

A Village Perspective on Competitive Authoritarianism in Russia

Fumiki TAHARA

Introduction

Russian electoral politics in the 21st century is often categorized as “competitive authoritarianism,” in which one dominant party, United Russia (UR hereafter), overwhelmingly wins every election; furthermore, competition is perceived as unfair (Levitsky and Way 2010; Ogushi and Adachi 2015). Although many political scientists have studied the process of formation or the variation in electoral authoritarianism at the regional level (e.g., Panov and Ross 2013; Aburamoto 2015; Saikkonen 2015), relatively few scholars have spotlighted how the UR party is actually grabbing votes on the local stage. This void contrasts with Indian election studies, in which the rural grassroots level has been a major focus of study (e.g., Nakamizo 2012). Studies of Chinese elections have dealt solely with the community level because competitive elections in China take place only at the village level (e.g., He 2007). Because we should pay more attention to rural politics in Russia, the present study attempts to explore how competitive authoritarianism is evolving in rural—especially village—settings.

During fieldwork in rural Russia, I identified some Russia-specific characteristics of election campaigns. I describe these as follows: “Mobilization of ballots is done in a less materialistic and more emotional way. Outward competition and material interests are sugarcoated in rhetoric about national unity, harmony, patriotism, the mourning of war dead, and the subsequent stabilization of the whole society” (Tahara 2015: 99). Given that my observations were relevant, in this paper, I will attempt to scrutinize the evolving sociological background of local electoral politics in Russia.

I will pose two questions:

- Why is electoral competition often conducted behind the scenes even though there is actual multi-party competition, whereas in India, open competition is welcomed as an embodiment of democratic values and, in China, electoral competition itself does not exist except at the village level, where there is no need to conceal it?

- Why do election campaigns employ emotional or sentimental mobilization tactics rather than stress redistribution of material resources such as roads or drinking water, as is often the case in India?

To answer these questions, it will help to focus on socio-geographical, demographic, and historical factors that are specific to Russian village communities. I will utilize field data from Tambov and Tatarstan, both of which are regarded as UR strongholds (Panov and Ross 2013; Korgunyuk 2015). This paper will enrich our understanding of the value system or the “ethos” hidden behind political events in contemporary Russia.

1. Village Administrators as “Faithful Agents”

(1) Electoral Arrangements

Why and how does the village count in Russian party politics? To answer this question, the first section gives a brief illustration of electoral arrangements, including those at the lowest (i.e., village) level.

Elections in Russia take place at four levels: the federation, *oblast* or republic, county (*raion*), and village (Table 1), of which the latter two represent local self-governing municipalities. The *oblast* level election employs a combination of proportional representation and a single mandate system, but there has been recent momentum to move entirely to proportional representation (Ross 2011: 642). In the Tambov regional election in 2011, 25 of 50 seats were single-member constituency seats, whereas the remaining 25 were proportional representation seats. In

Table 1. Electoral arrangement in research sites

Level	Category	Term (years)	Poklovo-Marfino (Tambov)	Ten’ki (Tatarstan)
Federation	Senators of Federation Council	n/a	166 seats, 2 senators are appointed from each of the 83 federal subjects	
	Deputies of State Duma	4	450 seats, proportional representation	
<i>Oblast, Republic</i>	Deputies of <i>Oblast</i> Duma	5	50 seats, 25 of which are single-member constituencies and 1 from Znamenka-Petrovskoe constituency	100 seats, 50 of which are single-member constituencies and 1 from Kamskoe Ust’e-Apastobo-Kaibitsy-Tetyushi (partly) constituency
<i>Raion</i>	Deputies of <i>Raion</i> Duma	5	Znamenka <i>raion</i> has 19 seats, 3 of which are from Poklovo-Marfino Village	Kamskoe Ust’e <i>raion</i> has 40 seats, 2 of which are from Ten’ki Village
Village	Deputies of Village Soviet	5	Poklovo-Marfino Village has 10 seats from the whole village	Ten’ki Village has 10 seats from 10 constituencies, each of which is composed of 1-5 streets

Source: Tahara (2015: 89) with minor revisions.

general, single-member constituencies are composed of two *raions* (e.g., Znamenka *raion* and Petrovskoe *raion* elect a common deputy).

At the *raion* level, a deputy normally represents a village or central town. However, there seems to be considerable regional variation: the Znamenka *raion* in Tambov had an election in 2013 and elected 19 deputies. The entire territory was divided into five constituencies, each of which had three to five deputies. Poklovo-Marfino (PM hereafter) village is one of the five constituencies and has three deputies. At present, the population of Znamenka is about 18,000 and the number of voters is 14,500, which, divided by 19, is 763. The number of deputies in each constituency is decided by the number of voters.¹⁾ In the Tatarstan case, all 40 deputies of the Kamskoe Ust'e *raion* come from 20 villages in the territory, and each village has two deputies. Interestingly enough, one of these two deputies is simultaneously the village chief and the other is a member of the village soviet.²⁾

At the village level, council members largely represent streets or hamlets in the territory. For example, PM village has 10 council members, four of whom are residents of the central hamlet, four of whom live in Alekseevka (another relatively big hamlet), and the remaining two are from small surrounding hamlets. Ten'ki Village in Tatarstan has 10 council members representing each constituency, each of which is composed of one to five streets (the village has 40 streets in total). In this paper, “village leaders” include the village chief and deputies, totaling 11 in PM and 10 in Ten'ki (as the village chief is also a council member).

(2) UR Party in the Local Setting

Russia's political system is still categorized as multi-party. Nevertheless, many observers have already reached a consensus that, under Putin's regime, the ruling UR Party engages in “competi-

Table 2. Results of Duma elections in Tambov and Tatarstan

Party	Tambov			Tatarstan		
	Single-member Constituency	Proportional Representative	Total	Single-member Constituency	Proportional Representative	Total
UR	24	19	43	41	47	88
Communist Party of the Russian Federation	0	4	4	0	3	3
Fair Russia	1	1	2	0	0	0
Liberal Democratic Party of Russia	0	1	1	1	0	1
No Party	0	0	0	8	0	8
Total	25	25	50	50	50	100

Source: Interview with Evgenii Aleksevich Matushkin, vice chairman of Tambov Duma, Tambov, March 11, 2012; *Gosudarstvennyi soviet respubliki tatarstan* website, available at: <http://gossovtatarstan.ru/deputaty/>, accessed September 29, 2015.

tive authoritarianism” that does not allow competition by opposing parties.³⁾ Table 2 shows the result of the recent Duma election; UR candidates won 43 of 50 seats (86%) in Tambov and 88 of 100 seats (88%) in Tatarstan.

Table 3 shows that approximately 80% of the deputies on the council at the *raion* level belonged to the UR fraction in recent years.

Table 3. Party background of *raion* deputies in Znamenka

	2012	2014
Formal membership in UR	15	12
Sympathizer of UR	2	3
Liberal Democratic Party	0	2
Communist Party	2	1
Non-party	2	1
Total	21	19*

*Among 19 deputies, 9 are new deputies and 10 are old ones (reelected).

