MEDIA CULTURES OF THE RUSSIAN 1990s

INVENTING THE POST-SOVIET PUBLIC SPHERE

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CHAPTER 1

The Sociological Turn: Public Opinion Polling and the Dream of an Open Society

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POSTSOCIALISM AS EPISTEMOLOGICAL CRISIS

The Soviet Union ended when the state no longer knew its people. This might be said of any political regime that loses legitimacy in the eyes of its populace, but in the Soviet Union, the epistemological crisis was both a long-term problem and acutely felt. Already in the post-Stalinist era anxieties about ways of knowing (and controlling) the populace waxed as the most brutal forms of political violence waned.[1] The Thaw saw both a general liberalization of political and social life and, at the same time, the launch of the first public opinion institute in the Soviet Union, run out of the friendly pages of *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*. The youth-oriented newspaper constantly asked readers to write in with questions about socialist norms, observations about themselves and others, and facts about their lives.[2] Many of their responses were printed in subsequent issues of the newspaper as questions, requests for improvement, or guides to behavior and style.

Further from the public eye, state planning recognized the need for better knowledge of the Soviet consumer, and launched a surprising number of surveys meant to determine what Soviet citizens needed and what they were buying.[3] Such information gathering resulted in a flurry of publications throughout the Brezhnev era, mostly printed in small runs exclusively for internal government readerships. The Academy of Sciences also opened an "Institute of Concrete Sociological Studies" (*Institut konkretnykh sotsial'nykh issledovanii*, or IKSI) in 1966 with a young professor of philosophy named Iurii Levada as its director. The next year, Levada offered a series of lectures on sociology—the first such course in the Soviet Union—at the Journalism Department of Moscow State University. But when a copy of the lectures began to circulate the next year, it came in for harsh criticism in a special session of the Academy of Social Sciences of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Levada's course was canceled, he was stripped of the title of Professor, and banned from teaching any courses in the future. But he was allowed to continue working at the Academy of Sciences.[4]

The split decision on Levada's fate reflected a broader ambivalence about sociology at the time. The state recognized the need to gather data for its continuing functioning but also feared ascribing too much importance to popular opinion. The Party, after all, was meant to guide the populace, and not the other way around. Furthermore, theoretical sociology, with its Western roots and connections to bourgeois thought, remained anathema in the Soviet Union.[5] For these reasons, even amid a recognized need for its work, the IKSI was shut down in 1972, and its employees were scattered throughout the state bureaucracy. Some of the most influential ended up in the vast state library system, where they had access to huge flows of more or less uncensored and unprocessed data. Meanwhile, Levada continued working with students in informal seminars held at his home, where he would develop his influential vision of the Soviet person as a special type, a "Homo sovieticus," molded by the revolutionary experiences and traumas of terror and war that characterized early Soviet life.

In official circles, sociology remained acceptable especially in economic investigations, and it was this context that ultimately changed the fate of sociology in the late- and post-Soviet era. A study with the unassuming title "On the Improvement of Socialist Industrial Relations and the Tasks of Economic Sociology" became, in the words of Boris Firsov, "without exaggeration the bravest and most radical scholarly work written by USSR sociologists."[6] Composed for a conference of agrarian economists in Novosibirsk in 1983 and marked "for internal use only," the text was deemed so dangerous that when two copies went missing, the KGB not only searched all conference locations, but even scoured the homes of conference attendees.[7] Nevertheless, it leaked to the West, where it became known as the Novosibirsk Report.[8]

Its author, Tatiana Zaslavskaia, argued that the basic assumptions of the Soviet economy were outdated, if not entirely wrong. Under Stalin, the Soviet Union had codified the fundamental harmony between productive forces (labor, technology, raw materials) and the mechanisms for their organization and interrelation (central planning). In a socialist state, there could be no contradiction between the two. The Soviet Union, it was believed, had overcome any inherent tensions among individual, group, and social interests, and the classless society had long moved beyond class antagonisms. Socialist economic relations, in other words, were assumed to be harmonious because such harmony was foundational to—indeed the raison d'être of—Soviet economic organization. But this assumed harmony, according to Zaslavskaia, was both wrong and dangerous. Labor and technology had developed enormously in the five decades since the foundations of the Soviet economy had been laid, while central planning remained much the same. Moreover, the assumption of a lack of internal contradictions blinded Soviet bureaucrats to pressing issues on the ground and led to stagnation. Under capitalism, Zaslavskaia pointed out, it is precisely class antagonisms that lead to economic development: the struggle between interested groups brings innovation which is embraced by some, resisted by others, and regulated by a decentralized market. Without markets,

socialist economies lack the decentralized organization and data-gathering mechanisms that can provide constant and automatic feedback. A functioning socialist economy would need to actively compensate for this lack. But instead, the Soviet stance of assumed harmony "deprives [production] of its social content," she argued, deliberately obscuring any internal conflict and stymying dynamism. The assumption of harmony, in other words, had blindfolded the Soviet Union and was leading to economic crisis.[9]

Zaslavskaia's "Strategy for Perfecting Production Relations," as she titled the most influential section of her report, included acknowledging the possibility of a disconnect between productive forces and planning, and even between various interests involved in the economy. Once such contradictions were acknowledged, they could only be addressed by broad information gathering and even the cautious introduction of market mechanisms as part of overall economic restructuring.

Shortly after the scandal around the Novosibirsk Report—but before it had been published in the West—the Central Committee of the Communist Party admitted that, while the "Party has many modes of flexible and effective feedback, which allow it to clearly understand any changes in the mood of the masses," nevertheless, "under contemporary conditions the necessity has ripened [*sozrela neobkhodimost'*] to create a specialized system for studying the needs, opinions, and moods of the working masses."[10]

The reaction to Zaslavskaia's report, in other words, was a harbinger of larger changes in Soviet society that in the coming years would open the door for Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of perestroika and glasnost. Indeed, it is no accident that the seeds of many of Gorbachev's reforms can be found in Zaslavskaia's report. Gorbachev was enamored with Zaslavskaia, and when he became General Secretary in 1985, he immediately brought her on as one of his chief economic advisors. The Novosibirsk Report became one of the blueprints for Gorbachev's policies, which recognized the need for economic restructuring—but even more important—acknowledged that such restructuring should be informed by broad-based data collection in the form of open communication. Such data collection became part of the larger project of glasnost, Gorbachev's policy of openness. Though glasnost was a sweeping initiative that loosened censorship, lifted taboos, published previously banned literature, and even, as Courtney Doucette has argued, reformed Soviet subjectivity, it was also a data-gathering initiative, meant to inform the economic restructuring of perestroika.[11] In other words, glasnost was introduced not only as the constant companion of perestroika, but also as its driving force. Openness, and the honest feedback it would encourage, would help save the Soviet economy from collapse.

Things, to put it mildly, turned out differently. Instead of saving the Soviet Union, Gorbachev's perestroika restructured it right out of existence. But the epistemological crisis that had precipitated the Soviet Union's end outlasted it. One organization that embodied the highest aspirations of perestroika-era data collection went on to become one of the most influential organizations in *post*-Soviet Russia's self-knowledge and

self-representation. That organization was the All-Union (and soon All-Russian) Center for the Study of Public Opinion, known most often by its Russian acronym VTsIOM (for *Vsesoiuznyi/Vserossiiskii tsentr izucheniia obshchestvennogo mneniia*). It was founded in 1987 by order of the Central Committee of the Communist Party with the broadest possible mandate for data-gathering and sociological analysis. Its head was Tatiana Zaslavskaia.

Statistics and statistical analysis had been important throughout the Soviet era. Production statistics were at the heart of central planning and socialist communication strategies. Both domestic and international propaganda broadcast statistics about, for instance, literacy gains immediately after the revolution and leaps in production during the first five-year plans. In the post-war era, the new discipline of cybernetics captured the bureaucratic imagination as the technical capabilities of data processing grew alongside the complexity of the Soviet economy.[12] By the mid-1970s—the middle of the era that would come to be known as the "Stagnation"—the statistical demands of the state had become so pervasive that statistics even served as the unexamined backdrop of melodrama, as in El'dar Riazanov's wildly popular *Office Romance* (*Sluzhebnyi roman*, 1977). The film's romantic entanglements and personal tragedies all unfold within an office named simply "Statistical bureau" ("*Statisticheskoe uchrezhdenie*"). Unlike in the production films of an earlier era, the work in this office plays no role in the film. By the mid-1970s, in other words, despite the enthusiasms of some cyberneticists, statistics seemed drab enough to serve as the most neutral of backdrops for melodrama.

The sociological turn of the late- and post-Soviet years, then, was new not for its use of statistical indicators to better understand society, but for a revival and a reinvention of what statistics could do. Put simply, the reinvention meant a shift from primarily economic data to sociology and public opinion. It was a way of using statistics to model not the economy, but the people, the "new narod" that was forming under the new social and political circumstances (see Pavel Khazanov's article in this volume). Despite Zaslavskaia's background in agrarian economics, the revolution that she helped launch actually represented a shift away from her area of expertise toward the more nebulous realm of broad-based subjective opinions. The organization that she helped to found would not gather production statistics directly from enterprises, nor would it collate direct consumption statistics from points of sale. Instead, it would have to create from scratch a complex apparatus for asking a broad sample of the population qualitative questions about their subjective opinions and then representing their answers quantitatively. Practically, this was an enormous and complex undertaking. Ideologically, it was a seismic shift.

