
Special issue

Carla Cabrera Cuadrado

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9631-3938>
carlacabreraquadrado@hotmail.com
Georgetown University

John Chrobak

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1036-9410>
johnchrobak@gwu.edu
George Washington University

Submitted

November 30th, 2022

Approved

March 13th, 2023

© 2023

Communication & Society

ISSN 0214-0039

E ISSN 2386-7876

doi: 10.15581/003.36.2.311-324

www.communication-society.com

2023 – Vol. 36(2)

pp. 311-324

How to cite this article:

Cabrera Cuadrado, C. & Chrobak, J. (2023). Illiberalism and the Deinstitutionalization of Public Diplomacy: The Rise of Hungary and Viktor Orbán in American Conservative Media. *Communication & Society*, 36(2), 311-324.

Illiberalism and the Deinstitutionalization of Public Diplomacy: The Rise of Hungary and Viktor Orbán in American Conservative Media

Abstract

The promotion of Hungary and Viktor Orbán among American conservatives is often presented as a warning of conservative embrace of illiberal politics. While acknowledging the draw of Hungary's illiberal policies as the motivating factor for American conservative interest in Hungary, our focus seeks to answer to what extent this embrace of Hungary can be considered a form of public diplomacy. We examined the frequency and substance of mentions of Hungary and Viktor Orbán in 1643 articles within 13 American conservative media outlets to track how the narrative around the country and the prime minister has evolved over the past four years, bearing in mind the impact of Tucker Carlson's interview with Viktor Orbán in late 2021. We found both an increase in the quantity of articles focused on Hungary and Viktor Orbán as well as a largely positive trend defending and praising the policies of Hungary and the prime minister. We also observed a strong focus on Orbán as the primary actor of Hungarian public diplomacy and argue that this hyper-presidentialized focus exemplifies the deinstitutionalization of public diplomacy, along with other elements that contribute to the enhancement of Orbán as an individual public diplomacy actor.

Keywords

Illiberalism, deinstitutionalization, public diplomacy, hyper-presidentialization, Viktor Orbán, American conservatives.

1. Introduction

In August 2021, *Fox News* host Tucker Carlson traveled to Budapest, Hungary from where he hosted *Tucker Carlson Tonight* for a week. Carlson is often touted as the most watched person in the United States, and with good reason (Medialite, 2021; Ankle, 2020). He is the leading figure in *Fox News*' lineup of hosts on America's most-watched news channel. Certainly, a majority of American conservatives receive their news from him. Thus, it is significant when in the opening segment of his tour in Hungary he began by issuing a call to Americans: "if you care about Western civilization, and democracy, and family –and the ferocious assault on all three of those things by leaders of our global institutions–, you should know what is happening [in Hungary] right now" (Carlson, 2021).

Carlson's feature of Hungary and the explicit elevation of the country, and the leadership of President Viktor Orbán in particular, is part of a broader phenomenon of segments of American conservatives lauding Hungary as an exemplary country committed to defending traditional values and fighting against "progressive liberals." We argue that this promotion of Hungary's image among American conservatives is a form of public diplomacy, heavily deinstitutionalized and marked by a hyper focus on individual public diplomacy actors.

2. The Deinstitutionalization of Public Diplomacy

In 1965, Edward Gullion introduced the term 'public diplomacy' to the academic world (Gullion, 1965). Since then, public diplomacy (PD) has been the center of attention of innumerable research studies, including the debate on its definition, scope, purpose, and several related characteristics. In Cull's words, "public diplomacy is an international actor's attempt to manage the international environment through engagement with a foreign public" (2009, p. 12). At the early stages of PD research, in what has been classified as "traditional public diplomacy," the international actor performing public diplomacy was the state or government of a country (U.S. Department of State, 1987; Snow, 2009). Therefore, public diplomacy was characterized by government to people relations. With the arrival of the new millennium, an evolution of the term took place leading to the "new public diplomacy," where there was a decentralization of PD practices carried out by non-state actors (Melissen, 2005; Kelley, 2010). The rise of non-state and non-traditional actors includes the massive appearance of PD international actors as non-profit organizations (Nye, 2005), cities (Manfredi, 2021a), and individual citizens (Sharp, 2001; Mueller, 2002).

Although mere increased engagement of citizen diplomats in public diplomacy efforts seems reasonable enough to exemplify the concept of deinstitutionalization of public diplomacy, this term has gained a different connotation introduced by Manfredi (2021b) in his description of the phenomenon:

Owing to their skepticism toward expert knowledge, populist leaders have deinstitutionalized public diplomacy. This signifies that they now monopolize the power to transmit messages and to project an international image through executive power, rather than through the habitual institutional channels (cultural institutes, educational exchanges, interviews with journalists, etc.) (p. 917).

Hence, the deinstitutionalization of public diplomacy lies in the lack of "institutional credibility" and recognition acclaimed by certain leaders, generally populist (Gass & Seiter, 2009). Whereas "institutional public diplomacy" has been praised and promoted by several authors (Schindler, 2014; Güleç, 2021), these skeptic leaders prefer to rely on their own expertise to conduct public diplomacy with their own means. Presidential public diplomacy has been on the rise since the beginning of globalization and digitalization; however, these practices haven't always prevailed over institutional public diplomacy (Forte dos Santos, 2021). As a clear example of the latest phenomenon, Trump's use of Twitter, other social networks, and the media has reflected his "hyper-leadership" in international public relations, which "confirms the deinstitutionalisation of public diplomacy practices" (Manfredi, 2022a, p. 11; Manfredi, 2022b). This hyper-presidentialization of public diplomacy is not exclusive to the United States. It has also taken place in Turkey under Erdoğan's leadership, as there is a visible "lack of institutional structure" of the country's public diplomacy (Çevik, 2020). Nor is it exclusive to the global West. Jair Bolsonaro's leadership in Brazil is another prominent example of the hyper-presidentialization of public diplomacy particularly in his use of his Twitter profile (Raposo de Mello, 2019). The aim of this paper is to analyze the phenomenon of deinstitutionalization of public diplomacy in an illiberal regime, as is Hungary, and the hyper-presidentialization of Viktor Orbán.

