



MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

Petting the Dog, Bulwarking the Flood: The Multimodal
Construction of Viktor Orbán's Leadership Myth on the Official
Website of the Hungarian Prime Minister

verfasst von | submitted by
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angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien | Vienna, 2025

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme code as it appears on the
student record sheet:

UA 066 824

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme as it appears on the student
record sheet:

Masterstudium Politikwissenschaft

Betreut von | Supervisor:

Mag. Dr. Karin Liebhart Privatdoz.

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Abstracts

(EN)

This thesis examines the symbolic construction of Viktor Orbán's leadership ideal on Hungary's official Prime Ministerial website. Through a multimodal analysis of speeches, articles, and curated imagery, it explores how charismatic authority and political charm are strategically combined to produce a compelling leadership myth. Grounded in theories of multimodality, myth, and political iconography, the study highlights how affective resonance and symbolic coherence underpin the digital mediation of power.

(DE)

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht die symbolische Konstruktion Viktor Orbáns als politische Führungsfigur auf der offiziellen Website des ungarischen Ministerpräsidenten. Anhand multimodaler Analysen von Reden, Artikeln und kuratiertem Bildmaterial wird gezeigt, wie Charisma und politischer Charme strategisch verknüpft werden, um eine kohärente Autoritätserzählung zu schaffen. Gestützt auf Theorien zu Mythos, Multimodalität und politischer Ikonographie beleuchtet die Studie die affektive und symbolische Vermittlung politischer Macht im digitalen Raum.

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1. Introduction

*Una festa in grande stile
Un ambiente signorile
Le tartine di caviale, lo champagne
Un'orchestra nello sfondo
E la crema del bel mondo
Si incontrava quella sera
E c'ero anch'io.*

Raffella Carrà, *Il Presidente* (1977)

The interest for the topic of the present thesis stems from a rather unscientific, intuitive source. In 1977, the Italian singer Raffaella Carrà sang about a lavish celebration fueled by expensive fizzy booze and caviar canapés, an entire orchestra setting the aural mood for the distinguished guests formed by international diplomacy, cultural and commercial representatives, even a delegation of an Indian Maharajah. With the snapshots and news reports around this event, she even had the feeling that ‘*c'ero anch'io*’ - I was there, too. However, as it goes, eventually the carabinieri uncovered the president’s entanglement in governmental irregularities and initiate legal prosecution. In the second half of the song, the media is equally eager to report: ‘*The President arrested! He pleads innocent!*’, leaving an involved and puzzled Carrà to ask herself whether or not ‘*il mio caro presidente*’ will find a way to get out of it by tomorrow. While the song is kept in an ironic tone with strings and brass instruments indicating joy and confusion, the overall interest was awakened: How did the president manage to arouse such an interest in Raffaella, give her the impression of being close to his everyday affairs, and worry for ‘her dear president’ incarcerated over governmental crime? The underlying mechanisms, then, are the public perception of a certain image of their ‘dear president’, as for such an assessment one needs to acquire a certain relationship to them, one has to get a feeling of knowing the president, a certainty of their behavior and a clear idea of their moral compass to eventually be surprised or shocked when consequences do not seem to match with the perception one had from the government official. While the song implicitly refers to public media reporting, my interest lies closer to the original source of *Il Presidente*. Media reports what sells best, with headlines framing the president conducive to the media outlets’ sales figures, aligning with the imagined opinions of their core readership. But what did the president himself want to embody? Does the presentation of lavish food and rich visitors serve a wider purpose than exemplifying the use of taxpayers' money? Would Raffaella Carrà feel differently about the president, if he and his

office were to narrate different facets to his reign, tell the president in all of the different personas that make up his myth? The song may be ironic, even satirical, yet it captures something central to this thesis. Why did Carrà, who had no real political involvement, speak of “*her*” president? What enabled this sense of closeness, attachment, even loyalty? How does a leader become dear to someone? What structures the symbolic intimacy between ruler and ruled? And what shapes the image of the leader before that intimacy can emerge?

Rather than analyzing how media outlets construct political leaders for consumption by their audience, this project turns to the other side of the equation: how the leader’s image is crafted and performed by the state itself, how a political figure tells his own story and projects authority not merely through policy or press releases, but through a dense field of symbolic production. What is of interest here is not simply governmental communication in its instrumental form, but rather the mythic architecture of leadership in the digital age: how charisma is narratively stabilized, how symbolic personas are visually cultivated, and how national identity and legitimacy are entangled in the image of one man.

The research and sub-questions guiding this project are as follows:

How is Viktor Orbán’s leadership constructed and mythologized through multimodal communication on the Hungarian Prime Minister’s official website?

Sub 1: Which symbolic personas shape Orbán’s self-representation on the website, and how are they supported through textual and visual cues?

Sub 2: To what extent are charisma and charm employed in the visual communication of Orbánian leadership, and how do they differ in function and emphasis?

Sub 3: How does Orbán’s self-representation on miniszterelnok.hu compare to social media portrayals in terms of multimodal strategy and narrative scope?

In contrast to frameworks that focus primarily on democratic legitimization, this project is less concerned with whether the public believes in the leader’s image, and more interested in how this image is constructed to be believable in the first place; how a myth is built up, performed, circulated, and emotionally charged in state-curated digital communication. In the

spirit of Barthes (2009, originally 1957), myth is understood here as a second-order semiological system - not a falsehood but a mode of signification in which ideology is naturalized. In this context, Viktor Orbán does not merely govern as a party leader or public official, but as a cultural signifier around which symbolic roles, emotions, and narrative expectations accumulate.

Methodologically, the thesis employs a triangulated approach that allows for close interpretation across three sources of symbolic traditioning: recurrent speeches, governmental articles, and curated imagery. The State of the Nation addresses (2016–2024) are analyzed through a reflexive thematic reading informed by Braun/Clarke (2006), with additional structuring from Mayring's (2000) interpretive content analysis. The verbal layer of Orbán's digital presence - over 700 news-style articles published on miniszterelnok.hu - is examined for anchoring narratives and recurring symbolic scripts. The visual dimension, composed of headline imagery from the same website, is studied using a semiotic-mythological lens drawing on Barthes (2009) and Kress (2010). These three dimensions are not treated in isolation, but examined in constellation: each chapter of analysis traces how thematic and symbolic patterns are carried across speech, text, and image, producing layered personas of leadership that include figures such as the crisis commander, the guarantor of sovereignty, or the diplomatic statesman. This thesis aims not only to offer a case study of Orbán's leadership, but a methodological example that could inform future visual leadership analyses in state-curated environments.

Rather than aiming for exhaustive coverage or quantitative categorization, the thesis privileges symbolic richness and mythic condensation. As Barthes (2009: 170) reminds us, myth does not function by brute repetition but by traditionalization - it works best when it "goes without saying". Thus, the material is approached not for representativity, but for its density: the ability of certain motifs and postures to stabilize a coherent and resonant figure of authority. The structure of the thesis mirrors this tripartite material logic. Following the present introduction, Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature, with a particular focus on digital leadership, visual legitimation, and the emerging field of visual political science. Special attention is given to methodological debates and the relative absence of studies focusing on official state-run media environments Chapter 3 develops the theoretical framework, drawing together scholarship from political communication, visual cultural studies, and myth theory. It presents key conceptual terms - such as multimodality, anchorage, charisma, and myth - which form the interpretive scaffolding of the project. Chapter 4 presents the methodology in detail, outlining the corpus construction, sampling strategy, and analytical procedure for each mode. It justifies the

interpretive orientation of the project and discusses the epistemological role of symbolic saturation. Chapters 5 and 6 constitute the analytical heart of the thesis. They present and discuss the major findings across the three material dimensions: the emergence of narrative fields in speeches, the symbolic anchoring of leadership in articles, and the condensation of mythic roles in visual portrayals. These findings are then integrated into a broader discussion of digital myth-making, hybrid regimes, and the orchestration of charisma in non-participatory media contexts. Chapter 7 concludes by summarizing the thesis' contributions to the fields of political image research and digital communication, while also reflecting on its limitations and suggesting avenues for further research.

Ultimately, this thesis seeks to understand not merely what Viktor Orbán says and shows, but how he becomes sayable and showable as a leader: how the Hungarian Prime Minister is cast in recurring roles that confer coherence, appeal, and cultural authority. In studying the figures through which Orbán speaks and appears, this project hopes to render visible the mythic labor of political communication: the narrative sedimentation through which my dear president becomes plausible.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Historical Origins of Princely Visualization

In the sixteenth century, in a quest to win back the monarchical grace of Florence after participating in the upheaval against the crown, Machiavelli advised Lorenzo de Medici about the core interest of this work. Speaking about whether a prince should rather be hated than loved, Machiavelli proposed: “[...] a sensible man will base his power on what he controls, not on what others have freedom to choose. But he must take care, as I said, that people don’t come to hate him“ (Machiavelli 2014: 68). While naturally *Il Principe* is primarily a motivated pamphlet to charm the Florentine Prince and gain back his profession at the royal court, Machiavelli struck the core of communication between politicians and their constituents. Especially the last part of the quote, the prevention of public hatred, translates directly into today. Politicians must be seen in a legitimate, likable but generally not detestable light by their audience, especially since by now the audience is not easily pinned down to the physical borders of the Empire, but potentially span the entire planet with the aid of online spaces. Especially with the shift from the feudal understanding of a public, which viewed it as a mere canvas to present monarchical wealth and glory, away to a civic understanding, which realized that monarchical legitimacy is needed and based in societal approval (cf. Schild 1998: 65), rulers in political portraiture needed to present themselves as just, legitimate, lawful and based on civic approval. This led to a more and more professionalized curation of the leader’s image, following art historical trends, the needs of an epoch and finally societal tastes and legitimation.

The analysis of images is still largely following art historian Erwin Panofsky’s three-step-workflow: he introduced his model of iconological analysis to the field of art history which is viewed as the “[...] most fruitful school [...]” and the “[...] international [golden, RN] standard of art history [...]” (Schulz 2009: 58, own translation). Panofsky’s three-step method exceeds the mere description of codes and symbols used by adding a deeper analytical level, which also reconstructs the historical discourse around a certain motif and its embeddedness in other cultures and societies throughout. The first step, Panofsky calls the pre-iconographic description: the identification of the general sujet and the scene one is going to investigate. Secondly, the iconographic analysis employs the familiarity of objects and events of the scientists themselves - with the aid of socio-cultural knowledge and literary sources, the image is analyzed for its denoted message and underlying political significations. The third step, the

iconological interpretation, situates the respective image in its broader art historical context and carves out epochal and genre specific continuities and potential drifts - this is the core of art historical iconological analysis (Panofsky 1997: 31ff; also Panofsky:1994: 214ff). While for the political science context the final step requires a broader scope and potentially funding, most studies, implicitly or explicitly, utilize the first two steps proposed by Panofsky while searching for power, dominance and (counter-) hegemonial mechanisms employed by visual material.

2.2 Leadership Visuality in Political Science

Today, with the realm of politics and participation democratized in most corners of the world, this curation of the leadership persona on multiple channels with various affordances is still as crucial as it historically has been, if not even more. This thesis understands leadership not as a fixed role or title, but as a historically and symbolically charged mode of public authority. In political science, leadership is most often framed in relation to power, legitimacy, and followership. Max Weber's typology remains foundational: legal-rational, traditional, and charismatic authority shape how leadership is perceived and enacted (Weber 1963). Building on this, Jean Blondel defines political leadership as the capacity to mobilize others toward outcomes they might not otherwise pursue—less about status, more about impact (Blondel 1987). More recent contributions emphasize affective and symbolic dimensions: James MacGregor Burns draws a distinction between transactional and transformational leadership, with the latter based on shared goals and mutual elevation (Burns 1978). Scholars of populism and hybrid regimes, such as Kurt Weyland and Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, highlight personalism, charisma, and direct symbolic communication in contexts where institutional constraints are weak or performative (Weyland 2017; Levitsky/Way 2010). Across these perspectives, leadership is not neutral but constructed, mediated, and historically situated—an image as much as a function.

While the possibilities of persona management range from answering letters sent in to the Chancellor's Press Office, commenting latest meetings with the Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce delegation, to passing out autographs at local campaign events, this thesis will investigate the state-curation of Viktor Orbán's leadership myth on the official Prime Minister's website miniszterelnok.hu via verbal, textual and visual means. In his review on political image research, Phillipe de Vries recalls that the main focus in political science research to this end

lies in institutional discourses or ideology, as well as systemic structures and political rhetoric, calling for a stronger attention to the growing aspects of a predominant visual culture (cf. de Vries 2023). With the emergence of mass media and their continuous developments by the day, he argues that particular attention should be paid to the research on image management and visibility (cf. *ibid.*: 36). This claim is echoed and taken on in Petra Bernhardt and Karin Liebhart (2020).

„Political communication cannot be imagined without images“ – this is the opening to Petra Bernhardt and Karin Liebhart’s investigation of the strategic employment of visuals in the Austrian election campaign 2019, yet the area of visual political communication remains understudied (Bernhardt/Liebhart 2020: 9, own transl.). Images have the ability to actively shape and influence politics and policy decisions (cf. *ibid.*: 9) and, relying on Paula Diehl narrate the boundaries of the „[...] doable, sayable, and imaginable [...]“ (Paula Diehl in Bernhardt/Liebhart 2020: 13, own transl.). Journalists, as the producers of political visuals are never neutral, but active and motivated shapers of a mediatized reality (*Medienrealität*) (cf. *ibid.*: 17f.). They necessitate politicians to „[...] be able to visually convey their main foci, desires and goals, as well as their personal character [...]“ (*ibid.*: 14, own transl.), thus appealing to the public, mobilizing their electorate visually by memorable emotionalization and depiction. For political scientists, this poses challenges that are considerably different to the traditional focus of text and language-based research. Petra Bernhardt et al. (2019) suggest us to pay closer attention to visual strategies to maintain and claim power, to rethink text-based argumentative logic and instead become aware for visuals’ associative logic (cf. Bernhardt et al. 2019: 51). Visual political science should not fall into the trap of viewing visual campaigning as mere analogon, mere depiction of reality, but understand the inherent tension between „[...] the image content (*Bildinhalt*), its symbolic meaning and its production- and reception context“ (*ibid.*: 51, own transl.). In a well-respected review in the field Dan Schill (2012) describes the core functions of political visibility. As implicit arguments, images can activate the viewer’s social and cultural knowledge in order to convey a message (cf. Schill 2012: 122ff.), while they can also be deployed to set the thematic agenda by presenting or not presenting certain issues (cf. *ibid.* 124ff.). Other functions include the dramatization of events and/or politicians, support the formation of identity or igniting social deliberation processes when visualizing ambiguity (Schill 2012). One aim that Dan Schill articulates regarding his review is to help “develop the discussion in this essay of how images operate as argumentative symbols, and the specifics of those functions” (Schill 2012: 134), to which contemporary

scholars as well as this project are eager to contribute. This, however, requires a set of recalibrations for the social scientist, apart from the well-treaded paths of syntactical text-work.

In this regard, Marion G. Müller and Stephanie Geise call for what they call Visual Competence: the understanding of the multimodal, often multi-channel mix visuals are part of, so called ‘hybrid images’, and the need to holistically understand, analyze and interpret them (cf. Müller/Geise 2015: 117). They highlight that images’ associative logic, instead of assigning one meaning by one code, use the lack of direct codes to evoke conscious or unconscious cognitive reactions during their perception, doing so by emotional appeals or the activation of the viewers’ belief system often in a split of a second (cf. *ibid.*: 37). Instead of merely describing the scene in an image, which comes close to Visual Studies’ approach to the picture as denotation, the crucial aspect for the researcher lies in understanding the image’s connotation, its understanding within an intended cultural, societal, political, historical context, which they have to familiarize themselves with (cf. *ibid.*: 60). Hence, they urge us to not only take photographs as spontaneous snapshots of a man walking in a group, but analyze it with its inherent documentational nature (cf. *ibid.*). Visuality in political science is often considered a marginal source of data, partly due to their use for manipulation and propaganda (cf. Drechsel 2008). According to Benjamin Drechsel, occasional case studies attempted to answer political science related issues, but generally, “[...] political science (in the German-speaking world) has been rather hesitantly according to pictures until very recently” and the need for visual competence not yet acknowledged in the field since the 1990s (Drechsel 2008: 4). However, strands like Political Iconography around Martin Warnke or the recognition of Visual Politics as a subject by the German Political Science Association lay the foundations for a visually sensitive political science (cf. *ibid.*: 5). In light of recent developments in the attempt to broaden political science’s utilization of visuals to study questions around leadership, legitimacy, mobilization and the like, Drechsler does have a cautious, yet positive outlook: “Seen altogether it seems rather plausible that the “iconic turn” in cultural studies and social sciences is affecting political science, but it is not clear where this trend will lead to finally” (Drechsler 2008: 5).

2.3 Beginning of a Tradition of Multimodal Visuality

Still, rigorous methodological tradition has yet to be established. Recently, the field of Visual Political Science began to outline a vast diversity of vantage points and areas to

investigate, ranging from broad and abstract concepts to focused case studies of political messaging. However, the beginnings of normalizing visuals in social sciences, notably in the German-speaking literature, should not go unmentioned: Thomas Petersen and Clemens Schwender (2011) provide a comprehensive methodological handbook on both qualitative and quantitative methods for the analysis of still and moving image products while offering exemplary studies of images, series or movies from various academic backgrounds; Roswitha Breckner, Karin Liebhart and Maria Pohn-Lauggas (2021) recently published an edited volume of multimodal visual analysis projects specifically in a social science context with multiple diverse case studies laying out the methodological possibilities and vantage points in visual social science research; Marion G. Müller and Stephanie Geise (2015) provide a classical methodological guide offering necessary theoretical and terminological lenses while also offering a selected methodological toolkit and Sven Grampp (2024) just published a comprehensive and multifaceted monograph to develop a terminological and conceptual lens to analyze and interpret all levels of visual political communication under the banner of Political Media Iconography: Production, perception, reception and (social) deliberation.

Multimodality as an analytical toolkit was put forth in a study by Karin Liebhart, investigating a lengthy Youtube video by the Austrian Identitarian Movement under Martin Sellner. The combination of the visual setting of the scene, the cuts and post-production choices, as well as sounds and musical elements all jointly came to create the black and white worldview in cues of traditional gender binary, conservatism vs. liberalism, us versus them tropes, and the naming of internal and external opponents. Rather than focusing only on a transcript or the sound design for the video's meaning-making mechanisms, she emphasizes the Youtube video as essentially a "[...] multimodal image-text-sound-document that has to be analyzed on all those levels" (Liebhart 2021: 199, own transl.).

Theo van Leeuwen, one of the key proponents of multimodality, proposes the analysis of legitimacy via text and visuals, highlight that personal authority is often enforced by a 'because I said so' justification of superior claims in children's books (cf. Van Leeuwen 2017: 321f.); impersonal authority is signaled via placements of official documents and law books in political imagery (cf. *ibid.*: 322) or expert authority to be indicated via uniforms, logos and stereotypical props (cf. *ibid.*: 323f.) - all in the multimodal interplay with text, sound, layout, print font, etc., depending on the needs of the message and its channel. Legitimacy was further analyzed in its multimodal representation during the Greek election campaigns: Dimitrios

Chaidas (2018) found a multimodal layering of sacrifice, guilt and fear narratives in television and advertisement to be highly influential in voter mobilization. Fernando Pinto Santos further investigates the multimodal creation of legitimacy in a commercial organization framework (Santos 2023). The question of legitimacy is the overarching principle of political communication to the public. As Karen Sanders describes, politics is about persuasion: “Whether it is persuading the public about the cause for war, promoting a healthy eating campaign or trumpeting the latest welfare initiative [...]” (Sanders 2009: 73) – the tension between persuasion and a necessary tool to open the anonymous blackbox of politics will be taken up again later in this project.

2.4 Contemporary Application Cases of Visual Political Science

Also for political visibility on social media, valuable work has been put forth. Concerning political leaders’ social appeal online, David Taras states that they “[...] must embody something larger themselves [...]” (Taras 2019: 2) and that a well-orchestrated media attention eventually lead to Donald Trump’s success in 2016: although he was opposed with the party and spent less on the campaign, his flamboyance and bombastic language contributed to a higher media visibility (cf. *ibid.*: 9). Also, within the U.S. context, Benjamin Moffit proposes a narration of nationhood using visual cues. He investigates Bernie Sanders’ and Donald Trump’s visual campaign on Instagram, finding racial and gendered differences in signifying ‘the people’, with Trump’s version being more homogenous, white and male versus Sanders’ more diverse and heterogenous approach (Moffit 2024). Chaseten Remillard et al. studied the Instagram appearance of the former Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as another example for the storytelling and legitimacy-building on social media. Trudeau employed visual material that made him look goofy, easy-going and charming, yet also maintained the air of agency and competence (Remillard et al. 2019), underlining social media’s ability to soften a leader’s management into a more charming, approachable persona. In terms of a more longitudinal approach, Gal Yavetz investigates the Facebook appearance of Israeli Prime Ministers. Firstly, he finds that Benjamin Netanyahu presents himself differently on his private than on the governmental profile: privately he emphasizes leisure activities and family events, while on the governmental profile he employs a different language style and more pathos-centered visuals (cf. Yavetz 2021). In a second study, he analyzed the official Facebook page of the Israeli Prime Minister at a time when three different persons inhabited the post in

the frame of three years, allowing him to look for personality-based developments in the profile. He found that topics were differently prioritized depending on the incumbent Prime Minister, while especially Netanjahu emphasized personal leadership qualities, decision-making strength, and crisis management capabilities. A clear political affiliation was avoided by all three individuals under investigation (cf. Yavetz 2024). One final example in global politics that shows how social media visualization constructs a leadership persona stems from Deborpriya Shome and Tabereh Ahmed Neyazi, who study the personalization of politics during the West Bengal Assembly Election 2021. Employing a thematic analysis of Facebook advertisements by the two main parties in the region, they find that both major candidates “[...] relay carefully crafted messages and project a specific persona to the audience [...]” (Shome/Neyazi 2024: 778). Hence, photographs showed the candidates in identity and ideology shaping settings, while also relying on communal signification to mobilize the public.

