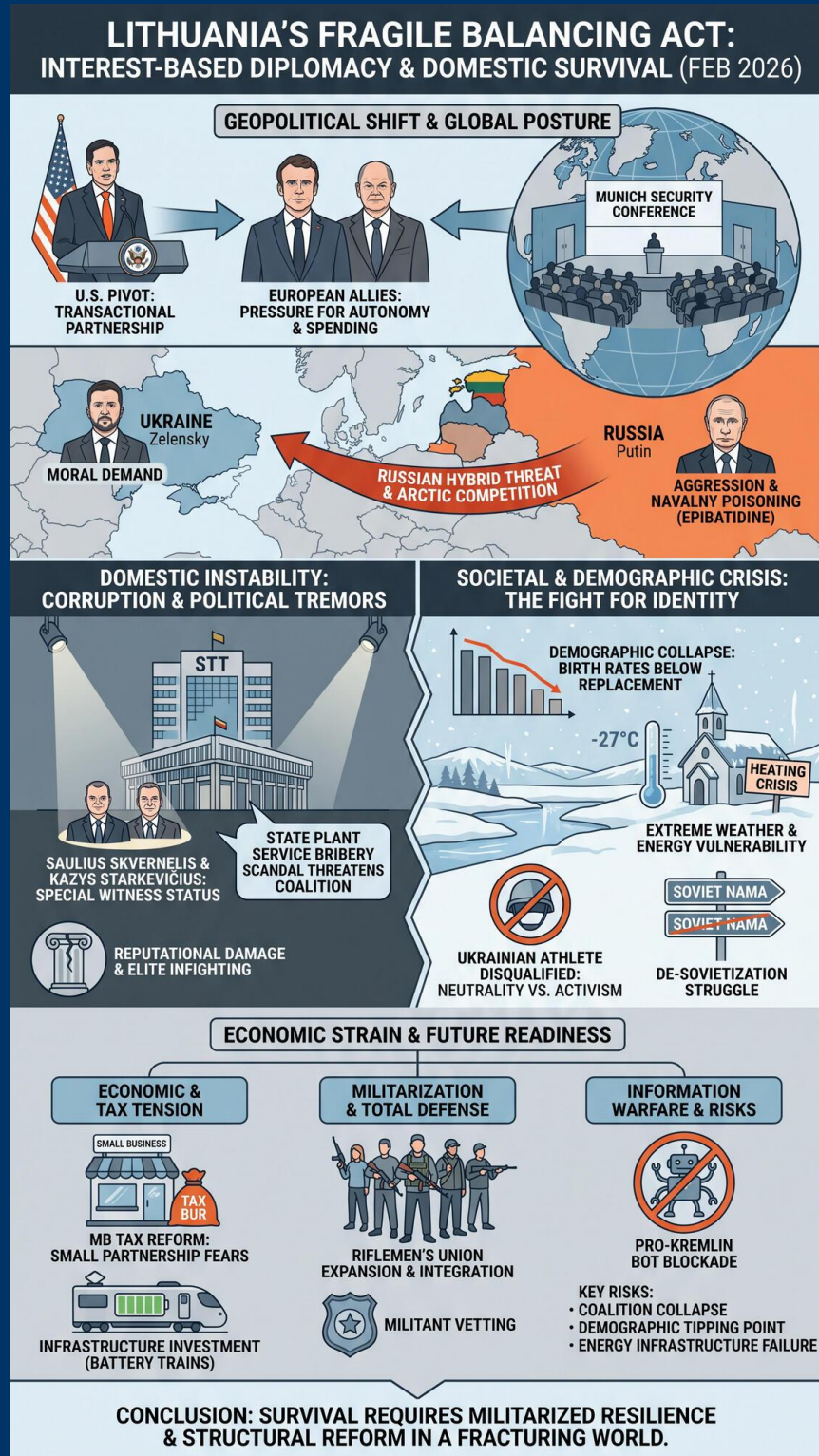


TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

LRT

FEBRUARY 15, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



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MUNICH SECURITY CONFERENCE
SHIFTS TOWARD INTEREST-BASED
DIPLOMACY AMID DOMESTIC
CORRUPTION RAIDS AND A
DEEPENING DEMOGRAPHIC CRISIS
IN LITHUANIA.

