Accounting for Secrets*

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Abstract
The Soviet dictatorship used secrecy to shield its processes from external scrutiny. A system of accounting for classified documentation assured the protection of secrets. The associated procedures resemble a turnover tax applied to government transactions. There is evidence of both compliance and evasion. The burden of secrecy was multiplied because the system was also secret and so had to account for itself. Unique documentation of a small regional bureaucracy, the Lithuania KGB, is exploited to yield an estimate of the burden. Measured against available benchmarks, the burden looks surprisingly heavy.

Keywords: Accounting; Bureaucracy; Dictatorship; Lithuania; Norms; Secrecy; Soviet Union; Transaction Costs.

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Accounting is a core function of the state. Since ancient times, governments have counted people. In modern times, governments have used national accounting to measure income and wealth. The Soviet Union accounted for people and resources in the considerable detail that matched its totalitarian objectives. This is not to say that it did so perfectly: the defects of Soviet records of population, production, and consumption are well known.\(^1\) Despite their imperfections, these were important instruments of Soviet government.

In addition to people and resources, there was a system of accounting for secrets. Soviet officials counted all classified documents and many that were not classified. Each classified document had its own life course. Each moment of the life course was recorded from creation through dispatch, receipt, and inventorization, to incineration or assignment to the archive. The traces of this system are everywhere in the former Soviet archives.

The quantity of documentation is of interest because it suggests that accounting for secrets was costly: it consumed time and effort that was then unavailable for other uses. The costs of accounting for secrets deserve investigation, because a willingness to incur non-trivial costs is prima facie evidence of non-trivial motivation. The costs of Soviet secrecy set a lower bound on the value of secrecy to the Soviet rulers. In turn, the rulers valued secrecy because it helped to prevent change in the political order and preserved the flow of benefits to the regime.

The Soviet system of accounting for secrets is also evident from documentation of its failures. From creation to destruction, some particular person was responsible for every classified document at every moment. They lost or mislaid them in a variety of circumstances, or failed to record them as required. These failures are of interest because they reveal the system. In addition they provide evidence of misaligned incentives and of attempts to realign them.

This subject is of both historical and present-day importance. In history people have come together in organizations to share beliefs, accumulate experience, reputation, and precedent, and reduce transaction costs.\(^2\) From an organization perspective, however, when transaction costs fall beyond a point, transactions may be facilitated that allow resources or information to leak out and so undermine the organization’s

\(^1\) Treml and Hardt (1972); Davies and Wheatcroft (1994).

\(^2\) North (1995); Williamson (1996).
existence. In this case we look at an organization that existed to monopolize power and manipulated internal transaction costs to preserve its security.

This topic also throws light on current issues. As Washington and Brussels have woken up to looming fiscal disasters. Chinese political and business leaders have lectured European and American politicians on the paralysis of the democracies. Autocracy is sometimes thought to have the advantage over democracy in enabling decisive actions that eliminate consultation and procedural delay. In contrast democracies must negotiate decisions among competing factions and wavering voters. The political scientist Ronald Wintrobe has identified democracy’s DNZ (“do nothing zone”) where bargaining fails because the costs and risks of concluding negotiations are too high.

The impression that autocracies do business unhindered by process may be mistaken, however. While democracies make decisions in public, autocracies make theirs behind closed doors. The result is an asymmetry. When one way of doing business is out in the open and the other is hidden, we cannot easily compare their costs. In the case of the Soviet Union I will show that the procedures for managing secret business had an effect on transaction costs similar to a turnover tax levied on all stages of transactions in the government sphere (which in the Soviet Union was all-encompassing, given repression or prohibition of the private sector).

In the first part of this paper I discuss the historical framework of Soviet secrecy. Next, I describe the life course of the secret document and the data that it generated at each stage. I also illustrate mishaps and evasions. Using a unique data source, I go on to measure the burden of the Soviet system of accounting for secrets on the management of a small regional bureaucracy, specifically a republican KGB, and I suggest that in a comparative perspective the burden was heavy. Finally, I consider the scope for generalizing this finding.

1. Doing Business in the “Conspirative” State

Until it collapsed, secrecy was the single most important constraint on social science research on the Soviet Union. For most observers secrecy was so obvious that it became an “elephant in the room.” While scholars felt their way around particular secret matters, they gave relatively little

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3 For example Li (2013).
attention to Soviet secrecy in general.5 Here I describe a few basic principles and I place them in a comparative perspective.

**Conspirative rule**

A defining feature of Soviet single-party rule was *konspiratsiia*, translated here as “conspirativeness” (not as “conspiracy” or “plot” for which the Russian would be *zagovor*). These norms, which originated in the underground practices of the Bolshevik Party before the revolution, were formalized by the party in power in a series of politburo resolutions, especially the “Rules on handling the conspirative documents of the central committee” agreed on August 19, 1924 and a resolution on “On conspirativeness” adopted on May 16, 1927.6

Conspirative rules, in the words of the 1927 resolution, were “based on the old, well-tested principle that secret matters should be disclosed only to those for whom it is absolutely necessary to be informed.” The party’s central control commission was responsible for enforcing party rules, including these. “All letters, all the correspondence we maintain, are secret work ... All our work is secret,” its chairman declared in March 1950.7

The regime of secrecy was not limited to the party or to Moscow; it applied everywhere. From the 1920s, every Soviet agency and enterprise throughout the country maintained a first (secret) department for classified communications and records. The first department was staffed by party members and was supervised directly by the KGB or its predecessors responsible for state security.8

Information was power. From start to finish the stability of the one-party state rested on its ability to monopolize and channel information. When secrecy ended, so did communist rule. In March 1991 party officials lamented that they could no longer prevent the leakage of secret information to the press. Until the situation was stabilized, they ordered, leading committee members would have come to Moscow and familiarize

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5 There are some exceptions. From the Cold-War era see Bergson (1953), Maggs (1964), and Rosenfeldt (1978, 1989). The first benefits of the archival revolution are illustrated by Fitzpatrick (1990), Khlebnikov et al. (1995), Bone (1999), Harrison (2005, 2008), and Rosenfeldt (2009).

6 Istochnik (1993); Khlebnikov et al. (1995, pp. 74-77).

7 Hoover/RGANI, 6/6/57, 13 (KPK chairman Shkiriatov M. F., in verbatim minutes of meeting with KPK technical staff held March 18, 1950).

themselves with “documents of a secret character” within the four walls of the central committee building. Only in “extreme necessity” would secret documents be sent out by courier, marked “person to person” and subject to immediate return. They thought this would be temporary, but that is not how it turned out.

The evidence of the system of accounting for secrecy that I will describe comes from the war and the postwar period. It is a reasonable question whether this system was significantly different from that of earlier years or later years. The scope of Soviet censorship changed markedly over time. Less information reached the public from the late 1930s to the mid-1950s than in any period before or since. Censorship had wide social functions, including the suppression of unacceptable imagery and attitudes. From the point of view of keeping classified information from the public, however, the censorship was only the last of many filters. Thus, although censorship is important in its own right, variations in the scope of what was censored do not imply change in the underlying system of secret file management. This seems to have remained largely unaltered from 1927 to 1991.

**Degrees of secrecy**

As shown in Table 1, the Soviet state recognized various levels of security classification. Responsibility for correctly classifying the individual document lay with its author.

State secrets, loss of which could damage the interests of the state as a whole, were classified “top secret,” sometimes with a super-secret tag, “special file” or “of special importance.” Matters that were state secrets were listed in government decrees enacted from time to time, which were themselves state secrets (for example a decree of the USSR Council of Ministers dated September 15, 1966). Subject to agreement of the KGB, particular ministries could also declare aspects of their activity to be state secrets. The intentional disclosure or negligent loss of a state secret was always a criminal offence.

Documents classified “secret” fell into the lower category of administrative secrets, loss of which might damage the interests of an

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9 Hoover/RGANI, 89/21/66, 1 (CPSU Central Committee general departments deputy chief Laptev P. and organization department deputy chief Ryzhov Iu., “On familiarization of CPSU central committee members and regional party committee leaders with documents and materials of the CPSU central committee in the complex social situation,” March 5, 1991).

10 Goriaeva (2002); Harrison (2008).
agency or facility but did not threaten the state. Each ministry could determine the scope of administrative secrecy for itself. The disclosure of an administrative secret could be a criminal offense or an administrative violation, depending on circumstances.

How important were the differences between classes of secrecy? To an outsider it is often unclear why one document was classified secret and another top secret. No doubt Soviet bureaucracy was vulnerable to the same tendency to overclassify as American officialdom. It was common for auditors and stock-takers to refer to “secret and top secret” documents in the same breath. Documents that were only “secret” were counted just as obsessively as those of higher classifications.

