OCTOBER 2026

WEATHER, WAR AND WASHINGTON: WHAT FOLLOWS A RECORD GRAIN YEAR

ARROW

LONDON COPENHAGEN HONG KONG MONACO SHANGHAI SINGAPORE
ATHENS SEOUL TOKYO SYDNEY GENEVA DUBAI HAMBURG GENOA BANGKOK NEW DELHI HOUSTON

The Agenda

1 What happened

The record year and the Q3 turn

2 What comes next

Black Sea supply; Europe; China and US soybeans; Argentina; the 2027 weather

3 Freight

Panama, freight rates and the big ships

4 Wrap-up

What it means for the year ahead

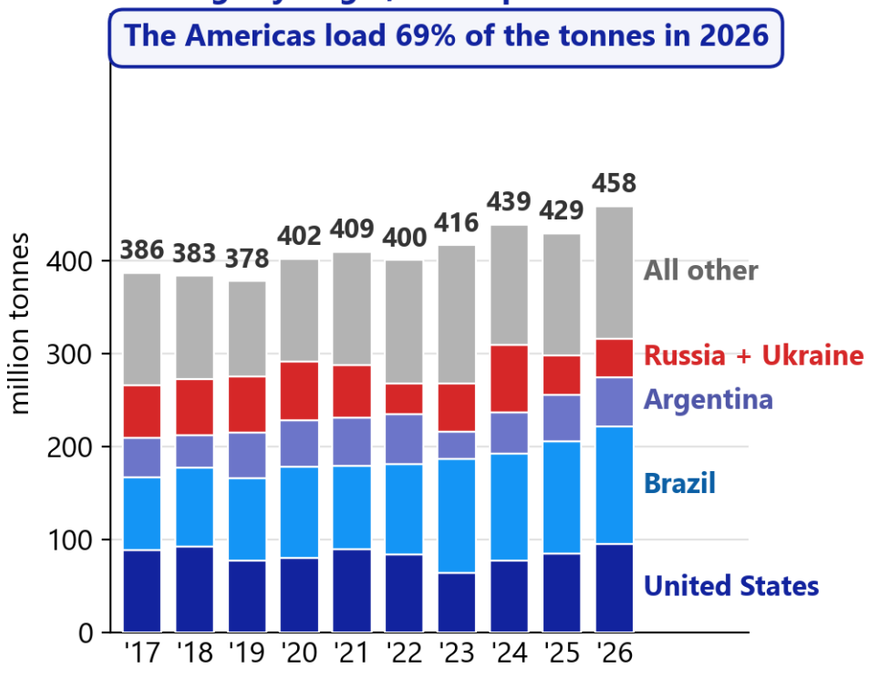
The Americas load most of the world's grain and Asia is its biggest buyer

World seaborne grain trade

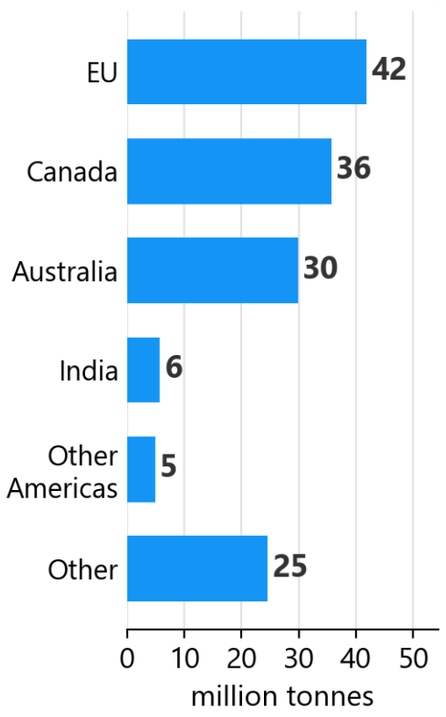
Loadings: Jan-Sep each year, deep-sea ships by sailing date. Buyers: share of 2025 tonnes (full year), deep-sea ships by arrival date

Loadings by origin, Jan-Sep

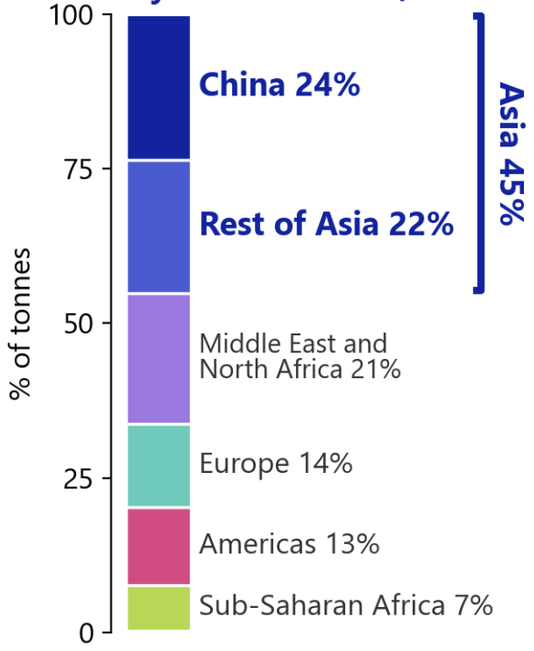
The Americas load 69% of the tonnes in 2026



