

# 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 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 (February 2021), as well as for the period from December 2019 to February 2021 (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 December 2020 – February 2021, the level of approval of the work of the President of the Russian Federation did not change significantly. The share of positive assessments is 50–52%, negative – 31–33%, which is slightly lower than in February 2020 when the share of positive assessments of the President's work was 45% (negative – 31%)<sup>2</sup>.

In yearly dynamics, there is a continuing decrease of positive assessments: in 2018 – 66%, 2019 – 56%, 2020 – 52%; in February 2021 – 50%.

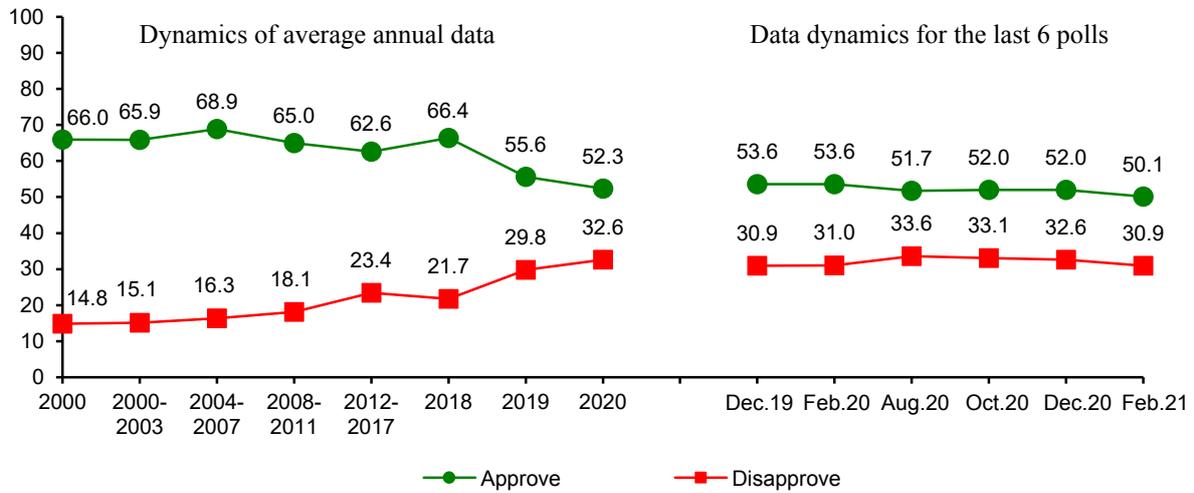
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<sup>1</sup> The polls are held six times a year in Vologda, Cherepovets, and in eight districts of the oblast (Babayevsky District, Velikoustyugsky District, Vozhegodsky District, Gryazovetsky District, Kirillovsky District, Nikolsky District, Tarnogsky 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 VolRC RAS polls is available at: <http://www.vssc.ac.ru/>.

<sup>2</sup> Hereinafter, the results of a comparative analysis of survey data, conducted in February 2021, and the results of a last-year monitoring "wave" are given in the frame (February 2020).

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 (+/-), Feb. 2021 to Feb. 2020
	2000	2007	2011	2012	2018	2019	2020	Dec. 2019	Feb. 2020	Aug. 2020	Oct. 2020	Dec. 2020	Feb. 2021	
<b>RF President</b>														
I approve	66.0	75.3	58.7	51.7	66.4	55.6	52.3	53.6	53.6	51.7	52.0	52.0	50.1	-4
I disapprove	14.8	11.5	25.5	32.6	21.7	29.8	32.6	30.9	31.0	33.6	33.1	32.6	30.9	0
<b>Chairman of the RF Government*</b>														
I approve	-*	-*	59.3	49.6	48.0	41.1	38.7	41.1	37.9	38.9	38.8	39.1	37.6	0
I disapprove	-	-	24.7	33.3	31.6	38.4	40.4	38.9	40.9	40.9	40.8	38.8	38.8	-2
<b>Governor of the Oblast</b>														
I approve	56.1	55.8	45.7	41.9	38.4	35.7	35.0	35.6	36.2	35.2	35.5	32.9	33.9	-2
I disapprove	19.3	22.2	30.5	33.3	37.6	40.2	42.5	40.8	41.8	41.9	42.1	44.2	42.4	+1

\* 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.

