



VIKTOR ORBÁN'S HUNGARY:

Interaction between Rhetoric and Political System

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Abstract

Purpose: The thesis aims to investigate the interaction between Orbán's hybrid regime and the populist argumentation of his speeches. Per this, the thesis explains how this interaction led to another two-thirds victory in the 2022 general elections. Thereby, the thesis defines the emergence of populism in Fidesz, the hybrid traits of the Hungarian political system, and the populist elements of Orbán's rhetoric.

Methodology: The thesis is a deductive, qualitative case study of Orbán's hybrid regime and populist rhetorical argumentation. For data management, the thesis relies on Critical Discourse Analysis and Coding. Through Coding, the researcher also obtained simplified quantitative data to demonstrate the frequency of several populist patterns in the analyzed speeches.

Theory: The thesis relies on the theoretical description of hybrid regimes and populism. First, the thesis explains the emergence of populism in Fidesz. Second, the thesis interprets the Hungarian political system through the hybrid regime theory. Third, the thesis uses populism again to understand Orbán's rhetorical argumentation.

Findings: Through Critical Discourse Analysis and Coding, with the help of the applied theories, the thesis identified that Viktor Orbán had created the belief through his speeches that his party and his hybrid regime were the sole options for a flourishing and secure Hungary.

Originality and value: The thesis provides a detailed analysis and carefully translated quotation of Viktor Orbán's speeches. In the highlights of the Hungarian language barrier, such a study gives a valuable insight into a political culture that is only superficially known abroad. A more detailed understanding can be precious considering the recent political conflicts in Europe.

Keywords: Hybrid regime, Populism, Hungary, Viktor Orbán, Orbán speeches, 2022 Hungarian General Election, Critical Discourse Analysis, Coding

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Abbreviations

European Union - EU

The Fundamental Law of Hungary – FLH

Prime Minister – PM

Annual Evaluation speech – AE speech

March 15 speech – M15 speech

October 23 speech – O23 speech

Critical Discourse Analysis – CDA

Descriptive Code - DC

Magyar Szocialista Párt (Hungarian Socialist Party) – MSZP

Eötvös Loránd University – ELTE

Faculty of Law – FoL

Magyar Demokrata Fórum (Hungarian Democratic Forum) – MDF

Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége (Alliance of Free Democrats) - SZDSZ

Member of Parliament – MP

Gross domestic product – GDP

Global Financial Crisis – GFC

International Monetary Fund – IMF

World Bank - WB

President of the Republic – PotR

1. Introduction

Viktor Orbán is the European Union's (EU) longest-serving prime minister (PM) and an exceptionally divisive figure:¹ A liberal turned conservative politician, who participated in the construction of modern Hungarian democracy in 1989-90, and turned it into a controversial political regime twenty years later.² A devout anti-communist and a self-proclaimed protector of democracy, yet a political strongman and fierce critique of the West.³ Regardless of all the controversies, in the highlights of his massive political success and more than 30 years of a political career, Viktor Orbán is undoubtedly a man of extraordinary luck and extraordinary talent.⁴

1.1. Controversial Political System

In 2010, after two turbulent and unsuccessful social democrat governments, Viktor Orbán and Fidesz won an unprecedented two-thirds majority mandate to form a right-wing conservative government.⁵ By European standards, extraordinary success was secured through a democratic election, resulting in unlimited power over Hungarian democracy.⁶

The Fidesz-controlled parliament modified, among others, the election system, accepted the new Fundamental Law of Hungary (FLH), manipulated the legislation, violated judicial and media independence, and neglected the unwritten agreement about appointing a politically unbiased Hungarian head of state.⁷

The above-listed authoritarian elements of Fidesz's governance triggered heavy critique from the Hungarian opposition and the EU.⁸ Replying to the critiques, Orbán claimed that the Hungarian political system's modifications only serve Hungarians and protect democracy.

1.2. Excellent Orator

Orbán rose to countrywide recognition in 1989 due to the bold, progressive speech he gave at the reburial ceremony of Imre Nagy and four other political martyrs of the Communist dictatorship.⁹

¹ Müller, Jan – Werner. 2022. "How Autocrats Endure: Viktor Orban and the Myth of the Self-Destructing Strongman". *Foreign Affairs* <https://rb.gy/2u2n6r>. (accessed May 4, 2022).

² Lendvai, Paul. 2019. *Orbán: Europe's New Strongman*. London: Hurst & Company, p. 1-33. and Müller, 2022.

³ Müller, 2022.

⁴ Debrecei, 2009, as quoted in Lendvai, p. 8.

⁵ Lendvai, p. 53-86.

⁶ Ibid, p. 86. and Ádám, Zoltán. 2019. "Explaining Orbán: A Political Transaction Cost Theory of Authoritarian Populism". In *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 66 No. 6: 385-401, p. 397.

⁷ Lendvai, p. 91-125.

⁸ Müller, 2022.

⁹ Lendvai, p. 7-8.

Since then, the young Viktor Orbán grew old, got rid of his long hair and beard, turned his back to liberal views, and was elected Hungary's PM five times.¹⁰ Despite all of the above-listed transformations, his skills as an orator are still pivotal to his political strategy. After carefully analyzing his speeches given before, Orbán perfected his rhetorical abilities; he has become a professional, and he never makes mistakes – not even the slightest tongue slip – even during the longest speeches.¹¹

This excellent proficiency is in the service of his regime. In his speeches, Orbán praises the political system he and Fidesz have created as a patriotic, conservative Christian government protecting Hungarians and Hungarian independence in an allegedly hostile world.¹²

1.3. Another Massive Electoral Victory in 2022

Trying to challenge Orbán's political dominance, the six most prominent opposition parties "ranging from the nationalist right to the metropolitan left" joined under a single list for the 2022 general election.¹³ Per this, the polls predicted a close competition.¹⁴ However, Orbán comfortably secured his fourth consecutive two-thirds majority victory by winning more than 53% of the votes.¹⁵ In order to prevent fraud during the voting process, a large number of Hungarian and international volunteers supervised the election; they did not report any major tampering that could have influenced the outcome.¹⁶ Nevertheless, due to the modification of the Hungarian political system, the competition "arguably lacked a level playing field".¹⁷

1.4. Problem Formulation and Research Question

The chapter has introduced Viktor Orbán, his politically controversial regime, his excellent rhetorical skills, and his massive victory in the 2022 general election. Per this, the thesis intends to answer the following research question:

Why did the interaction between Viktor Orbán's populist rhetorical argumentation and his controversial hybrid regime result in a significant victory in the 2022 general election?

¹⁰ Lendvai, p. 25.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 45.

¹² Unstoppable strongman. 2022. The Economist. <https://www-proquest-com.zorac.aub.aau.dk/magazines/unstoppable-strongman/docview/2648548348/se-2?accountid=8144> (accessed May 4, 2022).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Müller, 2022.

¹⁶ Unstoppable strongman. 2022.

¹⁷ Ibid.

2. Methodology

The following chapter summarizes the researcher's methodology in the thesis. In line with this, the chapter offers an insight into the *Thesis' Objective*, the *Research Design*, the *Methodological Clarification of the Applied Theories*, the *Choice of Data*, the *Data Management*, the *Replicability*, the *Objectivity*, and the *Limitations*.

2.1. Thesis' Objective

The thesis examines the interaction between Orbán's hybrid regime and the populist rhetorical argumentation of Orbán's speeches. Per this, first, the thesis intends to define the emergence of populism in Fidesz. Second, the thesis identifies the most relevant hybrid characteristics of the Hungarian political system. Third, the thesis' objective is to analyze Orbán's *Annual Evaluation* (AE), *March 15* (M15), and *October 23* (O23) speeches in order to identify populist elements in them. Ultimately, based on the findings, the researcher shows how the interaction between the hybrid regime and Orbán's rhetoric led to the fourth consecutive, two-thirds majority electoral victory.

2.2. Research Design

The thesis intends to answer the research question and carry out the research objective through a multi-step research design. In order to visualize the research design, the researcher has created the following figure:

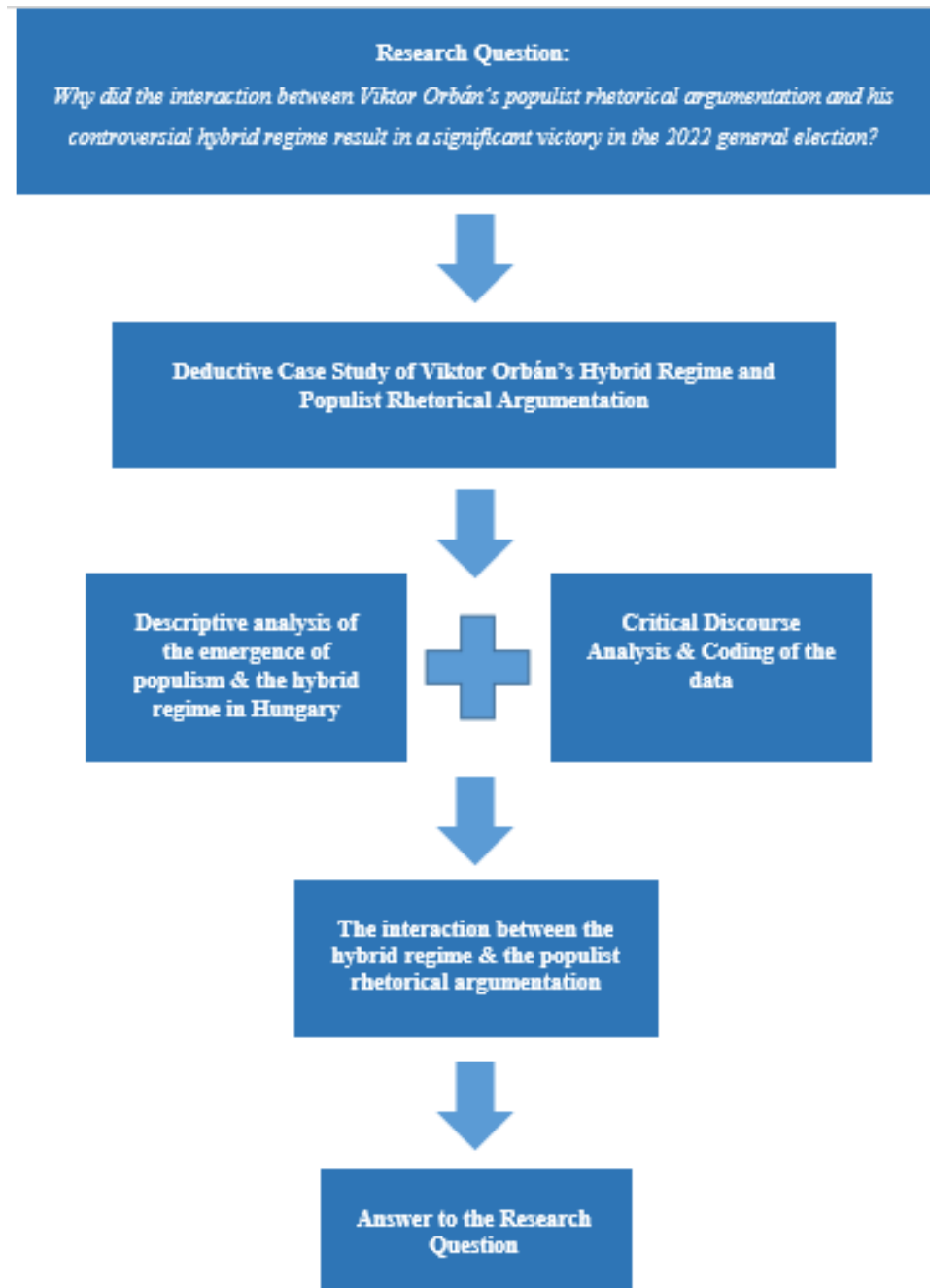


Figure 1: Research Design

As the figure shows, the researcher approaches the research question through the *Deductive Case Study of Viktor Orbán's hybrid regime and his populist rhetorical argumentation*.

As explained in the previous subchapter, the thesis examines the Hungarian political system and the Orbán speeches. The thesis is classified as a case study, according to Robert Yin's definition of a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context."¹⁸ Besides that, the research design follows an innovative causes-of-effects approach by tracing the "the originating causes of an observed outcome through the establishment of the specific processes and linkages producing it."¹⁹

Furthermore, the thesis' research question seeks to find an answer by relying on a deductive approach. In that sense, the deductive approach is creating of a research design to test a hypothesis based upon a theory that has already existed.²⁰

The thesis uses the theoretical understanding of hybrid regimes and populism. Per this, the research question suggests the hypothesis that the Hungarian political system is a democratic-authoritarian hybrid regime; Orbán's rhetorical argumentation is populist, and the interaction between the two largely contributed to Fidesz's electoral success in April 2022. Additionally, in line with the deductive approach, the researcher expects to identify hybrid and populist patterns to prove the pre-existing hypothesis.²¹

2.3. Methodological Clarification of the Applied Theories

The two main political science theories included in the thesis are the hybrid regimes theory and populism. Both theories are critically important for a better scientific understanding of the Hungarian political system under Viktor Orbán's premiership.

In that sense, the theoretical definition of hybrid regimes provides an academic understanding of the Hungarian political system. With the help of hybrid regimes theory, the researcher can introduce the most relevant authoritarian features of the Hungarian political system. As it will be proven, these features have played a key role in Orbán's third consecutive, two-thirds majority electoral victory.

Next, the researcher relies on the academic description of populism to gain theoretical insight into the emergence of Populism in Fidesz and Orbán's rhetorical argumentation. The researcher aims to identify a pattern in Viktor Orbán's speeches that helped to legitimize his

¹⁸ Yin, Robert. 2009. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, p. 18.

¹⁹ Lia, Daniela, and Roberto Roccu. 2019. "Case study research and critical IR: the case for the extended case methodology". In *International Relations*, Vol 33. No. 1: 67-87, p. 70.

²⁰ Wilson, Jonathan. 2010. *Essentials of Business Research: A Guide to Doing Your Research Project*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, p. 7.

²¹ Babbie, Earl R. 2010. *The Practice of Social Research*. London: Cengage Learning, p. 52.

hybrid regime politically as the only political force that could provide security to Hungarians while also effectively protecting Hungarian interests.

Finally, the theoretical understanding of hybrid regimes and populism helps the researcher interpret the results of the 2022 general election. Additionally, the primary interaction between the hybrid traits of the regime and Orbán's populist argumentation will be explained.

2.4. Choice of Data

The chosen data are Viktor Orbán's speeches; the thesis' approach is qualitative. The data consists of Orbán's AE speeches, M15 speeches, and O23 speeches. These three speeches are the most pivotal ones each year out of all the available speeches because of their political, cultural, and historical importance.

2.5. Data Management

In order to achieve the thesis' objective, the researcher used two essential data management methods. Primarily, the thesis relies on *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA) to interpret Viktor Orbán's populist rhetorical argumentation in his speeches. Additionally, the researcher also used *Coding* to identify patterns in the data and organize them into categories.²² Per this, the following two subchapters explain the appropriate use of CDA and Coding.

