

State violence and target group adaptation: Maintaining social status in the face of repressions in Soviet Russia

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journals.sagepub.com/home/jpr**Tomila V Lankina***International Relations Department, London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)***Alexander Libman***Osteuropa Institut, Freie Universität Berlin***Katerina Tertychnaya***Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford*

Abstract

How does state-led repression targeting communities influence the social reproduction of victimized groups? Although several excellent studies have explored the sociopolitical consequences of a broad set of conflict-trauma legacies, notably, communal, religious and kinship drivers of responses to state violence, few researchers have explored the mechanisms of social status preservation under violence. The omission of class and social status from conflict research is puzzling considering that millions of people from Cambodia to China and from Russia to Hungary have suffered from state-led violence that targeted entire social groups and communities – from monks and priests with privileged positions in the social hierarchies, to the aristocracy and bourgeoisie. To generate theory about the mechanisms of social submission, adaptation or resistance in the face of group-based repressions, we explored the effects of Soviet repressions on the survival choices and reproduction of the Tzarist educated strata. For our analysis, we deployed subnational data on repressions and social structure and combined this with novel survey evidence and archival sources. We found that, contrary to conventional wisdom, repressions did not prevent the Imperial educated estates from engaging in habitual status- and identity-enhancing pursuits. Throughout the Soviet period, these groups continued to aspire to higher education and professional achievement. What is more, we show that continuity in pursuits was more common in places with more extensive repressions and a larger ‘stock’ of pre-Revolutionary middle classes. We propose that in-group social bonding and permissive political opportunities facilitated social adaptation. Our findings contribute to conflict and social resilience literature.

Keywords

communism, repressions, Russia, social structure, value transmission, violence

Introduction

How does state violence influence targeted groups’ social reproduction? Existing scholarship has grappled with the sociopolitical consequences of conflict-trauma legacies. We have excellent studies on the communal, religious and kinship drivers of responses to state violence (Blaydes, 2018). There are also works on the effects of violence on social identities, norms (Bellows & Miguel,

2009; Nunn & Wantchekon, 2011; Balcells, 2012; Voors et al., 2012; Grosjean, 2014) and on political attitudes and behaviour (Blattman, 2009; Mikhailova, 2012; Getmansky & Zeitzoff, 2014; Kapelko & Markevich, 2014; Rozenas, Schutte & Zhukov, 2017; Zhukov &

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Talibova, 2018). Yet, we have yet to unpack the long-term implications of state-led violence for communities' adaptation, and for their ability to transmit their core values.

Many studies of community adaptations to violence have researched settings of ethnic or confessional strife rather than those related to social status preservation. The omission of class and social status from conflict research is puzzling considering that millions of people from Cambodia (Harris, 2013) to China (Parish, 2010) and from Russia (Fitzpatrick, 2005; Lankina, 2022) to Hungary (Mark, 2005) have suffered from state-led violence that targeted entire social groups and communities – from monks and priests, to the aristocracy and bourgeoisie. The question of whether state-led violence succeeds in obliterating some of the best educated strata is also non-trivial from the perspective of scholarship, which has placed the middle classes at the heart of debates about democracy and development (Lipset, 1959; Moore, 1993; Ansell & Samuels, 2014). Furthermore, education and, relatedly, opportunities to pursue occupations and enterprise autonomously from the state are important predictors of political preference when states liberalize (Gerber, 2001; Gerber & Hout, 2004; Chen, 2013; Lankina & Libman, 2021; Rosenfeld, 2021).

We identify three broad stylized sets of plausible group responses to repression: collective submission; 'living as before' – social reproduction as if nothing happened; and 'living as before using adaptive and compensatory tactics'. We also discuss two sets of factors that influence these paths. The first concerns group agency. Building on existing work, we propose that social reproduction is more likely when groups had a sense of shared in-group identity prior to repression; experiences of repression may reinforce this. In-group 'banding' may help targeted groups cope with threats and encourage value transmission. The second factor concerns political opportunities that shape individuals' ability to reproduce group status. Splits within the ruling elites, state weakness or the intensity of redistributive threats can shape the likelihood of each path.

We explore arguments focusing on the long-term effects of Stalinist repressions on the social reproduction of what we term the Imperial educated estates (*sosloviya*, hereafter EEs),¹ a group that united priests, aristocrats, merchants, the urban petit bourgeoisie and rural

entrepreneurs (Lankina & Libman, 2021). What set this group – also called 'former people' – apart was their superior education in a peasant and illiterate country. Before the Revolution, these groups also joined the modern professions in droves. In the early Soviet period, the authorities targeted these and several other groups like the wealthy peasants. Many of them experienced repressions directly. Either members of immediate families were shot, arrested or deported, or they themselves suffered exile and time in a Gulag. Far greater numbers of victims lived on, but under the shadow of ideological hostility as a group and fear of terror (Bahry & Silver, 1987).² Our preoccupation is not with these groups' involvement in the Civil War (1917–1922). Rather, we study whether ordinary people were able to preserve their core group values during the dark years of terror and after. We focus on social resilience and reproduction, as proxied by educational attainment and choice of profession.

We rely on rich qualitative and quantitative data. For the purpose of theory building we draw on the Harvard archive of interviews with Soviet wartime refugees conducted in the late 1940s to early 1950s (Inkeles & Bauer, 1959; Prendergast, 2017), coupled with evidence from archives and memoirs. The Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System (THPSSS) asked respondents about their social origins before the Revolution, about education and life trajectories thereafter.³ Respondents were mainly individuals who found themselves behind enemy lines as Nazi forces advanced during the Second World War, or who fled the violence. Next, we present subnational data on (i) the share of Imperial middle-class groups from the 1897 census; (ii) Soviet repressions between 1921 and 1959; and (iii) Soviet and post-Soviet education. Auxiliary analysis using outcomes such as entrepreneurial activities is shown in Online appendix D 2. Finally, we assemble original survey evidence where respondents recall family histories across the Imperial, Soviet and post-Soviet years. Jointly, the different datasets allow us to explore the complex mechanisms of social reproduction that we would be unable to discern relying on either data source separately.

We found that, contrary to conventional wisdom, Stalinist repressions did not prevent the Imperial

¹ Online appendix C extensively discusses the designation of Imperial EE.

² We use the terms Imperial bourgeoisie/middle class/educated estates interchangeably.