All other breakdown, Jan-Sep 2026



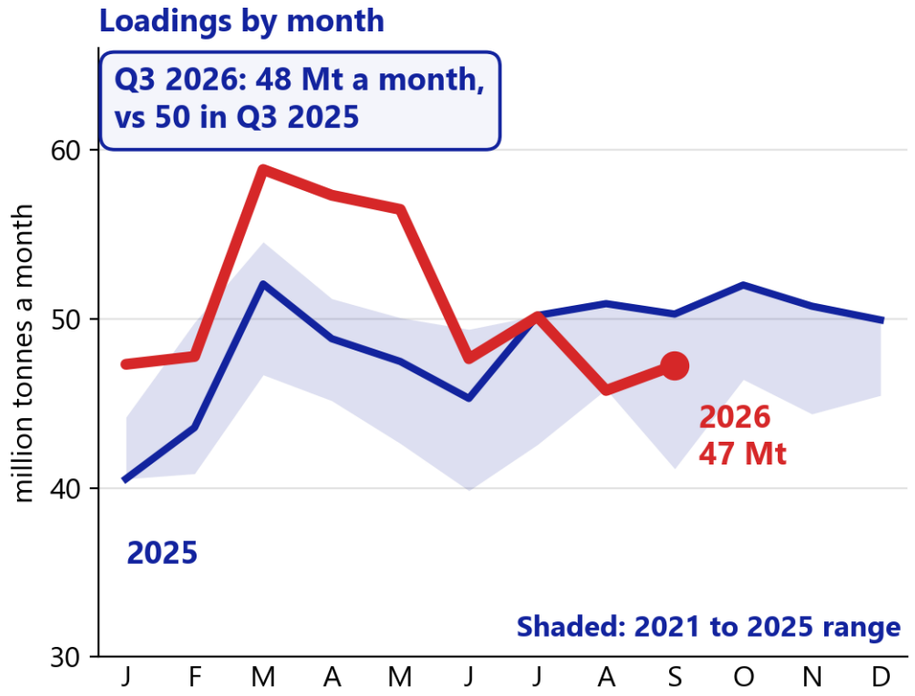
Buyer market share, 2025

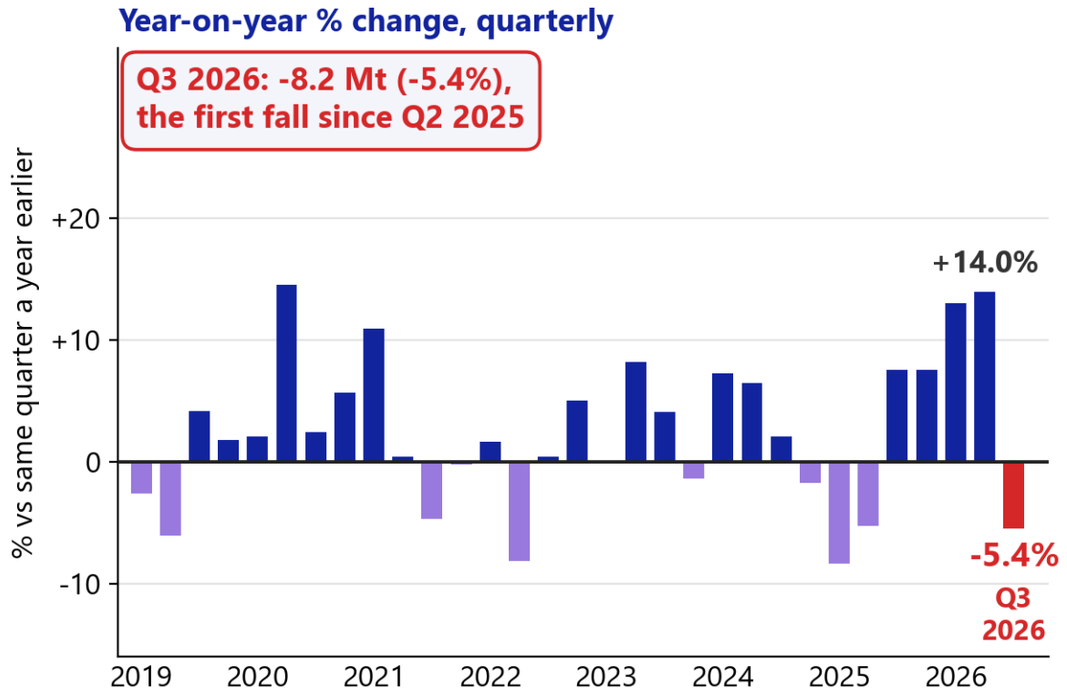


2026 is still a record, but the third quarter was the first fall in over a year

World seaborne grain loadings

Deep-sea ships by sailing date. Left: Jan-Sep 2026. Right: change vs the same quarter a year earlier

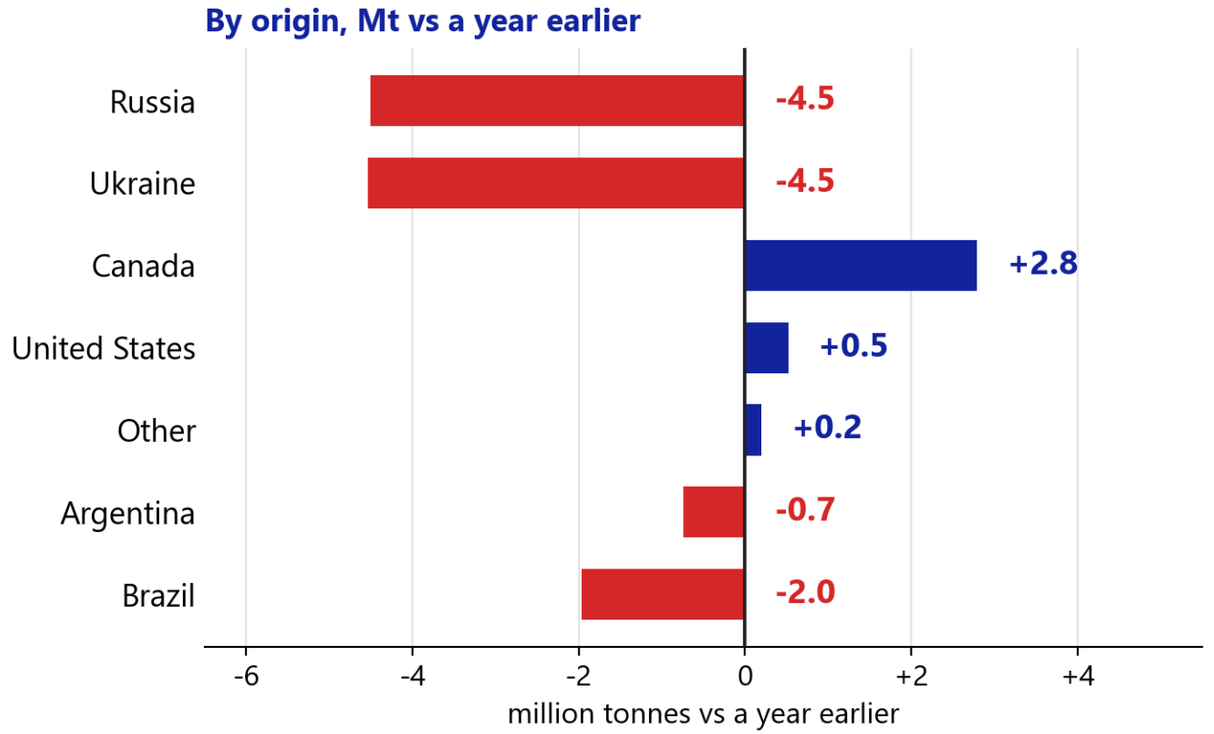


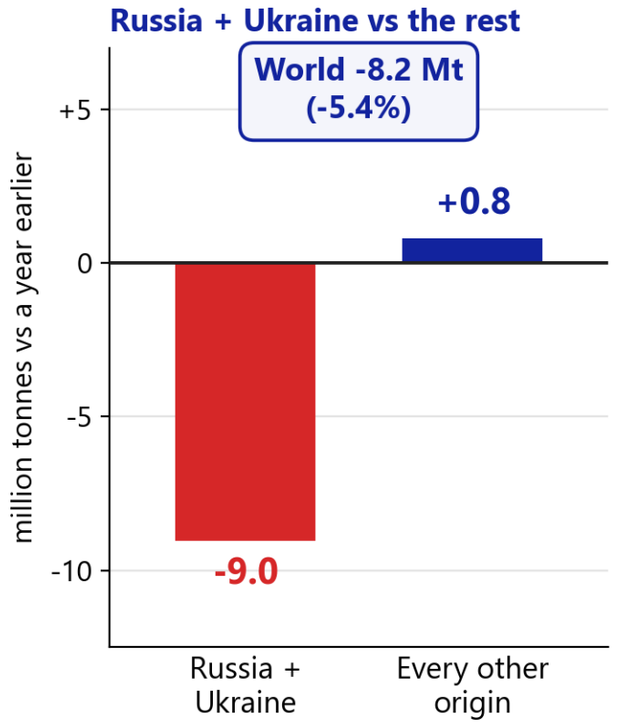


Since mid-year the Black Sea explains the whole fall and the rest of the world is flat

Change in Q3 world grain loadings vs a year earlier, by origin

Million tonnes of seaborne grain, deep-sea ships by sailing date, 1 Jul to 30 Sep in both years. Right: Russia + Ukraine vs every other origin

