

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 February – April 2017, and also on average for the latest six polls (August 2016 – June 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 Dmitry Medvedev's presidency). The yearly dynamics of the data is presented beginning from 2013.

In June 2017 compared with April, the level of approval of the work of the President of the Russian Federation increased by 4 p.p. (from 64 to 68%). This corresponds to the annual average indicator for 2016 and is the highest level of endorsement of the head of state for the 1st half of 2017. At the same time, the share of negative assessments of the President's work over the past two months decreased by 4 p.p. (from 23 to 19%).

The level of support for the Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation over the past two months did not change significantly and is about 48%, which is lower than in 2013–2016 (49–52%).

For reference: the nationwide level of approval of the RF President's performance remains stable. In April – May 2017 it was 82% according to VTsIOM and Levada-Center (the share of negative assessments was 12% according to VTsIOM and 18% according to Levada-Center).

The proportion of positive assessments of the work of the Chairman of the RF Government in April – May 2017 was 52–53% according to VTsIOM and 44–46% according to Levada-Center.

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.vscs.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	Aug. 2016	Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Feb. 2017	Apr. 2017	June 2017	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the latest 6 surveys compared to...		
														2016	2011	2007
RF President																
I approve	75.3	58.7	55.3	64.1	69.1	67.8	68.7	68.4	67.3	65.7	63.6	67.5	66.9	-1	+8	-8
I don't approve	11.5	25.6	29.4	22.3	17.5	18.8	19.6	19.7	19.3	21.1	23.6	19.3	20.4	+2	-5	+9
Chairman of the RF Government*																
I approve	-*	59.3	48.9	54.2	58.1	52.3	52.7	49.4	50.4	50.4	47.5	47.9	49.7	-3	-10	-
I don't approve	-	24.7	32.8	27.6	21.7	27.6	27.7	30.6	30.1	29.8	32.8	32.1	30.5	+3	+6	-
Governor																
I approve	55.8	45.7	44.4	40.1	39.3	37.7	38.4	39.1	40.2	38.9	36.7	40.6	39.0	+1	-7	-17
I don't approve	22.2	30.5	33.2	38.9	36.2	39.3	40.0	39.3	38.5	37.8	41.1	38.9	39.3	0	+9	+17
* Included in the survey since 2008.																

In April – June 2017, the assessment of success of the President's actions in addressing the key problems of the country slightly improved (by 2–3 p.p.):

- ✓ the share of the Vologda Oblast residents who think that the President successfully copes with the task of strengthening international positions of Russia: from 52 to 55%;
- ✓ the share of the Vologda Oblast residents who think that the President successfully copes with the task of restoring order in the country: from 47 to 50%;
- ✓ the share of those who believe that the President is successful in protecting democracy and strengthening citizens' freedoms: from 37 to 39%;
- ✓ 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: from 26 to 29%.

It should be noted that with regard to all the above issues (except “restoring order in the country”), the highest estimates are observed for the period from August 2016 to June 2017 (the latest six polls).

However, we can express concern about the level of people's support for the activities of the President on economic recovery and on promoting the welfare of people. In June 2017 it was 29%, which is lower than in 2011–2015 (30–34%), and significantly lower than in 2007 (47%). People twice as often express dissatisfaction at the President's work to solve financial problems of the population, and the proportion of those sharing this view has remained stable over the latest six surveys (57–60%).

