

EDITORIAL

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Public Administration Efficiency in 2000–2018 in the Assessments of the Region’s Population*



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Abstract. Previous issues of our journal contain editorials devoted to the most acute issues of Russia’s modern life and its future. Using expert assessments and the results of international, national and our own research, we touched upon key aspects of public administration efficiency in addressing the issues that ensure national security. These tasks are as follows: overcoming social inequality and “capitalism for the few”, ensuring the stability of the psychological state of society and promoting civic engagement of its main strata. We analyzed the state of affairs in science and education, in the economy and social sphere; we gave an objective assessment of the President’s key speeches and analyzed how effectively the Government was implementing the President’s orders (including those that were set out in the “May decrees”). We covered the most resonant events happening in the internal and international political arena. In the context of national security, we analyzed the correlation of interests of the general population and

* The paper presents the data of the public opinion monitoring conducted by VolRC RAS (1998 – February 2019).

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the elite. On repeated occasions, we considered the historical experience of Russia and foreign countries, drew analogies between the past and the present, trying to answer the question of how well the ruling elite learns the lesson and promotes sustainable development of the country in order to handle the increasingly complex conditions of global competition in the 21st century.

We should point out that, as the President himself has repeatedly noted, public opinion is the main criterion that determines the success of the work of the government and public administration efficiency, and influences the changes in the situation in the country. At the same time, the beginning of 2019 can be seen as a starting point in the implementation of the main provisions of the May 2018 Decree and, more broadly, in the implementation of the targets for the breakthrough development of the internal, primarily socio-economic, situation in Russia. Achieving these goals is a keynote of the new political cycle and the last (according to the current Constitution of the Russian Federation) presidential term of Vladimir Putin.

We decided to begin the first 2019 issue of the journal *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast* by analyzing key trends in people's subjective assessments concerning various aspects of everyday life over the past 18 years, including the dynamic changes taking place in the assessment of the work of public authorities, in the perception of living standards and the quality of life, and in the emotional and psychological background in society. The main information source that allows us to implement such a task is the sociological monitoring conducted by VolRC RAS on the territory of the Vologda Oblast for more than 20 years (since 1996).

The following tables show trends in a number of parameters of social well-being and socio-political sentiment of the Vologda Oblast residents in the long-term (annual) retrospective, as well as current (last six waves of the monitoring) changes in public opinion.

When analyzing current trends in public opinion, we place an emphasis on the results of V. Putin's third presidential term (2012–2017) and on the current dynamics of people's estimates (the latest six surveys: April 2018 – February 2019). These results show how well the head of state is able to build a system of public administration at all levels (federal, regional, municipal) in accordance with the goals noted in his Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation and set out in the May 2018 Decree and also in accordance with the task of effective transit of Russian statehood for the period up to 2024, the task that is strategically important for national security.

Key words: public opinion, assessment of performance of the authorities, President, social sentiment, results of the year.

¹ See, for example:

1. On assessing the effectiveness of the work of the executive authorities of the Russian Federation: transcript of the conference call. January 10, 2012. Available at: <http://archive.government.ru/special/docs/17719/>

2. Vladimir Putin's speech at the meeting of the Presidential Commission on monitoring the achievement of socio-economic development targets of the Russian Federation, May 7, 2014. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20974>

3. The President's address to the nation on August 29, 2018. *Official Website of the Russian President*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58405>

I. Dynamics of public opinion concerning the performance of the authorities and the situation in the country

According to the findings of our research, despite the numerous facts indicating that Dmitry Medvedev's Government does not implement the May 2012 Decrees efficiently², people's assessment of Vladimir Putin's performance during his third presidential term (2012–2017)³ improved: the share of positive judgments increased from 52 to 67%, and the share of negative judgments decreased from 33 to 20% (*Insert 1, Fig. 1*). The key event that influenced the positive dynamics of public opinion was the accession of Crimea and Sevastopol to the Russian Federation, the move that was supported by the vast majority of Russians. Thus, in 2014, there was an abrupt "surge" in the level of approval of the head of state (by 9 percentage points, from 55 to 64%).

In March 2018, on the eve of the presidential election, in his Address to the Federal Assembly,

² See, for example:

1. Volkova O., Nikolskaya P., Tkachev A., Mogilevskaya A. Promises of the third term: how the May Decrees of the President are executed. *RBK website*. Available at: <http://www.rbc.ru/economics/17/05/2016/573a034a9a7947d18967193a>

2. Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. "Russian Federation – a welfare state?": assessing the results of 25 years of implementation of Article 7 of the Russian Constitution. *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 2018, vol. 11, no. 6, pp. 9-25.

3. The disciplining essence of the May Decrees (editorial). *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 2018, May 16. Available at: http://www.ng.ru/editorial/2018-05-16/2_7225_red.html

4. Sheinis V.L. Historical transit: Russian drama. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 2017, January 27. Available at: http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2017-01-27/5_6914_drama.html

5. It will cost five thousand rubles to obtain an international passport: why so expensive. *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 2018, June 19 (an opinion of Finam analyst A. Korenev). Available at: <http://www.mk.ru/social/2018/06/19/oformlenie-zagranpasporta-oboydetsya-v-5-tysyach-rublej-pochemu-tak-dorogo.html>

³ Here and further, we provide the following periodization of presidential terms for the analysis of public opinion:

2000–2003 – V. Putin's first presidential term (four years, including the last full year of the first presidential term);

2004–2007 – V. Putin's second presidential term (four years, including the last full year of the second presidential term);

2008–2011 – D. Medvedev's presidential term (four years, including the last full year of D. Medvedev's presidential term);

2012–2017 – V. Putin's third presidential term (six years, including the last full year of the third presidential term);

2018 – the beginning of V. Putin's fourth presidential term.

Vladimir Putin outlined what the key vector of the country's development for the period up to 2024 would be if he were elected President once again. The statement that "everything hinges on efforts to preserve the people of Russia and to guarantee the prosperity of our citizens. We must achieve a decisive breakthrough in this area"⁴ was perceived by Russians with a high degree of optimism: according to the Federal Sociological Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences (FSRC RAS), more than 90% of Russians noted the importance of the following tasks set out in the Presidential Address: "increasing life expectancy to 80 years", "Russia joining the five largest economies of the world and securing its position among them", "renewal and development of Russian cities taking into account the opinion of their residents", "forming equal educational opportunities", "creating modern infrastructure in rural areas", "raising pensions, their indexation above the rate of inflation", "repairing regional and local roads", "affordable and high-quality medical care", "raising real incomes of the working population"⁵.

At the presidential election held on March 18, 2018, Russian society demonstrated a significant increase in the level of support for the current head of state and in voter turnout: compared to the presidential election of 2012, the turnout in Russia increased from 65.34 to 67.54%, and the support for Vladimir Putin – from 63.60 to 76.69% (for comparison: only 11.77% of Russians voted for P. Grudinin, who was on the second place according to the number of votes he received).

On May 7, 2018, Vladimir Putin officially assumed office as President of the Russian Federation and in his inauguration speech he

⁴ Presidential address to the Federal Assembly. March 1, 2018. *Official Website of the President of the Russian Federation*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56957>

⁵ Filina O. Birds in the hand turned into birds in the bush: what Russians think about the feasibility of strategic tasks of the state. *Kommersant*, 2018, May 28. Available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3635558>

once again confirmed his intentions regarding development plans for the period up to 2024, stating that **“now, we must use all the opportunities available to us primarily to address the most vital domestic development objectives, to achieve an economic and technological breakthrough, and to enhance competitiveness in the spheres that determine the future. A new quality of life, wellbeing, security and health are what constitutes our main goals and the focus of our policies”**⁶. The President addressed these words not so much to the Russian society that elected him, as to the ruling elites, and his words set a clear vector of state policy for the next six years.

At the same time, the first nine months of V. Putin's fourth presidential term (from June 2018 to February 2019) were marked by reforms that were negatively perceived by society. A special resonance was caused by the project of raising the retirement age, which catalyzed a number of mass protests across the country, largely due to the fact that the reform itself was carried out as a “covert operation”, without organizing a preliminary broad discussion with the people.

It should be noted that raising the retirement age is not the first case of such a practice of “shock therapy”. Monetization of benefits (2005) and the reform of RAS (2013) were carried out the same way... In the case of the pension reform, the issue became “routine”⁷, and it was facilitated by V. Putin's speech on federal TV channels (August 29, 2018), in which he spoke directly to the citizens of Russia and tried to explain the necessity and timeliness of this step, and also made a number of amendments to the draft law of the reform, significantly facilitating its course for many categories of the population.

⁶ Vladimir Putin's inauguration speech on May 7, 2018. *Official Website of the President of the Russian Federation*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57416>

⁷ *Trust ratings of politicians; ratings of approval of the work of state institutions; ratings of the parties: VTsIOM press release*, 2018, no. 3788, October 12. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=9363> (comment by M. Mamonov, head of the practice of political analysis and consulting at the research department).

N. Zubarevich: “They should have taken progressive steps and make comprehensive and well-thought-out decisions, but instead they did nothing for 15 years and then resolved the matter at once. In all countries, raising the retirement age has been a matter of public debate, and this reform is introduced gradually... Raising the retirement age is inevitable, it is not a reform, it is a fiscal measure to remove the burden from the federal budget, **but it was done outrageously, like a blow on the head...** What does a special operation mode mean? It means that first something is launched without any discussions, like a bolt out of the blue, as it was the case with the monetization of benefits. And then if any protests arise, this measure is revised. The monetization of benefits was supported by the additional flow of money, so that people did not take to streets. And now it is all done like in a two-move scheme: first they establish the retirement age at 65 for men and 63 for women; in the end, it will be 60 for women and 63 for men. It is a common political move – the Government is bad, the President is good”⁸

In October 2018, the relevant law on amending pension legislation was adopted⁹, however, according to the results of the monitoring, neither the law nor the President's televised address to the people was able to ensure the return of a positive trend in the dynamics of public opinion: from June 2018 (when the draft pension reform was first presented to the Russians) and up to the present, people's support for V. Putin has been declining by 2–4 percentage points every two months, and in general it decreased from 70 to 59% over the last five “waves” of the survey.

It is important to emphasize that by the end of 2018, the deterioration in the assessment of the President's work was noted in all socio-demographic

⁸ Materials of an interview with N. Zubarevich, director of the regional program at the Independent Institute for Social Policy (source: Kostareva A. Pension reform – a special operation in the emergency mode. Available at: <https://www.discred.ru/2018/07/18/pensionnaya-reforma-spetsoperatsiya-v-rezhime-avralla/>).

⁹ On amending certain legislative acts of the Russian Federation on the issues of assignment and payment of pensions: Law No. 350 dated October 3, 2018.

