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RURAL ROOTS OF AUTHORITARIAN POPULISM IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA

Abstract

This paper examines rural support for authoritarian populism in Vladimir Putin's Russia. Supporters of authoritarian populism are commonly portrayed as "simple people", who vote against their own interests as they are not sophisticated enough to resist the propaganda they encounter. This study rejects this simplistic approach and investigates the objective and subjective factors that shape political views and preferences of rural Russians, who are the main supporters of Putin's regime. In particular, this study discusses the agrarian transformations and historical legacies that gave rise to rural support for the authoritarian regime. Special attention is devoted to analyzing discourses in which villagers express their opinions about strongman leadership, democracy, national interests, the 'others' at home and abroad and other elements of authoritarian populism.

Keywords: authoritarian populism, Putinism, rural communities, Russia

1. Introduction

A number of analytical discussions on contemporary populist movements include Russia as an example of authoritarian populism (Stroop 2017, Reicher 2017). Some experts even believe that Putin was the first who discovered a breach in the modern liberal democracy and created an authoritarian regime that enjoys popular support by "making empty populist promises and using the political short-sightedness and irresponsibility of the ordinary people" (Yudin and Matveyev 2017). Authoritarian populism is a subset of populism. It is characterised by a coercive, disciplinary state, a rhetoric of national interests, populist unity between the "ordinary people" and an authoritarian leader, nostalgia for "past glories" and confrontations with "Others" at home and/or abroad. While the supply-side of authoritarian populism (i.e. the strategic appeals of its leaders and the programs of populist parties) have received considerable public and academic attention (Chacko and Jayasuriya

2017; Inglehart and Norris 2016; Vieten and Poynting 2016), little is known about the demand side of this phenomenon. The supporters of authoritarian populism are commonly portrayed as “simple people”, who vote against their own interests as they are not sophisticated enough to resist the propaganda they encounter (Judis 2016, Inglehart and Norris 2016). However, scholars often forget that “any regime reflects the needs of the society under which it had originated” (Taylor 1998, p.223).

This study looks beyond the assumption of “simple people – victims of propaganda”, and discusses various social, economic, political and cultural factors that influence rural dwellers’ support for Putin’s authoritarian governance. Rural Russians are the key political actors in Putin’s Russia: their electoral support and relatively high turnout at presidential, parliamentary and regional elections¹ have contributed to the regime’s durability for more than 18 years (Zubov 2017, Mamonova 2016a, Vasilyeva 2015). However, their political views and preferences are largely overlooked in Russian studies literature,² which portrays them as politically apathetic, conservative, reluctant to engage in open contestations, and having no influence on the ongoing political processes (see Granberg and Satre 2017 on the “othering” of rural Russians).

This paper approaches the issue of rural support for Putin’s governance in a complex way. It analyses both objective factors (the socio-economic and political situation in the countryside) and subjective factors (the popular discourses through which villagers justify their support for Putin and share their positions on democratic government, elections, domestic and foreign policy, migrant issues, etc.). In so doing, this paper contributes to the emerging literature on authoritarian populism and the rural world, which calls researchers to “understand, but not judge, the social base, and its class, gender, ethnic and cultural-religious dimensions, which gives rise to regressive and exclusionary, sometimes violent, political movements” (Scoons et al. 2017, p.3).

This study is based on primary qualitative data, obtained during fieldwork in the Moscow, Vladimir and Stavropol regions during 2013-2015 and in the Moscow region in 2017. The first set of primary data was collected to analyze rural politics in general, while the latter was conducted for the purposes of this study and focused on motives, incentives and underlying processes of rural support for authoritarian populism. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with various rural dwellers: commercial and subsistence farmers, rural workers, farm directors, civil servants, pensioners, rural activists, and other social

groups. Elements of critical discourse analysis are used to analyze the primary qualitative data. In order to ensure the respondents' anonymity their names have been replaced with pseudonyms. The interviews were conducted in Russian; the direct quotations used in the text are the author's translations. The primary data is complemented with secondary data derived from online sources, mass media and academic publications, interviews with experts, and statistical information from governmental and non-governmental analytical centers.

The paper is structured as follows. The next (second) section presents the existing theoretical assumptions about popular support to authoritarian populism and discusses their limitations. Section three briefly introduces the political situation in Russia. Section four discusses the relations between the structures of political authority and agrarian property regimes in Russia. The empirical analysis starts in section five, which provides an analysis of villagers' perceptions of democracy, elections and strongman leadership. Section six is devoted to understanding various interests behind villagers' support of Putin's regime. Section seven discusses who are the "Others" in rural Russia and why Russia's quest for great-power status in an international arena is more important for many villagers than their economic wellbeing. The final section discusses the implication of this study's results for understanding the rural support for authoritarian populism.

2. Popular Support for Authoritarian Populism: Key Assumptions and their Limitations

Authoritarian populism is not a new phenomenon. This term was first introduced by Stuart Hall (1980) to explain the policy of Margaret Thatcher that provided a right-wing solution to the economic and political crisis in Britain. Among the main features of authoritarian populism, Hall distinguished: a strong and interventionist state, a shift towards a "law-and-order" society, populist unity between people and the power block, an embrace of nationalist over sectional interests, and an anti-elite movement.

Hall's concept of authoritarian populism was criticized by Jessop et al. (1984) for its ambiguity and problematic coupling of the notions of "authority" and "people": "sometimes its authoritarian, disciplinary, coercive pole is emphasized, sometimes its populist, popular, and

consensual pole” (Jessop et al. 1984, p. 35). However, the very same contradiction between “authoritarian” and “populism” makes the concept of authoritarian populism suitable to explain the current crisis of liberal democracy. In this context, the ordinary people are willing to give up some of their personal freedoms and follow an authoritarian leader, who aims to represent the people’s interests and to return the national “glory” – one presumably lost due to the activities of the “Others” at home and/or abroad. It is aimed at “taking back control” in favor of the people and nation-states. It favors “nationalist interests over cosmopolitanism cooperation across borders, protectionist policies regulating the movement of trade, people and finance over global free trade, xenophobia over tolerance of multiculturalism, strong individual leadership over diplomatic bargaining and flexible negotiations, isolationism in foreign and defense policies over international engagement, and traditional over progressive values” (Inglehart and Norris 2016, p.17).

In many countries, authoritarian populism has a strong rural bias (Scoons et al. 2017; Inglehart and Norris 2016; Edelman 2003; Berlet and Lyons 2000). Neoliberal capitalism has brought a number of problems to rural areas around the world. The commodification of land and nature, massive resource extraction, multinational corporations’ control over the agri-food system, the dispossession of rural communities from productive resources, have caused poverty among many smallholders and farmers, exacerbated socio-economic inequality, and created the “relative surplus population” that spreads across rural, peri-urban and urban areas (Hall, Scoones, and Tsikata 2015; Edelman, Oya, and Borrás 2013; Li 2010). Many right-wing populist parties use the ongoing crisis in the countryside to gain popular support among the rural population.³ In their study of populist parties’ strategies across Europe, Inglehart and Norris (2016) revealed that “support for rural interests” is one of the main goals in the parties’ programs.

