

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Dog-whistle politics in far-right discourse: Analyzing ethnonationalism in Martin Sellner's book 'remigration'

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Abstract

This article explores the phenomenon of dog-whistle politics within the context of Austrian far-right activist Martin Sellner's rhetoric, focusing on how coded language is employed to promote ethnonationalist and far-right ideologies in contemporary European political discourse. By conducting a detailed qualitative content analysis of Sellner's 2024 book *Remigration: Ein Vorschlag* (Remigration: A Proposal), the study investigates the extent to which ostensibly neutral terms can function as linguistic vehicles for exclusionary, racist, and antisemitic messages to a specific, ideologically aligned audience. While Sellner's primary influence remains German/Austrian, his tactics reflect global far-right strategies. We thus contextualize his rhetoric through selective comparison with other far-right figures to illuminate shared communication logics. The findings reveal how coded language may shape public discourse while navigating social and legal constraints, with significant implications for political communication, media practices, and policymaking.

Keywords: Far-right discourse; immigration; Europe; conspiracy theory; metapolitics

Introduction

The rise of the far-right across Europe in recent years has been marked by nationalist movements that leverage public anxieties over migration, cultural identity, and economic insecurity (Moreau 2021; Vlandas and Halikiopoulou 2022; Wondreys and Mudde 2022). This article employs the umbrella concept of the 'far-right' to encompass a variety of actors marked by illiberal and antidemocratic attitudes to different degrees (Pirro 2023). This landscape has been shaped by pivotal events like the 2015 so-called refugee crisis, which saw over a million migrants, many fleeing conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, and other war-torn regions, enter Europe. This crisis fueled anti-immigrant sentiment and provided fertile ground for the far-right to grow, particularly in countries such as Austria and Germany (Goździak, Main and Suter 2020).

At the center of these movements, figures like Martin Sellner have emerged as key proponents of ethnonationalist ideologies (Moreau 2021). Sellner, an Austrian political activist born in 1989, is the co-founder and was, until 2023, the spokesperson for the Identitarian Movement in Austria (*Identitäre Bewegung*). The Identitarian Movement, which investigative journalist Andreas Speit (2018) characterizes as a far-right, pan-European organization, centers its ideology on the preservation of what it perceives to be national or 'ethnic' identities. It opposes multiculturalism and immigration, promoting instead the notion of 'ethnopluralism'; the idea that distinct ethnic and cultural groups should remain separate to maintain their unique identities (Camus and

Lebourg 2017). Identitarians present this view as cultural preservation, avoiding overtly racist language yet fostering a modern form of ethnonationalism within the framework of cultural protection (Speit 2018). To further their influence, Identitarian groups utilize social media extensively, employing visual campaigns and demonstrations that appeal to younger audiences, thereby expanding their reach from its core in France, Germany, and Austria to affiliated groups worldwide. And even if the organization has waned in some regions, the ideological framework has successfully gone global (Murdoch and Mulhall 2019; Šima 2021).

The Identitarian Movement has attracted significant scrutiny for its role in shaping far-right political discourse. Elements of its rhetoric have permeated political party platforms, as these parties attempt to incorporate Identitarian language while distancing themselves from explicit far-right extremism (Fielitz and Marcks 2019). Unlike earlier far-right activism, which often employed overtly fascist or white supremacist language, Identitarians craft their message around ‘cultural identity,’ reframing exclusionary and nativist policies as cultural preservation efforts. This repositioning allows them to evade accusations of explicit racism while still promoting a nationalist agenda under the guise of cultural integrity (Virchow 2015). Crucially, Sellner’s approach is rooted in a subverted ‘Gramscianism from the right,’ which posits that political power is preceded by cultural hegemony. By prioritizing the battle for ‘metapolitics’ – the underlying values and language of a society – Sellner justifies the production of dense theoretical texts and books like *Remigration* (2024) as essential tools for shifting the Overton Window, rather than relying solely on traditional street-level rallies. As such, the Identitarian Movement, and Sellner in particular, can serve as a bridge between radical far-right ideology and mainstream politics, providing ideological frameworks and marketing strategies that resonate with diverse political spectrums (Dahl 2023).

A foundational theme in Sellner’s discourse within this movement has been the concept of ‘remigration’. As the former spokesperson for the Identitarian Movement Austria, Sellner has persistently advanced this notion, which the Identitarians employ to advocate for the removal or discouragement of migration from Africa and the Middle East to Europe. Under Sellner’s influence, the Identitarian Movement has called for ‘remigration’ and issued warnings about the perceived ‘Islamization’ of Europe, as claimed by politicians such as Dutch Geert Wilders (2012). In line with this stance, the movement has even suggested the creation of detention zones at Europe’s borders to deter potential migrants and refugees (Richards 2022). It is worth noting that since stepping down from his formal role as the Identitarian Movement’s speaker in 2023 (Sulzbacher 2023), Sellner has transitioned into a ‘metapolitical entrepreneur.’ This shift reflects a move toward a decentralized, influencer-led model of activism, allowing him to operate as a high-profile ideologue across borders.

‘Remigration’ has emerged as one of the most contentious concepts in contemporary German politics. While proponents of ‘remigration’ often frame the idea as a sovereign migration policy or large-scale repatriation initiative, critiques argue that in practice it entails the forced deportation of millions of immigrants to re-establish an ethnically homogeneous society; a vision rooted in the German New Right of the 1970s (Latsch 2024). The idea solidified its place within far-right discourse following the high-profile 2023 meeting in Potsdam, Germany. At this gathering, far-right politicians and activists – including Sellner and members of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) – reportedly discussed a comprehensive strategy to expulse ‘non-assimilated’ immigrants and their descendants from Europe, irrespective of their citizenship status (Correctiv Staff 2024). After the event’s exposure, the ethnonationalist themes reportedly discussed at the conference attracted nationwide attention and triggered a huge wave of demonstrations. Intellectual protests culminated in ‘remigration’ being named Germany’s misnomer of the year 2023. Following the disclosure, Sellner received a three-year ban from entering Germany (Henley 2024).

