



Directorate of
Intelligence

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23501

Unrest in the Soviet Union: Measuring Social Instability

A Reference Aid

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Unrest in the Soviet Union

Measuring Social Incidents

Summary

Since January 1987, the most visible and potentially dangerous byproduct of Gorbachev's reforms has been the growth of unrest. Unrest comprises all manifestations of public activism within the Soviet Union that challenge or question basic tenets, or the performance, of the Soviet system. It includes demonstrations, strikes, riots, and ethnic clashes. From January 1987 through September 1989, this growth has been dramatic:

- The number of known incidents of unrest has grown from 301 in 1987, to 967 in 1988, to 1,099 in the first nine months of 1989.
- Known incidents of violent unrest grew from 33 in 1987, to 107 in 1988, to 146 in the first nine months of 1989. The majority of this violence was concentrated in the Caucasus.

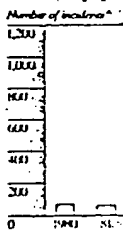
Both the number and size of individual demonstrations have grown. There were about as many known demonstrations of over 1,000 participants in the first nine months of 1989 as there were in 1987 and 1988 combined.

Over 80 percent of all known incidents of unrest during the period January 1987-September 1989 were concentrated in the Baltic republics, the republics of the Caucasus, and the Russian Republic.

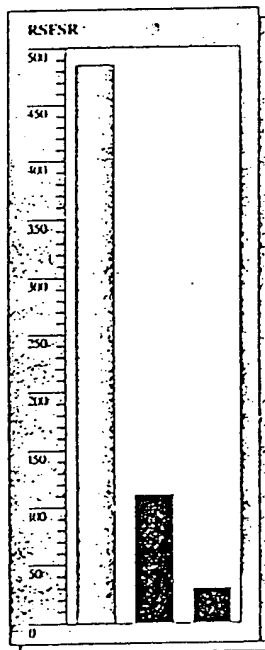
This study is a compilation of known incidents of unrest in the Soviet Union. It assesses the scale of Soviet unrest over time and defines it by the type, manifestation, geographic location, and—in the case of demonstrations—the size and the ethnic group involved. The factors behind the growth in unrest and

the regime's responses to it are beyond the scope of this Reference Aid.

Although we have made it as comprehensive as available information allows, the actual number of incidents is probably much higher. Nevertheless, we believe this study accurately indicates the dynamics of the problem the regime faces in coping with domestic unrest.

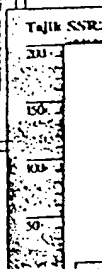
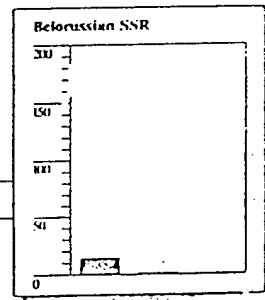
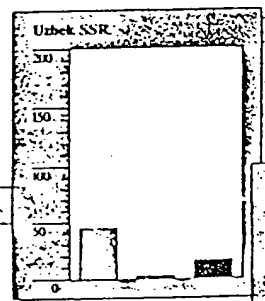
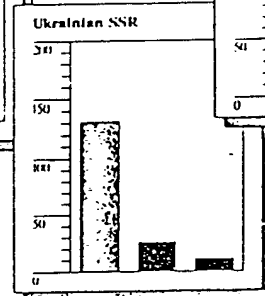
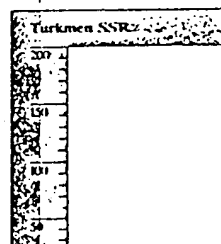
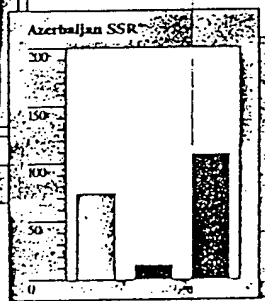
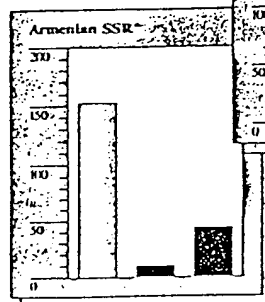
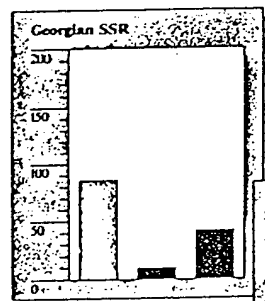


