

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 October – December 2015, and also on average for 2015 (six polls carried out in February – 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 October – December 2015, the assessment of work of the President of the Russian Federation did not change significantly: the level of approval is 69–70%, the proportion of negative assessments is 17–18%. It is better than it was earlier in the year, when the level of support for Vladimir Putin was 66% and the share of negative characteristics was 21%.

In general, by the end of 2015, it should be noted that there is a steady increase in the share of the Vologda Oblast residents who approve of the President’s work during the last three years: in 2013 – 55%, in 2014 – 64%, in 2015 – 69%. However, the level of support of the President of the Russian Federation that was registered in 2007 (75%) had not been reached yet.

In the past three years there was a slight increase in the support of the Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation (in 2013 – 49%; in 2014 – 54%, in 2015 – 58%). However, there are no significant changes in the current dynamics: in February 2015, the level of support of the Prime Minister was 56%, in October and December – 58%.

For reference: the nationwide level of approval of the RF President’s performance in October – November 2015 did not change considerably: 87% – according to VCIOM, and 85–86% – according to Levada-Center.

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/>

The same level of approval of the work of the head of state was marked by VCIOM and Levada-Center in February 2015 (88 and 86%, respectively).

In 2014–2015², the national average level of support of Vladimir Putin increased by 5–6 p.p. (according to VCIOM – from 81 to 87 %, according to Levada-Center – from 81 to 86 %).

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

Answer option	2007	2011	2013	2014	2015	Feb. 2015	Apr. 2015	June 2015	Aug. 2015	Oct. 2015	Dec. 2015	Dynamics (+/-), 2015 in comparison with...		
												2014	2011	2007
RF President														
I approve	75.3	58.7	55.3	64.1	69.1	66.3	67.5	69.5	72.0	69.3	69.7	+5	+10	-6
I do not approve	11.5	25.6	29.4	22.3	17.5	20.5	16.2	16.1	17.8	18.1	16.5	-5	-8	+6
Chairman of the RF Government *														
I approve	-	59.3	48.9	54.2	58.1	56.1	56.5	59.1	60.7	58.1	57.9	+4	-1	-
I do not approve	-	24.7	32.8	27.6	21.7	24.7	20.5	19.5	22.5	21.0	21.7	-6	-3	-
Governor														
I approve	55.8	45.7	44.4	40.1	39.3	38.3	37.1	40.5	41.5	38.7	39.7	-1	-6	-17
I do not approve	22.2	30.5	33.2	38.9	36.2	37.4	37.5	35.4	35.4	36.0	35.3	-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 did not change significantly:

– the share of the Vologda Oblast residents who think that the President successfully copes with the task of strengthening international positions of Russia remains at the level of 51–53% (the share of negative assessments is 32–33%);

– the share of the Vologda Oblast residents who think that the President successfully copes with the task of restoring order in the country is 49–51%; at the same time, the share of negative judgments remains stable (38–39%);

– 31–32% of the respondents believe that the President successfully copes with the task of economic recovery and promotes the increase in the welfare of citizens (the share of negative assessments is higher and remains at the level of 54–56%).

The share of those who believe that the President is successful in protecting democracy and strengthening citizens' freedoms increased slightly (from 38 to 41%) in the past two months.

² The data by VCIOM and Levada-Center are given for the period of January – November 2015.

Compared to the beginning of 2015, the evaluation of the success of the President's work in December remained stable for the majority of key issues. However, in the last 12 months there was an increase in the share of the Vologda Oblast residents (in February – 52%, in December – 56%) who are not satisfied with the way the RF President copes with the task of economic recovery and promotion of the growth of citizens' welfare.

In general in 2015 compared to 2014, people's estimates did not change significantly. The Vologda Oblast residents more often than in 2011–2013 point out Vladimir Putin's success in the strengthening of Russia's international positions, protection of democracy, economic recovery (increase by 5–6 p. p.) and especially in restoring order in the country (11–12 p.p.).

