

PUBLIC OPINION MONITORING

Public Opinion Monitoring of the State of the Russian Society

As in the previous issues, we publish the results of the monitoring of public opinion concerning the state of the Russian society conducted by VolRC RAS in the Vologda Oblast¹.

The following tables show the dynamics of a number of parameters of social well-being and socio-political moods of the region's population based on the results of the last "wave" of monitoring (December 2019 – February 2020), as well as for the period from February 2019 to February 2020.

We compare the results of the surveys with the data for 2007 (the last year of V. Putin's second presidential term, when the assessment of the President's work was the highest), 2011 (the last year of Dmitry Medvedev's presidency) and 2012 (the first year of V. Putin's third presidential term).

We also provide yearly dynamics of the data for 2017–2019.

In December 2019 – February, the level of approval of the work of the President of the Russian Federation did not change significantly: the share of positive assessments is 54%, the share of negative assessments is 31%.

In general, the level of approval of the work of the President in the beginning of 2020 is slightly lower than assessments in February 2019 (59%) and average assessments in 2019 (56%).

For reference:

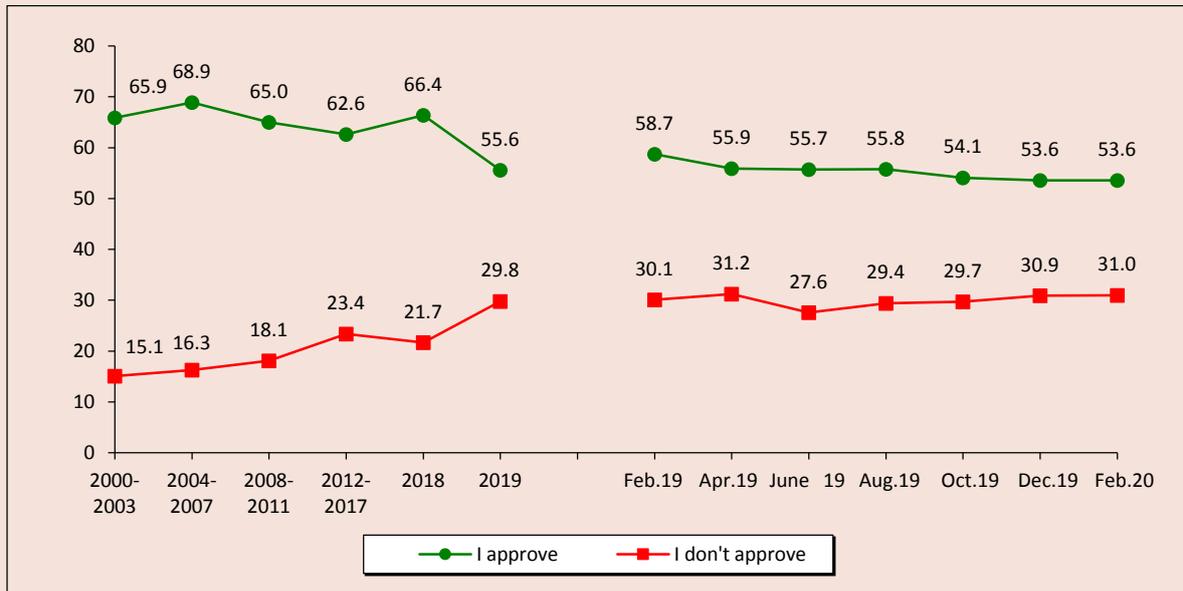
According to VCIOM, the level of approval of the work of the President of the Russian Federation in December 2019 – first half of February 2020 increased by 3% (from 63 to 66%), the share of negative judgments decreased from 28 to 25%.

According to Levada-Center, in December 2019 – January 2020, the share of positive assessments of the work of the head of state was 68%, and the proportion of negative evaluations was 31%.

