

**GOSKOMSTAT AND THE CENSUS:  
Evaluating the Process and Results**

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## **Executive Summary**

The issue of accuracy, or whether Soviet censuses have or have not presented data in a way that is as close to reality, or the "truth," or closer to results produced by established western methods, as possible, has been a primary focus in studies of Soviet censuses. While such analyses are obviously important, as I argue below, the census must not only be analyzed in terms of the data alone. Instead, as in other democratic institutions, the *process* is just as, if not more, important as the *results*.

Moreover, in order to understand why the results of the census do or do not measure up to international standards, we should consider the role of Goskomstat, the Russian state statistical committee, which is the institution that was responsible for organizing and carrying out the census, because it is by understanding the workings of this institution that we will be able to understand the basis for problems or successes in the census data. In other words, to focus only on results misses the underlying causes of those results; it is not that accuracy doesn't matter, but that results alone don't give insight into why there are or are not problems with results.

Finally, it is important to note that the census marks a crucial organizational achievement in the post-Soviet development of Goskomstat, perhaps as significant as the earlier move to a system of national accounts, and the census is therefore a window into the process of Russian state development. As I will discuss below, despite the problems with the census, Goskomstat is not the same old Soviet state bureaucracy, but it is also still a long way from an efficient, reliable, democratic institution.

## Introduction

The road to truth is strewn with obstacles: it is long and arduous. It is now, in the period of restructuring, that we can finally put an end to information that is full of illusions and self-deception. Truthful, many-sided, comprehensible information about the life of society must become the foundation of all political, economic and social reforms.<sup>1</sup>

Our work should concentrate on the information apparatus, for only when the Cheka is sufficiently informed and has precise data elucidating organizations and their individual members will it be able ... to take timely and necessary measures for liquidating groups as well as the individual who is harmful and dangerous.<sup>2</sup>

Information in the service of the state, especially the Soviet state, has always been an important aspect of governance, but the normative and positive consequences of its uses depend on the goals and capacities of state actors and institutions. Accordingly, the first post-Soviet Russian census, undertaken in October 2002, has important implications for our understanding of the development of the state and democracy in Russia.

Statistics, including census data, do not just provide information; rather, they allow governments (as well as individuals and opposition groups) to both characterize and monitor problems, and they allow for comparison of various solutions. In this way, statistics are foundational to both public policy and statehood — and are not value-neutral. For example, census data are necessary for characterizing and addressing issues of public health and social welfare, but they can also be used for carrying out discriminatory policies, including ethnic cleansing.

The issue of accuracy, or whether Soviet censuses have or have not presented data in a way that is as close to reality, or the "truth," or closer to results produced by established western methods, as possible, has been a primary focus in studies of Soviet censuses. While such analyses are obviously important, as I argue below, the census must not only be analyzed in terms of the data alone. Instead, as in other democratic institutions, the *process* is just as, if not more, important as the *results*. In this sense,

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<sup>1</sup> B.P. Orlov, "Illusions and Reality of Economic Information," *Problems of Economics*, vol. 32:1, May 1989, pp. 30-31.

<sup>2</sup> Cheka circulars, 1920-21, as cited by Peter Holquist, "'Information is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work': Bolshevik Surveillance in Its Pan-European Context," *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 69:3, Sept. 1997, p. 415; cited by Iu. D'iakonov and T. Bushueva, eds., *Fashistskii mech kovalsia v SSSR*, Moscow, 1992, p. 40.

if we consider the census as an election, we should be primarily concerned about the rules that govern the process rather than only concerned with the results. The way that the census was conducted tells us much about the functioning of the Russian state.

Moreover, in order to understand why the results of the census do or do not measure up to international standards, we should consider the role of Goskomstat, the Russian state statistical committee, which is the institution that was responsible for organizing and carrying out the census, because it is by understanding the workings of this institution that we will be able to understand the basis for problems or successes in the census data. In other words, to focus only on results misses the underlying causes of those results; it is not that accuracy doesn't matter, but that results alone don't give insight into why there are or are not problems with results.

Finally, it is important to note that the census marks a crucial organizational achievement in the post-Soviet development of Goskomstat, perhaps as significant as the earlier move to a system of national accounts, and the census is therefore a window into the process of Russian state development. As I will discuss below, despite the problems with the census, Goskomstat is not the same old Soviet state bureaucracy, but it is also still a long way from an efficient, reliable, democratic institution.

The data for this paper are primarily taken from interviews with Goskomstat offices in 11 regions of Russia in 2003, and also a systematic analysis of the journal *Voprosy Statistiki* from 1995-2002. *Voprosy Statistiki* (VS) is the in-house journal of Goskomstat, and as such it is an important, but heretofore, underutilized source which details internal organizational and methodological debates within Goskomstat. There were approximately 68 articles devoted to the census in VS during the 1995-2002 period.<sup>3</sup>

While there is a good deal of commentary on Goskomstat in the Russian press, most of focuses on Goskomstat publications of specific data, rather than on the internal workings of the organization itself, which is the purview of VS. Of course as an in-house journal we should expect VS to be biased

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<sup>3</sup> 1995 was chosen as the starting date because the previous journal, *Vestnik Statistiki* ceased publication in 1993, and only one issue of *Voprosy Statistiki* was published in 1994.

towards a positive view of Goskomstat, and that is the case, but nevertheless the articles in *VS* still provide an outline of the topics and issues that Goskomstat considered important and therefore *VS* functions as a window into Goskomstat.