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	Aug. 2016	Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Feb. 2017	Apr. 2017	June 2017	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the latest 6 surveys compared to...		
														2016	2011	2007
Strengthening Russia's international standing																
Successful	58.4	46.2	45.7	50.4	51.7	51.2	50.1	51.4	51.9	54.5	52.4	55.3	52.6	+1	+6	-6
Unsuccessful	24.9	33.7	36.2	32.4	31.3	29.9	30.3	28.8	31.1	26.5	27.7	25.8	28.4	-2	-5	+3
<i>Success index</i>	133.5	112.5	109.5	118.0	120.4	121.3	119.8	122.6	120.8	128.0	124.7	129.5	124.2	+3	+12	-9
Imposing order in the country																
Successful	53.2	36.6	39.4	48.0	50.2	49.2	50.0	49.7	50.2	49.5	47.3	49.9	49.4	0	+13	-4
Unsuccessful	34.0	50.0	47.5	39.1	37.9	36.7	35.1	35.6	36.7	36.8	38.8	35.8	36.5	0	-14	+2
<i>Success index</i>	119.2	86.6	91.9	108.9	112.3	112.6	115.4	114.1	113.5	112.7	108.5	114.1	113.1	0	+26	-6
Protecting democracy and strengthening the citizens' freedoms																
Successful	44.4	32.4	31.8	37.5	40.4	36.6	36.7	35.7	36.2	38.6	36.8	39.1	37.2	+1	+5	-7
Unsuccessful	37.0	48.3	51.0	45.4	41.5	44.3	45.0	44.7	44.3	41.3	43.5	39.7	43.1	-1	-5	+6
<i>Success index</i>	107.4	84.1	80.8	92.1	99.0	92.3	91.7	91.0	91.9	97.3	93.3	99.4	94.1	+2	+10	-13
Economic recovery and increase in the citizens' welfare																
Successful	47.2	30.7	31.3	34.8	34.2	27.2	26.7	26.4	27.2	26.1	25.8	28.5	26.8	0	-4	-20
Unsuccessful	39.1	56.1	56.8	53.4	52.3	59.4	60.4	60.9	61.1	59.1	57.3	57.2	59.3	0	+3	+20
<i>Success index</i>	108.1	74.6	74.5	81.4	81.8	67.8	66.3	65.5	66.1	67.0	68.5	71.3	67.5	0	-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 32–34% (which is lower than in 2015 – 39%), LDPR – by 11%, the Just Russia Party – by 4–5%. There was a decrease in the proportion of people who think that no political party reflects their interests (by 6 p.p., from 35 to 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	Aug. 2016	Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Feb. 2017	Apr. 2017	June 2017	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the latest 6 surveys compared to ...		
																		2016	2011	2007
United Russia	30.2	60.5	31.1	33.4	29.4	32.8	38.8	35.4	38.0	36.5	36.3	34.5	33.9	31.8	33.8	34.5	-1	+3	+4	
LDPR	7.5	11.0	7.8	15.4	7.2	7.6	6.2	10.4	21.9	10.5	12.8	13.9	10.2	10.7	11.1	11.5	+1	+4	+4	
KPRF	7.0	9.3	10.3	16.8	11.3	9.7	7.1	8.3	14.2	7.5	9.0	8.7	7.2	6.2	8.5	7.9	0	-2	+1	
Just Russia	7.8	8.8	5.6	27.2	4.6	3.5	3.6	4.2	10.8	4.7	6.1	4.9	4.3	4.8	5.1	5.0	+1	-1	-3	
Other	1.8	-	1.9	-	0.6	0.3	0.2	0.3	-	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.5	0.3	0.3	0	-2	-1	
No party	17.8	-	29.4	-	34.9	34.4	31.8	29.4	-	26.1	23.7	30.1	30.7	34.8	29.1	29.1	0	0	+11	
It is difficult to answer	21.2	-	13.2	-	10.2	11.7	12.2	12.0	-	14.3	11.8	7.7	13.6	11.2	12.1	11.8	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 69–71%, the share of those who believe that “everything is not so bad; it is difficult to live, but possible to stand it” is 77–79%.

Positive changes are noted in the self-assessment of income. So, in April – June 2017, the proportion of people who subjectively belong to the category of “the poor and extremely poor” decreased by 4 p.p. (from 47 to 43%), which is the lowest figure for the latest six surveys and for the period from 2011 to 2016.

Together with an assessment of the current financial situation, people’s forecasts concerning the prospects of economic situation in the country and their personal well-being became more positive: the consumer sentiment index increased by three points (from 81 to 84 p.), which is also the best value for the latest six surveys.

