Two Conservative Media Systems

What sharply different coverage of Trump and the White House means for the 2026 midterms

Media Tenor Analysis September 2026







Unsplash: Rubaitul Azad, Yang Xia

Key takeaways

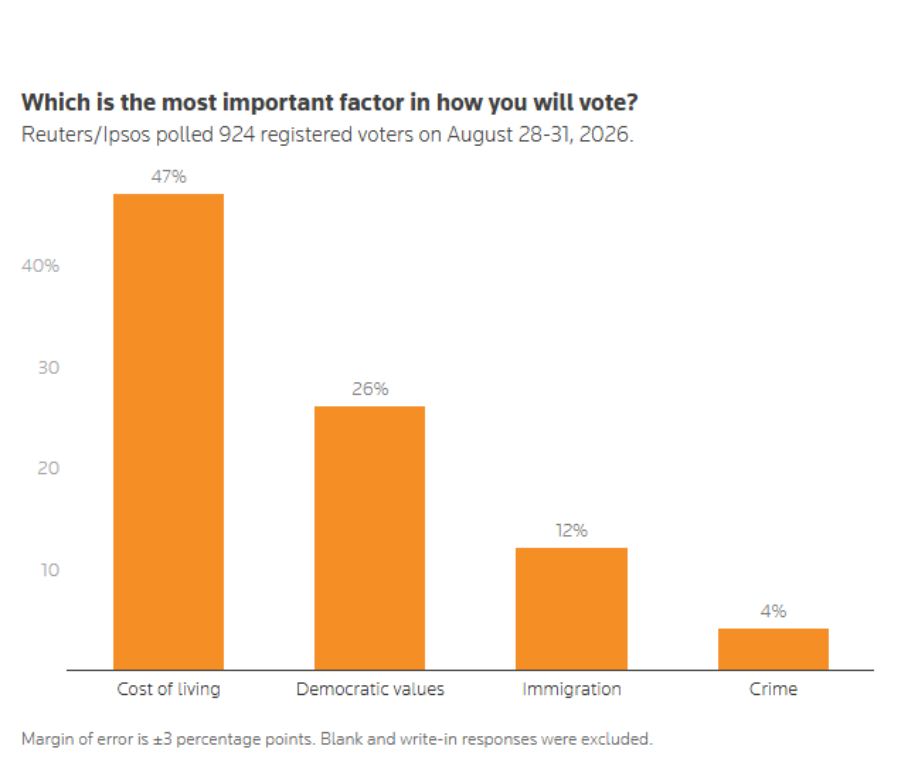
According to a Reuters/Ipsos poll, the cost of living, democratic values, and immigration are voters' key concerns. The poll also shows a five-percent lead for Democratic candidates towards the end of August. Whether Republicans will be able to catch up depends largely on the image of the recent achievements of US President Donald Trump and the White House that leading conservative media outlets present. Media Tenor's scientific content analysis shows:

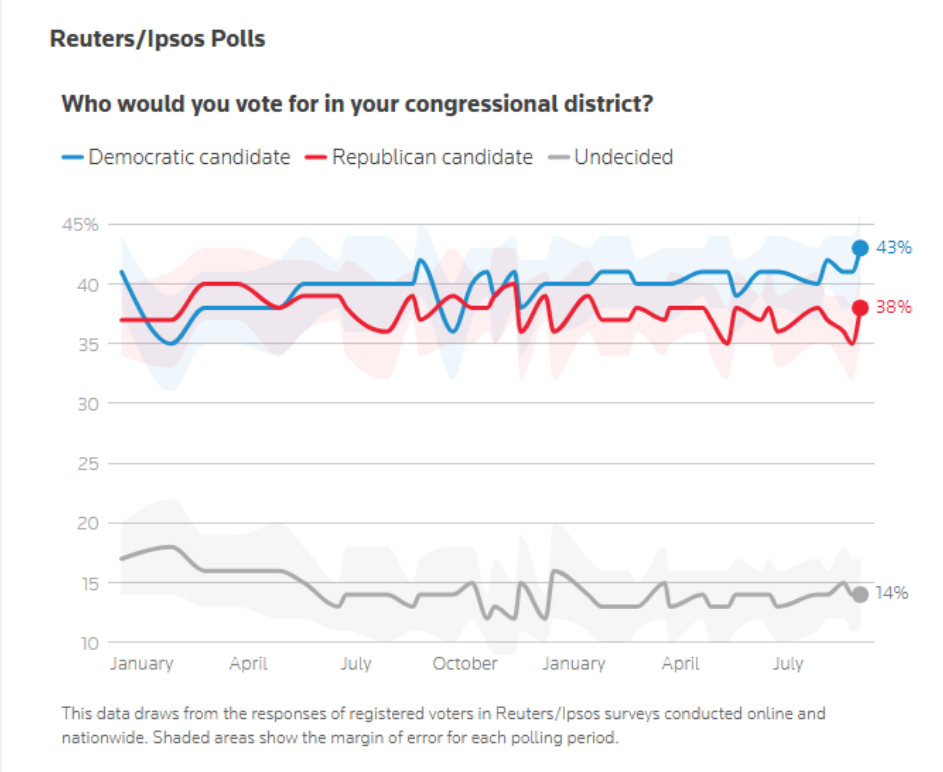
- The administration—not Trump—is Fox's strongest asset. Fox rates the White House at +25.4 but Trump at only +5.5. Trump has been near neutral throughout 2026.
- The WSJ is more negative toward the administration (−23.2) than toward Trump (−17.0) and toward both protagonists.
- Agenda selection matters, but framing matters more. On border control, economic policy, and trade agreements, the outlets reach sharply different conclusions on the same topic.
- Fox's positive narrative about the administration rests on diplomacy, peacekeeping, military action, border control, trade deals, and governing performance, not blanket approval.
- Neither outlet emphasizes the cost of living in its coverage of Trump and the administration. However, Fox presents the cost of living as a problem while simultaneously lauding the administration's efforts to lower it.

Basis: 223,717 analyzed reports

What the polls say: Cost of living and democratic values are decisive for voting behavior.

