

EDITORIAL

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What Kind of State Do Russians Want to Live In? What Kind of State Has Been Built?



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Abstract. This article examines the challenge of translating the desired vision for Russia’s future, shared by a majority of its citizens, into practical reality. The issue’s relevance is analyzed both before and after the commencement of the special military operation in Ukraine. Drawing on nationwide and regional sociological studies, as well as expert evaluations, the authors conclude that for most citizens, the desired future for Russia is that of a strong, sovereign nation grounded primarily in traditional values – with social justice being paramount – and the principles of a social welfare state. This vision broadly aligns with the course of national development pursued by Russian President Vladimir Putin over the past 25 years. However, the authors also note a persistent skepticism among experts and the broader public regarding the feasibility of actually achieving this desired future. This problem existed both prior to and following the start of the special military operation. Its root cause is identified as the inability or unwillingness of a significant portion of the ruling elites to implement the head of state’s strategic objectives aimed at

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strengthening national sovereignty. As a result, the future of Russia remains uncertain in the eyes of many of its citizens. Consequently, Russia's struggle for continued sovereign development is framed not only as a conflict with the Collective West but also as an internal battle against the nation's own protracted domestic issues. For the President, a key imperative thus becomes laying the groundwork to bring the system of state governance into alignment with the public's vision for the country's future. This entails, above all, concluding the special military operation on terms favorable to Russia and selecting a successor capable of continuing and reinforcing the quarter-century-long course of national development. The empirical foundation of the research is based on the authors' own sociological monitoring data, nationwide surveys, and assessments from a broad spectrum of experts. The authors' contribution lies in developing the theoretical and methodological framework for scholarly inquiry into defining the contours of Russia's future vision and identifying the obstacles to its practical implementation.

Key words: vision of the future, socialism, social justice, public opinion, continuity of national development policy.

The special military operation has now been underway for almost four years. For nearly that same period, Russia has been living through a historical phase where practically everything is undergoing decisive change. As A. Dugin writes, "The SMO is a ritual of transition from one state to another. When this transition ends, we will find ourselves in a new world. This will mean a different society, different people, different borders, different principles, different ideas, different institutions, and different political orientations"¹. **What exactly** these "people", "borders", "principles", and "ideas" will be is, as they say, being decided in real time. It is therefore no coincidence that V.V. Putin states that we "live in a time when everything is changing – and changing very rapidly; changing fundamentally. **None of us can fully foresee the future. However, this does not absolve us of the duty to be prepared for anything that may happen**"²...

In early 2025, we wrote that over his 25 years in the presidency, Russian President V.V. Putin had

evolved from a "Warrior" (beginning with the resolution of the Chechen conflict) to a "Creator," and that "this transformation is the result of a complex interplay of external and internal factors, which can only be analyzed within a single historical context"³.

"Putin began his presidency in the archetypal image of a 'Warrior,' over the years becoming a full-fledged 'Ruler' who in real time amends the world order, creating a new world order in the role of a 'Creator'".

*"'Warrior' – a purposeful and active fighter striving, on the one hand, to defeat enemies, on the other – to protect friends/people/voters. 'Ruler' – creates order out of chaos and maintains it, organizes processes, builds hierarchy. 'Creator' – a person who creates a new world order in which Russia will have a completely new role, and creates new rules of the game within the country and a new elite"*⁴.

¹ Dugin A. The key to Victory lies in the 1990s. Available at: https://zavtra.ru/blogs/klyuch_k_pobede_v_svo_vezhit_v_1990-h_kapitulyatsii_ukraini_budet_nedostatochno

² Vladimir Putin's speech at the Valdai Forum on October 2, 2025. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/78134>

³ Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. (2025). Vladimir Putin's 25 years of presidential terms: "Warrior", "Ruler", "Creator". *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 18(1), p. 11.

⁴ The dynamics of Vladimir Putin's image: From Warrior to Ruler-Creator: Report. Minchenko Consulting. October 2024. 23 p. Available at: https://minchenko.ru/news/news_235.html

This “single historical context” means that the President has had to perform all three roles simultaneously, periodically bringing one to the fore – the “Warrior,”⁵ the “Ruler,”⁶ or the “Creator”⁷ – depending on the situation on the domestic and foreign political stage. Throughout, however, his focus has remained on Russia’s future, setting objectives and defining a national development strategy for decades to come.

2008: “Today we are already formulating goals and objectives not for a month or two ahead, but for 20–30 years ahead”⁸.

2012: “A long-term state approach is necessary, one that considers the interests of both regions and virtually all sectors of the economy, geopolitical and social factors. We need to look 10, 20, 30 years ahead”⁹.

2022: “Always – when making any decisions – it is necessary to single out the main thing. What is the main thing for us? To be independent, self-sufficient, sovereign and to ensure development for the future, both now and for future generations...”¹⁰.

2023: “The country has always thought about the future. And we, of course, must act in exactly the same way. Always, under any circumstances, think about the future of the people and our state. That is what we do”¹¹.

2025: “...the very idea [of building the Trans-Siberian Railway across the country to the Pacific Ocean] serves as an example for us of strategic vision for the future, where not only current needs and circumstances are taken into account, but also the interests of the country for centuries to come...”¹².

⁵ For example, at the beginning of his presidential activity during the resolution of the Chechen conflict, during the “Five-Day War” in Georgia in 2008, and in the period (especially at the very start) of the SMO.

⁶ For example, in 2000, when V. Putin announced the principle of “equal distancing of all market entities from power,” effectively beginning the fight against oligarchs within the state governance system; during the resolution of the domestic situation amid the “Bolotnaya protests” of 2011–2012; as well as during the 2008 global financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the SMO, when intensive and rapid management decisions were required to organize the country’s life under crisis, fast-changing conditions.

⁷ For example, during the “Munich Speech” in 2007, when the President of the Russian Federation outlined the contours of the future world order and clearly defined Russia’s place and role in it, setting the country’s development strategy for decades ahead. Also, during the discussion and adoption of the 2020 constitutional amendments, and at present, during the SMO, when the foundation of Russia’s future is being laid – its values are being defined, the vector of the educational and upbringing process for younger generations is being set, the emphases of national policy in the economy and other spheres of life are being arranged, and mechanisms for renewing personnel within the state governance system are being tested.

⁸ Vladimir Putin’s speech at Dmitry Medvedev’s inauguration ceremony as President of the Russian Federation on May 7, 2008. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/2>

⁹ Opening remarks by Vladimir Putin at a meeting on the development of railway infrastructure and high-speed traffic on April 26, 2012. Available at: <http://archive.premier.gov.ru/events/news/18783/>

¹⁰ Vladimir Putin’s speech at the Plenary Session of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum on June 17, 2022. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/speeches/68669>

¹¹ Vladimir Putin’s speech at the Plenary Session of the World Russian People’s Council on November 28, 2023. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/copy/72863>

¹² Vladimir Putin’s speech at the Plenary Session of the VI International Arctic Forum “The Arctic – the Territory of Dialogue” on March 27, 2025. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/copy/76554>

The President's ability to effectively combine all three roles has so far ensured (and continues to ensure) the continuity of the country's national development course over the last 25 years. Over time, this has led (as experts note) to significant geopolitical and even civilizational consequences. On December 5, 2025, the new U.S. National Security Strategy was published, in which Russia, for the first time, was not named an enemy. Some experts called this event **"revolutionary"**¹³; "it states in black and white what was unthinkable until recently: **'NATO should not be an organization for endless expansion'**"¹⁴.

During the special military operation (SMO), the President faces the necessity of undergoing the same transformation of the three roles (from "Warrior" through "Ruler" to "Creator") as he did throughout his presidencies, **but now in an "accelerated" mode, under force majeure conditions, and with a sharply increased cost for any managerial error.**

Thus, in the initial months of the SMO, the President's primary task was to protect Russian statehood against the consolidated threat from the

NATO bloc and the "Kiev regime" (hostilities in the SMO zone, the sanctions "blitzkrieg," international and domestic terrorist acts).

"The White House has published an updated U.S. National Security Strategy. The appearance of this document had been awaited for several months, but the Trump administration kept delaying – making edits. And here is the result: the strategy looks revolutionary regarding Russia, Ukraine, and Europe. The Russian Federation is not an enemy of America, talk of supporting the 'nezalezhnaya' ['independent' – referring to Ukraine] 'until victory' is no more. The EU leadership 'undermines political freedom' and is generally capable of leading the Old World into the abyss. And NATO should not 'expand endlessly'"¹⁵.

"If we discard diplomatic formulations, we see a **radical, revolutionary turn** in views on national security in the USA... The de facto removal of the 'main threat' status and a call for strategic stability – this is a recognition of the strength of the Russian position"¹⁶.

"The new U.S. National Security Strategy marks a 180-degree turn in American politics"¹⁷.

¹³ Fedorova O. "A window of opportunity for the Kremlin": What the new U.S. National Security Strategy holds for us, revealed (opinion of political scientist E. Uvarov). Available at: <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2025/12/08/okno-vozmozhnostey-dlya-kremlya-vskrylos-chto-sulit-nam-novaya-strategiya-nacbezopasnosti-ssha.html?ysclid=mj6wgofmdl721169539>

¹⁴ Opinion of F. Lukyanov, Director of Research at the International Discussion Club "Valdai" (source: "Unthinkable changes". Trump is preparing a revolution in American politics. RIA Novosti. 06.12.2025. Available at: <https://ria.ru/20251206/strategiya-2060230804.html?ysclid=mj9lfb2hed78565126>)

¹⁵ Rinaeva I. Russia is no longer an enemy: The U.S. National Security Strategy has changed revolutionarily. Available at: <https://www.kp.ru/daily/27752.5/5180672/?ysclid=mj6vlr37vb44912633>

¹⁶ Fedorova O. "A window of opportunity for the Kremlin": What the new U.S. National Security Strategy holds for us, revealed (opinion of political scientist E. Uvarov). Available at: <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2025/12/08/okno-vozmozhnostey-dlya-kremlya-vskrylos-chto-sulit-nam-novaya-strategiya-nacbezopasnosti-ssha.html?ysclid=mj6wgofmdl721169539>

¹⁷ "Unthinkable changes". Trump is preparing a revolution in American politics. Available at: <https://ria.ru/20251206/strategiya-2060230804.html?ysclid=mj9lfb2hed78565126>

On December 9, 2025, speaking at a plenary session of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, the Chairman of the State Duma, V. Volodin, noted that **“since 2022, 152 federal laws on support measures for participants of the special military operation and their families have been adopted”**. On December 9, four more federal laws were adopted, providing for:

- ✓ Free travel for a serviceman and two of his close relatives to and from the location of the military medical commission;
- ✓ Extension of benefits for adult children of SMO participants after graduation from school until September 1;
- ✓ Granting regions the authority to establish additional measures of housing provision for families of servicemen killed during their service;
- ✓ Priority right to housing provision for SMO fighters who have the status of orphans and performed tasks to repel the invasion on the territory of the Russian Federation;
- ✓ The right to receive housing or a subsidy out of turn for servicemen: raising disabled children over 18 years of age; those who decided to continue military service under contract after certain wounds and injuries¹⁸.

As the system of state governance (society, the economy, the military-industrial complex) adapted to these challenges, the President’s role as “Ruler” grew increasingly prominent. This is associated with intensive, almost daily legislative activity across the entire system of state administration, all subordinated to the goal of organizing the country’s life under the conditions of the SMO. This includes socio-economic support for SMO participants, their families, and other categories of citizens; reorienting

the economy toward cooperation with partners from friendly countries; tightening accountability for disciplinary violations in the military-industrial complex, the army, and at systemically important facilities; combating foreign agents; and reforming the system of education and upbringing for the younger generations, etc.

As noted by V. Fedorov, General Director of VCIOM¹⁹ (the Russian Public Opinion Research Center), “in a sense, the SMO has already become routine”. This is evidenced, in particular, by data from FOM²⁰ (the Public Opinion Foundation), which shows a decline in public interest in news from the special military operation zone (by 20 percentage points over 4 years, from 35 to 15%).

V. Fedorov: **“The SMO is already in its fourth year, and in a sense, it has become routine. The question arises: how will we get used to living without the SMO? A serious question, by the way. Because during this time, the economy, the market, people’s mindset, their behavior, and international ties have all been restructured. And what will happen the day after the SMO ends? Clearly, new changes are coming, also quite profound”**²¹.

According to FOM data²²:

In December 2022, among the events covered in the media that generate the greatest interest, **35% of Russians** named events related to the SMO (namely the situation on the battlefield, advances of Russian troops, drone attacks, etc.);

In December 2023, their share was **26%**;

In December 2024 – **28%**;

In December 2025 – **15%**.

That is, over almost 4 years, interest in the SMO topic has halved (from 35 to 15%), although, undoubtedly, it was and remains the “number one topic” in public perception.

¹⁸ Support measures for SMO participants and their families expanded. Available at: <http://duma.gov.ru/news/62611/>

¹⁹ All-Russian Center for Public Opinion Research (VCIOM).

²⁰ Public Opinion Foundation (FOM).

²¹ Yakovleva E. We Are entering an acute phase of competition for the new image of the country and the world (Interview with V. Fedorov). Available at: <https://rg.ru/2025/12/01/dorogoe-vremia.html?ysclid=mj1cioyl9m924994387>

²² Dominants. Opinion Field: Sociological Bulletin. Available at: <https://fom.ru/Dominanty#page=13>

For reference: From 2022 to 2025, public interest in the activities of the President of the Russian Federation (meetings, trips, speeches, etc.) increased (from 1 to 8%), as did interest in issues of geopolitical relations with the West (from 1 to 10%).

This public “habituation” to life during the SMO indicates that **people are once again beginning to be concerned about the future – “what will happen the day after the SMO ends?” – which, in turn, means it is time to bring to the fore the President’s third “public image”²³: that of the “Creator” of the future.**

Thus, for Russia, two historical processes have currently converged at a single critical point: a global one – the era of nearly 25 years of the country’s development under conditions of a “liberal fog” – and, in historical terms, a relatively concrete one – the period of the SMO. As V. Fedorov remarked, during this period “Russians are starting to talk about the future again... What exactly that future will be is the main question”²⁴.

