Before the Numbers Disappeared:
Media and Perception of the 1937 Soviet Census

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by

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Abstract

This thesis surveys the 1937 All-Soviet Census and its importance to the government-citizen relationship under Stalin despite the suppression of the census shortly after completion. The census served as a vital data collection tool for the socialist regime and, as a point of accuracy and pride, it was important for the census to garner high participation. By studying the 1937 census as it was promoted and received by citizens, this research aims to reveal how Stalinist media functioned in 1936, how the promotion of the census reflected the concerns of the government, and how it illustrates the nature of Stalinist propaganda at the time.

The state implemented a marketing campaign to push the significance of the census as well as to recruit roughly 1 million workers needed to conduct the program. However, the campaign was not able to assuage the potential danger perceived in giving the government personal information, fears further cemented after heightened persecutions throughout 1937. Characterization of the census and its use in governing will be highlighted through close analysis of the newspaper campaigns of the *Moscow News* (an international paper) and *Pravda* (a domestic paper). Conversely, the views of Soviet citizens in regard to personal identity will be discussed through diaries of enumerators and intellectuals. Reservations surrounding the census commonly stemmed from the Soviet government’s tense relationship with religion and the fear of being persecuted based on information provided to census workers.

The census is a societal process that dates back thousands of years and its importance as a tool in societal organization cannot be understated. There is power in collecting personal data on individuals and with that power, a potential for abuse by authorities and fear for participants. The 1937 census was fraught with foundational issues before enumerators began and this was reflected in the ‘undesirable’ results yielded. Through media posturing and personal trepidations, power is given to the otherwise mundane act of people counting and through the lens of Soviet society, the 1937 census stood at a tipping point to the political tensions that would define the greater half of the Stalinist era.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

With the start of a pandemic, protests for racial justice, and a hotly debated presidential election 2020 will undoubtedly be written into history books for years to come. While many moments defined the year, one usually mundane event also caused waves—the 2020 United States Census. As a tenant of his 2020 campaign, former President Donald Trump pushed for the inclusion of a question on citizenship status on the upcoming census. This request posed logistical issues for the Census Bureau as well as a more serious issue of the citizenship question perpetuating rumors of mass deportations for the estimated 10.8 million people living in the U.S. undocumented. With these fears, the legality of asking for citizenship on the census came into question, steadily moving its way through the courts and concluding with a 5-4 Supreme Court decision stating that census organizers did not have a compelling enough reason to include the citizenship question into the 2020 census. Despite the ruling, irreparable damage had been done to the census as organizers estimated that millions of undocumented immigrants would abstain from the census out of fear of the Trump administration and the use of personal information being used as a means for deportation.

The issues of the 2020 census are not novel, as people counting is an ancient and steadfast tradition of humankind and with this long history troubles have always existed. Each census serves not just to enumerate a population, but to be a litmus test for relational dynamics between leaders and the people. Just over 80 years before the Trump administration administered their census, the Soviet Union oversaw a nationwide enumeration that also proved controversial. While the differences between the two states are vast and the historical circumstances equally disparate, the Stalinist census of 1937 also included a contested question that led many to worry about the intent of the census. The count bore this out, for the Soviet government suppressed the results of their census just as the state had initiated a widespread purging of its citizens.

This thesis focuses on the census and what it tells us about the Soviet Union during the interwar period. The 1937 census was only the third ever undertaken on the territory the Russian Federation governs over today. The Russian Empire has its own intriguing history with censuses with its first occurring in 1897 under Nicholas II. This census was the first and only national census under the empire and is notable for its categorization of nationality based on mother tongue. Refusal to participate in the census stemmed primarily from the census's role in tax collection and a shortage of enumerators meant much of the rural reaches of the empire were miscounted.[1]

The next universal census would not be held until 1926, under the newly formed Soviet Union. The census was vital in the country's state-building efforts centered on a planned economy and obtaining the data necessary for what would become the First Five-Year-Plan, Stalin's industrialization campaign. It is also noteworthy because it collected data on almost 200 different ethnic identities within the state. To do so, it too included a controversial question: ascertaining a person's *narodnost,* or national belonging. This term originates from an 1820s letter between P. A. Viazemskii and A. I. Turgenev, which spoke about *narodnost* in response to

[1] Lee Schwartz, "A History of Russian and Soviet Censuses," in *Research Guide to the Russian and Soviet Censuses,* ed. Ralph S. Clem (Cornell University Press, 1986), 51.

French and Polish versions of the term. However, the term was widely used in circles of the elite and intelligentsia more often than in the vocabularies of serfs, peasants, and lower-class peoples.[2]

With the First Five-Year Plan complete, the census of 1937 looked to build on its predecessors, asking questions on education and occupations to better inform socialist policies. Census organizers spent months recruiting and training nearly one million workers to prepare for the count. Leading up to the census on January 6, 1937, major news outlets such as *Pravda* touted the significance of the census to the nation's future while the English-language paper *Moscow News* praised the accomplishments to be found from census data to an international audience.

The figures of the 1937 census were collected and processed within a few months of the main collection date. Then, the Stalinist government promptly labeled this data defective and announced work on a 1939 replacement census under separate leadership. The 1937 numbers were never published publicly and were only able to be examined fully after Soviet archives began opening in 1991. These numbers seemed to hold some substantial power over the success of the Soviet Union, to an extent to which the government decided to hide its results rather than admit shortcomings in preparations or how respondents weary of handing data over to enumerators may have skewed results.

Through the story of the lost Soviet census come questions on the essence of people counting. *What value does a census have for a state? For its people? How does fear of a census connect to the people's fear of the state?* This thesis seeks to answer these questions through

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[2] Alexey Miller, "Natsiia, Narod, Narodnost' in Russia in the 19th Century: Some Introductory Remarks to the History of Concepts," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 56, no. 33 (2008): 381-82.

analysis of media surrounding the 1937 census, as well as a dive into the reception of citizens being counted. While previous scholarship on the 1937 census has focused on its suppression and what the numbers in it contained, this study will examine how the census was promoted, taken, and understood at the time.

Chapter One provides a general history of the 1937 census, including the series of estimates published in the early 1930s that compounded into the egregious errors found during the official enumeration. This chapter also situates the work within the context of previous scholarship on Soviet censuses. The next chapter is an analysis of foreign and domestic news media, primarily from *Pravda* and *Moscow News*, as used to promote the census as well as expose its shortcomings. Coverage from the foreign press serves to contextualize the census as a tool for international respect and a gauge of success for the socialist experiment. The final chapter focuses on the diaries of enumerators and respondents in an attempt to understand the reception of the census, often despite the rigorous media campaigns. These writings illuminate the fears of religious persecution and the existing distrust towards the state.

This study of the 1937 Soviet census highlights people counting as a tool in understanding the relationship between a government and its citizens. The census occurred at a pivotal time in Soviet history so the census provides a lens through which underlying issues of distrust and persecution can be understood. The Stalinist period of Soviet history revealed a paradox state--a country generating media and posturing itself towards a socialist future of inclusion while simultaneously distorting information and silencing those not supporting the state's message. Rumors of dissenting citizens being arrested or executed filled some citizens with fear of their government, making 1937 a particularly interesting moment to be collecting intimate data. A controversial census requires pre-existing controversy within a state-citizen relationship, as the census only provides a platform for these issues to be seen. Censuses categorize people based on predetermined descriptors and for those who suspected they would not fit within these categories, or rather within the 'correct' categories, a census became a criminal investigation. Despite the anxieties potentially manifested from census-taking, the data collected through the census is vital to running a functioning government, especially one with lofty goals as the Soviet Union. This placed both the Soviet people and its leaders in a state of precarity based solely on the success of a census.

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Reimagining the Lost Census

The timeline for the census was clearly laid out in Soviet papers. The event would begin with a preliminary count lasting from January 1-5 and the bulk of the recording happening on January 6, from 8am to midnight.[3] The count on January 6 served as a check to remove those who may have died, moved, or were absent on enumerators' first visit to homes. The week following the census (January 7 to 11) provided workers time to revisit homes to clarify answers. In total, census workers would visit homes a maximum of 3 times and those on trains, steamboats, carts, and more, as well as in hotels, huts, and houses would only be counted on January 6. Similar preparations were made for those working, on vacation, or business trips during the time of the census. The Stalinist era had begun in 1929 with massive industrialization where production would be sped up in order to achieve the goal of socialism; the 1937 census would also be conducted speedily.

Before the fall of the Soviet Union, the results of the 1937 census were well hidden from the public eye and virtually did not exist to academics both domestically and abroad. Books such as Ralph Clem's extensive guide to Russian and Soviet censuses make mention of 1937 only in reference to its later replacement census in 1939.[4] Foreign documents, such as those published by the Royal Statistical Society in London, allude to the 1937 census in vague terms of its

[3] "How Will the National Census be Conducted," *Pravda*, December 19, 1936, page 6.

[4] Ralph S. Clem, *Research Guide to the Russian and Soviet Censuses* (Cornell University Press, 1986), 55.

inaccuracies similar to the language used by the Soviet government.[5] But on all accounts, before 1991, the all-Soviet census did not exist.

Since 1991, historians have been wading through government documents and personal accounts of the lost census in an attempt to better understand its coverup and why the census was considered dangerous for public consumption. Scholars have concluded that the suppression of the census was prompted by data that marked a low population count that significantly contradicted the state-approved estimates that had been advertised since the early 1930s. The replacement census in 1939 then provided numbers more aligned with these estimates. Methodological mistakes on the part of the enumerators and those planning the census were attributed as the primary reason for the cover-up, however, because of records released from the Russian State Archive of the Economy (RGAE) we now understand that the census was poorly received by the State because inflated numbers conceived in wake of the famines in the early 1930s had continued to be incorporated into State planning.

Conversations surrounding the 1937 census have mostly ended here, with the census debacle being explained by the growing need to please the State--especially Josef Stalin. Methodological errors are also understood to have been caused by census planners desperate to discover demographic information that would support the State's image of the Soviet citizenry. This image is where the theme of my thesis will be focused. What events conspired for the Soviet State to place such enormous pressure on the census and its presumed "success"? How did the government foresee the census affecting its reputation among its citizens and the international community at large? To answer these questions, we must first dive into the history

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[5] *Observations on the Population of Soviet Russia at the Census of January 17th, 1939.* Journal of the Royal Statistical Society 104, no. 2 (1941): 172-74.

of the Soviet census up until 1937 and the conditions that pushed for the results to be erased for over 50 years.

Most specialists in the field have tied the suppression of the census to the horrific famines of the early 1930s caused by the Stalinist collectivization of agriculture in regions such as Ukraine and Kazakhstan.[6] Collectivization was a state-sponsored system of production mandated fully in 1930 as a response to rising food shortages. Collectivization combined individual peasant farms and provided workers with farming machines capable of mass production.[7] In return, peasants were expected to surrender a portion of their crops to the state for distribution throughout the Soviet Union, especially within its growing urban centers. However, these quotas often far exceeded the average yield of most farms, leading to heightened shortages and famine conditions that led to a 1932 harvest failure and the death of over 5 million Soviet citizens across the southern half of the country.

In an attempt to mitigate the public and international communities from realizing the full extent of the famines caused by State collectivization, famine relief measures were taken by senior party leaders but were not included in more widespread documentation used for general state planning.[8] This caused a rift to develop in the information collected and analyzed by various state agencies, such as the Central Administration for Statistics (TsUNKhU), which was

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[6] A.N. Alekseenko, "The population of Kazakhstan in 1926-1939," *Computer and Historical Demography,* 2000, http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2003/0101/analit02.php.

[7]Lynne Viola et al., *The War Against the Peasantry, 1927-1930* (Yale University Press, 2005), 3.

[8] R.W. Davies et. al., "The Soviet Population and Censuses of 1937 and 1939." In *The Industrialization of Soviet Russia 7: The Soviet Economy and the Approach of War, 1937-1939* (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2018), 131.

responsible for planning and conducting Soviet censuses. This discrepancy of information would lead to increasingly larger gaps between estimated population growth and reality.

This gap became compounded as the TsUNKhU continued to produce population estimates in line with pre-famine data while the State continued to plan the Soviet economy around these inflated numbers, rather than numbers adjusted for the effects of the famines. If discrepancies were found, leaders of the State Planning Committee (Gosplan) explained by claiming TsUNKhU workers were double-counting deaths and underreporting births in an attempt to delegitimize growth.[9] In response to this, census workers were encouraged to falsify data to better match the state-approved estimates and recording of births and deaths became the duty of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, better known as the NKVD (later it would adopt the acronym KGB, its best-known moniker in the West).[10] The NKVD was closely aligned with Stalin's regime and served as an enforcer of policy during this period, especially as the purging of opponents of the state peaked in the late 1930s.

The enlistment of NKVD forces and continued pressure from senior officials kept census data from deviating from its perceived trajectory of population growth. This endless cycle of falsehoods would soon add up, culminating in the catastrophe that was the 1937 census. By that point, the gap in population projections and suspected reality had grown to roughly 6.3 million people--an amount that would call any state government into question but would potentially be

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[9] Davies et. al., "The Soviet Population and Censuses of 1937 and 1939," 132.

