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Bendegúz Plesz & András Körösényi

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# The opportunities and constraints of successful heresthetical strategies: attitudes, identities, and the framing of the Russian-Ukrainian war in Hungary

Bendegúz Plesz <sup>a,b</sup> and András Körösi <sup>a,b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Institute for Political Science, HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences, Budapest, Hungary; <sup>b</sup>Faculty of Law, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary

## ABSTRACT

Heresthetic and emphasis framing are essential techniques for inducing and shaping public opinion in political communication. The results of a public opinion survey experiment (N = 1000) show that success is highly dependent on the dimension of judgment. Namely, the strategic framing of economic interests, security and justification are effective dimensions, whereas the identity dimension is resistant to framing. Discussing the theoretical implications, we argue that in a realist, empirically grounded theory of democracy, in addition to the emphasis on political identity, heresthetic (and framing) will play an essential role as a means of manipulation by political leaders.

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Heresthetic; framing; identity politics; Russian-Ukrainian war; Viktor Orbán

## 1. Introduction

In 2022, against all expectations, Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party won a landslide victory in parliament, winning a two-thirds majority for the fourth time in a row. Political analysts have offered several factors that might have contributed to this victory, such as Fidesz's vast resource dominance, control over the more significant part of the media, and other authoritarian elements of the political regime that limit democratic competition. This paper analyses an uncovered aspect of Fidesz's campaign strategy. We focus on Fidesz's heresthetic or framing manoeuvres on an issue that became crucial during the election campaign after the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The central research question of our paper concerns the causal relation between the Rikerian heresthetical manipulation of the perceptual dimension of issues, namely the perception and evaluation of the Russian-Ukrainian war, and the successful formation of public opinion. Our findings reveal new aspects of successful heresthetical strategies, highlight the different potentials in micro- and macro-political framing and unfold the role of posing a heresthetical dilemma in an electoral campaign.

**CONTACT** Bendegúz Plesz  plesz.bendeguz@tk.hu

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We have three aims in our research.

First, we aim to explore the opportunities and constraints of heresthetical strategies in different judgement dimensions. We rely strongly on Willaim Riker's (1983, 1986, 1996) concept of heresthetics and on the framing-research provided by George Lakoff (2011), Dennis Chong and James Druckman (2007a, 2007b, 2010, 2011, 2013). Heresthetic and emphasis framing are essential techniques for inducing and shaping public opinion in political communication. Surveying the perception of the Russian-Ukrainian war in Hungary in the autumn of 2022, we explore which interpretative dimensions offer a space for shaping citizens' preferences and which serve as limitations. Our results reinforce previous research findings (Lecheler and de Vreese 2019) that framing can be widely used to shape citizens' opinions and preferences; however, its effectiveness is highly dependent on the particular dimension of framing. Focusing on the dilemmas of rhetoric and heresthetic, i.e. the opportunities and constraints of successful reasoning in different dimensions of judgement, we follow the direction taken by Jerit (2008), Wedeking (2010), and Körösényi et al. (2022). After presenting the possible heresthetic strategies (choice of the best dimension for rhetoric; micro- and macro-political framing) and their empirical context and dimensions, we will examine what makes it possible to manufacture consent for the chosen direction of action and its constraints. Our central research question (RQ) concerns the opportunities and constraints that each dimension of judgement offers to political actors in shaping public opinion. Our analysis is an ex-post investigation of the strength of the main frames used by politicians and social commentators framing the Russian-Ukrainian war in the 2022 Hungarian election discourse. Based on theoretical considerations and the empirical context, we have chosen four perceptual dimensions (or dimensions of judgement) framing the war: *security, economic interest, justification, and identity*. The results show that the success of framing is highly dependent on the dimension of judgement applied. Namely, the strategic framing of economic interests, security, and justification have proven to be highly effective dimensions, whereas the identity dimension was resistant to framing.

Second, we aim to connect the emerging problem of identity politics to heresthetic. Previous research has shown the increasing role of group and/or partisan identity in electoral behaviour and the diminishing the role of issue politics and rhetoric argumentation in the formation of electoral party preferences (Achen and Bartels 2016; Finkel et al. 2020; Iyengar and Kinder 2010; Mason 2018). We aim to explore the extent to which political identity can become a constraining factor, as opposed to framing or heresthetic shaping of public opinion. In order to connect identity politics to the problem of heresthetic, we make a distinction between short-term heresthetical maneuvers, for example, during a concrete election campaign, what we call micro-political heresthetic, and long-term or permanent macro-political heresthetical efforts that may reshape the entire spatial structure of the political palette (Gamson and Modigliani 1989).<sup>1</sup> While framing studies tend to focus on the short-term effects of persuasion and framing in a given context (micro-political level), we claim that the macro-political level is also present in the form of a broader context – a “deep frame” or cultural narrative, as Lakoff (2011) called it –, which is often the result of long-term framing efforts related to identity politics. In this perspective, political identity means perceiving political reality in a particular “deep frame” or through a particular

cultural narrative. The results of our survey show that there is no framing effect in the political identity dimension.

Third, we argue that Hungary provides a fascinating case study for heresthetical research due to the ambivalent and antagonistic political positions and framing strategies within the political elites and among citizens regarding the Russian-Ukrainian war. By highlighting the role of a heresthetical dilemma posed during the election campaign, we provide a new aspect to the explanation of the unexpected 2022 election results.

This study explores the opportunities and constraints of framing the Russian-Ukrainian war using a public opinion survey ( $N = 1000$ ). In the experiment, participants were randomly divided into two groups (500-500 people) and each group rated four statements on a 5-point scale, indicating how much they agreed with each statement. It was arranged that both groups received a statement on the four pre-defined judgement dimensions (security, economic interest, justification and group identity).

The paper is structured as follows. First, we present the theoretical–conceptual framework of our research, such as heresthetic, framing, social and political identity, and the perceptual and evaluative dimensions of the Russian-Ukrainian war included in our research (section 2). Second, by presenting a heresthetical dilemma posed during the 2022 Hungarian parliamentary election campaign, we highlight the political stakes of heresthetics and the empirical and theoretical relevance of our research (section 3). Third, we formulate our research questions and hypotheses (section 4). Fourth, we unpack the Hungarian context of our empirical research and, more specifically, the perceptions of the Russo-Ukrainian war in Hungary (section 5). Next, we describe the research design (section 6). Then we present the empirical findings (section 7), and finally, we discuss the results and the broader context of our research, including democratic theory relevance of our findings (section 8).

