INTERNATIONAL CATALYST AND WOMEN'S PARLIAMENTARY RECRUITMENT: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF KENYA AND AUSTRALIA 1963 - 2002

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ABSTRACT

The thesis is a comparative study of the impact of international catalysts on women's entry into the national parliaments of Kenya and Australia. The central question that the thesis addresses is whether international catalysts have similar impacts on women's parliamentary recruitment in countries that have had different terms of incorporation into the international system. I answer this question by examining the political life stories of nine women each from Australia and Kenya who have succeeded in gaining parliamentary seats in the federal parliament in Australia and in the National Assembly in Kenya. I locate these women's life stories in three stages which address the obstacles that they had to overcome in their parliamentary pursuits and the factors that enabled them to overcome such barriers: namely self-selection (the decision to vie for parliamentary seats), party selection and voter selection. National contexts in both countries create socio-economic hurdles (for example lack of funds and other resources for campaigning), political obstacles (for example sexist candidate selection systems) and ideological or psychological prohibitive factors (the willingness of voters to select women candidates or the ability of women to imagine themselves as parliamentarians). In both countries, the chances of women succeeding at each of these three stages increases if there are facilitative factors that provide women with resources to overcome gender specific obstacles, or where facilitative factors neutralise or reduce the impact of the gender specific obstacles. Women's first entry into parliament and their period of greatest election vary between Kenya and Australia. In Kenya, the first woman entered parliament in 1969. The current parliament has 7.1 percent female

representation. In the Australian federal parliament, women have been represented since 1943, but in very small numbers until the 1970s. By 2002, women made up 25.3 per cent of the House of Representatives and 28.9 per cent of the Senate. Domestic factors alone are insufficient to explain women's varying representation in the two countries. The thesis turns to the international system and identifies the comparative ways in which international factors have contributed to the national variations in women's parliamentary recruitment in the two countries. This thesis argues that, while the national context forms the environment within which women's parliamentary recruitment occurs, international efforts act on the national contexts in ways that influence women's parliamentary recruitment. The thesis addresses this argument by focusing on two themes: the comparison of Kenya and Australia as influenced by international factors, and secondly, a comparison of women's political recruitment in the two countries in terms of domestic issues.