

PUBLIC OPINION MONITORING

Public Opinion Monitoring of the State of the Russian Society

As in the previous issues, we publish the results of the monitoring of public opinion concerning the state of the Russian society conducted by VoIRC RAS in the Vologda Oblast¹.

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 (October 2020), as well as for the period from August 2019 to October 2020 (last 6 polls).

We compare the results of the surveys with the data for 2000 (the first year of V. Putin's first presidential term), 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 August – October 2020, the level of approval of the work of the President of the Russian Federation did not change significantly. The share of positive assessments is 52%, negative – 33%.

At the same time, population's assessments are somewhat lower than 12 months ago (October 2019): the share of positive assessments decreased by 2 p. p. (from 54 to 52%), negative – increased by 3 p. p. (from 30 to 33%)².

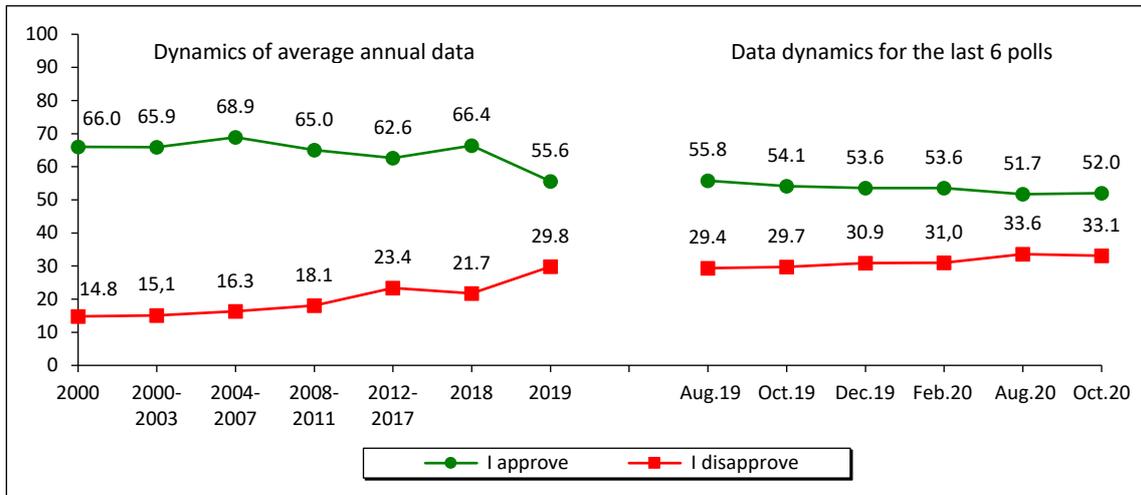
We should say that the level of approval of the President's work is noticeably lower in 2019–2020 than in 2000 (the first year of V. Putin's first presidential term). In this period, the share of positive assessments decreased by 10 p. p. (from 65 to 52–55%), and the relative share of negative assessments increased by nearly 2 times (15–17 p. p., from 15 to 30–33%).

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

More information on the results of VoIRC RAS polls is available at: [http:// www.vssc.ac.ru/](http://www.vssc.ac.ru/)

² Hereinafter, the results of the comparison of poll data (October 2020) and the results of the last year "wave" of monitoring (October 2019) are highlighted in a frame.

In general, do you approve or disapprove of the work of the President of Russia?
(% of respondents, FSBIS VolRC RAS data)*



* Hereinafter, all graphs show average annual data for 2000, 2018, 2019, as well as average annual data for 2000–2003, 2004–2007, 2008–2011, 2012–2017, corresponding to the periods of presidential terms.

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

Respond option	Dynamics of average annual data							Data dynamics for the last 6 polls						Dynamics (+/-), Oct. 2020 to Oct. 2019
	2000	2007	2011	2012	2017	2018	2019	Aug. 2019	Oct. 2019	Dec. 2019	Feb. 2020	Aug. 2020	Oct. 2020	
RF President														
I approve	66.0	75.3	58.7	51.7	67.3	66.4	55.6	55.8	54.1	53.6	53.6	51.7	52.0	-2
I disapprove	14.8	11.5	25.5	32.6	20.0	21.7	29.8	29.4	29.7	30.9	31.0	33.6	33.1	+3
Chairman of the RF Government**														
I approve	-*	-*	59.3	49.6	49.5	48.0	41.1	43.1	41.1	41.1	37.9	38.9	38.8	-2
I disapprove	-	-	24.7	33.3	31.1	31.6	38.4	36.3	37.5	38.9	40.9	40.9	40.8	+3
Governor of the Oblast														
I approve	56.1	55.8	45.7	41.9	39.8	38.4	35.7	36.1	35.6	35.6	36.2	35.2	35.5	0
I disapprove	19.3	22.2	30.5	33.3	39.3	37.6	40.2	38.5	40.1	40.8	41.8	41.9	42.1	+2