2.5.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

Style and argumentation have significant roles in the rhetorical analysis of political discourse.²³ Thereby, CDA is necessary if one is to examine Viktor Orbán's rhetoric. Considering populism, the rhetorical invention, finding, and creation of arguments, meanwhile also giving them a meaning, play a pivotal role.²⁴ In that sense, CDA provides a perfect methodological tool for data management since, according to the deductive hypothesis of this paper, the speeches are expected to have populist characteristics.

The researcher believes that the speeches serve as tools of political legitimization for the hybrid regime. Per this, the speeches contain direct and indirect references to the power circulation. In that sense, CDA is an exceptionally reliable methodological tool since it is never simply descriptive, and it aims to prove the circulation of power in discourse.²⁵ In line with this,

²² Taylor-Powell, Ellen and Marcus Renner. 2003. *Analyzing Qualitative Data*. Madison: Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System.

²³ Eisenhart, Christopher and Barbara Johnstone. 2008. "Discourse analysis and rhetorical studies". In *Rhetoric in Detail*. ED by Barbara Johnstone and Christopher Eisenhart: 3-31. Amsterdam: John Benjamin Publishing Company, p. 7.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 8.

²⁵ Fairclough, 1992, 2003 and Wodak, 1996, 2005, as quoted in Eisenhart and Johnstone, 2008, p. 9.

the researcher will identify linguistic and logical elements in the speeches that refer to political power.

CDA also provides an overview of crucial rhetorical argumentation by “looking systematically at one or more of the often unnoticed details of grammar or word choice.”²⁶ Grammatical and word choices are pivotal for analyzing the Orbán’s speeches since Orbán frequently relies on a folkish style of argumentation and harsh or militant words. In addition to that, CDA is “a highly systematic, thorough approach to critical reading (and listening), and critical reading almost inevitably leads to questioning the status quo”.²⁷ In that sense, the status quo of populist rhetorical argumentation is questioned because it can legitimize the autocratic manipulation of democratic structures.

Ultimately, CDA examines three key terms in the speeches: *power*, *ideology* and *history*.²⁸ Power is understood as repressive and productive in terms of language.²⁹ CDA defines ideology as social forms and processes.³⁰ Meanwhile, CDA also intends to track the history of phrases and arguments.³¹ Per this, power and ideology are crucial elements of the CDA of Orbán’s speeches. As it will be proven, linguistic and logical structures are often used in Orbán’s speeches in order to emphasize the importance of power.

Additionally, Orbán also uses his speeches to embrace his ideology. Furthermore, considering the history of phrases and arguments, a re-approaching pattern of word usage and argumentation is present in the earliest (2018) and latest (2022) analyzed Orbán speeches. By this, the CDA of each speech is organized into four subheadings that are called the ‘*Us versus them*’ divide in the X speech, A heroic leader calls for heroic missions in the X speech, The struggle for National Sovereignty in the X speech, and The Critique of supranationalism in the X speech.

2.5.2. Coding as Qualitative Data Management Method

The researcher has used Saldaña’s definition of a code in a qualitative manner, which “is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/ or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based visual data.”³² Following this

²⁶ Zdenek, Sean and Barbara Johnstone. 2008. “Discourse analysis and rhetorical studies”. In *Rhetoric in Detail*. ED by Barbara Johnstone and Christopher Eisenhart: 25- 31. Amsterdam: John Benjamin Publishing Company, p. 25.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 26.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 28.

²⁹ Foucault, as quoted in Zdenek and Johnstone, p. 28.

³⁰ Wodak, 2001, as quoted in Zdenek and Johnstone, p. 28.

³¹ Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, as quoted in Zdenek, and Johnstone, p. 28.

³² Saldaña, Johnny. 2013. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication, p. 3.

definition, the researcher identified several *Descriptive Codes* (DC) in each Orbán speech. A DC is a code that summarizes “the primary topic of the excerpt.”³³ The researcher’s DCs are as follows:

Internal opponents, Blame the predecessor, Foreign opponents, Anti-elitist, Communist sins/threat, Protect traditional/ Christian values, Children/Family/Marriage, Folkish phrases/metaphors/wisdom, Militant style, Importance of Power, Nationalist/patriotic, Glorious history, Muslim immigrants, Foreign threat, Anti-Western, Accusation of Soros

In line with Saldaña’s definition of DCs, some of the researcher’s codes not only do cover words, phrases or sentences, but they also code paragraphs or even a page of the coded speech.³⁴ Per this, the researcher turned argumentations and ideas into codes rather than words or phrases. This approach was crucial since the exact words or phrases could be repeated multiple times while Orbán was explaining the same argumentation.

Following the coding of each speech, the researcher identified patterns in them. According to Saldaña, patterns can be based upon similarities, differences, frequency, sequence, correspondence, and causation.³⁵ In this thesis, the patterns are identified on similarities and frequency. Per this, the researcher realized that similar patterns appear in all speeches with different but still significant frequency.

Next, the researcher codified the patterns into categories to organize the data “into a systematic order”.³⁶ Per this, the researcher used the categorization of codes as a methodological tool to summarize each genre of Orbán’s speech before he started the previously described CDA. The DC-s were categorized as the following table shows:

³³ Saldaña, p. 5.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 3.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 6-7.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 9.

Category	Descriptive Code(s)
Internal and foreign 'us vs. them' divide	Internal opposition Blame the predecessor Foreign opponents Anti-elitist Communist sins/threat
Call for heroic missions	Protect traditional/ Christian values Children/family/marriage
Folkish style	Folkish phrases/metaphor/wisdom
Call to arms	Militant style Importance of power
Struggle for national sovereignty	Nationalist/patriotic Glorious history Muslim immigrants
Critique of supranationalism	Foreign threat Anti-Western Accusation of Soros

Table 1: The categorization of the Descriptive Codes

Finally, the researcher organized the categories into a table in order to indicate their frequency each year in the particular category of speech:

Rhetorical Tool/Argumentation	Year X
Internal & foreign ‘us vs. them’ divide	Y
Call for heroic missions	Y
Folkish style	Y
Call to arms	Y
Struggle for national sovereignty	Y
Fierce critique of supranationalism	Y

Table 2: Explanatory table

Rhetorical Tool/Argumentation collects the categories into which the codes were organized. Year X stands for the year in which the speech was given. Finally, Y marks the frequency of the identified categories. Thanks to this method, the researcher turned qualitative data into simplified quantitative data. This additional angle to the analysis serves as a short introduction to each category of speech, enabling the researcher to present a more detailed analytical method. To explain the coding process in more detail, the researcher included a coded speech in the *Appendix*.

2.6. Replicability

In his book, Saldaña addresses the problem of replicability by stating that coding is a relatively subjective process.³⁷ In that sense, the DCs and the categories are unique creations of the researcher. However, since the thesis combines Coding with CDA, which relies on the theoretical description of populism, the findings are replicable even though other researchers may identify different CDs and categories.

2.7. Objectivity

Since the writer of the thesis is Hungarian, one may argue that the paper is not objective. On the contrary to this, the thesis only relies on social science methodologies and political science theories. The researcher does not intend to judge or comment on either Viktor Orbán or the Hungarian political system. Per this, the deductive hypotheses of the paper are not due to the

³⁷ Saldaña, p. 4.

writer's subjective opinion. The claims that Hungary is a hybrid regime and Viktor Orbán's rhetorical argumentation is populist are based on theoretical proof, not subjective judgment.

2.8. Limitations

Throughout the data management process, the researcher has identified four main categories of limitations, which are the following:

2.8.1. Limitation of Time

In order to make the data up-to-date, the researcher has set a time interval for the collected speeches. Per this, the researcher's data consist of speeches from February 2018 to March 2022. Only speeches from the given period underwent thorough analysis through CDA and coding.

2.8.2. Limitation of Space

The focus of the thesis is on Hungarian domestic politics. In that sense, the researcher aims to define the domestic political legitimization of the Hungarian hybrid regime through the Orbán speeches. The thesis does not include either positive foreign feedback or foreign criticism of Viktor Orbán and the Hungarian political system.

2.8.3. Limitation of Language

The researcher translated the Viktor Orbán quotes from Hungarian to English. Since Orbán frequently uses Hungarian folk wisdom and folkish metaphors or phrases, it is almost impossible to give back the same cultural meaning. Per this, the researcher paid careful attention to translating the speeches in a linguistically perfect way. Thereby, when the English equivalent of the Hungarian folk wisdom or folkish metaphor and phrase did not exist, the researcher used mirror translation paying attention to the content still making sense.

2.8.4. The Readers Assumed Limitation of Background Knowledge

Since the readers are likely to be foreigners, the detailed knowledge of Hungarian domestic politics is not an expectation. In accordance with this, the researcher included a chapter called *Contextualization of the Hungarian Domestic Politics (1990-2010)*, which intends to provide a brief understanding to the reader. Furthermore, the historical meaning of the M15 and O23 speeches are briefly explained before the thorough CDA. The researcher also explains the historical references in the quoted parts of the Orbán speeches.

3. Theoretical Framework and Application

The following chapter describes the essential features of the applied theories. Per this, the theoretical understanding of hybrid regimes and populism is presented to provide a theoretical framework for the empirical analysis.

3.1. Hybrid Regimes

Hybrid regimes are partially democratic, partially authoritarian political systems. According to scholar Fareed Zakaria, “[...] many countries are settling into a form of government that mixes a substantial degree of democracy with a substantial degree of illiberalism.”³⁸ Given the large scale of hybridity, some scholars define these ideologically mixed regimes as hybrid regimes, competitive authoritarian regimes, electoral autocracies, or illiberal democracies.³⁹ For simplicity, the thesis uses the term *hybrid regime* to refer to all the aforementioned definitions.

Hybrid regimes are a new breed of political systems that lack many vital characteristics of liberal democracies but cannot be defined as full-scale autocracies either.⁴⁰ In hybrid regimes, the representative institutions of liberal democracies exist, but they are rendered ineffective by a variety of manipulative strategies.⁴¹ Consequently, more social and political liberty is present than in full-fledged autocracies, and the incumbent government's power is partly based on popular demand; however, among others, media freedom is not fully guaranteed.⁴² Besides that, the regime's political legitimacy comes from being “reasonably democratic,” but it cannot be defined as a democracy with constitutional liberalism.⁴³

The hybridity comes from “a contingent set of institutions of domination with a comprehensive set of institutions of representation, subject to authoritarian manipulation.”⁴⁴ In hybrid regimes, the ruling party overemphasizes its strong democratic engagement; however, in reality, “the elections are either not free and fair, and/or their results are not directly translated into effective governing power.”⁴⁵ As Schedler explains:

“At the moment of their foundation electoral authoritarian regimes do something extraordinary. They adopt the formal institutional framework of their systemic competitor, liberal democracy. [...] They set up the full panoply of liberal-democratic institutions, from constitutions to constitutional courts, from

³⁸ Zakaria, Fareed. 1997. “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy”. In *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 76, No. 6: 22-43, p. 24.

³⁹ Sebők, Miklós and Zsolt Boda. 2021. *Policy Agendas in Autocracy and Hybrid Regimes: The Case of Hungary*. Cham: Springer Nature, p. 9.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 9.

⁴¹ Schedler, Andreas. 2013. *The Politics of Uncertainty: Sustaining and Subverting Electoral Authoritarianism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 74.

⁴² Sebők and Boda, p. 9.

⁴³ Zakaria, p. 42.

⁴⁴ Schedler, p. 75.

⁴⁵ Schedler, p. 75. and Sebők and Boda, p. 9.

legislatures to agencies of accountability, from judicial systems to federal arrangements, from independent media to civic associations.”⁴⁶

As the quoted paragraph shows, hybrid regimes “are virtually indistinguishable from liberal democracies”.⁴⁷ However, hybrid regimes seek to “constrain, contain and control democratic institutions”.⁴⁸

Hybrid regimes treat, among others, the courts and legislatures as “subordinate branches of executive power”.⁴⁹ According to this, hybrid regimes manipulate the electoral system, the court, the judicial system, and the media to consolidate their power.⁵⁰

3.2. Populism

The following section combines the *Ideational* and the *Political-Strategic Approaches* to populism.⁵¹ Besides that, the relevant causes and the populist approach towards identification, nationalism, and media are to be discussed.

From the ideational perspective, *populism* is an ideology that separates society into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups.⁵² These two groups are the authentic people and the illegitimate elite, based on the concept of morality.⁵³ As Pappas explains: “The politicization of resentment is but a necessary step towards the creation by emerging populist leaders of a new social cleavage between “the people” and the people’s enemies.”⁵⁴ Considering political strategy, the crucial ambitions of populism are mobilization and gaining comprehensive electoral support through focusing on, among others, charismatic leadership and ‘democratic illiberalism’.⁵⁵ Consequently, the political-strategic goal is transforming “potential majorities into real ones by creating novel social cleavages”.⁵⁶ This political strategy is constructed around a charismatic leader and follows three core principles.⁵⁷ First, the leader is the embodiment of

⁴⁶ Schedler, p. 81.

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 84.

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 84-87.

⁵¹ Mudde, Cas. 2017. “Populism: An Ideational Approach”. In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. ED Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al.: 35-52. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 36-52. and Weyland, Kurt. 2017.

“Populism: A Political-Strategic Approach”. In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. ED Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al.: 53-73. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 53-73.

⁵² Mudde. 2004. as quoted by Mudde, p. 38

⁵³ Mudde, p. 38.

⁵⁴ Pappas, Takis S. 2012. “Populism Emergent: A Framework for Analyzing its Contexts, Mechanics, and Outcomes”. *Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies: EUI Working Papers*, RSCAS 2012/01, p. 10.

⁵⁵ Pappas, p. 1-2.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 2.

⁵⁷ Weyland, p. 60-62.

the people.⁵⁸ Second, TV and social media are the keys to reaching the public, and third, the leader calls for heroic missions to mobilize voters.⁵⁹

According to Pappas, populism emerges when “established political parties or political systems undergo major de-alignment” that results in “the loss of salience” of previous political divides.⁶⁰ In the emerging political crisis, voters find their identity easier through the rhetoric of a charismatic, populist leader.⁶¹ Besides that, weak democratic governance and economic instability create a perfect foundation for the emergence of populism.⁶²

Identification is also a crucial part of populism. Populism is constructed upon the theoretical conflict between the powerful and the powerless.⁶³ Per this, the people are defined as the powerless, representing the oppressed legitimate power holders against an illegitimately powerful elite, the anti-thesis of the people.⁶⁴ This “us versus them” divide also requires the existence of an internal divide within the country.⁶⁵ In populist rhetoric, identifying of “the people” has a dual meaning. According to Panizza, “the signifier people refers to *the people* both as an underdog (the plebs) and as the holder of sovereignty (the demos).”⁶⁶ One of the populist leader’s main ambitions is to make the excluded layers of society “feel recognized as holders of sovereignty”.⁶⁷

Populist identification is closely related to nationalism because nationalism is equated to the people’s sovereignty according to the ideational approach to populism.⁶⁸ Combined with nationalism, populism creates an exclusive group within the nation that defines the members and – at the same time, those excluded from the nation and the national community of reference.⁶⁹ According to populist nationalism, people (the members of the nation) are the victims of a multicultural society and the multicultural elite.⁷⁰ Populism is also against

⁵⁸ Weyland, p. 62.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Pappas, p. 2.

⁶¹ Hawkins, Kirk A. et al. 2017. “Populism and its Causes” In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. ED Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al.: 242- 258. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.245.