[10] Izvestiia, 11 July 1934; Sistematicheskoe sobranie deistvuiushchikh zakonov Soiuza sovetskikh sotsialisticheskikh respublik (Moscow, 1934), 283. http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1934-2/the-kirov-affair/the-kirov-affair-texts/creation-of-the-nkvd/.

even more damning for Soviet Union's attempts at a planned economy, as well as their reputation domestically and abroad.[11]

At the same time, the census forged new ground in constructing Soviet identity in addition to collecting population size. The act of census taking itself is deeply entrenched in the social and political structures of society and the ways in which humans are categorized.[12] One major point of interest in the previous 1926 census was the introduction of a question on nationality or *narodnost*. While the last count under the Tsar in 1897 did include questions on religion, native language, and second language, the question of *narodnost* was a concept only just being introduced to the Soviet people.[13] Nationality during the early to mid-20th century was grounded in the tradition of European state-building that aided in the development of a cohesive shared identity often seen in extended histories of ethnohistorical development.[14] This was an important step for the Soviet government to take, as it had essentially no unifying identity yet to bolster a sense of nationalism within its people. Rather, the Soviet Union was still firmly a collection of peoples who were more likely to identify themselves by their language or religion before the broader concept of the nation.[15] By having data that showed that the newly formed Soviet Union was highly diverse (with over 130 languages and nationalities) it could be put into competition with world powers such as the United States in an attempt to be seen as a new

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[11] Davies et. al., "The Soviet Population and Censuses of 1937 and 1939," 138.

[12] Andrew Whitby, *The Sum of the People: How the Census Has Shaped Nations, from the Ancient World to the Modern Age*, (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2020), 7.

[13] Brian D. Silver, "The Ethnic and Language Dimension in Russian and Soviet Censuses." In *Research Guide to the Russian and Soviet Censuses*, edited by Ralph S. Clem (Cornell University Press, 1986), 71.

[14] Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Cornell University Press, 2005), 103.

[15] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 126.

melting pot for the world. This is a line of thinking that would later be utilized in the 1937 census.

The 1926 census worked as a way to effectively create divisions between the 15 Soviet republics for resource disbursement and in establishing Soviet governments at the local levels.[16] Soviet government structure at this time was organized at three levels: one representing villages, settlements, and small towns, another representing larger rural regions, medium-sized towns, and city wards, and finally one representing the wider territories, oblasts (provinces), and large cities.[17] Officials at the local soviet level (Soviets of Working People's Deputies) made legislative choices for their communities based on the wider policy aims of the central government.[18] For example, local deputies could make choices for the use of excess taxes, but the central government dictated the types and amounts of taxes assigned to citizens.[19] Many of these tax policy decisions stemmed from the demographic information garnered from the census, such as the amount of grain needed to be collected in one village in order to feed citizens in a particular city.

While the 1926 census served as a data collection operation for a new regime, 1937 was a mission to collect data matching the successes of the administration.[20] A new census was desperately needed to coordinate the planned economy and to serve as an indicator of the results

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[16] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 116.

[17] L.G. Churchward, "Continuity and Change in Soviet Local Government, 1947-1957," *Soviet Studies* 9, no.3 (1958): 256.

[18] 1936 U.S.S.R. Const. ch. VIII, art. 94. Accessed through Bucknell University http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/36cons03.html#chap08.

[19] Churchward, "Continuity and Change in Soviet Local Government, 1947-1957," 258.

[20] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 104.

of Stalin's five-year plan. Stalin's first five-year plan ran from 1928-1932 ("The Five-Year Plan in Four Years") and was mainly centered on rapid industrialization and output. The plan was developed backwards: the central party would develop target rates of growth and provide the country with policy and resources to reach such goals. These goals were lofty and, in many cases, impossible to reach in a span of five years. Party members would inflate percent increases in each new version of the plan's draft, with the final draft calling for an investment increase of 228 percent, producers' goods by 204 percent, and electricity by 335 percent.[21] These goals were often criticized both domestically and internationally as unattainable and were seen as a gamble rather than a plan.[22] Not only did this pressure increase the need for the census for further state planning, but demographic information was desperately needed to prove that the goals of the five-year plan were being met.

While delivering a report to the 17th party congress in 1934, Stalin stated that within the period between 1930 and 1933 the Soviet population had grown by roughly 8 million and would continue to grow at a rate of 3 million per year.[23] These projections would later become the benchmark over the next decade in what to expect from the population, although numerous statisticians would push for a reexamination of this projection, including those who headed the department, such as I.A. Popov, appointed by Lenin as the first director of the Soviet Central Statistics Administration. He was dismissed from his position in 1925 but continued to be a force

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[21]Lewis Siegelbaum, "Year of Great Change," *Seventeen Moments in Soviet History*, http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1929-2/year-of-great-change/.

[22] "DANGEROUS PLANNING." New York Times (1923-Current File), Nov 27, 1932. http://proxy.lib.miamioh.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy.lib.miamioh.edu/docview/99797265?accountid=12434.

[23] Josef Stalin. Report to the Seventeenth Party Congress on the Work of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U.(B.)1. https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1934/01/26.htm.

within the statistical community through his work in the Russian republic's statistical and agricultural divisions Popov called for a reexamination of Stalin's proposed 3 million per year increase.[24] However, because these numbers had become so deeply ingrained in the formation of the planned economy and the propaganda published by the state, any attempts to discredit the yearly growth estimates were cast off as anti-Soviet conspiracies and would have deadly consequences for the statisticians who attempted to provide different results.[25]

In 1929, the Statistical committee merged with Gosplan, which logistically made it difficult to complete a decennial census in 1930 because of personnel changes. It would not be until 1932 when the state finally prioritized an All-Union census, although it would continue to be pushed back until 1937.

Preliminary estimates produced from Gosplan put the population at about 180.7 million in 1937, however, both *Pravda* and *Moscow News* chose to publish a more conservative number of 170 million or did not publish numerical estimates at all.[26] Despite the wide range of results, the 1937 census' preliminary numbers only showed a Soviet population of around 161.6 million citizens. This number was explained by officials through acknowledging the miscalculations of former Gosplan committees and by pointing at collection errors due to double-counting.[27] The phenomenon of double-counting referred to Soviet citizens being counted in more than one

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[24] Davies et. al., "The Soviet Population and Censuses of 1937 and 1939," 129.

[25] Davies et. al., "The Soviet Population and Censuses of 1937 and 1939," 134.

[26] *Pravda* and *Moscow News* were two state-controlled newspapers, one published in Russian, the other in English, respectively. These papers were a direct form of communication between the State and the Soviet people as well as an outlet for the State to communicate with the international community. See "Amy of 1.5 Million is Taking Census of Soviet Union, First in 10 Years," from the January 6, 1937 edition of *Moscow News* for examples of the 170 million estimates. Domestically distributed articles from *Pravda* between December 1936 and January 1937 refuse to use overhead estimates.

[27] Davies et. al., "The Soviet Population and Censuses of 1937 and 1939," 136.

location and is the reasoning behind inflated estimates prior to 1937. To prevent this from happening in the census, the collection was to be conducted over the course of one day, except for more isolated regions that were interviewed weeks before the actual census date. However, the date chosen was one of the peak days of travel for the primarily Orthodox country--Christmas day. While the Soviet Union rebranded itself as an atheist state, many families still celebrated Christmas and made it a period of increased travel. Therefore, a significant portion of the population would be in transit as enumerators visited their homes. TsUNKhU attempted to account for this by stopping trains to count passengers, but the planners could not control whether or not citizens would be counted while traveling and within their permanent residence by family members that remained home.

The census director, Kraval, attempted to mitigate the negative assumptions made from the census by stating that the Soviet population had still steadily increased at a rate larger than most capitalist countries. Such comparisons were advertised widely within the Soviet Union and to its Western sympathizers.[28] Statements such as this worked to orientate population growth as an indicator of positive state development and would serve as supporting evidence of socialist success.

Despite the census being delayed numerous times and still not being fully ready to be conducted, it was heartily advertised as citizens were encouraged by the state to cooperate fully and truthfully with census workers.[29] Domestically, *Pravda* touted involvement in the census as

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[28] M. Zinde, "16 Hours to Collect Statistics on 170 Million Persons," *Moscow News*, November 18, 1936. Accessed through Miami University Online Archives.

[29] At this point, the census was still lacking the number of enumerators required to cover the country's 22,402,200 square kilometers of geographic space. Various parties of enumerators began data collection as early as October1936 in order to reach the more physically isolated regions of the Soviet Union.

a citizen's duty towards advancing the Soviet state.[30] The counters consisted of a myriad of workers varying from teachers, collective farm accountants, local leaders, and others.[31] It was important for enumerators to have a strong linguistic background as well as a familiarity with data organization.

The recruitment process was not without issue however, as miscommunication occurred between the state and local governments in terms of worker recommendations and approvals. For example, in Dnepropetrovsk, Chairman Maslov of the Kirovskii district was reported to have approved large numbers of workers without examining their credentials.[32] The mass approval of counters was reportedly common in some districts as the census loomed closer and the enormity of the project became more apparent to government officials. However, in an effort to hire large numbers of workers in a short period of time, oversight was not uncommon. Reports from the Belorussia district found that authorities approved lists of census workers without any type of interview only to later find that many of their new workers were foreigners, sick, or dead.[33]

Concern was also expressed that in some districts, officials were hiring high school students as enumerators. While it was assumed that the teens were being hired for their advanced literacy and language skills, state commissars feared the potential inaccuracies due to having such young workers. It was reported that those involved with these hirings were promptly prosecuted and framed as an example of potential sabotage for the census and by extension the

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[30] "Vsyesoyooznaya Pyerepis' Nasyelyeniya," *Pravda,* November 15, 1936, page. Accessed through Miami University Online Archives.

[31] "National Census Begins in Artic Regions," *Pravda,* December 11, 1936, page 4.

[32] "National Census," *Pravda,* December 10, 1936, page 3.

[33] "January 6 –National USSR Census," *Pravda*, December 28, 1936, page 1.

country as a whole.[34] While there is little record of how common these hiring issues were, the state government was cognizant of the potential doubts these issues could foster in citizens and combated with consistent marketing in the papers. Stories on census training were posted in *Pravda* with phrasing that detailed the work as thorough and organized and framed enumerators as heroes of the nation, having to endure the harsh Soviet landscape in the name of the motherland.

The census form itself underwent constant revision, with separate drafts being actively reformatted for two years before the census. The form originally included a wide array of demographic questions such as age, sex, family history, occupation, native language, as well as literacy and religious orientation.[35] This led to many citizens to become suspicious of the census and the intended use of such personal data. This census would be denoting ethnicity, job position, and religion—three details that had notoriously been utilized by the Soviet government to suppress "anti-Soviet" offenders amidst the fall out of the Civil War.[36] These categories, however, also stood as indicators of the successes of Soviet policy, as many of the first reforms under the Bolsheviks included dismantling the Orthodox Church and providing citizens with higher education in an attempt to increase the national literacy rate.

Final edits to the 1937 census form were made personally by Stalin in order to make the questionnaire more concise and less intimidating to citizens. Questions of religion, native

[34] "January 6 –National USSR Census," *Pravda*, December 28, 1936, page 1.

[35] Tsentral'noye Upravleniye Narodno-Khozyaystvennogo Uchyota. Soviet Gosplan Commissar, n.d. Web. http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/knigi/polka/img/p_pril3.gif.

[36] "NKVD Operational Order 00447," In *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939*, eds. J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, trans. Benjamin Sher (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 473-79.

language, and social group (e.g. laborers, white collar workers, kolkhozniks, individual farmers, artisans, people of free professions, priests of a cult or nonworking) remained. Questions were shorter to speed up the collection process and leave less room for enumerators to misinterpret participant responses.

The first census counts were recorded as early as mid-October in remote areas of Uzbekistan while areas in Siberia began enumeration in late July.[37] The planning committee recognized the need to reach these areas early to make time for travel as well as other unforeseen issues that could delay the count. Soviet media painted census work as a dangerous and gargantuan task consisting of arduous travel to remote areas of the country. Reporters in Irkutsk detailed some of the difficult traveling conditions in an attempt to paint enumerators as national heroes:

> "...the length of the route of the Semenov registrar, who records the nomadic population of the Nyukzhinskii district, Vitimo-Olekminsk district, — 2,400 kilometers, of which, [the registrar] must travel 850 kilometers along the rivers on rafts, walk 260 kilometers across the tundra, and ride the rest on reindeer. Tarasov Registrars in Lytkino should travel 1,200 kilometers on rafts and boats, 1,800 kilometers on reindeer, 1,600 kilometers by plane…"[38]

Papers reassured the public that only the best personnel would be hired and they would be receiving comprehensive training to not only accurately collect data, but also to be able to clearly articulate the national importance of census participation. Local governments were

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[37] "National Census in Uzbekistan," *Pravda,* October 19, 1936, page 6.

