

TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

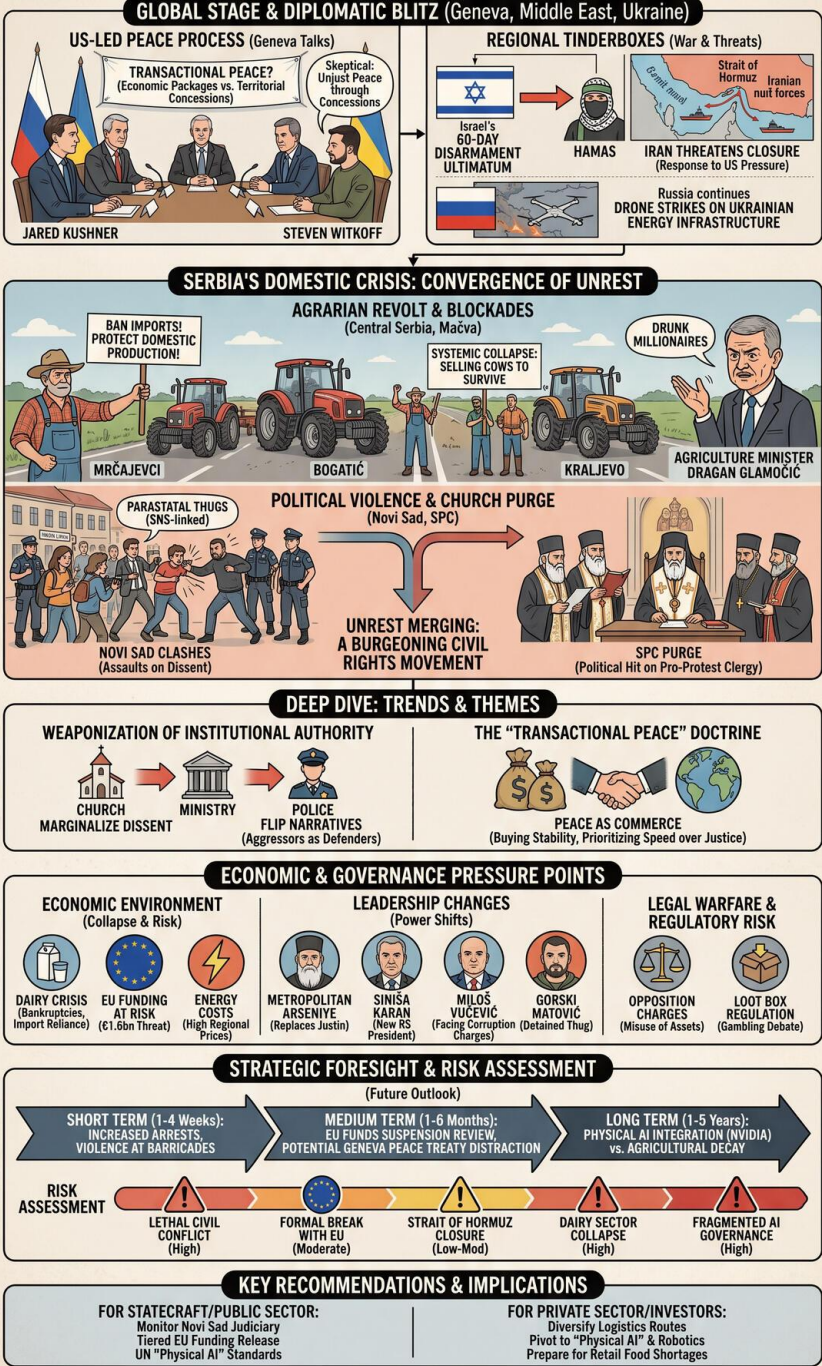
N1SRP

FEBRUARY 18, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT

DOMESTIC UNREST IN SERBIA SCALES UP AS TRUMP-LED DIPLOMACY DOMINATES THE GLOBAL STAGE

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE: February 18, 2026 – A Convergence of Internal Crises & External Maneuvering



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DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

