

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 August – October 2015, and also on average for the last six surveys (December 2014 – October 2015). These data are compared with the data for 2013–2014, 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 August – October 2015, the level of approval for Vladimir Putin’s work as president decreased slightly² (from 72 to 69%); however, it remains higher than in 2011–2014.

The share of negative assessments did not change and remained 18%, which is, in general, consistent with the average value for the last 12 months.

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

For reference: the nationwide level of approval of the RF President’s performance remains stable. According to VCIOM, the share of positive assessments is 86–87%, negative – 69% (in September – 1st half of October 2015).

According to Levada-Center, the share of Russians who express their approval for Vladimir Putin’s work as president is 83–84%, the proportion of negative characteristics is 15–17% (in August – September 2015).

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.vsc.ac.ru/>

² In accordance with the methodology of the survey, the decline in the assessments of the RF President’s performance is within the margin error (3%)

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

Answer option	2007	2011	2013	2014	Dec. 2014	Feb. 2015	Apr. 2015	June 2015	Aug. 2015	Oct. 2015	Average for the last six surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the last six surveys in comparison with...			
												2014	2013	2011	2007
RF President															
I approve	75.3	58.7	55.3	64.1	66.0	66.3	67.5	69.5	72.0	69.3	68.4	+4	+13	+10	-7
I don't approve	11.5	25.6	29.4	22.3	19.7	20.5	16.2	16.1	17.8	18.1	18.1	-4	-11	-8	+7
Chairman of the RF Government*															
I approve	-*	59.3	48.9	54.2	56.3	56.1	56.5	59.1	60.7	58.1	57.8	+4	+9	-2	-
I don't approve	-	24.7	32.8	27.6	24.7	24.7	20.5	19.5	22.5	21.0	22.2	-5	-11	-3	-
Governor															
I approve	55.8	45.7	44.4	40.1	39.3	38.3	37.1	40.5	41.5	38.7	39.2	-1	-5	-7	-17
I don't approve	22.2	30.5	33.2	38.9	37.0	37.4	37.5	35.4	35.4	36.0	36.5	-2	+3	+6	+14

* Included into the survey since 2008.

The assessment of success of the President's actions in addressing the key problems of the country in the last two months decreased slightly:

- the share of the Vologda Oblast residents who think that the President successfully copes with the task of restoring order in the country decreased from 52 to 49% (within the margin of error of the survey);
- the share of those who believe that the President is successful in protecting democracy and strengthening citizens' freedoms decreased from 43 to 38%;
- the share of those who believe that the President successfully copes with the task of economic recovery and promotes the increase in the welfare of citizens decreased from 37 to 32%.

The assessment of the President's efforts to strengthen international positions of Russia remains stable. In February – October 2015, the proportion of positive assessments was 51–52%.

The share of negative judgments on all of these issues did not change in the last two months.

In general over the last six polls the assessment of the performance of the President on all the key issues remains more positive than in 2013–2014.

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	Dec. 2014	Feb. 2015	Apr. 2015	June 2015	Aug. 2015	Oct. 2015	Average for the last six surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the last six surveys in comparison with...			
												2014	2013	2011	2007
Strengthening Russia's international standing															
Successful	58.4	46.2	45.7	50.4	50.8	50.4	52.7	51.1	52.2	50.7	51.3	+1	+6	+5	-7
Unsuccessful	24.9	33.7	36.2	32.4	30.3	29.5	28.7	32.5	32.4	33.1	31.1	-1	-5	-3	+6
<i>Index of success**</i>	<i>133.5</i>	<i>112.5</i>	<i>109.5</i>	<i>118.0</i>	<i>120.5</i>	<i>120.9</i>	<i>124.0</i>	<i>118.6</i>	<i>119.8</i>	<i>117.6</i>	<i>120.2</i>	<i>+2</i>	<i>+11</i>	<i>+8</i>	<i>-13</i>
Imposing order in the country															
Successful	53.2	36.6	39.4	48.0	52.1	50.3	50.1	49.9	51.7	48.6	50.5	+3	+11	+14	-3
Unsuccessful	34.0	50.0	47.5	39.1	35.1	37.3	37.5	38.0	37.9	38.7	37.4	-2	-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>117.0</i>	<i>113.0</i>	<i>112.6</i>	<i>111.9</i>	<i>113.8</i>	<i>109.9</i>	<i>113.0</i>	<i>+4</i>	<i>+21</i>	<i>+26</i>	<i>-6</i>
Protecting democracy and strengthening the citizens' freedoms															
Successful	44.4	32.4	31.8	37.5	40.7	39.5	39.2	42.2	42.6	38.1	40.4	+3	+9	+8	-4
Unsuccessful	37.0	48.3	51.0	45.4	41.9	40.9	39.9	38.3	41.7	44.3	41.2	-4	-10	-7	+4
<i>Index of success</i>	<i>107.4</i>	<i>84.1</i>	<i>80.8</i>	<i>92.1</i>	<i>98.8</i>	<i>98.6</i>	<i>99.3</i>	<i>103.9</i>	<i>100.9</i>	<i>93.8</i>	<i>99.2</i>	<i>+7</i>	<i>+18</i>	<i>+15</i>	<i>-8</i>
Economic recovery and increase in the citizens' welfare															
Successful	47.2	30.7	31.3	34.8	37.6	34.4	34.7	36.2	36.6	32.1	35.3	+1	+4	+5	-12
Unsuccessful	39.1	56.1	56.8	53.4	50.8	51.5	49.9	49.9	52.6	54.3	51.5	-2	-5	-5	+12
<i>Index of success</i>	<i>108.1</i>	<i>74.6</i>	<i>74.5</i>	<i>81.4</i>	<i>86.8</i>	<i>82.9</i>	<i>84.8</i>	<i>86.3</i>	<i>84.0</i>	<i>77.8</i>	<i>83.8</i>	<i>+2</i>	<i>+9</i>	<i>+9</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 August – October 2015 did not see any significant changes: the “United Russia” is supported by 38–39%, KPRF – by 7%, LDPR – by 6%, the “Just Russia” – by 3–4%.

