

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 VolRC 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 (December 2020), as well as for the period from October 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 2018–2020.

In October – December 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 at the beginning of the year: from December 2019 to December 2020, the share of positive assessments decreased by 2 p.p. (from 54 to 52%), negative – increased by 2 p.p. (from 31 to 33%)².

In yearly dynamics, there is a continuing decrease of the level of approval of the President's work: in 2018, the share of positive assessments was 66%, in 2019 – 57%, in 2020 – 52% (from 2018 to 2020 in general – decrease by 14 p.p., from 66 to 52%).

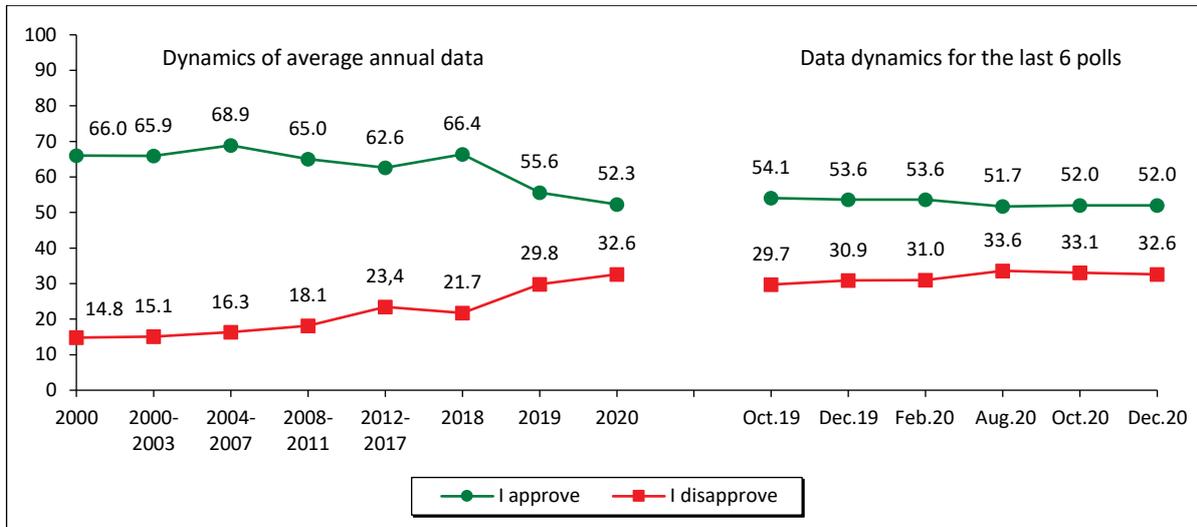
The relative share of negative assessments in 2018 was 22%, in 2019 – 30%, in 2020 – 33% (from 2018 to 2020 in general – growth by 11 p.p., from 22 to 33%).

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 VolRC RAS polls is available at: <http://www.vssc.ac.ru/>.

² Hereinafter, the results of a comparative analysis of survey data, conducted on December 2020, and the results of a last-year monitoring "wave" are given in the frame (December 2019).

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



* Hereinafter, all graphs show average annual data for 2000, 2018, 2019, 2020, 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 (+/-), Dec. 2020 to Dec. 2019
	2000	2007	2011	2012	2018	2019	2020	Oct. 2019	Dec. 2019	Feb. 2020	Aug. 2020	Oct. 2020	Dec. 2020	
RF President														
I approve	66.0	75.3	58.7	51.7	66.4	55.6	52.3	54.1	53.6	53.6	51.7	52.0	52.0	-2
I disapprove	14.8	11.5	25.5	32.6	21.7	29.8	32.6	29.7	30.9	31.0	33.6	33.1	32.6	+2
Chairman of the RF Government**														
I approve	-**	-**	59.3	49.6	48.0	41.1	38.7	41.1	41.1	37.9	38.9	38.8	39.1	-2
I disapprove	-	-	24.7	33.3	31.6	38.4	40.4	37.5	38.9	40.9	40.9	40.8	38.8	0
Governor of the Oblast														
I approve	56.1	55.8	45.7	41.9	38.4	35.7	35.0	35.6	35.6	36.2	35.2	35.5	32.9	-3
I disapprove	19.3	22.2	30.5	33.3	37.6	40.2	42.5	40.1	40.8	41.8	41.9	42.1	44.2	+3

* According to the methodology of the study, the sampling error does not exceed 3%. Hereinafter, changes with a 2 p.p. difference are not taken into account or considered insignificant; they are highlighted in blue in the tables. Positive changes are highlighted in green, negative changes are highlighted in red.

