

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 VoIRC RAS in the Vologda Oblast¹.

We would like to pay your attention to the fact that, due to quarantine activities in the Vologda Oblast, VoIRC RAS temporarily suspends conducting surveys of the region's population using questionnaires in places of respondents' residence.

It impacted the content of this material. The article includes the results of public opinion monitoring conducted by largest Russian centers (Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM) and Levada-Center) on such relevant topics as the approval of the President's work, the dynamics of Russians' political preferences, self-estimation of the financial well-being and prospects of its development, population's social well-being

For comparison², the dynamics of public opinion monitoring conducted by VoIRC RAS in the Vologda Oblast is given without data for April 2020. The results of research for April 2019 – February 2020 and average annual data for the last 3 years (2017–2019) are shown.

The assessment of the RF President's work

According to data of public opinion monitoring conducted by VoIRC RAS in the Vologda Oblast, in December 2019 – February 2020, the level of approval of the work of the President of the Russian Federation did not change significantly: the share of positive assessments was 54%, the share of negative judgements was 31%.

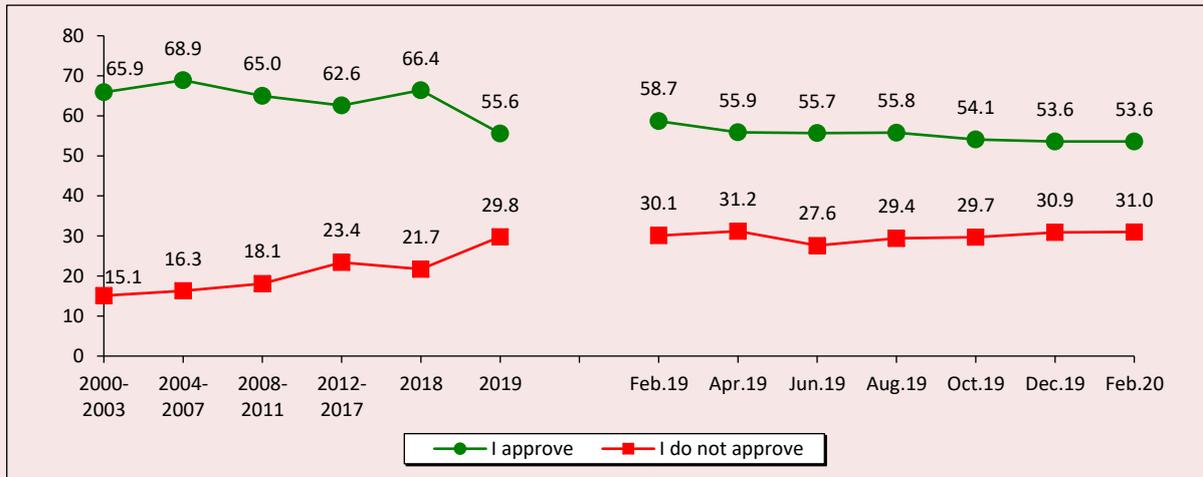
In general, the share of positive assessments of the President's work in early 2020 is slightly lower than in February 2019 (59%) and below average numbers for 2019 (56%).

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 VoIRC RAS polls is available at: <http://www.vsc.ac.ru/>

² It should be noted that different statistical approaches of VCIOM, Levada-Center, and VoIRC RAS do not allow comparing acquired results. Nevertheless, the collected data makes it possible to analyze the overall dynamics of social attitudes existing in Russian society and recorded by three different research centers (two Russian and one regional).

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



Source: data of VoIRC RAS.

At the beginning of 2020, various research centers record contradictory trends in the assessment of the President’s work by Russian people.

According to VCIOM, since December 2019, there has been a positive dynamic: in December 2019, the level of approval of the work of President was 63%, in February 2020 – 65%, in April – 69%.

According to Levada-Center, from December 2019 to March 2020, the share of positive judgments on the work of the President decreased by 5 p.p. (from 68 to 63%).

The results of surveys conducted by VoIRC RAS in the Vologda Oblast show that the level of approval of the President’s work has remained stable (54% since October 2019).

