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**ATTITUDES OF RUSSIAN CIVIL SERVANTS ON
PROFESSIONAL AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

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Executive Summary

This paper offers a preliminary analysis of surveys of Russian civil servants that were conducted from May 2002 to May 2003. The questionnaires sought responses on the professional life of civil servants as well as their attitudes on key political issues. The discussion and accompanying tables assess levels of job satisfaction in the civil service; the relative attractiveness of careers in the state sector; perceptions of job security; and the factors that influence the behavior of civil servants. The questionnaire results also illustrate perceptions of center-periphery relations in Russian politics; levels of trust toward politicians and key religious and national groups; and attitudes toward American military involvement in areas that had previously been part of the Soviet sphere of influence.

Introduction

This paper offers a preliminary analysis of surveys of Russian civil servants that were conducted from May 2002 to May 2003.¹ The questionnaires sought responses on the professional life of civil servants as well as their attitudes on key political issues. The discussion and accompanying tables assess levels of job satisfaction in the civil service; the relative attractiveness of careers in the state sector; perceptions of job security; and the factors that influence the behavior of civil servants. The questionnaire results also illustrate perceptions of center-periphery relations in Russian politics; levels of trust toward politicians and key religious and national groups; and attitudes toward American military involvement in areas that had previously been part of the Soviet sphere of influence.

Jobs and Career (Tables 1-5)

As **Table 1** indicates, in most respects Russian civil servants appear satisfied with their jobs. In our traditional understanding, the boss, or *nachal'nik*, in the Russian bureaucracy is seen as a dominant and demanding figure, yet over 70 percent of our respondents expressed satisfaction with their superiors. The high level of satisfaction with the level of independence enjoyed in the workplace also brings into question the image of the overbearing *nachal'nik*.

Confirming a view encountered frequently in the press, the survey reports that civil servants are very dissatisfied with their pay and perks, with almost two-thirds expressing

1. The surveys on which the analysis is based were administered to seven groups of Russian civil servants attending continuing education courses in several cities in European Russia between May 2002 and May 2003. The sample of 150 officials is representative of the Russian civil service in terms of gender and the percentage of ethnic Russians, though it is more heavily weighted toward officials in federal institutions in Moscow and in regional government structures at the expense of personnel in federal territorial agencies and in municipal government. It also underweights the very lowest ranks in the bureaucracy, whose occupants generally perform clerical and other routine tasks. Three-quarters of those questioned had 0-9 persons working under them, fourteen percent supervised 10-19 employees, and the remaining 10 percent had responsibility for 20 or more persons.

The survey was conducted by Professor Mikhail Guboglo and his colleagues at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academic of Sciences. A copy of the original questionnaire is attached.

disappointment with their salaries. One expects, of course, to encounter a certain dissatisfaction with pay levels in almost all organizations, but the gap between this issue and others was wider than might have been anticipated. Although state employees in some sectors have seen significant pay increases in recent years, notably in the area of law enforcement, most civil servants lag badly behind their colleagues in the private sector, with an average base salary (*dolzhnostnoi oklad*) of only 3500 rubles per month. Perks and pay supplements, for everything from time in rank to work with secret documents, brings the total remuneration to over 7500 rubles per month, on average.

One of the most surprising and disturbing findings in **Table 1** is the low level of satisfaction with job security. Less than half of the respondents were satisfied with their job security, and an even smaller percentage of officials were satisfied with personnel policy in their organizations, which covers issues such as appointments, promotion, and firing. The attitude to job security appears to bear out the claims that, despite occupying tenured civil service positions (labeled category “V” jobs in the Russian administrative lexicon), civil servants can be removed without cause.

In some cases, interviews and journalistic accounts tell us, the firings come as a result of politically-motivated reorganizations of Russian state organizations; in other cases, new leadership in an institution simply dismisses personnel directly, which violates legislation on the civil service. More research is needed to determine the scale of this phenomenon, but it clearly represents two challenges to the development of the Russian bureaucracy: the lack of job security undermines the concept of a politically neutral civil service, and it complicates the recruitment of qualified personnel. Already offering relatively low salaries, state organizations cannot afford to neglect job security or they will find it difficult to attract new talent.

Overall, our respondents believed that conditions within the civil service had improved under Putin (see **Table 2**). Asked about the changes in the prestige and productivity of work in the state bureaucracy in the preceding 2-3 years, about half said that the prestige had increased in the period and over 60 percent believed that productivity had improved. Given that there were no apparent reforms in this period that were designed to increase prestige or productivity, it seems likely that the positive responses reflected a more optimistic outlook generally on the political and economic situation in Russia.

In **Table 3**, respondents are asked to assess the importance of a range of factors on their job behavior. Obviously, questions such as this, which require self-reflection about internal motivations, may encourage respondents to offer answers that place them in a favorable light. Thus, the desire to be a professional was seen by 70 percent of those surveyed as significantly influencing their behavior on the job. But even if the high percentage reporting law as an important influence on their professional lives is not an accurate reflection of their actual motivations, it does at least indicate that they regard law as something which *should* play a key role in the behavior of officials.

In the Soviet era, most civil servants found their first jobs in the bureaucracy through the state distribution of cadres (*gosraspredelenie*), which sent new university graduates to work in often inhospitable venues for three years before they were free to seek employment independently. Postcommunist Russia abandoned this program, and therefore state institutions must now rely on the more fickle labor market to supply needed personnel. With the radical changes in the economy in the last decade, career patterns have become less predictable, and in our group of respondents, over three-fifths had work experience elsewhere before joining the civil service. Whereas only 11 percent of our sample had remained in the same institution

throughout their careers, half had changed employment two or three times, and over 20 percent had changed institutions four or more times.

Needing to compete for personnel with the private sector and other segments of the bureaucracy, Russian state institutions are constantly struggling to retain workers. **Table 4** gives some indication of the reasons that civil servants arrived at their current posts. Although pay was an important factor, it was less significant than the prestige or nature of work in the new job. **Table 5** gets at a slightly different issue in career advancement, asking respondents in what sector they would like to work if they wanted to change jobs. The results here are modestly encouraging for the state's ability to retain cadres in the future, in that a quarter were not considering changing jobs, and of those who were, over 40 percent would prefer to remain with the state sector, simply changing branches or levels of government.

The more than 20 percent who found it hard to say where they would go did not appear anxious to seek employment with the main competitor, the private sector, which appealed to over 20 percent of those who were willing to change jobs. These latter data appear to confirm the belief that, whether for good or ill, the public sector in Russia attracts a different kind of worker, who prefers the relative security and independence of state posts to the better paid but more demanding and vulnerable positions in the Russian business world.

Center-Periphery Relations (Table 6)

A central theme of the Putin presidency has been the recentralization of power. During the 1990s, the leaders of Russia's republics and regions encroached mightily on the patronage, budgetary and legislative prerogatives that the center had enjoyed for decades in the Soviet era. However bloated the center may have become under communist rule, this shift in power, as

many observers have noted, did not result from a constitutionally-mandated rearrangement of the Russian political system but rather from a seizure of federal authority by provincial elites.

One of the most obvious elements of this unilateral devolution of authority was the “capture” of territorial federal civil servants—that is, federal personnel working in the 89 republics and regions—by presidents and governors, many of whom sought to establish a form of personalist, authoritarian rule on their territory. With control of the media and of federal officers charged with monitoring elections and law enforcement, some presidents and governors operated with few constraints during the 1990s.

In **Table 6**, we asked the civil servants surveyed to assess the influence that provincial leaders continue to exert over territorial federal civil servants. In spite of the numerous efforts by Putin to reign in provincial elites—such as the formation of seven new federal districts, the reorganization of the provincially-based upper house, and threat to fire governors and disband regional assemblies whose laws and acts did not accord with federal legislation—over three-quarters of the respondents believed that provincial leaders continue to exercise influence over federal officials working in their territories. Whatever the appropriate form of federalism for Russia, none can operate effectively if there is not a clear distinction drawn between the agents of federal and provincial authority.

