

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 (April 2021) and for the period from February 2020 to April 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 2018–2020².

In February – April 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.

The level of approval of the President's work was a little bit lower in April 2021 (by 2 p.p.) than in February 2020, when the share of positive assessments was 54%. The share of negative assessments in April 2021, compared to February 2020, did not change significantly (31%)³.

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.vscs.ac.ru/>.

² In 2020, four "waves" of monitoring were conducted. Surveys in April and June 2020 were not conducted due to quarantine restrictions during the spread of Covid-19.

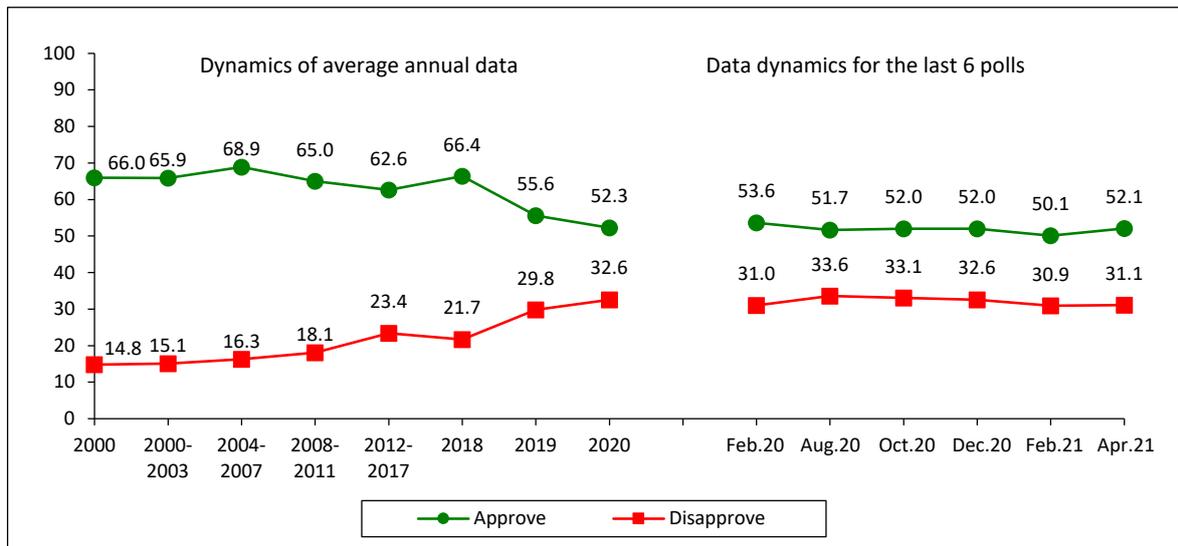
³ Hereinafter, the results of a comparative analysis of survey data, conducted in April 2021, and the results of a last-year monitoring "wave", conducted in February 2020 (the last survey before pandemic restrictions), are given in the frame.

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 (+/-), Apr. 2021 to Feb. 2020
	2000	2007	2011	2012	2018	2019	2020	Feb. 2020	Aug. 2020	Oct. 2020	Dec. 2020	Feb. 2021	Apr. 2021	
RF President														
I approve	66.0	75.3	58.7	51.7	66.4	55.6	52.3	53.6	51.7	52.0	52.0	50.1	52.1	-2
I disapprove	14.8	11.5	25.5	32.6	21.7	29.8	32.6	31.0	33.6	33.1	32.6	30.9	31.1	0
Chairman of the RF Government**														
I approve	-**	-**	59.3	49.6	48.0	41.1	38.7	37.9	38.9	38.8	39.1	37.6	38.8	+1
I disapprove	-	-	24.7	33.3	31.6	38.4	40.4	40.9	40.9	40.8	38.8	38.8	38.3	-3
Governor of the Oblast														
I approve	56.1	55.8	45.7	41.9	38.4	35.7	35.0	36.2	35.2	35.5	32.9	33.9	36.3	0
I disapprove	19.3	22.2	30.5	33.3	37.6	40.2	42.5	41.8	41.9	42.1	44.2	42.4	41.3	0

* Question: How do you assess the current performance of..?
 According to the research methodology, the sampling error does not exceed 3%, so hereinafter changes with a difference of 2 p.p. are not taken into account or are 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.

