

PUBLIC OPINION MONITORING

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 April – June 2018, and also on average for the latest six polls (August 2017 – June 2018). 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 2014.

In February – April 2018, the level of approval of the work of the President of the Russian Federation did not change and was 70%, which corresponds to an average annual indicator for 2015–2017. The share of negative evaluations of the President's work is 18%, which is lower than at the beginning of the year (21%).

The level of support of the work of the Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation for the past two months also did not change: the share of positive assessments is 52% (which corresponds to the level of 2016–2017), the share of negative assessments is 28% (lower than in February 2018 (31%)).

For reference: according to VTsIOM, the share of positive assessments of the President's work nationwide amounted to 81% in April – May 2018 (the share of negative judgments was 11–12%). In the first half of June, VTsIOM recorded a significant decrease in the level of support for the head of state: the share of positive assessments decreased by 4 p.p. (from 81 to 77%), the share of negative assessments increased by 2 p.p. (from 12 to 14%).

According to Levada-Center, the proportion of positive assessments of the President's work decreased by 3 p.p. in April – May (from 82 to 79%), the share of negative assessments increased by 3 p.p. (from 17 to 20%).

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.vssc.ac.ru/>.

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

Answer	2007	2011	2014	2015	2016	2017	Aug. 2017	Oct. 2017	Dec. 2017	Feb. 2018	Apr. 2018	June 2018	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the latest 6 surveys compared to ...		
														2017	2011	2007
RF President																
I approve	75.3	58.7	64.1	69.1	67.8	67.3	69.7	68.3	68.9	68.7	68.1	70.1	69.0	+2	+10	-6
I don't approve	11.5	25.6	22.3	17.5	18.8	20.0	17.3	19.4	19.3	20.8	18.4	17.5	18.8	-1	-7	+7
Chairman of the RF Government*																
I approve	-*	59.3	54.2	58.1	52.3	49.5	49.7	51.5	49.9	48.3	49.9	52.0	50.2	+1	-9	-
I don't approve	-	24.7	27.6	21.7	27.6	31.1	30.9	29.9	31.3	30.8	27.8	27.5	29.7	-1	+5	-
Governor																
I approve	55.8	45.7	40.1	39.3	37.7	39.8	42.3	40.8	39.4	39.3	39.5	40.5	40.3	+1	-5	-16
I don't approve	22.2	30.5	38.9	36.2	39.3	39.3	38.7	39.2	40.1	37.9	36.1	35.3	37.9	-1	+7	+16
* Included in the survey since 2008.																

In April – June 2018, there were no changes in Vologda Oblast residents' assessments of success of the President's work on addressing key problems of the country:

- 55–56% of respondents consider as successful his actions to strengthen Russia's international position and restore order in the country;
- 43% positively assess his work on protecting democracy and strengthening citizens' freedoms;
- 32% approve his work aimed to raise the economy and enhance the welfare of citizens.

On most key issues (except strengthening Russia's international positions), the opinions of Vologda Oblast residents in the middle of 2018 are slightly better than the average for 2017 (by 3–4 p.p.).