³ We are aware of the limitations of the Harvard project, notably the potential issues with self-selection of emigres and the geographic origin of respondents. We discuss these in detail in Online appendix A.

educated strata from engaging in habitual status and identity-enhancing pursuits. Continuity was facilitated by in-group banding and permissive political opportunities like leadership conflicts and change. Continuity in educational pursuits was more common in places with more extensive repressions and a larger stock of pre-Revolutionary middle classes. Additional analysis suggests that members of the Imperial educated groups made employment choices that were status-preserving but simultaneously aimed at maximizing their survival and well-being. Individuals and their offspring, for example, opted for non-ideologically tarnished professions that helped them avoid Communist Party membership. They also switched back to habitual entrepreneurial pursuits when the deterrent effect of threats subsided, reverting to the ‘living as before’ choices that they would have normally made (we show this in Online appendix D). Broadly, the findings imply that group targeting may have enhanced pre-existing identities, aiding group reproduction and survival (see, e.g. Blaydes, 2018).

Our focus on Soviet repressions of the Imperial EEs delineated how far our insights could travel. We studied one type of state-led, sustained violence against individuals based on group membership. Driving this type of violence were imperatives of a specific type of social engineering; its purpose was to deprive groups of access to state institutions and opportunities, or to ‘re-educate’ them. We anticipated findings to travel to other communist revolutionary states that engaged in this type of violence in the name of their ideology. Yet, the type of repression we studied is distinct from violence that aims to eradicate groups. Episodes of genocide, for example, that aim to physically exterminate populations, or to ‘cleanse’ territories of a given ethnic or religious group fall beyond the scope of our argument.

Theorizing and empirical study of social groups’ responses to repressions

Although not directly preoccupied with resilience in social structure, scholarship offers insights for developing theory on individual and group behaviour in a repressive environment. Recent work points to responses that range from complete disruption to successful social reproduction. At one extreme, the imperative of physical survival could be so acute as to lead groups to entirely abandon inertial behaviours. Albeit originating in the analysis of the process of political group resignation, which is distinct from the focus of our study, a useful metaphor for this tactic is ‘collective submission’: the process by which a group surrenders its fate and ensures submission to

another actor (Ermakoff, 2008). This scenario is in fact assumed in many studies of the fate of ‘former people’ after the Bolshevik Revolution and was prevalent before archives opened in the 1990s and memoirs of the survivors came to light (Timasheff, 1946). Another literature however suggests that violence may indirectly contribute to the resilience of communities with strong bonds among members prior to repression. Trauma could lead to prosocial behaviours (Bellows & Miguel, 2009; Blattman, 2009; Voors et al., 2012) and engender altruistic acts of giving and trust-based transactions (Gilligan, Pasquale & Samii, 2014; see also Berman, Clarke & Majed, 2023).

Beyond immediate acts of community solidarity when a group is under threat, what do we know about the ways in which social groups persevere in transmitting values and practices? The concept of ‘crypto-morality’ – ‘the secret adherence to one morality when practicing another in public’ (Greif & Tadelis, 2010) – encapsulates the attempts to safeguard the values of a community in the face of grave threats, and historically tried-and-tested tactics insulating it from the pressures to acquire another set of values. One example is the survival strategy of Jews in medieval Spain. The practice of crypto-Judaism emerged after the anti-Jewish riots of 1391. Later, during the Inquisition that lasted centuries, it was considered acceptable for Jews to convert to Catholicism to save lives and thereby serve the longer-term goal of group preservation. Jews would become public Christians but continue to practice their faith and reaffirm their Jewish identity in private (Greif & Tadelis, 2010). Such adaptations are consistent with ethnographic observations of marginalized communities. Writing about peasant resistance, Scott discusses ‘silences of contempt’ – subtle rebellion against prevailing orders or authority – masked behind ‘carefully calculated conformity’ in public life (Scott, 1985: xvii). And, as one Buddhist monk in Cambodia recalled about surviving under the Khmer Rouge: ‘When we were ordered to disrobe, we just did that so we could survive’. He then added that ‘he continued to practice his religion in secret’.⁴

Other studies alert us to shifts in political opportunity structures (POs), broadly defined as the ‘constellation of resources and institutions that encourage or prevent individuals from engaging in action and mobilizing resistance’ (e.g. Gleditsch & Ruggeri, 2010). Changes

⁴ <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/buddhist-monks-disrobed-survive-khmer-rouge>

in states' coercive capacity or in the intensity of redistributive threats (Rozenas & Zhukov, 2019), as well as power shifts or in-fighting between the ruling elites (Beissinger, 2022) may facilitate social reproduction. As Rozenas & Zhukov (2019) found, for example, in Soviet Ukraine, individuals feigned loyalty when the threat of retribution was high but reverted to behaviours that signalled disloyalty when it diminished. Shifts in behaviours under changed political contexts corroborate group adaptivity in response to the shocks of repression and their easing.

Just like antiregime grievances and awareness of victimization (Lawrence, 2017), group-specific aspirations and values may be transmitted within a single and across multiple generations. Through family interactions, children learn about the social status of their ancestors and absorb expectations about education or professional choices (Lupu & Peisakhin, 2017). Social identities and knowledge about the past are also transmitted indirectly, as when memorial services are held to honour the victims of repressions, through language and written records (Halbwachs, 1992). Finally, embeddedness in communities with shared values may further amplify the individual family's effect on attitudes and belief transmission within and across generations (Charnysh & Peisakhin, 2022).

Building on this discussion, we chart the possible individual and collective responses to repression. We also develop testable propositions about the mechanisms linking responses to repressions and the survival of social identities.

Building theory from the experiences of former Soviet citizens

Background

Communist Russia experienced several waves of repressions, most notoriously, the Great Terror of the 1930s. Ideologically motivated repressions and discrimination against Imperial EEs but also wealthy peasants, many of whom entered elite schools before the Revolution, began after the Bolsheviks took power in 1917 and varied in intensity throughout the 1920s to early 1950s. By the 1960s, the Soviet regime proclaimed the inauguration of a new society and ceased to obsessively record Imperial ancestry.

Repressions affected vast swathes of society, not least because of the imperative to use citizens as slave labour to meet Stalin's industrialization targets. Our concern is the behaviour of a particular segment of repressed groups: the Imperial intelligentsia and entrepreneurs, often of

noble, clergy, merchant and *meshchane* estate origin, as well as those of peasant origin who became urban tradesmen and rentiers. Targeted en masse, these groups espoused values and aspirations contrasting with those of the bulk of uneducated peasants (Lankina & Libman, 2021). Irrespective of whether they were nobles, clergy, merchants or *meshchane*, citizens from EEs converged on the shared aspiration for higher education, a desire to join civil service and the 'free' professions, and cultural interests. Entrepreneurs mostly came from among the merchant and *meshchane* estates; even so, the aristocracy, habitually in civil service jobs, were beginning to join merchants as businessmen. In Imperial Russia, these groups were gradually morphing into the Russian middle class in a modern sense of the term. Social status at birth was being displaced by non-ascribed, achievement-related criteria of access that is theoretically open to all, but where estate continued to matter for social mobility (Mousnier, Labatut & Durand, 1995; Lankina & Libman, 2021; Lankina, 2022).⁵ The 'before the Revolution' values of EEs encompassed educational-professional aspirations and entrepreneurial interests and acumen.

