

Public Opinion Monitoring of the State of the Russian Society

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

The following tables show the dynamics of several parameters indicating the social feeling and socio-political sentiment of the Vologda Oblast population in October – December 2016, and also on average for the last six polls (February – October 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 Dmitri Medvedev's presidency). The yearly dynamics of the data is presented beginning from 2013.

Estimation of performance of the authorities

In October – December 2016, the assessment of work of the President of the Russian Federation did not change significantly (67–68%). Approval of the President's work remains stable throughout 2016 and corresponds to the level of 2015 (69%).

The assessment of the work of the Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation over the past two months has not changed either: the share of positive judgements is 50%. It is lower than in the beginning of 2016 (in February, the level of support of the Chairman of the Government was 55%). In general, for the year 2016, the proportion of positive judgments about the work of the Prime Minister was 52%, which is lower than in 2014–2015 (54–58%).

For reference: the nationwide level of approval of the RF President's performance remains stable. In October – November it was 82–83% according to VTsIOM (the share of negative assessments was 13%) and 84–86% – according to Levada-Center (the share of negative judgements was 14–16%).

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 1,500 people 18 years of age 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.vscac.ru/>.

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

Answer option	2007	2011	2013	2014	2015	2016	Feb. 2016	Apr. 2016	June 2016	Aug. 2016	Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Dynamics (+/-) 2016 in comparison with...		
													2015	2011	2007
RF President															
I approve	75.3	58.7	55.3	64.1	69.1	67.8	68.1	66.9	67.4	68.7	68.4	67.3	-1	+9	-8
I don't approve	11.5	25.6	29.4	22.3	17.5	18.8	16.1	17.9	20.1	19.6	19.7	19.3	+1	-7	+7
Chairman of the RF Government*															
I approve	–*	59.3	48.9	54.2	58.1	52.3	54.9	53.5	52.8	52.7	49.4	50.4	-6	-7	-
I don't approve	–	24.7	32.8	27.6	21.7	27.6	22.6	25.7	28.6	27.7	30.6	30.1	+6	+3	-
Governor															
I approve	55.8	45.7	44.4	40.1	39.3	37.7	35.1	34.9	38.2	38.4	39.1	40.2	-2	-8	-18
I don't approve	22.2	30.5	33.2	38.9	36.2	39.3	38.2	39.6	40.3	40.0	39.3	38.5	+3	+9	+17
* Included into the survey since 2008.															

In October – December 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 50%;
- the share of those who believe that the President is successful in protecting democracy and strengthening citizens' freedoms is 36%;
- 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 26-27%.

People's assessments have remained stable throughout the entire year of 2016.

It should be noted that in general in 2016 compared to 2015 there was a significant decline in the proportion of people who consider successful the President's work on protecting democracy and strengthening citizens' freedoms (the index decreased by 7 points: from 99 to 92 p.), as well as his work to promote economic recovery and people's prosperity (decline by 14 points: from 82 to 68 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	2016	Feb. 2016	Apr. 2016	June 2016	Aug. 2016	Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Dynamics (+/-) 2016 in comparison with...		
													2015	2011	2007
Strengthening Russia's international standing															
Successful	58.4	46.2	45.7	50.4	51.7	51.2	50.9	50.7	52.2	50.1	51.4	51.9	-1	+5	-7
Unsuccessful	24.9	33.7	36.2	32.4	31.3	29.9	29.1	30.9	29.0	30.3	28.8	31.1	-1	-4	+5
<i>Index of success</i>	133.5	112.5	109.5	118.0	120.4	121.3	121.8	119.8	123.2	119.8	122.6	120.8	+1	+9	-12
Imposing order in the country															
Successful	53.2	36.6	39.4	48.0	50.2	49.2	47.7	48.1	49.7	50.0	49.7	50.2	-1	+13	-4
Unsuccessful	34.0	50.0	47.5	39.1	37.9	36.7	37.2	38.2	37.5	35.1	35.6	36.7	-1	-13	+3
<i>Index of success</i>	119.2	86.6	91.9	108.9	112.3	112.6	110.5	109.9	112.2	115.4	114.1	113.5	0	+26	-7
Protecting democracy and strengthening the citizens' freedoms															
Successful	44.4	32.4	31.8	37.5	40.4	36.6	36.9	35.6	38.3	36.7	35.7	36.2	-4	+4	-8
Unsuccessful	37.0	48.3	51.0	45.4	41.5	44.3	44.3	45.3	42.2	45.0	44.7	44.3	+3	-4	+7
<i>Index of success</i>	107.4	84.1	80.8	92.1	99.0	92.3	92.6	90.3	96.1	91.7	91.0	91.9	-7	+8	-15
Economic recovery and increase in the citizens' welfare															
Successful	47.2	30.7	31.3	34.8	34.2	27.2	28.0	27.6	27.5	26.7	26.4	27.2	-7	-3	-20
Unsuccessful	39.1	56.1	56.8	53.4	52.3	59.4	57.0	57.9	59.1	60.4	60.9	61.1	+7	+3	+20
<i>Index of success</i>	108.1	74.6	74.5	81.4	81.8	67.8	71.0	69.7	68.4	66.3	65.5	66.1	-14	-7	-40