The Legacy of the Soviet Era (Tables 7-9)

Although the continuities in cadres between the Soviet and post-Soviet eras remain formidable among the Russian political class, by the beginning of the Putin presidency the bureaucracy was rapidly moving away from the Soviet inheritance, at least in demographic terms. Slightly less than a third (44) of the respondents in our survey were 21 years old or

younger at the time of the Soviet Union's collapse, which means that they were likely to have begun full-time employment in the postcommunist era. Sixty percent reported that they had worked in the civil service for 10 years or less; that is, they joined the bureaucracy after the end of the Soviet era.

However, almost one-third of our respondents who had employment experience in the Communist Party, the Komsomol, or Soviet trade unions, and an unusually high percentage of this group found that experience useful or very useful (see **Table 7**). How should those responses be interpreted? It is tempting, of course, to view these positive attitudes toward Soviet institutions as confirmation of the continuing vitality of communist traditions in the postcommunist order. But it seems as likely that this attitude to earlier work in the Soviet era was as much a form of self-legitimation, a desire not to denigrate a life that had been invested in an earlier project. And, no doubt, it was in part a heartfelt defense of the professional qualities of those trained and socialized in a different social order.

In separate interviews conducted with Russian civil servants, many were passionate about the high standards of general and professional education achieved in the Soviet era as well as the value of Soviet administrative experience for postcommunist Russia. Indeed, some saw Soviet administrative professionalism as a kind of high-water mark, which has not yet been reached in the post-Soviet era.

Some of this nostalgia for the old regime is evident in **Tables 8 and 9**, which address the fallout of the Soviet Union's collapse. Fully two-thirds of our respondents believe that the fall of the USSR was harmful, while four percent view it positively and 16 percent somewhat positively. Additional research is needed to uncover what stands behind these responses. For some, the harm will be associated primarily with the disintegration of a single political

community; for others, with the disappearance of communism as a social order that provided discipline and stability; and some will no doubt have found it harmful because it ushered in a period of economic and political turmoil.

The unsettled character of the postcommunist order is illustrated in **Table 9**, which raises questions of identity and loyalty to political community. It is striking that less than half of the respondents believe the Russian Federation to be their *rodina*, or motherland. Fourteen percent—the most nostalgic of the lot—continue to identify instead with the Soviet Union, but more than a quarter consider their republic or city as the political community which they identified as their *rodina*. The latter figures, associating identity with a smaller piece of Russian territory, are particularly curious, given that there exists a term in Russian, *malaia zemlia*, which corresponds to the place where one is born or raised. To apply the term *rodina* to a republic, region, or city illustrates a profound weakness, or even absence, of the idea of loyalty to a Russian state. One may reasonably conclude that trying to develop a sense of *raison d'état* among civil servants who held these views would be immensely difficult.

Perceptions of Democracy and the Future (Tables 10-11)

The discussions about democracy in Russia often center around its institutional or cultural preconditions, or its degree of consolidation, but it is more difficult to find careful explorations of what Russians themselves understand by the term. Asked what was most important in democracy (**Table 10**), our respondents stressed factors that are normally associated with classical liberalism, which is a prerequisite to modern democracy. This reaction suggests an

almost intuitive understanding that political participation means little if it doesn't occur in a context where more primary political values, such as order and individual freedom, are highly developed.

Table 10 shows that more than half of the group believe that legality (*zakonnost'*) is the most important element in democracy. Almost a quarter regard individual freedom as the key to democracy, while less than ten percent view elections and political participation, rendered here as *vlast' naroda*, as the central feature of democracy.² No doubt this lack of association of elections with democracy reflects in part the lack of legitimacy of voting in the Soviet era and the low level of legitimacy that voting enjoys in many areas of Russia today.

Arguably, some of the most encouraging data in this preliminary assessment of the survey of Russian civil servants are contained in **Table 11**. Here one finds a very healthy percentage of respondents, almost 40 percent, who believe that their future depends most on themselves rather than outside forces. In a society whose roots and even recent traditions are collectivist, such a result seems a refreshing recognition of the importance of self-reliance (though, of course, it may also reflect an absence of confidence in public institutions).

Table 11 also provides insights into the civil servants' views of the relative importance of Russian political institutions. Not surprisingly, the presidency towers above the other institutions in importance, mentioned by almost a quarter of the respondents as the key to their future. Parliament, on the other hand, is seen by only one percent of the surveyed officials as the factor on which improvement in their lives most depends. Occupying an intermediary position between the giant and dwarf of Russian politics is the Russian Government (*Pravitel'stvo*) and local authorities. Although these views are not by any means objective indicators of the relative

2. The authors should note that *vlast' naroda* was not their first choice for this category but the consultant in charge of the survey, Mikhail Guboglo, insisted that it was the standard term used in social surveys for elections and political participation.

power of Russian political institutions, they do come from those who understand the operation of the Russian state better than most.

Attitudes on Domestic and International Politics (Tables 12-14)

Tables 12 and 13 assess the level of trust shown by civil servants toward politicians, groups, and institutions in Russia. The political prominence of institutions illustrated in **Table 11** correlated almost perfectly with their trustworthiness (**Table 12**) in the minds of our respondents. Where almost 80 percent of the civil servants surveyed trusted the president, less than 20 percent had similar feelings toward the Duma. This reputational gap is worrying, in our view, because, when combined with the power gap between federal executive and legislative institutions, it removes almost all constraints on presidential authority. This gap between state institutions is exacerbated by the lack of trust in political parties, with none of the three parties listed garnering the trust of over 20 percent of the civil servants questioned.

Although the behavior of the Duma and its parties may not have inspired confidence or trust among the civil servants or the broader population, their dismal showing is due at least in part to the control of the media by pro-presidential forces, who have little interest in increasing popular trust in individuals or institutions not associated with the president.

Table 13 offers evidence that the further one moves away from the individuals and institutions associated with Russia's core nation, the *russkie*, the higher the level of suspicion.³ Such a finding, of course, is commonplace, and the results would not be worth mentioning except that the Americans, who were held in high regard at the end of the Soviet era, have now

3. Among the other groups included in the survey, but not included in the table, were *russkie*, who received a very high trust score.

fallen to the level of a pariah nation. To what extent, however, the respondents were expressing their dissatisfaction with the American government and its policies, rather than with *amerikantsy* as a people (and this was the word used in the questionnaire), is unclear.

Table 14 clearly illustrates that the civil servants questioned were exceedingly critical of American government actions in areas of the world that, until recently, had been within Russia's sphere of influence. US involvement in Afghanistan and Georgia seems only to have deepened the wave of anti-americanism in Russia, which was unleashed in the second half of the 1990s by the conflict in the Balkans.

