

EDITORIAL

DOI: 10.15838/esc.2021.6.78.1

UDC 354, LBC 66.03

© Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V.

Trends in Public Opinion Regarding the Effectiveness of Public Administration. Presidential Cycles 2000–2021



**Vladimir A.
ILYIN**

Vologda Research Center, Russian Academy of Sciences
Vologda, Russian Federation

E-mail: ilin@vscc.ac.ru

ORCID: 0000-0003-4536-6287; ResearcherID: N-4615-2017



**Mikhail V.
MOREV**

Vologda Research Center, Russian Academy of Sciences
Vologda, Russian Federation

E-mail: 379post@mail.ru

ORCID: 0000-0003-1396-8195; ResearcherID: I-9815-2016

Abstract. Since 2008, in the Editorial section of the journal, we have been monitoring the effectiveness of public administration; this helps us to analyze the consistent steps that the President makes in order to build new foundations of the Russian statehood, which was, in fact, completely destroyed in 1991. Besides, we assess the effectiveness of the President's decisions from the point of view of the broad strata of the Russian population (voters), whose opinion is one of the main criteria for the effectiveness of the public administration system and the work of the head of state. In order to form an objective and unbiased view of the events and processes taking place in Russia and abroad, we use assessments obtained from a wide range of specialists in various fields: political analysts, economists, sociologists, philosophers, representatives of civil society. No less important is our regular access to a significant number of statistical, sociological,

For citation: Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. Trends in public opinion regarding the effectiveness of public administration. Presidential cycles 2000–2021. *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 2021, vol. 14, no. 6, pp. 9–32. DOI: 10.15838/esc.2021.6.78.1

Russian and foreign databases; by using them comprehensively, we can look at the situation in the country and assess the effectiveness of public administration from the point of view of not only individual experts, but also voters. The main information source of sociological data in our research is the public opinion monitoring that we have been conducting in the Vologda Oblast since 1996. Regularly, once every two months, we carry out a survey covering 1.5 thousand residents of the region, thus obtaining an average annual “cross-section” of public opinion based on the estimates of nine thousand voters representing the main social strata and groups that differ in income, territory of residence, employment, marital status, education and many other socio-demographic characteristics. Due to a monitoring nature of the research, we can observe how, in the course of time, the events and decisions taken by the head of state are lined up in a clear, consistent, logically verified line, which many experts can see. But the majority of voters who observe “with the naked eye” the situation in the country and the actions of the authorities, do not see this line, because it is perceived on a subconscious and routine level, that is, based on the general opinion prevailing in their environment and stereotypes that people develop through their own life experience, the experience of relatives and friends (including negative life experience of the 1990s). This is why our editorial articles often supplement the analysis of latest events and processes in Russia and abroad with a retrospective look at the management decisions that preceded them. We pay special attention to the principle of historicism, and in this regard it is important for us to build a chronology of events. The current article is the last one in 2021; it briefly summarizes the analysis of public administration effectiveness in the context of Vladimir Putin’s presidential terms, with an emphasis on the first four years of the fourth presidential cycle (2018–2021).

Key words: public administration effectiveness, monitoring, presidential cycles, public opinion.

A brief overview of the results of the work of the President of the Russian Federation and the system of public administration he created in the period from 2000 to 2018

During his first three presidential terms (2000–2018), Vladimir Putin managed not only to move the country away from the edge of the abyss after the collapse of the USSR and the period of the “turbulent” 1990s, but also to make it a key center of the multipolar world. This happened, among other things, due to the almost complete restoration of the military-industrial complex and bringing it to a new level, in line with the most advanced technologies of the 21st century; Russia’s solid position in the

foreign policy arena, effective participation of the Russian armed forces in international military campaigns. Vladimir Putin’s Munich Speech in 2007, his speech at the Valdai Forum in 2013, the Crimean Spring of 2014, Russia’s participation in the Syrian conflict (2016), the latest speech of the head of state at the Valdai Forum in October 2021 – all this is far from a complete list of the President’s specific actions and public speeches that ensured a stable and consistent growth of Russia’s geopolitical status.

In addition, we cannot but mention the successful energy policy of Russia: construction of main gas pipelines¹, active cooperation with OPEC

¹ Main gas pipelines of Russia according to the chronology of the beginning of construction:
2010 – Nord Stream;
2015 – Power of Siberia;
2016 – Nord Stream 2;
2017 – TurkStream.

countries that control a significant share of world oil exports and reserves. In the first half of 2020 (during the first “wave” of the epidemiological crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic), as well as in the second half of 2021 (when the energy crisis in Europe flared up), the Russian Federation has clearly proven the global importance of national energy policy by confirming its informal status as an “energy superpower”, which was once assigned to it by Secretary General of the World Energy Council Christoph Frei².

Naturally, the growth of Russia’s international authority as a geo-political player could not suit the United States (and its allies), who are trying to preserve their power in a gradually transforming, but still unipolar, world. This led to a hybrid war against our country, which resulted in the creation of a stable background of anti-Russian sentiment in the West, especially after Crimea and Sevastopol became part of the Russian Federation in 2014 as a result of a nationwide referendum.

The stronger Russia became, the greater was the circle of unfriendly countries forming around it (thanks to the aggressive information foreign policy of the United States), including Eastern European states, Ukraine, Georgia... To the President, this could not but become an objective obstacle in solving many of the most important internal problems of the country.

Nevertheless, during the period from 2000 to 2018, the head of state managed to achieve significant results in the domestic political arena as

well. Perhaps his key achievements, according to many experts, were as follows: establishing a strong vertical system of state administration; bringing Russian civil society to a new level of development through, for example, decisions such as the establishment of the Civic Chamber (2005), the All-Russian Popular Front (2011), as well as regular appeals to the general population as the main “evaluators” of the effectiveness of the authorities and, in general, the implemented course of national development (during live televised phone-in programs, annual Addresses to the Federal Assembly, internal meetings with Government members, etc.).

What the President failed to do (in our opinion, based on the assessments of many experts) was to overcome negative consequences of the liberal-capitalist development vector, which Russia was pursuing after the collapse of the USSR. First of all, this concerns the ruling elites, among whom the system of “oligarchic capitalism” (which began to be built up under Boris Yeltsin³) has become stronger, and the “lack of spirituality” as **“an environment in which the ruling elite, who do not possess spiritual qualities, feels very good and comfortable, guided only by their immorality”⁴**.

Along with objective external circumstances, the course of national development implemented by Vladimir Putin has long been hindered by the so-called “fifth” and “sixth” columns. And if the President managed to cope with the “fifth” column (non-systemic opposition) relatively successfully

² The World Energy Council called Russia an energy superpower. *RIA-novosti*. March 24, 2019. Available at: <https://ria.ru/20190324/1552060830.html>

³ See more in: Ilyin V.A. “Crony capitalism” – a source of social inequality in modern Russia. *Ekonomicheskie i sotsial'nye peremeny: fakty, tendentsii, prognoz*, 2017, vol. 10, no. 6, pp. 9–23.

⁴ Mamychenko A.V. *Replacement of the Elites. New People of the Creative State. Professional Parliament. Book 2*. P. 90.

⁵ “The sixth column includes liberals in power, oligarchs and a significant, if not the main, part of the Russian elite, which, being formally loyal to the patriotic course of President Putin, is organically connected with the West and is immensely burdened by this course... (Source: Dugin A. *Geopolitics of Novorossiia 7 years later*. Official website of the Izborsk Club. April 9, 2021. Available at: <https://izborsk-club.ru/20918>).

(especially after the adoption in 2021 of the law on restricting the right of extremist organizations to participate in elections), then the “sixth”⁵ column continues to strengthen its position among Russia’s ruling elites, largely due to the system of “oligarchic capitalism” it has created with its own hands.

The results of the activity of the “sixth” column can be seen only when “large” time series are analyzed. The results are barely perceptible, always accompanied by exemplary reporting to the President and Russian society through the mass media, but in fact they are deep, systemic, contrary to the nationally oriented course of development pursued by Vladimir Putin and, in our opinion, extremely negative.

We will list only some of them, which, in our opinion, are the most complex and important ones.

1. First of all, it is **poverty and inequality** – perhaps the main “sore spots” of a modern (post-

Soviet) Russian society, which experts have been paying attention to for a long time and which the President himself recognized as “our main enemy ..., a threat to stable development, to the demographic future”⁶.

Regular revisions of the methodology for calculating poverty; unpunished failure to achieve the targets laid down in the May Decrees and national projects⁷; specific reforms, such as the monetization of benefits (2005), and amendments to pension legislation (2018) – all this, unfortunately, is part of the public administration system created by the President of the Russian Federation, and leads to the fact that the problem of social injustice becomes dominant in public opinion assessments, and poverty acquires special, specific features that determine its relevance compared to the situation in developed countries.

