

# PUBLIC OPINION MONITORING

## Public Opinion Monitoring of the State of the Russian Society

As in the previous issues, we publish the results of the monitoring of public opinion concerning the state of the Russian society conducted by VoIRC RAS in the Vologda Oblast<sup>1</sup>.

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

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

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

In February – August 2020<sup>2</sup>, the level of approval of the work of the President of the Russian Federation changed insignificantly (by 2 p. p., from 54 to 52%); the share of negative assessments increased by 3 p. p. (from 31 to 34%).

*For reference:*

*According to VCIOM, the level of approval of the work of the President of the Russian Federation in February – August 2020 decreased by 5 p. p. (from 65 to 60%), according to Levada-Center – by 9 p. p. (from 69 to 60%)<sup>3</sup>.*

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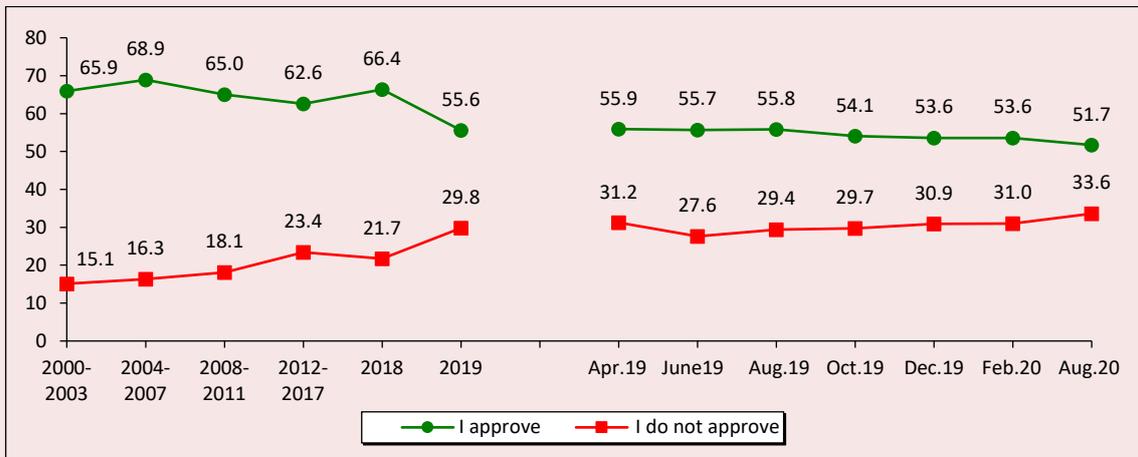
<sup>1</sup> The polls are held six times a year in Vologda, Cherepovets, and in eight districts of the oblast (Babayevsky District, Velikoustyugsky District, Vozhegodsky District, Gryazovetsky District, Kirillovsky District, Nikolsky District, Tarnogsky District and Sheksninsky District). The method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

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

<sup>2</sup> Due to quarantine measures carried out in the Vologda Oblast in order to prevent the spread of coronavirus infection, no population surveys were conducted in April and June 2020.

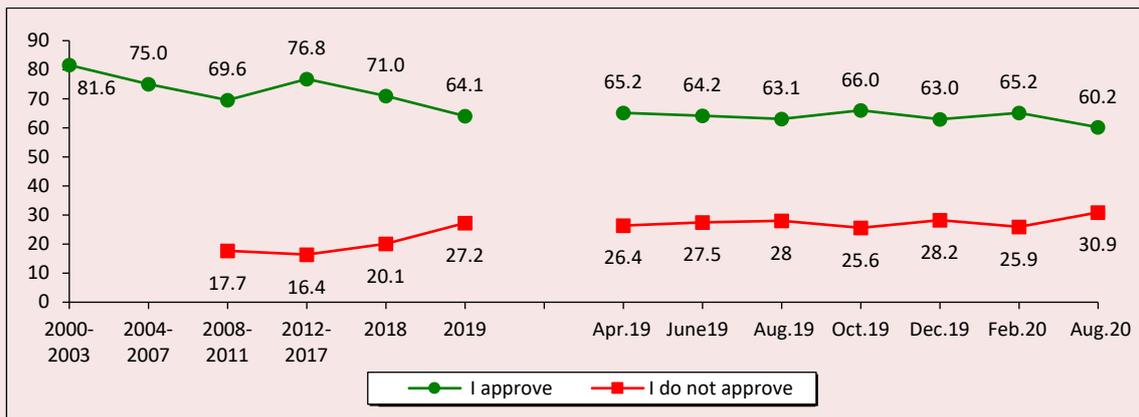
<sup>3</sup> Different methodological approaches, applied by VCIOM, Levada-Center, and VoIRC RAS, do not allow comparing the results with each other. Nevertheless, the collected information makes it possible to analyze the overall dynamics of social attitudes that exist in Russian society, which are recorded by three different research centers (two Russian and one regional).

