TITLE: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN THE USSR
(Technical Report)

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SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN THE USSR

by Michael Swafford

SUMMARY

Face-to-face interviews on all aspects of social stratification were administered to a modified probability sample of 2,510 adults in the European USSR: the RSFSR west of the Urals, the Ukraine, Byelorussia, Moldavia, and the Baltic (represented by Lithuania). The interviews, conducted by interviewers who underwent special training, lasted approximately 130 minutes on the average, yielding 750 variables for each respondent. The response rate was 84%. The data have been transmitted to the United States, and should be available for distribution in September 1992, together with one or more reports of research findings.
Paragraphs 2 and 3 of the contract's "Statement of Work" require 1) a ten-page technical report, "including a review of activities undertaken, results achieved and plans for future related efforts"; and 2) a "statement of the manner in which the database to be developed during the project will be make accessible to other scholars," together with material documenting the content of the database.

Review of the Original Proposal

The original proposal sought "to take advantage of remarkable developments in Soviet survey research during the past year (1989) to conduct a large-scale high-quality survey on social stratification in the Soviet Union. The seventy-minute face-to-face interviews would cover six topics related to stratification: 1) perceptions of social status; 2) the actual level of material inequality; 3) Soviet citizens’ perceptions of the level of inequality; 4) citizens’ evaluations of which categories of people get more or less than a fair share of material goods, and their opinions on what would be fair; 5) social mobility; and 6) lifestyle and other behavioral correlates of social standing. Special attention would be given to the function of cooperatives and to black-market activity. The survey, then, would bear on several of NCSEER’s priority topics: group interests; repercussions of social diversity; nationality; reform efforts; and the second economy."
"Probability samples in fifteen locations would be drawn; fieldwork would be conducted by one of the most reputable Soviet survey organizations. My Fulbright Award for lecturing on survey methods and statistics in the Institute of Sociology will put me in an ideal location to identify the best Soviet subcontractor."

"Full payment to the subcontractor would be based on the deposit of the data in the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research. If this proves impossible despite newly-adopted measures for the export of data, partial payment to the subcontractor would be allowed if the data were made fully available to Western researchers in the USSR."

Activities Undertaken

My efforts to locate a collaborator worked out even better than I expected. I spent the first seven months of 1990 lecturing to practicing sociologists on statistical analysis and computers (see the chronology in Chart 1). In Moscow, these lectures in the Institute of Sociology were attended by workers from the Institute, the All-Union Center for the Study of Public Opinion, the Academy of Social Sciences of the Central Committee, the (then) Higher Komsomol School, the Moscow Energy Institute, and Moscow State University. I gained unexpected entree to several of these institutions. Auditors invited me to use their data in illustrating techniques during the course, and in the end gave me data; I thereby gained insight into their methods.

On this basis, I avoided many pitfalls, and I did not choose the collaborators whom I expected to pick at the outset, even though they were willing. I found a group headed by Genady Denisovsky, Paulina Kozyreva, and Michael Kosolapov and the Institute of
Sociology—a group which has been conducting survey research on themes very similar to mine for fifteen years. They have also been using probability samples of areas, albeit small ones, while most Soviet sociologists have settled for samples of people affiliated with certain institutions. Over the years, they have developed a network of serious collaborators around the Soviet Union, many who earned Candidate degrees under their tutelage. Thus, I found reliable, intellectually stimulating partners rather than a contractor.

I am pleased to report that we were able to organize a survey even more ambitious than the one described above. I originally considered a probability sample of a large region to be too ambitious to promise and therefore proposed to cover fifteen cities and villages in four republics, with special attention devoted to rural-urban differences in two of the four republics. Instead, we were able to draw a probability sample representing almost all the European part of the country; the RSFSR west of the Urals, Ukraine, Moldavia, and the Baltic. We employed ninety-three sampling points rather than the fifteen originally

1 Actually, I shared the substantive part of my proposal with my Soviet Colleagues, but not the budget or the details on sampling reviewed in this paragraph. I retained the modest sample promised in the proposal as a fallback position in case they were unable to fulfill the more ambitious plan outlined here.

