It is for Trump to lose rather than the Democrats to win

Media Tenor analysis | January 2025–October 2026*

Media analysis suggests that the cost of living will be a decisive factor in the upcoming midterm elections.







Unsplash: Rubaitul Azad, Yang Xia; until October 23, 2026

Basis: 167,761 /105,389 reports on protagonists in the Wall Street Journal, FOX News, WSJ; *October‘s data up to 10/2025

The emperor has no clothes

Vienna, October 29, 2026. For months, we've been watching the same play: fairy tales remain fairy tales, and no matter how lavishly staged, the audience eventually unmasks them for what they are. The story of the supposed "dealmaker" from New York was already false the very first time it floated through the media. Donald Trump left behind too much scorched earth in New York City as a businessman for that ever to be hidden. His relationship with half of humanity is not what women, men, and children dream of. And so, 2026 becomes the year when one truth breaks through the fog of fairy tales: lies have short legs.

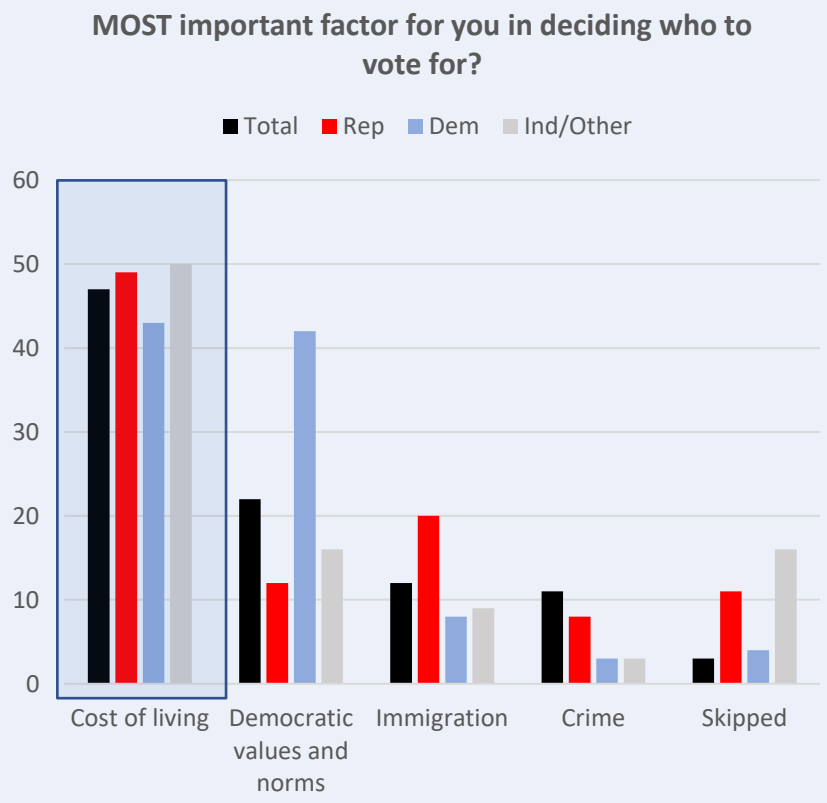
Trump was sold by the U.S. mainstream media as the candidate with the best grasp of economics and deal making. His promise to break the hostage of inflation collapsed just as spectacularly as his swaggering performance in tariff "negotiations." Unsurprisingly, both the Wall Street Journal and FOX have now—out of sheer necessity for their own balance sheets—started calling things by their real names: inflation cannot be denied, tariffs hurt the domestic economy more than they deliver short term gains, and above all, endless coverage of wars initiated or prolonged by Trump does not beam positive images into American living rooms.

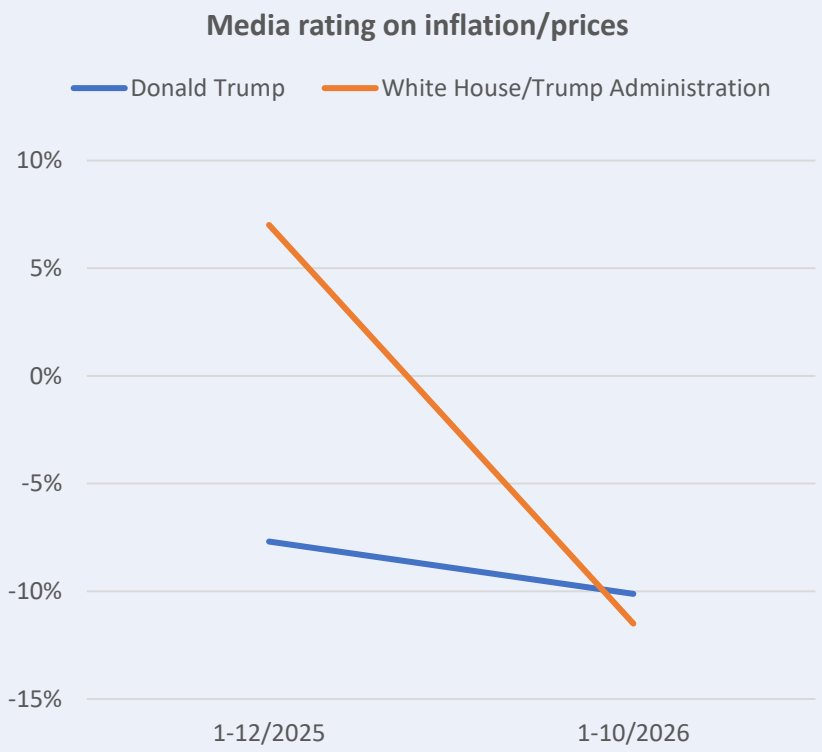
And in elections, one rule still applies: the incumbent must win. Yet all data from continuous media analysis shows that the reality being conveyed no longer gives Trump the support he once—wrongly—counted on. Whoever, like the German Chancellor, allows too much media spotlight to shine on a single person should not be surprised when the team can no longer pull the chestnuts out of the fire.

At the same time, it is also true: the almost invisible Democrats will need, after next Tuesday, to work above all on their narrative. When they are reported on positively in the U.S. mainstream media, it is only about their polling numbers. On substance—what they truly intend to do differently from the Republicans—there is still far too little visibility. And correspondingly little approval.

For further information, please contact Roland Schatz at r.schatz@mediatenor.com

U.S. citizens united in their most pressing concern





Source: Ipsos/Reuters poll Aug 28-31, 2026

Media Tenor:
Trump: 78 / 79 reports;
White House Administration: 57 / 52 reports

Depending on the source, about 50 per cent and more of the U.S. citizens consider the cost of living the most important factor in their Midterm-voting decision. And this is one of the few issues on the public agenda where Republican and Democratic voters are united. So here it seems to matter most what people see in the media and feel in their purses.

The tone of coverage on U.S. president Donald Trump has declined from -7.6 in 2025 to -10 in the first ten months of 2026. At the same time, the tone of coverage on the White House Administration has dropped from plus 7 to -11 points despite a number of efforts to address the problem.

