

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 2018, and also on average for the latest six polls (June 2017 – April 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 was 68%, which corresponds to an average annual indicator for 2015–2017. The share of negative evaluations of the President's work for the past two months decreased by 3 p.p. (from 21 to 18%).

The level of support of the work of the Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation in February – April 2018 was 48–50%, which is a bit lower than in 2014–2016 (52–58%). The proportion of negative assessments in the past two months decreased by 3 p.p. (from 31 to 28%).

For reference: according to VTsIOM, the share of positive assessments of the President's work nationwide amounted to 82–83% in January – April 2018 (the share of negative judgments was 11%).

According to Levada-Center, the support of the head of state from February to April increased by 5 p.p. (from 76 to 81%), the share of negative assessments decreased by p.p. (from 22 to 19%).

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.vsrc.ac.ru/>.

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

Answer	2007	2011	2014	2015	2016	2017	June 2017	Aug. 2017	Oct. 2017	Dec. 2017	Feb. 2018	Apr. 2018	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the latest 6 surveys compared to ...		
														2016	2011	2007
RF President																
I approve	75.3	58.7	64.1	69.1	67.8	67.3	67.5	69.7	68.3	68.9	68.7	68.1	68.5	+1	+10	-7
I don't approve	11.5	25.6	22.3	17.5	18.8	20.0	19.3	17.3	19.4	19.3	20.8	18.4	19.1	0	-7	+8
Chairman of the RF Government*																
I approve	-*	59.3	54.2	58.1	52.3	49.5	47.9	49.7	51.5	49.9	48.3	49.9	49.5	-3	-10	-
I don't approve	-	24.7	27.6	21.7	27.6	31.1	32.1	30.9	29.9	31.3	30.8	27.8	30.5	+3	+6	-
Governor																
I approve	55.8	45.7	40.1	39.3	37.7	39.8	40.6	42.3	40.8	39.4	39.3	39.5	40.3	+3	-5	-15
I don't approve	22.2	30.5	38.9	36.2	39.3	39.3	38.9	38.7	39.2	40.1	37.9	36.1	38.5	-1	+8	+16
* 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 55–56%;
- the share of those who believe that the President is successful in protecting democracy and strengthening citizens' freedoms is 43%;
- 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 31%.

Among the tangible changes that occurred in February – April 2018, we should note the increase in the proportion of Vologda Oblast residents who believe that the President successfully copes with the problem of restoring order in the country (by 3 p.p., from 51 to 54%). This is much higher than in 2014–2017 (48–50%) and considerably higher than in 2011 (37%).

It should be noted that, on average, over the past six surveys, the assessment of the President's success in solving key problems of the country roughly corresponds to the level of 2007 (the difference makes 1–2 p.p.). This applies to all problems, except for the “economic recovery and the growth of the welfare of citizens”: the proportion of people who positively assess the work of the head of state in this direction was 47% in 2007 and on average over the past six surveys – 31% (it decreased by 16 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	June 2017	Aug. 2017	Oct. 2017	Dec. 2017	Feb. 2018	Apr. 2018	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	50.4	51.7	51.2	55.7	55.3	58.1	57.6	56.5	55.2	56.1	56.5	+5	+10	-2
Unsuccessful	24.9	33.7	32.4	31.3	29.9	26.8	25.8	26.1	26.3	28.3	26.9	26.9	26.7	-3	-7	+2
<i>Success index</i>	133.5	112.5	118.0	120.4	121.3	129.0	129.5	132.0	131.3	128.3	128.3	129.2	129.8	+8	+17	-4
Imposing order in the country																
Successful	53.2	36.6	48.0	50.2	49.2	50.6	49.9	52.0	52.7	52.0	50.9	54.2	52.0	+3	+15	-1
Unsuccessful	34.0	50.0	39.1	37.9	36.7	36.1	35.8	35.6	35.1	34.6	32.7	30.8	34.1	-3	-16	0
<i>Success index</i>	119.2	86.6	108.9	112.3	112.6	114.5	114.1	116.4	117.6	117.4	118.2	123.4	117.9	+5	+31	-1
Protecting democracy and strengthening citizens' freedoms																
Successful	44.4	32.4	37.5	40.4	36.6	40.3	39.1	41.7	42.5	43.3	42.8	42.9	42.1	+5	+10	-2
Unsuccessful	37.0	48.3	45.4	41.5	44.3	40.2	39.7	38.8	38.3	39.3	38.7	37.1	38.7	-6	-10	+2
<i>Success index</i>	107.4	84.1	92.1	99.0	92.3	100.2	99.4	102.9	104.2	103.9	104.1	105.8	103.4	+11	+19	-4
Economic recovery and increase in citizens' welfare																
Successful	47.2	30.7	34.8	34.2	27.2	29.3	28.5	31.3	32.3	31.6	31.0	31.3	31.0	+4	0	-16
Unsuccessful	39.1	56.1	53.4	52.3	59.4	56.9	57.2	55.9	55.3	56.3	53.7	55.3	55.6	-4	0	+17
<i>Success index</i>	108.1	74.6	81.4	81.8	67.8	72.4	71.3	75.4	77.0	75.3	77.3	76.0	75.4	+8	+1	-33

