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Classification: UNCLASSIFIED **Status:** [STAT]
Document Date: 01 Oct 90 **Category:** [CAT]
Report Type: JPRS Report **Report Date:**
Report Number: JPRS-USS-91-003 **UDC Number:**

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Institute under the USSR Academy of Sciences]

Headline: Muscovites on Elections

Source Line: 915D0004G Moscow SOTSIOLOGICHESKIYE ISSLEDOVANIYA in
Russian No 10, Oct 90 (signed to press 30 Aug 90) pp
123-128

Subslug: [Article by Aleksandr Mikhaylovich Demidov, candidate of
philosophical sciences and head of the Sector for Studying
Public Opinion of Muscovites of the Sociology Institute
under the USSR Academy of Sciences]

FULL TEXT OF ARTICLE:

1. [Article by Aleksandr Mikhaylovich Demidov, candidate of
philosophical sciences and head of the Sector for Studying Public
Opinion of Muscovites of the Sociology Institute under the USSR
Academy of Sciences]

2. [Text] The elections of people's deputies to the republic and
local soviets have concluded. Now the bodies of legislative power
have been reorganized from top to bottom on a fundamentally new
basis. Certain results can be given. In the given article, an
analysis of the political situation has been made from the viewpoint
of two previous election campaigns and the results of studying public
opinion among the Moscow residents and these were obtained in the
course of regular polls of the capital's population over the last 18
months. In particular, let us examine in greater detail how the state
of public opinion influenced voter behavior in the choice of the
elections, and for this we must ascertain, in the first place, the
general background of the election fight or, in other words, voter
opinion on urgent problems of the sociopolitical and economic life of
the nation. Secondly, the attitude of the public to the electoral
system, thirdly, assessments of the organization and execution of the
election campaign, and finally, and fourthly, voter preferences on
the candidates for people's deputies.

3. The election campaign began to get underway at the end of the
fourth year of perestroyka, some 6 months after the 19th All-Union
Party Conference and on which public opinion placed great hopes for

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improving the state of affairs in all spheres of our life. They had just adopted the amendments and supplements to the USSR Constitution as well as the new Law on the Elections of USSR People's Deputies. During this period after the excitement which accompanied the preparations for the party forum, there was a definite drop in the public mood and again skeptical notes could be clearly heard. This was manifested above all in the attitude toward the party. While prior to the conference more than 1/2 of those questioned assumed that the authority and influence of the CPSU in society were rising, around 1/5 voiced the opinion that there would not be any changes and only 3 percent assumed that over the long run party authority and influence should decline, while the cross-section of public opinion after the concluding of the 19th Party Conference provided a completely different picture. Only 23 percent of those questioned pointed to increased authority and influence of the party, while 37 percent stated that the situation had not changed at all and 17 percent of the respondents spoke directly about a decline in CPSU authority. (We would point out, incidentally, that a year later, in the summer of 1989, 70 percent of those questioned now pointed to a decline in confidence in the CPSU.)

4. The Muscovites also took a very skeptical attitude toward amendments in the USSR Constitution concerning the electoral system. In December 1989, only 18 percent of those polled felt that the adopted laws to a significant degree would contribute to the development of democracy in the nation. Such skepticism was fully explainable since over a protracted historical period we have adopted a multiplicity of good laws, decrees and decisions which were later emasculated in the course of their practical implementation by the executive bodies which concentrated real political and economic power in their hands. In particular, doubt was voiced over the procedure for electing (1/3) of the people's deputies from the public organizations, the procedure for proposing and registering candidate deputies, the antidemocratic practice of preelection district meetings which steadily filtered out declared candidates to the benefit of the partocracy. All of this could not help but tell on the state of public opinion and the attitude of the population to the adopted election laws.

5. The negative views in the minds of the people were intensified by the slipping of the economic reform. According to the same poll, just 6 percent of the respondents felt that the state of the national economy was satisfactory while around 70 percent was critical. The problems of interethnic relations began to cause ever-greater fears. Only Soviet foreign policy and domestic democratization were viewed affirmatively, however even here 55 percent of those questioned expressed satisfaction with what had been achieved.