TABLE 1

Levels of Job Satisfaction

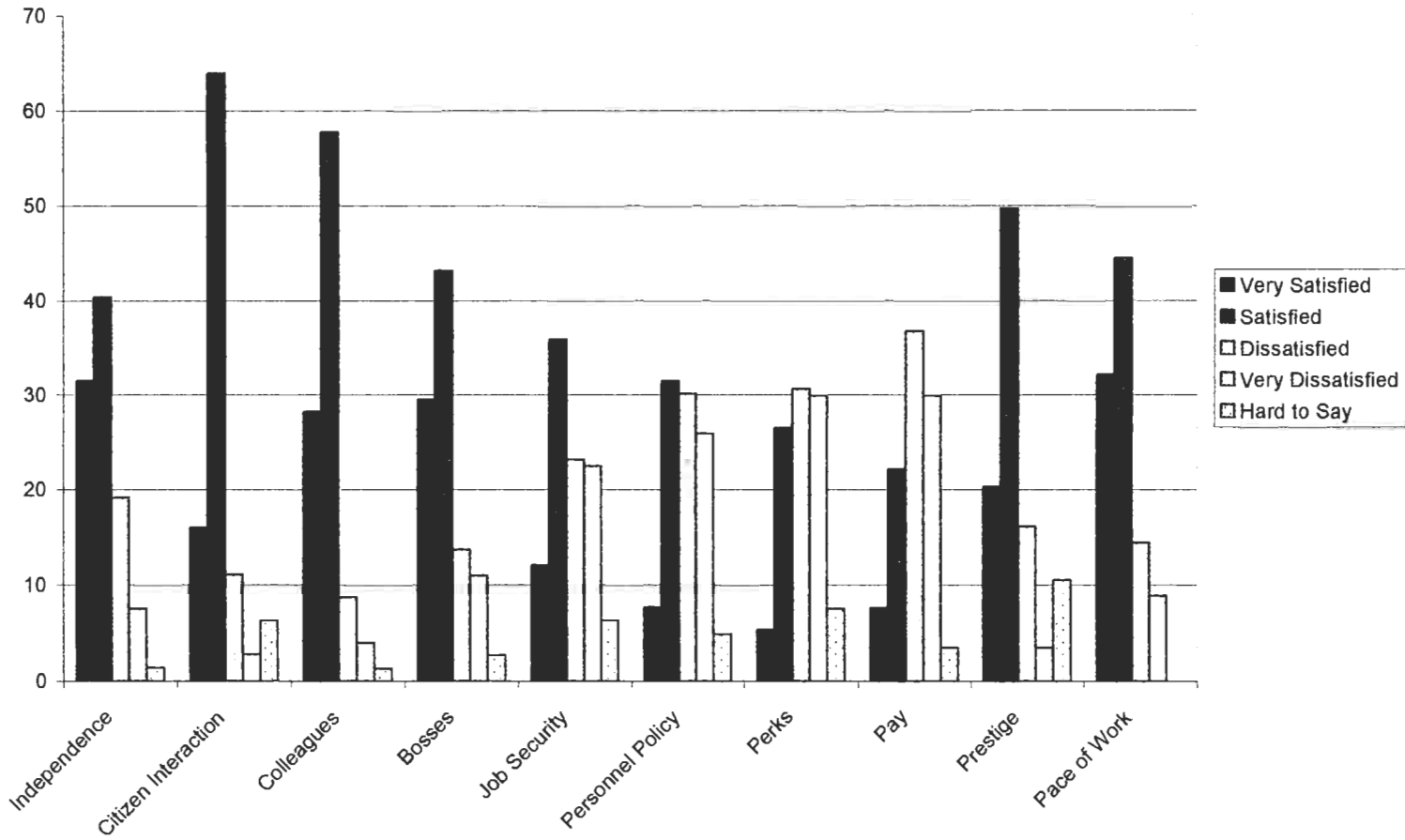


TABLE 2

Perceived change in prestige and productivity of civil service

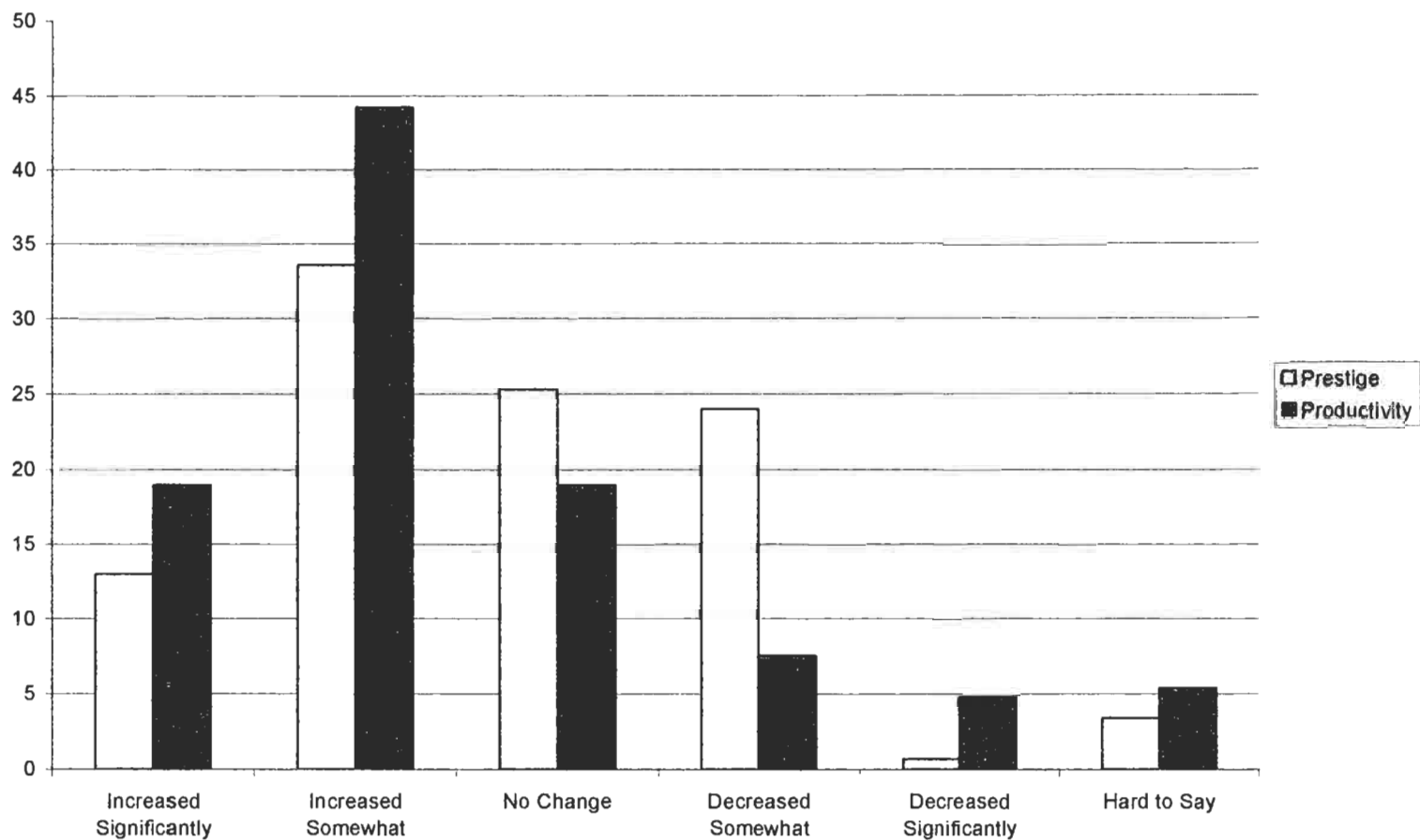


TABLE 3

Concern for which factors motivate your behavior on the job.

