

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 June – August 2017, and also on average for the latest six polls (October 2016 – August 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 August 2017 compared with June, the level of approval of the work of the President of the Russian Federation did not change significantly (68–70%). It corresponds to an average annual indicator for 2015–2016 and is slightly higher than at the beginning of 2017 (66%). Thus from April 2017, there has been a decline in the share of negative evaluations of the President's work: for the period from April to August, 2017 – by 7 p.p. (from 24 to 17%).

The level of support for the Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation did not change significantly and is 48-50%, which is lower than in 2015–2016 (52–58%).

For reference: the nationwide level of approval of the RF President's performance remains stable. In June, July, and in the first half of August it was 83% according to VTsIOM, the share of negative assessments in this period was 10–11%.

The proportion of positive assessments of the work of the Chairman of the RF Government in June – middle of August 2017 was 51–53%, the share of negative assessments was 31–32%.

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.vscd.ac.ru/>.

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

Answer	2007	2011	2013	2014	2015	2016	Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Feb. 2017	Apr. 2017	June 2017	Aug. 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	68.4	67.3	65.7	63.6	67.5	69.7	67.0	-1	+8	-8
I don't approve	11.5	25.6	29.4	22.3	17.5	18.8	19.7	19.3	21.1	23.6	19.3	17.3	20.1	+1	-6	+9
Chairman of the RF Government*																
I approve	-*	59.3	48.9	54.2	58.1	52.3	49.4	50.4	50.4	47.5	47.9	49.7	49.2	-3	-10	-
I don't approve	-	24.7	32.8	27.6	21.7	27.6	30.6	30.1	29.8	32.8	32.1	30.9	31.1	+3	+6	-
Governor																
I approve	55.8	45.7	44.4	40.1	39.3	37.7	39.1	40.2	38.9	36.7	40.6	42.3	39.6	+2	-6	-16
I don't approve	22.2	30.5	33.2	38.9	36.2	39.3	39.3	38.5	37.8	41.1	38.9	38.7	39.1	0	+9	+17
* Included in the survey since 2008.																

There have been no substantial changes in the assessment of success of the President's actions in addressing the key problems of the country over the past two months.

There was a slight increase in the share of the Vologda Oblast residents who think that the President successfully copes with the task of strengthening international positions of Russia (by 3 p.p., from 55 to 58%) and protecting democracy (by 3 p.p., from 39 to 42%).

The share of the Vologda Oblast residents who think that the President successfully copes with the task of restoring order in the country remains stable (50–52%), as well as 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 (29–31%).

It should be noted that economic recovery and promoting the welfare of people remain the only issue on which citizens' assessments of the President's work are mostly negative: for the latest six surveys, the share of negative judgments was 1.5–2 times higher than the proportion of positive assessments.

In your opinion, how successful is the RF President in coping with challenging issues?*(as a percentage of the number of respondents)

Answer	2007	2011	2013	2014	2015	2016	Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Feb. 2017	Apr. 2017	June 2017	Aug. 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	51.4	51.9	54.5	52.4	55.3	58.1	53.9	+3	+8	-4
Unsuccessful	24.9	33.7	36.2	32.4	31.3	29.9	28.8	31.1	26.5	27.7	25.8	26.1	27.7	-2	-6	+3
Success index	133.5	112.5	109.5	118.0	120.4	121.3	122.6	120.8	128.0	124.7	129.5	132.0	126.3	+5	+14	-7
Imposing order in the country																
Successful	53.2	36.6	39.4	48.0	50.2	49.2	49.7	50.2	49.5	47.3	49.9	52.0	49.8	+1	+13	-3
Unsuccessful	34.0	50.0	47.5	39.1	37.9	36.7	35.6	36.7	36.8	38.8	35.8	35.6	36.6	0	-13	+3
Success index	119.2	86.6	91.9	108.9	112.3	112.6	114.1	113.5	112.7	108.5	114.1	116.4	113.2	+1	+27	-6
Protecting democracy and strengthening citizens' freedoms																
Successful	44.4	32.4	31.8	37.5	40.4	36.6	35.7	36.2	38.6	36.8	39.1	41.7	38.0	+1	+6	-6
Unsuccessful	37.0	48.3	51.0	45.4	41.5	44.3	44.7	44.3	41.3	43.5	39.7	38.8	42.1	-2	-6	+5
Success index	107.4	84.1	80.8	92.1	99.0	92.3	91.0	91.9	97.3	93.3	99.4	102.9	96.0	+4	+12	-11
Economic recovery and increase in citizens' welfare																
Successful	47.2	30.7	31.3	34.8	34.2	27.2	26.4	27.2	26.1	25.8	28.5	31.3	27.6	0	-3	-20
Unsuccessful	39.1	56.1	56.8	53.4	52.3	59.4	60.9	61.1	59.1	57.3	57.2	55.9	58.6	-1	+2	+19
Success index	108.1	74.6	74.5	81.4	81.8	67.8	65.5	66.1	67.0	68.5	71.3	75.4	69.0	+1	-6	-39

