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The Genesis of Ethnically Motivated Control in Russia: Keeping Watch on the Poles in the Nineteenth Century

Abstract: This paper reviews the genesis of ethnically motivated control in the nineteenth-century Russian Empire. We determined that people of Polish descent were the main target of the earliest examples of the practice of such types of control.

“Watching the Poles” differed from classic police surveillance and was closer to more modern intelligence practices: an entire category of population, rather than specific individuals, were being controlled.

The practice was not passive either; it involved the Imperial government’s active intrusion into the private lives of people of Polish descent. This allows us to view the Empire’s attitude toward Poles as an early example of population policy and control over the Poles as one of the tools of executing this policy in practice.

Keywords: population policy, ethnically motivated control, Russian Empire, Polish question.

Ethnically motivated control¹ is a prevalent phenomenon that became especially visible after the devastating attacks on the USA and the EU and the resulting “war on terror.”

For instance, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the United States introduced compulsory registration of people from “target countries” aged 16 and over.² These people were required to share personal information and have their photo and fingerprint samples taken. The country also adopted a “voluntary” FBI interview program, which allowed the Agency to interrogate 5,000 people from countries “with a strong al Qaeda presence” ([Attorney General 2002](#)) in 2001 and 2002, and about 10,000 Iraqis in 2003 ([FBI 2003: 64](#)). In the UK, the number of searches targeting people of Asian descent on suspicion of terrorist activity increased threefold after 9/11, and fivefold after the London underground bombings of 2005. Italy and France launched police sweeps of private homes and businesses that were owned by members of ethnic minority groups. Many European nations started large-scale personal data collection and covert surveillance of certain population categories, motivated by their ethnicity and/or nationality ([Open Society Institute 2009](#)).

¹ For the purposes of this paper, we define ethnically motivated control as institutionalized practices of putting specific population categories under special scrutiny on the basis of ethnicity, nationality, race, native language, religion, or citizenship. While conceptually close to ethnic profiling, this type of control covers a broader range of practices and is not limited to measures taken by law enforcement.

² Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Bahrain, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, North Korea, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, and Eritrea.

Despite a series of high-profile scandals (see, for instance, Rankin, Gillis 2018; Rachidi 2018), along with rulings by the ECHR and international proposals urging governments to abandon ethnically motivated control practices (ECRI 2004; ECRI 2007), such practices continue to exist in many countries worldwide. In particular, CERD's closing remarks issued over the past few years point out that the ethnic profiling issue still persists in the USA (CERD 2014), Switzerland (CERD 2014), Canada (CERD 2017), Russia (CERD 2017), Sweden (CERD 2018), and Japan (CERD 2018). The EU-MIDIS European study (2nd wave, 2015–2016), in turn, states that ethnic profiling is a “common reality” for EU members and is especially widespread in Austria, Italy, and Germany (FRA 2018: 3).

Research into the Issue

Ethnically motivated control has been drawing researchers' attention for more than five decades. As early as in the mid-1960s, Jerome H. Skolnick dedicated a separate chapter of his *Justice Without Trial: Law Enforcement in Democratic Society*—a work that eventually became a classic—to racial bias in the police force (Skolnick 1966). Later, research into ethnically motivated control continued in the USA and the UK (Lea 1986, Antonopoulos 2003), while not sparking a lot of interest in other countries. This changed upon the publication of several studies that used statistical data to highlight the glaring ethnic imbalance in law enforcement (see, for instance, Lamberth 1996; Verniero and Zoubek 1999; Spitzer 1999; Lansdowne 2000). The result was heated social and political debate. Research into ethnically motivated control rapidly gained popularity and spread across even those countries where such studies had previously been absent or pushed to the fringe. Consequently, it became apparent that law enforcement officers in various countries worldwide often treated people belonging to the ethnic majority and specific ethnic minorities in a dramatically different way. Among other cases, the studies pointed to a disproportionately high number of police stops and searches of African Americans in the US (Lamberth 1996), people of Caribbean descent in the UK (Bowling and Phillips 2007), people of African and specifically North African descent in France (Jobard and Lévy 2009), the Roma in Hungary (Kádár and Pap 2009), people of African descent in Ireland, the Roma in Greece, people of North African descent in Spain (FRA 2010: 77), and people of Caucasian and Central Asian descent in Russia (YURIKS 2006).

A recent study of the currently available documentary sources that contain official orders to engage in ethnically motivated control, as well as descriptions of relevant control practices, has revealed that ethnically motivated control practices are not only institutionalized but are presented as an official duty imposed on law enforcement officers by their superiors (Grigor'eva 2019). And as such orders tend to be linked to specific political events (armed conflicts, terror attacks, high-profile crimes, etc.), it appears that the imposition of ethnically motivated control stems not from ethnic prejudice as such³ but rather from a very particular understanding of political needs, with “common sense” being used as a justification.

³ Otherwise, special control would have been extended to any and all ethnic groups that are subject to prejudice.

