

CHAPTER 3

Social Research and the Military:

A Cross-National Expert Survey

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INTRODUCTION

The reason why this research is presented in a handbook is to let the reader know who carries out research in the sociology of the military and under what conditions. As the reader can see from the pages that follow, there are common traits that characterize this research in the various countries as well as distinguishing ones: together, thanks to the good number of countries represented in the research, they provide a useful world overview on the subject. Added to this reason is another, that of giving the reader an example of a quite new research methodology in the sector, one that makes it possible to exploit fully the resources offered by the Internet.

The subject of this study is military sociological research. The study is based on an expert survey conducted by e-mail, in successive stages, among a group of colleagues from different countries who agreed to participate. These countries are Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, India, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Slovenia, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and the United States. The basic questions we posed to ourselves in this study were of two types. One was of a methodological nature, namely what are the advantages/disadvantages and the prospects offered by a survey carried out by e-mail? The second area of interest regarded content and was aimed mainly at providing answers to the following questions: (1) Who is the typical military sociologist? (2) Who commissions such research, and what procedures do they use? (3) How much freedom do researchers have in this field? and (4) What is the social status of military sociological research in the various countries?

The study naturally falls within the more general context of the relationships between theoretical work and empirical research. In its results, it lends support to the thesis, already authoritatively expressed (Boron, 1999), of a crisis of theoretical studies and the advance

of a sociology aimed at chiefly pragmatic ends, while expressing no value judgment on this change here. Boron, for instance, argues (Boron, 1999, p. 47 and following) that the discrediting of theoretical work is due to (1) the crisis of the university format; (2) the growing role played by nonacademic institutions (and, for our purposes, the military is undoubtedly one such institution) and private foundations in drawing up research agendas; (3) effects of the social sciences market, which rewards pragmatic, realistic approaches and punishes theoretical ones; (4) the practical approach, which is increasingly demanded by research funders; and (5) what he calls the deplorable consequence of the garbage-in/garbage-out cycle due to the conditions in which the research is performed. The presentation of the study results begins with an analysis and discussion of the data resulting from the research, followed by a paragraph that illustrates the methodological aspects of the research, and ends with some concluding remarks. Last, Appendix B contains the questionnaire used for the expert survey.

Before analyzing the data it is convenient to present the conceptual framework for a multicase research on the military field study (see Figure 3.1) that we used as a guideline for the research. This scheme is then reproposed at the end of the study (see Appendix A), modified in accordance with the results of the empirical survey, under the name “Resulting framework for a Multicase ‘Research on the Military’ Field Study.” Appendix A provides the reader with a quick graphic view of the unfolding of the research and its results.

