

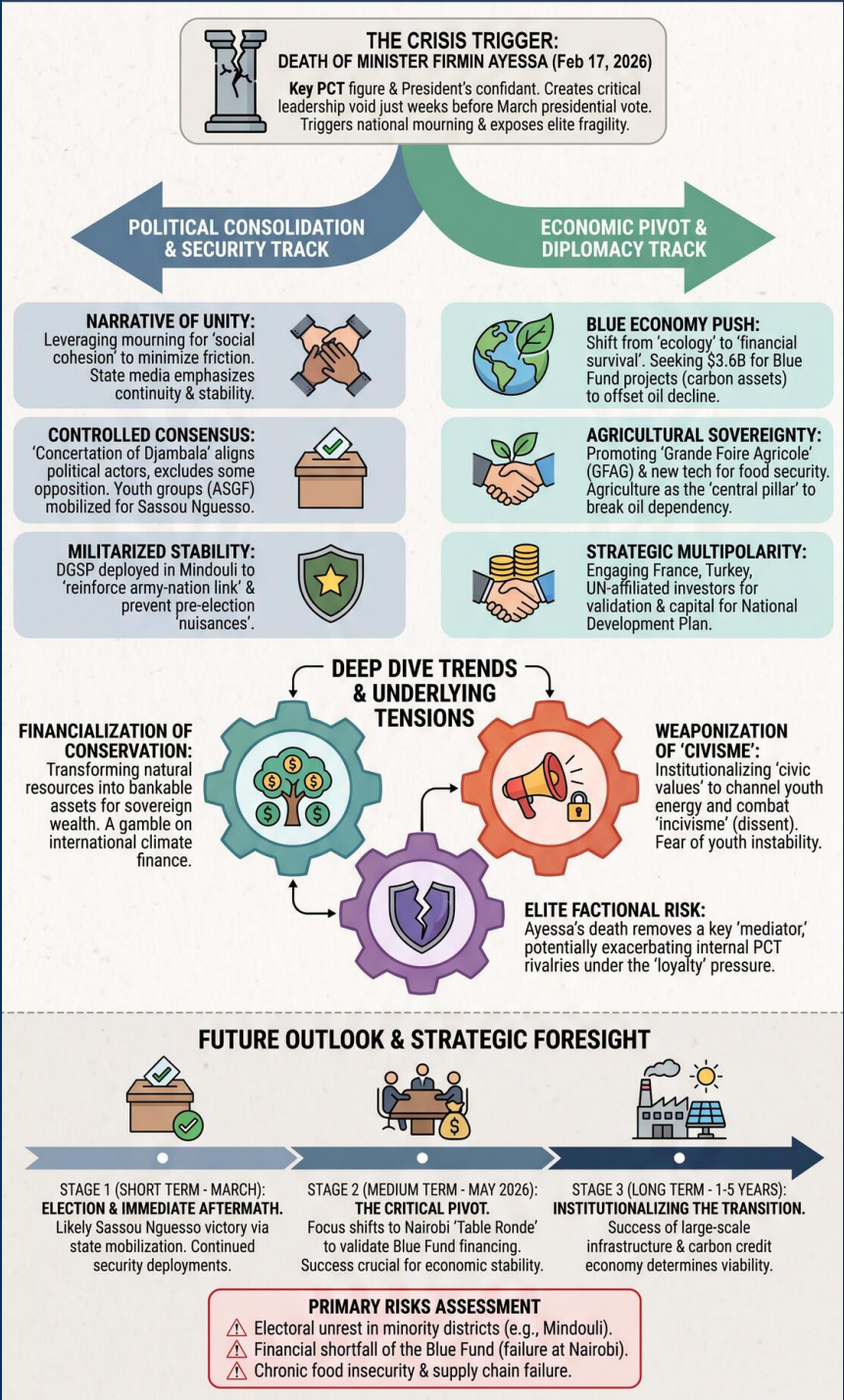
TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

TELECONGO

FEBRUARY 18, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT

THE REPUBLIC OF CONGO: LEADERSHIP VACUUM & PRE-ELECTION STRATEGY (February 2026)



TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

TELECONGO

FEBRUARY 18, 2026

THE REPUBLIC OF CONGO
CONFRONTS A SIGNIFICANT
LEADERSHIP VACUUM AND
HEIGHTENED PRE-ELECTION
TENSION FOLLOWING THE DEATH
OF A KEY CABINET PILLAR.

