

EDITORIAL

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Nationwide Poverty – “a Threat to Steady Development and Our Demographic Future”¹



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. In our paper “Trends in Public Opinion Regarding the Effectiveness of Public Administration. Presidential Cycles 2000–2021” published in the previous issue of the journal (December 2021), we identified several critical internal and external challenges that accompany the process of establishing a new Russian statehood and strengthening Russia’s geopolitical role in the context of the global historical process – the transition from a unipolar to a multipolar world order. We identified the problem of poverty as one of the main “sore spots”, citing expert opinions and official statistical data revealing its scale and the complex nature of its implications. In the present article, we continue this topic and analyze in detail the problem of poverty – its geopolitical significance, objective and subjective components, how the

¹ Vladimir Putin’s speech at a meeting with deputies of the State Duma of the eighth convocation. *Official website of the RF President*. October 12, 2021. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/66905>

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dynamics of the standard of living and quality of life are perceived in various socio-demographic groups, as well as the key reasons that, in our opinion, explain why poverty has been an acute problem for Russia for more than a decade.

Key words: poverty, standard of living, subjective perception, “sixth column”, internal and external challenges.

Throughout the entire period of Vladimir Putin’s presidential terms, the process of formation of a new post-Soviet Russian statehood has been accompanied by a number of internal and external challenges that restrain the development of Russia’s geopolitical role in the context of the formation of a multipolar world and pose risks of internal political crises caused by the ineffectiveness of public administration in a number of areas critical to the country and society.

Some of these challenges (such as poverty, inequality, transformation of the education system into a service sector, modernization of the health system, “stalling” national projects²) are connected, first of all, with the quality of the ruling elites that evolved in the post-Soviet period, or rather, with the motives that they are guided by when making certain managerial decisions.

It is worth noting that when we talk about the “quality” of the post-Soviet ruling elites, we mean, first of all, **the bourgeois-liberal ideology** that has developed in this environment, which determines the goals and interests that they are guided by when making managerial decisions. It is the ideology, and not just a set of unrelated and chaotic motives.

Under the Constitution of the Russian Federation (including its new version, effective as of 2021) “no ideology may be established as the state or obligatory ideology” (Article 13). However, as some experts note, “ideology has existed in society throughout the history of mankind... society cannot live without ideology”, which means that Russia has an ideology as well. It can be called a bourgeois and liberal ideology, since it puts personal interests “at the forefront”.

“In the early 1990s, our country officially declared, through the Constitution, that it was a state without an official ideology. But as already mentioned, the point is that society cannot live without ideology, because ideology is not just an invention of communists. And this means that Russia also has its own defining ideology. And it is a bourgeois ideology, a liberal ideology in other words. It determines everything in our life, from education to culture.... And it is plain and simple: in a competitive struggle (the vastness of this concept in our life is evidenced even by the fact that it has thoroughly entered even into education!) in the market, you have to get as much money, i.e. benefits, as possible”³.

² Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. (2021). Trends in public opinion regarding the effectiveness of public administration. Presidential cycles 2000–2021. *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 14(6), 9–32.

³ Menshikov V.M. (Doctor of Sciences (Pedagogy), Professor, Head of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Kursk State University; expert of the Kursk branch of the Izbornik Club). Is it possible to create a modern national ideology for Russia and how to do it? *Zavtra*. February 5, 2022. Available at: https://zavtra.ru/blogs/mozhno_li_i_kak_sozdat_sovremennuyu_obshenarodnuyu_ideologiyu_rossii

The liberal bourgeois ideology of the ruling elites is becoming the main factor in the ineffectiveness of public administration, manifested in the stalling of the implementation of publicly declared national development goals (national projects), and in high and stable levels of poverty and inequality; all this creates risks to the legitimacy of the current government at all levels (including the RF President) in the assessments of public opinion.

Another group of problems that our country is facing is of an external nature, connected with the global, centuries-old historical confrontation between the Anglo-Saxon and Eurasian civilizations. Its aggravation accompanies the process of transition from a unipolar to a multipolar world.

“The Big War unfolding before our eyes is not just about a geopolitical confrontation, redistribution of the spheres of influence or ensuring national interests, but about something much deeper and more important... this is a confrontation between two civilizations... A confrontation between the poles of reality – between good and evil... **Since the main players – the United States and Russia – are powers with strong weapons, this war concerns all the peoples of the Earth**”⁴.

Despite the fact that Russia has repeatedly proven its leadership to the whole world in terms of development of its military-industrial complex and defense capability, the negative influence of external factors is being spread, first of all, along a different, “hybrid” line. It is expressed in the systemic and complex attempts of the collective West to restrain

Russia’s development through economic sanctions, whipping up anti-Russian sentiments in European countries, harsh (sometimes exceeding the bounds of decency) public rhetoric against Russia and Vladimir Putin personally, the financing of certain organizations and individuals representing the so-called “fifth column”, etc.

“It is probably difficult to give a scientific definition of where the opposition ends and the “fifth column” begins... But still, the line between the oppositionists and the “fifth column” is internal; it is difficult to see it externally. What is this line? **An oppositionist, even a very tough one, eventually fights to the end for the interests of their homeland. And the “fifth column” consists of those people who fulfill what is dictated by the interests of another state, they are used as a tool to achieve political goals that are alien to us**”⁵.

Perhaps the most painful and tragic “method” by which the West is trying to prevent its main competitor (at least ideologically) from strengthening its geopolitical status includes attempts to pit historically fraternal peoples against each other. Sometimes these attempts are relatively successful (as, for example, in the case of Georgia or Ukraine), sometimes they are still unsuccessful (as in the case of Belarus or Kazakhstan).

The tragedy of this method of conducting a hybrid war on the part of the West lies not only in the casualties, but also in the fact that once fraternal peoples, united by a common culture, history, kinship ties of their citizens, are actually become

⁴ Dugin A. About the fronts of the ongoing global war. September 26, 2017. Available at: <http://ruspravda.info/Dugin-o-frontah-idushchey-globalnoy-voyni-28987.html>

⁵ Vladimir Putin’s big press conference, December 18, 2014. *Official website of the RF President*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47250>

enemies; and this information and ideological background is “zombifying” the living generations, is transmitted to the following generations, leading to the threat that historical ties may be lost forever.

“We understand that the threat to Kazakhstan’s statehood that has arisen is not caused by spontaneous protest actions over fuel prices, **but by the fact that destructive internal and external forces have taken advantage of the situation... At the same time, the elements of “Maidan” technologies consisting in power and information support for protests were actively used...**

The events in Kazakhstan are not the first and certainly not the last attempt of outside interference in the internal affairs of our states... And the measures taken by the CSTO have clearly shown that we will not allow the situation to be rocked at home and will not allow the scenarios of the so-called color-coded revolutions to be implemented”⁶.

By and large, in the historical confrontation between Russia and the West, the latter has only two “channels” of influence left: the “sixth column” and the undermining of statehood in neighboring countries.

V. Korovin (Director of the Center for Geopolitical Expertise): “The sixth column consists of the bearers of liberal pro-Western ideology, who at the same time wear the “friend of Putin” badge and occupy some formal position in the state system”⁷.

At the same time, while “maniacally” (just as the “consumer society” ideology “prescribes”) pursuing their personal ambitions to preserve the unipolar world, the world of “one sovereign”, the key representatives of the Anglo-Saxon countries ignore the security of the whole world.

“...what is a unipolar world? No matter how this term is prettified, it ultimately means only one thing: **it is one center of power, one center of force, one center of decision-making. This is the world of one master, one sovereign. And this is ultimately disastrous not only for everyone who is within this system, but also for the sovereign itself, because the unipolar world is destroying the sovereign from within...**

For the modern world, the unipolar model is not only unacceptable, but also impossible in general. And not only because with sole leadership in the modern – we emphasize it: in the modern – world, neither military-political nor economic resources will be enough. But what is even more important: **the model itself is not working, since it is not and cannot be based on the moral foundation of modern civilization**”⁸.

The gradual, but purposeful and steady escalation of the international political situation against the background of Russia’s futile attempts to “make contact” suggests that the West is ready to sacrifice all the foundations of global security achieved by mankind since the Nuremberg trials in order to revive a unipolar world and once again single-handedly rule over what will remain after the Big War that will somehow affect all countries and lead to the formation of new laws of the world order.

⁶ Vladimir Putin’s speech at the session of the Collective Security Council of the CSTO, January 10, 2022. *Official website of the RF President*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67568>

⁷ Trump’s victory: What will happen to the liberal “zoo” in Russia? Experts on what awaits the fifth and sixth columns after Donald Trump’s victory. Available at: https://tsargrad.tv/articles/pobeda-trampa-chto-budet-s-liberalnym-zooparkom-v-rossii_34288

⁸ Vladimir Putin’s speech at the Munich Security Conference, February 10, 2007. *Official website of the RF President*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>

“At the end of 2021 – beginning of 2022, the world information space faced a **media campaign unprecedented in its scale and sophistication, the purpose of which was to convince the world community that the Russian Federation was preparing an invasion of the territory of Ukraine.**

Thus, we can talk about the **collusion of Western governments and the media in order to escalate artificial tension around Ukraine by massive and coordinated stuffing of false information to pursue their own geopolitical interests, in particular, to distract attention from their own aggressive actions**⁹.