* According to the research methodology, the sampling error does not exceed 3%, therefore, hereinafter, changes with a difference of 2 p. p. or less in all tables are considered insignificant. They are highlighted in blue in the tables (negative changes are highlighted in red, and positive changes are highlighted in green).

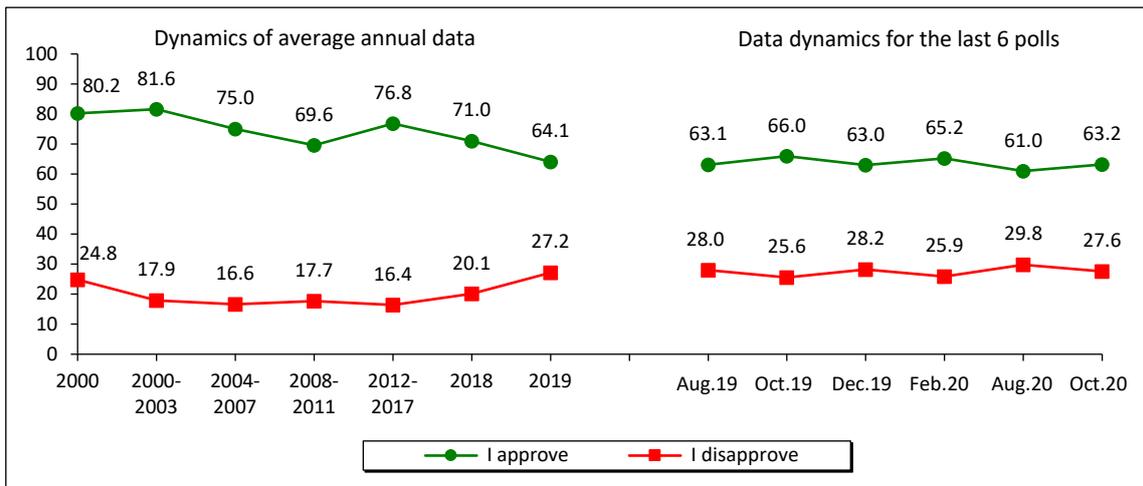
** The question was first asked in 2008. In 2020, the first poll was conducted in January 24–February 12. The current chairman of the RF Government M. V. Mishustin has just started his new work (January 16, 2020), therefore, respondents were asked about work of the former Prime Minister – Dmitry Medvedev.

For reference:

According to VCIOM, the level of approval of the President’s work did not change significantly in August–October 2020 (61–63%), the share of negative assessments decreased by 2 p. p. (from 30 to 28%).

According to Levada-Center, the relative share of positive assessments of the President’s work increased by 3 p. p. (from 66 to 69%), negative – decreased by 3 p. p. (from 33 to 30%)³.

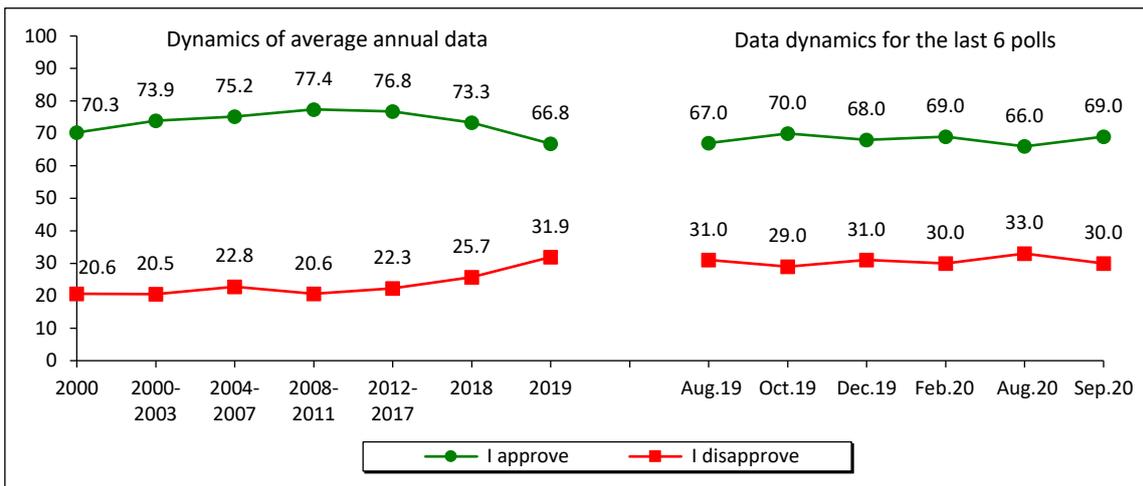
In general, do you approve or disapprove of the work of the President of the Russian Federation? (% of respondents; VCIOM data)