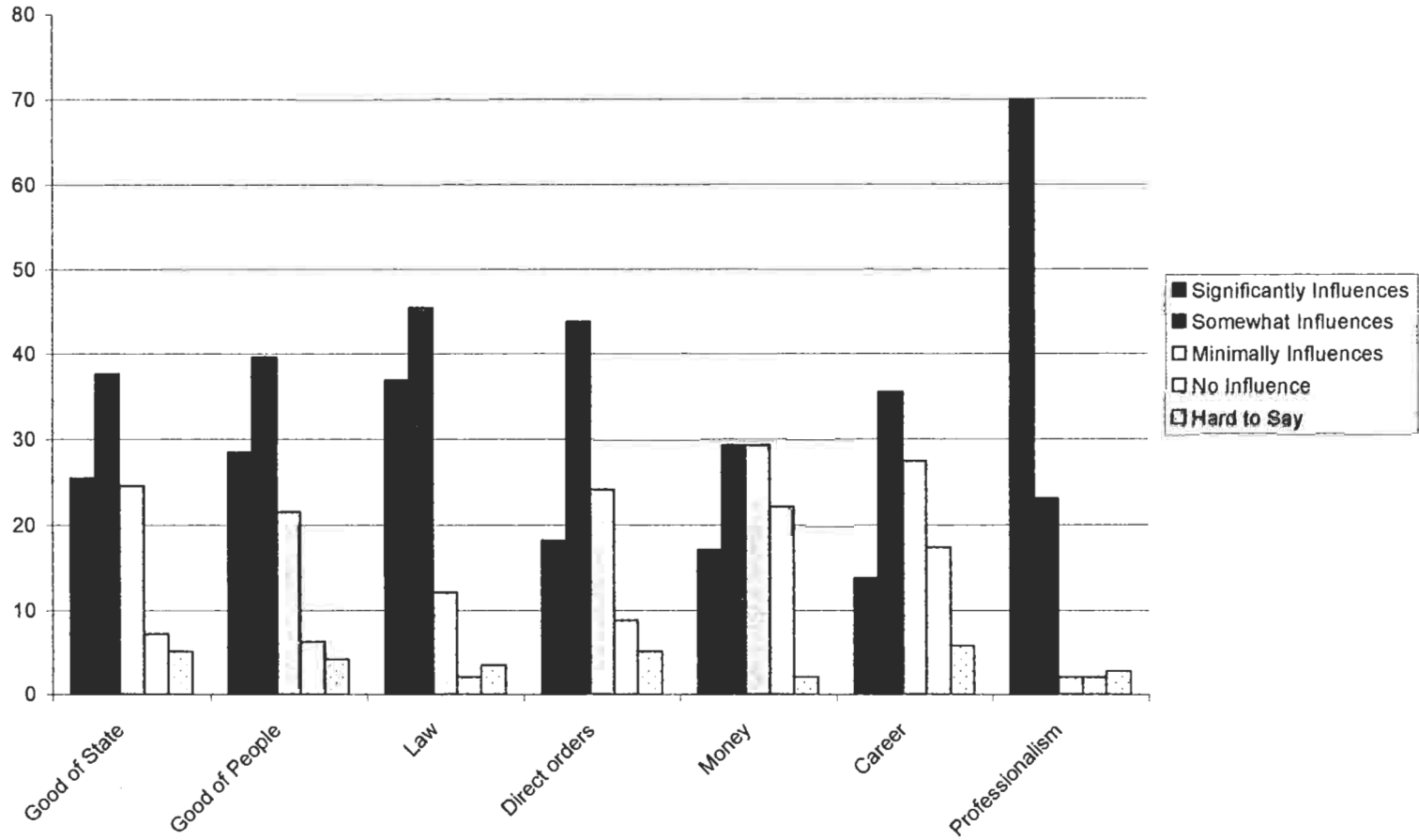


TABLE 4

Reasons for leaving previous job.

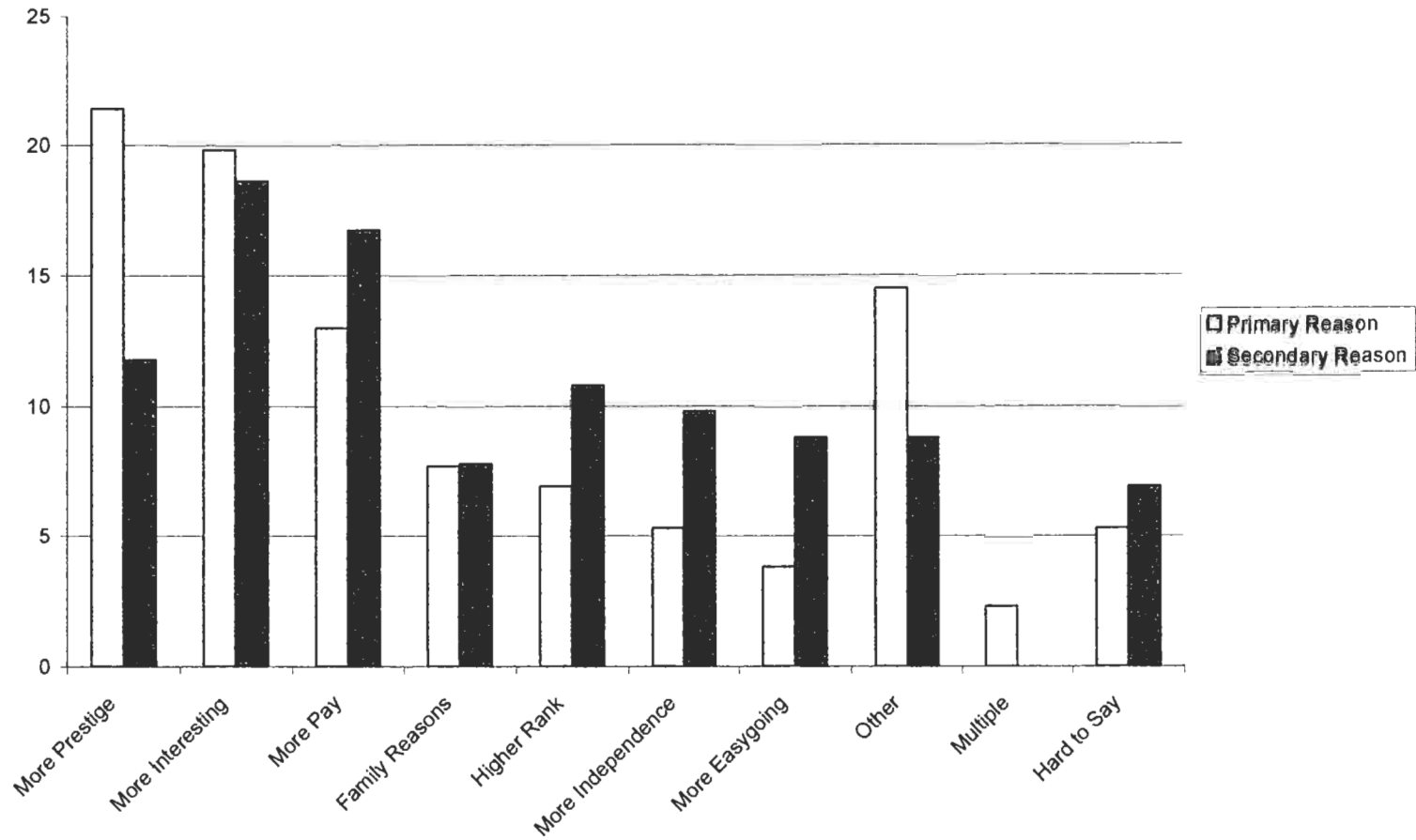


TABLE 5

If you want to change jobs, where would you like to go?