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

In the past two months, the support for United Russia increased by 2 p.p. (from 38 to 40%), which corresponds to the level of 2015 (39%) and which is higher than in 2016–2017 (35%).

In February– April 2018, 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 29 to 26%). It is less than in 2011–2017 (30–34%), however, it is still significantly higher than in 2007 (18%).

The structure of Vologda Oblast residents' preferences concerning political parties did not change significantly and corresponds to the level of 2016–2017: LDPR is supported by 10–11%, KPRF – by 8%, the Just Russia party – by 3–5%.

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		June 2017	Aug. 2017	Oct. 2017	Dec. 2017	Feb. 2018	Apr. 2018	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the latest 6 surveys compared to ...		
		2011							2017									2016	2011	2007
United Russia	30.2	60.5	31.1	33.4	32.8	38.8	35.4	38.0	34.7	33.8	35.2	35.6	37.9	38.4	39.7	36.8	+1	+6	+7	
LDPR	7.5	11.0	7.8	15.4	7.6	6.2	10.4	21.9	11.0	11.1	10.9	11.5	11.6	10.1	9.6	10.8	0	+3	+3	
KPRF	7.0	9.3	10.3	16.8	9.7	7.1	8.3	14.2	7.6	8.5	8.0	7.3	8.1	7.1	8.1	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	5.1	5.8	4.5	4.3	3.5	2.5	4.3	0	-1	-4	
Other	1.8	–	1.9	–	0.3	0.2	0.3	–	0.5	0.3	0.4	0.8	1.1	0.9	1.2	0.8	0	-1	-1	
No party	17.8	–	29.4	–	34.4	31.8	29.4	–	29.2	29.1	26.1	26.2	28.5	28.8	26.2	27.5	-2	-2	+10	
It's difficult to answer	21.2	–	13.2	–	11.7	12.2	12.0	–	12.2	12.1	13.7	14.1	8.6	11.1	12.7	12.1	0	-1	-9	

In February–April 2018, the share of people who characterize their daily mood as “normal, fine and good” increased by 3 p.p., from 69 to 72%. This is higher than in all the previous years of measurements.

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” increased by 3 p.p. (from 76 to 79%, which corresponds to the average level for 2014–2017).

Meanwhile, the self-assessment of people’s financial situation in February–April did not change significantly: the proportion of Vologda Oblast residents who consider themselves to have an “average income” is 41–42% (for comparison: in 2007 – 48%); the share of the “poor and extremely poor” is 46–47% (in 2007 – 42%).

The consumer sentiment index in February–April was 89–90 points. It is higher than in 2015–2017 (77–85 p.), but significantly lower than in 2007 (106 p.). It should also be noted that the value of the index below the level of 100 points (this has been observed since at least 2011) indicates that the majority of the population make pessimistic forecasts about the prospects of the economic situation in the country and the dynamics of their personal financial situation.

Estimation of social condition (percentage of respondents)

Answer	2007	2011	2014	2015	2016	2017	June 2017	Aug. 2017	Oct. 2017	Dec. 2017	Feb. 2018	Apr. 2018	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	69.4	68.7	68.0	70.4	71.0	73.8	71.0	70.5	68.6	71.5	71.1	+3	+8	+7
I feel stress, anger, fear, depression	27.8	28.9	24.9	25.9	26.2	24.2	23.2	21.2	22.8	24.0	23.4	23.1	23.0	-3	-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	78.7	80.5	74.4	77.1	76.2	79.0	77.7	0	+3	+4
It's impossible to bear such plight	13.6	15.3	12.6	14.5	15.6	15.8	14.8	13.5	17.5	16.2	16.3	14.8	15.5	0	0	+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	43.5	45.2	43.0	41.7	41.2	41.8	42.7	+1	0	-5
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	43.2	45.8	48.8	47.1	46.2	46.5	46.3	-3	+2	+4
Consumer sentiment index																
Index value, points	105.9	89.6	87.6	77.1	77.7	84.6	84.3	86.2	86.7	87.3	89.2	90.3	87.3	+10	-2	-19
* Question: "Which category do you belong to, in your opinion?"																