## 2. Theoretical and conceptual pillars

We have based our research on four theoretical and conceptual pillars. The first one is William Riker's concept of heresthetic. Riker (1986) argues that political actors can use two analytically distinct strategies to persuade the public: rhetoric and heresthetic. Whereas rhetoric is persuasion by eloquence or argumentation aimed at directly changing the recipient's preferences, heresthetic refers to the strategic manipulation of the decision-making situations. "Heresthetics, in [his] coinage of the word, has to do with the manipulation of the structure of tastes and alternatives within which decisions are made, both the objective structure and the structure as it appears to participants" (Riker 1983, 55).<sup>2</sup>

Contrary to the rigid analytical separation of rhetoric and heresthetic (where the former involves the manipulation of preferences and the latter the manipulation of decision alternatives), Riker (1983, 65) himself stressed that heresthetic is intertwined with rhetoric in practice. Heresthetic involves the manipulation of both alternatives and preferences at the same time. In other words, heresthetic is the manipulation of "the agenda and the salience of dimensions of judgement" (Riker 1983, 57).<sup>3</sup> I.e. heresthetic is a method to redefine the political situation. As Riker (1986, 34) argued, "... redefinition depends in part on the invention of a new viewpoint, but it also requires rhetorical success in persuading indifferent people to accept the novelty". We will focus on one ubiquitous way

of Riker's heresthetic: manipulating the perceptual dimension of issues. Therefore, heresthetic in our research refers to the choice or shaping of the perceptual dimension of an issue so that voters know and judge it within the dimension (frame) chosen by the manipulator. I.e. by heresthetic, we mean a shift of emphasis to a new dimension of perception, as in the heresthetical dilemma of the Hungarian election campaign, which introduced the security and economic interest dimensions as an alternative to the moral justification perspective in the evaluation of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

The second conceptual pillar of our research is framing. In psychology and communication studies, we can grasp the problem of heresthetics through emphasis framing (Chong and Druckman 2007c; Kahneman and Tversky 1984; Tversky and Kahneman 1981). Emphasis framing changes the perspective from which a given issue is perceived and judged. The concept of framing describes selective political communication that emphasises certain features or consequences of an issue or causes while ignoring other aspects. The emphasis on a particular communication aspect is informative and selective, influencing the recipient's evaluations. Frames provide access to particular perspectives, while others remain inaccessible. Entman defined framing as

essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient (...) in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (Entman 1993, 52).

Salience, therefore, lies at the heart of framing. Since framing is "98 percent unconscious" (Lakoff 2011, 95), we are concerned with *framing strategies* in an analytical sense. We consider the intentional or unconscious shaping of opinions or preferences through framing as a strategic action in an analytical sense and, thus, as manipulation.<sup>4</sup> We understand heresthetic as a kind of framing that shifts the emphasis to a new dimension of perception and/or evaluation.

The third pillar of our research is social and political identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979). It focuses on the motivation to belong to a group rather than the formalisation of a clear and coherent worldview. According to this argument, people are not primarily interested in politics and a social signalling mechanism better describes their behaviour. Their adoption of policies and positions serves to express their group membership and/or political identity. In contrast to elite persuasion, the policy adoption argument claims that elites do not need to worry much about strategically framing issues; they can shape the position of their followers by mere declaration (Broockman and Butler 2017). This policy adoption makes framing efforts unnecessary for the leaders of a political party and inefficient for rivals. Political identity prevail over issue-positions (Finkel et al. 2020; Kinder and Kalmoe 2017; Mason 2018). Based on previous research findings, we will take political identity as a constraining factor of heresthetic or the effective framing of public opinion.

In order to connect identity politics to the problem of heresthetic, we differentiate between short-term heresthetical maneuvers (micro-political heresthetic) and long-term or permanent (macro-political) heresthetical efforts that may reshape the entire political space (Gamson and Modigliani 1989). While the former is mainly related to individual (micro-political) public policy issues, the latter is typically understood in the politics dimension. Namely, macro-political heresthetic refers to the central axes of conflict in

the political arena, i.e. not only to government/opposition but to “us” and “them” and to the definition of “friend” and “enemy”. Identity politics is, therefore, primarily about radically (re)shaping a broader worldview or narrative of political interpretation (macro-level). Lakoff (2011, 96) has called this a “deep frame” or cultural narrative. In this research, we take cultural narrative as a manifestation of identity politics.

Finally, the perceptual and evaluative dimensions play a crucial role in our research. The role of these dimensions follows directly from Riker’s concept of heresthetic and Lakoff’s approach to framing. Based on their insights and empirical considerations, which will be explained later in the section on the Hungarian context, we consider four dimensions of perception and evaluation in our research: security (D1), economic interest (D2), justification (D3) and identity dimensions (D4). We assumed that the potential for framing might be different in them. For material public policy issues, such as security and economic interests, we assumed that citizens’ lack of contextual knowledge and technical competence regarding causal relationships in public policy details make them susceptible to framing effects. For value-laden perspectives such as identity and justification dimensions (partly also connected to identity) we assumed that long-term predispositions make citizens more resistant to direct framing effects.

### 3. The political stakes and the theoretical and empirical relevance of heresthetic

Before embarking on a detailed and systematic presentation of our research design, the wider empirical context and the research findings, we tell a story to highlight the political stake and the theoretical and empirical relevance of heresthetic in public opinion formation. The story is an episode from the 2022 Hungarian parliamentary election campaign at the beginning of the Russian attack on Ukraine, which proved fatal for the opposition to the Orbán government. Before this event, political analysts and pollsters expected a tight race, and all sides seriously considered the possibility of an opposition victory. However, this event was crucial in restructuring the agenda and changing electoral chances. Péter Márki-Zay, the opposition candidate for prime minister (chosen through primary elections), had to face an inconvenient question in a live video interview, the answer to which had a significant impact on the campaign and the outcome of the elections. The question was asked by a reporter from a (government-critical) media outlet, but Viktor Orbán himself could not have asked his challenger a more baffling question. Whether Péter Márki-Zay, as future prime minister, would send arms and Hungarian soldiers to help Ukraine against the Russian army posed a real heresthetical dilemma.<sup>5</sup> In other words, it was a dilemma to which any clear answer would – and did – lead to a split in his constituency and, thus, to a significant loss of votes. “Heresthetically, the dilemma-maker succeeds because he forces his opponent into a choice of alternatives such that, whichever alternative is chosen, the opponent will alienate some of his supporters” – as Riker put it (1983, 60).

Suppose Péter Márki-Zay replies that he would *not* send Hungarians to the Ukrainian front as soldiers. In that case, he will demobilise a section of the pro-Western opposition’s core voters and expose himself to further criticism from his coalition partners, who were already reluctant to accept his premiership. For the identity-based pro-Western opposition voters, moral identification with the West, freedom, and other Western values take

precedence over pragmatic or material arguments and perceived or actual economic interests. If, on the other hand, he answers yes to the question posed, he will lose voters with looser ties outside his narrower identity-based electoral base and those who are merely dissatisfied with the government and for whom material and existential security is more important. The starting assumption of our research is that this is precisely what happened. The creation of the heresthetical dilemma introduced security as a new perceptual dimension, and the government, by communicating mainly in this dimension, dramatically increased its salience, with which it was able to win over those swing voters who did not have a solid partisan or geopolitical identity “The point of a heresthetical act is to structure the situation so that the actor wins, regardless of whether or not the other participants are persuaded” in another perceptual or evaluative dimension, as Riker noted (1983, 60).

Orbán built his vote-maximising electoral strategy successfully on the exploitation of his opponent’s heresthetical dilemma that has been posed. He aimed, first, to secure his core constituency, i.e. his political identity-based camp, in the identity dimension (by distancing himself from the “pro-war” West and emphasising the government’s “pro-peace” position). Second, he aimed to expand his potential voter base far beyond his core voters by being “pro-peace” and, in particular, by emphasising the issue’s security dimension (salience). It is essential to add that Orbán introduced the security dimension through a concrete *existential* interpretation of peace. The typical campaign slogans were “Let us preserve the peace and security of Hungary” or “War supporters! [opposition politicians on the billboard] The left would drag us into war”.