The supporters of authoritarian populism are commonly portrayed as “simple people” who vote against their own interests (Inglehart and Norris 2016). The popular support for this political movement is discussed as being “irrational” (Jessop et al. 1984, p.35) and “against all logic and humanism” (Peters 2017, p.1). For example, the recent choice of British farmers for Brexit was discussed in the media as a “vote against self-interests”, because by leaving the EU, British farmers lost their access to subsidies within the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy, cheap migrant labor from Europe, and European markets. In regimes where authoritarian

governments enjoy popular support for many years (such as in Russia and China), popular support is commonly explained by state-led propaganda that has the greatest impact on the less sophisticated population, who are not able to resist it (Geddes and Zaller 1989). Russian rural dwellers' consistent support for Putin despite rural poverty and unemployment is often presented as "paradoxical" and largely a result of the state control over mass media (Vasilyeva 2015).

There are two main explanations of popular support for authoritarian populism: the economic insecurity perspective and the cultural backlash thesis. The economic insecurity perspective emphasises the consequences of profound changes transforming the workplace and society in post-industrial economies (Inglehart and Norris 2016; Piketty 2014, Hacker 2006). According to this view, less secure social strata – so-called "left-behinds" – are heavily affected by economic insecurity and social deprivation and, therefore, are more vulnerable to anti-establishment, nativist, and xenophobic feelings; as a result, they blame "Others" for stripping prosperity, job opportunities, and public services from "Us" (Inglehart and Norris 2016). However, this perspective explains only one side of the phenomenon. In their analysis of 268 populist political parties in 31 European countries, Inglehart and Norris (2016) revealed that populists do indeed receive great support from those less well-off and those who have experienced unemployment. However, in terms of occupational class, populist voting was strongest among the "petty bourgeoisie", not unskilled manual workers. Moreover, populist parties received less support among those whose main source of income came from social welfare benefits (Inglehart and Norris 2016). Both of these findings contradict the economic inequality and social deprivation argument.

The cultural backlash thesis explains popular support for authoritarian populism as a reaction to progressive cultural change. According to this position, the societal transformation to post-materialist values (primarily, cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism) have triggered a retro backlash. This backlash would be especially present among older generations, who "feel strangers from predominant values in their own country, left behind by progressive tides of cultural change which they do not share" (Inglehart and Norris 2016, p.5). For these people, the past is associated with national "greatness", traditional family values, and a strong, monocultural national identity. Their conservatism and traditionalist inspirations are ardently manipulated by populist politicians. However, the cultural backlash thesis

does not explain why younger generations support authoritarian populism. It also presents the populist support as a unique moment in history.

An additional weak point of both cultural and economic theories is that they tend to treat the supporters of authoritarian populism as a homogeneous group, without distinguishing different motives and interests among them. When talking about the supporters of authoritarian populism, many scholars use the concept of “silent majority”, borrowed from Richard Nixon’s populist approach during the Vietnam War. This “silent majority” is portrayed as the majority of the “ordinary”, “simple”, “little” people, whose interests are often overlooked in favor of the “vocal minority” of the economic and political establishment (Judis 2016, Inglehart and Norris 2016). There is no significant attempt to understand the divisions and different interests within this group.

Finally, the majority of studies repeat the initial shortcoming of Hall (1980): they focus on the ideological, discursive aspects of authoritarian populism and the political strategies of populist parties, and overlook the socio-economic transformations and class conflict that provided the ground for this political movement’s emergence (see the critique of Jessop et al. 1984). However, classic studies have demonstrated the existence of interrelations between the structures of political authority and agrarian property regimes. Moore (1966, p.426) believed that “the destruction of the peasantry was critical to the formation of liberal democracies, while the retention of peasantries into the modern era imposed either fascism or communism”. Rueschemeyer et al. (1992) argued that the inclination of different rural groups towards democracy depend on the agrarian structure and class conflict in the rural society. According to them, “independent family farmers in small-holding countries were a pro-democratic force, whereas their posture in countries or areas dominated by large landholdings is more authoritarian. Peasants living on large estates remained by and large unmobilized and thus did not play a role in democratization. Rural wage workers on plantations did attempt to organize, and where they were not repressed, they joined other working-class organizations in pushing for political inclusion” (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992 p.247). Therefore, understanding the pattern of agrarian transformation is crucial to understanding the inclination of rural population towards authoritarian populism or liberal democracy.

3. Is there Authoritarian Populism in Russia?

There are ongoing debates on whether Vladimir Putin's rule can be characterized as authoritarian populism (Oliker 2017, Muravyeva 2017, Yudin and Matveyev 2017). Putin did follow the same path as some Western populists – he came to power through elections and then proceeded to centralize. His regime's strongman authoritarian leadership, coercive disciplinary state power, traditionalist and nationalist (sometimes xenophobic) appeals in domestic and foreign policies, demonstrative attacks on "disloyal" elites, and popular support among ordinary Russians are features that resemble authoritarian populism. However, Putin did not come to power in 2000 on a populist platform, and his first two presidential terms were based on a programme of economic modernization and neoliberal development. This period also coincided with rising oil prices, which boosted Russia's economic growth. The global financial crisis that hit the country in 2008 triggered growing dissatisfaction among many Russians who experienced a decline in earnings. People became more critical to systematic corruption and started doubting the government's ability to manage the economy. The crisis also "undercut whatever vestiges of support remained for the neoliberal, globalization, and pro-Western model of economic development" (Chaisty and Whitefield 2015, p.167).

In response to the growing social discontent, Putin's third presidential turn (from 2012 onwards) involved more direct engagement with nationalist issues, and took "a conservative direction, with greater prominence given to themes of order and the need to protect the state" (Chaisty and Whitefield 2015, p.169). Putin has used the Tsarist and Soviet legacies in order to develop patriotism and a unified sense of Russian identity and to create positive historical parallels to justify the state's policy toward internal opposition and external enemies (Mamonova 2016a, p.326). The idea of a strong – nearly sovereign – leader, who has the power to intervene in any political process and decision making, is often portrayed by the state-controlled mass media as the only efficient way to rule the country. Furthermore, the Orthodox Church gained an important role in constructing a unifying ideology and loyalty to the country's authoritarian leadership.