Source: Interview with Anatolii Ivanovich Bushuev, *raion* chief of Znamenka, Tambov, March 13, 2012 and July 30, 2014

The village level is not an exception to the high rate of UR membership. In the Znamenka *raion* in Tambov, four out of seven village chiefs were UR members in 2009, and the remaining three were sympathizers.⁴⁾ Party penetration is deeper in Tatarstan. In Kamskoe Ust’e *raion*, all 20 village chiefs were UR members.⁵⁾ Tables 4 and 5 show that among 10 deputies in each village, five in PM and seven or eight in Ten’ki were UR members. Despite the deep penetration of the party among rural elites, it may not be correct to assume that these people were “forced” to join UR after becoming deputies. One deputy in Ten’ki Village claimed that the high UR membership rate among deputies was not because of their status as village deputies but because most occupied important posts in various spheres.⁶⁾ Another deputy from the same village disclosed that, when he became deputy, he did not have any political ambitions, but he could not help but run for election because he held an important position (i.e., the principal of a professional school).⁷⁾

Similarly, the chief of Znamenka *raion* in Tambov claimed that it did not matter to which party the *raion* deputies belonged. In his opinion, what was more important was that the deputies belonged to certain social groups or organizations so that they could reflect local voices. In this regard, some sources can provide potential contestants for deputies’ seats by:

- finding them among social activists
- finding them through party organizations

Table 4. List of village deputies, Poklovo-Marfino, 2013

Number	Name	Sex	Year of Birth	Age (2013)	Education	Occupation	Home Address (hamlet)	Party	More than two terms?	Interviewed?
1	Anuriev, S. E.	m			Higher	Engineer (Zalataya Niva)	Alekseevka	no	yes	no
2	Zabrovskaya, M. V.	f			11 years' school	Technical worker	Alekseevka	UR	no	no
3	Isaeva, L. V.	f			Secondary vocational	Pensioner	Alekseevka	LDP	no	no
4	Korneev, N. V.	m	1960	53	Higher	Schoolteacher	PM	no	yes	yes
5	Nasil'nikova, T. V.	f			Secondary vocational	Librarian	Alekseevka	UR	no	no
6	Nasil'nikova, T. E.	f	1955	58	11 years' school	Pensioner	PM	UR	yes	no
7	Solomatina, V. M.	f	1957	56	11 years' school	Pensioner	PM	UR	yes	yes
8	Filatov, A. P.	m			Higher	Director of an agricultural company (not farmer)	Novoznamenka	no	no	no
9	Filipov, I. V.	m	1949	64	Higher	Pensioner	Sergeevka	no	yes	yes
10	Yudaeva, E. V.	f	1975	38	11 years' school	temporarily not working	PM	UR	yes	no

Source: Data provided by Poklovo-Marfino (PM) village and interview with Olga Viktrovna, the village chief of PM village, July 24, 2014

Table 5. List of village deputies, Ten'ki, 2013

Constituency	Name	Sex	Year of Birth	Age (2013)	Education	Occupation	Home address (street)	Party	More than two terms?	Interviewed?
1	Belyakov, E. V.	m	1965	48	Higher	Professional school principal	Lesnaya (TZOS)	UR	no	yes
2	Zainullin, Sh. A.	m	1961	52	Higher	Director of agro-firm Ten'kovskaya	Komarova (Komscoe Ust'e)	UR	yes	yes
3	Akutina, L. I.	f	1956	57	Higher	Village school principal of	Mira (TZOS)	UR	yes	yes
4	Kalyashii, S. V.	f	1956	57	Secondary vocational	Worker of agro-firm Ten'kovskaya	Pervomaiskaya	UR	?	no
5	Khamkin, A. E.	m	1959	54	Higher	Businessman	Lisina	no	yes	yes
6	Bolonenkova, L. G.	m	1961	52	Secondary vocational	Vice-director of agro-firm Ten'kovskaya	Novaya	UR	?	yes
7	Abdyllin, Sh. Sh.	m	1953	60	Higher	Doctor at the village hospital	komsomol'skaya (Komscoe Ust'e)	?	?	no
8	Blyakov, V. A.	m	1946	67	Higher	Professional school teacher	Oktyabr'skaya	no	yes	yes
9	Bikkinina, N. N.	f	1958	55	Higher	Kindergarten principal	Krasnaya Gorka	UR	yes	yes
10	Stepanov, A. V.	m	1963	50	Higher	Village chief	Lesnaya (TZOS)	UR	yes	yes

Source: Data provided by Ten'ki village and interviews with deputies, August 21–23, 2013

- finding them among such different groups as farming companies or farmers' associations⁸⁾

In both research sites, I noted that the village chief decides who will run for the village deputy election and from which constituency he or she will emerge. One deputy who serves as the principal of a kindergarten commented, “About who contests and from which constituency he or she stands, after *Stepanov* (village chief) decides everything, they will ask residents for support but the final decision is made by voters.”⁹⁾ Another deputy of the same village explained that “in order to avoid unnecessary competition, the contestant is to be allocated to the proper constituency in rotation . . . there is no advantage to becoming a deputy. I did not want to be reelected but *Stepanov* persuaded me to continue.”¹⁰⁾

(3) Cascade-like Structure of Loyalty

One explanation for the situation described above is that UR is deeply involved in administrative

power. As Ogushi and Adachi (2015: 74) have observed, when central leadership presses regional governors to mobilize the electorate for UR, mobilization depends on the regional governor's "administrative resources." Among other causes, after the abolition of gubernatorial elections in early 2005, "the appointment and further survival of regional chief executives largely depended on their loyalty to UR" (Gel'man 2008: 919). The reality is that, as shown in my sample cases, not only regional governors, but also a majority of administrative leaders at the *raion* and village levels have joined UR.

The UR party in Tambov has an organization named the Deputy Union of Supporters of the United Russia, which has 2,000 members including regional, *raion*, and village deputies. E. A. Matushkin, the vice chair of the Tambov regional council, noted that in the 2012 presidential election, 2,000 members of the Deputy Union used their tactics to contact 300,000 residents. Village deputies, among others, can make effective contacts with people because they are well informed about each family, and they know whose opinion matter. Consequently, Putin polled 72.76% in Tambov, which was much higher than the Russian average of 63%.¹¹⁾

As conceptualized in my previous study, in every election at the regional or federal level, Russian village leaders are supposed to perform as "faithful agents" of *raion* leaders, most of whom are UR members. *Raion* leaders are expected to be agents of regional UR leaders and to pledge allegiance to them. This "electoral vertical" (Ross 2009) has a cascade-like loyalty structure (Tahara 2015: 98–99). A deputy of PM village, who has been a member of UR since 2006, mentioned that she actually took part in mobilizing or agitating people to vote for Putin in the presidential election in 2012. As a result, 80% of PM residents voted for Putin.¹²⁾