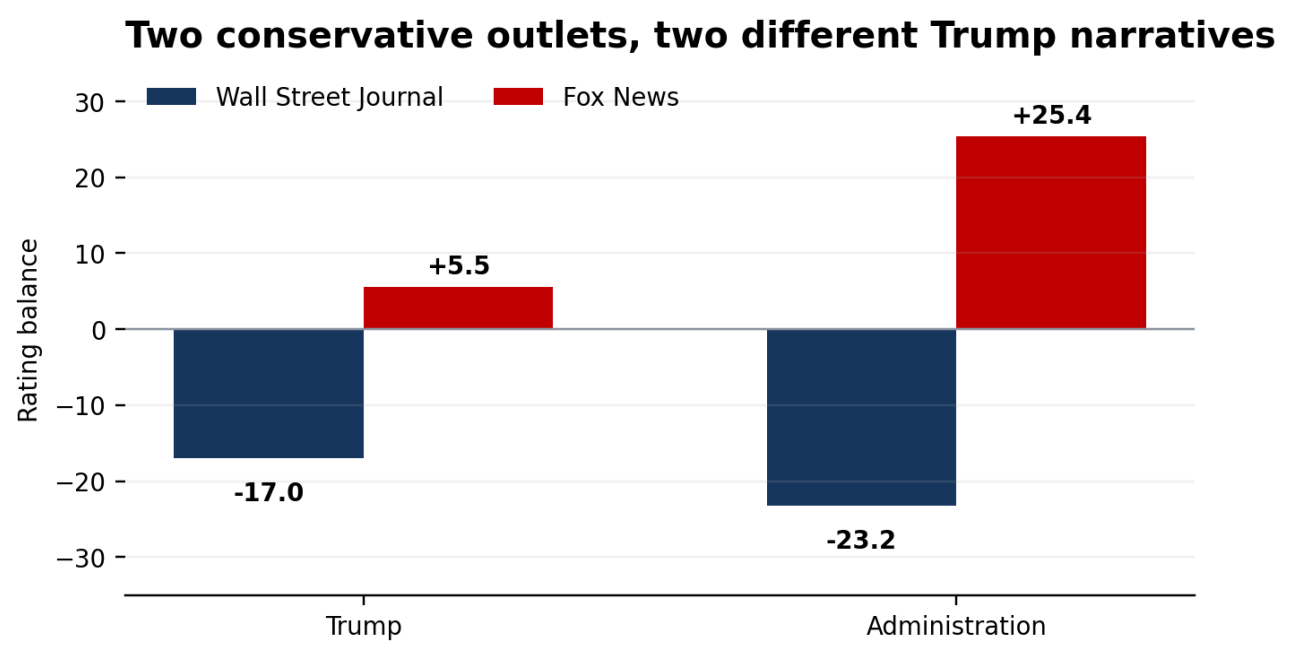
Current Reuters/Ipsos poll





The conservative media provides different narratives on Trump and the White House administration.

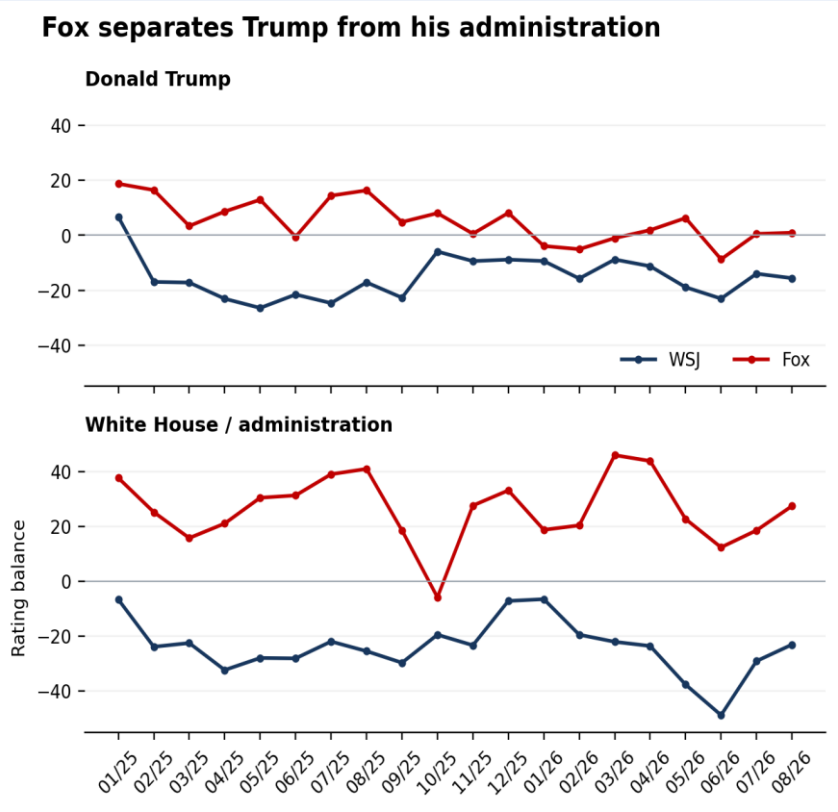
Tone of coverage in the Wall Street Journal / on Fox News 1/2025 – 8/2026



- Media Tenor's content analysis coded positive, neutral, and negative statements about Donald Trump and the White House/Trump administration.
- These statements are categorized by medium, month, and topic. This briefing covers the period from January 2025 to August 2026.

Fox's policy shield does not offer Trump full protection.

