



**European Politics and Society:
Václav Havel Joint Master Programme**

Leiden University

...

**Framing Democratic Backsliding in Hungary: Conservative Media
Portrayals of Democratic Transgressions under Viktor Orbán**

Master's Thesis

Author: Emilie Joe Brandt

Supervisor: Dr. Matthew Broad

Year of the defence: 2024

Declaration

I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.

I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.

I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

The Hague, Netherlands 14th June 2024
Brandt

Emilie Joe

Abstract

Hungary is a country with a dual reputation, as an exemplar for democratic backsliding in Europe, but also as an ideological hub for conservative political thought. This research examines conservative media framing of democratic backsliding in Hungary under Viktor Orbán, focusing on how different types of democratic transgressions, or challenges to democracy, are portrayed by the media from 2011 to 2022. A frame analysis is conducted on U.S. conservative media to determine if there is variance in the framings of four different democratic transgressions. The findings show that conservative media does in fact frame violations of the law, violations of democratic norms, violations of ideals and power-consolidating changes to democratic institutions differently. These findings indicate a complex relationship between conservative ideology and the portrayal of democratic backsliding, suggesting that conservative media may prioritize ideological alignment over democratic principles. Furthermore, the impact and growing popularity of “national conservatism” on the frame results is considered. This study contributes to scholarly understandings of how conservative media sources portray democratic decline to ideologically aligned audiences and highlights the influence of transnational political movements on democratic standards.

Keywords

Hungary, Viktor Orbán, Democratic Backsliding, Media Framing, Democratic Transgressions, National Conservatism, Frame Analysis, Conservative Politics

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review	5
Introduction	5
Literature Review	8
Chapter 2: Research Design and Methodology	13
Case Selection	13
Constructing and Operationalizing the Frame Analysis	15
Formulation of Hypotheses	20
Feasibility of Research Design and Limitations	23
Chapter 3: Results	24
Sample Results	24
Hypothesis Testing	32
Chapter 4: Discussion and Conclusion	39
Discussion	39
Conclusion	49
Bibliography	53

Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

Introduction

What comes to mind when thinking of Hungarian politics? Perhaps a glimpse toward the past, with thoughts of great empires like the Austro-Hungarian empire or its position as a satellite of the Soviet Union. Other people, especially those interested in contemporary European politics, may think of Hungarian political changes as the exemplar for democratic backsliding in Europe. That is certainly how authors of the European Parliament (EP) 2022 report examining the state of Hungarian democratic diagnose the country. In the report's accompanying press release, Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield, the EP's rapporteur on the situation in Hungary, announced: "The conclusions of this report are clear and irrevocable: Hungary is not a democracy."¹ Scholars generally agree with the report's prognosis of democratic backsliding, acknowledging that Hungary has fallen short on several markers for democratic health since Prime Minister Viktor Orbán was re-elected in 2011.² It has been widely documented that the country's controversial Prime Minister has used his time in government to consolidate his power, passing legislation incompatible with standards for democratic functioning and challenging the values of the European Union (EU).³

On the other hand, a different group of people see Hungarian political developments through quite a different lens. They do not see Hungary's recent political changes as defined by democratic erosion or the deterioration of a supposed set of shared European values, but instead view Orbán favorably. Some even think of Hungary under Orbán as a potential model for conservative leadership and governance, admiring the ideology espoused by the Prime Minister who they view as preserving Hungary's minority culture in an increasingly globalized world. This admiration for Hungary's political ideology under Orbán has been espoused by prominent figures in the Western conservative movement, such as Tucker Carlson, whose Fox News show *Tucker Carlson Tonight* set a record in 2020 as the highest-rated program in U.S. cable news history, tallying an average of 4.33 million viewers per show.⁴ In 2021, the Fox News host created a series of week-long programming that showcased the Hungarian political model. In the opening segment, Carlson described Orbán saying: "He is defending democracy against the unaccountable billionaires, the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and certain western governments. He is fighting for democracy against those forces which would like to bury it."⁵ Similarly, in a recent address to the Conservative Political Action Conference's third annual gathering in Budapest, former U.S. President Donald Trump affirmed his admiration and

¹ "MEPs: Hungary Can No Longer Be Considered a Full Democracy."

² Bernhard, "Democratic Backsliding in Poland and Hungary."

³ Bogdandy and Sonnevend, *Constitutional Crisis in the European Constitutional Area*; Szelényi, *Tainted Democracy*; "Hungary," 2022.

⁴ Concha, "Trump Dings CNN, 'Morning Joe' Ratings as Tucker Carlson Sets Record."

⁵ Thorpe, "Tucker Carlson: What the Fox News Host Is Doing in Hungary."

ideological alliance with Orbán, whom he revered as a "great man."⁶ The alliance between Orbán and Trump, which has been termed a 'bromance' by CNN and Politico alike, illustrates the extent to which Orbán's ideological appeal has transcended Hungary's national borders, despite the well-documented democratic backsliding that has come with the implementation of his political agenda since 2011.⁷ Carlson and Trump are not alone in their position; in fact, prominent leaders from across Europe and the U.S. have reiterated their admiration for Orbán's brand of conservatism.⁸

This admiration for Orbán, despite his democratic deficits, is not only a position held by elites, but is also the position held by a group of conservative publics. In 2019, Pew Research Center noted that 27% of European adults across 14 EU member states said they trusted Orbán to do the right thing regarding world affairs.⁹ While this falls short of a majority of citizens, journalists have simultaneously documented the success of Orbán's 'soft power strategy,' an effort to brand Hungary as an intellectual hub for conservative political thought, subsequently attracting conservatives from across the globe. Foreign Policy has reported that "Many of the foreign researchers and writers aligned with conservatism who spent time in Hungary at the expense of institutes and foundations funded by Orbán's government have become vocal defenders of the prime minister."¹⁰ This strategy to popularize Hungarian conservatism and bolster Orbán's international reputation has also brought about a myriad of high-profile conservative events held in Budapest, drawing European leaders like Gert Wilders, Adrej Babis, and Irakli Garibashvili—who combined have an X following of over 2 million users, illustrating the reach they have to conservative publics across the continent.¹¹ As such, it is clear that Hungary has become a country central to contemporary conservative political thought, with a growing number of political leaders, commentators and even conservative publics paying closer attention to Hungarian politics under Orbán.

In this landscape of simultaneous reprimand and regard, characterized by a general range of feelings toward Hungary's democratic changes, one is left to wonder: Are Hungary's democratic transgressions all framed the same? Is it true that some threats to democracy have different implications than others? And how are these transgressions being portrayed to ideologically aligned conservative audiences? As Amel Ahmed explained in her recent APSR article, scholars often employ a wide array of democracy measures without properly theorizing what these measures say about a country's democratic health and the potential implications of public support for democratic backsliding.¹² To remedy this conceptual gap, there is a need to consider the categorical and contextual differences between types of democratic transgressions,

⁶ Tolan et al., "American Conservatives Embrace Hungary's Authoritarian Leader at Budapest Conference."

⁷ Tolan et al.; Lili Bayer, "Trump-Orbán Bromance Takes Off."

⁸ "Speakers at CPAC Hungary"; Wallace-Wells, "What American Conservatives See in Hungary's Leader."

⁹ Clancy, "Under Viktor Orban's Leadership, Hungarians Differ in Views of Democracy."

¹⁰ Albuquerque, "Hungary's Plan to Build an Army of American Intellectuals."

¹¹ "Speakers at CPAC Hungary."

¹² Ahmed, "Is the American Public Really Turning Away from Democracy?"

or types of threats to democracy. Ahmed's work is helpful here; she argues that by viewing democratic transgressions differently, researchers can better develop a sensibility toward the level of threat different democratic transgressions may represent and how these threat levels translate into public opinion foundations on backsliding. She introduces four categories of transgressions: violations of the law, violations of democratic norms, violations of democratic ideals and power consolidating changes to democratic institutions. Violations of the law are defined as an actual violation of the rule of law, the constitution, established procedure, or another formal institution regulating democratic competition.¹³ Violations of democratic norms are defined as violations of the informal rules that govern political procedure that often challenge the norms of how politics were conducted in the past.¹⁴ Violations of democratic ideals violate an aspirational view of how democratic politics should be conducted.¹⁵ Finally, the last transgression type is power consolidating changes to democratic institutions which involve changes to the law or the constitution that consolidate the power of ruling elites.¹⁶ Ahmed gives examples of each transgression type in practice, arguing that public support for each type of transgression has a different implication on public opinion foundations on backsliding.¹⁷ Overall, this thesis seeks to build on Ahmed's assertion that there are "benefits of theoretically grounded classifications," and conversely, that there are "dangers of an undifferentiated view of transgressions" when forming conclusions about sources of support for democratic backsliding.¹⁸

This differentiated view of democratic transgressions has been used to add nuance to discussions on the implications of public opinion support for democratic backsliding. Notably, it has been employed to show that in many contexts, democratic backsliding occurs during a simultaneous and "equally consequential" struggle over the meaning of democracy, reflecting popular questions about what underlying values democratic governments are meant to uphold.¹⁹ This thesis begins to illustrate how this sort of values-contestation is evident in portrayals of Hungarian democratic backsliding by the media, by digging deeper into the variance that exists in how different democratic transgressions in Hungary are presented to audiences.

It is not yet fully understood whether such variation exists regarding how different expressions of democratic backsliding in Hungary are characterized by the media, or whether potential ideological alignment with Orbán impacts these media portrayals. This is essential to disentangle because the media is one of the most significant informants of public opinion, especially since media frames have been proven to play a key role in exerting political power and wield considerable influence over public comprehension of political change.²⁰ Thus, research on

¹³ Ahmed, 968.

¹⁴ Ahmed, 969.

¹⁵ Ahmed, 969.

¹⁶ Ahmed, 969.

¹⁷ Ahmed, 969.

¹⁸ Ahmed, 968.

¹⁹ Ahmed, 974.

²⁰ Choi and Lee, "The Role of a Scene in Framing a Story"; Tversky and Kahneman, "Rational Choice and the Framing of Decisions."

the media framing of Hungarian democratic transgressions can help illuminate how different forms of democratic challenges are presented to publics, moving toward a better view of how Hungary's democratic backsliding is portrayed and the implications of this portrayal. Furthermore, the question of how conservatives understand Hungary's democratic backsliding, specifically, is an issue of practical concern to those studying de-democratization. This is because the research helps point toward possible sources of support for de-democratization, providing insight into the potential values-based struggles taking place in Western democracies, especially due to the emergence of what scholars have termed a new "transnational political family" of "national-conservatism."²¹

In light of this, this thesis asks:

Does conservative media framing of Hungarian democratic backsliding vary depending on the type of transgression, and if so, in which ways?

These questions will be considered across four chapters. First, to conclude this chapter, the relevant literature will be reviewed. Then, the second chapter will outline the research design and explain and justify the case selection at the heart of the research, U.S. conservative media. Then, the third chapter will present the findings and answer the research question. Finally, the thesis will end with a discussion and conclusion, examining possible avenues for further academic exploration, and detailing how the growing popularity of national conservatism as a "transnational political family" contextualizes the results.

Literature Review

This thesis draws on scholarly work situated across multiple disciplines, from sociology to comparative politics to international relations. Through a review of the relevant literature, this section will show the importance of understanding if and how conservative media frames of Hungarian backsliding vary depending on the type of transgression, hence connecting this research to other, related scholarly pursuits like attempts to understand public opinion foundations on backsliding and any sources of legitimacy for de-democratization processes.

Media Framing, Public Opinion Foundations on Democracy, and the Role of Media Bias

The first section of the literature review explores the relationship between media framing, democracy, and public opinion foundations on different democratic transgressions. This section underscores how media frame analyses, like the one undertaken in this thesis, can reveal how democratic backsliding is presented to audiences. Understanding the variance in frames of democratic transgressions is crucial for a comprehensive view of how these transgressions are portrayed and their implications for democratic backsliding.

Studying media framing of various democratic transgressions informs several existing scholarly pursuits. First, it enhances knowledge about public opinion foundations of democratic

²¹ Altinors and Chryssogelos, "Beyond Populism and into the State," 1.

backsliding. The media's selection of how and what news stories to cover have been shown to impact public comprehension of political events, so by examining the framings of democratic transgressions, an idea can be gathered about the potential range of public attitudes that exist toward differing types of democratic challenges.²² De Vrees argues that the consequences of news media framing operate on both the individual and societal level. On an individual level, the interaction between framing effects and an individual's preconceived understanding of a topic can alter individual attitudes. On a societal level, media framing may shape processes such as political socialization, decision-making, and collective actions.²³ These individual and society-level understandings of democratic transgressions therefore influence public support for democracy and can impact both individual and society-level reactions to processes of democratic backsliding.

However, not all processes of democratic backsliding are the same and backsliding is often a dynamic, layered process.²⁴ This study aims to achieve what Ahmed describes as a "differentiated view" of democratic transgressions because not all challenges to democracy hold the same implications for a country's democratic health.²⁵ For instance, the implications of media approval for a violation of democratic ideals differs from media approval for a violation of democratic laws. Ahmed explains this, saying "to the extent that ideals do not become codified into law or develop into norms, they reflect a different category, and their violation holds more ambiguous meaning for democratic backsliding."²⁶ Ultimately, similar to Ahmed's work on public opinion surveys on democracy, the thesis seeks to unpack any differences that emerge in analyzing the framings of democratic transgressions, but to do so through a news media frame analysis and not an analysis of survey data, and to focus on Hungarian democratic transgressions, not American transgressions, like Ahmed did in her study. Understanding this variance can reveal the "trade-offs" citizens make when analyzing democratic transgressions. For example, in Finland, scholars found that "citizens may be willing to trade off ideological congruence for democratic principles, that is, overlook democratic transgressions committed by a leader who is ideologically close to them."²⁷ Identifying whether such variance exists in conservative media framings of democratic transgressions is the first step in examining if such trade-off effects occur in the selected case, especially given the ideological dimension of the research question.

Another benefit of focusing on conservative news media coverage is its clear ideological positioning, which connects to literature on how ideologically biased media can legitimize de-democratization. Existing research shows how media framing and reporting bias internally in Hungary legitimizes its democratic backsliding, with authors finding that pro-government media

²² Choi and Lee, "The Role of a Scene in Framing a Story"; Entman, "Framing Media Power"; Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm"; de Vreese, "News Framing"; Tversky and Kahneman, "Rational Choice and the Framing of Decisions."

²³ de Vreese, "News Framing," 52.

²⁴ Bernhard, "Democratic Backsliding in Poland and Hungary."

²⁵ Ahmed, "Is the American Public Really Turning Away from Democracy?," 971.

²⁶ Ahmed, 969.

²⁷ Saikkonen and Christensen, "Guardians of Democracy or Passive Bystanders?"

in Hungary uses derogatory language to support de-democratization and discredit anti-government protests by framing them as illegitimate.²⁸ However, this research fails to differentiate between types of democratic transgressions and does not examine the impact of a media source's ideological slant in contextualizing the news media frames—two essential aspects of this thesis. Though the media is considered a vital pillar of democratic protection, what happens when a biased media presents democracy through an ideological lens? This thesis connects to the wide range of existing scholarship that seeks to answer that question.

Hungary's Conservatism, National Conservatism and the Global Context

Hungary, a relatively small, landlocked country in Europe with a distinct language, culture, and history, is a pertinent case for this study. Prime Minister Orbán emphasizes Hungary's uniqueness, calling it “the Lone Star State of Europe” and arguing frequently that a defensive form of conservatism based on preserving the nation-state is necessary for Hungary's survival.²⁹ While Orbán is staunchly grounded in this worldview today, it is noteworthy that he and his party have evolved significantly. Orbán was formerly a liberal centrist, and in the 1990s, his Fidesz party was pushing for freedom and democracy in the post-communist period.³⁰ However, in the 2010 parliamentary elections, his Fidesz party was transformed from a mainstream national conservative party into a catch-all people's party, combining his conservative nationalistic rhetoric with a new populist discourse.³¹ Scholars have pointed out that this shift was not all too surprising, arguing that the groundwork for this new illiberal conservative ideology to flourish had already been laid in Hungary.³² These Hungarian political developments have been studied at length in European political science, but an emerging body of work seeks to place this new Hungarian conservatism espoused under Orbán within the context of broader, global conservative ideological movements. Such work has begun to unpack, what exactly is this Hungarian national conservatism, what are its features, and how does Hungarian ideology fit within broader processes of historical conservative ideological development.³³ This is one group of literature within which this thesis is grounded because the study of conservative media framing of Hungary, specifically, can assist in answering this question.

One of the central papers identifying Hungarian national conservatism as part of a distinct lineage of conservative political thought was by Varga and Buzogány. They examined the intellectual underpinnings and historical trajectory of the ‘Global Right’ movement, arguing that national conservatism in Central and Eastern Europe emerged as a response to the “loss of

²⁸ Susánszky, Kopper, and Zsigó, “Media Framing of Political Protests – Reporting Bias and the Discrediting of Political Activism.”

²⁹ “Speech by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on 15 March.”

³⁰ Buzogány, “The Ideational Foundations of the Illiberal Backlash in Central and Eastern Europe,” 811.

³¹ Lendvai, “The Transformer.”

³² Buzogány, “The Ideational Foundations of the Illiberal Backlash in Central and Eastern Europe,” 811.

³³ Varga and Buzogány, “The Two Faces of the ‘Global Right’”; Bluhm and Varga, *New Conservatives in Russia and East Central Europe*.

moral bearings” due to neoliberal globalization and a defense of Western civilization.³⁴ In other works, Varga also examined how, in Central and Eastern Europe, the conditions of post-communism led a group of political elites and political parties to increasingly reject “the consensus around market reforms, democratization, and rule of law” that characterized moves toward a more open society from the 1990s.³⁵ Instead, he argues, political leaders like Orbán presented themselves as conservatives who reject liberal values, developing a new and distinct ideology that is inherently illiberal and “aims to re-establish a strong state sovereignty.”³⁶ While ideologically, national conservatism may seem similar to other forms of conservatism, the great contribution of this body of work is how it has started to carve out the distinct evolution of national conservatism in Central and Easter Europe, and in Hungary, specifically. However, this scholarship does not yet connect these developments to perceptions of Hungary from outside Central Europe or to framings of Hungarian democratic deficits by ideologically aligned media.