This paper is organized as follows: I discuss Goskomstat's conduct in the census in terms of ideology, incentives, transparency and institutional boundaries, as reflected in *VS* articles. In ideology, I focus on international models that influenced Goskomstat's organization of the census. The discussion of incentives considers the political or economic incentives that might have influenced both the results and the process. And finally in the discussion of transparency and institutional boundaries, I consider the openness of the organization to debate and deliberation, and also the ability of the organization to maintain organizational boundaries. In conclusion I address some of the implications of the census and Goskomstat's role on state-building and democracy in Russia.

## **Ideology**

An important phenomenon in the changing information environment in post-Soviet Russia has been the availability of alternative statistics as well as models in scholarly journals or books by either individuals, other states, or international organizations, which substitute for Russian state data that are considered in some way deficient. Here we can think of recent estimates of GDP or infant mortality by the World Bank, IMF, and UN, for example. Moreover, there has been a great deal of direct contact between international and foreign institutions and Russia's state statistical agencies going back to the late 1980s. For example, the US Bureau of the Census and Goskomstat initiated exchanges in 1987.<sup>4</sup> This type of interaction grew in terms of frequency and scope throughout the 1990s.

What is interesting is that rather than simply existing as alternative data, as was the case during Soviet times, in the post-Soviet period, these alternative statistics, and the methodologies used to construct the data, sometimes became models for Russian state statistical work. In other words, rather

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<sup>4</sup> Tim Heleniak and Albert Motivans. "A Note on *Glasnost*' and the Soviet Statistical System," *Soviet Studies*, vol. 43:3, 1991, pp. 473-490.

than just functioning as a part of civil society or a check on the state, alternative sources of information were at times important to the transformation of key state institutions, such as Goskomstat.

Goskomstat itself published several comparisons of Soviet or Russian censuses with the censuses in the West and other CIS countries.<sup>5</sup> There was even a short article specifically on the organization of the US 2000 Census which included a picture of the US census website.<sup>6</sup> Goskomstat also published material from Western scholars translated into Russian,<sup>7</sup> and at one point even published a bibliography of western sources on the census (containing 18 entries).<sup>8</sup>

And, Goskomstat officials did not only study methodological issues in the West; they also considered western methods of "marketing" the census. In May 2001 representatives of Goskomstat and the Russian media went to Washington, D.C. in May 2001 to meet with US Census Bureau officials specifically in order to study the experience of the US Census Bureau in raising awareness of the 2000 US census.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> A. Isupov, "Perepis' naseleniia Rossii 1999 goda," *VS*, 1997:3, pp. 21-29; Tatarinova, O.M., "O khode perepisi naseleniia v stranakh SNG," *VS*, 1999:5, pp. 67-68; [prepared by the "Statkomitetom SNG"] "Rekomedatsii po sopostavleniiu obshchih prirostov tsislenosti naseleniia za mezhduperepisnoi period," *VS*, 2000:4, p. 11; M.T. Minbaev, "Razvitie metodov interpretazii mikroperepisei naseleniia," *VS*, 2002:6, pp. 40-45; V.L. Sokolin, "Pervaia perepis' naseleniia novoi Rossii (Obzor vystuplenii na zasedanii demograficheskoi seksii Doma uchenykh RAN): Vstupitel'noe slovo predsedatelia Goskomstata Rossii V.L. Sokolina," *VS*, 2000:4, pp. 3-5; "Rekomendatsii po podgotovke perehodnykh kliuchei mezhdru tipologiei semei i domohoziaistv (po materialam Statkomiteta SNG)," *VS*, 2001:5, pp. 39-44; "O sostoianii informatsionno-statisticheskoi bazy po sotsial'no-demograficheskim harakteristikam naseleniia," *VS*, 2001:10, pp.69-70.

<sup>6</sup> "Iz Interneta: Perepis' naseleniia v SShA [USA]," *VS*, 2000:3, p. 53

<sup>7</sup> L. Zubchenko, "Perepisi naseleniia v Evrope v 90-kh godakh: ot raznoobraziia nazional'noi praktiki k mezhdunarodnoi sopostavimosti rezul'tatov," *VS*, 1996:7, pp. 52-54

<sup>8</sup> "Anotirovannaia bibliografiia zarubezhnykh publikatsii po voprosam organizatsii i provedeniia perepisei naseleniia," *VS*, 1996:7, pp. 56-57

<sup>9</sup> "Vstrecha s rukovodstvom Biuro perepisi SShA," *VS*, 2001:7, p. 66

## Incentives

If one reads the Moscow press reports on the census, it is hard to escape hyperbolic claims about the results of the census having been manipulated or completely falsified.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, in terms of active manipulation, there have been some well known cases both during the Soviet and post-Soviet period that probably feed these recent claims of gross falsification.<sup>11</sup> There are many interesting things about these recent press reports on the census, and indeed one could write an interesting "discourse of the census" analyzing the wild assumptions which underlie claims about census intrigues. However, these charges and claims were made in the absence of evidence, and usually also lacked specification of the mechanisms by which manipulation might take place.