Priorities of voters and media attention

Two different measures: voter importance of the topic and share of coded coverage of the topic 1-10/2026

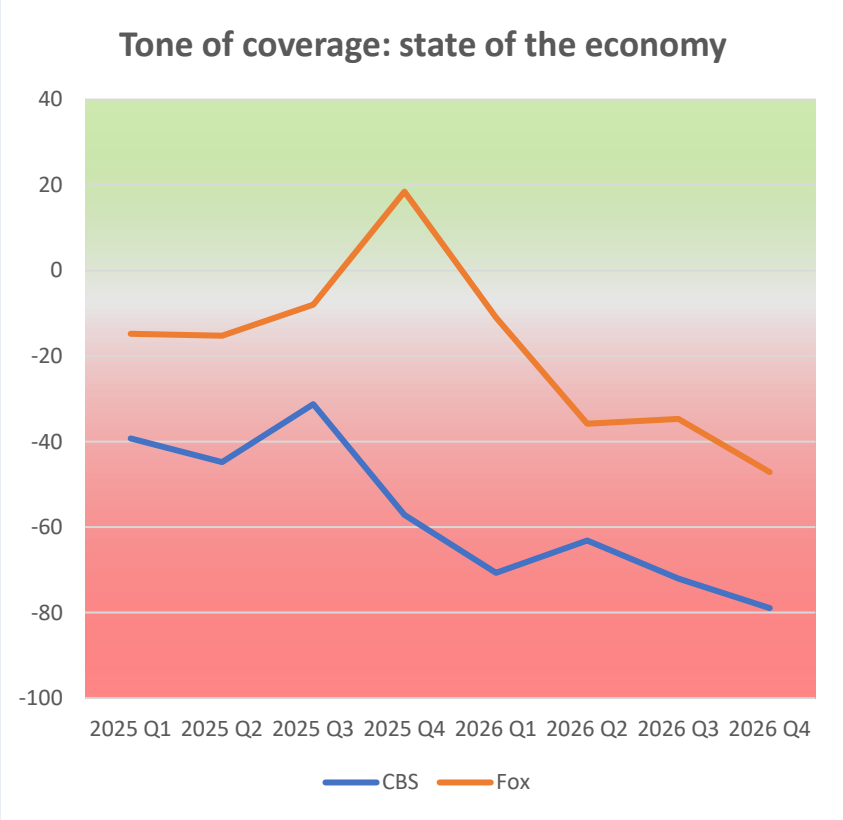
Issue (polls) / media category	Voters	Media share
Economy / economy and prices	**84%**	**7.5%**
Healthcare / health	**68%**	**1.7%**
Education / education	**62%**	**0.8%**
Immigration / illegal migration	**59%**	**0.5%**

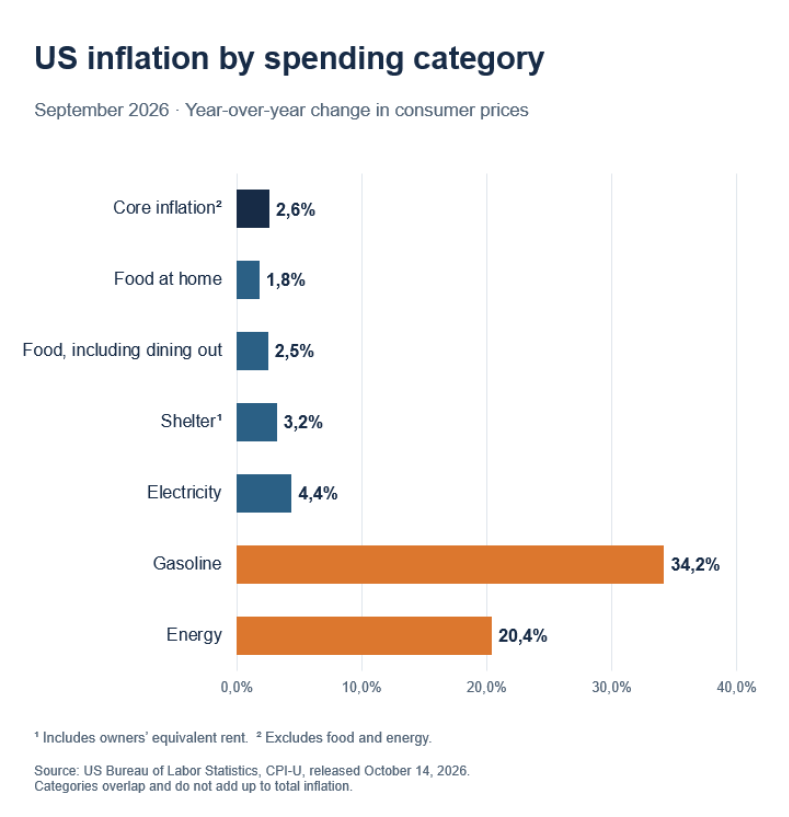
The topic labels are approximate: illegal migration is narrower than immigration. Poll percentages are not shares of attention and can total more than 100%.

Pew Research Center: registered voters, Sep 28–Oct 4, 2026; Media Tenor: 105,339 coded statements, CBS, FOX and WSJ, Jan–Oct 2026 (October incomplete).

