



# SHADES OF PROPAGANDA

## CONTENT ANALYSIS OF NEWS COVERAGE DURING THE 2026 HUNGARIAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION CAMPAIGN



A kutatócsoportas Magyar Dövid két évvel ezelőre fogta fel a VTI által készített Magyar Tendeműk - videó

Tiszta ügyintézés - Előrejelzés az ország közéletéről a Magyar Pártok Nemzeti Szövetségében

**FIDESZ**  
A BIZTOS VÁLASZTÁS  
Mi lesz az oka annak, ha a Fidesz vezet a választásokon?

Magyar Péter ismét katasztrófát vallott +  
Orbán Viktor

Szantandrián folytatta az országpolitikai elemzést  
Orbán Viktor

Orbán nem érkezik a választásokra

Az Orbán-kormány nem fogja tudni megőrizni a hatalmát a választásokon

Orbán Viktor: Az apa férfi, az anyja nő

Itt vannak a hazugságok, amelyek igazolják, hogy Orbán Viktor nem fogja tudni megőrizni a hatalmát a választásokon

Magyar Péter me is csúnyán alulmaradt +  
Orbán Viktor

# SHADES OF PROPAGANDA

Content analysis of news coverage  
during the 2026 Hungarian  
parliamentary election campaign

MÉRTÉK MEDIA MONITOR

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**JUNE 2026**

The study is available in Hungarian language [here](#).

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Hungarian hub  
against disinformation  
**LAKMUSZ-HDMO**



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# The Study at a Glance

2026 Hungarian election campaign · media monitoring · manual coding · content analysis

7

## mainstream outlets

6 pro-government · 1  
independent (RTL)

4 weeks

## campaign monitoring

16 March – 10 April 2026,  
weekdays

1,828

## news items coded

of 4,597 collected (≈40%  
relevant)

6,545

## coded data rows

topic · actor×attitude · narrative

## WHAT THE PROJECT DID

Part of the Hungarian Digital Media Observatory (HDMO). The study tracks how government propaganda messaging travels across different media types — public-service news, serious and tabloid portals, and commercial television. Pro-government sources are the focus; RTL is included as an independent reference point.

RTL

2  
TÉNYEK

M1  
DUNA



Magyar Nemzet

Blikk

index

## SAMPLING RULE

A news item entered the coded corpus only if a **domestic political actor** appeared in it.

**TV** — full 18:00 news broadcasts screened; items with a domestic actor coded.

**Portals** — items published between 12:00–18:00, collected via RSS feeds.

# Three Lenses on the Campaign

The study is built in three parts — from how news is made, to who appears in it, to what it argues

## 1 News-making

*How is each outlet's coverage produced?*

- Topic focus & election references
- Sourcing and use of social media
- Authorship attribution on portals

## 2 Political actors

*Who appears, how, and in what light?*

- Active vs. passive appearance
- Favorable / unfavorable / neutral tone
- Balance between rival parties

## 3 Narratives

*Which political stories dominate the news?*

- Pro-gov. vs. government-critical
- 15 latent themes (via NMF)
- Each outlet's narrative profile

# How Political Actors Are Represented

Two dimensions — visibility and attitude, coded for every appearance

Each appearance of a political actor was coded twice: once for the form of presence (does the actor get to speak?), and once for the attitude of the coverage (is the portrayal favorable or hostile?).

## **DIMENSION 1 — VISIBILITY**

### **Active vs. passive appearance**

- Active: the actor speaks (interview, direct quote, paraphrase)
- Passive: the actor is talked about, with no voice of their own

## **DIMENSION 2 — ATTITUDE\***

### **Favorable · unfavorable · ambivalent · neutral**

- Ambivalent = a critical item that still lets the actor respond
- Measures whether the framing helps or harms the actor

**Why it matters:** A passively portrayed actor cannot explain their actions, rebut claims, or shape their own narrative — the audience only ever sees a pre-selected, partial picture.

*Actor categories aggregate every mention linked to a party or its members. “Government / Fidesz-KDNP” and “Tisza Party” each pool the party and its individual politicians.*

*\*Hopmann, D. N., Van Aelst, P., & Legnante, G. (2011). Political balance in the news: A review of concepts, operationalizations and key findings. *Journalism*, 13(2), 240–257. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911427804>*

# Who Gets to Speak

Share of appearances where the actor is passive — talked about, but given no voice · overall sample

## FIDESZ-KDNP

37%

of appearances are passive — the governing side speaks for itself two-thirds of the time.