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6. The listed processes in mass conscience occurred against the background of its further politization, greater activeness of the broad strata and groups of the public, the developing independent movement and the flourishing of street democracy. It is no surprise that under these conditions there was a sharp rise in the overall critical attitude which accompanied an assessment of the course of perestroyka as a whole. Around 1/2 of those polled pointed out that their hopes tied to perestroyka had not been realized, 37 percent said this had partially been realized and only 3 percent of the respondents had hopes that were fully realized.

7. Under these conditions, just what characterized the 1989 election campaign? First of all, there was voter activeness which increased as voting day drew closer. Remaining in our memory were stormy voter district meetings which, as a rule, lasted far beyond midnight, televised and nontelevised debates of the candidates, official and independent posters and leaflets which praised certain candidates and were often inaccurate about others, pickets at subway stations and many other attributes of a real developing political struggle.

8. What candidate deputies did the Muscovites prefer? First of all, the voters focused on personality. For more than 1/2 of those polled, the main thing was human and professional qualities in the candidate and not his position, profession or even belonging to one or another sociopolitical organization. Among the personal qualities in first place were put honesty, decency and a feeling of social justice. Such preferences of course were manifested due to the stereotype which has formed in mass conscience of the corrupted representative of power, the bureaucrat, concerned solely with his own problems, worried about his personal privileges and violating social justice. In addition, an absence of a developed political structure in society was felt and this did not make it possible for the voter to focus on the membership of the candidate in one or another political organization. Party membership was not a factor which determined voter choice. But there was the other factor that belonging to the party apparatus immediately reduced the candidate's chances. The most popular with the Muscovites were representatives of the creative intelligentsia, including journalists, scientists and writers. In second place came workers followed by economic leaders.

9. In preparing to vote, the voters most often focused on the candidate's election program and more precisely on his position and attitude toward urgent problems. These possibly were not so apparent in the text of the program as they were in the entire flow of information which the candidate was able to get across to the voter. Incidentally, in 1989, the voters obtained the basic mass of information needed by them from the mass information media, followed by pamphlets and election posters and to a lesser degree from the

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personal speeches of the candidate deputies.

10. What did the Muscovites not like in the preparations for last year's elections? Above we have spoken about the shortcomings of the legislation apparent in the stage of discussing the draft Election Law. These views (the district meetings, the elections in public organizations and the procedure for putting up candidates) continued to cause dissatisfaction in the course of the election campaign itself. People expressed greatest dissatisfaction over the unequal status of the candidates (having in mind primarily the material and technical opportunities to conduct an election campaign) as well as the creating of beneficial conditions by the authorities for some and obstacles for others who were "not to the liking" of the party apparatus for various reasons. In addition, the persons questioned by us pointed to the discourtesy in conducting the election campaign and the use of prohibited methods, primarily attempts to compromise the opponent.

11. Regardless of the listed shortcomings recorded by mass conscience, as a whole, around 80 percent of the Muscovites was satisfied with the 1989 election results as persons having real authority among the people and who are active supporters of perestroyka became deputies.

12. The First Congress of USSR People's Deputies which followed the elections for the first time in our history demonstrated real political pluralism in the superior bodies of the nation. The critical and sharp judgments heard from such a high rostrum simply shocked many. In any event, virtually no one was indifferent. From the obtained data, 96-98 percent of the Muscovites followed the entire work of the congress and a large portion did this regularly.

13. The respondents also judged the democraticness of the congress work very high. As for the assessments of the success of the congress's work, here our polls showed significant fluctuations depending upon the events occurring at the congress. From 24 percent to 36 percent of the Muscovites on one or another day pointed out that the congress was going much more successfully than they had expected.