I believe that a focus on active manipulation, however, is a red herring that draws our attention away from the real problem of the more complex incentives facing Goskomstat that negatively affect the quality of census data. Consider that in the past, the problem with Soviet demographic data was not simply that it was falsified, but that it wasn't published. For example, it was long suspected that detailed publication of the 1979 Soviet census was held up for more than 10 years, not because of any technical or methodological flaw in the census, but rather for political reasons.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, a review of past Soviet censuses suggests that in this sphere the Soviets were not technologically or methodologically behind the West; and on some issues, such as under-counting, they seemed to have developed better methods; but the problem with censuses was the lack of publication of results (especially the 1979 census, where only 368 pages, in contrast to over 3000 for 1970 and 1959 censuses were published).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Regional press reports on the census were considerably more favorable towards Goskomstat and the census than reports in Moscow.

<sup>11</sup> For example, in June 1998, the head of Goskomstat, Yuri Yurkov, and his top deputies were arrested for helping companies avoid taxes. More than 20 people were charged and Yurkov pleaded guilty. The specific charges were that Goskomstat officials understated production in exchange for bribes and that they sold confidential information about firms to competitor firms. Michael Gordon, "Statisticians Accused of Aiding Tax Evasion," *New York Times*, June 10, 1998, p. A3.

<sup>12</sup> Lee Schwartz, "USSR Nationality Redistribution by Republic, 1979-1989: From Published Results of the 1989 All-Union Census," *Soviet Geography*, vol. 32:4, April 1991, pp. 209-248; Chauncy D. Harris, "Research Note on the Release of More Detailed Data from Three Soviet Censuses," *Post-Soviet Geography*, vol. 35:1, Jan. 1994, pp. 59-62.

The experience with the 1979 census suggests that the real test for Goskomstat is going to be how much of the 2002 census data gets published, and made available to scholars. If we consider the political or economic incentives for outright falsification, they are rather sketchy, but if we take into account the institutional legacy of secrecy and the incentives, especially economic, of maintaining a monopoly on data, then we see the real threat to the quality of the census data may be yet to come.

Moreover, beyond withholding of findings, there is a range of more complicated incentives that affects the quality of the census results by making certain types of data more likely to be collected in the first place. As discussed above, the adoption of specific international models or the demands of international institutions will increase the likelihood of collection of certain types of information. For example, migration data is of interest to the UN, and migration data is therefore now a major concern of Goskomstat.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, various compensation schemes which rely on symbolic as well as economic rewards, such as the awarding of "presidential medals" for more than 85% completion rates, or municipal awards or census preparation may in the best case encourage extra work in some regions or in the worst case, encourage manipulation to make it appear that extra work has been completed.<sup>15</sup> From the incentives alone it is not clear what the effect on the quality of the census will be.

At a somewhat deeper level, the political landscape may determine the feasibility of certain methodological choices. The decentralization and democratization of post-Soviet Russian politics may make the achievement of methodological rigor in future censuses quite difficult. The post-Soviet Russian government cannot exert the level of control, including sampling, pre-surveys, second round controls, etc., which they were able to do in the past.

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<sup>13</sup> W. Ward Kingkade, "Content Organization, and Methodology in Recent Soviet Population Censuses," *Population and Development Review*, vol. 15:1, Mar. 1989, p. 122.

<sup>14</sup> V. Moisyenko, "Migratsiia naseleniia v perepisiakh Rossii i SSSR," *VS*, 1997:3, pp. 30-37

<sup>15</sup> N.I. Chmarov, "Konkurs "Perepis'-2002" v Smolenskoii oblasti," *VS*, 2001:4, p. 60

Thus, despite the occasional attribution of inaccuracy in Goskomstat census data to active manipulation, I share the assessment of those scholars who have argued against the idea that Goskomstat officials routinely deliberately falsified data; instead I believe it is necessary to focus on the complexities of the system and some of the issues described above.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, if it were the case that Goskomstat officials were simply manipulating or falsifying information, solving the problem of accuracy would not be so complicated. However, the interconnectedness of methodology, incentives, and technology suggests that establishing "the truth" is rather difficult, and is not just a measurement issue.

### **Transparency**

Given the complexities of census methodology and data, openness or transparency in Goskomstat is crucial to the evaluation of the census process. From *Voprosy Statistiki*, there is a great deal of information provided by Goskomstat on the organization of the census. Below I outline the several ongoing discussions within the pages of *VS*, which suggest some level of transparency in the workings of GKS. These include discussions of past and future censuses, census pre-trials, conferences with scholars or others outside Goskomstat, regional participation, methodological questions, and discussion of the content and categories of the census.

In *VS* there were several articles which dealt with the history of Goskomstat (and it's organizational predecessors such as TsSU) and in particular past censuses including the first Russian census of the 19th century.<sup>17</sup> There was even a frank discussion, by a current Goskomstat researcher, of the history of All-Soviet censuses of the 20th century, including the manipulation of the 1937 census.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Vladimir G. Treml, "Dr. Vanous's 'Dark Side of Glasnost' Revisited" *Comparative Economic Studies*, vol. 31:4, Winter 1989, pp. 95-109; V. Kudrov, "Are the Calculations of Economic Growth Rates for the USSR and Russia Reliable," *Problems Of Economic Transition*, vol. 37:6, Oct. 1994, pp. 53-66.