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



Source: FSBIS VoIRC RAS data.

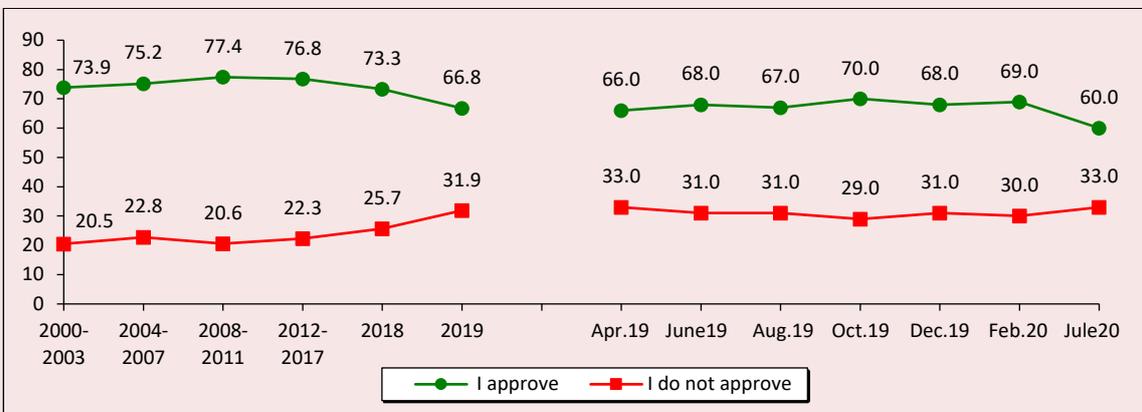
In general, do you approve or disapprove of the work of the President of the Russian Federation? (% of respondents)



Source: VCIOM data. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/>

There is no data on the level of disapproval of the President's work for 2000-2007. Data for August 2020 – the average value for two surveys: August 2, 2020 and August 9, 2020.

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



Source: Levada-Center data.

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

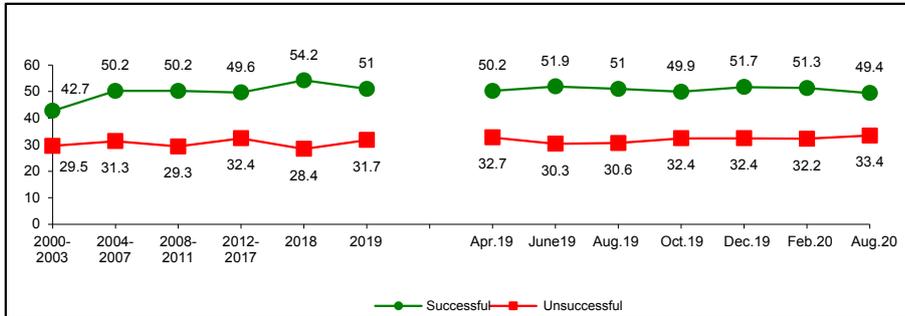
Answer	2007	2011	2012	2017	2018	2019	Apr. 2019	June 2019	Aug. 2019	Oct. 2019	Dec. 2019	Feb. 2020	Aug. 2020	Dynamics (+/-) Aug. 20 to...	
														Feb.20	Aug.19
<b>RF President</b>															
I approve	75.3	58.7	51.7	67.3	66.4	55.6	55.9	55.7	55.8	54.1	53.6	53.6	51.7	-2	-4
I don't approve	11.5	25.5	32.6	20.0	21.7	29.8	31.2	27.6	29.4	29.7	30.9	31.0	33.6	+3	+4
<b>Former Chairman of the RF Government*</b>															
I approve	-*	59.3	49.6	49.5	48.0	41.1	38.8	40.9	43.1	41.1	41.1	37.9	38.9	+1	-4
I don't approve	-	24.7	33.3	31.1	31.6	38.4	40.2	38.0	36.3	37.5	38.9	40.9	40.9	0	+5
<b>Governor</b>															
I approve	55.8	45.7	41.9	39.8	38.4	35.7	34.7	35.4	36.1	35.6	35.6	36.2	35.2	-1	-1
I don't approve	22.2	30.5	33.3	39.3	37.6	40.2	41.4	38.6	38.5	40.1	40.8	41.8	41.9	0	+3