Mamonova (2016a) argued that Putin's governance (re-)established naive monarchist principles in the state-society relations: the president plays the role of an intercessor and benefactor for the ordinary people, while all problems are blamed on "disloyal" and "evil" elites, who

deliberately misrepresent and misinform the president. Indeed, Putin regularly demonstrates his benevolence and closeness to ordinary Russians (i.e. his shirtless pictures on fishing trips, staged meetings with provincial residents, the annual TV question-and-answer session “Hotline with the President”, etc.). From time to time, Putin demonstratively punishes “disloyal” elites to maintain his image of the “just and impartial ruler”. However, the business elites are the backbone of Putin’s regime and his demonstrative punishments are aimed at maintaining the elites’ loyalty and satisfying anti-elite sentiments of ordinary Russians (Mamonova 2016a).

The relations between Putin and elites are one of the arguments against calling the Russian regime “populism” (Oiker 2017, Yudin and Matveyev 2017). Oiker (2017, p.16) argued that “anti-elite and anti-corruption campaigns, and popular feeling, are fundamentally different in Russia, where corruption is simply more accepted as part and parcel of the system, than in Europe”. Another reason against Russian populism is the depoliticization of ordinary Russians. According to Yudin and Matveyev (2017), while populist leaders in other countries are aimed at mobilizing and politicizing their supporters, Putinism is based on the demobilization and depoliticization of the Russian population and on the endorsement of peoples’ “non-interference in the affairs of those who are above”. However, Muravyeva (2017) argued that “parapolitics” and “depoliticization” are features of populism “a-la-Rus”. This form of populism would be one where the president-elites coalition is officially “hidden” from the public, and where, in addition to the population’s depoliticization, any political affair is also depoliticized and presented solely as an economic, technical issue (e.g., the protectionist food policy is presented as an economic measure and anti-LGBT policy as demographic revival).

The present paper does not take sides in the debates on Russian populism but rather aims to examine why rural dwellers support the following features of the regime: strongman leadership, a strong coercive state, traditionalism and conservatism, nostalgia for “past glories”, and confrontation with the “Others” at home and abroad. Rural dwellers are the major supporters of Putin’s regime. According to the Public Opinion Foundation (2017), 70% of rural Russians have a strong positive attitude towards the president and 21% a semi-positive attitude; these are the highest figures in the country, where the averages are 66% and 20%, respectively. We could certainly doubt the results of Russian opinion polls; however, even if the actual numbers of Putin’s supporters are lower than presented, all experts agree upon the phenomenal popularity

of Putin among ordinary Russians, and especially among the residents of rural areas (Vasilyeva 2015). Rural dwellers constitute nearly 30% of the total population (Rosstat 2017). Moreover, many residents of small towns and town-like settlements are not very different from rural dwellers “in terms of lifestyle, consumption pattern, and socio-political orientations and beliefs”. Together with villagers, they represent more than 50% of the population (Gudkov and Dubin 2002, p.1). This largely conservative social array “has a decisive influence on the course of changes in the country” (Gudkov and Dubin 2002, p.1).

4. Agrarian structure and political regime

In order to understand the villagers’ support for the existing regime, we need to understand the socio-economic structure of the rural society. The classical studies on rural societies demonstrate interrelations between the structures of political authority and agrarian property regimes (Marx and Engels 1967 [1848], Moore 1966, Skocpol 1979, Rueschemeyer et al. 1992). Moore (1966) argued that the preservation of the peasantry leads to an emergence of authoritarian regimes, as the landed class needs a repressive state to help with surplus extraction. Meanwhile, the bourgeoisie is the major actor pushing for democracy, as economic development driven by capitalist interests in competition with each other brings about political freedom and democratization of the society (Moore 1966). Marxists, on contrary, believed that bourgeois democracies proclaim the rule of the people, but, in fact, only protect the interests of the capitalist class (Marx and Engels 1967 [1848]).

This study follows Rueschemeyer et al. (1992), who explained different classes’ inclination towards or against democracy using the following factors: 1) their control of productive resources and relations to other classes; 2) their ability to organize themselves and engage in collective action; 3) the structure, strength and autonomy of the state apparatus and its relations with civil society; and 4) geopolitical dependence relations (since the geopolitical interests of core countries may generate direct interventions to support or resist the repressive state apparatus). Rueschemeyer et al. nuanced Moore’s argument on the pro-democratic bourgeoisie, arguing that the bourgeoisie’s attitude towards extending political inclusion to lower classes depends on its ability to accumulate productive resources in a given agrarian property structure. In small-holding countries, the

rural bourgeoisie – family farmers – is “a pro-democratic force, whereas its posture in countries or areas dominated by large landholdings is more authoritarian” (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992, p.247). Meanwhile, peasants are the least inclined to democracy, as they are unable to mobilize themselves and do not have a strong interest in effecting their political inclusion due to their subsistence-oriented production. The typical rules in agrarian societies that feature the peasant mode of production have been autocracy and oligarchy (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992). Even today, Kurtz and Barnes (2002) have revealed that a larger rural population with peasant-like features correlates with lower levels of democracy.

The Soviet government attempted to eradicate the peasantry and create rural proletariats. The peasants’ land and property were confiscated in favor of kolkhozy and sovkhozy (large-scale collective and state farms) during the collectivization campaign of the 1930s. This was accompanied by *dekulakisation* – arrests, deportation and even murders of so-called *kulaks* – better-off peasants, who were labeled as “rural bourgeoisie” and seen as enemies of the socialist regime. According to Bernhard (2005, p.21), the Soviet government solved the “landlord-peasant problem, though democracy was not on the agenda”. Along with the state control and planning system in all spheres of economy, a strong authoritarian regime emerged. Despite the proclaimed proletarianization of society, Soviet villagers did not completely become rural workers. Even though nearly all rural dwellers had official jobs at kolkhozy and sovkhozy, they also conducted subsistence farming on their household plots of 0.2 ha on average, which they had been allowed to own since the late 1930s. This highly productive food production – so-called *lichnoye podsobnoye khoziaystvo* [personal subsidiary farming] – was “outside the state planning and procurement system” (Wegren 2005, p.8) and preserved a number of peasant features (see Humphrey 2002 on “Soviet peasant”).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia stepped on the way towards capitalist development and democratization of society, largely promoted by Western experts and donors. In the countryside, the land reform was initially aimed at distributing the kolkhozy’s and sovkhozy’s land to rural dwellers by means of land share certificates for private farming development. However, due to the absence of financial resources and informational support, the fragmented and often non-functioning markets, and the rural dwellers’ unwillingness to leave the collectives, the majority of land recipients did not become farmers (Pallot and Nefedova 2007). The restructured kolkhozy and sovkhozy

experienced severe financial difficulties in free market conditions. This led to increased rural unemployment and poverty. Many rural residents, especially young people, “voted with their feet” and moved to cities. Those who remained in the villages became highly dependent on subsistence farming on their household plots.