Visual material is also employed in relation to the construction of society and stating a national status quo. In his contribution, Johannes Marent analyses the symbolic reordering of German society during the 2015 migration management crisis utilizing the relatively novel Image Segment Analysis. He outlines how media images, through deliberate choices on in-image boundaries and bodily separation lines, as well as employed textual framing with the placement and layout of words the media first included the incoming people to later segregate them as undesired, oppositional in relation to the German public (cf. Marent 2021). Using Stuart Hall’s theories of encoding and decoding as well as symbolic othering (cf. *ibid.*: 34f.), Marent exemplifies one key area of political image utilization in politics and media: the multimodal mobilization via the narration of statehood and normalcy. He relies on the concept of symbolic ordering, understood as “[...] the process of reaffirming and securing boundaries of belonging and negotiating national values” (Marent 2021: 49), which will be echoed in this thesis at least implicitly, since its connection to Barthesian myth-making is uncanny but misses the state-controlled, long-term curation and maintenance in the representation of leadership that is best captured with Barthes among others, which will be closer discussed in the following chapter. Another venue for visuals in political communication was investigated by Bernadine Jones (2024). Her study on the United Kingdom’s visual communications of COVID-19-measures showed the importance of a balanced and well-orchestrated interplay of multimodal messaging. Many posts especially in the early phase of crisis communication are considered ‘shitpostings’: “Mixing colours, graphics, fonts, sizes, placement and content adds to the polysemic nature of these texts, opening opportunities for misinterpretation and increasing the information overload already experienced in a stressful time” (Jones 2024: 52). This is a direct example of multimodal

messaging gone wrong and the need for a solid anchoring of visual material to be at least semi-universally received and understood.

2.5 Viktor Orbán's Visuality Online

For our Hungarian case, recent studies analyze Viktor Orbán's persona narrative on social media. Zea Szebeni and Virpi Salojärvi investigate Orbán's Instagram account, pointing out that photographs in plenary settings, in conversations or during international diplomacy portrays the Hungarian Prime Minister as 'always-on', constantly working with little to no time for leisure activities (cf. Szebeni/Salojärvi 2022: 819), strongly gendered in-image-roles with women often serving supportive purposes (cf. *ibid.*: 821), or catering to cultural expectations by staged photographs of the Prime Minister praying (cf. *ibid.*: 823). In a study on Viktor Orbán's Facebook profile, Julia Sonnevend and Veronika Kössvedí find strongman themes like dominance, defining threats, charismatic presence and competence to be ensured, but also a strategic positioning of the Prime Minister as a gentle figure who cares for animals and changes diapers, thus giving the strongman a more human, down-to-earth face (Sonnevend/Kövesdi 2023). The decision by the Prime Minister to head for the international political online arena was investigated by Julia Sonnevend (2024a). She views Orbán's 2022 accession to Twitter as a clear desire to be part of the global Right-Wing network and urges that the leadership myth that Orbán portrays internally is far more nuanced and multi-faceted than the sole focus on strongman decision-making laid out internationally (Sonnevend 2024a). While these studies offer valuable glimpses into Orbán's visual narrative, the academic output on Hungarian visual political communication remains scarce. The limited scope and temporality of the existing literature further underline the need for a more systematic and longitudinal exploration – a gap this thesis aims to address through an in-depth, multimodal analysis of the official state-curated website *miniszterelnok.hu*

2.6 Challenges and Gaps in Contemporary Visual Analysis

Most visual political studies focus on social media. However, Richard Rogers (2013) urges us not to treat all digital content as mere interactional tools adapting to the ever-shifting demands of broad consent and generating an active followership. Governmental websites, he

argues, represent a more stable, curated domain. They are not shaped by comments, likes, or trending hashtags, but reflect institutional priorities and top-down communication. As such, they offer a unique window into state ideology and leader branding.

While the literature reviewed showed the possibilities of multimodal leadership-curation online, two weaknesses in contemporary research remain under-addressed. Firstly, most of the research on political visibility takes place in interactive, socially reactive online spaces like Social Media. While it is apparent that the curation of leadership personas is primarily targeted at voter mobilization, a large part of online interaction and output relies on attention-seeking and traffic generating considerations. The Social Media space influences leadership portrayals in regard to the audience, with the leader's media team designing content in a way to yield interaction with as large an audience share as possible, but also in relation to other political actors on the platform, so that struggle and negative campaigning are directly reflected in the leaders' profile. Another weakness is the focus on election campaigns and unitary events. While much research was conducted on the discussion of certain events or the positioning during several weeks of campaigning, there is a lack of understanding the creation and maintenance of a leadership myth longitudinally in a single, uninterrupted ideal online environment, especially with regards to post-communist spaces in the European Union (EU). To address both, the interactive bias of social media logic, as well as the enduring curation apart from momentary snapshots, this thesis investigates the official website of the Hungarian Prime Minister miniszterelnok.hu and aims at providing a long-term analysis and interpretation of the carefully crafted Myth of a leader – the Orbánian Myth. By outlining the guiding motifs and traits as well as their official positioning in governmental discourse, this study attempts to fathom the mechanisms employed in Viktor Orbán's political communication as well as the public appeal his long-lasting role in Hungarian and European Politics seem to exhibit. All terms united, Viktor Orbán is in the public interest of Hungarian politics since 1989, incumbent as the Hungarian Prime Minister for almost twenty years, of which more than fifteen years consecutively. Only the former German chancellor Angela Merkel was in office for a comparable duration, which begs the question of reasons for and mechanisms behind Orbán's enduring success and popularity.

This thesis sets out to investigate how a sustained political myth of Viktor Orbán is curated and visually-textually constructed on the official Hungarian government website miniszterelnok.hu in the Barthesian sense. Rather than assessing the formal legitimacy of

Orbán's leadership, the analysis centers on the symbolic scaffolding through which his persona is made desirable to a domestic audience. The goal is to lay bare what "his people" are invited to think of the Prime Minister - what traits, motifs, images, and affective cues are emphasized and repeated to create a compelling narrative of enduring leadership. Drawing on methods from political iconography, psychology and multimodal visual analysis, the study explores how mythic elements: from masculinity and sacrifice to civic closeness and strategic dominance are interwoven into a long-term narrative strategy. These representations, it is argued, work less through rational persuasion and more through affective resonance and aesthetic coherence, shaping the figure of Orbán not just as a political leader, but as an emblem of continuity, control, and national self-understanding.

3. Theoretical Foundation

3.1 The Leader's Image across Modern History

The previous chapter began with Machiavelli's proposition to The Prince to maintain his image aiming at avoiding public hatred around his person. In a similar vein, he assures that "You'll be held in contempt, on the other hand, if you're seen as changeable, superficial, effeminate, fearful or indecisive. So a ruler must avoid those qualities like so many stumbling blocks and act in such a way that everything he does gives an impression of greatness, spirit, seriousness and strength [...]" (Machiavelli 2014: 72).

In the age of easily accessible mass media, it is hard not to see Machiavelli's advice being put into action. On television, we see presidential debates where migrants are claimed to have cooked pets, while the opponent struggles to keep a straight face. Newspapers are filled with colorful statespeople handshakes, and on mobile screens, short clips with funky tunes show the finance minister dancing or the Bavarian chief minister's latest culinary discovery. All these activities are orchestrated to achieve a single goal: catch the attention of a broad audience and shape perceptions of the politician's personality - ideally to garner votes. But what are politicians seeking when presenting themselves in these ways? One approach to answering this question was proposed in the mid-20th century by German sociologist Max Weber and his typology of three pure types of legitimate leadership. He identifies three ideal types of leadership (cf. Weber 1963: 215f.):

Traditional leadership is based on the societal belief in the holiness of eternal order and obedience on grounds of sacred self-honor. This type of leadership was especially common in feudal societies, where the leader was accepted by the subordinates due to the divine place the leader was apparently put in. *Legal leadership* refers to today's notion of the rule of law, in which statehood and laws are discussed and decided following codified legal guidelines and the subordinates are citizens. *Charismatic leadership*, Weber says, occurs by the people's affective devotion to the leader and his supposed 'graceful gifts' such as magic, revelation or heroism. The main source of credibility lies in the leader's mind and rhetoric, especially in his novel, extraordinary, emotional appeal; common for example in the case of prophets, war heroes or grand demagogues. These extraordinary qualities require constant recognition, which "[...] is freely given and guaranteed by what is held to be a proof, originally always a miracle, and consists in devotion to the corresponding revelation, hero worship, or absolute trust in the leader" (Weber 1963: 242), in is in a dialectical need of constant prove and recognition (cf. *ibid.*: 244).

In light of these performative requirements, recent research has shifted its attention to a more subtle but equally strategic mode of emotional appeal: charm. Julia Sonnevend, in her 2024 monograph, argues that charm constitutes a distinct political force in a new public space of interaction for both political leaders and their electoral devotees. In the new arena of social media, leaders should "[...] appeal to our desire to see them as ordinary and authentic", requiring to base their chances not solely on Weberian heroism, "[...] but something more relatable, more 'everyday'" (Sonnevend 2024b: 3), a notion of politicians to be "[...] 'just like you'" (*ibid.*: 4) through affective gestures and stylized accessibility. This portrayal of staged ordinariness is what Sonnevend defines as charm and the representation of a charming interaction (cf. *ibid.*). Politicians increasingly rely on posture, tone, and repetition to appear emotionally appealing, their very bodies become representations of ideological and sentimental sets (cf. *ibid.*: 18). The display of charming encounters is likely not the only cornerstone of a communication campaign, it is the "[...] strategic public relations campaign that weaponizes the personal magnetism of political leaders [...]" (Sonnevend 2024b: 8). She stresses that this affective charisma differs from Weber's transcendent type. It does not inspire awe, but affinity. It is this balance of awe and affection that contemporary politicians have to find, they "[...] strive toward the role of superheroes, mixing ordinary and extraordinary qualities (Sonnevend 2024b: 6). In a very pointed way, Sonnevend asserts that

“Being good at petting dogs [...] is not what politicians need to perform well in high-level bureaucracy. Yet, paradoxically, this is what we expect from our leaders”
(Sonnevend 2024b: 20).

This framework proves especially useful when studying leaders who do not rely on populist exuberance or emotional warmth alone, but rather on a strategically designed and executed, multifaceted combination of advertised personas - as may be the case with Viktor Orbán.

3.2 The Spectacle of Showing: Symbolic Illusion or Legitimate Reflection?

A helpful theoretical lens for interpreting this strategic visibility is offered by Murray Edelman, who in the 1960s wrote about politics as symbolism; he famously writes: “Political forms thus become symbols of what the people have to believe in order to remain secured” (Edelman 2005: 2, own translation). What appears to us as the institutional core of modern democracies, including government offices, national symbols, and parliamentary rituals, Edelman frames as staged performances that function largely to reassure the public and reduce uncertainty.

Crucially, Edelman argues that political language “[...] does not mirror an objective ‘reality’ but creates it by abstracting certain sentiments into a coherent structure of sense [Sinnstruktur, R.N.] from a complicated and confusing world” (Edelman 2005: 147, own translation). Rather than directly reflecting power, language and symbolism produce and stabilize it. In this framework, the image of a leader is not a representation but a tool of governance: a stylized form that generates and maintains public belief.

However, this perspective has been countered by scholars such as Ulrich Sarcinelli, who argue that symbolic politics are not merely deceptive or manipulative, but an essential element of how politics operates in modern democracies. According to him, symbols, rituals, and affective media do not necessarily undermine democracy, but make abstract institutions visible and emotionally tangible. He argues that this ‘*Parade of abstract symbols*’ is a necessary means for viewers to better understand and identify with the politicians they elected, thus granting legitimacy to the politicians themselves (cf. Sarcinelli 1987: 10). Further, he criticizes Edelman’s assumption of a merely reactive mass of citizens, underscoring both Sonnevend’s

and Weber's diagnosis that the combination of charm and charisma has to be granted and recognized by the citizen; that there is no automatism (cf. Sarcinelli 1987: 61).

This revision of Edelman's skepticism introduces a more balanced view that is particularly useful for analyzing Orbán's communication strategy. While his visibility certainly stages authority, it also works to embed political action in culturally resonant forms, drawing from symbolic codes, national memory, and emotional legibility.

3.3 Historical Beginnings of a Visual Science

In terms of working with visuals scientifically, Aby Warburg and Erwin Panofsky made commendable analytical and methodological efforts in the years between the World Wars. Warburg, art historian from Hamburg, Germany, began collecting visual artifacts from Greek antiquity to his present and categorizing them by recurrent themes and motifs. This allowed him to uncover meaningful connections between artworks across epochs and geographies, with his *Atlas Mnemosyne* being published posthumously (cf. Schulz 2009: 45f.). His approach was grounded in semiotics - the understanding of pictures as signs with encoded meanings - which then form cultural motifs and interpretations (cf. *ibid.*: 102).

For Warburg, images are only truly intelligible when embedded in their productive and receptive context, their "Gesamtkultur" (cf. *ibid.*: 47). He emphasized their relation to visibility, medium, and embodiment (cf. *ibid.*: 52). This perspective remains influential for reading visual leadership not just as decoration, but as a mode of cultural memory and symbolic transfer. Panofsky's three-step method extended beyond the simple decoding of symbols by including historical discourse and cultural embeddedness. As Marion G. Müller writes, "[...] the best iconological studies resemble detective stories" (Müller 2018: 29, own translation; see also Müller/Geise 2015: 57). These codes become tools of staged authority, projecting constancy, seriousness, and symbolic presence: as seen in the evolution of the *Herrscherbild* from baroque oil portraiture to press photography. Bringing this into the contemporary: while Viktor Orbán is not depicted on horseback or cast in bronze, his digital appearances often repeat these legitimizing patterns. In today's mediatized sphere, such images are no longer static but re-circulated, ritualized, and integrated into symbolic political communication, thus echoing long-standing traditions of visually staging power, now adapted for state websites and the rhythms of online visibility.

3.4 Multimodality and Myth: Narrating Leadership to the Modern Public

With the role of visual political leadership communication outlined above, the analysis of Viktor Orbán's curated persona is guided, *grosso modo*, by two theoretical frameworks: Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's (2006) and Gunther Kress' (2010) work on multimodal communication, as well as Roland Barthes' (2009; 1977) contributions to myth-making and press photography.

In their seminal monograph *Reading Images* (2006), Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen develop a grammar of visual design - not in the rigid sense of language, but as a system that allows depicted elements to construct meaning (cf. Kress/van Leeuwen 2006: 1). The creation of meaning is not dictated by predefined grammar; rather, it depends on the communicator's intent: they "[...] thus 'have' a meaning, the signified, which they wish to express [...]" (ibid.: 9). The communicator's decisions on visual, spatial, textual, architectural, or personal elements are motivated, based on what they wish to show or claim (cf. ibid.: 10). This allows for narrative construction, a "story" that, in our case, reflects how the Cabinet of the Prime Minister's Office (CPMO) wants Viktor Orbán to be perceived. Strategic use of props, angles, and compositional cues help achieve the "preferred reading" (cf. ibid.: 44). In this process, Orbán becomes the "Carrier" of values or meanings to be visually transmitted. To stabilize interpretation and resolve polysemy, "Attributes" are introduced (cf. ibid.: 49).

In his later work *Multimodality* (2010), Gunther Kress outlines a more expansive framework. He argues that visibility has overtaken textual dominance, creating a "[...] new communicational world [...]" in which meaning is always tied to cultural knowledge and traditional representations (Kress 2010: 6ff.). Multimodality constitutes a "[...] division of labor [...]" (ibid.: 11) among communicative modes: text, image, sound, architecture among others, each operating as a mode of meaning (cf. ibid.: 81).

As a plastic example, one could think of a ballet at the opera. The message would be the piece itself, the story of the Nutcracker laid out in written form as a libretto. The orchestra with strings and trombones, the stage designers crafting props and costumes weeks ahead of the performance, as well as the dancers on tip-toes are in fact distinct modes (linguistic, acoustic, gestural, spatial, material, coloral and, considering the purchase of a physical ticket or the program pamphlet, tactile modes). These work hand in hand to convey the message - the story - of the piece (cf. ibid.: 159). The division into modes provide helpful for the systemically rigorous analysis of images, however this original version views modes each as distinct, closed

forms of representations primarily meant to analyze the instantaneous, dynamic “[...] bodilyness of those who make and remake signs in constant semiotic (inter-)action” (Kress 2010: 13). In this thesis, modes will not be treated as sealed-off systems but as analytical categories used to trace continuities, ruptures, and mythic stabilization in the representation of Orbán’s leadership.

The analysis of these curated visual series draws heavily on Roland Barthes’ theory of myth. His 1957 *Mythologies* offers an accessible and compelling entry into myth as a mode of communication. Using French wrestling as an example, Barthes identifies clear roles - the Harlequin, the Pantaloon, the Doctor — whose gestures and performances are familiar, ritualized, and iconographic: the Pantaloon is “[...] nothing but a ridiculous cuckold, Harlequin an astute servant and the Doctor as a stupid pedant [...]” (Barthes 2009: 6). The spectacle is not about real combat; it is about audience expectations being fulfilled: they “[...] only [enjoy] the perfection of an iconography” (ibid.: 8f.). Barthes defines myth as “[...] a system of communication, a message”, something that can be conveyed through any medium (cf. ibid.: 133). Myth builds on the triad of signifier, signified, and sign, but in less direct ways than language; it becomes a “metalanguage”: not language itself, but speech about it (cf. ibid.: 137f.).

A central illustration is Barthes’ reading of a French military campaign poster, which shows a soldier of color saluting the French tricolor (cf. ibid.: 139). While the literal reading may simply recognize a man in uniform, the mythic reading conveys French imperial benevolence. The poster naturalizes a highly political structure into something unspoken and unproblematic. As Barthes writes: it is “[...] tied to the totality of the world: to the general history of France, to its colonial adventures, to its present difficulties” (ibid.: 142). Myth is thus embodied, learned, and naturalized through culture until it “[...] transforms history into nature” (ibid.: 154). The constructed appears eternal. This concept is especially useful when applied to visual politics, where compositions, gestures, and props appear ordinary, but are deeply ideological.

A firsthand example is a memory that came to mind in the process of writing this manuscript: in middle school, around the age of thirteen, our music teacher explained to us the intricacies of Sergei Prokofiev’s *Peter and the Wolf*. We learnt how violines, which “sound happy”, introduce the young and agile Peter, or how “dull and slow” sounds of a bassoon announce his overprotective grandfather. While we students took the explanations as boring, even annoying narrations about the facts of the world, there is no factual way in which instruments can “sound” like emotion or justify in themselves the appearance of one character

over the other. What happened then was the presentation of a myth in music history, picked up and made use of in Prokofiev's piece.

This ties back to Barthes' understanding of myth as "depoliticized speech" — a structure that "gives an historical intention a natural justification, and makes contingency appear eternal" (Barthes 2009: 168). Through repetition and familiarity, myth becomes what "goes without saying" (*ibid.*: 170, *italics original*). The processes and traditions used to create meaning are socially learned and embodied. Over time, these traditions solidify into what appears as natural, self-evident fact - even though they are contingent and historically produced. With this cultural set of encoded, meaning-laden requisites, both through objects and composition, myth becomes engraved in the collective consciousness of a society and, as Barthes writes, "transforms history into nature" (Barthes 2009: 154). Neither can the bassoon in *Peter and the Wolf* be 'dull' or 'lethargic' as such, nor the strings and brass of *Il Presidente* 'joyful' or 'confused'. The mythic meaning goes back to the tradition of strategic note-positioning in musical theory and their break with melodic harmony. However, this was not made explicit in class - the instruments '*were* emotional'. The theory of myth as proposed by Barthes, and extended through multimodal analysis, offers the core lens through which this thesis examines the curated persona of Viktor Orbán. His image on the Prime Minister's website is not simply expressive; it is constructed, iterated, and mythologized: a speech about leadership that seeks to transform a political figure into an apparently natural embodiment of authority, constancy, and national coherence.

The next chapter will apply this understanding of myth to the visual curation of Orbán's leadership persona: how specific image types, angles, props, and verbal anchors stabilize mythic roles across time and modality.

4. Methodology

This thesis follows a qualitative, interpretive research design aimed at understanding the mythic construction of political leadership across textual and visual modes. Recognizing that power is not only enacted but symbolically stabilized, the project draws from methodological frameworks appropriate to multimodal symbolic analysis: reflexive thematic reading (Braun/Clarke 2006), interpretive content analysis (Mayring 2000), and semiotic close reading (Barthes 2009; Kress 2010). Each material set, political speeches, website articles, and

press images, was treated through a distinct but interconnected lens, reflecting the research interest in narrative regularities, anchoring strategies, and symbolic condensation.

4.1 Reflexive Thematic Analysis of the State of the Nation Addresses 2016-2024

The State of the Nation speeches (2016–2024) were analyzed using an interpretively adapted form of qualitative content analysis. While the speeches from 2022 to 2024 are available on the current Prime Minister’s website, the speeches from 2016 to 2021 stem from the officially archived version of the websites, which is indicated on miniszterelnok.hu. A table collecting the addresses, and their source link will be made available in the appendix. While Mayring’s (2000) model emphasizes systematic coding and later abstraction, my approach began with holistic familiarization: I read all speeches in full before any formal coding, allowing recurrent themes, tonal patterns, and rhetorical logics to emerge intuitively. Passages were then selectively coded and grouped according to these interpretively recognized themes. This method aligns closely with Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke’s (2006) model of reflexive thematic analysis, which emphasizes the researcher’s role in constructing, rather than discovering themes. The key strength of this method, especially when dealing with less linear meaning, is that it is a constant reconfiguration of coding and verbalizing themes to the point of reaching the most possible analytical saturation (Braun/Clarke 2006: 91f.). As they argue, “[t]hemes do not passively emerge from either data or coding; they are not ‘in’ the data, waiting to be identified and retrieved by the researcher. Themes are creative and interpretive stories about the data, produced at the intersection of the researcher’s theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skill, and the data themselves” (Braun/Clarke 2019: 594). Coding was therefore recursive, non-linear, and sensitive to symbolic density, rather than line-by-line exhaustiveness. The resulting “Big Four” narrative fields: Protection, Sovereignty, Success, and Vigor; structure the later chapters of this thesis and emerged through repeated comparison and thematic stabilization across the speech corpus. While naturally other themes were covered as well, like ‘Expertise by Seniority’ or cues at charm by referring to the audience by ‘dear friends’, their content and frequency do not justify dedicated synthesis into meaningful narrations. Rather, those insights were either integrated into the distilled Big Four or reflected on generally at the end of this project. This process reflects a methodological familiarity with structured analysis (as per Mayring), while adapting it to the demands of myth analysis, in which condensation and connotation outweigh exhaustive classification.