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



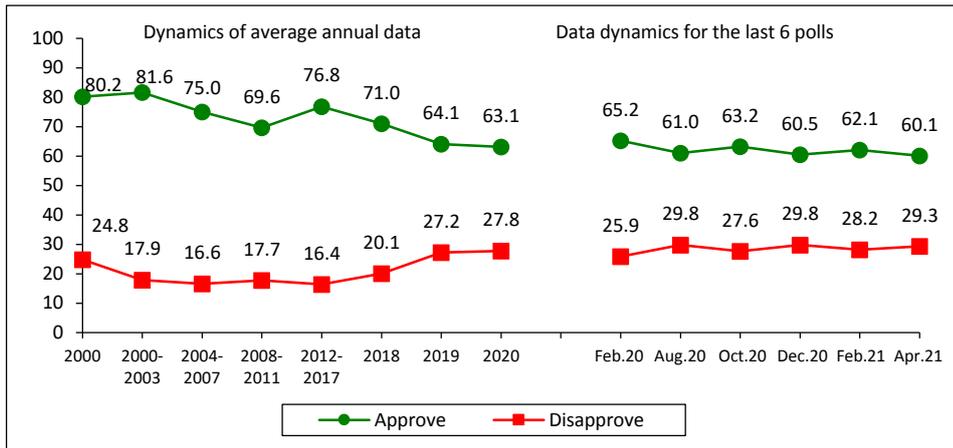
* Hereinafter, all graphs show the average annual data for 2000, 2018, 2019, 2020, as well as the average annual data for the periods 2000–2003, 2004–2007, 2008–2011, 2012–2017, corresponding to the periods of presidential terms.

For reference:

According to VCIOM data for February – first half of April 2021⁴, the level of approval of the President’s work was 61–62%, share of negative answers was 28–29%.

According to the latest data of the Levada-Center (February – March 2021⁵), assessment of the President’s work slightly decreased: share of positive assessments was 2 p.p. lower (from 65 to 63%), negative assessments remained the same – 34–35%.

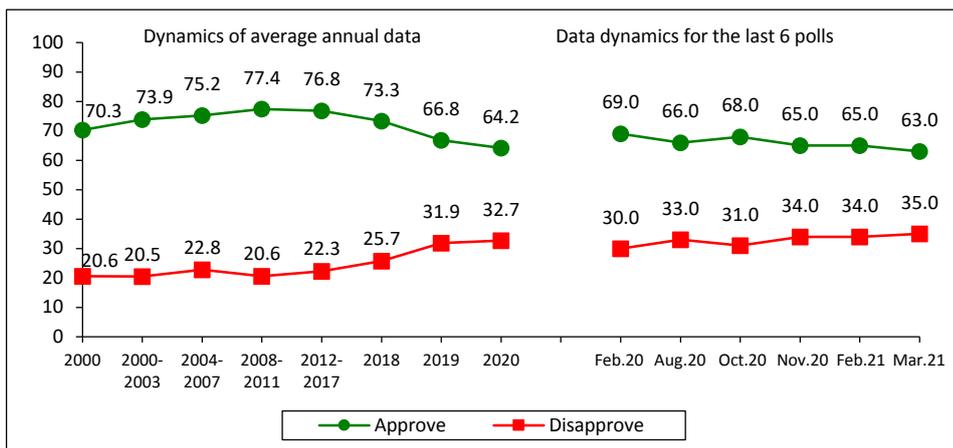
In general, do you approve or disapprove of the work of the President of the Russian Federation?
(% of respondents; VCIOM data)*



Annual dynamics (April 2021 to February 2020)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Approve	-5
Disapprove	+3

* Question: In general, do you approve or disapprove of the work of the President of the Russian Federation?
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.
Data for April 2021 – average value for two polls: conducted on April 4, 2021 and April 11, 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 (March 2021 to February 2020)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Approve	-6
Disapprove	+5

* Question: In general, do you approve or disapprove of the work of V. Putin at the position of the President (Prime Minister) of Russia?
Source: Levada-Center data. Available at: <https://www.levada.ru/> (no data for December 2020).

⁴ At the moment of writing this article, VCIOM latest data were dated April 11, 2021. Source: VCIOM. Ratings. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/ratings/dejatelnost-gosudarstvennykh-institutov>

⁵ Latest data – March 2021. Source: Levada-Center. Indicators. Available at: <https://www.levada.ru/indikatory>

From February to April 2021, there were no significant changes in the share of the Oblast residents who think that the President successfully strengthens Russia’s international positions (46%), protects democracy and citizen’s freedoms (31–32%).

