A META-ANALYSIS OF SOVIET SURVEY RESEARCH METHODS

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This study compares the practices of reporting survey results on nationality issues and interethnic relations in the Former Soviet Union. No attempt is made, nor intended, to represent how surveys in the FSU are conducted as a whole across organizations or topics. Quality, ethics of data collection, and survey practice are specific to individual organizations and their staff. Our concern in this study is to glean information about the status of nationalities from surveys published in the Soviet Union between 1988-1991. No systematic attempt at gathering all possible surveys on this topic was made since this was not feasible in the Soviet pre-Coup context. Data are derived from internal research reports of the conducting organizations which are more detailed and better documented than journal articles.

The value of comparative research lies in testing the historical, spatiotemporal limits of theoretical generalizations and specifying a universal model of social behavior. International surveys, as those of the Eurobarometer and US Information Agency, which examined cultural variations in the definition of democracy, have made major contributions to the theory of cross-cultural research. [1] There is a need, as well, for methodological studies elucidating the problems of cross-cultural research. A central problem in drawing cultural comparisons is the nonequivalence of concepts, but an equivalence of research methods used to examine concepts, such as, whether a vote in Russia means the same as a vote in America.

Cross-cultural research focuses attention on theory construction, conceptual clarity and the suitability of applying equivalent methods across cultures, thus making untenable the assumption of cultural homogeneity and conceptual validity which underlies standardized indicators, operational definitions and the meta-analysis of single society studies. Probability theory, hypotheses testing and derivation of sampling estimates, however, are universally applicable. Insofar as meta-analysis is a validation technique, which relies upon individual statistics, it is well suited for establishing the consistency of a cross-cultural relation by compiling statistics derived under many different research conditions. [2]

The requirements for testing statistical estimates in meta-analysis call for the quantification of correlations, regression coefficients, probability levels, effect size, and so forth. Meta-analysis is useful in examining the measures of various research methods and estimating the accuracy of Type II errors, such as accepting inferences from spurious survey results. Meta-analysis has been limited in cross-cultural modeling by a latent assumption of universalism of concepts and indicators. Generating theoretical explanations grounded in specific culturally-based concepts is a key methodological challenge faced by a comparative meta-analyst of cross-cultural surveys.

A formal meta-analysis is not possible of Soviet survey results since most report only percentages, often without a referent denominator, and as a whole, do not report effect sizes. This compilation of "Soviet" surveys is a meta-analysis only insofar as meta-analysis is a comparative method. This study is concerned with the practice of reporting results and the inferences based upon these results rather than with the statistical estimates derived from surveys. [3]

The utility of surveys and polls may roughly be said to vary with the purposes and goals of the researcher: the MODELERS test theory in surveys and the DESCRIBERS gather information in polls.[4] Meta-analysis is useful as a technique of combining statistical results, for MODELERS, to clarify conceptual relations and for DESCRIBERS, to predict the prevalence of relations. The criteria for reporting results also varies among modelers and describers in specifying the degree of scientific vs. entertaining information provided by polls and surveys. The level of scientific credibility in both polls and surveys, however, is subject to standards of acceptable research practice. Credibility depends not only on how the research was conducted with respect to issues of internal and external validity, but how results are reported and interpreted; and subsequently used.

The recent surge since 1988 in the publication of opinion polls from the Former Soviet Union has provided information often cited as a credible source by the American press and academic community. The governments of the Newly Independent States have turned to surveys and polls as a means of ascertaining and predicting the flow of current events, and as a rationale for public policy. The prevalence of polls in a country has often been cited as an indicator of the extant level of democracy and freedom to voice one's opinions. Government responsiveness to public opinion has often been equated with an increased responsiveness to a potential electorate.

Poll content may also serve as an indicator of which issues are a priority for public decision-makers, who are consumers of poll results. A series of surveys on interethnic and nationality conflicts were conducted in the Soviet Union by various government and commercial organization before the dissolution of the Union. Interethnic conflict in the FSU has been posited as a primary explanation for the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the August Coup.[5] Nationality issues, refugee resettlement costs, national security and loss of life, property, and productivity have dominated international concern over the political stability of the center in Moscow.