* 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%), LDPR – by 11%, LDPR – 11%, the Just Russia Party – by 5–6%.

Since April 2017 there has been a decrease in the proportion of people who think that no political party reflects their interests (in April – 35%, in June – 29%, in August – 26%). However, on this basis it is premature to draw any definite conclusions, since in the same period (from April to August 2017), the proportion of those who found it difficult to express their attitude to the main parties increased from 11 to 14%.

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		Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Feb. 2017	Apr. 2017	June 2017	Aug. 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	36.3	34.5	33.9	31.8	33.8	35.2	34.3	-1	+3	+4		
LDPR	7.5	11.0	7.8	15.4	7.2	7.6	6.2	10.4	21.9	12.8	13.9	10.2	10.7	11.1	10.9	11.6	+1	+4	+4		
KPRF	7.0	9.3	10.3	16.8	11.3	9.7	7.1	8.3	14.2	9.0	8.7	7.2	6.2	8.5	8.0	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	6.1	4.9	4.3	4.8	5.1	5.8	5.2	+1	0	-3		
Other	1.8	-	1.9	-	0.6	0.3	0.2	0.3	-	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.5	0.3	0.4	0.3	0	-2	-1		
No party	17.8	-	29.4	-	34.9	34.4	31.8	29.4	-	23.7	30.1	30.7	34.8	29.1	26.1	29.1	0	0	+11		
It is difficult to answer	21.2	-	13.2	-	10.2	11.7	12.2	12.0	-	11.8	7.7	13.6	11.2	12.1	13.7	11.7	0	-2	-10		

In June – August 2017, assessments of social well-being of the population improved slightly:

- the percentage of people describing their mood as positive, increased by 3 p.p. (from 71 to 74%);
- the share of those who believe that “everything is not so bad; it is difficult to live, but possible to stand it” increased from 79 to 81%;
- in addition, from April 2017, there has been a gradual increase in the consumer sentiment index, which shows the improvement of people’s forecasts concerning the prospects of the Russian economy and their personal wealth (in April 2017 – 81 p., in June – 84 p., in August – 86 p.).

However, we cannot conclude that the improvement of people’s social well-being is due to the strengthening of their financial position. The consumer sentiment of the population is still dominated by negative judgments. In addition, over the past two months there was an increase in the proportion of those who subjectively consider themselves to be “poor and extremely poor” (by 3 p.p., from 43 to 46%). Their share remains very high – almost one in two oblast residents considers himself or herself to be “poor and extremely poor”.

