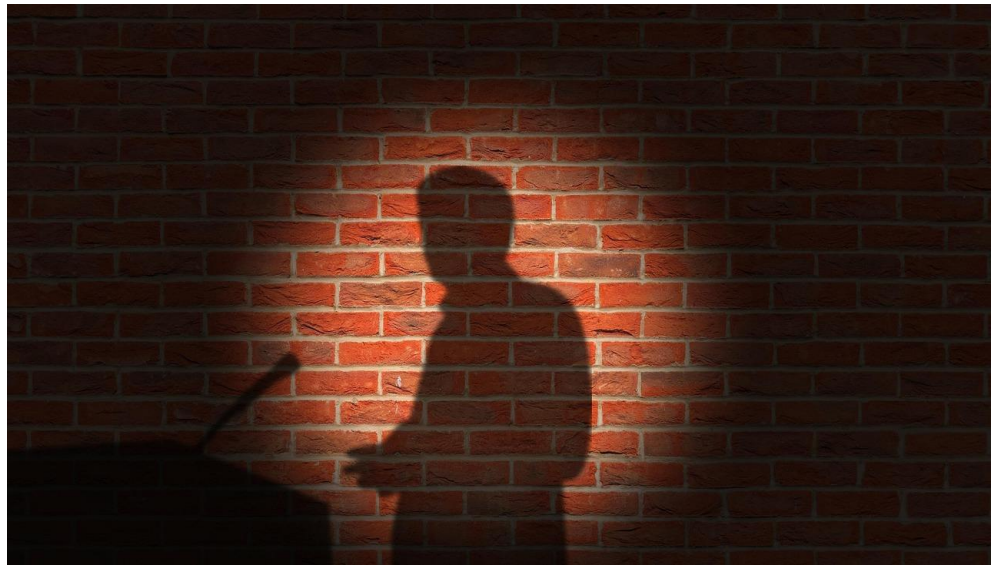


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Did Trump's Election Change Orbán's Communication?



During the 2024 campaign, Viktor Orbán has made no secret of who he would like to see as President of the United States. He hoped that the outcome of the election would provide him with a more favorable political environment to pursue his policy aimed at achieving greater national sovereignty. But has anything changed now that the desired outcome was attained? Our [analyses](#) looked at Viktor Orbán's speeches since Donald Trump's election to see if there was a shift in his communication. On the one hand, we examined how Viktor Orbán reflected on the election of Donald Trump, what his

expectations were, on the other hand, we looked at how this new situation affected his views concerning the relationship between liberalism and democracy.

The starting point of the analysis was that a more detailed elaboration of Viktor Orbán's alternative interpretation of the relation between liberalism and democracy depends to a large extent on the political context. COVID, the war in Ukraine and the pursuing energy crisis pushed theoretical thinking into the background. Looking back, the Hungarian Prime Minister talked the most about the changing face of liberal democracy mainly after successful elections or when crisis management was not a top priority.

Our analysis found three levels of abstraction in Viktor Orbán's speeches from November 6, 2024 to May 10, 2025. Firstly, Viktor Orbán has returned to the idea launched in 2014 which derives the breakdown of the Western model of state organization from the shifting of the previous balance of the two elements of liberal democracy (liberalism and democracy). Secondly, he speaks of the theory of connectivity as a part of his foreign policy strategy. Since the first level of abstraction states that the Western model has failed, the purpose of the second layer of abstraction is to be open in all directions, regardless of political ideology. Thirdly, there is an attempt at creating a new grand strategy,

which further breaks down the second level of abstraction, connectivity. The existence of the three levels highlighted three challenges in the Prime Minister's conceptual thinking:

1.) The problem of definitional diversity: The concept of the illiberal state has undergone many changes since 2014 to the present. Because of this, the same idea is expressed in speeches in many different ways, from Christian democracy to sovereignty. This is not helpful for theoretical clarification;

2.) The diversity of the levels of abstraction: the levels of abstraction we have identified compete rather than reinforce each other. There is a lack of a clear hierarchy of thought, with a current emphasis on practical application rather than on theory. All three levels of abstraction are needed to underpin the governance of a country, even if it is not usually possible to develop all three at the same time. It is counterproductive in the long run to conclude that the theory is "ready" and now it just needs to be applied to everyday life. The theoretical foundations need to be continuously developed, just as the grand strategy needs to be adapted from time to time in the light of changing circumstances;

3.) Conceptual thinking is exclusive in nature: since Viktor Orbán outlines an alternative model of state organization,

and consequently defines himself as the systemic opposition to liberal democracy, the resulting grand strategy considers the alternative model feasible only if the current system of governance is implemented beyond 2030. This raises two problems. On the one hand, it does not take the degeneration of the dominant parties into consideration, which, based on international and historical patterns, can only be stopped by some kind of internal renewal. On the other hand, it does not take into account the innovation that has taken place in the opposition sphere. In the last fifteen years, the dominant party, Fidesz, has always brought innovation to the system, but in the last year a new opposition party (Tisza) has emerged offering *inclusive* policies to break the dominance, reaching out to Fidesz and opposition voters alike, so that after victory they can return to a competitive party political system. The polarizing strategy that has served Fidesz well previously has reached its limits in face of Tisza's "catch-all" approach.

Besides the three levels of abstraction in Viktor Orbán's communication, our analysis has identified several other trends in the speeches:

- There was a sense of restraint in the speeches, a minimization of expectations up until Trump's inauguration.

- Viktor Orbán is not looking for help on specific issues, the very fact that the Biden administration is no longer in power is of value to the government as it creates less conflict between the countries.
- Trump's policy is beneficial for Orbán, because it acts as a "battering ram" in world politics, it also lends legitimacy to the Hungarian government's policy, because the United States has a similar approach.
- Viktor Orbán is aware of the fact that Trump's favoring of US interests may have negative effects for Hungary, but he also believes that Trump will open the way for a different type of politics, one that recognizes national interests as a principle of state organization.
- The Prime Minister regularly returns to the main theme of his 2014 Baille Tusnad speech, that in a changing world there is a race to find the model of state organization that will make a nation most competitive.
- Orbán believes that the liberal, progressive dominance in the Western world is over. This causes a shift in his communication from theoretical thinking (first level of abstraction) to the practical application of his alternative model.
- Especially in the press conferences following the meetings with regional leaders, there is a shift from the broader theory of connectivity (second level of abstraction) to the

application of a national grand strategy in foreign policy (third level of abstraction).

All in all, Viktor Orbán sees Donald Trump's election as a turning point which affects the future of Europe and Hungary alike. He sees this turn of events as conducive to his politics. While it is unlikely that the three levels of abstraction we have identified will be further theorized during the upcoming electoral campaign, nevertheless the advantage Fidesz has enjoyed over its opposition since 2010 may erode if it does not continue to elaborate on its theoretical grounding.