

Reclaiming Freedom, Reframing Truth: The Alt-Right as Pseudo-Minority Discourse

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This study examines how European Alt-Right elites construct legitimacy through “pseudo-minority” discourse. Four keynote speeches from CPAC (Conservative Political Action Conference) Hungary 2025 (Orbán, Meloni, Weidel, Wilders) were analyzed using theory-driven thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) within a social constructionist framework, informed by Social Representations Theory and Minority Influence Theory. Findings reveal a recursive rhetorical architecture that first anchors political issues as existential moral threats (e.g., “civilization under attack”), converting diffuse anxiety into shared social representations. Second, leaders perform a “pseudo-minority” style by displaying high consistency and moral investment, a discursive strategy that theoretically triggers socio-cognitive conflict while bypassing the psychological dismissal typically associated with rigidity. Co-occurrence analysis indicates that the frequent pairing of rigid imperatives with value-bridges provides a linguistic framework for the incremental normalization of exclusionary values. These results identify the discursive pathways through which Alt-Right influence simulates the conditions for latent conversion, facilitating a

long-term transformation of the moral 'common sense' that is theoretically consistent with simultaneous public bipolarization and delayed private agreement.

KEYWORDS: Alt-Right rhetoric, Minority influence, Pseudo-minority discourse, Social Representations Theory

INTRODUCTION

CPAC, Conservative Political Action Conference, Hungary 2025 serves as a transnational communicative scene where nationalist rhetoric and moral storytelling converge. Figures like Viktor Orbán, Giorgia Meloni, Alice Weidel, and Geert Wilders utilized this stage to reassert a shared moral universe, framing 'civilization' as being under threat from elite decay and globalism. Analyzing these speeches provides a unique lens on how contemporary European Alt-Right leaders construct legitimacy through emotion and morality, revealing the mechanisms through which discourse transforms ideological conviction into collective identity, an intersection best understood through the theoretical frameworks of Alt-Right narratives, social representations and minority influence. Despite growing attention to Alt-Right communication (e.g. Hartzell, 2018; Topinka, 2022; Vandiver, 2020), little is known about how its moral-emotional discourse operates as a system of minority influence rather than as a set of isolated ideological claims. This study addresses this by combining discourse analysis with social representation theory and minority influence theory to uncover how moralized narratives translate into legitimacy.

Alt-Right narrative

The European radical right has mainstreamed a distinctive communicative style that constructs meaning by moralizing difference and redefining legitimate public speech (Mudde, 2019; Wodak, 2015, 2021). Mudde (2007) conceptualized the far right's ideological core as a triad of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. This framework remains central for analyzing contemporary rhetorical appeals, as Rydgren (2018) has further demonstrated by identifying these core features as the 'master propeller' of radical right-wing success across European contexts. Building on this triad, populism supplies the antagonistic form ("people" vs. "elite"), while nativism and authoritarianism provide the justificatory content and moral imperative that render exclusion

morally legitimate (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018). This configuration allows far-right actors to present exclusionary politics as the defense of ordinary citizens, re-inscribing hierarchy within the language of equality and authenticity (Brubaker, 2017).

The effectiveness of the Alt-Right narrative lies in its ability to transform ideological polarization into moral antagonism. As Wodak (2021) notes, European far-right leaders consistently frame political conflict as an existential struggle between purity and corruption, security and chaos, civilization and decline. De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017) show that this antagonistic framing is not accidental but discursively produced through what they term equivalence chains, namely linguistic linkages that bind disparate grievances, such as migration, unemployment, moral decay, into a single narrative of loss. The “people” thereby emerge as a moral subject whose suffering authenticates their political agency. Through repetition and affective charge, such narratives function as performative crises rather than descriptions of reality, inviting audiences to experience anxiety and resentment as forms of civic virtue (Moffitt, 2016). These rhetorical structures help explain why empirical analyses across Europe find strong correlations between perceptions of cultural threat and support for populist-radical-right parties (Golder, 2016; Meijers, 2022).