¹ The polls are held six times a year in Vologda, Cherepovets, and in eight districts of the oblast (Babayevsky District, Velikoustyugsky District, Vozhegodsky District, Gryazovetsky District, Kirillovsky District, Nikolsky District, Tarnogsky District and Sheksninsky District). The method of the survey is a questionnaire poll by place of residence of respondents. The volume of a sample population is 1,500 people 18 years of age and older. The sample is purposeful and quoted. The representativeness of the sample is ensured by the observance of the proportions between the urban and rural population, the proportions between the inhabitants of settlements of various types (rural communities, small and medium-sized cities), age and sex structure of the Oblast's adult population. Sampling error does not exceed 3%.

More information on the results of VolRC RAS polls is available at: <http://www.vsrc.ac.ru/>.

In general, do you approve or disapprove of the work of the President of Russia? (% of respondents)



How do you assess the current performance of..? (% of respondents)

Answer	2007	2011	2012	2017	2018	2019	Feb. 2019	Apr. 2019	June 2019	Aug. 2019	Oct. 2019	Dec. 2019	Feb. 2020	Dynamics (+/-) Feb. 20 to...	
														Dec. 19	Feb. 19
RF President															
I approve	75.3	58.7	51.7	67.3	66.4	55.6	58.7	55.9	55.7	55.8	54.1	53.6	53.6	0	-5
I don't approve	11.5	25.5	32.6	20.0	21.7	29.8	30.1	31.2	27.6	29.4	29.7	30.9	31.0	0	+1
Former Chairman of the RF Government*															
I approve	-*	59.3	49.6	49.5	48.0	41.1	41.6	38.8	40.9	43.1	41.1	41.1	37.9	-3	-4
I don't approve	-	24.7	33.3	31.1	31.6	38.4	39.3	40.2	38.0	36.3	37.5	38.9	40.9	+2	+2
Governor															
I approve	55.8	45.7	41.9	39.8	38.4	35.7	36.5	34.7	35.4	36.1	35.6	35.6	36.2	+1	0
I don't approve	22.2	30.5	33.3	39.3	37.6	40.2	41.5	41.4	38.6	38.5	40.1	40.8	41.8	+1	0

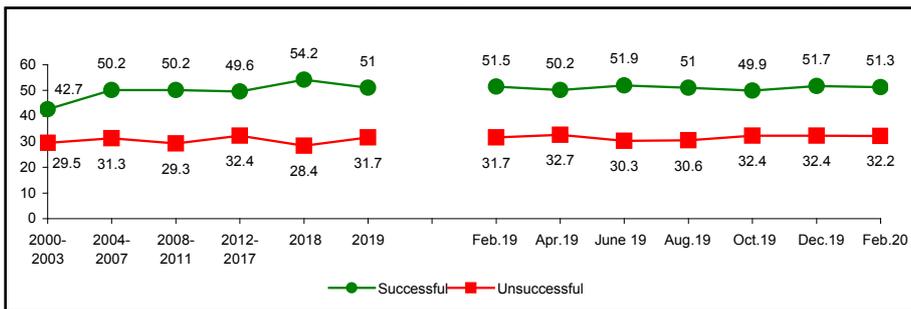
* The question has been asked since 2008. In 2020, the survey was conducted in the period from January 24 to February 12. Current Chairman of the RF Government is M.V. Mishustin has just stepped into his new role (January 16, 2020), therefore, respondents were asked about the activities of former Prime Minister D. A. Medvedev.

Over the past two months, there have been no significant changes in the assessment of the success with which the President solves the country's key problems: 51–52% of residents of the Oblast positively assess the work of the head of state aimed at strengthening Russia's international positions, 44% positively assess his efforts aimed at restoring order in the country, 34–35% positively assess his efforts aimed at protecting democracy and strengthening the freedoms of citizens, 26% positively assess his efforts aimed at boosting the economy and increasing the welfare of the population.

Assessments of residents in February of 2020 correspond to the level of February 2019 and average annual assessments of 2019. At the same time, over the past 12 months (from February 2019 to February 2020) the share of people who are not satisfied with the work of the President aimed at boosting the economy and increasing the welfare of the population slightly increased (by 3%, from 57 to 60%).

