

Counting the Soviet Nation: Population Politics under Brezhnev

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Abstract

This thesis addresses a period in Soviet history when, for the first time, basic indicators of health and mortality worsened in a sustained way that could not be explained by a temporary disaster. Not only did this worsening occur in combination with very low birth rates among ethnic Russians, but it stood in contrast to the progress on mortality and longevity being made in the capitalist West. As such, the Brezhnev era (1964-1982) provided uncharted demographic territory for leaders of the Soviet Union. The aim of this work is to examine the political implications of this change and subsequent response. An enormous literature shows how economic dynamics affected the Soviet Union, but these works often see demographic dynamics as a side-note rather than a political force in their own right. This study seeks to address this, arguing for the significance of population change in shaping late-Soviet politics and culture.

When Leonid Brezhnev took power in 1964, the Soviet population appeared in relatively good shape. Yet by end of the period, men were living three and a half years less than they had done a decade before. Alcoholism ran rampant, infant mortality had increased, and birth rates plunged below replacement levels. In response, the government attempted to suppress knowledge about the population from the public and the world in general, fearing that the bad news about Soviet health would undermine its domestic legitimacy and status on the world stage. At the same time, elites tried to reshape the population by controlling reproduction in a bid to resolve the Union's economic problems and bolster its military status. Instead, Soviet society developed independently of the regime, which was ultimately unable to affect basic life processes in the way the Party desired.

This work shows how political demography functioned in the Soviet Union, how population issues found purchase in official discourse, and why population dynamics became an important lens through which elites viewed other societal problems. Several themes emerge. Firstly, the research demonstrates the link between statistics and legitimacy, where indicators like life expectancy acted as a summary of the social policies of Soviet rule. Secondly, this study highlights the alluring nature of strategic demography, through which rulers seek to consolidate their power and mould the culture of society for generations to come. The Soviet Union was far from the only country aiming to reshape its population or halt changes brought by modernisation. This is a history of a specific region, but its themes are global in nature. Strategic demography asks not only how many, but what kind of people live in a territory and how this can be changed in the future. Finally, the research demonstrates how the pursuit of an ideal Soviet population was ultimately reduced to attempts to hide evidence, restrain choice, and paper over cracks.

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A Note on Transliterations

Throughout the thesis I use a modified version of the Library of Congress system of transliteration. I have made the following adaptations to aid the non-Russian speaker and improve general readability. The ligature tie used by the Library of Congress to represent double articulation, is not used here for ease of writing. This means that the letter *ц*, which usually becomes *ts̑*, is rendered simply as *ts*. This also applies to *iu* (*ю*) and *ia* (*я*). I have excluded diacritics that are not easily available on a standard keyboard and that do not have much meaning for the non-linguist reader. The letter *й* is rendered here simply as *i* and not *ĭ*. The letters *э* and *ё* appear as *e* rather than *è* and *ë*. In instances where Russian author names are well known or otherwise published in English I have not altered the transliteration of these. Well-known cities are referred to by their common English translation. For example, the capital of Ukraine is referred to as *Kyiv* throughout this thesis, except in bibliographic references to Russian language materials, where it appears as *Kiev*. Many Russian archival files had no proper title, or their titles bore no relations to the contents of the file. Rather than transliterating these, I have added a description in English as the title of archival files referenced here.

Abbreviations

Gosplan - State Planning Committee (*Gosudarstvennyi Planovyi Komitet*).

TsSU – The Central Statistical Administration of the USSR (*Tsentral'noe statisticheskoe upravlenie SSSR*).

AN – The Academy of Sciences of the USSR (*Akademiia Nauk SSSR*).

Goskomtrud – The State Committee for Labour and Social Issues (*Gosudarstvennyi komitet SSSR po trudy v sotsial'nykh voprosakh*).

Minvuz – The Ministry of Higher and Specialised Secondary Education (*Ministerstvo vysshego i srednego spetsial'nogo obrazovaniia SSSR*)

MGU – Moscow State University (*Moskovskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet*).

Population Centre – The Centre for the Study of Population Problems at Moscow State University (*Tsentr po izucheniiu problem narodonaseleniia Moskovskogo Universiteta*).

Scientific Council – The Scientific Council for the Study of Socio-Economic Problems of the Population at the Academy of Sciences USSR (*Nauchnyi sovet Akademii Nauk SSSR sotsial'no-ekonomicheskie problemy narodonaseleniia*).

Npn – This document has no page numbers.

Archival abbreviations

GARF - State Archive of the Russian Federation (*Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii*).

RGAE - Russian State Archive of the Economy (*Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Ekonomiki*).

ARAN – Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences (*Arkhiv Rossiikaia Akademiia Nauk*).

TNA – The National Archives of the United Kingdom

Introduction

This thesis is about demography in the Soviet Union. But it is not a study of statistical indicators, or even one of population change itself. Instead, this work shows how demography interacted with politics, how politicians and experts attempted to understand population change, to control it, and ultimately to remake Soviet society in the Party's desired image by changing demographic processes. As such, it is the social and political response to demographic change that is of most interest. By looking at the late-Soviet period through the lens of demographic politics, what can we learn, the research asks, about social change, ideology, censorship, or the functioning of the state?

The period between 1964 and 1982, when Leonid Brezhnev was leader of the USSR, was a key moment in the history of Soviet population change. The post-war generation was the first to have small, 'modern' families of the kind that dominate across Europe and America today. In this period, fertility rates fell below the replacement level of 2.1 in many republics for the first time. Russia was now on course for depopulation. At the same time, the gains made in health and mortality stalled, then reversed; life expectancy began to reduce in the very year that Brezhnev took power.¹ Infant mortality increased year on year from 1971.² Changes in Soviet fertility were echoed in reductions all around the world, but the worsening state of Soviet public health was not; most countries in the Global North continued to see improvements. The concerns and issues that arose in this period were thus different to those of previous eras. Under Stalin, natalism became a key strand of government policy, but health was still improving thanks to advances in medicine. Khrushchev's focus had likewise been replacing the war dead, but as life expectancy was increasing under his leadership, the focus was on births alone. Temporary spikes in the death rate during the first half of the twentieth century could also be put down to the huge, but temporary, upheavals of war, famine, and repression. The Brezhnev era was therefore the first time that the effects of stable, peacetime Soviet rule on demographic processes were observable, making it a highly interesting and fruitful case study for historians.³

¹ Andreev, E. M., Darskii, L. E., and Kharkova, T. L., *Naselenie sovetskogo soiuza: 1922-1991* (Moscow, 1993), p. 95.

² Goskomstat, *Naselenie SSSR 198: statisticheski sbornik* (Moscow, 1988), p. 344.

³ Blum, A., *Rodit'sia, zhit', i umeret' v SSSR: 1917-1991*, trans. Kustova, E. and Toritskaya, I. (Moscow, 2005).

This work shows how political demography functioned in the Soviet Union, how population issues found purchase in official discourse, and why population dynamics became an important lens through which elites viewed other societal problems. Evidence presented here shows that population experts saw worsening mortality, decreasing life expectancy, and falling fertility as an impending crisis and eventually persuaded ministers to see it in this way too. The Soviet government responded to this unwelcome news with stricter censorship of statistics on the one hand, and a renewed pronatalist drive to try and reverse changes on the other. The demographic discussion bled into many areas of state policy, from health, to propaganda, to education, to governance of the republics. Concern about demographic change produced real world effects and, in many cases, unintended consequences, as this thesis will show. Among other things, it resulted in improved family welfare, gave a voice to Russian nationalists, changed the relationship between ideology, science and academia, and reinforced sexist values. What it did not ultimately do was affect basic life processes. The effects of state response were many and varied, but the regime was ultimately unable to remake the population through the combined force of science and socialism, as elites had so passionately believed would be possible.

This thesis shows demographic change was a highly significant force shaping late-Soviet politics and culture, but one that has long been overlooked in the literature. Discussion of population was so highly politically charged because it provided terrain for leaders to imagine the nation's future, and in this respect leaders came to see demography as an unwelcome reflection of Soviet socialism. Knowledge of population change initially came from a small group of specialists who organised the census and first raised concerns about these trends. Their experience demonstrates how social statistics were dependent on individuals within institutions and not only reflected, but also shaped the way the population was known. Throughout the period, experts' influence and resources grew, but they always remained subject to censorship and potential repression because their findings so often contradicted the central Party belief that Soviet socialism (and ultimately communism) was superior to other political systems. A standoff between ideology and reality was, therefore, an endless problem for demographers. The way they navigated this is explored throughout this study.

Understanding the social and political response to demographic change in the Soviet Union is valuable because it shines a light on the workings of the Soviet state, the relationship between

experts and leaders, and the clash between ideology and empirical evidence in policy making. It is necessary too for understanding contemporary demographic statistics in former Soviet countries, where today's numbers still bear the imprint of Soviet distortion many decades before. Knowledge of the response to this earlier period of demographic problems in the Brezhnev era helps make sense of the responses to later demographic crises and stresses, such as that of the 1990s, or more recently Putin's pronatalism and the suppression of mortality data from infectious diseases. Most of all, it contributes to a wider global history that shows how the pursuit of an ideal population usually involves reimagining the future through other people's choices, with repercussions for gender relations, reproductive freedoms, and the treatment of minorities.⁴ This pursuit can bring positive results, like the improvement of healthcare or maternity leave, but plans are easily waylaid. What starts off as a desire to improve health and vitality can quickly become about restraining choice, burying evidence, and papering over cracks.

This thesis is in some measure both a political and a social history. It seeks to compare elite events and the workings of the state with the lives and perspectives of ordinary people. In exploring the meaning of population change, this thesis draws on and contributes to several areas of scholarship and historiography. It contributes to gender history and the history of contraceptive medicine, but it is also useful for understanding the role of experts, the construction of scientific knowledge, and the functioning of the Soviet state. It will also be helpful to those wishing to understand the Soviet perspective on global population debates of the mid-twentieth century. The remainder of this introduction provides an overview of demographic trends in the twentieth century and discusses the development of population statistics and the census in the USSR. I will discuss key perspectives on the history of population and the politics of reproduction before considering some of the main agents of the thesis—population experts—and their role in this particular history.

⁴ For examples from the significant literature addressing the global history of strategic demography, see Connelly, M., *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population* (Cambridge, MA, 2008); Bashford, A., "Nation, Empire, Globe: The Spaces of Population Debate in the Interwar Years", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, no. 1 (2007): 170-201; Togman, R., *Nationalizing Sex: Fertility, Fear, and Power* (Oxford, 2019); Hartmann, H. and Unger, C. R., eds. *A World of Populations: Transnational Perspectives on Demography in the Twentieth Century* (Berghahn Books, 2014); Hartmann, B., *Reproductive Rights and Wrongs: the Global Politics of Population Control* (Boston, 1995).

Demography as politics

Counting and measuring the population is a mathematical and supposedly objective logistical process, and indeed, one which has become so essential to modern statecraft that nation states can barely function without it.⁵ It should come as no surprise, therefore, that knowledge of the population is a topic fraught with political significance. Questions like, ‘When will I die?’ ‘How many of us are there?’ ‘Where do people live?’ are basic questions about life itself. They are concerned with birth, death, and space, or in demographic terms fertility, mortality, and migration—the three central tenants of demography.⁶ Of these three elements, this thesis focuses primarily on the first two, patterns of births and deaths as beginnings and endings that shape the population. Migration, while discussed where relevant, is not the main focus of this research. Many other excellent studies have discussed Soviet migration at length.⁷

Scholars have shown that demography matters for three primary reasons. Practically, measuring the size and characteristics of the population allows states to plan the services they provide for their citizens, whether that be healthcare, education, pensions, infrastructure, or defence.⁸ Additionally, Blum argues that demography provides proof of social dynamics in a way that transcends categories ‘imposed’ by the authorities.⁹ In other words, mortality rates and life expectancy show how good the healthcare system is, how nutritious the food provision, how high the risk from suicide, addiction, or violent crime. Just by knowing population statistics, one gets a sense of whether life in a certain place is well organised, prosperous, and reasonably equal. In this way, population statistics are a reflection of politics, but they also provide indications of where improvements are needed. Finally, demography provides a window into the future through trends in reproduction, the primary driver of

⁵ For a few of the many works discussing statistics as the basis of statecraft, see Ghosh, A., *Making It Count: Statistics and Statecraft in the Early People's Republic of China* (Princeton, 2021); Hacking, I., *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge, 1990); Desrosières, A., *The Politics of Large Numbers: a History of Statistical Reasoning*, trans. Naish, C. (Cambridge, MA, 1998); Poovey, M., *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago, 1998); Weiner, A., *Landscaping the Human Garden: Twentieth-century Population Management in a Comparative Framework* (Stanford, Calif., 2003).

⁶ Bashford, A., "Nation, Empire, Globe."

⁷ For a few examples, see Buckley, C. J., Ruble, B. A., and Hofmann, E. T., *Migration, Homeland, and Belonging in Eurasia* (New York, 2008); Sahadeo, J., *Voices from the Soviet Edge: Southern Migrants in Leningrad and Moscow* (New York, 2019); Buckley, C., "The Myth of Managed Migration: Migration Control and Market in the Soviet Period", *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (1995): 896-916; White, A., "Internal Migration Trends in Soviet and post-Soviet European Russia", *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 6 (2007): 887-911.

⁸ For a collection of discussion on some of these themes, see Goldstone, J. A., Kaufmann, E. P., and Toft, M. D., *Political Demography: How population changes are reshaping international security and national politics* (Oxford, 2012).

⁹ Blum, A., "Social History as the History of Measuring Populations: A Post-1987 Renewal", *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2, no. 2 (2001): 279-294.

population growth. It shows how populous the nation will be in comparison to others; what kinds of families will be most common; whether the country will be dominated by the old or by the young. The answers to these question have huge significance for the economy and military, but they are also of great cultural importance. Through population politics scholars have shown that ‘the nation becomes a “biological reality”, one that could be purified, enlarged, or even “improved”.’¹⁰

Given that population statistics both reflect quality of life in the present, and indicate the cultural landscape of the future, it is little wonder that so few governments resist the urge to try and shape the population one way or another. Most countries aim to improve life expectancy and reduce mortality. In modern times, fertility is hardly less of a target; Togman shows that four out of five countries in the world now have policies aimed at influencing rates of reproduction.¹¹ Globally, much of the twentieth century has been about efforts to reduce the global population. Scholars like Connelly and Bashford show how environmentalism, feminism, nationalism, eugenics, food science, Malthusianism, and religion all collided to create a world movement for population control.¹² Yet alongside the history of population control, and just as much part of it, is the history of those places determined to grow their populations through higher fertility. In the 1960s–1980s period (when the population control movement was at its peak globally) the Soviet Union fell into this category along with most of Eastern Europe.¹³ Like debates about global overpopulation, debate about population decline ‘ebbs and flows, depending both upon demographic realities and perceptions of the links between population change and economic, social, and political power’.¹⁴

For modern states that are not losing large sections of the population to war or natural disasters, reproduction and migration are the main options for significantly increasing the

¹⁰ Connelly, M., *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population*, p. 5.

¹¹ Togman, R., *Nationalizing Sex: Fertility, Fear, and Power*.

¹² Connelly, M., *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population*; Bashford, A., *Global Population: History, Geopolitics, and Life on Earth* (New York, 2014); Hartmann, H. and Unger, C. R., *World of Populations*.

¹³ Drezgić, R., "Policies and Practices of Fertility Control Under State Socialism", *The History of the Family* 15, no. 2 (2010): 191-205; David, H. P., Joanna, S., and Anastasia, P.-V., *From Abortion to Contraception: A Resource to Public Policies and Reproductive Behavior in Central and Eastern Europe from 1917 to the Present* (London, 1999); Kligman, G., "The Politics of Reproduction in Ceaușescu's Romania: a Case Study in Political Culture", *East European Politics & Societies* 6, no. 3 (1992): 364-418.

¹⁴ Teitelbaum, M. S. and Winter, J. M., *The Fear of Population Decline* (Florida, 1985), p. 1.

population, and both feature heavily in the history of twentieth-century Europe as well as further afield.¹⁵ Frequently, however, governments opted to try and preserve their country's ethnic and cultural composition, and thus looked to increase rates of childbearing.¹⁶ The idea that reproduction could be managed is particularly interesting in communist countries like the Soviet Union, where, as David and McIntyre argue, population policies highlight the unusual interplay of societal desires, the need to reconcile the repressive system with a centrally managed economy, and the subdued, but still present, theory of social equality between men and women.¹⁷ More broadly, Kligman points to the importance of reproductive and population policies as a barometer for the character of a nation state.¹⁸ What importance does the state attach to the autonomy of the individual, the parity of the sexes, the homogeneity of the population, or its own role as arbiter? In other words, the way a state acts in the arena of reproduction tells us much about what kind of polity it is, and how it views its citizens.¹⁹

In the interwar years, fears of over and under population began to emerge side by side. Scholars highlight the role of the First World War in causing governments to associate strong population growth with international power.²⁰ Over a short period, governments in France, Britain, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Portugal, and the Soviet Union all implemented measures to try and boost their birth rates.²¹ Eugenics was also high on the agenda, as people began to believe that they could change the quality of their populations. Britain and France particularly feared a change in racial composition driven by immigration from their empires, while anti-communists worried about an increasing Soviet population, at the very moment when the

¹⁵ This is because in low-mortality societies gains that can be made from improving mortality are usually very marginal. Teitelbaum, M. S. and Winter, J. M., *The Fear of Population Decline*, pp. 3-8.

¹⁶ Excellent discussion on this theme generally by Teitelbaum, M. S. and Winter, J. M., *A Question of Numbers: High Migration, Low Fertility, and the Politics of National Identity* (New York, 1998); Joppke, C., *Challenge to the Nation-State* (Oxford, 1998). For case studies, see Adams, M. B., *The Wellborn Science: Eugenics in Germany, France, Brazil, and Russia* (Oxford, 1990); Claro, M., "Interpreting the World or Changing it? The "Woman Question" and the "Sexual Question" in Soviet Social Sciences", *Clio. Women, Gender, History* 41, no. 1 (2015): 41-64; Ginsborg, P., "The Politics of the Family in Twentieth-Century Europe", *Contemporary European History* 9, no. 3 (2000): 411-444; Hoffmann, D. L., "Mothers in the Motherland: Stalinist Pronatalism in Its Pan-European Context", *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 1 (2000): 35-54; Horn, D., G., *Social Bodies: Science, Reproduction, and Italian Modernity* (Princeton, N.J., 1994).

¹⁷ David, H. P. and McIntyre, R. J., *Reproductive Behaviour: Central and Eastern European Experience* (New York, 1982), p. xi.

¹⁸ Kligman, G., "The Politics of Reproduction in Ceaușescu's Romania," p. 365.

¹⁹ Gal, S. and Kligman, G., *The Politics of Gender after Socialism: a Comparative Historical Essay* (Princeton, 2000), pp. 21-22.

²⁰ Hoffmann, D. L., "Stalinist Pronatalism in Its Pan-European Context."; Ipsen, C., *Dictating Demography: The Power of Population in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, 1997); Schneider, W. H., *Quality and Quantity: the Quest for Biological Regeneration in Twentieth-century France* (Cambridge, 2002); Soloway, R. A., *Demography and Degeneration: Eugenics and the Declining Birthrate in Twentieth-Century Britain* (North Carolina, 2014).

²¹ Hoffmann, D. L., "Stalinist Pronatalism in Its Pan-European Context."

Soviets themselves were worried about low population growth.²² As Teitelbaum and Winter put it, 'few European leaders in these years failed to succumb to the temptations of strategic demography'.²³ Furthermore, a new discourse accompanying state interventions changed the nature of motherhood itself.²⁴ Davin describes how child-rearing became construed as a national duty rather than a private activity. Good mothers now needed instructions, and private misfortunes, such as the death of a child, were defined in statistics and discussed by the new professionals of public health.²⁵ Family and motherhood were promoted as concepts but in a new way, such that science, the male, the state, and the professional took precedence over tradition, the female, the family, and the amateur in matters of reproduction.²⁶

After 1945, the belief that populations could and should be controlled faded somewhat following the exposure of the horrors caused by utopian nationalist projects.²⁷ Baby booms discouraged worries about depopulation. Indicating the new spirit of the age, the Soviet Union legalised abortion in 1955 and by the end of the decade abortion was legal in Yugoslavia, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and Romania.²⁸ Gradually, the debate about population began to centre on migration in much of Western Europe, while globally the drive to reduce population in developing countries reached its heyday. Yet in the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc pronatalism never really faded. Nakachi shows the intense focus the Soviet government placed on replacing the war dead, while Bridger, Attwood and Rivkin-Fish have demonstrated how pronatalist policies adversely affected gender relations into the 1980s and beyond.²⁹ Specialists began to wrestle with questions like the provision of contraception or the economic disadvantages of an aging population. New policies to

²² Teitelbaum, M. S. and Winter, J. M., *The Fear of Population Decline*, pp. 39-42.

²³ Teitelbaum, M. S. and Winter, J. M., *The Fear of Population Decline*, p. 41.

²⁴ Quine, M. S., ed. *Population Politics in Twentieth-century Europe: Fascist Dictatorships and Liberal Democracies* (Routledge, 1996).

²⁵ Davin, A., "Imperialism and Motherhood", *History Workshop*, no. 5 (1978): 9-65.

²⁶ Davin, A., "Imperialism and Motherhood."

²⁷ Teitelbaum, M. S. and Winter, J. M., *The Fear of Population Decline*.

²⁸ Desfosses, H., "Pro-Natalism in Soviet law and Propaganda," in *Soviet Population Policy: Conflicts and Constraints*, ed. Desfosses, H. (New York, 1981). For a detailed discussion of the events leading up to the legalisation of abortion in the USSR, see Nakachi, M., *Replacing the Dead: The Politics of Reproduction in the Postwar Soviet Union* (Oxford, 2020).

²⁹ Nakachi, M., "Liberation Without Contraception? The Rise of the Abortion Empire and Pronatalism in Socialist and Postsocialist Russia," in *Reproductive States: Global Perspectives on the Invention and Implementation of Population Policy*, eds. Solinger, R. and Nakachi, M. (Oxford, 2016); Nakachi, M., *Replacing the Dead*; Bridger, S., "Heroine Mothers and the Demographic Crises: the Legacy of the Late Soviet Era," in *Gender, Equality and Difference During and After State Socialism*, ed. Kay, R. (Basingstoke, 2007); Attwood, L., *The New Soviet Man and Woman: Sex-Role Socialization in the USSR* (London, 1990); Rivkin-Fish, M., "Anthropology, Demography, and the Search for a Critical Analysis of Fertility: Insights from Russia", *American Anthropologist* 105, no. 2 (2003): 289-301.

explicitly increase fertility were introduced in Romania (1966, 1972, 1979), Bulgaria (1967, 1968, 1973, 1975), Hungary (1965, 1966, 1970, 1972, 1973, 1974), Czechoslovakia (1964, 1968, 1970, 1972, 1976), Poland (1971, 1972, 1974, 1978) and finally the USSR (1981).³⁰ In these initiatives, women's dual roles as producers and reproducers are generally accepted by historians to have taken priority over the supposed socialist desire for equality.³¹

Distinct timeframes can be seen in the history of population thought, but it is often more fruitful to examine ideas thematically. Substantial work by scholars asks what is common to pronatalism, for example, across different contexts and timeframes. King argues that 'all pronatalist efforts are, ultimately, expressions of nationalism'.³² She shows how demography is inherently linked with nationalism because it is through demographic statistics that the national community is imagined, not just today, but in a shared national future.³³ Her view is echoed by others who have drawn the link between nationalism and reproduction, showing that in pronatalist policy and rhetoric, the shared future is one of a larger, more virile population, which is equated with international power.³⁴ Examples are abundant. Quine demonstrates how Mussolini's speeches about the birth rate constantly mention the 'spiritual renewal' of the Italian nation, 'rebirth', and a new 'young and fertile race'. Italian policies were presented as the patriotic policies of a proud government, determined to make Italy prosperous and strong. In doing so, the regime both claimed legitimacy for itself and linked a certain kind of reproductive politics with future national success.³⁵ Ultimately, as Teitelbaum and Winter point out, rates of population growth are always comparative, either internally among groups, with neighbouring countries, or more broadly within international blocks.³⁶ Through such comparisons of statistics, the boundaries of the nation are defined, desires for a stronger nation are expressed, and commitment to the future of the nation state is declared.³⁷

³⁰ Drezgić, R., "Policies and Practices of Fertility Control," p. 192.

³¹ David, H. P., Joanna, S., and Anastasia, P.-V., *From Abortion to Contraception*, p. 47.

³² King, L., "From Pronatalism to Social Welfare? Extending Family Allowances to Minority Populations in France and Israel", *European Journal of Population* 17, no. 4 (2001): 307.

³³ King, L., "Demographic Trends, Pronatalism, and Nationalist Ideologies in the Late Twentieth Century", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 25, no. 3 (2002): 367-389. For a broader discussion of these themes, see Anderson, B., *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed. ed. (London, 2006). Rivkin-Fish, M., "Anthropology, Demography, and the Search for a Critical Analysis of Fertility: Insights from Russia."; Gal, S. and Kligman, G., *The Politics of Gender after Socialism*.

³⁴ Gal, S. and Kligman, G., *The Politics of Gender after Socialism*, pp. 21-22. Also for discussion in specific contexts, see Ipsen, C., *Dictating Demography: The Power of Population in Fascist Italy*; Schneider, W. H., *Quality and Quantity: the Quest for Biological Regeneration in Twentieth-century France*.

³⁵ Quine, M. S., *Population Politics in Twentieth-century Europe*, pp. 36-37.

³⁶ Teitelbaum, M. S. and Winter, J. M., *The Fear of Population Decline*.

³⁷ Gal, S. and Kligman, G., *The Politics of Gender after Socialism*.

In addition to the nation itself, scholars demonstrate how reproductive discourses are crucial in positioning groups within a nation as insiders or outsiders.³⁸ Bashford argues that historiographical debate has frequently focused on population policies exclusively from the angle of gender, making the issue one of bodies, sexuality, and motherhood, even though for policy makers at the time that was often not the most significant factor.³⁹ She shows that the problem of population in the twentieth century was as much defined by density and redistribution, as by the desire for a gross numerical increase or decrease.⁴⁰ One of the enduring issues states have faced is differential fertility and the question of how to increase or decrease the birth rate of just one subsection of society, or indeed whether such a goal should even be permissible. From democracies to dictatorships, states have grappled with this problem and the inherent racial, religious, or class discrimination it entails. A vast literature discusses the particular outsiders created through reproductive debate: Yugoslavia and Kosovo, Nazi Germany and its Jews, Britain and its poor, Romania and its Roma population, France and Britain and their colonial subjects, and Israel and its Arab population are among some examples.⁴¹ Chapter four of this thesis discusses this phenomenon in the context of the Soviet Union and its Central Asian Republics. As Gal and Kligman argue, social movements and regimes often use utopian narratives to define themselves. In such narratives idealised visions of reproduction determine who can or should reproduce, which elements of reproduction certain people are responsible for, and in what circumstances reproduction is moral.⁴² This process determines not just the boundaries of the nation, but which subsections of society truly belong to it.

Another large body of work discusses demographic policy and gender. Scholars show how pronatalism constitutes women as certain kinds of actors, mediating the debate about what

³⁸ Gal, S. and Kligman, G., *The Politics of Gender after Socialism*, pp. 21-22.

³⁹ Bashford, A., "Nation, Empire, Globe," p. 173.

⁴⁰ Bashford, A., "Nation, Empire, Globe," pp. 173-174.

⁴¹ In order: Drezgić, R., "Policies and Practices of Fertility Control."; Quine, M. S., *Population Politics in Twentieth-century Europe*; Soloway, R. A., *Demography and Degeneration: Eugenics and the Declining Birthrate in Twentieth-Century Britain*; Kligman, G., "The Politics of Reproduction in Ceaușescu's Romania."; Camiscioli, E., "Producing Citizens, Reproducing the 'French Race': Immigration, Demography, and Pronatalism in Early Twentieth-Century France", *Gender & History* 13, no. 3 (2001): 593-621; Ittmann, K., "Demography as Policy Science in the British Empire, 1918–1969", *Journal of Policy History* 15, no. 4 (2009): 417-448; Elizarov, V. V., "Teoriia i praktika demograficheskoi politiki v SSSR", *Statistika i ekonomika*, no. 5 (2017): 71-84; Leibler, A., "Disciplining ethnicity: Social sorting intersects with political demography in Israel's pre-state period", *Social Studies of Science* 44, no. 2 (2014): 271-292.

⁴² Gal, S. and Kligman, G., *The Politics of Gender after Socialism*, p. 20.

women should be. There are striking similarities despite different timeframes and policy approaches. National movements have been noted for their patriarchal nature, where women are portrayed as ‘vessels’ of the nation or race—outsiders who ensure continuity. This paradoxical role leads to the frequent demonising of women, who are too ‘selfish’ to have children and are accused of holding the nation hostage as a victim.⁴³ In communist states this effect has been attributed to selfish consumerism.⁴⁴ In capitalist countries, women’s entry into the workforce has been blamed.⁴⁵ Either way, the control of women ‘thus becomes the logical project of nationalism’.⁴⁶ Seen another way, women having total autonomy over their reproduction is incompatible with attempts to raise the birth rate, if, as has proved to be the case across Europe, that autonomy means they choose to have fewer children. Pronatalism, in all but its softest forms, therefore, always seeks to position women as objects to be controlled or people to be influenced.⁴⁷

Finally, it is important to note the various studies that have engaged critically with the role of demographers as enablers of coercive power. Ittmann points out that demography has no single ideological perspective, yet we must understand the purposes to which demographic analysis is put. He is among those who point out that, like other professionals, demographers seek to be relevant and to portray their work as objective and mathematical, ignoring the role their calculations and forecasts have played in colonialism, eugenics, racism, or infanticide.⁴⁸ After all, it was the work of demographers that enabled the Nazi regime to systematically exterminate certain populations. In this, statistics are a key technology of power, and historians show how demographic statistics were often not used to solve problems, but to both conceal them, and, sometimes, even construct them.⁴⁹ The Romanian government stopped registering births until five days after birth to bring down infant mortality in 1988.⁵⁰ Similarly the Soviet Union stopped publishing infant mortality statistics altogether from 1974

⁴³ Gal, S. and Kligman, G., *The Politics of Gender after Socialism*, p. 26.

⁴⁴ Desfosses, H., "Pronatalism..."

⁴⁵ Cole, J., *The Power of Large Numbers : Population, Politics, and Gender in Nineteenth-Century France* (London, 2000).

⁴⁶ Gal, S. and Kligman, G., *The Politics of Gender after Socialism*, p. 26.

⁴⁷ Its softest form is considered to be removing common obstacles to childrearing where women have already expressed a desire to have more children.

⁴⁸ Ittmann, K., "Demography as Policy Science in the British Empire, 1918–1969," p. 428. Also on this theme, see Schneider, W. H., *Quality and Quantity: the Quest for Biological Regeneration in Twentieth-century France*; Adams, M. B., *The Wellborn Science: Eugenics in Germany, France, Brazil, and Russia*.

⁴⁹ Statistics as a technology of power: Foucault, M., "Governmentality," in *The Foucault effect : studies in governmentality*, eds. Burchell, G., et al. (London, 1991).

⁵⁰ Kligman, G., "The Politics of Reproduction in Ceaușescu's Romania," p. 390.

to 1985.⁵¹ In the most repressive cases, statistics become the political means through which individuals are punished and officials removed from their jobs, such as in the periodic show trials of doctors, midwives, and abortionists that took place in Romania throughout the 1980s whenever a particularly poor set of statistics appeared.⁵²

Demographic knowledge is never produced in a vacuum, but in specific contexts, where reports, charts, and statistics work alongside implicit assumptions about gender, ethnicity, and class to create a constraining context for everyday people, who must make their lives and reproductive choices within this framework.⁵³ Scholars highlight the remarkably poor accuracy with which demographic forecasts have predicted the future. Yet such information, because it appears in numerical form, is frequently granted the status of an incontestable reality.⁵⁴ Such expert knowledge is all the more powerful because, as Gal and Kligman argue, the power of reproductive issues in politics is that they are almost never only about biological reproduction. Rather, issues of reproduction are typically used to discuss a variety of other political topics. In Poland, the United States, and many other countries around the world, views on abortion constitute a 'litmus test' for views on church-state relations, public health, and women's rights.⁵⁵ Abortion in politics, it seems, is rarely just about abortion. Reproduction thus 'provides a terrain for imaging new cultural futures' and the demographic knowledge that accompanies such debates should be similarly understood as an important tool in this process.⁵⁶ Like in most countries of Europe and America, managing, shaping, and improving the population became a key concern of the Soviet government in the Brezhnev era.

The changing Soviet population: facts and figures

During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Russian empire had traditional patterns of mortality and fertility: very high birth rates coupled with high death rates. An extremely

⁵¹ David, H. P., Joanna, S., and Anastasia, P. V., *From Abortion to Contraception*, p. 235; Anderson, B., Katus, K., and Silver, B., "Developments and Prospects for Population Statistics in Countries of the Former Soviet Union", *Population Index* 60, no. 1 (1994): 4-20.

⁵² Kligman, G., "The Politics of Reproduction in Ceaușescu's Romania," p. 388. Also on this theme in a colonial context, see Cohn, B. S., "The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia," in *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays* (Oxford, 1990).

⁵³ Gal, S. and Kligman, G., *The Politics of Gender after Socialism*, p. 20.

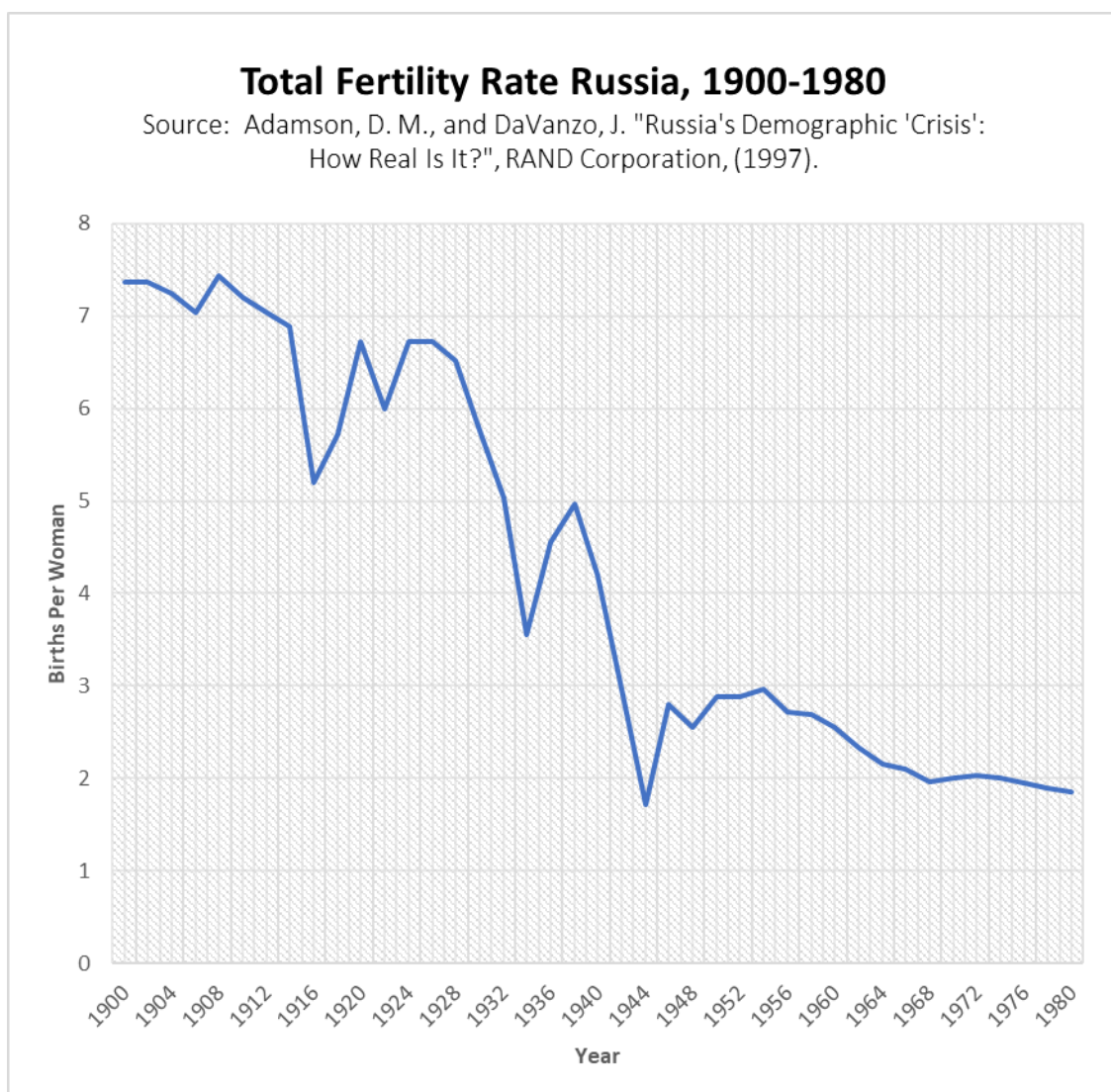
⁵⁴ Teitelbaum, M. S. and Winter, J. M., *The Fear of Population Decline*, p. 131.

⁵⁵ For discussion in the Polish context, see Gal, S. and Kligman, G., *The Politics of Gender after Socialism*, p. 34.

⁵⁶ Ginsburg, F. D. and Rapp, R., eds. *Conceiving the New World Order: the Global Politics of Reproduction* (University of California Press, 1995), p. 313.

large number of children died in infancy from infectious diseases and lack of modern medicine.⁵⁷ As greater understanding of disease and hygiene began to develop globally, mortality sharply reduced in the Soviet Union, spurred on by vaccines and antibiotics. Soviet healthcare, though far from perfect, was provided free to the population, and propaganda campaigns encouraged hygiene.⁵⁸ Life expectancy also increased enormously, from just 32 in the Russian Empire (1896) to just over seventy in 1964. This trend was driven by sharp reductions in infant mortality as medical knowledge revolutionised childrearing.⁵⁹ However, describing a trend of downward mortality and increasing life expectancy obscures enormous

Figure 1.



⁵⁷ Patterson, D., "Mortality in Late Tsarist Russia: A Reconnaissance", *Social History of Medicine* 8, no. 2 (1995): 179-210.

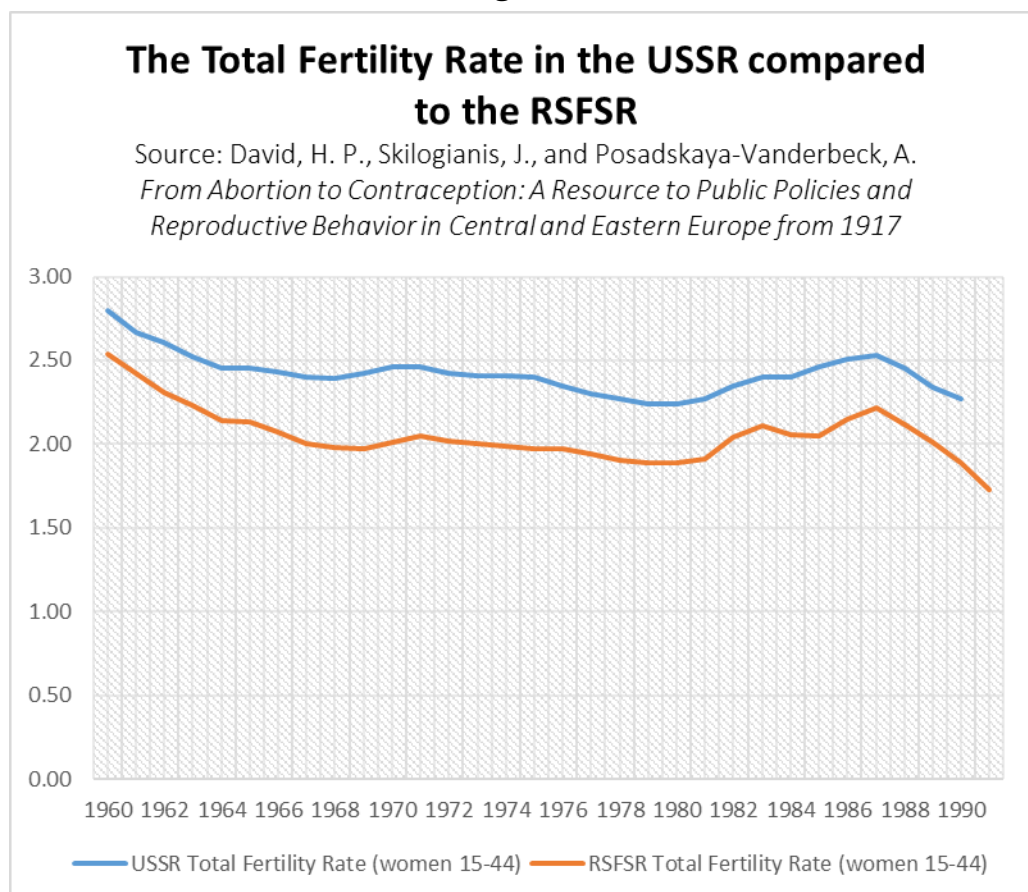
⁵⁸ Starks, T., *The Body Soviet: Propaganda, Hygiene, and the Revolutionary State* (Wisconsin, 2009).

⁵⁹ Goskomstat, *Naselenie SSSR 1987: statisticheski sbornik*, p. 151. The figure of 32 is largely caused by the enormous number of children who did not make it to adulthood. This therefore skews the mean average and those who made it to adulthood could usually expect to live longer than this.

population shocks from upheaval, famine, collectivisation, and most significantly the Second World War, which wiped out almost an entire generation of young men.⁶⁰

As mortality decreased, fertility fell sharply. The Russian empire had one of the highest fertility rates in the world—more than seven births per woman—due to early marriage and lack of contraceptive knowledge (Figure 1). By 1940 fertility in Russia had fallen to 4.25. It continued to decrease; in 1955 the average was 2.83 and by the 1970s the fertility rate for the Russian part of the USSR had fallen below the replacement level of 2.1 (Figure 2).⁶¹ The Soviet Union as a whole, however, saw fertility decline much more gradually. The falling fertility rate of the USSR disguised differences in fertility levels between ethnic groups that opened up sharply in the post-war period. While fertility in the Slavic and Baltic regions of the USSR fell to very low levels, the fertility of women in the Caucasus remained at a higher

Figure 2.

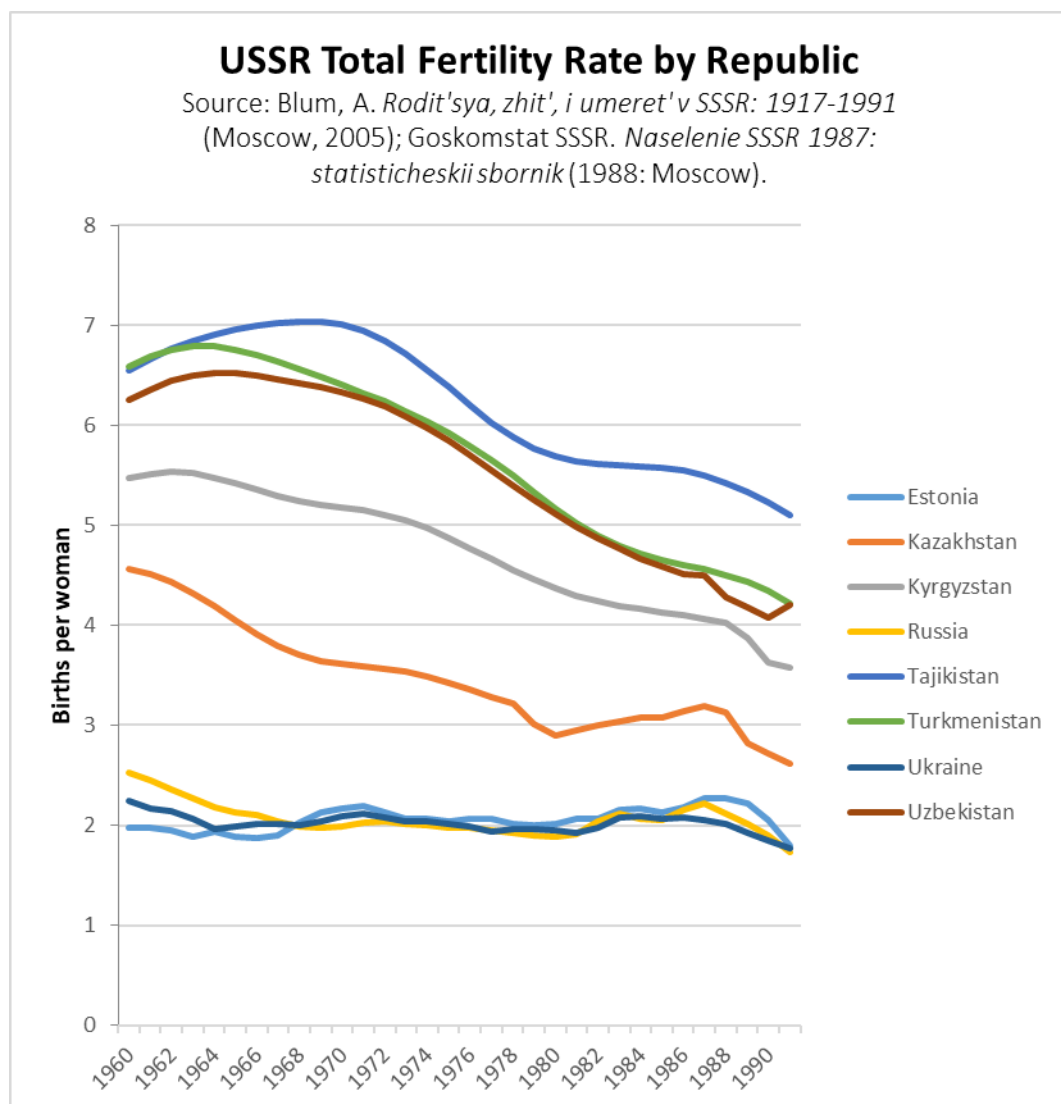


⁶⁰ By 1944, badly affected regions of the USSR saw sex ratios as extreme as 28 men for every 100 women between the ages of 16 and 54, according to Nakachi, M., *Replacing the Dead*, p. 21.

⁶¹David, H. P., Joanna, S., and Anastasia, P. V., *From Abortion to Contraception*, p. 230; Blum, A., *Rodit'sia, zhit', i umeret' v SSSR*, p. 95.

level, and the fertility of the Central Asian Republics was higher still (Figure 3). Russians began to have fewer than two children in the early 1970s, but Tajik women were giving birth to almost seven, and this was similar in other parts of Central Asia. One inevitable result of this was the changing proportion of nationalities in the USSR and the projected shrinking of the ethnically Russian population. In 1959 those living in Russia accounted for 56.3% of the population. By 1989, this had reduced to 51.4%, barely a majority. In contrast, those from the five Muslim republics of Central Asia accounted no longer for 12.8% of the population, but for 19.7%.⁶² The significance of this change is discussed in more detail in chapter four.

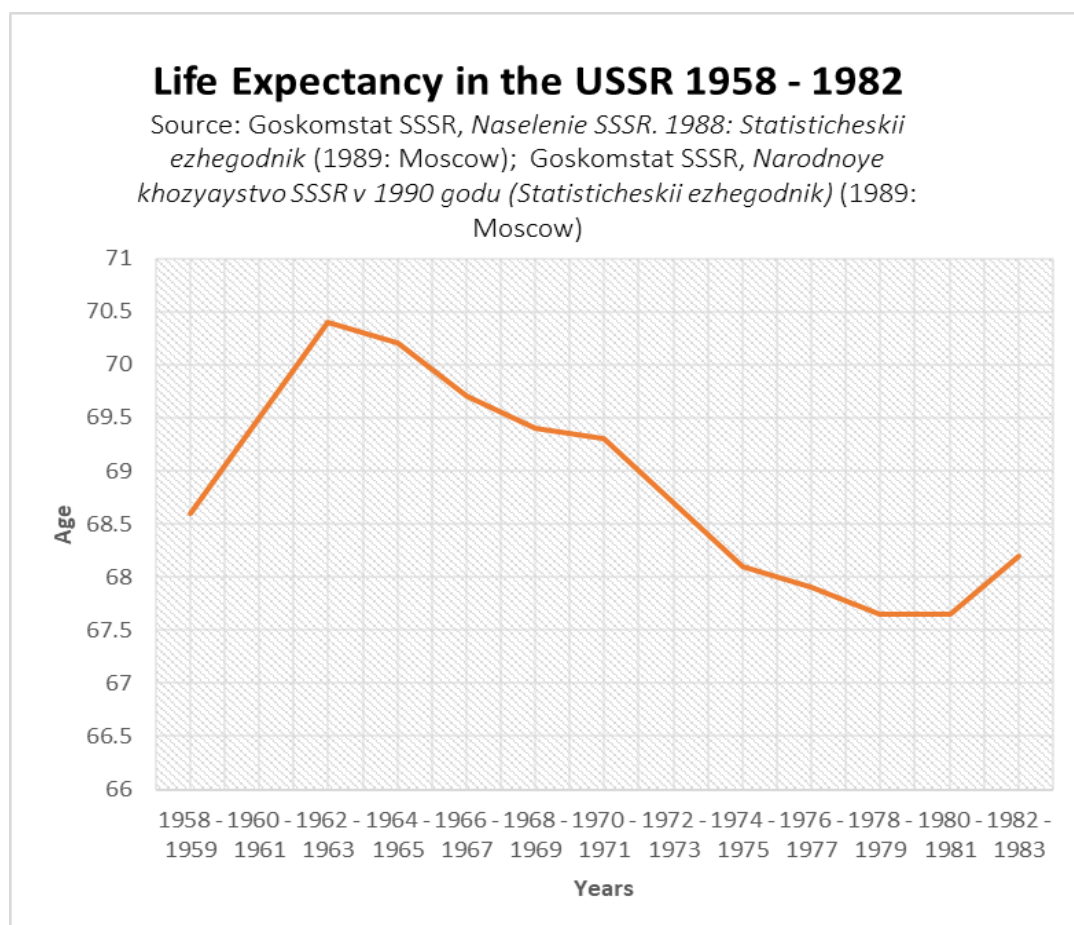
Figure 3.



⁶² Anderson, B. A. and Silver, B. D., "The Changing Ethnic Composition of the Soviet Union," p. 165.

Until the Brezhnev era, it is safe to say that the population of the USSR was becoming healthier, living longer, and having fewer children, more of whom survived than ever before. The enormous demographic shocks of Revolution, repression, and the Second World War left scars on the population structure, but the surviving population continued to experience long-term trends towards health and small families. Starting in the 1960s, however, public health improvements slowed significantly until finally they stopped and then reversed. Life expectancy reduced every year from 1964 to 1981 driven primarily by poor male health. By the end of Brezhnev's premiership, men in the USSR lived 3.5 years less on average than when he had taken power (figure 4).⁶³ With the start of Gorbachev's anti-alcohol campaign, this trend eventually started to reverse.⁶⁴ Until the 1970s infant mortality had followed a consistent downward trend: from 1960 to 1971 it fell from 35.3 to 22.9 (deaths per 1000 live births). From 1971, however, this trend reversed, peaking at 31.1 in 1976, but remaining

Figure 4.



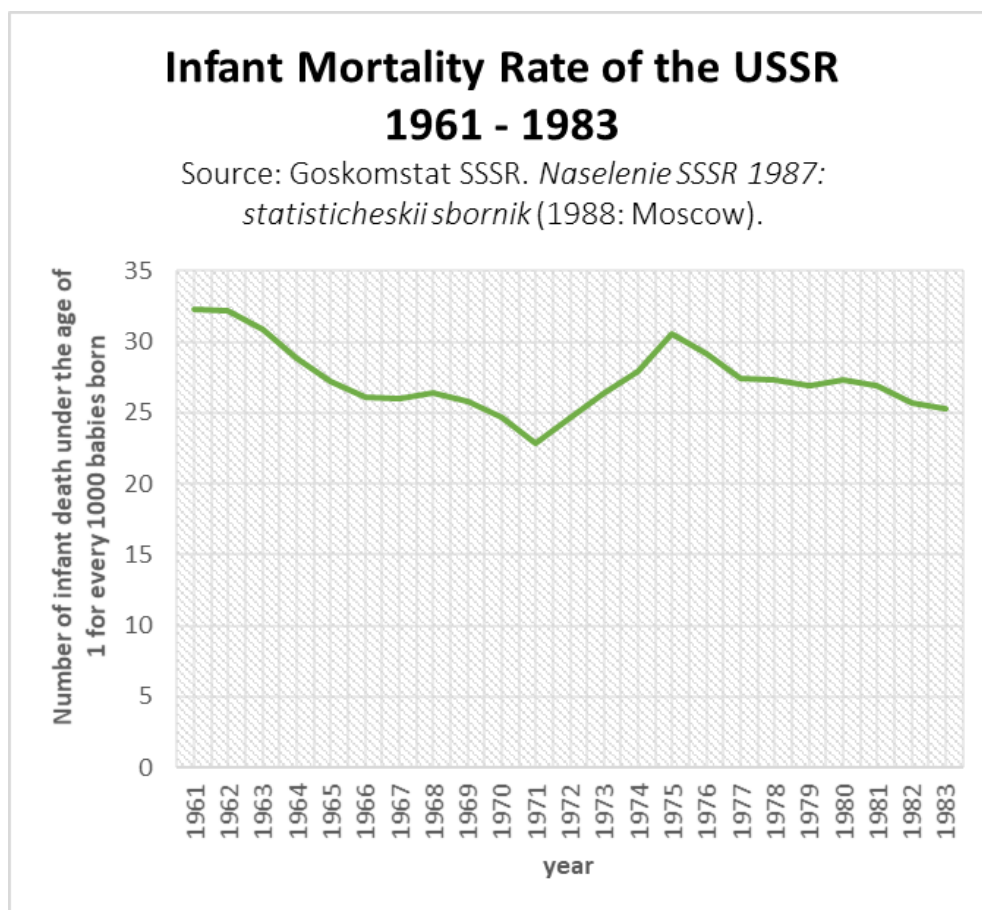
⁶³ Andreev, E. M., Darskii, L. E., and Kharkova, T. L., *Naselenie sovetskogo soiuz: 1922-1991*, p. 95.

⁶⁴ Adamson, D. M. and DaVanzo, J., "Russia's Demographic 'Crisis': How Real Is It?", RAND Corporation, (1997).

higher than the 1971 level until the late 1980s (Figure 5).⁶⁵ As a result, infant mortality data was banned from publication, something that is discussed in chapter two of this thesis.⁶⁶

The long 1970s was therefore a worrying time for leaders from the point of view of public health and population growth. These issues—often described together simply as population problems—concerned Soviet leaders. They called into question previous assumptions that even before true communism had been achieved, Soviet socialism would continue to provide both improvements in health and a growing population. Instead, the trends indicated worsening health and slowing population growth, with each generation in the Slavic part of the USSR now projected to give birth to a generation smaller than itself.⁶⁷ As population problems intensified, the Party expanded research, while suppressing dissemination of information, fearing an unwelcome reflection of Soviet socialism in these figures. This

Figure 5.



⁶⁵ Goskomstat, *Naselenie SSSR 1987: statisticheskii sbornik*, p. 344.

⁶⁶ Alain Blum, 'Social History as the History of Measuring Populations: A Post-1987 Renewal', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 2, 2 (2001): 279-94.

⁶⁷ Demographic lag means that fertility rates fall below replacement level years before depopulation actually starts to occur.

expansion of research required statisticians to measure these changes and social scientists to interpret them. The goal of knowing the population could only be achieved with the help of experts, but the Party was distrustful of spectators and wary of producing any evidence of its failures. Population statistics as a discipline in the Soviet Union left both leaders and experts with much to be cautious about.

The development of demographic statistics in the Soviet Union

It is difficult to understand Soviet demography under Brezhnev without taking into account the very recent history of repression in the discipline. However, the story of population statistics in Russia began much earlier. By the time the revolution occurred, a well-developed statistical tradition already existed in the Russian Empire. For example, statisticians working for local self-government organisations, *Zemstva*, had created comprehensive databases of the peasant population.⁶⁸ The military also gathered population statistics to help expand and map the empire.⁶⁹ Rulers gradually came to acknowledge numerical data as an essential type of knowledge for developing administrative and fiscal policies, meaning they began to rely on statisticians to manage the state.⁷⁰ In 1897 the Central Statistical Committee organised the first Russian census. This significant project was the only full census to be held before the revolution, as the next census was abandoned after World War One broke out in 1914.⁷¹

After the revolution, the Bolsheviks aimed to rapidly industrialise while also nationalising the economy. They embraced population statistics and other forms of expert scientific knowledge in order to achieve these goals, hoping to make the Soviet Union a technologically advanced society. Lenin had a positive relationship with bourgeois experts, whom he accepted as long as they were willing use their skills in aid of the Bolshevik cause.⁷² In 1919 the Kyiv

⁶⁸ Kingston-Mann, E., "Statistics, Social Science and Social Justice: The *Zemstvo* Statisticians of Pre-Revolutionary Russia," in *Russia in the European Context 1789-1914*, eds. McCaffray, S., P and Melancon, M. (London, 2005).

⁶⁹ Rich, D., "Imperialism, Reform and Strategy: Russian Military Statistics, 1840-1880", *The Slavonic and East European Review* 74, no. 4 (1996): 621-639.

⁷⁰ Stanziani, A., "European Statistics, Russian Numbers, and Social Dynamics, 1861–1914", *Slavic Review* 76, no. 1 (2017): 1-23; Johnson, R., "Liberal Professional and Professional Liberals: the *Zemstvo* Statisticians and Their Work.," in *The Zemstvo in Russia: an Experiment in Local Self-government*, eds. Emmons, T. and Vucinich, W. (Cambridge, 1982); Cadiot, J., "Searching for Nationality: Statistics and National Categories at the End of the Russian Empire (1897–1917)", *Russian Review* 64, no. 3 (2005): 440-455.

⁷¹ Schwartz, L., "A History of Russian and Soviet Censuses," in *Research Guide to the Russian and Soviet Censuses*, ed. Clem, R. (London, 1986), pp. 50-52.

⁷² Hirsch, F., *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (London, 2005); Wheatcroft, S., "Soviet Statistics under Stalinism: Reliability and Distortions in Grain and Population Statistics", *Europe-Asia Studies* 71, no. 6 (2019): 1013-1035.

Demographic Institute opened under M.V. Ptukha, and the Institute completed the first tables of mortality.⁷³ Lenin also ordered a new census, which was conducted in 1920.⁷⁴ The 1920 census faced significant problems because Russia was still in the middle of a civil war, and famine gripped much of the country. There was neither enough paper, nor trained staff, meaning the results were incomplete in many areas.⁷⁵ The next census was conducted in 1926, two years after Lenin's death. The 1926 census is widely considered to be the first comprehensive picture of Soviet society and represented a large improvement in the government's knowledge of its population.⁷⁶

During the 1930s statisticians collected more population statistics than ever before because the new planned economy required demographic data to underpin workforce and consumption plans. In 1930 the Party permitted a second demographic institute to open in Leningrad to extend the work of the Kyiv Institute. However, as Stalin consolidated his power he changed the relationship between statisticians and the state. Stalin's goal was to control all aspects of society, and he was less inclined to work with bourgeois experts. Loyalty replaced competence as the key criteria for recruitment and Stalin saw statisticians who produced evidence of negative population dynamics as disloyal.⁷⁷ Those who did were usually quickly replaced. Stalinism put statistical agencies under enormous ideological pressure; statisticians felt the need to produce a separate type of socialist-specific statistics to rival statistical techniques emerging in capitalist countries.⁷⁸ They argued that total enumeration was superior to the mathematical probability models used in the West despite its labour intense nature.⁷⁹ In demography, the key idea became that the economic mode of production determined the population structure and its movements.⁸⁰ Capitalism, it was believed, meant few could afford medical care, and the oppressed working class chose to

⁷³ Tipolt, A. N., "Iz istorii likvidirobannogo Demograficheskogo instituta Akademii nauk SSSR (1930-1934)." *Demoskop Weekly*, No. 153-154, (2004) Accessed: 04/07/19.
<http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2004/0153/nauka01.php>.

