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Shocking Experience: How Politicians' Issue Strategies Are Shaped by an External Shock During Campaigns

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Abstract

In this article, we focus on how the issue strategies of political leaders are influenced by an external shock that completely changes the public agenda of the election campaign. The 2022 Hungarian parliamentary election campaign is a unique case to investigate this question, as Russia attacked Ukraine six weeks before the election day (April 3, 2022). The study aims to investigate whether the campaign's issue strategies changed due to this shocking event, and if so, what are the main directions of the changes. The examination relies on a manual content analysis of Hungarian party leaders' Facebook posts during the campaign, covering both the period before and after the outbreak of the war. First, based on the literature, we distinguish between different issue strategies such as issue ownership, issue stealing, "riding the wave," and multi-issue and issue-poor strategies. We categorize political leaders' issue strategies based on their issue focus before and after the external shock. Our results show that while war, economy, and foreign policy play a greater role in the communication of most political actors after February 24, there are remarkable differences between political actors. The communication of opposition party leaders seems to persist with their original issue strategies (issue-poor and multi-issue campaigns), while Viktor Orbán clearly changed his focus immediately after the invasion of Ukraine and ran a "riding the wave" campaign with a focus on war.

Keywords

campaign; content analysis; external shock; Facebook; Hungary; issue strategies; riding the wave strategy; war

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1. Introduction

Six weeks before the Hungarian parliamentary elections in 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. This event completely changed the context of the ongoing election campaign. The invasion was an unexpected shock

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for the public: It closely affected Hungary since Ukraine is a neighboring country with a significant Hungarian minority and because the Hungarian government has a rather close relationship with Russia. From a campaign strategy perspective, a crisis like this poses a major challenge for political actors: While they may have a professionally pre-designed and implemented issue strategy, an external shock drastically changes the campaign environment (Kreiss et al., 2017). In this explorative and descriptive study, we investigate how the issue strategies of political actors are shaped by an external shock that radically changes the entire public agenda.

The high degree of professionalization of political communication implies that campaigns usually follow a scripted approach, designed by experts, in line with the strategic interests of the respective actors (Kreiss et al., 2017). However, this approach contrasts with the idea of continuous adaptation and response to the changing political context (Kreiss, 2016). While the "seize the moment" approach is crucial for effective political action (Palonen, 2006), it requires flexibility, which might be challenging regarding the pre-planned issue attention strategies.

This dilemma is particularly evident in social media campaigning, which is a key area of contemporary political campaigning. On the one hand, political actors' communication is entirely under their own control and can reach their voters in an unmediated way, allowing them to implement a data-driven, carefully designed, and self-centered communication strategy (Bene et al., 2022). On the other hand, the "real-time" and interactive nature of these platforms (Kaun & Stiernstedt, 2014), driven by the logic of "popularity" (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013), encourages political actors to respond to their immediate environment, current events and the fluctuations of public mood (Kreiss, 2016).

Under normal circumstances, this dilemma can be easily resolved in practice. Political actors can respond to minor changes in the campaign environment without abandoning their overall strategy: When attention to an issue is at stake, they can pay more attention to the "topic of the day" while maintaining their overall issue focus (Kreiss et al., 2017). However, sometimes an external shock can drastically change the entire campaign environment, especially in terms of issue context, and a strategy developed in a completely different issue environment may fit poorly in the new political context. Accordingly, an external shock can be a great test of the flexibility of pre-planned campaign strategies and how they can be overridden by the urge to "seize the moment."

However, our knowledge is highly limited about the flexibility of issue campaign strategies, especially in the social media context. Most research treats campaign strategies empirically as static entities and focuses on the patterns of political actors' communication during the whole campaign (see Carsey, 2000). The few more dynamic approach mostly concentrates on how political competition (e.g., Banda, 2013) or the closeness of election day (e.g., Baumann et al., 2021) shape campaign strategies. It is, however, not investigated how the transformation of the external campaign context affects political actors' issue strategies.

In this research, we fill this gap by focusing on the unique case of the 2022 Hungarian general election campaign whose public agenda was strongly affected by the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war. In our explorative and descriptive study, we uncover the dynamics of political leaders' issue strategies during the campaign, focusing on how an external shock—the Russian invasion—affects their issue attention. While it is not common for major external shocks to occur during a campaign, in an era of polycrisis (Henig & Knight,

2023) and due to the scandal and moral outrage amplifying the role of social media platforms (Zulli, 2021), external shocks will likely become increasingly common in future campaigns. Therefore, our explorative study can provide important insights for understanding future campaigns affected by external shocks. Also, as an extreme case, it can show the degree of resilience of professionalized campaign strategies: if they are followed even in a radically different campaign environment, it can show that professionalized campaigns are largely resistant to their environment. Our study focuses on Facebook, one of the most important campaign platforms in Hungary (Bene & Farkas, 2022). To this end, we first differentiate between five ideal-typical issue strategies and in turn, longitudinally investigate in a descriptive way how these characterize political leaders' Facebook communication over three months before election day, one and a half before, and one and a half after the outbreak of the military conflict.