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

The Republic of Congo is currently navigating a period of profound national mourning and strategic realignment following the death of **Firmin Ayessa**, the Minister of State for Civil Service, Labor, and Social Security, who passed away in Istanbul on February 17, 2026. Ayessa was a central figure in the ruling Congolese Party of Labor (PCT) and a close confidant of President Denis Sassou Nguesso. His death has triggered a massive state-led commemorative effort and underscored the fragility of the political elite just weeks before the presidential elections scheduled for March 12 and 15, 2026. The government is leveraging his legacy to call for national unity, stability, and "social cohesion," a narrative aimed at minimizing friction during the upcoming vote [commemorative state response](#).

Simultaneously, the administration is aggressively pursuing a dual-track strategy of electoral mobilization and economic diversification. The "Concertation of Djambala" serves as the primary mechanism for aligning political actors—including some opposition and civil society members—around a consensus for a peaceful election. However, the exclusion of certain opposition candidates on regulatory grounds suggests a tightly controlled political environment [electoral consensus efforts](#). On the economic front, the state is heavily promoting the **Blue Fund for the Congo Basin** and the "Grande Foire Agricole" (GFAG) as vehicles for "financial survival" and food sovereignty, attempting to transition the national discourse from oil dependency to climate-based financing and agricultural self-sufficiency [economic transition strategy](#).

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

The Passing of Firmin Ayessa and Political Vacuum

- Minister of State Firmin Ayessa died in Turkey following an illness, leaving a critical opening in the Ministry of Civil Service and the PCT leadership [death of Ayessa](#).
- The government has declared a period of national mourning, framing Ayessa as a "pillar of the state" and a model of loyalty [state mourning](#).
- Political figures, including Senate President Pierre Ngolo, have characterized his death as a "tsunami" for the nation's hearts, potentially impacting the PCT's campaign efficiency [political impact](#).

Escalation of Presidential Election Preparations

- The "Concertation of Djambala" concluded with calls for "free, transparent, and peaceful" elections, though the exclusion of non-recognized parties remains a point of contention [Djambala concertation](#).
- Youth associations like "Synergie Jeunesse Espoir du Futur" (ASGF) have officially mobilized to support President Sassou Nguesso's candidacy [youth mobilization](#).
- Deployment of the **DGSP** (Directorate General of Presidential Security) in Mindouli is being justified as a measure to "reinforce the army-nation link" despite local anxieties [security deployment](#).

Strategic Pivot to Climate and Blue Economy Financing

- Ministers of Environment and Finance met to validate 43 "mature and bankable" projects for the Blue Fund, totaling 3.6 billion dollars [Blue Fund projects](#).
- The government is shifting focus from "ecology" to "financial survival," seeking to turn natural resources into bankable assets [financial pivot](#).
- International support is being sought via a "Table Ronde" scheduled for May 2026 in Nairobi [international financing](#).

Agricultural Sovereignty and Technological Innovation

- The first edition of the Grande Foire Agricole (GFAG) at Bombou Mingali highlighted innovations like solar driers and smokehouses to reduce post-harvest losses [agricultural fair](#).

- Research on disease-resistant manioc and "giant" hybrid tomatoes aimed at ensuring food security [agricultural research](#).
- The state is promoting agriculture as the "central pillar" of the National Development Plan to break oil dependency [breaking oil dependency](#).

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Armed Conflict & Militarization

- Security forces (DGSP) are notably active in the Mindouli district, formerly a site of instability, to "prevent nuisances" during the pre-election period [Mindouli security](#).
- The Republic of Congo is mourning the death of the technical director of Telecongo, Brunel Cyril Titsato, alongside Minister Ayessa [Telecongo leadership loss](#).

Climate & Extreme Weather

- Recovery efforts continue in Chicapika following a devastating tornado on February 4-5 that destroyed 44 homes and a church [Chicapika tornado recovery](#).
- Extensive reporting on global climate risks, including measles outbreaks in Somalia and droughts in Nigeria, used to frame the urgency of the Blue Fund [global climate context](#).