The past famine for analytical data has turned into a feast of generalizations concerning events and developments in the 15 Republics of the Newly Independent States, especially in the area of interethnic conflict. Many "Soviet" polls assert a variety of causal relationships, descriptions of attitudes and political opinion. However, there is little empirical evidence to suggest that assertions are well documented, and some political, ethnic and nationality stereotypes have become accepted as scientific fact, buttressed by poll results. Most Soviet surveys claim to be descriptive, few test any models. The predominant goals of the surveys cited in this study are to provide information for government decision-makers on various nationality and interethnic issues. [6]

Scientific credibility and scope of inferences possible from "Soviet" survey results are often taken for granted but depend upon the level of internal validity (the theory testing of causal models) and external validity (the description of population parameters). A guide of 20 questions outlining essential elements of reporting scientific validity was developed by the National Council on Public Polls to help journalists decide whether or not to publish poll results. An adapted version of these basic questions may serve as a useful guide to classify total survey error and compare the interpretability and utility of "Soviet" survey results. (FIG 1).

The sources of total survey error affect the scope of drawing inferences from survey data: to the population as a whole, to a specific group, or to causal relations in a model. Modelers of causal relations must address threats to internal validity through research design. Describers of population parameters must address the level of generalization across persons, settings, and temporal periods, taking into consideration the problem of interaction which specifies the level that a relationship can hold for a specific group, rather than the population as a whole. The adjustments to the extensiveness of theoretical generalizations must be articulated and restricted to what the sampling design permits between the frame and the target population.

FIG 1:CRITERIA FOR REPORTING POLL RESULTS [7] (CITED IN SURVEYS N=11)

- who did the poll 11
- why was the poll done and who paid for it 11
- when was it done 11
- number of respondents interviewed 10
- selection of respondents 5
- what were the target population, sampling frame, and sampling unit: (social groups, geographic regions, nations, eligible voters, registered voters, all those voting) 1
- reporting results based on subgroups or total sample: (i.e., which denominator is used in calculations) 1
- interview mode: face-to-face, mail, telephone, convenience (i.e., dial-in, mail-in, etc.) 3
- exact wording of questions asked 3
- question order, format and response categories 0
- any construction of scales or instruments 1
- specification of margin of error or CI 0

- sources of total survey error or accuracy (how close to true value and stability over replications): mean square error = bias (constant) + variance (precision) 0
  - ♦ systematic effect on results: 0
    - measurement bias 0
      - interviewer effect
      - mode effect
      - instrument effect (translations)
      - response effect
    - bias of nonobservation 0
      - frame noncoverage error of unequal probability of respondent selection into frame
      - unit and item nonresponse error of unequal collection of respondent data within frame
      - sampling bias of statistic calculated only on subset (subgroup) in sample
  - ♦ nonsystematic decrease in statistical significance or confidence level 0
    - measurement variance 0
      - response variance among respondents over replications
      - correlated response variance between interviewers over replications
    - variance in nonobservation 0
      - frame coverage variance of repeated samples
      - unit and item nonresponse of repeated trials
      - sampling error of repeated samples

By and large, those Soviet surveys, which are reported here, provide descriptive information on population groups based on frames designed for convenience rather than scientific validity.[5]

The criteria for reporting poll results represent at least the minimum information necessary for evaluating the methodological context and quality of reported data. Only the first four criteria were reported consistently by the Soviet surveys. Any discussion of the margin of error or sources of total survey error was entirely missing in these studies. The one survey which specified the relation between population, frame, and sampling distribution mentioned that the ethnic subgroups were chosen from an address list by interviewers based on a quota of ethnic sounding surnames. One survey gave the specific denominators of subgroup percentages, but attributed attitudes to an ethnic group as a whole, based on samples of less than 100 respondents. Only three surveys specified the interview mode, two of which were by telephone. Singularly, the surveys commissioned by the Ministry of Defense and the Congress of the Russian Federation provided the exact wording of several questions.