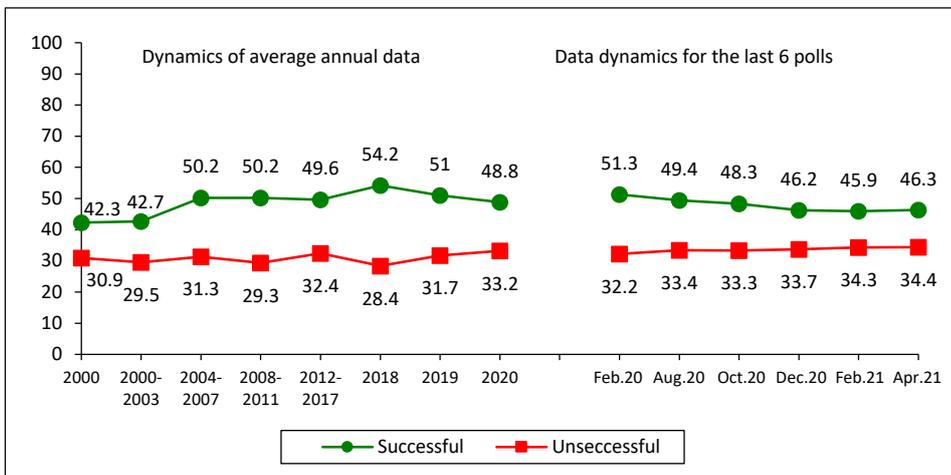
At the same time, negative changes are recorded in the assessment of the successfulness of the President in restoring order in the country (share of positive assessments has decreased by 4 p.p over the last two months – from 41 to 37%) and increasing the welfare of the population (share of negative assessments increased by 2 p.p. – from 61 to 63%).

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 7 p. p. (from 44 to 37%);
- ✓ protecting democracy and strengthening the freedoms of citizens – by 4 p. p. (from 35 to 31%);
- ✓ boosting the economy and increasing the welfare of the population – by 3 p. p. (from 26 to 23%).

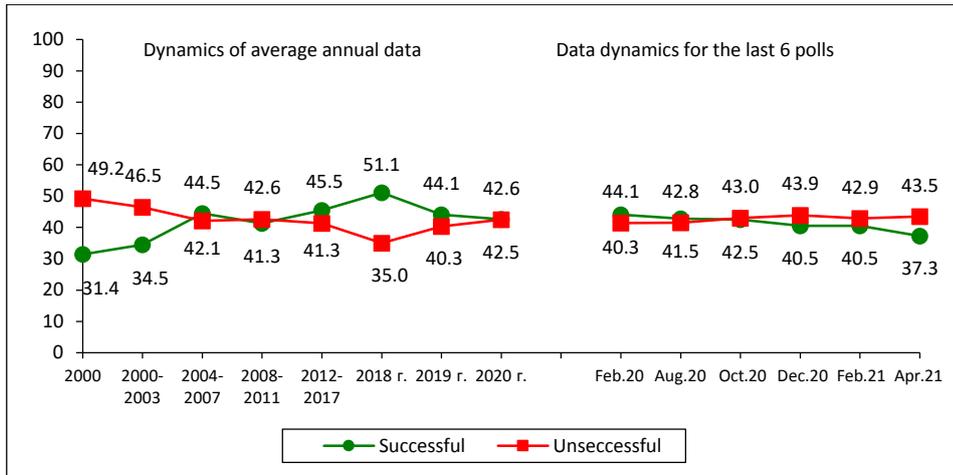
In your opinion, how successful is the RF President in coping with challenging issues..?
(% of respondents; FSBIS VoIRC RAS data)

