

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 VolRC 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 2019, and also on average for the latest six polls (June 2018 – April 2019).

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 for the last two years (2017–2018).

The main emphasis in the analysis of the data is made on the changes in public opinion that have occurred over the past 10 months (from June 2018 to April 2019). This is due to the fact that in June 2018 the State Duma introduced a bill on reforming the pension system, after which people's estimates on various monitoring indicators (including the attitude toward the work of the President and other authorities) significantly decreased. Thus, the survey data for June 2018 represent an indicator that must be achieved at least in order to “return” to the state of relations between society and the government, which was observed before the implementation of the pension reform.

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 VolRC RAS polls is available at <http://www.vssc.ac.ru/>.

In February – April 2019, the negative trend of decreasing support for the work of the head of state continued, it was observed since June 2018. In general, over the past 10 months (from June 2018 to April 2019), the share of positive assessments decreased by 14 percentage points (from 70 to 56%), negative – increased by 13 percentage points (from 18 to 31%).

Since June 2018, there has been a decrease in the share of positive judgments concerning the Prime Minister's work; by 13 p.p. (from 52 to 39%) for the past 10 months (from June 2018 to April 2019). At the same time, the share of negative assessments for the same period increased by 12 p.p. (from 28 to 40%).

For reference:

The nationwide level of approval of the work of the head of state from June 2018 to April 2019 decreased by 8 p.p. (from 73 to 65%; according to VTsIOM).

According to Levada-Center, the level of approval of the President's work in May 2018 was 79%. It decreased to 67% (by 12 p.p.) In July 2018, it amounted to 65% in March 2019 (in general, for the period from May 2018 to March 2019 it decreased by 14 p.p.)

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

Answer	2007	2011	2012	2017	2018	June 2018	Aug. 2018	Oct. 2018	Dec. 2018	Feb. 2019	Apr. 2019	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-) Apr. 2019 to June 2018	Dynamics (+/-) the latest 6 surveys compared to...		
														2017	2011	2007
RF President																
I approve	75.3	58.7	51.7	67.3	66.4	70.1	65.9	63.5	61.9	58.7	55.9	62.7	-14	-5	+4	-13
I don't approve	11.5	25.6	32.6	20.0	21.7	17.5	22.1	24.1	27.0	30.1	31.2	25.3	+14	+5	0	+14
Chairman of the RF Government*																
I approve	-*	59.3	49.6	49.5	48.0	52.0	47.4	45.2	45.3	41.6	38.8	45.1	-13	-4	-14	-
I don't approve	-	24.7	33.3	31.1	31.6	27.5	31.9	34.8	36.9	39.3	40.2	35.1	+13	+4	+10	-
Governor																
I approve	55.8	45.7	41.9	39.8	38.4	40.5	37.3	35.7	38.3	36.5	34.7	37.2	-6	-3	-9	-19
I don't approve	22.2	30.5	33.3	39.3	37.6	35.3	36.9	39.1	40.3	41.5	41.4	39.1	+6	0	+9	+17
* Included in the survey since 2008.																

Over the past 10 months (from June 2018 to April 2019), there has been a significant decrease in the number of Vologda Oblast residents who consider the work of the head of state successful in the following fields:

- ✓ strengthening Russia's international position – by 6 p.p. (from 56 to 50%);
- ✓ restoring order in the country – by 13 p.p. (from 55 to 42%);
- ✓ protecting democracy and strengthening freedoms of citizens – by 11 p.p. (from 43 to 32%);
- ✓ economic recovery and welfare growth – by 4 p.p. (from 32 to 28%).

