

MÉRTÉK MEDIA MONITOR

ELECTION

CAMPAIGN 2022

Analysis of the news shows
of the three most-watched
television channels



MERTEK BOOKLETS

Volume 27



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2022. MAY

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Published by
Mérték Médiaelemző Műhely
Közhasznú Nonprofit Kft.
[Mertek Media Monitor
Nonprofit Ltd.]
H-1042 Budapest, Árpád út 90-92.

Responsible for the publication
Ágnes Urbán, managing director

Responsible editor
Gábor Polyák

The editing of the report was
finished at May of 2022.



ISSN: 2559-8937
ISBN: 978-615-6406-07-1

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ELECTION CAMPAIGN 2022

Analysis of the news shows of the three most-watched television channels

Motto:

Manipulating public information, placing certain pieces of information front and centre while relegating others to the background, inflating one's virtues and presenting the opponent in a negative light are inevitably integral aspects of political communication and of the way politics works. For obvious reasons, the competition to capture the attention and votes of the electorate cannot limit itself to a form of political communication that is based on dry facts alone. Mobilising voters and fostering loyalty to the given political side, party, or candidate also necessitates communication that appeals to emotions, is subjective, and occasionally stirs negative feelings towards the opponent. At the same time, manipulation is also a serious threat to the fairness of elections and may render a genuinely democratic discourse impossible.

(Krisztina Nagy - Gábor Polyák¹)

Executive summary

Many news reports, events, and opinions have reflected on the television coverage of the 2022 election campaign in Hungary. The current study draws on statistics to capture the coverage of the election campaign in the news shows of the major television channels, to present how the latter have handled the relevant events and developments.

¹ Választóvédelem – Gondolatkísérlet a tisztességtelen politikai befolyásolás elleni szabályozás kialakítására [Voter protection – A thought experiment for drafting regulation to safeguard against unfair election influence]. *Fundamentum* 2021 – http://epa.oszk.hu/02300/02334/00082/pdf/EPA02334_fundamentum_2021_02-03_043-066.pdf

In summary, we can conclude that the evening news of RTL Klub reported in a nuanced and balanced manner about the events of the campaign period, thereby assisting voters in their efforts to make carefully considered and thoughtful decisions. By contrast, the public television channel Duna TV, and TV2, the other major commercial channel we reviewed in addition to RTL Klub, plainly operated as part of the government's propaganda machine. Occasionally they even violated the law in order to impede voters their efforts to make well-informed voting decisions. Their one-sided and biased editorial practices had a substantial impact on the fairness of the election. The following will discuss the evidence that supports the conclusions summarised above.

Background

Mérték Media Monitor has been tracking the television news coverage of Hungarian election and referenda campaigns since 2014. The goal of our tracking is to show to what extent news shows with high viewer ratings help or actually impede viewers in finding out about the ideas and opinions (platforms) of the various political players that compete in elections. A monitoring that goes far back in time also provides us with the opportunity to capture how the Hungarian media system works, not only at any given moment but also over time, as it evolves.

Our data for the period covered by the present research has already been published in several briefer analyses disseminated during the campaign period. These were written in the hope that not only would the results of our research help us better understand the events and dynamics retrospectively, in their historical context, but they would also assist the editors of the news shows in providing a decent and fair coverage of the campaign.

Our research sought to assess whether the news shows of the most-watched television channels provided a **balanced** coverage. It did not evaluate whether the news items disseminated were well-founded or factually accurate, nor did it consider their tone; it focused exclusively on whether the principle of balance and fairness equal opportunity prevailed in the news coverage.

This research was realised with the assistance of the German Marshall Fund.

The legal framework

With respect to the Fundamental Law's pronouncements concerning press freedom, an important new element resulted from an amendment of the Hungarian constitution – also reflecting on previous decisions of the Constitutional Court – was that the legislator amended Article IX with the following clause: "Hungary... shall ensure the conditions for the free dissemination of information necessary for the formation of democratic public opinion." Even without delving into a detailed interpretation of the concept of democratic public opinion, on the basis of the Constitutional Court's opinions alone we can state that "comprehensive, **balanced**, and accurate"² (emphasis added by the authors) public information is an essential precondition for the creation and operation of a democratic public opinion.

² Constitutional Court Decision No. 37/1992.(VI.10.)

The legal extrapolation of the constitutional requirement was performed in the Media Act: "Linear media services engaged in the provision of information shall provide **balanced** coverage on local, national and European issues that may be of interest for the general public and on any events and debated issues bearing relevance to the citizens of Hungary and the members of the Hungarian nation, in the general news and information programmes broadcasted by them. The detailed rules of this obligation shall be set forth by the Act with a view to ensure proportionality and democratic public opinion"³ (emphasis added by the authors).

Duna TV, TV2, and RTL all provide linear media services and hence they are legally required to provide balanced coverage. According to the Media Act, "[s]ubject to the nature of the programs, information shall be **balanced** within a given program or in **the series of programs shown regularly**"⁴ (emphasis added by the authors).

The public media define the concept in greater detail in their Public Service Code: "The news items disseminated by the public service media providers are obliged to present the political parties, movements, social organisations, as well as the representatives of the latter, and the positions held by all of the aforementioned, in a **balanced** manner. Correspondingly, the public service media providers shall strive to present the divergent views in a way that allows the listeners and viewers to compare and contrast the underlying opinions" (emphasis added by the authors). The Public Media Election Office is entrusted with the responsibility of reviewing the enforcement of the rules laid down in the Codex. Specifically, its responsibilities include "[t]he monitoring... of whether individual media contents – news shows, political news shows – about the election provide a **balanced chance for** [the different viewpoints] **to appear in the news**, and the correspondingly appropriate division of the broadcasting time of public service news shows [to provide for such a balance]" (emphasis added by the authors).

In the first Media Act adopted after the regime transition, the legislator expounded on this obligation in greater detail: "The information provided on domestic and foreign events which may be of interest for the general public, and on issues of dispute shall be diverse, factual, current, objective and **balanced**"⁵ (emphasis added by the authors). Based on the application of the law at the time, the goal of balanced coverage is that the audiences can learn about the various "relevant opinions." Although the concept of balance did not mean that the media authority tallied the number of seconds allocated to distinct opinions, it did imply that the **proportion** of the media coverage received by the various opinions was important. The content analyses of the National Radio and Television Commission (abbreviated as ORTT in Hungarian) continuously tracked the share that the various political players received of the media coverage, and the Board published the relevant data. The term "proportions" in the decisions of the Constitutional Court, in combination with the clause "the series of programs shown regularly" in the law and the term "share of appearances" in the Public Service Codex clearly implies that even though those who apply the law do not strictly examine exact quantities of time, overall proportions do play a pre-eminent role in assessing whether a coverage is balanced.

In several specific cases decided by the media authority since the adoption of the new media regulation, the decision cited the concept of "editorial freedom" in limiting the enforcement of the requirement of balanced coverage. The vacuity of the relevant statutory rule became manifest in the Media Council's application of the law as decisions mandating the enforcement of balanced coverage essentially disappeared from the Council's case law. Even in the years before 2020, the Media Council had rendered no more than 2-3 decisions a year that granted the petition (thus finding that a legal violation had occurred) – but according to its report published in 2021, in 2020 that number had dropped to zero. It is worth noting how the Media Council interpreted the provisions concerning balanced coverage, and how it hollowed out the concept over time. The Media Council's decision No. 1292/2019

³ Article 13 of Act CIV of 2010 on the Freedom of the Press and the Fundamental Rules of Media Content

⁴ Article 12 (2) of Act CLXXXV of 2010 on Media Services and on the Mass Media

⁵ Act 1 of 1996 on Radio and Television Broadcasting

– which the Hungarian supreme court, the Curia, affirmed in response to an appeal – essentially voided the very concept of balanced coverage in the form that would have allowed for its application in specific cases. In its decision, the Media Council stated that the media service provider was not obliged to present contrasting opinions in any detail, nor did it have to invite those who represent such views onto its shows. Its obligation was merely to make clear that opposing views exist. How easy it is to conform to this interpretation of the law was also apparent in an interview with the president of the Media Council, in which he said that “[t]he people... do not demand that any news show be balanced.”⁶

The framework of the analysis

Our analysis looked at the news shows (starting at 6 PM) of the major (previously terrestrial analogue) television channels with the highest share of viewers during the campaign period (from 12 February to the day of the election) in the run-up to the 2022 elections to the Hungarian National Assembly.⁷ As part of our research, we relied on standardised code instructions to record every single news item on these shows in which a **Hungarian politician was featured in some form**. We did not deal with those news items that did not touch on Hungary, nor did we code those that reported about Hungary or events in Hungary but did not feature Hungarian politicians.

To pre-empt potential distortions, the coders were trained and took a test before they started coding. They then rotated weekly amongst each other the channels they monitored. The coding instructions featured quantitative and qualitative codes alike; we included 27 criteria per news item. The coding was facilitated by the fact that the news shows are also available online and can be watched again subsequently.

The news shows

The analysis extended to data about 51 shows per television channel.⁸

The news shows of Duna TV were typically 30-minutes long, while the news shows of TV2 and RTL Klub lasted 45 minutes each. During the total time in question, the Duna news show featured 755 items overall, an average of 15 a day, while TV2 presented 1,110 items in total with an average of 22 a day, and RTL presented 1,100, also with a daily average of 22.

A total of 1,271 news items featured Hungarian politicians (or also featured Hungarian politicians) – 457 on Duna TV, 432 on TV2, and 382 on RTL).

The share of coded news items as a percentage of all items broadcast by the public service television channel’s news show was over 50%, while in the case of the commercial television channels slightly over a third of all news items ended up being coded. We coded a total of 2,604 minutes of news. The length of the coded items as a proportion of the total news time was roughly in line with their share of the total number of news items broadcast.

⁶ <https://24.hu/belfold/2022/02/21/koltay-andras-nmhh-elnok-mediatanacs-interju/>

⁷ <https://port.hu/cikk/tv/elkepeszto-kulonbsegek-vannak-a-tv2-es-az-rtl-klub-hiradoinak-nezoi-kozott/article-82226?fbclid=IwAR3nQ82L3-UTuwWhdaWBdWF93bx-EewKFcq2KKTijpus-Sz8E7IY7LjGC80c>

⁸ The election campaign is officially 50 days long; we also coded the news shows broadcast on election day before the voting ended and the ballot boxes were sealed.