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

Answer option	2007	2011	2013	2014	2015	2016	Aug. 2016	Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Feb. 2017	Apr. 2017	June 2017	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the latest 6 surveys compared to...		
														2016	2011	2007
Mood																
Usual condition, good mood	63.6	63.1	68.6	69.4	68.7	68.0	68.8	70.2	70.4	67.2	68.6	71.0	69.4	+1	+6	+6
I feel stress, anger, fear, depression	27.8	28.9	26.2	24.9	25.9	26.2	25.8	24.3	26.1	28.5	25.5	23.2	25.6	-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	78.0	78.3	79.5	81.1	78.2	77.3	78.7	78.9	+1	+4	+5
It's impossible to bear such plight	13.6	15.3	14.2	12.6	14.5	15.6	15.5	14.9	14.9	16.1	16.4	14.8	15.4	0	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	43.2	42.3	43.7	42.5	42.8	43.5	43.0	+1	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	49.5	48.9	47.4	47.2	47.3	43.2	47.3	-2	+3	+5
Consumer sentiment index																
Index value, points	105.9	89.6	90.3	87.6	77.1	77.7	79.4	80.8	79.4	82.0	80.8	84.3	81.1	+3	-8	-25

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

Improving social mood over the past two months occurred in six socio-demographic groups. First of all, we should note the increase in the share of positive evaluations among people 55 years of age and older (by 7 p.p., from 60 to 67%), among people with higher education (by 6 p.p., from 72 to 78%), and among those who according to their own assessments of their income, fall within the category of 20% of the poorest inhabitants of the oblast (by 9 p.p., from 49 to 58%).

The decline in the assessments of social mood in April – June was noted only in one group (although it is very significant) – among people under 30 years of age (by 5 p.p., from 81 to 76%).

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	Aug. 2016	Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Feb. 2017	Apr. 2017	June 2017	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the latest 6 surveys compared to...		
														2016	2011	2007
Sex																
Men	65.9	64.5	69.9	68.9	69.5	68.8	67.3	71.6	73.3	66.9	67.6	72.5	69.9	+1	+5	+4
Women	61.7	62.0	67.5	69.8	68.0	67.4	70.0	69.0	68.1	67.4	69.4	69.9	69.0	+2	+7	+7
Age																
Under 30	71.3	70.0	75.5	75.1	77.1	76.4	74.5	76.3	80.8	70.9	80.5	75.4	76.4	0	+6	+5
30–55	64.8	62.5	69.2	69.5	67.2	67.4	67.1	68.9	71.8	66.7	70.1	72.0	69.4	2	+7	5
Over 55	54.8	58.3	62.4	65.4	65.5	64.0	67.7	68.3	62.8	65.8	60.4	67.4	65.4	+1	+7	+11
Education																
Secondary and incomplete secondary	58.4	57.4	60.6	62.5	63.6	62.1	61.7	64.7	62.8	61.4	64.9	65.8	63.6	+1	+6	+5
Secondary vocational	64.6	63.6	68.1	70.4	70.1	68.4	68.5	72.1	72.7	67.7	69.3	70.2	70.1	+2	+6	+5
Higher and incomplete higher	68.6	68.3	77.4	76.2	72.7	74.3	76.8	74.6	76.9	73.1	71.7	78.0	75.2	+1	+7	+7
Income groups																
20% of the poorest people	51.6	45.3	46.2	50.8	51.8	52.5	56.3	55.5	57.5	44.6	49.1	57.1	53.4	+1	+8	+2
60% of the people with median income	62.9	65.3	71.9	72.3	71.0	69.4	70.4	71.8	70.7	70.8	70.6	72.9	71.2	+2	+6	+8
20% of the most prosperous people	74.9	75.3	83.3	84.8	82.0	80.9	78.5	79.3	83.5	86.3	79.9	81.3	81.5	+1	+6	+7
Territories																
Vologda	63.1	67.1	75.0	76.4	73.9	69.9	69.2	71.0	73.6	67.9	70.6	74.0	71.1	+1	+4	+8
Cherepovets	68.1	71.2	75.3	76.3	70.6	71.7	74.0	72.7	74.0	73.7	74.1	76.1	74.1	+2	+3	+6
Districts	61.6	57.1	61.6	61.8	64.6	64.8	65.7	68.1	66.6	63.1	64.3	66.6	65.7	+1	+9	+4
Oblast	63.6	63.1	68.6	69.4	68.7	68.0	68.8	70.1	70.4	67.2	68.6	71.1	69.4	+1	+6	+6

It is necessary to analyze in detail the tangible improvement in the social sentiment among people older than 55, among persons with higher and incomplete higher education, and among those who, according to their self-reported income relate to 20% of the poorest inhabitants of the oblast. Based on national studies and commentaries by experts from VTsIOM and Levada Center, we can draw the following conclusions.

