

APPENDIX C

Data Validation: Comparison of SAAOR Studies with Internal Soviet Studies and Other Data

Given the serious constraints on carrying out survey research on the USSR, and the lack of access to reliable Soviet data from the same time period, it was a complex task to assess the validity of the SAAOR data. Even under normal polling circumstances, different surveys can yield different results depending on specific question wording or sampling design. (This became evident when many of the surveys conducted in 1991–1992 by internal institutes frequently showed quite different results from one institute to the next.)

The novel research approach that circumstances constrained SAAOR to adopt significantly compounded these issues. However, it was occasionally possible to compare SAAOR findings with work done inside the USSR both during the Cold War period and immediately thereafter, and it is instructive to examine the correlations that emerge.¹

C.1. Comparison of Findings from Separate SAAOR Data Bases (Emigrant and Traveler Surveys)

As noted earlier, SAAOR systematically interviewed Jewish emigrants from the USSR as part of a separate project entirely distinct from the travelers surveys. Since emigrants were a special group within the overall population, it was not SAAOR

84 ■ Appendix C

practice to use them to project listening rates to Western radio back on to the Soviet population. However, in many ways they were typical of non-emigrants in the same educational, age and geographic categories. Because of this, they constituted a useful surrogate group to study listening behavior in greater detail than with Soviet citizens. The emigrants' patterns of listening behavior were similar to those of respondents in the traveler surveys, although they listened to Western radio at much higher rates.

Emigrants listened to Western radio at twice the rate of travelers. This is not surprising, since they were, on average, more educated than the traveler population, and since emigration in the Soviet Union amounted to a political act. Figure 46, which is based on Western radio listeners in each sample, shows that station choice was consistent between the two samples, with an identical rank order and comparable rates.

In 1990, Radio Liberty was the station most widely heard among Western radio listeners in each sample, followed by VOA, BBC and Deutsche Welle. In the 1970s and 1980s, VOA was the most widely heard station, according to both emigrant and traveler surveys. The fact that two different "samples" yielded highly similar results, increases our confidence in the reliability of the data from SAAOR traveler surveys.

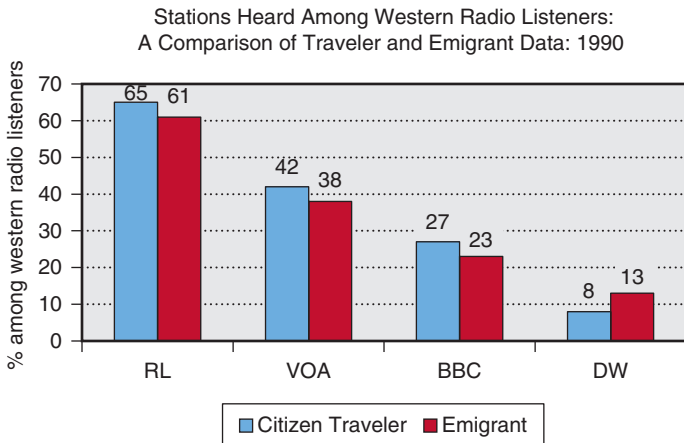


FIGURE 46. Stations Heard Among Western Radio Listeners: A Comparison of USSR Traveler and Emigrant Data: 1990

C.2. Comparison of Findings on TV Viewing Behavior (SAAOR Survey and Internal USSR Studies)

The first real opportunity to compare SAAOR data on Soviet media behavior with data from an internal study came in 1975. Data from a survey group of 1,832 respondents interviewed between 1972 and 1974 was compared in terms of demographic categories² with a study conducted in Leningrad a few years earlier.³ While neither study attempted to project all-Union behavior (the SAAOR study was primarily interested in looking at the relationship between TV viewing and Western radio listening) the similarity of the results by demographic group is striking. Both studies show the same trend in terms of average hours of weekly TV viewing by educational attainment, with lower levels of TV viewing noted at higher educational levels (see Figure 47).

Similar results are noted for weekly hours of TV viewing by age (see Figure 48). The amount of TV viewing grew in each study with increasing age. Respondents over 40 years of age viewed considerably more television in an average week than did those under thirty.

