women is both demeaning and infantilizing and seeks to negate the women parliamentarians' rights to voice their opinions. While Delaney was determined to disassociate herself from such tropes, instead seeking acceptance "like any other member", Hannan leans into this sexist remark ("I have not even started yet"), reclaiming it as a form of power. Both women are seeking to demonstrate their agency and equality in the chamber, but they do so in different ways.

In the 21st century, the culture of the chamber has improved. Reflecting on a woman MHK of an earlier generation, when women were uncommon in the Keys, one of our respondents indicated that "she said that she would wear a suit and tie in there because she didn't believe there was any other way of making them take her seriously. So, visually [she], on occasion did make herself look masculine as well" (#18). Another, early, respondent reported being advised by a male parliamentarian that she would be "all right here if you think like a man" (#19). One advantage of the culture of the chamber becoming less monolithically masculine was that it could feel more welcoming for women candidates. One of our respondents specifically addressed women considering standing:

> it's not like it used to be. You know, it probably would have put me off, to be honest, … I know in the '80s what it was like for some of the female politicians. And you know, those male politicians should be absolutely ashamed of themselves now. And as should every single person in the media who didn't call it out for what it was, because it's absolutely disgraceful that that happened really in my lifetime, it really is. But, but, and that would have put me off if that was the culture now, but it isn't, it's not like that now. (#20)

An important factor in this cultural change is the increased, and sustained, presence of a significant number of women in the Keys. As more women join a chamber, there is a point at which it ceases to be a homosocial space with anomalous women members, and a more heterosocial space. In particular, as being a woman MHK becomes less exceptional, the emphasis on their gender might be expected to change in both the chamber and in the media (Ye, 2014). The idea of a "'critical mass' beyond which sex balance becomes normal, widely accepted and irreversible" (Fraenkel, 2006; cf Studlar and McAllister, 2002) is broadly accepted in the global literature, often suggesting 30% as a tipping point. In the Manx context, this was reached for the first time in the General Election of 2021, but the General Election of 2016 had led to an unprecedented 20% of MHKs being women, leading one respondent to share experience of parliamentarians who had sat pre and post 2016:

> They said that with 5 women in it … that the mood and the tone of the debates and everything improved massively at that point … is it politics or is it the person? Is it the gender? I don't know (#21).

Reflecting on observing earlier sittings of Tynwald from outside, one respondent remembered, "it was a male dominated old boys' club, it was" (#22).

This considerable improvement is not to say that men in the Keys do not themselves show patriarchal ideas and norms. Our 21st century respondents reported gendered language in Tynwald (#23), offensive discussion about menstrual cycles (#24, #25), dismissive use of "flower", "love", "petal" to women MHKs (#26, #27, #28), comments on women's fashion and grooming which would not be made of a man (#29), and the denigrating of political conflict by sending flowers to a woman, but not to a man, political opponent (#30). In addition, a comparison of the 1987-1992 debates on the Sexual Offences Bill, during which there were either one or two women MHKs, and those which took place in 2019-2020 on the Sexual Offences and Obscene Publications Bill, when there were five women in the House of Keys, shows that while the tone of the debate had improved in the intervening years, there was still evidence of patriarchal attitudes towards women. While there were significantly fewer disagreements among members during the later debates, comments made by Mrs Caine, a former journalist, in a discussion on whether those accused of a crime ought to be granted anonymity, were challenged in the House. Mrs Caine noted that:

> It also should be recognised that being found not guilty is not the same as being found innocent. ... If there was adequate evidence to bring a case to court, there must have been a case to answer (HK 03.12.2019).

Three Members challenged Mrs Caine on this statement. Mr Hooper challenged the idea that a person found not guilty may not be innocent, stating that it is "complete nonsense" and "if no one finds you guilty you are innocent of a crime". Mrs Costain stated that some of Mrs Caine's words were "ill-advised" and "could have been phrased in a different manner." The Chief Minister, Mr Quayle, chose to chastise Mrs Caine, stating "I was disappointed with a couple of comments the Hon. Member has made" and "I think the Hon. Member should think long and hard about her words and withdraw them." Mrs Caine then clarified that her comments referred to assumptions often made by the general public, rather than her personal beliefs.