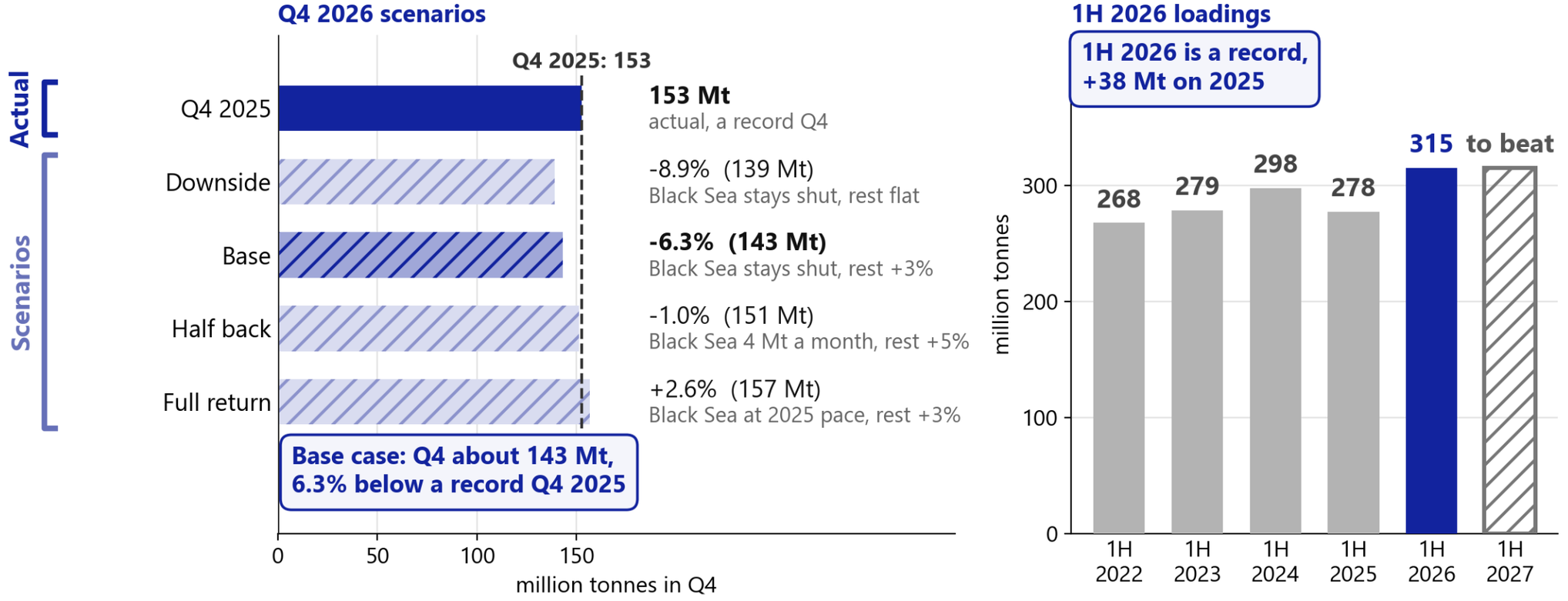




The next six months run against record comparisons

World seaborne grain loadings

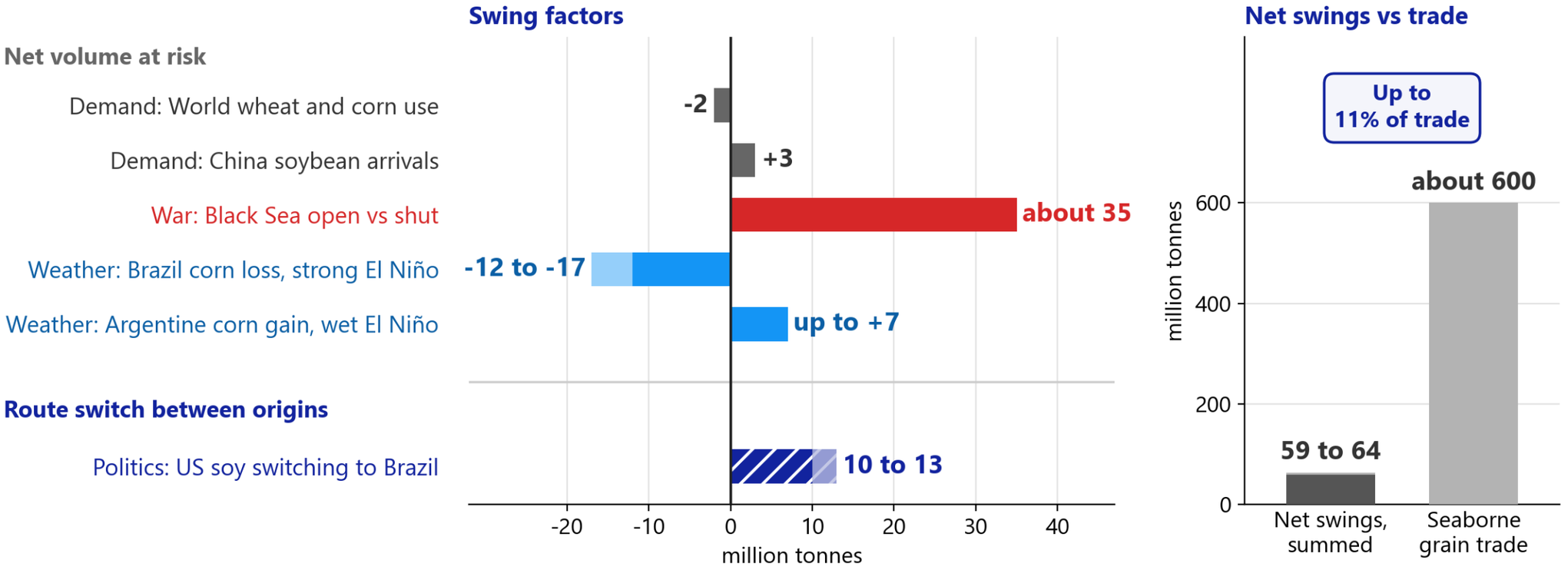
Left: Q4 2025 actual (solid), 2026 scenarios (hatched). Right: 1H loadings by year. Deep-sea ships by sailing date



Demand is steady but the swings are not

Swing factors for 2026/27 seaborne grain

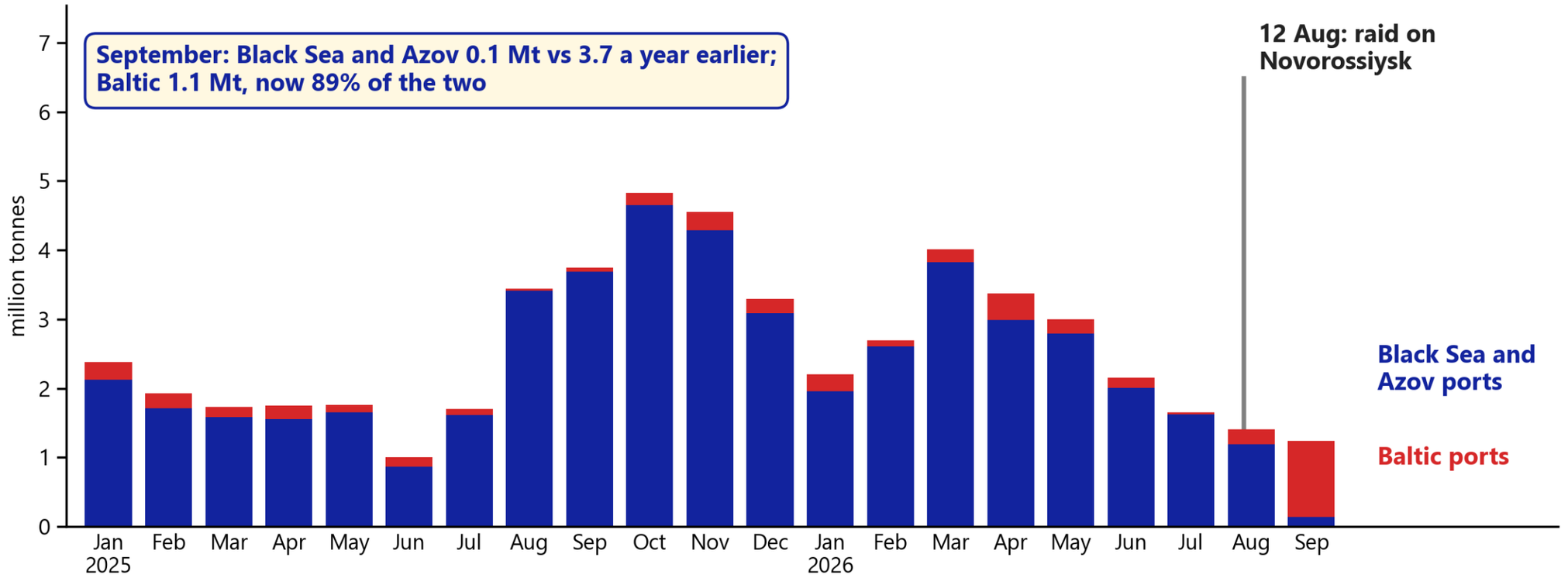
Million tonnes a year or season; demand and corn rows are signed (left of zero is less grain), the rest are swing sizes. Right: swings summed vs trade