<sup>17</sup> M. Grigoryanz, "Doroga dlinoiu v sto let (k 100-letniiu pervoi vseobshchei perepisi naseleniia Rossii 1897 goda)," *VS*, 1997:3, pp. 3-13

<sup>18</sup> A. Volkov, "Kak stalo krivym zerkalo obshchestva (kh 60-letniiu perepisi 1937 goda)," *VS*, 1997:3, pp. 14-21

The first post-Soviet Russian census was originally planned for 1999 (which would have been 10 years after the last Soviet census of 1989). There were several articles, including a number by E. Mikhailov, the head of the Demographic Statistics and Census Directorate of Goskomstat, which outlined generally the need for a new census and the organizational issues involved including the need to draw lessons from past censuses and the 1994 micro-census, and the need to improve methodology and find qualified personnel.<sup>19</sup> In detailing the plans for the 1999 census, one article included an actual copy of the project-questionnaire for the census, and comments on some of the questions and the categories in which the population will be divided.<sup>20</sup>

The trial censuses and the discussion of their results also constitute an important source for understanding the decision-making process within Goskomstat. Lessons from the "micro-census" of 1994 were outlined and the planned-1996 trial census was also discussed extensively: The specific questions were presented, methodological issues were discussed, and detail on the regions that were included in the trial census was also outlined.<sup>21</sup> The results of the 1997 trial census (conducted in preparation for the planned 1999 All-Russia census) were also discussed in detail.<sup>22</sup>

Goskomstat formed a Commission on the Census in late 1999, which formally met several times to organize both the trial census in 2000 and the national census in 2002. The technical aspects of collecting and processing the data for the 2000 trial and the 2002 national census were discussed in great

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<sup>19</sup> E. Mikhailov, "O proekte osnovnykh organizatsionnykh i metodologicheskikh polozhenii Vserossiiskoi perepisi naseleniia 1999 goda," *VS*, 1995:7, pp. 58-66; E. Mikhailov, "O Programmno-metologicheskikh i organizatsionnykh polozheniakh Vserossiiskoi perepisi naseleniia 1999 goda. Dolklad nachal'nika Upravleniia demograficheskoi statistiki i perepisi naseleniia Goskomstata Rossii," *VS*, 1996:1, pp. 14-23; Isupov, A.A. , "O predstoiashchei vserossiiskoi perepisi naseleniia," *VS*, 1999:12, pp. 77-78.

<sup>20</sup> E. Mikhailov, "O proekte programy Vserossiiskoi perepisi naseleniia 1999 goda," *VS*, 1995:10, pp. 40-45

<sup>21</sup> E. Mikhailov, "O proekte osnovnykh organizatsionnykh i metodologicheskikh polozhenii Vserossiiskoi perepisi naseleniia 1999 goda," *VS*, 1995:7, pp. 58-66; Probnaia perepis' naseleniia Rossii 1996 goda," *VS*, 1996:7, pp. 41-44

<sup>22</sup> V.Sokolin, I.Zbarskaia, "O rezul'tatakh probnoi perepisi naseleniia 1997 goda i podgotovke kh vserossiiskoi perepisi naseleniia 1999 goda," *VS*, 1997:11, pp. 44-47

detail.<sup>23</sup> The 2000 trial, which enumerated about 100,000 people was supposed to help Goskomstat decide a number of questions including the length of time necessary for the census and which different categories within the population would be used in the census.

The 2000 trial was also used to test the effectiveness of current preparations, and to prepare a study of the commuting population in a region of Moscow. The preparations that were underway in each of the regions participating in the 2000 trial census were also discussed.<sup>24</sup> The trial census was also intended to work out various organizational issues for the 2002 census, including the interaction between authorities on different levels. The articles in *VS* provided some quantitative results from the pilot census, outlined the categories of data that were collected, and reported on the sequence of procedures that were undertaken before, during, and after the census. Information was also given on the number of surveyors, their training and compensation.<sup>25</sup>

In July of 2002, Chairman Sokolin of Goskomstat provided a detailed overview of the preparations for the 2002 census, which included a discussion of the laws and regulations concerning the census (including the federal law "O Vserossiiskoi Perepisi Naselenia" signed by Putin on 25 Jan. 2002); the process of finalizing the specific questions to be asked; the dates during which the census would be carried out; the cooperation between federal and regional authorities; the difficulties in conducting the census in hard-to-reach regions; the recruitment of temporary staff to help with the census; the training of all staff involved with the census; the information-educational (marketing) work; and the financial dimensions of the census.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "O rabote perepisnoi Goskomstata Rossii," *VS*, 2000:2, p. 96; "O rabote perepisnoi Goskomstata Rossii," *VS*, 2000:3, p. 53; "Zasedanie Perepisnoi komissii Goskomstata Rossii," *VS*, 2000:4, p. 12

<sup>24</sup> "Probnaia perepis' naseleniia 2000 goda - vazhneishii etap podgotovki k Vserossiiskoi perepisi naseleniia 2002 goda," *VS*, 2000:6, pp. 56-57; "Zasedanie Perepisnoi komissii Goskomstata Rossii," *VS*, 2000:6, p. 57

<sup>25</sup> V.L. Sokolin, I.A. Zbarskaya, "O predvaritel'nyh rezul'tatah probnoi perepisi naseleniia 2000 goda," *VS*, 2001:2, pp. 3-7; V.A. Vlasov, "Zasedanie soveta rukovoditelei Goskomstata Rossii v Samare (Organizatsionnye voprosy predstoiashchei perepisi v sisteme Goskomstata Rossii)," *VS*, 2001:9, pp. 66-67.