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January 1987-September 1989

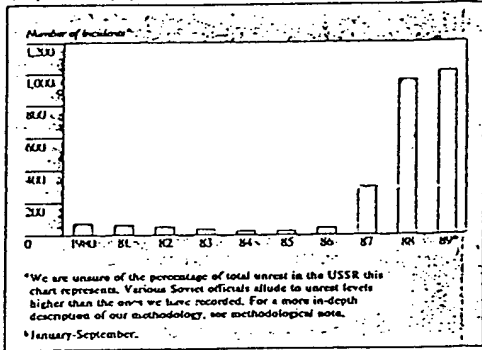
- Demonstrations
- Strikes
- Riots, fighting, pogroms, beatings, assassinations, attacks against security forces, and bombings



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The Soviet Union: Political Instability

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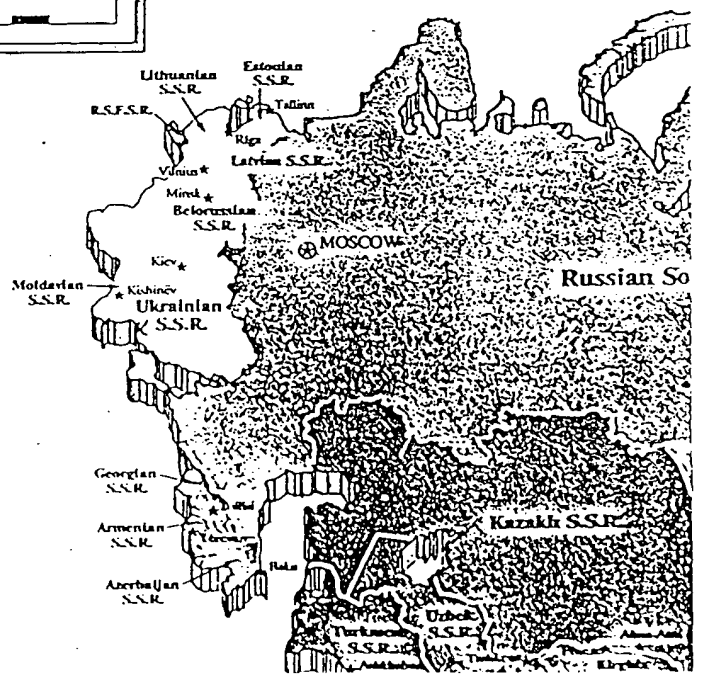
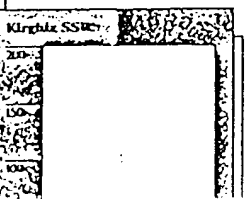
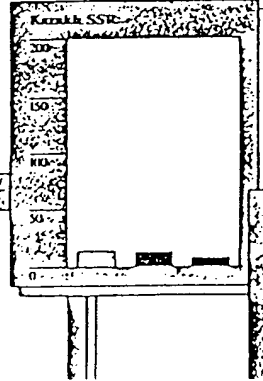
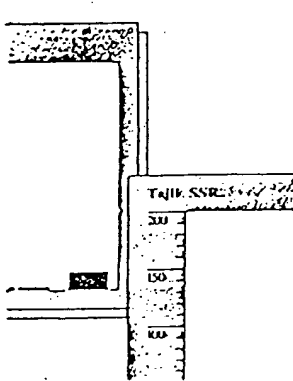
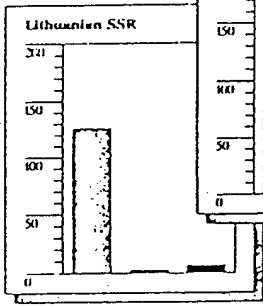
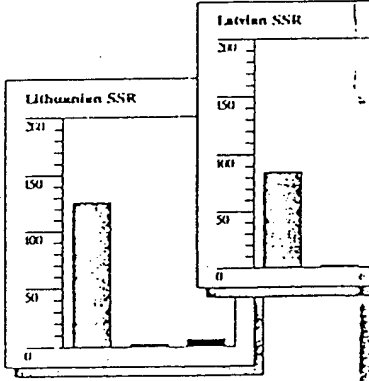
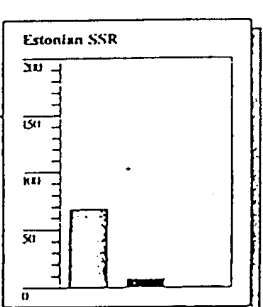
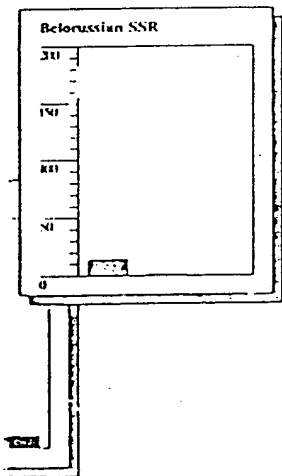


