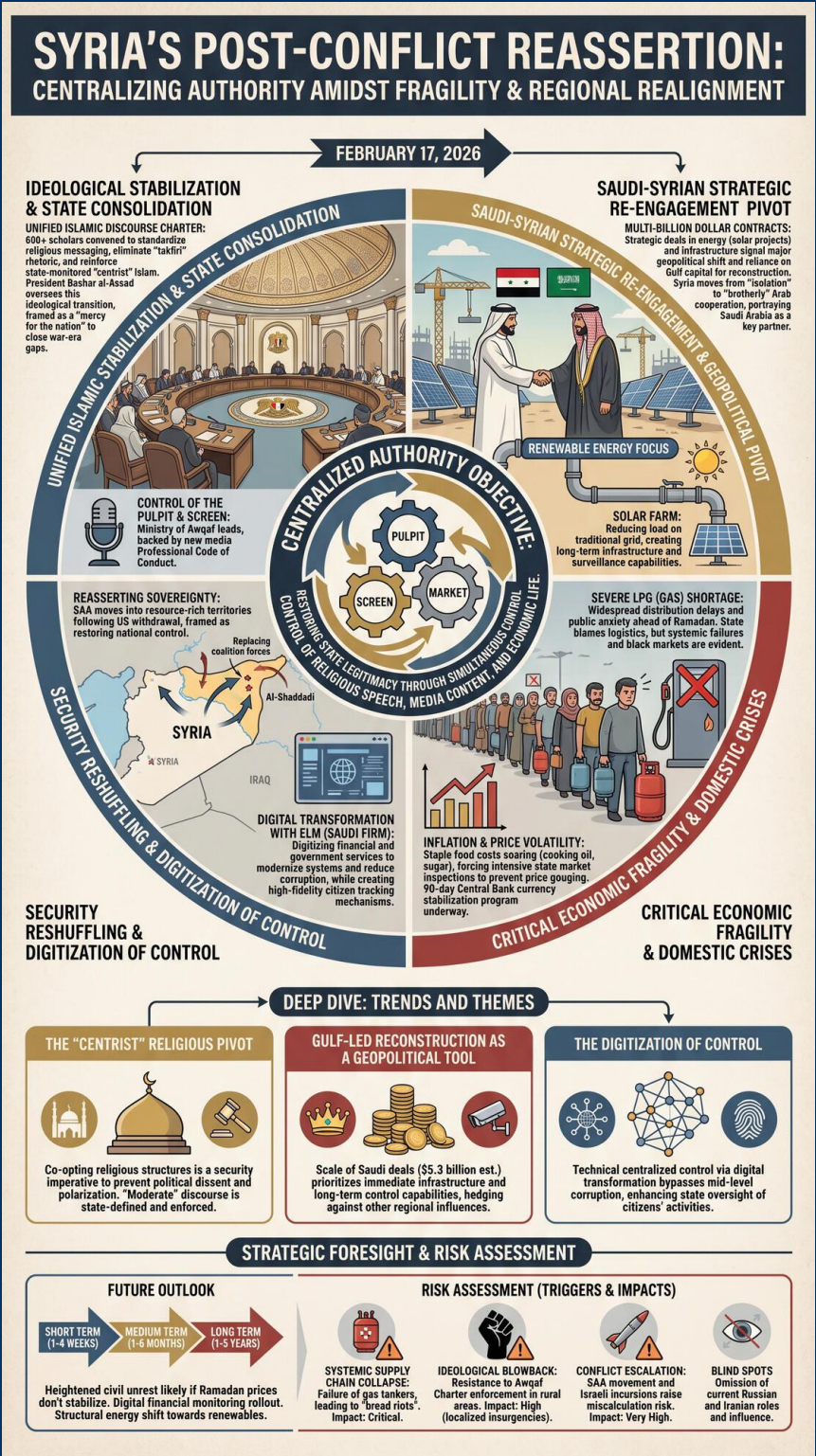


TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

SYRIANNEWS

FEBRUARY 17, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



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THE REASSERTION OF CENTRALIZED AUTHORITY AMIDST POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION AND ECONOMIC FRAGILITY