What does the desired future image of Russia look like in people’s minds? How realistically can this image be realized given the existing external and internal challenges facing the Russian Federation? And, perhaps most importantly, to what extent does the state, led by V.V. Putin for the last 25 years, align with the vision of Russia’s desired future held by the majority of the population?

First of all, we should note that the image of the future is a topic of growing relevance in our country. Recall that back in 2015 (long before the start of the special military operation in Ukraine), an expert study²⁵ was conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IS RAS). Its results showed that **“the desired future of Russia and the realistically forecasted situation in the country in the medium term (for the next 5 years) are not simply different but are in many ways opposite.**

Unfortunately, the situation experts predicted for the country in the near future was distinctly pessimistic”²⁶.

As experts noted in 2015, Russia needed above all in the coming 5 years: “rotation of the political elite at the center and in the regions,” “transparent and legitimate elections at all levels of government”, “stability of legislation”, “a change in the state’s attitude toward the spheres of culture, education, and science, moving away from their commercialization”, etc. However, in reality (according to the experts), something quite different would happen in the country: “a decline in public incomes, rising prices, and a falling standard of living”, “a prolongation and tightening of Western sanctions against Russia”, “a sharp drop in oil and gas prices”, “the degradation of social infrastructure (healthcare, education, culture)”, etc. (including “a large-scale war in Ukraine with the direct or indirect participation of Russia and NATO countries”; *Insert 1*). It is worth noting that many of these expert predictions have indeed materialized: Russia has become embroiled in a large-scale war in Ukraine, Western sanctions have continued and intensified, and a business-oriented approach still prevails in the state’s treatment of culture. As for the “rotation of the political elite at the center and in the regions,” by and large, it has not occurred (with the exception of a number of “targeted,” though very important, personnel appointments initiated personally by the President – such as the introduction of figures like M.V. Mishustin, A.R. Belousov, I.V. Krasnov, etc., into the system of state governance).

²³ The dynamics of Vladimir Putin’s image: from Warrior to Ruler-Creator: Report. Minchenko Consulting. October 2024. 23 p. Available at: https://minchenko.ru/news/news_235.html

²⁴ Interview with V. Fedorov, 19.09.2025. Available at: <https://mash.ru/longread/208400/?ysclid=mj0zupqr7k735339624>

²⁵ The expert survey was conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IS RAS) with the participation of the ZIRCON Research Group from July to October 2015. The survey involved 154 experts: 94 from Moscow and 60 from various regions of the country. Five types of specialists were invited to participate: state and municipal employees, officials, high-level managers, heads of state universities; representatives (heads) of business structures and business associations, commercial consulting centers; representatives (heads) of public associations, NPOs, independent intellectual organizations, clubs, etc.; journalists, publicists actively publishing materials on the research topic in the media; researchers, scientists, specialists from analytical centers professionally engaged in studying the problems and prospects of the country’s development (source: Gorshkov M.K. et al. Russian Society and the Challenges of Time. Book Four. Moscow: Ves’ Mir, 2016. 400 p.).

²⁶ Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. (2018). Revisiting the issue concerning the future of Russian statehood. Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast, 11(5), 9–29.

Insert 1

Data from the all-Russian survey (IS RAS, 2015)

Distribution of assessments regarding the necessity of various factors (conditions) for achieving a desirable situation in Russian society by 2020 (average score on a scale from 1 (not necessary) to 10 (absolutely necessary) points)		Distribution of assessments regarding the probability of factors (conditions) under which Russian society will develop in the next five years (average probability score on a scale from 1 (highly unlikely) to 10 (most likely) points)*	
1. Rotation of the political elite at the center and in the regions	8.5	1. Reduction in population incomes, rising prices, falling standard of living, unemployment	7.7
2. Conducting transparent (with public oversight) and legitimate elections at all levels of government	8.1	2. Prolongation of Western countries' sanctions against Russia; loss of the ability to import critically important goods, resources, technologies, ideas	7.6
3. Stability of legislation, "rules of the game"	8.0	3. Sharp drop in oil and gas prices, crisis in the Russian oil and gas industry, reduction in budget revenues	6.7
4. Change in the state's attitude toward the spheres of culture, education, and science, moving away from their commercialization	7.7	4. Destruction of "social" infrastructure (healthcare, education, culture), departure of professionals, reduction in staff and institutions, collapse of intra-sectoral communications	6.5
5. Strengthening the role of representative government bodies, development of a multi-party system	7.2	5. Tightening of domestic policy, reduction of citizens' rights and freedoms, introduction of formal and/or informal censorship in the media, etc.	6.4
6. Lifting of sanctions by Western countries, restoration of dialogue and relations with the West	6.7	6. Mass spread of technologies for monitoring citizen behavior, total loss of privacy	6.3
7. Preservation of the foreign policy course aimed at restoring Russia's strong role in world politics and independence, active protection of national interests	6.4	7. Technological and other catastrophes, major accidents, including those caused by human factors	5.9
8. Strengthening the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church, expanding its parish network	3.6	8. Increased terrorist pressure on Russia (terrorist attacks, sabotage, intimidation)	5.1
9. Continued priority development of the raw materials sector of the economy, considering Russia's competitive advantages in the international division of labor; maintaining relatively low prices for labor and raw materials	3.0	9. Sharp increase in demand for engineering and technical professions and specialties, demand for engineers and technicians, reorientation of the labor market from the service sector to the production sector	4.6
		10. Large-scale war in Ukraine with the direct or indirect participation of Russia and NATO countries	4.5
		11. Decrease in the influx of migrants from Asian countries into Russia, increase in migration (workers, specialists) from European countries	3.7
		12. Successful import substitution, development of non-resource sectors of the economy, improvement of the investment climate	3.7
* Cells highlighted in green indicate factors that scored more than 5 points on the scale from 1 to 10, i.e., considered the most necessary by experts.		* Cells highlighted in green indicate factors that scored more than 5 points on the scale from 1 to 10, i.e., considered the most probable by experts.	

Source: Gorshkov M.K. et al. (2016). Russian Society and the Challenges of Time. Book Four. Moscow: Ves' Mir. 400 p.

“On the one hand, the state proclaims the necessity of preserving and strengthening traditional Russian spiritual and moral values, and on the other – through its directive instructions, *it pushes the sphere of culture into market-based operating conditions with the demand for non-profit cultural organizations to ‘earn more’...*

“In the economics of culture, a business approach to evaluating cultural activity still prevails, and concepts such as ‘economic efficiency,’ ‘investment,’ ‘labor productivity,’ ‘profit,’ ‘competition,’ etc., continue to be used. Meanwhile, the mechanical transfer of standard economic categories to the sphere of culture risks underestimating its social significance and also creates false expectations regarding the commercial potential of cultural goods... The market as a system of economic relations is one of humanity’s greatest achievements; however, not all spheres of public life fit into the market mechanism of economic management. And the sphere of culture is one of them»²⁷.

In 2018, three years after the IS RAS expert survey and following the Russian President’s Address to the Federal Assembly, in which he announced a course toward “a decisive breakthrough... in preserving the people of Russia and ensuring the well-being of our citizens”²⁸, similar studies were conducted by VCIOM and FCTAS RAS²⁹. These studies likewise revealed a discrepancy between the desired image of Russia’s future and the future perceived as realistically achievable – this time according to the broader population, not just experts.

According to VCIOM data³⁰ (Tab. 1):

✓ **53% of Russians** expressed the view that the president’s promises would not be fulfilled; of these, **47%** cited “corruption and bureaucracy within the government” as the reason, while another **6%** believed “the president’s proposals are too vague, non-specific, and therefore impossible to implement”;

✓ confidence that “the President outlined specific, realistic tasks that will most likely be completed in the shortest possible time” was demonstrated by **34% of citizens**.

Table 1. In your opinion, how realistic are the tasks the president outlined in his Address to the Federal Assembly of Russia, and will they be fulfilled or not? (closed-ended question, one answer), % of those who followed the Address or learned its contents from the news

Answer option	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2018
The President outlined specific, realistic tasks that will most likely be completed in the shortest possible time	28	31	31	36	29	49	34
The President outlined specific, realistic tasks, but they will not be fulfilled due to corruption and bureaucracy within the government	49	47	40	42	46	31	47
The president’s proposals are too vague, non-specific, and impossible to implement	11	12	17	16	20	8	6
Difficult to answer	12	10	12	6	5	12	13

The question was asked from 2009 to 2018. Subsequently, the wording was changed (“In your opinion, will the majority of the tasks set by Vladimir Putin in his speech be implemented in full, implemented partially, or will the majority of tasks not be implemented?” Answer options: “Will be implemented in full”, “Will be implemented only partially”, “The majority of tasks will not be implemented”, “Difficult to answer”). Source: Address of the President to the Federal Assembly: First Impressions. VCIOM Press Release. No. 3602. 2018. March 13. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=116743>

²⁷ Muzyychuk V.Yu. (2025). Culture in the Logic of the Market: Facts VS Myths: Monograph. Saint Petersburg: Aletheia. P. 13.

²⁸ The exact quote from V. Putin: “...everything is based on preserving the people of Russia and the well-being of our citizens. It is here that we need to make a decisive breakthrough” (source: Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, 01.03.2018. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/42902>).

²⁹ Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences (FCTAS RAS).

³⁰ Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly: First Impressions. VCIOM Press Release No. 3602. 2018. March 13. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=116743>

According to FCTAS RAS data, the most important tasks announced by the President in the 2018 Address to the Federal Assembly were “growth of real incomes,” “creating accessible and high-quality healthcare,” “bringing regional and local roads into good condition,” “increasing pension sizes and indexing them above inflation rates,” etc. **However, Russians believed that 8 out of 10 of the listed tasks would most likely not be fulfilled.** All of them (except for “securing Russia’s place among the world’s five largest economies” and “the emergence of affordable mortgage lending”) **were among the “top ten” of the head of state’s target objectives that, in the view of citizens, would not be realized** (*Insert 2*).

Thus, the question of Russia’s future image existed even before February 2022. After the

start of the SMO, which became the culmination of an almost 20-year period of escalating geopolitical tensions between Russia and the NATO bloc³¹, the issue of the future image and a new Social Contract in Russia became even more acute. As experts note, “the global transformation of the geopolitical system in 2022 created a problem of *fundamentally revising the social contract...*”³². The expert community raised the question: “**if we no longer want to become part of the West, then what do we want to become?**”³³. This is precisely what is evidenced by numerous attempts after the start of the SMO to create a desired image of the future, to outline its contours, and to formulate development benchmarks for the next 20, 30, or 40 years³⁴.

³¹ Let us briefly recall the main chronology of the escalating tensions in geopolitical relations between Russia and the NATO bloc:

February 10, 2007 – V. Putin’s “Munich Speech”, where he first addressed the Western political community, openly stating that Russia is a sovereign country and will pursue sovereign, independent domestic and foreign policy.

February 22, 2014 – The state coup in Ukraine.

March 21, 2014 – Federal Constitutional Laws on the accession of Crimea and Sevastopol to the Russian Federation (“Crimean Spring”). This was followed by de facto 8 years of shelling in Donbas.

December 17, 2021 – Russia presented official demands to the NATO bloc for security guarantees. However, the key ones were rejected.

February 22, 2022 – Treaties on Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between Russia and the DPR, LPR, Kherson, and Zaporozhye regions.

And only after all these events – on February 24, 2022, the start of the SMO was announced, which became a forced measure to protect the population of Donbas and, in essence, to ensure Russia’s own national security.

October 5, 2022 (already during the SMO) – Laws on the admission of the DPR, LPR, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions into the Russian Federation.

³² Balatsky E.V., Ekimova N.A. (2022). Social contract in Russia: Before and after 2022. *Journal of Institutional Studies*, 14(3), 74–90.

³³ Interview with V. Fedorov for “*Rossiyskaya Gazeta*”, June 20, 2025. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/sobytie/intervju-valerija-fedorova-rossiiskoi-gazete-na-poljakh-pmehf-2025?ysclid=mj1035zs58343855852>

³⁴ See, for example:

1. “Horizon 2040” – a project launched by the Agency for Strategic Initiatives (ASI) and the Russian Export Center in November 2022. The project’s goal is to define Russia’s position on the international stage in 2040 and propose scenarios for long-term internal development in key areas. The highest collegial governing body of ASI is the Supervisory Board, headed by the President of the Russian Federation, V.V. Putin. The state Agency for Strategic Initiatives was essentially created and overseen from the presidential administration by A.R. Belousov.

2. The project “Worldview of Russian Civilization” (authors – A. Prokhanov, V. Averyanov, M. Maslin, et al., first presented on December 9, 2023, at a conference of the Izborsk Club at St. Petersburg State University).

3. Kharichev A.D. (2025). Civilization “Russia”. *Civil Enlightenment Notebook*. No. 7. March-April.

Insert 2

Respondents' assessment of the importance and feasibility of tasks set in the annual Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation on March 3, 2018 (data from FCTAS RAS³⁵), %

Top ten most important tasks announced by the President		Top ten tasks unlikely to be implemented	
Growth of real incomes of the working population	98%	An increase in the average life expectancy of Russians to 80 years	46%
Creating affordable and high-quality medical care	98%	Putting regional and local roads in order	41%
Putting regional and local roads in order	98%	Creation of modern infrastructure in rural areas	39%
The increase in pensions, their indexation is higher than the rate of inflation	96%	The increase in pensions, their indexation is higher than the rate of inflation	38%
Creation of modern infrastructure in rural areas	95%	Growth of real incomes of the working population	37%
Creating equal educational opportunities	94%	Creating affordable and high-quality medical care	37%
Renovation and development of Russian cities, taking into account the opinions of their residents	93%	Creating equal educational opportunities	36%
An increase in the average life expectancy of Russians to 80 years	91%	Renovation and development of Russian cities, taking into account the opinions of their residents	34%
Russia's consolidation in the "five" largest economies in the world	91%	The formation of a massive middle class in the country	31%
The appearance of an affordable mortgage (with an average rate of 7%) for the majority of Russian citizens and their families	90%	Reduction of the state's share in the economy	27%
<i>Ranked in descending order within the "top ten" most important tasks.</i>		<i>Ranked in descending order within the "top ten" tasks unlikely to be implemented.</i>	

³⁵ Without illusions. Available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3638493?ysclid=mjb36kyd39147525926>

“We cannot move forward while constantly looking back. And deciding who was right – the Reds or the Whites ... 100 years ago? Or – how did we come to the collapse of the USSR 35 years ago?!... We must argue not about the past, but about the future. And set landmarks – where should we be in 5–10–20 years? What needs to be done for that?