Diplomacy & Statecraft

- The Turkish Ambassador to Congo, Ilmi Ege Turemen, formally presented condolences to Prime Minister Anatole Coline Makoso, highlighting bilateral ties [Turkish diplomacy](#).
- Negotiations are underway with France to revise the judicial cooperation convention [French judicial talks](#).

- Meetings with the "Fédération des Nations Unies" (led by Nicolas Rodin) focused on digital investment and legislative frameworks for the tech sector [UN digital talks](#).

Leadership Dynamics & Governance

- President Sassou Nguesso is being portrayed as the "grand builder of modern Congo," with documentaries and political meetings reinforcing his 47-year legacy since 1979 [Sassou Nguesso legacy](#).
- The state is grappling with "incivisme" (uncivic behavior) among youth, launching awareness campaigns led by Hillarian Ivu Mbala [civic awareness](#).

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

Stability Through Continuity The state narrative is heavily saturated with the concepts of "peace," "unity," and "social cohesion." This appears to be a defensive posture against potential electoral unrest. The pervasive mourning of Firmin Ayessa is being used as a unifying symbol, reminding the citizenry of the "stability" provided by the current elite. The "Concertation of Djambala" is the operationalization of this theme, bringing disparate groups under a single government-led umbrella to validate the electoral process [electoral validation](#).

The Financialization of Conservation A clear trend is the transition of environmental policy from purely ecological concerns to a mechanism for sovereign wealth generation. By framing the Congo Basin's carbon-sequestering capacity as a "bankable asset," the government is attempting to attract billions in "Blue Fund" capital to offset declining oil revenues. This involves

institutionalizing carbon credits and seeking international "Table Ronde" validation to ensure long-term "financial survival" [financialization of ecology](#).

Weaponization of "Civisme" The government is increasingly focusing on the behavior of its youth, launching multiple associations and conferences to combat "incivisme." This trend suggests an underlying fear of youth-led dissent or social media-driven instability. By institutionalizing "civic values" through groups like the GAE (Génération Auto-Entrepreneur) and Synergie Jeunesse, the state seeks to channel youth energy into entrepreneurship and support for the status quo [youth control](#).

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

Elite Consolidation vs. Factional Risk The death of Firmin Ayessa removes a key stabilizer within the PCT. Ayessa was described as a "mediator" who could bring together those who disagreed [Ayessa as mediator](#). His absence may exacerbate internal factionalism within the party just as the campaign intensifies. The heavy emphasis on his "loyalty" serves as a warning to other elites to remain aligned with the President.

Managing Dissent in Mindouli The deployment of the DGSP and the sub-prefect's symbolic distribution of national flags to village chiefs in Mindouli indicate a persistent concern regarding regional stability [Mindouli flag distribution](#). The state's narrative emphasizes that the military presence is for "protection," yet the mention of "past drifts" suggests a history of friction that the government is desperate to avoid repeating during the March vote.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

Strategic Multipolarity Congo-Brazzaville is positioning itself at a crossroads of international influence. It maintains deep ties with **France** (judicial cooperation) and **Turkey** (health and diplomacy), while simultaneously courting **UN-affiliated digital investors** and regional blocs like **CEMAC** and the **African Union** [economic blocs](#). The portrayal of the outside world is one of a source of necessary capital and validation for the "Blue Fund" and National Development Plan.

Global Climate Leader Aspiration The state media frames Congo as a "solution country" for global climate change due to its peatlands and forests [Congo as solution](#). This is a strategic posture designed to elevate the nation's diplomatic weight and leverage its natural capital for sovereign debt relief or direct investment, effectively turning the environmental crisis into a geopolitical asset.

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The economic climate is characterized by an urgent push for diversification away from petroleum and toward agriculture and green financing. The government is actively deploying microcredits through **FIGA** and **Colissa** to stimulate local entrepreneurship and "break the chains of poverty" [poverty alleviation credits](#).

Key Economic Vectors

- **Microfinance Mobilization:** Remittance of 97.7 million CFA francs to Kai Innovab and 31.6 million CFA francs to Figa for entrepreneurs in the Bowenza and Louté districts [microfinance figures](#).