3. Hungary as an illiberal regime

3.1. *Illiberalism as a concept*

Illiberalism is an emerging concept in political science that has evolved since Fareed Zakaria's initial coining of the term "illiberal democracies" (Zakaria, 1997). While Zakaria's analysis focused on an observed divergence between liberalism (an embrace of the rule of law, separation of powers, and protection of civil liberties) and electoral democracy, contemporary authors have come to describe illiberalism as an ideology itself. Marlene Laruelle identifies illiberalism as representing "a backlash against today's liberalism in all its varied scripts –political, economic, cultural, geopolitical, civilizational– often in the name of democratic principles and thanks to them (by winning the popular vote)" noting that "it proposes solutions that are majoritarian, nation-centric or sovereigntist, favouring traditional hierarchies and cultural homogeneity; and [calls] for a shift from politics to culture and is post-post-modern in its claims of rootedness in an age of globalisation" (Laruelle, 2022, p. 304). The key components relevant here are the focus on the call for majoritarian, nation-centric solutions in the backlash to liberalism with a particular emphasis on favour for traditional hierarchies and cultural homogeneity.

It is therefore important to make some clarifying distinctions. First one should avoid conflating illiberalism with that which is not liberal. To equivocate the two presupposes an definitive evaluation of what counts as liberalism and asks an audience to evaluate a society according to those normative standards. This erases the nuances of unique experiences with liberal practices (or lack thereof) that can play on the particular formulation of illiberalism in a society (Laruelle, 2022, p. 310). Rather, what is captured by the term illiberalism, is a reference to a rejection of perceived liberal values, relative to the particular social context, and a pushback against them.

It is also important to distinguish illiberalism from conservatism. While there is considerable overlap in many cases when comparing illiberal actors and conservatives (Hamilton, 2021; Buzogány & Varga, 2018), the two labels are not synonymous (Laruelle, 2022, p. 315; Hamilton, 2021). Moreover, there are some, like Fukuyama (2022), who point to cases in the United States of leftist illiberalism. Thus, illiberal ideology is not a unique feature of the political right, rather it is a distinct phenomenon that rejects the values of liberalism in favour of an alternate order.

Illiberal actors, as understood in this paper, are primarily identified by their rejection of liberal values, often motivated by a perceived failure inherent to liberalism itself. The solution is often sought outside of the context of liberalism; a different order. Therefore, when describing Viktor Orbán's transformation of Hungary into an illiberal regime and noting connections between segments of the American conservative sphere and Hungary, it must be understood that this is fundamentally an attraction to a specific ideology and ordering of society. In the American context, there are a number of political thinkers that could arguably be classified as illiberal. A quintessential example would be Patrick Deneen who has explicitly argued that "[a]lready there is evidence of growing hunger for an organic alternative to the cold, bureaucratic, and mechanized world that liberalism offers" (Deneen, 2019, p. 191). Others, such as Curtis Yarvin and Charles Haywood, advocate for a more authoritarian monarchical (Cesarian) approach with concentrated power in a singular effective leader (Waller, 2022) and dismiss electoral democracy¹. Rod Dreher, one political writer who has written prolifically about Hungary, has presented what he calls "[a] strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian nation" (Dreher, 2017). While Dreher's book does not advocate for Cesarian politics, it does criticize the political evolution of what implicitly is understood as illiberalism

¹ The note about Cesarian politics here is particularly relevant as some scholars have identified political and specifically constitutional changes in Hungary and Poland as evocative of Cesarian politics (Sata & Karolewski, 2020).

for marginalizing the role of religion in public life and removing an “ultimate conception of the good” (p. 44) with no way of “agreeing on the ‘thou shalt nots’ that every culture must have to restrain individual passions.” (p. 51).

Indeed, rather than seeking to amend the flaws of liberalism, illiberal actors reject liberalism as a desired form of social organization. The alternative would be a shift in focus to restoration of culture “[taking into account] facts of local geography and history” (Deneen, 2019, p. 193), small communities (Dreher, 2017, p. 132), and support for the family (Klein, 2022); components emphasized in Hungarian politics today.

3.2. Hungarian illiberalism

Viktor Orbán’s transformation of Hungarian society into an illiberal regime is a well-documented story. From his re-election as prime minister in 2010, to his seminal speech at Băile Tușnad (Orbán, 2013) to the demotion of Hungary by European MMPs as a “hybrid regime of electoral autocracy” rather than a democracy (Delbos-Corfield, 2022), Viktor Orbán has transformed the country into one with increasingly limited protections for civil liberties led by a recalcitrant political regime with a weakened fourth estate and judiciary. Early changes to the Hungarian constitution have consolidated power for the Fidesz-led government and have weakened the balancing role of the Hungarian Constitutional Court (Kovács & Tóth, 2011; Bánkuti, Halmai & Scheppele, 2012). In conjunction, governmental capture of the media (Krekó, 2022) and the suppression of operational space for civil society actors have effectively closed the public space for the Hungarian political opposition to operate (Serhan, 2017).

Hungary’s shift into an illiberal regime is often discussed as part of a larger regional trend (Greskovits, 2007; Krastev, 2018; Bustikova & Guasti, 2017; Appel, 2019) and is frequently referred to in conjunction with Poland (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018; Drinóczi & Bień-Kacała, 2019; Buzogány & Varga, 2021). Indeed, Hungary has become the quintessential example of an illiberal regime and, with particular consideration to Viktor Orbán, has become a rallying force not only within the European Union but more globally as well, for advancing a political system rejecting values associated with contemporary liberal democracies. This public perception of Hungary and especially Viktor Orbán has been played into by Orbán who has embraced this image of himself and Hungary among like-minded counterparts abroad. It is this positioning that plays the central role of Hungarian public diplomacy for the purposes of this discussion.

