

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 the period from February 2018 (the beginning of the first year of V. Putin's fourth presidential term) to June 2019.

We compare the results of the surveys with the data for 2007 (the last year of V. Putin's second presidential term, when the assessment of the President's work was the highest), 2011 (the last year of Dmitry Medvedev's presidency) and 2012 (the first year of V. Putin's third presidential term).

We also provide yearly dynamics of the data for the last two years (2017–2018).

In April – June 2019, the level of approval of the work of the President of the Russian Federation did not change significantly: the share of positive assessments was 56%, the share of negative assessments decreased from 31 to 28%.

Thus, after a long (from June 2018 to April 2019) decrease in the level of approval of the work of the head of state (which was caused primarily by the reaction of people to the pension reform according to which the retirement age had been raised), the dynamics of population estimates as a whole stabilized. At the same time, the share of positive assessments remains significantly lower than the average for 2018 (56% in June 2019 vs. 66% on average for 2018).

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.vsc.ac.ru/>.

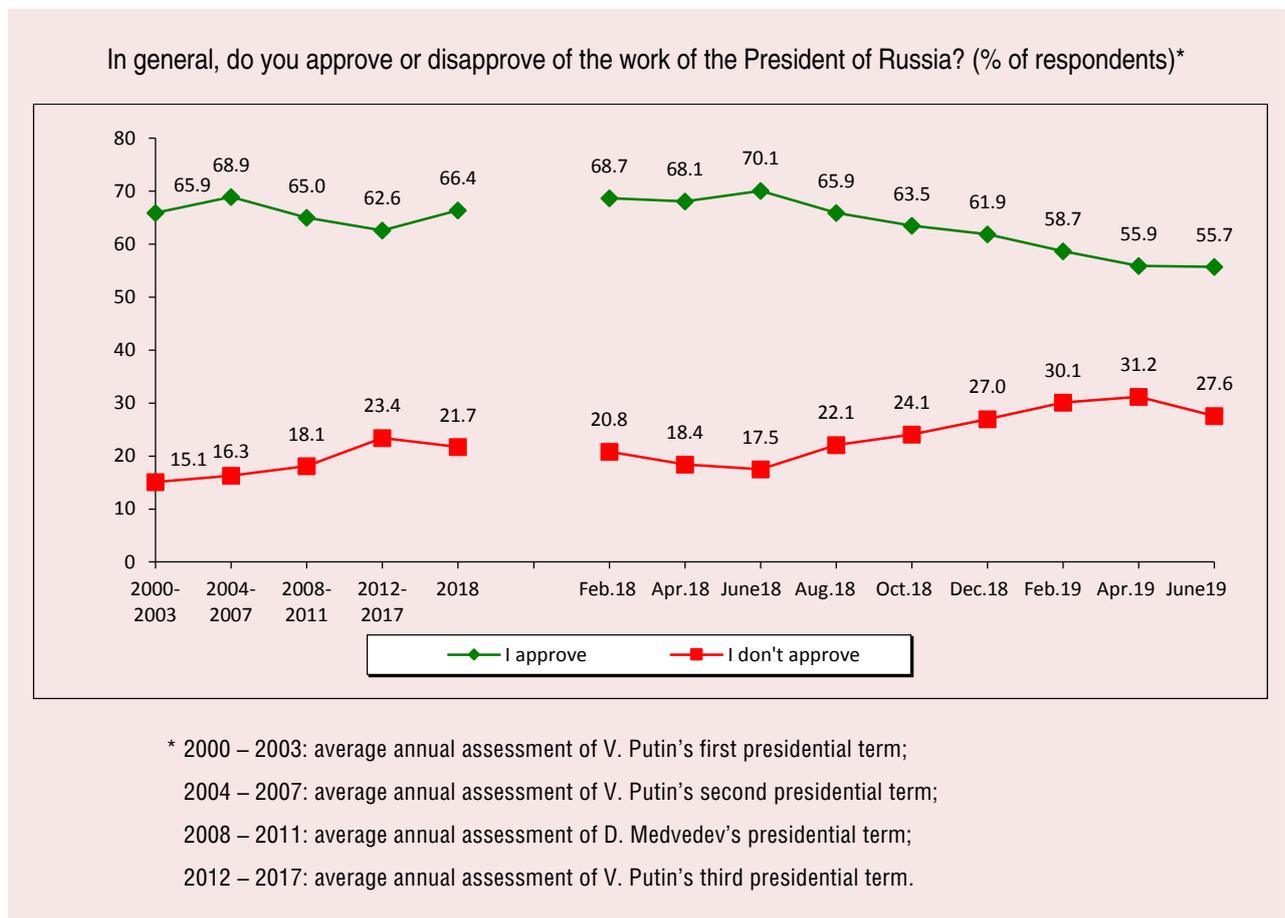
For reference

In general, the level of approval of the work of the head of state in recent months has remained stable. According to VTsIOM, the share of positive assessments in May 2019 (just as in April) was 66%, negative – 32%.

For comparison: in February 2018, the level of approval of the President’s work, according to VTsIOM, was 78%, and the level of disapproval was 12%².

According to Levada-Center, support for the President’s work in the first half of June was 64% (in April–May – 65%). The share of negative judgments was 27% (in April – May – 26%).

For comparison: in February 2018, the share of positive assessments of the President’s work, according to Levada-Center, was 76%, negative – 22%.



² It should be noted that in February 2018, VTsIOM conducted a telephone survey (apparently in connection with the upcoming presidential election). To compare the current indicators, it is more correct to analyze the results of the January survey, according to which the share of positive assessments of the President’s work was 83%, negative – 11%.

Over the past two months there was a slight (by 3 percentage points) improvement in the assessments of the President’s work aimed to restore order in the country (the share of positive responses increased from 42 to 45%), to protect democracy and strengthen the freedoms of citizens (from 32 to 35%).