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

February 17, 2026, marks a pivotal effort by the Syrian state to transition from a period of active conflict to one of institutional consolidation and regional economic integration. The primary narrative arc of the day focuses on the "Unified Islamic Discourse Charter," a massive state-led initiative to standardize religious messaging, eliminate extremist ideology, and reinforce national identity. By convening over 600 religious leaders, the state is attempting to close the ideological gaps left by years of war, framing the "defunct regime" as a historical era of chaos that is now being replaced by a centrist, state-monitored "moderate" Islam. This domestic ideological stabilization is being coupled with a major diplomatic and economic pivot toward Saudi Arabia, evidenced by the signing of strategic multi-billion dollar contracts in energy and infrastructure.

However, this high-level institutional progress is heavily counterbalanced by severe and

immediate domestic crises. The state is grappling with a critical shortage of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG), leading to massive distribution delays and public frustration just as the country prepares for Ramadan. While officials blame "maritime logistics" and weather, the underlying theme is one of extreme economic vulnerability and high inflation that threatens to undermine the state's narrative of "liberation and recovery." In the peripheries, particularly Suwayda and the northeast, the central government is struggling to reassert security control over "mercenary" groups and tribal factions, using a combination of military pressure (replacing US forces in Shaddadi) and diplomatic overtures to local leaders.

The day's events converge on a single strategic objective: the restoration of state legitimacy through the simultaneous control of "the pulpit, the screen, and the market." By regulating religious speech, implementing a new professional code for media content creators, and attempting to manage volatile food and fuel prices, the Syrian leadership is signaling a return to a high-density, centralized governance model intended to facilitate foreign investment, primarily from the Gulf, while suppressing the potential for renewed civil unrest driven by economic hardship.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Standardization of National Ideology:** The Ministry of Awqaf launched a [Unified Islamic Discourse Charter](#) involving 600 scholars to eliminate "takfiri" rhetoric and align religious messaging with state objectives. The move is framed as a critical component of [post-liberation social order](#), emphasizing "moderate" religious values and national unity.

- **Saudi-Syrian Strategic Economic Re-engagement:** The state announced [multi-billion dollar strategic contracts](#) with Saudi Arabia, specifically focusing on [solar energy projects](#) and infrastructure. This indicates a significant geopolitical shift and a heavy reliance on Gulf capital for reconstruction.
- **Crisis in Essential Energy Supplies:** Severe delays in [domestic gas distribution](#) have caused widespread public anxiety. The Ministry of Energy cited [maritime technical issues](#) and weather, but reports of black markets and price manipulation suggest deep systemic failures in the supply chain.
- **Security Reshuffling in the Northeast:** Syrian government forces have moved to occupy positions in [Al-Shaddadi and surrounding areas](#) following the withdrawal of US-led coalition forces. This development is framed as a [restoration of national sovereignty](#) over vital resource-rich territories.
- **Digital Governance and Media Control:** The Ministry of Information launched a [Professional Code of Conduct](#) for journalists and digital content creators, while the Ministry of Finance announced a major [digital transformation project](#) with the Saudi company "Elm" to modernize financial systems and reduce corruption.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Armed Conflict & Militarization

- The Syrian Arab Army (SAA) is actively moving into [territories formerly held](#) by the "defunct regime" and foreign-backed forces, particularly near the Euphrates Dam and Al-Shaddadi. State media emphasizes the removal of "remnants" and the [handover of coalition bases](#) to the SAA.

- Ongoing Israeli incursions in [Quneitra](#) continue to challenge border sovereignty, with reports of civilian arrests and agricultural sabotage via chemical spraying by Israeli aircraft.

Leadership Dynamics & Governance

- President Bashar al-Assad's active participation in the [Islamic Discourse Conference](#) signals his personal oversight of the country's ideological transition. He is being framed as the architect of a [new national consensus](#) that bridges the gap between state and mosque.
- Administrative decentralization is being debated via the [Decree 107](#), with the state attempting to balance local community needs with a desire for centralized oversight to prevent "separatist" tendencies.