In the late Soviet Union, there was its own quite strong futurological school and tradition, its own vivid science fiction. Alas, with the collapse of the USSR, it all disappeared. We were told: there’s no need to invent anything of our own, everything has already been invented – in the West! And if we dream, then only of building a society of the Western type here in Russia. Well, what’s the need for futurology here?! So it vanished; our future became today’s West.

And so it continued for several decades, until it became clear that this goal is both unattainable and does not inspire us... A vacuum of goal-setting emerged: if we no longer want to become part of the West – then what do we want to become? A good, substantive answer to this question has not yet been found; instead, there are only pseudo-historical fantasies...

We need our own vivid image of the future, not reducible to either our own previous experience or the experience of Western or Eastern countries. Such an image can only be invented, created, brought to life. This is our most urgent task today. Solve it – and many problems that seem unsolvable today will either be solved or simply disappear from the agenda”³⁶.

During this period (after the start of the SMO), research by FCTAS RAS showed a sharp increase in the share of Russians who would prefer to live in a socialist rather than a capitalist society.

Thus, in 2020 (before the SMO), the share of Russians who wanted to live under socialism was 26%, while in 2022 (the first year of the SMO) it increased to 48% (a rise of 22 percentage points; *Tab. 2*).

For comparison, the proportion of those who wanted to live in a capitalist society decreased from 21 to 12% over the same period (a drop of 9 p.p.).

Overall, during the period of V.V. Putin’s presidencies (from 2000 to 2025), the share of those wishing to live under socialism increased from 31 to 44% (+13 p.p.), while the share for capitalism decreased from 21 to 14% (-7 p.p.).

Table 2. What kind of society would Russians prefer to live in? (Data from FCTAS RAS), % of respondents

Answer option	Years											Dynamics (+/-)		
	1998	2000	2004	2008	2012	2018	2020	2022	2023	2024	2025	2025 to 2000	2022 to 2020	2025 to 2022
In a socialist one	38	31	34	33	39	29	26	48	48	43	44	+13	+22	-4
In a capitalist one	22	21	22	18	18	24	21	12	5	15	14	-7	-9	+2
In some other	10	12	8	10	7	6	4	6	10	7	6	-6	+2	0
Difficult to answer	30	36	36	39	36	41	49	34	37	35	36	0	-15	+2

*Data for 2021 are not available.
 Calculated from: Levashov V.K., Velikaya N.M., Shushpanova I.S. et al. (2025). “How Are You, Russia?” Express Information. 55th Stage of the All-Russian Sociological Monitoring, May 2025: Bulletin. FCTAS RAS. Moscow: FCTAS RAS. P. 56.

³⁶ Interview with V. Fedorov for “Rossiyskaya Gazeta”, June 20, 2025. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/sobytie/intervju-valerija-fedorova-rossiiskoi-gazete-na-poljakh-pmehf-2025?ysclid=mj1035zs58343855852>

The reason for the growing public demand specifically for socialism in Russia’s future image is largely connected to an acute deficit of social justice, which has long been noted in Russian society. As early as 2013, RAS Academician M.K. Gorshkov wrote: “*Russia, for the most part, does not accept an unjust society... Successful people today reason like this: ‘Alright, I’m on my feet. But I have children, grandchildren. Will there be a place for them in an unjust society? Where is the guarantee that tomorrow they won’t find themselves in the same place as my low-income neighbors? Today I buy my way out of problems. But I am not eternal...’.* *Society has matured. People have become more measured in their assessments; they are not against innovations, but on one condition: the foundation of society must remain traditional values, in which lies Russia’s strength*”³⁷.

According to data from VoIRC RAS, the majority of people (50–60%) note that “Russian society is structured, on the whole, unfairly” (Fig. 1). This is largely due, as experts note, to “radically liberal reforms guided by far from the best examples of Western economic thought”.

“The stubborn continuation of radically liberal reforms, guided by far from the best examples of Western economic thought. The avalanche-like breakdown of property relations and the unregulated, uncontrolled privatization of state property and national natural resources essentially opened the floodgates for unlimited and unjustified growth of social inequalities.

As a result, in just 10–15 years, the country received enormous differentiation in the social status of various groups of the Russian population, and social inequalities acquired sharper forms than ever before”³⁸.

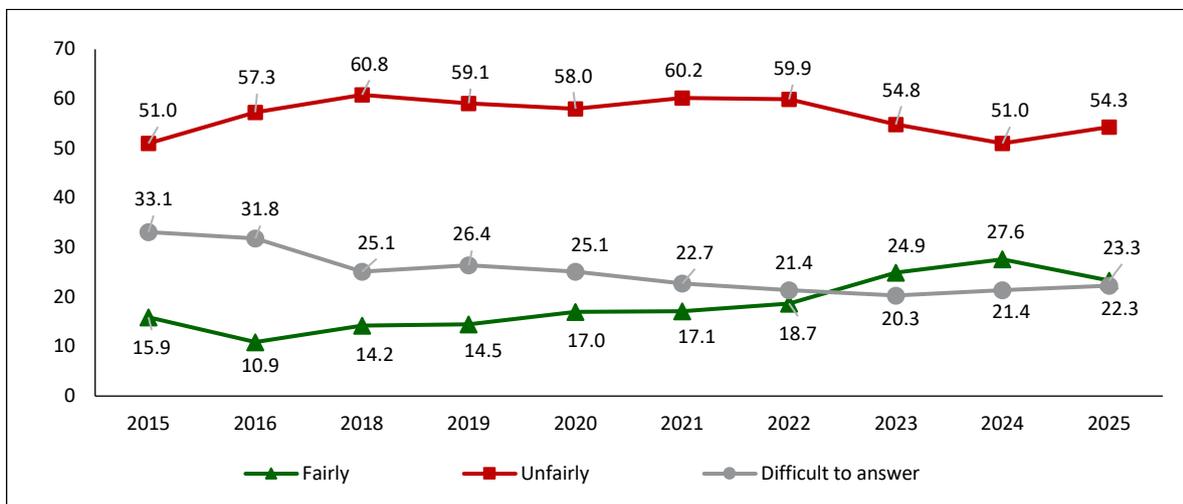


Figure 1. Distribution of answers to the question: “In your opinion, is modern Russian society structured fairly or unfairly on the whole?”*, % of respondents

* The question has been asked since December 2015.

Source: VoIRC RAS data.

³⁷ Gorshkov M.K. What is justice like? Available at: <https://aif.ru/society/42337?ysclid=mj9mbkg3f3757810455>

³⁸ Gorshkov M.K. (2021). The problem of equality and justice in Russia. In: Gorshkov M.K., Kozyreva P.M., Li Peilin, Chernysh M.F. (Eds). Problems of Social Equality and Justice in Russia and China: Monograph. Moscow: Novy Khronograf. P. 10. (Source: <https://www.isras.ru/publ.html?id=10458&ysclid=mj9mphich256843524>).

With the start of the SMO, the share of those who note the unfairness of modern Russian society's structure began to gradually decline (by 9 p.p., from 60% in 2021–2022 to 51% in 2024). This was most likely related to the “rally ‘round the flag’” effect amid a sharp aggravation of national security threats and the consolidation of society around the President of the Russian Federation, who declared a strategic course toward strengthening national sovereignty based on traditional Russian values³⁹.

However, according to the latest data (for 2025), the proportion of people who consider Russian society to be unfair has increased again (from 51 to 54%).

“What do people expect from the state? Above all, social justice”⁴⁰, noted M.K. Gorshkov, Director of the Institute of Sociology FCTAS RAS, in one of his 2025 interviews. Social justice is the foundation of a social state and is included in the list of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values⁴¹, which have been proclaimed “**the foundation of Russian society, allowing for the protection and strengthening of Russia’s sovereignty**”⁴².

“The state is obliged to promote the economic and social progress of **all its citizens**, for ultimately the development of one is the condition for the development of the other, and it is in this sense that we speak of a social state... **The function of the state** is to maintain **absolute equality in rights for all different social classes**, for each private self-determining individual, through its power”⁴³. (Lorenz von Stein – author of the term “social state”, German historian, philosopher, and economist).

However, as experts note, among citizens, “the dominant opinion is that the creation of a just society in Russia is unlikely even in the medium term”⁴⁴. This forces us to recall once again the words of VCIOM Director V. Fedorov: “**Russians are starting to talk about the future... What exactly that future will be is the main question**”⁴⁵.

The significant role of social justice in the desired image of Russia’s future is also evidenced by the fact that, in people’s opinion, “justice” (44%) and “collectivism” (48%) are the key characteristics of socialism (and by a large margin over any other answer options; *Tab. 3*).

³⁹ See, for example: Presidential Decree 809 “On the Approval of the Fundamentals of State Policy for the Preservation and Strengthening of Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values” dated November 9, 2022.

⁴⁰ Chetverikova A. For Russian citizens, justice and law are more valuable than money (interview with M.K. Gorshkov). Available at: <https://rg.ru/2025/05/21/kak-reshit-neravenstva.html>

⁴¹ See Clause 1.5 of Presidential Decree 809 dated November 9, 2022 “On the Approval of the Fundamentals of State Policy for the Preservation and Strengthening of Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values”.

⁴² See Clause 1.7 of Presidential Decree 809 dated November 9, 2022 “On the Approval of the Fundamentals of State Policy for the Preservation and Strengthening of Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values”.

⁴³ Roik V.D. Conceptual foundations for the formation of a social state in Russia: Issues of population incomes and social budgeting. Available at: <http://viperson.ru/>

⁴⁴ Gorshkov M.K. (2021). The problem of equality and justice in Russia. In: Gorshkov M.K., Kozyreva P.M., Li Peilin, Chernysh M.F. (Eds). Problems of Social Equality and Justice in Russia and China: Monograph. Moscow: Novy Khronograf. P. 30.

⁴⁵ Interview with V. Fedorov, 19.09.2025. Available at: <https://mash.ru/longread/208400/?ysclid=mj0zupqr7k735339624>

However, while “collectivism” has become a less significant criterion reflecting the essence of socialism over the period from 1998 to 2025 (down 10 p.p., from 58 to 48%), “social justice”, on the contrary, has come to be assessed significantly more often by Russians as the main characteristic of a socialist society (up 15 p.p., from 29 to 44%; *Tab. 3*). Ultimately, this indicates that the “deficit” of social justice is one of the system-forming, essential characteristics of the state under the leadership of V.V. Putin over the past 25 years.

Thus, to date, Russians’ conception of Russia’s future image is quite clear: a strong,

sovereign state oriented primarily toward the values of socialism (a social state), the most significant of which is social justice. It is important to note that this conception did not arise solely against the backdrop of national security threats during the SMO but was largely shaped by the targeted, methodical long-term policy of the head of state (specific steps and managerial decisions by the President, the Government, and the State Duma of the Russian Federation in this direction are presented in *Insert 3* (over 25 years) and *Insert 4* (for the period from October to December 2025)).

Table 3. Dynamics of respondents’ opinions on what the concept of “socialism” means to them, % of respondents

Answer option*	Year											Dynamics (+/-)		
	1998	2000	2004	2008	2012	2018	2020	2022	2023	2024	2025	2025 to 1998	2022 to 2020	2025 to 2022
												Entire measurement period	First SMO year vs. last pre-SMO year**	Period of the SMO
Collectivism	58	55	53	44	45	39	38	39	43	49	48	-10	+1	+9
Justice	29	25	25	34	34	30	29	44	44	46	44	+15	+15	0
Patriotism	40	40	38	36	36	41	48	39	38	38	33	-7	-9	-6
Order	43	39	41	38	40	38	44	35	35	38	31	-12	-9	-4
Morality	23	20	21	25	21	17	25	24	25	27	24	+1	-1	0

*The table presents the first “top five” most common answer options (out of 23).

**The question was not asked in 2021.

Calculated from: Levashov V.K., Velikaya N.M., Shushpanova I.S. et al. (2025). “How Are You, Russia?” Express Information. 55th Stage of the All-Russian Sociological Monitoring, May 2025: Bulletin. FCTAS RAS. Moscow: FCTAS RAS. P. 56.