[38] "Beginning of the National Census in the North," *Pravda,* July 21, 1936, page 6.

encouraged to reexamine their census personnel and replace workers if necessary.[39] These workers were constantly referred to as an “army,” due in part to its massive size--roughly 1,500,000 workers-- but also to reinforce their importance to the state. This was embodied in a periodical from TsUNKhU chief, Ivan Kraval, who stated that “only under the condition of real socialist discipline on the part of all the people involved in the census can we ensure the success of this grandiose operation.”[40] Census planners and state leaders worried of the intentional and unintentional sabotage of the census through direct inaccuracies when recording data, but also in perpetuating rumors surrounding the census that potentially discouraged participation.

Many Soviet citizens feared revealing too much information regarding religious identity due to the aggressive anti-religious campaigns that began in 1921 and were renewed under Stalin in 1928. These campaigns often included the show trials and executions of high-ranking church members, as well as the confiscation of church funds and valuables.[41] Understandably, this would make the more religious people of the Soviet Union hesitant to divulge such personal information to enumerators.

No question regarding religion was found in the original draft of the census questionnaire when it was presented to party leaders on February 22nd, 1935.[42] After the final draft was edited by Stalin himself in 1936 however, question 5 simply left a space blank to denote religion.[43]

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[39] Ivan Kraval, “National Census of the Soviet State,” December 23, 1936, page 4.

[40] Ivan Kraval, “National Census of the Soviet State,” December 23, 1936, page 4.

[41] Felix Corley, ed., *Religion in the Soviet Union: an Archival Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), Doc. 06.

[42] Corley, *Religion in the Soviet Union*, 404.

[43] Tsentral'noye Upravleniye Narodno-Khozyaystvennogo Uchyota. Soviet Gosplan Commissar, n.d. Web. http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/knigi/polka/img/p_pril3.gif.

Enumerator instruction was not so brief, for the question on religion required a full explanation on how to ask the question to citizens:

> On question 5: An answer to this question should be given only for people aged 16 and above. The question is not about the faith to which the person asked or his parents belonged officially in past times [e.g. in the tsarist era]. If the person asked considers himself a nonbeliever, write 'nonbeliever'. If the person asked considers himself a believer, write 'believer', and for believers holding a particular dogma, write the name of the religion (for example, Orthodox, Lutheran, Baptist, Molokan, Mohammedan, Jew, Buddhist, etc.).[44]

It is interesting to note how the wording of this instruction gave freedom of interpretation for the worker to label the citizen as atheist or a non-believer—a statistic that would have been greatly appreciated by those heading the anti-religious campaigns. However, it is a gamble to add such a question on a census, knowing that having to provide such sensitive information may deter citizens from providing accurate data to workers or take part in the census at all. Rumors spread among the people that information from the census would be used to place extra taxes on those who marked themselves as religious.[45] Others stated that believers would be treated as kulaks and would suffer treatment similar to the priests of the fallen tsarist period. In the end, the census revealed that a large number of citizens still considered themselves religious: roughly 55 million people over the age of 16 labeled themselves believers, 42 million saw themselves as nonbelievers, and only 890,000 abstained from the question.[46]

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[44] Corley, *Religion in the Soviet Union*, 405.

[45] Corley, *Religion in the Soviet Union*, 406.

[46] Felix Corley, "Believers' Responses to the 1937 and 1939 Soviet Census," *Religion, State and Society* 22, no. 4 (1994): 407.

When the date of the census finally arrived—January 6, Christmas eve—enumerators were met with mixed reactions from Soviet citizens. S. Kovrigin, a census worker in Moscow, recounted his experience as being primarily positive. While collecting data from factory workers, he noted that they were friendly, welcoming, and extremely forthcoming in answering his questions--often providing too far greater detail than necessary.[47] Others were less trusting of the State's intentions for the census. During a period where political arrests and purging were becoming more commonplace, citizens were skeptical of why census workers needed information about their religious preferences and family background.[48]

The preliminary analysis of the census data uncovered what many workers already knew--that there was a large discrepancy between the state estimates of the population and the actual data collected. An extensive report authored by M. V. Kurman, a demographer within TsUNKhU, said that the shortfall was more likely closer to 8 million.[49] He broke down the gap as having been caused by complications such as double counting in the 1926 census, migration, and a number of unrecorded deaths. This report and the shortfall, dubbed Kurman's Gap, was released for internal consumption among the political leadership on March 14, 1937. A week later, the state responded by arresting Kurman for attempting to defame the NKVD, who served as record keepers for Soviet births and deaths. After this, the census was referenced in multiple *Pravda* articles but was ultimately dubbed a failure due to "wreckers" such as Kurman, who intentionally allowed the census to fail in order to harm the state. An article published in *Izvestiia*

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[47]Karl Schlogel. *Moscow, 1937*. Translated by Rodney Livingstone. (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2012), 109-111.

[48]Catherine Merridale. "The 1937 Census and the Limits of Stalinist Rule," The Historical Journal 39, no. 1 (1996): 233.

[49] Davies et. al., "The Soviet Population and Censuses of 1937 and 1939," 138.

solidified these claims, stating: “It is well-known that the results of the 1937 census were declared defective. Wreckers...ignored government instructions and the elementary foundations of statistical science.”[50] However, there are no clear records indicating that statisticians had intentionally interfered with population records.

Roughly 50 years after the failed census, historians were left wondering how this 8-million-person gap came to be and if the state did indeed know about it, why the Soviet government went ahead with the census? Additionally, why was the state so adamant about pursuing the census? Some consider its suppression an instance of government misinformation in an attempt to hide the massive death toll of Stalin’s economic plans that resulted in widespread famine in the Soviet Union’s agricultural heartlands. Catherine Merridale states in her article on the census, that Soviet leaders such as I. A. Kraval, who headed the census committee, feared delivering numbers that reflected the famine-caused deaths that affected rural regions in Ukraine and Kazakhstan.[51] Some census planners may have feared being accused of treachery and being sent to labor camps, such as happened to the “wreckers” of 1933 who were accused of undercounting population growth with the intent of undermining the nation.[52] These “wreckers” are considered among the victims of the Stalinist purges and terror that would later define the end of the decade. In chapter 3, I will connect the rise of anti-Soviet attacks to the State’s

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[50] *Izvestiya*, December 3, 1938 in Davies et. al., 144.

[51] Merridale, “The 1937 Census and the Limits of Stalinist Rule,” 4.

[52] Davies et. al., “The Soviet Population and Censuses of 1937 and 1939,” 132. Workers within the TsUNKhU were charged for falsifying population growth through double-counting deaths and under-recording births. Because of this assumption, 1.5 million deaths were suppressed in population records, coinciding with the sweeping famines plaguing the country that very same year.

mirrored attempts to further define the Soviet citizen as can be seen through the 1937 census and the ways in which it was advertised both domestically and abroad.

Conducting a census on the eve of the "Great Terror" heavily influenced planning operations[53]. Yearly population estimates and numbers regarding the successfulness of the 5 Year Plan were often padded to provide Party leaders with numbers showing positive results.[54] These false numbers led Party leaders to expect census results demonstrating that the Soviet Union was progressing well, but were instead met with the harsh reality of a large death rate and a population resistant to conforming to the idealized Soviet citizen.[55] A major disappointment found in the results of the census found that religion still was a major factor in the lives of the people and that the encouraged atheism of the Soviet government was not being adhered to. In fact, religion worked to cripple census results as many feared disclosing their religious affiliations in fear of being oppressed by the government.[56] This often resulted in inaccurate results or some who refused to give answers to enumerators at all for fear of the state learning information that could be used against them later. Distrust from citizens towards their government was reciprocated, however, as the hypocritical nature of the media often touted the

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[53] The "Great Terror" references a period in the late 1930s, peaking in 1937, where government workers and citizens deemed "anti-Soviet" were expelled from the Soviet Union, jailed, or executed. This purge was aimed at Kulaks (wealthy peasants), ethnic minorities, and other groups resisting Soviet leadership. Purging additionally caused voices of dissent to be removed from the government, thus reinforcing a culture of producing policy and action that aimed to please government leaders rather than reflect the realities caused by mishandled socialist principles. It is estimated that these Stalinist purges caused the deaths of nearly one million people.

[54] "Observations on the Population of Soviet Russia at the Census of January 17th, 1939," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 104, no. 2 (1941): 172-74.

[55] The ideal characterization of the "new Soviet citizen" versus the reality of Soviet life will be discussed further in the third chapter of this thesis.

[56] Corley, "Believers' Responses to the 1937 and 1939 Soviet Census," 404.

census as an opportunity to better understand the Soviet citizen, but also to condemn those that did not meet that image.

Other modern scholars contributing to the conversation see the failure of the census as caused by methodological blunders. This was also the main reason cited by the Soviet government for the census being labeled as defective, as cited often in newspapers such as *Pravda*.[57] This narrative focuses largely on the incompetence of enumerators in their collection of data and the occasional resistance they met from citizens mainly due to a fear of providing the state with personal information that would later be dangerous for citizens. Enumerators were also blamed for twisting questions and inaccurately counting military personnel and those traveling during the time of the census.[58]

Double-counting citizens also became an issue as the census took place on January 6—the eve of Orthodox Christmas—due to yet another delay of the census, which was originally supposed to be finished a month earlier in December. Because enumerators were sent out on a holiday, many people were out traveling or just unwilling to cooperate. Scholars have looked into the disorganization of the census by examining the records of local governments and the issues they faced.[59]

Overall, historians have explained the mistakes made by census planners and how the census data was not an accurate depiction of the Soviet population. Researchers have dug into the religious and ethnic resentment that incited pushback from citizens and how that might have

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[57] Various *Pravda* articles from 1936 to 1939.

[58] Davies, et.al., "The Soviet Population and Censuses of 1937 and 1939," 135.

[59] Merridale, "The 1937 Census and the Limits of Stalinist Rule," 11.

affected results. Others such as Ralph S. Klem have provided a more methodological approach to understanding the census and have looked at its problematic questions and execution by enumerators. Most of these studies utilize state documents and public statements such as newspapers, however, few have dissected the language used surrounding the census and the importance the state and its leaders placed on its results. Scholarly study on this topic revolves heavily on the suppression of the census data and events that took place after January 6, 1937, and not the efforts made before this date. But why allow a census to be conducted if it was meant to fail, as some scholars have suggested when analyzing the 1937 results? Why place a media spotlight onto the census and heighten the stakes for its results, if for years census workers were unsure of their estimates? What did the Soviet government hope to prove if the census had been successful? Was the census really that vital for the future of Soviet life? These questions open a new avenue of research to understand how the census was promoted by the state and how it ultimately affected and was affected by the relationship between the government and its citizens.

This thesis aims to understand why and how the census was understood by the public and the international community and how these pressures facilitated the State's decision to dismiss the census results entirely. The next chapter will dive into the ways Soviet media portrayed the census in 1936 in an effort to bolster participation and paint the census as a major accomplishment for Soviet society. These articles additionally serve as yet another instance in which falsified population growth was embedded in the public consciousness and effectively increasing the fallout of a census with contradicting results.

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Domestic Versus Foreign Press Covering the 1937 Census

In the November 18th, 1936 edition of the *Moscow News*, a full spread article entitled "16 Hours to Collect Statistics on 170 Million Persons" was published in an effort to advertise the upcoming census.[60] Below the headline are images of four Soviet women representing the north, south, east, and west of the country. One stands in a snowy landscape within the Arctic circle clutching animal skins. Another is shown working on Ukrainian-style embroidery, while another image shows an Uzbek actress on stage in Tashkent. The final image shows a woman working the Soviet south—a large basket thrown over her shoulder filled with tea leaves. These women are examples of the happy and diverse lifestyles they are able to live under the Soviet state, a lifestyle that is expected to be quantified through the census data being collected the following year.

16 Hours to Collect Statistics on 170 Million Persons

IN THE NORTH, SOUTH, EAST AND WEST, all members of all nationalities of the USSR will be interviewed by the census-takers early next year. Left to right: A Nenets hunter of silver fox who lives on the upper part of the Yenisei River about 63 miles from the Kara Sea beyond the Arctic Circle; Galina Prasenko, member of the Saraching embroidery artel in the Ukraine; Sara Imanturi, Uzbek actress of the Khamza Theater in Tashkent; a worker of the Chakva Tea Plantation near Batumi in the Soviet South —Photos by Debabov, Soyuzphoto and Shakhovski

Front-page of Moscow News from November 18, 1936, by Mikhail Moiseevich Zinde. Eastview Soviet Database.

[60] Mikhail Moiseevich Zinde, "16 Hours to Collect Statistics on 170 Million Persons," Moscow News, November 18, 1936. Accessed through Miami University Online Archives.