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

The diplomatic landscape on February 15, 2026, is dominated by the Munich Security Conference, where U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio has signaled a pivot toward a more constructive, albeit interest-driven, [transatlantic partnership](#). Framing the United States as the "children of Europe," the administration is attempting to soothe allies rattled by previous isolationist rhetoric, even as it maintains pressure for increased defense spending and autonomy. This diplomatic charm offensive occurs against a backdrop of intensified Russian aggression and the fallout from the [poisoning death of Alexei Navalny](#), which has galvanized European leaders to reassess the nature of the Putin regime and the necessity of long-term security guarantees for Ukraine.

Domestically, Lithuania is reeling from high-level corruption allegations, with the Special

Investigation Service (STT) conducting [raids on the offices](#) of former Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis and conservative MP Kazys Starkevičius. This scandal, centered on alleged bribery within the State Plant Service, threatens to destabilize the political coalition and has ignited debates over the "reputational damage" to the state. Concurrently, the nation faces a severe [extreme weather event](#), with record snowfall and temperatures dropping to -27°C, placing significant strain on energy infrastructure and rural communities already struggling with rising heating costs and the loss of traditional tax subsidies.

Strategic narratives are converging around the theme of survival—both demographic and geopolitical. Experts warn of a [population collapse](#) as birth rates continue to fall below replacement levels, prompting radical proposals such as "internet blackouts" to encourage procreation. The integration of the Lithuanian diaspora and the ongoing struggle to remove the [remnants of totalitarian symbolism](#) from public spaces underscore a nation attempting to fortify its identity and resilience in a fracturing global order. The disqualification of a Ukrainian athlete for a [political helmet protest](#) further illustrates the tension between institutional neutrality and the moral demands of the current conflict.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Munich Security Conference and U.S. Pivot:** Secretary of State Marco Rubio adopted a reconciliatory tone, characterizing the U.S. as a partner sharing European heritage rather than just a critic. [Rubio's speech](#) emphasized interest-based diplomacy, suggesting that while the U.S. supports Europe, it expects Europe to lead in its own defense.

- **High-Level Corruption Raids in Lithuania:** The STT targeted the offices of Saulius Skvernelis and Kazys Starkevičius in a [bribery investigation](#) linked to agricultural certifications. Both politicians have been granted "special witness" status, causing significant political tremors within the Seimas.
- **Worsening Demographic Crisis:** Lithuania reported a decline of [1,500 fewer births](#) annually, with experts warning that current financial incentives are failing. The state faces a long-term threat to labor supply and social systems as the population ages.
- **Militant Vetting and Expansion of the Riflemen's Union:** New legislation aims to increase the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union to [50,000 members](#) while significantly hardening the vetting process to prevent infiltration by actors with anti-state interests.
- **Extreme Weather and Energy Vulnerability:** Record snowfall in Raseiniai and extreme cold have paralyzed rural logistics, while [churches and schools](#) report being unable to afford heating bills following the removal of tax support.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Armed Conflict & Militarization: NATO Lt. Gen. Remigijus Baltrėnas emphasized that Europe must learn from [Ukraine's drone experience](#) and prepare for Russia's rapid reconstruction of military capabilities. The Lithuanian Riflemen's Union is being legally integrated as a [combatant force](#) to be activated immediately upon the declaration of a state of war.

Leadership Dynamics & Governance: The STT raids on Skvernelis and Starkevičius

represent a critical test for [institutional integrity](#). While the opposition calls for resignations, the ruling coalition is struggling to manage the reputational fallout in the face of public skepticism regarding "high standards" of political conduct.

Diplomacy & Statecraft: The Munich Conference highlights a "third way" proposed by leaders like Macron, who seek to navigate the [US-China-Russia triangle](#). Meanwhile, the U.S. continues to engage with "problematic" allies like Hungary and Slovakia to ensure a unified front on [energy security](#).

Macroeconomics & Trade: Debate is raging over the reform of the [Small Partnership \(MB\)](#) tax structure. Small business advocates warn that removing tax benefits could drive 67,000 entrepreneurs into the shadow economy or abroad, while proponents argue it is necessary to end "tax arbitrage" against salaried workers like teachers and doctors.