- **Infrastructure Investment:** 14 billion CFA francs allocated for water treatment and distribution infrastructure in Brazzaville [water infrastructure](#).
- **Timber and Paper Sector:** Projected investment of 190 billion CFA francs in the wood industry, including a paper pulp factory in Pointe-Noire [timber investment](#).
- **Digital Market Gaps:** Discussions regarding a mandatory "gateway" for SMS traffic to capture lost revenue from tech giants like Google and Meta [digital revenue capture](#).

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

The primary leadership shift is the vacuum left by Firmin Ayessa's death, necessitating new appointments in key sectors.

- **Firmin Ayessa (Deceased):** Minister of State for Civil Service and Labor. His death removes a central PCT strategist and cabinet pillar [Ayessa status](#).
- **Brunel Cyril Titsato (Deceased):** Technical Director of Telecongo. His passing disrupts state media technical leadership [Telecongo change](#).
- **Manuanzapier:** Appointed as the campaign director for President Sassou Nguesso in the Mbinda district [campaign appointment](#).
- **Blondine Ngoonga:** Named campaign director for Sassou Nguesso in the first constituency of Talangay [Talangay campaign lead](#).
- **Marvik Ongalebangu:** President of the newly formed "Synergie Jeunesse Espoir du Futur" (ASGF), signaling a new generation of pro-government youth leaders [new youth leader](#).

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

Telecongo's editorial hierarchy for February 18 is dominated by the **sanctification of Firmin Ayessa**. The broadcast is heavily nationalistic and somber, framing the state as a resilient entity capable of absorbing such a blow. The second primary focus is the **legitimacy of the upcoming election**, with significant airtime given to "concertations" and youth groups endorsing the President. Minor or "buried" stories include local issues like the Chicapika tornado recovery and the Kintele vocational training graduation, which are used to demonstrate that the state continues to function effectively despite the high-level mourning [functional state narrative](#). The tone is reassuring but prescriptive, emphasizing that the path to the future is solely through the existing leadership.

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

The day's framing reinforces a narrative of Congolese sovereignty supported by a network of diverse international partners.

COUNTRIES and LEADERS

- **Denis Sassou Nguesso:** Portrayed as a stable, "patriarchal" figure and "grand builder" whose leadership is essential for national peace [Sassou Nguesso framing](#).
- **Turkey:** Framed as a compassionate partner and a destination for advanced medical care, despite the unfortunate outcome of Ayessa's treatment [Turkey framing](#).

- **France (Emmanuel Macron):** Portrayed as a formal diplomatic partner, with recent visits and judicial negotiations emphasizing a relationship of equals [France framing](#).
- **DRC and Gabon:** Framed as critical regional allies in the Blue Fund initiative, essential for the "solution country" narrative [regional allies](#).

NON-STATE & CORPORATE ACTORS

- **UN/Fédération des Nations Unies:** Framed as a source of technological legitimacy and capital investment [UN framing](#).
- **INI Congo:** Characterized as a vital technical partner for electrical infrastructure improvement [INI Congo framing](#).
- **PCT (Congolese Party of Labor):** Framed as the only viable political path, with all other groups portrayed as either supportive or irrelevant [PCT dominance](#).

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

The primary information operation is the **"Unity Narrative."** State media is flooded with messages about "vivre ensemble" and "national cohesion," effectively branding any opposition as "uncivic" or a threat to peace. The exclusion of opposition parties is framed as a matter of "respecting laws" regarding party registration and congresses, rather than political suppression [legalistic exclusion](#).

- **Narrative Seeding:** The term "solution country" is being seeded to justify future climate funding [narrative seeding](#).

- **Censorship of Dissent:** Opposition absence at the Djambala concertation is minimized, with the government claiming they were not invited because their parties are not "recognized" by the Ministry of Interior [dissent management](#).
- **Emotional Manipulation:** The death of Ayessa is used to create an emotional landscape where political opposition appears disrespectful or untimely.

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

Likely Electoral Outcome Given the heavy mobilization of state resources, youth associations, and the military in former opposition strongholds, President Sassou Nguesso is positioned for a first-round victory. The "concertations" have effectively fragmented the opposition, leaving no unified front [electoral consolidation](#).

Post-Election Economic Shift Following the election, the government will likely aggressively pivot toward the May 2026 "Table Ronde" for the Blue Fund. Success in this arena is critical; failure to secure the multi-billion dollar funding could lead to severe austerity as oil prices fluctuate or production plateaus.