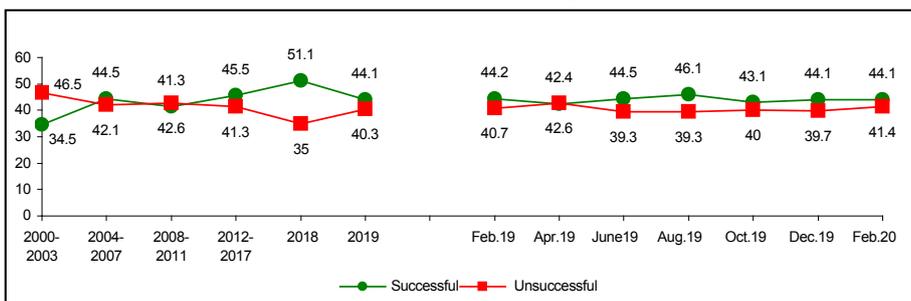
In your opinion, how successful is the RF President in coping with challenging issues?*
(% of respondents)

Strengthening Russia's international standing



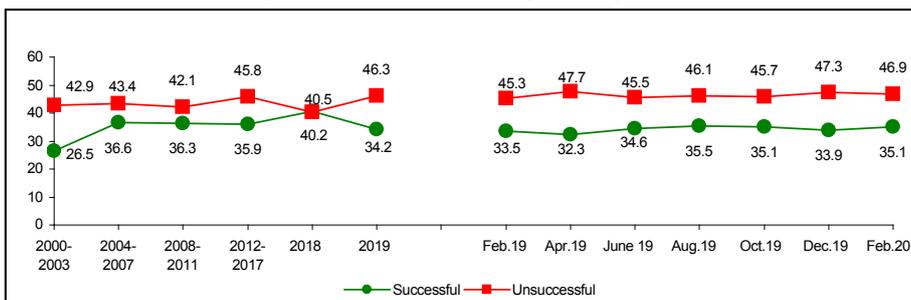
Dynamics (+/-) Feb. 2020 compared to		
Answer	Dec. 19	Feb. 19
Successful	0	0
Unsuccessful	0	+1

Imposing order in the country



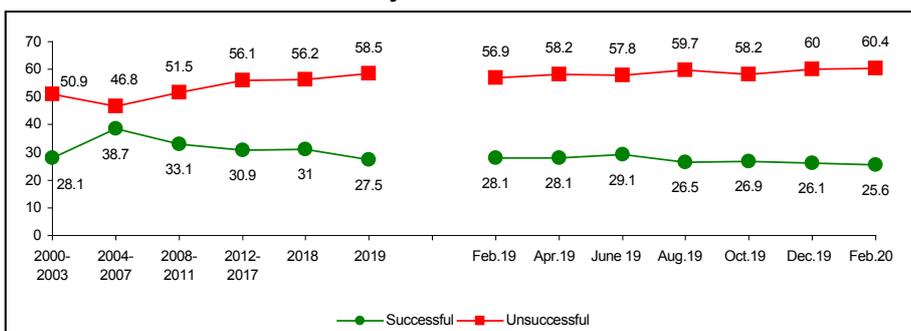
Dynamics (+/-) Feb. 2020 compared to		
Answer	Dec. 19	Feb. 19
Successful	0	0
Unsuccessful	+2	+1

Protecting democracy and strengthening citizens' freedoms



Dynamics (+/-) Feb. 2020 compared to		
Answer	Dec. 19	Feb. 19
Successful	+1	+2
Unsuccessful	0	+2

Economic recovery and increase in citizens' welfare



Dynamics (+/-) Feb. 2020 compared to		
Answer	Dec. 19	Feb. 19
Successful	-1	-3
Unsuccessful	0	+4

In December 2019 – February 2020, the structure of people’s political preferences has not changed: the level of support for the United Russia party is 33–34%, LDPR and KPRF – 8–9%, the Just Russia party – 4–5%.

As in February of last year and on average in 2019, the share of people who believe that none of the political forces represented in Parliament expresses their interests is 34%, which is much higher than in 2017–2018 (29%).