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

Answer	2007	2011	2014	2015	2016	2017	Aug. 2017	Oct. 2017	Dec. 2017	Feb. 2018	Apr. 2018	June 2018	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the latest 6 surveys compared to ...		
														2017	2011	2007
Strengthening Russia's international standing																
Successful	58.4	46.2	50.4	51.7	51.2	55.7	58.1	57.6	56.5	55.2	56.1	55.6	56.5	+1	+10	-2
Unsuccessful	24.9	33.7	32.4	31.3	29.9	26.8	26.1	26.3	28.3	26.9	26.9	26.7	26.9	0	-7	+2
<i>Success index</i>	133.5	112.5	118.0	120.4	121.3	129.0	132.0	131.3	128.3	128.3	129.2	128.9	129.7	+1	+17	-4
Imposing order in the country																
Successful	53.2	36.6	48.0	50.2	49.2	50.6	52.0	52.7	52.0	50.9	54.2	55.1	52.8	+2	+16	0
Unsuccessful	34.0	50.0	39.1	37.9	36.7	36.1	35.6	35.1	34.6	32.7	30.8	32.9	33.6	-2	-16	0
<i>Success index</i>	119.2	86.6	108.9	112.3	112.6	114.5	116.4	117.6	117.4	118.2	123.4	122.2	119.2	+5	+33	0
Protecting democracy and strengthening citizens' freedoms																
Successful	44.4	32.4	37.5	40.4	36.6	40.3	41.7	42.5	43.3	42.8	42.9	43.4	42.8	+2	+10	-2
Unsuccessful	37.0	48.3	45.4	41.5	44.3	40.2	38.8	38.3	39.3	38.7	37.1	38.1	38.4	-2	-10	+1
<i>Success index</i>	107.4	84.1	92.1	99.0	92.3	100.2	102.9	104.2	103.9	104.1	105.8	105.3	104.4	+4	+20	-3
Economic recovery and increase in citizens' welfare																
Successful	47.2	30.7	34.8	34.2	27.2	29.3	31.3	32.3	31.6	31.0	31.3	32.3	31.6	+2	+1	-16
Unsuccessful	39.1	56.1	53.4	52.3	59.4	56.9	55.9	55.3	56.3	53.7	55.3	55.2	55.3	-2	-1	+16
<i>Success index</i>	108.1	74.6	81.4	81.8	67.8	72.4	75.4	77.0	75.3	77.3	76.0	77.1	76.4	+4	+2	-32

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

The structure of Vologda Oblast residents' preferences concerning political parties did not change significantly for the entire period of February – June 2018: the United Russia party is on top (38–40%), LDPR and KPRF are supported by 7–10%, the Just Russia party – by 2–4%.

We should point out that in June 2018 (compared to February 2018 and also to the average for 2017) there was a decline in the proportion of those who believe that none of the major political parties expresses their interests (by 3 p.p., from 30 to 27%).

Which party expresses your interests? (percentage of respondents)

Party	2007	Election to the RF State Duma 2007, fact		Election to the RF State Duma 2011, fact		2014	2015	2016	Election to the RF State Duma 2016, fact		2017	Aug. 2017	Oct. 2017	Dec. 2017	Feb. 2018	Apr. 2018	June 2018	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the latest 6 surveys compared to ...		
																			2017	2011	2007
United Russia	30.2	60.5	31.1	33.4	32.8	38.8	35.4	38.0	34.7	35.2	35.6	37.9	38.4	39.7	38.9	37.6	+3	+7	+7		
LDPR	7.5	11.0	7.8	15.4	7.6	6.2	10.4	21.9	11.0	10.9	11.5	11.6	10.1	9.6	9.7	10.6	0	+3	+3		
KPRF	7.0	9.3	10.3	16.8	9.7	7.1	8.3	14.2	7.6	8.0	7.3	8.1	7.1	8.1	8.7	7.9	0	-2	+1		
Just Russia	7.8	8.8	5.6	27.2	3.5	3.6	4.2	10.8	4.8	5.8	4.5	4.3	3.5	2.5	2.3	3.8	-1	-2	-4		
Other	1.8	-	1.9	-	0.3	0.2	0.3	-	0.5	0.4	0.8	1.1	0.9	1.2	0.5	0.8	0	-1	-1		
None	17.8	-	29.4	-	34.4	31.8	29.4	-	29.2	26.1	26.2	28.5	28.8	26.2	26.7	27.1	-2	-2	+9		
It's difficult to answer	21.2	-	13.2	-	11.7	12.2	12.0	-	12.2	13.7	14.1	8.6	11.1	12.7	13.3	12.3	0	-1	-9		

In April – June 2018, the share of positive assessments of social mood was 72–73%, which is slightly higher than at the beginning of the year and the average for 2017 (69–70%).

In addition, over the last two months, the proportion of those who believe that “everything is not so bad; it’s difficult to live, but it’s possible to stand it” decreased slightly for the past two months from 79 to 77%; however, in general it corresponds to the indicators of February 2018 and the average annual data for 2017 (77–78%).