February 18, 2026, was defined by an intensifying internal crisis in Serbia, where large-scale agrarian protests have merged with reports of state-sponsored violence against students and a significant purge within the Serbian Orthodox Church. Serbian farmers have [vowed to radicalize protests](#) after negotiations with Agriculture Minister Dragan Glamočić collapsed in mutual recrimination. The government's dismissive posture, characterized by the Minister labeling protesters "drunk millionaires," has served as a catalyst for expanded road blockades across Central Serbia and the Mačva region. This agrarian revolt is converging with a burgeoning civil rights movement following [violent clashes in Novi Sad](#), where students and journalists were allegedly assaulted by activists linked to the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) while police reportedly stood by. President Aleksandar Vučić, speaking from New Delhi,

further inflamed tensions by dismissing the severe injuries as "just a few slaps," suggesting the students provoked the violence.

On the international front, a "Trump-style" diplomatic blitz is underway in Geneva, with U.S. envoys Steven Witkoff and Jared Kushner moderating high-stakes negotiations between [Russia and Ukraine](#), as well as separate talks with Iran. While the U.S. delegation reports "significant progress" and the establishment of "guiding principles," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has expressed profound skepticism, warning that a peace achieved through Ukrainian territorial concessions is inherently unjust. Simultaneously, the Middle East remains a tinderbox as Israel issued a [60-day disarmament ultimatum](#) to Hamas, and Iran threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz in response to U.S. military pressure. This global maneuvering occurs against a backdrop of domestic technological debates ranging from NVIDIA's "Physical AI" to the controversial rise of "AI companions" and the psychological impact of gaming "loot boxes."

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Collapse of Serbian Agrarian Negotiations:** After a failed meeting with the Minister of Agriculture, farmers in Mrčajevci, Bogatić, and Kraljevo have [transitioned to total road blockades](#), demanding an immediate ban on dairy and meat imports to protect domestic production. The government maintains such a ban is legally impossible under EU stabilization agreements.

- **Novi Sad Political Violence:** Multiple students and journalists were [assaulted during a protest](#) marking the 200th anniversary of Matica Srpska. Identified attackers include known SNS-linked figures with criminal records, while the state narrative characterizes the event as a defense of the "foundations of the state."
- **U.S.-Led Peace Process in Geneva:** Envoys Witkoff and Kushner have concluded a third round of talks [aimed at ending the Ukraine-Russia war](#). Reports suggest an economic "reconstruction" package for Gaza and Ukraine is being used as leverage, though Ukraine remains wary of the "Trump administration's" push for rapid concessions.
- **Purge of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC):** The Holy Synod [removed Metropolitan Justin of Žiča](#) from his post. Official reasons cite financial mismanagement, but critics and theological analysts describe it as a political hit for his support of student and farmer protests.
- **EU Funding at Risk:** The European Commission has warned that it may [withhold 1.6 billion euros](#) in grants and loans if Serbia fails to rectify judicial laws that reportedly "curtail the independence of prosecutors" to protect high-ranking officials from corruption investigations.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Civil Unrest & Social Order

- The use of "parastatal" actors or "thugs" to suppress dissent in Novi Sad signals a significant degradation of the rule of law. Reports indicate police [surrounded protesters at Park Ušće](#) in Belgrade, preventing movement and arresting students while ignoring pro-government violence.
- Farmer blockades are no longer localized; they are [expanding to the Mačva region](#) and potentially involving fruit growers from Topola, indicating a broader breakdown in the social contract between the state and the rural population.

Diplomacy & Statecraft

- The "Trump 2.0" administration is bypassing traditional State Department channels, using [private envoys like Jared Kushner](#) to negotiate complex territorial disputes in Eastern Europe and the Middle East.
- The Iranian nuclear track is seeing "movement" on principles, yet remains shadowed by [threats of naval blockades](#) and the deployment of U.S. combat groups to the Persian Gulf.

Legal Warfare & Regulatory Risk

- Marinika Tepić has filed [criminal charges against Miloš Vučević](#) for the corrupt use of government aircraft for private vacations, highlighting the ongoing use of legal filings as a primary tool for the Serbian opposition.