As indicated above, loyalty of the lower-level leaders is exemplified by the number of votes they obtain in their respective territories, and the results could directly affect the future accessibility of the lower level to higher-level resources. For those *raions* that are not successful enough to mobilize ballots, regional leaders may withhold or reduce subsidies. The former Znamenka *raion* chief, V. F. G., resigned in May 2011, just after the abovementioned Tambov Duma election. One Tambov leader assumes that he resigned because he did not appear sufficiently passionate in the campaign and could not satisfy officials at the UR headquarters in Tambov.¹³⁾ V. F. G. mentioned that he had worked as a *raion* chief for eight years, so that was enough. He did not want to continue in politics. After resigning his post, he was encouraged to come back but he simply rejected the offers.¹⁴⁾

Given pressure from above, it may be quite natural that some local leaders become fed up with politics under the present regime. V. F. G.'s words, "[p]olitics is not my thing," eloquently reveal his antipathy toward politics and the expected role of faithful agent.¹⁵⁾

2. Care Flows

Hereafter, I will analyze local factors that have influenced a Russian version of competitive authoritarianism. In the first section, I will clarify the relationship between the geographical or demographic situation and features in the governance of Russian villages. I will argue that the latter can be termed “care-oriented” village governance.

(1) Social Composition of the Russian Village

Space and Population

Compared to China and India, each with a population of more than one billion, Russian rural areas are most impressive for their vast landscape and scant populations. First, Russia is much more urbanized—with only 22.4% of the population remaining in rural areas—than China and India, where more than half of their populations continue to live in the countryside. Urbanization has led to only a small proportion of the population of working age living in villages. The population drain sometimes reaches the point of demographic catastrophe.¹⁶⁾ Second, a high degree of mechanization in agricultural production reduces the labor needs in rural areas. Those who are engaged in agricultural work are not “peasants” in the Chinese or Indian sense but managerial employees in agro-firms or farms. Third, there is a general trend toward concentration of the population and resources in central hamlets, whereas surrounding peripheral hamlets are progressing toward extinction. As the population drain is more intense in peripheral hamlets than in central hamlets, more pensioners or senior citizens are left in the former. These geographical and demographic conditions give credence to the idea that, from the perspective of cost, the majority of public facilities and services should be concentrated in central hamlets. For example, federally or regionally funded “gasification” programs, which provide a collective heating service in winter, intentionally avoid peripheral hamlets with very small populations. Out of 17 hamlets in PM, only three have gas pipe heating systems.¹⁷⁾

Figure (Appendix 1–4) illustrates the geographical structure of two research sites. Here, we can find the geographical distance between the central hamlet and peripheral hamlets in an administrative village. PM village occupies 30,000 ha. In this vast area, as many as 17 hamlets have 800 households and 2,431 people. The largest hamlet identified in this site had 800 people, and the smallest hamlet had only six people. The village chief predicted that seven out of 17 hamlets would surely vanish within 10 years, as most residents are elderly.¹⁸⁾ Ten’ki Village in Tatarstan is much more centralized than Tambov, but it still has five small peripheral hamlets and one cottage area.

Demographic Composition

Table 6 shows the basic demographic composition of research sites examined in this study.

Table 6. Demographic composition of research sites (2009)

Site	Population	Kids & Students		Laboures*		Pensioners		
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Tambov	Kuzminskii	772	138	17.9	376	48.7	258	33.4
	Duplyato-Maslovka	1,340	261	19.5	728	54.3	351	26.2
	Areksandrovka	1,372	432	31.5	510	37.2	430	31.3
	Suhotinka	1,690	169	10.0	558	33.0	963	57.0
	Nikol'skoe	1,204	276	22.9	586	48.7	342	28.4
	Pokrovo-Marfina	2,431	389	16.0	1313	54.0	729	30.0
Tatarstan	Ten'ki	1,826	296	16.2	835	45.7	695	38.1
Average		1,519	280	18.4	701	46.1	538	35.4

*The number includes unemployed laboures.

Source: my field notes from September 2009

Although the table does not contain information about occupations, based on my own observation, research sites generally have the following composition:

- Managers and employees of agro-firms—the majority of them male—in charge of production
- Village administrative staff and social workers—the majority of them female—who specialize in public services, including educational, medical, cultural, commercial, as well as firefighting services¹⁹⁾
- Pensioners—the proportion of pensioners being fairly high in Russia—and schoolchildren who attend village schools typically for 11 years

Seen from the perspective of economic resources, this triangle presents a rather distorted, centralized village social structure, in which many local resources are concentrated among relatively few agro-firms and farmers.²⁰⁾ On the other hand, village administrations normally do not have enough budgetary independence to cope with meticulous public service needs by residents, who are largely pensioners and schoolchildren. This social composition corresponds with what I call “care-oriented village governance,” in which agro-firms or farmers provide physical or financial assistance to village administrators and social workers, and administrators and social workers provide public services to pensioners and schoolchildren. As agro-firms and farmers engage in the most productive activities, village administrators in Russia are not expected to play roles in economic development issues that are as large as those of their Chinese counterparts (Matsuzato and Tahara 2014: 136). Thus, most matters of village governance in Russia coincide with public

services, the core of which provides care for residents. Thus, we can regard face-to-face everyday contact that occurs between village administrators/social workers and pensioners as “care service.”

(2) Care-oriented Village Governance

Administrative Substitutions by Private Businesses

Naturally, agro-firm and farmer assistance for village administration is prevalent in rural Russia. Local residents regard it as a “public responsibility” of enterprises.²¹⁾ In both of my research sites, private enterprises, making full use of tractors or other agricultural machinery, serve residents and provide public services such as removing snow, fighting fires, constructing roads, and providing job opportunities or other personal assistance to individual households. An influential director in Ten’ki village, who is a village deputy and *raion* deputy simultaneously, told us that he represents agro-firms in such activities as repairing roads, watering, and snow plowing. Agro-firms also assist with school gardens and orphans’ homes; they lend out their machines free of charge. The annual budget of this director’s enterprise includes expenses for a contribution to the locality, amounting to R500,000–600,000 and comprising 0.5% of gross expenditures.²²⁾

Firefighting is vitally important in rural Russia. To combat fires, PM village has five fire brigades and volunteers. Volunteers have no permanent organizational affiliations. A fire brigade can ask anybody to help with its activities. Fire brigades have a satellite system at the national level. If a fire occurs in any PM village, the headquarters station passes the signal from Moscow downward to Tambov, Znamenka, and the village soviet. The village soviet then orders private farmers and volunteers to take action. About 20 farmers are on the volunteer list for specific territories in case of fire. They are supposed to store water at all times.²³⁾

Agro-firms also assist village administrators by creating job opportunities for local residents. The largest agro-firm in Znamenka *raion*, Zalataya Niva, employs 200 workers, not including their family members. About 100 members of its staff work in sales and reproduction. About 85% of the workers are from local hamlets, and the remaining 15% commute from the city of Tambov.²⁴⁾