The language used by Mr Hooper and Mrs Costain indicate that they view Mrs Caine as an equal, with Mr Hooper mounting a robust and direct challenge and Mrs Costain responding more gently. However, Mr Quayle chooses to chastise Mrs Caine as one might scold a child, noting his disappointment in her and suggesting that she "think long and hard" before withdrawing her comments. The words used by Mr Quayle can be argued to infantilise Mrs Caine, suggestive of a positioning of her not as an equal but as an intellectual and moral inferior

or as someone deemed to lack the ability to make responsible choices regarding the language she deploys. In this sense, the different ways in which Mrs Caine was challenged might be said to showcase the increasingly complex gendered engagements within the house with some members such as Mr Hooper and Mrs Costain disagreeing in a way which, while robust and challenging, suggest equal respect while Mr Quayle challenged in a manner which potentially speaks to a view of Mrs Caine as less capable of exercising professional judgement.

The built environment

Politicians have bodies, and those bodies occupy, and interact with, the built environment (Machin, 2022). We follow Malley in seeing that the cultural assumptions in a legislature's building can serve to remind some members "of their marginalised status, primarily in terms of gender and class" (Malley, 2012). In this sense, it can be seen that the legislature is not just a gendered space but also a gendering space in that the space itself invites certain forms of conduct which themselves align with particular conceptions of masculinity. Accordingly, this section reflects on the role of materiality in structuring the patriarchal norms experienced by participants.

If the twentieth century social environments were not constructed to meet the needs of women MHKs, the built environment was even less so. The Isle of Man's parliament moved into its current accommodation in Douglas in 1881. Alterations to the chamber of the House of Keys took place in 1909 and it was at this point that the current seating arrangements were created. Members sit in two rows facing each other across the room. All of these changes took place before women could stand for election to the House of Keys. As Lovenduski (2005) notes of the Palace of Westminster, it "institutionalizes the norms of the men who founded it and for so many years inhabited it as a wholly male institution." (at 48) As one woman MHK noted, with the significant increase in the number of women in parliament since 2021, "there's always a queue for the toilet" as "obviously the place wasn't built for having so many women." (#31)

When the parliamentary estate was expanded in the 1970s, Tynwald agreed to the construction of "a separate room for lady members" (TC 19.6.1973). Three women had been elected to the House of Keys at the previous election. This was the first time that more than one woman had sat in the Keys. Rather than accommodating the three women MHKs in the Members' Room, it was felt that a separate space had to be created for the women. Thornton-Duesbury was particularly keen to see the establishment of a "Lady Members' Room" noting that, even as Chair of the Board of Education, she currently had no private space to work in: "To have the lady members' room and to be able to withdraw there is a tremendous help" (TC 7.7.1976). A similar system operated in Westminster. Takayanagi notes that "the women MPs often found themselves either formally or informally excluded from spaces such as dining rooms and smoking rooms, and confined to the Lady Members' Room." (Takayanagi, 2023 at 139). By 1989, however, there was considerable opposition in Tynwald to having a Lady Members' Room. In a debate about making the best use of space within the building, Mr Brown noted that:

> We have a Members' Reading Room and we should all share it; we are all members together. To have one room set aside, with respect, for two lady members … is absolutely a waste (TC 12.7.1989).

He made the point that the women in Tynwald used the Members' Reading Room in any case. Hazel Hannan supported the move, noting that "in this day and age it is totally outdated and outmoded and should be done away with post haste." (TC 12.7.1989). The Lady Members' Room was removed. In the UK, each house still has its own room for women members. In a larger legislature, Norton (2023) notes that this may help create a space for women who do not

wish to "act like men" (at 51; see also Norton, 2019). However, given the importance of lived experience to how we understand the world, we argue that heterosocial spaces are key to the effective development and passage of legislation.