Hence the growing tension in the global situation, which has been observed over the past years, and especially in recent months (which may be due to a significant “blow” to the authority of the United States after its “shameful flight”¹⁰ from Afghanistan, called by experts “the biggest failure in the history of NATO”¹¹),

The very fact that the RF President had to introduce the term “red lines” into public rhetoric (he did it in his Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation on April 21, 2021) is most suggestive.

And the way in which the context for the term “red lines” was changing quite clearly reflects the development dynamics of the entire international political situation (*Insert 1*): first, the President made transparent hints that in each particular case

“What was Putin’s message behind the “red lines”? **Obviously, it is not just a warning** that any attempt to expand NATO’s zone of influence to the East, that is, to the post-Soviet or post-Imperial (which is the same thing) territory, will face a military response from Moscow. **We are faced with a refusal to recognize the strategic status quo that has developed since the collapse of the USSR, as well as questioning the legitimacy of the Baltic states’ accession to NATO and the entire US policy in the Eastern zone.**

Vladimir Putin makes it clear: when we were weak, you took advantage of our weakness and took away what, according to historical logic, belongs only to us, Russians; now we have come to our senses, overcome liberal insanity and are overcoming the treacherous – Western-inspired – trends of the 1980s and 1990s inside Russia itself; **so we are now ready to conduct a full-fledged dialogue from the position of strength**¹².

Russia itself would determine where these “red lines” were marked; then he made confident and even irritated statements that with the expansion of NATO to the East, Russia was “*cheated, just brazenly deceived*”, and therefore not Russia, but the West should provide security guarantees, and “*immediately, now*”; and eventually there emerged official draft documents of the Russian Foreign Ministry on ensuring legal security guarantees from the United States and NATO, which the West called no less than “Putin’s ultimatum”¹³.

⁹ Examples of publications of a large-scale disinformation campaign by Western media promoting the thesis of Russia’s allegedly impending invasion of Ukraine. *Official website of the RF Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. February 11, 2022. Available at: https://www.mid.ru/ru/press_service/publikacii-i-opроверzenia/opроверzenia1/nedostovernie-publikacii/1798160/

¹⁰ Kozin V. (Corresponding member of the Academy of Military Science of Russia and Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences). The USA and NATO: An escape unworthy of the great powers. Available at: <https://zvezdaweekly.ru/news/2021921333-QCBBW.html>

¹¹ The biggest failure in the history of NATO: International reaction to the events in Afghanistan. *Vesti*. August 16, 2021. Available at: <https://www.vesti.ru/article/2601284>

¹² Dugin A. Putin integrates the post-Soviet space from Ukraine to Kazakhstan with a chord of decisive actions. *Voronezh independent socio-political portal “Chetyre pera”*. Available at: http://4pera.com/news/feysbuchnye_truth/aleksandr_dugin_putin_integriruet_postsovetskoe_prostranstvo_ot_ukrainy_do_kazakhstan_akkordom_resh/

¹³ “Putin’s ultimatum”: What will NATO’s reckless scheme in Ukraine turn out for the world? Available at: <https://www.ntv.ru/novosti/2648130/>

In the context of increasing international political tension, a special role belongs to the internal situation in the countries that are key players in the foreign policy arena. Their economic, technological, moral, etc. situation has an impact not only on their own national security, but also the security of the whole world. As for Russia, its “main enemy” on this “internal front” was quite clearly defined (actually recognized) by Vladimir Putin who said that **“the low average income of our citizens, of millions of people, is our main enemy, a threat to steady development and our demographic future”**¹⁴.

2000: “We must certainly continue our efforts to decrease the number of people with incomes below the subsistence level, eradicate poverty, decreasing its level and the number of low-income people, which is **a threat for the stability and unity of our society as it denigrates people**”¹⁵.

2021: “The fight against poverty is **a clear priority**. We regularly discuss this issue, which is directly connected to our response to the demographic challenge”¹⁶.

However, according to experts, poverty is a relative concept that has both an objective and a subjective side, which makes it difficult to objectively assess not only poverty itself, but also its complex implications. The increase in the standard of living and quality of life causes a corresponding increase in the level of claims and needs, and this introduces a contradiction between objective

indicators of poverty and its subjective perception for the general population.

L. Ovcharova (Director of the Institute for Social Policy, HSE University): “Poverty is a relative phenomenon in time and space. There are always several definitions of poverty. In the scientific mainstream of the twenty-first century, it is a combination of several criteria of poverty. It is one thing when there is less money than the subsistence level ... and it is another thing when there are enough resources for survival, but consumption is significantly lower than the prevailing consumption standard in the country”¹⁷.

In the context of our analysis (poverty as a factor contributing to national security in the context of the escalation of the current geopolitical confrontation and the longer historical process of confrontation between Eurasian and Western civilizations), it is the subjective perception of poverty that is of primary importance, since it determines the nature of public sentiment, the internal state of society.

“In the “competition” between subjective and objective assessments of people’s well-being, subjective indicators are still of primary significance ... objective indicators are a kind of limiter that does not allow for the development of a situation in which a high level of life satisfaction is combined with low objective indicators of well-being”¹⁸.

¹⁴ Vladimir Putin’s speech at a meeting with deputies of the State Duma of the eighth convocation. *Official website of the RF President*. October 12, 2021. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/66905>

¹⁵ Vladimir Putin’s speech at the plenary session of the 17th Congress of United Russia, December 23, 2017. Official website of the RF President. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56478>

¹⁶ RF President’s speech at the Meeting of the Council for Strategic Development and National Projects, December 15, 2021. *Official website of the RF President*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/67366>

¹⁷ Poverty is a threat to the quality of economic growth (materials of an interview with L. Ovcharova, Director of the Institute for Social Policy, HSE University). *Ekspert*. July 15, 2019. Available at: <https://expert.ru/expert/2019/29/bednost---ugroza-kachestvu-ekonomicheskogo-rosta/>

¹⁸ Zubets A.N. (Doctor of Sciences (Economics), Director of the Institute of Socio-Economic Research of the Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation) (2020). *Russian and International Approaches to Measuring the Quality of Life*. Moscow. Pp. 14–15.

Insert 1

Chronology of development of the “red lines” theme in Russia’s public rhetoric

Date	Source	Citation
April 21, 2021	<p>Presidential Address to the RF Federal Assembly, April 21, 2021. Official website of the RF President. Available at: http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/messages/65418</p>	<p>“We have enough patience, responsibility, professionalism, self-confidence and certainty in our cause, as well as common sense, when making a decision of any kind. But I hope that no one will think about crossing the “red line” with regard to Russia. We ourselves will determine in each specific case where it will be drawn”.</p>
November 30, 2021	<p>Vladimir Putin’s speech at the Russia Calling! Investment Forum, November 30, 2021. Official website of the RF President. Available at: http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67241</p>	<p>“Our relationship was almost idyllic, especially in the mid-1990s, when we nearly became allies. However, despite all our warnings, conversations and requests, the [bloc’s] infrastructure ultimately approached our border. The situation went as far as the deployment of BMD systems in Poland and Romania, and the launchers that have been stationed there, the Mk 41, can be used to launch Tomahawk missiles and other strike systems. This is creating a threat to us – this is an obvious fact... You have asked about Ukraine and where the red lines run. They are, above all, the threats to us that can come from that territory”.</p>
December 17, 2021	<p>On Russian draft documents on legal security guarantees from the United States and NATO. Official website of the RF Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Available at: https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1790809/; RIA-novosti. Available at: https://ria.ru/20211217/bezopasnost-1764226189.html</p>	<p>to prevent further eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and deny accession to the Alliance to Ukraine;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to abandon any military activity of NATO in Ukraine, Eastern Europe, Transcaucasia, Central Asia; • the Parties shall undertake not to deploy ground-launched intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles outside their national territories, as well as in the areas of their national territories, from which such weapons can attack targets in the national territory of the other Party; • the Parties shall not undertake actions nor participate in or support activities that affect the security of the other Party; • the Parties shall refrain from deploying their armed forces and armaments in the areas where such deployment could be perceived by the other Party as a threat to its national security; • the United States of America shall undertake to prevent further eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and deny accession to the Alliance to the States of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; • the United States of America shall not establish military bases in the territory of the States of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics that are not members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, use their infrastructure for any military activities or develop bilateral military cooperation with them.