Insert 3

Key steps and managerial decisions by the President that have influenced Russians' perception of the country's desired future image

- ✓ February 28, 2000 – The principle of “equal distancing of all market players from power” (During a meeting with oligarchs, V. Putin informed them that their work should center around the national idea, not any specific political figure. This marked the beginning of an active policy to reduce the influence of oligarchs on political decision-making in the state).
- ✓ April 4, 2005 – Federal Law 32 “On the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation”.
- ✓ May 6, 2011 – At an interregional conference of the “United Russia” party in Volgograd, V. Putin proposed the establishment of the All-Russian Public Movement “People's Front ‘For Russia’” (People's Front) or the All-Russian People's Front (ONF).
- ✓ December 12, 2012 – Subjective assessment of public opinion was introduced into the list of criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of government bodies⁴⁶.
- ✓ March 21, 2014 – Federal Constitutional Law 6 «On the Admission of the Republic of Crimea into the Russian Federation and the Formation of New Subjects within the Russian Federation – the Republic of Crimea and the Federal City of Sevastopol».
- ✓ March 3, 2018 – Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation (which announced a course toward «breakthrough development in preserving the people and ensuring the well-being of our citizens»).
- ✓ July 1, 2020 – All-Russian vote on approving amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation.
- ✓ February 24, 2022 – Start of the Special Military Operation (SMO).
- ✓ October 5, 2022 – Federal Constitutional Laws 5–8 «On the Admission into the Russian Federation of the Donetsk People's Republic, the Lugansk People's Republic, the Zaporozhye Region, and the Kherson Region».
- ✓ November 9, 2022 – Presidential Decree 809 «On the Approval of the Fundamentals of State Policy for the Preservation and Strengthening of Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values».
- ✓ March 31, 2023 – Decree 229 «On the Approval of the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation» (where Russia was for the first time proclaimed a «distinct state-civilization»).
- ✓ May 8, 2024 – Decree 314 «On the Approval of the Fundamentals of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Historical Enlightenment».
- ✓ November 25, 2025 – Decree of the President of the Russian Federation 858 «On the Strategy of the State National Policy of the Russian Federation for the Period until 2036».

⁴⁶ On Assessing Citizens' Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Heads of Territorial Bodies of Federal Executive Authorities (Their Structural Subdivisions) and Territorial Bodies of State Extra-Budgetary Funds (Their Regional Branches) Taking into Account the Quality of Public Service Delivery, Heads of Multifunctional Centers for Providing State and Municipal Services Taking into Account the Quality of Organizing the Provision of State and Municipal Services, as well as on Using the Results of the Said Assessment as Grounds for Decisions on the Early Termination of the Performance of Official Duties by the Relevant Heads: RF Government Resolution 1284.

Monitoring of regulatory legal acts (laws, decrees) signed by the President of the Russian Federation from October 25 to December 18, 2025⁴⁷

MEASURES TO SUPPORT SMO PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR FAMILIES, TO DEVELOP THE MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX, MOBILIZATION, ORGANIZATION OF MARTIAL LAW, AND ENHANCE ANTI-TERRORISM PROTECTION OF FACILITIES

October 27 – Federal Law 387 “On Amendments to the Federal Law ‘On Veterans’”. It was decided to include, among combat veterans and war invalids, individuals who, from October 1, 2022, to September 1, 2023, concluded agreements (or had other legal relationships) with the Ministry of Defense and performed tasks as part of special units of military formations during the SMO.

October 27 – Federal Law 392 “On Amendments to Articles 458 and 459 of the Criminal Procedure Code of the Russian Federation.” The procedure for sending criminal case materials abroad and executing foreign requests has been revised. If procedural actions involving a suspect or accused are impossible during pre-trial or trial proceedings due to their location abroad, the criminal case materials are transferred to the Prosecutor General’s Office of the Russian Federation, which, if grounds exist, applies to the competent authorities of a foreign state with a request for criminal prosecution. Thus, the possibility of sending criminal case materials for criminal prosecution abroad will no longer depend on the citizenship of suspects and accused persons, the stage of criminal proceedings, or the location of the crime falling under Russian jurisdiction. The mechanism for executing requests for criminal prosecution or initiation of a criminal case in Russia has been similarly changed.

November 4 – Federal Law 404 “On Amendments to the Code of the Russian Federation on Administrative Offenses”. Introduces administrative liability for failure to comply with a decision of the interdepartmental body ensuring coordination of the activities of federal executive authorities, executive authorities of constituent entities of the Russian Federation, and local self-government bodies in countering extremist activity and implementing state policy in the field of countering extremism.

November 5 – Decree of the President of the Russian Federation 818 “On Amendments to Decree of the President of the Russian Federation 554 of June 28, 2024, ‘On Monthly Compensation Payments to Certain Categories of Military Servicemen Performing Military Service under Contract’”. Contract servicemen participating in the SMO who previously received a pension for long service are entitled to an additional payment equal to 100% of their pension. This compensation now also applies to servicemen repelling an invasion on the state border, as well as in regions adjacent to the zones of the special military operation. **November 17 – Federal Law 420 “On Amendments to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation”**. It was decided to prosecute from the age of 14, inter alia, for facilitating terrorist activity, organizing a terrorist community and participating in it, sabotage, facilitating sabotage activity, undergoing training for sabotage purposes, organizing a sabotage community and participating in it. The list of cases where a suspended sentence is impossible has been expanded. Statutes of limitations for all sabotage-related crimes have been abolished.

November 28 – Federal Law 439 “On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation”. Provides for the granting of state social assistance on the basis of a social contract to combat veterans who took part in the SMO and some other categories of combat veterans, in order to stimulate their active steps to engage in individual entrepreneurial activity.

December 15 – Federal Law 490 “On Amendments to Article 68 of the Federal Law ‘On Education in the Russian Federation’”. SMO participants, after receiving secondary vocational education, have the right to receive secondary vocational education again in another profession or specialty at the expense of budgetary allocations from the federal budget, budgets of constituent entities of the Russian Federation, and local budgets.

⁴⁷ The insert is a continuation of the monitoring of the most important regulatory legal acts signed by the President of the Russian Federation, which has been conducted since June 2022 (the first issue of monitoring is presented in the article: Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. (2022). A difficult road after the Rubicon. Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast, 15(3), 9–41.

**MEASURES FOR INFORMATION SECURITY, REGULATION OF FOREIGN AGENTS' ACTIVITIES,
AND EDUCATION/UPBRINGING OF YOUNGER GENERATIONS**

October 27 – Federal Law 385 “On Amendments to Article 4 of the Federal Law ‘On Countering Extremist Activity’”. Decisions of the Interdepartmental Commission on Countering Extremism become mandatory for execution by federal, regional, and municipal authorities.

November 4 – Decree of the President of the Russian Federation 798 “On the Day of the Languages of the Peoples of the Russian Federation.” To preserve and support the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation, the Day of the Languages of the Peoples of the Russian Federation is established (September 8).

November 4 – Decree of the President of the Russian Federation 799 “On the Day of the Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of the Russian Federation.” To preserve the traditional way of life, economic activities, crafts, and unique culture of the indigenous small-numbered peoples of the Russian Federation, the Day of the Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of the Russian Federation is established (April 30).

November 17 – Federal Law 422 “On Amendments to the Federal Law ‘On Objects of Cultural Heritage (Historical and Cultural Monuments) of the Peoples of the Russian Federation’.” Amendments have been introduced regarding the preservation and integration of cultural heritage sites into economic circulation. Information about them will be included in the unified housing construction information system (type of cultural heritage object, its protected attributes, location, registration and cadastral numbers, category of historical and cultural significance, information about the owner’s preservation obligation, the object’s condition, etc.). The procedure for placing this data in the system is defined. It will be disclosed on a website designated by the Government.

November 25 – Decree of the President of the Russian Federation 858 “On the Strategy of the State National Policy of the Russian Federation for the Period until 2036.” For the first time, the Strategy introduces specific performance indicators. By 2036, the level of all-Russian civic identity should be no less than 95%, the share of Russians positively assessing relations between representatives of various nationalities – no less than 85%, and those noting the absence of discrimination against themselves on national or linguistic grounds – no less than 90%. The results of implementing the Strategy should be the cohesion of the people, strengthening the status of the Russian language, and a reduction in the number of conflicts.

November 28 – Federal Law 441 “On Amendments to the Federal Law ‘On Education in the Russian Federation’.” Starting January 1, 2026, ninth-graders who have not passed the State Final Attestation (GIA) will be able, while preparing for a retake, to simultaneously receive free training in vocational programs for workers and employees. The list of relevant professions and organizations where such training can be completed will be determined by the regions.

December 8 – Decree of the President of the Russian Federation 901 “On the Establishment of the International Fund ‘International Projects of the Presidential Grants Fund’.” The Fund’s goals are to develop and implement programs and projects in the field of social development (including assistance to persons in need), healthcare, culture, art, science, education, enlightenment, preservation of historical memory, physical culture, sports, tourism, ecology, development of non-profit organizations, charity, and volunteerism on the territories of foreign states, as well as comprehensive support, monitoring, and evaluation of the results of such programs and projects; participation in the development and implementation of international programs and projects, and in international cooperation in humanitarian, environmental, cultural, and other areas based on decisions of the President of the Russian Federation.

December 15 – Federal Law 462 “On Amendments to the Federal Law ‘On Countering the Legalization (Laundering) of Proceeds from Crime and the Financing of Terrorism’ and Articles 41 and 51 of the Federal Law ‘On Special Economic Measures and Forcible Measures’.” Individuals for whom there is information about involvement in extremism, terrorism, or sabotage will be required to coordinate financial transactions with Rosfinmonitoring (the Federal Financial Monitoring Service). Not only the salaries of these individuals will come under control but also other incomes to be determined by the Government. Banks will be required to block transactions of individuals who are wanted and included in the list of terrorists and extremists.

MEASURES FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC SUPPORT OF BROAD SEGMENTS OF THE POPULATION, STRENGTHENING THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY, INCLUDING ON THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA

November 28 – Federal Law 429 “On Amending Article 1 of the Federal Law ‘On the Minimum Wage’.” Starting January 1, 2026, the minimum wage will increase by 20.7% to reach 27,093 rubles.

November 28 – Federal Law 432 “On Amendments to the Budget Code of the Russian Federation and Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation.” Starting January 1, 2026, 100% of revenues from the gambling tax will be allocated to the federal budget instead of regional budgets. The base price for oil will be gradually reduced from 2026 by \$1 per barrel to \$55 per barrel by 2030, with subsequent annual indexation of 2% starting in 2031. Revenues from the technological levy will be directed to support and finance initiatives in the electronic and radio-electronic industry.

November 28 – Federal Law 435 “On Granting Social Guarantees to Women Awarded the Title ‘Mother-Heroine’.” Women awarded the title “Mother-Heroine” (after 2022) are granted the rights and benefits established for Heroes of Socialist Labor and Heroes of Labor of the Russian Federation.

November 28 – Federal Law 443 “On Amendments to Articles 1 and 2 of the Federal Law ‘On Additional Monthly Material Support for Citizens of the Russian Federation for Outstanding Achievements and Special Merits to the Russian Federation’ and the Federal Law ‘On Insurance Pensions’.” Women awarded the title “Mother-Heroine” (after 2022) are granted the right to receive additional material support provided for by the Federal Law “On Additional Monthly Material Support...” for Heroes of Socialist Labor and Heroes of Labor of the Russian Federation. Furthermore, amendments are made to the Federal Law “On Insurance Pensions,” removing limitations when calculating periods of childcare up to the age of one and a half years for inclusion in the insurance record for pension eligibility.

December 8 – Decree of the President of the Russian Federation 896 “On the Strategy for the Development of Healthcare in the Russian Federation for the Period until 2030.” It provides for the development of medical rehabilitation for persons with disabilities, including SMO participants; ensuring independence in the production of domestic high-tech medicines; full integration of healthcare systems in new regions with the country's national healthcare system; and the development of clinical decision support systems using artificial intelligence.

- ✓ The share of citizens leading a healthy lifestyle should increase to 13.6%;
- ✓ Alcohol consumption should decrease to 7.8 liters of ethanol per capita per year;
- ✓ The share of medicines produced in Russia in the total volume of vital and essential drugs will increase to 90%;
- ✓ The level of technological independence in healthcare should reach 80%;
- ✓ The staffing level of doctors in institutions providing free medical care will be 43.46 per 10,000 population.

Nevertheless, in 2025 (just as in the IS RAS expert survey conducted 10 years ago, in 2015), the question arises: **how realistic is this desired future image?** It is important to note that the conclusions reached by IS RAS experts in 2015 remain quite valid today:

- ✓ “the only actors in Russia are the President and his inner circle”;
- ✓ “there are no other serious subjects capable of influencing the future”;
- ✓ there is a “high probability” of the continuation of processes assessed by experts as “undesirable for the country”;
- ✓ “the most likely scenario for the development of Russian society is a pessimistic (negative) one – but with the preservation of the dominant role of the state”⁴⁸.

A. Dugin: “In essence, **it is he [V. Putin] who is the main load-bearing structure of our entire state-civilization.** A significant part of the elites clearly lags behind the President, his will, and instructions. Even those representatives of power completely loyal to Putin and oriented towards Victory often turn out to be incompetent and unsuitable for this activity. And that is why the head of state turned to the necessity of recruiting a new elite from SMO participants... **That is, the unhurried, unawakened, internally unmobilized old elites are now letting our President down**”⁴⁹.

“In the summer of 2022, after the start of the SMO, we outlined new forks:

- 1) Continuation of the inertial model of Russia’s adaptation to the world economy as a raw material semi-periphery... Result – stagnation and sliding into a protracted crisis for many years.
- 2) Support for costly mega-infrastructure projects, increased etatization of the economy, elimination of private initiative, price regulation, increasing closure from the external world. Result – sliding into a pseudo-USSR with all the ‘charms’ of an inflexible planned economy.
- 3) A model of stimulating economic growth through realizing the potential of both internal and external development drivers. The main feature – orientation towards rapid economic growth rates.

Today it can be stated that a combination of the first and second options was chosen – an inertial scenario of economic development with a parallel strengthening of the trend towards etatization and economic isolation”⁵⁰.

Why do these sociologists’ conclusions remain relevant? Because **there is still no answer to the question “What kind of state are we building, and what have we built up to the present moment?” – neither from the state itself nor, consequently, from the broader population.**

Many experts point to the emergence of a “*dangerous vacuum*” in the country. As S.A. Karaganov notes, “the ruling stratum of the state is dominated by economist-technocrats”, who are “*incapable of leading the country and the people to new horizons*”. It is therefore no coincidence, as RAS Corresponding Member Zh.T. Toshchenko emphasizes, that many Russians “*still do not understand what kind of state, what kind of society they are building*”.

⁴⁸ Gorshkov M.K. et al. (2016). Russian Society and the Challenges of Time. Book Four. Moscow: Ves’ Mir. P. 346.