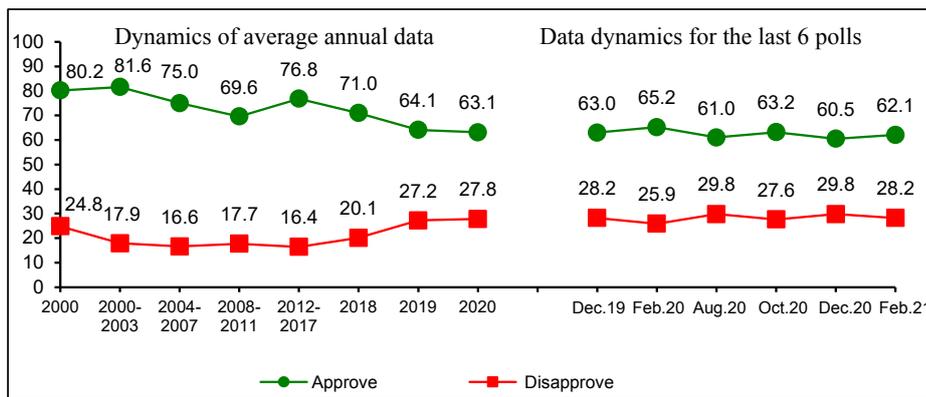
*For reference:*

*According to VCIOM, the level of approval of the President’s work in December 2020 – first half of February 2021<sup>3</sup> was 61–62%, and the share of negative assessments was 28–30%.*

*According to latest Levada-Center data (November 2020 – January 2021<sup>4</sup>), assessment of the President’s work has not changed: the share of positive assessments was 64–65%, negative – 34%.*

*At the same time, according to data of VCIOM and Levada-Center, yearly dynamics gradually change in a negative way (since 2012–2017).*

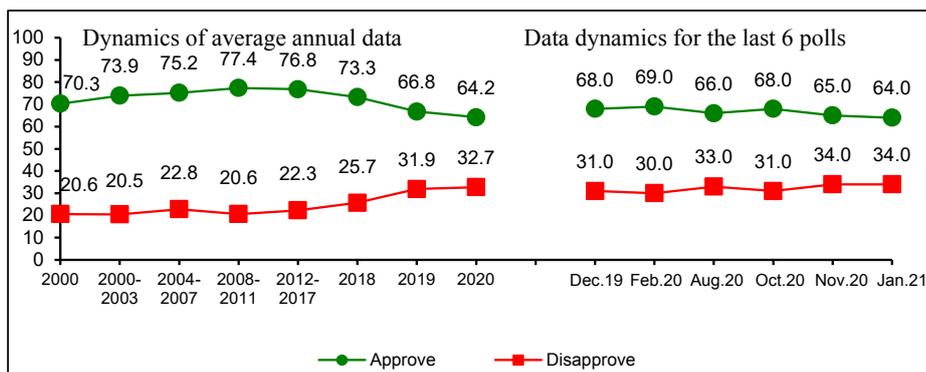
**In general, do you approve or disapprove of the work of the President of Russia?**  
(% of respondents, FSBIS VolRC RAS data)



Annual dynamics (February 2021 to February 2020)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Approve	-3
Disapprove	+2

Source: VCIOM data. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/>  
Data for February 2021 – average value for two polls: conducted on February 7, 2021 and February 14, 2021.

**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)



Annual dynamics (February 2021 to February 2020)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Approve	-5
Disapprove	+4

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

<sup>3</sup> At the moment of writing this article, VCIOM latest data were dated February 14, 2021. Source: VCIOM. Ratings. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/ratings/dejatelnost-gosudarstvennykh-institutov/>

<sup>4</sup> Source: Levada-Center. Indicators. Available at: <https://www.levada.ru/indikatory/>

From December 2020 – February 2021, there have been no significant changes in the assessment of the success with which the President solves the country’s key problems:

- ✓ 46% of the Oblast’s residents think that the President is successful in strengthening Russia’s international positions (the share of opposite assessments is 34%);
- ✓ 41% of citizens positively assess the President’s work in restoring order in the country; (the share of opposite assessments is 34%);
- ✓ 32% of people think that the President is successful in protecting democracy and strengthening the freedoms of citizens (the share of negative characteristics in higher – 48%);
- ✓ 25% of respondents positively assess V.V. Putin’s efforts aimed at boosting the economy and increasing the welfare of the population (the share of those who support the opposite opinion has been stable since August 2020 – 61–62%).

Compared to February 2020, the share of positive assessments, regarding successfulness of the President’s work, decreased in nearly all key issues:

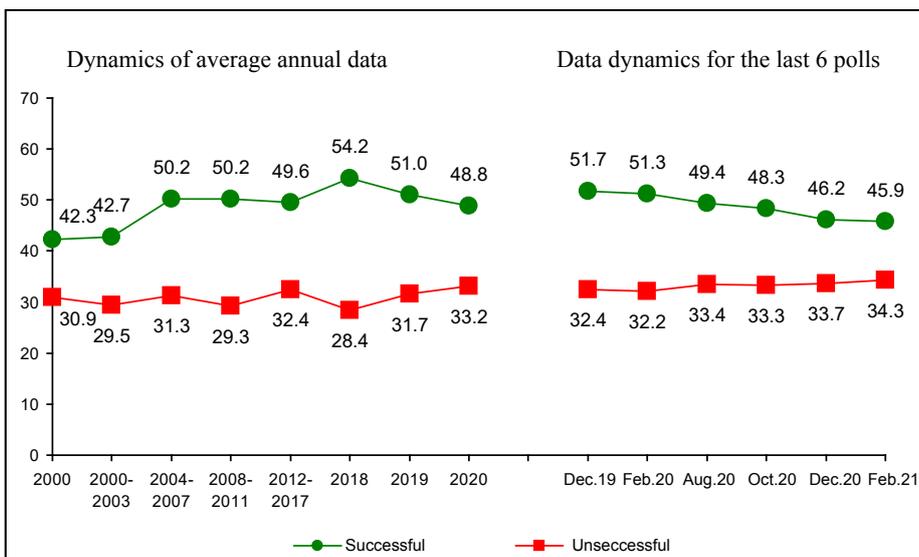
- ✓ strengthening Russia’s international positions – by 5 p. p. (from 51 to 46%);
- ✓ restoring order in the country – by 3 p. p. (from 44 to 41%);
- ✓ protecting democracy and strengthening the freedoms of citizens – by 3 p. p. (from 35 to 32%);
- ✓ boosting the economy and increasing the welfare of the population – by 1 p. p. (from 26 to 25%); there are no major changes, but it is necessary to remember that the lowest number of the Oblast’s residents positively assesses the President’s work in solving these problems – 24–26%).

In yearly annual data dynamics, negative trends have been recorded since 2018; regarding successfulness of the President’s work in boosting the economy and increasing the welfare of the population – since the mid-200s (from 2004–2007).

**In your opinion, how successful is the RF President in coping with challenging issues..?**

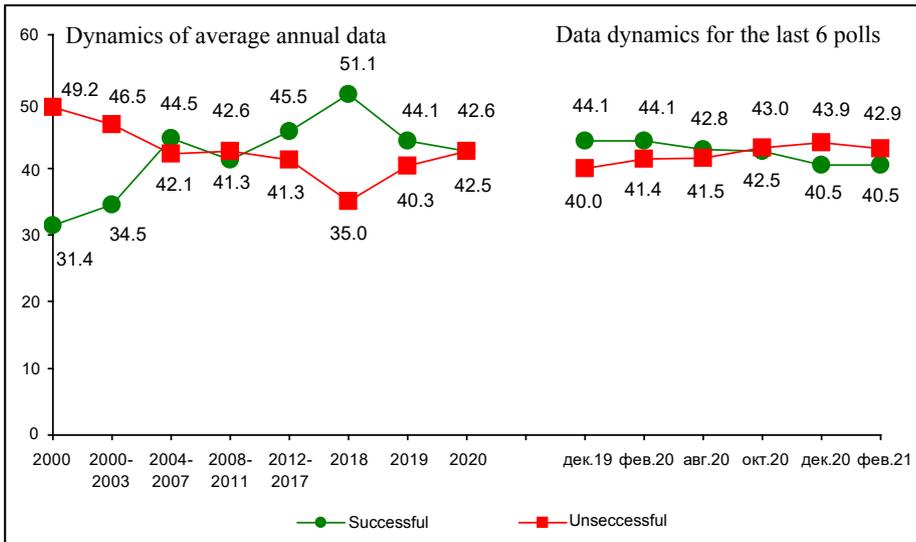
(% of respondents; FSBIS VoIRC RAS data)

**Strengthening Russia's international positions**



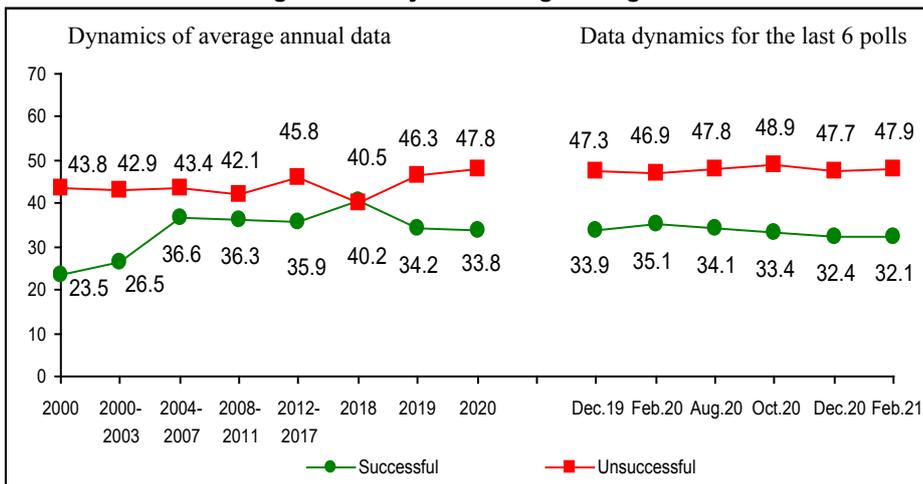
Annual dynamics (February 2021 to February 2020)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Successful	-5
Unsuccessful	+2