The archives provide limited evidence of care in classification. In December 1956, for example, the KGB requested a list of USSR Supreme Court secret rulings on anti-state and other crimes. The Supreme Court supplied a list of rulings, each classified to one level or another, and also the corresponding list of top secrets (some “of special importance”) and ordinary secrets agreed with the KGB. The KGB responded by amending the latter, deleting a few items, downgrading others, and adding a new item: “All correspondence on questions of secret file management” – ‘secret’.” A revised list was duly prepared and circulated.¹¹

The difference between grades of classification mattered practically in two ways. First was personnel selection and promotion. Corresponding to levels of secrecy were levels of clearance. The KGB cleared every government employee for some level of access (or none). Clearance depended on factors ranging from professional qualification to personal

¹¹ Hoover/GARF, R-9474/16/552, 47-72 (memo to USSR Supreme Court chairman Volin A. A., signed by KGB Moscow city administration deputy chief Belokonev, December 7, 1956; memo to Belokonev, signed by USSR Supreme Court deputy chairman Zeidin E., January 11, 1957; “List of guiding decrees of the USSR Supreme Court Plenum,” signed by USSR Supreme Court first department chief Pastushenko A., no date; memo to USSR KGB first deputy chairman Ivashutin P. I., signed by Zeidin, December 7, 1956; “List of information constituting state secrets and other information subject to classification by the USSR Supreme Court,” signed by Pastushenko (here USSR Supreme Court chief of the secret and encryption department) and others, December 6, 1956; memo to Zeidin, signed by Ivashutin, January 19, 1957; memo to USSR KGB fifth administration fourth department chief Lipatov A. I., signed by Pastushenko, March 21, 1957; memo to the USSR Council of Ministers administration secret unit, signed by Pastushenko, March 25, 1957; revised “List of information constituting state secrets and other information subject to classification by the USSR Supreme Court,” signed by Pastushenko and others, March 14, 1957.
and family background, including political loyalty. Denial of clearance was a block to personal advancement. This made clearance a potent instrument of social control.\footnote{Grybkauskas (2007a,b).}

Second, a document’s level of classification determined punishment of the violator. A story from Vilnius in 1973 shows how this worked. While drinking in a bar, a police lieutenant lost an informer’s paperwork documenting their code name, real name, address, life story, associates, criminal activities, and police contacts. Taken together, were these a state secret, leading to prosecution, or just an administrative secret? Local officials wanted the more serious charge, but Moscow overruled them. The officer lost his job, but criminal charges were dropped for lack of a crime.\footnote{Hoover/LYA K-1/10/405, 24-26 and 27-28 (memos to USSR KGB investigation department chief Volkov A. F., both signed by Lithuania KGB investigation department chief Kismanis E., November 6, 1973 and March 1, 1974 respectively).}

\textit{Secrecy as a transaction tax}

Soviet procedures for handling classified paper resemble a turnover tax applied to administrative transactions with two properties. First, the tax was entirely consumed in collecting it; second, the recursive property of Soviet secrecy applied a multiplier on the initial tax.

The turnover aspect of the secrecy tax arose from the fact that it was paid every time a classified document changed hands in considering any issue and distributing any information or decision. A personal instruction might change hands only once or twice, but a decree that was distributed from Moscow to every establishment of a ministry or every province or district could change hands hundreds of times. It is clear that deadweight losses resulted. The regime was willing to incur these losses because secrecy served other objectives, for example regime stability, that outweighed the costs of the administrative system.\footnote{Harrison (2013).}

The secrecy tax multiplier arose from the recursive property of Soviet secrecy. In the Soviet Union secrecy covered not only each original tangible or intangible object that was secret, but also the existence of secrets, including the regulations that protected them. When classified information was distributed, not only its content but also the fact that it existed was classified. This affected the system of accounting for secrets because the paperwork created by logging and auditing secret paperwork
was also classified secret, and so had to be accounted for in subsequent inventories and inspections, the documentation of which had to be kept secret and accounted for in turn and so on ad infinitum.

Infinite recursion did not mean expansion without limit; a finite multiplier was at work: One more secret document increased the total cost of secrecy by more than its own cost. Much of what we find in the former Soviet archives is explained by this multiplier.

When it comes to measurement I will distinguish first-order and higher-order recursion. The first order of accounting for secrets involved the registration of incoming and outgoing secret instructions and correspondence in (secret) ledgers. Higher orders involved the subsequent inventorization, transfer, audit, and destruction of secret documentation, including the ledgers created in the first round.

**Soviet and American secrecy compared**

Since 1940, U.S. classification practices have been governed by a sequence of presidential executive orders. Several underlying principles have distinguished the American system from that adopted under Soviet rule. One is the concept of an “informed citizenry” (the term used in Executive Order 11652 of March 8, 1972). As well as need-to-know, there is right-to-know, which did not exist in the USSR. Since World War II the American system has correspondingly emphasized the avoidance of excessive classification and overclassification of documents, a subject considered rarely (and only in secret) in the Soviet documentation.

The Soviet system of classification made no presumptions about ultimate disclosure. From U.S. President Harry S. Truman’s Executive Order 10290 (1951), in contrast, the American system has maintained that all classified documents should be declassified either automatically after the expiry of a fixed term or when circumstances permit, with grounds for exemption that have become more restricted over time, particularly since the 1966 Freedom of Information Act.

Another contrast is found in whether or not the existence of a classified document containing a secret was itself a secret, as in the Soviet system. From Eisenhower to Carter, successive executive orders provided that “References to classified material which do not reveal classified security information shall not be classified.” At this time, therefore, American secrecy was not recursive. From President Ronald Reagan’s Executive Order 12356 (1982), this wording disappeared. The practical effects are not clear.

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15 These are summarized by Quist (2002, pp. 70-73) and updated by Elsea (2013)
General presumptions against excessive classification or in favour of ultimate disclosure did not prevent the build-up of classified material in the United States as long as mechanisms were lacking to enforce them. Several attempts were made to change this dynamic; examples have included the Freedom of Information Act (1966); President Jimmy Carter’s Executive Order 12065 (1978), which established an Information Security Oversight Office that has monitored the classification process and reported annually to the president since that time; and President Barack Obama’s Executive Order 13526 (2010), which imposed mandatory declassification targets on federal agencies. The scope of secrecy in American government has always been contested, however, and will surely remain so.\(^{16}\)

It is easier to compare the principles of American and Soviet security than practices. Some measures of practical activities can be found but they are not contemporaneous. It would be desirable to measure the Soviet Union against America in the Cold War, but what is known today about the Soviet Union in the Cold War remains incomplete and can be set against the standards of America only in the relatively recent past.\(^{17}\)


\(^{17}\) In both countries, access to classified information required clearance and there are a few numbers relating to both clearances and clearance refusals. The American data are relatively recent and nationwide; the Soviet data relate to the small border province of Lithuania in the late Cold War. Taken at face value, they suggest that more Americans were cleared in proportion to the population, and fewer were refused clearance. Clearances: In 2011, 4.8 million U.S. personnel were cleared for access to information classified at all levels (U.S. ODNI 2012, p. 3), or 1.5% of the total U.S. population. In 1979 in Soviet Lithuania, according to Grybkauskas (2007a, p. 80), 14,000 personnel were cleared for “top secret” (including “special file”) documentation. In an earlier year, 1973, 2,027 clearances were issued at the “secret” level compared with 2,230 at the higher levels (Grybkauskas 2007a, p. 84). Applying that proportion to the total cleared in 1979 at the higher levels would suggest approximately 27,000 cleared personnel in total for Soviet Lithuania in 1979, or 0.8 per cent of the population at the time – half the American proportion. Refusals: In 2011 refusals ran from zero to 1.2% of applications to the Defense Intelligence Agency, FBI, National Geo-Spatial Intelligence Agency, National Reconnaissance Office, and State Department. For the CIA refusals ran at more than 5%, and they reached 8% at the National Security Agency (ODNI 2012, p. 7). No average is given, but the CIA and State are relatively small employers, suggesting an
Secrecy loomed large in the life of the KGB officer. A veteran of the KGB mission in Dresden, East Germany (where Vladimir Putin was also stationed) reports, recalled that the officer’s “sharpest weapon” was not a knife or a gun, but the hole punch that pierced a stack of papers to allow them to be sewn into the files. When the Berlin wall came down, the last duty of the officer before abandoning his post was to destroy secret paperwork in colossal quantities.

Secrecy does not seem to have burdened the U.S. intelligence community in the same way. Among many reviews of recent years, the 9/11 Commission criticized U.S. intelligence structures as “too complex and secret,” and for preferring “need to know” over “need to share” with other agencies and with the public. The nub of such criticisms was not that the 15 agencies involved in U.S. intelligence and counter-intelligence were overburdened by the costs of secret information management but that they had skimped on the procedures that would allow for effective information management. For the FBI, America’s closest analogue to the KGB in domestic counter-intelligence, it was a case of “real men don’t type.”

2. The Secret Document’s Life Course

In this section, I show that the life course of the secret document had rites of passage, enacted at certain fixed points: production, distribution, inventorization, storage, transfer of ownership, and destruction or archiving. I describe what appears to be generally true and I give examples. Examples do not prove a rule, and I first discuss how the evidence has been selected.

