

Public Opinion Monitoring of the State of the Russian Society

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

The following tables show the dynamics of a number of parameters indicating the social feeling and socio-political sentiment of the Vologda Oblast population in April – June 2015, and also on average for the last six surveys (August 2014 – June 2015). These data are compared with the data for 2013, and also for 2007 (the last year of Vladimir Putin's second presidential term, when the assessment of the President's activity was the highest, and for 2011 (the last year of Dmitry Medvedev's presidency)

Estimation of performance of the authorities

In April – June 2015, there was a continuing upward trend in the support of the RF President's performance: the approval level increased from 68 to 70%, the share of negative assessments remained the same (16%). In general, people's assessments are better than in 2013 (when the level of approval was 55%), in 2014 (64%) and early 2015 (the approval level in February was 66% and the share of negative judgments was 21%).

On average for the last six polls, the level of approval of federal authorities by the Vologda Oblast residents remains higher than in 2013 and 2014.

For reference: the nationwide level of approval of the performance of the RF President did not change significantly. Thus, according to VTSIOM surveys carried out in April – May 2015, the level of support of Vladimir Putin's performance is 88% (the share of negative assessments is 7%). According to Levada Center (over the same period) approval of the President of the Russian Federation is 86%; the proportion of negative assessments is 13%.

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 1500 people aged from 18 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 details on the results of ISEDT RAS polls are available at <http://www.vssc.ac.ru/>

How do you assess the current performance of..? (as a percentage of the number of respondents)

Answer option	2007	2011	2013	2014	Aug. 2014	Oct. 2014	Dec. 2014	Feb. 2015	Apr. 2015	June 2015	Average for the last six surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the last six surveys in comparison with...		
												2013	2011	2007
RF President														
I approve	75.3	58.7	55.3	64.1	66.4	66.8	66.0	66.3	67.5	69.5	67.1	+12	+8	-8
I do not approve	11.5	25.6	29.4	22.3	19.3	18.5	19.7	20.5	16.2	16.1	18.4	-11	-7	+7
Chairman of the RF Government *														
I approve	-*	59.3	48.9	54.2	55.2	56.2	56.3	56.1	56.5	59.1	56.6	+8	-3	-
I do not approve	-	24.7	32.8	27.6	26.8	23.9	24.7	24.7	20.5	19.5	23.4	-9	-1	-
Governor														
I approve	55.8	45.7	44.4	40.1	38.8	39.7	39.3	38.3	37.1	40.5	39.0	-5	-7	-17
I do not approve	22.2	30.5	33.2	38.9	40.1	39.6	37.0	37.4	37.5	35.4	37.8	+5	+7	+16
* Included into the survey since 2008.														

Over the past two months there has been an increase in the proportion of the Vologda Oblast residents who believe that the President is successful in protect democracy and strengthening citizens’ freedoms (from 39 to 42%). Assessment of the activity of the head of state in the field of restoring order in the country and economic recovery did not change significantly (50 and 36%, respectively).

It is noteworthy that public opinion concerning V. Putin’s work to strengthen Russia’s international standing has deteriorated (the share of positive assessments for the last two months decreased from 53 to 51%, the proportion of negative judgments increased from 29 to 33%).

In general, people’s current assessments are better than they were in the beginning of the year, and better than in 2013 and 2014. This also concerns their judgements about challenges such as economic recovery and prosperity that the President has to cope with and that are the most relevant for the Oblast residents.

However, on average over the last six surveys, the proportion of negative assessments remains higher than the proportion of positive answers in the attitude of the population toward the activities of the President concerning two issues – protection of democracy (42 vs. 40%) and the increase in the welfare of citizens (51 vs. 35%).

In your opinion, how successful is the RF President in coping with challenging issues?* (as a percentage of the number of respondents)