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	2015	Feb. 2015	Apr. 2015	June 2015	Aug. 2015	Oct. 2015	Dec. 2015	Dynamics (+/-), 2015 in comparison with...		
												2014	2011	2007
Strengthening Russia's international standing														
Successful	58.4	46.2	45.7	50.4	51.7	50.4	52.7	51.1	52.2	50.7	53.2	+1	+6	-7
Unsuccessful	24.9	33.7	36.2	32.4	31.3	29.5	28.7	32.5	32.4	33.1	31.5	-1	-2	+6
<i>Index of success</i>	133.5	112.5	109.5	118.0	120.4	120.9	124.0	118.6	119.8	117.6	121.7	+2	+8	-13
Imposing order in the country														
Successful	53.2	36.6	39.4	48.0	50.2	50.3	50.1	49.9	51.7	48.6	50.5	+2	+14	-3
Unsuccessful	34.0	50.0	47.5	39.1	37.9	37.3	37.5	38.0	37.9	38.7	38.0	-1	-12	+4
<i>Index of success</i>	119.2	86.6	91.9	108.9	112.3	113.0	112.6	111.9	113.8	109.9	112.5	+3	+26	-7
Protecting democracy and strengthening the citizens' freedoms														
Successful	44.4	32.4	31.8	37.5	40.4	39.5	39.2	42.2	42.6	38.1	41.0	+3	+8	-4
Unsuccessful	37.0	48.3	51.0	45.4	41.5	40.9	39.9	38.3	41.7	44.3	43.7	-4	-7	+4
<i>Index of success</i>	107.4	84.1	80.8	92.1	99.0	98.6	99.3	103.9	100.9	93.8	97.3	+7	+15	-8
Economic recovery and increase in the citizens' welfare														
Successful	47.2	30.7	31.3	34.8	34.2	34.4	34.7	36.2	36.6	32.1	30.9	-1	+3	-13
Unsuccessful	39.1	56.1	56.8	53.4	52.3	51.5	49.9	49.9	52.6	54.3	55.7	-1	-4	+13
<i>Index of success</i>	108.1	74.6	74.5	81.4	81.8	82.9	84.8	86.3	84.0	77.8	75.2	0	+7	-26

* Ranked according to the average value of the index of success for 2015.

The structure of the Russians' preferences concerning political parties in October – December 2015 did not see any significant changes: the “United Russia” is supported by 38–39%, KPRF and LDPR – by 6–7%, the “Just Russia” – by 3–4% during the entire year of 2015.

It is necessary to note a steady increase in the support of “United Russia” in annual dynamics: in 2013 – 29%, in 2014 – 33%, in 2015 – 39%. This is significantly higher than in 2007 (30%).

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	2015	Feb. 2015	Apr. 2015	June 2015	Aug. 2015	Oct. 2015	Dec. 2015	Dynamics (+/-), 2015 in comparison with...		
														2014	2011	2007
United Russia	30.2	60.5	31.1	33.4	29.4	32.8	38.8	38.8	38.2	40.3	38.5	38.0	39.0	+6	+8	+9
LDPR	7.5	11.0	7.8	15.4	7.2	7.6	6.2	6.7	6.1	5.4	5.9	6.1	7.1	-1	-2	-1
KPRF	7.0	9.3	10.3	16.8	11.3	9.7	7.1	7.7	7.8	6.8	7.1	6.9	6.5	-3	-3	0
Just Russia	7.8	8.8	5.6	27.2	4.6	3.5	3.6	4.1	3.7	3.3	3.5	3.3	3.7	0	-2	-4
Other	1.8	–	1.9	–	0.6	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.4	0	-2	-2
No party	17.8	–	29.4	–	34.9	34.4	31.8	30.3	31.5	32.5	33.8	32.3	30.5	-3	+2	+14
It is difficult to answer	21.2	–	13.2	–	10.2	11.7	12.2	12.0	12.5	11.6	11.1	13.3	12.9	+1	-1	-9

In October – December 2015, the assessments of social condition of the Vologda Oblast residents did not change significantly:

- 70% characterize their mood positively;
- 78% consider that “everything is not so bad; it’s difficult to live, but it’s possible to stand it”;
- 39% consider themselves to have “average income”;
- the consumer sentiment index remains at the level of 78 points.

Compared to the beginning of the year, in December, the share of positive assessments of social sentiment increased by 8 percentage points (from 62 to 70 %), stock of patience – by 4 percentage points (from 74 to 78%). Nevertheless, there are no positive changes in the dynamics of social self-identification: like in February 2015, about half of the Vologda Oblast residents (51–53%) consider themselves to be “poor and extremely poor”, the proportion of people of “average income” is 36%.

In general for the year 2015, the estimates of social mood and stock of patience are better than in 2007–2011 (by 5 p.p.) and they roughly correspond to the level of 2014. At the same time, we can point out an annual increase in the share of the “poor and extremely poor” residents of the Vologda Oblast: in 2007 – 42%, in 2011 – 44%, in 2013 – 47%, in 2014 – 49%, and in 2015 – 51%. People’s confidence in the future is gradually decreasing (consumer sentiment index in 2007 was 106 points, in 2011–2013 – 90 points; in 2014 – 88 points, in 2015 – 77 points).