TV news highlight inflation painting a bleak picture of the economy

Tone of coverage on the state of the economy 1/2015 – 10/2026



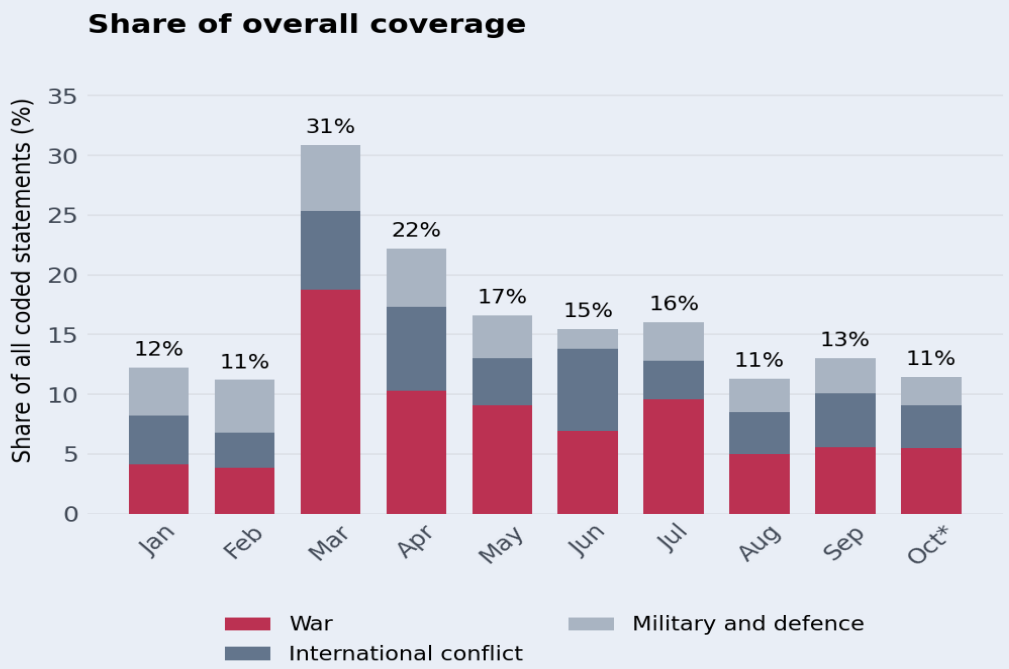


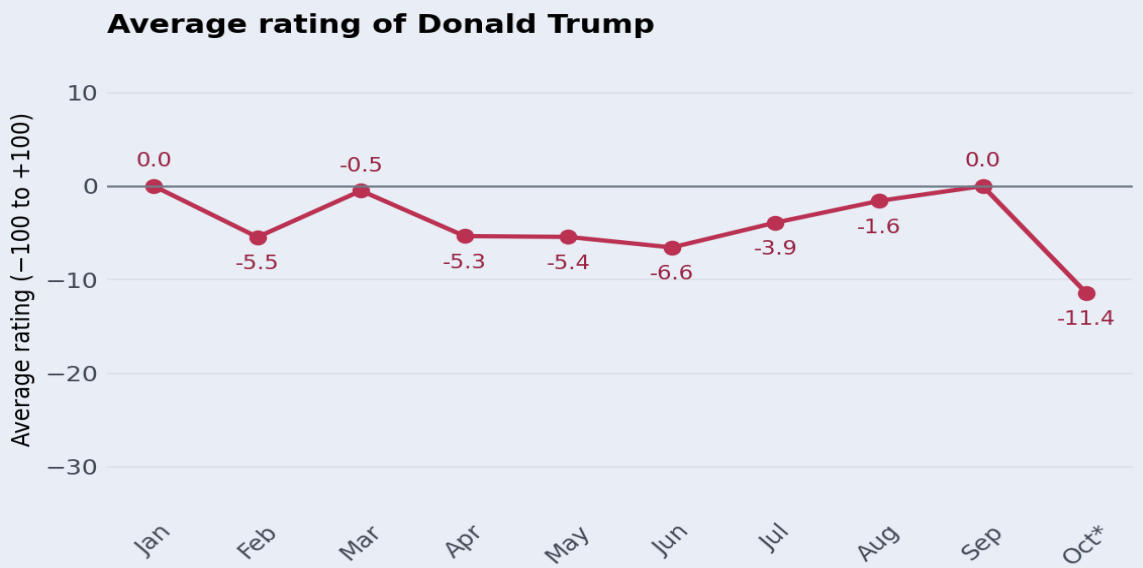
News coverage of the state of the economy can affect people's perceptions (e.g. consumer sentiment, investment decisions and fertility rates). The tone of economic coverage on CBS and FOX evening news declined in 2026. Most recently, the issue of the cost of living has contributed most to this decline (e.g. fuel prices). Media emphasis contributes to perceived inflation (along with the frequency of purchasing the particular goods).

Source: Media Tenor, supplied dataset. Coded statements, Jan–Oct 2026; October incomplete. /

Scepticism over Trump's approach to warfare is on the rise

Monthly share of all coverage and tone of Trump on the same topics 1-10/2026

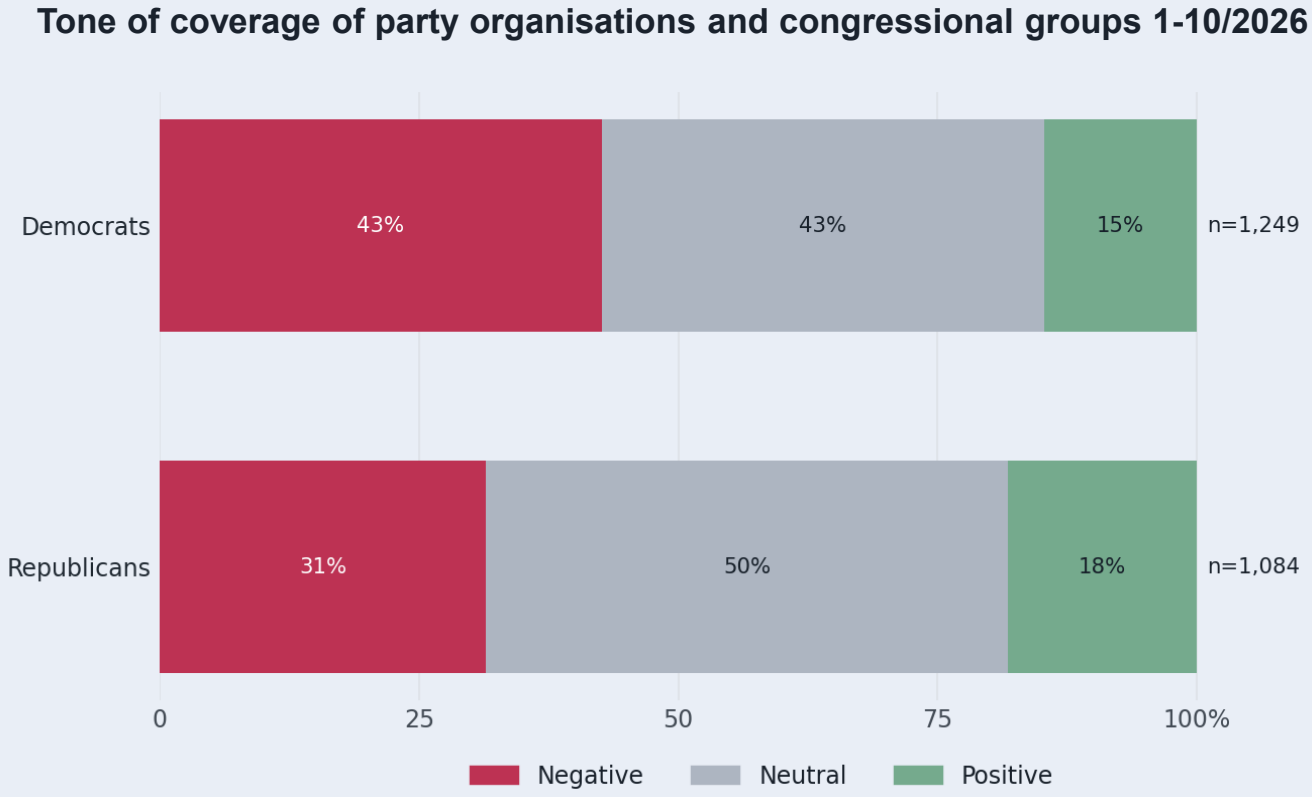




Left: combined share. Right: (positive − negative) / all Trump statements × 100; neutral included.

Source: Media Tenor. CBS, FOX, WSJ; 3,693 coded reports on Donald Trump, Jan–Oct 2026. Topic groups: Warfare, International conflicts, Military, defence. October incomplete.