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

Data for October 2020 – average value for two polls: from October 4, 2020 and October 11, 2020.

In general, do you approve or disapprove of the work of V. Putin at the position of the President of Russia? (% of respondents; Levada-Center data)



Source: Levada-Center data. Available at: <https://www.levada.ru/>

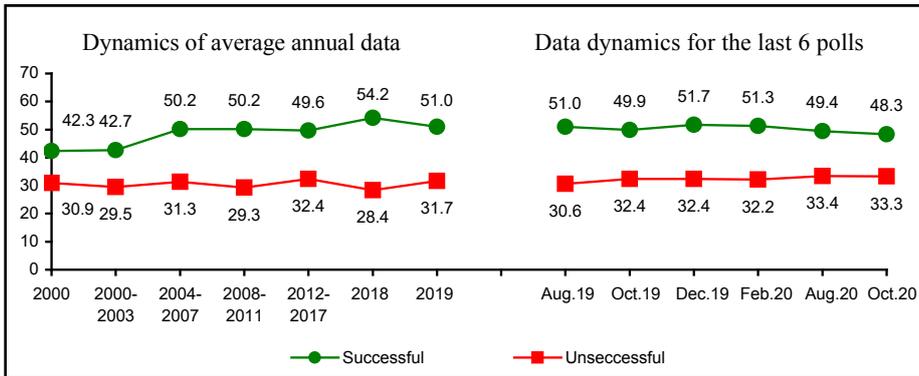
³ Different methodological approaches, applied by VCIOM, Levada-Center, and VolRC RAS, do not allow comparing the results with each other. Nevertheless, the collected information makes it possible to analyze the overall dynamics of social attitudes that exist in Russian society, which are recorded by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

From August to October 2020, there have been no significant changes in the assessment of the success with which the President solves the country's key problems:

- ✓ 49% of residents of the Vologda Oblast positively assess the work of the head of the state aimed at strengthening Russia's international positions;
- ✓ 43% positively assess the President's efforts aimed at restoring order in the country;
- ✓ 33–34 positively assess the President's efforts aimed at protecting democracy and strengthening the freedoms of citizens (at the same time, 48–49% 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 24–25%, which is three times lower than the share of those who support the opposite point of view (61–62%).

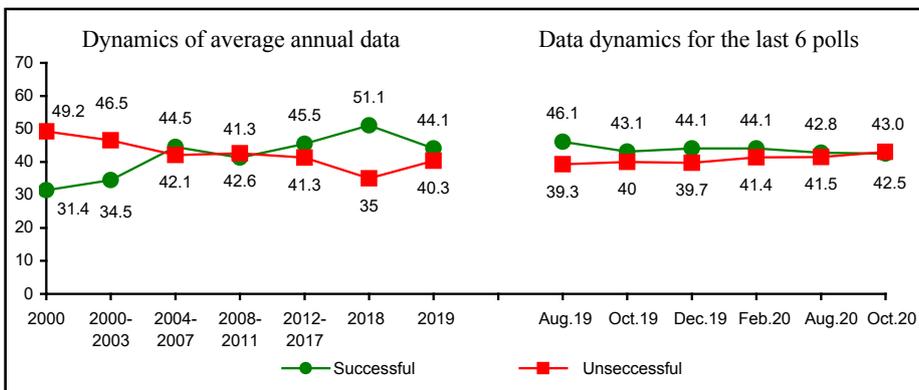
It should also be noted that, compared to October 2019, assessments of the success of the President's work on all aforementioned issues have worsened, except for the strengthening of Russia's international positions. Thus, the share of people who think that the President is not successful in restoring order in the country increased by 3.4 p.p. (from 39 to 42%), protecting democracy and strengthening citizen's freedoms (from 46 to 49%), boosting the economy and increasing the welfare of the population (from 58 to 62%).

