



The Institute for Conflict Studies and Analysis of Russia

WHAT RUSSIANS ARE TALKING ABOUT: NARRATIVES AND TRENDS OF SOCIAL NETWORKS AND MEDIA FOR OCTOBER 2024

Comprehensive AI-powered media analysis

Prepared by the Institute for Conflict Studies and Analysis of Russia. November 2024.

Resume



The BRICS summit was the most discussed topic on Russian TV and social media in October 2024. During the 16th annual summit in Kazan, Russia presented a range of initiatives to counter the West's isolationist policies and strengthen President Putin's authority. News about the BRICS summit garnered 600 million views and more than 8 million reactions.

The second major topic in Russian media in October was the advancement of Russian forces in Donbas. According to media monitoring, Telegram posts regarding the city of Vuhledar received 442 million views and 10 million reactions, while posts about Selydivo garnered 400 million views and almost 12 million reactions.

The migration crisis in Russia also ranked among the top three topics in Russian media and social networks in October. Relevant messages reached 479 million views and more than 12 million reactions on Telegram, 58% of which were negative. The most active discussions on migration occurred in the middle and at the end of the month, during the passage of key legislative initiatives. On October 15, a bill to combat sham marriages was passed, and on October 29, four additional bills were adopted, significantly increasing penalties for organizing illegal migration.

The worsening economic situation and shortages of popular goods and services in Russia were also reflected in discussions on Russian social media. In October, posts about inflation in Russia accumulated 183 million views and 2.4 million reactions. Almost 40% of these posts had a negative tone. The peak of views occurred following the statement by the head of the Central Bank, Elvira Nabiullina, about the necessity of raising the key interest rate to 23%.

Resume



Russia's recruitment of regular North Korean military forces to participate in the war also became a popular topic in the Russian information space. On October 18, video evidence of North Korean soldiers in Russia surfaced online for the first time. On that day, the related news gained almost 14 million views. The total number of views of posts on this topic in October reached 94 million, with nearly 2 million reactions.

In October, Ukrainian forces continued to target deep Russian rear areas. Ukrainian drones struck military bases and strategic facilities up to 2,000 kilometers from the front line. Posts in the Russian segment of Telegram about drone strikes and air defense operations garnered 18 million views and nearly 100,000 reactions, the majority of which were negative.

In October, there is again a clear difference between the results of official sociological surveys regarding trust in President Putin (more than 80%) and the reactions of Russians on social networks to his mentions. According to the results of media monitoring for October, Russians left about 190 thousand comments under Telegram publications that mentioned the president, of which 57% were negative.

This figure is close to the same indicator last month.

Research Methodology

Our findings on the sentiments of the Russian Federation citizens are based on an AI-powered analysis of the Russian media landscape. This study encompasses social media posts and user comments in October 2024, as well as news from leading media outlets and official statements.

Our research aims to identify the key factors shaping public sentiment in various Russian regions, particularly in the context of ongoing military operations and recent military-political decisions made by the Russian government. Furthermore, we examined the patterns of reactions to these events as portrayed through pro-Kremlin propaganda.

For monitoring, keywords and phrases were used that reflected the above-mentioned issues, as well as related topics. This detailed analysis helps to better understand the attitudes of Russian society, the main topics of daily discussions and the most typical reactions of Russian citizens in the face of full-scale aggression against Ukraine.

Specifically, we examined topics such as the progress of military operations, the involvement of North Korean troops, socio-economic issues including rising prices and inflation, the migration crisis, key socio-political trends, and other current matters.

AGENDA

- ❑ **Course of 'SMO'**
- ❑ **Socio-economic Sentiments**
- ❑ **Socio-political Sentiments**