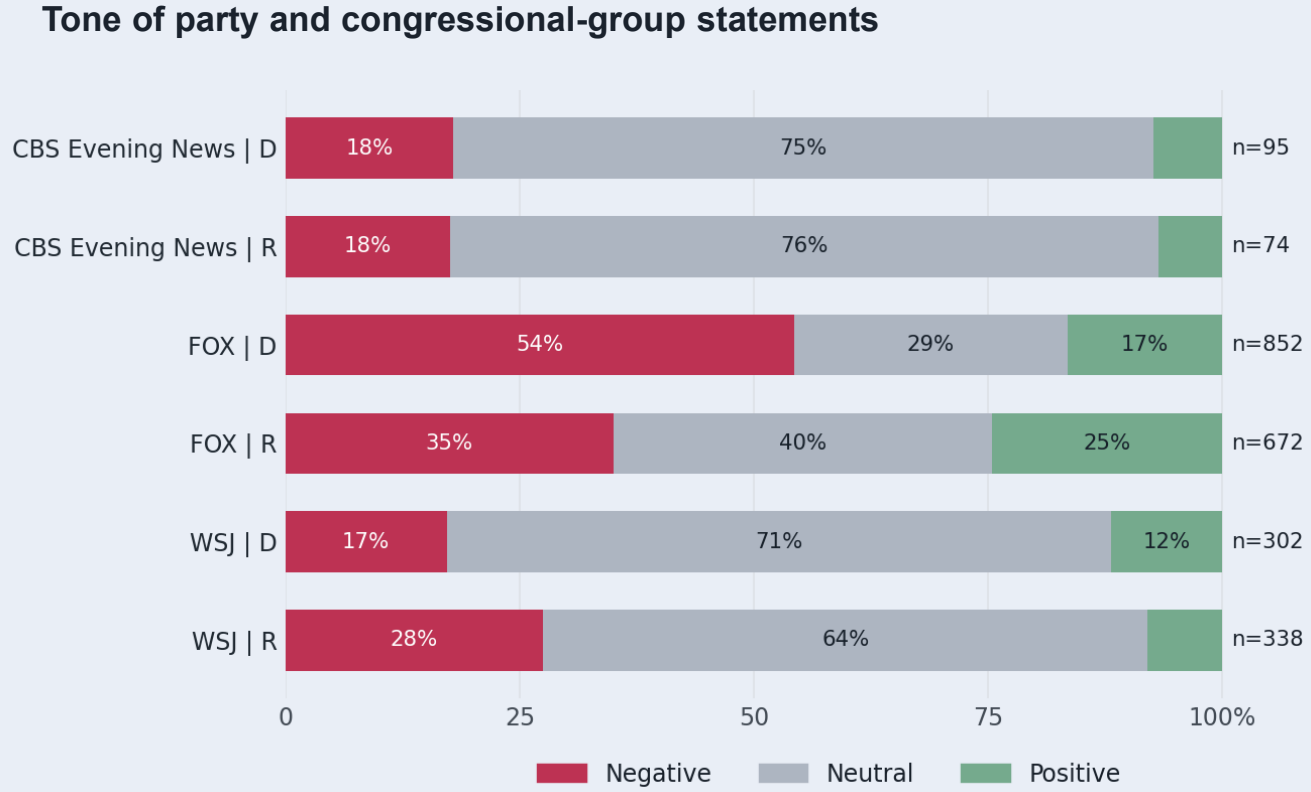
If Democrats score a home run, it is not because the Media like them



The overall tone of the coverage of the Democrats, Republicans and related congressional groups has been negative, but more so for the Democrats than the Republicans. Therefore, despite declining approval rates for U.S. President Donald Trump, the midterm elections are not a home run for the Democrats. But Agenda Setting and Elections teach anyhow only one lesson: The incumbent has to loose it.

Source: Media Tenor, supplied dataset. Coded statements, Jan–Oct 2026; October incomplete.

FOX News and the WSJ feature notable criticism of Republicans

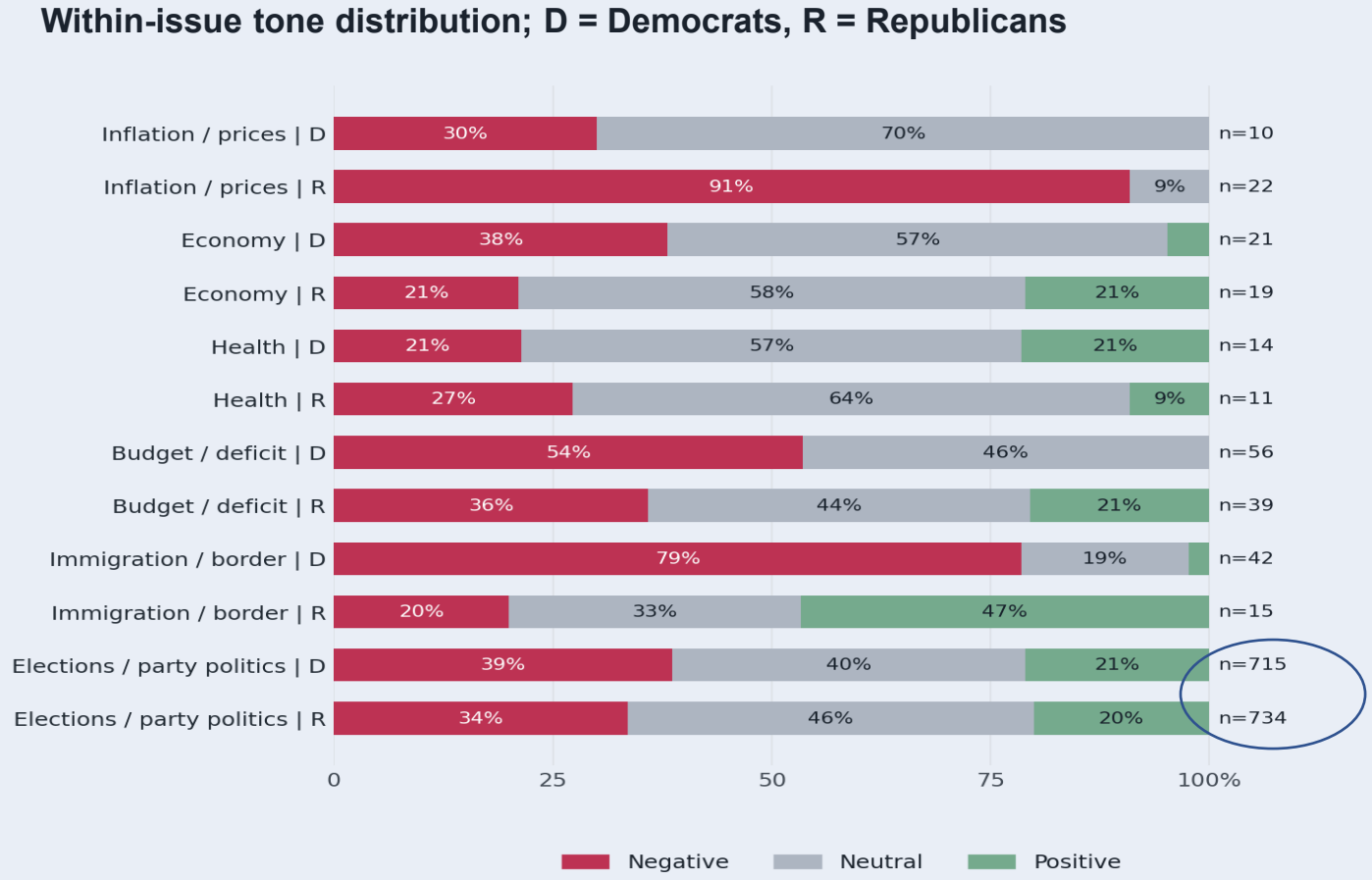


Taking a closer look at FOX News reveals some interesting insights into both parties and their organizations. The Democrats have been criticized most for their parliamentary work, allegations of socialism and an alleged lack of internal unity.

