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 Oblast[1].

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 August 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 June − August 2019, the level of approval of the work of the President of the Russian Federation did not change significantly: the share of positive assessments is 56%, the share of negative assessments is 28−29%.

The dynamics of public opinion concerning the performance of the head of state show no tangible changes since April 2019 (that is, during the latest three surveys). It was then that we saw the reversal of the negative trend of reducing the share of positive judgments caused primarily by the reaction of society to the changes in the pension legislation (during the period from June 2018 to April 2019, the share of positive assessments of the President's work decreased by 14 p.p., from 70 to 56%; however, since April 2019 it has been stable at 56%).
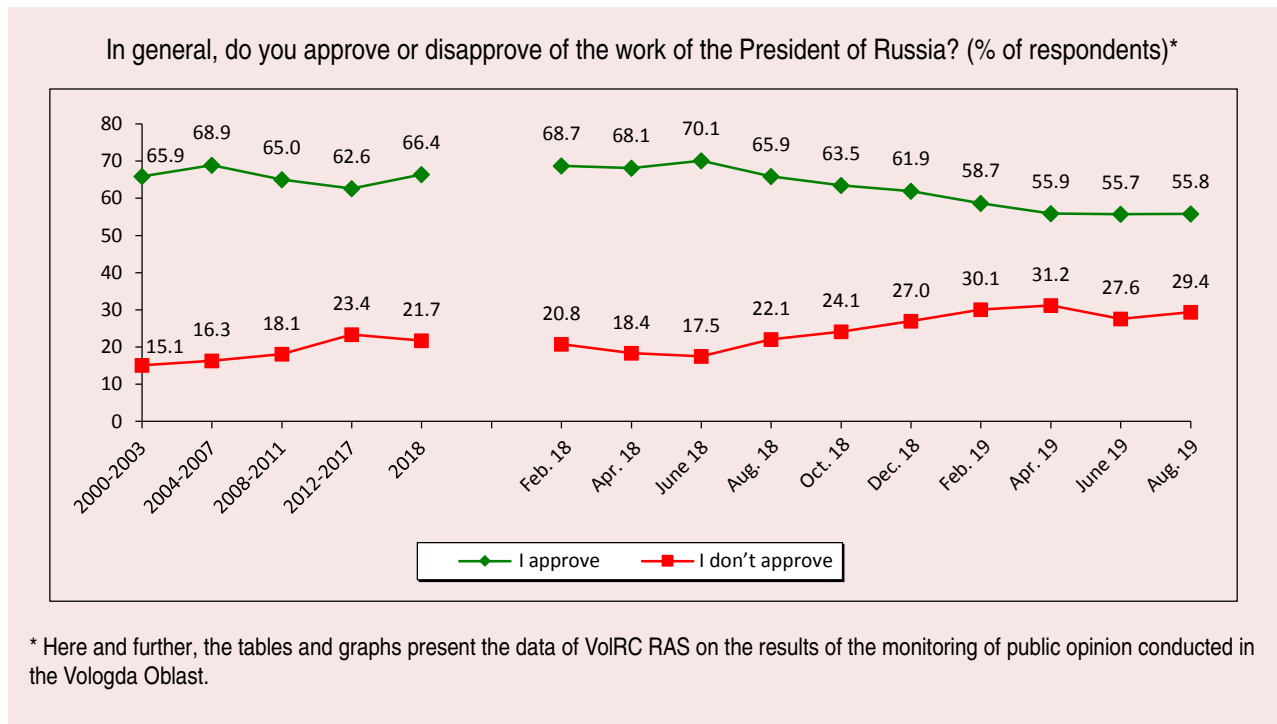
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[1] The polls are held six times a year in Vologda, Cherepovets, and in eight districts of the oblast (Babayevsky District, Velikoustyugsky District, Vozhegodsky District, Gryazovetsky District, Kirillovsky District, Nikolsky District, Tarnogsky District 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.vscc.ac.ru/.

For reference

According to VTsIOM, the share of positive assessments in June − August 2019 nationwide was 64%, negative − 27−28% (for comparison: in February 2018, the level of approval of the President's activities, according to VTsIOM, was 78%, the level of disapproval was 12%[2]).

According to Levada-Center, support for the President's work in June − July 2019 was 68%, the share of negative judgments was 28% (for comparison: in February 2018, the share of positive assessments of the President's work, according to Levada-Center, was 76%, negative − 22%).

In general, do you approve or disapprove of the work of the President of Russia? (% of respondents)*

* Here and further, the tables and graphs present the data of VolRC RAS on the results of the monitoring of public opinion conducted in the Vologda Oblast.