Over the past five months (March – July 2020) there have been no significant changes in the assessment of the success with which the President solves the country's key problems:

- ✓ 49–51% of residents of the Vologda Oblast positively assess the work of the head of state aimed at strengthening Russia's international positions;
- ✓ 43–44% positively assess the President's efforts aimed at restoring order in the country;
- ✓ 35% positively assess the President's efforts aimed at protecting democracy and strengthening the freedoms of citizens (at the same time, 46–47% share the opposite point of view);
- ✓ the share of those who positively assess his efforts aimed at boosting the economy and increasing the welfare of the population is 25–27%, which is three times lower than the share of those who support the opposite point of view.

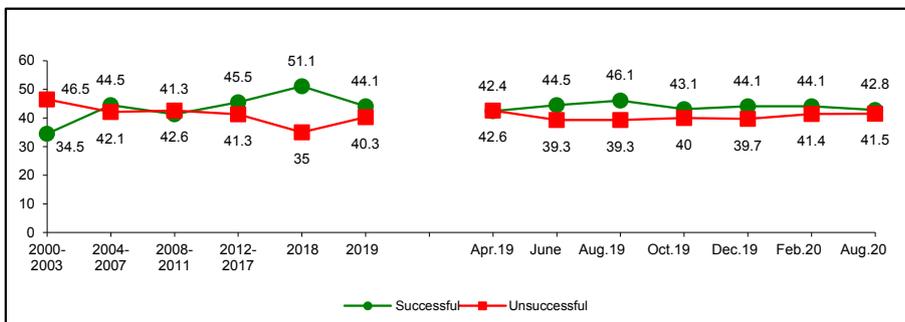
In your opinion, how successful is the RF President in coping with challenging issues?\*(% of respondents)

Strengthening Russia's international standing



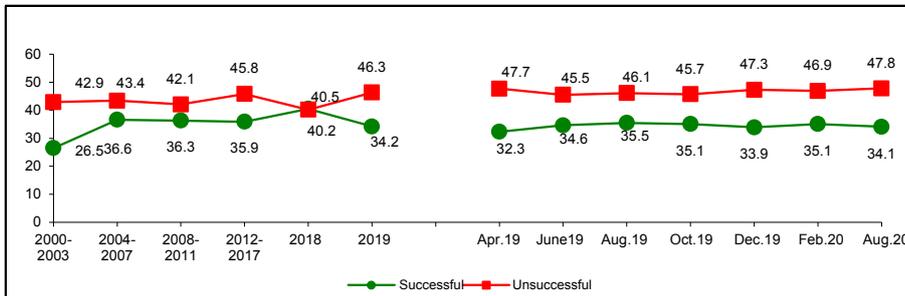
Dynamics (+/-), Aug. 2020 compared to...		
Answer	Feb. 20	Aug. 19
Successful	-2	-2
Unsuccessful	+1	+3

Imposing order in the country



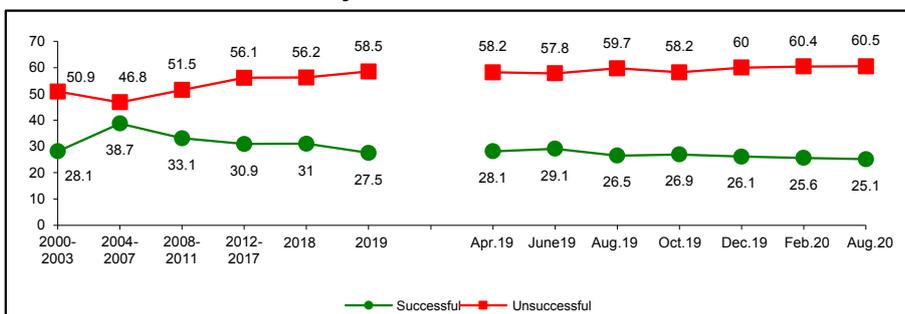
Dynamics (+/-), Aug. 2020 compared to...		
Answer	Feb. 20	Aug. 19
Successful	-1	-3
Unsuccessful	0	+2