Known Incidents of Unrest: January 1980-September 1989

From January 1980 through December 1986, 326 incidents of unrest occurred throughout the USSR. The somewhat higher levels of unrest during 1980-81—as compared with the mid-1980s—coincided with food shortages in various areas of the Soviet Union, which sparked numerous demonstrations and strikes. Conversely, the low point in such activities (1983-85) coincided with the tough policies on public activism of former Soviet leaders Yuriy Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko.

During the first few months of 1987, Gorbachev unveiled and began to implement a program that called for increased popular participation in the political process. This call to participate quickly generated a positive response among many Soviet citizens. By

mid-1988 almost all segments of Soviet society had been affected in some way by the growth of political activism. Various manifestations of unrest—demonstrations, strikes, ethnic clashes, and other forms of violence—have taken place in virtually all areas of the Soviet Union. The number of these incidents has grown dramatically from 300 in 1987 to over 2,000 in 1988 and in the first nine months of 1989. Indeed, growth during the period January 1988-September 1989 was so great that it exceeded the approximately 2,000 reported cases of unrest known to have occurred during the period 1953-83.



Soviet Union: Instability

Number of Incidents
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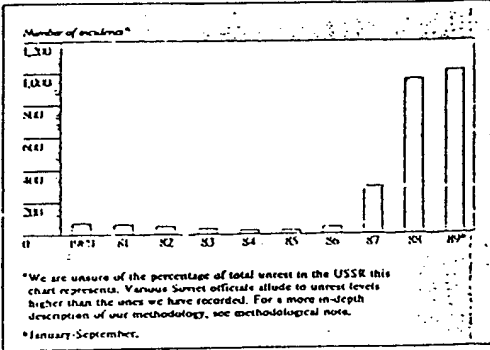
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* Includes no attacks seen
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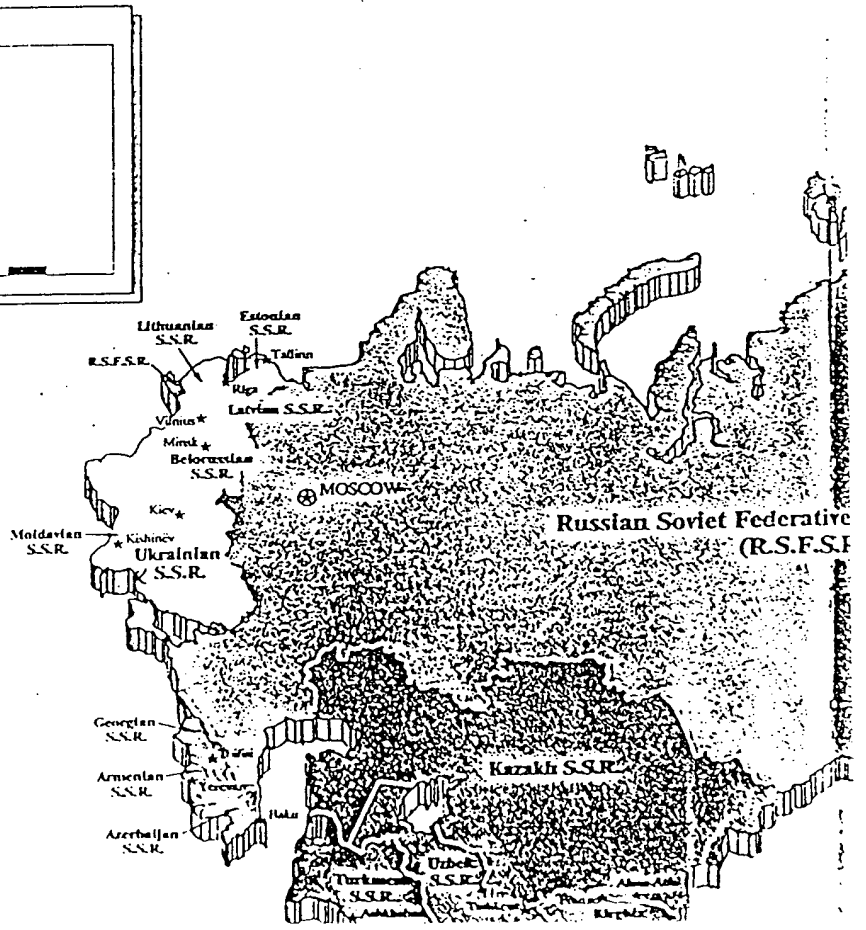
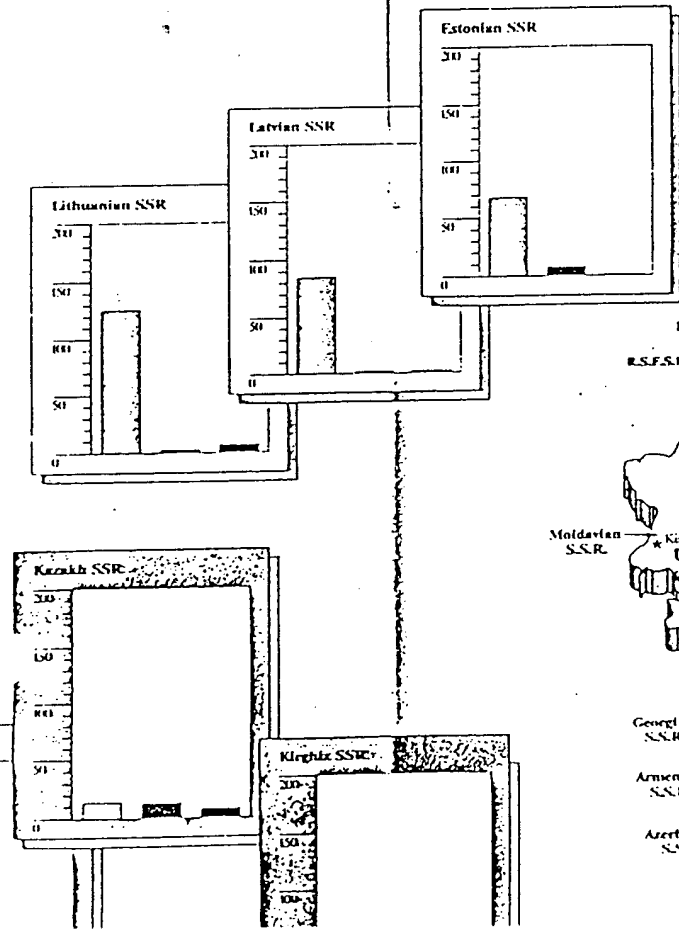