Youth Discontent Flashpoints Despite the state-led "civisme" campaigns, the high frequency of these programs suggests an underlying volatility. If the promised FIGA microcredits and agricultural employment do not materialize rapidly, youth unrest could become a post-election challenge.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks): Extensive state funerals for Firmin Ayessa will dominate the

news, followed by a surge in campaign events as the February 28 campaign start date approaches. Expect further security deployments in rural areas [campaign start](#).

Medium Term (1-6 Months): The March elections will be concluded, followed by a potential cabinet reshuffle to replace Ayessa and others. Focus will shift entirely to the Nairobi "Table Ronde" and the validation of Blue Fund projects [medium term focus](#).

Long Term (1-5 Years): The Republic of Congo will attempt to institutionalize its "carbon credit" economy. The success of large-scale infrastructure projects like the paper pulp factory and the Pointe-Noire/Brazzaville electrical line will determine the viability of this transition [long term viability](#).

RISK ASSESSMENT

The national risk profile is elevated due to the convergence of electoral tension and high-level leadership loss.

- **Electoral Unrest in Minority Districts:** Risks of localized violence in districts like Mindouli if voters perceive the DGSP presence as intimidatory. **Triggers:** Clashes between security forces and local populations during the March 12-15 vote. **Likelihood:** Moderate. **Impact:** High (loss of international legitimacy). **Mitigations:** Continued "concertation" efforts and symbolic distributions of national flags [Mindouli risk](#).

- **Financial Shortfall of the Blue Fund:** Failure to secure the 3.6 billion dollar investment target. **Triggers:** Negative outcome at the May 2026 Table Ronde. **Likelihood:** Moderate. **Impact:** Extreme (economic instability and loss of government mandate). **Mitigations:** Intensive diplomatic lobbying and project maturation [Blue Fund risk](#).
- **Food Insecurity and Supply Chain Failure:** Chronic dependence on imported food remains a vulnerability despite agricultural fairs. **Triggers:** Global price spikes or local crop failures. **Likelihood:** High. **Impact:** Moderate to High. **Mitigations:** Scaling up the GFAG initiatives and Mani-hybrid research [food risk](#).
- **Succession Instability:** The loss of key cabinet pillars like Ayessa creates factional competition. **Triggers:** Open disagreements during the PCT's post-election reorganization. **Likelihood:** Moderate. **Impact:** High. **Mitigations:** Strong presidential control and emphasizing "loyalty" as a core value [leadership risk](#).
- **Climate-Driven Displacement:** Increased frequency of extreme weather events like the Chicapika tornado. **Triggers:** Further severe weather seasons. **Likelihood:** High. **Impact:** Moderate. **Mitigations:** Strengthening the Civil Security command and improving urban drainage [weather risk](#).

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- The transcripts provide no information on the **actual health of President Sassou Nguesso** himself, which is a critical piece of context given the sudden death of his close contemporary, Ayessa.

- There is a significant blind spot regarding the **views of the excluded opposition**. The broadcast only presents the state's legalistic justification for their absence.
- The **status of external debt repayments** is omitted, despite the focus on "financial survival" and the Blue Fund.
- The **actual effectiveness of the DGSP** in Mindouli is unverified; state media only reports the official "protection" narrative [security gap](#).

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

The "Unity" Cover for Factional Purge The emphasis on "loyalty" following Ayessa's death might not be just mourning, but a pre-emptive warning to internal PCT rivals. Ayessa's death may be used as a pretext to reshuffle the cabinet and remove "unreliable" elements under the guise of "national renewal" and "honoring his legacy."

The Blue Fund as a "White Elephant" While the state frames the Blue Fund as a survival mechanism, it may actually be a stall tactic to maintain elite lifestyle amid oil decline. If the funds are mismanaged or fail to materialize, the "climate leader" narrative could collapse, leading to rapid civil unrest as the youth see no tangible benefits from the "Green Transition."