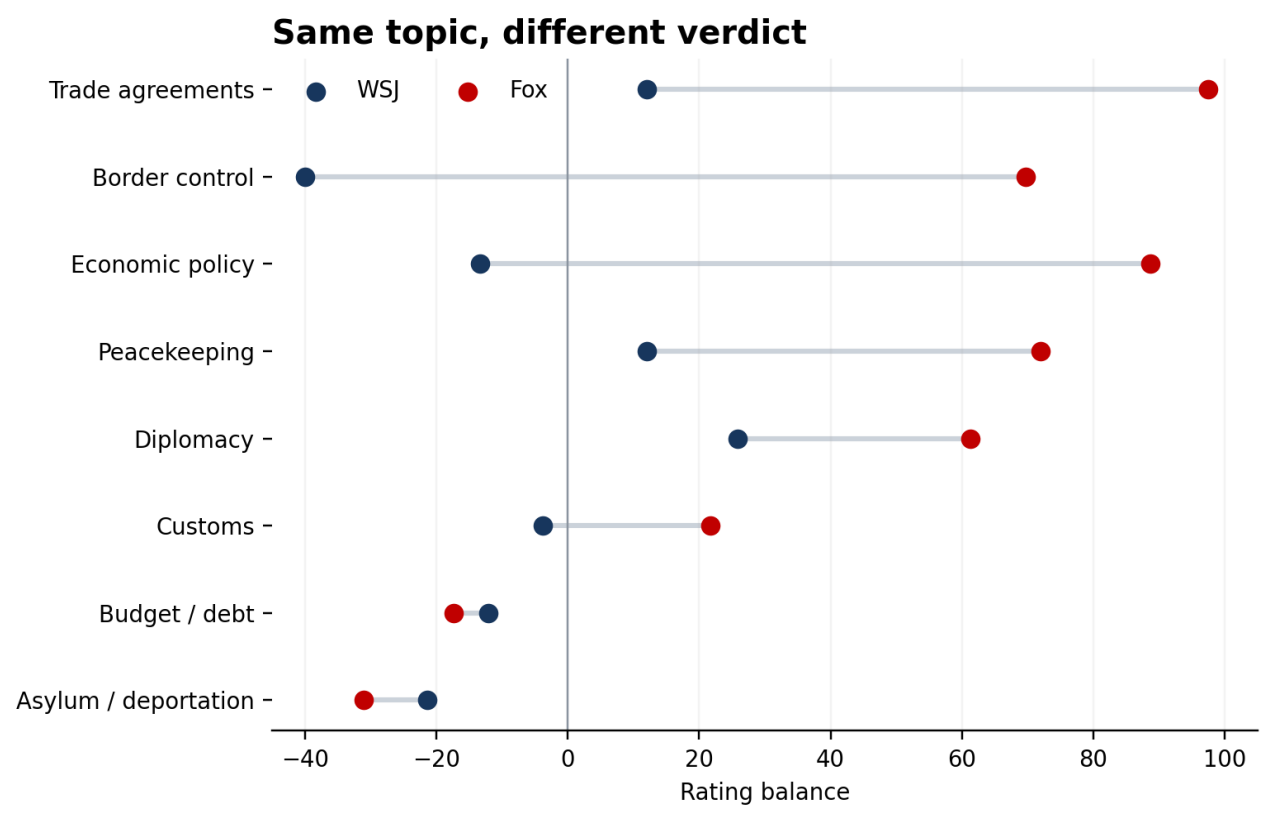
Tone of coverage in the Wall Street Journal / on Fox News 1/2025 – 8/2026



- Fox's Trump balance drops from +18.8 in January 2025 to nearly zero in most months of 2026, reaching −8.8 in June.
- Throughout 2026, Fox's administration balance remains positive, ranging from +12.3 to +45.9.
- The Wall Street Journal's (WSJ) administration coverage deteriorated sharply in May and June 2026, reaching −37.6 and −48.8, respectively, while its coverage of Trump was less negative.
- Therefore, the protagonist gap is structural: policy execution and the president's personal standing are assessed separately.

Same subject, different verdict.