This chapter is devoted to that shift. VTsIOM brought members of the late-Soviet intelligentsia together in an unexpected new way: philosophers, poets, economists, and

sociologists turned to public opinion as a new way of knowing and representing the world. At stake was nothing less than a new understanding of truth. The fall of the Soviet Union was also the fall of a regime of truth. As the state admitted that its previous systems of knowledge had failed, questioning old truths, surfacing hidden truths, and producing new truths became major themes of perestroika and glasnost. The stated goals of openness and restructuring led to broader questions about epistemology, knowledge production, and rethinking investigative pathways. How had Soviet practices obscured truth rather than revealing it? And just as important, how could new systems be established that would more reliably bring truth to light? In the late- and post-Soviet years, VTsIOM represented some of the most influential answers to these questions. Its vast data-gathering apparatus, prominent media presence, and proximity to political power helped to define a new post-Soviet regime of truth.

If the Soviet regime of truth was premised on party-guided dialectical materialism, VTsIOM would offer something new. Its data-driven approach was premised on neoliberal values of transparency and technocratic governance, while its focus on respondents' subjective opinions rejected the Soviet-Marxist legacy in favor of a coyly stated but deeply held Hegelian idealism. It was modeled on Western institutions—such as Gallup in the United States and Allensbach in West Germany—which had explicitly framed themselves as bulwarks of democracy. But it was founded not amid the 1940s rise of authoritarianism, but during the neoliberal wave of the 1970s–2000s. In this context, it presented itself as a tool for governance—for gauging the acceptability of policies enacted by an executive—much more than as a responsive indicator of electoral politics. Among its most important early issues was the privatization of state industries, a staple of global neoliberalism and a process over which citizens had no control. For this reason, its polls were filled with subjective measures, for instance, asking, "How do you feel about the fact that private individuals own large factories?" (from a 1990–92 study), or developing an "Optimism Index" (beginning in 1994). Such measures distilled the subjective feelings of the populace into apparent social facts. They sought to represent what VTsIOM researchers would later call the objective Spirit of the age as sociological truth.

The approach proved powerful and enormously influential in its first decade, but it brought with it significant blind spots. By representing public opinion statistically, rather than directly and qualitatively, VTsIOM played a significant role in the disappearance of the reader from post-Soviet press, which Courtney Doucette details in Chapter 2. VTsIOM's polling also underappreciated the roles of nationality and ethnicity, even as the Soviet Union disintegrated into the various national independence movements of the late 1980s and early 1990s. By the mid-1990s, public faith in polling was replaced by a widespread belief in the manipulability of sociologically represented truth. By the early 2000s, VTsIOM had become ripe for state capture, and polling would go on to play a very different role in the rising authoritarianism of Putin's Russia.

VTSIOM: A GATHERING OF THE LATE-SOVIET INTELLIGENTSIA

The All-Union Center for the Study of Public Opinion was officially founded by decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party on December 7, 1987. Zaslavskaia, who would serve as its founding director, envisioned a center modeled on the West German Allensbach Institute of Demoscopy (*Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach*) created forty years earlier and tasked with carrying out monthly public opinion surveys of the West German populace. But, by her own admission, she had little experience with the study of public opinion. Her area of expertise was agrarian economy and she was asked to lead the center in large part because of the moral authority and respect she had earned among both the intelligentsia and the political elite. As she remembered ten years later, she agreed to take the position "only under the non-negotiable condition that my deputy be Boris Grushin."[13]

Grushin was perhaps the only person in the country with real experience executing public opinion surveys. He had studied at Moscow State University's Philosophy Faculty alongside Levada in the late 1940s and 1950s, and the two knew and respected one another. But unlike Levada, Grushin did not immediately turn to sociology, but remained devoted to philosophy. He became one of the founding members of the Moscow Logic Circle (later known as the Moscow Methodological Circle), whose other members included Alexander Zinoviev and Merab Mamardashvili. Despite earning the respect of peers and professors alike, Grushin was not allowed to defend his thesis due to accusations of anti-Marxism, and his promising career in academic philosophy was cut short. He soon found a job in the propaganda department of *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, where, after rising to editor, he launched the first public opinion surveys in the USSR from its pages. They were a wild success. Even Nikita Khrushchev explicitly endorsed the endeavor. But as the postwar Thaw receded into Brezhnev's stagnation the Institute of Public Opinion at *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* came under attack. By 1967, it was closed, and Grushin was once again out of work.[14]

His next effort was a short-lived Center for the Study of Public Opinion at the IKSI at the Soviet Academy of Sciences. But it too was closed down after conducting just one study.[15] Grushin spent the balance of the decade campaigning in vain for state support for public opinion polling, but his pleas met with silence and rejection. "We don't need that kind of thing here," he was told when he offered to open a public opinion section in *Pravda*, "Let them do that kind of thing at home [in the West]." He collected these and other rejections in his memoir of the era, *The Bitter Taste of Being Unwanted* (*Gor'kii vkus nevostrebovannosti*, 1987).

So it was with the enthusiasm of a lifelong dream fulfilled that Grushin agreed to work under Zaslavskaia in 1987. He quickly set about fulfilling the VTsIOM's mandate to create not only the central office in Moscow, but also "25 field offices, located in each of the capitals of the Union Republics and in a range of other cities in the country."[16] The field offices would be staffed through connections Grushin had made over the course

of his career working on the borderlands between sociological research and state power. For the first time, Grushin was able to implement many of the ideas and methodologies he had pursued during the previous decades. The single study he had conducted at IKSI would be particularly influential. Remembered as the "first all-union representative survey of 2000 respondents," it would serve as VTsIOM's model for nationwide population sampling.[17]

Grushin invited his old acquaintance Levada, known by then as the Soviet Union's leading theoretical sociologist, to join VTsIOM. Many of Levada's former students soon followed. Among the most influential was Lev Gudkov, who had attended Levada's lectures on sociology in the 1960s and had worked briefly with him at the Academy of Sciences before finding himself—like all those interested in theoretical sociology—turned out of mainstream academic circles. Gudkov eventually found work in the Institute of the Book inside the State Lenin Library, where he met Boris Dubin, who would become his constant co-author until Dubin's death in 2014. Dubin was not a sociologist at all. He was a poet and a translator who had come of age in Moscow's underground art scene. He had been part of a loose grouping of artists and writers which called itself SMOG (meaning either "The Youngest Organization of Geniuses" (*Samoe molodoe obshchestvo geniev*) or "Boldness, Thought, Image, Depth" (*Smelost', mysl', obraz, glubina*)) and included Leonid Gubanov, Sasha Sokolov, Iuliia Vishnevetskaia, and Eduard Limonov.[18] It was through the literary underground, and not through sociology, that Dubin eventually found his way to the Institute of the Book where he met Gudkov. When the two combined forces—alongside colleagues Aleksei Levinson and Abram Reitblat—they realized the enormous potential of their out-of-the-way post.

Not only did they have the vast holdings of the Lenin Library at their fingertips—including access to ideologically sensitive materials unavailable to most researchers—they could also request volumes from the Library of Foreign Literature. But even more enticing was the stream of data that came into the Institute of the Book. The institute was connected to the Book Chamber, which tracked publication and print runs of all new books published in the Soviet Union. At the same time, libraries across the country sent in data on library holdings, reader requests, and deficit titles. In this way, the Institute of the Book became a central clearing house for data on what was published, in how many copies, and—most important—what people actually read. As Gudkov told me in an interview, "We knew that data could tell us something about what people were thinking."[19] But they hadn't yet developed the theoretical apparatus to process that information.

Gudkov and Dubin compiled an exhaustive bibliography of Western theories on the sociology of literature. Because of their special position within the library system, they had access to many (though far from all) of the volumes they listed. "Those were good times," Gudkov said, "despite the gloom [*mrak*]. You could sit all day and read. No one made us do anything else…Of course, we couldn't publish or present our work

publicly…But we could do what we wanted. Those were good times."[20] They were especially enamored of reader-response theory and its leading theorists Wolfgang Iser and Hans-Robert Jauss. Iser argued that every literary text implies a certain kind of reader, and that careful reading of the text can then help reconstruct this "implied reader."[21] Jauss saw literature as a constant interaction between text and reader, writing and response, to which the reader brings a certain "horizon of expectations" specific to an historical moment, which, once again, could be reconstructed through concerted hermeneutic effort.[22] These theories gave Dubin and Gudkov the apparatus they needed to make reading habits into sociologically useful data. Since they knew what people were reading across the country through library data, they could analyze the population's favorite texts. Through careful literary interpretation, they could reconstruct the "implied reader" of those texts and the "horizon of expectations" they brought with them, which would in turn reveal something essential about the masses of Soviet citizens requesting these texts.

Iser and especially Jauss were banned in the Soviet Union for their connections to the Nazi Party. Though not public knowledge at the time, Jauss had been an SS officer who oversaw atrocities on the Eastern Front.[23] But both theorists' more anodyne loyalties to National Socialism were well known, and as a result reader-response theory remained anathema in Soviet literary criticism. Curiously, then, it was Dubin and Gudkov's work that introduced this influential strain of literary theory into Soviet and post-Soviet discourse, and it did so as a sociological, not a literary, methodology. As glasnost settled in, Dubin and Gudkov were able to discuss preliminary findings and even prepare them for publication. Many were collected in *The Book and Reading in the Mirror of Sociology* (1990), which—as the introduction noted—was motivated by "a united sociological idea—the relationship to reading as a social phenomenon and to literature and the structures of its dissemination as social institutions."[24] What Gudkov and Dubin discovered in the Institute of the Book was that books and reading, approached the right way, could serve as sociological material. And they would carry that innovation into their work at VTsIOM.

