

The section “Public Opinion Monitoring of the State of the Russian Society” presents the results of regular sociological polls conducted by VoIRC RAS on the territory of the Vologda Oblast. The information was published in our journal since March 2009 (Issue 1(5)) as part of the article from the editor-in-chef.

Since October 2017 onward (beginning with Issue 5(53)) “Public Opinion Monitoring” is published as an Appendix to the issue presenting reference information about major trends in social well-being of the region’s residents.

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 VoIRC 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 2017, and also on average for the latest six polls (February – October 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 are presented beginning from 2013.

In October – December 2017, the level of approval of the work of the President of the Russian Federation did not change significantly (68–69%). It corresponds to an average annual indicator for 2015–2016 and is slightly higher than at the beginning of 2017 (66%). The share of negative evaluations of the President’s work for the past two months is 19%.

The level of support of the work of the Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation in the past two months slightly decreased (by 2 p.p., from 52 to 50%). It is lower than in 2014–2016 (52–58%). The proportion of negative assessments in October – December 2017 was 30–31% (it was 23–28% in 2014–2016).

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 information on the results of VoIRC RAS polls is available at <http://www.vscs.ac.ru/>

For reference: the nationwide level of approval of the RF President's performance remains stable. According to VTsIOM, In October and in the first half of December 2017, it was 82–83% (the share of negative assessments was 10–11%). According to Levada-Center, the level of support for the President during the same period amounted to 81–82% (the share of negative judgments was 17–18%)

The proportion of positive assessments of the work of the Chairman of the RF Government according to VTsIOM in October and until the beginning of December 2017 was 54% (the share of negative assessments was 31%); according to Levada-Center, the share of positive assessments was 44–46% (the share of negative assessments was 53–55%).

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

Answer	2007	2011	2013	2014	2015	2016	Feb. 2017	Apr. 2017	June 2017	Aug. 2017	Oct. 2017	Dec. 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	65.7	63.6	67.5	69.7	68.3	68.9	67.3	-1	+9	-8
I don't approve	11.5	25.6	29.4	22.3	17.5	18.8	21.1	23.6	19.3	17.3	19.4	19.3	20.0	+1	-6	+9
Chairman of the RF Government*																
I approve	59.3	48.9	54.2	58.1	52.3	50.4	47.5	47.9	49.7	51.5	49.9	49.5	-3	-10	-	-
I don't approve	-	24.7	32.8	27.6	21.7	27.6	29.8	32.8	32.1	30.9	29.9	31.3	31.1	+4	+6	-
Governor																
I approve	55.8	45.7	44.4	40.1	39.3	37.7	38.9	36.7	40.6	42.3	40.8	39.4	39.8	+2	-6	-16
I don't approve	22.2	30.5	33.2	38.9	36.2	39.3	37.8	41.1	38.9	38.7	39.2	40.1	39.3	0	+9	+17

* Included in the survey since 2008.

There were no substantial changes in the assessment of success of the President's work on addressing the key problems of the country over the past two months:

- the share of those who think that the President successfully copes with the task of strengthening international positions of Russia is 57–58%, which is higher than the average for 2017 (56%);
- the share of those who think that the President successfully copes with the task of restoring order in the country is 52–53% (national average for 2017 is 51%);
- the share of those who believe that the President is successful in protecting democracy and strengthening citizens' freedoms is 43% (national average for 2017 is 40%);
- 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 32% (national average for 2017 is 29%).

It should be noted that the President's work to address material problems of the population still finds the least support among the people; however, in the course of 2017 (from February to December), the proportion of people who assess positively the work of the President in this direction increased notably (by 6 p.p., from 26 to 32%).