Strengthening Russia’s international positions



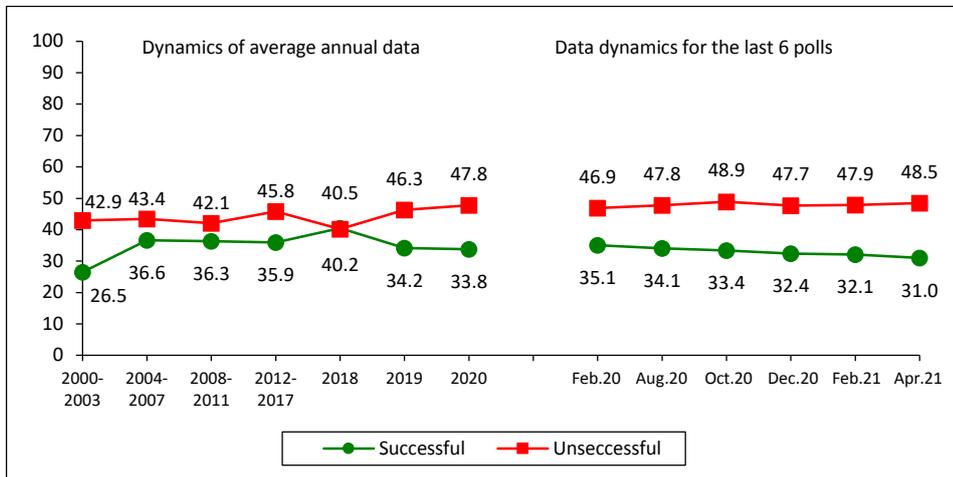
Annual dynamics (April 2021 to February 2020)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Successful	-5
Unsuccessful	+2

Imposing order in the country



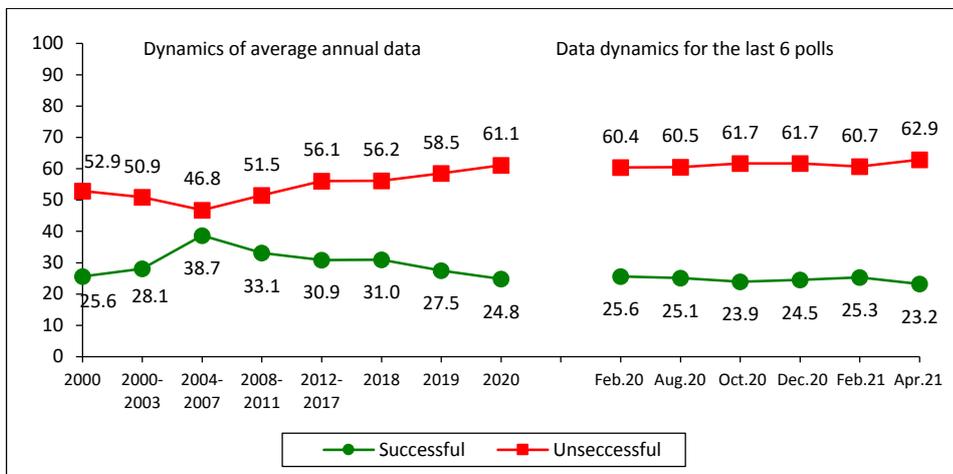
Annual dynamics (April 2021 to February 2020)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Successful	-7
Unsuccessful	+2

Protecting democracy and strengthening citizens' freedoms



Annual dynamics (April 2021 to February 2020)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Successful	-4
Unsuccessful	+2

Economic recovery and increase in citizens' welfare



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

In February – April 2021, there were no significant changes in the structure of people’s political preferences in the Vologda Oblast. The United Russia party still prevails (the share of its supporters is 31–32%), and the support for other parties is much lower: 10% – LDPR, 8–9% – KPRF, 3–4% – the Just Russia party.

The third of the region’s population (36%) thinks that none of the political forces represented in the State Duma express their interests.

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						Dynamics (+/-), Apr. 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	Feb. 2020	Aug. 2020	Oct. 2020	Dec. 2020	Feb. 2021	Apr. 2021	
United Russia	18.5	30.2	31.1	33.4	29.1	35.4	38.0	37.9	33.8	31.5	33.2	30.9	31.1	30.9	30.5	31.5	-2
KPRF	11.5	7.0	10.3	16.8	10.6	8.3	14.2	9.2	8.8	8.4	8.9	8.6	8.8	7.3	8.3	8.7	0
LDPR	4.8	7.5	7.8	15.4	7.8	10.4	21.9	9.6	9.1	9.5	9.9	9.3	9.4	9.5	10.1	9.9	0
Just Russia	-	7.8	5.6	27.2	6.6	4.2	10.8	2.9	3.4	4.7	4.7	4.8	4.3	5.0	3.6	2.6	-2
Other	0.9	1.8	1.9	-	2.1	0.3	-	0.7	0.3	0.5	0.6	0.4	0.3	0.7	0.2	0.1	0
None	29.6	17.8	29.4	-	31.3	29.4	-	28.5	33.7	34.2	34.0	33.6	33.8	35.3	35.9	36.4	+2
Hesitate to respond	20.3	21.2	13.2	-	11.7	12.0	-	11.2	11.0	11.1	8.7	12.4	12.2	11.2	11.3	10.9	+2

Over the past two months, the indicators of the population’s social well-being have improved:

- ✓ in February – April 2021, the share of people who positively assess their emotional state increased by 3 p.p. (from 60 to 63%);
- ✓ 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” – by 4 p. p. (from 70 to 74%).