There was considerable heterogeneity in the spatial distribution of EEs⁶ in pre-Soviet Russia on the one hand, and in the intensity of Soviet repressions on the other. Indeed, the EE share in a region did not predict the intensity of Stalinist repressions (see also Online appendix E). While several regions with EE shares below the national median featured large populations of repressed citizens, others with above the median EE shares featured a lower count of repressed citizens. Anecdotally, this could be attributed to particularly zealous NKVD (the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) or party operatives (Slezkine, 2017). Moreover, under Stalin, EEs were not the only ones targeted: during collectivization the peasantry and ethnic communities were repressed. In the early 1940s, scores of 'non-politicals' were sent to the camps as men were enlisted to fight Nazi Germany. The demand for manpower during the war increased arrests for minor offences such as ordinary misdemeanours (Ginzburg, 1967; Ellman,

⁵ We discuss the decision to bracket these groups under the category of Imperial EEs in Online appendix C.

⁶ In districts comprising present-day Chukotka, less than 1% of the population were ascribed to EEs. In Moscow the EE share exceeded 25%. Variation in the share of EEs was driven in part, by regions' pre-Revolutionary development, urban status, role in the Imperial governance structure, and prevalence of ethnic or religious groups within the EEs (see Lankina & Libman, 2021; Lankina, 2022).

2002; Khlevniuk, 2015). Finally, as we show in Online appendix E, there was considerable variation in the geographic, economic and social characteristics of regions with high- and low-intensity repression.

To build new theory on Imperial educated groups' social reproduction in response to repressions, we deployed a variant of case-based research. We allowed the protagonists – citizens who lived through the early Soviet period – to speak for themselves, drawing on the Harvard project, archival data and memoirs (Neklutin, 1976; Lankina, 2022). The Harvard transcripts encompassed aristocrats, clergymen, merchants and *meshchane* who had been born before the Revolution, maintained knowledge of family origins, lifestyles, and aspirations before 1917, and then lived under the Bolsheviks. As research reminds us, 'case studies emphasize the rich, real-world context in which the phenomena occur' (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007: 25). Using macro- and microdata, we then tested the propositions derived inductively from THPSSS within the parameters of deductive reasoning (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Complementary quantitative data helped ascertain whether THPSSS responses applied to citizens who stayed in the USSR *then* and whether they remain relevant for Russia's social structure *now*.

Repression and social reproduction: Three routes

Our definition of repressions includes policies targeting 'former people' such as deprivation of citizenship rights via the category of *lishentsy*: expropriation of property, arrests, exile, forced labour and, in the most extreme case, executions of family members. Most Soviet citizens, particularly those targeted by repressions, lived in fear and were aware of witch hunts affecting their family and communities. Our reading of THPSSS and other qualitative evidence led us to articulate three broad stylized sets of plausible responses to repressions of the educated segment of Tzarist society: collective submission; living as before; and living as before using adaptive and compensatory tactics. We articulate these with reference to the habitual educational and professional aspirations and pursuits of the Tzarist educated strata.

Collective submission: The first route – abandoning inertial behaviours, a form of 'abdication' (Ermakoff, 2008) but of a social kind – is the most intuitively plausible. Consider education. The Bolsheviks set curbs on university admissions of 'former people'. Even applying for a university place risked social exposure, for citizens had to fill out entries on estate origin. One THPSSS interview encapsulates the fears of being 'outed':

My father was a civil servant, a member of the lower nobility [...] It was tense. If father were to wear a tie he became an intellectual and he could be taken out and shot. I had to cover up my social origin. We destroyed our identification documents for fear that a search party might find them and take them out and shoot us (Schedule A, Vol. 7, Case 95, ML, p. 12).

By contrast, a 'worker' or 'peasant' had access to food ration cards and housing. Manual factory labour sometimes carried higher pay than white-collar professions. In an extreme scenario, we might have anticipated that groups habitually aspiring to advanced education in an illiterate country would abandon this set of milestones when confronted with repression. As one woman reported, she had lost the energy and will to even think about education: Schooling in the past had presented no difficulties for her. Her father was well off. He was able to pay for her education without any strain on his resources. The respondent thought that her educational opportunities were above the average because her father's living was above average. However, the respondent seemed to have been so beaten by her life since 1919, that education as a weapon for advancement had lost any particular significance for her. All she wanted to do was live: 'We lived from day to day. We didn't think about the future. I didn't think about a career for my children' (Schedule A, Vol. 7, Case 100, SH, p. 15).

This narrative may not be representative of others' experiences, or of the entire Stalin period. By the 1960s, Imperial origins ceased to matter in university admissions when the goal of building a 'proletarian dictatorship' was substituted with the goal of constructing an 'all-people state'. We remain agnostic as to whether a family with experience of repressions would seize the chance to resume the pre-Revolutionary trajectory of education from 1960s onwards.

Living as before: The second route, of 'living as before', describes the transmission of aspirations as though nothing happened. This appears implausible. Take education: for an individual coming from a family with habitual university education, 'living as before' would mean embracing Marxist–Leninist dogma. This trajectory would imply that citizens would not tailor educational–professional choices to the changed environment where pedagogic content is different and where certain occupations have become more ideologically impregnated and less 'safe'. The responses of Soviet refugees on this score are telling. Asked whether families

continued life as before, interviewees denied this was possible⁷: 'Even Communist Party families were destroyed in 1937 and 1938. No family in the Soviet Union ever lived as they lived before' (No. 95, ML, p. 18).

Yet, some families did get on as before, or so it seemed. How did they do it? One respondent described with envy a *meshchane* (urban estate) family who kept their heads down but adhered to pre-Revolutionary values while pursuing their life-course milestones:

One is amazed that life goes on in the old fashion, that the ways of the Revolution has not touched them yet. [...] They don't speak with the language of the party agitators. The things they hear outside go in one ear and out the other, how can they do it.

Interviewer: Did you know such families yourself?

Yes. They are not active workers, they are not especially passive either. They just stay in the golden middle. They don't stand up in meetings, but they do vote no when they have to [...]. This has to do with the landowners or the bourgeoisie (*meshchane obyvateli*) who try not to notice anything and not let themselves be noticed. And they gain from it. True, they don't get themselves a career and they live quietly, but they have an iron curtain around their families.

Interviewer: And you know about such families?