Russia's grain is squeezed into its small Baltic ports while Novorossiysk is offline

Russian grain loadings by month, Black Sea ports vs Baltic ports

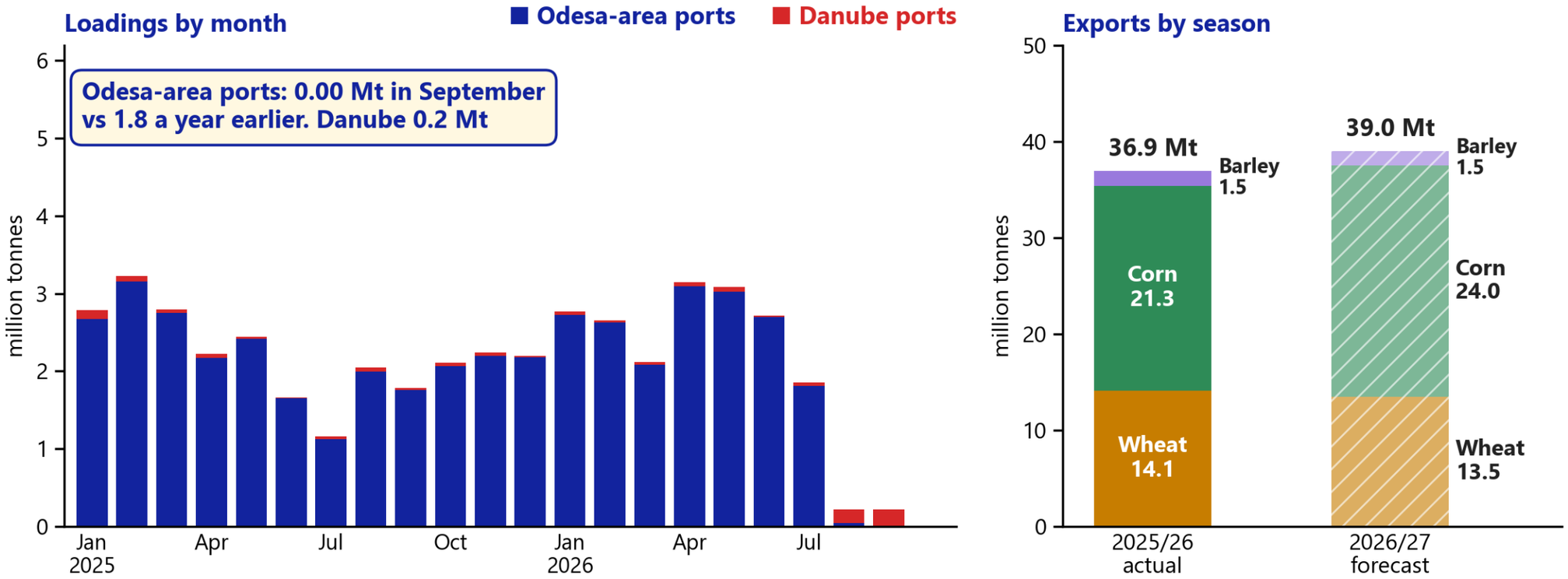
Seaborne loadings, million tonnes by sailing month, deep-sea ships, Black Sea incl. Azov, to 30 Sep



Ukraine forecasts 2 Mt more exports, but Odesa ports loaded no grain by sea in September

Ukraine grain exports

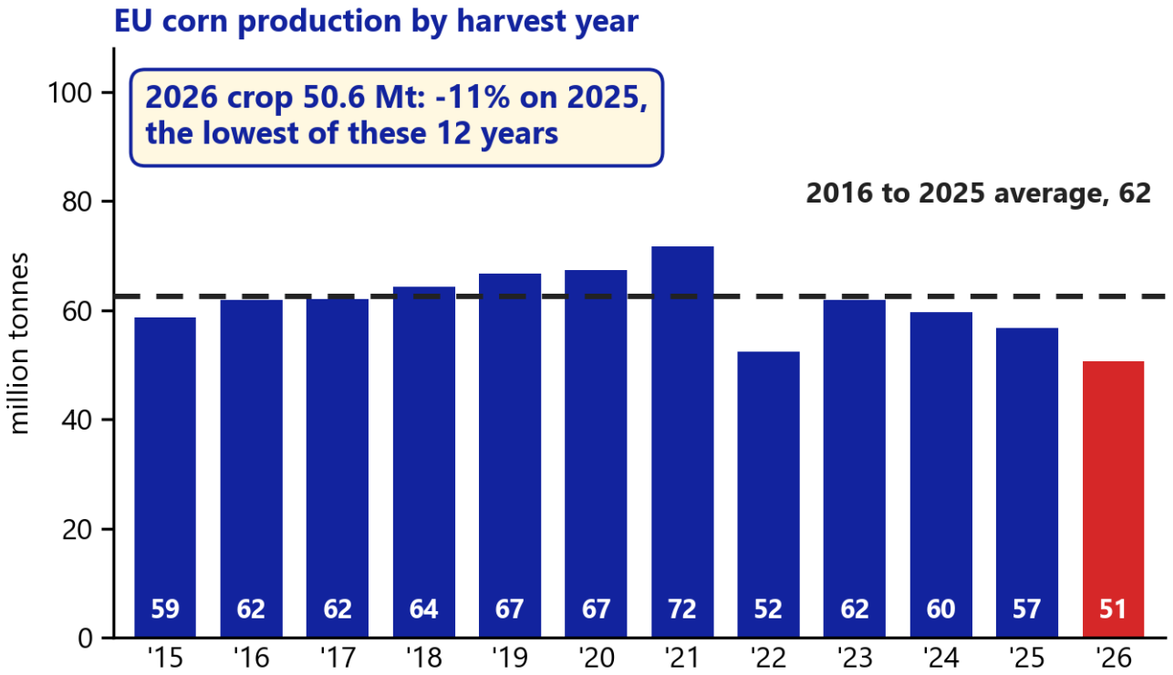
Wheat, corn and barley. Left: seaborne loadings by sailing month, ships only (no rail or road). Right: all routes, July to June seasons

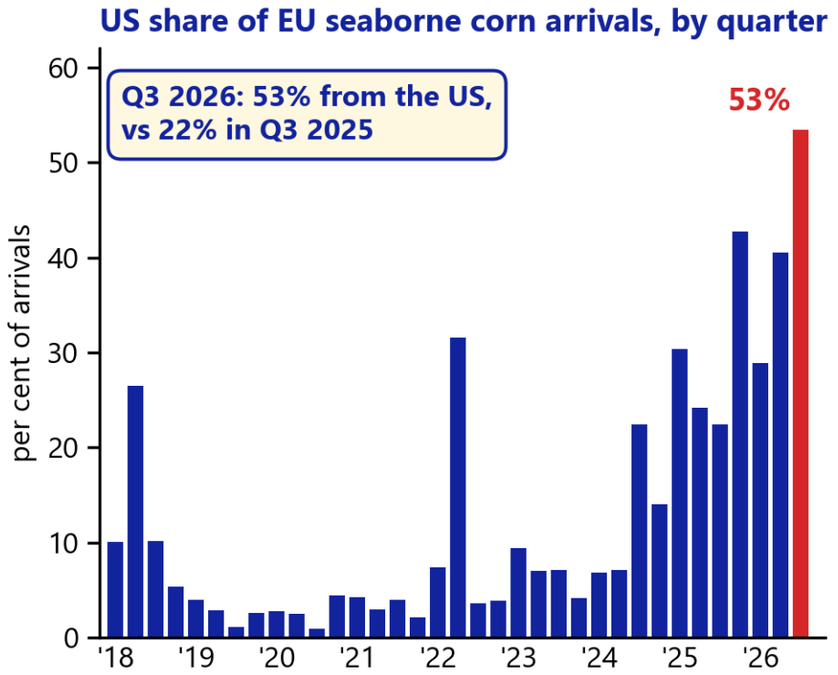


Europe's corn crop fell 11%, and US corn is filling the gap

EU corn supply

Left: dashed line is the 2016 to 2025 average. Right: corn arriving at EU ports, loaded outside the EU, by arrival quarter