⁴⁹ Dugin A.G. Where the elites are pulling Putin. Available at: https://tsargrad.tv/articles/dugin-molchat-ne-stal-i-raskryl-karty-kuda-jelity-tjanut-putina_1057108?ysclid=mjbbpe421361535526

⁵⁰ Politburo 2.0 Report. The Besieged Fortress. An Analytical Review of the State of Russian Elites. Official Website of “Minchenko Consulting”. 25.11.2025. Available at: https://minchenko.ru/analitika/analitika_139.html

S.A. Karaganov: “A dangerous vacuum has now formed... today, facing a new major challenge, we feel the need to comprehend our place in the world and, most importantly, to comprehend who we are and what is valuable to us.

In the speeches of the President, in the statements of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in the latest Foreign Policy Concept of Russia, many ideas have increasingly begun to sound which, it seems, could form the basis of Russia’s ideological platform, its society and true elite, returning the country to its roots while powerfully propelling it towards a triumphant future. **But a more or less clear outline, let alone one approved at the state level and purposefully, yet naturally creatively (through discussions and probable adjustments) offered to broad circles of the elite and introduced into public consciousness, does not yet exist...**

In the ruling stratum of the state, economist-technocrats, ‘political technologists’ still predominate. They are useful for current management, they do much that is needed, **but they are incapable of leading the country and people to new horizons, ensuring deep, ideological unity of the people and the government in the difficult, fateful struggle into which the country and the world have entered**⁵¹.

Zh.T. Toshchenko: “**To this day, it is not clear to many Russians what kind of state, what kind of society they are building.** The social state proclaimed in the Constitution of the Russian Federation, whose policy is aimed at creating conditions ensuring a dignified life and free development of the individual (Article 7.1), denotes a certain general guideline which has not been sufficiently specified for understanding and embodiment in current socio-economic, socio-political, and everyday life”⁵².

Furthermore, data from monitoring sociological studies by Vologda Scientific Center of the RAS (VolRC RAS) show that even with the obvious “preponderance” of socialism (34%) over capitalism (19%) in people’s ideas about Russia’s desired future, the most common answer to the question “In what kind of society would you like to live?” is “**in some other, difficult to answer**” (46%; *Tab. 4*).

This answer option predominates across all major socio-demographic categories of the population – among men and women (46–47%), among representatives of different age groups (from 43 to 53%, especially among those under 30), among people with different income levels

(40–48%) and levels of education (44–48%), living both in cities (37–49%) and in rural areas (50%; *Tab. 4*).

The cited expert assessments and sociological survey data directly indicate that Russia’s desired (socialist and sovereign) future appears weakly attainable to its citizens; as it was 10 years ago, it remains “in a fog”. Recall that the proportion of people uncertain about the future, although declining in recent years (from 56% in 2023 to 51% in 2025), **still constitutes more than half of citizens.** According to survey data, **they state that they “face the problem of uncertainty about the future”** (since 2021, their share has been 51–57%; in 2015 it was 55%; *Fig. 2*).

⁵¹ Karaganov S. (2025). The Living Dream-Idea of Russia, The Code of the Russian in the 21st Century: A Report within the Project “The Russian Dream-Idea and the Code of the Russian in the 21st Century” under the Auspices of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy and the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs of the National Research University “Higher School of Economics”. July 2025. P. 17.

⁵² Toshchenko Zh.T. (2025). The Fates of the Social Contract in Russia: Evolution of Ideas and Implementation Lessons: Monograph. Moscow: FCTAS RAS.

Table 4. What kind of society would you like to live in?, % of respondents

Indicator	In a socialist one	In a capitalist one	In some other; difficult to answer
Gender			
Male	34.4	19.5	46.1
Female	34.2	19.2	46.6
Age			
under 30	29.2	17.7	53.1
30-55	33.8	18.9	47.4
over 55	36.7	20.5	42.8
Education			
Secondary and incomplete secondary	33.1	20.1	46.8
Secondary vocational	34.8	17.4	47.9
Higher and incomplete higher	34.9	20.8	44.2
Income groups			
Bottom 20%	33.0	18.7	48.3
Middle 60%	34.9	19.0	46.1
Top 20%	38.5	22.0	39.6
Territories			
Vologda	34.1	17.4	48.6
Cherepovets	40.2	22.7	37.1
Districts	31.0	18.5	50.4
Region	34.3	19.3	46.4

Source: data from VoIRC RAS.

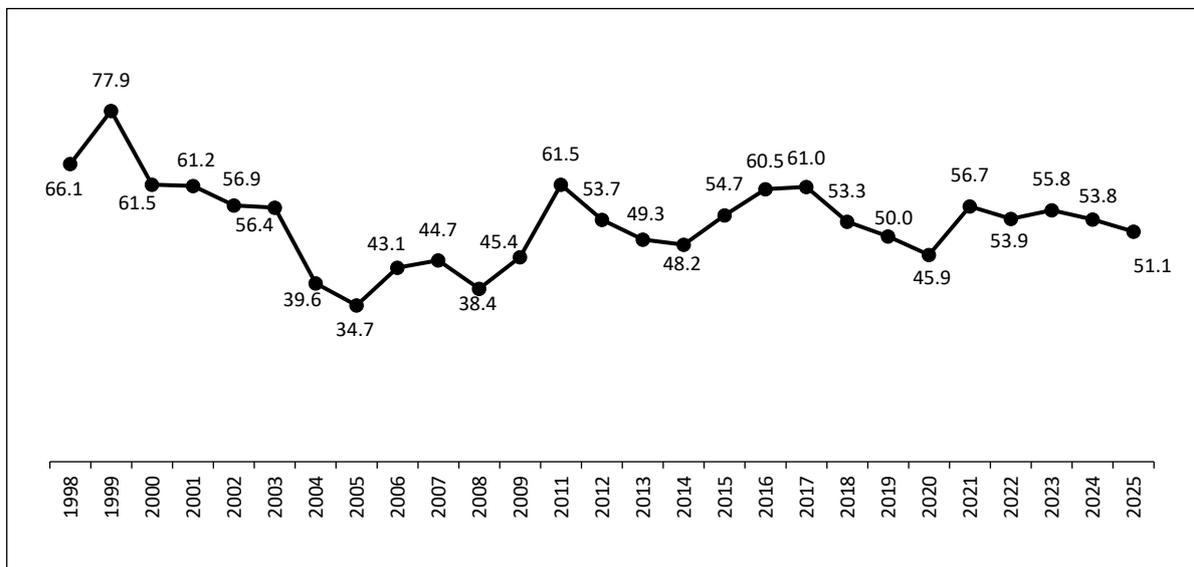


Figure 2. Share of people facing the problem of a lack of confidence in the future*, % of respondents

*The question is asked once a year, in February. Wording: "Which of the following problems did you personally encounter last year?" Answer option: "Lack of confidence in the future." Data dynamics for the entire measurement period are presented. The question was not asked in February 2010.

Source: VoIRC RAS data.

The reason lies precisely in what we discussed at the beginning of the article: today, in the President's role as "Creator", two temporal lines converge simultaneously – the line of Russia's entire historical development path in the 21st century and the line of the last four years of the new path Russia began in February 2022. **Therefore, the realism of achieving Russia's desired future image upon "exiting" the SMO (or, more broadly – the civilizational conflict with the West) directly depends on a historical assessment and acknowledgment of the country's own accumulated mistakes throughout the entire post-Soviet period. As A. Dugin writes, "We will not be able to win in Ukraine if we do not defeat the 1990s within ourselves, if we do not put on trial that historical reality, those mistakes and those crimes that we ourselves committed by destroying a great power"**⁵³.

And first and foremost, the state itself must do this. Because (as V.V. Putin himself noted in his first programmatic article, "Russia at the Turn of the Millennium") "in our country, the state, its institutions and structures *have always played an exceptionally important role in the life of the country and the people*. For a Russian, a strong state is not an anomaly, not something to be fought against, but on the contrary, *the source and guarantor of order, the initiator and main driving force of any change*"⁵⁴.

Nevertheless, the necessary historical assessment of the past (which includes not only public acknowledgment of mistakes but also "corrective

work" and the adoption of appropriate management decisions) has still not been carried out. And, apparently, will not be implemented, at least until the SMO is concluded, until an agreement is reached between Russia and the NATO bloc that ensures our country the possibility of peaceful, long-term, sovereign development.

Over the past 25 years (since the beginning of V.V. Putin's first presidential term), Russia has still not adopted an official state ideology. This has de facto meant one thing: "*a prohibition on revising the ideological postulates of liberalism*"; the establishment of a latent ideology that ignores Russian traditional values and morality and is based on the recognition of *consumerism and money as leading values in people's lives..., an understanding of profit as the only driving force of social development*"⁵⁵.

"Our national idea should not be directed against anyone, most often this 'anyone' being the West. Anti-Westernism is a sign of dependence on it, of limited intellectual sovereignty. It, like all social thought and social sciences, must be emphatically sovereign. Not negating, but incorporating the intellectual achievements of all civilizations. After all, Russia is a true civilization of civilizations»⁵⁶.

One of the reasons for this (as noted, for example, by S.A. Karaganov) is "the current unreadiness of the country's leader (and in Russia, much depends on him) to abandon the illusions of the past – the 1980s–1990s"⁵⁷.

⁵³ Dugin A. The key to Victory lies in the 1990s. Available at: https://zavtra.ru/blogs/klyuch_k_pobede_v_svo_vezhit_v_1990-h_kapitulyatsii_ukraini_budet_nedostatochno

⁵⁴ Putin V. Russia at the turn of the millennium. Available at: https://www.ng.ru/politics/1999-12-30/4_millennium.html?ysclid=mj70po83ih132547491

⁵⁵ Radikov I.V. (2019). The search for ideological landmarks in post-Soviet Russia. *Vestnik Moskovskogo gosudarstvennogo lingvisticheskogo universiteta. Obshchestvennye nauki*, 1(834), 54–75.

⁵⁶ Karaganov S. (2025). The Living Dream-Idea of Russia, The Code of the Russian in the 21st Century: A Report within the Project "The Russian Dream-Idea and the Code of the Russian in the 21st Century" under the Auspices of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy and the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs of the National Research University "Higher School of Economics". July 2025. P. 14.

⁵⁷ Ibidem. P. 16.

In previous articles⁵⁸, we have cited expert opinions confirming the view that “large and great countries are not built without big, forward-leading ideas, and having lost them, they collapse with a thunderous crash”⁵⁹. We have not only cited expert assessments but also corroborated them with real “numbers” – sociological research data demonstrating a decline in the creative, intellectual, and moral-ethical potential of Russian society in the absence of an official state ideology, or more precisely – under the influence of the “latent” ideology of liberalism (some specific empirical data are presented in *Insert 5*⁶⁰).

Perhaps it is also appropriate here to mention an important observation recently voiced by N. Mikhalkov in his program “Besogon TV”. The regularly introduced measures of a “prohibitive-protective” character by the State Duma (aimed at regulating the functionality of the state mechanism in the spheres of migration, culture, etc.) indicate not only that the authorities are concerned with this issue.

N. Mikhalkov’s reaction to the draft law “On Amending the Law on the State Emblem of the Russian Federation” dated November 20, 2025 (the bill aims to prevent distortion of the state emblem of the Russian Federation):

“How strange, is it really necessary to legislatively enshrine such a simple thing – respect, preservation of the images of the country’s state symbols. Surely this is an absolutely natural thing that should not require anything but real, sober understanding?!”

Well, okay, for some reasons there is a need to introduce such a law... **and who could be against it? And this is precisely where the most interesting part arises.** Instead of this law being simply adopted immediately in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd readings, these familiar laments about ‘delicacy,’ ‘sensitivity,’ ‘possible infringement of religious feelings’ began to be heard... Who is saying this? **And is it not clear to us that a state’s symbols change only when that state is enslaved by another state, with different symbols. And enslavement by other countries, this is not necessarily military action, bombing, tank attacks... no, it can happen from within, covertly, almost imperceptibly”**⁶¹.

⁵⁸ See, for example:

Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. (2025). What the 30-year absence of a state ideology leads to: “The enemy is not only on the other side of the frontline”. *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 18(2), 9–38.

Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. (2025). “The constitutional ban on state ideology means a ban on revising the ideological tenets of liberalism”: What the 30-year absence of a state ideology leads to. *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 18(3), 9–39.

Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. (2025). What a 30-year absence of state ideology leads to: “Great nations are not built without great, guiding ideas, and having lost them, they collapse with a thunderous crash”. *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 18(4), 9–45.

⁵⁹ Karaganov S. (2025). The Living Dream-Idea of Russia, The Code of the Russian in the 21st Century: A Report within the Project “The Russian Dream-Idea and the Code of the Russian in the 21st Century” under the Auspices of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy and the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs of the National Research University “Higher School of Economics”. July 2025.

⁶⁰ For more information, see: Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. (2025). “The constitutional ban on state ideology means a ban on revising the ideological tenets of liberalism”: What the 30-year absence of a state ideology leads to. *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 18(3), 9–39.