Which party expresses your interests? (% of respondents)

Party	2007	2011	Election to the RF State Duma 2011, fact	2012	2016	Election to the RF State Duma 2016, fact	2017	2018	2019	Feb. 2019	Apr. 2019	June 2019	Aug. 2019	Oct. 2019	Dec. 2019	Feb. 2020	Dynamics (+/-) Feb. 20 to...	
																	Dec. 19	Feb. 19
United Russia	30.2	31.1	33.4	29.1	35.4	38.0	34.7	37.9	33.8	34.6	33.3	34.8	33.5	32.8	33.7	33.2	-1	-1
KPRF	7.0	10.3	16.8	10.6	8.3	14.2	7.6	9.2	8.8	9.1	8.0	8.5	8.7	9.1	9.2	8.9	0	0
LDPR	7.5	7.8	15.4	7.8	10.4	21.9	11.0	9.6	9.1	8.9	8.2	9.1	10.5	8.3	9.4	9.9	+1	+1
Just Russia	7.8	5.6	27.2	6.6	4.2	10.8	4.8	2.9	3.4	2.9	2.9	2.5	3.9	4.2	4.0	4.7	+1	+2
Other	1.8	1.9	-	2.1	0.3	-	0.5	0.7	0.3	0.6	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.6	+1	0
None	17.8	29.4	-	31.3	29.4	-	29.2	28.5	33.7	34.2	34.7	32.3	32.1	34.3	34.3	34.0	0	0
It's difficult to answer	21.2	13.2	-	11.7	12.0	-	12.2	11.2	11.0	9.7	12.6	12.4	10.9	11.2	9.3	8.7	-1	-1

The estimates of social well-being of the population slightly decreased over the last two months. The share of people who characterize their mood as “usual, good” decreased by 3% (from 70 to 67%), and the share of those who think that “everything is no so bad and we can live; it’s difficult to live, but it’s possible to stand it” decreased from 78 to 75%.

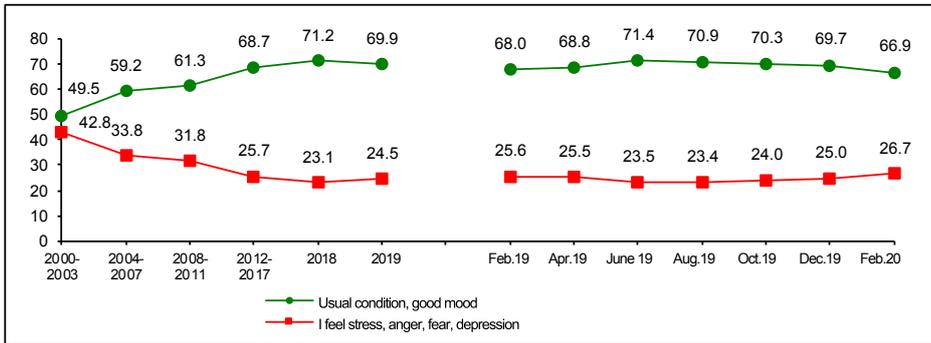
These numbers correspond to values of February 2019, but they are lower than average numbers in 2019.

At the same time, in the short-term (for the last two months) retrospective, there is no significant changes in the estimates: the proportion of residents of the Oblast who subjectively refer to themselves as “middle-class” citizens is 40–41%; the consumer sentiment index (showing people’s ideas about the future of the Russian economy and their personal financial situation) is 91 points.

The changes of the estimates of financial well-being in the long-term retrospective are more negative: thus, over the last 12 months (from February 2019 to February 2020), the share of “middle class” people decreased by 4% (from 44 to 40%), and the share of “poor and extremely poor” increased from 45 to 49%.