The text itself praises Soviet progressiveness through systems of collectivization and industrialization, as well as increases in health services and education. Clear distinctions are made to distance the Soviets from their Tsarist predecessors, comparing the treatment of citizens and the handling of earlier censuses. The article, which appeared in the English-language newspaper published in the Soviet capital, sought to garner support for the Soviet project from the international community. State media at this time was viewed as a vital tool in spreading political information and news, but also in shaping how the Soviet people perceived the character of their state and identified with Soviet nationalism. Clear and easily disseminated information was especially vital to the 1937 census as it was a wide-scale collection endeavor over the span of only a few weeks. Newspapers and posters were used to explain the census and its purpose to citizens to ensure truthful participation that would lead to accurate data. Census advertisements also painted a confident picture of the bureaucratic systems of the Soviet government to an international community that was increasingly standardizing decennial censuses.

This chapter will analyze various forms of media originating from newspapers, posters, and satirical magazines during the months leading up to the 1937 census. Specifically, it will look at rhetoric used by the state to encourage participation in data collection and the use of the census as a tool in defending socialist policies. It will be important to note that these messages were also published for an international audience, most likely as a way to cast off doubts about the regime. As noted in chapter one, the census was expected to bring in data supporting the reported successes of Stalin's 5-year-plans and the overall planned economy. An analysis of state media will reveal the mass messaging being sent out to the world and enable us to recover the dynamics and contradictions in the way the Soviet state promoted the census. These paradoxes will be discussed at length in the final chapter of this thesis as a way to underscore the public reception of the 1937 census. This chapter will serve as an exploration of the Soviet Media's role in perpetuating said paradoxes of the idealized Soviet state seen in census advertisements and its reality.

Selling the Census to the People

Newsprint media was a vital part of the Soviet propaganda machine, especially as literacy rates continued to rise. One of the leading papers of the Bolshevik party during the Revolution and throughout the Soviet era was *Pravda*. This paper had its first formalized run from 1912-1914 after new censorship laws inspired by the 1905 Revolution weakened the Tsarist regime and called for more press freedoms. Up until this time, the Tsar's government was fairly strict in its censorship of mass media, justifying its rationale through paternalistic attitudes to protect people.[61] *Pravda* was unique in its first two-year run, as it was able to publish works legally and without major censorship from the state. Editors, consisting mainly of Bolshevik leaders, eluded the censors by continuously changing the paper's name slightly and posing as a new publication.[62] Censors permitted *Pravda* to continue this charade until 1914 when the paper was officially outlawed by the State in an increased effort to quell internal conflict as Russia entered World War I. The paper continued, however, under illegal means and was able to survive the

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[61] Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917 - 1929* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 22.

[62] Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State*, 27.

increased war censorship due to the Bolshevik party's organizational and financial superiority over other papers at the time.

Beyond *Pravda*, the Bolsheviks used other papers to further cement their ideologies within Russian society. Papers were published and distributed at the local level to soldiers fighting in the Russian Civil War. Readership among the peasantry remained low, despite the group being one of the most vital demographics needed to secure Bolshevik success in the political revolution.[63] Widespread illiteracy and cross-country distribution due to the war served as major obstacles spreading *Pravda* and other party-controlled papers. Large scale papers rarely included localized news and were often filled with dense legal and party jargon that prevented many peasants from connecting with the Bolshevik ideals.[64] Leaders of the local Soviets as well as chairmen of the collective farms were expected to educate their communities on the census process and its significance to the nation.[65] As the census drew nearer and stories of local confusion for the census reached the state, these same local leaders were chastised for not painting a "clear picture of the exceptional significance of the census."[66] Party leaders, through Soviet media, placed significant blame on regional newspapers and their failure to sufficiently inform the people and the process of the census.

The state's decision to push newspapers as the primary form of communication of policy to citizens and party members generated a need for enhanced distribution techniques. A rationing system was developed by the Central Committee in 1930 that determined distribution through

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[63] Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State*, 33.

[64] Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State*, 46.

[65] "Preparation for the All-Union Population Census," *Pravda*, December 27, 1936, page 3.

[66] "January 6 –National USSR Census," *Pravda*, December 28, 1936, page 1.

"control numbers" that set subscription quotas that were to be met by postal services, factory leadership, and other party members.[67] These quotas aimed to streamline the production process of papers and reduce the costs of printing and to ensure papers were available to those wishing to read them. However, the increased legislation proved to adversely affect the dissemination of information as the major papers *Pravda* (Truth)*, Izvestiia* (News), and *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* (Komsomol Truth) became scarce in comparison to demand.[68] These papers rose in popularity in part due to their subsidized pricing by the state, but also because of their function as authorities in political information. The state relied on papers to advertise policy changes and, as was the case in 1936, promoted major party endeavors such as a national census.

The census process relies on a clear communication of intention in order to gather useful and accurate personal information in a peaceful and equitable manner in which citizens trust their government to handle such sensitive data. The Soviet state (and governments today) thus advertised a census heavily before and during data collection. Due to the unsteady balance of newspaper supply and demand that failed to be controlled through state planning, state-approved news became a valued commodity to the Soviet population. This increased value on information would include advertisement of the census as well. Historian Mathew Leone describes this break in communication as being caused by the Central Committee's desire to distribute information to

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[67] Matthew Edward Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2004), 61.

[68] The All-Union Leninist Young Communist League (Всесою́зный ле́нинский коммунисти́ческий сою́з молодёжи), better known as the Komsomol, was a political youth organization within the Soviet Union. It was described as being an organization with "the aim of assisting the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in the education of youth and children in the spirit of Communism" through political and general education, along with physical and occupational training. "Soviet Legislation (XVI): Selection of Decrees and Documents," The Slavonic (and East European) Review, Vol. XV, No. 43 (July, 1936), pp. 221-225.

the most politically valuable within the population.[69] Those deemed politically significant included the armed forces, factory workers, and party outposts in more remote areas of the country. State farms and smaller industrial enterprises existed far lower on this list while simultaneously being a target demographic of interest for the census. According to a 1936 Central Committee report, the three major papers were unavailable to meet the demand of papers for most Moscow and Leningrad newsstands. Instead, a majority of circulating papers were only being distributed to government and economic institutions who were able to ensure their subscriptions.[70]

One of the major talking points within the press advertisement was the census structure itself. In analyzing the wording of the questions and how these questions were presented to the public, we can better understand the Soviet citizen's willingness to cooperate or hesitancy to divulge information to enumerators. In a November edition of *The Moscow News*, question content was highlighted as a way of conveying the social progressiveness of the Soviet Union's refusal to ask invasive questions of familial social histories:

> One of the most significant features of the forthcoming census, distinguishing it from preceding ones, is the absence of the question of social origin on the registration cards. The dropping of this question reflects the victory of socialist construction in the land of soviets, which is now on the threshold of the classless Socialist society.[71]

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[69] Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses*, 69.

[70] Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI), f.17, op.114, d. 336, 1. 109 and RGASPI, f.17. Op. 114, d. 761, 1. 114, cited in Matthew Edward Lenoe, Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2004), 63.

[71] Mikhail Moiseevich Zinde, "16 Hours to Collect Statistics on 170 Million Persons," *Moscow News*, November 18, 1936, page 3.

The mention of questions in regard to social origin reflected the intention to diverge from the 1897 and 1926 censuses, both of which contained a variety of questions regarding family social class designation (peasants, Cossacks, merchants, nobility, etc.). These types of questions were explicitly excluded from the 1937 census, although similar questions such as occupation type and current social status remained.[72] However, by stating that the census would not ask about social *origin*, it is understood that the State wished to portray the Soviet Union as a place of social mobility and possibility, rather than one bound by the legacies of one's family. It also separated the Soviet regime from the social nomenclature of the Russian empire and any negative connotations citizens may be harboring from the former heads of state. The idea of the classless Socialist society was additionally vital to the tenets of Marxism that guided the Bolshevik regime to an extent. Because Marxist ideology placed the needs of the worker at the center of the economy, it would be vital not to divide society into social classes from birth. Questions on social status remained as a gauge of one's current economic state, which now allowed for mobility.

In addition to social progressiveness in the way of class division, *The Moscow News* painted the census to international audiences as an opportunity to showcase the erosion of contradictions between social groups:

> Exact figures of the census will reflect these magnificent advances. The census will show how rapidly the population is growing and developing under the conditions of the dictatorship of the proletariat; it will show how in the process of revolutionary transformations of society the working man is remaking his own nature, how the contradictions inherited from the past are being outlived; it will show that the exploiters have been eliminated, that contradictions between social groups are disappearing, that the contradictions between town and countryside

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[72] Lee Schwartz, "A History of the Censuses," in *Ralph S. Clem, Research Guide to the Russian and Soviet Censuses (Cornell University Press, 1986), 51.*

> and between mental and manual labor are becoming obliterated, that the backwardness of previously oppressed nationalities of women are disappearing.[73]

The article's author, B. Smulevich continued, stating that "the contradictions between town and countryside and between mental and manual labor..." were being obliterated under Soviet society. Here, the Soviet population was assumed to be coming together under a united identity, defying any and all former divisions that may have existed under the Tsar. The census was being posited as a vital statistical operation aiming to capture an exact picture of the Soviet population, which was assumed to be an economically flourishing melting pot of cultures and lifestyles.

Smulevich's article in particular drew on the erasure of rural "backwardness" brought about by the opening of new schools and vocational institutions that trained new Soviet workers. Backwardness was identified through characteristics such as illiteracy, spiritualism, and use of home remedies rather than modern medicine. Medicine was also used as a way to bolster enthusiasm for the census and further explain its importance to the Soviet people. Soviet-based papers pushed medical advancements in the USSR as evidence to back the expected population increase. In citing the work of L.S. Kaminskii's article in *The Soviet Medical Journal,* the *Moscow News* reported that completing a successful and accurate census would provide "the figures on sex, nationality, matrimony, literacy, education, and other characteristics…[that would] allow a revision in the work of medical institutions from the point of adaption to local conditions."[74] The use of census data for increased medical treatment is a fairly standard use of demographics, for the Soviet state it also served as a measure of their success as a government.

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[73] B. Smulevich, "Army of 1.5 Million is Taking Census of Soviet Union, First in 10 Years, Moscow News, January 6, 1937.

[74] "Census Data to Aid Health Protection," *Moscow News*, December 16, 1936, page 10.

Census figures were expected to deliver further information on the connection between increased Soviet culture and improvements in health. Figures expected to "show whether and to what extent certain prejudices and superstitions still [lingered] among a section of the population."[75] This is likely in reference to the varied cultural and religious norms of medicine located within the roughly 9 million square miles that made up the Soviet Union.

Beginning in the late 1920s, the Soviet regime had begun to send medical workers to the outer Soviet republics to bring advanced biomedical practices as well as messages of the cultural revolution being promoted by the government. In Kazakhstan, medical workers were sent to lower rates of disease and increase quality of life, which came bundled with the implied notion that life in Kazakhstan before Soviet intervention was abysmal, but through faith in the Soviet state and Communist party citizens would be able to lift themselves up towards economic and cultural development.[76] Citizens were urged to let go of a belief in superstition (and by proxy, religion) and believe in the power of science, thus curing rural areas of their "backwardness."[77] Effects of Soviet influence in some areas were extremely helpful to the population but were often played up by Soviet media. A regional *Pravda* article from 1935 stated that before the Revolution, Kazakhs were ignorant of doctors, but through Soviet intervention were now flourishing through "an enormous network of public health institutions."[78] Later claims would go

[75] "Census Data to Aid Health Protection," *Moscow News.*

[76] Paula A. Michaels, "Medical Propaganda and Cultural Revolution in Soviet Kazakhstan, 1928-41," *The Russian Review* 59 (April 2000): 160.

[77] Paula A. Michaels, "Medical Propaganda and Cultural Revolution in Soviet Kazakhstan," 160.

[78] *Pravda Iuzhnogo Kazakhstana,* June 6, 1935, page 3.

so far to say that the lives of Soviet women had improved so much that they no longer needed abortions--a precursor to the 1936 anti-abortion law.[79]

Newspapers used the conversation of medical advancements to aid the state's image among the people, preemptively stating that the expected population increase was not only caused by a higher birth rate of Soviet children because of economic growth but directly because of the Communist Party and the Soviet Government's increased spending on public health. Additions of hospital beds, childcare, sanitoriums, and increased support of mothers in wake the of a recent act prohibiting abortion was contributed to the reported drop in the Soviet death rate, which was stated to have dropped 44 percent as compared to figures from 1913.[80]

Local population numbers were vital in understanding the medical needs of the various Soviets in terms of distributing vaccinations and ordering the construction of new medical buildings and the training of new professionals. This point was not lost on the state media, as it was used in elevating citizen engagement of the 1937 census. The *Moscow News* explained to its readers that because of the lack of updated population data, health facilities were forced to send out its workers to conduct local counts of the population, which took the medical professionals away from providing actual treatment.[81] The census would allow for more accurate information in gauging the general sanitary conditions and health of localized areas and make calculations regarding medicine distribution and the safety of an area's water supply. These specific areas of

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[79] Paula A. Michaels, "Motherhood, Patriotism, and Ethnicity: Soviet Kazakhstan and the 1938 Abortion Ban," *Feminist Studies* 27, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 307.