_The medium is the message_

The evidence of secret document handling is drawn from three microfilm collections in the archive of the Hoover Institution. In recent years the Hoover Archive has acquired major microfilm holdings of the records of average refusal rate well below 5 percent. The refusal rate in Soviet Lithuania across all employments in 1973, and again in 1981, was around 7 percent (Grybkauskas 2006, p. 84).

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19 Described at first hand, by Putin (2000, p. 76); Funder (2003, p. 67) refers to one hundred burnt-out shredders found in just one building of the Stasi headquarters complex.


core agencies of the Soviet state and party. Those used here are from the KPK (commission of party control), the Gulag (chief administration of labour camps of the Soviet interior ministry), and the KGB (committee of state security) of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic.\footnote{22}

Before primary documents can be used for research, they must be acquired (by the archive) and identified (by the researcher). Both stages involve selection. Not all Soviet official records were archived; we will see that large quantities were routinely incinerated. In general terms we know that documents were destroyed when they were judged to have neither operational nor historical value. In fact the former Soviet archives that have been opened are full of records of historical value, including “secret plans, reports, minutes, decisions, appeals, and the official and private correspondence of citizens from the highest authorities in the Kremlin to the humblest provincial petitioner.”\footnote{23}

How much was discarded compared to what was kept? As a benchmark, estimates of the proportions of documentation of federal agencies destined for the U.S. National Archives range from “1-3%” (an overall average) to 20 percent in the case of the FBI, the internal security functions of which would appear to match most closely those of the KGB.\footnote{24} But in the Soviet case we may never know how much was lost.

Making it into the archive is only the first stage. To be usable in historical research, records must be retrieved. Like the container of Indiana Jones’s Lost Ark, a document can be lost as easily inside an

\footnote{22 Gulag records are found at the Hoover Archive in the Archives of the Soviet Communist Party and Soviet State Microfilm collection, State Archives of the Russian Federation (GARF, Gosudarstvennyi arkhiiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii), 1903-1990, and KPK records are in the same collection, but from the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiiv noveishei istorii) 1903-1990. Lithuania KGB records are in the Lietuvos SSR Valstybės Saugumo Komitetas (KGB) Selected Records collection.}

\footnote{23 Gregory and Harrison (2005, p. 721).}

\footnote{24 The website of the U.S. National Archives and Records administration observes that: “Of all documents and materials created in the course of business conducted by the United States Federal government, only 1%-3% are so important for legal or historical reasons that they are kept by us forever.” See http://www.archives.gov/about/ (accessed July 31, 2012). Haines and Langbart (1993, p. xvi) report: “In 1984 the National Archive proposed and the FBI accepted recommendations for the FBI Records Retention Schedule, which would preserve approximately 20 percent of all Bureau records as permanently valuable and allow for the destruction of the rest.”}
archive as outside it. Archives generally have written (and increasingly digitized) catalogues. The quality of cataloguing across former Soviet archives is highly variable; this is not surprising given that they were never intended for access by scholars.

Faced with incomplete or defective file catalogues, the researcher depends on the private knowledge and good will of the archivist and on good luck. When catalogues are deficient, microfilm records have a huge advantage. The researcher who goes to Moscow to consult the original paper records goes with a project. Its aims and objectives are predetermined. Based on the archival catalogue and the archivist’s advice, you make requests; files arrive one by one on your desk. Selection is biased towards your purpose; it is also slow. You don’t get to browse the shelves. In any case, you don’t have time.

Working with microfilm, you get much more than you asked for. You requested a file; they give you a box. The box holds eight reels, meaning 20 to 100 files. The structure of the information is linear-access; you have no choice but to scan and skip, and in the process you get to see a lot of stuff you didn’t ask for and never expected. In this way, selection bias is weakened. The significance for the present topic is that the raw documentation of the Soviet system of accounting for secrets appears hopelessly unpromising at first sight, and would scarcely feature on anyone’s wish list: endless lists in smudged type or minute handwriting, titled “Deed of acquisition and transfer of documentary materials”; “Deed of the destruction of documents”; “Ledger of decrees and decisions.” These are not records that any researcher would look for, not knowing they existed, or that any archivist would bring out unprompted. Only repeated involuntary exposure to them could make one begin to wonder what they were all for.

To summarize, the medium was the message. The microfilm record brought the Soviet system of accounting for secrets to light. At earlier stages, however, other biases may have been at work in selecting the documents that escaped incineration and so entered the archive in the first place. As a result there is still uncertainty around the extent to which our data are representative of the wider Soviet bureaucracy.

Rites of passage

Production. The original secret document was usually typewritten with a fixed number of carbon copies. On February 7, 1965, for example, deputy chief Juozas Petkevičius of the Lithuania KGB signed a six-page report to Moscow on popular responses to Khrushchev’s dismissal in 1964. The front page shows we have copy no. 2 of a document classified “top secret.” A standard block of information on the back of the last page, reproduced below at (A), confirms that two copies were made. Copy 1 went to
Moscow and copy 2 to “file no. 236.” The person responsible for the document is identified as Baltinas, and the typist as Kuzina. The date of typing is February 6, one day before the signature. This information was standard although not absolutely uniform. The next document in the file shows minor variations (B). Copy 1 went to Moscow, but the file destination of the second copy is not completed; we see this quite often. The last line adds that the original draft was destroyed.


Distribution. Every office maintained ledgers of outgoing and incoming secret and non-secret documentation, including letters, instructions, and telegrams. (In other words, when a document changed hands, it was logged twice, once by the sender and once by the receiver.) Some ledgers listed correspondence such as reports and memoranda; others itemized the instructions that cascaded down from above.

The correspondence ledgers amounted to substantial documentation in their own right. Many have been archived. Ledgers were typically bound volumes of 100 double-sided sheets (200 pages) with handwritten entries that recorded every item received, any copies made, to whom they were distributed, by whom acknowledged, when returned, and whether destroyed, with dates of each event.25

Every office quickly accumulated many ledgers. When the USSR MVD Gulag secretariat changed hands on January 7, 1953, it was recorded that in the two years from 1951 this office had acquired 343 ledgers (nearly 70,000 pages) listing incoming correspondence, more than half of them

25 To illustrate, ledger no. 221 of the Lithuania KGB listed decrees, directives and instructions of the USSR KGB through 1972, divided into sections: top secret (pages 1 to 30), secret (31 to 90), non-secret (121 to 180), and “for personnel” (po lichnomu sostavu) (181-200). Hoover/LYA K-1/10/403, 1-110 (Zhurnal registratsii. Sekretno. Zhurnal no. 221 ucheta prikazov, ukazaniiia i instruktsii KGB pri SM SSSR 1/1-31/12/1972).
secret items. Another 15 ledgers itemized more than 11,000 incoming coded telegrams and more than 2,000 outgoing in 1952 alone.\textsuperscript{26}

With such a system, what could go wrong? Either sender or recipient could be guilty of a lack of care. When that happened, the minutes normally required to enter an item in the correspondence ledger turned into hours of painful investigation. To illustrate: a secret packet arrives. You sign for it, so now you are responsible. When you open it, you find a missing page or an incorrect serial number. Who can say it’s not your fault? You convene your colleagues. Together you write and swear a witness statement to confirm the discrepancy.\textsuperscript{27}

That example was the sender’s fault. Alternatively, the sender could be a victim of the recipient’s lack of care. Here is a tale with which every student can empathize. You returned a secret item to the KGB training librarian. But there’s no record of it, so it seems you lost it and you will be charged with a violation. You’re saved only when the book turns up on the library shelf.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{26} Hoover/GARF R9414/1a/193, 4-40 (deed of transfer signed by former chief of USSR MVD GULAG Chirkov and deputy chief Kovalev, January 7, 1953).

\textsuperscript{27} Hoover/GARF R9414/1/2575, 107 (deed signed by military unit 7557 chief of secret unit Kozyrevskii, manager of archival file office Iakushev, and secret unit despatcher Ludtsev, November 10, 1951) – a document with the wrong serial number; ibid., 28 (deed signed by MVD security administration chief of secretariat Polovnev and filing officer Laskina, June 13, 1951) – a document with the wrong number of sheets appended; ibid., 31 (deed signed by MVD Sakhalin ITL administration, chief of secret unit Sil’vanovskii, senior inspector Karpukhina, and senior inspector Kovbasa, July 31, 1951) – a document lacking “secret” classification; ibid., 33 (deed signed by Riazan oblast UMVD, chief of secretariat Aleshin, filing officer Gracheva, and typist Kochetygova, August 13, 1951) – a document intended for another recipient; ibid., 35 (deed signed by MVD Gulag senior operational commissioner of secretariat Shaposhnikov, assistant Petrova, and assistant inspector of secretariat Baranova, August 17, 1951) – documents wrongly numbered and wrongly addressed. From another archive, Hoover/LYA K-1/10/308, 56 (deed signed by 301 training parachute regiment captain Sliadnev, junior sergeant Shlezinger, and servicewoman Os’kina, addressed to USSR KGB special department chief, copied to Lithuania KGB second administration, March 22, 1963) – a document wrongly classified and wrongly addressed.