Of course, I lived in such a family as a teacher in Saratov and they stayed that way and their children got an education. They even wrote *meshchane*. [...] They were not activists. They weren't in the Komsomol, but their son finished an institute and became an engineer. He knew his business well and he got along (Schedule A, Vol. 20, Case 387, pp. 58–59).

This example may not be representative of those with family experience of arrest or execution. Furthermore, a close reading of the transcript, specifically, 'they don't get themselves a career', suggests that the family may or may not have eschewed habitual careers – a decision not to join the Komsomol, for instance, could mean professional sacrifices. Yet we also learn that the son was able to become an engineer, despite not joining the Komsomol and even writing *meshchane* about origins, a stigmatized estate. These ambiguities call for a more nuanced picture of the social responses to repression.

Living as before using adaptive and compensatory tactics: We now turn to the third possibility of adaptive choice. The interview transcript above alludes to behaviours like

keeping your head down, not being an 'activist', while all along seemingly doing well, as in obtaining university degrees. For clarity, we distinguish between types of interrelated adaptation that have the potential for long-term consolidation of group values, even if this involves temporary compromise. One is opting for a high-status profession that is not tarnished by ideological compromise, such as medicine or engineering. Another type of adaptive tactic is risk-avoidance in political activity or entrepreneurial pursuits. Finally, we anticipated that there would be sensitivity to shifts in the threats emanating from the political environment over time.

Let us again examine educational and professional choices. THPSSS transcripts testify that medicine as a profession helped individuals to avoid ideological compromise with the repressive regime. This pattern relates to the aforementioned changes in the POSs. In the early post-Revolutionary years, Bolshevik leaders abandoned their initial class vigilance in favour of absorbing Imperial EEs into the expanding Soviet occupations when they realized that their developmental objectives would not be attained with a cadre of peasant and worker origin. One medic stated that 'in 1930, there had been educated from six to eight thousand new Soviet doctors, the majority of whose parents had been old (Tsarist) intellectuals' (Schedule, B, Vol. 21, Case 40, MGF, p. 1, 17). Many entrepreneurs and aristocrats became willing converts to the Soviet professions as this helped them to avoid the party cadre route to social mobility in a regime that they abhorred. A female psychiatrist from a 'fairly aristocratic family of the St Petersburg intelligentsia' stated: 'I wanted to be a doctor or a teacher but I could not be a teacher because I never could be a Marxist agitator [...] I thus chose medical work, as the most apolitical work' (Schedule B, Vol. 21, Case 424, MF, pp. 3, 11). A professor of anatomy, of noble estate, maintained, 'The Party did not interfere in our work. In the social sciences they were active but not so much in medical subjects' (Schedule B, Vol. 22, Case 453, MF, p. 9).

Simultaneously, we observed risk-avoiding behaviours consistent with an intricate 'mythology' justifying political passivity and eschewing overt dissidence. When the regime persecuted kin members, families 'rallied to each other's support and strengthened the ties of mutual solidarity' (Inkeles & Bauer, 1959: 212). Such bonding mostly characterized intelligentsia: '[F]or every one reported to have grown apart there were eight which came closer together, whereas in the peasantry the ratio was a mere 1:1.5' (Inkeles & Bauer, 1959: 213). Other researchers also found purposeful forms of resistance. One aristocrat interviewed as part of an oral history

⁷ The full wording of this question and response categories can be found in Online appendix A 1.1.

project about the adaptation of ‘former people’ to life in Soviet Russia stated: ‘It was considered necessary to isolate adolescents from undesirable influences and to form for them a circle of socializing from amongst acquaintances, to teach them to react appropriately to propaganda at educational establishments’ (Tchuikina, 2006: 135).

Building on these insights, we anticipated that the regional share of EEs would condition the overall effect of repressions. Greater support from a sizeable group of fellow Tzarist educated strata may modify the effects of repression. In-group residential clustering, mutual aid and closure could facilitate social reproduction and facilitate the intergenerational transmission of values, practices and aspirations.

Empirical analysis

Research design: Triangulation with macro- and microdata

To test expectations, we deployed regional historical data from Imperial, Soviet and post-Soviet statistical sources. We complemented this analysis with evidence from two nationally representative surveys and a citywide representative survey fielded in Samara by Levada Market Research in 2019 and 2020. The national surveys allowed the linkage of region-level characteristics – repression experience and historical share of educated groups – to self-reported family histories. The Samara survey enabled investigation of the mechanisms of legacy transmission. Both types of data and the empirical designs that they allow have distinct strengths and weaknesses. However, if both the macro- and micro analysis provide consistent evidence, the findings are unlikely to have been driven by structural problems associated with one source. Statistical analysis was performed using Stata.

Investigating correlations between historical and contemporary phenomena with macrodata does not allow for complete isolation of the effects of social isomorphism and cannot postulate causal relationships. In our work, educational persistence might not necessarily account for high levels of contemporary education in places with sizeable EEs. Other factors, such as the presence of urban hubs and Soviet-era educational investments in places originally having a large share of EEs (Lankina & Libman, 2021; Lankina, 2022) may account for this outcome. Post-Soviet educated populations may be the product of Soviet policies of social levelling. A new middle class of latter-day peasants and factory workers may have emerged in historical urban centres, educated by survivors of repressions. If this new middle class emerged primarily in locations with

sizeable populations of past EEs, we would expect to observe correlations between pre-Soviet and Soviet regional educational characteristics, but that would not constitute evidence of social persistence.

One solution to these challenges would be to trace persistence in social status, occupation or behaviours within families. Obtaining these types of data, however, is challenging, if not impossible. Wars, revolutions, migration and repressions leave little in terms of documentation of family histories. Surveys of family histories is a possible solution, however, the findings may suffer from desirability bias and imperfect recall. Individuals may claim ancestries depending on context, stereotype or fashion,⁸ or may lack knowledge of family histories, possibly because victims of repression might hide the truth. Archival data at a regional level, on the contrary, do not suffer from these problems. Combining micro- and macro-level data may thus constitute an optimal strategy for empirical research.

Macro-level evidence: Data and empirical strategy

We began by leveraging subnational variation in EEs and intensity of repressions between 1921 and 1959.⁹ We captured EE share (nobility, clergy and the urban estates of merchants and *meshchane*) using data from the first Imperial Russian census of 1897. To capture repression experience, we used the regional number of entries in the Memorial Database as computed by Zhukov and Talibova (2018). The Memorial nongovernmental organization has been gathering material on Stalinist repressions. Its dataset includes 2.65 million records of individuals arrested and convicted for political crimes in 1921–1959. While not exhaustive, the Memorial repository, discussed extensively in Online appendix A 1.5, remains the most systematic record of repressions.