Amid this controversy, Sellner’s 2024 book, *Remigration: Ein Vorschlag* (‘Remigration: A Proposal’), further integrated the concept into far-right discourse. Remarkably, even before its publication, the book was pre-ordered in bulk. By March 2024, it was ranking third as an Amazon

bestseller and first in its political science section, until the far-right activist and publisher Götz Kubitschek decided not to provide Amazon with it. The book was ultimately released through Kubitschek's German publishing house, Antaios (Thomalla 2024). Sellner's *Remigration* encapsulates the broader concerns of the European far-right about cultural displacement. In it, Sellner advocates for forced or incentivized 'return' of non-ethnically European immigrants, including descendants born in Europe, to their countries of origin, irrespective of their citizenship (Sellner 2024).

It is within this context that 'remigration' is now debated – often euphemistically – in mainstream political arenas, raising urgent questions about the boundaries of democratic legitimacy (Völker and Saldivia Gonzatti 2024). As both a rhetorical device and a symbolic policy demand, 'remigration' condenses broader societal anxieties about identity, migration, and sovereignty (for migration, see Boukala 2021). Its growing visibility necessitates critical scholarly attention to its ideological roots, mobilizing power, and implications for liberal democratic orders (Mudde 2019).

Against the backdrop of the long-term political repercussions of the 2015 refugee crisis, the rise of far-right parties like the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2020) and the AfD (Hartleb 2022), and the increasing polarization of European politics, Sellner's ideas have found significant resonance. While not a member of the FPÖ, Sellner resonates rhetorically with populist narratives that have gained momentum across Europe, particularly in the context of the 2024 European Parliament elections, where far-right parties leveraged public fears about migration, terrorism, and the erosion of national sovereignty to achieve significant electoral gains (Mudde 2024; Langer, Damski and Weninger 2025). During the campaign, the FPÖ adopted rhetoric aligned with Sellner's remigration discourse (Chastand 2024).

The mainstreaming of these ideologies is evident. In Austria, the FPÖ, under the leadership of figures like Heinz-Christian Strache, initially entered a coalition government with the conservative party (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2020), highlighting this trend (Müller and Gebauer 2021). By 2024, under the leadership of Herbert Kickl, the FPÖ became the strongest party in Austria, reflecting the growing normalization of nationalist rhetoric, anti-elite narratives, and 'remigration' discourse within Austrian politics (Haselbacher and Reeger 2024; Langer, Damski and Weninger 2025). Similarly, the AfD in Germany, the third-largest party in the Bundestag following the 2017 federal elections, had by 2024 risen to the position of the second-largest party, establishing itself as the main opposition to mainstream politics (Neu 2024; Schmalenberger 2024). At the 2025 national snap elections, the AfD came second only after the Conservative Christian-Democratic Union. Both parties, the FPÖ and the AfD, alongside other far-right movements across Europe, have employed dog-whistle tactics to appeal to nationalist sentiments while avoiding overtly racist language (Givens 2022; Langer 2024b).

In the subsequent sections, we will examine how Sellner's work employs these dog-whistle techniques to normalise and disseminate the remigration narrative across far-right and conservative audiences alike. Before delving into the specific themes within the book, it is essential to establish an analytical framework through a review of the literature on dog-whistle politics and far-right populism.

Literature review and methodological framework

Understanding remigration requires an interdisciplinary inquiry that unpacks its symbolic, strategic, and institutional dimensions (Völker and Saldivia Gonzatti 2024). This study is situated at the intersection of political theory, discourse analysis, and extremism research, drawing on several key frameworks to analyse the coded language of the far-right.

The central theoretical concept is dog-whistle politics – the use of coded language that appeals to specific audiences while remaining ostensibly benign. The term itself is derived from ultrasonic sounds heard by dogs but not by humans (Marincea 2022). Ian Haney López (2014) established its

function in U.S. political discourse as a strategy to mobilize electorates by capitalizing on latent racial anxieties while avoiding explicit accusations of racism. This tactic is exemplified by Donald Trump's immigration rhetoric, including slogans such as 'build the wall,' which critics interpret as coded appeals linking migration, criminality, and demographic threat while retaining plausible deniability (Langer 2024a; Nacos, Shapiro and Bloch-Elkon 2024: 114–154; Norris 2021). Admittedly, this and other comparisons in this article with segments of the American right are intended to highlight similarities in rhetorical strategies concerning migration and national identity, not to suggest ideological equivalence between American immigration restrictionism and European ethnonationalism. While both actors may converge in their use of restrictive immigration rhetoric, Sellner's Identitarian position conceptualizes the political community as defined by ethno-cultural continuity. By contrast, Trump's immigration restrictionism—though it can mobilize similar anxieties in practice—remains formally anchored in a civic-nationalist and state-centric register, focusing on legality and enforcement rather than ethnic belonging.

In a European context, scholars demonstrate similar strategies. Cas Mudde (2007; 2019) illustrates how far-right parties like the AfD leverage fears about immigration, using terms that frame migration as a threat to cultural and demographic stability without employing explicit racism. Holger Marcks and Janina Pawelz (2022) further highlight how these narratives portray migrants as criminal and violent threats, inciting militancy. Ruth Wodak's (2015) discourse-historical approach is particularly salient, offering a framework for analyzing how far-right leaders manipulate linguistic ambiguity to promote exclusionary ideas while maintaining plausible deniability.

To dissect the specific linguistic mechanisms of this coded language, our analysis also draws on the literature of conceptual metaphors in political discourse (Chilton 2004). Chilton argues that metaphors are powerful tools for shaping political perception. Sellner's use of metaphors, such as framing migration as 'cultural infiltration' (*Überfremdung*), serves to construct migration as an existential threat, evoking fear and urgency without resorting to overtly racist language. This lens allows us to explore both the manifest content of Sellner's rhetoric, focused on cultural preservation, and the latent ethnonationalist ideologies embedded within his metaphorical choices. Synthesizing these frameworks clarifies that Sellner's discourse is part of a broader global far-right trend, reflecting the dual objectives of communicating exclusionary ideas to an in-group while maintaining political legitimacy.