\textsuperscript{28} Hoover/LYA K-1/10/406, 1-2 (memo to Lithuania KGB deputy chairman Aleksandrov, signed by seventh department chief Bukauskas and seventh department second section chief Abramov, March 14, 1972);
Intermediaries could blur responsibility. In 1944, Stalin’s war cabinet telegraphed a secret instruction to a factory manager. In his absence, the town party secretary held it for safe keeping. Five years later, someone asked: Who now held the telegram? The party secretary said he handed the telegram to the manager, but without obtaining a receipt. The manager, now a junior minister, swore he had never received it. This story has several notable features. It took five years to follow up the missing telegram, and two more years to investigate it. The case was considered important enough to be reported to Stalin’s chief of staff. And the outcome? After investigation, no guilt could be assigned.\textsuperscript{29}

Secret documents were supposed to be distributed through one of two channels, the agency’s own courier service (if it had one) or the “special service” of the ministry of communications. These channels were cumbersome. Mishaps arose when officials resorted to workarounds; they carried documents themselves or sent them by personal courier. Lapses of attention on the part of the bearer, sometimes linked with alcohol, led to many cases of documents being lost or stolen in transit.\textsuperscript{30}

The sheer volume of secret correspondence was sometimes of concern. Throughout the Soviet system there was a perennial cascade of instructions, many of them secret, and many of them implementing, modifying, or cancelling previous instructions. So many decrees heightened the risk that a non-secret decree could disclose the content of secret ones or their existence by referring to them (a problem that illustrates the recursive quality of Soviet secrecy).\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{29} Hoover/RGANI, 6/6/1575, 33-34 (report to Poskrebyshev, signed by KPK chairman Shkiriatov, April 16, 1951).

\textsuperscript{30} Hoover/GARF, R9414/1a/145 (Gulag chief Nasedkin to chiefs of camps of republics, regions, and provinces, July 1, 1946); Hoover/GARF, R9414/1a/84, 6 (acting Gulag chief Dobrynin, decree no. 4, January 13, 1947); Hoover/GARF, R9414/1a/91, 1 (Gulag chief Dolgikh to minister Kruglov, May 22, 1951).

\textsuperscript{31} Hoover/GARF, R9414/1/85, 170 (Gulag chief Dobrynin, “top secret” decree no. 139, October 17, 1947).
Inventorization. In important offices such as those of the Gulag, secret paperwork was inventorized on the first of each month. Many archived files contain lengthy sequences of affidavits enumerating hundreds of secret and top secret items incoming and outgoing from various offices.\textsuperscript{32} Despite the scope for deficient storage and mistakes in

\textsuperscript{32} To illustrate: Hoover/GARF R9414/1/2575, 12 (deed signed by MVD GULAG security administration chief of organizational department Koriukin, senior lieutenant Grigor’ev and junior sergeant Safronova, May 10, 1951), counting secret and top secret documents, 737 incoming and 371 outgoing; ibid., 13 (deed signed by MVD GULAG security administration senior assistant to chief of quartermaster’s division Ziuzin and secretary of quartermaster’s division Ragina, May 8, 1951), counting secret and top secret documents for April, incoming 130, outgoing 73; ibid., 14 (deed signed by MVD GULAG security administration senior instructor of political unit Bartkevich and secretary of political unit Karmanenkov, May 15, 1951) counting secret and top secret documents for April, incoming 281, outgoing 88; ibid., 15 (deed signed by MVD GULAG security administration senior instructor of political unit Bartkevich and secretary of political unit Karmanenkov, May 15, 1951) counting secret and top secret documents for April, incoming from no. 736 to no. 907, outgoing from no. 3/46 to no. 3/74; ibid., 16 (deed signed by MVD GULAG security administration filing officer of secretariat Laskina and cryptographer of secretariat Chernenko, May 10, 1951) counting secret and top secret documents for April, not numbered but all present and correct; ibid., 18 (deed signed by MVD GULAG security administration senior veterinary officer Kuz’kin and secretary of operations department Kalmykova, May 25, 1951), counting secret and top secret documents for April, incoming 805, outgoing 167; ibid., 19 (deed signed by MVD GULAG security administration senior instructor of political unit Kuriachii and secretary of political unit Karmanenkov, June 5, 1951) counting secret and top secret documents for May, incoming 185, outgoing 30; ibid., 20 (deed signed by MVD GULAG security administration filing officer of secretariat Laskina and cryptographer of secretariat Chernenko, June 8, 1951), counting secret and top secret documents for April; ibid., 21 (deed signed by MVD GULAG security administration senior instructor of political unit Bartkevich and secretary of political unit Karmanenkov, May 15, 1951), counting secret and top secret documents for June 1 to 10, incoming 69, outgoing 27; ibid., 22 (deed signed by MVD GULAG security administration senior assistant to chief of quartermaster’s division Ziuzin and assistant to chief of quartermaster’s division Ovechkin, June 12, 1951), counting secret and top secret documents for May, incoming 106, outgoing 89; ibid., 23 (deed signed by MVD GULAG security administration senior assistants to chief of orgstroii department Sorokin and Kurzikova, department secretary Safronova, June 16, 1951), counting secret and top secret documents for May, incoming 748, outgoing 311; ibid., 24 (deed signed by MVD GULAG
handling, nearly all such accounts certified everything as all present and correct. In all cases, deeds of inventorization were signed off by at least two officials who had to agree that the records were in order, or share the consequences if not. It was not possible for one person to cover personal deficiencies without securing the collusion of others.

Comprehensive inventories were also required when one official was appointed to replace another in charge of an office. A joint affidavit acknowledged the transfer of responsibility for classified papers. Such documents could range in length from one to many dozens of pages. The following case is not untypical. In June 1965 the first (secret) department of the Lithuania KGB second administration changed hands. Two senior lieutenants signed a deed of transfer (typed the same day in one copy,\textsuperscript{33} Over six pages the document enumerated files, ordinary, letter-coded, and special; decrees and instructions; personal files and personnel records; “most wanted” “no longer wanted” notices and lists; information about German intelligence; lists of traitors, foreign agents, participants in anti-Soviet organizations, war criminals, and state criminals; forms to request undercover documentation and wire taps; records of undercover operations department officers Kuz'kin, Pylov, Usatov, Rudnev, and Salo, June 14, 1951) counting secret and top secret documents for May to June 10, incoming 1,137, outgoing 259, and from the first of the year, incoming 4,028, outgoing 868.

\textsuperscript{33} Hoover/LYA, K-1/3/636, 155-161 (deed of transfer, signed by LSSR KGB second administration first department, outgoing operational commissioner Marma and incoming Kirichenko, June 11, 1965). From earlier years see also Hoover/LYA K-1/10/34, 348-351 (deed of transfer of LSSR MGB decrees held by Department “B”, signed by outgoing department secretary Nesytykh and incoming Litvinova, December 8, 1947, 1945), listing 234 decrees and directives of the Lithuania MGB including 69 top secret, 47 secret, and 117 nonsecret and other, noting that two are in the possession of comrades Andreev and Obukauskas; at the level of a parish office, Hoover/LYA K-1/10/35, 192-228 (deed of transfer, signed by LSSR MGB Zarasai parish outgoing division secretary Sukhorukova and incoming Shishin, July 12, 1949), listing 1,393 decrees, instructions and circulars of USSR and Lithuania MGB issued since 1939, of which 798 were top secret or secret; from the same period, Hoover/GARF R9414/1/2575, 1 (deed of transfer signed by MVD GULAG security administration secretary of quartermaster’s division Ragina and deputy chief of quartermaster’s division Ovechkin, May 16, 1951); Hoover/GARF R9414/1a/193, 4-40 (deed of transfer signed by former chief of USSR MVD GULAG Chirkov and deputy chief Kovalev, July 7, 1953); ibid., 64-99 (deed of transfer signed by Gulag secretariat first division outgoing deputy chief Savina and incoming Konovalov, July 7, 1953).
documentation issued to officers; card indexes of agents, “safe house”
keepers, and active cases; and ledgers for registration of incoming and
outgoing correspondence.

In this list the largest single item was the correspondence ledgers,
amounting to 13 volumes and so 2,600 pages altogether, compared with a
mere 1,400 pages of documents in files. This illustrates the recursive
aspect of secrecy: the deed itemized not only original documents but also
the ledgers that itemized them as they came in and went out. Classified
“secret,” the deed of transfer would enter future inventories in its own
right.