⁷⁴ Vishnevskii, A. I., "Trudnoe vozrozhdenie demografii", *Sotsiologicheskii zhurnal*, no. 1-2 (1996): 93-116.

⁷⁵ Feshbach, M., "The Development of the Soviet Census," in *Soviet Population Policy: Conflicts and Constraints*, ed. Desfosses, H. (New York, 1981), p. 4.

⁷⁶ Schwartz, L., "A History of Russian and Soviet Censuses," p. 52, p. 54.

⁷⁷ Wheatcroft, S., "Soviet Statistics under Stalinism: Reliability and Distortions in Grain and Population Statistics," pp. 1020-1022; Pollock, E., *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars* (Princeton, 2006).

⁷⁸ Tipolt, A. N., "Iz istorii likvidirobannogo Demograficheskogo instituta Akademii nauk SSSR (1930-1934)"; Blum, A., "Social History as the History of Measuring Populations," p. 285.

⁷⁹ For more on this, see Ghosh, A., *Making It Count: Statistics and Statecraft in the Early People's Republic of China*.

⁸⁰ Hoffmann, D. L., *Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism (1914-1939)* (Ithaca, 2011), p. 133; Leykin, I., "The History and Afterlife of Soviet Demography: The Socialist Roots of Post-Soviet Neoliberalism", *Slavic Review* 78, no. 1 (2019): 150.

limit their family size through abortions to make their wages go further. Under communism, the population would supposedly be very healthy because all their needs would be met. Bad habits like drinking and smoking would naturally disappear.⁸¹ In addition, mothers would be so well supported with childrearing that they would chose large families, leading to strong population growth. Like many of the revolutionary ideas, this turned out to be wishful thinking, though it was not acknowledged as such until the 1960s.

Within the government structure, the Central Statistical Administration (TsSU) was responsible for both economic and demographic statistics. In January 1930 it was subsumed by Gosplan under pressure from planners who needed tighter control over statistics. Wheatcroft describes how this was followed by a period of 'false and meaningless' economic statistics, which wreaked havoc on economic plans. For this reason, in 1931 Gosplan set up the Central Department of National Economic Accounting (TsUNKhU) and hired V. V. Osinskii as its director. Osinskii was a competent statistician who had led the 1926 census before being fired. In general, during the 1930s there was an extremely high turnover of staff. Many senior leaders were fired, sometimes arrested, and sometimes reinstated when their successor performed poorly or was himself arrested (leaders of statistical bodies at this time were all male, though women worked at lower levels).⁸²

By the early 1930s, statisticians had started to exaggerate population estimates to hide the consequences of the 1932-1933 famine. Stalin exaggerated still further. At the 22nd Soviet Party Congress, he announced that the Soviet population had reached 168 million by the end of 1933, but he appears to have invented this figure. Scholars show the population actually numbered just over 160 million.⁸³ When data was revealed for Ukrainian mortality rates in 1934, Nikolai Alekseevich Voznesenskii, Head of Gosplan, declared that anti-Bolshevik saboteurs had falsified it. Demographers quickly rushed to defend themselves and revise their mortality estimates downwards. The extreme political pressure of the terror produced an unsustainable situation in statistical agencies, whereby statisticians repeatedly inflated their

⁸¹ DiMaio, A. J., "Evolution of Soviet Population Thought: From Marxism-Leninism to the Literaturnaia Gazeta Debate," in *Soviet Population Policy: Conflicts and Constraints*, ed. Desfosses, H. (New York, 1981).

⁸² Wheatcroft, S., "Soviet Statistics under Stalinism: Reliability and Distortions in Grain and Population Statistics."

⁸³ Tolts, M., "Tainy sovestskoi demografii." *Demoskop Weekly*, No. 171-172, (2004) Accessed: 26/06/2020. <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2004/0171/analit06.php>.

estimates of the size of the Soviet population to match Stalin's proclamations and stay ahead of accusations of sabotage.⁸⁴

In 1937 the TsUNKhU completed a new census. Because it accurately reflected the purges and famine which had been ignored in demographic forecasts, the size of the population was much smaller than expected at 162 million people. According to the estimates from TsUNKhU, the population should have numbered at least 170-172 million by 1937, meaning eight to ten million people were missing. This total was even further from the projections of the second five-year plan, according to which as many as nineteen million more people were expected.⁸⁵ Over the course of the next year, the government reviewed and rejected the results. Another census was ordered to be completed in its place, and the government declared the 1937 census a failure of statistics. By 1939, not only those who were involved in the original census, but most of the statisticians involved in its cover up had either been shot or sent to gulags by the NKVD.⁸⁶ A new census was created under the leadership of I.V. Sautin, D. Ia Bozin, and Vladimir Nikonovich Starovskii.⁸⁷ Starovskii went on to be appointed head of the TsUNKhU and its successor the TsSU (which split from Gosplan again in 1948). He remained in post until 1975 and was skilled at understanding the demands of the Soviet system, gradually re-building the TsSU after it had been purged.⁸⁸

When the 1939 census appeared for publication, the task of writing the foreword fell to Peter Gavrilovich Podiachikh. Podiachikh had been a Gosplan employee since 1936 but was only assigned to population statistics in 1938 to replace those the Party had sacked or killed. He was typical of a certain type of Party statistician, whose first priority was to please superiors even at the expense of improving scientific knowledge. He was consistently loyal to the regime throughout his career and in later years frequently blocked the collection or publication of new demographic data. He explained the 1937 census in the following way:

⁸⁴ Tolts, M., "Tainy sovestskoi demografii"; Wheatcroft, S., "Soviet Statistics under Stalinism: Reliability and Distortions in Grain and Population Statistics."; Livshits, F. D., "Perepis' s osobym mestom v uctorii." *Demoskop Weekly*, No. 271-272, (2007) Accessed: 09/03/20. http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2007/0271/arxiv02.php#_FNR_2.

⁸⁵ Volkov, A. G., "Perepis' naseleniia 1937 goda: vymyly i pravda," in *Perepis naseleniia SSSR*, vol. 3-5 (Moscow, 1990), npn; Wheatcroft, S., "Soviet Statistics under Stalinism: Reliability and Distortions in Grain and Population Statistics," p. 1027.

⁸⁶ Vishnevskii, A. I., "Trudnoe vozrozhdenie demografii," npn.

⁸⁷ Bogoiavlenskii, D., "O pripiskakh v perepisi 1939g." *Demoskop Weekly*, No. 571-572, (2013) Accessed: 25/06/20. <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2013/0571/arxiv01.php>.

⁸⁸ For example, see Starovskii's handling of the negative statistics surrounding the 1944 Family Law, in Nakachi, M., *Replacing the Dead*, p. 129.

The census was supposed to reflect the historical achievements of our Motherland recorded in the USSR Constitution during the first five-year plans and provide materials for planning the further development of the country's national economy. However, due to the fact that enemies of the people crept into the leadership of the preparation and conduct of the census, it was carried out in gross violation of the elementary foundations of statistical science and the approved instructions.⁸⁹

Podiachikh became Deputy Head of the Organisational Sector of the Census Bureau and was then appointed Head of the Census Bureau when Starovskii was promoted in 1940.⁹⁰ A close ally of Starovskii, he went on to lead the 1959 and 1970 censuses and became heavily involved in the censorship of demographic publications. Chapters two and three of this thesis discuss censorship in various forms.⁹¹

There is disagreement in the literature over the extent of falsification of the 1939 census. Some argue that the figures were more or less dictated by Stalin, who announced the population had reached 170 million at the Soviet Party Congress in March 1939, before the results had been calculated. When Voznesenskii and Sautin sent the preliminary results over, they had to send a long justification explaining why their new figure of 167.3 million could actually be revised upwards to match the 170 million that Stalin had stated ten days earlier. Those who argue the results were substantially falsified have also demonstrated various manipulations of prisoner numbers and army units which affected the overall total.⁹² Others are more circumspect.⁹³ New research by Wheatcroft argues that once the number of people born between 1937 and 1939 is taken into account, the 1939 figure is only actually around one million higher than in 1937. At 16 million fewer than the planned figures, these numbers were hardly what Stalin desired. Though Wheatcroft acknowledges some fiddling, he argues that statisticians ultimately forced Stalin to change his mind and accept reality, though he did so 'in a very ungracious and deceptive way.'⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Podiachikh, P. G., *Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1939g.* (Moscow, 1953), p. 12.

⁹⁰ Livshits, F. D., "Perepis' s osobym mestom v uctorii".

⁹¹ Also see, Lovett, J., "Turning Science into Fiction? Censoring Population Research in the Soviet Union, 1964–1982", *Contemporary European History* (2022): 1–20.

⁹² Tolts, M., "Repressirovannaia Perepis", *Rodina*, no. 11 (1989): 56–61; Tolts, M., "Skol'ko zhe nas togda bylo?", *Ogonek*, no. 51 (1987): 131–197; Volkov, A. G., "Perepis' naseleniia 1937 goda: vymygly i pravda."; Poliakov, I. A., Zhiromskaia, V. B., and Kiselev, I. N., "Polveka molchaniia. Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1937g.", *Sotsiologicheskaia issledovaniia*, no. 8 (1990): 30–52; Blum, A., *Rodit'sia, zhit', i umeret' v SSSR*; Andreev, E. M., Darskii, L. E., and Kharkova, T. L., *Naselenie sovetskogo soiuza: 1922–1991*; Tsaplin, V. V., "Statistika zhertv stalinizma v 30-e gody", *Voprosy istorii*, no. 4 (1989): 175–181.

⁹³ Bogoiavlenskii, for example, argues these figures can be used subject to certain adjustments. Bogoiavlenskii, D., "O pripiskakh v perepisi 1939g.".

⁹⁴ Wheatcroft, S., "Soviet Statistics under Stalinism: Reliability and Distortions in Grain and Population Statistics," p. 1029.

While the NKVD was purging the TsUNKhU, the Party closed the Demographic Institutes. The Institute of Mathematics took over the functions of the Leningrad Demographic Institute in 1934, while the Kyiv Institute was closed down in 1938. V. V. Paevsky, Director of the Leningrad Institute, died of a heart attack on the day of its closure, but Ptukha was sent to prison.⁹⁵ Writing in the 1990s, Anatoli Vishnevskii, the Soviet, and later Russian, demographer who started his demographic career in the 1960s, argued that the harsh regime of the 1930s led demographers to conformism, often voluntarily denouncing their colleagues. Interestingly, he referred to the 1930s as a time when ‘demography was destroyed by the hands of the demographers themselves.’⁹⁶ For example, Boleslav Iakovlevich Smulevich, one of the demographers who worked on the 1937 census, was apparently particularly active in criticising the Leningrad Institute of Demography and this led to its closure. Vishnevskii described how the initial accusations that led to purges usually came from demographers themselves, and that this tendency to accuse others lasted until perestroika as a hangover from this period. I will discuss this in more detail throughout the thesis.

Following the 1939 census demography essentially disappeared as a discipline. Stalin had realised that demography threatened his legitimacy. There were some survivors of the period who went on to work in demography after Stalin’s death. A few, such as Podiachikh and his colleague Aron Iakovlevich Boiaarksii stayed within the TsSU. Others like Smulevich and Ptukha were sent to prison or gulags and then later rehabilitated. They generally then took on slightly different work in the interim period. As Livshits points out, all statisticians of that generation would have worked on or witnessed the 1937 census.⁹⁷ After Stalin’s death, Khrushchev agreed to a TsSU proposal for a new population census, which took place in 1959 under Podiachikh’s leadership. The Party considered the census a success, and it facilitated a revival of the discipline. Statisticians made no attempt to re-evaluate the 1939 census, but neither did they falsify new census data.⁹⁸ Statistics of the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras were reasonably truthful—though they very rarely provided the whole truth. From this point onwards the Party controlled population statistics by defining what could be collected, how it was categorised, and most importantly how it could be presented in

⁹⁵ "Demograficheskomu institutu Rossiiskoi Akademii nauk moglo by ispolnit'sia 70 let." *Demoskop Weekly*, No. 6, (2001) Accessed: 20/02/21. <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/006/nauka01.php>.

⁹⁶ Vishnevskii, A. I., "Trudnoe vozrozhdenie demografii," npn.

⁹⁷ Livshits, F. D., "Perepis' s osobym mestom v uctorii".

⁹⁸ Blum, A., *Rodit'sia, zhit', i umeret' v SSSR*, p. 39.

publications. Where data revealed clearly negative trends, it was now generally censored by the Party rather than falsified by statisticians. The correct figures still existed for top leaders to see, but were either suppressed from publication, or aggregated, rounded, and cherry picked. There are of course some exceptions to this generalisation. Chapter two will discuss infant mortality—one area where there is evidence of active falsification.

The developments of the 1960s and 1970s must be understood in the context of the heavily politicised and troubled history of Soviet population statistics. As Vishnevskii highlighted, statisticians were strongly influenced by what took place in the 1930s.⁹⁹ The next section will look more closely at the individual people involved in demography during the Brezhnev era, exploring who they were and what kind of lives they led.

Population experts in the Brezhnev era Soviet Union

Defining who counted as a population expert in the Soviet Union is a somewhat difficult task. For a start, in the 1960s the word demography (*demografiia*) and demographer (*demograf*) were barely used by those studying the population. Instead, statisticians, mathematicians, economists, ethnographers, legal scholars, and sociologists sometimes took an interest in population matters and became de facto demographers, working on the newly emerging ‘science of population’ (*nauka narodonaseleniia*). This difficulty is neatly summarised by Mikhail Iakovlevich Sonin, Soviet population expert at the Institute of Economics of the USSR Academy of Sciences, who noted, ‘they called me an economist-worker, then a demographer, a sociologist. Looking back on what I did, I think that all my life I worked on a single theme – people.’¹⁰⁰ Experts worked at a large variety of institutes and organisations most of which did not specialise in demography. Nevertheless, the Brezhnev era was a time of expansion for population study, and by the 1980s the term demographer (*demograf*) had become common.

For the purposes of this thesis, the term demographer or population specialist is used to refer to anyone substantially involved in studying population dynamics regardless of their formal training or job title. Determining an exact number of demographers in this period is difficult. Soviet demographer Evgenii Andreev reported that when he started out in the early 1970s

⁹⁹ Vishnevskii, A. I., "Trudnoe vozrozhdenie demografii."

¹⁰⁰ Sonin, M. I., "Vspominaniia Mikhaila Iakovlevicha Sonina." *Demoskop Weekly*, No. 437-438, (2010) Accessed: 08/06/20. <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2010/0437/nauka02.php>.

there were ‘a maximum of thirty’ demographers in the Soviet Union.¹⁰¹ There were of course many more students of demography and related fields, but this thesis focuses on those who were most senior in their field and therefore held the most influence in the USSR. It can safely be said there was a small elite cohort of population experts, the most significant of whom are listed in appendix one with their dates of birth and job titles. I have chosen these individuals because of the seniority of their position, the frequency with which they appear in primary source documentation, and the level of influence they appear to have exerted during this timeframe.

Who were this cohort? Of the [thirty-three experts listed](#) in appendix 1, twenty-eight were men and five were women, reflecting the gender inequality present in prestigious positions. They spanned a significant age range between them. Seven were born before 1910, giving them some knowledge of the revolution (three as adults and four as children). A further seven were born before 1928, meaning they were adults at the time of the Second World War. Twelve experts were born between 1928 and 1939, making them children during the War and the Stalinist Terror of the 1930s—this cohort would have at least some memory of Stalinism. Two experts count as the baby boomers, born in 1944 or later (among those listed there were no births in the years 1939 to 1943). This group would have had very few personal memories of the War or Stalinism even if they were alive for the final few years as infants. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to discover the dates of birth of five of the experts listed. Although there was a range of ages, most key experts were therefore in some stage of middle age during the period in question, as might be expected given their seniority.

The socio-economic background, nationalities, and ethnic profile of the demographers is more difficult to determine as detailed information is available for only a few of them. Some things are certain: by virtue of being highly qualified specialists, all the experts listed had a higher education. The typical route to becoming a demographer in the Brezhnev era involved undergraduate study—usually in a related field such as economics—and then enrolling as a graduate student at a university or within the Academy of Sciences. Though no comprehensive information on ethnicity is available, there are some indicators. From records available, at least nine of those listed are known to be Jewish or have some Jewish

¹⁰¹ Borusiak, L., "Nauka o zhizni. Interv'iu c Evgenii Andreevym." *Demoskop Weekly*, No. 469 - 470, (2011) Accessed: 28/06/21. <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2011/0469/analit06.php>.

heritage.¹⁰² Aside from this, the majority of the names appearing on the list of experts are Slavic names, indicating Russians, Belorussians, and Ukrainians dominated the profession. Among the younger demographers training in the 1940s and 1950s, many attended Moscow State University of Economics and Statistics (MESI) because this was then home to the only course in the USSR which included population statistics. Interestingly, according to the account of Raisa Seergevna Rotova, trainee demographer in the 1970s at Moscow State University, MESI was one of very few higher education institutions where students could go if they had an 'unreliable personal profile' [neblagonadezhnye anketi], meaning their personal file said they had repressed relatives or were from an untrusted ethnic group.¹⁰³ She claims this meant that there were an above average number of people in this category working on demography by virtue of the fact their options for study were limited in this way.

Of the experts, Party membership was another key identifier. Most experts were Party members, as it was difficult to become very senior without being a member. Two notable exceptions are Andrei Gavrilovich Volkov, head of the Department of Demography at the Central Statistical Administration, and Boris Tsezarevich Urlanis, specialist at the Institute of Economics, USSR Academy of Sciences. According to the accounts of colleagues, both men succeeded without Party membership because of their expertise and personability.¹⁰⁴ Those who were members identified with the Party to varying degrees. Sonin described himself as a committed communist, while Dimitri Ignatovich Valentei, head of the Centre for the Study of Population at Moscow State University, seems to have been only peripherally interested in the cause, and colleagues claim he attempted to resign his membership during Glasnost' when he discovered his father had been shot by the NKVD in 1937 on trumped-up charges.¹⁰⁵

As these experts were working in the 1970s, by definition all of them escaped the Terror and the Second World War, either by being born too late, by being lucky, or because they were

¹⁰² These individuals were Urlanis, Smulevich, Merkov, Sonin, Sifman, Vishnevskii, Voldarskii, and A. Kvasha. Source: JewishGen.org. Boiarskii is also listed as Jewish, though in memoirs do not describe him as such, instead reporting that one of his relatives was a Jewish rabbi, but his father kept the family heritage a secret: 'at that time it was better and safer to know nothing about one's ancestors'. Boiarskii, E., "K stoletiiu so dnia rozhdeniia Arona Iakovlevicha Boiarskogo." *Demoskop Weekly*, No. 263-264, (2006) Accessed: 09/06/20. <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2006/0263/nauka02.php>.

¹⁰³ Denisenko, M. B. and Elizarov, V. V., eds. *Razvitiie naseleniia i demograficheskaia politika: Pamiati A. Ia. Kvasha* (Ekonomicheskii fakultet MGU, 2014), p. 48.

¹⁰⁴ Vishnevskii, A. I., "Andrei Gavrilovich Volkov. Shtrikhi k biografii." *Demoskop Weekly*, No. 385-386, (2009) Accessed: 05/06/20. <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2009/0385/nauka01.php>.

¹⁰⁵ Rotova, R. S., "Rukovoditel', kollega i tovarishch," in *D. I. Valentei v vosnominaniakh kolleg i uchenikov*, eds. Rotova, R. S. and Denisenko, M. B. (Moscow, 2006).

repressed in prisons and gulags but subsequently rehabilitated during the Thaw. Many of their family members and colleagues had met an unfortunate fate—the conflicts of the early twentieth century left few families untouched, and for this reason they would have been all too aware of the dangers of the political situation.¹⁰⁶ It is noticeable that the older demographers and Jewish demographers were more likely to have been repressed. Boleslav Iakovlevich Smulevich originally trained as a doctor and was arrested in 1938 after working on the 1937 census. He passed between prisons and eventually ended up in the Komi Gulag.¹⁰⁷ He was released in 1946, but then sacked from the Semasko Institute in 1949 during the anti-cosmopolitan (anti-Semitic) purges.¹⁰⁸ He was only rehabilitated properly in 1956, having lost almost twenty years of his life to imprisonment.

The purges of 1949 affected many demographers. Sonin resigned from his job after being warned of a planned workplace purge that would have seen him arrested.¹⁰⁹ Arkadii Mikhailovich Merkov, another doctor, suffered a similar fate, becoming very senior before being arrested in 1949 and sentenced to five years in prison. He too was rehabilitated in 1956.¹¹⁰ Uralis was also arrested in 1949 before being released but still lost his job at Moscow State University.¹¹¹ A newspaper reported that he was fired, ‘for the low ideological and political content of the lectures, expressed in praising bourgeois statistical accounting and belittling the activities of Soviet statistical science’.¹¹² In reality, however, it was his Jewish ethnicity that was most likely to have led to his sacking.¹¹³ Smulevich, Sonin, Merkov, and Uralis were all Jewish.

By nature of their work, demographers can correctly be described as part of the Soviet intelligentsia: people with a higher education who undertook intellectual work and shaped

¹⁰⁶ On this topic, see Harris, J. R., *The Great Fear: Stalin's Terror of the 1930s* (Oxford, 2016).

¹⁰⁷ Interestingly Smulevich was one of those brought in under Iakovlev to try and correct the 1937 census. Volkov, A. G., "Perepis' naseleniia 1937 goda: vymygly i pravda."

¹⁰⁸ "Iz zhizni sovetskikh demografov. K 110-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia Boleslava Iakovlevicha Smulevicha." *Demoskop Weekly*, No. 151-152, (2004) Accessed: 20/04/21.
<http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2004/0151/nauka01.php>.

¹⁰⁹ Sonin, I. M., "Vspominaniia ob ottse." *Demoskop Weekly*, No. 437-438, (2012) Accessed: 06/02/20.
<http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2010/0437/nauka03.php>; Sonin, M. I., "Vspominaniia Mikhaila Iakovlevicha Sonina".

¹¹⁰ "Arkadii Mikhailovich Merkov (1899-1971)." *Demoskop Weekly*, No. 143-144, (2004) Accessed: 09/06/20.
<http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2004/0143/nauka02.php>.

¹¹¹ Uralis, E., "Moi otets." *Demoskop Weekly*, No. 265-266, (2006) Accessed: 07/02/20.
<http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2006/0265/nauka06.php>.

¹¹² Cited in: Vishnevskii, A. I., "Trudnoe vozrozhdenie demografii," npn.

¹¹³ Pinkus, B., *The Jews of the Soviet Union: the History of a National Minority* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 139-210.

cultural norms. But this thesis also uses the term elites to refer to a much more select group of individuals. These were people in highly prestigious positions who could actively shape policy. Politicians, high level bureaucrats and planners fell into this category. While elites had a real say in how things were run, the broader intelligentsia did not. For example, when interviewed for this thesis, Valentina, a medical researcher from Novosibirsk, referred to herself as part of the intelligentsia. Yet her job working in a provincial hospital cannot be described as one which gave her any kind of say in how the Soviet system worked. Similarly, experts existed all over the USSR, but they only became part of the elite when they achieved a high professional status, affording them access to sensitive political information, classified statistics, policy drafts, seats on advisory committees, and influential patrons in bodies like the Central Committee or Council of Ministers. It is these experts who occupied prestigious jobs in Moscow, who planned the census, and who regularly interacted with ministers and senior Party officials who drove response to population change in this era. Many would not have considered themselves elite, both because the term sat firmly outside of Soviet ideology, and because they were not always wealthy. But their influence and proximity to government distinguishes them from the wider intelligentsia and makes their inclusion in this group meaningful for this research.

While the individual experiences of these demographers were of course unique, they were also characteristic of this period of Soviet history. Nearly all demographers were married and where this information is available it seems most had one or two children. This included Urlanis, father of two but author of the famous statement that: 'three children is the exact number of children which satisfies the interests of society on the one hand, and the interests of parents on the other'.¹¹⁴ There is little evidence that any of them were personally convinced by the call for families to have three or four children. It is clear from their memoirs that they lived in conditions, which were often very difficult and shared a common experience of terror and oppression that affected family members if not themselves directly. Those born around the turn of the century would have experienced the First World War, the Russian Revolution, the Russian Civil War, several famines, the Great Terror under Stalin, the Second World War and a constant background of disappearances and arrests outside of the worst period of the 1930s terror. For many, it was the closing chapter of their lives, when the peace of Khrushchev and Brezhnev finally came that they were able to complete their

¹¹⁴ Urlanis, B., "V sem'e odin rebenok," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 27th September 1972, p. 13.

best work and fully devote themselves to demographic science.¹¹⁵ But they were shaped by the events of their earlier lives, and the fear created by such an environment would have left a heavy mark on all of them.¹¹⁶ Their actions during this period must therefore be seen in the context of a Soviet society recovering from the trauma of the terror and Second World War.

Defining Soviet ideology in the Brezhnev era

This thesis discusses ideology throughout, showing how it created a constraining context, but also that it became less important in the work and lives of Soviet citizens over time. Soviet ideology was never fixed; since 1917 the Party had frequently adapted Marxism-Leninism to suit its needs, pushing new forms and applying concepts in different ways. Sometimes ideological doctrine was driven by the strong ideas of the Party leader himself, while at other times warring Party factions competed to shape the form it would take. Brezhnev himself, however, differed from previous Party leaders in that he had no strong ideological ideas of his own, and therefore, as Sandle notes, controlling the flow of information that reached Brezhnev, advising, and persuading him became a key task for different wings of the Party.¹¹⁷

In recent years many fascinating works have explored the way that different groups of citizens interacted with the state and ideology in the late-Soviet period.¹¹⁸ Yet despite the plethora of works which refer to ideology in the Brezhnev era, such works rarely (if ever) provide a clear definition of the term. Doing so is slippery because the vast writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin were interpreted in many different ways, and beyond these texts there was never a clear articulation or document stating what correct ideological doctrine consisted of in the 1970s. One of the most illuminating works in this regard is Mitrokhin's study of the CPSU Central Committee Department for Agitation and Propaganda.¹¹⁹ He interviewed former Brezhnev-era department workers about the ideology of the time. Mitrokin found that each worker carried a version of the ideology in their heads, informed by their beliefs about

¹¹⁵ "Chetvert' veka so dnia smerti Rozy Iosifnovy Sifmana (1900-1978)." *Demoskop Weekly*, No. 131-132, (2003) Accessed: 09/06/20. <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2003/0131/nauka02.php>.

¹¹⁶ On this, see Harrison, M., *One Day We Will Live Without Fear: Everyday Lives Under the Soviet Police State* (California, 2015).

¹¹⁷ Sandle, M., "A Triumph of Ideological Hairdressing? Intellectual Life in the Brezhnev Era Reconsidered," in *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, eds. Bacon, E. and Sandle, M. (London, 2002), pp. 146-147.

¹¹⁸ For example, see the many interesting studies in Fainburg, D. and Kalinovsky, A., eds. *Reconsidering Stagnation in the Brezhnev era: Ideology and Exchange* (Lexington Books, 2016); Fuerst, J., "Where did all the normal people go? Another look at the Soviet 1970s", *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 14, no. 3 (2013): 621-640.

¹¹⁹ Mitrokhin, N., "Back Office Mikhaila Suslova ili kem i kam proizvodilas' idiologia Brezhnevskogo vremeni", *Cahiers du Monde russe* 54, no. 3/4 (2013): 409-440.

what their bosses thought, what their peers thought, but also what they personally understood to be the correct interpretation of Marxism-Leninism. Moreover, he found wide variation and numerous factions: neo-Stalinists nostalgic for repression, Russian nationalists advocating ethnic purity, those who simply believed the Party was already on the right track by virtue of their own personal success, and moderate progressives who wanted some degree of liberalisation and pragmatism while rejecting antisemitism. Even within a single department of socially homogenous employees, understanding of ideology was varied and unclear.

In trying to untangle this mess, historians have fared little better. Ideology is variously used by scholars of the Soviet Union to refer to some or all of: (1) basic Party values, like equality and common ownership; (2) key principles of governance that have developed over time, including Party monopoly and the need for limits on freedom of expression; (3) beliefs about the course of history, such as “developed socialism” or “socialist modernity”; and (4) claims to global leadership of the communist cause that informed foreign policy goals.¹²⁰ If views on some of these things changed over time, did it mean the ideology had changed? Or simply adherence to it? Some scholars go as far as to argue that late-Soviet ideology was less a belief system on which everything was built, than retrospective window dressing for whichever policy was politically expedient at the time.¹²¹

In thinking about this question, it is perhaps most useful to identify how each of the four strands of ideology identified above did or did not change under Brezhnev. Basic values in which the Party professed to believe remained largely unchanged throughout the period. The Party still did not believe in private property. Equality was still central to Soviet thinking, and this still included both equality between classes, between nationalities, and between men and women. Brezhnev governed differently to Khrushchev, but the key underlying principles of governance were remarkably similar. The primacy of the Party as the sole vanguard of the working class was unchallenged. The need for control over thought and expression was still accepted. Small-scale, non-systemic criticisms of policy, of parts of the government, or of society in general were acceptable in public sphere and the media, but systemic criticisms of the entire system or the rightness of Soviet rule were “anti-Soviet” and required suppression.

¹²⁰ Meyer, A. G., “Review of: *Ideology and Policy: The Political Uses of Doctrine in the Soviet Union* by Terry L. Thompson”, *The Russian Review* 49, no. 4 (1990): 509-511.

¹²¹ Thompson, T. L., *Ideology and Policy: The Political Uses of Doctrine in the Soviet Union* (New York, 1989).

Corruption in a single factory could be publicised and condemned, endemic corruption caused by one-party rule and the stability of cadres could not.

If the basic values and principles of governance were consistent with previous eras, then the most significant change in ideology during the Brezhnev era was beliefs about teleology, or the course of history. True communism was still regarded as the ultimate goal, a utopian heaven on earth where the state would no longer be necessary. It was still believed, just as it had been since the revolution, that socialism was the transitional state on the way to true communism. The Soviet Union was striving towards communism but had not got there yet. However, both the timescale for this change and the predetermined stages of development were now altered. This change saw Khrushchev's promise of achieving communism by 1980 quietly dropped. Instead, leaders saw the transition to communism as a long-term goal for the distant future. Socialism, in this view, was no brief transitional period, but a long phase of development in its own right.¹²²

Moreover, socialism now had different phases. In 1971 the concept of 'developed socialism' appeared at the 24th Soviet Party Congress when Brezhnev told those assembled:

In our country, it will be recalled, socialism triumphed back in the latter half of the thirties. This was followed by more than three decades of the Soviet people's heroic struggle and labour . . . The developed socialist society to which Lenin referred in 1918 as the future of our country has been built by the selfless labour of the Soviet people.¹²³

There was now a distinct higher stage of socialist development within Soviet ideology, which could be expected to last many years. The Soviet Union was said to have achieved this, while other socialist states had not. The goals of this new approach to ideology were threefold. Firstly, adjusting the teleology in this way removed the problem of communism not materialising by the predicted dates. Secondly, in order to maintain a commitment to the fourth element of Soviet ideology mentioned above (a claim to global leadership of the communist cause), Soviet leaders needed to prove superiority to the states of Eastern Europe. Developed socialism re-established the theoretical hegemony of the USSR following events like the Prague Spring and the rise of Mao.¹²⁴ Thirdly, developed socialism reasserted the role

¹²² Sandle, M., "Brezhnev and Developed Socialism: The Ideology of Zastoi?."

¹²³ Brezhnev quoted in Sandle, M., "Brezhnev and Developed Socialism: The Ideology of Zastoi?," p. 167.

¹²⁴ Thompson, T. L., *Ideology and Policy: The Political Uses of Doctrine in the Soviet Union*, pp. 20-29.

of the Party as the monopolistic leader for the foreseeable future. Questions of the state withering away were no longer of immediate concern.

In summary, unlike the revolutionary optimism of the Khrushchev years, ideology under Brezhnev came to embrace gradual, incremental, and moderate improvement. The fundamental values were unchanged, but the road to achieving the final goals was substantially altered. Some of the revolutionary zeal disappeared from ideological discussions, and it became accepted that developed socialism would still come with problems that needed to be resolved. Beyond these basics, interpretation of ideology was quite varied, as Mitrokin's study of the Agitprop Department shows. Many fields, particularly in social sciences, were shaped by debates about the correct nature of ideology, and, as this thesis will show, demography was no exception.

Finally, it is worth briefly noting that throughout the thesis I use the term socialism or Soviet socialism to refer to the system put into practice by the Soviet Union. The term communism usually refers to the ideal system Soviet leaders envisaged, something that was still being built. However, in the West, the countries of the Eastern Bloc were (and still are) widely referred to as communist because they were led by communist parties, adhered to Marxist doctrine, and totally abolished private enterprise. Socialism was often seen as something less extreme and not necessarily aimed at establishing communism. For this reason, I sometimes use the term communist to mean Marxist, Soviet-type states where it would be confusing to do otherwise.

Methodology and sources

To study population politics in the late-Soviet period, this thesis uses a mixed method, combining archival sources with published materials, memoirs, and oral history interviews. Study of elite thinking on population is mostly conducted using materials from archives of the Russian Federation, in particular, the Russian State Archive, the Russian State Archive of the Economy, and the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Due to the scattered nature of population study at the time, there is no archival fond devoted to the topic of demography. This study has sought to combine materials from different institutions and bodies, all of which played a role in population matters at one time or another. The archival documents used in this thesis are primarily stenograms of meetings, reports on

studies/censuses planned or conducted, and policy proposal documents. A small amount of personal correspondence supplements this. In addition to archival documents, this thesis makes great use of published work, both demographic texts written by experts, and discussion aimed at a popular audience in the form of articles in newspapers and magazines. When combined with archival sources, these published documents illuminate the official position of the regime in comparison to the more private views of its experts and ministers and make interesting reading.

Memoirs and interviews with demographers that have taken place since the fall of the Soviet Union provide another valuable source of information on the political dynamics of the time. Memoirs are often criticised by historians, Taylor argues they are a ‘useless’ form of oral history, ‘set down to mislead historians’.¹²⁵ It is true that memoirs are a one-way form of quite self-conscious communication, which tends to omit details showing the author in a poor light, and this can sometimes lead historians to discount them completely.¹²⁶ Yet memoirs do have value, particularly in the context of the USSR where written sources themselves can be a poor reflection of reality. The general distrust of writing down personal thoughts or of speaking one’s mind in the Soviet Union means that it can be hard to understand actors’ real motivations or feelings from the written sources of the time.¹²⁷ As a result, memoirs offer one of the only windows into the thoughts of people who, for political reasons, were unable to speak freely. In many cases, we only know about the falsification (or excessive manipulation) of data because Soviet experts later admitted in memoirs that they did this. People who were there and took part in these events thus have something valuable to say about this history. Nevertheless, their writings are approached here critically and with a degree of caution. As Shaw notes, memoirs are mediated by hindsight, and memoirists can lie both inadvertently and by design.¹²⁸ When making use of memoirs, this thesis therefore seeks to assess the factual information they contain, ‘analysing questions of intention and style, and thinking through issues of subjectivity, sensibility, and personal (and collective) experience.’¹²⁹

¹²⁵ A. J. Taylor cited in Thompson, P. and Bornat, J., eds. *The Voice of the Past*, 4th ed. (Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 190.

¹²⁶ Thompson, P. and Bornat, J., *The Voice of the Past*, p. 190.

¹²⁷ On this point, see Raleigh, D. J., *Soviet Baby Boomers: An Oral History of Russia's Cold War Generation* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 6-7.

¹²⁸ Shaw, C., "Soviet Memoir Literature: Personal Narratives of a Historical Epoch," in *Reading Russian Sources: A Student's Guide to Text and Visual Sources from Russian History*, ed. Gilbert, G. (New York, 2020).

¹²⁹ Shaw, C., "Soviet Memoir Literature," p. 221.

Finally, this thesis draws on interviews with eighteen women from the former Soviet Union born between 1936 and 1956. The purpose of these interviews was to explore the perspectives of ordinary Soviet women who were starting their families in the Brezhnev era Soviet Union and were therefore the target of most of the demographic policy and propaganda. How did they perceive the supposed crisis, and what opportunities and challenges faced them as young mothers? Unlike the other chapters, this section moves away from elite pre-occupations. The interviews took place remotely and were semi-structured oral history interviews. This method was chosen to retain a focus on the topic in question but provide enough flexibility to explore particular events and memories raised by the participants. Oral history interviews are different to other historical sources because of ‘the interpersonal dynamics of the interview situation and the process by which the participants cooperate to create a shared narrative.’¹³⁰ They are inherently subjective, and, as Passerini and Portelli argue, this is both their strength and their weakness.¹³¹ Following the generally accepted methods laid out by Abrams and others, as an interviewer I aimed to discover four things: ‘what happened, how they felt about it, how they recall it, and what wider public memory they draw upon.’¹³² A detailed description of the selection of participants and the interview method can be found at the start of chapter five preceding the results and discussion of findings.

Chapter outline

This thesis is made up of five thematic chapters that examine the population debate from different angles to provide a unique look at the dynamics of the time. Chapter one traces the development of population as a topic of study in the post-war Soviet Union. It provides a wider look at how population problems went from being a peripheral issue at the start of the Brezhnev era, to a central topic of concern by the early 1980s. To do so, the chapter examines the institutions and actors that structured demographic knowledge and considers how experts fought for influence in the population policy making process.

The second chapter focuses on demographic statistics themselves, showing how the Soviet state controlled statistics, and how statistical knowledge was shaped by the political system.

¹³⁰ Abrams, L., *Oral History Theory* (London, 2016), p. 65.

¹³¹ Passerini, L., "Work, Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism", *History Workshop Journal* 8, no. 1 (1979): 82-108; Portelli, A., "What Makes Oral History Different," in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Perks, R. and Thompson, A. (London, 1998).

¹³² Abrams, L., *Oral History Theory*, p. 87.

Both the actual numbers and the categories they fell under were affected by the Soviet system of data collection and the Soviet worldview through which leaders saw demographic change. The chapter highlights the standoff between ideology and empirical trends, and it shows how the regime sought to censor and control population statistics.

International population politics is the subject of chapter three, which considers Soviet demographic change in its global context, and shows how the Soviet government sought to use the arena of population politics to gain influence in the world. It presents three case studies that demonstrate the government's aims and also highlight how population politics worked in practice. In many cases the government was actually dragged unwillingly into the new arena for population diplomacy but ended up using the dynamics of the period to its advantage.

Elite attempts to change the population by controlling reproduction are explored in chapter four. It shows how the Soviet government perceived higher birth rates in Central Asia and lower birth rates in Slavic Republics as a threat to national identity and the stability of the USSR. The issue of demographic change was complex, and concerns about differential fertility between republics saw racism mix with legitimate economic concerns like uneven labour resources and military problems. I show that rather than aiming to change these factors, the government placed primary emphasis on changing patterns of reproduction to remedy the situation by changing the population itself. In doing so, they deepened divisions between Central Asians and other Soviet peoples, portraying them as distinct groups who had a predetermined role and place in life. The effects of this are explored in detail.

The fifth and final chapter is based on oral history interviews with ordinary women living in the Soviet Union in the Brezhnev era. It seeks to discover how they experienced demographic change in their own families, and how they perceived state attempts to manipulate their reproductive decisions. Unlike previous chapters, it takes non-elite experience as its subject, asking how social change affected women's lives. The chapter reflects on the events detailed in the previous four by considering the contrast between state population politics and citizen's everyday experience of demographic change.

In summary, this research examines a particular period in Soviet history when demography became highly significant, presenting the government with new choices and challenges on

both an ideological and a practical level. It shows how population change (and Soviet society's understanding of that change) impacted late-Soviet politics and culture, and as such this is not a study in historical demography, but one in demographic history. As Soviet demographers were so keen to tell the world, demography sits at the junction of so many societal issues. Public health, addiction, economics, reproductive rights, ethnic conflict, and urban planning all bear some relation to demographic dynamics. They both impact and are impacted by population change, though demography is never solely responsible for any of them. This interplay—between population measurements at an abstract level and societal phenomena—is especially interesting in the USSR, where the monumental scale of the demographic change over the course of the twentieth century makes it not only an unusual case study, but an original and important one. No other country lost so much of its population in the War, and few saw their fertility decline so quickly. The steady and even improvement in health and longevity seen elsewhere was absent. Instead, the USSR saw sudden improvements followed by appalling periodic setbacks and then gradual decay. In exploring how knowledge about the population was created, controlled, used, spread, and experienced, this study demonstrates the significance of demographic change for late-Soviet society—a change that, to the dismay of elites, remained stubbornly outside the control of the Party and state.

Chapter One: The Science of Population

This chapter examines the acquisition and structure of population knowledge in Brezhnev's Soviet Union. How did leaders come to know the population at this time, and what does this tell us about late-Soviet socialism, the role of experts, and the functioning of the state? The chapter is split into three sections. The first examines the structure of institutions involved, the role of the key actors and their networks, the main events that defined the era, and the relationship among these things. Mistrusting demographers, the government never allowed an institute of demography to reopen after Stalin closed the old ones. As a result, Brezhnev era population study was split between many smaller departments and study groups across academia, the Academy of Sciences, and the state statistical bodies. This unusual, scattered structure led to the formation of cross-institutional alliances that structured the administrative space and, as will be seen at the end of the chapter, sometimes mobilised to defend common interests.

The second section turns to the policy-making process, considering the role demographers played in changing population policy. Did being academic experts in a one-Party state make them lame ducks or empowered professionals? All modern governments have a relationship with experts, but the form this takes is highly varied. The case of late-Soviet socialism is particularly interesting because of the curious combination of societal forces: a commitment to Marxist-Leninist ideology, a strong emphasis on advanced science and technology, the absence of non-state institutions, and the suppression of information from the public. Policy-making thus helps to reveal where power lay in the state. Though the upper echelons of the Party had the potential to monopolise power, in practice the Party could be influenced, and this section explores strategies for policy influence including networking, publishing, and direct appeals to leaders. A constant task for specialists in this period was to raise the profile of population issues, which were not initially considered important. By doing so, population experts ultimately persuaded ministers to share their view that demographic change was a crisis.

A third section examines debates of the late 1960s, when population specialists argued passionately that they were not just statisticians, simple accountants of the population, but

scientists of a complex discipline which ‘sat at the junction’ of many other social sciences.¹ They longed to take part in resolving sociological issues such as desired family size, appropriate migration policy, and family benefits, all of which fell outside of a narrow definition of demography as population statistics. The issue of whether or not there was a ‘science of population’ therefore occupied a huge amount of their time in this period. They saw it as vital for being able to influence policy and for being taken seriously as specialists. I show that the early Brezhnev/Kosygin years were an important turning point when specialists renegotiated some of the Stalin era constraints on their discipline.

Taken as a whole, the chapter shows how—with experts’ encouragement—population matters went from being a peripheral issue in the early 1960s to a topic of major concern for Soviet leaders by the end of the Brezhnev era. Leaders gradually began to conceptualise the drivers of social progress differently. They quietly sidestepped teleology and dialectical materialism in their search for a solution to the population problem and other social problems more broadly. The standoff between ideology and reality often found in Soviet academia was particularly intense within Soviet population research. In persuading ministers to understand and engage with demographic problems, experts gradually brought this standoff to an end.

How did the production of population statistics work in the Soviet Union?

After statisticians had successfully run the 1959 census, demography began to flourish as a discipline. The Central Statistical Administration had been the only institution involved in population statistics since the closure of the demographic institutes in the 1930s. At this time, even the word demography (*demografiia*) was rarely used. Instead, experts referred simply to population statistics (*statistika naseleniia*) or at a push population science, or population policy (*nauka narodonaseleniia*, *politika narodonaseleniia*).² This reflected the Stalin era destruction of the discipline, but this began to change in the early 1960s as individual scholars in related areas took an interest in demography and lobbied for its revival. It was a time of growth for science generally, including social science, and the expansion of demography took place in the context of a scholarly expansion of research in the 1960s.³ For

¹ Karakhov, M. K. et al., *Problemy narodonaseleniia, trudy vsesoiusnoi mezhvuzovskoi nauchnoi konferentsii posviashchonnoi problemam narodonaseleniia Srednei Azii* (Tashkent 1965) (Moscow, 1970), p. 9

² Elizarov, V. V., "Teoriia i praktika demograficheskoi politiki v SSSR." Elizarov also notes that the term ‘demograficheskaiia politika’ at this point referred solely to contraception and family planning abroad.

³ Ivanov, K., "Science after Stalin: Forging a New Image of Soviet Science", *Science in Context* 15, no. 2 (2002): 317-338; Koslova, L. A., "Sozdanie pervogo akademicheskogo instituta sotsiologii - iski AN SSSP,

the whole Brezhnev era there was no single demographic institution. Research and development occurred within larger institutes and university faculties. The pattern throughout the 1960s and 1970s was one of institutional growth, but the structure was scattered with no single organisation leading.⁴ The main institutions will be explored here with reference to appendix 2, which shows the institutional structure in a visual form.

Perhaps most important institution was the Central Statistical Administration of the USSR (TsSU)—the government agency responsible for collecting population statistics, running censuses, and supplying the government with demographic forecasts. There were republic, regional, and local offices of the TsSU, but in practice the TsSU was highly centralised. Templates for data were established in Moscow, data was centrally collated, and the First Section within the TsSU controlled who could access which data sets.⁵ The TsSU was slow and bureaucratic, and one of its main purposes was actually to restrict access to data.⁶ The Soviet government saw statistical analysis as a means of evaluating government policy in a way that was objective and scientific, making numerical data a prime target for control and censorship.⁷

The TsSU was led by Vladimir Nikonovich Starovskii until his retirement in 1975 when Lev Mordkovich Volodarski took over.⁸ Starovskii was a skilled politician. When he took the post in 1941 five of his seven predecessors in the role had been shot.⁹ Faced with a daunting task he not only survived the last decade of Stalinism, but expertly managed the demands of Khrushchev and Brezhnev, bringing stability to an organisation that had experienced violence and turmoil. Though an achievement in many ways, the price of this stability was suffocating caution and conservatism. Below the Director, the TsSU was split into sections. Population

1968: *Atmosfera i ychatvuiushchie sub'ekty*", *Sotsiologicheskii zhurnal* 24, no. 3 (2018): 117- 140; Graham, L. R., *Science in Russia and the Soviet Union: A short history* (Cambridge, 1993).

⁴ Feshbach, M., "The Soviet Population Policy Debate: Actors and Issues", RAND Corporation, (1986).

⁵ Anderson, B., Katus, K., and Silver, B., "Developments and Prospects for Population Statistics," p. 5; Tolts, M., "The Failure of Demographic Statistics: A Soviet Response to Population Troubles" (paper presented at the IUSSP XXIVth General Population Conference, Salvador-Bahia, Brazil, 2001).

⁶ Anderson, B., Katus, K., and Silver, B., "Developments and Prospects for Population Statistics," p. 5.

⁷ This is discussed in chapter two. On numerical data as object reality, see Hacking, I., *The Taming of Chance*; Patriarca, S., *Numbers and Nationhood: Writing Statistics in Nineteenth Century Italy* (Cambridge, 1996); Cole, J., *The Power of Large Numbers*. On the link between the Soviet ideology and science Pollock, E., *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars*, pp. 3-4; Desrosières, A., *The Politics of Large Numbers: a History of Statistical Reasoning*.

⁸ *Directory of Soviet Officials*, U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, (1979), p. 317.

⁹ "Vladimir Nikonovich Starovskii (1905-1975)." *Demoskop Weekly*, No. 203-204, (2005) Accessed: <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2005/0203/nauka02.php>.

statistics within the TsSU were structured across two main areas: The Census Bureau (led by Podiachikh until 1973, when he became a deputy director of the TsSU), and the Scientific Research Institute (established in 1963 and led by Aron Iakovlevich Boiaarksii). Podiachikh was a close ally of Starovskii, and they worked closely together to complete the inflated 1939 census, but Boiaarksii was generally better liked and respected by his colleagues outside the TsSU.¹⁰ Within the Scientific Research Institute was the Department of Demography, led by Andrei Gavrilovich Volkov from 1965.¹¹

Feshbach has accurately characterised the TsSU in this period as 'a conservative, purely statistical unit that resisted outside suggestions for the collection of new data... and failed to release essential data that it did collect.'¹² TsSU leaders generally strove to acquire control over all statistics for their institution and this tendency to restrict access to data, especially data showing failings of the regime, meant specialists outside the agency were hostile to it.¹³ For example, in a 1968 *Literaturnaia Gazeta* article, Viktor Perevedentsev, demographer at the Academy of Sciences, wrote a scathing account of the 'all knowing' TsSU and the 'strange position' it took on demographic matters.¹⁴ He told of 'the two opposing approaches to the contemporary demographic situation in the country', whereby statisticians at the TsSU claimed that there were no demographic problems, while demographers outside the institution pointed to the many issues that were being ignored. As an example, Perevedentsev examined the recent TsSU forecast, which had predicted population growth for the 1980s by using an assumption that fertility trends would reverse. 'There is again no scientific basis for this forecast and not one serious demographer will vouch for it,' he told readers.

To say that there was frustration at the TsSU among Soviet scholars would therefore be an understatement. As the years went on, the TsSU did seek to expand its data collection, but its reputation remained. When Starovskii was nominated to be a member of the Academy of Sciences in the 1980s, Academician N. P. Fedorenko remembers sharp opposition from the Academy because 'in general, everyone at that time knew that the TsSU was nothing other

¹⁰ Sudoplatov, A. P., "Politicheskie kulisy razvitiia demografii v MGU," in *D. I. Valentei v vosnominaniakh kolleg i uchenikov*, eds. Rotova, R. S. and Denisenko, M. B. (Moscow, 2006), p. 8

¹¹ Vishnevskii, A. I., "Andrei Gavrilovich Volkov. Shtrikhi k biografii"; "Vladimir Nikonovich Starovskii (1905-1975)".

¹² Feshbach, M., "The Soviet Population Policy Debate", p. 67.

¹³ Shenfield, S. D., "The Struggle for Control over Statistics," in *Cracks in the Monolith: Party Power in the Brezhev Era*, ed. Millar, J. R. (New York, 1992), p. 89.

¹⁴ Perevedentsev, V. I., "Zdravyi smysl ili nauchnoe znanie," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 10th July 1968, p. 11.

than the “Ministry of Lies”¹⁵. The TsSU was thus a major player in population statistics, but, as this research will show, the institution often hindered the development of demographic knowledge because leaders were afraid of revealing the negative demographic effects of successive Soviet policy decisions. Chapter two discusses aspects of this hindrance with respect to census data in particular.

The initiative to develop demography beyond the boundaries of the TsSU started first within higher education.¹⁶ The process was doubtless encouraged by the re-evaluation of Soviet science by the Khrushchev government, the gradual integration of Soviet science with Western science, and the expansion of other social sciences such as sociology.¹⁷ In 1962 the Ministry for Higher and Specialised Secondary Education (Minvuz) in partnership with the Scientific Technical Councils of the USSR formed a problem group devoted to ‘population in the period of building communism’.¹⁸ One specialist described the moment as a ‘phoenix rising from the ashes and starting life again’, noting that from this moment forward, the growth of demography really started.¹⁹ The problem group quickly became the Coordination Council on Population Problems in 1963 and then later the Population Section in 1968. Name changes reflected its increased role and importance, and it functioned as a body for coordinating research and setting the direction within universities.²⁰

The agency of Dimitri Ignatovich Valentei was key to the creation of the Population Section.²¹ Originally trained as an economist, Valentei finished his doctorate (‘Socio-economic problems of population: views and theories’) in 1961.²² The Population Section was his initiative and he chaired it on a voluntary basis.²³ The Minvuz Population Section set the agenda and coordinated the work of more than thirty-five departments in Higher

¹⁵ Fedorenko, N. P., *Vspominaniia proshloe, zagladivai v budushchee* (Moscow, 1999), p. 305.

¹⁶ Kiseleva, G. P., "Ob osnovnikh etapakh razvitiia issledovani problem narodonaseleniia v vysshei shkole," in *Obrazovatelnaia i sotsialno-professionalnaia struktura naseleniia SSSR*, ed. Zhiltsov, E., N (Moscow, 1975), pp. 93-95.

¹⁷ Koslova, L. A., "Sozdanie pervogo akademicheskogo instituta sotsiologii - iski AN SSSP, 1968: Atmosfera i ychatvuiushchie sub'ekty."; Ivanov, K., "Science after Stalin: Forging a New Image of Soviet Science." On optimism for a new independence for science during this period see Popovsky, M., *Science in Chains: The Crisis of Science and Scientists in the Soviet Union Today* (London, 1980); Fortescue, S., *The Communist Party and Soviet Science* (London, 1986).

¹⁸ Burnashchev, E. and Namestnikova, G., "Dela i dni demografov", *Voprosy ekonomiki*, no. 5 (1966): 156.

¹⁹ Burnashchev, E. and Namestnikova, G., "Dela i dni demografov," p. 156.

²⁰ Kiseleva, G. P., "Ob osnovnikh etapakh..." p. 100.

²¹ Feshbach, M., "The Soviet Population Policy Debate".

²² "80 let so dnia rozhdeniia Dimitiriia Ignat'evicha Valenteia." *Demoskop Weekly*, No. 81-82, (2002) Accessed: 18/06/20. <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2002/081/nauka03.php>.

²³ "80 let so dnia rozhdeniia Dimitiriia Ignat'evicha Valenteia".

Educational Institutions.²⁴ The Section also supervised all population training across universities and was granted the authority to organise conferences.²⁵ One Soviet specialist described its role as, 'the formation of specialist scientific public organisations, creative collectives, the creation of research institutions, enhanced training, the extension of publishing activities, and the coordination of scholars.'²⁶

In 1964 Valentei and some of his likeminded colleagues appeared on the pages of *Izvestiia*, arguing for the need to set up an institute for the study of population. He made a proposal to the government bodies and to the leadership of Moscow State University (MGU).²⁷ As a result, in 1965 the Population Laboratory was set up within the Faculty of Economics at Moscow State University, and Valentei became the director. From 1968 this was renamed the Centre for the Study of Population Problems (henceforth referred to in this thesis as the Population Centre).²⁸ The Minvuz Population Section coordinated research, but it was higher education departments themselves which undertook the research and trained students. As Valentei led both the Population Centre at MGU and the Minvuz Population Section, it is unsurprising the Population Centre became the leading research body for demography in the USSR. Once established, the Centre quickly grew in size, doubling to fifty people by 1975, though there were an additional one hundred and thirty students and twenty-five doctoral candidates specialising in population issues within the MGU faculty of Economics.²⁹ During the 1970s, the Population Centre also undertook important work for the United Nations training foreign demographers, as the third chapter of this thesis explains.³⁰

The third major player in population research was the Academy of Sciences, though the government refused to allow an institute of demography within the USSR Academy of Sciences system (AN). Instead, the Scientific Council for the Study of Socio-Economic Problems of the Population (henceforth the Scientific Council) was set up in 1968 to address

²⁴ Remennikov, B., "O nekotorykh rezul'tatov nauchnikh issledovaniia i o koordinatsionnom plane nauchnoissledovatel'skikh rabot na 1976-1980gg.," in *Zhenshchina na rabote i doma*, ed. Valentei, D. I. (Moscow, 1978), pp. 113-115.

²⁵ Feshbach, M., "The Soviet Population Policy Debate", pp. 14-15.

²⁶ Burnashchev, E., "Tsentr po izucheniiu problem narodonaseleniia moskovskogo universiteta – 10 let," in *Demograficheskie aspekty zaniatosti*, ed. Valentei, D., I (Moscow, 1975), p. 113.

²⁷ "80 let so dnia rozhdeniia Dimitiriia Ignat'evicha Valenteiia"; "Nauka o naselenii," *Kommunist*, No. 9, (1964): 126-128.

²⁸ Burnashchev, E., "Tsentr po izucheniiu..." pp. 113-115.

²⁹ Burnashchev, E., "Tsentr po izucheniiu..." p. 115.

³⁰ Salas, R. M., ed. *Reflections on Population*, 2nd ed. (Pergamon, 1985).

the fact that scholars working on population were spread out, and so it was difficult to train up new specialists as a cohort.³¹ The Scientific Council was led by Timon Vasilyevich Riabushkin and coordinated the work of around seventy institutions across the Academy system. The main institutes with scholars working on problems were the Institutes of Economics, Sociology, Central Economic-Mathematical, Social and Economic Problems (Leningrad), and also the institutes of various branches of the Academy of Sciences in the Republics.³² Often it was the interest of a particular specialist in population matters that meant their institute was involved. For example, Valentina Sergeevna Steshenko was instrumental in opening a Department of Demography within the Ukrainian Institute of Economics.³³ As demography developed, the Scientific Council was split into sections, such as the problems of work, medical demographic problems, and geographical regions.³⁴ The Scientific Council held conferences and plenaries where they considered questions of population theory and policy and began to publish yearbooks on certain issues.³⁵

The TsSU, the Population Centre, and the Scientific Council were the main three players in research, but many other agencies were involved in population politics and policy. Other universities such as those in Tashkent, Rostov on Don, or the Kyrgyz Republic played a role.³⁶ The Semashko Institute was home to medical demographers like Arkadii Mikhailovich Merkov. The State Planning Committee (Gosplan) and the State Committee for Labour and Social Issues (Goskomtrud) played an important role in turning demographic research into costed policy proposals, and their roles will be explored more fully in the next section.

Though theoretically quite separate, in fact the institutional delineations described here obscure the cooperation and coordination involved in population research. From 1964, monthly sessions were held at the Demographic Section within the Moscow House of Scientists (an Academy of Science organisation), where experts from the TsSU, MGU and

³¹ Degtyar', L., "Nauchnyi sovet po problemam demografii", *Voprosy ekonomiki*, no. 3 (1979): 154-156.

³² Galetskaiia, R. A., "Nauchnyi sovet Akademii Nauk SSSR "sotsial'no-ekonomicheskie problemy narodonaseleniia"", *Obshchestvennye nauki*, no. 5 (1980): 148-152; Galetskaiia, R. A., "Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskie problemy narodonaseleniia, glavnye napravleniia", *Voprosy ekonomiki*, no. 3 (1972): 150-152.

³³ Feshbach, M., "The Soviet Population Policy Debate", p. 55.

³⁴ ARAN, f. 1731, op. 1, d. 323. USSR Academy of Science Social Sciences Section Meeting Minutes 13th February. (1981), l. 6.

³⁵ Galetskaiia, R. A., "Nauchnyi sovet Akademii Nauk," p. 148.