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

Answer	2007	2011	2013	2014	2015	2016	Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Feb. 2017	Apr. 2017	June 2017	Aug. 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	70.2	70.4	67.2	68.6	71.0	73.8	70.2	+2	+7	+7
I feel stress, anger, fear, depression	27.8	28.9	26.2	24.9	25.9	26.2	24.3	26.1	28.5	25.5	23.2	21.2	24.8	-1	-4	-3
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	79.5	81.1	78.2	77.3	78.7	80.5	79.2	+1	+4	+5
It's impossible to bear such plight	13.6	15.3	14.2	12.6	14.5	15.6	14.9	14.9	16.1	16.4	14.8	13.5	15.1	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	42.3	43.7	42.5	42.8	43.5	45.2	43.3	+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	48.9	47.4	47.2	47.3	43.2	45.8	46.6	-2	+2	+4
Consumer sentiment index																
Index value, points	105.9	89.6	90.3	87.6	77.1	77.7	80.8	79.4	82.0	80.8	84.3	86.2	82.3	+5	-7	-24
* Question: "Which category do you belong to, in your opinion?"																

Over the past two months the social mood has improved in 8 out of 14 socio-demographic groups (especially among young people – by 5 p.p., from 75 to 80%; among people with secondary vocational education – by 7p.p., from 70 to 77% and among 20% of the most well-off residents of the oblast – by 5 p.p., from 81 to 86%).

Among the most socially vulnerable groups the proportion of those who characterize their mood as “normal, good” in June – August 2017 has not changed significantly: 67–68% among people aged over 55 and 57–58% of those who according to their own assessment of their revenues refers to the category of 20% of the poorest inhabitants of the oblast.

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	Oct. 2016	Dec. 2016	Feb. 2017	Apr. 2017	June 2017	Aug. 2017	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-) the latest 6 surveys compared to...		
	2016	2011	2017	2016	2011	2007										
Sex																
Men	65.9	64.5	69.9	68.9	69.5	68.8	71.6	73.3	66.9	67.6	72.5	74.6	71.1	+2	+7	+5
Women	61.7	62.0	67.5	69.8	68.0	67.4	69.0	68.1	67.4	69.4	69.9	73.1	69.5	+2	+7	+8
Age																
Under 30	71.3	70.0	75.5	75.1	77.1	76.4	76.3	80.8	70.9	80.5	75.4	80.1	77.3	+1	+7	+6
30-55	64.8	62.5	69.2	69.5	67.2	67.4	68.9	71.8	66.7	70.1	72.0	75.9	70.9	+3	+8	+6
Over 55	54.8	58.3	62.4	65.4	65.5	64.0	68.3	62.8	65.8	60.4	67.4	67.8	65.4	+1	+7	+11
Education																
Secondary and incomplete secondary	58.4	57.4	60.6	62.5	63.6	62.1	64.7	62.8	61.4	64.9	65.8	65.2	64.1	+2	+7	+6
Secondary vocational	64.6	63.6	68.1	70.4	70.1	68.4	72.1	72.7	67.7	69.3	70.2	76.7	71.5	+3	+8	+7
Higher and incomplete higher	68.6	68.3	77.4	76.2	72.7	74.3	74.6	76.9	73.1	71.7	78.0	79.1	75.6	+1	+7	+7
Income groups																
20% of the poorest people	51.6	45.3	46.2	50.8	51.8	52.5	55.5	57.5	44.6	49.1	57.1	58.1	53.7	+1	+8	+2
60% of the people with median income	62.9	65.3	71.9	72.3	71.0	69.4	71.8	70.7	70.8	70.6	72.9	73.7	71.8	+2	+6	+9
20% of the most prosperous people	74.9	75.3	83.3	84.8	82.0	80.9	79.3	83.5	86.3	79.9	81.3	86.4	82.8	+2	+7	+8
Territories																
Vologda	63.1	67.1	75.0	76.4	73.9	69.9	71.0	73.6	67.9	70.6	74.0	77.0	72.4	+2	+5	+9
Cherepovets	68.1	71.2	75.3	76.3	70.6	71.7	72.7	74.0	73.7	74.1	76.1	77.9	74.8	+3	+4	+7
Districts	61.6	57.1	61.6	61.8	64.6	64.8	68.1	66.6	63.1	64.3	66.6	69.7	66.4	+2	+9	+5
Oblast	63.6	63.1	68.6	69.4	68.7	68.0	70.1	70.4	67.2	68.6	71.1	73.8	70.2	+2	+7	+7