End of Insert 1

Date	Source	Citation
December 21, 2021	Vladimir Putin’s speech at the Expanded Meeting of the Defence Ministry Board, December 21, 2021. Official website of the RF President. Available at: http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67402	<p>“If our Western colleagues continue their obviously aggressive line, we will take appropriate military-technical reciprocal measures and will have a tough response to their unfriendly steps. And, I would like to stress that we are fully entitled to these actions that are designed to ensure Russia’s security and independence.</p> <p>As we know well, they are operating thousands of kilometers away from their national territory under different pretexts, including the need to ensure their own security. When international law and the UN Charter get in their way, they declare them obsolete and unnecessary. However, when something meets their interests, they immediately refer to the norms of international law, the UN Charter, international humanitarian law and so on. These manipulations are annoying”.</p>
December 23, 2021	Vladimir Putin’s annual news conference, December 23, 2021. Official website of the RF President. Available at: http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/press_conferences/67438	<p>“We remember, as I have mentioned many times before and as you know very well, how you promised us in the 1990s that [NATO] would not move an inch to the East. You cheated us shamelessly: there have been five waves of NATO expansion, and now the weapons systems I mentioned have been deployed in Romania and deployment has recently begun in Poland.</p> <p>We are not threatening anyone. Have we approached US borders? Or the borders of Britain or any other country? It is you who have come to our border, and now you say that Ukraine will become a member of NATO as well. Or, even if it does not join NATO, that military bases and strike systems will be placed on its territory under bilateral agreements. This is the point.</p> <p>And you are demanding guarantees from me. It is you who must give us guarantees, and you must do it immediately, right now, instead of talking about it for decades and doing what you want, while talking quietly about the need for security guarantees to everyone”.</p>
February 8, 2022	News conference following Russian-French talks. Official website of the RF President. Available at: http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67735	<p>I want to reiterate, I have said this before, but I would really like you to hear me this time and convey this message to your readers, viewers and internet users.</p> <p>Do you realize that if Ukraine joins NATO and decides to take Crimea back through military means, the European countries will automatically get drawn into a military conflict with Russia? Of course, NATO’s united potential and that of Russia are incomparable. We understand that, but we also understand that Russia is one of the world’s leading nuclear powers, and is superior to many of those countries in terms of the number of modern nuclear force components. But there will be no winners, and you will find yourself drawn into this conflict against your will. You will be fulfilling Paragraph 5 of the Treaty of Rome in a heartbeat, even before you know it.</p>

Analyzing the position of Russia in the international arena, domestic experts¹⁹ (based on the theoretical approaches of E. Fromm and the research by R. Inglehart) say that our country is:

✓ first, among the relatively poor states (annual incomes are less than 10 thousand US dollars), in contrast to China (10–13 thousand US dollars), the U.S., Germany and the UK (13 thousand US dollars and more);

✓ second, among the states focused on “being” rather than “having”, or, in other words, on the “value of self-realization” rather than “accumulation of material wealth”²⁰.

Thus, among the key countries (such as the USA, China, Germany, the UK) Russia is the only one that does not have a high standard of living and does not put material security above everything else; this is confirmed by the results of sociological studies, which clearly demonstrate how socio-cultural, spiritual and moral, ideological, rather than material and consumer, aspects of life are important for Russians. For example, in 2014, when Crimea and Sevastopol became part of the Russian Federation in the context of a political crisis that broke out in Ukraine, the level of approval of the President of the Russian Federation (according

to VCIOM) literally soared from 63.1 to 81.4% compared to 2013; although during the same period the share of Russians who considered inflation in the country to be “very high” increased from 57 to 59%²¹, and the proportion of those who believe that if they lose their job, it would be difficult or impossible for them to find another one of equal value increased from 45 to 47%²² (*Tab. 1*).

According to the data of a regional monitoring conducted by VoIRC RAS, the share of positive assessments of the President’s work in 2014 compared to 2013 increased from 55.3 to 64.1%, but at the same time the proportion of those who subjectively classify themselves as “poor and extremely poor” increased from 47 to 49%; the share of those who had enough money “for food, at best” increased from 32.4 to 33.5%; the share of those who believe that “the next 12 months will be bad for Russia’s economy” increased from 24.9 to 27.7% (See *Tab. 1*).

We have but to add that, according to official statistics, 2014 has not brought any significant positive changes to the dynamics of national living standards: the share of people living below the poverty line in 2014, compared with 2013, increased from 10.8 to 11.3%, or by almost a million people²³.

¹⁹ Poduzov A.A., Yazykova V.S. (2021). On the ratio of the level of material security and the subjective quality of human life. *Problemy prognozirovaniya*, 5.

²⁰ Scientists describe the countries focused on “being” and those focused on “having” as follows: speaking about “having” and “being”, Fromm does not use the ordinary meanings of these words, rather, he speaks about two main types of value orientations of an individual, two ways of human existence in the world. A person with an orientation toward “having” treats the world as an owner would treat their own property. Whereas, when focusing on “being”, one considers the latter as the opposite of possession: it means love of life, the desire to live not only for oneself, and genuine involvement in the world. In our opinion, this concept can be interpreted as an idea of a wide range of options for the meaning of human life and the content of its quality in modern society, a spectrum that is limited on one side by a person’s full aspiration to accumulate material wealth, and on the other is completely focused on the values of self-realization, that is, on the full disclosure of one’s own personal potential” (Source: Poduzov A.A., Yazykova V.S. (2021). On the ratio of the level of material security and the subjective quality of human life. *Problemy prognozirovaniya*, 5, 90).

²¹ The wording of the question “How would you assess the price increase (inflation) over the last month or two?” (One answer, % of respondents). Answer option: “Inflation is very high”. Source: Inflation perception Indices. *Official website of VCIOM*. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/ratings/indeksy-vosprijatija-infljicii>

²² The wording of the question “If you lose your job, do you think it will be easy for you to find an equivalent job?” (Closed question, one answer, % of those who work). Answer options: “I think I will be able to find an equivalent job only with great difficulty”, “I think it is almost impossible”. Source: Employment index. *Official website of VCIOM*. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/ratings/indeks-trudoustroistva>

²³ Federal State Statistics Service. Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/uov_51g.doc

Table 1. Dynamics of public opinion assessments regarding the RF President's work and respondents' own financial situation in 2013–2014, % of respondents

Answer option (population group)	2013	2014	Dynamics (+/-), 2014 to 2013, p.p.
<i>VCIOM data (for the Russian Federation)</i>			
The level of approval of the RF President's work	63.1	81.4	+18
The proportion of those who consider inflation in the country to be “very high”	57.0	59.0	+2
The proportion of those who believe that in case of job loss it will be difficult or impossible for them to find another, equivalent one	45.0	47.0	+2
<i>VoIRC RAS monitoring data (for the Vologda Oblast)</i>			
The level of approval of the RF President's work	55.3	64.1	+9
The proportion of those who subjectively classify themselves as “poor and extremely poor”	46.9	49.1	+2
The proportion of those who have “just enough money to buy food”	32.4	33.5	+1
The proportion of those who believe that “the next 12 months will be bad for the national economy”	24.9	27.7	+3

Thus, in 2014, in the wake of a patriotic upsurge due to the events of the “Crimean spring”, the support for the head of state increased significantly, although there were no economic prerequisites for it. This is the important role of the subjective, non-material factor that influences the state of Russian society and places our country among the countries focused on “being” rather than “having” (according to the classification of A.A. Poduzov and V.S. Yazykova).

A similar effect (a significant increase in support for the head of state in the absence of any tangible positive changes in the dynamics of the standard of living and quality of life) could be expected in 2018, when Vladimir Putin delivered his Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, in which he outlined the general vector of Russia's immediate development prospects – “to achieve a real breakthrough in improving the quality of life”²⁴. However, in fact, it turned out that the support for the head of state even decreased (from 83.5 to 71.0% according to VCIOM and from 67.3 to 66.4% according to VoIRC RAS), which was mainly due to

people's negative perception of the pension reform that had been announced in June 2018.

Nevertheless, we should note that placing Russia among the countries oriented toward “being” rather than “having” is still quite conditional; it is necessary, first of all, to compare different societies at the international level, to understand the deep differences between societies of different states, with different histories, cultural and religious features, mentality, etc. we mean that it does not negate the fact that Russians expect a dynamic development of the standard of living and quality of life and an increase in the availability of conditions for ensuring and improving material well-being.

Experts from Boston Consulting Group (BCG), an international consulting company, having analyzed the motives of consumers in 18 countries, came to the conclusion that the top five key motives of Russians' consumer behavior include “a desire to keep in touch with their cultural and historical heritage”, and in this respect our country is truly unique, since in other countries (including the USA, China, Germany, the UK, etc.) such motives were not found²⁵. But at the same time, the researchers note:

²⁴ Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, March 1, 2018. *Official website of the RF President*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56957>

²⁵ The study involved 18 markets that account for about 60% of the world's population, and 40,000 respondents from Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, the UAE, the United Kingdom and the United States. Available at: https://news.rambler.ru/sociology/47731693/?utm_content=news_media&utm_medium=read_more&utm_source=copylink

“Although Russian consumers have a completely different way of thinking than those in the United States, their needs, for luxury goods, for example, are surprisingly similar”²⁶. Moreover, Russians place the importance of “being an individual” on the top among the key motives of consumer behavior, which was not the case in any other country in the world. Even in the USA, buyers’ main motive turned out to be “a preference for communication with a narrow circle of closest friends”.