³⁶ Burnashchev, E. and Namestnikova, G., "Dela i dni demografov."

others all met to discuss demographic issues.³⁷ Lively debates often saw scholars give speeches attacking one another, or conversely, supporting the positions of those outside their institutions.³⁸ Records of meetings held at the TsSU, the Academy of Sciences, and other places show that when demographic issues were being discussed, scholars from all different institutions were present. For example, a meeting at the TsSU in 1975 to discuss the results of a natality study listed as present staff from Gosplan, MGU, the Academy of Sciences, and Moscow State University of Economics.³⁹ They argued, among other things, about the necessity of openly publishing the study results, the value of adding new questions to the census, and the extent to which fertility rates could be controlled.

The various institutions played a role in sharing out research too. The Social Sciences Section of the Academy of Sciences USSR held a meeting on 4th November 1976 at which individual scholars were given areas of population research to lead. Valentei, for example, was put in charge of 'problems of population theory and critique of bourgeois theories', while Riabushkin (AN), Boiaarskii (TsSU) and state planner V. G. Kostakov (Gosplan) were tasked with exploring problems of population reproduction and labour resources, including forecasting the age/sex structure of the population.⁴⁰ Specialists worked on demographic books together and corresponded about publications, sometimes advising one another on how best to get something into print if the TsSU objected.⁴¹ They also spent much time at conferences and academic events. Though they worked in separate institutions these specialists therefore knew each other very well and regularly came into contact with one another, particularly in Moscow, which acted as a hub for population research.

Further to this, demographers did not always stay in a single institution. Alexander Iakovlevich Kvasha, for example, worked at the Institute of Economics (AN) until 1965, then moved to the Department of Demography at the TsSU, before becoming a Professor in the

³⁷ Borisov, B., "V demograficheskoi sektsii moskovskogo doma uchenikh", *Vestnik statistiki*, no. 3 (1978): 76-77.

³⁸ GARF, f. 603, op. 1, d. 232. Address by A. M. Merkov to the 24th All-Union Symposium on questions of population theory. (1966).

³⁹ RGAE, f. 1562, op. 56, d. 2916. Minutes of a TsSU meeting discussing the results of the 1972 natality study. (1975), ll. 1 - 39.

⁴⁰ ARAN, f. 1731, op. 1, d. 224. USSR Academy of Sciences Social Science Section, meeting minutes 4th November. (1976), l. 103.

⁴¹ GARF, f. 574, op. 1, d. 140. Letter from Economist Y. P. Gerchuk to Boris Tzesarevich Uralis. (1962), ll. 1-2; GARF, f. 603, op. 1, d. 270. Correspondence between Boiarskii and Merkov. (1970), ll. 1-4.

Population Centre of MGU in 1971.⁴² Fedorenko may have referred to the TsSU as the 'Ministry of Lies', but this did not mean that everyone who worked there was only interested in pedalling Soviet propaganda. Known at the time by their peers as the 'volkovtsy', there were many progressive demographers who worked under Volkov in the Department of Demography.⁴³ Far from being considered liars, they were happily welcomed by their peers into alternative institutes and celebrated for their contributions.⁴⁴ In general, it was well known who was a bureaucrat, interested primarily in pleasing the Party, and who was interested most of all in science and advancing knowledge. Scientists who engaged in ideological campaigns against their colleagues usually destroyed their reputations among associates.⁴⁵ Institutions had a particular culture stemming from their leaders and this could constrain the actions of their staff; indeed, the extremely hierarchical nature of the TsSU and centralised decision-making process afforded regular demographers little say in how things were run. Nevertheless, population specialists were much more than just products of their institutional affiliation and experts from outside the TsSU frequently liked and worked with particular TsSU demographers, despite opposing the way their institution was run.

That there was no proper demographic institute was a constant source of frustration for demographers.⁴⁶ As often in Soviet public life, there was power and safety in numbers. Because population specialists were scattered around other institutes in problem panels or small departments, they could not easily collectively advocate for themselves and their discipline. With no institute, there was no institute director to represent their specific interests at the highest levels of decision making in places like the Academy of Sciences Presidium. The Scientific Council (AN) functioned in many ways as a substitute for an institute but had far less authority. With no budget of its own it was reliant on members to obtain funding from their own institutes, where demography was often a low priority.⁴⁷ At one particular meeting, Urlanis told the Social Sciences Section that he had seen on television that millions of roubles were spent in archaeology on finding out how ancient people lived,

⁴² Denisenko, M. B. and Elizarov, V. V., *Razvitie naseleniia...* pp. 12-13.

⁴³ Denisenko, M. B. and Elizarov, V. V., *Razvitie naseleniia...* p. 48.

⁴⁴ Commemoration of many TsSU demographers such as Sifman, Darskii, Volkov etc, by their peers in other institutions: Denisenko, M. B. and Elizarov, V. V., *Razvitie naseleniia...* p. 13.

⁴⁵ Shlapentokh, V., *Soviet Intellectuals and Political Power: The post-Stalin era* (New York, 1990), p. 179.

⁴⁶ A request for one appears very frequently in conference resolutions and journal articles: Karakhov, M. K. et al., *Trudy konferentsii Srednei Azii (Tashkent 1965)*, p. 386; Kiseleva, G. P., "Vosproizvodstvo naseleniia i ego raionnye osobennosti", *Voprosy ekonomiki*, no. 3 (1968): pp. 153-155.

⁴⁷ Feshbach, M., "The Soviet Population Policy Debate", p. 83.

But when the question concerned how people live now, how to fix the acute demographic situation, how to study issues connected with the modern population — for this there is no money, and the Academy of Sciences shows a total indifference.⁴⁸

In fact, the establishment of an institute appears to have been halted by central government rather than the Academy. In 1961 the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences considered the issue and, deciding on the need of an institute, approached the government seeking permission to establish one. Riabushkin reported back to demographers later that they had been told that the establishment of such an institute was not possible ‘in the current circumstances’, but that theoretically everyone had agreed on the need for one.⁴⁹ This bland bureaucratic statement hid an intense fear of repeating the mistakes of the 1930s.

Another common complaint was that there was no specific demographic journal in the Soviet Union in this period, despite demographers’ requests to establish one.⁵⁰ Between 1960 and 1973 almost six thousand articles on demography were published in academic journals, but all were scattered between economic and other social science journals.⁵¹ As one specialist grumbled,

It is embarrassing when you visit one of the socialist countries of Europe and you are presented with a demographic journal and asked to give our Soviet one in exchange, and you have to say that we don't have one.⁵²

Without a centralised hub or publication vehicle, conferences played an important role as spaces for collaboration. National conferences could be organised by the Population Section and the Scientific Council. Two all-Union conferences were held each year, as well as smaller conferences in between these.⁵³ Lowenhardt stresses the importance of conferences in Soviet decision making more generally, arguing they were places for communication and the coordination of action on certain policy issues. He claims the publication of proceedings in the media had ‘the function of letting it be known that the policy position(s) expressed at the conference are backed up by enough institutional power to resist their being silenced by

⁴⁸ ARAN, f. 1731, op. 1, d. 96. USSR Academy of Sciences Social Science Section, Presidium meeting minutes 7th June. (1968), l. 19.

⁴⁹ ARAN, f. 1731, op. 1, d. 96, l. 81.

⁵⁰ Requests for one appear in conference resolutions: "Vseoiuznyi simposium po problemam vosproizvodstva naseleniia", *Vestnik statistiki*, no. 10 (1968): 82-84; Bagrii, P. I., ed. *Voprosi demografii, materialy konferentsii posviashchennoi sostoianiiu i zadacham demograficheskoi nauki na Ukraine* (Statistika, 1968); Karakhov, M. K. et al., *Trudy konferentsii Srednei Azii* (Tashkent 1965).

⁵¹ Kiseleva, G. P., "Ob osnovnikh etapakh..." p. 100.

⁵² ARAN, f. 1731, op. 1, d. 96, l. 75.

⁵³ ARAN, f. 1731, op. 1, d. 96, l. 85.

censorship.⁵⁴ Conferences provided an arena for opinion groups to form around a certain policy position as demographers did not always agree on issues along institutional lines.⁵⁵ Sensitive things could be discussed face to face and off the record, then an agreed version sent for publication in the press.⁵⁶ Crucially though, these opinion groups—to use the term coined by Griffiths—were issue based. They were not the broader, more permanent interest groups that Skilling has argued characterised Soviet politics.⁵⁷ As we shall see in chapter three, international conferences also played an important role, allowing scholars to familiarise themselves with foreign scholarship on demography and become aware of the fact that the Soviet Union lacked things that other countries had, like demographic journals and open access to data.⁵⁸

Agenda setting and the policy process

In open societies, experts may not always be able to influence policy making but they are usually free to try. There are many routes open to specialists who wish to bring about policy change, be it through civil society organisations, popularisation in the press, or even civil disobedience and protest. But in authoritarian regimes that suppress information, like the Soviet Union, the picture is less clear. Expert knowledge is essential to modern statecraft, which usually necessitates some kind of relationship between political leaders and experts. What form that relationship takes can tell us much about the interplay of ideology, pragmatism, truth, and dissent. In the Soviet context it can help us to understand where power lay in the state. Did the upper echelons of the Party monopolise power, or could the Party be influenced, and if so, how and by whom? This section examines these questions by showing how demographers and economists attempted to influence the Soviet government to change policy, considering when they were successful and why.

As outlined in the Introduction, population change began to alarm specialists in the 1960s. Births per woman in the Slavic regions of the USSR fell below the replacement level of 2.1, male life expectancy began to decline, and infant mortality increased.⁵⁹ This sparked fears of

⁵⁴ Lowenhardt, J., *Decision Making in Soviet Politics* (New York, 1981), p. 87.

⁵⁵ Feshbach, M., "The Soviet Population Policy Debate", pp. 11-13.

⁵⁶ Feshbach, M., "The Soviet Population Policy Debate", pp. 11-13.

⁵⁷ Skilling, G., H and Griffiths, F., eds. *Interest Groups in Soviet Politics* (Princeton University Press, 1971).

⁵⁸ On foreign conferences as legitimisation for social science: Fortescue, S., *The Communist Party and Soviet Science*, p. 27.

⁵⁹ Denisenko, M. B. and Elizarov, V. V., *Razvitie naseleniia..*; Mezentseva, E. and Rimachevskaia, N., "The Soviet Country Profile: Health of the USSR Population in the 70s and 80s—an Approach to a Comprehensive Analysis", *Social Science & Medicine* 31, no. 8 (1990): 867-877.

an impending demographic crisis if existing trends continued. Population experts attempted to bring these trends to the attention of the government and advocated for what they termed 'an active demographic policy'. By this they meant a policy that sought to actively shape the demographic structure of the USSR, for example, through pronatalism, rather than passively responding to population change. Eventually, in 1981, following the 26th Soviet Party Congress, an extensive set of pronatalist measures was announced. They included fully paid maternity leave for one year after the birth of a child, increased benefits for each child born, more funding for nurseries, and the goal that all married couples under thirty would be provided with at least a separate room within an apartment.⁶⁰ This change was significant because it represented a change in the way population was understood in the Soviet Union. Early Bolsheviki had presumed communism would cause all population issues to naturally disappear, and that communism would be established quickly. Under Stalin, questioning this logic was not permitted and even much smaller transgressions could see experts arrested.⁶¹ Permitting open discussion of population problems and policies to affect them within academic circles was therefore a significant step towards resolving the ideology/reality standoff that plagued population research.⁶² It required the Marxist commitment to dialectical materialism to be side lined, in favour of a pragmatic, flexible policy approach by the government.

The Soviet policy setting process has been conceptualised in different ways by scholars. Over the years the academic community has espoused, and then rejected in turn, theories of Soviet governance as totalitarian, pluralist, or corporatist.⁶³ Instead, more nuanced descriptions which cannot be encapsulated in a single word have come to dominate. Hough, for example, describes a fixed framework within which interests could compete, such that the system was characterised by 'a conflict among a complex set of crosscutting and shifting alliances of persons with divergent interests.'⁶⁴ His description resonates particularly well with evidence from the area of Brezhnev-era population policy, where a wide array of experts, bureaucrats,

⁶⁰ Egorova, A. G. and Bogolyubova, K. M., eds. *Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskovo Soiuz v rezoliutsiakh i resheniiakh s'ezdov, konferentsii i Plenumov TsK (1981-1985)*, vol. 14 (1987), pp. 21-30. On how these aims worked out in practice see, Bridger, S., "Heroine Mothers and the Demographic Crisis," pp. 116-117.

⁶¹ Wheatcroft, S., "Soviet Statistics under Stalinism: Reliability and Distortions in Grain and Population Statistics."

⁶² Desfosses, H., "Demography, Ideology, and Politics in the USSR", *Soviet Studies* 28, no. 2 (1976): 244-256.

⁶³ Skilling, G. H., "Interest Groups and Communist Politics Revisited", *World Politics* 36, no. 1 (1983): 1-27; Bunce, V., "The Political Economy of the Brezhnev Era: The Rise and Fall of Corporatism", *British Journal of Political Science* 13, no. 2 (1983): 129-158.

⁶⁴ Hough, J. F., "The Soviet System: Petrification or Pluralism?", *Problems of Communism* 22, no. 3 (1972): 28-29.

and politicians sought to influence the policy process both through their institutions and as individuals.

Empirical studies of Soviet policy making in different areas have found that attempts to change policy by bureaucrats and experts were most likely to be successful in situations where the top leadership had declared an interest in changing policy, but not yet made a decision about what form that should take.⁶⁵ In the case of criminal policy, for example, Solomon finds that criminologists were provided with a *raison d'être* by the government's desire to reduce drunken delinquency. For this to occur, the Party apparatus had to give permission for these experts and their institutions to exist in the first place. Unlike in liberal democracies where research is sometimes funded by private companies, charities, NGOs, or philanthropists, in the Soviet Union the state was the only possible source of financial support for experts. While technical experts could create an 'atmosphere of new ideas' different to the thinking of previous generations, they therefore lacked 'independent leverage to force a new idea into official currency'.⁶⁶ However, once leaders had recognised a general issue like population dynamics as suitable for investigation, they permitted the establishment of departments and programmes, meaning people could become experts, and eventually seek to change policy by putting forward proposals on the basis of their expertise.⁶⁷

To change policy, however, specialists needed more than just toleration from leaders. Scholars highlight that leaders' initial willingness to consider policy proposals usually came from the existence of a practical societal problem with no obvious solutions. This problem created what Gustafson refers to as an 'entering wedge', through which experts could advance the status of their whole discipline.⁶⁸ The goal of experts was therefore often to raise the profile of their area of expertise, such that senior leaders would take an interest in the issue and be open to their proposals. The key tools in this battle were an institute, a journal, an established curriculum to produce students, publicity, state prizes, and seats on advisory

⁶⁵ Gustafson, T., *Reform in Soviet Politics: The Lessons of Recent Policies on Land and Water* (Cambridge, 1981); Lowenhardt, J., *Decision Making in Soviet Politics*.

⁶⁶ Gustafson, T., *Reform in Soviet Politics*, p. 83.

⁶⁷ Little, R. D., *Governing the Soviet Union* (London, 1989), pp. 180-204; Gustafson, T., *Reform in Soviet Politics*; Brown, A., "Political Power and the Soviet State: Western and Soviet Perspectives," in *The State in Socialist Society*, ed. Harding, N. (London, 1984); Hough, J. F. and Fainsod, M., *How the Soviet Union is Governed* (Cambridge, MA, 1979); Solomon, P. H., *Soviet Criminologists and Criminal Policy: Specialists in Policy-Making* (New York, 1978); Tompson, W., *The Soviet Union under Brezhnev* (New York, 2003), pp. 30-31.

⁶⁸ Gustafson, T., *Reform in Soviet Politics*, p. 88.

groups.⁶⁹ Contrary to early research on natural and social science in the Soviet context, which assumed a top-down dictation of doctrine from the Party, scholarship since the 1970s has generally shown a more varied process. Studies of the Brezhnev era demonstrate that although the Politburo held an instant veto, a bi-directional relationship existed between experts and the government, who encouraged each other to consider policy needs and problems.⁷⁰

In considering how the case study of demographic policy fits into broader research on Soviet policy-making, it is important to note significant similarities and certain unique features of the case. Like policy making in other areas, population policy making was subject to veto by the Party. Specialists required the 'entering wedge' described by Gustafson, and they tried to use the same tools and tactics listed above. Hough's description of shifting, cross-institutional opinion groups that characterised the policy-making process is certainly true of demographic policy; experts aimed to raise the profile of their issue and attract further interest. However, important differences existed. Roberg's work on nuclear physicists shows how physicists used their high professional status to drive policy change in a way that was not possible for demographers because the latter were far less revered.⁷¹ In addition, the urgency described by Solomon in the case of criminal policy was lacking in population research. Criminology became a significant discipline with new institutions because Party leaders had already agreed on the need for reform.⁷² Demography, by contrast, had always played a role in labour forecasting, and specialists were needed to measure the population regardless of whether policy change was wanted. Rather than actively seeking to change policy, it is more accurate to say that leaders put off changing it, as new demographic policy changes were announced long after equivalent pronatalist policies were introduced in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, demographers used this bidirectional relationship and were eventually effective in persuading ministers to make changes, though they didn't achieve everything they wanted. Considering the effect of top-down initiatives in comparison to specialist-led agitation is important for understanding leaders changing perceptions of the population over time, and both types of initiative will now be addressed.

⁶⁹ Gustafson, T., *Reform in Soviet Politics*, p. 91.

⁷⁰ Roberg, J. L., *Soviet Science Under Control: The Struggle for Influence* (London, 1998); Fortescue, S., *The Communist Party and Soviet Science*; Lubrano, L. L. and Solomon, S. G., eds. *The Social Context Of Soviet Science* (Westview Press, 1980); Ivanov, K., "Science after Stalin: Forging a New Image of Soviet Science."; Thompson, W., *The Soviet Union under Brezhnev*.

⁷¹ Roberg, J. L., *Soviet Science Under Control: The Struggle for Influence*.

⁷² Solomon, P. H., *Soviet Criminologists*.

Government-led initiatives

By holding a census in 1959 and agreeing to the creation of the population study groups, Soviet leaders had recognised that changing population dynamics were important, and this provided the initial impetus for development. In 1966 the 23rd Soviet Party Congress declared the intention of extending empirical research within social science. The subsequent decree spoke of 'the necessity of studying complex problems arising at the junction between social science and natural science.'⁷³ It also stated the following plans:

The Central Statistical Administration of the USSR Council of Ministers, together with Gosplan USSR and the USSR Academy of Sciences will work on a scientifically based system of statistical data, indispensable for economic, sociological, demographic and other scientific research.⁷⁴

This acted as a catalyst for further development in demography and Soviet demographers in later years credited this decree as the point at which the government became interested in demographic issues.⁷⁵

Following this, at each Party Congress and in the decrees that followed it, demographic issues were mentioned. The 1971 Congress noted the importance of forecasting population growth.⁷⁶ As evidence of demographic problems became clearer in the mid-1970s, senior leaders recognised the issue as needing policy intervention. At the next Congress in 1976, Brezhnev talked at much greater length about population problems:

Population and environmental problems which have been aggravated in the last few years must not fall off the radar of Soviet scientists... the creation of an effective demographic policy is an important task of the whole complex of natural and social science.⁷⁷

In 1981, following the 26th Soviet Party Congress, the new demographic policy was announced.

These pronouncements demonstrate the top leadership's gradually changing thinking on demographic issues, but momentum for policy change was gathering at lower levels of the Soviet bureaucracy and in academia throughout the period too. The general direction set at

⁷³ Anonymous, "O merakh po dal'neishemy razvitiuu obshchestvennikh nauk i povisheniiu ikh roli v kommunisticheskom stroitel'stve: Postanovlenie Tsentral'nogo Komiteta KPSS", *Voprosy filosofi*, no. 9 (1967): 9.

⁷⁴ Anonymous, "O merakh..." p. 9.

⁷⁵ Burnashchev, E., "Tsentr po izucheniiu..." pp. 112-113.

⁷⁶ Remennikov, B., "O nekotorykh rezul'tatov..." pp. 86-87.

⁷⁷ *Materialy XXV s'ezda KPSS* (Moscow, 1976), p. 73.

each Congress for the next five-year plan was fed down into government departments and agencies. In the case of population research, Minvuz and the USSR Academy of Sciences cascaded instructions down from their top governing bodies. For example, the Population Centre worked according to the plan of the Minvuz Population Section, which drew up consolidated plans for groups of scholars, universities and other education bodies.⁷⁸ Within the Academy of Sciences, meetings were held after each Congress to plan research in light of the most recent Congress.⁷⁹ After the 1971 Congress for example, the Scientific Council began discussions with other research institutions about analysing the tendencies of the birth rate and changes to the size and structure of the population by 1990 and 2000.⁸⁰ This work was a direct result of the government decree.

In general, the research organisations and government agencies worked in partnership, though not without conflict. Often a research organisation would be given a research task defined by the state planning agencies and then provide a range of policy recommendations. For example, between 1973 and 1975 the Leningrad Financial Economic Institute was given the task of studying the family, in particular expanding the labour capability of pensioners as a result of the demographic situation in Leningrad.⁸¹ As society changed and the economy became more complex, Gosplan increasingly relied on demographers for forecasts and insights on which to base their plans, demonstrating how experts and the government needed one another.⁸² Gosplan staff would often commission universities or institutes to conduct research, such as Tashkent University, which was given the task of predicting population development for the Uzbek Republic by the year 2000.⁸³

Demographers were well aware of the practical implications of this research. At a meeting of the Social Sciences Section of the Academy of Science in 1976, Section leaders delegated research projects and pointed out that the whole point of the programme was its practical use for Gosplan. To this, Riabushkin, head of the Scientific Council on Population at the

⁷⁸ Burnashchev, E., "Tsentr po izucheniiu..." p. 117.

⁷⁹ Galetskaiia, R. A., "Glavnye napravleniia izucheniia sotsial'no-ekonomicheskikh problem narodonaseleniia", *Vestnik Akademii Nauk*, no. 8 (1976): 127-130; Galetskaiia, R. A., "Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskie problemy."; Shelestov, D. K., "Izuchenie problem narodonaseleniia na uroven' zadach, postavlennikh XXV s'ezdom KPSS", *Voprosy filosofii*, no. 10 (1976): 166-172, p. 166.

⁸⁰ Galetskaiia, R. A., "Nauchnyi sovet Akademii Nauk."

⁸¹ Remennikov, B., "O nekotorykh rezul'tatov..." p. 88.

⁸² Degtyar', L., "Nauchni sovet," p. 155.

⁸³ Remennikov, B., "O nekotorykh rezul'tatov..." p. 88. Also projects from the Academy refer to being part of an agreed plan for research between Gosplan and the Academy, e.g., ARAN, f. 1977, op. 2, d. 138. Factors in the stabilisation of the family in the early part of its existence. (1979), ll. 1-63.

Academy of Sciences, replied that they would be happy to look at these questions if they were actually provided with the necessary facilities such as their own department.⁸⁴ This highlights some of the tensions in the system where as experts, demographers were needed but not always valued or trusted very highly.⁸⁵ The regime was inherently mistrusting of population specialists, knowing that by virtue of their work they saw regular evidence of the demographic and social disasters caused by Soviet rule.⁸⁶ Party leaders were wary of anyone who knew too much about the population and disliked making themselves vulnerable to experts in this way.

Expert agency and influence

By 1976, demographers already knew what they needed to work on, and they set their minds to thinking about how, specifically, a Soviet population policy should work.⁸⁷ But prior to 1976 demographers had spent more than a decade trying to persuade the government that policy change was necessary. Only in the mid-1970s did the Party commit to reform. The agency of experts played a large role in change, showing why population policy went from being a peripheral issue to one suitable for significant policy change.

A 1977 study of Soviet sociology explains how expert advice ‘specifies a problem area, defines the nature of the problem, and then examines policy alternatives aimed at its resolution.’⁸⁸ Demography, as a discipline closely aligned to sociology, worked in much the same way. Government leaders received all of their knowledge about the population through these experts. Without these statisticians, there was no way of finding out about the population. Everything that leaders knew and understood about the population was therefore shaped by demographers’ representations of the world and the explanations and reports that accompanied the figures.⁸⁹ The top-down process described so far was in reality much more of a two-way relationship, albeit one in which population specialists were the very junior partner. Despite being less powerful, evidence suggests that demographers gradually

⁸⁴ ARAN, f. 1731, op. 1, d. 233. USSR Academy of Sciences Social Sciences Section, meeting stenogram 4th November. (1976), l. 15.

⁸⁵ On this point Elizarov argues demography was of peripheral importance to the government only in this period. Elizarov, V. V., "Teoriia i praktika demograficheskoi politiki v SSSR."

⁸⁶ Blum, A., *Rodit'sia, zhit', i umeret' v SSSR*, p. 26.

⁸⁷ Galetskaiia, R. A., "Glavnye napravleniia izucheniia sotsial'no-ekonomicheskikh problem narodonaseleniia."

⁸⁸ Hahn, J. W., "The Role of Soviet Sociologists in the Making of Social Policy," in *Social Scientists and Policy Making in the USSR*, ed. Remnek, R. B. (New York, 1977), p. 54.

⁸⁹ Blum, A., "Social History as the History of Measuring Populations," p. 293.

persuaded ministers to see population dynamics as a major problem requiring policy change. Their role in defining the nature of the problem—as Hahn, Gustafson, and others describe—was vital to the adoption of new policy. As experts, they actively attempted to influence policy from the mid-1960s onwards. Their eventual success shows that with persistence, the Soviet government was willing to listen to experts.

There were several options open to demographers seeking to influence policy and all involved some means of raising the profile of the issues involved. One route to policy change was simply writing to the Soviet leadership to advocate as an individual, an option open to very senior experts with high professional standing.⁹⁰ For example, in 1968 Valentei sent a long report to Kosygin, which warned about serious demographic problems in the USSR. These included the birth rate, which was ‘intensively falling’, on a level ‘never before observed in our country’. He also discussed the changing geographic distribution of the population and issues of labour resources. Valentei recommended urgent measures such as improving the economies of small towns to stem migration to cities, and free nursery places, school meals, and benefits for poorer families.⁹¹ A large section of the report was also devoted to the need to develop demography itself. He requested a journal and an institute, along with the free publication of data, ‘without which, naturally, there can be no talk of the scientific development of population problems’, highlighting that ‘the USSR is one of the few countries where population data is secret.’⁹² In a dig at the TsSU he also requested that the government...

Change the nature of the relationship between the statistical authorities and the scientific community. Recognise the creation of all necessary conditions for the effective wide ranging and comprehensive study of the problems of population as one of the primary task of central and local statistical organisations. Discuss the issue of introducing effective relations between statistical bodies and scientific institutions, which need various kinds of statistical materials.⁹³

His letter reflects the particular tensions between competing institutions in the field, and again shows how little specialists felt they were trusted or valued by the regime.

⁹⁰ Fortescue, S., *The Communist Party and Soviet Science*, pp. 61-64; Roberg, J. L., *Soviet Science Under Control: The Struggle for Influence*.

⁹¹ GARF, f. 5446, op. 102, d. 15. Letter and report by Valentei 'On Current Population Issues' to Comrade A. N. Kosygin, Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers. (1968), ll. 1-14, l. 35.

⁹² GARF, f. 5446, op. 102, d. 15, ll. 35-40.

⁹³ GARF, f. 5446, op. 102, d. 15, ll. 35-40.

The exact effect of Valentei's direct appeal is difficult to quantify but it appears to have met with some success. Documents evaluating the report by the Council of Ministers note that there were not enough resources to implement Valentei's ideas in the current five year period, but a signed directive from Kosygin says the report should be sent to Gosplan, the Ministry and Health, Goskomtrud, and the TsSU, and that these institutions were to work on a plan to include population issues in the next economic plan for 1971-1975. The Council of Ministers also then wrote to various agencies, requesting new reports comparing the pro-natalist measures taken in other countries with those of the USSR.⁹⁴ While no instant policy change emerged, the appeal certainly seems to have been heard. However, Valentei's requests for the discipline of demography itself appear to have been unsuccessful. The archive shows that once received, the report was summarised into a separate document for Kosygin. In the shortened version the analysis of demographic problems in the Soviet Union remained, but Valentei's requests about the development of demography, along with calls for an institute and a journal, were removed.⁹⁵ It is unlikely Kosygin ever even saw Valentei's requests for these things.

Publication was another route to getting noticed. Access to journals and newspapers was an important tool for promoting policy positions, and this partially explains demographers' persistent demands for a journal to be established.⁹⁶ Throughout the entire period, articles on demographic issues were published regularly in newspapers, particularly *Literaturnaia gazeta* where more controversial issues were discussed. These articles most commonly warned about the falling birth rate, urging women to have more children and recommending policy positions such as increased maternity leave or part time working.⁹⁷ Some topics, such as increasing infant mortality or suicide were totally off limits, although alcoholism and its effects on male health were addressed in a series of famous articles by Urlanis.⁹⁸ The number

⁹⁴ GARF, f. 5446, op. 102, d. 15, ll. 43-121.

⁹⁵ GARF, f. 5446, op. 102, d. 15, ll. 114-120.

⁹⁶ Little, R. D., *Governing the Soviet Union*, p. 182; Leykin, I., "The History and Afterlife of Soviet Demography," p. 162.

⁹⁷ Some examples: Perevedentsev, V. I., "Commentary on Statistics: The Only Child," *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, March 16th 1977, p. 12. Translated in The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, No. 11, Vol. 29, April 13th, 1977, pp. 1-2; Vishnevskii, A. I., "Demograficheskaia revoliutsiia," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 27th March 1975, p. 13. ; Kiseleva, G. P., "One? Two? Three?," *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, 4th July 1973, p. 13. Translated in Current Digest of the Soviet Press, No. 41, Vol. 25, 7th November, 1973; Urlanis, B., "Father, Mother and Three Children," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 27th September 1972, p. 13. Translated in The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, No. 48, Vol. 24, 27th December, 1972, p. 8; Perevedentsev, V. I., "Pochemy ne dvoe? Demograficheskii kommentarii," *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, 1st September 1971. ; Perevedentsev, V. I., "Kak Racnadayutsia Sem'i," *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, 3rd September 1969.

⁹⁸ The first of which was, Urlanis, B., "Beregite muzhchin," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 24th July 1968, p. 12.

of articles on the topic indicates some population problems were recognised as suitable for discussion, though the TsSU did push back against the publication of particular statistics if they showed the USSR negatively, a tendency I examine further in chapter two.⁹⁹

As the real decision making body, the ultimate goal for experts wanting policy change was to influence at least one Politburo member who could persuade their colleagues.¹⁰⁰ This persuasion could come from an individual or an institution and clearly sometimes met with success. Referring to the late 1970s, V. Kh. Echenike, demographer at MGU Population Centre recalled:

The preparation of analytical notes, reports, and informational materials for the top party leadership (union and Moscow) was of great importance for D.I. [Valentei] and for the whole Center [at MGU]. With the help of these "papers"[spravok] ... it was sometimes possible to draw the attention of the Central Committee of the CPSU or even the general secretaries themselves to some demographic problems.¹⁰¹

The tendency for policy decisions to be pushed upwards by committees that could not agree, meant Politburo members had an enormous amount of paperwork to read, and, as in the previous example of Valentei's letter, proposals were summarised by aides. Items could only be added to the Politburo meeting agendas by either the Politburo members themselves or through the Secretariat of the Central Committee.¹⁰² Brezhnev's more collective style of leadership meant that access to the First Secretary himself was not always necessary; persuading one of the other members could work just as well.¹⁰³ Furthermore, as Hough notes, in practice there was a lot of overlap between the party and the government. In May 1978, 14 voting members of the politburo were also on the Council of Ministers, and in turn virtually all of the Council of Ministers were members of the Central Committee.¹⁰⁴ This meant demographers, along with others looking for policy change, could appeal to the Politburo via the Council of Ministers or through patronage connections.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ One such example: RGAE, f. 1562, op. 47, d. 35. Letter from the Head of the TsSU to the Central Committee of the CP USSR. (1970), l. 1.

¹⁰⁰ Sakwa, R., *Soviet Politics in Perspective*, 2nd ed. (London, 1998).

¹⁰¹ Echenike, V. K., "Rabota riadom s rukovoditelem TsN," in *D. I. Valentei v vosnominaniiakh kolleg i uchenikov*, eds. Rotova, R. S. and Denisenko, M. B. (Moscow, 2006), p. 43.

¹⁰² Brown, A., "Political Power," p. 81.

¹⁰³ Tompson, W., *The Soviet Union under Brezhnev*, p. 31. On Brezhnev's collective leadership style: Bacon, E. and Sandle, M., eds. *Brezhnev Reconsidered* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 14-16.

¹⁰⁴ Hough, J. F. and Fainsod, M., *How the Soviet Union is governed*, p. 362.

¹⁰⁵ Kelley, D., R., "Group and Specialist Influence in Soviet Politics: In Search of a Theory," in *Social Scientists and Policy Making in the USSR*, ed. Remnek, R. B. (New York, 1977). Willerton, J. P., *Patronage and Politics in the USSR* (Cambridge, 1992).

Part of the problem demographers faced in trying to change policy in the early 1970s was that there was at that time no state body responsible for implementing social policy. The TsSU dealt with statistics, Gosplan with economic planning, and everything else was left to interactions between the State Committee on Labour and Wages (Goskomtrud) and the Central Council of Trade Unions. These latter two bodies dealt mostly with wages and had a limited remit. Demographers therefore lacked a government agency to champion policy change with government proposals.¹⁰⁶ Changing this was a matter of gaining access to and persuading the right people through extensive networking. In mid-May 1973, Valentei and his colleague at MGU, Anatoli Pavlovich Sudoplatov, were able to spend three days at the dacha of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Razdory. Though neither men were Central Committee members, Valentei received an invite from with Boris Grigorevich Vladimirov, adviser to the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee. Vladimirov and Valentei had previously worked together on the journal *Economic Sciences*, and this connection proved highly beneficial. According to Sudoplatov's account, while at the dacha they were able to speak to many Central Committee members informally, scoping out what appetite existed for policy change, and they created a five-page memorandum for the Central Committee of the CPSU, entitled 'On the Serious Issues of the Study of the Population'. They put this memorandum on the desk of Andrei Pavlovich Kirilenko, Politburo member and Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU. This was made possible, Sudoplatov tells us, because Kirilenko's assistant was another well-known acquaintance of Valentei through *Economic Sciences*, I. P. Pomialov, and he agreed to help.¹⁰⁷

The report warned that it was impossible to oversee the country's population problems through the TsSU because the agency could only report on circumstances to be fixed, and not develop proposals for actively shaping demographic realities.¹⁰⁸ Once returned from the dacha, Population Centre staff produced additional documents about demographic problems and sent them to the Central Committee with the help of Pomialov who called R. V. Khokholov, the Rector of Moscow State University, and advised him to send the documents in an official capacity as a statement from the institution. Sudoplatov credits these actions with the creation of a new commission and the expansion of Goskomtrud's remit as reflected in its change of name from 'the Committee on Labour and Wages', to 'the Committee on

¹⁰⁶ Sudoplatov, A. P., "Politicheskie kulisy..." p. 8.

¹⁰⁷ Sudoplatov, A. P., "Politicheskie kulisy..." p. 10.

¹⁰⁸ Sudoplatov, A. P., "Politicheskie kulisy..." p. 10.

Labour and Social Issues'.¹⁰⁹ The change led the way for a working group on fertility at Goskomtrud in the late 1970s and for the subsequent major changes in policy announced in 1981.

Once the issue had been properly acknowledged by senior leaders as needing policy change, other branches of government became seriously involved. Proposals concerning population policy were created by government agencies and then circulated as a written draft for comment.¹¹⁰ Little points out that generally in the Soviet Union the number of agencies that needed to be consulted meant a formal proposal was the only practical way.¹¹¹ Proposals had been circulating from the late 1960s, but as the years went on, they began to be taken more seriously. A 1967 proposal from the TsSU on stopping fertility falling was circulated, which recommended greater social support measures, but the Ministry of Finance objected on the grounds that the state did not have adequate resources.¹¹² Once the 1976 Congress had declared the need for an active demographic policy things changed, as government started to work towards a policy to be announced at the next Congress. A working group on stimulating fertility was set up under the new remit of Goskomtrud, and in 1979 it produced a set of proposals including increasing benefits and providing better childcare. These proposals were addressed to N. A. Tikhonov, First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers, and signed off by Gosplan, the Academy of Science, the Ministry of Finance, the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions and the Central Committee of the USSR.¹¹³ Interestingly, demographic specialists are not listed as taking part in the working group, though the proposals clearly draw heavily on their work. This suggests that government agencies took over the main policy work as policy drew closer to actually being changed. The exact proposals of 1979 are also discussed in chapter four.

The expansion of Goskomtrud and the subsequent working group demonstrates that demographers did influence the policy making process and were able to encourage policy change, even if leaders retained the ultimate veto.¹¹⁴ Shifting and cross-cutting alliances (as

¹⁰⁹ Sudoplatov, A. P., "Politicheskie kulisy..." p. 11.

¹¹⁰ Individual letters: GARF, f. 5446, op. 102, d. 15, ll. 1-120.

¹¹¹ Little, R. D., *Governing the Soviet Union*, p. 189.

¹¹² GARF, f. 262, op. 8, d. 6721. TsSU report to the USSR Council of Ministers and Gosplan 'On the Falling Birthrate in the RFSFR'. (1967), ll. 1-95.

¹¹³ GARF, f. 9553, op. 3, d. 719. Plan by Goskomtrud: 'Prepared proposals on problems connected with the improvement of the demographic situation'. (1979), ll. 1-8.

¹¹⁴ Discussion on leaders stepping in to veto evidenced by studies in Remnek, R. B., ed. *Social Scientists and Policy Making in the USSR* (Praeger, 1977).

described by Hough) were part and parcel of the policy process. As Kelley argues, policy making in the Soviet Union—like in all complex bureaucratic structures—involved ‘problem-solving, persuasion, bargaining, and political forms of behaviour’. It is therefore important to understand which forms of behaviour were dominant, their sequence, and their overlap in this particular case.¹¹⁵ The most important activity in this case was persistence in raising the profile of the issue and encouraging senior Party leaders to take notice of the problems they were concerned about through persuasion and increased awareness. Formal channels, though used, were not enough on their own; using personal networks was necessary to tweak the circumstances, and in this Valentei appears to have been particularly skilled.

There were of course other factors encouraging the government to take demographic problems seriously. As chapter four will show, poor census results, the implementation of pronatalist population policies across Eastern Europe, and the rise of Islamist ideology in the Middle East as a threat to Central Asia were all additional motivations and undoubtedly played a part by making leaders receptive to proposals.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, experts were key because they understood trends, publicised them, set them in the context of the USSR and created a climate where it was hard to ignore these problems. Not all of their attempts were immediately successful. Indeed, it took around twenty years of campaigning before significant policy changes occurred, but the evidence suggests Soviet experts not only saw demographic change as an impending crisis, but eventually persuaded ministers to see it this way too. They raised the profile of the demography and developed proposals that were eventually implemented. Their success demonstrates that to solve complex social issues the government began to rely on experts, and in doing so was forced to reduce the overreliance on ideological ‘solutions’ that had failed in previous decades.

Statisticians or social scientists?

One of the major debates in the 1960s revolved around the discipline of demography itself and what it meant to study the population. As population experts, were demographers fundamentally mathematicians, providing objective knowledge to the government, but having

¹¹⁵ Kelley, D., R, "Group and Specialist Influence," p. 134.

¹¹⁶ On pronatalism across eastern Europe: Drezgić, R., "Policies and Practices of Fertility Control."; David, H. P. and McIntyre, R. J., *Reproductive Behaviour: Central and Eastern European Experience*; David, H. P., Joanna, S., and Anastasia, P.-V., *From Abortion to Contraception*. Teitelbaum, M. S. and Winter, J. M., *The Fear of Population Decline*. On Islamism as a threat to communist ideology in connection with the changing population structure: Toft, M., "Death by Demography: 1979 as a Turning Point in the Disintegration of the Soviet Union", *International Area Studies Review* 17, no. 2 (2014): 184-204.

little to do with the social implications of that knowledge? Or were they social scientists, whose fundamental goal was to transform the population so that society worked better? Most began to see themselves to varying extents as social scientists, though they were opposed by some, most notably Podiachikh, Head of the Census Bureau, who saw demography as a branch of statistics. Perspectives in the literature vary in the way they perceive this and other similar demographic debates. Feshbach portrays this debate primarily as a personal rivalry between Valentei—who wanted population science to be an incredibly broad discipline—and Podiachikh—who did not. He emphasises the personal aspects of the debate and downplays the institutional aspects.¹¹⁷ Blum, however, cautions against studies of population politics which are ‘overly focused on big personalities, thereby ignoring more systematic behaviours of those involved in statecraft.’ He recommends focusing instead on ‘networks that structure the administrative space, which then form coherent groups that often defend common interests.’¹¹⁸ In this vein, Desfosses in her 1976 paper sees this debate as the ‘most vivid public expression’ of a much deeper conflict between the Population Centre and the TsSU, which represented the difference between ‘demographic theoreticians’ and ‘data-gathering officials’.¹¹⁹ This section aims to build on this prior research using new evidence from archives and accounts published by demographers since the fall of the Soviet Union. It will be argued that the debate was about power and resources, but it was also about fighting against old ways of thinking that were excessively ideological. The debate is important, therefore, because it demonstrates how scholars and researchers sought to renegotiate the ideological constraints imposed on them by the regime.

As early as 1959, some population experts were starting to write about the broader elements of population dynamics. Boiaarskii wrote of the need to take account of cultural, physiological, economic, ethnic, and psychological factors when considering population dynamics.¹²⁰ Changing patterns of fertility were crucial for encouraging this argument, as population experts were unsure exactly why fertility was falling in particular regions or how to change this fact, necessitating greater social investigation. Boiarskii’s work was followed by Valentei’s famous 1961 book, *Problemy narodonaseleniia* (*Problems of the Population*) which argued demography was much more than counting the population and gave a longer

¹¹⁷ Feshbach, M., "The Soviet Population Policy Debate", pp. 14-17.

¹¹⁸ Blum, A., "Social History as the History of Measuring Populations," p. 287.

¹¹⁹ Desfosses, H., "Demography, Ideology," pp. 247-248.

¹²⁰ Boiarskii, A. I., "K voprosu o vzaimosviasi pokazatelei vosproizvodstva naseleniia," in *Problemy demograficheskoi statistiki*, ed. Nemchinov, V. (Moscow, 1959).

explanation of this argument.¹²¹ When the Brezhnev-Kosygin premiership took power in 1964, demographers were spurred on by these leaders' more practically focused attitude and stability.¹²² The new leadership was perceived to be less erratic and unpredictable than Khrushchev, which made giving specialist advice easier.¹²³ Early on, the leadership signalled, through events such as their rejection of Lysenkoism, that a more objective and scientific era in policy making had begun.¹²⁴ Indeed, scholars note that though crackdowns did occur in sociology and economics in the early 1970s, in general the Party under Brezhnev valued experts and recognised that the Soviet Union had societal problems that were impossible to solve without further research and understanding. This led to a further expansion of even those social sciences which had faced conservative crackdowns; within a few years, the Institute of Sociology was growing in size again, though censorship often increased.¹²⁵ This was characteristic of the period, as the government desired to both expand and suppress knowledge about social problems. Furthermore, in 1965 a large group of senior demographers was able to attend the Second World Population Conference in Belgrade, where they were introduced to international scholarship and saw the advanced position of demography in many other countries.¹²⁶

For a number of reasons, therefore, the debate over the existence of a science of population began in earnest in the late 1960s. Theoretically, there should have been little reason to have such a debate. The 1967 post-Congress decree 'to regard demographic research as one of the important trends of science' should have clearly signified that demography was a branch of social science, and Valentei did try and argue that this was the case.¹²⁷ Furthermore, the TsSU, the Academy of Science and Gosplan were directed by the decree to prepare a research plan for sociological, economic, and demographic research for the period 1968-1972.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, in practice this was not accepted by everyone. There were several key battle grounds in the debate. The All-Union Scientific Conference on Population Problems of

¹²¹ Valentei, D. I., *Problemy narodonaseleniia* (Moscow, 1961).

¹²² Desfosses, H., "Demography, Ideology," p. 246.

¹²³ Sandle, M., "Ideological Hairdressing."

¹²⁴ Tompson, W., *The Soviet Union under Brezhnev*, p. 26.

¹²⁵ Sakwa, R., *Soviet Politics in Perspective*, p. 162; Tompson, W., *The Soviet Union under Brezhnev*, pp. 30-13; Sandle, M., "Ideological Hairdressing."

¹²⁶ Proceedings of the United Nations World Population Conference, Belgrade, 30th August - 10th September, (1965), Vol. 1-4.

¹²⁷ Valentei, D. I., "K voprosy o predmete nauki o narodonaselenii", *Vestnik statistiki*, no. 1 (1968): 34-41.

¹²⁸ Anonymous, "O merakh...". Also, see discussion by Feshbach, M., "The Soviet Population Policy Debate".

Central Asia which took place in Tashkent in 1965 was one such arena. Valentei told those assembled in his report:

Effective and active studies of population problems are possible only when they sit at the junction of well-known social and natural sciences: philosophy and political economy, economic geography and ethnography, demographic statistics, laws, social psychology, urban planning, medicine and physiology.¹²⁹

He went on to explain his conviction that solutions to population issues ‘can only be given by a complex science – the science of population.’ Notably, demographic statistics was only one of the disciplines he mentioned, which were to be included in the science of population.

Other conferences and symposiums followed and saw similar debate. The First Republican Demographic Conference took place in Kyiv in October 1966 with more than 170 experts taking part. Despite the government indicating with the above decree that they were interested in population problems, the conference proved hard to organise. When the conference plans were reported to the then leader of the Ukrainian Republic, V. Shcherbitskii, he initially said that the demographic situation in Ukraine was not good enough to hold such a conference.¹³⁰ At that time, such events were expected to be an exhibition of Soviet achievements and not a statement of problems. The conference saw sharp divisions of opinion. Podiachikh hit out at those involved, saying they acted as if they had everything solved, but that ‘the idea of the science of demography was borrowed from bourgeois scholars.’¹³¹ Scholars replied to him arguing: ‘Soviet demography and Soviet demographers cannot stand on the side lines of world population problems’, and asked ‘is demography really absorbed by demographic statistics as some of our comrades suggest?’¹³²

To a greater and greater extent, Podiachikh began to stand alone in his opinion that ‘there is nothing to demography once you exclude population statistics’ and that attempts to claim otherwise were simply fuelled by scholar’s ‘desire to grasp the unintelligible’.¹³³ Over the course of a five year period, he argued that the issues demographers wanted to study (such as

¹²⁹ Karakhov, M. K. et al., *Trudy konferentsii Srednei Azii (Tashkent 1965)*, p. 9.

¹³⁰ "Veka v istorii otechestvennoi demografii: Kievskaiia konferentsiia 1966 goda." *Demoskop Weekly*, No. 263-264, (2006) Accessed: 18/11/19. http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2006/0263/nauka01.php#_FNR_1.

¹³¹ Podiachikh, P. G., "O predstoiashchei vseoiuzhoi perepisi naslelniia i nekotorykh voprosakh izucheniia problem narodonaseleniia" (paper presented at the The First Republican Scientific Conference on Demography, Kyiv, 27th-29th October 1966), p. 28. Also, see discussion of this in Ia, A., "Konferentsiia no voprosam narodonaseleniia na Ukraine", *Vestnik statistiki*, no. 1 (1967): 78-82.

¹³² Bagrii, P. I., "Za nauku - demografiu" (paper presented at the The First Republican Scientific Conference on Demography, Kyiv, 27th-29th October 1966).

¹³³ Kamishov, V., "Diskussiia: syshchestvuet li demografiia?", *Voprosy ekonomiki*, no. 8 (1969): 153.

motivations for family size, migration policy, and healthcare issues), were so broad that they couldn't possibly be united into a single science.¹³⁴ Following the Kyiv Conference, in November 1966, the report on a symposium by held by MGU states: 'An absolute majority of participants in the symposium expressed no doubt on the existence of an independent science of population.'¹³⁵ Still, the wide interpretation supported by Valentei and his colleague Iu. N. Kozyrevym at that event was rejected. It appears nearly all experts in population issues decided that a science of population existed, but not all were willing to accept that it encompassed so many others. A debate began on the pages of *Vestnik statistiki*, the academic statistical journal, in which scholars argued mainly in favour of demography as a science, with only a few people against the idea.¹³⁶

How important were institutional loyalties in this? Undoubtably they played a role, particularly hostility towards the TsSU. The resolutions of the Tashkent and Kyiv conferences single out the TsSU for criticism, asking for it to be less secretive, to take scholars opinions into account, and to carry out more research.¹³⁷ Articles appeared in *Literaturnaia gazeta* claiming that demographers were unable to do their jobs because of the poor quality of statistical materials, lack of an institute, lack of qualified personnel, and 'the strange position of the TsSU', which impeded work.¹³⁸ New interpretations could be damaging for other institutions too. For example, some Gosplan staff spoke out against the idea of demography as an all-encompassing science, on the grounds that a science studying living conditions and labour was tantamount to denying the existence of other sciences like the study of labour economics.¹³⁹ When the debate threatened to reduce the remit of their own organisation, staff were generally not in favour.

¹³⁴ K, B., "Mezhvuzovskii teoreticheskii seminar po problemam demografii", *Vestnik statistiki*, no. 8 (1968): 86-89.

¹³⁵ Kiseleva, G. P., "Vsesoiuznyi simpozium po voprosam marksistsko-leninskoi teorii narodonaseleniia", *Vestnik statistiki*, no. 2 (1967): 81.

¹³⁶ The debate ran mainly from 1968-1970. Articles belonging to it have the headline 'V poryadke obsuzhdeniia' in addition to their title. Examples Guzevaty, I., "Teoriia narodonaseleniia i demograficheskai nauka", *Vestnik statistiki*, no. 8 (1968): 43-45; Kolpakov, B., "K voprosu o demografii kak nauke", *Vestnik statistiki*, no. 9 (1969): 49-54; Valentei, D. I., "K voprosy o predmete nauki o narodonaselenii.", Podiachikh, P. G., "Statistika i izuchenie problem narodonaseleniia", *Vestnik statistiki*, no. 4 (1969): 45-56; Vostrikova, A. M., "Spornoe i besspornoe", *Vestnik statistiki*, no. 11 (1970): 50-59.

¹³⁷ Bagrii, P. I., *Voprosi demografii, materialy konferentsii posviashchennoi sostoiianiiu i zadacham demograficheskoi nauki na Ukrainie*, p. 293; Karakhov, M. K. et al., *Trudy konferentsii Srednei Azii (Tashkent 1965)*, p. 386.

¹³⁸ Perevedentsev, V. I., "Zdravyy smysl ili nauchnoe znanie," p. 11.

¹³⁹ Kiseleva, G. P., "Vsesoiuznyi simpozium ..." p. 81.

Emotions could run high among scholars. At a meeting of the Academy of Sciences in 1968, Urlanis accused the TsSU of obstruction, to which Podiachikh exclaimed, ‘I don’t understand the behaviour of Comrade Urlanis!’ and pointed out that the government was ultimately in charge not the TsSU.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, the TsSU did not exist in a vacuum, rather it received detailed instructions from the government and its staff were swiftly removed if they made politically damaging mistakes. At the end of the meeting, Riabushkin, Head of the Scientific Council, remarked, ‘there was also the strange speech of Comrade Podiachikh who was offended that Urlanis is always protesting about the TsSU. But Comrade Podiachikh pounces every time, often rudely, on scientific workers. Such tones achieve nothing.’¹⁴¹ It is clear some TsSU statisticians saw the TsSU as a senior partner to the Academy of Sciences and university departments, and this caused tensions.

The question of whether demography was a science in its own right also had significant bearing on whether or not population experts required an institute. If demographers were statisticians then the TsSU statisticians, as those from a government agency, were the most important and senior. But if demographers were social scientists, then their expertise was slightly different to that of the TsSU as an institution. They had a broader remit and a strong claim to an institution of their own which would be able to challenge the TsSU. Apprehension about population experts outside the TsSU having a more influential position are evident in some of Podiachikh’s objections. He claimed that population statisticians were wasting time worrying that if demography was not technically a science they wouldn’t be able to make progress. He claimed they didn’t need to unite many specialists under one roof to explore population problems, just clear goals and good planning. In fact, he claimed specialists worked better in their own places of speciality, rather ‘than, for example, under one roof at the Centre for Population Problems at Moscow State University, where representatives of many sciences would all work on such simple and narrow issues, such as “the problem of small towns”’.¹⁴² The question of institutions and their hierarchies is therefore not insignificant, but the reality is actually more complex.

¹⁴⁰ ARAN, f. 1731, op. 1, d. 96, ll. 19-32, l. 35.

¹⁴¹ ARAN, f. 1731, op. 1, d. 96, l. 80.

¹⁴² GARF, f. 603, op. 1, d. 426. Population Statistics, Population Science and the Science of Demography: On the New Attempt to Liquidate Statistics as a Social Science. (1969), ll. 33-34.

At the 24th All-Union Symposium on Questions of Population Theory (MGU, November 1966), Merkov's opening address attacked Podiachikh's conception of demography, referring to the views he had expressed a couple of months earlier at the Kyiv Conference. During the address, Merkov remarked:

It would not be possible to enter into a discussion with him [Podiachikh], if it were not for the fact that such a point of view [as Merkov holds] is being advocated by a number of TsSU employees, maybe present, maybe not, but sufficiently actively manifesting themselves in this regard.¹⁴³

Institutions were clearly important, because Merkov implies that without support within the TsSU, the matter would be closed for discussion, but this statement shows that the conflict was not a simple contest between the TsSU and various research institutions. There was a larger conflict manifesting itself, which transcended institutional boundaries and contested whether population issues and their wider sociological context were appropriate for research, policy proposals, and serious consideration.

Merkov was referring to other demographers who worked in the TsSU but not under Podiachikh. These were Boiaarksii, head of the Scientific Research Institute of the TsSU, and Volkov, Head of the Demography Department who reported to Boiaarksii. Within the Department of Demography, Smulevich, Kvasha, Sifman, Darskii, Pavlov, and Belova were among the demographers who supported the idea of a broader understanding of demography as a science of population.¹⁴⁴ For his team of mostly young specialists, Volkov explained this re-evaluation was an opportunity to go beyond what he termed 'the problems of population accounting' and undertake much more interesting work.¹⁴⁵ Other than Kvasha, Volkov's demographers did not support quite as broad a definition of demography as Valentei's, arguing certain things, such as analysis of migration, should not be included.¹⁴⁶ In fact, Kvasha subsequently left the TsSU, taking up Valentei's invitation to a post within MGU because of his more open-minded views that aligned more closely with Valentei's own on this question.¹⁴⁷ This demonstrates two things. Firstly, Podiachikh and Valentei held the most extreme views at either end, but there was actually a whole spectrum of opinions on the

¹⁴³ GARF, f. 603, op. 1, d. 232, l. 2.

¹⁴⁴ Denisenko, M. B. and Elizarov, V. V., *Razvitie naseleniia...* p. 49; Kiseleva, G. P., "Vsesoiuznyi simpozium ..." p. 82. Full names and details of the department staff mentioned can be found in appendix one.

¹⁴⁵ Volkov, A. G., "My sdelali, chto smogli." *Demoskop Weekly*, No. 125-126, (2003) Accessed: 06/07/20. <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2003/0125/nauka01.php>.

¹⁴⁶ Denisenko, M. B. and Elizarov, V. V., *Razvitie naseleniia...* pp. 49-50.

¹⁴⁷ Denisenko, M. B. and Elizarov, V. V., *Razvitie naseleniia...* p. 49.

subject. Secondly, the TsSU demographers' support for the general project demonstrates how experts would sometimes seek solidary, allies, and consensus in attempts to expand the framework of constraints within which they worked. Institutions played a role, but there was a network of common interests outside of these boundaries. In this particular case, these interests—expanding the scope, freedom, and prestige of their work—were more important than institutional advantage.

This cross institutional 'opinion group' manifested itself in other ways too.¹⁴⁸ Population specialists worked collectively and cross-institutionally to oppose Podiachikh and his narrow understanding of demography. For example, when asked to write a definition of demography in the Medical Encyclopaedia in 1967, Merkov started with the sentence: 'Demography widely uses statistical data about the population and its processes of movement, however, it cannot be reduced simply to demographic statistics.'¹⁴⁹ Wherever specialists could exert their influence on the issue, they did so. The textbook, *Demographic Statistics (demograficheskaya statistika)*, was republished in a new edition called *Course on Demography (Kurs demografii)*, a fact which enraged Podiachikh.¹⁵⁰ Podiachikh claimed he had not been consulted and that this was an attempt to whitewash statistics, changing reality without changing any of the contents of the book. At an Academy of Sciences meeting Boiaarskii opposed this idea; he explained that he had personally taken part in the creation of the original book and that they had wanted to use the word 'demography' then. After 1961 when many of the courses relating to demographic analysis were cut, the commission for publication 'categorically proposed that either "demographic statistics" would be written on the cover, or nothing would. It was a very authoritarian committee.'¹⁵¹ The issue was being driven by many people and was much more than just a personal rivalry between two individuals as Feshbach argues. Gradually, population specialists pushed back against the constraints that had limited the discipline since Stalinism with whatever tools were available to them, whether it was articles in the press, the naming of textbooks, or scholarly tasks they were given.

¹⁴⁸ On specialists forming opinion groups, see Skilling, G. H., "Interest Groups and Communist Politics Revisited."; Lowenhardt, J., *Decision Making in Soviet Politics*.

¹⁴⁹ GARF, f. 603, op. 1, d. 164. Merkov's draft for entry in the medical encyclopedia of demography. (1967), l.1.

¹⁵⁰ Mentioned in his talk at the 1969 summit: GARF, f. 603, op. 1, d. 426.

¹⁵¹ ARAN, f. 1731, op. 1, d. 96, l. 52.

Finally, at the end of March 1969, the Scientific-Methodological Council of the TsSU of the USSR held a summit to decide the issue. Podiachikh presented his paper, arguing that criticism of his position amounted to an attempt to liquidate population statistics as a discipline. In the paper, he explained why Valentei, Perevensentsev, and Urlanis, among others, were wrong, arguing it was not possible to form a higher science from such wide areas of study, 'just as it is not possible to force an adult to wear the clothes of a child.'¹⁵² Of the roughly twenty people present, Podiachikh was alone in his views.¹⁵³ The views of Boiaarksii, as Podiachikh's counterpart of similar seniority, were particularly important, and he gave a report arguing the following:

Demography, as a science of population has all the necessary attributes of a science: basis in fact, a system of knowledge, a practical application. In as much as the population is the subject of all social phenomena, it touches on all social (and not only social) sciences.¹⁵⁴

He pointed out that oceanology relies on biologists but is not biology, and that economics uses statistics but is more than just its method. According to accounts of the meeting, Podiachikh was rounded on by his colleagues and the meeting ended when A. I Ezhov, Chair of the Scientific-Methodological Committee, joined the majority and ruled that demography was closely connected with demographic statistics, but that it was an independent science, as evidenced by international conferences and summits around the world devoted to the topic. He took the view of Volkov's supporters, that while it was a science, the very broad definition was too extreme.¹⁵⁵ This ruling marked the end of the debate.