* Ranked according to the average value of the index of success for 2016.

Over the past two months, the structure of Russians' preferences concerning political parties did not change. The United Russia Party is supported by 35–36%, LDPR – by 13–14%, KPRF – by 9%, the Just Russia Party – by 5–6%.

In comparison to the beginning of the year, we can see the growth of support for LDPR (by 7 p.p., from 7 to 14%).

On the whole in 2016 compared to 2015 there was a slight decline in people's support to the United Russia Party (by 4 p.p., from 39 to 35%), although this party still occupies the leading position in the structure of political preferences of the Vologda Oblast residents.

It should be noted that in December 2016, for the first time since April, there was an increase in the proportion of people who believe that no major political party expresses their interests (by 6 p.p., from 24 to 30%). Apparently, this is due to the gradual "decay" of the excitement caused by the election campaigns of political parties (in May 2016 the United Russia Party conducted intra-party voting (primary election); and in September 2016, the election to the State Duma of the Russian Federation took place).

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	Election to the RF State Duma 2016, fact		2016	Feb. 2016	Apr. 2016	June 2016	Aug. 2016	Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Dynamics (+/-) 2016 in comparison with...		
		2011	2011	2011	2011				2016	2016								2015	2011	2007
United Russia	30.2	60.5	31.1	33.4	29.4	32.8	38.8	38.0	35.4	35.1	34.1	36.0	36.5	36.3	34.5	-3	+4	+5		
LDPR	7.5	11.0	7.8	15.4	7.2	7.6	6.2	21.9	10.4	6.9	8.2	10.3	10.5	12.8	13.9	+4	+3	+3		
KPRF	7.0	9.3	10.3	16.8	11.3	9.7	7.1	14.2	8.3	9.4	7.2	8.0	7.5	9.0	8.7	+1	-2	+1		
Just Russia	7.8	8.8	5.6	27.2	4.6	3.5	3.6	10.8	4.2	2.7	2.7	4.0	4.7	6.1	4.9	+1	-1	-4		
Other	1.8	-	1.9	-	0.6	0.3	0.2	-	0.3	0.5	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.3	0	-2	-1		
No party	17.8	-	29.4	-	34.9	34.4	31.8	-	29.4	31.7	34.9	29.7	26.1	23.7	30.1	-2	0	+12		
It is difficult to answer	21.2	-	13.2	-	10.2	11.7	12.2	-	12.0	13.7	12.7	11.7	14.3	11.8	7.7	0	-1	-9		

Assessments of social feeling in October – December 2016 did not change significantly:
 – the proportion of people who describe their mood as “normal, good” remains at the level of 70%;

– 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 80–81%.

The proportion of the Vologda Oblast residents who consider themselves “rich” or “with average income” is 42–44%, which is slightly higher than at the beginning of the year (40%). The proportion of people who consider themselves “poor and extremely poor” remains higher and remains at the level of 47–49% since April 2016.

The consumer sentiment index (CSI) that reflects people’s assessment of the prospects for development of the economic situation and personal financial situation remains at around 79–80 points since August 2016, which is slightly higher than in the first half of the year (in it was 75–77 p. in February – June).

Nonetheless, the consumer sentiment index still remains below 100 points, which indicates the predominance of pessimistic forecasts in people’s evaluation of the prospects for their personal financial well-being and the general state of the Russian economy.

Among the overall changes that took place in 2016 (compared to 2015), we should point out a slight increase in the proportion of people who consider themselves to have the “average level of prosperity” (by 3 p.p.: from 39 to 42%).