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

Answer	2007	2011	2012	2017	2018	June 2018	Aug. 2018	Oct. 2018	Dec. 2018	Feb. 2019	Apr. 2019	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-) Apr. 2019 to June 2018	Dynamics (+/-) the latest 6 surveys compared to...		
														2017	2011	2007
Strengthening Russia's international standing																
Successful	58.4	46.2	43.1	55.7	54.2	55.6	53.3	51.3	53.5	51.5	50.2	52.6	-5	-3	+6	-6
Unsuccessful	24.9	33.7	37.9	26.8	28.4	26.7	29.1	30.7	30.3	31.7	32.7	30.2	+6	+3	-4	+5
<i>Success index</i>	133.5	112.5	105.2	129.0	125.7	128.9	124.2	120.6	123.2	119.8	117.5	122.4	-11	-7	+10	-11
Imposing order in the country																
Successful	53.2	36.6	35.4	50.6	51.1	55.1	51.0	48.5	46.9	44.2	42.4	48.0	-13	-3	+11	-5
Unsuccessful	34.0	50.0	50.7	36.1	35.0	32.9	36.2	37.9	39.5	40.7	42.6	38.3	+10	+2	-12	+4
<i>Success index</i>	119.2	86.6	84.7	114.5	116.1	122.2	114.8	110.6	107.4	103.5	99.8	109.7	-22	-5	+23	-9
Protecting democracy and strengthening citizens' freedoms																
Successful	44.4	32.4	28.8	40.3	40.5	43.4	39.8	37.3	36.5	33.5	32.3	37.1	-11	-3	+5	-7
Unsuccessful	37.0	48.3	52.3	40.2	40.2	38.1	41.4	42.7	43.3	45.3	47.7	43.1	+10	+3	-5	+6
<i>Success index</i>	107.4	84.1	76.5	100.2	100.2	105.3	98.4	94.6	93.2	88.2	84.6	94.1	-21	-6	+10	-13
Economic recovery and increase in citizens' welfare																
Successful	47.2	30.7	28.5	29.3	31.0	32.3	30.6	30.6	29.9	28.1	28.1	29.9	-4	+1	-1	-17
Unsuccessful	39.1	56.1	57.9	56.9	56.2	55.2	58.3	57.2	57.6	56.9	58.2	57.2	+3	0	+1	+18
<i>Success index</i>	108.1	74.6	70.6	72.4	74.7	77.1	72.3	73.4	72.3	71.2	69.9	72.7	-7	0	-2	-35
* Ranked according to the average value of the index of success for 2016.																

In the structure of Vologda Oblast residents' preferences concerning political parties for the period from June 2018 to April 2019, there has been a decline of support for the United Russia PARTY (by 6 p.p., from 39 to 33%) and a marked increase in the proportion of people who believe that none of the political parties represented in the Parliament expresses their interests (by 8 p.p., from 27 to 35%). The positions of the other parliamentary parties have not changed significantly.

Which party expresses your interests? (% of respondents)

Party	2007	Election to the RF State Duma 2007, fact		2011		Election to the RF State Duma 2011, fact		2012		Election to the RF State Duma 2016, fact		2017	2018	June 2018	Aug. 2018	Oct. 2018	Dec. 2018	Feb. 2019	Apr. 2019	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-) Apr. 2019 to June 2018	Dynamics (+/-) the latest 6 surveys compared to...		
																						2017	2011	2007
United Russia	30.2	60.5	31.1	33.4	29.1	38.0	34.7	37.9	38.9	38.1	36.5	36.0	34.6	33.3	36.2	-6	+2	+5	+6					
LDPR	7.5	11.0	7.8	15.4	7.8	21.9	11.0	9.6	9.7	9.7	9.7	8.8	8.9	8.2	9.2	-2	-2	+1	+2					
KPRF	7.0	9.3	10.3	16.8	10.6	14.2	7.6	9.2	8.7	10.3	11.1	9.9	9.1	8.0	9.5	-1	+2	-1	+3					
Just Russia	7.8	8.8	5.6	27.2	6.6	10.8	4.8	2.9	2.3	2.7	3.4	2.8	2.9	2.9	2.8	+1	-2	-3	-5					
Other	1.8	-	1.9	-	2.1	-	0.5	0.7	0.5	0.6	0.4	0.4	0.6	0.3	0.5	0	0	-1	-1					
None	17.8	-	29.4	-	31.3	-	29.2	28.5	26.7	28.5	29.0	31.9	34.2	34.7	30.8	+8	+2	+1	+13					
It's difficult to answer	21.2	-	13.2	-	11.7	-	12.2	11.2	13.3	10.0	9.9	10.2	9.7	12.6	11.0	-1	-1	-2	-10					

Over the past 10 months, the proportion of people who characterize their emotional well-being as positive has decreased slightly (by 4 p.p., from 73 to 69%). There has been an increase in the proportion of Vologda Oblast residents who consider themselves to be “poor and extremely poor” (by 2 p.p., from 45 to 47%). The consumer sentiment index decreased by 2 points (from 92 to 90 p.), which indicates a decrease in the positive forecasts of the population regarding the prospects for the development of their own financial situation and the economy as a whole.

