

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 ISEDТ 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 February – April 2017, and also on average for the latest six polls (June 2016 – April 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.

In February – April 2017 the assessment of the work of the President of the Russian Federation did not change significantly (64–66%). At the same time, it should be noted that approval of the President's work at the beginning of 2017 is lower than in 2015 – 2016 (68–69%).

The assessment of the work of the Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation over the past two months deteriorated slightly: the share of positive judgements decreased by 3 p.p. (from 50 to 47%). For comparison: in 2015 the level of support of the Chairman of the Government was 58%, in 2016 – 52%, in March 2017 – 48%.

For reference: the nationwide level of approval of the RF President's performance remains stable. In February – March 2017 it was 84–85% according to VTsIOM (the share of negative assessments was 10%) and 82–84% – according to Levada-Center (the share of negative judgements was 15–17%). The proportion of positive assessments of the work of the Chairman of the RF Government, according to Levada-Center, has decreased significantly in February – March 2017 – by 10 p.p., from 52 to 42%.

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 ISEDТ RAS polls are available at <http://www.vssc.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	June 2016	Aug. 2016	Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Feb. 2017	Apr. 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	67.4	68.7	68.4	67.3	65.7	63.6	66.9	-2	+8	-8
I don't approve	11.5	25.6	29.4	22.3	17.5	18.8	20.1	19.6	19.7	19.3	21.1	23.6	20.6	+3	-5	+9
Chairman of the RF Government*																
I approve	-*	59.3	48.9	54.2	58.1	52.3	52.8	52.7	49.4	50.4	50.4	47.5	50.5	-8	-9	-
I don't approve	-	24.7	32.8	27.6	21.7	27.6	28.6	27.7	30.6	30.1	29.8	32.8	29.9	+8	+5	-
Governor																
I approve	55.8	45.7	44.4	40.1	39.3	37.7	38.2	38.4	39.1	40.2	38.9	36.7	38.6	-1	-7	-17
I don't approve	22.2	30.5	33.2	38.9	36.2	39.3	40.3	40.0	39.3	38.5	37.8	41.1	39.5	+3	+9	+17
* Included in the survey since 2008.																

From February to April, 2017 there was a slight decrease in the assessments of the President's work to strengthen Russia's international standing (the percentage of positive judgments decreased by 3 p.p., from 55 to 52%) and his work to restore order in the country (by 3 p.p., from 50 to 47%).

The opinion of the oblast residents about the success of the President's work to protect democracy and strengthen freedoms of citizens and his work to ensure economic recovery and citizens' prosperity over the past two months did not change significantly (the share of positive assessments is 37 and 26%, respectively).

On average for the latest 6 surveys, compared with 2015, the proportion of the oblast residents who believe that the head of state successfully copes with the challenge of protecting democracy and strengthening freedoms of citizens decreased by 3 p.p. (from 40 to 37%); with the challenge of economic recovery and increasing welfare of citizens – by 8 p.p. (from 34 to 26%). In 2007, the proportion of people, who positively assessed the work of the head of state to address financial issues of the population, accounted for 47%, in 2011 – 31% in April 2017 – 26%. Thus, over the past 5 years a negative trend in public opinion continues.