On the surface, the debate about the existence of demography as a discipline seems relatively niche and unimportant. Volkov, writing in 2003, remarked that it seemed strange now to think that attempts by demographers of the Scientific-Research Institute of the TsSU to expand and deepen demographic studies met with such resistance from senior figures in the TsSU.¹⁵⁶ It is important, however, because it represents a turning point in the ideology/reality standoff, the point at which population problems were recognised as suitable for sociological

¹⁵² GARF, f. 603, op. 1, d. 426, ll. 1-59, quote l. 54.

¹⁵³ Accounts differ slightly over whether there were 19 or 20 people present. Kamishov says one person supported Podiachikh; Dubnov and Volkov reported no supporters. Kamishov, V., "Diskussii: syshchestvuet li demografiia?"; Dubnov, B., "Diskussii o demografii i demograficheskoi statistike", *Vestnik statistiki*, no. 8 (1969): 72-79; Volkov, A. G., "Sushchestviet li nauka 'Demografiia'? K 95-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia A. Ia. Boiarskogo (1906-1985)." *Demoskop Weekly*, No. 41-42, (2001) Accessed: 20/05/20. <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/041/nauka01.php>.

¹⁵⁴ Dubnov, B., "Diskussii o demografii i demograficheskoi statistike," pp. 1-2.

¹⁵⁵ Dubnov, B., "Diskussii o demografii i demograficheskoi statistike," pp. 78-79.

¹⁵⁶ Volkov, A. G., "My sdelali, chto smogli".

investigation by everyone involved. Accepting demography as a science meant acknowledging that population issues could not be solved simply by changing the economic mode of production and that they required research and policy change. The drivers of social progress were being re-evaluated. This debate was therefore an important part of ending the extremely dogmatic approach that had dominated population research since the 1930s. In the end, the acknowledgment of demography as a social science was not followed by the establishment of an institute as some demographers had hoped. Nevertheless, the legitimacy of their position as researchers had been assured, and the framework of constraints within which population specialists worked had been expanded by this ruling.

Conclusion

Over the course of the 1960s, demography re-emerged as a legitimate area of study, spurred on by the successful completion of the census in 1959, new leadership under Brezhnev, and the increasing number of international events in which Soviet scholars took part. This re-emergence was characterised by the creation of new scholarly councils and departments, though demographers did not achieve their goal of an institute specifically focused on demography in this period. Instead, the production of knowledge about the population occurred across a scattered mix of institutions. Of this, the TsSU was the most influential but did not have a monopoly on population research. Demographers defended their institutional interests to an extent, but opinion groups frequently formed around certain issues that transcended institutional boundaries.

In population policy-making, the evidence suggests demographic experts tried to influence the government through publication of issues, formal proposals, and using personal connections that gave them access to more senior members of the government. The government retained the ultimate veto, but because leaders had indicated that they were at least willing to expand population research, this gave demographers the opportunity to advocate their views. By constantly raising the profile of population problems they created an atmosphere where such problems were hard to ignore, encouraging the government to announce major policy changes in 1981. The agency of individuals was really important in this, as the activities of Valentei in setting up organisations and manoeuvring policy proposals show.

Like many specialists in the USSR, demographers felt the clash of ideology and reality acutely in their work.¹⁵⁷ Having witnessed the destruction of the discipline and the repressions of their peers in the Stalinist era, they were particularly careful. With a more stable political climate, demographers saw an important opportunity for change open up in the late 1960s and sought to expand their professional remit by arguing that their discipline was more than just population accounting. The debate over whether demography was a science and what it entailed saw resistance from senior members of the TsSU. The debate had more than two sides and was settled because a large enough group of cross-institutional scholars supported a progressive position. This cross-institutional solidarity occurred because the debate represented a much larger project of resisting the constraints imposed on their profession by the regime. In this respect, experts' personal-professional interest was more important than their institutional loyalties. The decision that demography was an independent science in 1969 took place in the context of a changing understanding of how social progress was achieved. Pressing social issues required new knowledge and a new vision for their resolution. The 1969 decision was a turning point for demography, but it reflected long-standing trends towards pragmatism and the expansion of social science in the Soviet Union.

¹⁵⁷ Desfosses, H., "Demography, Ideology."

Chapter Two: State Control Over Statistics

A strange, science-like mixture that made it possible to see real life, as if through poorly pointed binoculars.¹

Anatoli Vishnevskii

If, during the terror of the 1930s, demographic knowledge was controlled by violence and outright deception, then by the Brezhnev era control was more nuanced. This chapter is primarily about statistics. It demonstrates the ways in which the state monopolised demographic knowledge, controlling who was allowed to know the population. Control took place in a number of ways, some of them subtle—pressure for socialist-specific population theories, self-censorship, a lack of resources—some of them more tangible, like the removal of publications by formal censors, or bans on certain experts travelling abroad. In this there was no single puppet master with a grand plan for what statistics should show. Instead, a large enough group of elites had shared assumptions. Politicians, leaders of statistical bodies, and experts alike felt a political need to use statistics to create population theories that were distinct from those used in the West. Socialist population science should be superior to its capitalist counterpart, though as this chapter shows, no-one was able to explain what this should mean in practice. Elites also believed statistics should show progress in health, longevity, and population growth. If this couldn't be achieved, then a good number of these elites assumed concealing negative demographic trends was a bare minimum in case their publication damaged the Party's legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

This chapter shows change over time, how attempts to square ideology with empirical evidence gradually failed, and empirical evidence won out, though it did so largely behind closed doors. Nevertheless, while leaders eventually came to accept that problems existed, their primary response was to hide problems in health rather than addressing them, fearing that the open discussion needed to affect change would undermine the strength of the regime—a fear that turned out to be well founded in light of glasnost'. In addition, demographers' failed attempts to formulate a socialist law of population demonstrate the pervasive role of ideology in Soviet science. Not just the numbers, but also the taxonomy was shaped by state controls, with key categories like social class off limits in social

¹ Vishnevskii on the impact of Soviet ideology on demographic writing. Vishnevskii, A. I., "Trudnoe vozrozhdenie demografii," npn.

statistics. As such, population statistics were not merely reflections of an objective reality but deeply embedded in their social context. Secrecy and the control and restriction of demographic research actually hindered leaders' ability to know the population, and in knowing it to improve health and longevity.

This chapter shows how politics influenced population statistics in four key respects. A first section examines censorship and secrecy surrounding the data. The second section considers limitations on data collection and the design of censuses. A third section examines how the allocation of resources constrained possibilities. A fourth and final section examines the theoretical development of the discipline, showing how ideology and reality clashed causing problems for experts. Several key areas will be considered throughout—the mismatch between empirical observations and existing theories, the secrecy that pervaded everything, the inflexible taxonomy of population statistics, and the poor resourcing and outdated technology that plagued departments.

Lies, damned lies, and statistics?

Historical population data presents the scholar with difficulties because it is usually both useful and incomplete. Historians approach written sources critically, but where numbers are involved the temptation is to either reproduce them as fact or denounce them as fiction. In some ways numbers fall more easily into the categories of true and false, there are no 'sides of the story'—eight is demonstrably not nine. On the other hand, eight is nearly nine, and rejecting imperfect historical data usually leaves no information at all, severely reducing what we know about the past. For this reason, numerical sources must be approached much like any other evidence, where internal consistency, confirmation in other sources, and awareness of the context, purpose, and author help to corroborate the account.² After all, as Haynes and Husan argue, 'it is not statistics who lie but the people who use them'.³ Statistics themselves can only be more or less accurate with greater or lesser degrees of error. What is important to understand, therefore, is which statistics were collected and why, who did the measuring, and what issues reduce their accuracy. Not a mirror reflection then, but a painting of reality, which while depicting the same scene could have been painted in many different styles.

² On this, see Thompson, P. and Bornat, J., *The Voice of the Past*, pp. 188-193.

³ Haynes, M. and Husan, R., *A Century of State Murder? Death and Policy in Twentieth-century Russia* (London, 2003), p. 4.

In the case of the Soviet Union much data was kept secret, but Anderson, Katus, and Silver point out there is no ‘treasure trove of “real” data that could make everything clear about the demographic history of the Soviet Union if only the data were published or the archives opened wide’.⁴ As in any society, the data collected was always partial, and while the Soviet government may have been coercive, labour discipline was poor. In statistical offices, as elsewhere, workers frequently did not full fill their duties to a high standard.⁵ These statistics should not be discarded; indeed, they are the only major source of information available about Soviet population dynamics. Nevertheless, scholars highlight limitations of the data: the Soviet Union did not follow the World Health Organisation guidelines for recording mortality; birth registrations were missing in some republics; often only aggregate population data was ever recorded.⁶ These are just a few of the better documented problems. A study by Katus, Puur, and Sakkeus found that different methods to calculate the same indicators were used over a number of years by the Central Statistical Administration, meaning even data collected by the same organisations is often not comparable.⁷

A large body of scholarship therefore dispenses with the idea that a dictatorial government ensured that every aspect of life in the Soviet Union of was accurately recorded in a meaningful way.⁸ Population statistics collected during this period of Soviet history reflect the political context. There were three important factors at play which affected the statistics. First, secrecy, censorship, and a culture of fear led those in charge of statistics to manipulate the numbers to please leaders. Second, the census, as the main source of demographic data, was tightly controlled by the TsSU who made sure that only questions appropriate to a socialist society were asked in the first place. Third, a lack of resources and open communication put Soviet specialists at a disadvantage, even when compared to other

⁴ Anderson, B., Katus, K., and Silver, B., "Developments and Prospects for Population Statistics," p. 10.

⁵ Anderson, B., Katus, K., and Silver, B., "Developments and Prospects for Population Statistics."

⁶ On these and the many other limitations of Soviet population data see: Anderson, B., Katus, K., and Silver, B., "Developments and Prospects for Population Statistics."; Anderson, B. and Silver, B., "Infant Mortality in the Soviet Union: Regional Differences and Measurement Issues", *Population and Development Review* 12, no. 4 (1986): 705-738; Coale, A., Anderson, B., and Harm, E., *Human Fertility in Russia since the Nineteenth Century* (New Jersey, 1979); Tolts, M., "Population Trends in the Russian Federation: Reflections on the Legacy of Soviet Censorship and Distortions of Demographic Statistics", *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 49, no. 1 (2008): 87-98; Anderson, B., "Marriage, Family, and Fertility Data in Russian and Soviet Censuses," in *Research Guide to the Russian and Soviet Censuses*, ed. Clem, R. (London, 1986).

⁷ Katus, K., Puur, A., and Sakkeus, L., "Population Data and Reorganisation of Statistical System: Case of Estonia.", *Trames* 1, no. 3 (1997): 171-189.

⁸ Buckley, C., "The Myth of Managed Migration: Migration Control and Market in the Soviet Period."; Anderson, B. and Silver, B., "Estimating Census Undercount from School Enrollment Data: an Application to the Soviet Censuses of 1959 and 1970", *Demography* 22, no. 2 (1985): 289-308.

communist countries. While censorship of demography existed all across the Eastern Bloc, demographic research institutes, state committees, and journals were commonplace. Czechoslovakia, for example, had a state committee on population issues under their Council of Ministers.⁹ Visiting academics were often surprised to find that Soviet Union lacked this disciplinary infrastructure.¹⁰ In addition to these constraints, the ideological demands of the political system had a profound effect on the justification and theorisation of population statistics. Experts were not just under pressure to explain away any problems, but also to create utopian theories showing why socialism and communism were inherently destined to have a positive demographic impact. These factors produced particular numbers and categories, but there was nothing inevitable about these; they could have been otherwise had different choices been made. Understanding these choices provides an insight into the way the government perceived the population, and shows politicians saw poor population dynamics as a potential threat to their legitimacy.

Censorship and secrecy

The politically sensitive nature of demographic statistics meant they were surrounded by secrecy, lest anyone should try to reveal politically damaging information about public health, infant mortality, abortion rates, and declining fertility.¹¹ In fact, the increasingly poor state of public health in the Brezhnev era meant censorship actually tightened as Party elites responded to the new trends. What had begun during the revolution as a plan to dramatically improve health and hygiene, by the 1970s had turned to frantic attempts at burying evidence and shying away from the investments needed to improve public health. Demography was shaping Soviet politics and culture, but not in the way leaders had wanted. The secrecy around population statistics went beyond simple censorship; these data were often classified too, meaning they were kept secret from many TsSU employees and demographers at outside institutions. The TsSU kept track of datasets by creating numbered copies for specific individuals, and most datasets came in this form.¹² Though theoretically watertight, personal

⁹ ARAN, f. 1731, op. 1, d. 96, l. 32.

¹⁰ ARAN, f. 1731, op. 1, d. 96, l. 75.

¹¹ The fact fertility was declining was openly discussed in publication, even in newspapers, but exact figures and statistics on the topic were not included.

¹² For example, the report on future tendencies of natality and mortality is a numbered copy contained in RGAE, f. 1562, op. 48, d. 2071. Minutes of a meeting by the Scientific methodological committee of the TsSU USSR. (1971), ll. 55-139.

connections between demographers who had trained and worked closely together meant they were often able to circumvent this system and obtain classified data.

As a result of the secrecy and bureaucracy surrounding statistics, these unofficial practices were often necessary to get any work done at all. For example, Valery Vladimirovich Elizarov, Professor of Demography at the Moscow HSE, worked at MGU in the early 1980s. According to his account, at that time he received a call from the Communist Party Central Committee, who wanted statistical information about births in different timeframes. Elizarov advised the Central Committee to go to the TsSU because the data was classified, meaning the university were not allowed to see it. However, citing the TsSU bureaucracy and their long process for obtaining data, the caller simply insisted Elizarov do his best. With this instruction, Elizarov called his boss, Alexander Iakovlevich Kvasha, who recommended they each estimate the figures separately and compare results. Only when they later met in person, did Kvasha admit, ‘smiling slyly’, that he had an unofficial copy of the data hidden at home, but that he couldn’t admit this over the phone.¹³ Elizarov and Kvasha then presented the Party with mostly correct figures, pretending they had estimated them.

As Kvasha had previously worked at the TsSU for a decade it is unsurprising he found ways of getting around restrictions, but the story also highlights the scattered nature of state control and bureaucracy. The TsSU had become so inefficient and bureaucratic that even Soviet leaders found it difficult to obtain statistics. Though it was TsSU leaders who classified data and gave permission for it to be viewed, the Central Committee of the Communist Party sat well above the TsSU in the hierarchy of Soviet institutions. That its members asked MGU for the data instead of the TsSU suggests either they weren’t even aware that those particular statistics were classified, or they were aware, but suspected hidden copies would be available. Either way they had no real objection to Moscow State University possessing statistics on the age/sex structure of the population. Despite this fact, Kvasha perceived a real threat from breaking TsSU rules, so much so that he lied about it, even in a private phone call, in case the KGB were listening. He clearly felt that should an adversary find out he possessed classified statistics, then the Central Committee would not bother to interfere to prevent him suffering negative consequences. Secrecy and bureaucracy therefore had a stifling effect on statistical knowledge that even affected the government. In general, experts were able to know about

¹³ Denisenko, M. B. and Elizarov, V. V., *Razvitie naseleniia...* p. 40.

population dynamics despite secrecy, but they spent much of their time and energy on political charades to manage this knowledge.

For statistics that were not classified, censorship tightly controlled what could be published to stop the public finding out about trends that cast doubt on the regime's ability to improve public health. Only the Head of the TsSU could give permission for publication, even senior figures like the head of the Census Bureau did not have this right.¹⁴ Anything that was published had to pass through Glavlit, the state censor, first, and detail was often removed along the way to prevent the reader gaining a clear a picture of the situation.¹⁵ In fact, statisticians and demographers faced incentives not to publish data at all, as they were punished for publishing the wrong data, but rarely for not publishing the approved data.¹⁶ Such problems were actually acknowledged quite openly. A 1966 *Literaturnaia gazeta* article referred to the inability of the TsSU to separate 'those data that are indeed state secrets from those that are senselessly buried in the depths of statistical institutions because of someone's absurd over-caution or failure to understand true state interests.'¹⁷ The state, of course, was not a single figure making clear decisions, but a group of cautious elites each personally deciding to be on the safe side whenever they were presented with a decision.

Showing the Soviet regime in a good light was the primary criteria for publication: life in the USSR should appear to be long and healthy. Where problems existed, population statistics should at least show progress being made, so that the Party could claim Soviet rule was bringing improvements to the quality of life. As this desire for good news was at odds with the realities of demographic trends in Brezhnev era, professionals of all kinds were under increasing pressure to self-censor to avoid being sacked or threatened by the Party. This culture of fear produced discrepancies throughout the entire system of data collection, such that statistical bodies could unknowingly receive false information from clinics, hospitals, and maternity homes. Not all censorship or falsification occurred at the hands of statisticians, and this was an important element of the system, one that makes it hard or even impossible to establish accurate figures in the present for some kinds of data.

¹⁴ RGAE, f. 1562, op. 59, d. 2762. Minutes of a meeting by the TsSU Commission for Population Statistics and Labour Resources to discuss the main results of the 1975 natality survey. (1977), ll. 1-20.; RGAE, f. 1562, op. 56, d. 2916, ll. 1-39.

¹⁵ Anderson, B., Katus, K., and Silver, B., "Developments and Prospects for Population Statistics," p. 5.

¹⁶ Anderson, B., Katus, K., and Silver, B., "Developments and Prospects for Population Statistics."

¹⁷ "Sila i slabosti molodoi nauki," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 6th August 1966, pp. 1-2.

Of all the demographic indicators, historical evidence shows that infant mortality was particularly susceptible to this kind of falsification. For example, in April 1979 two demographers visited the Chechen-Ingush Republic to investigate how the Republic was achieving its low rate of infant mortality. They quickly found the mortality rate to be a fabrication, as one of them explained:

It was enough just to go into the regional children's hospital and, honestly, in the corner there was a big box of unregistered death certificates for children under one. A great big pack.¹⁸

When they counted the certificates that had been excluded, they discovered a seventy percent underestimation of deaths based on this alone. Not only did this mean the infant mortality figures were wrong, but life-expectancy was greatly reduced by taking into account so many child deaths. Though the demographers wrote a report on their findings, the authorities in the Republic quietly ignored it. Posters in the statistical offices continued to proudly advertise that life-expectancy had reached seventy in the Republic. In 1983 another delegation was sent from Moscow to follow up, but this time they did not find any irregularities in the mortality reporting. 'I don't think that the situation improved in the Chechen-Ingush Republic in that time. I think they just learned how to conceal this data,' one of the original investigators noted.¹⁹ Ultimately, it was easier to conceal information than to improve child mortality and the ironic result of this attempt to spread best practice in child health was that institutions simply became better censors.

Other accounts indicate that the problem was widespread rather than specific to the Chechen-Ingush Republic. The situation was especially severe in parts of Central Asia, where rates of infant mortality were higher in any case. Sadiniso Hakimova, Tajik surgeon, Professor, and Director of the Tajik SSR Ministry of Health Research Institute for the Protection of Mothers and Children provides a lengthy account of the healthcare system in late-Soviet Tajikistan. Writing after the fall of the Soviet Union, she explained:

The true number of deceased mothers and children remained a secret, not only from the people, but also from the medical community. All the main indicators of health were thoroughly corrected, first in the bowels of regional and city hospitals, and then in the Bureau of Medical Statistics of the Ministry of Health of the Republic. Then they were reprocessed, at the Union level as the Republic's health indicators

¹⁸ Borusiak, L., "Nauka o zhizni. Interv'iu c Evgenii Andreevym".

¹⁹ E. M. Andreev, opinion given in interview with Lubov' Boryskyak. Borusiak, L., "Nauka o zhizni. Interv'iu c Evgenii Andreevym".

were held in the Main Department of Medical Statistics of the USSR Ministry of Health.²⁰

She writes that only after several layers of fiddling, ‘having acquired a prestigious form’, did a select few of those statistics appear in publication.

Her account highlights that for this to work the Party needed, ‘an extremely scrupulous approach to the selection and placement of senior personnel’ right across the health system.²¹ Yet rather than a master plan, what these accounts demonstrate is the existence of a shared understanding about the purpose of statistics in Soviet society, and a shared fear of the consequences of getting it wrong among directors and bosses. Hakimova, writing in 1998, refers to this as the ‘unspoken function’ of healthcare statistics as a ‘tool for deceiving their own people and the rest of the world, presenting the bleak aspects of Soviet reality in a retouched and beneficial light for the ruling elite’.²² Behind each hidden box of dusty death certificates is the story of babies dying from poor care on unsanitary maternity wards.²³ Concealing these deaths mattered because it meant no lessons could be learned, nor improvements made in maternity care. Secrecy thus actively prevented progress in health. Far from aiding the government, it actually made it more difficult for them to improve health and longevity, stabilising legitimacy in the short term, but damaging it in the long run.

Beyond falsification, state control through censorship took many forms, and the aggregation of data was common tactic to disguise bad news while still publishing technically accurate data. In this way the statistics themselves were not fabricated, rather they were used to tell a misleading story about the state of health and population. After Brezhnev publicly declared in 1967 that average life expectancy had reached 70, staff at the TsSU felt forced to manipulate the published statistics to try and keep life expectancy at 70, even though it was already starting to decline. Evgenii Mikhailovich Andreev was part of a team of TsSU statisticians, given the task of calculating life expectancy from the 1970 census data. Writing about the period, he describes how, to the statisticians’ dismay, life expectancy for 1969-1970 was lower than Brezhnev had publicly described. The figure had fallen from 70 to 69.34.

²⁰ Hakimova, S., *Zalozhniki imperii* (Dushanbe, 1998), p. 139.

²¹ Hakimova, S., *Zalozhniki imperii*, p. 139.

²² Hakimova, S., *Zalozhniki imperii*, p. 43.

²³ On the poor state of maternity wards, see Kosiak, N. A., "Politika gosudarstva b oblasti zdravookhraneniia i razvitie sovetskogo semeinogo prava v 1955g. kontse 1970-kh gg", *Obshchestvo: politika, ekonomika, pravo*, no. 3 (2012): 11-17.

Eventually, his bosses, Boiaarksii and Gerogii A. Pavlov, decided to publish data for the four-year period 1968-1971 instead. As 1968 was a better year, its inclusion brought the average to 69.5. This figure could then be appropriately rounded to 70. He reports that after this time, mortality tables stopped being published, saying TsSU statisticians did not even discuss their publication until perestroika.²⁴

As these accounts show, those in charge of statistics effectively self-censored data on life-expectancy and infant mortality without a direct order from leaders to do so. Small adjustments, aggregation, and cherry picking became common self-censorship tactics used to disguise politically damaging information. Yet this self-censorship was just as much a form of state control as any uniformed official with a red pen. The fact that statisticians did not even discuss the publication of these statistics again until perestroika is important because it demonstrates they had an unspoken knowledge of censorship rules. Data that clearly showed a decline in health was not to be published. Because statisticians knew this, they censored it themselves, rather than be reprimanded by formal censors or Party leaders when the data was revealed.

Experts practiced self-censorship out of necessity, but they also disliked political control over their work and often sought to outwit the censors by pushing the boundaries in small ways.

As one trainee at the Moscow State University Population Centre explained:

Essentially there was no statistical data available that could be used as the basis of an interesting article for publication in the open press. Like detectives, we extracted this data in snippets from scientific literature, and then we'd recalculate the figures so the censors would agree to print them.²⁵

Many experts found it hard to know about negative trends while having to remain silent publicly. Uralnis was well known for such conflicts with the authorities. His daughter wrote of her father working in this difficult atmosphere:

I remember how hard it was for him to overcome battles with censors, when every figure was checked, not just the secret ones. To publish this or that data, characterizing the unfavourable situation in the country (high mortality and morbidity, a huge number of abortions, etc.), my father had to present the material so that secret figures did not appear, but at the same time a true picture of the

²⁴ Andreev, E. M., "Ozhidaemaia prodolzhitel'nost' zhizni 70 let: avtobiograficheskoe vystuplenie." *Demoskop Weekly*, No. 487-488, (2011) Accessed: 05/06/20. <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2011/0487/tema01.php>. On similar manipulations of life expectancy at this time see: Tolts, M., "The Failure of Demographic Statistics: A Soviet Response to Population Troubles".

²⁵ Kaliniuk, I. V., "On uchil rabotat' i zhut'," in *D. I. Valentei v vosnominaniakh kolleg i uchenikov*, eds. Rotova, R., Sergeevna and Denisenko, M., Borisovich (Moscow, 2006), p. 53.

demographic phenomena in the country was given. How many times he spoke in the TsSU, the Ministry of Health, and in other ministries with alarm for our country! He would say something like: "you write the figures in red ink, but you should be writing them in blood..."²⁶

Whether or not Urlanis ever really expressed his concerns in quite such provocative wording is, of course, impossible to verify, though stenogram records from the Academy of Science and TsSU do show several other passionate outbursts by Urlanis, denouncing the way population problems were disregarded and kept secret by those in charge.²⁷ Records show censors removed large chunks of Urlanis's 1974 book *Problemy dinamiki naseleniia SSSR* (*Problems of the Dynamics of the Population of the USSR*), including an entire chapter giving a demographic forecast for the USSR. Interestingly the data used in that chapter was already in open publication, but censors banned it anyway, presumably because they felt the use of this data to produce a gloomy forecast would be too politically damaging.²⁸

In many ways, controlling knowledge of the population was as much about controlling the narrative as the numbers. Even when statistics themselves were approved—and demographers would rarely attempt to publish statistics clearly prohibited—the written text was subjected to harsh scrutiny. For the most part, quantitative analysis was affected little by Marxism in this period. Instead, ideology played a large role when interpreting and explaining demographic changes and their consequences. Writing after the collapse of the USSR, former Soviet demographer Anatoli Vishnevskii claimed that 'distorted and dogmatized Marxism was bizarrely mixed with fragments of randomly introduced modern Western ideas, which gave rise to a strange, science-like mixture that made it possible to see real life, as if through poorly pointed binoculars.'²⁹ This is supported by archival evidence. A manuscript entitled 'Contemporary Socio-economic Issues of Population Reproduction of the USSR' sent for publication to the journal *The Health of the Russian Federal Republic* shows extensive sections crossed out by the editor of the journal.³⁰ The redacted sections were all explanatory text; the editor retained the numerical portion of the document untouched. In

²⁶ Urlanis, E., "Moi otets".

²⁷ ARAN, f. 1731, op. 1, d. 96, ll. 1-102; RGAE, f. 1562, op. 56, d. 2916, ll. 12-13.

²⁸ The original manuscript was destroyed in a fire at Urlanis's home so is unfortunately not available for further scrutiny. However, an account of these events as witnessed by Vishnevskii is given in Anatoli Vishnevskii, '100 let so dnia rozhdeniia Borisa Tsezarevicha Urlanisa', *Demoskop Weekly*, 253-254 (2006) <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2006/0253/nauka01.php#5> (Last visted 19/09/21).

²⁹ Vishnevskii, A. I., "Trudnoe vozrozhdenie demografii," no electronic page numbers.

³⁰ GARF, f. 603, op. 1, d. 162. Manuscript sent by Merkov for publication in the journal 'The Health of the Russian Federal Republic'. (1967), l. 2.

particular, the editor removed text that might touch on politically sensitivity events. For example, the author wrote that studies on natality, mortality and life expectancy were completely ‘stopped’ (prekrashcheny) in the 1930s, which the editor replaced with the word ‘aggregated’ (agregirovannyi), a particularly vague term chosen to gloss over the repression of demography in those years.

Because demographers faced significant hostility from the Party in this period, experts had to demonstrate loyalty in every aspect of their writing before it could be published. For example, Vishnevskii’s 1980 article was published only after he agreed to reduce the number of foreign demographers cited throughout.³¹ Another example comes from Raisa Sergeevna Rotova, a former publisher turned demographer working under Valentei at Moscow State University. She recalls preparations for the publication of his 1971 monograph, *Marxist-Leninist Theory of Population* (by publisher Mycl’):

DI. [Valentei] felt that the book might not be allowed for ideological reasons. He asked me to consult with the editor of our monograph from the publishing house V.I. Budarina (whom I knew well) to find out what needed to be done so that the book saw the light of day. The editor recommended adding an approving assessment of Academician Strumilin at the beginning of the book. DI.[Valentei] followed this advice, and the monograph came out. You can imagine how many similar episodes Valentei had to waste time and effort on, but which we don’t even know about.³²

By demanding these displays of loyalty in publishing, the Party ensured they retained control over the demographic narrative. As this example shows, a network of contacts was vital for experts to be able to navigate the demands of publishing successfully.³³

Finally, it is important to note that experts faced real consequences when they fell foul of censorship, and these consequences formed an important part of the control of cadres much noted by scholars of the late Soviet Union. First and foremost, it was people who were censored, as only those who demonstrated sufficient loyalty and were politically docile were allowed to move up in their careers.³⁴ Should an individual stop displaying loyalty, decisions could be quickly reversed. In 1979, for example, V. A. Borisov was fired from Moscow State University of Economics and Statistics after making a speech at a student conference at

³¹ Vishnevskii, A. I., "Trudnoe vozrozhdenie demografii."

³² Rotova, R. S., "Rukovoditel', kollega i tovarishch," p. 88.

³³ On this theme, see Oates-Indruchová, L., *Censorship in Czech and Hungarian academic publishing, 1969-89: Snakes and ladders* (London, 2020).

³⁴ Shlapentokh, V., *Soviet Intellectuals and Political Power*.

MGU. His address in full has not been preserved in written form, but his former colleagues describe the speech as the last straw after he questioned the link between high fertility and socialism and repeatedly highlighted the likelihood of Soviet depopulation.³⁵ The archival record also reveals senior TsSU staff regularly denounced certain demographers to their superiors.³⁶ In 1970, for example, after Urlanis had written an article entitled 'Fatherlessness' in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, Starovskii wrote to the Central Committee CPSU to complain that Urlanis had published the number of children born out of wedlock. Starovskii warned that this data could be used by 'bourgeois propagandists for harmful purposes' because abroad such children were considered illegitimate.³⁷ He requested that the Central Committee stop *Literaturnaia gazeta* publishing statistics that the TsSU had deemed secret.

Specialists therefore had to tread a careful line. As Blum argues, 'it is impossible to count births and deaths and to construct simple indicators without touching the deepest of social disparities or to identify, on a daily basis, demographic and social disasters.'³⁸ Yet population specialists were often powerless even to bring this knowledge to the attention of the public, let alone improve these indicators by setting policy. The very data that was recorded in the first place, and consequently that which survives today, is limited by secrecy, and population specialists also masked this data, however unwillingly they may have done so.³⁹ By concealing evidence of failures, the Soviet system actually damaged healthcare, failing to acknowledge or address real challenges. Statistics sometimes masked the full extent of the problem, but leaders *were* still aware of the general issues. Letters, for example, show Hakimova and other doctors repeatedly wrote to political leaders in Tajikistan and Moscow raising concerns about infant mortality.⁴⁰ For the most part leaders chose to respond to the issues with increased censorship rather than investment or policy change because this was easier to achieve, and, fearing an unwelcome reflection of Soviet socialism in these figures, decided to suppress them instead, papering over the cracks.

³⁵ Antonov, A. I., "85 let so dnia rozhdeniia Vladimira Aleksandrovicha Borisova." *Demoskop Weekly*, No. 161-161, (2018) Accessed: 20/10/21.

³⁶ Records of Podiachikh doing this: RGAE, f. 1562, op. 57, d. 400. Documents relating to the participation of specialists in the work of the United Nations on Population. (1969), ll. 87-124.

³⁷ RGAE, f. 1562, op. 47, d. 35, l. 1.

³⁸ Blum, A., *Rodit'sia, zhit', i umeret' v SSSR*, p. 26.

³⁹ Blum, A., *Rodit'sia, zhit', i umeret' v SSSR*.

⁴⁰ See letters published in Hakimova, S., *Zalozhniki imperii*.

Party control over census data

The political context limited what data was shared, but it also limited what data was collected in the first place and the most significant limitations arose from the design of Soviet censuses—a vital element of Party control over demographic knowledge. State control created an inflexible taxonomy of statistics that has outlasted the USSR and still constrains what is known about the Soviet population. As will be seen, it was both the numbers and the headings they fell under that mattered. Decisions about what to find out were shaped by the joint desire to know and to conceal population dynamics. Once created, evidence of negative trends could be suppressed, but this was a political risk. As the 1930s had shown statisticians and politicians alike, too much demographic knowledge could be a bad thing when it revealed failures of Party policy.

The censuses that took place between 1959 and 1979 were particularly conservative in their form in comparison to the 1926 census, and this was a constant annoyance for specialists outside the TsSU who aimed at the further study and development of demography. The conservative nature was partly because they were run by Starovskii and Podiachikh—who had originally been brought into population statistics at the TsSU to work on the inflated 1939 census.⁴¹ Despite their frustrations at the data's limitations, demographers in academia and the Academy of Sciences still had some input into the development of the census.⁴² This tension between the conservative TsSU and the progressive core of specialists in academia is neatly summarised in the resolutions of the 1965 all-Union population conference in Tashkent, which requested that when undertaking the next census in 1970, the TsSU 'more seriously consider the wishes of scholars working in the sphere of population problems.'⁴³ A particular bugbear at this time was that there was no question about the number of children born to a woman in her lifetime, which made calculating fertility indicators impossible.⁴⁴

In the years prior to each census there was a period of preparation and consultation. This typically saw a trial census, followed by discussions with senior demographers, and then an

⁴¹ On Podiachikh's background: Livshits, F. D., "Perepis' s osobym mestom v uctorii". On the superiority of the 1926 census: Perevedentsev, V. I., "Spor o perepisi," *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, 11th January 1967, p. 13. ; Uralnis, B., "Bezotsovshchina," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 7th January 1970, p. 12.

⁴² Schwartz argues that the restricted dissemination of census data was as big a problem as its collection: Schwartz, L., "A History of Russian and Soviet Censuses."

⁴³ Karakhov, M. K. et al., *Trudy konferentsii Srednei Azii (Tashkent 1965)*, p. 386.

⁴⁴ Perevedentsev, V. I., "Spor o perepisi," p. 13; Perevedentsev, V. I., "Zdravyi smysl ili nauchnoe znanie," p. 11.

all-union summit of statisticians, at which important questions were debated more broadly.⁴⁵ Changes could definitely be made by experts in some circumstances. Kolpakov, head of the TsSU for the Russian Republic, noted that most of the recommendations from the trial census were accepted at the summit in 1968, for example, extra questions about native language.⁴⁶

In the case of fertility, however, a bitter dispute started ahead of the 1970 census. Podiachikh claimed that the 1957 summit of statisticians had decided with finality that questions about fertility would not be included in future censuses.⁴⁷ Speaking at a 1966 conference, he set out his expectations, saying:

Sadly, it is impossible not to note that during preparations for the last census some scholars reduced their participation in discussions to just proposing the maximum extension of the programme, not taking into account the practical implications and economic realities (effectiveness) of the use of certain data.⁴⁸

Interestingly though, the trial ahead of the 1970 census *did* include a question on births, and in the years before and after the census the TsSU actively researched the falling birth rate.⁴⁹ Podiachikh maintained, however, that it would be too difficult to implement in the main census; that women lied; they broke down when they remembered their deceased children; that it was too expensive; that sample surveys were sufficient; and finally, that the question had already been resolved in 1957.⁵⁰ This position drew sharp criticism from colleges both inside and outside the TsSU. Kolpakov grumbled, 'Comrade Podiachikh is so reverent over the recommendations and conclusions of the last scientific council of statisticians, that took place fifteen years ago, as if they are the last instance of holy truth.'⁵¹

⁴⁵ RGAE, f. 779, op. 2, d. 92. Report by the Demographic Laboratory at the Scientific Research Institute of the TsSU USSR 'On the results of the indepth analysis of the materials of the trial census'. (1967), ll. 63-100; RGAE, f. 1562, op. 45, d. 6896. Minutes of a meeting by the TsSU permanent commission on the scientific methodology of demographic statistics. (1967), ll. 1-17.

⁴⁶ Kolpakov, B., "Obratosvaia podgotovka i probedenie perepisi naseleniia—nash vazhneishii grazhdanskii dolg", *Vestnik statistiki*, no. 8 (1969): 26-34.

⁴⁷ Podiachikh, P. G., "Vazhnyi etap podgotovki vseoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia", *Vestnik statistiki*, no. 10 (1967): 83.

⁴⁸ Podiachikh, P. G., "O predstoiashchei vseoiuzhoi perepisi naselnniia i nekotorykh voprosakh izucheniia problem narodonaseleniia", p. 19.

⁴⁹ RGAE, f. 1562, op. 45, d. 5892. Order of the TsSU to create tables of fertility in all republics for the years 1965-1966. (1967), ll. 1-2; RGAE, f. 1562, op. 45, d. 9719. Order of the TsSU to create tables of fertility in all republics for the years 1966-1972. (1968), ll. 1-2; RGAE, f. 1562, op. 44, d. 2665. Order of the TsSU to create tables of fertility in all republics for the years 1964-1965. (1966), ll. 1-2; RGAE, f. 1562, op. 56, d. 2916, ll. 1-39.

⁵⁰ RGAE, f. 1562, op. 45, d. 6896, ll. 1-17.

⁵¹ Kolpakov, B., "K voprosu o demografii kak nauke," pp. 51-52.

Though there were other ways of studying fertility, such as in separate studies and opinion surveys, demographers argued that the data did not accurately reflect the age sex structure of the population and in general was unreliable.⁵² When not listened to in private, they sought to influence events by appealing in the open press. At the all-union summit in 1968, demographer Viktor Perevensentsev reported that the main issue was the question of fertility and that it had been unresolved. In a blistering attack on the TsSU on the pages of *Literaturnaia gazeta* he subsequently referred to a split:

However, on two critical points, a year ago, just as ten years ago, the opinions of the TsSU and demographers have decisively gone their separate ways... The TsSU rejects the requests and suggestions of demographers with an enviable persistence. True, in the trial census last year a question about the number of children a woman has was included, but the main census does not include it... We need a specific scientific policy in the area of natality. It cannot be built without exact facts, and exact data can only be provided by a question on fertility in the census. This is not just my personal opinion, but, perhaps, the general opinion of all demographers not working at the TsSU... Before the census of 1959, having rejected the unanimous opinion of demographers on the necessity of including questions on fertility, the TsSU then decides to take upon itself the task of understanding population reproduction without any census data. Was this successful? No, it was not successful.⁵³

Despite being united in their efforts, demographers were unsuccessful, and the 1970 census remained as constricted at the 1959 one had been. The power afforded to bureaucrats meant that even with the opposition of all of his peers, Podiachikh was able to stop the collection of basic population data, limiting the knowledge available.

Podiachikh's refusal to broaden the census programme reflects the ongoing tension between the desire to know the population and the desire to hide bad news. Senior population specialist at MGU, Anatoly Pavlovich Sudoplatov, in his memoir refers to the 'colossal opposition of the leadership of the Central Statistical Administration, supported by the Central Committee of the CPSU, which categorically objected to any additional headache in the field of social policy.'⁵⁴ Senior Communist Party leaders did not want to have to deal with further evidence of societal problems encouraging Podiachikh and Starovskii to keep the census simple. Podiachikh held out for over twenty years, when even his TsSU colleagues describe him as being alone in his position 'with his many opponents'.⁵⁵ In reality, it is

⁵² RGAE, f. 1562, op. 48, d. 2071, l. 48.

⁵³ Perevedentsev, V. I., "Prodolzhenie spora," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 20th March 1968, p. 11.

⁵⁴ Sudoplatov, A. P., "Politicheskie kulisy..." pp. 7-8.

⁵⁵ Kolpakov, B., "K voprosu o demografii kak nauke," p. 50.



Merkov (right) and colleges at the All-Union Summit of Statisticians in 1968. GARF, f. 603, op. 1, d. 493.

unlikely he was alone. At an Academy of Sciences meeting in 1968 Podiachikh was criticised for his secretive attitude by colleges but responded: 'You are always saying 'the TsSU, the TsSU!' But you don't know that the TsSU reports to the government!?'⁵⁶ According to Sudoplatov, both Podiachikh and Starovskii opposed broader investigation into population matters, though Starovskii was not a demographer himself and so was rarely involved in this level of discussions.⁵⁷

The experience of the 1937 repressions and subsequent atmosphere of terror (under which Podiachikh and his colleagues had to falsify some of the 1939 census data) further encouraged the suppression of data. This would have endured with him as a formative experience, and though he never spoke out about this, other experts did. One demographer recalled that in the 1930s the bureau cleaner even stopped updating name plates on the office doors, reasoning: 'this one will soon be arrested too', a testament to the scale of repression.⁵⁸ Evidence suggests that Podiachikh had become exceptionally risk averse and disinclined towards change. Scholars have noted that often the tendency to withhold data followed no

⁵⁶ ARAN, f. 1731, op. 1, d. 96, l. 35.

⁵⁷ Sudoplatov, A. P., "Politicheskie kulisy..." p. 8.

⁵⁸ Sonin, I. M., "Vspominaniia ob ottse".

precisely established logic, but rather that senior bureaucrats ‘thought better of it’, when they realised certain comparisons could be made.⁵⁹ The inertia of the Soviet system discouraged innovation on the part of staff, and making changes to the census required extra work from the TsSU. The most significant pressure for a more extensive census also came from those outside the TsSU, and so the power struggle between the government agencies and research institutes also played a role. As Head of the Census, Podiachikh’s task was to discover information about the population, but the context, history, and desire to avoid bad news meant he chose to limit information collected. This dual expansion and suppression of knowledge was inherent in Soviet census design of the time.

Experts could freely debate some political constraints on data but not others, and this possibility depended on whether removing those constraints threatened the fundamental political system and ideology. In the above example, the TsSU received much open criticism for not collecting fertility data, but the collection of fertility data did not threaten the system as a whole. A series of separate fertility studies were later commissioned throughout the 1970s and the question was eventually included in the 1979 census.⁶⁰ What experts could not do, however, was invent new categories of analysis or combine them flexibly to produce new understandings about society that sat outside the socialist framework.⁶¹ Examining class, for example, was off limits because Soviet society was supposed to have no class differences.

Significant control was therefore exerted by the state simply by setting limits on the taxonomy of statistics, which constrained the way societal problems could be talked about. Specialists tried to get round these problems by analysing the data according to other preapproved categories. These were typically age, urban and rural areas, income, workers compared to employees and collective farmers, marital status, and level of education.⁶² In a rather tortured way, Boiaarksii wrote of the limitations of many demographic studies:

Knowledge of how the material basis of family life affects the birth rate, i.e., income in the first instance, cannot be considered exhaustive if fertility indicators grouped by family income are considered (...) without analysing the structure of these

⁵⁹ Blum, A., *Rodit'sia, zhit', i umeret' v SSSR*, p. 39.

⁶⁰ RGAE, f. 779, op. 2, d. 177. Scientific Research Institute of the TsSU report on the topic of patterns of natality and mortality. (1970), ll. 1-192; RGAE, f. 1562, op. 56, d. 2916, ll.1-39.

⁶¹ Blum, A., *Rodit'sia, zhit', i umeret' v SSSR*, p. 52.

⁶² Examples include: RGAE, f. 1562, op. 69, d. 3673. Report by the TsSU on 'The Dynamics and Differentiation of Natality in the USSR Based on Materials of the 1978 study'. (1981), ll. 1-21; ARAN, f. 1977, op. 2, d. 19. Socio-demographic aspects of reproduction and the distribution of labour resources. (1970), ll. 1-19.

incomes, or studying the dynamics of the growth of a family's wealth in connection with the history of its development.⁶³

Western scholars would have called the concept he was describing social class, but of course Boiaarksii could not. The problem with this, as he expressed it, is that scholars were forced to analyse various aspects of class such as education and income separately. The result was studies showing trends for many individual characteristics that were not cross referenced.⁶⁴ Though correlations can be seen, there is no sense of holistic individuals—what happened if a person was highly educated and received extensive workplace benefits but technically had a low salary? Demographers could not easily say. Higher levels of education correlated strongly with fewer children, but the picture for income was much less clear. Both high and low incomes tended to correlate with greater numbers of children than those on middle incomes.⁶⁵

Thus, the censorship of existing numbers was not the only constraint on population statistics. The power of politics was its ability to create an inflexible taxonomy of statistics that has outlasted the Soviet Union itself. It is not just the numbers, but the headings they fall under that matters. What historians know and observe about population dynamics in the Soviet Union has been shaped by these studies and there are certain questions that cannot be answered now because they could not be asked at the time.

Control of resources and coordination

Population statistics in the Soviet Union faced practical problems in addition to their ideological constraints. Resources were scarce and coordination was poor. Because there was no institute of demography, data collection was scattered across a wide range of institutions and the information was not always shared. Demographers also had to compete with other disciplines for funding allocation within their own institutes, and they often expressed their frustration to superiors at the lack of time and energy devoted to population problems.⁶⁶ These limitations came from the lack of government trust in demography, their wariness and desire to stop population experts uniting in a single place and advocating powerfully as a group. But just as appointing inexperienced loyalists in economic statistics had left Stalin

⁶³ Boiarskii, A. I., "Zadachi statistiki v issledovanii sotsial'nykh iavlenii," in *Voprosy demografii*, ed. Volkov, A. G. (Moscow, 1970), p. 13.

⁶⁴ ARAN, f. 1977, op. 2, d. 19, ll. 1-14; RGAE, f. 1562, op. 69, d. 3673, ll. 1-21.

⁶⁵ RGAE, f. 1562, op. 69, d. 3673, ll. 1-21.

⁶⁶ ARAN, f. 1731, op. 1, d. 96, ll. 1-102.

struggling to know the economy, stifling population research left Brezhnev-era politicians less able to understand population dynamics.⁶⁷ This unintended consequence of state control had significant implications for a government trying to know its population.

Of all the resource problems, computational technology was a particular issue. By 1968 the TsSU had approximately 35,000 (primitive) computers across the Soviet Union.⁶⁸ These were located in specific computer centres which performed both TsSU work and work for other agencies. These centres were designed to limit the total number of computers needed, but this design meant centres filled their time with much money-making contract work unrelated to their original purpose and were hard to access.⁶⁹ In addition, Gosplan and the TsSU never agreed about who was primarily in charge of the centres. This caused tension over the prioritisation of work.⁷⁰ More problematic still was the split between computational staff and statisticians. The former worked to very specific briefs with no wider context about the data, while the latter worked with pen and paper and received the finished results with no workings.⁷¹ This slowed the production of statistics considerably while the data went back and forth, especially for types of demographic tables that were being calculated for the first time.⁷² Boiaarskii noted how sets of statistics were tightly controlled by a single organisation, meaning that when mistakes were made as a result of insufficient statistical knowledge they then remained 'a secret of the organisers of the study'.⁷³ Just like the missing box of infant death certificates discussed above, here too the Soviet system caused problems in statistics that leaders were not even unaware of. Boiaarskii claimed this was a particularly acute problem for demographic sample surveys.

In 1967 the CPSU ordered institutions to work together to improve the system of demographic statistical data, but in practice the required collaboration ran into difficulties.⁷⁴ Perevensentsev referred to the strange situation whereby Gosplan and the TsSU were the

⁶⁷ On Stalin, see Wheatcroft, S., "Soviet Statistics under Stalinism: Reliability and Distortions in Grain and Population Statistics."

⁶⁸ Cave, M., *Computers and Economic Planning: The Soviet Experience* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 2.

⁶⁹ Cave, M., *Computers and Economic Planning*, p. 18.

⁷⁰ Cave, M., *Computers and Economic Planning*, p. 7.

⁷¹ Shenfield, S. D., "The Struggle for Control over Statistics."; Anderson, B., Katus, K., and Silver, B., "Developments and Prospects for Population Statistics."

⁷² RGAE, f. 1562, op. 62, d. 2456. Minutes of a meeting by the TsSU Commission for Population Statistics and Labour Resources to discuss plans for the results of the 1979 census. (1979), l. 12.

⁷³ Boiarskii, A. I., "Zadachi statistiki v issledovanii sotsial'nykh iavlenii," p. 9.

⁷⁴ Anonymous, "O merakh..." p. 9.

ones who should have most desired the development of demographic statistics, but ‘actually they impede the realisation of these conditions.’⁷⁵ In her analysis of the situation, Desfosses refers to the ‘apparent collusion’ of these organisations to restrict the allocation of resources to demographic departments.⁷⁶ The scattering of data collection between organisations, and the fact they worked poorly together caused very real problems. One demographer described how the authorities needed information on the reproductive choices of women in the Caucasus. The statistical authorities had no data, so the USSR Academy of Medical Sciences conducted an examination of medical histories. They had no information on the motives of woman having abortions, however, as this was collected by other agencies. Meanwhile the TsSU were only able to take into account population distribution as they had no access to the medical or opinion survey data. Eventually most of the efforts were rendered useless because of the lack of a united system for accessing social data between institutions.⁷⁷

Finally, population statistics were hampered by systems at the ground level. Boiaarskii lamented that, ‘the difficulty is that in any area there is not enough simple counting taking place.’⁷⁸ Far from being all-seeing, the regime actually lacked much basic knowledge about society. He continued:

No birth registration programme can provide a study of natality in the necessary depth. It is theoretically possible upon the registration of births to find out the details and conditions of parent's lives, their biographies, and even the biographies of their parents, brothers, and sisters. Practically such a possibility is quite limited. The main thing is that these parents can never tell us about those who have not had children (without which it is impossible to judge the intensity of the process). Moreover, if their child died within a few months or years, then when registering their death they will report information contradicting what was reported earlier.

In other words, there was no system to collect data on why people choose not to have children, and records were not updated by regional offices. Economists were also well aware of this issue. One Gosplan record from 1974 states:

We do not know our population well enough. We study and know the economy better than we know the producers. We have only just begun studying the influence of national traditions and psychology on population reproduction and the use of labour resources.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Perevedentsev, V. I., "Zdravyi smysl ili nauchnoe znanie," p. 11.

⁷⁶ Desfosses, H., "Demography, Ideology," p. 248.

⁷⁷ Boiarskii, A. I., "Zadachi statistiki v issledovanii sotsial'nykh iavlenii," p. 11.

⁷⁸ Boiarskii, A. I., "Zadachi statistiki v issledovanii sotsial'nykh iavlenii," p. 7.

⁷⁹ RGAE, f. 399, op. 1, d. 1771. Documents from the Council for the Study of Productive Forces. (1974), l. 316.

A combination of a lack of modern resources for demographers and a lack of coordination between the scattered bodies collecting statistics meant data was particularly partial, slow to appear, and not reliably comparable in many cases. The Soviet government in Moscow sought total control over population statistics by restricting free research, but ironically this control actually hampered their ability to know the population, and leaders struggled considerably to understand the Soviet population and society.

Matching ideology, theory, and evidence: The socialist law of population

The sections above have primarily explored direct constraints on population statistics in the form of rules, resources, and restrictions. Ideology suffused into most of those areas, but it also played a much more direct role in the development of Soviet demography through the theorisation of population statistics. Experts were not just under pressure to explain away any problems, but also to create utopian theories showing the why socialism was inherently destined to have a positive demographic impact. In the 1960s, Soviet population scientists perceived inventing a ‘socialist law of population’ as a way to resolve these demands. Prior to the introduction of ‘developed socialism’ as part of the ideological lexicon in 1971, communism was still seen as just around the corner in Party discourse.

In understanding these developments, it is useful to refer to the framework set out by philosopher of science Stephen John.⁸⁰ John differentiates between wishful thinking—when a scientist holds a belief not supported by evidence because it is comforting, such as a belief in the afterlife—and ‘wishful speaking’. Unlike the former, this latter category is about performance:

A scientist engages in wishful speaking when she makes a claim which is not well-established, and where her motivation for making that claim is the non-epistemic benefits that follow from others believing (or believing that she believes) that claim, regardless of its truth.⁸¹

He highlights that scientist and researchers become experts at playing the game and teaching their students the proper theories while quietly ignoring them in their own research and privately rejecting ideological doctrine. Soviet demographers benefitted from being seen to be establishing fundamental socialist laws whether or not they believed in their task. Over

⁸⁰ John, S., "Science, Truth and Dictatorship: Wishful Thinking or Wishful Speaking?", *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 78 (2019): 64-72.

⁸¹ John, S., "Science, Truth and Dictatorship," p. 66.

time, genuine optimism was replaced by wishful speaking as the increasingly poor empirical evidence showed their efforts were fruitless.

It is unclear who first suggested identifying a socialist law of population. Potentially this idea came directly from Soviet leaders, most likely originating in the Science Department of the Central Committee—the section of the Party that oversaw population and other research. Certainly in 1966 the 23rd Soviet Party Congress ordered the expansion of social science research, including demographic statistics.⁸² Moreover, the Party specifically identified theory as an area for improvement, claiming it was necessary to strengthen ‘the political, economic, and cultural cooperation of the socialist countries’, which would then provide ‘an effective path to the victory of socialism over capitalism’.⁸³ In official reports victory over capitalism was touted as the primary aim—theories would show why the socialist system was better for society, not just in a specific case, but always. However, scholars have argued that finding solutions to domestic problems emerging in the social sphere was the real aim in the short term.⁸⁴ Questions like why workers were leaving the virgin lands or why women were having fewer children were becoming urgent, though the positive slant (and long-term goal) of victory over capitalism was provided for the Soviet press.

Impetus for theory came from the top of the Party, but whether leaders ever requested a socialist law of population specifically is unclear. It is more likely that population experts began to think about how they could apply these directions to their newly emerging discipline and hit on the idea as the obvious way to fulfil the demands. Population specialists faced three significant problems in marrying their theoretical task with reality. Firstly, economics was clearly influencing population trends, but not in the way Marx had described, whereby the economic mode of production was the primary influence. Secondly, the trends witnessed in the Soviet Union during the 1970s—rising child mortality, falling fertility, and reducing male life expectancy—were overwhelmingly negative. For any law to be accurate it would need to explain this. Thirdly, the global population changes taking place were unprecedented, so there were no regular past events from which to build a theory. Like demographers everywhere, Soviet demographers were groping in the dark theorising an unknown future.

⁸² Anonymous, "O merakh..." p. 9.

⁸³ Anonymous, "O merakh..." p. 9.

⁸⁴ Gustafson, T., *Reform in Soviet Politics*.

In the early twentieth century, Soviet population theories were very simple.⁸⁵ As in many other fields, specialists, guided by political leaders, wrote that the rapid transition through socialism to communism would naturally solve all problems. Demographers claimed that this change in the mode of production would reduce mortality and produce steady but consistent population growth, whereby the average family would have three to four children.⁸⁶ Real, large reductions in mortality added weight to this belief, and while fertility was declining, rates still remained well above replacement level. A miniature post-war baby boom further discouraged re-evaluation of this premise. But when the small baby boom was followed by a rapid further decline in fertility, this view became more difficult to sustain.⁸⁷ Just as a change in the mode of production was not solving the problems of agriculture, housing, or productivity, neither was it solving all the problems of public health or population growth on its own.

The writings of Marx and Lenin became an obvious place to begin the search for a fresh explanatory theory that was nevertheless socialist. Demographers claimed that Marx had identified a law of population in capitalist societies.⁸⁸ This law states that capitalism will always produce more people than jobs, creating unemployed people for whom society has no economic role—a group he refers to as the ‘surplus population’. Without the threat of being able to replace workers from the surplus, business owners would have no power, so this group is essential to the stability of capitalism.⁸⁹ In a planned economy with no unemployment, a separate law needed to be found to reflect the dynamics. Lenin also believed that to survive in a capitalist environment, workers reduced their family size to make their limited wages go further, but that this dynamic would no longer apply once each person received resources according to their needs rather than their ability to pay. In as far as Marx and Lenin had expressed views on the topic, these views maintained that the dominant mode of production determined the economic structure, but there was no clear law set out for what would happen under socialism.

⁸⁵ Brackett, J. W., "The Evolution of Marxist Theories of Population: Marxism Recognizes the Population Problem", *Demography* 5, no. 1 (1968): 158-173.

⁸⁶ DiMaio, A. J., "Evolution of Soviet Population Thought."

⁸⁷ Teitelbaum, M. S. and Winter, J. M., *The Fear of Population Decline*, p. 79.

⁸⁸ Discussion of this was common in articles such as this one Galetskaja, R. A., "Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskie problemy," p. 150.

⁸⁹ For a more detailed summary see Liu, Z., "Marx's scientific theory of surplus population", *Population research* 2, no. 3 (1985): 1-16. Also on this topic, see DiMaio, A. J., "Evolution of Soviet Population Thought."

Initially, the mood among specialists in the early 1960s was optimistic as the discipline expanded and scholars felt themselves to be at the cutting edge of a new science. At this time health indicators were still improving, albeit at a slower pace than before. 'It is not hard to predict the direction of mortality,' Valentei claimed in 1965. 'The enormous economic and social achievements of our society have already provided a falling mortality rate. Without a doubt this indicator will fall in the future.'⁹⁰ Unbeknown to him, mortality would start to rise the very next year. The future of fertility seemed much more uncertain, however. Roza Iosifovna Sifman of the Central Statistical Administration, highlighted the many unanswered questions:

Is the demographic situation that has arisen in the modern day be a transitional phase? Will the ratio between the birth rate and the mortality rate [in Central Asia] change as a result of a decrease in fertility, similar to the situation that has occurred in western countries and to a certain extent throughout the USSR as a whole? Or will the current ratio of natality to mortality continue?⁹¹

The unprecedented population changes, coupled with directives from Party leaders, explains why population specialists started to search for a unifying theory to explain demographic change and make useful future predictions. The 1965 Tashkent Conference resolutions asserted that 'the correct understanding of socialist population laws is the basis for a socio-economic analysis of reproduction.'⁹²

At the same time, population specialists began to collectively denounce the old assumptions about socialism delivering optimum population growth. Arkadii Mikhailovich Merkov, a medical demographer specialising in public health, addressed the 24th All-Union Symposium on Questions of Population Theory in 1966. He argued against assuming that 'if under capitalism it is so, then here it is the opposite'. 'This simple formula is hardly appropriate,' he claimed, instead he urged demographers to find the 'real' law of fertility.⁹³ The same year, Iaropolk Nikolaevich Guzevaty, another expert, told those assembled at the Kyiv conference that for a long time people thought there would be 'a law of population inevitably predetermining a high level of natality and widespread reproduction of the population.' In reality however, experience had shown that like in the West, 'the process of declining birth

⁹⁰ Karakhov, M. K. et al., *Trudy konferentsii Srednei Azii (Tashkent 1965)*, p. 10.

⁹¹ RGAE, f. 779, op. 1, d. 12. Papers presented at the Scientific Conference on Population Problems of Central Asia. (1965), l. 53.

⁹² Karakhov, M. K. et al., *Trudy konferentsii Srednei Azii (Tashkent 1965)*, p. 393.

⁹³ GARF, f. 603, op. 1, d. 232, ll. 5-7.

rates is accelerating with the rise of people's well-being.⁹⁴ This rejection of simplistic thinking, coupled with the Party's instruction to find new theories opened the way for fresh ideas about the population, but because a Marxist worldview was the only acceptable prism of study, experts gradually found themselves with few real options for innovation. They could not explore demographic transition theory, as their colleagues in the West were doing because it was a theory that had emerged under capitalism.⁹⁵

In November 1966 the Soviet Ministry of Education organised the All-Union Symposium on Issues of the Marxist-Leninist Theory of Population at Moscow State University. The most important Soviet demographers attended, as well as senior demographers from socialist European countries.⁹⁶ At the symposium, experts suggested many iterations of a socialist law of population, such as the below formulation by Nikolai Semenovich Yesipov:

The provision of steadily improving living conditions for workers on the basis of full employment, and the use of public funds to achieve the most comprehensive development and vital activity of people, including the reproduction of the population as a source of labour resources.⁹⁷

Some, like Sonin, Volkov, and fellow specialist P. P. Litviakov argued the law must link the economic with the demographic. Others disagreed— Guzevaty, and his colleagues T. N. Medvedeva and Vladimir Nikolaevich Iagodkin thought demographic and economic processes occurred independently. Iagodkin suggested this definition:

The working population under socialism produce an accumulation of societal wealth, thereby creating the conditions which provide full employment of the working-age population in socially useful labour.⁹⁸

These definitions are prime examples of wishful speaking and highlight the problems demographers encountered. Iadokin's formulation relied entirely on economics and did not incorporate any analysis of demographic processes. Esipov's was little better. While both laws may have fulfilled the task of explaining why socialism was better than capitalism, they were of little use in explaining why fertility was falling or what would happen in the future. No definition was selected at the symposium because demographers were unable to agree.