Private farmers can provide additional help. A school principal in PM village wrote letters to seven farmers asking for financial support because of school budgetary restrictions. Two or three farmers responded to her and donated 3,000–4,000 rubles each. The money was used to paint school walls. In 2009, a farmer gave children opportunities to work at a sugar factory. He also paid them a regular salary, which they decided to use for school excursions. Thus, they made three trips to Moscow to visit the house of a famous writer.²⁵⁾

Contacts between Village Administration and Residents

What, then, is care? Yoshinori Hiroi (1997: 140–141) has discussed some salient features of the care industry:

- “reciprocity,” in which the provider and receiver of the service interact with each other in an interactive process that counts the most
- “time” to be shared, during which the services to be provided are more important than their instant “output”
- “evaluation” by the receiver of the service, including satisfaction with or trust in the provider, which has significance and can, conversely, affect the output of service
- high proportion of females on staff

Conditions pertaining to Russian villages, including population scarcity, aging, feminization of specialists, and monopolization of agricultural production by private businesses, give rise to “care flows” that typically appear between administrative and social workers in the central hamlets (providers of care) and older pensioners who live in peripheral hamlets (receivers of care). For instance, for those aged residents living alone in dying peripheral hamlets, face-to-face communication with village administrative or health care staff or salespersons (en route) can be valuable. In winters with heavy snowfall, more concern should be shown to disadvantaged residents. For schoolchildren, education by schoolteachers contains highly interactive, time-based, and evaluative elements. The meaning of public services provided by village administrators, including medical care, education, cultural activities, snow removal, firefighting, and delivery of daily commodities by village shops, can be better understood by characterizing them as care services.

Village chiefs often deputize those who occupy important posts in a village through their occupational positions, and they can contact and influence many more villagers than ordinary people. Among other reasons, care workers, including medical, educational, and cultural workers, can capture residents’ hearts through their daily livelihoods. It is also possible for them to influence residents’ voting behaviors. For example, a deputy who is the school principal in Ten’ki village mentioned that she makes use of the opportunity to meet with parents of her students. For those who do not come to the school meeting, she can find them at the periodical market held every Wednesday. She also argues that to understand children, one should understand their genes and observe their fathers and grandfathers. She cleans snow together with the children. For graduation, teachers attend picnics with children and their parents. In summary, she explained that she “connected herself to the community through school parents.”²⁶⁾ Another deputy, a kindergarten principal and wife of a farm manager, also noted that she could communicate with school parents

every morning and afternoon. She claimed that the topic of their conversation is not always limited to the education of children; rather, it covers broad aspects of life.²⁷⁾

As illustrated in this section, social composition specific to Russian rural areas makes village governance care-oriented because both the provider and receiver of care have opportunities for face-to-face communication. Since the community of care service providers overlaps with services provided by village administrators and leaders—among them faithful agents of UR—, its everyday activities have the positive effect of legitimizing the current ruling party.

3. Community of Mourning

This section explores the historical background of the Russian village. I suggest that the ruling UR party, in an attempt to stabilize its rule, intends to build a bridge between the war dead and living villagers, which will eventually cause the Russian village to become a “community of mourning.”

Tong and He (2002), both specialists in Chinese village studies, introduced the concept of “memory of community,” which implies that the village is not only a social unit but also a unit of collective memory. Memory is important in that it can affect the collective behavior of living villagers. The authors associate the strength and the weakness of collective memory in Chinese villages, mainly with the activity of existing lineage organizations. In the Russian case, I argue that wars, especially World War II, are the core of a village’s collective memory.²⁸⁾

As is well known, across the Soviet Union, nearly 28 million lives were lost in the Great Patriotic War from 1941 to 1945. Approximately 250,000 Tambov soldiers never came back from the front line. The death rate in armies varied from 45–64% among respective *raions* (Allenov et al. 2007: 248). At the village level, the significance of the number is even more obvious. In PM in Tambov, the number of the war dead carved on the existing monument is 321. In Ten’ki in Tatarstan, a villager told me that all 17 to 50 year-old male villagers served in the war, and 475 of these sacrificed their lives.²⁹⁾

(1) Care for Veterans

Nagoshi (2012: 115–116) has pointed out that, since the 60th anniversary of the victory in 2005, Putin has used the enormous sacrifice of lives as propaganda to boost patriotic feelings. Positive treatment of war veterans was a symbolic method to raise Putin’s support among senior citizens. In PM village, a 94-year-old war veteran receives 33,000 rubles per month as a pension from the federal budget.³⁰⁾ Although treated very well by the government, his daughter admitted that he still sometimes recalls the war with tears in his eyes.³¹⁾

Village leaders are supposed to work on the front line as faithful agents of Putin and his party. In Tambov, “Don’t Forget Even One” was the name assigned to a 2012 project in which *raion* leaders made courtesy visits to every World War II veteran. In Znamenka *raion*, there were 150 veterans on the list. According to the chief of the *raion* council, the living conditions of veterans are fairly good and it is important for government representatives to pay respect toward them by actually visiting them in their homes. One veteran is an elderly woman who worked as a spy during World War II. The chief of her village forgot to visit her on her birthday; consequently, the *raion* council chief reprimanded him for carelessness. On International Women’s Day (March 8), local leaders sent her gifts to assuage her anger.³²⁾

Nevertheless, many war veterans have been rapidly passing over the last few years. In 2012, nine veteran activists still lived in PM village. In 2014, the number had decreased to three.³³⁾ Eventually, with fewer war veterans to visit, UR and local leaders must implement alternative means to commemorate veterans.

(2) Care for the War Dead

Various public services offered by village administrators, which I mentioned in the previous section, involve caring for living residents. However, preserving the memory of the war dead and implementing regular mourning activities is care for “dead” residents. For Russian national leaders, care for the war dead has had a special meaning, as Popa (2013: 95) has noted:

The dead are commemorated on war monuments, graves of unknown soldiers . . . preserving the story of the Soviet (Russian) victory in World War II—and acknowledging the role of the Soviet army in it—are most significant for the Russian authorities, and all attempts at reinterpretation have been fiercely opposed.

On this point, what is remarkable about the UR party is that it intentionally activates patriotic feelings and war memories more effectively than previous rulers did. It is known that, in a specific village environment, tangible public facilities such as cemeteries, museums, or monuments can trigger these sentiments.