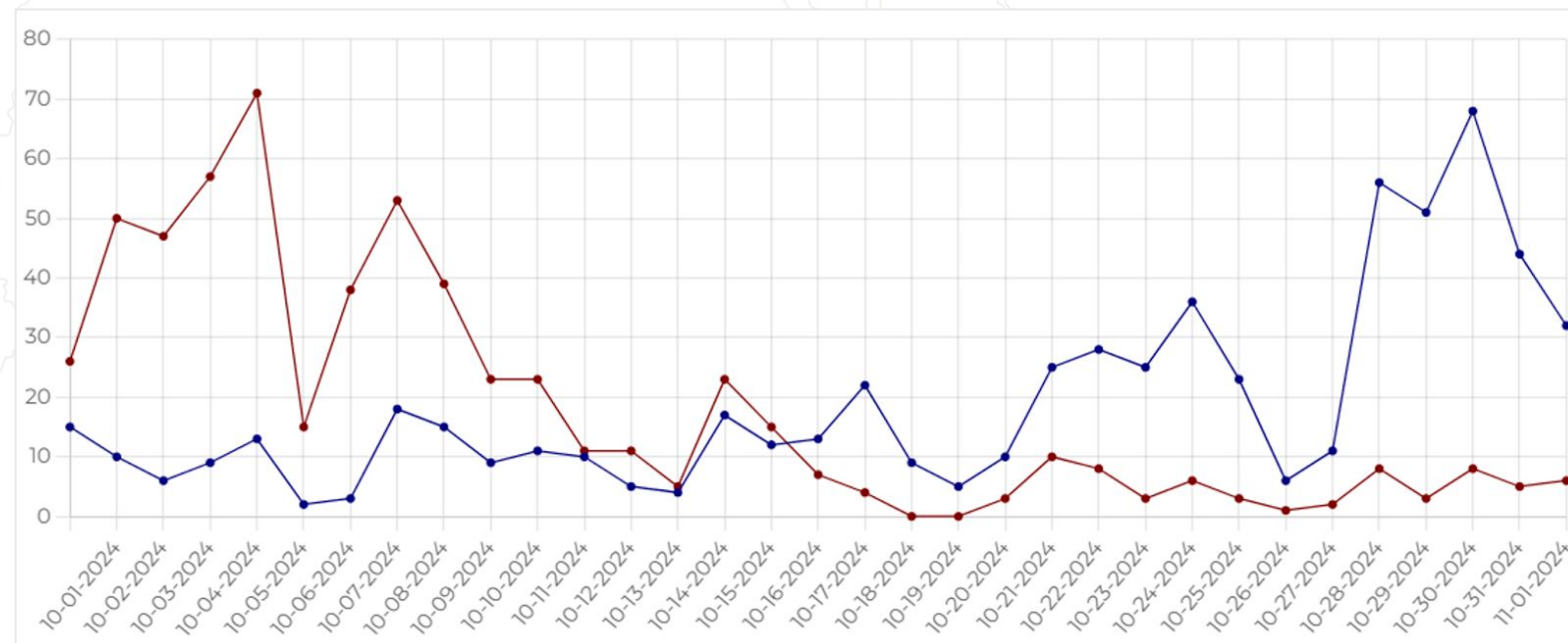
Course of 'SMO'

Advancement in Donbas

Despite record losses, Russian forces continued their active offensive on the front lines, focusing their efforts on the city of Pokrovsk, which holds strategic significance for the defense of Donbas. To achieve their objective, Russian assault units have been carrying out intensive offensive actions in the surrounding settlements. As a result, in October, Russian forces managed to capture the city of Selydove, located on the outskirts of Pokrovsk, as well as the town of Vuhledar in the south.

In case of success, Russian authorities will present the occupation of Pokrovsk as a "great victory." In September, Putin gave a direct order to seize the city by October 1, but that did not happen. Given the strategic importance of the battles for Pokrovsk, Russian propaganda actively covers these events. The graph of mentions on Russian television shows how discussions about Vuhledar (red) at the beginning of October shifted to conversations about Selydove (blue) by the end of the month.

Figure 1. Mentions of Selydove and Vuhledar in Russian TV shows.

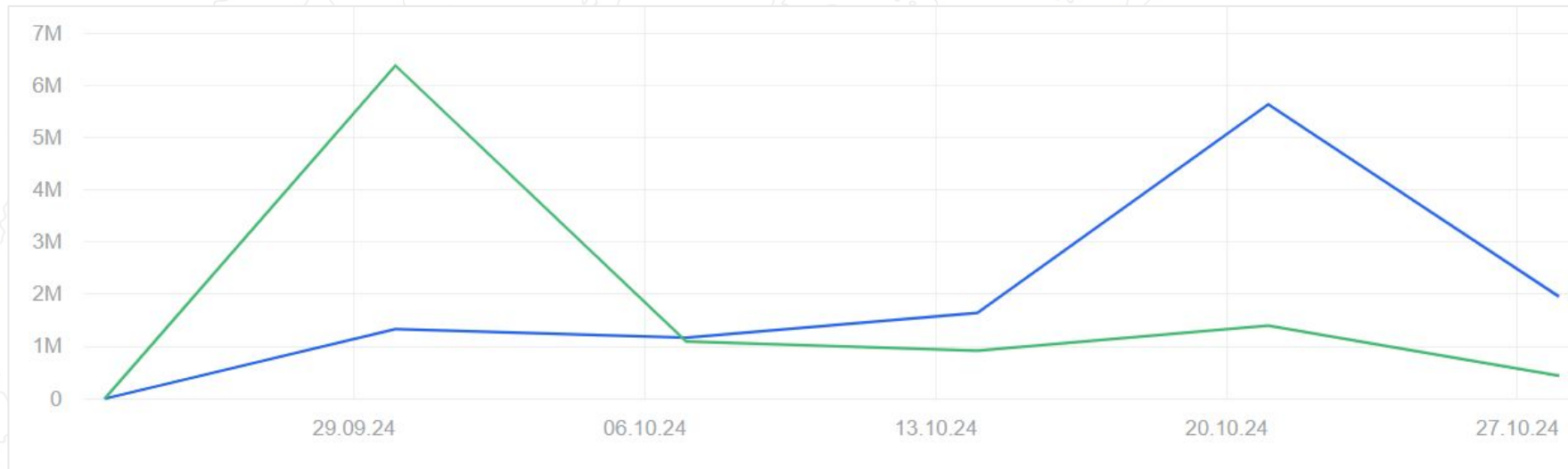


Advancement in Donbas

The Russian advance in Donbas also sparked significant discussions in Russian social media. According to monitoring data, Telegram posts mentioning Vuhledar garnered 442 million views and 10 million reactions in October, while posts about Selydove received 400 million views and nearly 12 million reactions.