How do you assess the current performance of..? (percentage 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	Aug. 2019	Dynamics (+/-) Aug. 19 to…	
																June 19	Feb. 18
Chairman of the RF Government*																	
I approve	-*	59.3	49.6	49.5	48.0	48.3	49.9	52.0	47.4	45.2	45.3	41.6	38.8	40.9	43.1	+2	-5
I don't approve	-	24.7	33.3	31.1	31.6	30.8	27.8	27.5	31.9	34.8	36.9	39.3	40.2	38.0	36.3	-2	+6
Governor																	
I approve	55.8	45.7	41.9	39.8	38.4	39.3	39.5	40.5	37.3	35.7	38.3	36.5	34.7	35.4	36.1	+1	-3
I don't approve	22.2	30.5	33.3	39.3	37.6	37.9	36.1	35.3	36.9	39.1	40.3	41.5	41.4	38.6	38.5	0	+1
* Included in the survey since 2008.																	

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[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, the share of Vologda Oblast residents who believe that the President is successfully coping with the problems of strengthening Russia's international positions (51—52%), restoring order in the country (45—46%), protecting democracy and strengthening citizens' freedoms (35-36%) has remained virtually unchanged.

At the same time, the assessments of the success of the work of the head of state aimed at economic recovery and increasing the welfare of citizens worsened slightly: the share of positive judgments decreased from 29 to 26%, the proportion of negative judgements increased from 58 to 60%.

In general, as of August 2019, the share of positive assessments of the President's activities to address the country's key issues is 4—6 percentage points lower than in February 2018 and the average for 2017 and 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	Aug. 2019	Dynamics (+/-) Aug. 19 to…	
																June 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	51.0	-1	-4
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	30.6	0	+4
Success index	*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*	*120.4*	*-1*	*-8*
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	46.1	+2	-5
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	39.3	0	+7
Success index	*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*	*106.8*	*+2*	*-11*
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	35.5	+1	-7
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	46.1	+1	+7
Success index	*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*	*89.4*	*0*	*-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	26.5	-3	-5
Не успешно	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	59.7	+2	+6
Success index	*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*	*66.8*	*-5*	*-11*
* Ranked according to the average value of the index of success for 2018.																	

In June – August, the structure of people's preferences concerning political parties did not change: the United Russia party is supported by 34−35%, LDPR and the Communist Party — by 9−11%, the Just Russia party — by 3−4%.

We should note that in comparison with the first half of 2018 (February−June), of all parliamentary parties, only United Russia has lost its positions (a decrease of 4−5 percentage points, from 38−39 to 34−35%)

In June − August 2019, the share of Vologda Oblast residents who believe that none of the parties represented in Parliament reflects their interests was 32%. It is less than in April 2019 (35%), but more than in early 2018 (29%) and also more than average annual estimates for 2017 and 2018 (29%).

Which party expresses your interests? (% of respondents)

Party	2007	2011	Election to the RF State Duma 2011, fact	2012	2016	Election to the RF State Duma 2016, fact	2017	2018	Feb. 2018	Apr. 2018	June 2018	Aug. 2018	Oct. 2018	Dec. 2018	Feb. 2019	Apr. 2019	June 2019	Aug. 2019	Dynamics (+/-) Aug. 19 to…	
																			June 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	33.5	-1	-5
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	10.5	+1	0
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	8.7	0	+2
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	3.9	+1	0
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	0.4	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	32.1	0	+3
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	10.9	-2	0

Like two months earlier, in August 2019, the proportion of residents of the Oblast who positively characterize their daily mood was 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" in was 77−78% in June − August.

At the same time, it is difficult to assess positively the lack of changes in the dynamics of self-assessments of the standard of living and quality of life of the population. Over the past two months, the proportion of people who subjectively classify themselves as "poor and extremely poor" was 46−47% (this is more than the proportion of those who consider themselves to have "average income" − 43%).

In fact, the consumer sentiment index for the entire period from February 2018 to August 2019 varies from 89 to 92 points (that is, less than 100 points), which indicates the prevalence of pessimistic judgments in the estimates of the population regarding the future prospects of the Russian economy and their own financial situation.

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	Aug. 2019	Dynamics (+/-) Aug. 19 to… June 19	Dynamics (+/-) Aug. 19 to… 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	70.9	-1	+2
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	23.4	0	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	76.8	-1	+1
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	16.2	0	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	42.9	0	+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	47.0	+1	+1
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	91.8	+1	+3

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

Over the past two months, the proportion of people who positively characterize their mood has not changed significantly in most socio-demographic groups.

The proportion of positive assessments among people 30–55 years of age increased slightly (by 4 p.p., from 70 to 74%).