2. Issue Strategies in Political Campaigning

With the change in voting behavior, Western European social-structural voting turned to issue voting: The emphasis on social-structural characteristics such as class or religion became less important in voting, and issues such as the environment or migration played a much greater role, which subsequently led to greater issue competition between the parties (Green-Pedersen, 2007). Accordingly, the question of which issues parties should emphasize in the election campaign to appeal to voters and thus win elections became a priority (Banda, 2013). Consequently, several strategies can be distinguished based on political actors' attention to different issues—the present study differentiates five issue attention strategies.

First, "issue ownership" is a strategy that focuses on specific issues that the party "owns" for a long period (see Green-Pedersen, 2007). As Vavreck (2009, p. 17) describes, "ownership means your party is favorably associated with the issue or you have an electoral advantage on the issue." Accordingly, the key elements of this strategy are to be seen as competent and engaged in certain policy areas while paying attention to those issues that are positively associated with the party or have long-term positive associations with the party (Petrocik, 1996). Since political actors can reach their own supporters directly with their communication on social media, it seems strategically attractive to focus on owned issues on these platforms. These followers are usually their strongest supporters (Wojcieszak et al., 2022), whose sympathy is probably based, among other things, on the issues that belong to the party (Banda, 2021). Accordingly, several studies have shown that political actors place a strong emphasis on the issues they own in their social media communication (e.g., Sandberg, 2022). However, it is not entirely clear whether followers really like it when their political actors post about their issues: Positive (Reveilhac, 2023), negative (Bene, 2021), and null effects (Bene et al., 2022) on user engagement have been found in the literature.

Second, parties and candidates can campaign with an issue, which is "owned" by an opponent party (Banda, 2013). The aim of this "issue stealing" or "issue trespassing" strategy (see Holian, 2004; Norpoth & Buchanan, 1992) is to reduce the other party's issue ownership advantage by weakening voters' identification of the party as the only credible representative. This way, a party can direct attention to the differences in issue positions, instead of issue competence. The strategy can increase support among opposing partisans and does not influence support among co-partisans (Banda, 2021). Due to the viral logic of content dissemination, political actors' posts can easily reach non-supporters on social media platforms whose impressions about the links between issues and parties can be changed this way. This strategy can be also encouraged by the fact that some studies found that followers are keen to interact with political actors' posts on issues owned

by other parties, maybe because this content can help them to argue for their parties in online debates with partisans from the other parties (Bene, 2021; Reveilhac, 2023).

Third, when a party adopts the strategy of "riding the wave" (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1994), it focuses on responding to current and popular issues that are high on the public agenda (see Sigelman & Buell, 2004). Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1994, p. 337) argue that "by advertising on the major issues of the day, candidates are more likely to be seen as concerned, responsive, and informed." Furthermore, responding directly to currently debated issues can help influence public debate and the way issues are framed (Green-Pedersen & Mortensen, 2015). However, political actors face a dilemma when following this strategy, as their voters might react unfavorably if this overshadows the parties' own issues (Budge, 2015). In social media, where direct feedback is provided, individual preferences can even be tracked in real-time, and the popularity of certain topics can also be measured instantly (Ceron et al., 2016), "riding the wave" strategy can be easily, and effectively applied.

The literature on party issue strategies has focused primarily on strategies that emphasize only a few issues and explained the criteria by which an issue is prioritized in a political actor's strategy. However, we argue that a campaign does not necessarily have a strong issue focus from which two possible paths follow.

First, there are cases in which a party focuses not just on a few issues, but on several. This can be called a "multi-issue strategy," which is close to the broad-appeal strategy (Somer-Topcu, 2015): Aiming to reach out to a wide range of voters, political actors pay balanced attention to a large number of issues. It can include strategic ambiguity (Jarzabkowski et al., 2010) with vague issue positions but actors might take clear positions on various issues (Somer-Topcu, 2015). Parties focusing on multiple issues can reach diverse voters with different issue preferences, but the wide-ranging attention to multiple issues might appear superficial too. On social media, a multi-issue strategy can provide connectivity to a broad range of voters who can carry the various messages of political actors into their own social circles (see Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). Moreover, political actors can trust that the algorithms that filter content for personal relevance will find their messages with their issue-specific audiences.

Last, it is also possible that instead of specific policy issues, political actors focus more on other political content such as mobilization, personalized communication, or specific scandals. This can be considered as an "issue-poor strategy" since it pays limited attention to specific issues. The literature—especially in a social media context—supports the idea that people care less about issues and more about political personalities, values, and scandals (see Grabe et al., 2017). Accordingly, talking about oneself, generalities, or even mobilization can be a means of attention maximization or personalization, rather than talking about issues.

Table 1 summarizes how the attention in the listed five strategies is focused on issues.

As Stokes (1963, p. 372) argued, "different weights should be given different dimensions at different times." Accordingly, issue strategies can change, and the categories listed in Table 1 are not sharply separated. Issue strategies can be shaped by the ever-changing institutional and political context of elections (Simon, 2002), and an external shock can significantly alter the political context of a campaign.

Table 1. Conceptualization of issue strategies.