In your opinion, how successful is the RF President in coping with challenging issues..?
of respondents; FSBIS VoIRC RAS data)
Strengthening Russia's international positions



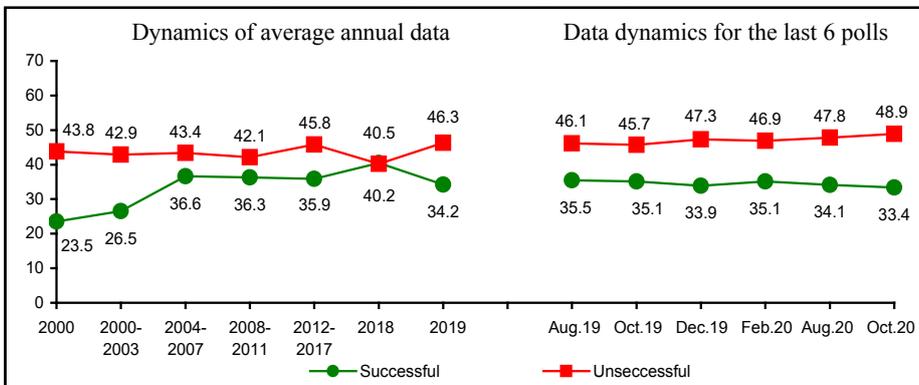
Annual dynamics (October 2020 to October 2019)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Successful	-2
Unsuccessful	+1

Imposing order in the country



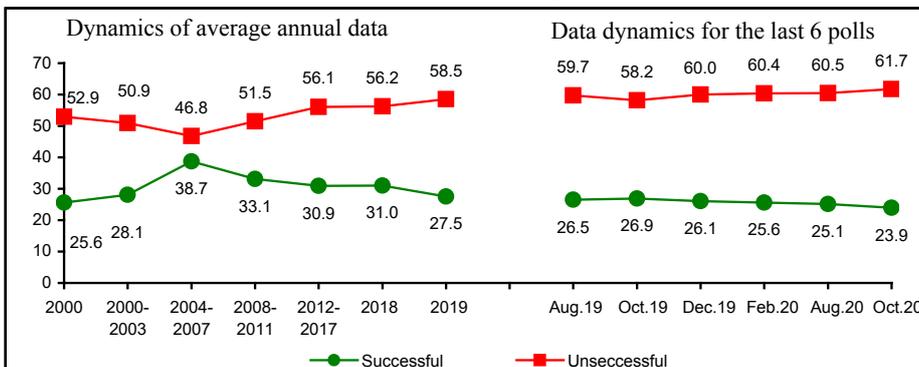
Annual dynamics (October 2020 to October 2019)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Successful	-1
Unsuccessful	+3

Protecting democracy and strengthening citizens' freedoms



Annual dynamics (October 2020 to October 2019)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Successful	-2
Unsuccessful	+3

Economic recovery and increase in citizens' welfare



Annual dynamics (October 2020 to October 2019)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Successful	-3
Unsuccessful	+4

In August–October 2020, the structure of people’s political preferences has not significantly changed: the level of support for the United Russia party is 31%, LDPR and KPRF– 8–9%, the Just Russia party – 4%. At the same time, the share of the Oblast’s population believing that none of the political forces represented in Parliament express their interests remains high (34%).

The same situation was a year ago (October 2019), however, in comparison with 2000, there are some changes. In particular, the level of support for the United Russia party has increased by 12 p. p. over this period (from 19 to 31%), however, the level of electoral and political apathy has also increased: the share of those who are not satisfied with any parties represented in the State Duma increased by 4 p.p. (from 30 to 34%).

Which party expresses your interests? (%of respondents; FSBIS VoIRC RAS data)