The graph of reactions to posts about Vuhledar (green) and Selydove (blue) shows that Russian propaganda actively exploited the theme of "successes" in the war to maintain the desired tone and authority of the current regime.

Figure 2. Views of Telegram Posts about Selydove and Vuhledar.



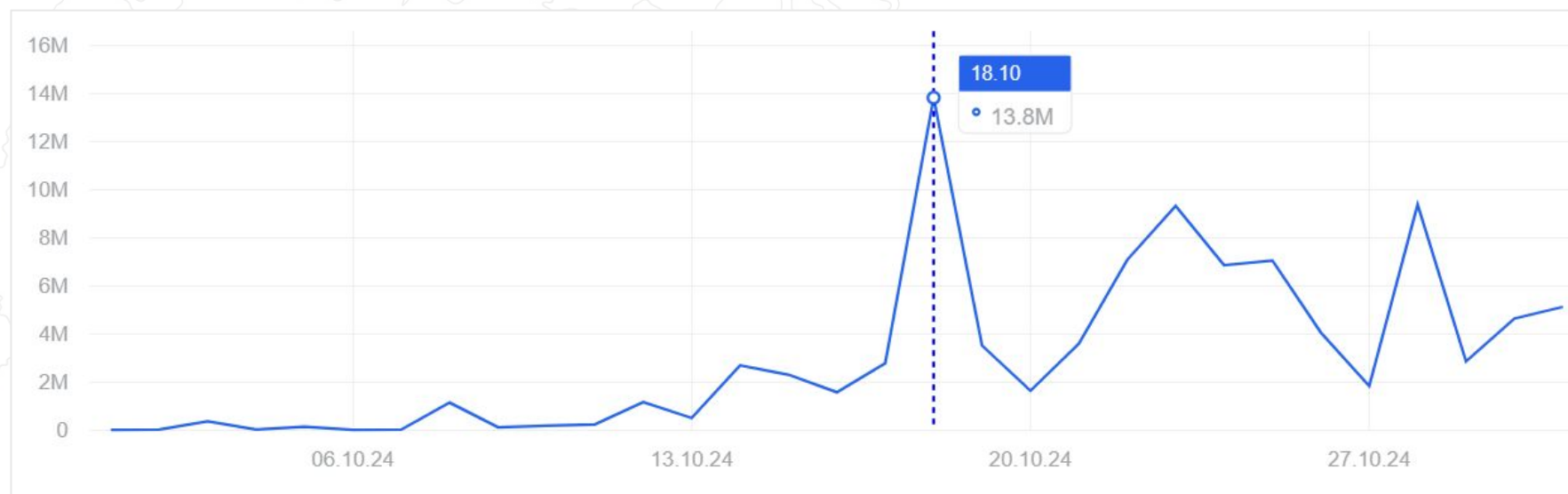
North Korean Soldiers in the Kursk Region



As Russia ramped up its offensive efforts on the front lines, it soon faced a critical shortage of ammunition and weapons. To cover this gap, the Kremlin turned to other countries, including North Korea, which became one of the major suppliers of artillery shells. The strategic partnership between Russia and North Korea was formalized on June 19, 2024, through an agreement that focused on military cooperation and included mutual assistance in the event of aggression against either country.

Russian media kept quiet about the involvement of foreign troops in the conflict until October 18, when video footage emerged confirming the presence of North Korean soldiers on Russian soil. The videos rapidly gained attention, accumulating nearly 14 million views on the same day. By the end of October, relevant posts generated 94 million views and almost 2 million reactions.

Figure 3. Views of Telegram Posts about North Korean Soldiers in Russia.



Drone Attacks by the Ukrainian Armed Forces



In October, Ukraine's Defense Forces continued to strike targets deep within Russian territory. Ukrainian drones attacked military bases and strategic sites up to 2,000 kilometers from the front line. This shift marked a turning point in how Russians perceived the war.

The graph shows that views of posts about UAV strikes peaked on October 10, following a massive attack on a Russian drone storage base in the town of Zhovtneve, Krasnodar Krai, where "Shahid" strike drones were stored.

Figure 4. Views of Telegram Posts about Ukrainian Drone Strikes.



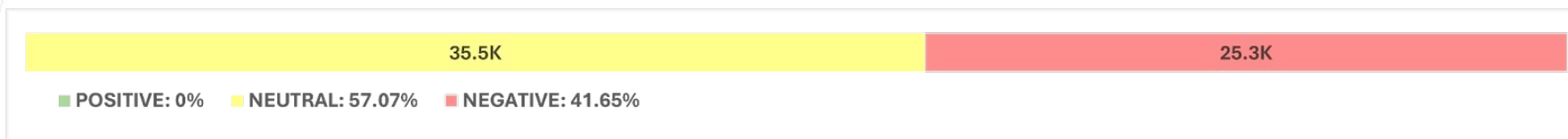
Drone Attacks by the Ukrainian Armed Forces



Overall, posts in the Russian Telegram segment about drone strikes and air defense operations in October garnered 18 million views and nearly 100 thousand reactions. Most publications had a negative tone, indicating the significant psychological impact these attacks had on Russians.