The idea that men and women might need different seating was referred to, in jest, during a discussion in the House of Keys in 1880 about expanding the franchise. Mr Sherwood noted that, in addition to supporting votes for women, he would also support women being admitted to the Keys as Members. However, "they would require some larger seats to be made", presumably to accommodate their voluminous skirts. Mr E. C. Farrant further commented, to roars of laughter, that "[t]o admit ladies as members of the House of Keys would at all events be putting the representation on a broader basis." (*Mona's Herald*, 10 November 1880, p. 3) While these comments were not made in seriousness, it is true that the furniture of the chambers is designed to suit norms associated with male bodies and men's experiences, rather than women's. One of our participants highlighted the fact that the seating in the chamber today is clearly designed for men, noting that the desks are set too far away from the chairs for many women to use comfortably because "for a woman to be able to use the desk, you've got to be right on the very edge of the seat." (#32) Similar complaints were found by Ross (2002) when interviewing women in the South African parliament (at 194). The seating in the chamber is in stark contrast to other places of employment where chairs which can be adjusted for different body types are the norm. Some women also bring in blankets to keep warm because the air temperature is often too cold. Requests to turn off the air conditioning or shut the door are sometimes met with comments from male MHKs saying that they're not cold. As one participant noted: "the men they've got their jackets on, you know, … they're bigger, they seem to stay warmer for longer." (#33)

It is widely recognised that "[t]he design and facilities of a building have an important role in making it an inclusive environment" (House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, 2021 at 22) for women and for others, and that the design of legislative buildings impacts parliamentarians in gendered ways (e.g. Childs, 2004; Ross, 2002). This also includes the decoration of the chamber, which can create a space which feels inclusive, or exclusive. Louise Haigh MP has noted of the Palace of Westminster that "[t]he fact that it is pictures of men and statues of men, everywhere, that really stands out, even in the Lady Members' Room, all the portraits are of men." (Meakin, 2019; see also Crawford and Pini, 2011). Portraits of former Speakers adorn the walls of the House of Keys, all of whom have been men. One participant noted that, while showing a group of schoolchildren round the chamber, one of them asked "Where are all the girl pictures?" (#34) The only portrait of a woman parliamentarian in the legislative buildings is that of former President of Tynwald, Clare Christian, which hangs, with portraits of other former Presidents, in the Legislative Council chamber. The lack of representation on display makes the chamber feel like a homosocial space and, as one respondent noted, "it is so important that people feel confident to come forward and not just see it as this man's world". The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's guide to Gender Sensitising Parliaments, highlighted the importance of "[e]valuating the gender and diversity inclusivity of artwork and other parliament spaces" (CPA, 2022 at 16) and Childs' Good Parliament report included a section on artwork noting that "new artwork should be commissioned to continue to show the diverse membership and activities of the Commons." (Childs, 2016 at 39). The Isle of Man legislative buildings would benefit from a similar review to ensure that "the artwork reflects the role that women have played in parliament and in society." (CPA (2020) at 17).

An abiding concern of the global literature is that when women become parliamentarians they remain subject to broader cultural norms as to their responsibilities as women, norms in tension with those of an institution structured around the cultural norms which apply to men (Uvuza, 2014). Expectations about mothers and childcare can appear during campaigning as an argument from voters that a woman was not an appropriate candidate ((#35, also #36, #37), (see also Hojund Madsen, 2019), but our respondents also saw childcare as a responsibility that impacted on them in Tynwald in a way it did not their colleagues who were fathers. Childcare was a recurrent issue with mothers who talked to us. Mothers, particularly those of young children, had factored the availability of childcare into their planning – for instance one candidate ensuring the family member who would be needed to help was on board with their plans to stand (#38). A number of them saw thinking about and planning childcare as a responsibility they felt lay on mothers who were MHKs, but probably not in the same way on fathers (#39). This was the case even for mothers with a partner, who were able to share out of hours childcare with them (#40); and for mothers of blended families (#41). This responsibility was felt particularly keenly in relation to single-parents (#42, #43, #44). This issue is consistent with broader feminist research which has argued that even as women have gained access to a wider range of social, political and employment spaces, gendered expectations around domestic labour have been maintained (e.g. Hochschild, 2012).

A particular example of this clash between cultural norms as to women's responsibilities outside the workplace, and the cultural norms of Tynwald, arises in relation to timings of parliamentary sittings. This can be seen at the micro, and the macro, level. At the macro level, the structure of the Parliamentary year was seen as not reflecting the needs of contemporary MHKs, particularly around school holidays. At the micro level, the start and finish times of sitting were seen as aligned with historic considerations such as train times, rather than being "aligned with school times" (#45). Additionally, some of our respondents saw a willingness to continue sittings past planned times in order to finish business as reflecting the position of men, rather than women (#46). In contrast to larger legislatures such as the UK Parliament, attendance at sittings of the House of Keys, and Tynwald, is mandatory unless the parliamentarian is excused (Standing Orders of the House of Keys, 3.1(1); Standing Orders of Tynwald Court, 3.1).