4. Hungarian public diplomacy

Hungary’s public diplomacy strength has historically been lackluster and has, by widely accepted measures, decreased in recent years. The 2021 Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brand Index classifies Hungary as the 32nd country in a study of the image of 60 countries (Ipsos, 2021). This result, down 11 positions from the 2005 ranking, shows that Hungary’s public diplomacy isn’t particularly remarkable and that it has shifted from a leader among Central European countries to a lower-than-average ranking (Szondi, 2008). As some authors have already highlighted, this is partly due to the lack of long-term Hungarian public diplomacy strategy and the “rarely synthesized or co-ordinated” efforts of a variety of PD actors (Nagy, 2012; Szondi, 2008, p. 202). Moreover, this decline has also been the consequence of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s political and economic reforms, which have damaged Hungary’s image abroad (Lawniczak, 2015).

However, during this period “successful short term public diplomacy projects have already been carried out” (Nagy, 2012). Hungary’s accession to the European Union proved to be a successful public diplomacy effort supported by other Central European countries in the Visegrad Group that were also seeking their integration into the EU (Szondi, 2009). Other public diplomacy efforts include radio and television broadcasting until its closing in 2007,

the *Hungaricum Club* founded by Hungarian companies, several programs conducted by the Hungarian National Tourism Organization, the 19 *Magyar Kulturális Intézet* abroad, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Nagy, 2012; Szondi, 2008, 2009). More recent public diplomacy efforts supported by the Orbán government include the strengthening of the diaspora-state relations through the Balassi Institute and the hundreds of sports diplomacy events that Hungary has hosted and/or co-financed (Kantek, Veljanova & Onnuddottir, 2021; Garamvolgyi & Doczi, 2021). The latter seems to be the star public diplomacy niche of Viktor Orbán, who appointed sports reporter Tamás Menczer as Secretary of State for the State Secretariat for Communication and the International Representation of Hungary (Kormany.hu, 2020).

Additionally, there are a few more examples of government-financed initiatives to promote Hungary's image. Some such examples can be found in a number of political think tanks and foundations such as the Common Sense Society, the Századvég Foundation, and the Danube Institute, which all publish in English and who seek to promote collaboration and transnational connection among thinkers while in practice defending the policies of Fidesz (Buzogány & Varga, 2018). The Danube Institute receives funding from the Hungarian government via the Batthyány Lajos Foundation (Danube Institute, n.d.) and the Századvég Foundation was founded by Fidesz (Buzogány & Varga, 2021). In the United States, the Hungarian Foundation, founded in 2012 by the Fidesz-led government, has reportedly received \$21 million USD to spend on grants for US-based organizations (Vogel & Novak, 2021). Clearly, the Hungarian government has not restrained from engaging in any form of public diplomacy to engage foreign audiences; however, it is unclear how effective these efforts have been in making American audiences pay attention.

Most of the information transmitted to foreign audiences about Hungary in the last years has been related to Orbán's political and economic reforms, as well as his attitude and position toward certain international issues. According to Jungblut's (2017) study on Hungarian public diplomacy, 89% of the text in Hungarian official websites highlighted a political "first actor" as the face of public diplomacy, 37% of those being Orbán that "first actor" (p. 390). This hyper-focus on the Prime Minister has clearly been intentional, since Mega Film Publishing House was hired "to manage PM Viktor Orbán's presence on social media sites," and is reminiscent of President Trump's hyper-presidentialization and deinstitutionalization of public diplomacy (Lawniczak, 2015, p. 222).

Before Trump, Orbán's government was not particularly praised by American audiences. In fact, "[r]elations with the USA and most large EU member states [cooled] as a consequence of controversies over Hungarian reforms" and "[a]ccusations against the Hungarian government [were] made primarily by the American and German diplomacy" (Sadecki, 2014, pp. 28–30). Nevertheless, there has been an increasing interest in Hungarian illiberal politics, especially within American conservative circles, that goes beyond the official public diplomacy institutions.

5. The presence of Hungary and Orbán in American conservative dialogue

5.1. Methodology

To analyze the prominence of Hungarian public diplomacy within American conservative circles, as well as the impact of Tucker Carlson's interview with Viktor Orbán, we have conducted the following study using quantitative and qualitative methods. 13 of the largest American conservative outlets with opinion or commentary sections were analyzed to find mentions of Hungary and Viktor Orbán from January 1, 2019 to September 30, 2022 to compare the trend of articles and content before and after Carlson's interview in 2021. These outlets and the focus on opinion and commentary pieces were selected to capture the conceptual place of Hungary and Viktor Orbán within American conservative thought rather than pure frequency with which either actor appeared in American conservative headlines. For each

outlet, a Google search was made for any articles published within that time period that included the word “Hungary” or derived words such as “Hungarian.” To be thorough, a keyword search within the official websites was then made to double check the articles containing relevant information. This permitted analysis of the overall trend of the number of articles focused on Hungary and Viktor Orbán. A separate further analysis was conducted of the content of the articles to assess how both Hungary and Viktor Orbán were portrayed.

5.2. Results

A total of 1643 articles were analyzed. Some of the articles showcased in the Google search were excluded from the study because of the following reasons:

- The link gave an error when opening it.
- The link forwarded to a list of articles.
- The word “Hungary” or derived was only mentioned in the title of a suggested article.
- The word “Hungary” or derived was only mentioned in an author’s biography.
- The word “Hungary” or derived was only mentioned in the comments of the article.
- The word “Hungary” or derived was only mentioned in the description of a photo.

Another share of the articles was marked as irrelevant because there was a mention of “Hungary” or a derived word in the text, but it was referring to:

- A demonym, the place of birth or origin. For example, “Hungarian athlete.”
- A physical location. For example, “the 2022 World Aquatics Championships in Hungary.”
- A member of an institutional membership. For example, “the Visegrad Group is composed by Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia.”
- A historical entity, event or fact. For example, “Austro-Hungarian Empire” or “the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.”