In fact, literature and the publishing world played an outsized role in the sociological picture of Soviet and post-Soviet Russian society that VTsIOM constructed. VTsIOM's broad-based public opinion surveys often included questions on how much people were reading, which genres they favored, and how they found their reading materials. For comparison, no such questions were consistently asked in Gallup's or Allensbach's regular studies of the American or West German populace. The Soviet Union's proud reputation as the best-read country in the world (*samaia chitaiushchaia strana v mire*) helps explain the appetite for such questions in the Russian context, but Dubin and Gudkov's background at the Institute of the Book was also an essential component. When these two researchers joined VTsIOM, they brought with them their bibliographic experience and theoretical apparatus as they continued to work on the sociology of culture—and

especially of literature. Their writings within the influential publications of VTsIOM gave literature a central place in post-Soviet Russia's self-understanding and self-representation, and this alliance between literature and sociology shifted the position of the intelligentsia in post-Soviet Russia. Suddenly close reading, careful analysis of cultural texts, and literary hermeneutics—the skills the late-Soviet intelligentsia had developed in part to avoid public life through codes of Aesopian language and double meanings— could now prove central to the developing public sphere.

The motley collection of not-quite-sociologists who gathered under the umbrella of VTsIOM brought together some of the most important tendencies of the late-Soviet intelligentsia—from the economist Zaslavskaia to the underground poet Dubin, from the repressed theoretician Levada to the philosopher-turned-technocrat Grushin. Their work at VTsIOM transformed them from outcasts—each pushed to the edges of late-Soviet life—into central figures in the post-Soviet public sphere. All of the late-Soviet experiences they brought with them—their diverse backgrounds and their years of academic exile—influenced how they saw their work, and how they crafted the mirror they would hold up to post-Soviet society. They hoped to provide a clear reflection of the post-Soviet citizen amid seismic social transformations. But that clarity proved both theoretically complex and ultimately elusive. Their work would transform post-Soviet society at least as much as it measured and reflected it.

COLLECTING AND REPRESENTING PUBLIC OPINION

Logistically, the institutionalization of VTsIOM and its procedures was a major undertaking. Not least because "the majority of the staff knew almost nothing about the study of public opinion."[25] Zaslavskaia knew little. Levada, despite his deep theoretical knowledge of sociology, was equally inexperienced. Only Grushin had any practical experience and he spent his first year pulling his hair out bringing the others up to speed.[26] But there were even more fundamental problems. Almost $500,000 earmarked to buy computer technology suddenly disappeared in an international bank transfer. (The promised technology was delivered only two years later.) And most essentially, VTsIOM needed to set up twenty-five offices across the Soviet Union, and somehow connect them.

In order to measure public opinion from across the vast swathes of Soviet territory, VTsIOM's surveys would have to be standardized and disseminated to the new regional offices. In each of the twenty-five locations, workers would then go out to physically knock on doors and conduct interviews with representative members of the local populations, chosen according to Grushin's sampling method. The completed surveys would then have to make their way back to the Moscow office for processing. The material realities of the Soviet Union made these tasks much more difficult than they were in either the United States or West Germany, where VTsIOM's model organizations operated. The Soviet Union was much vaster than either country, it was technologically

behind, and crucially it was more ethnically and linguistically diverse. These realities complicated the task of setting up a nationwide network in ways that can be roughly grouped under three terms: quality control, communication, and standardization.

Local offices, thousands of miles from Moscow, were staffed by the best people Grushin could find, but the lack of official education in sociology—and especially public opinion polling—throughout the Soviet Union meant that many office directors might have been well-respected but had little practical experience or comprehension of sociological methods. For the first two years, interviewers and their supervisors came to Moscow for training courses in summer and senior VTsIOM researchers often traveled from Moscow to the field offices to train regional staff, carry out quality control checks, and even conduct interviews among the local populations.[27] Still, worries about survey quality and uniformity lingered, especially in VTsIOM's first years. The Moscow office, as Zaslavskaia worried, "could do little to control how a survey was actually conducted in Dushanbe or Khabarovsk."[28]

Once the survey was conducted, the results had to make their way back to Moscow. In the late-Soviet era, fax machines still had not appeared even in the capitals, phone connections were unreliable, and the mail could take months to reach the farthest regional offices. The trains, however, still ran. VTsIOM paid train conductors to take packets of blank surveys across the country, where they would be met at the station by local employees who would take the forms to the field offices, conduct surveys, and send the results back by the same means. The system worked relatively well, though not without its problems. One tranche of results from Almaty, for instance, was lost and the Kazakh section of a nationwide survey had to be completely redone.[29]

The need for standardization and communication meant that the network of field offices was created not only on Soviet-era infrastructure, but also through Soviet-era connections (mostly those Grushin had developed) and under Soviet-era assumptions. Those with bureaucratic knowledge and connections to Moscow were chosen to lead field offices over those with other skills, such as local knowledge, embeddedness in local and indigenous populations, or fluency in local languages. These priorities were set out of expediency rather than any philosophical preference. Standardization and efficiency was key to pulling off VTsIOM's all-but-impossible task. But standardization came at certain costs. Leaders of field offices and poll workers were trained in Russian to ask questions and collect responses in Russian. When VTsIOM researchers from Moscow traveled to field offices, quality control checks were handled in Russian. To my knowledge, VTsIOM did not conduct any polls in local languages. The preference for Russian was likewise one of expediency and standardization. The vastness of Soviet space and the unprecedented sampling ambitions made VTsIOM's data-gathering complex enough without translating among several languages. But the overreliance on Soviet networks, legacies, and Russocentrism created blind spots that would haunt the center and puncture its truth claims by the middle of the first post-Soviet decade.

By the end of 1988, however, the most basic logistical hurdles had been overcome and VTsIOM launched its first survey. It was a survey on the "problem of electing leaders," requested by the Gorbachev administration in an early effort to gauge the effects of undermining the Communist Party's monopoly on power. The second survey, launched around the same time, asked about the demand for literary journals. "Literary journals," as Gudkov explained to me, "were a deeply political question. The Central Committee of the Communist Party wanted to limit the print runs of the perestroika journals [*perestroechnye zhurnaly*, meaning those legacy Soviet journals such as *Znamia* and *Novyi mir*, which had gained enormous popularity during perestroika by publishing previously banned literature] in favor of more conservative publications such as *Pravda*."[30] VTsIOM's research showed that demand—and in fact readership—far outstripped supply and recommended that Goskompechat', the Soviet body responsible for mass media, not only increase print runs, but also allow journals to raise circulation from month to month rather than only once a year. Perhaps unexpectedly, VTsIOM's second-ever survey combined literature and politics in a way that brought the market reasoning of supply and demand into late-Soviet decision-making.

The next year, in 1989, VTsIOM launched its first large-scale public opinion surveys under the title "New Year." The survey grew into an annual longitudinal study led by Levada that asked citizens how they felt about everything from travel restrictions to alcohol consumption to socially marginalized groups. As the results rolled in, VTsIOM sought ways to represent its findings to a public unused to polling. Alongside narrative publications in various periodicals, academic articles, and policy recommendations, VTsIOM commissioned a series of comics that appeared in the pages of *Izvestiia*, the official newspaper of the Soviet government.

The comics were accompanied by short narratives written by VTsIOM researchers, while the illustrations themselves show human figures who are meant to represent respondents giving certain answers to a single survey question. The figures seem to roughly correspond to these respondents' demographic characteristics and are drawn in dynamic and often humorous situations meant to both catch the reader's eye and reflect something about the results of the survey. For instance, one such drawing that appeared on the front page of *Izvestiia* under the headline "The State and Us" shows three older men on the left representing three positions that the accompanying text describes as that of those who have "become used to state support." In the middle, two younger men stand under an apple tree. One says that the state is now so weak that citizens should be ready to make sacrifices to help the state (as he picks an apple with his left hand and gives away another with his right). The other insists on the opposite, that citizens should make the state serve their interests. A final figure sits on the ground, representing those who "had trouble answering" (Figure 1).

In this illustration, the represented ages of the figures roughly correspond to the demographic characteristics of the respondents who chose those answers, as described

FIGURE 1 Image from Artifact 00095.[a] Boris Dubin and V. Rozantsev, "Gosudarstvo i my," *Izvestiia* 49, no. 22952 (February 18, 1990): 1. The voice bubbles in the illustration read: under 4.4%, "The state gave us everything, no one has the right to demand anything else"; under 8.4%, "The state gives us so little that we do not owe it anything"; under 11.3%, "The state gives us more than a little, but we could demand more"; 33.2%, "The state is currently in such a position that we should help it, even be ready to make sacrifices"; under 32.5%, "We should become free people and make the state serve our interests"; and under 10.3%, "I have difficulty answering."

in the accompanying text. More confusing, perhaps, is the setting. Nothing in the accompanying text explains the apple tree or why the two young men would be helping each other pick and distribute its fruits. Meanwhile, the text itself seems to push interpretation in a direction not necessarily implied by the results. "For many decades," reads the teaser text in bold, "state organs have concentrated in their hands all of the available resources and the populace was left with the role of waiting in line. This could not help but instill a 'dependent consciousness' in many." This is a surprising way to open this short text, since only a small minority opinion (the 4.4% who responded that "The state gave us everything, no one has the right to demand anything else") seems to represent such a dependent consciousness.