In the macro-level analysis, we used region-level university education (share in overall population and in key occupational groups) as a proxy of educated groups’ social reproduction. We used data for Soviet and post-Soviet tertiary education considering the near-universal secondary schooling from the mid-1940s onwards.¹⁰ University education is a significant proxy of social

⁸ In Germany, the younger generations hesitate to admit the involvement of their grandparents with the Nazi regime, even if the grandparents themselves talk openly about it (Welzer et al. 2014).

⁹ Online appendix E addresses concerns about attrition and the link between the underreporting of repressions and EEs.

¹⁰ Despite evidence of historical persistence in education (Lankina, Libman & Obydenkova, 2016; Lankina & Libman, 2021), little is known about the impact of repressions on these stocks.

Table I. EE legacy and repressions as predictors of education and employment choices

Dependent variable		Effect of repressions		Effect of EE	
		β	SE	β	SE
Education (labour force)	1960	0.007	(0.007)	0.077*	(0.032)
	1965	0.011	(0.010)	0.101*	(0.040)
	1970	0.015	(0.012)	0.116*	(0.047)
	1975	0.021	(0.015)	0.129*	(0.056)
	1980	0.022	(0.016)	0.142*	(0.060)
Engineers with university degree	1965	0.004	(0.004)	0.044*	(0.019)
	1970	0.007	(0.005)	0.059*	(0.024)
	1975	0.010	(0.007)	0.073*	(0.029)
Doctors with university degree	1965	0.000	(0.001)	0.009**	(0.003)
	1970	0.000	(0.001)	0.010**	(0.003)
	1975	0.001	(0.001)	0.010**	(0.003)
Education (total population)	2002	0.046	(0.037)	0.338**	(0.119)
	2010	0.057	(0.051)	0.385*	(0.167)

EE: educated estates; OLS: ordinary least squares.

OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. All regressions also control for distance from Moscow (capturing how peripheral locations impinge on education and repressions).

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

persistence, as some occupations became sites of refuge for pre-Soviet EEs. Online appendix H presents maps showing the spatial distribution of the key variables of interest and explores the correlations between them. Leveraging variation in university education over time, we also explored whether the effects of repression changed as the threat of violence subsided across different periods. In Online appendix D, we consider alternative outcomes that allowed us to nuance findings: late Soviet period entrepreneurial activity and Communist Party membership.

We interacted regions' repression experience with the EE proxy. If repressions led to permanent deterioration of the 'old' educated groups' status – the 'collective submission' scenario – the interaction term would be negative and significant. Regions with a legacy of high-intensity repressions would exhibit lower levels of educational continuity. If educated groups carried on 'as before' we would expect no interaction effects. In a region with an Imperial legacy of a sizeable educated strata, for example, we would expect to find comparatively large university-educated populations and professionals in the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods, regardless of repression levels. Finally, repressions may have forced descendants of the Tzarist middle class to adjust their strategies for educational and professional attainment, in which case we would anticipate several outcomes. We might observe no interaction effects if adaptation involved persistence in aspirations for higher

education. But we may also find a positive interaction effect if Imperial EEs intensified their striving for learning to reaffirm their identities of intelligentsia or professionals, against a backdrop of, or following, repressions.

Repressions, educational persistence and professional choices

The dependent variables in Table I are *Share of individuals with a university degree in the regional workforce* in 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975 and 1980; *Regional population share with university education* reported in the 2002 and 2010 censuses; and *Share of individuals with a university degree among engineers and medical personnel* in 1965, 1970 and 1975. We first report the relationship between repressions and EE share and Soviet and post-Soviet education (Table I). Across models, EE share had a significant and positive effect on Soviet and post-Soviet education. The *Repressions* variable was insignificant. This could have been driven by both the persistence of the educated class, despite the broader repressive environment (the 'living as before' argument), but also by the creation of a new Soviet educated strata in place of repressed citizens.

In Table II, we present the findings from interacting the *Repressions* and *EE share* indicators. Across all specifications, repressions had a direct negative effect on regional education and education level among medical professionals and engineers. The interaction term,

Table II. EE legacy, repressions and their interaction as predictors of education and employment choices

Dependent variable		Effect of repressions		Effect of EE		Effect of interaction term	
		β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Education (labour force)	1960	-0.051**	(0.013)	-0.012	(0.035)	0.006**	(0.001)
	1965	-0.073**	(0.019)	-0.028	(0.040)	0.009**	(0.002)
	1970	-0.085**	(0.024)	-0.039	(0.046)	0.011**	(0.003)
	1975	-0.101**	(0.029)	-0.059	(0.053)	0.013**	(0.003)
	1980	-0.105**	(0.031)	-0.054	(0.060)	0.014**	(0.003)
Engineers with university degree	1965	-0.029**	(0.006)	-0.007	(0.021)	0.003**	(0.001)
	1970	-0.041**	(0.009)	-0.015	(0.024)	0.005**	(0.001)
	1975	-0.050**	(0.012)	-0.020	(0.028)	0.006**	(0.001)
Doctors with university degree	1965	-0.004**	(0.001)	0.003	(0.003)	0.000**	(0.000)
	1970	-0.005**	(0.001)	0.002	(0.003)	0.001**	(0.000)
	1975	-0.005**	(0.002)	0.002	(0.003)	0.001**	(0.000)
Education (total population)	2002	-0.219**	(0.060)	-0.047	(0.126)	0.028**	(0.006)
	2010	-0.343**	(0.073)	-0.196	(0.164)	0.043**	(0.007)

EE: educated estates; OLS: ordinary least squares.

OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. All regressions also control for distance from Moscow.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

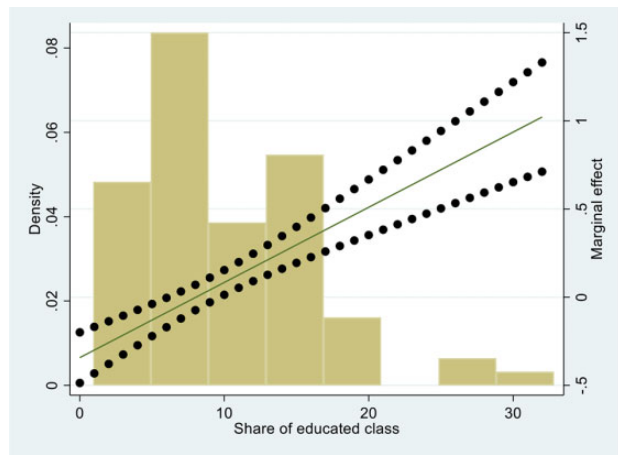


Figure 1. Marginal effect of repressions on education levels in 2010, 5% confidence intervals

however, was significant and positive, indicating that the negative effect of repressions was evident particularly in regions with a low pre-Revolutionary EE share. In terms of marginal effects, the impact of repressions on educational persistence and the free professions was reversed for regions with small and large EE shares. Table II also shows that the effect of educational persistence in Table I was conditional on repressions. Figure 1 suggests that where EEs comprised less than 10% of the population, repressions led to deterioration of education levels in the long term. A higher EE figure – with the regional average at 10.1 and median at 8.7% – produced the opposite

effect. Repressions were associated with an increase in regional educational stocks.