## TISZA PARTY

78%

of appearances are passive — the main challenger is mostly talked about, not heard.

## RTL — THE REFERENCE CASE

In the one independent outlet the pattern reverses: Tisza's passive share (33%) is **lower** than Fidesz's (43%), and direct-quote rates are nearly equal (≈43% each).

*RTL is also the only outlet where Tisza politicians appeared in interview settings during the campaign.*

## Sharpest gap: Híradó.hu

91% of Tisza appearances were passive, against 38% for Fidesz — a more than tenfold quoting advantage.

## The leaders mirror this

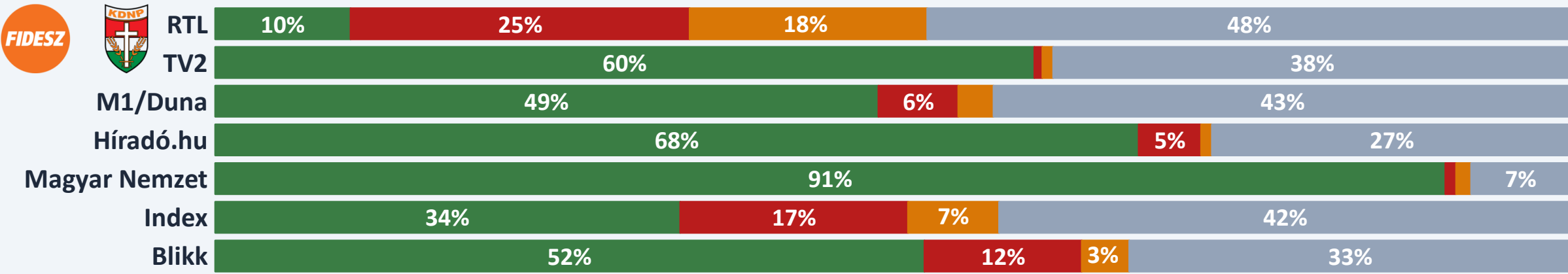
Orbán passive 45% / quoted 48%; Péter Magyar passive 69% / quoted 24%.

# Tone of Coverage – Fidesz-KDNP and Tisza Party

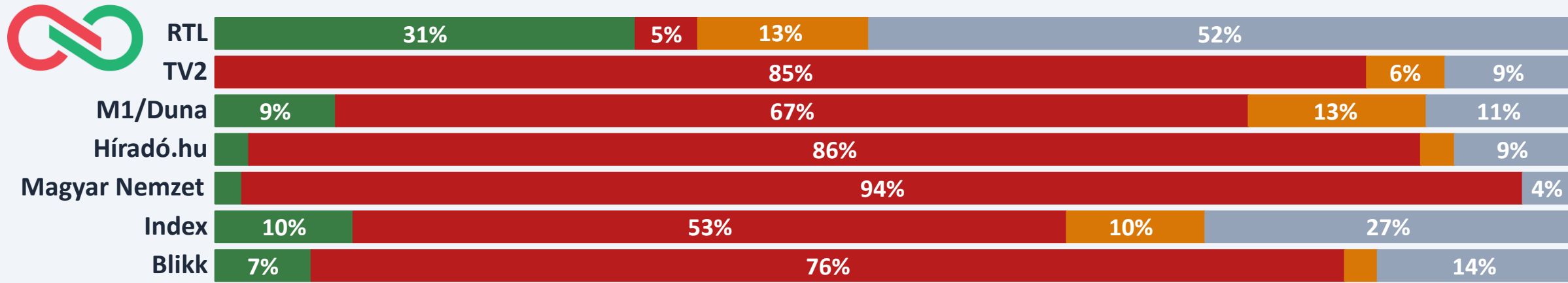
Following Hopmann et al. (2011)