**Imposing order in the country**



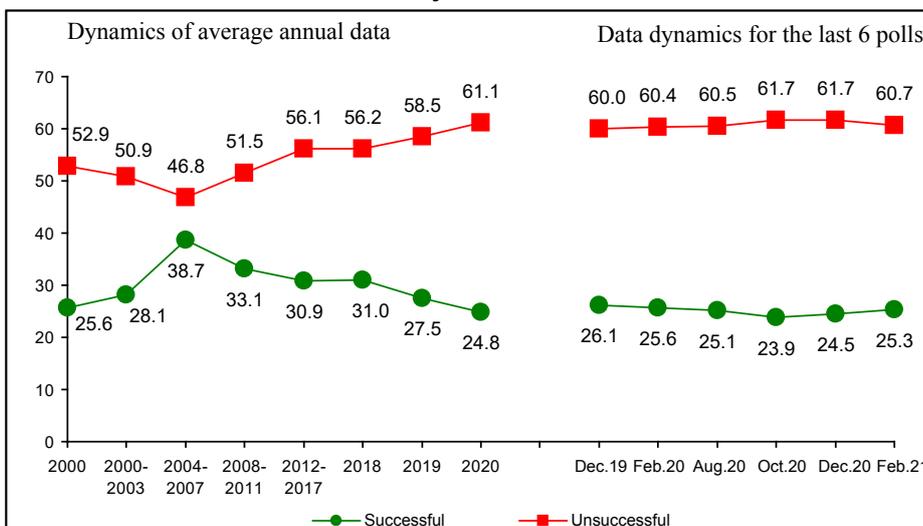
Annual dynamics (February 2021 to February 2020)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Successful	-3
Unsuccessful	+2

**Protecting democracy and strengthening citizens' freedoms**



Annual dynamics (February 2021 to February 2020)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Successful	-3
Unsuccessful	+1

**Economic recovery and increase in citizens' welfare**



Annual dynamics (February 2021 to February 2020)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Successful	-1
Unsuccessful	+1

In December 2020 – February 2021, the structure of people’s political preferences in the Vologda Oblast has not significantly changed. The United Russia party still prevails (the share of its supporters is 31%), and the support for other parties is much lower: LDPR – 10%, KPRF – 8%, the Just Russia party – 4%.

At the same time, the opinion of the Oblast’s population that none of the political forces represented in the State Duma express their interests is the most common. 34–36% of respondents share it.

A similar structure of political preferences was recorded in February 2020 and on average for 2019 and 2020.

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 (+/-), Feb. 2021 to Feb. 2020
	2000	2007	2011	Election to the RF State Duma 2011, fact	2012	2016	Election to the RF State Duma 2016, fact	2018	2019	2020	Dec. 2019	Feb. 2020	Aug. 2020	Oct. 2020	Dec. 2020	Feb. 2021	
United Russia	18.5	30.2	31.1	33.4	29.1	35.4	38.0	37.9	33.8	31.5	33.7	33.2	30.9	31.1	30.9	30.5	-3
KPRF	11.5	7.0	10.3	16.8	10.6	8.3	14.2	9.2	8.8	8.4	9.2	8.9	8.6	8.8	7.3	8.3	-1
LDPR	4.8	7.5	7.8	15.4	7.8	10.4	21.9	9.6	9.1	9.5	9.4	9.9	9.3	9.4	9.5	10.1	0
Just Russia	-	7.8	5.6	27.2	6.6	4.2	10.8	2.9	3.4	4.7	4.0	4.7	4.8	4.3	5.0	3.6	-1
Other	0.9	1.8	1.9	-	2.1	0.3	-	0.7	0.3	0.5	0.1	0.6	0.4	0.3	0.7	0.2	0
None	29.6	17.8	29.4	-	31.3	29.4	-	28.5	33.7	34.2	34.3	34.0	33.6	33.8	35.3	35.9	+2
Hesitate to respond	20.3	21.2	13.2	-	11.7	12.0	-	11.2	11.0	11.1	9.3	8.7	12.4	12.2	11.2	11.3	+3

In early 2021, there is a stable dynamics of social mood:

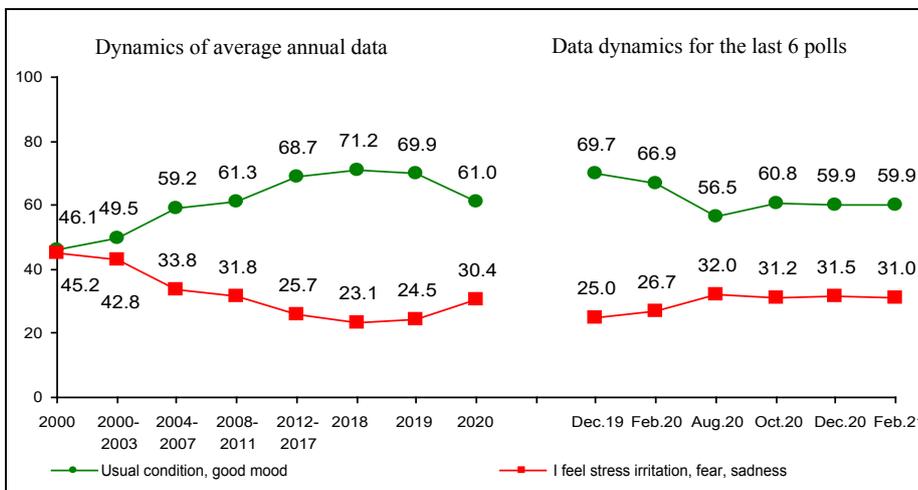
- ✓ share of people who positively assess their emotional state is 60% (opposite characteristics are mentioned by 31–32% of respondents);
- ✓ share of those who think that “everything is not so bad, and it is possible to live; it is difficult to live, but it is possible to stand it” is 70% (20–21% of the Oblast’s residents have a low stock of patience);
- ✓ nearly 40% of population subjectively refer to themselves as “middle-class people” (48–49% of respondents refer to themselves as “poor and extremely poor”);
- ✓ insignificantly (by 2 p.p.), Consumer Sentiment Index increased (from 83 to 85 p.).

On the background of actual absence of any changes in assessments of social well-being over the last two months, there are general negative trends in comparison with February 2020:

- ✓ share of positive assessments of emotional well-being decreased by 7 p.p. (from 67 to 60%);
- ✓ share of people with a large stock of patience decreased by 5 p. p. (from 75 to 70%);
- ✓ Consumer Sentiment Index decreased by 6 p. p. (from 91 to 85 p.);
- ✓ share of “poor and extremely poor” have barely changed (40%).

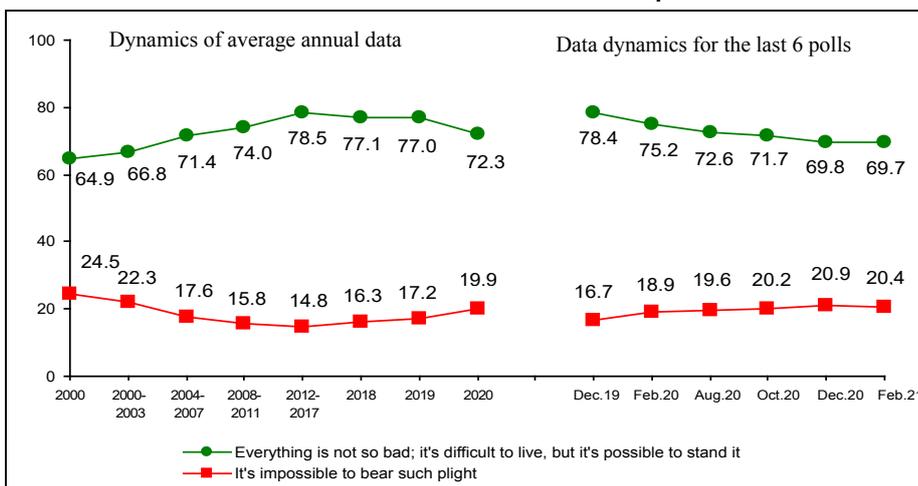
**Estimation of social condition (% of respondents; FSBIS VoIRC RAS data)**

**Social mood**



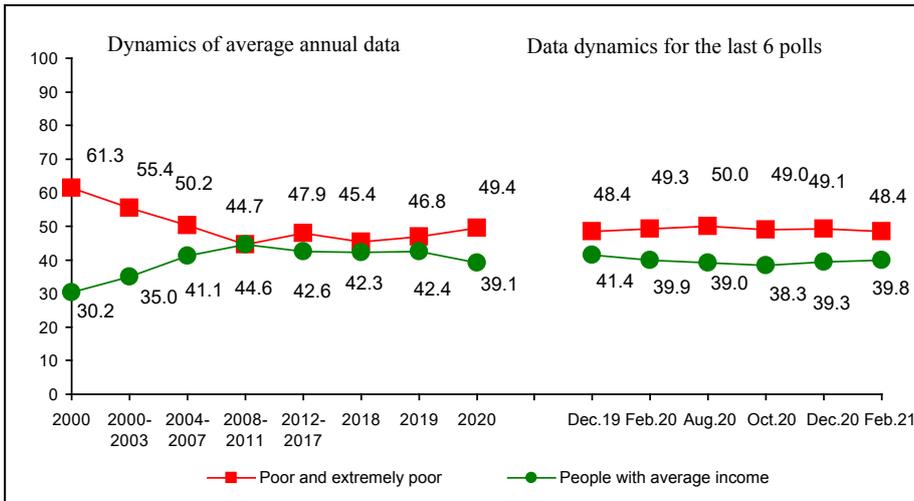
Annual dynamics (February 2021 to February 2020)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Usual condition, good mood	-7
I feel stress, irritation, fear, sadness	+4