Information Warfare & Disinformation: Lithuanian authorities and Facebook have blocked [pro-Kremlin bot networks](#) targeting the Kapčiamiestis military polygon. Analysts highlighted the shift from "automated bots" to "hybrid trolls" who weaponize real local concerns to sow social division.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Return of Interest-Based Alliances

The Munich Conference subtext suggests a move away from the "value-based" rhetoric of the post-Cold War era toward a colder, [transactional diplomacy](#). Secretary Rubio's speech, while polite, signaled that U.S. support for European territorial integrity is increasingly viewed through the lens of U.S. national interests rather than shared

ideological destiny. This leaves frontline states like Lithuania in a precarious position, forcing a rapid [militarization of society](#) to prove their value as a self-reliant security provider rather than a mere consumer of U.S. protection.

Demographic Exhaustion and Radical Policy Proposals

Lithuania's demographic decline has reached a tipping point where traditional family benefits are openly acknowledged as ineffective. The discussion has moved toward [radical social interventions](#), such as telecommunications blackouts, reflecting a state of panic within governance circles. As rural towns like Pakruojis age, the shift from [kindergartens to nursing homes](#) as the primary infrastructure investment signals a structural transition to a "senescent economy."

The Ghost of Totalitarianism in Modern Infrastructure

The ongoing struggle to rename streets and remove Soviet-era symbols like [Salomėja Nėris](#) reflects a deeper societal effort to decouple from the Russian sphere of influence. However, this "de-Sovietization" is met with local irony and resistance, suggesting that top-down ideological cleansing remains disconnected from the [practical concerns](#) of citizens who prioritize administrative stability over symbolic change.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

Elite Infighting and Judicial Scrutiny: The STT raids on Skvernelis and Starkevičius have severely damaged the perception of political stability. The granting of [special witness status](#) to high-ranking officials suggests that the investigation into the State Plant Service is not an isolated incident but part of a

broader crackdown on systemic corruption. This creates a opening for populist factions to challenge the current government's mandate.

Societal Polarization over Tax Reform: The proposed tax changes targeting Small Partnerships (MB) have created a rift between the [entrepreneurial class](#) and the public sector. Critics characterize the current system as a "farm of animals" where some pay less tax than others, while business owners view the reform as an [existential threat](#) to small-scale innovation.

Public Resource Constraints: The extreme weather has exposed the fragility of local governance. In Raseiniai, the declaration of an [extreme situation](#) and the failure of basic services like snow removal have led to calls for national military assistance, highlighting the limits of municipal capacity.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

Strategic Positioning in a Multipolar World: Lithuania is attempting to project itself as the [central hub](#) of Ukrainian advocacy in the EU. By hosting "Ukraine House" in Munich and pushing for formal NATO integration, the state is leveraging the conflict to increase its own strategic weight within the bloc. However, this is countered by the [Russian energy dependency](#) of neighbors like Slovakia and Hungary, which Rubio's recent visits sought to address through bilateral pressure.

The "Arctic and Greenland" Strategic Theater: The U.S. continues to pressure Denmark regarding [Greenland](#), viewing the Arctic as a critical frontier for containing Russian and Chinese expansion. Lithuania, while not an Arctic state, is framing its

security concerns as part of this broader northern defense architecture.

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

Lithuania's economy is currently defined by high energy costs, inflationary pressure on social services, and a looming labor shortage due to birth rate declines. The agricultural sector is under scrutiny following a [bribery scandal](#) involving product certifications. The private sector is mobilizing against tax reforms that would remove the competitive advantage of Small Partnerships.

- **Energy Costs:** Churches in Krekenava and Kupiškis report heating bills exceeding [400-3300 EUR](#), leading to the closure of religious sites during winter.
- **Infrastructure Investment:** LTG Link is testing six new [battery-powered trains](#) produced by Stadler, signaling a shift toward sustainable, lower-traffic route management.
- **Tax Subsidies:** The removal of the 1.2% income tax support for religious and local communities has caused a [financial crisis](#) for rural institutions.
- **Shadow Economy Risks:** Economic experts warn that the [MOP tax reform](#) could push a significant portion of the 67,000 Small Partnerships into unregulated cash transactions.

