

Who Wants to Leave Moscow for the West? Results of an October 1992 Survey

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In 1976, underground author Boris Khazanov wrote that his "generation has grown up with the conviction that it is as difficult to leave the Soviet Union as it is to throw a stone so high that it will not return to the earth."¹ Now, only sixteen years later, Russia may be on the verge of implementing a new emigration law that will, with few qualifications, allow people to move freely out of Russia as tourists, temporary workers and permanent emigrants.

Not surprisingly, Russian and Western observers are deeply concerned about the potential size and implications of this movement. Both sides are in principle keen to ensure freedom of movement in general and freedom of emigration in particular as a basic human right. But in practice many people in the West are afraid of a flood of immigrants at a time of economic recession and growing xenophobia. At the same time, many citizens of Russia are afraid of a brain drain—that is, the departure of large numbers of highly trained specialists.²

Based on the results of a February 1991 survey, one of the authors of this paper has estimated the emigration potential of Russia to be 4.75 to 8.90 million people. Whether or not this potential is realized depends in part on Western states' willingness to accept immigrants. His findings showed that in Russia the desire for democracy was nearly as strong as the desire for economic improvement in motivating some citizens to emigrate. And he emphasized that "it is clearly an exaggeration to characterize potential emigrants as representing sim-

ply a latent 'brain drain' since the desire to emigrate is equally strong among the better- and less well-educated."³

We will explore the brain drain question further in this article. Our analysis is based on an October 1992 telephone poll conducted in Moscow, using a randomly selected sample of 988 city residents. Overall, the margin of error for a sample this size is +/- 3.2 percent, nineteen times out of twenty.

One of the questions asked in the survey was "Is it your intention in the near future to leave for one of the developed countries of the West?" Respondents were permitted to answer yes, no or hard to say.⁴ The wording of the question was admittedly vague. Respondents who want to travel abroad for a few weeks and those who want to emigrate permanently might both be inclined to answer yes. Our interest here does not, however, lie with the total number of people who wish to leave Moscow temporarily or permanently (see Table 1).⁵

	Frequency	%	95% Confidence interval
Yes	65	6.7	+/- 1.6
Hard to say	50	5.2	+/- 1.4
No	850	88.1	+/- 2.0
Total	965	100.0	

Rather, we want to explore the social characteristics of Moscow residents who are inclined to leave the city. That will allow us to determine whether the pool of residents who want to leave represents a potential brain drain of highly educated specialists or something else. (We interpret the brain drain argument to mean that desire to leave Russia varies proportionately with the level of educational attainment.)

Consider first the distribution of intentions to leave Moscow by nationality (see Table 2).⁶ Slavic and Tatar residents of Moscow seem to be much less interested in leaving the city than Jews and others. Thus, among Slavs and Tatars, between 4 and 9 percent expressed the desire to leave. Among Jews and others, 22 to 26 percent said they wanted to leave. There is nothing surprising in this finding, although it is unclear exactly who the "others" are. The Jewish emigration movement from Russia has been in existence for over twenty years. Israel is committed to accepting as many Russian Jews as wish to settle there, while the United States, Germany, Canada and other countries are committed to accepting thousands of Russian Jews annually as well. Owing to these special circumstances, the departure of Jews is much more likely than the departure of Slavs and Tatars.

	Yes	No	Total
Other	7 (26)	21 (74)	28 (100)
Jewish	5 (22)	18 (78)	23 (100)
Belarussian	1 (9)	10 (91)	11 (100)
Russian	49 (6)	739 (94)	788 (100)
Ukrainian	2 (4)	41 (96)	43 (100)
Tatar	1 (4)	20 (96)	21 (100)
Total	65 (7)	849 (93)	914 (100)

More interesting is Table 3, which classifies intentions to leave Moscow by work status.⁷ The picture that emerges from the table is more complicated than the brain drain interpretation. Clearly, the people least likely to want to leave Moscow are pensioners, housewives and workers. Only 1 percent of these people expressed any interest in going to the West. Between 6 and 9 percent of white-collar workers (*sluzhashchii*) said

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they wished to leave Moscow for the West—6 percent among those without higher education and 9 percent among those with higher education. And fully 16 percent of students said they wanted to leave.

Table 3

Intentions to Leave Moscow by Work Status

(Weighted results; Percent in parentheses)

	Yes	No	Total
Employer	15 (30)	35 (70)	50 (100)
Unemployed	4 (23)	12 (77)	16 (100)
Student	8 (16)	42 (84)	50 (100)
White-collar with university	23 (9)	234 (91)	257 (100)
White-collar without university	9 (6)	140 (94)	149 (100)
Worker	2 (1)	149 (99)	151 (100)
Pensioner, housewife	3 (1)	237 (99)	240 (100)
Total	64 (7)	849 (93)	913 (100)

So far these results seem to favour the view that the higher one's education, the greater the desire to leave for the West. However, 23 percent of unemployed people in our sample expressed the desire to leave Moscow for the West, and most of the unemployed are not highly educated. Moreover, fully 30 percent of private employers said they wanted to leave Moscow for the West, and they are probably not particularly highly educated either. These results do not, therefore, suggest that desire to leave Moscow for the West varies proportionately with educational attainment. Instead, our data suggest that the people who want to leave tend to believe they cannot fulfil their potential in Russia—and they are not just or even primarily people with higher education.