Figure 1. The share of coded news as a percentage of all news items broadcast by the news shows (%)

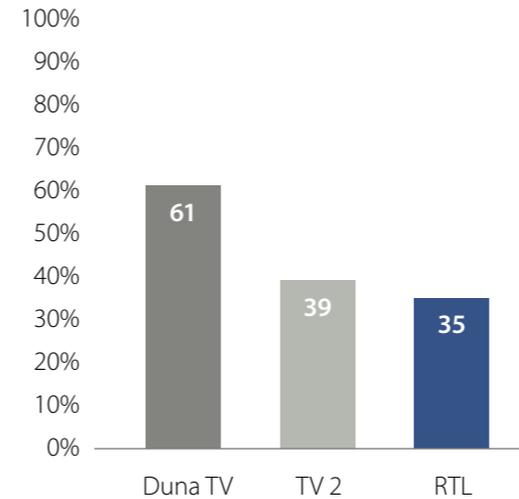
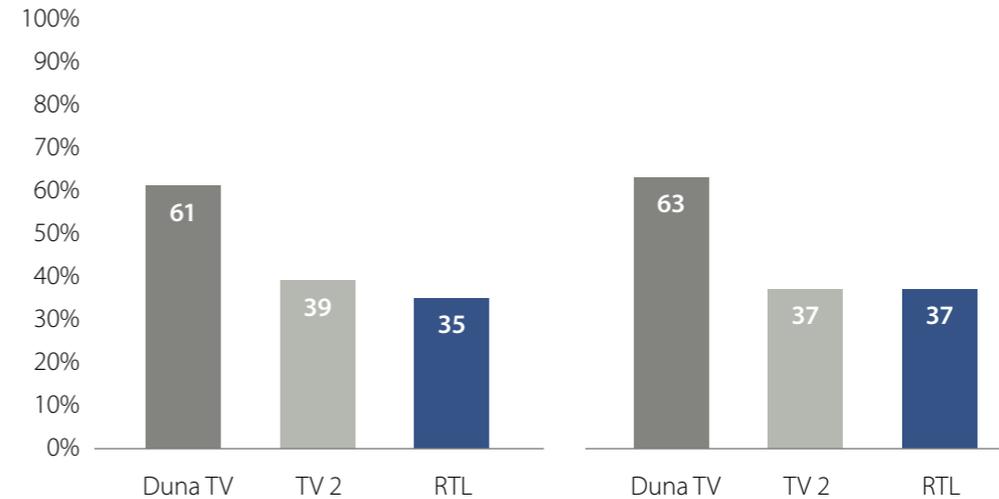


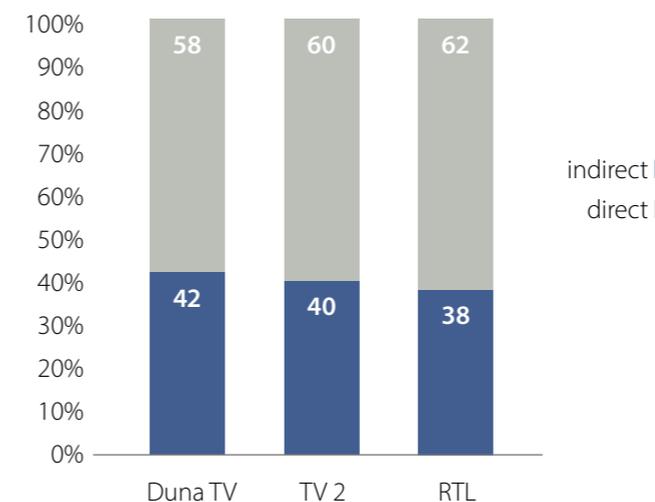
Figure 2. The length of the coded news items as a share of all the news broadcast by the news shows (%)



The lengths of the news items varied substantially. We encountered items as short as 12 seconds (RTL) and as long as 996 seconds (TV2). The average length of the coded items was 120 seconds on Duna TV, 118 seconds on TV2, and 132 seconds on RTL Klub.

In analysing the contents, we distinguished between items that were directly connected to politics and those that were only indirectly connected thereto. We regarded items as direct election coverage that either expressly referred to the impending elections or the activities and opinions of the competing players. We coded items as indirect election coverage when a Hungarian politician was featured in the news items but the report itself did not openly touch on the electoral competition.

Figure 3. The share of news items that dealt with the election directly or indirectly (%)



For a while, the war in Ukraine influenced the number and share of Hungary-related political news,⁹ but over time the number of items touching on Ukraine declined and, viewed over the entire period, the fluctuation in the number and length of political news was not very pronounced.

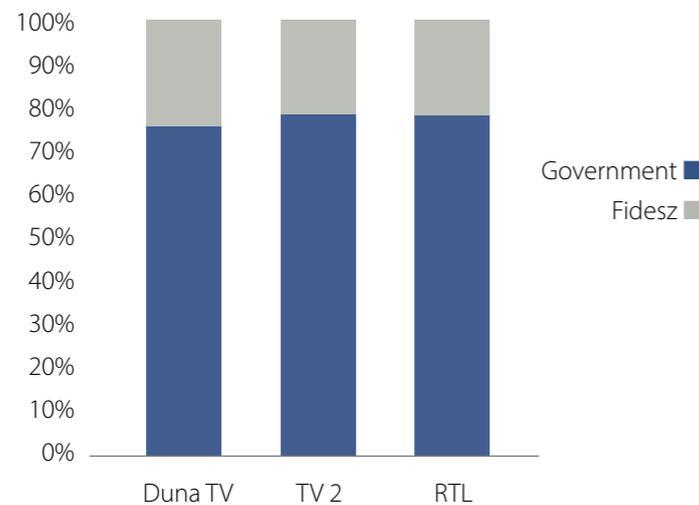
The share of the news coverage devoted to the various players and opinions

Counter to Hungary's commitments to the OSCE,¹⁰ the campaign activities of state officials are not limited in any form by the relevant laws, nor is the use of state funds for campaign purposes prohibited by any statute.

In our coding, we distinguished between government officials and government parties or their politicians, but in most analytical situations we ended up treating them the same, with the label "government side." We coded items as featuring Fidesz or KDNP politicians when the politicians of these governing parties were either mentioned by name or when it was clear in context that a politician appeared in the given news item as a party representative. With respect to Viktor Orbán's media appearances, too, we distinguished between his roles as a party politician and prime minister, respectively.

Our data clearly illustrate the intertwining between the governmental and party political campaigns. Among the presentations of the government side, the government itself took up four-fifths of the items while the remaining fifth featured the two governing parties; this statistic did not differ between the channels we tracked.

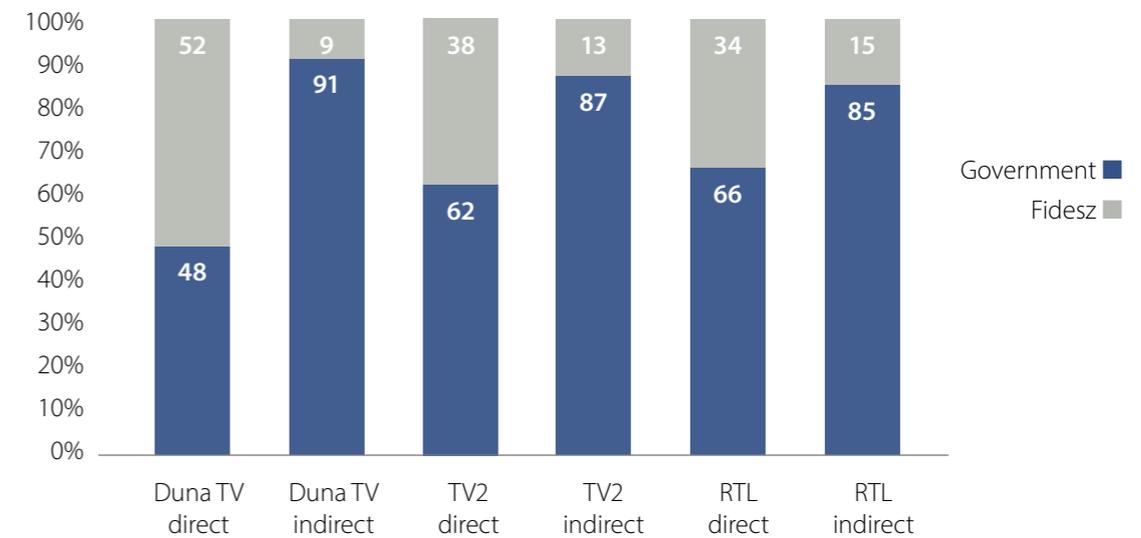
Figure 4. The share of the government and Fidesz and/or KDNP, respectively, in those news items that mention the government side (%)



⁹ <https://mertek.eu/2022/02/28/az-ukrajnai-haboru-első-három-napja-a-nagy-televíziók-esti-hírműsorában/>
¹⁰ Article 5.4 of the OCSE's Copenhagen Document of 1990 mandates a "clear separation between the State and political parties."

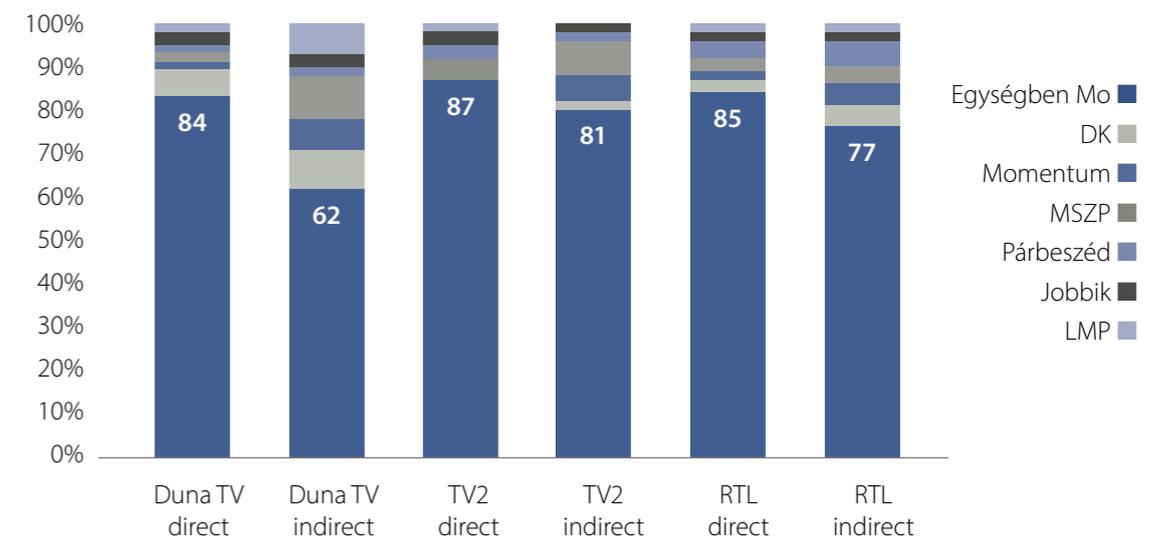
The presentation of the government side as political parties (rather than as the government itself or its officials) was higher than average in those news items that engaged the elections directly; nevertheless, among these news items, too, the government itself was featured more prominently. It was only on Duna TV that items mentioning Fidesz and/or KDNP were as frequent as mentions of the government side.

Figure 5. The share of mentions of the government and the parties affiliated with the government, respectively, in the news items that touched directly or indirectly on the election (%)



Although in this context this issue was only relevant from the angle of communications and it did not have any legal implications, we also looked at the respective share of the mentions of the joint opposition list United for Hungary on the one hand, and of the separate mentions of the parties that made up the opposition alliance.