Changeovers occasionally exposed the loss of documents. When an
office changed hands, the new boss had a strong incentive not to cover for
items that had gone missing under the old one. A classified document was
reported by the incoming chief of the Gulag secretariat under these
circumstances in February 1948, at a time when the entire Soviet
bureaucracy was in a state of high anxiety over a recent law that
criminalized the accidental or negligent disclosure of state secrets.34 The
last person to hold it, a former chief of Gulag, could no longer trace it. The
loss was reported to the interior minister, who demanded another
search.35

However strong the precautionary motivation for the newcomer to
check the integrity of the secret files left by his predecessor, it could be
overridden by other factors. Corners were sometimes cut in the Gulag in
wartime when newly appointed camp bosses took over “on the go,”
dispensing with inventories and deeds of transfer in the rush. Later, they
encountered problems because they had accepted responsibility for
documents that turned out to be missing.36

Secure storage and handling. In every establishment, classified
documents were the property of the first (secret) department. The
documents themselves were held under file headings that were
periodically reviewed and approved. Each file was listed as either secret
or top secret, with its term of conservation (three years, for example) and

34 Harrison (2013).

35 Hoover/GARF R9414/1a/193, 60 (Gulag chief Dobrynin to Interior
minister Kruglov, February 2, 1948). The memo bears Dobrynin's
handwritten note: “The minister has been informed. He has decreed to
search again for the aforementioned decree. Dobrynin. 2.2.48.”

36 Hoover/GARF R9414/1dop/1382, 56 (memo to all chiefs of camps,
signed by NKVD administration for prisoners of war and internees chief
Petrov, November 10, 1943).
the name of the responsible official. The secret department required secure accommodation where safes could be locked away and staff could work unobserved. Outside working hours, documents were supposed to be filed in safes and the doors and safes of the secret department were supposed to be sealed as well as locked.

Office by office and from time to time, the security of file storage and compliance with procedures for handling secret documentation were audited by inspectors of the MVD or KGB. Their reports show that inadequate facilities and understaffing could interact. The existence of files did not ensure that documents were placed in them in a timely way; backlogs of unfiled documents might accumulate. Safes might be left unsealed overnight. Lacking secure accommodation, classified work might

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37 To illustrate: for 1953 the MVD GULAG security administration had a list of 492 file titles (with 8 titles in reserve, taking the total up to 500), classified “top secret,” covering 27 typewritten pages, including directives, plans, and correspondence with each of the Gulag’s units and subunits. Hoover/GARF R9414/1dop/194, 2-28 (nomenklatura of secret files of the MVD GULAG security administration for 1953, signed by security administration chief of secretariat Teterevkov and acting chief of security administration Egnarov, December 22, 1952). For similar documents see Hoover/GARF R9414/1dop/194, 80-82 (nomenklatura of 32 secret files of the MVD GULAG secretariat for 1953, signed by deputy chief of secretariat Kovalev, no date but December 1952, classified “secret”) and ibid., 83-84 (excerpt from nomenklatura of 16 secret files of the MVD GULAG secretariat, cryptography division, for 1953 (second half), signed by chief of cryptography division Malakhov, August 29, 1953, classified “secret”).

38 Hoover/GARF R9414/1/2575, 132-4 (deed of inspection of secret file keeping and the storage of state secrets at MVD Gulag, 69th militarized security detachment, signed by Karaganda province MVD administration, operational commissioner Tret’ian, November 26, 1951).

39 An inventory of incoming and outgoing secret correspondence of the MVD security administration in November 1952 found documents not yet filed, going back to January, with delays in filing in all departments. Hoover/GARF R9414/1/2588, 90 (deed of inventorization, signed by GULAG MVD security administration senior lieutenant of the internal service Babinskii and four others, dated November 6, 1952). A Lithuania KGB report on security in ministries and state organizations in April 1969 noted that the Kėdainiai raiispolkom secretary was failing to keep files in good order. Hoover/LYA K-1/3/670, 67-73 (report “On the status of provision of preservation of state secrets in ministries and institutions of the republic,” signed by LSSR SM chief of administration Petrila, April 1969) on pages 67-68.
be done and documents left lying around in areas accessible to civilians or, in the Gulag, even to prisoners.\(^{40}\)

From time to time, external audits gave rise to scandals. Best known is the Gosplan affair of 1949. Until March of that year Nikolai Voznesenskii, in charge of planning, was Stalin's younger favourite. Part of a high level intrigue that caused Stalin to lose confidence in him was the discovery that many secret and top secret papers were missing from Gosplan. The report noted, sinisterly, that no one had yet been prosecuted “as the law demands.”\(^{41}\)

Other audits that can be found in the archives cover a range of years and types of organization.\(^ {42}\) They often exposed violations similar to those found in Gosplan, including failures to use and store classified paperwork securely, and a steady trickle of lost instructions, reports, internal publications, photographs, maps, and security passes. These

\(^{40}\) In August 1944, the chief of Gulag complained of secrecy violations in camps and colonies. He cited reports from camps in the Khabarovsk region that listed files with top secret papers, ledgers of secret correspondence, and stamps and seals openly accessible on office desks, and top secret papers and topographical maps in cupboards open to prisoners. Hoover/GARF, R9414/1/324, 84 (Gulag chief Nasedkin to chiefs of ITL, UITL, and OITK of republics, regions, and provinces, August 19, 1944). A Lithuania KGB report of April 1969 recorded that the safe for secret documents belonging to one of the local authorities was often left unsealed. It also criticized a variety of ministries, enterprises, and institutes for lack of separately enclosed office space for those executing secret paperwork. Hoover/LYA K-1/3/670, 67-73 (report “On the status of provision of preservation of state secrets in ministries and institutions of the republic,” signed by LSSR SM chief of administration Petrila, April 1969).

\(^{41}\) Khlevniuk et al. (2002, pp. 293-300). Voznesenskii was afterwards arraigned and executed for treason and undermining the economy (Gorlizki and Khlevniuk 2004, pp. 83-89).

\(^{42}\) See, in addition to those already cited, a Stalin-era MGB inspection of Gosprodsnab, the state committee for supply of consumer and industrial goods, reported at second hand in Hoover/RGANI, 6/6/1650, 21-23 (report to KPK chairman Shkiriakov, signed by responsible controller Byshov, June 1953); and on similar lines a Brezhnev era report on local government and party organizations in Soviet Lithuania in Hoover/LYA K-1/3/670, 55-61 (report to the Lithuanian party central committee, signed by KGB chair Petkevičius, March 31, 1969); ibid., 88-91 (to Lithuanian council of ministers chairman Maniushis I. A., signed by LSSR KGB chair Petkevičius, April 1, 1969).
could give rise to sharp criticism, but the lethal consequences of the Gosplan affair were exceptional.

**Destruction.** The secret document’s life course ended with selection for destruction or the archive. Numerous records of this stage populate the archives. They take the by-now familiar form of an affidavit signed by two or more officers, listing files identified as having lost operational significance and not retaining any historical value, and destroyed by burning. Some are brief (today we destroyed so many files) while others itemize every record destroyed over many pages.43

Given the quantities of paperwork destroyed each year, it is not surprising that mistakes were made. Deviations from the record were a nightmare for honest officials, and an opportunity for dishonest ones, with little possibility of telling the difference with hindsight. When documents went missing everyone would blame each other, while those closest to the event would maintain that the missing documents had actually been destroyed without a record being kept. Thus, they were willing to admit to procedural violations, not to losing state secrets.

Conversely, one might ask whether the process of destruction gave scope to cover up the loss or misappropriation of documents by recording them as incinerated. If this happened, it could be detected only if a document listed as destroyed, but in reality missing, subsequently turned up intact. Exactly this happened in the Gosplan affair, when 33 documents listed as destroyed turned up in the possession of an official of the secret department.44

43 Hoover/GARF R9414/1/2575, 17 (deed of file destruction signed by MVD GULAG security administration cryptographer of secretariat Chernenko and filing officer of secretariat Ivanova, May 17, 1951); Hoover/GARF R9414/1/2588, 13-37 (deed of file destruction signed by MVD GULAG security administration operation department chief of third division Shipkov, senior operational commission Kharchevnikov, and secretary of operations department Kalmykova, April 1, 1952); ibid, 63-69 (deed of destruction, signed by MVD GULAG security administration operations department, senior operational commissioner Kharchevnikov, senior veterinary officer Kuz'kin, and secretary Kalmykova, July 26, 1952); ibid., 78-79 (deed of destruction, signed by MVD GULAG security administration, operations department deputy chief Khanevskii, senior operational commissioner Dmitriev, senior veterinary officer Kuz'kin, August 14, 1952), referring to a 32-page appendix listing each document destroyed); Hoover/GARF R9414/1/2590, 29-30 (selection of documentary materials of the USSR MVD GULAG security administration subject to destruction, signed by chief of secretariat Teterevenkov and four others, December 16, 1952).

44 Khlevniuk et al. (2002, p. 296).
Compliance, avoidance, and evasion

Because secrecy procedures worked in the same way as an oppressive and distorting tax, one would naturally hope to find evidence of compliance, avoidance, and evasion. The archives present plenty of evidence of compliance and evasion, but none of avoidance.