The Republicans, on the other hand, have been criticized for their stance on international unity, opinion poll results and parliamentary work. It can be assumed that the purpose of this topic selection is to encourage unity and align with the presidential agenda.

Source: Media Tenor, supplied dataset. Coded statements, Jan–Oct 2026; October incomplete.

Moderate visibility on pressing issues

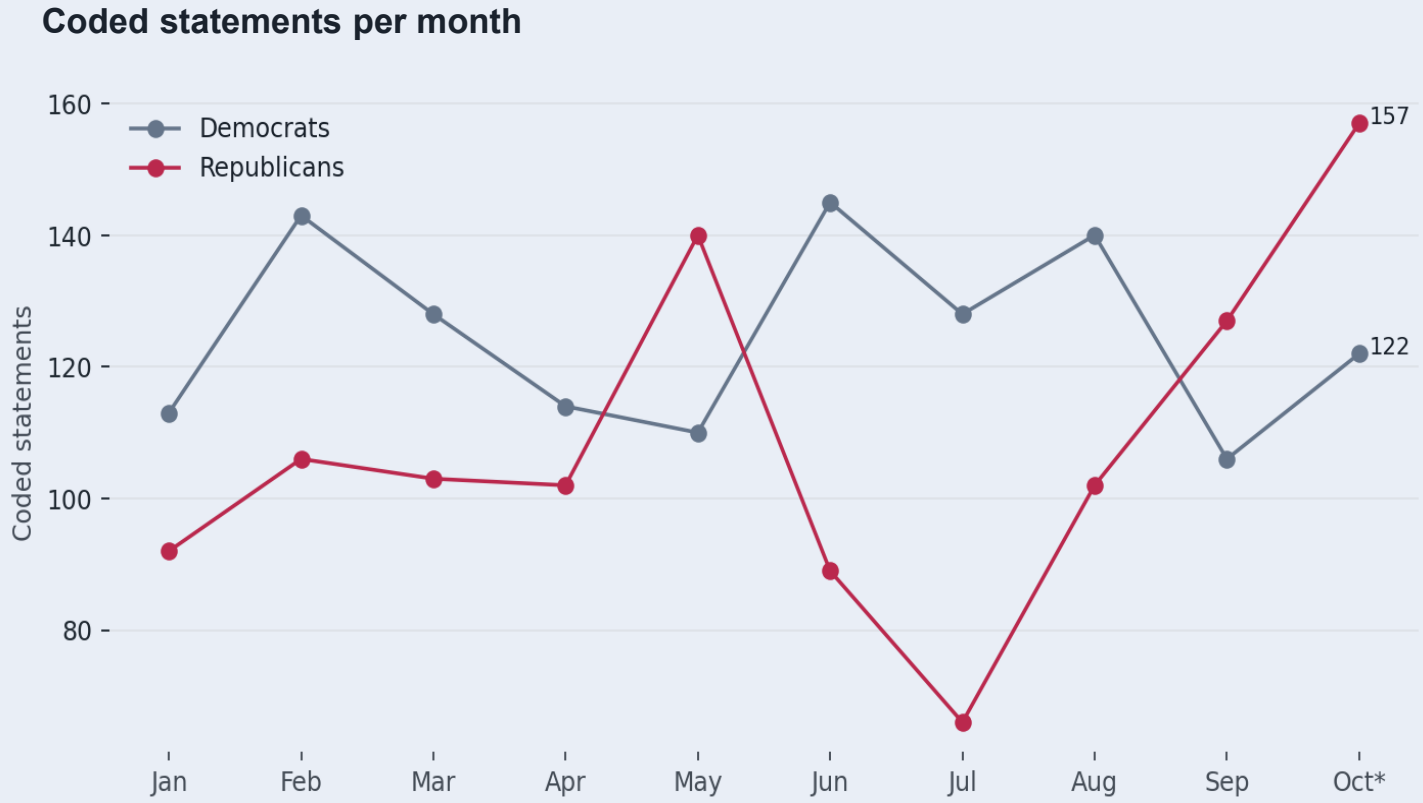


So far in 2026, both parties and their organizations have had moderate visibility on pressing issues. The vast majority of statements addressed elections, opinion polls and party politics.

Taking into account the caution required when interpreting moderate levels of statements, the Republicans achieved a more favorable rating on the economy, budget deficit and immigration/border issues. The Democrats scored higher on health and inflation issues.

Source: Media Tenor, supplied dataset. Coded statements, Jan–Oct 2026; October incomplete.

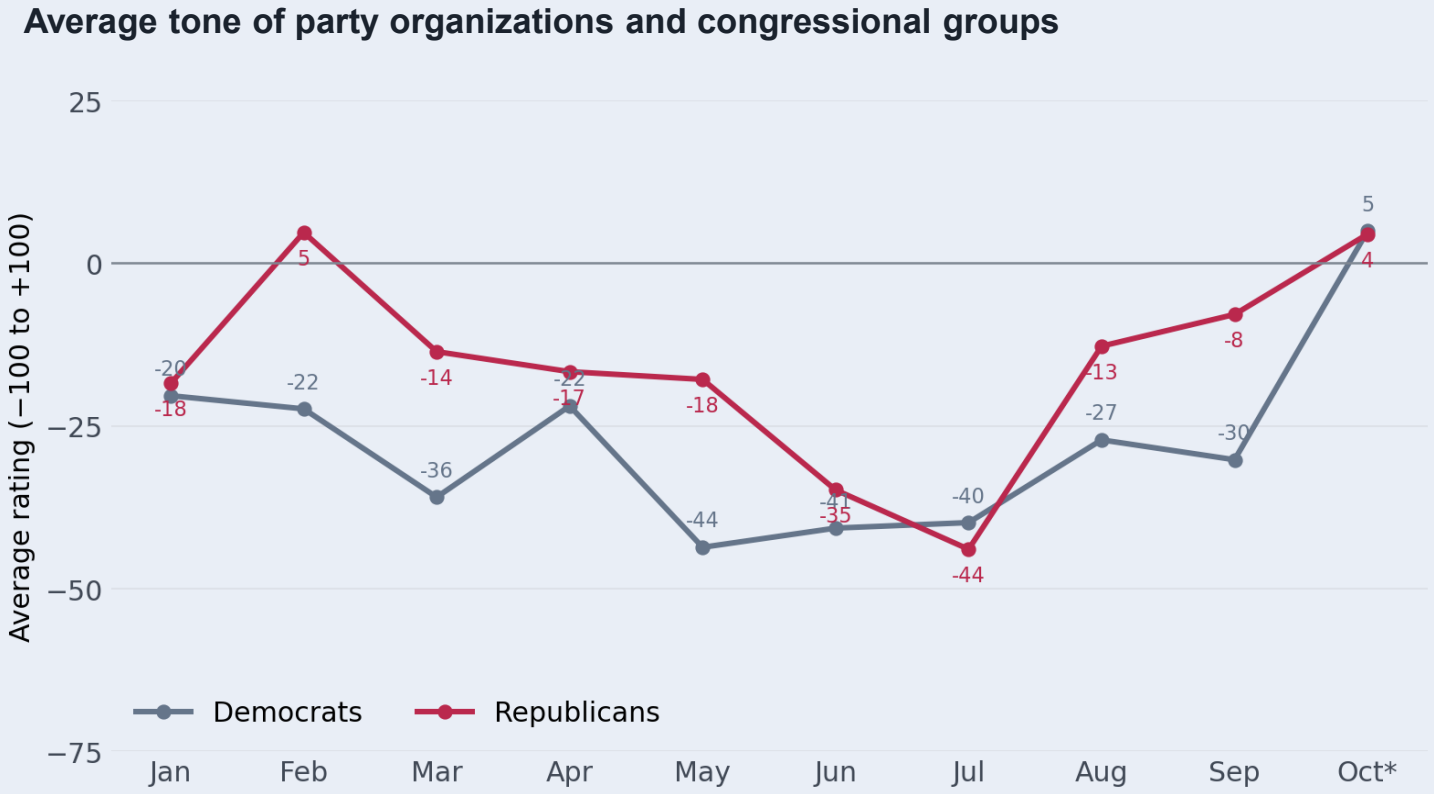
Republicans gain visibility ahead of the midterms