The results reported in Table II are robust to alternative specifications reported in Online appendix D.¹¹ Altogether, the evidence implies that repressions may not have disrupted educational persistence. However, repressions may have led to adaptive behaviours among ‘former people’ who were eager to maintain their pre-Revolutionary education and who sought university education for their descendants.¹²

Family histories

We now explore the effects of repression and EEs on social reproduction using self-reported indicators. Responses to two nationally representative surveys undertaken in July 2019 and September 2020, each with a sample of approximately 1,600 respondents, allowed us to map individual family trajectories from Imperial to Soviet to post-Soviet years. As in the previous section, we documented the effects of repressions and EEs on social reproduction, proxied with education and professional choices.

¹¹ To address concerns about ecological fallacy, Online appendix I presents sensitivity checks. Our main strategy for dealing with these challenges was to leverage micro-level data, presented next.

¹² Online appendices D 1 and 2 suggest that these groups also exercised caution, avoiding illegal entrepreneurship or professions with excessive political exposure.

In both surveys, we first asked respondents to state their pre-Revolutionary ancestors' estate(s). We recoded responses into a dummy variable, which took the value of one if there were EE ancestors and zero otherwise.¹³ Next, respondents were asked about Soviet-period family occupations. Again, we recoded responses into a dummy that took the value of one if respondents reported employment among positions requiring a university degree, such as white-collar jobs, intelligentsia or management, and zero otherwise. Finally, we collected information about respondents' contemporary education. A dummy variable took the value of one if the respondent had obtained, or partially completed, university-level education. We acknowledge that the information for the Soviet and post-Soviet periods is based on different typologies, yet we believe that the questions about employment were appropriate: citizens may recall parents' or grandparents' lifelong occupations but may be uncertain as to whether they received university education or not.¹⁴

We provide the question wording and descriptive statistics in Online appendices A 1.2 and B 1.1, respectively, and discuss concerns about social desirability bias and imperfect recall, common with survey data. Thus, some respondents may have reported not the actual but the desired ancestral origin, consistent with current social norms. The direction of such bias is theoretically difficult to determine, yet the fact that 50% of respondents reported ancestry from multiple educated and non-educated estates, implies that there is perhaps no sense of contemporary stigma associated with reporting ancestry from either group. Furthermore, survey respondents may have lacked information about ancestry, making up responses on the go. However, the fact that across the two national surveys the share of respondents reporting EE ancestry remained relatively stable, alleviates some of these concerns. Finally, as Lankina and Libman (2021) show, there is a robust correlation between self-reported ancestry and Imperial census data for the regions of respondents' residence.

Based on the survey responses, we restricted the sample to respondents who claimed EE ancestry (which accounted for 18% of the sample) and from this identified three family trajectories:

- *Continuity path*: This is when EE descendants in the Soviet period held positions requiring a university degree; in turn, their present-day descendants also report having obtained or partially completed university education. This group was able to survive through the Soviet years, pursuing higher education, a marker of social status. The continuity path, associated with approximately 20% of the respondents who claimed EE ancestry, is consistent with the continuity, or 'living as before', scenario.
- *Interrupted path*: In this case, Soviet-period EE descendants were in occupations that were not associated with university education, but their descendants, surveyed in 2019 and 2020, held university degrees. This captured one of several possible interrupted paths, when EEs lost social status in the Soviet period but regained it after the fall of communism.¹⁵ This path, associated with roughly 17% of the respondents with EE ancestry, is consistent with the 'living as before' scenario. Descendants of EEs may have temporarily opted for inconspicuous occupations, only to resume educational and occupational aspirations consistent with 'living as before' when the political risks had subsided. Although this group of respondents appears modest in number, it may have been a significant contributor to the highly skilled professionals that can currently be found in post-communist Russia, in high-earning and high-status occupations. As Savage reminds us, for those in the 5% of high-status, upper middle-class positions, privilege may be derived from historical patterns of accumulation of material, cultural and human capital (Savage, 2021).
- *Permanent loss path*: This describes EE descendants who took up blue-collar or other lower-status positions during the Soviet period and their present-day descendants do not hold university degrees. Members of this group lost their status after the Revolution and never regained it. This path, associated with 39% of respondents with EE ancestry, is consistent with 'collective submission'.¹⁶

¹³ In the 2020 survey, we asked separate questions about maternal and paternal ancestries. Respondents with at least one EE ancestor are assigned a value of one, and zero otherwise.

¹⁴ Online appendix G compares respondents with and without claimed EE ancestry; individuals with EE ancestry are typically better educated, wealthier and reside in larger urban centres.

¹⁵ Targeted groups may have also eschewed education or white-collar occupations in Stalinist Russia, resuming activities consistent with 'living as before' under Khrushchev or Brezhnev.

¹⁶ The remaining 24% belong to respondents with ancestors among the Imperial EEs and Soviet educated groups, but who themselves do