Estimation of social condition (percentage of respondents)

Answer	2007	2011	2012	2017	2018	June 2018	Aug. 2018	Oct. 2018	Dec. 2018	Feb. 2019	Apr. 2019	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-) Apr. 2019 to June 2018	Dynamics (+/-) the latest 6 surveys compared to...		
														2017	2011	2007
Mood																
Usual condition, good mood	63.6	63.1	67.3	70.4	71.2	72.5	72.5	71.3	70.7	68.0	68.8	70.6	-4	0	+8	+7
I feel stress, anger, fear, depression	27.8	28.9	27.0	24.2	23.1	22.8	22.5	23.1	23.5	25.6	25.5	23.8	+3	0	-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	76.6	77.7	77.1	76.5	78.0	75.7	77.1	74.3	76.7	76.4	0	-1	+2	+2
It's impossible to bear such plight	13.6	15.3	15.8	15.8	16.3	16.6	15.5	17.1	17.5	19.1	17.5	17.2	+1	+1	+2	+4
Social self-identification*																
The share of people who consider themselves to have average income	48.2	43.1	44.7	43.1	42.3	43.1	43.3	42.8	41.6	43.8	41.3	42.7	-2	0	0	-6
The share of people who consider themselves to be poor and extremely poor	42.4	44.3	44.5	46.6	45.4	45.3	44.1	45.4	44.7	44.8	46.9	45.2	+2	-1	+1	+3
Consumer sentiment index																
Index value, points	105.9	89.6	91.5	84.6	89.9	92.2	89.2	89.2	89.1	90.1	90.0	90.0	-2	+5	0	-16
*Question: "Which category do you belong to, in your opinion?"																

From June 2018 to April 2019, there has been no improvement in the social mood in any of the socio-demographic groups. At the same time, negative trends are observed in 9 out of 14 groups. The proportion of people who positively characterize their daily emotional state, especially significantly decreased:

- ✓ among men (by 6 p.p., from 75 to 69%);
- ✓ among persons over 55 years of age and people with secondary and incomplete secondary education (by 5 p.p., from 65 to 60%);
- ✓ among those people who according to their own assessments of their income belong to the top 20% of inhabitants of the Oblast (by 5 p.p., from 86 to 81%);
- ✓ and among the inhabitants of the cities (in Vologda – by 6 p.p., from 75 to 69%, in Cherepovets – by 9 p.p., from 77 to 68%).

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

Population group	2007	2011	2012	2017	2018	June 2018	Aug. 2018	Oct. 2018	Dec. 2018	Feb. 2019	Apr. 2019	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-) Apr. 2019 to June 2018	Dynamics (+/-) the latest 6 surveys compared to...		
														2017	2011	2007
Sex																
Men	65.9	64.5	69.1	70.6	72.8	74.5	73.9	70.8	73.4	69.9	68.6	71.9	-6	+1	+7	+6
Women	61.7	62.0	65.8	70.2	69.8	70.9	71.3	71.8	68.4	66.4	69.0	69.6	-2	-1	+8	+8
Age																
Under 30	71.3	70.0	72.3	78.1	80.0	81.3	77.9	85.1	81.6	76.3	81.2	80.6	0	+2	+11	+9
30-55	64.8	62.5	67.9	71.5	72.6	75.1	74.9	70.9	71.6	68.0	71.5	72.0	-4	+1	+10	+7
Over 55	54.8	58.3	62.1	64.9	65.2	64.7	66.5	65.4	64.7	64.3	59.8	64.2	-5	-1	+6	+9
Education																
Secondary and incomplete secondary	58.4	57.4	57.2	63.6	64.8	64.8	66.5	63.8	67.8	61.5	60.4	64.1	-4	+1	+7	+6
Secondary vocational	64.6	63.6	66.7	72.0	72.2	74.9	72.6	73.5	70.5	68.6	73.0	72.2	-2	0	+9	+8
Higher and incomplete higher	68.6	68.3	77.0	75.8	76.8	77.4	78.4	76.5	74.1	73.8	73.3	75.6	-4	0	+7	+7
Income groups																
Bottom 20%	51.6	45.3	51.5	52.9	57.3	60.0	53.1	59.6	61.3	50.4	56.1	56.8	-4	+4	+11	+5
Middle 60%	62.9	65.3	68.7	72.0	71.9	72.3	74.5	73.1	69.7	67.2	69.9	71.1	-2	-1	+6	+8
Top 20%	74.9	75.3	81.1	83.7	82.9	85.5	83.4	81.3	83.4	86.2	81.0	83.5	-5	0	+8	+9
Territories																
Vologda	63.1	67.1	73.6	72.6	71.0	75.4	70.4	68.8	67.1	65.5	68.5	69.3	-7	-3	+2	+6
Cherepovets	68.1	71.2	76.2	75.7	75.8	76.7	79.1	77.7	74.5	71.1	67.8	74.5	-9	-1	+3	+6
Districts	61.6	57.1	59.8	66.1	68.7	68.6	69.8	69.2	70.5	67.6	69.6	69.2	+1	+3	+12	+8
Oblast	63.6	63.1	67.3	70.4	71.2	72.5	72.5	71.3	70.7	68.0	68.8	70.6	-4	0	+8	+7

Conclusion

Thus, the dynamics of both national and regional sociological data indicate a significant negative impact of the pension system reform on Russian society. We note that the draft pension reform was submitted to the State Duma and announced to the public in June 2018, after which there was a sharp decline in the share of positive judgments on many indicators (including the traditionally most stable one – the social mood and support for the President's work)

At present, the rate of negative trends has slowed significantly. Nevertheless, the situation looks worse on almost all the monitoring indicators in comparison with June 2018, and so far there are no sustainable positive changes that allow us to talk about the prerequisites for returning to this "pre-crisis" level.