#### 4. Research question and hypotheses

##### (1) The opportunities of heresthetical strategies

The first framing experiments revealed that communicating a given issue in a different frame significantly influences the opinion formation and the preferences of the recipients (Kahneman and Tversky 1984; Nelson and Kinder 1996; Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997; Tversky and Kahneman 1981). Primarily since framing also provides an aspect or dimension of the judgement of the case. While framing research in communication studies uses different terms, in this paper, following the Rikerian analytic tradition, we refer to it as a dimension of judgement. Thus, for example, in the classic Ku Klux Klan protest experiment, respondents were asked to form an opinion on whether to permit or ban a protest that involved the possibility of violence. The experimental group that met the free speech frame was much more willing to tolerate the KKK protest than the group that received the public safety frame (Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997). Framing research then explored the factors that determine the success of the framing effect, like elite communication (Chong and Druckman 2007b; Zaller 1992), including the identity of the messenger (Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013), the strength of frames (Chong and Druckman 2007c), the temporal evolution of the framing effect (Chong and Druckman 2010; Lecheler and de Vreese 2013, 2016), and the moderating role of political knowledge and interest (Brewer 2003). Nevertheless, an important determinant is also the presence of *counter-framing*, i.e. the presence of competing frames (Chong and Druckman 2011;



Sniderman and Theriault 2004; Wise and Brewer 2010) and whether the counter-frames are provided in the same or different perceptual dimensions (Detenber et al. 2018; Ho 2021; Jerit 2008; Körösényi et al. 2022).

Let us recall two arguments from the behavioural and cognitive science literature, all of which create the potential to shape preferences through strategic framing. The first argument that opens up the opportunity for framing is the different “availability, accessibility and applicability” of aspects: the brain is not able to calculate all aspects at once, but only some of them and not evenly (Chong and Druckman 2007a, 2007c; Fishbein and Ajzen 2010). Framing and heresthetical act as selection tools for the individual in deciding which of the possible aspects the brain will ultimately invoke. The second argument concerns the world’s complexity and lack of transparency in political processes, making it difficult for many citizens to process and understand information. Ready-made narratives from elite discourse and articulated interpretations, i.e. the framing of information, reduce complexity and serve as a mental anchor or heuristic for citizens to understand politics and policies and to formulate their preferences (Bartels 2002). According to Zaller (1992), ideally, people would arrive at the same position after a week of in-depth study and five minutes of listening to experts who share their social predispositions. Since information is costly and time-consuming, voters use heuristics (Lau and Redlawsk 2001), and “they need only be able to recognise which elites share their predispositions and take cues from them” (Zaller 1992, 328). Given that “mass belief systems will, with the sorts of lags [...], tend to follow the elite view” (Zaller 1992, 328).

Both arguments suggest that framing and heresthetic contribute to shaping citizens’ opinions; in other words, they can induce opinions or preferences among a segment of citizens or influence their existing beliefs. In our research, we have chosen four dimensions of judgement framing the Russian-Ukrainian war in the Hungarian context: security, economic interest, justification, and identity. Our central research question is the following:

*RQ: Which dimensions of judgements offer adequate framing opportunities to manufacture consent?*

However, we assume that the effectiveness of framing is highly dependent on the dimension of judgement applied. Based on the previous research presented above, we consider political identity to be a limiting factor for heresthetic and/or effective framing of public opinion. Therefore, we do not expect frames in identity and identity-related dimensions to be effective. However, we expect that frames in non-identity dimensions, such as security and economic interests, which provide an additional level of rationalisation for the position or the chosen direction of action, will be an effective means of shaping public opinion and generating consent for the chosen policy.

*H1: Framing in the public security (D1) and economic (D2) dimensions effectively influence opinion and manufacture consent.*

## (2) The constraints of heresthetic

Having discussed the possibilities of shifting preferences, we now turn to the main barriers to changing public opinion and attitudes, as revealed by behavioural and political science research. The first is the effect of the individual’s attitude structure: while a more ambivalent attitude set increases the effect of framing on opinion, strong pre-



existing dispositions limit the effect (Fatemi, Hasseldine, and Hite 2008; Ho 2021; Körösenyi et al. 2022). Our data do not allow us to investigate this effect in our research, so we cannot formulate a hypothesis. Another moderating factor is intense partisanship: Citizens with strong partisan affiliations are more likely to accept the opinions of their party leaders. Since a “party constructs a conceptual viewpoint by which its voters can make sense of the political world” (Achen and Bartels 2016, 268), partisan voters are “protected” against framing the political world differently. Thus, in contrast to the logic of the “folk theory” of democracy (Achen and Bartels 2016) and to the median voter model (Downs 1957), the causal relationship between citizens’ preferences and party political position is reversed. Citizens’ preferences no longer determine their party choice but their party affiliation or membership that determines their opinion (Kinder and Kalmoe 2017; Zaller 1992). Therefore, while partisanship has been described above as an opportunity to influence opinion, in our survey experiment, where we measure the strength of frames retrospectively, it is a constraint on heresthetic efforts. We assume that:

H2a: Partisanship moderates the effect of framing on citizens’ opinions.

H2b: While government voters are more pro-Russian, opposition voters are more pro-Atlantic.

The third constraint on the impact of framing on existing opinions and preferences is that of social and political identity. Social and political identity as a constraint on the impact of framing coincides to some extent with partisanship but is still a separate factor, as identity can have several bases, such as ethnic, linguistic, racial or religious. These can also become the basis of political identity in classic identity politics, as in the case of the Irish party system of the twentieth century or the contemporary BLM movement. However, this relationship is reversed when political (group) affiliation becomes the basis of social identity in a broader sense (Disch 2021; Finkel et al. 2020; Mason 2018). This new kind of identity politics implies something more or different from partisanship in the political dimension discussed in the conceptual section, which may strongly influence political opinions and preferences but whose primary concern is “what kind of (public) policy do we want?” This is a different question.

For most people, partisanship is not a carrier of ideology but a reflection of judgements about where “people like me” belong. They do not always get that right, but they have much more success than they would construct their political loyalties based on ideology and policy convictions. Then, often enough, they let their party tell them what to think about the issues of the day,

as Achen and Bartels put it (Achen and Bartels 2016, 266). The critical question is not “What (public) policy do we want?” but “Who are we?” The answer to this question has a substantial impact on public policy preferences. In short, we vote for who we are, not what we want.

Identities in the sense of group membership have mainly been used as a moderating factor in evaluating framing effects. Experimental studies have measured and found that respondents follow leader or party cues (Broockman and Butler 2017; Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013). However, framing questions about the constitutive features of identity (like the definition of the in-group and the out-group) still need to be addressed. Our approach to investigating the role of identity framing is twofold.

First, we aim to explore the possibility of strategic framing in the justification of the war dimension (D3), which is closely related to moral evaluations and, thus, to identities and

could be highly controversial in the context of military aggression. Experimental studies in political science have shown that voters not only adjust their perception of reality (in times of crisis, the attribution of responsibility) to their partisan group membership (Bisgaard 2015; Tilley and Hobolt 2011) but that these cognitive dissonance mechanisms even extend to moral evaluations (Anduiza, Gallego, and Muñoz 2013). The results of an experiment show that the same moral violation (e.g. corruption) is judged differently depending on whether the politician responsible is a member of the respondent's party, of unknown partisanship, or a rival party (Anduiza, Gallego, and Muñoz 2013). For some people, moral judgements are linked to their group identity, and moral judgements are part of and coloured by identity formation. In other words, in-group favouritism and out-group animosity extend to the justification of the war, and we expect to find resistance to framing in this dimension.