<sup>26</sup> V.L. Sokolin, "O khode podgotovki k Vserossiiskoi perepisi naseleniia 2002 goda," *VS*, 2002:7, pp. 3-6

In addition to discussing past censuses and trial census preparation and results, articles in *VS* also outlined a number of conferences that addressed organizational and methodological issues. The conferences included Goskomstat representatives, state agencies, scientific associations, research centers, and regional representatives, as well as some foreign scholars.<sup>27</sup>

In one such article which reports on a meeting between Goskomstat and Russian scientists, three representatives of Goskomstat answer a series of questions, including comparisons with the conduct of the census in the US, whether there is a proposal to create a register of the population, whether there are enough qualified individuals to conduct the census, how much the 2000 census and the 2002 census will cost, whether the homeless will be counted in the census, whether the results of the trial census will be published, whether data on "mother tongue" will be analyzed, methodological discrepancies between the conduct of the census in different regions, whether there will be an attempt to verify the results of the census, and how children, people with dual citizenship and prisoners are to be counted.<sup>28</sup>

The discussion of the role of regions in the census was also discussed in some detail in the pages of *VS*. Some of the articles were written by regional Goskomstat officials, or by regional administration officials. There were a series of articles that detailed the regional experiences with the 2000 trial census, such as for example in Briansk and Primorskii Krai. The articles detail the steps taken before, during, and after the trial census, with a special focus on the information-explanatory work (marketing), the actual

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<sup>27</sup> "Rekomendatsii Vserossiiskogo soveshchaniia statistikov po perepisi naseleniia Rossii 1999 goda," *VS*, 1996:7, pp. 38-40; V.L. Sokolin, "Pervaia perepis' naseleniia novoi Rossii (Obzor vystuplenii na zasedanii demograficheskoi sektsii Doma uchenykh RAN): Vstupitel'noe slovo predsedatelia Goskomstata Rossiii V.L. Sokolina," *VS*, 2000:4, pp. 3-5; "Ob organizatsii rabot i zadachah sistemy gosudarstvennoi statistiki po podgotovke k porovedeniiu Vserossiiskoi perepisi naseleniia 2002 goda," *VS*, 2000:1, pp. 13-15; "Moskovskie demografy obsuzhdaiut problemy predstoiashchei perepisi naseleniia," *VS*, 2000:3, pp. 42-49; I.A. Zbarskaya, "Pervaia perepis' naseleniia novoi Rossii (Obzor vystuplenii na zasedanii demograficheskoi sektsii Doma uchenykh RAN): Demograficheskaiia situatsiia v Rossii na poroge XXI veka i neobkhodimost' perepisi naseleniia," *VS*, 2000:4, pp. 5-8; "Obsuzhdenie materialov predstoiashchei perepisi naseleniia," *VS*, 1996:1, pp. 24-31

<sup>28</sup> V.L. Sokolin, I.A. Zbarskaya, L.M. Eroshina, "Pervaia perepis' naseleniia novoi Rossii (Okonchanie obzora vystuplenii na zasedanii demograficheskoi sektsii Doma uchenykh RAN): ," *VS*, 2000:5, pp. 6-10

work of the surveyors, the efforts to verify the collected data, the logistical details, and the results the number of people that were surveyed. The articles also discussed census questions that people either did not understand, or were reluctant to answer.<sup>29</sup>

Similarly there were several detailed articles on regions' preparation for the actual 2002 census.<sup>30</sup> The articles summarized conferences and meetings from different regions and considered a range of topics including: the coordination between federal and local authorities; the definition of the borders of the various regional, city, and village jurisdictions; the creation and updating of address registries; the preparation of maps to be used in the census; information-educational work (marketing) and surveys to gauge public perception of the census.<sup>31</sup> There was also discussion of the issue of reaching not-easily-accessible areas such as in the Far East and the measures employed to overcome these difficulties.<sup>32</sup>

The discussion of methodology in *VS* has been similarly detailed, while not necessarily systematic. A range of topics were discussed including: computer systems to be used for scanning and processing the results from the census;<sup>33</sup> servers that could potentially be used to summarize and analyze the data from the census;<sup>34</sup> systems for collection and storage of data which work on both the regional and federal level;<sup>35</sup> the use of "multi-phase sampling;"<sup>36</sup> international guidance on comparison of population

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<sup>29</sup> "Muratova, G.N. Bondarenko, "Brianshchina gotvitsia k perepisi naseleniia," *VS*, 2000:6, pp. 58-59; E.G. Guseva, L.O. Kiseleva, "Probaia perepis' naseleniia vo frunzenskom raione g. Vladivostoka v 2000 godu," *VS*, 2001:2, pp. 7-11