⁶¹ BesogonTV “Who Wants to Be Holier Than the Pope?” Episode from 05.12.2025. Available at: <https://besogontv.ru/?ysclid=miy77xyei9523577182>

For reference: On December 9, 2025, a bill mandating the depiction of crosses atop the scepter and orb in the description of the state coat of arms of the Russian Federation was adopted by the State Duma in its first reading. The bill’s authors were 412 deputies headed by Parliament Speaker V. Volodin, who expressed confidence in the need to “do everything to prevent distortion of our statehood symbols” (source: Kondratyev A. Deputies halted the ‘cross-fall’: The State Duma specified the image of Russia’s coat of arms). Available at: <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2025/12/09/22155571.shtml?ysclid=mj4e1e6p2z885796718>

Some trends in public opinion reflecting the dynamics of society's development in the absence of an official state ideology in the country⁶²

Population group	% Average annual data		Dynamics, 2018–2024 to 1996–1999		People Average annual data		Dynamics, 2018–2024 to 1996–1999
	1996–1999	2018–2024	1996–1999	2018–2024	1996–1999	2018–2024	
	%						
1. Dynamics of self-assessments reflecting people's attitudes toward Knowledge and Education							
the proportion of people who believe that it is important to "have a good education"	86.7	64.4	-22	1301	966	-335	
the proportion of people who agree that "one should make full use of one's learning abilities"	86.7	67.0	-20	1301	1005	-296	
the proportion of people who are interested in the topic of "parenting and education of children"	71.5	59.0	-13	1073	885	-188	
the proportion of people who are interested in the topic of "morality, morals, rules of human behavior in society"	67.8	55.5	-12	1017	833	-185	
the proportion of people those who are interested in "the life of society, the state, history"	74.5	62.8	-12	1118	942	-176	
the proportion of people who believe that "knowledge beautifies a person's life, makes them happier"	77.1	67.6	-10	1157	1014	-143	
2. Dynamics of self-assessments reflecting people's attitude toward Creativity							
the proportion of people who believe that the process of creating new things brings joy in everyday life	63.2	38.2	-25	948	573	-375	
the proportion of people who believe that "creativity must be fully realized"	80.9	63.2	-18	1214	948	-266	
the proportion of people who are positive about being the author of the results of creative work	63.8	49.5	-14	957	743	-215	
the proportion of people who believe that "creativity beautifies a person's life, makes them happier"	75.0	63.0	-12	1125	945	-180	
the proportion of people, who believe that a creative person causes distrust of others	14.7	20.3	+6	221	305	+84	
the proportion of people who believe that "a creative person limits their own life, loses a lot"	20.5	23.1	+3	308	347	+39	
3. Dynamics of self-assessments reflecting people's attitudes toward the norms of morality							
the proportion of people who feel remorse in the case of an "unfulfilled promise"	73.9	58.2	-16	1109	873	-236	
the proportion of people who feel remorse in the case of an "insult or rudeness"	81.6	65.8	-16	1224	987	-237	
the proportion of people who feel remorse in the case of an "unfair act"	72.8	60.5	-12	1092	908	-185	
the proportion of people for whom "mutual assistance and mutual assistance"	86.2	78.0	-8	1293	1170	-123	
are important the proportion of people for whom "responsiveness to other people"	84.0	76.0	-8	1260	1140	-120	
the proportion of people for whom "decency" is important	90.6	84.6	-6	1359	1269	-90	

⁶² Source: Data from the VoISC RAS. Changes are shown for the period from 1996–1999 (B. Yeltsin's last presidential term) to 2018–2024 (V. Putin's fourth presidential term). More detailed data are presented in the article: Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. (2025). "The constitutional ban on state ideology means a ban on revising the ideological tenets of liberalism": What the 30-year absence of a state ideology leads to. Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast, 18(3), 9–39.

If harsh restrictions “from above” are required to minimize the opportunities for foreign agents, representatives of the state administration system parasitizing on the migrant issue, representatives of show business transmitting spiritual and moral values and a lifestyle contrary to the national development course to the broad population, etc., **it means that in Russian society, “those layers that would like to continue the sweet-for-them but ruinous-for-the-country-and-people 1990s** are still present and resisting – when ‘cash conquered evil,’ personal enrichment was considered the main goal in life, and the ideology of mass theft and plunder of the country reigned instead of the ideology of serving the people and the State⁶³; therefore, society *acutely needs “for all of us, from the President to the farmer, worker, engineer, officer, scientist, entrepreneur, civil servant, to understand what we want to be and what we want our country to be”*⁶⁴.

In other words, Russian society (effectively an entire generation that grew up in a country without its own, sovereign national ideology) finds itself in a state where **the state must legislate from above the most basic, utterly natural things, which (as N. Mikhalkov says) in reality “should not require anything but real, sober understanding”...**

By and large, over the past 25 years, the principle of oligarchic capitalism has not disappeared anywhere, as evidenced by **the entire financial system built in the country: from national accounts and the activities of the Central Bank (Insert 6) to the capital circulating within the marketplace systems that Russian citizens encounter practically every day in their daily lives.** The sums are enormous, but they

circulate through financial channels so concealed that even experts can only make approximate calculations.

“That oligarchic capitalism has been established in Russia today is not disputed by anyone. Oligarchic capitalism is a socio-economic model of societal and state development based on the total control of the production of goods and services by private owners of the means of production, on legalized exploitation, i.e., the unfair appropriation of practically all the results of hired labor. Policy in all spheres of life is aimed at obtaining super-profits in the shortest period, even to the detriment of national security. Control over the financial and monetary systems is exercised by a narrow circle of individuals. Merging occurs, including through the development of kinship relations, of the financial-industrial elite (oligarchy) with representatives of state power. The state begins to serve not society, but oligarch-billionaires...”

One might only add that capitalism in Russia is not simply oligarchic. Such is capitalism today in the USA, Europe, Canada, and other so-called ‘developed countries.’ In Russia, it is an oligarchic capitalism of a dependent, or comprador, type. That is, Russian oligarchs are under external management. And if so, the entire Russian Federation finds itself under external management. No signs of national sovereignty are visible, despite the loud declarations by officials about its restoration after February 24 of last year”⁶⁵.

⁶³ Karaganov S. (2025). The Living Dream-Idea of Russia, The Code of the Russian in the 21st Century: A Report within the Project “The Russian Dream-Idea and the Code of the Russian in the 21st Century” under the Auspices of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy and the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs of the National Research University “Higher School of Economics”. July 2025. P. 13.

⁶⁴ Ibidem.

⁶⁵ Katasonov V. “‘Oligarchic collectivism’ from the novel ‘1984’ and today’s world”. Available at: <https://reosh.ru/valentin-katasonov-oligarxicheskij-kollektivizm-iz-romana-1984-i-segodnyashnij-mir.html?ysclid=mj14kbi85w899643298>

Even with such an approximate examination of the financial system, some experts conclude that **the policy of the Central Bank, for example, “contradicts what is written in the Constitution”** (*Insert 6*), while marketplaces **operate to the detriment of the state, “underpaying taxes by 1.5 trillion rubles”**, and do not legally formalize their employees, thereby contributing to the development of “shadow” employment and the growth of the precariat – a stratum of people who are “alienated from labor and from society”, meaning they “**lack confidence in their necessity to**

their country, their state, their society; they are not only limited but often deprived of the right to claim employment in their own or a related profession, social security, or hope for a guaranteed future for their family and loved ones”⁶⁶.

We should also note that the critical assessments by experts regarding the Bank of Russia and the management of the country’s economy presented in *Insert 6* did not appear in recent years or in connection with the start of the special military operation, but much earlier. **In fact, they were voiced as early as the beginning of the 2000s.**

1. V. Katasonov: “Take, for example, the current policy of the Central Bank. It is called inflation targeting. The guys have really gotten too brazen! **They don’t even bother to translate into Russian what they receive from Washington**, from the International Monetary Fund. **I’m not even mentioning that inflation targeting contradicts what is written in the Constitution of Russia”**⁶⁷.

“If, on the eve of the SMO, all that currency which was stolen in late February 2022 [referring to the freezing of Russian currency reserves by the EU and G7 countries] had been used to purchase precious metal, **Russia’s gold reserve would have increased by almost 5,000 tons of gold**. And if, on top of that, the Bank of Russia had been purchasing all the gold mined in the country in recent years, **the total amount of the Russian Federation’s gold reserve would have approached 8,000 tons. We could have become the world’s No. 1 gold power**”⁶⁸.

2. On November 18, 2025, at the Bank of Russia conference “Focus on the Client,” G. Gref stated that “marketplaces this year **underpaid taxes by 1.5 trillion rubles**. That is, all those discounts they give are at our expense. And I don’t feel the slightest bit sorry for physical retail networks, but it is unpleasant to me when marketplaces illegitimately take market share from physical networks **due to non-market competitive conditions created by the state**”⁶⁹.

3. S. Anureev: “Order pickup points [of marketplaces] mostly belong to individual entrepreneurs working under a simplified taxation system. **In 90% of pickup points, employees are not formally registered because if people are officially registered and all 47% of taxes are paid for them [13% personal income tax, 30% social contributions], the activity of 80% of pickup points would become unprofitable, and they would close...** Business media cite the number of pickup points for ‘Ozon’ as up to 75,000, for ‘Wildberries’ – up to 87,000. The total number of people working at pickup points would be 326,000, and their total annual wage bill – 258 billion rubles. **The individual entrepreneur-owners simply withdraw cash as their own income, paying 6% tax instead of the aforementioned 47%, thus underpaying wage taxes by 106 billion rubles per year**”⁷⁰.

⁶⁶ Toshchenko Zh.T. (2018). The Precariat: From a Proto-Class to a New Class: Monograph. Moscow: Nauka. P. 253.

⁶⁷ Valentin Katasonov on the Central Bank’s actions: “The guys have really gotten too brazen”: Interview for “Tsargrad” publication. 30.11.2025. Available at: <https://reosh.ru/valentin-katasonov-o-dejstviyax-cb-rebyata-sovsem-uzhe-obnagleli.html?ysclid=mj0005afk5541099434>

⁶⁸ Katasonov V. Once again on Russia’s international reserves. Available at: https://zavtra.ru/blogs/eshe_raz_o_mezhdunarodnih_rezervah_rossii_kommentarij_k_tcifram_ria_novosti_kak_informatciya_dlya_razmishleniya

⁶⁹ Marketplaces underpaid 1.5 trillion rubles in taxes due to discounts. Available at: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/25653461>

⁷⁰ Anureev S. Gref is right about marketplaces and 1.5 trillion rubles in taxes. Available at: https://zavtra.ru/blogs/gref_prav_naschyot_marketplejsov_i_15_trln_rub_nalogov

For example:

Delyagin M.G. Can the new Russian authoritarianism become effective? *Mir Rossii*. 2000. No. 1. P. 114–138.

Polterovich V.M. The root of problems – state inefficiency. *Ekonomicheskaya Nauka Sovremennoy Rossii*. 2000. No. 1 (5). P. 41–44.

Glazyev S.Yu. The choice rests with the country's president. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. 28.04.2001. Available at: https://nvo.ng.ru/economics/2001-04-28/4_glazyev.html?ysclid=mj8krvc5x4487860748

Glazyev S.Yu. No need to wait for favors from the authorities. *Zavtra*. 13.05.2002. Available at: <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/2002-05-1421>

Lvov D.S. What kind of economy does Russia need? *Ekonomicheskkiye i Sotsial'nyye Peremeny v Regione*. 2003. Issue 20. P. 3–15.

Delyagin M.G. Rehearsal for a catastrophe. *Zavtra*. 21.07.2004. Available at: <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/2004-07-2132>

Glazyev S.Yu. We have never had such a destructive government (interview with the newspaper 'Izvestia'). *Izvestia*. 14.12.2004. Available at: <https://iz.ru/news/297574>

Under these conditions, seemingly unexpected facts uncovered by the Accounts Chamber of the Russian Federation and alarming expert forecasts regarding the present and future of the Russian economy become quite explainable: **“Russian authorities with one hand raise the profit tax, and with the other – suppress economic activity in the country.** And these contradictory actions, naturally, do not ensure a proportional growth in federal budget revenues. The general deterioration of economic prospects for 2026 suggests that federal budget revenues from profit tax are more likely to decrease”⁷¹.

Furthermore, representatives of government bodies at all levels (federal, regional, municipal) continue to become subjects of criminal cases on a daily basis. Over 2024–2025 (during which we have been monitoring arrests and detentions of representatives of the ruling elites), one can speak of **more than 90 such cases.** And this – only according to open sources of information (the latest data, for October 25 – December 18, 2025, are presented in *Insert 7*).

“The Accounts Chamber presented **sensational** results on the collection of profit tax, the rate of which for the federal budget was increased this year from 3% to 8%. **Accounting for inflation, profit tax revenues to the treasury, all else being equal, should have increased almost threefold. But in fact, the nominal increase in federal budget revenues turned out to be around 75%.** This conditional shortfall is explained by a growing number of loss-making companies and a general reduction in the total profit of enterprises...

Besides surprises with the profit tax, the SP auditors discovered **a rapid growth of the state debt, which increased by almost 10% in one year.** Such rapid growth of the state debt worries many economists... Expenditures on servicing the Russian Federation's state debt amounted to 2.3 trillion rubles.

The rapid increase in budget expenditures for servicing the state debt is explained by the Central Bank's high key rate, but the possibility for the Accounts Chamber to verify the economic rationale of the Central Bank's key rate is not directly enshrined in Russian legislation”⁷².

⁷¹ Ibidem.