But the apparent contradiction actually aligns with one of Levada's major projects and one which VTsIOM's findings were often used to support. Levada had been discussing the Soviet person, or Homo sovieticus, as a "specific socio-anthropological phenomenon" throughout the late-Soviet years in the private seminars he held with many of his former students. When he joined VTsIOM, a direct study of the phenomenon was among his top priorities. For Levada, the Soviet person was formed by the experiences of revolution and state terror and had taken on the central characteristics of exceptionalism (*iskliuchitel'nost'*), state paternalist orientation (*gosudarstvenno-paternalistskaia orientatsiia*), and hierarchical thinking (*ierarkhichnost'*).[31] This Soviet person was never demographically distinct. The model applied equally across genders and nationalities,

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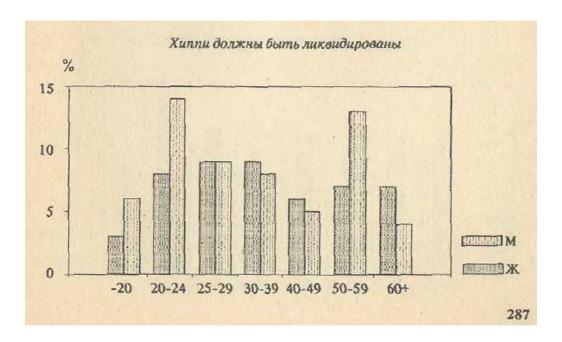[a] https://postsoviet90s.com/artifacts/the-rise-of-public-opinion-polling

which might help account for the fact that all the figures in the illustration in Figure 1 appear to be male, even though VTsIOM disaggregated results according to sex (though not according to nationality, which was implicitly assumed by VTsIOM's methodology to play little role in most polls). The Homo sovieticus model helps explain not only certain methodological decisions, but also some of the apparent incongruities in VTsIOM's presentation of its data. For instance, the "dependent consciousness" mentioned above might not correspond to the largest group of respondents, but it does correspond to important characteristics of Homo sovieticus.

Levada argued that Homo sovieticus was on its way out. It was no longer the dominant force in society, especially among the younger generations. Those born after the Second World War had missed the revolution, were too young for Stalin's terror, and had experienced only milder forms of state violence.[32] A series of studies designed by Levada set out to show how society was changing—becoming more tolerant, for instance. In one such study, VTsIOM researchers asked citizens in late 1991 what should be done with certain people "whose behavior deviates from generally accepted norms." Answers ranged from "liquidate" to "provide help" to "leave them to their own devices," and the groups included drug addicts, murderers, hippies, prostitutes, the poor, the homeless, and homosexuals. Setting aside the enormous ethical problems in grouping these "behaviors" under one rubric, the study shows that society was relatively tolerant (more tolerant, certainly, than the Soviet state had often been): most thought these people needed help and or should be left to their own devices. However, thanks to the study's disaggregation of results by demographic characteristics of respondents, it is clear that there is no straightforward correlation between age and tolerance. The group most likely to advocate for the "liquidation" of, say, hippies or drug addicts were 20–24-year-old men, and 25–29-year-old women, respectively (Figures 2 and 3).

Nevertheless, VTsIOM's publications often made the case that younger generations were more tolerant, open, and forward-looking, while it was the older generations who held fast to conservative views. For instance, when VTsIOM published an illustration in *Izvestiia* on a similar subject ("The Strength and Weakness of Taboos", Figure 4), the visuals made an implicit argument about the tolerance of various demographic groups. This question asks which topics should be off-limits for public discussion. An older woman in a kerchief covers her mouth in apparent shame as she voices the two most popular answers, "Sex techniques" (17%) and "Sexual relations between people of the same gender" (14%). An old man with a cane voices several other potential taboos, while a relatively young apparently blind man has "difficulty answering" and the youngest and most able-bodied figure feeds a power cord to a TV camera while responding, "There are no such topics." In contrast to the illustration, the text reveals that the group most likely to have trouble answering is women over 60 years old. It says nothing about the demographics of those who see no topics worth banning, and instead lets the illustration speak for itself.

Figures 2 and 3 Images from Artifact 0095.[b] Respondents who said that hippies (top) and drug addicts (bottom) should be "liquidated," broken down by age group and gender. (The lighter colored bars marked M represent men, the darker colored bars marked Ж represent women.) Iurii Levada, ed., *Prostoi sovetskii chelovek* (Moscow: VTsIOM, 1993), 287–88.

FIGURE 4 Image from Artifact 0095.[c] B. Dubin with illustrations by V. Rozantsev and A. Bezik, "Sila i slabost' zapretov," *Izvestiia* 86 (March 27, 1990): 2.

The illustrated format began as a way to introduce public opinion data to a new audience. But the intended accessibility of the format led to oversimplification and even, at times, misrepresentation. While not always true to the data, the illustrations projected the prejudices and hopes that Levada's Homo sovieticus project articulated: that an overdependence on the state, inculcated over generations, led to the paternalism and intolerance that characterized Soviet society, but that these characteristics were receding as the older generations aged. The illustrations suggest that the perestroika-era and post-Soviet subject would be more independent, more tolerant, more liberal. In other words, as they oversimplified and even misrepresented the data they were intended to elucidate, the illustrations attempted to create a post-Soviet subject that the data did not necessarily support.

When VTsIOM launched its own monthly journal in 1993, *Monitoring of Public Opinion* (*Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniia*), it eschewed the simplification of such illustrations and instead combined theoretical complexity with radical transparency.[33] The journal would be divided into two sections. The first, comprising roughly 30% of the journal's pages, was given over to in-depth analytical articles that treated the group's findings with a level of complexity and nuance that illustrated newspaper write-ups did not allow. The articles treated both broad longitudinal trends and more

[c] https://postsoviet90s.com/artifacts/the-rise-of-public-opinion-polling

narrow results of a specific month's surveys. These articles not only presented findings, they also developed the center's methodology and sociological theory. The second two-thirds of every issue was filled with reams of raw data, pages upon pages of the disaggregated results of that month's surveys. The idea was to disseminate widely all of the information gathered, without the distraction of illustrations or visualizations, in the hope that transparency would lead to uptake, and the public opinion surveys would lead to a populace that better understood itself and a government that was more responsive to its needs.

The publication of raw data also suggested that VTsIOM's efforts were but one aspect of this new way of knowing the world it was projecting. Other researchers, both domestic and international, might be able to use the data in their own research. In this way, VTsIOM was adopting and amplifying the worldwide practice of public opinion polling that it saw as an essential aspect of joining the post-Cold War world. Indeed, in the first issue of *Monitoring*, VTsIOM's head researchers Levada and Gudkov invoked George Gallup as the international founder of public opinion polling and its best advocate for the practice's importance for an open society.[34] For Gallup, public opinion polling was a necessary aspect of political life, for "In the democratic community, the attitudes of the mass of people determine policy." Even more important, public opinion was a bulwark against authoritarianism. Writing in 1940, Gallup wanted public opinion polling to respond to critiques of democracy from the likes of Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin, who suggested (in Gallup's paraphrase) that "democracy is cumbersome and slow-moving." While the will of a strong leader can act quickly and boldly, the logic went, democracy has to consider the consent of the governed. Public opinion—broad-based, statistically represented, and transparently published—would help address this problem. It would give democratic society the tools it needed to respond to its populace and ultimately to survive the threat of authoritarianism. Furthermore, public opinion had at its heart a very democratic principle: "It believes in the value of every individual's contribution to political life, and in the right of ordinary human beings to have a voice in deciding their fate. Public opinion, in this sense, is the pulse of democracy."[35]

THE OBJECTIVE SPIRIT AND THE MARKET

Looking back on their years at VTsIOM, however, Dubin and Gudkov saw something more than the pulse of democracy in their version of public opinion polling. In a 2008 volume, they wrote that they were drawn to the kind of broad-based sociological analysis practiced at the center, because they saw it as the only "reasonable foundation" from which to begin the kind of research that might approach society's "objective Spirit" (*ob"ektivnyi Dukh*).[36] On one level, the sentiment expresses something that VTsIOM's monthly journal also emphasized, that broad sociological analysis could lead to a clearer

and even objective vision of society.[37] VTsIOM's monthly journal carried the slogan "From Opinions to Understanding" ("*Ot mnenii k ponimaniiu*"), suggesting that the collation of huge numbers of comparable opinions would allow a meta-level of understanding of the country as a whole that was previously inaccessible. But the use of "objective Spirit" suggests something beyond straightforward objectivity.

The phrase is patently Hegelian, as Dubin and Gudkov's capitalization of Spirit (*Dukh*) underlines. For Hegel, the objective Spirit is the driving force of history.[38] It is the human spirit as it expresses itself in the world, and in a broadly held reading of Hegel, it culminates in the ethnic nation-state.[39] What is at stake in defining the object of sociology in these Hegelian terms is nothing less than a full refutation of the Soviet-Marxist vision of history. In place of materialism—the primacy of economic and material conditions in the unfolding of history—VTsIOM sided with Hegel's idealism. Broadly defined, philosophical idealism holds that external reality can best be known through our perception, our ideas about that reality, and therefore reality is above all a mental construct. For Hegel, history should be understood from this position. It is driven not by the material world alone, but by ideas about the world in constant dialogical tension with the world itself. That dialectic creates the objective Spirit. VTsIOM, through its broad-based public opinion surveys, mirrored this dialectic. It asked about material conditions but gave primacy to respondents' subjective answers in its attempt to model post-Soviet society. In other words, it reconstructed the changing world primarily by asking for people's subjective experience of and ideas about that world. In this way, it was public opinion as idealist philosophy. Or perhaps the other way around.