This study employs a qualitative content analysis (QCA) of Martin Sellner's book *Remigration: Ein Vorschlag*. QCA is the ideal method for this research, as it allows for a detailed examination of texts to uncover implicit themes and messages, delving deeper into the meaning and context of language than quantitative approaches (Mayring 2000; Krippendorff 2013). The decision to focus solely on this text is justified by its status as a comprehensive and structured representation of Sellner's political ideology, offering a systematic presentation of his ideas (Weber 1990). Limiting the scope to this well-defined text facilitates a concentrated and systematic analysis, ensuring the subtleties of his rhetoric are fully explored in light of our research question (Schreier 2012).

The methodological approach is grounded in interpretive political discourse analysis, with particular sensitivity to coded language, metaphors, and historical allusions (Wodak 2015). The analysis began with an inductive close reading of the entire text to identify recurring discursive patterns and ideological tropes. This process was iterative: preliminary reading yielded a broad set of thematic categories, which were then refined to distill five central tropes. These tropes – such as 'Ethnopluralism,' the 'Great Replacement,' and the 'Guilt Cult' – were selected based on their consistency, ideological salience, and their capacity to encode exclusionary messages under an ostensibly neutral surface. The analysis prioritizes discursive nuance over quantification and thus does not employ automated tools, corpus software, or keyword-based linguistic tagging (Gee 2014). This decision was made to retain the contextual integrity of meaning and to allow space for the interpretive reconstruction of implicit ideological cues (Wodak and Meyer 2016). The excerpts selected for analysis in the following sections are intended to be illustrative, not exhaustive, representing broader discursive patterns that permeate the source text (Kreis 2017).

Rather than treating language as transparent, this study understands discourse as a site of power, framing (Reem and Pisiu 2020), and identity construction. It draws from critical discourse analysis (CDA), seeking to reveal the communicative logic and discursive function of far-right rhetoric in its own terms (Talbot, Atkinson and Atkinson 2003). This aligns with calls for interpretive rigor in the study of far-right populism (Mudde 2019). In Sellner's case, this methodology is essential for distinguishing between the manifest content, framed as cultural preservation, and the latent content, which can reveal exclusionary ideas rooted in antisemitism, racism, and ethnonationalism.

Analysis

Our analysis proceeds from the premise that Sellner's book must be understood not merely for its ideological content, but as a political act in itself: a tool of metapolitical influence aimed at normalizing extremist positions within democratic discourse (Fielitz and Thursten 2020). Sellner's text is not isolated but part of a larger ecosystem of right-wing media, alternative publishing, and digital propaganda. It may serve to radicalize, legitimize, and mobilize by providing a 'respectable' intellectual foundation for ethnic-nationalist politics. Consequently, the analytical task is not only to critique what the book says but also to understand what it seeks to *do* in the cultural and political field.

To this end, we will draw on five key tropes derived from *Remigration: Ein Vorschlag* that function as discursive placeholders for dog-whistle politics: *Schuldkult* (guilt cult), *Ersetzungsmigration* (replacement migration), *Überfremdung* (cultural infiltration), *Mainstream-Medien* (mainstream media manipulation), and *Identitätspolitik* (identity politics). Each of these concepts, while presented in apparently neutral language, serves to communicate exclusionary messages to a specific audience attuned to far-right ideologies. Sellner consistently uses such euphemisms and coded language obscure the coercive implications of his ideas; terms like 'cultural preservation' or 'self-determination' are employed to justify coercive exclusion without overtly invoking racism. This is the core of his metapolitical strategy: by using a mainstream-style vocabulary to articulate goals associated with white nationalism, he sets a rhetorical trap. Any opposition is framed as 'repression' by the 'elite,' effectively using the shock of his critics to validate his own narrative of victimization.

Our analysis will demonstrate how Sellner's rhetoric, through these tropes, strategically taps into latent anxieties about national identity, migration, and cultural preservation. He positions himself and his followers as defenders of freedom and victims of 'globalist' suppression, using a populist narrative that appeals to grievance, fear, and imagined historical continuity. This strategic ambiguity enables him to reach a broader audience without openly violating legal or normative boundaries. By employing these dog-whistle tactics, Sellner creates a narrative that appeals to far-right supporters who view migration and multiculturalism as existential threats. We will not only unpack the meaning and function of these five key tropes but also situate Sellner's discourse within the broader global far-right framework (Strub 2004).

Schuldkult (Guilt Cult)

Sellner's use of the term *Schuldkult* is central to his critique of Germany's culture of Holocaust remembrance. By framing Holocaust memory as a 'guilt cult,' Sellner argues that the emphasis on Germany's past atrocities has been weaponized to weaken national identity and undermine the country's sovereignty. In *Remigration: Ein Vorschlag*, Sellner (2024: 21–24) asserts that this guilt is used to justify liberal immigration policies that threaten to dilute Germany's ethnic and cultural character:

The center of German identity is the feeling of a deep, indelible historical guilt, derived from various historical sources. The most important identity-political tool of this ‘guilt cult’ in Germany is ‘Holocaust education.’ This educational practice, installed during the course of ‘denazification,’ has shaped the national character for decades The elite of this ‘guilt cult bloc’ make no secret of the fact that they take pleasure in the humiliation and harm of their own people From this perspective, population replacement is often quite explicitly described as ‘reparation’ for a historical guilt, which forms the core of their identity politics. [Translations from German by the primary author.]