First, the dramatic improvement in social mood in May 2017 among people older than 55 may be associated with a **sharply increased interest in the celebration of Victory Day** [May 9, it commemorates the victory of the Soviet Union over Nazi Germany in the Great Patriotic War 1941–1945. – Translator’s note]. According to Levada Center 76% of Russians were going to celebrate Victory Day on May 9, 2017, and this is the highest figure for the period from 2000 to 2017 (for comparison: in 2015 this figure was 65%, and in 2016 – 63%²). The growth of excitement around one of the main national holidays (especially for people of older age categories) may be associated in turn, with the April events, among which the principal one was a terrorist attack in Saint Petersburg (55% of Russians pointed that out. For comparison, the next most important events for people were Easter (28%), rising prices (20%), and the resumption of hostilities in Donbass (14%)³).

Second, the growth of positive sentiments in June 2017 among people with higher education (who are more often, in comparison with other categories of population, interested in political and economic life in the country and abroad) also cannot be considered outside the context of the April events. **They could affect the informational messages in the media**, in particular, concerning the situation in the international arena. Thus, VTsIOM experts note that “April was indeed a difficult time for Russian society: it began with a terrorist attack in the Saint Petersburg subway and during the month there were tensions in Syria, North Korea and Eurovision. As for May, it was, though a complicated, but still a more peaceful and optimistic period: Victory Day, no signs of price hike or the depreciation of the ruble. This eventually allowed the indicators of social feeling to win back April’s losses”⁴. “In conditions when the pressure of adverse circumstances is protracted, public consciousness is ready to greedily soak up any positive news. In recent months there were many such events: the emerging growth in industrial production and overall GDP, the strengthening of the ruble (society perceives it as a sign of economic growth), the rapid decline of tension around Syria and North Korea, etc. All these factors stimulate emotional uplift”⁵.

² Celebration of Victory Day. *Press release of Levada-Center of May 5, 2017*. Available at: <http://www.levada.ru/2017/05/05/deklaratsii-o-dohodah-chinovnikov/>

³ Memorable events. *Press release of Levada-Center of April 28, 2017*. Available at: <http://www.levada.ru/2017/04/28/zapomnivshiesya-sobytiya-10/>

⁴ Social feeling of Russians: a monitoring. *Press release 3398 of June 19, 2017. Official website of VTsIOM*. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=116274>

⁵ Happiness exists! *Press release 3362 of April 26, 2017. Official website of VTsIOM*. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=116179>

Third, among low-income groups the improvement of the social mood in the first half of the year, most likely, is “**seasonal**”. It is associated with the ability to use additional resources to maintain their standard of living and meet the psychological needs of employment and leisure (both are associated with the approach and the beginning of the summer season and an opportunity to work at their dachas). A corresponding trend was observed in 2015 and in 2016, although a sharp increase in positive emotions was observed not in June, but in April (in 2015 – from 38 to 56%, in 2016 – from 43 to 51%). In 2017 the rise in positive emotions occurred later (in June, from 49 to 57%), and this may be due to the attacks in Saint Petersburg and the abnormally cold and rainy climate in the spring and summer, which compromised the productivity of the entire dacha season.

