**Coding Strategy**

**Code 1** has determined if the news article had a domestic or international focus, perhaps both. To identify this context, the coder has analyzed a range of words, sentences, paragraphs and grammatical structures in search of reference to domestic or international issues. For instance, the analyzed news source, referred to as "News 11" (see below), had a domestic focus, concentrating on the municipal policy of a small Hungarian town. There were no specific keywords considered for the classification as such a list would have been rather extensive. One method of determining whether a news item had a primarily domestic or foreign focus was to consider the categorization employed by the publishing newspaper itself. Specifically, the article states that News 11 was published under the domestic news section, and the content therein reflected domestic dimensions, leading to its classification as "D" for domestic. Similarly, “News 214” had direct references to a foreign environment, therefore it was classified as “FI” for Foreign. The last category “B” for Both has been considered in cases where a domestic decision had international dimensions and effects as well, or vice versa. As an example, "News 209" covered the planned amendment of the Hungarian Fundamental Law, which represented the domestic dimension. However, the fact that this amendment would also impact the country's membership in the European Union and NATO was considered the foreign dimension of the story. This then resulted in a classification as “B”.

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| **Code 1 - Domestic/Foreign** | **Example** |
| D=Domestic | *“The Hódmezővásárhely organization of Fidesz requests the resignation of Péter Márki-Zay from his position as mayor”* 11 |
| FI=Foreign | “As we wrote, *Viktor Orbán visited Moscow*, where he held talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin and then held a joint press conference.” 214 |
| B=Both | “*The opposition would amend the Fundamental Law to make it more difficult to leave the EU and NATO*” 209 |

**Code 2** was divided according to two main categories: whether the parties embraced negative campaigning against the other side (i.e. anti-elitism) or embraced their own agenda.

The former was then separated into two parts. The first category was labeled as “Code 2 - Fidesz/Attack” to group those negative, anti-elitist messages that originated from the government and were directed against the United Opposition. Simultaneously, “Code 2 - Opposition/Attack” represents a group of codes for the negative, anti-elitist campaign of the Hungarian Opposition’s coalition. The use of these specific code labels ("Fidesz/Attack" and "Opposition/Attack") allowed us to employ a rigorous approach capturing the (negative) tone and nature of the political discourse as reflected in the news coverage. The category on negative campaigning was also separated into their own codes regarding the specific ways Fidesz or the United Opposition condemned one another.

**Code 2a - Fidesz/Attack**

For the case of Fidesz, the condemnation of the opposition has often been identical with its anti-elitist stance. The analysis of "News 477" serves as an illustrative example that demonstrates the anti-gender narrative employed by the government. In this news item, the government positions itself as the protector of traditional values and conservative families, rejecting what it characterizes as the "West's gender madness" promoted by the opposition. Notably, this negative, anti-gender messaging is frequently coupled with an anti-European Union (EU) narrative. As the select examples show, the Hungarian government often "crowds together" its anti-elitist rhetoric, simultaneously attacking both Brussels and the Opposition, as seen in "News 464". It also accused the oppositional candidate of supporting both illegal immigration and the “LGBTQ lobby” (News 169). The presence of keywords such as “gender”, “roma”, “migrant”, “LGBTQ”, “Gyurcsány”, “Péter Márki-Zay”, “Soros”, “Brussels” helped the coding of this category and indicated the government’s anti-elitist, adversarial narrative. Furthermore, phrases like “the opposition wants to send soldiers to Ukraine” or “utility price reduction” supported the coding process as well.