Figure 6. The share of mentions of the United for Hungary alliance and the parties affiliated with the opposition alliance, respectively, in the news items that touched directly or indirectly on the election (%)



If we only look at the frequency of the mentions received by the government and the parties (disregarding those political players which are formally not affiliated with either political side), it is readily apparent that two major blocs dominate most of the coverage, while the smaller parties that ran separately in the election were only sporadically featured. The data in the figures below also indicate that even though the specific numbers differed, the overall trend was the same for all three channels.

Figure 7. The frequency of the mentions of the government and the political parties in the news shows (the number of items mentioning them)

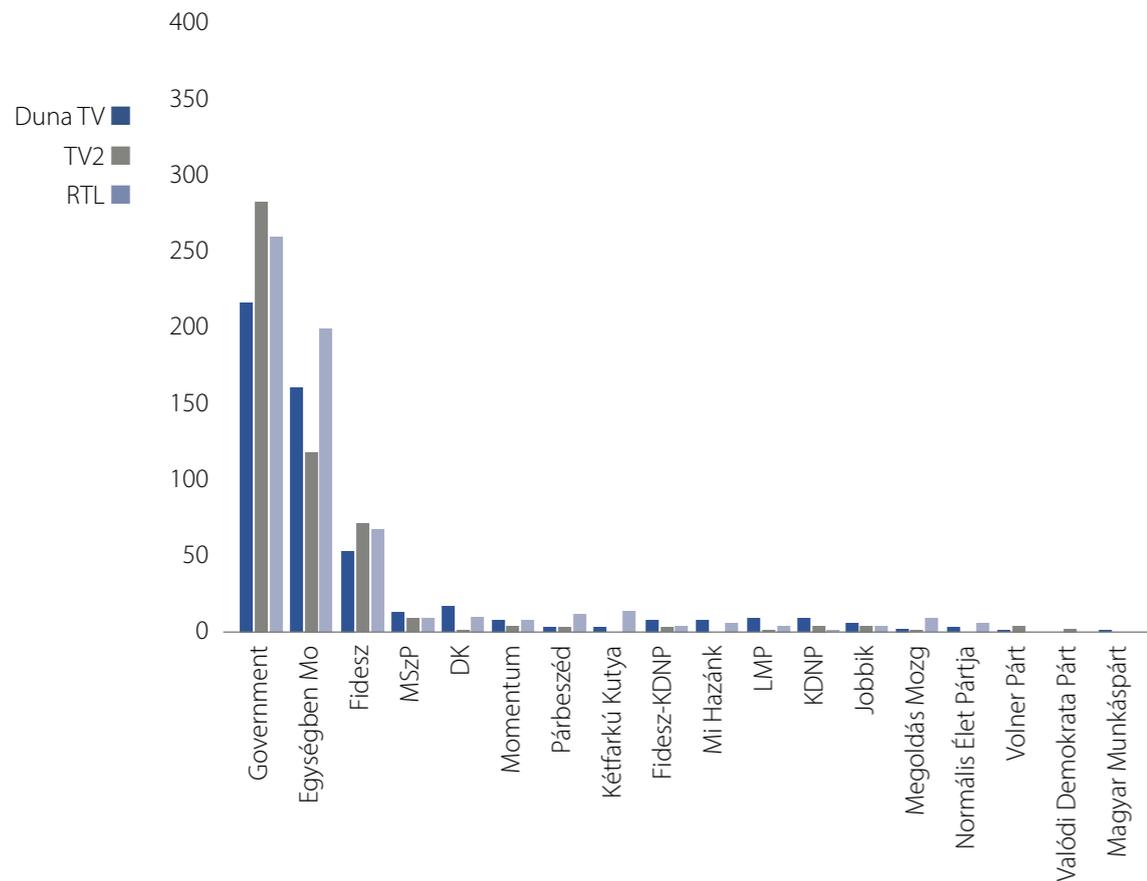
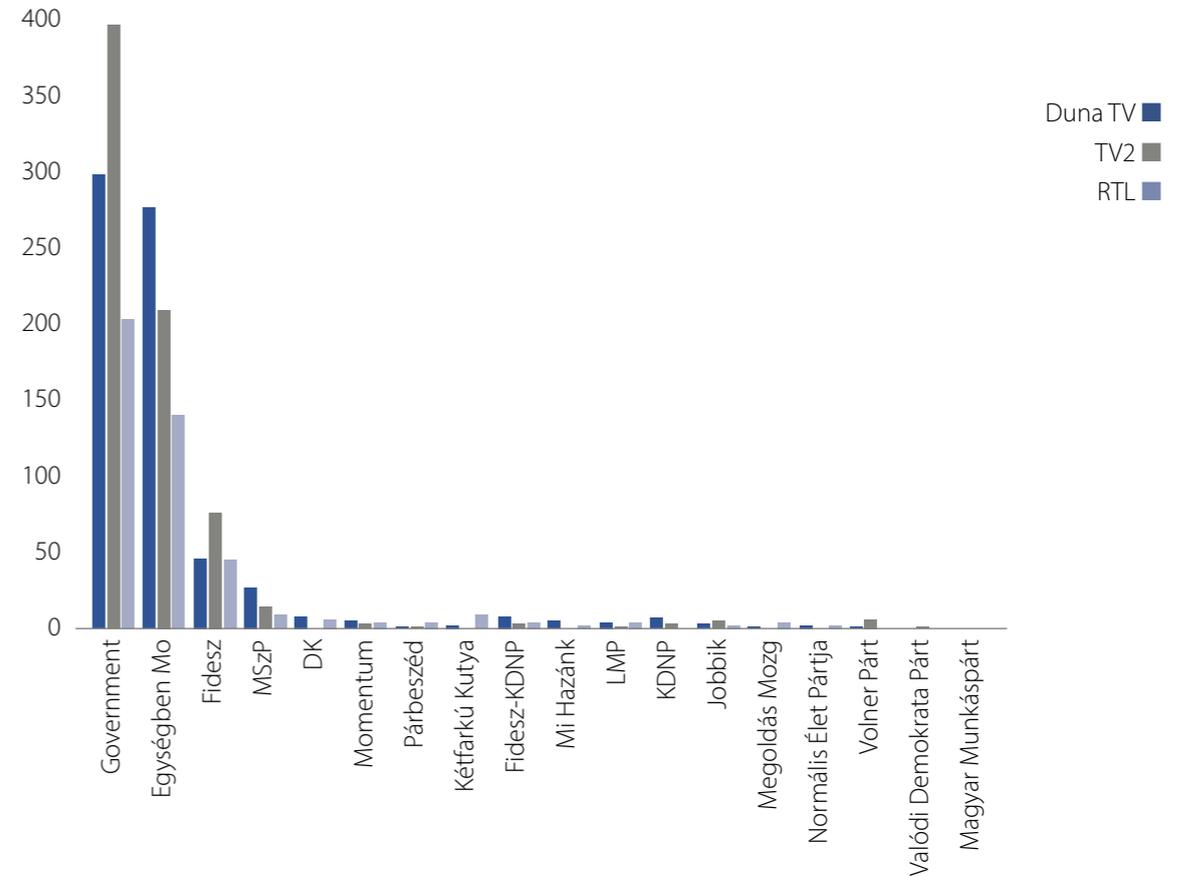


Figure 8. The lengths of the items mentioning the government and the political parties in the news shows (minutes)



Aggregating the data for the political blocs, it appears – at first glance – that with the exception of TV2’s news shows, the share of mentions was relatively balanced, even though the balance of the lengths of the mentions clearly tilted towards the government.

Figure 9. The share of coverage received, respectively, by the government and the parties affiliated with the government (government side), and by the other parties competing in the election, by channel

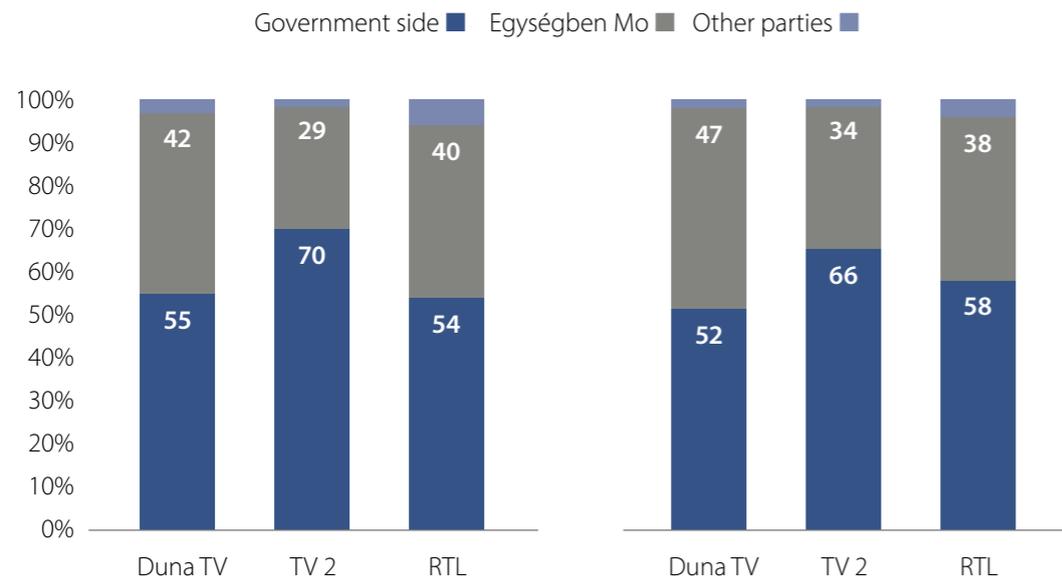
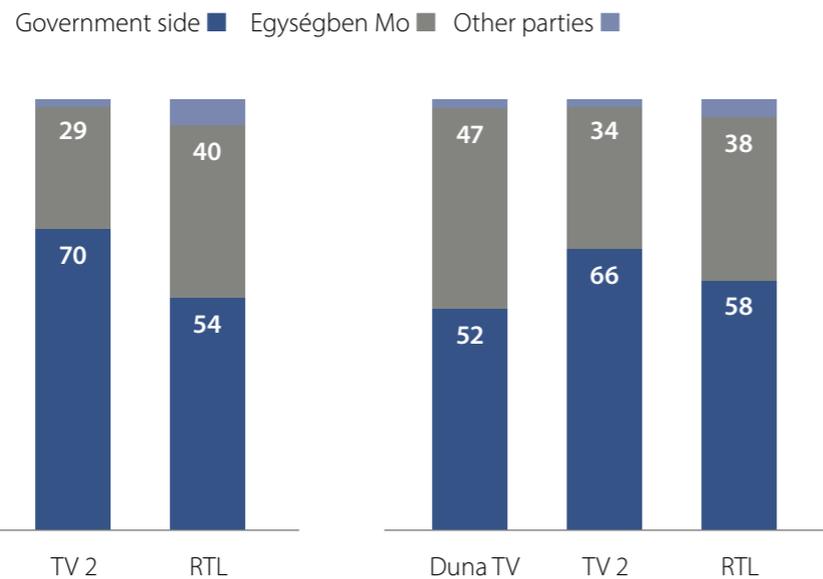