This framing taps into the concept of *secondary antisemitism*, a term coined by Theodor W. Adorno and widely discussed in studies of far-right ideology. Secondary antisemitism describes the resentment that many Germans feel toward the continued public remembrance of the Holocaust and the moral responsibility associated with it. Rather than denying the Holocaust, this form of antisemitism reframes memory itself as an oppressive burden imposed on contemporary Germans; transforming historical responsibility into perceived victimhood (Bergmann and Erb 1997). Sellner capitalizes on this discourse by presenting *Schuldkult* as a psychological manipulation, compelling Germany to accept multiculturalism and immigration. This logic aligns with broader far-right narratives that construe Holocaust remembrance not as an ethical reckoning, but as a mechanism to perpetuate guilt and weaken national sovereignty (Rensmann 2017a).

Sellner’s critique must also be situated within the larger context of the *Schlussstrich*-Debatte (literally, ‘the drawing-a-line debate’), a recurring theme in postwar German cultural-political discourse. The term refers to calls for a definitive end to the public engagement with the Nazi past, arguing that the nation should ‘move on.’ Prominent far-right figures, such as the AfD’s Björn Höcke, have echoed this sentiment. In his widely criticized 2017 speech in Dresden, Höcke denounced Berlin’s Holocaust memorial as a ‘monument of shame’ and called for a ‘180-degree shift in remembrance policy.’ His claim that Germany’s excessive focus on the Nazi era has paralyzed the nation’s ability to develop a positive self-image is a quintessential example of secondary antisemitism in contemporary Germany (Art 2018).

Höcke’s stance on Holocaust remembrance closely parallels Sellner’s approach. They both advocate for shifting the focus from national guilt to a vision of national renewal free from historical burdens. Sellner’s rhetoric reflects a broader trend among far-right figures who capitalize on generational shifts and the increasing temporal distance from World War II, framing *Schuldkult* as an obstacle to national resurgence by maintaining a collective guilt he argues is no longer relevant. By critiquing Holocaust memory as a form of moral coercion, Sellner can invoke antisemitic sentiments without outright Holocaust denial, strategically garnering support from those who view Holocaust remembrance as a hindrance, thereby circumventing the legal and social consequences associated with denial in Germany and Austria (Bazyler 2017).

Sellner’s rhetoric surrounding *Schuldkult* also resonates with developments in other European far-right movements, particularly in France. As Alina Mozolevska (2024) notes, French far-right figures such as Éric Zemmour frequently invoke a romanticized vision of France’s past, mirroring German far-right leaders like Sellner, who call for a positive national narrative unencumbered by the legacy of guilt. Zemmour’s campaign speeches evoke a ‘golden age’ of France, arguing it has been compromised by mass immigration and multiculturalism. Just as Sellner seeks to abolish the *Schuldkult* in Germany, Zemmour minimizes France’s colonial and wartime culpability, avoiding or minimizing critical engagement with the nation’s own historical crimes. This selective historical memory, focusing on glorification while omitting inconvenient pasts, suggests a shared strategy among European far-right movements: reshaping national identity through exclusionary, revisionist narratives.

The connection between French and German/Austrian far-right discourses is unsurprising given their shared intellectual roots. The Identitarian Movement itself originated in France (Murdoch and Mulhall 2019: 10), and thinkers such as Alain de Benoist and Renaud Camus –

whose ‘Great Replacement’ myth profoundly influenced European far-right thought – anticipated many of the ideas now central to German-speaking Identitarian Movements (Bracke and Hernández Aguilar 2023). Zemmour’s early advocacy of ‘remigration’ as a solution to perceived demographic decline demonstrates that Sellner is less an original theorist than a derivative figure within a transnational ideological trend. Across these movements, the reconfiguration of historical memory serves as a key strategy for legitimizing ethnonationalist politics under the guise of cultural preservation.

Ersetzungsmigration (Replacement Migration)

The second trope to be analyzed is inspired by Camus’ 2011 book *Le Grand Remplacement* (‘The Great Replacement’). Camus posits that European populations are being demographically and culturally replaced through mass migration from Africa and the Middle East. Hence, he combined ethnonationalism, racism, and anti-liberalism (Deltau 2022). Germany’s AfD has gradually adopted this conspiracy myth, thereby continuing its own radicalization (Leconte 2019; AfD 2024). Fittingly, Sellner (2016) wrote the afterword for the German edition of Camus’ book: as is evident, there is an affinity between both writers (Önnerfors 2021). Sellner’s use of the term *Ersetzungsmigration* – translated as ‘replacement migration’ – in his 2024 book is one of the clearest examples of how his rhetoric aligns with the global Great Replacement Myth. In his book, Sellner devoted an entire chapter to *Ersetzungsmigration*, underscoring the importance of this recurring theme to his ideological impetus (Sellner 2024: 13–21). Sellner (2024: 13) leverages this concept in *Remigration: Ein Vorschlag* to argue that so-called mass migration is not a mere demographic shift but a deliberate attempt to destroy Germany’s cultural and ethnic identity:

The prevailing population policy is without question ‘replacement migration’ [Ersetzungsmigration]. . . . The response of almost all Western European countries to the ‘pill dip’ and the decline in birth rates following the ‘baby boomer’ generations was ‘replacement migration’. Since the 1970s, population growth in Western Europe has been almost exclusively attributable to immigrants and their birth rates. The native population is shrinking and being replaced by foreign populations, which grow through chain migration and replacement births.

In this section, Sellner’s use of *Ersetzungsmigration* moves beyond simple dog-whistling into semantic normalization. By mimicking the dry, data-driven language of demography, he ‘re-describes’ a conspiracy myth as a sober policy assessment. The narrative of *Ersetzungsmigration* taps into the fear that German culture is being deliberately erased by foreign influences, a notion that resonates deeply with far-right supporters. This fear is often framed as a response to the increasing visibility of immigrant communities in Europe, particularly in urban centers, where cultural diversity is most apparent.