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| **Code 2a - Fidesz/Attack** | **Example** |
| M=LGBTQA+, Gender, Roma issues, migrants | “*His open support of immigration and the LGBTQ lobby*, the fight against utility cuts, and the desire to abolish the minimum wage all serve a specific purpose - to gain the political and financial support of the international left-wing network.” 169“So the Hungarian people know very well that there is a madness in the West, *a gender madness*, which begins to undermine, shake, and wants to rearrange the most basic, certain, fixed points of life.” 477“Márki-Zay has made it clear several times: if he comes to power, *he would let in migrants* and every family would have to pay an additional 32,000 forints per month." 82 |
| GY=Gyurcsány's candidate, Gyurcsány's led opposition | "So, *Gyurcsány's candidate* for prime minister has offended not only the rural Hungarians but also the Hungarians beyond the borders." 29"Péter Márki-Zay is a man of the left, and the *strings are still being pulled by Gyurcsány* - pointed out the Fidelitas and Ernő Korponyai, the president of Fidelitas in Csongrád-Csanád County, on their social media page." 33 |
| SB=Soros, Brussels, multinational companies, US puppet | “After greeting the Transcarpathian Hungarians separately, Viktor Orbán began his March 15 speech at Kossuth Square by talking about *the Brussels bureaucrats, György Soros and the international media*, and the successful fight against them since October 23.” 387 |
| P=Personality, personal qualities of an opposition figure criticised | "A scene fit for a *comedy: Márki-Zay and the opposition cannot even explain their own program*." 122 |
| POL=political program criticised | “Péter Márki-Zay, the prime ministerial candidate of the liberal-left side, *attacks the institution of minimum wage in a way that its abolition would also weaken the social safety net*." 120 |
| W=supporters of war, russophobia, harming energy policies | “At the end of the 2022 election, the opposition raised the issue of Hungary's energy supply as a campaign issue, which *threatens our energy security* created over twelve years and the utility reduction policy introduced for the benefit of residential consumers.” 346"As you can clearly see, the left cannot stand for peace even for a single day, because they *make constant pro-war declarations, yielding to the demands of the international left.* Ferenc Gyurcsány, the leader of the left, has now declared that anyone who does not send weapons and soldiers to Ukraine and does not die in a war is a bad person." 464 |

**Code 2b - Opposition/Attack**

In contrast, the negative campaign messaging employed by the Opposition relied on a more limited set of "buzzwords", including "corruption", "authoritarian", "lying", and "Putin". This disparity suggests that the government was more effective in shaping the public discourse through the strategic use of a broader range of evocative terms and narratives. The government's ability to "crowd together" its anti-elitist messaging, linking it to a diverse array of perceived threats and antagonists, appears to have been a more potent communication strategy compared to the Opposition's more focused critiques which often operated with abstract terms such as ‘constitution’, ‘corruption’ and ‘autocracy’.

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| **Code 2b - Opposition/Attack** | **Example** |
| P=Putin's puppet | "However, we see that *Viktor Orbán has become Putin's puppet*.” 214 |
| C=Corruption | "Opposition: The Völner case shows that *Fidesz is corrupt to the core*." 104 |
| AUT=Fidesz' authoritarian policies criticised | "One of the foundational beliefs of Putin's regime is that the West is dead and t*he future belongs to autocracies. He shares this belief with the president of China and, not least, with Viktor Orbán."* 347"The environment is such because politics has divided and eliminated most of the high-reach media outlets that are interested in spreading the half-truths of one side or the other. *There is KESMA and the public television, which, in fact, is not public but state television. When MTVA was established, it was explicitly stated that it is not its role to criticize the government.*" 450 |
| L=Government accused of lying | "*Viktor Orbán is lying* when he deliberately portrays the opposition as pro-war, while the ruling party and the opposition have signed a joint statement on the peaceful resolution of the war – Ágnes Kunhalmi, the co-chair of the MSZP, firmly tells Blikk." 449 |
| POL=political program criticised | "Privatization and competition are very far from *what Fidesz is doing*." 16 |

The category, on ‘embracement of own agenda’, was also separated into their own codes adhering to programmatic issues or promises.

