

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 ISEDТ 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 December 2015 – February 2016, and also on average for the last six polls (April 2015 – February 2016). These data are compared with the data 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 Dmitri Medvedev’s presidency). The yearly dynamics of the data is presented beginning from 2013.

Estimation of performance of the authorities

In December 2015 – February 2016, the assessment of work of the President of the Russian Federation did not change significantly (68–70%) which corresponds to the average indicators for 2015 (69%) and which is significantly higher than in 2011–2014 (59–64%).

In the past two months there was a slight increase in the support of the Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation (by 3 p.p., from 58 to 55%). In February 2016, the level of support of the Chairman of the RF Government was lower than in 2011 and 2015 (58–59%).

For reference: the nationwide level of approval of the RF President’s performance in December 2015 – January 2016 decreased by 2 p.p. (from 86 to 84%) according to VCIOM data and by 3 p.p. according to Levada-Center data (from 85 to 82%).

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 ISEDТ RAS polls are available at <http://www.vsec.ac.ru/>

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

Answer option	2007	2011	2013	2014	2015	Apr. 2015	June 2015	Aug. 2015	Oct. 2015	Dec. 2015	Feb. 2016	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the latest 6 surveys in comparison with...		
													2014	2011	2007
RF President															
I approve	75.3	58.7	55.3	64.1	69.1	67.5	69.5	72.0	69.3	69.7	68.1	69.4	+5	+11	-6
I don't approve	11.5	25.6	29.4	22.3	17.5	16.2	16.1	17.8	18.1	16.5	16.1	16.8	-6	-9	+5
Chairman of the RF Government*															
I approve	-*	59.3	48.9	54.2	58.1	56.5	59.1	60.7	58.1	57.9	54.9	57.9	+4	-1	-
I don't approve	-	24.7	32.8	27.6	21.7	20.5	19.5	22.5	21.0	21.7	22.6	21.3	-6	-3	-
Governor															
I approve	55.8	45.7	44.4	40.1	39.3	37.1	40.5	41.5	38.7	39.7	35.1	38.8	-1	-7	-17
I don't approve	22.2	30.5	33.2	38.9	36.2	37.5	35.4	35.4	36.0	35.3	38.2	36.3	-3	+6	+14
* Included into the survey since 2008.															

In December 2015 – February 2016, the share of the Vologda Oblast residents who think that the President successfully copes with the task of strengthening international positions of Russia did not change significantly (51–53), which corresponds to the level of 2014–2015.

However, the assessment of success of the President's actions in addressing the key problems of the country in December 2015 – February 2016 slightly reduced:

- the share of the Vologda Oblast residents who think that the President successfully copes with the task of restoring order in the country decreased by 3 p.p. (from 51 to 48%);
- the share of those who believe that the President is successful in protecting democracy and strengthening citizens' freedoms decreased by 4 p.p. (from 41 to 37%);
- 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 by 3 p.p. (from 31 to 28%).

In general, the assessment of the success of the President's work on all these issues remains at the level of 2014–2015 except for his work on economic recovery and improvement of the citizens' welfare (34–35% in 2014–2015, 28% in February 2016).

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	Apr. 2015	June 2015	Aug. 2015	Oct. 2015	Dec. 2015	Feb. 2016	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the latest 6 surveys in comparison with...		
													2014	2011	2007
Strengthening Russia's international standing															
Successful	58.4	46.2	45.7	50.4	51.7	52.7	51.1	52.2	50.7	53.2	50.9	51.8	+1	+6	-7
Unsuccessful	24.9	33.7	36.2	32.4	31.3	28.7	32.5	32.4	33.1	31.5	29.1	31.2	-1	-2	+6
Index of success	133.5	112.5	109.5	118.0	120.4	124.0	118.6	119.8	117.6	121.7	121.8	120.6	+3	+8	-13
Imposing order in the country															
Successful	53.2	36.6	39.4	48.0	50.2	50.1	49.9	51.7	48.6	50.5	47.7	49.8	+2	+13	-3
Unsuccessful	34.0	50.0	47.5	39.1	37.9	37.5	38.0	37.9	38.7	38.0	37.2	37.9	-1	-12	+4
Index of success	119.2	86.6	91.9	108.9	112.3	112.6	111.9	113.8	109.9	112.5	110.5	111.9	+3	+25	-7
Protecting democracy and strengthening the citizens' freedoms															
Successful	44.4	32.4	31.8	37.5	40.4	39.2	42.2	42.6	38.1	41.0	36.9	40.0	+3	+8	-4
Unsuccessful	37.0	48.3	51.0	45.4	41.5	39.9	38.3	41.7	44.3	43.7	44.3	42.0	-3	-6	+5
Index of success	107.4	84.1	80.8	92.1	99.0	99.3	103.9	100.9	93.8	97.3	92.6	98.0	+6	+14	-9
Economic recovery and increase in the citizens' welfare															
Successful	47.2	30.7	31.3	34.8	34.2	34.7	36.2	36.6	32.1	30.9	28.0	33.1	-2	+2	-14
Unsuccessful	39.1	56.1	56.8	53.4	52.3	49.9	49.9	52.6	54.3	55.7	57.0	53.2	0	-3	+14
Index of success	108.1	74.6	74.5	81.4	81.8	84.8	86.3	84.0	77.8	75.2	71.0	79.9	-2	+5	-28

* Ranked according to the average value of the index of success for 2014.