## FIDESZ-KDNP



## TISZA PARTY

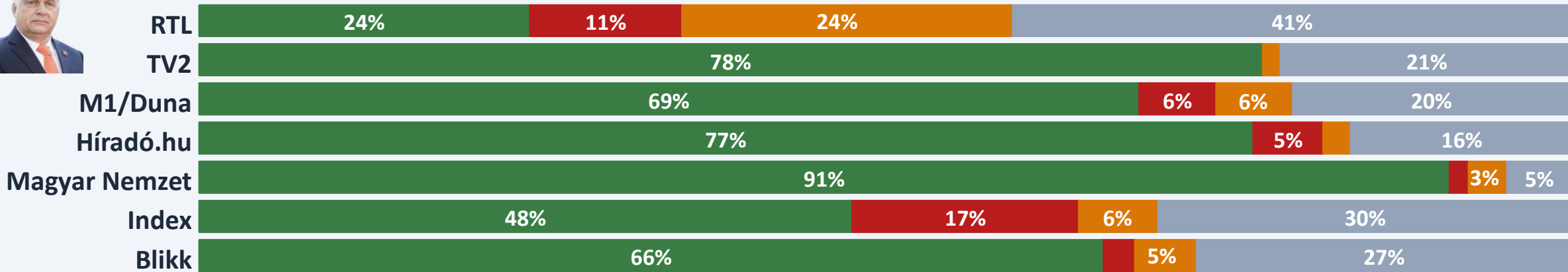


# Tone of Coverage – Viktor Orbán and Péter Magyar

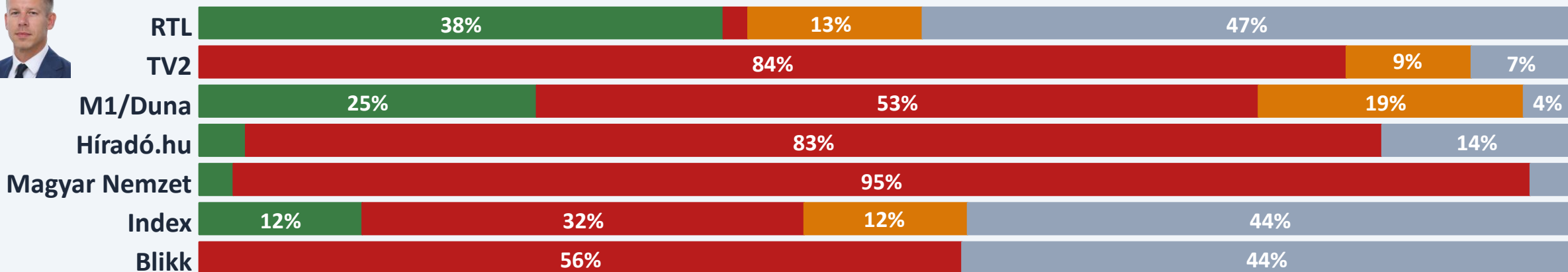
Following Hopmann et al. (2011)

Favorable Unfavorable Ambivalent Neutral

## VIKTOR ORBÁN



## PÉTER MAGYAR



# The Asymmetry of Campaign Narratives

Manual content analysis of 7 outlets · 1,828 news items · 5,271 narrative codes

## PRO-GOVERNMENT

**91.4%**

of all narrative codes (4,818)

## GOVERNMENT-CRITICAL

**8.6%**

of all narrative codes (453)

11× more pro-government narratives than government-critical ones

## Negative dominates

**53.8%**

of the whole corpus attacks an enemy — the pro-government message builds threats, it does not mainly praise.

## One theme for all critique

**12 vs 1**

of 15 latent themes carry government messaging; all government-critical content collapses into a single theme.