Party	Dynamics of average annual data										Data dynamics for the last 6 polls						Dynamics (+/-), Oct. 2020 to Oct. 2019
	2000	2007	2011	Election to the RF State Duma 2011, fact	2012	2016	Election to the RF State Duma 2016, fact	2017	2018	2019	Aug. 2019	Oct. 2019	Dec. 2019	Feb. 2020	Aug. 2020	Oct. 2020	
United Russia	18.5	30.2	31.1	33.4	29.1	35.4	38.0	34.7	37.9	33.8	33.5	32.8	33.7	33.2	30.9	31.1	-2
KPRF	11.5	7.0	10.3	16.8	10.6	8.3	14.2	7.6	9.2	8.8	8.7	9.1	9.2	8.9	8.6	8.8	0
LDPR	4.8	7.5	7.8	15.4	7.8	10.4	21.9	11.0	9.6	9.1	10.5	8.3	9.4	9.9	9.3	9.4	+1
Just Russia	-	7.8	5.6	27.2	6.6	4.2	10.8	4.8	2.9	3.4	3.9	4.2	4.0	4.7	4.8	4.3	0
Other	0.9	1.8	1.9	-	2.1	0.3	-	0.5	0.7	0.3	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.6	0.4	0.3	0
None	29.6	17.8	29.4	-	31.3	29.4	-	29.2	28.5	33.7	32.1	34.3	34.3	34.0	33.6	33.8	-1
Hesitate to respond	20.3	21.2	13.2	-	11.7	12.0	-	12.2	11.2	11.0	10.9	11.2	9.3	8.7	12.4	12.2	+1

The estimates of social well-being changed positively and insignificantly for the first time over the last 6 polls (from August 2019 to October 2020): the share of the Oblast’s population who positively assess their daily emotional state, in August – October 2020, increased by 4 p. p. (from 57 to 61%). At the same time, the relative share of those who negatively assess their mood remains stable: as in August 2020, 32% of the Oblast’s population noted that they feel “stress, irritation, fear, sadness”.

There were no significant changes in the level of stock of patience in August–October 2020: the share of those who think that “everything is not so bad, and it is possible to live; it is difficult to live, but it is possible to stand it” is 72%; the relative share of those who “cannot bear their plight” is 20%.

Besides, in 2020, the structure of population’s social self-identification remains stable: 49.5% of the Oblast’s residents refer to themselves as “poor and extremely poor”. At the same time, the share of those who subjectively refer to themselves as “rich and middle-class people” is nearly 10 p. p lower (39–40%).

Consumer Sentiment Index in October 2020, just like in August 2020, was 86 p., which is 5 p. less than in February (91 p.).

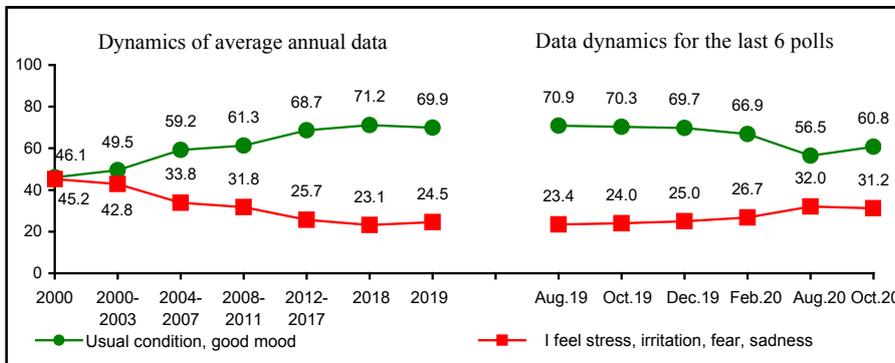
If we compare the current situation (in October 2020) with the last year’s period (October 2019), negative changes are more obvious:

- ✓ the share of social mood’s positive assessments decreased by 10 p.p. (from 70 to 60%);
- ✓ the share of people who think that “everything is not so bad, and it is possible to live; it is difficult to live, but it is possible to stand it” decreased by 6 p. p. (from 78 to 72%);
- ✓ the share of those who refer to themselves as “rich and middle-class people” decreased by 3 p. p. (from 41 to 38%)

Consumer Sentiment Index decreased by 6 points (from 92 to 86 p.). At the same time, for many years (since 2007–2008), it has been below 100 points, which means the prevalence of negative assessments in the population’s estimations concerning the future of the Russian economy and their personal financial situation

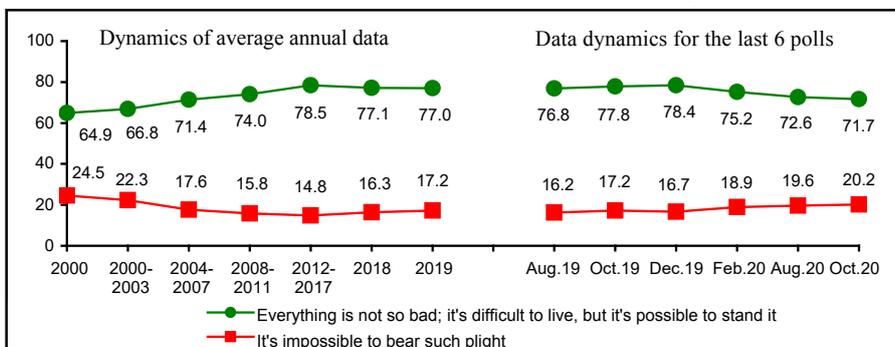
Estimation of social condition (% of respondents; FSBIS VoIRC RAS data)