Compared with December 2015, in January 2016, the proportion of people who believe that their interests are expressed by the political party “United Russia” decreased (by 4 p.p., from 39 to 35%). Their share is lower than the average for 2015 (39%), but higher than in 2007–2014 (30–33%).

There was a slight increase (by 2 p. p., from 7 to 9%) in the share of those who support the Communist party (KPRF): in February 2016, it reached its peak over the period from April 2015 to February 2016 (9%).

As for the rest, the structure of the Russians’ preferences concerning political parties did not see any significant changes: LDPR is supported by 7%, the “Just Russia” – by 3–4%. This distribution of assessments remained during the entire year of 2015.

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	2015	Apr. 2015	June 2015	Aug. 2015	Oct. 2015	Dec. 2015	Feb. 2016	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the latest 6 surveys in comparison with...		
		2011	2011	2011	2011											2014	2011	2007
United Russia	30.2	60.5	31.1	33.4	29.4	32.8	38.8	38.2	40.3	38.5	38.0	39.0	35.1	38.2	+5	+7	+8	
KPRF	7.0	9.3	10.3	16.8	11.3	9.7	7.1	7.8	6.8	7.1	6.9	6.5	9.4	7.4	-2	-3	0	
LDPR	7.5	11.0	7.8	15.4	7.2	7.6	6.2	6.1	5.4	5.9	6.1	7.1	6.9	6.3	-1	-2	-1	
Just Russia	7.8	8.8	5.6	27.2	4.6	3.5	3.6	3.7	3.3	3.5	3.3	3.7	2.7	3.4	0	-2	-4	
Other	1.8	–	1.9	–	0.6	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.4	0.5	0.2	0	-2	-2	
No party	17.8	–	29.4	–	34.9	34.4	31.8	31.5	32.5	33.8	32.3	30.5	31.7	32.1	-2	+3	+14	
It is difficult to answer	21.2	–	13.2	–	10.2	11.7	12.2	12.5	11.6	11.1	13.3	12.9	13.7	12.5	+1	-1	-9	

In December 2015 – February 2016, the assessments of social condition of the Vologda Oblast residents worsened noticeably (in April 2015 – February 2016 we observe the minimal values of positive and maximum values of negative assessments):

– the proportion of people who describe their mood as “normal, good” decreased by 7 p.p. (from 70 to 63%);

– the proportion of those who say that “everything is not so bad; it’s difficult to live, but it’s possible to stand it” dropped by 5 p.p. (from 78 to 73%).

The deterioration of psychological well-being of the population is apparently due to the absence of positive changes in the dynamics of their financial situation. For instance, for the last two months there were no significant changes in the share of the Vologda Oblast residents who consider themselves “poor and extremely poor” (50–51%, this indicator remained stable over the past year); The consumer sentiment index continues to decline (78 points in December 2015, 75 points in February 2016, which is the lowest level since June 2015). The negative trend of the CSI indicates, first of all, the deterioration of expectations in the dynamics of personal financial situation and economic situation in general.

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

Answer option	2007	2011	2013	2014	2015	Apr. 2015	June 2015	Aug. 2015	Oct. 2015	Dec. 2015	Feb. 2016	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the latest 6 surveys in comparison with...		
													2014	2011	2007
Mood															
Usual condition, good mood	63.6	63.1	68.6	69.4	68.7	67.6	69.5	73.1	70.4	69.6	63.4	68.9	0	+6	+5
I feel stress, anger, fear, depression	27.8	28.9	26.2	24.9	25.9	26.6	24.4	23.5	25.4	24.3	28.9	25.5	+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	78.9	79.0	82.2	78.2	78.0	73.1	78.2	-3	+3	+4
It's impossible to bear such plight	13.6	15.3	14.2	12.6	14.5	14.9	14.7	13.3	13.9	12.7	16.1	14.3	+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	36.7	39.4	39.9	39.2	38.9	39.9	39.0	-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	51.6	48.0	50.5	50.2	50.5	51.4	50.4	+1	+6	+8
Consumer sentiment index															
Index value, points	105.9	89.6	90.3	87.6	77.1	73.4	80.1	77.9	77.7	77.7	75.0	77.0	-11	-13	-29

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

In annual dynamics, the share of people who characterize their mood as “good, normal” has been stable since 2013 (69–70%) and higher than in 2007 and 2011 (65–67%).