Identity construction is therefore central to Alt-Right rhetoric, since it depends on a continual delineation of the boundaries between “us” and “them”, translating abstract cultural anxiety into personalized enemies (Krzyżanowski, 2020). Migrants, feminists, environmentalists, or European institutions and “elites” are cast as agents of an imposed cosmopolitanism that undermines local sovereignty and moral order (Backman & Demker, 2019). Brubaker (2017) captures this move as a shift from nationalism to civilizationism, activating the defense of a perceived Western or Christian civilization rather than the nation alone. This broadened frame allows the Alt-Right to transnationalize its message while preserving the logic of exclusion. At the same time, the discourse repositions dominant majorities as victimized minorities, a process that Forscher and Kteily (2020) describe in psychological terms as moral inversion and status threat. By claiming that “the majority can no longer speak”, Alt-Right rhetoric enacts what Salazar (2018) calls a community of discourse founded on resentment: a sense of collective grievance that fuses identity with injury. Through this rhetorical inversion, privilege is rearticulated as oppression, enabling moral legitimacy for defensive aggression.

A defining feature of the contemporary Alt-Right is its affective and stylistic mode of persuasion, mobilizing emotions, especially anger, fear, nostalgia, and humiliation, as instruments of belonging and boundary-making (Wodak, 2021; Krzyżanowski, 2020). The appeal to affect functions rhetorically, since it binds audiences not through agreement with propositions but through shared feelings of grievance (Salmela & von Scheve, 2017). Converging evidence indicates that sensitivity to status threat and grievance emotions shape receptivity to Alt-Right appeals (Forscher & Kteily, 2020; Salmela & von Scheve, 2017), turning anger into courage, resentment into authenticity and fear into civic virtue (Moffitt, 2016). By dramatizing decline and performing outrage, leaders and influencers present themselves as emotionally truthful figures, thereby collapsing sincerity into truth (Hartzell, 2018).

This discourse highlights what Lux and Jordan (2019) call *mainstreimeist* ideology, that is the blending of extremist imaginaries with mainstream vocabularies of morality, family and nation. Its communicative success also rests on its transnational circulation of narratives. As Froio and Ganesh (2019) show, far-right actors across Europe increasingly borrow frames, slogans, and symbols from one another, transforming domestic grievances into global civilizational discourses. Such framing enables cross-border solidarity among movements otherwise divided by national identity and it extends the emotional vocabulary of victimhood to an imagined collective. The digital sphere intensifies this process by connecting local publics to global repertoires of fear and nostalgia (Fielitz & Thurston, 2018). Caiani and Kröll (2015) argue that online transnationalization not only expands reach but also transforms the far-right's organizational logic, from parties and movements to networked cultures of discourse.

These dynamics underline that the Alt-Right operates less as a fixed ideology than as a discursive ecosystem that reproduces itself through emotional circulation, symbolic inversion and normalization. These discursive operations expand what is perceived as legitimate expression in the public sphere and each rhetorical move, e.g., constructing “the people”, vilifying “the elite”, dramatizing crisis and claiming authenticity, produces a shared symbolic world. This world consists of recurring representations of identity, threat, and moral order, which organize collective perception far beyond the immediate audience. In this sense, Alt-Right discourse functions as a generator of social representations (Gibson, 2015; Moscovici, 1988). It constructs common-sense knowledge that defines what is thinkable and sayable in public life. The next section therefore examines how these rhetorical formations can be understood through the framework of social

representations theory, which illuminates how discourse produces collective meaning and, through that, social influence.

Social Representations and the Discursive Construction of Meaning

The theory of social representations (SR) emerged from Moscovici's (1961/1976) effort to explain how societies transform the unfamiliar into the familiar through shared symbolic frameworks. Representations make complex or abstract phenomena accessible to collective understanding, enabling groups to negotiate social reality through communication (Jodelet, 1991; Prost et al., 2023), a framework particularly relevant for understanding how Alt-Right discourse converts ideological abstractions into affective common sense. This shift from cognition to communication positions discourse as the primary site where collective meanings are produced, circulated and contested (Howarth et al., 2014; Jovchelovitch, 2007). Within this framework, knowledge is not a private mental state but a social practice of meaning-making, which is dynamic, conflictual and inherently political. Social representations (SR) transform the unfamiliar into the familiar through anchoring, classifying threats into known categories and objectification, materializing abstract ideas through metaphors like “the nation as a family” (Bauer & Gaskell, 2008; Moscovici, 1988). Through these mechanisms, ideological constructs become emotionally charged social realities rather than abstract doctrines.

Building on this foundation, scholars such as Joffe (2003) and Marková (2017) have highlighted a third, affective mechanism, emotional condensation. This process fuses the cognitive and symbolic dimensions of representation through emotion, compressing multiple meanings, such as danger, morality and belonging, into powerful symbolic images. Unlike anchoring, which classifies, or objectification, which visualizes, emotional condensation energizes representations, turning them into affective nuclei that mobilize collective sentiment and moral judgment. In contemporary political discourse, emotional condensation explains how narratives of purity, contamination, or protection become psychologically compelling and socially contagious.