It is worth mentioning the high percentage of irrelevant articles with a mention of Hungary, as it represents a higher percentage than the relevant articles. This is due because of several reasons. Almost 60% of irrelevant articles come from *The National Interest* (44%) and *The American Conservative* (15%). The first has a deep focus on history, therefore, several articles from this outlet explore the history of the Austro-Hungarian Empire or its role in other nation’s histories. The latter has a few authors that have lived in Hungary for short periods of time while writing articles for the outlet, therefore, there are a lot of mentions of Hungarian colleagues and places that were irrelevant to Hungarian politics or state of affairs. Common to all outlets is the increasing presence of Hungary in sports competitions as reflected in Hungary’s sports diplomacy strategy, as well as the mention of Hungarian-born billionaire George Soros, present in many articles, but not always involving Hungary in the story. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, there are also several articles that remind the list of NATO members, including Hungary, but without making any further mention of the country.

Out of the 1643 articles found in Google searches and websites, only 558 proved to be relevant to our research. Relevant articles included main stories about Hungary and Hungarian politics, as well as mentions of Hungary as a political actor.

Table 1: List of total, excluded, irrelevant and relevant articles for each American conservative outlet analyzed.

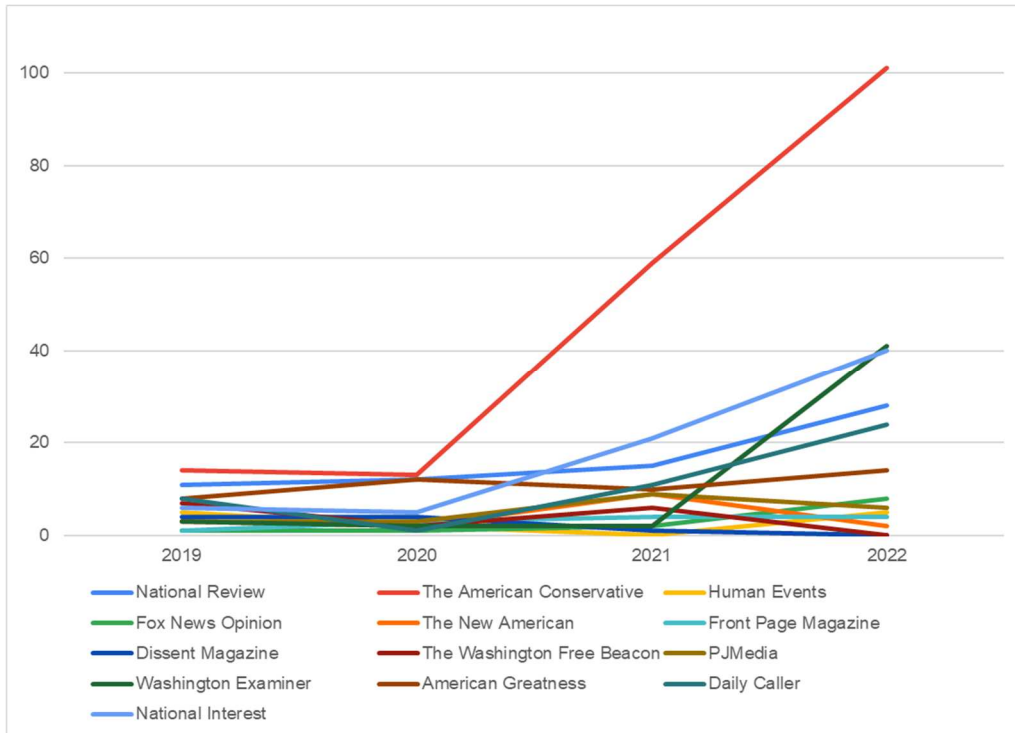
Outlet	Total articles	Excluded	Irrelevant	Relevant
<i>National Review</i>	168	81	20	67
<i>The American Conservative</i>	518	224	107	187
<i>Human Events</i>	25	5	9	11
<i>Fox News Opinion</i>	24	2	10	12
<i>The New American*</i>	16	0	0	16
<i>Front Page Magazine</i>	42	8	22	12
<i>Dissent Magazine</i>	17	0	8	9
<i>The Washington Free Beacon</i>	38	3	20	15
<i>PJMedia</i>	72	14	37	21
<i>Washington Examiner</i>	111	24	39	48
<i>American Greatness</i>	118	7	67	44
<i>Daily Caller</i>	108	27	37	44
<i>The National Interest</i>	386	13	301	72
Total	1643	408	677	558
Percentage	100%	24,83%	41,21%	33,96%

*Results were retrieved from the website directly.

Source: Own elaboration.