Discussions about Hungary’s conservative ideology fall within a broader landscape where the ideological underpinnings of right-wing movements are increasingly relevant, both within global politics because of the surge of the far-right, and also within scholarship seeking to understand the implications of this rise of conservatives in power.³⁷ Scholars have documented at length the rise of right-wing politics and how parties on the right have governed in recent years for substantial periods of time, across both the Global North and Global South.³⁸ Increased attention has also been given to styles of governance, especially the rise of populism and the populist radical right.³⁹ However, this thesis focuses on how ideology contextualizes portrayals of democratic transgressions, aligning with scholarship that seeks to move “beyond” examining populism to explore the increased appeal of the defense of the nation-state, especially given the impact of “a new transnational political family” that they call national conservatism. National conservatism, Altinors and Chryssogelos argue, functions as “an innovative model for acquiring and exerting power from the right,” characterized by endorsing the state’s economic role, traditional values and hierarchies, and a proactive, or even confrontational stance in foreign policy.⁴⁰

National conservatism is not only the recipient of increased scholarly attention, but Hungarian national conservatism also receives notable material support, especially as part of the aforementioned Hungarian soft power strategy under Orbán. The Hungarian government both funds and helps to popularize ideologically aligned publications and institutions across Europe and the U.S., such as the Danube Institute, Mathias Corvinus Collegium, the Hungarian

³⁴ Varga and Buzogány, “The Two Faces of the ‘Global Right,’” 1093.

³⁵ Bluhm and Varga, *New Conservatives in Russia and East Central Europe*.

³⁶ Bluhm and Varga.

³⁷ Akkerman, Lange, and Rooduijn, *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe*; Brennan and Hamlim, “Comprehending Conservatism: Frameworks and Analysis”; Caiani, “Radical Right-Wing Movements”; Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*; Mudde, *The Ideology of the Extreme Right*.

³⁸ Aresal, Adaman, and Saad-Filho, “Authoritarian Developmentalism: The Latest Stage of Neoliberalism?”

³⁹ Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*.

⁴⁰ Altinors and Chryssogelos, “Beyond Populism and into the State,” 1.

Conservative, European Conservative magazine, and the National Conservatism Conference.⁴¹ Scholars have noted how Orbán’s populist rhetoric has increased the effectiveness of Hungarian soft power, raising the country’s profile by creating a “much larger international fame and agenda-setting capacity than would have been expected from a small Central European country.”⁴² They acknowledge, though, that Orbán’s populist orientation and divergent foreign policy positioning within the EU simultaneously damages the country’s reputation in the eyes of the European moderate majority. However, for those who may ideologically align themselves with Hungarian brand of conservatism, or even those who are targeted by the country’s soft power attempts—such as conservatives in the U.S.—the soft power strategy could impact how democratic backsliding in Hungary is seen and understood. Therefore, studying portrayals of Hungarian democratic backsliding is particularly insightful because of the country’s positioning as a potential ideological leader, or even, as a potential national conservative democratic model.

Conclusion

This overview of the current state of academic research related to media framing of democratic transgressions and Hungary’s position within the broader conservative movement illustrates why it is important to better understand any variability that exists in conservative media frames of Hungarian democratic transgressions. The following methodology will explain the case selection of U.S. conservative media, discuss the construction and operationalization of the frame analysis, and introduce hypotheses. Broadly, it will outline how this thesis seeks to address the identified gap in the literature.

⁴¹ Dániel, “Orbán’s European Right-Wing Conference in Brussels Loses Second Venue”; Rutai, “Hungary Is Funding European Publications. But Have They Had an Impact?”; Chotiner, “Why Conservatives Around the World Have Embraced Hungary’s Viktor Orbán”; “Hungary Embraces National Conservatism”; “Balázs Orbán - National Conservatism Conference, Brussels 2022”; Ecarma, “‘Call It the Tucker Carlson Wing of the GOP’: The American Conservative Wants to Be the Atlantic of the Right”; Tolan et al., “American Conservatives Embrace Hungary’s Authoritarian Leader at Budapest Conference.”

⁴² Kacziba, “Political Sources of Hungarian Soft Power,” 81; Visnovitz and Jenne, “Populist Argumentation in Foreign Policy.”

Chapter 2: Research Design and Methodology

To answer the question, “Does conservative media framing of Hungarian democratic backsliding vary depending on the type of transgression, and if so, in which ways?” this thesis conducted a deductive news media frame analysis on U.S. conservative media. A frame analysis was determined to be the appropriate methodology because of it can systematically and thoroughly capture how democratic transgressions are portrayed. Frame analysis facilitates a depth of understanding regarding narrative construction and presentation, focusing on the underlying narratives and themes present in media content.⁴³ Additionally, frame analysis allows researchers to compare how different sources frame the same issue, in this case democratic backsliding in Hungary, because all sources are analyzed using as a set of standard frames and frame codes. Furthermore, frame analysis has been used to understand and reveal biases that shape how information is presented.⁴⁴ This is advantageous for understanding how media outlets may influence public perception through selective framing or framing with certain biased ‘tones,’ which speaks to the broader goal of the research: to better understand how Hungarian transgressions are presented to conservative audiences. Finally, a focus on news media was taken in line with previous research recognizing the importance of news media in shaping people’s perceptions of democratic change.⁴⁵ Having established why a frame analysis of news media was chosen for this thesis, this section outlines how the case study was selected and how the news media frame analysis was constructed and operationalized. It also introduces various hypotheses which are then tested and analyzed in the results section.

Case Selection

When examining which conservative media market to select for the case study, acknowledging Hungary’s attempt to position themselves as a conservative ideological hub, the U.S. conservative media was selected for multiple reasons. First, no conservative public has been targeted more by Hungary’s soft power strategy than that of the U.S. While this admittedly biases American conservative sources’ coverage of democratic transgressions because of an increased likelihood of them being targeted by this soft power campaign, it simultaneously gets to the heart of the issue by speaking to if and how Orbán has been successful in his attempts to capture conservative political attention and whether this impacts any variance that exists in the framings of democratic transgressions. Furthermore, while the unipolar geopolitical power of the U.S. continues to decline, the country remains a hub for conservative political thought with ideas and understandings of global issues from the U.S. being disseminated across borders, to a broader transnational conservative movement.⁴ In fact, scholarship has documented how American leaders have sought “to dominate the global communication, information, and media

⁴³ Scheufele, “Framing as a Theory of Media Effects”; Vladislavljević, “Media Framing of Political Conflict: A Review of the Literature.”

⁴⁴ Susánszky, Kopper, and Zsigó, “Media Framing of Political Protests – Reporting Bias and the Discrediting of Political Activism.”

⁴⁵ Vladislavljević, “Media Framing of Political Conflict: A Review of the Literature.”

infrastructure,” broadcasting American ideology widely as part of their own soft power attempts.⁴⁶ Therefore, selecting U.S. conservative news media sources can provide insight into the sorts of frames on Hungarian democratic transgressions that are influencing global conservative political thinking.

Second, considering how the EU is “inextricably bound by the transatlantic relationship,” U.S. conservative media frames on democratic transgressions have the power to legitimize or delegitimize issues handled by the EU, such as its reaction to democratically backsliding Member States like Hungary.⁵ This idea is tied to the so-called international dimension of democratization. While scholars now rightfully problematize the efficacy of American democracy promotion efforts, literature on “democratic erosion” still considers the international context to be an important factor in mitigating democratic backsliding.⁶ It has been shown that international naming and shaming of Hungarian backsliding has not worked, as argued by Mudde who states: “Arguably, few countries have a more restraining international context than Hungary, a medium-sized country in the most integrated project of transnational democracy in world history. And yet, despite some minor amendments and withdrawals, the EU has not prevented the fundamental democratic erosion in the country.”⁴⁷ However, the U.S. remains one of the EU’s closest ideological allies and both actors collaborate actively on issues of joint-strategic and ideological interest.⁴⁸ As such, if—instead of aligning themselves with the EU’s position on Hungary’s democratic backsliding—U.S. conservatives framed certain Hungarian democratic transgressions approvingly, this would have far-reaching implications for the EU’s strategic alliance with the U.S. and for broader global democratic norms.

With these wide sweeping implications in mind, the case selection informs an emerging body of scholarship seeking to understand the relationship between the U.S. conservative movement and Hungarian conservative movement, especially given the close ties and similar tactics observed between populist figures, Donald Trump and Viktor Orbán.⁷ Finally, there is a growing trend to research external images of the EU to better understand how the EU and its Member States are represented beyond its borders, especially through the study of images in news mass media production. Choosing a case study outside of the EU supports this movement of scholars seeking to bring perspectives from beyond Europe into the European political science discourse.⁴⁹ In conclusion, because of the influence of—and the attention given to—American conservatives, it is valuable to understand how Hungary’s democratic transgressions are portrayed to American conservative audiences. This thesis begins that work by examining U.S. conservative media framing of various Hungarian democratic transgressions. Then, further research could examine whether these findings are generalizable in other cases.

⁴⁶ Mirrlees, “American Soft Power, Or, American Cultural Imperialism?,” 206.

⁴⁷ Mudde, “The Far-Right Threat in the United States.”

⁴⁸ Petrović, “EU Ideology.”

⁴⁹ Lucarelli and Fioramonti, “Have You Heard of the EU? An Analysis of Global Images of the European Union”; Lucarelli and Fioramonti, *External Perceptions of the European Union as a Global Actor*; Neumann, “Self and Other in International Relations.”

Constructing and Operationalizing the Frame Analysis

To construct the frame analysis, this research followed the steps outlined in “Qualitative News Frame Analysis: A Methodology.”⁵⁰ The first step was to choose a medium or topic for the frame analysis.⁵¹ As discussed, the topic is variance in conservative news media coverage of democratic transgressions in Hungary. The medium selected is articles and blog posts for a combination of practical and scholarly-informed reasons. First, it has been argued that print media can “communicate more complex ideas” in a longer form than television or radio clips. Additionally, print media was selected because the articles and blog posts could be uploaded without transcription into MAXQDA, the software program used for computer-assisted qualitative data analysis.

The second step was to determine a time period of analysis, which was selected to be 2011-2022.⁵² The time period begins in 2011, the first year that Orbán governed as Prime Minister and the year that marked the beginning of Hungary’s constitutional revolution. Many scholars have detailed the events of the constitutional revolution.⁵³ Scholars described the frenzied nature of the revision process by saying: “Taken over the first three years of the Fidesz government, the constitutional changes [were] complicated, detailed and spread out across a new Constitution, four major constitutional amendments, dozens of ‘cardinal’ (supermajority) laws, and thousands of pages of ordinary laws that were all passed in a giant legislative blur, sometimes in the middle of the night.”⁵⁴ Beginning in 2011 is appropriate for understanding variance in the framing of democratic transgressions because 2011 marked the first year of significant changes to the democratic institutional order in Hungary. Additionally, the year 2022 was chosen as an ending point because it captures the evolution of democracy and democratic standards throughout Orbán’s time as Prime Minister, without delving deeply into his fourth term in power which is still ongoing. Based on previous research findings, it is expected that by capturing the evolution of democratic backsliding taking place from 2011 until 2022, the results will also show an increased number of frames of democratic transgressions over time—with the coverage of Hungary’s transgressions increasing as the country becomes better-known for its struggles with democracy.⁵⁵

The third step of the frame analysis was to draw the sample.⁵⁶ The sample construction and source selection were informed by a study on the rise of Hungary and Orbán in American conservative media. In the study, Cabrera-Cuadrado and Chrobak analyzed thirteen of the most prominent and influential U.S. conservative news sources.⁵⁷ Their paper was largely quantitative

⁵⁰ Marais and Linström, “Qualitative News Frame Analysis: A Methodology.”

⁵¹ Marais and Linström, 9.

⁵² Marais and Linström, 9.

⁵³ Bánkuti, Halmai, and Scheppele, “Hungary’s Illiberal Turn.”

⁵⁴ Scheppele, “Understanding Hungary’s Constitutional Revolution,” 113.

⁵⁵ Bogaards, “De-Democratization in Hungary.”

⁵⁶ Marais and Linström, “Qualitative News Frame Analysis: A Methodology,” 29.

⁵⁷ Cabrera Cuadrado and Chrobak, “Illiberalism and the Deinstitutionalization of Public Diplomacy.”

in nature and could pull from this large group of sources. However, for the sake of the thesis's qualitative analysis, only four sources were selected—all of which were included in the previous analysis and qualified by Cabrera-Cuadrado and Chobrak as one of the twelve “largest American conservative outlets with opinion or commentary sections.”⁵⁸ The inclusion of op-ed pages and opinion coverage was important because they play an influential role in informing public debates.⁵⁹ The sources selected to draw from for the sample were *Fox News Opinion*, *National Review*, *The American Conservative*, and *The National Interest*. *Fox News Opinion* was selected because it has the largest audience and the broadest appeal, which is important because this thesis is connected to literature on public opinion foundations on democratic backsliding.⁶⁰

The other three sources were selected because they appeal to different parts of the American conservative movement. Scholars have dedicated books to defining and tracing the history of the American conservative movement; however, for the sake of this thesis, the American conservative movement is understood as “a movement that began to gain steam in the post- World War II era [that] had, by the 1980s, emerged as a transformative political force in the United States” by combining “a collection of issue-based counter-movements under the broad umbrella of the Republican Party, arising in reaction to and with the aim of reversing recent progressive social and historical developments”.⁶¹ The sources selected have different histories, contributors and audiences that all fall under this American conservative umbrella movement.

First, *National Review* was founded in 1955 and had a significant impact on streamlining American conservative ideology in the '50s and '60s by bringing together disparate sections of conservative thought under ideological tenants such as anti-liberalism, anti-communism, the moral righteousness of Christianity and libertarian “small government” politics.⁶² Based in New York, *National Review* remains widely popular, especially among libertarian-leaning conservatives.⁶³ *The American Conservative*, on the other hand, occupies a very different space in the U.S. conservative media landscape. It was founded in 2002 and was mainly known for its opposition to the Iraq War. Since then, columnists have sought to resist the “increasingly globalist domestic agenda” they observed in the Republican party, promoting a nationalist, “America-first” view. The publication has become increasingly influential within the broader conservative media landscape since Trump's election in 2016 with its audience growing notably.⁶⁴ Finally, *National Interest* is an international relations publication based in D.C. that is associated with the realist school of international studies. It emphasizes the importance of “law and order” and many of its contributors work in the D.C. policy-making landscape, contributing

⁵⁸ Cabrera Cuadrado and Chrobak, 315.

⁵⁹ Coppock, Ekins, and Kirby, “The Long-Lasting Effects of Newspaper Op-Eds on Public Opinion.”

⁶⁰ Hoewe, Cramer Brownell, and Wiemer, “The Role and Impact of Fox News.”

⁶¹ Gross, Medvetz, and Russell, “The Contemporary American Conservative Movement,” 328.

⁶² Yeates, “Public Spheres of Influence and the Effects of the Alt-Right,” 13.

⁶³ “National Review Institute | Home Page.”

⁶⁴ “About Us - The American Conservative”; Ecarma, ““Call It the Tucker Carlson Wing of the GOP’: The American Conservative Wants to Be the Atlantic of the Right.”

conservative perspectives on defense issues, national security, military affairs, foreign policy, and U.S. politics.⁶⁵ As such, it was chosen to capture elite perspectives on Hungarian democratic transgressions as informed by members of the D.C. conservative community. In sum, choosing sources with different audiences, contributors and ideological positionings within broader American conservatism creates a representative sample, so that any variance in frames of Hungarian democratic transgressions found in the sample can be generalizable to the wider U.S. conservative media landscape.

Once the sources were selected, the sample was drawn. I used the website search bar to find articles and blog posts. To select relevant results, I chose articles that had at least one sentence framing Hungarian democratic developments that took place during Orbán's time as Prime Minister from 2011-2022. When Hungary was used in a list of countries experiencing democratic backsliding, this was not included because it was difficult to determine what type of transgression was being framed. I sectioned my search into yearly periods to capture any change in coverage of Hungarian democratic changes over time.

The key words that I used to begin my search were "Hungary" and "Democracy." After screening the initial results and selecting relevant articles, I also searched for "Hungary, conflict;" "Hungary, challenge;" and "Orbán, democracy" to ensure that I did not miss any relevant results. After selecting the relevant articles and blog posts from each site, I downloaded the text version of the texts and uploaded them into MAXQDA, sectioned by year and source.

The fourth step was to identify the unit of analysis. The unit of analysis in media frame analyses often are the individual news articles that appeared in the selected newspapers during the selected temporal period.⁶⁶ In this thesis, the unit of analysis needed to be smaller than individual articles to effectively capture variance in framings of different transgressions. As such, an article "scene" was selected as the unit of analysis. "Scenes" are identifiable as "a complete unit of narration" which, in this case, frames an identifiable democratic transgression.⁶⁷ Therefore, different ways transgressions are framed within a single article could be considered. As the purpose of the thesis is to understand how each transgression is framed to audiences, the unit of analysis required this level of specificity.

Finally, the last step of constructing the frame analysis is to select the frame typology. Two sub-questions were formulated to answer the central research question: Does conservative media framing of Hungarian democratic backsliding vary depending on the type of transgression, and if so, in which ways? They were:

- Sub-question 1: What democratic transgression is being framed?
- Sub-question 2: How is the democratic transgression being framed?

⁶⁵ "About The National Interest."

⁶⁶ Marais and Linström, "Qualitative News Frame Analysis: A Methodology," 29.

⁶⁷ Choi and Lee, "The Role of a Scene in Framing a Story," 704–5.

To answer the first question, I used a deductive approach to frame analysis, following the methodological recommendation of de Vreese who argues for choosing frames with clear operational definitions that are “recognized by others” and not “a figment of a researcher’s imagination.”⁶⁸ As such, I tested to see if frames on the following democratic transgressions, adapted from Ahmed’s democratic transgressions conceptualization, were present in the sample. The chart below, Figure 1, shows how the frames were identified and outlines examples of the types of challenges to democracy that would qualify for each frame, as explained by Ahmed in her article. In the results section, the examples that emerged in the sample will be outlined in a similar chart.⁶⁹

Figure 1: Frame Definitions and Examples

What democratic transgression is being framed?	How is the frame defined? ⁷⁰	What are some examples? ⁷¹
Frame of law violation	Frames a violation of the rule of law, the constitution, established procedure, or other formal institutions regulating democratic competition.	Frames on resorting to violence to settle disputes, forging ballots, and political interference with investigations.
Frame of norm violation	Frames a violation of informal rules that govern political interactions.	Frames on abolishing the filibuster, election overrides by state legislatures, and flouting court rulings.
Frame of ideal violation	Frames a violation of an aspirational view of how democratic politics should be conducted.	Frames on unwillingness to compromise, an acceptance of constraints on civil liberties, corruption tolerance and conspiratorial thinking.
Frame of power consolidating change to democratic institutions	Frames a change to the law or the constitution that consolidates the power of ruling elites.	Frames on a range of actions such as reducing ballot access and gerrymandering, as well as more egregious acts such as expanding presidential powers, removing

⁶⁸ de Vreese, “News Framing,” 52.