Figure 10. The total time of coverage received, respectively, by the government and the parties affiliated with the government (government side), and by the other parties competing in the election, by channel



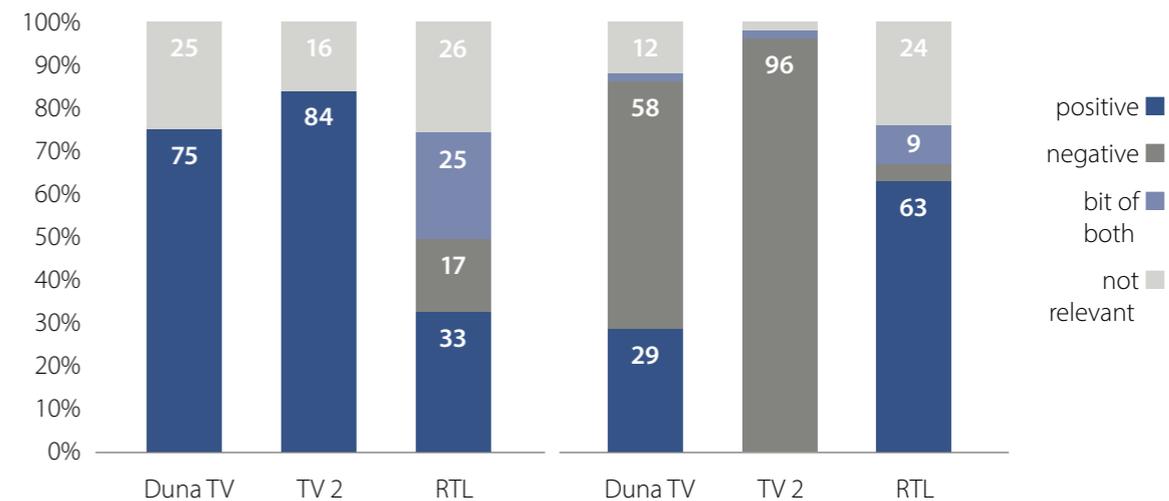
If in addition to the data on the frequency or the length of their appearances in the news we also consider the context in which the government, parties, or politicians were presented,¹¹ we find that despite the seeming balance in the coverage, the real picture is completely different (Figure 11).

The figure shows clearly that RTL Klub presented news about the government side in a nuanced manner, while TV2 and Duna TV predominantly emphasised the positive aspects of the government's activities and their coverage did not include any doubts or criticisms concerning the latter.

The picture that emerges when looking at the context of the news that featured opposition politicians was completely different. RTL Klub once again presented the political players in a nuanced manner, but the TV2 news shows presented them only in a negative context, giving them no opportunity to appear in a positive light. The data show that Duna TV did afford opposition politicians a few opportunities to present themselves positively, but in its coverage, too, news items that featured the opposition negatively predominated.

¹¹ We classified a news item as positive when the impression it gave rise to was that the given player had participated in an event that benefitted the country or the public, or when they did something that qualified as such; but we also coded something as positive if the given player was given the opportunity by the channel to discuss their comments or actions in a way that reflected their own plans and opinions. We qualified a news item as negative when either the anchor (based on their own comment or citing other sources) or the general presentation of the news involved an evaluation of the activity of the political player that was featured in the given news item, thereby helping the viewers arrive at a "correct understanding" of the actions of the player in question. A news item was assessed as "both" if the given political players were presented by the channel in a nuanced manner, featuring both positive and negative aspects as described above. Finally, we classified news items as irrelevant when neither of the elements described above were featured, when the report was about the event itself and did not include an evaluation thereof.

Figure 11. The context in which the government or the parties affiliated with the government side were presented in the news (%)



Politicians

Some politicians were given leading roles in the news shows, that is they were featured often, while others only appeared sporadically, as part of the coverage of specific issues, in either negative or positive contexts. A total of 239 politicians appeared in the news shows. On average, each politician was featured eight times in the news. However, this average obscures a vast spread in the distribution of the numbers, with 99 politicians appearing only once in the news and 39 twice. The 20 most featured politicians, by contrast, accounted for 63% of all appearances by politicians.

The politician who was featured most in the news was Viktor Orbán. During the 51 days we tracked, viewers who watched all three of the news shows monitored by us saw the prime minister 286 times. This meant a daily average of nearly two appearances by news show/channel. The prime minister was followed by his challenger, the opposition candidate for prime minister, Péter Márki-Zay, who appeared 234 times on the news shows during this period. Foreign minister Péter Szijjártó lagged barely behind with 212 appearances.

The minister in charge of the Prime Minister's Office, Gergely Gulyás, was also featured relatively frequently (72), as were government spokesman István Hollik (60) and the mayor of Budapest, the opposition politician Gergely Karácsony (38). They were followed by a group of politicians with about 20 appearances each (Alexandra Szentkirályi, Ferenc Gyurcsány, Csaba Horváth, Katalin Cseh, Mihály Varga, Máté Kocsis, Katalin Novák, János Áder, Csaba Dömötör, András Fekete-Győr, Lőrinc Nacsa, and Ákos Hadházy).

However, the overall statistic on how often individual politicians were featured in the news needs to be nuanced further by looking at the distribution of the numbers between channels, as well as the context in which they were presented. It is almost self-evident that both Duna TV and TV2 portrayed governing party politicians in a positive context, while they featured their opposition counterparts in a negative light. RTL Klub was the only channel that allowed political players from all sides to predominantly appear in a positive context, giving them space to express their views.

Figure 13. The frequency and the contexts of the appearances of the 20 most featured politicians on Duna TV, as a share of all the appearances by politicians in the news shows of the channel

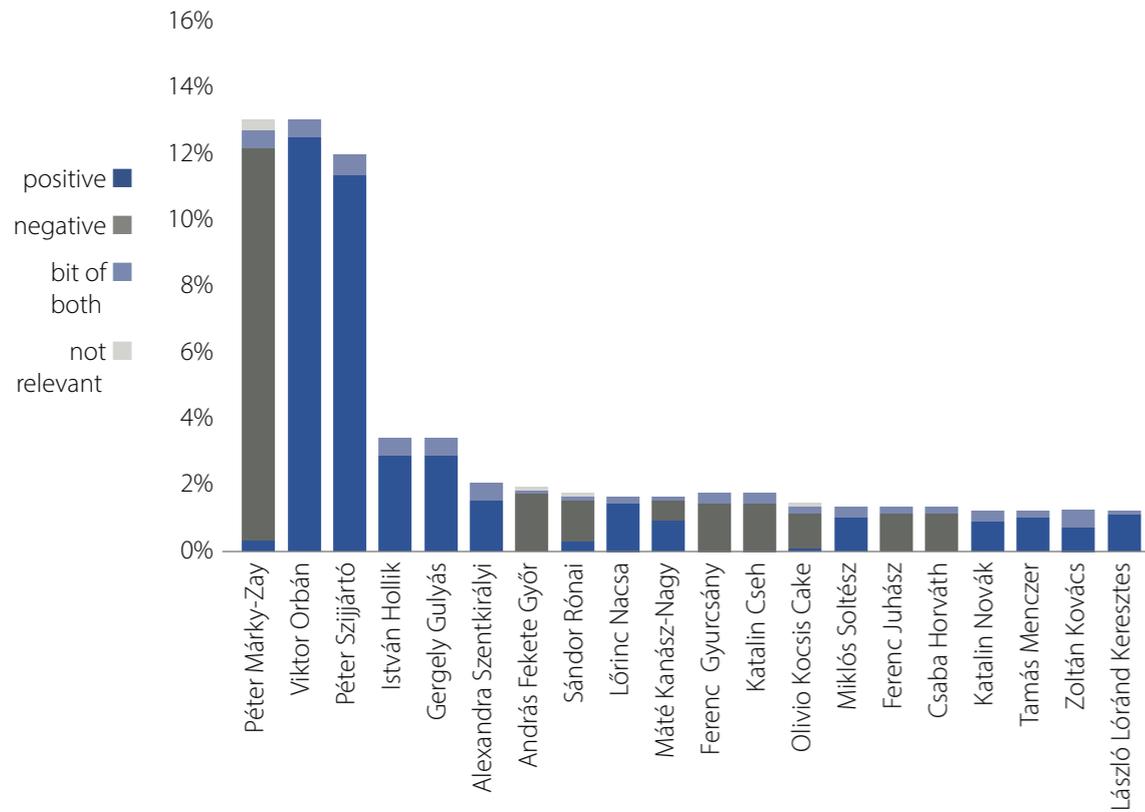


Figure 14. The frequency and the contexts of the appearances of the 20 most featured politicians on TV2, as a share of all the appearances by politicians in the news shows of the channel