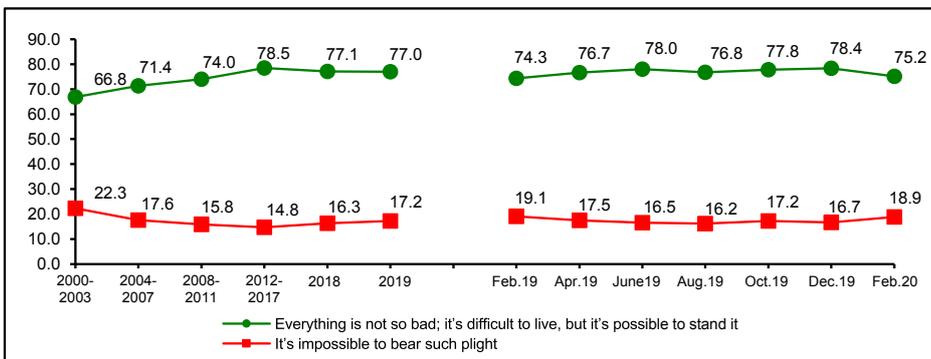
Estimation of social condition (% of respondents)

Social mood



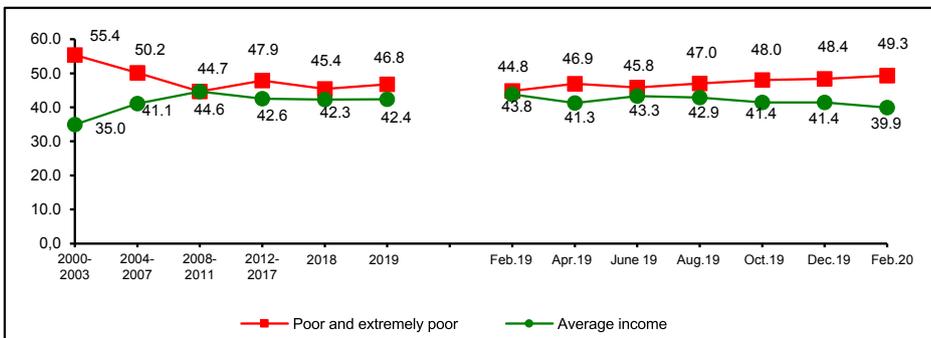
Dynamics (+/-) Feb. 2020 compared to		
Answer	Dec. 19	Feb. 19
Usual condition, good mood	-3	-1
I feel stress, anger, fear, depression	+2	+1

Stock of patience



Dynamics (+/-) Feb. 2020 compared to		
Answer	Dec. 19	Feb. 19
Everything is not so bad; it's difficult to live, but it's possible to stand it	-3	+1
It's impossible to bear such plight	+2	0

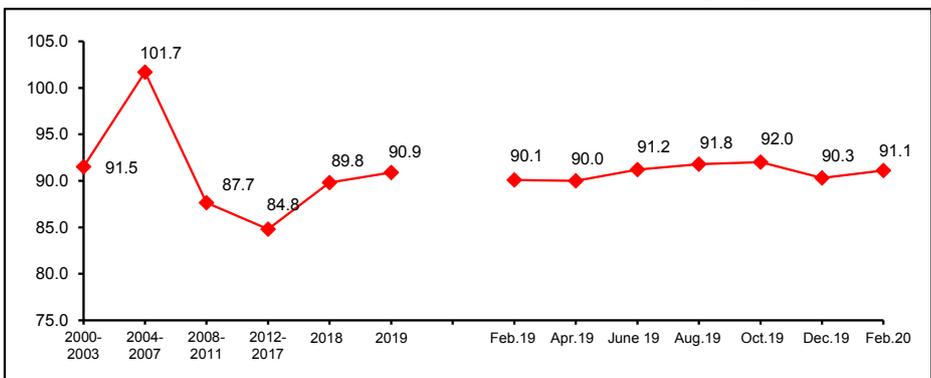
Social self-identification*



Dynamics (+/-) Feb. 2020 compared to		
Answer	Dec. 19	Feb. 19
Share of people who consider their income average	-2	-4
Share of people who consider themselves poor and extremely poor	+1	+5

* Question: "Which category do you belong to, in your opinion?"