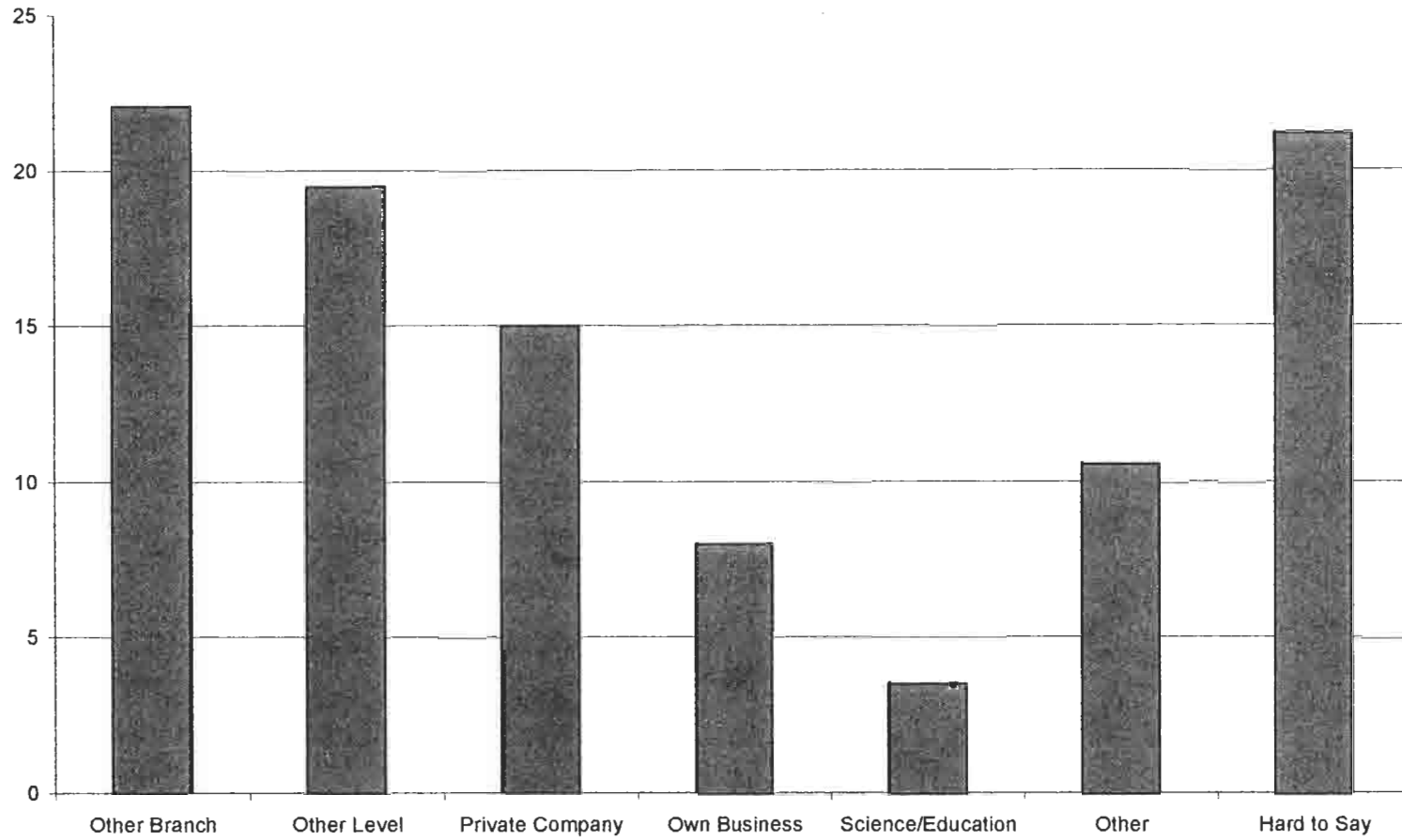


TABLE 6

Perceived influence of provincial leaders on federal civil servants

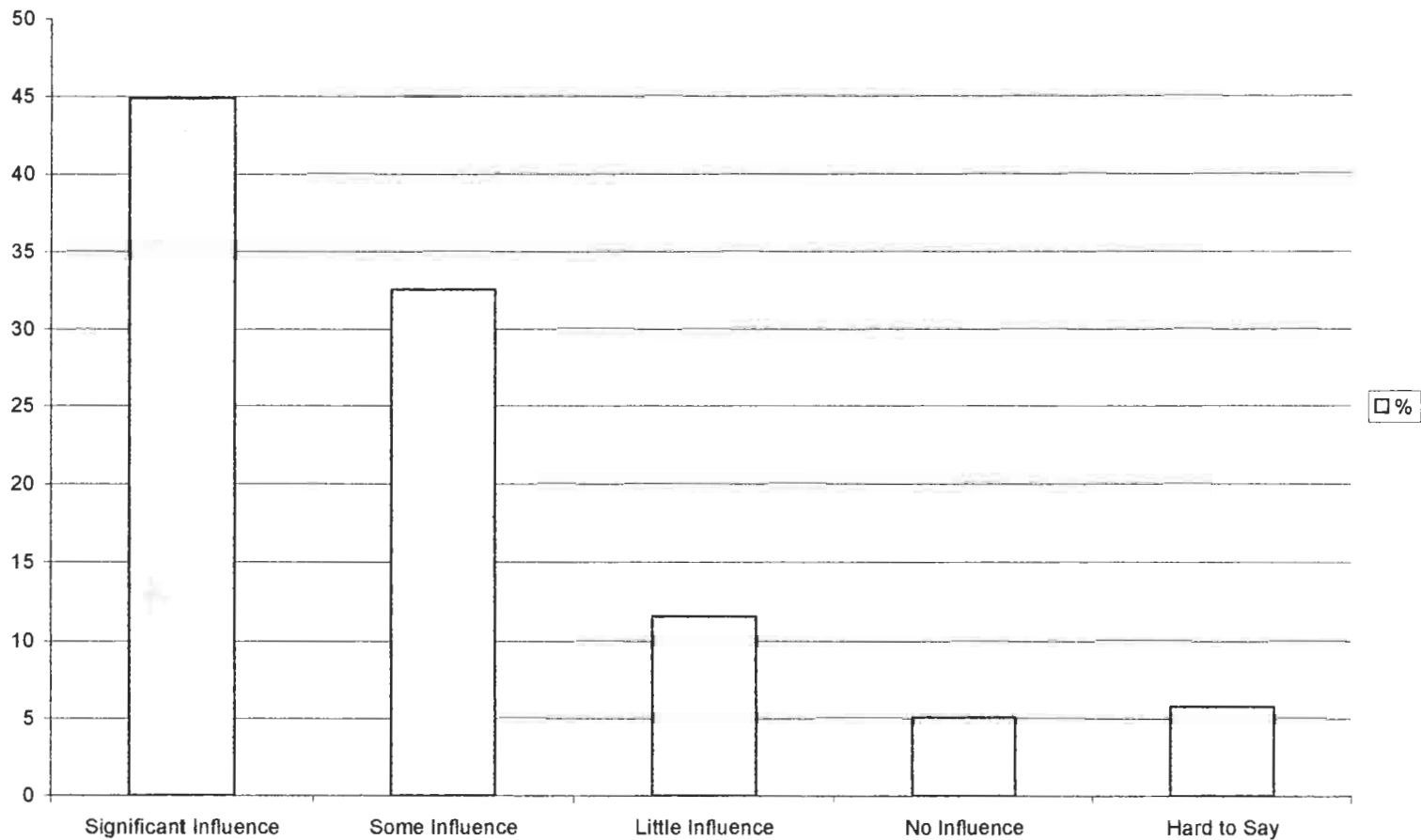


TABLE 7

Did you find your work in Communist Party, Komsomol, or Trade Union bodies useful?

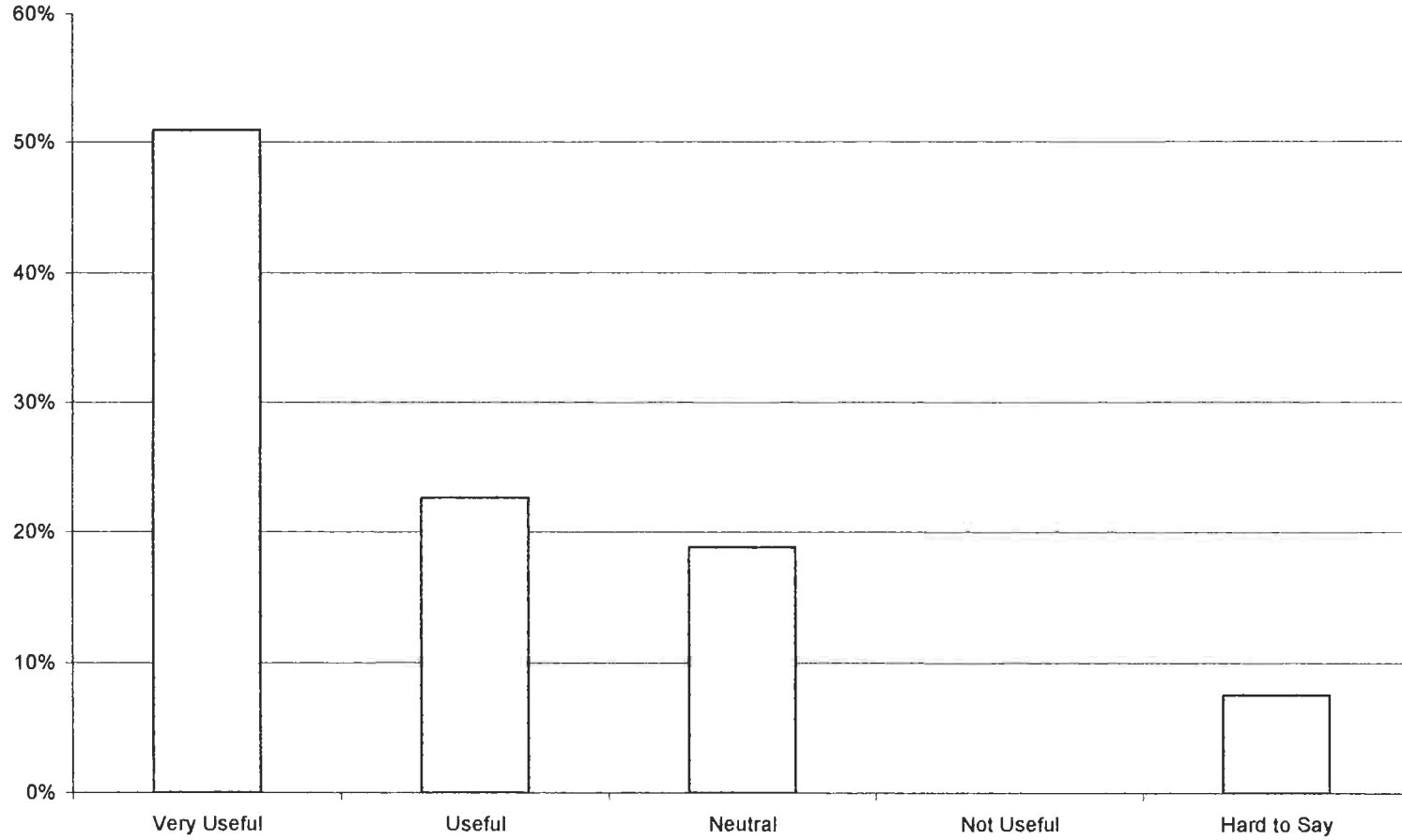


TABLE 8

Perceived effect of fall of USSR?