Known Incidents of Unrest: January 1980-September 1989

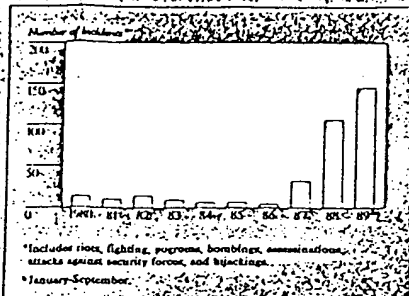
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Known Incidents of Violent Unrest: January 1987-September 1989

Acts of violent unrest in the Soviet Union have increased dramatically. These include industrial sabotage, interethnic pogroms or brawls, riots, hijackings, bombings, and attacks against security or military targets. Although violence was involved in just over 10 percent of all unrest in the USSR during the period January 1987-September 1989, it has had significant personal and social costs. In an October 1989 interview, a Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) official stated that 300 people had died and 5,260 had been injured in interethnic confrontations in the Caucasus and in Central Asia since the beginning of 1988. Moreover, violence during 1988 and 1989 reportedly compelled over 300,000 persons to move to safer areas.

All Soviet republics have experienced some form of violence since January 1987, but the republics of the Caucasus—Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia—have experienced the highest levels. Interethnic violence in the Caucasus and, to a somewhat lesser extent, in Central Asia accounts for most incidents of violent unrest. Attacks against Soviet state security or administrative targets have increased dramatically—almost