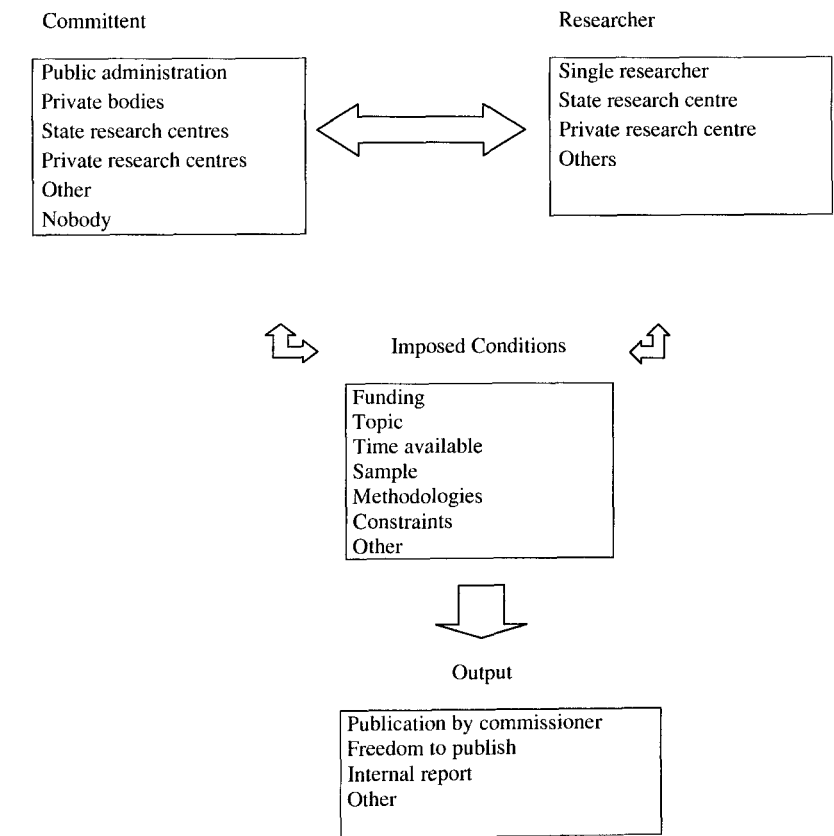


FIGURE 3.1. Conceptual framework for a multicase “research on the military” field study.

WHO IS RUNNING THE RESEARCH IN
THE SOCIOLOGY OF THE MILITARY
AND HOW ARE THEY DOING IT?

The Typical Military Sociologist

To outline the ideal military sociologist, we can start from the sociodemographic data. Ignoring general national characterizations, a larger percentage are male (76% of the sample), fairly well distributed over the different age groups (see Table 3.1), who mostly began doing research in the sector during the 1980s (see Table 3.2) and for the most part are engaged in military sociology in a prevalent (64.7%) but usually not exclusive way (only 11.4%). The military sociologist's education is quite diversified, where the most numerous group is the Ph.D.s (40.6%; several of them are also officers), closely followed by university professors (37.5%). Officers (19.8%) are rather numerous and are equally divided between active and retired. Most of the university professors teach sociology, but not all: 25% teach military psychology (solely or together with military sociology), 17% teach military history, and 8% subjects that can be grouped under conflict resolution science. The main places where the teaching is done are universities and military academies, each with equal percentages of respondents (40%); 11% teach in war college-type institutions and the remainder elsewhere. Most of them do their research work mainly in state-run research centers (34.4%), but a good percentage do it in universities (28.1%) and some freelance (18.8%); a minority (12.5%) work in private research centers. From this point on, however, the situation begins to appear rather different from country to country.

There are countries in which the researcher says he performs military sociological research chiefly (when not exclusively) in a state-run center and others where the research activity on this topic appears to be more balanced between public and private centers; in both cases there is almost always collaboration with the university. And finally, in a few countries it is the research of the freelancers that appears to be most active and widespread. The first area includes Austria, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, and Switzerland. The respondents from South Africa, Slovenia, and Belgium do their research work almost exclusively in universities. Research activity appears to be more evenly divided between public and private in Bulgaria, Italy, Russia, Slovenia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, while it seems to be almost entirely entrusted to freelancers, usually in a university environment, in Argentina, India, and Lithuania. The freelancers' contribution is also strong in Austria, Italy, Russia, and South Africa.

This areal division brings the survey to the parties to whom the research is concretely entrusted by the commissioning bodies. Here, too, the general average does not always seem to be significant, given the big national differences. However, this average sees state-run

TABLE 3.1. Distribution of Age in Military Sociology

Age of respondent (Years)	Percentages of military sociologists
30–40	28
40–50	28
50–60	32
Over 60	12

TABLE 3.2. Distribution by Decade

Start to work in the field	Percentage in military sociology
Before 1970	12
In the 1970s	17
In the 1980s	53
In the 1990s	18

research centers in first place percentagewise, followed by the individual researcher, and then the private research center.

In the first group, the commissioning bodies assign the research without distinction to an individual researcher, a state-run center, or a private center. This group includes Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Italy, Israel, The Netherlands, Slovenia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, which shows a perhaps slight prevalence of assignments being given to private centers. In the second group, entrusting research to private centers appears to be rare (or nonexistent). This group includes Bulgaria, Germany, Poland, Russia, Sweden, South Africa, and Switzerland, but with the following difference: in Bulgaria, Germany, Russia, and Sweden it seems to be almost exclusively the state-run centers that receive research assignments, while in Switzerland it is normally the individual researcher who is called to do research.¹ Then there is the third group, where there are few or no commissioning bodies and the input to the research often comes from the bottom, the individual researcher, so that, in adjusting the subsequent sets of the questionnaire, we had to replace the expression "commissioner" with "authority who accepts/finances the research." This group is made up of Argentina, India, and Lithuania.