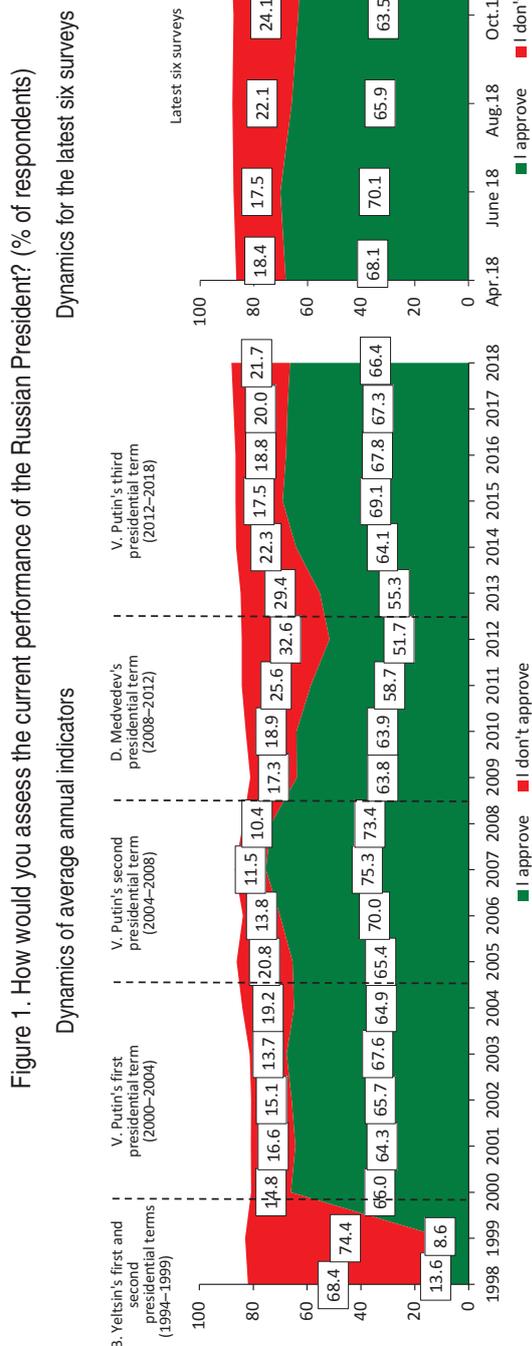


Table 1. How would you assess the current performance of the Russian President? (answer: I approve completely and in general, % of respondents)

Dynamics of average estimates broken down by V. Putin's and D. Medvedev's presidential terms

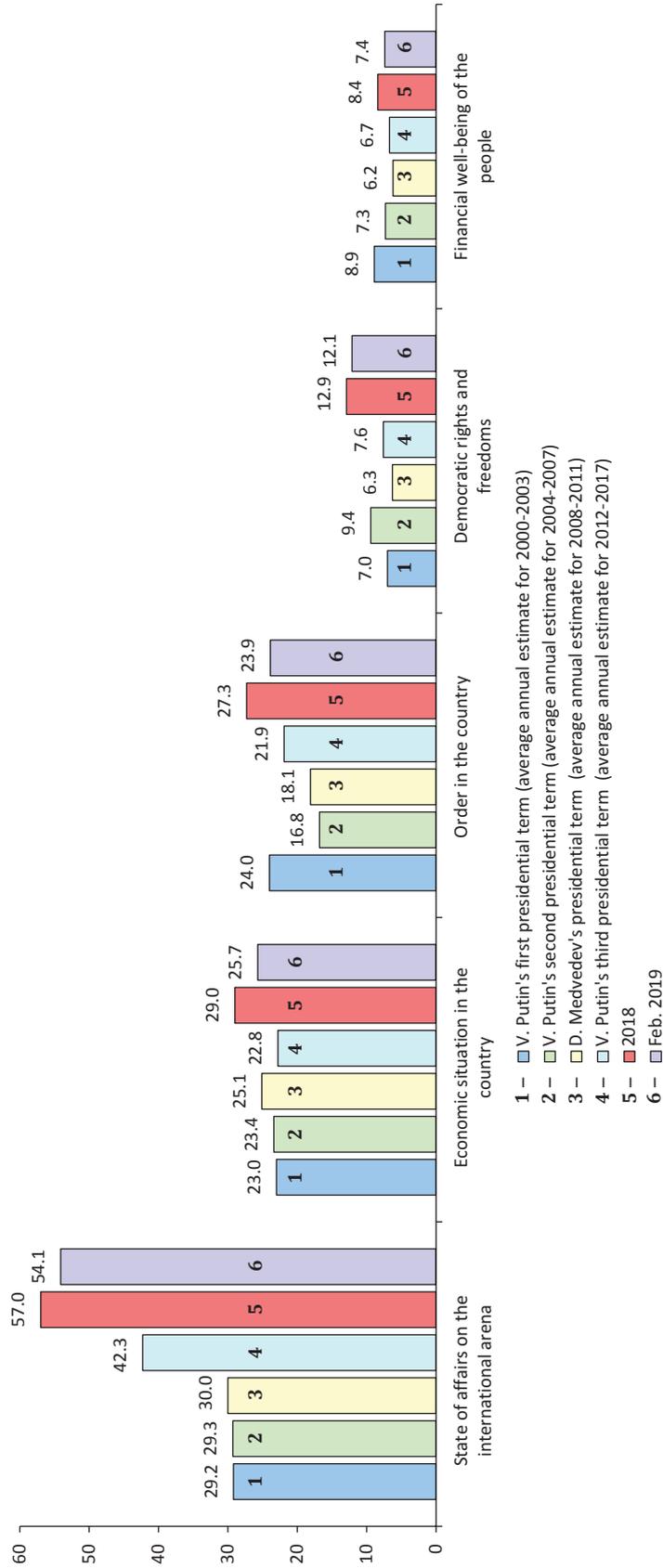
Population group	Average annual estimate for 2000-2003		Average annual estimate for 2004-2011		Average annual estimate for 2012-2017		Average annual estimate for 2018 to 2020-2003		Dynamics of average annual estimates (+/-)	
	-2003	-2007	-2011	-2017	2000-2003	2012-2017	2012-2017 to 2018 to 2020-2003	2012-2017 to 2018 to 2020-2003	2012-2017 to 2018 to 2020-2003	2012-2017 to 2018 to 2020-2003
Sex										
Men	65.8	69.0	63.1	59.6	64.0	64.0	-6	+4		
Women	66.0	68.9	66.5	64.9	68.3	68.3	-1	+3		
Age										
Under 30	68.8	70.7	64.7	61.2	63.0	63.0	-8	+2		
30-55	65.2	68.6	64.4	61.4	64.8	64.8	-4	+3		
Over 55	64.4	67.9	66.0	5.1	69.9	69.9	+1	+5		
Education										
Secondary and incomplete secondary	61.9	65.3	60.4	56.9	58.0	58.0	-5	+1		
Secondary vocational	66.6	70.2	65.8	63.8	70.0	70.0	-3	+6		
Higher and incomplete higher	70.1	71.9	69.1	67.2	70.3	70.3	-3	+3		
Income groups										
Bottom 20%	55.4	60.8	55.4	50.2	9.9	9.9	-5	0		
Middle 60%	68.3	71.4	66.7	64.8	68.8	68.8	-4	+4		
Top 20%	73.2	76.5	72.7	71.9	76.4	76.4	-1	+5		
Territories										
Vologda	66.2	65.3	64.5	61.1	62.5	62.5	-5	+1		
Cherepovets	64.6	72.5	73.8	74.1	78.1	78.1	+10	+4		
Districts	66.5	68.8	60.7	56.9	6.8	6.8	-10	+5		
Oblast	65.9	68.9	65.0	62.5	66.4	66.4	-3	+4		

Dynamics for the latest six surveys

Population group	Dynamics (+/-), Feb. 19 to Apr. 18					
	Apr. 2018	June 2018	Aug. 2018	Oct. 2018	Dec. 2018	Feb. 2019
Sex						
Men	62.6	69.6	63.1	62.6	59.9	56.8
Women	72.5	70.5	68.2	64.3	63.5	60.1
Age						
Under 30	60.8	66.0	66.8	62.0	56.6	56.3
30-55	66.5	70.3	64.0	61.5	58.9	56.7
Over 55	73.6	71.7	67.9	66.9	67.9	62.2
Education						
Secondary and incomplete secondary	58.5	60.9	60.9	57.8	52.2	49.3
Secondary vocational	72.2	75.6	69.1	66.6	64.9	62.3
Higher and incomplete higher	72.9	72.0	66.7	65.3	68.2	62.8
Income groups						
Bottom 20%	51.5	52.7	50.5	46.7	43.5	46.0
Middle 60%	74.1	72.3	66.4	65.5	64.9	59.2
Top 20%	70.5	78.9	80.1	75.0	73.1	65.9
Territories						
Vologda	63.8	65.5	61.7	60.5	57.9	54.7
Cherepovets	79.8	82.9	78.4	74.4	70.8	66.5
Districts	63.9	65.3	61.1	59.0	59.0	56.3
Oblast	68.1	70.1	65.9	63.5	61.9	58.7

Insert 2

Figure 2. In your opinion, what is V. Putin primarily concerned with?
 (% of respondents, excluding the answers: “other” and “it’s difficult to answer”)



groups, including those that are traditionally most positive – young people and the residents of the region who assess their income as high (*Insert 1, Table 1*). Thus, from April 2018 to February 2019, the percentage of respondents under the age of 30 who support the work of the head of state decreased from 61 to 56%, and among those who, according to self-assessment of their income, belong to the category of 20% of the most affluent residents of the region, the share of those who support the President's performance decreased from 71 to 66%.

According to the public opinion, the President is concerned much more with Russia's position on the world stage than with the financial situation of the people. For instance, on average during V. Putin's third presidential term, 42% of the Oblast residents considered that he was concerned first of all with international issues (*Insert 2, Figure 2*). And in February 2019, the share of those who share this opinion increased to 54% (even despite the President's policy statements, which focused primarily on addressing domestic socio-economic and political issues in the period up to 2024). For comparison: only 7–8% of the residents of the region consistently share the point of view that V. Putin is primarily concerned with "people's financial situation".

People's opinion that the President addresses mostly the situation in the international arena is objective and has its reasons. In fact, throughout the period of gradual restoration of Russia's international status after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the period of the "turbulent 1990s" (that is, since 2000 and especially since 2007, when V. Putin delivered his famous Munich speech), the United States of America and its allies have been waging a full-fledged war aimed at preventing the emergence of a new strong player in the geopolitical arena. According to experts, "it is strategically important for the U.S. to stop the revival of Russia. After all, Russia is becoming not just an independent state, but a global geopolitical player; one of the world's geopolitical centers. It becomes

the "supporting structure" of the new world order... That is why the Americans started messing around. They have one goal – to stop Russia"¹⁰. Economic sanctions, doping scandals around Russian sports, the Skripal case, tense situation in Syria and Ukraine, aggravation of the political situation in Venezuela – all these events and the "tools" of the hybrid war, of course, demand the President's attention at least because ensuring territorial security of the borders is a necessary condition in addressing sustainable development issues. Nevertheless, we cannot belittle the importance of the internal agenda: Russian history has repeatedly proved that if the ruling elites neglect the emerging needs of the masses for a long time, this poses a threat akin to external expansion and leads to the most disastrous consequences for the state.

Therefore, the effectiveness of implementation of the main tasks of public administration requires balance; and the historical task that the President has to deal with today in order to implement the most effective transit in 2024 and beyond consists in showing his political will and making the difficult,

It is well-known that Putin is responsible for the growth of the military industrial complex and for the strengthening of the army, the exploration of reserves of mineral resources of Russia, including the continental shelf, their development, production and implementation. Medvedev is responsible for agriculture, forestry, fishery, waterways, rivers, ports, development of cities and towns, housing and communal services, etc.

Wherever there is personal control or personal interest of Vladimir Putin, everything is all right. Where comes the responsibility of the Government and some of its members, almost everywhere there is devastation, corruption and raw materials exporting economy.¹¹

¹⁰ "It seems that NATO is preparing for a war with Russia" (an interview with L. Ivashov). *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 2016, June 27. Available at: <https://www.vologda.kp.ru/daily/26547.7/3563115/>

¹¹ President! Don't you sell us! *Argumenty nedeli*, 2018, no. 13 (606), April 5. Available at: <http://argumenti.ru/society/2018/04/568556?typelink=openlink>

but long overdue decisions about the responsibility of officials and the mechanisms of effective public control over the adoption of management decisions at all levels of power. According to experts, “we, Russians, often suffer from bifurcation, parallelism, and duplication. We have only one state post, the institute, that does not split – it is the President ... Neither efficiency, nor poor pensioners, nor bad education in itself will change the Constitution, because it is necessary to change the policy of the government”¹².

At the end of V. Putin's third presidential term there was an increase in the share of positive judgments about his success in strengthening Russia's international positions (from 43 to 54%), in restoring order in the country (from 35 to 51%), in the protection of democracy and strengthening citizens' freedoms (from 29 to 41%; *Inserts 3–4, Figures 3–5*). **However, the share of the Oblast residents who believe that the head of state successfully copes with the problem of economic recovery and welfare growth still remains stable and extremely low:** in fact, since the global financial crisis (2009) the proportion of those who share this opinion varies in the range of 27–35%, and it amounted to 31% by the end of 2018, the share similar to that in the crisis year of 2009 (32%) and only slightly more than in 2000–2001 (26–28%; *Insert 4, Figure 6*) when the country was just beginning to recover from the severe economic shocks of the 1990s. In February 2019, the share of positive assessments of the success of the President's work on addressing the issues of economic recovery and growth of citizens' welfare decreased to 28%.

The attitude toward the authorities, as well as the general social feeling, depends primarily on how people assess the dynamics of their well-being. In this issue, significant changes (neither for the worse

nor for the better) have not been observed since 2009. In fact, over the past ten years, the proportion of the Oblast's residents who consider themselves as people of “average income”, is about 40–44%, and the proportion of the “poor and extremely poor” varies in the range of 45–50% (*Insert 5, Figure 7*). According to the results of the third presidential term, the share of “poor and extremely poor” residents of the Oblast was 47%.