⁶⁹ Ahmed, “Is the American Public Really Turning Away from Democracy?,” 969.

⁷⁰ Ahmed, 968–69.

⁷¹ Ahmed, 968–69.

		presidential term limits, and abolishing Congress.
--	--	--

To answer the second question about how democratic transgressions are framed, the thesis drew inspiration from the methodology employed in Choi and Lee’s 2006 article in the *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*. In this work, they coded news story frames as positive, negative or neutral, arguing that the frame codes can be “evaluated based on the tone of the reporting” through a close reading of each text.⁷² To test if the codes captured the variance in framings of different democratic transgressions in this sample, a pilot study was constructed using the guide: “Pulling a Random Sample from a MAXQDA Dataset.”¹⁹ Each news article was read several times in detail to generate a similar frame code typology that could be applied uniformly to each type of democratic transgression and could facilitate comparison. In closely reading the articles within the sample, the codes that best matched the tone of the reporting were descriptive, dismissive, approving and disapproving. Their operational definitions are outlined in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Frame Code Typology

How is the democratic transgression being framed?	How is the frame code defined?
Code 1: Descriptive	The section of the article frames a democratic transgression in neither a dismissive, approving or disproving manner. It reports the democratic change in Hungary using neutral language.
Code 2: Dismissive	The section of the article frames democratic transgression in a way that downplays, overlooks or ignores its threat to democracy, or it belittles other groups for their distress over the transgression.
Code 3: Approving	The section of the article frames the democratic transgression as acceptable or even ideal for Hungary’s political system.
Code 4: Disapproving	The section of the article frames the democratic transgression as unfavorable or threatening to the integrity of Hungary’s democratic system.

Crucially, the frame code is not only determined by what is said in the article’s discussion of democracy, but also by what was not said. Furthermore, frames can overlap and coexist within

⁷² Choi and Lee, “The Role of a Scene in Framing a Story,” 710–12.

“scenes” or units of narration in articles.⁷³ For example, in the random sample used to identify the codes, one of the articles selected was ‘The Misunderstood Nature of Populism.’ In the article, there were approving frames of ideal violation because the article defended the rejection of liberal internationalism and criticized the EU’s multiculturalism.⁷⁴ Simultaneously, another frame of power consolidating changes to democratic institutions was coded as dismissive. This is because it framed Orbán’s continued electoral success as legitimizing to his regime, arguing that the Hungarian electoral results showed that power is shifting back to the people and away from a group of progressive ‘elites.’⁷⁵ In this discussion of Orbán’s continued re-election, the author fails to acknowledge the steps Orbán took to consolidate his power *through* Hungarian institutions, leading to the “dismissive” frame code.³⁶

Formulation of Hypotheses

Multiple hypotheses were constructed for the question “Does conservative media framing of Hungarian democratic backsliding vary depending on the type of transgression, and if so, in which ways?” Broadly, it is expected that there will be variance in U.S. conservative media framing of democratic transgressions, especially because Ahmed has already shown the wide range of attitudes towards different types of democratic transgressions that exist in U.S. public opinion surveys.⁷⁶ The following hypotheses were constructed under this assumption.

Hypothesis 1: Frames of law violations are most commonly coded as disapproving.

The first hypothesis is that frames of law violations will be most commonly coded as disapproving. This is informed by literature on the “cuing affect” from political leaders and how one’s political party is ‘an opinion-forming agency of great importance,’ serving as a ‘supplier of cues by which the individual may evaluate the elements of politics.’⁷⁷ The party that the majority of U.S. conservatives support, the Republican party, has a long history of promoting itself as the “Law and Order” party, with scholarship showing that even in the 1970s, the Republican leadership’s position on law and order was echoed by Republican opinion at the grass-roots, with high levels of respect for the police and strict penalties supported for those who violate the law.⁷⁸ In terms of responses to democratic backsliding, a similar “cuing affect” has been found in the U.S. and Canada, supporting the hypothesis that conservative media outlets taking cues from Republican party elites, especially before Trump’s election in 2016, would frame law violations disapprovingly in line with the elite position.⁷⁹ Of course, the Republican party’s law and order reputation has been challenged under Trump, who is now a convicted felon and who attempted to

⁷³ Choi and Lee, 710–12; Tversky and Kahneman, “Rational Choice and the Framing of Decisions.”

⁷⁴ O’Sullivan, “The Misunderstood Nature of Populism.”

⁷⁵ O’Sullivan.

⁷⁶ Ahmed, “Is the American Public Really Turning Away from Democracy?,” 971.

⁷⁷ Slothuus, “Assessing the Influence of Political Parties on Public Opinion,” 304.

⁷⁸ Erskine, “The Polls.”

⁷⁹ Gidengil, Stolle, and Bergeron-Boutin, “The Partisan Nature of Support for Democratic Backsliding.”

overthrow the 2020 U.S. elections.⁸⁰ However, even Trump supporters who remained loyal to him after these law violations, could continue to take their cues from his frenzied conspiracies about electoral fraud espoused after the 2020 elections.⁸¹ Therefore, frames on violations of the law, such as forging ballots, and political interference with investigations, are predicted to be coded as disapproving due to this likely increase in sensitivity to matters of electoral interference and a preponderance of support for law and order created by the cuing effect.

Hypothesis 2: Frames of norm violations are most commonly coded as descriptive.

Predicting media frames of norm violations, defined as violations of the informal rules that govern political interactions, is challenging because the U.S. and Hungary have distinct historical contexts that shape the formation of these democratic norms. In cases of ideal violations, U.S. conservatives might find common ground with conservative Hungarian political actors who are ideologically aligned. However, norm violations lack such transnational ideological connections. Therefore, we can look towards scholarship to inform the hypothesis. Scholars note that journalists play a key role in frame setting by interpreting political events and defining "what is at issue for readers."⁸² For U.S. media frames of Hungarian norm violations, it is likely that journalists have fewer pre-existing value judgments due to their unfamiliarity with the Hungarian context. This unfamiliarity reduces the likelihood of their framing these violations with strong approval or disapproval. Therefore, conservative media frames of Hungarian norm violations are expected to be mostly descriptive. They need to provide U.S. audiences with context about why these violations are considered significant within Hungary's unique democratic culture and history. The difference in political contexts between the U.S. and Hungary limits the ability of U.S. conservative media to frame these norm violations with a clear approving, disapproving or dismissive tone. This hypothesis expects that the lack of transferability prevents the framing from being influenced by American biases, making the coverage more about providing information and context rather than judgment. This results in a predicted the dominance of a descriptive code for frames of norm violations, focusing on the distinct democratic culture and history of Hungary, and avoiding the biases that could arise from trying to apply American political contexts to instances of Hungarian backsliding.

Hypothesis 3: Frames of ideal violations are more commonly coded as approving.

The third hypothesis predicts that frames of violations of democratic ideals will be coded as "approving" most commonly. In fact, the prediction is that frames of ideal violations will be coded more approvingly than any other frames of democratic transgressions. There are multiple reasons for this hypothesis. First, Ahmed has shown that there are "pragmatic limitations" on the extent to which democratic ideals can be applied in democracies. For example, even when publics agree that compromising is beneficial to democracy, there still exist "pragmatic limits to

⁸⁰ "Capitol Riot Was 'culmination of an Attempted Coup,' Jan. 6 Committee Chair Thompson Says"; Sisak et al., "Guilty."

⁸¹ CNN Staff, "Fact Check: 2022 Election Disinformation and Conspiracy Theories."

⁸² Brüggemann, "Between Frame Setting and Frame Sending: How Journalists Contribute to News Frames."

how much or how often [democracies] can reach decisions through compromise rather than unilateral action.”⁸³ Second, frames of ideal violations include framings discussing civil liberties violations. Such frames will likely be entangled in broader ideological conflicts such as the debate over refugee rights or civil protections for LGBTQ citizens. Research has already shown that in the U.S. and Hungary, political leaders like Trump and Orbán have similarly manufactured fear during various crises, such as the refugee crisis, capitalizing on the existing xenophobia, “vitriol for refugees,” and “us versus them” sentiments in their voting bases to mobilize support for their political campaigns and ideological movements.⁸⁴ As such, the approving frame code is hypothesized to be most common for frames of ideal violations because of how civil liberties restrictions could be framed as acceptable given the alleged “threat” mounted by these persecuted groups.

Hypothesis 4: Frames of power consolidating changes to democratic institutions are most commonly coded as dismissive and disapproving.

The fourth hypothesis predicts that dismissive and disapproving frame codes are most common in the sample of frames of power consolidating changes to democratic institutions. This is because the research has shown that Americans disapprove of the most threatening forms of democratic transgressions, but simultaneously, that the threat of power consolidating changes to democratic institutions is the most difficult to detect. Several scholars have examined the robustness of support for democracy in the U.S., finding mixed results. A study by Graham and Slavik had some of the bleakest results, finding that the U.S. public’s viability to check democratic backsliding is “strikingly limited.”⁸⁵ However, when Ahmed re-interpreted the results to account for the different threat levels of democratic transgressions given the contextual factors of the study, her analysis finds the most severe punishment from the American public for actions considered the most threatening to democracy and the weakest public punishment for actions posing the least threat to democracy.⁸⁶ It is known that power consolidating changes to democratic institutions are potentially the most dangerous democratic transgression type because they constitute an endogenous mode of de-democratization where backsliding takes place not against, but through, democratic institutions.⁸⁷

While the threat-level is high, power consolidating changes to democratic institutions also “can be the most difficult to detect” because they exploit the fact that democratic institutions are to some extent vulnerable to be changed by popular preferences.⁸⁸ Therefore, it is predicted that a differentiated view of transgressions will show that frames on power consolidating changes to democratic institutions will be coded most as mostly disapproving and dismissive because of the high threat level to democracy, but also, the likelihood of overlooking the threat they pose to democratic integrity.

⁸³ Ahmed, “Is the American Public Really Turning Away from Democracy?,” 969.

⁸⁴ Cervenka, “Public Opinion in the United States and Hungary,” 2.

⁸⁵ Graham and Svolik, “Democracy in America?”

⁸⁶ Ahmed, “Is the American Public Really Turning Away from Democracy?,” 971.

⁸⁷ Ahmed, 969.

⁸⁸ Ahmed, 969.

Feasibility of Research Design and Limitations

Conducting a media frame analysis was an obvious methodological choice to answer the research question because it asks specifically about conservative media framing of different democratic transgressions. The case selection of U.S. conservative media aided in the feasibility of the research because the sources selected were all uploaded into MAXQDA in the same language, English, and did not require translation if quoted within the study. It is acknowledged, however, that the time period of selection is quite long. As such, the process of selecting relevant sources was laborious because each result needed to be read closely to see if it matched the sample criteria. To accommodate for this, the process of selecting relevant articles was split up by year and breaks were taken between *The American Conservative*, *National Review*, *National Interest* and *Fox News Opinion*. These breaks were designed to reduce the likelihood that any relevant articles were missed in the final sample. However, stratifying uploading the articles and blog posts into MAXQDA by source also created a design limitation because then the coding system design was not able to pull data on the evolution of codes over the temporal scope of analysis, from 2011 until 2022. This is unfortunate because the codes for frames of law violations, frames of norm violations, frames of ideal violations and frames of power consolidating changes to democratic institutions, may have changed as Hungary continued its de-democratization process and as the country received more slack from the international community and the EU for its democratic backsliding process. Ultimately, the stratification of the results by source was prioritized over the ability to capture evolution over time because the integrity of the sample was more important than capturing changes in frames over time, especially because the research question asks about variance in framing of different democratic transgressions and not about changes in frames over time. Attempting to accommodate for this flaw in the research design, though, the results will still show the evolution of U.S. conservative media framing of Hungarian democracy as a whole, just not differentiated by transgression type.

Conclusion

To summarize, this thesis will answer the question, “Does conservative media framing of Hungarian democratic backsliding vary depending on the type of transgression, and if so, how?” through a frame analysis of U.S. conservative media coverage of Hungarian democratic backsliding from 2011 through 2022. It will show that frames of law violations, frames of norm violations, frames of ideal violations and frames of power consolidating changes to democratic institutions are present within the sample. Then, it will code each of these frames as descriptive, dismissive, approving and disapproving. The results section will present these findings comparatively and test the four hypotheses. Afterward, the discussion section will touch on the contextual factors informing U.S. conservative media frames, analyzing in more detail the content of the frames given the growing popularity of the national conservative movement.

Chapter 3: Results

The previous chapter discussed the case selection, how the frame analysis was constructed and how the frame analysis was operationalized to answer the question “Does conservative media framing of Hungarian democratic backsliding vary depending on the type of transgression, and if so, in which ways?” This section will outline the results of the frame analysis. It will begin by describing the sample, comparing the findings from this study to previous findings in similar works. Then, it will show variance in U.S. conservative media framing of different types of democratic transgressions by discussing the results of the codes for each frame. Finally, it will test the hypotheses and begin to analyze the potential implications of the result on democratic standards.

Sample Results

Sample Overview

In total, the sample consisted of 885 “scenes” that framed democratic transgressions in Hungary. Of the media sources selected, *The American Conservative* framed democratic transgressions in Hungary the most with 513 scenes framed. *National Review* framed 203 scenes, while *National Interest* framed 157 scenes. For the fourth source, *Fox News Opinion*, there were only 83 articles results and five matched the criteria of the study. From these five articles, 12 scenes of democratic transgressions were included in the analysis. The sample results from each of the four U.S. conservative media sources are visualized in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Results Stratified by U.S. Conservative News Media Source

Source	Results (shown in number of articles)	Relevant articles	Scenes that frame democratic transgressions
<i>The American Conservative</i>	267	116	513
<i>National Review</i>	265	74	203
<i>National Interest</i>	194	59	157
<i>Fox News Opinion</i>	83	5	12
Total	909	254	885

The American Conservative dominating in their coverage of Hungary’s democratic transgressions is consistent with previous findings on U.S. conservative media coverage of Hungary. In Cabrera-Cuadrado and Chrobak’s article, they showed that “there is great disparity of relevant results between outlets, the most prominent being *The American Conservative*.”³⁷ This is likely explained, in part, by the columnist Rod Dreher who is an American expatriate writer and editor that moved to Hungary due to his admiration for Orbán’s conservatism and

Hungary’s “Christian democracy.”⁸⁹ His articles dominated *The American Conservative* sample, and he even has been credited with encouraging popular conservative pundit, Tucker Carlson’s, infamous visit to Budapest in 2020.⁹⁰ The prominence of his perspective within the sample is a potential limitation to the study, indicating that further research should be done to disentangle conservative media framing of Hungarian backsliding in the U.S. broadly, from the opinions of prominent conservative political writers. However, the repetitiveness of Dreher’s articles simultaneously shows the strong presence of American conservative intellectual interest in Hungary, regardless of the country’s democratic challenges, illustrating the success of their tactics to attract conservative intellectual interest through Hungarian soft-power strategies.

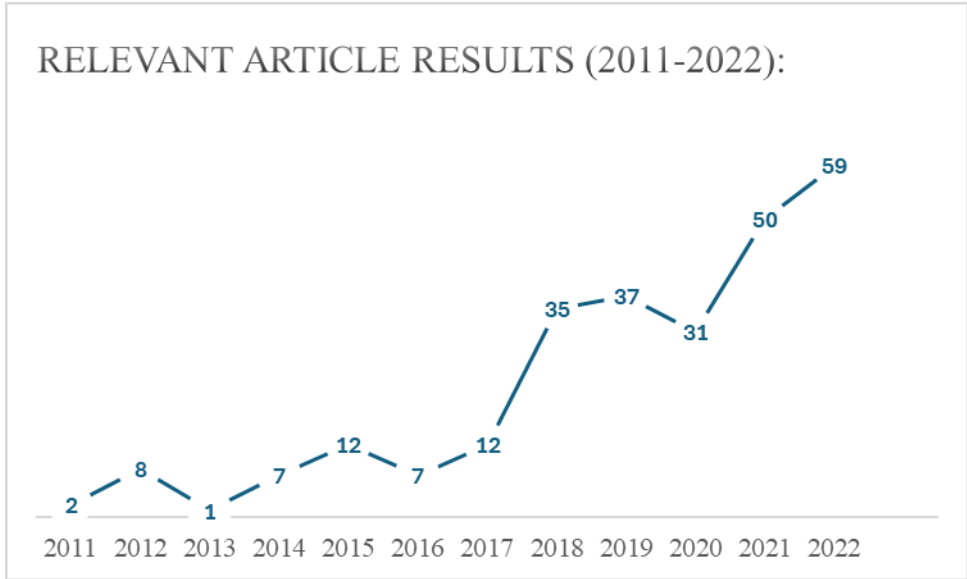
While this thesis does not analyze the changes in frames of different democratic transgressions over time, as it is outside the scope of the study, it is still important to acknowledge that 2011-2022 was a dynamic period for democratic backsliding in Hungary. As a result, coverage of Hungarian democratic developments in U.S. conservative media changed over time. In their study on the rise of Orbán and Hungary in American conservative media, Cabrera-Cuadrado and Chrobak began to track how the narrative around Hungary and its prime minister evolved in U.S. conservative media over time, focusing on changes from 2019 until 2022. Their results showed an increase in U.S. conservative media interest in Hungary following Tucker Carlson’s interview with Orbán in 2021. Although Cabrera-Cuadrado and Chrobak did not look at coverage of Hungarian democratic transgressions, specifically, it is still insightful to compare the thesis results with their findings. This is because this thesis analyzes a wider time period and, thus, can provide insight into trends of American conservative interest in Hungary before 2019.