<sup>30</sup> "Podgotovka k perepisi naselenia 2002 goda v regionakh Rossii," *VS*, 2001:5, pp. 44-46; "Podgotovka k perepisi naselenia 2002 goda v regionakh Rossii," *VS*, 2001:6, pp. 69-71; "Podgotovka k perepisi naselenia 2002 goda v regionakh Rossii," *VS*, 2001:7, pp. 67-72; V.A. Vlasov, "Podgotovka k perepisi naseleniia 2000 goda v regionakh Rossii (Organizatsionnye voprosy predstoiashchei perepisi v sisteme Goskomstata Rossii)," *VS*, 2001:9, p. 67; V.A. Vlasov, "Na zasedanii perepisnoi komissii Goskomstata Rossii (Organizatsionnye voprosy predstoiashchei perepisi v sisteme Goskomstata Rossii)," *VS*, 2001:9, p. 66; "Podgotovka k perepisi naseleniia 2000 goda v regionakh Rossii," *VS*, 2001:10, pp. 67-68; K.B. Barazgov, "Soveshchanie po podgotovke k Vserossiiskoi perepisi naselenia v Sverdlovskoi oblasti," *VS*, 2000:10, p. 74

<sup>31</sup> N.G. Mikhailova, "Ob otnoshenii naseleniia k predstoiashchei prerepisi naselenia," *VS*, 2001:4, pp. 59-60

<sup>32</sup> V.I. Dibirdeev, "Perepis' naseleniia v trudnodostupnykh rayonakh: osobenosti, prakticheskie podkhody," *VS*, 2002:1, pp. 63-65; A.A. Ageenko, R.A. Chaika, N.D. Fokina, "Vserossiiskaia perepis' naselenia 2002 goda: podgotavlivaia naselenie - gotovimsia sami," *VS*, 2001:4, pp. 57-59

<sup>33</sup> A. Amutuni, "Sovershenstvovanie tekhnologii obrabotki dannykh probnoi perepisi 1996 goda i Vserossiiskoi perepisi naseleniia 1999 goda," *VS*, 1996:3, p. 39

<sup>34</sup> E.V. Priakhina, A.V. Obukhov, "Issledovanie vozmozhnostei obrabotki materialov Vserossiiskoi perepisi naseleniia 2002 goda na platforme Intel/Microsoft," *VS*, 2002:1, pp. 60-63

increases over time;<sup>37</sup> the issue of population register vs. census;<sup>38</sup> and the use of more detailed census forms to overcome imprecision of findings on families and households<sup>39</sup> In July 2000, *VS* published an article on the 9 June 2000 meeting of the Census Commission of Goskomstat, where the committee approved a technical document (*razrabotka*) on the "Vserossiiskii Perepis' Naselenia 2002 goda" which outlined the methodological and logistical details of the census.<sup>40</sup>

On the issue of content and categories, once again Goskomstat seems to have provided a good amount of discussion through its journal *VS* of the debates over various questions and classifications including: the distinction between current residents and permanent residents, in accordance with international standards;<sup>41</sup> the change from family-based to household-based accounting;<sup>42</sup> how to handle the problem of migration;<sup>43</sup> and the enumeration of different ethnicities and nationalities;<sup>44</sup> as well as more general discussions of questions.<sup>45</sup> Pilot questionnaires were made available for commentary<sup>46</sup> and

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<sup>35</sup> A.L. Amatuni, I.B. Pavlov, V.I. Bolotov, "Avtomatizirovannaia obrabotka materialov perepisi naseleniia Rossii," *VS*, 2000:3, pp. 50-52

<sup>36</sup> T. Chernysheva, "O vozhozhnosti ispol'zovaniia mnogofaznoi vyborki pri provedenii perepisi naseleniia," *VS*, 1996:7, pp. 44-52

<sup>37</sup> [prepared by the "Statkomitetom SNG"] "Rekomendatsii po sopostavleniiu obshchih prirostov tselenosti naseleniia za mezhduperepisnoi period," *VS*, 2000:4, p. 11

<sup>38</sup> Bakhmetova, G.Sh., Isupov, A.A. , "Registr naseleniia kak sistema demograficheskogo ucheta," *VS*, 1999:5, pp. 33-40

<sup>39</sup> Volkov, A.G., Soroko, E.L. , "Tipologii semei i domokhoziaistv v Rossii: razvitie i analiz," *VS*, 1999:5, pp. 40-52

<sup>40</sup> "Zasedanie Perepisnoi komissii Goskomstata Rossii," *VS*, 2000:7, p. 77

<sup>41</sup> E. Mikhailov, "O proekte osnovnykh organizatsionnykh i metodologicheskikh polozhenii Vserossiiskoi perepisi naseleniia 1999 goda," *VS*, 1995:7, pp. 58-66.

<sup>42</sup> E. Mikhailov, "O Programmno-metologicheskikh i organizatsionnykh polozheniiakh Vserossiiskoi perepisi naseleniia 1999 goda. Dolklad nachal'nika Upravleniia demograficheskoi statistiki i perepisi naseleniia Goskomstata Rossii," *VS*, 1996:1, pp. 14-23; A. Kvasha, "O podgotovke k perepisi naseleniia 1999 goda," *VS*, 1995:10, pp. 46-48

<sup>43</sup> E. Mikhailov, "O Programmno-metologicheskikh i organizatsionnykh polozheniiakh Vserossiiskoi perepisi naseleniia 1999 goda. Dolklad nachal'nika Upravleniia demograficheskoi statistiki i perepisi naseleniia Goskomstata Rossii," *VS*, 1996:1, pp. 14-23

<sup>44</sup> E. Mikhailov, "O Programmno-metologicheskikh i organizatsionnykh polozheniiakh Vserossiiskoi perepisi naseleniia 1999 goda. Dolklad nachal'nika Upravleniia demograficheskoi statistiki i perepisi naseleniia Goskomstata Rossii," *VS*, 1996:1, pp. 14-23