** 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:

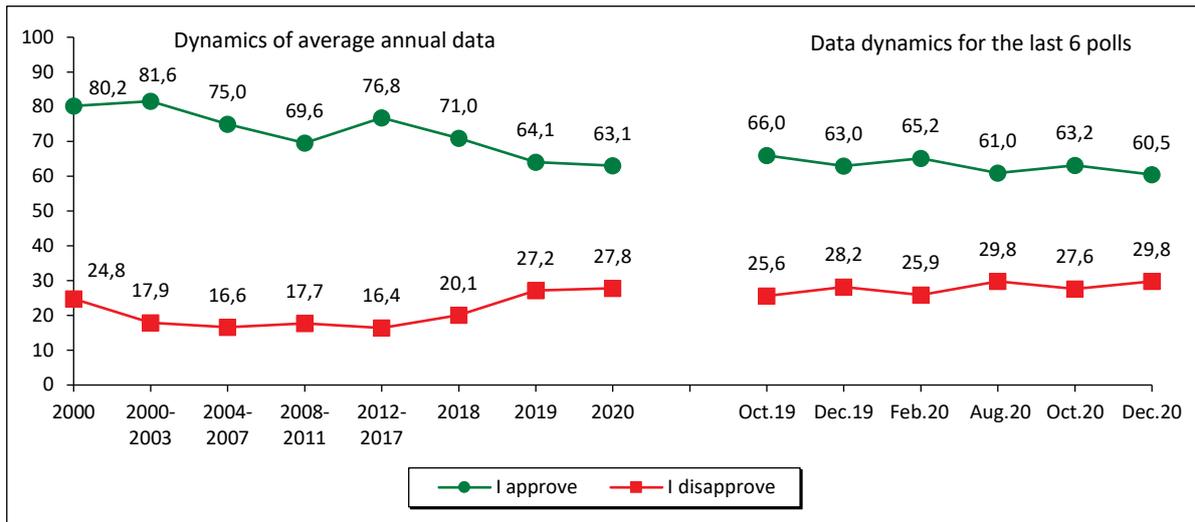
According to VCIOM, the level of approval of the President's work in October – December 2020 decreased insignificantly (by 2 p.p., from 63 to 61%), the share of negative assessments also decreased by 2 p.p. (from 28 to 30%).

There are no significant changes in 2020 in comparison with 2019 (the level of approval is 63–64%).

According to Levada-Center, the relative share of positive assessments of the President's work in October – November 2020 decreased by 3 p.p. (from 68 to 65%), negative – increased by 3 p.p. (from 31 to 34%)³.

There is a 3 p.p. decrease of the approval of the President's work (from 67 to 64%) in average annual assessments for 2019–2020.

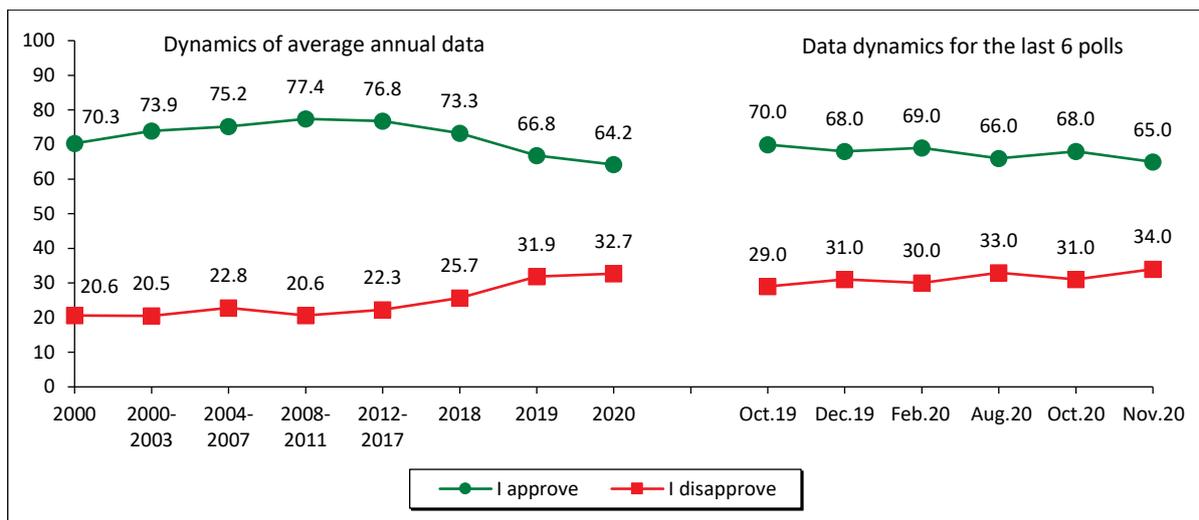
In general, do you approve or disapprove of the work of the President of the Russian Federation? (% of respondents; VCIOM data)