Cleaning of Cemeteries

A cemetery or collective graveyard is an important public space in a Russian village. Based on my field observations, it is appropriate to assume that by having local residents involved in activities in the cemetery, the UR party is attempting to awaken the collective memory of the war dead, presumably according to the Russian tradition of viewing the grave as a home for the soul and the site of future resurrection. Moreover, Bouchard (2004: 361) has pointed out that, in the Russian

context, “[g]reat emphasis is placed upon visiting the graves of the dead on a regular basis and ensuring that the graves are neat and tidy.” The efforts of UR seem to have worked, as one village chief in Znamenka told us that she enrolled in the UR party in 2008 because she empathized with UR party-led activities, which included cleaning of cemeteries.³⁴⁾ A deputy of PM village told me that families and relatives clean most tombs before Easter. Not all street people participate, but the cleaning of cemeteries is a long-standing tradition that has never stopped in PM. Some tombs or tombs of war widows, however, have been abandoned.³⁵⁾

In Ten’ki, the custom of cleaning cemeteries was interrupted for about 20 years until 2003. A former village chief, who is an ethnic Tatar, launched an initiative to restore the tradition of assigning villagers to clean cemeteries.³⁶⁾ On Parents’ Day after Easter, residents of Oktyabr’skaya Street clean the tombs of female teachers who were war widows or spinsters. This activity is combined with school education and performed by students.³⁷⁾

It is worth noting that activities aimed at recalling collective memory are often associated with education. The principal of the school, also one of the village deputies, claimed that “the most effective patriotic education they are doing is letting students go to the cemetery and take care of the tombs of spinster teachers.”³⁸⁾ The gender imbalance in Russia was 1.8 women for each man in 1945 and 1.5 in 1948 (Denisova 2010: 56). In Tambov, the death rate of men was especially high among those born during the periods 1900–1914 and 1923–1924. In these age brackets, there were more than five women for each man including the number of disabled men and those with serious ill (Allenov et al. 2007: 248). This explains why many women died unmarried in the post-war period. In PM village, other than formal classes, there are activities such as excursions to museums, open-class discussions, competitions, etc., which are all related to World War II. These activities have been ongoing ever since the foundation of the school there. The day of victory, May 9th, is an especially important occasion for those activities.³⁹⁾ One sports activity called “Zalnitza,” a kind of obstacle race, is also related to World War II and patriotic education. Students participating in the event look as if they are fighting on the battlefield. Tambov region held this race and PM school placed in the top ten in 2013.⁴⁰⁾

Erection of Monuments

Tambov’s regional government is now promoting a project to erect war memorials.⁴¹⁾ UR headquarters in Tambov are supportive of this project. Fifty monuments are planned across the whole region, two of which are projected for the Znamenka *raion*. The Znamenka *raion* chief, speaking on behalf of the UR party, told us that the erection of monuments is a substitute for historical education. He stressed that “without a proper historical education, another government would emerge within two years.”⁴²⁾

Of course, keen stress on building war memorials and instilling education regarding the na-

tion's history is not unique to UR.⁴³⁾ However, among many other political parties that have emerged since the collapse of the Soviet Union, UR, although in an implicit way, is the one that preeminently seized these strategies. Representing local UR, Anatolii Ivanovich Bushuev, the raion chief of Znamenka, commented with a witty expression that “recent reconstruction of the monument in Duplyato-Maslovka village was proposed by UR, but we must have been very happy to accept it, supposing it had been done by the Communist Party.”⁴⁴⁾

Monuments were to be built in all major hamlets. Before 2013, Dyuploto-Moslovka, Bolishoi Karian, Bolontzovka, and Sukhotinka had completed the construction of monuments, palaces, or squares.⁴⁵⁾ Tambov's regional council has also persuaded PM village to build a new monument in front of the cultural center. Construction fees, estimated to be about 1.5 million rubles, will be raised by donations from private businesses and farmers. They plan to complete the project in 2015 on the 70th anniversary of the victory.⁴⁶⁾ Asked why farmers are willing to donate money, the village chief told us, “Because they are enrolled in social organizations such as [the] Farmers' Society.”⁴⁷⁾ Interestingly, one of the farmers in PM, Yurin Viktorovich Kozlov, spontaneously constructed a small monument on his farmland with a plate inscribed: “Don't Forget Anyone, Don't Forget Anything.”

Besides these monuments, a museum plays a role in preserving the memory and identity of the villagers who died. One of the seven villages in Znamenka *raion*, Aleksandrovla, is not a very big hamlet. However, residents exhibit a sense of pride for having sacrificed many lives for the nation. Some 800 of the 4,000 villagers served in the Great Patriotic War, and 300 never returned. The village has a small and unique museum to exhibit war-related items, which includes portraits of all war dead villagers. The curator of the museum collected these photos one by one through patient effort.⁴⁸⁾

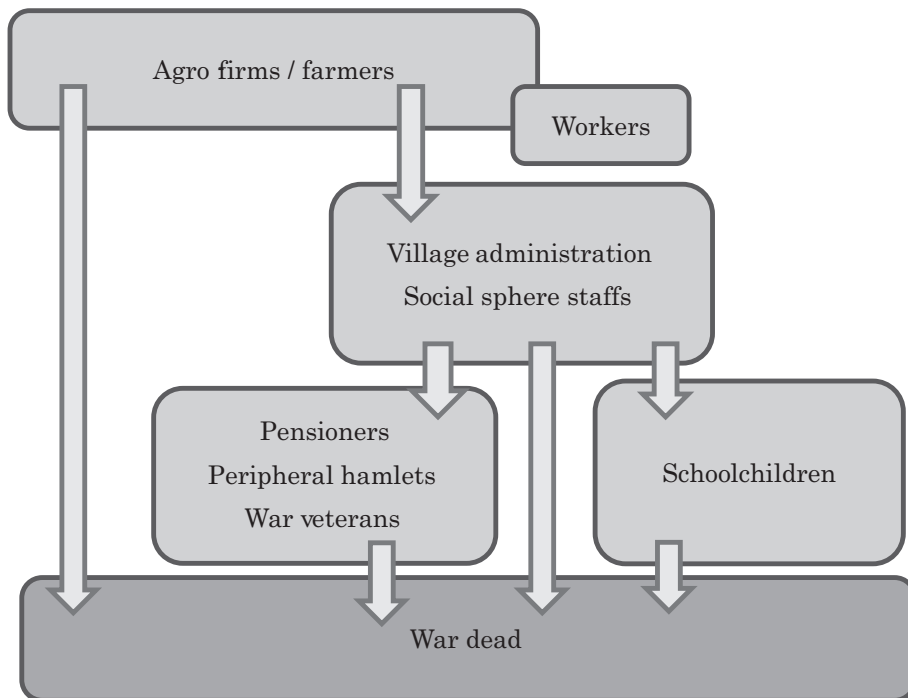
Conclusion

Here I will answer the two research questions posed in the introduction of this paper.

First, why should open electoral competition be concealed? As discussed in the first half of the paper, because of the social character of Russian villages, daily public services provided by the village public administration are care-oriented, rather than meant to further economic development (as in China) or chase after material resources from the government (as in India). Since care is based on face-to-face personal interaction—sharing of time and sympathy—it is not consistent with competition among different groups or an outward struggle for votes. In other words, everyday forms of care-oriented village governance, not competitive propaganda, are the most effective methods for mobilizing the ballot in rural Russia.

Second, why are emotional and sentimental mobilization tactics employed, rather than material ones? The socio-historical character of Russian villages as “communities of mourning” can explain this point. Pensioners, who account for a good proportion of rural voters, have already lived most of their lives, and they do not require further material prosperity. Even though they did not experience the last war themselves, older villagers live with memories of the past, which may include family memories, especially of war dead fathers or brothers. By facilitating activities such as cleaning cemeteries or building monuments, the UR party attempts to associate living villagers, including the younger generation, with dead villagers who have sacrificed their lives for the nation. Memory counts in the sense that it can bridge the personal past with the nation’s history.