14. The public polls conducted a day later clearly recorded both the increased expectations and a certain disappointment with the results of the congress. While prior to its start, some (2/3) of the Muscovites assumed that the work of the deputies would be successful and effective, after the conclusion only a third of those polled gave such a view.

15. The First Congress of People's Deputies accelerated the

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development of political processes in the nation and activated mass conscience. The escaped genie of pluralism caused a reassessment of existing notions and stereotypes. This has begun to be apparent in the views of not only history but also the modern political system. In July 1989, over ½ of the Muscovites uniformly favored the repeal of Article 6 of the USSR Constitution. The attitude toward a multiparty system became more tolerant, although the dominant view in social conscience in that period was that in and of itself a multiparty system does not determine the level of democracy in the nation. Possible factions in the Congress and in the party itself began to seem acceptable although the opinion still prevailed that it was better to maintain unity.

16. Some 10-13 percent of the Muscovites questioned by us during that period were firm supporters of maintaining the principles of the former political system, around 25 percent favored insignificant changes in maintaining the underlying principles of the former system, 10-15 percent were unable to voice their position while around 50 percent favored substantial changes in the sphere of sociopolitical relations.

17. If one speaks about individual sociodemographic groups, the more critical and radical judgments were voiced by the ITR [engineer and technical personnel] and (to a somewhat lesser degree) by representatives of the intelligentsia not employed in production (physicians, teachers, scientists and journalists), more moderate by workers as well as employees of state institutions. In the age groups standing out is the middle generation of 30-45-year-olds who were most critical of the situation and maintained more radical judgments on many questions even in comparison with the youth. In terms of educational level, one can trace a clearly expressed linear dependence: the higher the education, the more critical assessments and radical judgments.

18. Among the events which had a noticeable impact on the state of mass political conscience during the period between the 1989 and 1990 electoral campaigns, one must also mention the wave of strikes which swept the nation in the summer of 1989 and the regular outbursts at the centers of interethnic conflicts. The attitude of the Muscovites to strikes was complex: of course, they are undesirable and cause great harm but sometimes they are admissible and even necessary. In one way or another, in being superimposed on the increasing problems and difficulties in the economic sphere, the wave of strikes heightened the critical attitudes in society. There was a clearly voiced demand for more decisive changes, however there was no unanimity over the question of precisely what changes were required. For example, on the question of introducing a ration system for supply, the opinions of the Muscovites were split virtually equally.

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The supporters and opponents of market relations also were evenly split.

19. In addition to the economic problems related to the public's notions primarily of the supply of vital necessities and which for the last 2 years has been in first place in terms of importance in the course of our polls, with the start of autumn the problem of combating crime emerged in second place in terms of importance in the public conscience, in bypassing the problem of protecting the environment. Interethnic relations in the capital itself did not greatly bother the Muscovites although (1/3) of our respondents still noticed their exacerbation in Moscow as well.

20. The absence of real headway in resolving the listed problems very noticeably reduced the credit of trust in the measures of the superior authorities and the policy of perestroyka as a whole. The obtained data concerning public opinion showed that the expectations of a majority of those polled were not being met and as a whole the situation in the nation was deteriorating. A further decline in the authority of the CPSU and its leading bodies was also recorded.

21. In analyzing the state of mass conscience in that period, one cannot help but mention the growing independent movement and the appearance of alternative political structures in the form of associations, platforms and actually parties. This led as a result to the formation of electoral blocs in the 1990 elections. While in 1989, the numerous "informal" organizations did not represent a real political force and a majority of the Muscovites did not see them as real claimants to power, after the First Congress of People's Deputies, the situation began to change. A major role was played by the establishing of the Interregional Deputy Group (MDG) and around this the alternative political structures began to gather. At the end of 1989, our poll showed that the activities of the MDG were approved basically by 57 percent of the Muscovites. The results of the past elections to the Moscow Soviet and the RSFSR from Moscow showed that this support from the public has increased.