By suggesting that migration forms part of a broader process of demographic and cultural displacement, Sellner appeals to anxieties about cultural preservation while providing a simple, yet inflammatory, explanation for complex social and demographic changes. This narrative has become a cornerstone of far-right rhetoric across Europe, influencing populist leaders like Zemmour, who endorsed the idea of remigration in his 2022 presidential campaign (Ivaldi 2022; 2023) and Viktor Orbán in Hungary (Mudde 2019; Önnerfors 2021). While less explicit about the term, the French right-wing populist leader Marine Le Pen has also employed related dog-whistle politics (Ivaldi 2022; 2023).

Although the ‘Great Replacement’ narratives are usually not explicitly linked to Jews, they often carry antisemitic undertones, suggesting that these elites, frequently portrayed as Jewish or globalist conspirators, such as Hungarian-American Jewish businessman and philanthropist George Soros (Langer 2021) or the European Jewish banking family, the Rothschilds (Langer

2022), are intentionally weakening European nations. Sellner's invocation of *Ersetzungsmigration* positions him squarely within this tradition, framing migration as an existential threat to Germany's cultural and ethnic identity. His rhetoric mirrors populist fears in the United States, particularly during Donald Trump's presidential campaigns, where immigration from Latin America and the Caribbean has often been described as an 'invasion' that threatened to fundamentally alter American society (Langer 2024a). Trump's frequent use of the term 'invasion' aligns with Sellner's portrayal of migration as a deliberate and organized effort to undermine national identity (Verney 2018; Gorman 2021).

Sellner's *Ersetzungsmigration* narrative is further complicated by his attempts to link migration with broader geopolitical issues, particularly the role of international organizations like the European Union. He argues that the EU, driven by its allegedly liberal elites, is complicit in the replacement of native populations across Europe. This framing resonates with the Eurosceptic wing of the far-right, which views the EU as a vehicle for promoting so-called mass migration and undermining national sovereignty. Sellner's rhetoric echoes the sentiments of other far-right leaders, such as Nigel Farage in the UK, who have argued that the EU's open borders policies are facilitating a 'flood' of migrants that threatens to erase national identity (Hart and Winter 2022; Agameya 2024).

A common strategy in framing *Ersetzungsmigration* as an existential threat is assigning criminality to immigrants. Indeed, the specific link between immigration and criminality has become a staple even of mainstream 'immigration-skeptical' discourse (Rosina 2024). The book *Remigration* builds on this association and intensifies this narrative, framing migrants as a direct threat to public safety and social stability. For instance, Sellner (2024: 16) writes:

The signs of population replacement are also noticeable in everyday life. The increase in Muslims within the population, Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism, the rise in crime (especially offenses such as gang rapes), social welfare abuse, and the prevalence of foreign names: Germany is becoming a 'multi-minority society', and the native majority is being reduced to just one ethnic group among many.

This passage exemplifies a central tactic in far-right rhetoric – the use of alarmist language to frame immigration as an existential threat to the native population. Sellner asserts that the signs of 'population replacement' are visible in everyday life, listing several issues strategically chosen to invoke fear and resentment. The selective foregrounding of highly sensationalized crimes like gang rapes serves to generalize criminality to broader migrant populations. The overall framing positions (Chong and Druckman 2007) the native majority as victims of a concerted effort to 'replace' them, which feeds into the larger conspiracy myth of *Ersetzungsmigration*. This narrative is not only meant to justify exclusionary and repressive policies but also fuels a sense of urgency and righteousness among those who see themselves as defenders of their nation's cultural and ethnic purity.

Überfremdung (Cultural Infiltration)

The term *Überfremdung* – literally 'overforeignization,' in a sense of 'cultural infiltration' – also plays a key role in Sellner's discourse, allowing him to articulate fears of cultural erasure without resorting to explicitly racist language. The term carries substantial historical baggage in German-speaking contexts, having been used in nationalist and xenophobic discourse since the late nineteenth century and prominently during the Nazi era (Schmitz-Berning 2007: 615). The term resurged in the second half of the 20th century and has been used by various far-right actors ever since, like the Swiss People's Party in its anti-immigration campaigns (Skenderovic 2007), former FPÖ leader Jörg Haider (Heinisch 2004), or the organizers of the 2017 Neo-Nazi rock festival *Rock gegen Überfremdung* (Rock against Overforeignization) in Thuringia, Germany (Nilan 2021).

Sellner's use of *Überfremdung* exemplifies Chilton's (2004) theory of conceptual metaphors in action. By framing migration as 'cultural infiltration' (Sellner 2024: 126–127), he can activate a metaphor of warfare and contamination, implicitly constructing immigrants as hostile invaders threatening the alleged purity of German identity. This aligns with Chilton's observation that such metaphors spatialize abstract concepts (e.g., identity) into tangible threats, legitimizing exclusionary policies as so-called defense. The use of *Überfremdung* allows Sellner to frame migration as a form of cultural interventionism, where foreign cultures – particularly Islamic or Islamo-normative ones – are seen as actively undermining or diluting German traditions. In *Remigration: Ein Vorschlag*, Sellner (2024: 126–7) states that . . .

Migrants [. . .] cause 'overforeignization' [*Überfremdung*], ethnic fragmentation, and pose a threat to democracy and internal security. Our ethnocultural identity could be irreversibly distorted or displaced beyond recognition. Additionally, there are the [. . .] economic costs. The significant personal suffering caused by imported criminality must also be considered. National wealth, internal security, democracy, ethnocultural identity, etc., have undeniable intrinsic value. It is ethically justified to advocate for remigration to preserve these values, promote the common good, and prevent the suffering caused.

Sellner's narrative taps into deep-seated anxieties about cultural preservation, particularly among far-right supporters who view multiculturalism as a threat to national cohesion. This rhetoric is not unique to Sellner but is part of a broader trend within European far-right discourse of an alleged European cultural dilution through migration (Mudde 2007). Sellner's invocation of *Überfremdung* echoes these historical anxieties while adapting them to contemporary concerns about migration and globalization. His framing of *Überfremdung* also parallels the rhetoric used by Trump, who frequently warned that immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean would fundamentally alter U.S. culture. Trump's portrayal of migration as a threat to American values mirrors Sellner's arguments about the dangers of cultural infiltration in Germany. Both figures employ dog-whistle politics to suggest that migration is not just a demographic issue but a cultural one, where the very fabric of the nation is at stake (De la Torre 2017).