The existence of recurring ethnically motivated control practices in various countries worldwide—which are explained away by the generally accepted mentality (“common sense”)—allows us to view ethnically motivated control as a social institution. And since any social institution is a product of history, understanding it would be impossible without first considering the historical process that led to its genesis.

This paper is dedicated to how the earliest ethnically motivated control practices originated and functioned in the Russian Empire. To avoid any anachronism, we would like to emphasize that such control can only be described as “ethnically motivated” very loosely, as the notion of ethnicity during that period was different from the modern concept and, apart from other elements, encompassed religious denomination and social status.

Description of the Research

The timeline of our research is based on the assumption that ethnically motivated control could not have originated before the late eighteenth century, as in the pre-national period, ethnicity was not considered an important distinctive feature of individuals or groups.

Empiric data for the study was derived from archival sources, both published and unpublished. We accessed unpublished sources at the Russian State Archive of Ancient Documents (RGADA) and the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF). We found the largest number of archival sources that contained information about early ethnically motivated control practices at Section 109 of the GARF (materials related to the Third Department of His Majesty’s Own Chancellery).

After analyzing digitalized records from the archive, we discovered that people of Polish descent were the main target of ethnically motivated control in the nineteenth-century Russian Empire. Essentially, other non-Russian groups were not the subject of special surveillance interest, at least until 1911.⁴

It is important to reiterate that for the purposes of our study we defined ethnically motivated control as general control that was imposed on all Poles as a special population category. Our examples of ethnically motivated control did not include cases where individuals of Polish descent were put under targeted surveillance because they had been exposed while committing, or were suspected of committing, a specific crime (including participation in an uprising or any other type of anti-government activity that was criminalized under Imperial law).

Why Poles?

Researchers are unanimous in their opinion that the “Polish question” was of paramount importance to the nineteenth-century Russian Empire. However, any attempts to resolve the issue only exacerbated it further, giving rise to new national “questions” (including the

⁴ On November 17, 1911, the Ministry of Internal Affairs issued Memorandum No. 63021, which was addressed to governors, mayors, and the Warsaw Chief of Police, and instructed them to ensure that their monthly reports on the sentiment of the general public include, among other things, specific mentions of the attitudes of the non-Russian population (*Tsirkulyar... 1911*).

“Ukrainian question” and the “Lithuanian question”), which would later play a significant role in the Empire’s collapse.

On the one hand, the focus on the “Polish question” was determined by specific political circumstances: the Polish uprisings, the Polish revolutionaries’ involvement in anti-government conspiracies, and international approval and the support of foreign governments for the Polish national movement, made Russian emperors and a significant share of Imperial officials doubt the Polish subjects’ loyalty. On the other hand, the new official rhetoric, which starting from the 1830s was molded into “official nationalism,” contributed significantly to suspiciousness toward any and all Poles by definition.⁵ The process of building Russia as a nation was accompanied by the creation of the myth of Russian Autocracy (Wortman 2004), where Poland and its people were assigned the role of Russian statehood’s “eternal enemy,” threatening its very existence. In this context, working out the “Polish question” became a matter of existential importance. And putting Poles under special scrutiny grew to be a vital element of this work, as it both allowed the state to evaluate its policy of “improving the population quality” in what used to be the Commonwealth (Rzeczpospolita), and served as a foundation for designing new, more efficient control measures.

What Makes a Pole?

Historical literature lacks a consolidated opinion on which particular population group was described as Poles (or “Polacks,” currently an ethnic slur) in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. Certain researchers believe that, at least until the 1860s, the term “Pole” was largely synonymous with “Catholic,” that is, almost exclusively defined by a religious denomination (Gorizontov 1999). According to a different point of view, the concept of “Poles” included intricately intertwined religious, social, political, and ethnic components. For instance, in his article “Polyak v imperskom politicheskom leksikone” (“The Pole in the Imperial Political Lexicon”), Mikhail D. Dolbilov states that the “Polish nation” mentioned in government documents during the reign of Catherine the Great meant, first and foremost, the Polish *szlachta*, or gentry. Later on, in Imperial Russia, the concept of Poles, while retaining its social implications, also gained political connotations, and the “Polack” slur would sometimes be used to describe anyone who stood against the government, regardless of ethnicity. This continued until the 1870s; afterwards, the term gained a more neutral use, referring to a specific ethnicity and culture, and eventually came to include Polish commoners as well (Dolbilov 2012). At the same time, Anna A. Komzolova points out that until the mid-nineteenth century, it was very common for Russian statistical studies to universally apply the “Polish” denominator to all people who lived in the Rzeczpospolita; in other words, the key criterion was the place of birth rather than anything else. The situation changed only in the latter half of the 1850s, when General Staff officers collected statistics on the northwestern region, including information on the so-called tribal composition of the local population. This data was later used to prove that the region was mostly populated by “Polonized” Russians and Lithuanians rather than actual Poles (Komzolova 2008).

