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Informal Institutions and the Post-Communist State

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Abstract

In their study of the structures that shape political behavior, scholars have emphasized the impact of formal, or "parchment" institutions. These range from constitutions to legislative bodies to regulatory frameworks, each one serving as a set of rules for political actors. In parallel, scholars have examined the importance of their "graffiti" counterparts: informal institutions such as local customs, reputations, and "folkways" that are found outside of the formal halls of power.

Rather than focusing on either set of institutions alone, this project examines the interactions between formal politics and informal institutions—unofficial solutions and unwritten rules—and how these played out in the post-communist states in East Central Europe. Second, while much of the literature has assumed that informal institutions will either become formalized, or persist to undermine formal institutions, I find that under certain competitive conditions informal institutions can reinforce formal rules, encouraging their development and strengthening their power to structure politics.