- The debate over "loot boxes" in gaming is moving toward [strict international regulation](#) as experts liken these mechanisms to unregulated gambling targeting children.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Weaponization of Institutional Authority

- The state is increasingly using institutional tools (the Church Synod, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Police) not for governance, but for the [marginalization of dissent](#). The removal of Metropolitan Justin represents a shift where even traditional pillars like the SPC are being cleansed of voices that support civic rebellion.
- The government's information strategy involves "flipping" narratives: assaults on students are framed as an [attack on the "foundations of the state,"](#) allowing the aggressors to be portrayed as defenders of the nation.

The "Transactional Peace" Doctrine

- The Geneva talks reveal a new global paradigm where peace is treated as a commercial transaction. The focus on "reconstruction plans" and "economic packages" [offered by the U.S. delegation](#) suggests an effort to buy stability, a strategy that both Ukraine and Iran view with suspicion as it may prioritize "muscle velocity" (speed of action) over structural justice.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

Serbia is experiencing a severe loss of government mandate among key constituencies. The agricultural sector is in a state of "systemic collapse," with farmers claiming they must [sell one cow every three days](#) just to cover basic overhead. The government's inability to negotiate—choosing instead to insult protesters—suggests a leadership that is either unwilling or unable to address the core economic grievances of its base. This is compounded by elite infighting within the SPC and allegations of massive corruption regarding the [private use of state assets](#). The state's reliance on "batinaši" (thugs) to maintain order in cities like Novi Sad indicates that the official police force may no longer be sufficient to contain public anger, or that the government prefers the plausible deniability of non-uniformed violence. In Bosnia, the [ongoing paralysis of the House of Peoples](#) by the SNSD delegates shows that regional instability remains a primary tactic for maintaining local political leverage.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

The international system is being framed as an arena where personal relationships and "muscle velocity" supersede traditional multilateralism. The U.S. is projecting power defensively in the Middle East while simultaneously [moderating peace talks in Europe](#). Russia is portrayed as an actor seeking to "buy time" through diplomacy while continuing [massive drone strikes](#) on Ukrainian energy infrastructure. Serbia, meanwhile, is caught in a defensive crouch: it is being pressured by the EU over judicial standards while its leadership seeks to

maintain a "balanced" posture that is increasingly viewed by the West as a move away from democratic norms. The framing of the "outside world" by Serbian state media is increasingly hostile, labeling foreign reporters and European parliamentarians as "[politically biased](#)" enemies of the state.

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The economic climate is marked by a profound crisis in the primary sector and growing regulatory threats to Serbia's integration with European capital markets. Market sentiment is volatile as blockades disrupt major transport arteries, affecting internal supply chains.

- **Agricultural Collapse:** Milk prices have [dropped by 30-40 dinars](#) in two years, pushing domestic dairy farmers toward bankruptcy. Serbia has become a net importer of pork and milk, losing its "food sovereignty."
- **EU Financial Risk:** The potential [suspension of 1.6 billion euros](#) in EU funding poses a catastrophic risk to the Serbian national budget and infrastructure projects.
- **Technology Markets:** The global online gambling market has reached [\\$100 billion](#), comparable to the GDP of countries like Serbia or Oman, prompting new biometrics-based regulations in Brazil and site-blocking in India.
- **Energy Costs:** Continued Russian strikes on the Ukrainian energy sector [targeting 12 regions](#) are keeping regional energy prices elevated and supply chains brittle.

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

The day saw several significant shifts in the religious and political hierarchies of the region, signaling a tightening of control by the dominant ruling factions.

- **Metropolitan Justin of Žiča:** Forced out by the SPC Synod and replaced by [Metropolitan Arsenije of Niš](#). This is a major defeat for the "pro-protest" wing of the church.
- **Siniša Karan:** Sworn in as the new [President of Republika Srpska](#), vowing to continue the secessionist-leaning path of Milora Dodik.
- **Miloš Vučević:** Facing increasing legal and public pressure following [charges filed by the opposition](#) regarding misuse of official resources.
- **Gorski Matović:** A high-profile SNS activist and former convict [was finally detained](#) after video evidence of him assaulting a student went viral, though the arrest is viewed by the opposition as a "pro-forma" measure.