⁹⁴ Guzevaty, Y. N., "Voprosi o dinamike rozhdamosti pri sotsialisme" (paper presented at the The First Republican Scientific Conference on Demography, Kyiv, 27th-29th October 1966), p. 84.

⁹⁵ For more on transition theory, see Rivkin-Fish, M., "Anthropology, Demography, and the Search for a Critical Analysis of Fertility: Insights from Russia."

⁹⁶ Kiseleva, G. P., "Vsesoiuznyi simpozium ...".

⁹⁷ Kiseleva, G. P., "Vsesoiuznyi simpozium ..." p. 81.

⁹⁸ Kiseleva, G. P., "Vsesoiuznyi simpozium ..." pp. 83-84.

Of the significant problems surrounding any law, the link between economics and fertility represented the first of three major barriers to adoption. Rather than the dominant mode of production it was socio-economic development and female education that appeared to cause falling fertility. Some Soviet experts tried to explain this away by pointing to the smaller cohort of Soviet mothers in the 1960s, which was a result of the Second World War. As Americans didn't have this problem, it was argued they were seeing a reducing birth rate because of capitalism, while the Soviet Union was simply recovering from the war and would soon overtake the USA.⁹⁹ As time wore on, however, it became apparent that such explanations were insufficient to account for the continually reducing rate of births. Demographers began to turn to social norms and values to explain the trend instead.¹⁰⁰ This dilemma reflected a fundamental paradox between the illusion of a system which had remade social structures, and the reality of society developing independently from the political system.¹⁰¹ Demographic processes were clear evidence of this, and they made for uncomfortable reading. How, demographers asked themselves, could a socialist law of population based on development also apply in capitalist countries?

Negative domestic demographic trends formed a second major barrier. The trends witnessed in the Soviet Union in particular during the 1970s—rising child mortality, falling fertility, and reducing male life expectancy—were overwhelmingly negative. For any law to be accurate it would need to explain this. Yet inventing a law which predicted doom and linked this to socialism would have been a dangerous for demographers, explaining why they felt it so necessary to wishfully speak. As a result, definitions of the law such as those explored above usually lacked any perceptible link to these trends. Meeting records from the Scientific Methodological Committee of the TsSU show experts frequently tied themselves in knots in attempts to satisfy all expectations of them. At one meeting in 1971, for example, Merkov pointed out that the report on future natality and mortality had gone so far as to predict the elimination of all environmental diseases for children under one.¹⁰² The trend was even worse in the popular press. Demographer Vishnevskii wrote the following in response to a letter in *Literaturnaia gazeta*:

⁹⁹ One such example can be seen in Lif, S., "O nekotore spornikh voprosakh v rabote B. Ts. Uralnisa "Dinamika i struktura naseleniia SSSP i SShA"", *Vestnik statistiki*, no. 10 (1965): 68-71.

¹⁰⁰ Leykin, I., "The History and Afterlife of Soviet Demography."

¹⁰¹ Blum, A., *Rodit'sia, zhit', i umeret' v SSSR*, p. 20.

¹⁰² RGAE, f. 1562, op. 48, d. 2071, l. 43.

The person of the future will be guided primarily by a sense of duty, and married couples will decide to have two or three children in the interest of the general good, despite the sacrifices it may entail.¹⁰³

These wildly optimistic statements show the inherent difficulty in creating a law which proved socialism increased fertility and reduced mortality, when all the numerical data indicated the opposite.

A third problem was provided by the unprecedented nature of population transition. Precisely because it is a new phenomenon, population experts the world over have been remarkably poor at predicting the future, and the Soviet Union was no exception in this.¹⁰⁴ Sonin warned his colleges at a TsSU meeting of the difficulty of making assumptions about natality, saying: 'I must tell you that when you speak to sixteen year old girls they speak totally differently to those you are interviewing [adults] and in general [these predictions] are not reliable.'¹⁰⁵ The rapid pace at which society was changing meant assumptions were often wrong.

Demographers tended to assume that the decline in fertility rates would change, if only because predicting a continued decline until the population reached a single person seemed ridiculous. The answer to this appeared to be a future time, when rising living standards would solve the lack of housing space and poor childcare facilities. Sonin, for example, continued, 'So I think we must outline an increase in fertility, that is, in this period when childbearing will not mean, as it were, as significant decrease in the standard of living.'¹⁰⁶ His assumptions that the standard of living would reach the required heights very soon were based on the fact that capitalist countries had enjoyed increases rather than evidence from the Soviet system.

As demographers faced this acute difficulty in squaring ideology with reality they were constantly aware that any wrong move could see them demoted, sacked, or even have their institutions entirely restructured. As was customary, demographers extensively justified their work with long passages from Marx or Lenin, reinterpreting the historical texts to fit with the existing phenomena. As Desfosses notes, however, 'such quotation mongering and paraphrasing of Marx was not, in the Soviet context, a game; it served to make even the most

¹⁰³ "What will the person of the future be like?," *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, 12th April 1978, p. 11. Translated in Current Digest of the Soviet Press, No. 16, Vol. 30, 17th May, 1978.

¹⁰⁴ Teitelbaum, M. S. and Winter, J. M., *The Fear of Population Decline*, p. 131.

¹⁰⁵ RGAE, f. 1562, op. 48, d. 2071, l. 28.

¹⁰⁶ RGAE, f. 1562, op. 48, d. 2071, l. 35.

cautious Soviet demographers feel secure in their investigations of the USSR's demographic realities.'¹⁰⁷ At this time many research institutions became victims of increased political control over social science. In 1972 the Institute of Empirical Sociological Research became just the Institute of Sociology after its empirical research tasks were removed and several of its staff sacked.¹⁰⁸ This occurred primarily at the will of hard line conservative Iagodkin, who, in addition to being an economist/demographer involved in the search for a socialist law of population, was Secretary of the Party Committee of Moscow State University. Iagodkin also sat on of the Population Section at the Ministry of Education, and it was through him and others like him that the hard-line views and watchful eye of a certain section of the Party was ever present. He went on to become Secretary for Ideology at the Moscow City Committee of the CPSU in 1971 and also a Candidate Member of the Central Committee. Sociology was but one of the victims of his tenure.¹⁰⁹ Thus memories of the 1930s Terror discussed in the introduction were not the only factor in experts' cautiousness. The very real consequences of making a political mistake in the here and now would have been at the forefront of experts' minds as they wrestled with this problem.

Over the next few years an ever-growing number of formulations of the law appeared. Between 1969 and 1973 there were around 4000 works on demography published in the Soviet Union, many of which discussed theory, but there were no real breakthroughs.¹¹⁰ Indeed, in 1971 the Academy of Sciences held a meeting of the Scientific Council devoted to demographic problems in light of the 24th Party Congress. Timon Vaselevich Riabuskin, head of the Scientific Council at the Academy of Sciences, noted the many attempts to formulate the law but continued, 'however, there are currently no universally recognised formulations and clear enough explanations of the way this law acts.'¹¹¹

By the mid-1970s, most scholars were starting to admit that the creation of such a law was likely to be impossible. As Soviet demographer Galina Petrovna Kiseleva wryly noted in

¹⁰⁷ Desfosses, H., "Demography, Ideology," p. 225.

¹⁰⁸ Hahn, J. W., "Soviet Sociologists."

¹⁰⁹ Statement by S. Trapeznikov and V. Iagodkin on the state of affairs in ICSI of the USSR Academy of Sciences (1970), originally TsKHSD, f. 4, op. 22, d. 939, l. 170, now published online by University of Nevada, accessed 05/06/20. http://cdclv.unlv.edu/archives/Documents/iksi_reorg.html; "Interview with Yuri Levada." *Publishing House of the Russian State Art Institute for Contemporary Art*, No. (2013) Accessed: 05/06/20. <http://gefter.ru/archive/10334>.

¹¹⁰ Kiseleva, G. P., "Ob osnovnikh etapakh..." p. 100.

¹¹¹ Galetskiaia, R. A., "Sotsal'no-ekonomicheskie problemy," p. 150.

1975, 'there are as many formulations of this law as there are researchers of it.'¹¹² In fact, she wrote that many researchers now believed there could be no single law of population, rather a system of laws in which 'both economic and demographic laws can be distinguished.'¹¹³ Occasional lip service was given to theory, but demographers mostly focused on policy proposals.¹¹⁴ Previous attempts even began to be criticised; Valentina Sergeevna Steshenko, Ukrainian Academy of Sciences specialist, argued in 1978 that experts must look at how population processes worked in practice and not merely 'limit ourselves to only studying theory and the theoretical statements of our predecessors, ignoring the logic and results of empirical developments'.¹¹⁵

It is important to note, however, that while the most hopeless utopian theories might have been rejected, demographers still passionately believed that they could shape the population through science and socialism. Steshenko argued that the revival of demography created a new force, one which went beyond the mere description of facts. Instead, demography should be seen, 'as an instrument of the reorganisation of objective reality.'¹¹⁶ Though specialists started to move on from the idea of a single law, they continued to feel the clash of reality and ideology acutely. They may not have searched for a single socialist law, but they spoke and wrote passionately about solving population problems, shaping the family, and moulding the population. The new population science was to be transformative by improving the lives of the population, though not in the limited way of the 1960s.

In the later 1970s and 1980s Marxism-Leninism offered a much looser framework for population research. Key ideas still could not be challenged, such as the primacy of population growth, but experts could pursue population transformation in more varied ways provided they could find some vague justification from the enormous writings of Marx, Engels, or Lenin. The case of demography explored here adds to and supports the conclusions of a large body of scholarship showing how ideology became less important in the Soviet Union over time. Though it remained ever-present in official discourse, it no longer persuaded most people at the level of meaning.¹¹⁷ As Yurchak puts it, as long as citizens

¹¹² Kiseleva, G. P., "Ob osnovnikh etapakh..." p. 95.

¹¹³ Kiseleva, G. P., "Ob osnovnikh etapakh..." p. 95.

¹¹⁴ Galetskaiia, R. A., "Nauchnyi sovet Akademii Nauk," p. 150.

¹¹⁵ Steshenko, V., *Demografiia v sovremennom mire* (Moscow, 1978), npn.

¹¹⁶ Steshenko, V., *Demografiia v sovremennom mire*.

¹¹⁷ Yurchak, A., *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, 2013).

accepted Marxism-Leninism as ‘the socio-political framework of reality within which to further their personal interests and goals,’ then they were free to mock it privately in the safety of their kitchens.¹¹⁸ In later years, Vishnevskii, Soviet demographer, wrote that by 1985 it was difficult to believe that any experts really thought that the most important task for demography was confronting ‘bourgeois science’, yet they all wrote, spoke, and often acted as if this were true.¹¹⁹ Yet the stale discourse contrasts quite radically with experts’ ambitious aims. Many including Valentei, Kvasha, and Medkov all maintained that population science should not just be about managing reproduction but about changing working and living conditions forever.¹²⁰

For population specialists, the struggle to achieve all that was expected of them was intense; their work had to be both meaningful and theoretical, practical for policy, but acceptable to leaders. There was a tendency among scholars to avoid facing up to the confrontation between ideology and empiricism for as long as was possible, falling victim to wishful speaking as a way to paper over the growing chasm between demands. Research by Blum shows that during perestroika, population specialists started to be able to speak their mind more openly and shared a wider array of more radical ideas.¹²¹ The search for the law of population under socialism shows the Brezhnev era was a transitional one for social scientists, who were forced to re-evaluate the success of their regime. Empirical evidence gradually came to be acknowledged privately by leaders, who did make some efforts to improve the situation. While no public discussion about mortality was permitted, leaders made modest investments healthcare during the 1970s, but stopped short of the kind of investments needed to make a significant difference to vital statistics.¹²² Despite this eventual private acknowledgement of problems, the primary state response was censorship, ensuring the public did not discover the growing nature of problems until glasnost’.

¹¹⁸ Shtromas, A., *Political Change and Social Development. The case of the Soviet Union* (Frankfurt, 1981), p. 23.

¹¹⁹ Vishnevskii, A. I., "Trudnoe vozrozhdenie demografii," npn.

¹²⁰ Elizarov, V. V., "Teoriia i praktika demograficheskoi politiki v SSSR," p. 77.

¹²¹ Blum, A., *Rodit'sia, zhit', i umeret' v SSSR*, p. 55.

¹²² Kosiak, N. A., "Politika gosudarstva v oblasti zdravookhraneniia i razvitie sovetskogo semeinogo prava v 1955g. kontse 1970-kh gg."

Conclusion

Soviet state control over statistics worked by combining multiple methods with the result that it was almost impossible for highly negative information about population dynamics to come to the public's attention. The legitimacy of the regime was at stake. Soviet socialism had to be seen as adequately providing for its citizens. Promoting good news about health and population growth was the top goal, but when no good news existed, then preventing negative trends being publicised was the bare minimum. To do so the Party used every tool at its disposal: limiting data collection and taxonomy, classifying data, censorship, restricting resources, encouraging analysis through a Marxist framework, control of cadres, and sacking those who challenged the system. As seen in the previous chapter, the system grew up gradually as Soviet society evolved. Groups of elites within institutions developed a gut feeling about when to conceal information or refuse requests.

As this chapter has shown, Soviet population statistics were socially situated. Far from being absolute truths or absolute falsehoods, these data reflected a certain understanding of population dynamics, but this understanding was not the only one that was possible. The way population issues were measured and understood in the first place was a result of choices made. Questions of what numbers to collect, how to categorise them, and what theories were acceptable to link patterns together were very important. By and large, population specialists wanted these numbers to accurately reflect patterns of births and deaths, and they overcame opposition to gather the existing data in the first place.

Population study was constrained by the political context in several ways. The omnipresence of ideology meant it was difficult to square the empirical evidence with the required political theory demonstrating the superiority of the USSR. It also meant certain questions could not be asked and certain categories of statistics could not be developed in the first place. Once collected, population statistics were subject to high levels of secrecy and official censorship. Finally, demographic problems were in many ways considered low priority.¹²³ The resulting poorly resourced and badly coordinated institutions struggled to produce high quality statistics.

¹²³ Elizarov, V. V., "Teoriia i praktika demograficheskoi politiki v SSSR."

The Brezhnev era was a transitional one for demography. It was preceded by an optimistic period full of utopian visions and followed by a much franker and more open admission of the need for change during glasnost'. In between, experts tried to accommodate the demands of the regime but increasingly failed because trends in health and population growth worsened so that it became harder and harder to claim socialism was solving all problems. Ideology never disappeared but was side lined as searches for real solutions took precedent among experts. Despite the failings of the statistical system, ministers soon became aware of worsening public health, but they responded with increased censorship to prevent the public from learning too much and in doing so hampered their ability to tackle many of the challenges.

Chapter Three: Population Politics on a Global Stage

The conditions of a nation's life may be assessed by many indices. One of the most important of these is life expectancy. It is a summary, if you will, of all that is being done for man.¹

Brezhnev 1967

Like many political regimes of the twentieth century, the Soviet government associated a large, youthful, and healthy population with international power. Such a population, it was believed, made for a strong military, a large workforce, and a chance at global domination with the cultural hegemony this would bring.² A solid rate of population growth higher than that of its enemies was therefore an important way for the Soviet Union to signal its power. Perhaps America had the upper hand for now, but it was the Soviet Union, through its virility, that was to be master of the future. But population statistics also mattered because they showed what life was like for Soviet citizens. How many of them died before their time, as infants, or from infectious disease? In short, these numbers provided a snapshot of health and family life that was inherently comparative. Unlike economic statistics at this time, demographic indicators had more or less universal definitions—life expectancy, for example, was measured similarly in every country.³

In the Brezhnev era, international cooperation on population matters became an important part of Soviet foreign strategy. This chapter will show how the Soviet government sought to use population politics to spread its influence around the world. Population conferences, educational exchange, medical aid, and contraceptive advice all became important components in the Soviet bid for power and influence on the world stage. It would be easy to assume that all the Soviet actors involved in this programme were striving to achieve this goal in much the same way. In reality, much like the domestic dynamics explored in the previous two chapters, Soviet population politics at the international level represented a competing, cross cutting selection of interests and motivations which were often in conflict. The Party strove to tightly control this highly politicised work because when viewed in international comparison, health and mortality statistics reflected the successes and failures of the entire Soviet project. Most often though, Soviet experts and bureaucrats used their

¹ Brezhnev, L. I., *Leninskim kursom: rechi i stat'i*, vol. 6 (Moscow, 1978), pp. 29-30.

² Teitelbaum, M. S. and Winter, J. M., *The Fear of Population Decline*; Togman, R., *Nationalizing Sex: Fertility, Fear, and Power*.

³ Blum, A., "Social History as the History of Measuring Populations."

international connections to try and influence the government's policy decisions, and at times to gain power and advantage for themselves or their institutions. In demonstrating not only what leaders wanted from population politics, but also how it worked in practice, Soviet population politics emerged as a battleground for power and influence, into which the Soviet government was sometimes dragged unwillingly.

Since their infancy, demographic statistics have always been comparative. Rates of mortality, for example, are of little interest if not to show how different circumstances and actions affect human death. It is the very fact that population markers vary between times, places, and groups that has always made them interesting. However, population statistics became more important in the mid-twentieth century for three reasons. Firstly, the United Nations began to take a serious interest in population matters all over the world. With the global population skyrocketing, experts sounded the alarm about overpopulation and the inability to feed future generations. Connelly shows how Malthusianism, feminism, environmentalism, food science, demography, eugenics, and religion all collided to create a world movement for population control.⁴ With this came a new institutional framework within the UN. In 1946 the United Nations Population Commission was established for international demographic study, and by the 1950s the Commission was urging all member states to undertake population research.⁵ Gradually, interest in population matters grew and the Commission was expanded to become the United Nations Fund for Population Activities in 1969. As part of this, new spaces appeared for the direct comparison of population statistics in the form of organised events and programmes. A one-off World Population Conference was first held in 1927, but from the 1950s they were held every ten years by the United Nations. These conferences were significant events where government delegates sought global solutions to problems. The archives show American agencies frequently requested Soviet support with their aims of reducing the global population boom.⁶

The UN sought Soviet involvement in other ways too. As a result of encouragement from Yugoslavia, the United Nations began to run courses on demography at Moscow State

⁴ Connelly, M., *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population*. On this, also see Bashford, A., *Global Population: History, Geopolitics, and Life on Earth*.

⁵ Wolchik, S. and Curry, J., "Specialists and Professionals in the Policy Process in Czechoslovakia and Poland.", *The National Council for Soviet and East European Research*, (1985).

⁶ RGAE, f. 1562, op. 57, d. 509. Documents relating to the participation of the TsSU USSR in the work of international organisations on population issues. (1970), ll. 1-46.

University in partnership with the Population Centre there.⁷ In addition, regional symposiums, conferences, and seminars were held by European communist countries. This led to the creation of a new group for the cooperation of socialist countries in the field of demography under M. Minkov at the USSR Academy of Sciences.⁸ Other institutions appeared or took a new interest, such as the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon), which researched and cooperated on population issues within communist Europe. By the early 1970s Comecon was holding regular seminars on demographic statistics, and in 1972 the Polish TsSU recommended establishing a permanent working group on population within Comecon.⁹ Because foreign governments were now taking a new interest in population questions, these issues became much more pressing for the Soviet government too, who could hardly refuse to take part. Through population politics a new performative arena opened up, in which the Soviet Union was to be judged but could also seek to extend its influence on the world stage.

Secondly, population statistics became more important because the process of decolonisation that took place in the Global South opened up new opportunities for America and the Soviet Union, whose governments often saw these newly independent states as little more than pawns in their power struggles.¹⁰ Now that nuclear weapons made direct military competition too dangerous, each side sought to gain advantage elsewhere. As Westad argues, 'Washington and Moscow needed to change the world in order to prove the universal applicability of their ideologies, and the elites of newly independent states proved fertile ground for their competition.'¹¹ The Soviet Union did not seek to export the exact version of Marxism-Leninism they had developed, rather they believed that by 'producing a faster and better modernity' they would create the conditions for the final victory of Soviet socialism over Western capitalism.¹² This competition provided revolutionary movements and newly

⁷ RGAE, f. 365, op. 9, d. 2868. Soviet report on participation in the UN Interregional Demographic Training and Research programme in Population and Development Planning at MGU. (1979), ll. 1-16.

⁸ Galetskaja, R. A., "Nauchnyi sovet Akademii Nauk," p. 152.

⁹ RGAE, f. 561, op. 7, d. 121. Report by the Permanent Statistical Committee of the CMEA to the general secretary of the CMEA on future progress. (1965), ll. 1-144; RGAE, f. 561, op. 7, d. 424. Council for Mutual Economic Assistance report 'Improvement in methods for calculating the population: microcensuses and population registers and the preparation of future censuses and housing stock'. (1972), ll. 17-21.

¹⁰ Webber, M., "'Out of Area' Operations: The Third World," in *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, eds. Bacon, E. and Sandle, M. (London, 2002).

¹¹ Westad, O. A., *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 4.

¹² Iandolo, A., "The Rise and Fall of the 'Soviet Model of Development' in West Africa, 1957-64", *Cold War History* 12, no. 4 (2012): 703-704.

independent states with what Bradley describes as ‘the benefits and dangers of superpower patronage’: arms, advisers, funds, and technology.¹³ The superpowers provided these things not only for the military, but also for civil development. In exchange for these offers, the superpowers expected developing countries to reject the ideals, allyship, and aid of the opposing superpower.

Both the Soviet Union and the USA engaged in cultural diplomacy, seeking to accrue soft power by offering a path to prosperity to those striving for a better life in the developing world. Health became an import element of the ‘better modernity’, and the Soviet Union trained doctors, built hospitals, funded medical drugs, and advised on reducing run-away population growth in developing countries. This investment had a lasting legacy, in 2014, for example, 11.4% of registered Ghanaian doctors were Soviet trained.¹⁴ For this programme to work, the Soviet Union needed to show it had resolved the problems in health and population that developing countries were facing and had done so better than its adversary.

Fundamentally, soft power was about being attractive as a mentor, ally, and role model, so demonstrating expertise in health and wellbeing based on successful experience became increasingly important in this period. Vital statistics and population study facilitated these interventions and this presence.

Thirdly, the mid-twentieth century became an important turning point for the Soviet Union specifically, because positive demographic trends reversed. Until the 1960s the Soviet Union had made similar progress in reducing mortality as other industrialised countries. This was largely thanks to significant medical advances such as vaccines and antibiotics. The birth rate, though declining, was also well above replacement level, providing a constantly growing population. After the mid-twentieth century, however, improvements in life expectancy and infant mortality had started to fall behind Western democracies. Fertility in the Western part of the USSR also fell to lower levels than seen in the USA.¹⁵ Moreover, this process was somewhat mimicked in the communist states of Europe. Life expectancy in East Germany began to quickly fall behind West Germany despite the countries starting from the

¹³ Bradley, M. P., "Decolonisation, the Global South, and the Cold War 1919-1962," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, eds. Leffler, M. and Westard, O. A., vol. 1: Origins (Cambridge, 2010), p. 465.

¹⁴ Kochetkova, E. et al., "Soviet Technological Projects and Technological Aid in Africa and Cuba, 1960s-1980s", HSE Working Paper (2016), p. 11.

¹⁵ On these trends and changes see: Mezentseva, E. and Rimachevskaya, N., "The Soviet Country Profile: Health of the USSR Population in the 70s and 80s—an Approach to a Comprehensive Analysis."

exact same base.¹⁶ Comparisons therefore troubled the Soviet government for the first time because they showed the Soviet Union (and sometimes communism more generally) in a bad light. Just at the moment when the United Nations was institutionalising population politics, and opportunities for influence were appearing in the Global South, the Soviet Union's own track record on population and health matters began to appear shaky. For multiple reasons, the mid-twentieth century was therefore a period of increased opportunity, but also increased risk in population politics.

Archives show that Soviet leaders and government agencies quickly perceived the advantages and risks of global population politics. Preparation documents for the 1965 UN World Population Conference explain that their main goal at the conference was to show the USSR population favourably.¹⁷ As noted above, this became more difficult as time went on and demographic comparisons became starker. A 1971 report from Gosplan read:

Fertility in the republics with the highest economic potential (Russia, Ukraine, Latvia, Estonia, Belorussia) significantly lags behind that of the USA and all the economically developed countries of Europe (West Germany, England, France, Italy and others). This represents a prominent loss in comparison with capitalist countries.¹⁸

Fertility was low, but it was actually mortality comparisons that were considered most shameful. The report continued:

Suffice to say that of every thousand children under one in the USSR in 1970, twenty-five little girls and boys died. Meanwhile in Sweden (for the year 1965) and the Netherlands it was thirteen, in Finland and Norway fourteen, and Japan fifteen (for 1969). Evidently, saving the lives of little children must become one of the most important tasks of demographic policy.¹⁹

Whether or not the Soviet government wanted to be competing, the universal nature of population statistics meant comparisons could not be avoided.

Against this background I will now turn to explore three specific case studies to show how Soviet population politics functioned in the international arena. First I will look at preparations made ahead of the Second World Population Conference in 1965. Then I will

¹⁶ Luy, M., "Mortality Differences Between Western and Eastern Germany Before and after Reunification. A Macro and Micro Level Analysis of Developments and Responsible Factors", *Genus* 60, no. 3/4 (2004): 99-141.

¹⁷ RGAE, f. 99, op. 1, d. 367. TsSU report on demographic factors in the planning of economic development to be given at the 2nd World Population Conference in 1965. (1963), ll. 1-4.

¹⁸ RGAE, f. 99, op. 2, d. 1090. Gosplan report to the Council of Ministers 'Forecast of Labour Resources and their use in the future up to the year 1990'. (1971), l. 41.

¹⁹ RGAE, f. 99, op. 2, d. 1090, l. 42.

consider the courses on demography set up at Moscow State University in partnership with the United Nations. Finally, I will examine Podiachikh's letter exchange with William Draper, US delegate to the United Nations Population Commission, on the issue of global overpopulation. The case studies show that for Soviet leaders, population issues had a different meaning and purpose on the world stage. Domestically, as the next chapter shows, leaders tried to resolve demographic problems and reshape their own population by influencing demographic behaviour. This new global arena was also about influence, but it was not really about influencing population dynamics themselves, rather population politics was about putting on a convincing show as a cutting edge socialist superpower. This performance would then afford influence in other areas through allies, trade, and intelligence.

Conferences: The Second World Population Conference 1965

The World Population Conferences held by the United Nations were among the most important new forums for population coordination, and as such they provide a valuable case study in Soviet use of population politics. These conferences, held roughly every decade, represented a chance for experts from all over the world to gather and discuss global population challenges. They also provided governments with an opportunity to advertise their successes in health and population matters to the rest of the world. The Second World Population Conference took place in August and September of 1965 in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, and was the first under Brezhnev/Kosygin. It was a particularly important event for the Soviet government, who used this forum to signal their move away from previous dogmatic thinking on population. The conference saw delegates give individual papers about their own countries and then discuss the urgent issue of exponential global population growth. The Soviet delegation accepted, for the first time, that the overpopulation problem faced by developing countries was a very real struggle for resources, and not just an unemployment issue created by capitalism.²⁰ Though Soviet leaders were generally against large scale birth control programmes, the Soviet delegation at the conference indicated, again for the first time, that some very limited contraceptive use was acceptable to help women space pregnancies and improve health.²¹ Overall, however, the Soviet delegation argued that economic and cultural development was the only way to bring down fertility long term, and that large scale attempts

²⁰ Brackett, J. W., "Marxism Recognizes the Population Problem."

²¹ DiMaio, A. J., "Evolution of Soviet Population Thought," p. 168.

at birth control in Africa and other places led by the USA would be unsuccessful because they failed to take into account the cultural need for children in pre-industrial societies.²²

In preparation for the conference, senior demographers were chosen by TsSU leaders and invited to write specific papers in their area of expertise for presentation at the conference. The papers were translated into English and other languages by the UN and circulated for international scholars to read. Before each Soviet paper was approved it had to pass through the TsSU for review to check it was politically appropriate. This section will explore this process, examining the feedback that one specific demographer, Arkadii Mikhailovich Merkov, received on his paper. The case study demonstrates four important things about the practice of Soviet demography in an international arena. Firstly, it shows the main purpose of these events for Soviet leaders was to demonstrate superiority to the capitalist West on population issues. Secondly, it demonstrates how this produced enormous problems for scholars who had to try and manipulate data to fit the narrative that the Soviet Union was superior. Thirdly, and as a result of this problem, every sentence and number seen by an international audience was tightly controlled. No risks were taken, even when this produced the more damaging overall impression that the Soviet Union was concealing horrendous secrets. Finally, it shows that many population specialists understood the politics but did not want to present obviously misleading data, and they attempted not to when they could.

In 1965 the Soviet delegation was made up of senior demographers from the TsSU and research institutions. Among those present were Podiachikh, Smulevich, Valentei, Volkov, Merkov, Boiaarksi, Urlanis, Guzevaty, Riabushkin, Slezarev, Iagodkin, and Perevedentsev (full names and positions can be found in the appendix to the thesis introduction).²³ As with any foreign conference, the issue of who could attend and what they could report on was controlled through the Party apparatus, in this case the Science Department of the Central Committee. Conferences abroad were considered a privilege and those held in socialist countries were easier for specialists to attend. Permission to attend those held in enemy countries, particularly the capitalist states of America and Western Europe, was only granted to the most loyal and trusted specialists. These were typically party members who had

²² Isupov, A., "Vtoraia vsemirnaia konferentsiia po voprosam narodonaseleniia", *Vestnik statistiki*, no. 6 (1965): 33-41.

²³ Proceedings of the United Nations World Population Conference

already proven their loyalty on trips to socialist countries first.²⁴ The fact that the World Population Conference was held in Belgrade was significant because it meant a wider range of Soviet scholars were able to attend. Boris Urlanis, for example, was not a Communist Party member, and despite the fact that he was famous within the international demographic community, he was not fully trusted by the authorities. Urlanis frequently received invitations to speak at international events in the West but was then denied exit visas at the last moment, sometimes even after he had packed. His daughter recalled:

How our authorities were afraid that Dad, knowing too many secret and revealing materials, would not say the right thing to the scientific community of other countries about our great country, which was drowning in lies.²⁵

Though he eventually made it to France and England in the late 1970s he was denied the chance to ever see Canada and America.

The possibility of demographers sharing such secret and revealing materials to foreign colleagues was a constant fear for Party leaders. It shows how deeply politicised population statistics were, and again demonstrates the atmosphere of constant suspicion and secrecy in which population specialists had to work. Most specialists faced similar difficulties to Urlanis, but a small number were actively trusted and could represent the USSR with a degree of autonomy. Thanks to his connections in the Foreign Ministry and Central Committee, Valentei fell into this category, travelling widely and using his influence to advance demography at home. This will be explored in the next section. Another such person was Podiachikh, who in addition to his role at the TsSU, was Permanent Representative of the USSR to the UN Population Commission. This position meant he was generally trusted to represent the USSR and had a high degree of autonomy. In fact, he was expected to act as editor and censor for other specialists at international events, and this was the case for the World Population Conference in 1965.²⁶

In 1964, a year ahead of the conference, Podiachikh wrote to Merkov to request that he prepare a report on the medical demography of the USSR to give at the World Population

²⁴On demographers specifically: Echenike, V. K., "Rabota riadom c rukovoditelem TsN," p. 46. Fortescue describes the process at length for academics in general: Fortescue, S., *The Communist Party and Soviet Science*, pp. 88-89.

²⁵ Urlanis, E., "Moi otets".

²⁶ GARF, f. 603, op. 1, d. 228. Documents relating to Merkov's report on reproduction in the USSR and developed capitalist countries for the United Nations Population Conference. (1964-1965), ll. 1-104.

Conference.²⁷ At this time, Merkov was head of the Public Health Statistics Division at the Semashko Institute of Public Health Organisation and History of Medicine. The note requested that the report be sent to Podiachikh for review, and also to Boleslav Iakovlevich Smulevich, another demographer at the TsSU. It is likely Smulevich was chosen for this role as an additional reviewer because he specialised in medical demography and had worked at the Semashko Institute himself as a doctor before becoming a population specialist.²⁸ Scholars note that generally before any published academic literature even reached Glavlit, an 'elaborate system of refereeing' had performed most of the political censorship under the guise of scientific peer review.²⁹

Merkov responded with a multi-page report exploring fertility and mortality in the Soviet Union, using England, France, and America as comparators. His report used standardised tables of fertility and mortality which accounted for differing age structures of the population, as is customary in demographic literature. It demonstrated the USSR had made similar levels of progress to Western countries in reducing mortality, but that it lagged in certain areas. For example, the standardised mortality rate per 1000 of the population showed the USSR at 7.3. This was better than the USA at 7.5, but worse than England and France which both had rates of 6.9.³⁰ Infant mortality was also shown in tables to be higher than other developed countries. Merkov repeatedly highlighted that these effects, along with reduced population growth, were hangovers of the Second World War and its devastating impact on the population, which other countries had not suffered. In general, his report showed the USSR in a positive light, claiming much progress had been made. The feedback he received is interesting because it shows the intended purpose of Soviet reports. They were not to be factual statements, but rather theatre performances, showcasing the success of Soviet policies under the gaze of the international community. Instead of presenting Merkov's scholarly evaluation, reviewers aimed to fashion the paper into a dazzling display of achievements by a global superpower.

Both Smulevich and Podiachikh wrote back to Merkov with damning feedback. Smulevich began his letter by addressing the report's implication that the Soviet Union was faring no

²⁷ GARF, f. 603, op. 1, d. 228, l. 104.

²⁸ "Iz zhizni sovetskikh demografov. K 110-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia Boleslava Iakovlevicha Smulevicha".

²⁹ Fortescue, S., *The Communist Party and Soviet Science*, p. 88.

³⁰ GARF, f. 603, op. 1, d. 228, l. 105.

better or worse than developed countries and that ‘socialism does not create advantages in solving the problems of public health’.³¹ His feedback asked, ‘from where did he get such a scientifically incorrect and politically harmful conclusion?’, and continued, ‘only socialism creates the conditions for the provision of health in its widest sociological form.’ Smulevich’s feedback then turned to Merkov’s choice of statistics. He claimed Merkov had used too few indicators, all of which were demographic rather than medical: ‘all this cannot be reflected only in mortality indicators which are widely used by bourgeois scholars with the purpose of furthering capitalism’. Nor should the medical health of the nation ‘be reduced to an analysis of the process of reproduction.’³²

Podiachikh’s response was equally critical. Podiachikh particularly stressed the role that Merkov’s Conference report was to play for the Soviet Union:

In the report it is necessary to include the main aim of the conference – providing assistance to developing countries in studying the interrelation of demographic indicators with economic development. In connection with this, the report should demonstrate the historical side of reproduction and show that in the early years, pre-revolutionary Russia and the Soviet Union had a low economic and cultural level, and that after a short period of time it caught up with advanced capitalist countries, not only in economic and cultural terms, but in indicators showing reproduction. You need to show the role of healthcare in this and show that the standard of healthcare in the USSR is higher than in capitalist countries.³³

In short, the report needed to show developing nations that the Soviet route to health and wellbeing was faster than the capitalist route. This highlights the perennial difficulty for Soviet health and population statistics: how could they demonstrate the standard of health was higher than the West when in fact the standard was similar if not lower? Focusing on progress and change over time was one way around the fact that healthcare was better in the West. Though the USSR might still be behind, it had modernised faster, something that would be important to developing countries looking to quickly improve public health.

Despite the focus on improvement, openly noting issues still facing the Soviet Union was unacceptable to the reviewers, whose goal was not to evaluate, but to persuade. Both reviewers took particular objection to the following sentence by Merkov, which they crossed out multiple times:

³¹ Smulevich’s response: GARF, f. 603, op. 1, d. 228, ll. 104-108.

³² GARF, f. 603, op. 1, d. 228, l. 108.

³³ GARF, f. 603, op. 1, d. 228, l. 2.

Despite the fact that child mortality in the USSR has reduced by more than 8.5 times in comparison with the previous period it is still higher than comparative countries. The future reduction of child mortality is an important task for Soviet healthcare.³⁴

Podiachikh suggested the following formulation to reframe the narrative:

You should have given a comparison of what child mortality was in 1911-1913 in the USSR and in other countries, and by how much it has reduced in these countries in the same time frame as in which the USSR has reduced it by more than 8.5 times.³⁵

Any statistic that didn't show the USSR as better needed to be looked at in a different way and a method found to present the data such that the Soviet Union appeared to have created ideal conditions for health and wellbeing.

The exchange demonstrates that the main purpose of the event for the Soviet Union was to display its success as socialist superpower and appear attractive to developing nations still choosing their developmental path. With détente policies aiming to avoid nuclear war, influencing newly decolonised states functioned as a proxy conflict.³⁶ Demonstrating that the Soviet Union could be a powerful ally with the expertise to resolve pressing demographic issues was part of this. It facilitated other kinds of connections, like the training of foreign specialists, or healthcare aid networks. Countries with governments that were sympathetic to the Soviet Union could also be trade partners and useful allies in forums like the UN General Assembly. Accordingly, every population statistic was subjected to intense scrutiny before it could appear in front of an international audience. Despite the overwhelmingly negative responses explored above, most of the draft report text actually remained in the final version. Merkov had described the USSR incredibly positively wherever it was possible but had stopped short of artificially manipulating data.

On 14th March 1964 Merkov replied to Podiachikh about the feedback, agreeing to make the changes but saying that Smulevich's comments about the report not having a medical focus and overly relying on mortality and fertility were of little help. He wrote that comparing medical statistics with capitalist countries 'is not always in our interest, moreover, the Soviet materials on this issue are not available for open publication.'³⁷ The exchange demonstrates

³⁴ GARF, f. 603, op. 1, d. 228, l. 14.

³⁵ GARF, f. 603, op. 1, d. 228, l. 2.

³⁶ Wallenstein, P., "American-Soviet Detente: What Went Wrong?", *Journal of Peace Research* 22, no. 1 (1985): 1-8.

³⁷ GARF, f. 603, op. 1, d. 228, l. 6.

the extent to which demographers were forced to tie themselves in knots; in this case excluding nearly all public health data from a public health report so as not to embarrass the Soviet government (and in doing so endanger themselves). Evidently, Merkov understood broadly what was required because he had excluded politically damaging data on diseases in the first place, but he was reluctant to include deliberately misleading statistics until forced to by those in charge.

International arenas involved different dynamics to domestic demography. At home, statistics did not have to be revealed at all. Censors often simply decided against publication if there was no positive demographic news to publish. However, international forums like the UN had the effect of forcing the Soviet Union to release at least some information on domestic demography in order to be involved in the population conversation. Merkov's final report shows he made the requested changes and replaced the standardised mortality tables with unadjusted ones.³⁸ This meant that the mortality rate per 1000 appeared as 7.5 for the USSR, 9.5 for the USA, and 11.9 for England. It concealed the true situation by relying on the fact that the USSR had a much younger population and so the statistics did not compare like for like. Though superficially it provided better numbers, it would have been immediately obvious to foreign specialists watching. Ironically, Blum points out that this tendency to conceal and manipulate actually increased speculation in Western literature, sometimes causing scholars to presume that Soviet demographic indicators were worse than they actually were.³⁹

Figure 8. Mortality per thousand of the population in the report before and after censorship

(Source: table compiled by author from GARF, f. 603, op. 1, d.228, ll. 1-141.)

	USSR	USA	England	France
Standardised	7.3	7.5	6.9	6.9
Unadjusted	7.5	9.5	11.9	11.9

The issue of data not being cleared for publication often reoccurs in sources from the time and is highlighted by this case. It shows how refusing to publish data was a strongly ingrained default with government agencies. In later years Volkov noted that at this time

³⁸ GARF, f. 603, op. 1, d. 228, ll. 135-141ob.

³⁹ Blum, A., *Rodit'sia, zhit', i umeret' v SSSR*, p. 39.

demographers used to joke that TsSU leaders could say no to suggestions even before they'd been uttered.⁴⁰ At times this produced farcical situations. As a side note in his feedback to Merkov, Podiachikh informed him that he would need to take out the population pyramid based on the 1959 census data, which showed age groups as five-year blocks. He said that this data had not been cleared for publication and ordered Merkov to use the openly published data instead.⁴¹ Merkov replied to say that the statistics 'not cleared for publication' were actually from page three of Podiachikh's own book, *Population of the USSR*, published three years previously. In fact, he argued, he couldn't change this data as there was no other openly published data to use.⁴² There is no further comment from Podiachikh preserved in this file so his precise response to this revelation is unclear, but the final report shows a population pyramid with those under twenty aggregated into ten-year age groups to display less detailed information. Clearly despite the data being in open publication by Podiachikh himself, Merkov was still made to change it.

This highlights two phenomena. Firstly, the default when dealing with politically sensitive information was to conceal it in some way, even if this was unnecessary. Secondly, those acting as censors were especially wary of population statistics when they were published for an international audience and felt they had to be particularly careful. Podiachikh had evidently deemed the pyramid safe for public scrutiny at one time, but as head of the census he will have been constantly looking at various different pyramids, most of which were secret and did evidently not instantly recognise this version of the data. Upon seeing detailed statistics, his impulse was automatically to refuse to show them in the United Nations report translated into English. The vast majority of data was never published, so that it was not actually unreasonable of him to assume such data would not have been cleared for publication. Quite possibly he would even have advised against publication of that specific pyramid in a book written by another demographer, although it is of course impossible to know.

Merkov's paper was one of twelve papers given by the Soviet delegation at the 1965 conference. Its journey from first draft to the finished product is indicative of the process

⁴⁰ Volkov, A. G., "Sushchestviet li nauka 'Demografiia'? K 95-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia A. Ia. Boiarskogo (1906-1985)".

⁴¹ GARF, f. 603, op. 1, d. 228, l. 3.

⁴² GARF, f. 603, op. 1, d. 228, l. 5.

each of these papers went through before being presented to the world. The Soviet authorities wanted to demonstrate that their national community was populous, healthy, and virile. Proving this, they believed, would show others that the Soviet project had been a success. Poorer nations were encouraged to visualise their own future if they chose socialism through the success of the Soviet Union. For this reason, it was not good enough just to be equal to capitalism for Soviet leaders. Only clear superiority would influence other nations to follow their path to socialism, affording the Soviet Union hegemonic power through strategic alliances. In this environment, conferences became about performing socialist achievements on the world stage and documents were carefully crafted to persuade, deceive, and promote.

Education: The Interregional Demographic Training and Research Programme at Moscow State University

Cooperation on demography was a key soft-power tool for the USSR to extend its influence, and knowledge exchange became an important part of this. From the mid-1970s, courses on demography were set up for foreign specialists from developing countries at Moscow State University under Valentei's leadership as the Scientific Director. The courses were run at the request of the United Nations and in partnership with its Population Council. The Soviet government used these courses to spread the Marxist-Leninist worldview by teaching the Soviet perspective on population issues. Party documents note how the programme aimed to 'develop socialist orientations' in these specialists who would then develop 'socialist states' in their own countries.⁴³ Party evaluations of this programme preserved in the archives reveal quite how directly Soviet leaders aimed to influence the running of other countries, but the set up and management of the programme also tells us much about the functioning of the Soviet state and the way population politics was used by different factions of the state.

Interestingly, many senior party figures were initially against the idea of training foreign specialists and, fearing the courses were more trouble than they were worth, used various tactics to stall the programme. The international population arena meant the Soviet Union was often forced to engage with international demography. If it did not, the West, led by America, would be the only major player shaping population debate, and so the Soviet Union generally engaged in order to demonstrate its influence as a superpower, even when leaders had misgivings about demography. In this case, Valentei was key to the success and

⁴³ RGAE, f. 365, op. 9, d. 2868, l. 10.

establishment of the programme and used his personal connections abroad to bypass some of the Soviet bureaucracy. In contrast to the censorship explored in the previous section, this episode shows that population specialists were not always mere puppets controlled by party leaders. In the right circumstances they could actively use their knowledge, skills, and connections to set the agenda for their own benefit, provided their goals were not too far from those of the Politburo leaders.

The educational programme was formally known as the United Nations Interregional Demographic Training and Research Programme in Population and Development Planning. It saw ‘middle and high level government officials from developing countries’—who already had some expertise in population—spend three to four months in Moscow making academic and policy connections and learning from Soviet experts.⁴⁴ Courses were conducted in English and covered theory and methodology, the demographic aspects of economic planning, and population policy making.⁴⁵ Between 1977 and 1981 one hundred people from thirty-five different developing countries were trained.⁴⁶ The programme was deemed a success. A 1985 UN statement on its adoption declared the following:

The interdisciplinary character of the course and its empirical content are distinctive. And, the continued high rate of nominations of individuals by governments of developing countries to the training programme is evidence of its wide acceptance, and a general recognition of its practical value. The United Nation system, to fulfil the provisions of the World Population Plan of Action, is committed to supporting research and training programmes as have been established in the University.⁴⁷

The programme was also beneficial for Soviet diplomatic aims. The Soviet report on its progress stated: ‘The educational plan was developed such that in the course of their study, participants would become familiar with the main position of the Marxist-Leninist theory of population.’ The goal was to ‘neutralise their possible perceptions’ and convert them to socialism, in the hope they would then spread socialism to their own countries.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, its initial set up caused some controversy within the Soviet government. It was a bold step forward for demography in the USSR which had not previously been so actively

⁴⁴ Quote: Archive of the United Nations Development Programme, DP/1986/40. Report of the Executive Director on the Programmes of the Regional and Interregional Demographic Training and Research Centres. (1986), p. 10. For background information, see RGAE, f. 365, op. 9, d. 2626. UN report on the Interregional Demographic Training and research Programme in Population and Development Planning at MGU. (1978), ll. 1-21.

⁴⁵ "Population Training in Moscow", *Population Index* 44, no. 4 (1978): 618-618.

⁴⁶ Salas, R. M., *Reflections on Population*, p. 295.

⁴⁷ Salas, R. M., *Reflections on Population*, p. 295.

⁴⁸ RGAE, f. 365, op. 9, d. 2868, ll. 1-16.

involved in international population matters. Once Soviet demographers were tasked with so important a task as the development of socialist states abroad, this afforded them and their institutions prestige, larger budgets, and required them to maintain expertise, so that Soviet demography did not fall too far behind that of other countries.

At the Second World Population Conference in 1965, Valentei established a strong relationship with the then head of the Central Statistical Administration of Yugoslavia, Milos Matsura.⁴⁹ Matsura proved to be an important ally and soon became Director of the Population Department at the UN Secretariat. It was Matsura's invitation that allowed Valentei to visit more than ten of the leading scientific centres for the study of population in the USA in 1970.⁵⁰ Such trips provided an important insight into the scientific progress made by other countries, and attendees brought new ideas back to the USSR. One of Valentei's former graduate students noted how Valentei sneaked back a box of different types of contraceptives to show the department, and they all marvelled at the different coloured pills designed to help women keep track of their dosage.⁵¹ She claims that his work with the UN was vital for advancing the status of demography within the USSR because of the attention it drew to MGU and the discipline as a whole. Working with Valentei, it was Matsura who first approached the Soviet government in 1970 with the request to organise courses on demography and social development using the Population Centre at MGU.⁵²

The invitation from outside of the Soviet Union was important because it meant the government was forced to seriously consider the proposal and could not just ignore it as it might have done had it come from a Soviet academic. The USSR Foreign Ministry sent the UN proposal to the International Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU.⁵³ There it was championed by one of the Department's Deputy Directors, Professor Rotislav Aleksandrovich Ulianovskii. Ulianovskii was a Professor at the Academy of Sciences and close acquaintance of Valentei, who acted as his patron within the patronage networks that characterised the Brezhnev era Soviet Union.⁵⁴ The proposal was signed off by B. N.

⁴⁹ Sudoplatov, A. P., "Politicheskie kulisy..." p. 8.

⁵⁰ Sudoplatov, A. P., "Politicheskie kulisy..." p. 8.

⁵¹ Bakhmetova, G. S., "Na kafedre byl malen'kii i družnyi kollektiv," in *D. I. Valentei v vosnominaniakh kolleg i uchenikov*, eds. Rotova, R. S. and Denisenko, M. B. (Moscow, 2006), p. 22.

⁵² Sudoplatov, A. P., "Politicheskie kulisy..." p. 8.

⁵³ Sudoplatov, A. P., "Politicheskie kulisy..." p. 9.

⁵⁴ Sudoplatov, A. P., "Politicheskie kulisy..." p. 9. On patronage networks Willerton, J. P., *Patronage and Politics*; Tompson, W., *The Soviet Union under Brezhnev*.

Ponomarev, Head of the Department and Central Committee Secretary responsible for relations with non-communist countries.⁵⁵ Despite this, Valentei's colleague at MGU, Sudoplatov, recalled opposition, saying that although nobody dared to contradict Ponomarev openly, 'spokes were actively inserted into the wheels' (*spiltsy v kolese stali aktivno vstavliat*) at all stages, presumably—though Sudoplatov does not directly say—by bureaucrats.⁵⁶

In February of 1974, Valentei left to spend a month in Cuba, leaving Sudoplatov in charge of the MGU Population Centre at a time when the Central Committee faced some particularly potent internal conflicts. Despite the programme seemingly going ahead, he suddenly received word that the Ministry for Education had 'no record' of the letter signed by Alla Petrovna Shaposhnikova, the Deputy Minister for Education, which gave permission for the courses to be held at MGU. Sudoplatov was called into the office of the MGU Rektor, R. V. Khokholov, and promptly told off for violating the rules on preparing documents for the CPSU Central Committee and for deceiving the Ministry of Higher Education. Fortunately, he had previously placed copies in the Foreign Ministry and at MGU, and, having the foresight to take the copies with him to this meeting, he remembers 'to his [Khokholov's] amazement, I laid before him a copy of that same letter.'⁵⁷ After Kholokhov turned pale, Sudoplatov recounts how the Director turned the whole situation around, using his own position on the Revision Committee of the Central Committee to accuse the Central Committee Science Department of major failings. The Science Department, characterised by scholars as an ideological rather than a scholarly organisation, was well known as a stronghold of conservative bureaucrats and had a difficult relationship with the Academy.⁵⁸ Shortly after this, many of the old curators on the Committee who had long been at loggerheads with Khokholov were removed. Sudoplatov described the period as an interesting but nerve-wracking time with much intrigue.

The events described by Sudoplatov show how decisions were fought over by different branches of government and agencies. Patronage networks were enormously important in this, and as scholars have argued, usually transcended institutional boundaries as people

⁵⁵ Ponomarev's role: Hough, J. F. and Fainsod, M., *How the Soviet Union is governed*, p. 411.

⁵⁶ Sudoplatov, A. P., "Politicheskie kulisy..." p. 9.

⁵⁷ Quotes and account: Sudoplatov, A. P., "Politicheskie kulisy..." pp. 10-11.

⁵⁸ Fortescue, S., *The Communist Party and Soviet Science*, pp. 76-78.

dragged their departments into issues that were really related to their personal network rather than their institution.⁵⁹ Sudoplatov only realised later, for example, that Khokholov had managed to spin the situation to his personal advantage and settle an old score.⁶⁰ International contacts were really important in such situations because they acted externally to these politics. Valentei's contacts at the United Nations meant that he could put pressure on the Soviet government through key foreign actors. Without these actors, it is unlikely the programme at MGU would have gone ahead, even with his support in the Foreign Ministry.

We do not know for certain why some members of the governing bodies opposed the programme, but it likely connected to the status and influence it would afford the Population Centre at Moscow State University. Scholars of Soviet decision-making note how granting universities and other professional institutions a role in a problem solving had unintended consequences. In order to fulfil their role, these professionals required institutions, funding, freedom to travel, and access to foreign information sources. Once this had been granted it was difficult to reverse and could become a self-propelling cycle of independent advocacy for these professionals.⁶¹ Upon return from his trip to America in 1970, Valentei wrote a report for various government agencies with a description of American population research centres and his conclusions about the serious lag in domestic demography.⁶² It provoked a sharp reaction, particularly in the Science Department of the Central Committee, which at that time was led by neo-Stalinist Sergei Pavlovich Trapeznikov.⁶³ Affording power and influence to any particular group or institution was always risky—as this example shows—because it could be used to portray others in a bad light. Decisions to allow new projects could snowball, to the detriment of those who allowed them, and create additional headaches for branches of government.

The established programme at MGU became quite popular with the government who began to see it as an important tool for extending their influence. While the UN report on the project for leaders simply told of the programme's goal of helping developing countries, the Soviet

⁵⁹ Willerton, J. P., *Patronage and Politics*.

⁶⁰ Sudoplatov, A. P., "Politicheskie kulisy..." p. 11.

⁶¹ Gustafson, T., *Reform in Soviet Politics*; Griffiths, F., "Images, Politics, and Learning in Soviet Behaviour Toward the United States" (Doctoral thesis, Columbia University, 1972).

⁶² Sudoplatov, A. P., "Politicheskie kulisy..." pp. 8-9.

⁶³ Sudoplatov, A. P., "Politicheskie kulisy..." pp. 8-9; Fortescue, S., *The Communist Party and Soviet Science*, p. 76.

report reveals more self-interested goals.⁶⁴ The report stated that the programme had been successful in its aims of helping participants value Marxist-Leninist population theory and developing socialist orientations in them. The end goal, clearly stated as the development of socialist states in the third world, was seen as a likely outcome by Party.⁶⁵

The establishment and running of the United Nations Programme shows how significant global coordination on population matters was for the development of demography in the Soviet Union. Under the Soviet system no research could take place without government interest or funding, and parts of the Party were strongly against the development of population research.⁶⁶ The UN programme provided a reason for the government to be interested, namely that better demographers who worked in an impressive, world leading Population Centre were more likely to be able to influence foreign trainees. If demography on the world stage was about giving a superpower-worthy performance, then demographic research should be cutting-edge and not limited to a few academics hidden away in other departments. This worked as a form of ‘skin in the game’ for the government, who needed to allow more research freedoms and representation at international events in order to reap the benefits of using demography as soft power. If the government refused to run the programme, then a neighbouring country would do so instead and gain the benefits that the Soviet Union was giving up. Though Party leaders ultimately had the final say, politically savvy specialists used their connections to influence the government enhance the status of their specialism.⁶⁷ Education was an important diplomatic area within international population politics, and as this programme demonstrates, Soviet leaders used it to their advantage to spread the Party’s vision around the world.

Strategic Aims: Who decides the Soviet position? Letters from Podiachikh on overpopulation

In matters of population, top Party leaders set out broad overall aims. For example, Khrushchev stated ‘The more people we have, the stronger our country will be’.⁶⁸ Brezhnev continued this line and also claimed that life expectancy was ‘one of the most important’

⁶⁴ RGAE, f. 365, op. 9, d. 2626, ll. 1-21.

⁶⁵ RGAE, f. 365, op. 9, d. 2868, ll. 1-16.

⁶⁶ On the dependence of Soviet specialists for government interest and approval see: Gustafson, T., *Reform in Soviet Politics*, pp. 91-92.

⁶⁷ On the significance of professional reputation in this context: Little, R. D., *Governing the Soviet Union*, pp. 180-182.

⁶⁸ Cited in: DiMaio, A. J., "Evolution of Soviet Population Thought." p. 166

indices by which a nation is judged.⁶⁹ No demographer or bureaucrat could then declare, for example, that the Soviet Union should not be aiming for population growth or that life expectancy was not important. The finer points, however, were left to specialists and lower level politicians who debated what the Soviet position was. They sometimes came to opposing conclusions. When there was no clear top down directive, leaders allowed specialists free reign, but would intervene if they thought that scholars had made the wrong choices.⁷⁰ State policy was often conflicted and amounted to what people believed it to be rather than any recorded truth. Lower levels of government were made up of key actors who attempted to influence the process within certain boundaries.

One of the major global debates at this time was whether high birth rates would lead to an unsustainable number of people on the planet, and, if so, what should be done to avoid this. The argument that population growth should be curtailed for the benefit of all was first put forward by English Cleric Thomas Malthus in his 1789 book *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. He argued that increased food supply enabled population growth, which in turn led to poverty and hunger. To avoid large-scale misery and famine in the future, humanity should aim to reduce births through later marriage and what he termed 'moral restraint' among the working classes.⁷¹ Referred to as Malthusianism or neo-Malthusianism, the idea that population growth should be limited to preserve resources was strongly rejected by Soviet elites. For specialists, key red lines were set to the overpopulation debate which they could not safely transcend. Firstly, the USSR could not be requested to reduce its own population growth. Secondly, because Malthus had wanted to limit the fertility of the working classes specifically, Malthusianism globally was seen as anti-Soviet.⁷² Any discussion of limiting population growth needed to demonstrate that it was different to Malthusianism. Thirdly, support for contraception could not be too strong because it would highlight a lack of domestic provision.

To convince developing nations to adopt communism, or, if not fully, to at least align themselves with Soviet interests, Soviet leaders needed to demonstrate that they offered a distinct and separate future from American capitalism in all ways. This future needed to be

⁶⁹ Brezhnev, L. I., *Lenskim kursom*, 6, p. 680, pp. 629-630.

⁷⁰ On Party leaders stepping in where specialists got it wrong see discussion by: Hahn, J. W., "Soviet Sociologists."; Little, R. D., *Governing the Soviet Union*, p. 182.

⁷¹ Gilbert, G., *Introduction to An Essay on the Principle of Population* (Oxford, 2008), p. xviii.

⁷² Discussion of this issue: Desfosses, H., "Population as a Global Issue: The Soviet Prism."

superior. In matters of population, this meant opposing the views of capitalist countries and offering an alternative vision. By 1970, both the Soviet Union and its enemies were forced to recognise that rapid population growth in developing countries was a real and significant problem. For American specialists, however, the issue was a global one; further global population growth was unsustainable for environmental reasons.⁷³ Developing countries bore the brunt of the growth and therefore needed the most help, but other nations should also aim to have fertility rates around replacement level. For Soviet leaders and demographers, however, the issue was a national one. Particular countries had problems that were specific to their circumstances. There was no legitimate reason why the USSR with all its geographical space, should not have families of three or four children. The same applied to many other developing countries.⁷⁴

The issue, therefore, was how to reduce population growth in countries where average families still numbered six or seven children. The United States favoured widespread programmes of birth control; in 1965 President Johnson claimed that every five dollars invested in birth control was worth one hundred dollars put into economic development.⁷⁵ Women, it was assumed, would not continue to have endless pregnancies if given the option not to. Childbearing and rearing was hard work, stretched family resources, and entrenched poverty.⁷⁶ The Soviet experts, on the other hand, stressed that this approach was doomed to failure, and that economic development was the only way to reduce population growth. While the population relied on subsistence farming, they argued, the practical need for large families to work the land remained. Without a welfare state, women's participation in a post-industrial workforce, or a reduction in religious dogmatism that opposed contraception, the cultural need for children, particularly male children, would remain. Even if birth control programmes were rolled out, families would not use them to limit their fertility to two children.⁷⁷ The Soviet Union did not totally ignore birth control, just as the Americans did not ignore socio-economic development, but each side placed a substantially different emphasis on the two factors.⁷⁸

⁷³ Hartmann, H. and Unger, C. R., *World of Populations*.