At the same time, the share of people who subjectively classify themselves as “poor and extremely poor” remains consistently high (48% against 40% of those who consider themselves to be people with “average income”).

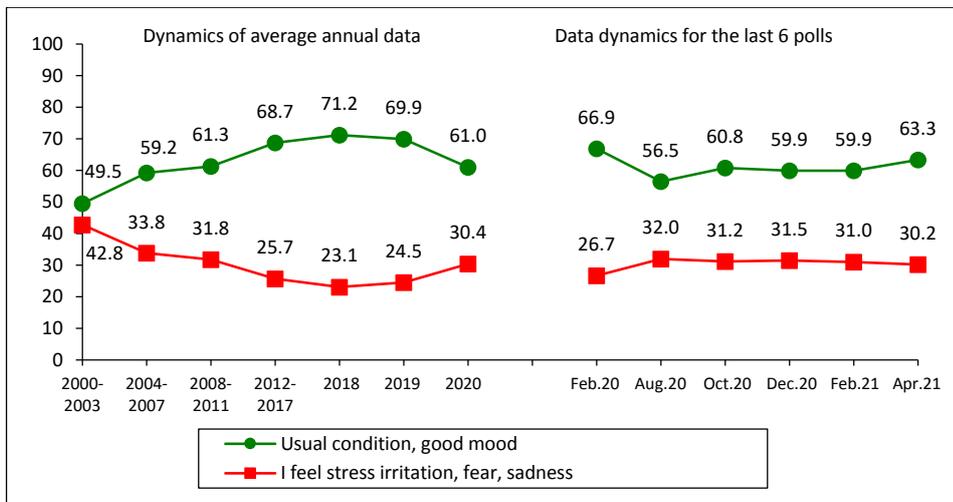
Moreover, in February – April 2021, Consumer Sentiment Index somewhat decreased (from 85 to 83 p.p.), which indicates an increase of pessimistic judgments among the population regarding the forecasts of the development of the economic situation in the country and their personal financial well-being.

Compared to February 2020, indicators of social sentiment decreased (share of positive assessments decreased by 4 p.p. – from 67 to 63%), the consumer sentiment index noticeably declined (by 8 points, from 91 to 83 p.p.).

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” has not changed significantly (74–75%), as the share of people, who refer to themselves as “poor and extremely poor” (40%).

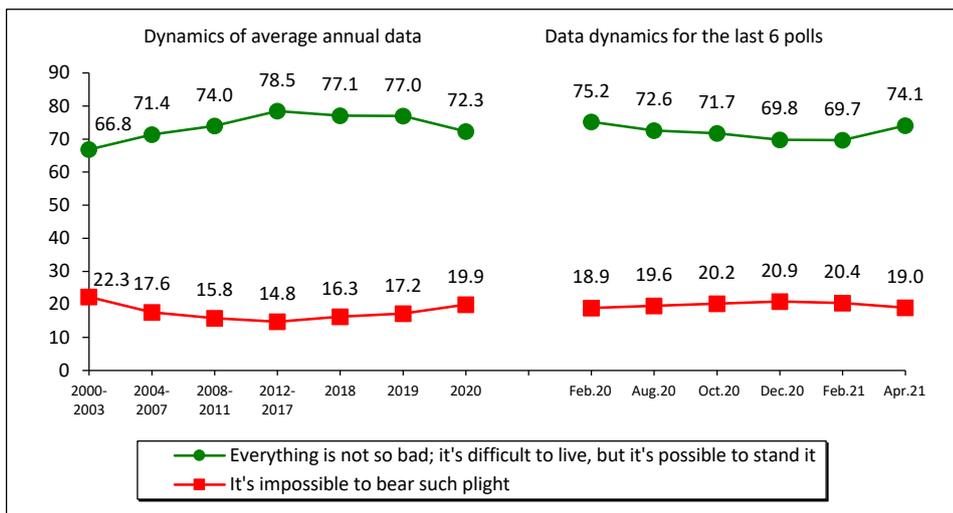
Estimation of social condition (% of respondents; FSBIS VoIRC RAS data)

