

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 December 2016 – February 2017, and also on average for the latest six polls (April 2016 – February 2017). 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 December 2016 – February 2017, the assessment of the work of the President of the Russian Federation did not change significantly (67%). Approval of the President's work remains stable throughout 2016 and in the beginning of 2017.

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 2014–2016 (52–58%). In general, for the latest 6 surveys, the proportion of positive judgments about the work of the Chairman of the RF Government declined by 7 p.p. (from 58 to 51%), and in comparison with 2011 – by 8 p.p. (from 59 to 51%).

For reference: the nationwide level of approval of the RF President's performance remains stable. In December 2016 – January 2017 it was 85–86% according to VTsIOM (the share of negative assessments was 9–10%) and 84–85% – according to Levada-Center (the share of negative judgements was 14–15%). The proportion of positive assessments of the work of the Chairman of the RF Government, according to the polls, has decreased slightly (by 3 p.p., from 61% in December 2016 to 58% in the first half of February 2017).

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.vsc.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	2016	Apr. 2016	June 2016	Aug. 2016	Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Feb. 2017	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-) the latest 6 surveys compared to...		
														2015	2011	2007
RF President																
I approve	75.3	58.7	55.3	64.1	69.1	67.8	66.9	67.4	68.7	68.4	67.3	65.7	67.4	-2	+9	-8
I don't approve	11.5	25.6	29.4	22.3	17.5	18.8	17.9	20.1	19.6	19.7	19.3	21.1	19.6	+2	-6	+8
Chairman of the RF Government*																
I approve	-*	59.3	48.9	54.2	58.1	52.3	53.5	52.8	52.7	49.4	50.4	50.4	51.5	-7	-8	-
I don't approve	-	24.7	32.8	27.6	21.7	27.6	25.7	28.6	27.7	30.6	30.1	29.8	28.8	+7	+4	-
Governor																
I approve	55.8	45.7	44.4	40.1	39.3	37.7	34.9	38.2	38.4	39.1	40.2	38.9	38.3	-1	-7	-18
I don't approve	22.2	30.5	33.2	38.9	36.2	39.3	39.6	40.3	40.0	39.3	38.5	37.8	39.3	+3	+9	+17
* Included into the survey since 2008.																

In December 2016 – February 2017 there was a slight improvement of assessments of the work of Russian President aimed to strengthen Russia's international positions (by 3 p.p., from 52 to 55%, the highest figure for the latest 6 surveys) and the work on protecting democracy and strengthening freedoms of citizens (by 3 p.p., from 36 to 39%)

Assessments of the work of the head of state in the field of restoring order in the country in December 2016 – February 2017 did not change significantly: it is considered successful by 50% of the population, unsuccessful – by 37%.

The opinion of the people about the success with which the President deals with the task of economic recovery and growth of welfare of citizens remains stable and low: the proportion of positive judgments is 26–27%, negative – 59–61%.

It should be noted that on average for the latest 6 surveys, compared to 2011, there was an improvement in people's assessment of the President's work on coping with all the key tasks (by 4–13 p. p.), except for economic recovery and increasing the welfare of the population (the share of positive ratings decreased by 4 p.p., from 31 to 27%).