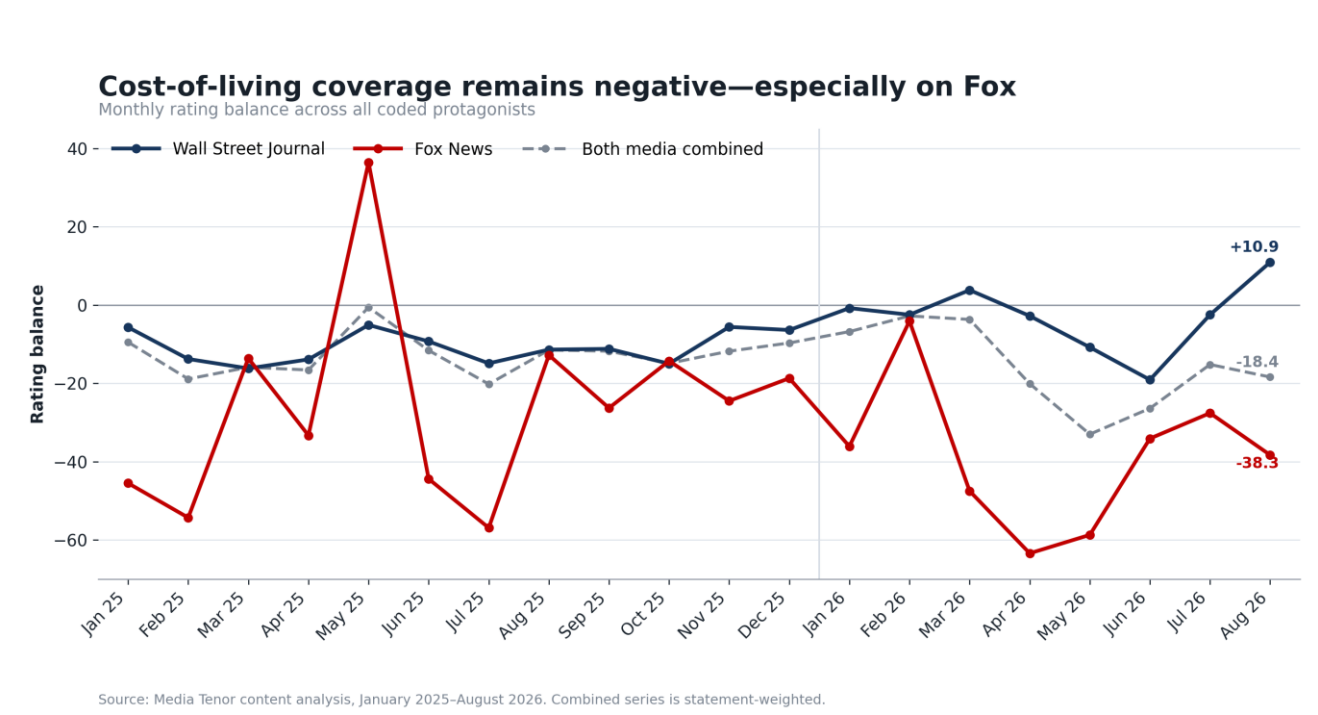
Tone of coverage in the Wall Street Journal / on Fox News 1/2025 – 8/2026



- Fox now maintains a strongly positive narrative about the administration, while its evaluation of Trump personally has become neutral.
- Meanwhile, the WSJ's economic outlook has taken a turn for the worse in key areas: economic and tax policy coverage is now a significant source of negativity.