Protecting democracy and strengthening citizens' freedoms



Dynamics (+/-), Aug. 2020 compared to...		
Answer	Feb. 20	Aug. 19
Successful	-1	-1
Unsuccessful	+1	+2

Economic recovery and increase in citizens' welfare



Dynamics (+/-), Aug. 2020 compared to...		
Answer	Feb. 20	Aug. 19
Successful	-1	-1
Unsuccessful	0	+1

In February – August 2020, the structure of people’s political preferences has not significantly changed.

The level of support for the United Russia party is 31–33%, LDPR and KPRF – 8–9%, the Just Russia party – 5%.

It should be noticed that, over the last few months (as well as on average in 2019), a significant part of the oblast’s population (34%) believes that none of the political forces represented in Parliament express their interests. It is much higher than in 2016–2018 (29%).

Which party expresses your interests? (% of respondents)

Party	2007	2011	Election to the RF State Duma 2011, fact	2012	2016	Election to the RF State Duma 2016, fact	2017	2018	2019	Apr. 2019	June 2019	Aug. 2019	Oct. 2019	Dec. 2019	Feb. 2020	Aug. 2020	Dynamics (+/-) Aug. 20 to...	
																	Feb.20	Aug. 19
United Russia	30.2	31.1	33.4	29.1	35.4	38.0	34.7	37.9	33.8	33.3	34.8	33.5	32.8	33.7	33.2	30.9	-2	-3
KPRF	7.0	10.3	16.8	10.6	8.3	14.2	7.6	9.2	8.8	8.0	8.5	8.7	9.1	9.2	8.9	8.6	0	0
LDPR	7.5	7.8	15.4	7.8	10.4	21.9	11.0	9.6	9.1	8.2	9.1	10.5	8.3	9.4	9.9	9.3	-1	-1
Just Russia	7.8	5.6	27.2	6.6	4.2	10.8	4.8	2.9	3.4	2.9	2.5	3.9	4.2	4.0	4.7	4.8	0	+1
Other	1.8	1.9	–	2.1	0.3	–	0.5	0.7	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.6	0.4	0	0
None	17.8	29.4	–	31.3	29.4	–	29.2	28.5	33.7	34.7	32.3	32.1	34.3	34.3	34.0	33.6	0	+2
It's difficult to answer	21.2	13.2	–	11.7	12.0	–	12.2	11.2	11.0	12.6	12.4	10.9	11.2	9.3	8.7	12.4	+4	+2

The estimates of social well-being of the population significantly decreased over the last five months (March – July 2020):

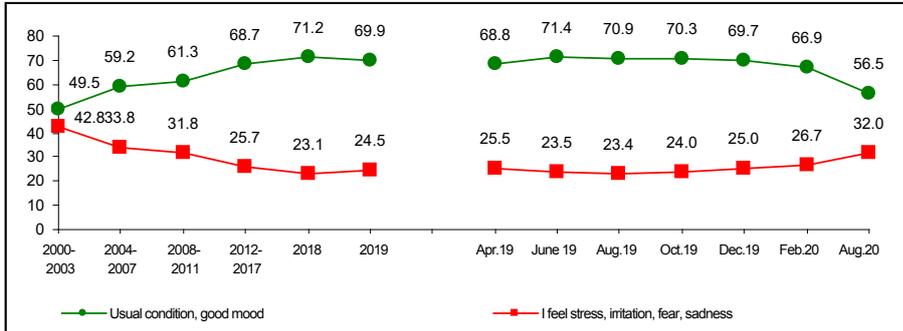
- ✓ the share of those who positively assess their daily emotional state decreased by 10 p.p. (from 66 to 56%);
- ✓ the share of those who think that “everything is no so bad and we can live; it’s difficult to live, but it’s possible to stand it” decreased by 2 p.p. (from 75 to 73%).