*H3: Framing in justifying the war dimension (D3) does not allow for shaping citizens' preferences.*

Second, since the issue we are examining is the Russian-Ukrainian war, which is strongly condemned by both sides, attributing blame could reveal the direction of identities, namely which side constitutes the "us" and the "them" for the respondents. The foundation of identity is the demarcation of "us" and "them"; therefore, it denotes the identity dimension of judgement (D4). Given that the opposing sides are evident and that the categories of "us" and "them" are always mentally accessible to voters, the direction of the framing should be indifferent. Social identity theory (Hogg 2016; Hornsey 2008) and party identity theory (Converse 1964; 1969; Kinder and Kalmoe 2017) suggest that these are stable and rarely change; hence, we do not assume a framing effect.

*H4: Framing in the dimension of judgement based on group identity (D4) does not allow for shaping citizens' preferences.*

To sum up: We have introduced four evaluation dimensions and assumed that framing would be effective in evaluation dimensions not connected to value-laden perspectives, while it would be ineffective in the justification and identity-based evaluation dimensions. After presenting the possible strategies of framing, we will briefly describe the empirical context of our research.

## 5. Empirical context and the investigated dimensions

### 5.1. Perceptions of the Russian-Ukrainian war in Hungarian politics

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in late February 2022, the war came to the fore in the Hungarian general election campaign that had just begun (Bene, Burai, and Farkas 2022; Enyedi and Szabó 2022; Szabó and Szilágyi 2022). Although the war was directly relevant to any EU and NATO member state, the relevance of the Hungarian case study was underlined by the fact that the political and media environment in Hungary, where both Atlanticist and pro-Russian narratives were prominent, could be considered exceptional in the European Union (Korkut 2017; Tóth 2022). It divided the parties and the political elite more or less along government/opposition lines, and this division persisted in the period following the April general elections (and thus at the time of our survey in October).

First, what was this split all about? While the Orbán government, which has pursued a policy of opening up to the East in its foreign and economic policy over the past decade,

was somewhat reluctant to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine and opposed from the outset the supply of arms to Ukraine by NATO and EU member states and the trade sanctions imposed on Russia, the opposition was in favour of helping the Ukrainians with arms supplies and the sanctions policy. As we have presented above, Péter Márki-Zay, the opposition's candidate for prime minister, even envisaged sending Hungarian soldiers to help Ukraine. While the government emphasised the priority of the country's economic interests (stability of Russian gas and oil supplies) and national security (peace in the neighbouring state, which is home to a significant Hungarian-speaking minority), the opposition saw the Russian invasion as an act of aggression against a sovereign Ukraine and a threat to the security of the whole of Europe. On the economic front, the opposition criticised the government's policy of maintaining dependence on Russian energy imports and called for its swift abolition, in contrast to the government's rhetoric and policy, which continued to emphasise the importance of stable Russian energy supplies based on long-term contracts throughout this period. Another critical aspect of the political interpretation of the situation is that while the opposition, in line with the interpretation of European and American leaders and the mainstream Western press, unequivocally blamed Vladimir Putin and Russia for the outbreak of the war, politicians and on the government side in Hungary presented a wide range of positions, from pro-Atlantic to openly pro-Russian. Many commentators blamed the United States for the outbreak of the war because of its increased political and military influence in Ukraine and NATO's eastward expansion. While the more restrained and broader communication from government officials emphasised the need for an immediate peace agreement, analysts and social commentators in the state-controlled media took a more directly pro-Russian stance.

It is also worth considering how this is reflected in the political public sphere and the press, through which most citizens encounter politics. A kind of duality characterised the Hungarian media structure in the 2010s: on the one hand, a powerful KESMA/Mediaworks media bloc under government control has gradually emerged, while on the other hand, alongside it, a fragmented, mostly government-critical but pluralistic media world existed (Enyedi and Szabó 2022; Hann et al. 2020). Due to this asymmetric structure of the politically relevant media, it is perhaps not an exaggeration to claim that the unified pro-government media, controlled from one centre, created a more or less hegemonic position for the government side (Bajomi-Lázár and Stępińska 2019; Polyák 2019). At the same time, the presence of an overall plural media and the high penetration of social media also led to the confrontation of pro-government media consumers with opposing political interpretations and opposition standpoints (Janky, Kmetty, and Szabó 2019).

## 5.2. Interpretive dimensions of the Russian-Ukrainian war

We identified four dimensions of perception or judgement of the Russian-Ukrainian war (security, economic interests, justification and group identity), which were tested in a public opinion survey experiment. We established framing (perception or judgement) dimensions that would allow for the analysis and analytical evaluation of possible framing strategies of political actors. Let us look at these dimensions and the reasons for their selection.

*D1: Security dimension.* A war in a neighbouring country is a security threat and negatively impacts the sense of security of the average citizen. One of the significant issues in

the domestic political debate and the spring election campaign was the security dimension (Bene, Burai, and Farkas 2022; Enyedi and Szabó 2022; Szabó and Szilágyi 2022). The pro-government campaign presented the elections as a choice between a pro-war opposition and a pro-peace government position. On the other hand, the opposition presented Russian aggression as a threat to the security of Hungary and Europe.

*D2: Economic interests.* At the outbreak of the war, Russian energy dependence was amongst the highest in the EU and NATO member states and became one of the critical issues in the election campaign. While the government presented the necessity of maintaining Russian energy supplies as vital for the Hungarian economy, the opposition stressed the importance of ending this dependence during and after the campaign.

*D3: Justification.* The majority of opposition politicians and those in the media critical of the government, in accord with the Western (and Ukrainian) narrative, regarded the Russian aggression as a threat to the autonomy and sovereignty of independent states and ultimately to freedom, which the entire international community must oppose. “Ukraine’s freedom is our freedom”, it was often said, or in Zelensky’s formulation, “Ukraine defends the freedom of all of Europe against Russian aggression” (Zelensky 2022). In this narrative, Putin’s aggression is also an export of autocracy. In sharp contrast, the narrative of the Orbán government and pro-government media commentators has portrayed Ukraine as a corrupt regime oppressing the Hungarian ethnic minority, being under US political influence, “at Russia’s back”. Moreover, according to this argument, Ukraine, or the Eastern-south-eastern part, is historically part of Russia.

*D4: Group membership, identity.* Hungary has belonged to the West for a thousand years in the Atlanticist narrative of the opposition, and freedom must be defended against the aggression and authoritarian threat that endangers it. Hungary is a member of the EU and NATO, and it is economically, politically, and militarily integrated into the West. As part of these communities, it must join in the military aid to Ukraine and the sanctions against Russia, even if these come at a heavy cost (e.g. energy supply problems). On the other hand, the ruling party’s narrative is more ambivalent and characterised by a kind of specific duality due to Orbán’s more than a decade-long “freedom fight” against Brussels.<sup>6</sup> In addition to acknowledging the millennia-old political and cultural allegiance to the West and emphasising current EU and NATO membership, opening up to the East has become a new economic and political priority (Buzogány 2017). Hungary lies in the geopolitical triangle of Berlin, Moscow and Istanbul, as Orbán has often pointed out. Since the second half of the 2000s, an increasingly strong criticism of the West has emerged. In contrast to the decadent (neo)liberal world order and civilisation in crisis, it is characterised by the search for something authentic: a Christian-conservative, nationalist and sovereigntist renaissance or a reaction (Enyedi 2024; Szelenyi and Csillag 2015). This reaction is linked to anti-liberalism or illiberalism and anti-Americanism or anti-Atlanticism. The anti-American and anti-Western resentments of the political right arose in the wake of historical events in the twentieth century, such as 1918, 1945 and 1956 (cf. Kiss 2021). According to this political narrative, which has often been emphasised in political speeches of politicians of the national right over the past two decades, Hungary has repeatedly been the victim of betrayal by Western elites (Lipiński and Szabo 2023). In his discourse, Orbán interprets the international order as an antagonistic binary of “corrupt elites” vs “pure people” and

positions Hungary in the international order against the liberal “establishment”, successfully transferring his populist politics from the domestic to the international level (Hisarlioğlu et al. 2022). This discourse of Hungarian moral superiority over the inferiority of the West aims to renegotiate or modify existing hierarchies in international politics. However, it also implies a reordering and a clear definition of “us” and “them” for his deep frame of politics.