M.K. Gorshkov: **“The problem of social injustice and inequality ranks first in the list of social contradictions... Over 25 years of reforms, it has penetrated into all the pores of society and has become typical of the relations in almost all social segments.**

Poverty and injustice in Russia are associated with the group of the working poor. In the developed countries, in general, these terms are incongruous, they cause confusion: “How can you be poor if you work?... If a person works, by definition they cannot be poor”. But they can in our country...

What can hinder us on the way to this bright future? First of all, an extremely low level of governance in the country. The managerial culture is bad: the volume of inadequately made decisions is large, there is a lack of miscalculation of the consequences (social, political, moral and psychological) of the decisions made.

Today, the key contradiction in Russia is not even the contradiction between the rich and poor, but **the contradiction between the need for qualitative growth of the public administration system at all levels, the need for professional decision-making with a calculation of its variant consequences, and the actual level of governance, which is demonstrated today by both federal and regional bodies”⁸.**

⁶ Vladimir Putin’s speech at a meeting with deputies of the State Duma of the eighth convocation. *Official website of the President of the Russian Federation*. October 12, 2021. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/66905>

⁷ See more in: Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. “Intellectual feebleness” of the ruling elites and the “deep people” of the “long state”. *Ekonomicheskie i sotsial’nye peremeny: fakty, tendentsii, prognoz*, 2019, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 9–35.

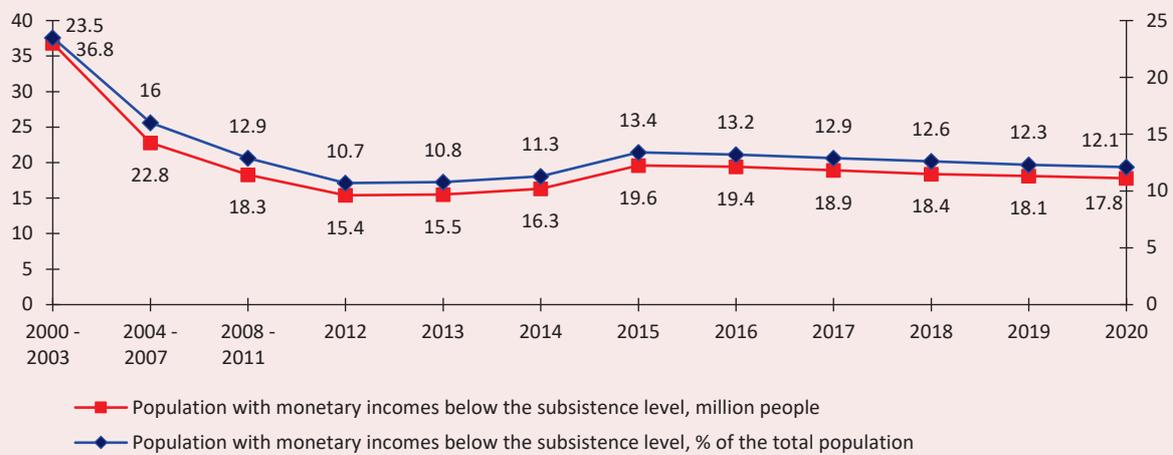
⁸ Gorshkov M.K. “Injustice and poverty are felt equally acutely” (an interview to the newspaper *Kultura*, June 8, 2017). Available at: <https://portal-kultura.ru/articles/person/162230-mikhail-gorshkov-my-znaem-obshchestvo-v-kotorom-zhivem/>

“In 2020, real disposable incomes decreased by 2.8% by 2019, the accumulated decline by 2013 – the point of the absolute post-Soviet maximum – has reached 9.7%. The average disposable income in constant prices last year did not even reach the level of 2010, so, **judging by income statistics, the past seven years appear to be lost for the Russian consumer**”⁹.

According to official statistics, the number of Russians living below the poverty line, in fact, has not changed over the past eight years (*Fig. 1*).

At the same time, in 2006–2020, the number of dollar billionaires in Russia increased from 60 to 102 people, and their welfare increased from 153 to 278 billion dollars (*Tab. 1*). Even during the pandemic, which had a comprehensive negative impact on

Figure 1. Number of population with monetary incomes below the subsistence level



* 2000–2003: Vladimir Putin’s first presidential term. 2004–2007: Vladimir Putin’s second presidential term. 2008–2011: Dmitri Medvedev’s presidential term.

Source: Federal State Statistics Service.

Table 1. Dynamics of the number and fortune of Russian dollar billionaires

Number/fortune		2006	2012	2018	2019	2020	2020 to 2006, %	Average annual data for 2006–2020
Number, people		60	110	106	100	102	1.70	89
Fortune	billion USD	337.3	426.8	417.7	425.1	392.3	1.16	367.4
	On average per billionaire	5.6	3.9	3.9	4.3	3.8	0.7	4.1
Fortune	billion rubles*	9168.4	13269.2	26189.8	27504.0	28371.1	3.09	16335.9
	On average per billionaire	152.8	120.6	247.1	275.0	278.1	1.82	177.6

* The fortune indicated in *Forbes* in US dollars has been converted into rubles at the exchange rate set by the Bank of Russia.
Sources: *Forbes*; VoIRC RAS calculations.

⁹ Misikhina S. Features of national consumption. *Ekspert*, 2021, November 15. Available at: <https://expert.ru/expert/2021/47/osobennosti-natsionalnogo-potrebleniya/>

Table 2. Comparative analysis of the amount of dividends and own revenues of consolidated budgets of the regions, in which the corporations are located, average for 2015–2019

Indicator	PAO Severstal (Vologda Oblast)	Magnitogorsk Iron & Steel Works PJSC (Chelyabinsk Oblast)	PAO NLMK (Lipetsk Oblast)
Dividends to the main shareholder, billion rubles	68.4	32.9	71.6
Own revenues of the region's consolidated budget, billion rubles	65.3	154.2	55.5
Ratio of dividends to the main shareholder to the own revenue of the region's consolidated budget (Item 1 to Item 2), %	104.7	21.3	129.0

Source: calculated according to the accounting statements of corporations and the statements of the Federal Treasury of the Russian Federation.

the state of the Russian economy, the number of dollar billionaires in Russia continued to increase: according to Forbes, in 2021, the number of dollar billionaires in the country increased from 98 to 117 people¹⁰.

In some system-forming corporations (PAO Severstal, PAO NLMK), the amount of dividends of the main shareholders exceeds the own revenues of consolidated budgets of respective regions (*Tab. 2*).

All this suggests that at the legislative level there emerge conditions for a purposeful “separation” of the stratum of super-rich people from a significant proportion of Russians with low and medium incomes, that is, in fact, for increasing inequality.

2. The second important problem that we would like to draw attention to is *the transformation of the education system into a service sector*; as a result, the educational element was lost, there was a sharp decline in the authority of the teacher as a mentor and educator. The long-lasting consequence is that the new, younger generations of Russians “can no longer succeed without abandoning moral guidelines”¹¹.

“The decline in secondary and higher education is a direct consequence of cultivated inequality in all spheres of life. Young scientists have to work in laboratories and workshops for only about 20 thousand rubles a month. And all sorts of top managers receive an official salary of about several hundred thousand or million rubles. **This injustice, among other things, leads to the degradation of our science, school education, culture and the general level of relations...**

The trouble is that the majority of today's schoolchildren do not want to study, they do not read literature, are not interested in poetry or the exact sciences. And it's not enough just to urge them to learn! **In reality, they see other examples: one achieves welfare and success not by virtue of knowledge, but in spite of it. The most boorish, out-of-control, but able to adapt and fulfill any orders of the authorities, have more chances to achieve something than the “nerds” with intelligence and knowledge. And in general, the richest people today are football players and mixed martial arts fighters, corrupt officials and code-bound thieves.**

All this is largely a consequence of the fact that the status of the teacher has declined significantly over the past decades. The profession itself has ceased to be prestigious and worthy. It is not the promises of the authorities that shape the attitude toward teachers and toward education, but the real life that we observe every day”¹².

¹⁰ Forbes – 2021 Rating. Available at: <https://www.forbes.ru/milliardery-photogallery/425573-20-stran-s-naibolshim-kolichestvom-milliardero-2021-reyting-forbes>

¹¹ Gorshkov M.K., Sedova N.N. “Self-sufficient” Russians and their life priorities. *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, 2015, no. 12, pp. 4–16.

¹² Bitsoev S. The collapse of education in Russia: Why the prestige of the teaching profession has fallen. *Moskovsky komsomolets*. November 19, 2019. Available at: <https://www.mk.ru/social/2019/11/19/krakh-obrazovaniya-v-rossii-pochemu-upal-prestizh-professii-uchitelya.html>

Recently, there have been more and more calls to “revive the Soviet school of education, abolish the Unified State Exam, bachelor’s degree system, specialty system...”¹³. However, so far this task seems unrealizable¹⁴.

