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Vast Majority of Russians Think Foreign Media Criticize Putin to Weaken Russia

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A cover of Germany's Der Spiegel magazine showing Russia's President Vladimir Putin. The headline reads "The Arsonist. Who Will Stop Putin?"

The overwhelming majority of Russians view negative foreign media coverage of President Vladimir Putin and of Russia in general as an attempt to destabilize the country, pollster VTsIOM revealed Wednesday.

The poll revealed that 87 percent of respondents see such ulterior motives in critical remarks released by foreign media outlets. A mere 4 percent of respondents said such criticism was intended to improve the country's situation.

Of the 1,600 people polled, 82 percent said those who condemn Putin's policies want to see the Russian government's collapse.

Similarly, 87 percent of respondents said they considered such criticism of Putin to be

baseless, while the same number said such comments were a result of the Russian president following policies independently of the rest of the international community.

The role of foreign media has been thrust into the spotlight in recent months amid the ongoing Ukraine crisis, a conflict that analysts say has relied more heavily on information warfare than previous conflicts.

Western media outlets have repeatedly accused their Russian counterparts of unethical, inaccurate reporting, and at times flat-out propaganda. Russia has hit back and accused foreign journalists of the same.

Sixty-eight percent of respondents to the VTsIOM poll agreed with the official line on foreign media, describing it as biased in reporting on the actions of the Russian government, while 20 percent said the reporting was objective.

At the same time, however, more Russians were found to rely on foreign media today than was the case five years ago, with 37 percent stating that they turn to foreign media now compared with 29 percent in 2009.

The poll was conducted from Oct. 25-26 in 132 cities and 45 regions of Russia. It had a margin of error no higher than 3.5 percent, the pollster said.

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