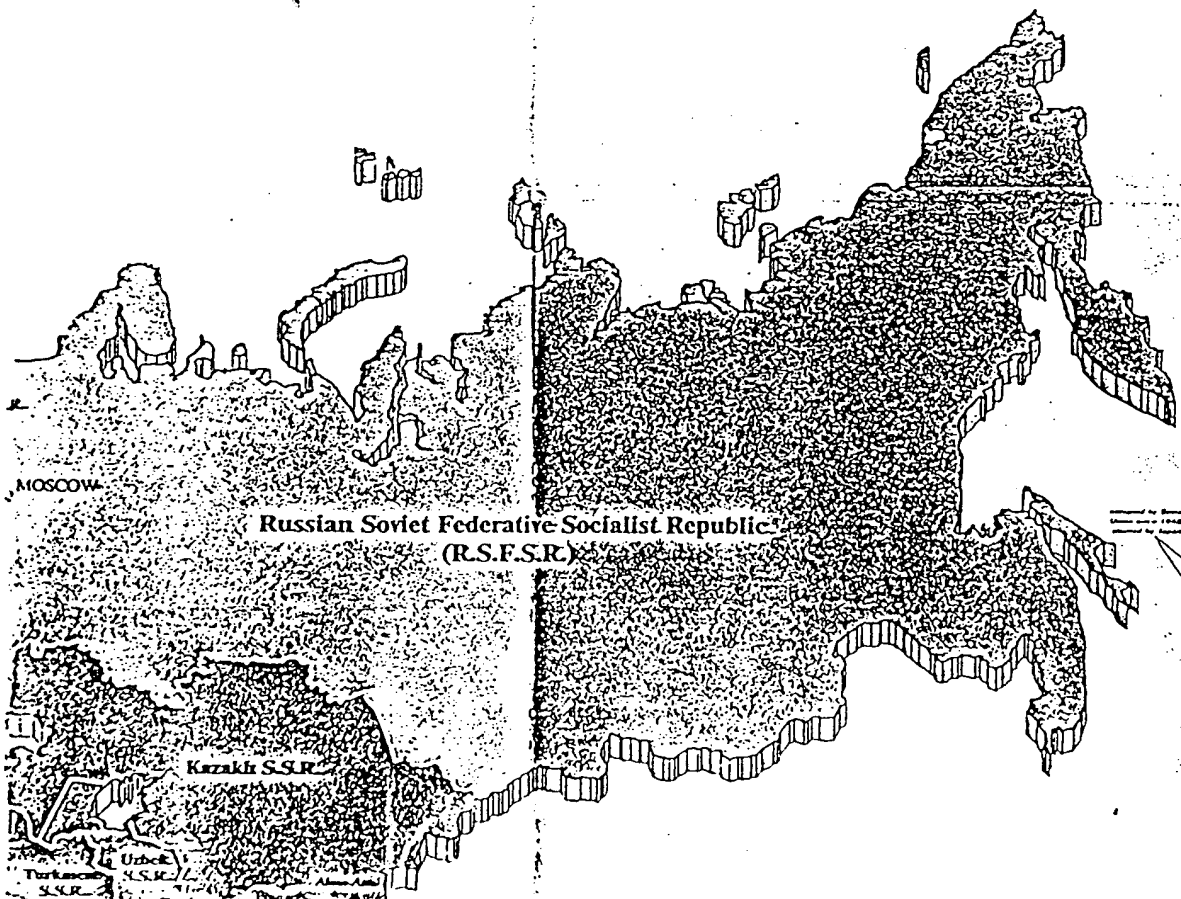
exclusively in the Caucasus—from one in 1987, to 17 in 1988, to 36 in the first nine months of 1989. The Baltic republics—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—and Belorussia have experienced the lowest levels of violence.

The use of weaponry by Soviet citizens in the course of violent unrest is also on the rise. The private possession of weapons is strictly limited by the state to shotguns and hunting rifles, but possession of such weapons is widespread. More alarming for the authorities is that at least some Soviet citizens now possess automatic weapons and explosives; in April 1989, for example, *Pravda* reported that the police had confiscated grenade launchers, machineguns, and even a mortar from various "criminal" organizations.

Interethnic violence in the Caucasus and in Central Asia has resulted in the greatest use of firearms and explosives. There are numerous reports in the Soviet press of firefights between groups of Armenians and Azeris, and between Georgians and Abkhazians. Extremists in the Caucasus have attacked local militia and MVD and MOD troopers to steal their weapons. Some local militia stations in the Caucasus have been looted of weapons by local mobs. Despite attempts by security forces to confiscate weapons from the citizenry, the use of firearms in the Caucasus continues to rise. In addition, firearms have been sporadically used by extremists to attack other ethnics or security forces in the RSFSR and the Ukraine.