Social mood



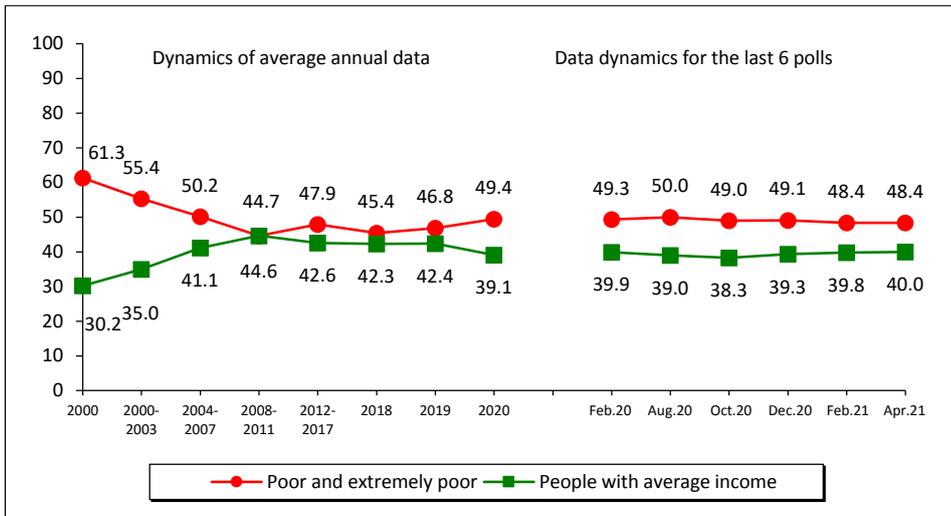
Annual dynamics (April 2021 to February 2020)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Usual condition, good mood	-4
I feel stress, irritation, fear, sadness	+4

Stock of patience



Annual dynamics (April 2021 to February 2020)	
Respond option	Dynamics (+ / -)
Everything is not so bad; it's difficult to live, but its possible to stand it	-1
Its impossible to bear such plight	0

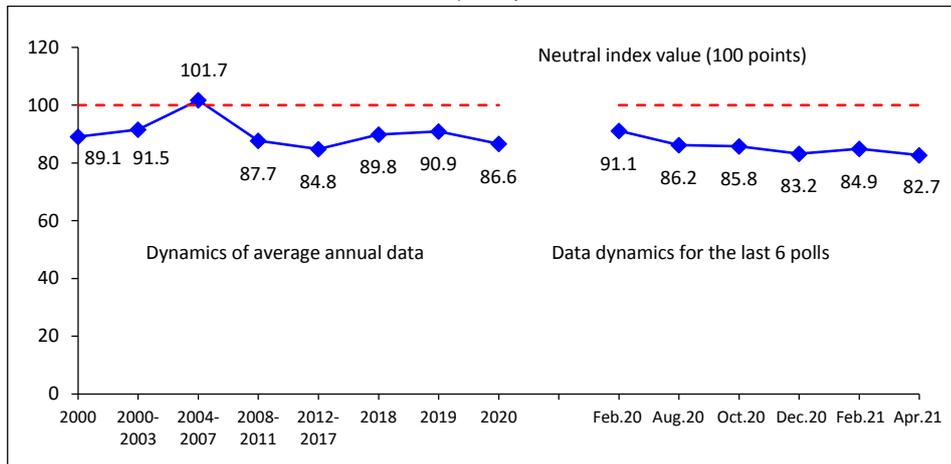
Social self-identification*



Annual dynamics (April 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

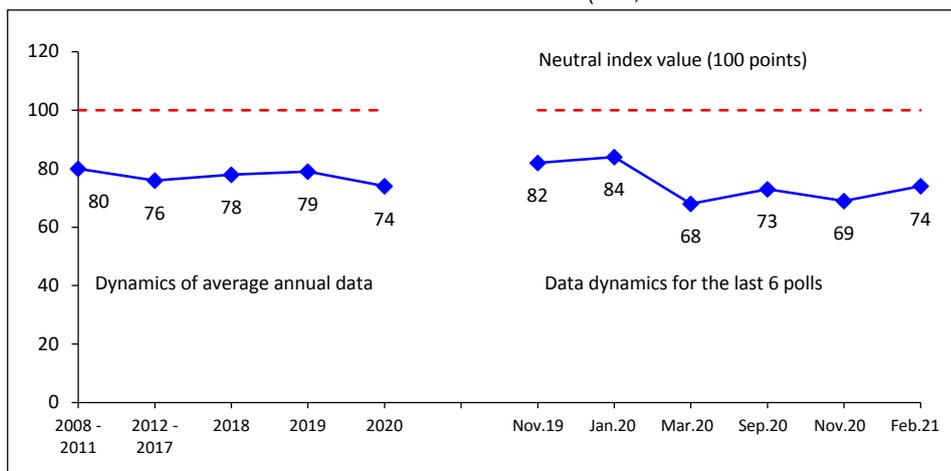
* Question: "Which category do You belong to, in your opinion?"