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

Personnel shifts are currently driven by judicial pressure rather than routine

appointments, with significant implications for the upcoming election cycle.

- **Saulius Skvernelis:** The former PM faces [severe reputational risk](#) following STT raids on his cabinet; his future as a party leader is now in question despite "special witness" status.
- **Kazys Starkevičius:** A veteran conservative MP, Starkevičius has suspended his [party membership](#) due to his involvement in the bribery investigation, weakening the conservative block's moral standing.
- **Agnė Silickienė:** Mentioned as a central figure in the [Plant Service scandal](#), her role as a former advisor to Skvernelis links the current investigation directly to the highest levels of past governance.
- **Vladyslav Heraskevych:** The Ukrainian skeleton athlete has become a symbol of [political activism in sports](#), following his disqualification for protesting the war on his equipment.

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

LRT's editorial priority for the day was the **Munich Security Conference**, given extensive airtime to contextualize Lithuania's place in the evolving U.S.-European alliance. The **STT corruption raids** were the secondary lead, treated with a skeptical, analytic tone that emphasized the potential for long-term political damage. The **weather crisis** was treated as a matter of immediate public safety. **Buried stories** included the specific details of Russian battlefield gains, which were minimized in favor of high-level diplomatic discussions. A **conspicuous omission** was any detailed discussion of the specific evidence found in the STT raids,

focusing instead on the political theater and "special witness" terminology.

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

The world is portrayed as a fracturing system where traditional values are secondary to strategic interests, and small states must prove their utility to larger protectors.

- **United States (Marco Rubio):** Portrayed as a firm but [reconciliatory leader](#). Rubio is framed as moving away from the "arrogant" JD Vance tone toward a more constructive, interest-based partnership, though he remains skeptical of European self-sufficiency.
- **Ukraine (Volodymyr Zelensky):** Framed as a [principled fighter](#) refusing to trade territory for a "false peace." The broadcast highlights the moral gravity of his presence in Munich, juxtaposed against the "war slave" characterization of Putin.
- **Russia (Vladimir Putin):** Characterized as [chaotic and corrupt](#), particularly in the context of the Navalny poisoning. The use of South American frog toxins (epibatidine) is framed as proof of a regime that has abandoned all international norms.
- **Denmark:** Portrayed as a state under [territorial threat](#) due to U.S. interests in Greenland, drawing a direct parallel to Ukraine's struggle for sovereignty.

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

- **Anti-State Narrative Seeding:** Russian-linked [bot farms](#) are actively weaponizing local concerns about military polygons (like Kapčiamiestis) to generate friction between the civilian population and the military.

- **The "Meta-Narrative" of Neutrality:** The Olympic Committee's use of [Rule 50](#) to ban Ukrainian protests is framed as a form of "forced neutrality" that serves the interests of the aggressor state by silencing moral opposition.
- **Propaganda Delta:** While the broadcast emphasizes U.S.-EU unity, the subtext of the Rubio speech reveals a growing delta between [American interests](#) and European security expectations, which the state media attempt to soften through historical analogies.

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- **Coalition Collapse:** If the STT raids lead to formal indictments against Skvernelis, his political faction may fracture, leading to an [early election scenario](#) or a significant shift in coalition power dynamics.
- **Militant Integration:** The legal shift of the Riflemen's Union indicates a move toward a [Total Defense model](#). In the next six months, expect intensified civilian military drills and a possible mandate for all public sector employees to undergo basic defense training.
- **Demographic Incentives Shift:** With financial payouts failing, the state will likely pivot to [structural interventions](#) regarding urban planning and social engineering to combat the "loneliness epidemic" cited by economists.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term: Rapid escalation of [heating cost protests](#) if the extreme cold persists, potentially forcing the government to reinstate tax subsidies for religious and social

institutions. STT raids will likely produce "leaked" evidence to the press to maintain public pressure.

Medium Term: The MOP tax reform will face a [constitutional challenge](#) or be significantly watered down as the 67,000 Small Partnership owners mobilize a lobbying effort. U.S. pressure on defense spending will force a reallocation of the 2027 budget toward [advanced drone and AI-based defense](#) systems.