The “stagnant” nature of self-assessment of the dynamics of the financial situation – the most important factor in social well-being and civic activity – does not yet allow us to talk about any serious grounds for “breakthrough development”, and in the first nine months of V. Putin's next presidential term there has been no tangible progress in this situation.

Management decisions taken in 2018 (VAT increase and the pension reform), apparently, hit Russians hard. The decisions affected not so much the perception of the current financial situation as the assessment of its prospects. Thus, in June 2018 – February 2019, the proportion of people of “average income”, as well as the “poor and extremely poor” did not change (43 and 45%, respectively; *Insert 5, Figure 7*), but the consumer sentiment index¹³, which reflects the dynamics of people's forecasts about the future of the Russian economy and their own financial situation, decreased from 92 to 90 p. over the same period (*Insert 5, Figure 8*).

¹³ The consumer sentiment index is calculated based on the answers to the questions:

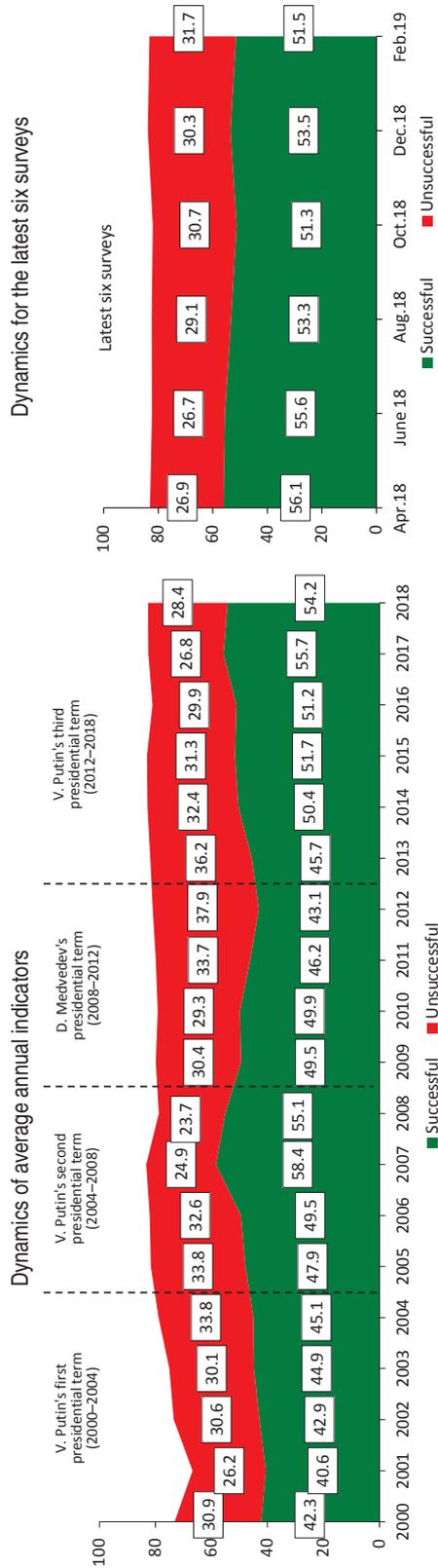
1. How would you assess the financial situation of your family: is it better or worse than it was a year ago? (answers: “better”, “worse”).
2. If we talk about major purchases for the house, then, generally speaking, do you think now is a good or bad time to buy most of these goods? (answers: “good”, “bad”).
3. Do you think that in a year your financial situation will be better, worse or about the same as it is now? (answers: “it will be better”, “it will be worse”).
4. Do you think the next 12 months will be a good or a bad time for the country's economy, or will there be something else? (answers: “good”, “bad”).
5. If we talk about the next five years, will they be a good or bad time for the country's economy? (answers: “good”, “bad”).

Private indices are calculated for each question. The arithmetic mean of the partial indices gives the total value of the consumer sentiment index.

¹² Will there be a next anniversary of the Russian Constitution? (an interview with Professor S. Shakhrai). *Argumenty nedeli*, 2018, no. 49 (642), December 13. Available at: <http://argumenti.ru/society/2018/12/595669?typelink=op enlink>

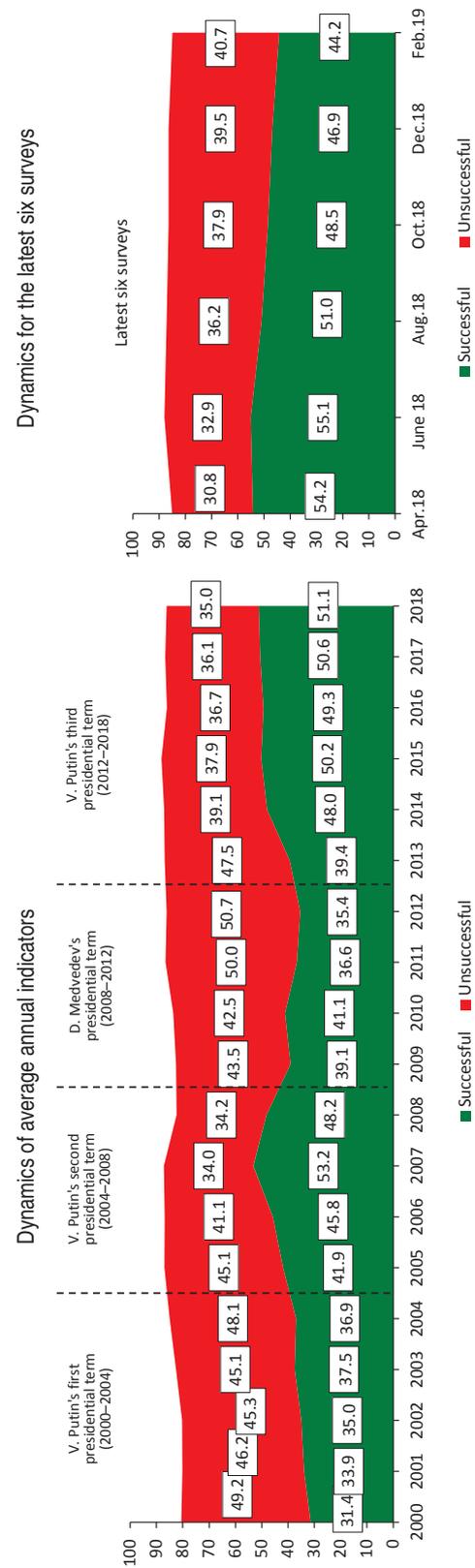
Insert 3

Figure 3. In your opinion, how successful is the Russian President in addressing the problem of strengthening Russia's international positions? (% of respondents)*



* Included in the survey since 2000.

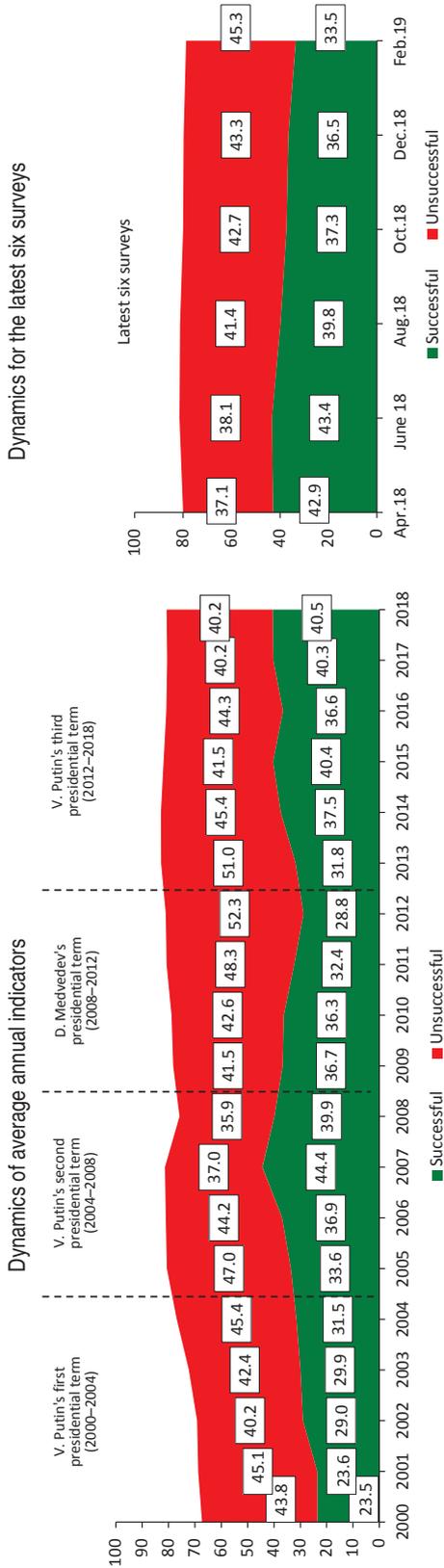
Figure 4. In your opinion, how successful is the Russian President in addressing the problem of restoring order in the country? (% of respondents)*



* Included in the survey since 2000.

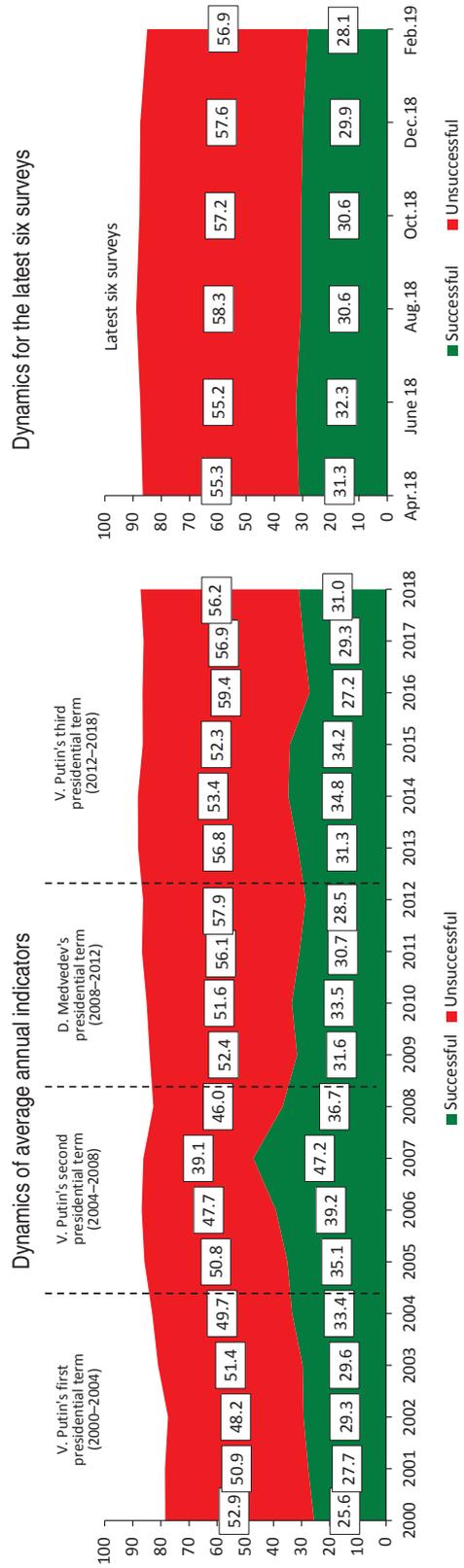
Insert 4

Figure 5. In your opinion, how successful is the Russian President in addressing the problem of protecting democracy and strengthening citizens' freedoms? (% of respondents)*



* Included in the survey since 2000.

Figure 6. In your opinion, how successful is the Russian President in addressing the problem of economic recovery and promoting citizens' welfare? (% of respondents)*



* Included in the survey since 2000.