In summary, from the village perspective, we can understand more clearly the context in which the Russian version of competitive authoritarianism is evolving. Stress on unity and patriotic feelings by Putin and the UR party, in our view, seems to suit the sociological and historical structure of the Russian village, a community of mourning with care flows (Figure 1). Conversely, the tactics associated with the Russian version of competitive authoritarianism will reinforce the character of the future Russian village.



Source: prepared by the author

Figure 1. Care flows in a community of mourning

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Notes

- 1) Interview with Anatolii Ivanovich Bushuev, *raion* chief of Znamenka, Tambov, July 30, 2014
- 2) Interview with Zufar Galimullovich Garaef, the chief of Kamskoe Ust’e *raion*, Kamskoe Ust’e *raion*, Tatarstan, September 12, cited from Tahara (2015: 88)
- 3) Levitsky and Way (2010, 186–201) argue that, as authoritarian consolidation progressed under the Putin regime from 2000–2008, elections became less competitive. For more on this point, see also Gel’man (2008, 913–915).
- 4) Interviews in Znamenka *raion*, Tambov, September 3–8, 2009
- 5) Interview with Khalim Khamidullovich Ibatov, the chief of Bol’shie Saltyki village, Bol’shie Saltyki village, Kamskoe Ust’e *raion*, Tatarstan, September 12, 2009
- 6) Interview with Aleksandr Egorovich Khamkin, Ten’ki village, Kamskoe Ust’e *raion*, Tatarstan, August 22, 2013
- 7) Interview with Belyakov, Ten’ki village, Kamskoe Ust’e *raion*, Tatarstan, August 23, 2013
- 8) Interview with Anatolii Ivanovich Bushuev, the *raion* chief of Znamenka, Znamenka, Tambov, July 30, 2014
- 9) Interview with Bikkinina, a deputy and kindergarten principal, Ten’ki village, Kamskoe Ust’e *raion*, Tatarstan, August 21, 2013
- 10) Interview with Khamkin, Ten’ki village, Kamskoe Ust’e *raion*, Tatarstan, August 22, 2013. The “managed” aspect in *raion* and village deputy elections is consistent with what one leader of a town council claimed: “We need more or less manageable candidates. A substantial part of the candidates we select come from the public sector because we are able to control them” (Ledyaeu et al. 2014: 219).
- 11) Interview with E. A. Matushkin, the vice chair of the Tambov regional council, Tambov, March 11, 2012
- 12) Interview with Vera Mihkhailovna Solomatina, a deputy in PM village soviet, PM village, Znamenka, Tambov, July 28, 2014
- 13) Interview with Vladimir Penikov, the deputy chief of Social Institute in the Tambov state, March 9, 2012
- 14) Interview with V. F. G., the former *raion* chief and director of Zalataya Niva, PM village, Znamenka, Tambov, July 25, 2014
- 15) Although the present study does not aim to compare research sites, the political regime of Tatarstan may be even more “vertical” than Tambov. Under Shaimiev’s regime in the 1990s, meso-level (*raion* and city) elites in Tatarstan were required to justify their roles by demonstrating their ability to mobilize votes, even though local chief executives’ posts were not elective (Matsuzato 2001: 55). Panov and Ross (2013: 747–748) have asserted that UR in regions with strong leaders like Shaimiev is “nothing more than an instrument which is used by authoritarian leaders to maintain their personal rule.”
- 16) The method for building sustainable communities in Russia is of vital importance. For the general char-

- acteristics of Russian rural communities, see O'Brien and Wegren (2002: 403–416).
- 17) Interview with Oliga Viktorovna Suvorova, the village chief of PM, PM village, Znamenka, Tambov, September 7, 2009, cited from Tahara (2013: 85)
 - 18) Ibid.
 - 19) Regarding feminization of rural specialists in health, education and culture, see Bridger (1987: 71–76).
 - 20) Wegren (2014) suggests that, in contemporary rural Russia, the demarcation between entrepreneurial and non-entrepreneurial households is a major cause of inequality. The gap between large enterprises, private farmers, and other ordinary villagers was also apparent in my field research.
 - 21) Of course, such responsibility is more or less forced by local authority, as one urban businessperson confessed. He mentioned, “Our authorities have, in so many ways, put pressure on me. And my business is finished . . . Therefore, one should not quarrel with the authorities. If they ask, you have to obey” (Ledyayev et al. 2014: 220).
 - 22) Interview with Shagit Aminbaevich Zainullin, the director of the agro-firm Tenikovskaya, Ten'ki village, Komscoe Ust'e, Tatarstan, September 14, 2009, cited from Tahara (2013: 91)
 - 23) Interview with Oliga Viktorovna Suvorova, the village chief, PM village, Znamenka, Tambov, July 24, 2014
 - 24) Interview with V.F.G., the director of Zalataya Niva, PM village, Znamenka, Tambov, July 25, 2015
 - 25) Interview with Nataliya Vyacheslavovna, the school principal, PM village, Znamenka, Tambov, July 23, 2014
 - 26) Interview with Lidiya Ivanovna Akutina, Ten'ki village, Komscoe Ust'e, Tatarstan, August 23, 2013
 - 27) Interview with N. N. Bikkinina, a village deputy, a kindergarten principal and wife of a farmer, Ten'ki village, Komscoe Ust'e, Tatarstan, August 21, 2013
 - 28) Merridale (2003: 176) also suggests that “Great Patriotic War was crucial, as it forced the consciousness of death and the urgency of mourning ritual upon entire populations.”
 - 29) Interview with Bulankin, a resident of Ten'ki village, Ten'ki village, Komscoe Ust'e, Tatarstan, August 22, 2013
 - 30) There are 20 widows of war veterans living in PM village. They are entitled to equal pension amounts as if they are war veterans.
 - 31) Interview in Novoznamenka hamlet, PM village, Znamenka, Tambov, July 29, 2014. Born in August 1920 in Alekseevka hamlet, he joined the army in 1940 and went to war in 1941. He was sent to Baku. He worked as a driver after the war. This veteran joined the Communist Party sometime around 1955–1960 and is still a member of the Communist Party of Russian Federation.
 - 32) Interview with Anatolii Ivanovich Bushuev, the chief of the Znamenka council, Znamenka, Tambov, March 12, 2012, cited from Tahara (2015: 94). As a similar example of war veterans, Löwenhardt and Verheul (2000: 119) reported that, in the December 1999 election in a Tatarstan village, an aged “veteran of the war” was respectfully greeted by the head of administration and all others present and invited to cast the first vote.
 - 33) Interview with Oliga Viktorovna Suvorova, the village chief, PM village, Znamenka, Tambov, July 24, 2014
 - 34) Interview with Suetlana Aleksandrovna Dubanova, the village chief, Duplyato-Maslovka village, Znamenka, Tambov, September 4, 2009
 - 35) Interview with Nikolai Vasil'evich Korneev, a deputy of the village soviet and a teacher, PM village, Znamenka, Tambov, July 28, 2014.
 - 36) Interview with Bulat Schakirzanovich Fatyhov, a former village chief, Ten'ki village, Komscoe Ust'e,