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	Apr. 2016	June 2016	Aug. 2016	Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Feb. 2017	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-) the latest 6 surveys compared to...		
														2015	2011	2007
Strengthening Russia's international standing																
Successful	58.4	46.2	45.7	50.4	51.7	51.2	50.7	52.2	50.1	51.4	51.9	54.5	51.8	0	+6	-7
Unsuccessful	24.9	33.7	36.2	32.4	31.3	29.9	30.9	29.0	30.3	28.8	31.1	26.5	29.4	-2	-4	+5
Success index	133.5	112.5	109.5	118.0	120.4	121.3	119.8	123.2	119.8	122.6	120.8	128.0	122.4	+2	+10	-11
Imposing order in the country																
Successful	53.2	36.6	39.4	48.0	50.2	49.2	48.1	49.7	50.0	49.7	50.2	49.5	49.5	-1	+13	-4
Unsuccessful	34.0	50.0	47.5	39.1	37.9	36.7	38.2	37.5	35.1	35.6	36.7	36.8	36.7	-1	-13	+3
Success index	119.2	86.6	91.9	108.9	112.3	112.6	109.9	112.2	115.4	114.1	113.5	112.7	113.0	+1	+26	-6
Protecting democracy and strengthening the citizens' freedoms																
Successful	44.4	32.4	31.8	37.5	40.4	36.6	35.6	38.3	36.7	35.7	36.2	38.6	36.9	-4	+4	-8
Unsuccessful	37.0	48.3	51.0	45.4	41.5	44.3	45.3	42.2	45.0	44.7	44.3	41.3	43.8	+2	-4	+7
Success index	107.4	84.1	80.8	92.1	99.0	92.3	90.3	96.1	91.7	91.0	91.9	97.3	93.1	-6	+9	-14
Economic recovery and increase in the citizens' welfare																
Successful	47.2	30.7	31.3	34.8	34.2	27.2	27.6	27.5	26.7	26.4	27.2	26.1	26.9	-7	-4	-20
Unsuccessful	39.1	56.1	56.8	53.4	52.3	59.4	57.9	59.1	60.4	60.9	61.1	59.1	59.8	+7	+4	+21
Success index	108.1	74.6	74.5	81.4	81.8	67.8	69.7	68.4	66.3	65.5	66.1	67.0	67.2	-15	-7	-41

* 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 significantly. The United Russia Party is supported by 34–35% (which is lower than in 2015 – 39%), KPRF – by 7%, the Just Russia Party – by 4%.

In early 2017, there was a significant decrease in the level of support of LDPR (by 4 p.p., from 14 to 10%), although it remains higher than in 2015 (6%).

It should also be noted that in December 2016 – February 2017 there was an increase in the proportion of people who find it difficult to decide what political party reflects their interests (by 6 p.p., from 8 to 14%), which may indicate the growth of disinterest or ignorance of the population about the political situation in the country.

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	2016	Election to the RF State Duma 2016, fact		Apr. 2016	June 2016	Aug. 2016	Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Feb. 2017	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-) the latest 6 surveys compared to...		
		2015	2011	2007																			
United Russia	30.2	60.5	31.1	33.4	29.4	32.8	38.8	35.4	38.0	34.1	36.0	36.5	36.3	34.5	33.9	35.2	-4	+4	+5				
LDPR	7.5	11.0	7.8	15.4	7.2	7.6	6.2	10.4	21.9	8.2	10.3	10.5	12.8	13.9	10.2	11.0	+5	+3	+3				
KPRF	7.0	9.3	10.3	16.8	11.3	9.7	7.1	8.3	14.2	7.2	8.0	7.5	9.0	8.7	7.2	7.9	+1	-2	+1				
Just Russia	7.8	8.8	5.6	27.2	4.6	3.5	3.6	4.2	10.8	2.7	4.0	4.7	6.1	4.9	4.3	4.5	+1	-1	-3				
Other	1.8	-	1.9	-	0.6	0.3	0.2	0.3	-	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.3	0	-2	-2				
No party	17.8	-	29.4	-	34.9	34.4	31.8	29.4	-	34.9	29.7	26.1	23.7	30.1	30.7	29.2	-3	0	+11				
It is difficult to answer	21.2	-	13.2	-	10.2	11.7	12.2	12.0	-	12.7	11.7	14.3	11.8	7.7	13.6	12.0	0	-1	-9				

Over the past two months, assessments of social well-being slightly worsened. The percentage of people describing their mood as positive decreased by 3 p.p. (from 70 to 67%). The proportion of those who say that “everything is not so bad; it’s difficult to live, but it’s possible to stand it” declined from 81 до 78% (by 3 p.p.).