Finding a suitable generalization to connote the work environment of our typical researcher is difficult because in some countries the universities are mainly public and in others mainly private, with all the shades in between, so attributing to the individual researchers a public or private work environment is strongly disturbed by the "university" variable. To generalize nonetheless, we feel it is fair to say that our typical researcher works mainly in a public research center, with strong exceptions in the United States and the United Kingdom. The commissioning bodies, almost exclusively public, alternate in awarding the research to individual researchers; to the public centers where they work; and, where they exist, to private centers as well.

But are there preferences/exclusions in the choice of researcher by the commissioners? In general, the countries where there is no exclusion and/or preference in choosing the researcher prevail, but not by much (55.6% versus 44.4%), and the situation has to be looked at country by country. Here, too, it is possible to divide the countries into groups. In the first, most numerous, group, the respondents state that there is no exclusion or preference in the choice of researchers except what may be dictated by the individual's scientific qualifications. These countries are Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Israel, The Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Then there is a country where the respondents' opinions are divided, and this is Germany: two respondents say there are no preferences, while the third states, "I believe there are, but it is very difficult to prove. . ."

¹ Almost always this term means "applied research."

The absence of preferences and exclusions may be determined by particular local factors, as in Switzerland, for which a respondent says, "In a small country there are often not many experts in the field. You have to rely on those at disposal independently of gender, race, civilian or military, and so on." Countries with reported exclusions or preferences are Argentina, Austria, France, India, Italy, Lithuania, and Russia. Where there are preferences, they seem to be in favor of friends (40%), military people (20%), civilians (20%), and for political reasons (20%). Examples of such preferences or exclusions expressed by researchers of individual countries are as follows:

(1) There is a preference of gender and function, expressed in assertions like "Research is exclusively commissioned to high ranking officers, or clerks/bureaucrats from Ministry of Defence or academy. As usual they are males." (2) There are the added dimensions of acquaintances and political attitude, expressed by responses like "Preferences: in general terms: personal friendship; conservative attitudes of researchers; sex: male; reserve officers; party membership (of course, of the political party in power)..." (3) There are also preferences due to acquaintances: "Preferences or exclusion depend upon who knows whom" or "Friends of bureaucrats who belong to the commissioning body."

With these data in mind, therefore, we can say that in many countries our typical researcher is male, a high-ranking officer or functionary (or an ex-officer or ex-functionary) with acquaintances in the usual commissioning body, and politically close to the party in power.

An attempt to learn, in very general terms, the political positions of the respondents was not very successful, as 53% of the sample did not respond to this question, judged by some as "too private to answer." However, the data for those who answered confirm a prevalently sympathetic position to the party in power (28%), with 12.5% professing indifference and 6.3% opposed.

What is the real role that the military sociologist plays, beyond the research activities? We tried to determine this by means of a question asking whether sociologists acted as advisers or experts to the general staff (question 26 in Appendix B). This role is present in several countries: the dual role of adviser and researcher occurs in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, The Netherlands, Slovenia, Sweden, and the United States. In the United States, for example, one respondent states:

There are a few military officers with education in sociology that do act as advisors in personnel matters. The greatest influence is from academics who do research and then present it to military personnel. In a few cases, noted sociologists are consulted directly by military leaders and appointed to commissions and study groups.

Such a figure appears as an adviser in Austria and mostly as a researcher in South Africa. He is an occasional figure ("for specific issues") in Belgium and Switzerland and a composite one ("specialists from psychology and related disciplines") in the United Kingdom. There seem to be initiatives toward hiring such figures in the remaining countries (except for India and Lithuania), expressed in statements like "Until now, connections in the right place (more often than not, political) were the main source of influence. There is now talk of institutionalising social science adviser..." Our typical researcher thus tends also to take on an official role of consulting and/or research for the top echelons of the military establishment. This is already a reality in some countries especially in the United States, while it is in progress elsewhere.



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