The results of our monitoring of public opinion clearly show the vector of evolution of spiritual and moral development in the conditions of market transformations, including those taking place during Vladimir Putin’s presidential terms. Over the past 20 years, there has been an increase in the proportion of people who do not care about empathy in society, sensitivity toward others (by 9 p.p.), self-esteem, high professionalism (by 7 p.p.), respect for the team (by 6 p.p.), performance of their official duties (by 5 p.p.), honesty, decency, charity, mutual

assistance, law-abidance, respect for parents and loved ones (by 4 p. p.), etc. (Tab. 3).

During the same period, there has been an increase in the proportion of people who tolerate and have nothing against such phenomena and qualities as laziness (by 22 p.p.), the desire to work less and get more (by 16 p.p.), conceit and arrogance (by 12 p.p.), sycophancy and servility (by 9 p.p.), disrespectful attitude toward women (by 7 p.p.), drug addiction (by 6 p.p.), embezzlement, bribes, frivolous attitude toward children (by 3–4 p.p.; Tab. 4). The increase in the proportion of such people seems insignificant, but the process of transformation of spiritual and moral values is of a long and evolutionary nature; therefore, first of all, in this case, its vector is important.

Table 3. Importance of moral qualities, % of respondents*

Phenomena / actions	Important			Not important		
	1996	2020	Dynamics (+/-), 2020 to 2000	1996	2020	Dynamics (+/-), 2020 to 2000
Responsiveness, sensitivity to other people	86.5	78.1	-9	13.6	21.9	+9
Self-esteem	91.2	84.5	-7	8.7	15.5	+7
High professionalism	85.3	78.5	-7	14.7	21.5	+7
Respect for the team	85.9	80.9	-6	14.1	19.1	+6
Performance of official duties	87.8	82.6	-5	12.2	17.4	+5
Honesty, truthfulness	92.9	86.2	-4	7.1	13.8	+4
Tolerance, respect for the views and opinions of others	86.7	79.0	-4	13.3	21.1	+4
Respect for parents, loved ones	93.3	88.4	-5	6.8	11.5	+4
Decency	93.7	87.1	-4	6.3	13.0	+4
Mutual assistance and mutual support	88.1	80.6	-4	11.9	19.4	+4
Compliance with laws, law-abiding behavior	80.6	77.0	-4	19.3	23.0	+4
Respect for someone else’s (private, state) property	78.3	75.2	-3	21.8	24.8	+3
Showing compassion, mercy	80.4	76.0	-3	19.6	23.9	+2

* Ranked according to the decrease in the proportion of people for whom the above-mentioned moral qualities are unimportant. The wording of the question: “People evaluate different life phenomena in different ways. To some, one thing is important, to others – another... Which of the following is important to you and which is not?” In total, there are 18 possible answers to the question. Here and further, when presenting the results of the public opinion monitoring, we use average annual data calculated as an average of six polls conducted during the year.

¹³ Opinion of the Chairman of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation A. Bastrykin (Source: Bastrykin called the Unified State Exam torture for young people and proposed to cancel it. *RBK*. November 23, 2021. Available at: <https://www.rbc.ru/society/23/11/2021/619ce0d39a794724b788912c>).

¹⁴ Opinion of the Head of Rosobrnadzor A. Muzaev (Source: Rosobrnadzor estimated the probability of cancellation of the Unified State Exam by 2030. *RBK*. March 5, 2021. Available at: <https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfrenews/6041cb5c9a7947726e7d022a>).

Table 4. People's attitude toward negative moral phenomena and actions, % of respondents*

Phenomena / actions	Unacceptable			Acceptable, quite normal		
	1996	2021	Dynamics (+/-), 2021 to 1996	1996	2021	Dynamics (+/-), 2021 to 1996
Laziness	66.3	48.9	-17	22.3	44.4	+22
Desire to work less and earn more	52.4	40.1	-12	36.1	52.5	+16
Arrogance, conceit	79.4	69.8	-10	10.9	22.5	+12
Sycophancy, servility	81.8	72.3	-10	9.0	18.2	+9
Disrespectful attitude toward women	88.0	80.0	-8	5.6	12.8	+7
Drug addiction	92.5	87.7	-5	2.0	7.8	+6
Frivolous attitude toward family and children	90.2	87.3	-3	3.9	8.3	+4
Embezzlement	85.0	80.4	-5	7.8	11.5	+4
Bribes	80.4	76.6	-4	10.7	13.7	+3

* Ranked by the decrease in the proportion of people for whom the above phenomena and actions are acceptable and quite normal. The wording of the question: "Please express your attitude toward the following phenomena ..." In total, there are 15 possible answers in the question.

3. The third urgent problem, in our opinion, is **modernization of the healthcare system**, which began in 2010, since the adoption of the law on compulsory medical insurance, carried out under the leadership of T. Golikova, who after almost 10 years (at the end of 2019) admitted that "optimization was carried out unsuccessfully in many Russian regions"¹⁵.

The results of the so-called optimization of healthcare are disappointing and, by and large, represent a very significant threat to national security (which was especially evident amid the COVID-19 pandemic). During the period from 2010 to 2019, the number of hospital beds in Russia decreased from 93.8 to 80.0 per 10 thousand people, and compared to 2000 – from 115.0 to 80.0 per 10 thousand people¹⁶.

In 2010–2018, the share of healthcare expenditures in Russia was slightly more than 3% of GDP; for comparison, in the USA, Germany, and the UK, the figure was 8–9%¹⁷.

For the period from 2010 to 2019, life expectancy in Russia was 71.1 years. For comparison: in the USA – 78.7 years; in China – 75.7 years; in Germany – 80.7 years; in the UK – 81 years¹⁸.

"The current extinction of Russia is not only the result of the "optimization" of healthcare and the new coronavirus infection, due to which many people, our fellow citizens, have lost access to timely and qualified medical care; it is also the result of the socio-economic situation that has developed in our country as a whole"¹⁹.

¹⁵ Golikova acknowledged the optimization of healthcare in the regions as unsuccessful. *RBK*. November 3, 2019. Available at: <https://www.rbc.ru/society/03/11/2019/5dbecba99a79470b57a29e69>

¹⁶ *Russian Statistical Yearbook – 2020*. Available at: https://gks.ru/bgd/regl/b20_13/Main.htm

¹⁷ World Bank database. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.XPD.GHED.GD.ZS?view=chart>

¹⁸ World Bank database. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.IN?view=chart>

¹⁹ Delyagin M.G. The situation in the financial system of Russia is unacceptable. *Zavtra*. November 24, 2021.

The President's targets assume an increase in the growth rate of life expectancy and the achievement of the indicator of 78 years by 2030²⁰. However, so far, the actual situation is completely the opposite: in 2020 alone, life expectancy in Russia decreased by almost two years (from 73.3 to 71.5 years)²¹. Of course, this is partly due to the COVID-19 epidemic, but in any case, it proves that the healthcare system was not prepared for this challenge.

4. Finally, the fourth negative aspect that deserves attention is *Russia's lagging behind in the development of scientific and technological potential, that is, in fact, lagging behind in the main factor that determines the future for decades to come.*

We agree with Vladimir Putin's statement that "Today knowledge, technology and expertise make the most important competitive advantages. They are the key to a real breakthrough and improved quality of life"²².

However, the real processes and decisions taken in the field of science and technology development clearly contradict this thesis. First of all, this concerns the 2013 reform of the Russian Academy of Sciences, which the academic community

A.M. Sergeev: "One can't improve everything at the same time. Without the leaders, without the beacons to guide the way, nothing can be improved. **The country should have a system for training the scientific and technological elite; there should be places where one has to take it to the extreme limit to study there. As, in fact, it should be: we must give it one hundred and ten percent; studying is not just having fun.** I communicate a lot with the teaching staff. **There is dissatisfaction with those means of social mobility, those paths that should help gifted and motivated children to join the scientific and technological elite. Indeed, in the 2030s, they will hold leading positions in the country, in science, in education, in technology...**

Our country lacks an effective innovation system that could turn our knowledge into our technology. And just like that, you can't extract profit from fundamental science at the expense of scientists themselves"²³.

described as follows: "a huge mistake"²⁴, "a powerful blow to scientists and to innovation development of the Russian economy"²⁵, "an extremely costly and unpromising reform"²⁶.