The proportion of the Vologda Oblast residents who believe that the “United Russia” expresses their interests, increased by 5 percentage points (from 33 to 38%) on average over the last six polls compared to 2014.

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

Party	2007	Election to the RF State Duma 2007, fact	2011	Election to the RF State Duma 2011, fact	2013	2014	Dec. 2014	Feb. 2015	Apr. 2015	June 2015	Aug. 2015	Oct. 2015	Average for the last six surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the last six surveys in comparison with...			
														2014	2013	2011	2007
United Russia	30.2	60.5	31.1	33.4	29.4	32.8	36.7	38.8	38.2	40.3	38.5	38.0	38.4	+6	+9	+7	+8
KPRF	7.0	9.3	10.3	16.8	11.3	9.7	8.3	7.7	7.8	6.8	7.1	6.9	7.4	-2	-4	-3	0
LDPR	7.5	11.0	7.8	15.4	7.2	7.6	7.8	6.7	6.1	5.4	5.9	6.1	6.3	-1	-1	-2	-1
Just Russia	7.8	8.8	5.6	27.2	4.6	3.5	3.2	4.1	3.7	3.3	3.5	3.3	3.5	0	-1	-2	-4
Other	1.8	–	1.9	–	0.6	0.3	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2	0	0	-2	-2
No party	17.8	–	29.4	–	34.9	34.4	32.7	30.3	31.5	32.5	33.8	32.3	32.2	-2	-3	+3	+14
It is difficult to answer	21.2	–	13.2	–	10.2	11.7	11.1	12.0	12.5	11.6	11.1	13.3	11.9	0	+2	-1	-9

In October 2015 compared to August 2015 certain negative changes are seen in the dynamics of assessments of social well-being.

Nevertheless, people's estimates remain higher than at the beginning of the year:

- in the past two months there was a slight decrease (from 73 to 70%) in the proportion of the Vologda Oblast residents who positively assess their mood (this figure was 62% in February 2015);

- the proportion of positive assessments of the stock of patience decreased from 82 to 78% (this figure was 74% in February 2015).

The structure of social self-identification remains consistently low since June 2015: 50% of the Vologda oblast residents consider themselves to be “poor and extremely poor”, 39% – consider themselves to be “people with average income”.

The consumer sentiment index (CSI) that describes the people's forecasts of development of the economy and their personal wealth did not change in the last two months and amounted to 78 points. It is higher than at the beginning of 2015 (76 p.), and lower than in 2013–2014, when it was 88–90 points.

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

Answer option	2007	2011	2013	2014	Dec. 2014	Feb. 2015	Apr. 2015	June 2015	Aug. 2015	Oct. 2015	Average for the last six surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the last six surveys in comparison with...			
												2014	2013	2011	2007
Mood															
Usual condition, good mood	63.6	63.1	68.6	69.4	70.9	61.8	67.6	69.5	73.1	70.4	68.9	-1	0	+6	+5
I feel stress, anger, fear, depression\	27.8	28.9	26.2	24.9	24.1	31.3	26.6	24.4	23.5	25.4	25.9	+1	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	80.0	74.3	78.9	79.0	82.2	78.2	78.8	-2	-1	+4	+5
It's impossible to bear such plight	13.6	15.3	14.2	12.6	13.6	17.3	14.9	14.7	13.3	13.9	14.6	+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	42.3	38.3	36.7	39.4	39.9	39.2	39.3	-4	-5	-4	-9
The share of people who consider themselves to be poor and extremely poor	42.4	44.3	46.9	49.1	51.0	53.3	51.6	48.0	50.5	50.2	50.8	+2	+4	+7	+8
Consumer sentiment index															
Index value, points	105.9	89.6	90.3	87.6	82.3	75.7	73.4	80.1	77.9	77.7	77.9	-10	-12	-12	-28
* Question: "Which category do you belong to, in your opinion?"															