⁷⁴ Smulevich, B. Y., "Demografiia i politika," in *Voprosy demografii*, ed. Volkov, A., G (Moscow, 1970).

⁷⁵ Desfosses, H., "Population as a Global Issue: The Soviet Prism," p. 190.

⁷⁶ Unger, C. R., "Family Planning—A Rational Choice? The Influence of Systems Approaches, Behavioralism, and Rational Choice Thinking on Mid- Twentieth- Century Family Planning Programs," in *A World of Populations: Transnational Perspectives on Demography in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Hartmann, H. and Unger, C. R. (New York, 2014).

⁷⁷ Brackett, J. W., "Marxism Recognizes the Population Problem."

⁷⁸ On the trade-offs, see Desfosses, H., "Population as a Global Issue: The Soviet Prism."

As part of their attempt to raise fertility in the European regions of the USSR, Soviet planners decided not to produce or import contraception for sale domestically. A very small number of condoms existed but were extremely hard to come by, and the majority of Soviet women relied on withdrawal backed up by abortion, a topic discussed in detail in chapter five.⁷⁹ Supporting widespread programmes of birth control abroad was somewhat at odds with this domestic policy. Furthermore, the Soviet offer of economic development, which would also reduce population growth, was attractive to many leaders of developing countries who had doubts about the American programmes. The official report back to the Party from a 1969 population seminar in Copenhagen reads:

In unofficial discussions taking place after the lectures, representatives of those developing countries such as Chile, Peru, Trinidad and Algeria expressed their belief in the futility of the efforts being made by advocates of family planning policies in developing countries, believing that the backward economic and cultural development of the countries was a barrier along with religious superstition and illiteracy.⁸⁰

The document advised that most developing countries were unaware of the Soviet position on birth control, and that they should propagate it more widely because it was popular with the leaders of these nations, especially those who were socially conservative.⁸¹ Slight differences in population policies were paraded in front of representatives of developing countries to try and gain influence.

As Permanent Representative of the USSR to the United Nations Population Commission, Podiachikh enjoyed considerable freedom, including travel to the United States and undertaking official correspondence on behalf of the Foreign Ministry. In 1970 he was also promoted to Deputy Director of the TsSU under Starovskii and had considerable influence. He held strong orthodox views on the unacceptability of birth control and Malthusianism. In 1970 William Draper, US delegate to the United Nations Population Commission, wrote to Podiachikh urging him to consider the dangers of endless population growth and to take part in the United Nations programme aiming to reduce population growth to zero by the year

⁷⁹ David, H. P., Joanna, S., and Anastasia, P.-V., *From Abortion to Contraception*; Nakachi, M., "Liberation Without Contraception?."

⁸⁰ RGAE, f. 1562, op. 46, d. 2241. Report on Soviet participation in the International Seminar on Statistics in Demographic Studies in Copenhagen. (1969), l. 3.

⁸¹ The term 'socially conservative' is used here to refer to cultures where contraception was disapproved of for religious reasons or because it threatened to weaken the hierarchy of men over women.

2000.⁸² In his reply, Podiachikh refused to allow the Soviet Union to take part. He blamed US policy for the world's problems, pointing out that 200 billion dollars were spent on arms and war every year.

If the resources that have been spent on wars in the last 100 years had gone on creating material wealth to improve people's lives and raise their cultural level there would not be such problems in the world, which progressive people worry about, and there would be no necessity of creating such an organisation as that which you call [The Committee for the Management of the] Population Crisis.⁸³

In his reply he argued that much of the problem was caused by American companies taking advantage of developing countries for profit. Instead, America should spend the money used for wars on education, healthcare, and development.⁸⁴

Several things are important to note about his response. Firstly, though the Soviet Union had now recognised that overpopulation existed as a theoretical concept, the idea that a *Soviet* fertility rate of between two and three births per woman was too high was completely at odds with the leadership's desire for population growth. This issue occurred repeatedly at international events, Soviet delegate G. Zeinalov told those at the 1974 UN Amsterdam Symposium that:

The population density of the USSR is on average 11 people per sq. kilometre, while in a range of developed counties this is 300-400 people. I don't understand why our country should reduce this. We are for population growth and an increase in fertility. The Soviet Union has the right to determine its own policy.⁸⁵

Part of Podiachikh's rejection of the programme was therefore a strong rejection of the notion that the USSR's own population growth should be zero. Secondly, while many of his points are essentially sound, they of course ignore the actions of the Soviet government, which also stockpiled arms and instigated conflicts at the expense of education and healthcare spending. The spirit of his reply is one of untrusting hostility. Unlike the desire for collaboration that the MGU case study showed, his answer shows how acting on behalf of the Soviet state, he used the arena of population politics to oppose and compete with the United States.

Many historians have argued that the history of the population control movement is a global one, which to be understood in its entirety must be considered outside the framework of the

⁸² RGAE, f. 1562, op. 57, d. 509, ll. 3-8.

⁸³ RGAE, f. 1562, op. 57, d. 509, l. 35.

⁸⁴ RGAE, f. 1562, op. 57, d. 509, ll. 32-46.

⁸⁵ GARF, f. 663, op. 1, d. 413. Report on attendance at the United Nations Population and Human Rights Symposium, Amsterdam 21st - 29th January. (1974), ll. 1-27.

Cold War.⁸⁶ These scholars stress that for many countries in the Global South, which were most heavily involved in population reduction, the Cold War was simply a background event to which they paid little attention. Many developing countries were happy to take aid wherever they could, playing both sides in the conflict and pursuing their own distinct aims.⁸⁷ Interaction and development also occurred between countries and institutions which sat outside the traditional East/West dichotomy, such as the Catholic Church and its role in Chilean and Peruvian population control, or demographic knowledge exchanges between India and China, to name but a few examples.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, however the events appeared from a global standpoint, the Soviet government was obsessed by its gains and losses in a Cold War context. Despite developing countries repeatedly demonstrating their ability to choose a third path not offered by the USSR or the USA, archives show the Soviet government saw foreign affairs almost exclusively through this frame. The issue of overpopulation was an area where Soviet elites believed they could outshine the Americans and appear more attractive to developing countries via their promise of socio-economic development. By perceiving the world in this way, the Soviet government (along with America) brought the Cold War to the population control movement and imposed this artificial agenda on the struggle for population reduction, however poorly it may have fitted.

Podiachikh's reply to Draper makes the Soviet position appear clear-cut, but his reports back to his bosses at the Foreign Ministry about his UN work reveal a more complex picture. He frequently wrote with anguish about developments in Soviet population politics but seemed unable to persuade his superiors to publicly support him. On 12th May 1969, Podiachikh wrote to the Deputy Foreign Minister (V. M. Vinogradov), the Vice Chairman of the State Committee of the Council of Ministers of the USSR for Science and Technology (D. M. Gvishiani), The Head of the TsSU USSR (V. N. Starovksii), and the Deputy Permanent Representative of the USSR to the UN (A. V. Zakharov). He warned that Malthusians from the UN and other organisations, financed by monopolies, were trying to deceive developing countries with birth control 'to the detriment of measures aimed at increasing the pace of

⁸⁶ For this type of argument, see Bashford, A., *Global Population: History, Geopolitics, and Life on Earth*; Connelly, M., *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population*.

⁸⁷ Wallenstein, P., "American-Soviet Detente: What Went Wrong?"; Westad, O. A., *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*.

⁸⁸ Ghosh, A., *Making It Count: Statistics and Statecraft in the Early People's Republic of China*; Mooney, P., "'Overpopulation' and the Politics of Family Planning in Chile and Peru: Negotiating National Interests and Global Paradigms in a Cold War World," in *A World of Populations: Transnational Perspectives on Demography in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Hartmann, H. and Unger, C. R. (New York 2014).

socio-economic development'.⁸⁹ If countries felt American birth control alone would be effective to raise wellbeing, large scale investment programmes suggested by the USSR might seem difficult and unnecessary. Podiachikh urged his bosses to prepare a memorandum from the USSR government to be shared with scholars stating the Marxist-Leninist position that population growth could be reduced with economic and cultural development.

The reason for his particular concern appeared to be his fellow population specialists. He claimed this memorandum was 'extremely' necessary because of recent publications, particularly a debate that appeared on the pages of *Literaturnaia gazeta* in 1966, in which scholars had argued that overpopulation was a serious issue. He claimed the debate,

...With a clear bias in favour of birth control disorientated many scholars in the USSR and progressive foreign scholars and gave the bourgeois press the opportunity to distort the position of the party and government of the USSR on this issue.⁹⁰

His letter further objected to an article given for publication in foreign languages to the magazine *Sputnik* in April 1968:

The compilation of materials in this magazine appeared below the headline 'Birth control: yes or no?'. Immediately after the title, an arch-Malthusian bullies the reader, saying that soon the population of the earth will be 1000 billion (against 3.5 billion now). When inserting this tendentious compilation, the editorial office of the journal knew that in September 1967 the Representative of the Soviet Council of Ministers, Comrade Kosygin, sent D. Rockefeller a negative answer to the request to collaborate on the birth control policies.⁹¹

Though superficially his concern was enemy states, in reality it appears to have been the changing position on birth control (for use abroad only) of scholars and the press, which was being looked kindly upon by Soviet leaders. Desfosses argues this gradual acceptance became necessary when many developing nations themselves became convinced of the benefits of contraception. *Domestic* birth control was unacceptable, but senior leaders began to accept it as a compromise in developing countries, not wanting to alienate potential allies.⁹²

On 10th September, Podiachikh wrote again to Gvishiani and Vinogradov to restate his views and request the memorandum he had asked for in May, which clearly had not been issued.⁹³

⁸⁹ RGAE, f. 1562, op. 57, d. 400, l. 59. Full Letter: ll. 51-60

⁹⁰ RGAE, f. 1562, op. 57, d. 400, l. 59.

⁹¹ RGAE, f. 1562, op. 57, d. 400, ll. 59-60.

⁹² Desfosses, H., "Population as a Global Issue: The Soviet Prism," p. 193.

⁹³ RGAE, f. 1562, op. 57, d. 400, l. 86.

This time he went further, enclosing an eight-page report entitled ‘On some incorrect opinions of individual USSR scholars on the role of Malthusian policies of birth control’.⁹⁴ In the report he specifically named Urlanis, Sonin, Arab-Ogly, Gerasimov, and Valentei. Apart from Sonin, all the specialists named had been involved in the *Literaturnaia gazeta* debate on overpopulation of 1965. This debate, which took place on the pages of the newspaper over the course of a year, saw scholars debunk the communist idea that overpopulation was a fallacy which should always be opposed.⁹⁵ Experts argued that overpopulation of the earth was indeed possible, if far off, and that resources needed to be carefully managed. Podiachikh was only of one two scholars to argue the opposite, and his opinion was rather buried under the overwhelming number of articles by his opponents. Unsurprisingly, each of the scholars named in this subsequent report had held an opposing view to Podiachikh.

Podiachikh claimed that the demographers he listed had mislead the USSR representatives in international organisations, writing, ‘a statement of the government of the USSR would show that these opinions have nothing in common with Marxist-Leninist theory from the point of view of either the Party or the government of the USSR.’⁹⁶ After using many quotations to prove that Lenin had disapproved of contraception, he discussed Malthusianism, asking ‘do some of our scholars not act even worse (knowingly or unknowingly)?’.⁹⁷ He accused them of trying to divert Soviet healthcare aid for developing countries into contraception, while writing that Urlanis and Gerasimov were deliberately distorting the facts to achieve a policy focused on birth control that did not involve socio-economic development.

The denunciation was quite astonishing in its claims, which had little basis in fact and twenty years previously would almost certainly have resulted in the arrest and imprisonment of his colleagues. Neither Urlanis nor Gerasimov showed any desire to prevent socio-economic development in poor countries, nor is there any evidence they wanted to divert healthcare aid. Most telling are Podiachikh’s final comments. After complaining about Valentei’s conference paper, saying it was ‘of the level of a lecture for students’, he wrote that Americans were asking him at conferences why other Soviet experts disagreed with him.⁹⁸ Evident in these words is his intense sense of embarrassment and anger that he was being undermined by

⁹⁴ The report itself: RGAE, f. 1562, op. 57, d. 400, ll. 87-94.

⁹⁵ On this, see Brackett, J. W., "Marxism Recognizes the Population Problem."

⁹⁶ RGAE, f. 1562, op. 57, d. 400, l. 86.

⁹⁷ RGAE, f. 1562, op. 57, d. 400, l. 89.

⁹⁸ RGAE, f. 1562, op. 57, d. 400, l. 93.

other demographers, particularly those outside of government agencies, some of whom were not even party members.

It is surprising that Podiachikh's letters appear to have met with total silence. Three months later on the 15th December, he sent another update on his work at the UN to the same four officials. He again discussed Malthusianism and stated:

The successful upholding of the Marxist-Leninist theory is made quite hard in recent years because the opinion of the party and government of the USSR on this issues is almost invisible in our press... and at the same time, at scientific meetings, in print and in reports sent to international meetings, some of our scholars state theories which clearly contradict long held scientific conclusions.⁹⁹

This was followed by an exact repeat of his request for the memorandum, this time underlined. After Podiachikh received Draper's letter the following year, he wrote a further missive to his seniors, on 20th October 1970, this time to Gvishiani and N. P. Firiubin, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs. He warned of US Malthusianism, pointing out that Draper had even used the work of Urlanis to claim evidence of 'strong support for family planning' that 'came from the USSR'. Referring to his previous letters and reports he wrote, 'unfortunately, I have not received a reply to a single one of these documents, although for 10 years I have had to carry out the tasks of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs'.¹⁰⁰

As Podiachikh's actions show, it is hard to say exactly what the Soviet state's position on birth control or overpopulation was (beyond the boundaries discussed at the start), because in the absence of a very clear statement from the Politburo, different state actors believed different things. The Soviet position was arguably what other countries understood it to be and in this Podiachikh was losing the battle. He may have been the official representative on population, but he was not the only person sent to conferences and United Nations events. To his dismay, foreign scholars saw the opinions of other demographers as equally indicative of the Soviet position as his own. By not objecting to their more nuanced statements and publications, indeed, by allowing press articles on the issue to be translated and sent to foreign media outlets, senior Party leaders demonstrated implicitly that they accepted the position of other demographers.¹⁰¹ The issue shows that contestation among key actors at a

⁹⁹ RGAE, f. 1562, op. 57, d. 400, ll. 123-124.

¹⁰⁰ RGAE, f. 1562, op. 57, d. 509, l. 32.

¹⁰¹ Novosti Press Agency sent Urlanis and Guzevaty's 1966 *Literaturnaia gazeta* articles, which argued overpopulation was real, to the Population Reference Bureau for publication in the USA. Such a step indicates

lower governmental level determined policy on many population matters. In this case, Soviet policy evolved to mean that birth control should be provided in developing countries with extremely high rates of population growth, but that this should occur in conjunction with economic development. The Soviet Union itself should be left to grow its population in peace.

Conclusion

International population politics was a form of cultural diplomacy used by the Soviet government to extend its influence around the globe. Rather than seeking to shape foreign population dynamics themselves, the Soviet Union and its representatives used the arena of population politics to demonstrate Soviet superpower status, both by showcasing its own success in health and wellbeing, and by assuming leadership positions on population matters through the UN and elsewhere. In doing this, performance was key because Soviet elites saw population politics exclusively through the frame of their struggle against the West. The Soviet Union needed to appear prosperous and knowledgeable to impress potential allies among developing nations, and so leaders used conferences and events to put on a show promoting Soviet policy achievements (bending the truth to do so). By training foreign specialists, the Soviet Union established lasting links with other countries and could justify further involvement in their population and health affairs. Dazzling trainees in Moscow and setting an opposing course to the USA on overpopulation, Soviet leaders hoped those watching would see the universal applicability of communism and would ultimately want to develop socialist states at home as a first step towards communism.

International population politics became useful for the Soviet government, but despite this, evidence shows they were often dragged somewhat unwillingly into the fray on population matters. At times there was no clear policy on an issue and bureaucrats and experts were left to fight it out among themselves. The increasing institutionalisation of population cooperation on the world stage meant that the Soviet Union was forced to take part in population diplomacy or risk developing countries turning to their rivals for support. Nevertheless, some factions of the government disliked any further development in demography. As demography was expert knowledge, the government was forced to rely on experts both as representatives,

the government supported their position: Brackett, J. W., "Marxism Recognizes the Population Problem," p. 171.

and to police other specialists too, which gave technical experts greater prestige and power. The case studies highlight the fractured nature of the Soviet state, which functioned as a competing set of interests. At times, bureaucrats defended their institutions, while at others they supported their patronage networks or defended a particular policy interest. Much of the USSR's response to global issues and willingness to work with other nations was influenced by bureaucrats below the top level of government. These case studies show that while many specialists did have their work tightly controlled, others were able to use their position and connections to influence the government towards their way of thinking. Specialists were both powerless and powerful in different situations, and outcomes were unpredictable. Personal networks and connections were all important and allowed the system to function by speeding along decision making processes and bypassing some of the formal bureaucracy. Connections abroad could be of particular value and put outside pressure on Soviet leaders to take part in population diplomacy to a larger extent.

Chapter Four: What Kind of Babies? Purifying, Enlarging, and Improving the Soviet Population¹

The state has an interest not only in the quantity of its citizens but also in their quality. It matters to the state what sort of population or what sort of manpower is increased.

G. I. Litvinova, *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo*, 1978

In contrast to the previous chapter, which took international population politics as its focus, this chapter addresses domestic population politics; in particular, it shows how and why elites attempted to change the Soviet population through reproduction. One of the most significant demographic developments of the Brezhnev era was differential fertility. The falling fertility of Slavs in contrast to the high fertility of the Central Asian peoples was rapidly reshaping the population of the Soviet Union. Predictions showed that by 1989 ethnic Russians would become a minority in the USSR, a trend that was said to threaten the very nation itself.² Not only the proportion but the actual population of Slavs was projected to shrink due to their low fertility, and by 1976 Brezhnev was urging the study of ‘aggravated’ population problems as one of the major tasks of scientific study.³ For a number of reasons that will be explored in this chapter, neither elite technical experts nor political leaders thought a larger number of Central Asians would be an acceptable substitute for Slavs, and leaders ploughed considerable time and resources into trying to enlarge and ‘improve’ the population by raising the birth rate among Slavs, while suppressing it among Central Asians (and to some extent the peoples of the Caucasus too).

How did politicians and experts come to see controlling rates of reproduction as vital to the success of the nation? In Soviet leaders’ minds, one of the enduring paradoxes of their rule was the fact that they apparently controlled vast swathes of territory in Central Asia and yet seemed to have little influence over the actions of the people who lived there. Revolutionary beliefs that the distinction between nationalities and cultures would fade away were proved incorrect as the decades went by.⁴ In much of Central Asia, loyalties of kin, clan, tribe, and

¹ This chapter has been published in a revised form. See, Lovett, J., ““The Fate of the Nation”: Population Politics in a Changing Soviet Union (1964–1991)”, *Nationalities Papers* (2022): 1-20.

² RGAE, f. 1562, op. 41, d. 1786. Statistical tables by the TsSU showing estimated population statistics for the period 1972-2000. (1975), ll. 1-55.

³ *Materialy XXV s'ezda KPSS*, p. 73.

⁴ Hirsch, F., *Empire of Nations*.

ethnicity continued to take preference over loyalty to the Soviet Union as a whole, making it difficult for the government to fully implement socialist reforms. As the proportion of people from Central Asian republics grew, labour supplies became unbalanced between regions because the centrally planned economy had been designed to match population dynamics from decades before. Leaders feared that in the future it would be precisely those people who were hardest to integrate in the desired way who dominated the Union. Gradually, throughout the 1970s, reshaping the population through reproduction began to seem easier than addressing the economic and social challenges brought by demographic change, let alone than rethinking old prejudices or racism against those from the region. For social observers in the capital, both fertile Central-Asian mothers and reluctant Slavic mothers thus became abstract groupings, whose lives had no significance beyond the categories themselves, which had to be altered in size to protect the nation.

This chapter will examine the impact of differential fertility rates, and Soviet leaders' perception of it as a threat to the security and economic development of the Soviet state from the early 1970s onwards. It will interrogate the ways in which prejudice, economic challenges, and security concerns converged in late Soviet population policy and discourse. I argue that the government's response failed to appreciate the structural and operational issues of state socialism, instead positioning economic problems as an inevitable result of the changing proportion of nationalities in the USSR. Rather than trying to resolve economic concerns, under Brezhnev the Party ultimately attempted to change the population itself, with serious negative consequences for the economy and the relationship with local elites. The chapter will place demographic change in the context of the broader literature about the dissolution of the USSR, which discusses how economic challenges went unresolved, and a lack of faith in the Soviet system among the intelligentsia undermined the legitimacy of the regime. Though this chapter focuses primarily on the Brezhnev era, I will also discuss the results of Soviet population policies enacted in the 1970s and early 1980s, some of which became apparent only during perestroika.

A number of studies have examined the social effects of changing Soviet fertility, but these have been mostly focused on gender and motherhood. Historians like Attwood and Nakachi have explored pronatalist campaigns to boost childbearing, showing how these reinforced

traditional gender roles.⁵ Bridger, for example, shows how heroine mothers became the renewed focus of propaganda in the 1970s as demographic worries intensified.⁶ Studies on the early Soviet Union have demonstrated the fundamental importance of demographic statistics to the formulation of ethnic identities.⁷ Scholars have also identified tensions between ideas of integration and the right to self-determination for nationalities, showing these goals existed simultaneously within Soviet government but were at odds.⁸ In addition, place-specific studies have emphasised the depth of the economic challenges facing certain republics, where the enormous diversity was poorly understood in Moscow.⁹ In areas like the Turkmen Republic, or the Tajik Republic the slow pace of economic development encouraged economists to give up on these nationalities and question their place in the Soviet Union.¹⁰ Toft has also argued for the primacy of the 1979 census in flaring ethnic tensions that are widely acknowledged to have contributed to the dissolution of the USSR.¹¹ In addition, demographers have, of course, also written about the changing ethnic makeup of the USSR, providing detailed statistical analysis on which many of these studies are based.¹²

This chapter aims to build on this literature, using archival evidence to examine how the Moscow elite misdiagnosed some of the economic problems of the Soviet system as demographic problems. In doing so they failed to appreciate the structural and operational issues of state socialism and aggravated tensions with local Republic leaders, both factors

⁵ Nakachi, M., "Liberation Without Contraception?"; Nakachi, M., *Replacing the Dead*; Rivkin-Fish, M., "Anthropology, Demography, and the Search for a Critical Analysis of Fertility: Insights from Russia."; Attwood, L., *Sex-Role Socialization in the USSR*; Desfosses, H., "Pronatalism..."

⁶ Bridger, S., "Heroine Mothers and the Demographic Crisis."

⁷ Cadiot, J., "Searching for Nationality: Statistics and National Categories at the End of the Russian Empire (1897–1917)."; Abramson, D., "Identity Counts, the Soviet Legacy and the Census in Uzbekistan," in *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses*, eds. Kertzer, D. and Arel, D. (Cambridge, 2002); Shearer, D., "Elements Near and Alien: Passportization, Policing, and Identity in the Stalinist State", *The Journal of Modern History* 76, no. 4 (2004): 835–881; Martin, T., *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (New York, 2001).

⁸ Hirsch, F., *Empire of Nations*; Edgar, A. L., "Nation-Making and National Conflict under Communism," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, ed. Smith, S. A. (Oxford, 2014).

⁹ Bremmer, I. and Taras, R., eds. *Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).

¹⁰ Edgar, A. L., *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton, 2004); Kalinovsky, A., *Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan* (New York, 2018).

¹¹ Toft, M., "Death by Demography."

¹² For some of the most notable studies, see Andreev, E. M., Darskii, L. E., and Kharkova, T. L., *Naselenie sovetskogo soiuza: 1922–1991*; Anderson, B. and Silver, B., "Demographic Analysis and Population Catastrophes in the USSR", *Slavic Review* 44, no. 3 (1985): 517–536; Anderson, B. and Silver, B., "Demographic Sources of the Changing Ethnic Composition of the Soviet Union", *Population and Development Review* 15, no. 4 (1989): 609–656; Coale, A., Anderson, B., and Harm, E., *Human Fertility in Russia since the Nineteenth Century*; Blum, A., *Rodit'sia, zhit', i umeret' v SSSR*; Karabchuck, T., Kurno, K., and Selezneva, E., *Demography of Russia: From the Past to the Present* (London, 2017).

which ultimately undermined the stability of the USSR. In believing they could strengthen the Soviet Union through population politics, leaders ultimately weakened it. This chapter will first explain the different patterns of fertility across the USSR. It will then turn to consider why first demographers, then bureaucrats, and ultimately political leaders saw this as a looming crisis, showing that labour imbalances, prejudice, security concerns, and language issues were all involved. The consequence of this perception was that the government aimed to change patterns of reproduction through propaganda, and the third section of this chapter examines this. Finally, I show that the government response placed blame for economic issues on the reproductive behaviour of Central Asian peoples, and in doing so angered many local leaders and other elite commentators, particularly in places where there were pre-existing tensions such as Uzbekistan.

Differential fertility in the USSR

Differences in the birth rates of ethnic groups in the USSR emerged gradually throughout the twentieth century. Initially, rates were relatively similar everywhere. Ransel shows that primitive forms of abortion—at that time the only way of preventing birth—were not acceptable to women who had been born before the revolution.¹³ This generation was still deeply religious, and Ransel shows that both Muslim and orthodox Christian women rejected abortion as an unthinkable sin, instead spending almost all of their fertile lives pregnant. However, each subsequent generation of Slavic women became less religious, and within three generations, Slavic women generally saw abortion as a perfectly acceptable way to limit their fertility, no longer being greatly troubled by religious notions of sin. In 1940 the fertility rate in Russia was 4.25; by 1955 the average was 2.83; by the 1970s it had fallen below the replacement level of 2.1.¹⁴ The cohort of Russian women born in the 1960s were the first to give birth to fewer than 2.1 children on average, and fertility remained below replacement for Slavic women during most of the Brezhnev era.¹⁵

However, similar effects were not seen to the same extent in Central Asia. Religion remained a far more important part of everyday life, and this discouraged abortion, but religion was not the only factor. Worldwide, female education is the factor most strongly correlated with

¹³ Ransel, D. L., *Village Mothers: Three Generations of Change in Russia and Tataria* (2000).

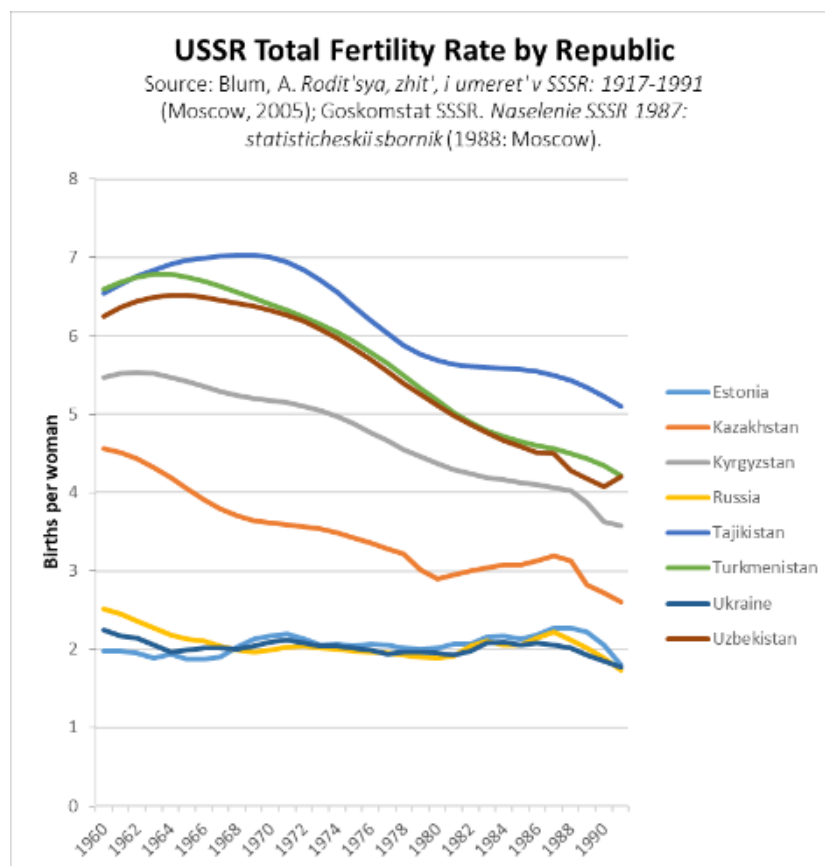
¹⁴ David, H. P., Joanna, S., and Anastasia, P.-V., *From Abortion to Contraception*, p. 230.

¹⁵ Frejka, T. and Zakharov, S., "The Apparent Failure of Russia's Pronatalist Family Policies", *Population and Development Review* 39, no. 4 (2013): 635-647.

lower fertility.¹⁶ In Russia, the Bolsheviks had quickly and successfully dismantled the traditional version of the patriarchal family, educated girls, and sent women into the workplace. By contrast, women's liberation faced much stronger opposition in parts of Central Asia. Family patriarchs continued to dominate the household, and women's participation in education or labour outside the family structure remained low.¹⁷ Without bodily autonomy, financial independence, or an alternative pursuit in life, women lacked both incentives and possibilities to reduce their family size. In addition, Central Asian societies generally remained more rural than other parts of the Soviet Union and so suffered less from the lack of living space that curtailed family sizes in cities.

During the Brezhnev era, much of Central Asia saw fertility rates similar to pre-transition levels. Tajik women, for example, were giving birth to almost seven children on average in the early 1970s while Russians began to have fewer than two. Even in Kazakhstan, which had

Figure 3. (repeated)



¹⁶ Reher, D. S., "Economic and Social Implications of the Demographic Transition", *Population and Development Review* 37 (2011): 11-33.

¹⁷ Edgar, A. L., *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*; Northrop, D., "Languages of Loyalty: Gender, Politics, and Party Supervision in Uzbekistan, 1927-41", *The Russian Review* 59, no. 2 (2000): 179-200.

the lowest fertility rate in Central Asia, mothers were having twice the number of children as their Russian peers.¹⁸ As a result, demographers tended to group republics by “type” of reproduction.¹⁹ Though an effective shorthand, this masked some important differences that can be seen on the graph below. As previously mentioned, an inevitable consequence of these fertility rates was the changing proportion of nationalities in the USSR. In 1959 those living in Russia accounted for 56.3% of the population. By 1989, this had reduced to 51.4%, barely a majority. In contrast, those from the five Muslim republics of Central Asia accounted no longer for 12.8% of the population, but for 19.7%.²⁰

Understanding population change—elite perceptions

On 15th June 1977 Brezhnev gave an interview to French magazine *Le Monde*. Among the questions, the interviewer asked Brezhnev how he imagined the future of the Soviet Union, and whether accelerated population growth in some republics could cause structural changes. He gave the following answer:

As for the growth of the population in certain republics of our country, this phenomenon does not bother us. On the contrary, it pleases us, because it reflects, first of all, a powerful rise in the economic level of our republics, including a huge increase in the well-being of the population of the former outskirts of tsarist Russia, the colossal progress they have made on the path of socialist transformations. All this ultimately strengthens that single entity, which we call a new historical community—the Soviet people.²¹

If Brezhnev was to be believed, then the Soviet government happily accepted the changing proportion of nationalities because all the people of the USSR were Soviets with diminishing distinctions between them. In reality, however, this was far from the case. The knowledge that differentiated birth rates were causing changes in the proportions of the nationalities in the USSR actually caused quite severe anxiety in government ministries. ‘It is impossible,’ one report by Gosplan stated, ‘not to note that one of the most serious consequences of the low birth rate in some republics and the high birth rate in others is the changing composition of nationalities in the USSR.’²² Birth rates were so low in certain regions that despite very high fertility in Central Asia, the Central Statistical Administration was privately predicting

¹⁸ Blum, A., *Rodit'sia, zhit', i umeret' v SSSR*, p. 97.

¹⁹ ‘Type’ here refers to rate, average age, the average gap between births, and other factors that formed a recognisable pattern of childbearing. RGAE, f. 779, op. 2, d. 327. Report by the Central Statistical Administration on ‘methods of grouping the population by type of reproduction’. (1976), ll. 4-29.

²⁰ Anderson, B. and Silver, B., “The Changing Ethnic Composition of the Soviet Union,” p. 165.

²¹ Article re-published in Brezhnev, L. I., *Lenskim kursom*, vol. 6, p. 431.

²² RGAE, f. 99, op. 2, d. 1090, l. 41.

that by 1988 the overall number of newborns would be lower than the year before for the first time, and that this trend would continue.²³ Government agencies warned of economic problems caused by differential fertility between republics, and a 1971 report from Gosplan to the Council of Ministers recommended changing this by ‘influencing public opinion using the means of mass propaganda and education of a social, pedagogical and medical nature’.²⁴

In part, it was expert advice that drove the worries expressed by politicians and bureaucrats. Specifically, those experts living in major Russian cities, and most of all Moscow, regularly raised concerns about differential fertility and appear to have been influential. These experts disagreed somewhat about demographic policy, but together they formed an elite group that nevertheless saw the issue from a Russian point of view. A lively debate occurred within the republics about these problems, but such debates seem to have had little impact on Moscow in this era, rather meeting records from the Central Statistical Administration, policy proposals from Gosplan, and reports by the USSR Academy of Sciences tend to cite the same few Russian specialists time and again. Discussions by Tajik economists, for example, tended to focus on how to draw the Tajik people into industry and raise their standard of living, while those from Moscow focused primarily on moving the population itself to labour shortage areas in Siberia and the North.²⁵ When this failed they focused on changing fertility itself.

As will be seen, Slavic experts differed on how best to even out differential fertility, but unlike specialists in Central Asia, they were united by that need for this, as well as the need to raise the birth rate in general.²⁶ In the specialist press, demographers called on the government to create ‘a social climate that will be conducive to a higher birth rate. To this end’ Riabushkin, Head of the Scientific Council (AN) noted, ‘a vigorous campaign should be launched to propagandize the ideal Soviet family’.²⁷ Individually, demographers proposed all kinds of measures to change fertility levels including increased benefits and also some

²³ RGAE, f. 1562, op. 41, d. 1786, l. 46.

²⁴ RGAE, f. 99, op. 2, d. 1090, l. 42.

²⁵ Kalinovsky, A., "Central Planning, Local Knowledge?: Labor, Population, and the "Tajik School of Economics"", *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 17, no. 3 (2016): 596.

²⁶ Heer, D., "Soviet Population Policy: Four Model Futures," in *Soviet Population Policy: Conflicts and Constraints*, ed. Desfosses, H. (New York, 1981).

²⁷ Riabushkin quoted in Galetskaiia, R. A., "Demograficheskaia politika: ee napravleniia", *Voprosy ekonomiki*, no. 8 (1975): 151.

putative measures.²⁸ They also raised the alarm through scholarly bodies like the Academy of Sciences with reports to the government.²⁹ But why, exactly, were differentiated fertility rates so concerning to specialists and the government?

Anxiety about high birth rates in Central Asia and low Slavic birth rates can be explained in several ways. Firstly, it was informed by prejudice and racism towards people from Central Asia who had different cultures and appearances to Russians. Recent research shows racism in the Soviet Union had its own particular cultural form. In official Party communications, racism was portrayed as both wrong and absent from the Soviet Union entirely—something allegedly only propagated by the West. As Zakharov notes, ‘in spite of all the anti-racist propaganda in the Soviet Union and the condemnation of racism within the framework of presenting fascism as an absolute evil, racism was paradoxically not presented as a social problem in public discourse’.³⁰ Accordingly, outside of propaganda, race was not a topic ever discussed by ordinary Russians.³¹ Yet racism was very much real. Sahadao’s oral history study of Central Asia migrants in the Soviet Union found that ethnic stereotyping and racist slurs towards people of these ethnicities ‘counterbalanced equal citizenship and the friendship of peoples’.³²

According to Brundy, many Russians saw the Soviet Union as ‘essentially a Russian nation-state’ rather than a multi-ethnic empire.³³ Ideas of Russia as the older brother among the nationalities was widespread, positioning the Russians as the guide or teacher and other nationalities (and particularly those from Central Asia) as those needing guidance. In Central Asia, Russian leaders saw religion as an ‘ideological cloak’ which supposedly hid class exploitation and stopped historical progress.³⁴ The ironic result of the nationalities policy was that it created a kind of Russian nationalism whereby ‘a “truly Soviet Russian” believed themselves to be the “most Soviet of all Soviets”’ and accordingly entitled to conduct

²⁸ For a summary from the perspective of the time, see Heer, D., “Fertility and Female Work Status in the USSR.”; Heer, D., “Soviet Population Policy: Four Model Futures.”

²⁹ ARAN, f. 1877, op. 8, d. 519. Report to the Presidium of the USSR Academy of Science on the issue of population. (1966), ll. 1-51; ARAN, f. 1877, op. 8, d. 737. Report: ‘Problems of the population in the USSR in light of the tasks of future planning’. (1968), ll. 1-18; ARAN, f. 1977, op. 2, d. 40. Proposal for the social conception of a longterm plan on problems of the socio-demographic structure. (1971), ll. 1-38.

³⁰ Zakharov, N., *Race and Racism in Russia* (New York, 2015), p. 37.

³¹ Zakharov, N., *Race and Racism in Russia*, p. 38.

³² Sahadeo, J., *Voices from the Soviet Edge*, p. 198.

³³ Brundy, Y., *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State*. (Cambridge, MA, 1998), p. 7.

³⁴ Law, I., *Red Racisms: Racism in Communist and Post-Communist Contexts* (Basingstoke, 2012), p. 145.

civilizing missions elsewhere.³⁵ This attitude was often noted by foreign ambassadors, who commented on the distinctions drawn privately by Soviet politicians between “the Russians” and “the others” in the USSR’, one letter saying that they ‘regarded the Russians at the master race who controlled and should continue to control the USSR as a whole’.³⁶

Controlling the USSR as a whole was a key concern for Russian political leaders in Moscow. Fear that the dominant position of ethnic Russians and Slavs within the USSR was being undermined was a clear motivation for discriminatory demographic policy. Written examples of ethnic slurs or open racism are rare in the archives, but reports sometimes included veiled references to ‘social change’ or wrote that it was problematic that the ‘most culturally developed regions’ had the lowest birth rates.³⁷ If Russians were no longer a majority, it was unclear whether they would continue to hold political power, something became a great source of anxiety. Indeed, discussion of this issue was always tinged with prejudice, and it can be difficult, when looking at sources, to separate this from other concerns.

To write off concern simply as a matter of racism, however, would be to oversimplify the issues involved in changing population structure. The reasons for concern cited in documents also reveal a complex picture—forms of prejudice and legitimate economic concerns overlapped. In the Soviet centrally planned economy uneven fertility meant large excesses of labour resources in some areas and severe shortages in others. Theoretically workers could be sent where needed, but in practice this was difficult. Documents note that those from Central Asia and the Caucasus particularly resisted moving from their native republic, which, as Goskomtrud complained, made it more difficult to use their labour resources in regions of intensive development, particularly in the north and east of the country.³⁸ According to Goskomtrud and Gosplan reports, workers from Central Asia and the Caucasus also mostly worked in light industry and tended to lack the skills needed to move to shortage areas.³⁹ The number of inflexible workers who could not be moved was growing excessively fast in certain areas. In others, low birth rates meant there was no ready supply of new labour. Sahadeo shows Moscow and Leningrad offered sufficient opportunities to be attractive to

³⁵ Zakharov, N., *Race and Racism in Russia*, p. 46.

³⁶ The National Archives of the UK, FCO 28/1616, ENS18/12. Foreign Office documents related to Population in the Soviet Union. (1971), p. 3.

³⁷ RGAE, f. 99, op. 2, d. 1090, ll. 42-43; GARF, f. 5446, op. 102, d. 15, l. 32.

³⁸ GARF, f. 9553, op. 3, d. 719, l. 69.

³⁹ RGAE, f. 99, op. 2, d. 1090, ll. 2-42. See also ARAN, f. 1977, op. 2, d. 40, l. 19.

migrants, but other regions where labour was needed did not.⁴⁰ In particular the north and far east of the RFSFR appeared unattractive not just to the people of Central Asia, but to those from all republics. Climatic conditions were particularly harsh, and the regions tended to lack infrastructure such as nurseries and entertainment venues.⁴¹ Government organisations like Gosplan therefore perceived a high Central-Asian birth rate—which might otherwise have been welcomed in an economy hungry for labour—as unhelpful because the new generation could not be moved to the required areas.

The labour resources issue was further exacerbated by language differences. The data from the 1970 census found only 14.5% of Uzbeks, 15.4% of Turkmens, and 15.4% of Tajiks spoke Russian fluently.⁴² This impeded the movement of excess of labour resources to shortage areas and also caused potential problems for the military. Fears were expressed in one 1977 article in journal *Voprosy filosofii*:

Such unfavourable demographic trends in our country as the drop in the birth rate, the halt in the growth of average life expectancy, the development of irrational migration patterns, the formation of disproportionate age and sex structures in the population in some regions and the systematic rise in the divorce rate all impact the Soviet military. These demographic trends manifest themselves in the size, geographic distribution and **national make-up** of cohorts of conscripts ... Efforts must be made to surmount and offset the consequences of the country's unfavourable demographic situation and to prevent them from affecting the combat capability of readiness of the Soviet military.⁴³

Though the 'national make-up of cohorts of conscripts' should not have mattered, in practice it did. Scholars such as Toft have shown that during the war with Afghanistan, the low level of Russian spoken meant Central Asian conscripts often did not understand instructions and had to communicate with their commander via an interpreter.⁴⁴ 'The language barrier makes it harder to use these contingents in the military,' experts warned in the early 1970s.⁴⁵

Cultural considerations and suspicions also came into play also because the new ethnic mix increased the proportion of conscripts from the most politically alienated periphery regions.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Sahadeo, J., *Voices from the Soviet Edge*.

⁴¹ An issue well known to specialists. See GARF, f. 5446, op. 102, d. 15, ll. 1-121.

⁴² ARAN, f. 1977, op. 2, d. 40, ll. 19-20.

⁴³ Sorokin, A. I., "Vooruzhennye sily razvitogo sotsializma", *Voprosy filosofii*, no. 2 (1977), p. 11. (Emphasis added)

⁴⁴ Toft, M., "Death by Demography," p. 195.

⁴⁵ ARAN, f. 1977, op. 2, d. 40, l. 40.

⁴⁶ Rakowska-Harmstone, T., "Nationalities and the Soviet Military," in *The Nationalities Factor in Soviet Politics and Society*, eds. Hajda, L. and Beissinger, M. (London, 1990).

The Soviet Union had a long history of mistrust of Central Asian recruits, despite them forming part of the military since the start of the Soviet Union. They were initially excluded from conscription in the Second World War along with others deemed 'class enemies' by the Party.⁴⁷ Suspicions were heightened in the late-Soviet period by the conflict in Afghanistan. The Soviet leadership worried that the emergence of Islamism via the Iranian revolution and the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan represented a competing spiritual and moral authority to which the people of Central Asia would be drawn. In Politburo discussions from March 1979, Alexei Kosygin, Chairman of the Council of Ministers, voiced these concerns, asking 'With whom will it be necessary for us to fight in the event it becomes necessary to deploy troops—who will it be that rises against the present leadership of Afghanistan? They are all Mohammedans, people of one belief, and their faith is sufficiently strong that they can close ranks on that basis'.⁴⁸ Having historically been Muslims even if many did not actively practice, it was feared 'Mohammedans' within the Soviet Union would feel loyalties to these places and be encouraged to rise up against leaders in Moscow or defect to join sides with the Mujahedeen, something that was occasionally documented, though far from commonplace.⁴⁹

Language barriers, combined with highly sensitive conflicts therefore caused issues for industry and the military, while uneven labour supplies and a non-mobile population threatened the economy. These barriers, though sometimes imagined more strongly than they existed in practice, were real and did present problems for the Soviet government. It encouraged a situation where Moscow politicians, planners, and bureaucrats saw Central Asian peoples as unreliable, un-Soviet, and inferior as an economic and military resource. As one commentator summarised in the journal *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo* in 1978:

The state has an interest not only in the quantity of its citizens but also in their quality. It matters to the state what sort of population or what sort of manpower is increased - whether these people have a high or low degree of training, whether they have a high degree of mobility or, by virtue of a number of circumstances (including a tendency to have large families or a language barrier), are tied down to a specific region.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Feferman, K., "Between 'Non-Russian Nationalities' and Muslim Identity: Perceptions and Self-Perceptions of Soviet Central Asian Soldiers in the Red Army, 1941–1945," in *Combatants of Muslim Origin in European Armies in the Twentieth Century: Far From Jihad*, eds. Bougarel, X., et al. (London, 2017).

⁴⁸ Documents on the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2001, e-Dossier, no. 4, Transcript of CPSU CC Politburo Discussions on Afghanistan, 17–19 March 1979.

⁴⁹ Suny, R., *The Soviet Experiment: Russia the USSR and the Successor States* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 440–441; Toft, M., "Death by Demography."

⁵⁰ Litvinova, G. I., "Vozdeistvie gosudarstva i prava na demograficheskie protsessy", *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo*, no. 1 (1978): 135.

Elites—both technical and political—quickly came to see issues of skills and mobility as fundamental problems about the ‘quality’ of the population. According to this view, large families were not only less useful because they were the wrong ‘type’ of families, but their high fertility actively played a harmful role in preventing migration.

This perception was important because it affected the way the government tried to address economic and military issues. Rather than aiming to change the skills of the population, the government placed primary emphasis on changing patterns of reproduction. They sought to remedy the situation by changing the population itself. Family and cultural factors, particularly in the 1980s, came to be seen as fixed, meaning the government felt there was no point in trying to develop and upskill Central Asian Republics because their populations would continue to refuse to be drawn into the right areas of industry.⁵¹ Many people from Central Asian Republics certainly did not want to move to areas where they faced prejudice and lack of support. Government attempts to assimilate them into the population were also perceived negatively because rather than incorporating the culture of these peoples, campaigns often sought to erase it.⁵² Nevertheless, the government did little to really address these issues or provide effective incentives and support for career change. Scholars of Tajikistan, in particular, have noted that planners and academics in Moscow often had little understanding of the culture of different Republics in Central Asia. When early attempts to develop industry in Tajikistan failed, the Soviet system was too inflexible to adapt to the needs of the population to resolve economic challenges.⁵³

Expert influence?

As discussed in the first chapter, starting in the early 1960s demographers and other population experts regularly tried to influence the government, encouraging leaders to implement what they termed an ‘active demographic policy’—in other words, a policy that sought to actively shape the demographic structure of the USSR rather than passively responding to population change. Moscow based experts felt that differential fertility was a key problem from the mid-1960s. For example, at the All-Union Conference on Problems of

⁵¹ Kalinovsky, A., *Laboratory of Socialist Development*, pp. 89-90.

⁵² Hirsch, F., *Empire of Nations*; Edgar, A. L., "Nation-Making and National Conflict under Communism."

⁵³ Kalinovsky, A., *Laboratory of Socialist Development*, pp. 63-90; Yusufjonova-Abman, Z., "State Feminism in Soviet Central Asia: Anti-religious Campaigns and Muslim Women in Tajikistan, 1953–1982," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Women and Gender in Twentieth-century Russia and the Soviet Union*, ed. Ilic, M. (London, 2018).

the Population in Central Asia (which took place in Tashkent in 1965), demographers discussed the issue at length, with Valentei highlighting the problems of uneven labour resources and unsuccessful attempts at incentivising migration.⁵⁴ Among the most influential experts in Moscow there was widespread agreement that the government should aim for every family to have three children, evening out fertility rates.

However, the elite cohort of experts disagreed about how best to achieve this and who should pay for measures designed to change reproduction.⁵⁵ From 1948, mothers in the Soviet Union had received a lump sum upon the birth of their second child and for each child after that no matter how many they had. They also received a small monthly allowance for their fourth child and subsequent children. In 1974 an additional set of means-tested payments was introduced which gave a monthly benefit to poor families for their second and additional children. However, a two-parent family with an average income still only received support for their fourth child.⁵⁶ In reality, what this meant is that nearly all support was paid to mothers in Central Asia while the average Russian family received little or no support (a fact echoed by Russian mothers interviewed for this research in the next chapter). Specialists disagreed about how best to achieve their goal. Some like, Kvasha and Valentei, argued all benefits should cease after the third child, discouraging very high fertility.⁵⁷ Others favoured an investment in childcare facilities in Russia to ease the load of working mothers, while encouraging more labour participation in Central Asia as a means to address the problem.⁵⁸ Put forward by Steshenko among others, this option encouraged gender equality. Urlanis and Perevedentsev were among those who favoured a third option with benefits continuing to be paid for higher order births but with some differentiation between regions.⁵⁹ Any number of slightly different recommendations and positions were held by demographers at the time. The differences led to a lively debate throughout the 1960s and 1970s while the government considered the issue.

⁵⁴ Karakhov, M. K. et al., *Trudy konferentsii Srednei Azii (Tashkent 1965)*, Valentei quoted p. 11.

⁵⁵ For a summary of demographer's views from a rare expert who disagreed with them, see Kostin, L. A., *Trudovye resursy SSSR* (Moscow, 1979), p. 125.

⁵⁶ Heer, D., "Soviet Population Policy: Four Model Futures," p. 128.

⁵⁷ Kvasha, A. Y., *Problemy ekonomiko-demograficheskogo razvitiia* (Moscow, 1974), pp. 163-164; Valentei, D. I., *Teori i politika narodonaselenie* (Moscow, 1967).

⁵⁸ Steshenko, V. and Piskunov, V. P., *Demograficheskaiia politika* (Moscow, 1974); Steshenko, V., *Demografiia v sovremennom mire*.

⁵⁹ Both quoted in Heer, D., "Soviet Population Policy: Four Model Futures."

From panic to propaganda—the Soviet government response

The government was predisposed to listen to experts when they urged that something be done to address differential fertility. After all, leaders had already supported pro-natalist policies in previous eras and so targeting reproduction was not new to the Party. In addition, they were running into increasing economic difficulties by the early 1970s that would only be compounded by population change. Though lobbying took time to succeed (as previous chapters showed), by the mid-1970s the government in Moscow became determined to change differential fertility through policy. In 1978, Kosygin wrote to Goskomtrud, Gosplan, the Trades Union Council, the Academy of Sciences, and the Ministries of Law, Health, and Finance, asking them to reconsider the child and maternal benefits set up by the 1944 Family Law and create fresh proposals.⁶⁰ A working group on fertility was established and written proposals were circulated between the above agencies and the Party Central Committee between 1976 and 1980.⁶¹

Proposals on raising fertility recommended all kind of practical changes. For example, among the changes recommended in 1979 were increased benefits, better preschools, increasing living standards for those with children, better housing, increased maternity leave, for women to be banned from dangerous physical labour, improved nursery food, increased leave for mothers with sick children, commissioning studies of infertility, producing more children's shoes, and many more suggestions too.⁶² Reports even included a recommendation for 'the widespread production and promotion of modern contraceptive methods' due to the problem of medical infertility that was sometimes caused by repeat abortions.⁶³ This was an issue frequently noted by specialists of the Brezhnev era who were united in their support. Discussion documents used by the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences from as early as 1966 show demographers like Urlanis arguing that lack of access to contraception actually reduced birth rates by causing health problems.⁶⁴ Experts were, it seems, able to get items on the agenda, though not always into reality.

⁶⁰ GARF, f. 5446, op. 140, d. 1482. Council of Ministers documents on the provision of benefits to workers and employees upon the birth of a child. (1977-1981), l. 1.

⁶¹ GARF, f. 5446, op. 136, d. 1339. Council of Ministers documents on compliance with procedures to create more part-time working opportunities for women with children. (1976-1980), ll. 1-93.

⁶² GARF, f. 9553, op. 3, d. 719, ll. 1-93.

⁶³ GARF, f. 9553, op. 3, d. 719, l. 16.

⁶⁴ ARAN, f. 1877, op. 8, d. 519, ll. 1-51.

What is noticeable about the policy proposals is that most of these ideas were never realised, particularly where they were complex, costly, or required improved or increased production. Production was a particular issue surrounding contraceptive devices like condoms (which are discussed in the final chapter). Propaganda on the other hand was relatively cheap, the political system was well set up to implement it, and the size and intensity of a campaign could be increased very quickly. Accordingly, propaganda became the main method by which the Soviet government attempted to rectify fertility issues. Attwood highlights the fact that rising living standards had done nothing to stop birth rates falling, and this concerned planners, making them sceptical of the effectiveness of increased welfare, further encouraging a propaganda approach.⁶⁵

The working group on fertility set out extensive plans to change public opinion. Goskino and Gosteleradio were told 'to extend the production of documentary and artistic films... on the problems of family life... preparing young people psychologically for family life.' The Ministry of Culture was told to run lectures which would prepare young people for their roles as mothers and fathers. The Academy of Pedagogical Science USSR was 'to systematically put out propaganda on the experience of bringing up a family via the journal *Family and school*'.⁶⁶ This was in addition to recommending propaganda in print, visual forms, and via the health and medical agencies. Any agency that could conceivably influence public opinion was required to and this included population experts who were required to write appropriately for the press. Publications like *Nedelia* informed their readers that traditional and natural gender roles were being lost to the detriment of society.⁶⁷ Later on, in the 1980s, sex education classes began in schools, which encouraged traditional gendered behaviour in the hope this would reverse the demographic situation.⁶⁸

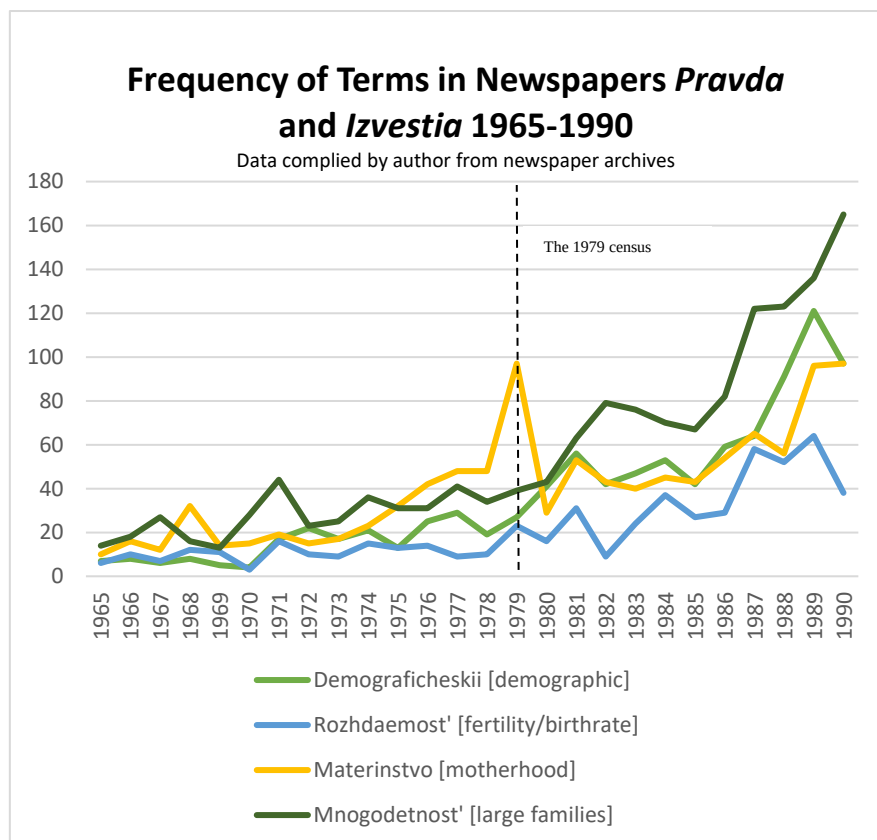
⁶⁵ Attwood, L., *Sex-Role Socialization in the USSR*, p. 7.

⁶⁶ GARF, f. 9553, op. 3, d. 719, ll. 86-93, quote l. 93.

⁶⁷ Aseyev, G., "Preparatory Lessons for Life: Moscow Schools Plan Sex Education Courses," *Nedelia*, 3rd January 1978, p. 11. Translated in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, No. 4, Vol. 30, 22nd February 1978, pp. 18-19.

⁶⁸ Attwood, L., *Sex-Role Socialization in the USSR*; Zdravomyslova, E. and Temkin, A., "The Crisis of Masculinity in Late Soviet Discourse", *Russian Social Science Review* 54, no. 1 (2013): 40-61; Desfosses, H., "Pronatalism...".

The 1979 census was crucial to this moment in history because it intensified the debate by highlighting the changing proportion of nationalities in the USSR. Results of the census were largely unpublished until perestroika, and even then the data was limited to each Republic rather than to specific ethnic groups.⁶⁹ Evidence suggests the campaign to change fertility levels intensified sharply once the results of the census became apparent to elites. Between 1970 and 1979 the population of ethnic Russians was increasing by an average of 1.3% per year. Meanwhile ethnic Tajiks were growing at 4%, Azerbaijanis at 3.6% and Turkmens at 3.8%.⁷⁰ By 1989, ethnic Russians were predicted to be a minority in the USSR. This knowledge intensified the pressure and existing propaganda was quickly stepped up. The graph below shows the frequency of terms relating to childbearing and fertility published in popular Soviet newspapers, demonstrating how discussion in the media of topics related to the campaign increased over a long period as the demographic issues received more and more attention. By their very nature, demographic processes take a long time to reverse, and



⁶⁹ Anderson, B. and Silver, B., "The Changing Ethnic Composition of the Soviet Union."

⁷⁰ Anderson, B. and Silver, B., "The Changing Ethnic Composition of the Soviet Union," pp. 609-612.

evidence shows the population panic which began in the Brezhnev era continued during perestroika.