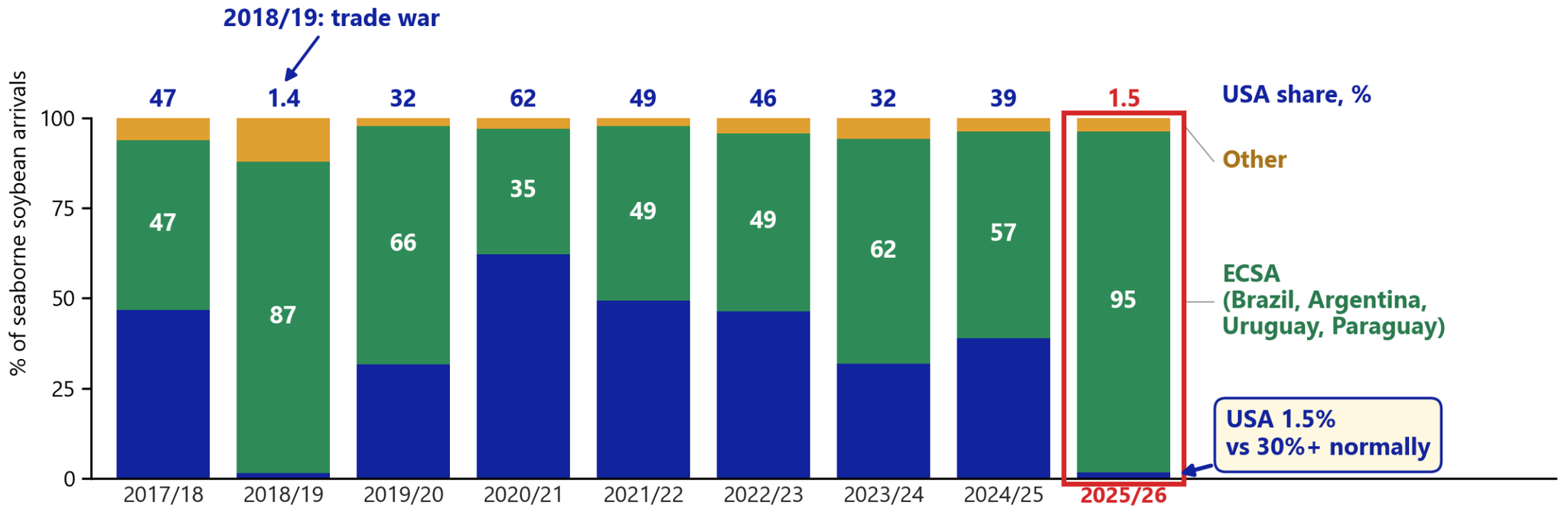




From September to January the US normally supplies 30% or more of China's soybeans; last season it was under 2%

Origin of China's soybean imports, Sep-Jan

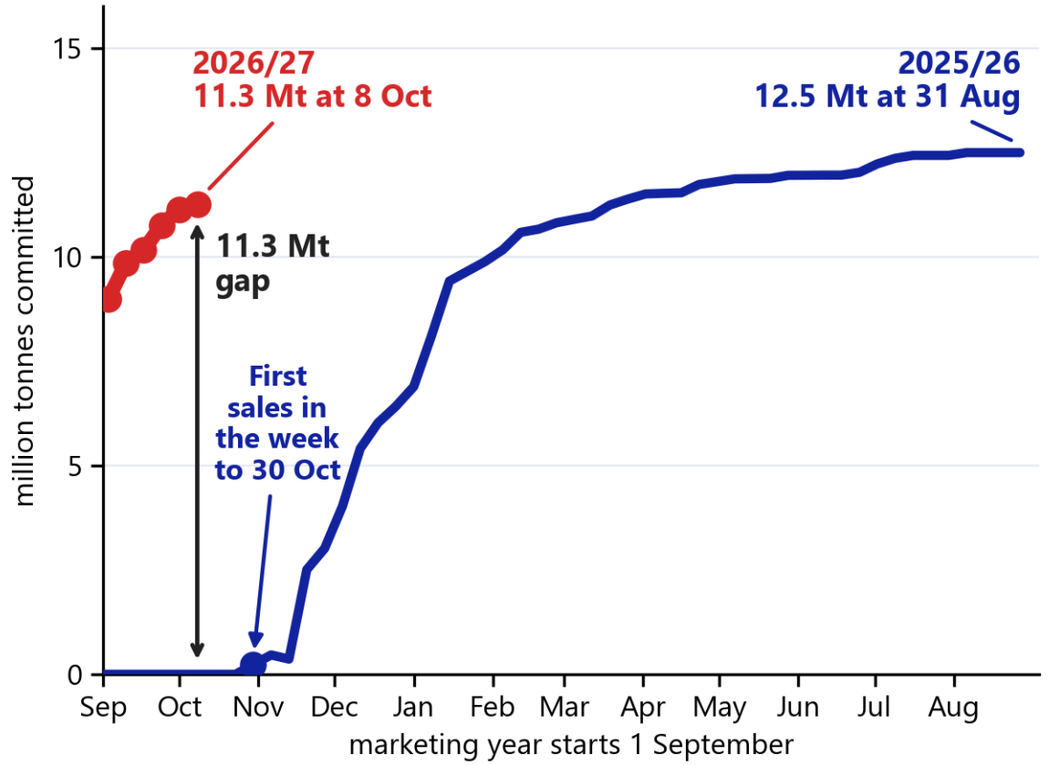
Share of seaborne tonnes by discharge date, Sep-Jan of each marketing year (2025/26 = Sep 2025 to Jan 2026)



By 8 Oct China had booked 11.3 Mt of US new-crop soybeans; last year it bought none until the end of October

US soybean commitments to China by week of the marketing year

Total sold to China, shipped or not, by week from 1 September; 2026/27 to 8 Oct, 2025/26 to 31 Aug