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

Data for December 2020 – average value for two polls: from December 6, 2020 and December 13, 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 October to December 2020, there have been no significant changes in the assessment of the success with which the President solves the country’s key problems:

Nevertheless, a gradual decrease of the share of positive assessments over 2020 is seen in most key problems. From December 2019 to December 2020:

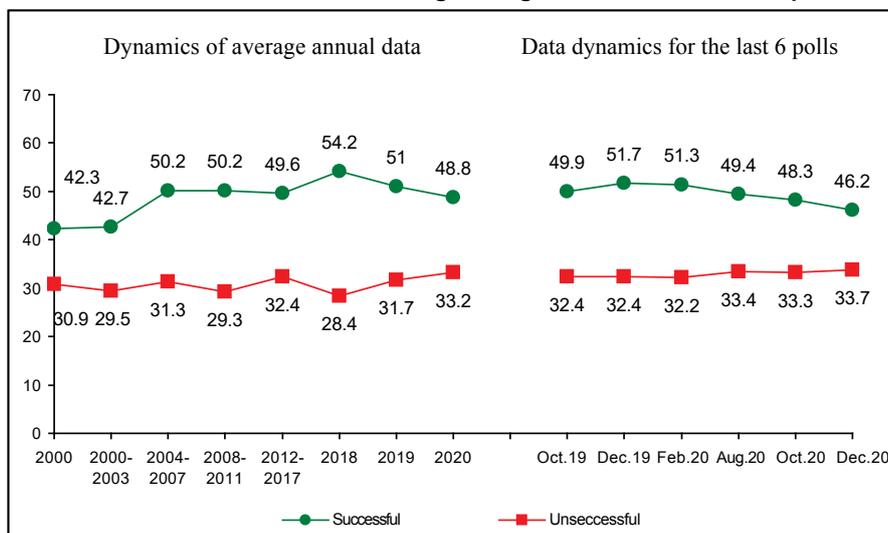
- ✓ there is a 6 p. p. (from 52 to 46%) decrease of the share of people who think that the President is successful in strengthening Russia’s international positions;
- ✓ there is a 3 p. p. (from 44 to 41%) decrease of the relative share of those who positively assess the President’s work in restoring order in the country;
- ✓ there is a 2 p. p. (from 34 to 32%) decrease of the share of people who support the President’s work protecting democracy and strengthening the freedoms of citizens;
- ✓ the share of those who positively assess his efforts aimed at boosting the economy and increasing the welfare of the population has barely changed in December 2019 – December 2020 (25–26%); it remains rather insignificant, and the relative share of negative assessments has increased by 2 p. p. over the same period (from 60 to 62%).

There is a decrease of the share of positive assessment in the dynamics of average annual data from 2018 concerning the President’s work on:

- ✓ strengthening Russia’s international positions (by 5 p. p., from 54 to 49%);
- ✓ restoring order in the country (by 8 p. p., from 51 to 43%);
- ✓ protecting democracy and strengthening the freedoms of citizens (by 7 p. p., from 41 to 34%);
- ✓ boosting the economy and increasing the welfare of the population (by 6 p. p., from 31 to 25%).

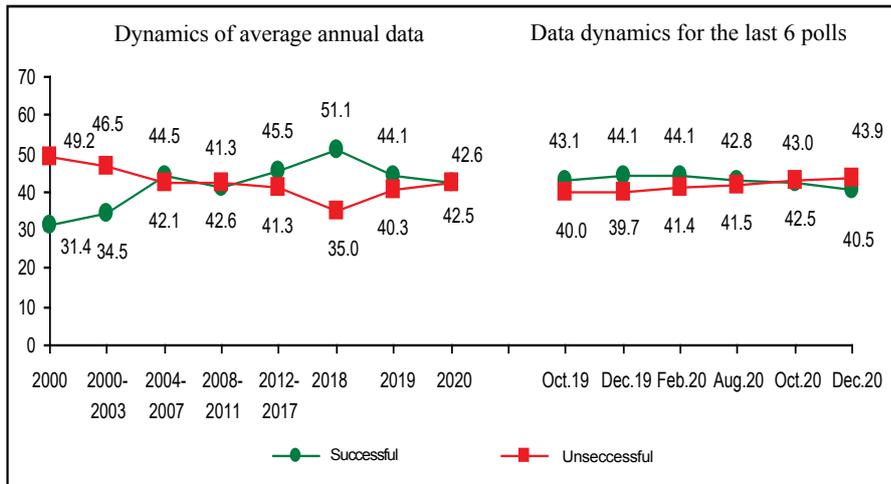
In your opinion, how successful is the RF President in coping with challenging issues..?
(% of respondents; FSBIS VoIRC RAS data)