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	June 2016	Aug. 2016	Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Feb. 2017	Apr. 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	52.2	50.1	51.4	51.9	54.5	52.4	52.1	0	+6	-6
Unsuccessful	24.9	33.7	36.2	32.4	31.3	29.9	29.0	30.3	28.8	31.1	26.5	27.7	28.9	-2	-5	+4
<i>Success index</i>	133.5	112.5	109.5	118.0	120.4	121.3	123.2	119.8	122.6	120.8	128.0	124.7	123.2	+3	+11	-10
Imposing order in the country																
Successful	53.2	36.6	39.4	48.0	50.2	49.2	49.7	50.0	49.7	50.2	49.5	47.3	49.4	-1	+13	-4
Unsuccessful	34.0	50.0	47.5	39.1	37.9	36.7	37.5	35.1	35.6	36.7	36.8	38.8	36.8	-1	-13	+3
<i>Success index</i>	119.2	86.6	91.9	108.9	112.3	112.6	112.2	115.4	114.1	113.5	112.7	108.5	112.7	0	+26	-6
Protecting democracy and strengthening the citizens' freedoms																
Successful	44.4	32.4	31.8	37.5	40.4	36.6	38.3	36.7	35.7	36.2	38.6	36.8	37.1	-3	+5	-7
Unsuccessful	37.0	48.3	51.0	45.4	41.5	44.3	42.2	45.0	44.7	44.3	41.3	43.5	43.5	+2	-5	+7
<i>Success index</i>	107.4	84.1	80.8	92.1	99.0	92.3	96.1	91.7	91.0	91.9	97.3	93.3	93.6	-5	+9	-14
Economic recovery and increase in the citizens' welfare																
Successful	47.2	30.7	31.3	34.8	34.2	27.2	27.5	26.7	26.4	27.2	26.1	25.8	26.6	-8	-4	-21
Unsuccessful	39.1	56.1	56.8	53.4	52.3	59.4	59.1	60.4	60.9	61.1	59.1	57.3	59.7	+7	+4	+21
<i>Success index</i>	108.1	74.6	74.5	81.4	81.8	67.8	68.4	66.3	65.5	66.1	67.0	68.5	67.0	-15	-8	-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 32–34% (which is lower than in 2015 – 39%), LDPR – by 11%, KPRF – by 6–8%, the Just Russia Party – by 4–5%.

In February – April 2017 there was an increase in the proportion of people who think that no political party reflects their interests (by 3 p.p., from 31 to 35%). It is significantly higher than in 2016 (29%).

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	2016	Election to the RF State Duma 2016, fact		June 2016	Aug. 2016	Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Feb. 2017	Apr. 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	36.0	36.5	36.3	34.5	33.9	31.8	34.8	-4	+4	+5		
LDPR	7.5	11.0	7.8	15.4	7.2	7.6	6.2	10.4	21.9	10.3	10.5	12.8	13.9	10.2	10.7	11.4	+5	+4	+4		
KPRF	7.0	9.3	10.3	16.8	11.3	9.7	7.1	8.3	14.2	8.0	7.5	9.0	8.7	7.2	6.2	7.8	+1	-3	+1		
Just Russia	7.8	8.8	5.6	27.2	4.6	3.5	3.6	4.2	10.8	4.0	4.7	6.1	4.9	4.3	4.8	4.8	+1	-1	-3		
Other	1.8	-	1.9	-	0.6	0.3	0.2	0.3	-	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.5	0.3	0	-2	-1		
No party	17.8	-	29.4	-	34.9	34.4	31.8	29.4	-	29.7	26.1	23.7	30.1	30.7	34.8	29.2	-3	0	+11		
It is difficult to answer	21.2	-	13.2	-	10.2	11.7	12.2	12.0	-	11.7	14.3	11.8	7.7	13.6	11.2	11.7	0	-1	-9		

Over the past two months, assessments of social well-being of the population did not change significantly. The percentage of people describing their mood as positive is 67–69%, the share of those who believe that “everything is not so bad; it is difficult to live, but possible to stand it” is 77–78%.

In March 2017 the proportion of the oblast residents who consider themselves “poor” and “extremely poor” was 47%, which corresponds to the indicators as of December 2016 and February 2017. The proportion of people of “middle” income is slightly lower: 43%.