The dynamics of social identification did not see any significant changes over the past two months: the proportion of those who consider they have “average income” is 43%, the proportion of the “poor and extremely poor” is 47%, which is higher than in 2007 (42%) and 2011 (44%).

For the period from December 2016 to February 2017 the consumer sentiment index increased slightly (by 3 points, from 79 to 82 p.), although its value remains less than 100 points, which indicates the predominance of pessimistic forecasts of the population regarding the dynamics of development of the economic situation and their personal financial situation.

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

Answer option	2007	2011	2013	2014	2015	2016	Apr. 2016	June 2016	Aug. 2016	Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Feb. 2017	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-) the latest 6 surveys compared to...		
														2015	2011	2007
Mood																
Usual condition, good mood	63.6	63.1	68.6	69.4	68.7	68.0	67.0	68.0	68.8	70.2	70.4	67.2	68.6	0	+5	+5
I feel stress, anger, fear, depression	27.8	28.9	26.2	24.9	25.9	26.2	25.4	26.7	25.8	24.3	26.1	28.5	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	77.5	78.2	78.3	79.5	81.1	78.2	78.8	0	+4	+5
It's impossible to bear such plight	13.6	15.3	14.2	12.6	14.5	15.6	16.4	15.7	15.5	14.9	14.9	16.1	15.6	+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	40.9	42.8	43.2	42.3	43.7	42.5	42.6	+4	-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	49.4	47.1	49.5	48.9	47.4	47.2	48.3	-2	+4	+6
Consumer sentiment index																
Index value, points	105.9	89.6	90.3	87.6	77.1	77.7	74.4	77.3	79.4	80.8	79.4	82.0	78.9	+2	-11	-27

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

Over the past two months the assessments of social mood deteriorated in the majority (in 8 out of 14) of socio-demographic categories. The percentage of positive ratings of emotional state declined more dramatically among people under the age of 30 years (by 10 p.p., from 81 to 71%) and among those who, according to their own assessments of their income fall within the 20% of the least wealthy layers of the population (by 13 p.p., from 58 to 45%).

However, in the Vologda Oblast in general, the proportion of people describing their mood as "normal, good", still corresponds to the average level of 2013–2016 (68–69%).

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	Apr. 2016	June 2016	Aug. 2016	Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Feb. 2017	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-) the latest 6 surveys compared to...		
														2015	2011	2007
Sex																
Men	65.9	64.5	69.9	68.9	69.5	68.8	66.5	70.0	67.3	71.6	73.3	66.9	69.3	0	+5	+3
Women	61.7	62.0	67.5	69.8	68.0	67.4	67.5	66.5	70.0	69.0	68.1	67.4	68.1	0	+6	+6
Age																
Under 30	71.3	70.0	75.5	75.1	77.1	76.4	75.4	81.2	74.5	76.3	80.8	70.9	76.5	-1	+7	+5
30-55	64.8	62.5	69.2	69.5	67.2	67.4	66.0	68.3	67.1	68.9	71.8	66.7	68.1	+1	+6	+3
Over 55	54.8	58.3	62.4	65.4	65.5	64.0	63.7	59.8	67.7	68.3	62.8	65.8	64.7	-1	+6	+10
Education																
Secondary and incomplete secondary	58.4	57.4	60.6	62.5	63.6	62.1	62.4	62.9	61.7	64.7	62.8	61.4	62.7	-1	+5	+4
Secondary vocational	64.6	63.6	68.1	70.4	70.1	68.4	67.3	69.3	68.5	72.1	72.7	67.7	69.6	-1	+6	+5
Higher and incomplete higher	68.6	68.3	77.4	76.2	72.7	74.3	71.5	73.3	76.8	74.6	76.9	73.1	74.4	+2	+6	+6
Income groups																
20% of the poorest people	51.6	45.3	46.2	50.8	51.8	52.5	51.3	52.0	56.3	55.5	57.5	44.6	52.9	+1	+8	+1
60% of the people with median income	62.9	65.3	71.9	72.3	71.0	69.4	67.6	69.3	70.4	71.8	70.7	70.8	70.1	-1	+5	+7
20% of the most prosperous people	74.9	75.3	83.3	84.8	82.0	80.9	81.0	85.2	78.5	79.3	83.5	86.3	82.3	0	+7	+7
Territories																
Vologda	63.1	67.1	75.0	76.4	73.9	69.9	69.1	71.5	69.2	71.0	73.6	67.9	70.4	-4	+3	+7
Cherepovets	68.1	71.2	75.3	76.3	70.6	71.7	70.5	72.5	74.0	72.7	74.0	73.7	72.9	+2	+2	+5
Districts	61.6	57.1	61.6	61.8	64.6	64.8	63.9	63.7	65.7	68.1	66.6	63.1	65.2	+1	+8	+4
Oblast	63.6	63.1	68.6	69.4	68.7	68.0	67.1	68.1	68.8	70.1	70.4	67.2	68.6	0	+6	+5