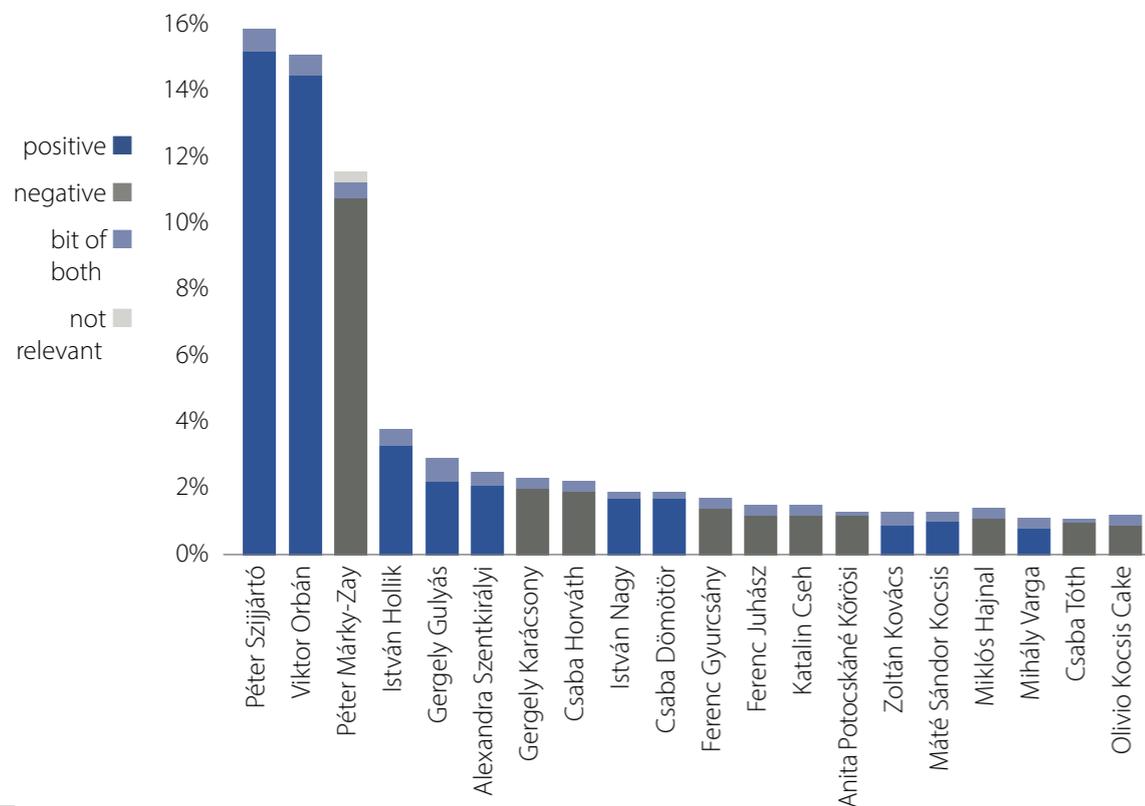
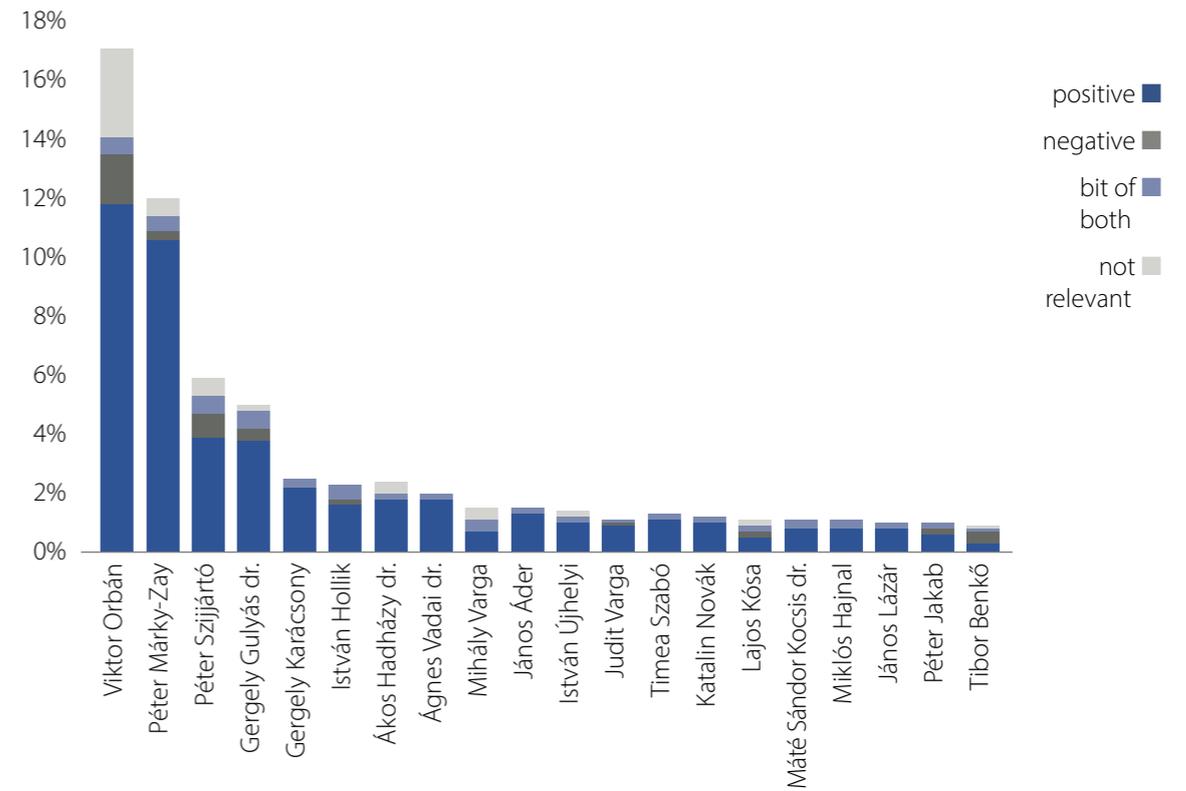


Figure 15. The frequency and the contexts of the appearances of the 20 most featured politicians on RTL Klub, as a share of all the appearances by politicians in the news shows of the channel



The fact that Ferenc Juhász made it onto the list of the top 20 most featured politicians illustrates the impact of the pro-government propaganda machine. Juhász is a former defence minister who is no longer active in everyday politics; he nevertheless made it into the Top 20 of the most featured politicians by virtue of a comment he made in a show on ATV, a video of which was broadcast nine times over a span of a few days by TV2 and Duna TV.

Looking at the five most featured politicians, we only discovered a single difference between the television channels: although only by the barest of margins, Gergely Karácsony edged out Fidesz spokesman István Hollik for a spot in the top five on RTL Klub. If we look at the appearances in the news shows by grouping them according to positive vs. negative contexts of the presentation, we see Péter Márky-Zay stand out, as he was featured almost exclusively in negative contexts in the news shows that were biased in favour of the government; in the meanwhile, government or governing party politicians were predominantly featured in positive contexts. The politicians featured on the RTL Klub news show, by contrast, were presented in positive context in about two-thirds of their appearances, and the viewers could actually learn about their opinions and ideas.

Figure 16. The contexts in which the five most frequently appearing politicians were featured in the Duna TV news shows

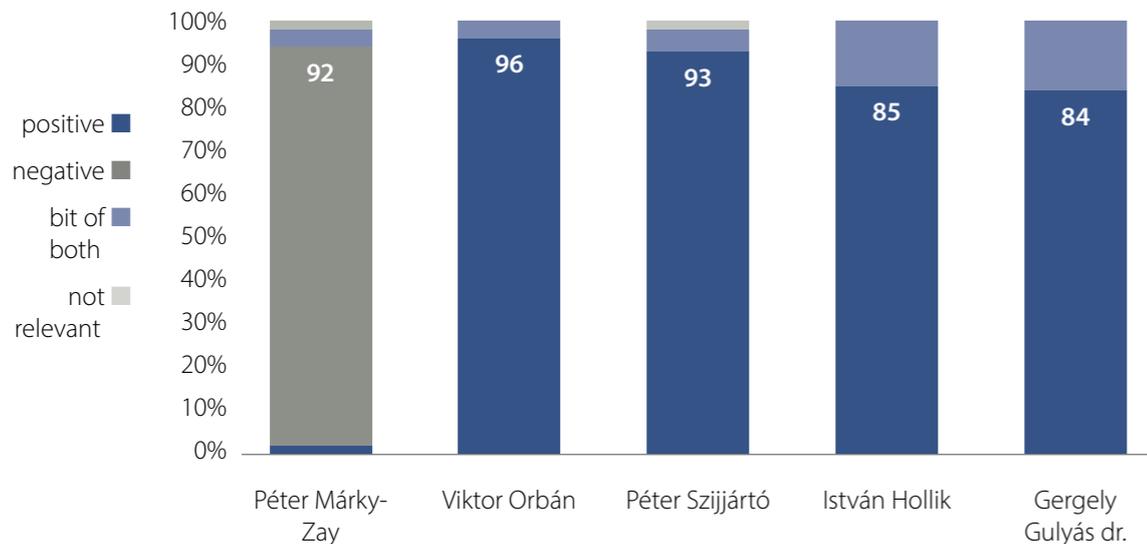


Figure 17. The contexts in which the five most frequently appearing politicians were featured in the TV2 news shows

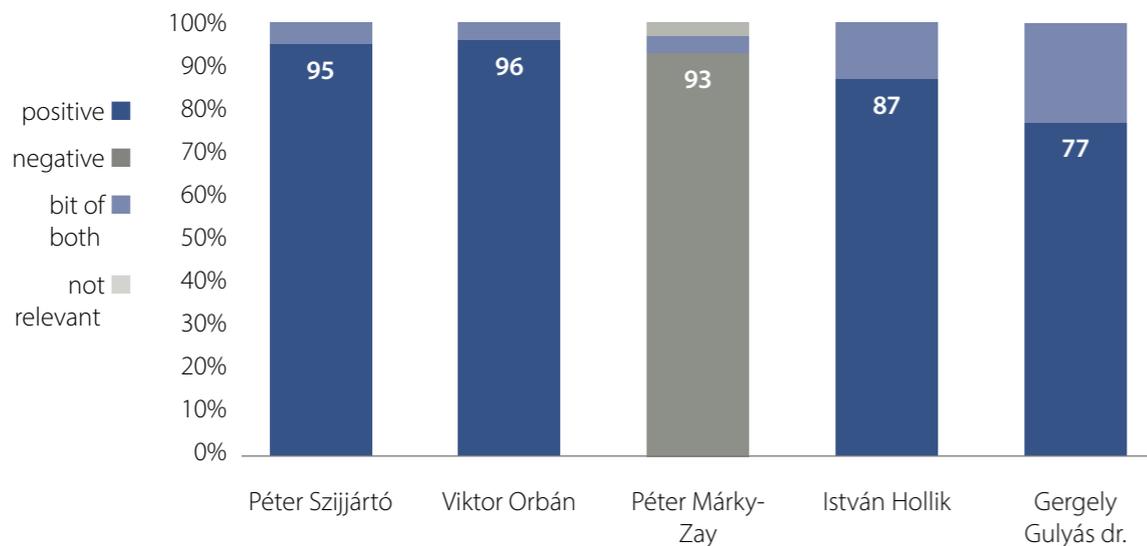
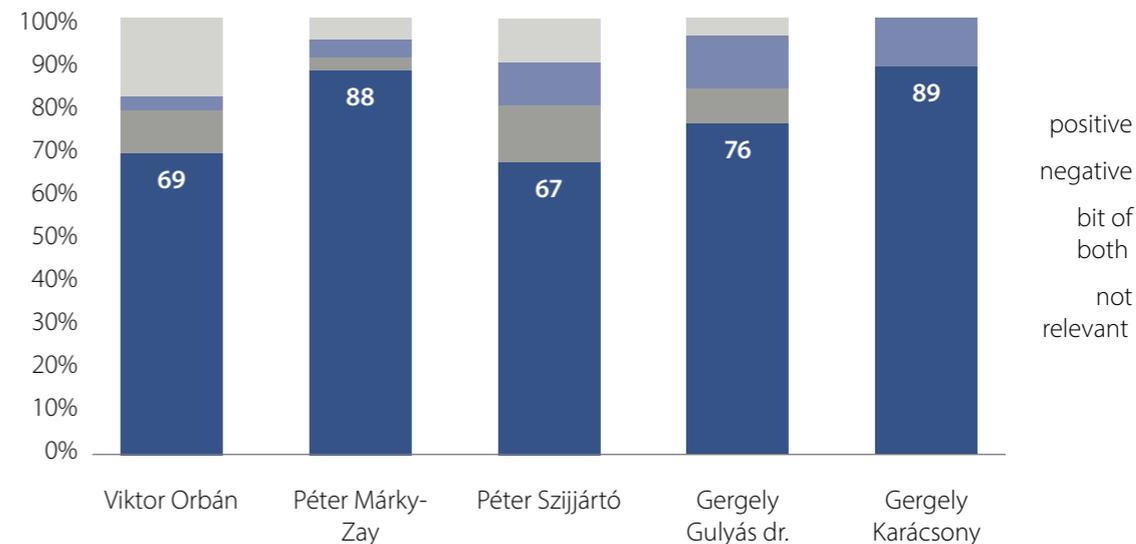


Figure 18. The contexts in which the five most frequently appearing politicians were featured in the RTL Klub news shows



Another revealing issue is how much and which politicians were given the opportunity to comment in person. A situation in which a politician is allowed to explain their position is different for a viewer as compared to a situation in which the anchor (or another politician) presents their views and often also frames the interpretation of said views.