⁶² Ibid, p .247.

⁶³ Panizza, Francisco. 2017. “Populism and Identification”. In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. ED Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al.: 362- 379. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 363.

⁶⁴ Mudde, 2017, p. 40.

⁶⁵ Panizza, p. 366.

⁶⁶ Panizza, p. 367.

⁶⁷ Panizza, p. 370.

⁶⁸ De Cleen, Benjamin. 2017. “Populism and Nationalism” In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. ED Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al.:306- 324. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 307.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 308.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 313.

supranational movements and organizations because of their economic power and influence over national sovereignty.⁷¹

4. Contextualization of the Hungarian Domestic Politics (1990-2010)

The following chapter provides a socio-political understanding of the Hungarian Political System before the beginning of total Fidesz dominance. Per this, the researcher shortly introduces Viktor Orbán and the origin of Fidesz, the political aspect of the System Change, the economic crisis under the 2006-2010 MSZP (Magyar Szocialista Párt) government, and Viktor Orbán as the leader of the opposition in the same period.

4.1. The Origin Story of Viktor Orbán and Fidesz

Viktor Orbán was born in 1963 and grew up in extreme poverty in Felcsút.⁷² After finishing grammar school, he began his university studies at Eötvös Loránd University's (ELTE) Faculty of Law (FoL), the most prominent Hungarian law school.⁷³ During his university studies, Orbán was admitted to and resided at Bibó István Szakkolégium, an extra-curricular college; which also served as a dormitory and was considered to be a small "island of autonomy" during the last years of the Communist dictatorship.⁷⁴ Fidesz was founded in Bibó college, as a liberal-democratic youth organization, by, among others, Viktor Orbán and János Áder, and in 1989 it was organized into a political party.⁷⁵ Orbán gained countrywide recognition and popularity in the same year due to his brave, revolutionary speech at the reburial of Imre Nagy, the martyr PM of the oppressed 1956 revolution.⁷⁶

4.2. The Political Aspect of the System Change and the Long 1990s

The first free general elections in Hungary were held in April 1990. The centrist, conservative Christian MDF (Magyar Demokrata Fórum) secured an absolute majority.⁷⁷ The liberal left-wing SZDSZ (Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége) formed the largest opposition group with ninety-three members of parliament (MP), while the historical heir of the Hungarian Communist Party, now socialist democrat MSZP, gained 33 seats.⁷⁸ Fidesz, at that time a

⁷¹ De Cleen, p. 314.

⁷² Lendvai, p. 11-13.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 14-17.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 17-18.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 10-23.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 6-8.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 24.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 24.

central-liberal party, secured twenty-two seats, a vast electoral success for a party led by political newcomers in their mid-twenties.⁷⁹

Unfortunately, Hungarians woke up soon from a smooth political transition. The rapid shrink of gross domestic product (GDP), unemployment, and the liquidation of enterprises quickly made the MDF government unpopular.⁸⁰ In the meantime, József Antall, the widely respected PM, suddenly died due to an aggressive form of cancer, which led to the total downfall of the already troubled MDF.⁸¹

In the political vacuum, following the inner fights between the liberal and the conservative wing of Fidesz, Orbán transformed Fidesz into a central right, conservative party.⁸² The ideological makeover was costly because, in the 1994 parliamentary election, Fidesz dropped to last place regarding the number of representatives, with only twenty MPs delegated to the parliament.⁸³ However, during the 1994- 1998 period, freed “of its liberal and doubting elements,” Fidesz successfully filled the vacuum left by the collapse of MDF.⁸⁴ As a result, Fidesz won the 1998 general election, and Orbán became the youngest Hungarian PM ever at thirty-four.⁸⁵

The first Orbán government was a conservative coalition government with 148 Fidesz MPs, 48 Smallholders’ Party MPs, and 19 MDF representatives.⁸⁶ Regardless of its absolute majority, several bribery scandals compromised the coalition government and Orbán’s close family and friends.⁸⁷ Per this, in 2001, Fidesz desperately raised the minimum wage, real incomes, and pensions to secure its popularity.⁸⁸ As a result, “(i)n the first quarter of the election year of 2002, the growth rate of real earning was three times of GDP”; so the economy significantly deteriorated.⁸⁹

Despite all the hardship, Orbán remained popular until the end of his premiership.⁹⁰ Consequently, the narrow victory of the MSZP-SZDSZ coalition in the 2002 general election

⁷⁹ Lendvai, p. 24.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 25.

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 24-25.

⁸² Ibid, p. 34-37.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 30-31.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 40.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 33.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 43.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 43-47.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 47.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 47.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 49.

was a huge surprise.⁹¹ In 2006, MSZP was re-elected following a campaign that promised broad economic reforms and less austerity.⁹² Per this, the 2002 – 2010 period was the time of MSZP dominance.

4.3. The 2nd MSZP – SZDSZ Coalitional Government (2006 – 2010)

Shortly after his re-election, PM Ferenc Gyurcsány “announced a complete turnaround in government policy, including drastic fiscal expenditure cuts”.⁹³ On top of that, just one month after the election, the audio record of Gyurcsány’s ‘Őszöd speech’ that had privately been delivered to the MSZP fraction was leaked. In the speech, Gyurcsány admitted “lying in the morning, in the evening and at night” throughout the previous two years and during the campaign.⁹⁴ In response, the political-economic frustration culminated in wide-scale anti-government protests.⁹⁵

4.3.1. The 2006 Anti-Government Protests

In 2006, Fidesz and the newly formed far-right Jobbik party organized a series of anti-government protests in Budapest, demanding Gyurcsány’s abdication.”⁹⁶ The protests climaxed on October 23 when the crowd was commemorating the 1956 revolution against communist oppression.⁹⁷ That day, a particularly violent protest started against the MSZP government:

*“The response of the poorly led police was disproportionately harsh. Thirsting for revenge after their failure during the assault on the TV centre a few weeks previously, they reacted with great brutality and in equal measure against both the far-right hooligans and the peaceful demonstrators as they made their way home. [...] On this tragic day of unrest 326 civilians were injured (sixteen badly), as were 399 police officers (forty-seven seriously).”*⁹⁸

As the quote shows, the executive power had poor control over the police, which used brutal retaliation against its compatriots. Thereby, the democratic legitimization of the Gyurcsány

⁹¹ Lendvai, p. 49

⁹² Fabry, Adam. 2019. “Neoliberalism, crisis and authoritarian- ethnicist reaction: The ascendancy of the Orbán regime”. In *Competition and Change*, Vol. 23 No. 2: 165- 191, p. 171.

⁹³ Fabry, p. 171.

⁹⁴ Gyurcsány, Ferenc, 2006, as quoted in: Őszödi beszéd. 2006. 5. 26. Balatonőszöd <https://www.magyarhirlap.hu/belfold/20210916-kozoljuk-gyurcsany-oszodi-beszedenek-teljes-szoveget> (accessed May 29, 2022) – researcher’s translation.

⁹⁵ Fabry, p. 171.

⁹⁶ Fabry, p. 171.

⁹⁷ Lendvai, p. 71

⁹⁸ Lendvai, p. 71-72.

government was significantly undermined. In the meantime, Orbán's popularity – as the opposition leader and main organizer of the protests – was rapidly rising.⁹⁹

4.3.2. The Global Financial Crisis

On top of the already tense atmosphere, the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) caused a substantial economic backlash worldwide and put the Gyurcsány government under more immense pressure.¹⁰⁰ In late 2008 and early 2009, the debt was 75% of the national GDP, causing a severe recession.¹⁰¹

The GFC was particularly hard for Hungary because of the country's "lower-than-average maturity of its sovereign debt and the high level of indebtedness of Hungarian households and the private sector".¹⁰² In order to handle the grave liquidity crisis, the MSZP government received a total of 25.1 billion United States dollars bailout package from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB), and the EU.¹⁰³ However, by 2008, Hungarian households and small-scale businesses had already been heavily indebted to the Swiss franc.¹⁰⁴

4.4. Orbán, the Leader of Opposition between 2006 and 2010

Fidesz constructed its whole campaign by emphasizing the MSZP government's lies and controversial decisions that had led to a particularly damaging recession. In addition to that, Orbán accused the MSZP government of serving foreign interests by indebting Hungary.¹⁰⁵ Besides, he led a series of successful and patriotic campaigns, such as the referendum against paid healthcare consultation and university tuition.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, Fidesz voted against the government's austerity package and refused to participate in discussion with the government.¹⁰⁷ Per this, Orbán became the reckless and relentless symbol of resistance against the widely unpopular government. As a result, Orbán and Fidesz achieved a groundbreaking electoral victory in 2010. Quoting Lendvai, "For the first time in the history of democratic Hungary, a political party had achieved a two-thirds majority".¹⁰⁸ However, as the upcoming analysis will

⁹⁹ Lendvai, p. 70-73.

¹⁰⁰ Fabry, p. 171-172.

¹⁰¹ Scoggins, Bermond. 2020. "Identity Politics or Economics? Explaining Voters Support for Hungary's Illiberal FIDESZ". In *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, Vol. 36 No. 1: 3-28, p. 9

¹⁰² Fabry, p. 172.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 171-172.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 171.

¹⁰⁵ Kim, Seongcheol. 2021. "... Because the homeland cannot be in opposition: analysing the discourses of Fidesz and Law and Justice (PiS) from opposition to power". In *East European Politics*, 37:2, 332-351, p. 337-339.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 339.

¹⁰⁷ Lendvai, p. 79-80.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 85.

prove, this extraordinarily strong democratic legitimization was used to transform Hungarian democracy into a controversial hybrid regime.

5. Analysis

The Analysis chapter contains three main subchapters. In the first one, the researcher describes the emergence of Orbán's populism and the current Hungarian political system with the help of the applied theories.

Following this, the second subchapter provides a CDA of Viktor Orbán's most prominent speeches given between 2018 and 2022. Throughout the CDA of the speeches, the researcher identifies populist rhetorical elements and the political legitimization of the hybrid regime through them.

Finally, in the last subchapter, the researcher answers the research question based on the findings of the descriptive and empirical parts while also explaining the results of the 2022 general election.

5.1. Viktor Orbán and the Emergence of Populism

The following subchapter describes the emergence of populism in Fidesz. Besides that, the researcher shows how Orbán's image as Hungary's sole capable and patriotic leader was constructed.

5.1.1. The De-alignment Crisis of the Established Parties

As explained in the Theory chapter (see p. 19), among other reasons, populism emerges when “established political parties or political systems undergo major de-alignment” that results in “the loss of salience” of previous political divides.¹⁰⁹ Seemingly, contrarily to this, as one of the participants of the system change, then one of the most prominent parties of the democratic era (that has even formed a government between 1998 and 2002), Fidesz is arguably an established party. However, since MDF's collapse (see p. 21), Fidesz has been keen on positioning itself as a patriotic, national party representing the people against the established parties (such as MDF, SZDSZ, MSZP et cetera).¹¹⁰ Arguably, one of the most prominent examples of this narrative is in Orbán's speech following the 2002 election defeat against the MSZP – SZDSZ coalition:

¹⁰⁹ Pappas, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ Kim, p. 337.

“The homeland is not just politics, but it is also our life. Maybe our parties and representatives are in opposition in the Parliament; however, we, who are in the square, cannot be and will not be in opposition because the homeland cannot be in opposition.”¹¹¹

Not only had Orbán created the still ongoing ‘us versus them divide’ in this speech, but he also positioned himself and his voters as the ‘homeland’. Arguably, this narrative contains a significantly populist element. Thereby, according to the quote, the democratically elected MSZP – SZDSZ coalition did not truly represent the homeland because its legitimacy had not come from it.

The governance of the MSZP-SZDSZ coalition between 2006 and 2010 was full of political scandals and poor economic decisions; meanwhile, it was also challenged by the 2008 GFC (see p. 23). Due to the hardship, opposition leader Fidesz could position itself as the true defender and champion of democracy.¹¹² Per this, the established parties, MSZP, SZDSZ, and MDF, lost many votes. In the meantime, Fidesz undoubtedly became the most potent political force.

The de-alignment arguably climaxed in the total loss of salience of the major system-changing parties in the 2010 general election. Neither MDF nor SZDSZ could secure 5% of the votes necessary to be represented in the parliament; meanwhile, MSZP won only 19%, (compared to its 43% in 2006).¹¹³ Since 2010, MDF and SZDSZ have been dissolved, while MSZP has become an insignificant party with constant leadership and loyalty struggles.

5.1.2. The New ‘Champion’ of a New Era

Viktor Orbán and Fidesz have arguably become the ultimate winners of the 2006 – 2010 period. As explained in the contextualization chapter (see p. 23), the Gyurcsány government received a massive bailout package that further increased Hungary’s foreign debt. In reply, Orbán formulated the populist narrative that the Gyurcsány government was serving foreign interests.¹¹⁴

Presumably, the economic instability provided the opportunity for Orbán to pose as the voice of the oppressed and financially underprivileged masses. Per this, Fidesz relentlessly

¹¹¹ Viktor Orbán, 2002, as quoted in: Orbán Viktor Dísz téren tartott beszéde. 2002. 5. 7. Budapest <http://www.ma.hu/tart/rcikk/a/0/3774/1> (accessed May 23) – researcher’s translation.

¹¹² Kim, p. 339.

¹¹³ Lendvai, p. 85.

¹¹⁴ Kim, p. 337.

attacked the Gyurcsány's government for its poor economic decisions.¹¹⁵ In line with this, Gyurcsány, the IMF, and the World Bank are still significant boogeymen even in Orbán's most recent speeches.

Furthermore, in the tense internal divide, Orbán had presumably realized the political potential and became the most valiant critique of the Gyurcsány government.¹¹⁶ He had arguably intensified the 'us versus them divide' to mobilize the masses and maximize his power accumulation for the next election. As the leader of the opposition, Orbán constantly called for protests and demanded Gyurcsány's abdication.¹¹⁷ On October 23, 2006, the anti-government protest climaxed in a bloody street fight (see p. 22) that significantly undermined the democratic legitimacy of the Gyurcsány government and arguably further estranged neutral voters.

The results of the 2010 general election show that Orbán succeeded in becoming the symbol of resistance and the unquestionable, sole-option of leadership for the disillusioned masses in the "cold civil war".¹¹⁸

5.2. The Hybrid Traits of Hungary under Viktor Orbán's Premiership (2010 – 2022)

The *Hybrid Regimes* subchapter (see p. 17-18) explains that hybrid regimes combine democratic and authoritarian elements. In 2010, Fidesz secured a strong, popular demand-based democratic legitimization by their two-thirds majority victory through a free, two-round democratic election; however, it used its power to hybridize the Hungarian political system.

5.2.1. The New Election System

Arguably, the democratically gained two-thirds majority entitled Fidesz to virtually unlimited power.¹¹⁹ With this power, they modified the Hungarian elections system to cement their position "ever since".¹²⁰ Assumedly, "the theoretical possibility of removing the government" exists; however, the modification of the two-rounded election system to one round, strongly favors the largest party (which is Fidesz).¹²¹

¹¹⁵ Lendvai, p. 68-70.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 70.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 70-90.

¹¹⁹ Ádám, p. 397.

¹²⁰ Ibid, p. 397.

¹²¹ Lendvai, p. 92.