⁵ As the first example of “official nationalism,” B. Anderson cites Uvarov’s Triad (Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality), introduced in 1832. (Anderson 2016: 161)

In the later eighteenth- and nineteenth-century archival documents containing information on “watching the Poles,” we find various criteria of what constitutes a Pole. The most widespread criterion, as far as we can deduce from the preserved documents, was place of birth. Religious denomination was also fairly popular. But along with this, “Polish-sounding” last names and use of the Polish language were also taken into account.

Can “Watching the Poles” Be Viewed as Ethnically Motivated Control?

The lack of clarity in defining the concept of Poles in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century raises a question: can we really consider “watching the Poles” to be a form of ethnically motivated control, even after making allowances for certain facts? Or was this phenomenon based on a different principle (religious, social, territorial)? Analysis of archival documents shows that “Pole” and “a person born in Poland” were often viewed as interchangeable concepts. This does not imply, however, that the entire population of the former Rzeczpospolita looked exactly the same to the people who were giving and following orders about “watching the Poles,” or that this population was lumped into a single category without question. Some of the evidence in favor of the above includes the doubts regarding such a sweeping approach expressed by various Russian officials. For instance, in 1831, V.V. Levashov, the Civil Governor of Volhynia, received an order to desist from issuing passports for entering St. Petersburg to any of the locals without first notifying the Third Department of His Majesty’s Own Chancellery (hereinafter referred to as the Third Department). Rather confused by the order, he deemed it necessary to ask whether “this Prohibition extends to all persons that currently dwell in Volhynia, such as Russians, especially officials, men and women also, or does it merely concern the Poles?” (Pis’mo... 1831: 12). The letter that Levashov received in response is just as notable: he was permitted to oversee the issue of passports to male Russians and any women at his own discretion, only notifying the Third Department of passports issued to male Poles.

The notion of Catholic faith as one of the defining characteristics of the Poles was quite widespread among the general Russian populace and government officials alike. Nevertheless, it would be a great oversimplification to believe that “Pole” and “Catholic” were identical concepts. The documents with orders and reports on “watching the Poles” rarely mention being Catholic as a separate criterion for singling someone out for surveillance. Being Catholic mostly served as an additional parameter, alongside place of birth. Furthermore, as we analyze the mutual links between the notions of being a Pole and being a Catholic, we must bear in mind both that the religious aspect could replace the national and vice versa (Dolbilov 2013).

The social principle, as far as documentary sources tell us, was almost completely inapplicable to “watching the Poles.” At least, reports on imposing special control over Poles and people who were originally from Poland mention people from different social groups. For instance, the list of Poles residing in St. Petersburg that was compiled by the Imperial capital’s chief of police in 1831 includes noblemen, members of the *szlachta* (gentry), landowners, common citizens, retired officers, as well as Poles with “no title” and “those whose occupation in the city is not known” (Spiski polyakov... 1831: 178–192).

Overall, when following orders regarding surveillance of Poles or people of Polish descent, Imperial officials often relied on a combination of criteria (place of birth and religion, place of birth and a Polish-sounding last name, etc.) rather than a single one. This allows us to define the Empire's control over Poles as a practice that was based not solely on the territorial, religious, or ethnic principle, but on a range of combinations of the above.⁶

At the same time, it is worth mentioning that the modern concept of ethnically motivated control is also very broad. In addition to ethnicity (actual or assumed), it also encompasses a number of other reasons for controlling people, such as skin color, language, religion, and nationality (ECRI No. 11). Furthermore, ethnically motivated control includes both control over people from certain target countries and control over people from specific regions (in cases where the relevant region's ethnic and/or religious denomination differs substantially from that in the rest of the country). That is to say, the modern perception of ethnically motivated control is actually based on a complex blend of underlying criteria rather than the purely ethnic principle; we believe that this allows us to draw certain parallels with Imperial Russia's surveillance over Poles.

Surveillance Then and Now: Is There Continuity?

There is also another vital methodological question: Is it possible to make a comparison between the nineteenth-century surveillance practices and modern high-tech surveillance? As rightly noted by some researchers, the far-reaching proliferation of surveillance in modern countries and the astounding capabilities for monitoring common citizens through the Internet, cell phones, and bank-card activity, make us believe that control over civilians in times of peace is a fairly recent phenomenon (Skouvig 2017, Weller 2012). But in fact surveillance experts agree that this perception is false: the history of surveillance is far longer than it might appear at first glance. For instance, sociologists believe that modern surveillance emerged in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, and link the birth of the phenomenon to the ideas of the Enlightenment, the development of nation states and government bureaucracies, the Industrial Revolution, and the rise of capitalism (Giddens 1990; Foucault 1975). Historians, on the other hand, delve even deeper, claiming that surveillance practices reminiscent of what we see today could be found as early as in the sixteenth century (Higgs 2004). They do note, however, that it was in the late eighteenth century that political and social surveillance saw a fundamental shift in its development: it became more organized, formal, and centralized, gradually transforming into the modern bureaucratic surveillance system (Weller 2012). Therefore, the turn of the nineteenth century is a more or less universally accepted reference point for the genesis of the centralized, structured, and regular surveillance practices that would later on grow into the omnipresent surveillance system that exists today.