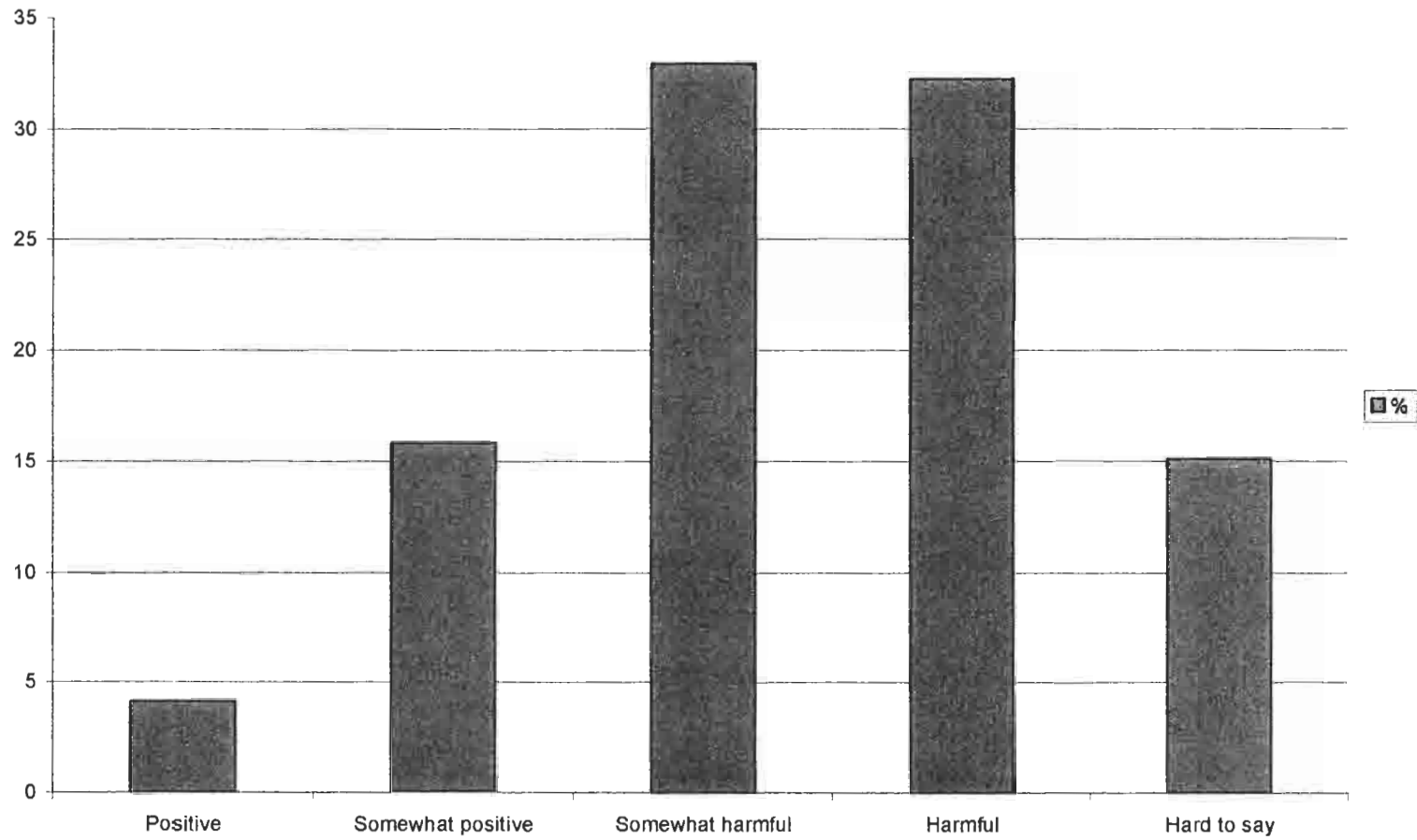


TABLE 9

What do you understand by homeland (rodina)?

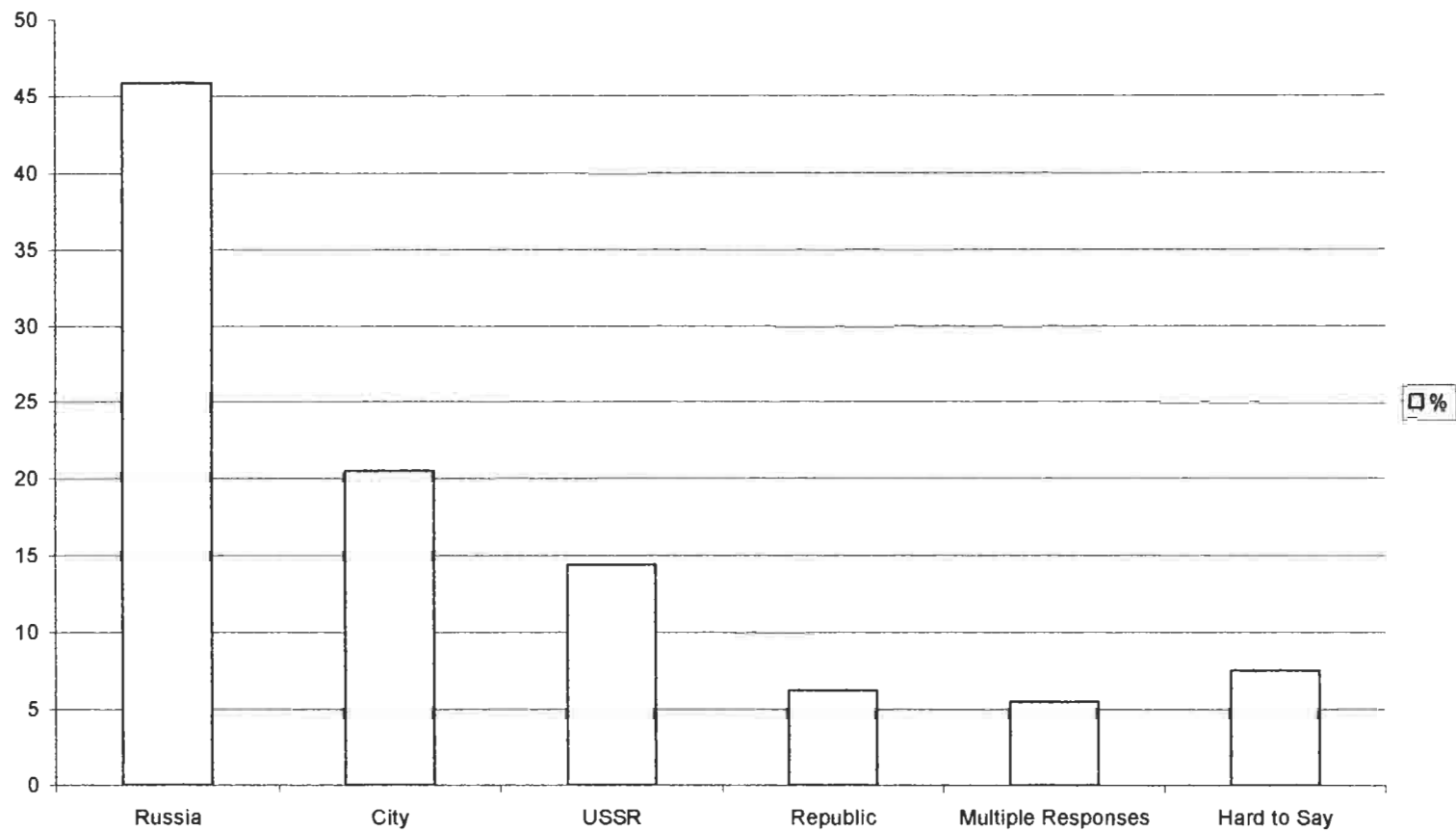


TABLE 10

What is most important in democracy?