[80] Mikhail Moiseevich Zinde, "16 Hours to Collect Statistics on 170 Million Persons," *Moscow News*, November 18, 1936, page 3.

[81] Mikhail Moiseevich Zinde, "16 Hours to Collect Statistics on 170 Million Persons."

development were attempts to appeal to more localized audiences, all with the aim of garnering favor of the Soviet regime and ensuring participation in the upcoming census.

In addition to appealing to a more specific base, Soviet papers in 1936 were also attempting to reach a more international audience, aiding in the Soviet Union's agenda through Communist International (Comintern), an organization aimed at the creation of an international Soviet republic, among other goals.[82] Editor-in-chief of the *Moscow News,* Mikhail Markovich Bordin (born Gruzenberg), founded the paper with the aid of Anna Louise Strong, an American Socialist who believed strongly in the ideals of international communism. Before starting the newspaper in 1930, Borodin served as a Comintern agent in China, where his fluency in English helped in his effort to spread communism in Canton.[83] Strong was a firm advocate of socialism and spent the latter half of her life in Eastern Europe and China, writing for both the *Moscow News* and for International papers.[84] Both Strong and Borodin had aspirations for international communism and believed news media was one of the best methods of spreading those ideals. Not only is this seen in articles from both the *Moscow Times* and *Pravda*, but also in the Soviet state's relationship with the foreign press. These writers played a critical role in providing countries, such as America and England, with information on the successes of the Soviet state. This was especially true in advertising the 1937 census.

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[82] Harold Henry Fisher, *The Communist Revolution: An Outline of Strategy and Tactics* (Stanford University Press, 1955), 13.

[83] Dan N. Jacobs, "Recent Material on Soviet Advisers in China: 1923-1927," *The Chinese Quarterly* No.41 (March 1970): 108.

[84] B. K. Clinker, "Anna Louise Strong (1885-1970)," *Knox Historical Society*, http://www.knoxhistory.org/index.php/local-history/authors/107-government-politics/127-anna-louise-strong (accessed November 30, 2020).

Making Sense of the Census Abroad

Beyond the need for the Soviet state to define and set expectations for the Soviet citizen, leaders were additionally concerned for the reputation of the Soviet Union to the international community. In domestic papers, it was often touted that estimates for the 1937 census would show impressive statistics far superior to that of western nations. In analyzing the decrease of mortality since 1913, the *Moscow News* reported the death rate to have dropped 44 percent--a change that took the United States, France, and Japan over a century to achieve.[85] One *Pravda* article stated that western, "bourgeois" states refused to collect accurate data because they realized how "unprofitable" it would be to uncover the internal contradictions of capitalism found through census numbers.[86] This consisted of underreporting the unemployed, the illiterate and in the process, hiding the true nature of oppression and poverty among its population.

Other articles pushed a comparison of Soviet growth rates to that of capitalist countries.[87] The Soviet population was especially lauded for having a relatively young population, with 45% of the current population having been born under the Soviet regime (post 1917). This was placed in direct comparison of Nazi Germany, stating that only 30.8% of the population was under the age of 19 and being dubbed "a nation without youth."[88] It was clear that Soviet papers were pushing Soviet superiority through the use of census numbers. By using census data to present

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85 Mikhail Moiseevich Zinde, "16 Hours to Collect Statistics on 170 Million Persons." While Japan may not have been considered a western nation in 1936, it was most likely referenced here because of the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905). Japan defeated Russia in the war, making it the first Asian power to triumph over a European power in modern history and bringing shame and instability to the Russian people and its Tsar.

86 "January 6 –National USSR Census," *Pravda*, December 28, 1936, page 1.

87 Ivan Kraval, "National Census of the Soviet State," *Pravda*, December 23, 1936, page 4.

88 Ivan Kraval, "National Census of the Soviet State," Pravda, December 23, 1936, page 4.

progressive population growth and a well-organized census process, the papers postured the Soviet state as a success to the rest of the world. This continued past Russian publications, as large news outlets such as the American *New York Times* and the London *Times*.

This comparison was propagated in the international media even when reporting on the 1939 census, in which new data showed a population increase from 147 million in 1926 to 170 million in 1939.[89] *The Times* (London) compared this 15.9 percent increase to that of other western nations--Britain included, which had only grown 2.7 percent in the same period. The article went so far as to say that the whole of 'capitalist' Europe [that is Italy, Germany, Britain, and France] had grown by 32 million, while the Soviet Union alone had increased by 23 million. The article continued by stating that even birth rates had been higher in the Soviet Union--a feat solidifying their claims of advancements in healthcare.[90] In coverage of the 1939 census, foreign papers such as *The Evening Star* of Washington D.C. placed population estimates much lower than in 1937, closer to 169,000,000 (the number census leaders pushed for in the early days of census advertisement).[91] The article then quoted *Pravda* in saying that "the census would show that 'while death is reaping a rich harvest in the capitalist countries,' the Soviet birth rate is increasing and the death rate is falling."[92] This focus on increasing birth rates would then be held up against non-socialist nations as a way to promote Soviet superiority and the successes of socialism.

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89 "Soviet Census Figures," *The Times* (London), June 3, 1939, page 11.

90 "Soviet Census Figures," page 11.

91 "Soviets Plan Census," *The Evening Star* (Washington D.C.), July 27, 1938, page A-4.

92 "Soviets Plan Census," *The Evening Star*.

Soviet media, of course, was more blatant in their comparisons of the USSR and other states such as Fascist Germany--a regime alternative to democracy and in direct competition with Soviet ideologies. The *Moscow News* regularly pointed out the failings of the German state, reporting (ironically) on the food shortages that arose in 1933 and their mishandling of state intervention.[93] In regard to employment, Soviet papers critiqued Adolf Hitler's leadership and support of a fascist government framework. In a full-page article analyzing the growth of the German state under Hitler, fascist leaders were condemned for promising the German people to abolish poverty and resolve the employment crisis plaguing the country since the end of the first World War.[94] The article claims that the German state falsified figures of employment, dismissing the 1,170,000 citizens still unemployed. The falsification of German data was heavily scrutinized and deemed proof of the superiority of Soviet Socialism over German Fascism, despite the Soviet Union itself being guilty of falsifying its own population data.

The combativeness of Soviet media towards states of competing ideologies was also turned upon the former Tsarist regime, where the goal was to erase doubt of the socialist framework. Reports on the documented Soviet population increase credited the Soviet regime as a whole and more specifically, its socialist government structure. In quoting *Izvestiia*, *The Times* remarked that the Soviet Union saw the rapid increase in population as being connected to the Bolshevik party's practiced ideologies:

> The difference in the increase in population between the Soviet Union and 'capitalist' Europe is attributed to the Socialist system, but a graph published in *Pravda* shows that the population of Russia increased from 106,400,000 in 1897

[93] "Food Rationing Ushers in Hitler's 'Glorious Future,'" *Moscow News*, December 23, 1936, page 4.

[94] "War of Aggression Underlying Theme of Nazi Congress," *Moscow News,* September 23, 1936, page 10.

> to 134,200,000 in 1920--mostly under the Tsars--in spite of the Revolution, several wars, and continental internal upheaval.[95]

Foreign reporting surrounding the census consisted of primarily echoes of state-approved headlines and statistics, however, correspondents did not shy away from adding allusions to their own skepticism of the regime's honesty regarding the count and the need for numbers. An American newspaper saw the census as a chance to poke fun at the Soviet state's reputation for brutality and flimsy reasoning for taking another census in 1939: "The Soviet government will take a new census because the first was unsatisfactory. It must have shown some 'counterrevolutionaries" overlooked by the executioners."[96] Comments such as these encouraged the Soviet state to increasingly discount the validity of foreign press to the Soviet people. This often caught reporters in a feedback loop: foreign reporters would accuse the Soviet media of falsely claiming growth, while Soviet newspapers accused foreign press of falsely slandering the Soviet state.

While not as openly skeptical regarding the census as *The New York Times*, *The Times* (London) took this opportunity to question the "formidable power lies behind these simple figures [of the census results]."[97] By directly comparing census numbers to the growth percentages of the Tsarist empire, the validity of growth due solely to changes made by the Soviet regime is called into question. This was a relation consciously avoided by the Soviet media (and in turn, the State).

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[95] "Soviet Census Figures," *The Times* (London).

[96] "Must Have," *The Key West Citizen* (Key West, Florida), January 11, 1938, page 5.

[97] "Soviet Census Figures," *The Times* (London).

In an article published in the *Moscow News* on the eve of the 1937 census, the 1897 census--the last census under the Tsar-- was discredited as a product of the fear and distrust that existed between the Tsar and his people.[98] It was printed that those living in the villages viewed the census in 1897 as a Tsarist tool of repression. Rumors crept through the countryside, sewing seeds of paranoia that census participation would lead to later government persecutions with punishments such as exile to Arabia, the transport of young women and girls to underpopulated regions, or more extreme whispers of old men and women being boiled into soap in order to keep the population demographic young.[99] While these fears have never been justified through historical evidence, they served an important role in understanding the rhetoric of the Soviet state in their attempts to discount the former Tsarist empire while simultaneously bolstering their own by means of census data.

Working as a foreign correspondent within the Soviet Union was no small feat. Reporters walked a fine line between attempting to provide the world with a glimpse of the Soviet experience while additionally navigating the constant vigilance of Soviet censors. State permission was needed to both live and work in the USSR and even then reporters needed to stay in the good graces of the foreign ministry department if they were to be allowed to send any of their work back home. Journalists such as the Welshman Gareth Jones risked their lives in attempting to report on the more unsavory sides of the Soviet Union in the 1930s, often resulting in their deportation from the state.[100] Others such as Walter Duranty of the *New York Times*,

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[98] B. Smulevich, "Army of 1.5 Million."

[99] B. Smulevich, "Army of 1.5 Million."

[100] Gareth Jones was a welsh journalist best known for his reporting on the Soviet famine during the early 1930s. While he was granted a relatively unrestricted visa for work--due to his previous work with former British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George--his most memorable work was done out of the purview of Soviet handlers. One such endeavor occurred when Jones jumped off of a train headed to Kharkiv, where he was being expected by German

navigated the censors well--to the point where Duranty, somewhat unwittingly, sometimes knowingly, aided the Soviet Union in its attempts to cover up the famine and show trials of the 1930s.[101]

In regard to the 1937 census, reporters were often influenced in similar ways--caught between regurgitating Soviet-approved lines and finding subtle ways to integrate their own reflections. Additionally, foreign press became entangled in the feedback loop driven by the war over truth. The Soviet-state media would disseminate information, regardless of its validity, while the foreign papers either accepted or challenged these propagated truths. In the cases where the Soviet State truths were challenged, papers such as *Pravda* and *Moscow News* quickly and resolutely defended itself by framing the critiques as attacks on the State by foreign enemies. For some non-Soviet reporters, scrutinizing the Soviet government risked losing their visas into the country, but repeating Soviet news line for line promised faulty journalism that risked legitimizing a reality that was potentially dangerous for the Soviet people and the larger international community. Developing a delicate balance between appeasing the Soviet State and searching for contradictions then became the key for good journalism for the international press corps.

The *New York Times* assigned Harold Denny to report from Moscow between 1936 and 1939 and work closely with the first U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union, William C. Bulitt.[102]

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government officials. Rather than attending that meeting, Jones visited over 20 villages across rural Ukraine and talked to them about their experience with collectivization, where he found that many of the people were suffering from extreme food shortages, which they blamed unequivocally on the Soviet government. For more information on the cover-up of the famine and the role of the foreign press, see Anne Applebaum, “How Stalin Hid Ukraine's Famine From the World,” *The Atlantic*, October 13, 2017.

101 Anne Applebaum, *Red Famine: Stalin’s War on Ukraine* (Doubleday: Random House New York, 2017), 300.

102 “Harold Denny, 56, Journalist, Dead,” *New York Times*, July 4, 1945, page 13.

Denny was not a journalist by trade, so his work in Moscow consisted mainly of concise updates that would appear among a smattering of blurbs in the international section of *The Times*. As in the *Moscow News*, Denny stated that final results of the census expected to reveal optimistic data surrounding increased industrialization, collectivization of agriculture, socialization of the country, decline of religion, and the spread of education--the core tenets of advertisement strategy.[103] Denny comments later that such progress was being utilized by the Soviet press to contrast the present census and the one taken under the tsar in 1897, similar to previously referenced articles.[104]

Denny was cognizant of the role of Soviet media in pushing the importance of the census as seen when he wrote that, “for months the Soviets kept training the whole population by means of editorials and articles in the newspapers on the meaning and importance of the census and the necessity of full cooperation."[105] It is important here to note that foreign press was also aware of the underlying unrest surrounding the census. Denny addresses that "elements" feared the use of census information being used against them, despite the state assuring them that all information given would be kept "rigidly secret."[106] These fears were generated largely due to the question on religion, which “caused considerable disquiet in many places.”[107] Many citizens feared rumors that their answers would provide the government with an “excuse to close the remaining churches or to take some kind of reprisals against worshipers.”[108] While we can only speculate

[103] Harold Denny, “Fear of Census Lost by Russians,” *The New York Times*, January 10, 1937.