Name	No. of issues	What issues	Strategy	Goal
Issue-ownership	A few	Own	Paying attention to issues favorably tied to the party.	Being seen as competent in certain policy areas.
Issue-stealing/ passing	A few	Others	Weakening the voters' identification of that party as a credible or competent representative of that issue.	To spread ambiguity, and reduce the other party's issue ownership advantage: it is less about the difference in attention, and more about the difference in issue position.
Riding the wave	A few	Popular "hot" topic	Responding to current and popular issues, highlighting major issues of the day.	To influence the public debate and the framing of the issues.
Multi-issue	Several	Any type	Providing a balanced focus on several issues.	To create an omnipotent image and have an overarching political program; to reach more voters with different issue preferences.
Issue-poor	None	—	Paying less attention to issues, focusing on personalization, mobilization, etc.	Instead of issues, focus on political personalities, values, scandals, etc.

While it is well established that parties consciously choose their issue strategies, it is not known how dynamic these strategies are and how responsive they are to radical changes in the political agenda. It is an important question whether political actors stick to their carefully defined issue strategies even when the political environment changes significantly, or whether they react quickly to changing conditions by reshaping their issue strategies.

3. Political Communication and External Shocks

As Hay (1999) noted, a crisis is not only a period of fragmentation and disruption but also an epoch-making "moment of decisive intervention," therefore narratives are also important. The main sources of crisis narratives are leaders, who have the opportunity to reframe and capitalize on the disruptive nature of exogenous shocks (Körösényi et al., 2016). Accordingly, the crisis is a narrative construction. How an external shock becomes an event that circumscribes the political space depends on how political actors deal with it. From this perspective, it is useful to distinguish between the notions of exogenous shocks, which refer to shocking events, and crisis that refers to the narratives built around these events by political leaders and parties.

Political actors may place the external shock at the center of their issue strategies for two reasons (Körösényi et al., 2016). The first reason is that the leader adopts conventional crisis management practices to reduce the degree of contingency as quickly as possible and overcome the crisis. In this case, politicians frame the shock as an anomaly rather than a systemic problem. However, there is also the possibility that political actors try to raise the stakes, uncertainty, and urgency by interpreting the crisis as a systemic failure that can only be dealt with by the leader. Either way, they need to emphasize the issue to have a good position in the

competition for the dominant crisis narrative. However, leaders can also choose not to react to shocking events and stick to their original policy position and issue strategy (Calca & Gross, 2019)—especially during a campaign—which was already carefully designed. Further, the coherence and consistency of an issue campaign can be an important asset to risk over a shocking event whose significance and outcome are, by definition, difficult to predict.

There is little research on how political actors respond to an external shock outside of campaigns or when it occurs long before campaigns. A much-discussed case is the 2001 terrorist attack in the United States (e.g., Gershkoff & Kushner, 2005; Greenstein, 2002). The Bush administration succeeded in amplifying the sense of crisis, dominating news coverage and capitalizing politically on the shock (John et al., 2007). While the administration's communications initially focused primarily on domestic security, the external threat became a major issue over time, introducing the "war on terror" and the "axis of evil" frames, and thus gaining public support for the administration's legislative proposals (Gershkoff & Kushner, 2005; John et al., 2007), transferring his high policy competence ratings to other issues as well (Green & Jennings, 2012). The attack also affected the 2002 congressional campaign, as candidates paid more attention to issues related to 9/11, such as foreign affairs and the military, and they reacted to the shock consistent with the issue ownership of their parties—Republicans included foreign policy and military issues more frequently in their ads (Strach & Sapiro, 2011).

A more recent example of an external shock is the Covid-19 pandemic, which has influenced political communication worldwide, with different reactions from leaders; e.g., Italy's prime minister formulated a storytelling crisis narrative that provided hope while boosting public support and trust in the government (Mazzoleni & Bracciale, 2021). This was also the case in Germany and Australia, where leaders applied conventional crisis management techniques and managed to strengthen their leadership by often speaking personally about the crisis (van Aelst, 2021). Meanwhile, the US President compared the virus to regular flu and advocated keeping the economy open but he also admitted privately the lethality of the coronavirus (Yang & Bennett, 2021). The Brazilian president pursued this strategy even more consistently, questioning public health infrastructure legitimacy without proposing policy solutions, and even accusing left-wing activists of seemingly increasing the mortality rate (Davis, 2021).

As can be seen, the literature suggests that politicians respond to external shocks with different strategies. However, there is no research on issue strategies in cases where the exogenous shock does not occur before but during the election campaign and requires an immediate response from politicians. This is particularly important in the era of professionalized political communication, where campaigns are highly planned. Reacting promptly to an external shock is therefore a major strategic challenge and the response given can have a major impact on the election outcome. This study aims to fill this gap by examining how Hungarian political leaders reacted to the Russian invasion of Ukraine during the 2022 campaign period and changed or stuck to their issue agenda. Accordingly, our research question is formulated as follows:

> RQ1: How did the issue strategies of the 2022 Hungarian election campaign change before and after the Russian invasion of Ukraine?

As this is an understudied area, our research follows a descriptive and exploratory logic. In differentiating issue strategies, we adopt a descriptive focus and aim to categorize political actors' strategies based on the five

strategic approaches discussed above. However, as previously mentioned, these are not clear-cut strategies and there are no existing and validated indicators to classify campaign strategies. Our approach allows for the interpretation of nuances and confluences in the strategies. In addition, in terms of temporal dynamics, we follow an explorative logic with an open research question that allows us to take an open-ended explorative approach to describe the role of external shocks in campaign strategies.