On October 5, 2024, due to a failed test, Russia lost its top-secret S-70 drone worth \$15 million, which was hit by friendly fire in the sky near Konstantinovka, Donetsk region. The news and photos from the crash site sparked unprecedented interest among Russians. On the other hand, Russian propaganda took maximum measures to neutralize the effects of this event and create information noise. Relevant Telegram posts drew nearly 4 million views and over 60 thousand reactions, with more than 40% of the negative feedback. The share of compromised sources covering this news reached approximately 37%, far above the average rate of 15%.





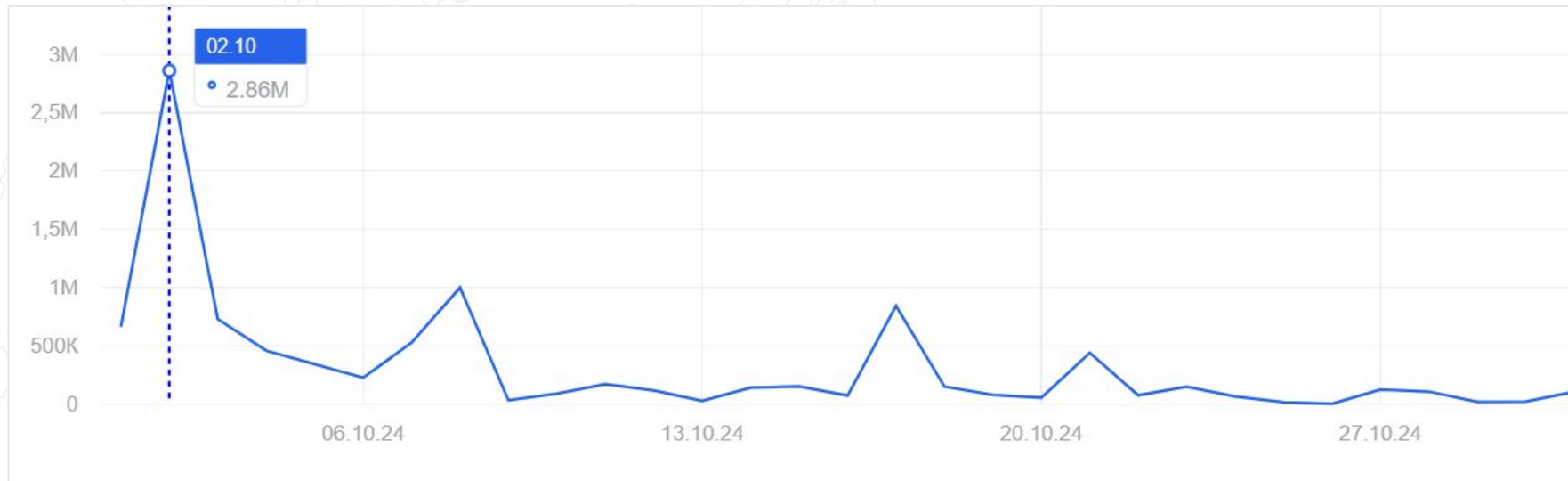
Socio-economic Sentiments

Mobilization in the Russian Federation

Faced with record losses, the Kremlin ramped up efforts to encourage new military recruiting contracts, offering substantial financial rewards. Since 2022, these incentives have increased from 200,000 rubles to 3 million rubles in some regions. Russia also continues its “partial mobilization,” which remains active as of October 2024.

Russian leadership recruits individuals convicted of serious crimes and citizens with legal issues for combat roles. As the graph shows, views on Telegram posts about mobilization in Russia reached 10 million in October, peaking on October 2, when Putin signed a law exempting defendants serving in the military from criminal liability.

Figure 5. Views of Telegram Posts about Mobilization in Russia.



Inflation and Shortages of Goods

The prolonged conflict and isolation continue to weigh heavily on Russia's economy. In October, the Russian government raised the interest rate to 21% to counter persistent inflation.

Insights into Telegram discussions on inflation and economic downturn reveal that this topic resonates deeply among Russians, many of whom feel the impact through declining living standards and shortages of essential goods and services. In October alone, posts about inflation accumulated 183 million views and 2.4 million reactions, nearly 40% reflecting a negative outlook. The peak followed the announcement of Central Bank head Elvira Nabiullina about a potential rate hike to 23%.

Figure 6. Views of Telegram Posts About Inflation in Russia.



Inflation and Shortages of Goods

Despite shortages in auto parts, dairy products, and other goods and services, the labor shortage is the most critical challenge for Russia's economy. This issue stems from significant casualties at the front, the emigration of skilled workers, stricter migration policies, and the defense industry's soaring demands, which have risen sharply since 2022.