Central administrative ministries were primarily responsible for subcontracting to ancillary government agencies to carry out survey research, obtaining current data for the frequent policy revisions so characteristic of Perestroika. But the government organs did not use surveys as a means for testing causal models, continuing rather an established trend of using empirical data to argue for the justification of ideology as the theoretical explanation for current events and social relations, as well as for the manipulation of

TABLE 1: POOLED SURVEY RESULTS (N=13):

WHO DID THE POLL:

- All-Union Center for Public Opinion Research (VsioM)
- Universities (Irkutsk, Gorky, Nizhni-Novgorod, Moscow,etc)
- Military-Political Academy of Lenin and the USSR State Committee on Public Education
- Research Laboratory on Problems of Management and Personnel, USSR Academy of Sciences of the Ministry of Interior
- Research Laboratory on Problems of Management and Personnel, USSR Academy of Sciences of Ministry of Interior and Institute of Sociology, USSR Academy of Sciences

WHO PAID FOR THE POLL:

- All-Union Center for Public Opinion Research on Socioeconomic Issues (VsIOM)
- Ministry of Education/Central Committee CPSU
- Subcommittee on Public Opinion, Supreme Soviet, Congress of People's Deputies of Russia
- Ministry of Education/Ministry of Defense
- Ministry of the Interior/Law Enforcement

WHEN WAS THE POLL DONE:

	1991	1990	1989	1988
April-June	3			
November-December		3		
January-June		4		
February-May			2	
August				1

WHY WERE POLLS DONE:

- ● Quality of Life
- satisfaction with life including social bonds and interethnic ties
- ● Political Attitudes
- student participation in demonstrations for national sovereignty
- monitor progress of the first five years of Perestroika
- attitudes of military students and future officers
- attitudes towards defending the central Union
- attitudes toward military as social institution
- attitudes towards the use of military in domestic interethnic conflicts among police, army, and indigenous population
- ● Ethnic Stereotypes
- attitudes towards ethnic stereotypes
- patterns of ethnic self-awareness and identification with nationality
- attitudes toward Russians living in other Republics after declaration of Russian sovereignty
- interethnic relations within the Ministry of the Interior staff
- interethnic relations between police, soldiers, Ministry of the Interior and indigenous nationalities
- ● Refugee Problem
- monitoring of mass demonstrations of refugees in Moscow
- factors in forced migrations of nationalities due to interethnic conflicts
- monitoring cost of welfare aid to refugees
- monitoring public support before declaring extraordinary situation in Nagorno-Karabakh
- monitoring support after the deployment of armed forces to Nagorno-Karabakh among the police, army soldiers, and indigenous nationalities
- attitudes of indigenous population concerning independence of Tatarstan from Russia

domestic and international public opinion.

Current relations between Russia and other Independent States are couched in the past social bonds described by these surveys. Future relations will be influenced by a more accurate representation of the dynamic of ethnic interaction and the sociopolitical structure of nationalism, clarifying the extent to which ethnicity is differentiated from, yet an integral political component of nationalism. The indicators and questions, used as the operational conceptions of nationalism in these surveys, are valuable in ascertaining the direction of research paradigms, as well as policy formation.

One set of surveys is concerned specifically with nationalist attitudes, first, towards Russians by other nationalities and secondly, towards nationalities inside the Republics of Armenia, Azerbaidjan, Kazakhstan, Georgia, and Latvia. These surveys were contracted by government policy makers: the Russian Parliament wanted an idea of how Russians are perceived in other Republics, and the Union Ministry of Interior wanted to consider various options for maintaining social order, given a general lack of understanding the dynamics of ethnic tension by the staff of the police force within Republics.

A second set of surveys concerns general quality of life issues among nationalities, such as satisfaction with life as a whole; with one's job; with one's social contacts such as friends and family; with the degree of social freedom, personal security, leisure pursuits, housing; nutrition; and with the state of the environment. Dissatisfaction on either a personal or group level is one basis for social conflict, and the differential distribution of the quality of life among nationalities is further cause for ethnic tension.

A third set of surveys concerns the State Committee on Public Education, which undertook several large-scale probability surveys of postsecondary school students in the tumultous years of early Perestroika. Several surveys, conducted in 1988-1989, investigated students' views towards democratization and nationalism. The early 1988 student polls conducted by the State Committee on Public Education were clearly formulated as attempts to move onto the bandwagon of Gorbachev's orientation towards Glasnost. One State Committee survey purports to measure the distribution and structure of Russian nationalism and ethnic prejudice during a crucial period for the newly sovereign Russian Federation, planning its first popular presidential election. This survey was one of the few to be conducted on this topic before Eltsin's election as President of the Russian Federation in June, 1991.