Beyond Sellner's book, the framing of *Überfremdung* is evident in the Identitarian Movement's broader rhetoric, which presents Islam as a force fundamentally incompatible with European values (Zúquete 2018). Sellner's discourse is also linked to the 'clash of civilizations' narrative, which frames Western culture as being under siege from non-Western influences, particularly through migration. This idea, most famously articulated by Samuel Huntington (1996) in *The Clash of Civilizations*, gained traction as a significant talking point in far-right discourse, particularly in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks. It has been used to justify policies aimed at restricting immigration and safeguarding national identities, especially in Europe and North America (Haynes 2019).

Mainstream-Medien (Mainstream Media Manipulation)

Sellner's discourse frequently incorporates critiques of the so-called mainstream media, which he portrays as a unified, manipulative organ working to promote 'liberal agendas' and suppress dissenting views. In *Remigration*, Sellner (2024: 16) suggests that the 'mainstream media' are dismissing criticism of immigration and demographic shifts by labeling them as 'far-right conspiracy theories.' Elsewhere in the book, Sellner (2024: 166) asserts:

The threat posed by demographic change must be made just as present in the national consciousness as it was successfully done by the mainstream media with the staged backdrop of the 'coronavirus pandemic' and 'man-made climate change'. We lack their resources and millions, but unlike them, we have an unbeatable trump card up our sleeve: reality.

This portrayal of the media is a hallmark of far-right dog-whistle politics, where the press is framed as an extension of so-called globalist elites, who allegedly seek to control public discourse. The narrative of media manipulation can overlap with longstanding antisemitic tropes about Jewish control of the media, which have their origins in early 20th-century conspiracy myths as promoted by the 1903 Russian antisemitic pamphlet *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (Santing 2022: 12). In this framework, the media are depicted as a tool wielded by Jewish elites to manipulate public opinion, suppress nationalist sentiment, and – in contemporary antisemitism – promote ‘liberal’ policies such as multiculturalism and immigration (Meleagrou-Hitchens, Bennett Clifford and Vidino 2020: 6).

Sellner’s portrayal of the media draws heavily on this conspiratorial framework, although it is presented in a more coded and subtler manner to avoid accusations of overt antisemitism. By criticizing the *Mainstream-Medien*, Sellner positions himself as an outsider challenging the dominant narrative, a tactic that resonates with far-right supporters, who already feel alienated by what they perceive as biased or dishonest reporting. This narrative mirrors similar critiques made by Trump during his presidency, where he frequently referred to the press as ‘fake news’ and accused mainstream media outlets of being part of a liberal conspiracy to undermine his administration (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen 2024).

Beyond discrediting journalism, Sellner’s critique of the media also plays into broader populist narratives about the elite versus the people. By framing the media as part of an elite cabal out of touch with ordinary Germans, Sellner reinforces his populist credentials as a defender of the so-called common people against a corrupt and manipulative elite. This framing, too, appeals to far-right supporters already predisposed to view the media as part of a larger globalist conspiracy to undermine national sovereignty. In this sense, Sellner’s critique of the media can serve as a dog whistle for antisemitic conspiracy theories about Jewish control of the press, while also reinforcing far-right narratives about the elite’s manipulation of public discourse (Rensmann 2020; Schenk, Hoffarth and Mayer 2020; Schiller 2022; Schmidtke 2023).

Identitätspolitik (Identity Politics)

Sellner’s discourse also critiques identity politics (Fukuyama 2018), which, he claims, demobilizes Germans and controls public discourse. He argues that identity politics is a tool used by liberal elites to suppress nationalist sentiment and prevent Germans from asserting their cultural and national identity. In *Remigration: Ein Vorschlag*, Sellner (2024: 22–23) states:

At the center of identity politics usually lies a national narrative in the form of a ‘founding myth’. It serves as something akin to the ‘DNA’ of the country. From this derive national taboos and thus the boundaries for debate. Even in a democracy, identity politics sets limits on freedom of expression. In Turkey, for example, ‘insulting Turkishness’ or blasphemy against Islam is a red line. In the United States, freedom of speech ends with what is termed hate speech against sexual and ethnic interest groups. These red lines are enforced through legislation or social repression. In the long term, identity politics determines policy through the control of discourse, independent of changes in government. Over extended periods, it even shapes the character of the people. The German population policy is referred to as replacement migration. The dogma of identity politics is, in this context, a cult of guilt that resembles a religious belief.

Sellner’s mention of ‘founding myths’ and ‘national narratives’ as central to identity politics resonates with the far-right’s obsession with cultural purity and the preservation of a homogeneous national identity. By arguing that identity politics sets boundaries for debate and limits freedom of expression, Sellner implies that these narratives are being manipulated to suppress nationalist sentiments. Within far-right milieus, critiques of identity politics intersect with

conspiratorial narratives about transnational or ‘globalist’ elites – often drawing on antisemitic tropes concerning Jewish influence (Langer 2024b) – allegedly eroding national identities. This critique of identity politics can be understood within the broader far-right conspiracy theory of ‘Cultural Marxism,’ which posits that an intellectual elite is intentionally subverting ‘Western’ civilization by promoting multiculturalism, feminism, and other progressive ideologies that weaken national identity. This myth has also its roots in antisemitic narratives (Achinger and Fine 2015: 4; Rensmann 2017b: 410), including narratives of a ‘Judeo-Bolshevik’ plot to undermine Christian and national values (Hanebrink 2020).