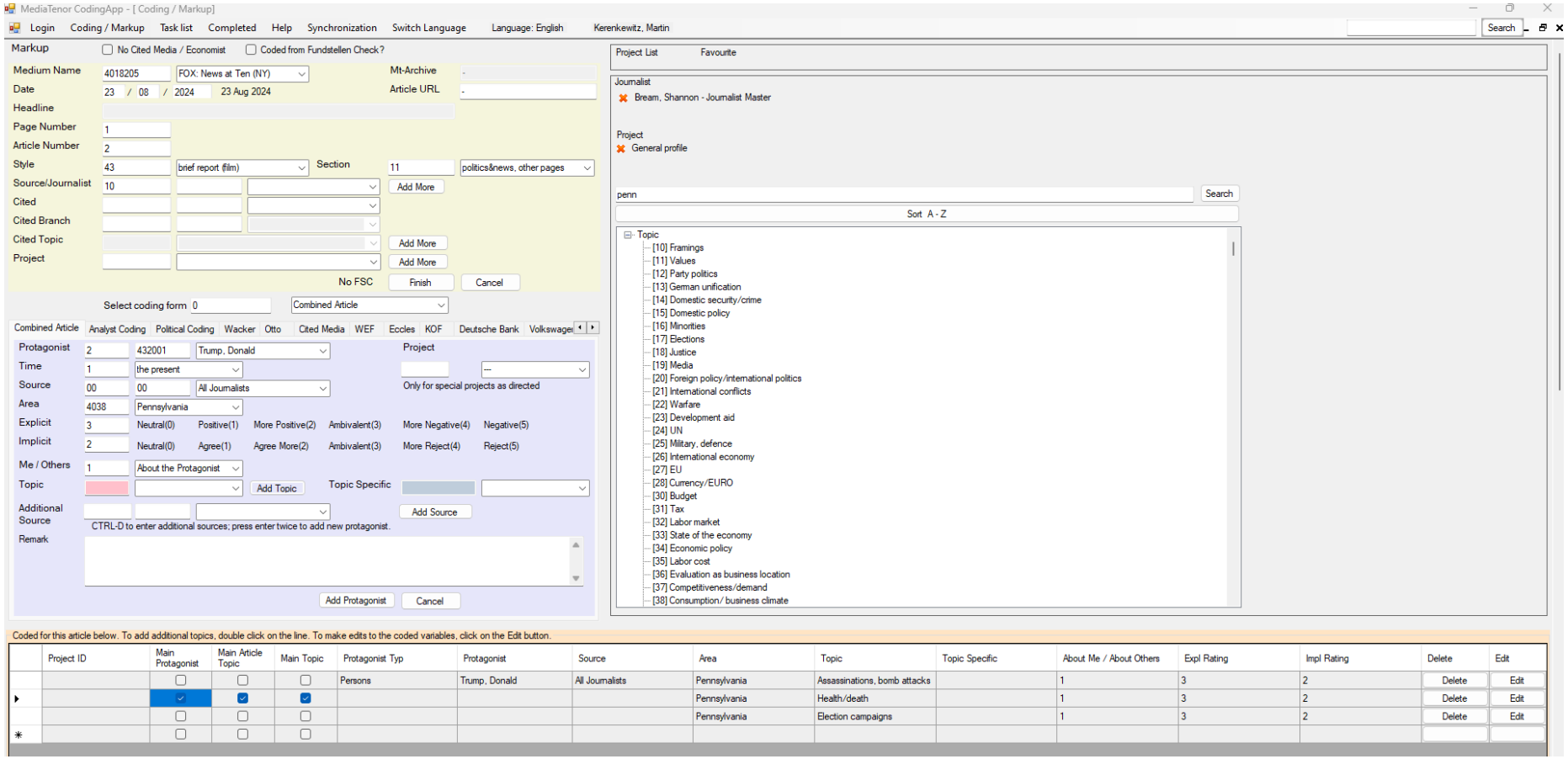
The cost-of-living narrative poses a threat to Republicans.

Tone of coverage in the Wall Street Journal / on Fox News 1/2025 – 8/2026



- Topics related to the cost of living account for only a small fraction of overall coverage of Trump and his administration.
- However, general news coverage is more than twice as often linked to cost-of-living issues.
- Despite lauding the administration's efforts to lower them, Fox News presents a negative narrative on cost-of-living.