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	Feb. 2017	Apr. 2017	June 2017	Aug. 2017	Oct. 2017	Dec. 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	54.5	52.4	55.3	58.1	57.6	56.5	55.7	+5	+10	-3
Unsuccessful	24.9	33.7	36.2	32.4	31.3	29.9	26.5	27.7	25.8	26.1	26.3	28.3	26.8	-3	-7	+2
<i>Success index</i>	<i>133.5</i>	<i>112.5</i>	<i>109.5</i>	<i>118.0</i>	<i>120.4</i>	<i>121.3</i>	<i>128.0</i>	<i>124.7</i>	<i>129.5</i>	<i>132.0</i>	<i>131.3</i>	<i>128.3</i>	129.0	+8	+16	-5
Imposing order in the country																
Successful	53.2	36.6	39.4	48.0	50.2	49.2	49.5	47.3	49.9	52.0	52.7	52.0	50.6	+1	+14	-3
Unsuccessful	34.0	50.0	47.5	39.1	37.9	36.7	36.8	38.8	35.8	35.6	35.1	34.6	36.1	-1	-14	+2
<i>Success index</i>	<i>119.2</i>	<i>86.6</i>	<i>91.9</i>	<i>108.9</i>	<i>112.3</i>	<i>112.6</i>	<i>112.7</i>	<i>108.5</i>	<i>114.1</i>	<i>116.4</i>	<i>117.6</i>	<i>117.4</i>	114.5	+2	+28	-5
Protecting democracy and strengthening citizens' freedoms																
Successful	44.4	32.4	31.8	37.5	40.4	36.6	38.6	36.8	39.1	41.7	42.5	43.3	40.3	+4	+8	-4
Unsuccessful	37.0	48.3	51.0	45.4	41.5	44.3	41.3	43.5	39.7	38.8	38.3	39.3	40.2	-4	-8	+3
<i>Success index</i>	<i>107.4</i>	<i>84.1</i>	<i>80.8</i>	<i>92.1</i>	<i>99.0</i>	<i>92.3</i>	<i>97.3</i>	<i>93.3</i>	<i>99.4</i>	<i>102.9</i>	<i>104.2</i>	<i>103.9</i>	100.2	+8	+16	-7
Economic recovery and increase in citizens' welfare																
Successful	47.2	30.7	31.3	34.8	34.2	27.2	26.1	25.8	28.5	31.3	32.3	31.6	29.3	+2	-1	-18
Unsuccessful	39.1	56.1	56.8	53.4	52.3	59.4	59.1	57.3	57.2	55.9	55.3	56.3	56.9	-3	+1	+18
<i>Success index</i>	<i>108.1</i>	<i>74.6</i>	<i>74.5</i>	<i>81.4</i>	<i>81.8</i>	<i>67.8</i>	<i>67.0</i>	<i>68.5</i>	<i>71.3</i>	<i>75.4</i>	<i>77.0</i>	<i>75.3</i>	72.4	+5	-2	-36

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

Since April 2017, the structure of Russians' preferences concerning political parties shows a gradual growth of support of the United Russia Party (from April to December 2017 – by 6 p.p., from 32 to 38%). The positions of other parties did not change significantly.

Besides, from April to December 2017, there was a reduction in the proportion of people who believe that none of the major parties expresses their interests (by 6 p.p., from 35 to 29%) and the proportion of those who still finds it difficult to decide on their party and political preferences (by 3 p.p., from 11 to 8%).

Along with these generally positive trends indicating the growing interest of people in political life of the country, and the increase in the support of the ruling party, we cannot but point out that for the past two months the share of those who are not satisfied with any of the political forces represented in Parliament increased by 3 p.p. (from 26 to 29%). As we approach the presidential election scheduled for March 2018, the trend in this indicator will correlate more and more with the final number of voters who will participate in Russia's most important election.