## Concentrated in one outlet

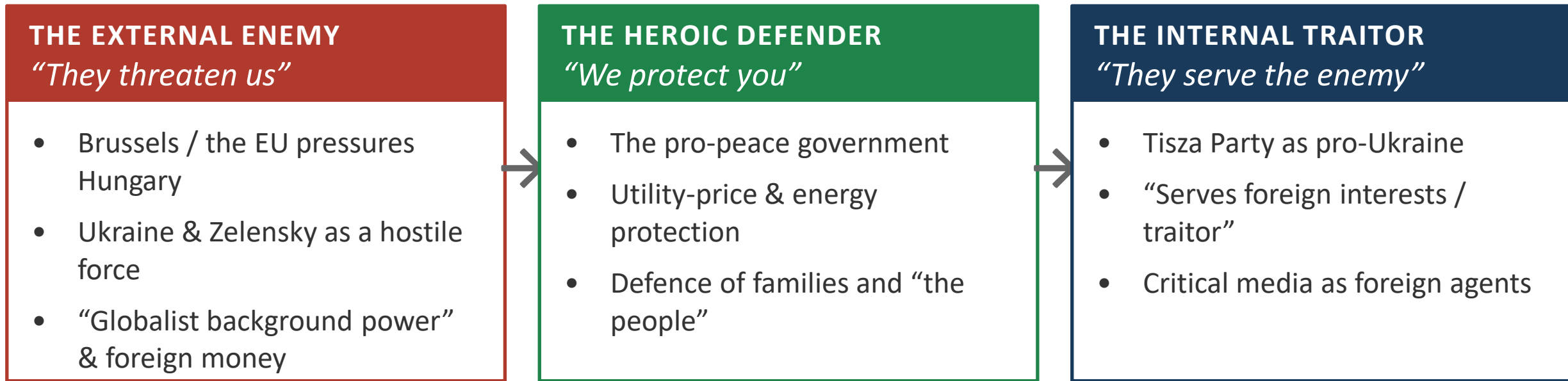
**~50%**

of all pro-government narratives come from Magyar Nemzet alone — more than 5× every outlet's critical content combined.

# A Familiar Template with Local Casting

Bennett & Edelman's "threatened society" narrative (1985)\*, filled by Hungarian campaign messaging

**A Cold-War-era American frame.** An external enemy threatens the nation; a heroic government defends it; an internal traitor is the enemy's accomplice. Hungarian campaign messaging casts local actors into these three fixed roles — audiences need only recognize the template, not memorize 70 narratives.



**The structure is context-independent; only the casting is Hungarian.** The narrative fragments are indexical — a single cue ("the opposition is pro-Ukraine") activates the whole story for the audience.

\*Bennett, W. L., & Edelman, M. (1985). *Toward a new political narrative*. *Journal of Communication*, 35(4), 156–171.

# Where the 15 Themes Come From

From manual coding to data-driven themes — the themes are a pattern in the data, not a researcher's choice

## 1 Manual coding

Human coders read 1,828 news items and tag each one with codes in three families: topic, actor×attitude, and narrative.

**130 distinct codes**



## 2 Document × code matrix

Each news item becomes a row of codes.  
The question: which codes recurrently appear together?

**1,828 rows × 130 codes**



## 3 NMF → 15 themes

An algorithm (non-negative matrix factorization) finds the recurring bundles of co-occurring codes. One item can belong partly to several themes.

**15 latent themes**

**Why this method:** political messages stack on top of each other — one article can be a threat narrative and an economic one at once. NMF's additive logic captures this, so an article belongs partly to several themes rather than to one box. The themes therefore show which messages travel together, not which story the researchers selected.

# The 15 Themes by Narrative Role

Each data-driven theme sorted into the three roles of the campaign's master narrative