Method

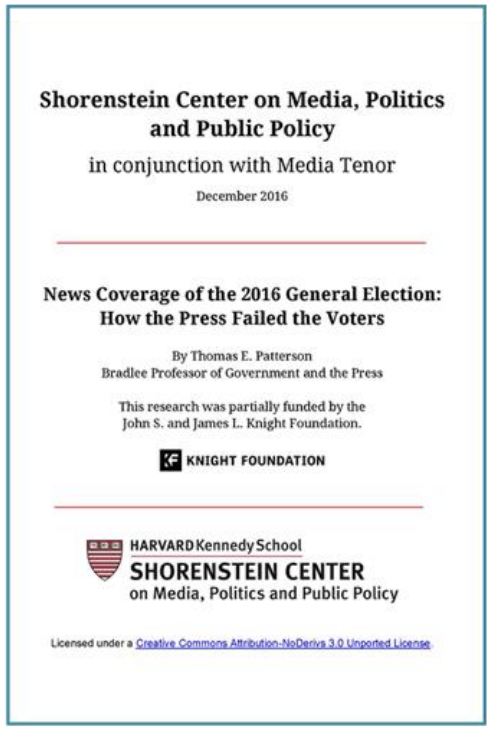


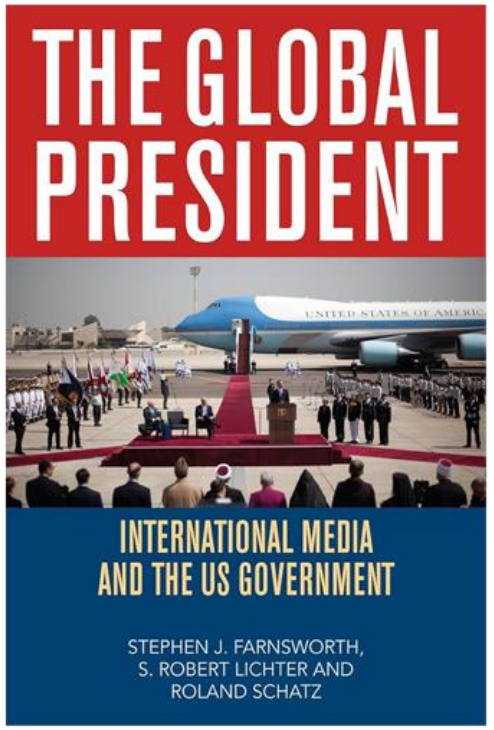
Scientific content analysis carried out by trained staff – inter-coder reliability: 87% Q4 25

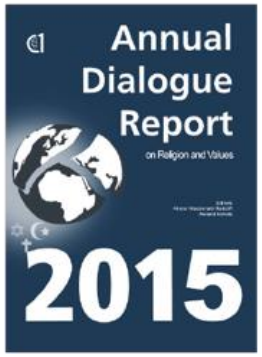
Background

Roland Schatz is a fifth-generation journalist. As founder and CEO of Media Tenor International, he served as Senior Advisor to UN Director-General Michael Moller from 2013 to 2019, and in the same capacity to Mafalda Duarte, Head of the World Bank's Climate Investment Fund, from 2019 to 2020. In 2020, Pope Francis appointed him to his Covid Commission to report via weekly newsletters in 10 languages.

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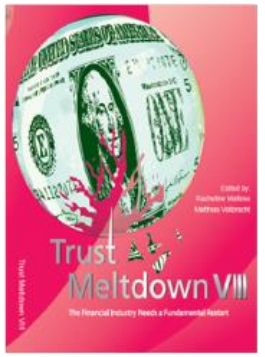












Media Tenor has been publishing analyses of US presidential election campaigns since 2000. These have been published in reports by the Shorenstein Center at the Harvard Kennedy School. Media organisations such as the BBC, CzechTV and SABC have been using Media Tenor's analyses for decades. The studies are available free of charge at www.mediatenor.com.