In the new one-round system, the majority of the Hungarian MPs are elected directly from single-member districts.¹²² There are 106 mandates from single-member districts, 18 in Budapest and 88 in the countryside. The winner of each district only has to gain a simple majority compared to the absolute majority of the two-round system. In addition to that, the single-member districts have undergone a “laser-sharp gerrymandering” due to Fidesz’s absolute power in the parliament.¹²³ The gerrymandering arguably aims to compensate for the more liberal atmosphere of the larger cities in the countryside by combining them with smaller towns into one single-member district.

The other 93 members of the Hungarian parliament are delegated from party lists. However, the party-list seats have also been manipulated by the modification of the election system.¹²⁴

“In most European countries, the party lists are compensated when the individual candidates of a party win votes but lose in their actual constituency. Instead of offsetting the distorting effects of the first-past-the-post system, in Hungary it is the winning parties in the individual constituencies who are also assigned to the transferable votes for the party list seats. This perverse winner compensation system, peculiar to Hungary, completely undermines proportional representation.”¹²⁵

As the quote proves, Fidesz has constructed a hybrid regime that ensures its advantage in the general election. Arguably, the new election system enabled Fidesz to gain a two-third majority with only 45% of the votes in 2014 and 49% in 2018.¹²⁶ By enjoying the benefits of the new election system, Fidesz can pose as a “sort of democratically approved authoritarianism”.¹²⁷ Furthermore, Fidesz defines the electoral success as the most robust democratic tool of popular demand, which even encourages Orbán to proclaim Hungary “as a prototypical ‘illiberal regime’” while still representing a sizeable amount of multi-party democracy throughout a free but not fair election.¹²⁸ Thereby, arguably, the system is still “reasonably democratic”, but it is not a democracy with constitutional liberalism anymore.¹²⁹

¹²² Unstoppable strongman. 2022.

¹²³ Müller, 2022.

¹²⁴ Lendvai, p. 129-130.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 129-130.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p. 128 and Ibid, p. 234.

¹²⁷ Ádám, p. 385.

¹²⁸ Fabry, p. 166.

¹²⁹ Zakaria, p. 42.

5.2.2. Authoritarian Manipulation of Democratic Structures

Considering the structure of a hybrid regime, the representative institutions are de facto present; however, they are ineffective due to the authoritarian manipulation they suffer.¹³⁰ According to Fabry, “Orbán handed personal friends and loyal party apparatchiks long-term posts in the corridors of power, including the President of the Republic, the State Audit Office and the Constitutional Court”.¹³¹ The handover resulted in “no effective checks and balances remaining in place”.¹³² Thereby, arguably, both legislative and judiciary powers serve the will of the executive power, due to which the separation of power is de facto abolished.¹³³

The cornerstone of Orbán’s hybrid regime is the FLH which was accepted by the Fidesz-controlled parliament “in nine days, without any previous national debate, any political or legal discussion, and of course without a plebiscite.”¹³⁴ The FLH is widely criticized for its authoritarian elements and controversies.¹³⁵

Another critical manipulation of the democratic structure was “the organized and successful assault on judicial independence”¹³⁶:

“First the selection procedure for the justices of the constitutional court was altered. In the past an all-party parliamentary committee had proposed candidates who were then accepted or rejected in a parliamentary vote. Now their appointment became a decision of parliament, with its huge Fidesz majority. [...] In order to achieve a pro-government majority on the court bench as quickly as possible, the prime minister increased the number of justices from eleven to fifteen. As one position was already vacant, the ruling party was able immediately to appoint five new justices, all men close to Fidesz. [...] With the aid of its two-thirds majority, the government decided on the compulsory retirement of all judges and prosecutors who had reached the age of sixty-two (as of 2012), thereby reducing their retirement age by eight years. This measure, implemented without any public debate, affected 274 judges. A new regulation formally abolished the Supreme Court and renamed it the Kuria. This was done

¹³⁰ Schedler, p. 74.

¹³¹ Fabry, p. 175

¹³² Ádám, p. 397.

¹³³ Lendvai, p. 93.

¹³⁴ Ibid, p. 95.

¹³⁵ Fabry, p. 176.

¹³⁶ Lendvai, p. 238.

to ease first the removal of András Baka, the Court's independent president, and then his replacement by a pro-Fidesz justice at the head of the new body.”¹³⁷

The quoted paragraph explains how Fidesz gained control of judicial power – one of the most essential pillars of checks and balances – through serious structural manipulation, “which has provided legal cover for a degree of institutional corruption”.¹³⁸

Fidesz also abandoned the tradition of appointing the President of the Republic (PotR) upon the consensus of the government and the opposition. Arguably, an independent president posed an unpredictable factor to Orbán since “a strong personality could in crisis situation obstruct the will of the prime minister”.¹³⁹ Thereby, the Fidesz majority parliament appointed three Fidesz members as PotR (Pál Schmidt, János Áder and Katalin Novák) to assure unquestionable loyalty. By this, neither Schmidt nor Áder (Orbán's personal friend from ELTE FoL) obstructed not even the most controversial bills and arguably signed almost everything without the slightest hesitation. Katalin Novák starts her first term in May; however, there is no doubt about her political loyalty since she has served as the Minister of Family Affairs, one of the flagships of the 4th Orbán government.

5.2.3. Violation of Media Freedom

The violation of media freedom is another significant hybrid trait of the Hungarian political system. Following the 2010 general election victory, Fidesz incorporated “the three public service TV stations (M1, M2 and Duna-TV), the three nationwide radio stations and even the official press agency” in its newly founded Media Services and Support Trust Fund.”¹⁴⁰

In addition to that, Fidesz also created the National Media and Information Authority, whose Fidesz supermajority parliament elects five members.¹⁴¹ The organization was widely criticized for violating media freedom since it “has the right to deny media outlets of their licenses and impose heavy fines [...] for publishing ‘improper content’.”¹⁴²

Since Fidesz's 2010 election triumph, several ‘unfriendly’ media providers have been taken over or dissolved. The most prominent examples are origo.hu, index.hu, Népszabadság

¹³⁷ Lendvai, p. 103-104.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p. 238.

¹³⁹ Ibid, p. 95.

¹⁴⁰ Vásárhelyi, 2013 and Magyar, 2015, as quoted in Lendvai, p. 115.

¹⁴¹ Fabry, p. 175-176.

¹⁴² Ibid.

(one of the oldest Hungarian printed newspapers) and Klubrádió. In accordance with this, Lendvai points out one of the most significant problems with the public media providers,

“Appearances by government members and other Fidesz politicians make up 70 per cent of the news on state TV and over 80 per cent of the daily programmes on Kossuth Rádió, the national radio station; two out of three reports trumpet government triumphs, whilst two thirds of the news about the opposition deals with its failures or internal disputes.”¹⁴³

As the quoted paragraph indicates, the Fidesz takeover has significantly undermined Hungarian democracy. According to Lendvai, “80 per cent of viewers and listeners receive only information provided directly or indirectly by the government”.¹⁴⁴ This has arguably provided an unfair advantage during the general election campaigns.

5.2.4. Not a Full-scale Autocracy

To summarize the way hybrid regimes operate, it is crucial to emphasize that they seek to “constrain, contain, and control democratic institutions”.¹⁴⁵ On the one hand, according to Lendvai, Fidesz has total control over several pivotal democratic bodies¹⁴⁶. Thereby, Hungary cannot be defined as a democracy with constitutional liberalism. However, on the other hand, Hungary is still a free country to visit and leave, and protestors can freely organize anti-government protests. Freedom of speech still exists, and so does the possibility of removing Fidesz through an election. Finally, and most importantly, Hungary is also a member of the EU. According to Freedom House, Hungary is ‘*Partly free*’, among others, due to the traits of its political system that the researcher identified as a hybrid.¹⁴⁷ Per this, the researcher defines Hungary as the textbook example of a hybrid regime, in which authoritarian characteristics live side-by-side with democratic elements.

5.3. Critical Discourse Analysis of the Orbán Speeches

In order to understand the political legitimacy of this controversial hybrid regime, it is essential to study Viktor Orbán’s rhetoric through his most important speeches.

¹⁴³ Lendvai, p. 118-119.

¹⁴⁴ Lendvai, p. 119.

¹⁴⁵ Schedler, p. 84.

¹⁴⁶ Lendvai, p. 101-110.

¹⁴⁷ Freedom House. 2022. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/hungary/freedom-world/2022> (accessed May 29, 2022).

Arguably, the three most prominent speeches the Hungarian PM gives each year are the AE speech in February, the M15 speech commemorating the revolution and freedom fight of 1848/49, and the O23 speech remembering the 1956 revolution against the Soviet occupation.

In the following subchapters, the researcher proves how Orbán's populist rhetoric legitimizes the previously introduced hybrid regime politically as the sole option to represent Hungarians and protect their interests among the alleged internal and foreign enemies and the fabricated threats. Based upon the limitation of time (see p. 16), the researcher only analyzed speeches from 2018 to 2022.

5.3.1. The Annual Evaluation Speeches (2018 – 2022)

Throughout his political career, Viktor Orbán has given twenty-three AE speeches. The speeches are given each year in February and evaluate the previous year. The in-person audience attends upon invitation, and they are predominantly Fidesz members/sympathizers or media workers. The speech itself is one of the most significant political events of the year, and it is broadcasted or analyzed by several domestic TV channels or media providers. Thereby, the AE speeches enjoy a nationwide audience.

The following table summarizes the frequency of the most prominent rhetorical tools and arguments of the AE speeches, calculated on the categories defined in the Methodology chapter (see p. 14). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the 2021 speech did not occur.

Rhetorical Tool/Argumentation	2018	2019	2020	2022
Internal and foreign 'us vs. them' divide	17	19	17	43
Call for heroic missions	11	5	11	6
Folkish style	6	11	18	24
Call to arms	11	9	18	25
Struggle for national sovereignty	9	7	8	5
Critique of supranationalism	16	11	20	14

Table 3: Frequency of populist rhetorical elements in the AE speeches

The table shows each AE speech's six most important rhetorical tools or argumentations. As it is to be proven, each of them belongs to the populist theoretical toolkit.

Furthermore, it is essential to emphasize a significant rise in the number of tools/argumentations referring to the *Internal & foreign 'us versus them' divide* in the 2022 AE speech. The reason for this was presumably the 2022 general election when the opposition competed on a single list against Fidesz.¹⁴⁸

The united opposition arguably represented a more considerable challenge for Orbán. In that sense, he assumedly relied more on populist rhetorical elements to mobilize and unite his voters against the opposition. The fact that the other AE speeches contain a more or less consistent amount of populist elements supports the researcher's reasoning.

5.3.1.1. The 'Us versus Them' Divide in the Annual Evaluator Speeches

As explained in the Theory chapter (see p. 18-19), populism builds on the 'us versus them' divide by separating society into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups.¹⁴⁹ In line with this, there is visible internal and foreign socio-political cleavage represented in Viktor Orbán's AE speeches between 'the people' (Fidesz supporters) and their domestic and foreign enemies:

*"We must say no to the moneymen believing themselves to be demigods, the Brussels bureaucrats who act in their favor, and the fake-civilians feasting on their money; who are trying to tell us how and with whom we should live with, how we should talk, and what we should teach to our children."*¹⁵⁰

In this quote, Orbán hints that a foreign enemy (*moneymen, Brussels bureaucrats*) backed by its domestic allies (*fake-civilians*) tries to control Hungarians against their will. By this, Orbán arguably creates cleavage and an anti-elitist atmosphere. According to him, the elite is illegitimate since the 'people' do assumedly not support them. Another prominent example of this can be found in Orbán's 2018 AE speech when he addresses his political opponents in the EU, who demand Hungary demolish her border fence:

"Interestingly, these kinds of suggestions come from people protected by bodyguards, transported in armored limousines, whose houses do a tall fence surround, and who are protected by a security system all 24 hours of a day. We

¹⁴⁸ Unstoppable strongman. 2022.

¹⁴⁹ Mudde, 2004, as quoted in Mudde, p. 38.

¹⁵⁰ Viktor Orbán, 2019 a, as quoted in: Orbán Viktor éwertékelő beszéde. 2019. 2. 10. Budapest <https://miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-evertekelo-beszede-3/> (accessed March 14, 2022) – researcher's translation.

rather suggest them; first, they should remove their gates, dismantle their fences, and send their guards away. We suggest continuing the negotiations if the experiment is successful and they are still alive."¹⁵¹

This violent reply arguably widens the socio-political cleavage by aiming to enrage the audience. Orbán accuses the Brussels elite of being illegitimate hypocrites who would risk the safety of the people while they enjoy total security. Additionally, he depicts migration as a conflict between the powerful elite trying to force their will on the powerless people. This argumentation assumedly makes the excluded people feel recognized as the legitimate holders of power.¹⁵²

Another tool for strengthening the 'us versus them' divide is the opposition's accusation of communism. An example of this is present in Orbán's 2020 AE speech: "It is indeed an interesting coincidence that Hungary was led into bankruptcy by the ex-communists with their liberal policy."¹⁵³ The Hungarian PM arguably refers to the 2008 GFC and merges communism with liberalism. He continues: "This example confirms that such a thing as a liberal does not even exist. A liberal is nothing but a communist with a degree."¹⁵⁴ This strong claim presumably aims to widen the cleavage between Orbán's supporters and their domestic and foreign opposition by triggering strong anti-communist emotions in a country that was under Soviet occupation for 45 years.

Finally, considering the concept of morality, Orbán used the Covid-19 pandemic in his 2022 AE speech to deepen the social cleavage via a moral aspect:

*"Not only had the virus attacked Hungary but she was also attacked by the leftists who intended to overthrow the government. [...] In the wake of a deadly pandemic, exploiting the fear of millions of families to overthrow the government is an indefensible act in all courts."*¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Viktor Orbán, 2018 a, as quoted in: Orbán Viktor évértékelő beszéde. 2018. 2. 18. Budapest <https://miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-evertekelo-beszede-2/> (accessed March 14, 2022) – researcher's translation.

¹⁵² Panizza, p. 370.

¹⁵³ Viktor Orbán, 2020, as quoted in: Orbán Viktor évértékelő beszéde. 2020. 2. 16. Budapest <https://miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-evertekelo-beszede-4/> (accessed March 14, 2022) researcher's translation.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Viktor Orbán, 2022 a, as quoted in: Orbán Viktor évértékelő beszéde. 2022. 2. 12. Budapest <https://miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-evertekelo-beszede-5/> (accessed March 14, 2022) – researcher's translation.

As the quoted paragraph indicates, Orbán arguably pictures the Hungarian opposition as the immoral enemy of the people who threaten the safety of millions to gain power and overthrow the government that protects Hungarians from the pandemic.

5.3.1.2. A Heroic Leader Calls for Heroic Missions in the Annual Evaluation Speeches

In general, heroic missions are the cornerstones of Orbán's rhetoric. Arguably, this is also true for the AE speeches. The Hungarian PM constantly uses sentences like "nowadays the danger threatens us from the West", "We are fighting an enormous battle." or "Border patrol demands relentless readiness, hardiness, and endurance."¹⁵⁶ Such a rhetorical strategy arguably creates the feeling of constant threat.