Consumer Sentiment Index (CSI)



Dynamics (+/-) Feb. 2020 compared to		
CSI	Dec. 19	Feb. 19
Value of index in points	+1	+1

In the context of main socio-demographic groups in the beginning of 2020, there are mostly negative changes (in 10 groups out of 14). Against the general background, the decrease of social mood estimates among women (by 10%, from 81 to 71%), among people with higher and incomplete higher education (by 6%, from 75 to 69%), and among people who refer to themselves as members of the 60% of middle-income residents group (by 5%, from 73 to 68%) is particularly noticeable.

In fact, no positive changes of social mood were observed in any of the analyzed socio-demographic groups over the last two months. Moreover, in 10 out of 14 groups, the estimates are lower than average numbers in 2019.

Social mood in different social groups (answer: "Good mood, normal condition", % of respondents)

Population group	2007	2011	2012	2017	2018	2019	Feb. 2019	Apr. 2019	June 2019	Aug. 2019	Oct. 2019	Dec. 2019	Feb. 2020	Dynamics (+/-) Feb. 20 to...	
														Dec. 19	Feb. 19
Sex															
Men	65.9	64.5	69.1	70.6	72.8	70.1	69.9	68.6	72.1	71.8	69.2	69.0	67.0	-2	-3
Women	61.7	62.0	65.8	70.2	69.8	69.6	66.4	69.0	70.8	70.1	71.2	70.3	66.9	-3	+1
Age															
Under 30	71.3	70.0	72.3	78.1	80.0	81.1	76.3	81.2	82.9	85.2	79.9	81.3	71.7	-10	-5
30-55	64.8	62.5	67.9	71.5	72.6	71.2	68.0	71.5	70.5	74.0	71.1	71.9	67.5	-4	-1
Over 55	54.8	58.3	62.1	64.9	65.2	63.3	64.3	59.8	67.4	60.7	65.1	62.6	64.3	+2	0
Education															
Secondary and incomplete secondary	58.4	57.4	57.2	63.6	64.8	63.2	61.5	60.4	64.4	65.6	63.4	64.0	63.1	-1	+2
Secondary vocational	64.6	63.6	66.7	72.0	72.2	72.7	68.6	73.0	77.3	72.8	73.9	70.4	69.0	-1	0
Higher and incomplete higher	68.6	68.3	77.0	75.8	76.8	73.4	73.8	73.3	72.1	73.9	72.6	74.7	68.6	-6	-5
Income groups															
Bottom 20%	51.6	45.3	51.5	52.9	57.3	53.2	50.4	56.1	54.9	53.2	54.1	50.2	48.4	-2	-2
Middle 60%	62.9	65.3	68.7	72.0	71.9	71.4	67.2	69.9	74.1	72.1	72.6	72.6	68.4	-5	+1
Top 20%	74.9	75.3	81.1	83.7	82.9	81.8	86.2	81.0	81.0	81.4	80.5	80.5	79.1	-1	-7
Territories															
Vologda	63.1	67.1	73.6	72.6	71.0	68.6	65.5	68.5	70.3	68.0	70.8	68.6	66.9	-2	+1
Cherepovets	68.1	71.2	76.2	75.7	75.8	71.2	71.1	67.8	72.1	74.4	72.0	69.9	67.3	-3	-4
Districts	61.6	57.1	59.8	66.1	68.7	69.8	67.6	69.6	71.7	70.5	69.0	70.3	66.8	-4	-1
Oblast	63.6	63.1	67.3	70.4	71.2	69.9	68.0	68.8	71.4	70.9	70.3	69.7	66.9	-3	-1

Conclusion

The main political event of recent months was the Address of the Russian President V. Putin to the Federal Assembly. In his speech, the President proposed a number of significant changes to the Constitution of the Russian Federation², which will cause changes of the country's political system, and it has already led to the appointment of a new Government.

