

Code of Conduct for National Leaders

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CAN a prime minister of a country dance, sing, drink, entangle in a group hug at a private party with friends, or enjoy clubbing till 4 am? What if she is only 36 years old? Yes, we are talking about Finland's Prime Minister Sanna Marin. In a leaked video that went viral the prime minister, in the black camisole top, was seen 'dancing and singing with reckless abandon' and 'laughing, cavorting, hips swiveling' as described by Marja Heinonen, a Finnish writer and author in her opinion in CNN.

According to a news report by Kostya Manenkov and Karl Ritter of the Associated Press published on August 21, 2022, the prime minister acknowledged that the party was rather boisterous but to her knowledge, there was only alcohol but not drugs. She also took a drug test to put an end to such speculations.

The prime minister told reporters, "I hope that in the year 2022 it's accepted that even decision-makers dance, sing and go to parties", which means she is not sure about the public acceptance of such behaviour. Her doubt is further revealed when she says, "I didn't wish for any images to be spread, but it's up to the voters to decide what they think about it". As for the voters, there were opinions like, "I think it's important for our politicians to be respectable and enjoy the trust of the public. So, I don't think it's a good look".

Of course, there are people on the other side too. They question why she can't have a normal private life like others.

Let's try to find the answer to this question. The first thing to note is lawmakers, ministers, prime ministers, presidents, etc. are not just jobs with corresponding salaries and benefits. These people do not work nine to five and buy bread for the breakfast from street shops on their way home after the office. They don't learn about tax hikes from the newspaper; they increase the taxes. There are plenty of things like these that prove they don't live like common people.

Heads of the state or government are national leaders. They lead the nation. They influence people by their actions, behaviour, and charisma. They must have the wisdom and prudence to guide a nation in the right direction. They have to be able to handle crises and calamities. Their responsibilities and nature of work constitute a way of life that can't be compared with common people. Accordingly, they have to have a different code of conduct.

We have seen that the Finnish prime minister is only 36 years old. Perhaps her age could be attributed to the 'dancing and singing with reckless abandon.' So, should there be a minimum age for the posts like the prime minister and president?

Sebastian Kurz became the foreign minister of Austria at the age of 27 and then became the chancellor of the country at the age of 31. The Finnish prime minister was 34 when she took office. Jacinda Arden became prime minister of New Zealand at the age of 37. And, Emmanuel Macron became president of France at 39.

In most countries, there is no minimum age for holding the office of the prime minister. The minimum age is usually specified for becoming a lawmaker that is a member of parliament, which is 18 to 25. However, some countries have a minimum age for the

president including Bangladesh. The president of Bangladesh has to be a minimum of 35 years old. The minimum age for the president in India and the USA is also 35. The minimum age for president in Pakistan and China is perhaps the highest in the world at 45.

It is common sense that the more you advance in age the more knowledge and experience you accumulate. That gives you a kind of maturity and your decisions and behaviour are guided more by the brain than by hormones. However, it is also true that people's physical and mental ability gradually diminishes with advanced age. That raises the pertinent question, should there be a maximum age limit for the posts of prime minister and president?

There is a retirement age for civil servants and occupations that are regulated by law in all countries. It's generally 65. The law probably assumes that after age 65



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people cannot have the physical and mental ability to continue with their profession or even if they do, their productivity will not be at the level required.

Laws are made by lawmakers. Since they do not set a retirement age for themselves or the prime minister and president, it probably implies that they don't need one. And they may be right in that order. Their mental abilities may not dwindle with age like common people. We have seen Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia become prime minister at the age of 92. He did not show any sign of physical or mental decay during his tenure. Also, Joe Biden became the president of the USA at the age of 78 and he is going strong as of now. Of course, some people might contend that these are exceptions.

How about educational qualifications for the national leaders? Shouldn't there be a minimum qualification for holding the highest offices in the country? Of course, academic degrees do not always reflect the knowledge and wisdom of a person. But there should be some criteria to filter out the people devoid of intellectual capacity to lead a nation from the race to the throne.

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