[104] Harold Denny, “Fear of Census Lost by Russians.”

[105] Harold Denny, “Fear of Census Lost by Russians.”

[106] Harold Denny, “Fear of Census Lost by Russians.”

[107] Harold Denny, “Wane of Religion is Shown in Russia,” *The New York Times*, January 7, 1937.

[108] Harold Denny, “Wane of Religion is Shown in Russia.”

what these rumors may have consisted of, it is accurate to assume that the increased anti-religious campaigns of the Soviet leadership shaped these fears of providing personal information to the state.[109] Despite these known fears, the Soviet government pushed a narrative in which an "overwhelming majority" of the people now considered themselves "unbelievers."[110]

The issue of religion was once again brought up in *The Times'* (London) coverage of the subsequent 1939 census, stating that "It is noteworthy that on that occasion [1937] citizens were required to state whether or not they believed in the existence of God, but the forms in use today include no question relating to religion."[111] It was of interest to this paper to draw attention to the continued theme of religion in causing friction within the census process and how it became a point of interest internationally. This was mainly due to the Soviet radical claims of being an atheist state.

Of course, branding a state atheist and having citizens actually prescribe to atheism are two separate challenges, which could be seen in anxieties surrounding the census. The 1930s was a period defined by paranoia on behalf of both citizens and state leaders. As Stalinist purges became more common and devastating, the importance of watching and being watched became pivotal within the USSR. As historian Sheila Fitzpatrick explores in her book *Everyday Stalinism*, "surveillance was not a totally one-sided activity."[112] Citizens became very aware of the State's attempts to gather information on the population and in return, "citizens practiced

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[109] These fears would continue to be justified as 1937 and 1938 marked the beginning of the Stalinist purges that led to 168,300 Orthodox Clergy being arrested and over 100,000 being shot. Alexander N. Yakovlev, *A Century of Violence in Soviet Russia* (Yale University Press, 2002), 165.

[110] Harold Denny, "Wane of Religion is Shown in Russia."

[111] "Soviet Census Begun," *The Times* (London), January 18,1939, page 11.

[112] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 187.

their form of surveillance on the regime, notably trying to decode its public pronouncements to find out what was really going on."[113] In this instance, Soviet media aimed to portray national harmony and progress in the wake of achieving socialism, while the citizens were increasingly doubtful and scared of the messages and resulting actions of the Soviet government. This was especially true in the census, where political executions and ethnic deportations caused citizens to distrust personally invasive state processes (like enumeration) were understood as surveillance opportunities for the state.

Conversely, the lack of clear messaging regarding the census caused unease within the population. S. Kovrigin, an enumerator who collected data in the Pervomaiskii district in Moscow, was shocked to discover the widespread ignorance of the census:

> The managers of the apartment blocks had omitted to inform people about the importance of the census and to explain how they should go about answering the questions. As a result, there were all sorts of proactive rumors flying about. An old woman asked whether it was true that the authorities were planning to expel religious people from Moscow. This meant that I had to act the part of a propagandist.[114]

This ultimately caused distrust between the census takers and the citizens. In 1939, a Soviet man with a Finnish last name refused to respond to an enumerator because he believed that the census was only being conducted so the state could find the Finns and Estonians and then deport them.[115] Others held similar reservations for the religion question, fearing its appearance as the start of another anti-religious campaign. Fitzpatrick states that citizens reading the census

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[113] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 187.

[114] Karl Schlogel. *Moscow, 1937*. Translated by Rodney Livingstone. (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2012), 110.

[115] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 124.

documents believed that "its [the religion question] unexpected appearance [in the census] could be read either as a threat or a promise."[116] Again, while there is little information connecting census data to the later persecution of various groups in the Soviet Union, comments such as these show the deeply seeded mistrust towards the government.

By discarding the question on religious affiliation, the Soviet state believed it was taking precautionary measures to ensure the 1939 census would not be affected by those weary of persecution as a result of information given to enumerators. Less than 200 miles from the Soviet mainland, Nome, Alaska's *The Nome Nugget* reported on the distrust of the census into 1939:

> Ignorant Russian peasants appear to have been filled with panic when the new census was taken in the Soviet Union. In many places, it is said when informed of the coming visit of the census officials, peasants fled with terror and hide themselves in the forests. Soviet authorities were obliged to fly planes over the wooded districts and other likely hiding places dropping explanatory notes and reassuring leaflets asking the villagers to return to their homes.[117]

Stories such as these demonstrate that the fear of divulging personal information to the State was not erased with the 1937 census. They also presented a contradicting view of the census presented by Soviet news outlets. Another American article from Ohio emphasized how the 1939 census would not include the "religious adherence of citizens," which was the root cause of fear for many dodging census takers.[118] Providing stories such as this to an American audience broke away from the feedback loops many foreign press members caught themselves in in order to appease Soviet officials allowing the

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116 Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 189.

117 "Soviet Peasants Hide from the Census Takers," *The Nome Nugget* (Nome, Alaska), December 4, 1939, page 3.

118 "World Religious News," *Morgan County Democrat* (McConnelsville, Ohio), January 12, 1939, page 3.

reporters to remain in the country. The reporters recognized the distrust rooted in issues such as religion and looked to share these issues with international audiences.

Regardless of whether trust was reestablished in the 1939 census, the census in 1937 was a spectacular failure of communication between the citizen and the state. In my concluding chapter, I will analyze the response to the religion question and how the census served as an example for the Soviet regime's disconnect from the people that would become even more apparent in the years following 1937 as the purges under Stalin's purview became more and more common in Soviet life.

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A People's Paradox: Public Perception of the Census

> *What value can such statistics have if people are afraid to tell the truth? Everyone is scared. Nobody believes the promises of the government. So it will probably turn out that only an insignificant part of the citizens of the USSR has faith in various religions, and yet this is undoubtedly not so. From the words of one pilot, I know that when the Red Army men make a parachute jump, almost all of them cross themselves with the sign of the cross before jumping. What is it? Faith or just a habit?*
>
> -From the diary of Lev Nikolaev, dated January 2, 1937[119]

The expectations placed upon the 1937 All-Soviet Census revolved around collecting data needed to quantify the successes of the Soviet regime and effectively run a socialist government. Newspaper campaigns within *Pravda* and *Moscow News* --to name just two publications-- framed the census as a historically important event for the country and its participation as being an expectation of civic duty. The census itself hoped to capture an image of Soviet life and correspondingly, an image of the Soviet citizen. In wake of the 1936 Soviet constitution, which profiled the average Soviet as diverse and dedicated to advancing socialism, the census sought to confirm these depictions. On January 6, 1937, this meant full and honest participation in the ongoing census and, for some, working directly with the effort as census workers. However, this patriotic image of the census was not shared by all Soviet citizens as worry over persecution for religion, political ideology, and nationality threaded doubt into census participation and the handing over of personal information to enumerators. This chapter explores the voices of the people who served in the census and the duality of public and private life

[119] Lev Petrovich Nikolaev, 2 January 1937, (European University in St. Petersburg). *Prozhito*. https://prozhito.org/note/36671.

through personal diaries compared to the Soviet image perpetuated by the state. As it will show, January 6 illustrated the deep paradoxes within the Stalinist USSR during this time.

December 1936 ushered in the second constitution of the USSR, known as the "Stalin Constitution," which was adopted as a framework for the Soviet government and civic rights and expected duties. This document was the longest iteration of the constitution, serving as the primary governing doctrine until 1977, when a new one was adopted under Leonid Brezhnev. Of interest to this study on the 1937 census, the constitution laid out that the Soviet of the Union, one half of the national-level legislative body similar to the United States House of Representatives, determines its number of deputies (representatives) on the basis of one to every 300,000 of the population.[120] While the constitution itself did not mention a reoccurring census, it would be necessary in determining an accurate number of deputies as well as in making general decisions within the planned economy. The census then became an important tool in administering representatives to meet the needs of the people effectively.

Additionally, this constitution looked to outline the responsibilities and idealized vision of the Soviet citizen. In line with the marketing for the census, the constitution touched on gender, race, and class equality as well as freedom of conscience--whereas there is an established separation of church and state but there is an ensured freedom to worship or not worship.[121] Before the constitution's ratification, there had been debates to include an amendment prohibiting the practice of religious rites; however, Stalin himself denied the proposed amendment. He plainly stated that the amendment would run counter to the spirit of the

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[120] USSR Constit. (1936), chapter III, article 34. http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/36cons01.html.

[121] USSR Constit. (1936), chapter X, article 124.

constitution, showing that while the State did not endorse nor believe in the merits of religion, it was not willing to deprive its citizens of the freedom to choose.[122] While the state did not outlaw the continued practice of religion, they did propagate a narrative image of the country as an atheist state. This image would then become shattered in wake of the 1937 census results, which showed a startlingly high number of believers.

The distinction between public and private life as shown through diaries have been widely studied by Soviet historians looking to understand the power of Soviet ideology at the individual level. Official documents, such as the 1936 constitution, outlined their views of desired patriotism and good citizenship, but often these beliefs were not ubiquitous at the ground level. Questions of public and private life in understanding the "authentic" Soviet self is a matter of subjectivity—an idea that is vital when examining Soviet diaries. Soviet subjectivity essentially asks whether or not Soviet citizens had classical "liberal" selves (which means people had public and private lives that were separate, believed in a sense of autonomy) or whether we should see Soviet citizens as "illiberal." The idea of self and the influences behind human thought and action are immensely complicated, therefore it is important to note that these diary entries only represent a small fraction of their authors and even then, there are no clear answers to how these diaries connect to the lived realities of their authors. Choi Chatterjee and Karen Petrone suggest in their work on selfhood and subjectivity that Soviet selfhood consisted of new social norms within this public/private binary that created an incompatible difference between self-construction and self-exploration.[123] This suggests that people experiencing the Soviet

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[122] I. V. Stalin, *Problems of Leninism* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishers, 1934).

[123] Choi Chatterjee and Karen Petrone, "Models of Selfhood and Subjectivity: The Soviet Case in Historical Perspective," *Slavic Review* 67, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 972.

regime could only be categorized through various identities crafted because of the state.[124] The Soviet self was contradicting and brimming with "mixed emotions as it negotiated biological needs, interpreted cultural codes, and constructed self-definitions in dialogue with state and community precepts."[125]

Jochen Hellbeck's work on autobiographical texts as a tool of the Stalinist state argues that Soviet revolutionary politics centered on pushing citizens to think of themselves as historical subjects with a defined sense of agency and selfhood. These authors understood that the period in which they lived would be examined critically for its anti-capitalist approach to governance and that by creating diaries they would be creating historical records of agreement or dissent to this era-defining approach. Additionally, Hellbeck emphasizes how diaries of the 1930s were exercises in mindfulness and self-expression. People used diaries as an outlet to explore spiritual affiliations, grievances towards the state and their neighbors, and an array of other events they felt were worth documenting. This is to say that diaries varied greatly in terms of content and were subjective, thus their use in historical analysis is limited to providing the broad strokes of Soviet life, rather than precise accounts of unfolding events. People were experiencing a major shift in their lives with the establishment of the USSR, so it makes sense that the sense of personal identity and expression would be shifting as well. Hellbeck suggests that those who kept diaries understood they were living through a major epoch and valued the documentation of everyday life—"byt," a significant Russian term.[126]

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[124] Chatterjee and Petrone, "Models of Selfhood," 974.

[125] Chatterjee and Petrone, "Models of Selfhood," 986.

[126] Jochen Hellbeck, "Working, Struggling, Becoming: Stalin-Era Autobiographical Texts," *The Russian Review* 60, no. 3 (July 2001), 348.

Hellbeck's work on the writings of Stepan Podlubnyi found that diaries were often deeply self-conscious on account of the Stalinist regime's powerful influence over individuals' sense of self. This did not mean the State was successful in unequivocally subjugating its citizens, but that it proved extremely difficult to escape the State's cultural reach.[127] Analysis of Soviet diaries does not provide exhaustive coverage of the Soviet people's feelings towards the 1937 census, but these writings do provide an alternative account of the enumeration process and its perceptions in voices not directly attached to governing officials. The diaries covered here are from the male, educated perspective, thus this analysis is limited in its scope of representing a very diverse Soviet population. However, these accounts of census workers and participants do serve in providing a new lens from which the census may be understood and allows exploration into how census takers negotiated the State's aims with their personal beliefs and relationships.