Sellner’s reference to identity politics as a tool of demobilization aligns with this broader narrative, suggesting that the promotion of diversity and inclusion is part of a larger plot to weaken German identity and prevent nationalist movements from gaining traction. By framing identity politics as a form of cultural control, Sellner taps into far-right anxieties about the loss of national sovereignty and the perceived erosion of traditional values. This critique of identity politics also mirrors similar arguments made by far-right movements across Europe and North America, where ‘Cultural Marxism’ is frequently invoked as an explanation for activities of progressive movements and the alleged decline of national identity. Figures like Viktor Orbán in Hungary and Donald Trump in the United States have employed similar rhetoric to argue that ‘liberal elites’ are using identity politics to divide and weaken their respective nations, often framing these efforts as part of a larger globalist conspiracy (Weyland and Madrid 2016; Mirrlees 2018; Langer 2021; Langer 2022). In Sellner’s case, the critique of identity politics can serve as a dog whistle for antisemitic conspiracy myths while also appealing to far-right supporters. By framing identity politics as a form of cultural control, Sellner positions himself as a defender of traditional German values against the forces of globalization and multiculturalism. Judith Goetz and Alexander Winkler (2023) argue that this discourse could also include violence.

Political repercussions in comparison

As mentioned above, the concept of ‘remigration’ first gained political traction in France (Ivaldi 2022, 2023), the birthplace of the *Nouvelle Droite* (‘New Right’) and many of the ethnonationalist ideas later adopted by the Identitarian Movement. France’s deeply rooted far-right tradition has long provided the ideological foundation for movements across Europe (Hentges, Kökgiran, and Nottbohm 2014). Over time, European and American politicians and publishers have refined and reinterpreted these ideas, importing them into their own political contexts (Minkenberg 2014; Maly 2019). This section examines how these transnational currents reverberated in Germany, Austria, and the United States, particularly through their near-simultaneous manifestations in 2024 and 2025.

The AfD’s 2025 federal election manifesto incorporated the concept of ‘remigration’ into official party policy, explicitly framing it as a ‘catalog of measures to reverse migration policy state failure’ (AfD 2025: 101). This move marks a profound radicalization, translating Sellner’s ethnonationalist rhetoric into a concrete policy framework. The manifesto weaponizes *Ersetzungsmigration* tropes by decrying ‘uncontrolled population growth’ (100) and depicting Muslims as carriers of ‘imported foreign conflicts’ and ‘antisemitism’ (101). Echoing Sellner’s discourse of *Überfremdung*, it calls for ‘detention centers at the border’ (103) to enable mass deportations of ‘persons without residency rights’ (107). Crucially, the manifesto cloaks these exclusionary aims in pseudo-legal language, asserting that the proposed measures ‘correspond to current legal standards or can be implemented via constitutional amendments’ (101) – a textbook example of Sellner’s dog-whistle tactic of disguising extremism as technocratic necessity. As extremism scholar Peter R. Neumann notes, this agenda targets millions based on their origin and religion, transforming Sellner’s once-fringe ideology into a parliamentary project (Deutschlandfunk 2025).

The FPÖ likewise adopted ‘remigration’ rhetoric during its 2024 parliamentary campaign. On the stump, party leaders warned of a ‘Barbarian invasion’ and ‘imported Islamism’ (Schiltz 2025).

The party's election manifesto codified Sellner's doctrine as state policy, demanding the creation of an 'EU Commissioner for Remigration' (FPÖ 2024: 13) to oversee the deportation of 'uninvited foreigners' (42). This institutionalization represents the mainstreaming of Sellner's ethno-nationalist project, translating Identitarian rhetoric directly into policy. The manifesto amplifies *Ersetzungsmigration* fears by declaring that misguided migration policy 'threatens Austria's cultural identity and social peace' (51) and framing Muslim communities as 'Islamic parallel societies' (51) – both core motifs in Sellner's writings. It also operationalizes his proposal for extraterritorial detention facilities, advocating 'migration centers on other continents' (51) to warehouse those slated for deportation. Like the AfD, the FPÖ masks exclusion through technocratic euphemism, describing remigration as a 'paradigm shift to reverse migration flows via legal measures' (51). As Neumann observes (Deutschlandfunk 2025), these platforms collectively transform Sellner's once-marginal ideology into actionable governance, targeting those deemed 'culturally unassimilable' through pseudo-legal mechanisms.

The impact on public opinion is equally striking. A 2025 survey by Dennison and Kutsov found that 39 percent of Germans endorse the Great Replacement myth. Similarly, Herold (2025) reports that 37 percent agree with the statement that 'there is a group of people in this country who are trying to replace the native-born population with immigrants,' directly echoing the Great Replacement narrative. In Austria, the 2024 *Right-Wing Extremism Barometer* produced by the Documentation Archive of the Austrian Resistance found that 47 percent believe 'the Austrian population is being replaced by immigrants,' while 23 percent blame 'political elites' for this development, closely mirroring Sellner's and the FPÖ's rhetoric (Kranebitter and Willmann 2024: 23). While these trends cannot be attributed solely to Sellner, they underscore the growing normalization of far-right dog-whistle politics and their role in shaping European attitudes toward immigration.

Sellner's ideology also resonates beyond Europe, particularly within the MAGA movement in the United States, highlighting global entanglements among far-right actors. While direct causal links are difficult to prove, there are indications of cross-fertilization. Sellner's wife, white nationalist influencer Brittany Pettibone, collaborated with Steve Bannon to connect European and American far-right communities (Maly 2020). Moreover, the January 6, 2021, Capitol attack mirrored the tactics of the August 2020 storming of the Berlin Reichstag – an event publicly endorsed by Sellner (Rosenberg 2023).

