

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 ISED T 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 2016, and also on average for the last six polls (August 2015 – June 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 work was the highest) and for 2011 (the last year of Dmitry Medvedev's presidency). The yearly dynamics of the data is presented beginning from 2013.

Estimation of performance of the authorities

In April – June 2016, the assessment of work of the President of the Russian Federation did not change significantly (67%). Approval of the President's work remains stable since the beginning of the year, and it is higher than in 2011 – 2014 (59–64%). However, in August 2015 – June 2016 (latest six surveys), we note insignificant negative changes: the percentage of positive ratings of the President's work decreased by five percentage points (from 72 to 67%).

Similar dynamics of public opinion is noted in the assessment of the work of the Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation: from February to June 2016, it remains stable (53–55%), however, for the period from August 2015 to June 2016, we note a decrease in the proportion of positive judgments (by eight percentage points, from 61 to 53%).

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 ISED T RAS polls are available at <http://www.vssc.ac.ru/>

In the first half of 2016, there has been a consistent increase in the proportion of negative assessments of work of the President (in February – 16%, in April – 18%, in June – 20% total – by four percentage points) and the Government (in February – 23% in April – 26% in June – 29%, total – by six percentage points).

For reference: the nationwide level of approval of the RF President’s performance is 81–82% according to VTsIOM (for April – first part of June 2016) and Levada-Center (for April – May). The share of negative assessments of the President’s work according to VTsIOM is 12–13%, and in it 17–19% according to Levada-Center. In general, the results of nationwide polls have not changed substantially since the beginning of the year.

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

Answer option	2007	2011	2013	2014	2015	Aug. 2015	Oct. 2015	Dec. 2015	Feb. 2016	Apr. 2016	June 2016	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-) the latest 6 surveys in comparison with...		
	2015	2011	2007												
RF President															
I approve	75.3	58.7	55.3	64.1	69.1	72.0	69.3	69.7	68.1	66.9	67.4	68.9	0	+10	-6
I don't approve	11.5	25.6	29.4	22.3	17.5	17.8	18.1	16.5	16.1	17.9	20.1	17.8	0	-8	+6
Chairman of the RF Government*															
I approve	-	59.3	48.9	54.2	58.1	60.7	58.1	57.9	54.9	53.5	52.8	56.3	-2	-3	-
I don't approve	-	24.7	32.8	27.6	21.7	22.5	21.0	21.7	22.6	25.7	28.6	23.7	+2	-1	-
Governor															
I approve	55.8	45.7	44.4	40.1	39.3	41.5	38.7	39.7	35.1	34.9	38.2	38.0	-1	-8	-18
I don't approve	22.2	30.5	33.2	38.9	36.2	35.4	36.0	35.3	38.2	39.6	40.3	37.5	+1	+7	+15

* Included into the survey since 2008.

In April – June 2016, the assessment of success of the President’s actions in addressing the key problems of the country 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 is 51–52%;
- the share of the Vologda Oblast residents who think that the President successfully copes with the task of restoring order in the country is 48–50%;
- the share of those who believe that the President is successful in protecting democracy and strengthening citizens’ freedoms is 36–38%;
- 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 is 28%.

For the first half of 2016 (February – June), people’s estimates remain stable. However, in comparison with the average for 2014 – 2015, there has been a noticeable deterioration of public opinion that concerns the work of the head of state in addressing the issues of economic recovery and growth of citizens’ welfare: in 2014 and 2015, the proportion of positive judgments was 34–35% in February – June 2016 – 28%.

For the latest six surveys (from August 2015 to June 2016), the share of negative assessments of effectiveness of the President's work in coping with economic problems in the country increased by six percentage points (from 53 to 59%); from the beginning of 2016 – by two percentage points (from 57 to 59%).