Obviously, to say that surveillance in the Russian Empire is the direct counterpart of surveillance in modern Russia would be incorrect, as the technical capabilities of today's

⁶ A separate research issue that is not covered in this paper is the development of Polish identity. Readers interested in the subject may consult a classical work by Tadeusz Łepkowski, *Polska — Narodziny Nowoczesnego Narodu* (Łepkowski 2003).

surveillance systems are simply incomparable to what existed in the nineteenth century. The substantial differences between nineteenth-century and modern social and political climates, legal systems, and notions of acceptable norms are also quite evident.

Nevertheless, there are elements that link the surveillance practices of Imperial and modern Russia, pointing to continuity between the two: first, the government-sanctioned, deliberate, regular, and formal nature of the surveillance; and second, the fact that such surveillance targets a whole category of the population that is deemed untrustworthy simply by virtue of its ancestry.

The First Special Orders to “Watch over the Poles”

It is very likely that the earliest order to put the Poles under special scrutiny came from Catherine the Great, who issued a mandate in 1789 addressed to Peter D. Yeropkin, the Moscow Commander-in-Chief. The mandate contained an instruction to order the city’s chief of police “as convenient, and with no public disturbance, [to] make a list of all the Poles that do reside there in the Capital, with note of whence they came, since when they dwell there, and of their affairs also,” and subsequently to “observe, most diligently and yet discreetly, how they behave”⁷ (*Reskripty... 1789: 1*). Yeropkin provided the Empress with a list of all the Poles currently residing in Moscow,⁸ as well as excerpts from the chief of police’s comments about them over the course of the same year, 1789. That said, this mandate was probably a stand-alone occurrence, as no other such documents could be found until the very end of Catherine’s reign.

During the reign of Paul I, there appeared to be no special decrees on putting Poles under surveillance (although there were a number of orders to tighten the control over people from France and Switzerland, which later extended to all foreign subjects).

When Alexander I came to power, however, the mandates on “watching the Poles” emerged again. For instance, on March 24,⁹ 1812, the Emperor issued a secret order to the Minister of Police and the civil governors of the regions that bordered on the Duchy of Warsaw and the Austrian Empire, with instructions to “watch, as closely as possible, the Poles and Jews as they move from place to place” (*Ukaz Aleksandra I... 1812: 1*). Another curious order is dated 1815 and comes from Prince Michael Andreas Barclay de Tolly, general field marshal and Commander-in-Chief of the 1st Army, who demanded that the addressees—the military governors of the border regions (*guberniyas*)—“secretly and closely” watch over the Polish officers and rank and file that served in France (*Spisok s kopii... 1815: 1b*). The governors of the border *guberniyas*,¹⁰ in turn, forwarded the Prince’s orders to their subordinates. The civil governor of Vitebsk was particularly zealous and, upon receiving the above instructions from the military governor of Belarus, made an order of his own: “before any person whatsoever of the Polish Nation sends a letter into foreign lands, or into

⁷ A similar order was also given in relation to the French. Both documents stemmed from the Empress’s fear of revolutionary ideas, which the Poles and the French were suspected of harboring, becoming more widespread.

⁸ There were 25 people on the list, belonging to various social groups (interestingly enough, only two of them were part of the *szlachta*—the gentry). Their faith was not indicated.

⁹ April 5, 1812, on the Gregorian calendar.

¹⁰ I.e., regions along the border with the Duchy of Warsaw and the Austrian Empire.

the *Guberniyas* that were previously Polish, or into the Duchy of Courland also, the seals on such letters must be opened” (*Kopiya s sekretnogo... 1815: 6*); he also wanted to be notified immediately if the content of the letters was found to be dubious. It must be mentioned, however, that the order was subsequently withdrawn due to difficulties with putting it into practice: the post-office workers in Vitebsk were not trained in the art of postal censorship; it was hard to tell whether the sender was Polish or not; and rumors of letters being opened would have made the secret inspections public.