2 Upon determining that a large-scale probability sample would be feasible, I submitted a mid-year report explaining that I wanted to give up the oblasts in Uzbekistan and Transcaucasia because a probability sample of the entire European region would be considered far more valuable than the sample offered in the original proposal. Note that only Lithuania fell into the sample from the Baltic region; since Estonia and Latvia do differ from Lithuania, they are not yet properly represented. Incidentally, as regards the Baltic and other republics declaring independence, I of course recognize that the borders of the USSR are subject to question now, and that they may well change further during the course of the proposed research. Nevertheless, I consider it important to study all people under direct rule of the Soviet regime for decades. In this proposal, the terms "country," "USSR," and "Soviet Union" should be understood to denote the territory under direct control of the Soviet regime as of 1989.
proposed. Thus, although the original proposal offered something unique in the Soviet Union, the survey we conducted will be much more valuable.

The duration of the interviews was also greater than projected; 130 minutes rather than 70, on the average. Our decision to lengthen the interview was based on two pilot studies in which even pensioners were able and willing to give cogent answers until the end of the interview, no doubt because the interview contained interesting questions of considerable variety.

Incidentally, though I originally proposed merely to utilize questions from existing questionnaires to minimize the need for questionnaire development, we in fact started from scratch, debating every word of three drafts over a period of several months. Of course, for purposes of comparability, we used standard items whenever possible. For instance, the items on distributive justice are the same ones used in cross-national research throughout Europe and the United States.

Though the content of the questionnaire was tied closely to the six issues enumerated above, lengthening the questionnaire enhanced the depth and scope of questions we were able to ask respondents—so much so that the content might be compared to that of the General Social Survey in the United States, which is somewhat shorter. The best way to confirm this is to examine the questionnaire delivered to the National Council in five languages (including English). However, Chart 2 (pages 9-11) offers a topical overview of the contents.

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3 The interviews were translated from Russian to Ukrainian, Moldavian, and Lithuanian, then backtranslated, and respondents were given the option of interviews in Russian or in the root language of the republic in which they lived. The English or other languages versions of the questionnaire are available upon request from the National Council for Soviet and East European Research, Tel. (202)387-0168.
Other features of our research warrant mention here, too. My contact with survey organizations while on the Fulbright Award revealed that interviewer training is normally ignored—that interviewers usually break basic rules by interpreting questions for respondents or by changing the wording. I therefore secured permission to arrange for the translation and distribution of the University of Michigan Survey Research Center’s interviewer training manuals. Furthermore, I wrote lectures on interviewing based specifically on our questionnaire; these were delivered in Russian to all twenty-nine field supervisors, who attended three-day training sessions in an old estate outside Moscow that was rented to remove supervisors from distractions. Further, the supervisors were given a nine-point curriculum and instructed on how to train interviewers under their supervision. To insure consistency, they were given tape recorders along with recordings of the lectures they had heard. I am told that this training, though not as extensive as training in the U.S., was the most extensive ever used in Soviet sociological research.

Another innovation was the introduction of rigorous quality control in coding and data entry. At my insistence, data are being entered twice to catch data-entry errors, and a full program of data cleaning has been instituted to check for range and branching errors. Again, I have been told that my demands far exceed the Soviet norm—that nobody ever enters data twice to check for inconsistencies.

In closing this description of the work we have completed to date, I want to emphasize the role of my Soviet collaborators, who succeeded admirably in fielding the survey despite the Soviet administrative jungle, pervasive shortages of paper and ink, monetary instability which tripled the cost of interviewers and transportation during the
course of fieldwork, and other peculiarities of the Soviet landscape such as the lack of sufficient telephones and transportation facilities.

*Plans for Data Distribution*

The data were transmitted to the United States on June 14, and as promised, will be available to all scholars on schedule (September, 1992) at the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR). By March, 1992 the Soviets will have developed full documentation under my direction, including indexes, frequency distributions, coding manuals, etc. For the sake of scholars who do not read Russian, the English translation of the questionnaire will also be made available.

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4 I have insisted that the data be made available to all Soviet sociologists, too. In the USSR, data are virtually never shared. We hope to set an example with these data.
Chart 1: Calendar of Activities Undertaken

1990

January-July  While living in the Soviet Union under a Fulbright Award, sought Soviet collaborators and reached a tentative agreement with three at the Institute of Sociology.

August-September  Submitted draft questions to my collaborators after reviewing questionnaires they had previously used in the Soviet Union as well as well-known Western questionnaires.

September-October  Spent six weeks in Moscow laying the groundwork for the study, including preliminary work on sampling and questionnaire.