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

Answer	2017	2018	2019	Apr. 2019	June 2019	Aug. 2019	Oct. 2019	Dec. 2019	Feb. 2020	Apr. 2020	Dynamics (+/-), Apr. 2020 to...	
											Feb. 2020	Apr. 2019
<i>Assessment of the President's work according to VCIOM</i>												
I approve	83.5	71.0	64.1	65.2	64.2	63.1	66.0	63.0	65.2	68.6	+3	+3
I do not approve	10.3	20.1	27.2	26.4	27.5	28.0	25.6	28.2	25.9	22.4	-4	-4
<i>Assessment of the President's work according to Levada-Center</i>												
I approve	82.2	73.3	66.8	66	68	67	70	68	69	63*	-6	-3
I do not approve	16.8	25.7	31.9	33	31	31	29	31	30	36*	+6	+3
<i>Assessment of the President's work according to VoIRC RAS</i>												
I approve	67.3	66.4	55.6	55.9	55.7	55.8	54.1	53.6	53.6	н.д.	–	–
I do not approve	20.0	21.7	29.8	31.2	27.6	29.4	29.7	30.9	31.0	н.д.	–	–

Sources: Database of VCIOM. Available at: https://wciom.ru/news/ratings/odobrenie_deyatelnosti_gosudarstvennyx_institutov/; Database of Levada-Center. Available at: <https://www.levada.ru/indikatory/>; data of VoIRC RAS.
*Data for March 2020.

Political preferences of population

In general, the level of support for the United Russia party slightly increased across the country (VCIOM data). Currently, it is 35% which is approximately corresponds to the average annual estimates for 2019 and April 2019 data.

Support for other parliamentary parties in February – April 2020 did not change significantly.

It should also be noted that, since the beginning of the year, the share of Russians who found it difficult to answer the question “What party would you vote for if the elections were to happen next Sunday?” has increased slightly (by 4 p.p., from 13 to 17%). It is possible that, in the first months of 2020, the issue of political preferences is not so important for people (in comparison, in particular, with the assessment of activities of state authorities and development of the economic situation on the background of quarantine activities during the coronavirus epidemic).

Dynamics of political preferences in the country in general
(% of respondents)

Answer	2017	2018	2019	Apr. 2019	June 2019	Aug. 2019	Oct. 2019	Dec. 2019	Feb. 2020	Apr. 2020	Dynamics (+/-), Apr. 2020 to...	
											Feb. 2020	Apr. 2019
United Russia	50.4	40.0	33.5	34.8	34.0	32.6	33.6	32.6	33.0	35.2	+2	0
KPRF	11.4	14.2	15.3	15.7	15.1	15.2	15.5	15.2	14.7	13.0	-2	-3
LDPR	9.5	10.4	12.4	12.1	12.2	12.6	12.4	12.6	11.9	10.0	-2	-2
Just Russia	5.1	5.5	6.0	6.2	6.1	5.7	6.1	5.8	6.2	5.8	0	0
Non-parliamentary parties	5.7	7.9	9.6	6.0	9.9	10.5	10.8	10.8	11.1	9.9	-1	+4
“I will come and spoil a bulletin”, “I would not participate in the elections”.	6.5	9.5	9.9	9.2	9.9	10.0	10.0	10.5	10.2	9.8	0	+1
I hesitate to answer	11.2	12.7	12.7	12.7	12.9	13.6	11.8	12.7	13.3	16.5	+3	+4

Question wording: “Would you please say what party would you more likely to vote for if the State Duma elections were to happen next Sunday?” Options: “The United Russia, KPRF, LDPR, “Just Russia”, “non-parliamentary parties”, “I will come and spoil a bulletin”, “I hesitate to answer”, “I would not participate in the elections”.

Source: Database of VCIOM. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=10238>

There are no significant changes in the structure of political preferences of residents of the Vologda Oblast. The level of support for the United Russia party is stable – 33–34%, LDPR and KPRF – 8–9%, and Just Russia – 4–5%.

As in last February 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%)**.