One way or another, with all the specific and general features of Russia, the processes taking place in Russia are similar to those in other key countries. According to the World Bank’s regular assessments, “since the early 1990s, the proportion of the world’s population living below the absolute poverty line (1.9 US dollars per day) has decreased from 35 to 8.4%”²⁷. Due to the growing living standards during the 21st century (*Tab. 2*) the World Bank has to revise the absolute poverty line from

Table 2. The proportion of the population below the poverty line in some countries of the world, %

Country	Poverty line*	1999	2002	2005	2008	2010	2012	2016	Dynamics (+/-), 2016 to 2002, p.p.
Russia	1.9 USD (147.2 rubles)	4.5	1.1	0.8	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	-1.1
	3.2 USD (247.9 rubles)	16.8	6.6	4.5	0.9	0.8	0.5	0.4	-6.2
	5.5 USD (426.1 rubles)	43.4	26.2	18.5	7.3	5.6	4.3	4.1	-22.1
China	1.9 USD (147.2 rubles)	4.5	31.7	18.5	14.9	11.2	6.5	0.5	-31.2
	3.2 USD (247.9 rubles)	68.4	57.7	43.2	34.7	28.6	20.2	5.4	-52.3
	5.5 USD (426.1 rubles)	88.9	80.6	70.5	60.7	53.5	44.4	24.0	-56.6
USA	1.9 USD (147.2 rubles)	0.7	0.7	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	+0.3
	3.2 USD (247.9 rubles)	0.7	1.0	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	+0.2
	5.5 USD (426.1 rubles)	1.2	1.5	1.5	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7	+0.2
Germany	1.9 USD (147.2 rubles)	no data	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	3.2 USD (247.9 rubles)	no data	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.2	+0.2
	5.5 USD (426.1 rubles)	no data	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.5	+0.3
UK	1.9 USD (147.2 rubles)	0.2	0.2	0.5	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.0
	3.2 USD (247.9 rubles)	0.5	0.5	0.8	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.3	-0.2
	5.5 USD (426.1 rubles)	1.0	0.7	1.2	1.0	0.7	0.6	0.5	-0.2

* Calculations in rubles are given at the US dollar exchange rate as of February 1, 2022.
Source: World Bank. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator?tab=all>

²⁶ Comment by Patrick Witschi, associate director in Singapore for Boston Consulting Group and one of the authors of the study. Dulneva M. Analysts have found similarities between Russians and Americans in the love of luxury. *Forbes*. December 9, 2021. Available at: <https://www.forbes.ru/society/448981-analitiki-nasli-shodstvo-mezdu-rossianami-i-amerikancami-v-lubvi-k-roskosi>

²⁷ Kosyrev D.E. (orientalist scholar, journalist, political commentator for RIA-novosti). Back to poverty: The World Bank is sad, China is full of optimism. October 18, 2020. Available at: <https://ria.ru/20201018/bednost-1580259778.html?in=t>

time to time (it has been 1.9 US dollars per day since 2015²⁸).

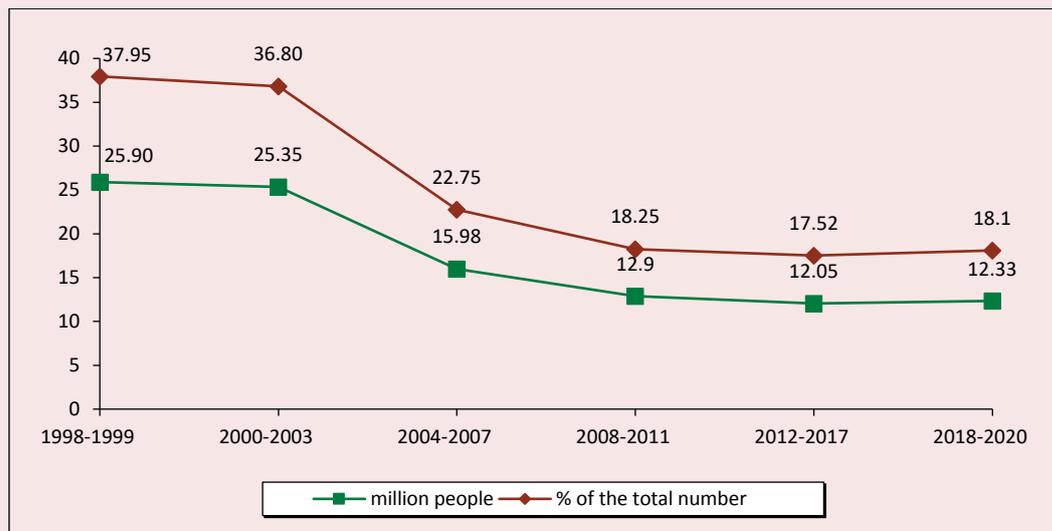
However, according to Rosstat data, in fact, since Dmitry Medvedev’s presidential term (that coincided with the 2008 global financial crisis) there have been no positive changes in the dynamics of the poverty level. Despite the fact that, in general, during Vladimir Putin’s presidential terms the share of Russians with incomes below the subsistence level has almost halved (from 25 to 12% of the total population, or from 37 to 18 million people; *Fig. 1*), since the 2008–2011 period, this indicator has remained stable (12%, or 18 million people).

The presented dynamics of official statistics are confirmed by the findings of sociological studies.

“By the time of the current [2021] April Presidential Address, the number of the registered poor was 18 million people. But it is a rosy picture painted by Rosstat. Experts, criticizing official statistics for changing the calculation parameters and embellishing the data in favor of the authorities, name higher figures. Surveys of independent sociological groups indicate that only 25% of our fellow citizens believe that their incomes are above the necessary minimum”²⁹.

Thus, based on the results of all-Russian surveys that help to identify a minimum set of household furniture and appliances that a Russian family requires so as to have a normal standard of living³⁰,

Figure 1. Russia’s population with monetary incomes below the subsistence level (average annual data)



Source: Rosstat. Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/urov_51g.doc

²⁸ From 2008 to 2015, the poverty line was 1.25 USD. Source: How the World Bank assesses the level of poverty. *TASS-DOSYE*. January 15, 2020. Available at: <https://tass.ru/info/7525997>

²⁹ Kostikov V. (Head of the “AiF” strategic planning center). At least they don’t wear bast shoes. Why has the problem of poverty so alarmed the authorities? *Argumenty i fakty*. April 28, 2021. Available at: https://aif.ru/politics/russia/horosho_chno_ne_v_laptyah_pochemu_problema_bednosti_tak_vstrevozhila_vlast

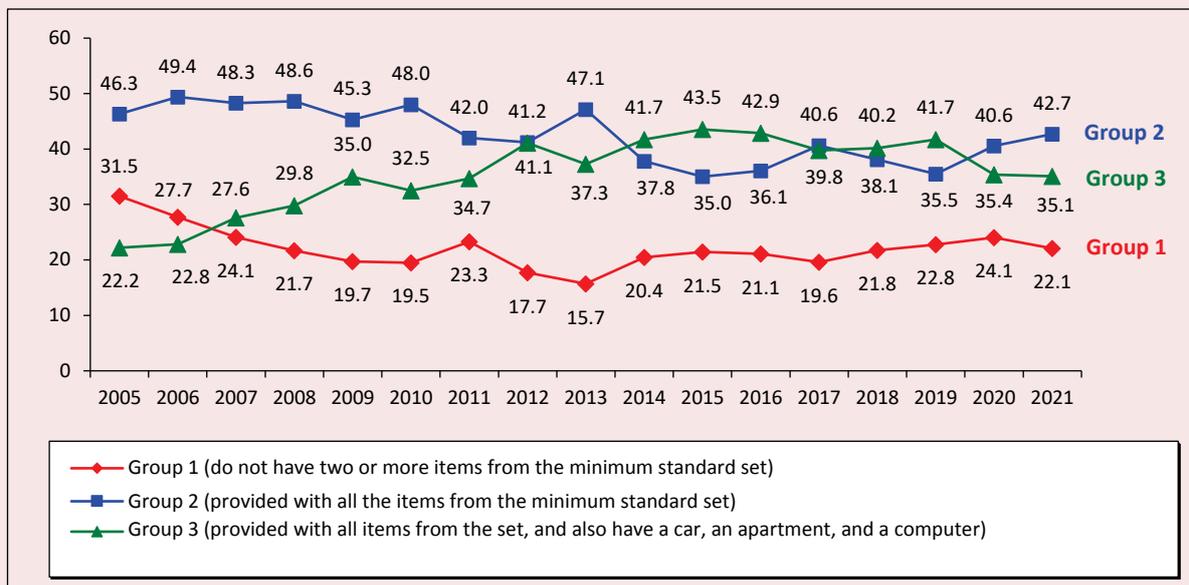
³⁰ “... in the course of the research, we identified a number of durable items that the vast majority of Russians possesses and which this majority currently recognizes as absolutely necessary for a normal standard of living. According to the results of the research, the standard set includes six items: a refrigerator (1.3% of respondents did not have it as of March 2003), a color TV (5.4% of respondents did not have it), a carpet or a palace (6.7% of respondents), as well as a washing machine, a vacuum cleaner and a set of furniture (from 14.9% to 17.9%). This means that if a Russian family does not have these items, then its standard of living is really low. The absence of two or more of the above items (first of all, a refrigerator and a TV) means that the family is poor” (Source: Davydova N.M., Popova I.P., Tikhonova N.E. (2004). The index of living standards and the stratification model of Russian society. *Sotsiologicheskiye issledovaniya*, 6, 120–130).

and also using our own accumulated database of the public opinion monitoring³¹, we analyzed the changes in the number of people within the three groups identified according to the level of provision of industrial goods and real estate³².