Similar to Cabrera-Cuadrado and Chrobak’s study, the results of this thesis show an increase in U.S. conservative media coverage of Hungarian democratic transgressions from 2020 to 2021 and again in 2022, as visualized in Figure 4. However, Figure 4 also shows that U.S. conservative media coverage of Hungarian democratic transgressions trended slowly upward between 2011-2017 and increased significantly in 2018—two years before another jump in coverage was observed following Tucker Carlson’s visit, as recorded in the previous study by Cabrera-Cuadrado and Chrobak. The trends from before 2019 indicate that Carlson’s visit to Budapest did not spur interest in Hungarian political developments outright, but instead, provided a catalyst that accelerated the trend in coverage that already existed in U.S. conservative media. This finding points to an opportunity for further scholarly analysis, examining the variables shaping these trends in U.S. conservative media coverage of Hungary and examining why and how the trends changed over time.

Figure 4: Trend in Relevant Article Results for each American Conservative Outlet Analyzed in the Sample (y-axis) per year (x-axis)

⁸⁹ Dreher, “Why Do US Conservatives Like Hungary?”

⁹⁰ Thorpe, “Tucker Carlson: What the Fox News Host Is Doing in Hungary.”



Frame Content and Incidence Rates

In terms of the content of the results, as expected, frames of law violations, norm violations, ideal violations and power consolidating changes to democratic institutions were all found within the sample. The frames that were found are shown in Figure 5 with their definitions.

Figure 5: Frames Found in the Sample

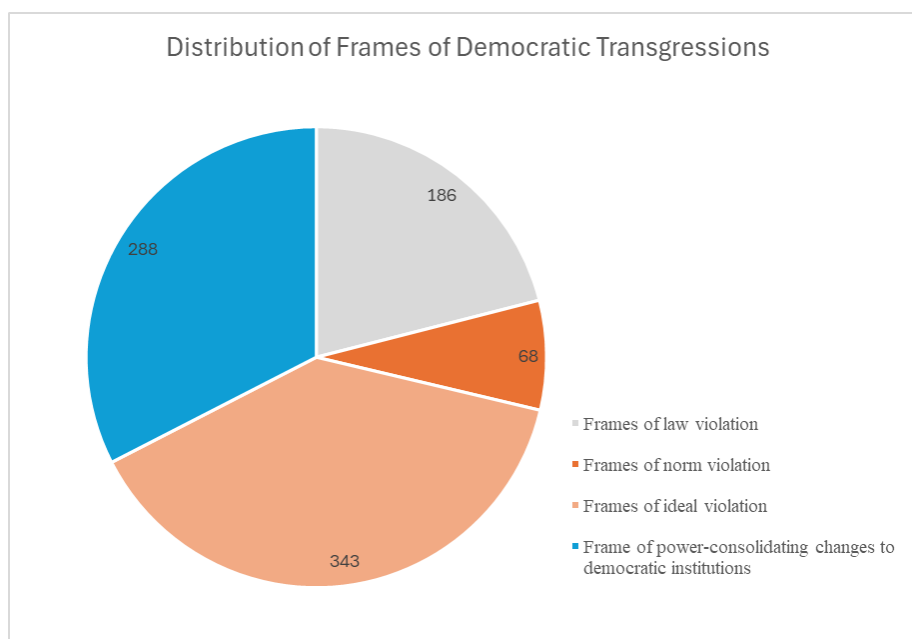
What democratic transgression was framed?	How was the frame defined? ⁹¹
Frame of law violation	Frames a violation of the rule of law, the constitution, established procedure, or other formal institutions regulating democratic competition.
Frame of norm violation	Frames a violation of informal rules that govern political interactions.
Frame of ideal violation	Frames a violation of an aspirational view of how democratic politics should be conducted.
Frame of power consolidating change to democratic institutions	Frames a change to the law or the constitution that consolidates the power of ruling elites.

While all the frames of transgressions were found within the sample, the incidence rates varied. Frames on ideal violations were the most common in the sample, with 343 incidences observed. Frames on power consolidating changes to democratic institutions were observed the second-most, 288 times. Frames on law violations were the third most common, observed 186

⁹¹ Ahmed, “Is the American Public Really Turning Away from Democracy?,” 969.

times, and finally, frames on norm violations were the least common, with only 68 incidences observed. The results can be seen comparatively in a pie chart in Figure 6. The results are not surprising considering the literature on the modes of de-democratization that have taken place in Hungary. Bogaards has done work to categorize the democratic deficiencies in Hungary using Freedom House data to show that four of the seven dimensions of democratic deficits identified in the country pertain to the electoral regime and to issues with political liberties.⁹² When translating this into the frames found in the sample, the most common frame—a frame of ideal violation—includes the constraints of political liberties. Furthermore, the second most common frame—a frame of power consolidating changes to democratic institutions—captures Hungary’s changes to its electoral regime. Therefore, the distribution in frames of democratic transgressions is not surprising because it likely reflects the frequency and popularity of certain types of democratic transgressions implemented by Orbán and his government, over others.

Figure 6: Pie Chart of Frames of Democratic Transgressions



However, the examples of what were included within these frame categories were distinct to the Hungarian case. As such, they moved beyond the examples provided in Ahmed’s conceptualization of transgressions because her examples were more specific to surveys about backsliding designed in the U.S., and this study instead focused on examples found in frames on Hungary. These examples are described in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Frame Findings and Examples from Hungarian Context

⁹² Bogaards, “De-Democratization in Hungary.”

What democratic transgression is being framed?	What are some examples that emerged in the coverage of Hungarian democracy by U.S. conservative media?
Frame of law violation	The dominant example was frames on Hungary’s violation of EU law. Notably, the sample did not include ways Hungary violates its national laws because such frames did not exist in the sample. This is likely because Orbán himself is an attorney and surrounds himself with other attorneys who help him with policy formulation. ⁹³ The Helsinki Committee explains that Orbán’s rule of law violations are “are technically [domestically] legal” possible because of “the abuse of the party’s majority position in parliament and the exploitation of an implied ‘good faith’ principle that elected officials act only as prescribed, instead of using their position to entirely reshape the administration.” ⁹⁴ Instead, the main way Orbán violates the formal institutional order is through EU law violations. Since according to Ahmed, violations of the law can also include democratic transgressions that subvert established procedure and other formal institutions—such as EU institutions, this study includes frames on Hungary’s violation of EU law as examples of frames of law violations. ⁹⁵
Frame of norm violation	Frames on Orbán and Fidesz promoting allies in high positions in government or stacking government institutions with loyalists were most common. Another example was the framing of Hungary maintaining close ties with or supporting illiberal dictatorships because Orbán’s relationship with illiberal leaders, such as Putin. This was included as a norm violation because it directly violates the EU’s positioning of itself as a defender of liberal democracy and challenges the EU’s self-identification as a normative power on the global stage. ⁹⁶
Frame of ideal violation	The most common example was frames on the Fidesz government’s acceptance of constraints on civil liberties that were never explicitly coded into law, such as language in the new constitution or in new legislation could be used to restrict religious plurality, limit reproductive freedom, and threaten LGBTQ+ rights without explicitly denying these rights to individuals. Additional examples included corruption tolerance by Hungarian officials or attempts to

⁹³ Kenes, “Viktor Orbán: Past to Present,” 6.

⁹⁴ Netherlands Helsinki Committee, “Systematic Backsliding of the Rule of Law in Hungary.”

⁹⁵ Ahmed, “Is the American Public Really Turning Away from Democracy?,” 969.

⁹⁶ Manners, “Normative Power Europe”; Wood, “The European Union”; Nouredine, “Critically Assess and Analyse the Notion That the EU Is a Normative Power.”

	<p>restrict the media landscape without officially changing the laws. Finally, another common example also included was Orbán and his government’s rhetorical opposition to liberalism and liberal internationalism because these are two trends that have been characteristic to the establishment of the current democratic order in Europe, and therefore, opposition to them constitute a violation of contemporary democratic ideals.⁹⁷ Naturally, then, within this group also fell frames on ideal violations, when the sources opposed migration and challenged the current model of supranational migration governance, and the current liberal international order as embodied in the EU.</p>
<p>Frame of power consolidating changes to democratic institutions</p>	<p>The most common example was frames on the constitutional revolution. Another common example was the COVID-19 state of danger declared by the government, and changes to the electoral regime implemented to maintain Fidesz’s electoral success through institutional changes such as gerrymandering or expanding Hungarian citizenship to loyalists outside of Hungary’s present-day borders.</p>

There is, admittedly, a normative dimension to qualifying the examples above as frames of democratic transgressions. In fact, an argument that was encountered frequently in the sample of conservative coverage is that many of the examples in Figure 7 do not actually undermine Hungary’s democratic integrity. According to some conservative sources, the above examples are not symptomatic of democratic backsliding but instead fully justified by the circumstances. For example, an article by *The American Conservative* entitled “Orbán, Soros, and the Unbridgeable Conflict Over Hungarian Sovereignty,” argues that Orbán’s expulsion of Soros-associated institutions from the civil society space is justified because of his attempts to impose globalist, liberal ideology onto a vulnerable Hungarian society. To the author, limiting civil society is not a democratic transgression, but a victory for the Hungarian people. In the article’s next excerpt, the author also frames an example of power consolidating changes to democratic institutions, the constitutional revolution, dismissively by failing to acknowledge the threat it caused to Hungarian democratic institutions. This excerpt provides a glimpse into this sort of argumentation:

“These ideas are integral to Soros’s vision of an “Open Society” and drive his contributions to NGOs (over the years totaling \$400 million in Hungary). His vision, however, runs counter to the nationalist ideals Orbán has supported and defended. The Constitution of Hungary, passed under Fidesz in 2011, makes them clear. The preamble—the “National Avowal”—connects modern Hungary to the past, its forebears,

⁹⁷ Chaudoin, Milner, and Tingley, “The Center Still Holds”; Jahn, “Rethinking Democracy Promotion.”

its Christian faith, and its historical constitution. It proclaims the constitutional continuity of the Hungarian state and ties its fortunes to the history of the Hungarian nation, while also affirming it as a democracy.”⁹⁸

The fact that both the constitutional revolution and the expulsion of Soros-associated institutions are not characterized as a democratic threat illustrates the range of interpretations that exist for Hungary’s democratic changes. This must be reckoned with in a study on the framing of Hungarian democratic backsliding such as this thesis. As such, the following section will qualify the most common examples that were found in the four frame categories in Figure 7 as threats to democracy. They will illustrate how they are considered legitimate, recognized challenges to democracy in Hungary by democracy experts. To do so, it will draw on a reputable source for democratic integrity, such as Freedom House’s “Freedom in the World” reports, which are the most widely read and cited report of its kind on global trends in political rights and civil liberties.⁹⁹ Additionally, it will draw from existing scholarship on liberal democracy in Europe.

For frames of law violations, Hungary’s violations of EU law were the most common example. The sample frequently included framings of the conflict between EU institutions and Hungary, including key moments like the Article 7 proceedings brought by the European Parliament in 2018. Furthermore, the sample discussed the EU-Hungary conflict during the 2015 migration crisis which ultimately led to subversions of the EU’s common migration policy, ruled illegal by the European Court of Justice. These rulings and formal proceedings against Hungary illustrate the extent of their democratic decline.¹⁰⁰ Freedom House has also taken note of the EU-Hungary legal conflict, stating in a rule of law report that “European courts have heavily criticized Hungarian asylum and immigration policy, ruling that the policies and actions were incompatible with EU law and at times amounted to human rights violations. Despite this, the government has maintained its stance.”¹⁰¹ They also note how “Hungarian courts have also shown continued resistance to European judicial oversight on due process matters in 2019.”¹⁰² In part, due to the issue of Hungary violating EU law, Freedom House docked them six points out of sixteen within their 2021 Rule of Law section of their country report.¹⁰³ Overall, the examples are recognized widely as legitimate transgressions to Hungary’s democracy.

For frames of norm violations, one of the most common examples was frames about Orbán and Fidesz promoting allies into high positions in government or stacking government institutions with loyalists. Freedom House comments on this trend in their 2022 report, giving this anecdote as supporting evidence for a low four-and-a-quarter out of seven score for judicial framework and independence: “After receiving the title of judge, a development facilitated by amendments in the 2019 omnibus law, Zsolt András Varga, a justice named to the Constitutional

⁹⁸ Pocius, “Orbán, Soros, and the Unbridgeable Conflict Over Hungarian Sovereignty,” 3.

⁹⁹ “Freedom in the World.”

¹⁰⁰ “The European Migration Crisis and Hungary.”

¹⁰¹ “Hungary,” 2021.

¹⁰² “Hungary.”

¹⁰³ “Hungary.”

Court in 2014, was appointed to a nine-year term as Curia president... He was nominated despite objections from the National Judicial Council, the country's top professional forum of judges." Therefore, Freedom House recognizes the threat to Hungary's democracy posed by norm violations such as the most common sample example framed, the promotion of Fidesz loyalists to high government positions.¹⁰⁴

For frames of ideal violations, the most common examples framed the government's restriction of civil liberties that were never coded into law. According to Freedom House, civil liberties include freedom of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, rule of law (including an independent judiciary and equal access to due process), and personal autonomy and individual rights.¹⁰⁵ As outlined above, common examples in the sample included framing of language in the new constitution or in new legislation could be used to restrict religious plurality, limit reproductive freedom, and threaten LGBTQ+ rights without explicitly denying these rights to individuals. The protection of civil liberties is so essential and paramount to democracy that Freedom House uses analytics on civil liberties as a central way to diagnose a country's democratic health for their "Freedom In the World" country reports.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, it has been shown by democracy scholars that "attacks on LGBTI people and their rights can be a precursor to democratic backsliding, and anti-LGBTI stigma and policies may contribute to the weakening of democratic norms and institutions," so the threat of restricted civil liberties for LGBTQ+ people is clear.¹⁰⁷ Additionally, another common example in the sample was framings of government actions that were outside of legislative action (which are understood as power consolidating changes to democratic institutions) to restrict Hungary's free and fair media landscape. This limitation of citizens' freedom of expression is not compatible with a healthy, functioning democracy because freedom of expression "is the lifeblood of democracy, facilitating open debate, the proper consideration of diverse interests and perspectives, and the negotiation and compromise necessary for consensual policy decisions," according to Freedom House.¹⁰⁸

Finally, for frames of power consolidating changes to democratic institutions, the most common example that was framed in the sample was the constitutional revolution. Scholars have criticized how during the constitutional revolution, "Neither the opposition parties nor civil society organisations nor the general public had any influence in the constitutional process" and there was no popular ratification process so the creation of the new constitution failed to meet the popular approval standards expected of Hungary's liberal democracy.¹⁰⁹ The effects of the constitutional revolution on Hungarian democracy were also commented on in the 2013 Freedom House country in transit report which states: "The increased range of laws that will require a

¹⁰⁴ "Hungary," 2022.

¹⁰⁵ "Freedom in the World Research Methodology."

¹⁰⁶ "Freedom in the World Research Methodology."

¹⁰⁷ Flores, Carreño, and Shaw, "Democratic Backsliding and LGBTI Acceptance," 2.

¹⁰⁸ "Freedom of Expression."

¹⁰⁹ Bogdandy and Sonnevend, *Constitutional Crisis in the European Constitutional Area*.

supermajority to pass under this new constitutional framework will likely impact the effectiveness of future governments. The overall quality of legislation has been low, as it has often been drafted hastily to suit the immediate interests of the Orbán government; imprecisely worded laws also allow for freer interpretation by the executive branch... Even as the government has increased its influence over other public institutions, power within the government has been concentrated in the hands of the prime minister.” This quotation shows how even as far back as in 2013, experts on democratic standards were concerned about Orbán’s accumulation of power and its democratic implications in the form of power-consolidating changes to democratic institutions such as the constitutional revolution.¹¹⁰ Another quite common example was Hungary’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The government declared a state of danger, relying on the new constitutional order to move legislative power from the parliament to Orbán’s government. According to legal scholars, this state of danger created “an unlimited temporal scope for governmental actions, as the end of the state of danger was supposed to be declared by the Government”.¹¹¹ In a study on Hungary’s response to the pandemic, Kovács argued that laws such as this one show how “Prime Minister Viktor Orbán strategically capitalised on the opportunity the COVID-19 situation provided to gain more unchecked power,” illustrating the clear threat to democracy this action posed.¹¹² In sum, the examples of frames of power consolidating changes to democratic institutions, as well as the other three frame of democratic transgressions outlined in the preceding paragraphs, have all been shown by previous scholarship and by Freedom House to be threatening to Hungary’s democracy. This justifies the categorization of the examples in Figure 7.

Overall, regarding the frame content and incidence rates, the sample found a large range of frames, the number of which increased over the scope of the study—from 2011 until 2022. While *The American Conservative* dominated in terms of scenes that framed Hungarian democratic transgressions, *National Interest*, *National Review* and *Fox News Opinion* all discussed Hungarian democratic backsliding in multiple ways, with frames of different categories of democratic transgressions found in each source. The findings support assertions that Hungarian democracy and the government of Viktor Orbán have captured the attention of American conservative media, as demonstrated in previous scholarly work. They also show that the expected frames were distributed in different ways with different rates of incidence, which likely can be explained by the evidence that some democratic transgressions were more common than others throughout the scope of Hungary’s democratic backsliding.