**Stock of patience**



Annual dynamics (February 2021 to February 2020)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Everything is not so bad; it's difficult to live, but it's possible to stand it	-5
Its impossible to bear such plight	+2

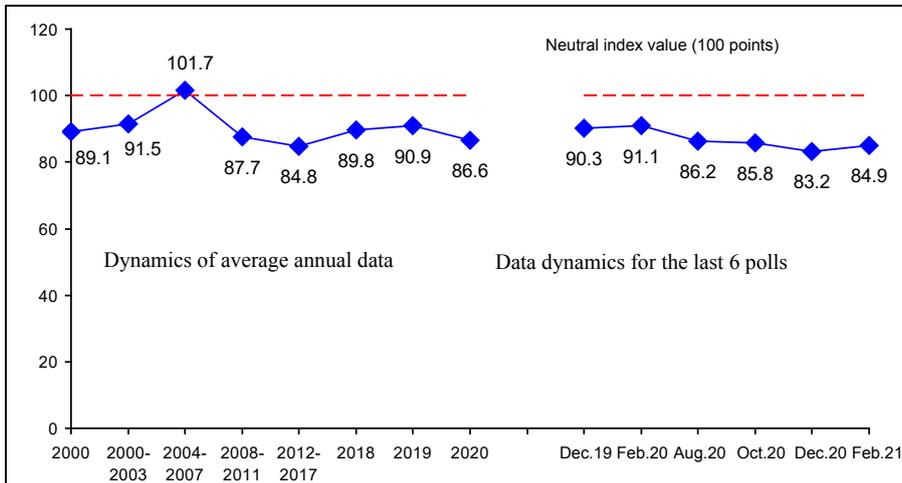
Social self-identification\*



Annual dynamics (February 2021 to February 2020)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Share of people who consider their income average	0
Share of people who consider themselves poor and extremely poor	-1

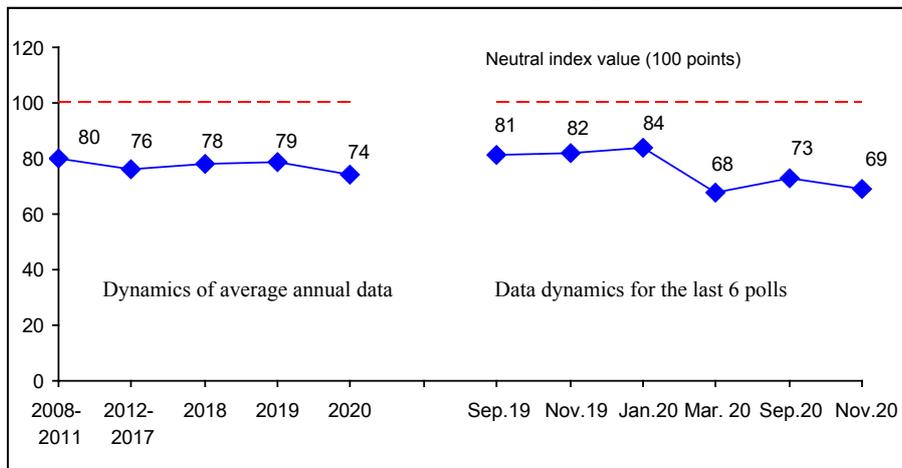
\* Question: "Which category do You belong to, in your opinion?"

Consumer Sentiment Index (CSI)



Annual dynamics (February 2021 to February 2020)	
CSI	Dynamics (+ / -)
Index value, points	-6

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



Annual dynamics (February 2021 to February 2020)	
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 4 out of 14 socio-demographic territories, there were insignificant positive changes from December 2020 to February 2021:

- ✓ people aged 30–55 (by 3 p. p., from 61 to 64%);
- ✓ people with secondary and incomplete secondary education (by 3 p. p., from 53 to 56%);
- ✓ people who, according to self-assessments, are included the category of 20% of the least wealthy residents of the Oblast (by 5 p. p., from 39 to 44%);
- ✓ Cherepovets residents (by 3 p. p., from 61 to 64%).