Social mood



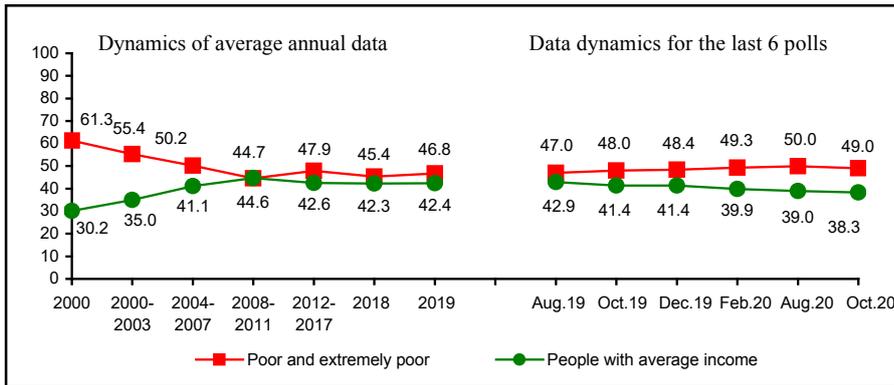
Annual dynamics (October 2020 to October 2019)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Usual condition, good mood	-10
I feel stress, irritation, fear, sadness	+7

Stock of patience



Annual dynamics (October 2020 to October 2019)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Everything is not so bad; it's difficult to live, but it's possible to stand it	-6
It's impossible to bear such plight	+3

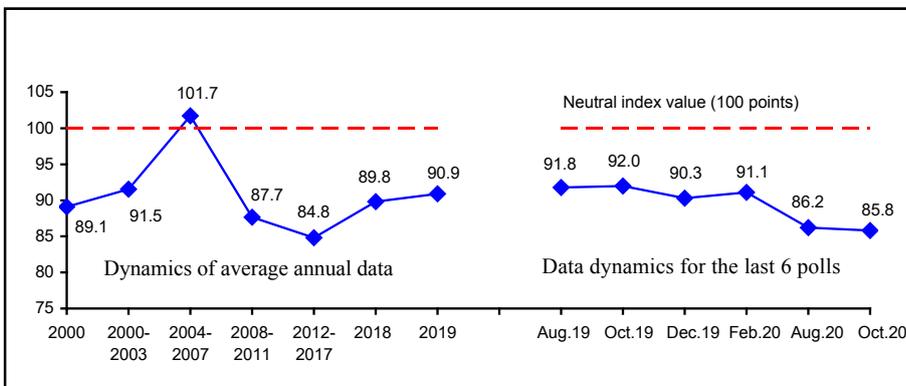
Social self-identification*



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

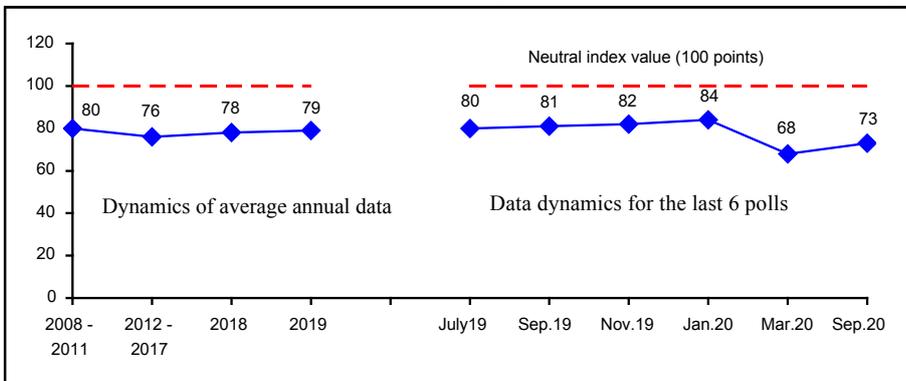
Annual dynamics (October 2020 to October 2019)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Share of people who consider their income average	-3
Share of people who consider themselves poor and extremely poor	+1