Trends in the number of people within these groups are obvious (Fig. 2): over the period from 2005 to 2021, the share of people who possess all the goods listed in the survey (including such

expensive things as a computer, motor vehicle, and apartment) increased from 22 to 35%; the proportion of those who have only the minimum necessities decreased from 46 to 43%; the share of those who do not have two or more things even from a minimal set (although this does not mean that such people do not have, for example, a computer or a car) decreased from 32 to 22%.

Figure 2. Dynamics of the level of provision of industrial goods and real estate (VoIRC RAS data), % of respondents



³¹ The monitoring is held since 1996 once every two months 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 volume of the sample is 1,500 people 18 years of age and older. 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 adult inhabitants of the Vologda Oblast. The method of the survey is a questionnaire poll by place of residence of respondents. Sampling error does not exceed 3%.

³² The conditionality of the designated categories is due to the fact that during the monitoring of public opinion, representatives of the so-called “social bottom” and, conversely, people who can be classified as “super-rich” are not interviewed.

The wording of the question is “How would you assess your family’s need for industrial goods, real estate?” Answer options: “We have them in a sufficient amount”, “There is no need in them”.

Three groups were formed according to the level of provision of items from the minimum set (refrigerator, TV, washing machine, vacuum cleaner, furniture and since 2009 – cell phone):

Group 1 – do not have two or more items from the set;

Group 2 – have all items from the set;

Group 3 – have all items from the set, and also have a car, an apartment, and a computer.

The answer option “cell phone” has been added to the standard set since 2009. According to Rosstat, it was in 2009 that the number of mobile communication devices per thousand people stopped growing, that is, the number of their owners reached a certain “plateau”, and we considered this “point” as the moment when the cell phone ceased to be a luxury item, and became a means of communication accessible to the vast majority of citizens.

Thus, the information obtained (even despite its conditionality and methodological limitations) reflects the following general trend registered according to the official statistics indicated above: **the standard of living (financial security) as a whole has been increasing over a significant period of time (2005–2021), alongside a virtually complete “stalling” of its dynamics in the 2010s.** Thus, over the past eight years (from 2013 to 2021), the share of representatives of group 1 increased by 6 p.p. (from 16 to 22%); group 3 – decreased by 2 p.p. (from 37 to 35%); group 2 – decreased by 4 p.p. (from 47 to 43%).

It is noteworthy that we observe similar dynamics in the subjective perception regarding the

relevance of such problems as inflation and low standard of living in the estimates of the population. The severity of these problems as a whole has increased over the period from 2000 to 2021, primarily due to negative changes in public opinion over the past 13 years.

In 2000–2004 the share of people who note the relevance of the problem of inflation and poverty decreased (by 5 p.p., from 45 to 40%, and by 18 p.p., from 51 to 33%, respectively), while their share has not actually changed since 2008 (55–60 and 40–50%, respectively; *Tab. 3*).

The results of sociological findings also indicate that the socio-demographic portrait of poverty has expanded during Vladimir Putin’s presidential terms.

Table 3. Ten most pressing issues of concern to the population*

Issue	1999		2000		2004		2008		2012		2018		2021	
	%	Rank												
Inflation	54.5	2	44.7	2	39.5	1	56.3	1	55.3	1	53.7	1	62.3	1
Low standard of living, poverty	57.1	1	50.8	1	32.8	4	41.4	2	43.2	2	51.1	2	52.3	2
Stratification of the population into poor and rich	21.3	9	27.7	7	30.8	5	31.4	4	37.5	3	35.9	3	31.9	3
Housing provision, low housing affordability	11.8	14	16.8	9	23.1	9	36.3	3	28.6	4	23.5	4	25.5	4
Economic instability, shutdown of enterprises	39.6	4	29.1	6	14.8	13	17.0	10	16.5	11	22.5	6	22.3	5
Social insecurity	32.5	6	34.4	4	28.7	6	24.8	7	22.3	8	19.9	9	22.2	6
Political instability	21.9	8	16.0	10	8.7	17	7.8	15	11.2	16	23.1	5	20.5	7
High crime rate, insecurity from criminality, hooliganism	33.4	5	36.9	3	34.2	3	28.4	5	25.5	6	19.0	10	20.0	8
Unavailability of healthcare, poor quality of medical services	12.4	13	14.6	13	24.0	8	15.8	11	18.5	9	15.7	10	18.8	9
Corruption, bribery	14.8	11	15.4	11	18.7	10	17.5	9	19.8	9	21.9	7	17.7	10

* Ranked according to the data as of 2021. In total, 23 issues appear in the survey.
Source: VolRC RAS public opinion monitoring.

To reflect this process, we examined socio-demographic features of the population groups identified according to self-assessment of income level and social self-identification, the two criteria in the public opinion monitoring. At that, the former criterion more objectively reflects the actual situation, which follows from the calculation methodology³³.

The data obtained suggest that the socio-demographic portrait of low-income population groups has not changed significantly during Vladimir Putin’s presidential terms: as in the early 2000s, they still include mainly women, middle-aged people (30–55 years old), people with secondary and incomplete secondary education, inhabitants of districts, and childless respondents.

Certain “risk groups”, according to the average annual data for the period from 2000–2003 to 2018–2021, showed tangible positive shifts. For example, among people who classify themselves as least affluent, the proportion of women decreased by 8 p.p. (from 62 to 54%), the proportion of people with secondary education decreased by 9 p.p. (from 54 to 45%); the proportion of persons aged under 30 decreased by 7 p.p. (from 26 to 19%; *Tab. 4*).

However, there is much more data that allows us to conclude that the socio-demographic portrait of the group of the bottom 20% has expanded due to the inclusion of other categories of population in it.

During the period under consideration (from 2000–2003 to 2018–2021), other categories: men (+8 p.p., from 38 to 46%), persons aged over 55

Table 4. Socio-demographic portrait of the bottom 20% group (the proportion of those who consider themselves “bottom 20%”, % of respondents)

Population group	Presidential terms (average annual data)						Dynamics (+/-), p.p.
	1998–1999	2000–2003	2004–2007	2008–2011	2012–2017	2018–2021	2018–2021 to 2000–2003
<i>Sex</i>							
Men	39.9	38.1	42.6	41.7	42.7	46.3	+8
Women	60.1	61.9	57.5	58.3	57.4	53.8	-8
<i>Age</i>							
Under 30	24.4	25.9	24.4	27.7	22.6	19.0	-7
30–55	60.6	54.9	48.5	51.3	54.9	56.7	+2
Over 55	15.1	19.2	27.1	21.0	22.4	24.3	+5
<i>Education</i>							
Secondary and incomplete secondary	51.2	53.8	57.0	49.6	49.3	44.5	-9
Secondary vocational	35.3	33.6	30.1	35.0	34.1	38.7	+5
Higher and incomplete higher	13.5	12.6	12.9	15.4	16.5	16.8	+4

³³ Self-assessment of one’s own income: the “bottom 20%”, “middle 60%” and “top 20%” groups are identified according to Vologda Oblast inhabitants’ subjective assessments of their monthly income (the wording of the question “Would you calculate the actual average monthly income per member of your family for the last month?”).

Social self-identification: based on the answer to the question “Which category do you belong to, in your opinion?” there are groups of people who classify themselves as “rich”, “people with average income”, “poor” and “extremely poor”. Since the share of the “rich” and “extremely poor” is very small, these four groups are combined in pairs (“rich and with average income”, “poor and extremely poor”) for a more objective interpretation of the data.