Hypothesis Testing

The prediction that there would be variance in the way that U.S. conservative media framed democratic transgressions was found to be correct as shown in Figure 8. In the sample, U.S. conservative media’s frames on democratic backsliding varied significantly depending on

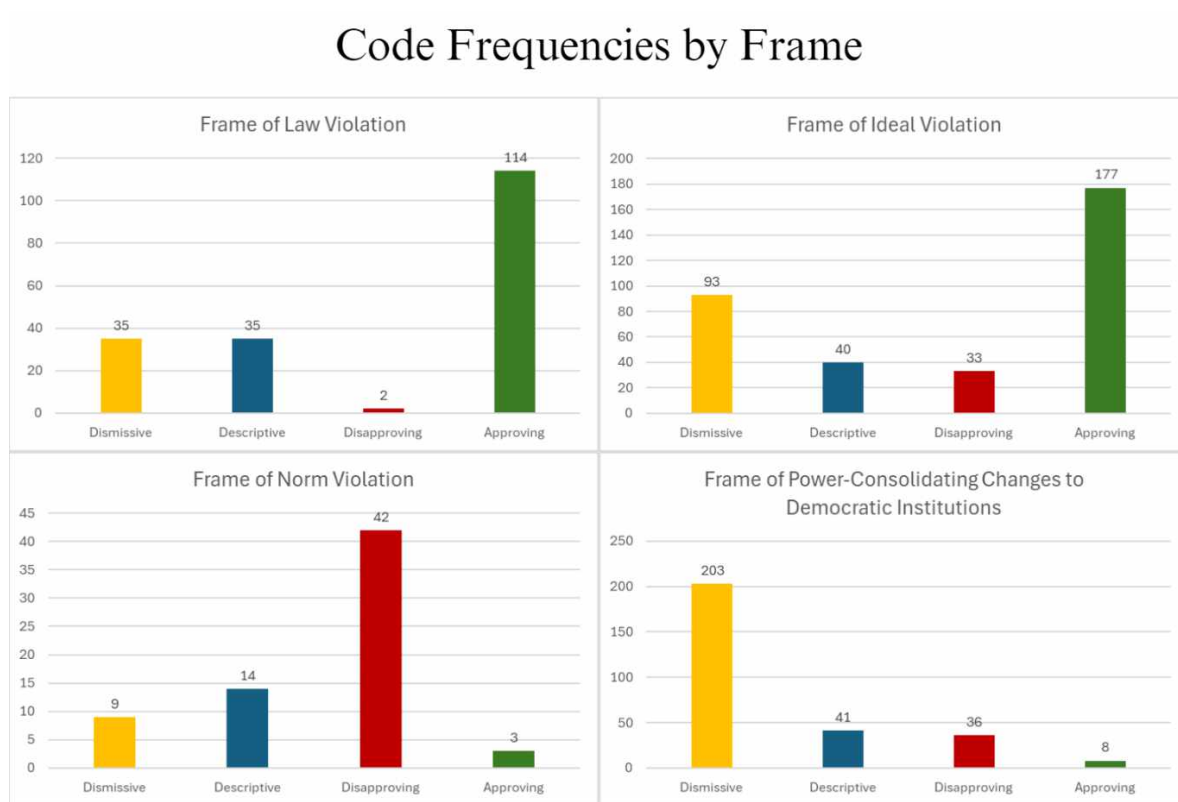
¹¹⁰ Kovacs, “Nations in Transit 2013.”

¹¹¹ Scheppele, “Understanding Hungary’s Constitutional Revolution,” 112.

¹¹² Kovács, “The COVID-19 Pandemic,” 1.

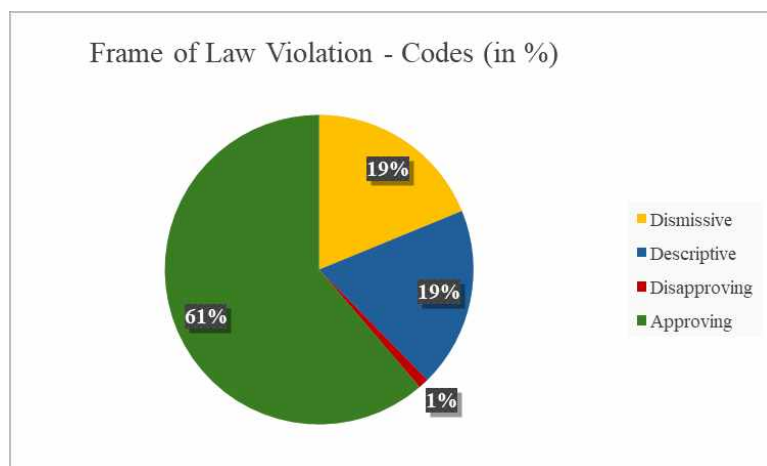
the democratic transgression. Approving codes dominated for frames of law violations and frames of ideal violations. Disapproving codes dominated for frames of norm violations. Lastly, dismissive codes dominated for frames of power consolidating changes to democratic institutions. The numeric distribution of each frame code for frames on law violations, norm violations, ideal violations, and power consolidating changes to democratic institutions is illustrated in Figure 8. Given that the answer to the first part of the research question “Does conservative media framing of Hungarian democratic backsliding vary depending on the type of transgression?” is yes, the following section will answer the second part of the research question, exploring “in which ways” by examining the evidence to support or reject each hypothesis.

Figure 8: Variance in U.S. Conservative Media Frames of Different Democratic Transgressions in Hungary



Hypothesis 1: Frames of law violations are most commonly coded as disapproving.

The results shown in Figure 9 overwhelmingly reject the hypothesis that frames of law violations are most commonly coded as disapproving. Instead, the opposite is found to be the case. Approving codes dominate, consisting of 61% of the sample of frames of law violations. Dismissive and descriptive codes were also observed with relative frequency, both consisting of nineteen percent of the total of code percentage. Finally, disapproving codes were found to be the least common frame code, consisting of only one percent of the total codes for frames of law violations. In sum, there is no evidence to support Hypothesis 1.

Figure 9: Code Distribution for the Frames of Hungary’s Law Violations

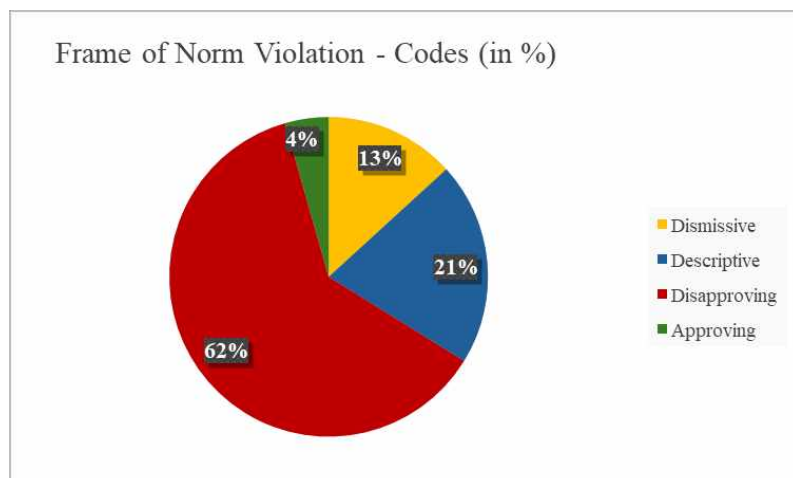
The predominance of approving codes and the minority of disapproving codes in the sample of frames of law violations indicates the absence of a cueing effect from the Republican party to disapprove of law violations. Despite the party branding itself as the “law and order” party, and despite its heightened sensitivity toward examining electoral processes prompted by the party’s most recent president, the hypothesis was rejected. Perhaps other factors, such as American conservative support for leaders like Trump, who pick and choose which aspects of the law to respect and who belittle judges, prosecutors, witnesses, jurors and the broader U.S. justice system through verbal assaults, created an alternative cueing effect that led to the high incidence of “approving” codes for frames of law violations.¹¹³ Another factor that potentially influenced the results is that examples of frames of law violations in Hungary were overwhelmingly frames of Hungary violating EU law. Perhaps the frame code distribution that was found reflects an ideological position of conservative media, the rejection of supranational governance as embodied in the EU. This idea will be explored further in the discussion section.

Hypothesis 2: Frames of norm violations are most commonly coded as descriptive.

The results did not find evidence to support the hypothesis that frames of norm violations are most commonly coded as descriptive; therefore, the hypothesis is rejected. Instead, the most common frame code was found to be disapproving, totaling sixty-two percent. However, descriptive codes were the second most common, sitting at twenty-one percent of the total, which is still more common than dismissive and approving codes combined. As such, the results for Hypothesis 2 are not as far from the expected results when compared to Hypothesis 1. The last code category, approving, consisted of only four percent of the total frame codes for frames of Hungary’s norm violations. The entire distribution of codes can be seen in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Code Distribution for the Frames of Hungary’s Norm Violations

¹¹³ Stone, “Trump’s Attacks on Justice System Are Causing Real Damage, Experts Say”; Honderich and Levinson-King, “US Mid-Terms 2022: Tracking Trump’s ‘extraordinary’ Endorsement Spree”; “Donald Trump Favorability.”

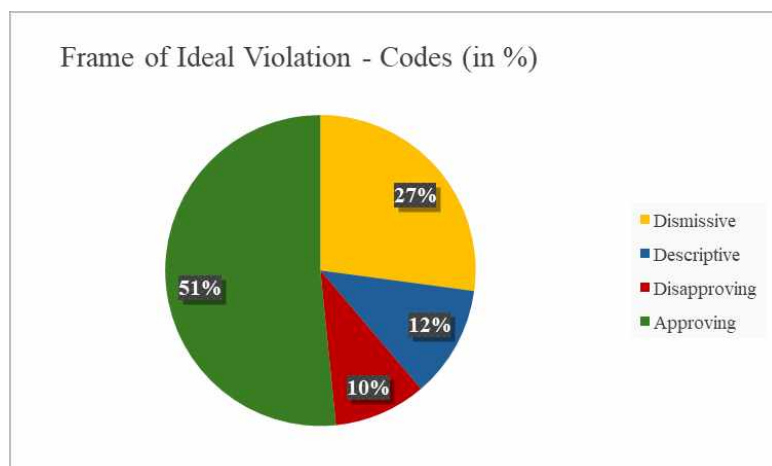


Considering these results, it is possible that the coverage of democratic norm violations in Hungary did require some level of description, but that the negative connotations of Hungary's norm violations were relayed more easily to American audiences than expected. Furthermore, the dominance of disapproving codes and scarcity of approving codes is a positive result for those worried about public opinion foundations on democracy because norm violations were predominately framed as unfavorable or threatening to the integrity of Hungary's democratic system. Perhaps, as philosophy scholars have argued, the impact of democracy does not establish moral requirements to obey the law, as evidenced by the result for frames of law violations, but democracy instead fosters a moral force to respect a shared "democratic provenance" that is embodied in democratic norms.¹¹⁴ However, it is noteworthy that frames of norm violations were the least common frame observed when compared to frames of law violations, frames of ideal violations and frames of power consolidating changes to democratic institutions. Therefore, the only democratic transgression frame where a disapproving code dominated was for the frame that was observed in only 68 "scenes," in a total sample of 885 "scenes." As a result, this disapproving frame code may be less powerful in influencing public opinion when compared to other, more common frames of democratic transgressions.

Hypothesis 3: Frames of ideal violations are more commonly coded as approving.

The hypothesis that frames of ideal violations are most commonly coded as approving is supported by the results because fifty one percent of the frame codes were found to be approving. However, the expectation that frames of ideal violations will be coded approvingly more than any other frame type was not supported by the evidence because sixty one percent of frames of law violations were coded as such. The second most common code type was dismissive, tallying twenty seven percent of the sample. Finally, a minority of codes for frames of ideal violations were disapproving, only ten percent. The remaining twelve percent were descriptive. The full distribution of frame codes is visualized in Figure 11.

¹¹⁴ Frye and Klosko, "Democratic Authority and Respect for the Law."

Figure 11: Code Distribution for the Frames of Hungary’s Ideal Violations

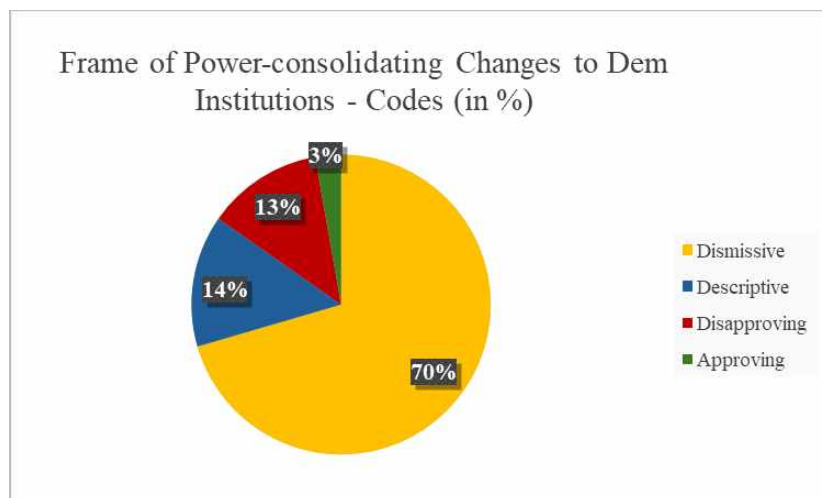
This evidence supports Ahmed’s finding about the pragmatic limitations of democratic ideals in democratic decision-making which may lead to dismissal or even approval of democratic ideal violations.¹¹⁵ In fact, approval was more common than dismissal and a stark ten percent of codes framed ideal violations in a disapproving manner. Additionally, the result provides evidence that such violations may be entangled in broader ideological conflicts that are meaningful to conservatives such as the debate over refugee rights or civil protections for LGBTQ+ citizens, especially because a large number of the examples of Hungarian transgressions that fell under this frame were instances of the Fidesz government’s acceptance of constraints on civil liberties. The implication of this finding is concerning for those interested in how Hungarian democratic backsliding is seen and understood abroad, because it shows the possibility that democratic ideals are being traded off within conservative ideological debates. Furthermore, the potential impact of the approving frame code for ideal violations is especially noteworthy because frames of ideal violations were the most common within the sample of U.S. conservative media, framed in 343 ‘scenes’ across the four sources.

Hypothesis 4: Frames of power consolidating changes to democratic institutions are most commonly coded as dismissive and disapproving.

There is some evidence to support the hypothesis that frames of power consolidating changes to democratic institutions are commonly coded as dismissive and disapproving because dismissive was, in fact, the most common code, being coded as such in seventy percent of the sample. However, disapproving frames were not nearly as common as predicted, consisting of only thirteen percent of the sample, so the hypothesis in its entirety was not supported by the evidence. Descriptive codes were similar in their frequency compared to disapproving codes, consisting of fourteen percent of the sample. Finally, approving codes were the least common, coming in at only three percent of the total. Figure 12 shows the full distribution of frame codes.

¹¹⁵ Ahmed, “Is the American Public Really Turning Away from Democracy?,” 969.

Figure 12: Code Distribution for the Frames of Hungary’s Power consolidating changes to Democratic Institutions



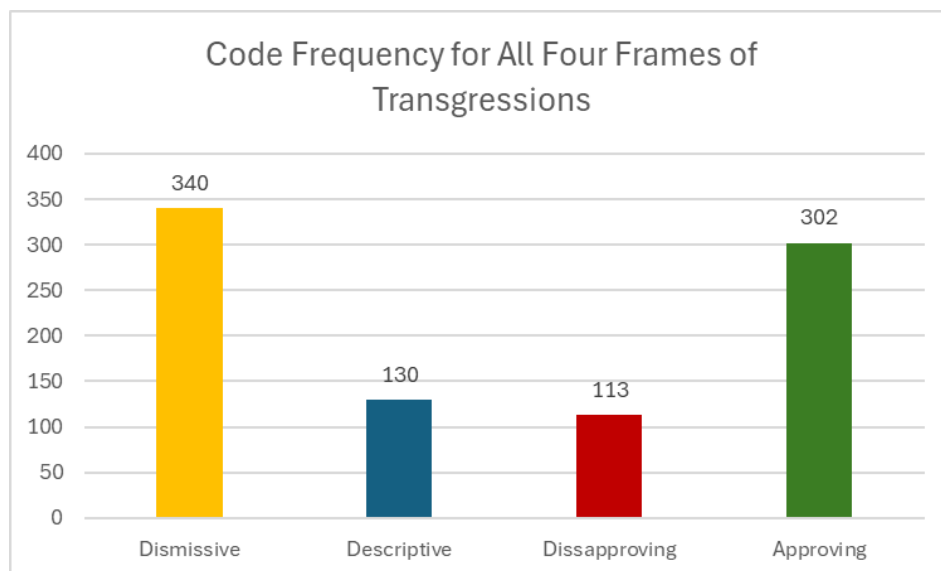
Despite the high threat level of power consolidating changes to democratic institutions, the results show that frames of these changes were rarely framed in a “disapproving” tone, illustrating that U.S. conservative media may not be punishing towards the actions considered by Ahmed to be the most threatening to democracy.¹¹⁶ However, the evidence does support the scholarship that argues that the high threat level of power consolidating changes to democratic institutions is difficult to detect, because a vast majority—seventy percent—of the frame codes were dismissive. It is promising that the frame code rate of approving frames is so low, falling at only three percent, but generally, frames on power consolidating changes to democratic institutions were the most likely of all the frames to be dismissed. This is a concerning result for democratic standards because most of the sample fails to reckon with how such violations have consolidated Orbán’s power not against, but through Hungary’s democratic institutions.

Summary of Results

The code distribution of all four frames of democratic transgressions combined shows a dominance of dismissive and approving codes as seen in Figure 13. Generally, this does not paint an optimistic picture for how democratic backsliding in Hungary under Orbán is portrayed to conservative publics in the U.S.

Figure 13: Code Frequency for Sample Total with all Frames of Democratic Transgressions Combined

¹¹⁶ Ahmed, 969.



However, when the frame codes are stratified by transgression, a more nuanced picture is revealed. For frames on law violations and frames on ideal violations, approving codes dominated which is concerning for potential public opinion foundations on democratic backsliding, especially considering how the U.S. is struggling with its own issues with the rule of law and is facing unprecedented levels of ideological polarization.¹¹⁷ However, for frames of norm violations, only four percent were approving, illustrating how different the code results were depending on the type of transgression framed. In fact, frames of norm violations were overwhelmingly disapproving, a fact that is impossible to see when examining Figure 13 on its own. Finally, for power consolidating changes to democratic institutions, there was a preponderance of dismissive codes which account for sixty percent of the dismissive codes in the total sample. This illustrates how the high threat level of power consolidating changes to Hungary’s democratic institutions is likely not fully understood—a discouraging reality—but at least only three percent of the frames approved of such changes.

Overall, these insights into the variance in U.S. conservative media frames of Hungarian democratic transgressions help move towards a better differentiated view of democratic transgressions. By conducting a frame analysis into U.S. conservative media framing of democratic backsliding in Hungary, the thesis has shown that different types of Hungarian democratic transgressions are being presented by the media to American conservatives in a diverse range of ways. The value of this stratification by transgression is clear, especially when comparing the results to a non-differentiated view of frames of backsliding seen in Figure 13. Now, what does this result mean for scholarly understandings of media frames of democratic backsliding, given Hungary’s intention to be a leader within the global conservative movement? This will be considered in the discussion section of the next chapter, followed by the conclusion.

¹¹⁷ “Capitol Riot Was ‘culmination of an Attempted Coup,’ Jan. 6 Committee Chair Thompson Says”; Graham and Svulik, “Democracy in America?”