4. The Hungarian Case

The Hungarian political system can be described as a plebiscitary leader democracy (Körösényi et al., 2020), which is "democratic in form but authoritarian in substance" (Weber, 1978, as cited in Körösényi et al., 2020, p. 22) with a charismatic authority legitimized by competitive elections. The elections can be described as "free but not fair," meaning that the act of voting is free, but the playing field is highly "unbalanced" in terms of resources, media access, and electoral rules (see Batory, 2014). To defeat Fidesz, which had by then won three elections with a two-thirds majority, in the 2022 Hungarian national election campaign, a six-party opposition coalition, United for Hungary—with Jobbik, the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), Politics Can be Different (LMP), the Democratic Coalition (DK), the Momentum Movement (MM), Everybody's Hungary Movement (MMM), and Párbeszéd (Dialogue)—was formed.

Social media, especially Facebook, play an important role in the election campaign for both the government and the opposition. The latter has long used Facebook as its main communication platform, where it can compensate for its limited media access (Bene et al., 2023). The government has increasingly turned to this platform since 2019. Accordingly, Facebook played a key role and was the most important social media platform in the 2022 campaign (Bene & Farkas, 2022). Further, Facebook is the most widely used social media platform in Hungary with 53 percent of the online population consuming news there, while this share is much lower in any other social network sites (9% on TikTok, 7% on Instagram, and 5% on Twitter; Newman et al., 2023). Additionally, Facebook provides a platform to examine parties' and candidates' campaign communication strategies and tactics without any prior journalistic selection having taken place.

In addition, the 2022 election campaign was shaped by another factor: Six weeks before election day, Russia attacked Ukraine and the war became a dominant topic of the campaign (Scheppele, 2022).

5. Method

In this study, we analyzed the Facebook communication of Prime Minister candidates Viktor Orbán and Péter Márki-Zay as well as the opposition leaders Ferenc Gyurcsány (DK), Péter Jakab (Jobbik), Anna Donáth (Momentum), Ágnes Kunhalmi (MSZP), Máté Kanász-Nagy (LMP), and Tímea Szabó (P). The data was collected between January 1 and April 3, 2022 (election day). Posts were collected every day, using CrowdTangle.

We conducted a manual content analysis of the politicians' published posts (N = 2914). The unit of analysis is the entire post, both verbal and visual elements are included. To cover a broad range of policy issues in the posts, the coded variables distinguish between 24 policy topics and an additional variable, "other policies." The variables appear as bivalent dummy variables in the database, i.e., if they are present, they are assigned

the value 1, and 0 if they are not present. An issue to be coded present needed to be mentioned in the posts. The coding scheme is available in an online repository (https://bit.ly/CamforS_OSF).

Coding was performed by four undergraduate students who participated in a two-session coding training course. To avoid systematic coder bias, the posts were randomly distributed among the four coders. The reliability of the coding was tested on a random sample ($N = 135$), resulting in a Brennan-Prediger kappa coefficient of over 0.8 for almost all variables, except for the public policy of the war (0.77).

As a dynamic perspective, the analysis focused on the presence of each topic in 10-day blocks. There are nine blocks in total, and the first day of block 6 falls on February 22, the eve on which Putin announced the entry of peacekeepers into the breakaway states, and two days later the invasion began—this block can be considered the date of the external shock.

Issue ownership (see Table 2) was defined based on previous research. Accordingly, the leading issues for the governing parties are migration (Bíró-Nagy, 2022), family (Sata, 2023), and energy policies due to the focus on reducing utilities (Böcskei, 2016). Corruption (Bene, 2021), education, and health (Dobos et al., 2018) have long been key issues for the opposition; and also environment for the Green parties (LMP, PM). As for the "hot" topic, the most important current issue of the 2022 campaign was the economy due to the serious economic difficulties caused by record-high inflation.

6. Findings

Our findings show that the role of policy issues in campaigns varies among political leaders and within campaigns (see Table 3 and Figure 1). In general, for all political actors, the proportion of issue-related posts gradually decreases just before election day, but the outbreak of war temporarily interrupts this trend. As for the degree of policy focus, one opposition leader, Ferenc Gyurcsány, has an extremely low issue presence in his Facebook campaign in both periods, addressing policy topics only in the third and fourth of his posts in these periods respectively, which is also true for Péter Jakab in the second period. To a lesser extent, Viktor Orbán (only in the pre-war period), Péter Márki-Zay, Péter Jakab, and Ágnes Kunhalmi also pursued a

Table 2. The number of politicians' published posts.

| Politician	Period		Total	Owned issues
	Pre-war	War		
T. Szabó (P)	172	231	403	education; healthcare
M. Kanász-Nagy (LMP)	92	132	224	environment; education
Á. Kunhalmi (MSZP)	88	113	201	education
P. Jakab (Jobbik)	141	243	384	education; healthcare
A. Donáth (Momentum)	169	174	343	corruption
F. Gyurcsány (DK)	52	103	155	—
P. Márki-Zay (opp. PM cand.)	364	511	875	corruption
V. Orbán (Fidesz)	115	214	329	migration; family; energy
Total	1193	1721	2914	

Table 3. Main indicators of political leaders' issue strategy before and after the outbreak of the Ukraine–Russia war.