- Tatarstan, September 13, 2009
- 37) Interview with Belyakov, a village deputy, Ten'ki village, Komsкое Ust'e, Tatarstan, August 21, 2013
 - 38) Interview with Akutina, a school principal and deputy, Ten'ki village, Komsкое Ust'e, Tatarstan, August 23, 2013
 - 39) Interview with Nataliya Vyacheslavovna, the school principal, PM village, Znamenka, Tambov, July 23, 2014
 - 40) Interview with Nikolai Vasil'evich Korneev, a deputy of the village soviet and a teacher, PM village, Znamenka, Tambov, July 28, 2014
 - 41) This part about monuments is exclusively based on information obtained in Tambov. It is still uncertain if they have employed a similar method of erecting monuments in Tatarstan.
 - 42) Interview with Legachov, the chief of Znamenka *raion*, Znamenka, Tambov, March 12, 2012, cited from Tahara (2015: 94–95)
 - 43) For instance, in October 2010, UR and the Communist Party in Ul'yanskovsk *oblast* competed with each other to take credit for the erection of a monument. UR initiated the contest by building a monument. However, the Communist Party claimed that the project site that was located in a village had been preoccupied by UR without the Communist Party's permission. What followed were successive removals and re-erectments of monuments by two parties [*Kommersant'*(Samara), October 20, 2010, cited from Aburamoto (2015: 196–197)].
 - 44) Interview with Anatolii Ivanovich Bushuev, the *raion* chief of Znamenka, Znamenka, Tambov, March 13, 2012
 - 45) Interview with Anatolii Ivanovich Bushuev, the *raion* chief of Znamenka, Znamenka, Tambov, July 30, 2014
 - 46) Interview with Oliga Viktorovna Suvorova, the village chief of PM, PM village, Znamenka, Tambov, July 24, 2014
 - 47) Ibid.
 - 48) Interview with Mikhail Alekseevich Bondarev, the museum curator and a *raion* deputy, Aleksandrovka village, Znamenka, Tambov, September 5, 2009

