

How did “military sociology” originate and work?

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Six months of research in radically new conditions - for both researchers and those being researched - have passed. Opinion polls in Russia are no longer the monopoly of the traditional pollster triad, which does not prevent the vast majority of liberal commentators from continuously attacking "military sociology".

Traditional specialists in the field of sociology - political scientists, political philosophers and journalists - keep repeating the same mantras: "you can't trust polls these days", "even if conducting opinion polls made any sense at the beginning of events, they are meaningless today", "polls should be banned", "polls help Putin"...

If "it's hard to trust the polls today" – was it easy yesterday?

Yesterday it was not so scary. Strong and stable ratings of support for Putin or even United Russia provided by the state pollsters made little difference. Elections did not depend on the ratings (yet were consistent with them), and life was going on with no regard to the ratings.

And then the military operation began, and its support/non-support became a frustrator for everyone, because now it literally affects life or death - not only for Ukrainians, but already for those on the Russian side, even if only the military.

Commentators' Distrust

As for commentators, they seem to be under some kind of a spell: they usually talk about distrusting opinion polls in the first 5 minutes of their speeches, stating directly: "Sociologists don't trust public opinion polls." And for the next 55 minutes they discuss and interpret these polls, creating their own unique niche of those compensating for the lack of reliable sociology.

Respected experts - sometimes contrary to common sense and available empirical experience - shut themselves off from the reaction of society, thus devaluing the results of research: the lack of criticality, empathy, social morality, and political will in the majority of the population, although this had been revealed in polls even before the 'special operation'.

Trusting Empirical Experience

I would encourage our celebrity experts to listen to the living voice of the general population. Ironically, refusals to be interviewed, difficulties in understanding the questions, reluctance to answer, or unbridled enthusiasm create a sense of surveys' credibility. Below are a few examples.

Misrepresentation:

- Would you say that you support or do not support the special military operation on the territory of Ukraine?
- Wait, I don't understand. What does that mean!? Are we at war?
- No, the war has been going on for a long time. Now it's a special military operation.
- So, it's an operation. Is that some kind of help?
- It's a special military operation.
- Yes, help I support. We need to help.

As well as refusals:

- "I don't understand anything."
- "I am neutral. There are special people who will figure it out."
- "I don't care."
- "They won't tell us the whole truth anyway."

And a complex worldview:

"I support the operation. Putin knows what he is doing. We elected him, let him decide. Russia is helping Russians. We will win," – and in the end, after the interview is over: "My neighbor's son got killed. And hospitals are filled with wounded. I wish it would be over already..."

Special Military Sociology

The special military operation mobilized independent sociology, which has no functional limitations apart from ethics and methodology, and is not prepared to impose a moratorium on its activities "in the conditions of a totalitarian society at war," as the polls' critics suggest.

Russia and Ukraine are not the first territories of "military sociology". The most prominent pollster in the United States, Gallup, conducted research throughout World War II.

"In the spring of 1943 an opinion poll was conducted, the findings of which were classified. According to the results, 62% of American respondents agreed with the statement that after defeating the Axis countries it would be possible to build a world without wars, and 63% supported the idea of the United States joining an international organization for security along with the Soviet Union."¹

And these are simply sociological chronicles of the beginning of World War II, from September 1, 1939, to December 1941:

"Should President Roosevelt have declared war on Germany, as well as on Japan?" (Yes – 91%, No – 7%)²

Even then, opinion polls had already become a propaganda tool. On August 20, 1934, the New York Times published the results of a German poll on "constitutional amendments" concentrating unlimited power in the hands of Chancellor Adolf Hitler³: 90% in favor.

¹ [US public opinion towards USSR at WWII](#)

² [How did Public Opinion About Entering World War II Change Between 1939 and 1941?](#)

³ [HITLER ENDORSED BY 9 TO 1 IN POLL ON HIS DICTATORSHIP](#)

I was unable to find any sources that would mention opinion polls in Nazi Germany in a later period, when the war was already well underway, but I did find an analytical paper related to many years of research in occupied Germany⁴.

“In October 1945, less than six months after the capitulation of Hitler's Germany, the Intelligence Branch of the Office of the Director of Information Control, Office of Military Government for Germany (U.S.), set up its Opinion Survey Section, under the direction of Dr. Frederick W. Williams. This agency conducted 72 major surveys during the course of the next four years, an average of one every third week. The reports based on these surveys went to the highest levels of the American occupation authorities.”