Konstantin Fyodorovich Izmailov served as a census taker in both the 1937 and 1939 censuses, while also documenting the everyday happenings of his life as a Soviet citizen. Izmailov began keeping a daily diary in 1923 and his over 5,000 entries provide a snapshot of the Soviet life the census wished to capture. In analyzing Izmailov's writings, we gain a new understanding of how the census was not a grand event in the life of citizens but was met with civic pride, in the case of Izmailov, and annoyance by others. Andrei Stepanovich Arzhilovskii also performed his civic duty as an enumerator but was executed just months later on the charges of anti-Soviet activity. Arzhilovskii had a long history as an enemy of the state, but his

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[127] Jochen Hellbeck, "Fashioning the Soviet Soul: The Diary of Stepan Podlubnyi (1931-1939)," Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas 44, no. 3 (1996), 372.

experience in accounting and skill with words made him a qualified worker for the census. His personal diaries reveal a deep-seated discontent with the Soviet regime and his life under the Communist party and provide insight into the citizen-state relationship.

Konstantin Fyodorovich Izmailov: Census-taker and Citizen

Izmailov was born on March 15, 1900 in the village of Smolenskoye, within the Smolenskii district of Altai Krai. Trained as a carpenter in his youth, he would become an accountant later in life. He was highly engaged with his community, joining the Communist party in 1923 and serving as platoon commander during his training. In many ways, Izmailov was an ideal Soviet citizen--he served in his village's people's court, kept himself updated with Soviet newspapers (such as *Pravda*), and was deeply engaged in his community as a collective farm accountant, employee of the state bank, and local postal office. However, his diaries very rarely discuss political ideologies. Most entries are mundane: they talk about the weather, Izmailov's hobby as an actor, or an itemized schedule of his day. It is clear from his short mentions of Stalin and Lenin, that Izmailov viewed the Soviet government in a positive light, but that it was not a force occupying his entire existence (at least as expressed on the page). Izmailov could be characterized as a Soviet patriot due to his intense involvement in the Soviet experiment, but his diaries do not reflect it. Under Hellbeck's parameters of the diary under the aims of the Soviet State, Izmailov was not developing his "revolutionary self" because he was not consistently reflecting on the political and social ideologies of the country. The diaries of Izmailov read then as a mundane account of daily happenings rather than a manifesto of revolutionary socialist ideals played out in the context of everyday life.

Izmailov was likewise indifferent about religion within his diaries, despite coming from a religious household. His writings often commented on the lack of community-wide celebrations on religious holidays such as Christmas and Easter, but that it was still recognized by many as an "old religious day" and was celebrated with food and a day off of work.[128] As a young man who was only a teenager during the 1917 revolution, this mindset aligns with the narratives seen in papers such as the *Moscow News* and *Pravda*, where the papers claimed a rise of "non-believers" after the establishment of the Soviet government. While unsure of Izmailov's exact religious beliefs, his writings affirm that he viewed religion as a relic of Tsarist Russia and as no longer applicable to his life. His entry from the day after the census was taken illustrates his views: "Nobody is celebrating [Orthodox Christmas]. An ordinary working day. Even old people who believe in God and those who are members of collective farms work today as on normal working days."[129]

The idea of civic duty and patriotism attached to the 1937 census was another point marketed in the papers. The papers written for international audiences proclaimed that Soviet citizens were excited to participate in the census and were well prepared to do so. According to the diaries of citizens such as Izmailov, this enthusiasm was more nuanced and often exaggerated. Completing a country-wide census is a large undertaking, especially for a country as geographically large as the Soviet Union. So, it is correct to assume that the work of a census taker was long and arduous, plus many citizens were still uncertain about the safety of handling personal information to the state. In response to reservations Soviets may have had concerning

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128 Konstantin Fedorovich Izmailov, April 11, 1936, ed. Angelina Mikhailovna Sitnova (European University in St. Petersburg). *Prozhito*. https://prozhito.org/person/1629.

129 Izmailov, January 7, 1937.

participation in the census, enumerators were branded as civic heroes, loyal to the party and state, who were braving the harsh Soviet winter in service to their country.[130] News reports assured citizens that data would only be used to aid governing logistics and infrastructure. By marketing census workers as heroes, the state aimed to build trust in the census process while simultaneously encouraging more people to apply to be data collectors and processors.

Izmailov began his work with the census on January 1, when a pre-count was conducted which would give workers a sense of the number of households they would be collecting data from within their assigned region near the outskirts of the village.[131] The work days were roughly 10 to 14 hours a day, where workers would sit down with citizens and ask standard questions of age, education, occupation, and the suspect question on religion.[132] After the official collection of data on January 7, workers then revisited a number of households to conduct an additional controlled tour of their regions to ensure their data was correct and all citizens were counted.

The timeline for the census was clearly laid out in Soviet papers in an attempt to mitigate confusion among citizens. For most of the country, the census began with a preliminary count from January 1-5 and the bulk of the recording happening on January 6, from 8am to midnight.[133] The count on January 6 served as a check to remove those who may have died, moved, or were absent on enumerators' first visit to homes. The week following the census (January 7-11) provided workers time to revisit homes to clarify answers. In total, census

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130 Gunnar Thorvaldsen, "Religion in the Census," *Social Science History* 38, no. 1-2 (Spring/Summer 2014): 208.

131 Izmailov, January 3, 1937.

132 Michael Prishvin, January 2, 1937, ed. Angelina Mikhailovna Sitnova (European University in St. Petersburg). *Prozhito*. https://prozhito.org/note/405308.

133 "How Will the National Census be Conducted," *Pravda*, December 19, 1936, page 6.

workers would visit homes a maximum of 3 times and those on trains, steamboats, hotels, and other temporary residences would only be counted on January 6. Similar preparations were made for those working, on vacation, or business trips during the time of the census.

It is unsure as to why Izmailov volunteered to work the 1937 census, but we can draw conclusions from his past experience to understand why he would be involved. After officially joining the Communist Party in 1923, Fedorovich worked briefly as a census officer for the military, where he aided in registering those citizens eligible for conscription.[134] Izmailov also worked in the village of Smolenskoye as both a carpenter and a farmer, where he spent his days working on assorted projects throughout the area. Additionally, he spent many hours working in his village's Machine Tractor Station (MTS), which housed collectively owned farming machinery. This resume poised Izmailov as a prime candidate for census worker, due in part to his military census experience and his intimate knowledge of his local population through his work. Izmailov's diaries do not explicitly state whether he was recruited to work the census, or if he joined through his own volition, we do know that he was granted compensation and time off of his job at the state bank for training and execution of the census during the first week of January 1937.[135] In 1939, he described the job as an honor and that he was extremely proud of his responsibilities as an enumerator.[136]

Izmailov did not comment much on his time as a census worker in 1937, regarding it just as another job, despite the more extended hours:

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134 Izmailov, January 19, 1927.

135 Izmailov, December 31, 1936.

136 Izmailov, January 11, 1939.

> A dark, heavy snowstorm was blowing at night. It snows all the time again during the day. Everything was positively covered with snow. Today I again spent the whole day working on the population census on my site — Kotel and Cheremshanka. At 7 o'clock in the morning in the village Council there was the last instructive meeting of instructors-controllers and counters.[137]

Much of his diaries from the week of the census were devoted to comments on the weather, likely due to how much time enumerators spent outdoors traveling from household to household. Earlier during the week, Izmailov wrote on the "dark blizzard" plaguing the Kotel and Cheremshanka areas, where he was assigned to collect data.[138] Coupled with the bleak weather, the time spent collecting data also proved strenuous:

> At 8 am, all the enumerators went to their stations to continue working on the census. By the evening, I finished all the work on the census today and handed over all the documents to the village Council at 6 o'clock. And today I'm off work. Tomorrow morning I go back to work at the state Bank. I didn't do anything at home today all day. There was no free time.[139]

Workers invited to work the census were given leave from their usual occupations to take time preparing the conducting data collection. The timing of the census at the beginning of the new year and on the eve of Orthodox Christmas only added to the time crunch for workers, as many hoped to complete their work as quickly as possible. Izmailov was required to work on the New Year's holiday despite it being a non-working day for a majority of the country. His writings from January 1 state that this was his first full day working on the all-Union census and was expected to work until January 7.[140] From there

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137 Izmailov, January 6, 1937.

138 Izmailov, January 4, 1937.

139 Izmailov, January 6, 1937.

140 Izmailov, January 1, 1937.

he would return to his accountant position at the state bank, where he was temporarily given a leave of absence.

Izmailov's accounts of the 1937 census can be regarded as a typical survey of a Soviet diary: discussions on everyday occurrences such as weather and jobs set up more as a chronicle of events from the day rather than an introspective look into one's inner thoughts. This differs from his entries in 1939 however, as they provided more information about the details of the census job as well as Izmailov's own thoughts on the position:

> Tomorrow I will be relieved of my main work at the postal service. I will be at the census to February 1. I am glad for the job entrusted to me as an enumerator for the All-Union Population Census in my village! I will do this work with honor and conscientiousness! It's an honor to be a great account activist! Today in the Narkhozuchet all the enumerators have given their hands all the materials on the population census, personal identification cards, metal tokens with the inscription 'All-Union Population Census of 1939.'[141]

Izmailov's diaries from this period reflect an even greater effort to bolster the image of the national census likely due in part to the 1939 census being organized in wake of the claimed systematic errors of the 1937 collection. This change in tone could be due to Izmailov's fear of his diaries being found by officials and then used as evidence for persecution-- a phenomenon that grew more regular during the Stalinist purges and was the fate of census takers such as Andrei Stepanovich Arzhilovskii. The 1937 census's assumed errors resulted in a dismissal and censorship of the 1937 results entirely. In response to the failure, the 1939 census was spread out over a larger period of time--as

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[141] Izmailov, January 11, 1939.

opposed to the 1937's census' one day of official counting--and provided workers with a longer training period:

> During the day, busy again working in the village Council to prepare for the population census. All the instructors-supervisors and counters on horseback rode around the village, delimiting the areas. I went too. I was given the entire Krasnoyarsk street from the veterinary station to the mountain and the Boiler. From January 10, we will start the round.[142]

According to Izmailov, the Smolensk census team was given from January 12 to February 5 --significantly longer than the week spent preparing and conducting the 1937 census-- to complete their counting and allow census takers to more accurately collect data albeit at a slower pace.[143] One entry states that Izmailov was only able to collect data on 12 families during an 11-hour work day because the job required detailed attention in filling out the questionnaire correctly.[144] The questionnaire itself was shortened and streamlined to help mitigate collection errors. Most noticeably, the Soviet government decided to omit any question regarding religion from the 1939 census. It's clear that the new census organizers were taking precautions to avoid the failures of 1937, but such precautions become ineffective when issues of trust remain as a barrier for accurate data collection.

Konstantin Fedorovich Izmailov was an average patriotic Soviet citizen in terms of his history, work experience, and place in society. His diaries provide a glimpse into the mundane and tiring aspects of the census through a narrative of a man relatively

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[142] Izmailov, January 4, 1939.

[143] Izmailov, January 10, 1939.

[144] Izmailov, January18, 1939.

enjoying life under the Soviet regime. Izmailov continued living in the village of Smolenskoye until being drafted into the Great Patriotic War, where he eventually went missing near Leningrad in March of 1942.

Andrei Stepanovich Arzhilovskii: Census-taker and Convict

Andrei Stepanovich Arzhilovskii was born in 1885 within the village of Zyryanka (Tyumen oblast), where he would spend the majority of his life.[145] Arzhilovskii received an education from the local public school where he developed a passion for writing. His education later led to his required appointment to the Tyumen Regional Council under the Tsarist government and the Civil Investigation Commission under the government of Aleksandr Vasilevich Kolchak, a naval officer who temporarily gained power over the Omsk region after a military coup in 1918 but would later be overthrown and executed by the Bolshevik army in January 1920. Despite no other indications of counter-revolutionary practices and likely due to his connection to the Kolchak government, Arzhilovskii was arrested in 1919 and would be sentenced to 8 years of hard labor.[146]

Arzhilovskii at this point was married with children and owned a medium-sized farm that fell into disrepair without him. He later pleaded with the courts to allow him to return home to care for his home and family and was granted his leave and was later granted amnesty by the

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[145] Taken from forward by Konstantin Lagunov and information granted to him from the Tyumen region's Book of Memory. Konstantin Lagunov, "Foreword by Konstantin Lagunov to Arzhilovskii's diaries," *Open List*, https://ru.openlist.wiki/%D0%90%D1%80%D0%B6%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B2%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%B9_%D0%90%D0%BD%D0%B4%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B9_%D0%A1%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BF%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%87_(1885)

[146] Lagunov, *Open List.*

newly formed USSR in 1923. Free from his first prison sentence, Arzhilovskii became heavily involved in his community, becoming a leader in the community farm, local audit commission, the people's court, and a writer for the local wall newspaper *Pyshminsky Voice*. As a writer, Arzhilovskii was a vocal proponent of "Muzhik socialism" (peasant socialism), in which more political power is less centralized and granted to the people.