**Code 2c - Fidesz/Own**

The government did not put forward an official program, therefore their general policy decisions and promises were considered to be coded as “POL” for Political program, rather than having to rely on a dedicated program or manifesto to reference. “News 477” and “News 54“ indicate that Fidesz offered broad, non-specific commitments without any details how to implement them, exemplified by statements like "continue the work we have started,” along with additional promises listed in "News 54”. In the post-RAiU phase, the “peace” narrative of the ruling party (coded as “PE”) has emphasized a neutral position while concurrently accusing the opposition of dragging the nation into war. For coding “PE”, keywords referencing “peace” and “neutrality” and phrases highlighting PM Orbán's good leadership helped the coding process. Finally, not openly pro-Russian but pro-Transcarpathian and anti-Ukranian messages and news blaming Brussels for the ongoing conflict were grouped under the code “AUKR”. This "AUKR" code was considered to convey an anti-elitist sentiment without an overtly negative tone (except for loosely connected pro-government mediums, see Appendix I), and was classified as an official government message. The coder considered messages which did not directly fit “Code 3 - Yes” and “Code 2 - Fidesz/Attack W” codes to fit “AUKR”. The apparent strategy of Fidesz-KDNP was to couple this “AUKR” message with the “protector of Hungarian interests” (Code 3) message and the Peace Narrative (Code 2, “PE”) emphasizing that Hungarians outside of the borders are under the protection of the Prime Minister as well. This messaging likely aimed to appeal to Hungarians holding strong nationalist sentiments and the Hungarian diaspora abroad, who represent an important voting bloc for the Fidesz party.

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| **Code 2c - Fidesz/Own** | **Example** |
| POL=Political program | "The campaign began with the idea that the decision of the people, the parliamentary election, would be about whether Hungary should go back to where we were before 2010, say, to the period of left-wing governance under Gyurcsány, or *whether we should preserve our achievements and continue the work we have started*."[[1]](#footnote-1) 477*"We here at Fidesz know exactly how to do it: tax cuts, investments, university development, research, innovation, greater appreciation for work and workers, rural development, and even better government work* - he listed.” 54  |
| AUKR= not openly pro-Russian but pro-Transcarpathian and anti-Ukranian, blaming Brussels | "Viktor Orbán announced on Monday afternoon, following the meeting of the national security operational corps, that the government has decided not to allow arms shipments across the Hungarian-Ukrainian border.‘*Because Hungarians live in Transcarpathia, and we cannot support any action that would jeopardize their safety*,’ the Prime Minister added.” 297"*The Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister threatens the Hungarians of Transcarpathia in a Nazi tone*." 443"Hungary is a somewhat reluctant ally of the West; although we officially support the sanctions, we also want to remain on good terms with Russia; *the war against Ukraine is the fault of both sides, but mainly of the West,* and least of all Putin's personal responsibility; the best thing would be if the Ukrainians would give up their resistance as soon as possible, and Russia would be punished as little as possible – broadly speaking, this is the stance that crystallizes from the way the Orbán government communicated about the war in Ukraine through state channels to the domestic audience." 290 |
| PE=Peace narrative, Hungary must stay out of the war, Orban as good leader | "The stance of the Fidesz government is well known both domestically and internationally: *Hungary wants to stay out of the war* and will not send Hungarian troops to Ukraine. For this reason, the Ukrainian government is doing everything it can to ensure a change of government in our country on April 3: Zelensky has already made a deal with Péter Márki-Zay – as we can read on the Magyar Nemzet website." 486"In this situation, *the country needs Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, his sharp insight, composure, and international experience.* Not some crazy fortune hunters and the domestic stewards of the international left." 372 |

**Code 2d - Opposition/Own**

In contrast to the negative campaign messaging employed by the Opposition against Fidesz government (Code 2b), Code 2d referenced their own agenda including various policy domains, such as the economy, utilities and energy, healthcare, and education, as well as general stances on issues like the EU, NATO, Ukraine, and democracy. In news, where the domain of the political program of the Opposition was not specified, a more general code “POL” was implemented. This suggests the Opposition's messaging was more straightforward and issue-focused compared to the Fidesz party's approach, which relied more heavily on implicit, emotive appeals as evidenced by the broader "AUKR" category. Nevertheless, it remained somewhat abstract, and the messages were oftentimes delivered in a long format filled with more technical terms primarily addressed to the public but ultimately only speaking to the elites.