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

Answer option	2007	2011	2013	2014	2015	2016	Feb. 2016	Apr. 2016	June 2016	Aug. 2016	Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Dynamics (+/-) 2016 in comparison with...		
													2015	2011	2007
Mood															
Usual condition, good mood	63.6	63.1	68.6	69.4	68.7	68.0	63.4	67.0	68.0	68.8	70.2	70.4	-1	+5	+4
I feel stress, anger, fear, depression	27.8	28.9	26.2	24.9	25.9	26.2	28.9	25.4	26.7	25.8	24.3	26.1	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	78.4	78.0	73.1	77.5	78.2	78.3	79.5	81.1	0	+3	+4
It's impossible to bear such plight	13.6	15.3	14.2	12.6	14.5	15.6	16.1	16.4	15.7	15.5	14.9	14.9	+1	0	+2
Social self-identification*															
The share of people who consider themselves to have average income	48.2	43.1	43.9	43.2	38.7	42.1	39.9	40.9	42.8	43.2	42.3	43.7	+3	-1	-6
The share of people who consider themselves to be poor and extremely poor	42.4	44.3	46.9	49.1	50.7	49.0	51.4	49.4	47.1	49.5	48.9	47.4	-2	+5	+7
Consumer sentiment index															
Index value, points	105.9	89.6	90.3	87.6	77.1	77.7	75.0	74.4	77.3	79.4	80.8	79.4	+1	-12	-28
* Question: "Which category do you belong to, in your opinion?"															

For the past two months there have been no significant changes in social sentiment in the majority (in 10 out of 14) of socio-demographic groups in the Vologda Oblast².

In four out of 14 socio-demographic categories there was an increase in the percentage of people whose mood is positive and condition fine and normal. Among them:

- persons under 30 years of age (by 5 p.p., from 76 to 81%);
- persons 30–55 years of age (by 3 p.p., from 69 to 72%);
- Vologda Oblast residents, who, according to their assessment of their incomes are included into the category of the 20% most wealthy (by 2 p.p., from 70 to 72%);
- residents of the city of Vologda (by 5 p.p., from 79 to 84%).

The deterioration of the social mood in October – December 2016 is registered in only one socio-demographic category – among the people over 55 years of age (by 5 p.p., from 68 to 63%).

Compared to the beginning of the year, the percentage of people describing their mood as positive increased in all the groups, except for those over 55 years of age (in this category, the proportion of positive judgments for the period from February to December 2016 has not changed – 62%)

² When analyzing the dynamics of public opinion in different socio-demographic groups only the changes by 3 p.p. or more were taken into consideration, because this value is outside the sampling error.

On the whole, in 2016 compared to 2015, the change of social mood is observed only among Vologda residents: the proportion of positive characteristics decreased by 4 p.p. (from 74 to 70%). In all the rest socio-demographic categories there were no significant changes.

Social mood in different social groups (answer: "Good mood, normal condition", as a percentage of the number of respondents)

Population group	2007	2011	2013	2014	2015	2016	Feb. 2016	Apr. 2016	June 2016	Aug. 2016	Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Dynamics (+/-) 2016 in comparison with...			
													2015	2011	2007	
Sex																
Men	65.9	64.5	69.9	68.9	69.5	68.8	63.9	66.5	70.0	67.3	71.6	73.3	-1	+4	+3	
Women	61.7	62.0	67.5	69.8	68.0	67.4	63.1	67.5	66.5	70.0	69.0	68.1	-1	+5	+6	
Age																
Under 30	71.3	70.0	75.5	75.1	77.1	76.4	69.9	75.4	81.2	74.5	76.3	80.8	-1	+6	+5	
30-55	64.8	62.5	69.2	69.5	67.2	67.4	62.1	66.0	68.3	67.1	68.9	71.8	0	+5	+3	
Over 55	54.8	58.3	62.4	65.4	65.5	64.0	61.5	63.7	59.8	67.7	68.3	62.8	-2	+6	+9	
Education																
Secondary and incomplete secondary	58.4	57.4	60.6	62.5	63.6	62.1	57.8	62.4	62.9	61.7	64.7	62.8	-2	+5	+4	
Secondary vocational	64.6	63.6	68.1	70.4	70.1	68.4	60.7	67.3	69.3	68.5	72.1	72.7	-2	+5	+4	
Higher and incomplete higher	68.6	68.3	77.4	76.2	72.7	74.3	72.9	71.5	73.3	76.8	74.6	76.9	+2	+6	+6	
Income groups																
20% of the poorest people	51.6	45.3	46.2	50.8	51.8	52.5	42.6	51.3	52.0	56.3	55.5	57.5	+1	+7	+1	
60% of the people with median income	62.9	65.3	71.9	72.3	71.0	69.4	66.3	67.6	69.3	70.4	71.8	70.7	-2	+4	+6	
20% of the most prosperous people	74.9	75.3	83.3	84.8	82.0	80.9	77.9	81.0	85.2	78.5	79.3	83.5	-1	+6	+6	
Territories																
Vologda	63.1	67.1	75.0	76.4	73.9	69.9	65.1	69.1	71.5	69.2	71.0	73.6	-4	+3	+7	
Cherepovets	68.1	71.2	75.3	76.3	70.6	71.7	66.4	70.5	72.5	74.0	72.7	74.0	+1	0	+4	
Districts	61.6	57.1	61.6	61.8	64.6	64.8	60.9	63.9	63.7	65.7	68.1	66.6	0	+8	+3	
Oblast	63.6	63.1	68.6	69.4	68.7	68.0	63.5	67.1	68.1	68.8	70.1	70.4	-1	+5	+4	