Certain elements of the 2024 Republican Party platform, shaped by the MAGA movement, echo themes comparable to Sellner's vision, particularly regarding mass deportation, cultural threat narratives, and anti-elite rhetoric (GOP 2024). Its pledge to 'CARRY OUT THE LARGEST DEPORTATION OPERATION IN AMERICAN HISTORY' (Preamble) and the warning that 'Biden's Migrant Invasion [...] must not alter our Country' deploy *Ersetzungsmigration* logic without naming it, reframing mass expulsion as a matter of national security. Mirroring Sellner's *Überfremdung* narrative, the platform criminalizes migrants as sources of 'deadly drugs and Migrant Crime' (Ch. 2) and calls for strict cultural assimilation ('Those who join our Country must love our Country,' Ch. 2.4). Its attacks on 'weaponized government' (Ch. 9.1) and demands to defund schools promoting 'radical gender ideology' (Ch. 7.6) replicate Sellner's *Mainstream-Medien* and *Identitätspolitik* tropes, scapegoating institutions deemed subversive. Strategically, the platform legitimizes ethnonationalist aims through pseudo-legal mechanisms ('extreme vetting,' 'proof of citizenship') and militarized language (naval 'blockades,' Ch. 2.1), closely paralleling AfD and FPÖ tactics. While tempered by conventional conservative rhetoric, the MAGA-aligned platform exhibits themes associated with remigration discourse, including large-scale deportation proposals, concerns about cultural change, and critiques of political elites: sanitizing exclusionary ideology for mainstream consumption while retaining its core logic of ethnic and cultural exclusion.

Discussion

Martin Sellner's rhetoric – and that of other advocates of 'remigration' – has had a profound impact on political discourse in Germany, Austria, and beyond. His ideas are no longer confined to far-right fringe movements but have entered the platforms of influential populist parties such as the AfD and the FPÖ, shaping public debates on immigration policy. This influence is not merely rhetorical; it has translated into concrete political proposals. For example, the AfD's political manifestos explicitly call for a 'remigration', including revoking citizenship from dual-national criminals and facilitating large-scale deportations of asylum seekers. Such discourse has contributed to the radicalization of parts of the electorate and has begun to influence mainstream parties, including the Christian Democratic Union, which in recent years has advocated stricter immigration controls and expanded deportation measures.

Sellner's influence also extends beyond policy debates to challenges against the very foundations of Germany's democratic order. His rhetoric surrounding 'remigration' has been linked to attempts to delegitimize democratic institutions such as the Federal Constitutional Court and to amplify conspiratorial claims of media manipulation – portraying journalists as members of a 'global elite' intent on protecting immigrants over natives. In this sense, 'remigration' discourse operates as both a political and epistemic project: it undermines trust in democratic institutions while constructing an alternative narrative of national victimhood and betrayal.

In conclusion, the spread of 'remigration' rhetoric and Sellner's strategic use of dog-whistle politics have substantial implications for democratic norms, constitutional discourse, and migration policies in Germany, Austria, and beyond (Müller 2016). His ideas have migrated from the periphery to the political mainstream, influencing far-right parties and contributing to the radicalization of public discourse. The media play a crucial role in either amplifying or contesting these narratives, shaping how exclusionary ideas are received by the public. The growing traction of such rhetoric, together with rising hate crimes and polarization, underscores the urgent need for robust interventions by policymakers, educators, and civil society to counter the divisive impact of dog-whistle politics on democratic values and social cohesion.

Sellner's *Remigration: Ein Vorschlag* is particularly relevant because it crystallizes a key ideological project of the European far-right: the normalization of ethnonationalist exclusion under the guise of rational policy debate. While 'remigration' is presented as a neutral or even humanitarian concept, it is in fact a euphemism for the forced or coercive return of migrants and ethnic minorities, especially from Muslim communities, and serves as a rhetorical bridge between extremist ideology and populist electoral strategy.

To summarize, Sellner's influence can be understood through three intersecting dynamics:

1. **Strategic Language:** His discourse is carefully engineered to appear civic-minded, culturally protective, and legally plausible, while concealing its racist and authoritarian implications. This form of dog-whistle rhetoric enables extremist ideas to enter public discourse with plausible deniability for their proponents.
2. **Transnational Impact:** Although rooted in the German-speaking world, Sellner's ideas resonate across Europe and North America, particularly within Identitarian networks and segments of the far-right seeking intellectual legitimacy. Terms such as 'ethnopluralism' and 'remigration' have migrated into the vocabulary of more mainstream actors, including the AfD, the FPÖ, and figures like Éric Zemmour.
3. **Cultural Metapolitics:** Sellner positions himself less as a political leader than as a cultural entrepreneur. His strategy is to shift the Overton window; normalizing exclusionary ideas in public discourse through metapolitical engagement in publishing, social media, and countercultural activism rather than traditional party politics.

Sellner's book is, therefore, not merely a manifesto but a discursive blueprint for 21st-century far-right movements: it reframes racism as policy, ethnonationalism as patriotism, and deportation as the defense of order. It demonstrates how language itself becomes a political weapon in the hands of the far-right.

Future research should explore how far-right actors continue to build on Sellner's strategies and whether similar patterns of coded rhetoric and populist adaptation are emerging in other national contexts. The role of digital platforms – particularly Telegram and TikTok – in the dissemination of such rhetoric also warrants further scrutiny, especially in the context of combating online hate speech and extremism. From an Identitarian perspective, 'cultural preservation' is framed as a defensive response to the perceived threats of multiculturalism and immigration. By using modern digital tactics and countercultural aesthetics, Identitarian leaders seek to mobilize younger Europeans skeptical of liberal and multicultural ideals.

The Identitarians might lack direct political power, but as this article has shown, figures like Sellner exert ideological influence on broader right-wing and far-right parties in Europe. The increasing presence of 'remigration' in right-wing political discourse – often with less explicit but similar exclusionary connotations – suggests that Sellner's strategy of linguistic normalization is successful. His long-term objective is to shift public perception and make discussions of reversing immigration not only permissible but politically advantageous, encouraging mainstream and populist parties to adopt stricter immigration stances inspired by 'remigrationist' thinking. The continued normalization of 'remigration' discourse may further shift the boundaries of acceptable political language within European migration debates.

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