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

The network's editorial hierarchy emphasizes domestic crisis over international breakthroughs. The lead story throughout the day was the [violence against students in Novi Sad](#) and the radicalization of the farmers' protests. International news, including the Geneva peace talks, was secondary, suggesting that the "internal fire" in Serbia is perceived as a more immediate threat to regional stability than the outcome of the war in Ukraine. The emotional tone is one of alarm and skepticism toward the state, highlighted by the frequent use of victim testimonials and

on-the-ground reporting from blockaded roads. There is a conspicuous omission of the government's detailed plan for the agricultural sector, if one exists, with the coverage focusing almost exclusively on the [failure of current policies](#).

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

The day's reporting presents a world where traditional alliances are fraying and "strongman" dynamics are being tested by both street-level unrest and elite negotiations.

- **Serbia / Aleksandar Vučić:** Portrayed as a "weak and defensive" leader reacting to crisis with force and distraction. The broadcast frames the administration as increasingly "corrupt" and willing to [shield criminals](#) to maintain power. (Quote: "The president is a manipulator and a liar... he addresses only his voting base.")
- **USA / Donald Trump Administration:** Portrayed as "competent but transactional" and "chaotic." The use of Kushner and Witkoff is framed as a bold move to [bypass stagnant diplomacy](#), but one that risks the sovereignty of smaller nations. (Quote: "Witkoff has no experience with Russia... I fear there will be some kind of US-Russia pact.")
- **Ukraine / Volodymyr Zelensky:** Portrayed as "principled but besieged." He is shown as the lone voice of caution against a [rushed and unfair peace](#). (Quote: "Zelensky said it was not fair that Trump asks Ukraine to make concessions.")
- **Iran / Ayatollah Khamenei:** Portrayed as "defiant and stable" in the face of pressure, yet willing to engage in "guiding principles" if the price is right. (Quote: "Any American attempt to overthrow the government [will fail](#).")

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

- **Narrative Seeding:** The Serbian government is seeding a narrative that all dissenters (students, farmers, critical clergy) are ["Ustaše" or "enemies of the state,"](#) effectively trying to mobilize nationalist sentiment against economic and civil rights grievances.
- **Censorship & Intimidation:** The reporting highlights [52 incidents of attacks or threats](#) against N1 and Nova journalists in the past year, indicating a systematic effort to suppress independent reporting through physical and digital intimidation.
- **The "Spin" Delta:** There is a massive gap between the "ground truth" of hospital records for beaten students and the [official state spin](#) that characterizes the events as "a few slaps" and "media theater."

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- **The Serbian Convergence:** If the farmers and students successfully coordinate their protest schedules, the government may face a "perfect storm" of urban and rural unrest that will require either significant financial concessions it cannot afford or a move toward open authoritarianism.
- **The Geneva Pivot:** A "grand bargain" between the U.S. and Russia is increasingly likely, potentially involving a freeze of current frontlines in Ukraine. This would lead to a [domestic political crisis in Kyiv](#) and a realignment of European security structures.

- **Agricultural Exodus:** Without an immediate ban on imports or massive subsidies, Serbia's livestock sector will [face an irreversible collapse](#), leading to long-term food dependency and permanent rural depopulation.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks): Expect a dramatic increase in arrests of student activists and "preventative" detention of farmer leaders as the state seeks to head off a planned ["March for Justice"](#) on February 21. Violence on the barricades is a high probability.

Medium Term (1-6 Months): Serbia will likely face a formal "suspension of funds" review from the EU. This will coincide with the [potential signing of a peace treaty](#) in Geneva, which the Vučić administration will attempt to use as a diplomatic distraction to burnish its image as a "regional stabilizer."

Long Term (1-5 Years): The integration of "Physical AI" into industrial processes [promised by NVIDIA](#) may provide a path for economic modernization, but only if the rule of law is restored to attract the necessary high-tech investment. Conversely, the continued decay of domestic agriculture will lead to structural trade deficits.