²⁰ "On the goals of national development until 2030", June 21, 2020. *Official website of the President of the Russian Federation*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/63728>

²¹ Federal State Statistics Service database. Available at: <https://www.fedstat.ru/indicator/31293>

²² Vladimir Putin's Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation. March 1, 2018. *Official website of the President of the Russian Federation*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/42902/page/1>

²³ Sergeev A.M. In the USSR, there was a different attitude toward scientists. Sad thoughts in the festive year. *Argumenty nedeli*, 2021, November 9. Available at: <https://argumenti.ru/society/2021/11/746025>

²⁴ A.I. Miroshnikov (Academician, Doctor of Sciences (Chemistry), member of the Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences, member of the Department of Biological Sciences of RAS Section of Physico-Chemical Biology). Source: Academics consider the scandal related to the election of the president of the Russian Academy of Sciences a "disgrace". *Kommersant*. March 27, 2017. Available at: <http://kommersant.ru/doc/3254105>

²⁵ G.B. Kleiner (RAS Corresponding Member, Doctor of Sciences (Economics), Member of the Department of Social Sciences of RAS Economics Section, deputy director of RAS Central Economics and Mathematics Institute). Source: *Ibidem*.

²⁶ Polterovich V.M. The reform of the Russian Academy of Sciences: Expert analysis. *Obshchestvennye nauki i sovremennost'*, 2014, no. 1, p. 26.

Table 5. Dynamics of research and development costs, % of GDP

Country	2000	2010	2018	Dynamics (+/-) 2018 to ...	
				2010	2000
China	0.89	1.71	2.14	+0.43	+1.25
Germany	2.41	2.73	3.13	+0.4	+0.72
UK	1.62	1.65	1.70	+0.05	+0.08
Russia	1.05	1.13	0.98	-0.15	-0.07
USA	2.63	2.74	2.83	+0.09	+0.2

Source: World Bank. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator?tab=all>

Among the less noticeable, but no less negative decisions in the field of science we can name the following: unification of the Russian Foundation for Humanities and the Russian Foundation for Basic Research, the major Russian funds that finance scientific research (2016); “Westernization” of domestic science, when funding leaves the academic sector, being redistributed to universities and newly created development institutions²⁷, and often without taking into account the spatial aspect (needs and opportunities of territories); M. Kovalchuk’s proposal, which is discussed today and which is aimed at reformatting the scientific potential of the Russian Federation and unite scientific and scientific-and-educational organizations into five clusters “in accordance with the tasks they face”²⁸; President of the Russian Academy of Sciences A.M. Sergeev called this proposal “untimely”, noting that “when decisions are made that are not discussed with the scientific community, it is perceived extremely painfully... We must think about how to make sure that scientists themselves are involved in the decision-making process, rather than how to move from one place to another. Here we believe that there is a certain flaw on the part of the authorities”²⁹.

These and many other measures lead to the fact that Russia is lagging increasingly behind its geopolitical competitors in terms of scientific and technological potential (*Tab. 5*).

These system-wide negative processes have been going on for a long time; they accompany the work of Vladimir Putin as President of the Russian Federation. They lead to three consequences for the Russian statehood: destabilization of the domestic social situation (lack of tangible dynamics of improving the standard of living and quality of life becomes the main “claim” of society to the state and to Vladimir Putin personally); Russia’s lagging behind in key development indicators in the international arena (which is a direct threat to national security in the context of the emerging multipolar world), and moral “decomposition” deep within Russian society (we agree with Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu who described it as “a more terrible part than external threats” in August 2021³⁰).

Thus, throughout all Vladimir Putin’s presidential terms, his policy was filled with contradictions between the positive results he himself has achieved in the external political arena and the systemic failures to implement his specific instructions, goals, and tasks formulated in the May Decrees and national projects in the internal life of the country.

²⁷ Pisarev D. Is there life in RAS? *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. December 2, 2020. Available at: https://www.ng.ru/nauka/2020-12-02/100_184401122020.html

²⁸ RAS academicians demanded to stop Mikhail Kovalchuk from “destroying the scientific space of Russia”. Available at: <https://theins.ru/news/238020>

²⁹ Interview with A.M. Sergeev, February 9, 2021. *Troitskii variant – Nauka*, 2021, no. 3 (322).

³⁰ Sergei Shoigu’s speech at the panel discussion of the All-Russian Youth Educational Forum “Territory of Meanings” (August 2021). Available at: https://zavtra.ru/events/shoigu_nazval_strashnejshuyu_ugrozu_dlya_rossii

Public administration system in the face of internal and external challenges in 2019–2021

The 2019–2021 period for Russia was full of large-scale international and domestic events. In many ways, it has become a real test of strength for the entire system of public administration that Vladimir Putin has been creating over the previous 18 years.

Russia faced *the year 2019* in the context of the already adopted amendments to the pension legislation (since January 1, 2019) and the national projects that are traditionally³¹ “stalled”. The consequences were clearly manifested in the results of the single voting day held on September 8, 2019. Despite the fact that either representatives of United Russia or self-nominated candidates whom the party actively supports won in all regions, the party in power failed to reverse the trends that were noted in previous federal and regional elections: in 2019, the number of those who voted for United Russia in the election to the legislative bodies decreased by 1.7 million in comparison with 2018, and by 2.9 million people – in the election of heads of regions³². **Thus, the past elections have shown that people are not satisfied with the state of affairs in the country, but they understand that today Russia has no other feasible alternative (except for the course of national development pursued by the President).**

Amid growing anxiety and “disappointment and irritation” from unrealized expectations, the President of the Russian Federation and the public administration system faced two global external challenges *in 2020*.

The first one is the COVID-19 pandemic announced by the World Health Organization on

March 11, 2020. The coronavirus epidemic, which still remains undefeated, has not only changed the world in all forms of its organization (from international political relations to the daily life of each individual), but has also clearly shown the results of modernization processes in the healthcare system.

It is no coincidence that according to the latest data from the World Health Organization (as of November 1, 2021), Russia ranked 5th in the world in terms of the number of coronavirus cases and deaths (*Tab. 6*). At the same time, over the year (from November 1, 2020 to November 1, 2021), the number of COVID-19 cases in Russia increased fivefold, and the number of deaths – eightfold (that is, more than in the leading countries: the USA, India and Brazil).

Table 6. Countries leading in the total number of reported COVID-19 cases (as of November 1, 2021)

Country	Data as of November 1		Growth 2021 to 2020 (times)
	2020	2021	
<i>Total number of cases</i>			
USA	10016321	46146676	4,6
India	8507754	34355536	4,0
Brazil	5631181	21862458	3,9
UK	1206500	9272070	7,7
Russia	1774334	8795095	5,0
<i>Deaths</i>			
USA	243943	747957	3,1
India	126121	460791	3,7
Brazil	162015	609060	3,8
UK	48888	141743	2,9
Russia	30537	246814	8,1
Source: World Health Organization. Statistics on the spread of coronavirus in the world. Available at: https://covid19.who.int/table			

³¹ See more in: Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. Nationally oriented rotation of the elites – the most important condition for the implementation of national projects. *Ekonomicheskie i sotsial'nye peremeny: fakty, tendentsii, prognoz*, 2019, vol.12, no. 4, pp. 9–25.

³² See more in: Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. The 2018–2019 regional election: Voters’ trust in the authorities continues to decline. *Ekonomicheskie i sotsial'nye peremeny: fakty, tendentsii, prognoz*, 2019, vol. 12, no. 5, pp. 9–24.

The second external challenge that Russia faced in 2020 was of a geopolitical nature. In May 2020, at the Davos Forum, the beginning of the Great Reset policy was announced, and its leader is the US President J. Biden³³. The purpose of the Great Reset was to restore the dominance of global political and economic elites over the power that is gradually slipping out of their hands; to slow down the process of transition from a unipolar to a multipolar world as much as possible.

To this end, the process of purposeful erosion of universal spiritual, moral and cultural values has intensified (especially in the United States and European countries); the aggressive nature of foreign and anti-Russian policy has become more pronounced, since Russia and China, the two countries with nuclear potential and a high level of development of national culture (i.e. the countries that can become cultural centers of a multipolar

“In the modern world, the United States has only two serious enemies – China and Russia... Ideological confrontation with our country is very important for Washington. Russia has become the “other” state that American propaganda endows with the most negative features. As for China, it is a serious competitor in the economic sphere”³⁴. “...China will remain an economic rival, Russia – an enemy...”³⁵.

world), have turned out to be the main obstacles to global forces.

At the same time, China is coping more effectively with negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and has higher GDP growth rates, which, according to experts, will allow it to overtake the United States and become the top economy in the world by 2030 (Tab. 7). By this time, Russia

Table 7. The rating of countries by level of economic development (CEBR forecast)*

Country	2010		2020		2030	
	GDP billion USD (in constant prices)	Rank	GDP billion USD (in constant prices)	Rank	GDP billion USD (in constant prices)	Rank
China	6.762	2	14.059	2	26.365	1
USA	16.801	1	19.685	1	23.822	2
India	1.915	9	2.453	6	4.909	3
Japan	6.388	3	4.646	3	4.788	4
Germany	3.813	4	3.577	4	3.866	5
UK	2.777	6	2.496	5	3.415	6
France	2.967	5	2.414	7	2.782	7
Brazil	2.475	7	1.290	12	2.095	8
Canada	1.813	11	1.514	9	2.035	9
Russia	1.830	10	1.385	11	1.993	10

* Ranked by the ranking of countries in 2030; total number of countries is 193.
Source: WORLD ECONOMIC LEAGUE TABLE 2021 A world economic league table with forecasts for 193 countries to 2035 December 2020, 12th edition. Annual report by the Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR).