Emblematic of this position was VTsIOM's relationship to literature and the bourgeoning book market. VTsIOM surveys on reading habits were often published in *Knizhnoe obozrenie*, the major trade publication of the book industry. *Knizhnoe obozrenie* had eagerly embraced market thinking even before the fall of the Soviet Union, and in the 1990s, it developed post-Soviet Russia's first bestseller lists, which became central to the newspaper's reputation and to the publishing world. As VTsIOM placed its studies alongside bestseller lists and articles like "How to Become the Russian Agatha Christie" and "The Formula for Success," it seemed to suggest that its sociology might also have market potential.[40] For instance, VTsIOM published the feature "What Are Russians Reading?" (Figure 5), which showed genre preferences disaggregated for gender, age, and education levels. The study found that action thrillers ("*ostrosiuzhetnaia slovesnost'*") had become the "gravitational pole for young men" while "the interests of young and more educated women are concentrated first and foremost on romance novels."[41]

Though such statistics do not include individual titles, the bestseller lists printed in the very same newspaper confirm the findings with names of actual bestsellers including, in this particular week, Nikolai Leonov's *Confessions of a Spy* and an unauthorized
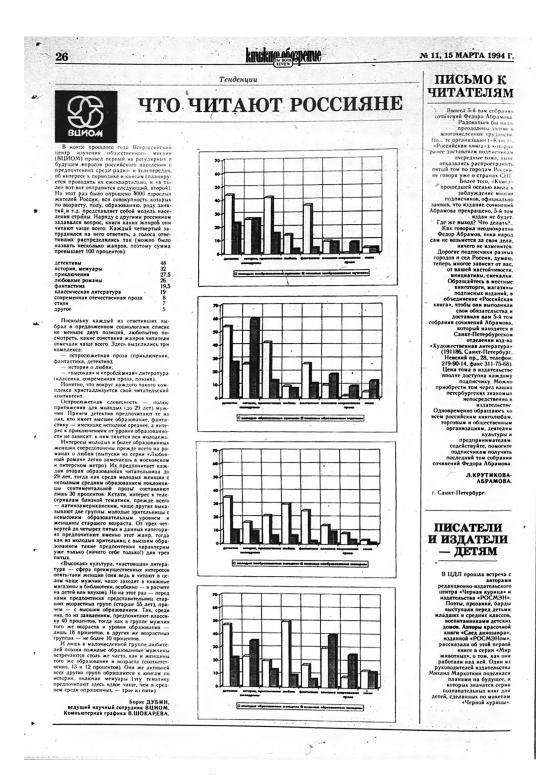
Figure 5   Image from Artifact 00095.[d] Boris Dubin, "Chto chitaiut rossiane?" *Knizhnoe obozrenie* (March 15, 1994): 26.

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[d]   https://postsoviet90s.com/artifacts/the-rise-of-public-opinion-polling

FIGURE 6 Image from Artifact 00017.[e] On the right page, list of "Bestsellers of Moscow"; on the left, the headline "The Magic of the Bestseller" tops an article about what is read abroad and what is published in Russia today. *Knizhnoe obozrenie* (August 16, 1994): 6–7.

sequel to Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* called *Rhett Butler* (Figure 6).[42] The latter was part of a trend of bestsellers which had specifically followed the market data published in *Knizhnoe obozrenie* to produce ready-made bestsellers. *Rhett Butler* was one of six sequels and prequels to Mitchell's international sensation all penned by an anonymous collective of Minsk-based writers and published under the name Dzhuliia Khilpatrik. The Khilpatrik collective was only one (and perhaps the most successful) of several such groups which used the new market data to drive the creative process (Artifact 00098[f]).[43]

In this particular context, VTsIOM's sociological study distills the market, providing a higher level of abstraction. VTsIOM's researchers took this orientation one step further. Dubin and Gudkov argued that literature—including the pulp fiction bestsellers that enjoyed such popularity at the time—could be seen as an important social institution, "the basic functional significance of which we take to be the support of the cultural identity of society." In this light, each type of literature could provide insight into the

[e] https://postsoviet90s.com/artifacts/bestsellers-of-moscow
[f] https://postsoviet90s.com/artifacts/gone-with-the-wind-the-post-soviet-sequels

"structure of the normative-value systems of certain social groups."[44] In other words, as they argued at length in their co-authored book *Literature as a Social Institution* (1994), through the hermeneutic strategies championed by Iser and Jauss, what people read could be a promising approach to that ever-elusive objective Spirit.

In a series of essays, Dubin showed how this methodology might be applied to specific genres. Among essays on romance and historical fiction, Dubin wrote on the "Sociological Poetics of the Russian Action Novel [*roman-boevik*]," in which he analyzed the rising popularity of violent action thrillers by the likes of Danil Koretskii and Viktor Dotsenko and their protagonists Antikiller and Mad Dog.[45] In a subtle analysis of dozens of bestselling works, Dubin argued that action thrillers provided a symbolic test of Russian masculinity during the transitional years, as Russia moved from "an ideology of collectivism to an ideology of individualism." Nearly all the protagonists in this genre, Dubin notes, are orphans, and in the novels, they almost always act alone. The protagonist, Dubin writes, is the sole "source of 'reality' in the novel."

> [He] is at the cutting edge of time, he alone gives it its pace and rhythm of events, he directs himself and what happens. More than that, he feels himself to be on the cutting edge of world history, if not of all of civilization: "I am the edge of humanism: its sharpened end [*ia krai gumanizma; ego zaostrennoe okonchanie*]," the protagonist says of himself, justifying his destructive mission and confirming his own reality.[46]

The hero not only guides the reader through the difficulties of the new world; he creates the values of that new world through his own ability to navigate it. The new world is corrupted by selfish interests, but it is only the extraordinary individual, guided by a strict (but individual) moral code, who can set things right. The hero of the action thriller is in many ways the opposite of Homo sovieticus, whose decline VTsIOM had so long been tracking. If the Soviet person had a "dependent consciousness" characterized by "state-paternalist orientation" and "hierarchical thinking," then the hero of the action thriller is the individualist extraordinaire, fully independent and able to navigate and even transform a world almost entirely bereft of state power. The implied reader of these texts does not correspond directly to their heroes but the texts are constructed in such a way to make it clear that a reader is intended to admire the hero, his actions, and his values. The popularity of such novels, in turn, suggested a widespread aspiration toward the values which the protagonists express both explicitly and implicitly.

Though Dubin's genre analyses were inspired by research done at VTsIOM (the results of which were often published in VTsIOM's monthly journal), they appeared in literary journals such as *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, *Znamia*, or *Novyi mir*.[47] These articles, and others like them, changed the relationship between literature and the social sciences. They showed that literary criticism, especially criticism that took on mass literature, might grow out of the social sciences. More specifically, the social

sciences might guide critics' attention, and in turn the tools of criticism might be used to deepen sociological analysis. Though an "anthropological turn" in literary studies was discussed in subsequent decades—following a similar turn in the Anglo-American scholarship—the researchers at VTsIOM, and especially Dubin, brought the social sciences and literary studies together much earlier.[48] This synthesis, however, was different from the later anthropological turn. Based as it was on public opinion surveys, statistical data, and sociological theories, it might instead be thought of as the sociological turn in literary studies. It suggested that sociology and statistically represented public opinion, rather than aesthetics, might guide a critic's attention, and that the analysis of commercial culture—rather than of high art—might reveal society's most resonant symbolic representations.

Crucially, this kind of literary criticism connects the market to symbolic cultural representation. *Knizhnoe obozrenie*'s bestseller lists identify individual novels with broad appeal, VTsIOM's representative surveys suggest who reads what, and essays like Dubin's extract an understanding of the collective psyche by reading the bestselling books in the most popular genres. But something else happens in between: the market intervenes. As we saw with "Dzhuliia Khilpatrik," the availability of bestseller lists and sociological information on readers' preferences pushed writers and publishers to create literature based on the demands identified in the market data. The bestselling action thrillers that Dubin analyzed, then, were partly what readers demanded, but partly what the market had made profitable to produce at high volume. In this way, as VTsIOM constructed and represented an image of post-Soviet Russian society through the literature it chose to read, it empowered the market to guide those representations. In other words, if post-Soviet society's "objective Spirit" might be pursued through broad-based statistical sampling, then its reflection in mass culture was inevitably mediated by the market. Combined, these two developments might be seen as part of a broader marketization of culture, but not in the way that phrase is usually understood. Cultural products were indeed exchanged on capitalist markets in new ways. But the market was not simply a place of exchange; it became an integral part of how culture was received, how it was evaluated, and how its meanings—and their broader implications for society—were extracted.

That the market might play such a central role in the transition away from the Homo sovieticus model that had been at the center of Levada and the VTsIOM researchers' investigations from the late 1980s is perhaps no surprise. Yearly surveys had shown that even as post-Soviet Russians were exhausted by and often opposed to some of the economic reforms that ushered in the market economy, they had adopted many of the values of neoliberal capitalism. Over the course of the 1990s, even as more respondents say they could not find their way in the new society, they showed a stronger orientation toward individual success, for instance, and they began to value private property over collective responsibility.[49] But what is perhaps more surprising is that the combination

of state disintegration and post-Soviet capitalism that characterized the Russian 1990s not only moved society away from Levada's Soviet person, but moved it toward the testosterone-charged hero of the action thriller. Through the market and VTsIOM's representations of post-Soviet society, in other words, it appeared that Homo sovieticus was replaced not by a liberal democratic subject, but by something closer to Savelii "Mad Dog" Govorkov.

NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE AND THE MANIPULATION OF PUBLIC OPINION

Levada argued that as Homo sovieticus receded, the Soviet Union weakened and eventually fell, opening the way for a new liberal, independent subject. But as the Union disintegrated, something else happened to Soviet citizens: they became Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and so on. The proliferation of citizenship categories was dwarfed by those of ethnic identification. VTsIOM had neither the linguistic resources, the demographic sophistication, nor the local staffing to measure and respond to all the rapidly shifting ethnic rifts threatening to pull societies apart across the former Soviet Union. Simultaneously, many of the logistical hurdles VTsIOM had overcome in its first two years resurfaced. Several regional offices found themselves divided from the central hub by newly drawn international borders. Some reorganized into private polling firms that cooperated with VTsIOM on occasional projects, others disappeared entirely. Customs regulations exacerbated the communication problems that had dogged VTsIOM from the start. But the problems went beyond the logistical. The question of national independence was among the most fraught during the transition years—making it one of the most important topics for VTsIOM to study. But nationalities and ethnicities had always been a blind spot, with linguistic specificity and local knowledge often sacrificed in the name of standardization and expedience. As the Soviet Union ended, the increasing violence of national independence movements made such study both more pressing and more difficult.

Gudkov recalled one vivid example in his interview with me. A routine quality control trip took him to the Dushanbe office in the fall of 1991. He was in the process of conducting interviews in an apartment block with a local colleague when a machine gun fired. It was close by. Then an artillery shell exploded even closer. The conversation was cut short, and Gudkov and his colleague rushed back to safety as the Tajikistani civil war started in earnest. Less than an hour later, Gudkov was on the last civilian flight out of the city, with unfinished survey results in his carry-on luggage.[50] Though VTsIOM and its flagship publication continued to cover national independence movements extensively, including the unfolding civil war in Tajikistan, this moment shows the difficulty of implementing VTsIOM's ideals in the post-Soviet context. Public opinion, as articulated by Gallup, was supposed to provide the "pulse of democracy." It was

to give an open society a clear and transparent vision of itself, so that well-informed decisions could be made quickly that would benefit the populace. Yet when warfare literally interrupted and overtook VTsIOM's data-gathering operations, it became clear that the violence moved faster than reliable information in the post-Soviet peripheries. The open society to which post-Soviet Russia aspired did not have time to understand—much less undertake decisions to stem—the violence that accompanied its birth.

The Tajikistani civil war did not silence VTsIOM. (The center and its successor the Levada Center would continue their work through much more dire straits up to the present day.) Indeed, throughout the 1990s VTsIOM's *Monitoring of Public Opinion* devoted a huge proportion of its pages to polling on the various national independence movements across post-Soviet space, from Dushanbe to the Crimean Peninsula. Gudkov himself moved away from literary sociology for much of the early 1990s in order to concentrate on the various national independence movements that were pulling the country and its neighbors apart. Among the regions in his portfolio was Chechnya, which had declared its independence even before the Soviet Union dissolved. A civil war had been raging in the region since, with refugees streaming into Russia and unchecked violence on the ground. As Boris Yeltsin entered the last years of his first term, it was clear that the conflict in Chechnya—along with the catastrophic transition to a market economy—was among the most serious domestic issues he would face.

For Gudkov, the entanglement between the First Chechen War and Yeltsin's 1996 re-election campaign changed the place of polling in Russia forever. After Yeltsin's re-election, public opinion polling was no longer seen as a transparent metric of popular sentiment. It was seen as one more tool to be manipulated by the new breed of PR strategists who came to be known as "political technologists." Indeed, the manipulability of public opinion became a dominant theme of the second half of the 1990s, as the hopes that were invested in the possibility of an open society gave way to a society that seemed manipulable through the very mechanisms that were charged with its protection. For most, the turn came with the 1996 presidential campaign. When Yeltsin announced his intentions to run for a second term in January that year, his approval rating hovered around 6%, and for the first two months of the campaign, he polled well behind Communist Party candidate Gennady Ziuganov.[51] Yeltsin first led (at 28% to Ziuganov's 26%) in an April 4 poll conducted just days after an International Monetary Fund loan was approved (at the urging of US President Bill Clinton).[52] Soon the Yeltsin campaign hired a panel of British and American strategists and enlisted the help of media tycoons Boris Berezovsky and Vladimir Gusinsky, and for much of April and all of May, Yeltsin led in the polls, though he never captured majority support and after the first round of voting in June, he was forced into a runoff election the next month, in which he squeaked out a narrow victory (Artifact 00102[g]).[53] The election is remembered not only

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[g] https://postsoviet90s.com/artifacts/a-way-out-of-the-dead-end

for the heavy hand of Western (largely American) involvement, but also for the frequency of polls that not only followed the developing narrative, but drove it.[54]

But for Gudkov, the loss of trust in public opinion polling started not in Moscow, but in Chechnya. Gudkov had been overseeing VTsIOM's polling on Chechnya since 1992, which had shown consistent and widespread support within the republic for independence from Russia (if not always for the leadership of Dzhokar Dudaev). But in late 1994, he was invited into the Russian White House and asked to explain a recent poll that showed the opposite. The poll was not VTsIOM's; it was commissioned by Russian intelligence and carried out by Nugzar Betaneli, a Georgian specialist in public opinion. "I was horrified," Gudkov told me. "Because this information was on Yeltsin's desk and essentially it said that the Chechen people would greet Russian soldiers with flowers in their hands…It was pure manipulation of information, manipulation of leadership. I was horrified and said that it was pure falsification."[55] Nevertheless, the decision to invade was undertaken and Yeltsin launched the disastrous First Chechen War. But Chechnya's place in VTsIOM's surveys—and in Yeltsin's political fate—only grew. In fact, Gudkov recalls that the end of the First Chechen War was also connected to public opinion. "In 1996, we showed that without a peace treaty in Chechnya," Gudkov told me, "Yeltsin couldn't win re-election. That was the main condition. And relying on our data, Yeltsin unwillingly agreed to peace."[56]

It is a nice story about a good poll setting right the sins of a bad poll. And Yeltsin did indeed sign a temporary ceasefire in the weeks before the election. He even flew down to Grozny and declared victory over the "rebellious Dudaev regime."[57] But the peace barely lasted through election day and the brutality of the third Battle of Grozny in August 1996 made the last-minute ceasefire look like a cynical campaign stunt. Indeed, the twin roles public opinion played in the First Chechen War represent not the good and bad side of polling, but rather two ways in which polling can be manipulated, and two ways in which the faith in polling was undermined. First, VTsIOM's success had made public opinion polling an influential and profitable enterprise, and polling agencies proliferated. Some—like Boris Grushin's commercial Vox Populi, or the Public Opinion Foundation (FOM)—grew directly out of VTsIOM's operations. Others were connected to VTsIOM's regional offices or started independently. Almost all worked for hire, often producing the results clients desired. But the second way polling was undermined was perhaps more insidious. The right polls could be used for anything—both stoking war and ending it. And as Yeltsin's declaration of victory in Grozny made clear, even transparent, rigorous, good-faith polling could be used cynically.

By the second half of the 1990s, the hopes for a transparent metric that would clearly reflect the pulse of democracy, that would hold up a reliable mirror to a newly open society, had transformed to something more equivocal. Public opinion surveys still provided essential information about society, and VTsIOM and its researchers worked tirelessly, honestly, and idealistically toward the open society that they had envisioned

since the center was founded the previous decade. But after 1996, it had become clear that a truly world-class polling agency—and VTsIOM had made itself into that—was not enough to ensure an open society. Under the chaotic and violent conditions of post-Soviet capitalism, openness, transparency, and information flows were as manipulable as their opposites. After Yeltsin's cynical use of polling in the 1996 campaign, he mostly ignored the poll numbers as he stumbled through his second term in office. His successor, on the other hand, would pay close attention to polling and soon transform its role in society.

Vladimir Putin was appointed Deputy Prime Minister and then acting Prime Minister in August 1999, but it wasn't until September that he first entered the public consciousness. At a press conference, he was asked about the recent bombing of Russian forces outside of Grozny, Chechnya. His response ("We will follow the terrorists wherever they go…That means, if you'll excuse me, we'll find them in the toilet, we'll soak them in the latrine if it comes to that. That's it. The question is closed.") became emblematic of the hard line he intended to take in prosecuting the Second Chechen War, and boosted his poll numbers immediately.[58] He became a national figure, Yeltsin's handpicked successor, and on December 31, 1999, acting President. VTsIOM's polls predicted his easy victory in the March 2000 elections and rising oil prices buoyed his poll numbers for much of his first term.[59] But the polls also recorded the first disaster of his presidency with a clear dip in August 2000 when the Kursk submarine sank and Putin's bloodless response was seen as distant and even heartless.

Two years later, as VTsIOM's polls began to show popular dissatisfaction with the Second Chechen War, the organization found itself on a list of government agencies slated for privatization. The polling agency was still officially a government entity, reporting to the Ministry of Labor, but it had received no state funding since 1992 and had operated with *de facto* independence. Levada saw the upcoming changes as a government takeover, cloaked as the opposite. Through privatization, he feared, VTsIOM's independence would disappear. Over the next year, VTsIOM polls continued to surface politically unwelcome results. Perhaps most damning, Putin's party, United Russia, had earned little trust. Less than six months from the December 2003 parliamentary elections, VTsIOM showed that neither the working class (who preferred the Communists) nor intellectuals (who preferred the liberal party Yabloko) trusted United Russia to represents their interests.[60] According to Levada and other VTsIOM researchers, it was results like this that put VTsIOM in the administration's crosshairs. But the Ministry of Property, who handled the privatization, denied any political motivation. "Levada is a civil servant who reports directly to the Labor Minister," said ministry spokesman Aleksandr Parshukov. "It just so happened that [Labor Minister Aleksandr] Pochinok hasn't been interfering in his affairs."[61] In September 2003, VTsIOM was turned into a joint stock company, with a new board of directors (which included no VTsIOM researchers) and 100% of shares owned by the state.