RISK ASSESSMENT

- **Risk: Escalation to Lethal Civil Conflict in Serbia.** Triggers: A student or farmer death at the hands of "parastatal" thugs or police. Likelihood: Moderate-High. Impact: Catastrophic domestic instability, potential state of emergency. Mitigations: Immediate independent oversight of police actions and the removal of known criminal elements from party-affiliated security details.

- **Risk: Formal Break with the EU.** Triggers: The official withholding of the [1.6 billion euro grant](#). Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: Severe economic contraction, loss of investor confidence. Mitigations: Reversal of the controversial judicial law changes and a return to transparent legislative processes.
- **Risk: Closure of the Strait of Hormuz.** Triggers: Collapse of the [Geneva-Oman nuclear track](#) or a U.S. naval provocation. Likelihood: Low-Moderate. Impact: Global energy price spike, possible direct military conflict. Mitigations: De-escalation of naval rhetoric and formalizing the "guiding principles" reached in Geneva.
- **Risk: Collapse of the Serbian Dairy Sector.** Triggers: Continued [uncontrolled imports from Belarus and the EU](#). Likelihood: High. Impact: Loss of 60,000+ jobs, permanent food insecurity. Mitigations: Introduction of temporary protective tariffs and interventionist buying by the Republic Directorate for Commodity Reserves.
- **Risk: Fragmented Global AI Governance.** Triggers: Divergent regulations between the [UK, EU, and US](#) regarding robotics and autonomous systems. Likelihood: High. Impact: Reduced innovation, creation of "tech-havens" for unregulated physical AI. Mitigations: Establishing a common regulatory framework through the UN or a similar multilateral body.

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- The transcripts mention that the U.S. envoys are moderating talks, but they fail to detail the [specific territorial lines](#) being discussed for a Ukraine-Russia ceasefire, leaving the "success" of the talks unverified.
- There is a lack of information regarding the [intentions of the HDZ](#) in the Bosnian House of Peoples; the focus is solely on the SNSD, which may obscure a broader coordinated strategy of legislative sabotage.
- The reports on the SPC Synod's decision lack a direct interview with [Metropolitan Justin himself](#), leaving his side of the financial allegations completely unrepresented.
- The "Physical AI" vision presented at CES is not grounded in current Serbian labor market data, failing to analyze how such technology would actually affect a nation currently [struggling with basic agricultural production](#).

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

- **The Managed Revolt:** The current farmers' protests and student violence may be a "pressure valve" operation coordinated by elements of the state to identify and "flush out" opposition leaders well ahead of the October elections, allowing the state to [neutralize them](#) systematically in the coming months.

- **The Geneva Stall:** The "progress" reported by the U.S. in Geneva may be an elaborate stall tactic. Russia may be [pretending to negotiate](#) while preparing for a decisive spring offensive, using the diplomacy to discourage further Western arms shipments to Ukraine.
- **Black Swan:** A major [earthquake in the Balkans](#) (similar to the 4.6 Richter event near Livna) during a period of total road blockades could prevent emergency services from reaching victims, turning a natural disaster into a political catastrophe that topples the regional governments.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- International observers must immediately [prioritize monitoring of the Novi Sad judiciary](#) to ensure that the identified attackers of students are not released due to political pressure.
- EU leadership should consider "tiering" the 1.6 billion euro grant, releasing funds specifically for [agricultural reform](#) while withholding infrastructure funds, to address the immediate food crisis without rewarding judicial corruption.
- The UN should seek to include "Physical AI" standards in the next round of global safety summits to prevent [regulatory arbitrage](#) by firms like NVIDIA and Alphabet.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- Logistics firms operating in the Balkans should [diversify routes away from the Ibarska Magistrala](#) and Mrčajevci, as blockades are likely to become semi-permanent.
- Tech investors should pivot toward "Physical AI" and [autonomous robotics](#) in factory automation, as Nvidia's CES 2026 roadmap indicates this is where the next major capital infusion will occur.
- Retailers in Serbia must prepare for [significant shortages in domestic dairy and meat](#), as the livestock census indicates a "catastrophic" drop in headcounts that imports cannot easily fill without price spikes.