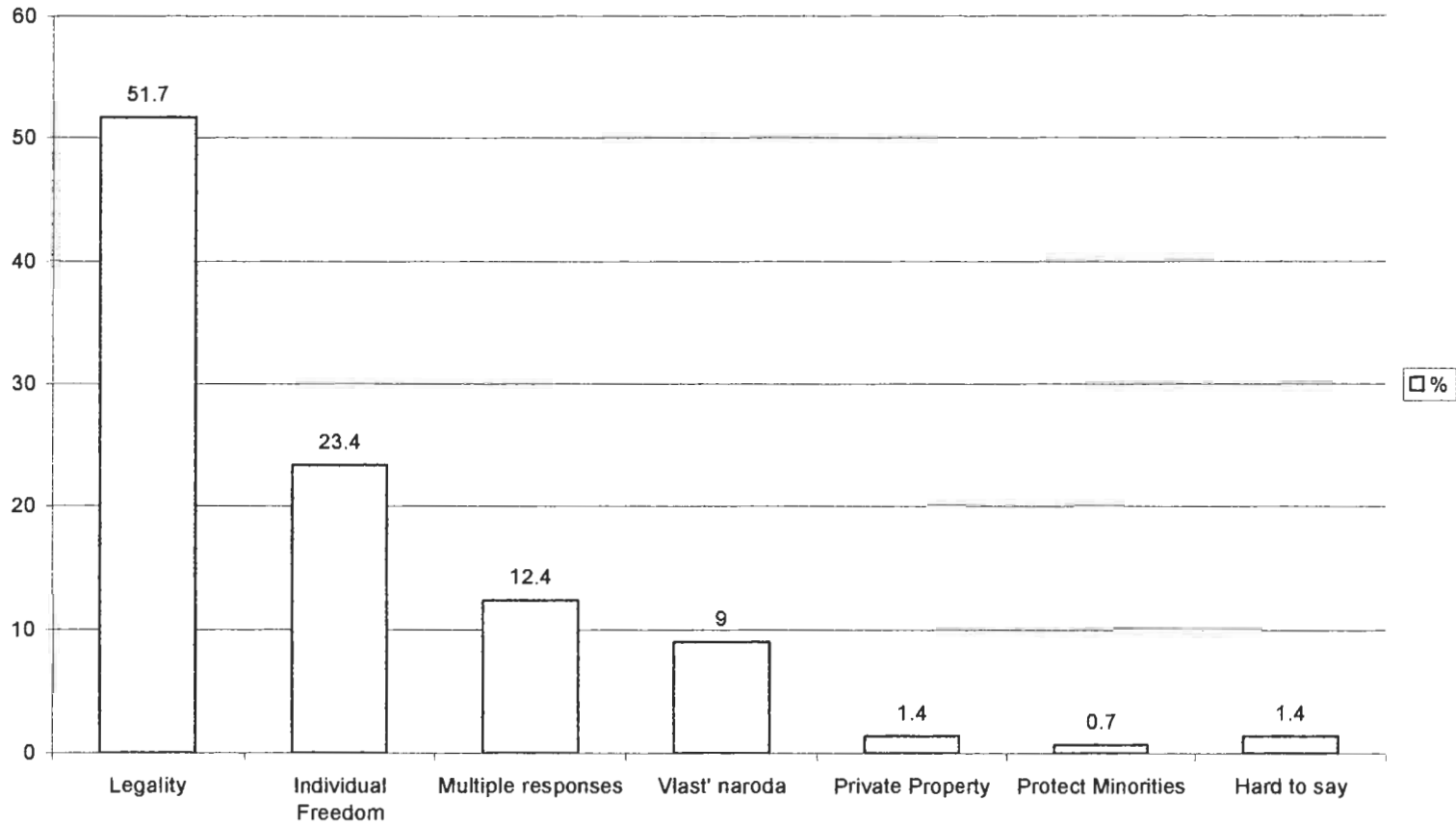


TABLE 11

On what does improvement in your life most depend?