The right way to capture both the Atlanticist and Russian norm promotion is through identity politics. We claim that in today’s Hungarian context, pro-Russianism is not primarily an alternative political offer but a critical confrontation with the Western, globalised, liberal world order. Both sides condemn the Russian-Ukrainian war and consider it a manifest evil. However, the blame is placed solely on the opposing group: while on the opposition side, Putin is blamed for the aggression, on the pro-government side, it is the US that is blamed for neglecting Russia’s security interests through their political influence on Ukraine.<sup>7</sup> In our experimental survey questionnaire, we used anti-Americanism to indicate this direction of identification. Based on social identity theory (Tajfel 1978; Tajfel and Turner 1979) and the Hungarian context as a starting point, we used the out-group definition (Laclau 2007; McDermott 2011) to capture group membership. In other words, we tried to measure what the respondent considers the out-group against which he/she defines himself/herself. Considering the Hungarian context, we found that the definition of out-group, namely the enemy, is much more robust in forming a pro-Russian orientation than in-group similarities or an alternative worldview. At the same time, we acknowledge that all the frames in each dimension of judgement involve some identity-related perspectives, as in any framing attempt. Our rationale for labelling the fourth dimension as the identity dimension is that it is directly derived, without any reasoning, from the most basic constitutive element of identity, namely the definition of “us” and “them”. In contrast, the other three dimensions involve an additional cognitive step leading to a higher level of abstraction.

## 6. Data

We designed a survey experiment to answer the research questions and test our hypotheses ( $N = 1000$ ). The survey was conducted on a nonprobability-based sample from a Hungarian “Net panel” (NRC<sup>8</sup>) and was conducted online between 3 October and 11 October 2022. The sample was representative of the Hungarian population aged between 18 and 65, with internet access and censuses on gender, age, education, and place of residence. Weights were applied to the regression models to adjust for differences in gender, age, education, and place of residence, as these were constructed by the polling company based on census data. For the experiment, participants were randomly divided into two groups (500-500 people), and each group rated four statements on a 5-point scale of how much they agreed with each statement. It was arranged so both groups were given one statement on the four predefined judgement dimensions (security, economic interest, justification, and group identity). Two pro-Atlantic and two pro-Russian statements were presented to both groups to avoid acquiescence bias (Table 1). Each statement provides a meaningful dimension of judgement in its own right, and by comparing them in terms of framing effect, we can discover the potentials and constraints

**Table 1.** Questionnaire design and statements.

Dimensions of Judgement	Orientation	Statements for group A (N = 500)	Orientation	Statements for group B (N = 500)
Security	pro-Russian	NATO plans in Ukraine are a direct threat to Russia and Russian citizens.	pro-Atlantic	Russia is an aggressor, and its acts of war are a direct threat to Europe.
Economic interest	pro-Atlantic	Russia's deliberate use of natural gas as a weapon against Europe, which threatens the domestic economy, cannot be dissociated from the war in Ukraine, and the rapid liberation from dependence on Russia best serves the national interest	pro-Russian	In the interests of Hungary's economic and social security, peace must be established as soon as possible. Until that happens, the country's neutrality best serves the national interest.
Justification	pro-Russian	Ukraine is a chauvinist country that deserves its fate.	pro-Atlantic	Ukraine is a sovereign country, and the bloodshed committed is an unforgivable crime.
Group identity	pro-Atlantic	Only Russia is responsible for the crisis in Ukraine.	pro-Russian	The United States is primarily responsible for the crisis in Ukraine.

of a heresthetical manoeuvre for choosing or changing the dimension of judgement for a successful communication strategy.

### 6.1. Dependent variable

The dependent variable was the agreement or disagreement with the framed statements about the ongoing war in Ukraine, which the respondents evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale. First, we examined the ratings obtained in each dimension of judgement, for which we reversed the coding of the Western frames for harmonisation so that in all analyses, a value of "1" indicates a firm agreement with the pro-Atlantic position. In contrast, a value of "5" indicates a firm agreement with the pro-Russian position.

### 6.2. Independent variables

This research has two independent variables: the framing effect variable and party affiliation. The framing effect variable was also a dichotomous variable indicating whether the respondent received the pro-Atlanticist or the pro-Russian frame (pro-Atlanticist = "0", pro-Russian = "1") in the examined dimension of judgement. For the party affiliation variable, the questionnaire asked each respondent to indicate on a scale of 1–10 how close they felt to the parties listed (thermometer scale corresponding to the expressive understanding of partisanship). To examine political party affiliation and commitment, we created a government versus opposition voter dummy (government = "0", opposition = "1"). In Hungary's 2022 April general election, three party lists (Fidesz-KDNP, United Opposition, Mi Hazánk) finished above the five per cent parliamentary threshold. Taking into account domestic political cleavages (Péli 2021) and respondents' attitudes, those who felt closest to Mi Hazánk (Our Homeland), a small (5,88%) radical right party, were also assigned to the pro-government side. We decided to do so because the politicians of the Mi Hazánk also engaged in a pro-Russian discourse concerning the war, but sometimes even more radically. Nevertheless, we obtained the same results in the regression analysis when we excluded them and classified them as pro-government (Appendix).

## 7. Results

### 7.1. The field of manipulation

In response to RQ1, the analysis revealed that the security dimension (D1), the economic interest dimension (D2), and the justification dimension (D3) all have the potential to successfully manufacture consent to the chosen direction (Table 2). In addition, partisanship was found to be an important moderating factor for evaluations in all dimensions. Therefore, we accepted H1, while in the identity dimension (D4) framing has no significant effect.

In each of the four dimensions, government voters are significantly more pro-Russian than united opposition voters (Table 2). Therefore, we accept H2b. In the justification dimension (D3), we found a clear and robust framing effect (Table 2, model 3). We, therefore, reject H3. Counter-arguments can move preferences significantly but not beyond the median (see Figure 1, D3) so that strategic framers (i.e. political actors) find themselves in a trade-off framing situation (Körösényi et al. 2022). In other words, moral counter-arguments can significantly moderate the evaluations but cannot turn them around. In model 4, the direction of the frames had no significant effect on respondents' evaluations. Therefore, there is no framing effect in the group identity dimension. We accepted H4.