In 2022, the Standing Orders Committee of Tynwald recommended reforms to how the chamber was used, suggesting that the Keys should not sit during school half-term holidays and, instead, take a shorter break over the summer. It also suggested revising end time for sittings of Tynwald – which are attended by the entire House of Keys – from 8pm to 6.30pm, as "[e]ven though it is only one or two days a month it does not support a good work/life balance for Members and staff, and … could have a negative impact on the diversity of our parliament." (Standing Orders Committee of Tynwald, para. 16). Lawrie Hooper MHK, who supported the recommendations, noted that there were many good reasons for these proposals but that "the core one is trying to remove barriers to people being able to stand and do the job effectively", adding that "[m]any people don't stand in the first place because the job can be incompatible with having a family, which impacts representation." (*Isle of Man Today*, 8 May 2023). The recommendations were debated in Tynwald in May 2023. Changes to the Tynwald sittings times were approved, but changes to the sitting dates were not approved, despite significant support (TC 17.05.2023). Some MHKs argued that Tynwald needed to modernise in order to "make our parliament more accessible" (Mrs Barber, TC 17.05.2023) and "adapt [to] modern working practices" (Mr Ashford, TC 17.05.2023) with a number of members arguing that they knew of people who were "deterred from standing for election because of the working practices of this Court." (Dr Haywood, TC 17.05.2023). Others were concerned about public perception, noting that parliamentarians should "be prepared to come to work during

half-term just like so many of the people that we represent have to." (Mrs Corlett, TC 17.05.2023). After all, "How many working in our population would love to align their holidays with schools?" (Ms Edge, TC 17.05.2023) This is a challenge which other parliaments have faced. When the new Scottish Parliament was established, the sitting hours reflected a "more regular professional schedule" which was more conducive to family life. However, this resulted in a "consistently negative" media response, complaining that "members of the Scottish Parliament have given themselves a very easy life." (Ross, 2002 at 199).

The online environment

At the outset, we had anticipated that social media would be of limited importance when compared to larger democracies. This is because the smallness and intimacy of the Isle of Man offers far more extensive opportunities for direct contact between candidates, politicians, and the public more broadly. However, this perspective proved to be incorrect. Indeed, counter-intuitively, it seems that the smallness and intimacy of the Isle of Man resulted in an increased salience of social media.

Extensive work has been carried out, especially in the UK, on online misogyny directed at women politicians. In line with this work, our participants shared experiences of online abuse, particularly anonymous abuse. As one participant explained, "once you get in, you realise that there's a lot of people get pseudonyms and they go attacking you." While abuse can be policy-related, it was also often gender specific: "I didn't recognize it against gender so, so much until I got in, and then it was very much so. It was like, it's been quite horrific, to be honest" (#47). Another commented that she has her "own personal trolls who will… Who will repeatedly post up very personal comments." (#48) The gendered abuse experienced by our participants included name calling (e.g. "silly cow or silly bitch" (#49)), with the term 'woman' itself being used in a disparaging way ("So, they'll say "this woman doesn't…" Whereas you wouldn't say that if it's a man, they don't tend to say "this man." It's almost as if woman in itself is mildly insulting" (#50)). Complaints around politicians' priorities were sometimes framed as competence issues, for example, "'Oh, is that all she's got on her mind?' and it's like, Well, no, actually… (laughter) no, actually, I can do more than one thing at once" (#51).

Participants acknowledged that anonymous letters had long been part of the experience of MHKs, including hand-delivered to home addresses (#52), but felt that the ease of online communication and the ubiquity of online anonymity made this form of abuse much more common (#53). One of our participants felt that the toxicity they encountered online may have been displaced from physical interactions as some expressions of misogyny had become less socially acceptable (#54). Participants gave examples of abuse which had been misogynistic, homophobic, and transphobic (#55, #56). As well as abuse directed at themselves, respondents were concerned at abuse directed at their children as a consequence of their political role, and the impact on their children at seeing their mother abused (#57, #58). The targeting of families can itself be viewed through a gendered lens due to the social expectations around women being primary caregivers and the impact that this may have both on the way women experience such abuse being targeted at their families and in the perception that such targeting is legitimate by those perpetuating the abuse.