The share of those who believe that the President successfully copes with the task of strengthening Russia’s international positions and boosting the economy and the welfare of citizens did not change over the past two months (45 and 29%, respectively).

It should be noted that in the period from February 2018 to June 2019, the share of positive assessments of the President’s work to address the key problems of the country decreased slightly (by 2–8 p.p.). Moreover, unlike the general level of support for the work of the head of state, in this case we cannot say that the negative changes are associated with a sharp deterioration in public opinion in June 2018, when the reform of the pension legislation was announced (in June 2018, there were no sharp leaps in the dynamics of population estimates).

To date, the share of positive assessments related to the solution of all key issues in the country remains 2–5 p.p. lower than in 2016–2018.

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

Answer	2007	2011	2012	2017	2018	Feb. 2018	Apr. 2018	June 2018	Aug. 2018	Oct. 2018	Dec. 2018	Feb. 2019	Apr. 2019	June 2019	Dynamics (+/-) June 2019 compared to...	
															Apr. 19	Feb. 18
Strengthening Russia’s international standing																
Successful	58.4	46.2	43.1	55.7	54.2	55.2	56.1	55.6	53.3	51.3	53.5	51.5	50.2	51.9	+2	-3
Unsuccessful	24.9	33.7	37.9	26.8	28.4	26.9	26.9	26.7	29.1	30.7	30.3	31.7	32.7	30.3	-2	+3
<i>Success index</i>	133.5	112.5	105.2	129.0	125.7	128.3	129.2	128.9	124.2	120.6	123.2	119.8	117.5	121.6	+4	-7
Imposing order in the country																
Successful	53.2	36.6	35.4	50.6	51.1	50.9	54.2	55.1	51.0	48.5	46.9	44.2	42.4	44.5	+2	-6
Unsuccessful	34.0	50.0	50.7	36.1	35.0	32.7	30.8	32.9	36.2	37.9	39.5	40.7	42.6	39.3	-3	+7
<i>Success index</i>	119.2	86.6	84.7	114.5	116.1	118.2	123.4	122.2	114.8	110.6	107.4	103.5	99.8	105.2	+5	-13
Protecting democracy and strengthening citizens’ freedoms																
Successful	44.4	32.4	28.8	40.3	40.5	42.8	42.9	43.4	39.8	37.3	36.5	33.5	32.3	34.6	+2	-8
Unsuccessful	37.0	48.3	52.3	40.2	40.2	38.7	37.1	38.1	41.4	42.7	43.3	45.3	47.7	45.5	-2	+7
<i>Success index</i>	107.4	84.1	76.5	100.2	100.2	104.1	105.8	105.3	98.4	94.6	93.2	88.2	84.6	89.1	+5	-15
Economic recovery and increase in citizens’ welfare																
Successful	47.2	30.7	28.5	29.3	31.0	31.0	31.3	32.3	30.6	30.6	29.9	28.1	28.1	29.1	+1	-2
Unsuccessful	39.1	56.1	57.9	56.9	56.2	53.7	55.3	55.2	58.3	57.2	57.6	56.9	58.2	57.8	0	+4
<i>Success index</i>	108.1	74.6	70.6	72.4	74.7	77.3	76.0	77.1	72.3	73.4	72.3	71.2	69.9	71.3	+1	-6