Figure 7. What group do you belong to, in your opinion? (% of respondents)

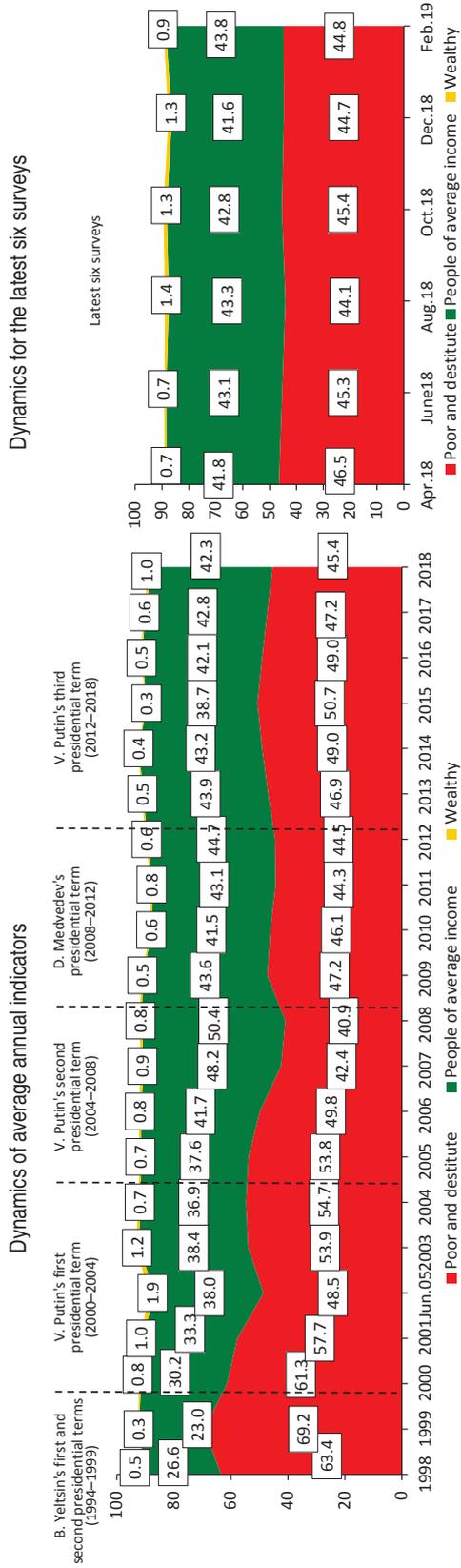
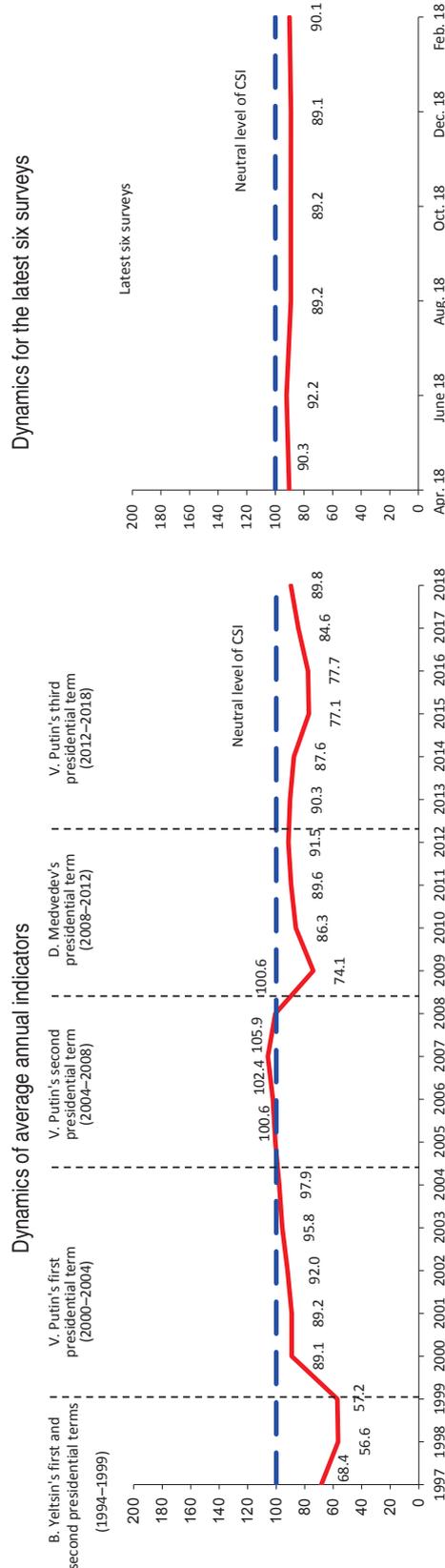


Figure 8. Consumer sentiment index (CSI, points*)



*To calculate the CSI, the proportion of negative answers is subtracted from the proportion of positive answers, then 100 is added to the resulting value, so as not to have negative values. Thus, completely negative answers would give the general index 0, positive – 200, the balance of the former and the latter expresses the value of the index 100, which is, in fact, a neutral mark (---).
The value of the CSI below 100 points means that more than 50% of respondents give negative forecasts about the future economic situation in the country and their personal material well-being.

Insert 6

Figure 9. What could you say about your mood in the last few days? (% of respondents)

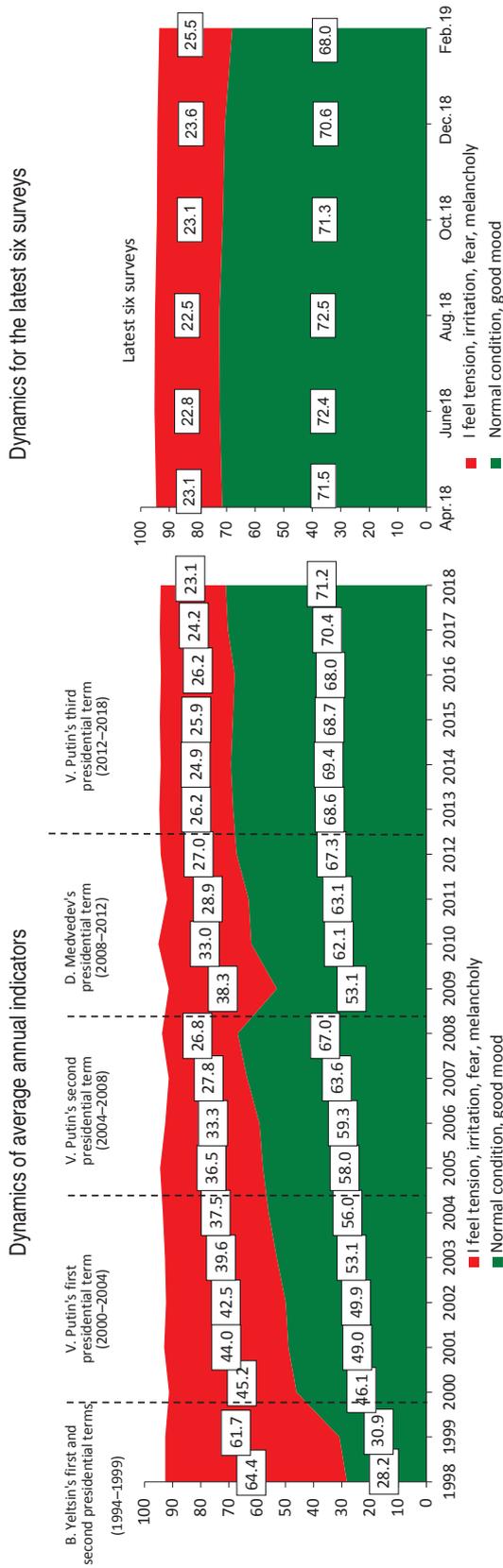
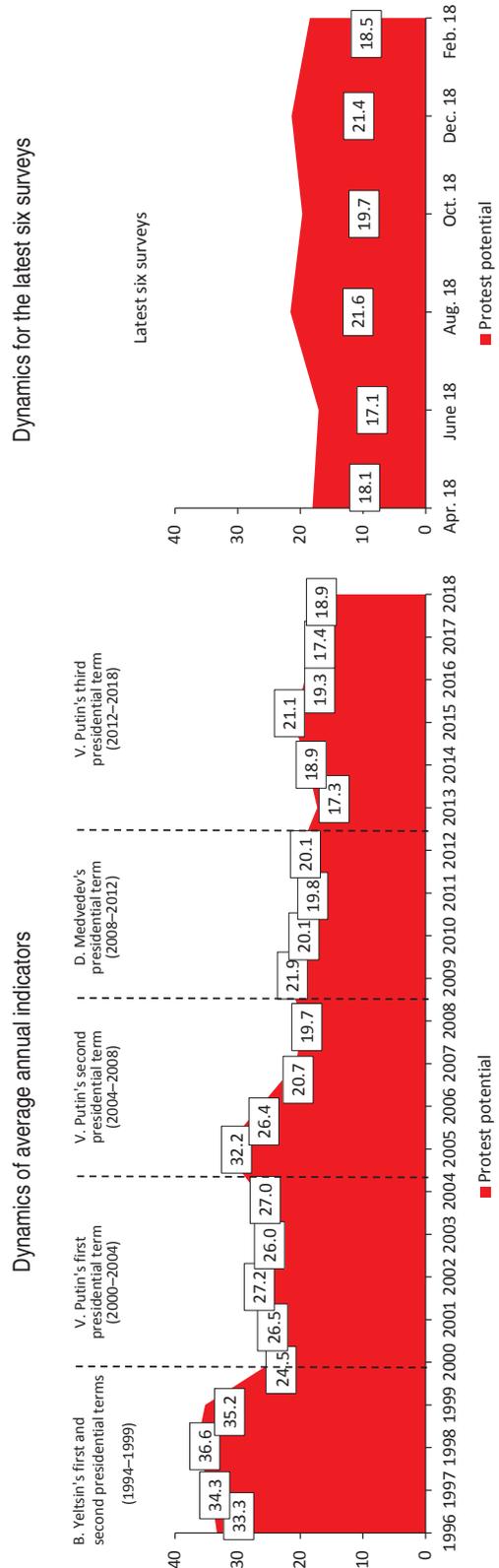


Figure 10. Protest potential



Despite the mainly negative assessment of the dynamics and perspective financial situation, people's mood in some aspects remains positive. A steady improvement in the emotional background is observed almost throughout the whole measurement period (from 2000 to 2018). During V. Putin's third presidential term, the proportion of people who characterize their mood as "normal, good" increased from 67 to 70% (*Insert 6, Figure 9*).

Some caution, however, is caused by the dynamics of people's assessments in 2018: on the one hand, there were no negative changes in them (even despite the unambiguously negative attitude of the majority of the Oblast residents toward raising VAT and retirement age, the share of those who positively characterize their mood remained at 71%). On the other hand, ambiguous government decisions did not make people more optimistic. Thus, from February to December 2018, the share of those who "feel tension, irritation, fear, melancholy" remained stable at 23%. At the beginning of 2019, we already observe noticeable negative changes: in particular, the proportion of people who positively characterize their mood decreased from 71 to 68% in the last two months.

The dynamics of the protest potential over the latest six surveys show multidirectional trends. In general, for the period from April 2018 to February 2019, it remained at the level of 18%, while the "surge" was observed in June – August (from 17 to 22%; *Insert 6, Figure 10*), which also indicates a clearly negative first reaction of people to the changes in pension legislation. In December 2018, the level of protest potential was 21%, which was the same as in 2009 and 2015 – the crisis years for the Russian economy.

The year 2018 provided a vivid example of how the general level of discontent with the situation in the country is quickly converted by the non-systemic opposition into real protest actions, and the danger here lies not only in the purposeful undermining of public confidence in the government, but also in the next factor hindering the

implementation of plans for Russia's breakthrough development.

II. Assessment of the dynamics of the results of the past year

Every year in February, VolRC RAS conducts a sociological survey, in which the Vologda Oblast residents assess the results of the past year and describe their expectations about the prospects of the coming year. The following section shows the main results of the next "wave" of the survey. The dynamics of the relevant data for the entire survey period (from 2000 to February 2019) are provided for comparison.

In general, during this period, the dynamics of public opinion showed a rather sharp deterioration in the estimates of the outgoing year only twice (both for the country as a whole and for one's family). This was during the period of 2008–2009 (coinciding with the global financial crisis and the end of V. Putin's second presidential term) and during the period of 2013–2015, when there were talks about a new wave of economic crisis comparable with the economic shocks of the 1990s in Russia (*Insert 7, Figures 11–12*). Even the euphoria of the "Crimean spring", which took place in early 2014, "began to give way to people's discontent with price tags in stores" by June 2014¹⁴.

It is noteworthy that in these crisis periods, the assessment of the results of the year for Russia as a whole deteriorated more rapidly than for one's family. Thus, in 2008–2009, the share of positive judgments about the results of the year for the country decreased by 24 p.p. (from 43 to 19%), for one's family – by 18 p.p. (from 48 to 30%). In 2013–2015 for Russia – by 26 p.p. (from 45 to 19%), for one's family – by 11 p.p. (from 50 to 39%). **These changes suggest that it is in their personal and family life that people find more opportunities to improve their living conditions and maintain well-being.** It is no coincidence that more

¹⁴ In the minds of Russians, Crimea retreats under the onslaught of the crisis. *Vedomosti*, 2015, January 30. Available at: <http://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/news/38844121/krizisprotiv-kryma>

than half of the Oblast residents (from 54 to 82%) note that they are pleased with the state of affairs at work, in relations with friends and relatives, and in health (*Insert 9, Table 2*). However, when it comes to the political or economic situation in the country, the share of positive judgments does not exceed 40% (*Insert 10, Table 3*).