Answer option	2007	2011	2013	2014	Aug. 2014	Oct. 2014	Dec. 2014	Feb. 2015	Apr. 2015	June 2015	Average for the last six surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the last six surveys in comparison with...		
												2013	2011	2007
Strengthening Russia's international standing														
Successful	58.4	46.2	45.7	50.4	50.9	52.3	50.8	50.4	52.7	51.1	51.4	+6	+5	-7
Unsuccessful	24.9	33.7	36.2	32.4	30.0	31.0	30.3	29.5	28.7	32.5	30.3	-6	-3	+5
<i>Index of success**</i>	<i>133.5</i>	<i>112.5</i>	<i>109.5</i>	<i>118.0</i>	<i>120.9</i>	<i>121.3</i>	<i>120.5</i>	<i>120.9</i>	<i>124.0</i>	<i>118.6</i>	<i>121.0</i>	<i>+12</i>	<i>+9</i>	<i>-12</i>
Imposing order in the country														
Successful	53.2	36.6	39.4	48.0	47.5	49.4	52.1	50.3	50.1	49.9	49.9	+10	+13	-3
Unsuccessful	34.0	50.0	47.5	39.1	37.8	37.8	35.1	37.3	37.5	38.0	37.3	-10	-13	+3
<i>Index of success</i>	<i>119.2</i>	<i>86.6</i>	<i>91.9</i>	<i>108.9</i>	<i>109.7</i>	<i>111.6</i>	<i>117.0</i>	<i>113.0</i>	<i>112.6</i>	<i>111.9</i>	<i>112.6</i>	<i>+21</i>	<i>+26</i>	<i>-7</i>
Protecting democracy and strengthening the citizens' freedoms														
Successful	44.4	32.4	31.8	37.5	37.6	38.2	40.7	39.5	39.2	42.2	39.6	+8	+7	-5
Unsuccessful	37.0	48.3	51.0	45.4	43.7	44.3	41.9	40.9	39.9	38.3	41.5	-10	-7	+5
<i>Index of success</i>	<i>107.4</i>	<i>84.1</i>	<i>80.8</i>	<i>92.1</i>	<i>93.9</i>	<i>93.9</i>	<i>98.8</i>	<i>98.6</i>	<i>99.3</i>	<i>103.9</i>	<i>98.1</i>	<i>+17</i>	<i>+14</i>	<i>-9</i>
Economic recovery and increase in the citizens' welfare														
Successful	47.2	30.7	31.3	34.8	35.1	33.9	37.6	34.4	34.7	36.2	35.3	+4	+5	-12
Unsuccessful	39.1	56.1	56.8	53.4	50.2	54.4	50.8	51.5	49.9	49.9	51.1	-6	-5	+12
<i>Index of success</i>	<i>108.1</i>	<i>74.6</i>	<i>74.5</i>	<i>81.4</i>	<i>84.9</i>	<i>79.5</i>	<i>86.8</i>	<i>82.9</i>	<i>84.8</i>	<i>86.3</i>	<i>84.2</i>	<i>+10</i>	<i>+10</i>	<i>-24</i>
* Ranked according to the average value of the index of success for the last 6 surveys.														
** The indices are calculated as follows: the share of negative answers is subtracted from the share of positive answers, then 100 is added to the obtained value, so as not to have negative values. Thus, completely negative answers would give the total index of 0, and completely positive answers would give the total index of 200; the balance between the former and the latter expresses the value of the index 100, which is, essentially, a neutral mark.														

The structure of the Russians' preferences concerning political parties in April – June 2015 shows that their support to the “United Russia” increased slightly (from 38 to 40%), which in general corresponds to the growth of people's approval of federal authorities. Assessments concerning other parties in the last two months did not change significantly: the share of the Oblast residents who believe that their interests are expressed by KPRF is 7%, by LDPR – 5%, by the “Just Russia” – 3%.

Which party expresses your interests? (as a percentage of the number of respondents)

Party	2007	Election to the RF State Duma 2007, fact		Election to the RF State Duma 2011, fact		2013	2014	Aug. 2014	Oct. 2014	Dec. 2014	Feb. 2015	Apr. 2015	June 2015	Average for the last six surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the last six surveys in comparison with...		
		2011	2011	2013	2011										2007		
United Russia	30.2	60.5	31.1	33.4	29.4	32.8	34.3	35.5	36.7	38.8	38.2	40.3	37.3	+8	+6	+7	
KPRF	7.0	9.3	10.3	16.8	11.3	9.7	9.1	9.3	8.3	7.7	7.8	6.8	8.2	-3	-2	+1	
LDPR	7.5	11.0	7.8	15.4	7.2	7.6	6.9	7.3	7.8	6.7	6.1	5.4	6.7	-1	-1	-1	
Just Russia	7.8	8.8	5.6	27.2	4.6	3.5	3.7	3.9	3.2	4.1	3.7	3.3	3.7	-1	-2	-4	
Other	1.8	–	1.9	–	0.6	0.3	0.1	0.7	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.3	0	-2	-2	
No party	17.8	–	29.4	–	34.9	34.4	35.0	32.6	32.7	30.3	31.5	32.5	32.4	-2	+3	+15	
It is difficult to answer	21.2	–	13.2	–	10.2	11.7	10.9	10.7	11.1	12.0	12.5	11.6	11.5	+1	-2	-10	