⁷² Sergeev M. The Accounts Chamber showed the other side of the 2025 budget. Available at: https://www.ng.ru/economics/2025-12-09/4_9397_budget.html?ysclid=mj1793snmz601548006

Insert 6

Experts on the activities of the Bank of Russia

<p>S. Yu. Glazyev (scientist, economist, politician; since April 17, 2025 – State Secretary of the Union State of Russia and Belarus)</p>	<p>“Contemporary Russia’s monetary policy, based on a high key rate, essentially blocks economic development, creating a vicious cycle of stagnation. Commercial banks, instead of lending to the real sector, prefer to deposit funds with the Central Bank, receiving stable, risk-free income. However, the root of the problem lies deeper: the Central Bank, contrary to its mission to create and distribute money to stimulate the economy, is essentially draining liquidity, accumulating losses. This is a paradox: the institution that creates money itself becomes loss-making... Such a model of the banking system not only hinders economic development but also contributes to wealth concentration, reduced competitiveness, and the gradual degradation of the manufacturing sector. A solution could be tightening control over banking activities: they should report on the share of investments in the real economy rather than chasing speculative income. However, as long as the model remains unchanged, banks transform from creditors into the main players in the field of property redistribution, exacerbating socio-economic disparities.”⁷³.</p>
<p>A. M. Babakov (political figure, entrepreneur. Deputy Chairman of the State Duma of the VIII convocation)</p>	<p>“I believe that at this point, we still need to ensure that the state exercises real management over the financial sector. Either the financial system manages the state, or the state manages the financial system. Banks should not be mere analogs of commercial enterprises; they should be institutions of development and report on outcomes, including improvements in quality of life and other criteria, not just on the amount of profit they generate”⁷⁴.</p>
<p>M. G. Delyagin (economist, politician, publicist, deputy of the State Duma of the Russian Federation)</p>	<p>“The Russian banking system is today the largest, institutionally recognized speculator. Essentially, the entire liberal segment of state administration works in its interests, consciously or unconsciously facilitating the siphoning of resources from the real economy into the banking sphere. As a result, despite sanctions, depressions, and wars, the profits of the largest banks are only growing: according to O. Deripaska’s forecasts, by the end of 2025, the banking sector will post up to 4.5 trillion rubles in profit ⁷⁵ – a phenomenal result, exceeding the 2022 figures by 22 times... Bank of Russia Head E. Nabiullina promotes the idea of structural adjustment, emphasizing the need to get rid of ‘inefficient’ enterprises. At first glance, the reasoning seems sound – why support loss-makers? But if one analyzes the very structure of profitability, it becomes clear: this slogan hides a desire to squeeze out the entire real sector. After all, most of the ‘inefficient’ are precisely the knowledge-intensive, manufacturing, technological companies that ensure the country’s strategic security...”</p>

⁷³ Sergei Glazyev on the Central Bank’s key rate and real estate. Available at: <https://smarent.com/tpost/jzyje1rka1-sergei-glazev-pro-stavku-tsb-i-nedvizhim?ysclid=mj025ng0t5809690879>

⁷⁴ “Sunday Evening with V. Solovyov”. 25.05.2025. Available at: <https://smotrim.ru/article/4517705?ysclid=mj01zv9heg609035726>

⁷⁵ For reference: By the end of 2025, the forecast changed: On December 2, 2025, speaking at the VTB forum “Russia Calling!”, the President of the Russian Federation V. Putin noted that “according to the Bank of Russia’s forecast, by the end of 2025 the banking sector will post a profit of around 3.2–3.5 trillion rubles” (source: Official website of the President of Russia. Available at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/78631>). On December 10, 2025, some experts pointed out that “the sector’s net profit in 2025 will amount to 3.5–3.6 trillion rubles”. (source: Belikov Yu. Easing will be smooth and cautious. Available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/827055?ysclid=mjb6kkaso0715062417>)

	<p><i>All this underscores a fundamental problem: the real economy and national interests become hostages to banking logic, oriented primarily toward quick financial results. Instead of supporting strategic production, banking policy often stimulates the flow of resources into the speculative sphere, and the liberal administrative apparatus facilitates this transit, turning a blind eye to the long-term consequences</i>⁷⁶.</p>
<p>V.Yu. Katasonov (chairman of the S.F. Sharapov Russian Economic Society, Dr.Sc. (Econ.), Corresponding Member of the Academy of Economic Sciences and Entrepreneurship)</p>	<p><i>After the start of the special operation, the European Union and G7 countries blocked about half of Russian currency reserves... If, on the eve of the SMO, all that currency which was stolen in late February 2022 had been used to purchase precious metal, Russia's gold reserve would have increased by almost 5,000 tons of gold. And if, on top of that, the Bank of Russia had been purchasing all the gold mined in the country in recent years, the total amount of the Russian Federation's gold reserve would have approached 8,000 tons. We could have become the world's No. 1 gold power...</i>⁷⁷.</p> <p><i>"The Bank of Russia, to put it mildly, distorts the statistics of Russia's international reserves. It will soon be four years since the Collective West 'froze' a significant portion of Russia's currency reserves..., four years since the Bank of Russia has had no access to the stolen currency reserves. It is more than dubious to include such currency reserves in the composition of the international reserves of the Russian Federation today. Yet the Bank of Russia includes them, and without any reservations... The exact amount of Russian currency reserves stolen in late February is now known — 311 billion dollars... If Russian monetary authorities had acted proactively, we could have a completely different volume of international reserves today... If, on the eve of the SMO, Russia's monetary authorities had converted 'toxic' currencies amounting to 311 billion dollars into gold, that gold would now be valued at approximately 718 billion dollars... This figure can be considered the real cost of the damage Russia suffered because the monetary authorities ignored gold. Current record gold holdings in the international reserves are something Russia's monetary authorities tend to credit themselves with. Meanwhile, the current record value of gold merely masks the inaction of the monetary authorities...</i></p> <p><i>As of January 1, 2022, gold in reserves amounted to 74.0 million ounces, or 2,301.66 tons... as of October 1, 2025, the physical volume of gold was 74.9 million ounces (2,329.65 tons). Over the entire period, gold in Russia's reserves increased by only 28 tons! Russia's gold reserve turned out to be almost frozen. On an annual basis, the average increase in gold reserves was a mere 7 tons! While gold production in Russia in recent years has been approximately 330 tons per year</i>⁷⁸.</p>

⁷⁶ Delyagin M. The banking "diaspora" is destroying the Russian economy. Available at: <https://argumenti.ru/economics/2025/09/966797>

⁷⁷ Katasonov V. Once again on Russia's international reserves. Available at: https://zavtra.ru/blogs/eshe_raz_o_mezhdunarodnih_rezervah_rossii_kommentarij_k_tcifram_ria_novosti_kak_informatciya_dlya_razmishleniya

⁷⁸ Katasonov V. A New gold record in Russia's international reserves, but the Bank of Russia, to put it mildly, distorts statistics. Available at: https://zavtra.ru/blogs/novij_rekord_zolota_v_mezhdunarodnih_rezervah_rf

Facts of detentions and arrests of representatives of the ruling elites (October 25 – December 18, 2025)⁷⁹

December 9 – The former head of Ivanovo was detained on suspicion of abuse of power. According to the investigation, while serving as deputy chairman of the government of the Ivanovo region from 2020 to 2024, the detainee used his official position to create favorable conditions and provide patronage to commercial companies. In total, over 30 contracts worth more than 500 million rubles were concluded as part of the scheme.

December 3 – Officers of the FSB Directorate for Tatarstan detained the head of a military procurement office of the Ministry of Defense, suspected of taking a bribe on an especially large scale. The individual is alleged to have received monetary rewards for facilitating the approval of work acceptance certificates and for not applying penalties when violations of a state contract for technical oversight of general-purpose military vehicles in Crimea and the SMO zone were identified. Based on the collected materials, a criminal case has been initiated under articles for bribe-taking and abuse of power in the execution of a state defense order.

December 3 – First Vice Mayor of Nizhny Novgorod, S. Yegorov, was detained on suspicion of taking a bribe for facilitating illegal commercial activity. The suspect is alleged to have received, through an intermediary, a bribe of a substantial amount from February to August 2025 for assistance in organizing illegal commercial activity in Nizhny Novgorod.

December 1 – The head of the department for investigating particularly important cases of the Investigative Committee's Directorate for the Kemerovo Region, L. Kharitonov, was detained. It is noted that Kharitonov was involved in a number of major criminal cases in the region.

November 28 – In Dagestan, 17 employees of a branch of the Social Fund of Russia were charged in a corruption case, including the head of the regional division's administration. The damage from their activities exceeds 1.4 billion rubles.

November 14 – The first deputy head of the Federal Penitentiary Service Directorate for the Chelyabinsk Region, the head of the service's internal security department, and the chief accountant were detained on suspicion of corruption. It is specified that the suspects, among other things, used the production capacities and convict labor of penitentiary institutions for personal enrichment.

November 12 – In Saint Petersburg, an Interior Ministry employee was detained for taking a bribe from a media representative. It is specified that "since 2022, the administrator of the news channel 'Konkretno.ru' systematically transferred bribes to the head of the information and public relations department of the Main Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs for Saint Petersburg and the Leningrad Region in exchange for daily incident reports from the department."

November 12 – In Yalta, Deputy Mayor I. Belomestnova was detained. She oversaw construction and urban improvement issues. According to the press service of the FSB Directorate for the Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, in 2022, the official received a bribe of 2.5 million rubles from the director of a commercial firm.

November 10 – In Moscow, former advisor to the Prime Minister of Dagestan and former deputy of the Dagestan parliament, D. Abuev, was detained. He is suspected of state treason and cooperation with Ukrainian special services, including preparing sabotage and intending to fight against the Russian Federation.

November 7 – In Moscow, the director of the Department of Mechanical Engineering for the Fuel and Energy Complex at the Ministry of Industry and Trade of Russia, M. Kuznetsov, was detained on suspicion of corruption.

November 6 – In Udmurtia, the head of Zavyalovsky District was detained on suspicion of taking a bribe on a large scale.

October 30 – Former deputy of the Legislative Assembly of the Perm Krai, K. Okunev, was detained. He is suspected of committing a crime under Article 205.2 of the Criminal Code of Russia, i.e., public calls for terrorist activities.

October 29 – The head of Askizsky District of Khakassia was detained on suspicion of abuse of power in the execution of a contract for the construction of a school worth over 1.1 billion rubles.

⁷⁹ Source: RT in Russian. Latest news on detentions. Available at: <https://russian.rt.com/tag/zaderzhanie?ysclid=mdzklnnsn147444962>

In May 2025, at the instruction of the acting governor of the Kursk Region, A. Khinshtein, a list of **more than 70 officials** who had previously been exempted from criminal liability or had their convictions expunged was prepared⁸⁰. In November 2025, A. Khinshtein noted that he was “extremely dissatisfied with the results of the work carried out: **only 9 people ceased their official activities**, despite the fact that the list of individuals, for example, who were held liable for taking or giving bribes or for robbery, is quite substantial”⁸¹.

In our view, it is difficult to disagree with the head of the Kursk Region when he says that “individuals who have been subject to criminal liability for taking or giving bribes (even if not subsequently convicted)... with such a past have no place in government bodies”⁸². The very fact of their presence in the system of state governance is, at the very least, perplexing. Therefore, such work should undoubtedly be carried out intensively across the entire country, in every region, in every municipality; through the All-Russian People’s Front, political parties, the State Duma, or any other mechanism capable of most effectively and swiftly “cleansing” the state governance system of people with a “dark” past.

Expert assessment:

“Khinshtein voiced the problem openly – meaning he wanted to solve it, not hide it. This adds credibility: if it were a showcase campaign, no one would publicize the formulation ‘there are former robbers in government.’ **Their very presence indicates that the personnel selection system is essentially non-functional. Background checks are formal, official references substitute for real filters. People whose biography itself precludes trust end up in positions where budget funds are distributed and contracts are signed. And if they have reached leadership posts – it means someone promoted them there, and not just once.**

This is no longer an isolated mistake but a system failure. It means there are those within the system itself who cover up, turn a blind eye, sign the necessary papers. The personnel vertical has ceased to be a filter and turned into a pipe: whatever goes in, flies out at the top. Therefore, the Kursk region case is not a local story but a symptom that the system fundamentally cannot recognize risks and does not want to see its own flaws”⁸³.

⁸⁰ Kursk officials will have their past remembered. Available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/7713366?ysclid=miy9ts272521996872>

⁸¹ Khinshtein demanded the dismissal from government bodies of all previously convicted employees. Available at: https://www.ng.ru/politics/2025-11-05/2_9373_news2.html?ysclid=miy9jc1w1u743954955

⁸² Khinshtein demanded the dismissal of all officials with a criminal past. Available at: <https://life.ru/p/1806740?ysclid=mj5u2cy7gd862838518>

⁸³ Prokhorov I. Robbers in power: Khinshtein uncovered the “Augean stables” of officials. The scale is staggering. Available at: https://spb.tsargrad.tv/articles/grabiteli-vo-vlasti-hinshtejn-vskryl-avgievny-konjushni-chinovnikov-masshtaby-porazhajut_1431154?ysclid=miy9ti4opy301345892

And, speaking of this – in November 2025, the Supreme Qualification Collegium of Judges of Russia (VKKS of Russia) granted the petitions of the Chairman of the Investigative Committee of Russia, A. Bastrykin, giving consent **to bring criminal charges and/or arrest six judges**⁸⁴... **In all cases, the crimes were of a corrupt nature...** “The most principled and slippery issue – concerning the termination of the status of judge in retirement of the former chairman of the Krasnodar Territory Court, A. Chernov – was considered on November 27. As experts noted, this is not equivalent to the VKKS’s consent to initiate a criminal case against Chernov, **but along with the status, the judge also loses guarantees of immunity**”⁸⁵.

Expert assessment:

“The situation addressed by the Chairman of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation **has actually been wrong for a long time...** Judges are now given a guideline: what matters are real efforts, not symbolic gestures for a checkmark. **But why hasn’t the practice become uniform over so many years? Because the system itself is structured so that every decision is made manually, without common methodologies and with a huge caseload per judge.** Different regions live by different legal traditions, personnel come from different agencies, and regulatory wording leaves too much room for interpretation”⁸⁶.

On December 2, 2025, at a meeting of the Council of Judges of the Russian Federation, the

Chairman of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, I. Krasnov, noted that judicial decisions “*should not contain hints, unsubstantiated evaluative judgments, give rise to ambiguous interpretations, and especially should not be a catalyst for fraudulent and other illegal schemes. Unfortunately, such facts exist. Making decisions to please regional and local authorities, serving the interests of corporations and commercial structures is unacceptable. The reaction to any actions of a corrupt nature – regardless of the level at which they are committed – will be uncompromising*”⁸⁷.

The cited facts from the real activities of the state governance system, the financial and judicial systems, answer the question of **why the desired image of the country’s future, both 10 years ago and today in 2025, appears extremely difficult for Russians to achieve: because over 25 years, the state, by and large, has not changed.** And, judging by expert forecasts, it is not aiming to change in the near future. This is precisely what is evidenced by the “cosmetic” changes in “Politburo 2.0”, which essentially amount to preserving this system in the condition it was in even before the start of the SMO.