Leader	Period	No. 1 topic (% of all posts)	No. 2 topic (% of all posts)	Other topics (% of all posts)	Number of topics mentioned > 5% of all posts	% of posts mentioning policy issues	Strategy
V. Orbán (Fidesz)	before 22/02	foreign (13%)	economy (8%)	26%	4	50%	issue-poor with moderate "riding-the-wave"
	from 22/02	war (41%)	immigration (14%)	30%	5	55%	"riding-the-wave"
P. Márki-Zay (PM Opp.)	before 22/02	corruption (12%)	economy (10%)	31%	5	48%	issue-poor with moderate issue ownership
	from 22/02	war (20%)	foreign (14%)	34%	3	45%	issue-poor with moderate "riding-the-wave"
F. Gyurcsány (DK)	before 22/02	foreign (8%)	health (4%)	21%	1	33%	issue-poor
	from 22/02	war (16%)	foreign (10%)	9%	2	24%	issue-poor with moderate "riding-the-wave"
A. Donáth (Momentum)	before 22/02	corruption (16%)	education (14%)	50%	7	66%	multi-issue with moderate issue ownership
	from 22/02	war (33%)	foreign (22%)	51%	6	76%	multi-issue with moderate "riding-the-wave"
P. Jakab (Jobbik)	before 22/02	economy (12%)	health (7%)	24%	3	46%	issue-poor
	from 22/02	war (9%)	immigration (4%)	18%	1	24%	issue-poor with moderate "riding-the-wave"
Á. Kunhalmi (MSZP)	before 22/02	education (15%)	economy (7%)	25%	4	40%	issue-poor with moderate issue ownership
	from 22/02	war (20%)	foreign (9%)	31%	2	46%	issue-poor with moderate "riding-the-wave"
M. Kanász-Nagy (LMP)	before 22/02	environment (23%)	education (9%)	53%	6	66%	multi-issue with stronger issue ownership
	from 22/02	war (21%)	energy (16%)	58%	6	61%	multi-issue with moderate "riding-the-wave"
T. Szabó (P)	before 22/02	education (15%)	health (13%)	49%	5	60%	multi-issue with moderate issue ownership
	from 22/02	war (17%)	economy (12%)	39%	3	50%	issue-poor with moderate "riding-the-wave"

low-topic strategy, mentioning policy issues in less than half of their posts. In contrast, a heavy issue-centric campaign characterizes Anna Donáth, Máté Kanász Nagy, and Tímea Szabó (only in the pre-war period).

When it comes to the dominance of specific issues, which characterizes issue ownership, issue stealing, and riding the wave strategies, we could not find any political leaders in the pre-war period, who ran a campaign with a strong issue focus. The most important topics appear in 12–16% of all posts of each politician, except for the issue-poor campaign of Ferenc Gyurcsány, and Máté Kanász-Nagy, who refers to environmental issues in almost every fourth post. However, these key issues are not particularly prominent in the overall campaign. Moreover, these key issues do not seem to be particularly prominent even within the respective candidates' campaigns. As shown by the share of other policy issues, the leaders talk about other issues more often than their top issues; this is true even for the leader with the strongest issue focus, Máté Kanász-Nagy. As suggested by the number of issues that were touched upon at least in the 5% of all posts, a few opposition leaders such as Anna Donáth, Tímea Szabó (only in the pre-war period), and Máté Kanász-Nagy pursued a multi-issue campaign strategy with an intensive discussion of numerous policy topics. However, in the case of Kanász-Nagy, this strategy is complemented by a more pronounced issue ownership focus in the first period. Interestingly, the top issue receives a similar level of attention in issue-poor (Viktor Orbán, Péter Márki-Zay, Péter Jakab, Ágnes Kunhalmi, but not Ferenc Gyurcsány) and multi-issue strategies.