Dealing with their online environment was such an important part of managing their roles that our participants had developed explicit coping strategies. Some opted for complete disengagement from social media (#59, #60), or shifted their posting to neutral topics and images (#61). Others sought to limit engagement by correcting errors or misstatements once, and then ceasing to engage with the poster (#62). One approach, driven by the absence of any

staffers for MHKs, was to have a family member act as a third party filter for all social media (#63).

Why were concerns about social media so important to our participants?

One explanation is capacity. Participants suggested that in a small democracy like the Isle of Man, the limited mainstream media was less valuable as a way of communicating with constituents, so that social media was particularly important as a way of getting an MHKs message out. Another is intimacy. One concern from participants was that hostility could be very easily translated from an online space to a physical space. Participants were aware of the ease with which a social media interaction could be brought off-line. This could easily happen at an MHKs home. Our participants considered their home addresses to be easily available, and accessible by short journeys from anywhere on the Island. The final explanation arises from another feature of small democracy politics – the personalisation of politics. One participant noted:

> I think it's just so personal here. But in the UK, … people are far more inclined to hate Boris Johnson than they are the local MP, you know, it becomes almost depersonalized. A lot of people don't know who their local MP is. (#64)

Conclusion: Acknowledging patriarchy in Manx politics

Women have been eligible to sit in the House of Keys for more than a century. The ubiquity, institutionalisation, and social acceptability of sexism and misogyny has very much reduced over that period. Although the 21st century experience so far is that women are forming an increasingly strong proportion of the legislation, it remains to be seen whether this is an enduring change. The next General Election to the House of Keys is in September 2026. The smallness of the Isle of Man means that individual decisions, and the outcomes of individual electoral contests, can lead to a significant percentage change in the composition of the national legislature.

In any case, as our interviews with recent and current women MHKs show, Manx women in public life continue to operate in environments shaped by this legacy. This has three important effects.

Firstly, it constitutes a dignitary harm to women. Dignitary harms are insults to a person's dignity or autonomy or injuries to their standing as a person (Anderson, 2006). Dignitary harms can arise by words or conduct that treat someone as inferior on account of a group membership. We see MHKs and women considering standing to become MHKs encountering sexism as a harm in itself, rather than simply a cause of other harms (Mitchell, Cribb & Entwistle, 2023). As well as harming the dignity of specific women, this harm also operates by normalising and institutionalising particular conceptions of gender which may interfere with the ability of women to engage in political activity.

Secondly, patriarchy can function as a constraint on the ability of women MHKs to freely perform the role for which they have been elected. As the discussion above shows, women MHKs have been aware of constraints under which they operate, which their male colleagues do not – for instance dress and grooming, and criticism and abuse for departing from feminine coded behaviour. These constraints do not always limit women MHKs of course – key political figures of the 20th and 21st century have excelled. They are however a further burden on women who serve as MHKs.

Thirdly, awareness of the patriarchal environment has an impact on women considering entering Manx politics. In our focus group for women who decided not to stand, concerns over

how women politicians are treated, particularly by the Manx public and on social media, were a significant reason for the decision not to stand, especially in relation to the impact it would have on their family.

As mentioned earlier, since 1919 when women have chosen to stand, they have been elected at very much the same rate as men. Any feature of Manx public life which deters women from standing in the same volume as men will have a significant impact on the composition of the House of Keys.

Our study shows not only the importance of talking to women in small democracies about the particularity of their experience, but identifies an unexpected area for study: the way in which the intimacy of small democracies can amplify concerns over the impact of social media on the lives of women politicians. We have shown that the characteristics which shape women politician's experiences of patriarchy are closely linked to the smallness of the Isle of Man. Intimacy, capacity, and the absence of political parties make the experience of the women considered in this study very different from that in the neighbouring large, and closely linked, democracies of the United Kingdom. These factors are, however, shared by other small democracies. Informed by the global literature on women in politics, small democracies will have much to learn from each other's unique experiences: both in identifying challenges posed to their democracy by patriarchy, and in sharing solutions which work in a small democracy context.

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