Energy & Critical Minerals

- The [natural gas shortage](#) is the most acute governance failure of the day. The state is attempting to mitigate this by resuming [production in Raqqa](#) and seeking long-term solutions via [Saudi-funded solar plants](#) to reduce the load on the traditional grid.

Macroeconomics & Trade

- The state is facing severe inflationary pressure ahead of Ramadan. Market reports from [Lattakia and Daraa](#) show the price of staples like cooking oil reaching [unprecedented levels](#), forcing the government to deploy intensive inspection tours to prevent price gouging.
- A major currency exchange program is underway, with the Central Bank [preparing for a 90-day period](#) to stabilize the exchange rate and modernize the financial sector.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The "Centrist" Religious Pivot

The state is aggressively moving to co-opt religious structures. By framing the new [Islamic Discourse Charter](#) as a "mercy for the nation," the government is attempting to move away from the fragmented religious landscape of the war years. This is not merely a spiritual move but a [security imperative](#); the state aims to ensure that "the pulpit" cannot be used as a platform for political dissent. The focus on "moderate" and "unified" discourse is a direct response to the ideological polarization that fueled the conflict.

Gulf-Led Reconstruction as a Geopolitical Tool

The sheer scale of the [Saudi-Syrian strategic contracts](#) (estimated at \$5.3 billion) suggests that Syria's reconstruction is being used as a primary vehicle for regional normalization. The focus on [aviation, telecommunications, and solar energy](#) indicates that the state is prioritizing sectors that offer both immediate infrastructure benefits and long-term surveillance/control capabilities. This economic alignment with Saudi Arabia also functions as a hedge against other regional influences.

The Digitization of Control

Under the guise of "Digital Transformation," the state is implementing new systems of oversight. The [partnership with Elm](#) to digitize financial operations and the [Code of Conduct for content creators](#) reflect a broader trend of technical centralized control. By digitizing government services, the state aims to bypass mid-level corruption that hampered war-time logistics while simultaneously

creating a [high-fidelity tracking system](#) for citizens' economic and social activities.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

The domestic situation is characterized by a "two-tier" reality. In Damascus, the elite are celebrating [successful international book fairs](#) and high-tech investment deals. Conversely, in the provinces, there is significant strain. In [Suwayda](#), tribal leaders and local officials are in a tense standoff with the central government regarding tribal autonomy and "mercenary" recruitment. The government's decision to move Prince Hassan al-Atrash [out of his traditional power base](#) in the south indicates an attempt to dismantle local power structures that could foster dissent.

Societal frustration is mounting over the [cost of living](#). The state's inability to maintain a steady supply of gas has led to a "crisis of confidence" in the [Ministry of Energy](#). Governance capacity is being stretched thin by the need to manage both [Ramadan food price volatility](#) and the complex [rehabilitation of schools and hospitals](#) in recently "liberated" zones like Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor. The closure of local courts and their [centralization in Hama](#) has also caused a "shock" to the local population, further distancing citizens from the state's legal apparatus.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

Syria is projecting an image of a state that has "won" its sovereignty and is now choosing its partners. The international system is framed as moving away from "hostile" Western intervention toward a multipolar arena of "brotherly" Arab cooperation. The [Syria-Saudi](#)

[Strategic Ceremony](#) was used as a platform to declare the [end of the isolation era](#). This framing purposefully ignores Western sanctions, focusing instead on the [Saudi and Gulf investments](#) as the only relevant external economic factors.

Relations with Turkey and Israel remain adversarial. Turkey is portrayed as a source of [illegal immigration and border instability](#), while Israel is explicitly labeled an aggressor for its [operations in Quneitra](#). The state is positioning itself defensively against these two "external threats" while using the [reopening of Iraqi borders](#) to demonstrate its growing regional maneuverability and the [integration of the "Levantine economic space."](#)

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The economic environment is highly volatile, marked by extreme commodity scarcity and a transition toward a digital financial system. While high-level investment deals are promising, the average citizen is facing a "Ramadan Crisis" characterized by high inflation and fuel shortages.