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		Feb. 2017	Apr. 2017	June 2017	Aug. 2017	Oct. 2017	Dec. 2017	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the latest 6 surveys compared to...		
		2011	2011	2011	2011					2016	2016								2016	2016	2016
United Russia	30.2	60.5	31.1	33.4	29.4	32.8	38.8	35.4	38.0	33.9	31.8	33.8	35.2	35.6	37.9	34.7	-1	+4	+5		
LDPR	7.5	11.0	7.8	15.4	7.2	7.6	6.2	10.4	21.9	10.2	10.7	11.1	10.9	11.5	11.6	11.0	+1	+3	+4		
KPRF	7.0	9.3	10.3	16.8	11.3	9.7	7.1	8.3	14.2	7.2	6.2	8.5	8.0	7.3	8.1	7.6	-1	-3	+1		
Just Russia	7.8	8.8	5.6	27.2	4.6	3.5	3.6	4.2	10.8	4.3	4.8	5.1	5.8	4.5	4.3	4.8	+1	-1	-3		
Other	1.8	-	1.9	-	0.6	0.3	0.2	0.3	-	0.1	0.5	0.3	0.4	0.8	1.1	0.5	0	-1	-1		
No party	17.8	-	29.4	-	34.9	34.4	31.8	29.4	-	30.7	34.8	29.1	26.1	26.2	28.5	29.2	0	0	+11		
I'm not sure	21.2	-	13.2	-	10.2	11.7	12.2	12.0	-	13.6	11.2	12.1	13.7	14.1	8.6	12.2	0	-1	-9		

After a noticeable (3–7 p.p.) decline in the main indicators of social well-being in August – October 2017, at the end of the year there was a consistently high proportion of positive assessments of mood (71%) and the stock of patience (74–77%).

This may be due to the fact that the proportion of the Oblast residents who consider themselves to be “poor and extremely poor” declined slightly in October – December 2017 (by 2 p.p., from 49 to 47%) and reached the average level for 2017 (47%).

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the share of the “poor and extremely poor” among the inhabitants of the Oblast still exceeds the proportion of people with “average income” (47 and 43%, respectively on average for 2017). Although the consumer sentiment index, the dynamics of which demonstrates the forward-looking expectations of the population, has remained stable since August 2017 (86–87 p.), still has not reached 100 points, indicating the prevalence of negative expectations of people regarding the development of their personal well-being and economic situation in the country as a whole.

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

Answer	2007	2011	2013	2014	2015	2016	Feb. 2017	Apr. 2017	June 2017	Aug. 2017	Oct. 2017	Dec. 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	67.2	68.6	71.0	73.8	71.0	70.5	70.4	+2	+7	+7
I feel stress, anger, fear, depression	27.8	28.9	26.2	24.9	25.9	26.2	28.5	25.5	23.2	21.2	22.8	24.0	24.2	-2	-5	-4
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	77.3	78.7	80.5	74.4	77.1	77.7	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	14.8	13.5	17.5	16.2	15.8	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	42.5	42.8	43.5	45.2	43.0	41.7	43.1	+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	47.2	47.3	43.2	45.8	48.8	47.1	46.6	-2	+2	+4
Consumer sentiment index																
Index value, points	105.9	89.6	90.3	87.6	77.1	77.7	82.0	80.8	84.3	86.2	86.7	87.3	84.6	+7	-5	-21
* Question: "Which category do you belong to, in your opinion?"																

In October – December 2017, the proportion of positive assessments of social mood has not changed in the majority of socio-demographic groups. The increase in the share of people whose condition is “normal, and fine” is registered among those whose self-reported income relates to 20% of the wealthiest inhabitants of the Oblast (by 4 p.p., from 82 to 86%) and among people under 30 years of age (by 3 p.p., from 79 to 82%).

At the same time for the last two months there was a significant decrease in the share of positive assessments of social sentiment among people over 55 years of age by 5 p.p., from 66 to 61%) and among those who, according to their self-reported income refer to the 20% of the poorest inhabitants of the Oblast (by 7 p.p., from 58 to 51%).