Strengthening Russia's international positions



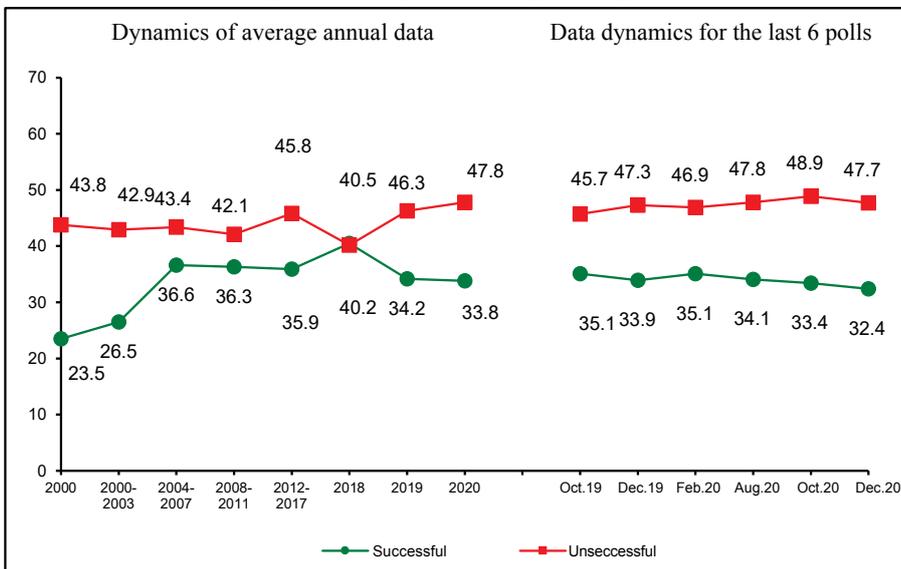
Annual dynamics (December 2020 to December 2019)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Successful	-6
Unsuccessful	+2

Imposing order in the country



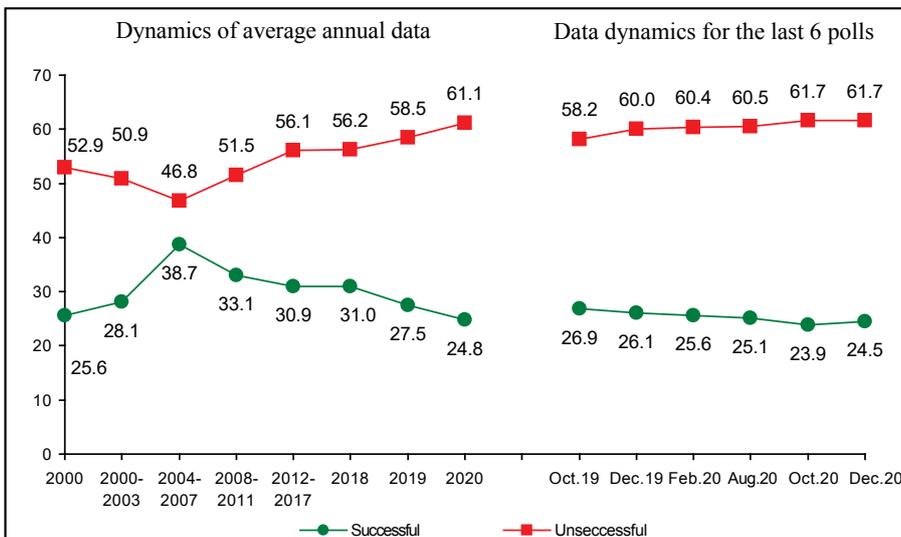
Annual dynamics (December 2020 to December 2019)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Successful	-3
Unsuccessful	+4

Protecting democracy and strengthening citizens' freedoms



Annual dynamics (December 2020 to December 2019)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Successful	-2
Unsuccessful	0

Economic recovery and increase in citizens' welfare



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

In October – December 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 – 7–9%, the Just Russia party – 4–5%. 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 (34–35%).