- **Commodity Prices:** Gold prices fluctuated, with 21k gold reaching [16,750 SYP per gram](#). Essential food items in Latakia and Daraa saw price hikes of up to [50-100%](#) in the lead-up to Ramadan.
- **Energy Infrastructure:** Strategic Saudi investment of [billions for solar energy](#) is intended to offset the massive deficit in domestic electricity and gas production.

- **Sanctions Impact:** The Ministry of Transport announced that [US Treasury export licenses](#) are the primary hurdle to resuming European flights, indicating that while political ties are shifting, financial and technical sanctions remain a critical constraint.
- **Housing Crisis:** The state estimates a need for [at least 2 million new housing units](#) due to war damage, with [72% of infrastructure in camps](#) like Yarmouk effectively destroyed.

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

The day's reports highlight a consolidation of power around a few key technocratic and religious leaders, while local southern power figures are being marginalized.

- **Bashar al-Assad (President):** Acting as the ultimate [arbiter of national ideology](#), moving beyond purely military leadership to oversee religious and institutional reform.
- **Mohammad Shukri (Minister of Awqaf):** Emerged as a [central figure](#) in domestic policy, tasked with the ideological "purification" of the national discourse.
- **Prince Hassan al-Atrash:** A significant [leadership shift](#) in the south; his "departure" from Suwayda to Damascus/Daraa signals a [weakening of independent tribal authority](#) in favor of central state control.
- **Administrative Appointments:** Sudden shifts in the management of the [LPG distribution network](#) and local court systems in [Hama and Salamiyah](#) indicate a purge of local officials deemed incompetent or corrupt during the energy crisis.

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

The network's editorial hierarchy is strictly nationalistic and reassuring, prioritizing institutional successes over humanitarian crises. The "Lead Stories" are the **Unified Islamic Discourse Charter** and the **Saudi-Syrian Strategic Contracts**. These are given extensive airtime with high production value. The **LPG shortage** and the **Suwayda security situation**, while covered, are "buried" under technocratic explanations and blamed on external factors or "regime remnants." The tone is optimistic about the long-term ("The New Syria") while being defensive about the short-term ("temporary logistical setbacks"). A **Conspicuous Omission** is any mention of Russian military presence or Iranian influence, which are completely absent in favor of the new Saudi-Syrian narrative. Also absent is any direct reporting on the current status of political prisoners or anti-government protests in contested zones.

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

The broadcasts frame the world through a lens of regional realignment, with Saudi Arabia as a "savior" partner and Western nations/neighbors like Turkey and Israel as perpetual "foes."

- **Saudi Arabia:** Portrayed as a strong, competent, and principled "brotherly" partner. The framing of the [strategic ceremony](#) suggests Saudi Arabia is the key to Syria's [modernization and recovery](#).
- **Turkey:** Characterized as weak, chaotic, and an instigator of instability. State media focuses on [illegal crossings and the failure to manage border security](#).

- **Israel:** Framed as a principled foe that is consistently [violating international law](#) through tactical incursions and agricultural warfare.
- **United States:** Portrayed as a "retreating power" whose withdrawal from [Al-Shaddadi](#) is a victory for Syrian sovereignty. The US is also blamed for hindering [civilian aviation](#) through sanctions.

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

The state is currently engaged in a high-intensity information operation to redefine the "Syrian identity." The launch of the [Unified Islamic Discourse Charter](#) is a textbook example of **narrative seeding**, where the state is preemptively defining "correct" Islam to prevent radicalization. Simultaneously, the [Journalist Code of Conduct](#) acts as a soft **censorship mechanism**, framing professional responsibility as a duty to support "national truth" over "misleading rumors." The state media's handling of the [gas crisis](#)—calling it a "temporary maritime delay" rather than a systemic shortage—is a clear **psychological operation** intended to manage public anger and prevent the transition from "logistical frustration" to "political unrest."

