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Democracy in the Former Soviet Union: An Updated Analysis

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Poster Presentation P31

DEMOCRACY IN THE FORMER SOVIET UNION: AN UPDATED ANALYSIS

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Upon the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the region was flooded with scholars who were itching at the prospects of studying the outcomes of a transition from authoritarian rule with a centrally planned economy to democratic rule with free market capitalism. The initial forecast for democracy varied across the region, but it was presumed that the regimes formed were, in fact, on the road to democracy. However, through this initial survey, it was impossible to provide sure claims regarding the longevity of the institutions put in place shortly after transition, as well as the economic reforms that took place as a result of a transitioning democracy. This presentation puts forth a model that accounts for the social, economic and political factors that explain the current level of democratic consolidation of each of the nations in the Former Soviet Union. These factors will be accounted for at both the time of the transition towards democracy as well as through the policies enacted in the formative years of the regime which shaped the extent to which democracy has been consolidated in this region. In doing this, this presentation attempts to explain the variation seen between predicted levels of democracy at transition and the level of democracy in 2008. The findings of this study indicate that variation between the predicted levels of democracy and the actual levels of democracy today found in Russia, Belarus and Georgia can be accounted for by forces external to the institutional process of democracy-building. The variables that can make up this external force are ethnic conflict, border disputes, the presence of a resource curse and a strong cultural disposition towards authoritarianism.