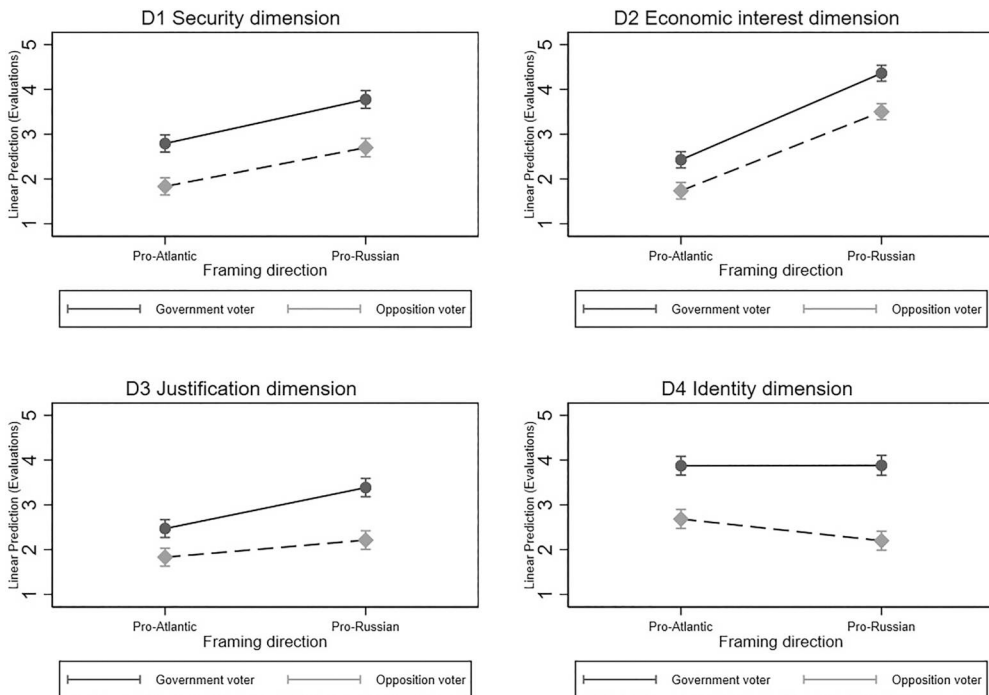
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**Table 2.** Weighted Least Squares (WLS) Regression Models.

	Model (1)		Model (2)		Model (3)		Model (4)	
	Security (D1)		Economic Interest (D2)		Justification (D3)		Identity (D4)	
	B	B	B	$\beta$	B	$\beta$	B	$\beta$
Framing direction ( <i>pro-Russian vs. pro-Atlantic</i> )	0.965*** (0.113)	0.360	1.863*** (0.100)	0.648	0.745*** (0.116)	0.282	-0.129 (0.119)	-0.045
Partisanship ( <i>opposition vs government voters</i> )	-0.896*** (0.114)	-0.334	-0.639*** (0.102)	-0.222	-0.784*** (0.122)	-0.297	-1.437*** (0.119)	-0.503
Controls								
Political interest	-0.073 (0.064)	-0.057	-0.077 (0.059)	-0.056	0.005 (0.063)	0.004	-0.095 (0.061)	-0.069
Gender	0.160 (0.129)	0.060	0.004 (0.114)	0.001	0.142 (0.130)	0.053	0.071 (0.131)	0.025
Age	0.000 (0.004)	-0.005	0.007* (0.004)	0.062	-0.010** (0.005)	-0.099	0.000 (0.005)	0.004
Education	-0.180** (0.077)	-0.106	-0.074 (0.073)	-0.040	-0.160** (0.079)	-0.095	-0.080 (0.081)	-0.044
Type of residence	0.077 (0.091)	0.039	0.064 (0.075)	0.031	0.044 (0.087)	0.023	0.178* (0.097)	0.086
Household income	-0.016 (0.024)	-0.034	-0.002 (0.020)	-0.004	-0.036 (0.023)	-0.073	0.039 (0.025)	0.076
_cons	3.219*** (0.420)		2.359*** (0.347)		3.315*** (0.443)		3.682*** (0.414)	
Observations	529		542		531		517	
R-squared	0.283		0.486		0.198		0.285	

The models are weighted using population weights for gender, age, education, and place of residence. Standard errors are in parentheses, confidence intervals: \*\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*  $p < .1$ .





**Figure 1.** Interaction effects of partisanship and framing direction predicting the evaluations in each dimension of judgements.

Note: The linear predicted margins of the Government or Opposition status with 95% confidence intervals of the evaluations in all dimensions. The WLS regression models included: political interest, gender, age, education, type of residence, household income and Gov.-Opp. Status interacted with framing direction. On the Y-axis “1” equals the pro-Atlanticist position, while “5” equals the pro-Russian position. The models are weighted using population weights for gender, age, education, and place of residence.

can significantly moderate the evaluations but cannot turn them around. In model 4, the direction of the frames had no significant effect on respondents’ evaluations. Therefore, there is no framing effect in the group identity dimension. We accepted H4.

Regarding H2a, our results provide partial support for the hypothesis that partisanship moderates the framing effect, but with nuanced outcomes across the dimensions examined (Table 3). Notably, the interaction between partisanship and framing shows significant effects in the last two dimensions (D3: justification and D4: identity), but these effects differ based on partisan alignment. In D3, framing has a significant effect on both pro-government and opposition voters (Table 3), with a slightly stronger effect observed among pro-government voters (Figure 1). This indicates that framing in this dimension reinforces existing partisan positions, but with a more pronounced impact on those aligned with the government. For D4, while no main framing effect is observed initially, partisanship still moderates the framing effect, though in a complex manner. Specifically, among opposition voters, pro-Russian framing has a significant negative effect, pushing them further toward the pro-Atlanticist position (Figure 1). In contrast, for pro-government voters, there is no significant difference between the effects of the two frames, indicating that framing does not sway their opinions in this dimension. In the first two dimensions (D1: security and D2: economic interest), framing effects are observed regardless of partisan alignment, meaning that pro-Russian framing has a similar impact on both pro-government

**Table 3.** Weighted Least Squares (WLS) Regression Models with interaction.

	Model (1) Security (D1)	Model (2) Economic Interest (D2)	Model (3) Justification (D3)	Model (4) Identity (D4)
Framing direction ( <i>pro-Russian vs. pro-Atlantic</i> )	1.034*** (0.163)	1.965*** (0.136)	1.034*** (0.166)	0.110 (0.170)
Partisanship ( <i>opposition vs government voters</i> )	-0.825*** (0.158)	-0.534*** (.147)	-0.485*** (.165)	-1.200*** (0.166)
Framing * Partisanship (interaction)	-0.157 (0.223)	-0.214 (0.202)	-0.629*** (0.233)	-0.486** (0.241)
Controls				
Gender	0.148 (0.131)	-0.012 (0.114)	0.164 (0.127)	0.068 (0.133)
Education	-0.13** (0.052)	-0.028 (0.052)	-0.128** (0.056)	-0.017 (0.060)
Political interest	-0.078 (0.064)	-0.083 (0.057)	0.001 (0.061)	-0.102* (0.061)
Household income	-0.018 (0.024)	-0.005 (0.020)	-0.035 (0.022)	0.038 (0.024)
Age	0 (0.004)	0.007* (0.004)	-0.010* (0.005)	0 (0.005)
Type of residence	0.011 (0.060)	0.034 (0.048)	0.013 (0.056)	0.145** (0.062)
_cons	3.382*** (0.411)	2.346*** (0.340)	3.275*** (0.411)	3.489*** (0.418)
Observations	529	542	531	517
R-squared	0.283	0.486	0.213	0.294

The models are weighted using population weights for gender, age, education, and place of residence. Standard errors are in parentheses, confidence intervals: \*\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*  $p < .1$ .

and opposition voters. This suggests that in these material dimensions (D1, D2), the success of framing is not dependent on prior partisan beliefs. Overall, these results support the theory that framing is an influential tool for shaping attitudes in material dimensions, while in value-laden dimensions (D3, D4), partisanship can either amplify the framing effect or, in some cases, lead to a boomerang effect due to motivated reasoning.