Chapter 4: Discussion and Conclusion

The previous chapter showed that there is variance in conservative media framing of Hungarian democratic backsliding, depending on the type of democratic transgression that was framed. This result points toward multiple avenues for follow-up research. For scholars interested in American public opinion foundations on democratic backsliding, follow up research could be done to determine the exact impact of this result on American conservative public opinion foundations on democracy, differentiated by transgression. For scholars interested in continuing to understand how Hungarian backsliding is seen by the media outside of Hungary, follow-up research could be done to test whether these results could be replicated in countries that are not as heavily targeted by Hungary's soft power strategy to become a global conservative leader. This sort of work could also help to measure the impact of this Hungarian soft power strategy on foreign publics, especially those important to EU foreign and security policy formulation. Furthermore, it will be interesting for scholars to monitor the evolution of support for Orbán in the U.S., especially in a moment marked by potential turning political tides due to the possibility of a Trump re-election.

Finally, a central question when considering the implications of the research results is *why* does U.S. conservative media framing of Hungarian democratic backsliding vary depending on the type of transgression? Because this thesis is so closely tied to literature on “the global right” and how the ideological underpinnings of Orbán and his Fidesz party appeal to national conservatives despite the country's backsliding, the following discussion considers these dynamics. In doing so, it will argue that one possible takeaway that could explain and contextualize the variation in frames of different democratic transgressions is the role that Hungary plays in a growing, transnational national conservative ideological movement that is gaining popularity among U.S. conservatives. Thus, in the following section, the discussion will explore why the discovery of variance in transgression framing matters and will provide insight into the potential implications of the findings on global politics.

Discussion

When examining the framing of democratic backsliding in Hungary, U.S. conservative media sources did not merely frame a democratic transgression in terms of the impact it had on the country's democratic integrity, but instead, the frame codes were often informed by how the transgression aligned with the broader goals and ideology of the national conservative movement. This section will discuss how the popularity of national conservatism could explain the variance found in the framings of democratic transgressions. It seeks to show how the results can be used to understand how national conservatives view democratic challenges. To understand why frames of different democratic transgression were coded differently, it is useful to examine the ideological underpinnings of national conservatism in Hungary and how this ideology then translates into American conservative discourse.

What is national conservatism?

Scholarship on national conservatism, its ideological features, and its transnational linkages is relatively new. As touched on in the literature review, studies on the global right-wing movement illustrate how many successful contemporary right-wing parties in Europe and the U.S. have their intellectual roots in the ‘New Right’ movement; however, they recognize that national conservatism has a distinct lineage that was historically influential in Central Europe especially in the 1990s.¹¹⁸ More recently, especially following an influential series of events organized by the Edmund Burke Foundation in Brussels, London, Washington, Orlando, Miami and Rome, the national conservative movement has gained more salience in both academic and media coverage.¹¹⁹ Specifically, scholars have noted the transnational nature of national conservatism, with some beginning to consider national conservatives to be a new transnational political family that is “internationally embedded,” both “responding to as well as accentuating processes of crisis of neoliberal globalization.”¹²⁰ In the article “Beyond populism and into the state: The political economy of national-conservatism,” Altinors and Chryssogelos argue that national conservatism around the world exhibits three common traits:

1. “National conservatism accepts the need for economic statecraft, re-politicising activities that under the neoliberal paradigm were seen as technocratic and depoliticized.”
2. “It radicalises traditional hierarchies like religion, race, gender, and ethnicity to underpin its vision of an authoritarian domestic order.”
3. “It adopts an aggressive foreign policy posture against, invariably, traditional enemies or international institutions, allowing it to present neoliberal sovereigntism as necessary tool against foreign adversaries.”¹²¹

Their article goes on to consider national conservatism to be “a new paradigm of right-wing politics on a global scale.”¹²²

An important contextual factor impacting how U.S. conservative media frames different Hungarian democratic transgressions is the increased popularity of national conservatism. Varga and Buzogány note that conservatives in Hungary and the U.S. alike increasingly “use this term as their preferred self-designation.”¹²³ Crucially, the scholarship has already begun to illustrate how national conservative actors garner political legitimacy by amplifying and re-politicizing conservative and traditionalist values.¹²⁴ This section will illustrate how the contextual popularity of national conservatism in the U.S. can help make better sense of the different frame codes that emerged in the coverage of Hungary’s process of democratic backsliding from 2011-2022,

¹¹⁸ Varga and Buzogány, “The Two Faces of the ‘Global Right,’” 1097.

¹¹⁹ “Edmund Burke Foundation Homepage.”

¹²⁰ Altinors and Chryssogelos, “Beyond Populism and into the State,” 2.

¹²¹ Altinors and Chryssogelos, 3.

¹²² Altinors and Chryssogelos, 2.

¹²³ Varga and Buzogány, “The Two Faces of the ‘Global Right,’” 1097.

¹²⁴ Altinors and Chryssogelos, “Beyond Populism and into the State,” 1.

impacting U.S. conservative media's disapproval, approval, dismissiveness or descriptiveness of frames of different Hungarian democratic transgressions. For each type of democratic transgression—violations of the law, violations of democratic norms, violations of democratic ideals, and power-consolidating changes to democratic institutions—the following sections will unpack the dominant frame codes and analyze how the results could be explained, at least in part, by the popularity of national conservative ideology among U.S. conservatives.

Violations of the Law

Approving codes overwhelmingly dominated for frames of law violations. However, an analysis of this result needs to acknowledge the types of law violations considered as examples within the frame of law violation sample. The framings did not discuss violations of Hungarian domestic law. Instead, the sample predominately framed violations of EU law. Given this, many of the approving codes portrayed Hungary's violations of European law through an ideological lens. The frames described imperative attempts to reclaim Hungary's national sovereignty, given broader schemes by the EU to impose a set of supranational, globalist ideas onto the defenseless Hungarian population. This idea is consistent with national conservatism's view that "supranational institutions threaten to erase cultural differences and deteriorate normative bearings in modern society more generally" and the tendency for populist, national conservative leaders like Orbán to adopt aggressive foreign policy postures towards constructed enemies such as the EU.¹²⁵

In the sample of U.S. conservative media frames, the opposition to supranationalism created a Eurosceptic narrative of sorts that argued that Hungary's violations of EU law were necessary to retain and recover national self-determination in the face of an overreaching EU. The existence of this Euroscepticism illustrates the extent to which the rejection of supranational governance has become commonplace in the sample. Multiple types of Euroscepticism were found within the articles, from hard Euroscepticism, defined as presenting principled opposition to the project of European integration, to a softer Euroscepticism, defined as opposing the trajectory of the EU and the further extension its competencies.¹²⁶ For hard Eurosceptics, the EU was portrayed as an enemy to the nation-state, with some articles going as far as to describe the European project as imperial in its ambitions, comparing contemporary efforts of the EU in Central Europe to historic occupation by the Soviet Union. In multiple articles, including "The European Union as seen from Washington," hard Eurosceptic rhetoric was used to justify Hungary's violations of European law. The author argued, "The EU is the most aggressive and dangerous enemy of the nation-state anywhere in the world" and that "The goal of woke activists and supranational organizations is one and the same: eroding the political authority of independent nation-states and transferring that authority to foreign, unelected bureaucracies unburdened either by patriotic sympathy or the rigors of democratic accountability."¹²⁷ Given

¹²⁵ Varga and Buzogány, "The Two Faces of the 'Global Right,'" 1100.

¹²⁶ Szczerbiak and Taggart, "Contemporary Research on Euroscepticism," 13.

¹²⁷ Roberts, "The European Union as Seen from Washington."

this threat, Hungary, the article continued, “is not merely on the front lines of that conflict” between the nation state and its supranational enemies, but “is the salient—the tip of the spear, thrusting forward into unfriendly territory.”¹²⁸ These quotations illustrate the hard Euroscepticism and principled opposition to supranationalism that contributed to the dominance of the approving frame code.

Soft Euroscepticism was also commonplace in the approving portion of the sample of frames of law violations. Frames defended the violations of European law, especially during the migration crisis when many articles framed Hungary’s refusal to participate in the EU Common European Asylum System as a valiant attempt to protect Hungary’s borders from the threat of multiculturalism and to save Hungary’s unique ethnic and cultural identity. In an interview with Judit Varga, the Hungarian Minister of Justice, she described how Hungary’s membership in the EU has subjected the country to “political correctness,” “woke culture,” and “an ever-growing hegemony of opinion putting pressure on politicians, especially by the Western media.”¹²⁹ Both Varga and the article’s author object to the expansion of EU competencies, illustrating their soft Eurosceptic positions. Varga argued:

“I always say that the European Union should be like a good wine. We say that a good wine doesn't need a label. So if the European Union is invisibly helping to prosper us, member states to prosper—which was the primary goal—let's live in peace. Let's foster prosperity, let's have industrial development, let's have a free trade area. But this should have always been the goal of this whole community. Now, they want to pursue political goals, pursue gender ideologies, pro-migration ideologies. This is too much. The whole framework of the European Union was not fit for this. When we joined, this was not among the rules, that we have to give up our cultural background. And we don't want to give it up. This should remain an economical cooperation.”¹³⁰

This soft Euroscepticism justified Hungary's violations of EU law without rejecting outright the European integration project as embodied by the EU. Varga sees herself and Hungary as European citizens and argued that Orbán’s tenure as prime minister illustrates how “it is possible to be a pro-European country but running our own political way. Not always fitting the mainstream, but always cooperating with our partners in a mutually respectful manner.”¹³¹

In conclusion, both hard and soft euroscepticism exist in the approving 61 percent of the sample of U.S. conservative media frames on Hungary’s violations of the law. While this ideological position is admittedly not exclusive to national conservatives, the staunch rejection of supranationalism and the defense of the nation state that lead to the Eurosceptic rhetoric in the sample are both ideological features of the movement.¹³² Furthermore, the fact that U.S.

¹²⁸ Roberts.

¹²⁹ Devlin, “Brussels Versus Budapest.”

¹³⁰ Devlin.

¹³¹ Devlin.

¹³² Varga and Buzogány, “The Two Faces of the ‘Global Right,’” 1100.

conservative media sources hosted and interviewed members of Orbán's government illustrates the resonance of Hungary's conservative ideology in U.S. conservative media discourse. Finally, providing Fidesz party members with a platform to frame their Rule of Law conflicts with the EU in their own words contributed to the dominance of approving frame codes of Hungary's transgressions to democracy in the form of violations of EU law and illustrates the sympathy towards Hungary's ideological position that is present in the U.S. conservative media sample.

Violations of Democratic Norms

The disapproving code dominated for frames of norm violations because generally, the U.S. media did not speak favorably about Orbán promoting his allies to high positions in government or stacking the courts with loyalists. Additionally, a large portion of the disapproving sample was coverage of Orbán's relationships with Russia and China which was described in the sample as alarming, worrisome and controversial. This result is undoubtedly biased by the case selection of U.S. conservative media because of the geopolitical competition between the U.S., China, and Russia. However, despite Fidesz being labeled by some as 'Russia's Trojan Horse in the EU,' the sample frames continued to emphasize Hungary's commitment to NATO, portraying Hungary's relationships with both Russia and China as negative developments that should cause concern but also as the result of pragmatism, born out of Hungary's circumstances as a small, landlocked country bordering Ukraine.¹³³

In the literature on national conservatism, scholars note that national conservative leaders such as Orbán are often "wearier of the Eurasian option" because "the intellectual lineage established by Strauss and Voegelin has strongly defended the cultural cohesiveness of 'Western' civilisation, including the United States and the Western Christian majority countries in Eastern Europe."¹³⁴ While the similarities in conservative tradition between the U.S. and Hungary were mentioned in the sample, some frames also warned that the U.S. was pushing Hungary towards Russia and China. For example, after Biden excluded Hungary from his Summit for Democracy, *The American Conservative* expressed their disapproval of the norm violation, saying "the U.S. is not wrong to be concerned about Hungary's warming relations with Russia and China" but also said that "it was a predictable consequence of the respective establishments in Washington and Brussels alienating Hungary from the community of Western nations."¹³⁵ While the frame remains disapproving, the authors placed the blame for democratic norm violation not on Hungary, but on the Western political establishment. This tendency is consistent with observations about national conservative foreign policy formulation which have been characterized as viewing "international regimes through a more transactional mindset" and tending to use foreign policy "to flaunt anti-establishment credentials and keep followers

¹³³ Mueller, "Eastern Europe Goes South"; Thomas Ambrosio, "Russia's Effects on a Consolidated Democracy"; Vernou, "No Pivot: The U.S. Can't Take on China Without Europe."

¹³⁴ Varga and Buzogány, "The Two Faces of the 'Global Right,'" 1100.

¹³⁵ Devlin, "The Summit for Democracy Charade."

mobilized.”¹³⁶ In this case, the transactional incentives for Hungary to maintain ties with Russia and China were acknowledged by *The American Conservative*. Regardless, the frames remained disapproving, possibly because ties with Russia and China do little to engage anti-establishment conservatives in the U.S. who likely remain skeptical of their respective governments. In conclusion, analyzing the potential translation of national conservative ideology into the sample remains a useful explanatory tool for discussing the results, even for frames of democratic transgressions in Hungary that the U.S. conservative media did not predominately approve of or dismiss.

Violations of Democratic Ideals

The dominance of approving codes for frames of violations of democratic ideals in Hungary illustrates how the U.S. conservative media portrays Orbán’s decision-making as a product of being on the “front lines” of a larger, global ideological battle. National conservatism is known for seeking to roll back the so-called ‘1968 agenda’ of civil rights, halt gender-related emancipation, and curb the power of international organizations, with leaders adopting an intense posture to perform these “conservative values interventions.”¹³⁷ According to literature on national conservatism in Central and Eastern Europe, specifically, “the nation, its founding figures and Christian religion” are portrayed as the main connections to the past, and upholding these is not only a way to “fulfil one’s duty,” but also is connected to ideas of national “freedom” within national conservative parties.¹³⁸ Admiration and approval for this defense of nationalism and the subsequent violation of democratic ideals it purportedly necessitates was also found in the sample of approving codes for frames of ideal violations. The presence of national conservative ideology in the U.S. conservative media sample can be explored further through a closer examination of three common content themes that emerged: the rejection of liberal internationalism, the alleged need to restrict civil liberties to protect national conservative values, and the existence of a fight against globalist elites.

The rejection of liberal internationalism was common in the approving sample. In fact, some articles even argued that violations of liberal democratic ideals were necessary to combat the corrosive impact of the liberal international order on conservative values, framing the violations of democratic ideals not as a threat to democracy but “as a salve.” For example, a *National Review* article from 2017 stated:

“In recent years, however, liberalism has come to mean the proliferation of liberal institutions — the courts, supra-national bodies, charters of rights, independent agencies, U.N. treaty-monitoring bodies, etc. — that increasingly restrain and correct parliaments, congresses, and elected officials. This shift of power was questionable when these bodies merely nullified or delayed laws and regulations. But more recently they have taken to

¹³⁶ Altinors and Chryssogelos, “Beyond Populism and into the State,” 14.

¹³⁷ Altinors and Chryssogelos, 1099.

¹³⁸ Varga and Buzogány, “The Two Faces of the ‘Global Right,’” 1097.

instructing democratically accountable bodies to make particular reforms and even to impose them on the entire polity through creative constitutional and treaty interpretation. Their decisions have concerned a wide range of official powers from welfare rules through gay marriage to regulations on migration and deportation (of, among others, convicted terrorists). Liberal democracy under this dispensation becomes the undemocratic imposition of liberal policies — which, incidentally, is the core of truth in Viktor Orbán’s somewhat misleading advocacy of “illiberal democracy.”¹³⁹

The article approved of Orbán’s rejection of liberal democracy, arguing that liberal democracy is a system that undemocratically imposes undesirable liberal values onto conservative publics through the power of liberal institutions. Ironically, it failed to address the ways that Orbán himself changed institutions and shifted power to protect his own interests and ideology. Regardless, it illustrates the extent to which the approving sample justified Orbán’s violation of democratic ideals, including those, such as a commitment to liberalism, that have been—at least rhetorically—foundational to the Western democratic order since the Enlightenment.¹⁴⁰ This rhetoric is aligned with broader national conservative attempts to curb the power of international organizations and protect national sovereignty.¹⁴¹

Another content theme repeated in the ‘approving’ sample was that the violation of democratic ideals was necessary to protect the vulnerable conservative values of the Hungarian nation. In 2021, *National Interest* praised Fidesz saying the party is “distinctly socially conservative in outlook and reactionary in tactics and approach,” justifying Orbán’s attempts to “to preserve Hungarian ethno-socio uniqueness” even if it necessitated restricting civil liberties. A repeated argument was how preserving Hungary’s conservative values required forward thinking political maneuvering. For example, ensuring an ideologically aligned conservative slant in the media by intervening in the media landscape, or combatting alleged “LGBTQ propaganda targeting children” was necessary, regardless of how these restrictions of civil liberties and the media landscape impacted Hungary’s democratic standards.¹⁴²

Finally, a third content theme in the ‘approving sample’ regarded Hungary’s battle against “globalist,” “imperial” or “supranational” elites. This enemy construction is common rhetoric for populist radical right parties in Europe, such as Fidesz. It has also been pointed out as a feature common among national conservative populists, specifically, who adopt aggressive postures against enemies to present “neoliberal sovereigntism” as necessary tool against foreign adversaries.¹⁴³ The findings provide evidence that the enemy constructions created by Orbán and

¹³⁹ John O’Sullivan, “Populism Is No Threat to Democracy – It’s a Salve.”

¹⁴⁰ Altinors and Chryssogelos, “Beyond Populism and into the State,” 3; Zafirovski, “Modern Democratic Society and the Enlightenment.”

¹⁴¹ Altinors and Chryssogelos, “Beyond Populism and into the State,” 3.

¹⁴² Maitra, “Hungary and the New Reactionary Vanguardism.”

¹⁴³ Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, 64; Altinors and Chryssogelos, “Beyond Populism and into the State,” 3.

his government were directly copied into U.S. conservative media frames and ultimately, presented without interrogation to American conservative audiences.