The structure of people’s social self-identification remains stable: the proportion of people who subjectively consider themselves to have “average income” is 43%; the share of “the poor and extremely poor” is slightly higher: 45–46%.

It is necessary to point out a gradual growth of the consumer sentiment index (CSI), indicating an improvement in people’s forecasts regarding the prospects of the economic situation in the country and their own financial situation. On average, the CSI was 85 points in 2017, 89 p. in early 2018, and 92 p. in June 2018. Thus, the positive trend of increasing the share of people’s optimistic forecasts is obvious, although its pace remains minimal and, in fact, the CSI still remains below 100 points, which indicates the predominance of pessimistic judgments about the prospects of their financial situation.

Estimation of social condition (percentage of respondents)

Answer	2007	2011	2014	2015	2016	2017	Aug. 2017	Oct. 2017	Dec. 2017	Feb. 2018	Apr. 2018	June 2018	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the latest 6 surveys compared to ...		
														2017	2011	2007
Mood																
Usual condition, good mood	63.6	63.1	69.4	68.7	68.0	70.4	73.8	71.0	70.5	68.6	71.5	72.5	71.3	+1	+8	+8
I feel stress, anger, fear, depression	27.8	28.9	24.9	25.9	26.2	24.2	21.2	22.8	24.0	23.4	23.1	22.8	22.9	-1	-6	-5
Stock of patience																
Everything is not so bad; it's difficult to live, but it's possible to stand it	74.1	74.8	80.8	78.4	78.0	77.7	80.5	74.4	77.1	76.2	79.0	76.5	77.3	0	+2	+3
It's impossible to bear such plight	13.6	15.3	12.6	14.5	15.6	15.8	13.5	17.5	16.2	16.3	14.8	16.6	15.8	0	+1	+2
Social self-identification*																
The share of people who consider themselves to have average income	48.2	43.1	43.2	38.7	42.1	43.1	45.2	43.0	41.7	41.2	41.8	43.1	42.7	0	0	-6
The share of people who consider themselves to be poor and extremely poor	42.4	44.3	49.1	50.7	49.0	46.6	45.8	48.8	47.1	46.2	46.5	45.3	46.6	0	+2	+4
Consumer sentiment index																
Index value, points	105.9	89.6	87.6	77.1	77.7	84.6	86.2	86.7	87.3	89.2	90.3	92.2	88.7	+4	-1	-17
* Question: "Which category do you belong to, in your opinion?"																

In the context of the main socio-demographic groups, there were no significant changes in the dynamics of positive assessments of social sentiment in the last two months. At the same time, it is noteworthy that, compared with the beginning of the year, the assessments of social sentiment slightly improved (by 3–7 p.p.) in almost all socio-demographic groups (except for people over 55 years of age, people with higher and incomplete higher education, and 20% of the most well-off residents of the Vologda Oblast). And the positive changes over the past six months were especially significant among the people who according to self-assessments of their well-being belong to the category of the bottom 20% of Vologda Oblast residents (from February to June, the share of positive assessments in this group increased by 12 p.p., from 48 to 60%).

Social mood in different social groups (answer: "Good mood, normal condition", percentage of respondents)