Regarding identity, more people held the US responsible (37%) than the Russians (25%), with 38% saying “don’t know/no answer” or “neither agree nor disagree”, revealing a starkly different picture of Hungarians’ geopolitical identities than in other European countries, according to an ECFR survey (Leonard and Krastev 2022). On average, 16% of respondents were unable or unwilling to answer each statement. On average, 22% of respondents marked “neither agree nor disagree”, which rarely reflects a carefully balanced opinion but rather a “non-attitude” (Converse 1964). Accordingly, 38% of respondents could be considered undecided or could not make up their minds about politics, even regarding a war in the neighbourhood.

## 8. Discussion

The contribution to the field of our research is threefold.

### (1) Framing as opportunity and constraint

In this experiment, we focused on the dilemmas of heresthetic, namely, the opportunities and constraints of successful heresthetic strategies in different judgement dimensions. Our results, first, coincide with previous research findings of framing research that

effectiveness is highly dependent on the particular dimension of framing (Jerit 2008; Körösi et al. 2022). Namely, the persuasion framed as economic interests is a highly effective dimension for shaping attitudes, while the security and justification dimensions can also be used effectively to manufacture consent for political action. In contrast, opinions and preferences were almost immovable in the identity dimension and resisted framing. Indeed, identities, and hence political identities, are stable in the short term, in line with previous research (Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1969; Fishbein and Ajzen 2010; Green and Platzman 2022).

Our findings, second, suggest that political identities cannot be arbitrarily shifted by heresthetic, i.e. political identities can be an essential constraint of framing endeavours. Thus, in our experiment, as long as both political blocks blame their geopolitical out-group for the war in Ukraine (i.e. NATO or Putin), it is voters' geopolitical group identity – whom they feel closer to – that will determine the attribution of responsibility for the war, not the direction of the argument. While most relevant considerations are not readily available in heresthetic situations, the “us” and “them” categories are always accessible to voters.

Thirdly, our findings reveal another constraint: the strong influence of partisan identity on opinion. It suggests that citizens already had a partisan predisposition in their perception of the war, reflecting the fundamentally antagonistic attitude of rival Hungarian political elite groups towards the neighbouring war. While both the intensity of identity towards the belligerents and the partisan identity are short-term limitations of framing, the robust persuasion effect in other dimensions indicates the potential for shaping public opinion – yet both show that the development of public opinion at any given time is highly dependent on party and elite discourse (Zaller 1992).

The limitation of our study in this regard is that the strong effect of partisanship on public opinion formation is partly due to the partisan polarisation of the Hungarian electorate (Patkós 2023), where party identification plays an increasing role in opinion formation (Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013). Furthermore, our analysis is based on cross-sectional data, and the research design is insufficient to explore the extent to which group identities can be shaped over time.

## (2) The role of heresthetic in the development of identity politics

The conceptual distinction we introduced between micro- and macro-level framing made the linking of identity politics and public opinion formation possible in our research. Based on this conceptual distinction, we arrive at two insights about the role of heresthetic that have yet to be developed in the literature.

First, we claim that the macro-political heresthetic has a robust role in developing political identity groups. From this perspective, political identity means a shared perception of political reality in a particular “deep frame” or through a particular cultural narrative by the members of an identity group. By strengthening political identification, macro-political heresthetic has a stabilising effect on the formation of political preferences. Although we have revealed identity as a constraint on framing and opinion formation in the short term, it is clear from other research that political identity can be both an opportunity and a constraint in the longer term (Lakoff 2011, 95–97). We all have multiple identities (Roccas and Brewer 2002), and each plays a contingent role in shaping opinion.

Drawing on Riker's (1983, 1986, 1996) logic, we claim that strategic macro-political heresthetic can increase the salience of one or another of our identities (i.e. the identity dimension), which shapes political opinion in the longer term. Framing in the identity dimension is a type of communication that invokes and situates its message within a "deep frame" or, in other words, a cultural narrative. The "freedom fighter" master narrative of Viktor Orbán and the government side, whose hegemony in Hungarian political discourse is the result of a decade of Fidesz rule (e.g. a 2/3 constitutional majority in the legislature) and its consequent dominance in political communication, has created this deep framework of West-sceptical or anti-West statements (e.g. *illiberal democracy*), which is examined in our experiment (cf. Körösenyi, Illés, and Gyulai 2020). This is the contextual background for the fact that in our experiment, the identity-based dimension of judgement decisively sorted voters into partisan groups, thereby confirming the previous studies that emphasise the robust role of political identity in shaping political preferences (Achen and Bartels 2016; Kinder and Kalmoe 2017; Mason 2018).

Second, based on our empirical results, we claim that micro-political heresthetic may have an opposite role in breaking the stability or realigning electoral preferences in the short run. Since the perceptual dimensions of the war examined in our survey (especially the economic and security dimensions) resonate in many respects with the campaign of the 2022 Hungarian general elections, our findings contribute to the explanation of the election results: namely, they highlight the communicative opportunities and constraints of opinion formation through heresthetic that shape the dimension of perception and judgement. The populist master narrative of the "freedom fight" – successful for more than a decade – served as a cultural or macro-political narrative for Viktor Orbán and the Fidesz government (Körösenyi, Illés, and Gyulai 2020), which has a vital identity feature in the definition of "us" (sovereign Hungary) and "them" (Brussel, U.S.), suddenly became a constraint. With the outbreak of the war at the end of February 2022 and the resulting change in the international political context, the manoeuvring space for Orbán's politics relying on the geopolitical identity, which had been built up over many years and was based on anti-liberalism, opposition to the West and anti-Americanism, suddenly narrowed. The opportunity left for Orbán's vote-maximising campaign strategy was heresthetic, namely, to shift the focus from moral justification to security and economic interests in the perception of the war. While pro-government commentators were serving the geopolitical identity of the core constituency with anti-American and anti-Western, often openly pro-Russian rhetoric, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and government officials communicated primarily in the dimensions of security and economic interests by contrasting peace and war. In these perceptual dimensions, he was able to argue in a way that aligned with the geopolitical identity of his core partisan supporters – pitting the pro-peace views of Hungarians against the pro-war positions of the West – while opening up a new space for persuading voters who were not partisan or had no geopolitical identity. The firm "peace or war" rhetoric successfully increased the salience of the security dimension. At the same time, the "Russian gas is the key to cheap overheads" energy security rhetoric emphasised the dimension of economic materialist interests. The success of this heresthetical strategy was demonstrated by the fact that opinion polls showed that material reasons and non-engagement in the war were the two most critical explanatory issues influencing the government's voters (Enyedi and Szabó 2022). The 2022 Hungarian general election was thus a vivid example of Riker's thesis that "[w]inners

must have better arguments; but, when the race is so close, they must also have the better heresthetical skills" (Riker 1996, 258). This heresthetical skill means finding that dimension of judgement regarding a given issue that (1) allows for a broad selective framing effect between the arguments and (2) best fits with the actor's cultural narrative.