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. 2017	Apr. 2017	June 2017	Aug. 2017	Oct. 2017	Dec. 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	66.9	67.6	72.5	74.6	71.3	70.8	70.6	+2	+6	+5
Women	61.7	62.0	67.5	69.8	68.0	67.4	67.4	69.4	69.9	73.1	70.8	70.3	70.2	+3	+8	+8
Age																
Under 30	71.3	70.0	75.5	75.1	77.1	76.4	70.9	80.5	75.4	80.1	79.4	82.2	78.1	+2	+8	+7
30-55	64.8	62.5	69.2	69.5	67.2	67.4	66.7	70.1	72.0	75.9	71.4	73.1	71.5	+4	+9	+7
Over 55	54.8	58.3	62.4	65.4	65.5	64.0	65.8	60.4	67.4	67.8	66.4	61.4	64.9	+1	+7	+10
Education																
Secondary and incomplete secondary	58.4	57.4	60.6	62.5	63.6	62.1	61.4	64.9	65.8	65.2	63.3	61.2	63.6	+2	+6	+5
Secondary vocational	64.6	63.6	68.1	70.4	70.1	68.4	67.7	69.3	70.2	76.7	73.3	75.0	72.0	+4	+8	+7
Higher and incomplete higher	68.6	68.3	77.4	76.2	72.7	74.3	73.1	71.7	78.0	79.1	77.1	75.6	75.8	+1	+7	+7
Income groups																
Bottom 20%	51.6	45.3	46.2	50.8	51.8	52.5	44.6	49.1	57.1	58.1	57.9	50.7	52.9	0	+8	+1
Middle 60%	2.9	65.3	71.9	72.3	71.0	69.4	70.8	70.6	72.9	73.7	71.7	72.0	72.0	+3	+7	+9
Top 20%	74.9	75.3	83.3	84.8	82.0	80.9	86.3	79.9	81.3	86.4	82.1	86.2	83.7	+3	+8	+9
Territories																
Vologda	63.1	67.1	75.0	76.4	73.9	69.9	67.9	70.6	74.0	77.0	74.0	72.2	72.6	+3	+6	+10
Cherepovets	68.1	71.2	75.3	76.3	70.6	71.7	73.7	74.1	76.1	77.9	76.9	75.2	75.7	+4	+4	+8
Districts	61.6	57.1	61.6	61.8	64.6	64.8	63.1	64.3	66.6	69.7	66.1	66.9	66.1	+1	+9	+5
Oblast	63.6	63.1	68.6	69.4	68.7	68.0	67.2	68.6	71.1	73.8	71.1	70.5	70.4	+2	+7	+7

CONCLUSION

The results of the public opinion monitoring carried out in 2017 allow us to draw the following conclusions:

1. In society there remains a high level of support for the incumbent President. For the period from February to December 2017, the proportion of positive assessments of the work of the head of state increased by 3 p.p. (from 66 to 69%). The proportion of those who think that the President is successful in addressing key problems of the country increased by 2–6 p.p. It is important to note that in the first place the evaluation of success of the President's work on economic recovery and growth of welfare of citizens improved (by 6 p.p., from 26 to 32%).

However, the lack of negative dynamics in the assessment of the work of the key state authority does not allow us to talk about people's satisfaction with the situation in the country, and can only prove the absence of any really promising options of the course of development from the point of view of the people.

Still, it is necessary to point out that:

- the success of the President's work to raise the welfare of the population is noted only by 32%, while 55–59% of respondents express the opposite point of view.
- the work of the Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation is supported by about 50% of the Oblast residents, however, 30% (one in three people) characterize it as negative;
- the proportion of people who believe that the ruling party United Russia reflects their interests, for the period from February to December 2017, increased by 4 p.p. (from 34 to 38%). However, can we say that this level is sufficient for the political force that has been dominating the political scene of the country for more than 20 years and has a constitutional majority in the State Duma, taking into account the fact that more than 60% of the population do not consider themselves to be its supporters?