In late 1929, Arzhilovskii's average-sized farm was used to declare him a kulak and was additionally accused of counterrevolutionary agitation against the collective farms.[147] Arzhilovskii was sentenced to 10 years in prison, and his family was sent to work on a logging farm. However, seven years into his sentence, in 1936, Arzhilovskii fell seriously ill and was released from prison to die at home. He returned to Tyumen and began working as an accountant at Red October, a timber processing plant. After being arrested twice by the Soviet government and becoming known for his opinion pieces in the paper (mainly calling out corrupt officials), Arzhilovskii gained a local reputation: "People at work keep their guard around me, they don't want to get too close: a former convict, shabbily dressed, unshaven and in general a sorry-looking old devil…"[148] Additionally, his diaries revealed he was often upset with the living conditions under the Soviet government: "A man breathes free in our country, but he also starves for free."[149]

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[147] Kulak was a term used during the end of the Russian empire to describe peasants with large amounts of land. During the Soviet period, the term was used to describe semi-wealthy property owners who were considered hesitant allies of the Soviet government.

[148] Andrei Stepanovich Arzhilovskii, *November 3, 1936*, in *Intimacy and Terror,* eds.Veronique Garros, Natalia Korenevskaya, and Thomas Lahusen (New York: The New Press), 117.

[149] Arzhilovskii, *December 11, 1936*, 131.

Arzhilovskii chronicled the last months of his life with discussions on his wife, his children's education, and occasional musings on his current life. He continued to point out the contradictions in Soviet life: celebrating the First of May despite many citizens starving and out of work, pilots were given enormous funds to travel to the North Pole while his family waits hours in line for bread or the praise given to factory managers who embezzle funds.[150] Arzhilovskii was highly critical of the Soviet brand of Socialism within the pages of his private diary. In public, his criticisms were limited to opinion articles on corrupt local leaders and factory workers and rarely explicitly vocalized his distaste of the Soviet government. Arzhilovskii was aware what risks were involved in casting a spotlight on his beliefs: "I can't help wanting to stir up this stagnant swamp. Writing things down does not always lead to bad results: at least you feel better when you speak your mind."[151]

On July 29, 1937 Arzhilovskii would be arrested for the final time on charges of involvement in a kulak terrorist organization.[152] Arzhilovskii denied these claims but stated: "My beliefs, unfortunately, are not purely Soviet: in particular, I remain with the views of the owner and do not believe in building socialism all over the world. My beliefs remained only with me and in my diaries: I have never been involved in disseminating my beliefs anywhere."[153] Arzhilovskii was executed on September 5, 1937--just weeks before the arrest and swift execution of the state and regional heads of the census at the height of the Great Terror.

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150 Arzhilovskii, *June 30, 1937*, 162.

151 Arzhilovskii, *March 1, 1937*, 149.

152 Lagunov, *Open List.*

153 Lagunov, *Open List.*

As a convicted felon and known critic of government leaders, Arzhilovskii did not fit the picture-perfect image of the enumerators touted in *Pravda.* Regardless, likely due to his known writing abilities and accounting background, he was hired to work the 1937 census and wrote about his experiences. His entry from January 6, 1937 highlights the arduous nature of census taking:

> Christmas Eve. I sit here all by myself, exhausted; I desperately need to sleep. I spent all last night working on the national census. The kids are asleep, Liza has curled up for the night, too. Genya went to the club to see *Chapaev.* In an hour I have to make my rounds and report to my supervisor. Of course, I won't actually go around to the houses, everything is clear as it is. Everyone has been counted; I finished by work long ago. By the way, during the census I discovered that sometimes I make bad grammar mistakes: I thought that you had to write the "non" in the word "nonbeliever" as a separate word. But you have to write them together. The Tatar commandant and my own kids proved it to me with their "Rules of Grammar." Live and learn. I'd do anything not to have to go out. But I have to. It was warm during the day; now the wind is blowing. Tamara is not feeling well. Well, Christmas Eve. In the old days, things were different. But what can you do? Still, we have enough meat for tomorrow, though we're short of bread. An empty stomach is better for your health. Well, I guess I'd better start getting ready…[154]

Arzhilovskii completed his work as a census taker without issue, making multiple rounds to the 15 households on his roster. Within this minuscule portion of the population, Arzhilovskii noticed the enduring religious beliefs that ran counter to the Soviet regime:

> As I make the rounds of the 15 households on my census list, I see that a lot of people live worse than we do: it's a bitter consolation. In spite of 20 years of reeducation, some people are still religious, and when they come to the question on the census form about religion they give a straightforward answer: believer. Old allegiances, old habits….[155]

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[154] Arzhilovskii, *January 6, 1936,* 136.

[155] Arzhilovskii, *January 1, 1937,* 135.

This was not the first time Arzhilovskii commented on the state of religion in the USSR. One entry, in particular, points out the portraits of party leaders that were displayed in his factory, just as Orthodox icons once were.[156] While not being religious himself, Arzhilovskii would connect religion to his nostalgia towards pre-Soviet times--a theme within his diaries that ultimately served as evidence for his final arrest by the NKVD.

The life and documented experiences of Andrei Stepanovich Arzhilovskii provide a contrasting lens through which to view the census. Arzhilovskii was a public critic of those who abused power and a private skeptic of the current socialist system as a whole. He recognized the government’s failure to provide work and food for citizens, yet still served his community as a writer and worker. In some respects, this made him a model citizen and perfect candidate for enumerator, but his outspoken reputation and criminal record did not align with the image presented in census propaganda. Arzhilovskii’s case then stands as a prime example of the contradictions the Soviet Union desired from the state and the lived realities of those the census counted. Izmailov would go on to work the 1939 census, with his diaries clearly revealing the fear many felt in the midst of the purges. Arzhilovskii, who worked in the 1937 census, would fall victim to those purges.

Lingering Unease, Trust, and Terror

Like Arzhilovskii, some Soviets saw a connection between the question on religion and the palpable hesitancy towards participating in the census and how that may have been a factor in

[156] Arzhilovskii, *November 1, 1936*, 118.

the state's decision not to publish census results. Vladimir Ivanovich Vernadskii, a lauded scientist and founder of the field of biogeochemistry, understood that officially, the 1937 census data was not published due to the disorganization of census workers and managers. His own speculation, however, pinned the lack of publication on the unexpected number of believers found in the data. While not a devout believer himself, Vernadskii writes about the arrests of Orthodox priests and the "tragic history of the disintegration of Orthodoxy and, perhaps, the beginning of its revival" evident in the clash of Soviet and traditional ideals.[157] He thought instead that the number of believers was possibly underreported due to people, such as his sister and nieces, who falsely identified as non-believers in fear of future persecution from the state. Others hoped that census data showing high proportions of believers would push the government to reopen churches.[158] Lev Petrovich Nikolaev, an orthopedic physician and scholar, noticed the public unrest regarding the question of religion as well:

> When filling out the questionnaire, some misunderstandings were caused by the item "Believer or unbeliever?" Despite the fact that the newspapers have repeatedly written that citizens are guaranteed the secrecy of their answers, many are afraid to say that they believe. One houseworker in our apartment ran away so as not to fill out this questionnaire: she is a believer, but she is afraid to say so and at the same time does not want to lie and say that she does not believe.[159]

Nikolaev highlights the issue of trust that is vital to an accurate census. If the Soviet people were unable to trust the use of their data in the hands of the state, they were more

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[157] Vladimir Ivanovich Vernadskii, March 13, 1937, ed. Angelina Mikhailovna Sitnova (European University in St. Petersburg).

[158] Thorvaldsen, "Religion in the Census," 209.

[159] Lev Petrovich Nikolaev, January 2, 1937, ed. Angelina Mikhailovna Sitnova (European University in St. Petersburg). *Prozhito*. https://prozhito.org/note/36671.

likely to craft their answers to enumerators to fit the perceived image of a model citizen or otherwise avoid census takers completely.

The model Soviet citizen was described in the Stalin constitution as patriotic towards the state and the pursuit of socialism as aligned with the rights and responsibilities granted to Soviet citizens much like men such as Konstantin Fyodorovich Izmailov. These model Soviets were sought after in completing the 1937 census, as it would reflect well on the idea that the Soviet Union was flourishing under socialism while also ensuring that data was being collected accurately, without fear that census takers and data analysts would abuse such information. As shown through the narratives of Izmailov and Arzhilovskii, it's clear that enumerators were not uniform in background and criticisms of the state. While there is no indication that this affected their roles as census takers, their deaths reveal a larger understanding of paradoxes within the Soviet Union at this time.

This paradox of trust and terror is best seen through the issue of religion within the census and the anxieties emphasized in the diaries of Vernadskii and Nikolaev, who both saw the unease of the people as evidence of the continued struggle between the state and the people as the Stalinist purges raged on. Additionally, the diaries of the census takers and participants serve to subvert the expectations placed on the census and its results by Soviet media campaigns. Workers faced challenges of distrust while serving as representatives of the state, standing as a larger reflection of the perception of state programming and the perceived dangers of sharing personal data with those conducting purges on their loved ones.

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Taking Account of the Census: A Conclusion

A new census was slated for January 17, 1939 in response to the unexpected and unsatisfactory results of 1937. The 1937 census produced a population count nearly 8 million short of published estimates, in some estimates, the number was even higher. Results of the 1937 count were allegedly circulated among government agencies, but its data never appeared in print.[160] Historians such as Lee Schwartz point towards the statistical principle of double counting as a primary reason the state conducted the census again as well as confusion between local officials, enumerators, and a lack of cooperation from respondents. Double counting refers to when citizens are documented by enumerators both at home by their families and by themselves while outside of the home. While this would have caused the census count to show higher numbers of citizens, double counting was likely used to explain why pre-census estimates were so off.

Very little changed between the state of census relations between 1937 and 1939. Fears of religion were still on the minds of many citizens and new tactics were not employed by the Soviet media machine to combat it. Papers employed messaging that framed the 1937 errors as an inside job perpetrated by enemies of the state. These "wreckers" were said to have defied government instructions intentionally in an effort to tarnish the efforts of the Soviet experiment. In an attempt to assign a scapegoat for the defective census, statisticians and census organizers such as M.V. Kurman, O.D. Kvitkin, Ivan Kraval, and even replacement leaders such as I.D.

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[160] Lee Schwartz. "A History of Russian and Soviet Censuses." In *Research Guide to the Russian and Soviet Censuses*, edited by Ralph S. Clem. Cornell University Press, 1986, 55.

Vermenichev were arrested and, in some cases, executed for their crimes towards the state.[161] This likely did nothing to quell the fears of Soviet citizens nor government employees. The 1937 census aimed to showcase the trumpeted achievements of the Stalinist state: by 1939, the Soviet census captured the fear Stalinist purging prompted.

The question on religion was omitted from the 1939 recount yet international news still reported peasants fleeing from enumerators in fear of handing over their most personal secrets to the Soviet government. The fear was not ubiquitously felt throughout the Soviet Union, but distrust was likely felt from many citizens as the Stalinist purges reached a high point at this time. In understanding the fractured trust between citizens and government as seen in the census, it stands to reason that personal data collection is a fragile process that reveals much about a government system. The Soviet government was aware of the terse sentiments in divulging personal information to government workers and created a media campaign to combat it. While it is not possible to objectively measure if the campaign succeeded or failed in its goal of easing tensions, it serves to prove that the state was aware of the distrust citizens felt and the likely issues heading into 1937.

Skeptics of the census who did not take part in the count did not greatly affect its results. Rather, it was a decade's worth of overestimating and ignoring famine deaths that caused the disconnect between Soviet propaganda and collected population data. This is the consensus between various academics such as Catherine Merridale, Lee Schwartz, and R. W. Davies who

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[161] Davies et al. "The Soviet Population and Censuses of 1937 and 1939." In *The Industrialization of Soviet Russia 7: The Soviet Economy and the Approach of War, 1937-1939.* Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2018, 141.

have all conducted research on the reasoning behind the fallout of the 1937 census and how it stands as an embodiment of the economic disorganization of the socialist regime.

Aside from being a tool in understanding governmental disorganization, this research demonstrates how the lack of rapport between the government and the citizen is highly detrimental to the outcomes of a national census. Media campaigns such as those created by *Pravda* depend on a foundational level of trust of the state being able to handle personal information responsibly. However, it is clear that the Soviet regime's muddied past deeply influenced the preconceived notions of how census data would be used, as seen in diaries of men such as Lev Petrovich Nikolaev, who understood that a census is worthless if those counted are too afraid to tell the truth.

In covering the period just before the 1937 census took place, a rich story of a Soviet Union portrayed in the media can be juxtaposed with the more complex reality of the citizens who experienced the lived realities of the regime. The diaries of Soviet census workers show that an employee of the state could be critical of their government while also participating in it. The census stands a relational gauge between levels of government and the population. In studying the ways governments, such as the Soviet Union, engage with data collection much can be understood in how the regimes are perceived by individuals and their private and public identities. The Soviet census of 1937 and its issues then stands as a product of tense power dynamics and miscommunication that would in the coming years become synonymous with the Stalinist regime. In this sense it truly captured all the dynamics of Stalinism.

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