In spite of these separate instructions to put Poles under special scrutiny, it appears that surveillance over this population group did not become widespread, much less institutionalized, until the Polish uprising of 1830–1831, which caused a steep surge in the number of such orders. Less than a month after the uprising began, Alexander von Benckendorff, the chief of Imperial gendarmes and the head of the Third Department, ordered information to be collected on all the Poles living in St. Petersburg. His secret agents were tasked with spying on the Poles who were staying in the capital. Meanwhile, the Emperor prohibited the governors of the Polish regions from issuing passports for traveling to St. Petersburg to anyone without notifying the Third Department in advance. The notification was to include detailed information on “the person who expresses his desire to travel to yon capital and the nature of his affairs therein” (*Otnosheniye... 1831: 1*). If any Russian subjects that were originally from the Congress Kingdom of Poland or from the *guberniyas* annexed from Poland were returning from abroad, the Emperor’s decree dictated that they be detained at the border, have their passports confiscated, and be sent to the interim military governor of Volhynia and Podolsk; they would not be allowed to enter Russia without the governor’s permission (*Pis’mo A.Kh. Benkendorfu 1831: 16*). Furthermore, people from the *guberniyas* annexed from Poland were not allowed to become civil servants in the capital without the Emperor’s personal permission. The government ministries and departments were instructed to make lists of their employees from Polish *guberniyas*, complete with statements on their “moral and social conduct” (*Predpisaniiye A.Kh. Benkendorfa... 1831: 1*). This secret instruction was written by Alexander von Benckendorff and sent to the following officials: Georg Ludwig Cancrin, the Minister of Finance; P.M. Volkonsky, the Minister of the Imperial Court; V.P. Kochubey, the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers; A.I. Chernyshyov, head of the Grand Staff; K.V. Nesselrode, the Minister of Foreign Affairs; A.S. Menshikov, head of the Naval Staff; P.S. Meshchersky, head prosecutor of the Holy Synod; A.A. Zakrevsky, the Minister of the Interior; Charles Christophe von Lieven, the Minister of National Education; A.N. Golitsyn, the Chief Director of the Post Service; A.A. Württemberg, the Chief Director of the Transportation Service; D.V. Dashkov, Superintendent of the Ministry of Justice; A.Z. Khitrovo, the State Controller; N.I. Demidov, the Chief Director of Cadet Corps; N.M. Longuinov, the State Secretary of the Petition Committee; G.I. Villamov, the State Secretary of Empress Alexandra Fedorovna; D.N. Bludov, the Superintendent of the Foreign Faiths Department; P.K. Essen, the military governor of St. Petersburg; K.I. Opperman, the Chief Director of Engineering Department; and M.M. Speransky, the Active Privy Councilor. The Third Department received the lists requested continuously from April to September 1831. The sheer scale of this operation reflected just how concerned the Emperor and the chief of gendarmes felt about people of Polish origin. This feeling, which lingered even after the Polish uprising was crushed, was

caused not only by the internal armed conflict itself but also by the role that Poles were assigned within the concept of Russian statehood.

The Inclusion of Poles in the Myth of Russian Autocracy

Negative references to Poles in the official political discourse date back to Catherine the Great's reign. We know that when the Empress gave instructions to Jacob von Sievers, Russian Ambassador to the Rzeczpospolita, she referred to Poles as a "fickle" and "frivolous" nation, inclined to be "lecherous and wild as the French" and filled with "malice and hatred" toward the people of the Russian Empire. Bearing in mind that such a disparaging description was soon translated into the language of "specific political moves," researchers conclude that it served as justification for associating Poles with revolutionary threat, treason, and scheming—a notion that persisted throughout the nineteenth century (Dolbilov, Miller 2006: 71).

During the reign of Tsar Nicholas, the perception of Poles as a threat to political security reemerged in a completely new light after their inclusion in the concept of Russian statehood. Following the Decembrist revolt, the Russian monarchy was redefined as a monarchy *sui generis*, a sacred, inviolable institution borne directly out of the Russian people's natural predisposition to be governed by an autocratic ruler (Wortman 2002: 362). This concept required symbolic validation. Soon, the historical unity of the Emperor and his people began to be depicted through officially approved, idealized stories about Kuzma Minin and Dmitri Pozharsky's liberation movement against the Poles, and about the heroic Ivan Susanin, who sacrificed himself to save Mikhail Romanov, the forefather of the Russian ruling house, from the Polish invaders. Established under Nicholas I, this tradition was maintained by his successors as well. In other words, the officially accepted myth of Russian statehood painted Poles as the historical enemy of the Russian people and the Russian monarchy and thus could not fail to influence perception of this population category by the rest of Imperial subjects,¹¹ government officials, and the Emperors themselves. Evidently, this bias against Poles was reflected in real-life policy.¹²

Another strong contribution to forming the perception of the "Polish question" as an existential problem that could potentially influence the stability and very preservation of Russian statehood also doubtless came from the "patriotic" essays of the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The Second Polish Uprising and the Intensification of Special Surveillance over Poles

In the mid-1850s, the surveillance over Poles became somewhat more lax, reflecting the official policy during the early years of Alexander II's reign, which was aimed at finding a compromise with the Polish elite. This policy included the simplification of the special

¹¹ For a more detailed analysis of how Russians formed their Polish stereotypes, please consult works by E. Giza, A. Kępiński, G. Orłowski, and M. Dolbilov (Giza 1993; Kępiński 1990; Orłowski 1992; Dolbilov 2005)

¹² As shown by R. Wortman in his studies, the myth of Russian statehood had a direct impact on both the mentality and actions of Russian emperors and their advisors (Wortman 2002, 2004).

inspection procedure that had been established in 1831 and targeted people from the Western *guberniyas* traveling to St. Petersburg. Starting from 1856, civil governors of the Empire's western region were allowed to issue passports to travelers headed for St. Petersburg without special permission from the military governors, and reports to the Third Department now concerned only those travelers whose political loyalties were found to be highly questionable. However, the early 1860s saw unrest in the Congress Kingdom of Poland, which was then followed by another uprising in 1863–1864; this not only prompted a return to the previous practices, but also caused these practices to become more advanced and widespread.