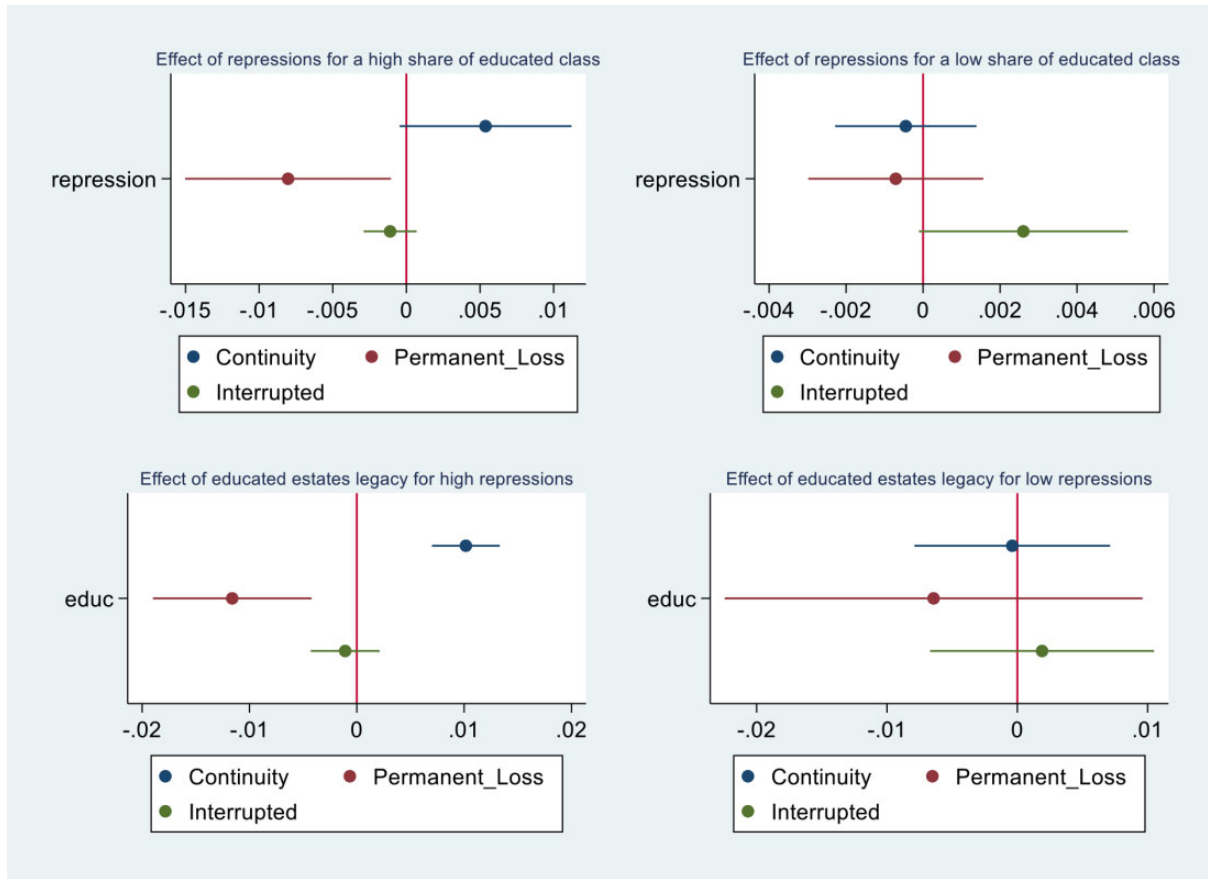


Figure 2. Marginal effects of region-level repressions and EE share on family pathways among educated strata, 5% confidence intervals.

Only respondents with ancestry in EEs were included in the analysis. There are 296 observations with a below-average region-level EE share; 451 with an EE share above average; 371 with region-level repression count that was below average; and 376 with an above-average region-level repression count.

We created dummies for each of the three family paths and regressed them on repression count in the respondents' present-day region of residence. First, we split the sample into two groups (respondents in regions with either a high or low share of EEs, that is, above and below the average) and then estimated regressions separately for each group. This allowed us to test whether the effect of repressions on either of the family trajectories was contingent on regional EE share. In line with evidence from the macro-level data, we anticipated that in regions with a larger EE stock, repressions would either increase the probability of a continuity trajectory or dampen the probability of a permanent loss path. We also split respondents into residents of regions with high and low repression counts and estimated the effect of

EEs on family history paths for each of these groups. All models controlled for the survey year and clustered standard errors at the region level.¹⁷ In Online appendix F, we show that interactions between EE share and repressions yielded consistent results.

Figure 2 summarizes the findings.¹⁸ The upper panel reports the marginal effect of repressions for regions with a larger and smaller EE stock. For regions with a high EE share, repressions decreased the likelihood of the permanent loss path. This is consistent with the macro-level evidence shown in Table II. For regions with a low EE share, intensive repressions increased the likelihood of the interrupted path (p -value .059). This finding is consistent

not have any university education. We discuss this group (designated as 'partial continuity') below.

¹⁷ Findings shown here rely exclusively on respondents with EE ancestry. In Online appendix D we draw on the full sample. The findings were consistent.

¹⁸ Splitting the sample according to the median, rather than the mean, of repressions and EE share yielded consistent results.

with ‘adaptive’ behaviours found in environments with high-intensity repression, where one cannot count on the support of large numbers of EE stratum counterparts. Status loss was nonetheless temporary: EE descendants resumed university education in the less hostile environment following the end of communism. The lower panel of Figure 2 reports the marginal effect of EE legacy for areas with different repression experiences. The results suggest that in regions with high numbers of victims, large values on the EE measure increased the likelihood of the continuity path. Low numbers of repression victims made all paths equally likely regardless of EE share. In sum, repressions and high EE saturation increased the likelihood of EE status retention through the Soviet and post-Soviet decades.¹⁹

In sum, in line with the macro-level analysis, the findings suggest that repressions in places with a sizeable share of educated groups did not interrupt intergenerational education persistence.²⁰

Micro-level evidence of social reproduction mechanisms

To explore some of the potential mechanisms that facilitated the intergenerational reproduction of aspirations, practices and values, we looked for evidence of community and family socialization within one Russian city, Samara. Our author-commissioned survey (described in Online appendix B 1.2) was conducted face-to-face in September 2020, with a city-representative sample of 758 respondents. Samara, a traditional merchant town in the Volga region with sizeable EE populations, experienced high-intensity repressions during the early Soviet years²¹ and represents the type of context we would associate with EE social reproduction and persistence. The survey items tapped into both intrafamilial channels of value transmission and those related to the wider circles of day-to-day interactions. To ascertain familial channels of value and knowledge transmission, we asked about the kinds of books that were read in their families and whether respondents held conversations about life before the Revolution. To explore whether there had

been a homologous ‘clustering’ dimension to residential patterns, or a semblance of a social ‘field’ in Soviet Russia (Bourdieu et al., 1993) we asked questions gauging the educational and professional status of their neighbours. Specifically, we asked whether, growing up, respondents had neighbours among the intelligentsia, like teachers and doctors. All outcomes were recoded into dummy variables.

As in the nationally representative surveys, we asked about respondents’ Imperial ancestry, recoding responses into a dummy that took the value of one for indications of EE ancestry (approximately 27%) and zero otherwise.²² Using *Self-reported ancestry* as the key independent variable and standard sociodemographic controls, Models 1.1–1.3 (Table III) showed that respondents with EE ancestry were more likely than others to report discussing their family’s pre-Revolutionary history with grandparents and that their neighbours were doctors and teachers. EE ancestry respondents were also more likely than others to report having books published before the Revolution at home, a signifier of the educational capital of their ancestors. Conformity expressed in the attendance of Soviet schools could have been supplemented with counterpointing socialization within the home and residential choices that may have sabotaged the values potentially internalized by children in the public spaces of the Soviet regime.