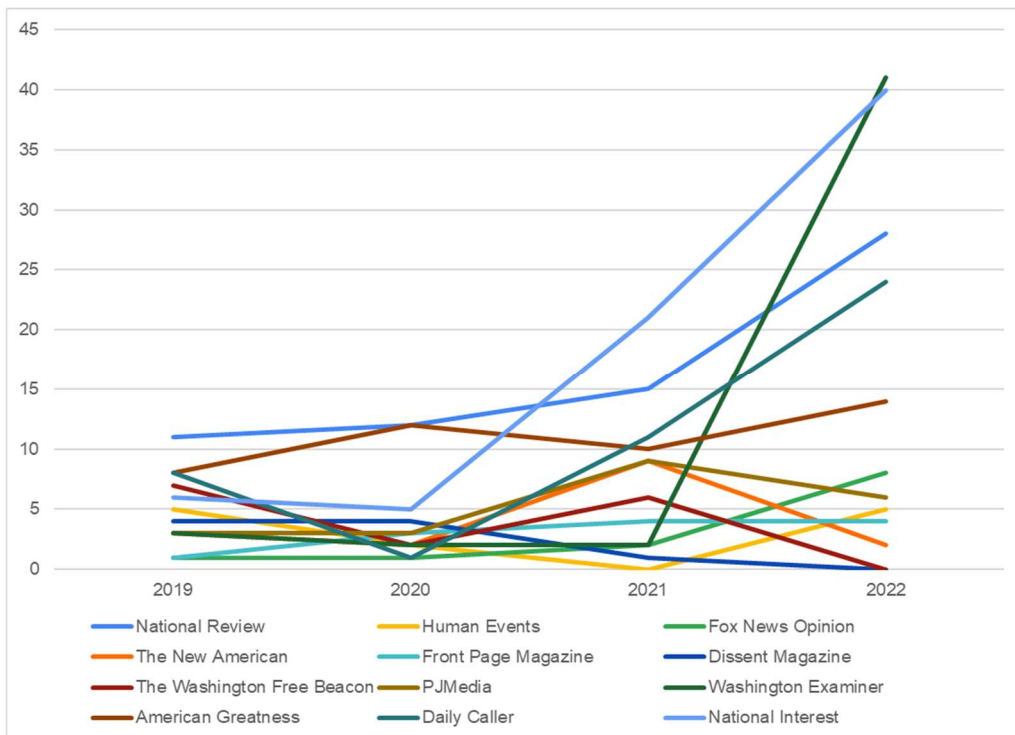
As shown in Table 1, there is great disparity of relevant results between outlets, the most prominent being *The American Conservative* with 187 (more than 33% of the relevant articles). *Dissent Magazine*, *Human Events*, *Front Page Magazine* and *Fox News Opinion* are at the bottom with 9, 11, 12 and also 12 relevant articles, respectively. However, the importance lies in when these articles were published. In 9 out of the 13 outlets there is a clear trend of increasing relevant articles with a mention of Hungary from 2019 to 2022 (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). In the remaining 4 outlets, fewer than 10 relevant articles were identified per year, 3 of which had the highest number of relevant articles in 2021 while still indicating an increasing trend from 2019 to 2021. Hence, only one outlet shows a decreasing trend in relevant articles from 2019 to 2022, *Dissent Magazine*, with 4 articles in 2019 and 0 in 2022. It is important to note that the number of 2022 articles collected reflects only a portion of the year. Consequently, this amplifies the significance of an increased number of articles published on Hungary in a shorter period of time.

Figure 1: Number of relevant articles published in the different media outlets from January 1st, 2019 until September 30th, 2022.



Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 2: Number of relevant articles published in the different media outlets from January 1st, 2019 until September 30th, 2022, excluding the outlier *The American Conservative*.



Source: Own elaboration.

Within the 558 relevant articles, Hungarian politics were the main story in 165 of them, almost 30% of the articles. Regarding the time of publication, 4 outlets show a steady increase in the quantity of articles that focus on Hungary, 4 of them show an increase in articles until 2021, 4 others don't show any increasing or decreasing trend in their articles on Hungary and only one outlet provides a clear decline on relevant articles on Hungary, *Dissent Magazine*, from 2 articles in 2019 to 0 in 2022.

The clear increase of articles written about Hungary confirm the increasing interest of American conservatives in Hungarian affairs. The most prominent example of these increasing trends can be found in *The American Conservative*, which shifted from 13 relevant articles in 2020 to 59 in 2021 and 101 in 2022 and went from 2 articles on Hungary in 2020 to 27 and 33 articles in 2021 and 2022, respectively. A second prominent example can be found in the *Washington Examiner*, where the number of articles increased from 2 in 2021 to 41 in 2022, and its articles on Hungary from 1 in 2021 to 12 in 2022.

The rise in the quantity of articles alone is not sufficient evidence to convincingly demonstrate American conservative affinity for Hungary. Indeed, while no study was done to analyze the quantity of articles published in liberal outlets for comparison, it is reasonable to expect that similar trends would be seen. To that point, there are ample examples of liberal outlets criticizing the policies of the Hungarian government or Viktor Orbán. However, our analysis went beyond simply quantifying the number of articles published. We also analyzed the content of the articles.

A total of 146 articles out of 558 (26%) defend the illiberal actions taken in Hungary, praise Hungary's politics or praise the leadership of Viktor Orbán. The majority of these (93) were found in *The American Conservative*, of which most were written by Rod Dreher, a senior editor who spent several years in Hungary and could be considered a prominent public diplomat for the country. He has called himself an "Orban fan" and constantly suggests in his articles that "American conservatives have a lot to learn from Orban" (Dreher, 2022a, 2022b) –note how he makes the reference of learning from Orbán instead of learning from Fidesz or Hungarian politics, emphasizing again the hyper-presidentialization of public diplomacy. In these articles we find praise of Hungarian politics with "[t]hey deserve our whole-hearted and full-throated support" (Jasper, 2021) or "let's make America more like Hungary" (Carlson, 2022), and also praise of the Prime Minister like "Orban, not far right, just right!" (Caldwell, 2019) or "[t]ogether the two, along with Hungary's Viktor Orbán, are the brightest leaders in all of Europe in the Trumpian model" (Malloch, 2022). In contrast, a handful of articles unreservedly criticized Orbán and Hungary. What was marginally more common (but still less common than instances of praise for Hungary) were qualified and nuanced criticism. For example, "We should not hold up Viktor Orbán as an American model, but neither should we interpret him without regard for his nation's history and culture" (McLaughlin, 2022). Nevertheless, these remained a small minority of the total and no discernible pattern emerged to the outlets which published them or their frequency.

A second focus of our research was on the prevalence of Viktor Orbán as the primary actor when mentioned. Out of the 558 relevant articles, 64% mention Orbán and 41% of these articles highlight the Prime Minister as the main actor. Whether the article is dedicated to Hungary or just shortly mentions a political aspect of Hungary in a different story, Viktor Orbán seems to be present in most of the articles and his presence has increased with time. In 8 out of the 13 outlets, there was an increasing mention of Orbán across years, whereas 9 of them showed an increase in portraying Orbán as the main actor. In 3 of the outlets there was an increment in Orbán's mention until 2021 (only 2 of them having Orbán as main actor), one outlet showed a decreasing trend, and one other kept a steady number of articles throughout the years. When compounded with the aforementioned praise focusing on Orbán rather than Fidesz or the Hungarian government as a whole it strongly suggests that Hungary's public image, at least among American conservatives, is largely driven by the

behavior of the prime minister. Articles in *The National Interest*, *American Greatness*, *The American Conservative* and *Human Events* not only mention the role and power of Orbán as a main actor in Hungary, but they also use the term “Orbánism” in a reference to good country leadership and an ideology that could be applied to the United States, as they suggest with the term “American Orbánism.”