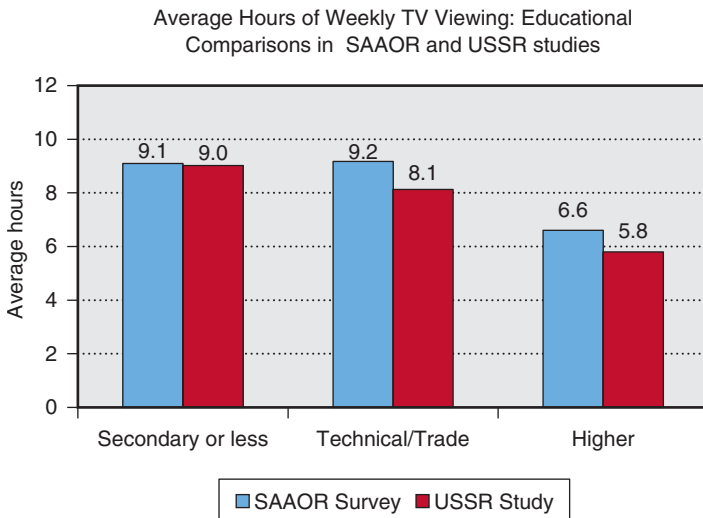


FIGURE 47. Average Hours of Weekly TV Viewing by Education in SAAOR and USSR Studies

86 ■ Appendix C

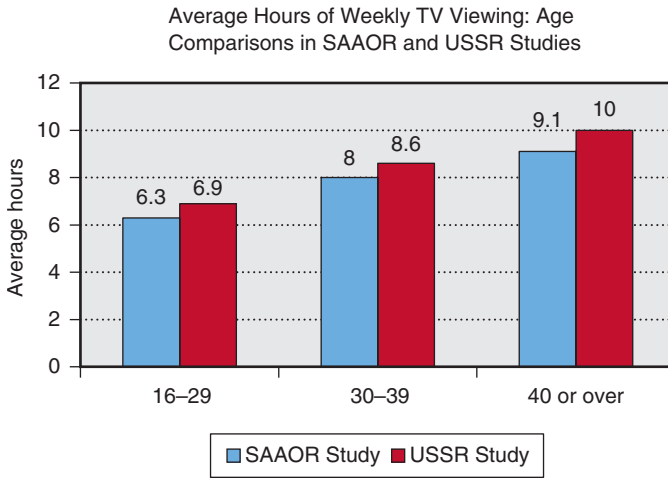


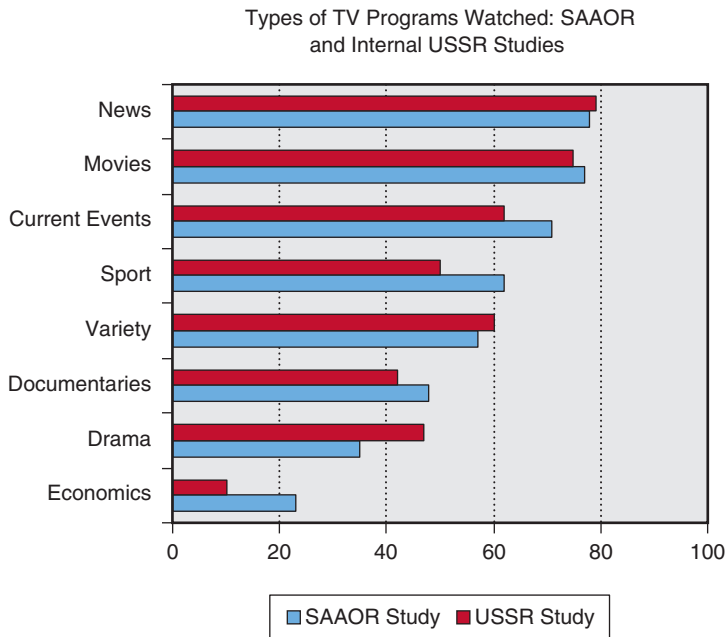
FIGURE 48. Average Hours of Weekly TV Viewing: Age Comparisons in SAAOR and USSR Studies

In terms of preferred programming, we again note a striking similarity between the two studies (see Figure 49). News and movies lead in each study. Only with economic programming, which was viewed by the lowest number in each study, is there a clear difference. Respondents in the SAAOR survey were more likely to choose programs on economic themes than respondents in the USSR study. This may be due to the higher educational level of the SAAOR traveler respondent sample. In each sample, however, this category ranked last.

It was noted earlier in this paper that the extensive media study based on SAAOR data in 1981 lined up closely with findings on media use from a variety of internal USSR sources.⁴ The similarity of the findings in the specific comparative studies on TV behavior again help to increase our confidence in the SAAOR data as reliably depicting media usage patterns in the USSR.