It is necessary to note the recovery growth of social well-being assessments after their sharp decline in the beginning of the year. In February 2015, compared with December 2014, the share of positive assessments of social mood dropped from 71 to 62%. In the following months (from February to June 2015) there was an increase in the share of positive assessments (from 62 to 70%).

In April – June 2015, the proportion of the Vologda Oblast residents, who describe their mood as “normal and fine”, rose from 68% to 70%; the proportion of those, who “experience stress, anger, fear, depression”, decreased from 27 to 24%.

The stock of patience remains at the same level: 79% of the Oblast residents believe that “everything is not so bad; it’s difficult to live, but it’s possible to stand it”, 15% say that “it’s impossible to bear such plight”. For comparison, in December 2014, the share of positive assessments was 80%, in February, 2015 – 74%.

The assessments of financial position have improved for the first time in the course of the last six surveys. In April – June 2015, the share of those, who consider that they have “average income”, increased from 37 to 39%, the proportion of “the poor and extremely poor” fell from 52 to 48%,

The consumer sentiment index, which characterizes people’s forecasts concerning the prospects of economic development and their personal wealth, increased from 73 to 80 points, which roughly corresponds to the level of December 2014 (82%).

Estimation of social condition (as a percentage of the number of respondents)

Answer option	2007	2011	2013	2014	Aug. 2014	Oct. 2014	Dec. 2014	Feb. 2015	Apr. 2015	June 2015	Average for the last six surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the last six surveys in comparison with...		
												2013	2011	2007
Mood														
Usual condition, good mood	63.6	63.1	68.6	69.4	70.5	69.3	70.9	61.8	67.6	69.5	68.3	0	+5	+5
I feel stress, anger, fear, depression	27.8	28.9	26.2	24.9	25.1	24.6	24.1	31.3	26.6	24.4	26.0	0	-3	-2
Stock of patience														
Everything is not so bad; it's difficult to live, but it's possible to stand it	74.1	74.8	79.3	80.8	82.5	80.3	80.0	74.3	78.9	79.0	79.2	0	+4	+5
It's impossible to bear such plight	13.6	15.3	14.2	12.6	12.8	12.1	13.6	17.3	14.9	14.7	14.2	0	-1	+1
Social self-identification*														
The share of people who consider themselves to have average income	48.2	43.1	43.9	43.2	44.1	43.5	42.3	38.3	36.7	39.4	40.7	-3	-2	-7
The share of people who consider themselves to be poor and extremely poor	42.4	44.3	46.9	49.1	49.6	49.3	51.0	53.3	51.6	48.0	50.5	+4	+6	+8
Consumer Sentiment Index														
Index value, points	105.9	89.6	90.3	87.6	87.1	84.0	82.3	75.7	73.4	80.1	80.4	-10	-9	-25
* Question: “Which category do you belong to, in your opinion?”														

In April – June 2015, the proportion of negative assessments of the current financial situation in the Vologda Oblast decreased from 38 to 32%, the share of negative forecasts for the coming year decreased from 31 to 24%. This allows us to expect positive changes

nationwide. According to the associates of the Institute of Sociology of RAS, “numerous forecasts², which predict economic collapse and social depression in Russia by the spring of 2015, prove to be wrong... As always happens in times of crisis, society captures the increasing tension even if there are no serious social cataclysms in the country³.

Public opinion concerning the current situation and prospects of development
of welfare situation (as a percentage of the number of respondents)

Вариант ответа	How would you assess your financial situation: is it better or worse than it was a year ago?				Do you think that in a year your financial situation will be better or worse or about the same as now?			
	October 2014		April 2015		October 2014		April 2015	
	Vologda Oblast	Russian Federation	Vologda Oblast	Russian Federation	Vologda Oblast	Russian Federation	Vologda Oblast	Russian Federation
Better	9	22	6	10	6	31	5	25
The same	48	56	41	44	38	46	34	38
Worse	28	22	38	46	23	23	31	37
It is difficult to answer	15	–	16	–	33	–	30	–

Source of the data for the Vologda Oblast: public opinion monitoring carried out by ISEDT RAS.
Source of the data for the Russian Federation: information-analytical summary of the findings of the national survey “Russian everyday life in crisis: how we live and how we feel” (RAS Institute of Sociology, 2015).