A variety of factors can influence people’s subjective identification with the “poor and extremely poor” or “people with average income” (comparing their current financial situation with the crisis of the 1990s; comparing their wealth with the wealth of, for example, a more affluent neighbor; comparing the standard of living in Russia and in the West (information about which is becoming more and more accessible thanks to the Internet); regular information from the media about the excess profits of celebrities and officials, the amount of bribes, etc.). When distributing population groups according to self-assessment of income level, we consider only the figure that the respondent indicated when describing the level of their own monthly income.

End of Table 4

Population group	Presidential terms (average annual data)						Dynamics (+/-), p.p.
	1998–1999	2000–2003	2004–2007	2008–2011	2012–2017	2018–2021	2018–2021 to 2000–2003
<i>Territory</i>							
Vologda	17.5	16.1	13.4	14.3	14.6	12.4	-4
Cherepovets	8.5	7.9	10.2	8.9	10.4	12.6	+5
Districts	74.1	76.0	76.4	76.8	75.1	75.1	-1
<i>Number of minor children in the family</i>							
No children	33.9	39.4	48.7	47.4	43.6	44.3	+5
1 child	33.1	31.6	28.8	29.4	30.0	24.5	-7
2 children	25.0	23.1	19.5	20.0	22.0	23.6	+1
3 and more children	8.2	5.9	3.0	3.3	4.4	7.6	+2

(+5 p.p., from 19 to 24%), persons with secondary vocational and higher education (+4–5 p.p., from 34 to 39%), and residents of Cherepovets (+5 p.p., from 8 to 13%; see Tab. 4) “came much closer” to these “traditional” groups of “poverty”.

Having analyzed the dynamics of the average annual data on social self-identification, we can draw the following main conclusion: in 2018–2021, in almost all groups, about half of the citizens (45–50%, and in some categories even more) considered

themselves to be “poor and extremely poor” (the only exceptions are persons who, according to self-estimates of income, belong to the top 20% in the region; Tab. 5). Although we cannot but note a number of positive aspects, for example, the fact that during Vladimir Putin’s presidential terms, people in most socio-demographic strata began to identify themselves with the “poor and extremely poor” less often (in the Vologda Oblast in general, their share decreased by 7 p.p., from 55 up to 48%),

Table 5. Socio-demographic portrait of the “poor and extremely poor” group (proportion of those who consider themselves “poor and extremely poor”), % of respondents

Population group	Presidential terms (average annual data)						Dynamics (+/-), p.p.
	1998–1999	2000–2003	2004–2007	2008–2011	2012–2017	2018–2021	2018–2021 to 2000–2003
<i>Sex</i>							
Men	63.1	50.8	47.7	42.8	46.8	46.1	-5
Women	68.7	57.9	52.2	46.1	48.8	48.6	-9
<i>Age</i>							
Under 30	56.6	41.4	39.9	36.9	43.0	44.5	+3
30–55	67.0	56.0	48.3	44.2	47.5	45.3	-11
Over 55	73.2	67.6	62.7	52.1	51.8	51.6	-16
<i>Education</i>							
Secondary and incomplete secondary	70.8	60.3	58.7	52.3	55.9	55.0	-5
Secondary vocational	66.4	56.1	49.4	46.6	47.6	44.9	-11
Higher and incomplete higher	58.9	46.6	41.4	34.1	39.9	42.9	-4
<i>Income groups</i>							
Bottom 20%	83.9	70.9	68.2	62.6	68.4	63.8	-7
Middle 60%	71.1	60.8	54.1	48.8	49.9	50.7	-10
Top 20%	40.5	30.0	22.2	18.7	24.8	27.3	-3

End of Table 5

Population group	Presidential terms (average annual data)						Dynamics (+/-), p.p.
	1998– 1999	2000– 2003	2004– 2007	2008– 2011	2012– 2017	2018– 2021	2018–2021 to 2000–2003
<i>Territory</i>							
Vologda	66.7	57.7	44.3	44.8	48.2	44.2	-13
Cherepovets	59.3	48.7	38.2	33.9	41.4	50.9	+2
Districts	69.4	56.9	58.7	49.9	51.2	47.4	-9
Oblast	66.3	54.9	50.2	44.6	47.9	47.5	-7
<i>Number of minor children in the family</i>							
No children	52.2	55.5	60.7	63.1	60.5	60.7	+5
1 child	28.9	29.2	26.5	23.7	24.2	21.1	-8
2 children	15.4	13.2	11.3	11.8	13.1	14.9	+2
3 and more children	3.5	2.1	1.5	1.5	2.1	3.3	+1

with the exception of persons under the age of 30 and childless persons: the proportion of the “poor and extremely poor” among them increased by 4–5 p.p. (from 41 to 45% and from 56 to 61%, respectively).

In addition, over the past period, various population groups have significantly levelled off according to the criterion of relating themselves to the category of the “poor and extremely poor”. Moreover, it happened not by increasing the share of those who had not previously referred themselves to the category of the “poor and extremely poor”, but due to fact that the share of those who in the early 2000s made up the bulk of the “poor and extremely poor” has decreased at a greater pace: these are people who assess their own income level as low (by 2018–2021, their share among the “poor and extremely poor” has decreased by 7 p.p., from 71 to 64%), and persons aged over 55 (by 16 p.p., from 68 to 52%).

Thus, we can draw two conclusions from the sociological data presented above.

First, the absence of positive dynamic changes in reducing the level of poverty has a psychological effect and is reflected, among other things, in the increasing urgency of the problem of people’s negative perception of the dynamics of the standard of living and quality of life.

Second, at present we are talking not only about the fact that almost half of the inhabitants consider themselves “poor and extremely poor”, but also about the fact that over the past 20 years the socio-demographic portrait of poverty has become more diverse; poverty has “taken root” in those strata of Russian society, whose representatives previously did not consider themselves poor (men, people with secondary vocational and higher education).

However, the main threat of poverty lies in the fact that its subjective perception becomes the main factor that has a complex psychological impact on people’s assessment of various aspects of life: their daily emotional state, attitude toward the work of authorities, toward the general state of affairs in the country, toward their own future and the future of their children.

Having analyzed the dynamics of the average annual data of the socio-demographic portrait for the periods of presidential terms according to the key indicators of public opinion monitoring, we came to the conclusion that the negative assessment is given most often by people who, according to self-assessment of their income, belong to the category of the bottom 20%. In this case, the key monitoring parameters are as follows:

1. The level of approval of the work of the RF President (as the one who takes personal

responsibility for the state of affairs in the country (Vladimir Putin spoke about this during his first inauguration) and governs the country and the

Vladimir Putin (a speech at his first inauguration on May 7, 2000): “I understand that I have taken on a great responsibility, and I know that in Russia the head of state has always been and will always be the person who is responsible for everything in the country”³⁴.

public administration system via the “hands-on approach”, and finally, as a person who enjoys people’s exceptional trust, compared to all other government institutions and political leaders).

2. Social mood (one of the most representative indicators reflecting people’s emotional and psychological well-being in everyday life).

3. Protest potential (not just reflecting people’s attitude toward the living conditions in the country (region, locality), but showing how ready they are to take part in protest actions, that is, their willingness to move from value judgments to concrete actions).

4. Stock of patience³⁵ (another indicator that reflects people’s psychological perception of the present, living conditions in the country, in one’s personal life).

5. Consumer sentiment index (an integral indicator characterizing people’s forecasts regarding the prospects for development of the economic

situation in the country and their personal financial situation; it reflects respondents’ attitude not only toward the dynamics of the standard of living and quality of life, but also toward the psychological perception of the future).

6. Confidence/lack of confidence in the future (an indicator that characterizes people’s general psychological perception of their “tomorrow”, the future of their children, which basically depends to a great extent on their perception of “today” and is its reflection).

Thus, from the total number of indicators presented in the monitoring, we selected those that most representatively reflect people’s perception of the state of affairs in the country (*Insert 2*), their present (*Insert 3*) and future (*Insert 4*). **The results of the study show that according to all the above criteria, those Vologda Oblast inhabitants who belong to the category of the bottom 20% according to self-assessment of their income, most often express negative judgments, compared with representatives of other socio-demographic groups.**

The dynamics of statistical data, the results of foreign and Russian studies, the information we received during sociological surveys conducted at the regional level since the mid-1990s – all this indicates that the problem of poverty remains urgent and it is becoming even more acute, despite the fact that in general “Russians are now living a better life, in any case, compared to the turbulent 1990s and the 2000s”³⁶.

³⁴ Vladimir Putin’s inaugural speech on May 7, 2000. *Moskovskie novosti*. May 7, 2012. Available at: https://www.mn.ru/blogs/blog_reference/80928

³⁵ Unlike the protest potential, the stock of patience reflects only people’s attitude toward the situation in the country and in their personal life (The wording of the question “In your opinion, which of the following statements describes the current situation most accurately?”, answer options: “Everything is not so bad, and life is livable”; “Life is hard, but we can endure it”; “It is already impossible to bear such plight”; “I find it difficult to answer”).