The use of explosives has also increased. In the period July-September 1989, there were 11 known bombing incidents—all in the Caucasus—as compared with 10 such incidents nationwide in 1988. There have also been bombings—or attempted bombings—in the Ukraine, and in cities of the RSFSR. The dramatic growth in incidents of violence is a phenomenon that does not bode well for the regime's efforts to manage future unrest.

In 1988 almost all segments of Soviet society had been affected in some way by the growth of political dissent. Various manifestations of unrest—demonstrations, strikes, ethnic clashes, and other forms of dissent—have taken place in virtually all areas of the Soviet Union. The number of these incidents has increased dramatically from 300 in 1987 to over 2,000 in 1988 and in the first nine months of 1989. Indeed, the number of incidents during the period January 1988-September 1989 was so great that it exceeded the approximately 1,000 reported cases of unrest known to have occurred during the period 1953-83.

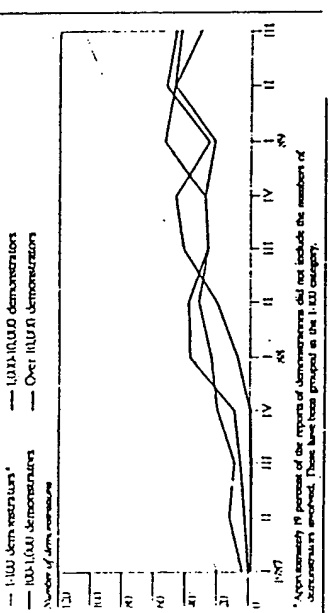


Ethnic Participation in Known Demonstrations January 1987-September 1989

Ethnic Group	Population*	Demonstrations	Median Size of Demonstrations	Total Participants*	Per Capita Participation
Russians	141,000,000	370	3,400	1,254,700 ^b	Less than 1%
Ukrainians	41,800,000	114	9,500	1,081,000	2%
Belarusians	9,900,000	12	14,300	170,000	2%
Moldavians	11,500,000	29	5,800	227,400	2%
Estonians	1,000,000	70	15,000	1,000,400	100%
Latvians	1,400,000	65	25,500	1,657,000	119%
Lithuanians	2,900,000	129	19,400	2,498,400	86%
Armenians	4,500,000	198	78,300	15,478,700 ^c	344%
Azeris	6,200,000	37	102,900	3,609,000 ^c	60%
Georgians	3,970,000	80	33,300	1,655,500	42%
Jews	1,900,000	70	160	10,000	Less than 1%
Chinese in Tibet	6,000,000	87	1,600	17,400	3%
Central Asians ^d	51,000,000	33	900	30,400	Less than 1%
Other of Unidentified ^e		42	150	6,300	...

* American figures taken from U.S. Bureau of Census, CIA Staff Paper No. 41, 1984.
^b Approximately 10 percent of all demonstrations were reported without numbers of participants. These have been included as having 25 participants for each demonstration. All figures have been rounded off to nearest thousand.
^c Armenian figures taken from U.S. Bureau of Census, CIA Staff Paper No. 41, 1984.
^d Majority of demonstrations reported without numbers of participants.
^e Majority of demonstrations reported without numbers of participants.

Distribution of Known Demonstrations by Sizes January 1987-September 1989

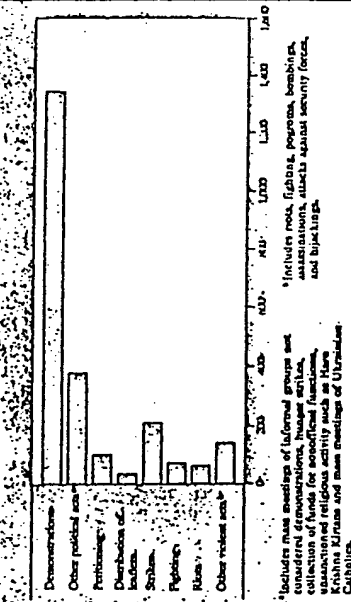


Known Demonstrations: January 1987-September 1989

Demonstrations have accounted for almost 60 percent of all incidents of unrest. Since 1987, both the number of demonstrations and the size of individual demonstrations have grown. The larger demonstrations, those numbering over 1,000, did not make up a significant percentage of the total until the last three months of 1987. From that point on, their growth was dramatic; during the first three months of 1988, there were more than twice as many demonstrations involving 1,000 or more people than there were in all of 1987. This trend continued in 1989, when, in the first nine months of the year, there were more reported demonstrations of over 1,000 people than there were in all of 1988.