* Ranked according to the average value of the index of success for 2018.

In the past two months, the structure of people’s preferences concerning political parties did not change significantly. At the same time, in the period from February 2018 to June 2019, we observe a slight decrease in support for United Russia (by 3 p.p., from 38 to 35%) and an increase in the proportion of Vologda Oblast residents who believe that none of the parties represented in Parliament expresses their interests (by 3 p.p., from 29 to 32%).

The positions of other parliamentary parties do not change significantly: the level of support for LDPR is 9–10%, KPRF – 7–8%, Just Russia – 3–4%.

Which party expresses your interests? (% of respondents)

Party	2007	2011	Election to the RF State Duma 2007, fact	2012	2016	Election to the RF State Duma 2011, fact	2017	2018	Feb. 2018	Apr. 2018	June 2018	Aug. 2018	Oct. 2018	Dec. 2018	Feb. 2019	Apr. 2019	June 2019	Dynamics (+/-) June 2019 compared to...	
																		Apr. 19	Feb. 18
United Russia	30.2	31.1	33.4	29.1	35.4	38.0	34.7	37.9	38.4	39.7	38.9	38.1	36.5	36.0	34.6	33.3	34.8	+2	-4
LDPR	7.5	7.8	15.4	7.8	10.4	21.9	11.0	9.6	10.1	9.6	9.7	9.7	9.7	8.8	8.9	8.2	9.1	+1	-1
KPRF	7.0	10.3	16.8	10.6	8.3	14.2	7.6	9.2	7.1	8.1	8.7	10.3	11.1	9.9	9.1	8.0	8.5	+1	+1
Just Russia	7.8	5.6	27.2	6.6	4.2	10.8	4.8	2.9	3.5	2.5	2.3	2.7	3.4	2.8	2.9	2.9	2.5	0	-1
Other	1.8	1.9	-	2.1	0.3	-	0.5	0.7	0.9	1.2	0.5	0.6	0.4	0.4	0.6	0.3	0.3	0	-1
None	17.8	29.4	-	31.3	29.4	-	29.2	28.5	28.8	26.2	26.7	28.5	29.0	31.9	34.2	34.7	32.3	-2	+4
It's difficult to answer	21.2	13.2	-	11.7	12.0	-	12.2	11.2	11.1	12.7	13.3	10.0	9.9	10.2	9.7	12.6	12.4	0	+1

The assessments of psychological well-being of the population remain at a high level: as of June 2019, the proportion of people who experience mainly positive emotions is 71%; the proportion of those who believe that “everything is not so bad; it’s difficult to live, but it’s possible to stand it” is 79%. In general, these indicators have remained stable throughout the period from February 2018 to June 2019.