The protest potential implies not just an attitude, but the implementation of concrete behavior. It is formed by respondents who answered the question “What are you ready to do to protect your interests?” as follows: “I will take part in a rally, a demonstration”; “I will participate in strikes, protest actions”; “If necessary, I will take up arms, man the barricades”.

³⁶ The language of poverty. How has the standard of living of Russians changed in 20 years?: Transcript of the broadcast of the program “Big Country” on the OTR channel, February 15, 2020. Experts: K. Kalachev, political scientist, head of the “Political Expert Group”, and D. Zavorotny, head of the Center for Economic Strategies. Available at: <https://otr-online.ru/programmy/bolshaya-strana/yazyk-bednosti-kak-izmenilsya-uroven-zhizni-rossiyan-za-20-let-41337.html>

Insert 2

The level of approval of the RF President's work and the protest potential, % of respondents

Population group	Proportion of positive assessments of the RF President's work					Dynamics (+/-), p.p. to 2000–2003	Protest potential					Dynamics (+/-), p.p. to 2000–2003		
	Presidential terms (average annual data)						Presidential terms (average annual data)							
	1998–1999	2000–2003	2004–2007	2008–2011	2012–2017		2018–2021	1998–1999	2000–2003	2004–2007	2008–2011		2012–2017	2018–2021
Sex														
Men	12.7	65.8	69.0	63.1	59.6	53.3	-13	43.3	30.8	29.8	23.3	21.0	20.2	-11
Women	9.9	66.0	68.9	66.5	64.9	59.0	-7	30.1	22.6	23.9	18.0	17.4	19.6	-3
Age														
Under 30	10.4	68.8	70.7	64.7	61.2	53.3	-16	36.7	26.5	27.5	20.3	17.6	17.1	-9
30–55	11.0	65.2	68.6	64.4	61.4	53.9	-11	40.1	27.9	27.1	21.2	20.0	20.2	-8
Over 55	12.3	64.4	67.9	66.0	65.1	60.9	-4	27.6	21.6	24.8	19.0	18.5	20.6	-1
Education														
Secondary and incomplete secondary	11.9	61.9	65.3	60.4	56.9	51.2	-11	36.7	25.6	25.3	20.6	20.4	21.8	-4
Secondary vocational	10.5	66.6	70.2	65.8	63.8	58.1	-9	37.2	26.6	27.0	21.0	18.7	17.9	-9
Higher and incomplete higher	10.9	70.1	71.9	69.1	67.2	59.8	-10	33.2	26.0	27.6	19.3	18.0	20.4	-6
Income groups														
Bottom 20%	9.5	55.4	60.8	55.4	50.2	42.5	-13	44.6	24.3	28.0	24.9	25.8	27.6	+3
Middle 60%	11.1	68.3	71.4	66.7	64.8	59.0	-9	34.7	27.4	27.7	20.6	18.7	19.1	-8
Top 20%	15.2	73.2	76.5	72.7	71.9	66.4	-7	28.8	24.8	23.3	15.9	12.6	12.7	-12
Territory														
Vologda	10.4	66.2	65.3	64.5	61.1	52.0	-14	33.2	27.6	29.9	22.3	21.8	23.1	-5
Cherepovets	10.4	64.6	72.5	73.7	74.1	64.2	0	34.6	28.1	25.7	20.0	20.9	27.2	-1
Districts	11.9	66.5	68.8	60.7	56.9	54.5	-12	37.8	24.3	25.5	19.6	16.5	13.8	-10
Oblast	11.2	65.9	68.9	64.9	62.5	56.4	-9	35.9	26.1	26.6	20.4	19.0	19.8	-6

In the dynamics of the average annual data throughout the entire measurement period (from 1998 to the present), the lowest level of approval of the RF President's work was noted among people who, according to self-assessments of their income, belong to the bottom 20% (moreover, during Vladimir Putin's presidential terms it decreased by 12 p.p., from 55 to 43%); this group also showed the highest level of protest potential (from the first to the fourth presidential terms of Vladimir Putin, the level of protest potential increased by 4 p.p., from 24 to 28%).

Insert 3

Estimates of social mood and the stock of patience, % of respondents

Population group	Proportion of positive assessments of social mood					Population group	Proportion of positive assessments of the stock of patience							
	Presidential terms (average annual data)				Dynamics (+/-), p.p. 2018–2021 to 2000–2003		Presidential terms (average annual data)				Dynamics (+/-), p.p. 2018–2021 to 2000–2003			
	1998–1999	2000–2003	2004–2007	2008–2011			2012–2017	2018–2021	1998–1999	2000–2003		2004–2007	2008–2011	2012–2017
<i>Sex</i>														
Men	34.1	53.6	62.5	63.3	69.5	67.4	+14	44.5	67.8	72.8	73.7	77.7	75.4	+8
Women	26.7	46.5	56.6	59.7	68.1	67.0	+21	40.2	66.0	70.3	74.2	79.1	75.7	+10
<i>Age</i>														
Under 30	45.8	60.4	66.7	69.1	75.7	75.5	+15	50.5	71.9	75.0	76.7	81.2	77.4	+5
30–55	28.4	48.2	59.5	61.2	68.8	68.8	+21	40.9	65.6	71.2	73.9	78.1	75.8	+10
Over 55	19.3	40.3	52.1	54.7	64.0	61.6	+21	37.1	63.7	68.5	71.8	77.2	74.5	+11
<i>Education</i>														
Secondary and incomplete secondary	25.7	44.9	55.3	55.9	61.6	61.6	+17	37.5	63.4	67.5	70.2	72.3	71.7	+8
Secondary vocational	28.8	49.1	58.8	60.5	69.3	68.7	+20	41.8	67.4	71.9	73.5	79.3	77.2	+10
Higher and incomplete higher	38.2	56.1	64.2	68.0	75.5	71.2	+15	49.8	70.6	75.3	78.7	84.0	77.6	+7
<i>Income groups</i>														
Bottom 20%	18.7	34.8	48.8	46.0	51.0	52.1	+17	27.4	53.7	59.7	60.6	61.6	62.8	+9
Middle 60%	27.1	48.3	58.6	61.8	70.9	68.4	+20	42.8	67.1	72.3	75.3	81.2	77.1	+10
Top 20%	48.5	65.3	71.6	74.3	82.6	79.9	+15	62.2	79.1	81.9	84.6	89.7	87.0	+8
<i>Territory</i>														
Vologda	32.5	52.4	58.0	64.2	73.6	65.2	+13	45.2	67.4	70.0	73.3	81.0	72.7	+5
Cherepovets	41.8	53.0	63.1	66.2	74.3	69.6	+17	51.8	67.7	76.7	83.3	85.6	77.2	+10
Districts	23.2	46.3	57.9	57.5	63.1	66.9	+21	36.2	65.9	69.5	69.7	73.2	76.1	+10
Oblast	30.0	49.5	59.2	61.3	68.7	67.2	+18	42.1	66.8	71.4	74.0	78.4	75.6	+9

According to the average annual data for the presidential terms, “the bottom 20%” group has the lowest share of positive assessments of social mood (although from 2000–2003 to 2018–2021 it increased from 35 to 52%) and the lowest indicator of the stock of patience (during Vladimir Putin’s 1st–4th presidential terms it increased by 9 p.p., from 54 to 63%).

Insert 4

Consumer sentiment index, points and the assessment of confidence in the future, % of respondents