C.3. Comparison of Attitudes to Andrei Sakharov (SAAOR Survey and Unofficial Internal Poll)⁵

During the Cold War period it was possible to compare SAAOR data not just with official studies, but also with unofficial polls conducted inside the USSR by Soviet social scientists, presumably of a “dissident” political bent.⁶ The unofficial poll cited here was

Data Validation: SAAOR/Soviet Studies Comparison ■ 87**FIGURE 49. TV Program Preferences in SAAOR and USSR Studies**

based on 853 structured conversations with Soviet citizens in Moscow and surrounding areas in 1981. While it was not based on a scientific sample, the authors stated that considerable care was taken to reach a broad segment of the population.

The attitudes toward Sakharov that emerged from the unofficial poll were strikingly close to those found in a previously published SAAOR study.⁷ About half the respondents in each study held no opinion of Sakharov, while those that did divided roughly three to two against him (see Figure 50).

While two polls, each employing an unorthodox methodology, cannot in scientific terms validate each other, it is instructive that the results from similarly gathered datasets should give such close results.

C.4. Comparison of Attitudes Toward Solidarity in Poland (SAAOR Survey and Internal Poll)

Another comparison with an unofficial internal poll concerned attitudes toward the Solidarity labor movement in Poland. The general findings of the SAAOR study have been presented

88 ■ Appendix C

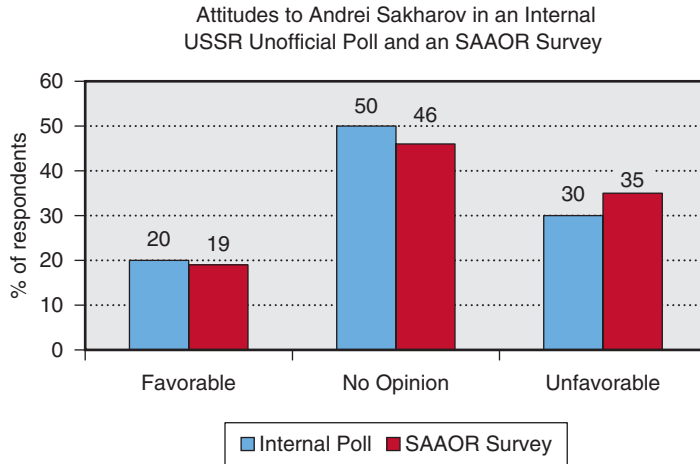


FIGURE 50. Attitudes to Andrei Sakharov in an Unofficial Internal USSR Poll and an SAAOR Survey—1981

above (see Figure 43). The Soviet poll was carried out at the same time as the SAAOR poll (September 1980–December 1981) with 618 respondents in Moscow and environs.⁸ The survey methodology was similar to that used in the unofficial poll on Sakharov, i.e., a structured informal conversation in

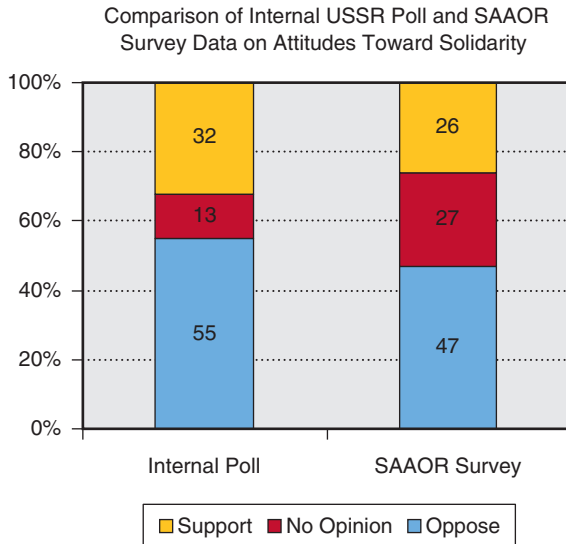


FIGURE 51. A Comparison of an Unofficial Internal USSR Poll and SAAOR Survey Data on Attitudes Toward Solidarity in Poland

Data Validation: SAAOR/Soviet Studies Comparison ■ 89

which the questions were placed casually. The Soviet researchers noted that their respondent group was biased in favor of workers, intellectuals and CPSU members.

In each case, around half of those polled opposed Solidarity, while around three in ten supported it (see Figure 51). The responses of blue collar workers were virtually identical for the two groups, varying by only one percentage point. About one-fifth of the workers supported Solidarity and a third were undecided.