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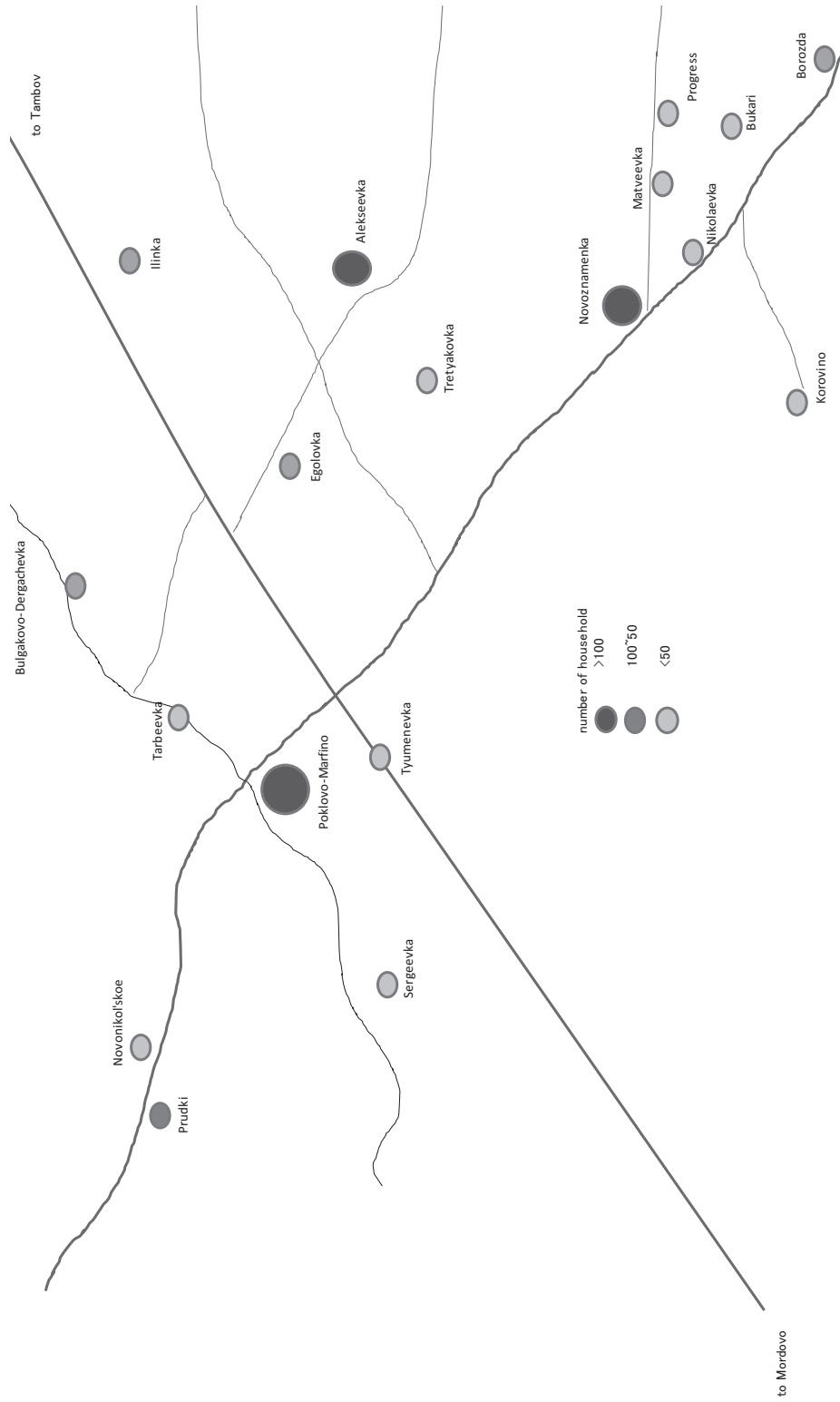
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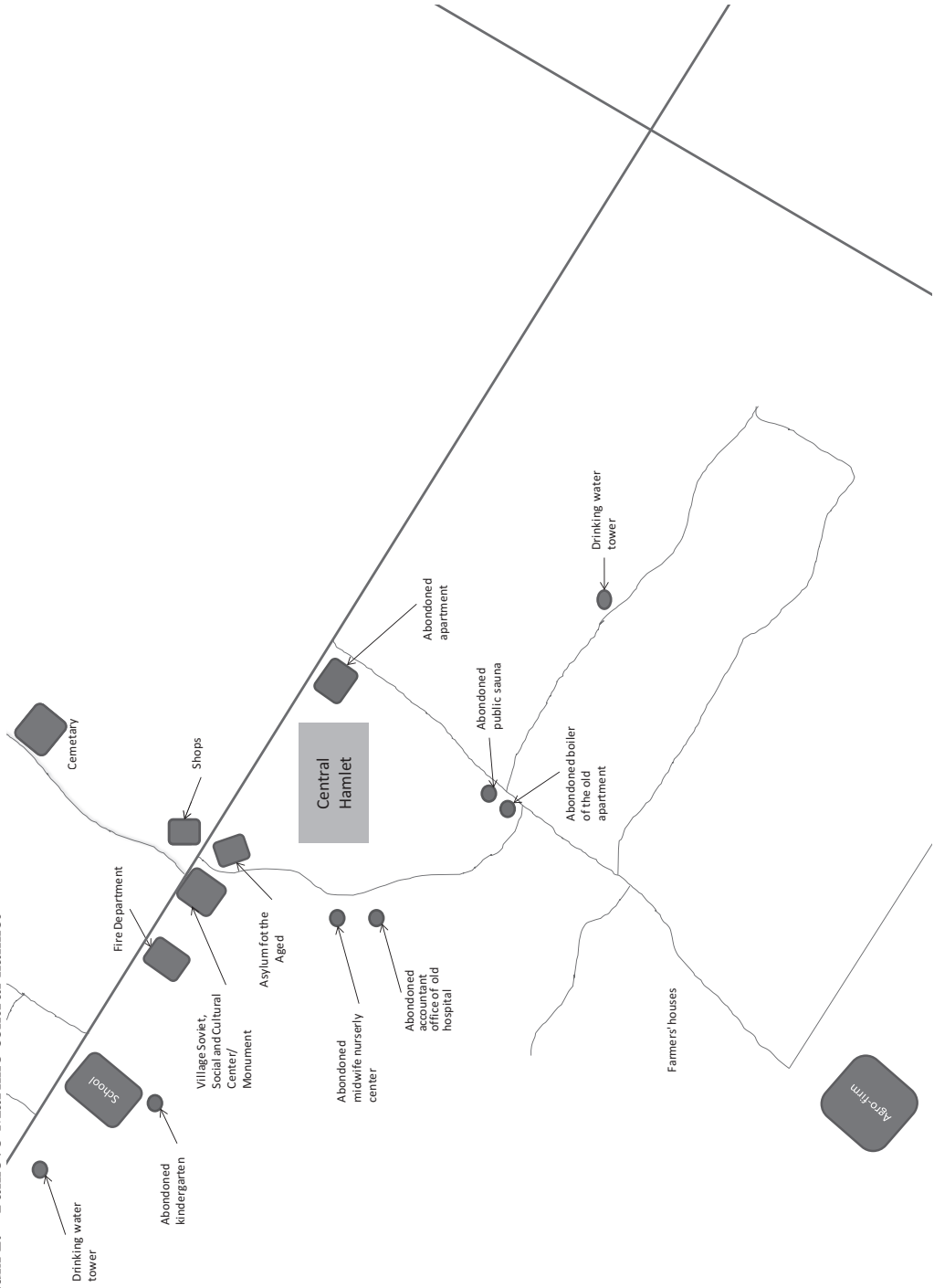
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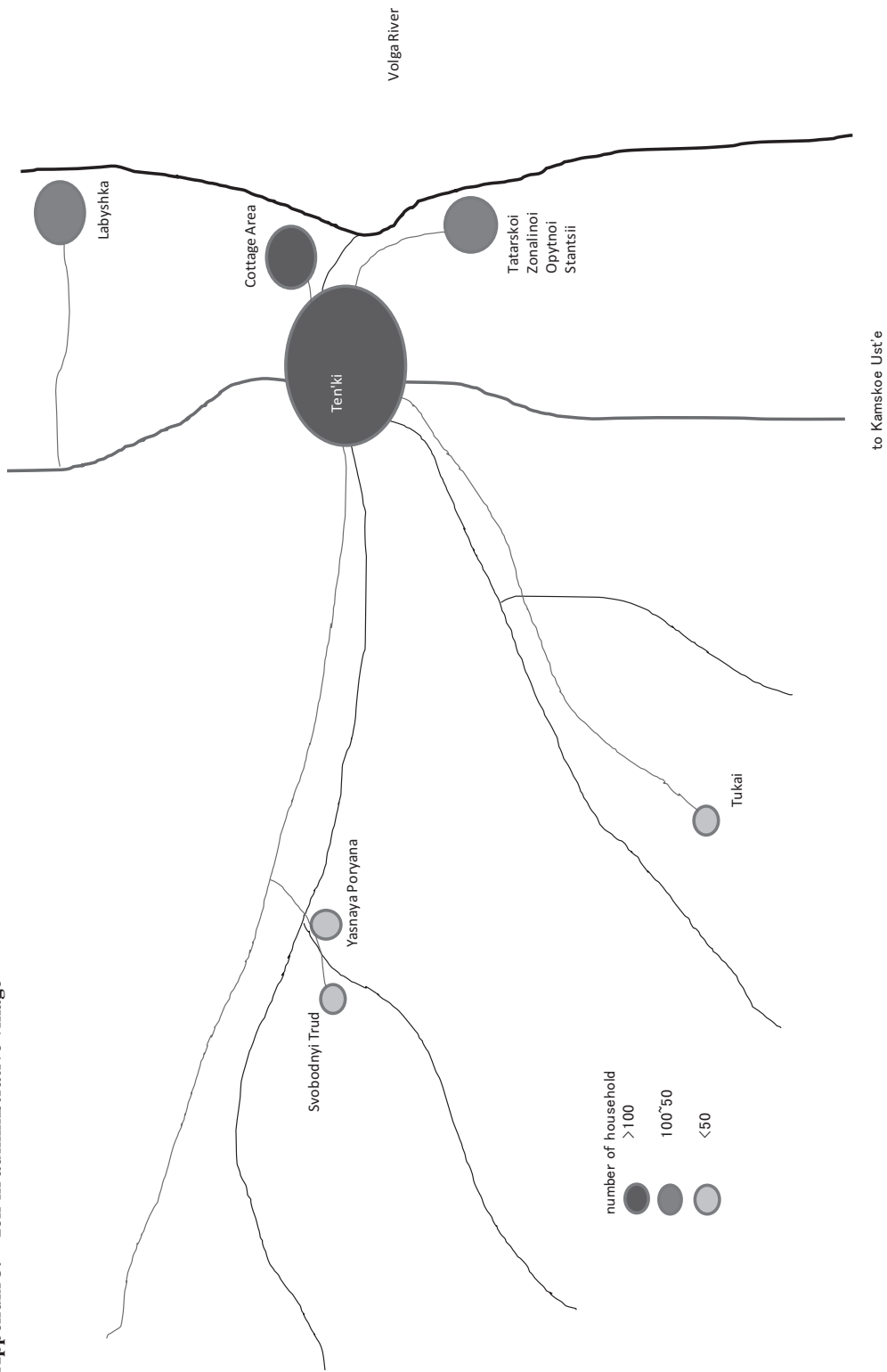
Appendix 1. Paklovo-Marfino administrative village



Appendix 2. Pakovo-Marfino central hamlet



Appendix 3. Ten'ki administrative village



Appendix 4. Ten'ki central hamlet