The same situation was a year ago (December 2019), however, in comparison with 2018, the level of support for the United Russia party has noticeably decreased (by 6 p.p., from 38 to 32%), and the share of those who are not satisfied with any parties represented in the State Duma also increased (by 5 p.p., from 29 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						Change (+/-), Dec. 2020 к дек. 2019
	2000	2007	2011	Election to the RF State Duma 2011, fact	2012	2016	Election to the RF State Duma 2016, fact	2018	2019	2020	Oct. 2019	Dec. 2019	Feb. 2020	Aug. 2020	Oct. 2020	Dec. 2020	
United Russia	18.5	30.2	31.1	33.4	29.1	35.4	38.0	37.9	33.8	31.5	32.8	33.7	33.2	30.9	31.1	30.9	-3
KPRF	11.5	7.0	10.3	16.8	10.6	8.3	14.2	9.2	8.8	8.4	9.1	9.2	8.9	8.6	8.8	7.3	-2
LDPR	4.8	7.5	7.8	15.4	7.8	10.4	21.9	9.6	9.1	9.5	8.3	9.4	9.9	9.3	9.4	9.5	0
Just Russia	-	7.8	5.6	27.2	6.6	4.2	10.8	2.9	3.4	4.7	4.2	4.0	4.7	4.8	4.3	5.0	+1
Other	0.9	1.8	1.9	-	2.1	0.3	-	0.7	0.3	0.5	0.1	0.1	0.6	0.4	0.3	0.7	+1
None	29.6	17.8	29.4	-	31.3	29.4	-	28.5	33.7	34.2	34.3	34.3	34.0	33.6	33.8	35.3	+1
Hesitate to respond	20.3	21.2	13.2	-	11.7	12.0	-	11.2	11.0	11.1	11.2	9.3	8.7	12.4	12.2	11.2	+2

There were no significant changes in the dynamics of estimates of social well-being over the past two months: the share of the Oblast’s population who positively assess their daily emotional state is 60–61%, 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 70–71%.

At the same time, from December 2019 to December 2020, there are obvious negative changes: the share of those who positively assess their mood has decreased by 10 p.p. (from 70 to 60%); the relative share of those who “cannot bear their plight” increased by 4 p.p. (from 17 to 21%).

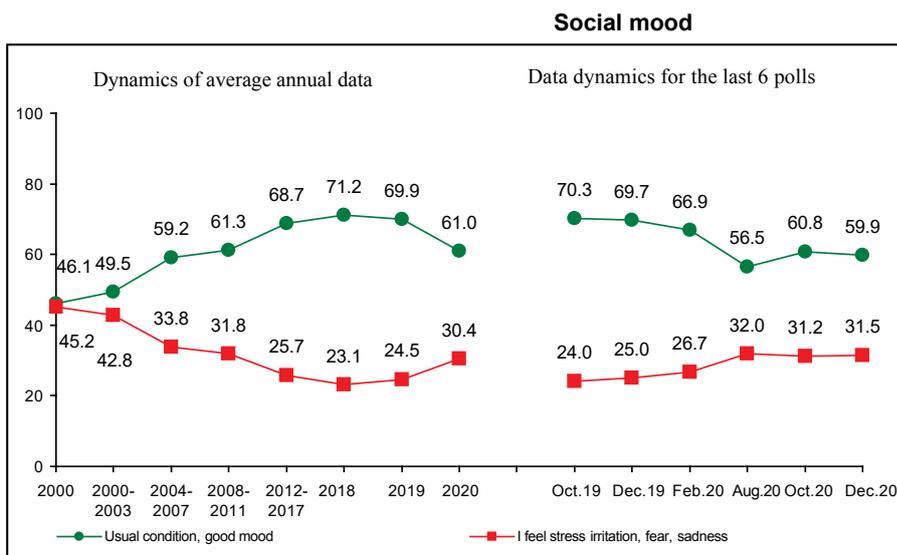
We should also note that the share of positive assessments of social mood decreased by 9 p.p. (from 70 to 61%) in 2020 in comparison with 2019, and the relative share of people who have a large stock of patience decreased by 5 p.p. (from 77 to 72%).

The structure of social self-identification has not changed in comparison with October 2020 and December 2019: nearly a half of the Oblast’s residents (48–49%) subjectively refer to themselves as “poor and extremely poor”; nearly 40-41% refer to themselves as “middle-class people”.

At the same time, there has been a steady trend a gradual increase of people who subjectively include themselves to low-income population groups over the last three years: in 2018 – 45%, in 2019 – 47%, in 2020 – 49% (in general for 2018–2020 – by 4 p. p., from 45 to 49%).