The concentration of people's interests and hopes on their microsociety correlates with the assessments of experts who in the 2010s noted such a phenomenon as social atomization of Russian society¹⁵, and today they register a steady growth of the so-called "self-sufficient Russians" who do not need state support or simply do not believe in its effectiveness¹⁶. According to FSRC RAS estimates, the share of "self-sufficient Russians" increased from 34 to 48% in 2011–2016. Experts note: "Today, self-sufficient Russians are not a social periphery, not a marginal layer, but a significant social group that expresses a trend toward the formation of an activist dominant in Russian society"¹⁷.

Thus, having learned to do without the support of the authorities, society increasingly ceases to count on this support and tries to find resources for adaptation in its immediate environment. This trend is noted both nationwide and in the findings of the surveys conducted in the Vologda Oblast.

A special place in the list of problems faced by respondents in the past year belongs to "uncertainty about the future". Throughout the measurement

period (from 1998 to February 2019), this problem ranked first, with the exception of 2007, when most of the monitoring indicators achieved the highest scores (*Insert 11, Table 6*). Since 2012, 50–60% of the residents of the Vologda Oblast have noted they feel uncertainty about the future.

Uncertainty about the future is a problem that is in fact typical of the whole of modern world civilization, which scholars call a "society of dangers and disasters"¹⁸, a society "in which security is raised to a level of central value"¹⁹; "a risk society that is constantly balancing on the edge of security and unreliability, uncertainty and choice"²⁰. This is connected not only with the unstable geopolitical situation, but also with rapid scientific and technological progress, and in particular with the development of information technology that increases the variability of choice of opinions and, accordingly, the inconsistency of public consciousness.

Nevertheless, it should be said that the key problems that 25 to 35% of the population have to deal with ("inability to improve housing conditions due to the high cost of housing", "lack of funds for paid medical care", "necessity to find additional employment due to the low income", "reducing the time for rest due to the need to work extra hours") are certainly the factors that destabilize people's ideas about tomorrow and force them to seek support in the circle of closest friends and relatives.

Analyzing the list of critical life issues as a criterion of efficiency of activity of the ruling elites, we should note that in general the relevance of some of them decreased for the period from 2000 to February 2019 (this, in particular, concerns such problems as high crime rate, delays in payment of salaries and pensions, inability to improve

¹⁵ Social atomism is a political and philosophical concept, according to which society consists of isolated individuals (a kind of "atoms") that enter into social interaction for the implementation of their own interests and goals (source: Analytical portal "Humanitarian technologies". Available at: <https://gtmarket.ru/concepts/7227>).

Gorshkov M.K., Tikhonova N.E. "Russian dream": an experience of sociological measurement. *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, 2012, no. 12, pp. 3-11; Zhukov V.I. Russia in the global system of social coordinates: sociological analysis and forecast. *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya=Sociological Studies*, 2008, no. 10, pp. 29-40.

¹⁶ Petukhov V.V. Dynamics of social moods of Russians and the formation of request for changes. *Sotsis*, 2018, no. 11, p. 50.

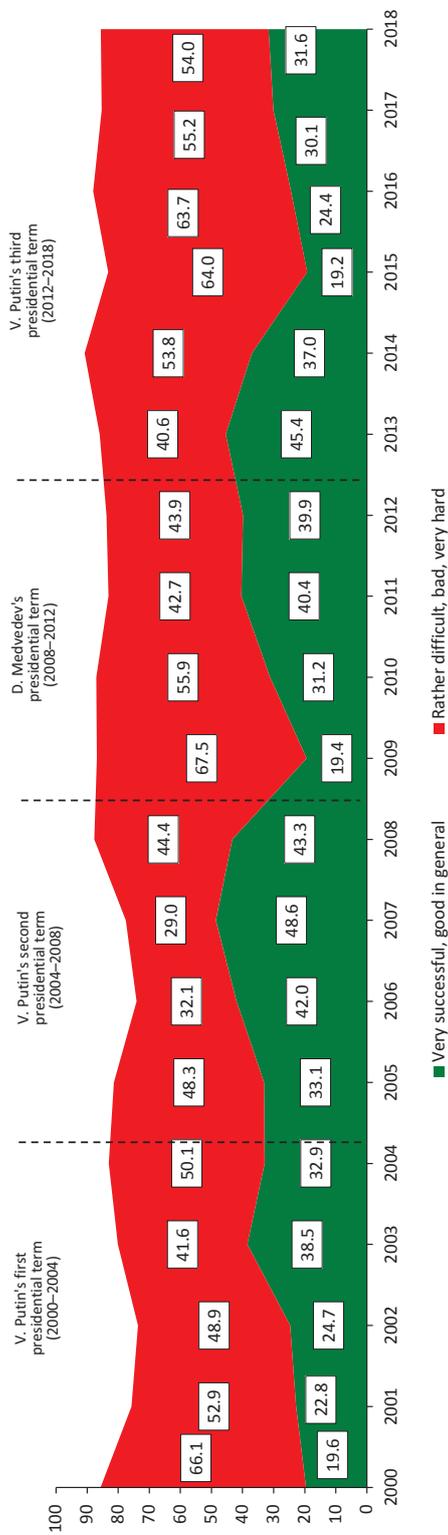
¹⁷ *Russian Society in Spring 2016: Concerns and Hopes: Information and Analytical Summary on the Results of the All-Russian Research*. Moscow, 2016. P. 30.

¹⁸ Beck U. *Risikogesellschaft. Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne*. – Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986, 391 p.

¹⁹ Ewald F. *Die Versicherungs – Gesellschaft. Kritische Justiz*, 1989, no. 22, pp. 385-393.

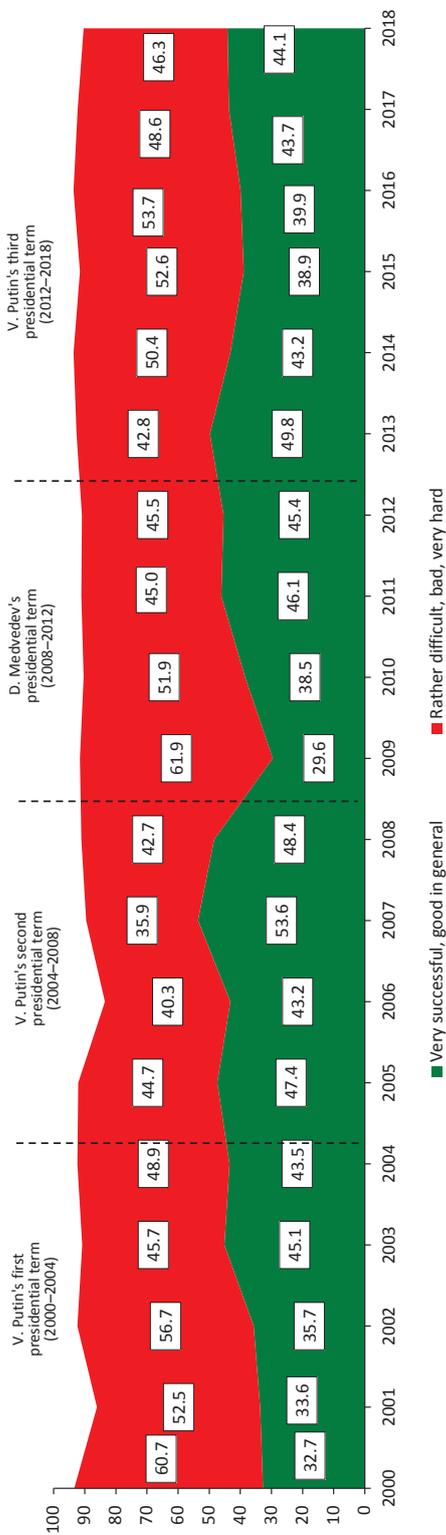
²⁰ Bechmann G. Modern society as a risk society. *Voprosy filosofii*, 2007, no. 1, pp. 26-46.

Figure 11. How would you assess the results of the past year for Russia?* (% of respondents)*



Included in the survey since 2001.

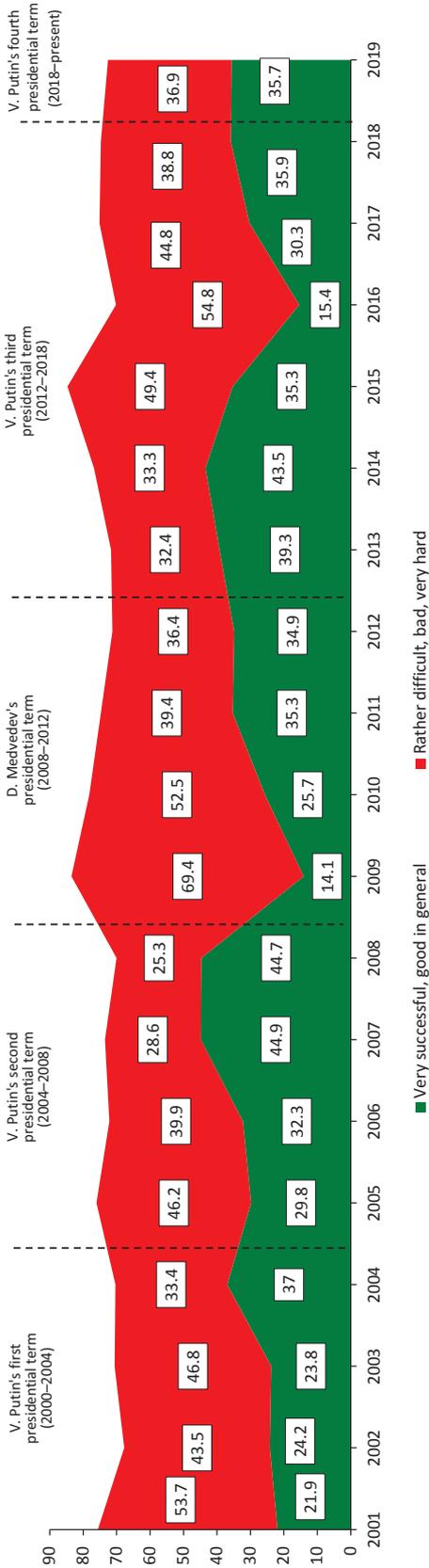
Figure 12. How would you assess the results of the past year for you personally (for your family) (% of respondents)*



* The wording of the question is as follows: "How would you assess the results of the past year?". Thus, the data for 2016 in the graphs were obtained in February 2017, the data for 2017 were obtained in February 2018, etc. Included in the survey since 2001.

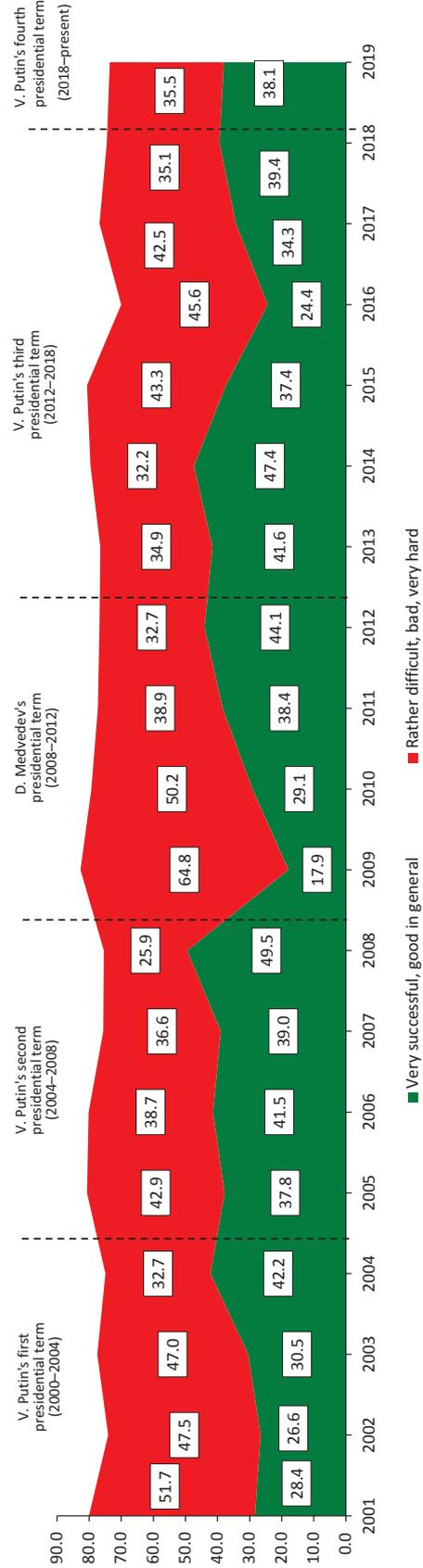
Insert 8

Figure 13. In your opinion, what will be the coming year for Russia? (% of respondents)*



* Included in the survey since 2001.