Conclusion

Characterizing the social mood of Russians in July – August 2017, VTsIOM experts say that **“in the summer months, the behavior of most indicators of social well-being is quite stable (fluctuations are within three percentage points)”**². This can be also said concerning people’s attitude toward the activities of state bodies and political parties: **“The situation with political ratings is relatively stable. The fluctuations that we registered are wave-like. In the summer months, volatility of the indicators is traditionally low. This situation will continue, obviously, to the onset of fall and the completion of the period of vacation”**³.

In general, the dynamics of public opinion in the Vologda Oblast corresponds to the overall Russian trend: **according to the key indicators of the monitoring (including the attitude toward the work of the head of state and evaluation of social well-being) the changes do not exceed 3 p.p.**

Perhaps the most positive trend can be seen in a gradual increase in the consumer sentiment index. **The value of CSI remains extremely low, but in April 2017 it was 81 points, in June – 84 p., in August – 86 p.**

We cannot but agree with the opinion of Russian experts that before the fall and end of the period of vacation we can hardly expect any tangible changes in the dynamics of public opinion. That is why their conclusion that **“the crisis has come to an end”** seem premature to us⁴.

According to the public opinion monitoring carried out by ISEDT RAS, the proportion of Vologda Oblast residents who consider themselves to be “poor and extremely poor” over the last two months has increased (from 43 to 46%), while in the socially vulnerable groups (people over 55 years of age and members of the category of 20% of the poorest), there have been no improvements in the dynamics of social mood.

VTsIOM experts also note that **“today Russians are worried about financial problems even more than a year ago... For three months in a row, low wages and the low standard of living top the list of critical issues – in July they were named by 24% of Russians (against 18% in January and 14% in July 2016). One in five residents (21%) is concerned about the state of the economy (at the beginning of the year – 16%). The top three problems include social policy: 18% in July (a year ago its share was half this figure – 9%). The urgency of health sector issues also remains high: according to a recent survey, this topic is of concern to 17% of citizens (in January the figure was at the same level, in July 2016 it was 10%). With regard to unemployment, since the beginning of the year this indicator had no sharp ups or downs (variations were**

² Social well-being of Russians: monitoring: VTsIOM press release 3437. *Official website of VTsIOM*. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=116346>

³ Ratings of parties, ratings of trust to politicians, ratings of approval of work of state institutions: VTsIOM press release 3433. *Official website of VTsIOM*. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=116338> (comment of M. Mamonov, head of VTsIOM practice of political analysis and consulting).

⁴ The problematic background of the country: monitoring: VTsIOM press release 3440. *Official website of VTsIOM*. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=116346>

in the range of 12–16%), according to the data of the latest survey, 14% of respondents named this issue among major problems. The same can be said for the problems in education (from January to July, variations were in the range of 10–14%, in July – 12%)”⁵. Summary of experts is as follows: **“The ranking of pressing issues is a barometer of mismatch between reality and expectations, it shows the main points of deprivation followed by a request to the government. To date, the most urgent issue is the problem of financial welfare, low wages and low standard of living that brings to the fore the second subject – social support”**⁶.

Thus, today, in our opinion, we cannot speak with optimism about overcoming the crisis and negative trends in addressing the key concerns of the population. First, because the real “test” for the dynamics of public opinion (and, therefore, for the authorities at all levels) will be the autumn-winter period. Second, because the problems of the Russian economy, as shown by the results of long term monitoring studies carried out by ISEDT RAS, are not concentrated around crisis periods, but are more profound and long-term, and are associated with the effectiveness of management decisions and with the motives of those who make the decisions.

Future trends in social attitudes of Russian society will be seen in the results of the next stages of ISEDT RAS monitoring.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ *Ibidem* (comment by Yu. Baskakova, supervisor of the practice of social modelling and forecasting at VTsIOM Department of Research).