Dynamics of political preferences in the Vologda Oblast
(% 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. 2019	Feb. 2019
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
I hesitate 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

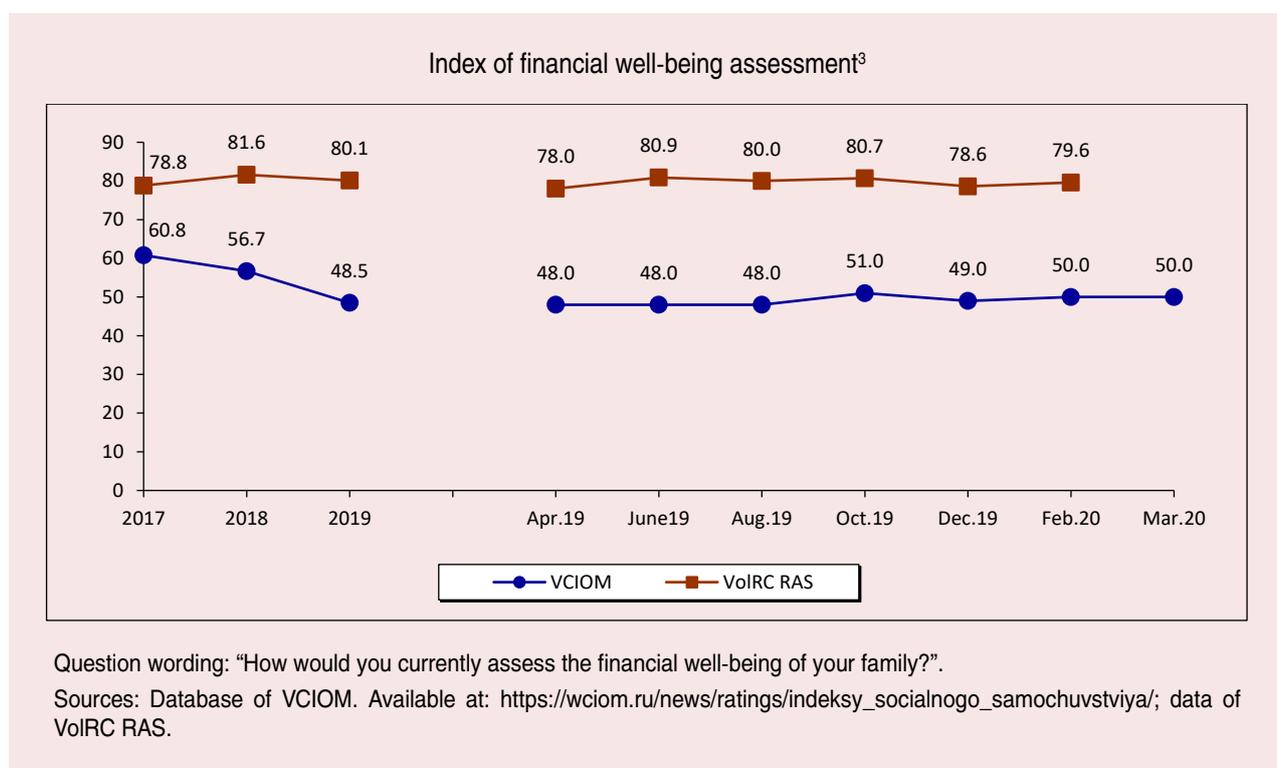
Question wording: “Which party expresses your interests?”.
Source: data of VoIRC RAS.

Self-estimation of the financial well-being

According to Russian (VCIOM) and regional (VoIRC RAS) studies, the Russians’ estimation of the financial well-being remains stable at the beginning of 2020.

According to VCIOM, the index of financial well-being assessment in February – March 2020 was 50 p. which is approximately equal to average value of the index for 2019 (49 p.), and it is **slightly higher than in April 2019 (48 p.)**.