In the tense and always alert atmosphere, Orbán can easily call for heroic missions such as "We need to stand up for our Hungarian identity, our Christianity, we must protect our families, our communities, and we must protect our freedom too."¹⁵⁷ The heroic mission of protecting freedom and independence is a common characteristic of the AE speeches:

*"However, I warn you, we are independent now, but independence is not like jam. It cannot be put on the shelf to be preserved. It has to be protected time to time. Therefore, I ask you not to forget; one shall not give the fate of the country to the hands of internationalists."*¹⁵⁸

Besides the call for a heroic mission, the quoted paragraph arguably contains two other populist elements. The more obvious one is the 'us versus them' divide by threatening the audience with the internationalist boogeyman. The second and less obvious one is the jam metaphor. As demonstrated in the AE speeches table, Orbán frequently uses a folkish style to strengthen his image as a leader who is one of the people. In this case, a simple thing like a homemade jam on storage room shelf (which is present in every countryside Hungarian household) can arguably create further sympathy towards Orbán. Additionally, it also provides an easy-to-understand metaphor.

Rhetorical elements that further support Orbán's charisma are also present in all the AE speeches. One of the most prominent pieces of evidence is in the 2022 AE speech: "We know it from Clint Eastwood: If there is a weapon nearby, it is better to have it in our hand."¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Viktor Orbán, 2018 a, Viktor Orbán, 2022 a, and Ibid – researcher's translation.

¹⁵⁷ Viktor Orbán, 2019 a – researcher's translation.

¹⁵⁸ Viktor Orbán, 2018 a – researcher's translation.

¹⁵⁹ Viktor Orbán, 2022 a – researcher's translation.

Orbán's passion for Western movies is a known fact.¹⁶⁰ Lendvai argues that Orbán often understands politics as a Western movie where a lone hero fights for a hopeless cause and triumphs.¹⁶¹ In the same speech, Orbán also refers to another heroic movie, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*: "Look to our coming on the fiftieth day, look to the right-wing!"¹⁶² In the movie, Gandalf – one of the purest and most heroic characters – who saves the besieged forces of good from the darkest evil says almost the same thing. These movie references arguably contribute to Orbán's popularity and personal charisma by softly interpreting him as a lone hero or as a savior who comes to the rescue.

Finally, the importance of power is also widely present in the AE speeches: "How could a country that is unable to protect herself be proud?"¹⁶³ Per this, Orbán often refers to battle-like historical images such as "The life of border fortresses has never been easy."¹⁶⁴ He calls his supporters to arms based upon this: "Saddle up, our campaign has begun, and it is time for us to ride out too." or "They shall not find us with an empty storage room and without dry gunpowder".¹⁶⁵ The calling to arms rhetoric has arguably created a strong comradeship among Fidesz voters.

5.3.1.3. The Struggle for National Sovereignty in the Annual Evaluation Speeches

In line with the theoretical contextualization of populism, Orbán claims that the people are the victims of a multicultural society and the elite.¹⁶⁶ This thought is arguably the cornerstone of Orbán's every single AE speech.

According to Orbán, multiculturalism (especially Muslim immigration) poses the biggest threat to national sovereignty and national identity:

*"If everything goes on like this, there will be an unambiguous Muslim majority in the big cities of Europe [...]. Our culture, identity, and our nations; the way we know them now if it goes on like this, will stop existing. Our worst nightmares will come true. The West will fall without Europe even noticing that she is being occupied."*¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁰ Lendvai, p. 39.

¹⁶¹ Lendvai, p. 39.

¹⁶² Viktor Orbán, 2022 a – researcher's translation.

¹⁶³ Viktor Orbán, 2020 a – researcher's translation.

¹⁶⁴ Viktor Orbán, 2022 a – researcher's translation.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid and Viktor Orbán, 2020 a – researcher's translation.

¹⁶⁶ De Cleen, p. 314.

¹⁶⁷ Viktor Orbán, 2018 a – researcher's translation.

This narrative is arguably in line with the previously described fear prompting by picturing a future in which Hungarians have lost their culture, their identity, and even their nation. About ‘multi ethnicity’ countries, Orbán further threatens: “The historical tradition of those countries ends, and a new world will begin.”¹⁶⁸ In addition to that, Orbán also names the enemy who is responsible for this threat: “Brussels is the citadel of neo-internationalism, and migration is its tool.”¹⁶⁹

On the other hand, Orbán does not forget to emphasize his endeavors to preserve Hungary’s national sovereignty: “Since the Brussels and Washington-appointed ways were impassable, we had to make a new one.”¹⁷⁰ Another tool for stressing out the achievements is using the metaphor of a glorious historic victory in the context of stopping the alleged enemies of Hungary in the 21st century:

*“Hunyadi halted the troops of the sultan at Nándorfehérvár, and we stopped the troops of George Soros on our southern borders. However, the example of Nándorfehérvár tells us that one triumph on its own does not solve anything. One may easily find themselves at Mohács from Nándorfehérvár.”*¹⁷¹

One of the greatest heroes of Hungarian history, János Hunyadi defended the border fortress of Nándorfehérvár in 1456 against the sieging Ottoman Empire, and by this, he preserved the Hungarian Kingdom’s independence. Arguably, this militant-nationalist metaphor not only does strengthen the comradeship of Fidesz supporters but also braces their national pride. However, Orbán also warns that the fight must be continued by reminding his audience of the tragedy of Mohács in 1526, when Suleiman the Great crushed the Hungarian forces, due to which the Hungarian Kingdom lost its independence later.

5.3.1.4. The Critique of Supranationalism in the Annual Evaluation Speeches

As described in the Theory chapter (see p. 19-20), populists fiercely criticize supranational movements and organizations. This pattern is arguably present in Orbán’s AE speeches.

“Fidesz and KDNP have been obstructing political correctness in Hungary for eight years. The Euro-blabla, the liberal beautification, correctly saying nothing

¹⁶⁸ Viktor Orbán, 2019 a – researcher’s translation.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid – researcher’s translation.

¹⁷⁰ Viktor Orbán, 2020 – researcher’s translation.

¹⁷¹ Viktor Orbán, 2022 a – researcher’s translation.

has failed. We have sent the muzzle back to Brussels and the leash to the IMF.”¹⁷²

As the quoted paragraph indicates, the EU (*Brussels*) and the IMF are pictured as the enemies of Hungarian sovereignty. The muzzle and leash metaphor presents them as supranational masters wanting to chain Hungary like a dog. In line with populism, Orbán harshly criticizes globalization. “We cannot be fooled any longer by the liberal fairy tales about self-regulating markets, good capitalism, European Union, and globalized world order.”¹⁷³ In addition to that, he compares communism to supranationalism:

*“Thirty years ago, we thought that the communist way of thinking that propagated the end of nations and supranationalism, had been thrown into history’s garbage heap. It seems like we were wrong. Today, the motto is still the same: the world shall become international! They propagate a world without nations again, they want an open society, and they are fabricating a supranational world government.”*¹⁷⁴

This strong parallel arguably pictures Orbán not only as a national hero who actively took part in the overthrowing of the communist regime, but it also indicates that he still protects Hungarians from modern day-communists.

5.3.1.5. Political Legitimization through the Annual Evaluator Speeches

The researcher argues that the AE speeches intend to legitimize Orbán’s hybrid regime. In that sense, the *‘us versus them’ divide*, *the heroic missions*, *the struggle for national sovereignty* and *the critique of supranationalism* serve legitimizing purpose in each AE speech.

In the AE speeches, the *‘us versus them’ divide* polarizes society into two political groups. Following this, Orbán calls for *heroic missions* through fear prompting threats in his AE speeches. Additionally, the alleged *struggle for national sovereignty* and the *critique of supranationalism* – both heavily emphasized in the AE speeches - support these threats by further explaining the enemies against which the patriotic Hungarians must fight to preserve their independence.

¹⁷² Viktor Orbán, 2018 a – researcher’s translation.

¹⁷³ Viktor Orbán, 2020 – researcher’s translation.

¹⁷⁴ Viktor Orbán, 2019 a – researcher’s translation.

Per this, for his voters, Orbán's hybrid regime does not seem as a controversial, partially democratic partially authoritarian political entity but the last fortress of democracy and sovereignty in a hostile world. Orbán himself confirms the researcher's belief:

"They call it illiberal, postliberal, Christian-democratic, democratorship, authoritarian or hybrid regime; only God knows what. No wonder that they struggle because today, there is nothing like our state-system in Europe [...]." ¹⁷⁵

In the quoted paragraph, Orbán praises the unique character of his regime. He arguably intends to present his controversial hybrid regime as the perfect democracy protecting its citizens against allegedly undemocratic threats. Thereby, the AE speeches aim to legitimize the Hungarian hybrid regime through political polarization and a fear-prompting atmosphere based on the alleged threat of supranationalism.

5.3.2. The March 15 Speeches (2018 – 2022)

Orbán's M15 speeches commemorate the beginning of the Hungarian revolution and freedom fight against the Habsburg Empire on March 15, 1848. The Hungarian PM usually speaks from the steps of the National Museum, the same place where Sándor Petőfi, one of Hungary's most celebrated poets, recited his poem, Nemzeti Dal (National Song), which sparked the revolution.

It is arguably accessible for Orbán to draw a parallel between the 19th-century struggles for independence and his claim of Brussels' 'imperialistic ambitions'. Despite this, comparing the 2018 and 2022 speeches (both given shortly before the general elections) to the 2019 one is interesting. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the speeches of 2020 and 2021 were canceled.

¹⁷⁵ Viktor Orbán, 2020 – researcher's translation.

Rhetorical Tool/Argumentation	2018	2019	2022
Internal & foreign ‘us vs. them’ divide	14	2	14
Call for heroic missions	6	2	5
Folkish style	5	3	5
Call to arms	11	-	10
Struggle for national sovereignty	13	13	6
Critique of supranationalism	7	4	9

Table 4: Frequency of populist rhetorical elements in the M15 speeches

As the table indicates, prominent populist elements such as emphasizing the *internal and foreign ‘us versus them’ divide*, the *call for heroic missions* and the *call to arms* entirely or almost completely disappeared from the 2019 M15 speech. On the contrary, the two election-year speeches are full of rhetorical elements *calling to arms* and referring to the *internal & foreign ‘us versus them’ divide*. Per this, Orbán is presumably more ‘peaceful’ in off-campaigning years, while during general election campaigns, he heavily relies on populist rhetorical elements.

5.3.2.1. The ‘Us versus Them’ Divide in the March 15 Speeches

Emphasizing and deepening the socio-political cleavage is a vital element of Orbán’s rhetoric in the M15 speeches as well:

*“We are on one side. We who believe in nation-states, in the protection of the borders, in the value of family and work. Against us, those who want an open society, a world without borders and nations, new kind of families, devaluated work and cheap laborers.”*¹⁷⁶

The quoted paragraph arguably creates a socio-political cleavage between the patriotic and hard-working people and the illegitimate elite seeking only financial gains. Orbán continues:

¹⁷⁶ Viktor Orbán, 2018 b, as quoted in: Orbán Viktor ünnepi beszéde az 1848/49. évi forradalom és szabadságharc 170. évfordulóján. 2018. 3. 15. Budapest <https://miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-unnepi-beszede-az-1848-49-evi-forradalom-es-szabadsagharc-170-evfordulojan/> (accessed March 14, 2022) – researcher’s translation.

“National and democratic forces on one, and supranational and anti-democratic forces on the other side.”¹⁷⁷ Presumably, this argument aims to picture the people as the sovereign holders of power by emphasizing their strong and inherent democratic devotion. A similar narrative is present where Orbán states, “we are the ones who want to see a strong Europe, strong nation-states, and new, strong leaders, who do not bring trouble here but take help over there.”¹⁷⁸ Per this, Orbán hints that Fidesz voters represent the fundamental forces of democracy since they want to save Europe and give real help, how and where it is needed. Presumably, this rhetorical strategy also makes the excluded layers feel recognized as the holders of sovereignty.¹⁷⁹

In his M15 speeches, Orbán also identifies both the internal and foreign enemies of the people. Referring to Gyurcsány’s Őszöd speech (see p. 22), he says, “They confessed to being capable of lying in the morning, at noon, and night without taking a breath.”¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, he describes the enemy in detail: “They do not argue but censor, they do not fence with a sword but sting, kick, bite and spread the seeds of hatred wherever they go.”¹⁸¹ However, besides further emphasizing the danger that the enemy represents, he also adds that they do not stand a chance against the seemingly underdog yet powerful masses:

*“We have to be prepared that our candidates will eventually face a Soros candidate everywhere. [...] We also have to prepare for them trying to sneak in disguised. [...] They do not dare openly take on their master. They know that if they fairly stand out to the country, and tell who pays for their service, they do not stand a chance.”*¹⁸²

Based upon the same logic, addressing both the ‘internal and foreign enemy’; Orbán says the following:

“We have sent words: we will not let them jerk our homeland back to the leftist nightmare from which we saved her twelve years ago. We have sent words: we will not let them lead Hungary into bankruptcy again. [...] We have sent words: we, the rightists, are not meek losers who are scared of the mighty-influential

¹⁷⁷ Ibid – researcher’s translation.

¹⁷⁸ Viktor Orbán, 2019 b, as quoted in: Orbán Viktor ünnepi beszéde az 1848/49. évi forradalom és szabadságharc 171. évfordulóján. 2019. 3. 15. Budapest <https://miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-unnepi-beszede-az-1848-49-evi-forradalom-es-szabadsagharc-171-evfordulojan/> (accessed March 14, 2022) – researcher’s translation.

¹⁷⁹ Panizza, p. 370.

¹⁸⁰ Viktor Orbán, 2018 b – researcher’s translation.

¹⁸¹ Ibid – researcher’s translation.

¹⁸² Ibid – researcher’s translation.

*international media, the Brussels bureaucrats, or the mighty-rich George Soros, all of them supporting the leftists.”*¹⁸³

The tense rhetorical strategy arguably deepens the socio-political cleavage by referring to the 2008 GFC. Furthermore, it also names the supporters of the people’s internal enemy in foreign entities such as *international media* or *Brussels bureaucrats* to emphasize anti-elitism.

Finally, Orbán uses the Russo – Ukrainian war as a moral concept in his 2022 M15 speech by asking, “Peacebuilding rightists or warmonger leftists?”¹⁸⁴ Orbán argues that the opposition wants to force Hungary into the war. Per that, he says, “Those who vote for peace vote for Fidesz. We have to feel with a Christian heart and think with a Hungarian head.”¹⁸⁵ This argumentation presumably creates the impression in the voters that Orbán and Fidesz are the sole options for safety and security while the opposition is only mongering war and suffering.

5.3.2.2. A Heroic Leader Calls for Heroic Missions in the March 15 Speeches

In line with the previously described AE speeches, the M15 speeches also call for Heroic missions. First, Orbán creates an alert atmosphere full of threats. “In less than three weeks, we will decide about Hungary’s fate again, and in this election, not only are the next four years at stake.”¹⁸⁶ Arguably, the threat of losing more than the elections aims to mobilize his audience. Besides that, Orbán describes other threats: “We want a new beginning to stop Europe’s decline, to end the fever dreams about the European United States.”¹⁸⁷ Presumably, a strong expression like ‘Europe’s decline’ and ‘fever dreams’ create a threatening atmosphere in which the Hungarian PM can easily fabricate heroic missions.