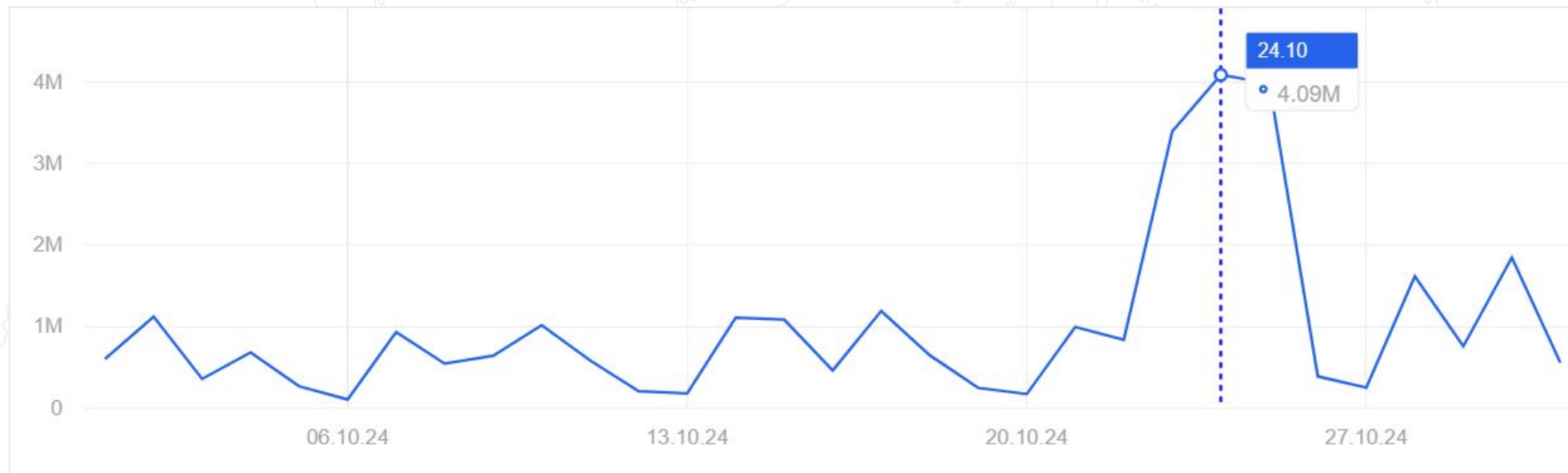
This labor shortfall impacts all sectors of the economy, including the public sector and law enforcement agencies. The scarcity of qualified personnel has reduced production volumes and quality, while wages have surged out of necessity. In terms of industry distribution, official data indicates the following:

- Policeman shortage – 20%
- Shortage of preventive healthcare doctors – over 25%
- Shortage of specialists in housing and communal services – over 100,000
- Construction industry labor shortage – 200,000
- Agricultural labor shortage – 200,000
- IT specialist shortage – 740,000
- Private sector: 85% (small businesses); 89% (large businesses).

Inflation and Shortages of Goods

As the graph shows, the peak of Telegram posts mentioning workforce shortages in Russia coincided with a statement from Moscow Mayor Sergey Sobyenin, who projected that the capital's labor shortfall would double to 1 million workers over the next five years.

Figure 7. Views of Telegram Posts About Workforce Shortage in Russia.



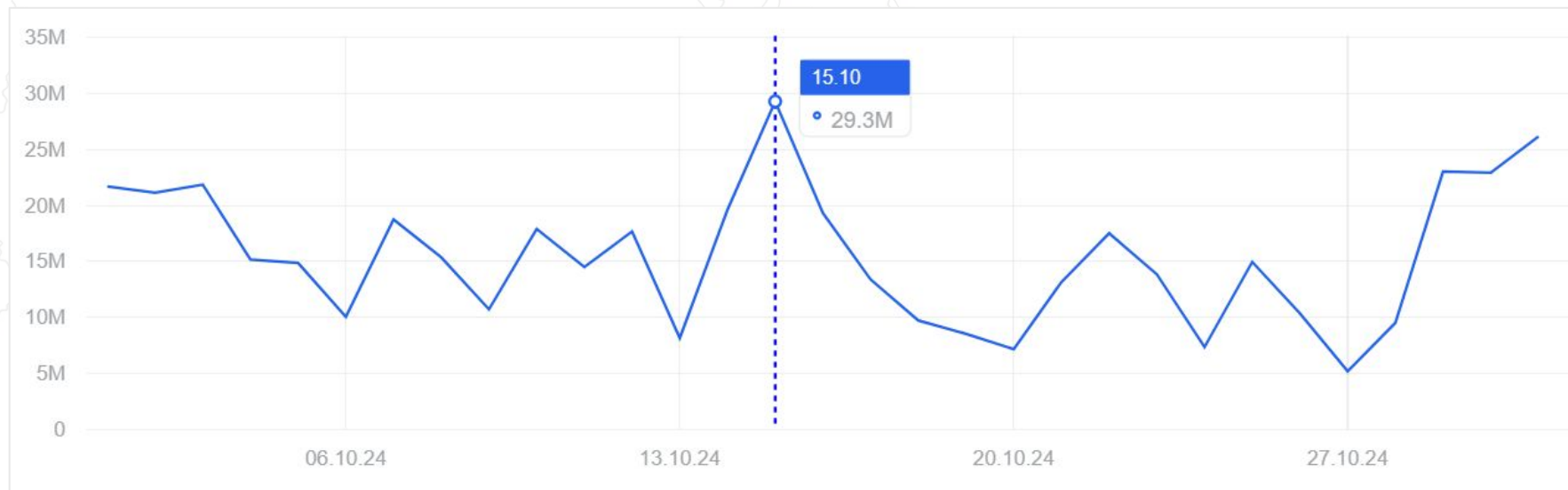
Intensification of the Migration Crisis

Russia's workforce shortage is driving a significant influx of migrants. Businesses eager to attract low-cost labor rely on semi-legal and illegal methods to bring in and naturalize citizens from Central Asia.