Black Swan Event: Election Interruption A major natural disaster (e.g., a tornado significantly larger than the Chicapika event) or a sudden health crisis within the top leadership tier could force an indefinite postponement of the March elections, plunging the nation into a constitutional crisis and potentially inviting military intervention [military readiness](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- Accelerate the **integration of youth** into the formal economy through FIGA to preempt post-election instability [youth inclusion](#).
- Strengthen **judicial cooperation** with France to ensure legislative stability for incoming digital and green investments [judicial stability](#).
- Maintain a transparent **succession plan** to replace the "four pillars" of the state (Ayessa, Bouya, etc.) and prevent factional infighting.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- Monitor the **digital legislative gateway** proposal; this could significantly impact the operating costs for telecom and tech companies in Congo [tech regulatory risk](#).
- Opportunities exist in **agricultural technology** (solar driers, resistant hybrids) as the state prioritizes food sovereignty [ag-tech opportunities](#).
- Evaluate **carbon credit frameworks** early, as the Blue Fund's projects will require private sector validation and technical management [carbon market opportunities](#).

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

The current legislative environment is focused on creating a framework for digital sovereignty and electoral consensus.

• **BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:**

- **Digital Legislation Review:** Proposals to create a mandatory "gateway" for digital traffic to capture revenue from multinational tech companies [digital gateway proposal](#).
- **Judicial Cooperation Convention:** Revision of the 52-year-old treaty with France to modernize judicial assistance [judicial revision](#).

• **HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:**

- **Concertation of Djambala:** A high-level meeting involving the Prime Minister and political actors to validate the March 2026 electoral process [Djambala event](#).
- **Blue Fund Ministerial Council:** A technical meeting to validate the 43 core projects of the green economy transition [Blue Fund meeting](#).

KEY STORIES

- **Death of Firmin Ayessa:** Extensive coverage of the passing of the Minister of State for Civil Service in Istanbul, including state condolences and the declaration of national mourning [Ayessa story](#).
- **Concertation of Djambala:** Reporting on the political dialogue aimed at ensuring a peaceful presidential election in March 2026 [Djambala story](#).

- **Blue Fund for the Congo Basin:** Validation of 43 investment projects totaling \$3.6 billion to transition the economy toward conservation [Blue Fund story](#).
- **Mindouli Security Deployment:** The sub-prefect of Mindouli justifies the deployment of the DGSP and reinforces national unity ahead of elections [Mindouli story](#).
- **Chicapika Tornado Recovery:** Distribution of 1,200 sheets of roofing and construction materials to 44 families affected by the February 4-5 storm [Chicapika story](#).
- **Grande Foire Agricole (GFAG):** Inauguration of the first agricultural fair at Bombou Mingali, showcasing solar technological innovations [GFAG story](#).
- **Digital Investment Talks:** Senate President Pierre Ngolo meets with a UN federation delegation to discuss digital sector legislation [Digital talks story](#).
- **Youth "Civisme" Conference:** Hillarian Ivu Mbala leads a conference in Brazzaville on youth civic values and the "vivre ensemble" [Youth civisme story](#).
- **Telecongo Leadership Loss:** Official announcement of the death of technical director Brunel Cyril Titsato [Telecongo loss story](#).
- **Mbinda Campaign Mobilization:** Deputy Pierre Manwanza visits Mbinda to install the local campaign director for President Sassou Nguesso [Mbinda campaign story](#).
- **FIGA Microcredits:** Distribution of millions in CFA francs to youth entrepreneurs in the Bowenza region [FIGA story](#).
- **Kintele BTS Graduation:** First promotion of vocational students at the Kintele Polytechnic Institute [Kintele story](#).
- **Maman Bouelle Health Center:** Renovations and equipment upgrades for the health center in Talangay [Maman Bouelle story](#).
- **Judicial Cooperation Convention:** Negotiations with France to modernize the bilateral judicial agreement [Judicial convention story](#).
- **Global Health Risks:** Reports on measles in Somalia and malaria risks due to climate change as part of the "Carnet de Santé" series [Health risk story](#).
- **Telecongo 20h Headlines:** A summary of the day's main news focused on national mourning and electoral preparation [20h headlines](#).

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.

For questions or suggestions, please contact kalev.leetaru5@gmail.com. To learn more or subscribe to our free daily newsletters, visit <https://blog.gdeltproject.org/announcing-our-new-daily-todays-trends-on-capitol-hill-todays-media-trends-newsletter-briefings/>. You can also learn more about the GDELT Project at <https://blog.gdeltproject.org/> and the Internet Archive's TV News Archive at <https://archive.org/details/tv>.