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- **Consolidation of the "Religious Police":** The new Islamic Charter will likely evolve into a formal enforcement mechanism, where imams who deviate from the [state-approved script](#) will be removed or arrested. This marks the end of independent religious authority in the country.

- **Economic Dependence on Riyadh:** The scale of the [Saudi deals](#) suggests that Riyadh will now have a significant say in Syrian domestic policy, particularly regarding the exclusion of rival regional influences. This may lead to a more "conservative but capitalist" social shift in Damascus.
- **Escalation in the South:** The removal of [Prince Hassan al-Atrash](#) from Suwayda may backfire, creating a power vacuum that more radical local factions might fill, potentially leading to [increased armed clashes](#) between local militias and the SAA.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

- **Short Term (1-4 Weeks):** Heightened civil unrest is likely if [Ramadan food and fuel prices](#) do not stabilize. Expect the state to use [religious discourse](#) during Ramadan to urge "patience and sacrifice."
- **Medium Term (1-6 Months):** A major rollout of [digital financial monitoring](#) will occur. This will likely reduce small-scale petty corruption but will consolidate control over capital in the hands of central ministries.
- **Long Term (1-5 Years):** A structural shift in the energy grid toward [renewables](#) will begin to decouple the Syrian state from its reliance on contested oil/gas fields in the northeast, potentially making it more resilient to Western energy-based leverage.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The current environment is brittle, where high-level state-building efforts are vulnerable to ground-level logistical failures.

- **Systemic Supply Chain Collapse:** Continued failure to deliver [LPG and fuel](#) could trigger spontaneous "bread riots" or fuel-queue protests. **Trigger:** Failure of the next three promised gas tankers to dock. **Likelihood:** Moderate-High. **Impact:** Critical (leads to widespread civil unrest). **Mitigations:** Using [Saudi lines of credit](#) for emergency fuel purchases.
- **Ideological Blowback in Rural Areas:** Enforcement of the [Awqaf Charter](#) may meet resistance in recently "liberated" areas with deep-seated local religious traditions. **Trigger:** Arrest of a popular local imam. **Likelihood:** Moderate. **Impact:** High (localized insurgencies). **Mitigations:** Gradual implementation and [tribal co-option](#).
- **Conflict with Israel Escalation:** The SAA movement toward [Shaddadi](#) and closer to border zones increases the risk of a miscalculation. **Trigger:** SAA anti-aircraft fire hitting an [Israeli jet over Quneitra](#). **Likelihood:** Moderate. **Impact:** Very High. **Mitigations:** Direct [Saudi-mediated de-escalation](#).

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- **Iranian/Russian Status:** The broadcasts completely omit the current role of Iran and Russia. Given their historical footprint, their absence in the new "Saudi-led" narrative is a major strategic blind spot that hides potential internal friction.

- **Sanction Evasion Details:** The state mentions [US Treasury hurdles](#) for aviation but doesn't explain how the multi-billion dollar Saudi deals are being cleared through global financial systems, leaving a gap in the understanding of Syria's current financial isolation status.
- **Security in the Northwest:** There is almost no reporting on the current status of Idlib or the Tahrir al-Sham controlled areas, which remain a major threat to the "Unified Syria" narrative.