Putin’s rise to power in 2000 has changed the direction of Russia’s democratic reforms. His “guided democracy” is characterized by state control over political, economic, social, and civil institutions. The democracy is now used rather “for decoration, than direction”: election results are predefined, the mass media is state controlled, and court decisions follow the interests of the authorities (Dawisha 2014, p.8). In the countryside, the previous state programs of private farming development were curtailed, and the main state support was directed towards the reestablishment of large-scale industrial agriculture, albeit in neoliberal guise. Land sales were legalized in 2002, which brought oligarchic capital to the countryside. Russian oligarchs and foreign investors bought (or rented) land shares from the rural population, which led to the emergence and spread of agrohholdings and megafarms on former collective lands (Visser et al. 2012). In his analysis of the land reform, Wegren (2009, p. 143) states: “Russia’s contemporary land reform did not deliver on early intentions in that large farms continue to use most of Russia’s agricultural land. Individuals have not become ‘masters of the land’”. The former large collective farms were transformed into even larger agricultural enterprises, while the majority of the rural population continue being dependent on semi-subsistent farming at their household plots.

The preservation of Soviet-like agricultural structures makes it so the neoliberal agricultural development is socially accepted to a certain extent. Villagers often continue calling the large farms “kolkhozy” and “sovkhozy” and experience strong nostalgia about the Soviet past (Mamonova 2016b). Moreover, according to Petrick et al. (2013), due to the socialist tradition of industrialized farming, post-Soviet rural dwellers regard themselves primarily as workers and not as landowners; they therefore do not long for independent commercial family farming but prefer wage jobs. Although the newly established large farms need much less labor than their collective predecessors, the created jobs are very much appreciated by the rural population. Mamonova (2016b) argued that the contemporary Russian agricultural system is an example of the “coexistence scenario”, i.e. a situation where large and small farms operate on different market segments and do not compete with each other regarding land. Large farm

enterprises control 80% of Russian farmland and contribute to 52% of the gross agricultural output, specializing primarily in grain production for export. Meanwhile, rural households grow staple food for personal consumption and occasional sales at local markets. They produce 35% of the total food in Russia by cultivating only 8% of the country's farmland. Private farming remains underdeveloped, with only 0.5% of rural dwellers that can call themselves commercial family farmers; their contribution to the domestic agricultural product is about 10% (Rosstat 2017, All-Russian Agricultural Census of 2016).

The underdevelopment of rural bourgeoisie – i.e. individual family farmers – left the Russian countryside without the main driving force for democratization. The majority of small-scale food producers share peasant features, such as a self-controlled resource base, traditional farming methods, family labor, and a non-commercial orientation. This peasant-like farming makes rural households resilient to economic disturbances, and therefore, limits their propensity for collective action. Rural wages contribute to just one-third of the rural family income; other incomes come from farming and social transfers, making many households similar to what Dorondel and Șerban (2014) called the “peasant-worker” formation. The lack of capitalist development within rural society hinders the emergence of bottom-up demands for democracy. Meanwhile, the preservation of many Soviet structures and networks makes rural dwellers more inclined towards the former socialist values and system of governance. The post-socialist “pro-democratic” reforms did not result in the emergence of civil society in the countryside. The majority of the rural population tends to distrust independent civil organizations and collective initiatives. As a result, there are hardly any civic organizations or social movements that could defend the interests of smallholders and represent them in the political arena (Mamonova and Visser 2014).

The ongoing geopolitical conflict between Russia and the West brought Russia further away from Western forms of democracy and liberal governance. In response to the Western sanctions over Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and military interventions in Eastern Ukraine, the Russian government adopted an embargo on food imports from a number of Western countries. This embargo is often discussed as part of the protectionist food policy that aims to help develop national agriculture and guarantee national food security (Wegen et al. 2017). However, food embargo primarily benefits large agribusinesses that receive the majority of state subsidies. Meanwhile, the number of family farmers has declined

since the embargo was adopted, despite official claims that the embargo positively influences the small-scale entrepreneurship in the countryside (All-Russian Agricultural Census of 2016⁴).

5. Democracy, Elections and Strongman Leadership

In authoritarian populism, the ordinary people are willing to give up some of their personal democratic freedoms and follow an authoritarian leader who claims to represent their interests. In the early 1990s, many Russians were enthusiastic over democracy and supported democratic reforms hoping that the post-socialist transformation would bring a better life to many. However, the economic and political turmoil of the 1990s disillusioned many Russians with democracy, which became associated with instabilities and uncertainties. Today, a majority of the population believes that their country would be better served by a strong leader rather than a democratic government. According to a Pew Global Attitudes poll (2006), the Russian people would choose a strong economy over a good democracy by a margin of almost six to one. In the countryside, where people experienced the most painful post-soviet transition period, democracy provokes quite negative associations. Pensioner Vitaly (69), who used to be a combine driver at a former kolkhoz, does not believe in democracy for ordinary people, but describes it as a means of wealth accumulation by elites:

Demokratiya [democracy] is, in fact, *der'mokratiya* [note: a vulgar and profane word associated with faecal matter]. It belongs to those who have large wallets [full of money]. They have democracy. [...] We do not know what democracy is. Maybe, democracy does not exist at all. There is a ruling elite [that follows the principle]: you give to me – I give to you. That is what they call a democracy.⁵

The vulgar word “*der'mokratiya*” is commonly used by less educated rural dwellers, as revealed in a number of interviews for this study. However, there is also another, more spiritual explanation for the ‘bad nature’ of democracy. Thus, Maria (59) – a former vendor in a rural shop, now a subsistent farmer – shared her understanding of democracy:

Democracy comes from the word “demon”. I cannot explain it, but it is very negative. I have read the Elders’ sayings, I don’t remember what it was exactly about, but he [the author of the text] compared democracy to demons.⁶

Certainly, the official position of the Orthodox Church does not support this argument. It is not possible to track the original source of the “demon” explanation for the word “democracy”, but it would not be surprising for some extreme religious views to find support among rural dwellers, who are traditionally more superstitious and prone to believe in *supernatural* powers.