4.2 Analyzing Textual Trends on *miniszterelnok.hu*

To analyze the symbolic stabilization of Orbán's leadership across the everyday textual layer of his website, I collected a corpus of over 700 articles published on the official Hungarian Prime Minister's website. This included all content published up to December 13, 2023. The material was extracted via automated script and compiled into a structured dataset including title, date, associated image, summary, and article tags. Articles were read and annotated with intuitive content codes (e.g., "prot" for protective framing, "chal" for EU critique, "coop" for international partnership), reflecting the political scripts most frequently mobilized. These tags did not serve as rigid analytical categories but helped track symbolic tendencies across the corpus. Only articles which used imagery of Viktor Orbán were considered for closer examination – occasional text-image campaign material without Orbán depicted or articles authored by Ániko Lévai were only considered for a broader contextualization. While Lévai is married to the Hungarian Prime Minister and a relatively familiar face in the Hungarian context, this cannot be said outside of Hungary. Hence, her role is only verbally described, but images not printed in-text here. The resulting 700+ articles are those reports that are directly tied to Viktor Orbán: textually and visually.

Instead of generating a fixed typology, I synthesized this material into five anchoring narratives, which capture the discursive regularities most used to frame Orbán's leadership. These narratives were not mechanically extracted, but developed through iterative synthesis, pattern recognition, and interpretive triangulation, grounded in close reading and thematic convergence. While not every article mapped neatly onto a single narrative script, the corpus reveals how anchorage, in Barthes' (1977) sense, functions to guide readers toward a preferred understanding of Orbán's political persona. These anchoring frames lend verbal stability to the visual representation of leadership and extend the symbolic labor of the speeches into everyday government communication.

4.3 The Prime Minister's Visuality on *miniszterelnok.hu*

The third material dimension of the thesis focuses on the visual construction of Orbán's leadership Myth. A total of 1486 images were retrieved from the website. To aid data familiarization, these were initially sorted into emotional-functional categories - *Charisma*, *Charm*, *Wife*, and *Unsure*, based on the image's affective tone and representational logic. The photographic core corpus used for closer analysis consists of over 700 images from the Prime

Minister's website. Images and their articles connected to the work and role of Ániko Lévai were scanned for general impression¹, however the analytical focus, in line with this project's interest and scope and feasibility considerations, favored depictions of and articles on Viktor Orbán, which is why other entries were excluded from closer analysis. The *Charisma* folder, with a total of over 570 unique files², encompassed the largest number of images and included sovereign, formal, or symbolic portrayals of Orbán. *Charm*, totaling at 15 images, included more emotionally expressive moments, often involving smiling, implied gestures of touch, or visible spontaneity. *Wife* grouped depictions of Anikó Lévai in performative roles associated with charity, hospitality, or other social performances³. *Unsure* served as a provisional category for symbolic, indirect, or ambiguous images (7 images).

From here, the corpus was reorganized into more granular structural-functional folders that reflect recurring visual settings and symbolic functions, a method familiar to other forms of visual analysis, most commonly in Visual Typology Analysis and other iconographically grounded approaches (cf. Müller/Geise 2015: 211ff.; also, Müller 2018). These include: *Movement* (often Orbán exiting a vehicle in performative fashion), *Memorial* (funerals, tributes), *Meetings and Handshakes*, *Professional Everyday* (governing routines), *General Speeches* (flag backdrops, podiums), *Public Engagements* (fairs, rural tours), *Fidesz Logo* (campaign and party visuals), *Media and Interviews* (studio and press formats), *Orbán Past* (archival or black-and-white imagery), and *Flood* (disaster response). This two-layered classification helped expose visual motifs and ritualized codes of legitimation across divergent contexts. Duplicate images, typically those used for layout thumbnails or social media previews, were moved into a separate folder and excluded from analysis due to their non-representational function.

From the full visual dataset, 180 images were selected for more detailed consideration, based on symbolic clarity, thematic density, and illustrative strength. Observations and preliminary analysis were noted in a dedicated table. Out of these, 61 images were chosen for close reading, guided by the principle of interpretive saturation. Each major motif was represented multiple times to allow for comparative depth while ensuring analytical parsimony.

¹ Those images depict Lévai, Lévai and/or charity colleagues or impressions of her events where she is not depicted.

² Over 120 additional duplicates were sorted into a separately.

³ While this folder contained close to 750 images and their articles, they were not largely used for close analysis. Viktor Orbán is not present and often the motifs are connected to charity, but do not depict Lévai. Hence, they were outsourced and scanned for a crucial nuance in the results chapter.

The selection followed a purposive, theory-informed sampling logic (cf. Kruse 2015)⁴ privileging images with high degrees of mythological condensation, that is, scenes where symbolic, emotional, and narrative charge accumulate visibly and meaningfully.

Close readings were conducted using a semiotic-mythic framework, grounded in Barthes' (2009) analysis of visual ideology and Kress's (2010) account of the social semiotics of multimodal communication. The analysis focused on posture, gesture, framing, spatial setting, gaze, facial expression, and accompanying article content - all elements through which political meaning is encoded. Given the convergence of visual and textual storytelling in political legitimation, a multimodal approach was required. As Kress (2010) notes, "[t]he (social-semiotic) multimodal view adds an insistence that meaning is made in a multiplicity of modes, always in ensembles of modes" (Kress 2010: 182); thus, leadership is not just spoken or shown but assembled across semiotic platforms. Images were examined not for isolated symbolism but for their capacity to stabilize mythic personas through composition, repetition, and rhetorical performance. These personas; including a crisis commander, sovereignty father, diplomatic strongman, and others, did not emerge through statistical representation but through iconographic clustering.

The exemplary image analyses follow a holistic image–anchorage–myth flow, drawing methodologically from traces of Erwin Panofsky's three-step iconological analysis. However, in contrast to Panofsky's final step, which traditionally seeks out deeper historical continuities in artistic conventions, this framework prioritizes the iconographic and textual anchoring of Orbánian Myth.

Each analysis begins with a neutral description of the depicted scene, offering the reader a general visual orientation. This is followed by a summary of the accompanying website article, which functions as the primary anchorage, the textual frame that stabilizes or guides interpretation. Thirdly, the visual explicitness of textual motifs is assessed: what elements of the article are made visible? Which fragments are elevated to iconographic status, and how?

The penultimate step is a multimodal compositional analysis, focusing on how spatial arrangement, framing, gesture, or color collectively support the underlying ideological narrative of the article. Finally, the image is evaluated in terms of persona proliferation: how its visual messaging contributes to the stabilization and symbolic consolidation of the respective mythic

⁴ especially chapter VII on reconstructive analysis of interview data.

role, as constructed across both the *State of the Nation* speeches and the broader website narrative. The reduced sample is methodologically appropriate not due to numeric representativity, but because of symbolic richness and mythic saturation; not all occurrences are of equal semiotic value. As Barthes reminds us, myth operates not through raw repetition but through traditionalization up to the point where it *goes without saying* (cf. Barthes 2009: 170). In this sense, the 61 selected images function are analyzed as concentrated examples of the projected leadership myth - dense in meaning, structured in form, and resonant in anchoring context.

While the combination of methodological approaches proves effective for understanding historically embedded and symbolically stabilized leadership myths, certain limitations must be acknowledged. This thesis does not investigate the reception or social credibility of Orbán's leadership narratives. Such questions would require access to audience engagement metrics (which the website does not provide), in-country ethnographic research (which lies beyond the linguistic and logistical scope of a Master's thesis), or a broader platform-spanning quantitative analysis. The latter, while potentially illuminating, would shift focus away from the central interest of this project: the curated, state-controlled narration of leadership, as it appears relatively unimpressed by the participatory or algorithmic demands of social media platforms.

Throughout this project, the guiding assumption is that political representation, particularly in hybrid regimes, is not merely descriptive but performative. It is through the controlled interplay of image, language, and ritual repetition that authority is visually sustained and symbolically naturalized. The following chapter presents the results of this methodological framework: a synthesis of speech, article, and image into recurring figures of leadership myth.

5. Results: Toward an Orbánian Leadership Myth

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the thesis, synthesizing the analysis of speeches, articles, and visual representations into recurring symbolic configurations of Viktor Orbán's leadership. Drawing on the methodological framework established in the previous chapter, the findings are organized around six visual personas that stabilize Orbán's image across time and mode. These personas are not isolated themes but performative clusters of symbolic meaning — visual tropes anchored in political speech and stabilized by recurring narrative scripts in article discourse. They represent condensed leadership myths that recur

across divergent settings and formats, naturalizing Orbán's authority through repetition, modulation, and multimodal interplay.

Each persona is presented as a discursive-visual formation supported by both iconic patterns and anchoring verbal scripts. While the material covers a wide range of settings — from rural engagements to international diplomacy — the symbolic labor of legitimation occurs through a relatively limited set of mythic structures. These are: The Protector, The Ideological Sovereign, The Fatherly Figure, The Strategic Cooperator, The People's Leader, and The Historical Hero.

The structure for each chapter will be as follows: In the first step, the synthesized narratives covered in the analyzed State of the Nation addresses between 2016 and 2024 will be laid bare in an attempt to verbalize which is supposed to go without saying, the main cornerstones of Orbánian longitudinal myth-strategy. The analysis revealed clear dominance of four thematic tropes, referred to as the Big Four: Protection, Successes, Sovereignty and Vigor. After tracing annually published verbal traces of myth, one exemplary image will be discussed in detail, thus beginning to trace multimodal mythic contingency and proliferation. As a third step, the anchorage of the images, essentially the articles published on the official website of the Prime Minister, will be narratively outlined similarly to the State of the Nation addresses in the first step. The final phase of myth synthesis will be the close reading of a symbolically dense example from the respective anchorage line. With the selection of images printed in this thesis, a core aim was the presentation of myth firstly in a more institutionalized, 'sanitary' visualization, followed by a naturalized 'myth in action' image in the second close-read example.

The visual material has been altered by the author to comply with data protection regulations, specifically the EU's General Data Protection Regulation: identifiable persons who are not part of the public eye have been blurred and all images were decided to print in black-and-white. Unless made explicit that an image is originally monochrome, the author made this alteration consciously.

As this project is limited in scope and financial means, some of the following statements, particularly those drawn from Orbán's speeches and official discourse, may appear unfiltered, strategically biased, or lacking empirical substantiation. However, the aim here is not to evaluate their factual truth, but to examine their symbolic function within the mythic construction of leadership. This thesis approaches communication not as a field of rational

debate, but as a space of strategic impression-making, in which meanings are condensed, repeated, and visually embedded. In the Barthesian sense, myth is not about lies, but about the transformation of history into nature - it allows statements, impressions, and ideological frames to “go without saying” (Barthes 2009: 170). Myth does not require verification; it operates through depoliticized speech, which elevates cultural and political claims into the register of the self-evident. This chapter, therefore, does not fact-check political rhetoric but reads it as an act of symbolic naturalization, a performative effort to make Orbán’s leadership appear not constructed, but simply true. Given the rather innovative approach in political science this thesis takes, I deem it appropriate to guide the reading process by clarifying terminology applied in this chapter.

Each of the following subchapters forms a Persona that contribute traits, iconography and frames to the overall Orbánian Myth identified in the thesis. As the project takes on an interpretivist approach, it must be expected that it does not provide the entirety of the Orbánian Leadership Myth, but rather the fragments thereof based on the sources consulted. A Persona then is the result of the synthesis of the State of the Nation Address, the textual frame provided by the website’s articles and the visual analysis of the website’s photographs. Finally, direct quotes used from the sources are coded according to my final dataset. The code for speech quotations consists of a capitalized thematic marker (P=Protection), a small marker for the year (a=2016) and a three-digit number indicating the continuous number of enumeration within the thematic quote collection, e.g. within the collection of “Protection” quotes. The website articles are coded equally to the images: The images retrieved were named according to the Headlines they were intended for. To make them more tangible, a code was applied consisting of the publication year of the article, the month of publication, and the four-digit continuous number in the overall sample (e.g. 23030895 indicates an image with its article published in March 2023, with the number 0895 in my data set). Only once the process was completed, images were further investigated. This makes it possible to identify all images studied in the complete supplement material provided online. A selection of the data documentation of any data directly quoted or printed in this thesis will be made available in the appendix.

5.1 The Protector: Leadership as a Shield

5.1.1 State of the Nation Addresses: Protection

“Brussels must not overstep the boundaries of its own conceptions. It must not turn against the European people. The European Union must not be a kind of Soviet Union reloaded.” (2016, Pa059)

“Not only did this diktat end the First World War, it also ended the era of Hungarian history leading up to it. [...] History has not recorded a nation that could survive such a loss of blood.” (2020, Pe178)

The *Protector* is the most tonally urgent and immediately legible of Orbán’s leadership personas. Rooted in the speech theme of Protection, this figure channels a rhetoric of threat, crisis, and existential vigilance. Orbán’s discursive construction of protection rests not only on physical security - such as border defense or disaster response - but on a broader claim to symbolic guardianship. In this cluster of the State of the Nation Addresses, Viktor Orbán invokes notions of Hungary as nation under constant siege. Around the country, existential threats and ideological contamination are lurking to get hold of the pure, sober nation, yet Hungary, as personified in Viktor Orbán himself, heroically withstands these threats and preserves its cultural, political and spiritual integrity, as Hungarians “[...] have escaped from the grip of the surrounding circle of enemies.” (SCe049) . Orbán situates Hungary within a historical continuum of struggle in different shapes: from the trauma of the Treaty of Trianon after the First World War, the suppression of communism to the new dangers posed by ‘globalist’ networks, supranational institutions, and mass migration.

He cultivates a perception that the country is constantly under siege, be it by external entities like the EU, liberal NGOs or ‘foreign-funded’ activists aiming to tempt Hungary and its society into moral corruption, or internally by political opposition actors that are portrayed as being disloyal or subversive. This protectionist frame is deeply embedded in a metaphysical logic: Hungary has something precious - its culture, children, the Christian roots, its sovereignty - that others are actively trying to erase or undermine. These ‘others’ are defined by Orbán himself; when he claims that he is not talking about organizations promoting “an important cause”, he himself defines importance in this regard. Those aligning with his ideological goals, like the Fidesz-affiliated think-tank and cadre-manufacture Mathias Corvinus Collegium (MCC), do not pose a threat to Hungarian integrity, however those critical of the current

government, which are reliant on foreign donors for their livelihoods, are painted as internal parasites. Orbán leverages historical injustices such as Trianon and Soviet occupation to evoke a sense of collective trauma, portraying Hungarians as survivors in a long war for national existence. He channels this legacy into warnings about modern forms of domination: EU bureaucrats in Brussels, transnational capitalists, and cultural imperialists using migration policy and identity politics to transform Hungary from within. Particular attention is paid to the figure of Hungary-born philanthropist George Soros, who functions in these speeches as a kind of symbolic enemy: a transnational puppet master trying to override national will and open borders to masses of migrants. Orbán portrays Soros not only in congruence with antisemitic tropes, such as a financier of national misery, but as an architect of a new type of human, the “Homo Sorosensus” (2018, Pc133) with the core aim to replace traditional, sovereign national bodies with global reach.

In parallel, the protection narrative also serves as a cultural firewall. The speeches articulate an intense effort to defend national identity and traditional values, particularly in relation to gender, family, and education. Liberal ideologies are cast as corrosive, foreign-born dogmas aiming to erode the innocence of Hungarians and national social cohesion, which Orbán is ready to fight against as a bastion of sanity and stability in Europe. To Viktor Orbán, protection does not only happen on the borders, but it is a permanent struggle for Hungarian selfhood that is being threatened from all directions: politically, culturally, and biologically. In this Big Four theme, he views Hungary as a passive, innocent victim that the rest of the world wants to deny ‘its identity’. But let’s not forget: the speeches put forth Orbán’s own version of Hungary and its position in the world. The bleak outlook is not based on studies or public opinion polls that were cited, it underlines a natural reason, a god-given truth of Viktor Orbán as the Prime Minister of Hungary he is the only one perceiving the international and national adversities and the only one with the cure for the perceived ills awaiting the country.

5.1.2 Image Reading I: The Prime Minister at a Military Base



Image 1 Code: 23030895, Viktor Orbán at Base Visit, blur added by author, source: miniszterelnok.hu

The image depicts an outdoor scene at a military base involving the Prime Minister, two soldiers in uniform, and three other men, who given their formal attire are likely to be part of Orbán's delegation. While most of the participants are not named on the website, the man in the front following the Prime Minister with his gaze is: the minister of Defense, Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky. The gaze dynamic is interesting and forms an unfinished triangle, with Szalay-Bobrovniczky facing the Prime Minister, who on his part is looking directly at the speaking soldier, who on his part leaves the triangle open by looking off to the horizon. The other three people, one of them covered by the Prime Ministerial body, do not seem to be direct participants in this conversation.

The headline of the belonging article reads “Hungary stands for peace, but we must keep our powder dry” (MTI 2023: 23030895) followed by a brief statement on the military visit in which Prime Minister Viktor Orbán intending to “[...] inform himself about the defense capabilities of the Hungarian Defense Forces [...]” (ibid.). The Defense Minister was to inform the Prime Minister about the progress of military development programs, current cadet trainings and ordered capability enhancement earlier that year. The article further tells us that before the image was taken, the Prime minister gave a speech before military leaders, pointing out that “[...] in the present era of threats, the government’s most important goal was to defend Hungary, [this] could not slow down even despite the European economic crisis caused by the sanctions” (ibid.). This article reinforces Orbán’s narrative of constant danger and omnipresent threats to national integrity, especially pronounced by EU mismanagement and poor decision-making. This textual anchorage reinforces Orbán’s Persona as Protector, positioning him as a leader who remains vigilant in the face of persistent external dangers. The headline itself already participates in the construction of this persona: *Hungary desires peace*, but the *threat of conflict* remains real enough to demand readiness. The metaphor of “keeping our powder dry” evokes restraint under pressure - a leader who does not escalate, but prepares. The Prime Minister appears not only well-informed, but deeply embedded in the operational culture of national defense. Here, protection is not reactive but proactive, part of a long-term governance strategy in an era of instability.

The image relies heavily on the visual cues provided by the opposition of military uniform versus ironed designer suits. This clash is reinforced by the rather coarse architecture of the military base in rural Hungary in the background. In the gestural mode, Viktor Orbán takes on an investigative role: calmly and with one hand in his pocket, he critically listens to the soldier’s assessments, with a supportive look of approval from the minister of Defense. The soldier himself, who could take on a dominant, active role in this visual narration, becomes subordinate to the Prime Minister, as he avoids the direct look into the Prime Ministerial eyes while visually uttering a point. Orbán’s confident hand-in-pocket posture forms another powerful opposition with the nervous, eye-contact-avoiding soldier, who is presented as anxiously awaiting Prime Ministerial approval of what he is saying. Materially, the scene is shaped first and foremost by the unglamorous, ‘unfiltered’ exterior of the base. It provides the impression of the Prime Minister outside of his ‘Budapest castle’, keen on approving the inner workings of his administration: a committed, invested leader. While they seem to leave the premises, the group standing past the entry post and the man hidden behind Orbán carrying a bag, danger is insinuated by the red signal activated on the traffic light peeking up behind

Szalay-Bobrovniczky. The image, thus, proliferates and advances the anchorage: Hungary plagued by threat and danger with a committed leader ready to leave the comfort of Kossuth Tér to investigate defence potential first-hand, making sure the nation is prepared for the case of all cases.

This image subtly visualizes the Protector persona not through overt crisis or symbolic heroism, but through composure in proximity to latent risk and its anticipated mitigation. In the State of the Nation speeches, Orbán consistently frames Hungary as surrounded by diffuse external dangers, often posed by partners in supranational diplomacy - from cultural erosion to political manipulation. This visual iteration of the Protector myth mirrors that framing: the Prime Minister appears physically present in a zone of preparedness, outside symbolic seats of power, yet at ease in an environment marked by discipline, vigilance, and the quiet expectation of threat. The red traffic light behind his delegation, the unglamorous base setting, and the power imbalance between speaker and listener all hint at a world where danger is ambient, and where leadership is defined not by action alone, but by presence in places where things could go wrong. In this sense, the image does not dramatize defense, but normalizes it - turning Orbán's proximity to institutional readiness into a visual extension of the myth that only he can see what others deny, and only he can protect what others would lose.

5.1.3 Website Narrative: The Protector of a Nation

The advantages the official website provides compared to annual speeches are evident: temporal spontaneity, differentiation of topics and events covered, and seamless integration of real-time developments into the mythified personas. The Protector persona outlined in the speeches and investigated in the first image is consolidated and adapted by the images' anchorage, the articles on the website. While it is not feasible to exactly pinpoint each article to a self-evident narrative line of anchorage, the synthesized narration of the verbal website fits most directly into the anchorage line of "Protector of the Nation", spanning issues of migration and identity politics, over cultural heritage and *Himnusz* to the positioning of Hungary as an island of peace midst a war mongering EU. To unpack the narrative further, symbolically dense examples were assembled to synthesize a traceable storyline.

Viktor Orbán still posits migration as an existential question for the survival of Europe, which is why utmost importance must be paid to the protection of borders, specifically external borders. This places Hungary in the front line of national and European defense, which is

continuously echoed. The negative consequences of mass migration are implied to hit Hungary hard since the 2015 migration management crisis as is upheld as a shield of expertise by seniority. It is claimed that, in light with the Russo-Ukrainian war continuing, this pressure will not only remain, but intensify, “[...] it is slowly becoming unbearable even for countries in the West” (COPM 2023; 23020862), the Prime Minister states. The emphasis “even for countries in the West” plays on the often evoked notion that ‘the West’ was unaware of potential conflict arising with people from various socio-cultural backgrounds arriving jointly in a new environment. On the other side of the same coin, he implies that he has always anticipated these consequences, underlining his mastery of geopolitics and the image of a far-sighted, well-prepared leader.

Further, the EU is depicted as one of the actual driving forces in the Russian war against Ukraine. Often with the aid of foreign agents, first and foremost George Soros and his alleged network, the EU fuels the war by providing financial and military aid to Ukraine, which for the prime minister means a direct participation in a war against Russia, followed by the destruction of the own economy and acting against the true will of the own people. He reassures the readers of his moral purity and confirms he will not let Hungary fall into the ‘Western’ trap of “war psychosis” : “I have no doubt that if we didn’t have a nationally oriented, right-wing government in office in Hungary today, we would be in this conflict that is increasingly escalating between the countries of Western Europe and Russia [...]” (COPM 2024: 24031243). Thus he further naturalizes his peaceful leadership role, by implying that national opposition parties would “be in this conflict”, he is the only actor in political Hungary that guarantees peace.