Conclusion

Thus, in October 2015 there was a slight (within the margin of error of the survey) decrease in the assessments of performance of state administration authorities, as well as in the proportion of the Vologda Oblast residents who positively characterize their mood and stock of patience.

The speech delivered by President Putin at the 70th anniversary session of the UN General Assembly did not influence the Russian society in the same way as his 2013 speech at the meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club. We recall that at Valdai the President announced his conceptual vision of Russia's future, dwelling upon the "spiritual bonds" of the Russian people, the "Russian world", the unacceptability of a unipolar world order. After that, in the tide of the

“Crimean spring” events (when Crimea and Sevastopol joined the Russian Federation), research centers (VCIOM, Levada-Center, ISED T RAS) registered record-breaking levels of support for the President among Russians.

In October 2015, the President, in fact, continued to develop the conceptual provisions that he had announced in February 2007 at the Security Conference in Munich. Speaking at the 70th session of the UN General Assembly, Vladimir Putin made it perfectly clear that the unipolar world order was unacceptable, and he cautioned against the consequences that may result from the hegemony of a dominant power in international political relations.

The changes observed in October 2015, in our view, have three reasons:

- first of all, a “slow and long” downgrade of the President’s rating was forecasted back in mid-2015, because even at that time his rating reached its top and could not grow any higher³;
- second, there are no significant changes in dealing with internal economic issues. Despite V. Putin’s statement that economic issues occupy at least 80% of his work time, if not more⁴, statistical data and sociological polls show negative trends in the dynamics of the standard of living.

According to Rosstat, real disposable money incomes of Russians in January – August 2015 amounted to 96.9% of the corresponding period of the previous year, real wages – to 91%. The consumer price index in September 2015 amounted to 100.6% of August 2015 and 100.5% of December 2014. In general, the proportion of Russians with money incomes below the subsistence level was 15.1% in the first half of 2015, in 2014 it was 11.2% (for comparison).

According to the data of sociological polls conducted in 2015, more than half of the population (52–54%) think that the Russian President fails to cope with the issues of economic recovery and increase in citizens’ welfare; 50–53% consider themselves to be poor or extremely poor, the majority of Russians think that their financial position will deteriorate as well as economic situation in the country (as evidenced by the consumer sentiment index, which is about 75–77 points according to all the polls in 2015, i.e. it remains below 100 points, which means that negative assessments prevail over positive ones).

In addition to the pessimistic data of statistics and sociological surveys that indicate stagflation in the economy and difficulties in people’s financial situation, the trust in the government is undermined by frequent corruption scandals involving substantial sums of money (for example, the cases of RUSNANO and Oboronservis; arrests of governors Aleksandr Khoroshavin, Vyacheslav Gaizer, etc.).

The third reason why the level of approval of the Government is declining consists in the fact that the military action which Russia launched against terrorists in Syria could trigger memories of the terrorist attacks that occurred in Russia in the midst of the Chechen war. Since September 30, 2015, the Russian air force at the formal request of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has been carrying

³ Gorbachev A., Garmonenko D. Prezident i ego reiting [President and His Rating]. *Nezavisimaya gazeta* [Independent Newspaper], 2015, July 10. Available at: http://www.ng.ru/politics/2015-07-10/1_president.html

⁴ Vystuplenie Prezidenta RF na VII investitsionnom forumе “Rossiya zovet!” 13 oktyabrya 2015 g. [Speech of the RF President at the 7th Russia Calling! Investment Forum, October 13, 2015]. *Ofitsial’nyi sait Prezidenta RF* [Official Website of the President of Russia]. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/50498>

out surgical military strikes against the targets of terrorist groups in Syria. Despite the intentions that are, in general, quite clear (“to counter the spread of terrorism⁵, and, in particular, to prevent terrorists from penetrating into Russia), this fact could cause social anxiety due to the fear of recurrence of such tragedies as the “Nord-Ost” (2002) or the terrorist act in Beslan (2004).

We think that further dynamics of public opinion will depend on three factors:

- the first one – how successful the actions of the President and the Government will be in overcoming the negative trend of stagflation in the economy and deterioration of the standard of living;
- the second one – how effective Russia’s actions in Syria will be, which largely depends on its policy toward foreign partners, their interest in the cooperation on the establishment of an anti-terrorist coalition;
- the third one – how successful the actions of power structures and law enforcement agencies will be with regard to preventing terrorist acts on the territory of Russia. Currently, each case can become a major focus of public attention and can have a significant impact on people’s attitudes to the authorities and on the general perception of the situation in the country.

⁵ Vystuplenie V.V. Putina na plenarnom zasedanii yubileinoi 70i sessii General’noi Assamblei OON [Vladimir Putin’s Speech at the Plenary Meeting of the Anniversary 70th Session of the UN General Assembly]. *Ofitsial’nyi sait Prezidenta RF* [Official Website of the President of Russia]. Available at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50385>