In response to widespread migration law violations, Russian authorities passed a series of initiatives in October 2024 to crack down on illegal migration. On October 15, a bill targeting sham marriages took effect, followed by four additional bills on October 29 that increased penalties for organizing unlawful migration.

The migration issue draws strong reactions in Russian social media. In October, Telegram posts on migrant topics drew 479 million views and over 12 million reactions, with 58% showing negative sentiment. Discussions peaked mid- and late-month, coinciding with the passing of new bills.

Figure 8. Views of Telegram Posts Regarding Migrants in Russia.





Socio-political Sentiments

Declining Public Trust in Government Officials

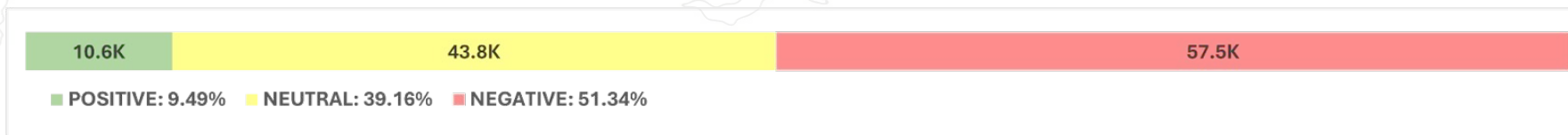


According to an objective analysis of social sentiments, trust in the Russian government, particularly in President Vladimir Putin, is declining. The main reasons for this decline include the economic downturn, the ongoing war on Russian territory, significant losses, and the country's isolation.

In October, Russians left approximately 190,000 comments on Telegram posts mentioning President Putin, with 57% of these comments expressing negative sentiment:



As for mentions of the state bodies, including the State Duma, the Security Council, and regional governors, the number of comments on relevant posts amounted to 112,000, with 51% of the reactions being negative:

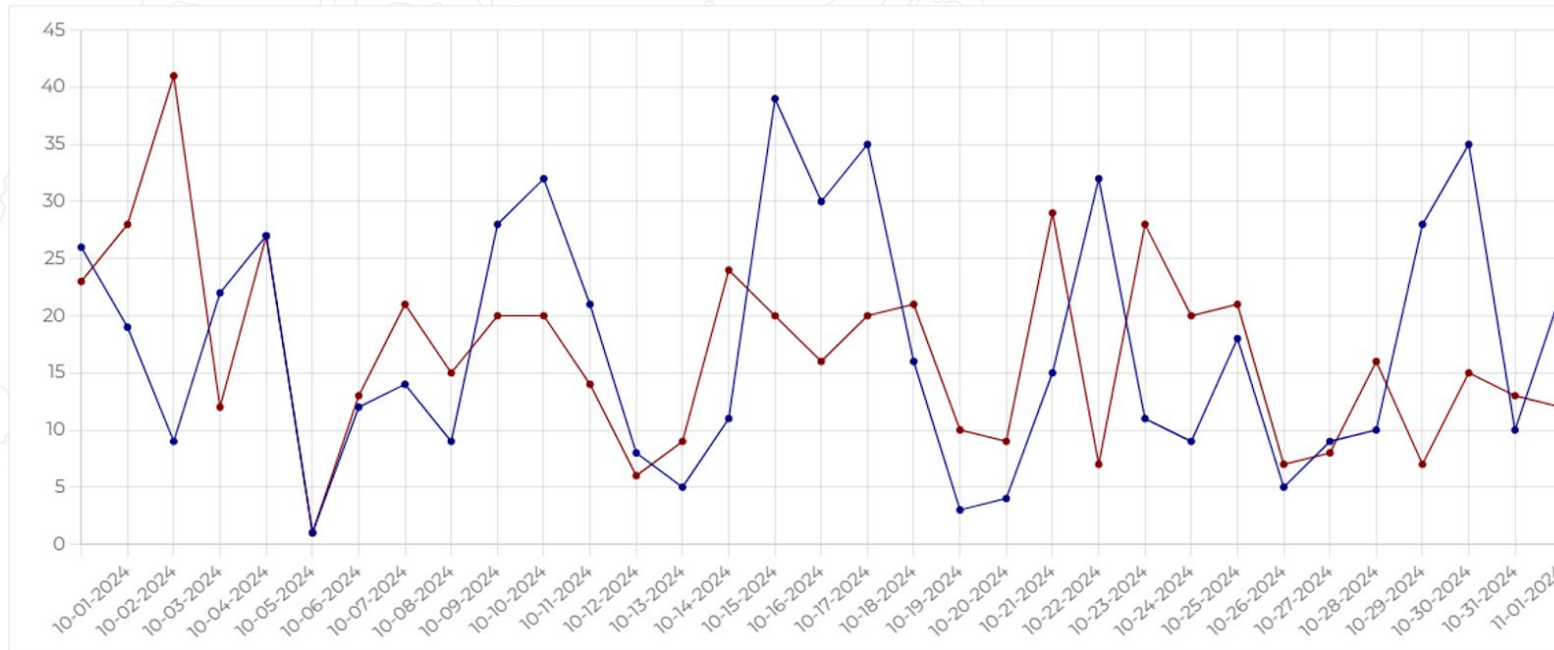


A Surge in Xenophobia and Discrimination

The intensifying migration crisis in Russia leads to an increase in xenophobic and discriminatory attitudes. The rhetoric surrounding migrants become more radical, particularly among government officials. For example, Sergey Obukhov, leader of the Communist Party of Russia, referred to illegal migrants as "latent criminals" during debates on anti-migration legislation. He cited statistics suggesting that migrants are "five times more likely to engage in terrorism and twice as likely to commit violent crimes."