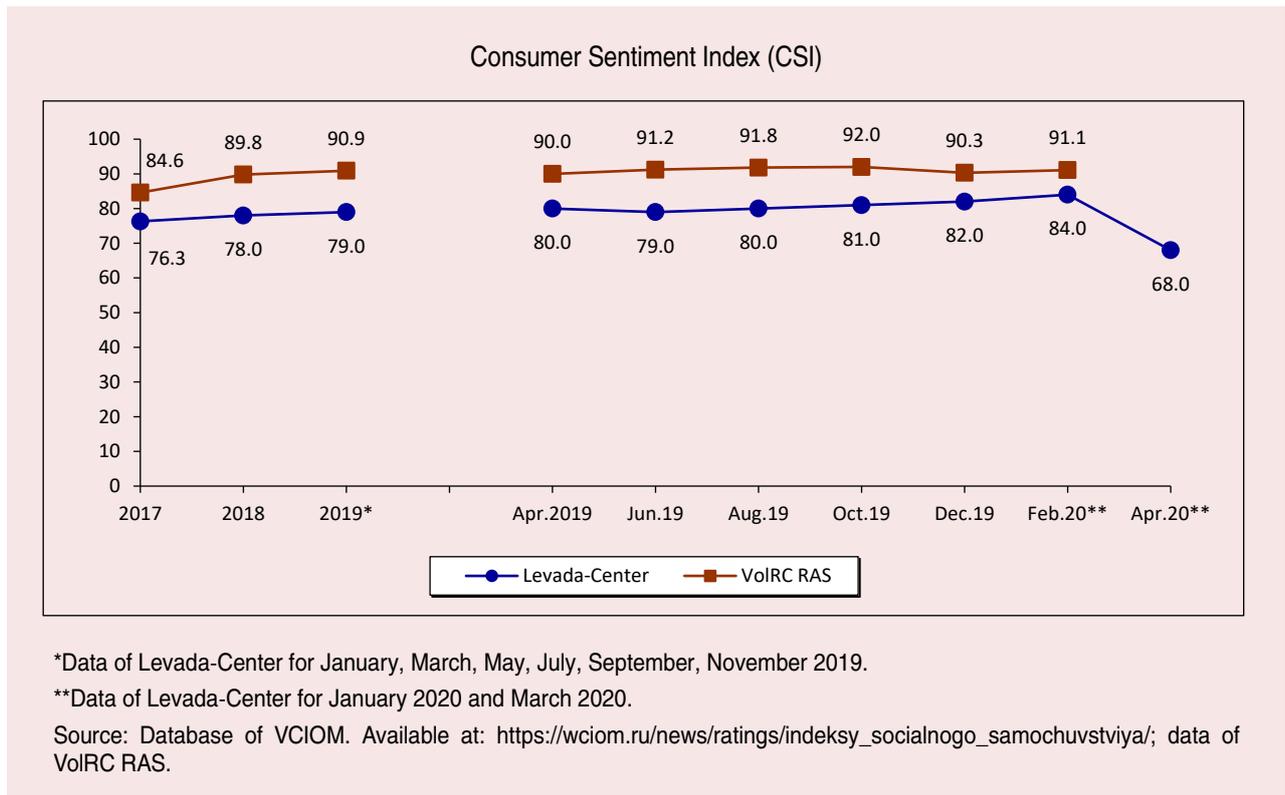
According to VoIRC RAS, the index of financial well-being assessment at the beginning of 2020 was 79 p. which is also equal to average indicator for 2019 (80 p.), and it is **slightly higher than in April 2019 (78 p.)**.



³ VCIOM index of financial well-being is calculated as the difference between the sum of positive and average assessments and the sum of negative ones.

The index of financial well-being is calculated by VoIRC RAS by subtracting the share of negative responds from the share of positive, and then 100 is added to the resulting value to avoid negative values.

Consumer Sentiment Index (CSI) which characterized expectations of people regarding development of their financial situation in the future has significantly decreased across the country (from 84 to 68 p. – Levada-Center data). It is much lower than the average number for 2019 (79 p.) and for April 2019 (80 p.). Apparently, the noticeable drop of CSI in April 2020 is a consequence of the deterioration of the current and uncertain future socio-economic situation due to forced quarantine activities introduced to counter the spread of viral infection.