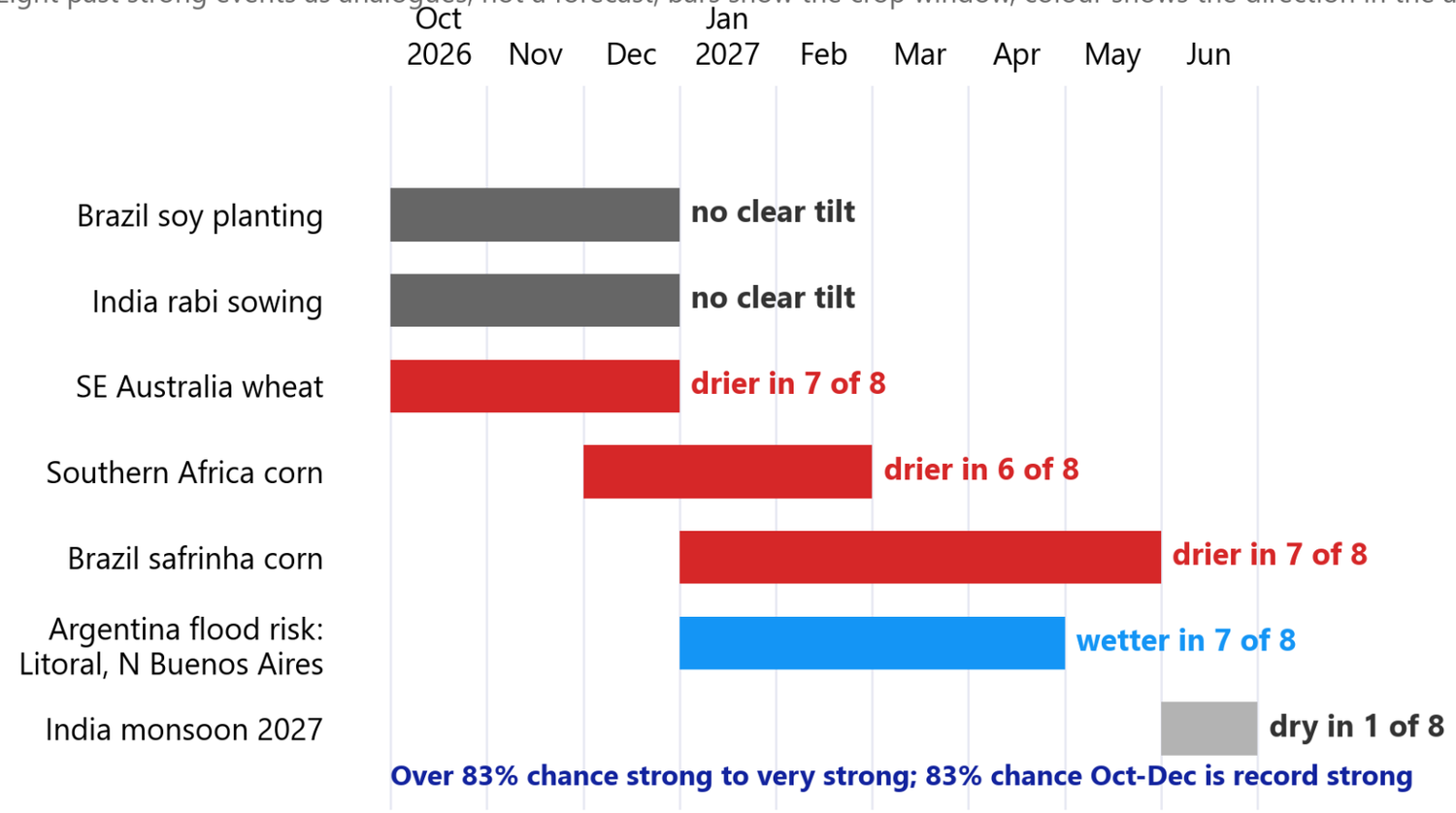
By the week to 8 Oct China had committed 11.3 Mt of the new crop.

Last year it bought no new-crop US soybeans until the week to 30 Oct.

A very strong El Niño, and what lands when

Crop weather risks by month in past strong El Niño events

Eight past strong events as analogues, not a forecast; bars show the crop window, colour shows the direction in the analogues



Net effect on seaborne grain: roughly neutral (1 to 2% of trade)

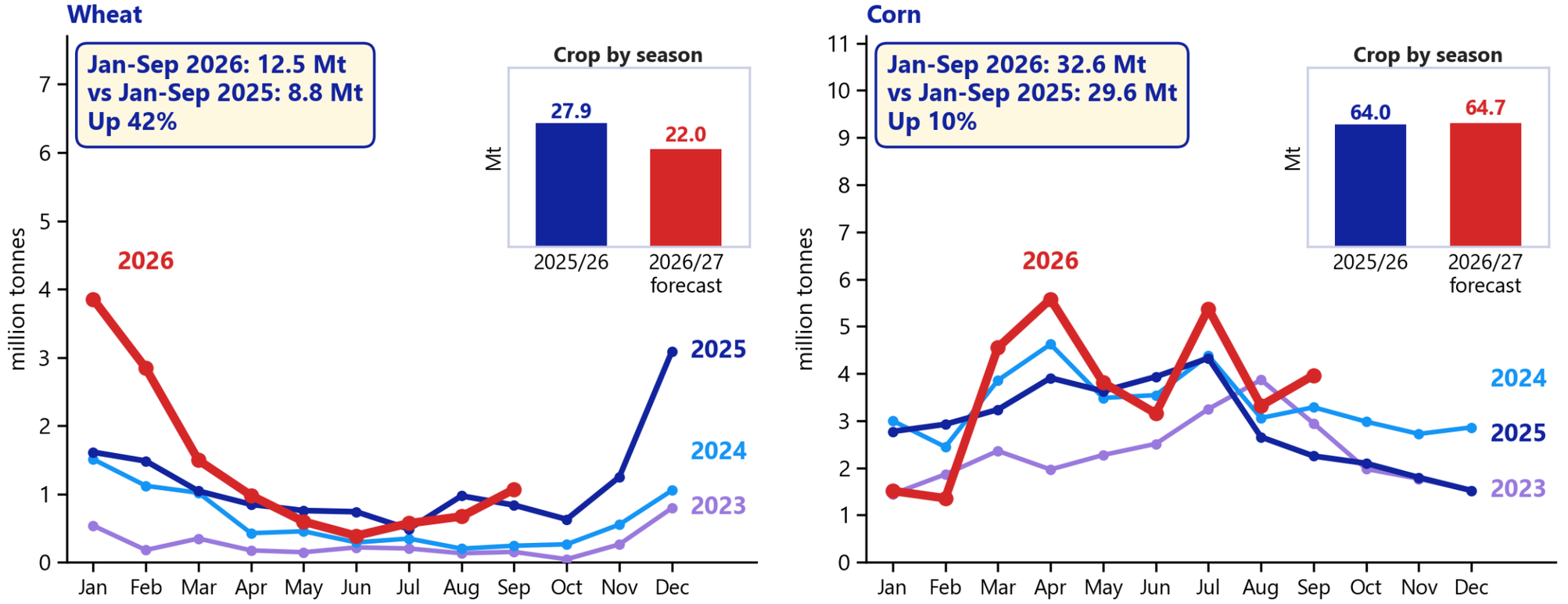
Why neutral: shortfalls are met by bigger crops elsewhere and by stocks

Fertiliser: a minor driver of seaborne grain volume

Argentina's wheat exports will fall back next season, while corn could hold up

Argentine wheat and corn loadings by month

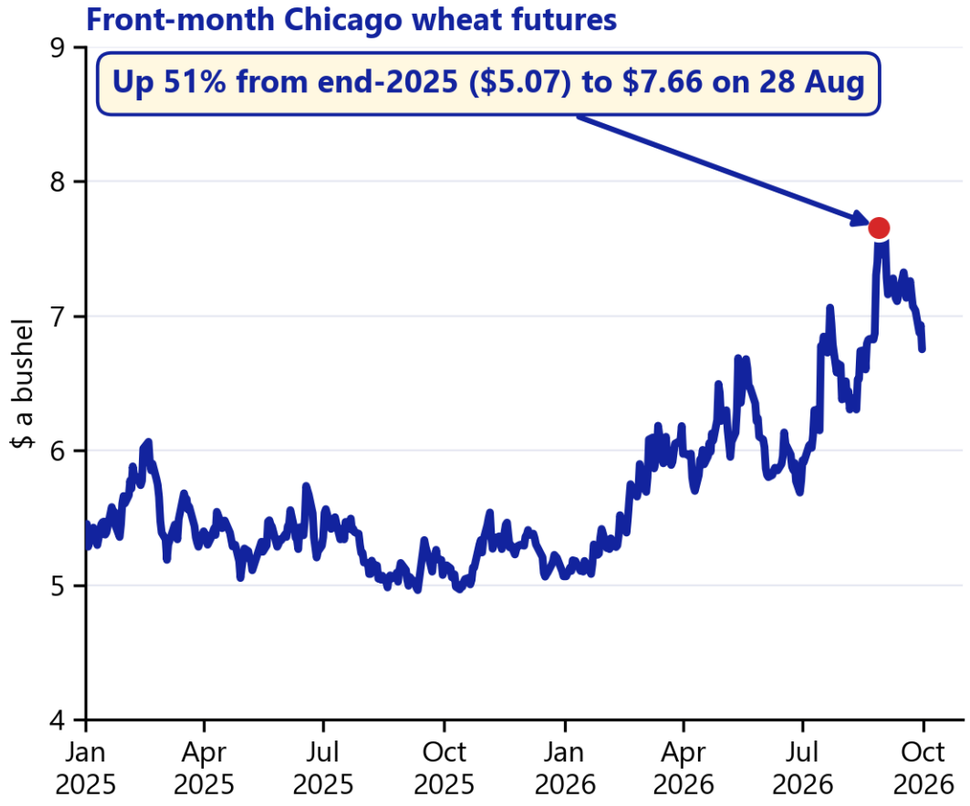
Seaborne loadings by sailing month, deep-sea ships; small bars compare the crop by season (2026/27 is the average of three forecasts)