The propaganda campaign aimed to even out fertility rates by encouraging births in the European Republics and discouraging them in Central Asia and to a lesser extent the Caucasus. Suppression of fertility rates was a delicate topic, and the issue was usually discussed in terms of female emancipation and participation in the labour force. 'Every effort' one demographer's article read 'should be made to promote vocational education for women in the Central Asian Republics and to involve them in social production'.⁷¹ The purpose of encouraging female involvement in the public sphere was to bring down the very high birth rates that characterised the region. The ideal Soviet family, as understood by the

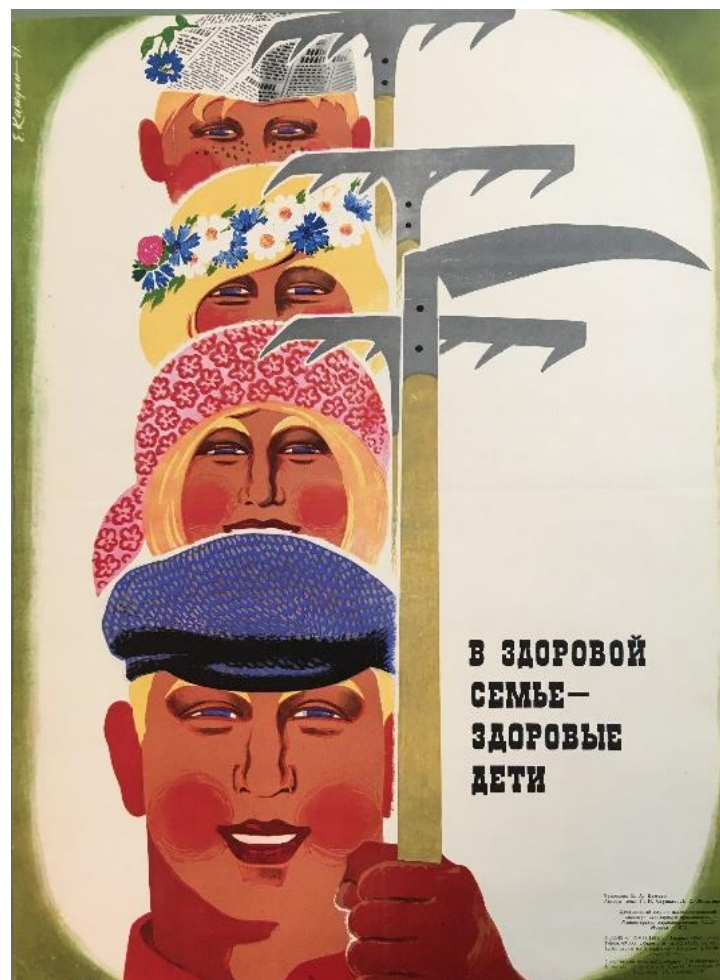


Figure 11. "In a healthy family there are healthy children". Ministry of Health USSR, 1972 poster. Image courtesy of the Russian State Library.

⁷¹ Galetskaja, R. A., "Demograficheskaia politika: ee napravleniia," p. 150.

government and demographers at this time, was the three-child family. If families all had three children, demographers argued, then the population would grow at a steady, economically advantageous rate, while proportions of certain nationalities would remain constant, thus maintaining the status quo in the USSR.⁷²



Figure 12. “Two children is good but three is better”. Ministry of Health USSR, 1973 poster. Image courtesy of the Russian State Library

Three children was not seen as more desirable than four, but more realistic for Slavic women who were then typically only having one or two children.⁷³ Specialists were actively involved in propaganda and wrote regularly for the popular press. Uralnis, for example, proclaimed in *Literaturnaia gazeta* that three children was as the number, which ‘satisfied the interests of

⁷² Not all demographers agreed on the exact path that should be taken. For a summary, see Heer, “Four Model Futures”.

⁷³ Desfosses, H., “Pronatalism...”.

society on the one hand, and the interests of parents on the other'.⁷⁴ Though women in all Republics were meant to be having three children, in practice, most propaganda in this area focused on inhabitants of European Republics either explicitly or implicitly. Posters encouraging families to have three children appeared. These posters warned of the dangers of small families and pushed the Soviet ideal of a multi-child family. Posters featured pictures of blond, Slavic children, implying that the ideal Soviet family was, in fact, ethnically specific.

Articles about the three-child family in the national press echoed this message of an ethnically specific ideal Soviet family. Articles consistently discussed the third child being an additional child, rather than a number at which to cease childbearing; in many cases, Central Asian families were simply excluded from this discourse. *Literaturnaia gazeta* spoke of fining families 'who do not produce a second child within three years of the first', asking 'perhaps that would work?'.⁷⁵ A typical article entitled 'How Many Children to Have' in *Izvestia* from 1979 told readers:

In a big family it is easier to overcome troubles. The older children help the younger ones, they grow, as a rule, into more responsible and independent people, while an only child most often becomes an egotist.⁷⁶

Parents were warned that childbearing was not simply for their own benefit, but that the very future of their nation depended on this.

Indeed, the question of whether to have a second, third or fourth child (why not?) for happy, married couple is not only a personal matter. Here the interests of society are affected, problems of the birth rate, the growth of the population and maybe even, to put it clearly, the fate of the nation.⁷⁷

Missing from any of these articles was an acknowledgement that Central Asian families already had many children, or any kind of encouragement to be more like those from the Central Asian Republics. Articles never asked, for example, what Central Asia was doing right that other republics could learn from. Instead, high birth rates in Central Asia were also portrayed negatively.

⁷⁴ Uralnis, B., "V sem'e odin rebenok," p. 13.

⁷⁵ Alemaskin, M., "Family Despot - What Makes the Only Child System a Poor One," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 14th Feb 1973, p. 11. Translated in The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, No. 19, Vol. 25, 6th June, 1973, p.19.

⁷⁶ Kalyuzhnaia, M., "Skol'ko imeet' detei," *Izvestiia*, 9th March 1979, p. 8.

⁷⁷ Kalyuzhnaia, M., "Skol'ko imeet' detei," p. 8.

The discussion of high Central Asian birth rates was more subtle than that of low Slavic ones. Articles discouraging births in Central Asia often used a medical viewpoint to show why these large families were problematic. *Izvestia* ran discussion pieces with headlines such as 'The Large Family Through Doctor's Eyes'.⁷⁸ In this particular piece, S. U. Sultanova, Vice-Chairman of the Uzbek Republic Council of Ministers was interviewed, and he bemoaned the high fertility rate because of its effects on women's health in the Republic. 'Unfortunately,' he told readers, 'we have not yet overcome the prevailing Eastern attitude that are women the active propagators of the species, which restricts their social status and limits their opportunities to raise healthy children in the spirit of modern-day requirements.' In the Western Republics, being a propagator of the species was said to be a women's natural role, and large families, allegedly, functioned better than small ones. In Central Asia, however, large families were shown as backward and 'Eastern'. Rather than achieving progress, their fertility was said to be halting progress and development.

In the specialist press, certain Russian demographers were more overt as the decade went on. 'The large family is becoming an outmoded demographic type, the support of which cannot be successful and can hardly be desirable,' Litvinova wrote, referring to families of six or seven children still common in Central Asia.⁷⁹ Another report in *Voprosy ekonomiki* explained:

The birth rate in Turkmenia, especially in the rural areas, is very high, approaching the maximum physiological capacity of the republic's women. From the standpoint of economic and social interests, this highly expanded type of population reproduction in Turkmenia and other republics with similar birth rate indices is less than optimal. The present high birth rate makes it virtually impossible for mothers to work.⁸⁰

Various reasons to reduce fertility were provided, from women's health to their absence in the workforce. It should be noted that some of these reasons were valid arguments. Bearing seven or eight children does indeed place significant stress on a woman's body. Yet at the same time, Bridger shows that 1970s magazines aimed at rural Slavic women made heroine mothers (those with ten children) the focus of 'sustained propaganda'.⁸¹ In these articles, which used examples of Ukrainian heroine mothers, no mention was made of the perceived

⁷⁸ Dimov, G., "The Large Family Through Doctor's Eyes," *Izvestia*, 28th February 1987, p. 2. Translated in The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, No. 9, Vol. 39, 1st April, 1987, p. 22.

⁷⁹ Litvinova, G. I., "Vozdeistvie gosudarstva i prava na demograficheskie protsessy," p. 135.

⁸⁰ M. Orazgyldiyev quoted in Galetskaya, R. A., "Demograficheskaya politika: ee napravleniia," p. 152.

⁸¹ Bridger, S., "Heroine Mothers and the Demographic Crisis."

health risks so often raised during discussions of Central Asian fertility levels. Nor did the concern—expressed elsewhere—that, ‘the raising of a large number of children inhibits a rise in the cultural level of mothers of large families,’ seem to apply to Slavic mothers.⁸² Central Asian women also allegedly needed to be drawn into the workforce, despite the excess labour resources already present in the region. So many of the concerns publicly expressed for the women of Central Asia seem only to apply when they aligned with broader political goals. Reproductive labour was valuable to elites only when performed by ‘true members’ of the nation.

Demographic policy and the inflammation of tensions

Discussion of demography in the media played into larger narratives in the 1980s, which alleged that the titular nationalities received preferential treatment over the Russian Federated Republic. By the early 1980s, allegations, which previously had only been mutterings, began to appear openly in the press, claiming that the Republics received preferential treatment because their leaders held the government to ransom. An ethnic ‘old boy network’ was said to exist to the detriment of ethnic Russians. With time, these allegations came to anger local elites, who were in any case becoming increasingly disillusioned with the inability of the Soviet regime to manage problems.⁸³ Not only did infrastructure and economic issues go unresolved, but Central Asian ways of life were now being regularly attacked.

A particularly good example of this elite thinking is an article published in *Sovetskaia gosudarstvo i pravda* in 1982 entitled ‘The Demographic Policy of Soviet Union’ written by well-known demographers Galina Litvinova and Boris Ulanis. They called for the supposed imbalance of power between the Republics to be corrected and stated that before 1917 many peoples of Asia were suffering depopulation, but that the introduction of the Soviet system and privileged treatment they received meant this situation had been quickly reversed. They continued:

Even though the demographic situation in the USSR has altered sharply, the existing system of allocation budgetary resources, the policy of purchase prices, which affects the level of material security of the rural population and others, continues to remain privileged for the peripheral Republics and areas, although it is the central

⁸² Quote occurs in passage explaining why the levels of reproduction in Central Asia are too high. Kvasha, A. I., “Ob optimalnom tipe vosproizvodstva naseleniia SSSR,” in *Voprosy demografii*, ed. Volkov, A. G. (Moscow, 1970), p. 39.

⁸³ Suny, R., *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, CA, 1993), p. 126.

regions, the Non-Black Earth-Zone above all, which now needs such privileges more.⁸⁴

The article flatly stated that the 1944 family law that was aimed at 'the maximum encouragement of large families' no longer made sense in the context of the new demographic reality. Women should not be receiving heroine mother medals, nor, they wrote, had they ever been particularly effective. The authors claimed that collective farms in Turkmen Republic each had several nurseries and kindergartens, while parents in farms of other Republics were unable to find childcare, and that Russian children faced an educational disadvantage.

Taxation, pricing policy and wages were another bugbear:

In 1970 there were 11.5 hectares of arable land per able-bodied collective farmer in the RSFSR, while there were only 1.6 in the Uzbek SSR but incomes per collective farmer in the latter were 33% higher than in the RSFSR ... For decades, taxation policy has been such that the greatest taxation privileges have been given to the peripheral areas of the country. As for budgetary policy, during all the years in which the Soviet State has existed, the RSFSR not only never enjoyed a subsidy from the All-Union budget like several other Republics, but the Republic's budget has received one of the lowest rates of return from turnover tax — the basic form of budgetary income.⁸⁵

Crucially, perceptions of budgetary fairness were linked with demographic change.

The All-Union censuses of 1970 and 1979 demonstrate a growth in the proportion of indigenous nationality in the majority of the Union and Autonomous Republics as well as a diminution in the proportion of such people living outside the boundaries of their Republics. One of the reasons for this consists in the fact that privileges are preserved in the Republics for the social advance of representatives of indigenous nationalities. This was justifiable in the first years after the Great October but demands to be changed under today's conditions.⁸⁶

This article was one of the most clear and open calls for a redress of the balance in the press, but others echoed its sentiments.

A fierce debate began among specialists, with some, like Urlanis and Litvinova above, alleging an unfair distribution of state resources that was being compounded by the increase in the proportion of the population from Central Asian Republics and the Caucasus. As the government and its ministries discussed pronatalist policies, the key issue became whether

⁸⁴ Urlanis, B. and Litvinova, G., "Demograficheskaia politika Sovetskogo Soiuz", *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravda*, no. 3 (1982): 39.

⁸⁵ Urlanis, B. and Litvinova, G., "Demograficheskaia politika Sovetskogo Soiuz", p. 42.

⁸⁶ Urlanis, B. and Litvinova, G., "Demograficheskaia politika Sovetskogo Soiuz", p. 44.

any increased financial benefits should go to these Republics also. Who should bear the burden of the natural increase in nationalities from Central Asia and the Caucasus, society asked itself? If benefits were paid monthly for each child, then regions where five children were still common would receive the lion's share of the welfare payments, which would, in effect, be subsidised by Republics with lower fertility rates. If welfare was differentiated by ethnic group or region, however, these groups were likely to protest and claim discrimination, upsetting the carefully managed balance of power. And some scholars, particularly those from southern republics, were already voicing such objections. Kazakh demographer M. B. Tatimov argued in his 1978 book that 'a differentiated population policy is by its nature and intent the same thing as a discriminatory policy'.⁸⁷ As a result of the dilemma and differing opinions of experts the government delayed the issue repeatedly.

In 1981 a new set of pronatalist measures were finally announced. They raised benefits for the birth of each child and sought a compromise solution with regards to nationality.⁸⁸ Lump sum benefits were introduced of 50 roubles for the first child with 100 roubles for the second and third.⁸⁹ This benefit was not differentiated, but some were. Particular regions of Russia in the north and east *were* given higher benefits, residents in Vologda, Murmansk, Archangelsk and other places were awarded 50 roubles a month in child benefit while all other areas of the USSR received 35 roubles. In addition, the roll out of the benefit was differentiated; though they eventually received the same amount, increased benefits were rolled out to Russia and the European Republics a year earlier than the Caucasus or Central Asia. Juviler has noted that by introducing the lump sum grant, small families still benefited, and this balanced the proportion of money going to each Republic more evenly.⁹⁰

Despite only slight differentiation in policy—the effect of which disappeared by the time benefits had been raised for all regions—those in Central Asia felt that government had acted in a discriminatory way.⁹¹ It is true that local leaders often used their bargaining power based on their rights as a nation to negotiate advantages for their people in exchange for

⁸⁷ Feshbach, M., "The Soviet Population Policy Debate", p. 28.

⁸⁸ Egorova, A. G. and Bogolyubova, K. M., *Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskovo Soiuza...* pp. 21-30.

⁸⁹ Selezneva, E., "Struggling For New Lives: Family and Fertility Policies in the Soviet Union and Modern Russia", IOS Working Papers, (2016).

⁹⁰ Juviler, P., "The Urban Family and the Soviet State: Emerging Contours of a Demographic Policy," in *The Contemporary Soviet City*, eds. Morton, H. and Stuart, R. (Basingstoke, 1984), p. 101.

⁹¹ Nakachi, M., "Liberation Without Contraception?," p. 24.

cooperation with Moscow.⁹² Some scholars, like Hosking, have gone so far as to argue Russians were actually the victims of the system of Republics.⁹³ Central Asian Republics *did* receive subsidies, but they were also by far the poorest areas and had the lowest standard of living. In their eyes, subsidies did not do nearly enough to make them equal, let alone give them a concrete advantage. Central Asia was discussed in elite Russian discourse as both incredibly prosperous and in a state of total turmoil depending on who stood to gain from the diagnosis. If welfare payments were at stake, Central Asia was already said to be greedily taking too much. But when blame was being apportioned for poor health or economic growth it was the high fertility of women and selfish culture of local elites that was to blame.

This thesis takes the Brezhnev era as its focus. However, it should be noted that Soviet population policy evolved over several decades and its effects continued to be felt in the years immediately after Brezhnev had gone. The 1979 census increased the urgency and intensity of population debate, but at that time, the heavy censorship of publications still meant certain demographic issues like infant mortality could not be discussed in open publication. However, once glasnost' arrived and censorship of demographic statistics eased, commentators were able to speak more openly about problems that had been decades in the making.⁹⁴ These dynamics in the post-Brezhnev era are briefly explored here because they show how viewing issues through the population prism not only became fundamental to Soviet discourse but also deeply problematic and destructive to the stability of the Soviet Union over time.

After some censorship had been lifted, publications quickly intensified their criticism of Central Asia and its demographic tendencies. A common angle for media publications was to focus on the very poor child and maternal health in some Central Asian Republics, and the high rates of infant mortality there, a topic that had previously been off limits in open publication. Such discussions tended to blame local culture and corruption, often implying people from these republics were too irresponsible to have large families. One article described how a state of 'despotic oppression' existed in Turkmenia (the Republic with the

⁹² Hirsch, F., *Empire of Nations*, pp. 314-319; Suny, R., *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, pp. 120-127.

⁹³ Hosking, G. A., *Rulers and Victims: the Russians in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, MA, 2006).

⁹⁴ On the easing of demographic censorship, see Tolts, M., "The Failure of Demographic Statistics: A Soviet Response to Population Troubles".

highest infant mortality rate) that caused the low standards of living and malnourishment leading to infant deaths.

The head of a farm in Turkmenia can say without hesitation how many livestock he has, how many of them died last year or last month, and what diseased they died of. But don't bother to ask him how many children died on his collective farm in the same period and why.⁹⁵

According to the author, the 'disunited tribal structure' and 'large size of Turkmenian families', which served to 'inhibit the growth of social activism' was to blame. Such articles were commonplace; 'The family is big, but can one rejoice when there is no certainty the child will live and be healthy?', *Literaturnaia Gazeta* asked its readers in relation to Central Asia.⁹⁶ Meanwhile *Komsomolskaia Pravda* described the terrible conditions, alleging that men in Turkmenia would not give their wives enough to eat to the extent that their babies died of malnourishment.⁹⁷ Articles all urged better contraception for these regions as part of the solution. The economic deprivation and the lack of medical infrastructure that lead to malnutrition and infant mortality was, therefore, misdiagnosed as a population problem of overly large families and backward culture.

By blaming Central Asians for their economic problems, the Soviet government sought to absolve itself of any responsibility for the issue. *Izvestia's* claims in 1986, that no nurseries, hospitals, or maternity clinics were being built because money was swallowed by corruption were echoed more and more strongly by leaders.⁹⁸ At the 19th Soviet Party Conference in June 1988, Minister for Health Yevgeniy Ivanovich Chazov told those assembled:

The Uzbek writer Sharif Rashidov wrote about happy children of a blossoming republic, but the leader of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, Sh. Rashidov, did exactly nothing for saving the thirty-three thousand children who died every year not surviving up to one year of age. They squandered and embezzled millions of rubles in the republic, but 46 percent of the hospitals were accommodated in buildings which did not answer minimum sanitary hygienic demands.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Velsapar, A.-M., "Where a staff won't grow – why children are dying in Turkmenia," *Moskovskiiye novosti*, April 7th 1990, p. 8. Translated in The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, 1990. No. 6, Vol. 2, 23rd May, pp. 30-31.

⁹⁶ Pasev'yev, I., "The Family is Big, But Can One Rejoice When There's No Certainty the Child Will Live and be Healthy?," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 27th Jan 1988. Translated in The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, No. 10, Vol. 40, 6th April, 1988, pp. 22-23.

⁹⁷ Voshchanov, P. and Bushev, A., "Social Portrait of a Phenomemon: 'It's easy for children's lives to come to an abrupt end here'," *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, 25th April 1990, p. 2. Translated in The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, No. 20, Vol. 42, 20th June 1990, pp. 1-4.

⁹⁸ Kuleshov, V., "Pamiatniki dolgostroiui: pochemu ne khvataet detsadov, bol'nits I polikliniki v Turkmenii," *Izvestiia*, 10th April 1986, p. 2.

⁹⁹ Chazov cited in Lane, D., *Soviet Society Under Perestroika* (Boston, 1990), p. 353.

The volume and frank nature of these criticisms meant local elites were only too aware of the accusations levelled at them in the media and at Party meetings, and this could hardly fail to aggravate relations. Soviet leaders washed their hands of the economic issues of state socialism, by positioning those from Central Asia as inherently corrupt and backward—features leaders saw as fixed. By doing so, Moscow was absolved of any responsibility because allegedly problems stemmed from the culture of these people, in which the Soviet system played no part. Even infant deaths were said to be the result of overly large families and corrupt officials. If these trends were inherent, then changing the population itself appeared to be the only way forward.

As glasnost' allowed a wider range of complaints to be made publicly, leaders from Central Asian republics began to make their discontent with the discourse known. In 1989, the Second Congress of the USSR People's Deputies saw a scathing attack from Ubaidullayeva, the Deputy Director of the Uzbek Republic Academy of Science, Institute of Economics in Tashkent. She complained that previous speeches had disrespected the Republic's women by implying large families were to blame for the Republic's economic problems. She argued that it was the years of stagnation and command administrative system that was to blame and not the birth rate. 'We women and mothers of Uzbekistan demand that Deputy Bronshtein make a public apology to us,' she finished.¹⁰⁰ The 'undesirability', in the Soviet central government's eyes, of large Central Asian families might not have been often openly mentioned, but the Central Asian leaders easily perceived the dynamic and resented any discrimination from pronatalist policies that followed.

There is disagreement in the literature over the origins of the conflict between ethnicities that ultimately resulted in the secession of the Republics and collapse of the USSR. Lenin's initial nationalities policy is widely acknowledged to have helped him to forge the Soviet Union by securing the support of key ethnic groups within the former Russian Empire. However, during the late 1920s and 1930s the nationality question became more centrally directed with less regard for local leaders. The government sent missionary-like organisations to educate the people of Central Asia in the new Soviet ways, but met much resistance.¹⁰¹ Hirsch notes that far from coming together as one people, nationality gradually became 'the most

¹⁰⁰ "The Second Congress of USSR People's Deputies: Verbatim Report," *Izvestia*, 18th December 1989, pp. 2-5. Translated in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, No. 2, Vol. 42, 14th Feb, 1990, pp. 22-23.

¹⁰¹ Edgar, A. L., *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*.

important official category of identity for Soviet citizens.’¹⁰² As for ethnic tensions in the later Soviet period, one school of thought argues tension started properly under Brezhnev, caused in part by Russification policies which prepared the way for Soviet demise.¹⁰³ Another school of thought alleges that under Brezhnev the policy of ‘corporatist compromise, ethnic equalisation and masterly inactivity’ kept the nationalities issue on an even keel without too much tension until perestroika.¹⁰⁴ This study supports the position of Tishkov and Brubaker who highlight the defining role of national elites over ordinary people in driving and shaping ethnic conflicts. Moscow based technical elites and politicians alike failed to grasp the structural and economic issues of state socialism, seeing the problem as a fixed issue of population dynamics. Ordinary people from Central Asia may have paid little attention to the issue, but Moscow leaders antagonised politicians and experts in Central Asia by claiming local economic troubles were a result of their reproductive choices. In doing so they undermined the stability of the relationship between central and peripheral ruling class, increasing tensions that lead to the secession of the Republics.

Conclusion

From the early 1970s onwards, the Soviet government saw higher birth rates among Central Asian Republics as a threat to Party control, to national identity, and to the stability of the USSR. Russian leaders worried that their dominance within the Union would be undermined if ethnic Russians were no longer a numerical majority. Real economic issues appeared as a result of differential fertility and the labour imbalances it caused. Low levels of Russian language in some Republics also presented a problem for the military and for industry. However, understanding of these issues was tinted with prejudice and the Soviet government was all too willing to abandon other solutions in favour of changing the population itself by altering patterns of reproduction. In doing so they divided Central Asians from other Soviet peoples, portraying them as distinct groups who had a predetermined role and place in life.

¹⁰² Hirsch, F., *Empire of Nations*, p. 324.

¹⁰³ Among those who have taken this view are Brubaker, R., *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and Nationalism and in the New Europe* (Cambridge, 1996); Nahaylo, B. and Swoboda, V., *Soviet Disunion: A History of the Nationalities Problem in the USSR* (London, 1990); Tishkov, V. A., *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and After the Soviet Union: the Mind Aflame* (London, 1997); Tompson, W., *The Soviet Union under Brezhnev*.

¹⁰⁴ Fowkes, B., "The National Question in the Soviet Union Under Brezhnev," in *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, eds. Bacon, E. and Sandle, M. (2002), p. 68.

For all the hot air about population issues and fertility throughout the 1970s and 1980s, little actually changed from a policy perspective.¹⁰⁵ As the next chapter shows, the experience of bringing up children had hardly been transformed by moderate increases in benefits. Indeed, research by Russian demographers demonstrates that the completed cohort fertility rates were unchanged by pronatalist policies of the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁰⁶ Elite observers passionately believed they could reshape the USSR through reproduction, creating an ideal Soviet population that would resolve all economic issues. They failed, and in the process of trying, ministers actually damaged their relationship with Republic leaders. A vast literature has shown the role that ethnic tensions played in the ultimate dissolution of the USSR. Demographic change was a particularly important aspect of this because it made the tensions seem more urgent. The government didn't perceive the status quo as a stable situation, but a ticking timebomb demanding urgent attention. By aiming to solve economic issues with demographic solutions, the government alienated Central Asian politicians who saw this as a discriminatory attack on their rights and culture.

Beyond angering the Republics, the fact that Moscow leaders failed to appreciate the structural and operational issues of the Soviet system left them unable to tackle these challenges. In the end, the enormous problems facing leaders simply looked easier to tackle when viewed through the prism of population policy. Propaganda on childbearing was easy and cheap in comparison to reskilling the population, effectively incentivising migration to labour shortage areas, or making those on the periphery identify with the Soviet Union as a nation. Even had they been willing to seriously attempt these incentives, prejudice against Central Asian peoples meant Moscow leaders were unlikely to ever see these populations as an acceptable substitute for Slavic people. Considered in its entirety, the problem was one of both economics and belonging, as identity and culture led leaders to misdiagnose many economic issues through the frame of population, making them far more difficult to resolve.

¹⁰⁵ Bridger, S., "Heroine Mothers and the Demographic Crisis."

¹⁰⁶ Frejka, T. and Zakharov, S., "The Apparent Failure of Russia's Pronatalist Family Policies."; Zakharov, S., "Russian Federation: From the First to Second Demographic Transition", *Demographic research* 19 (2008): 907-972.

Chapter Five: Reproduction in the Late USSR: Mothers Have Their Say

What did it feel like to be a young woman in the 1970s Soviet Union? The archives tell us little about this. As the previous chapter shows, high level discussions about fertility were held by older men in government, but the voices of the young women who controlled their own fertility were notably absent from these arenas. The Academy of Sciences sometimes undertook questionnaires in an attempt to understand more, but the government's understanding of changing patterns of reproduction remained poor.¹ In contrast to previous sections, this chapter explores the perceptions of ordinary Soviet women who were starting their families during the Brezhnev era. How, I ask, did they understand the changing demographic situation? Were they aware of the pressures to have more children or did government propaganda totally pass them by? Unaware of discussions at the Party Congress, meetings at the Census Bureau, or arguments in the specialist press, ordinary Soviet citizens encountered the subject of demography only when it featured in the popular press or affected their lives through policy. Against the background of increasing government concern, this chapter uses oral testimony to examine how ordinary women felt about childbearing, the factors that affected their decisions on family size, and what, if anything, they remember now of the propaganda campaigns and policy changes. It asks how reproduction and everything that accompanied it appeared from below, to young women living ordinary lives in the Soviet Union of the 1970s.

Interviews show that women experienced historical events and government campaigns as a fuzzy backdrop to their personal lives. Their decisions about marriage, childbearing, and work were shaped by societal norms, but these norms were often in sharp contrast to Party desires and ideals. Indeed, most women did not perceive the state as trying to influence their reproductive choices, though the archives show this was clearly the government's intention. I show that though fertility choices were shaped by the broader economic and sociological environment, the state was not able to knowingly shape childbearing patterns in any meaningful way. When exploring reproductive decision making, common themes emerged from women's accounts and are presented here. Five key areas will be considered—family

¹ ARAN, f. 1977, op. 2, d. 25. The family and natality: problems of sociological studies of the reproductive behaviour of families (Antonov, A.). (1974), ll. 81-93; ARAN, f. 1977, op. 2, d. 149. Factors in the stabilisation of young families. (1980); ARAN, f. 1977, op. 2, d. 138, ll. 1-68.

relationships, contraception, material conditions, propaganda and policy, and social conformity. The picture that emerges is one of society developing independently from the Party as ordinary people continued to make the best of the opportunities afforded them.

Methodological design and considerations

Oral history is valuable as an approach because it provides information that can otherwise be difficult to access. Evidence about the everyday experience, decision making, and personal relationships of non-elites rarely appears in archives because it is infrequently written down. Oral history has, therefore, been vital for studying topics that were considered too mundane, banal, or private to record, but which are essential to understanding the lives of the majority.² In addition, by using oral evidence, scholars have been able to research the lives of those absent from the archives because of their status in society, in particular women, minorities, and marginalised groups.³ In the case of women, feminist historians have long argued that oral testimony is a particularly important source for women's history because women traditionally lived such a large part of their lives outside the public sphere.⁴

A precise account of historical events is not usually the aim of oral history, however. Far from just gathering empirical data, oral historians such as Alessandro Portelli and Luisa Passerini have shown that the value of oral history lies in its subjectivity. It can tell us 'not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did.'⁵ It can be used to connect historical events with individual experience and dominant cultural narratives.⁶ Thus oral history asks what people value, how they perceive their society, and how they experienced social change within their lifetime.

Like any historical source, interview data must be approached critically and interrogated rather than taken at face value.⁷ Like memoirs or retrospective accounts, oral testimony is

² Thompson, P. and Bornat, J., *The Voice of the Past*.

³ Studies are too numerous to cite individually, many excellent examples are contained in: Perks, R. and Thomson, A., *The Oral History Reader* (New York, 2015); Srigley, K., Zembrzycki, S., and Iacovetta, F., *Beyond Women's Words: Feminisms and the Practices of Oral History in the Twenty-first Century* (New York, 2018).

⁴ Gluck, S., "What's So Special About Women? Women's Oral History", *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 2, no. 2 (1977): 3-17.

⁵ Portelli, A., "What Makes Oral History Different," p. 67.

⁶ Abrams, L., *Oral History Theory*; Thompson, P. and Bornat, J., *The Voice of the Past*; Passerini, L., "Work, Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism."

⁷ On validity issues within all historical sources see, Thompson, P. and Bornat, J., *The Voice of the Past*, pp. 188-193.

mediated by memory. Bruner has conceptualised the self as ‘a perpetually rewritten story’, showing how people re-evaluate memories in light of subsequent life experiences.⁸ If acknowledged and explored, this re-evaluation can itself be a valuable source of information. Nostalgia for communism in Russia and other states of Eastern Europe can tell us much about the sort of trade-offs presented by large scale social change, as well as about the universal differences of youth and old age.⁹ But theorists have shown that oral sources differ from other kinds of historical sources because they involve the production of information about the past through a two-way dialogue. The interview is a social interaction, ‘a process by which the participants cooperate to create a shared narrative.’¹⁰ The interview is sensitive to dynamics between interviewer and interviewee caused by the positionality of participant and researcher.¹¹ Memory is not a ‘passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings.’¹²

There are historians who find the problems of oral history so great as to argue it has little value, but the majority do not see oral history in this way.¹³ Most argue that while the dynamics of oral history interviewing are complex, it is an effective way to find out both empirical *and* subjective information about the past. For example, historians of the holocaust have used interviews not only to explore subjective experience, but as evidence to document real historical events.¹⁴ As Abrams points out, if we as historians find ourselves able to recognise or reject certain discourses about our lives and the past then we must assume others are also able.¹⁵ After all, few would bother with oral history if it could tell us nothing about history. The key is therefore to recognise the dynamics of the interview and approach it

⁸Bruner, J., "The "Remembered" Self," in *The Remembering Self: Construction and Accuracy in the Self-Narrative*, eds. Neisser, U. and Fivush, R. (Cambridge, 1994), p. 53. On this point see also, Anderson, K. and Jack, D., "Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses," in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, eds. Gluck, S. B. and Patai, D. (London, 1991); Schacter, D. L., *Searching for Memory: The brain, the mind, and the past* (New York, 2008); Miller, J. and Glassner, B., "The "Inside" and the "Outside": Finding Realities in Interviews," in *Qualitative Research: Issues of Theory, Method and Practice*, ed. Silverman, D., 3rd ed. (London, 2011).

⁹ On this topic see, Archer, R., "'It was better when it was worse': Blue-collar Narratives of the Recent Past in Belgrade", *Social history* 43, no. 1 (2018): 30-55.

¹⁰ Abrams, L., *Oral History Theory*, p. 65.

¹¹ Bryman, A., *Social Research Methods*, 5th ed. (Oxford, 2016).

¹² Portelli, A., "What Makes Oral History Different," p. 68.

¹³ For a review of this debate see, Sangster, J., "Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the use of Oral History", *Women's History Review* 3, no. 1 (1994): 5-28.

¹⁴ Several studies using Oral History in this way can be found in: High, S., *Beyond Testimony and Trauma: Oral History in the Aftermath of Mass Violence* (Vancouver, 2015).

¹⁵ Abrams, L., *Oral History Theory*, p. 61.

critically as an imperfect source, acknowledging that participants may sometimes lie, exaggerate, or misremember, and that it will not always be possible to detect this.

This chapter is based on interviews with eighteen women born between 1936 and 1956. The majority of participants were in their early seventies, born between 1945 and 1950. This generation of women tended to be giving birth during the Brezhnev era, though some continued childbearing into later periods too. Owing to the global coronavirus pandemic, this research was conducted remotely over video link. This had several consequences both positive and negative. As everyone knows, a conversation conducted over video call can sometimes be interrupted by poor connection or technical issues. A time lag often leads to participants interrupting each other or talking simultaneously. This is a particular problem in an interview where participants are encouraged to reflect at length and shutting down speech by interrupting can discourage further sharing.¹⁶ Speech can be less clear on a recording than if the person was in the room. It is also slower to build rapport online without offers of tea, a present of some nice biscuits, idle chit chat, or any of the niceties that might proceed a face-to-face interaction. Participants usually wanted to start straight away, asking what the first question was even before I had explained how the interview would work.

There were benefits to this form of interviewing, however. By interviewing remotely, I was able to include women across a huge geographical area, not being limited by travel or funding in this way. The study includes women from many different kinds of places: villages, towns, cities, and capitals. In addition, the pandemic provided a captive audience with pensioners lacking entertainment under lockdowns. All interviews were conducted in Russian. This naturally limited the nationalities of the participants and meant that those interviewed were from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. All spoke Russian as their native language. In addition, there was one participant from Lithuania who took part. Her native language was not Russian, but she had a very high level of fluency. As a result, this study cannot speak for those from the Caucasus, Central Asia, or the Baltic states and should be understood as specific to people living in the Slavic regions of the USSR. However, this does not mean that all those who took part were Slavs. As part of the interview, I asked all women what they considered to be their ethnic group. Ten participants identified as Russian. The other half had

¹⁶ Anderson, K. and Jack, D., "Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses."; Terkel, S. and Parker, T., "Interviewing an Interviewer," in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Perks, R. and Thompson, A. (London, 2016).

a variety of ethnicities including Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Moldovan, Belorussian, Bashkiri, Buryat and Jewish.

I chose to interview women specifically because of the central role they play in deciding family size.¹⁷ While participants often told me the opinions of their husbands, this study does not describe male views on the topic. Access to participants was gained through snowball sampling with acquaintances. Women interviewed were from a variety of ethnicities and socio-economic circumstances (see appendix for full demographic profile). Women with a higher education or skilled employment were over-represented in the sample compared to their numbers in the population. Nevertheless, the study does include several women who received only secondary education and worked in shops, factories and on farms. Access to technology had an obvious impact on the study but was not as restrictive as might be imagined. Smartphone access is now widespread in the former Soviet Union and many older people have recently received a crash course in video calling to stay in contact with relatives during lockdowns. There were cases where the device did not belong to the person using it. One acquaintance took her smartphone round to her neighbour's flat so I could speak to her. Another arranged an interview with her mother while her mother was visiting from her village and so would be able to use the laptop, for example.

Silence is widely acknowledged to be a form of testimony, though one very difficult to interpret. Like all interviews, silence was an important part of the interviews undertaken for this study. Participants often omitted details, changed the subject, or gave only surface level detail. In seeking to deal with silences and omissions I have followed the strategy set out by Posadskaya and Engel by drawing the reader's attention to areas where there are contradictions, silences, or possible deliberate misinterpretations.¹⁸ I have sometimes offered reflections on these sections of interview but tried to avoid putting words in the mouth of participants by making it clear that this reflection is conjecture based on silence rather than the participant's assertion. One of the most difficult topics to discuss during the interview was sex. This was not a study of sexual behaviour, so I did not ask participants directly about sex, but in as much as contraception is highly relevant to decisions about family size the topic

¹⁷ This has been confirmed in previous studies, Ransel, D. L., *Village Mothers: Three Generations of Change in Russia and Tataria*, p. 117.

¹⁸ Engel, B. and Posadskaya-Vanderbeck, A., *A Revolution of Their Own: Voices of Women in Soviet History* (New York, 2019), pp. 223-224.

often came up indirectly. Research has highlighted that for this generation of Soviet citizens discussion of sex was the ultimate taboo.¹⁹ As might be expected when discussing contraceptive practices, women were more likely to allude to situations indirectly, leave important pauses or half-finished sentences, hoping I had got the gist of the situation. Silence and its interpretation is therefore particularly important for this section of the study.

Finally, it should be noted that for a few interviews there was someone else present in the room and this affected the dynamic. I usually asked to speak to participants alone, but there were cases where the participant was uncertain about the technology or had poor hearing and wanted a family member there with them. For obvious reasons this usually precluded discussion of certain topics and the most useful information came from interviews with the participant alone.

Literature review

Oral methods are well established in the Soviet context. Indeed the repressive nature of the Soviet Union means its former citizens sometimes perceive private memory as the only reliable source of information, associating written documents with falsification and whitewash.²⁰ Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, scholars were particularly keen to document the experiences of persecution and pursued this goal through extensive oral history interviewing.²¹ Other studies have focused on particular periods within history, such as those by Posadskaya and Engel or Figes who focused on the revolution and Stalinist period.²² Some studies have taken as their focus a particular generation, exploring that generation's experience of life in different decades. Raleigh, for example, has written about Soviet baby boomers based on oral testimony.²³ Oral history has also been used to examine particular

¹⁹ Rotkirch, A., "What kind of sex can you talk about?": Acquiring Sexual Knowledge in Three Soviet Generations," in *On Living Through Soviet Russia*, eds. Bertaux, D., et al. (New York, 2003).

²⁰ Perks, R., "By Train to Samarkand: A View of Oral History in the Soviet Union", *Oral History* 19, no. 1 (1991): 64-67; Sherbakova, I., "The Gulag in Memory," in *International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories vol. I: Memory and Totalitarianism*, ed. Passerini, L. (Oxford, 1992).

²¹ Sherbakova, I., "The Gulag in Memory."; Zugostova, M., *Dressed for a Dance in the Snow: Women's Voices from the Gulag* (New York, 2020); Gheith, J. and Jolluck, K., *Gulag Voices: Oral histories of Soviet Incarceration and Exile* (New York, 2011).

²² Figes, O., *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* (New York, 2007); Engel, B. and Posadskaya-Vanderbeck, A., *A Revolution of Their Own: Voices of Women in Soviet History*.

²³ Raleigh, D. J., *Soviet Baby Boomers: An Oral History of Russia's Cold War Generation*. Other notable studies of generations include Westrate, M. T., *Living Soviet in Ukraine from Stalin to Maidan: Under the Falling Red Star in Kharkiv* (New York, 2016).

areas of life and events as diverse as Nazi invasion, the Chernobyl disaster, and life in Soviet communal flats.²⁴

With regards to childbearing and family life, David Ransel's extensive study of three generations of village women in Russia and Tataria demonstrates the gradual change in practices of childbearing, the modernisation and medicalisation of birth, medicine, childcare, and the reduction of fertility between the generations.²⁵ The oldest generation of women interviewed by Ransel (who started interviews in 1990), were born from the late 1920s onwards, with the majority born in the 1930s. This generation are mostly older than participants interviewed for this study—and also exclusively village residents—but there is still some overlap between the oldest participants I interviewed, and the youngest in Ransel's study. Ransel found several trends among this generation. Firstly, he found women of this generation still relied upon condoms, coitus interruptus, and abortion as the main means of fertility control. This study supports those observations, as does research by Ilic and others.²⁶ Secondly, in contrast to previous generations, he found husbands left decisions about family size totally up to their wives. Thirdly, several women interviewed by Ransel mentioned unhappy marriages as a reason for limiting fertility. Both these trends were also found among the women interviewed for this study and will be discussed in detail.

In addition to Ransel's work, Leinarte's study of Lithuanian women in the post-war period argues that women internalised Soviet propaganda completely, becoming unable to remember or talk about their lives clearly outside of the language provided by the regime, despite opposing Sovietism and considering themselves an occupied state.²⁷ This study engages with this argument and also challenges it. While this may be the reality for Lithuanian women of this generation, it does not appear to hold true for those from other parts of the Soviet Union based on the evidence of this study. In exploring childbearing and fertility through a new set

²⁴ Messana, P., *Soviet Communal Living: An Oral History of the Kommunalka* (New York, 2011); Walke, A., *Pioneers and Partisans: an Oral History of Nazi Genocide in Belorussia* (Oxford, 2015); Alexievich, S., *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster* (New York, 2006). For a collection of oral history studies see: Bertaux, D., Rotkirch, A., and Thompson, P., *On Living Through Soviet Russia* (New York, 2003).

²⁵ Ransel, D. L., *Village Mothers: Three Generations of Change in Russia and Tataria*.

²⁶ Drezgić, R., "Policies and Practices of Fertility Control." Also, see Ilic, M., *The Palgrave Handbook of Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century Russia and the Soviet Union* (New York, 2017); Ilic, M., *Soviet Women – Everyday Lives* (London, 2020).

²⁷ Leinarte, D., *Adopting and Remembering Soviet Reality: Life Stories of Lithuanian Women, 1945-1970* (Amsterdam, 2010).

of interviews, this study therefore aims to build on previous research, examining how women of this generation approached these decisions.

Results

The impact of childhood experiences

This generation of women were aged between sixty-four and eighty-four at the time of interview. They had mostly grown up shortly after the war and despite having different backgrounds, most interviews started the exact same way with the participant recalling that in early childhood almost everything had been destroyed by the war. Fertility rates in the Russian Republic during the 20 year period when participants were born ranged from 4.75 to 2.58 births per woman.²⁸ Accordingly, a few participants were only children, but the majority grew up in large families—five children was not uncommon—and many had siblings who had died in childhood. Several reported that their mothers gave birth to so many children because of the difficulties of obtaining illegal abortions. For their parents, times were extremely hard. This was particularly true for their mothers. A participant who was one of seven siblings, six of whom survived to adulthood recalled:

The work was ten times greater, but she lived to be 84... She worked right up until her pension. Two months maternity leave. Two months! She was breastfeeding, she'd run to lunch, feed, take a chunk of bread and then back to work. It was like this with all the children. She'd go to bed at one and then be up at five in the morning. Cows, geese, ducks, garden, vegetable patch, children, washing, cooking... There was no grandmother or grandfather [to help].²⁹

These challenges do not mean participants reported unhappy childhoods, but they spoke of being very poor and having parents who worked almost constantly. As with any discussion of youth, memories can be tinged by nostalgia, and I evaluate the effects of nostalgia on the interviews in the final section of this chapter.

Participants asserted that society was very equal and everyone at that time was poor. Nonetheless, it became clear life was harder for those in the Western Soviet Union who suffered particularly from the overwhelming destruction of infrastructure during Second

²⁸ Due to the Second World War, fertility rates in the USSR during this period were extremely variable. A short boom followed the war. Statista: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1033851/fertility-rate-russia-1840-2020/>, accessed 19/03/221.

²⁹ Ekaterina, interview by author, December 2020. All names have been changed to protect anonymity. Replacement names reflect the character of the original name.

World War. In Ukraine ten million people, almost a quarter of the population, were left homeless by 1946.³⁰ Ukrainian participants told me the following:

There was nowhere to live because the town was completely destroyed... and so we lived in... right there in the museum [where her parents worked] in a small room.³¹

Mama's husband she was killed in... during the war. So there were four of us, ... Mother didn't want her last child because it was hard. But she had seven children by the way, two were killed by bombing... and basically she didn't want it, but abortion was forbidden and, well, she was 42 and in those times that was already quite late for a woman to be giving birth. But she was saved, she was unconscious and everything and a little girl was born and thank god, she is my favourite sister! So everything was all ok.³²

In addition, those who lost parents fell into much deeper poverty as described by Zamira, born in Magnitogorsk in 1948. She was one of five siblings who lost their father in 1951.

And [at school] both poor people studied and people who, well, those families like we were without Dad. It was very difficult for Mum of course... the school helped. A lot. Because I remember that in the fourth grade, that means the fourth year of study, the school helped Mum buy me a coat. That's how it was even.... It was just as hard for everyone after the war.³³

Zamira, her five siblings and their mother lived for a while in a single room.

These early childhood experiences were important because they had a big impact on whether or not women wanted a large family themselves. Some participants said they had wanted several children (usually two to three) because they themselves had enjoyed having siblings. When I asked Vera why she had said there must always be at least one sibling she replied:

At home there were three of us and we knew we would be ready to help each other, so I thought that if something happened to us, brother and sister or brother and brother they would always help each other.³⁴

Another responded to the same question by saying that a boy and a girl, two children is a full family. 'Why not?!' she asked. She continued, 'so that my daughter wouldn't be alone, that's also important, like how it was good for me that I have three brothers and a sister, I really understood this.'³⁵ Participants who felt this way clearly valued large families and spoke as if they had recreated the kind of family they had grown up in. In reality, however, these women

³⁰ Nakachi, M., *Replacing the Dead*, p. 26.

³¹ Natalia, interview by author, November 2020.

³² Liubov, interview by author, January 2021.

³³ Zamira, interview by author, December 2020.

³⁴ Vera, interview by author, December 2020.

³⁵ Zamira, interview by author, December 2020.

still had fewer children than their parents and continued the trend of reducing their fertility. It is important to note they gave these statements in relation to a family size of two or three children not five or six. A family of three came to be considered a large family where before it would only have been average.

Naturally, some women wanted several children, but for the most part, this generation saw a large family as a route to poverty and were keen to avoid it by not having a family as large as the one they had grown up in. In this regard, early experiences of poverty and aspirations for a better future seem to differentiate them from previous generations.

There was this conviction that it was better to have one child and provide them with everything than to have lots and be poor. Then nobody wanted to be poor. Everyone wanted to have wealth... and even I well, someone who would have given birth [a third time] but we worried that, how to put it? That we couldn't teach then we and couldn't- also, well this sort of thing. And after we lived there, a family lived in that house who had 14 children, 14!... and they were very poor, everyone pitied them, we did too. And no-one wanted that you know. So one child, but maximum two.³⁶

In response to a question about whether she thought about how many children she would like as a teenager, Liubov from Ukraine replied, 'in as much as my family had many siblings and it was very hard for us to live, I knew I didn't want a large family. That's for sure, but did I want to have one or two children? Yes.' She later explained that she had not initially wanted a second child despite later giving birth.

Well we sort of... probably we didn't think... it was possible. I didn't think it was possible. Probably... he would not have prevented it, he was a very kind man and all that, but probably we were scared you know. Everyone wanted... well they wanted to live better.³⁷

Early experiences left the post-war generation of women with few illusions about the difficulties of managing a large family. Even from a young age, women knew they would not be recreating the kind of families they had grown up in. Though no woman could be sure how many children she would eventually have, girls completely ruled out families of four or five before they even reached adulthood. Once this generation reached adulthood, they made decisions about family size in relation to a "new normal" range: one or two children was considered average, three was a large family.

³⁶ Nadezhda, interview by author, January 2021.

³⁷ Liubov, interview by author, January 2021.

Marriage and support in the home

A woman's relationship with her husband made a significant difference as to whether she wanted, and indeed had, more than one child. When the marriage was a happy one women were more likely to have more children. I asked participants whether they had a good husband, and what defined a good or bad husband. Ekaterina had four children—the most of any woman interviewed and the only person with this many. She mentioned her husband was great, and when I questioned what she meant by this she replied:

Oh! He took care of us, cared for the whole family. We called him our golden fish.³⁸ He made everything better. He worked and cared... he was very fun, very fun. He played with the children, we did sport – the whole family, we still do. ... The most important quality of my husband is that he is an optimist. He- he supported always.. if I was going wah wah wah [she wails] he would say “it's nothing Katiusha, we'll get through it!”. We'll get through it was his favourite phrase and he took on my whims.... indulged me ... my fatigue... It was just me with the children, alone. The children went to... figure skating, music, sports sections, and I ferried them about, here and there, I ran around like this and he consoled me... His most important quality is ... he always supported, and never lost heart...³⁹

Nina, born in 1949, married a man who went on to be the Director of a state farm and probably achieved the highest status and wealth of any participant.

A good husband? Well first of all, he took over all the material support — absolutely everything. I didn't know what it was to be short of bread. Then of course I also had to, but... for these 8 years, I just didn't know what it was to make money. I was on maternity leave for a very long time, three years, then for a very long time ... I worked near him. He did not let me from his side. And then I did return to school [as a teacher] and there I had two classes. But he somehow ... but he treated me very well, he'd take our daughter out. Well ... either the large apartment, or the fact that he had good patrons. Busygin was ... the director of a large enterprise, or I don't know. We didn't have any showdowns. Not one you know. And then I just got tired of family life. It's all taken care of. This huge apartment.... with new tiles, with all this...⁴⁰

By contrast, those with unhappy marriages were keen to reduce the number of children they had, feeling they didn't have the right support to contemplate another child.

I didn't want a second child very much, that is I didn't want a second at all. So that's why... well basically... um I somehow tried to prevent it and—unfortunately I'll be in front of the Lord—I had abortions because I didn't want a child, but not because my life was difficult or anything... It's just a woman wants a child when there is a reliable husband next to her. When you have support. My husband was good, but he

³⁸ In reference to a well-known Russian fairy tale, in which a golden fish grants wishes. For a published version, see Pushkin, A., "A Tale About a Fisherman and a Fish," in *Russian Magic Tales from Pushkin to Platonov*, ed. Chandler, R. (London, 2012), pp. 18-32.

³⁹ Ekaterina, interview by author, December 2020.

⁴⁰ Nina, interview by author, January 2021.

was dependent on alcohol. He was a wonderful person, and all the same, I didn't... fight this habit, to be honest, it was bad, in this sense.⁴¹

Later in the interview Liubov expanded on the lack of support she faced:

Yes it was a problem, for me it was, it was depressing for me, that is morally... well, because you're counting on something, you want even just to spend time, and he arrives from work... well, I mean there are lots of men who read newspapers who also don't see their wife, but those who drink, he lies down and sleeps on you. And you basically, you can't rely on him as a member of the family.⁴²

Tatiana also expressed this view, showing the determination of this generation not to put up with bad marriages but to seek divorce rather than have a large family with an undesirable partner.

If I had had a good husband, like a loving first husband, I would have had a third, maybe a fourth or fifth. But the situation was complicated. I had a second child for myself. I gave birth because I wanted one for myself, as I said to you already, one seemed not enough somehow.⁴³

Where excess alcohol became involved this was a clear route to an unhappy marriage and ultimately divorce, even if the woman reported that the husband had been a good person. This had an impact on family size as participants explained. Svetlana, born in 1946 and mother of one, was targeted with abuse by her husband and his family. I asked the participant whether the fact he drank affected her desire to have more children. She replied '*Of course! Of course, I didn't even want to have any kids with him, I wanted to leave. I left him after three months and we didn't live together.*'⁴⁴

Bad husbands, according to participants, were ones who drank to excess, didn't engage with contraception, coerced their wives into sex, treated their wives as domestic servants, or were otherwise unkind. In response to questions about good marriages, participants did not explicitly mention physical violence, and I did not ask. As a result, this study cannot say for certain whether these women experienced domestic violence themselves, nor how far violence was accepted by them. There is limited scholarship on domestic violence in the Soviet context. Attwood shows magazines like *Krest'ianka* and *Rabotnitsa* published letters from women giving accounts of beatings and violence.⁴⁵ Despite these examples, the state

⁴¹ Liubov, interview by author, January 2021.

⁴² Liubov, interview by author, January 2021.

⁴³ Tatiana, interview by author, January 2021.

⁴⁴ Svetlana, interview by author, January 2021.

⁴⁵ Attwood, L., *Creating the New Soviet Woman: Women's Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity* (Houndmills, 1999), pp. 52-53.

generally hid domestic violence, which according to Marxist doctrine was a relic from a former time that would disappear with the advent of communism and socio-economic equality.⁴⁶

Assessing the scale of domestic violence in the Soviet Union is difficult because no survey data was collected on this at the time, but domestic homicide rates do give some indication of the prevalence. For comparison, UK statistical survey data shows that 7.9% of women and 4.2% of men experienced domestic abuse in the year 2018, totalling almost 2 million victims.⁴⁷ The same year there were 173 actual murders by romantic partners or ex partners.⁴⁸ While we cannot assume this precise ratio of abuse to murder applied in the Soviet Union, it does demonstrate level of domestic violence that lies behind such homicide statistics. Months or years of abuse usually precede murder and, of course, only a tiny fraction of abuse relationships end in death. In the Soviet Union in the year 1980 (which saw the highest figures recorded), 17,646 'family homicides' were committed (this included spousal murders, and the killings of children, parents and other family members).⁴⁹ When the size of the population is taken into account, this produces a ratio of 6.7 domestic murders per 100,000 of the population. In comparison, the 2018 UK ratio was 0.26. In the context of oral history interviews, it should be noted that strong taboos exist around domestic violence in post-Soviet countries, and misconceptions about domestic violence are still common.⁵⁰ From the information gathered in this study it is only possible to speculate about physical violence in these women's marriages, but it was certainly a feature of Soviet marriage in general.

Newspaper articles discussing women's double burden of paid work and domestic chores were common during the 1970s and 1980s, indicating the problem of unequal labour was at least acknowledged in parts of Soviet society.⁵¹ Experts frequently discussed the topic in specialist literature too, although they rarely saw more equality between the sexes as the

⁴⁶ Horne, S., "Domestic Violence in Russia", *American Psychologist* 54, no. 1 (1999): 55-61; Sperling, V., "Rape and Domestic Violence in the USSR", *Response to the Victimization of Women & Children* 13, no. 3 (1990): 16-22.

⁴⁷ Office for National Statistics Report, "Domestic abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2018", <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2018#prevalence-of-domestic-abuse>, last accessed 02/03/22.

⁴⁸ Macintosh, T., and Swann, S. "Domestic violence killings reach five-year high", BBC, 13th September 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-49459674>, last accessed 02/03/22.

⁴⁹ Muravyeva, M., "Bytovukha: Family Violence in Soviet Russia", *Aspasia* 8 (2014): 107.

⁵⁰ Muravyeva, M., "Bytovukha."

⁵¹ Perevedentsev, V. I., "Skol'ko imet' detei? Ekonomicheskii aspekt," *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, 20th November 1968.

answer. However, treating their wife like a domestic servant, a feature of “bad husbands” identified by participants, usually meant more than just not doing domestic chores. Women who discussed this explained how their husbands were rude and humiliated them if the home was not exactly to their liking. They explained that their husbands could never be satisfied no matter how hard they worked.⁵² I asked all women about the double burden. When women were unhappy in their marriages they tended to acknowledge this and point to their husband’s lack of help.

Of course, of course! He didn’t even know, he didn’t know things like how much bread costs and where the shop is. Well, maybe I worked in the shop, but it was like this for many families. They knew only work, how to drink, and how to lie on the couch, yes, it’s no secret.⁵³

I asked her whether she was used to this dynamic at the time. She replied, ‘no, I will die and still not be used to it’.

If, however, participants had a happy marriage then they tended not to perceive this as a problem, even if they acknowledged that they had done all the domestic labour themselves.

I didn’t think that I needed to share domestic work with my partner. He- it was harder for him because he was at work and arrived home and would again sit down to read and write. So, I automatically did everything that needed to be done, that is, I cooked and I fed him and everything else.... He constantly worked, that is, how to put it? You could say that my son says to me, and his wife too, that I was a victim, but I don’t consider myself a victim. I think it’s the normal position of women, who must take care of the house as we say [dom vesti]. Keep it together. That’s all. And to me- it was pleasant to me. To me it was pleasant that I could make another’s life easier.⁵⁴

This statement demonstrates the internalisation of the period’s gender norms. Though Valentina said her husband worked much harder, she also reported working twelve hour shifts at a hospital herself. To do everything was evidently not unusual, and she resisted re-evaluating the behaviour of a husband she loved in light of social change and the beliefs of a younger generation. It is particularly telling that the unequal division of labour had clearly been discussed in the family before (‘my son says I was a victim’). For Valentina, who reported a happy marriage, it was the love of her career that stopped her desiring a second child. She explained there was a heavy workload, but linked this to employment, not to domestic labour. Most women were keen to dispel the idea that they were victims, one even

⁵² Svetlana and Tatiana in particular talked at length about this in interviews by author, January 2021.

⁵³ Svetlana, interview by author, January 2021.

⁵⁴ Valentina, interview by author, January 2021. Maria and Olga expressed very similar dynamics.

pointed out to me that women in 1970s Britain would have done all the housework too.⁵⁵ In general, their perception was that this was the normal way of things, and they only felt it affected their decisions about family size when they perceived their particular husband to be less helpful or supportive than the husbands of others. Nevertheless, in noting the harsh workload of their mother's generation the issue emerges slightly differently. Workload and support clearly were important factors, but women did not generally perceive greater equality as a resolution to this. Instead of laying the blame with husbands, they saw endless toil as an inevitable consequence of having four or five children and not something that could be easily remedied. In many cases this was also felt to be true of having a third child.

Conformity and social norms

Historians have characterised Soviet society under Brezhnev as being socially conservative, dominated by 'bourgeois family values' and a 'strong sense of propriety'.⁵⁶ This is supported by the experiences of participants, who expressed pressure to conform—namely to marry by twenty-five and have a child after marriage. Pressure to conform sometimes led to unhappy outcomes. Two women who later got divorced both told me they had been unsure about the marriage at the time but felt they had no option.

Nadezhda: There were two guys there, friends of her husband... and one of them- ... I was very naughty – they both wanted to take me home — and I, do you know what I said?

Author: What did you say?

Nadezhda: I said "whoever laces up my boots better, he can take me home" – such a notion! Very naughty I was! And well the one who did them up better was the one I preferred. I say "ah, good!" and off we went. But I didn't even think- I thought just of that [the lift home]. But he was very- he knew how to talk, he was calm... and very, very elegant. And then I- I saw all my friends had got married and I was already 24, and at 25 everyone said you became an old maid. I thought I need to get married. But I admit... I didn't really feel that proper pure love, just he was a good man, pleasant — I thought he suited me, that's all. But... he sadly, he, well... that year he became not so [great] already. Yes he had already become not so pleasant.⁵⁷

Reaching the age of twenty-five loomed large for many women who felt it was socially unacceptable to be single after this age.

⁵⁵ Liubov, interview by author, January 2021.

⁵⁶ Tompson, W., *The Soviet Union under Brezhnev*, pp. 99-100.

⁵⁷ Nadezhda, interview by author, January 2021.

Research by Rotkirch found that 50% of women and 60% of men in this generation thought sex before marriage was acceptable.⁵⁸ Despite this, participants explained it was considered shameful to be *pregnant* before marriage—‘the whole village would smear your fence with tar if it happened’—as Iulia explained.⁵⁹ A hasty marriage was sometimes arranged if pregnancy had occurred, as happened for Svetlana. ‘Well where can you go? I got pregnant with my first child, how... well how else... that’s why I went with him cause there’s a kid and all. I thought well a kid needs a father.’. In her case this left her feeling trapped.

So, I can’t say I strongly loved him or anything, but clearly he had some kind of feelings towards me, er and you can see... so it turned out that I married him. But... lots of boys courted me, I... was quite a plain girl, but I was... an optimist.. a good cheerleader. So ... I did have a choice of who to marry but er... well you know... I got stuck married to him.⁶⁰

She chose to marry him despite the fact that she said her parents opposed the match. Whether they knew of the pregnancy is unclear. As a working-class woman whose parents were collective farmers in Tambov, the cut off age for marriage in her community seemed to be younger than twenty-five. I asked whether her starting a family at twenty-one was considered early.