Population group	Consumer sentiment index					Proportion of people who don't have confidence in the future											
	Presidential terms (average annual data)				Dynamics (+/-), p.p. 2018–2021 to 2000–2003	Presidential terms (average annual data)				Dynamics (+/-), p.p. 2018–2021 to 2000–2003							
	1998–1999	2000–2003	2004–2007	2008–2011		2012–2017	2018–2021	1998–1999*	2000–2003		2004–2007	2008–2011	2012–2017	2018–2021			
Sex																	
Men	57.8	93.9	103.9	88.8	85.2	88.1	88.1	88.1	88.1	-6	no data	55.6	36.7	45.8	53.9	50.3	-5
Women	56.1	89.8	100.0	87.3	84.5	87.7	87.7	87.7	87.7	-2	no data	61.4	43.6	50.6	55.2	52.5	-9
Age																	
Under 30	67.8	102.4	109.6	93.8	89.8	92.3	92.3	92.3	92.3	-10	no data	48.9	32.1	37.0	47.6	44.3	-5
30–55	55.6	89.6	102.2	86.6	84.7	88.7	88.7	88.7	88.7	-1	no data	63.8	41.5	52.2	53.6	52.6	-11
Over 55	50.1	83.5	93.6	84.0	81.6	84.9	84.9	84.9	84.9	1	no data	58.4	46.5	52.2	61.0	53.3	-5
Education																	
Secondary and incomplete secondary	53.9	88.5	96.3	84.6	79.4	83.4	83.4	83.4	83.4	-5	no data	58.0	40.6	51.7	59.6	55.2	-3
Secondary vocational	57.0	89.9	100.8	86.5	84.6	88.9	88.9	88.9	88.9	-1	no data	63.0	42.6	50.0	55.2	51.5	-12
Higher and incomplete higher	61.4	97.1	108.9	93.2	90.7	91.3	91.3	91.3	91.3	-6	no data	56.2	38.4	43.2	48.7	47.6	-9
Income groups																	
Bottom 20%	46.9	77.0	88.9	76.2	69.7	72.9	72.9	72.9	72.9	-4	no data	69.3	45.2	55.5	64.0	54.9	-14
Middle 60%	53.6	89.5	101.0	86.3	84.3	87.8	87.8	87.8	87.8	-2	no data	61.7	41.0	50.5	54.9	53.1	-9
Top 20%	73.5	109.1	118.0	101.0	100.7	102.3	102.3	102.3	102.3	-7	no data	47.9	35.6	39.8	44.5	42.7	-5
Territory																	
Vologda	58.0	93.6	101.0	86.7	85.3	84.2	84.2	84.2	84.2	-9	no data	55.0	45.9	48.4	49.4	47.7	-7
Cherepovets	64.4	92.7	106.2	92.0	89.9	89.7	89.7	89.7	89.7	-3	no data	54.6	39.1	49.5	51.4	53.3	-1
Districts	53.0	89.3	99.8	85.9	81.9	89.0	89.0	89.0	89.0	0	no data	63.3	38.8	48.0	59.0	52.7	-11
Oblast	56.9	91.5	101.7	87.7	84.8	87.9	87.9	87.9	87.9	-4	no data	59.0	40.5	48.4	54.6	51.5	-8

* Included in the survey since 2000.

Over the entire measurement period (according to the average annual data for the presidential terms), **the lowest value of the consumer sentiment index** was noted in the group of the bottom 20% (during Vladimir Putin's presidential terms it decreased from 77 to 73 points; while any value of the CSI below 100 points means the predominance of pessimistic forecasts regarding the future of the economy and one's personal financial situation).

This group also regularly shows **the highest proportion of those who face the problem of uncertainty about the future** (even though during Vladimir Putin's 1st–4th presidential terms their share among the least affluent segments of the population decreased by 14 p.p., from 69 to 55%).

There have been no noticeable changes in the dynamics of the number of people living below the poverty line since 2008; poverty (according to the findings of our research) is “taking root” in the structure of Russian society and is affecting more social strata (according to our surveys – men, people over 55, people with secondary vocational education); finally, the subjective perceptions of poverty and the dynamics of its change become key factors determining people’s social perception of the surrounding reality, living conditions, assessment of the work of the authorities, one’s own present and future.

“The most amazing thing is that now (unlike the mid-2000s), when you study poverty in Russia, you no longer feel either shock or surprise. And this indifference is dangerous, as it characterizes the usual social depression. There is no surprise, because not only the poor are poor in Russia, almost all of Russia is poor”³⁷.

Thus, the problem is not so much poverty in itself as its complex implications that affect the state of public consciousness and behavior.

But the problem of poverty also lies in the fact that the fight against it is in direct contradiction with the interests of the part of the ruling elites, which experts call the “sixth column” and which focuses primarily on personal enrichment, which in fact means personal use of national resources.

We should bear in mind that Russia has already witnessed the time when the ineffectiveness of the fight against poverty eventually led to the collapse of statehood.

“Governmental policy in any sphere of life of the country’s citizens is the actions of PEOPLE working in the power structures... Naturally, performance indicators, as well as the ways to achieve them, depend on how these people perceive what is “good” and what is “bad”. **That is, the actions of people working in government agencies are based on a set of views and ideas, according to which they perceive and evaluate their attitude toward reality and other people. In other words, actions are based on a certain ideology.**

The existing ideology and the corresponding economic policy have caused a long-term decline in the welfare of the majority of households in Russia. **And if the ideology is not changed, then this trend will continue**”³⁸.

Thus, according to some experts, it was not the collapse of the Soviet ideology, but the long process of “fermentation” of the Soviet nomenclature, when the motives gradually shifted from public (national) to personal interests, which became the main reason why the USSR collapsed. And only after this process reached a certain “boiling point”, it became necessary to dismantle the ideology; and this process was carried out by the elites as rapidly and peremptorily as some reforms that clearly contradict the interests of the majority of the population continue to be implemented today (“monetization of benefits” (2005), reform of the Russian Academy of Sciences (2013), pension reform (2018)).

³⁷ An unpromising people (editorial). *Ekspert*. July 15, 2019. Available at: <https://expert.ru/expert/2019/29/neperspektivnyj-narod/>

³⁸ Mokiy M.S. (2021). Economic policy and ideology in modern Russia: Status and prospects. *Economics of Contemporary Russia*, 3, 77–87.

“The transition to capitalism began with the decisive dismantling of ideology and the institutions associated with it. In retrospect, in many people who feel nostalgic about the USSR, this created an idealistic illusion that it was the rejection of ideological dogmas that caused the collapse of the system, but in reality (in strict accordance with Marx’s theory) the situation was quite the opposite. The evolution of the system urged the ruling circles to get rid of the shackles of ideology”³⁹.

This trajectory, which led to the collapse of the USSR (as experts note), still exists today. Perhaps this is the major reason that explains why poverty remains our “main enemy” and why publicly stated goals and objectives aimed at alleviating it, in practice, turn into revisions of the deadlines for the implementation of plans and calculation methods; or relevant indicators “quietly” disappear from the national development goals (as it happened with the task of Russia’s joining the top five countries with the highest level of economic development: this task no longer appears in national projects after their revision in 2020).

“In fact, the trajectory of development that Russia has been following up to the present time was fully formed in the late Soviet years”⁴⁰.

In fact, when Vladimir Putin named poverty the “main enemy” of the backbone of a new post-Soviet statehood he was building, he simultaneously

declared “war” on the “sixth column”, which is quite logical after his decisions actually weakened the “fifth column”, as well as with the support of the Mishustin Government, in which, according to experts, “the work on the modernization of the economy and public administration is system-wide, comprehensive and is already bearing fruits”⁴¹.

“It is fundamentally important that the Mishustin Government was able to turn the solution of current problems into the first step toward solving strategic problems aimed at institutional changes, increasing the flexibility and effectiveness of public administration in order to address two fundamental tasks: economic growth that promotes the achievement of national development goals, and economic adaptability that promotes sustainability. Traditionally, multi-level tasks and plans have been fused into a single structured system, which is a model of the basic principles of state planning, redesigned for the needs and conditions of a modern, digital economy.

The unified plan for achieving national development goals for the period up to 2024 and for the planned period up to 2030 integrates the short-term task of returning to sustainable economic growth and growth of people’s incomes and the long-term task of achieving the above-mentioned tasks in a rapidly changing external environment in a “post-COVID” world⁴²”.

³⁹ Kagarlitsky B. From the conscientious nomenclature – to the bourgeois oligarchy. *Ekspert*. December 20, 2021. Available at: <https://expert.ru/expert/2022/01/ot-sovestlivoy-nomenklatury-k-burzhuznomu-oligarkhatu/>

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ Delyagin M. Two years of “ Sturm und drang”: The silent success of the Mishustin Government. Available at: <https://universe-tss.su/main/politika/russia/106824-mihail-deljagin-dva-goda-buri-i-natiska-molchalivij-uspeh-pravitelstva-mishustina.html>.

⁴² Ibidem.

“Mishustin’s important achievement (and here we can talk about his personal achievement) consists in the transition to a situation in which **government leaders realized their personal responsibility for the orders they received.** Indeed, the time of responsibility has not yet come, but even the information that appears in the public field suggests that all members of the government are seriously concerned about the results of their work. Someone will say that this is a normal situation, but those who were familiar with the actual performance of the government know that for many years officials had no real responsibility”⁴³.

Thus, the main task that the head of state and his inner circle are facing now is to make the fight against poverty a lively and dynamic process noticeable by all the strata (and not only by socially vulnerable ones); it can be done only through tough

“...the greatness of the state does not consist in its vast territory and global military-political influence; rather, it consists in ensuring that all Russians have a high standard of living that corresponds to our vast natural and human wealth”⁴⁴.

decisions that would limit the “appetites” of the “sixth column”.

Today, this issue, which determines the degree of legitimacy of the government and the conditions for progressive historical development initiated by the President in the 2000s, is of key importance not only for Russia. It is a matter of a larger, historical significance, since it primarily determines the security of the “rear” in the context of an extremely tense international situation and the civilizational confrontation between Russia and the West, which is entering the next phase of turbulence.

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⁴³ Khazin M. On the work of Mishustin. *Official website of M. Khazin*. January 20, 2020. Available at: <https://khazin.info/articles/10-vlast-i-obshhestvo/98539-o-rabote-mishustinaa>

⁴⁴ Perkhavko V. The deep origins of Russian imperialism. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. December 2, 2021.

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)