22. Along with the listed trends, we cannot help but mention one other, rather contradictory trend in mass conscience, and which rather strongly influenced voter behavior in the course of the 1990 elections. We said that a pluralism of opinions, a boldness of judgments and vivid speeches at the first congress were welcomed by the public, however over time the street democracy began to cause irritation. This trend was apparent with particular strength after the Second Congress of People's Deputies which caused dissatisfaction among a significant portion of the public precisely due to the lack of decisions on the most important questions of the state structure, property and so forth.

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23. Precisely this determined, in our view, the mood with which the voters entered the 1990 election campaign. Even 3 months prior to the elections, the mass information media began to note a certain decline in voter activeness in comparison with the previous year, although interest in the coming elections was quite high: over 70 percent of those polled pointed out that they were concerned who would be elected as members of the republic and local soviets. During that period around 74 percent of the Muscovites intended to vote on 4 March. However, at the end of January and the beginning of February 1990, we recorded a decline in the given indicator by 10 percent. However, in our view, this showed not so much a drop in the activeness of the Muscovites as a response to a number of questions which arose in the course of the election campaign.

24. As a result, the Law on Elections to the Republic and Local Soviets was positively received. There was satisfaction, first of all, with the abandoning of the district meetings and the election of deputies by public organizations. However, the very procedure and organization of the elections undoubtedly influenced the fact that on 4 March a significantly smaller number of Muscovites went to the voter urns than in the previous spring. The electing of deputies all at once to three levels of soviets in four voter districts, the necessity of making one's way through 20 or 30 names of candidates of course could not help but lead to confusion among a portion of the voters and a refusal to vote generally, as a sort of defensive response. Moreover, the distribution of information about the candidates was extremely poorly organized. Even official election posters appeared in Moscow in a majority of the districts only 2 weeks prior to the elections. In this sense the provision of the law on observing the equality of candidates in utilizing materiel for the election campaign did poor service. The candidates were fettered in their actions, looking hopefully at the district commissions which were unable to promptly get the necessary information to the public. According to our data, a predominant majority of the voters a month prior to the elections did not know a single one of their candidates to all levels of the soviets.

25. Thus, while in the course of the 1989 campaign, there was a tendency for growing voter activity among the public and a focus on participation in voting as election day drew near, in the spring of 1990, the trend was the reverse.

26. The preference of the Muscovites on their candidate people's deputies as a whole was the same as in the spring of 1989, however the criteria of the social justice, honesty and incorruptibility of the candidate, in remaining extremely high for the voters, moved to second place, giving way to competence. It is no accident that

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lawyers were given the highest rating among all professions. Undoubtedly, the voters were led to this by observing the work of the USSR people's deputies.

27. The demands of competence, a knowledge of the laws and professional political skills which the voters placed on the deputies reflect the current level of our experience in parliamentary activities. In the future, we feel, precisely civil, political and moral positions will again emerge in the forefront among the demands made on the deputies, since professionalism is required primarily for experts. In any event, no competent deputy can possess professional knowledge on all discussed questions. There is no need for this.

28. What else influenced the choice of the Muscovites? An important factor was the place of residence of the candidate. Around 70 percent of the Moscow voters preferred to see a deputy residing in their rayon. And this applied not only to the elections to the rayon soviet but also to the Moscow Soviet and even the Russian Parliament. As a result, 80 percent of the elected deputies of the Moscow Soviet reside in the region where they ran. Party affiliation of the candidates, as before, did not have great importance for the voters, however in comparison with the 1989 elections, there was a tendency to prefer nonparty persons. This also was reflected in the voting results: 58 percent of the communists was elected to the Moscow Soviet and this was ¼ less in comparison with the make-up of the USSR people's deputies.

29. The people preferred candidates whom they knew better, as they say, recognizing their face. This was the case if the candidate was not a resident but at least worked in the rayon. The voters also preferred to be personally acquainted with the candidate, either in meetings or at least in TV debates. Newspaper articles or even pamphlets had significantly less effect since the people did not trust the impartiality of the press. Male candidates were preferred over female. The voters focused rather strongly on the support of workers but due to the fact that extremely few of them were running, the share of this social group in the make-up of the new soviets was small.