1991

January-February  Spent six weeks in Moscow working through several drafts of the questionnaire and conducting two pilot studies.

March  While I was in Nashville, the sample was drawn; also, the questionnaires were translated into three other languages, then backtranslated. In Nashville, I prepared interviewer training materials.

April-May  Spent six weeks in the USSR. Oversaw interviewer training. Fieldwork began on April 4 and finished on May 25.

May-June  Coding and data cleaning began in my presence and continues to date. Initial data transmitted to me on June 14.

June-September  Coding of open-ended questions will continue. Data management and cleaning will continue at least until March 1992, as will the development of documentation for the data set.

September  Analysis and writing will begin.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>March</td>
<td>Documentation complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>September</td>
<td>Limited access for the research team ends; data will be distributed to the National Council and ICPSR on diskettes, and to Soviets through the Institute of Sociology. One or more research reports will be delivered to the Council.</td>
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Chart 2
Topical Overview of Questionnaire

Respondent

Work history (occupation, dolzhnost, economic sector, control over others and over work process, pay, premiums, perquisites, job-seeking behavior, and satisfaction with work). All these pieces of information were gathered about the major occupation; some were asked about each of the following:

- first job after schooling
- current work
- supplementary work (including work on private plots and in individual labor activity, as well as second jobs)
- last job before retirement
- any other job characteristic of respondent’s career

Schooling, including all forms of special and advanced education

Ethnicity (nationality), including self-identification with one or more nationalities; passport nationality; attitudes towards the recording of nationality in passports. [Except for the question about passport nationality, respondents were always free to list more than one ethnicity in answering these questions.]

Sex and year of birth

Location of residence of birth, completion of general schooling, age 20, and present

Service in armed forces and in wars

Family and Household

Occupation, education, and ethnicity of spouse, grandparents, parents, and (where applicable) siblings and children

Precise structure of current household

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5 Questions were not presented in the order given in this chart, nor were they necessarily presented as blocks in the manner listed in the chart. The chart is not by any means exhaustive.
Chart 2 (continued)

Ownership of and desire to buy some twenty-six items, ranging from vacuum sweepers to dachas; financial ability and inclination to buy these items should they "appear"; wealth

Housing situation in detail

Household expenditures on eight types of goods and services

Structure of household income (i.e. amount from each member), including that from private plots

Respondent behaviour

Participation in referendum and in various political activities

Membership in organizations

Use of mass media

Religious observances

Smoking and drinking

Language: mother-tongue; knowledge of other languages of the USSR; languages spoken in school,, at work, at home, with spouse, parents, children, and friends. [More than one language could be listed for each.]

Labor (see above)

Respondent’s judgements and opinions

Judgements on; a) material well-being, b) prestige, and c) influence of:

1) 16 socio-occupational groups in Soviet society (including collective farmers, unskilled labor [rabochii], skilled labor, cooperative owners, hired hands in cooperatives, pensioners, republican government leaders, republican CPSU leaders, career Army officers, sluhashchyi [non-manual labor in this particular context], intelligentsia, scientists,
teachers, doctors, speculators, pensioners)\(^6\)

2) two or three nationalities [1) Russian, 2) root nationality of the republic in which the interview was conducted [if not Russian], and 3) other nationalities of the republic]

3) respondent (i.e. respondent’s judgement of his or her own well-being, prestige and influence)

Opinions about who receives more or less than they deserve in Soviet society (16 socio-occupational groups, three nationalities, and the respondent)

Principles on which respondent bases judgements of fairness

Judgements on percent of population in poverty; percent who are wealthy; and amount of income needed for a family of three (father, mother, and child) to live a) normally, b) at the edge of poverty, and c) quite well

Confidence in 24 institutions, ranging from courts and media to various political parties

Interest in politics

Opinions about political and economic reform; ecology; preference for various leaders

Attitudes about women’s roles
Religious identification; content of religious beliefs
Self-identification: group or class membership; ethnic identity (see above); social standing
Satisfaction with twelve aspects of life, and with life in general
Self-assessment of health
Fatalism
Locus of control

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\(^6\) I have learned through previous experience that such lists offend people whose favorite group has not been included in the form they would have preferred. We would have preferred to include more groups, but in pilot studies found that longer lists put off respondents. We are also aware that the list of groups seems uneven because it includes both very general and very specific listings. This was done on purpose.