One of those heroic missions is the “war for the existence of the homeland, the retention of the nation and our Christian culture”.¹⁸⁸ Orbán hints that the sheer existence of the homeland and Hungary’s Christian identity depends on the success of the heroic mission, which arguably triggers strong mobilization. Another heroic mission described in the M15 speeches is about protecting traditional values: “We will protect our families and children! The father is man, the mother is woman, and our children shall be left alone!”¹⁸⁹ This mission is constructed upon the

¹⁸³ Viktor Orbán, 2022 B, as quoted in: Orbán Viktor ünnepi beszéde az 1848/49. évi forradalom és szabadságharc 174. évfordulóján. 2022. 3. 15. Budapest <https://miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-unnepi-beszede-az-1848-49-evi-forradalom-es-szabadsagharc-174-evfordulojan/> (accessed April 15, 2022) – researcher’s translation.

¹⁸⁴ Viktor Orbán, 2022 b – researcher’s translation.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid – researcher’s translation.

¹⁸⁶ Viktor Orbán, 2018 b – researcher’s translation.

¹⁸⁷ Viktor Orbán, 2019 b – researcher’s translation.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid – researcher’s translation.

¹⁸⁹ Viktor Orbán, 2022 b – researcher’s translation.

previously described socio-political cleavage according to which the foreign enemy represents a danger to traditional family values.

Furthermore, Orbán also takes the opportunity to strengthen his charisma in his M15 speeches. “Once, I asked Schwarzenegger how many push-ups he could do. He replied that he only starts counting them after they start to hurt. That is how we do it in the campaign.”¹⁹⁰ Arguably, not only does this rhetorical element braces the impression of a strong leader, but it also creates the image of an internationally respected and recognized politician who presumably talks to Hollywood superstars daily.

Per this, Orbán uses his charisma to call his supporters to arms: “We have fought many remarkable battles together, but the greatest thing that we can achieve in our lifetime, the greatest battle that we can fight together, is still ahead.”¹⁹¹ As the quote indicates, Orbán widely uses battle-like militant language. In addition to that, he also uses militaristic metaphors such as “A good soldier does not fight because he hates what he is facing, but he fights for what is beyond him; he loves Hungary and the Hungarian people.”¹⁹² Arguably, Orbán pictures his supporters as soldiers and himself as their commander, and together they fight for a heroic cause. Further examples of this are present: “We have prepared, saddled up and we are ready for the upcoming three weeks campaign” or “my dear friends, you have fought well indeed”, and “Nineteen days of marching awaits, and in the end, on April 3 we will fight them.”¹⁹³

Finally, to support his military-style rhetoric, power is also a significant element of the M15 speeches.

*“A weak nation will never live in peace; they may only have mercy for her. A weak nation does not deserve freedom; it may only deserve fake-goulash to her barrack. A weak nation cannot achieve an accord; it may only accept its fate”*¹⁹⁴

The quote arguably calls for a powerful nation that can only be achieved through heroic efforts. Besides that, it also refers to the communist times (the unique way of Hungarian communism from the 60ies until the system change is called Goulash Communism), which arguably aims to mobilize voters based on anti-communism.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid – researcher’s translation.

¹⁹¹ Viktor Orbán, 2018 b – researcher’s translation.

¹⁹² Ibid – researcher’s translation.

¹⁹³ Ibid – researcher’s translation, Viktor Orbán, 2022 b – researcher’s translation and Viktor Orbán, 2022 b – researcher’s translation.

¹⁹⁴ Viktor Orbán, 2022 b – researcher’s translation.

5.3.2.3. The Struggle for National Sovereignty in the March 15 Speeches

Since March 15 commemorates the revolution and freedom fight that led to the foundation of the Hungarian nation-state, the constant struggle for national sovereignty is the cornerstone of Orbán's M15 speeches. Per this, Orbán frightens his audience with the following:

*"The situation is, my dear friends, they want to take our country. Not with a signature, like hundred years ago in Trianon. Now they want us to hand her over willingly to others, aliens from another continent who do not speak our language and do not respect our culture, laws, and way of life. They want to replace them with theirs."*¹⁹⁵

This strong statement arguably contains two crucial populist elements. First, Orbán draws a parallel with the Treaty of Trianon, which is undoubtedly the biggest tragedy of Hungarian history since it took away two-thirds of Hungary's territory, because of which approximately 5.5 million ethnic Hungarians live in her neighboring countries. Second, Orbán describes a dystopic scenario in which the homeland that the audience knows and loves does not exist anymore because (Muslim) immigrants have occupied it.

The Hungarian PM also identifies the real enemy responsible for this threat: "Foreign might and international powers want to force all of this on us with the help of their domestic servants."¹⁹⁶ This over-dramatized, black-and-white argument serves to unite the crowd against the enemy.

Just like in the AE speeches, Orbán also uses the metaphoric comparison of the historical glory and the threatening present in the M15 speeches:

*"Eventually, we sent home the sultan with his janissaries, the Habsburg emperor with his Labanc army, the Soviets with their comrades, and now we will send home Uncle Georgie hand in hand with his network."*¹⁹⁷

In the quoted paragraph, Orbán lists some of the occupiers of Hungary throughout her history and concludes with the newest alleged occupier, George Soros. However, with the presumed ambition to motivate his audience, he emphasizes that eventually, all the efforts failed.

¹⁹⁵ Viktor Orbán, 2018 b – researcher's translation.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid – researcher's translation.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid – researcher's translation.

5.3.2.4. The Critique of Supranationalism in the M15 Speeches

In line with populism, the M15 speeches also violently attack all sorts of alleged supranational ambitions: “Do not fool ourselves. We do not fight tenuous opposition parties but an international network organized into an empire.”¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, also emphasizing the threat of a would-be multicultural society, he directly accuses Brussels:

*“Brussels does not protect Europe. It does not want to halt migration but to support and organize it. It wants to attenuate, to replace Europe’s population. It throws our culture, way of life, and everything that differentiates and separates us, Europeans, from the world’s people.”*¹⁹⁹

In Orbán’s narrative, Europeans are defined by specific unique characteristics that are still common in each European nation. According to him, Brussels is non-European because it assumedly threatens these common European characteristics. A similar yet less harsh anti-supranationalist argument also appears in Orbán’s 2019 M15: “We wish to the peoples of Europe to get rid of their night blindness. They shall realize that in a liberal empire, we all lose our freedom.”²⁰⁰

In 2022, considering the emerging threat of the Russo-Ukrainian war, Orbán’s rhetoric becomes harsh again. However, instead of addressing Russian aggression, he still sticks to his anti-western argumentation:

*“We are in the range of vision of larger nations than we are; Germans, Russians, Turks, and newly Americans. However, this does not give a reason for defeatism or fear, and it is not a reason for giving up ourselves. Not only do muscles determine strength. You cannot wrestle the lion, but you can throw dirt in its eyes. The bear is invincible in arm wrestling, but you can put a ring in its nose and chain it. You can trick the wolf into a pit, and we know that one can cook a stew out of a wild boar.”*²⁰¹

The quote arguably refers to Germans, Russians and Turks historically while addressing the US as the current great power, presumably trying to offend Hungarian sovereignty. Additionally,

¹⁹⁸ Ibid – researcher’s translation.

¹⁹⁹ Viktor Orbán, 2018 b, – researcher’s translation.

²⁰⁰ Viktor Orbán, 2019 b – researcher’s translation.

²⁰¹ Viktor Orbán, 2022 b – researcher’s translation.

Orbán emphasizes to his followers through animal metaphors that smartness can tackle even great power ambitions.

In the context of the war, Orbán also blames great power ambitions: “No matter who wins, we always lose. Central Europe is only a chessboard for the world’s great powers, and for them, Hungary is only a chess piece.”²⁰² Orbán arguably describes the war as the consequence of countering great power interests. Per this, the best for Hungary is to stay out of the allegedly ideological conflict:

*“Neither the United States nor Brussels will think with Hungarian head and feel with Hungarian heart. [...] Our interest is not being a pawn-sacrifice in the war of someone else. We cannot win a single thing in this war, but we can lose everything. We must stay out of this war. Not even a single Hungarian is allowed to fall in between the Ukrainian anvil and the Russian hammer. Thereby, we will not send either soldiers or weapons to the battlefield”*²⁰³

Orbán arguably suggests that the West only considers Hungary to be a possible sacrifice in its struggle for power. This is arguably in line with his previously described anti-supranationalist narrative, in which Brussels is named the citadel of anti-nation-state ambitions. Interestingly, the quote suggests that Brussels and the West represent a more significant threat to Hungary than Russia, which directly attacked Hungary’s neighbor. Besides that, Orbán also fabricates the threatening image of Hungarian soldiers dying in Ukraine. In line with this, Orbán presents even sending weapons as means of participation that could endanger Hungarian lives.

5.3.2.5. Political Legitimization through the March 15 Speeches

In the M15 speeches, Orbán pictures his regime as the textbook example of democracy and the protector of Hungarian sovereignty. During the 2018 and 2022 general election campaigns, the speeches were used to picture Orbán as the heroic ‘commander’ who leads his ‘army’ into battle for independence. Per the researcher’s argument, Orbán praises his regime:

“Now we have a national constitution, one million more citizens, and all the 15 million Hungarians have a motherland. One country, one homeland, one nation! Moreover finally, we have an inherent foreign policy. We are capable of closing

²⁰² Ibid – researcher’s translation.

²⁰³ Viktor Orbán, 2022 b – researcher’s translation.

our borders from migration. We will have a combat-worthy army, a world-class military industry, and dignified universities.”²⁰⁴

The widely criticized FLH (see p. 28) appears in this quote as a tremendous democratic achievement that presumably has united 15 million Hungarians with the motherland. Furthermore, Orbán claims that his regime provides a voice to Hungarians, security on the borders. Besides that, it also contributes to developing Hungary into a state-of-the-art military and intellectual power.

Per this, Orbán argues that his regime is the key to Hungary’s peace and prosperity. “We must win this election, and we will win this election. We will win, and then, there will be peace, security, and calm in Hungary.”²⁰⁵ The quote arguably suggests that without the Orbán regime, Hungary would fall into anarchy. In that sense, it is arguably accessible for him to legitimize his hybrid regime politically as something necessary and even blissful for Hungarians.

5.3.3. The October 23 Speeches (2018 – 2021)

In 1956, on October 23, Hungarians revolted against the communist occupation, and a hopeless fight for independence started. The Soviet Union crushed Hungary’s struggle for sovereignty on November 4. The newly appointed, Soviet-backed regime executed hundreds and imprisoned thousands as a retaliation. In 2006, on the fiftieth anniversary of the start of the revolution, a violent and bloodily oppressed anti-government protest started (see p. 22). Viktor Orbán (at that time, leader of the opposition) had a significant role in organizing the protest, which demanded the abdication of PM Ferenc Gyurcsány. Per this, Orbán commemorates both events in his October 23 (O23) speeches. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, he did not give an O23 speech in 2020.

²⁰⁴ Ibid – researcher’s translation.

²⁰⁵ Viktor Orbán, 2022 b – researcher’s translation.

Rhetorical Tool/Argumentation	2018	2019	2021
Internal & foreign ‘us vs. them’ divide	10	6	26
Call for heroic missions	5	7	6
Folkish style	2	4	5
Call to arms	2	-	10
Struggle for national sovereignty	16	10	7
Critique of supranationalism	9	-	6

Table 5: Frequency of populist rhetorical elements in the October 23 speeches

About the timeline of the speeches, the 2018 O23 speech followed the 2018 general election victory, the 2019 one occurred in an off-campaign year, and the 2021 O23 speech introduced the 2022 general election campaign. In line with this, the 2021 O23 speech contains the most significant number of ‘*us versus them*’ *divide*-based argumentation (26 in total). Additionally, the 2021 O23 speech contains a significantly higher number of *call-to-arms* rhetoric (10) than the other two O23 speeches (2 and 0). Similarly to the M15 speeches, the 2019 O23 speeches contain less populist rhetorical elements than the 2018 and 2021 speeches since it was an off-campaign year.

5.3.3.1. The ‘Us versus Them’ Divide in the October 23 Speeches

The O23 speeches contain arguably the harshest and most violent ‘*us versus them*’ *divide* out of all three categories of speeches included in the thesis. In the O23 speeches, Orbán often blames the West for not giving tangible help during the ‘56 revolution: “We stayed Europeans even when they sold us in Yalta, even when they let us down in ’56.”²⁰⁶ Such elements presumably aim to introduce the anti-Western (anti-elitist) argumentation of the O23 speeches.

In addition to that, Orbán frequently merges the foreign socio-political cleavage with the internal one: “a homeland can only exist until there are more patriots than Moskal-leaders,

²⁰⁶ Viktor Orbán, 2018 c, as quoted in: Orbán Viktor ünnepi beszéde az 1956. évi forradalom és szabadságharc 62. évfordulóján. 2018. 10. 23. Budapest <https://miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-unnepi-beszede-az-1956-evi-forradalom-es-szabadsagharc-62-evfordulojan/> (accessed March 14, 2022) – researcher’s translation.

mercenaries, Hungarian members of the all-time international brigades combined.”²⁰⁷ In Orbán’s narrative, internal traitors serve foreign interests who conspire against the people.

In his book, Lendvai defines the Hungarian sense of abandonment as the consequence of historical misfortunes, foreign occupation, and the ‘sisterlessness’ of the Hungarian language, which resulted in pessimism and an abandoned feeling.²⁰⁸ In line with this argumentation, a particularly harsh accusation of the Hungarian opposition is voiced:

*“They compete to be the Hungarian governor for Brussels and George Soros. They compete to be the ruler of Hungary by their grace. They compete to be the next Pasha of Buda, the President of the Vice-regal Council, or the new Party Secretary. They openly admit to being willing to sup even with the devil to be in power. Their goal is taking Hungary from the hands of the Virgin Mary beneath the legs of Brussels.”*²⁰⁹

In the quoted paragraph, Orbán arguably aims to trigger the sense of abandonment by listing the occupiers of Hungary (Ottoman Turks, Habsburgs, and the Soviet Union). In Orbán’s narrative, Brussels and Soros represent another occupier, and their tool to accomplish the occupation is the Hungarian opposition.

This accusation arguably describes the Hungarian opposition as part of the illegitimate elite who intends to oppress sovereign power holders. Additionally, Orbán claims that this alleged occupation also endangers Hungary’s Christian identity. Per this, the opposition represents the illegitimate and is also the antithesis of the Christian people.

Considering the *internal ‘us versus them’ divide*, Orbán frequently refers to the bloodily oppressed protest of 2006:

“Fifteen years ago, the young communists turned October 23 into November 4. Teargas grenades, rubber bullets, expandable batons, uniforms without identification numbers, and water cannons on one side. The fooled and

²⁰⁷ Viktor Orbán, 2019 c, as quoted in: Orbán Viktor ünnepi beszéde az 1956. évi forradalom és szabadságharc 63. évfordulóján. 2019. 10. 23. Budapest <https://miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-unnepi-beszede-az-1956-evi-forradalom-es-szabadsagharc-63-evfordulojan/> (accessed March 14, 2022) – researcher’s translation.