In the dynamics of social self-identification, since June 2019, there is an ongoing trend of the increase of the share of people who subjectively refer to themselves as “poor and extremely poor” (in general, the share of “poor and extremely poor” increased by 4 p.p., from 46 to 50%). At the same time, the proportion of residents of the Oblast who subjectively refer to themselves as “middle-class” citizens decreased by 43 to 39% (by 4 p.p.) since June 2018 to August 2020.

There are even more alarming changes in the dynamics of Consumer Sentiment Index (CSI) which shows people’s ideas on the future of the Russian economy and their personal financial situation. In February – August 2020, CSI decreased by 5 p.p. (from 91 to 86 p.p.) in the Vologda Oblast, in the country in general (according to Levada-Center data for January – March 2020) – by 16 p.p. (from 84 to 68 p.p.). At the same time, it should be noted that any CSI value less than 100 points means that negative ratings prevail over positive ones.

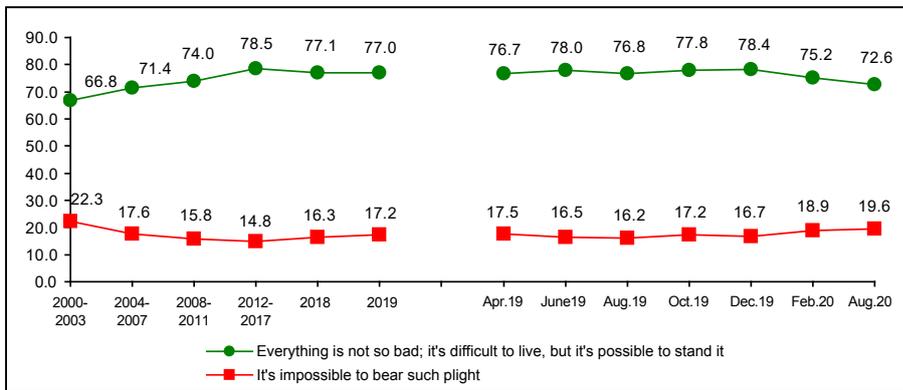
**Estimation of social condition (% of respondents)**

**Social mood**



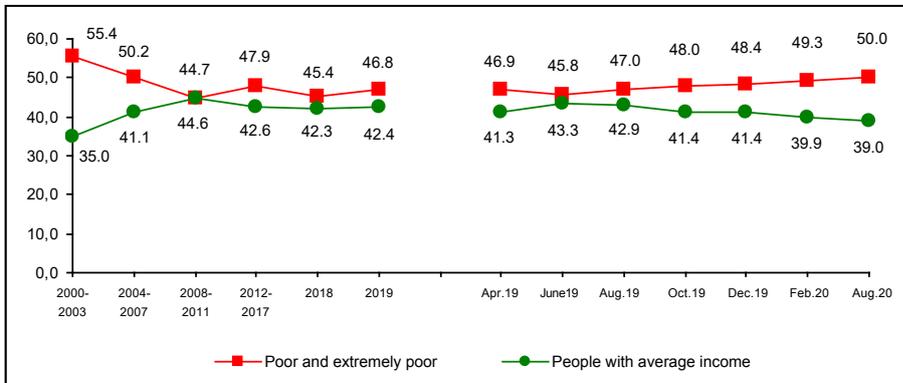
Dynamics (+/-), Aug. 2020 compared to...		
Answer	Feb. 20	Aug. 19
Usual condition, good mood	-10	-14
I feel stress, irritation, fear, sadness	+5	+9

**Stock of patience**



Dynamics (+/-), Aug. 2020 compared to...		
Answer	Feb. 20	Aug. 19
Everything is not so bad; it's difficult to live, but it's possible to stand it	-2	-4
It's impossible to bear such plight	+1	+3