<sup>45</sup> V.Sokolin, I.Zbarskaia, "O rezul'tatakh probnoi perepisi naseleniia 1997 goda i podgotovke kh vserossiiskoi perepisi naseleniia 1999 goda," *VS*, 1997:11, pp. 44-47

<sup>46</sup> E. Mikhailov, "O proekte programy Vserossiiskoi perepisi naseleniia 1999 goda," *VS*, 1995:10, pp. 40-45

in one article the categories from the questionnaires for the 2000 trial census and the 2002 federal census were defined and the international or standard interpretation of the categories, as well as the rationale for choosing them were provided.<sup>47</sup> Several other articles extended this discussion of categories.<sup>48</sup> However all of this discussion of categories takes the form of a presentation of a somewhat finished discussion rather than an invitation to take part in the decision.

One of the traditional problems with Goskomstat and its Soviet predecessors was the ignorance (both deliberate and unintentional) of whole classes of activity. Some areas were specifically ignored, such as prison and military activity, but others, such as the informal economy were not captured due both to methodological issues and to political or ideological debates over the existence of such activity. Despite all the discussion in *VS* over categories and questions, one still is left wondering why, for example, religion was left out? It was not a category of analysis during Soviet times, but its inclusion has not been debated very much at all, even though it is of obvious policy relevance.

In considering the level of openness in Goskomstat and the transparency of its organization of the census via an analysis of the articles in *Voprosy Statistiki*, the conclusion is mixed. On the one hand there is definitely more information about Goskomstat's internal processes available to the public than had existed in the past. And there is clearly engagement with the international community on a range of methodological and organizational issues. But on the other hand, a number of topics appear to be off-limits in terms of discussion.

Moreover, as noted earlier, a very important indicator of Goskomstat's openness will be whether data that is collected is made fully available and in what form. For example, on the ethnicity question, even though it was essentially an open list question where respondents could list any ethnic group, it is not clear how Goskomstat is going to aggregate that responses and whether the disaggregated responses will be made available.

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<sup>47</sup> L.M. Eroshina, "Pervaia perepis' naseleniia novoi Rossii (Okonchanie obzora vystuplenii na zasedanii demograficheskoi sektiis Doma uchenykh RAN): O chem budut sprashivat' perepischiki. Kak budut podchitany itogi perepisi," *VS*, 2000:5, pp. 3-6

<sup>48</sup> "Zasedanie Perepisnoi komissii Goskomstata Rossii," *VS*, 2001:5, p. 46; "O perechne kategorii naseleniia, podlezhashchikh uchetu pri Vserossiiskoi perepisi naselenia 2002 goda," *VS*, 2001:6, pp. 66-68

## **Institutional Boundaries**

Organizationally, there has been a good deal of division, consolidation, and renaming of the Russian and Soviet state statistical organizations during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In brief the Central Statistical Administration (Tsentrāl'noe Statisticheskoe Upravlenie SSSR — TsSU) existed from 1918 until 1930, when its personnel and work were transferred to the section of Economic Accounting (Sektor Narodnokhoziaistvennovo Ucheta) in the State Planning Commission (Gosplan). In 1931 this section became the Central Administration of Economic Accounting of the Gosplan of the USSR (Tsentrāl'noe Upravlenie Narodnokhoziaistvennovo Ucheta — TsUNKhU, Gosplana SSSR).

In 1948, the state's main statistical organization was removed from Gosplan and given independent status under the Council of Ministers of the USSR, and renamed the TsSU. TsSU remained until 1987, when it was transformed into Goskomstat USSR (Gosudarstvennyi Komitet SSSR po Statistike). In 1991, Goskomstat USSR became Goskomstat of the Russian Federation.<sup>49</sup> And finally, in 1992, the CIS Statistical Committee "Statisticheskii Komitet Sodruzhestva Nezavisimykh Gosudarstv — Statkom SNG) was established, with a former Goskomstat chairman, M.A. Korolev as its chairman.<sup>50</sup> As in Soviet times, the mechanism for political control of Goskomstat has also shifted during post-Soviet times: for example, Goskomstat Russia was initially subordinate to the Supreme Soviet, but in the fall of 1993, it was taken over by the Russian government.

In contrast to the centralized control of the TsSU days, there are now many organizations beyond Goskomstat Rossii whose work must be coordinated in order for Goskomstat to meet its objectives. Goskomstat needs to cooperate with a range international and foreign organizations, such as the UN, World Bank, and U.S. Bureau of the census, for technical and material assistance.<sup>51</sup> But more importantly Goskomstat also has to coordinate with other Russian state bureaucratic branches.

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<sup>49</sup> *Rossiiskaia Gosudarstvennaia Statistika, 1802-1996*, Moscow: Izdat-Tsentr, 1996.

<sup>50</sup> James Noren, "Statistical Reporting in the States of the Former USSR," *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics*, vol. 35:1, 1994, pp. 13-37.