Long Term: If birth rates do not stabilize, Lithuania faces a [structural economic contraction](#), necessitating either mass immigration from outside the EU or a radical automation of all public and care services. The NATO-Russia border will remain the most militarized zone in the world, with permanent ["combat-ready" status](#) for the Baltic states.

RISK ASSESSMENT

- **Institutional Loss of Public Mandate:** The corruption scandal involving Skvernelis and Starkevičius risks a total collapse in [public trust](#). Triggers: Formal indictments of multiple cabinet members. Likelihood: High. Impact: Catastrophic political instability. Mitigations: Independent judicial oversight and transparency in the STT investigation.
- **Demographic Collapse:** Failure to reach a [2.1 fertility rate](#) leads to the aging out of the workforce. Triggers: Continued birth rate decline in 2027. Likelihood: Certain. Impact: Long-term economic stagnation. Mitigations: Radical IVF support and urban social restructuring.

- **Energy Infrastructure Failure:** The combination of extreme cold (-27°C) and [high heating costs](#) could lead to a humanitarian crisis in rural areas. Triggers: A major power grid failure during a cold snap. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: High. Mitigations: Emergency fuel reserves and mobile heating centers.
- **Russian Hybrid Escalation:** Pro-Kremlin bot farms successfully inciting [civil unrest](#) near military installations. Triggers: Accidental civilian-military incident during a polygon exercise. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: Tactical disruption of defense readiness. Mitigations: Counter-propaganda units and local community engagement.
- **Transatlantic Decoupling:** The U.S. pivot to interest-based diplomacy leaves the [Baltics isolated](#) if U.S. and EU interests diverge on China. Triggers: U.S. withdrawal of support for Ukraine in exchange for Chinese trade concessions. Likelihood: Low but rising. Impact: Existential threat to Baltic security. Mitigations: Rapid development of autonomous European defense capabilities.

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- **Evidence in STT Raids:** The broadcast fails to provide specific details on the [alleged bribes](#) or the scale of the corruption within the State Plant Service, leaving the "special witness" status open to political interpretation.
- **Russian Battlefield Status:** There is a lack of data on current [Russian logistical strain](#) or the specific impact of the latest Western sanctions on their defense industry.

- **Integration of Non-Ukrainian Migrants:** While the integration of Ukrainians is discussed, the status and [social integration](#) of migrants from Belarus and Central Asia are largely ignored.
- **Healthcare Readiness for the Cold:** The impact of the [extreme cold](#) on a healthcare system already strained by the aging demographic was not addressed.

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

- **The Corruption Raid as Political Weaponization:** A contrarian view suggests the STT raids are not a sign of institutional health but a [pre-emptive strike](#) by the ruling faction to neutralize Skvernelis ahead of the next election cycle, using "special witness" status as a tool for character assassination without the burden of proof.
- **The Munich "Charm Offensive" as a Stalling Tactic:** Rubio's constructive tone may be a stalling tactic to keep Europe calm while the U.S. secretly negotiates a [frozen conflict](#) with Russia to pivot resources toward Taiwan, leaving Lithuania to face a reorganized Russian military alone in 2028.
- **Black Swan - The "Deep Freeze" Collapse:** A prolonged cold snap below -30°C combined with the [closure of rural heating](#) leads to the first mass migration of internal refugees from the Lithuanian countryside to the cities, collapsing urban housing markets and overwhelming social services.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- Prioritize the [legal integration of the Riflemen's Union](#) to ensure a seamless transition to combat status in the event of an invasion.
- Re-evaluate [demographic policies](#) to focus on social connectivity rather than just financial payouts.
- Establish an independent anti-corruption task force to oversee the [STT investigation](#) and prevent political weaponization.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- Prepare for [tax reform](#) by diversifying corporate structures away from Small Partnerships (MB).
- Invest in [battery-powered and off-grid infrastructure](#) as centralized energy systems face climate and geopolitical stress.
- Monitor [Arctic and Greenland logistics](#) as a new theater for long-term shipping and defense contracts.

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

Current legislative activity focuses on defensive militarization, transport

modernization, and ideological decoupling from the Soviet past.