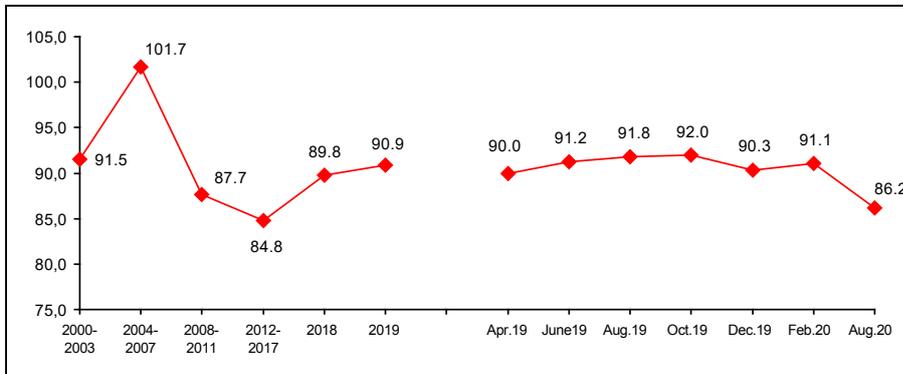
**Social self-identification\***



Dynamics (+/-), Aug. 2020 compared to...		
Answer	Feb. 20	Aug. 19
Share of people who consider their income average	-1	-4
Share of people who consider themselves poor and extremely poor	+1	+3

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

**Consumer Sentiment Index (CSI; FSBIS VolIRC RAS data for the Vologda Oblast)**



Dynamics (+/-), Aug. 2020 compared to...		
CSI	Feb. 20	Aug. 19
Index value, points	-5	-6

A significant deterioration of social mood estimates for February – August 2020 is observed in all major population's socio-demographic categories, primarily among residents of Cherepovets (by 13 p.p., from 67 to 54%), people over 55 years of age (by 12 p.p., from 64 to 52%) and the oblast's residents who, according to their self-assessment of income, belong to the group of 60% of middle-class citizens (by 12 p.p., from 68 to 56%). Although it should be noted that in almost all groups (with the exception of people under the age of 30 and 20% of the most affluent people), the share of those who positively characterize their mood decreased by 8–12 p.p.

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

Population group	2007	2011	2012	2017	2018	2019	Apr. 2019	June 2019	Aug. 2019	Oct. 2019	Dec. 2019	Feb. 2020	Aug. 2020	Dynamics (+/-) Aug. 20 to...	
														Feb. 20	Aug. 19
<b>Sex</b>															
Men	65.9	64.5	69.1	70.6	72.8	70.1	68.6	72.1	71.8	69.2	69.0	67.0	55.6	-11	-16
Women	61.7	62.0	65.8	70.2	69.8	69.6	69.0	70.8	70.1	71.2	70.3	66.9	57.3	-10	-13
<b>Age</b>															
Under 30	71.3	70.0	72.3	78.1	80.0	81.1	81.2	82.9	85.2	79.9	81.3	71.7	69.0	-3	-16
30-55	64.8	62.5	67.9	71.5	72.6	71.2	71.5	70.5	74.0	71.1	71.9	67.5	56.2	-11	-18
Over 55	54.8	58.3	62.1	64.9	65.2	63.3	59.8	67.4	60.7	65.1	62.6	64.3	51.9	-12	-9
<b>Education</b>															
Secondary and incomplete secondary	58.4	57.4	57.2	63.6	64.8	63.2	60.4	64.4	65.6	63.4	64.0	63.1	51.7	-11	-14
Secondary vocational	64.6	63.6	66.7	72.0	72.2	72.7	73.0	77.3	72.8	73.9	70.4	69.0	59.1	-10	-14
Higher and incomplete higher	68.6	68.3	77.0	75.8	76.8	73.4	73.3	72.1	73.9	72.6	74.7	68.6	58.6	-10	-15
<b>Income groups</b>															
Bottom 20%	51.6	45.3	51.5	52.9	57.3	53.2	56.1	54.9	53.2	54.1	50.2	48.4	40.4	-8	-13
Middle 60%	62.9	65.3	68.7	72.0	71.9	71.4	69.9	74.1	72.1	72.6	72.6	68.4	56.6	-12	-16
Top 20%	74.9	75.3	81.1	83.7	82.9	81.8	81.0	81.0	81.4	80.5	80.5	79.1	76.4	-3	-5
<b>Territories</b>															
Vologda	63.1	67.1	73.6	72.6	71.0	68.6	68.5	70.3	68.0	70.8	68.6	66.9	57.0	-10	-11
Cherepovets	68.1	71.2	76.2	75.7	75.8	71.2	67.8	72.1	74.4	72.0	69.9	67.3	54.4	-13	+20
Districts	61.6	57.1	59.8	66.1	68.7	69.8	69.6	71.7	70.5	69.0	70.3	66.8	57.5	-9	-13
Oblast	63.6	63.1	67.3	70.4	71.2	69.9	68.8	71.4	70.9	70.3	69.7	66.9	56.5	-10	-14