6. Discussion

The trends exposed in the study confirm that there has been an increasing interest among American conservative outlets in Hungary and Orbán from late 2021 onward. Tucker Carlson’s interview with Viktor Orbán definitely contributed to the success of Orbán’s presence in the American media and political discourse –only after the interview was Orbán invited to speak at the Conservative Political Action Committee (CPAC)–, but it is not clear whether this event was pivotal in this success or not.

Orbán’s success among an American audience has not gone unnoticed. In October 2022, Orbán opened an official Twitter account. His bio read “Freedom fighter, Husband, Father, Grandfather, Prime Minister of Hungary.” The particular choice to self-identify as a “freedom fighter” is an identifier that he has claimed in the past (for instance at his speech at CPAC Dallas) and plays into the role of Orbán as a figure leading the charge for traditional values in Europe. It is also worth noting who he followed. Among the first and few people followed, were various heads of state and government, but also other, more controversial political figures such as Marine Le Pen of France, Geert Wilders of the Netherlands, Tom van Grieken of Belgium, Andrej Babis of the Czech Republic, and Silvio Berlusconi and Matteo Salvini of Italy. There also are a number of conservative thinkers and personalities such as Tucker Carlson, Jordan Peterson, Patrick Deneen, and the aforementioned Rod Dreher who authored many of the pieces included in our study. Orbán also tweets exclusively in English, a phenomenon not common among non-native English-speaking European leaders, and his fifth tweet explicitly tongue-in-cheek questioned former U.S. President Donald Trump’s lack of presence on the platform.

This English-speaking Twitter account of the Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is a step further towards the deinstitutionalization of public diplomacy, by sending the message to foreign publics directly himself instead of relying on official institutions. As well as it is exemplified in Trump’s use of Twitter, Orbán is highlighting his figure and his private Twitter account as the official source of information for foreign audiences interested in Hungary, clearly representing the aforementioned phenomenon of hyper-presidentialization of public diplomacy.

7. Conclusion

The increasing interest of American conservatives in Hungary and, more specifically, in Viktor Orbán represents an emerging form of public diplomacy. The potential of individual actors to produce and conduct public diplomacy for the promotion of a country has resulted in the deinstitutionalization of public diplomacy, where Viktor Orbán has acquired the main role of promoting the country with his own means, including American conservative outlets and, more recently, Twitter. It is a role that Orbán has played into and that has proven to be highly successful for Hungary. Hungary’s hosting of CPAC in Budapest and Orbán’s subsequent invitation to CPAC Dallas has elevated the profile of the prime minister among conservative American audiences, and has proven to be a resource for the hyper-presidentialization of Hungarian public diplomacy.

One obvious limitation of our study is that it focused on a small segment of American conservative rhetoric. While we sought to focus on a range of outlets from foreign policy focused outlets generally targeted to higher-educated audiences (sometimes requiring subscriptions) to more widely read and accessible outlets with a more general audience, we

did not capture other sources of discourse that are popular among segments of American conservatives (such as Breitbart or One America News Network). Thus, the general trends presented here should not be interpreted to necessarily represent the views of all American conservatives.

To that same end, we were unable to find opinion polling on the attitudes of American conservatives toward Viktor Orbán or Hungary. Even general polls on attitudes of Americans towards Hungary would be immensely helpful in demonstrating the extent to which Hungary's public image has changed in recent years. Having opinion polling on American attitudes delineated by political affiliation would be truly key to support our theory and is an added challenge to showing the efficacy of deinstitutionalized public diplomacy. It would be interesting to consider whether Hungary's success among an American audience can be replicated among other global audiences. Indeed, there are groups of illiberal actors outside the United States who may find similar attraction to Hungarian policies. It would also be worth tracking how American perceptions of Orbán and Hungary change over time, particularly among American conservatives, and whether the deinstitutionalized and hyper-presidentialized public diplomacy of Hungary will have a lasting impact on American audiences in the long-term. The key question will be whether the success of deinstitutionalized public diplomacy among conservative audiences receptive to illiberal ideas will survive and find success in the long run, or whether playing into illiberal policies and ideology will have its own backlash effect and alienate audiences and international partners less willing to join the Hungarian model.

References

- Ankel, S. (2020, August 27). How Tucker Carlson went from a CIA reject to the most-watched person on cable news, accused of peddling prejudice to millions. *Business Insider*. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com/fox-news-host-tucker-carlson-biography-of-right-wing-superstar-2020-7>
- Appel, H. (2019). Can the EU Stop Eastern Europe's Illiberal Turn? *Critical Review*, 31(3-4), 255-266. <https://www.doi.org/10.1080/08913811.2019.1647956>
- Bánkuti, M., Halmai, G. & Scheppele, K. L. (2012). Hungary's illiberal turn: disabling the constitution. *Journal of Democracy*, 23(3), 138-146. <https://www.doi.org/10.1353/jod.2012.0054>
- Bustikova, L. & Guasti, P. (2017). The illiberal turn or swerve in Central Europe? *Politics and Governance*, 5(4), 166-176. <https://www.doi.org/10.17645/pag.v5i4.1156>
- Buzogány, A. & Varga, M. (2018). The ideational foundations of the illiberal backlash in Central and Eastern Europe: The case of Hungary. *Review of international political economy*, 25(6), 811-828. <https://www.doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2018.1543718>
- Buzogány, A. & Varga, M. (2021). Illiberal thought collectives and policy networks in Hungary and Poland. *European Politics and Society*, 1-19. <https://www.doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2021.1956238>
- Caldwell, C. (2019, May 13). Orban: Not Far Right, Just Right. *Human Events*. Retrieved from <https://humanevents.com/2019/05/13/orban-not-far-right-just-right/>
- Carlson, T. (2021, August 3) Tucker: The mainstream media's job is to defend the ruling class *Tucker Carlson Tonight*. Retrieved from https://video.foxnews.com/v/6266295237001?playlist_id=5198073478001#sp=show-clips
- Carlson, T. (2022, March 14). Tucker Carlson: Everything that Tulsi Gabbard said about biolabs in Ukraine is true. *Fox News Opinion*. Retrieved from <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/tucker-everything-tulsi-gabbard-said-true>
- Çevik, S. B. (2020). Turkey's Public Diplomacy in Flux: From Proactive to Reactive Communication. In N. Snow & N. Cull (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of public diplomacy* (pp. 350-359). New York: Routledge.