Again, unorthodox methodologies cannot scientifically validate each other but the similarity of the findings strongly suggests that a reasonably accurate picture of attitudes toward Solidarity was being sketched in the SAAOR data.

C.5. Comparison of Attitudes to *Perestroika* (SAAOR Data and Polls Commissioned in the USSR by Western Media Organizations: 1988–1989.)⁹

In the later *perestroika* period (1988), a few Western media organizations managed to include their own questions in internal Soviet public opinion studies. The French publications *Le Point* and *Le Matin*, as well as *Time* magazine and CBS-*New York Times*, worked on such studies with the Moscow-based Institute of Sociological Research. In areas where it was possible to make comparisons with SAAOR data, the French-sponsored studies were consistent with SAAOR findings on *perestroika*, withdrawal from Afghanistan, emigration from the USSR, and awareness of Andrei Sakharov and his work.¹⁰

Time magazine conducted a study in Moscow in March 1989 with the Institute of Sociology at the Academy of Sciences.¹¹ Some of the questions could be compared with results from SAAOR survey data and they showed similar results.¹² In the SAAOR poll, 34% felt that limits to *glasnost'* were undesirable, while in the *Time* poll 33% felt that there was not enough *glasnost'*. Support for Gorbachev was 78% in the SAAOR data and 79% in the *Time* poll. Sixty-eight percent felt that East-West relations had recently improved in the SAAOR data, while 63% held that view in the *Time* poll.

A CBS-*New York Times* poll in 1988 also queried Muscovites on their attitudes toward *perestroika*. SAAOR posed similar questions

90 ■ Appendix C

Comparison of SAAOR and CBS Internal USSR
Poll on Benefits of *Perestroika*

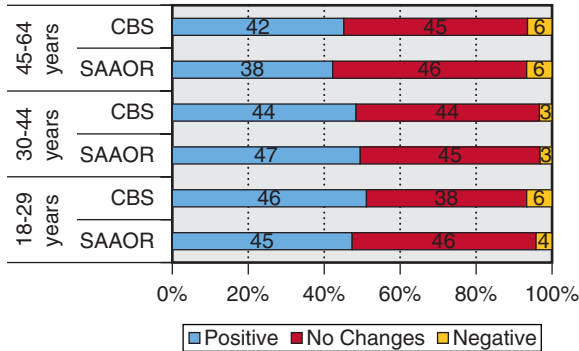


FIGURE 52. Comparison of CBS-New York Times Internal USSR Poll with SAAOR Survey on Benefits of *Perestroika*: 1988

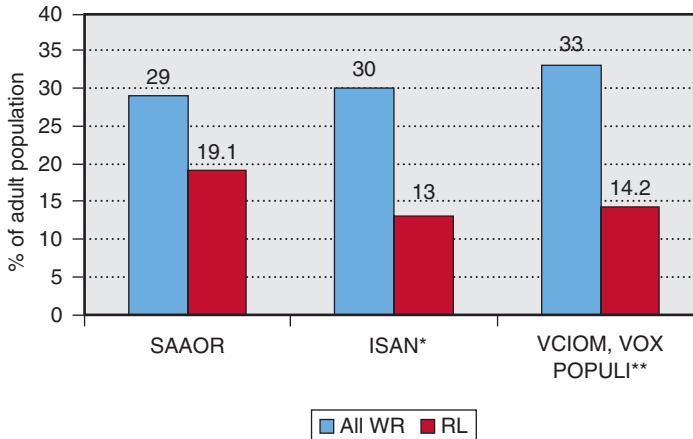
in its traveler surveys at about the same time. The comparative results of the two polls, when examined in terms of age categories, are very close, as can be seen in Figure 52.¹³ The two polls showed approximately equal levels of support (or “no change”) in each category. Negative responses were very small in each poll. Additionally, the CBS-*New York Times* poll queried respondents on how well they felt the USSR had succeeded in its policy in Afghanistan. Twenty-five percent in the CBS-*New York Times* poll felt that Soviet policy had completely succeeded. At that point in early 1988, 27% in the SAAOR poll shared this optimistic view (as noted above, this figure declined a year later in 1989). On the other hand, 33% in the CBS-*New York Times* poll felt that Soviet policy had failed in Afghanistan compared with 37% in the SAAOR poll. Again, the results of the external and internal polls are very similar.