## CONCLUSIONS

Analyzing the dynamics of public opinion for the period from February to August 2020, we cannot ignore the fact that this time was the most acute moment of the epidemiological crisis associated with the spread of coronavirus infection. At the same time, the alarming state of people was caused not just by the risk of infection but by two other factors – lifestyle changes (in particular, professional conditions, limited vacation opportunities, etc.) and the deterioration of the economic

situation in the country due to the forced need to introduce strict restrictive measures. Neither Russia nor most of the world's countries have actually ever experienced such a situation, and it has certainly contributed to a high degree of uncertainty and anxiety in the nature of public moods.

At the same time, there were also positive factors that could have a positive impact on the dynamics of public opinion. First, on July 1, 2020, one of the main political events of recent years took place – the all-Russian vote on amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation. In the country as a whole, 78% of Russian voters (almost 58 million people) supported the amendments to the Constitution with a turnout of 68% (74 million people). By supporting changes to the text of the Basic Law, society not only voted for strengthening national values and moving Russia toward a social state but also placed its trust in the President personally, who initiated the reform to change the Constitution on January 15, 2020 in the Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation.

Second, Russian studies show that, during the entire period of the acute epidemiological crisis, Russians had a fairly positive assessment of the activities of the authorities to prevent the spread of the infection. Thus, according to VCIOM data, 53–57% of Russians say that the Russian authorities take sufficient measures to prevent the coronavirus epidemic, 71% note significant assistance from volunteers<sup>4</sup>.

Based on the analysis of the factors that determine the nature of public mood in 2020, it would be logical to assume that, against the background of a deteriorating (for obvious reasons) mood, self-assessment of own financial situation, and growing anxiety about the future of the Russian economy, positive changes will be observed in the dynamics of assessments of government activities. However, as the dynamics of public opinion shows, this is not the case. However, as the dynamics of public opinion shows, this is not the case. The level of approval of the President's activities in the Vologda Oblast and in the country as a whole has significantly decreased (by 3–9 p.p.); there are no positive changes in the assessments of the success of the President in solving the country's key problems (including the economic recovery and the growth of citizens' welfare); as in 2019, a third of population (34%) believes that none of the political parties, represented in the State Duma, express their interests (this is even higher than the level of support for United Russia – 31%).

The current situation suggests that, for now, factors, negatively affecting the psychological well-being of society (the ongoing threat of the coronavirus pandemic, the state of uncertainty due to the possibility of job loss, deterioration of the financial situation), “outweigh” the efforts of the authorities to support the socio-economic situation in the country and general population's living standards.

It should be noted that the new decree on national development goals, signed by the President on July 21, 2020, actually postpones the implementation of national projects from 2024 to 2030, which also does not inspire optimism in people who still wait for “a decisive breakthrough in saving people”, which was promised by the President in 2018<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Coronavirus: The fight continues! VCIOM analytical review no. 4237, dated May 18, 2020. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=10282>

<sup>5</sup> The Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly on March 1, 2018. *The Russian President's official website*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56957>

However, by voting for the amendments to the Constitution on July 1, 2020, society once again gave the government a vote of confidence, although with difficulties, and, as some experts note, “it was not possible to consolidate society around the amendments to the Constitution. The result is high, but there is no monolithic support”<sup>6</sup>. In most Russian regions (47 out of 56), its oblast centers, and large industrial cities, the share of Russians who voted against amendments to the Basic Law was higher than the national average number (21.27%). It means that, even after supporting the amendments, society doubts that it will be implemented without significant changes in the system of public administration.

Whether this will be done or not is an open question, but it will determine the dynamics of public mood in the following months and overall prospects for the country’s socio-economic development until 2024, when the next Presidential elections will be held.

For now, the future remains unclear, and everything depends on the President’s decisions.

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

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem.*