The Samara survey also included questions that tapped into self-reported experiences of family repression. While we anticipated issues of imperfect recall and, potentially, social desirability bias (Balcells, 2012; Lupu & Peisakhin, 2017), there were no data that would have allowed us to leverage within-city variation in repressions and EEs as in the previous analysis. The repression item was coded one if a family member was either repressed or deported under Stalin (~26% of respondents) and zero otherwise. We combined this measure with the self-reported ancestry question to create a four-category indicator that assigned respondents into one of four groups: those with EE ancestry who faced repressions (~8%) and did not (~19.13%), and those without EE ancestry with (~18%) and without repressions (55%). Models 2.1–2.3 (Table III) suggest that EE ancestry respondents with a family experience of repression were more likely than those with similar ancestry but no repression experiences, to report discussing their family history with

¹⁹ Multinomial logit models yielded consistent results (Online appendix D 4).

²⁰ For the partial continuity group, we found a significant and positive association with repressions in regions with a high EE share (and no significant effects elsewhere), for both the full sample and the sample of respondents claiming EE ancestry. This was in line with our findings.

²¹ According to Memorial data, Samara belongs to the 25% percent of regions with the highest repression count among territories presently part of Russia.

²² As in the 2020 omnibus survey, we asked separate questions on maternal and paternal ancestors and collapsed respondents with one or more EE ancestors into one category.

Table III. Evidence from the Samara survey

Variable	Models					
	1.1	1.2	1.3	2.1	2.2	2.3
	<i>Family history</i>	<i>Intelligentsia neighbours</i>	<i>Pre-1997 books</i>	<i>Family history</i>	<i>Intelligentsia neighbours</i>	<i>Pre-1917 books</i>
Imperial educated	0.718** (0.191)	0.738** (0.167)	0.838** (0.216)			
Educated/repressed				1.266** (0.377)	0.358 (0.380)	1.087** (0.343)
Non-educated/ repressed				0.620* (0.252)	0.502† (0.271)	0.385 (0.303)
Non-educated/ not repressed				0.108 (0.192)	-0.380 (0.249)	-0.295 (0.255)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	-0.675† (0.359)	-2.275** (0.465)	-3.07** (0.584)	-0.77* (0.327)	-2.009** (0.507)	-2.92** (0.575)
Observations	758	758	758	758	758	758

Logit coefficients with robust standard errors, clustered by city districts in parentheses. Baseline category for the main independent variable in Models 2.1–2.3 was having EE ancestors and not reporting family experiences of repression. Models controlled for age, gender and education. † $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

parents and grandparents.²³ They were also more likely to report having pre-Revolutionary publications at home when growing up. We found no differences in the probability of repressed and non-repressed groups reporting living next to neighbours who were doctors and teachers.

We cautiously interpreted these results as evidence of the social clustering of educated groups, independent of repression experiences. Even at the height of the Stalinist repressions, EE groups clustered in a residential sense (Tchuikina, 2006). Over time, communist planners also began allocating housing based on occupational–organizational criteria. Such clustering would facilitate in-group mutual aid and social closure via routine access to next-door neighbours of the same ancestry and may also have facilitated social reproduction.

Conclusion

This study has pushed the boundaries of violence research to explore how groups are able to sustain their core values when facing state repression. We have discussed the effects of Stalinist repressions on Tzarist Russia’s educated groups using archival and regional

macro- and microdata. Responses to questions about the experience and threat of repressions from the Harvard project suggested several possible choices open to citizens. We articulated these in a stylized way as collective submission, living as before, and living as before using adaptive and compensatory tactics. In proposing these stylized categories, we were sensitive to the time-variant POS openings and closures that made certain choices possible. We were also sensitive to variations in group size that can affect the survival choices and opportunities of targeted groups.

Evidence from macro-level data suggests that repressions had a negative effect on education in all regions, but this effect was particularly pronounced in regions with a comparatively low prevalence of EEs. In regions with legacies of sizeable EE shares, the effect was reversed: repressions, counter-intuitively, enhanced regional educational stocks. We associated this outcome with risk-avoiding and identity-enhancing behaviours. Such adaptive tactics may have included avoiding being too involved with the activities of the ruling party; law-abiding behaviours; seeking out high-status professions that were insulated from party-political pressures; and socializing with in-group members, something that repressions may only serve to intensify because of increased in-group solidarity and identity activation. Survey responses corroborated these findings and allowed us to unpack the mechanisms at work.

²³ Reverse causality is another concern. Respondents who discuss politics with their family more frequently could have a greater awareness of family experiences of repression. Yet, reassuringly, those discussing family history with their parents and grandparents were not more likely than others to report experiencing repressions.

Our study contributes to the literature on repressions and social resilience. The findings call for a better understanding of the discreet ways in which specific groups – in our case, those persecuted but endowed with high cultural, human and relevant social capital from pre-revolutionary times – resist state-led attempts to obliterate their social networks, values and identities. Albeit single-country focused, our study has brought us closer to answering these questions and to developing a broader comparative agenda for exploring adaptation across settings. Finally, our study calls for sensitivity to multiple histories in the life-courses of generations, and drives home the utility of using historical data spanning various time periods.

We are aware of the scope limitations of our findings. Even when investigating state-directed violence under communism, we found significant variations in the political opportunities that shaped groups' ability to adapt. Thus, Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign encouraged the nascent Chinese communist state to double up on purges against class undesirables from among the 'former' groups (Schram, 2010; Lankina, 2022). China was far less lenient when it came to permitting the educated and elite strata of Imperial society to enter the party-managerial organs or the professions (Parish, 2010). We would therefore not expect the descendants of Chinese 'former people' to raise their heads as professionals and entrepreneurs as their Soviet counterparts did. Nevertheless, even in the more repressive Chinese context, we have evidence of the resilience and social status reproduction of the formerly privileged groups after Mao's death, when repressions subsided (Clark, 2015). We found similar evidence of the resilience of targeted groups under other bloodthirsty communist regimes like in Cambodia (Tan, 1979; Harris, 2013).

Finally, our work contributes to the broader political science debates beyond the topic of social resilience in one setting. The finding that mass terror did not obliterate social groups in their entirety and that groups continued to engage in status-maintaining behaviours underlines the importance of studying the values and practices that transcend distinct regimes. It also calls for further engagement between sociology and political science. How the nexus between historically conditioned social structure and repression shapes developmental and political outcomes is an agenda for further research. Our article constitutes an important step in this direction.

Replication data

The dataset, codebook and do-files for the empirical analysis in this article, along with the Online appendix,

are available at: <https://www.prio.org/jpr/datasets>. All analyses were conducted using Stata.

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