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Dissertation Abstract

Tentative Title of Dissertation:

“How the European Union’s Criteria for Membership Move Public Opinion: Support for Gender Equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina”

Abstract:

The European Union has a problem. The EU’s policy standards ask all applicant states to promote equal treatment between women and men. However, across recent and current candidacies for EU membership, commitment to gender equality has been sporadic and inconsistent. Despite a 2003 gender equality law in Bosnia and Herzegovina, discrimination against women remains an everyday reality, including workplace harassment and unfair hiring. The EU helped change laws successfully, but normative commitments remain weak. In 2012, one thousand women marched in protest of gender inequality in Sarajevo. Do people’s attitudes toward gender equality change when the EU emphasizes this issue as a criterion for membership? This question is important because the EU strives to change states’ policies, but it has been criticized for years for acting against what citizens want. What the EU should hope is that attitudes change when it prescribes policies, because this would enhance its legitimacy and improve support for gender equality.

The enticements of EU membership influence the general population. Individuals perceive benefits from joining the EU such as access to more goods, ease of travel, and funding for infrastructure projects. I argue that EU standards move public opinion, because people believe that meeting the standards leads to membership. I will conduct a survey experiment in Bosnia. I expect that people who perceive benefits from membership will exhibit stronger support for gender equality when they receive political messages saying that gender equality is an EU standard and meeting the standard is necessary for membership.