Another point echoed in the anchorage is the lurking threat of new imperial powers to take away Hungarian sovereignty. During a speech held in occasion of the 200th anniversary of the Hungarian national anthem, the *Himnusz*, the Prime Minister warns of the EU, specifically the European Commission in Brussels, resembling in action imperialist projects of subversion spanning from the Ottoman Empire to the Soviet occupiers during the Cold War. The underlying narrative is that of uniquely Hungarian greatness - the ‘Hungarian bravura’ he refers to in his speeches - threatened to be taken from the country and replaced by imposed ideological interests that counter-act and oppose those of a free Hungary, a Hungary under Orbán. But instead of submitting to Soviet or Brussels’ imperialist attempts targeting Hungary, “We have always resisted them, we have always outsmarted them, and we have always found

our own paths in life. [...] If there is any virtue that deserves the reward of survival, it is that of remaining true to ourselves” (COPM 2023: 23010172; also COPM 2024: 24101419).

This last example from the “Protector of the Nation” anchorage is located in the realms of values; specifically the protection from ‘Western’ moral corruption. In early 2023, a crime involving child protection came to light at a Budapest school. Without going into details on what happened or who the perpetrator was, the Prime Minister acknowledged the need for rigorous investigation of the incident and his dedication to protect the children in Hungarian schools, a personal duty he is endowed with qua his own fatherhood. Yet, the perpetrator was alleged to have a clear, ideologically driven motive: “This is what gender ideology does, [...] that boys dressed as girls and girls dressed boys go into our schools to sensitize our children. This is [...] a threat against which we must protect our children” (COPM 2023: 23020870). Without evidence public in this regard⁵, Viktor Orbán represents an omnipotent leader with undisclosed specialty knowledge, aware of the causes and motivations of the perpetrator, with accurate, pointed diagnoses and cures. Further, the embedded meeting with the Interior Minister, the Protection Persona shows Orbán as a present, dedicated leader taking immediate and relentless action for his subordinates.

The anchoring discourse that accompanies images of Orbán in security-related or disaster-response contexts consistently mobilizes a vocabulary of threat, vigilance, and national survival. Across the sampled articles, Orbán is framed as the central defensive actor in a world marked by crisis: illegal migration, war at the borders, ideological subversion, and natural disasters are described not merely as political challenges, but as symbolic tests of national endurance. This anchoring frame verbally stabilizes the Protector Persona by suggesting that governance is a function of constant safeguarding - a permanent state of emergency in which leadership is defined by preparedness and resistance. In doing so, these articles elevate Orbán not just as a national official, but as a mythic sentinel, singularly responsible for collective preservation. He does not need statistics or codified scientific proof, he is speaking truth that has no basis for debate or argument, his persona is a self-evident reality, not intrinsically looked for, not easily describable in words, but common sense and goes without saying.

⁵ Neither English nor Hungarian unaffiliated sources could be retrieved for this project that confirm gender playing a role in the perpetrator’s motive.

5.1.4 Image Reading II: At a Flood Defense Site



Image 2 Code: 24091365, Viktor Orbán visiting swollen Danube, blur added by author, source: miniszterelnok.hu

This second example of visual mythic reinforcement marks a *novum* in the Prime Minister's official visual communication: Viktor Orbán in immediate, unfiltered proximity to physical danger. Following the flooding of the Danube across Europe in October 2024, the Prime Minister visited affected areas to inspect local defense operations - measures he had previously ordered as part of a national emergency response. In the image, Orbán is not flanked by his usual diplomatic entourage from Budapest, but instead appears as a solitary figure of responsibility, directly engaging with local disaster management actors. He is captured listening attentively to the explanations of regional authorities and aid workers: an embodied performance of concern, readiness, and attentiveness.

The composition reinforces the sense of proximity and tension: police and firefighters stand within meters of the swollen river, where floodwaters press against sandbags and protective foil: literal markers of emergency infrastructure. Unlike institutional portraits or choreographed press photos, this image embeds the Prime Minister in an active site of vulnerability. Leadership is not performed through command, but through calm closeness to potential catastrophe. This proximity to danger is not theatrical or exaggerated. Orbán's group is positioned on the right-hand margin of the frame, allowing the flooded landscape and makeshift defenses to visually dominate via the classical Rule of Thirds. The omnipresence of danger is not merely suggested, it is proven by the photograph itself: the scene absorbs the political figure rather than centering him. Trees and bridge piers are submerged, and all present, including the Prime Minister, stand nearly equally close to the water's edge. Yet, Orbán remains calm, focused, and composed, visually embodying preparedness.

A particularly striking detail emerges in the gaze of a woman standing beside the speaker: she is not participating in the conversation but maintains a fixed look on Orbán, reinforcing his symbolic centrality even when not verbally active. Another subtle but significant element is Orbán's attire: rubber boots instead of polished leather; a gesture that marks a departure from elite formality and signals a pragmatic, hands-on presence in the elements. The accompanying article - a brief summary of a Facebook post by Orbán - recalls a similar 2013 flood response, praising the vigor of local communities and announcing a long-term infrastructural investment:

"[...] we've agreed [...] that we'll build a mobile barrier here in the next year or two. This won't arouse the enthusiasm of the people of Baja, but it will provide greater security" (MTI 2024: 24101434).

This image and article together illustrate myth in motion. The central theme remains the same: ever-present danger, the need for constant preparation, and the lone figure of leadership equipped to face it. However, unlike the first image, with its formal suits, blurred casern, and institutional setting, this second example dispenses with political theater. It offers a fragment of 'living truth', raw and immediate. Rubber boots replace expensive shoes; the scene emphasizes intimacy, urgency, and visceral presence. In doing so, it visually extends Orbán's Persona of the Protector: not only of the nation's values, but of its very physical survival in moments when the state must act.

5.2 The Strategic Cooperator: Leadership as Realist Strategy

5.2.1 State of the Nation Addresses: Successes

“We were black sheep, but now we are a success story.” (2017, SCb019)

“Let’s not be bashful: let’s say loud and clear that over the past one hundred years our forebears made great sacrifices, and that over the past ten years we, too, have worked hard.” (2020, SCe065)

The Strategic Cooperator is best represented in the Big Four cluster of “Successes”, not in terms of economic statistics alone, but as a marker of strategic foresight, national interest, and geopolitical independence. Unlike the “Sovereign”, who performs autonomy through separation, or the “Protector”, who reassures through presence, the Strategic Cooperator performs Hungary’s international viability: Orbán as a statesman who balances diplomacy and autonomy, leveraging relationships without compromising sovereignty. Success, for Orbán, is both validation from the past and a future promise. It operates as a legitimizing discourse, where the transformation of Hungary under his Fidesz leadership is cast not only as imperative, but as unexpected, even miraculous. The core of this success story lies in economic and institutional rebuilding: turning around a country haunted by debt, unemployment, and dependence caused primarily by past governmental mismanagement, into one of growth, confidence and strategic autonomy.

Orbán builds this story through metrics: GDP growth figures, job creation, foreign investment, public confidence, as well as through symbolic victories such as “[sending] the IMF packing” (cf. SCb012) or building border fences. These acts function both as policy outcomes and as myth-making gestures. The state is portrayed as an efficient, active agent capable of mobilizing the economy, society and defense mechanisms all at once. Unlike ‘Western’ systems, where governance is sluggish and technocratic, the Hungarian Model (cf. Sb022) is depicted as bold, responsive, and morally sound. Moreover, economic success is portrayed as endogenous - it is not the result of outside aid or loans, market trends of EU generosity, but of distinctly Hungarian choices like lowering taxes, rejecting austerity measures, supporting families and revitalizing industry. Work is valorized as a moral good, with welfare dependency framed as corrosive. Here, economic growth also becomes a moral metric - an expression of national discipline, pride, and willpower.

Apart from claimed economic success, social success is no less important. The emphasis lays on increase marriage rates, rising birth rates, and public safety. Hungary is framed as a country where even marginalized groups are being pulled into dignity and participation. These achievements are woven into a narrative of upward national momentum; emerging from historical trauma with self-esteem and a sense of purpose. Finally, success includes defense, especially the defense of borders against migration. These policies are not only functional victories but symbols of sovereignty, control, and courage in a chaotic world. By succeeding where others failed, Hungary becomes both an outlier and a model, “the black sheep” turned “success story”.

5.2.2 Image Reading I: The Prime Minister and Alexandar Vučić in Negotiation



Image 3 Code: 23040935, Viktor Orbán negotiating with Serbia's Alexandar Vučić, source: miniszterelnok.hu

The image captures a familiar motif in diplomatic photography: two delegations seated opposite one another at a long negotiation table. At the center, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán sit directly across from each other, visibly engaged in animated discussion. Additional figures identified in the anchoring article include Defence Minister Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky, the CEO of a Hungarian defense firm, and State Secretary for National Information József Kovács. Others, including a woman using her phone, remain unnamed. The table is richly adorned with drinks, floral arrangements, culinary items, and visible documents. Flags and decorative artwork fill the blurred background.

The article focuses on deepening bilateral defense cooperation between Hungary and Serbia, as well as broader discussions on European security, the war in Ukraine, and prospects for Western Balkan integration (MTI 2023: 23040935). A joint visit to a Serbian airbase is briefly noted. While the visual setup aligns with conventional security diplomacy, the image's symbolic architecture reveals a more layered operation: a performance of sovereign authority across national and supranational registers. Compositionally, only Orbán and Vučić are in sharp focus, the rest of the delegation is subtly blurred. This establishes both leaders as the primary anchors of national identity, visually central and symbolically charged. Yet gesturally, the dominance leans unmistakably toward Orbán: he leans forward, speaking forcefully with hand gestures, eyes trained on his negotiation partner. Vučić, in contrast, maintains a soft expression, listening with his mouth closed, gaze fixed on Orbán's speech. Others in the room, excluding the distracted few, also look toward Orbán, reinforcing his gravitational centrality.

This interpersonal dynamic supports the *Strategic Persona*: even when abroad, Orbán occupies the authoritative center. The Hungarian guest becomes the discursive driver, while Vučić, despite being the host, appears deferential, absorbing Orbán's ideas. The visual hierarchy thus reverses diplomatic protocol: Hungary leads, Serbia listens. Yet the Strategic Cooperator Persona extends beyond interpersonal dominance. In the background, the Hungarian, Serbian, and EU flags signal a supranational frame. Notably, however, no EU officials are present or mentioned in the anchoring article. Instead, Orbán assumes the visual and rhetorical position of interpreter, mediator, and informal broker; performing a diplomacy that transcends his national role. The EU becomes symbolically present but institutionally silent, while Orbán fills the vacuum: not as formal envoy, but as a regional power player shaping the conversation from within.

The richly arranged table - with untouched food, drinks, and the visual rituals of diplomacy - serves a subtle function. It is ignored by all, especially during Orbán's animated speech. This reinforces the idea that substance outweighs form, and that true authority lies not in setting or script, but in strategic performance. Orbán's rhetorical command becomes the actual centerpiece, displacing the ceremonial tableau. Ultimately, this image enriches the Orbánian Myth of with strategic diplomacy: he is the one who reads the room, controls the tempo, and speaks across levels: national, regional, and supranational. He does not oppose institutions like the EU outright, but inhabits them tactically, shaping their direction through symbolic and performative dominance. It is not a sovereignty of retreat, but of choreography: Orbán as architect, not occupant, of European space.

5.2.3 Website Narrative: Strategic Diplomat and Global Actor

On the website, Viktor Orbán reinforces his success-yielding international cooperation by his positioning as a Strategic Diplomat and Global Actor. International encounters primarily serve one uniting goal: to strategically place Hungary in the position of a desired diplomatic and economic partner, serving Hungarian national interest as defined by the Prime Minister. The illustrative examples selected for the synthesis of his line of website anchorage range from the often-evoked notion of Hungary as a bridge between Eastern and Western diplomacy, strengthening the geopolitical position of the EU by Western Balkan advocacy, and the situating of Orbánian Hungary as the last bastion of European conservatism.

In the speeches, but more pronounced in the website articles, Orbán continuously places Hungary as a bridge between East and West - a narrative frequently employed in the branding of the country after the Cold War. At the Summit of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA), Viktor Orbán reinforced this notion. Addressing directly the Azerbaijani president Ilham Aliyev, he emphasized that his Hungarian Strategy of international diplomacy was not forged by ideological bloc thinking, but by what was the best solution for a changed world with mass migration, pandemics, the Russian war against Ukraine and ensuing financial hardship. He advocates for connectivity between the EU and Central Asia instead of Brussels' alleged 'decoupling' - the ideologically driven isolation from non-Western cooperation. By naming these grave, self-damaging insufficiencies of the European Union, he underlines that his claims are not only based on a general disdain towards Brussels, but by a naturalized, innate incompatibility of the Hungarian Strategy for international cooperation and that his path of independence is the only way his true Hungary can be its true self: "We have all sorts of disputes with the EU [...], but our national economic strategy is based on making Hungary a meeting point for the most advanced companies and economies in the East and the West" (COPM 2023: 23111158). This notion is further perpetuated by his regular engagement in economical multilateral summits of the Organization of Turkic States, which he describes as "[...] a pillar of crucial importance in maintaining cooperation between East and West [...]" (MTI 2024: 24071349).

A plastic example of the bridge function with national self-interest is the advocacy for a swift further integration of the Western Balkan states in EU structures. For instance,

a close bilateral cooperation with Serbia is deemed crucial, especially in regards to affordable energy security, mitigating the self-harming effects of EU sanctions against Russia, and border security in terms of illegal immigration. The sovereignty here is exemplified by the EU's inability to secure itself, especially Hungary, which heightens the inevitable need for an own path, own solutions - taking matters in one's own hands. Hence, bilateral agreements sought by the Prime Minister - he is taking matters into his own hands and addressing responsibilities the EU is structurally unable to fulfill. This is not framed as a critique of occasional mismanagement or flawed policy choices, but as a fundamental, enduring incapacity. The European Union, in this narrative, is not misguided; it is inherently incapable. There is no room for debate, only reaffirmation. The myth does not argue - it declares.

A press statement released after a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Orbán and the Serbian President of the National Assembly exemplifies this elegantly: "Mr Orbán reassured the Serbian house president that at every EU forum Hungary would remain a committed advocate of the Western Balkans' EU integration, while in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war, they both urged an immediate ceasefire and peace talks" (MTI 2023: 23030894). While Hungarian interests lie at the heart of his bilateral endeavors, he is also positioned as the sovereign handyman for the whole European conservatism. Not only as a spokesperson for the EU in bilateral meetings, but also at international summits like the annual Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) taking place in the U.S.A., Orbán solidifies his position as a globally relevant bulwark for sovereignty and nationalism. In the speech held in 2024 in front of international conservative leaders like Donald Trump, Nigel Farage or Santiago Abascal, the naturalization of the Prime Minister's global impact on national sovereignty crystalizes: "[...] let us not brood on the fashions and tortures of Brussels [...] Let the era of the sovereigntists come at last! [...] Make America Great Again! Make Europe Great Again! Go Donald Trump! Go European Sovereigntists" (COPM 2024: 24041252).

Through this discursive strand, the figure of Orbán emerges not merely as a diplomat but as a geopolitical mythmaker - constructing Hungary as the axis where sovereignty, conservative common sense, and anti-globalist realism intersect.

5.2.3 Image Reading II: The Prime Minister and Volodymyr Zelensky



Image 4 Code: 23020872, Viktor Orbán and Volodymyr Zelensky, source: miniszterelnok.hu

The second image illustrating the visual construction of the *Strategic Cooperator* Persona is taken after a multilateral meeting between a Ukrainian delegation, led by President Volodymyr Zelensky, and a select group of EU heads of state. At the center of the image stands a handshake between Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and President Zelensky - a diplomatic ritual rendered here in striking asymmetry. In the blurred background, military personnel and officials appear to be in motion, possibly exiting the room. An accredited photographer is visible, capturing the same moment from the opposite angle. The room itself is neutral and unbranded, a blank institutional space that allows the handshake to carry the full symbolic load.

The anchoring article summarizes Orbán's post on social media, in which he reaffirms Hungary's support for financial and humanitarian aid, while rejecting military support "[...] in the interest of avoiding the shedding of any more human lives" (MTI 2023: 23020872). The framing reiterates Hungary's unique positioning between East and West: Orbán as peace-seeking negotiator, carving space for Hungary's interests without fully aligning with the geopolitical mainstream. The article notes that the meeting took place "at the venue of the EU summit": not formally an EU event, but a gathering of ideological allies, framing Hungary as part of an unofficial bloc within the Union.

While the article remains vague on concrete outcomes, the composition of the image speaks more forcefully. Orbán and Zelensky are the only fully focused figures, while all others fade into soft blur - anonymous and secondary. The handshake, normally a token of diplomatic formality, becomes a gesture of asymmetrical performance. Orbán meets Zelensky's hand directly, upright and squared, his eyebrows raised in a stone-faced expression of finality. Zelensky, in contrast, bows his head slightly, avoids eye contact, and appears to accept the terms silently; not in resistance, but in reluctant agreement. Even their attire feeds into the visual hierarchy: Orbán in a formal suit, Zelensky in his signature wartime sweater. This moment narrates Orbán as the final word: a negotiator who meets international actors not on their terms, but on his own. He does not bend to performative alignment with dominant narratives about the war in Ukraine; instead, he inserts Hungary into the scene as a moral outlier, guided by national interest and principal. In this representation, Orbán is not confrontational, he is calculated, resolute, strategically distant, yet central.

A particularly revealing detail lies not in the image itself, but in which version of it is shown to whom. This frame - featuring Orbán's dominance and Zelensky's lowered gaze - appears only on the Hungarian-language version of the website. The English-language page features the same article, with no major translation shifts, but selects a more balanced image: both leaders face forward, eye contact is shared, and postures are more symmetrical. This single variation offers a rare glimpse into the platform's editorial selectivity: the same event is framed differently for different publics. Rather than undermining the myth, this variation confirms the flexibility of the Strategic Cooperator Persona. Orbán is not locked into a single posture, but adapts, calibrates, and performs diplomacy not just in meetings, but in the mediated afterlife of those meetings. Myth here is not fixed; it is edited, exported, and audience-aware.

5.3 The Ideological Sovereign: Leader of the New European Right

5.3.1 State of the Nation Addresses: Sovereignty

“We shall not surrender our right to decide who we want to live with, and who we do not want to live with.” (2016, Sa011)

“The Hungarian viewpoint is an exception only in Europe – across the world it is the norm.” (2023, Sg103)

This Persona produces Orbán’s leadership as an inevitable national historical command and the perfect role model for European Conservatism, which aligns directly with the Sovereignty cluster identified in the Big Four of the State of the Nation addresses analyzed. The sovereignty narrative in Orbán’s rhetoric is deeply interwoven with themes of self-realization, civilizational divergence, and national destiny. It begins by positioning Hungary as victor of self-governance after centuries of external control: first Imperial under the Ottomans and the Habsburg Crown, then Communist under the banner of Hammer and Sickle. However, the lurking oppression by Imperial forces is still preying on Hungary today, subtly but equally dangerous. Globalization, liberal ideologies and EU federalism are the new forms of Imperial subversion threatening to erode national sovereignty, which therefore needs to be continuously defended and portrayed. This asserts that national sovereignty is not a relic of the past but the only viable framework for flourishing within the dynamics of the modern world. Orbán constructs a dichotomy between two Europes: one rooted in historical consciousness and moral realism, which is Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), especially the Visegrad-Group and the Western Balkans. The other is seduced by globalist utopia and self-loathing, with questionable morale of open societies and the free movement of people and liberal ideas - the rest of the EU, specifically where no right-wing political agent is ruling the government. Hungary is not only different from; but more grounded, more responsible, more loyal to its people than Western elites who he claims see themselves as citizens of the world, abandoning the needs and interests of their people and countries.

A key mechanism here is the refusal to participate in what Orbán portrays as meaningless international moral crusades - against Russia, nationalism, or tradition. For Hungary, foreign policy is not about parading trending values, but about realist, calculated self-interest. The sovereignty frame thus justifies Hungary’s refusal to follow EU sanctions, its active participation in the war against Ukraine, and its ongoing relations with illiberal partners.

Another dimension is protest: Sovereignty is expressed through resistance - to EU mandates, to supranational regulations, to ideological conformity. Through referenda like National Consultations, constitutional reform, and symbolic gestures, like verbally expelling the IMF, Orbán builds a language of defiance as an expression of freedom. The West is portrayed as locked in decay, unable to recognize its own failures, while Hungary, anchored in tradition and clear-sightedness, is leading a counter-revolution. Sovereignty also becomes pedagogical and emotional. Hungarian youth are raised with a patriotic stamp, taught ethics and national pride. The cultivation of Hungarian sovereignty is not limited to legal-political frameworks - it is a national ethos, carried in schools, collective rituals, and everyday speech. Being sovereign means knowing who you are, where you stand, and what you are not willing to compromise. Orbán further regionalizes this vision by championing CEE as a rising bloc, morally sound, historically resilient, increasingly self-aware. Sovereignty is not the self-isolation from diplomacy; it is collaborative among those who have earned it through historical suffering.

5.3.2 Image Reading I: The *Terminator* Exit



Image 5 Code: 23071003, Viktor Orbán leaving Limousine, source: miniszterelnok.hu

If then, being sovereign means to know who one is, where one stands, and what amount of leverage one is ready to bring to the table, the first example captures this exceptionally well. The image depicts the Prime Minister leaving a black limousine, the door held open by an anonymous hand. The brief anchoring article refers to an upcoming NATO meeting in Vilnius that Viktor Orbán will attend.

Together with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó and the already mentioned Defense Minister Szalay-Bobrovniczky, the Prime Minister is reported to set off for Vilnius, Lithuania, to attend the multilateral meeting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). However, this again is countered by a bilateral meeting with talks between Hungary and Lithuania. While the article does not further specify the agenda or contents of Orbán's mission to Vilnius, the headline reads as a departure "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has left for NATO Summit" (MTI 2023: 23040935), while the image evokes an arrival - with Viktor Orbán facing the car with his back and the door being held as if to pull not push.

The Prime Minister leaves the car with a stern, determined, coarse facial expression, the eyes facing forward. His readiness for fight and action are indicated by his readjustment of his suit, a motif very consistent for multilateral meetings across the website. His face is not directly lit, feeding the scene with additional seriousness. The sky is filled with grey clouds peeking through between tall trees and a blue light signal is placed on top of the black limousine, both signs of a clearly framed arena and pressing urgency of the occasion. Overall, Viktor Orbán is depicted in his recurrent Terminator stance, anticipating fierce struggle, getting ready to defend and stand in for Hungarian interest in multilateral negotiation. Orbán's posture reminiscent of Arnold Schwarzenegger's famous movie character, and the scene composition visually reflect what the speeches narrate: a leader who arrives not for consensus, but for confrontation. Not for diplomacy as compromise, but as resistance. The readjustment of the suit is ritualistic - the symbolic armor of a man preparing to hold his ideological line. Even the lighting contributes to this reading: no spotlight, no smile, no softness - just focus.