This project is a compelling demonstration of the feasibility of honest professional research under extreme physical and ethical conditions.

“Germany in 1945 was a nightmare of dislocated persons. Typically, 90 per cent of the buildings in major population centers were destroyed. Bridges were out. Roads were torn up. People lived under the rubble. Refugees streamed west from Soviet-held territories. Soldiers, released from captured armies, walked home. Wives and children who had been evacuated from the cities returned to start rebuilding. Occupying armies settled into those hotels and homes which were still in sound condition.”⁵

Initially, attitudes toward conducting sociological surveys were skeptical, and not without reason - it was unclear whether Germans would honestly tell military government representatives what was in their hearts and minds. The crucial success factor was the interviewers themselves - "honest, thoughtful, sensitive"⁶. The first interviews were conducted by American service personnel who spoke German "like natives", and then German citizens were selected and trained. One can only imagine the tremendous psychological work involved in training American and German interviewers, who until yesterday had been enemies to one another. Later, a pilot study was conducted to see how respondents' responses would differ depending on which organization and which country the interviewers named in the surveys.

The problem of conducting polls in a situation where participants are critically dependent on the authorities behind the polls sounds surprisingly relevant. At the same time, we see the use of methodological techniques and even tricks to obtain the most reliable results.

Many of the questions sound quite relevant to the reality of 2022.

The Reconstruction of Germany

Question: “Which of these statements comes closest to your opinion?”

- A. Germany herself should bear the responsibility for her reconstruction under the supervision of the Allies.
- B. Germany should be occupied by the Allies until she is able to form a good democratic government.
- C. The Americans should reconstruct Germany as soon as possible in order to avoid her becoming a prey to Communism.
- D. The reconstruction of their country should be left to the Germans themselves without interference from the Allies."

⁴ [Public opinion in occupied Germany: the OMGUS surveys, 1945-1949](#)

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ [Public opinion in occupied Germany: the OMGUS surveys, 1945-1949](#), стр. xix

Source: OMGUS Report 175, June 1949, p. 57.

The Allies' Efforts to Aid Blockaded Berlin: Berlin Views

Question: "In your opinion are the Western Powers doing all they possibly can to relieve the needs of Berlin or could they do more?"

Source: OMGUS Report 175, June 1949, p. 52

Views on National Socialism

Question: "Was National Socialism a bad idea, or a good idea badly carried out?"

Source: OMGUS Report 175, June 1949, p. 9.

Government and Racial Superiority

Question: "Do you think that some races of people are more fit to rule than others?"

Source: OMGUS Report 100, March 1949, p. 9

Economic Security vs. Guaranteed Freedoms

Question: "Which of these types of government would you, personally, choose as better:

- A. A government which offers the people economic security and the possibility of a good income,
- B. A government which guarantees free elections, freedom of speech, a free press and religious freedom?"

Source: OMGUS Report 175, June 1949, p. 7.

Collective German Responsibility for World War II

Question: "Do you think that the entire German people are responsible for the war because they let a government come to power which plunged the whole world into war?"

Source: OMGUS Report 100, March 1948, p. 8.

Time for Independent Players

Through the 1930s to the 1960s, there were few public opinion institutes, and they mostly worked to serve the state's interests. Over 80-90 years, the global society has moved far ahead: public opinion research has had a variety of independent demand and non-profit funding in addition to the state's. In the US alone, there are several dozen large and hundreds of small private companies. State and political interests have not disappeared, manipulations continue and are visible, but there is always an alternative.

Russia never had a public opinion research industry; for the past 20 years, socio-political research has been conducted by the "Big Three": the two government contractors and the Levada Center.

The military operation has mobilized independent researchers to address a new challenge. In the face of the unfolding catastrophe, knowledge must be not only beyond the authorities' control, capturing the reality, predictive, but also actionable - in other words, such that can become a ground for counteracting this catastrophe.

The Excruciating Question

The main question for the morally healthy and reflective part of society, the nerve of perception, has become a basic human astonishment: "How can you?" The same question turned out to be the main content of the Ukrainian respondents' virtual telegrams (see "The Mirror of the Military Operation"⁷).

The reasons, patterns, and scale of support for military invasion were the focus of our analysis.

The releases published in this unique journal end in May 2022. By August, we have, for the first time, the feeling that we can give an answer to this (without exaggeration) sacred question.

For five months, the dynamics of attitudes toward the operation were virtually nonexistent. In July, we registered the first significant decrease: in a month and a half, according to the Chronicles project, the share of responses to the direct question about support dropped from 64% to 55%.