What might avoidance measures look like? Steps might have been taken to economize on the recording or transmission of classified information or to prevent overclassification. No serious measures have come to light. Did officials even think about avoidance, let alone suppose that avoidance would be a good idea? In April 1974 Lithuania KGB officials warned that secret paperwork was a growing burden. Across the organization as a whole, they reported, excluding its first (secret) department, secret and top secret items incoming and outgoing totalled 1.3 million in 1973; this was an increase over 1972 of more than 4 percent. The same figure would have made around 1,000 classified items per year per employee. The authors called on “unit leaders to take forceful measures to restrict administrative correspondence and get rid of instances of the creation and duplication of documents not required by urgent administrative necessity.” That’s all. There is no sign that this (or any other unreported concern) ever led to specific measures that could have reduced or diverted classified information flows.

On compliance and evasion the evidence is mixed. The mass of internal inventories suggests near universal compliance. In many offices, it seems, years went by without a single sheet going missing. It was worthy of note when one document in a thousand or ten thousand went astray. Apparently isolated violations were reported to Moscow. When a police officer lost an agent’s files, and failed to report it, the loss was uncovered in less than a month. When a manager was implicated in the loss of a classified item, he was pursued for it for years. These documents

45 Hoover/LYA K-1/3/786, 28-38 (report “On the condition of and measures to improve work with documents in the LSSR KGB,” signed by chief of inspection Rupshis, chief of information and analysis division Andriatis, and chief of secretariat Grakauskas, April 8, 1974) on page 33. This report also gave figures for the Lithuania KGB second (counter-intelligence) administration alone (30,965 items of secret and top secret correspondence in 1971, 31,236 in 1972, and 33,000 in 1973) and for the Kaunas city department of the KGB (4,658 items in 1973 up to April 10, and 5,456 in the same period of 1974, an increase of 12 percent).

46 In 1971 the Lithuania KGB employed 203 officers, 670 enlisted men, and 346 civilian employees; the total was relatively stable over preceding years (Anušauskas 2008, p. 43).
give the strong impression of an orderly system of record keeping and tracking where mistakes were exceptional.

In contrast, the records of inspections that have been archived sometimes suggest a culture of carelessness and negligence. In some cases entire organizations degenerated into slipshod practices, giving rise to multiple, repeated violations over considerable periods of time.

It is natural to wonder how to reconcile the conflicting impressions of compliance and evasion. The data themselves are not above question. In some cases the appearance of compliance could have been a façade behind which officials hid systematic infringements and abuses – but the cost of collusion required to keep up appearances over time makes it unlikely that this was typical. In a few cases where entire organizations were implicated in evasion the scandal may have been politically motivated, but was probably not completely fabricated.

Plausibly, the truth was a combination of the two. In the Soviet system, secrecy was a fundamental norm. The value of secrecy was signaled by stringent procedures and fearsome penalties for violating them, though these were not always imposed. Officials of any status needed to win the trust of their superiors, whether they were ambitious for promotion or just wished to be left alone to sleep peacefully. The first requirement was to be trusted with secrets. Thus incentives for compliance were high-powered, and it would not be surprising if most officials were careful to comply with secrecy rules most of the time.

At the same time compliance with the basic norms of secrecy must have been vulnerable to small, individual evasions that, if tolerated, could spread infectiously by example. Nobody was perfect; minor violations were inevitable. Caught between an exacting rule book and the need to get things done, one person took a shortcut. The next person copied it to save effort and maintain goodwill. In this way, rule-breaking could propagate itself for a while. This appears to be the case in most kinds of offending. So it was probably the case in the Soviet bureaucracy as well.

The result would be multiple equilibria. In the good equilibrium, compliance would be nearly universal, and individual evasions would be quickly exposed and punished. If one person’s backsliding was tolerated, however, with some probability it would be copied through the

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Glaeser, Sacerdote, and Scheinkmann (1996) show that variations in crime rates across U.S. cities and precincts have been much larger than any variations in economic conditions. They associate this with social interactions that cause personal choices over law-breaking versus honest citizenship to become locally aligned. Empirically, they find that petty crime is more susceptible to neighbourhood effects than major crimes such as homicide.
organization, shifting the locality towards the bad equilibrium until it met some external resistance. Hence, frequent inspection and occasional scandals.

A working hypothesis is that personal adherence to Soviet rules for secret file management was intrinsically heterogeneous: skewed towards compliance by career incentives that were high-powered but not deterministic, with instances of evasive behaviour that broke out, spread infectiously on an epidemiological model, and were exposed and suppressed only when career concerns were reawakened.

3. Measuring Transaction Costs

In this section I evaluate the burden of the secrecy tax on the administrative turnover of a small regional Soviet bureaucracy. I use a unique source, the catalogue of the Lithuania KGB collection at the Hoover Institution, to work out the proportion of its archived documentation that arose from accounting for secrets. The source is unique in combining two features: it is digitized and it goes down to the level of the individual file.\(^48\) It enables us to distinguish the records of the secrecy accounting system from other management records, and also first-order and higher-order accounting records separately. Other archival catalogues are unpublished paper records that cannot be reproduced, and/or they do not provide file-level information.

_Soviet Lithuania and Soviet secrecy_

While KGB archives in Russia remain closed for historical research, evidence from Lithuania and other newly independent states can provide a keyhole through which to peer into the Soviet past. Although fascinating in its own right, a keyhole is not unrestricted access. How far can we generalize from what is seen through the keyhole? Soviet Lithuania was a borderland and in some respects a colony. Does the keyhole show us Soviet rule, colonial rule, or the tyranny of distance?

The subjugation of Lithuania to Soviet rule took place two phases. In the first phase, from 1940 to 1953, Lithuania fell under alternating Soviet and German military occupations. Lithuanian society was divided. Armies

\(^{48}\) File catalogues in Russian archives, if they exist, are paper-based and often lack basic file descriptors. Even those file catalogues that have been published are generally not detailed at this level. And they are also not complete, which is of even more concern. See for example Mironenko and Kozlov (2005).
and militarized security forces battled each other and armed insurgents.\textsuperscript{49} This was different from Russia’s revolution and civil war, but not that different: communist rule in Russia also required a civil war, which was fought in two stages, from 1918 to 1920 for control of the towns and borders, and from 1929 to 1934 for control of the countryside.

From 1954 Lithuania entered a longer phase of civil peace. In the peaceful phase officials of the Lithuania KGB maintained a clear sense of their specific environment, based on Lithuania’s location and history.\textsuperscript{50} Bordering the Baltic Sea and Poland, Lithuania was a strategic front line of the Cold War. Other factors included the Lithuanians’ living memory of national independence, the presence of former “state criminals” (the leaders of pre-Soviet Lithuania and the Lithuanian insurgency) who had survived and returned from imprisonment or deportation, and the activities of the Roman Catholic church. Yet, despite such differences, the methods of Soviet rule in Lithuania were no different from those that were applied everywhere.

Sent to Kiev in 1970 to take over the Ukrainian KGB, Vitalii Fedorchuk contemptuously dismissed the idea of doing things the local way: “We work for the entire Union. There is no such thing as Ukraine in our work.”\textsuperscript{51} What worked in Moscow and Magadan worked the same in Kiev or in Vilnius: the registration of the population; the control of employment, promotion, travel and association; the capture or suppression of all organizations and means of communication; mass surveillance and continual monitoring of all the environments where people gathered to live, work, learn, and play; and minimal or zero tolerance of deviations from political and social norms.

From this perspective Lithuania was not a colony, and was no distance at all from Moscow. It was an integral part of the Soviet Union, incorporated forever. The social order that was established in Lithuania followed the same template that was built in every Union Republic, starting with Russia. If many Lithuanians felt themselves to be a subject population, Moscow aimed for equal treatment and equal opportunity. Equal distrust was its starting point for everyone, for no person’s loyalty

\textsuperscript{49} For vivid description see Reklaitis (2007), Statiev (2010); Weiner and Rahi-Tamm (2012).

\textsuperscript{50} Burinskaitė (2011, pp. 25-26).

\textsuperscript{51} Quoted by Weiner and Rahi-Tamm (2012, p. 7).
was taken for granted.\textsuperscript{52} If Lithuanians were somewhat resistant to communism and many could be expected to be disloyal in a tight spot, it was not because they were a colonial population: the Russians were treated no differently.

The denial of local particularity, which could look like a weakness from the perspective of an era obsessed with “soft power,” reduced the tasks of organizing totalitarian rule in each locality to a simplified template that could be and was applied everywhere. This is why the archives of the former Soviet borderlands are such a precious resource.