Moreover, Russian television programs play a significant role in promoting the stigmatization of migrants. As the graph illustrates, discussions on these topics predominantly focus on the connection between migrants (blue) and terrorism (red).

Figure 9. Mentions of Migrants and Terrorism in Russian TV shows.

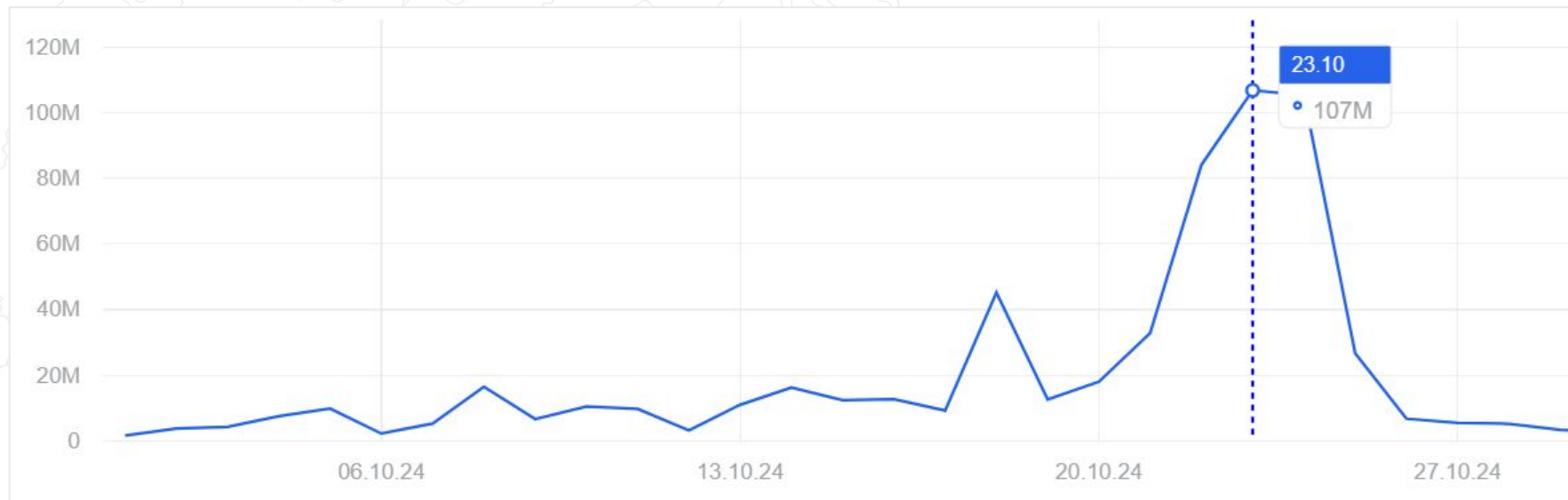


BRICS Summit in Kazan

October 2024 marked a surge in the Kremlin's activity on the international stage. At the sixteenth annual BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia presented a series of initiatives to counter the West's isolating policies and strengthen President Putin's authority. Among the proposed solutions were ideas for creating an alternative regional currency to the dollar, establishing international trade platforms, and other proposals, all of which were largely dismissed by the summit participants.

Russian propaganda actively prepared the public for a “significant breakthrough,” but after the evident failure, the media campaign designed to support this narrative abruptly ended. Media monitoring results confirm the substantial efforts made by propaganda in this direction. BRICS-related posts received 600 million views and more than 8 million reactions.

Figure 10. Views of Telegram Posts on BRICS Summit.