This performance of the *Ideological Sovereign* Persona rests not in verbal exchange, but in pre-emptive stance. It shows a leader not seeking multilateral agreement but preparing to endure and resist it. The reference to an additional bilateral meeting with Lithuania subtly reinforces the idea that sovereignty is not isolation, but selective engagement, diplomacy on one's own terms. If the Vilnius NATO summit represents the arena of collective pressure, the bilateral meeting suggests a parallel channel: one where Orbán can articulate Hungary's vision without supranational interference. In this sense, the image performs the Sovereign Persona by anticipation: Orbán is not yet at the table, but he's already resolved. The ideological battle, the myth suggests, is not fought in dialogue but in physical and moral stance.

5.3.3 Website Narrative: Voice of a New European Right

The website produces the Prime Minister as the vanguard of a European conservative awakening, the sole role model of leadership fighting Brussels dictates, the only cure against the threatening virus of liberal metastation in the national flesh. He is the Voice of the New European Right, an ideological blueprint for regimes, actors and the future of the entire supranational body of the European Union. In this line of anchorage, Viktor Orbán personifies common sense pragmatism to challenges like war in Ukraine, national minority rights, international alliances to strengthen the conservative moral, and his alleged unique moral compass revolving around the nation, the family and Christianity. His unique insight into the inner workings of world politics and his moral uncompromisability makes him a wanted guest internationally, he is invited to speak *for* the wider conservative movement abroad - as a mentor, not their peer. In these occasions, he shares his wisdom with an Italian audience, presenting an indisputable reality that he is the natural tutor on and the invitee the sole match in Orbán's lonely strive for a conservative world order.

In an interview given for a French weekly, Orbán outlines why a swift Ukrainian accession to the EU would be a rushed decision, as both parties are equally ill prepared to adequately handle the consequences posed by EU war acceleration and poor Ukrainian decision making. The interviewer, who asks rather favorable questions, then asks the Prime Minister about a word on the Hungarian minority residing by the Hungaro-Ukrainian border. He replies:

"Human rights and minority rights cannot be a matter for negotiation. [...] Ukrainians must respect them – not [...] because they're necessary simply to maintain relations with Europe. [...] As your president put it so well a few years ago, human rights, the rule of law and the rights of minorities are basic principles; this is an existential issue" (COPM 2023: 23121179).

These lines are not only the answer to a regular, potentially briefed question in an interview. They exemplify the naturalization of Viktor Orbán being in charge of grand EU processes and the final word on it. The use of terms like "Human" and "minority rights" signal at criticism from external media, which often lament the lack of those in Hungary. By implication, this framing of 'minorities' excludes the groups typically named by Western discourses: LGBT+ communities, ethnic or religious minorities, and migrants. Instead, the sole referent is the Hungarian ethnic minority in Ukraine and through this, Orbán's own nation. The strategic omission of numbers infers a great relevance of the situation in Ukraine to the Hungarian society. In the same interview, then, he is asked about EU criticism toward Hungary

for a lack of the Rule of Law. He begins by outlining how the term itself is not defined or outlined in the official Founding Treatise and that now, the Rule of Law is used as a direct political weapon against those member states that do not blindly follow the Brussels dictates of ideological corruption. Naturally, Fidesz' break with the European People's Party in the European Parliament directly caused this change in intra-European diplomacy. The way back into EU diplomatic normality, then, is the joining of the Italian and Polish chaired European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) party family (cf. *ibid*). Here, the interview itself becomes an element of myth. Viktor Orbán, interviewed by a French conservative weekly, giving verdicts on EU intricacies, shortcomings, and the solution and healing of EU-caused damaged to his party by joining ECR form a coherent, realistic chain of reason that only Orbán has the cognitive capacities to comprehend and pass on, a quality other EU countries envy Hungarians for.

An example of this verbalized mythic fragment is presented during a 2024 rally of Matteo Salvini, at the time Lega's candidate for the Prime Ministerial office, in Italy. Viktor Orbán was an invited speaker on Salvini's behalf attesting an all-time high of patriotic nationalism, of which his presence knights Salvini as its ideal proponent in Italy. Orbán pledges for a deepened alliance between the two countries and the willingness and inevitable necessity to join nationalist forces with other right-wing forces of the EU. As a stronghold of resistance against the EU elite, he reassures the European Right's readiness for a long-term power grab in future elections for the European Parliament and provides the ideological blueprint for the societal proliferation of this spirit:

"If we yield Brussels to the Left, they will overthrow the national governments of the Patriots one by one – as they have done with Poland. This is why we must not withdraw from Brussels, but march upon it. Brussels must be seized! Brussels must be taken from the bureaucrats and given back to the people of Europe"
(COPM 2024: 24101434).

With the speech of national reawakening in an international context, Orbán's wisdom, foresight, and moral purity is legitimized beyond the national Hungarian context: if even a famous leader in Italy invites his wise words of ideological guidance in pursuit of a Conservative change in Europe, it works like an overall seal of approval of competence and further naturalizes into unquestioned reality. Similar messages and insights are sent also in non-EU contexts, for instance at a panel discussion in Washington hosted by The Heritage Foundation, one of the largest conservative think tanks of the United States of America (cf.

MTI 2024: 24031227). This persona reinforces another guiding narration of Orbán's success beyond the Carpathian Basin: Orbán as the only actor in Europe and beyond capable of maintaining and guaranteeing national identity and conservative pragmatism over external attempts to force liberalism, open societies and subversion of nationhood by Brussels. This is expertise and essence envied and desired beyond Hungary and his presence is awarding conservative, nationalist devotion to the country - which Orbán is the core icon in honest action.

5.3.4 Image Reading II: At Matteo Salvini's Rally



Image 6 Code: 24101434, Viktor Orbán at Salvini's Rally, source: miniszterelnok.hu

The second example of the visualization of the Ideological Sovereign myth takes up Salvini's rally in Italy again, to which the Hungarian Prime Minister was invited to speak; a direct occasion of selective international cooperation. The website provides the full text of the speech held at the rally, part rally and part manifesto - a dedication to a Europe of nation states. The Prime Minister's speech is a passionate endorsement of Italian right-wing leader Matteo Salvini and a rallying cry for European nationalists.

He presents Hungary as a successful model of conservative governance, fiercely opposes migration, and calls for reclaiming the European Union from what he sees as leftist and bureaucratic dominance. The speech combines historical references, cultural pride, and a vision of a united patriotic Europe. Not only does Orbán advocate for a Europe of the nations, but a Europe of the people: “[...] Brussels must be taken from the bureaucrats and given back to the people of Europe.” (COPM 2024: 24101434). Orbán shows his support to the Italian right-wing conservative and an act of brotherhood in the closing line of his speech: “Long live Italy! Long live Hungary! Avanti ragazzi di Buda! Avanti ragazzi di Lega!” (ibid.). While not made explicit in the text, ideological alignment of Matteo Salvini is implied by the invitation, but also explicit regarding the visual arrangement of this shot.

In the image, Orbán stands on stage behind a branded pult, off the center on the left. His face is stern and serious, his hands seeking hold on the see-through pult. His off-center position allows for the text on the pult to be read in full: “#iostoconSalvini” (‘#IStandWithSalvini’) and “Difendere i Confini” (Defending the borders). The hashtag makes clear the ideological support to Salvini, Orbán literally stands with Salvini, on his very invitation; while the other, larger text shows a clear alignment in both leaders’ core claim of border protection from migrants. While these texts are written in yellow on the blue backdrop, a white addition to the claim is made: “Non è Reato” (‘Is not a Crime’). This insertion shows vividly the ideological sovereignty both actors have in common. The European Union often criticized Viktor Orbán, his rhetoric around migration and unilateral decisions which eventually led to the infringement of funds. While the infringement followed several breaches of EU laws and norms apart from migration affairs, the text on the pult frames the EU in a way that they consider Italy, and in turn Hungary, as criminally evading EU policy by protecting the borders, hence they insist that ‘Defending the borders *is not* a crime’. Here, the textual mode guides the interpretation of the image: the integrity of Europe and its national boundaries is framed to be at stake, a solution countering EU liberalism must be laid out, the matter is grave and serious. Even though not every viewer may speak Italian, the text underpins Orbán’s global relevance in the aim of national resistance against Brussels, which strengthens his legitimacy even when the person cannot directly make sense of the text. The Italian tricolor separating the hashtag from the core message underlines the Prime Minister speaking for both Hungary and Italy, and eventually the conservative forces of the EU, keeping ideological sovereignty while not shying away from anticipated adversity.

This image encapsulates the essence of the *Ideological Sovereign* persona: Orbán as the transnational defender of national identity, standing in alignment with allies, but never

subsumed by them. His presence at the rally — off-center, yet visually dominant — reinforces the idea that sovereignty is not isolation, but the strategic assertion of ideological conviction across borders. The speech, with its populist call to “give Brussels back to the people,” combined with the branded podium’s unapologetic messaging, merges gesture, language, and staging into a singular mythic performance. The message is clear: defending national borders is not a deviation from Europe - it is a correction of it. Through posture, slogan, and symbolic alliance, Orbán embodies a version of Europe where sovereignty is ideological, not institutional - and where resistance becomes legitimacy.

5.4 The People's Leader: Leadership as Spatial Proximity

5.4.1 State of the Nation Addresses: Vigor

"No government can succeed without the people."
(2023, Pg276)

"The Hungarian people have yet to embark on their real great adventure. And the greatest victories have yet to come."
(2019, Vd048)

The People's Leader Persona materializes the Big Four theme of Vigor, a symbolic logic that does not rely on rhetoric of danger, sovereignty, or achievement, but rather on presence, energy, and immediacy. In this field, Orbán's leadership is defined not by what he defends or decides, but by how he moves among citizens, appearing resilient, enduring, and bodily attuned to the national rhythm. The Big Four line of Vigor is the most emotive and sensitive line in overall Orbanian myth-making. It portrays Hungary not merely as stable or successful, but as heroic, vibrant, and a historical necessity. This cluster emphasizes strength, bravery, and self-confidence.

Orbán frames politics as a constant battle requiring courage, agility, and relentless drive. His speeches often evoke martial metaphors, such as campaigns, boxing matches or a 'Reconquista' (2022, Vf073). Political life is about struggle, and Hungary's success depends on its willingness to fight, whether in Brussels, at the border, or in the domestic arena. Vigor, then, is a national attribute: an energetic identity formed in adversity, sharpened in battle, and expressed through both humility and force. This vitality is not only for survival - it is for greatness. Orbán often speaks of Hungary's destiny and mission using language that looks forward: "[...] we've only started to pick up speed [...]" (2019, Vd036), "[...] the greatest victories have yet to come" (2019, Vd048). Such rhetoric transforms policy into prophecy, suggesting that Hungary's energy will reshape not only its own path but Europe's as well.

Hope, pride, and joy are not luxuries in this vision, they are necessities for collective endurance. Vigor is ultimately about national morale: keeping alive the fire of historical identity while expanding its influence outward. It is the spirit that animates the machine.

5.4.2 Image Reading I: The Prime Minister facing Audience



Image 7 Code: 23010235, Viktor Orbán facing Crowd, blur added by author, source: miniszterelnok.hu

This first example of *People's Leader* myth visualization evokes a sheer mass of public legitimacy surrounding Orbán's leadership - placing him dangerously close to drowning in the supportive crowd. There's no anchoring article attached to the image, but the website positioning, a relay quote, and the authentication by signature are worth closer attention.

The quote accompanying the image reads: “*This is our country, [...] so we will fight for it to the end [...]*” (COPM 2025: 23010235) and captures a recurring pattern in Orbán’s political self-framing: struggle and endurance as prerequisites for legitimate rule. As outlined in previous chapters, and developed further in 5.6 on the *Historical Hero*, Orbán builds his Myth around permanent defense - not only from external actors, but from what the website frames as intentional erosion by institutions like the EU. What makes this relay (cf. Barthes 1977: 41) particularly revealing is the signature directly beneath it. This is not a citation, but a gesture of ownership. It’s not someone quoting Orbán - it is Orbán, signing off on the credo.

Its position is no less significant. This quote-image pair is the first thing users see when clicking on “Career,” essentially laying out the core script: Orbán is here to fight, and he has been from the start. In that sense, it isn’t just an image; it’s a declaration of premise. And as Barthes reminds us, “[...] *myth hides nothing*: its function is to distort, not to make disappear” (Barthes 2009: 145): Myth is not the proposal of one option of reading, it is the presentation of truth – in this sense, a preferred truth.

The visual reinforces this construction. The crowd stretches far beyond the frame, flags blur into one another, and banners rise toward a stage we never fully see. Orbán stands facing the audience, his back turned to us, the viewer. He is not making eye contact, not appealing for connection. He is already connected - addressing the only group that matters in the frame: the nation assembled. His facial features are obscured, but the lighting isolates him from the shadowed first rows of the audience. The effect is not intimate. It’s ritualistic. One thing that stands out across the visual dataset curated for this thesis: the idea of Viktor Orbán as People’s Leader does not rest on physical proximity. There are very few instances of one-on-one interaction with citizens, even fewer with any visual intimacy. Orbán doesn’t play the role of *a* People’s Leader in the classic populist sense - he is *The* People’s Leader. Not through handshakes or smiles, but through mass address, predictable messaging, and a kind of pedagogical reassurance. He does not need to be close - he only needs to appear correct.

This image, placed at the gateway to Orbán’s official career narrative, turns crowd support into proof. The message is not that he seeks validation, but that he already has it. The myth of the *People’s Leader* here is not based in proximity or emotion — but in scale, signature, and the implied permanence of consent.

5.4.3 Website Narrative: *The People's Leader*

On the website, the myth of the Prime Minister as a common-man among all others is presented with strategic restraint, emerging only in rare, highly curated contexts. The few examples are most densely presented visually and are always embedded in a grander event, like the opening of a Hungarian think tank branch abroad or an obvious election campaign stunt. However, on a visit to a local Civic Circle, which is a Fidesz astroturf association with local clubs all over the country, Orbán treats its members as equally crucial to the proliferation of a morally pure Hungary as he is himself. While the website lays a strict strategic focus on those functions, placing them as careful societal embedding of the other mythic personas, content authored by Ániko Lévai, wife of the Prime Minister, seem to proxy the sentimental aspect of social interaction with constituents. This will be further investigated in the last chapter of the mythic personas discussion.

When the MCC, schooling facility, think tank and cadre factory affiliated to Fidesz, opened a new branch by the Hungaro-Romanian, Viktor Orbán was invited to inspect the new Campus. While the website article contains a couple of images, whereas the norm is one image in the header, the only comment on the young adults in those images is:

"[...] Mr Orbán met with the Transylvanian and Hungarian students of MCC who asked the Prime Minister about the specificities of European politics, the possibilities for enforcing Hungarian national interests and the challenges of the politician's calling as well as about his book and film preferences" (MTI 2023: 23071008).

This showcases several issues. Firstly, Orbán is still the undisputed master of world politics and a fruitful balance of national and supranational efforts. The new students who just arrived at the facility are already eager for the master's wisdom and invaluable insight in playing the diplomatic fiddle, which only the Prime Minister can explain. The only glimpse at the person Viktor Orbán is the brief closing line of students having inquired his taste in popular culture, to which the reader does not get a response. Secondly, this message is not meant to be mythical for outside readers, but for those who were actually endowed with his presence. This reinforces Orbán not only as *a* People's Leader, but *his* people's leader - with his wisdom and expertise imprinted on eager students early on in their career. His leadership is thus not limited geographically, but

ethnically, exceeding the national boundaries of Hungary to include Hungarian minorities abroad.

The Prime Minister's visit to a Budapest branch of the Civic Circles was also commented with a short press statement. The occasion, which was also joined by a Budapest district mayor, was attended by over fifty civilians taking from the image. However, instead of Orbán being 'just like them' the visit served the mobilization of his protectionist claims: "“we must build such communities everywhere; our opponents would then never be able to divert Hungary off the course of growth”" (MTI 2023: 23091088). Instead of the Prime Minister as an equal to the people he leads, this myth of the People's Leader rather highlights the social embeddedness of Orbán's leadership. It is less about the Prime Minister being an equal, but his role deeply rooted in public consent to his ideology and motivations, the portrayal of Orbán among his people, but not equal to them, transports the naturalization that has taken place: he is the leader of all Hungarians, young and mature, in a coffee house, salon or a cadre-center. In this reading, it is the strategic spatial proximity that serves the myth, equalization or personal information would run counter to it - the Orbánian version of The People's Leader. In a similar vein, the annual Summer University held in Romania also serves to reiterate the threats and geopolitical tensions the Prime Minister realizes and has crystal clear solutions to - these are presented on stage in front of an innumerable crowd (cf. COPM 2024: 23071032).

The final example revisits the most archetypal image of *The People's Leader*, recognizable from political iconography worldwide. Viktor Orbán is depicted in a conversation with a traditionally, almost stereotypically dressed farmer, who is visibly glad about the visit. What could be the opening of a personal touch shows its mythic function in the first sentence: "Mr Orbán spoke before more than a hundred farmers from the region in a granary [...]" (MTI 2024: 24041263). The point of Orbán travelling to rural Hungary is not to become an equal to the inhabitants, it is the opposite: to become the leader they long to marvel at, who performs to care about their grievances, who is capable of taking on their world of turmoil. Orbán is not expected to 'talk with' them, he is speaking 'before' them, as the intelligent, smug master of the political stage, seeing right through the charades, approaching the dragon's den with one hand by the sword. As a village child himself, Orbán understands the farmers' desires and struggles and he, as always, is the cure to remedy "[...] Brussels' flawed decisions [...]" (ibid.). The Persona

of *The People's Leader* may diverge from the common understanding of the term. Instead of emphasizing leadership through equality, this personas reinforces his unique capability to Protect the Nation and its sovereignty by allowing the direct, unmediated experience of his natural energy of competence, clarity and most of all, omnipotent capability.

5.4.4 Image Reading II: Prime Ministerial Interaction with a Rural Farmer



Image 8 Code: 24041263, Viktor Orbán at Farmers' Event, blur added by author, source: miniszterelnok.hu

The second image read in this persona (24041263) offers a striking visual turn, where the image and its anchoring article do not fully align. While also touched upon above, it deserves closer attention. In this case, it is appropriate to begin with the image itself and then outline the decisive reframing the anchorage introduces. The image shows Prime Minister Orbán in what appears to be an animated exchange, surrounded by attendees. While clearly taken in the context of a larger event, the focus in the foreground is unmistakable: a traditionally dressed farmer, smiling at Orbán with childlike joy, and Orbán in a suit, smiling back. The farmer lifts one hand, mid-gesture, as if about to initiate a handshake. Orbán looks at him with a more reserved friendliness, but his smile is warm. The two men are positioned closely, their interaction drawing all visual weight, yet they do not touch. The moment remains unsealed.

The scene is modest: a workshop or agricultural facility. The farmer stands in partial shadow, while Orbán is visibly better lit, he becomes the radiant figure in a room not designed for radiance. This composition echoes a recurring visual pattern from the website's broader imagery. As outlined in the first example, Orbán's *People's Leader* persona doesn't rely on proximity in the populist sense - he is not often shown engaging with individuals. But here, the image suggests an almost-intimacy. A moment of physical connection is visually implied, but crucially: it never fully happens. The crowd around them: in motion, occupying space, gently interrupts the gesture before it completes. Rather than undermine the myth, this restraint gives it a longer leash. It shows that closeness is possible, but still filtered through the structure of symbolic leadership. This reinforcement is aided by the anchorage: The Prime Minister started a campaign tour across the rural parts of the country, implying a tight schedule and no room for spontaneous acts of friendly banter or bonding. He arrived in the village of Nemesgörzsöny in North-West Hungary with a delegation of economic and municipal representatives to speak "[...] before more than a hundred farmers from the region in a granary [...]" (MTI 2024: 24041263). During the lecture, the article evokes the question of whom else farmers should trust in improving their situation if not "[...] a Prime Minister who is one of them [...]" (ibid.). Further, he blamed EU mismanagement for the collapse of prices for agricultural produce.

This example is a multimodal living proof of the flexibility and mobility of myth: proximity is visually implied, but not intimacy, clothes and speaker-listener dynamics give Orbán a position of dominance, yet he evokes the notion of being 'one of them'. The example illustrates how the *People's Leader* persona operates on symbolic presence rather than physical intimacy. Orbán is not hugging citizens, nor engaging in retail-style friendliness; but he is near enough to suggest it, and far enough to remain elevated. The myth is flexible: he is *of the people* rhetorically, *for the people* in message, but *above the people* in image. The incomplete handshake says as much as a real one would - and paired with the anchoring text, it affirms that closeness is not the method. Explanation *is*. In this performance, the leader doesn't touch the citizen - he narrates their world to them and is thanked for doing so.

5.5 The Fatherly Figure: Leadership as Moral Clarity and Pedagogic Stability

5.5.1 State of the Nation Addresses: Sovereignty-Protection Blend

“Despite all difficulties, with due caution what I can tell you is that the future of Hungarians – including that of schoolchildren and pensioners – is assured.”
(2017, Sb026)

“This takes its toll on everyone: each of us individually, our families, and also our wider common family, the Hungarian nation.”
(2024, Sh113)

The *Fatherly Figure* Persona emerges through a rhetorical style that blends national stewardship with strategic calm. Unlike the Sovereign, who performs authority through declaration, or the Protector, who embodies urgency in moments of threat, this figure blends the two Personas and derives legitimacy from explanation: from the ability to narrate crises, reassure the public, and frame political reality as comprehensible and manageable. This Persona emerges from Orbán’s rhetorical posture as a calm, morally anchored leader offering interpretive guidance in turbulent times. This mythic image draws its force not from spectacle or command but from the strategic combination of national history, cultural inheritance, and pedagogical tone - leading not through domination, but through legibility and “[...] due caution [...]” (2017, Sb026). This leadership performs reassurance, crafting coherence where others see only chaos.