²⁰⁸ Lendvai, p. 112.

²⁰⁹ Viktor Orbán, 2021, as quoted in: Orbán Viktor ünnepi beszéde az 1956. évi forradalom és szabadságharc 65. évfordulóján. 2021. 10. 23. Budapest <https://miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-unnepi-beszede-az-1956-evi-forradalom-es-szabadsagharc-65-evfordulojan/> (accessed March 14, 2022) – researcher’s translation.

humiliated nation on the other who had to hear that they had been lied to in the morning, at noon and at night.”²¹⁰

November 4 marks the bloody end of the 1956 revolution when the Soviets brutally crushed the Hungarian struggle for sovereignty. Orbán merges the 1956 revolution with the 2006 protest and compares the democratically elected Gyurcsány government to the communist dictatorship. In addition, he visualizes the ‘us versus them’ divide by recalling the picture of the people on one side against the lies and oppression by Gyurcsány.

He adds, “In 1956, Ernő Gerő and the others headlong rushed to Moscow. We were not this lucky in 2006. The socialists and their leader stayed on our back.”²¹¹ The quote undoubtedly addresses Ferenc Gyurcsány again, who is still one of the most prominent faces of the Hungarian opposition as the leader of DK, the largest opposition party. Gyurcsány’s still ongoing presence in the Hungarian public life is arguably one of the most robust tools in Orbán’s O23 speeches to demonize the whole opposition. Per this, Orbán claims that the opposition is “machinating and plotting, spreading the seeds of unrest, hatred, feud and violence.”²¹² In line with populism, this arguably creates a wide social cleavage between the opposition voters and the Fidesz supporters.

Finally, considering the question of morality, Orbán brings up the controversial topic of colonization. In his 2018 O23 speech, Orbán connects past and present by describing the conflict between the powerful and the powerless as follows:

*“Brussels only managed colonies. However, we had never been a colony, or a colonizer. We did not take anybody’s homeland. That is why we do not want to give away ours either.”*²¹³

On the one hand, Orbán arguably describes Brussels as a past and present colonizer who intends to capture other nations’ homelands. On the other hand, strongly building upon the concept of morality, he emphasizes that Hungary has never been part of this controversial process; thereby, she represents the authentic people against an illegitimate and immoral elite. Still in line with the ‘neo-colonialist’ accusation, in his 2021 O23 speech, Orbán stresses that such ambitions have consistently failed in Hungary:

²¹⁰ Viktor Orbán, 2021 – researcher’s translation.

²¹¹ Ibid – researcher’s translation.

²¹² Ibid – researcher’s translation.

²¹³ Viktor Orbán, 2018 c – researcher’s translation.

*“It is high time for Brussels to understand that even the communist failed to control Hungary. We are the speck of dust in the machine, the stick in the gears, the thorn under the fingernail. We are the David that Goliath better leaves alone.”*²¹⁴

Per populism, the quoted paragraph arguably describes Fidesz and its supporters as both the underdog (plebs) and the sovereign power holders (demos).²¹⁵ In addition to that, the Biblical reference to David (who was also the underdog against the mighty Goliath) presumably aims to make the allegedly excluded Christian patriots “feel recognized as holders of sovereignty”.²¹⁶

5.3.3.2. A Heroic Leader Calls for Heroic Missions in the October 23 Speeches

Following the logic of the two previously introduced categories of speeches, the O23 speeches also call for heroic missions. Arguably, the first step to the legitimization of those missions is the introduction of an alleged threat:

“Not even in our wildest dreams would have we imagined Europe to be endangered not by external military threat, not by American or Russian ambitions, but by herself. Who would have thought that the most successful continent of the planet [...] to start to go downhill and is adrift to downfall?”²¹⁷

The quoted paragraph is from 2018, and it describes the alleged threat of Europe’s self-destructive decline. In addition to that, it also contains anti-elitist argumentation by mentioning the alleged military ambitions of two great powers.

In the off-campaign year of 2019, the threat was the presumed lack of unity: “The despicable always comes together. The question is: Are the patriots willing to come together?”²¹⁸ Finally, in 2021, preparing for the 2022 general election, Orbán introduced two more sinister threats. First, referring to the New Testament, Orbán pictured the utter decline of Hungary if she lost her orientation. “It is an old teaching that every country, city, and household divided against itself will not stand.”²¹⁹ Second; he emphasized the threat of the international elite supporting the Hungarian opposition in the upcoming general election by saying:

²¹⁴ Viktor Orbán, 2021 – researcher’s translation.

²¹⁵ Panizza, p. 367.

²¹⁶ Ibid, p. 370.

²¹⁷ Viktor Orbán, 2018 c – researcher’s translation.

²¹⁸ Viktor Orbán, 2019 c – researcher’s translation.

²¹⁹ Viktor Orbán, 2021 – researcher’s translation.

“[...] the real challenge and even threat is the international hinterland, money, media, and network behind them. This is such a strong power that it can only be defeated and forced out by millions of Hungarians united.”²²⁰

It is arguably accessible for Orbán to call for heroic missions based on these threats. In 2018, he addressed the alleged decline of Europe: “Reject the ideology of globalism and support the culture of patriotism instead. The world is richer, and humanity is better if the colorful light of nations embraces the Earth.”²²¹ In his 2019 O23 speech, Orbán asked the crowd to make further endeavors for the continuous existence of the homeland: “A homeland can only exist until there are some to make a sacrifice for her.”²²² Finally, in 2021, the heroic mission issues the alleged threat endangering Hungary’s orientation. “Hungary will be the first country in Europe where the violent LGBTQ propaganda will be stopped before it can reach the gates of our schools.”²²³

As said before, October 23 also marks the anniversary of the violent 2006 protests. Considering his endeavors in organizing the protests, Orbán does not even have to use movie quotes (2021 AE speech) or Schwarzenegger (2021 M15 speech) to strengthen his charisma. Instead, he positions himself as the commander of the audience.

“If the trumpets sound insecure, we cannot stand behind even the most important and fairest cause. Therefore, we have to form a barrier, and we have to call for those who believe in nations’ Europe, we have to wave the flag of free and strong Europe.”²²⁴

As the quote shows, Orbán often uses militant phrases such as “*form a barrier*” or “*wave the flag*” to keep his crowd alert. Besides that, he directly calls his supporters to defend the homeland: “When the time comes, step out of your hose and defend it.” or “What we achieved yesterday and the day before must be protected tomorrow.”²²⁵ Finally, as ‘a good commander’, Orbán also aims to unite his ‘army’ before the ‘fight’:

²²⁰ Ibid – researcher’s translation.

²²¹ Viktor Orbán, 2018 c – researcher’s translation.

²²² Viktor Orbán, 2019 c – researcher’s translation.

²²³ Viktor Orbán, 2021 – researcher’s translation.

²²⁴ Viktor Orbán, 2018 c – researcher’s translation.

²²⁵ Viktor Orbán, 2021 – researcher’s translation.

“Look at the person standing next to you. If you look into their eyes, you can see that you can count on them. They will do everything to break through even the thickest wall. This is our strength; this is our hinterland [...].”²²⁶

The emotional language of the quote demonstrates Orbán’s undeniable charisma. Per this, it is arguably accessible for Orbán’s supporters to feel recognized and united for a heroic cause by listening to him.

5.3.3.3. The Struggle for National Sovereignty in the October 23 Speeches

The victimization of the people by the multicultural elite appears as one of the cornerstones of the O23 speeches too. In his 2018 O23 speech, Orbán claims that “Europe is the home of nations not a melting pot.”²²⁷ Furthermore, he compares migration to a military occupation that aims to suppress ‘native’ Europeans:

*“Military-aged men are approaching in increasing numbers from other continents and cultures. In our lifetime, slowly but surely, they will form the big cities of Europe in their image while they force the European aboriginals into the minority.”*²²⁸

The quote uses radical phrases such as ‘military-aged men’ or ‘European aboriginal’ to picture a dystopia. The emotional and dramatic language is arguably a populist rhetorical strategy that aims to mobilize voters via nationalism and xenophobia. In the same speech, Orbán addresses the enemy that is responsible for this:

*“The Brussels vanguard and other anti-nation-state leaders consider migration a chance and an opportunity even today. A chance to replace the nation-states’ European Union with a multicultural, mixed ethnicity, homogenously glazed empire.”*²²⁹

This harsh accusation visualizes the threat of a multicultural empire that seeks to demolish national sovereignty. Compared to this harsh language, the 2019 O23 speech is relatively mild.

“Even then, we wanted Hungarian, therefore European style of living. We wanted a strong and independent Hungary among the nations of Europe.”

²²⁶ Ibid – researcher’s translation.

²²⁷ Viktor Orbán, 2018 c – researcher’s translation.

²²⁸ Ibid – researcher’s translation.

²²⁹ Viktor Orbán, 2018 c – researcher’s translation.

Moreover, there was no argument over this because back then, the western part of Europe truly used to be the common homeland of free nations.”²³⁰

Here Orbán claims that in 1956 Western Europe represented the values that the Hungarian freedom fighters of ‘56 shared. However, Western Europe has abandoned its values since then, while Hungary (assumedly under Orbán’s leadership) has become a properly European country.

After launching the general election campaign two years later, Orbán’s argumentation was radical again: “They also attacked us when we halted migration and built the fence that protects our border.”²³¹ In that sense, Western Europe represents an enemy that allegedly intends to change Hungary’s ethnicity.

5.3.3.4. The Critique of Supranationalism in the October 23 Speeches

The O23 speeches arguably picture Brussels as the capital of modern-day imperial conquest. “We have accepted Helmut Kohl’s and Jacques Chirac’s invitation, not the occupation of Bonaparte or the Third Reich. We Hungarians have suffered enough from empires.”²³² The quote argues that the flourishing of Hungary (and presumably Europe, too) can only be guaranteed by conservatism, which Kohl and Chirac represented in the past.

Contrary to this, Orbán hints that today’s Europe follows imperial ambitions just like Napoleon or Hitler. The argument is continued:

*“Europe has been misled not by proud nations but by imperialistic desires. [...] National and international socialism, fascism, and communism all chased imperial pipe dreams. Supranational ideals, new breeds of man produced in a melting pot, never before seen financial profits and to guarantee all of this; a global, therefore, imperial governance.”*²³³

As the quoted paragraph shows, Orbán arguably merges fascism, communism, and liberalism (‘international socialism’) as one and describes them as the reason for Europe’s alleged decline. Furthermore, he uses a far-right phrase (‘new breeds of man’) to anger his audience against the alleged enemy.

Finally, Orbán argues that he, an elected leader, has real democratic legitimacy compared to Brussels, which he accuses of anti-democratic thinking and imperialist ambitions:

²³⁰ Viktor Orbán, 2019 c – researcher’s translation.

²³¹ Viktor Orbán, 2021 – researcher’s translation.

²³² Viktor Orbán, 2018 c – researcher’s translation.

²³³ Viktor Orbán, 2018 c – researcher’s translation.

*“Today, Brussels is ruled by those who desire an empire to replace the free nations’ alliance. A European empire controlled by Brussels bureaucrats, not by the elected leaders of the nations.”*²³⁴

As the quote indicates, Orbán arguably positions himself as a victim threatened by supranational thinking. Further in line with this argumentation, Orbán accuses Brussels of communism: *“Today, Brussels treats us and the Polish as enemies. We have the feeling of déjà vu. The odor of the Brezhnev Doctrine cuts through the air.”*²³⁵ Continuing the Cold War-like comparison, Orbán warns his supporters as follows:

*“And somewhere on the other side of the Great Water, Uncle Georgie is preparing too. [...] Now, they want their commissars to be elected instead of forcing them on us. Now, instead of firearms, they have Facebook.”*²³⁶

The quote suggests that Soros intends to occupy Hungary through the general elections. In line with this, Orbán claims that modern imperialists do not use violence through commissars, but they use the elections and social media to achieve their supranational ambitions.

5.3.3.5. Political Legitimization Through the October 23 Speeches

The O23 speeches legitimize the Orbán regime through the over-emphasized ‘us versus them’ divide and the alleged *struggle for national sovereignty*. In line with this, Orbán frequently reminds the audience of the economic and moral failures of his predecessor’s government:

*“After they had robbed and bankrupted the whole country, they put the leash of IMF onto our neck. Cripple Hungarian, I shall make you a hunchback too! And when we raised our voice, they answered with teargas, rubber bullet and cavalry charge.”*²³⁷

As the quote shows, Orbán pictures his predecessor as an incapable, anti-democratic leader ready to use violence against his nation. Contrary to this, Orbán describes the Fidesz regime as follows:

“Today, Hungary is strong enough to value the old and the youth simultaneously. We rebuild the 13th-month pension, and the youth making a living out of work will not have to pay taxes from next year. The prepaid taxes

²³⁴ Ibid – researcher’s translation.

²³⁵ Viktor Orbán, 2021 – researcher’s translation.

²³⁶ Ibid – researcher’s translation.

²³⁷ Viktor Orbán, 2021 – researcher’s translation.

of the current year will be given back to the families raising children. We have a Hungarian world and a Hungarian life of our own. We have a constitution that guarantees that they can never do again what they did to us in '56 and 2006. We have stepped over the borders separating the nation to reunite Hungarians. For this, we needed millions of concordant voices and hard-working hands – those who believed in the power of love and unity. The glory is theirs; they deserve appreciation. Although it did not hurt to have an able, interdict government.”²³⁸

According to Orbán, his regime provided financial welfare to all Hungarians (*the children, the youth, the families, and the old*). Besides that, it also protected the country from the alleged communist threat represented by the events of 1956 and 2006. Furthermore, paradoxically to the political cleavage, he builds upon, Orbán describes himself and his government as the force that made the alleged unification of Hungarians and ethnic Hungarians possible.

Such argumentation presumably intends to hide the previously described (see p. 26-30) significant authoritarian characteristics of the regime and over-emphasize its capability of an able and economically advantageous governance. Arguably, Orbán interprets that such prosperity would be impossible if the allegedly Gyurcsány led opposition were in power. With this, he presumably legitimizes his controversial system in the eye of the Hungarian voters.

5.3.4. Summary of the Researcher's Critical Discourse Analysis

The CDA showed that Viktor Orbán's rhetoric contains several populist elements. Per this, a the researcher identified a similar pattern in each speech, based upon which he created identical tables summarizing the populist elements of each category of speech.

Through the CDA, the researcher has argued that Orbán emphasizes a populist-style '*us versus them*' divide in each speech, which arguably polarizes Hungarian society into two homogenous parts. In the socio-politically polarized atmosphere, Orbán can easily conceptualize threats that allegedly seek to destroy Hungary's culture, identity, peace, and prosperity. Following this, he calls his audience for *heroic missions* to address the alleged threats. For this, Orbán equally relies on his rhetorical and personal charisma.

As the CDA has proven, the *struggle for national sovereignty* against Hungary's fabricated enemies is also one of the cornerstones of each Orbán speech. In line with the alleged

²³⁸ Ibid – researcher's translation.

fight for sovereignty, Orbán heavily *criticizes supranationalism* and accuses his political enemies of imperialist ambitions, thereby anti-democratic thinking.