³³ See more in: Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. Where does the soullessness of the ruling elites lead? *Ekonomicheskie i sotsial'nye peremeny: fakty, tendentsii, prognoz*, 2021, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 9–28.

³⁴ Polonskii I. Who is the main enemy of the United States: China or Russia? *Voennoe obozrenie*. October 11, 2018. Available at: <https://topwar.ru/148186-kto-glavnyj-vrag-ssha-kitaj-ili-rossija.html>

³⁵ Opinion of national security specialist Prof. D. Yonchev (source: US election results: Russia is an enemy, China is a rival, Europe is a competitor. *Information webite Inosmi.info*. November 7, 2020. Available at: <http://www.inosmi.info/itogi-vyborov-v-ssha-rossiya--vrag-kitaj--sopernik-evropa--konkurent-bnr.html>).

will have ranked only 10th in terms of economic development. This clearly does not correspond to the goals of “Russia’s joining the top five world economies” (which was indicated by the President in the May 2018 Decrees, but, apparently, it was fairly and objectively deleted from the decree “On national development goals through to 2030”).

Thus, without finally solving the complex of internal problems that accumulated in 2018–2019 (and, by and large, continued throughout the 2000s), in 2020 the President once again found himself facing a number of external and internal force majeure circumstances that require cardinal and quick solutions.

Such a decision was Vladimir Putin’s initiative to amend the Constitution of the Russian Federation, which he announced during his Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation on January 15, 2020, even before the pandemic and the Great Reset were officially announced (which once again underlines the President’s strategic foresight). This step made it possible to consolidate Russian society around traditional spiritual and moral values, as well as the values of a welfare state (which was Russia’s response to the Great Reset), and strengthen the system of public administration by distributing powers and responsibilities among its various institutions and changing the deeply liberal Government of D. Medvedev, which was

gradually arousing public discontent, to the largely technocratic, but professional Government of M. Mishustin.

In addition, the initiative to change the Basic Law of the country helped to relieve tension in society and in political circles about the transit of presidential power, that is, the possibility of Vladimir Putin’s leaving the post of head of state in 2024 in accordance with the 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation. The so-called “Tereshkova amendment” turned out to be the most vulnerable point in the President’s initiative to change the Basic Law; however, in the existing external and internal political conditions, the positive effect of this amendment turned out to be much more significant than the negative consequences of “targeted” protest actions organized by the non-systemic opposition³⁶.

At the All-Russian referendum on amendments to the Constitution, held from June 25 to July 1, 2021, 78% of voters, or about 58 million people, voted for changing the Basic Law of the country (*Tab. 8*). Thus, the voters once again gave a credit of confidence to the President and to the course of national development he is pursuing. Moreover, the Russians’ support for the amendments to the Constitution turned out to be even greater than the support for Vladimir Putin himself in all the presidential elections in which he participated.

Table 8. Dynamics of support for Vladimir Putin in the RF presidential elections and the All-Russian vote on amendments to the Constitution

The number of votes cast for V.V. Putin / amendments to the Constitution	RF Presidential election				All-Russian vote on amendments to the Constitution
	March 26, 2000	March 14, 2004	March 4, 2012	March 18, 2018	July 1, 2020
% of the number of voters	52.94	71.31	63.60	76.69	77.92
Million people	39.74	49.56	45.60	56.42	57.75

³⁶ For a more detailed analysis of the content of amendments to the Constitution and their significance, see the article: Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. Another step toward V. Putin’s “Long State”. *Ekonomicheskie i sotsial’nye peremeny: fakty, tendentsii, prognoz*, 2020, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 9–33.

At the same time, Russian society has again expressed dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in the country. This is evidenced by the fact that in 47 out of 86 RF constituent entities, the share of votes against amendments to the Constitution was higher than the national average (21.27%), and in regions and large cities with backbone enterprises³⁷, 1.5 million fewer people voted for the amendments to the Basic Law initiated by the RF President than for Vladimir Putin in the 2018 presidential election.

Thus, the President's initiative to strengthen social obligations of the state and the traditional spiritual and moral values proclaimed by the new Constitution of the Russian Federation helped to reduce the negative psychological effects of the situation of uncertainty caused by the first "waves" of the COVID-19 epidemic and by the "wave" of destruction of traditional spiritual and moral values, actively coming from the West.

But, as many experts noted, "it was not possible to consolidate Russian society around the amendments to the Constitution. The result is obvious, but there is no solid support"³⁸, since it did not affect in any way either the standard of living and quality of life or people's subjective feeling of the positive dynamics of their change.

In 2021, against the background of events such as the personal meeting of the presidents of Russia and the United States in Geneva (June 16), as well as the withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan (August), the degree of anti-Russian sentiment has somewhat decreased. Moreover, the United States, the system of liberal capitalist values it personifies, and President Biden himself were increasingly criticized.

Thus, in 2021, the conditions were relatively favorable (at least compared to 2020) for the President to focus attention on Russia's internal problems once again. In our opinion, Vladimir Putin's most important decisions of this year included a **decree that banned extremist organizations from participating in elections (June 4, 2021)³⁹** (which effectively nullified the possibility of the "fifth column" to destabilize the situation in the country⁴⁰); **as well as the signing of a new National Security Strategy (July 2, 2021)⁴¹**, in which (as experts noted) for the first time we observe that the system of national values or moral and spiritual values was "prominently marked" ... "ideological leadership, which is necessary in the world"⁴² is pointed out as a separate priority.

³⁷ The study sample included 14 regions and 17 cities (regional capitals and some large cities), on the territory of which major, systemically important companies for the Russian economy are located (such as Norilsk Nickel, NLMK, Kovatek, Severstal, Lukoil, Metalloinvest, MMK, Evraz, PhosAgro, Acron, Rusal, Severalmaz, Polymetal). See more in: Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. Announced in 2018, V. Putin's "decisive breakthrough" is now stuck. *Ekonomicheskije i sotsial'nye peremeny: fakty, tendentsii, prognoz*, 2020, vol. 13, no. 5, pp. 22–54.

³⁸ Constitutional prologue to the future. *Ekspert*, 2020, no. 28, July 6–12.

³⁹ See Federal Law 157-FZ, dated June 4, 2021 "On amendments to Article 4 of the Federal Law "On basic guarantees of electoral rights and the right to participate in a referendum for citizens of the Russian Federation" and Article 4 of the Federal Law "On elections of deputies of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation".

⁴⁰ See more in: Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. Voters supported the President: On the results of the election to the State Duma of the eighth convocation. *Ekonomicheskije i sotsial'nye peremeny: fakty, tendentsii, prognoz*, 2021, vol. 14, no. 5, pp. 9–33.

⁴¹ See more in: Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. National Security Strategy – 2021: Positive experiences and conflicting expectations. *Ekonomicheskije i sotsial'nye peremeny: fakty, tendentsii, prognoz*, 2021, vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 9–32.

⁴² Opinion of Director of the Center for Military-Political Studies of MGIMO A. Podberezkin (source: Experts assessed the changes in the national security strategy signed by Putin. *RBK*. July 3, 2021. Available at: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/03/07/2021/60e0a1c79a7947a36edadc3d>

These and some other⁴³ steps taken by the President (including the draft law “On the general principles of organization of public power in constituent entities of the Russian Federation”, which is currently under discussion and which assumes the subordination of all public power directly to the head of state), became a logical continuation of his Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation in 2018 and the initiative to amend the Constitution of the Russian Federation in 2020. **Together, they made it possible to outline the boundaries and vector of the ideological course of national development, according to which Russia will have to develop under Vladimir Putin’s presidency, that is, potentially in the next 15 years.**

Moreover, these boundaries were outlined not only for the majority of the country’s citizens, who are still in a state of uncertainty about the future due to the pandemic and the stalling implementation of national projects, but also for the ruling elites, who continue to increase their personal welfare, despite the decline in the economy and the level of incomes of the population in the context of the epidemiological crisis.

However, as experts warned in 2016, “no patriotic upsurges solve any pressing socio-economic problems”⁴⁴. And this was clearly

manifested in the election to the State Duma of the Russian Federation held on September 17–19, 2021.