Except for RTL Klub, the leader of the opposition was barely given any airtime to present his positions and views himself. The main point is not that Péter Márki-Zay was not invited to appear in the broadcasts of the public service television – except for the five minutes afforded to him near the end of the campaign. The broader issue is that he was barely quoted in the coverage about him; for the most part, a still image of him was featured while his personal comments were single sentences or fragments taken out of context, completely unsuitable for presenting his actual opinions.

Figure 19. The time allotted to Viktor Orbán and Péter Márki-Zay, respectively, to comment in person during the campaign on the Duna TV news show (minutes)

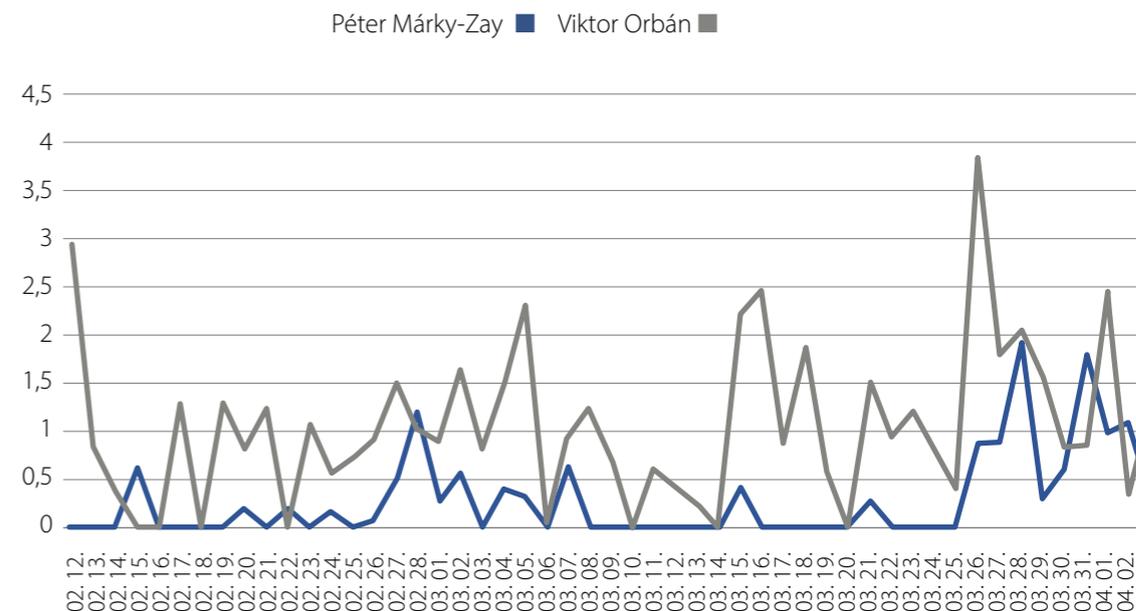


Figure 20. The time allotted to Viktor Orbán and Péter Márki-Zay, respectively, to comment in person during the campaign on the TV2 news show (minutes)

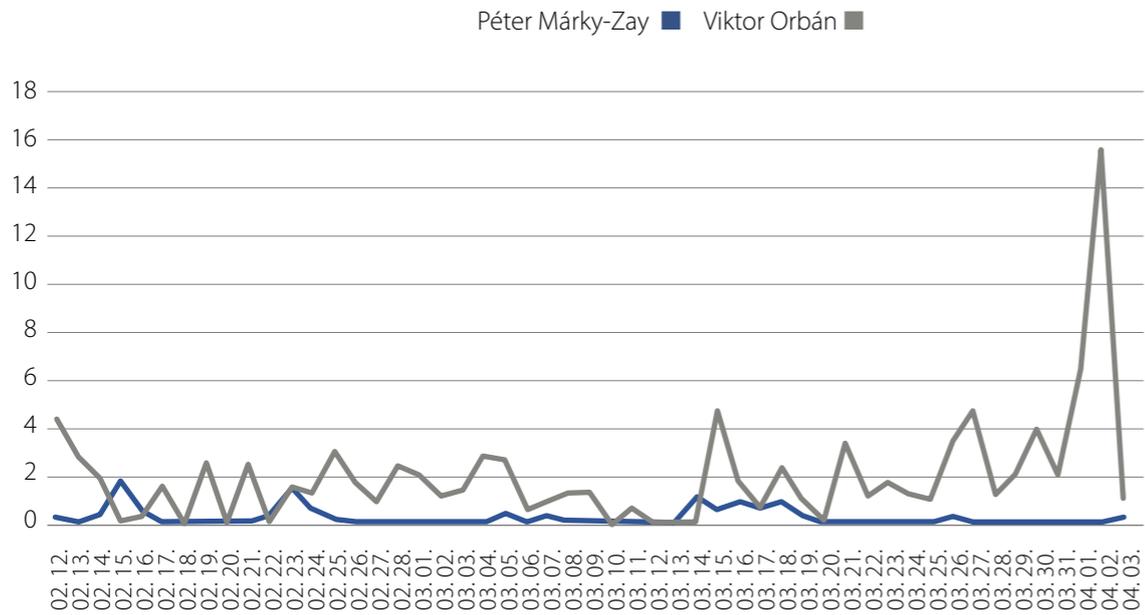
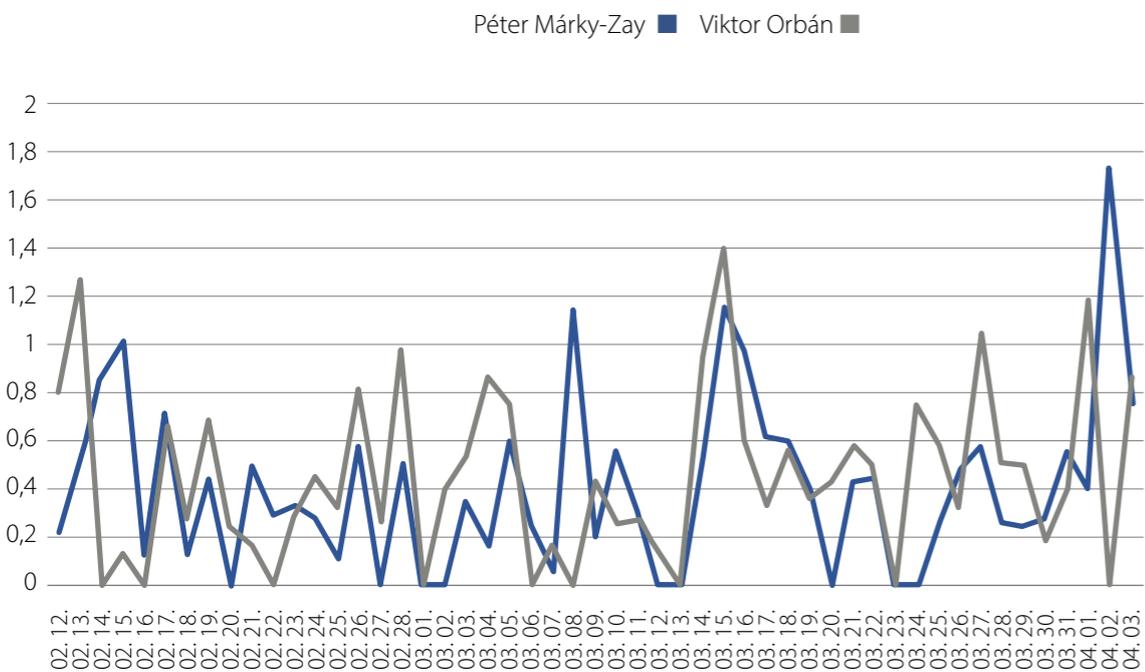
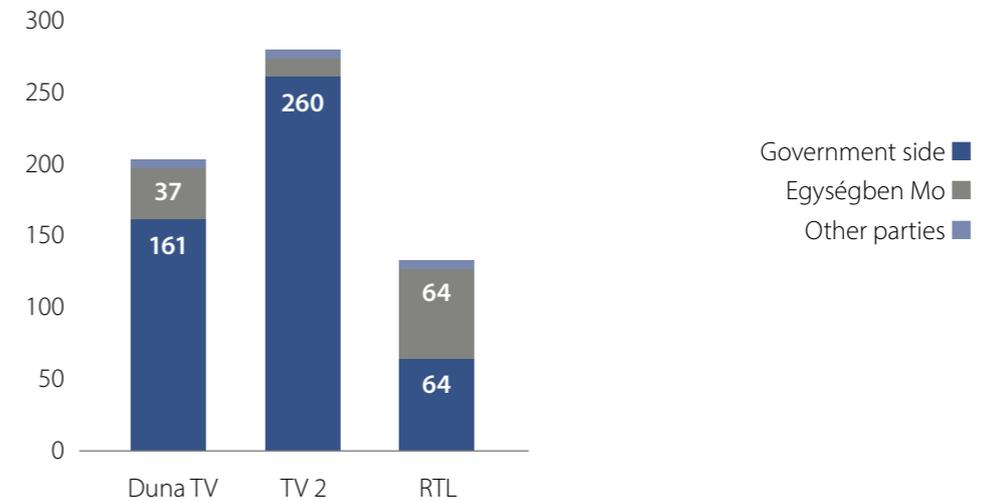


Figure 21. The time allotted to Viktor Orbán and Péter Márki-Zay, respectively, to comment in person during the campaign on the RTL Klub news show (minutes)



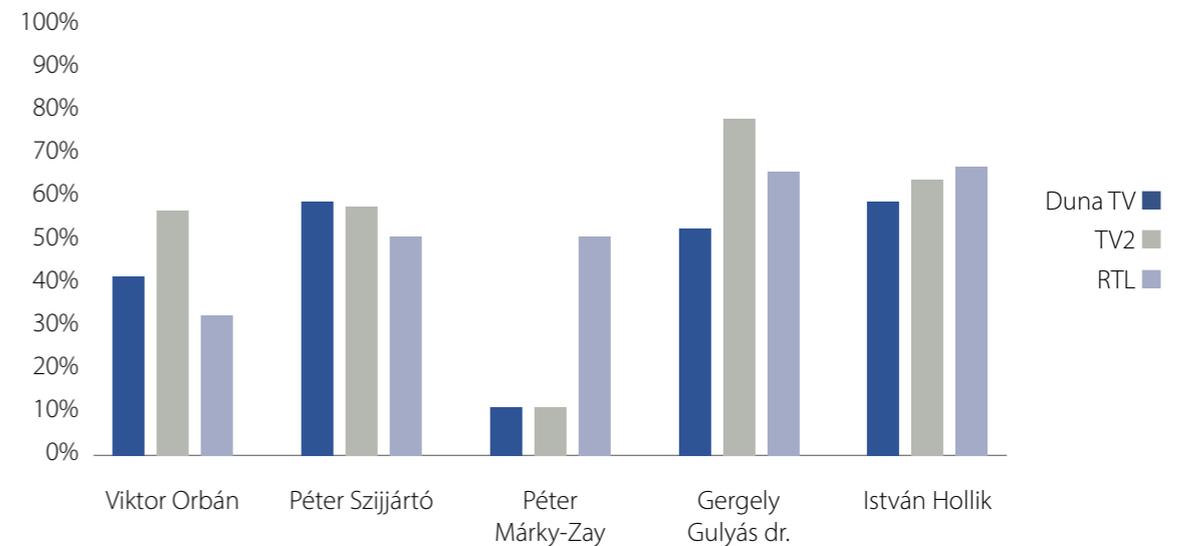
Although every politician had considerably less time to comment in person than the total time of coverage they received in the news shows, in the case of opposition politicians the relevant ratios were very different from that of the politicians affiliated with the government. The disproportionality was especially striking in the case of TV2.