The recent study of Volkov and Goncharov (2015) on Russians’ views on democracy revealed that the negative associations with democracy are shared by 13% of the population, and that 24% think that this form of government is not for Russia. Meanwhile, 63% of respondents believe that democracy is needed. However, the majority of them believe that Russia should have its own “unique” form of democracy, which is largely associated with a strong state that takes care of the people, economic stability, law and order, and free elections.⁷

Democracy finds its stronger adherents among those Russians who have benefited financially from the transition to capitalism (Pew Global Attitudes poll 2006). Independent family farmers that emerged during the transition period of the 1990s are, in general, pro-democratic and have a clearer understanding of democracy. However, they are disappointed with *how* democracy has worked out in their country. Alexander (55), a farmer specialized in potato production, shares his pessimistic views:

Do not we have democracy? What is democracy? If it is to say whatever you want to say – I can say everything now, how does it change the situation? [...] Voting? I can go to the elections. But if I will not vote for him, they will ‘draw’ my answer. What is the point?⁸

The largest number of violations in the conduct of elections, including substitution of mobile ballot boxes, usually occurs in the countryside (Mishanova 2010). However, these violations do not provoke social resistance or mobilization, but rather contribute to a deepening of political apathy among rural dwellers. Many family farmers – who typically are more critical to Putin’s regime – do not participate in elections. For example, a farmer Nikolai (65) said: “why should I go? My voice changes

nothing. Last time I voted for Yeltsin, it took me a half of a day, while my cows were not milked". However, Nikolai acknowledges that many residents of his village still go to the election polls:

Here, people go to the polls. Mostly elderly. By inertia. It is like a duty of some kind. Elections, elections! You get a postcard. A beautiful postcard! There is a flag painted; they addressed me personally: "Nikolai Alexandrovich, come to the polls". But is there a choice?⁹¹⁰

Many respondents said that they consistently vote for Putin as there is no better alternative. Indeed, Putin's government consistently and purposefully eliminated all political alternatives, presenting Putin as the only man capable of ruling the country (Levinson 2017). Therefore, the elections are perceived not as making a democratic choice between different candidates, but rather as a symbolic act of expressing loyalty and their approval of Putin's performance. This distorted understanding of elections comes to the fore in the following quote from rural dweller Ivan (71). When asked whether he will vote in the presidential elections of 2018, Ivan answered with an honest surprise: "Are we electing Putin again? Five years have passed already? Time flies!"¹¹

Elections in the countryside are different from urban areas, in that rural voters are primarily guided by the candidates' personal characteristics, not by pre-election political campaigns and programs (Shpikalov 2010, Petrov 2013). Thus, many of this study's respondents stressed the importance of Putin's strong and heroic traditional masculinity and his charismatic leadership, but they are not interested in the political program of his party. The image of Putin as a representative of the ordinary people is highly popular among rural dwellers. A rural bus driver, Vladimir (58), stresses which of the president's features he appreciates the most:

How nicely he treats the ordinary people! He knows [everything] inside and out. I like him very much. He can answer any question. And he does not look whether you are poor or a millionaire. He talks to everyone.¹²

In his public appearances, Putin shows that he does not only support the ordinary people, he is also one of them. Berelovich (2017) referred to Putin's shirtless photoshoots where he rides horses, goes on fishing trips, etc. as the means to create a populist image of a real "*muzhik*" (real man,

man of the people; and, interestingly, also literally a peasant man in Tsarist Russia). Indeed, in their interviews, villagers often used the word “muzhik” to characterize the president. In addition, although the “peasant” meaning of the word is less common nowadays, it is possible to suggest that Putin’s “muzhik” image is more popular in the countryside than in urban areas.

While describing the ideal profile for a country leader, many of this study’s respondents used the word “*khozyain*” (a household leader, a master). This description is also shared by villagers who do not support Putin, as they blame Putin for being a bad “*khozyain*”. The word “*khozyain*” was first mentioned in the *Domostroy* (Domestic Order) – the 16th-century Russian set of household rules, instructions and advice pertaining to various religious, social, domestic, and family matters in the Russian society (Pouncy 1994). According to the *Domostroy*, the main qualities of a good *khozyain* were discernment, knowledge of the practical side of the matter, and concern for the material and especially moral position of subordinates. Today, the word “*khozyain*” is often associated with a leader of a wealthy rural household (similar to *kulak*). Many of the interviewed villagers compared the country with a traditional peasant family while explaining their views on what form of governance is needed for Russia. Villager Sergey (61), who is self-sufficient in food production at his household plot, refers to the idea of “*khozyain*” as the head of a peasant family and the head of the country:

Russia – it used to be mostly peasant. How is a peasant family organized? There should be a *khozyain*. Otherwise, the household will fall apart. There should be only one bear in a den. And everyone should listen to him. A strong man should lead the family [...] The state is a family but on a large scale.¹³

Thus, even though the contemporary rural society is not a peasant society, many traditional peasant norms and values have been preserved and define peoples’ perceptions of an ideal form of governance in Russia. The failure of democratic institutions to express the will of the people discourages critically-minded people to participate in elections, while supporters of the regime go to the polls to express their loyalty and their approval of the president’s performance. The rural attention to the personal characteristics of the leader, instead of his political programs, create a fertile ground for cultivating the image of Putin as a real “muzhik” and

a good “khozyain” for the country, which also have strong associations with the peasant culture and lifestyle.

6. Against self-interests?

Rural dwellers’ support for Putin’s regime is often portrayed as being against their self-interests. Russian journalist Vasilyeva (2015) wrote: “few jobs and little hope, but rural Russia sticks with Putin”. Although Putin’s agricultural policies enhanced the performance of the agrarian sector and caused a moderate decline in overall rural poverty (however, at a much slower pace than urban poverty), the percentage of the poor that are concentrated in the countryside has grown (Papalexiou 2015). The official rural unemployment is about 10%, while the real number might be 2-2.5 times higher (Bondarenko 2012). Rural salaries are at 53.3% of the average level in the country, and 20% of rural families live below the poverty line (Bondarenko 2012). Outmigration from rural areas in search of better employment in the cities is a growing trend, creating a demographic watershed. Today, the Russian countryside experience serious ageing, with 26% of its inhabitants are above retirement age.

In their interviews, rural dwellers expressed strong dissatisfaction with the socio-economic situation in the countryside. However, their feelings of inequality and injustice are less strong: “Have we ever lived well in the countryside?” – farm manager Sergey (46) rhetorically asked.¹⁴ Many villagers take the period of economic and political instabilities during the post-socialist transition period of the 1990s as a point of comparison. For many of them, the situation has improved since then. Ludmila (54) – a milkmaid at the reorganized collective farm – refers to the interruptions in the payment of wages¹⁵ during the 1990s to justify her support for Putin:

As for me, I am for Putin. With him, we started receiving salaries. Before, we worked without salaries. Once, we did not receive salaries for seven months. I remember I did not go to a shop for three months. We planted our household plot with potatoes. That’s how we survived. (I: When did the situation begin to change?) With Putin. With him, we started seeing the light.¹⁶

The bitter memories of the post-socialist transition period make rural dwellers afraid of any changes. Many respondents refer to the ongoing

political and economic crisis in Ukraine as a result of a societal push for pro-democratic changes. Villager Sergey (61) explained why he supports the existing order despite the existing socio-economic problems in Russia:

Was it better during Yeltsin? Would it be better if the *der'mokrats* come to power again?! In Ukraine, they came. Nothing got better – the same corruption. Do you want to be like in Ukraine? There, they live even worse than us. If we will change the [political] power – it will be only worse.¹⁷

Thus, for the sake of stability, Russian dwellers are willing to tolerate corruption. Kendall (2013) found that, despite negative societal attitudes towards corruption, there is a high tolerance for it among the Russian society. A villager, Ludmila (54), said with regret: “You have to steal; you do not steal – you get nothing. Unfortunately, this is the rule. That is what we’ve come to”. The belief that corruption is unavoidable and cannot be defeated was reinforced by various highly-demonstrative anti-corruption campaigns against regional governors that ended with the removal of all charges and the release of the corrupt officials (Sinelschikova 2017). According to opinion polls, 89% of Russians are convinced that government bodies are entirely or seriously corrupt; however, only 25% of respondents thought the president Putin accountable for this (Levada Centre 2016). In their interviews, many rural dwellers talked about the president as a just and impartial benefactor of the ordinary people, while all problems were ascribed to corrupt officials, who distorted the noble orders of the president. Natalia (81), who runs a small farm together with her son and daughter-in-law, gave this representative statement:

Putin is a good man. He increased our pensions... He makes it better for people, but you cannot be a warrior when you are alone in the field. He cannot cover everything. The local authorities are those who do things wrong.¹⁸

Mamonova (2016a) revealed that many rural Russians faithfully believe in the myth of a just president and evil officials. However, some of them strategically use this myth in their grievances: they frame their dissent within the official discourse of deference and express their loyalty to the president to shield themselves from repressions. At the same time, they deliberately exploit the gap between the rights promised by the president and the rights delivered by local authorities, demanding that

the latter fulfill their obligations. This form of state-society interactions was commonly used by peasants in Tsarist Russia and has re-emerged in Putin's regime (Mamonova 2016a). The official forms of dispute resolution are ineffective – courts are among the most corrupt public institutions in Russia. Therefore, rural dwellers resort to more traditional methods: they write petitions to the president and organize pickets to Kremlin alongside appeals to prosecutor offices and courts.

Even though rural activists venerate the president in their grievances, few of them naively believe in his impartiality and incorruptibility. The following focus group discussion with rural dwellers – a group of former workers from the reorganized sovkhoz “Serp i Molot” in the Balashicha district – is indicative. These workers have been using different means to demand compensations for their land shares, which they lost during the illegal acquisition and deliberate bankruptcy of the sovkhoz:

Woman 1: And who did this? It was during Putin. So, it was his will. The courts are not fools – they fulfilled his order. Putin could not be uninformed about this. I doubt that... Then, there was Medvedev [as the president]. Useless! Now Putin again.

Woman 2: And wherever he speaks, he does not talk about rural areas – nothing. Silence. Like nothing is going on here.

I: For whom will you vote in the next presidential elections?

Woman 1: Despite everything [I will vote] for Putin. He is experienced. He knows how to rule the country.

Woman 3: It won't go our way, anyway.

Woman 4: I voted and continue voting for Putin, although I know that this [corruption and injustice] is the result of his dealings. It is impossible that the *khozyain* does not know what is going on in his country.¹⁹

The abovementioned discussion reveals a phenomenon that, at first glance, seems paradoxical: rural dwellers blame Putin for his misdeeds, which have negatively affected their personal situation, but still support him during elections. The phrase “It won't go our way, anyway” can be a key to explain this. Rural socio-economic marginalization has exacerbated the sense of inferiority and pessimistic views on the future among the rural poor: villagers have found themselves in the bottom ranks of Russian society and have hardly any economic or political power to influence the status quo. This is added to 70 years of socialism, which were characterized by the suppression of personal interests for the benefit of the collective. If we take into account that capitalist rules (which prioritize individual

property and individual wellbeing) did not work out in the countryside, the neglecting of personal interest in favor of societal interests is not surprising.

7. Who are the 'Others'?

Authoritarian populism is largely based on the idea of "Others" at home or abroad, who are depicted as depriving the ordinary people of their rights, values, prosperity and identity, and who are presumably responsible for the decline of the nation's "greatness" and "wealth". For the last five years, only 25% of villagers interacted with foreign migrants, while, in Moscow, this share is 85% (Pipia 2017). The foreigners in the countryside are primarily migrants from former Soviet republics, who came to Russia to work (from Central Asia) and do business (from the Caucasus region). The latter ones are least tolerated by rural residents, especially by those who sell their farm product at local markets. Smallholders often complain that farm markets are controlled by the migrants from North Caucasus, who make it very difficult to get a fair price for their products. Farmer Alexander (61), who sells potatoes to a reseller from Azerbaijan, describes his experience:

Azerbaijanis! They control our market. It is very difficult to negotiate with them. They have no sense of decency. [...] He [Azerbaijan reseller] sets the price and I have to accept it. If he finds somewhere cheaper – he leaves me. Like it was last year. I prepared my products for his price, and he left me with the entire harvest unsold.²⁰

However, the level of intolerance towards migrants in rural areas is significantly lower than in urban areas. Pipia (2017) found out that 65% of villagers think that it is important to limit the inflow of migrants, and 20% are convinced that there is no need to create any obstacles for migrants, as they can benefit the country. In large cities, these numbers are 72% and 16%, respectively (author's calculations based on Pipia 2017). There is a common belief that Russian villagers do not want to work, therefore the migrant labor (primarily from Central Asia) is considered a necessity, and is, therefore, tolerated by many rural residents. Sergey (46) – a manager at a large agricultural enterprise – shares his experience with local rural labor:

Local villagers do not want to work in agriculture. They prefer working at a pioneer camp or a holiday house, where salaries are even lower than at our farm. They are afraid of hard work. You know, a milkmaid's working day begins at 4 a.m. and ends at 10 p.m. It is very hard work. Here [at the farm enterprise], we have about 100 employees. Only 30 people are local. The rest are Uzbeks, Tajiks, Moldovans.²¹

This study did not reveal any significant tensions between local villagers and migrant workers as the jobs taken by migrants are not desired by the rural population because of their hardship and/or low payment. In fact, rural dwellers often hire foreign workers for construction, repair work and household services. The migrants from the former Soviet republics are not considered completely alien because of a common historical background (Yormirzoev 2015). Moreover, the Russian state promotes a multicultural and multi-ethnic society, which reduces ethnic nationalist sentiments (Arnold 2016). Therefore, although there is some hostility towards the "others" at home, these "others" are not seen as those who are responsible for the country's problems.