## EXTERNAL ENEMY

**T10** **Ukraine–Tisza link**  
n=123 · narrative-driven

**T11** **EU-hostile sovereignty**  
n=126 · narrative-driven

**T5** **Right-wing foreign allies**  
n=100 · mixed / theme-driven

**T7** **Neutral foreign affairs**  
n=155 · actor×attitude

## HEROIC DEFENDER

**T1** **Pro-peace Hungary & wins**  
n=60 · narrative-driven

**T8** **Favorable image of Fidesz**  
n=168 · actor×attitude

**T9** **Economic development**  
n=125 · narrative-driven

**T12** **Energy & utility protection**  
n=75 · narrative-driven

**T3** **Neutral image of Fidesz**  
n=77 · actor×attitude

## INTERNAL TRAITOR / CRITIQUE

**T6** **Tisza as a threat**  
n=108 · narrative-driven

**T2** **Unfavorable image of Tisza**  
n=175 · actor×attitude

**T13** **Tisza / Péter Magyar scandals**  
n=54 · narrative-driven

**T14** **Foreign interference & media**  
n=99 · narrative-driven

**T15** **Government-critical frame**  
n=137 · actor×attitude

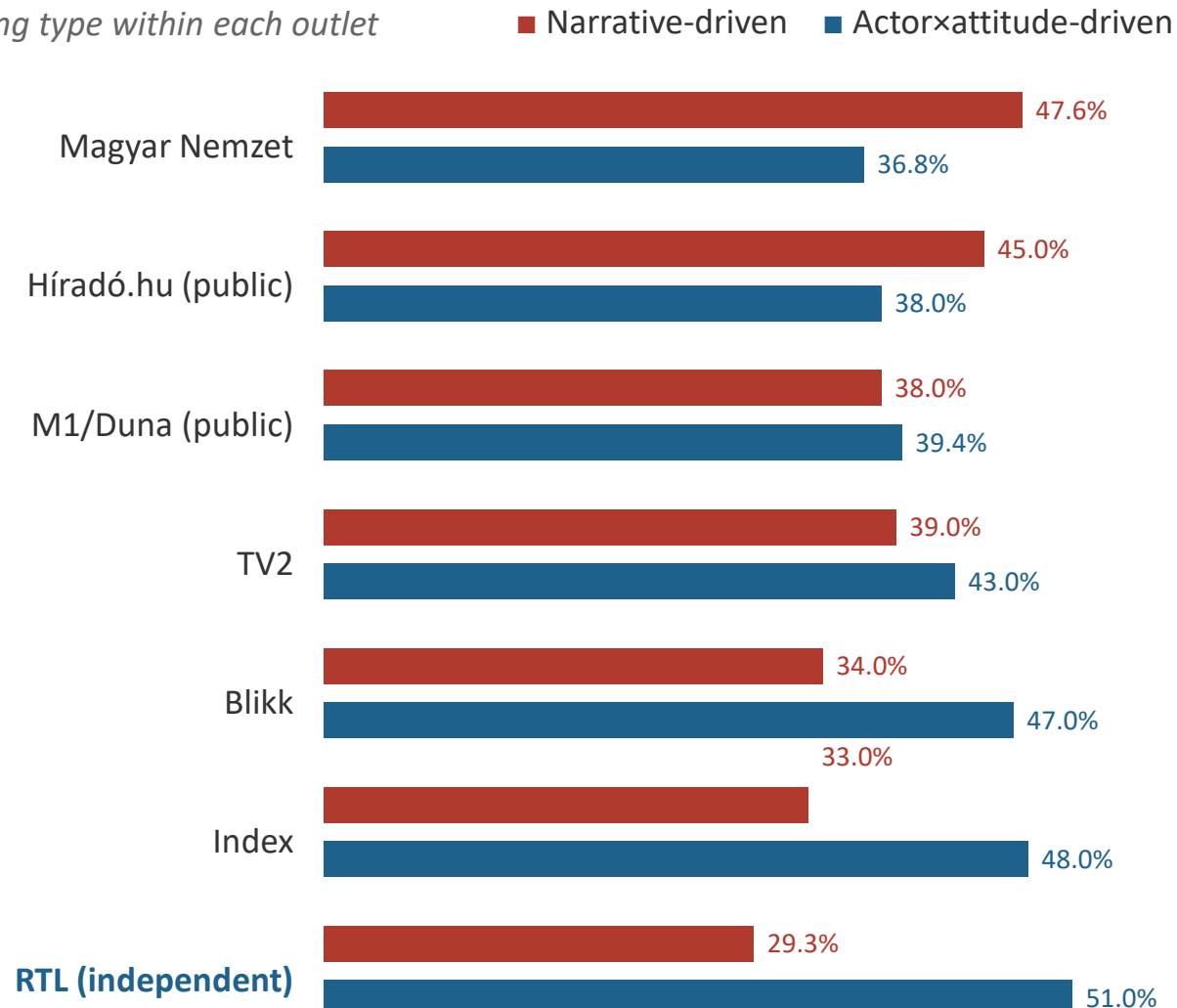
*Outside the template: T4 Plural campaign space (n=246) — the largest theme, but on public TV largely mandatory, formal opposition airtime, not genuine pluralism.*

# Narrative-Driven vs. Actor-Driven News

What organizes each outlet's coverage: strategic narratives, or actors and events

**In captured outlets, news is organized by strategic narratives; in independent ones, by actors and events.** Where narratives dominate, journalism and campaign communication become hard to tell apart.

Share of coding type within each outlet



## RTL: a reference case

Same country, same campaign — yet RTL's news is edited otherwise. Its profile is the mirror image of the captured outlets: it largely ignores the government's narrative packages. This makes Hungary a clear illustration of how strategic narratives can reorganize news production — connecting to the international media-capture literature.

## Enemy construction in pro-government outlets:

### Supporting Ukraine = treason

(the dominant framing logic across all pro-government outlets)

***"Orbán Balázs to journalist Szabolcs Panyi: 'You are a spy!'"*** (hirado.hu; rebroadcast on M1/Duna)

***"Brussels interferes in the election and backs Péter Magyar"*** (hirado.hu)