Proportion of people describing their mood as “normal, fine”, in certain socio-demographic groups (retrospective analysis; percentage of the number of respondents)

Population group	2015			Dynamics + / –		2016			Dynamics + / –		2017			Dynamics + / –	
	Feb.	Apr.	June	Apr. to Feb.	June to Apr.	Feb.	Apr.	June	Apr. to Feb.	June to Apr.	Feb.	Apr.	June	Apr. to Feb.	June to Apr.
Over 55 years of age	60.7	63.7	65.9	+3	+2	61.5	63.7	59.8	+2	-4	65.8	60.4	67.4	-5	+7
Higher and incomplete higher	65.8	73.1	70.6	+7	-3	72.9	71.5	73.3	-1	+2	73.1	71.7	78.0	-1	+6
20% of the least well-off	38.3	55.6	57.1	+17	+2	42.6	51.3	52.0	+9	+1	44.6	49.1	57.1	+5	+8

Conclusion

Thus, according to the results of the sociological survey conducted in June 2017, in the dynamics of public opinion we observe some very significant, positive changes. First and foremost, they are about an improving self-assessment of people’s incomes (a decline in the share of “the poor and extremely poor”), a growth of optimistic expectations regarding the standard of living (an increase in the consumer sentiment index), as well as improving social mood in some socio-demographic groups (among people over 55; persons with higher education; 20% of the poorest).

The analysis shows that an increase in positive sentiment in June could not be considered apart from the April events, memorable, first of all, by the terrorist attack in Saint Petersburg. VTsIOM experts, commenting on the improvement of social mood, which they registered in May 2017, spoke about the combination of two factors: on the one hand, a relatively calm situation in the international political arena, on the other hand, the strengthening of the ruble exchange rate that is perceived by society “as an indicator of economic growth”⁶.

⁶ Social feeling of Russians: a monitoring. Press release 3398 of June 19, 2017. *Official website of VTsIOM*. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=116274>

However, we cannot say that VTsIOM assessments are dominated by optimistic expectations. Rather, they should be called “careful”. So, Head of VTsIOM Research Department S. L’vov notes that “receiving signals about the changes in the markers of social well-being, we still need to wait for in the next wave of the study, instead of concluding that this trend is sustainable and long term. It often turns out that the sum of factors, such as the updated fears, high-profile events, price fluctuations, general information background, etc., can momentary “bend” the trend line of social well-being in one way or another”⁷.

“The economy continues to be the main concern factor for our fellow citizens... It is a trend that reflects the specifics of unanimous reactions of our society to the current crisis (the economy is not getting rid of “extras” and reduce the income of “all”)⁸. It is for a reason that the President during his annual live TV phone-in began his conversation with the people “by answering the main question: did the economic crisis come to an end?”, “highlighting the most pressing issues that have yet to be resolved... Real incomes have been declining over the last several years, and what is even more alarming is the growing number of people below the poverty line with incomes below the minimum living wage”⁹.

It should be noted that, traditionally, the “seasonal” factor plays its part. At least, a retrospective analysis of public opinion dynamics shows that it could affect the improvement of the social mood in the most socially vulnerable population groups, whose self-reported income refers them to the category of 20% of the poorest inhabitants of the oblast. VTsIOM experts say: “One should forget that private life remains the main “generator” of happiness. **This suggests that people continue to retreat in their “inner world” of family, trying to distract themselves from the problems of the “outside world”, which continue to be perceived as very painful**”¹⁰.

Thus, it is premature to talk about the fact that positive changes observed in the dynamics of public opinion in June 2017 will become a stable trend. Autumn months will become a real “test”, when the holiday and dacha period ends, climatic conditions deteriorate and utility tariffs increase, traditionally. This is the time when we will be able to say with more confidence that the changes in the dynamics of public opinion reflect the effectiveness of the work of the authorities in maintaining the material status of broad segments of the population and social protection of vulnerable population groups.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ Toward the “Direct Line with Vladimir Putin”: critical issues that Russians are worried about. Press release 3396 of June 15, 2017. *Official website of VTsIOM*. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=116269>

⁹ Transcript of the Direct Line with Vladimir Putin, June 15, 2017. *Official website of the Russian President*. Available at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/54790>

¹⁰ Toward the “Direct Line with Vladimir Putin”: critical issues that Russians are worried about. Press release 3396 of June 15, 2017. *Official website of VTsIOM*. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=116269>