The consumer sentiment index in February – April 2017 was 81–82 points. This is higher than in 2015–2016 (77 p.), but it is still below 100 p., which means the predominance of pessimistic population forecasts 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	June 2016	Aug. 2016	Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Feb. 2017	Apr. 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	68.0	68.8	70.2	70.4	67.2	68.6	68.9	0	+6	+5
I feel stress, anger, fear, depression	27.8	28.9	26.2	24.9	25.9	26.2	26.7	25.8	24.3	26.1	28.5	25.5	26.2	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	78.2	78.3	79.5	81.1	78.2	77.3	78.8	0	+4	+5
It's impossible to bear such plight	13.6	15.3	14.2	12.6	14.5	15.6	15.7	15.5	14.9	14.9	16.1	16.4	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	42.8	43.2	42.3	43.7	42.5	42.8	42.9	+4	0	-5
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	47.1	49.5	48.9	47.4	47.2	47.3	47.9	-3	+4	+6
Consumer sentiment index																
Index value, points	105.9	89.6	90.3	87.6	77.1	77.7	77.3	79.4	80.8	79.4	82.0	80.8	80.0	+3	-10	-26

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

In February–April 2017 the proportion of people describing their mood as “normal, excellent, good”, in most socio-demographic groups did not change.

At the same time, there was an increase in the proportion of residents experiencing positive emotions: in people under the age of 30 (by 10 p.p., from 71 to 81%), from 30 to 55 years old (by 3 p.p. from 67 to 70%) and among those who, according to their own assessments of their income, fall within the 20% of the least wealthy (by 4 p.p., from 45 to 49%).

Negative changes in the dynamics of social mood over the past two months are observed among people older than 55 years of age (by 6 p.p., from 66 to 60%) and among those who, according to their own assessments of their income, fall within the 20% of the wealthiest residents of the oblast (by 6 p.p., from 86 to 80%).

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	June 2016	Aug. 2016	Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Feb. 2017	Apr. 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	70.0	67.3	71.6	73.3	66.9	67.6	69.5	0	+5	+4
Women	61.7	62.0	67.5	69.8	68.0	67.4	66.5	70.0	69.0	68.1	67.4	69.4	68.4	0	+6	+7
Age																
Under 30	71.3	70.0	75.5	75.1	77.1	76.4	81.2	74.5	76.3	80.8	70.9	80.5	77.4	0	+7	+6
30-55	64.8	62.5	69.2	69.5	67.2	67.4	68.3	67.1	68.9	71.8	66.7	70.1	68.8	+2	+6	+4
Over 55	54.8	58.3	62.4	65.4	65.5	64.0	59.8	67.7	68.3	62.8	65.8	60.4	64.1	-1	+6	+9
Education																
Secondary and incomplete secondary	58.4	57.4	60.6	62.5	63.6	62.1	62.9	61.7	64.7	62.8	61.4	64.9	63.1	-1	+6	+5
Secondary vocational	64.6	63.6	68.1	70.4	70.1	68.4	69.3	68.5	72.1	72.7	67.7	69.3	69.9	0	+6	+5
Higher and incomplete higher	68.6	68.3	77.4	76.2	72.7	74.3	73.3	76.8	74.6	76.9	73.1	71.7	74.4	+2	+6	+6
Income groups																
20% of the poorest people	51.6	45.3	46.2	50.8	51.8	52.5	52.0	56.3	55.5	57.5	44.6	49.1	52.5	+1	+7	+1
60% of the people with median income	62.9	65.3	71.9	72.3	71.0	69.4	69.3	70.4	71.8	70.7	70.8	70.6	70.6	0	+5	+8
20% of the most prosperous people	74.9	75.3	83.3	84.8	82.0	80.9	85.2	78.5	79.3	83.5	86.3	79.9	82.1	0	+7	+7
Territories																
Vologda	63.1	67.1	75.0	76.4	73.9	69.9	71.5	69.2	71.0	73.6	67.9	70.6	70.6	-3	+4	+8
Cherepovets	68.1	71.2	75.3	76.3	70.6	71.7	72.5	74.0	72.7	74.0	73.7	74.1	73.5	+3	+2	+5
Districts	61.6	57.1	61.6	61.8	64.6	64.8	63.7	65.7	68.1	66.6	63.1	64.3	65.3	+1	+8	+4
Oblast	63.6	63.1	68.6	69.4	68.7	68.0	68.1	68.8	70.1	70.4	67.2	68.6	68.9	0	+6	+5