New orders to make lists of Poles and people of Polish origin began to reemerge over the same period. In 1861, Prince V.A. Dolgorukov, the new head of the Third Department (*Pis'mo V.A. Dolgorukova... 1861: 12*) requested lists of enrolled and non-enrolled students from the Congress Kingdom of Poland and the Polish *guberniyas* who were attending classes at the St. Petersburg, Tartu, Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Kazan universities (*Imennyye spiski studentov... 1861*). And in 1863, A.E. Timashev, military governor of Kazan, Perm, and Vyatka, requested lists of government officials who were originally from the Congress Kingdom of Poland and the Polish *guberniyas* and were currently employed in the Vyatka *guberniya*, as well as lists of people from the Polish *guberniyas* who were currently living in the Vyatka *guberniya* under police surveillance (*Raport... 1863: 21–40*). Timashev also ordered special record books to be compiled that indicated the total number of Poles living in the Vyatka, Kazan, and Perm *guberniyas* (*Predpisaniye A.Ye. Timasheva... 1863: 16*). In 1864, M.N. Muravyov, the governor general of Vilnius, issued a memorandum that requested lists of Polish civil servants currently employed in the northwestern *guberniyas*. The lists included notes on how trustworthy the civil servants were and classified them into two categories: those who could be allowed to continue serving, and those who needed to be replaced by ethnic Russians (*Muravyov 1866: 25–26*). In 1866, V.A. Dolgorukov requested lists of all persons of Polish origin who were residing in the Ostsee (Baltic) region (*Spiski lits pol'skogo... 1866*).

Surveillance of Poles who were living or staying in the Russian capital also resumed, starting from 1861. The Third Department agents made secret reports of their surveillance on an annual basis; this continued until 1873 at the very least.¹³ Similar reports also came from Moscow and other cities across the Russian Empire (*Agenturnyye zapiski... 1861–1873*).

In 1863, following an order by the aforementioned Governor General of Vilnius, Muravyov, all persons of Polish origin who were returning to the northwestern region from abroad were obligated to report personally to the respective *guberniya's* governor, stating “where precisely they intend to take up their residence, what they intend to occupy themselves with, and generally how they intend to live their life” (*Muravyov 1866: 152*). All such travelers, except for those who were known to be absolutely trustworthy, had to be searched for “outrageous brochures and other dubious written works” and correspondence with the rebels (*Muravyov 1866: 153*).

¹³ We have not found any reports bearing a later date; this, however, does not mean that they did not exist.

The year 1863 also saw the introduction of a new rule: people born in the Congress Kingdom of Poland had to personally “present themselves” to the Third Department upon arrival in St. Petersburg to “be witnessed.” This procedure remained in place at least until 1874 (*Ob adresnykh biletakh... 1874*).

Starting from the latter half of the 1860s, the Imperial authorities grew especially troubled by the presence of Polish employees in the railway transportation system; such employees were put under surveillance, and the authorities issued memoranda on compiling lists to rate their trustworthiness. One such list, dated 1867, covered all employees who were working with railway equipment on the Nikolaevskaya and Petersburg-Warsaw lines and were originally from the Congress Kingdom of Poland and western *guberniyas*; each of them was subsequently put under covert surveillance (*Agenturnyye zapiski... 1867*). In 1910, the head of the Moscow gendarmerie that was responsible for overseeing the railways requested lists of all Poles working on railway lines within the office’s jurisdiction (*Perepiska po nablyudeniuyu... 1910*).

Orders to tighten control of the “Polish element” kept appearing sporadically in different parts of the Empire throughout the 1880s and the 1890s. For instance, in 1887, the head of the gendarmerie in the Suwałki region instructed his subordinates to “observe the disposition of the Polish population more closely” (*Rasporyazheniye... 1887: 1*), while in 1895, the police department chief wrote to the mayor of Odessa, demanding that he take measures “on increasing surveillance of the Polish element residing in Odessa” (*Kopiya pis'ma... 1895: 1*).

“Watching the Poles” as a Tool of Early Population Policy

Peter Holquist makes a distinction between police surveillance of specific individuals (criminals, members of the opposition, revolutionaries) and government surveillance of the population at large, which he refers to as “*osvedomlenie*” [informing] (*Holquist 1999: 91–92*). The latter is an essential element of so-called population policy, which treats the people of the country as a subject of state control (*Holquist 1999: 85*).

As evidenced by the aforementioned instructions, as well as by reports on following such instructions, the practice of “watching the Poles” was not a matter of case-by-case surveillance but of control over an entire category of the population, which was considered untrustworthy by nature.¹⁴

It is interesting to note that the early predecessors of reports on public sentiment—which P. Holquist describes as the “classic artifacts” of the *osvedomlenie* system (*Holquist 1999: 92*), linking their origin to the 1905–1907 revolution and their widespread prevalence to the First World War—can be traced back to the 1830s, when such reports were compiled on the population of the Congress Kingdom of Poland. For example, I.O. de Witt, military governor of Warsaw, supplied the Third Department with regular reports on “the sentiments of the people in the Congress Kingdom of Poland” from the end of October of 1831 to the beginning of March of 1839 (*Doneseniya voyennogo gubernatora... 1831–1839*). After

¹⁴ That said, this form of control was also combined with the classical surveillance of specific members of the opposition and revolutionaries of Polish origin.