² Some examples of pessimistic forecasts for spring 2015:

1. Mikhail Delyagin, Doctor of Economics, Director of the Institute of Globalization Problems: “The growth of social tension in spring will lead to major protest actions, but they will be scattered; however, in autumn they will begin to unite in a common front”. Source: *Ofitsial'nyi sait Moskovskogo ekonomicheskogo foruma* [Official Website of the Moscow Economic Forum]. Available at: <http://me-forum.ru/media/news/3693/>

2. “In 2015, economic recession will increase on the background of accelerating inflation: by mid-year, inflation can reach nearly 20%, which has not been observed since the early 2000s. Forecasts predict a 5–10% decline in real incomes for the first time since the 1990s, which will bring down the retail trade and the service sector... According to Barclays, the peak price growth of 16–17% will occur in March – April, in the end of the year it will be 12.5%. However, analysts at Barclays do not rule out that, given the unprecedented devaluation and volatility of exchange rate, the rate of inflation can be higher. Source: *Krizis-2015: k chemu i kak gotovyatsya ekonomisty i proizvoditeli v Rossii?* [Crisis-2015 What Do Economists and Manufacturers in Russia Prepare for and How Do They Do It?]. *Gazeta “Vedomosti”* [Vedomosti Newspaper], January 26, 2015. Available at: <http://www.vedomosti.ru/library/articles/2015/01/26/glavnoe-ne-kurs-a-stabilnost>

3. Andrey Davidovich, Director of Market Research & Management Consulting Agency “Market”: “We will feel the crisis especially acutely by the spring of 2015”. Source: *Delovaya gazeta “Vzglyad”* [Business Newspaper “View”]. Available at: <http://www.vz.ru/economy/2015/1/3/722716.html>

4. Vladislav Zhukovsky, independent economist and investment advisor (from an interview on December 1, 2014): “The current crisis will reach its peak in about six months. I think that by the spring of 2015, consumer loans will be finally guzzled, and the mortgage market will also face problems. Source: *Svobodnaya pressa* [Free Press]. Available at: <http://svpressa.ru/economy/article/105772/>

³ *Informatsionno-analiticheskoe rezюме po itogam obshchenatsional'nogo issledovaniya “Rossiiskaya povsednevnyy v usloviyakh krizisa: kak zhivem i chto chuvstvuem?”* [Information-Analytical Summary of the Findings of the National Survey “Russian Everyday Life in Crisis: How We Live and How We Feel”]. IS RAN [RAS Institute of Sociology]. 2015. Pp. 2, 4.

In April – June, 2015 in 8 out of 14 socio-demographic groups there was an increase in the proportion of people describing their mood as “fine, normal, good”, especially among men (from 67 to 73%), people aged under 30 (from 74 to 79%), persons with secondary vocational education (from 68 to 74%), and 20% of the wealthiest (from 78 to 83%).

There were no significant changes in 5 groups: women (67%), people aged 30 – 55 (68%), the poorest 20% (57%), the residents of Cherepovets (65%) and districts (65%).

A slight decrease in the proportion of people, who characterize their mood positively, is observed only among persons with higher and incomplete higher education (from 73 to 71%).

Social mood in different socio-demographic groups (answer option “Good mood, usual, good condition”, as a percentage of the number of respondents)