Conclusion

The results of a poll conducted in April 2017 show that there still remain the troubling trends in people's assessment of the work of the authorities. During the latest 6 polls (June 2016–April 2017) the level of support for the President of the Russian Federation decreased by 3 p.p. (from 67 to 64%), for the Chairman of the RF Government – by 5 p.p. (from 53 to 48%). During this entire period there were no positive changes in the public opinion.

At the same time, the proportion of people who consider that the President successfully copes with the issues of economic recovery and growth of welfare of citizens remains stable (25–26%). For comparison: 57–60% of people share the opposite viewpoint.

The dynamics of people's preferences concerning political parties can be considered a telling indicator. The support of the ruling party after the 2016 election to the State Duma has a negative trend so far: in October 2017 it was 36%, in February 2017 – 34%, in April – 32%. The share of supporters of other parliamentary parties remains stable. At the same time, there is a continuous increase in the share of the oblast residents who believe that none of the political forces today expresses their interests: in October 2016 – 24%, in February 2017 – 31%, in April – 35%. Such dynamics of population estimates may be due either to a general increase in political apathy of the population, or disappointment in the political system which developed in Russia. In any case, the President's address to the parliamentary parties (and especially to United Russia) concerning the fact that “this election result is good, but it is without question an advance on the part of our people, and we now must live up to their expectations”², remains without attention yet.

For the past two months there were no significant changes in the dynamics of indicators of social mood and people's self-assessment of the level of their income. It should be noted that people's assessments of the prospects of their welfare are still dominated by pessimistic judgments (as evidenced by the value of the consumer sentiment index, which is below 100 points).

In February – April 2016, the indices of social mood among people under the age of 30 improved (the share of positive ratings increased by 10 p.p., from 71 to 81%), and deteriorated – among people of 55 years of age (by 6 p.p., from 66 to 60%) and among those who, according to self-assessments of their incomes fall within the group of 20% of the wealthiest inhabitants of the oblast (by 6 p.p., from 86 to 80%). In our view, this may be a consequence of large protests organized by the opposition in early 2017 (in particular, an anti-corruption rally held on March 26, 2017). According to the experts (E. Minchenko), “anti-corruption protests can unite different population groups – schoolchildren and truckers, liberal democrats and the leftists... Another

² Transcript of the meeting of President Vladimir Putin with Government members on September 19, 2016. Official website of the Russian President. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/52913>

serious risk of protests consists in the fact the potentially they can be “appropriated” by the most radical power. For example, A. Navalny, who last December said he intended to run for president in 2018. So far, there was no unification of different forces in the protests against corruption – in particular, students and truckers have different needs, but it is likely that the bond between them will happen in the future”³.

It would seem that recently (in 2014, 2015), sociologists have noted a record growth of support for the President’s work, but the effect of the “Crimean spring” and the international success of the President’s policy is giving way to the issues of domestic economic development and social well-being and confidence in the future. With the approach of the presidential election scheduled for March 2018, the expectations of society regarding the effective solution of urgent issues related to the achievement of social justice, improvement of the standard of living and quality of life are increasingly becoming the unifying factor that is used by the non-systemic opposition and motivates the representatives of various social strata to participate in mass protests.

“In the future everything will depend on the actions of the government: if it is able to solve the problems, then it is unlikely that someone will unite against it, if not – then any unrest is possible”⁴.

³ Scientists have named the main risks of Navalny’s protest for the Kremlin. *RBC Channel from April 03, 2017*. Available at: <http://www.rbc.ru/politics/03/04/2017/58de4d6d9a7947f6ac645050?from=main>.

⁴ *Ibidem*.