On average over the past six surveys, in comparison to 2014, a slight decrease in the proportion of positive assessments of social mood can be observed only among city dwellers (in Vologda – by 3 p.p., from 76 to 73%; in Cherepovets – by 5 p.p., from 76 to 71%) and also among the people who, according to self-assessments of their income, fall into the group of 20% of the wealthiest inhabitants of the Vologda Oblast (by 3 p.p., from 85 to 82%).

Compared to 2007 and 2011, on average for the last six surveys, the changes are positive: in most socio-demographic categories of the population, the share of people experiencing positive emotions increased by 5–8 p.p.

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

Population group	2007	2011	2013	2014	2015	Apr. 2015	June 2015	Aug. 2015	Oct. 2015	Dec. 2015	Feb. 2016	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the latest 6 surveys in comparison with...		
													2014	2011	2007
Sex															
Men	65.9	64.5	69.9	68.9	69.5	67.4	72.7	75.2	69.8	69.9	63.9	69.8	+1	+5	+4
Women	61.7	62.0	67.5	69.8	68.0	67.8	66.8	71.3	70.9	69.2	63.1	68.2	-2	+6	+6
Age															
Under 30	71.3	70.0	75.5	75.1	77.1	73.5	79.4	78.9	82.8	76.9	69.9	76.9	+2	+7	+6
30-55	64.8	62.5	69.2	69.5	67.2	67.9	67.6	72.1	68.0	69.0	62.1	67.8	-2	+5	+3
Over 55	54.8	58.3	62.4	65.4	65.5	63.7	65.9	70.8	66.0	65.9	61.5	65.6	0	+7	+11
Education															
Secondary and incomplete secondary	58.4	57.4	60.6	62.5	63.6	62.1	64.0	70.2	65.7	64.6	57.8	64.1	+2	+7	+6
Secondary vocational	64.6	63.6	68.1	70.4	70.1	68.2	73.6	75.3	70.3	67.7	60.7	69.3	-1	+6	+5
Higher and incomplete higher	68.6	68.3	77.4	76.2	72.7	73.1	70.6	74.1	75.8	76.9	72.9	73.9	-2	+6	+5
Income groups															
20% of the poorest people	51.6	45.3	46.2	50.8	51.8	55.6	57.1	55.7	54.2	49.8	42.6	52.5	+2	+7	+1
60% of the people with median income	62.9	65.3	71.9	72.3	71.0	69.2	71.3	77.7	70.1	72.2	66.3	71.1	-1	+6	+8
20% of the most prosperous people	74.9	75.3	83.3	84.8	82.0	78.1	82.5	85.1	87.1	78.8	77.9	81.6	-3	+6	+7
Territories															
Vologda	63.1	67.1	75.0	76.4	73.9	72.5	75.6	77.9	77.6	73.6	65.1	73.7	-3	+7	+11
Cherepovets	68.1	71.2	75.3	76.3	70.6	69.8	71.2	74.9	71.4	73.2	66.4	71.2	-5	0	+3
Districts	61.6	57.1	61.6	61.8	64.6	63.7	65.1	69.4	65.9	65.0	60.9	65.0	+3	+8	+3
Oblast	63.6	63.1	68.6	69.4	68.7	67.6	69.5	73.1	70.4	69.5	63.5	68.9	0	+6	+5

Negative trends in social mood are observed in the short-term dynamics of public opinion. In the first half of 2015 (February – June) there was a steady increase in the share of the Vologda Oblast residents who characterized their emotional state positively. However, in August – October 2015, negative trends were observed in most groups and they remain in early 2016.

Short-term dynamics of assessments of social mood in different socio-demographic groups
(answer “Good mood, normal condition”, as a percentage of the number of respondents)

