

A Feminist Historical Institutional Approach and Gender Participation in Queensland Politics

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Abstract : Political processes are shaped by the gendered culture of parliaments. This paper examines how the institution of parliament has been affected by the changing number of women in politics. In order to understand how and why gender change occurs, the paper employs a feminist historical institutionalism approach. It argues that while it is difficult to change the gendered nature of political institutions, it is possible, from a gender perspective, to understand the processes of change both formally and informally. Increasing women's representation has been a slow process which has not occurred without political struggles. A broadly defined 'feminist historical institutionalism' has critiqued existing approaches to institutions and combined historical institutional analysis with tools of gender to enhance our understanding of institutional processes and change. The paper examines the gendered rules, norms, and practices that influence institutional design choices and processes. Institutions such as Parliament often are able to adjust to women's entry and absorb them without too much interruption. Exploring the hidden aspects to informal institutions involves identifying unspoken and accepted norms that may guide decision-making - exposing and questioning the gender status quo. This paper examines the representation of women in the Queensland Parliament, Australia. It places the Queensland experience in historical context, as well as in the national and international context. The study is interesting, given that its gender representation has rocketed from one of the worst performing states in 2012 to one of the best performing in 2015 with further improvements in 2017. The state currently has a re-elected female Premier, a female Deputy Premier and a female-dominated cabinet - in fact, Queensland was the first ministry in Australia to have a majority of women in its Cabinet. However, it is unnecessary to dig far below these headlines to see that this is uncharacteristic of its history: progress towards this current position has been slow and patchy. The paper finds that matters such as the glass ceiling and the use of quotas explain women's recent success in Queensland politics.

Keywords : feminist historical institutional approach, glass ceiling, quotas, women's participation in politics

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