No not early, not early, I had finished college (teknikum). I didn’t get married early, everyone did it that age and even earlier. It- it was said that I was waiting around, people laughed about it and me – in the village... it wasn’t... no not at all, me and him we knew each other. And you see how fate turned out? Well yeah...

The pressure to live the kind of life expected of them meant nearly all young women of this generation married and had a child. As divorce was widespread and acceptable, marriages that only took place because of social pressure were quick to breakdown. Nadezhda and Svetlana both later got divorced and explained this limited their desire for another child.

Conformity and social norms worked in other ways too. For the most part, women of this generation simply didn’t consider a larger family because it was just not the norm among their peers. Svetlana, who spent her adulthood in Volgograd told me ‘all the classmates were only children. We didn’t have big families then in our time—in our years it was one or at most two, but two was rare’. Later in the interview we returned to the topic, and she said ‘Even in those days... I know that abortions were hard... to do. But... people found some

⁵⁸ Rotkirch, A., "What kind of sex can you talk about?": Acquiring Sexual Knowledge in Three Soviet Generations," p. 106.

⁵⁹ Iulia, interview by author, February 2021. Iulia was born in 1951.

⁶⁰ Svetlana, interview by author, January 2021.

way and didn't give birth.' After some prompting she continued, 'those who thought about it, they thought that they'd give a decent life to one or two.'⁶¹ Valentina also felt this way: 'not one of my friends had a large family. In the best case one child was born, that's all. I don't know, there wasn't ever a conversation about it. That is, we didn't discuss this topic.'⁶² To a great extent, women of all generations take their cues from their peers and parents. This generation of women were unusual only in desiring so few children in comparison to their parents. In this they continued a longer trend of transition.

State propaganda

The gradually intensifying government pronatalist propaganda campaign throughout the 1970s and 1980s coincided with the period when this generation of women were starting families. Participants had very little to say about propaganda in this area. At the time of interview in their later stages of life they struggled to recall any campaign clearly. Around half of participants assured me no such thing had ever taken place. 'Somehow I don't remember or there was never any kind of thing... you know... agitation to have more children was not something I ever heard of.'⁶³ They remembered Soviet propaganda but talked about it in the context of labour production rather than childbearing. It was common for participants in Russia to compare the contemporary benefits of maternity capital to their recollections of the 1970s and assert that the state at that time had no interest in the matter. Contemporary pronatalist drives had clearly affected their views on Soviet state support.

Despite this, participants did sometimes unwittingly repeat the messages of the Party. Olga told me:

You know I think you always need two, and more well if God gives them or if a woman decides, but one is somehow... boring... I thought that it would be boring when she left home... in a family it is good for a child to have a brother or sister.⁶⁴

Aside from the reference to God, the statement that it is good for a child to have a sibling and that families with one child are boring could be taken straight from newspapers of the time. Quite a few women expressed that the ideal number of children was larger than the number they gave birth to for similar reasons. Support, playmates, and the busyness of a multi-child family were cited as reasons. Linking these assertions to propaganda, however, is

⁶¹ Svetlana, interview by author, January 2021.

⁶² Valentina, interview by author, January 2021.

⁶³ Olga, interview by author, November 2020.

⁶⁴ Olga, interview by author, November 2020. Olga was born after the war in Soviet Lithuania.

problematic. Firstly, a significant number of women had one child and reported they had never desired another. If such feelings were the result of Party propaganda they evidently did not affect this sub-group of women. Secondly, views that it is nice for a child to have a playmate are hardly unique to the Soviet context. Similar thoughts are frequently expressed in countries never exposed to this kind of propaganda. The truth is that large families *do* have some advantages just as small ones have others. What was missing from the interviews was any uniform agreement that families with three children were better, as might be expected if Soviet women had internalised the government messaging. This is supported by the statistical evidence that shows fertility continued to fall. Though a small increase was seen in the 1980s, demographers have since demonstrated this occurred simply due to a change in the timing of births, rather than a greater number.⁶⁵

If half of participants denied any recollection of the propaganda, the other half had hazy memories and tended to dismiss these attempts.

Natalia: Well we didn't really believe our newspapers. ... If there was something interesting we would gather in the evening with Dad, everyone drank tea, and he told us what interesting thing had happened.. then we didn't have to read the papers. And then.... I remember that at that time... they were worried about low birth rates after the war yes?

Author: well yes

Natalia: and even when I had my third child... before that it was considered that five children was a Heroine Mother. And then even when you had a three children suddenly that was considered a large family, and we even received a special packet of food products that were difficult to get.⁶⁶

Natalia did not feel this affected her decision to have more children, however, rather she described the thought process as a haphazard mixture of not planning, giving birth, and having the occasional abortion when she did not feel very well or capable of having another child. Others agreed with her judgement, explaining that salaries were so low that increased benefits could have no effect.

Nina was unusual in having clear memories of the campaign and policy changes.

Yes there was this system [of propaganda]. I later understood that the population wasn't large enough and that was the most... but you know this policy didn't have any particular successes for the simple reason that it's not enough to simply go about

⁶⁵ Frejka, T. and Zakharov, S., "The Apparent Failure of Russia's Pronatalist Family Policies."

⁶⁶ Natalia, interview by author, December 2020.

for nine months and then give birth. And... most importantly, most importantly there were not the conditions for births.⁶⁷

She then explained she had done a nursing placement as part of her higher education, though she never worked as one afterwards. She described poor conditions in maternity hospitals and uncaring treatment of women.

And we went to practice [as nurses] everywhere, in many of these places, including- we were in maternity departments. You know, I just saw women in labour lying in the corridor. It was awful. I had a ward for two. This I could do, you know. And he [the doctor] cared for everyone. And all the women just lay in the corridor... both after abortions, and after these, some abortions were very complicated and you go over and she's all doubled over, it was the most, well and she simply, well with hands pressed to her stomach and chest, because evidently it's all, well, this is what we saw... It's what we saw.⁶⁸

She felt the lack of care and facilities discouraged women from future pregnancies and described the whole process of controlling fertility as a traumatic for many women of this generation. Previous literature has tended to highlight improvements brought by legal abortion, modern medicine, and improved bodily autonomy for this generation women. The post war generation certainly did benefit from these improvements, but Nina's testimony is an important reminder that the system, while perhaps improved, still caused women much physical pain and suffering while attempting to limit their fertility. As discussed in the previous chapter, population experts uniformly opposed restrictions on abortion, and in general favoured contraception. Vishnevskii, for example, in 1973 called for better contraception while describing abortion as a barbaric method of fertility control that damaged women's health when it was their only option.⁶⁹ However, in general, calls for birth control rarely highlighted women's experience, pain, or suffering as legitimate motivations to manufacture contraception, instead focusing on infertility as the primary problem.⁷⁰

Wealth and material circumstances

The relationship between wealth and fertility has long been an apparent paradox of demography. In pre-industrial societies, wealth corresponded with higher levels of fertility. In post-industrial societies, however, wealth is negatively correlated with fertility, and in general

⁶⁷ Nina, interview by author, January 2021.

⁶⁸ Nina, interview by author, January 2021.

⁶⁹ Vishnevskii, A. I., "Demograficheskie protsessy v SSSR", *Voprosy filosofii*, no. 3 (1973): 125.

⁷⁰ On the role of doctors in the late-Soviet period, see Leykin, I. and Rivkin-Fish, M., "Politicized Demography and Biomedical Authority in post-Soviet Russia", *Medical Anthropology* (2021): 1-16.

as a society achieves higher living standards, family sizes decrease.⁷¹ This fact was well known by Soviet specialists too, who cautioned against making simplistic assumptions about living standards.⁷² Claims that women would have had larger families if they had been in a stronger financial position should, therefore, be treated with caution because statistical evidence suggests the opposite. On the other hand, whether or not this is really the case, many women in this study believed it to be true. That they perceived their choices in this way is of itself significant and explains what it felt like to be starting a family as a young woman in the Brezhnev era Soviet Union.

This dynamic played out in interviews where low salaries, limited childcare facilities and lack of housing space were sometimes mentioned. Comparisons with modern Russia and other post-Soviet states seemed to inform the discussion and limit these concerns to a certain extent. Childcare run by the private sector is now costly, salaries are still low, and most people live in Soviet era housing still. New costs for higher education and housing are also a consideration for contemporary families. Though living standards have risen considerably, participants—who were all pensioners—did not perceive themselves as having been so much poorer back then.

When I asked women directly whether housing and wealth affected their decisions they often said yes, but with a little probing it became clear this was not the most important factor. Mother of three Vera initially lived in a single room in a Siberian town with her husband and first child. They were later given three rooms in a divided wooden house upon the birth of their second child. She explained, 'In any circumstances, even if we had had only one room, we wouldn't have been considering a single child.... We may have thought about the third, but there always had to be two.'⁷³ The necessity of two for Vera was related to her own family and the help and support she received from her siblings.

⁷¹ Colleran, H. et al., "Fertility Decline and the Changing Dynamics of Wealth, Status and Inequality", *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 282, no. 1806 (2015): 1-9; Kirk, D., "Demographic Transition Theory", *Population Studies* 50, no. 3 (1996): 361-387. For another perspective on this complex issue see, Reher, D. S., "Economic and Social Implications of the Demographic Transition."

⁷² ARAN, f. 1977, op. 2, d. 19, l. 7.

⁷³ Vera, interview by author, December 2020.

Other factors were much more decisive than housing or salary. If a woman wanted another child then usually she would find a way to make the material circumstances work. Far more difficult to reconcile were relationships.

Author: did housing affect your decision to have or not have children?

Liubov: For everyone without a doubt, for everyone.... It was decisive. If you have no-where to live you aren't going to have a child.

Author: But if... I mean if you had had, I don't know, a very big house, would you have wanted a third child? Or you still wouldn't have wanted one?

Liubov: no, well, I wouldn't have wanted a third child... [after some reflection where she discussed salaries being so low, she continued] To have a second or some third child is not even a question of whether you're rich or whether you have money but of who is there beside you. It is somehow subconscious.⁷⁴

Such exchanges were common. Women who reported the limited nursery facilities and the poor quality of them, when pressed, usually relayed that either they had never wanted another child, or that something about their relationship with their husband had held them back.

For the purpose of analysis, factors affecting decision making have been separated out in this chapter, but in reality many of these elements sat alongside each other. Tamara, mother of one, grew up on a collective farm near the Ukrainian boarder, then as an adult worked in a factory in Stalingrad. I asked her what she thought the ideal number of children was.

Well I... I think three is good. Four is already sort of.. tiresome. As far as it's possible financially, in as much as... again these everyday things... there can be problems. How much does your husband help, that's an issue too. If... there's no financial help... or childcare help you can take. Because with little children there is- you need to think ahead so that everything for them is... ok, so that they don't have the kind of Brodsky style childhood I did. I recall this every time we're out of salt, and so you know... I didn't want my children to be poor like I was in childhood.⁷⁵

Fear of poverty, lack of support from a partner, and aspirations for a better, wealthier life all intermingled, encouraging women to restrict their fertility to make their lives more manageable.

Preventing unwanted pregnancy

Being able to reliably prevent pregnancy is the essence of fertility control. For this generation it was possible to prevent pregnancy but not always easy. As noted in the literature, the only widespread, *reliable* method of fertility control for this generation was abortion.⁷⁶ Women of

⁷⁴ Liubov, interview by author, January 2021.

⁷⁵ Tamara, interview by author, January 2021.

⁷⁶ On this see Nakachi, M., "Liberation Without Contraception?"; Nakachi, M., *Replacing the Dead*; David, H. P., Joanna, S., and Anastasia, P.-V., *From Abortion to Contraception*.

this generation generally did nothing to prevent pregnancy straight after marriage, and this was true of all participants interviewed. All but one participant had been married at some point. Women only considered preventing pregnancy once they had given birth to their first child and wanted to avoid instantly becoming pregnant again. Prolonged nursing was mentioned by a few women, though never as the mainstay of their contraceptive practices. Medical research show this method is effective only for a few months postpartum while a baby is exclusively breastfed.⁷⁷

Interestingly, inter-uterine devices were mentioned by two participants, but when I asked others about IUDs they all insisted that they did not exist in the 1970s. It seems to have been the case that IUDs were available sporadically and not advertised as an option. One participant was fitted for an IUD after a medical condition meant another pregnancy would have been dangerous to her health.⁷⁸ The other participant who had used an IUD, Iulia, was a biology teacher who told me she had a much better awareness of these things because of her specialism.

For the average Soviet women of the 1970s there were essentially three contraceptive options. The rhythm method (where sex is restricted to days in the month estimated to be non-fertile ones), withdrawal (coitus interruptus), and condoms. A combination of the three methods was often used. If these forms failed, woman resorted to abortions when they were unwilling to have another child. Valentina was a good example of this: 'I, well, I hoped I could just... count the days in the menstrual cycle somehow, well... to protect against it that way, but twice it didn't work out.'⁷⁹ When the rhythm method failed Valentina explained she, like many women, had resorted to abortions.

Younger women seemed to have had more access to condoms than older women. The oldest participant born in 1936, reported that doctors would try to calculate the rhythm method for women, but that it did not work and in general her generation performed abortions, being unaware even of other methods.⁸⁰ As discussed in chapter three, the 1960s saw debates within government about the acceptability of birth control on a fundamental level. The end of the

⁷⁷ Kennedy, K. I. and Visness, C. M., "Contraceptive Efficacy of Lactational Amenorrhoea", *The Lancet* 339, no. 8787 (1992): 227-230.

⁷⁸ Tatiana explained this during interview by author, January 2021.

⁷⁹ Valentina, interview by author, January 2021.

⁸⁰ Vera, interview by author, December 2021.

1960s saw a softening in this government rhetoric, which appears to have coincided with slightly higher condom use. Younger women were therefore more likely to use condoms, but they stressed that some men refused. 'All responsibility fell to women,' as Luidmila told me.⁸¹ One of those who used condoms successfully was Ekaterina. Born in 1953, she reported this was her main form of contraception and she had not performed abortions. As a strong believer in God from a religious family, she told me she saw abortion as a sin and that her mother had warned her never to have an abortion. As a mother of four, it is possible she kept some unexpected pregnancies and did not mention this. Ekaterina was unusual both in her attitude to abortion, her religiosity, and her family size.

Often women reported the rhythm method as the main form of contraception, but when asked about the availability of condoms said they had also used these too. One participant who underwent several abortions explained:

Condoms yes. We used them, well but somehow, to be honest this is poor protection [she laughed] and what's more with the quality we had then, er well we didn't use- no we used them, but all the same they broke.⁸²

The poor quality of condoms is well noted in the literature, which partially explains women's ambivalence towards them.⁸³ Very few participants said this had been their own main method of contraception.

The biggest driver of abortion, by these women's accounts, was male carelessness. Women were in control of abortion, but they were reliant on men for cooperation with contraception.⁸⁴ When asked how they prevented pregnancy many participants gave slightly cryptic answers along the lines of 'my husband was very caring' or 'he looked after me very well'.⁸⁵ This meant either being willing to adhere strictly to the rhythm method, practising withdrawal very carefully, or always buying and using condoms. Tatiana's answer particularly highlighted this mindset:

Tatiana: There was almost nothing available. I counted my biological cycle... like that. Maybe there were condoms.

Author: ... but you didn't use them?

⁸¹ Luidmila, interview by author, January 2021.

⁸² Liubov, interview by author, January 2021.

⁸³ David, H. P., Joanna, S., and Anastasia, P.-V., *From Abortion to Contraception*.

⁸⁴ This finding is supported by: Drezgić, R., "Policies and Practices of Fertility Control."

⁸⁵ Natalia and Nina, interviews by author, December 2020 and January 2021.

Tatiana: I am not a man! This is a male affair. [she laughs]⁸⁶

The idea that she was able to take control of the process by buying and insisting on condom use evidently did not reflect the reality of her life or the norms of the time.

The kind of relationship, and the equality a woman had within marriage was therefore particularly important in determining whether she was likely to face repeated abortions as a backup to other methods of fertility control. According to Nina's account, she had avoided abortions by strictly limiting sex to certain times of the month. 'We counted the critical days. Yes that's how it was. I kept a diary. Yes I now recall that I kept a diary! And he looked in it when we needed to.'⁸⁷ For many years Nina taught in a school in a Siberian town. She told me that her circle of peers were not as fortunate as she was in preventing pregnancy.

Well in general these conversations were constant among the female teachers about what helps and what doesn't help and all that because... well probably 95% of woman were married. They were married and who used what. Who did.. what. It was simpler for me because I had a very intelligent, understanding husband so... but there were all sorts. One woman, also a history teacher, she was also a history teacher, Liudmila she was called — I forget her patronymic. She was always complaining that her husband... some kind of... chauffeur, he didn't consider her tastes. And very often... well... literally... he'd force her to be with him. And she would get pregnant, she'd get pregnant and all the time be asking "how do you do it?! How do *you*?!". Well to start with she hounded me and when I told her that we live by a timetable, she looked at me with eyes wide "what?" she says, "are you crazy", and I say, "well how else?" [She laughs].⁸⁸

Others alluded to this kind of dynamic in their own lives. Liubov undertook five abortions between her first and second child, reflecting, 'I got pregnant very easily yeah... unfortunately, and my husband probably didn't have much mercy on me... so...[ne scshadul]'.⁸⁹

Women of this generation felt that abortion was a negative thing, but unavoidable and did not judge those who did them even if they did not need to themselves.

You know... how to put it? ... I generally never blamed women who wanted to do that because life was very hard and you know not all men used protection and to give birth every year, is of course... at that time nobody judged.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Tatiana, interview by author, January 2021.

⁸⁷ Nina, interview by author, January 2021.

⁸⁸ Nina, interview by author, January 2021.

⁸⁹ Liubov, interview by author, January 2021.

⁹⁰ Olga, interview by author, November 2020.

Abortion at this time was normal even if rarely discussed. A few participants described the situation in abortion clinics. ‘In our country... well it was awful. I don’t know how it is now, but then it was just a conveyer belt... women um... getting rid.’⁹¹ Svetlana—who it should be noted did not openly say she had undergone abortions—replied the following when I asked what her view of abortion was then:

Err, bad but what can you do? Bad of course, bad. To kill a living thing... your own... flesh and blood, but what can you do? Nothing... nothing. Fear for survival was first of all, then giving birth and being in poverty. ... That kind of fear prevailed... even sometimes it was impossible to think of abandoning it or something... That’s when you get rid, well that’s done, no poverty, and in the soul, there was a relief of the spirt somehow. Not joy, of course, but there was relief. I don’t hide it.⁹²

Her response is quite typical in expressing both the unpleasantness of abortions and their necessity. Some guilt was expressed by participants—Liubov, for example, told me: ‘Unfortunately I will be in front of the Lord’—but much of this seemed retrospective. The increasing influence of the Orthodox Church in Russia and other post-Soviet countries continues to change opinions including the way women saw their previous choices. This was particularly true of women who had become religious after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Like previous generations, but in contrast to younger people, sex had been taboo for these women. Iulia told me ‘I can speak openly about this because I am a biologist, it is natural for me, but for woman of that time it’s not natural to talk about this. It’s shameful to speak about it, intimate relations are a taboo topic’.⁹³ In their youth, women who discussed contraception only ever did so in whispers between close friends, and there was a lack of general knowledge. ‘For us there was, you know... such... *illiteracy* I would say.’⁹⁴ Women explained that it was very difficult to find out accurate information. No sex education was provided at schools, or home, nor were such topics written about in Soviet publications. This could leave people highly unprepared. As Galina, born in 1946, reported, ‘there was absolutely nothing of that kind. You know, what’s more, when I got married I was already twenty-five and I was very surprised about how it all worked after the wedding, it wasn’t like what I’d imagined. I really had no idea about it at all.’⁹⁵ Around half of interview participants told me they did not even discuss issues like contraception with close female friends.

⁹¹ Liubov, interview by author, January 2021.

⁹² Svetlana, interview by author, January 2021.

⁹³ Iulia, interview by author, February 2021.

⁹⁴ Liubov, interview by author, January 2021.

⁹⁵ Galina, interview by author, January 2021,

In some cases, the lack of properly reliable contraception did lead to births that wouldn't otherwise have occurred, such as for Liubov who explained why she had continued with her pregnancy despite not wanting a second child.

I didn't want to and went for an abortion, I went along for this abortion. Well, and the doctor persuaded me, but it was already official [the abortion], I arrived... at that time it was already allowed... I went officially, I was given a referral to do all the tests. Anyway, when I arrived and even stayed overnight in the hospital the doctor looked at me and she said "you have a good life, why do you want an abortion?" [u vas vse khoroso, zachem delat' vam abort?] ... well, the doctor said "go!".⁹⁶

A crucial difference between this one and her previous abortions was that it occurred in a state clinic for free. Though abortions had long been legal by this point—the early 1980s—Liubov had paid doctors for previous abortions and consequently they had not questioned her choice.

Unreliable contraception did play a role as this shows, but stories such as Liubov's were unusual in this generation. The general conclusion was that lack of contraception made their lives difficult but rarely resulted in them changing the number of children they had. This was in contrast to their mothers' generation, where women told me that there had been more unwanted pregnancies that were ultimately kept.

I would say my childhood was very difficult because they had already lost three children. Abortions were forbidden then. So, whether she wanted to or not, difficult or not, my mother was forced to give birth. And when I was born I was their seventh child and I was very unwanted, you understand. And they thought that I must die. Can you imagine? Er, in general my grandma somehow thought that if a newborn dies it becomes an angel, you see?⁹⁷

Tamara explained she had been born shortly after the war in a rural area of southern Russia experiencing semi-famine. For young women of the Brezhnev era, controlling fertility was difficult but ultimately possible to do reliably, and this changed the dynamic for this generation.

⁹⁶ Liubov, interview by author, January 2021.

⁹⁷ Tamara, interview by author, January 2021.

Life and family in a changing Soviet Union

For the most part, this generation of women seemed happy with the lives they had led. The acknowledged difficulties and certain unhappy circumstances, but felt that overall, they had been lucky when compared to their mothers' generation.

And *therefore* even, look I will tell you my personal story. Mum did an abortion... off someone at home, well, some sort of doctor at home so that nobody knew. She was pregnant with me and went to do an abortion and she would have done it, she thought she had done something, well, that it was successful, and it turned out no! I-I that is I was born ... but I know she did more abortions at that time too [the late 40s and early 50s] unfortunately. So I think it was really a nightmare at that time. Yes it was a nightmare... it was a very hard time.... And particularly when it comes to this topic very...⁹⁸

Many felt their lives could not even be compared to their parents who had suffered through the war. One woman for example, told me how her village in the Belorussian Republic had been occupied by the Nazis and both her father and grandfather had been taken and forced into slave labour for the German Pharmaceutical giant Bayer, leaving her mother and four sisters to survive the occupation.⁹⁹ This occurred before she was born and was not the main subject of the interview, but participants often relayed such stories to explain why they felt they could not even compare their lives to the hardships their parents faced.

Literature often highlights reduced repression and rising living standards as the reason life became easier after Stalin. For women, smaller families were pivotal in lightening the load.

Author: So in comparison with your mother you didn't work very much you'd say?

Nina: Yes, in comparison with mother I would say so. I could, for example, quietly sit and read a book for a bit. Mum couldn't do that because there were three of us [siblings]. She worked... Dad was completely incapable of cooking, and she would arrive. Er in general we very early on [learnt]... not about housekeeping or anything, but in any case.. in any case when she went off for his abortions we boiled potatoes. [She laughs] Yes that's how it was. I remember that the three of us would boil potatoes.¹⁰⁰

Another factor participants raised was the change in education. Most participants had parents who were literate, but three women told me their mother or both parents were not. These tended to be women whose families had been poorer. Their parents had worked either in

⁹⁸ Nadezhda, interview by author, January 2021.

⁹⁹ Elena, interview by author, January 2021.

¹⁰⁰ Nina, interview by author, January 2021.

factories or on collective farms.¹⁰¹ I asked one participant, born in 1950, whether her lifestyle differed significantly from her mother's she talked about war and famine before telling me:

My mother told me, for example, she had four sisters, five girls in the family. And they took it in turns to go to school because there were no clothes. Today you go to school because you can put on shoes and wear a blouse and so on. And tomorrow she will go to school. In the exact same set of clothes. It was very hard. So she didn't received an education but worked very hard.¹⁰²

This level of poverty was a major difference between this generation and previous ones.

When asked about the lives of generations of young women today in comparison to their own, answers were mixed. They of course pointed to the material advantages contemporary parents enjoy such as disposable diapers (always referred to by their brand name Pampers) and washing machines, both common refrains. Freedom to shape one's own life was a common benefit along with international travel. They highlighted the support that the Soviet system gave them, pointing out that at that time housing, education, and medicine were all free. As one participant living in Ukraine put it, 'but now if you don't have money you can't even do anything, you can't even buy food.'¹⁰³ This perhaps reflects the precarity of life in many capitalist post-Soviet countries, where salaries and pensions remain low, but the government support from the communist period has been removed.

Many felt a strong pull of nostalgia to the time simply because they were young. I asked one participant whether the 1970s were a happy time for her.

Yes yes. But not because of the social system, not because you had money or didn't have money—we were *young*. We were young and when a person is young... er they will always have meet ups and they worry more about love, perhaps their career, but.. I am just judging by myself. And I could go to these courses [college courses] they were fantastic to study, I studied for free.

She continued in this vein for some time talking about social events, dates, parties and meeting friends before concluding:

So comparing that period with now, of course I'd choose it! When I was young everything was better ... So that's why I remember this time as a golden one I'd say. Although on a purely political level, um, considering what the Soviet Union was, how it was, then it of course it was our tragedy.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Serzhima, Elena and Liubov, interviews January 2021.

¹⁰² Elena, interview by author, January 2021.

¹⁰³ Liubov, interview by author, January 2021.

¹⁰⁴ Liubov, interview by author, January 2021.

Happy lives can, of course, be lived in challenging times and vice versa. As Raleigh's study of the same generation found, the late Soviet system, though highly flawed, offered young people enough stability and security to lead enjoyable lives.¹⁰⁵

Nadezhda, a participant from Moldova, had fared well financially after the fall of the Soviet Union, unlike many other participants. She responded to a question about whether she thought things were easier for women today by saying:

Yes yes yes yes, yes. Feminism, we are already all... we do what we want, and we do what we think is necessary, but I am judging by myself! And after when I you know I worked, and I understood that I could do things. In some ways of course it was bad, there was no man immediately beside me ... but all the same the confidence in yourself, so much strength, so much, and... my mum was also a very strong person but.... In those times probably... it was harder for her. Although, *although* it was good from another side, why? Because everything was free! For the apartment we paid very little money, for the flat, very, very little. And Dad paid for everything. He brought all the food, we ate, Mum cooked very deliciously, and Mum didn't know what it was to pay for an apartment, for food, the only things she bought were her own things, she went out and bought them. And I, you know I pay for my own apartment myself, for my children, everything, everything, everything has to be paid for. And there are already other opportunities, *but* nevertheless, I am glad because you respect yourself, that you can do it, and you feel stronger and make yourself stronger. ... It was easier to live in Soviet times, it was easier to live, considerably. It was- we were sure we would go to university for free, medicine was free, and we could go on holiday and only have to pay a very little money and we could go.¹⁰⁶

The word feminism, it should be noted, was used only by Nadezhda, though discussions about agency and choice touched on similar themes with several women. This wide-ranging reflection demonstrates some of the tensions in society revealed by the collapse of the Soviet system and the changing position of women. While reflections on life today do perhaps tell us a little about what it was like to live in the Soviet Union, they tell us much more about what it is like to be old and look back at a life that has seen much social change. Any large-scale system change will bring with it certain advantages and disadvantages that will affect individuals in different ways, and participants' answers demonstrated this. They saw their youth as a simple and stable time even though it brought challenges of its own.

¹⁰⁵ Raleigh, D. J., *Soviet Baby Boomers: An Oral History of Russia's Cold War Generation*.

¹⁰⁶ Nadezhda, interview by author, December 2020.

Conclusion

From the perspective of women starting their families in the late Soviet Union, the new population policies so hotly debated by experts in the previous chapters had little impact. Few noticed the propaganda and those that did were unmoved by it. Certain changes were appreciated by women who noticed, for example, that they received more generous maternity leave as time went on. They perceived this as a long overdue welfare measure, however, rather than a reason to have larger families. For the majority of ordinary women, it appears the pronatalism of the 1970s passed them by, particularly when recalled in comparison to the extensive benefits received by Russian women today. If not influenced by the Party's desires, then what determined their fertility?

Firstly, this was the first generation of Soviet women to have full control of their fertility. The illegal status of abortion for previous generations made it unreliable, and unwanted pregnancies did lead to births relatively frequently. Ransel shows that sometimes women could not face the harrowing improvised procedures, the abortion didn't work, or there was limited access to the abortionist at the necessary moment.¹⁰⁷ In contrast, this generation were able to control the numbers of children they had effectively, even though doing so was sometimes unpleasant. This clearly made a difference to the overall number of children born; fertility became a true choice, unlike the rock-and-hard-place dilemmas of the past.

Secondly, beyond the ability to control pregnancy, desires further determined trends. Early experiences had a big impact on women. On the one hand, those who grew up in small families never considered having many children as this was not their norm. On the other, those who grew up with many siblings often experienced poverty, overcrowding, and saw their mothers overworked trying to balance the demands of work and family. They resolved to have fewer children themselves to alleviate these difficulties. Even those who adored siblings still did not see the need for as many as they had grown up with. This ties into one of the central themes of these interviews: the desire to live better. This generation experienced better living conditions than previous Soviet generations, but they achieved this partly by limiting their fertility. Indeed, participants could have chosen to live similar lives to their mothers, having large families at the expense of material comfort and overcrowding, but they

¹⁰⁷ Ransel, D. L., *Village Mothers: Three Generations of Change in Russia and Tataria*, pp. 108-116.

chose to live easier, more prosperous lives. For this reason, families of more than three children were totally out of the question, and a third child became unusual too.

Thirdly, a new normal range had been established, but *exactly* how many children to have—whether to have a second, for example—depended on a complex array of factors. Personal feelings, career choices, and the average among family and friends all played a role. By far the most significant factor, however, appears to be the woman's relationship with her husband and the strength of the marriage. Unhappy marriages left women feeling unsupported and unable to commit to another pregnancy. They also most often ended in divorce, reducing the opportunity for further children. As pregnancy outside of wedlock was considered shameful by this generation, 'going it alone' with an additional child after divorce was not something any of the women interviewed for this study considered.

Finally, this study has shown that patterns of childbearing in the late Soviet Union occurred in response to broad sociological stimuli but in contrast to what the Party wanted.

Transformations in medicine, industrialisation, female emancipation, and urbanisation affected Soviet women as they did elsewhere in the world. Far from internalising pronatalist propaganda or adopting Soviet narratives as Leinarte has argued Lithuanian women did, this research demonstrates how Soviet society developed independently from the regime. This generation created their own norms about family size regardless of the Party's desires.

Historical events and government pronouncements were experienced mostly as a background to women's personal lives, where they continued to make choices from the options available to them. In the area of reproduction, they chose the options most undesirable to the Party, and in doing so carved out their own path.

Conclusion

This thesis has addressed a period in Soviet history when, for the first time, basic indicators of health and mortality worsened in a sustained way that could not be explained by a temporary disaster. This worsening occurred both in combination with sub-replacement Slavic fertility, and in contrast to the progress on mortality and longevity made in the capitalist West. As such, the Brezhnev era provided uncharted demographic territory for Soviet leaders, and the aim of this work has been to examine the political implications of this change and subsequent response. An enormous literature shows how economic dynamics affected the Soviet Union, but these works often see demographic dynamics as a side-note rather than a political force in their own right. This study has sought to address this, arguing for the significance of population change in shaping late-Soviet politics and culture. As demographic changes became apparent, the Soviet government attempted to suppress knowledge about the population from the public and the world in general, fearing that the bad news about Soviet health would undermine the country's position as a global superpower. At the same time, elites believed they would be able to reshape the future population by controlling reproduction, and that this would resolve the Union's economic problems and bolster their military status. Instead, this research demonstrates that Soviet society developed independently of the regime, which was ultimately unable to affect basic life processes in the way the Party desired.

When Brezhnev and Kosygin took over from Khrushchev in 1964 the Soviet population appeared to be in relatively good shape. Each year, newborns were predicted to live longer than those of year before and the Soviet government had made huge strides in reducing disease and illness. Only falling birth rates offered any cause for concern. Yet just ten years later the government was debating major policy change to encourage births, stopping the publication of infant mortality figures, and hiding information on life expectancy. Increased alcohol consumption, and a lack of investment in healthcare, nutrition, or industrial safety procedures had allowed public health problems to creep up on the government just at the moment when women were reducing their childbearing. Ironically, secrecy sometimes actually hindered the government in achieving its purported aims (such as reducing infant mortality) because staff at all levels were encouraged to under report and disguise problems.

Experts saw reductions in health and fertility as an emerging crisis, and throughout the 1970s and early 1980s they gradually persuaded ministers to share their view of the situation.

An important theme to emerge from this research is the link between demography and legitimacy. Longevity, mortality, and rates of reproduction reflected the policies of Soviet rule and were known to do so by Soviet leaders. Brezhnev himself described these indices as ‘a summary.... of all that is being done for man: the conditions of his work and life, health protection, and insurance.’¹ He was well aware these were standards by which Soviet rule was to be judged. This effect worked both domestically and on the world stage, where demography was used as a diplomatic tool. For this reason, the first instincts of political leaders were to tighten censorship to hide evidence of negative demographic news. This occurred consistently throughout the 1970s as infant mortality figures stopped being published, life expectancy was manipulated, and the results of the 1979 census were hidden until perestroika. But covering up evidence of negative trends was only an initial reaction to the news. In the long term, Soviet elites aimed to reshape the population and passionately believed that this would be possible using the combined force of science and the socialist state.

Population dynamics became an important lens through which elites viewed other societal problems and aimed to resolve them. Differential fertility levels between Republics meant that the people of Central Asia were a growing proportion of all Soviet people, but this presented problems for Soviet leaders. Those from Central Asia were the least integrated into the Union and the most challenging for leaders in Moscow to control, owing to the fact they retained distinctive cultures separate from the Russian leaders. They were viewed with prejudice by Moscow elites, who feared losing their majority status and saw those from the periphery as backward and inferior. Their higher birth rates also caused an oversupply of labour in the region while they generally lacked the language, technical skills, or motivation to move to shortage areas in the Russian north or east. Over time, changing the population through reproduction began to seem more manageable than controlling territory, resolving economic imbalances, or integrating existing groups. When initial attempts to upskill the population failed, Moscow leaders gave up the charge and aimed instead to even out birth rates, encouraging births among Slavic women while warning Central Asians about the

¹ Brezhnev, L. I., *Leninskim kursom: rechi i stat'i*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1970), p. 97.

dangers of large families. In doing so, they angered local elites who felt they were being discriminated against, encouraging tensions that eventually played their part in the dissolution of the USSR. This demographic lens also left planners and politicians ill equipped to resolve the economic challenges presented by population changes.

As evidenced throughout this thesis, experts were central to the process of population politics and policy making in the Soviet Union. It was through demographers, statisticians, and social scientists that the government received its knowledge about the population, and in this respect experts shaped the understanding of political leaders. Their views, that these changes constituted a crisis, ultimately meant leaders accepted the issue as such. Yet the role of experts in the one-Party state was not as powerful as this description would make it appear. The government was fundamentally suspicious of demographers, remembering the nightmare caused by the 1937 census. Leaders wanted help to resolve demographic problems, but they also wanted to tightly control who was allowed to know the population, and what those who knew could tell others. Much of this history, and indeed Soviet political history more broadly, can be seen as a struggle between these two desires—the desire for control and the desire to resolve difficult societal issues.

How did the Party try to control experts? As population problems became more apparent, the government allowed population research to expand but suppressed dissemination, tightening censorship in the late 1960s. This tightening occurred partly because demographic trends became more politically damaging, but it was also in line with a much broader trend towards control over the social sciences and occurred in other disciplines too. The Party controlled experts initially through cadres. Who could become an expert or train at certain universities was subject to approval by the Party. Once appointed, promotions depended on loyalty as much as competence and senior academics were mostly Party members. Beyond this, other measures were used, such as control over travel abroad, attendance at international conferences, or access to Western demographic texts. The Central Committee repeatedly denied demographers the possibility of their own institute or journal, knowing these aided the cycle of independent advocacy that would make experts' opinions harder to ignore. The last line of defence against experts was censorship. This research has shown demographic censorship took place primarily through editorial review by demographers known to be particularly loyal to the Party. Wherever information about the population could reflect

negatively on the policy choices made by the Soviet government it was censored, though this study has highlighted the imperfect nature of this censorship, with a large grey zone existing.

If the government aimed to control experts, then experts equally aimed to evade this control, and this research has highlighted many ways in which this happened. By the 1960s the worst threats of death or arbitrary imprisonment had been lifted, and experts sought to circumvent Party control within acceptable boundaries. There were three main boundaries to their activities. Firstly, experts must accept Marxism-Leninism, at least outwardly, and pay suitable attention to it in their writing. Secondly, they could not openly challenge Soviet power or appear to support Western positions. Thirdly, they could not publish, or attempt to publish any demographic information that showed the Soviet Union in a clear negative light. These were the red lines, but their position still offered much scope for resisting Party bosses while working within the system. As such, experts mostly occupied the space between conformity and dissent. Their aims were sometimes selfless—aiming to improve society—and sometimes self-interested, a fact that is perhaps to be expected.

The main aim of population experts in this period was to raise the profile of their discipline, gain formal recognition, seats on advisory bodies, and enough institutional clout to resist outside censorship. These things served two higher goals. The first was status and prestige purely for its own sake (or more likely for the sake of the material advantages a high-status job brought in the Soviet economy of shortage), but the second was to use this prestige and clout to influence policy. In this they were partially successful; demography grew enormously over the period, and politicians came to see demographic problems as extremely serious by the 1980s. However, demographers never achieved the status afforded to scientists or other kinds of experts due to the scattered nature of the discipline. They struggled to be recognised as more than population accountants, eventually being granted this status but never escaping the heavy censorship.

To ordinary women the pronatalism of the Brezhnev era was a vague preoccupation of elites and is now scarcely recalled. Instead, women remember the realities of family life in the period and the meaning of demographic change over their lifetimes. They experienced alcohol and declining male health not through a set of statistics, but through the experience of husbands, friends, and family. Few of them knew that life expectancy was declining, but all of them knew someone who had divorced due to alcoholism. In listening to these women's

stories, it becomes apparent that their life choices were shaped by factors beyond their control, but factors that had little to do with active choices by the state. The goal of this research has been to explore population politics from a variety of angles and the views of ordinary women contrast quite strongly with those of elites.

The 1960s and 1970s presented women with a framework for their lives. This framework dictated that they work and that they marry a man in their early twenties and have a child or children. The framework did not provide much help in rearing those children, either from the state or from their families. Of course, all of these dictates were technically choices, but the alternatives were not particularly palatable. Deviating from the framework, either by not marrying, having a child out of wedlock, choosing to remain childless, being of an alternative sexuality, or attempting not to work led either to severe social shame or significant material disadvantages. It was difficult for a woman to make ends meet without support from a man, and single people who didn't start a family couldn't usually access housing. Over family size women were also given a choice, unlike their mothers who struggled to control their fertility. Yet here again the framework of late-Soviet life presented a choice with an obvious answer. Women could have many children and face a lifetime of poverty, overwork, overcrowded accommodation, and no career opportunities with little support. Or they could limit their childbearing to one or two children and continue to enjoy the benefits of work, have reasonable living conditions, and limit the most work-intense period when children are small to a few years. The vast majority chose the latter and saw themselves as lucky to be presented with this new choice in comparison to generations past.

This framework and the choices it presented determined the outcome, if not of individuals' lives, then of lives and demographic choices on average. It was created not by the Party alone but by a combination of forces. Industrialisation, gender norms, culture, urbanisation, contraceptive possibilities, and state laws all played a role. Ironically, the choices presented to women by society ended up producing the opposite result to what the Party desired. Elites spent decades attempting to reshape the population in their desired image, yet ordinary people took little notice. Late-Soviet society gradually developed independently of the regime in this regard.

In addition to its focus on domestic demographic change, this thesis has examined global population politics from the Soviet perspective, asking what significance international

activities had for Soviet politics. It has found that the Soviet Union used the issue of population and demographic change to spread its influence around the world, particularly to developing countries. I have argued that the Soviet government saw population politics almost exclusively through the framework of the Cold War, aiming to gain strategic advantage over America wherever possible, and ignoring the variety of other meanings that population change had for third countries. It spread its influence by training foreign population specialists in Moscow, participating in global forums like the UN Population Commission, sending medical aid, and providing contraceptive advice to developing countries. Moscow elites took the opposing view to the majority of countries at the time and claimed that controls to reduce population growth to zero were unnecessary.

Soviet leaders also aimed to demonstrate the superiority of Soviet rule in matters of health and population growth. They believed that by demonstrating the benefits of the socialist developmental path they could encourage developing countries to follow their lead, ultimately providing allies and trade partners abroad. These activities became possible during this period of history because a new arena for population diplomacy opened up. This was caused, firstly, by worry about unsustainable population growth, which led the United Nations and other organisations to establish global forums for population study, cooperation, and action. It was encouraged, secondly, by the cohort of newly decolonised states in the Global South that provided fertile ground for both the United States and the Soviet Union to spread their influence in areas where the form of governance was still being chosen. In achieving its goals, the Soviet Union faced the fundamental problem that its own demographic data did not show what it would have liked. Leaders therefore tried to heavily control who could represent the Soviet Union abroad and what they could say. This research has demonstrated that many Soviet leaders were actually quite unwilling to become involved in population diplomacy because the risks it entailed to the Soviet reputation. Ultimately, however, the risk that other countries would go ahead without the USSR proved too great and demographic diplomacy became an important part of the Soviet performance on the world stage.

This thesis has highlighted the alluring nature of strategic demography, through which rulers seek to consolidate their power and mould the culture of society for generations to come. The Soviet Union was far from the only country aiming to reshape its population or halt changes brought by modernisation. As such this is a history of a specific region, but its themes are

global in nature. Strategic demography asks not only how many, but what kind of people live in a territory and how this can be changed in the future. Many of the issues faced by the Soviet Union—crumbling health infrastructure, low birth rates, or stagnating life expectancy—were not actually national but transnational, affecting the entire Eastern Bloc. This work has shown how political demography functioned in the Soviet Union, how population issues found purchase in official discourse, and why population dynamics became an important lens through which elites viewed other societal problems. This knowledge has implications for our understanding of late-Soviet society and politics, so much of which is currently tied to economic explanations for the developments that occurred. In that space this thesis reaffirms the importance of demographic developments and the societal response to them as a driver of change in the late-Soviet period.

The Soviet Union has ceased to exist, but population politics lives on in its old territory. In contemporary Russia, pronatalism is the agenda of the day, as benefit programmes seek to encourage an ever smaller cohort of mothers to break the now well-established norm of small families. ‘In a global sense we risk becoming an empty space, whose fate is decided by others’, as Putin put it recently.² He is not the only one concerned. Latvia has lost a fifth of its population—mostly through migration—in the last twenty years and now has a diplomat devoted solely to relations with the Latvian diaspora abroad.³ Elsewhere too, the legacy of Soviet dreams informs the way governments see population questions. In much of the Union’s periphery, Soviet-drawn borders never matched the ethnic geography of the region, and this has encouraged conflicts in already unstable parts of Central Asia.⁴ Many countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia have made gender relations a key part of their national identity, claiming their goal is to undo the transformations Soviet leaders made to family life.⁵

Meanwhile a whole generation of Soviet experts are passing away, but they are replaced by a new set of demographers and statisticians who face many of the same problems. The coercive

² Druzhinin, A. “Putin v novoi programmnoi stat’e predlozhit strategiiu narodoberezheniia”, *Ria Novosti*, 12th February 2012. Last accessed [02/09/21] <https://ria.ru/20120212/564003187.html>.

³ Sander, G. “Latvia, a disappearing nation”, *Politico*, 5th January, 2018. Last accessed [23/08/21] <https://www.politico.eu/article/latvia-a-disappearing-nation-migration-population-decline/>

⁴ George, J. A., “Expecting Ethnic Conflict: the Soviet Legacy and Ethnic Politics in the Caucasus and Central Asia,” in *The Politics of Transition in Central Asia and the Caucasus* (London, 2009).

⁵ Acar, F. and Günes-Ayata, A., eds. *Anthology: Gender and Identity Construction: Women of Central Asia, the Caucasus and Turkey* (Brill, 2000).

power exerted over Russian statistical agencies is only beginning to be highlighted by investigative reporters, but it is of significant interest for understanding the way Russia functions and shapes perceptions of itself.⁶ Similar dynamics arise time and again. For example, faced with a declining birth rate and a mass exodus of outward migration, the population of Turkmenistan is thought to be less than half the official figure. Neither mortality figures nor census data is publicly available in the country.⁷ These are just a few of the complex political-demographic questions arising in the former Soviet Union. ‘Try and convince a politician that life expectancy in Moscow is not eighty years old—it is useless,’ former Soviet demographer Andreev noted in 2011.⁸ For all that has changed since the collapse of communism, the desire of political leaders to see a flattering reflection of their leadership in social statistics has proved universal.

Several avenues for further research have been opened up by this thesis. A significant body of material on demography and Soviet social science exists that this study was unable to fully examine owing to travel restrictions. Research involving a wider range of women, in particular those from Central Asia and the Baltic states, would provide a better understanding of the experiences of all Soviet women, demonstrating where there is variety and similarity. In addition, consideration of the effects of demography during the perestroika period would provide a fascinating link with the period of study here, allowing for a longer term overview of the effects of demographic change on Soviet society. Finally, this study will be useful for similar investigations of demographic censorship and control in other contexts and timeframes. Under some circumstances demographics become a lens through which other societal problems are perceived, but the circumstances causing this are poorly understood. We lack studies explaining why, sometimes, demographic change becomes an elite obsession, while at other times it is ignored. Such research would be useful for understanding not just historical population politics but also modern day questions. If history is any guide, states will continue to seek demographic solutions to their problems long into the future.

⁶ For investigative reporting on the pressures on Russian statisticians, see “Nenaturalnye chisla”, *Proekt*, 8th June 2021. Last accessed [23/08/21] <https://www.proekt.media/narrative/dannye-rosstata/>.

⁷ Najibullah, F. “Turkmenistan Faces ‘Shocking Population Decline’ As Exodus Continues”, *Radio Free Europe*, 12th July, 2021. Last accessed [23/08/21] <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-population-decline-exodus/31355045.html>.

⁸ Borusiak, L., “Nauka o zhizni. Interv’iu s Evgenii Andreevym”.

Appendix 1 – List of Key Experts

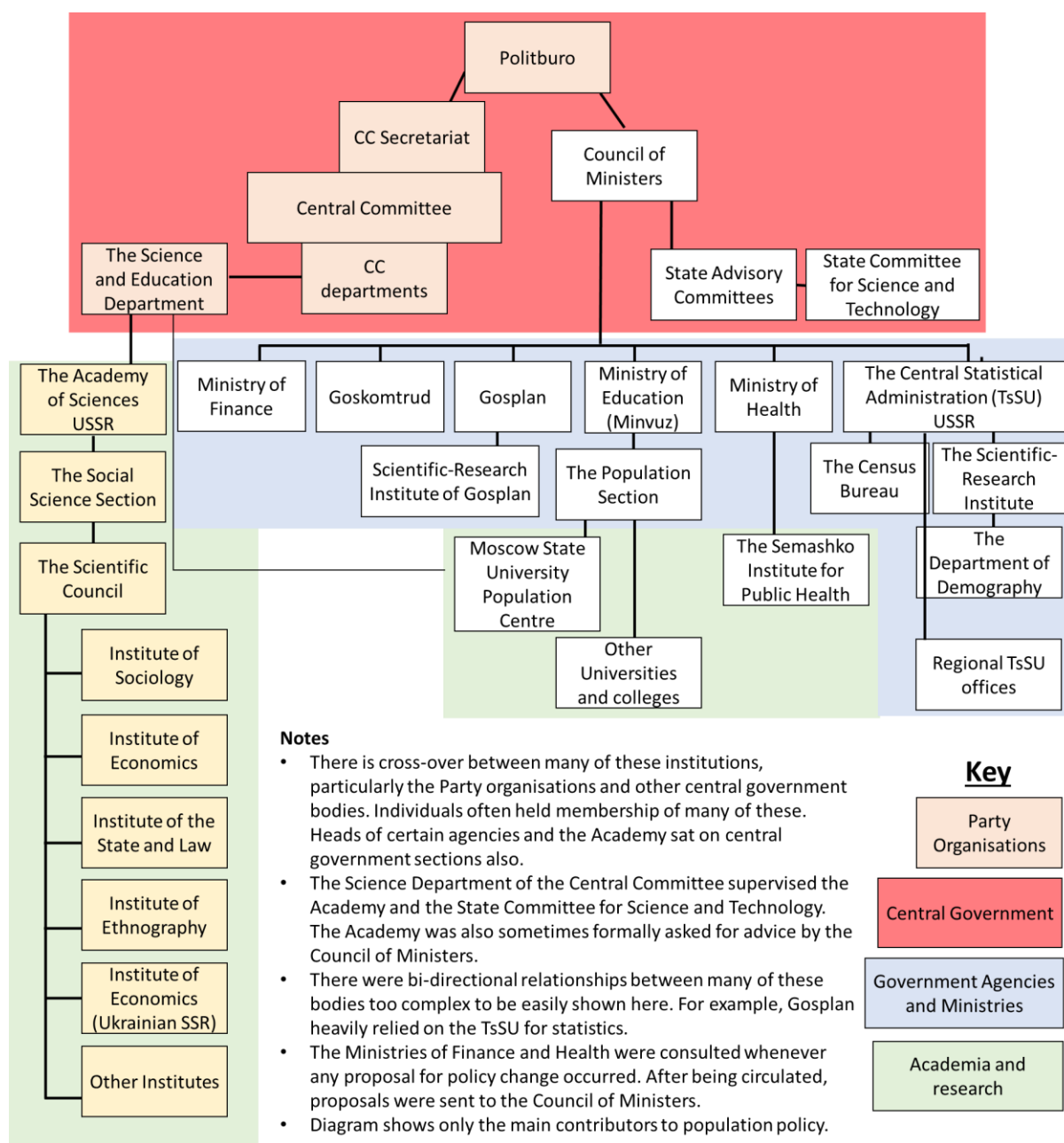
Sources: RAH, f. 1731, op. 1, d. 323, ll. 7-11; Feshbach, M. "The Soviet Population Policy Debate: Actors and Issues." (Santa Monica, 1986), p. 10; <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/>

Name (surname, first name, patronymic)	Position/s (held at time of relevance to thesis)
Andreev, Evgenii Mikhailovich (1944 – Present)	○ Mathematician at the Department of Demography, Scientific-Research Institute of the USSR (1970 onwards) ○ Head of the Population laboratory at the TsSU from 1975.
Arab-Ogly, Edward Arturovich (1925 – 2001)	○ Director of the Sociology Department at the Institute of the International Labour Movement (1967-1971) ○ Professor at the Institute of Social Sciences under the Central Committee of the CPSU (1965-1986)
Belova, Valentina, Andreevna (1933 – 1986)	○ Demographer within the Scientific-Research Institute of the TsSU Department of Demography (1964 onwards)
Boiaarksi, Aron Iakovlevich (1906 – 1985)	Director of the Scientific-Research Institute of the TsSU (1963 – 1978)
Darskii, Leonid Evseevich (1930 – 2001)	○ Specialist at the Scientific-Research Institute of the TsSU (1964 onwards)
Ezhov, A. I.	○ Chair of the Scientific Methodological Committee of the TsSU
Fedorenko, Nikolai Prokofievich (1917 – 2006)	○ Founder and first director Institute of Economics, USSR Academy of Sciences (1963 – 1985). ○ Member of the Presidium of the USSR Academy of Sciences
Galetskaia, R. A.	○ Specialist at the Central Economic Mathematical Institute, USSR Academy of Sciences
Gerasimov, Gennadi Ivanovich (1930 – 2010)	○ Journalist and Political Commentator. Institutions include: <i>Trud</i>, <i>Novoe Vremia</i>, Novosti Press Agency, TV show 'International Panorama'. ○ Contributor to the 1966 Literaturnaia Gazeta debate on overpopulation.
Guzevaty, Iaropolk Nikolaevich	○ Specialist at the Institute of Oriental Studies, USSR Academy of Sciences
Isupov, Arkadii Aleksandrovich (1931 – 2011)	○ Employee at UN Secretariat ○ Specialist at the TsSU from 1957 ○ Head of the All-Union Population Census Administration at the TsSU from 1973
Kiseleva, Galina Petrovna (1930 – present)	○ Demographer at Moscow State University (from 1965) ○ Scientific secretary of the Population Section of the USSR Ministry of Higher Education (1965 – 1976) ○ Experts at the Centre for Social Demography of the Institute of Sociology of the USSR Academy of Sciences (dates unknown)

Kostakov, V. G	Employee of the Scientific Research Economics Institute, Gosplan USSR
Kvasha, Aleksander Iakolevich (1928 – 2007)	Specialist at the Moscow State University Population Centre
Merkov, Ardkaii Mikhailovich (1899 – 1971)	Head of Population Statistics at the Semashko Institute for Public Health and the History of Medicine
Pavlov, Georgii Aleksandrovich (1938 – 1998)	TsSU Specialist. Deputy Head of the All-Union Population Census Administration at the TsSU from 1977
Perevedentsev, Viktor Ivanovich (1931 - 2009)	○ Specialist at the Institute of World Trade Union Movements, USSR Academy of Sciences ○ Frequent contributor to publications in Literaturnaia Gazeta
Podiachikh, Petr Gavrilovich (1911 – 1977)	○ Head of the All-Union Population Census Administration at the TsSU until 1973 ○ Deputy Head of the TsSU USSR from October 1970
Rumiantsev, Alexei Matveevich (1905 – 1993)	○ Vice President of the USSR Academy of Sciences, responsible for the Social Sciences Section (1967 – 1971) ○ Presidium Member of the USSR Academy of Sciences (1971 onwards)
Riabushkin, Timon Vasilevich (1914 – 1986)	○ Head of the Scientific Council on Socio-Economic Problems of the Population, USSR Academy of Sciences (1968 to death) ○ Specialist at the Institute of Sociological Research, USSR Academy of Sciences
Sifman, Roza Iosifovna (1900 – 1978)	○ Pre-war era demographer ○ Specialist at the TsSU Department of Demography 1964-1978
Slezarev, G. A.	○ Specialist at the Institute of Sociology, USSR Academy of Sciences
Smulevich, Boleslav Iakovlevich (1894 – 1981)	○ Doctor and population specialist at the Semashko Institute (until 1963) ○ Specialist at the Department of Demography, Scientific Research Institute of the TsSU (1963 – 1974)
Sonin, Mikail Iakovlevich (1910 – 1984)	○ Specialist at the Institute of Economics, USSR Academy of Sciences (1948 – 1984)
Starovskii, Vladimir Nikonovich (1905 – 1975)	Head of the TsSU USSR from 1957 to August 1975
Steshenko, Valentina Sergeevna (1934 – 2014)	Head of the Department of Demography at the Institute of Economics, Ukrainian Academy of Sciences (1969 onwards)
Sudoplatov, Anatoli Pavlovich (1943 – 2005)	Specialist at the Population Centre, Moscow State University mid 1960s onwards.

Urlanis, Boris Tsezarevich (1906 – 1981)	Specialist at the Institute of Economics, USSR Academy of Sciences (1957 onwards)
Valentei, Dimitrii Ignatevich (1922 -1994)	○ Head of the Problem Laboratory for the Study of Population (which later became the Population Department or Centre) at Moscow State University. (1965 onwards) ○ Chairman of the Coordination Council on Population Problems (later became the population Section) at Minvuz (1963 onwards)
Vishnevskii, Anatoli Grigorevich (1935 – 2020)	○ 1961 – 1971 Specialist at the Department of Demography, Institute of Economics, Ukrainian Academy of Sciences ○ 1971 – 1984 Specialist in the Scientific-Research Institute of the TsSU USSR
Volkov, Andrei Gavrilovich (1931 – 2009)	Head of the Department of Demography within the Scientific Research Institute of the TsSU from 1965
Volodarskii, Lev Mordkovich (1911 – 1989)	○ Head of the TsSU USSR from August 1975 ○ Candidate member of the Central Committee of the CPSU from 1976
Iagodkin, Vladimir Nikolaevich (1928 – 1985)	○ Member of the Population Section of Minvuz ○ Lecturer at the Political Economy Faculty at Moscow State University (1954 – 1967) ○ Secretary of the Party Committee of Moscow State University (1967 – 1971) ○ Secretary for Ideology at the Moscow City Committee of the CPSU (1971 – 1976) ○ Candidate member of the Central Committee of the CPSU (1971 – 1976) ○ Deputy Minister for Education (1976 onwards)

Appendix 2 – Diagram showing the main institutions involved in population knowledge and policy.



Appendix 3 – Demographic Profile of Interview Participants

Number of participants: 18

Age range: born 1936-1956

Nationalities: 10 participants identified as Russian. Other respondents identified as Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Moldovan, Belorussian, Bashkiri, Buryat and Jewish. (Jewish participants all lived in the RFSFR during the period of study. None were practicing Jews.)

Geographic Location

During the Brezhnev era:

- 3 participants lived in Moscow.
- 5 participants lived in capitals of other Soviet Republics or Leningrad.
- 7 participants lived predominantly in provincial towns and cities.
- 3 participants lived predominantly in villages or small settlements.

N.B Many participants moved within the timeframe studied so this breakdown is a simplification. Towns, cities, and regions lived in by participants during the period 1964-1982 are listed below.

Towns and cities:

- Moscow
- Leningrad
- Novosibirsk
- Magnitogorsk
- Stalingrad
- Kyiv
- Chişinău
- Vilnius
- Tambov
- Perm
- Murmansk
- Ust-ilimsk
- Norilsk
- Minsk
- Andijan

Rural areas

- Belgorod oblast
- Cheliabinsk oblast'
- Perm oblast'
- Republic of Buryatia

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- f. 603: Papers of Arkady Michailovich Merkov
- f. 663: Papers of Semen Iakovlevich Chikin, Deputy Minister for Health of the RFSRF
- f. 5446: The Council of Ministers USSR
- f. 9553: The State Committee for Labour and Social Issues (Goskomtrud) of the USSR

The Russian State Archive of the Economy (RGAE)

- f. 99: Economic Scientific-Research Institute of the State Planning Committee (Gosplan) of the USSR
- f. 365: Joint fond for institutions related to foreign economic relations
- f. 399: The Council for the Study of Productive Forces (COPS) of the State Planning Committee (Gosplan) of the USSR
- f. 561: Secretariat of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA)
- f. 779: The Scientific Research Institute of Goskomstat of the USSR
- f. 1562: The Central Statistical Administration of the USSR (TsSU)

The Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences (ARAN)

- f. 1977: The Institute of Sociology
- f. 1731: The Social Sciences Section

The National Archives of the UK (TNA)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office document collection

Newspapers and Magazines

Izvestiia

Kommunist

Komsomolskaia pravda

Literaturnaia gazeta

Moskovskie novosti

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Pravda

Rabotnitsa

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