“The main issues of concern to Russian society are internal ones. They were and remain as follows: standard of living and quality of life, eliminating social inequality, achieving social justice, fighting corruption, improving the efficiency of social institutions, the ability of ordinary citizens to use their services, finding solutions to the most pressing everyday problems... **These issues have remained unresolved for many years,** which largely caused the “euphoria” after the events of 2013–2014. However, **if the internal problems are not solved, then positive trends in public opinion are, to put it mildly, unstable**”⁴⁵.

During the voting, the United Russia party in power (despite the newly obtained constitutional majority in parliament) lost about 5% of the votes, **and in general over the past 14 years (from 2007 to 2021) – almost 15% (or 17 million) votes**⁴⁶. This fact is no less vivid characteristic of the President’s activity than the “Crimean spring” or the adoption of a new, socially oriented Constitution.

⁴³ See more in: Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. National Security Strategy – 2021: Positive experiences and conflicting expectations. *Ekonomicheskie i sotsial'nye peremeny: fakty, tendentsii, prognoz*, 2021, vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 9–32.

⁴⁴ Ershov Yu.G. R. Collins on the collapse of the Soviet Empire: Instructive conclusions. *Sotsium i vlast'*, 2016, no. 4, p. 118.

⁴⁵ Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. A new stage of Russian history: Trends, specifics and prospects. *Ekonomicheskie i sotsial'nye peremeny: fakty, tendentsii, prognoz*, 2015, no. 2 (38), pp. 42–71.

⁴⁶ See more in: Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. Voters supported the President: On the results of the election to the State Duma of the eighth convocation. *Ekonomicheskie i sotsial'nye peremeny: fakty, tendentsii, prognoz*, 2021, vol. 14, no. 5, pp. 9–33.

After the parliamentary election, in October 2021, Russian President Vladimir Putin noted that low incomes of Russians are “our main enemy and a threat to stable development, to the demographic future”⁴⁷. **In our opinion, the fact that the President himself recognizes that the public administration system he created does not solve internal problems effectively is the most objective assessment of the contradictory results of his work.**

Moreover, the data of official electoral statistics are confirmed by the dynamics of people’s subjective assessments, which we receive in the course of the regional monitoring of public opinion. Thus, the approval of the authorities at all levels (federal, regional, municipal) was steadily increasing during Vladimir Putin’s first and second presidential terms (*Insert 1*). However, since the presidency of Dmitri Medvedev (2008–2011), that is, over the past 10 years, the share of people who positively assess the work of the authorities has significantly decreased (on average for 2018–2021 compared to 2008–2011):

- ✓ Assessments of the work of the President decreased by 9 p.p. (from 65 to 56%);
- ✓ Assessments of the work of the Government of the Russian Federation decreased by 15 p.p. (from 51 to 36%);
- ✓ Assessments of the work of the Federation Council decreased by 3 p.p. (from 41 to 38%);
- ✓ Assessments of the work of the State Duma decreased by 9 p.p. (from 38 to 29%);
- ✓ Assessments of the work of the Governor decreased by 13 p.p. (from 49 to 36%);

✓ Assessments of the work of the heads of local administrations decreased by 7 p.p. (from 42 to 35%).

The same can be said about people’s assessment of the President’s work aimed at solving the country’s key problems (*Insert 2*). In fact, the positive dynamics of public opinion was noted only during Vladimir Putin’s first presidential term. Since the second presidential term (2004–2007), no positive changes have occurred:

The share of people who consider the actions of the head of state to strengthen Russia’s international positions and protect democracy as successful remains at the level of 35–37%; to restore order in the country – 45%;

The proportion of those who positively assesses the work of the head of state to boost the economy and increase the welfare of citizens decreased by 12 p.p. (from 39 to 27%).

Resume

Thus, taking into account the results of the monitoring concerning the effectiveness of the public administration system and the work of the head of state, conducted for more than 10 years, we (based on statistical data, public opinion polls and expert assessments) can draw two conclusions.

1. First, throughout his presidential terms, Vladimir Putin has consistently implemented a plan to restore the post-Soviet Russian statehood destroyed together with the collapse of the USSR. He outlined its foundations in detail and publicly in the 1999 article “Russia at the turn of the Millennium”: “the Russian idea”, “a strong state”, “an efficient economy”⁴⁸.

⁴⁷ Vladimir Putin’s speech at a meeting with deputies of the State Duma of the eighth convocation. *Official website of the President of the Russian Federation*. October 12, 2021. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/66905>

⁴⁸ Putin V.V. Russia at the turn of the Millennium. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. December 30, 1999. Available at: https://www.ng.ru/politics/1999-12-30/4_millennium.html

Insert 1

Dynamics of public opinion assessments concerning the work of federal, regional and municipal authorities*, % of respondents

Authorities	Level of approval/ disapproval (percentage of positive/negative assessments)	Boris Yeltsin's 2nd presidential term (1996–1999)	Vladimir Putin's 1st presidential term (2000–2003)	Vladimir Putin's 2nd presidential term (2004–2007)	Dmitri Medvedev's presidential term (2008–2011)	Vladimir Putin's 3rd presidential term (2012–2011)	Vladimir Putin's 4th presidential term (2018 – present)	Dynamics (+/–), Vladimir Putin's 4th presidential term (2018 – present) to...	
								Vladimir Putin's 1st presidential term (2000–2003)	Dmitri Medvedev's presidential term (2008–2011)
DYNAMICS OF ASSESSMENTS OF THE WORK OF THE RF PRESIDENT									
RF President	Level of approval	11.1	65.9	68.9	65.0	62.5	56,5	-9	-9
	Level of disapproval	71.4	15.1	16.3	18.0	23.4	29,0	+14	+11
For reference: RF President (according to VTsIOM data)**	Level of approval	12.8	81.6	75.0	69.6	76.8	64,5	-17	-5
	Level of disapproval	87.3	17.9	16.6	17.7	16.4	26,1	+8	+8
For reference: The share of the region's residents whose interests are expressed by the United Russia party***									
DYNAMICS OF ASSESSMENT OF THE WORK OF FEDERAL PUBLIC AUTHORITIES									
RF Government	Level of approval	23.8	42.6	46.6	51.0	43.9	36.1	-7	-15
	Level of disapproval	50.4	26.2	27.8	24.0	31.3	39.4	+13	+15
Federation Council	Level of approval	16.6	29.2	37.5	40.7	36.7	37.7	+9	-3
	Level of disapproval	40.3	25.4	26.8	23.6	30.0	30.7	+5	+7
State Duma	Level of approval	14.8	25.3	34.6	38.1	34.2	29.4	+4	-9
	Level of disapproval	54.5	37.8	36.4	30.8	36.3	41.6	+4	+11

End of Insert 1

Authorities	Level of approval/ disapproval (percentage of positive/negative assessments)	Boris Yeltsin's 2nd presidential term (1996–1999)	Vladimir Putin's 1st presidential term (2000–2003)	Vladimir Putin's 2nd presidential term (2004–2007)	Dmitri Medvedev's presidential term (2008–2011)	Vladimir Putin's 3rd presidential term (2012–2011)	Vladimir Putin's 4th presidential term (2018 – present)	Dynamics (+/–), Vladimir Putin's	
								Vladimir Putin's 1st presidential term (2000–2003)	Dmitri Medvedev's presidential term (2008–2011)
DYNAMICS OF ASSESSMENT OF THE WORK OF REGIONAL AND LOCAL PUBLIC AUTHORITIES									
Vologda Oblast Governor	Level of approval	36.5	49.2	52.1	49.2	40.5	36.5	-13	-13
	Level of disapproval	36.0	24.1	25.6	26.0	36.7	40.2	+16	+14
Heads of local administrations	Level of approval	30.1	38.7	40.3	42.4	38.3	35.7	-3	-7
	Level of disapproval	39.7	32.0	33.8	31.3	36.4	38.2	+6	+7