Throughout the speeches, Viktor Orbán repeatedly distances himself from political posturing or ideological flamboyance. Instead, he aligns himself with national continuity and endurance. He does not only narrate past hardships: wars, Trianon, communism, demographic decline, but also uses these stories to clarify the moral lessons Hungary must learn from them. In this framing, he becomes an interpreter of collective history, an elder explaining life to his people, not to berate, but to foster endurance and moral steadfastness with the guiding paradigm to “[...] sustain the Hungarian nation and its continued life in the future” (2019, Vd029). The mythic father explains: Hungarians are not driven by opportunism but by long-term logic; they act slowly but wisely, silently but decisively. History is full of traps and enemies, but Hungary always survived because it knew itself. In this persona, Orbán presents national insight and interpretive sovereignty as the key to survival surrounded by foes, often invoking imagery of

threats that cannot be faced without prior understanding, like the bear metaphor used to warn about forgotten historical traumas in his address in 2020 (cf. Pe199).

Economically and morally, the Fatherly Figure proposes not revolutions, but carefully calibrated action: reform that draws strength from cultural wisdom, long-term resilience, and a commitment to generational duty. Even warnings about demographic crisis and gender ideology are not shouted from the mountaintops but narrated as slow, insidious drifts Hungary must resist with parental vigilance (cf. 2017, Sb029). The core of this persona lies in its moral steadiness. It is as if he is telling his people: others panic, others rage, but I have seen the world, I understand its patterns, and I will show you how to live through them without losing yourself. In this sense, Orbán not only narrates one version of the world, but teaches his followers what it *is*, how it *has to* be dealt with in order to navigate with the innate, natural ‘Hungarian Bravura’ (2020, Ve055).

5.5.2 Image Reading I: Tucker Carlson and The Father's Hand



Image 9 Code: 23081040, Viktor Orbán interviewed by Tucker Carlson, source: miniszterelnok.hu

The first image illustrating the Fatherly Figure Persona emerges from an interview conducted by U.S.-American journalist Tucker Carlson, known for his biased reporting and uncritical interviews with global autocrats. This moment encapsulates a recurrent iconography and the fluid mobility of Orbánian myth, extending beyond Hungary's borders to resonate internationally.

The interview serves as a relay (cf. Barthes 1977: 41), rather than a direct interpretation of the image. It is thematically expansive, touching on geopolitics, war, and ferocious criticism of the European Union. Within this narrative, Prime Minister Orbán is not merely portrayed as a national leader but as a protective patriarch: steady, morally anchored, and speaking on behalf of Hungary's historical legacy, cultural identity, and national interest. On questions concerning the Russian war in Ukraine, NATO strategy, U.S. foreign policy, and liberal ideology, Orbán offers explanations that often diverge from international mainstream discourse. He adopts the tone of an elder explaining the world to a confused family; his nation. His rhetoric combines realist pragmatism, generational memory, and emotional appeal, asserting that Hungary's small size provides a unique vantage point. He warns of a looming world war, questions NATO's strategic coherence, and insists that peace - not ideological crusades - should be the priority.

At the core of his message is a defense of Christian, national, and family-centered values, sharply contrasted with what he perceives as the ego-driven, hegemonic liberalism of the West. The anchoring quote reads:

"Liberal originally meant freedom. But now in Europe, liberal means that you are enemy of the freedom [...] So liberals are against freedom" (COPM 2023: 23081040).

This quote stands as evidence of the morally simplified, explanatory tone with which Orbán narrates global affairs to his audience. Throughout the interview, he offers crisp, deliberate answers on matters ranging from war to inflation to the definition of "everyday" Hungarian values 'on the streets', thus mentoring his people in what it means to be Hungarian, and distributing verbal manifestos of *Hungarianness*.

A codified, textual version of this manifesto is found in the 2011 Fundamental Law dictated by Fidesz⁶, of which the preamble outlines a Christian-valued, patriotic path for all Hungarians to follow. In offering not just explanations but remedies, Orbán positions himself as both the moral high ground and patriarchal figure. This role is further symbolized through a recurring, ritualized gesture—what I term "The Father's Hand". In the image, the Prime Minister and Carlson sit opposite each other at a small wooden table, draped with a water glass and a serving plate. The scene is taken outside giving the background a calming, intimate ambient. The general media interest in the conversation is emphasized by a small area of a

⁶ The Fundamental Law was passed in its original form in 2011 and serves as the country's Constitution. Thanks to their parliamentary super majority, Fidesz could swiftly replace the former Constitution unanimously.

camera peeking through on the right margin. Everything besides the Prime Minister is kept in a blur, with the Prime Ministerial face being again the source of light. While Tucker Carlson is not visible, he serves a pivotal passive role as ‘the one Orbán explains the world to’, an analogy to national and international society. Like a father figure, the Prime Minister looks at Carlson with a determined, serious face, and a straight posture. To strengthen the effect of his explanations, Orbán’s left hand provides stabilization by being laid out flat on the table, while The Father’s Hand is a gestural expression of authority, clarity and infallibility, which is further expressed in his facial expression. It is not especially distanced or cold, it is focused and sincere, making sure the other party follows his every word. The fact that the Prime Minister is the only sharp focus in the image symbolized his overall approach to narrating the world to his followers: As long as Orbán is there to offer guidance and explanation, everything surrounding moves to the background, it may even blur, but the Prime Minister will continuously give guidance and moral security.

In this sense, similar to the occasion with the farmer in 5.4.4, it is not about emotional proximity or Orbán or the creation of personal bonds, it is about Orbán’s indisputable expertise and knowledge, he does not lead because he is their friend, he leads because he *knows* and he *teaches*. The *Fatherly Figure* persona rests not in intimacy, but in epistemic certainty. Orbán’s authority is not grounded in personal warmth or charismatic populism, but in his ability to make sense of the world: for his nation, and increasingly, for an international audience. As in earlier images, the Persona functions through selective clarity: Orbán is in focus; the world blurs. The gesture of The Father’s Hand, steady and directive, completes the frame. It is not emotional reassurance he offers, but moral and strategic stability. He does not persuade; he interprets. And in doing so, he positions himself not only as national leader, but as a kind of mythic instructor, one whose guidance makes a chaotic world appear legible again. An interesting modulation of the *Fatherly Figure* emerges when the persona is translated into a diplomatic setting. This shift will be explored in the second image reading of this chapter.

5.5.3 Website Narrative: The Fatherly Figure

In the anchorage line provided by the articles on the website, Viktor Orbán solidifies his moral superiority, the necessity to reclaim a faithful Europe and fight back the freedom for an own national ideology, a freedom corrupted and eroding on the command of Brussels and its ‘foreign agents’. The Fatherly Figure is less about reaffirming parental watch or comfort, but the reinforcement and maintenance of a moral,

unifying national spirit rooted in tradition and values rooted in a conservative interpretation of Holy Scripture. The pedagogical mentoring and embodiment of tradition and a Hungarian self is practiced by audience-loaded festival engagements, interview settings, diplomatic meetings with international ideological allies or regular visits to the Sistine Chapel.

In the annual Summer University, which resembles a political festival for conservative ideologies aimed at predominantly younger adults, the Prime Minister is seated in between ideological allies - public figures and long-term party functionaries. The core of the event, the Prime Ministerial lecture, typically consists of broad ideas on world historical events and their thorough analysis to finally climax into the questions that relate world history to contemporary Hungary. Typically, an early assessment takes the shape of “[...] the federalists are carrying out an attempt to oust us; they have openly said that they wanted a change of government in Hungary” (COPM 2023: 23071032) and further perpetuates the essential message of an endless siege being fought against Hungary, with the Hungarian Prime Minister as the only actor rhetorically and morally equipped to resist the threat. When laying out the foundational weapons against the federalist grab on Hungarian nationhood, tradition and values are cast as both shield and sword in the fight for Hungary’s ideological sovereignty: The Foundational Law, drafted and adopted by Fidesz in 2011 unanimously, which provides the national creed:

“It affirms our identities as men and women, because that is what we call family. It also affirms our borders, because that is how we can say who we want to live with. When in 2011 we created the new Constitution – a Hungarian, national, Christian constitution, different from other European constitutions – we did not make a bad decision” (cf. ibid).

Hence, traditional values and conservatism left the position of abstract concepts, they are a legally codified form of the Orbanian vision, a reality that does in fact speak. The fight against external interference is fought by the values taught by the Prime Minister, codified by him and reinforced regularly: clear commitment to gender roles, rejection of other family concepts, religion and nationalism juxtaposed to the rest of the EU, who is living the opposite. A direct embodiment of what he preaches are the Prime Minister’s regular visits to the Vatican. While the anchorage remains brief and factual, it is highlighted that bilateral relations are “sound and fruitful” and that “[...] keen appreciation was expressed for the commitment of the Catholic Church to the promotion of the development and wellbeing of Hungarian society [...]”

(MTI 2024: 24121477). Visually, the Prime Minister either stands side by side with the pope himself or seated opposite to him - in upright, obedient position. This hints at the pope being the only moral authority that Orbán deems worthy of paying closer attention to, the only authority that has the grounds of mentoring the mentor.

While most of the Fatherly Figure rests on pedagogy and moral mentorship, there are traces of a visual fatherly role Orbán mythifies among the European Right as well, most pronounced in the visual material. Especially during meetings with Marine Le Pen or Giorgia Meloni, the Prime Minister evokes notions of parental warmth, gestures of soft approval, and a sense of fatherly pride in the way he looks at them. While the anchorage does essentially not differ from the mechanisms outlined above, the visual fatherhood of the Hungarian Prime Minister over European political allies will be the interest of the following visual close reading. The Persona of the Prime Minister as a Fatherly Figure plays out in two forms: in terms of the Hungarian citizenry he addresses, as the first reading of the international interview image attempted to show, his calling is the description of the world's conflicts with pedagogical precision and patience. Diplomatically, however, he embodies the father of a movement - an awakened European conservatism, awakened by his rigorous, unquestionable, continuous expertise of implicit rules of world politics. In this reading, only God stands above the Prime Minister in terms of moral authority, and when he meets the one on Earth closest to God in Rome, he allows himself to be mentored.

5.5.4 Image Reading II: By the Window with Giorgia



Image 10 Code: 24061303, Viktor Orbán and Giorgia Meloni by a Window, source: miniszterelnok.hu

The Fatherly Figure Persona plays out in two forms. While the first example showed how the Fatherly Figure is activated to the national and international public, this second example is testimony of a different fatherly motif: emotional availability and parental elevation. This motif is recurrently employed during diplomatic meetings with ideological allies of right-wing conservatism, most notably with the leader of the French Rassemblement National, Marine Le Pen, and Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni of Fratelli d'Italia.

The brief press release captions the scene: Giorgia Meloni and the Hungarian Prime Minister had talks in Brussels, during which they “[...] evaluated the results of the European Parliament elections, and consulted with respect to political issues related to the European Right [...]” (MTI 2024: 24041263), as well as the agenda of Hungary’s upcoming presidency of the European Council (EUCO). Another meeting with Polish Prime Minister Morawiecki is stated to have happened that day as well to discuss “[...] cooperation among European right-wing forces” (ibid.). This is another example of bi- or multilateral cooperation with EU member states but outside of the EU’s supranational framework, of which the Hungarian Prime Minister is presented as the head negotiator, the father of the ideology in Europe. This sentiment is echoed in the image selected as the second close reading in this chapter.

The image depicts the profile silhouette of Giorgia Meloni literally looking up at Orbán with a bright open smile. In turn, the Prime Minister faces Meloni with a look of fatherly pride: his head is lowered to directly face the physically smaller Meloni without the air of direct power dominance, his face expresses a content and benevolent smile, the window through which they gaze outside suggest a more private setting, a hotel room for instance. Outside on the window pane there is a planting pot with green leafy flora, the blurred background reveals a street corner in the center of Brussels, as indicated by the awning of a restaurant extending. In front of the hotel building, Meloni and Orbán are faced by the EU, the German and the Italian flag. These reflect a number of meanings: firstly, Viktor Orbán is placed as Meloni’s ideological tutor, they discuss vantage points for the European Right and strategies for the upcoming Hungarian EUCO presidency. Metaphorically speaking, Meloni is framed as the student who’s just returned with a top grade, eager to share her success. Orbán, in turn, reacts with composed pride: satisfied not just with the result, but with the success of his prior guidance. The dynamic is affectionate but never equal - his approval signals that the ideological path he laid out is being followed, and may now expand under his watch. Together, under the protective wings of the Hungarian Prime Minister, the European Right strives to stand above the flags, above the EU and nation states the way they are now. Instead of an overarching EU reaching into national affairs, the plan is cross-border ideological cooperation of the European Right, formed and infused by Viktor Orbán, with negotiations already taking place with well-selected, promising students. This way, the emotionalized side of the Fatherly Figure is emphasized: leading national figures of European right-wing parties, promising disciples of the Hungarian Prime Ministers, are faced with physical warmth, tender smiles and ideological guidance and reassurance. While the citizenry experiences the Fatherly Prime Minister as an elevated lecturer, diplomatic allies face the personal touch of a Father, or at least a distant relative whom you do

not meet every day, but each Easter and Christmas bring emotional availability and the certainty of a job well done.

In sum, the Fatherly Figure persona marks one of the more emotionally legible but still carefully managed aspects of Orbán's myth. It is not universally deployed — nor is it uniformly warm. While domestic audiences receive instruction and interpretation from above, ideological allies abroad are occasionally granted the appearance of closeness, pride, and personal investment. But even here, hierarchy remains intact. There is no full equal, no mutual exchange. Whether lecturing the nation or smiling at a political protégé, Orbán performs the same underlying role: *he explains, he evaluates, and he affirms*. The myth is not built on shared intimacy, but on *measured approval*. The Father does not come down to join the family — he leans forward, nods, and signals that the path he laid out is being followed.

5.6 The Historical Hero: Leadership as Origin and Memory

5.6.1 State of the Nation Addresses: Retrospective blend

“Time has flown, and a lot of water has flowed under the bridges of the Danube. And so here we are, greying anti-communists, high and dry.”
(2016, PaNew⁷)

“[...] but to us it is as clear as day that the Cold War was won by the Poles, the Czechs, the Hungarians, the Germans, the Bulgarians, the Romanians, the Estonians, the Latvians and the Lithuanians: it was won by us.”
(2022, Sf096)

Unlike the other personas whose authority is constructed through presence and action, the Heroic Persona emerges through retrospective mythification - one that reaches back to Orbán's early career, his role in Hungary's post-communist transition, and frames his current leadership as the culmination of a lifelong fight for relevance and sovereignty. This persona is not always emphasized directly, but woven through rhetorical appeals to shared historical memory, national trauma, and enduring ideological struggle. Orbán often speaks of nearing physical oppression, external agents like the EU robbing Hungary off its nationhood, positioning himself and his political camp as the survivors and victors of similar challenges in history - it is supposed to evoke notions of Imperial occupation, most directly the Soviet occupation during the Cold War (cf. 2016, Pa059). Hence, Orbán and his camp are not merely managers of the present, but continuous architects of the post-1989 Hungarian nation.

In these moments, the tone becomes testimonial: a personal recollection that blends seamlessly with national narratives. The claim to legitimacy is not one of charisma or explanation, but sacrifice and foundational presence: when referring to inner workings of the EU, like decision-making processes or policy research, he recalls “[...] vivid childhood memories [...]” (2024, Ph330) from Communist Hungary that resemble those dynamics. A more direct link to the myth of the Prime Minister as a result of revolution and disobedience is a 2016 example that encapsulates this narrative. Having spoken about the incapacibilities of the EU and its reach into national affairs, he says:

⁷ This quote was added after the initial data collection, hence no direct enumeration could be used. The letter-based organization remains intact.

"[...] we no longer ponder how we should exit COMECON; instead we are concerned as to how we should protect our national interests within the European Union. Time has flown, and a lot of water has flowed under the bridges of the Danube. And so here we are, greying anti-communists, high and dry" (2016, PaNew).

Thus, history serves as an anchor for Orbán's revolutionary entry into politics some 40 years ago, which is adapted to present-day requirements. This self-mythologization places Orbán in the line of Hungary's national legends - not as a symbol of rupture, but as a continuity figure, someone who fought communism, resisted Soviet domination, and now resists the EU's reach into internal national affairs with the same moral clarity. His fight against Brussels thus becomes an echo of the fight against Moscow, rhetorically framed through allusions to occupation, foreign control, and moral decay. As such, Orbán's opposition to EU integration efforts (particularly around migration, LGBTQ+ rights, and judicial reform) is not posed as new or opportunistic, but as a historic calling; a repetition of resistance with updated adversaries. Even his references to contemporary illiberal democracies or critiques of 'Western hypocrisy' are anchored in a self-image of heroic endurance. He positions Hungary as a moral compass for others, precisely because it has suffered, endured, and learned the lessons of history firsthand.

5.6.2 Image Reading I: The Prime Minister as Archival Icon



Image 11 Code: 22110013, Viktor Orbán at Reburial Speech 1989, original b/w, source: miniszterelnok.hu

The first example provides a paradigmatic framing of Orbán's ascent into high-level national politics. Captured during his now-famous speech in 1989, in which he publicly called for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary, the image distills the revolutionary character of Orbán's leadership in its raw, originary form. As media visibility played a central role in Hungary's post-communist democratization (cf. Róka 2009), this image has become deeply embedded in the collective memory of Orbán's core electorate and functions as a visual shorthand for the origin story of a national living legend.

The image is embedded in the ‘*Career*’ timeline section of the website, which guides viewers through selected milestones in the Prime Minister’s political life. In this narrative arc, Orbán’s iconic moment follows another image - the police arrest - and is framed as an act of redemption: a spontaneous decision by his fledgling party to choose him to speak at the reburial ceremony of heroes from the 1956 revolution. Representing the voice of a new, liberal generation, Orbán’s young Fidesz was granted symbolic recognition at this long-awaited act of national closure.

The headline quote from this entry anchors the moment: “If we do not lose sight of the ideals of 1956, we can elect a government that will directly start negotiations on the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops” (COPM 2025: 22110013). Zsuzsanna Szelényi, then a Fidesz member and now political scientist and opposition politician, recalls the feeling the speech evoked in those present by the stage, she “[...] listened to the speech with incredible pride, tingling with excitement” (Szelényi 2022: 31). The textual anchoring elaborates on this affect: the Bolsheviks had tried to erase Hungary’s history, but the people had resisted, and Orbán was the first to voice this resistance publicly. While the withdrawal of Soviet troops had already begun before the speech (cf. *ibid.*: 31f.), the moment was not about policy precision - it was about rhetorical clarity and symbolic leadership. Orbán’s claim to courage, struggle, and national conviction begins here. This speech becomes the first gesture of the Historical Hero, and its mythic charge reverberates through his political communication to this day. The image in original black-and-white depicts the profile of a young Viktor Orbán with longer hair, an ill-fitted suit jacket and a ferocious, fierce articulation of claims noted on the piece of paper he is holding in his hands. Behind him, a wooden scaffolding is erected, cables and double-layered rows of microphones indicate the strong media interest in this momentous occasion.

Viktor Orbán appears as a man with moral determination and a clear vision for the country, he is not scared away by the dominance of the established political forces and his own party’s subordination during the event. Instead, the reburial of 1956 heroes gives legitimacy to the young party and frames their appeals to civic endurance and resistance during the final stages of ‘goulash communism’ (cf. Szelényi 2022: 30). As Szelényi recalls, they “[...] were fully aware that this day would go down in history” (*ibid.*: 31), and his composed posture and vigorous delivery in the image is reflective of this notion. The open cables, the scaffolding and the clear sky symbolize the underlying meaning of Viktor Orbán in this frame: the country is on the search for new political and social order, the structuring walls of goulash communism have been dismantled, he came to clean up the shambles left by ‘the withdrawal of Russian

troops'. He signals determination, confidence and a transformational fire that is echoed by microphones from behind and in front of him. He is willing to erect trunking around the open cables and fresh walls in the open space to create a new Hungarian oikos - of his ideal.

This image thus does not simply commemorate Orbán's entrance into political life; it constructs him as the founder of symbolic order amid post-communist disarray. In his posture, his improvisation, and the scaffolding around him, the visual scene frames not only a speech, but a genesis. He is not depicted as part of the crowd, nor merely a protester - he is the one who speaks through the tangle of cables, addresses history directly, and offers a clear, moralized direction for the future. The Historical Hero persona begins here not as a myth of nostalgia, but as an origin myth of authorship: of new language, new form, and a new national oikos being built from within the ruins.

5.6.3 Website Narrative: The Historical Hero

The revolutionary basis of the Prime Minister's political legitimacy reveals itself most explicitly in the curated presentation of his career milestones. Rather than offering conventional updates on current affairs or outcomes of diplomatic meetings, this section of the website functions as a longitudinal archive for mythic reinforcement. Through a selective sequence of iconic images and minimal but loaded textual cues, it constructs Orbán not merely as a politician, but as the *origin figure* of post-communist Hungary. While the current news pieces function as anchorage, fixing the intended meaning with explanations of who is depicted where doing what, the Career segment is textually embedded primarily in *relay*: contextual frames to guide the (moral) understanding of what is depicted (cf. Barthes 1977: 41). The focus is less on other figures or exemplifying a post-hoc zeitgeist that led to decisions or actions being depicted but serve as the frame of how the actions were natural for the time, how today's Prime Minister was involved and now naturally holds office for such a long time.

This segment, aimed also at non-Hungarian audiences, offers a distilled narrative of revolutionary vigor: what began as the youthful rejection of Soviet domination has matured into the contemporary resistance against Brussels and supranational encroachment, re-articulated through Orbán's championing of bilateral diplomacy and national sovereignty.

The opening quote of the ‘Career’-page, undated, lays out the foundational mantra⁸. The notion of fighting for ‘our country’ ‘to the end’ implies a continuous struggle against external threats to the nation morally and the country existentially, with the constant air of usurpation lingering over the Carpathian skies. The origin arc of this Persona is narrated by Viktor Orbán’s unshaven, informal meeting with founding members of the party, his personal struggle against the Soviet troops employed in Hungary, a police arrest for his outspoken dissent with the regime, which continues into the present with the oppositional Viktor Orbán taking down protective fencing around Kossuth Tér, and applauding masses after successful re-election.