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

- **The "Saudi Bait-and-Switch":** The stated multi-billion dollar deals are merely **declarations of intent** and will never be fully realized. They are being used by both Damascus and Riyadh as a diplomatic signal to the US and Iran, while ground truth remains one of continued economic decay and "empty cupboards."
- **The "Fragile Caliphate":** The [Islamic Discourse Charter](#) is actually a sign of **extreme state weakness**, indicating that the central government has lost control of the rural population's hearts and minds and is desperately attempting to use ideology as a last-resort security measure.
- **Black Swan Event:** A total **collapse of the Central Bank's digitization effort** due to a major cyberattack, leading to a complete freeze of all government salaries and private commerce during Ramadan.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- **Security:** Transition local militias in [Suwayda](#) into formal state structures to prevent them from becoming "mercenaries" for regional rivals.
- **Diplomatic:** Leverage the [Saudi energy deals](#) to push for a broader easing of civilian-sector sanctions at the UN.
- **Economic:** Prioritize the [natural gas supply chain](#) over high-tech digitization to ensure immediate domestic stability during the religious holidays.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Capital Allocation:** Opportunities are massive in the [renewable energy sector](#), particularly solar components and battery storage, as the state moves away from traditional fuels.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** New [media and digital codes](#) mean that any digital business in Syria must have robust state-monitored oversight protocols.
- **Supply Chain:** Investors should anticipate high volatility in food prices and fuel, requiring significant local storage capacity and independent power generation.

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

The legal and regulatory focus was on standardizing professional and religious

behavior while attempting to modernize the state's financial and administrative reach.

- **BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:**

- **The Unified Islamic Discourse Charter:** A regulatory framework to centralize all religious messaging under Ministry of Awqaf oversight ([20260217-11](#)).
- **Media Professional Code of Conduct:** New regulations for digital and traditional journalists to ensure "responsibility" and "national alignment" ([20260217-16](#)).
- **Decree 107 (Administrative Decentralization):** Ongoing debate over the level of local autonomy permitted for municipalities versus central government veto power ([20260217-94](#)).
- **The Central Bank Currency Program:** A 90-day regulatory window for the exchange and stabilization of the Syrian Pound ([20260217-14](#)).

- **HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:**

- **Ministry of Awqaf Scholars Conference:** A massive public gathering of 600 scholars to ratify the new discourse charter ([20260217-11](#)).
- **Saudi-Syrian Strategic Contract Signing:** A high-profile diplomatic event in Damascus marking the new economic alignment ([20260217-33](#)).
- **Energy Ministry Press Briefing:** An emergency briefing addressing the gas shortage crisis and promising a 24-hour turnaround in distribution ([20260217-102](#)).

KEY STORIES

- **Ministry of Awqaf Launches Islamic Discourse Charter:** Over 600 scholars gathered in Damascus to launch a national charter for unifying Islamic speech, removing extremist rhetoric, and supporting the state's centrist ideological vision ([20260217-11](#), [20260217-18](#), [20260217-20](#)).
- **Syria-Saudi Strategic Partnership Signed:** Strategic contracts totaling \$5.3 billion were signed between Syria and Saudi Arabia, covering aviation, telecom, and renewable energy, specifically large-scale solar projects .
- **Severe LPG (Gas) Shortage and Crisis:** [Widespread delays in domestic gas cylinder distribution have caused public anxiety; the Ministry of Energy blames technical maritime delays while promising immediate redistribution.](#)
- **Digital Transformation with Saudi Firm "Elm":** [The Ministry of Finance signed an agreement with the Saudi company Elm to digitize government services and financial operations to reduce corruption.](#)
- **Rehabilitation of Schools in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor:** [Educational authorities reported the reopening of 735 schools in Raqqa and 760 in Deir ez-Zor, part of the post-liberation rebuilding effort.](#)
- **Ramadan Market Monitoring in Lattakia and Daraa:** [Intensive government inspections of markets began to control the prices of essential staples \(oil, sugar, meat\) which are surging ahead of the holiday.](#)

- **Health Facilities Opening in Daraa:** The Minister of Health opened several new departments in Daraa National Hospital, though he refused to open the dental clinic due to missing equipment.
- **Spider Silk Nerve Repair Breakthrough:** A medical segment reported on innovative clinical trials using spider silk to repair damaged nerves, expected to be marketed by 2027.
- **Damascus International Book Fair Success:** The network celebrated over 1 million visitors to the fair, framing it as a symbol of cultural recovery.
- **Inauguration of Al-Sharq Bridge:** A vital bridge in Deir ez-Zor was reopened, restoring transport links across the Euphrates.

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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