Recent scholarship underscores that social representations are not neutral reflections of reality but fields of symbolic struggle (Howarth et al., 2014). Competing actors attempt to impose their own definitions of truth and legitimacy, determining which meanings prevail in public discourse. Krzyżanowski (2020) shows how far-right communication normalizes racism by *re-anchoring* “migration” within moral and civilizational binaries, while Awad and Wagoner (2022)

demonstrate how online imagery, such as the defense of “purity” or “heritage”, functions as objectifications that sustain collective emotions and identity boundaries. Thus, the SR framework offers a conceptual map of how ideologies circulate through discourse, blending cognition, affect and power.

These representational processes also form the foundation of social influence, understood not as linear persuasion but as a transformation of shared meaning. As Papastamou et al. (2017) argue, influence occurs when social groups elaborate, resist or redefine dominant representations. Majority discourse stabilizes social order through repetition and consensus, whereas minority discourse introduces cognitive conflict that opens space for representational change (Gardikiotis, 2011; Maass & Clark, 1984). From this perspective, influence operates through the reorganization of collective meaning within symbolic fields, an insight that becomes particularly relevant when examining movements like the Alt-Right, whose persuasive power depends on circulating emotionally charged, identity-relevant representations.

Social representations therefore provide a powerful bridge between language, ideology and emotion. They reveal how meaning is collectively constructed, morally loaded and affectively sustained, turning discourse itself into an instrument of influence. This orientation prepares the ground for the next section, which explores how social influence mechanisms consolidate and legitimize such representations within the moral-emotional architecture of Alt-Right rhetoric.

Social Influence and the Dynamics of Discursive Persuasion

Social influence was initially studied through controlled experiments that examined conformity, obedience and persuasion (Asch, 1956; Cialdini, 2001; Milgram, 1974). Yet, as the work of Moscovici (Moscovici, 1976; Moscovici & Faucheux, 1972) argues, these paradigms captured only one dimension of influence, that is the power of majorities to enforce compliance. In contrast, Moscovici introduced the notion of minority influence, shifting attention to how small, consistent groups introduce innovation by transforming the way people think rather than by enforcing conformity, arguing that social change originates not from obedience but from the creation of alternative meanings. Influence, therefore, operates not only through direct persuasion but through the reorganization of shared understanding (Maass & Clark, 1984; Papastamou et al., 2017; Turner, 1991).

From this standpoint, influence becomes a form of communication that structures collective cognition. Majority discourses maintain coherence by invoking consensus, “common sense” or obedience, while minority discourses disrupt it through cognitive conflict, a dynamic further unpacked below in the mechanisms of minority influence (Gardikiotis, 2017). Influence thus emerges as a dialogical process within which language mediates social identity, power and recognition.

This dialogical conception aligns with social identity theory and self-categorization theory (Reicher et. al., 2020; Turner & Oakes, 1986). These frameworks show that persuasion depends on ingroup identity and shared norms rather than rational argumentation alone. Messages are influential when they resonate with the collective self-definition of a group. Discursively, influence entails the rearticulation of “who we are” and “what we stand for” (Haslam et al., 2020). Such rearticulation is central to political communication, where leaders and movements attempt to define the normative boundaries of belonging. Through the constant negotiation of identity, discourse itself becomes a mechanism of social coordination and control.

When applied to ideological communication such as the Alt-Right, these principles highlight how marginal narratives can transform into mainstream discourse. Minority influence theory predicts that consistent and distinctive communication, when framed around moral conviction and group identity, can gradually reshape dominant norms (Nemeth, 2018). Initially peripheral, Alt-Right’s rhetoric achieved visibility through a combination of communicative persistence, emotional appeal and symbolic coherence. By framing itself as a silenced minority defending “truth” and “authenticity”, it enacted as counter-normative consistency, challenging established representations while maintaining a stable internal logic. Over time, repetition and media amplification facilitated what Wodak (2021) calls the normalization of the unsayable, shifting the boundaries of acceptable discourse.