C.6. Comparison of Findings on Western Radio Listening (SAAOR Survey and Internal Polls)

In 1990, it was possible to compare data on Western radio listening from the SAAOR traveler survey, which was in the field for about the first six months of the year, with surveys conducted inside the USSR. The comparison was not exact in terms of question wording and sample design, but proved nevertheless

Data Validation: SAAOR/Soviet Studies Comparison ■ 91

Comparative Listening to Western Radio and
Radio Liberty in External and Internal Surveys:
Annual Reach 1990



*ISAN Survey: Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Gus-Khrustalny

**VCIOM Survey: All-Union for Annual Reach: Vox Populi Survey RSFSR only

FIGURE 53. Comparative Listening to Western Radio in External and Internal Surveys: SAAOR, Institute of Sociology of the USSR Academy of Sciences and VCIOM/Vox Populi: Annual Reach 1990

instructive (see Figure 53). The SAAOR survey data represented the entire USSR. The ISAN (Institute of Sociology at the USSR Academy of Sciences) poll sampled three large urban centers (Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev) and a regional small city (Gus-Khrustalny). The VCIOM (All-Union Center for Public Opinion Research) had a representative sample of the entire USSR, and the *Vox Populi* survey covered the Russian Federation (RSFSR). The VCIOM survey provided a figure for aggregate listening to Western radio only, while the *Vox Populi* survey gave estimates only for individual stations. Their results are shown here side by side.

Both internal surveys showed slightly higher rates of listening to any Western radio in the past year than did the SAAOR data, although the results are within the same approximate range. Annual listening rates for Radio Liberty are somewhat higher in the SAAOR survey, but both internal surveys show high annual rates of listening to Radio Liberty as well. In sum, all three surveys present a relatively consistent picture of listening to Western radio and Radio Liberty in the USSR in 1990, the

92 ■ Appendix C

first year it was possible for Western organizations to commission Soviet research institutes to gather data on Western radio listening.

One of SAAOR's concerns in 1990 was that Radio Liberty might still suffer from the pariah status it had been assigned by Soviet media, and that this might lead to a problem of response bias in internally conducted surveys, with respondents hesitant to admit to Radio Liberty listening in a face-to-face survey conducted by the same interviewing networks that had formerly conducted government-sponsored surveys. Some anecdotal evidence surfaced to support this concern, but it was difficult to determine whether response bias effectively played a role in depressing Radio Liberty listening estimates. Since the results shown above were close to SAAOR estimates for the same period, this may be immaterial.

The results of a survey in St. Petersburg (ex-Leningrad) in 1991 can be compared with the SAAOR data from 1989 shown above (see Figure 12). The internal survey, conducted by the St. Petersburg Center for the Study and Forecasting of Social Processes found that Radio Liberty was heard by 20% of the population.¹⁴ This compares with an estimated listening audience of 24% in Leningrad in the 1989 SAAOR data. While these numbers are not identical (the two-year gap in the survey dates should also be borne in mind), they both testify to similarly sized audiences in Leningrad/St. Petersburg.

Internal surveys conducted in the Baltic States in 1990 were compared with SAAOR estimates from 1989.¹⁵ Average figures from the three internal surveys (two in Estonia and one in Lithuania) gave a weekly reach figure of 30% for Western radio listening overall, and 14% for RFE/RL.¹⁶ SAAOR estimates for 1989 were 29% for any Western radio, and 18.6% for RFE/RL. Again, these estimates are all in the same approximate range, and all show a considerable audience to RFE/RL.

Finally, a similar pattern emerged from a comparison of SAAOR data with a Soviet-sponsored survey of audiences to Western radio in Lithuania. A poll commissioned by the newspaper *Sovetskaya Litva* studied listening habits among students in Vilnius. The Soviet survey reported that 50% of the students surveyed were Western radio listeners, while SAAOR's figure for this age group was 52%. Twenty-eight percent of the students in the Soviet poll heard RFE/RL, compared with 29% in the SAAOR data.

Data Validation: SAAOR/Soviet Studies Comparison ■ 93

While these similarities in research findings are not scientific proof of the accuracy of the SAAOR data, they increase confidence that the findings are reasonable and that they do not run counter to other empirical evidence of listening.

In all the areas where comparisons could be made between internal studies and SAAOR traveler surveys, the results were close and the trends identical. This congruence of findings, while not scientific proof of the validity of the SAAOR traveler surveys, cannot be satisfactorily explained by either coincidence or good fortune alone, and is compelling evidence that the SAAOR methodological approach yielded reasonable and credible findings, both on Western radio and general media use and on public attitudes in the USSR.