Figure 22. Opportunities to comment in person for government-side and opposition politicians, respectively (seconds)



This means that politicians affiliated with the government side had a total of 161 minutes of speaking time in the news shows of Duna TV, while their opposition counterparts had 37 minutes. In the case of TV2, the government side was given 260 minutes of speaking time, while the opposition had 16. At RTL Klub, the government side and the opposition both received 64 minutes of speaking time.

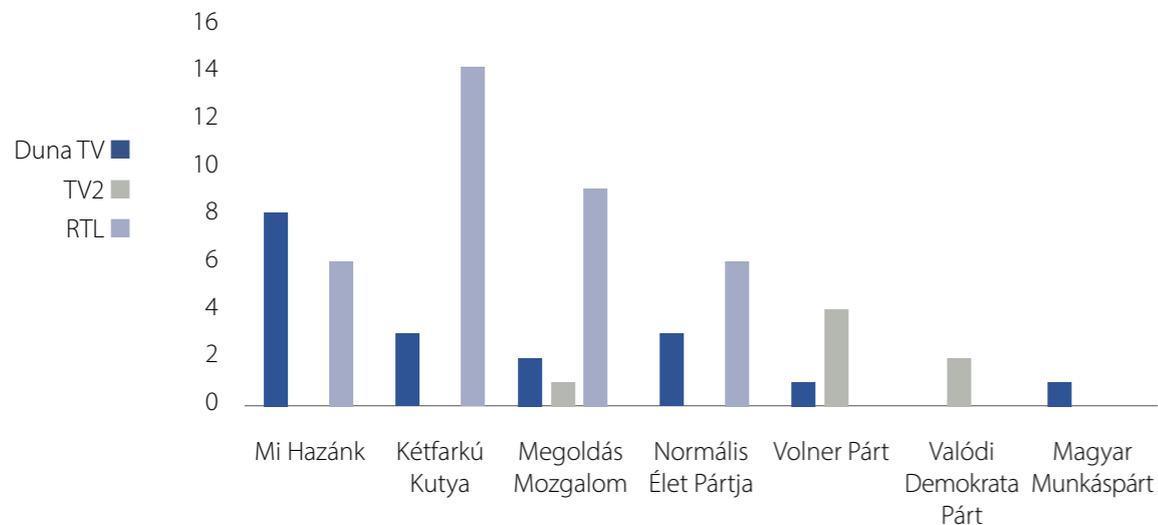
Figure 23. The share of in-person comments by the 5 most-covered politicians as a percentage of the total coverage they received (%)



The minor parties

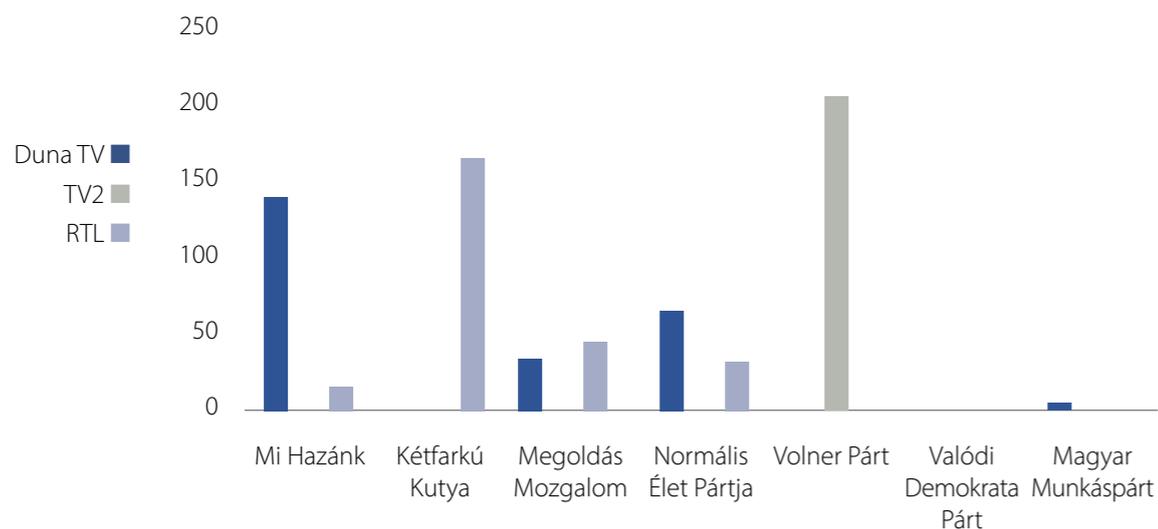
As we previously noted, the smaller parties competing in the election next to the two major blocs were given barely any space in the coverage. The numbers show that RTL Klub (and to a significantly lesser extent Duna TV) gave the smaller parties some airtime. TV2 failed to cover any of the smaller parties that ended up winning a discernible share of the vote, while the Volner Party, which did not compete in the election at all, the Real Democratic Party, which did not nominate a national list in the election, as well as the Solutions Movement were each given one occasion to comment.

Figure 24. How often the smaller parties' were featured on the various channels (number of appearances)



When we look at the opportunities of the representatives of smaller parties to comment in person, the picture that emerges is even more absurd.

Figure 25. The smaller parties' opportunities to comment in person in the news shows of the various channels (seconds)



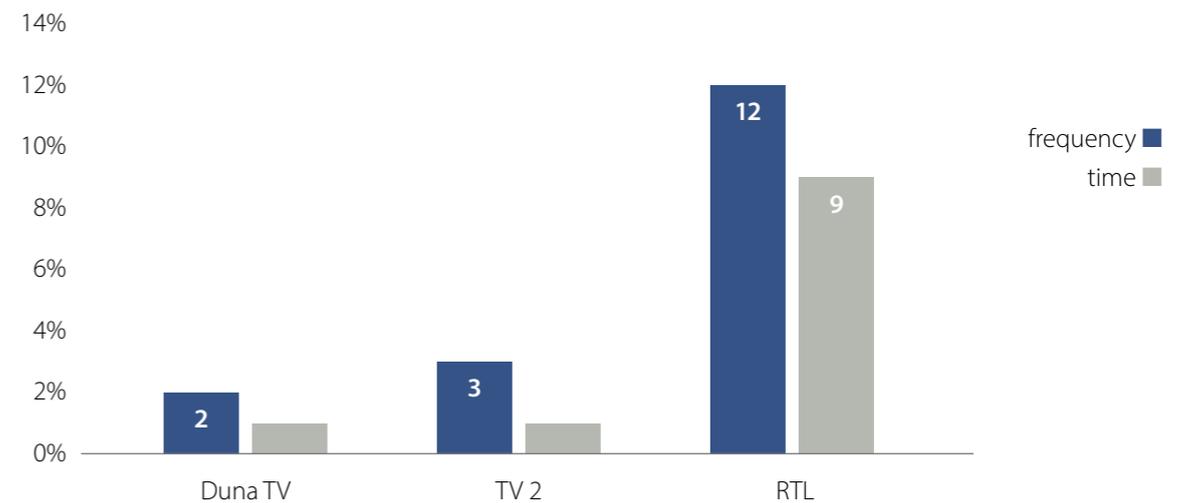
Candidates running in single-member constituencies

How much coverage was allotted to candidates running in single-member constituencies?

It is clear based on the numbers that the national television channels devoted little airtime to the coverage of the candidates running for seats in Hungary's 106 single-member constituency, they only featured them when a given candidate could be used to level criticisms at one of the major political blocs.

A mere 6% of the politicians' appearances in the news shows involved a politician's candidacy in a single-member constituencies (or the fact that they were constituency candidates, too, in addition to other capacities they served in). The channels handled the issue of single-member constituency candidates differently. Although presenting events that are of local relevance is sometimes challenging for a national television channel, RTL Klub – unlike the pro-government channels – devoted a relatively substantial chunk of airtime to the candidates vying to win single-member constituencies – those make up a majority of the 199 seats in the Hungarian parliament.

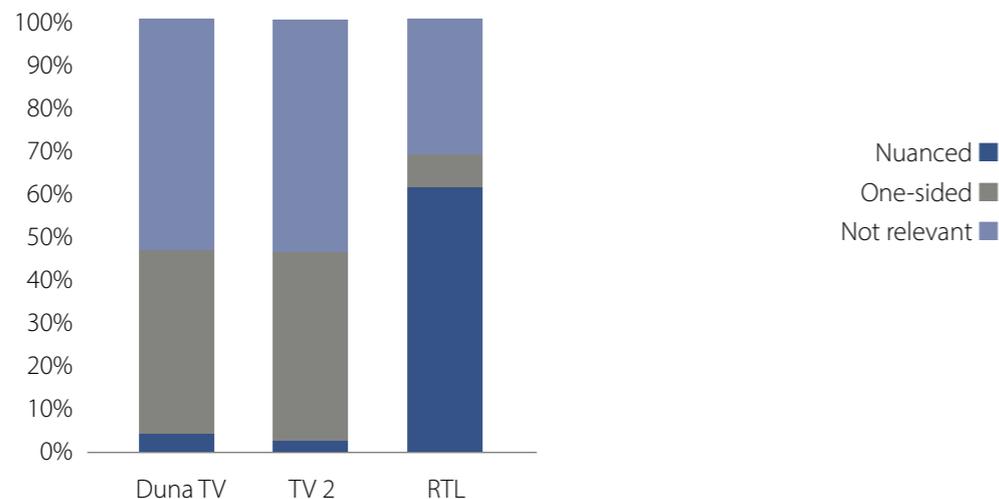
Figure 26. How often single-member constituency candidates appeared in the news and the total time of their appearances as a share of the total time in which politicians appeared in the news (%)



Newsroom practices

Diversity is a major constitutive element of balanced coverage. Whether a television channel covers an issue of public interest in a one-sided or a nuanced manner will unequivocally reflect the professional standards of the given channel, and of course also its beliefs about enforcing the public's right to information.