Consumer Sentiment Index (CSI)



Annual dynamics (October 2020 to October 2019)	
CSI	Dynamics (+ / -)
Index value, points	-6

Consumer Sentiment Index (CSI; Levada-Center data* for Russia)



Annual dynamics (October 2020 to October 2019)	
CSI	Dynamics (+ / -)
Index value, points	-8

* The index has been calculated since 2008

Source: Levada-Center data. Available at: <https://www.levada.ru/indikatory/sotsialno-ekonomicheskie-indikatory/>

The improvement of social mood's assessments in August–October 2020 is recorded in population's most (in 11 out of 14) main socio-demographic categories: first of all, among people aged 30–55 (by 7 p. p., from 56 to 63%) and those who, according to self-assessments of income, are included in the group of 20% of the least wealthy citizens (by 6 p. p., from 40 to 46%).

The deterioration of social mood's assessments in August–October 2020 is recorded among people aged under 30 (by 4 p.p., from 69 to 65%) and in the group of 20% of the wealthiest people in the Oblast (by 5 p. p., from 76 to 71%).

It should be also noted that, in comparison with the last year's period (October 2020 compared to October 2019), negative changes of social mood's assessments are recorder in all population's socio-demographic categories. The share of those who experience mostly positive emotions in most groups decreased by 7–11 p. p., among Cherepovets residents – by 13 p. p. (from 72 to 59%), among people aged under 30 – by 15 p. p. (from 81 to 64).

Social mood in different social groups (respond option "Wonderful mood, normal, stable condition", % of respondents; FSBIS VoIRC RAS data)

Population group	Dynamics of average annual data							Data dynamics for the last 6 polls						Dynamics (+/-) Oct. 2020 to Oct. 2019
	2000	2007	2011	2012	2017	2018	2019	Aug. 2019	Oct. 2019	Dec. 2019	Feb. 2020	Aug. 2020	Oct. 2020	
Gender														
Male	50.1	65.9	64.5	69.1	70.6	72.8	70.1	71.8	69.2	69.0	67.0	55.6	60.7	-9
Female	43.3	61.7	62.0	65.8	70.2	69.8	69.6	70.1	71.2	70.3	66.9	57.3	60.8	-10
Age														
Under 30	59.1	71.3	70.0	72.3	78.1	80.0	81.1	85.2	79.9	81.3	71.7	69.0	64.6	-15
30-55	44.2	64.8	62.5	67.9	71.5	72.6	71.2	74.0	71.1	71.9	67.5	56.2	62.5	-9
Over 55	37.4	54.8	58.3	62.1	64.9	65.2	63.3	60.7	65.1	62.6	64.3	51.9	56.9	-8
Education														
Secondary and incomplete secondary	41.7	58.4	57.4	57.2	63.6	64.8	63.2	65.6	63.4	64.0	63.1	51.7	56.9	-7
Secondary vocational	46.4	64.6	63.6	66.7	72.0	72.2	72.7	72.8	73.9	70.4	69.0	59.1	63.5	-10
Higher and incomplete higher	53.3	68.6	68.3	77.0	75.8	76.8	73.4	73.9	72.6	74.7	68.6	58.6	61.4	-11
Income groups														
Bottom 20%	28.4	51.6	45.3	51.5	52.9	57.3	53.2	53.2	54.1	50.2	48.4	40.4	46.0	-8
Middle 60%	45.5	62.9	65.3	68.7	72.0	71.9	71.4	72.1	72.6	72.6	68.4	56.6	61.9	-11
Top 20%	64.6	74.9	75.3	81.1	83.7	82.9	81.8	81.4	80.5	80.5	79.1	76.4	70.6	-10
Territories														
Vologda	49.2	63.1	67.1	73.6	72.6	71.0	68.6	68.0	70.8	68.6	66.9	57.0	61.0	-10
Cherepovets	50.8	68.1	71.2	76.2	75.7	75.8	71.2	74.4	72.0	69.9	67.3	54.4	59.3	-13
Districts	42.2	61.6	57.1	59.8	66.1	68.7	69.8	70.5	69.0	70.3	66.8	57.5	61.4	-8
Oblast	46.2	63.6	63.1	67.3	70.4	71.2	69.9	70.9	70.3	69.7	66.9	56.5	60.7	-10

CONSLUSIONS

Analyzing the dynamics of public opinion for the period from August to October 2020, we should highlight one important change which, however, still has not become a steady trend – the improvement of social mood in most (11 out of 14) main socio-demographic categories of population. In general across the Oblast, the share of people who feel mostly positive emotions increased by 4 p. p. (from 57 to 61%) in October 2020. This is not much, but such positive changes were recorded for the first time since August 2019, and this is especially important during the period of relentless epidemiological threat of the coronavirus infection spread.