Conclusion

The results of a poll conducted in early 2017 indicate that society still worries about the dynamics of the economic situation and the standard of living. While the evaluation of the President’s work on strengthening Russia’s international position has improved (the share of positive judgments increased from 52 to 55%), the dynamics of public opinion about the success of his work on strengthening the financial situation of the population shows no significant changes: as in 2016, only 26–27% of the Vologda Oblast residents believe that this problem is being solved successfully.

The share of people who consider themselves “poor and extremely poor” has been higher than the share of people with “median income” (by about 5 p.p.) since 2013. In early 2017, there is a significant deterioration of the social mood among the poorest inhabitants of the oblast (the share of positive characteristics decreased by 13 p.p., from 58 to 45%).

Many years of people’s dissatisfaction with the dynamics of their financial situation are gradually reflected in the assessment of the work of the authorities, first of all, the work of the Government of the Russian Federation that is responsible for the course of domestic economic and social policy. So, in 2011 the level of approval of the work of the Chairman of the RF Government was 59% in 2015 – 58%, and in 2016 – 52%, in February 2017 – 50%.

The evaluation of the work of the Russian President remains generally stable (the level of support is 66–68%), but after the “Crimean spring” of 2014 there were no significant positive trends in public opinion about the work of the head of state.

Among the notable changes that took place in the beginning of 2017 it is necessary to point out a decrease in the social well-being indicators: the proportion of people describing their mood as positive decreased by 3 p.p. (from 70 to 67%), the stock of patience also decreased (the percentage of those who believe that “everything is not so bad; it’s difficult to live, but it’s possible to stand it” decreased from 81 to 78%). So far it is impossible to say whether these changes are due to seasonal factors (climatic conditions of winter, the end of Christmas holidays, housing and utilities problems, low wages in the beginning of the year) or whether they will become a trend after a while.

At the end of 2016 in his Address to the Federal Assembly, the RF President said: “Stabilization does not mean an automatic transition to a sustainable recovery. If we do not address the underlying problems of the Russian economy, if we do not launch new growth factors at their full force, it will stagnate for years, and we will have to constantly scrimp and save, to delay development. We cannot afford that... I am asking the Government to explore ways to improve mechanisms that guarantee stability of the budget and public finances, while delivering on all our commitments regardless of external factors, including the price of oil and gas”².

Nevertheless, the draft budget, which was developed by the Government and adopted by the State Duma in December 2016, is considered by many experts (S.Yu. Glazyev, B.Yu. Titov, S.A. Glotov, N.V. Starikov) to be the budget of stagnation and standstill, which is inconsistent with the key objectives of national security and people’s expectations.

In these circumstances, there remain concerns regarding the future dynamics of public opinion. The absence of perceptible changes in the standard of living and quality of life can significantly aggravate the social situation in the country, which is unacceptable on the threshold of the presidential election scheduled for March 2018.

² Transcript of the Address of the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin to the Federal Assembly on 1 December 2016. *Official website of the RF President*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53379>