Of course, we should note that deep, systemic changes in state governance are associated with risks, making them undesirable and unsuitable during an ongoing SMO. **However, the problem is that experts from “Minchenko Consulting” do not link the prolongation of the “Politburo 2.0” model (which they characterize as a “conglomerate of clans and groups competing with each other**

⁸⁴ “Two judges from Saint Petersburg are former chairman of Smolninsky District Court, V. Tarasov, and a judge of the same court, K. Golikova. In total, the agenda includes permits for the involvement of six judges from different regions of Russia. In addition to our Saint Petersburg colleagues, we are talking about representatives of the courts of Adygea, Kursk, Kabardino-Balkaria and Mordovia. The board will also consider the issue of giving consent to the detention of the former chairman of Yurgomyzhsky District Court of the Kurgan Region, V. Kozlov” (source: Chulkov A. Two judges from Saint Petersburg may be prosecuted. Available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/8213028?ysclid=mj5t2ry99y635207201>).

⁸⁵ Nikitsky L. Solo of the new broom. Available at: <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2025/11/28/solo-novoi-metly>

⁸⁶ Trifonova E. Krasnov will complete the vertical of leadership of the third branch of power. Available at: https://www.ng.ru/politics/2025-12-02/1_9392_krasnov.html?ysclid=miyblmaycw681886806 (opinion of lawyer A. Gavrishev).

⁸⁷ Trifonova E. Krasnov will complete the vertical of leadership of the third branch of power. Available at: https://www.ng.ru/politics/2025-12-02/1_9392_krasnov.html?ysclid=miyblmaycw681886806

for resources...”⁸⁸) to the timeline for resolving the “Ukrainian conflict” (we note that at least 7 members of “Politburo 2.0” as of 2025 are listed in the Forbes ranking of Russia’s largest billionaires⁸⁹).

In other words, **there are no signs that the ongoing hostilities are the sole obstacle preventing the President and his close associates from the patriotic (power) bloc from making any substantial adjustments to the functioning of the state governance system...** This means that in the near future, it is

difficult to expect the emergence within the Russian system of state governance of **a mechanism of checks and balances** like, for example, the one in China, which “has determined the country’s success over the past few decades”⁹⁰.

As E.V. Balatsky rightly writes, the elements of the Chinese mechanism for elite self-organization are something “Russia, like most other countries, should scrutinize most attentively... **and begin work on adapting them to its own political and economic system**”⁹¹.

Some key elements (institutions, principles) of elite self-organization in the Chinese governance model⁹²

1. “The hierarchy of the CPC [Communist Party of China] cadres is based on a system of ranks, which are awarded **based on performance** and serve as the basis for further career advancement,” and also “**the principle of meritocracy**, according to which any promotion in position and rank **must be earned through success in the previous role**. And again, in Russian management practice, there are numerous examples of appointing people to high positions with no significant positive achievements to their name. **Thus, strict regulation of careers in government bodies and the CPC acts as a guarantee against personnel chaos and future managerial errors**”.

2. “**The CPC’s system of self-control**, with the National Supervisory Commission serving as its institutional element. The foundation of this system of self-control rests on two interconnected principles – **the total absence of immunity from criminal prosecution and the existence of the death penalty. The Chinese governance system categorically rejects the principle of irresponsibility**”.

3. “The main difficulty [in the economy] lies in coordinating all parts of a vast and extremely heterogeneous economy to give them a unified vector of movement and development. For this, China has created a special coordinating economic body – the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), which is part of the structure of the PRC’s State Council and was originally called the State Planning Commission of the PRC... The peculiarity of the NDRC’s work lies in the **heterogeneity of its functions**, which allows it to achieve a new level of coordination for the economic life of a huge country... The NDRC’s activities are guided by two informal principles – **the primacy of social stability and economic development, and the principle of delicacy and prudence**”.

⁸⁸ Minchenko E.N. Vladimir Putin’s Big Government and “Politburo 2.0”: A Report by “Minchenko Consulting”. August 2012. Available at: <https://minchenko.ru/analitika/?curPos=65>

⁸⁹ Among them: A. Rotenberg, G. Timchenko, R. Abramovich, V. Vekselberg, Yu. Kovalchuk, V. Alekperov, A. Mordashov (source: 146 Billionaires of Russia. Forbes Ranking – 2025. Available at: <https://www.forbes.ru/milliardery/535280-146-milliardero-rossii-rejting-forbes-2025?ysclid=mj9y71i97k216827885>).

⁹⁰ Balatsky E.V. (2025). Institutions of elite self-organization in the Chinese management model. Problems of Territory’s Development, 29(6), p. 26.

⁹¹ Ibidem.

⁹² For more information, see: Balatsky E.V. (2025). Institutions of elite self-organization in the Chinese management model. Problems of Territory’s Development, 29(6), 10–29.

Excerpts from the “Minchenko Consulting”⁹³ report, indicating the preservation of the “Politburo 2.0” in the state governance system:

1. A hostile environment and risks of military confrontation with NATO **make an inertial scenario in domestic politics most comprehensible to the elite, with system stability coming to the fore as the key parameter.**
2. **The composition of “Politburo 2.0” remains unchanged** (Yu. Kovalchuk, S. Kiriyyenko, N. Patrushev, M. Mishustin, S. Chemezov, I. Sechin, D. Medvedev, S. Sobyenin, G. Timchenko, A. Rotenberg, S. Shoigu), even despite an unfavorable socio-economic context and, consequently, a narrowing resource base: amid a growing budget deficit, increasing tax burden, and strengthening sanctions pressure, the highest echelon of the elite retains its positions.
3. Maintaining the current composition of “Politburo 2.0” and their confidants is largely achieved through the redistribution of assets as part of a large-scale property confiscation campaign, **which most significantly affects resource-rich representatives of the regional elite.**
4. **The key strategy for resource-rich elites is not proactive actions, but strategic waiting and supporting the status quo established in recent years.**
5. In 2021 [i.e., even before the start of the SMO], we described scenarios for the dynamics of the Politburo itself, among which the most probable was named **“stabilization of the Politburo 2.0 composition for the next few years**, made possible by applying administrative resources to redistribute rents in new economic sectors and through the creation of enlarged elite coalitions.” **Currently, this scenario is being implemented**, with the caveat that the redistribution process now includes old economic sectors as well.

Let us recall that experts from “Minchenko Consulting” began noting the existence of the “Politburo 2.0” system itself as early as 2012, long before the special military operation.

Thus, Russia has now been waging a war for its future for almost four years, and how long this war will last remains unknown. At the very least, at the

latest Board of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation on December 17, 2025, A.R. Belousov set tasks not only for 2026 but also “outlined parameters for longer-term planning, taking into account the course of the special military operation and the development of the military-political situation around Russia”⁹⁴.

Excerpt from A.R. Belousov’s speech at the expanded meeting of the Defense Ministry Board on December 17, 2025:

“... the priority direction for the Ministry of Defense is the **modernization of the Armed Forces in the long term**, considering external threats and the development of innovative technologies.

An analysis of the military-political situation shows that **military security threats have changed significantly over the past three years**. The North Atlantic Alliance continues to build up coalition forces, active preparations are underway for the deployment of intermediate-range missiles, the nomenclature of nuclear munitions has been updated, air and missile defense systems are being modernized, and the mobilization deployment system is changing. The operational speed of transferring alliance troops to the eastern flank is increasing... Military expenditures are increasing substantially...

All this indicates NATO’s preparations for a military clash with Russia. The alliance’s plans provide for achieving readiness for such actions by the turn of the 2030s. This has been repeatedly stated openly by official representatives of the NATO bloc”⁹⁵.

⁹³ Politburo 2.0 Report. The Besieged Fortress. An Analytical Review of the State of Russian Elites. Available at: https://minchenko.ru/analitika/analitika_139.html

⁹⁴ Sotak D. The army is entering a long-distance race. Available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/8294543?ysclid=mjb7k76fup74499157>

⁹⁵ Speech by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation, A.R. Belousov, at the expanded meeting of the Defense Ministry Board on December 17, 2025. Available at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/78801>

However, it must be emphasized that Russia's war for the future is not only a military conflict with the "Kiev regime" (which was clear from the very beginning of the SMO). Nor is it only a civilizational conflict with Western civilization (the NATO bloc, the Collective West) for a worthy place in the emerging multipolar world...

It is, first and foremost, Russia's war with its own self from the 1990s: with the "liberal fog" that enveloped almost all spheres of our life for decades; with the deep social and mental "trauma" inflicted on our country by the collapse of the Soviet Union.

All three aspects (or rather, incarnations) of the conflict in which Russia is involved are inextricably linked. As A. Dugin rightly notes, *"the key to Victory in the SMO lies in the 1990s... The abolition of Ukraine implies the simultaneous abolition of the Russian Federation of the 1990s. These two inauthentic, caricature realities are the result of the disintegration of an organic state, an Empire [the Soviet Union]"*⁹⁶.

*"...any absurd action we can think of will inevitably be carried out by the European Union. We are dealing with a clear illustration of the ratchet mechanism of degeneration. And if we ourselves do not revive our state, our political system with higher meanings, lofty ideals, sacredness, spirit, then we will come to the same point"*⁹⁷.

In this struggle of Russia with its own 1990s self, Russian society continues to place its hopes in the President. This is evidenced by the support Russians show for the head of state's activities, as reflected both in the official results of federal, regional, and municipal elections⁹⁸ and in data from monitoring sociological measurements⁹⁹.

Probably aware or sensing this burden of historical responsibility before the country and its people, the President is increasingly (or rather, "constantly", in his own words) thinking about choosing a successor and identifies as a key task of national development *"ensuring reliable continuity in the country's development for decades to come"*¹⁰⁰.

⁹⁶ Dugin A. The key to Victory lies in the 1990s. Available at: https://zavtra.ru/blogs/klyuch_k_pobede_v_svo_vezhit_v_1990-h_kapitulyatsii_ukraini_budet_nedostatochno

⁹⁷ Dugin A. Russia received a clear lesson – this is where migration licentiousness leads. Available at: https://zavtra.ru/blogs/vsyo_ruhnulo_rossiya_poluchila_naglyadnij_urok_vot_kuda_privedyot_migratsionnaya_vol_nitca?ysclid=miyajaxwp50260698

⁹⁸ According to official data from the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation (CEC RF), in the Presidential election on March 17, 2024, V.V. Putin was supported by over 76 million voters (87% of those who participated in the election).

Analysis of CEC data for all presidential elections held in Russia from 2000 to 2024 shows that over the 24 years since V.V. Putin was first elected head of state, his support level nationwide has practically doubled (by almost 37 million people): from 39.74 to 76.28 million voters (for details, see the article: Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. (2024). A solid "mandate of trust": 76 million people voted for Vladimir Putin's fifth presidential term. *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 17(2), 9–42.

Following the results of the Single Voting Day held in Russia on September 14, 2025, "in the elections for the heads of 20 regions of the Russian Federation, 19 nominees from 'United Russia' and one self-nominated candidate – the incumbent head of the Chuvash Republic, O. Nikolaev – won. None of the winners received less than 60% of the vote. Eight newly elected regional heads, including the new governor of the Kursk region, Alexander Khinshtein, received over 80% of the vote" (source: On the elections of regional heads and the costs of verticalization. https://www.ng.ru/editorial/2025-09-16/2_9339_red.html). As experts noted, "by entrusting all candidates for regional heads supported by him [the President] and representatives of the 'United Russia' party, citizens essentially, as if in a referendum, approved Vladimir Putin's policy" (assessment by K. Kostin, Chairman of the Board of the Civil Society Development Foundation. Source: Kostin K. Right and choice. Available at: <https://iz.ru/1954805/konstantin-kostin/pravo-i-vybor>).

⁹⁹ According to VCIOM data, throughout the entire period of the SMO (2022–2025), the approval rating for the activities of the President of the Russian Federation consistently ranged from 75 to 77%. This is significantly higher than the support level for V.V. Putin before the start of the SMO (60% in 2021) and "an order of magnitude" higher than the support level for the previous head of state, B. Yeltsin (9% in 1999). Source: VCIOM Ratings. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/ratings/dejatelnost-gosudarstvennykh-institutov/>

¹⁰⁰ Speech by V. Putin at the Ceremony for the Inauguration of the President of the Russian Federation, 07.05.2024. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/73981>

“When I think about this [choosing a successor], **and I think about it constantly**, of course, I think that a person must emerge, or better yet several people, so that people have a choice, who could earn **the trust of the country’s citizens**”¹⁰¹.

However, building the desired image of the future – that very strong, sovereign, and social state in which Russians would like to live – is a question of a strategic perspective spanning 30–40 years ahead. But “here and now”, it is precisely in the hands of the President (and only his) lies the opportunity to create the foundation of this Future: to conclude the SMO, to reach agreements with the Collective West that would allow Russia to focus on

solving internal problems, and to choose a successor who would be a true (and not a “kvass” or shallow) patriot, “who could earn the trust of the country’s citizens”¹⁰², and who would possess sufficient political will to continue and strengthen the course of national development that the country has been on for a quarter of a century (including conducting timely and effective “corrective work”).

V. Putin: “{The national idea of the country} lies in patriotism. I think nothing else can be. Patriotism should not be of the ‘kvass’ kind (shallow, blind and flag-waving)... This does not at all mean that one must constantly cling only to our heroic past; one must look towards our no less heroic and successful future. In this lies the key to success”¹⁰³.

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¹⁰¹ Direct quote from V. Putin from an interview with P. Zarubin on May 4, 2025. Available at: <https://tvzvezda.ru/news/2025541413-VuPoL.html?ysclid=mj72qe20nb300469656>

¹⁰² Direct quote from V. Putin from an interview with P. Zarubin on May 4, 2025. Available at: <https://tvzvezda.ru/news/2025541413-VuPoL.html?ysclid=mj72qe20nb300469656>

¹⁰³ V. Putin’s interview with P. Zarubin. Available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4341435?ysclid=mj9rtm5mdu22293906>

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