Negative changes of social mood were recorded in 4 socio-demographic groups over the past two months:

- ✓ people under the age of 30 (by 4 p. p., from 65 to 61%);
- ✓ people aged over 55 (by 3 p. p., from 57 to 54%);
- ✓ people who, according to income self-assessments, are included in the category of 60% of the wealthiest residents of the Oblast (by 3 p. p., from 63 to 60%);
- ✓ Vologda residents (by 3 p.p., from 59 to 56%).

Compared to last year (February 2020) all socio-demographic categories of the population have negative changes: the share of positive assessments decreased by 6–11 p. p. in all groups. Similar negative changes are recorded in the annual dynamics (for 2019–2020).

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 (+/-), Feb. 2021 to Feb. 2020
	2000	2007	2011	2012	2018	2019	2020	Dec. 2019	Feb. 2020	Aug. 2020	Oct. 2020	Dec. 2020	Feb. 2021	
<b>Gender</b>														
Male	50.1	65.9	64.5	69.1	72.8	70.1	60.8	69.0	67.0	55.6	60.7	60.0	60.8	-6
Female	43.3	61.7	62.0	65.8	69.8	69.6	61.2	70.3	66.9	57.3	60.8	59.8	59.2	-8
<b>Age</b>														
Under 30	59.1	71.3	70.0	72.3	80.0	81.1	67.6	81.3	71.7	69.0	64.6	65.2	60.9	-11
30–55	44.2	64.8	62.5	67.9	72.6	71.2	61.8	71.9	67.5	56.2	62.5	60.9	64.4	-3
Over 55	37.4	54.8	58.3	62.1	65.2	63.3	57.4	62.6	64.3	51.9	56.9	56.5	54.1	-10
<b>Education</b>														
Secondary and incomplete secondary	41.7	58.4	57.4	57.2	64.8	63.2	56.1	64.0	63.1	51.7	56.9	52.6	56.2	-7
Secondary vocational	46.4	64.6	63.6	66.7	72.2	72.7	63.5	70.4	69.0	59.1	63.5	62.5	60.9	-8
Higher and incomplete higher	53.3	68.6	68.3	77.0	76.8	73.4	63.3	74.7	68.6	58.6	61.4	64.6	62.7	-6
<b>Income groups</b>														
Bottom 20%	28.4	51.6	45.3	51.5	57.3	53.2	43.4	50.2	48.4	40.4	46.0	38.9	44.3	-4
Middle 60%	45.5	62.9	65.3	68.7	71.9	71.4	62.6	72.6	68.4	56.6	61.9	63.3	60.1	-8
Top 20%	64.6	74.9	75.3	81.1	82.9	81.8	75.6	80.5	79.1	76.4	70.6	76.3	76.0	-3
<b>Territories</b>														
Vologda	49.2	63.1	67.1	73.6	71.0	68.6	60.9	68.6	66.9	57.0	61.0	58.7	55.8	-11
Cherepovets	50.8	68.1	71.2	76.2	75.8	71.2	60.4	69.9	67.3	54.4	59.3	60.7	64.4	-3
Districts	42.2	61.6	57.1	59.8	68.7	69.8	61.4	70.3	66.8	57.5	61.4	60.0	59.7	-7
Oblast	46.2	63.6	63.1	67.3	71.2	69.9	61.0	69.7	66.9	56.5	60.7	59.9	59.9	-7

## CONCLUSIONS

The results of another public opinion monitoring “wave” of VoIRC RAS show that there were no significant changes in the dynamics of all key criteria (assessment of authorities’ work, party and political preferences, social mood). At the same time, a decline in the share of positive assessments that characterize the emotional state in some socio-demographic categories is alarming (by 3–4 p. p.: among people under the age of 30, population aged over 55, residents who self-assess themselves as middle-class Vologda population), as well as negative changes in assessments of social mood in yearly dynamics.

In our opinion, the formation of public opinion over the last two months was affected by multidirectional and even opposite processes.

On the one hand, mass vaccination of Russians against coronavirus which began in mid-December 2020, unconditional international success of the Russian vaccine (it was recognized not only by the World Health Organization, but also by the chief epidemiologist of the United States – A. Fauci<sup>5</sup>), and a gradual return of the healthcare system and social institutions to work in a “regular” mode<sup>6</sup>.

On the other hand, there was an increase in social tension associated with mass protests in support of A. Navalny in January – February 2021.

According to experts, “the key question, which occurs while analyzing the rallies on January 23 and all events related to work of non-system opposition, is as follows: can these events lead to a Russian

<sup>5</sup> See, for example:

1. H. Kluge (Director of the WHO European Regional Bureau): “WHO highly appreciates the efforts made by the Russian Federation to develop a vaccine against COVID-19, namely Sputnik V”. “Once again, I want to thank Russia for its excellent efforts to create a safe and effective vaccine” (Source: *RBK*. September 21, 2020. Available at: <https://www.rbc.ru/society/21/09/2020/5f6891cf9a7947464e34089b>).