Somewhat contradictory conclusions can be drawn about the dynamics of people’s assessments of their own financial situation:

On the one hand, during 2019, as well as on average for 2017–2018, the proportion of Vologda Oblast residents who consider themselves to have an “average income” (43%), remains stable. On the other hand, it remains lower than the proportion of those who consider themselves to be “poor” or “extremely poor” (46%).

The consumer sentiment index, which reflects people’s forecasts regarding the prospects of the economy and personal financial situation, remains stable in 2019 (90–91 p.); it is even higher than in 2017–2018 (85–89%). However, its value still remains lower than 100 points, which means the predominance of pessimistic judgments in the estimates of residents of the Oblast.

Estimation of social condition (% of respondents)

Answer	2007	2011	2012	2017	2018	Feb. 2018	Apr. 2018	June 2018	Aug. 2018	Oct. 2018	Dec. 2018	Feb. 2019	Apr. 2019	June 2019	Dynamics (+/-), June 2019 compared to...	
															Apr. 19	Feb. 18
Mood																
Usual condition, good mood	63.6	63.1	67.3	70.4	71.2	68.6	71.5	72.5	72.5	71.3	70.7	68.0	68.8	71.4	+3	+3
I feel stress, anger, fear, depression	27.8	28.9	27.0	24.2	23.1	23.4	23.1	22.8	22.5	23.1	23.5	25.6	25.5	23.5	-2	0
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	76.2	79.0	76.5	78.0	75.7	77.1	74.3	76.7	78.0	+1	+2
It’s impossible to bear such plight	13.6	15.3	15.8	15.8	16.3	16.3	14.8	16.6	15.5	17.1	17.5	19.1	17.5	16.5	-1	0
Social self-identification*																
The share of people who consider themselves to have average income	48.2	43.1	44.7	43.1	42.3	41.2	41.8	43.1	43.3	42.8	41.6	43.8	41.3	43.3	+2	+2
The share of people who consider themselves to be poor and extremely poor	42.4	44.3	44.5	46.6	45.4	46.2	46.5	45.3	44.1	45.4	44.7	44.8	46.9	45.8	-1	0
Consumer sentiment index																
Index value, points	105.9	89.6	91.5	84.6	89.9	89.2	90.3	92.2	89.2	89.2	89.1	90.1	90.0	91.2	+1	+2

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

Over the past two months, we observe an increase in the share of positive assessments of social mood in 6 out of 14 socio-demographic groups, especially in people over 55 years of age (by 7 p.p., from 60 to 67%). In other groups, there were no significant changes in the assessments of the emotional state.

At the same time, we should note that in comparison with the average level for 2018 we observe negative dynamics in the assessments given by some population groups. For example, among people with higher and incomplete higher education, the proportion of those who positively characterize their mood decreased by 5 p.p. (from 77 to 72%), and among residents of Cherepovets – by 4 p.p. (from 76 to 72%).