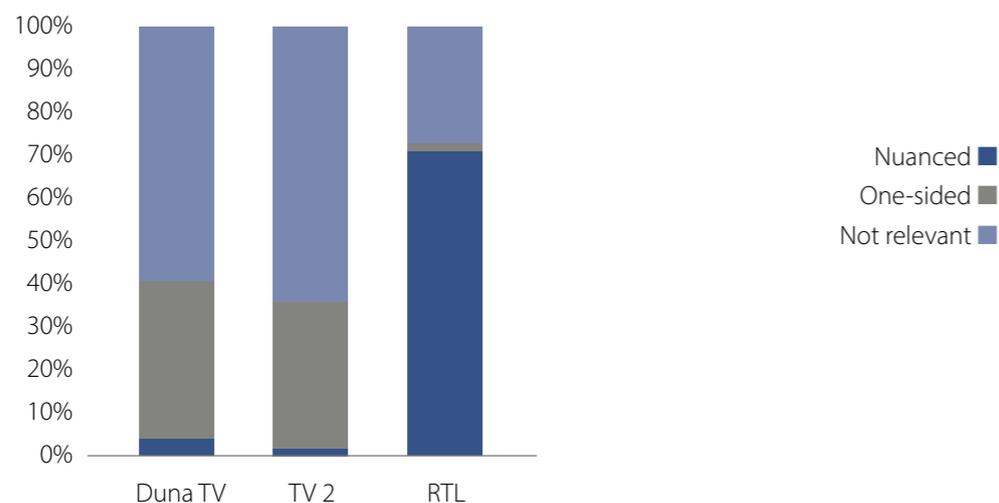
Figure 27. The distribution of news items examined based on whether the given channel presented the item in a one-sided or a nuanced manner¹² (%)



The figure above clearly shows that a nuanced and diverse presentation is a key editorial policy at RTL Klub, while neither TV2 nor Duna TV are aware of (or apply) such a policy.

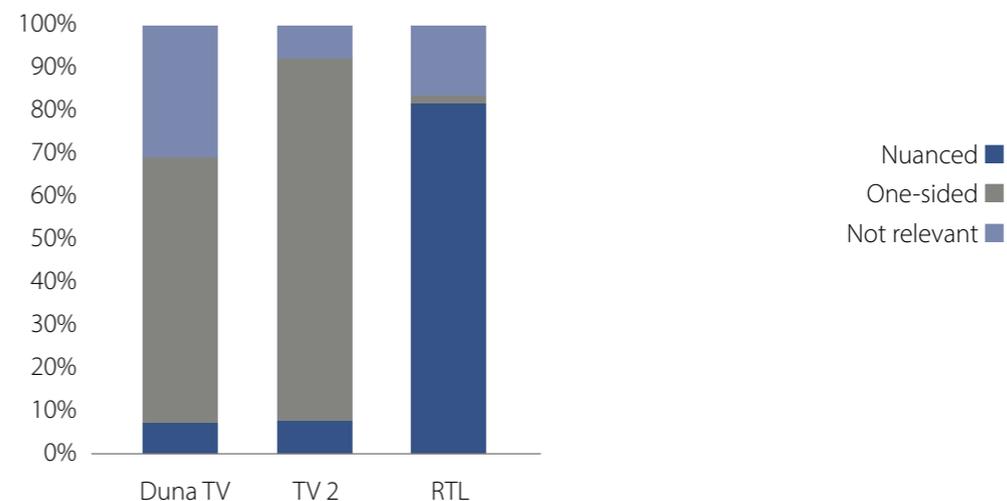
By contrast, in the news presenting the government side, both TV2 and Duna TV followed a policy of either presenting events that highlighted the government’s achievements (e.g. the inauguration of new factories, tax reductions, etc.) or presenting an event without acknowledging that there are relevant alternative views or interpretations concerning the given event. With respect to the opposition, one-sided negative coverage was also dominant.

Figure 28. The distribution of one-sided and nuanced presentations of news items about the government side



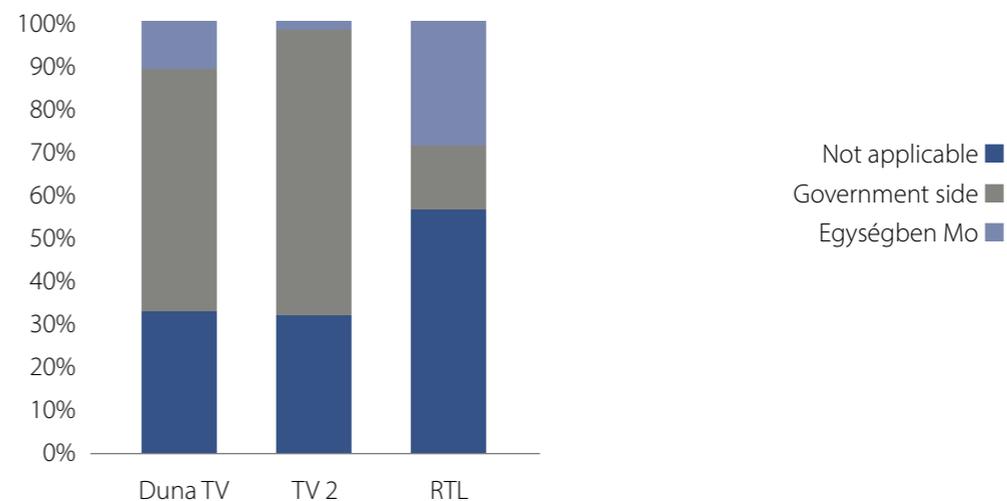
¹² We regarded news items as irrelevant when the underlying issue was not subject to dispute, and no other relevant and established fact, interpretation, or evaluation was associated with the given news.

Figure 29. The distribution of one-sided and nuanced presentations of news about the opposition



The frequency with which the given channels covered those events concerning the competing political blocs that were deemed as important also reflects an important newsroom policy. How much a channel focuses on presenting issues that are key components of the political agenda of either bloc – as opposed to issues that cannot be exclusively associated with the agenda of either side – is also revealing.

Figure 30. The distribution of news items covered based on their alignment with the respective political agendas of the competing political blocs (%)



Sources

On the whole, the news shows did not follow an established practice in designating their sources; they cite sources in an ad hoc manner that makes it difficult to discern an underlying policy. In our coding, we only recorded sources that were specifically named and designated in the news.

The results clearly show that the coordinated operation of the pro-government news empire plays a major role in the information these media outlets disseminate.¹³ The pro-government channels referred 147 times as sources to media that shared their partisan outlook, while there were only seven instances when they cited media that they consider as opposition media. RTL Klub generally cited independent media as sources (regarded by the government as opposition media), in a total of 15 cases.

Table 1. The most cited print or online new sources (number)

| | Duna Tv | TV2 | RTL |
|---------------|---------|-----|-----|
| Origo | 48 | 8 | 1 |
| Magyar Nemzet | 27 | 13 | 1 |
| Index | 10 | 11 | 0 |
| Mandiner | 9 | 7 | 1 |
| Telex | 4 | 2 | 6 |
| Metropol | 5 | 3 | 0 |
| bennfentes.hu | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| 444 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Direkt36 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| 24.hu | 1 | 0 | 4 |

Duna TV and TV2 addressed the lacking presentation of opposition politicians by featuring them in their news shows using illustrations that were often no more than still images or earlier recordings, without showing the relevant context. To find these, the news shows we analysed drew on materials that appeared in the news shows of ATV: Duna used ATV's shows 25 times and TV2 used them 15 times, while they both also occasionally resorted to excerpts taken from Partizán (12 times by Duna, and 3 times by TV2). The images thus used were often the same and were shown over and over again.

As a news source, the Hungarian news agency was entirely relegated to the background, with Duna TV citing the state news agency MTI on nine occasions, while the commercial channels referred to it 2-3 times each.

¹³ The references to outside sources can also be used to circumvent the strict legal rules that apply to television commentary: The anchors may not attach critical comments or explanations that evaluate the underlying news item, but they can do so by quoting outside sources.

Content

Our research very rarely dealt with the contents and the content-related issues involving the news shows. Insofar as we recorded content-related elements, those served an auxiliary function, namely to measure balance in the overall coverage.

The news items dealing with Ukraine that also presented the activities and opinions of Hungarian politicians made up roughly a quarter of all the coded items on all three television channels we tracked (Duna TV: 24%; TV2: 26%; RTL: 22%).

A prominent subject matter in the news of TV2 was the character assassination of opposition politicians, attempts at discrediting them (14%). This was also typical of the news shows of Duna TV (10%), but it was not characteristic of RTL news shows at all. None of the television channels we monitored featured news items that focused on discrediting a government politician.

The referendum campaign that ran in parallel with the election campaign was barely featured among the news items during the period we investigated. A mere 1% of news on Duna TV, and 2% each of TV2 and RTL Klub news, were explicitly aimed at reporting about the so-called child protection referendum.

As we discussed above, the presentation of the opposition in the case of Duna TV and TV2 was decisively negative. If we take a closer look at what this negative context entailed, it often implied that the news items frequently centred on the opposition politicians (their persons) rather than the opposition's manifesto and policies. By contrast, reporting about the government side was more likely to feature events and policy measures taken, while they were substantially less likely to home in on specific persons.

In presenting the government's activities, it was typical of all three channels to focus on discussing the objective aspects of events and happenings. When it came to the presentation of the opposition, by contrast, such an objective presentation was primarily typical of RTL Klub's coverage, while it was far less typical of Duna TV (TV2 completely refrained from an objective presentation of the opposition).

Figure 31. The key characteristics of the contents of news items presenting the government side (%)

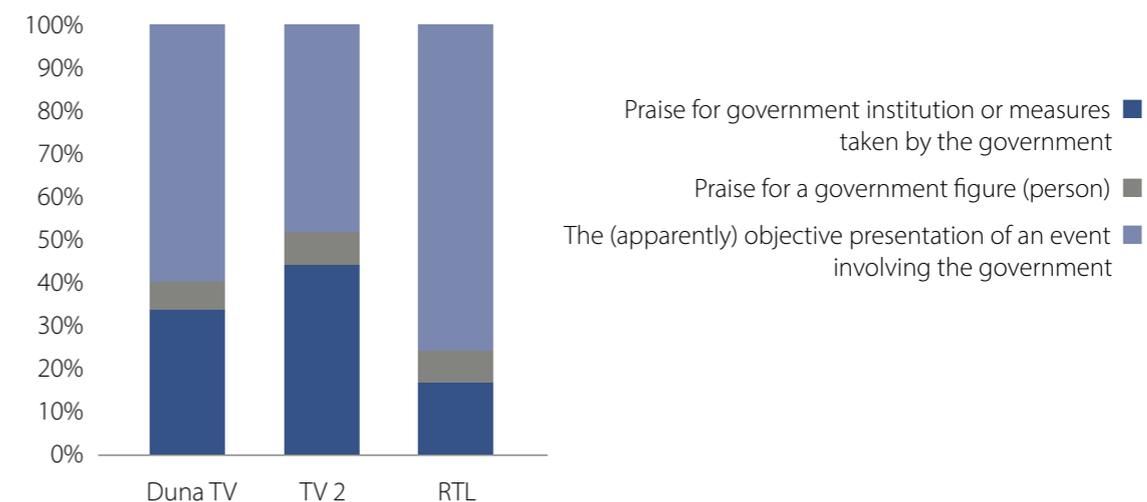


Figure 32: The key characteristics of the contents of news items presenting the opposition