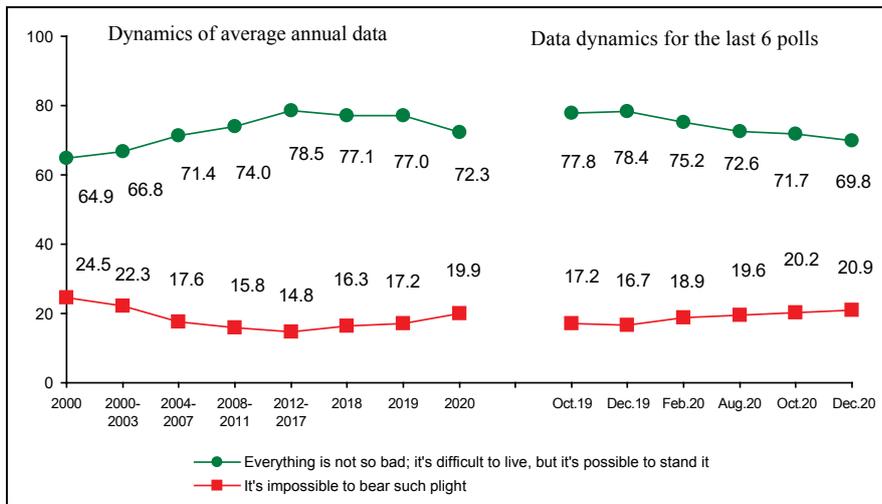
Dynamics of Consumer Sentiment Index (CSI), which shows population’s predictions regarding the prospects of economic development and their personal financial situation, see negative trends in monthly and annual retrospective: over the last two months, CSI decreased by 3 p.p. (from 86 to 83%), in comparison with December 2019 – by 7 p.p. (from 90 to 83%); in 2020 compared to 2019 – by 4 p.p. (from 91 to 87%). Meanwhile, for many years (from 2007–2008), Consumer Sentiment Index has been below 100 points, which means that negative attitudes prevail in population’s assessments.

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



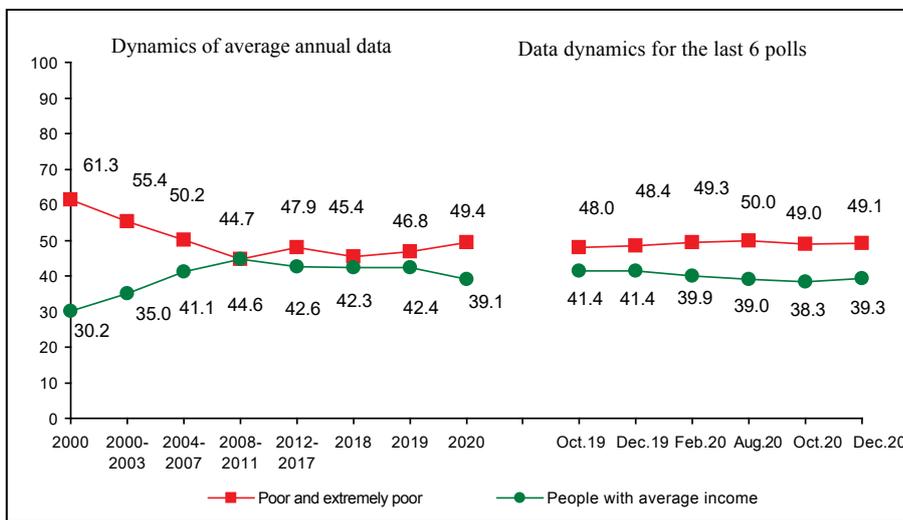
Annual dynamics (December 2020 to December 2019)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Usual condition, good mood	-10
I feel stress, irritation, fear, sadness	+7

Stock of patience



Annual dynamics (December 2020 to December 2019)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Everything is not so bad; it's difficult to live, but it's possible to stand it	-9
It's impossible to bear such plight	+4