Until 1989, demonstrations of over 10,000 people had taken place primarily in the Baltic republics and in the Caucasus. Since the beginning of 1987, however, such large demonstrations have also occurred regularly in the Ukraine, Moldavia, and cities of the USSR.

Known Incidents of Unrest by Type January 1987-September 1989



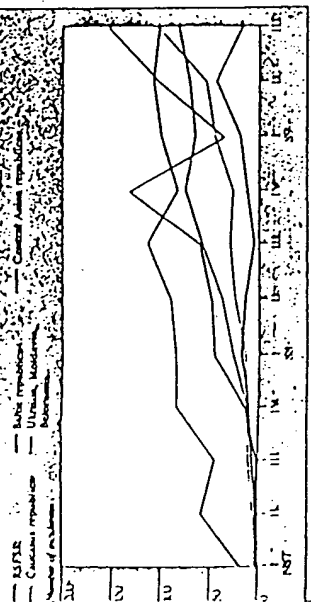
Includes riots, fighting, pogroms, bombings, assassinations, attacks against security forces, and hijackings.
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Types of Unrest: January 1987-September 1989

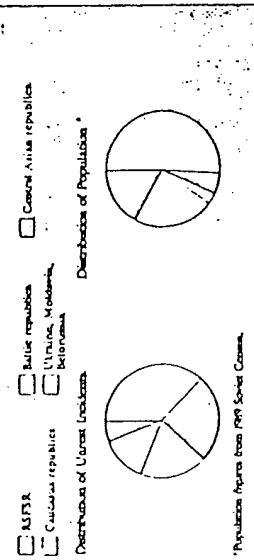
- The types of unrest have been organized into eight broad categories:
- **Demonstration.** An assembled group's public and nonviolent display of hostility toward regime policy or practice, or support for unsanctioned or unofficial goals.
- **Petitioning.** The collection of signatures on a document that protests official policy or practice, or seeks unsanctioned or unofficial goals.
- **Distribution of leaflets.** The public distribution or posting of unofficial or unsanctioned documents. We have not included in this, or any other category, the publication of samizdat material or letters to the editors of Soviet newspapers.
- **Strike/work stoppage.** A collective action by workers at a job site to curtail production in support of specific objections requiring redress by management or—in the case of nationalist-generated strikes—the regime.
- **Other political acts.** Other nonviolent actions generated by political concerns. These include hunger strikes, mass meetings of unofficial groups not classified as demonstrations, the collection of funds for nonofficial functions, and unsanctioned religious activity such as Hare Krishna religious festivals (Kirtans) and large-scale Ukrainian Catholic gatherings. This category does not include such unsanctioned religious activities as Ukrainian Catholic baptisms, funerals, or other common religious functions.
- **Riot.** An action of mass violence that threatens public order through the damage of property or injury to persons and requires the mobilization of additional security forces to restore order.
- **Fighting.** A brawl between two or more groups that has been generated by a political—usually interethnic—motivation. The size and scope of violence for incidents in this category are smaller than those of a riot.
- **Other violent acts.** Incidents of violence—other than fighting or riots—generated by political or economic concerns. These include the production or use of firearms and explosives for attacks against members of other ethnic groups or security forces, the assassination of both official and unofficial political leaders or their representatives, and hijackings, bombings, and sabotage.

Strikes have both economic and nationalist motivations. Known economic strikes were few until 1989, when they increased dramatically in both number and scope, culminating in the massive strikes by coal miners in the Kuzbass and Donbass regions in July 1989. Nationalist-motivated strikes have also increased dramatically. In 1988, Armenians in the Caucasus held a number of strikes to pressure Moscow into reuniting the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast with the Armenian Republic. By mid-1989, Azeris, Crimean Tatars, Georgians, and Russians in Estonia, Latvia, and Moldavia had all used strikes to advance their political agendas. Economic- and nationalist-motivated strikes probably will continue to form an increasing percentage of unrest in the near term.

Geographic Distribution of Known Unrest Incidents: January 1987-September 1989



Distribution of Known Unrest, as Compared With Distribution of Population With Distribution January 1987-September 1989.