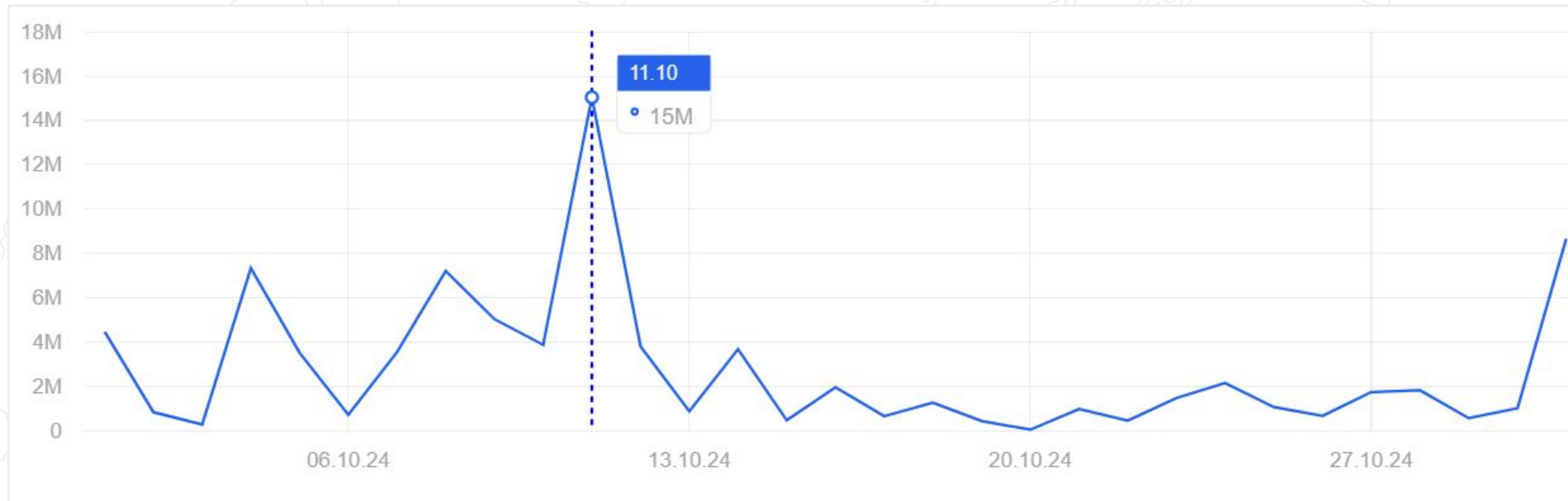


Russian propaganda actions reflect part of a broader strategy by the Kremlin to minimize the negative consequences of the war and sanctions while strengthening control over information flows within the country.

Incident in the North Caucasus

A key narrative of Kremlin propaganda centers on the active and successful fight against Russia's external and internal enemies. Against the backdrop of the migration crisis and rising xenophobic sentiments, concerns about the spread of extremism in Russia are intensifying. This issue sparked significant discussion in Russian social media following the October 11 incident in Ingushetia, where the vehicle of the "E" Center servant, which focuses on countering extremism, was shot at. In October, discussions in Telegram about extremism accumulated around 86 million views and 1,5 million reactions.

Figure 11. Views of Telegram Posts on Extremism in Russia.

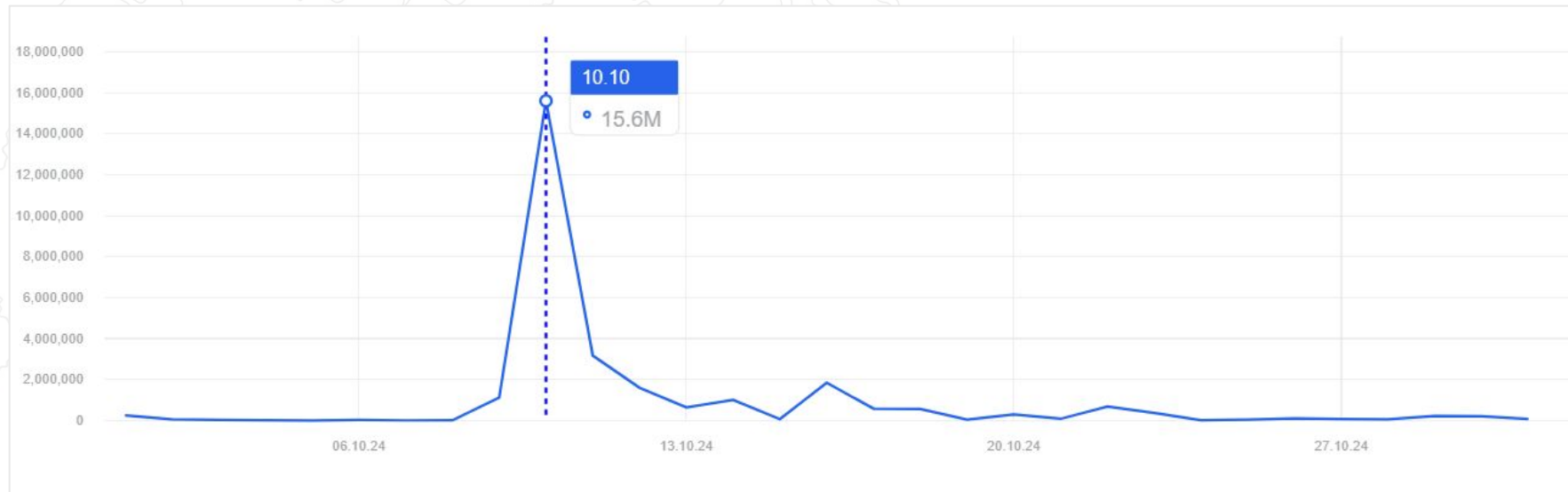


Incident in the North Caucasus

The crisis in the North Caucasus escalated due to a conflict involving Wildberries, one of Russia's largest marketplaces, with an annual turnover in the billions. A clash of business interests led to a shootout at the company's office, increasing regional tensions. In response, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov vowed to punish the other side of the conflict, represented by Suleiman Kerimov, a senator from Dagestan.

The situation quickly drew significant attention in Russian Telegram channels. Posts about the incident received nearly 29 million views and over 405,000 reactions. The highest spike in views occurred on October 10, when Kadyrov publicly claimed an attempt on his life and declared "blood revenge."

Figure 12. Views of Telegram Posts on Wildberries Incident.





Thank you!