Conclusion

Judging by the results of 2016, we can point out a consistently high level of support for the President's work (68 – 69%) and a gradual deterioration of public opinion concerning the work of the Government (the share of positive evaluations of the work of the Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers has declined by 5 p.p. (from 55 to 50%) from February to December 2016, and from 2015 to 2016 – by 6 p.p. (from 58 to 52%)). This is caused by the fact that the standard of living and the problems in the economic situation in the country remain the most pressing issues for the population.

It is no coincidence that the President's work on economic recovery and growth of welfare of citizens receives lower estimates than his work on dealing with other key issues (the percentage of positive assessments throughout 2016 was 26 – 28%, and in the period from 2015 to 2016 it decreased by 7 p.p., from 34 to 27%). The proportion of people who consider themselves to be “poor and extremely poor” still prevails over the share of those who consider themselves to have “average income” (in 2016 – 49% vs. 42%), although it should be noted that in February – December 2016 the share of the “poor and extremely poor” decreased (by 4 p.p., from 51 to 47%), and the share of people with “average income” increased (by 4 p.p., from 40 to 44%).

In the majority of socio-demographic categories of Vologda Oblast residents there is a stable high level of positive characteristics of social mood. Over the past year, the proportion of those who experience “good mood; normal, fine condition” increased by 7 p.p. (from 63 to 70%). However, the predominance of negative assessments in the consumer sentiment index (the value of CSI since 2011 remains below 100 points, it was 77 points in 2015 – 2016) indicates the pessimistic forecasts of people concerning the economic situation in Russia and their own financial well-being.

In the last month of the expiring year Vladimir Putin signed several important documents that define the priorities of domestic and foreign policy of Russia in the coming years: the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, the Information Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation, and the Strategy for Scientific and Technological Development. In his Address to the Federal Assembly on December 01, 2016, the President drew attention to the fact that “the principles of justice, respect, and trust are universal. We are consistent in defending these principles on the international stage and, as we see, not without result. But we must put the same effort into guaranteeing these principles here at home, with regard to every individual and to society as a whole”³.

Thus, the President again turns his attention to the domestic agenda and socio-economic issues perceived most acutely in the Russian society. The President's Address to the Federal Assembly, despite the fact that it is not a document of strategic development, should be regarded as a signal to the Government – an indication of what issues should be addressed in the first place and what degree of responsibility should be borne by the officials at all levels for the performance of their direct professional duties.

The President's orders must be heard, accepted and implemented (in particular, his orders concerning the following: “no later than May 2017, to develop a detailed plan of action through 2025, the implementation of which will make it possible to achieve economic growth rates higher than in the [rest of the] world as early as 2019–2020, and therefore strengthen Russia's positions in the global economy⁴), because it will determine the further dynamics of public sentiment not only in the region but in the country as a whole.

³ Poslanie Prezidenta RF Federal'nomu Sobraniyu ot 1 dekabrya 2016 g. [Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, December 01, 2016]. *Ofitsial'nyi sait Prezidenta RF* [Official website of Russian President]. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53379>

⁴ *Ibidem.*