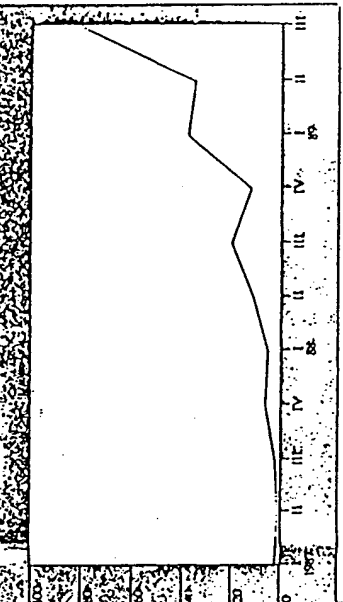
Distribution of Known Unrest: January 1987-September 1989

Incidents of unrest in the USSR have been distributed unevenly. Since mid-1987, unrest in the three Baltic republics and the Caucasus has been disproportionately large in relation to their populations. Protest in the Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania has been mainly peaceful, the primary vehicle of public activism is the demonstration. Popular fronts in all three republics wield great influence with the native populations and have been able to consistently organize aggressive demonstrations. Russians living in the Baltics have reacted to the demands of the Baltic with demands of their own. This growing inter-ethnic dispute, however, has so far resulted in only an occasional violent incident, primarily in Lithuania.

Since 1987, the Caucasus has accounted for a quarter of the known incidents of unrest in the USSR. Most of these can be traced to interethnic hostility, which, for example, in Armenia and Azerbaijan stems from the dispute arising over Nagorno-Karabakh, while Georgia has been angered by Abkhazian, Abren, and Mexican demands for greater cultural and political autonomy. Unrest in the Caucasus—unlike that in the Baltics, Belorussia, and the Ukraine—tends to be violent. Nationalist groups in the Caucasus, which are often composed of those who advocate extreme positions and reject compromise, have wielded increasing influence.

The RSFSR—the most populous republic—has recorded the highest proportion of incidents. Known unrest in the RSFSR has been concentrated in the urban areas, especially Moscow and Leningrad, possibly because reporting there is more complete. It has included strikes, demonstrations, and sporadic acts of violence.

Known Strike Incidents, January 1987-September 1989



Methodological Note

For this study, we define unrest as the unorganized or unofficial public activities of individuals or groups that challenge or question at least some of the basic tenets, or the performance, of the Soviet system. It does not include incidents that may be termed common crimes—such as bank robbery, rape, extortion, or murder—that are the result of a social pathology rather than political, economic, or ethnic activism.

Each incident of unrest used in this study is an identifiable event. For example, unspecified strikes will not be tallied into the total, but accounts of specific strikes—regardless of the source—will be counted. For the purpose of simple tabulation, incidents of unrest are weighted neither according to the number of participants nor by potential to harm the regime. No event is counted twice. For example, a demonstration at which leaflets are distributed would be counted as a demonstration only, and not as a demonstration incident and a leafletting incident.

The duration of incidents is also taken into account. We have tabulated strikes, hunger strikes and riots as single incidents regardless of their duration. For example, a strike that lasts seven days is counted as one strike. Similarly, multiple assaults against civilians, security personnel, and property in a specific area during a specific time are entered as one riot incident. All other manifestations of unrest are treated as individual events. The daily demonstrations in Yerevan during late November 1988, for example, are each entered separately, even though they were all generated by the same motivations and lasted for more than two weeks.

We have cleaned information on unrest in the USSR from [redacted] We have tried to document each incident with two or

more independent accounts, although for about 40 percent of the incidents there is only a single source of information. When two accounts of a particular incident did not correspond, our selection was based on our knowledge of source reliability. If the number of participants in an event could not be resolved, the more conservative number was used.

In spite of the fact that we cannot accurately estimate the percentage of unrest incidents that come to our attention, the events we have recorded are almost certainly only a part of such activity in Soviet society. Although we are unsure of their methodology, various official Soviet estimates are higher than ours. Highly visible and memorable events such as demonstrations, riots, and interethnic brawls probably have a better chance of being reported than more mundane incidents such as petitions. Also, events in the European areas of the USSR—where Western media, tourists, foreign diplomats, and an effective underground information system are more prevalent—probably have a better chance of being reported than events in Siberia or Central Asia.

Increased quality and quantity of reporting on Soviet unrest by both Soviet and Western media probably account for some of the increase in known unrest levels. The dramatic growth in these levels, however, should not be attributed primarily to more open coverage of a phenomenon already present. Evidence to support the theory that unrest levels have increased dramatically over the past three years include speeches by top-level national leaders voicing their concern over such disturbances, dissident reporting of growing unrest, and attempts to significantly increase the number of Ministry of Internal Affairs units responsible for controlling civil disobedience.