30. The appearance of preelection blocs, a sort of prototype of political parties of the parliamentary type became one other important and new aspect in the 1990 election campaign in comparison with the spring of last year. These were primarily Democratic Russia and the bloc of Sociopatriotic Movements of Russia. While at the outset the Muscovites did not pay particular attention to the belonging of the candidates to one or another official or unofficial political organization, after Democratic Russia published voter rolls the situation changed. The belonging to one or another bloc began to

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determine voter choice. The chances of independent candidates declined significantly.

31. The satisfaction of the Muscovites with the election results of the people's deputies was substantially lower than in the spring of 1989. Around 45 percent of those questioned stated that they were rather satisfied and almost the same number, some 40 percent, said that they were rather dissatisfied with the voting results. What was the reason for this? In our view, there were several of them. In the first place, the overall dissatisfaction with the organization of the election campaign and this dissatisfaction to one degree or another was expressed by a predominant majority of our respondents and was also partially transferred to the voting results. Secondly, the polarizing of the political forces naturally led to a polarizing of evaluations with some candidates being victors and others not. Thirdly, while in 1989, the very opportunity of a real choice caused satisfaction, now this was not enough. Demands also increased on both the candidates and the election system. Finally, and fourthly, there was also a general strengthening of critical attitudes in society. For this reason, the assessment of the voting results seems natural to us and not so low.

32. In one way or another the current political structure in society is transitional, unformed and rapidly changing. The processes in mass conscience correspond to such a situation. In concluding an analysis of the political situation based on the results of studying the public opinion of Muscovites over the last 18 months, we would like to point out the basic aspects of these processes.

33. The activating of public conscience is continuing. In recent months, this has assumed a qualitatively different character. While initially one observed basically a rise in the activeness of the various strata and groups in the public and the involvement of people in politics, at present there is not merely the politicizing of conscience but also the mass defining of one's positions and the polarizing of political views.

34. The present period in the development of society is also characterized by a radicalizing of the attitudes of people. At present, public opinion, as a rule, is ahead of those reforms which the authorities are carrying out. A majority of the Muscovites questioned by us expressed a demand for radical changes in all the life of the nation. This trend partially determines political sympathies, too.

35. The contradictions between the expectations of the public and their realization intensify the critical mood. People no longer want to accept many fewer shortcomings in comparison with those they

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tolerated previously. A manifestation of this is, for example, the loss of trust in a majority of the official and unofficial political institutions.

36. One other trend in the mass conscience at present is its growing mysticalness and the appearance of this we are encountering everywhere. This involves both a belief in miracles, flying saucers, the growing influence of various prophets, including psychotherapists, and much else.

37. Finally, and most importantly, one observes a democratizing of social conscience and this slowly is accepting democratic principles and models of political behavior. This is manifested primarily in a definite change in the attitude toward a pluralism of opinions, a multiparty system, the rights of the majority and opposition and informal structures. At the same time, for now this process is just beginning. The transition from the old totalitarian thinking will be rather complex and painful. In mass conscience we are still clearly recording views of rigid control and regulation of social life, intolerance of other opinions and leveling attitudes.

38. An important aspect which characterizes the state of social conscience is its particular emotional background. In the current political situation, political moods and emotions play a very marked role. If we turn again to the previous election campaign, we cannot help but point out that precisely emotions often determined voter attitudes to a candidate and correspondingly influenced the voting results. Public moods are currently very mobile and unstable and the clearest indications characterizing the emotional state of mass conscience are the appearance of anxiety and hope as well as abrupt shifts from one to the other. These are the basic traits of mass conscience established as a result of a systematic study of public opinion among the Moscow inhabitants in 1988-1990.

39. COPYRIGHT: Izdatelstvo ``Nauka'', ``Sotsiologicheskiye issledovaniya'', 1990.