Table 4

Intentions to Leave Moscow by Sector of Employment

(Weighted results; Percent in parentheses)

	Yes	No	Total
State	22 (5)	413 (95)	435 (100)
Mixed	4 (9)	37 (91)	41 (100)
Private	24 (18)	107 (82)	131 (100)
Total	50 (8)	557 (92)	607 (100)

Tables 4 and 5 support our interpretation. We asked our respondents to identify the economic sector in which they were employed.⁸ Table 4 shows that people employed exclusively in the private sector were more than 3.5 times more likely to want to leave Moscow than people employed exclusively in the state sector (18 percent as compared to 5 percent). People employed in both sectors expressed an intermediate level of desire to leave for the West. We may infer that people who want to leave Moscow are inclined to favour privatization of property, and the slow pace of privatization increases the desire of some people to leave Moscow.

We also asked our respondents whether they felt that Russia needs a strong leader to stabilize the economic and political situation.⁹ As Table 5 indicates, people who disagreed with the need for a strong leader are 2.5 times more likely to want to leave for the West than those who agree with the need for a strong leader (16 as compared to 6 percent). People who said they did not care whether Russia had a strong leader expressed an intermediate level of desire to leave for the West. We may infer that people who want to leave Moscow tend to be democrats, and the slow pace of democratization increases the desire of some people to leave Moscow.

Table 5

Intentions to Leave Moscow by Desire for Strong Leader

(Weighted results; Percent in parentheses)

	Yes	No	Total
Agree	43 (6)	666 (94)	709 (100)
Don't care	3 (12)	20 (88)	23 (100)
Disagree	16 (16)	85 (84)	101 (100)
Total	62 (7)	771 (93)	833 (100)

In sum, the results of our survey show that it is an oversimplification to characterize the desire of some Moscow residents to leave for the West as a brain drain. To be sure, there are highly educated people among those who wish to leave, but there are also many among those who wish to leave who are not so highly educated. They tend to be liberals and democrats. It follows that an accelerated pace of reform is the best way to

decrease the desire of Moscow residents to leave for the West.¹⁰ ■

Notes

1. Boris Khazanov, "Novaya Rossiya," *Vremya i my* 9 (1976): 135-45.
2. For a good review of this problem, see Sarah Helmstadter, "The Russian Brain Drain in Perspective," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Special Report* (August 18, 1992).
3. Robert J. Brym, "The Emigration Potential of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland and Russia: Recent Survey Results," *International Sociology* 7, no. 4 (1992): 387-95. The quotation is on p. 393.
4. "Est' li u vas namerenie v blizhayshchee vremya vyekhat' v odnu iz razvitykh stran zapada? (da, est'; nyet; zatrudnyayus' otvetit')."
5. We deleted all respondents under the age of eighteen from our analysis. Moreover, we report weighted results to reflect the age and sex distribution of the Moscow population. Because of this, as well as the fact that some respondents did not answer some questions, the totals in tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 do not equal 988.
6. Respondents were asked to state their nationality. The permitted responses were a) Russian, b) Ukrainian, c) Tatar, d) Jewish, e) Belarussian or f) other nationality.
7. Respondents were asked to state their occupation. The permitted responses were a) worker, b) white-collar worker with middle school education, c) white-collar worker with higher education, d) employer, e) businessman, f) a pensioner who is not working, g) housewife, h) student or i) unemployed.
8. Respondents were asked if they worked in a state or nonstate enterprise. The permitted responses were a) in a state enterprise, b) in an enterprise with a nonstate form of property or c) in an enterprise with a mixed form of property.
9. Respondents were asked "The opinion has emerged that for the stabilization of the economic and political situation in Russia there is a need for a strong leader. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this opinion?" The permitted responses were a) agree, b) inclined to agree, c) don't care, d) inclined to disagree or e) disagree.
10. We conducted a multiple regression analysis of desire to leave for the West. With 553 respondents providing valid responses, we discovered that $Y = 2.33 + .07(X1) + .10(X2) - .09(X3) - .07(X4)$, where Y = intention to leave for the West, X1 = work status, X2 = nationality, X3 = desire for a strong leader and X4 = sector of employment. All independent variables are statistically significant at the .05 probability level, and the entire equation predicts 9.3 percent of the variation in the desire to leave Moscow for the West. Age, income, marital status and gender were not statistically significant predictors of desire to leave for the West, net of the variables in our regression equation.