These surveys lack the methodological and sampling information necessary to draw conclusive generalizations about population groups and to assess the value of the data obtained. However, it is interesting to note that, although the measured concepts of nationalism, for example, are not explicitly defined, implicitly, the survey questions subsume a model of nationalism. Making explicit which models of nationalism are prevalent among students, and

TABLE 2: SURVEY SAMPLE SIZES AND FRAMES

- "National Stereotypes of Russians Among Students and Instructors"
  - target population - All-Union students and instructors in higher educational institutions
    inferences made to all students and all instructors in the Union; lacks demographic sample description
  - total n= 2175; students= 1468 instructors= 707
  - multi-stage area sample of universities in republics, without specification of selection method
- "Political Stereotypes Among Students and Instructors in Higher Education"
  - target population - students, instructors in higher educational institutions; inferences to all students, instructors
  - total n= 3070; students= 1800 instructors= 1270
  - multi-stage area with random selection; lacks demographic sample description
    stage 1-stratified selection of higher ed inst by 8 Republics (Belorussia, Ukraine, Moldova, Lithuania, Armenia, Tadzhikistan, Kirghizia, Kazakhstan) and type of institution; stage 2-individual within social science departments
- "Students' Attitudes Toward Socialism, Nationalism, and Perestroika"
  - target population - All-Union students and instructors in higher educational institutions; lacks demographic sample description; inferences made to all students and instructors in Union, within Republics, by nationality
  - no sample size specified; a series of two All-Union, regional samples without frame specification

- "Army and Society"
  - target population - military officers, soldiers and students; inference to students of higher education and all youth
  - total n=3090 (no other specifications of subgroup size)
  - multi-stage probability; lacks demographic sample description

stage 1- Republics (no specification which Republics selected)
stage 2 - 56 higher educational institutions, including military academies within Republic, and departments within educational institution (no specification which departments selected); 30 army posts and ministry of defense divisions (no specification of location)
stage 3- random selection of students and military cadets; no specification of selection methods of soldiers

● "The Problems of the Quality of Life in the Eyes of the Population"
•target population - All-Union; inferences made to nationalities as a whole and within Republics
• total n= 3161; Russia= 1341 Estonia= 622 Kazakhstan= 600 Uzbekistan= 598
•3-stage republic area stratified cluster sample; no size comparisons between sample and frame
stage 1- 4 Republics and 7 regional areas; stage 2- 52 population centers selected in regional areas with probability proportional to size of population center by sex and age; lacks sample description
stage 3- systematic selection of individuals by age and sex from address and electoral files

● "Attitudes Towards Russians in the Union Republics"
•target population-Russians residing outside Russia; inference made to urban adults ≥16 yrs within a nationality
•total n= 2000; Urban/Rural Russians= 1000 Urban/Rural NonRussians= 1000
urban areas= 882: Estonia, Tallinn= 80; Latvia, Riga= 80; Kazakhstan, Alma-Ata= 116; Western Ukraine, Lvov= 100; Uzbekistan,Tashkent= 120; Kyrgyzstan, Frunze=120; Azerbaijan, Baku= 120; Tajikistan, Dushanbe=120; Georgia, Tbilisi= 106; peripheral areas= 758; Tartu= 120; Elgava= 120; Ushtobe= 842; Khachmas= 80; Denau= 80; Rybach'e= 80; Nurek= 80; Kutaisi= 94; North Caucausus, Nal'chik=100
• multi-stage area representative sample; lacks demographic sample description
stage 1- selection of Republics in which Russian population is comparable in size to the indigenous population
stage 2- selection of urban populations only since few Russians live in rural areas; selection of metropolitan areas by controlled, probability proportionate to size of population in metropolitan area
stage 3- controlled systematic sampling from address and voting lists of sex-age-ethnic quotas
stage 4-determination of nationality from sound of surname (no other procedure specified)
stage 5- quotas set at equal number of age-sex groups in each nationality; interviewer discretion in respondent selection from a provisional 60% reserve of names for supplementation of sex-age-ethnic quotas; interviewer discretion in using indigenous language questionnaire or questionnaire in Russian

● "Sovereignty of Tatarstan"
•target population - Russians and Tatars in Republic; inference to all Tatars and Russians within Tatarstan
•total n=1115; representative sample of Russians and Tatars in urban Tatarstan
•same selection methods as specified in the "Attitudes toward Russians" survey