The improvement of social mood in February – April 2018 is observed in 11 of 14 socio-demographic groups. In all the groups, this figure is much higher than in 2007. We should point out the increase in positive emotions among people who according to their own assessments of their income belong to the bottom 20% of Vologda Oblast residents (by 14 p.p., from 48 to 62%). In part, this may be due to the fact that "Russians have adapted to the problems in the economy, are less worried about them and refuse such radical ways to overcome economic problems as saving on food"². This conclusion was made by experts of Romir Research Holding based on the results of surveys conducted in December 2017. At the same time, we cannot but agree with a more pessimistic assessment of some experts: "The fact that people are getting used to a sluggish crisis and to a stable slight decrease in real income has led to the fact that citizens no longer feel a sharp deterioration in their financial situation"³.

In our opinion, a significant increase in the share of positive assessments of social sentiment among the people who according to their own assessments of their income belong to the bottom 20% of Vologda Oblast residents in February – April 2018 can also be associated with the expectation of positive changes in the issues of internal socio-economic development, and above all – in the dynamics of the standard of living and quality of life, which the President spoke about in his Address to the Federal Assembly in 2018.

² Sociologists have found out that Russians got used to the problems in the economy, *RIA-Novosti*, 2018, January 30. Available at: <https://ria.ru/economy/20180130/1513586801.html>

³ Getting used to a "sluggish crisis", Russians returned to the survival experience of the 1990s. *Materials of an analytical review "The monitoring of the economic situation in Russia"*. Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration under the President of the Russian Federation (RANEP). Available at: <https://www.newsru.com/finance/01aug2017/survival.html>

At the same time, the increase in the proportion of those who positively characterize their mood is not observed in all groups: in fact, there are no changes in the estimates of people older than 55 years (64–66%), persons with higher and incomplete higher education (76–78%), representatives of the middle and high-income groups (72 and 82%, respectively).

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

Population group	2007	2011	2014	2015	2016	2017	June 2017	Aug. 2017	Oct. 2017	Dec. 2017	Feb. 2018	Apr. 2018	Average for the latest 6 surveys	Dynamics (+/-), the latest 6 surveys compared to ...		
	2016	2011	2007													
Sex																
Men	65.9	64.5	68.9	69.5	68.8	70.6	72.5	74.6	71.3	70.8	71.0	73.4	72.3	+3	+8	+6
Women	61.7	62.0	69.8	68.0	67.4	70.2	69.9	73.1	70.8	70.3	66.6	70.0	70.1	+3	+8	+8
Age																
Under 30	71.3	70.0	75.1	77.1	76.4	78.1	75.4	80.1	79.4	82.2	74.2	79.6	78.5	+2	+8	+7
30-55	64.8	62.5	69.5	67.2	67.4	71.5	72.0	75.9	71.4	73.1	68.8	74.0	72.5	+5	+10	+8
Over 55	54.8	58.3	65.4	65.5	64.0	64.9	67.4	67.8	66.4	61.4	65.6	64.2	65.5	+1	+7	+11
Education																
Secondary and incomplete secondary	58.4	57.4	62.5	63.6	62.1	63.6	65.8	65.2	63.3	61.2	60.5	65.5	63.6	+1	+6	+5
Secondary vocational	64.6	63.6	70.4	70.1	68.4	72.0	70.2	76.7	73.3	75.0	68.9	72.7	72.8	+4	+9	+8
Higher and incomplete higher	68.6	68.3	76.2	72.7	74.3	75.8	78.0	79.1	77.1	75.6	77.9	76.2	77.3	+3	+9	+9
Income groups																
Bottom 20%	51.6	45.3	50.8	51.8	52.5	52.9	57.1	58.1	57.9	50.7	47.7	61.8	55.6	+3	+10	+4
Middle 60%	62.9	65.3	72.3	71.0	69.4	72.0	72.9	73.7	71.7	72.0	70.3	71.7	72.1	+3	+7	+9
Top 20%	74.9	75.3	84.8	82.0	80.9	83.7	81.3	86.4	82.1	86.2	82.2	81.5	83.3	+2	+8	+8
Territories																
Vologda	63.1	67.1	76.4	73.9	69.9	72.6	74.0	77.0	74.0	72.2	71.0	73.5	73.6	+4	+7	+11
Cherepovets	68.1	71.2	76.3	70.6	71.7	75.7	76.1	77.9	76.9	75.2	71.5	75.0	75.4	+4	+4	+7
Districts	61.6	57.1	61.8	64.6	64.8	66.1	66.6	69.7	66.1	66.9	65.6	68.3	67.2	+2	+10	+6
Oblast	63.6	63.1	69.4	68.7	68.0	70.4	71.1	73.8	71.1	70.5	68.6	71.5	71.1	+3	+8	+8