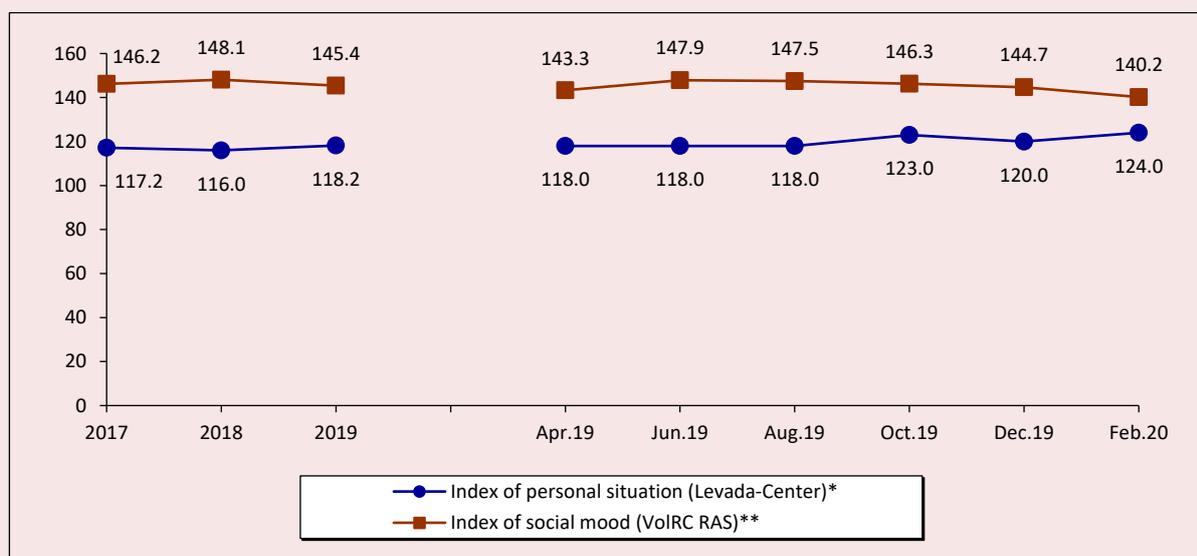


Assessment of social well-being

In general, across the country, the index of personal situation, measured by specialists of Levada-Center, for December 2019 – February 2020 increased by 4 points (from 120 to 124 p.).

According to regional studies of VoIRC RAS, since August 2019, there has been the worsening of social mood among residents of the Vologda Oblast: in general, in August 2019 – February 2020, the index of social well-being in the region decreased by 8 points (from 148 to 140 p.), and it decreased by 5 points (from 145 to 140 p.) during two last surveys.

Dynamics of indices of social well-being (in points)



* Levada-Center's index of personal situation is calculated according to two questions: "What could you say about your mood over the last few days?" and "Is your life and the life of your family has improved, deteriorated, or did not changed in the last year?". To calculate the index, the share of positive responses is subtracted from the share of negative ones, and then 100 is added to the resulting value to avoid negative values.

** The index of social mood is calculated by VoIRC RAS using the question "What could you say about your mood over the last few days?". To calculate the index, the share of positive responses is subtracted from the share of negative ones, and then 100 is added to the resulting value to avoid negative values.

Sources Database of Levada-Center. Available at: <https://www.levada.ru/indikatory/sotsialno-ekonomicheskie-indikatory/>; data of VoIRC RAS.

Conclusion

At the beginning of 2020, data of various centers conducting public opinion monitoring show rather contradictory trends. It, first of all, applies to assessments of the RF President's work and social well-being of population.

Different dynamics of data is mainly related to methodological nuances of sociological surveys conducted by VCIOM, Levada-Center, and VoIRC RAS. However, it also partly reflects the nature of the situation in the country at the beginning of 2020.

The President's initiatives to amend the text of the Constitution of the Russian Federation have a positive impact on the psychological state of people and the level of his support. We would like to remind that around 50% of Russians (according to VCIOM) support amendments to the Main Law, and the share of those who support this opinion continues to grow: in the February wave of the survey, the share of Russians who would vote for amendments to the Constitution was 43%, in March – 46%, in April – 50%⁴.