So far in 2026, both parties and their organizations have experienced varying degrees of visibility. Overall, the news has focused much more on the president and the White House administration.

Source: Media Tenor, supplied dataset. Coded statements, Jan–Oct 2026; October incomplete.

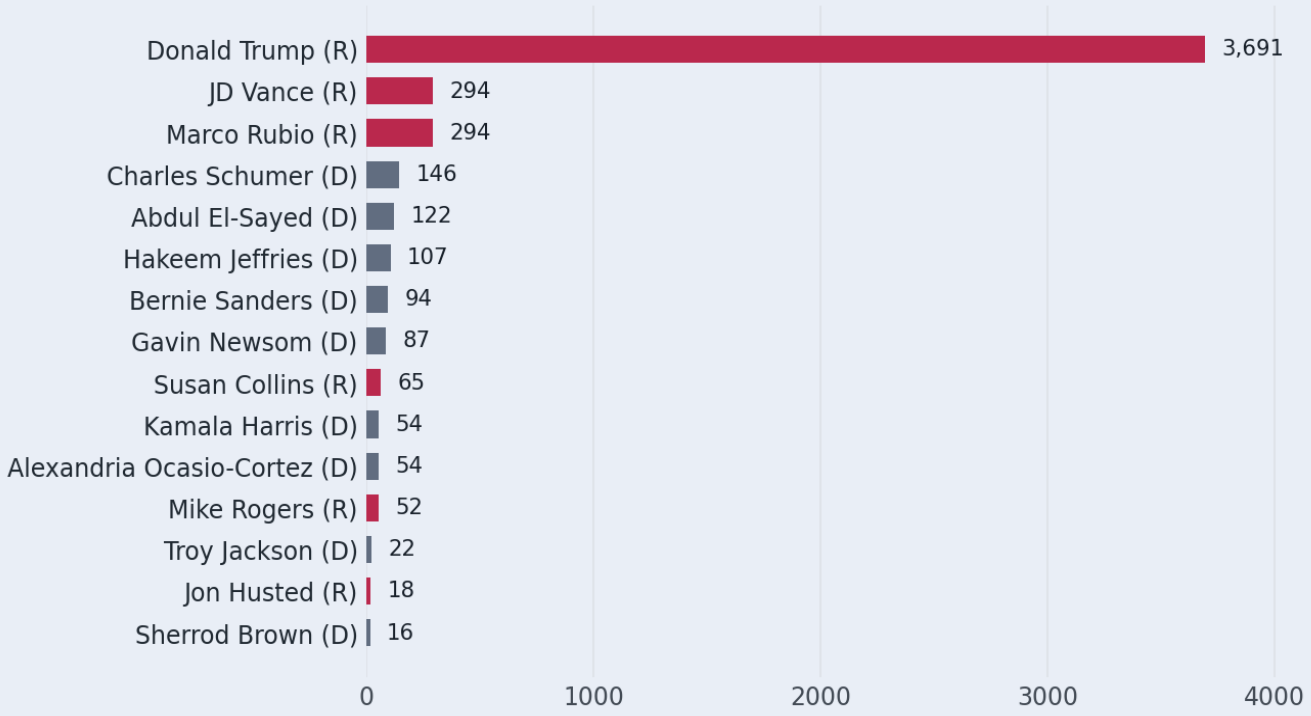
Horse race coverage adds positivity to Democrats' image



Election forecasts and approval rates have been the main driver behind the favorable trend in news reporting on the Democratic Party and its organizations.

Source: Media Tenor, supplied dataset; CBS, FOX, WSJ. January–October 2026; October incomplete.