According to VCIOM studies, 60–90% of Russians support Presidential amendments to the Main law³. According to the results of studies conducted by VolRC RAS in the Vologda Oblast, 50% of the Oblast's residents followed V. Putin's address on air, read the full text of the Address, or studied the comments of experts (another 12% plan to do so in the near future). The Address made a positive impression on 46% of respondents; 40–43% of residents believe that V. Putin's proposals will contribute to the improvement of the country's political system and to the increase of the level and quality of life of entire Russian society (for comparison: only 19% of residents of the region expressed the opposite opinion).

According to population's estimates, it is still difficult to describe activities of the new Cabinet of Ministers and the new Prime Minister of the Russian Federation Mikhail Mishustin. He has just begun his new work, and he remains unknown as a political figure to many people: therefore, 32% of respondents (the most common answer) said that “they are not yet familiar with his activities”.

However, the opinion of the region's residents on the resignation of the previous Government headed by Dmitry Medvedev was quite evident: more than half of respondents (51%) reacted positively to this event (for comparison: only 13% of residents of the region gave the opposite assessment).

The events that took place in the political life of the country in January 2020 largely determine the nature of public opinion on a variety of issues related not only to the assessment of the activities of federal authorities, but also to the prospects of the development of the Russian economy and own financial situation. In general, we could say that society is in a state of expectation, and this expectation is hardly alarming. On the contrary, people are optimistic about the prospects of the new Cabinet of Ministers to fulfill the targets and promises of the President and to do what the government of D. Medvedev had failed to do for many years.

It caused the corresponding dynamics of public opinion assessments: over the past two months, there have been no significant changes, which is rather a positive result, if we take into account negative trends in the long-term retrospective (over the past year). It is also relevant for assessments of the President's work, people's attitude to how well he copes with the problem of economic recovery and the growth of citizens' welfare, and self-estimation of own financial situation.

At the same time, the absence of significant changes in the dynamics of public opinion can only be described positively in relation to long-term trends. Let us remind that, in his public speeches,

² Among them: the constitutional provisions on regular indexation of pensions, and that minimum salaries cannot be below the subsistence level; the priority of the Constitution over international law; the inability to have foreign nationality for people holding positions “critical to ensuring the security and sovereignty of the country”; the approval of the members of the Government of the Russian Federation by the State Duma; the inclusion of the municipal level into a single system of public authorities, etc.

³ Amendments to the Constitution: Meaning and Relation. VCIOM press-issue, no. 4160, Feb. 3, 2020. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=10146> (In Russian).

the President sets the task of a breakthrough development and the significant improvement of the level and quality of life, which, first of all, should be appreciable for general population (in particular, he spoke about this in his Addresses to the Federal Assembly in 2018 and 2019). From this point of view, the monitoring results do not yet clearly indicate that this goal has been achieved, or it is even close to being achieved.

Of course, the President and the new head of the Cabinet of Ministers understand what general population expects from them, and that there is no time for the build-up. It gives the optimism, but this optimism is extremely restrained, because, in the current situation (the “stalling” of national projects and the lack of tangible positive changes in the dynamics of the level and quality of life), the understanding is clearly not enough...

Basically, it has been shown by negative changes in the estimations of social mood over the last two months. The decrease of the share of people who positively characterize their emotional state and the decrease of their stock of patience do not seem to be that significant (only by 3%), but it happened for the first time in the last 12 months. Besides, in some socio-demographic groups, the decrease of the share of positive judgments is much more noticeable (by 5–10%). Most likely, this means that people are tired of broken promises and prospects of “real changes for the better in the near future”⁴, and, the more specific these promises in public speeches of the country’s governing bodies are, the stronger people’s expectations and, of course, the deeper the disappointment from their failures are.

In these circumstances, we can only hope that the new Government will find new tools and mechanisms to implement the President’s truly ambitious assignments. Moreover, it will do so without harming the population and without unnecessary risks to exacerbate already “shaken” sense of social justice after the pension reform in 2018.

The materials were prepared by M.V. Morev, I.M. Bakhvalova, O.A. Sverkunova.

⁴ The Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation on February 20, 2019. The Russian President’s official website. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59863> (In Russian).