

# SECTION SEVEN

## EPILOGUE. Comparison of SAAOR Findings with Data from the Archives of the Institute of Sociology of the USSR Academy of Sciences: Late 1970s and Early 1980s.

As noted above, a comparison with work from the Soviet archives is now possible based on the paper given by Dr. Elena Bashkistrova at the October 2004 conference on the impact of Cold War Broadcasting held at the Hoover Institution.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Bashkistrova was a researcher at the Institute of Sociology of the USSR Academy of Sciences (referred to as ISAN below) and based her paper on research carried out by the Institute of Sociology in the late 1970s through the early 1980s. Although the methodology was obviously different from that employed by SAAOR, the Soviet research confirms large audiences to Western radio broadcasts during the period and allows for comparisons in a number of areas.

The data cited by Dr. Bashkistrova is based on 6,365 respondent cases selected on the basis of proportional quota sampling in 6 major Soviet cities. These were considered by the Institute of Sociology researchers to be approximately representative of the urban population of the USSR. No national surveys were undertaken. The reasons cited for this were 1) to avoid attracting attention that would be inevitable for a nation-wide study, and 2) the researchers hypothesized that the audience to Western radio in the provinces and rural areas was probably too small to be of significant interest.<sup>2</sup>

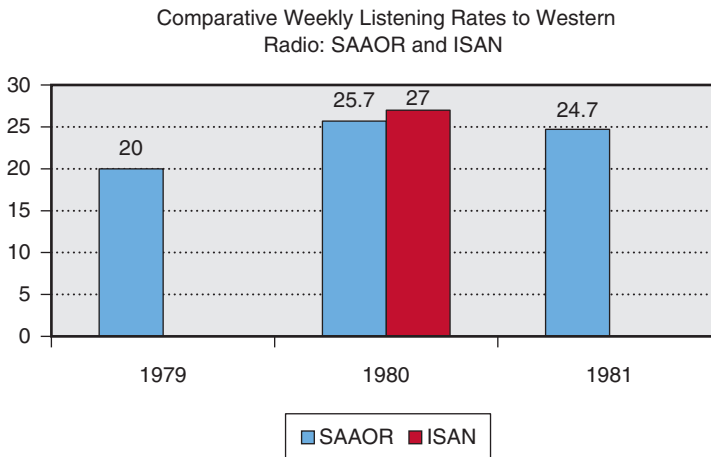
**70 ■ R. Eugene Parta****7.1. Comparative Listening Rates**

Overall weekly listening rates in the ISAN study and SAAOR data for the period are very close (see Figure 45), with the ISAN rate of 27% only slightly higher than the SAAOR rates.<sup>3</sup>

The ISAN study also noted a very high rate of occasional listening (less than once a week) to Western broadcasts, i.e. 35% of the urban population. Combined, these two figures showed that “by the end of the 1970s more than half of the USSR urban population listened to foreign broadcasting more or less regularly.”<sup>4</sup> This overall reach estimate of 62% is considerably higher than the annual reach of 34% tallied by SAAOR in 1980. One of the reasons that the ISAN rates are higher may be due to the fact that they are based on an urban sample only, while the SAAOR rates are based on simulated national samples. Another reason is likely the large number of “accidental” listeners and young people listening for entertainment who were much less likely to be captured in the traveler sample to which SAAOR was restricted.

**7.2. Demographic Comparisons**

In demographic terms, the SAAOR and ISAN samples are consistent in terms of education trends: listening increases in each as educational levels increase. ISAN noted that those with secondary



**FIGURE 45. Comparative Weekly Listening Rates to Western Radio: SAAOR and ISAN, 1979–1981**

## EPILOGUE. A Comparison of SAAOR Findings ■ 71

or higher education “composed about 70% of the total western radio audience.”<sup>5</sup> In 1980 ca. 74% of Radio Liberty’s audience fell into this education category. The estimate for all Western radio listeners would have been slightly lower as Radio Liberty’s audience was characterized by a relatively high educational level. A difference in the two datasets is noted in the case of age. Young people aged 16–24 listened at the highest rates and made up 44% of the audience to Western radio in the ISAN sample. In 1980, the year that corresponds closely to the ISAN sample, Radio Liberty’s audience also had its highest rate of listening among young people aged 16–29, although this situation shifted during the remainder of the 1980s and highest listening rates were then noted in the 30–49 year age cohort (see Figure 17).