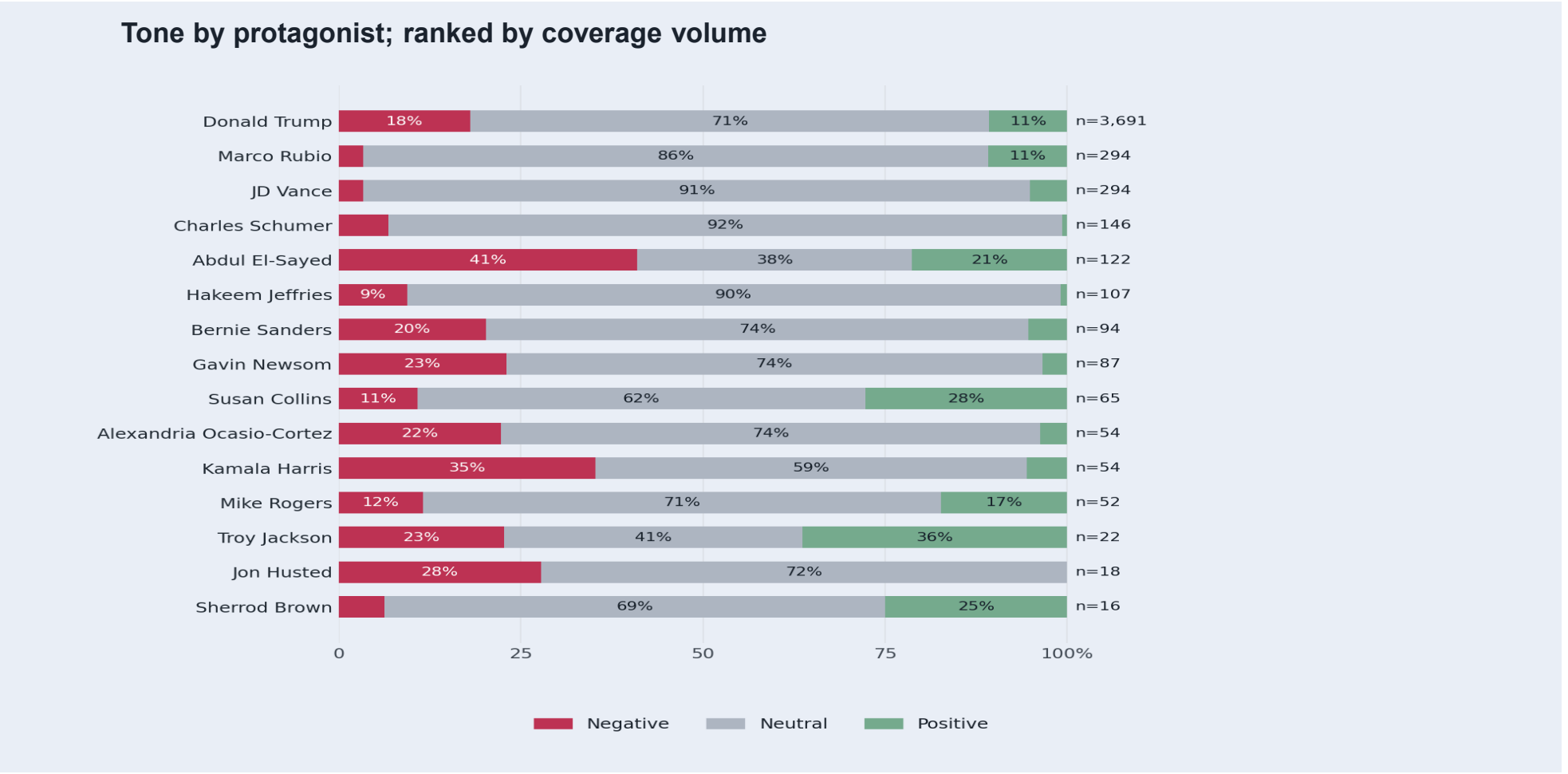
Candidates have visibility issues



Looking at the news coverage on some of the candidates and comparing it with Donald Trump and members of his administration, we see that the “news machine” Donald Trump has dominated the entire political arena, making it rather difficult for candidates to achieve a distinguished profile on their respective issues.

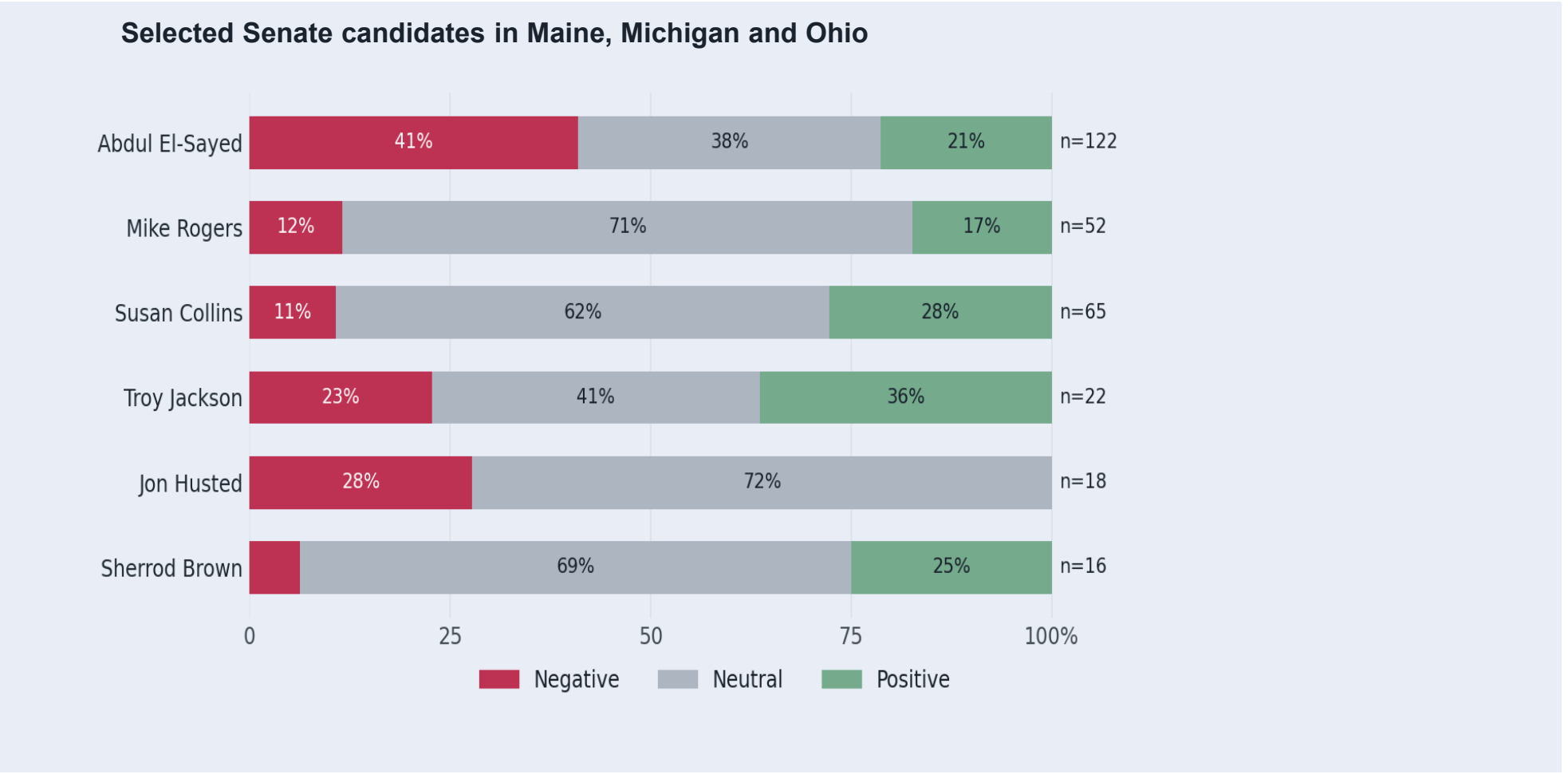
Source: Media Tenor, supplied dataset. Coded statements, Jan–Oct 2026; October incomplete.

How political figures are portrayed



Source: Media Tenor, supplied dataset. Coded statements, Jan–Oct 2026; October incomplete.

Senate candidates: visibility and tone



Source: Media Tenor, supplied dataset. Coded statements, Jan–Oct 2026; October incomplete.

Scope and interpretation

Definitions and limitations

Unit: a coded statement about a protagonist, topic and outlet. Rows are aggregates of statement counts.

Party comparison: party organizations and congressional party groups only. Individuals and administrations are separate.