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

Population group	2007	2011	2012	2017	2018	Feb. 2018	Apr. 2018	June 2018	Aug. 2018	Oct. 2018	Dec. 2018	Feb. 2019	Apr. 2019	June 2019	Dynamics (+/-) June 2019 compared to...	
															Apr. 19	Feb. 18
Sex																
Men	65.9	64.5	69.1	70.6	72.8	71.0	73.4	74.5	73.9	70.8	73.4	69.9	68.6	72.1	+4	+1
Women	61.7	62.0	65.8	70.2	69.8	66.6	70.0	70.9	71.3	71.8	68.4	66.4	69.0	70.8	+2	+4
Age																
Under 30	71.3	70.0	72.3	78.1	80.0	74.2	79.6	81.3	77.9	85.1	81.6	76.3	81.2	82.9	+2	+9
30-55	64.8	62.5	67.9	71.5	72.6	68.8	74.0	75.1	74.9	70.9	71.6	68.0	71.5	70.5	-1	+2
Over 55	54.8	58.3	62.1	64.9	65.2	65.6	64.2	64.7	66.5	65.4	64.7	64.3	59.8	67.4	+8	+2
Education																
Secondary and incomplete secondary	58.4	57.4	57.2	63.6	64.8	60.5	65.5	64.8	66.5	63.8	67.8	61.5	60.4	64.4	+4	+4
Secondary vocational	64.6	63.6	66.7	72.0	72.2	68.9	72.7	74.9	72.6	73.5	70.5	68.6	73.0	77.3	+4	+8
Higher and incomplete higher	68.6	68.3	77.0	75.8	76.8	77.9	76.2	77.4	78.4	76.5	74.1	73.8	73.3	72.1	-1	-6
Income groups																
Bottom 20%	51.6	45.3	51.5	52.9	57.3	47.7	61.8	60.0	53.1	59.6	61.3	50.4	56.1	54.9	-1	+7
Middle 60%	62.9	65.3	68.7	72.0	71.9	70.3	71.7	72.3	74.5	73.1	69.7	67.2	69.9	74.1	+4	+4
Top 20%	74.9	75.3	81.1	83.7	82.9	82.2	81.5	85.5	83.4	81.3	83.4	86.2	81.0	81.0	+0	-1
Territories																
Vologda	63.1	67.1	73.6	72.6	71.0	71.0	73.5	75.4	70.4	68.8	67.1	65.5	68.5	70.3	+2	-1
Cherepovets	68.1	71.2	76.2	75.7	75.8	71.5	75.0	76.7	79.1	77.7	74.5	71.1	67.8	72.1	+4	+1
Districts	61.6	57.1	59.8	66.1	68.7	65.6	68.3	68.6	69.8	69.2	70.5	67.6	69.6	71.7	+2	+6
Oblast	63.6	63.1	67.3	70.4	71.2	68.6	71.5	72.5	72.5	71.3	70.7	68.0	68.8	71.4	+3	+3

Conclusion

The results of the monitoring conducted in April – June 2019 allow us to say that people's attitude toward the work of the President has stabilized after quite a long period of negative dynamics caused by their reaction to the changes in the pension legislation. In general, similar trends are demonstrated by the results of all-Russian surveys conducted by VTsIOM and Levada-Center.

The absence of negative changes in the assessments of the President's work is noted for the first time since June 2018; however, it is difficult to judge whether it is a sign of exhaustion of public discontent about the pension reform or it is connected, for example, with the onset of the summer season – a period of vacations and dachas, which could move the socio-political agenda to the periphery of public consciousness. To date, we can only say that the dynamics of public opinion concerning the work of the President were negative most of the time that has passed since the beginning of the new political season, and to make the dynamics positive remains an urgent task for the coming months.

As for the assessment of the financial situation and its prospects for the near future, the situation remains stable, but it can hardly be called positive: the proportion of Vologda Oblast residents who subjectively classify themselves as “poor and extremely poor” exceeds the proportion of those who consider themselves to have an “average income”; and negative judgments prevail in the forecasts of the economic situation and people's personal material well-being.

By and large, we can say that public opinion is stable and positive only with regard to self-assessments of psychological well-being: in all socio-demographic groups (including pensioners and low-income people), more than half of the respondents say that they are in a “good mood; normal, even condition”.

Thus, to date, we can state that there are certain changes in the dynamics of public opinion assessments, but it is difficult to draw any long-lasting conclusions on this basis. The autumn-winter season, when the summer holidays come to an end and (due to the beginning of the heating season) utility tariffs increase, will be an important period in terms of testing the “strength” of the existing relations between society and the government. Much will also depend on how tangible the positive changes will be for the general population; the changes, which the first results of national projects, widely announced by the authorities, should lead to.

It is possible that many of the decisions made by the Government in the new political cycle and negatively met by the majority of the population are intended to have long-term effects, and their results should be expected in 20 or 30 years. However, whether the existing level of trust and the overall relative calmness of the socio-political situation can be maintained for these 20–30 years remains an issue that requires the closest attention of the governing bodies, especially in connection with the possible change of the head of state in 2024.

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