- Cull, N. J. (2009). *Public diplomacy: Lessons from the past* (No. s 12). Los Angeles, CA: Figueroa Press.
- Danube Institute (n.d.). *Mission Statement*. Retrieved from <https://danubeinstitute.hu/en/content/mission-statement>
- Delbos-Corfield, G. (2022, July 25). INTERIM REPORT on the proposal for a Council decision determining, pursuant to Article 7(1) of the Treaty on European Union, the existence of a clear risk of a serious breach by Hungary of the values on which the Union is founded. Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs. A9-0217/2022. Retrieved from https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2022-0217_EN.html
- Deneen, P. J. (2019). *Why liberalism failed*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Dreher, R. (2017). *The Benedict Opinion: A strategy for Christians in a post-Christian nation*. New York, NY: Penguin Random House.
- Dreher, R. (2022a, April 30). DeSantis, Magyar Of The Sunshine State? *The American Conservative*. Retrieved from <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/ron-desantis-viktor-orban/>
- Dreher, R. (2022b, August 4). Orban In The Lone Star State. *The American Conservative*. Retrieved from <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/orban-in-the-lone-star-state/>
- Drinóczi, T. & Biń-Kacała, A. (2019). Illiberal constitutionalism: The case of Hungary and Poland. *German Law Journal*, 20(8), 1140-1166. <https://www.doi.org/10.1017/glj.2019.83>
- Forte dos Santos, N. A. S. (2021). Presidential Public Diplomacy 2.0: Seven Lessons to Prevent Fire in Cyberspace. *Journal of Public Diplomacy*, 1(1), 36-56. <https://www.doi.org/10.23045/jpd.2021.1.1.036>
- Fukuyama, F. (2022). *Liberalism and its discontents*. London: Profile Books.
- Garamvolgyi, B. & Doczi, T. (2021). Sport as a Tool for Public Diplomacy in Hungary. *Physical Culture and Sport Studies and Research*, 90(1), 39-49. <https://www.doi.org/10.2478/pcssr-2021-0012>
- Gass, R. H. & Seiter, J. S. (2009). Credibility and Public Diplomacy. In N. Snow & P. Taylor (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of public diplomacy* (pp. 154-165). New York: Routledge.
- Greskovits, B. (2007). Is East-Central Europe Backsliding? Economic Woes and Political Disaffection. *Journal of Democracy*, 18(4), 40-46. Retrieved from <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/223233>
- Grzebalska, W. & Petó, A. (2018, May). The gendered modus operandi of the illiberal transformation in Hungary and Poland. In *Women's Studies International Forum*, 68, 164-172. Pergamon. <https://www.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2017.12.001>
- Güleç, C. (2021). NATO and public diplomacy: Opportunities and constraints of 21st century. *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs*, 26(1), 100-120. Retrieved from <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/perception/issue/64385/977885>
- Gullion, E. (1965). Remarks at the dedication ceremony for the Edward R. Murrow Center for Public Diplomacy.
- Hamilton, A. (2021). Conservatism as Illiberalism. In A. Sajó, R. Uitz & S. Holmes (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism* (pp. 70-81). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Ipsos (2021). Germany maintains top "nation brand" ranking, Canada and Japan overtake the United Kingdom to round out the top three. Retrieved from <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2021-10/NBI-2021-ipsos.pdf>
- Jasper, W. F. (2021, June 26). Globalists Mobilize "Woke" Soccer to Attack Hungary for Heroic Stance Against EU's LGBTQ Onslaught on Children, Parents, Family. *The New American*. Retrieved from <https://thenewamerican.com/globalists-mobilize-woke-soccer-to-attack-hungary-for-heroic-stance-against-eus-lgbtq-onslaught-on-children-parents-family/>