The notable improvement in the social mood among low-income people can be considered an exception: in February – April 2019, the share of positive assessments of the emotional state among people who according to self-assessments of their income belong to the bottom 20% of Vologda Oblast residents increased by 6 p.p. (from 50 to 56%). However, this can be largely due to the adoption of individual strategies for adaptation to difficult economic conditions, and also

due to the approach of the spring-summer (when people work at their dachas) season. At least, there are no significant positive changes in the dynamics of solving the problem of poverty: according to opinion polls, the share of “poor and extremely poor” in February – April 2019 increased from 45 to 47%; according to official data of Vologdastat, real wages in January 2019 amounted to 80.6% of the level of December 2019, while the consumer price index for goods and services has not actually changed – 100.9%.

Against the background of the growing need for change², the expectations “for a decisive breakthrough in the preservation of the people of Russia and the well-being of the citizens”³, and the implementation of the main tasks specified in the national projects⁴ become especially acute.

However, the first year after the election of the President of the Russian Federation has not brought any positive changes in the dynamics of the standard of living and quality of life. On the contrary, the pension reform has become a vivid example of decisions that contradict public expectations and experts’ assessments, many of which said that it is not necessary⁵, that it was carried out incorrectly, like a “special operation”⁶, and that it will not bring the desired results⁷.

These scientifically substantiated warnings have gone unnoticed by both the Government and the President, so it is not surprising that the pension reform has played the role of a trigger mechanism “to activate more fundamental changes, the consequences of which may last for a long time”⁸ (in fact, after their sharp fall in June 2018, no tangible positive changes in the dynamics of public opinion have been observed).

The decisions of the ruling elites that do not correspond to the national interests, that are, in a sense, adventurous, and that are often carried out by the method of “shock therapy” prove that “our officials do not possess the basic technique for carrying out institutional reforms”⁹, and this is regarded by many experts as a sign of their “intellectual feebleness”¹⁰. It is a critical barrier and risk to the existence of V. Putin’s “long state”¹¹ the state, built upon and existing exclusively due to the authority and personal qualities of the President, who, according to the current Constitution of the Russian Federation, in 2024 will have to transfer his powers to his successor.

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

² Socio-economic situation in the Vologda Oblast in January – February 2019: report. Vologdastat. 2019. 92 p.

³ During the period from 2014 to 2018, the share of Russians who believe that change is more important for the country than stability almost doubled (from 30 to 56%; source: Russian society after the 2018 Presidential Election: the request for a change: information and analytical summary. FNISTS RAN. Moscow, 2018. P.7.)

⁴ Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, March 1, 2018. *Official website of the RF President*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56957>

⁵ On national goals and strategic objectives of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2024: Presidential Decree No. 204 of May 7, 2018.

⁶ Shirov A.A., Potapenko V.V. About a fair pension system. *Ekspert*, 2018, no. 24, June 11-17.

⁷ Interview with N. Zubarevich, Director of the Regional Program of the Independent Institute of Social Policy (source: Kostarnova A. Pension reform – a special operation in the mode of emergency. Available at: <https://www.discred.ru/2018/07/18/pensionnaya-reforma-spetsoperatsiya-v-rezhime-avrala/>).

⁸ Bobkov V.N. Pension reform: simplicity of tactical decisions is fraught with strategic failure. *Rossiiskii ekonomicheskii zhurnal*, 2019, no. 1, pp. 31–40.

⁹ Belanovskii S.A., Dmitriev M.E., Nikol’skaya A.V. Signs of fundamental shifts in the mass consciousness of Russians. *Obshchestvennye nauki i sovremennost’*, 2019, no. 1, p. 16.

¹⁰ Polterovich V.M. Reformers of science lack the necessary qualifications to cope with the task. *Ekonomicheskie i sotsial’nye peremeny: fakty, tendentsii, prognoz*, 2015, no. 3, pp. 28–31.

¹¹ Noskovich O.I. How to build a long state? *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 2019, March 18. Available at: http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2019-03-18/7_7533_ideas1.html