In terms of listening in different parts of the USSR, the two datasets identify similar patterns. SAAOR identified highest listening rates to Western radio in the Moscow and Leningrad areas and in the Baltic States and Trans-Caucasus. The ISAN data also noted that “in the regions close to the state borders of the USSR the interest in Western radio programs was somewhat higher than in the central parts of the country. The Baltic Republics, Western Ukraine and Caucasian Republics of the former USSR are especially noteworthy in this connection.”<sup>6</sup>

### 7.3. Motivations for Listening, Programs Heard and Trust in Western Information

As indicated above, the ISAN surveys identified music and entertainment as a motive for listening to Western broadcasts at much higher rates than did the SAAOR data (ca. 69% in the ISAN data compared to only ca. 20% in the SAAOR data). We hypothesize that this is largely due to the difference in samples. ISAN was able to survey a representative number of young people while SAAOR had to rely on a much smaller group of younger travelers who may have been largely atypical of their age cohort in terms of their interest in news and information and the outside world.

However, in going beyond this atypical group we find that many of the other reasons given for listening to Western radio line up quite well between the two datasets. About 45% of the ISAN sample sought news and information and 38% listened to have a better understanding of the situation in the USSR. These

**72 ■ R. Eugene Parta**

are the reasons most frequently cited by the SAAOR traveler survey as well (see Figure 23). Bashkistrova states: "The audience interest in the information programs of Western radio was high, because the listeners could get information about international events which were not covered by the Soviet mass media due to various reasons."<sup>7</sup>

In detailing respondents' motives for listening to Western radio, after the high proportion singling out music and entertainment, the ISAN data indicates that 33% were "searching for information that differs from the official point of view," 27% were looking for "exclusive information," another 20% sought "hot news," 20% were "interested in information unavailable in the Soviet mass media" and another 7% said they were "searching for trustworthy information."<sup>8</sup> All of these categories imply that listeners were seeking something that they couldn't find in Soviet domestic media. Since some of the respondents obviously indicated more than one of these categories we can't simply add them together (that would total 107%!), but it's apparent that a very large proportion of listeners had strong information-seeking motives in tuning to Western broadcasts. This finding is entirely consistent with SAAOR data.

In terms of trust in what Soviet respondents were hearing from Western radios, Bashkistrova, in her study of the ISAN data, notes: "... the Soviet social scientists were suspicious about the finding that the Western broadcasting was so popular with the Soviet population, which found it both trustworthy and reliable."<sup>9</sup> The ISAN data indicates that 37% trusted the information either completely or partially, 32% said they didn't trust the data and 31% didn't venture an opinion. Bashkistrova notes "overall, the level of trust in the information broadcast by Western radio was sufficiently high when one considers that the figures include non-listeners as well as listeners." When one considers that some respondents may have been reluctant to admit in a Soviet survey that they trusted information from "enemy" sources these figures are impressive, indeed, with more respondents saying they trusted the information rather than disbelieving it.

These findings on trust cannot be compared directly to SAAOR data of the exact time period, since the question was not asked then, but a similar pattern emerges in looking at SAAOR data from 1985 and 1987. Net "credibility" scores (the

## EPILOGUE. A Comparison of SAAOR Findings ■ 73

percentage finding the broadcasts credible minus the percentage who did not) showed that all major stations had positive “credibility” scores (see Figure 26), meaning that more listeners trusted what they heard than didn’t.

Given the high number of people these percentages represent, it’s apparent from both the ISAN and the SAAOR data that millions of Soviet listeners were tuning to Western radio for news and information on a regular basis and to a greater or lesser extent believing what they heard.

### 7.4. Western Stations Heard

The ISAN data was primarily aimed at studying the audience to Western radio in general in terms of its behavior, motivations and social structure and didn’t attempt to compute weekly and overall reach figures for individual stations. Consequently, no comparisons between the two datasets can be made at that level. ISAN did, however, ask in a general sense what stations people heard and here the rank ordering of stations is very similar between the two datasets for 1979–1980, with VOA in first place in both, followed by BBC in second with Radio Liberty and Deutsche Welle lower (see Figure 1 and Figure 2 for SAAOR estimates).

### 7.5. Conclusions

A comparison of the ISAN data and the SAAOR data from the same period show striking similarities.

- Overall regular listening rates are similar in the two datasets, although because of the nature of the differing samples the ISAN data was able to capture a larger group of occasional listeners and young people who listened to entertainment programs.
- Demographic trends are consistent with the exception of the young group noted above due to sampling differences.
- Both datasets show that large numbers of Soviet citizens sought Western radio broadcasts as alternative sources of information.
- Trust in the information broadcast on Western radio was relatively high in both samples.