1839, as far as we can tell from the documents that have been preserved, this practice was abandoned. However, starting from the early 1860s, the viceroys of the Congress Kingdom of Poland (and later on, the heads of the Warsaw gendarme district) regularly wrote reports on “the political condition of the Kingdom of Poland,” featuring detailed descriptions of the sentiments among different social groups (see *Obzory politicheskogo sostoyaniya...1861–1862*; *Obzor politicheskogo... 1862–1864* and *1878*; *Politicheskiye obzory...1861–1868*; *Politicheskiye obzory... 1866–1914*; *Politicheskii obzor... 1898–1914*).

Like the *osvedomlenie* practices mentioned by Holquist, these surveillance practices were not passive; in other words, they were not limited to merely observing the Poles. Instead, they created the foundation for active government interference aimed at “improving the quality” of the population in the former *Rzeczpospolita* and the Empire overall. We can single out several strategies of such interference:

- 1) “purging” the Empire of the Poles (or at least the majority of them);
- 2) “improving the quality” of the Polish population;
- 3) removing “persons of Polish origin” from government structures, the army, the police, educational institutions, and specific regions (especially in the southwest and northwest), “improving” the demographic make-up of the former *Rzeczpospolita*.

The first strategy was limited to plans and suggestions and never executed in practice. But the very fact that it was considered speaks volumes. Nicholas I was the first to propose “purging” the Empire of Poles. Immediately after crushing the Polish uprising of 1830–1831, the Emperor felt enraged by the rebels’ persistence, and wondered if most of the Congress Kingdom of Poland, together with its disloyal population, could be removed from the Russian Empire. “I do not see any other path,” wrote the monarch in his notes on the Polish question, “but doing as follows: Announce that the honor of Russia has been satisfied in full by conquering the kingdom, but Russia has no interest in ruling over a land whose lack of gratitude was so glaring; that the true interest of the Empire dictates that we set our border along the Vistula and Narew rivers; and that Russia rejects the rest of the realm as unworthy of being owned by us, and allows our allies to do with that realm as they will” (*Schilder 1903: 349*).

A similar proposal was also made after crushing the Polish uprising of 1863–1864. It involved ceding the part of the Congress Kingdom of Poland that lay along the left bank of the Vistula River to Prussia and merging the remaining part with the western *guberniyas* of the Empire (*Dolbilov, Miller 2006: 183*).

The strategy of “improving” the Poles, in turn, was actively applied during the reign of Nicholas I. The Emperor had high hopes that education would help complete this mission (and even higher hopes for military service). Starting from the mid-1830s those young Poles who had particularly excelled in their studies were sent en masse to continue their education at universities outside the western region and the Congress Kingdom of Poland.¹⁵ After their education was complete, they were expected to work for five years in the *guberniyas* of Russia proper, and for three years in the *guberniyas* that had funded their studies. In 1852, military conscription was extended to Polish nobles, in violation of Catherine the Great’s Charter to the Gentry; they had to serve outside the former *Rzeczpospolita*. The

¹⁵ After the unsuccessful Polish uprising, universities in Vilnius and Warsaw were shut down, and until 1862, no new higher education institutions would emerge in the Congress Kingdom of Poland or in the western region.

service lasted ten years for conscripts and five years for volunteers. Those who preferred civil service were also obligated to work within Russia proper.

Special control over Poles was an important tool of “improving” the Poles; in a way, it was a type of monitoring the desired and undesired shifts in the attitudes of the Polish population. For example, after Nicholas I issued a relevant order, he started receiving regular reports on the conduct of Polish graduates of Russian universities (Gorizontov 1999: 39).

The uprising of 1863–1864 proved to the Imperial bureaucrats specializing in the “Polish question” that their attempts to Russify the Polish population had been fruitless; from then on, the attitude changed to a substantial degree. If we use Eric Lohr’s term, the Empire opted for the “demographic approach” to the national question; national identity was no longer considered pliable and possible to change—instead, it was now viewed as something set in stone (Lohr 2012: 17). Instead of individuals, the new nationalization mission targeted Imperial institutions, the demographic structure of the population, and the land ownership system of the west, which were supposed to be “purged” of Poles. As soon as 1864, on M.N. Muravyov’s recommendation, all educational institutions across the Empire imposed a 10% quota on the number of Polish students.¹⁶ A year later, the number of Poles entering military service was limited as well: from that point forward, the proportion of Poles in the army and the guard could not exceed 20%. People of Polish origin were not allowed to become gendarmes. Civil service was not free from discrimination against Poles either. The railways and post and telegraph offices were particularly severe when limiting the presence of Polish officials. Many government departments received secret memoranda that imposed acceptable percentages of Polish clerks, while some jobs became completely unavailable to Poles (Gorizontov 1999: 66). In 1865, people of Polish origin were banned from buying land in the western region. Some researchers believe that this measure was aimed at pushing Poles out of the western region of the Empire and into the Congress Kingdom of Poland, where there was no such ban (Dolbilov, Miller 2006: 213). This way, the untrustworthy “Polish element” would be gathered together within a single region, thus ridding the adjacent territories, which were presented as “truly and historically Russian,” of their presence. At the same time, the Empire also took great effort to encourage more of the “Russian element” to move from the inner *guberniyas* into the former *Rzeczpospolita*, by increasing the shares of Russian landowners and non-Polish citizens of the Orthodox faith.¹⁷ Special control over Poles continued to play a significant role during this period