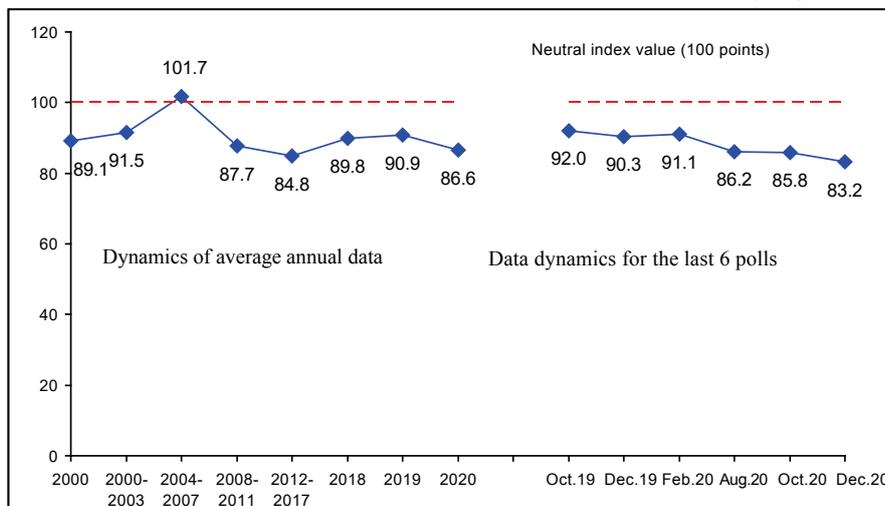
Social self-identification*



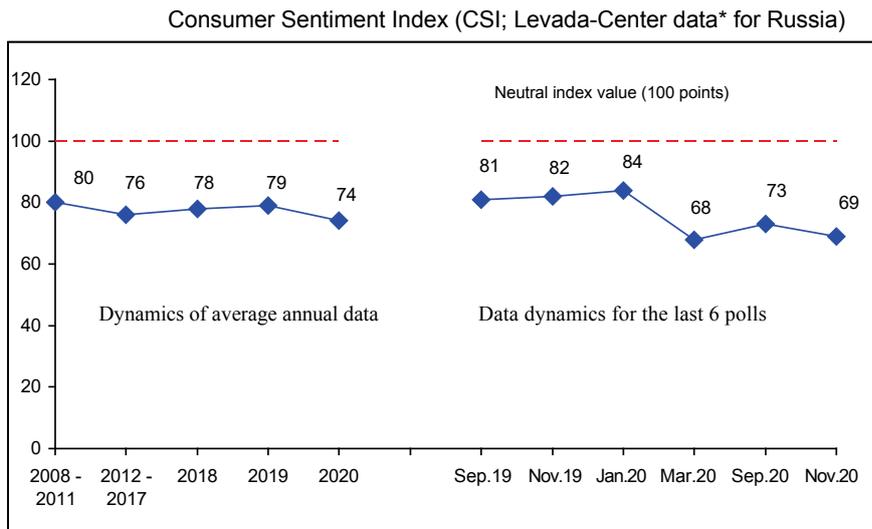
Annual dynamics (December 2020 to December 2019)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Share of people who consider their income average	-2
Share of people who consider themselves poor and extremely poor	+1

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

Consumer Sentiment Index (CSI)



Annual dynamics (December 2020 to December 2019)	
CSI	Dynamics (+ / -)
Index value, points	-7



Annual dynamics (December 2020 to December 2019)	
CSI	Dynamics (+ / -)
Index value, points	-13

* Index is calculated since 2008
 Source: Levada-Center data. Available at: <https://www.levada.ru/indikatory/sotsialno-ekonomicheskie-indikatory/>

In 10 out of 14 socio-demographic population categories, there were no significant changes over the last two months.

The share of positive assessments of social mood significantly decreased in two population categories: people with secondary and incomplete secondary education (by 4 p.p., from 57 to 53%) and people who, according to self-assessments of their income, are included the category of 20% of the least wealthy residents of the Oblast (by 7 p.p., from 46 to 39%).

Besides, in October – December 2020, there was a clear increase of social mood assessments among people with higher and incomplete higher education (by 4 p.p., from 61 to 65%) and those who, according to self-assessments of their income, are included in the category of 20% of the most wealthy residents (by 5 p.p., from 71 to 76%).

Compared to December 2019, the share of the Oblast’s residents positively assessing their daily emotional state decreased in all main socio-demographic categories (by 6–16 p.p.), especially among people aged under 30 (by 16 p.p., from 81 to 65%).

Negative dynamics of social mood is also recorded in annual perspective. Thus, in 2020 compared to 2019, the share of negative assessments decreased in all socio-economic groups (by 6–13 p.p.), especially among young people (by 13 p.p., from 81 to 68%).

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 (+/-), Dec. 2020 to Dec. 2019
	2000	2007	2011	2012	2018	2019	2020	Oct. 2019	Dec. 2019	Feb. 2020	Aug. 2020	Oct. 2020	Dec. 2020	
Gender														
Male	50.1	65.9	64.5	69.1	72.8	70.1	60.8	69.2	69.0	67.0	55.6	60.7	60.0	-9
Female	43.3	61.7	62.0	65.8	69.8	69.6	61.2	71.2	70.3	66.9	57.3	60.8	59.8	-11
Age														
Under 30	59.1	71.3	70.0	72.3	80.0	81.1	67.6	79.9	81.3	71.7	69.0	64.6	65.2	-16
30-55	44.2	64.8	62.5	67.9	72.6	71.2	61.8	71.1	71.9	67.5	56.2	62.5	60.9	-11
Over 55	37.4	54.8	58.3	62.1	65.2	63.3	57.4	65.1	62.6	64.3	51.9	56.9	56.5	-6
Education														
Secondary and incomplete secondary	41.7	58.4	57.4	57.2	64.8	63.2	56.1	63.4	64.0	63.1	51.7	56.9	52.6	-11
Secondary vocational	46.4	64.6	63.6	66.7	72.2	72.7	63.5	73.9	70.4	69.0	59.1	63.5	62.5	-8
Higher and incomplete higher	53.3	68.6	68.3	77.0	76.8	73.4	63.3	72.6	74.7	68.6	58.6	61.4	64.6	-10
Income groups														
Bottom 20%	28.4	51.6	45.3	51.5	57.3	53.2	43.4	54.1	50.2	48.4	40.4	46.0	38.9	-11
Middle 60%	45.5	62.9	65.3	68.7	71.9	71.4	62.6	72.6	72.6	68.4	56.6	61.9	63.3	-9
Top 20%	64.6	74.9	75.3	81.1	82.9	81.8	75.6	80.5	80.5	79.1	76.4	70.6	76.3	-4
Territories														
Vologda	49.2	63.1	67.1	73.6	71.0	68.6	60.9	70.8	68.6	66.9	57.0	61.0	58.7	-10
Cherepovets	50.8	68.1	71.2	76.2	75.8	71.2	60.4	72.0	69.9	67.3	54.4	59.3	60.7	-9
Districts	42.2	61.6	57.1	59.8	68.7	69.8	61.4	69.0	70.3	66.8	57.5	61.4	60.0	-10
Oblast	46.2	63.6	63.1	67.3	71.2	69.9	61.0	70.3	69.7	66.9	56.5	60.7	59.9	-10