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

Legislative activity in Feb 2026 is focused on consolidating state power in Serbia and RS, while the EU attempts to use regulatory levers to force a return to democratic norms. The Bosnian parliament remains in a state of suspended animation.

• **BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:**

- **Serbian Judicial Reform Amendments:** Strategic intent is to [split existing courts and prosecutor offices](#) to dilute their authority and protect officials from corruption probes.
- **Brazil's Pet Burial Law:** Recognizes the [emotional bond between owners and pets](#), allowing shared burial; a response to the "Bobi" the dog phenomenon.
- **New Mexico "Truth Commission" Law:** Establishes a commission to investigate [crimes related to the Epstein estate](#) and its political connections.

• **HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:**

- **Ministry of Agriculture Negotiation:** A failed event where the [dismissive attitude of the Minister](#) led to the radicalization of national protests.
- **Geneva Peace Summit Presser:** U.S. envoys claimed "significant progress" while [Ukraine issued warnings](#) of a "forced and unfair" peace deal.

KEY STORIES

- **Serbian Farmers' Revolt:** Farmers across Serbia, including in [Mrčajevci, Slatina, and Bogatić](#), have established total road blockades after a failed meeting with the Agriculture Minister. They demand a ban on all agricultural imports and higher subsidies. The protest is expanding to involve more sectors like fruit and vegetable growers [from the Mačva region](#).
- **Violence in Novi Sad:** Protesters and journalists were [brutally attacked](#) during a ceremony at the Serbian National Theater. Victims suffered burst eardrums and head wounds. Attackers were identified as SNS-linked figures, including [Gorski Matović and Đorđe Hrnjak](#). Police are accused of negligence and biased arrests.
- **Geneva Peace Negotiations:** High-level talks moderated by U.S. envoys Jared Kushner and Steven Witkoff [took place in Geneva](#). While the U.S. side reports a breakthrough on "guiding principles," President Zelensky and Iranian leaders remain skeptical. Russia continues its [attacks on energy infrastructure](#) during the talks.

- **Metropolitan Justin Removed:** The Holy Synod of the SPC [sacked the Metropolitan of Žiča](#). Official reasons cite financial crimes, but the move is widely seen as punishment for his support of anti-government protesters and his ["anti-ecumenical" stance](#).
- **Corruption Charges Against Vučević:** Opposition leader Marinika Tepić [filed charges](#) against the current Serbian PM for using a government jet for a private trip to Greece, costing an estimated 30,000 euros.
- **EU Financial Ultimatum:** The EU Commission warned Serbia it could lose [1.6 billion euros](#) if it does not reverse judicial laws that undermine prosecutor independence.
- **NVIDIA and "Physical AI":** CEO Jensen Huang [presented a vision at CES 2026](#) for robots that perform domestic and industrial tasks, using the "Omniverse" and "Ruben" chip platforms.
- **Bosnian Political Deadlock:** The House of Peoples session was [sabotaged by SNSD delegates](#) over the sequence of the agenda, including VSTV and election law reforms.
- **Gaza Disarmament Ultimatum:** Israel has given Hamas [60 days to disarm](#) or face continued full-scale war, a move reportedly backed by the Trump administration.
- **Death of Jessie Jackson:** The American civil rights icon [died at age 84](#), remembered for his historic presidential campaigns and work with Martin Luther King Jr.
- **Epstein Documents Controversy:** Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton traded [accusations of "derangement"](#) over the release of documents related to Jeffrey Epstein's network.

- **Icarus Animal Tracking Project:** The science mission [resumed operations](#) using smaller, shoebox-sized satellites after being grounded for two years due to the Russia-Ukraine war.
- **Serbian Winter Storm:** Heavy snow has caused [widespread power outages](#) in Western Serbia, particularly in the Zlatibor and Osečina regions.
- **Berlinale Protest:** Over 80 artists [signed a letter](#) condemning the Berlin Film Festival for its silence on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

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.

This report is entirely machine generated using Gemini 3 and may include errors and omissions. Please verify all findings. No data is used to train or tune any AI model.

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