From March to June we have been trying to look inside this infamous majority and understand what it consists of. We have been able to construct a well interpretable segmentation that gives a clear pyramid of support for the war - from 7% hawks, 17% militarists, and up to 27% war advocates.

No Monolithic Support

According to the July wave of the Chronicles' survey⁸, 55% profess support for the military operation.

38% of respondents, besides declaring their support, are ready to personally participate in the military operation, donate money to the army, or see victory over Ukraine as a personal benefit.

At this time, in August 2022, 38% is the most accurate estimate of real, reflexible support for the military actions in Ukraine.

As we look around us, we all sense, not only empirically but also intuitively, that there is a diversity of symptom complexes behind support for the military operation: conscious enthusiasm, justifications, militaristic and peacekeeping propaganda narratives, the archetype of victory, Soviet nostalgia and resentment, escapism, learned social helplessness, apoliticality, moral and economic exhaustion among a significant part of the population. These segments are yet to be explored.

But it is already abundantly clear and provable today that there is no overwhelming majority that would monolithically support the special military operation. Our research task is therefore to conduct a detailed segmentation of this group for the sake of understanding and

⁷ "Mirror of the military operation" - ExtremeScan, May 12, 2022

⁸ <https://www.chronicles.report/en>

predicting its dynamics. One is tempted to say "for the sake of future reforms and enlightenment" - but no, there is still a long way to go before we get there. At this point, we need to figure out how to talk to the core of support, the potential mobilization base, in order to convince the more flexible part (albeit probably not a very large one) to take the side of light. We have miles to go before we sleep.

A Phase Transition in the Public Mind

Judging by the aggregate of observations, it is possible to speak about the transition to a new phase of the society's state of mind. The first phase was confusion, euphoria and panic at the same time. Grief and anger for some people. These were replaced by a certain degree of adaptation, a decrease in interest in the events in Ukraine (for some, apathy), revision of life plans, and attempts to replace familiar goods.

But reality comes to every home, and reflection follows. According to July data, the number of people experiencing anxiety has increased in a month and a half (from 33% to 43%), which is indirectly confirmed by the increased demand for the corresponding pharmaceuticals. Unemployment (respondents or their relatives having lost their jobs) has reached 12%, its further growth is inevitable. 39% have had their income reduced, more than a half of people have to save money on food products because of rising prices, 30-40% have felt the disappearance of clothing, appliances, food and medicine, a quarter have stopped communicating with their loved ones because of political disagreements. The duration of hostilities predicted by respondents increased. Human losses are on the rise. Hidden mobilization is becoming more overt. These factors, as we can see from the study, are influencing changes in attitudes towards support.

When asked what could lead to a change in their (positive) opinion of the special military operation, 44% of the respondents answered "nothing". Meaningful reasons included protraction of the operation, lack of clear goals, theoretical weakness of the army and military commanders, corruption in the army, etc.

Although respondents mentioned possible new information of humanitarian nature (about casualties on the Ukrainian side) as one of the reasons for a potential change in their attitude toward the special military operation, **empathy remains a marginal narrative of the Russian residents' experiences. Compassion appears to be a weak factor in influencing attitudes toward military action.**

Equilibrium of Support and Non-Support

The share of those opposed to the military invasion is growing. It is not yet apparent through direct answers to the questions. However, additional methods of analysis confirm our hypothesis: the majority of respondents who found it difficult or refused to answer the question about support for the special military operation are very close (in terms of demographic and substantive characteristics) to the opponents of the military invasion. Their share is also 38%.

And so, by August 2022, in the 5th month of hostilities, the society is passing the tipping point of support/non-support for the special military operation in Ukraine: **38% vs. 38%**. Let this moment be remembered. We are entering a new phase, which - canonically, after anger and bargaining - will be a phase of depression.

A Word of Gratitude

Only 8% of Russians have avoided negative developments in the past six months, and I am not one of them. But I have gained a lot which would not have been possible in other circumstances. My main assets are my colleagues, with whom we are doing this important work. I am proud of my partners and very grateful to them for our work together.

<https://freemoscowuniversity.pubpub.org/pub/p-3-2a-koneva/release/2?readingCollection=54fbd417>

<https://freemoscowuniversity.pubpub.org/palladium-3?fbclid=IwAR1R2tKxJvoPYtWPQHaQWF6FGTzsFu8jM5G4lvUy2JYbY5FcgM6rNB9H5xE>