In August–October 2020, there were no significant changes in other key indicators of public opinion monitoring (including the assessment of the President’s work, the assessment of the success of the President’s actions to address the country’s major problems, population’s electoral preferences, as well as the characteristics of their financial situation and its development forecasts).

The vector of public opinion dynamics is more evident while analyzing population’s assessments in an average annual retrospective, and in this case, unfortunately, we have to state mainly negative changes.

In comparison with October 2019, in October 2020, the share of negative assessments concerning the President’s work insignificantly (by 3 p. p.) increased (from 30 to 33%, and these changes are also recorded in all-Russian VCIOM data). The share of the Oblast’s residents who think that the President’s work in restoring order in the country, protecting democracy, boosting economy, and increasing citizens’ welfare was unsuccessful went up by 3–4 p. p.

The particular concern is caused by the fact that, over the last 12 months (from October 2019 to October 2020), the share of people who positively assess their emotional state in fact decreased by 10 p. p. (from 70 to 60%), and the share of those who experience “stress, irritation, fear, sadness” increased form 24 to 31% (by 7 p. p.).

Undoubtedly, the coronavirus pandemic contributed to the deterioration of the social mood of the Oblast’s residents, which perhaps affected a lifestyle of every person in 2020. The uncertainty of the dynamics of the epidemiological situation, lifestyle changes as a result of the common introduction of restrictive measures, the worsening economic situation – all of this has a negative impact on the psychological state of society, and it is further exacerbated by the growing international political tensions in the territorial proximity from Russian borders (protests in Belarus, the deterioration of the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, “the Navalny’s case” that led to another anti-Russian sanctions).

However, it is no less important to pay attention to the fact that the prevalence of negative assessments in the dynamics of financial situation, in the assessment of the success of the President’s work to boost the economy and increase population’s well-being, in population’s forecasts concerning the prospects of the development of economic situation in the country and personal well-being is the trend which has been existing in Russian society for many years, and it had begun long before intial media messages about the upcoming coronavirus pandemic.

In fact, since 2008, Consumer Sentiment Index has been below 100 points which means the prevalence of pessimistic assessments concerning the forecasts for the Russian economy future, and, since 2012–2017, the share of people who subjectively refer to themselves as “poor and

extremely poor” prevails over the share of those who refer to themselves as “rich” or at least “middle-income”.

In general, over the last 20 years (from 2000 to October 2020), the share of people negatively assessing the President’s work to boost the economy and increase population’s well-being increased by 9 p. p. (from 53 to 62%), and Consumer Sentiment Index decreased by 3 points (from 89 to 86 p.).

This is primarily the reason why today we have a situation when the assessment of the President’s work is much worse than in 2000, when V. Putin started to act as the President: in 2000 – October 2020, the share of positive assessments of the President’s work decreased by 14 p. p. (from 66 to 52%), and the share of negative assessments increased by 18 p. p. (from 15 to 33%).

The similar results are shown by all-Russian studies. Thus, according to VCIOM data for 2000 – October 2020, the level of approval the President’s work decreased by 17 p. p. (from 80 to 63%), according to Levada-Center – the share of negative characteristics increased by 10 p. p. (from 20 to 30%).

Thus, based on given factual data, we shall conclude that the absence of positive dynamics in most aspects of the whole range of issues, which characterize the assessment of the efficiency of state administration (most of all, in population’s attitude to the President’s work, is related not just to the worsening of epidemiological, economic, and global political situation in 2020 but to the fact how efficiently state’s social obligations are fulfilled in the long-term perspective, in relation to increasing the growth of well-being and quality of citizens’ lives and achieving social justice.

This wording of the question becomes even more relevant after the adoption of amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation, which significantly strengthen the status of Russia as a social state, impose increased social obligations on the ruling elites, and stimulate the growth of society’s corresponding social expectations.

Will the Government fulfill these obligations? The answer is still uncertain, but, perhaps, it is not less important than overcoming the epidemiological threat of the coronavirus spread; in the long run at least.

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