\textit{Measurement}

By May 2011 the Hoover Archive had acquired 5,312 files from the Lithuanian Special Archive (the archive of the Soviet Lithuania KGB) containing just over one million microfilmed pages. These files, listed in Table 2, all from \textit{fond} K-1, are organized in five groups (\textit{opisi}) numbered 2 (counter-intelligence departments of the NKVD-NKGB-MVD-KGB up to 1954), 3 (counter-intelligence departments from 1945), 10 (the KGB secretariat), 14 (the KGB city administrations); and 45 (operational case files).\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{52} This was the conclusion of the first western empirical study of the Soviet citizen (Inkeles and Bauer 1959, pp. 282-283, 290-291).

\textsuperscript{53} Is five thousand files a lot? The Lithuania KGB counter-intelligence files, accumulated over half a century in a country with a midway population of 2.4 million, would make 44 files per million per year. An analogous figure for the FBI over its history from 1920 to the end of the 1980s would appear to be 66 files per million per year. The 66-per-million figure is found as follows. According to Haines and Langbart (1993), at the end of the Cold War FBI files were organized into 278 classifications, mostly by major violation but including 1 (“National Academy Matters”), 66 (“Administrative Matters”), 67 (“Personnel Matters”), and 230 to 240 (Training in various aspects). Files under 44 classifications were not enumerated for reasons of sensitivity (relating to foreign espionage, for example). The remainder amounted to 5.9 million files and headquarters and 14.3 million files at field offices (but the latter also including missing reports). Of the 278 classifications, some 64 would appear to cover areas in which KGB counter-intelligence would have expressed an interest, such as treason and sedition, the loyalty of government recruits, the security of government installation, and the causes of safety and security violations. Under these headings were roughly 1.2 million headquarters files. Where numbers of files at headquarters and in field offices are given for the same classification, the median ratio is 2.2, suggesting that FBI counter-intelligence files might have reached 3.8 million in total. Suppose that 20 percent were archived,
The operational case files consist largely of personal rather than management records, and many files remained open for 45 years (from 1940 to 1985) or more. In order to focus on year-to-year management of the Lithuania KGB and place some limits on heterogeneity in the data, opis 45 is excluded from the analysis. Below I refer to opisi 2, 3, 10, and 14 as the Lithuania KGB’s “management files” and the data I use are restricted to them.

It would be hard to make sense of this material without paying close attention to time variation. Figure 1 shows that the time distribution of the management files is highly skewed. Measured by their number, almost three fifths of all files were laid down in just one decade, from 1944 to 1953. Two spikes are also visible: a smaller one in 1953, the year of Stalin’s death, and a much larger one in 1984/85.

In order to understand the contribution of secret file management to the Lithuania KGB archive in different historical periods, it has been necessary to conduct a wider examination of the content of the files, and then extract results relevant to this study. The spirit of the exercise is to assess their composition, file by file, based on an analysis of keywords and keyword clusters in the file descriptions reported by the Hoover Archive’s electronic catalogue. Results are shown in Table 3 (for source and methods see the Data Appendix).

Soviet Lithuania was created by acts of war in 1940 and 1944, and Table 3 gives first priority to identifying files associated with the suppression of armed resistance to Soviet rule (or “counter-insurgency”). After that, I look for files associated with secret file management. Remaining files are assigned to identifiable focuses of the KGB’s mission defined as police work (the identification and pursuit of state criminals), matters relating to foreigners, the study of complaints and petitions, economic matters (surveillance of the economy and the causes of economic disruption), the suppression of anonymous circulars, matters relating to young people, preventive work (called profilaktika), and matters relating to Jewish people.

On that basis Table 3 aggregates all KGB management files over the entire Soviet era from 1940, the first Soviet occupation of Lithuania, to the KGB’s final retreat from the capital Vilnius in 1991, and in three sub-periods: 1940 to 1953 (the first and second Soviet occupations of Lithuania and the period of postwar counter-insurgency, ending in the year of Stalin’s death); 1954 to 1982 (a period that I call “Soviet postwar

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based on the FBI-NARA agreement reported in footnote 00. Then 760,000 files over 70 years (1920 to 1990) and normalized by the 1965 U.S. population of 166 million makes 66 files per million per year.
normality,” ending in the year of Brezhnev’s death); and 1983 to 1991 (the Soviet Union’s final years). Several stylized facts become visible.

Table 3 (column 1) shows that, taking the Soviet period as a whole, two categories account for 70 percent of all archived Lithuania KGB records: counter-insurgency, and secret file management. At first sight the KGB’s first priority in Lithuania was to suppress armed resistance to the Soviet state: nearly one half of all files are assigned to this activity. Secret file management is the second most important category, comprising nearly one quarter of all files. Documentation of all other activities, including the operational concerns popularly associated with secret police work such as the surveillance of nationalist circles and anti-Soviet activists, monitoring and suppressing economic disruption and open opposition, and ensuring cultural and ideological conformity, is confined to the remaining 30 percent of records.

Table 3 then shows (col. 2) that the main factor in the high rate of file creation up to 1953 was the armed struggle to Sovietize Lithuania. The bulge of 1944 to 1953 is explained entirely by the postwar counter-insurgency, which accounts for three quarters of the files created in this period.

Next come the long years of Soviet postwar normality (Table 3, col. 3) when the Soviet Union was economically and politically stable. With the ending of the counter-insurgency, the annual rate of file creation fell by three quarters. At the same time the contribution of counter-insurgency to file creation fell from 70 percent to less than 10 percent. Most new files dealing with counter-insurgency were now backward-looking as the KGB tracked down the men returning from the forests and kept them under surveillance.

After 1953 the single most important activity associated with file creation became secret file management, which accounts for one third (34 percent) of all files left in the archives from the time of Soviet postwar normality. This is the single most important fact to emerge from the data.

Of the archived files from 1983 and later (Table 3, col. 4), the proportion associated with secret file management rises to 70 percent. As discussed below, this may be connected with last-minute destruction of some records and a failure to discard others.

For a finer focus on some aspects, Figure 1 plots three categories over time: files relating to counter-insurgency, secret file management, and other matters. The initial bulge tracks the course of the counter-insurgency, peaking in 1945. The sudden spike of 1953 coincides with Stalin’s death, which occasioned a momentary increase in expressions of violent and non-violent opposition to Soviet rule in Lithuania, so that KGB activity increased in several dimensions. After that, counter-insurgency concerns dropped away and “normal” life set in. As can be seen, archived
records of secret file management diminished slowly over the following years from the 1950s through the early 1980s. But the decline was broken in 1984 by a sudden upturn. The tremendous peak of 1984/85 is explained entirely by a mountain of records associated with secret file management. After that, everything collapsed to very low levels and then zero.

Finally, to understand better the time variation in secret file management, Figure 2 isolates these files and assigns them to first and higher orders of recursive accounting. The figure shows that first order documentation was archived at a steady but low rate until 1984: typically, two ledgers recording decrees and instructions were kept from each year. The spike of 1985 consists entirely of ledgers of decrees and correspondence, that is, of first order documentation.

The 249 ledgers archived in 1984 and 1985 are a spectacular anomaly. They total 7 percent of all material in the Lithuania KGB management files. One possibility must be that ledgers were created in large numbers in every normal year, were kept for limited periods, and were then destroyed (as lacking historical interest) rather than archived, with the exception of 1984 and 1985 for some reason. This possibility is disturbing: if ledgers were more likely to be incinerated than other documents, then they would be underrepresented in the archive as a whole.

There is circumstantial evidence of this. The ledgers that have survived (from 1985, for example) were given a fixed term of conservation such as 10 years. When the Gulag secretariat changed hands in 1953, the largest single item in quantity of pages would probably have been the 358 ledgers (more than 700,000 pages) of incoming and outgoing correspondence, telegrams, and decrees. But these never made it into the archive; at some point, presumably, they were all incinerated. The changeover at the first (secret) department of the Lithuania KGB second administration in June 1965 was a much smaller affair, but the same applies to its 13 volumes (2,600 pages) of ledgers of incoming and outgoing correspondence. Where are the ledgers now? It seems that those from 1984 and 1985 are the only ones that have survived in significant numbers. As for the years after 1985, relatively few KGB records of any kind have survived from that period.

For present purposes the period of greatest interest is that of post-Stalin normality. We see that the tracking of secret paperwork accounted for 34 percent of management files left by the Lithuania KGB from that time. Within that, most surviving records are of higher order. If first order documentation suffered disproportionate attrition, then 34 percent is a lower bound.
Under what assumptions might we generalize this figure to the rest of the Soviet bureaucracy? Did every Soviet agency spend a third or more of its management resources on complying with secrecy regulations? To reach this conclusion we would need to rely on several identifying assumptions. These turn out to have varying plausibility. I discuss each in turn.

Assumption 1. The KGB was not markedly more secretive than any other Soviet organization. This is a strong assumption. In its favour is the fact that every Soviet organization had its own first department, and that the KGB’s mission was to set standards of secrecy for them all. The KGB’s system for managing secrecy was the same as everyone else’s; the KGB had a first department too. Against this, the proportion of secret to non-secret activity was surely not the same everywhere. Even core agencies had some unclassified correspondence. Agencies outside the core probably had more in relative terms.