<sup>51</sup> V.A. Vlasov, "V perepisnoi komisii Goskomstata Rossii," *VS*, 2001:4, p. 60; "O sostoianii informatsionno-statisticheskoi bazy po sotsial'no-demograficheskim harakteristikam naseleniia," *VS*, 2001:10, pp. 69-70

For example, an important issue in preparation for the 2002 census was the need for detailed and accurate maps, as well as population registries. To get this information, Goskomstat had to work with Roszemkadastr, Gosstroj Rossii, and Roskartografia.<sup>52</sup> In addition, during the actual conduct of the census, regional Goskomstat offices worked closely with local executive administrations, police, media, passport offices and housing authorities. These other institutions often provided free administrative support, security of offices and personnel, advertising and publication of state information, transportation, and information about the population.

The norm of interaction among these state and private organizations, however, was informal in the sense of not being specified in writing or law, and at the discretion of local executives rather than for payment specified in contracts. On the one hand this appears to be a legacy of Soviet-style mobilization of all resources to fulfill central directives (e.g. the census). But on the other hand, this is a concrete example of the use of "administrative resources," a contemporary phenomenon which has been well-noted in election campaigns. In the post-Soviet era, the state does not own, and is not supposed to control local administrations and media. And, other state organizations such as local police or transport authorities are not supposed to be working at the discretion of local executives, no matter how virtuous the goal (carrying out the census).

In general, based on observation of practices as well as interviews with local Goskomstat officials, it is hard to escape the conclusion that there is a remarkable lack of understanding of the necessity of maintaining institutional boundaries. Especially at the regional level, the idea seems to be that Goskomstat should get whatever data it needs from wherever it can, no matter what the source or the original intention of the data collection.

For example, it was commonly reported in the press that the census was not necessary because the passport offices had all the necessary information on the population (except for migrants). This turned out to be true since Goskomstat regional offices were instructed by e-mail one day before the

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<sup>52</sup> "Zasedanie Perepisnoi komissii Goskomstata Rossii," *VS*, 2000:7, p. 77; V.A. Vlasov, "V perepisnoi komisii Goskomstata Rossii," *VS*, 2001:4, p. 60

census ended to fill in forms with minimal information for all people who refused on the basis of information from the local housing authorities.<sup>53</sup> Similarly university and institute students were forced to work for the census or face expulsion; this is similar to the students being forced to pick potatoes in the old Soviet days and while useful to society, is nonetheless a violation of state institutional boundaries.

There should not be any sharing of information across institutional boundaries, that is, between the passport office, the police, the tax inspectors, the university system and Goskomstat. It was a common Soviet practice to use state agencies for whatever purpose suited the Party leadership, but this arbitrary requisition of services and information from other state organizations violates the principle of procedure over substance. In a dictatorship where the state serves whomever is in power, state offices may be used arbitrarily at the will of the dictator, but in a democracy there must be respect for institutional boundaries, no matter how noble the cause; in other words, the ends do not justify the means.

## **Conclusions**

The census and the information it produces about society are necessary, not only for the development of sound policies but also for the acceptance of policies by the public. In economic policy, for example, it is almost taken for granted that accurate information improves policy-making and implementation. Some scholars go even further and argue that information is necessary for economic prosperity, especially in modern economies, where openness, entrepreneurship, and initiative are important.<sup>54</sup> On the political side, information is important to the development of interests and to voting behavior.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See internal Goskomstat letter #VS-08-23/4744, signed by V.L. Sokolin.

<sup>54</sup> Frank Ellis, *From Glasnost to the Internet: Russia's New Infosphere*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.

<sup>55</sup> Schuman and Corning consider collective knowledge of public events voting behavior. One aspect of their study is that they correlate "correct" knowledge about the purges with voting behavior. See Howard Schuman and Amy D. Corning, "Collective Knowledge of Public Events: The Soviet Era from the Great Purge to Glasnost," *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 105:4, Jan. 2000, pp. 913-956.

For all of these reasons, we should expect that fundamental changes in the quality of information produced by Goskomstat will have substantial effects on public policy. But to evaluate the quality of the data we should go beyond the results and consider the process of constructing that data by remaining attentive to the ideology, incentives, and level of transparency in the state statistical committee.

Moreover, as the discussion of Goskomstat above illustrates, information and information institutions can be used by the state not only for welfare enhancing policies, but for increased policing or other non-democratic purposes as well. The information produced by the census is a crucial link between state and society; it allows society to make decisions and allows the state to shape issues and solutions. It is clear that the Soviet state used information and statistics to shape a particular type of society.<sup>56</sup> If the new Russian state is committed to democracy, then the data from the 2002 census must be treated confidentially and used for their intended purposes only, and Goskomstat as well as other state agencies must shore up their institutional boundaries so that they do not become agents of the executive.

Finally, in evaluating the process and results of census in Russia, we must keep a comparative perspective. It is necessary to compare the 2002 census not only with past Soviet censuses, but with the experiences of other countries as well. One could argue that the Soviet censuses are not a very high standard, but nevertheless that is the institutional legacy bequeathed to Goskomstat, and therefore progress over the past, is still progress.

Similarly however, it is important to keep in mind the experiences of other countries. Too often Russian events are looked at only in relation to the Soviet past or in relation to an idealized future, rather than in comparison to reality of other similar countries. State-building and the development of the institutions necessary for democracy and markets take time and experience. As we consider Goskomstat's progress at this point we should be critical, yet constructive, because working towards improvement of the institution is the only option.

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<sup>56</sup> For example, see Holquist 1997 on the use of surveillance by the Soviet regime to mold society.