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	Aug. 2015	Oct. 2015	Dec. 2015	Feb. 2016	Apr. 2016	June 2016	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-) the latest 6 surveys in comparison with...		
													2015	2011	2007
Strengthening Russia's international standing															
Successful	58.4	46.2	45.7	50.4	51.7	52.2	50.7	53.2	50.9	50.7	52.2	51.7	0	+5	-7
Unsuccessful	24.9	33.7	36.2	32.4	31.3	32.4	33.1	31.5	29.1	30.9	29.0	31.0	0	-3	+6
<i>Index of success</i>	133.5	112.5	109.5	118.0	120.4	119.8	117.6	121.7	121.8	119.8	123.2	120.7	0	+8	-13
Imposing order in the country															
Successful	53.2	36.6	39.4	48.0	50.2	51.7	48.6	50.5	47.7	48.1	49.7	49.4	-1	+13	-4
Unsuccessful	34.0	50.0	47.5	39.1	37.9	37.9	38.7	38.0	37.2	38.2	37.5	37.9	0	-12	+4
<i>Index of success</i>	119.2	86.6	91.9	108.9	112.3	113.8	109.9	112.5	110.5	109.9	112.2	111.5	-1	+25	-8
Protecting democracy and strengthening the citizens' freedoms															
Successful	44.4	32.4	31.8	37.5	40.4	42.6	38.1	41.0	36.9	35.6	38.3	38.8	-2	+6	-6
Unsuccessful	37.0	48.3	51.0	45.4	41.5	41.7	44.3	43.7	44.3	45.3	42.2	43.6	+2	-5	+7
<i>Index of success</i>	107.4	84.1	80.8	92.1	99.0	100.9	93.8	97.3	92.6	90.3	96.1	95.2	-4	+11	-12
Economic recovery and increase in the citizens' welfare															
Successful	47.2	30.7	31.3	34.8	34.2	36.6	32.1	30.9	28.0	27.6	27.5	30.5	-4	0	-17
Unsuccessful	39.1	56.1	56.8	53.4	52.3	52.6	54.3	55.7	57.0	57.9	59.1	56.1	+4	0	+17
<i>Index of success</i>	108.1	74.6	74.5	81.4	81.8	84.0	77.8	75.2	71.0	69.7	68.4	74.4	-7	0	-34

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

Over the past two months, the structure of the Russians' preferences concerning political parties did not see any significant changes and it has remained stable since the beginning of 2016. The "United Russia" is supported by 35–36%, LDPR – by 7–10%, KPRF – by 7–9%, the "Just Russia" – by 3–4%. In comparison to 2015, we note a decrease of support for the "United Russia" (by three percentage points, from 39 to 36%) and the growth in the number of supporters of LDPR (by four percentage points, from 6 to 10%).

In April – June 2016, the proportion of those who believe that today no party expresses their interests decreased (by 5 p.p., from 35 to 30%), which is, probably, connected with the growth of excitement concerning the "United Russia" primary election.

If we compare this period to previous election periods, we should note that in June 2016, the proportion of people whose interests are not expressed by any major political party is about the same level as in 2011 (29%), but remains significantly higher than in 2007 (almost twofold, 30% in 2016 vs. 18% in 2007).

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	Aug. 2015	Oct. 2015	Dec. 2015	Feb. 2016	Apr. 2016	June 2016	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-) the latest 6 surveys in comparison with...		
		2011	2011	2011	2011											2015	2011	2007
United Russia	30.2	60.5	31.1	33.4	29.4	32.8	38.8	38.5	38.0	39.0	35.1	34.1	36.0	36.8	-2	+6	+7	
LDPR	7.5	11.0	7.8	15.4	7.2	7.6	6.2	5.9	6.1	7.1	6.9	8.2	10.3	7.4	+1	0	0	
KPRF	7.0	9.3	10.3	16.8	11.3	9.7	7.1	7.1	6.9	6.5	9.4	7.2	8.0	7.5	0	-3	+1	
Just Russia	7.8	8.8	5.6	27.2	4.6	3.5	3.6	3.5	3.3	3.7	2.7	2.7	4.0	3.3	0	-2	-4	
Other	1.8	-	1.9	-	0.6	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.4	0.5	0.2	0.3	0.3	0	-2	-2	
No party	17.8	-	29.4	-	34.9	34.4	31.8	33.8	32.3	30.5	31.7	34.9	29.7	32.2	0	+3	+14	
It is difficult to answer	21.2	-	13.2	-	10.2	11.7	12.2	11.1	13.3	12.9	13.7	12.7	11.7	12.6	0	-1	-9	

Assessments of social feeling in April – June 2016 did not change significantly:

- the proportion of people who describe their mood as “normal, good” remains at the level of 67–68%);
- the proportion of those who say that “everything is not so bad; it’s difficult to live, but it’s possible to stand it” is 76–78%.