● "Interethnic Conflicts in the Nation and the Problem of Securing Social Order"
•target population - Ministry of Interior staff; inference made to indigenous population of Republic and subgroups
• total n=2740; Ministry of Interior Administrators=380 Police staff =1220 Civilians=1140
Kazakhstan - admin=140 staff=380 civilians=400; Georgia - admin=140 staff=380 civilians=400;
Latvia- admin=140 staff=380 civilians=400
•multi-stage representative sample; stage 1 - selection of Kazakhstan, Georgia, Latvia; stage 2 - selection of police managers, police staff, and indigenous citizens; lacks demographic sample description
● "Forced Migration of the Population: Tendencies and Consequences"
•target population - refugees; inferences made to refugees in general; lacks demographic sample description
•total n=3000; area sample of Erevan, Armenia; Donetsk, Ukraine; Prohladniy, Kabardino-Bulgaria; Rostov-on-the-Don, Stavropol', Krasnodar, Voronezh; no specification of subgroup size

● "Armenia-Azerbaidjan Conflict: Prognosis and Regulation"
•target population - all-union population; inferences made to Union population; lacks sample desciption
•total n=2501; area sample of cities: Moscow, Irkutsk, Omsk, Krasnoyarsk, Tumen', Chite, Kemerovo, Gor'kom, Barnaul, Novosibirsk, Ulan-Ude
● "Armenia-Azerbaidjan Conflict: Continuation"

- target population - indigenous nationalities in Azerbaijan and Armenia; inferences to nationalities in Republics
- total n=1945; indigenous population n=1010 police =795 soldiers=140
- multi-stage sample; stage 1 - urban areas of Baku and Erevan; stage 2 - indigenous nationality, police and army units stationed in Azerbaijan; lacks demographic sample description

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which are transmitted by postsecondary school instructors, is instrumental in differentiating between various stereotypes of nationalism and which group tends to manifest a specific stereotype as opposed to nationalism. The "hard" data provided by these surveys may be methodologically and conceptually "soft", nonetheless valuable in describing a theoretical construct of nationalism disseminated by the State Committee as an influential paradigm within the postsecondary educational system.

Survey indicators examined ethnic stereotypes of the Russian people by Russians themselves as well as other nationalities within the 15 republics. Several indicators, which were constructed to measure nationalism, included variables concerning ethnic preferences for a spouse; the official recognition of a national language; acceptability of quotas based on nationality for school enrollment and employment practices; participation in demonstrations; level of being versed in the history of one's own ethnic and cultural group; psychological and emotional attributes of one ethnic group made by another; religiosity; family structure. Respondents were compared on these indicators across Republics, as well as autonomous regions within the Russian Federation. The respondents' socioeconomic status or relationship to the *nomenklatura* were omitted as explanatory variables in analyzing the spread of scores on indicators. Although comparative generalizations to entire ethnic groups were made by the authors, no consistent attempt was made to report group subsample sizes, marginals, factor analytic derivation of indicator construct validity and reliability, correlation or regression coefficients, confidence intervals, probability, or significance levels. This obviates the standard practice of reporting survey results.

Given the lack of empirical specificity, it is therefore that much more striking that similar indicators of nationalism were used during the same period of time in a variety of independently conducted surveys, reflecting the paradigms prevalent in the research community, rather than an objective social condition. The array of indicators were used as predictive measures of interethnic conflict among nationalities. Nationalism has defied being confined in a statistical operational definition, even now - a time when it has assumed global proportions as a social problem. The empirical description of such a complex phenomenon by surveys conducted in the Former Soviet Union has led to the preliminary differentiation of latent stereotypes and ethnic prejudice from manifest nationalism.

These "Soviet" surveys neglect to explicitly propose a dynamic model of stereotype formation, often slipping into aggregation bias and theoretical confusion between micro, attitudinal, and macro, group, levels of analysis - between psychological and sociological perspectives. Although the relation between language and concepts is of paramount concern in developing valid questions in cross-cultural surveys, a hiatus in addressing this issue still persists. The dilemma of semantic, functional, and conceptual equivalence of indicators across nationalities remains the central problem for comparative meta-analysis. The significance of these social surveys lies in the empirical illustration hinting at the transformation of attitudes, values, and social relations of the research community and emergent national elites in Russia and other successor states of the Former Soviet Union.

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[7] adapted from Twenty Questions a Journalist Should Ask About Poll Results by Sheldon Gawiser and G.Evans Witt, Cofounders of the Associated Press/NBC News Poll; and from Robert M. Groves, ibid : 10.