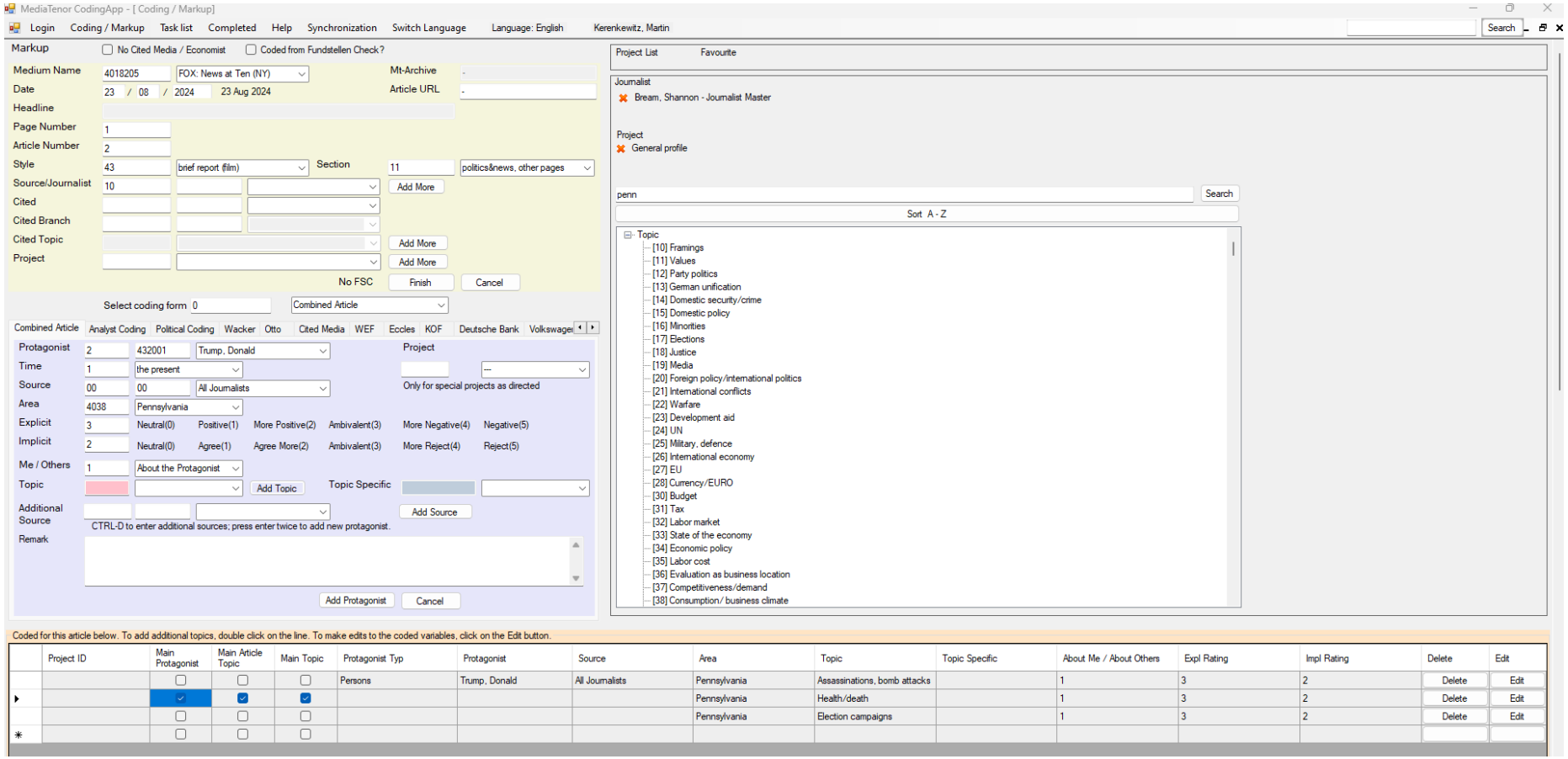
Positive, neutral and negative shares use all statements in the respective group.

October‘s data up to 10/2025.

Analyzed media: CBS evening news, FOX evening news, WSJ (sample coded)

Source: Media Tenor, supplied dataset. Coded statements, Jan–Oct 2026; October incomplete.

Method

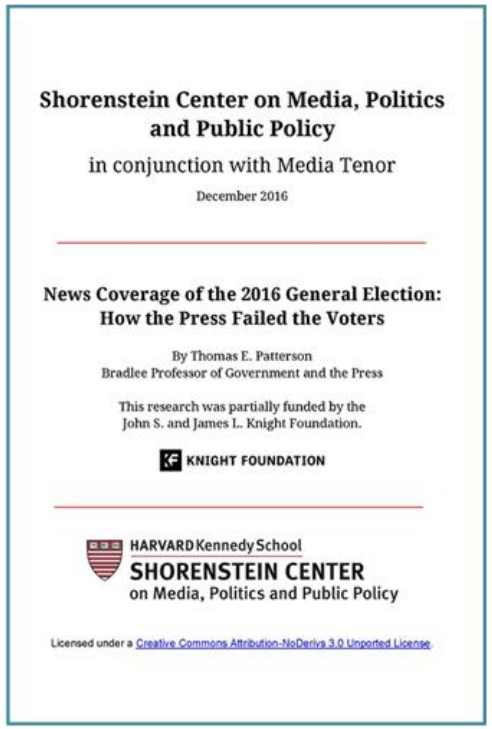


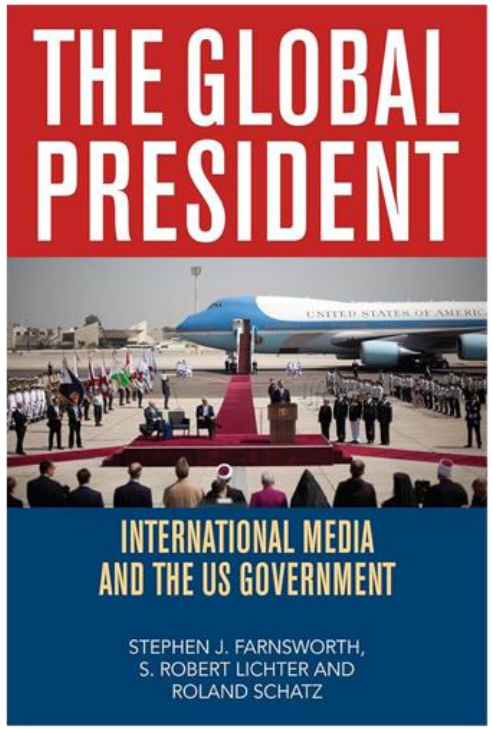
Scientific content analysis carried out by trained staff – inter-coder reliability: 87% Q4 25

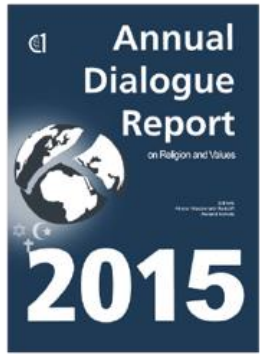
Background

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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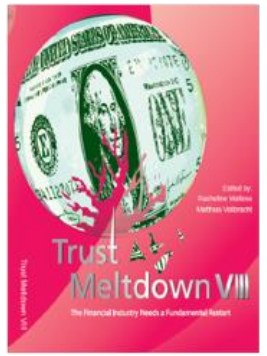












Media Tenor has been publishing analyses of US presidential election campaigns since 2000. These have been published in reports by the Shorenstein Center at the Harvard Kennedy School. Media organizations such as the BBC, Czech TV and SABC have been using Media Tenor's analyses for decades. The studies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