CONCLUSIONS

The results of another public opinion monitoring “wave” show that there were no significant changes in the dynamics of social mood in October – December 2020. The most noticeable result of two past months is a 3% decline of Consumer Sentiment Index (from 86 to 83 p.p.): this is the lowest value of the index in the whole studied period. Moreover, the trend concerning the worsening of population’s prospects on the future of the economy and their financial well-being is not unique for the Vologda Oblast; the same negative CSI dynamics is recorded in the results of all-Russian sociological studies, conducted by the Levada-Center (in September – October 2020; in general, CSI decreased by 4 points – from 73 to 69% – across the country).

However, the most concerning thing is a negative dynamics of public opinion assessments in a prolong perspective (annual and short-term) which include:

- ✓ decrease of the share of positive assessments of the President’s work (by 14 p.p.; from 66% in 2018 to 52% in 2020);
- ✓ reduction of the support for the “United Russia” party (by 6 p. p., from 38 to 32%);
- ✓ increase of the share of people who believe that none parliament parties represent their interests (by 5 p. p.; from 29 to 35%);

✓ sharp decrease of the share of people who positively characterize their daily emotional state (by 9 p.p.; from 70 to 61%);

✓ further drop of low values of Consumer Sentiment Index (by 4 points; from 91 to 87 p.).

While analyzing such distinct negative changes in the public opinion dynamics, it is impossible to avoid consequences of the coronavirus pandemic and mass quarantine restrictions, which had an impact on daily lives of nearly everyone. However, they are not the only reasons for decreasing public mood assessments. Such negative dynamics in all key monitoring indicators were recorded in 2019 too, when there was no sign of the pandemic. In particular, in such indicators as:

✓ level of the approval of the President's work (share of positive assessments decreased by 10 p.p. (from 66 to 56%) in 2019 in comparison with 2018; similar negative trends were also recorded during all-Russian studies of VCIOM and Levada-Center);

✓ assessments of the President's success in solving key problems of the country (in all main issues, the relative share of positive assessments decreased by 3–7 p.p.);

✓ social self-identification (2% increase of the share of people who subjectively refer to themselves as “poor and extremely poor” – from 45 to 47%).

Thus, the pandemic only forced some negative processes in the dynamics of public opinion; first, it concerns the assessment of the authorities' activities as the quintessence or “litmus paper” of general situation in the country, economic state, and prospects for a personal future.

In this situation, obviously, the most important aspect is further course of the epidemiological situation in the country and in the world, as well as social and economic support measures undertaken by the authorities for supporting the level and quality of life among population.

However, we should not forget that current mood of Russian society is largely based on the implementation of constant expectations, caused by promising goals and objectives of national development announced by the RF President in Addresses to the Federal Assembly, during the last press-conference (December 17, 2020), and recorded in national goals and direct orders of the President⁴.

In a long-term perspective, the realization of these social expectations (two times decrease of the poverty level, ensuring the rate of sustainable growth of population's income and the level of pension provision not lower than inflation, improvement of housing conditions and quality of urban environment, etc.) will define the nature of social mood and a total level of social tension in the country.

The materials were prepared by M.V. Morev, A.N. Gordievskaya, E.E. Leonidova

⁴ For example:

On measures to implement state social policy: Executive Order of the President of the Russian Federation no. 597, dated May 7, 2012. *Official website of the President of Russia*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/35261>

On national goals and strategic objectives of the Russian Federation through to 2024: Executive Order of the President of the Russian Federation no. 204, dated May 7, 2018. *Official website of the President of Russia*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/43027>

On the national development goals of the Russian Federation through 2030: Executive Order of the President of the Russian Federation no. 474, dated July 21, 2020. *Official website of the President of Russia*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/45726>