- **BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:**

- **Lithuanian Riflemen's Union Act Amendments:** Integrating 50,000 members into the [formal wartime chain of command](#) and hardening vetting procedures.
- **Tramway Equalization Law:** A proposal to classify [tramways](#) as equal to other public transport to facilitate investment in Vilnius and Kaunas.
- **Desovietization Act:** A mandate to replace the final [100 totalitarian street names](#) across the country.

- **HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:**

- **Munich Security Conference Plenary:** Rubio's keynote on [interest-based transatlantic relations](#).
- **STT Press Briefing:** Announcing "special witness" status for [Skvernelis and Starkevičius](#).
- **Lt. Gen. Baltrėnas NATO Briefing:** Addressing [Russian force regeneration](#) and drone warfare lessons.

KEY STORIES

- **Munich Security Conference Tone Shift:** Marco Rubio replaces previous harsh U.S. rhetoric with a "constructive" tone, framing the U.S. as the [children of Europe](#) while maintaining pressure for military autonomy.
- **STT Corruption Raids:** The Special Investigation Service raids offices of [Skvernelis and Starkevičius](#) regarding bribery for agricultural certificates at the State Plant Service.

- **Navalny Poisoning Evidence:** French and scientific reports confirm Alexei Navalny was poisoned with [epibatidine](#), a potent neurotoxin found in South American frogs.
- **Demographic Projections 2026:** Lithuania expects a shortfall of [1,500 births](#), with experts calling for radical social measures to combat population decline.
- **Extreme Cold Emergency:** Raseiniai declares an [emergency situation](#) as snow hits 0.5m and temperatures drop to -27°C.
- **Riflemen's Union Reform:** The Seimas debates integrating the [Riflemen's Union](#) directly into the armed forces for immediate activation during war.
- **MB Tax Reform Controversy:** 67,000 Small Partnerships face a loss of [tax advantages](#), leading to fears of business flight and shadow economy growth.
- **Ukrainian Athlete Protest:** Vladyslav Heraskevych is [disqualified from the Olympics](#) for a "no war" helmet protest, citing Rule 50 of the Olympic Charter.
- **Greenland and Arctic Defense:** The U.S. continues to push Denmark on [Greenland sovereignty](#) issues as part of the broader anti-Russian Arctic strategy.
- **Battery Train Implementation:** Stadler delivers new [battery-powered trains](#) for the Kaunas-Šiauliai route to improve infrastructure efficiency.
- **Church Heating Crisis:** Krekenava and other parishes report [unpayable heating bills](#) following the removal of tax support for religious organizations.
- **Pro-Kremlin Bot Blockade:** Authorities block a massive [bot network](#) that was spreading disinformation about the Kapčiamiestis military polygon.

- **Totalitarian Renaming Resistance:** Residents in Pasvalys ironize the [street renaming](#) process, suggesting humorous alternatives to Soviet names.
- **Panemunių Regional Park Protest:** Farmers in Šakiai protest [park expansions](#) that would restrict agricultural land use and devalue private property.
- **Isaac Newton Archives:** LRT showcases historical documents, including [Newton's "dwarves on giants' shoulders"](#) quote, in a segment on human achievement.
- **Marija Gimbutienė Legacy:** A deep dive into the work of the [world-renowned archaeologist](#) and her impact on Lithuanian identity.
- **Slime Mold Biology:** A scientific segment details the ["besmegenis" \(brainless\)](#) intelligence of slime molds and their movement patterns.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Today's Media Trends is a public interest experiment in applying deep thematic trend analysis to television news coverage from around the world to explore how responsibly applied advanced AI can help journalists and scholars better understand the overarching trends, themes and patterns of our global world.

No data is used to train or tune any AI model.

Each morning, in collaboration with the Internet Archive's TV News Archive, we apply Google's Gemini 3 to deeply examine yesterday's coverage from each television news channel to tease out the overarching themes and trends of its news coverage into a richly annotated thematic analysis. Each high-level insight is connected back to the original broadcast, allowing journalists and scholars to understand the dominate themes and trends and instantly click out to the underlying sources for details.

By helping journalists and scholars see the broader trends and patterns of global news coverage, this analysis helps them identify relevant stories and coverage they might not otherwise have encountered and uncover connections, emphases and narrative shifts that enable more comprehensive reporting and deeper, evidence-based research.

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