Population group	2007	2011	2014	2015	2016	2017	Aug. 2017	Oct. 2017	Dec. 2017	Feb. 2018	Apr. 2018	June 2018	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the latest 6 surveys compared to ...		
														2017	2011	2007
Sex																
Men	65.9	64.5	68.9	69.5	68.8	70.6	74.6	71.3	70.8	71.0	73.4	74.5	72.6	+2	+8	+7
Women	61.7	62.0	69.8	68.0	67.4	70.2	73.1	70.8	70.3	66.6	70.0	70.9	70.3	0	+8	+9
Age																
Under 30	71.3	70.0	75.1	77.1	76.4	78.1	80.1	79.4	82.2	74.2	79.6	81.3	79.5	+1	+9	+8
30-55	64.8	62.5	69.5	67.2	67.4	71.5	75.9	71.4	73.1	68.8	74.0	75.1	73.1	+2	+11	+8
Over 55	54.8	58.3	65.4	65.5	64.0	64.9	67.8	66.4	61.4	65.6	64.2	64.7	65.0	0	+7	+10
Education																
Secondary and incomplete secondary	58.4	57.4	62.5	63.6	62.1	63.6	65.2	63.3	61.2	60.5	65.5	64.8	63.4	0	+6	+5
Secondary vocational	64.6	63.6	70.4	70.1	68.4	72.0	76.7	73.3	75.0	68.9	72.7	74.9	73.6	+2	+10	+9
Higher and incomplete higher	68.6	68.3	76.2	72.7	74.3	75.8	79.1	77.1	75.6	77.9	76.2	77.4	77.2	+1	+9	+9
Income groups																
Bottom 20%	51.6	45.3	50.8	51.8	52.5	52.9	58.1	57.9	50.7	47.7	61.8	59.6	56.0	+3	+11	+4
Middle 60%	62.9	65.3	72.3	71.0	69.4	72.0	73.7	71.7	72.0	70.3	71.7	73.4	72.1	0	+7	+9
Top 20%	74.9	75.3	84.8	82.0	80.9	83.7	86.4	82.1	86.2	82.2	81.5	82.5	83.5	0	+8	+9
Territories																
Vologda	63.1	67.1	76.4	73.9	69.9	72.6	77.0	74.0	72.2	71.0	73.5	75.4	73.9	+1	+7	+11
Cherepovets	68.1	71.2	76.3	70.6	71.7	75.7	77.9	76.9	75.2	71.5	75.0	76.7	75.5	0	+4	+7
Districts	61.6	57.1	61.8	64.6	64.8	66.1	69.7	66.1	66.9	65.6	68.3	68.6	67.5	+1	+10	+6
Oblast	63.6	63.1	69.4	68.7	68.0	70.4	73.8	71.1	70.5	68.6	71.5	72.5	71.3	+1	+8	+8

Conclusion

The results of the monitoring of public opinion show a relatively favorable backdrop of public sentiment in the first half of 2018. The assessments of the work of the President, the Chairman of the Government and the United Russia party which has a constitutional majority in the State Duma remain stable. There is a high proportion of people who positively characterize their daily emotional state; the consumer sentiment index is gradually increasing, which indicates an improvement in expectations concerning the future of the Russian economy and people's personal financial situation.

Obviously, positive background of public opinion is connected with the beginning of a new political season. The benchmarks of state policy set out by the President for the nearest six years, as well as the mobilization nature of their implementation, are supported by the assessments of public opinion, despite the fact that 47% of Russians do not believe in the possibility of realization of the tasks contained in the Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly². “When Putin at his inauguration said that we are waiting for decisive changes and that he intends to deal with internal problems – primarily socio-economic, rather than external ones, he hit the spot”³.

At the same time, it should be noted that this stage of VoIRC RAS monitoring of public opinion was held before the beginning of June, that is, before the media spoke about the draft pension reform, which is not approved by (92% of Russians according to Romir Research Holding)⁴; and a corresponding petition to the President, prepared by the All-Russian Association of Trade Unions of the Confederation of Labor of Russia, was signed by more than two million people⁵.

Beginning from July 1, 2018, in the Vologda Oblast the amount of contribution to the major repairs of apartment buildings will be raised⁶; alcohol prices can be raised⁷, as well as the fees for the issuance of passports and driver’s licenses⁸ – all these, to put it mildly, “unpopular” measures can undermine people’s trust in the government, including the President, who nominated Dmitry Medvedev for the post of prime minister. It is no coincidence that, according to VTsIOM, the level of support of the head of state in the first half of June compared to May 2018 has decreased quite significantly (by 4 p.p., from 81 to 77%).