CONCLUSION

The results of the public opinion monitoring held in February – April 2018 show that the most significant changes in the beginning of the year occurred in the dynamics of social mood: in most socio-demographic groups the share of positive assessments of the emotional state increased markedly.

Nationwide research registers similar dynamics in the assessments of public opinion. For example, according to the results of surveys conducted in February, VTsIOM experts note that “all indicators of social well-being of Russians are higher today than they were two years ago... The Indices of social feeling are returning to the pre-crisis level of 2014, and the indicators of the economic situation and general vector of development of the country have already exceeded the values of four years ago considerably”⁴.

⁴ Social well-being of Russians: a monitoring. *VTsIOM Press Release*, 2018, no. 3617, March 29. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=9013>

At the same time, VTsIOM experts are in no hurry to make categorical conclusions about the dynamics of public sentiment. They note that “when negative sentiment is fading, it doesn’t mean it can turn into optimism... Despite the fact that the direction of the country’s development is perceived more as being correct, the prospects for improving personal financial situation still seem vague”⁵.

The same can be said when we look at the results of studies carried out by VolRC RAS on the territory of the Vologda Oblast: the share of “the poor and extremely poor” since December 2017 is 47% (which is higher than the share of people with “average income” – 41%); the consumer sentiment index in the last two months did not change (89–90 points, which indicates the predominance of pessimistic forecasts among the majority of people); more than half of Vologda Oblast residents are still skeptical about the success of the President’s efforts aimed to ensure economic recovery and growth of citizens’ welfare (54–55%).

Although there have been no significant changes in the dynamics of financial assessments in recent months, this does not affect a high level of people’s support that the head of state has (68–70%). Besides, it is necessary to mention that in the presidential election held on March 18, the share of Vologda Oblast residents who voted for Vladimir Putin was 72.41% (the national average is 65.26%); voter turnout in the Vologda Oblast was 66.2%, while the national average was 61.12%.

Overcoming the country’s backwardness and achieving a decisive breakthrough, first of all in internal development (“to preserve the people of Russia and to guarantee the prosperity of our citizens”⁶) became a keynote of the President’s Address to the Federal Assembly he delivered on the eve of the election (March 1, 2018). This was fully in line with people’s expectations, which is confirmed by VTsIOM experts who speak about “the relevance of the agenda, first of all, various aspects of ensuring the security of Russians and prospects for addressing social and economic problems”⁷. No less important is the fact that “a significant part of Russians perceived the Address through the prism of the program of action of the head of state for his next term in office. In this context, the purpose of the address is not only to identify the development objectives, but also to demonstrate the reality of ways to achieve them”⁸.

Thus, the fact that social mood of Russians has improved despite the continuing acuteness of current socio-economic problems proceeds mainly from people’s perception of the goals of the country’s development for the coming years, backed by specific instructions of the President, digital criteria for their achievement, and personal responsibility of the main executors. Whether any of the positive changes in the assessments of public opinion outlined in the beginning of the year can become a trend will depend primarily on how the instructions of the President will be executed by the new Cabinet of Ministers, the composition of which will be announced after the inauguration of Vladimir Putin in May 2018.

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

⁵ *Ibidem.* (Opinion of Yu. Baskakova, head of the practice of social modeling and forecasting at VTsIOM).

⁶ Address of the President to the Federal Assembly, May 1, 2018. *Official website of the President of the Russian Federation.* Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56957>

⁷ Address of the President to the Federal Assembly 2018: first impressions. *VTsIOM Press Release*, 2018, no. 3602, March 13. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=8989> (opinion of M. Mamonov, head of the practice of political analysis and consulting at VTsIOM).

⁸ *Ibidem.*