Levada left and much of the staff followed. Unwilling to let go of the organization he and colleagues had built, Levada opened VTsIOM-A and continued to publish independent, rigorous polling data under the same logo. An inevitable lawsuit forced the new agency to drop the Soviet-era acronym and take on the name Levada Center, under which it has continued to conduct the most reliable polls in Russia ever since. Meanwhile VTsIOM continues to exist, operating since 2003 as something like the state's internal polling agency while also trading on the VTsIOM brand to garner commercial contracts for market research and other side projects.

The takeover—a combination of bureaucratic maneuvering, neoliberal capitalist procedures, and resurgent state power—was perhaps a fitting end for VTsIOM and its ideals. Brought into the world to build a new regime of truth for the post-Soviet era, it combined Western models with previously suppressed theory, all energized by the diverse legacies of the late-Soviet intelligentsia. And it created something truly groundbreaking that transformed the society it served. For its first years of existence, VTsIOM played a vital role in the energetic and open public sphere that seemed poised to fulfill the promises of glasnost and perestroika. As its researchers strove to accurately portray society, to deeply analyze trends their research surfaced, VTsIOM gave post-Soviet society perhaps its most accurate picture of itself. More important, through its publications and prominent presence in other media outlets, VTsIOM propounded the idea that such an accurate picture might be possible. But it was, from its very beginning, a project of political power. It was formed by directive of the Communist Party and its first poll was commissioned by the General Secretary. It had built its nationwide network through bureaucratic connections and, as it gained independence and theoretical sophistication, it had formed a relationship with the capitalist market. So it was perhaps no surprise that it was vulnerable to a new combination of neoliberalism and state power in the guise of what would become Putin's capitalist authoritarianism.

Perhaps just as important, from its founding, VTsIOM had often treated public opinion polling not as a tool of popular sovereignty—a method by which broad swathes of the population might influence government decision-making—but as a barometer of public sentiment in reaction to decisions already made. Its first poll asked how people felt about democratic reforms already instituted. Early surveys on privatization asked not whether to continue, but how respondents felt about the current state of affairs. This relationship to polling subordinated public opinion to state prerogatives and opened the door to state takeover. It is worth reiterating that the state did not shutter VTsIOM after taking it over. It is as active as ever, executing weekly polls ordered by the state with results broadcast on state television and published in the press. In fact, polling remains central to the state's view of itself and its communication with the populace under Putin today. Greg Yudin has recently argued that "Russia exists in a state of constant plebiscite in which the regime aims to continuously demonstrate popular support for Putin to domestic and foreign audiences."[62] Never fully a tool for

popular sovereignty, polling has now transformed into the opposite: a tool for the legitimation of the state and the depoliticization of the populace. State-commissioned polls bombard the populace with Putin's popularity, making it very clear that opposition is doomed and the leader's every decision will be supported. Even independent polls (such as those by the Levada Center) show extremely high support for Putin's delusional invasion of Ukraine. But as Yudin has argued, this support reflects the populace's relationship to polling more than it does their feelings about the war. Yudin cites a recent poll which asked both "If Putin signed a peace treaty with Ukraine tomorrow would you support it?" (73% would) and "If Putin announced a renewed attack on Kyiv, would you support it?" (64% would), which suggests that respondents see polls as little more than an opportunity to agree with decisions already made, what pollsters call "acclaimation."[63]

This problem has certainly been exacerbated by the current regime. As Putin's state has become more repressive, respondents are only more likely to express agreement with all government decisions, not only because they fear reprisal, but also because they feel as though they are speaking directly to the state, with whom the only appropriate communication is supplicant flattery. Polls increasingly play a role similar to Putin's annual call-in shows, Direct Line (*Priamaia liniia*). They encourage a feeling of direct connection between the populace and political power, while providing evidence of the President's popularity and modeling the standards of correct behavior, all in a clearly stage-managed, but nevertheless convincing manner. These feedback mechanisms have become simulacra of democratic institutions with an importance that is perhaps surprising within an authoritarian regime. But Putin, like many of his modern autocratic peers, is addicted to polling. His administration commissions hundreds of polls a year from several different agencies, including the now-state-administered VTsIOM. And he pays close attention to their results, even if at times pressuring pollsters to adjust methodologies to produce better numbers.[64] Polling, even state-commissioned polling, plays such a central role in maintaining the legitimacy of the regime, in part, because of the democratic ideals invested in it in the early years of VTsIOM. The idealistic vision that a new regime of truth in the post-Soviet era might be possible, that through broad-based sampling of the public's subjective opinions, a sufficiently sophisticated sociology might be able to find (and represent) something approaching society's true interests, needs, and desires, was a powerful one, and something of that vision carries through in the perversion of public opinion that we see today.

Even if VTsIOM's early development embedded some of the weaknesses that have allowed Putin's authoritarian regime to turn polling into yet another tool of "sovereign democracy," its idealism should not be forgotten. Zaslavskaia's bravery in her 1983 "Novosibirsk Report" not only detailed a well-known secret—that Stalinist assumptions about the economy were leading to catastrophe—but also proposed a bold solution—a shift in the way the state was to understand society, economy, and

the populace. Levada's deep theoretical knowledge of Western sociology and Grushin's Soviet-era polling experiences and tireless bureaucratic efforts made Zaslavskaia's solution not only feasible, but practicable and influential even before the Soviet Union fell. The complex modeling of VTsIOM researchers such as Dubin and Gudkov made public opinion polling into something more than a feedback mechanism for state projects. It became a dominant mode of self-knowledge and self-reflection for post-Soviet society. For better and for worse, the liberal, transparent, market-adjacent thinking that energized VTsIOM's early research, theoretical investigations, and statistical modeling of Soviet and post-Soviet society became the prevailing regime of truth in the post-Soviet era. But the dream of this new kind of truth proved no match for state power. Its mechanisms and use value proved at least as serviceable for a rising autocrat as they had for understanding a newly democratic populace. Polling helped bring into existence an active post-Soviet public sphere. And it also helped pave the way for its demise.

Notes

1 Oleg Kharkhordin, for instance, points to the development of *druzhiny*, comrades' courts, and other institutions of the collective as the locus of mutual surveillance during the Thaw. See his *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), esp. pp. 279–328.

2 Boris Grushin, "Institut obshchestvennogo mneniia 'Komsomol'skoi pravdy'," in *Obshchestvennyi razlom i rozhdenie novoi sotsiologii. Dvadtsat' let monitoringa*, ed. Lev Gudkov and Boris Dubin (Moscow: Novoe izdatel'stvo, 2008), 443–62.

3 For a discussion of several such studies of late-Soviet consumption, see Serguei Oushakine, "'Against the Cult of Things': On Soviet Productivism, Storage Economy, and Commodities with No Destination," *The Russian Review* 73, no. 2 (2014): 198–236.

4 Lev Gudkov, "Sotsiologiia Iuriia Levady," introduction to Iurii Levada, *Vremia peremen: Predmet i pozitsiia issledovatelia* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2016), 10. For a discussion of several of the major works of IKSI, see pp. 10–14.

5 Grushin, "Istoriia izucheniia obshchestvennogo mneniia," *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniia* 63 (Jan–Feb 2003): 60–74.

6 Boris Firsov, *Istoriia sovetskoi sotsiologii. 1950-e–1980-e gody* (St. Petersburg: Iz-stvo Evropeiskogo universiteta, 2012), 301.

7 Firsov, *Istoriia sovetskoi sotsiologii*, 301.

8 Original publication in *The Washington Post*, August 1983. Full version: Tatyana Zaslavskaia, "The Novosibirsk Report," *Survey* 28, no. 1 (March 1984): 83–109.

9 Zaslavskaia, "The Novosibirsk Report," 93.

10 Materialy Plenuma Tsentral'nogo Komiteta KPSS, 14–15 iiunia 1983 goda (Moscow, 1983), 79. Quoted in Boris Grushin, "Na dal'nykh i blizhnykh podstupakh k sozdaniiu VTsIOMa," in *Obshchestvennyi razlom i rozhdenie novoi sotsiologii*, 18.

11 Courtney Doucette, "Glasnost in the Mailroom: The Soviet Subject in Gorbachev's Perestroika, 1985–1988," *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 48 (2021): 171–88.

12 Adam E. Leeds, "Dreams in Cybernetic Fugue: Cold War Technoscience, the Intelligentsia, and the Birth of Soviet Mathematical Economics," *Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences* 46, no. 5 (2016): 633–68.

13 T. I. Zaslavskaia, "K desiatiletiiu VTsIOM," *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniia* 1, no. 33 (1998): 9.

14 Grushin, "Institut obshchestvennogo mneniia 'Komsomol'skoi pravdy'."

15 The project was the Taganrog Study, which sought to understand the mechanisms and effects of Soviet mass media on the populace. See Boris Doktorov, "B.A. Grushin. Chetyre desiatiletiia izucheniia rossiiskogo obshchestvennogo mneniia," *Gefter.ru*, December 2, 2015, accessed December 15, 2022, http://gefter.ru/archive/16807.