¹⁶ With the exception of St. Vladimir’s University, where the “Polish element” quota was set at 20%.

¹⁷ It must be said, however, that similar measures were also extended to some other categories of the non-Russian population. For example, land purchase restrictions in the west were simultaneously imposed on people both of Polish and Jewish origin. In 1887, the enrollment of Jewish students in gymnasiums and universities was limited. In 1892, foreigners were barred from buying land in the Volhynia *Guberniya*, regardless of whether they had become Russian subjects (this measure primarily targeted German settlers). In 1902, Armenian refugees who had fled to Russia from Turkey and pledged allegiance as Russian subjects were forbidden to acquire, possess, or use land in: the Kuban region; the Black Sea *Guberniya*; the Sukhum, Batumi, and Artvin districts; and the Zugdidi, Senaki, and Ozurgeti *uyezds*. These restrictions were aimed at bolstering Russian land ownership in these regions. The “Russification” policy, which was increasingly actively implemented during the reign of Alexander III, was typical of many territories along the borders of the Russian Empire. That said, A.I. Miller rightly notes that other European states that were just as concerned about constructing their national identity—France and Britain, in particular—also implemented a largely similar policy during the same period (Miller 2000). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Russian government grew suspicious of any and all non-Russians in general, but it was the Polish population that served as the “measuring stick” for untrustworthiness. When people of non-

as well. Among other functions, it helped discover and subsequently fire Poles who were occupying job positions they were not allowed to hold, as well as to expose and eliminate Poles' attempts to buy land in the west.

Conclusions

Our study has allowed us to determine that the expansion and institutionalization of early ethnically motivated control practices in the Russian Empire began in the 1830s, with Poles being the main target.

The "Polish question" was a matter of special concern for the Russian monarchs and the Imperial bureaucrats for two reasons: on the one hand, there were specific political circumstances such as the Polish revolutionary movement, the uprisings, and the links between Polish rebels and foreign governments; on the other hand, the doctrine of "official nationalism" was shaping the myth of Russian statehood, where Poles were cast as the eternal enemy. This brought the "Polish question" to a whole new existential level; the answer to the question was directly linked to ensuring peace and prosperity in the Empire and, in fact, the Empire's very existence.

"Watching the Poles" differed from classic police surveillance in that rather than concerning certain individuals who were suspected of specific crimes, this form of control targeted an entire category of the population that had been declared "untrustworthy" by nature. The control was not passive and involved taking deliberate measures to change the demographics of the western region and the Congress Kingdom of Poland.

During the reign of Nicholas I, this was done through "improving the quality" of Polish subjects through education and military service. However, following the Polish uprising of 1863–1864, the Empire veered toward a "demographic" approach to the "Polish question": ethnic identity was now perceived as a fixed concept, and instead of influencing separate individuals, the Empire's efforts came to be centered on "improving" the demographic makeup of the western regions' population and "purging" people of Polish origin from government institutions.

The government officials' close attention to the percentages of various population categories among the residents and landowners of the former Rzeczpospolita, active attempts to "optimize" these percentages, and the notion that national security depended on these attempts, allow us to classify the above practices as an early example of population policy. And the prominent role of control at every stage of applying this population policy to Poles makes it possible to consider control as a tool of population policy.

The demographic approach to the national question would fully manifest itself later, during World War One and the Soviet period. As aptly noted by Zubov (1992), Kappeler (2000), Kaspé (2001), Lohr (2012), Holquist (2001) and other researchers, in spite of announcing that it had broken away from the Russian Empire, the USSR inherited many approaches and practices of the latter Imperial period. Ethnically motivated control was

Russian origin were suspected of being disloyal to the Empire, they were often compared to Poles, whereas the restrictions that had initially only been applicable to Poles and people born in Poland gradually began to extend to more and more population categories.

no exception. Designating specific ethnicities as “untrustworthy” and “the enemy” reached a particularly large scale in the Soviet era, and attempts to “neutralize” those ethnicities resulted, among other things, in mass deportations, which were not in fact a Soviet invention and had been practiced as early as World War One.¹⁸ Obviously, the Soviet population policy was more ambitious and far-reaching than Imperial practices, and control, including ethnically motivated control, was much more technically advanced. Nonetheless, the roots of the phenomenon lie in the nineteenth century.

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¹⁸ Not just in the Russian Empire either, but also in such countries as Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire (see Holquist 1999: 90–91).

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