An equally important positive factor is the decision to include V.V. Tereshkova's proposal to "nullify" V. Putin's presidential terms, if these changes to the Main Law are supported during the all-Russian referendum, in the general pack of amendments to the Constitution⁵. This initiative of the State Duma deputy helped to reduce some social disturbance related to the development of the political situation in the country after 2024, when V. Putin (in accordance with the text of the 1993 Constitution) would no longer be able to run for the post of the head of the state. According to experts, the "Tereshkova's amendment" responded to concerns of the majority. It opened the possibility for the current President to run for office again, and it changed the perspective of political life until 2024... There is a real guarantee that the constitutional reform in the format proposed by V. Putin will actually be implemented. Polls show that it is highly supported by the public⁶. Thus, according to VCIOM, at the end of March, 57% of Russians supported the removal of restrictions for the former, or current, President of the Russian Federation to participate in the next Presidential election as a candidate (for comparison, 33% of respondents supported the opposite point of view)⁷.

Another factor that has a positive impact on people's psychological well-being and support for the President's activities is the public's assessment of measures taken by Russian authorities to prevent the spread of the coronavirus epidemic. According to VCIOM, from March 19 to April 2, the share of Russians who believe that Russian authorities take "sufficient" measures to prevent the spread of the infection in the country increased from 56 to 63%⁸.

Nevertheless, the epidemiological situation in the country and in the world, as well as the economic situation, which is largely determined by the degree and duration of quarantine activities in various regions of Russia, cause concerns of general population. It, in particular, explains the

⁴ *A vote for amendments to the Constitution: The first forecast*. VCIOM analytical review no. 4217, dated 22.04.2020. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=10246>

⁵ We would like to remind that it was proposed by V.V. Tereshkova on March 10 during the meeting of the State Duma. On March 14, the amendment was included in the Main Law "On improving the regulation of certain issues of the organization and functioning of public authority". On March 16, it was approved by the Constitutional court of the Russian Federation (see Conclusion of the Constitutional court of the RF on the compliance with provisions of chapters 1, 2, and 9 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation of provisions of the Law of the Russian Federation on amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation "On improving the regulation of certain issues of the organization and functioning of public authority" that have not come into force, and the compliance with the RF Constitution of the procedure for entry into force of article 1 of this Law in relation to the request of the President of the Russian Federation. Available at: <http://doc.ksrf.ru/decision/KSRFDecision459904.pdf>)

⁶ Skorobogatyi P. Putin creates a "deep state" in Russia (materials of an interview with political scientist, teacher of MGIMO MFA of the RF A. Zudin). *Expert*, 23.03.2020, no. 13, p. 43.

⁷ *Social and political amendments: Ranking of Russians' preferences*. VCIOM analytical review no.4200, dated 31.03.2020. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=10215>

⁸ Sources: *And again on the coronavirus: What do Russians think?* VCIOM press-issue no. 4194, dated 18.03.2020. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=10205>; *Russia in the pandemic: Assessing the efficiency of anti-epidemic measures*. VCIOM press-issue no. 4206, dated 08.04.2020. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=10224>

sharp decline of the Consumer Sentiment Index (from 84 to 68 p. in January–March 2020 – data of Levada-Center), which reflects people’s forecast expectations regarding the prospects of the development of their personal financial situation and the economic situation in the country.

Thus, the current situation may be called a *force majeure*, and, in this sense, it is worth noting the timeliness of the President’s initiative to amend the Constitution of the Russian Federation, which he announced on January 15, 2020 in his annual Address to the Federal Assembly⁹. As always, by acting ahead of the curve, the head of the state managed to reduce socio-political tensions in the country. It is an especially important moment within the epidemiological and socio-economic crisis.

The future nature of public mood will depend mainly on two factors: the dynamics of the spread of the coronavirus infection and the efficiency of measures taken by the President and Government to maintain standards of living of general population, to prevent mass unemployment, to support businesses, and to build up the capacity of the health system.

The materials were prepared by M.V. Morev, E.E. Leonidova.

⁹ Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, January 15, 2020. *Official website of the President of Russia*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62582>