Among the leaders of the opposition parties, the leading—but not overly dominant—topics in the pre-war period are "owned" issues (see Table 2): corruption (Péter Márki-Zay, Anna Donáth), education (Anna Donáth,
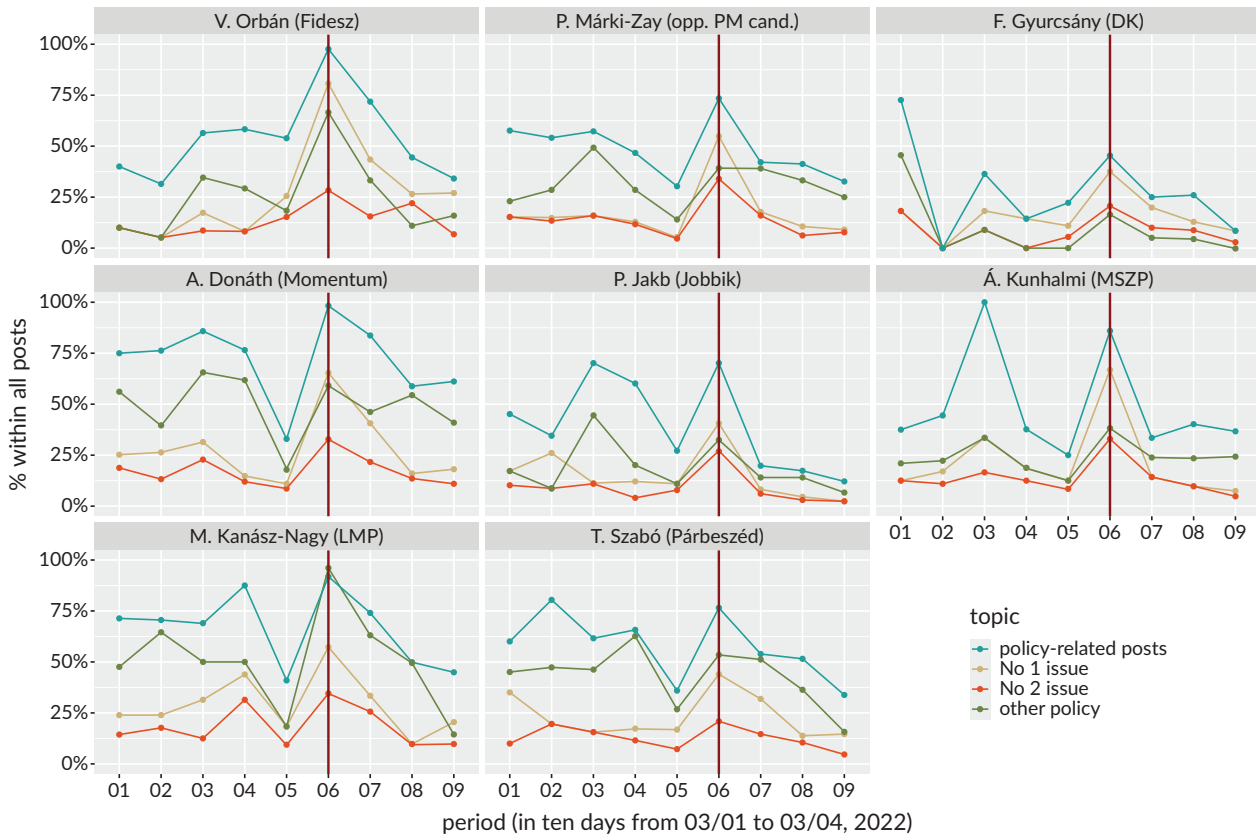
Figure 1. Temporal dynamics of the presence of issue-related posts, top issues, and other issues in political leaders' Facebook posts (10-day periods).

Ágnes Kunhalmi, Máté Kanász-Nagy, Tímea Szabó), healthcare (Péter Jakab, Tímea Szabó), and environment for the green party (Máté Kanász-Nagy). However, because these leading issues do not dominate their campaigns, the issue ownership strategy is moderate and only a complementary and subordinate strategy to the dominant issue-poor or multi-issue campaign strategies for these opposition leaders. In addition, some top politicians (Péter Márki-Zay, Péter Jakab) are paying more attention to the "hot" issue of the economy as a moderate "riding-the-wave" complementary strategy to their multi-issue and issue-poor strategy. The top issue for Viktor Orbán in the pre-war period is foreign policy. However, he has only discussed this topic intensively in the last twenty days before the outbreak of the war, so in this case, it can be interpreted as a moderate "riding the wave" approach within the dominant issue-poor strategy. In the weeks leading up to the outbreak of war, the growing tensions highlighted the role of foreign policy, so it was clearly a hot topic in those days. Previously, he also mostly focused on his "own" issues such as energy, family policy, and the hot topic of the economy. To summarize, the pre-war period was dominated by multi-issue and issue-poor strategies with moderate issue ownership focus in the case of oppositional leaders and a moderate move from issue ownership toward the "riding-the-wave" strategy in the case of Viktor Orbán.