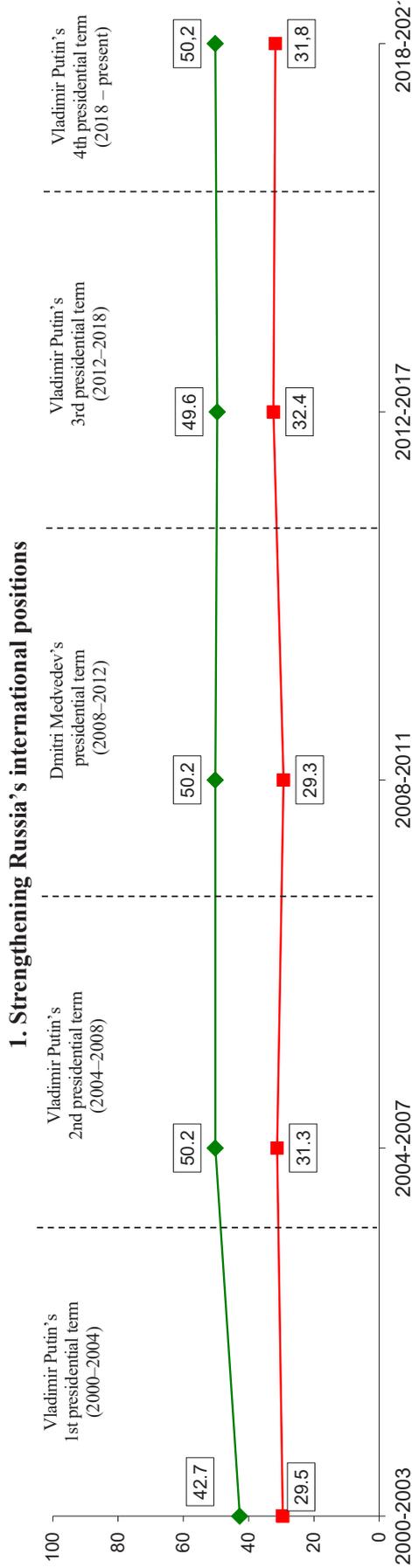
* The wording of the question: "How would you assess the work of ...?" Answer options: "fully and mostly approve", "fully and mostly disapprove". Source: VoIRC RAS public opinion monitoring.
** The wording of the question: "Do you generally approve or disapprove of the work of...?" Answer option: "The President of Russia".
*** The wording of the question: "Which party expresses your interests ...?" Answer option: "United Russia".
The average data for the period were calculated as an average of annual data. The data for each year – as an average for 6 surveys.

On average over the first four years of Vladimir Putin's fourth presidential term (2018–2021), the level of approval of the work of most federal, regional and local authorities (except for the Federation Council and the State Duma) is less than the average for his first presidency (2000–2003).

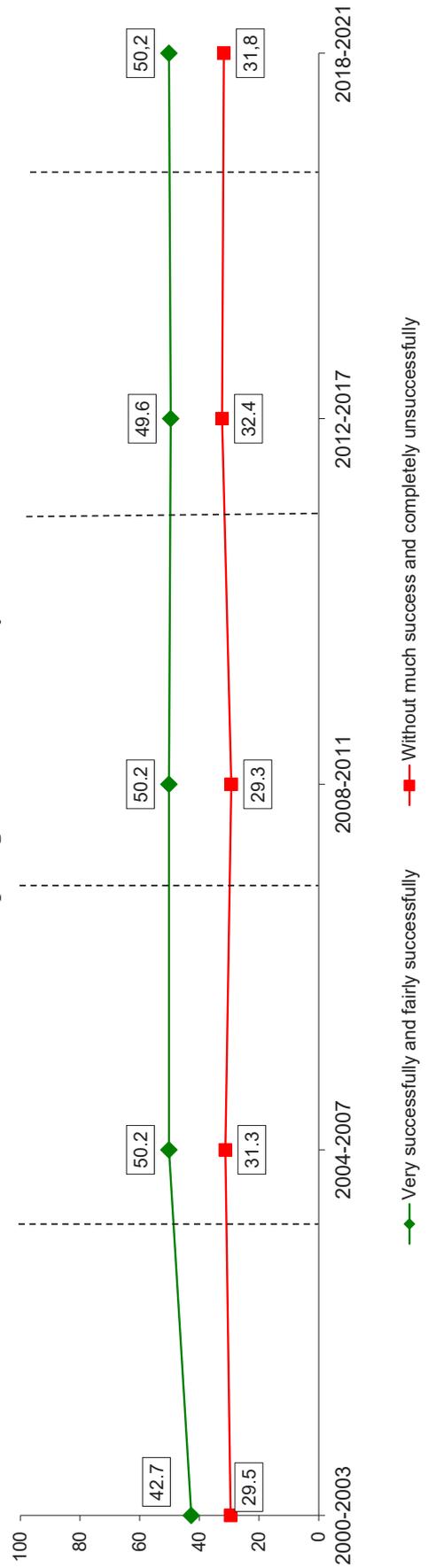
The level of approval of all authorities, except for the Federation Council, has been declining since the presidential term of Dmitri Medvedev (2008–2011).

Insert 2

Dynamics of people's assessments of how successfully the Russian President addresses the country's key issues*, % of respondents

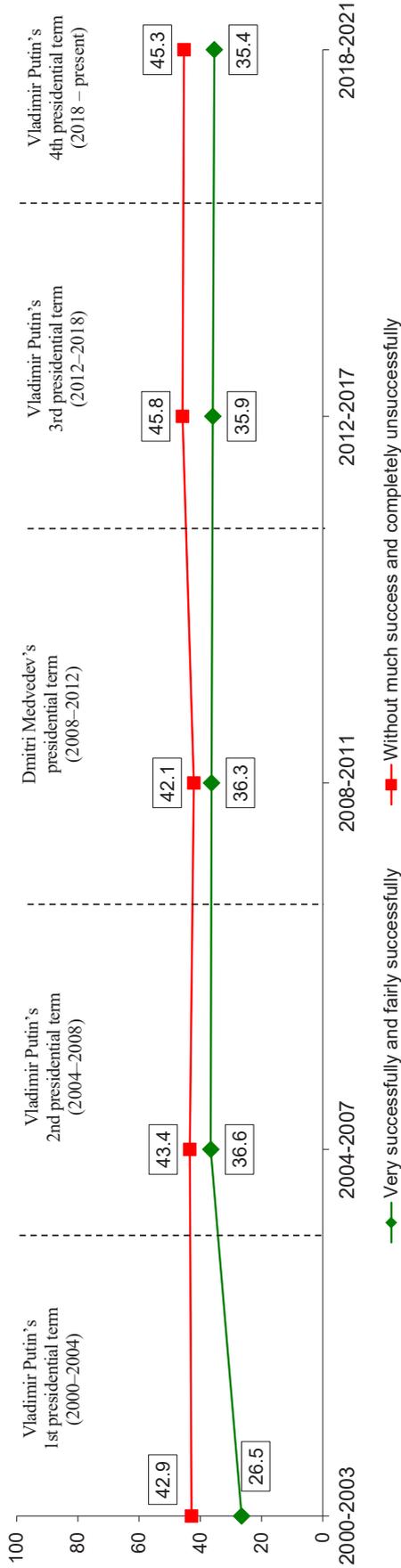


2. Imposing order in the country

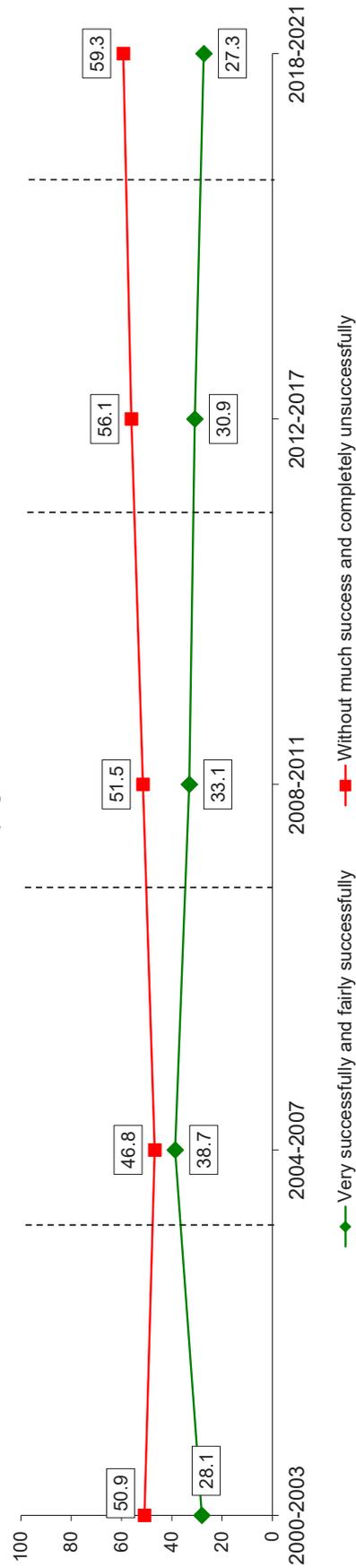


End of Insert 2

3. Protecting democracy and strengthening citizens' freedoms



4. Economic recovery, growth of citizens' welfare



* The wording of the question: "In your opinion, how successfully does the President cope with the following problem?": "without much success, completely unsuccessfully". The question is included in the survey since 2000.
Source: VolRC RAS public opinion monitoring.

The assessments of how successfully the President addresses Russia's key problems were improving during Vladimir Putin's first presidential term (on average for 2004-2007 compared to 2000-2003). Throughout all subsequent presidential cycles, people's assessments regarding the President coping with such problems as strengthening Russia's international positions, imposing order in the country and protecting democracy have not actually changed. At the same time, the share of people who consider the President's work aimed to promote economic growth and increase people's welfare to be successful has significantly decreased (by 12 p.p., from 39% on average in 2004-2007 to 27% in 2018-2021).