16 Grushin, "Na dal'nykh i blizhnykh podstupakh k sozdaniiu VTsIOMa."

17 Doktorov, "B.A. Grushin."

18 See "Dissidenty o dissidentstve," *Znamia* 9 (September 1997).

19 Lev Gudkov. Personal interview. Zoom. August 26, 2022.

20 Gudkov. Personal interview.

21 For more on Iser's implied reader, see Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).

22 For the paradigmatic English-language publication on Jauss's "horizon of expectations," see Hans Rober Jauss and Elizabeth Benzinger, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," *New Literary History* 2, no. 1 (Autumn 1970): 7–37.

23 Revelations of Jauss's involvement in war crimes and his falsification of his war record began to emerge in the mid-1990s. The definitive report is Jens Westemeier, *Hans Robert Jauss: Jugend, Krieg und Internierung* (Konstanz: Konstanz University Press, 2016).

24 V. D. Stel'makh and N. K. Lobachev, *Kniga i chtenie v zerkale sotsiologii* (Moscow: Knizhnaia palata, 1990), 4.

25 Tatiana Zaslavskaia, "Kak rozhdalsia VTsIOM," in *Obshchestvennyi razlom i rozhdenie novoi sotsiologii*, ed. Gudkov and Dubin (Moscow: Novoe izdatel'stvo, 2008), 13.

26 Zaslavskaia, "Kak rozhdalsia VTsIOM," 11.

27 Gudkov. Personal interview.

28 Zaslavskaia, "Kak rozhdalsia VTsIOM," 15.

29 Zaslavskaia, "Kak rozhdalsia VTsIOM," 14.

30 Gudkov. Personal interview.

31 Iurii Levada, "Fenomen 'Chelovek sovetskogo': sotsiologicheskie parametry" [1993], in his *Vremia peremen*, 502–4.

32 Iurii Levada, "Ukhodiashchaia natura?" [1992], in his *Vremia peremen*, 481–98.

33 See Artifact #00095: "The Rise of Public Opinion Polling," *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniia: ėkonomicheskie i sotsial'nye peremeny: al'manakh*. Vserossiiskii tsentr izucheniia obshchestvennogo mneniia. 1992–2009.

34 Iurii Levada and Lev Gudkov, "Ot mnenii k ponimaniu," *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniia. Sotsial'nye i politicheskie izmeneniia*, no. 1 (January 1993): 1.

35 George Gallup and Saul Forbes Rae, *The Pulse of Democracy: The Public-Opinion Poll and How It Works* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1940), 8.

36 *Obshchestvennyi razlom i rozhdenie novoi sotsiologii*, 5–9.

37 Gudkov wrote that Levada saw sociology as a "system of positive knowledge, free from ideology, and for that reason, to a certain degree, allowing the researcher to take control of his own illusions alongside mass prejudices." Gudkov, "Sotsiologiia Iuriia Levady," in Iurii Levada, *Vremia peremen*, 6.

38 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 266–409. See also: Paul Redding, "Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2020 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta, accessed December 15, 2022, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/hegel.

39 Terry Pinkhard, "Objective Spirit: The Pulse of Self-Consciousness," in *Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit: A Critical Guide*, ed. Marina F. Bykova (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 147–63.

40 Oleg Leont'ev, "Kak stat' Agatoi Kristi v Rossii," *Knizhnoe obozrenie* 13 (April 1, 1997), 6.

41 "Ostrosiuzhetnaia slovesnost'—polius pritiazhenii dlia molodykh (do 29 let) muzhchin…Interesy molodykh i bolee obrazovannykh zhenshchin sosredotocheny prezhde vsego na romanakh o liubvi," Boris Dubin, "Chto chitaiut rossiane?" *Knizhnoe obozrenie* 11 (March 15, 1994), 26.

42 See Artifact #00017: "Bestsellery Moskvy," *Knizhnoe obozrenie* 11 (March 15, 1994): 2.

43 See Artifact #00098: "Gone with the Wind: The Post-Soviet Sequels." For more on the phenomenon of collective bestsellers, see Bradley A. Gorski, "Bestseller, or the Cultural Logic of Postsocialism," *Slavic Review* 79, no. 3 (Fall 2020): 613–35.

44 Boris Dubin and Lev Gudkov, *Literatura kak sotsial'nyi institut* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1994), 12–13.

45 Boris Dubin, "Ispytanie na sostoiatel'nost': Sotsiologicheskaia poetika russkogo romana-boevika," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 22 (1996): 252–74; quoted here from his *Ocherki o sotsiologii kul'tury. Izbrannoe* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2017), 386–419. A translated (and somewhat abridged) version of this text can be found as "The Action Thriller (Boevik) in Contemporary Russia," in *Reading for Entertainment in Contemporary Russia: Post-Soviet Popular Literature in Historical Perspective*, ed. Stephen Lovell and Birgit Menzel (Munich: Verlag Otto Sagner, 2005), 101–16. Quoting Dubin, among others, Eliot Borenstein develops a related argument about 1990s Russian masculinity with Dotsenko's Mad Dog in a central role. See Borenstein, *Overkill: Sex and Violence in Contemporary Russian Popular Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), esp. ch. 6, "Men of Action: Heroic Melodrama and the Passion of Mad Dog," 159–94.

46 Boris Dubin, "Ispytanie na sostoiatel'nost'," 389.

47 For instance, see "Chtenie i obshchestvo v Rossii," *Novyi mir* 3 (1993): 32–35; or "Ideologiia besstrukturnosti: Intelligentsiia i konets sovetskoi epokhi," *Znamia* 11 (1994): 166–79, both by Dubin. For a full list of Dubin's work, see *Ocherki o sotsiologii kul'tury*, 845–82.

48 See Nikolai Poseliagin, "Antropologicheskii povorot v rossiiskiikh gumanitarnykh naukakh," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 113 (January 2012). A key text in this turn is Valery Podoroga, *Mimesis. Materialy po analiticheskoi antropologii* (Moscow: Kul'turnaia revoliutsiia, 2006).

49 Levada, "Homo Post-Soveticus," in his *Vremia peremen*, 550, 568–69; Boris Dubin, "Uspekh po-russki," *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniia* 5, no. 37 (September–October 1998).

50 Gudkov. Personal interview. In another example, Gudkov recalled a 1994 telephone conversation with Movladi Udugov, the Minister of Information of Chechnya. Gudkov had heard that VTsIOM interviewers had been surrounded by fighters. Udugov said he would love to help, but it was Russian tanks surrounding the particular building where the interviews were being conducted.

51 All the polls for this campaign are collected at Wikipedia, "Opinion Polling for the 1996 Russian Presidential Campaign," accessed December 15, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion_polling_for_the_1996_Russian_presidential_election.

52 "10.2 Billion Loan To Russia Approved," *The New York Times* [Reuters], March 27, 1996.

53 Berezovsky and Gusinsky were two signatories to the "Letter of the 13," an open letter signed by the most powerful rising oligarchs decrying the possible return to communism and pleading for an alliance between private capital and a corporate-friendly neoliberal state. See Artifact #00102: "Vyiti iz tupika!" *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, April 27, 1996.

54 For an overview of the 1996 election, see Michael McFaul, *Russia's 1996 Presidential Election: The End of Polarized Politics* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1997); for an overview of the use of polling, see David S. Mason and Svetlana Sidorenko-Stephenson, "Public Opinion and the 1996 Elections in Russia: Nostalgic and Statist, Yet Pro-Market and ProYeltsin," *Slavic Review* 56, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 698–717.

55 Gudkov. Personal interview.

56 Gudkov. Personal interview.

57 See Teimuraz Mamaladze, "Skazano—sdelano. Boris El'tsin v Chechne pobyval," *Izvestiia* 98, no. 24705 (May 29, 1996): 1.

58 The phrase "soak them in the latrine" ("*v sortire ikh zamochim*") became one of the first so-called "Putinisms," or memorable phrases from his public appearances celebrated by his followers. It even has a Wikipedia page devoted to it. See Wikipedia, "Mochit' v sortire," accessed July 15, 2023, https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%9C%D0%BE%D1%87%D0%B8%D1%82%D1%8C_%D0%B2_%D1%81%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B5.

59 Daniel Treisman used VTsIOM data to argue that Putin's popularity had everything to do with the economic circumstances (much of it global) of his first term in office. See Daniel Treisman, "Presidential Popularity in a Hybrid Regime: Russia under Yeltsin and Putin," *American Journal of Political Science* 55, no. 3 (July 2011): 590–609.

60 Aleksandr Golov and Orkhan Jemal, "Za chto razgoniaiut VTsIOM," *Novaia gazeta*, August 14, 2003, accessed July 15, 2023, https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2003/08/14/17565-za-chto-razgonyayut-vtsiom.

61 Oksana Yablokova, "Ministry Defends VTsIOM Overhaul," *Moscow Times*, September 3, 2003, archived copy accessed July 15, 2023, https://web.archive.org/web/20110617012356/http://www.eng.yabloko.ru/Publ/2003/PAPERS/9/030903_mt.html.

62 Greg Yudin, "The War in Ukraine: Do Russians Support Putin?" *The Journal of Democracy* 33, no. 3 (July 2022): 31.

63 "Spetsial'naia voennaia operatsiia" v Ukraine: otnoshenie rossiian." 12 volna (July 16–19, 2023), https://russianfield.com/12volna.

64 See Sergei Guriev and Daniel Triesman, *Spin Dictators: The Changing Face of Tyranny in the 21st Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022), esp. 121–28.

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