Consumer Sentiment Index (CSI, points; data of FSBIS VoIRC RAS for the Vologda Oblast)



Annual dynamics (April 2021 to February 2020)	
CSI	Dynamics (+ / -)
Index value, points	-8

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



Annual dynamics (February 2021 to January 2020)	
CSI	Dynamics (+ / -)
Index value, points	-10

* Index is calculated since 2008.

Source: Levada-Center data. Available at: <https://www.levada.ru/indikatory/sotsialno-ekonomicheskie-indikatory/>
 Latest data is for February 2021. There are no data for the period from April to August 2020.

In February – April 2021, share of people who positively characterize their emotional state improved in most (in 9 out of 14) socio-demographic groups – especially among people aged under 30 years (from 61 to 67%), as well as those who, according to self-estimation of income, are among 60% of average-income residents of the region (by 6 p.p., from 60 to 66%). It is impossible not to note the increase in the share of positive assessments of social mood in the group of those who, according to self-assessments of their income, belong to the category of 20% of the least wealthy residents of the Oblast (by 6 p. p., from 44 to 50%).

Negative changes over the past two months are observed only among people who, according to self-estimates of their own income, belong to the category of 20% of the wealthiest population (by 5 p. p., from 76 to 71%).

At the same time, the most pronounced changes are recorded in the dynamics from February 2020 to April 2021. During this period, the mood deteriorated in 9 of the 14 socio-demographic categories of the population. The negative changes were particularly pronounced among the residents of Vologda (share of positive ratings decreased by 10 p. p., from 67 to 57%), as well as among people who, according to self-estimates of income, belong to the category of the 20% of the wealthiest residents (by 8 p. p., from 79 to 71%).

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 (+/-), Apr. 2021 to Feb. 2020
	2000	2007	2011	2012	2018	2019	2020	Feb. 2020	Aug. 2020	Oct. 2020	Dec. 2020	Feb. 2021	Apr. 2021	
Gender														
Male	50.1	65.9	64.5	69.1	72.8	70.1	60.8	67.0	55.6	60.7	60.0	60.8	61.3	-6
Female	43.3	61.7	62.0	65.8	69.8	69.6	61.2	66.9	57.3	60.8	59.8	59.2	64.9	-2
Age														
Under 30	59.1	71.3	70.0	72.3	80.0	81.1	67.6	71.7	69.0	64.6	65.2	60.9	67.4	-4
30–55	44.2	64.8	62.5	67.9	72.6	71.2	61.8	67.5	56.2	62.5	60.9	64.4	65.5	-2
Over 55	37.4	54.8	58.3	62.1	65.2	63.3	57.4	64.3	51.9	56.9	56.5	54.1	59.1	-5
Education														
Secondary and incomplete secondary	41.7	58.4	57.4	57.2	64.8	63.2	56.1	63.1	51.7	56.9	52.6	56.2	56.9	-6
Secondary vocational	46.4	64.6	63.6	66.7	72.2	72.7	63.5	69.0	59.1	63.5	62.5	60.9	64.3	-5
Higher and incomplete higher	53.3	68.6	68.3	77.0	76.8	73.4	63.3	68.6	58.6	61.4	64.6	62.7	68.7	0
Income groups														
Bottom 20%	28.4	51.6	45.3	51.5	57.3	53.2	43.4	48.4	40.4	46.0	38.9	44.3	49.8	+1
Middle 60%	45.5	62.9	65.3	68.7	71.9	71.4	62.6	68.4	56.6	61.9	63.3	60.1	65.8	-3
Top 20%	64.6	74.9	75.3	81.1	82.9	81.8	75.6	79.1	76.4	70.6	76.3	76.0	70.8	-8
Territories														
Vologda	49.2	63.1	67.1	73.6	71.0	68.6	60.9	66.9	57.0	61.0	58.7	55.8	57.0	-10
Cherepovets	50.8	68.1	71.2	76.2	75.8	71.2	60.4	67.3	54.4	59.3	60.7	64.4	68.1	+1
Districts	42.2	61.6	57.1	59.8	68.7	69.8	61.4	66.8	57.5	61.4	60.0	59.7	64.0	-3
Oblast	46.2	63.6	63.1	67.3	71.2	69.9	61.0	66.9	56.5	60.7	59.9	59.9	63.3	-4

CONCLUSIONS

The results of another public opinion monitoring “wave” of VolRC RAS show several multidirectional changes in the dynamics of public opinion over the past two months.