An explanatory example of the opposition to global elite ‘enemies’ in Hungary was the struggle between Viktor Orbán and George Soros, the Hungarian-American billionaire hedge fund manager and philanthropist who founded Central European University (CEU), a university that has since been ousted from Budapest after a 2017 law removed its right to issue US-accredited diplomas in Hungary.¹⁴⁴ In the re-telling of the Orbán-Soros conflict in U.S. conservative media, Soros came to personify the elite threat facing Hungary. This framing is an echo of how Orbán himself presents Soros and his influence to Hungarian and European audiences. For example, in a 2017 speech to European Parliament, Orbán stated about Soros:

“I know that the power, size and weight of Hungary is much smaller than that of the financial speculator, George Soros, who is now attacking Hungary and who – despite ruining the lives of millions of European people with his financial speculations, and being penalized in Hungary for speculations, and who is an openly admitted enemy of the euro – is so highly praised that he is received by the EU’s top leaders.”¹⁴⁵

In 2022, *Fox News Opinion* echoed the validity of Orbán’s criticisms of Soros in an article with the sub-line, “Tucker calls out George Soros for trying to destroy the US justice system.” It argued, “This is exactly why the nation of Hungary closed a Soros-funded nonprofit in Budapest a few years ago because it was poison, and now that poison is here in the United States.”¹⁴⁶ Five years after Orbán got rid of CEU, Tucker Carlson took up Orbán’s anti-Soros, anti-globalist position, parroting Orbán’s talking points to *Fox News Opinion*’s American audience.

Furthermore, actions to restrict civil society institutions and remove Soros’s influence from Hungary were portrayed in the “approving” sample, not as a threat to democracy, but as a victory for nationalism. *The American Conservative* captured this in their analysis, saying: “Orbán and Soros stand for two essentially different visions of Hungary, and their conflict is about fundamental political questions: the nature of the Hungarian nation and the role of the Hungarian state in it. This is a fight between nationalists and anti-nationalists—those who view the nation as sovereign in Hungary and cherish its right to self-determination, and those who urge a move beyond sovereign states organized along lines of national identity.”¹⁴⁷ The article concluded arguing that “Most Hungarians support nationalist ideas and values,” implying that Orbán’s actions to remove Soros’s influence from Hungarian civil society were popularly supported.¹⁴⁸ *Fox News Opinion* also included a quote from Orbán arguing that his fourth term election victory was a rebuke to “the left at home, the international left, the Brussels bureaucrats” and “the Soros Empire, with all of its money.” The demonization of Soros and the justification of

¹⁴⁴ Zubaşcu, “Forcing the Central European University out of Hungary Was against EU Law, Court Says.”

¹⁴⁵ “Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s Speech in the European Parliament.”

¹⁴⁶ “Tucker Carlson: Western Governments Rarely Fight Back When George Soros Interferes.”

¹⁴⁷ Pocius, “Orbán, Soros, and the Unbridgeable Conflict Over Hungarian Sovereignty.”

¹⁴⁸ Pocius.

Orbán's aggressive posture, causing the violation of democratic ideals, illustrates how Hungarian enemy constructions have been accepted and repeated by U.S. conservative media.¹⁴⁹

In sum, frames of democratic ideal violations, including examples like the acceptance of constraints on civil liberties or the rejection of liberalism, were overwhelmingly coded as “approving,” potentially because of how Hungarian national conservatism translated into the U.S. conservative discourse. These approving frames emerge within the context of a growing popularity for national conservative ideology that rejects liberal internationalism, justifies restricting civil liberties using values-based arguments, and portrays the Hungarian nation as vulnerable to the threat of elite enemies from abroad.

Power-consolidating changes to democratic institutions

The majority of the codes for frames of power-consolidating changes to democratic institutions were “dismissive” of the threat to Hungary's democracy. The result can likely be understood, in part, as driven by many of the same ideological incentives outlined in the previous sections discussing national conservatism in U.S. conservative media. As touched on in the analysis chapter, the dismissive sample was coded as such because they ignored or downplayed the power-consolidating changes to democratic institutions that Orbán and Fidesz initiated to help maintain their power. For example, the EU's article 7 proceedings caused by rule of law issues in Hungary was excused as simply an attack by liberal elites in Brussels who dislike Hungary because the country defends conservatism.¹⁵⁰ Additionally, it was commonplace in the sample to describe the government as “democratically elected” and neglect the history of the constitutional revolution or changes to electoral districts through gerrymandering.¹⁵¹ For example, *The American Conservative* argued:

“Hungary is a normal country like any other, but it is governed by a man of the Right who is willing to use the power that voters gave him to advance conservative policy goals... If a democratically elected government rejects the full panoply of LGBT rights, or rejects the crude racialism of the progressive Left, or spurns any part of the establishment's woke ideology, the regime's propagandists trash them as non-democratic.”¹⁵²

However, in several of the frames of power-consolidating changes that were coded as dismissive and in a portion of the small group of “approving” codes, there was an argument that is potentially more sinister for the future of democratic governance. Scholars on national conservatism note that there is a common thread in the varieties of national-conservatism across the world, pointing out “the way [national conservative parties and leaders] emerge and become articulated as a territorialised, national-based response to the crisis of transnational neoliberal

¹⁴⁹ “Tucker Carlson: Elon Musk Restoring Free Speech to Twitter Would Be a Threat to the People in Charge.”

¹⁵⁰ Gottfried, “Neocons and Liberals Join Forces to Fight Populism.”

¹⁵¹ “A Wild Gerrymander Makes Hungary's Fidesz Party Hard to Dislodge”; Bogdandy and Sonnevend, *Constitutional Crisis in the European Constitutional Area*.

¹⁵² Devlin, “The Summit for Democracy Charade.”

globalisation.”¹⁵³ Some U.S. media frames on power-consolidating changes to democratic institutions dismiss the threat to democracy caused by the transgressions by arguing that Hungary could be an example of conservative governance, given the disfunction of the current neoliberal global order. These frames drew inspiration from Hungary’s nation-based response to the crisis of neoliberal globalization, without ever acknowledging Hungary’s democratic backsliding.

One article where this tendency is clear was “What is Hungarian conservatism?” published in *The American Conservative*. The article, written by Rod Dreher, has a subline that argues Hungarians “were 'national conservatives' before national conservatism was cool.”¹⁵⁴ In the article, a quote from Orbán was included that argued that national conservatism in the U.S. is the Anglo-Americanization of Hungarian conservatism. Orbán claimed:

“This movement calls itself national conservatism, and, curiously, the views it espouses reflect—presumably unintentionally—the principles of national Hungarian conservative thought. The movement is critical of globalization, encourages opposition to the unconditional enforcement of free trade, criticizes liberal politics for its lack of interest in practical results, and sees the pursuit of national interests and the preservation of national traditions as the primary task of politics. So what was new in the West in the 2010s is essentially the natural state of conservative thinking and politics in Hungary. It is not difficult to see why it has turned out this way. We Hungarians already had to deal with the problems currently faced by the West—and especially in the Anglo-Saxon world—in the nineteenth century. We were among those compelled to adapt to a changing world, rather than the other way around. We had to learn how to preserve our independence and how to assert our interests.”¹⁵⁵

Dreher goes on to dismiss critics of Hungary’s power-consolidating changes to democratic institutions, saying “one gets so weary of the mantras repeated by American establishment talking heads of the Left and the Right, about how Hungary is one step away from fascism, blah blah blah. It is demonstrably untrue, and reflects not only ignorance of the facts, but also the knee-jerk substitute of ideology for reality.”¹⁵⁶ Then, he doubles down on how Hungary is a potential model for conservative governance, concluding the article by arguing that all conservatives should read an essay by Fidesz political director, Balasz Orbán, so that they can “understand why some of us see Hungarian conservatism as a model on which to draw to create a new kind of American conservatism, one faithful to our own values and traditions.”¹⁵⁷

Dreher was not alone in his admiration for the Hungarian conservative model of governance within the sample and this argument that Hungary could be a model for conservative

¹⁵³ Altinors and Chryssogelos, “Beyond Populism and into the State,” 3.

¹⁵⁴ Dreher, “What Is Hungarian Conservatism?”

¹⁵⁵ Dreher.

¹⁵⁶ Dreher.

¹⁵⁷ Dreher.

democracy was not exclusive to *The American Conservative*. In fact, the potential for U.S. conservatives to learn from Hungarian conservatism was a theme that repeated in the dismissive sample. This illustrates how this thesis's discussion, that national conservative ideology and an admiration for Hungary could explain the way that variance emerged in the sample, is not merely a matter of theoretical debate. Orbán is openly boasting about the global popularity of the national conservative movement and taking credit for being one of its ideological leaders. U.S. conservatives are arguing that national conservatism is “cool” and that American conservatives should look to Hungary to see an example of a country that defends their values. While most of the scholarship on national conservatism as a global political force is new, published around 2022-2024, the roots of this political movement are already deep. Political leaders, media pundits, and conservative publics are already building relationships around a shared worldview and an ideological alliance. Simultaneously, powerful foundations like the Edmund Burke Foundation continue funding their mission “of strengthening the principles of national conservatism in Western and other democratic countries.”¹⁵⁸ Thus, the effects of national conservatism on global politics are already being felt. As such, it is imperative that more work is done to examine the role Hungary plays in this national conservative ideological movement, despite its exemplar status as a case of democratic decline, and how this affects both portrayals and perceptions of Hungary's democratic backsliding.

Conclusion

This research aimed to identify the ways in which conservative media framing of Hungarian democratic backsliding varied depending on the type of transgression. The entry-point for this research was a recognition that Hungary has a dual reputation, as a country known for its democratic backsliding, but also as a country positioning itself as a hub for global conservative political thought. Illustrative of this, the headlines about Hungary in the U.S. media preceding Orbán's most recent re-election read both “Why Conservatives Around the World Have Embraced Hungary's Viktor Orbán,” and “The Autocrat's Legacy: Defeating Viktor Orbán will be hard, but undoing Hungary's democratic decline will be harder.”¹⁵⁹ Acknowledging the tension between these two reputations, this thesis focused specifically on conservative media to develop a sense of how ideologically aligned media outlets covered the process of democratic decline in Hungary that was spearheaded by Orbán and his government. By asking about different categories of transgressions, the research sought to develop a sensibility toward the individual threat levels that different democratic transgressions represent and the varied implications the findings have on public support for democratic backsliding.

To investigate the specific ways conservative media frame democratic transgressions, the study tested for the presence of four frame types, adapted from a pre-existing conceptualization

¹⁵⁸ “Edmund Burke Foundation Homepage.”

¹⁵⁹ Chotiner, “Why Conservatives Around the World Have Embraced Hungary's Viktor Orbán”; Serhan, “The Autocrat's Legacy.”

of democratic transgressions established by Ahmed in her 2023 study on public opinion foundations on democratic backsliding. The first was a frame of law violation, defined as framing a violation of the rule of law, the constitution, established procedure, or other formal institutions regulating democratic competition. The second was a frame of norm violation, defined as framing a violation of the informal rules that govern political interactions. The third was a frame of ideal violation, defined as framing a violation of an aspirational view of how democratic politics should be conducted. Finally, the last was a frame of power consolidating changes to democratic institutions, defined as framing a change to the law or the constitution that consolidates the power of ruling elites. All four frames were found to be present in the sample of U.S. conservative media.

The analysis of U.S. conservative media coverage from 2011 to 2022 revealed significant variance in the framing of Hungarian democratic transgressions. First, the frequency of U.S. conservative media frames of democratic transgressions differed based on the transgression type. While all four frames were found in the sample, frames of ideal violations were the most common, followed by frames of power-consolidating changes to democratic institutions, frames of law violations, and frames of norm violations, respectively. Second, there was a difference in the frame codes—approving, disapproving, dismissive, or descriptive—that were most common for each frame type. Approving codes dominated for frames of law violations and frames of ideal violations, disapproving codes dominated for frames of norm violations, and dismissive codes dominated for frames of power-consolidating changes to democratic institutions. The variance in codes can only be seen when stratifying the results by frame, because when looking at the codes for the entire sample, dismissive codes appear to be the most common and approving codes are the second most common. Generally, the results indicate that not all democratic transgressions are framed the same by the conservative media in the U.S. Additionally, the results show the value added by examining the variance in frames of different transgression types, because this stratification provides a more nuanced picture of conservative coverage of Hungarian democratic backsliding than if the sample was not stratified by frames of different democratic transgressions.

The implications of these findings for conservative public opinion foundations on democratic backsliding are complex and significant. The increase in frames of Hungarian democratic transgressions show how Orbán’s Hungary has become increasingly relevant to conservative publics, providing evidence that his soft power campaign to attract global conservative interest has been successful. Furthermore, the fact that two out of the four transgression frames were dominated by approving codes does not bode well for public support for democracy, especially given the impact that the media has in shaping how publics understand political events, especially in polarized political contexts like the U.S.¹⁶⁰ The results show that conservative media sources predominately frame law violations and ideal violations in Hungary as acceptable or even ideal for Hungary’s political system. The discussion about the

¹⁶⁰ Prior, “Media and Political Polarization.”

rise of national conservatism illustrates the approving tone could be explained by how conservative media frames transgressions based on their ideological positioning—through the lens of their conservative values—instead of based on the threat level to democracy. Similarly, dismissive codes dominated for power-consolidating changes to democratic institutions, which downplayed, overlooked, or ignored the threat to democracy, or even belittled other groups, mainly “liberals,” for their distress over the transgressions in Hungary. This result also does not bode well for conservative public opinion foundations on democracy. The discussion section shows that some sources even went as far as to call Hungary a model for conservative governance, expressing admiration for Hungary’s brand of national conservatism. However, for frames of democratic norms violations, most of the codes were “disapproving,” portraying the transgression as unfavorable or threatening to the integrity of Hungary’s democratic system. Therefore, not all transgressions are framed the same and conservative publics may still disapprove of Hungary’s democratic backsliding when it manifests itself through violations of democratic norms.

In addition to highlighting the varied portrayals of democratic transgressions, the discussion illustrates how global trends in conservative ideology may impact these portrayals. This is consistent with Ahmed’s argument that democratic backsliding often occurs during a simultaneous and “equally consequential” struggle over the meaning of democracy, reflecting questions about what underlying values and ideals democratic governments are meant to uphold and protect.¹⁶¹ As seen in the discussion, there is evidence that conservative outlets frame democratic transgressions based on their implications for national conservatism. Furthermore, the results provide evidence that U.S. conservative media sources are willing “to trade off ideological congruence for democratic principles” and “overlook democratic transgressions committed by a leader who is ideologically close to them,” in this case Orbán.¹⁶² This phenomenon has already been observed in previous research on public opinion foundations on democracy, illustrated using case studies of democratic countries.¹⁶³ However, the results show how these tradeoffs operate globally, transcending national borders through transnational political movements.

Looking forward, the findings present a concerning picture for the future of democracy, given the approving stance toward Hungarian democratic backsliding in U.S. conservative media. While this thesis was limited by its inability to empirically establish a direct relationship between the rise of national conservatism and the frame analysis results, the insights gained highlight the potential impact of the growing national conservative movement on media portrayals of democratic backsliding. Furthermore, analyzing the variance in framing of

¹⁶¹ Ahmed, “Is the American Public Really Turning Away from Democracy?,” 974.

¹⁶² Saikkonen and Christensen, “Guardians of Democracy or Passive Bystanders?,” 130.

¹⁶³ Lauth, “The Internal Relationships of the Dimensions of Democracy”; Saikkonen and Christensen, “Guardians of Democracy or Passive Bystanders?”

democratic transgressions was proven to be a valuable tool for examining how democratic backsliding is portrayed to conservative audiences.

Bibliography

- “About The National Interest.” Accessed June 7, 2024. <https://nationalinterest.org/about-the-national-interest>.
- “About Us - The American Conservative.” Accessed June 7, 2024. <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/about-us/>.
- Ahmed, Amel. “Is the American Public Really Turning Away from Democracy? Backsliding and the Conceptual Challenges of Understanding Public Attitudes.” *Perspectives on Politics* 21, no. 3 (September 2023): 967–78. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592722001062>.
- Akkerman, Tjitske, Sarah L. de Lange, and Matthijs Rooduijn. *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe: Into the Mainstream?* Routledge, 2016.
- Albuquerque, Ana Luiza. “Hungary’s Plan to Build an Army of American Intellectuals.” *Foreign Policy*, 9 2023. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/05/19/hungary-american-conservative-right-wing-intellectuals-orban/>.
- Altinors, Gorkem, and Angelos Chryssogelos. “Beyond Populism and into the State: The Political Economy of National-Conservatism.” *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, April 13, 2024, 13691481241246538. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13691481241246538>.
- Aresal, Murat, Fikret Adaman, and Aldredo Saad-Filho. “Authoritarian Developmentalism: The Latest Stage of Neoliberalism?” *ScienceDirect* 124 (July 2021): 261–66. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2021.05.003>.
- “Balázs Orbán - National Conservatism Conference, Brussels 2022,” 2022. <https://nationalconservatism.org/natcon-brussels-2022/presenters/balazs-orban/>.
- Bánkuti, Miklós, Gábor Halmai, and Kim Lane Scheppele. “Hungary’s Illiberal Turn: Disabling the Constitution.” *Journal of Democracy* 23, no. 3 (n.d.): 138–46.
- Bernhard, Michael. “Democratic Backsliding in Poland and Hungary.” *Slavic Review* 80, no. 3 (September 2021): 585–607. <https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2021.145>.
- Bluhm, Katharina, and Mihai Varga. *New Conservatives in Russia and East Central Europe*. Routledge, 2020. <https://api.taylorfrancis.com/content/books/mono/download?identifierName=doi&identifierValue=10.4324/9781351020305&type=googlepdf>.
- Bogaards, Matthijs. “De-Democratization in Hungary: Diffusely Defective Democracy.” *Routledge* 25, no. 8 (02 2018): 1481–99. <https://doi.org/0.1080/13510347.2018.1485015>.
- Bogdandy, Armin von, and Pál Sonnevend. *Constitutional Crisis in the European Constitutional Area: Theory, Law and Politics in Hungary and Romania*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015.
- Brennan, Geoffrey, and Alan Hamlin. “Comprehending Conservatism: Frameworks and Analysis.” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 19, no. 2 (June 2014). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259994459_Comprehending_Conservatism_Frameworks_and_Analysis.
- Brüggemann, Michael. “Between Frame Setting and Frame Sending: How Journalists Contribute to News Frames.” *Communication Theory* 24, no. 1 (February 1, 2014): 61–82. <https://doi.org/10.1111/comt.12027>.
- Buzogány, Aron. “The Ideational Foundations of the Illiberal Backlash in Central and Eastern Europe: The Case of Hungary.” *Review of International Political Economy* 25, no. 6 (30 2019): 811–28.

- Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister of Hungary. "Speech by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on 15 March," 15 2016. <https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/speech-by-prime-minister-viktor-orban-on-15-march/>.
- Cabrera Cuadrado, Carla, and John Chrobak. "Illiberalism and the Deinstitutionalization of Public Diplomacy: The Rise of Hungary and Viktor Orbán in American Conservative Media." *Communication & Society* 36, no. 2 (13 2023): 311–24.
- Caiani, Manuela. "Radical Right-Wing Movements: Who, When, How and Why?" *Sociopedia*, January 1, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1177/205684601761>.
- Cervenka, Eve. "Public Opinion in the United States and Hungary: How Trump and Orbán Have Manufactured the Debate over Refugees." *International ResearchScape Journal* 7, no. 1 (June 5, 2020). <https://doi.org/10.25035/irj.07.01.09>.
- Chaudoin, Stephen, Helen V. Milner, and Dustin H. Tingley. "The Center Still Holds: Liberal Internationalism Survives." *International Security* 35, no. 1 (July 1, 2010): 75–94. https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00003.
- Choi, Yun Jung, and Jong Hyuk Lee. "The Role of a Scene in Framing a Story: An Analysis of a Scene's Position, Length, and Proportion." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 50, no. 4 (December 1, 2006): 703–22. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15506878jobem5004_8.
- Chotiner, Isaac. "Why Conservatives Around the World Have Embraced Hungary's Viktor Orbán." *The New Yorker*, 10 2021. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/why-conservatives-around-the-world-have-embraced-hungarys-viktor-orban>.
- Clancy, Laura. "Under Viktor Orban's Leadership, Hungarians Differ in Views of Democracy." *Pew Research Center*, Autumn 2022. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/08/03/hungarians-differ-in-their-evaluations-of-democracy-under-orbans-leadership/>.
- CNN Staff. "Fact Check: 2022 Election Disinformation and Conspiracy Theories." *CNN*, 9 2022. <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/11/08/politics/fact-check-election-voter-fraud-conspiracies/index.html>.
- Concha, Joe. "Trump Dings CNN, 'Morning Joe' Ratings as Tucker Carlson Sets Record." *The Hill* (blog), July 1, 2020. <https://thehill.com/homenews/media/505386-trump-dings-cnn-morning-joe-ratings-as-tucker-carlson-sets-record/>.
- Coppock, Alexander, Emily Ekins, and David Kirby. "The Long-Lasting Effects of Newspaper Op-Eds on Public Opinion." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 13, no. 1 (March 29, 2018): 59–87. <https://doi.org/10.1561/100.00016112>.
- Dániel, Zách. "Orbán's European Right-Wing Conference in Brussels Loses Second Venue." *Telex Hungary*, April 16, 2024. <https://telex.hu/english/2024/04/16/orbans-european-right-wing-conference-in-brussels-loses-second-venue>.
- Devlin, Bradley. "Brussels Versus Budapest." *The American Conservative*, 02 2022. <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/brussels-versus-budapest/>.
- . "The Summit for Democracy Charade." *The American Conservative*, 16 2021. <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/the-summit-for-democracy-charade/>.
- "Donald Trump Favorability." The Texas Politics Project, 2022. <https://texaspolitics.utexas.edu/set/donald-trump-favorability-february-2022>.
- Dreher, Rod. "What Is Hungarian Conservatism?" *The American Conservative*, January 8, 2022. <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/balazs-orban-hungarian-conservatism/>.

- . “Why Do US Conservatives Like Hungary?” Substack newsletter. *Rod Dreher’s Diary* (blog), March 2, 2024. <https://roddreher.substack.com/p/why-do-us-conservatives-like-hungary>.
- Ecarma, Caleb. “‘Call It the Tucker Carlson Wing of the GOP’: The American Conservative Wants to Be the Atlantic of the Right.” *Vanity Fair*, 27 2020. <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2020/04/the-american-conservative-the-right-atlantic>.
- Edmund Burke Foundation. “Edmund Burke Foundation Homepage.” Accessed May 11, 2024. <https://burke.foundation/>.
- Entman, Robert. “Framing Media Power.” In *Doing News Framing Analysis*. Routledge, 2009.
- . “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm.” *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): 51–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>.
- Erskine, Hazel. “The Polls: Politics and Law and Order.” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (1974): 623–34.
- European Parliament News*. “MEPs: Hungary Can No Longer Be Considered a Full Democracy.” September 15, 2022. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20220909IPR40137/meps-hungary-can-no-longer-be-considered-a-full-democracy>.
- Flores, Andrew R, Miguel Fuentes Carreño, and Ari Shaw. “Democratic Backsliding and LGBTI Acceptance.” *UCLA School of Law Williams Institute*, 2023.
- Fox News Opinion*. “Tucker Carlson: Elon Musk Restoring Free Speech to Twitter Would Be a Threat to the People in Charge.” 04 2022. <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/tucker-carlson-elon-musk-free-speech-twitter>.
- Fox News Opinion*. “Tucker Carlson: Western Governments Rarely Fight Back When George Soros Interferes.” Winter 2022. <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/tucker-carlson-western-governments-rarely-fight-george-soros-interferes>.
- Freedom House. “Freedom in the World.” Accessed June 9, 2024. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world>.
- Freedom House. “Freedom in the World Research Methodology.” Accessed May 10, 2024. <https://freedomhouse.org/reports/freedom-world/freedom-world-research-methodology>.
- Freedom House. “Freedom of Expression,” May 13, 2024. <https://freedomhouse.org/issues/freedom-expression>.
- Freedom House. “Hungary: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report,” 2021. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/hungary/freedom-world/2021>.
- Freedom House. “Hungary: Freedom in the World 2022 Country Report,” 2022. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/hungary/freedom-world/2022>.
- Frye, Harrison, and George Klosko. “Democratic Authority and Respect for the Law.” *Law and Philosophy* 36, no. 1 (February 1, 2017): 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10982-016-9278-9>.
- Gidengil, Elisabeth, Dietlind Stolle, and Olivier Bergeron-Boutin. “The Partisan Nature of Support for Democratic Backsliding: A Comparative Perspective.” *European Journal of Political Research* 61, no. 4 (2022): 901–29. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12502>.
- Gottfried, Paul. “Neocons and Liberals Join Forces to Fight Populism.” *The American Conservative*, August 13, 2018. <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/neocons-and-liberals-join-forces-to-fight-populism/>.
- Graham, Matthew H., and Milan W. Svobik. “Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States.” *American Political*

- Science Review* 114, no. 2 (May 2020): 392–409.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000052>.
- Gross, Neil, Thomas Medvetz, and Rupert Russell. “The Contemporary American Conservative Movement.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 37 (2011): 325–54.
- Hoewe, Jennifer, Kathryn Cramer Brownell, and Eric Wiemer. “The Role and Impact of Fox News.” *The Forum* 18, no. 3 (2020): 367–88. <https://doi.org/10.1515/for-2020-2014>.
- Honderich, Holly, and Robin Levinson-King. “US Mid-Terms 2022: Tracking Trump’s ‘extraordinary’ Endorsement Spree.” *BBC News*, September 15, 2022.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-62905365>.
- IOM Hungary. “The European Migration Crisis and Hungary.” Accessed May 10, 2024.
<https://hungary.iom.int/european-migration-crisis-and-hungary>.
- Jahn, Beate. “Rethinking Democracy Promotion.” *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 4 (2012): 685–705.
- John O’Sullivan. “Populism Is No Threat to Democracy – It’s a Salve.” *National Review*, 14 2017. <https://www.nationalreview.com/2017/10/populist-party-strength-helps-democracy/>.
- Kacziba, Péter. “Political Sources of Hungarian Soft Power.” *Politics in Central Europe* 16, no. s1 (February 1, 2020): 81–111. <https://doi.org/10.2478/pce-2020-0005>.
- Kenes, Bulent. “Viktor Orbán: Past to Present.” *European Center for Populism Studies*, Summer 2020. <https://doi.org/10.55271/lp0001>.
- Kovacs, Balazs Aron. “Nations in Transit 2013.” Freedom House, 2013.
https://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/NIT2013_Hungary.pdf.
- Kovács, Kriszta. “The COVID-19 Pandemic: A Pretext for Expanding Power in Hungary.” In *Routledge Handbook of Law and the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Routledge, 2022.
- Lauth, Hans-Joachim. “The Internal Relationships of the Dimensions of Democracy: The Relevance of Trade-Offs for Measuring the Quality of Democracy.” *International Political Science Review* 37, no. 5 (November 1, 2016): 606–17.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512116667630>.
- Lendvai, Paul. “The Transformer: Orbán’s Evolution and Hungary’s Demise.” *Foreign Affairs* 98 (2019): 44.
- Lili Bayer. “Trump-Orbán Bromance Takes Off.” *POLITICO*, May 13, 2019.
<https://www.politico.eu/article/trump-orban-bromance-takes-off/>.
- Lucarelli, Sonia, and Lorenzo Fioramonti. *External Perceptions of the European Union as a Global Actor*. Routledge, 2009. https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/doi/full/10.1111/j.1478-9302.2012.00266_10.x.
- . “Have You Heard of the EU? An Analysis of Global Images of the European Union,” 04 2012. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2100502.
- Maitra, Sumantra. “Hungary and the New Reactionary Vanguardism.” Text. *The National Interest*. The Center for the National Interest, September 2, 2022.
<https://nationalinterest.org/feature/hungary-and-new-reactionary-vanguardism-204519>.
- Manners, Ian. “Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, no. 2 (June 2002): 235–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00353>.
- Marais, Willemien, and Margaret Linström. “Qualitative News Frame Analysis: A Methodology” 17 (January 1, 2012): 21–38.

- Mirrlees, Tanner. "American Soft Power, Or, American Cultural Imperialism?" In *The New Imperialists: Ideologies of Empire*, 199–227. One World Press, 2006.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367237974_American_Soft_Power_or_American_Cultural_Imperialism.
- Mudde, Cas. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511492037>.
- . "The Far-Right Threat in the United States: A European Perspective." *SAGE Publications* 699, no. 1 (16 2022): 101–15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000271622111070060>.
- . *The Ideology of the Extreme Right*. Manchester University Press, 2002.
<https://doi.org/10.7228/manchester/9780719057939.001.0001>.
- Mueller, Jan-Werner. "Eastern Europe Goes South: Disappearing Democracy in the EU's Newest Members." *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 2 (2014): 14–19.
- National Review. "Hungary Embraces National Conservatism," April 9, 2018.
<https://www.nationalreview.com/2018/04/hungary-embraces-national-conservatism/>.
- National Review Institute. "National Review Institute | Home Page." Accessed June 7, 2024.
<https://nriinstitute.org/home>.
- Netherlands Helsinki Committee. "Systematic Backsliding of the Rule of Law in Hungary." Netherlands Helsinki Committee, April 13, 2022. <https://www.nhc.nl/systematic-backsliding-of-the-rule-of-law-in-hungary-explored-through-academic-research/>.
- Neumann, Iver. "Self and Other in International Relations." *SAGE Publications* 2, no. 2 (1996).
https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1354066196002002001?casa_token=xwcsOZTqp2EAAAAA:il221o2pnLBtFEQcA7EGLYKwbYI7AapdHaoUAUIPyBnrwo_zgJfAtHr8HTFa3Q3IuFHFNBk2b0yzxA.
- Noureddine, Raja. "Critically Assess and Analyse the Notion That the EU Is a Normative Power." European Union External Action Services, 24 2016.
https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/15687_en.
- O'Sullivan, Jack. "The Misunderstood Nature of Populism." *National Review*, 14 2017.
<https://www.nationalreview.com/2017/10/populist-party-strength-helps-democracy/>.
- PBS NewsHour*. "Capitol Riot Was 'culmination of an Attempted Coup,' Jan. 6 Committee Chair Thompson Says." June 9, 2022, sec. Politics.
<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/watch-jan-6-committee-chair-rep-bennie-thompson-calls-capitol-riot-the-culmination-of-an-attempted-coup>.
- Petrović, Nikola. "EU Ideology." *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research* 29, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 56–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610.2015.1082460>.
- Pocius, Skomantas. "Orbán, Soros, and the Unbridgeable Conflict Over Hungarian Sovereignty." *The American Conservative*, Winter 2018.
<https://www.theamericanconservative.com/orban-soros-and-the-unbridgeable-conflict-over-hungarian-sovereignty/>.
- Prior, Markus. "Media and Political Polarization." *Annual Review of Political Science* 16, no. Volume 16, 2013 (May 11, 2013): 101–27. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-100711-135242>.
- Roberts, Kevin. "The European Union as Seen from Washington," 5 2022.
<https://www.theamericanconservative.com/the-european-union-as-seen-from-washington/>.
- Rutai, Lili. "Hungary Is Funding European Publications. But Have They Had an Impact?" *Euronews*, September 17, 2023. <https://www.euronews.com/my->

- europe/2023/09/16/hungarys-government-is-funding-european-publications-to-little-success.
- Saikkonen, Inga A.-L., and Henrik Serup Christensen. “Guardians of Democracy or Passive Bystanders? A Conjoint Experiment on Elite Transgressions of Democratic Norms.” *Political Research Quarterly* 76, no. 1 (March 1, 2023): 127–42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10659129211073592>.
- Scheppele, Kim Lane. “Understanding Hungary’s Constitutional Revolution.” *Yale Law Review*, 2015, 111–24. <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783845261386-124>.
- Scheufele, Dietram. “Framing as a Theory of Media Effects.” *Journal of Communication* 49 (1999): 103–22. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1999.tb02784.x>.
- Serhan, Yasmeen. “The Autocrat’s Legacy.” *The Atlantic* (blog), July 6, 2021. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2021/07/viktor-orban-autocracy-hungary-election/619351/>.
- Sisak, Michael, Jennifer Peltz, Eric Tucker, Michelle L. Prince, and Jill Colvin. “Guilty: Trump Becomes First Former US President Convicted of Felony Crimes.” *AP News*, May 30, 2024, sec. U.S. News. <https://apnews.com/article/trump-trial-deliberations-jury-testimony-verdict-85558c6d08efb434d05b694364470aa0>.
- Slothuus, Rune. “Assessing the Influence of Political Parties on Public Opinion: The Challenge from Pretreatment Effects.” *Political Communication* 33 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2015.1052892>.
- “Speakers at CPAC Hungary,” 2023. <https://www.cpachungary.com/en/speakers>.
- Stone, Peter. “Trump’s Attacks on Justice System Are Causing Real Damage, Experts Say.” *The Guardian*, 05 2024. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/article/2024/may/07/trump-trial-justice-system-violence>.
- Susánszky, Pál, Ákos Kopper, and Frank Zsigó. “Media Framing of Political Protests – Reporting Bias and the Discrediting of Political Activism.” *Post Soviet Affairs* 38, no. 4 (September 9, 2021): 312–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2022.2061817>.
- Szczerbiak, Aleks, and Paul Taggart. “Contemporary Research on Euroscepticism: The State of the Art.” In *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*. Routledge, 2017.
- Szelényi, Zsuzsanna. *Tainted Democracy: Viktor Orbán and the Subversion of Hungary*. Hurst Publishers, 2022.
- The Economist*. “A Wild Gerrymander Makes Hungary’s Fidesz Party Hard to Dislodge.” 02 2022. <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2022/04/02/a-wild-gerrymander-makes-hungarys-fidesz-party-hard-to-dislodge>.
- Thomas Ambrosio. “Russia’s Effects on a Consolidated Democracy.” *Routledge*, 2020, 1–28.
- Thorpe, Nick. “Tucker Carlson: What the Fox News Host Is Doing in Hungary.” *BBC News*, 5 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-58104200>.
- Tolan, Casey, Kyung Lah, Anna-Maja Rappard, and Curt Devine. “American Conservatives Embrace Hungary’s Authoritarian Leader at Budapest Conference.” *CNN*, Summer 2024. <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/05/01/politics/gop-conservatives-hungary-cpac-orban-invs/index.html>.
- Tversky, Amos, and Daniel Kahneman. “Rational Choice and the Framing of Decisions.” *The Journal of Business* 59, no. 4, (1986): S251–78.
- Varga, Mihai, and Aron Buzogány. “The Two Faces of the ‘Global Right’: Revolutionary Conservatives and National-Conservatives.” *Critical Sociology* 48, no. 6 (2022): 1089–1107. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08969205211057020>.

- Vernou, Axel de. "No Pivot: The U.S. Can't Take on China Without Europe." *The National Interest*, July 18, 2022. <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/no-pivot-us-can%E2%80%99t-take-china-without-europe-203630>.
- Visnovitz, Péter, and Erin Kristin Jenne. "Populist Argumentation in Foreign Policy: The Case of Hungary under Viktor Orbán, 2010–2020." *Comparative European Politics* 19, no. 6 (December 1, 2021): 683–702. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41295-021-00256-3>.
- Vladisavljević, Nebojsa. "Media Framing of Political Conflict: A Review of the Literature." *Media Conflict and Democratisation*, 30 2015.
- Vreese, Claes H. de. "News Framing: Theory and Typology." *Information Design Journal* 13, no. 1 (April 18, 2005): 51–62. <https://doi.org/10.1075/idjdd.13.1.06vre>.
- Wallace-Wells, Benjamin. "What American Conservatives See in Hungary's Leader." *The New Yorker*, 13 2021. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-inquiry/what-rod-dreher-sees-in-viktor-orban>.
- Website of the Hungarian Government. "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Speech in the European Parliament," 26 2017. <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-in-the-european-parliament20170426>.
- Wood, Steve. "The European Union: A Normative or Normal Power?" *European Foreign Affairs Review* 14, no. Issue 1 (February 1, 2009): 113–28. <https://doi.org/10.54648/EERR2009007>.
- Yeates, Luke. "Public Spheres of Influence and the Effects of the Alt-Right: A Qualitative Study of Conservative Counter Spheres Through Representative Media Outlets." Master of Arts in Communication, Boise State University, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.18122/td/1602/boisestate>.
- Zafirovski, Milan. "Modern Democratic Society and the Enlightenment." *Springer, New York*, 27 2011, 19–66. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-7387-0_2.
- Zubaşcu, Florin. "Forcing the Central European University out of Hungary Was against EU Law, Court Says." *Science Business*, 07 2020. <https://sciencebusiness.net/news/forcing-central-european-university-out-hungary-was-against-eu-law-court-says>.