Figure 14. In your opinion, what will be the coming year for you personally (for your family)? (% of respondents)*



* Included in the survey since 2001.

Insert 9

Table 2. Which of the following areas have you been most content with recently? (% of respondents)*

Answer	For reference: average annual estimate for 1998–1999 (B. Yeltsin's presidential term)	V. Putin's first presidential term (annual average estimate for 2000–2003)	V. Putin's second presidential term (annual average estimate for 2004–2007)	D. Medvedev' presidential term (annual average estimate for 2008–2011)	V. Putin's third presidential term (annual average estimate for 2012–2017)	Annual average esti- mate for 2018	Dynamics of annual average estimates (+/-),						
							2012–2017 to ...		2000– 2003		2012– 2017– 2017		
							1998– 1999	+	-	+	-	+	-
							+	-	+	-	+	-	
1. Relations with friends, employees	58.0	62.6	67.0	71.5	78.2	82.1	+20			+16		+4	
2. Family relationships	54.8	58.6	64.0	69.3	76.0	79.9	+21			+17		+4	
3. Romantic relationships, sex life	37.8	41.4	49.4	50.7	58.8	59.3	+21			+17		+1	
4. My own state of health	30.8	35.7	45.5	45.3	56.5	58.6	+26			+21		+2	
5. Success in work and study	32.8	43.1	51.8	52.3	59.0	57.5	+26			+16			-2
6. State of health of my loved ones	24.0	30.0	39.9	43.0	52.3	54.1	+28			+22		+2	
7. Situation in the interna- tional arena	9.8	30.3	45.8	44.9	34.1	39.0	+24			+4		+5	
8. Political situation in the region	10.0	26.0	37.8	37.1	38.4	36.8	+28			+12			-2
9. Political situation in Russia	2.9	20.2	33.4	36.5	35.8	36.1	+33			+16		0	
10. Financial situation in my family	11.9	23.3	31.2	29.1	36.6	35.4	+25			+13			-1
11. Economic situation in Russia	3.1	14.5	29.1	20.9	26.4	23.5	+23			+12			-3
12. Economic situation in the region	7.3	20.8	33.4	21.9	23.7	21.3	+16			+3			-2

* Arranged according to the data as of 2018.

Insert 10

Table 3. Which of the following areas have you been most **displeased with** recently? (% of respondents)*

Answer	For reference: average annual estimate for 1998–1999 (B. Yeltsin's presidential term)	V. Putin's first presidential term (annual average estimate for 2000–2003)	V. Putin's second presidential term (annual average estimate for 2004–2007)	D. Medvedev' presidential term (annual average estimate for 2008– 2011)	V. Putin's third presidential term (annual average estimate for 2012–2017)	Annual average estimate for 2018	Dynamics of annual average estimates (+/-),						
							2012–2017 to ...		2000– 2003		2012–2017		
							1998– 1999	+	-	+	-	+	-
							+	-	+	-	+	-	+
1. Economic situation in the region	67.5	52.8	50.0	62.8	70.2	74.0	+3	+17	-	+4	-		
2. Economic situation in Russia	79.6	62.1	55.6	64.5	67.7	72.8	-12	+6	-	+5	-		
3. Financial situation in my family	73.0	61.2	58.2	60.7	57.9	62.7	-15	-	-3	+5	-		
4. Political situation in Russia	74.6	53.9	49.8	47.0	56.8	61.0	-18	+3	-	+4	-		
5. Situation in the international arena	61.8	42.3	37.2	38.4	58.4	59.3	-3	+16	-	+1	-		
6. Political situation in the region	60.0	44.3	44.2	45.3	53.6	58.7	-6	+9	-	+5	-		
7. State of health of my loved ones	51.1	52.1	45.8	45.9	42.3	40.6	-9	-	-10	-2	-		
8. My own state of health	51.4	48.0	43.5	44.5	38.0	37.6	-13	-	-10	0	-		
9. Success in work and study	36.1	30.3	31.9	30.6	31.8	36.8	-4	+2	-	+5	-		
10. Romantic relationships, sex life	28.4	30.1	31.7	31.8	32.2	35.4	+4	+2	-	+3	-		
11. Family relationships	23.7	22.4	23.6	20.2	18.7	18.6	-5	-	-4	0	-		
12. Relations with friends, employees	18.6	15.9	18.7	15.3	15.3	15.9	-3	-	-1	+1	-		

* Arranged according to the data as of 2018.

Insert 11

Table 6. Which of the following problems did you personally face last year* (% of respondents)

Answer	For reference: average annual estimate for 1998– 1999 (B. Yeltsin's presidential term)	V. Putin's first presidential term (annual average estimate for 2000–2003)	V. Putin's second presidential term (annual average estimate for 2004–2007)	D. Medvedev' presidential term (annual average estimate for 2008–2011)	V. Putin's third presidential term (annual average estimate for 2012–2017)	Annual average estimate for 2018	Dynamics of annual average estimates (+/-),					
							2012-2017 to...		2018-2019 to		2012-2017	
							1998- 1999		2000- 2003		2000- 2003	
							+	-	+	-	+	-
1. Lack of confidence in the future	69.7	53.5	40.2	53.5	54.5	51.7	-15	+1	-	-	-3	
2. Inability to improve housing conditions due to the high cost of housing	39.5	38.7	35.9	33.0	33.3	33.2	-6	-	-5	0		
3. Lack of money to pay for medical aid	27.8	27.0	23.0	23.2	26.0	28.8	-2	-	-1	+3		
4. Need to find additional work due to low income	32.0	26.3	22.7	24.0	28.7	24.8	-3	+2	-	-	-4	
5. Reduced rest time due to the need to work extra	14.5	20.8	17.7	22.0	24.9	24.2	+10	+4	-	-	-1	
6. High crime rate	36.4	32.1	33.7	23.6	18.6	23.8	-18	-	-14	+5		
7. The inability to purchase a travel package because of its high cost	14.7	18.5	18.4	17.9	23.6	20.8	+9	+5	-	-	-3	
8. Lack of money to buy medicines	33.4	23.9	17.3	15.4	16.7	18.6	-17	-	-7	+2		
9. Delays in payment of wages (pensions, scholarships)	57.5	21.8	15.4	17.0	14.4	13.7	-43	-	-7	-	-1	
10. Job loss	13.7	8.2	7.0	8.1	9.0	10.0	-5	+1	-	+1		

* The question was not asked in 2009.

** We provide 10 possible answers most common in 2018–2019. The full list consists of 13 possible answers.

Insert 12

Table 7. What plans did you manage to implement, among the things you had planned for the past year? (% of respondents)*

Answer	V. Putin's first presidential term (annual average estimate for 2000–2003)	V. Putin's second presidential term (annual average estimate for 2004–2007)	D. Medvedev' presidential term (annual average estimate for 2008–2011)	V. Putin's third presidential term (annual average estimate for 2012–2017)	Dynamics of annual average estimates (+/-)	
					2012-2017 to 2000-2003	2018-2019 to 2012-2017
					+	-
1. Buy new clothes, shoes	34.7	40.1	42.9	43.5	+9	+3
2. Improve the quality of nutrition	24.2	27.7	24.8	19.5	-5	+2
3. Get a job	18.4	18.6	15.6	15.0	-3	+2
4. Provide children with quality education	13.9	12.6	12.4	12.0	-2	+1
5. Receive necessary medical care	13.3	12.9	14.1	12.6	-1	-1
6. Improve living conditions	11.1	12.9	10.3	11.1	0	+1
7. Raise the salary	18.7	18.2	13.1	11.4	-7	0
8. Buy a car	6.4	9.8	9.5	9.2	+3	-2
9. Spend holidays in a health resort (recreation center) in Russia	6.4	7.6	7.4	6.8	0	-1
10. Spend holidays abroad	2.8	4.6	5.8	6.1	+3	-1
11. Buy a country house, a private subsidiary plot	9.6	9.1	7.1	4.3	-5	-1
It's difficult to answer	11.4	14.5	7.2	9.4	-2	-2

* Included in the survey since 2000.

Table 8. What plans did you fail to implement, among the things you had planned for the past year? (% of respondents)*

Answer	V. Putin's first presidential term (annual average estimate for 2000–2003)	V. Putin's second presidential term (annual average estimate for 2004–2007)	D. Medvedev' presidential term (annual average estimate for 2008–2011)	V. Putin's third presidential term (annual average estimate for 2012–2017)	Dynamics of annual average estimates (+/-)	
					2012-2017 to 2000-2003	2018-2019 to 2012-2017
					+	-
1. Buy new clothes, shoes	35.7	24.7	24.2	21.6	-14	-4
2. Improve the quality of nutrition	38.5	29.1	29.1	29.2	-9	-4
3. Get a job	18.4	17.2	18.1	19.1	+1	-2
4. Provide children with quality education	18.6	17.0	14.3	12.5	-6	+2
5. Receive necessary medical care	33.8	29.2	31.3	29.3	-5	+2
6. Improve living conditions	37.8	34.3	33.3	31.8	-6	+2
7. Raise the salary	42.0	39.2	45.7	47.6	+6	-2
8. Buy a car	23.6	24.0	23.5	24.3	+1	-1
9. Spend holidays in a health resort (recreation center) in Russia	28.1	24.8	25.8	27.8	0	0
10. Spend holidays abroad	14.5	16.1	18.3	22.6	+8	+2
11. Buy a country house, a private subsidiary plot	10.4	11.3	13.1	13.9	+4	+1
It's difficult to answer	11.4	14.5	7.2	9.4	-2	-2

* Included in the survey since 2000.

Table 4. Which of the following problems did you personally face last year?* (% of respondents)

Answer**	V. Putin's first presidential term (annual average estimate for 2000–2003)	V. Putin's third presidential term (annual average estimate for 2012–2017)	Annual average estimate for 2018–2019	Dynamics of annual average estimates (+/-),			
				2012–2017 to 2000–2003		2018–2019 to 2012–2017	
				+	-	+	-
Lack of confidence in the future	53.5	54.5	51.7	+1			-3
Inability to improve housing conditions due to the high cost of housing	38.7	33.3	33.2		-5		0
Lack of money to pay for medical aid	27.0	26.0	28.8		-1	+3	
Need to find additional work due to low income	26.3	28.7	24.8	+2			-4
Reduced rest time due to the need to work extra	20.8	24.9	24.2	+4			-1
High crime rate	32.1	18.6	23.8		-14	+5	
The inability to purchase a travel package because of its high cost	18.5	23.6	20.8	+5			-3
Lack of money to buy medicines	23.9	16.7	18.6		-7	+2	
Delays in payment of wages (pensions, scholarships)	21.8	14.4	13.7		-7		-1
Job loss	8.2	9.0	10.0	+1		+1	

* The question was not asked in 2009.
 ** We provide 10 possible answers most common in 2018–2019. The full list consists of 13 possible answers.

housing conditions; *Table 4*). At the same time, the relevance of a number of important problems has remained and even increased during V. Putin's three presidential terms. Thus, according to the results of his third presidential term in comparison with his first presidential term, we point out the following problems:

- ✓ the share of people who feel uncertain about the future remains the same (54%);
- ✓ the proportion of those who do not have enough money for paid medical service remains stable (27%);
- ✓ 26–29% of the Oblast residents still face the need to find additional employment because of low earnings;
- ✓ 8–9% note that last year they faced the problem of job loss.

In addition, during these periods, the proportion of those who do not have enough time to rest due to the need to work extra hours increased (from 21 to 25%), as well as the proportion of those who cannot buy a travel package because of its high cost (from 19 to 24%).

Thus, if we compare the current situation with that in the beginning of the 2000s (2000–2002), we see that the relevance of most of the issues under consideration decreased for the population of the region as a whole. However, this cannot be said if we compare people's estimates in 2018 and at the beginning of V. Putin's second (2004) and third (2012) presidential terms. In other words, no positive dynamics have been observed over the past 10–15 years.