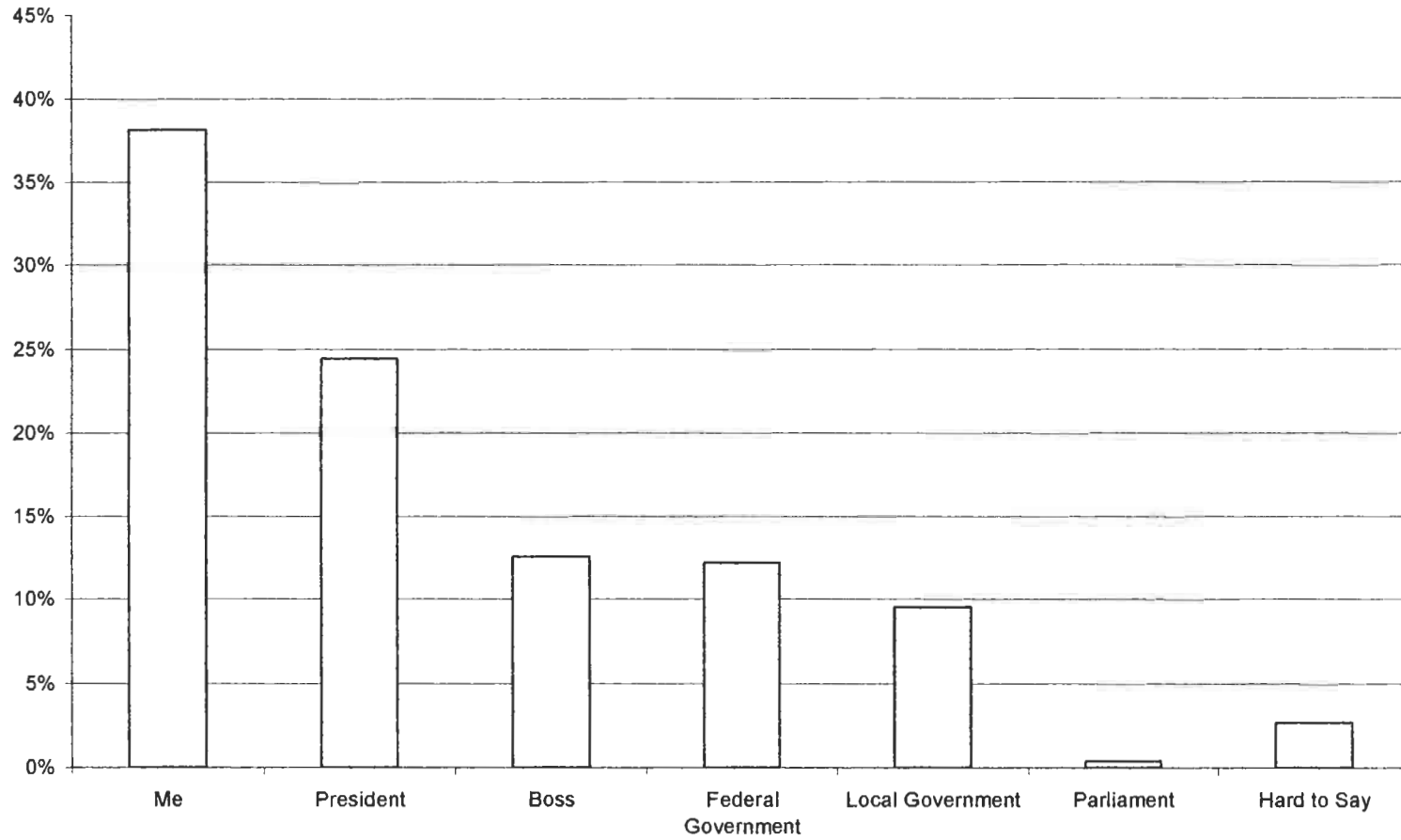


TABLE 12

Trust in politicians and institutions

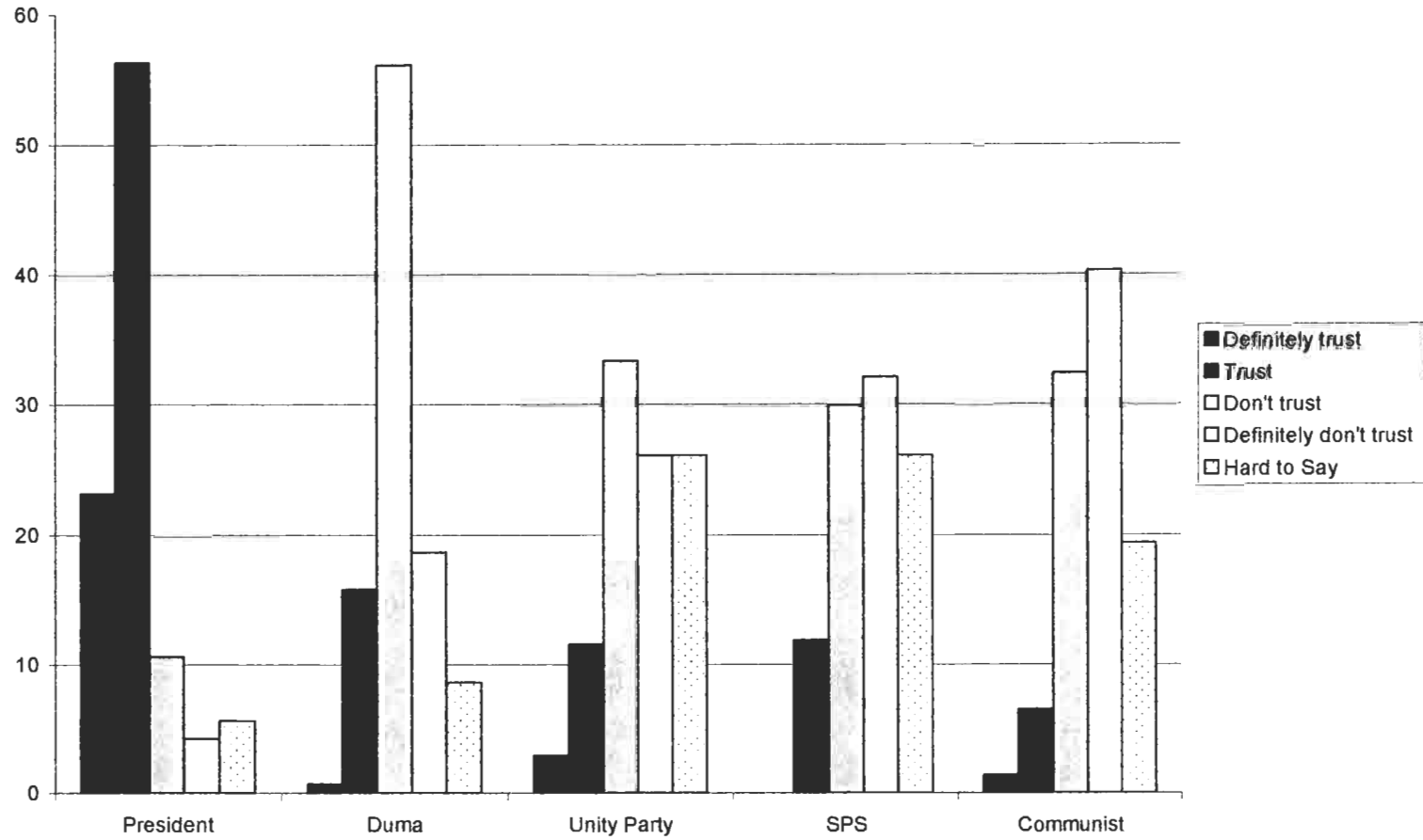


TABLE 13

Levels of trust towards nationalities and religions

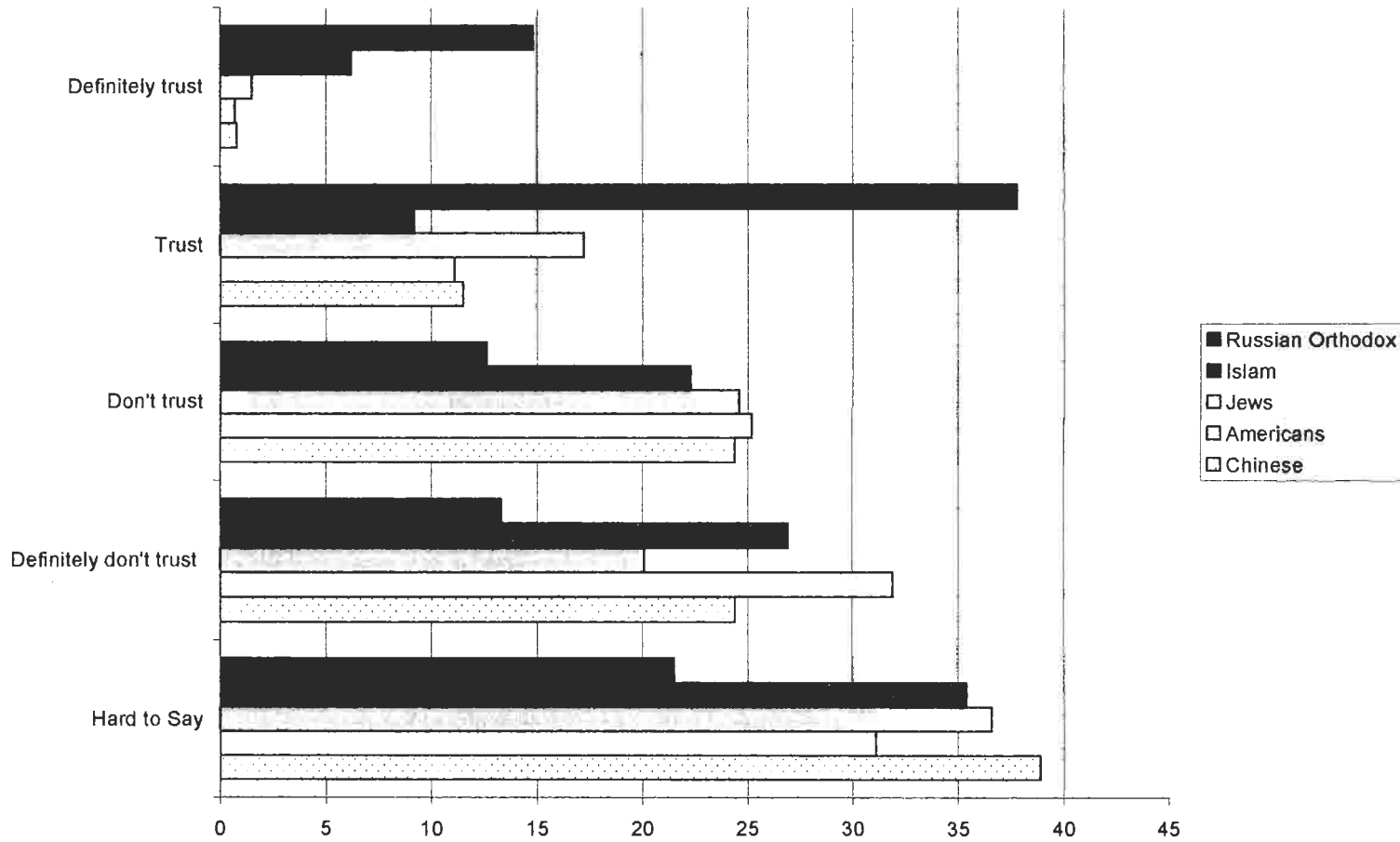


TABLE 14

Attitude to U.S. involvement in Afghanistan and Georgia.