The founding of the Party in the classrooms of Orbán’s alma mater is presented as ‘a battle for our freedom’ and connected to conquering fear. Orbán is visually set apart from the other party founders, seated in opposition to them and the focal point of all eye pairs present in the image. This battle eventually yields the iconic moment in Hungarian history, in which Orbán demanded the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary by 1989, which he delivers with determined confidence, and revolutionary longer hair. Orbán’s role is clearly articulated: “The Bolsheviks wanted to deprive Hungary of its history”, he stepped in for the greater good of the nation and “[he] is the first to publicly say that Soviet troops must be withdrawn from Hungary” (COPM 2022: 22110013). The occasion is framed as a direct reaction after personal state repression. After the entry featuring the young Viktor Orbán being pressed against a police car by several policemen, the memorable quote reads: “If we believe in our own strength, we can end the communist dictatorship [...]” and calls for the determined unification of social forces to force the regime “[...] to submit to free elections” (COPM 2022: 22110040).

The Persona underlying the political origin of the Prime Minister is rooted in dissent, fighting the superior power, rhetoric of battle and the assumption of one social will as defined by the Prime Minister himself. Quite naturally the curated framing of Viktor Orbán’s political maturing fits in seamlessly with current statements and conflicts the Prime Minister has to struggle with, be it the EU as a whole, its personification in Brussels, Soros-funded paratroopers targeting Hungary and the Prime Minister, or the calls for nationalist pragmatism at Conservative conferences overseas: The Prime

⁸ see image reading I in 5.4.

Minister *is* the struggle for national survival, he *is* the revolutionary force in prevailing oppression by Brussels, he *is* the dissent that historically made Hungary great.

5.6.4 Image Reading II: The Future Prime Minister in Protest



Image 12 Code: 22110037, Viktor Orbán carrying cordon from Kossuth Square in Budapest, blur added by author, source: miniszterelnok.hu

The second image features Orbán at a protest against a cordon around the Budapest parliament house on Kossuth Tér, which the Socialist-led government erected as a protective measure in 2006. What is framed as a martyric act of resistance can also be viewed as the literal beginning of the dismantling of Hungarian democracy. The narrating relay starts with a direct quote: “We Hungarians have nowhere left to retreat! Our opponents have bared their teeth. They are aggressive, ruthless and driven by a brutal lust for power [...]” (COPM 2025: 22110037).

The quote is not specifically attributed to anyone, but as the header of the ‘Career’ page is authenticated by the Prime Minister’s signature, it is positioned as an actual utterance by Viktor Orbán. It performs much of the Personas discussed in 5.1-5.5: he grants agency to the people, calls for resistance, names the threat and characterizes it. Thus, he supports the notion of the Prime Minister as an ever knowing and prepared leading figure. The image, in which Viktor Orbán among political and intellectual allies carries away a piece of fencing, symbolizes the central appeal of the text: while the post-communist ancestors of ‘goulash communism’ brutally try, “[...] Hungarian freedom cannot be hobbled by lies and the trampling of rights” (ibid.). What started with a publicly distributed speech in early Summer of 1989 lasted over the first legislative period in government by the end of the 20th century and now prevails in opposition. But not only that, the message could be taken and printed in today’s Hungarian newspapers: the ‘aggressive’ opponents to Hungary, their ‘brutal lust for power’ threatening the ‘hobbling of Hungarian freedom’ are the main rhetorical drivers in Orbán’s mobilization communication to this day. The overall strategy of naming and shaming was shaped and formed with the reburial of the heroes of 1956, trimmed and shaved to perfection today targeting NGOs, national opposition and the European Union.

The image requires context for viewers unfamiliar with this decisive year for Hungarian politics: Shortly before the scene took place, then Prime Minister of the socialist camp Ferenc Gyurcsány became the face of the moral corruption of politics after a speech was leaked, he gave at an internal party event in Balatonőszöd, the infamous Őszöd-Speech. In the speech, he indicated that information concerning the ruinous state of the Hungarian economy was not publicized, instead: “[...] We lied, morning, noon, and night” (Szelényi 2022: 8). This ‘Speech of Lies’ put Gyurcsány’s personal reputation in shambles to this day and caused public anger and a “[...] golden opportunity for Fidesz in opposition” (ibid.) that took the people and Orbán to the streets - with protestors throwing stones and calling for Gyurcsány’s immediate resignation. As Zsuzsanna Szelényi recalls: “Never in my life had there been comparable street violence in Hungary” (Szelényi 2022: 9). The cordon fencing around the parliament building, officially stated to be erected for security measures during a city festival, were then taken down under the implied guard of the demonstrators, Viktor Orbán “[...] to allow demonstrators to get closer to the building” (ibid.).

In the image, then, we see the action unfolding: Viktor Orbán, together with a political ally and intellectual supporter, carrying away a part of the cordon fence, a mutual, socially embedded act of resistance. While a cameraman captures the three democracy activists for the media in

the left margin, he is not accredited with any attention. Instead, Orbán holds the fence with his bare hands, marching straight ahead with confidence. determined look in his face, with other anonymous people in the background. Szelényi (ibid.) mentions the organizational mistakes that allowed extremists to participate, which is also present in the image by the waving Árpád flag on the right margin in the upper third. Without the scope of going in depth, the Árpád flag, with red and white stripes only, refers to the idea of a resurrection of the borders of Greater Hungary before the First World War - a clear far-right extremist, often Nazist connotation. Orbán embodies the textual ideal outlined above: together with 'the people', he takes matters in his own bare hands, a unified act of resistance against the regime, fueled and credited by the general will of the national good; his gaze forward, anticipating a golden future under his command. While the intention of the Cabinet Office is thus outlined, Szelényi offers a compelling counter narrative: While "Fidesz viewed this deed as civil disobedience", she viewed it as "[...] the leaders of a major party represented in Parliament, [enabling] demonstrators to attack the Parliament building, a democratic institution" (Szelényi 2022: 9).

This second moment of the *Historical Hero* Persona reveals the durability of Orbán's foundational myth: it is not frozen in time, but continually activated, repurposed, and made mobile across political epochs. What began as a dissident voice beneath scaffolding now reappears in street action against a democratically elected, but symbolically illegitimate, government. In both cases, the image offers more than protest; it offers a narrative of moral renewal. Orbán does not simply oppose he clears, dismantles, liberates. From Soviet troops to socialist fencing to EU supranational cooperation: the target shifts, but the myth remains: Hungarian freedom, once spoken into being, must be physically defended; by the same hands that built its origin.

5.7 Ániko Lévai and her Role of Proxied Proximity

While not politically active or widely known outside of Hungary, the Prime Minister's wife plays a distinct symbolic role in the curation of Viktor Orbán's multimodal political myth. She does not appear in political rallies, party-affiliated events, or official state speeches, but instead occupies a parallel visual narrative: charity work, local school visits, cultural awards, and mild ceremonial engagements. These are covered not only through curated photographic documentation, but also through Hungarian-language texts she authors herself, posted to the Prime Minister's website. Despite being unavailable in English, these contributions follow a consistent pattern: they report on emotionally resonant, apolitical events and foreground her engaged yet non-political persona — warm, maternal, composed. While she never comments on party politics, international affairs, or legislation, her presence across these select contexts contributes to a broader state aesthetic of stability, humility, and continuity. This performance of proxied charm and symbolic femininity has a long precedent in political systems where executive figures, especially male leaders, sustain a formal distance from emotional or affective performance. As Robert P. Watson outlines in his study of American First Ladies, such figures have historically acted as the “Nation's Social Hostess” and affective extensions of the presidency, crafting a soft counterpart to political authority (Watson 2014: 108f.). Often appearing at ceremonial functions, hosting events, or championing non-threatening social causes, these women become a morally encoded projection of national care. Even when not involved in policy-making or party affairs, they represent a form of symbolic labor: humanizing power, representing tradition, and smoothing the edges of executive leadership (ibid.: 117).

In the Hungarian case, Orbán's wife is neither overexposed nor publicly influential, but her occasional visibility is choreographed with care. In the self-authored articles she is depicted hosting children's sports events, visiting families in need or packing care packages - all in relation to the charity organization she promotes. It is here where we see charm, the approximation of the people on equal grounds, not as Hungary's First Lady, but as Ániko - one 'just like us'. Those charity-related visuals carry very prominent logos of the organization in the photos. The text then highlights the need for a tightly knit community and the personal calling Lévai views her involvement in. Instead of grand concepts of world affairs, Lévai writes about feelings, notions, societal topics, which feel more closely related to everyday Hungarians. Sonnevend's notion of charm on *miniszterelnok.hu* thus seems to be almost exclusively expressed by the content by and of Ániko Lévai, who kneels on the floor in a family's living room among several children or chants at the running chaos of pupils, motivating the youngsters

to give it their best at the marathon. This visual-discursive presence supports a broader dimension of Orbánian Myth: the normalization of state affect through structured familiarity. The Prime Minister's public persona, as analyzed across the six previous figures, does not accommodate warmth, emotional relatability, or small-scale human connection. That role is instead distributed, selectively and symbolically, through his spouse. Her rare but curated appearances offer a domestic resonance to Orbán's broader myth: while he governs, she reassures; while he explains, she embodies care. She does not lead the people, nor stand among them, but she listens, affirms, and appears at the symbolic margins of Hungarian political life.

In sum, the Prime Minister's wife cannot be considered a mythic persona in the same right as those performed by Orbán himself. However, she functions as an adjacent stabilizer within the visual architecture of state legitimacy. Her limited visibility reinforces the idea that Hungary, as imagined through Orbán's leadership, is not only defended and sovereign: it is also stable, cared for, and emotionally anchored through the appearance of traditional, non-political, *feminine values*. As Watson (2014) argues in the context of American presidencies, First Ladies serve as the nation's conscience, especially with regards to Human Rights and social welfare (cf.: 114ff.). In Hungary, the Prime Minister's wife does not serve the same institutional role - but in her silence, presence, and charity, she contributes to the same narrative function.

5.8 Closer to an Orbánian Myth

This chapter has traced the multimodal construction of Viktor Orbán's leadership myth across speeches, symbolic imagery, and curated digital archives. What emerges is not a single, fixed persona, but a repertoire of mythic figures: the Protector, Strategic Cooperator, Ideological Sovereign, *the* People's Leader, Fatherly Figure, and the Historical Hero, that together stabilize Orbán's Leadership Myth across divergent settings and political epochs. Each Persona is not merely representational but performative: it works by repetition, modulation, and emotional patterning, translating political discourse into symbolic presence and leadership into myth. Across this mythic repertoire, charisma is the dominant semiotic engine. It manifests as interpretive sovereignty, the ability to define threats, name allies, and explain the world from a position of epistemic certainty. Orbán does not persuade - he declares. This performative mode is most clearly seen in the Fatherly Figure Persona, where explanation becomes political mastery, and in the Sovereign and Heroic figures, where charisma operates through historical resonance and unshakable self-legitimation.

Yet beneath the surface of charismatic certainty lies a subtler affective register: what Julia Sonnevend has termed charm - a soft appeal that makes the leader feel 'just like us'. This dimension of Orbán's Myth becomes legible not through what he does, but through how care and calm are proxied, distributed, and performed at the margins. His wife's apolitical visibility, for instance, offers a feminized trace of state intimacy. Here, charm is not a trait Orbán embodies directly, but a delegated affect, assigned to symbolic figures like his spouse, staged in soft-lit humanitarian events, or implied through non-verbal composure in visual material. Thus, charisma and charm do not operate as binary opposites, but as a coordinated duality. Charisma provides ideological certainty; charm supplies affective cover. Charisma names, commands, and explains; charm reassures and smooths. The Myth of Orbánian leadership is forged not in one or the other, but in the interplay between both, sustained across image, text, and occasion. While charm, directly embodied by the Prime Minister, remains almost absent, there are those compulsory images of him kneeling by his dog, or the family portrait showing him as the grandpa among his grandchildren. Charm, thus, cannot be ignored or erased, but the primary focus by far seems to be put on charismatic extraordinariness and visual, as well as discursive certainty without experiments.

Importantly, this myth does not remain fixed within traditional media formats. As visual politics migrates into more spontaneous and socially performative spaces like Instagram stories, livestreamed walkabouts, TikTok trends, the balance between charisma and charm will likely shift. The official website, as shown throughout this thesis, functions as a kind of institutional archive: tidy, narrativized, and ceremonial. Social media, by contrast, carries a more volatile proximity - offering opportunities for casual affect, unguarded gestures, and curated spontaneity.

In sum, Viktor Orbán's leadership myth is not a fixed sculpture, but a rotating installation: it adapts, travels, and reinvents itself according to occasion and medium. It is multimodal, emotionally orchestrated, and symbolically saturated. In the interplay of charisma and charm - between explanation and proximity, elevation and intimacy - we do not find the truth of leadership, but its naturalization. And it is precisely this naturalization, through repetition and aesthetic consistency, that allows Orbán not only to lead, but to appear as if he always has.

6. Discussion

This chapter brings together the empirical findings of the preceding chapters to address the overarching research question of this thesis: *How is Viktor Orbán's leadership constructed and mythologized through multimodal communication on digital state and social media platforms?* The chapter follows the logic of the three sub-questions to gradually build toward a comprehensive understanding of the symbolic structure, affective strategies, and platform-specific variations that shape the Orbanian leadership myth.

6.1 Symbolic Personas and Multimodal Anchoring

Sub 1: Which symbolic personas shape Orbán's self-representation on the website, and how are they supported through textual and visual cues?

The findings from both the textual and visual analyses demonstrate that Orbán's digital self-representation revolves around a series of recurring symbolic personas, which crystallize into recognizable leadership figures. Each persona draws its legitimacy from the strategic convergence of visual composition, verbal framing, and ritual repetition. Their construction is not limited to any one media type but emerges through the tight interplay between headline images, article content, and speech motifs. These personas are not random accumulations of traits, but mythic configurations: they condense values, historical narratives, and political logics into legible figures that structure how Orbán is supposed to be imagined and understood. Their coherence is ensured by anchoring strategies that stabilize meaning across otherwise fleeting events. For example, a handshake at a summit becomes part of the Strategic Cooperator script not only through visual cues like setting and costume but also through verbal motifs of partnership, success, and continuity. Similarly, moments of memorialization or flood response are absorbed into the Protector Persona, often accompanied by solemn visuals and textual invocations of national unity, sacrifice, or dignity. This symbolic stabilization is not merely expressive, but performative: it *does* the work of governance through representation. The personas supply narrative structure to Orbán's rule and reinforce his presence as predictable, ideologically coherent, and emotionally controlled. They are not personalized avatars but archetypal figures: closer to statesmen, warriors, and guardians than to relatable human characters.

6.2 Charisma, Charm, and the Politics of Distance

Sub 2: To what extent are charisma and charm employed in the visual communication of Orbánian leadership, and how do they differ in function and emphasis?

The analysis reveals that charisma is the dominant mode of visual and rhetorical self-presentation. It is expressed through a repertoire of symbolic markers: posture, gaze, spatial centrality, architectural settings, national symbols, and elevated verbal tone. Whether in speeches or in headline photography, Orbán is positioned as a decision-maker above factional disunity, a leader whose stability and sovereignty seem to stem not from public affection but from historical necessity. Charm, by contrast, is not a central strategic mode in Orbán's digital leadership. Moments of emotional warmth, everyday spontaneity, or interpersonal closeness are exceptional and rare. On the Prime Minister's website in particular, charm is nearly absent, and where it does appear - such as the MCC branch opening or the photograph with the farmer - it serves a specific event. It does not convey warmth or interpersonal proximity, but a lecture and mentorship from above. Family portraits and involvement with pets are, however, present, indicating awareness of the inevitability of at least tightly controlled humanization of the Prime Minister. This finding lightly supports interpretations like that of Sonnevend (2024a, 2024b), who argues that charisma and charm function as dual affective poles in Orbán's digital persona, although an implied balance cannot be attested to *miniszterelnok.hu*. The leadership Myth built here is one of aesthetic distance, emotional legibility, but not permeability. Orbán is not staged to appear lovable or proximate. Rather, he is made to seem *consistent, safe, expectation-proof*. He is not close, but constant. The selective deployment of charm appears to be strictly instrumental. Its function is not to soften Orbán's image in a populist register, but to allow fleeting moments of warmth to stabilize the broader persona — a form of mythic reassurance, not emotional appeal. In this sense, distance is not a weakness to be overcome, but a feature of his myth: he is not “one of us” but the figure who ensures that “we will be okay.”

The strategic proxying of warmth and notions of care to Hungary's First Lady go in line with existing research on presidential image curation. While the Prime Minister himself is not narrated as specifically charming and endearing, these qualities show in relation to Ániko Lévai and her charity involvement. Charm does seem to be deemed highly instrumental and conducive to Orbán's Leadership Myth, however it should not directly be embodied by him.

6.3 The Website vs. Social Media: Controlled Myth vs. Affective Variation

Sub 3: How does Orbán's self-representation on miniszterelnok.hu compare to social media portrayals in terms of multimodal strategy and narrative scope?

While this thesis focuses predominantly on miniszterelnok.hu, existing studies on Orbán's social media presence - particularly those by Szebeni and Salojärvi (2022), Sonnevend and Kövesdi (2023), and Sonnevend (2024a, 2024b) - allow for a comparative reading. The contrast is not absolute, but one of register and intensity. On the official website, Orbán's myth is centrally curated, stable, and ideologically structured. The content is top-down, free from algorithmic or participatory demands, and built to project an image of enduring authority. There is little adaptation to the rhythms of public emotion. Instead, the site cultivates a mythic leader whose charisma rests on institutional weight, repetition, and symbolic reliability.

Social media, by contrast, introduces limited affective flexibility. Posts may feature lighter imagery, family scenes, or culturally resonant moments (e.g., football games, national holidays). However, even here, charm is tightly controlled. The overarching leadership myth remains intact, and emotional variation rarely challenges Orbán's portrayal as the stable guarantor of Hungarian interests. In fact, as Sonnevend (2024a) notes, even when Orbán engages in humor or informality, it is often in the service of affirming his place within a broader right-wing political network - not as a private person, but as a strategically placed mythic figure. In her recent monograph, Julia Sonnevend's study of Viktor Orbán's Facebook page supports the rather charisma-centered portrayal of the Prime Minister, however it seems to be more blended thanks to photo captions. She uses the example of the family portrait that is also positioned on the current official website. While the website narrates Orbán as a family man among his grandchildren, on Facebook the caption implies a strong ideological appeal (cf. Sonnevend 2024b: 74). This highlights a different logic, a more flexible approach to political communication and image curation on social media as compared to the needs of the governmental website. Hence, while a balance of charisma and charm may be evoked and may be observable in select political social media content, this thesis shows that in both, the centrally coordinated environment of the official website as well as social media scholarship on Viktor Orbán, charm is of limited, if not marginal importance in the curation of the Orbánian Myth. Thus, the platform distinction is not between charisma vs. charm, but between high-control myth-making and selective affective modulation. The digital leadership myth travels across platforms, but its core logic remains consistent: Orbán is not rendered close, but legible; not intimate, but enduring. However, a recent shift may be taking place: preliminary scans of Viktor

Orbán's Instagram account suggest a clear shift to more charming interactions, specifically orchestrated with his social media staff. Frequently, the Prime Minister rates 1980s rock classics and cotemporary popular music or is 'caught off guard' to interact with his social media staff, indicating an interest also in his younger followership. This is interesting, as this shift seems to be connected to the current unicum of the broad success of Péter Magyar and his Tisza Party. Future research, specifically with fluency in Hungarian, could take up this development.

6.4 The Construction of the Orbánian Leadership Myth

The central question guiding this thesis was: *How is Viktor Orbán's leadership constructed and mythologized through multimodal communication on the Hungarian Prime Minister's official website?*

The findings demonstrate that Orbán's leadership myth is not constructed to invite closeness or emotional identification, but to produce symbolic stability and trust at a distance. This myth is sustained not by the fullness of a private personality, but by public consistency, symbolic condensation, and multimodal anchoring. Across speeches, headlines, and photographs, Orbán appears not as a man among others, but as the figure *above* the uncertainty of the political moment. The thesis reveals that digital leadership representation in hybrid regimes like Hungary should not be assessed solely through tropes of populist emotionalism. Instead, Orbán offers a strong example of digital myth-making characterized by visual discipline, compositional consistency and one that combines visual discipline, rhetorical ritual, and institutional consistency to produce a leadership image that does not feel surprising, and therefore does not feel unsafe. In a political landscape saturated by spectacle and volatility, the Orbánian Myth communicates that some leaders will not change, and that perhaps this very invariance is the affective offer: not to love the leader, but to feel certain about him.

6.5 Avenues for Future Research

Building on the findings of this thesis, several promising avenues for future research emerge, particularly with regard to regional specificity, comparative leadership styles, and audience reception. First, the Hungarian case could be more systematically situated within a regional perspective. A comparative examination of leadership myths across Central and Eastern Europe - including Poland, Serbia, or Slovakia - may reveal recurring symbolic figures, mythic logics, or communicative strategies specific to the post-communist experience. These

comparisons would help determine whether the Orbánian Myth is a nationally singular phenomenon or part of a broader regional grammar of leadership legitimation.

Second, the analytic distinction between charisma and charm warrants deeper exploration across political regimes. A structured comparison between leaders in liberal and illiberal systems, or between Western and Eastern European settings, could illuminate how emotional proximity and symbolic distance function differently depending on the political and cultural environment. As this thesis suggests, Orbán's myth resists soft populist intimacy in favor of consistent, expectation-safe authority; a strategy potentially at odds with the affective immediacy often observed in Western leadership styles.

Third, while this project focused on the construction of leadership myth through production-level analysis, further research could address the reception side. Ethnographic fieldwork, audience studies, or digital discourse analysis could explore how citizens interpret, contest, or co-construct the leadership persona presented to them. Given the hybrid nature of Orbán's regime, it is likely that the visual and rhetorical strategies employed on official channels resonate differently across demographic and ideological segments, offering a valuable site for reception-focused inquiry.

Finally, future research could extend the investigation into the multilingual and transnational dimensions of digital state communication. Orbán's official channels do not communicate solely in Hungarian; English-language posts and press materials present a tailored vision of Hungary's leadership for foreign audiences. Multilingual comparative discourse analysis could explore how the leadership myth is adapted, reframed, or recalibrated across languages and geopolitical target groups - revealing how national identity is strategically projected beyond domestic borders.

7. Conclusion

The starting point of this thesis was a seemingly whimsical but ultimately revealing question: how does a public come to see a political leader as *‘theirs’*? What mechanisms produce not only recognition but attachment, familiarity, or symbolic trust? Raffaella Carrà’s ironic devotion to *‘il mio caro presidente’* may have been mediated by media spectacle, but it is precisely the accumulation of images, gestures, and speeches that enable such symbolic intimacy in the first place. In a political age marked by the visual, the curated, and the narrativized, these elements are not marginal: they are central to how political leadership is constructed, performed, and made desirable.