A slightly different picture is noted in relation to the implementation of life plans (*Insert 12, Table 7*). In the period from 2000–2003 to 2012–2017, people began to say more often that in the past year they were able to buy new clothes and shoes (from 35 to 44%), but there were no significant changes in all other positions listed in the survey. Moreover, during V. Putin's three presidential terms there was a decrease in the share of those who were able to improve the quality of their nutrition (from 24 to 20%), raise their wages (from 19 to 11%), and buy a country house or a private subsidiary plot (from 10 to 4%).

Table 5. Implementation of the plans for the year in the period of the third and the beginning of the fourth presidential terms of V. Putin (% of respondents)*

Answer	V. Putin’s third presidential term (annual average estimate for 2012–2017)			Annual average estimate for 2018–2019		
	Was implemented	Wasn’t implemented	Dynamics	Was implemented	Wasn’t implemented	Dynamics
Buy new clothes, shoes	43.5	21.6	22	46.5	17.5	29
Improve the quality of nutrition	19.5	29.2	-10	21.7	25.2	-4
Get a job	15.0	19.1	-4	16.8	17.6	-1
Provide children with quality education	12.0	12.5	-1	12.5	14.0	-2
Receive necessary medical care	12.6	29.3	-17	11.3	31.5	-20
Improve living conditions	11.1	31.8	-21	11.6	34.2	-23
Raise the salary	11.4	47.6	-36	11.3	45.8	-35
Buy a car	9.2	24.3	-15	7.5	23.5	-16
Spend holidays in a health resort (recreation center) in Russia	6.8	27.8	-21	5.9	28.1	-22
Spend holidays abroad	6.1	22.6	-17	4.9	24.2	-19
Buy a country house, a private subsidiary plot	4.3	13.9	-10	3.6	14.4	-11

* Excluding those who did not plan the options specified in the question or found it difficult to answer.

We can assume that people are less likely to implement their plans for the year, and it happens not because the opportunities for this are reduced, but because these plans have already been implemented earlier and, accordingly, people just do not intend to implement them next year. However, this could be said, for example, about buying a car, a private subsidiary plot or about getting a job. **The lack of positive changes to improve the quality of nutrition, education, medical care and housing not only for oneself but also for one’s children can hardly be explained by the fact that people are fully satisfied with these spheres of life. Even more so if we consider that the proportion of those who note the severity of such problems as “inaccessibility of health care, poor quality of medical services”, “low availability of housing”, “poor quality of engineering infrastructure (housing, roads, transport)” is 30–35% (according to the data as of 2018), and the proportion of those who point out “non-availability of educational services, poor quality of education” is 10–12%, and this figure has not changed since 2008.**

We should mention the fact that at the end of V. Putin’s third presidential term, as well as in 2018 – February 2019, the proportion of the Oblast residents who have not implemented their plans for the year, in most positions significantly exceeds the proportion of those who were able to do it. This includes plans to improve the quality of nutrition, receive necessary medical care, improve housing conditions, and raise wages (*Table 5, Tables 7–8 of Insert 12*).

Thus, summing up the results of the brief analysis of the dynamics of public opinion for the period from 2000 to 2019 that covers V. Putin’s three presidential terms and the beginning of his fourth presidency and one presidential term of D. Medvedev, it is necessary first of all to emphasize the obvious decline in the rate of positive trends observed mainly after the global financial crisis. **In fact, after the “collapse” of most indicators in 2008–2009 the pre-crisis level has not been reached either in the assessments of the head of state’s performance, or in the assessment of personal financial situation, or in people’s ideas about the**

future. Only the dynamics of their daily emotional state can be assessed relatively positively, which (as our research shows) is connected neither with the improvement of the situation in the country, nor with finding an effective solution to socio-economic issues, but rather with the fact that the interests of the Oblast residents are being focused more on the sphere of personal, family, and micro-social relations.

The fact that stable assessments are preserved generally reflects the strategic line of V. Putin's policy, since he prefers to act carefully and step-by-step, resorting to cardinal decisions only at "peak" moments (as, for example, in the situation with the accession of Crimea to Russia). However, after nine months of V. Putin's fourth presidential term, there are more and more factors indicating that maintaining stability alone is not enough.

The West is driving the case toward the total war, at any cost, without any rules; because as history shows, it cannot win a regular war against Russia... The very fact that the coming six-year term will be the last for V. Putin adds the ultimate drama to the whole situation, because this term will unfold in a cascade of increasing external challenges and, ultimately, total war...²¹

First, there still remains the pressure on Russia on the part of the U.S., UK and their allies. At the same time, the situation in the international arena indicates that in the coming years Russia cannot count on friendly partnership with the West. Consequently, the only way to maintain its status in the rapidly developing geopolitical space is to increase the power and effectiveness of the implementation of human potential within the country, which means to create comfortable conditions for life, to increase public confidence in the government, to ensure smooth operation

²¹ Korovin V. Golgotha of the last time. *Zavtra*, 2018, May 21. Available at: http://zavtra.ru/blogs/golgofa_poslednego_sroka

of the means of social mobility and conditions for implementation of civil initiatives. The need to develop at a faster pace was noted by the President himself, who pointed out that "the main threat and our main enemy is the fact that we are falling behind. If we are unable to reverse this trend, we will fall even further behind"²². However, this cannot be achieved if the general population is voluntarily distancing itself from social and state issues.

Second, since 2014, Russia has been experiencing a growing trend in the number of people who believe that currently reforming key areas of life in the country is more important than maintaining stability. "Today a significant part of Russian society comes to the conclusion that in the new realities the focus on stability actually means the focus on the preservation of stagnation and crisis phenomena. It is not a denial of stability as a public good, especially in a country that has experienced many cataclysms in its recent history, but rather an understanding of the fact that the inertial-protective paradigm of social development implemented by the authorities at this historical moment has exhausted itself"²³.

The number of those who believe that the country needs significant changes and political and economic reforms has doubled over the past six years (from 28% in 2012 to 56% in 2018). Thus, Russian society is gradually approaching another turn, a bifurcation in the road that opens up a new socio-economic and political perspective. There is a growing awareness that, without a serious reassessment of the strategies and priorities that proved successful in the past relatively successful decade, the country is unlikely to be able to move forward effectively²⁴.

²² Address of the President to the Federal Assembly, March 1, 2018. *Official Website of the President of the Russian Federation*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56957>

²³ Petukhov V.V. Dynamics of social moods of Russians and the formation of request for changes. *Sotsis*, 2018, no. 11, p. 43.

²⁴ Russian Society after the Presidential Election-2018: Request for a Change: Information and Analytical Summary. Moscow, 2018. P. 7.

Thus, in Russia as a whole, from 2014 to 2018, the share of those who believe that “the country needs stability” decreased from 70 to 44%, and the share of those who believe that “the country needs significant changes” increased from 30 to 56%.

The survey conducted in the Vologda Oblast has shown a similar trend: from February to August 2018, the proportion of residents of the region who believe that Russia needs stability decreased from 44 to 37%, and the proportion of those who believe that the country needs change increased from 38 to 46%²⁵. Thus, it is obvious that the implementation of this need (the need for change) will be the main factor in people's trust in the authorities and in V. Putin personally.

There has been some reshuffling in the composition of the Russian government, but it was not reduced essentially to getting rid of useless players and hiring new ones (although, it was done, too); rather it was all about trading places inside the cabinet of ministers. All this picturesque game of swapping places and offices in the White House looks like an illustration to Krylov's famous fable “Quartet” with its moral: “And you, my friends, no matter your positions, will never be musicians!” And yet...²⁶

According to the monitoring conducted by VolRC RAS in 2015, 51% of residents of the Vologda Oblast believed that “modern Russian society is arranged unfairly”. In 2016, their proportion was 57%, in 2018 – 60%.

²⁵ Methodical note: the survey conducted by VolRC RAS in the Vologda Oblast contained the answer “It's difficult to answer”. In February and August 2018, 17–18% of the population chose it. This explains some discrepancy in the estimates of residents of the Vologda Oblast and Russia as a whole. **Nevertheless, the general trend of growth in the need for change is similar in both studies.**

²⁶ Nagornyi A. Putin: the fourth term in office. *Zavtra Newspaper*, 2018, May 18. Available at: http://zavtra.ru/blogs/putin_srok_chetvyortij

However, so far there have been no tangible positive changes in the way people assess the situation in the country. The Government, which remained practically unchanged, “forgot about the previous May 2012 Decrees of the President”²⁷, and in its efforts to replenish the budget and search for funds for the implementation of the new May 2018 Decree came up with nothing better than the following measures:

A. To increase the retirement age, that is, to put it mildly, once again turn a blind eye to the unacceptable (even M. Oreshkin, the Minister of Economic Development of the Russian Federation, admitted it)²⁸ level of social inequality and, accordingly, ignore public demand for social justice.

B. To increase VAT from 18 to 20%, although, according to the Public Opinion Foundation (FOM), 34% of Russians believe that the increase in VAT will do the economy more harm than good (the opposite point of view is shared by 19% of the population); 57% of citizens believe that this reform will adversely affect their personal well-being (a different opinion is expressed by only 4% of respondents)²⁹. According to experts, “value added tax is one of the most convenient for the authorities, as it is one of the easily administered (i.e. collected) taxes. Its increase, of course, is painful for business. And, of course, business will try to shift the maximum burden of increasing the tax on consumers, that is, citizens, incorporating the increase in the prices of goods and services.

²⁷ It will cost five thousand rubles to obtain an international passport: why so expensive. *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 2018, June 19 (an opinion of Finam analyst A. Korenev). Available at: <http://www.mk.ru/social/2018/06/19/oformlenie-zagranpasporta-oboydetsya-v-5-tysyach-rublej-pochemu-tak-dorogo.html>

²⁸ Oreshkin called the level of inequality in Russia unacceptable. *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 2019, January 15. Available at: <https://www.mk.ru/economics/2019/01/15/orshkin-nazval-nedopustimym-uroven-neravenstva-v-rossii.html>

²⁹ *About VAT Increase: FOM Press Release*, 2018, July 2. Available at: <http://fom.ru/Ekonomika/14058>

And, of course, this cannot but raise inflation and lower the standard of living, and not just once and not for a short time”³⁰.

B. To carry out the so-called “tax maneuver” in the oil industry; this maneuver is officially presented as a tool for replenishing the budget; but, according to some analysts, it is done only so that “companies would not lose their position in the world market”, although “fuel will rise in price, and this is an absolutely inevitable process”³¹.

Keep in mind that we are all talking about progressive taxation. We say that the poor should pay little and the rich should pay much. There will be no progressive taxation, it is very difficult to implement, and there will be more taxes, and taxes will regulate everything. Property taxes, taxes on expensive cars, tax on gasoline, because the price of gasoline is the main tax³².

We can only guess what population group will have to “tighten the belt” next time; but it is obvious that the self-employed, for example, are much more likely to do this than the billionaires, the number of which in our country only in the last two years increased by 29 people (from 2016 to 2018 – from 77 to 106), and “the total fortune of all 200 richest Russian entrepreneurs for the year increased by 5.4%, or 25 billion USD, up to 485 billion USD”³³.

In May 2018, at the Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum, State Duma Deputy A. Makarov said with irony that “the main task of

implementing the Presidential Decree has been solved. We handed Rosstat over to the Ministry of Economic Development”³⁴. However, when almost a year has passed, we can see firsthand that these words are not far from the truth. Thus, according to

According to most experts, the level of inequality in the country is only growing. Even Rosstat admitted that inequality in 2018 began to increase at an accelerated pace. However, official statistics registered the minimum level of inequality for 12 years in 2017; this fact raises certain questions.

The growth in the number of dollar billionaires reflects the dynamics most clearly. **According to data published in April last year, there has been a record increase in the number of dollar billionaires over the past two years. Moreover, the state of 200 rich people exceeded the reserves of the Central Bank and the bank savings of all Russians.**

The Gini coefficient is the most common indicator of property stratification in the world. It compares the annual incomes of poor and rich citizens and shows the level of deviation from the absolute norm, that is, the same growth in the incomes of social groups. The closer to zero, the more equality in society and vice versa. **In January–September 2018, the index increased from 0.400 to 0.402 compared to the same period in 2017.** But in reality, statistics data do not give a complete picture, especially since often the incomes and assets of the richest population groups are not in the open access... According to the World Inequality Report prepared by researchers from the World Inequality Lab and published in 2017, **the level of economic inequality in modern Russia is comparable with pre-revolutionary indicators**³⁵.