The above-listed populist elements intend to legitimize Orbán's controversial hybrid regime politically. Per this, the '*us versus them*' divide arguably estranges both Fidesz and neutral voters from the allegedly corrupt and unpatriotic opposition, led by a failed ex-PM. Contrarily, the *heroic missions* aim to unite voters for Orbán's heroic fight for national sovereignty; against supranational empires. Finally, these populist elements arguably picture the Orbán regime as a safe haven for Hungarians that protects them in this heavily polarized, threatening world. In order to prove this, the following subchapter shortly explains the practical interaction between Orbán's rhetoric and the hybrid regime that resulted in a groundbreaking victory in the 2022 general elections.

5.3.5. The 2022 General Election in the Highlights of the Thesis

The thesis argues that the Orbán speeches interact with his hybrid regime through political legitimization. In return, the regime has autocratically been manipulated – due to which the researcher defines it as a hybrid regime – in a way that helps secure Orbán's power in the general election.²³⁹ By this, Orbán can preserve the democratic institution of the multi-party election and claim that his power is based on popular demand.

5.3.5.1. The Influence of the Hybrid Regime on the 2022 General Election

The thesis introduced three prominent hybrid traits of the Hungarian political system. These were identified as the *New election system* (see p. 26-28), the *Authoritarian manipulation of democratic structures* (see p. 28-29), and the *Violation of media freedom* (see p. 29-30). The above-listed hybrid traits arguably played a role in Fidesz's groundbreaking victory in the 2022 general election by providing an undemocratic advantage.

The undemocratic advantages of the election system

The New election system arguably favors the largest party because most of the MPs are elected directly from single-member district with a simple majority.²⁴⁰ In order secure this advantage, the six most prominent opposition parties “ranging from the nationalist right to the metropolitan left” joined under a single list.²⁴¹ By this, mathematically, the United Opposition formed the largest political party in the general election; however, they did not have the impression of a

²³⁹ Lendvai, p. 127-133.

²⁴⁰ Lendvai, p. 92. and Unstoppable strongman. 2022.

²⁴¹ Unstoppable strongman. 2022.

coherent party due to their ideological differences. Thereby, Fidesz could still enjoy the benefits of the Hungarian election system as the largest party.

Advantages provided by the authoritarian manipulation of democratic structures

One prominent example of the advantages that the authoritarian manipulation of democratic structures had provided in the 2022 election campaign is through the judiciary system. With the help of the judiciary, Orbán could spread his election propaganda through illegally accessed data. Many Hungarians who registered for Covid-19 vaccination on governmental websites received official emails praising the Fidesz government in the running up to the election campaign.²⁴² The Hungarian Supreme Court (Kúria), with its Fidesz appointed president, decided that such a way of accessing personal data to inform the public was perfectly acceptable.²⁴³

Additionally, the legislation and the PotR also served propaganda purposes. Shortly before the April election, the Fidesz-controlled parliament voted for Katalin Novák to be Hungary's first female head of state. With this, not only had Fidesz secured the post of presidency through a loyal party member for five years just before the election, but they could also pose as a progressive party.

The undemocratic advantages through the violation of media freedom

The biased media arguably provided the most significant advantage to Fidesz in the 2022 general election campaign. As Lendvai explained, “80 per cent of viewers and listeners receive only information provided directly or indirectly by the government”.²⁴⁴

In the entire run-up to the 2022 election, each opposition party was only given 5 minutes on state television.²⁴⁵ Lendvai points out that through the biased public media, “the prime minister easily succeeded in presenting himself and his party as heroic representatives of the spirit of the nation, at war on all fronts.”²⁴⁶ Most voters outside Budapest hardly listen to independent news or read independent websites; thereby, the opposition arguably struggled to spread its message to the voters of the 88 single-member districts in the countryside.²⁴⁷ In that

²⁴² Political Boosters. 2022. The Economist <https://www-proquest-com.zorac.aub.aau.dk/magazines/political-boosters/docview/2638293710/se-2?accountid=8144>. (accessed May 4, 2022)

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Lendvai, p. 119.

²⁴⁵ Müller, 2022.

²⁴⁶ Lendvai, p. 120.

²⁴⁷ Unstoppable strongman. 2022.

sense, the opposition had very little chance of convincing approximately 80% of the voting population.²⁴⁸

Consequently, the United Opposition won 17 out of 18 single-member districts in Budapest. At the same time, Fidesz could only secure one mandate in the capital.²⁴⁹ On the contrary to this, Fidesz won 86 out of 88 single-member districts in the countryside, while the United Opposition could only secure two mandates.²⁵⁰ This tremendous difference secured Fidesz's fourth consecutive two-thirds majority in the Hungarian Parliament.

5.3.5.2. The Influence of the Orbán Speeches on the 2022 General Election

Previously, the researcher proved that the populist rhetorical elements of the Orbán speeches intended to legitimize the hybrid regime politically. Per this, the researcher argues that this political legitimization interacts with the above-listed undemocratic advantages of the hybrid regime with the ambition of securing the general election victory for Orbán.

The interaction between the 'us versus them' divide and the new election system

One of the cornerstones of Orbán's 'us versus them' divide was the socio-political cleavage between patriotic Hungarians and Ferenc Gyurcsány, the failed ex-PM. Though the conservative ex-Fidesz member, Peter Márki-Zay, was their common candidate for the premiership, Fidesz still accused the United Opposition of being Gyurcsány's puppet.²⁵¹ Per this, the Fidesz propaganda machine referred to Márki-Zay as 'Mini Feri' (mini is a word for small, and Feri is the nickname of Ferenc Gyurcsány). Orbán himself used the term 'Mini Feri' in his 2022 AE speech.²⁵²

Orbán also emphasized how odd the alliance of the ideologically different opposition parties was: "Arrow Cross pants with a red vest and a rainbow pin."²⁵³ The Arrow Cross pants addressed the nationalist right Jobbik party and accused them of Nazism (the Arrow Cross Party was the Hungarian Nazi party in World War II). The red vest presumably accuses the DK leader Gyurcsány of communism, and the rainbow pin refers to the liberal Momentum party. Thereby, Orbán interpreted the United Opposition as a bogus political alliance and intended to

²⁴⁸ Lendvai, p. 119.

²⁴⁹ Nemzeti Választási Iroda. 2022. <https://vtr.valasztas.hu/ogy2022/egyeni-valasztokeruletek?tab=county2>. (accessed May 25, 2022).

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Unstoppable Strongman. 2022.

²⁵² Viktor Orbán, 2022 a – researcher's translation.

²⁵³ Viktor Orbán, 2020 – researcher's translation.

position them as an incoherent party. Contrary to this, as the CDA proved, Orbán was keen on picturing Fidesz as a genuine party that unites patriotic Hungarians.

The Fidesz-controlled media endlessly repeated Orbán's 'us versus them' divide.²⁵⁴ Following Lendvai's explanation, approximately 80% of the population heard this repeated argumentation every day during the election campaign.²⁵⁵ Per this, Fidesz secured its position as the largest party, even though, mathematically, the United Opposition should have formed a larger party. Thereby, Fidesz could still enjoy the undemocratic advantage of the new election system as the largest party.

The interaction between heroic missions and authoritarian manipulation

The CDA described how Orbán praised the FLH as the cornerstone of Hungarian independence (see p. 45-46). The researcher also provided that the FLH is also the cornerstone of authoritarian manipulation (see p. 28). In line with the fear-prompting atmosphere of the heroic missions, Orbán could arguably convince his audience that the FDL was indeed protecting Hungary from the alleged threats.

Furthermore, he also used the PotR to cement Fidesz's widely criticized stand in the Russo – Ukrainian war.²⁵⁶ In his 2022 M15 speech, Orbán praised Katalin Novák as the first female head of state of Hungary:

*“Katalin Novák is our new President of the Republic. May God bless her! She said that women wanted to win the peace, not the war. [...] Mothers know that it takes twenty years to bring up a man, but his destruction only takes twenty seconds. [...] Instead of the obligatory power of sanctions, they see hardship. If we wish to end the war, if we want Hungary to stay out of the war, we have to follow the guidance of women. It is the best time, in fact, for the first time, to have a woman as the President of the Republic.”*²⁵⁷

The quote arguably proves that the PotR is used for propaganda purposes in Orbán's rhetoric to support the PM's stand on the war. Additionally, as the quote shows, Orbán could bring up the heroic mission of traditional family values with Novák, a mother of three. As explained, before 2010, the parliamentary parties used to elect a neutral PotR based upon consensus to

²⁵⁴ Lendvai, p. 118-121.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 119.

²⁵⁶ Unstoppable Strongman. 2022.

²⁵⁷ Viktor Orbán, 2022 b – researcher's translation.

check and balance the legislation and executive powers.²⁵⁸ Per this, the Fidesz-controlled parliament has manipulated this democratic tradition and uses the PotR for their political ambitions.

The interaction between the struggle for national sovereignty and the biased state media

As explained before, the biased state media endlessly repeats Orbán's populist rhetorical argumentation.²⁵⁹ In his M15 speech, less than a month before the election, Orbán emphasized that leftist-Western warmongering threatens Hungary's safety and independence:

*“The leftists have lost their sanity, and it would sleepwalk into a cruel, long-lasting, and bloody war. The leftists want to send Hungarian soldiers and Hungarian weapons to the frontline.”*²⁶⁰

The state media, repeated this message from time to time until the very moment of the election, alongside Orbán's other promise: “We will not let the leftists drag Hungary into this war! [...] We will withstand the Hungarian leftists and the plans of the warmonger troublemakers behind them.”²⁶¹ Per this, Orbán did not allow the direct transport of Western weapons to Ukraine through Hungary's territory.²⁶²

This decision was arguably transferred to the public through the M15 speech as a necessity to protect peace in Hungary. Thereby, it helped politically legitimize the regime by depicting it as the protector of Hungarians, that could even withhold the pressure from the ‘warmonger leftists’ and their Western allies.

The interaction between anti-supranationalism and the biased state media

The CAD has also proved that Brussels appears in the Orbán speeches as a supranational enemy with imperial ambitions. Per this, Brussels and the EU represent an existential threat pivotal to Orbán's campaigns.²⁶³ Similarly to the above-described messages about the struggle for national sovereignty, the biased state media endlessly repeats Orbán's messages about Brussels' alleged supranational plans. The Hungarian PM even addressed Brussels in his victory speech following the publication of the general election results as follows, “We have secured an

²⁵⁸ Lendvai, p. 95.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 118-121.

²⁶⁰ Viktor Orbán, 2022 b – researcher's translation.

²⁶¹ Viktor Orbán, 2022 b – researcher's translation.

²⁶² Müller 2022.

²⁶³ Ibid.

enormous victory. It is a triumph visible from the Moon, but it can surely be seen from Brussels.”²⁶⁴

5.3.6. Answer to the Research Question

In the previous subchapter, the researcher has proven the interaction between Orbán’s populist rhetorical argumentation and his hybrid regime. Through CDA, the researcher has also proven that the Orbán speeches politically legitimize the hybrid regime as a unique and genuinely democratic political structure that protects Hungarian independence, identity, values, and security among the fabricated hostilities. In return, the hybrid regime provides undemocratic advantages to Fidesz and Viktor Orbán in the general elections through the new election system, the authoritarian manipulation of democratic structures, and the violation of media freedom.

This sort of political symbiosis is a highly successful strategy because it manipulates the public opinion to believe that Viktor Orbán and Fidesz are the sole options for a flourishing and secure Hungary; meanwhile, the opposition would give up Hungary’s independence and govern into destruction.

Per this, Fidesz secured a massive election victory in the 2022 general elections. As Orbán said in the international press conference three days after the general election:

*“We went back until the System Change, and I found that never before had any party received this many votes. In percentage, this was 54% of the casted votes, and in mandates, it was two-thirds of the parliamentary seats.”*²⁶⁵

The result entitled Fidesz to delegate 135 MPs to the parliament, 2 MPs more than in 2018.²⁶⁶ The two-thirds majority of the parliament entitles Fidesz to have total control over the parliament for the fourth consecutive term. Such absolutistic power is unprecedented in the European Union, a “supposed bastion of democracy”.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ Viktor Orbán, 2022 C, as quoted in: Orbán Viktor beszéde a Fidesz – KDNP választási győzelmét követően. 2022. 04. 03. Budapest <https://miniszerelnok.hu/orban-viktor-beszede-a-fidesz-kdnp-valasztasi-gyozelmet-kovetoen-2/> (accessed May 6, 2022) – researcher’s translation.

²⁶⁵ Viktor Orbán, 2022 D, as quoted in: Orbán Viktor nyilatkozata a nemzetközi sajtótájékoztatóján. 2022. 04. 06. Budapest <https://miniszerelnok.hu/orban-viktor-nyilatkozata-a-nemzetkozi-sajtotajekoztaton/> (accessed May 6, 2022) – researcher’s translation.

²⁶⁶ Nemzeti Választási Iroda. 2022.

²⁶⁷ Müller, 2022.

6. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the analysis, with the help of the applied theories, the thesis concludes the following:

In the *Viktor Orbán and the Emergence of Populism* subchapter, it is concluded that the emergence of populism in Fidesz is identical to the theoretical reasons behind the emergence of populism in general. Per this, the political scandals and the poor economic performance caused political de-alignment, in which the incumbent established parties lost their voters. Orbán realized the opportunity in the political vacuum, and through a populist narrative, he and Fidesz secured a democratic two-thirds majority in the 2010 general election.

In the *Hybrid Traits of Hungary under Viktor Orbán's Premiership (2010-2022)* subchapter, it is concluded that Hungary was transformed into a hybrid regime. Per this, Orbán and Fidesz, among others, modified the election system, created the controversial FLH, manipulated the legislation, violated judicial and media independence, and appointed a politically biased head of state. However, despite the partially authoritarian transformation, Orbán paid attention to preserving some essential elements of democracy, such as freedom of movement, freedom of speech, and multi-party elections. Furthermore, Hungary's EU membership politically legitimizes the country as a democracy. Thereby, Hungary is a partially authoritarian, partially democratic hybrid regime.

In the *Critical Discourse Analysis of the Orbán Speeches* subchapter, the researcher concluded that the analyzed Orbán speeches contain several populist elements. These elements are categorized as, *Internal and foreign 'us versus them' divide*, *Call for heroic missions*, *Folkish style*, *Call to arms*, *Struggle for national sovereignty*, and *Critique of supranationalism*. The populist rhetorical argumentation has polarized the society into two parts, created an alert atmosphere, and convinced Hungarians that the country is fighting for its independence against the supranational West. Through the CDA of the speeches, the researcher concluded that Orbán had legitimized himself, his party, and the hybrid regime as the sole options for a flourishing, safe, and independent Hungary in a hostile world.

Finally, in *The 2022 General Election in the Highlights of the Thesis* subchapter, the researcher concluded that the hybrid regime and Orbán's populist rhetorical argumentation interact through a political symbiosis. Per this, the hybrid regime provides undemocratic advantages to Orbán and Fidesz in the general election, while Orbán legitimizes the hybrid regime in his speeches through his charisma. This political symbiosis is highly successful

because it has made the voters believe that Orbán and Fidesz is the only capable and patriotic party in Hungary. The results of the 2022 general election further strengthen the thesis' hypothesis because Viktor Orbán and Fidesz secured a fourth consecutive two-thirds parliamentary majority; by this, total control over the Hungarian political system.

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