2. Throughout 2017 in the assessments of public opinion the relevance of financial issues remained high.

This is indicated not only by a substantial (30%) share of negative judgments about the work of the Prime Minister (who is responsible for the solution of these problems) and the high level (55–59%) of negative judgments about the President's work to address financial problems of the population, but also by the fact that almost half of the Oblast residents (47%) consider themselves “poor and extremely poor” and only 42% of the population belong to the category of people with “average income”. Over the past year of 2017, there were no positive changes in the dynamics of social self-identification of the population.

The consumer sentiment index, despite a 5 point increase (from 82 to 87 p.) in the period from February to December 2017, remains extremely low. In addition, the results of the latest wave of the surveys allow us to conclude that material problems have become more important to the public. This is evidenced by the fact that in October – December 2017 among the 14 socio-demographic groups the decline in the assessments of social mood (quite a significant decline by 5–7 p.p.) occurred only in socially vulnerable groups – among pensioners (from 66 to 61%) and among the people who according to their self-reported income belong to the 20% of the poorest inhabitants of the Oblast (from 58 to 51%).

3. Despite the importance of financial problems, the indicators of social well-being in 2017 remained fairly steady:

- the percentage of people describing their emotional state as positive for the period from February to December 2017 increased by 4 p.p. (from 67 to 71%); moreover, the positive changes occurred in all main socio-demographic groups, with the exception of socially vulnerable groups;
- the stock of patience remains consistently high (78% of the Oblast residents believe that “everything is not so bad; it's difficult to live, but it's possible to stand it”; and only 16% of respondents share the opposite opinion).

VTsIOM experts point out that the stable evaluation of social mood by Russians can be associated with the “absence of economic shocks in the past year... Russians have adapted to the economic situation. However, the optimism about the future is coming slowly: only one in three people expects their lives to be improved in the foreseeable future. The lack of optimism may partly explain the overestimations of current period: excess of pessimism, negative forecasts and expectations create a favorable background for comparing what we have now with what we have feared”².

We should also note that the most favorable assessments of social mood are typical of young people under the age of 30 years (70–80%) high-income groups (86%) and individuals with higher education (73–76%), that is, for those population groups who, by their socio-demographic characteristics form the basis of a “self-sufficient” part of the Russian society³ – “Russians, who take responsibility for what happens, who are guided by their own strength, who are confident in their ability to provide for themselves and their families and who do not need support from the state in this regard”⁴.

A positive emotional state in these population groups is critical, because, according to experts at the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, “Self-sufficient” Russians form a serious social base for stable and sustainable status and development in the Russian society. This is especially important in the current socio-political situation, when Russia is facing new and serious political, economic and socio-cultural challenges... In conditions when the state is forced to choose new landmarks for its development, to enter into the saving mode, which would inevitably affect the implementation of social policies, previously adopted social programs and weaken the state support of citizens, of particular importance is the fact that in society there are groups that are willing to take responsibility for their own lives without burdening the state with their dependence on it”⁵.

Perhaps the high level of optimism typical of those groups, which by their socio-demographic parameters belong to the category of “self-sufficient” Russians, can be considered a “litmus test” that allows us to summarize the main conclusion of the conducted research: the Russian society has many (primarily financial) problems, but seeks to solve them step-by-step in the framework of the current course of political and economic development of the country.

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² Social well-being of Russians: on the threshold of a new year. *VTsIOM Press Release*, 2017, no. 3537. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=116600> (Opinion of the head of VTsIOM practice of social modeling and forecasting Yu. Baskakova).

³ As the experts from the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences point out, “the self-sufficient part of society is localized mainly among young and well-off Russians” (source: Russian everyday life in crisis: how do we live and feel? *Information-analytical summary on the results of a nationwide study*. Moscow, 2015. P.16).

⁴ *Ibidem*. C. 16.

⁵ Russian society in the context of new realities. *Information-analytical summary on the results of a nationwide study*. Moscow, 2014. P. 8.