According to experts, “the real reason is related to the need to find additional sources of funding for the budget. The implementation of the President’s May Decrees in which a very significant part is related to socially significant programs that require additional funding suggests a noticeable (according to estimates voiced by Dmitry Medvedev – about eight trillion rubles) increase in budget revenues. We recall that the previous May 2012 Decrees of the President were safely “forgotten” for six years (one-time payments to public sector employees in January – February of this year before the presidential election do not count). It is clear that if the new May Decrees of 2018 are not executed, then it may lead to a growing social tension, dissatisfaction with the

² *Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly: first impressions: VTsIOM press release*, 2018, no. 3602, March 13. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=116743>

³ Fedorov V.V. The main front is here and not in Syria or Ukraine. *Analytics of VTsIOM experts*. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=238&uid=9149>

⁴ Romir: 92% of Russians opposed the raise of retirement age. *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, 2018, June 14. Available at: <http://www.mk.ru/economics/2018/06/14/romir-bolshinstvo-rossiyan-vystupili-protiv-pensionnoy-reformy.html>

⁵ *Official website of the petition “Do not raise the retirement age!”*. Available at: https://www.change.org/p/%D0%BD%D0%B5-%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%B2%D1%8B%D1%88%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%8C-%D0%BF%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%BD%D1%8B%D0%B9-%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%B7%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%82?source_location=discover_feed

⁶ *News at the official portal of the Vologda Oblast Government, June 18, 2018*. Available at: http://vologda-oblast.ru/novosti/povyshenie_razmera_vznosa_na_kapremont_v_mnogokvartirnykh_domakh_vologodskoy_oblasti_s_1_iyulya_sostavit_ot_1_rublya_20_kopeek_s_kvadrata/

⁷ Achievements in alcohol. *Izvestia*, 2018, June 20. Available at: <https://iz.ru/755586/evgeniia-pertceva/spirtnomu-gotoviat-novye-minimalnye-tseny>

⁸ Getting an international passport will cost five thousand rubles: why it is so expensive. *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, 2018, June 19. Available at: <http://www.mk.ru/social/2018/06/19/oformlenie-zagranpasporta-oboydetsya-v-5-tysyach-rublej-pochemu-tak-dorogo.html>

leadership of the country, the emergence of protest actions, etc. People would inevitably remind those in power about the previous May Decrees. That is why such importance is attached to the implementation of the President's May Decrees announced this year. In order to their position, the authorities must ensure successful implementation of at least a visible part of at least the most important social points of these Decrees. At the same time, there are clearly not enough financial resources for their implementation. For this reason, the authorities began to take a number of measures aimed at finding additional funds to replenish the budget in order to be later redistributed to the relevant socially oriented issues and returned back to the economy in an already targeted way... Here we are talking about the redistribution of resources from the entire population to specific recipients by transferring cash flows to socially important areas. In general, these actions will not have a positive impact on the growth rate of the country's economy, despite the assurances of individual leaders that raising the taxes, duties and deductions will lead to a corresponding increase in GDP. It should be understood that in the absence of significant foreign investment, the country's economy is a closed system with a certain "volume and weight"... All redistribution takes place within the system, without affecting its volume and weight"⁹.

Thus, the steps taken by the Government are aimed at the implementation of the May 2018 Decrees, but they do not contribute either to the recovery of the economy as a whole, or to overcoming "the main threat and our main enemy – the fact that we are falling behind"¹⁰; nor do they help strengthen social stability in the country, without which there will be no "decisive breakthrough"¹¹, especially in the "efforts to preserve the people of Russia and to guarantee the prosperity of our citizens"¹².

At the inauguration ceremony, V. Putin pointed out that "We don't have time for a slow start"¹³. Today's government bills are emerging in this very mode, against the background of the 2018 FIFA World Cup, which is taking place in Russia... However, the vector of movement set by the Cabinet of Ministers shows that the chances that in the near future we will see the continuation of favorable trends in public opinion are illusory.

The materials were prepared by M.V. Morev, I.V. Paranicheva, I.M. Bakhvalova.

⁹ *Ibidem* (Opinion of Finam analyst A. Korenev).

¹⁰ Address of the President to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, March 1, 2018. *Official website of the President of the Russian Federation*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56957>

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ V.V. Putin's inauguration speech, May 7, 2018. *Official website of the President of the Russian Federation*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57416>