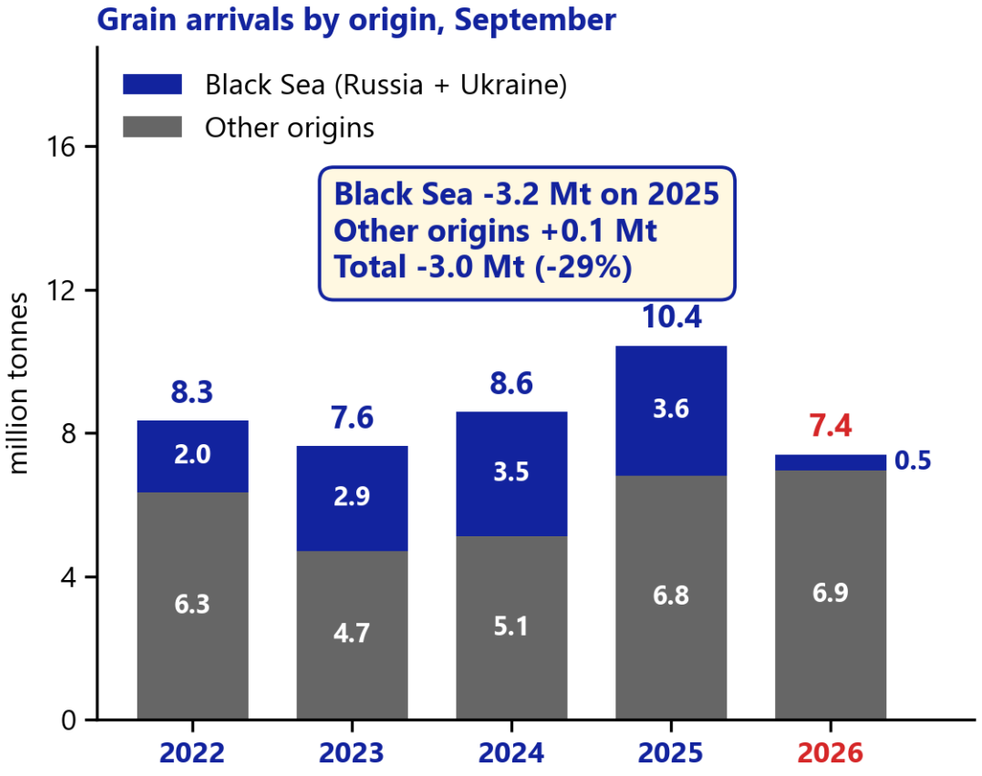


The Middle East and North Africa imported nearly 30% less grain in September, and other origins did not fill the gap

Middle East and North Africa grain market

Left: front-month Chicago wheat futures, daily. Right: seaborne grain arriving in 18 countries, deep-sea ships by arrival date, September