Compared to the beginning of the year, there was a slight increase in the proportion of the Vologda Oblast residents who consider themselves “rich” or “with average income” (by 3 p.p., from 40% in February to 43% in June 2016, which corresponds to the average figures for 2013–2014). The proportion of people who consider themselves “poor and extremely poor” decreased by four percentage points (from 51% in February to 47% in June 2016).

The consumer sentiment index for the period from April to June 2016 increased by three points (from 74 to 77 p., which corresponds to the average value for 2015).

However, despite some positive developments in April – June 2016, we cannot assert that there is a positive picture of self-assessments of social feeling, financial situation and forecasts:

- for the latest six surveys (from August 2015 to June 2016), the share of negative assessments of social mood and stock of patience increased by three percentage points (from 24 to 27% and from 13 to 16% respectively);

- the proportion of “the poor and extremely poor” is still greater than the proportion of those who consider themselves “wealthy and with average income” (as of June 2016 – 47% vs. 43%);
- the consumer sentiment index (77 p.) remains significantly below 100 points, which means that negative estimates prevail in people’s assessments of their financial situation and prospects of its development.

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

Answer option	2007	2011	2013	2014	2015	Aug. 2015	Oct. 2015	Dec. 2015	Feb. 2016	Apr. 2016	June 2016	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-) the latest 6 surveys in comparison with...		
													2015	2011	2007
Mood															
Usual condition, good mood	63.6	63.1	68.6	69.4	68.7	73.1	70.4	69.6	63.4	67.0	68.0	68.6	0	+5	+5
I feel stress, anger, fear, depression	27.8	28.9	26.2	24.9	25.9	23.5	25.4	24.3	28.9	25.4	26.7	25.7	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	78.4	82.2	78.2	78.0	73.1	77.5	78.2	77.9	-1	+3	+4
It's impossible to bear such plight	13.6	15.3	14.2	12.6	14.5	13.3	13.9	12.7	16.1	16.4	15.7	14.7	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	38.7	39.9	39.2	38.9	39.9	40.9	42.8	40.3	+2	-3	-8
The share of people who consider themselves to be poor and extremely poor	42.4	44.3	46.9	49.1	50.7	50.5	50.2	50.5	51.4	49.4	47.1	49.9	-1	+6	+7
Consumer sentiment index															
Index value, points	105.9	89.6	90.3	87.6	77.1	77.9	77.7	77.7	75.0	74.4	77.3	76.7	0	-13	-29

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

In the past two months, the percentage of those who describe their social mood as being positive did not change in 9 out of 14 socio-demographic categories of the population.

In some groups there is a growth of positive moods from April to June:

- among men (by four percentage points, from 66 to 70%);
- among people under the age of 30 (by six percentage points, from 75 to 81%);
- among people who, according to their own assessments of their incomes, fall into the category of 20% of the most well-off inhabitants of the Vologda Oblast (by four percentage points, from 81 to 85%).

Moreover, in April – June 2016 there is a decrease in the share of positive assessments of social sentiment among people over 55 (by 4 p.p., from 64 to 60%).

In general, compared with the beginning of the year, improvement of emotional state is observed in all socio-demographic groups (except for those older than 55).

From August 2015 to June 2016, in all socio-demographic categories of the population (except for 20% of the wealthiest residents of the Vologda Oblast and people under the age of 30 years) there is a slight (by 1–6 p.p.) decrease in the proportion of positive assessments of social mood.

On average for the latest six surveys in all the groups of the population, the proportion of those who characterize their mood as “normal, fine”, corresponds to the average value over the past three years (2013–2015).