Rosstat, GDP in 2018 grew by 2.3% compared to 2017. “The Russian economy has not shown such growth rates since 2012. At the same time, almost no one expected economic growth to reach more

³⁰ Byalyi Yu. Pension farce – 2018. *Krasnaya Vesna News Agency*, 2018, June 29. Available at: <https://rossaprimavera.ru/article/365b3ffa?gazeta=/gazeta/284>

³¹ What threatens Russia if the duties on oil are zeroed? Available at: <http://www.nykhas.ru/460863/chem-grozit-rossii-obnulenie-poshliny-n/> 26.02.2018 (an opinion of V. Bessel, Vice-President of NewTech Services group of companies, Professor of Gubkin Russian State University of Oil and Gas).

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ In Russia for two years, the number of dollar billionaires increased by 29 people. *RBK News*, 2018, April 19. Available at: <https://www.rbc.ru/business/19/04/2018/5ad82b929a79475a053b96f5>

³⁴ A. Makarov’s speech at SPIEF 2018. *Komsomolskaya pravda*, 2018, May 27. Available at: <https://www.vologda.kp.ru/daily/26834.7/3874829/>

³⁵ Oreshkin said inequality in Russia was beyond the limits. What is dangerous about this problem? *Vesti. Ekonomika*, 2019, January 15. Available at: https://www.vestifinance.ru/articles/113095?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fzen.yandex.com

than 2% last year: a consensus forecast of the Higher School of Economics provided for the growth of 1.7%, the Ministry of Economic Development said it would be 1.8%”³⁶.

However, as experts note, “a significant GDP growth was achieved only at the expense of revision of the data on construction. **And it is not a large-scale growth throughout the economy**”³⁷. In fact, “investment growth is weak, domestic consumer demand is slowing down”³⁸. Consumer spending of Russian households at the end of last year amounted to only 2.2%, although, this figure reached 2.5% in the first three quarters of 2018³⁹.

Thus, “we can believe in the figures of Rosstat – in construction, and in the data on GDP growth. But then we have to admit that the system of collecting statistics is completely ruined”⁴⁰.

...The trust in this instrument for measuring the state of the economy [Rosstat] was not simply in jeopardy. It just collapsed... The return of trust requires public control over the work of Rosstat. It is not enough to return it under the jurisdiction of the Cabinet of Ministers, as it has been done repeatedly. An obvious proposal is to equalize the status of Rosstat, for example, with the Accounts Chamber, which formally does not belong to any of the branches of government⁴¹.

³⁶ What explains the unexpected acceleration of the Russian economy. *RBC*. Available at: https://www.rbc.ru/economics/04/02/2019/5c586c9f9a79472433e1d9a2?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fzen.yandex.com

³⁷ The opinion of S. Murashov, macroanalyst at Raiffeisenbank (source: RBC. Available at: https://www.rbc.ru/economics/04/02/2019/5c586c9f9a79472433e1d9a2?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fzen.yandex.com).

³⁸ Opinion of D. Dolgin, chief economist of ING for Russia and CIS (source: *ibidem*).

³⁹ Tagorov V. We are becoming wealthier on paper: according to Rosstat, the Russian economy is growing at a record pace. Available at: <https://wek.ru/bogateem-na-bumage-rosstat-narisoval-rossijskoj-yekonomike-rekordnyj-rost>

⁴⁰ An opinion of K. Tremasov, director of the analytical department “Loko-Invest” and former head of the department of macroeconomic forecasting of the Ministry of Economic Development (source: RBC. Available at: https://www.rbc.ru/economics/04/02/2019/5c586c9f9a79472433e1d9a2?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fzen.yandex.com)

⁴¹ How do we reorganize Rosstat? (editorial). *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 2019, February 7. Available at: http://www.ng.ru/editorial/2019-02-07/2_7502_red.html

”It is possible that the new parameters of the assessment may result from a new government strategy to summarize the work of the federal center... We should not forget that the authorities plan to change radically the criteria for assessing poverty in the country, so we should not rule out that in the near future federal agencies will report that poverty in Russia is defeated, there are no poor citizens in the country anymore, and the middle class calls the shots”⁴².

According to the long-term dynamics of research, the indicators of public opinion monitoring are quite sensitive to the key events taking place in the country (such as the “Crimean spring”, the deterioration of the economic situation in 2008 and 2014). In this regard, we can say that the preservation of stable assessments concerning the work of the government, financial situation and mood in 2018 is an advantage rather than a disadvantage on the background of reforms in the pension legislation and the tax system, which were initially opposed by 80 and 57% of Russians, respectively⁴³.

The current pace of economic development does not suit us, and there is no reason to expect a faster growth of gross domestic product (GDP) and incomes. The goals are there, all the necessary resources are there, but we see no results. Why? **Because we still do not have a clearly formulated and comprehensive economic policy. Instead, we have a set of disparate solutions that do not make the overall clear picture**⁴⁴.

⁴² Tagorov V. We are becoming wealthier on paper: according to Rosstat, the Russian economy is growing at a record pace. Available at: <https://wek.ru/bogateem-na-bumage-rosstat-narisoval-rossijskoj-yekonomike-rekordnyj-rost>

⁴³ See: 1. *About VAT Increase: FOM Press Release*, 2018, July 2. Available at: <http://fom.ru/Ekonomika/14058>

2. *Raising the retirement age: citizens' reaction: FOM press release*, 2018, June 29. Available at: <http://fom.ru/Ekonomika/14057>

⁴⁴ Ivanter V.V. (Ed.). *Structural and Investment Policy Aimed to Ensure Economic Growth in Russia*. Moscow: Nauchnyi konsul'tant, 2017. 196 p.

Nevertheless, in the context of ambitious plans for the period up to 2024 and, at the same time, in the absence of “time to spare”, current trends in public opinion are difficult to assess positively. **Especially if we take into account the fact that the milestone period should be considered not 2024, but 2021, in which the election to the State Duma of the Russian Federation will be held.** According to experts, “the parliamentary election of 2021 is very important for the organization of a normal shift in 2024”. If society does not support the United Russia party and there is a situation of “uncertain format of the next Parliament”, then “it means there will be very serious political problems”⁴⁵.

The further policy of preserving the current state of affairs in the country is becoming an increasingly tangible threat to social stability and national security in general. Therefore, decisions that can ensure a breakthrough development in the dynamics of the standard of living and quality of life should be taken in the near future.

In the forecast of economic development, the least interesting are standard figures – the price of oil, the exchange rate, the rate of inflation, i.e. all that newspapers are so fond of writing about. **A list of specific actions to achieve the goals set by the President would be much more important... A forecast is not an action plan, but an assessment of the possible consequences of the policy that prevails in the economy. What is needed is not a forecast, but a state plan. A concrete and real plan**⁴⁶.

The following two things are needed to overcome the stagnation and ensure breakthrough development in the dynamics of the standard of living and quality of life:

⁴⁵ Gurova T., Skorobogatyi P. People are too independent to be bought for a grant (an interview with V.V. Fadeev, Chairman of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation). *Ekspert*, 2019, no. 1–3, p. 59.

⁴⁶ Ivanter V.V. Mechanisms of economic growth. *Mir novoi ekonomiki*, 2018, no. 3, p. 27.

first, the “system of strategic management” based on the “system of long -, medium- and short-term forecasts and the choice of economic development priorities, tools and on the mechanisms for their implementation”⁴⁷. We need a concrete and efficient action plan, not just a list of ambitious goals and optimistic indicators;

second, we need a “new Primakov” – a person who is able not only to declare, but also to organize a breakthrough in development; who is able to unite representatives of different political forces and elite groups, and on the basis of not just a common idea, but a concrete and achievable plan of action; who is able to hold officials at all levels accountable for the failure to implement this plan. According to experts, “in fact, all the necessary tools have already been determined by the authorities – there exists a law on strategic planning. **The only trouble is that it is not being observed. This is exactly the case when you do not need to invent anything again; it is enough to take the law and act in accordance with it**”⁴⁸. Thus, the **mechanism of responsibility** of public authorities and authorized officials for the objective results of their work **should be streamlined in order to work smoothly.**

Under the circumstances when the Russian Government “cannot formulate strategic goals and monitor their achievement”⁴⁹, **the key role in the implementation of these two tasks should be played directly by the President**, whose powers are, in fact, the main tool that can shift the vector of development of public administration toward the nationally oriented goals noted by the head of state in the Address to the Federal Assembly and the May 2018 Decree.

⁴⁷ Glaz’ev S.Yu. *A Leap Forward into the Future: Russia in New Technological and World Economic Structures*. Moscow: Knizhnyi mir, 2018. P. 481.

⁴⁸ Ivanter V.V. Mechanisms of economic growth. *Mir novoi ekonomiki*, 2018, no. 3, p. 27.

⁴⁹ Glaz’ev S.Yu. *A Leap Forward into the Future: Russia in New Technological and World Economic Structures*. Moscow: Knizhnyi mir, 2018. P. 482.

It is necessary to change the institutional environment in the framework of decision-making and to build a clear hierarchy of authorities in the framework of the development strategy and its implementation.

Within the framework of this configuration, **to define strategic development objectives is the function of the head of state**, who, using the potential of the government and the expert community, should offer a coordinated and implemented set of targets for the development of the country in the medium and long term⁵⁰.

We are talking about the system of selection of managerial personnel at all levels of the power vertical, starting with the Government of the Russian Federation. In Russia, it is necessary to change political consciousness, value priorities and moral responsibility of the ruling elites. All this cannot happen on its own, without the active participation of the head of state (who over the past decades has repeatedly proved to Russian society that he focused on the implementation of the interests of the general population, including those concerning domestic policy). We need a clear system of criteria to determine the effectiveness of the authorities, based on objective and comprehensive indicators... **Without a change in the political consciousness and political responsibility of the ruling elites before society, the very “breakthrough” that the President spoke about in his Address is impossible to achieve, and without the “breakthrough” it is impossible to ensure the country’s competitiveness at the geopolitical level, which in the current conditions of development of the world civilization actually means the loss of sovereignty and the crisis of Russian statehood.**

⁵⁰ Shirov A.A., Gusev M.S., Kolpakov A.Yu. et al. *Transformation of the Structure of the Economy: Mechanisms and Management*. Moscow, 2018. P. 257.

Will the President be willing and able to show his political will to make difficult, but long overdue decisions? This will determine the fate of the main historical task he has to deal with during his last presidential term: the task of ensuring the country’s progressive entry into the new political cycle of 2024.

* * *

In his Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation on February 20, 2019, the President noted: “You cannot fool the people. They are acutely aware of hypocrisy, lack of respect or any injustice. They have little interest in red tape and bureaucratic routine. It is important for people to see what is really being done and the impact it has on their lives and the lives of their families. And not sometime in the future, but now”⁵¹. That is why Vladimir Putin pointed out the following:

first, “very soon, this year people should feel real changes for the better”;

second – that the first results of the work on national projects planned for the beginning of 2020 will be summed up “on the basis of the opinion and assessments of citizens”⁵².

It is a powerful statement, because it was made against the background of “the lowest indicators of trust in the head of state for the whole time of trust surveys conducted by VTsIOM”⁵³ (33.4% according to VTsIOM as of January 13, 2019)⁵⁴.

⁵¹ Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, February 20, 2019. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59863>

⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁵³ Uglanov A. What is on the minds of the people of the deep. *Argumenty nedeli*, 2019, no. 6 (650), February 14–22. Available at: <http://argumenti.ru/society/2019/02/602299?type=link=link>

⁵⁴ *Trust ratings of politicians; ratings of approval of the work of state institutions; ratings of the parties: VTsIOM press release*, 2019, no. 3859, January 18. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=9518>

In addition, the head of state expressed his support for the financial block of the Government, saying the following: “I would like to address those of our colleagues who constantly criticise the Government, its financial and economic ministries and ask where the money went and where we invested it. We set a target to reach a certain level, after which we can use these funds, although cautiously so as not to cause any macroeconomic disturbances. We are about to reach this level, and are beginning to do it”⁵⁵.

Thus, Vladimir Putin takes **personal responsibility** for the implementation of national projects

and for the achievement of targets for breakthrough development in raising living standards and improving the quality of life and promoting the dynamic development of the economy, as defined in the May 2018 Decree.

Key benchmarks and concrete directions for improving the quality of life are likely to be supported by the dynamics of public sentiment. **But will their final implementation meet people’s expectations?** ... Taking into account negative results of the Government’s work on the implementation of the May 2012 Decrees, this issue is not only critical but also sensitive.

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⁵⁵ Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, February 20, 2019. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59863>.

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