2. M. Vujnović (WHO representative in Russia): “We very much welcome the publication that speaks about the effectiveness of the vaccine” (Source: *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. February 3, 2021. Available at: <https://rg.ru/2021/02/03/v-voz-privetstvuiut-publikaciiu-dannyh-o-vaccine-sputnik-v-v-the-lancet.html>).

3. “The chief epidemiologist of the United States, Anthony Fauci, positively spoke about Sputnik V, calling it a **contribution to the universal protection of humanity**” (Source: Baranov A. The West has finally admitted that the Russian vaccine is the best one. *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, February 9, 2021. Available at: <https://www.kp.ru/daily/27236/4364524/>).

4. Bloomberg (February 6, 2021): “**Countries are lining up for supplies of Sputnik V** after peer-reviewed results published in The Lancet medical journal this week showed the Russian vaccine protects against the deadly virus about as well as U.S. and European shots, and far more effectively than Chinese rivals.

In the global battle to defeat a pandemic that claimed 2.3 million lives in little more than a year, the race to obtain vaccines has assumed geopolitical significance as governments seek to emerge from the huge social and economic damage caused by lockdowns imposed to limit the spread of the virus. That’s giving Russia an edge as one of a handful of countries where scientists have produced an effective defense (source: Meyer H. Putin’s once-scorned vaccine now favorite in pandemic fight. *Bloomberg*. February 6, 2021. Available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-06/putin-s-once-scorned-vaccine-is-now-i-favorite-in-pandemic-fight?srnd=premium-europe>).

<sup>6</sup> Since February 1, a regular work of day hospitals, periodic and preventive medical examinations, as well as prophylactic medical examination, have been resumed. People can visit sports events in the region (at the same time, the load of the stands should not exceed 50%). A maximum number of spectators at plays, concerts and film screenings is extended from 25 to 50% of the capacity of a hall; working hours of public catering facilities are prolonged (from 6.00 to midnight). The same schedule is for concerts, performances, plays, movie screenings, and similar events. The rule on the transfer of 30% of employees to the “remote” work becomes recommended, not mandatory (source: Vologda Oblast news. January 28, 2021. *Official website of O.A. Kuvshinnikov – the Governor of the Vologda Oblast*. Available at: [https://okuvshinnikov.ru/press/news/na\\_vologodchine\\_v\\_polnom\\_obyome\\_vozobnovleny\\_profosmotry\\_dispanserizaciya\\_i\\_rabota\\_dnevnyh\\_stacionarov/](https://okuvshinnikov.ru/press/news/na_vologodchine_v_polnom_obyome_vozobnovleny_profosmotry_dispanserizaciya_i_rabota_dnevnyh_stacionarov/)).

“Maidan”? Actually, this is the main “horror story” – an uncontrolled political crisis with a subsequent leapfrog of regimes, a potential collapse of the country, and a loss of economic sovereignty”<sup>7</sup>.

Although the results of the protest actions showed that “in Russia, any form of “orange revolution” is impossible; there is no deep social division in the country”<sup>8</sup>, it must be admitted that these events caused a wide public response. Thus, according to Levada-Center, “the most memorable events of the first month of 2021 for Russians were the protests on January 23 and 31 (they were mentioned by 45% of respondents). Next, there were news about the coronavirus (12%) and return of A. Navalny (11%). Another 7% mentioned events in the United States – Biden’s inauguration, the storming of the Capitol. Only 4% of Russians believe that the investigation movie “Palace for Putin” can be called the main event of January and early February”<sup>9</sup>.

Opposite, but quite resonant recent events, which took place in the country and in the region, had a corresponding effect on the dynamics of public opinion, causing a situation of expectation: for some – alarming, for some – more hopeful. In our opinion, the direction of the future “balance” swing will largely depend on three factors: effectiveness of the Russian government’s measures for the population’s further socio-economic support; dynamics of the epidemiological situation (including the spring period, traditionally characterized by an increase in the spread of any viral infections); international political situation (related to the first political decisions of J. Biden as the President of the United States).

Materials were prepared by M.V. Morev, I.M. Bakhvalova, E.E. Leonidova

<sup>7</sup> A simple logic of a propagandist. *Expert*, no 6, February 1, 2021. Available at: <https://expert.ru/expert/2021/06/neslozhnaya-logika-propagandista/>

<sup>8</sup> Skorobogaty P. Why Russia has outgrown the Maidan. *Expert*, no. 6, February 1, 2021. Available at: <https://expert.ru/expert/2021/06/pochemu-rossiya-pererosla-majdan/>

<sup>9</sup> Levada-Center press-release, dated February 12, 2021. Available at: <https://www.levada.ru/2021/02/12/sobytiya-mesyatsa-2/>