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| **Code 2 - Opposition/Own** | **Example** |
| EUN=EU/NATO support | "The election will decide whether it's *Europe or Moscow.*" 331 |
| UKR=pro-Ukrainian | "In a letter also sent to the press, the opposition's prime ministerial candidate *assured the Ukrainian president and all citizens of Ukraine of his deep empathy, solidarity, and full support* on behalf of the Unity for Hungary party alliance." 308 |
| POL=Political program, MZP as politician | "Péter Márki-Zay's long journey to the prime ministerial candidacy. *Portrait*." 88"We talked with the opposition's prime ministerial candidate about the *planned new center-right party, the migrant counter, utility cost reduction, and the election program*." 109 |
| M=LGBTQA+, Gender, Roma issues, migrants | *"Why does Péter Márki-Zay like the Roma?* Because he says so in a video that you can also find in our article. Why does he consider their advancement and integration important?" 322"He believes that *the homophobic and transphobic campaign carried out by Viktor Orbán, and the referendum falsely labeled as child protection, not only cause general harm but also create previously non-existent dangers through this means.*" 371 |
| F=forint, economy, employment | "Huge *budget deficit, inflation* over 10 percent, soaring exchange rate – this is how Fidesz hands over the government *either to the opposition or to itself*." 528"The 12th point says: *'Hungarian euro!'* He believes this is necessary to reduce inflation, prevent fluctuations with the forint, and most importantly, to commit our country, which has so far been performing a peacock dance, to the EU, which can also guarantee the peace of the Hungarians." 389 |
| W=stop the war | "A protest is being organized under the title *'Let it finally end*!' for April 2nd, Saturday, the afternoon before election day." 476 |
| DEM=democracy, politicalaccountability, and constitutional reform | "Action for Democracy has decided to support the Everyone's Hungary Movement (MMM) because it sees *this civil organization as committed to the long-term reconstruction of democracy and the restoration of the system of checks and balances*." 482 |
| H=health | "In addition to anti-corruption measures, he believes that *the situation in healthcare needs immediate improvement.* The wages of healthcare professionals should be raised immediately, and a competitive, normative support model should be established." 123 |
| E=education | "*Free first degree, social minimum, tablets for students – this is what the opposition is preparing for*." 194 |
| G=gas and utility prices |  "*The utility cost reduction will stay,* but at the same time, there is a need for genuine utility cost reduction, more efficient energy usage, and it would be advisable to incorporate social elements into residential energy supply – these were among the things said by the opposition's joint prime ministerial candidate in an interview given to Népszava.” 168 |

The analysis also included a **Code 3**, which was designed to identify the presence of the government's newly introduced post-RAiU agenda, which positions it as the defender of 'Hungarian people' and their ‘interests'. In the analysis, the news content was coded to determine whether it contained references to the protection of ‘the people’ or advancement of Hungarian interests. This coding approach allowed us to assess the extent to which the government's stated post-RAiU positioning as a defender of the Hungarian people was reflected in the news coverage. We were able to evaluate the degree to which the government's rhetorical framing of itself as a champion of the people and the sole reinsurer of peace was manifested in the actual news reporting. This coding scheme under the label of Code 3, served as a mechanism to empirically examine the alignment between the government's stated agenda and its portrayal in the various news media. Furthermore it allowed us to contrast the ‘people-centric’ messages employed by both the government and the opposition. Prior to the start of the Ukrainian War, both political sides promoted narratives that positioned themselves as representing and furthering the interests of the Hungarian people. However, after the onset of the Ukrainian War, the 'protector of Hungarian interests' narrative was almost exclusively owned by the governing Fidesz party. This suggests a shift in the political discourse, where the government was able to more effectively position itself as the sole champion of Hungarian interests in the post-war context. “News 387” and “News 460” demonstrates the narrative employed in news. Interestingly, in both cases, the quotations referring to the protection of Hungarian interests originated directly from Prime Minister Viktor Orbán himself, who personally promoted his image as a strong leader capable of defending the Hungarian people in his speeches, whether they reside within Hungary or in the Transcarpathia region.

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| **Code 3 - National Interest/Hungarian People** | **Example** |
| Y=Yes | "Russia represents Russian interests, Ukraine represents Ukrainian interests, and neither the United States nor Brussels will '*feel with a Hungarian heart*'." 387"We cannot allow Hungary to be dragged into the war, so we are not sending troops or weapons to Ukraine. I made this clear to President Zelensky. *Hungary comes first for us*, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán shared in his Facebook post on Friday morning.” 460 |
| N=No | - |

1. The Fidesz government has no official program. They promised to their voters to continue the work that they have started. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)