Category of population	2007	2011	2012	2013	2014	Aug. 2014	Oct. 2014	Dec. 2014	Feb. 2015	Apr. 2015	June 2015	Average for the last six surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the last six surveys in comparison with...		
													2013	2011	2007
Sex															
Men	65.9	64.5	69.1	69.9	68.9	69.5	68.8	69.7	61.7	67.4	72.7	68.3	-2	+4	+2
Women	61.7	62.0	65.8	67.5	69.8	71.4	69.8	72.0	61.9	67.8	66.8	68.3	+1	+6	+7
Age															
Under 30	71.3	70.0	72.3	75.5	75.1	79.1	76.6	76.4	71.3	73.5	79.4	76.1	+1	+6	+5
30–55	64.8	62.5	67.9	69.2	69.5	70.3	68.3	69.8	58.3	67.9	67.6	67.0	-2	+5	+2
Over 55	54.8	58.3	62.1	62.4	65.4	64.9	66.1	69.1	60.7	63.7	65.9	65.1	+3	+7	+10
Education															
Incomplete secondary, secondary	58.4	57.4	57.2	60.6	62.5	63.3	65.4	67.8	54.8	62.1	64.0	62.9	+2	+6	+5
Secondary vocational	64.6	63.6	66.7	68.1	70.4	71.3	70.2	71.8	65.2	68.2	73.6	70.1	+2	+6	+5
Incomplete higher, higher	68.6	68.3	77.0	77.4	76.2	77.7	73.3	73.5	65.8	73.1	70.6	72.3	-5	+4	+4
Income groups															
20% of the poorest people	51.6	45.3	51.5	46.2	50.8	54.1	50.2	55.1	38.3	55.6	57.1	51.7	+6	+6	0
60% of the people with middle-sized income	62.9	65.3	68.7	71.9	72.3	71.5	73.5	75.0	65.2	69.2	71.3	71.0	-1	+6	+8
20% of the most prosperous people	74.9	75.3	81.1	83.3	84.8	89.6	79.0	81.6	80.3	78.1	82.5	81.9	-1	+7	+7
Territories															
Vologda	63.1	67.1	73.6	75.0	76.4	80.7	75.5	75.6	66.4	72.5	75.6	74.4	-1	+7	+11
Cherepovets	68.1	71.2	76.2	75.3	76.3	76.5	72.8	73.2	63.1	69.8	71.2	71.1	-4	0	+3
Districts	61.6	57.1	59.8	61.6	61.8	61.5	64.0	67.1	58.6	63.7	65.1	63.3	+2	+6	+2
Oblast	63.6	63.1	67.3	68.6	69.4	70.5	69.3	70.9	61.8	67.6	69.5	68.3	0	+5	+5

Assessments of social mood in all socio-demographic categories of the Oblast residents are better than at the beginning of 2015. However, the level of December 2014 has been reached only in 7 of out of 14 categories of the population so far.

On average for the last 6 surveys, in comparison to 2013, there have been some negative changes among people with higher and incomplete higher education (the share of positive assessments decreased from 77 to 72%) and among the residents of Cherepovets (from 75 to 71%).

Conclusion:

The results of the survey carried out in June 2015 indicate that after a period of tension, which took place in the late 2014 – early 2015 and was associated with the exacerbation of financial problems (rising prices, fluctuations in the exchange rate of the national currency, pessimistic expectations due to the impact of sanctions), public opinion of the Vologda Oblast residents is gradually improving. In the past two months the estimation of performance of federal and regional bodies of state administration became more positive, the position of “United Russia” strengthened (which also indicates that the population supports the current government), self-assessment of financial situation became more positive.

Positive changes in the estimates of the population influence the current mood of the people and their expectations concerning the future (this is evidenced by the dynamics of the consumer sentiment index, which improved for the first time for the last year).

The Vologda Oblast residents’ assessments concerning various aspects of their lives show the trend of recovery growth. Perhaps this suggests that people began to hope for success in overcoming the tense domestic situation, both for the country and for themselves. However, it is premature to speak about that with confidence. Improvement of public opinion can be associated with the beginning of summer (for many people it is the period when they go to their dachas and work at their subsidiary plots), and with the information policy of federal and regional authorities, which has changed in comparison with the late 2014 – early 2015.

April 28, speaking at the Truth and Justice Second Media Forum of Independent Regional and Local Media, Vladimir Putin described the current situation as follows: “I wouldn’t even call it a crisis – we have certain developments and complications... But overall, it is already clear that there is no collapse, nor will there be one. And that is what’s most important”⁴.

The President’s optimism is transmitted to the population through the media and, of course, affects the dynamics of public opinion. However, it is still unknown how the dynamics of the socio-economic situation in Russia will develop further.

⁴ Stenogramma Mediaforuma nezavisimyykh regional’nykh i mestnykh SMI [Transcript of the Media Forum of Independent Regional and Local Media]. *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* [Russian Newspaper], April 28, 2015. Available at: <http://www.rg.ru/2015/04/28/mediaforum-site.html>