In contrast, the "others" from abroad are seen by many rural dwellers as the major enemies of their country. Certainly, there is a strong impact of the state-led propaganda regarding the external threat: during the ongoing geopolitical crisis, the Russian mass media has portrayed the West, and particularly the United States, as the enemy of Russia (Lohschelder 2016). For many rural dwellers, however, the West is also responsible for the collapse of the Soviet Union – a regime that many of rural dwellers idealize nowadays. Therefore, the anti-Western propaganda finds a fertile ground in the countryside. The following focus group discussion with rural dwellers is representative:

Man 1: All our problems come from Americans. Americans – *they* paid Gorbachev to dissolve the Soviet Union. We did not want the Union to fall apart...

Woman 1: Yes, Americans. They ruined us then, and want to ruin us now. They cannot get enough! They need to seize someone, start a war – and our guys resist.

Man 2: America should understand that they will not conquer Russia. They must understand.²²

Russia's opposition to the West has a long history and is associated not only with geopolitical conflicts but also with the perception of self and

of the country's "distinctive path of development". This self-perception, combined with Russia's striving for "grandeur" and "a high-profile place in the world" and its "feeling of being treated as a humiliated second-rate country" (Diligensky and Chugrov 2000, p.7). Throughout its history, Russia has been choosing between the Western, and a more unique and traditional "Slavophile" pathway of development. The recent geopolitical conflict has brought the country closer to the Slavophile path, which is characterized by an "authoritarian government and severe restrictions on human rights, while seeing the source of the country's further development in its own particular traditions", and which results in Russia pursuing a policy of self-isolation (Diligensky and Chugrov 2000, p.7). In rural areas, the ideological confrontation with the West is not discussed in abstract notions of human rights and freedom of speech, but rather in relation to natural resources – the subject which is much closer to the rural population. Kalinin (2015) argued that natural resources play an important role in the Russian national identity and patriotic discourse. According to him, natural resources are less associated with their economic and material value, and more perceived as a historical-cultural and ideological resource that contributed to the "greatness" of the country in the past, and continue doing so in the present (Kalinin 2015). While talking about Russia's confrontation with the West, pensioner Michail (69) mentioned natural resources to explain why Russia's geopolitical isolation will not be a problem for his country.

These "foreign friends", so to speak... We need to implement harder sanctions against them. Harder. We should close our borders and work for a domestic market only. So that they would not have access to us. We will survive without them, while it will be hard for them without us. Look, we have all [natural] resources. They have only machines.²³

However, despite overall support for Russia's foreign policy, the villagers' attitudes towards the food embargo, which was imposed by Russia in response to the Western sanctions, are not so unambiguous. This study showed that those rural dwellers who are not engaged in farming – i.e. employees of budgetary institutions and non-agricultural workers – are mainly in favor of the national policy of food self-sufficiency. During a lunch break, teachers working at a rural school shared their beliefs that the embargo has a positive impact on the development of domestic agriculture; they jokingly added that they personally "can

survive without the cheese with mould.²⁴ Those who are engaged in agriculture often criticize the contemporary agri-food policy. Farmers and commercially-oriented smallholders criticize the government for helping only large agribusiness, while small-scale farmers are unable to get any grants and subsidies. Meanwhile, those dwellers who are not engaged in commercial food production, but grow food for personal consumption, said that they started buying less in shops, as they do not trust the quality of the industrially-produced food. Villager Igor (60), who is subsistence-oriented in his food production, explained:

This policy of [food] self-sufficiency is, in fact, self-destruction. How can they increase food production in such a short period? With chemicals! They [industrial food producers] are now like Chinese farmers – they dump tones of chemicals into the soil. It is dangerous to eat their products. For example, I had a great harvest of cabbage this year, but quite a poor one of carrots. I bought carrots at the market. The carrots looked excellent! I began to marinate [cabbage, which requires some carrots] – the carrots gave a very artificial red color and became slimy, which is not normal. I gave everything away to my goats. I did not eat it myself.²⁵

The failure of domestic policies to provide decent living standards for many people is compensated by a foreign policy that embraces imperial nationalism and aims to return the nation's glory and the respect of other countries (Arnold 2016). Even those rural dwellers who are very critical of Putin's governance support his neo-imperialist foreign policy, arguing that "we are being respected again!" (interview with villager Ludmila (54)²⁶). Sergey (46) – a manager at a large agricultural enterprise – tried to explain why Russia's quest for great-power status in the international arena is more important than economic wellbeing at home:

I: What is more important for you – Russia's domestic or foreign policies?

Sergey: I think that the pride of the country is the main thing.

I: Does this mean it comes before the economic concerns?

Sergey: Yes, it does. You know, we Russians – we can complain about life, but when misfortune happens, we all rise to protect our motherland. This is the mentality. This is, perhaps, the democracy. Each country has its own democracy. This is our feature.²⁷

Kremlin recently introduced the term "sovereign democracy", which fits the above-mentioned argument. Sovereign democracy implies the

country's ability to make and implement decisions for the benefits of its citizens independent of pressures from the international arena. Okara (2007) called sovereign democracy "a new social contract between the political regime and the nation", in which the Russian state is presented as "the guarantor of Russia's sovereignty and survival in the context of globalization and other external super-threats". This is quite similar to the authoritarian populism's discourse on the 'Others' abroad. This study revealed that this ideology fits well with the sentiments of many ordinary Russians, who put the "pride of their country" above their personal wellbeing.

8. Conclusion

This study investigates various factors that shape rural dwellers' support for the regime of Putin. Putin's government is often discussed as an example of authoritarian populism – a political regime characterized by a strong state, populist unity between the ordinary people and an authoritarian leader, a rhetoric of national interest, and hostility towards the "Others" at home or abroad. While the supply side of this form of governance is relatively well discussed, the demand side remains somewhat of a mystery. This study contributes to the emerging literature on authoritarian populism and the rural world in the following ways.

First, this study argues that, in order to understand the villagers' support for authoritarian populism, we need to understand the socio-economic structure and the nature of class conflict in the countryside. This study revealed that the post-socialist land reform failed to create a class of rural bourgeoisie – the main actor pushing for democracy. The majority of the rural population did not enter capitalist market relations, but instead took the form of "peasant-workers" that do not engage in conflict with large agribusiness over the land and associated resources, and therefore, do not strive for political representation. The preservation of many former Soviet structures in the agricultural production and in the relations between small and large farms makes the current agrarian structure to some extent acceptable by the rural population. Moreover, the semi-subsistence food production by rural households makes them resilient to economic disturbances, and therefore, less inclined to engage in collective action to defend their interests. The lack of civil society organizations that would represent the interests of the rural people, and the strong Soviet legacies

that guide people's perceptions about the strong state and authoritarian leadership, make the countryside the most prone to accept and even support Putin's autocratic governance.