### (3) The democratic theory relevance of the results

The results of this study show that the heresthetical formulation of preferences and the persistence of predispositions (attitudes, identity) play significant roles in forming public opinion. As famously explored by Converse (1969) and recently reaffirmed by Kinder and Kalmoe (2017), the political "belief systems" of ordinary citizens bore little resemblance to the ideal embodied in the "folk" theory of democracy, as voters' political preferences were mostly inconsistent, hastily improvised or non-existent at all (cf. Achen and Bartels 2016, 30–36). As our results also demonstrated, public opinion can be induced, and the resulting preferences are endogenous and can be shifted by skilful heresthetical manoeuvres. The identity-political dimension, therefore, even if it produces a long-term stability of political attitudes, does not "protect" against heresthetical manoeuvres. Here, it is not the shifting of attitudes on policy issues but the increase (or decrease) in the *saliency* of the identity dimension that may be at the heart of a successful heresthetical manoeuvre. Given these considerations, we argue that in a realist, empirically grounded theory of democracy, which Achen and Bartels (2016) lacked, heresthetical (framing) manoeuvres of setting or shifting the perceptual dimension will play an essential role as a means of manipulation by political leaders or parties, in addition to the emphasis on political identity.

## Notes

1. While the former is mainly related to individual (micro-political) public policy issues, the latter is typically understood in the politics dimension. Namely, macro-political heresthetical refers to the central axes of conflict in the political arena, i.e. not only to government/opposition but to "us" and "them" and to the definition of "friend" and "enemy". Identity politics is, therefore, primarily about radically (re)shaping a broader worldview or narrative of political interpretation (macro-level). Lakoff (2011, 96) has called this a "deep frame" or cultural narrative. In this research, we take cultural narrative as a manifestation of identity politics)
2. Several framing studies based on the theory of heresthetics have followed this rigid analytical separation of heresthetics and rhetoric (e.g. Jerit 2008; Wedeking 2010; Körösenyi et al. 2022).
3. Riker (1983, 65) considered "as heresthetical both the manipulation of preferences and the manipulation of alternatives (...) because one of the things that happens in the manipulation of alternatives is that as a consequence the saliency (and hence the content) of preferences are also changed".
4. By manipulation, we mean an action of an instrumental or strategic nature. One form of this is shaping beliefs or preferences through strategic framing (Iyengar and Kinder 2010; Kelly 2012; Lecheler and Vreese 2019).
5. Although Márky-Zay was precise in saying that "he could even send troops if NATO decided to do so," this statement was a way for the pro-government campaign to portray him as pro-war to the electorate (Bozzay 2022; Political Capital 2022).
6. Fidesz billboard in the 2014 election campaign: "A message to Brussels: Respect for the Hungarians!".
7. This attitude is reflected, for example, in the invitation to the National University of Public Service (a pro-government university which, among many think tanks, serves as the

intellectual back office of Fidesz and Orban) of John Mearsheimer, a distinguished professor of the so-called realist school of international relations, who predicted the Russian attack on Ukraine as a response to NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m-2Oy3MVyyA>.

8. <https://nrc.hu/netpanel/> The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Figshare at <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.22893521>.

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## Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Figshare at <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.22893521>.

## Ethical approval

The research was approved by the Institutional Ethics Review Board of Centre for Social Science (document number: 1-FOIG/26-8/2023).

## Notes on contributors

*Bendegúz Plesz* is an early career researcher working as a Junior Research Fellow at the Institute for Political Science, HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences and a PhD student at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. His research interests lie at the intersection of electoral behaviour and democratic theory, with a special focus on identity politics.

*András Körösesényi* is Research Professor at Institute for Political Science, HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences, Budapest, and Professor of Political Science at Faculty of Law, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. His research interest includes theories of democracy, political leadership and plebiscitary politics.

## ORCID

*Bendegúz Plesz*  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5455-5966>

*András Körösesényi*  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0631-9050>

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## Appendix

Table A1. Weighted Least Squares (WLS) Regression Models with Mi Hazánk (far right party) variable.

	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)	Model (5)	Model (6)	Model (7)	Model (8)	Model (9)	Model(10)	Model(11)	Model(12)
	Security (D1)			Economic Interest (D2)			Justification (D3)			Identity (D4)		
Framing direction	0.959*** (0.158)	0.925*** (0.121)	0.942*** (0.147)	1.966*** (0.131)	1.893*** (0.108)	1.768*** (0.128)	1.037*** (0.155)	0.717*** (0.127)	0.518*** (0.140)	0.136 (0.181)	-0.137 (0.135)	-0.248* (0.147)
Fidesz or Mi Hazánk	-0.002 (0.195)			-0.209 (0.138)			.072 (.167)			-0.007 (0.179)		
Fidesz or Utd. Opposition Utd. Opposition or Mi Hazánk		-0.830*** (0.126)			-0.718*** (0.112)			-0.786*** (0.135)			-1.447*** (0.137)	
Controls			0.800*** (0.179)			0.529*** (0.144)			0.825*** (0.167)			1.422*** (0.170)
Gender	0.383** (0.181)	0.241* (0.140)	0.009 (0.161)	0.040 (0.156)	-0.037 (0.126)	0.175 (0.144)	0.366** (0.172)	0.192 (0.140)	0.050 (0.154)	0.011 (0.191)	0.143 (0.150)	0.226 (0.160)
Age	0.004 (0.007)	0.004 (0.004)	-0.007 (0.005)	0.012** (0.006)	0.003 (0.004)	0.003 (0.005)	-0.006 (0.007)	-0.006 (0.005)	-0.013** (0.006)	0.005 (0.008)	0.005 (0.006)	-0.003 (0.006)
Education	-0.040 (0.110)	-0.186** (0.086)	-0.240** (0.105)	0.036 (0.090)	-0.149* (0.078)	-0.042 (0.091)	-0.029 (0.102)	-0.180** (0.086)	-0.159* (0.096)	0.071 (0.111)	-0.077 (0.092)	-0.112 (0.103)
Type of residence	0.084 (0.136)	0.067 (0.101)	0.060 (0.114)	-0.037 (0.102)	0.059 (0.081)	0.202** (0.100)	0.053 (0.126)	0.054 (0.097)	-0.025 (0.104)	0.137 (0.157)	0.171 (0.107)	0.251** (0.119)
Household income	-0.004 (0.035)	-0.033 (0.025)	-0.029 (0.031)	0.024 (0.024)	-0.005 (0.022)	-0.033 (0.026)	-0.057** (0.029)	-0.034 (0.025)	-0.041 (0.027)	0.054 (0.036)	0.027 (0.027)	0.032 (0.031)
Political interest	0.018 (0.097)	-0.139** (0.069)	-0.191** (0.076)	0.011 (0.070)	-0.025 (0.060)	-0.133* (0.071)	0.177** (0.083)	-0.044 (0.068)	-0.169** (0.069)	0.005 (0.089)	-0.142** (0.070)	-0.189** (0.082)
_cons	2.212*** (0.669)	3.302*** (0.454)	3.555*** (0.467)	1.733*** (0.472)	2.581*** (0.374)	1.895*** (0.482)	2.179*** (0.578)	3.248*** (0.490)	3.528*** (0.530)	2.771*** (0.661)	3.67*** (0.459)	2.613*** (0.508)
Observations	271	424	333	275	435	342	269	423	338	255	418	331
R-squared	0.164	0.289	0.281	0.533	0.523	0.460	0.204	0.203	0.224	0.023	0.285	0.258

The models are weighted using population weights for gender, age, education, and place of residence. Standard errors are in parentheses, confidence intervals: \*\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*  $p < .1$ .