The outbreak of the war causes significant changes in each actor's issue strategy. From that point, war is the top issue for each leader (see Table 1 and Figure 2), however, there are variations in its role within the overall campaign strategy. Seemingly, oppositional party leaders smoothly integrate the topic of war into their
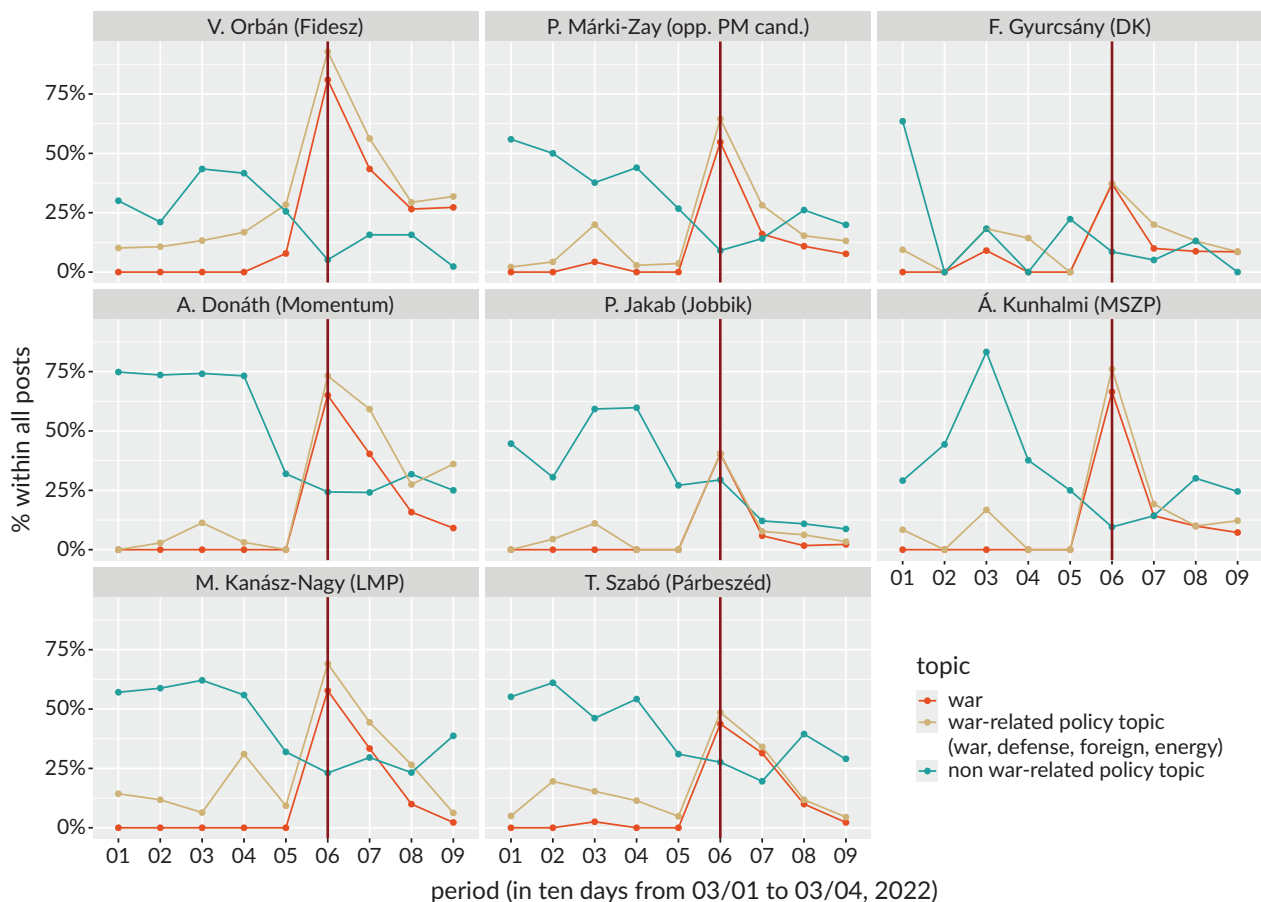
Figure 2. Temporal dynamics of the presence of the topic of war, topics associated with war (war, defense, foreign, energy), and non-war-related topics in political leaders' Facebook posts (10-day periods).

existing campaign strategy. Multi-issue campaigners such as Máté Kanász-Nagy and Anna Donáth still discuss a lot of policy issues, but their moderate issue ownership has been replaced by a moderate "riding-the-wave" strategy by prioritizing war and foreign policy rather than their own issues. Péter Márki-Zay, Ágnes Kunhalmi, and Ferenc Gyurcsány act similarly within their existing issue-poor campaign, while Tímea Szabó and Péter Jakab significantly decrease their overall policy focus at the same time.

A remarkably different approach is demonstrated by the incumbent PM, Viktor Orbán: After the outbreak of the war, he completely replaced his issue-poor campaign with a highly war-focused strategy. While he also touches upon other issues, the topic of war clearly dominates his Facebook campaign. It is telling that in each 10-day segment after the outbreak of the military conflict, the topic of war was much more prominent than all other policy topics together in his communication (Figure 2). In the case of oppositional leaders, a more balanced picture is unfolded, and other policy topics are frequently more highlighted than the topic of war or its associated policy fields (defense, foreign policy, energy). The temporal dynamic is also telling here: while the presence of the war topic gradually decreases over time, it stabilizes at a high level for Orbán and remains the key issue until the very end of the campaign. In contrast, most opposition leaders let the topic largely overwritten by other issues soon after the outbreak of the war. For Viktor Orbán, 27% of all posts are about the war in the last two 10-day periods of the campaign, and any other policy topics appear only in the 16% and 2% of published content, respectively. Anna Donáth is the only one who keeps up with Viktor Orbán in discussing issues related to war (but not the topic of war in itself), but she still insists on keeping her multi-issue profile and not subsuming the campaign under this prominent topic.