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	Aug. 2015	Oct. 2015	Dec. 2015	Feb. 2016	Apr. 2016	June 2016	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-) the latest 6 surveys in comparison with...		
	2015	2011	2007												
Sex															
Men	65.9	64.5	69.9	68.9	69.5	75.2	69.8	69.9	63.9	66.5	70.0	69.2	0	+5	+3
Women	61.7	62.0	67.5	69.8	68.0	71.3	70.9	69.2	63.1	67.5	66.5	68.1	0	+6	+6
Age															
Under 30	71.3	70.0	75.5	75.1	77.1	78.9	82.8	76.9	69.9	75.4	81.2	77.5	0	+8	+6
30–55	64.8	62.5	69.2	69.5	67.2	72.1	68.0	69.0	62.1	66.0	68.3	67.6	0	+5	+3
Over 55	54.8	58.3	62.4	65.4	65.5	70.8	66.0	65.9	61.5	63.7	59.8	64.6	-1	+6	+10
Education															
Secondary and incomplete secondary	58.4	57.4	60.6	62.5	63.6	70.2	65.7	64.6	57.8	62.4	62.9	63.9	0	+7	+6
Secondary vocational	64.6	63.6	68.1	70.4	70.1	75.3	70.3	67.7	60.7	67.3	69.3	68.4	-2	+5	+4
Higher and incomplete higher	68.6	68.3	77.4	76.2	72.7	74.1	75.8	76.9	72.9	71.5	73.3	74.1	+1	+6	+5
Income groups															
20% of the poorest people	51.6	45.3	46.2	50.8	51.8	55.7	54.2	49.8	42.6	51.3	52.0	50.9	-1	+6	-1
60% of the people with median income	62.9	65.3	71.9	72.3	71.0	77.7	70.1	72.2	66.3	67.6	69.3	70.5	0	+5	+8
20% of the most prosperous people	74.9	75.3	83.3	84.8	82.0	85.1	87.1	78.8	77.9	81.0	85.2	82.5	+1	+7	+8
Territories															
Vologda	63.1	67.1	75.0	76.4	73.9	77.9	77.6	73.6	65.1	69.1	71.5	72.5	-1	+5	+9
Cherepovets	68.1	71.2	75.3	76.3	70.6	74.9	71.4	73.2	66.4	70.5	72.5	71.5	+1	0	+3
Districts	61.6	57.1	61.6	61.8	64.6	69.4	65.9	65.0	60.9	63.9	63.7	64.8	0	+8	+3
Oblast	63.6	63.1	68.6	69.4	68.7	73.1	70.4	69.5	63.5	67.1	68.1	68.6	0	+6	+5

Conclusion

By mid-2016, after a significant deterioration in December 2015 – February 2016, social feeling has somewhat stabilized. Improvement is observed in assessment of social mood and stock of patience; people's perception of their financial situation and prospects of its development has become more positive.

However, we cannot say that there are significant positive changes in people's perception of their well-being and economic situation in the country. People more often consider themselves "poor and extremely poor" than "well-off and with median income" (47 and 43% respectively); the consumer sentiment index remains below 100 points (77 p.), which means the predominance of pessimistic forecasts of the welfare and prospects of the Russian economy. Thus, financial issues remain critical and they are a key factor in shaping people's attitude toward the work of the authorities.

Slight positive changes that took place in April – June 2016 did not improve public opinion about the efficiency of public administration. The level of support for the President and the Government remains stable (67 and 53%, respectively), as well as the evaluation of the success of the President coping with the key issues of the country. At the same time, economic policy pursued by the President is still evaluated negatively (the share of negative assessments of the President's work on coping with the issues of economic recovery and growth of welfare exceeds twofold the proportion of positive assessments – 59 and 28%, respectively). People get used to the crisis and, according to some experts, it can become "the most serious consequence of the crisis"².

The excitement around the primary election conducted by the "United Russia" on May 22, 2016 somewhat reduced people's political apathy (the number of those who believed that the key political parties in the country do not express their point of view decreased from 35 to 30%), but this had virtually no effect on the support of the ruling party (it remained at the level of 34–36%). It is therefore obvious that the closer the September elections to the State Duma, the more important the role of economic issue as a factor influencing the electoral preferences of the population. And if the general population do not feel that inflation is reduced and the growth of Russia's economy is resumed, which is expected by the government "in the near future"³, this may significantly complicate the situation at the polling stations.

² Zabelina N. Naselenie privykaet k bednosti [People get used to poverty]. *Nezavisimaya gazeta* [Independent newspaper], 2016, January 13. Available at: http://www.ng.ru/economics/2016-01-13/4_prices_2.html

³ Stenogramma vystupleniya V. Putina na plenarnom zasedanii Peterburgskogo mezhdunarodnogo ekonomicheskogo foruma 17 iyunya 2016 g. [Transcript of Vladimir Putin's speech at the plenary session of the Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum on June 17, 2016]. *Ofitsial'nyi sait Prezidenta RF* [Official website of RF President]. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/52178>