On the one hand, the indicators of social well-being of the population have improved:

- ✓ share of positive assessments of social mood in the region as a whole increased by 3 p. p. (from 60 to 63%). At the same time, positive changes are even more pronounced in certain socio-demographic categories. Thus, the share of positive assessments of social mood among people under the age of 30 (from 61 to 67%) and those who, according to self-assessment of their own income, belong to the group of 60% of middle-income residents of the region increased by 6 p.p. (from 60 to 66%);
- ✓ the share of people who believe that “everything is not so bad, and it is possible to live; it is difficult to live, but it is possible to stand it” increased by 4 p. p. (from 70 to 74%).

On the other hand, some monitoring indicators indicate that during the same period (from February to April 2021), people’s self-assessment of the current state and prospects of their financial situation has significantly deteriorated:

- ✓ thus, the share of residents of the region who believe that the President of the Russian Federation is not successfully coping with the problem of economic recovery and the growth of the population’s well-being increased by 2 p. p. (from 61 to 63%);
- ✓ throughout virtually all of 2020 and in 2021, a stable proportion of those who subjectively classify themselves as “poor and extremely poor” remains (48-49%, for comparison, the share of “middle-income” people is 40%);
- ✓ In April 2021, the Consumer Sentiment Index (CSI) once again decreased (by 2 p.p., from 85 to 83 p.) and reached the lowest value for the entire measurement period. Since 2008, the CSI has remained below 100 points, which indicates the predominance of pessimistic forecasts in people’s assessment of the future of the economy and their personal financial situation. Moreover, the pessimism of the population is increasing, as evidenced by the deteriorating dynamics of the CSI as in the annual dynamics (in 2019, the CSI was 91 p.p., in 2020 – 87 p.), and in the short-term retrospective (in February 2020, the CSI was 91 p., in April 2021 – 83 p.).

A number of non-material factors prevent the deterioration of social mood assessments:

- ✓ continued vaccination of the population and, as a result, a decrease in the number of diseases and deaths from coronavirus (while there is a “third wave” of the epidemic in several European countries);
- ✓ Russia’s position in international political relations is quite clear, resolute, and it reflects the national interests of the country (which significantly worsened after Biden’s victory in the US presidential election and the subsequent escalation of the conflict in Ukraine);
- ✓ the seasonal factor is also important since the onset of spring traditionally has a positive effect on the assessment of emotional well-being. This is largely why, for the entire measurement period in February – April, there was never a deterioration in social mood, while an increase in positive ratings by 3-4 or more percentage points is a quite common phenomenon: such changes, for example, were observed in the periods 1999–2003, 2007–2008, 2011, 2014–2016, 2018.

At the same time, the presence of sufficiently significant non-material factors that prevent a sharp deterioration in the assessment of social well-being is in some sense compensated by the most vulnerable

aspects that determine the nature of public sentiment, namely, issues related to the level and quality of life, which significantly worsened in 2020 – 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Perhaps that is why there are no significant positive changes in the dynamics of the level of approval of the activities of federal and regional authorities, despite the fact that the state continues to actively take measures to support socially vulnerable groups in difficult conditions of overcoming the consequences of the epidemiological crisis.

Another Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, held on April 21, 2021, was devoted to issues of internal development. In particular, to maintaining the level and quality of people's life in the post-crisis period. The President voiced specific instructions to the government and the heads of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, announced a number of measures of direct financial support to certain categories of population, which, of course, will be enthusiastically received by a significant part of Russian society.

How effectively the decisions of the President will be implemented is an ambiguous question, and, at the same time, it becomes particularly important in the context of the increasing tension in the international political situation, mass protest actions that continue to be organized by the non-systemic opposition, as well as the upcoming elections to the State Duma of the Russian Federation (September 2021).

Perhaps, on this background, the question of the effectiveness of the implementation of the President's clear and specific instructions, as always, acquires the status of a factor of national security, since the absence of tangible changes in this direction for most population will automatically mean an aggravation

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