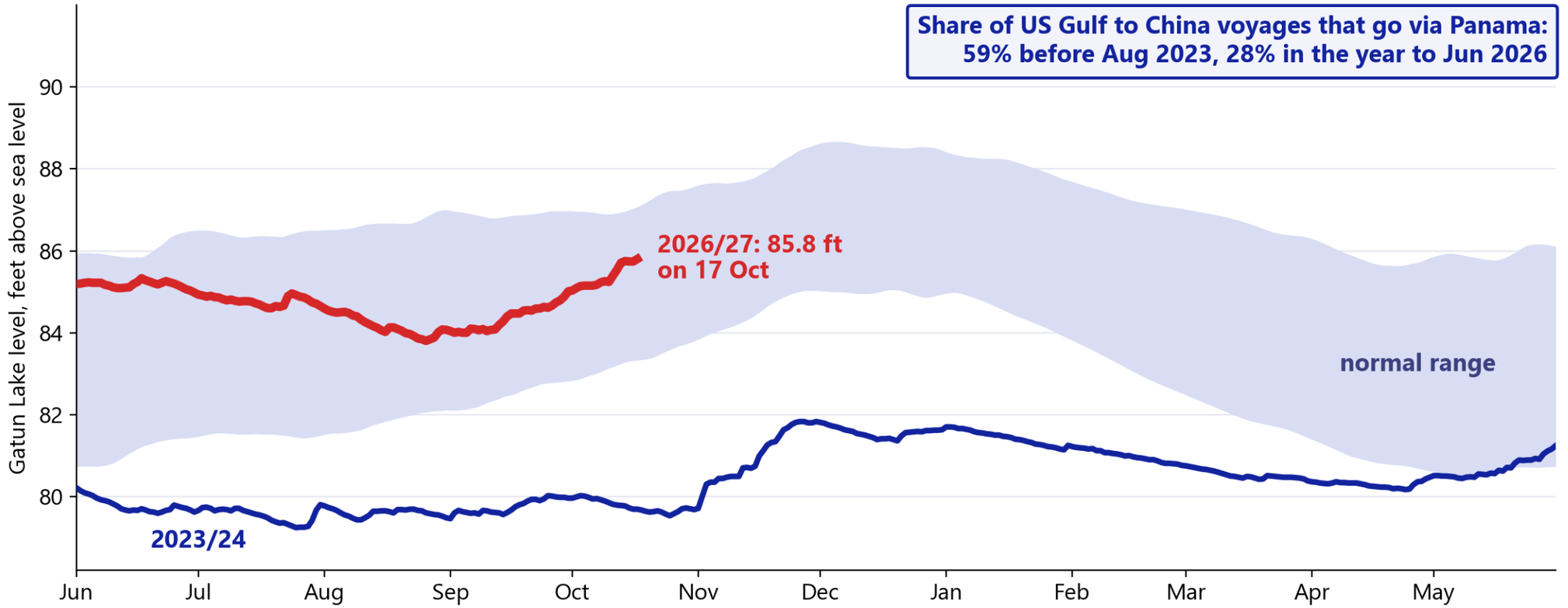




Panama has some relief now, but the worst may be to come in the dry season

Gatun Lake level

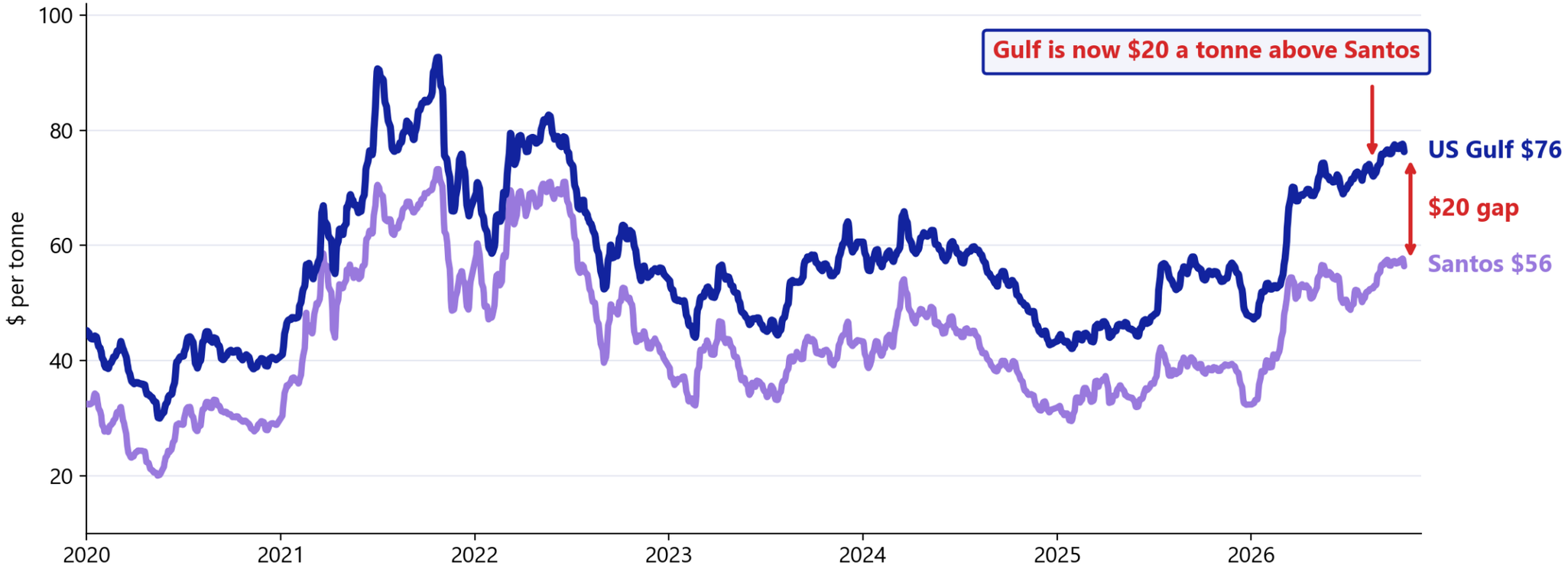
Daily, water year June to May; normal range is the middle 80% of the years 2000/01 to 2025/26



Freight to China from the US Gulf costs about $20 a tonne more than from Santos

Grain freight to Qingdao by route, US Gulf and Santos

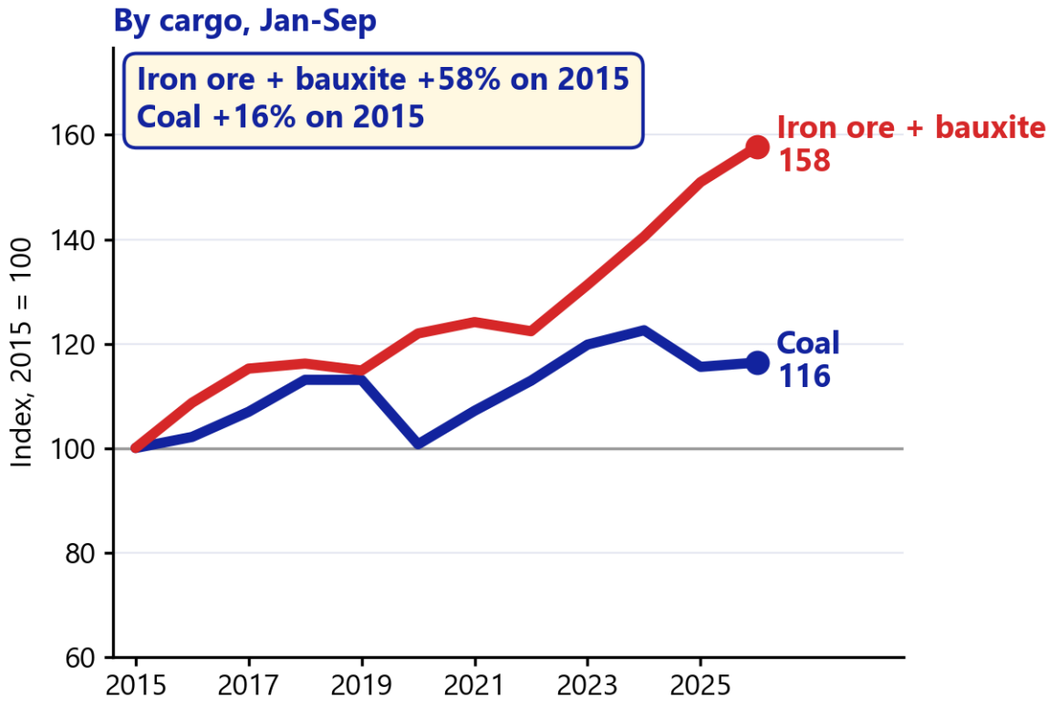
Daily from Jan 2020 for both routes, Panamax grain routes; latest 16 Oct 2026

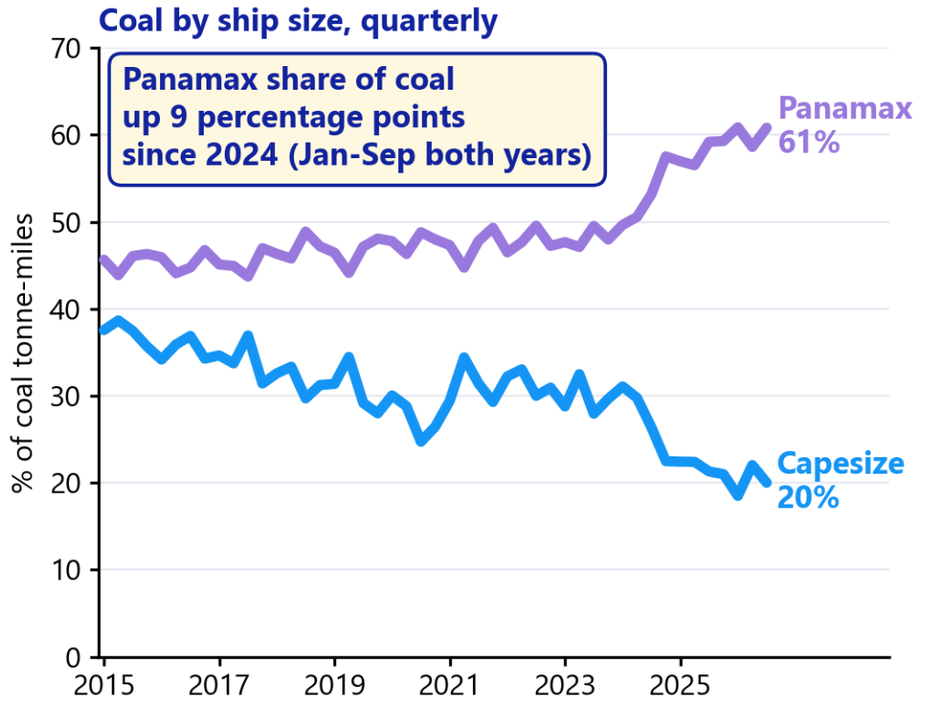


Tonne-miles grew in iron ore and bauxite, not coal, and coal has moved to Panamax

Dry bulk tonne-miles

Left: Jan-Sep of each year. Right: coal only, by quarter





The record is behind us, and politics, war and weather decide what comes next

The record is behind us. Grain trade stopped growing in mid-2026, and the next six months will run below last year.

From here, politics, war and weather decide where grain loads and how much, not demand.

What to watch next

On politics, watch whether China keeps booking US soybeans as the trade truce runs out in January.

On the war, watch whether the Black Sea ports reopen, a swing of up to about 35 Mt of loadings.

On weather, watch how a very strong El Niño hits Panama's dry season and Brazil's second-crop corn.