To sum up, it seems that all leaders responded to the external crisis by changing their issue strategy accordingly, but the degree of revision differs across opposition leaders and the prime minister. The formers insisted on their original approach to the role of issues in their campaign whether it be a multi-issue or issue-poor approach, and they only changed their moderate issue focus from issue ownership to a "riding-the-wave" strategy. In contrast, Viktor Orbán reconsidered his own campaign and replaced the issue-poor strategy with a strong "riding-the-wave" campaign which is largely about the reactions to the external crisis. The temporal patterns of this campaign also showed that he was the only leader who started to adapt his strategy even before the shocking event by putting more emphasis on foreign policy in the shadow of the emerging diplomatic conflict at the border of Ukraine. Actually, as suggested by Figure 2, he started to focus on the topic of war in the 10 days right before the outbreak of the military conflict: while no other leaders mentioned this topic in this period, it appeared in 8% of the Orbán's posts making it his second most important topic after foreign policy in the last 10 days before Russia attacked Ukraine.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

In this descriptive and explorative study, we have investigated how an external shock that drastically changes the campaign environment affects the campaign strategies of political actors. In such a situation, there is a tension between the professionalized campaign approach and the perspective of 'seizing the moment' (Kreiss et al., 2017). Political actors need to decide to what extent they will abandon their carefully crafted issue campaign strategy to provide an effective response to the external shock. As the war between Ukraine and Russia broke out in the middle of the 2022 Hungarian general election campaign, this particular case provided a unique opportunity to examine the issue strategies of political actors before and after the event that radically changed the public agenda.

Our findings show that the external shock affected each leader's issue strategy but they differed in the extent to which they changed their issue focus. While opposition leaders integrated the topic of war into their existing issue strategy, Orbán transformed his approach and replaced his issue-poor campaign with one largely focused on war. Moreover, he started to modify his issue strategy right before the outbreak of the war as a response to the growing tension at the Ukraine–Russia border. In contrast, opposition leaders did not really focus on the situation before the shocking event. Research suggests that government parties have more limited opportunities when choosing their campaign topics or adjusting their issue strategies during election campaigns compared to opposition parties as they are responsible for political decisions (Tresch et al., 2018). However, the outbreak of the war is a unique situation, as it does not require immediate policy reforms from the Hungarian government, therefore, both opposition and government parties can react more freely to this exogenous shock.

This receptivity to the issue is remarkable because, at the time of the outbreak of the war, this issue seemed to be less favorable for Viktor Orbán than for the opposition leaders. Firstly, one of the most divisive issues of the last decade has been Hungary's position in relations between the Western world and Russia. Orbán has long been attacked by the opposition for his close relations with Putin and Russia. They have been arguing that Russia represents a security risk which has been denied by the government party emphasizing instead the economic benefits of this relationship. To summarize, the invasion challenged one of the fundamental ideas of Orbán's foreign policy and gave support to an old opposition concern. Secondly, the war led to a huge wave of refugees, challenging the government's strong anti-immigration rhetoric (Bíró-Nagy, 2022). Despite these challenges, Orbán put this issue at the center of his campaign, while opposition leaders did not, although it fitted well with their previous communication. In this way, the prime minister had a head start in interpreting the external shock and his crisis narrative: the ruling party stood for peace while the opposition would embroil the country in war, and was able to dominate the campaign.

While we cannot evaluate the effectiveness of these issue strategies and the degree of adaption to the external shock, it is important to note that Orbán's political success is often attributed to his strong ability to adapt to changing political conditions. Palonen's (2006) idea of "seizing the moment" is directly echoed by one of the leading consultants of Viktor Orbán arguing that "ruling the moment" is one of the cornerstones of Orbán's politics (see Nagy, 2015), which is reflected in his crisis management. Crisis narratives are an important part of his communication since crises favor charismatic leadership which is the foundation of the regime (see Körösényi et al., 2020). Orbán's ability to respond to unexpected situations and adapt to existing challenges has allowed him to gain an upper edge in defining and interpreting cases. The 2022 election campaign confirmed this idea since, unlike other leaders, he could transform his entire campaign strategy on the spur of the moment.

Nonetheless, it seems that Orbán is the exception because the campaign strategies were relatively resistant even when the campaign environment drastically changed. Our study showed that political leaders insist on the main elements of their pre-defined issue strategies and make only minor corrections, even in cases when the external shock seemingly fits well their overall and long-term political narratives. This observation indicates that the highly planned character of professionalized political communication may decrease political actors' adaption ability (Kreiss, 2016). However, future research is needed to uncover whether a more coherent and self-consistent campaign or a faster adaptation to actual situations, "ruling of the moment," is the more effective strategy. Also, future studies should find and test structural explanations for these behavior, because certain types of political actors may be more flexible than others.

Naturally, our research has some limitations. Although the 2022 Hungarian general election campaign is a unique case to investigate the dynamics of issue strategies, findings cannot be automatically generalized to other campaign contexts. Although the Russian military invasion was an exceptional shock which is not typical in other campaigns, smaller but still important scandals and unexpected events frequently appear in campaigns all over the world where the question of issue attention dynamic can be explored. Also, in the age of polycrisis (Henig & Knight, 2023), it can be more common for external shocks to occur during campaigns. Another important limitation is that our attention is limited to issue strategies. While issue attention is a key element of campaign strategies, they also have other important ingredients such as emotional dynamics, mobilization strategy, etc. which are not touched upon here.

With these limitations in mind, our research yielded important insights into the dynamics of political campaigns and it showed that political leaders give different strategic responses under similar political situations.

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Conflict of Interests

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