Assumption 2. Paperwork intensity was uniform across activities – including the activity of accounting for secret paperwork. There’s no reason why not. But who knows? This kind of assumption, like the existence of a can opener on a desert-island, is heuristically useful but empirically empty. It might be near the truth. The truth is we have no idea.

Assumption 3. Files selected for the archive were representative across activities. This assumption does not seem to be particularly demanding and could be conservative. As discussed, it seems likely that first-order documentation of accounting for secrecy is underrepresented in the archives.

To summarize, we take the proportions of paperwork of different kinds in the Soviet archives to suggest the burdens of handling of secret paperwork. On that basis, the files of the Lithuania KGB at Hoover give a figure of one third for core agencies of Soviet government in normal times. A higher figure is not ruled out; lower figures might be found in a wider sample. Some identifying assumptions are required to generalize further, and some of these look flimsy, so we do not go all the way.

Benchmarks

When the government allocates resources to the security of its own paperwork, is one third a lot? In this section I discuss possible benchmarks obtained from other contexts. One criterion could be how much it takes to excite the public. At the end of 2006 it was revealed that in the previous financial year London’s Metropolitan police had spent around 5 percent of its £3.2 billion budget on “non-incident linked paperwork” (£122.2 million) and “checking paperwork” (£26.5 million).
This figure was enough to create newspaper headlines in the UK.\textsuperscript{54} The Lithuania KGB figure of one third is larger than that of the Met by an order of magnitude, suggesting that the British public would see it as very large.

The principal metric employed in annual reports of the U.S. Information Security Oversight Office is the number of instances of “original” and “derivative” classification and declassification.\textsuperscript{55} Although informative in general terms, this does not lead to any statistic against which Soviet practices can be benchmarked. Since 2003, however, the ISOO has published an annual supplementary estimate of the costs of classification and declassification. The costs of information security and classification management to American government, suitably normalized, could provide a benchmark.

In 2010, $5.7 billion (or 95 percent) of the U.S. federal government’s total outlays on the protection of classified information can be attributed to three departments: Defense, State, and Justice.\textsuperscript{56} What is the right denominator for this sum? In the case of the Lithuania KGB we compared the quantity of paperwork devoted to secret file management with all other paperwork not in individual case files. What is the U.S. government activity that corresponds with the latter? Since paperwork is labour-intensive we use labour costs of the three departments largely responsible for original classification, excluding outlays such as on

\textsuperscript{54} These figures emerged from the Home Office’s annual “activity-based costing” review of police budgets: “Police paperwork costs hit £625m,” by Ben Leapman, \textit{The Telegraph}, December 3, 2006. The figure of £625 million extrapolated the Met’s figures across the country. In 2009 a Home Office report (Normington 2009) made recommendations to reduce paperwork burdens on the police – including to abolish activity-based costing. So, transparency also creates burdens.

\textsuperscript{55} For example U.S. ISOO (2012a).

\textsuperscript{56} ISOO (2012b, p. 3). In 2010 total U.S. federal government costs of “information security” were $5.65 billion. This figure covers “information systems security” (the largest component) together with costs of classification management, declassification, operations security, and technical surveillance countermeasures. To this could be added $352.5 million laid out on “classification management,” making $6.0 billion in total. This figure excludes outlays on the physical security of persons and installations, declassification, education and training, operations security, technical surveillance countermeasures, and “security oversight, management, and planning.” In the same year, 95 percent of original classification activity was undertaken in the Departments of Defense, State, and Justice (U.S. ISOO 2012a, p. 6), and 95 percent of $6.0 billion makes $5.7 billion.
operation and maintenance, procurement, RDTE, construction, and housing. In 2010 U.S. federal outlays on national defense personnel, “conduct of foreign affairs,” and “litigative and judicial activities” came to $184.6 billion.\textsuperscript{57} With that on the bottom line and $5.7 billion on top, outlays on the protection of American secrets in 2010 ran at 3.1 percent of the direct costs of the general activities concerned. Again we have a fraction that falls below the Lithuania KGB’s secrecy burden by an order of magnitude.

Neither the 5 percent of the Metropolitan Police nor the 3 percent of the U.S. federal government can be considered a completely satisfactory benchmark. However, only a detailed historical micro-study of the composition of office documentation of western government agencies engaged in confidential business in the Cold War seems likely to do better.

Until then it seems reasonable to conclude that one third is a large fraction. It exceeds the benchmarks identified so far in British and American practices by an order of magnitude.

4. Conclusions

The Soviet system of accounting for secrets throws light on the transaction costs of doing business under a secretive dictatorship. Conspirative rule imposed something akin to a secrecy tax on the turnover of government business. The burden was increased by Soviet secrecy’s recursive aspect, which means that the system of accounting for secrets was itself secret and so had to account for itself.

Taxation is met by compliance, avoidance, or evasion. The evidence is consistent with the idea that most Soviet officials complied most of the time. There is no evidence of avoidance measures, but localized reports of evasion in the form of neglectful document handling are plentiful. If they went unchecked, bad examples could take hold and locally until they were uncovered and suppressed. Only continual enforcement secured general compliance.

The records of a small regional bureaucracy, the Lithuania KGB, let us measure the burden of secret paperwork. There is much time variation, not all of it easily explained. Under Soviet postwar normality from 1954 to 1982, secret file management contributed around one third of the total documentation now available. This figure is surprisingly large, may be understated, and is the main empirical contribution of the present paper.

\textsuperscript{57} U.S. OMB (2012, pp. 74 and 76): Table 3.2 – Outlays by Function and Subfunction: 1962–2017, line items 051 “military personnel,” 153, and 752.
Further identifying assumptions, some of them fragile, would be required to generalize the figure of one third across the Soviet bureaucracy. If we take it to signal only KGB objectives, then it seems that priority number one was to prevent the armed overthrow of the Soviet state; number two was to shield its own paperwork from the eyes of others.
### Table 1. Levels of Soviet Security Classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of classification</th>
<th>Top secret (“special file” or “of special importance”)</th>
<th>Top secret</th>
<th>Secret</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class of secret</td>
<td>State secret</td>
<td>State secret</td>
<td>Administrative secret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of clearance</td>
<td>First level</td>
<td>Second level</td>
<td>Third level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of damage arising from disclosure</td>
<td>Damage to defence and other state interests</td>
<td>Damage to defence and other state interests</td>
<td>Damage to work of an agency or facility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of penalization</td>
<td>Criminal</td>
<td>Criminal</td>
<td>Criminal or administrative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on Nikitchenko (1972, pp. 75, 323-324). English terms in the table have Russian equivalents as follows: classification (*grif sekretnosti*); clearance (*dostup*); state secret (*gosudarstvennaia taina*); administrative secret (*sluzhebnaia taina*). Not shown in the table are matters that were not secret but nonetheless confidential (*dlia sluzhebnogo pol’zovaniia or ne podlezhit oglaseniu*).
Table 2. The Lithuania KGB collection at Hoover, April 2011: files, pages, and years opened and closed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opis</th>
<th>Year opened</th>
<th>Year closed</th>
<th>Number of:</th>
<th>Files</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1941</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>8,959</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1945</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1,983</td>
<td>415,985</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1940</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>166,888</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>1944</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>662</td>
<td>76,004</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1,878</td>
<td>370,267</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>5,312</td>
<td>1,038,103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>194.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>115.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Counted among the files in this table is one 270-page file (Hoover/LYA, K-1/3/1979), a file catalogue created in 1996 by the new Lithuania Special Archive, which is excluded from further analysis.
Table 3. Lithuania KGB management files, 1940 to 1991: Composition by keyword clusters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1940 to 1953</th>
<th>1954 to 1982</th>
<th>1983 to 1991</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All files</td>
<td>3,433</td>
<td>1,992</td>
<td>1,003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per year</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>142.3</td>
<td>34.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of which, percent:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter-insurgency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounting for secrets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher order</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First order</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matters relating to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>foreigners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints and petitions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic matters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous circulars</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matters relating to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>young people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventive work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matters relating to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not classified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data Appendix, Table A-2. The bold figure is the one that I highlight as the main result of this section of the paper.
Figures

Figure 1. Lithuania KGB management files, 1940 to 1991: number of files by category assigned and year file was opened

Source: As Table 3.
Figure 2. Lithuania KGB management files, 1940 to 1991: number of files assigned to secret file management by first and higher orders and year file was opened

Source: As Table 3. Entries for 1985 (off the scale) are 209 (first order) and 3 (higher order).
References

Archives


Hoover/LYA: Lietuvos ypatingasis archyvas (Lithuanian Special Archive), Lietuvos SSR Valstybės Saugumo Komitetas (Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, Committee of State Security) at the Hoover Institution, selected records, 1940-1985

Hoover/RGANI: Archives of the Soviet Communist Party and Soviet State Microfilm Collection at the Hoover Institution. Records of the Russian State Archive of Recent History (Moscow)

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