At the same time, we point out negative changes among the residents of the Oblast over 55 years of age (the share of people with "good mood; normal condition", decreased by 7 p.p., from 67 to 60%), as well as among people with secondary vocational education (by 5 p.p., from 77 to 72%)

We should also note that in two of the 14 analyzed socio-demographic groups for the period from February 2018 to August 2019, the share of positive assessments of social mood decreased significantly: among people over 55 years of age (by 5 p.p., from 66 to 61%) and among people with higher and incomplete higher education (by 4 p.p., from 78 to 74%)

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	Aug. 2019	Dynamics (+/-) Aug. 19 to… June 19	Dynamics (+/-) Aug. 19 to… 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	71.8	0	+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	70.1	-1	+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	85.2	+2	+11
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	74.0	+4	+5
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	60.7	-7	-5
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	65.6	+1	+5
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	72.8	-5	+4
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	73.9	+2	-4
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	53.2	-2	+6
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	72.1	-2	+2
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	81.4	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	68.0	-2	-3
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	74.4	+2	+3
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	70.5	-1	+5
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	70.9	-1	+2

Conclusion

According to the results of the monitoring, there have been no tangible positive trends in the dynamics of public opinion on key issues characterizing the situation in the country. From about April to June 2019, the following indicators remain stable:

✓ the level of support for the head of state (56%) and United Russia (34%);

✓ the share of positive assessments of psychological well-being (71%) and the stock of patience (77%);

✓ the share of Vologda Oblast residents who relate themselves to the category of people with middle income (43%), and consumer expectations of the population (consumer sentiment index is 91—92 points).

One could say that in the summer months of 2019 it became possible to overcome the negative trend of declining support for the President, which was observed for nearly a year (from June 2018 to April 2019), and was caused by a negative perception of the pension reform (let us recall that over this period the proportion of positive assessments of the President's work decreased by 14 p.p., from 70% to 56%, and negative — increased by 13 p.p. from 18 to 31%).

However, first of all, it should be noted that the summer months — the period of holidays and working at private subsidiary plots — is not the most representative period to draw long-term conclusions. Second, it is not clear yet, which monitoring indicators must be changed so that we could see tangible positive changes: so far, there are no stable positive trends either in the head of state finding solutions to the key problems of the country, or in the dynamics of self-assessments of the financial situation, or in the trends of social mood. Finally, third (and most important), we must not forget what goals the state and society had to achieve at the beginning of the current political cycle: so far, it is only about preserving the legitimacy of the government, but not about "a decisive breakthrough in the well-being of our people"[3].

Against the backdrop of skeptical forecasts of experts on the tangibility of the implementation of national projects[4], worrying expectations about an imminent (perhaps this year) recession of the Russian economy[5], as well as pessimistic official statistics indicating the absence of positive changes in the dynamics of the standard of living and quality of life[6], the probability that in the

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[3] 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

[4] See, for example:

Why trillions of spending on national projects do not improve the situation. *Ekho Moskvy*, April 9, 2019. Available at: https://echo.msk.ru/blog/openmedia/2404337-echo/; Simchera V., Kalitin P., Averyanov V. *At the break of generations. Human "capital" or human "ballast"?* Available at: http://zavtra.ru/blogs/na_izlome_pokolenij; An extended meeting of the Regional Council of "OPORA Russia", March 22, 2019. *Official website of "OPORA Russia"*. Available at: http://opora.ru

[5] Titov's experts predicted a recession in 2019. *RBK Website,* August 5, 2019. Available at: https://www.rbc.ru/economics/05/08/2019/5d443a6d9a79470cb3c28cbc?utm_source=yxnews&utm_medium=desktop

[6] According to official statistics, the share of Vologda Oblast residents with monetary income below the subsistence minimum is growing for the third year in a row: in 2016 — 13.4%; in 2017 — 13.6%; in 2018 — 13.8%. In the first quarter of 2019, real wages amounted to 96.4% of the level of the fourth quarter 2018; real disposable monetary income — 78.1%. The consumer price index at the same time increased slightly: 101.5% in the first quarter of 2019 to the fourth quarter of 2018 (source: territorial office of the Federal State Statistics Service in the Vologda Oblast. Available at: http. //vologdastat.gks.ru; *Socio-economic situation in the Vologda Oblast in January — June 2019: report*. Vologdastat. Vologda, 2019. 83 p.). In the first quarter of 2019, real wages amounted to 96.4% of the level of the fourth quarter of 2018; real disposable monetary income was 78.1%.

autumn-winter period, public opinion the assessments will begin to deteriorate is quite high. And so far, we can only guess what the pace of these negative trends may be.

Under the circumstances, it is extremely important to achieve the goal set out by the President: "this year people should feel real changes for the better"[7]. Speaking at a meeting of the Council for Strategic Development and National Projects, V. Putin noted: "People are not interested in abstract promises. The result is what matters for people, here and now, not in some distant future. In any case, people should see that the process is underway, that it is positive and leads to these results"[8].

Will this ideological, but, at the same time, quite specific, message of the head of state addressed, first of all, to the ruling elites responsible for implementation of national projects, be realized; or will this target once again "sink" in the sea of bureaucratic excuses, interpretations and manipulations with statistical data? Further measurements of the public opinion monitoring will show.

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

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[7] Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, February 20, 2018. *Official website of the RF President*. Available at: http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59863

[8] The meeting of the Council for Strategic Development and National Projects, May 8, 2019. Available at: http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60485