The present thesis demonstrates how Orbán’s digital presence is neither spontaneous nor purely populist, but a carefully layered multimodal performance. Political legitimacy here is not anchored in interactive closeness but in symbolic familiarity and role-consistency. Rather than inviting the public into proximity, Orbán’s myth invites recognition of a stable, predictable, and potent leadership figure — one who embodies national continuity, sovereignty, and strength. This logic of “knowing the president” without truly approaching him explains how symbolic attachment and even ironic loyalty, as evoked by Carrà, become possible. Future research could expand on this foundation by comparing leadership mythologies across contexts: for example, contrasting post-communist and Western European approaches to visual legitimation, or exploring regional differences in the deployment of charm and charisma.

Beyond its case-specific findings, this thesis offers a methodological approach for future exploration in visual political science and studying symbolic leadership through multimodal communication. Drawing on approaches from media studies, visual semiotics, and political rhetoric, it integrates reflexive thematic reading, semiotic image analysis, and discourse-oriented close reading into a coherent analytic model. This methodological proposition - adapted to the specificity of hybrid regimes - invites broader application in leadership studies, particularly where affect, myth, and state-curated visibility intersect.

While political science has been slow to integrate visual methodologies, this thesis suggests that multimodal approaches are not only relevant but essential for understanding how contemporary leadership both is represented and ritualized in the digital age. The comparison of platform environments further underscores this logic. On the official website, multimodal messaging is formalized, symbolically dense, and stripped of performative spontaneity. The site functions as an archive of authority, curated for stability rather than attention. Social media

allows for occasional modulation in tone, particularly in the inclusion of pathos-oriented or affectively expressive content but remains equally controlled in its ideological messaging. The difference lies in degree, not direction. Revisiting the central research question - how Orbán's leadership is constructed and mythologized - the thesis concludes that what is built across platforms is not an emotionally plural figure, but a coherent, affectively restrained representation that emphasizes sovereignty, protection, and continuity. The myth is not designed to foster intimacy or emotional identification, but to consolidate legitimacy through repetition, symbolic density, and selective emotional calibration.

The opening with Raffaella Carrà's *Il Presidente* offered more than a lyrical curiosity. Her portrayal of a leader - glittering, charming, mythically present - captures the emotional ambiguity of mediated authority. In the song, the president is never directly encountered, yet he becomes *her* president. This imagined intimacy is sustained not by direct access, but by symbolic saturation: media appearances, photographs, elegant banquets, and a myth that invites attachment without real closeness. When scandal breaks and the *carabinieri* arrive, it is not merely a public figure who falls - it is *her dear president*. The betrayal cuts not because he was known, but because his image had been made familiar, trustworthy, narratively whole. In contrast, Viktor Orbán's leadership myth, as examined in this thesis, actively resists such forms of closeness. His presence across digital platforms is highly controlled, affectively sober, and structured to maintain distance rather than collapse it. While there are moments of performative warmth, these are rare and often mediated - notably through Anikó Lévai, whose recurring appearances embody a proxy of moral softness and domestic affect. Unlike Carrà's president, Orbán does not appear as a figure of emotional accessibility. Instead, his myth is grounded in reassurance, consistency, and symbolic closure. And yet, the mechanisms are not entirely different. Carrà's *presidente* and Orbán's leadership Myth both rely on carefully staged performances, emotionally suggestive framings, and symbolic reinforcement. The difference lies in affective strategy: where Carrà's song evokes the surprise of betrayal by a man who seemed knowable, Orbán's Myth leaves little room for surprise: precisely because the image it crafts is designed to resist emotional permeability. Its power lies not in affection, but in consistency. Not in proximity, but in control. In this light, the question is no longer just *how* a leader represents himself, but *what kind* of relationship he allows the public to imagine. If Carrà sings of a leader she thought she knew, this thesis suggests that Orbán's Myth offers no such illusion. He is not *my dear* president. He is *the* Prime Minister, and everything in the image confirms it.

8. References

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9. Appendix

This appendix aims at making more transparent the use and analysis of the data obtained. Most of the data presented here take the shape of excerpted insights, as the full coding tables would be too extensive to fruitfully be presented in the print-out of the thesis. However, the complete versions of research notes and tables will be provided to the University of Vienna via Supplement Material uploads.

A. State of the Nation Addresses 2016-2024

A.1 Coding Scheme

Using MaxQDA, the speeches were analyzed and bigger clusters identified. The focus of the thesis was the synthesized Big Four Clusters, which can further be differentiated into subfields. The codes of the statements were created firstly, by a capitalized Cluster abbreviation, followed by small letter indication of the year:

Cluster	Subfields
P (Protection)	Communism, Historical Trauma, Supranational Bodies, Opposition, George Soros, Immigration, Ideological Opponents, “New Age”/Identity, Birth Rates
S (Sovereignty)	General, Historical Roots, Others dragging into conflict, West as Romanticist Phantasma, Sources of HU Sovereignty, Sovereignty by Protest, CEE Sovereignty, Sovereignty as Patriotic Duty, Sovereignty by Cooperation
SC (Successes)	General Improvements, Economic Successes, Societal Successes, Defense Success
V (Vigor)	Bravery, Confidence, Pride and Glory

Year	Year code	Link*
2016	a	https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-state-of-the-nation-address/
2017	b	https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-state-of-the-nation-address-2/
2018	c	https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/viktor-orbans-state-of-the-nation-address/
2019	d	https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-state-of-the-nation-address-3/
2020	e	https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-

		orbans-state-of-the-nation-address-4/
2021	none	(COVID restrictions)
2022	f	https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-state-of-the-nation-address-5/
2023	g	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-state-of-the-nation-address-2023-02-18/
2024	h	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-state-of-the-nation-address-2024/

** Speeches from 2016-2020 were retrieved from the officially archived version of the Prime Minister's Website from his previous legislative period.*

Collecting the statements in a single pdf file, recurrent subfields were identified. While the entire file is too extensive for an appendix (almost 30 pages), a selection is exemplified. The full collection is made available to the University of Vienna by Supplement Material.

A.2 Example of Statements

From: Protection (P)

1.3 Supra-national bodies

Pa059

Brussels must not overstep the boundaries of its own conceptions. It must not turn against the European people. The European Union must not be a kind of Soviet Union reloaded.

Pb079

the open society means that people, ethnic groups and cultures are stamped out to size like hamburgers, so that they can be turned into merchandise. Countries are transformed into railway stations, with everyone being able to move in and out freely.

Pb101

Brussels attacking our job creation subsidies

Pc112

Eurobabble, liberal grandstanding and “PC” platitudes have been ditched. We’ve sent the muzzle back to Brussels and the dog lead to the IMF. Just look around, in a Europe of forced coalitions and liberal media dictates

Pg276

When the West entered the war with sanctions, (...)

Ph330

This is what a scientific debate is like in Brussels if France is behind it. I have vivid childhood memories of newspaper articles beginning with the phrase “according to Soviet scientists...”

From: Successes (SC)

3.3 Societal Successes

SCc034

And we also owe a debt of gratitude to every young Hungarian who has set out on the path of building a family. The number of marriages has risen by 46 per cent. The magic number that scientists refer to as the fertility rate has risen from 1.23 to 1.49: it's a promising start, but a long way from 2, which would provide for our long-term survival. That is still far off, but not entirely beyond our reach.

SCd041

I can tell you the following. A Hungarian child born today will have a good chance of living into the 22nd century, because Hungarians are living longer: they can hope to live longer lives. The number of marriages is rising, and we have dramatically reduced infant mortality

SCd044

we committed ourselves to the fight against poverty. We have rolled back the spread of criminality. We have given everyone the chance to lead an honest and law-abiding life. As a country we have exceeded our potential in supporting those who live for their children

SCe063

It is also good news that between 2010 and 2018, 90,000 more children were born than would have been if the trend leading up to 2010 had continued. More good news is that the number of marriages has surged upwards, and the number of divorces has never been so low. The number of miscarriages is steadily declining, and is at a historic low

SCf078

This would also be the case here if we were not continuously protecting families

B. The Website and its Articles

Code Structure

Each article was assigned a unique code, comprised of the year and month of publication and the continuous number in the raw dataset:

23121188 = Article 1188, published in December 2023

B.1 Examples of Website Article Coding (simplified for visual clarity)

Code	tags	summary	Link
23121188	sov, coop, prot, econ, id, chal, mig	economic focus on family and progress in 2024; EP elections as turning point to reshape Brussels leadership; pay increases and EU mig policy rejection, call for national opt-outs; opposes Ukraine EU membership, funds for Ukraine outside EU budget; energy and infra; stronger V4, ties with Meloni's ECR; EU blackmail and HU legal independence; US and Global pol, EU interference in national affairs;	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/the-goal-in-2024-is-for-families-to-be-in-the-focus/

		strict control of foreign interference (Antifa) and strengthening of traditional values	
23121189	coop, WB, chal	talks with Ana Brnabic; excellent pol and econ relations; railway line; Brussels unfair exceptions in EU accession talks (Ukr); WB discussions unduly slowed down	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/prime-minister-viktor-orban-had-talks-with-serbian-prime-minister/
23121190	coop, econ, green, chal, suc	gov and business coop essential; entrepreneurs contribute to national prosperity; Sandor Demjan: national self-respect, pursuing the impossible; debt, energy price, consumption - traps to avoid; HU success without EU funds; growth requires adaptation; green energy, logistics, telecom/pharma/defense as key sectors; gov support for businesses	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/speech-by-prime-minister-viktor-orban-on-hungarian-entrepreneurs-day/
23121191	prot, sov, chal, econ, peace	Major threats for year: russia-ukr war, terrorism, illegal mig; immediate ceasefire and talks in Ukr, Western strategy to prolong war; rushed discussions on Ukr accession; Battle in Brussels on 50 billion EU fund; protect nat sov: foreign infl, foreign dollars; successful inflation work, now improvements; Christmas message to ppl on tradition, religion, children	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/interview-with-prime-minister-viktor-orban-on-the-tv2-programme-tenyek/
24011192	coop, sov, chal, econ	strengthening HU-Slovak relations; shared sovereignty focus and Anti Brussels-Superstate initiatives; security coop: border/airspace; econ coop: Slovakia as HU's third largest trade partner; new development package and future coop	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/press-statement-by-viktor-orban-following-his-meeting-with-prime-minister-of-slovakia-robert-fico/
24011193	coop, sov, econ, WB	strengthen HU-Moldova diplomatic relations, strong support for Moldova's EU accession, also for declining comp of Europe; expanding econ coop; energy coop for econ sec	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/press-statement-by-viktor-orban-after-his-meeting-with-dorin-recean-prime-minister-of-moldova/
24011194	*similar to other GMH radio interviews*	*similar to other GMH radio interviews*	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/prime-minister-viktor-orban-on-the-kossuth-radio-programme-good-morning-hungary-2024-01-19/
24011195	coop, sov, econ, sec	HU-SLK relations at all time high: trade, security, energy; opposition to EU centralization, own mig policies; HU financial support to Ukraine, only via national budgets, no EU loans; close coordination of HU EUCO presidency; EU Ukraine fund to damage EU member states	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/relations-between-slovakia-and-hungary-have-never-been-better/
24011196	coop, econ, id, EU	deepening econ tie with Vietnam; historical, patriotic bond; HU econ technologically advanced and diverse; HU demographic and digital challenges, working on solutions; EU econ policy at crossroads; HU committed to peace, stability; geographic distanced overcome by air link and student exchanges; HU EUCO presidency to strengthen EU-Vietnam ties	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/speech-by-prime-minister-viktor-orban-at-the-hungarian-vietnamese-business-forum/
24011197	prot, rel	helping Israel Christians in "the war conflict"; need to stop the fighting and animosities leading to christian disappearance in "the Holy	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/christians-in-the-middle-east-too-must-be-protected/

		Land"; HU to continue to help "the survival of Christianity in the Middle East", "Hungary Helps" programme, humanitarian aid	
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B.2 Example Article into Website Narrative

While a direct translation of articles into a fix narrative line on the website proved difficult, some articles provided blue-print level fits. This is an example of the Protector of the Nation narrative pushed on the website.

Narrative	Code	Context	Summary	Excerpt	Link
1. Protector of the Nation	23020862	migration pressing issue	FB video; migration pressing challenge for EU; intensifying pressure; crit bureaucrats in Brussels "do they understand?"; future depends on border prot	"Now, the only question is whether the bureaucrats sitting on the Commission in Brussels also understand that action must be taken immediately. For instance, the legal procedures against Hungary must be suspended or revoked, and Member States, including Hungary, must be given support to build fences and to reinforce the protection of their borders. This is what the future of Europe depends on, Mr Orbán said.	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/pressure-of-migration-keeps-intensifying-future-of-europe-depends-on-the-protection-of-borders/
	23010172	EU = Soviets, Imperialists	Day of Hungarian Culture; symbolic power of national anthem; himnusz as national prayer; Hungarian identity: people suffering, enduring, prevailing; historical struggles of Imperial interference rejecting War, Liberalism, Brussels; unique role in Europe; not forced into ideological conformity	"The Soviets did not want us to be Hungarians, but wanted to force us to become proletarians of the world, who could then unite. And the Brussels bureaucrats want to hammer us into the form of liberal world citizens instead of our Hungarian form, which is considered to be outmoded. We have always resisted them, we have always outsmarted them, and we have always found our own paths in life."	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/speech-by-prime-minister-viktor-orban-at-a-ceremony-commemorating-the-200th-anniversary-of-the-birth-of-the-hungarian-national-anthem/
	23020870	LGBT = dangerous = p*docriminals	child prot meeting with interior minister; protection of children against gender ideology; incident shocked him "as a parent" (sexual harassment at school hyped up as gender ideology,	"This is what gender ideology does, this is not some messing about, this is not some fooling around, that boys dressed as girls and girls dressed boys go into our schools to sensitise our children. This is not some trendy babble or chit-chat, but a threat against which we must protect our children"	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/prime-minister-viktor-orban-consulted-with-the-interior-minister-about-child-protection-well-into-the-evening/

			"lgbt+ trend" in other state media)		
	23030886	Petőfi and Himnusz memorial	Petőfi as national icon; 1848 revolution as national awakening; eternal role of Petőfi in HU consciousness: language of freedom, slavery or freedom without compromise, worthiness of heritage; HU ongoing struggle for freedom (ideology, etc)	"We see him rebel when outsiders seek to tell Hungarians how they should live. We see him turning against the world powers who once more want to absorb Hungarians into a European superstate. We see him writing "Let there be peace" before the 12 Points of the Hungarian Revolution. And when words prove insufficient, we see him setting out in our stead, to die again for Hungarian freedom."	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/speech-by-prime-minister-viktor-orban-on-the-175th-anniversary-of-the-hungarian-revolution-and-war-of-independence-of-1848-49/
	24031243	EP elections, war drivers, foreign influence	pro-war EU versus pro-peace Hungary, Soros influence (Brussels vs the people; ideological control); economic challenge due to war; protect sovereignty; farmers and national interest; strengthening nationalist government, opposition with foreign interest damaging	"He observed that while in Hungarian domestic politics there were "episodes resembling The Real World series which keep public opinion in a state of excitement," what truly matters is the war. He stated "I have no doubt that if we didn't have a nationally oriented, right-wing government in office in Hungary today, we would be in this conflict that is increasingly escalating between the countries of Western Europe and Russia up to our knees, our waists or even our necks.""	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/decision-issue-of-ep-elections-is-who-is-pro-peace-and-who-is-pro-war/
	24101419	EU actively against HU (=Orbán)	Brussels openly trying to overthrow Orbán government, install pro-EU administration; EU debate as a direct attack on Hungary sovereignty; Hungary to resist EU influence, maintain control over borders and migration; focus on boosting domestic economy, housing, wage growth; prediction of strong economic growth in 2025, economic neutrality instead of Brussels prescription	"The Prime Minister said the debate was about the intention of toppling the incumbent Hungarian government; the European socialists want Klára Dobrev, while the People's Party want the Tisza Party with Péter Magyar in government. He added that he had believed also previously that this had been the goal of the two European leaders, but it was unusual that they threw this so openly into the face of the world, instead of concerning themselves with European affairs."	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/we-will-intervene-in-the-economy-on-three-points/

C. Images from the Website

Image Statistics

Image Corpus	Amount
Total	1486
<i>Ániko Lévai</i>	752
Orbán's leadership, <i>close analysis</i>	770
- First round of image reading	185
- Final round of image close reading	63

C.1 Compilation of in-text images, their respective article on the website and links to access the article

Code	Original Headline	Link
23030895 (image 1)	Hungary stands for peace, but we must keep our powder dry	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/hungary-stands-for-peace-but-we-must-keep-our-powder-dry/
24091365 (image 2)	Facebook statement by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/facebook-statement-by-prime-minister-viktor-orban-2024-09-23/
23040935 (image 3)	We are raising defence industry cooperation with Serbia to a new level	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/we-are-raising-defence-industry-cooperation-with-serbia-to-a-new-level/
23020872 (image 4)	Orbán Viktor tárgyalt Zelenszkij ukrán elnökkel (EN: Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had talks with Ukrainian President Zelenskyy)	https://miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-targyalt-zelenszkij-ukran-elnoekkel/ (EN: https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/prime-minister-viktor-orban-had-talks-with-ukrainian-president-zelenskyy/)
23071003 (image 5)	Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has left for NATO summit	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/prime-minister-viktor-orban-has-left-for-nato-summit/
24101434 (image 6)	Speech by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán at a Lega party rally	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/speech-by-prime-minister-viktor-orban-at-a-lega-party-rally/
23010235 (image 7)	[Career header]	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/career/
24041263 (image 8)	Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has launched his campaign tour of the countryside	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/prime-minister-viktor-orban-has-launched-his-campaign-tour-of-the-countryside/
23081040 (image 9)	Interview with Viktor Orbán by Tucker	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/interv

	Carlson	iew-with-viktor-orban-by-tucker-carlson/
24061303 (image 10)	Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had talks with Prime Minister of Italy	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/prime-minister-viktor-orban-had-talks-with-prime-minister-of-italy-2024-06-17/
22110013 (image 11)	Career (1989)	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/career/
22110037 (image 12)	Career (2006)	https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/career/

C.2 First phase of closer image reading of over 180 files, simplified excerpt

Code	Cluster	Orbán's Role	Partners' Role	Symbolic cues	Gesture Notes
23060960	Meeting WB	cooperator	BiH delegation	yes	flags flanking Altbau door, 1 female BiH delegate on very left, 1 BiH delegate folding hands, Orban with confident posture, soft smile, carpet on parquet floor
23060961	Speech	sovereign	-	yes	Orban off-cam, documents on his table, water glass emptied, flags in background, soft hand gesturing
23060962	Movement	sovereign	-	yes	Orban leaving black limousine for EU event, papers in hand, determined glance off-camera
23060963	Meeting WB	negotiator	Vucic and partner, Orbán and Novak	yes	Both parties sit at table, Novak smiling at camera; Orban looking at Vucic neutrally, hand on docs, Vucic similar posture, but soft hand gesture visible
23060964	Meeting CA	cooperator	reception committee, CA leader, military	yes	little girls receive Orban with bouquets of flowers, followed sideways by president and military, in the rain; media following the girls, Orban looks at them (grand) fatherly, Orban's security man holding umbrella, Orban not with him
23060967	Speech	protector	media stuff	yes	mediatized speech with mic on pult, holding rims of pult, serious, concerned off-cam look, summit (second

					pult)
23060968	Meeting	cooperator	V4 leaders	yes	all off-cam look, one person (CZ with ear peace), Orban holding pult with mouth slightly opened, Morawiecki's PL flag cut out
23060971	Professional Everyday	FATHERLY	defense council	yes	Orban with security forces at table, many maps and docs, drinks offered but untouched, Orban addressing someone off-cam with explanatory hand gesture and pen in hand
23060975	Meeting Asia	cooperator	Asian Leader, military	yes	Orban and leader shaking hand, frontal cam, armed soldier in left frame, unarmed soldier by the door in the right frame
23060976	Memorial	protector	coffin, photo	yes	Orban laying white roses in front of coffin, looking at photo propped up of deceased, deceased wearing "stolen ribbon", referring to his "brother in arms"; solemn face
23060980	Meeting WB	FATHERLY	Novak, Vucic, partner, audience, media	yes	Orban and Novak vs Vucic and partner at press conference, Vucic and partner looking confused/processing, Novak looks at them, Orban looks slightly off-them with explanatory gesture; audience watching, camera in blurr, frontal shot
23060982	Meeting WB	cooperator	Vucic	no	Both looking slightly off-cam, smiling, in nature with (Restaurant?) sun roof showing, small lanterns, early sun down, Orban better lid (Vucic face with shadow)
23060989	Meeting WB	FATHERLY	Albania PM Qemali, media	yes	flags, media audience, Qemali looking forward to Orban while he is speaking, IN ALBANIA (Kryeministria logo on Qemali pult)
23060995	Meeting WB	negotiator	WB delegation	yes	flags, docs on table, paintings, rather passive delegations but Orban and Kristo leaning toward each other, serious looks

23061000	Movement	protector	-	no	Orban leaving car, readjusting suit, serious, determined face, closeup, wrinkles, blue-light on car
23071003	Movement	protector	-	no	Orban leaving car, other person's hand on opened car door, blue-light on car, readjusting suit, serious, determined face, 2/3 cloudy sky and framing trees slight frog cam, wrinkles,

C.3 Final reading of images in the reduced corpus of over 60 images

As the table is too extensive to be printed here, one example will be written down including all categories and columns used. The entire tables and research notes are provided to the University of Vienna as Supplement Material.

Code:	23030895
Data Folder:	Crisis Management
Orbán's role:	protector
Actors:	Orban, military
Gestural elements:	Orban engaging with military chief, a man in suit walking in front of them, military chief not directly looking at Orban, but the other man does, another man entirely hidden behind Orban.
Spatial elements:	frontal shot, Outside of a military base in the yard, emotionless walls in background, whole scene in center, Orban's piercing look give him dominance
Visual elements:	frontal-shot, military base and uniform vs Orban's suit, electrical units of a gate next to them
Linguistic elements:	none
Modal Anchor:	suit, uniform, Orban's look
Narrative Line:	Protector of the Nation
Myth Type:	Defender of the Nation
Story:	Orban is paying visit to military base, while the soldier is portrayed as awestruck, shy, Orban pierces his eyes on him with an amicable, friendly, interested face, showing his anchorage in the military too. The other man in the front is

neutrally looking at Orban, probably its an administrator in the base, however his presence does not seem intentional or arranged.