Second, in order to understand why the ordinary people are willing to give up some of their personal democratic freedoms in favor of authoritarian governance, we need to understand how people experience democracy. In Russia, many rural people associate liberal democracy with the economic and political uncertainties of the post-socialist transition period. Democracy is seen as an abstract notion that benefitted local elites in the process of capitalist accumulation, but which was unavailable to ordinary villagers, who were left outside the capitalist development. Democracy finds its stronger adherents among those rural Russians who have benefited from the post-socialist transition period; however, even they are skeptical about the ability of democratic institutions to represent the interests of the ordinary people, because of widespread corruption and violation of democratic principles that are especially profound in the countryside. Instead of liberal democracy, many ordinary Russians prefer "sovereign" democracy, which is associated with a strong state that takes care of the people, economic stability, law and order, and the country's ability to make decisions free from international/globalization pressures.

Third, although many explanations behind rural support for Putin's governance can also be applicable to the Russian population in general, this research revealed a number of specific rural features that have their roots in the peasant culture. Despite the eradication of the peasant norms and values during socialism and the introduction of capitalist principles after the collapse of the Soviet Union, many rural dwellers preserved a number of peasant-like features, not only in their ways of farming but also in the ways of thinking. Thus, many villagers share traditional views on the hierarchy of power in a peasant family, and use them to explain the desired form of governance in the country. This helps to explain why the strongman leadership of Putin finds many supporters in the countryside. Moreover, this study revealed that villagers value the personal characteristics of the president much more than his political programs, which make them more responsive to Putin's image of "muzhik" and "khozayin" – the personal characteristics of a leader, according to peasant culture.

Fourth, this study suggests that rural support for authoritarian populism is not necessarily a result of state-led propaganda (although it is largely influenced by it). Propaganda has a strong impact on villagers' perceptions of Putin's governance: those households that are less engaged in food

production, and, therefore, have more time to watch television, express a stronger support for the regime than those who are full time busy with farming. However, this study revealed that rural dwellers do not naively believe everything they hear from mass media, and that the justification of their support does not always coincide with the official message sent via television screens.

Finally, this study demonstrated that the cultural backlash thesis and the economic insecurity perspective are only partly useful for explaining the support of some rural groups for Putin's governance. Thus, the harsh memories of the post-socialist transition periods, when rural residents felt abandoned and forgotten, support the economic insecurity perspective. In this context, even a small improvement in rural living standards during Putin's rule is highly appreciated by villagers. Similarly, the cultural backlash thesis explains the support of older groups of rural dwellers, whose nostalgia for the Soviet past is satisfied by the Soviet-style approaches in Putin's domestic and foreign policies. However, neither of these frameworks is enough to explain why villagers consciously vote against their self-interests, or why Russia's neo-imperialist policy abroad is perceived as more important than economic wellbeing at home.

This study explains that villagers ignore their personal interests because of their experienced socio-economic marginalization – which has exacerbated their sense of inferiority and their pessimistic views on the future – and the 70 years of socialism during which personal interests were suppressed for the benefit of the collective. It may also be explained by the recent shift towards a more traditionalist “Slavophile” episteme in the discursive sphere of Russian society, which led to a stronger association of Russian national identity with the country's status as a “global power”.

Overall, this study revealed that different rural groups have different political positions and different reasons to support Putin's government. Although many rural opinions repeat the official discourse generated by the government, this does not imply that rural dwellers are the victims of state-led propaganda. Rural traditional perceptions on power relations and their idealization of the socialist past makes them more receptive to the official discourse and Putin's leadership methods. This study demonstrates that rural support for authoritarian populism cannot be explained by one single framework, but that it should be studied as a combination of various economic, political, social, cultural and ideological factors that shape the ordinary people's perceptions and practices.

NOTES

- 1 The turnout is significantly higher for presidential elections than for regional and parliamentary elections.
- 2 With some notable exceptions, such as Mamonova 2016a,b, Mamonova and Visser 2014.
- 3 For example, French far-right presidential contender Marine Le Pen gained the support of many French farmers with her 'eating French' campaign, in which she called for more food to be produced and consumed in the country (Associated Press 2017)
- 4 According to the All-Russian Agricultural Census of 2016, there were 285 thousand family farms in 2006, while in 2016 this number declined to 174 thousand farms.
- 5 Interview conducted on 09-11-2017 in the Gravornoe village, Istra district, Moscow region.
- 6 Interview conducted on 10-11-2017 in the Sumarokovo village, Ruza district, Moscow region.
- 7 Volkov and Goncharov's sample also included urban population in their study, and the share of the rural population in their sample cannot be derived based on their published article. However, since they also included survey questions related to urban lifestyle, the rural population may have been underrepresented.
- 8 Interview conducted 24-08-2017 in the Deulino village, Sergiev-Posad district, Moscow region.
- 9 The words 'choice' and 'election' from the same word in the Russian language.
- 10 Interview conducted on 10-11-2017 in the village Sumarokovo, Ruza district, Moscow region.
- 11 Interview conducted 24-08-2017 in the village Deulino, Sergiev-Posad district, Moscow region.
- 12 Interview conducted on 09-11-2017 in the Gravornoe village, Istra district, Moscow region.
- 13 Interview conducted on 11-11-2017 in the Sumarokovo village, Ruza district, Moscow region.
- 14 Interview conducted on 12-11-2017 in the Sumarokovo village, Ruza district, Moscow region.
- 15 More than half of the Russian work force experienced some form of interruption of the payment of wages during 1994–1997 (Hjeds Löfmark 2008).
- 16 Interview conducted on 10-11-2017 in the Sumarokovo village, Ruza district, Moscow region.
- 17 Interview conducted on 12-11-2017 in the Sumarokovo village, Ruza district, Moscow region.

- 18 Interview conducted 20-07-2014 in the Rasshevatskaya village, Novoalexandrovsk district, Stavropol Krai.
- 19 Interview conducted 30-05-2013, in the Purschevo village, Balashikha district, Moscow region.
- 20 Interview conducted 24-08-2017 in the Deulino village, Sergiev-Posad district, Moscow region.
- 21 Interview conducted on 12-11-2017 in the Sumarokovo village, Ruza district, Moscow region.
- 22 Interview conducted on 08-11-2017 in the Gravornoe village, Istra district, Moscow region.
- 23 Interview conducted on 09-11-2017 in the Gravornoe village, Istra district, Moscow region.
- 24 Interview conducted on 12-11-2017 in the Sumarokovo village, Ruza district, Moscow region.
- 25 Interview conducted on 10-11-2017 in the Sumarokovo village, Ruza district, Moscow region.
- 26 Interview conducted on 10-11-2017 in the Sumarokovo village, Ruza district, Moscow region.
- 27 Interview conducted on 12-11-2017 in the Sumarokovo village, Ruza district, Moscow region.

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