Категория населения	Feb. 2015	Apr. 2015	June 2015	Aug. 2015	Oct. 2015	Dec. 2015	Feb. 2016	Dynamics (+/-), Feb. 2016 in comparison with...	
								Feb. 2015	Dec. 2015
Sex									
Men	61.7	67.4	72.7	75.2	69.8	69.9	63.9	+2	-6
Women	61.9	67.8	66.8	71.3	70.9	69.2	63.1	+1	-6
Age									
Under 30	71.3	73.5	79.4	78.9	82.8	76.9	69.9	-1	-7
30-55	58.3	67.9	67.6	72.1	68.0	69.0	62.1	+4	-7
Over 55	60.7	63.7	65.9	70.8	66.0	65.9	61.5	+1	-4
Education									
Secondary and incomplete secondary	54.8	62.1	64.0	70.2	65.7	64.6	57.8	+3	-7
Secondary vocational	65.2	68.2	73.6	75.3	70.3	67.7	60.7	-5	-7
Higher and incomplete higher	65.8	73.1	70.6	74.1	75.8	76.9	72.9	+7	-4
Income groups									
20% of the poorest people	38.3	55.6	57.1	55.7	54.2	49.8	42.6	+4	-7
60% of the people with median income	65.2	69.2	71.3	77.7	70.1	72.2	66.3	+1	-6
20% of the most prosperous people	80.3	78.1	82.5	85.1	87.1	78.8	77.9	-2	-1
Territories									
Vologda	66.4	72.5	75.6	77.9	77.6	73.6	65.1	-1	-9
Cherepovets	63.1	69.8	71.2	74.9	71.4	73.2	66.4	+3	-7
Districts	58.6	63.7	65.1	69.4	65.9	65.0	60.9	+2	-4
Oblast	61.8	67.6	69.5	73.1	70.4	69.5	63.5	+2	-6

The share of those who characterize their emotional state positively decreased especially noticeably in the following categories of population:

- people aged under 30 (by 13 p.p. from 83 to 70% in October 2015 – February 2016);
- the Vologda Oblast residents with secondary and incomplete secondary education (by 11 percentage points from 70 to 59% in August 2015 – February 2016) and secondary vocational education (over the same period by 14 p.p. from 75 to 61%);
- people who according to their own assessment of their income belong to the groups of the poorest 20% (by 15 p.p. from 58 to 43% in August 2015 – February 2016) and 60% of the residents with average income (over the same period – by 12 p.p. from 78 to 66%);
- residents of Vologda (by 13 p.p. from 78 to 65% in October 2015 – February 2016).

In the past two months (December 2015 – February 2016) the assessments of social mood deteriorated in all socio-demographic categories of the population (by 4–7 p.p.). There are no negative changes only among people who belong to the category of 20% of the wealthiest inhabitants of the Vologda Oblast according to their assessments of their own income.

Conclusion

In the period from December 2015 to February 2016 the dynamics of public opinion on the majority of key issues related to self-assessment of financial status and social well-being has worsened:

- assessment of the President’s success in dealing with the tasks of economic recovery and growth of the citizens’ welfare decreased by 3 p.p. (from 31 to 28%);
- the consumer sentiment index decreased by 3 points (from 78 to 75 p.);
- the percentage of positive ratings of social mood decreased by 7 p. p. (from 70 to 63%), the stock of patience – by 5 p.p. (from 78 to 73%);
- the share of the Vologda Oblast residents considering themselves “poor and extremely poor” remains at a consistently high level (50%) (for comparison: the proportion of people of “average income” is significantly lower – 39%).

The lack of positive changes in the dynamics of financial situation is one of the main concerns of the population. This concerns not only the Vologda Oblast inhabitants, but also the Russians in general. According to VCIOM, “in January 2016 the Russians were most worried about inflation. But they became less concerned with foreign policy issues”. Low wages, rising prices and the situation in the economy – these are the three most acute problems noted by the Russians in early 2016.

The lingering character of economic problems that is felt by the population, has a negative impact on the dynamics of assessments of performance of the authorities. The level of support of the head of state in the Vologda Oblast remains stable so far (68–70%), but in the country as a whole, there is a decrease in the assessments of the President’s work (from 86 to 84% according to VCIOM and from 85 to 82% according to Levada-Center).

Thus, the ongoing negative processes in the Russian economy are becoming an increasingly important factor in determining the trend in the social well-being of the Russians and their attitude towards the work of the government. At the beginning of 2016, the fears for one’s well-being became more important for people than international issues. A similar situation was observed at the beginning of last year, when rising prices and falling standards of living became more important for people than the development of events in Ukraine (including the accession of Crimea and Sevastopol to the Russian Federation).

December 31, 2015, Vladimir Putin signed a new National Security Strategy, which says that “the state policy of the Russian Federation in the sphere of national security is carried out through the concerted action of all elements of its system under the leadership of the President of the Russian Federation and coordinating role of the Security Council of the Russian Federation”².

Thus, the President takes personal responsibility for the implementation of key national security priorities and also those in the sphere of economy, standard of living and quality of life. This step of the head of state suggests, on the one hand, the dissatisfaction with the results of the work of the economic bloc of the Government; on the other hand, it allows us to hope it will be possible to overcome negative processes in the economy and to bring the domestic management system in line with Russia’s national interests.

² Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii ot 31 dekabrya 2015 goda №683 “O Strategii natsional’noi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii” [The Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of December 31, 2015 No. 683 “About the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation”]. *Rossiiskaya gazeta* [Russian Newspaper], 2015, December 31. Available at: <http://www.rg.ru/2015/12/31/nac-bezopasnost-site-dok.html>