- Jenne, E. K. & Mudde, C. (2012). Hungary's Illiberal Turn: Can Outsiders Help? *Journal of Democracy*, 23(3), 147-155. <https://www.doi.org/10.1353/jod.2012.0057>
- Jungblut, M. (2017). Between sealed borders and welcome culture: Analyzing mediated public diplomacy during the European migrant crisis. *Journal of Communication Management*, 21(4), 384-398. <https://www.doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-02-2017-0013>
- Kantek, J., Veljanova, I. & Onnudottir, H. (2021). Constructing Hungarian "Good-Will Ambassadors": The Collaborative Soft Power Efforts of Hungary's Balassi Institute and the Hungarian Community in Australia. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 27(7), 920-935. <https://www.doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2020.1858068>
- Kelley, J. R. (2010). The New Diplomacy: Evolution of a Revolution. *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 21(2), 286-305.
- Klein, E. (2022). Transcript: Ezra Klein Interviews Patrick Deneen. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/13/podcasts/transcript-ezra-klein-interviews-patrick-deneen.html>
- Kormany.hu. (2020, July 17). *Hungarian enterprises are strong enough to invest even during the crisis*. Retrieved from <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/hungarian-enterprises-are-strong-enough-to-invest-even-during-the-crisis>
- Kovács, K. & Tóth, G. A. (2011). Hungary's constitutional transformation. *European Constitutional Law Review*, 7(2), 183-203. <https://www.doi.org/10.1017/S1574019611200038>
- Krastev, I. (2018). Eastern Europe's illiberal revolution: The long road to democratic decline. *Foreign Affairs*, 97(3), 49-53.
- Krekó, P. (2022). The Birth of an Illiberal Information Autocracy in Europe: A Case Study on Hungary. *Journal of Illiberalism Studies*, 2(1), 55-72. <https://www.doi.org/10.53483/WCJW3538>
- Laruelle, M. (2022). Illiberalism a conceptual introduction. *East European Politics*, 38(2), 303-327. <https://www.doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2022.2037079>
- Malloch, T. R. (2022, September 29). Meloni's Grande Nuova Italia. *American Greatness*. Retrieved from <https://amgreatness.com/2022/09/29/melonis-grande-nuova-italia/>
- Manfredi-Sánchez, J. L. (2021a). Urban Diplomacy: A Cosmopolitan Outlook. *Brill Research Perspectives in Diplomacy and Foreign Policy*, 3(4), 1-90. <https://www.doi.org/10.1163/24056006-12340012>
- Manfredi-Sánchez, J. L. (2021b). Deglobalization and Public Diplomacy. *International Journal of Communication*, 15, 905-926. Retrieved from <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/15379/3357>
- Manfredi-Sánchez, J. L. (2022a). Vaccine (public) diplomacy: legitimacy narratives in the pandemic age. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 1-13. <https://www.doi.org/10.1057/s41254-022-00258-2>
- Manfredi-Sánchez, J. L. (2022b). Thinking about Latin American public diplomacy. *Latin American Policy*, 13(1), 6-19. <https://www.doi.org/10.1111/lamp.12242>
- McLaughlin, D. (2022, July 27). Viktor Orbán and His People. *National Review*. Retrieved from <https://www.nationalreview.com/2022/07/viktor-orban-and-his-people/>.
- Mediaite's 2021 Most Influential in News Media is: Tucker Carlson (2021, December 21). *Mediaite*. Retrieved from <https://www.mediaite.com/news/mediaites-2021-most-influential-in-news-media-is-tucker-carlson/>
- Melissen, J. (2005). *The New Public Diplomacy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mueller, S. (2002). The Power of Citizen Diplomacy. *Foreign Service Journal*, 79(3), 23-29. Retrieved from <https://afsa.org/foreign-service-journal-march-2002>
- Nagy, L. (2012). Nyilvános diplomácia Közép-Kelet Európában. *Közép-Európai Közlemények; Szeged*, 5(3-4), 177-190. Retrieved from <https://ojs.bibl.u-szeged.hu/index.php/vikekkek/article/view/12135>

- Nye, J. S. (2005). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. New York: Public affairs.
- Raposo de Mello, A. C. (2019). *Brazilian foreign policy on Twitter: digital expression of attitudes in the early months of Bolsonaro's administration*. Doctoral Thesis, Universidade de São Paulo.
- Sadecki, A. (2014). *Państwo stanu wyższej konieczności. Jak Orbán zmienił We 'gry* [The state of necessity. How Viktor Orbán has changed Hungary]. Warszawa: Centre for Eastern Studies.
- Sajó, A., Uitz, R. & Holmes, S. (Eds.) (2021). *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Sata, R. & Karolewski, I. P. (2020). Caesarean politics in Hungary and Poland. *East European Politics*, 36(2), 206–225. <https://www.doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2019.1703694>
- Schindler, C. E. (2014). *The Lost American Tradition: American Foreign Public Engagement & the Origins of American Public Diplomacy, 1776–1948*. Doctoral Thesis, University of Leeds.
- Seán, H. & Vachudova, M. A. (2018). Understanding the illiberal turn: democratic backsliding in the Czech Republic. *East European Politics*, 34(3), 276–296. <https://www.doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2018.1493457>
- Serhan, Y. (2017, June 13). Hungary's Anti-Foreign NGO Law. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/news/archive/2017/06/hungarys-anti-foreign-ngo-law/530121/>
- Sharp, P. (2001). Making Sense of Citizen Diplomats: The People of Duluth, Minnesota, as International Actors. *International Studies Perspectives*, 2(2), 131–150. <https://www.doi.org/10.1111/1528-3577.00045>
- Snow, N. (2009). Rethinking Public Diplomacy. In N. Snow & P. M. Taylor (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of public diplomacy* (pp. 1–11). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Szondi, G. (2008). Country Promotion and Image Management – The Case of Hungary. In K. Dinnie (Ed.), *Nation Branding. Concepts, Issues, Practice* (pp. 201–204). Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Szondi, G. (2009). Central and Eastern European public diplomacy: A transitional perspective on national reputation management. In N. Snow & P. M. Taylor (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of public diplomacy* (pp. 312–333). New York: Routledge.
- Toth, C. (2014, July 29). Full text of Viktor Orbán's speech at Băile Tuşnad (Tusnádfürdő) of 26 July 2014. *Budapest Beacon*. Retrieved from <https://budapestbeacon.com/full-text-of-viktor-orbans-speech-at-baile-tusnad-tusnadfurdo-of-26-july-2014/>
- U.S. Department of State (1987). *Dictionary of International Relations Terms*. Retrieved from <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015028440827;view=1up;seq=5>
- Vogel, K. P. & Novak, B. (2021, October 4). Hungary's Leader Fights Criticism in U.S. via Vast Influence Campaign. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/04/us/politics/hungary-orban-lobbying.html>
- Waller, J. (2022). *Intellectual Entrepreneurs Against Democracy: Theorizing Authoritarian Futures in America*. <https://www.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4117901>
- Zakaria, F. (1997). The rise of illiberal democracy. *Foreign Affairs*, 76(6), 22–43. Retrieved from <https://www.scasd.org/cms/lib5/PA01000006/Centricity/Domain/1198/FZakariaIlliberalDemocracy1997.pdf>
- Ławniczak, R. (2015). A post-socialist/communist perspective: From foreign-imposed to home-grown transitional public relations. In J. L'Etang, D. McKie, N. Snow & J. Xifra (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Public Relations* (pp. 213–225). London: Routledge.