2. Second, each of these foundations of the new statehood has not yet been achieved. First of all, it concerns the efficiency of the Russian economy. Despite the fact that the President is taking active and large-scale measures to determine the ideological vector of national development (both for society and for the ruling elites) and implementing targeted personnel measures and putting forward initiatives to improve the organizational foundations of the public administration system, the problems of poverty and inequality remain critical to the general population.

This negates the positive effect of other decisions and initiatives of the head of state (in particular, amendments to the Constitution, May Decrees, etc.), making the overall effectiveness of his activities extremely contradictory and not implemented to the fullest extent.

The “litmus test” in relation to this thesis is the federal and regional elections, in which Russian society regularly gives a “credit of trust” to Vladimir Putin’s course (either to the President himself or to the party of power he supports), but at the same time regularly expresses dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in the country, the dynamics of the standard of living and quality of life.

The American philosopher and sociologist R. Collins wrote that “the prospects for fruitful modernization in Russia, without breaking its socio-cultural code, are inevitably associated with a strong state”. However, so far everything points to the fact that modernization in Russia is following an “archaic path”, which “instead of

rapid social progress leads to an outflow of capital, a parasitic consumption of natural resources along with a surge in consumer lifestyle in the context of a dramatic differentiation of luxury and poverty, negatively affecting the level of trust in political power”⁴⁹.

In order to reverse this trend, the President of the Russian Federation will have to solve, perhaps, the main task he is facing – to nationalize the elites (the “sixth” column) in order to overcome internal, primarily ideological, contradictions in the system of public administration that hinder the implementation of his managerial decisions.

It is obvious that in the two years remaining until the end of Vladimir Putin’s 4th presidential term, it is impossible to solve this task. However, during this very period (2022–2023) the President will most likely decide whether he will again nominate his candidacy for the post of head of state; that is, whether he will personally continue the course of national development that he launched in 1999, or hand over the country in the condition, in which it is now, to his successor.

We (as authors and researchers who have been observing the effectiveness of the public administration system created by the President for a long time) think that the sooner he makes this decision, the more certain the political and social situation in the country will be. But, as practice shows, the President publicly announces his decision to participate in the elections only a few months before the vote itself⁵⁰.

⁴⁹ Ershov Yu.G. R. Collins on the collapse of the Soviet Empire: Instructive conclusions. *Sotsium i vlast'*, 2016, no. 4, p. 118.

⁵⁰ The 2018 presidential election was held on March 18, 2018. Putin announced his participation three months before the event (in December 2017). The 2012 presidential election was held on March 4, 2012; Putin announced his participation five months before the event (in September 2011).

E. Minchenko (President of Minchenko Consulting Communication Goup): “I think there were different options for the transit of power, it was clear how they were viewed. As a result, the option of zeroing presidential terms seemed to be the easiest to implement, the most understandable and reliable. Moreover, this option, according to sociologists, enjoys the support of a significant part of the population”.

D. Badovsky (Head of the Noncommercial foundation – Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Researches (ISEPR Foundation): “Zeroing out presidential terms gives Vladimir Putin additional space for opportunities and secures his political initiative. The right to be elected does not mean that you need to be elected – it will depend on the situation both in the world and in Russia, and on how the system of the branches of government will work in the coming years. But the presence of such a right will be a stabilizing and safety mechanism for the system in the conditions of its updated functioning”⁵¹.

The possibility of extending Vladimir Putin’s presidential terms potentially until 2036 (by 15 years) temporarily postpones acute issues related to the irreversibility of the transit of presidential power in Russia. However, the need for this shows that **the public administration system is not yet ready to function without the “hands-on management”**; therefore, it is still important to look for answers to the questions “What

“The project for the development of the Russian Federation is needed only by the Russian society and the Russian people, because it does not have to exist for so long in the format of a colonial state, to which many have become almost accustomed... Over the past 35 years, our country has not experienced any real development; neither has there been any significant increase in Russia’s competitive positions in the world community. Thus, there is a clear link between the lack of development of our country and the lack of a development project for the Russian Federation”⁵².

are the reasons for this?”, “What should be done so that by the next milestone period the President can safely hand over the country to his successor?”...

The real historical experience of Russia (in 1917 and 1991) shows that the processes of internal “ferment” are, in fact, a much more serious threat to national security than attempts of any external encroachments. And this must be taken into account, as well as the fact that the future of Russia cannot be built according to Western “patterns”. It must correspond to the Russian “gene code”, otherwise it will simply not be accepted by the broad strata of the Russian population and will remain only the lot of a small group of people who receive purely personal benefits from this “future”.

⁵¹ Experts on zeroing out the terms of the current President. *Vedomosti*. March 10, 2020. Available at: <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2020/03/10/824836-ob-obnulenii-srokov>

⁵² Aganin A. The image of the future. *Zavtra*. March 15, 2021. Available at: https://zavtra.ru/blogs/obraz_budushego_6

Thus, our view of the situation in the country and the logic of its development over the past 30 years coincides with the opinion of many experts:

1) Russia needs an image of the future, purposefully built, understandable and accepted by society;

2) this image of the future must comply with the basic principles of a “social and humanistically active state”⁵³.

We believe that only if these two conditions are met, it will be possible to overcome experts’ fulfilled forecasts that “the country will face a long-term prolongation of the current situation”⁵⁴.

To do this, the President will have to dramatically raise the quality of his managerial decisions, which are still quite fragmented, largely dictated by forced

circumstances and unrealized by part of the ruling elite surrounding him; all this resulted in the loss of 17 million votes of Russian voters in federal elections.

Will he manage to make it in time? Will he be able to do it...? Of course, we hope that life will give an affirmative answer to this question; that the head of state will be able to realize all the goals that he set for himself back in 1999 – to create, following the collapsed USSR, a virtually new country with a “Russian idea”, a “strong state” and an “effective economy”⁵⁵. But we do not know how it will actually be... Apparently, only time and the next waves of our monitoring of the effectiveness of public administration and, in general, the evolutionary process of the formation of a new, post-Soviet Russian statehood will show it.

References

1. Gorshkov M.K., Sedova N.N. “Self-sufficient” Russians and their life priorities. *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya=Sociological Studies*, 2015, no. 12, pp. 4–16 (in Russian).
2. Ershov Yu.G. R. Collins on the collapse of the Soviet Empire: Instructive conclusions. *Sotsium i vlast’=Society and Power*, 2016, no. 4, p. 118 (in Russian).
3. Lapin N.I. On the disclosure of the active humanistic function of the social state in Russia. *Vlast’=Power*, 2019, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 9–17 (in Russian).
4. Mamychenko A.V. *Zamena Elit. Novye Lyudi Kreativnogo Gosudarstva. Professional’nyi Parlament* [Replacement of the Elites. New People of the Creative State. Professional Parliament. Book 2]. 257 p.
5. Polterovich V.M. The reform of the Russian Academy of Sciences: Expert analysis. *Obshchestvennye nauki i sovremennost’=Social Sciences and Contemporary World*, 2014, no. 1, pp. 5–28 (in Russian).
6. Sulakshin S.S. et al. *Rossiye zhdet revolyutsiya? Voprosy perekhoda k postliberal’noi modeli Rossii (algoritm i stsenarii)* [Is a Revolution in Store for Russia? Issues of Transition to the Post-Liberal Model of Russia (Algorithm and Scenarios)]. Moscow: Nauka i politika, 2016. 712 p.
7. *WORLD ECONOMIC LEAGUE TABLE 2021 A world economic league table with forecasts for 193 countries to 2035 December 2020, 12th edition*. Annual report by the Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR).

⁵³ Lapin N.I. On the disclosure of the active humanistic function of the social state in Russia. *Vlast’*, 2019, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 9–17.

⁵⁴ Sulakshin S.S. et al. *Is a revolution in store for Russia? Issues of transition to the post-liberal model of Russia (algorithm and scenarios)*. Moscow: Nauka i politika, 2016. 712 p.

⁵⁵ Putin V.V. Russia at the turn of the Millennium. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. December 30, 1999. Available at: https://www.ng.ru/politics/1999-12-30/4_millennium.html

Information about the Authors

Vladimir A. Ilyin – RAS Corresponding Member, Doctor of Sciences (Economics), Professor, Honored Scientist of the Russian Federation, scientific director, Vologda Research Center, Russian Academy of Sciences (56A, Gorky Street, Vologda, 160014, Russian Federation; e-mail: ilin@vscc.ac.ru)

Mikhail V. Morev – Candidate of Sciences (Economics), Leading Researcher, deputy head of department, Vologda Research Center, Russian Academy of Sciences (56A, Gorky Street, Vologda, 160014, Russian Federation; e-mail: 379post@mail.ru)