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

Answer option	2007	2011	2013	2014	2015	Feb. 2015	Apr. 2015	June 2015	Aug. 2015	Oct. 2015	Dec. 2015	Dynamics (+/-), 2015 in comparison with...		
												2014	2011	2007
Mood														
Usual condition, good mood	63.6	63.1	68.6	69.4	68.7	61.8	67.6	69.5	73.1	70.4	69.6	-1	+6	+5
I feel stress, anger, fear, depression	27.8	28.9	26.2	24.9	25.9	31.3	26.6	24.4	23.5	25.4	24.3	+1	-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	78.4	74.3	78.9	79.0	82.2	78.2	78.0	-2	+4	+4
It's impossible to bear such plight	13.6	15.3	14.2	12.6	14.5	17.3	14.9	14.7	13.3	13.9	12.7	+2	-1	+1
Social self-identification*														
The share of people who consider themselves to have average income	48.2	43.1	43.9	43.2	38.7	38.3	36.7	39.4	39.9	39.2	38.9	-4	-4	-9
The share of people who consider themselves to be poor and extremely poor	42.4	44.3	46.9	49.1	50.7	53.3	51.6	48.0	50.5	50.2	50.5	+2	+6	+8
Consumer sentiment index														
Index value, points	105.9	89.6	90.3	87.6	77.1	75.7	73.4	80.1	77.9	77.7	77.7	-11	-13	-29

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

Conclusion

The results of the survey conducted in December 2015 indicate that people's attitude to the work of Russia's authorities remains stable, and it is more positive than at the beginning of the year. To the end of 2015, social mood improved, the stock of patience increased. The Vologda Oblast residents supported the work of the President on strengthening Russia's international positions and restoring order in the country (the share of positive opinions is higher than negative ones by 12–20 p.p.). Party and political preferences remain the same.

Nevertheless, the results of sociological measurements clearly show that the ineffectiveness of domestic economic policy remains the prime issue for the Russian society. People's estimation of their financial position is dominated by negative assessments, and there were no significant changes in this regard in 2015:

- the share of the Vologda Oblast residents who consider themselves to be "poor and extremely poor" exceeds (just like in the beginning of the year) the proportion of people of "average income" by 12–15 p.p. (38–39% vs. 51–53%);

- the consumer sentiment index that indicates the forward-looking expectations of the population, remains very low (77 points, which is below the neutral level);
- the President's work on economic recovery and increase in citizens' welfare is assessed not so positively as his work on strengthening Russia's international positions, restoring order in the country and protecting democracy. It is dominated by negative assessments (34% of positive opinions versus 52% of negative opinions);
- the level of approval of the President's work continues to increase (from February to December 2015 – by 4 p.p., from 66 to 70%); however, it is clear that this growth is associated with his activities on the global arena. There is no increase in the support of Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's work in 2015 (56–58%), because he is primarily responsible for independent domestic economic policy.

Negative trends in the assessment of financial position are observed in the annual retrospective, which indicates the lingering nature and aggravation of economic problems:

- the percentage of the “poor and extremely poor” was 42% in 2007, 44% – in 2011, 47% in 2013, 49% in 2014, and 51% in 2015;
- the consumer sentiment index in 2007 was 106 points, in 2011–2013 – 90 points, in 2014 – 88 points, and in 2015 – 77 points.

Thus, the long-term negative trends in people's perception of their standard of living and prospects of development of financial situation are a direct result and clear proof of the ineffectiveness of domestic economic policy pursued by the Government.

It is no coincidence that the society is not content with the work of the authorities in this very aspect³. It is no coincidence that a large part of the Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly in December 2015 was connected not with the struggle against international terrorism, or with the geopolitical interests of Russia and the USA, but with internal economic problems and administration efficiency issues⁴. Moreover, the President' tone “turned out to be alarmed and concerned”⁵.

Further dynamics of public opinion will depend on the degree of responsibly with which the Cabinet of Ministers will accept the main theses presented by Vladimir Putin in his Address to the Federal Assembly, and also on the degree of efficiency with which the President's orders will be implemented; he has repeatedly drawn attention to these issues during his third presidential term.

The presence or absence of any changes in domestic economic policy will be indicated by the subjective assessments of the population concerning their standard of living and quality of life; these assessments will be revealed during the next stages of the monitoring conducted by ISEDТ RAS.

³ Skorobogatyi P. Trevozhnyi i loyal'nyi [Worrisome and Loyal]. *Ekspert* [Expert], 2015, no. 45, November 2. Available at: <http://expert.ru/expert/2015/45/trevozhnyij-i-loyalnyij/>

⁴ Poslanie Prezidenta RF V.V. Putina Federal'nomu Sobraniyu 3 dekabrya 2015 g. [Address of the RF President Vladimir Putin to the Federal Assembly, December 3, 2015]. *Ofitsial'nyi sait Prezidenta RF* [Official Website of the RF President]. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/messages/50864>

⁵ Poslanie ozabochennogo cheloveka [Message of a Worried Man]. *Nezavisimaya gazeta* [Independent Newspaper], 2015, December 4. Available at: http://www.ng.ru/editorial/2015-12-04/2_red.html