Beyond its structural and representational dimensions, social influence also operates through identifiable mechanisms that characterize the persuasive dynamics of minority discourse. Moscovici (1980) and Mugny (1982) first demonstrated that minorities exert influence not by authority or coercion but by maintaining consistency in their positions over time. The notion of holding to a coherent viewpoint even under pressure creates cognitive conflict within the majority and triggers deeper message elaboration, a process Moscovici termed conversion. The persistence of the minority acts as a signal of conviction, inviting others to reconsider dominant assumptions

(Mugny, 1982; Mugny & Papastamou, 1982). Another mechanism involves independence and autonomy of thought. Successful minority influence depends on being perceived as acting from internal principles rather than strategic conformity (Mugny & Papastamou, 1982; Nemeth, 1986). Independence communicates authenticity and moral integrity, qualities that increase the persuasive weight of minority positions, particularly in ideological or moral debates. As a result, discursive minorities gain traction not through numerical strength but through symbolic authority.

Minorities also mobilize universal values, e.g., justice, equality, freedom, to legitimize their divergence (Moscovici et al., 1985; Mugny, 1982). By appealing to shared moral ideals, they present their stance as more consistent with the collective conscience than that of the dominant majority. This rhetorical strategy reframes dissent as fidelity to common principles, allowing minority movements to portray themselves as moral reformers rather than deviants.

Finally, minority discourse often involves symbolic identification with the people or the nation. Reicher and Haslam (2006) show that social influence is strongest when speakers redefine group boundaries and present themselves as representatives of a moral ingroup. Through this process, minorities transform their structural marginality into rhetorical centrality, asserting that they, not the institutional elites, speak for the “true” collective self. This strategy underlies what has been called the rhetoric of majoritarian minority: a form of discursive inversion through which exclusionary movements appropriate the language of victimhood and authenticity to expand their appeal.

In their seminal work, Mugny and Papastamou (1982) argued that minority influence is best understood as a triadic communication: an active minority (source) addresses a broader public (audience) about a contested object (issue). Rather than seeking obedience to the source, as the majoritarian power does, effective minorities keep principled consistency around the object, creating cognitive conflict that prompts deeper elaboration and “conversion”, namely private, often delayed attitude change that can precede or even occur without public compliance (Martin & Hewstone, 2009; Moscovici, 1980; Personnaz, 1981). In this triadic dynamic, minorities gain traction when they present themselves as autonomous and value-driven (not strategic), reframing the meaning of the issue and, by extension, who “we” are in relation to it, mechanisms theorized across classic and contemporary work on autonomy/consistency and identity-relevant persuasion (Mugny, 1982; Mugny & Papastamou, 1982). The net effects are deeper message processing, latent

(private) shifts, divergent thinking and sleeper-type normalization of initially counter-normative positions.

Paicheler's studies (1976) add a crucial corrective, namely that minority style can trigger "reactive" dynamics. Certain confrontational or identity-threatening enactments do not yield uniform movement, but they split audiences, producing simultaneous attraction and repulsion, what Paicheler termed bipolarization. Under these conditions, a minority can catalyze conversion in receptive segments while mobilizing counter-reaction in others, sharpening opinion separation and increasing salience of the contested norm. This accounts for the empirical pattern in which pseudo-minority political actors grow both followership and backlash at once, with mixed public compliance but potent private change signals, exactly the asymmetry a triadic model would predict when style amplifies identity stakes. Together, these mechanisms, namely consistency, independence, conflict articulation, indirect influence, value appropriation and symbolic identification, constitute the architecture of minority discursive influence. They explain how peripheral voices acquire legitimacy, reshape collective meaning and eventually redefine the limits of acceptable discourse. Understanding them is crucial for analyzing movements such as the Alt-Right, whose persuasive success depends less on overt coercion than on the subtle normalization of dissenting representations within the communicative field.

A critical dimension in analyzing Alt-Right discourse is the interplay between institutional power and the performative style of an active minority. Unlike classic minority influence, where the source typically lacks structural power (Moscovici, 1976), the actors in this study, many of whom occupy high-ranking governmental positions, utilize a "pseudo-minority" style as a deliberate discursive strategy. By framing themselves as outsiders resisting a hegemonic "globalist" or "liberal" elite, they effectively mobilize the psychological mechanisms of minority influence, such as behavioral consistency and the creation of social conflict (Butera & Mugny, 2001), while simultaneously wielding institutional authority. This "hegemonic minority" positioning allows them to bypass the accountability typically associated with power (Reicher et al., 2008), reframing their exercise of authority as a defensive struggle for "truth" and "freedom" against a perceived oppressive majority. As Papastamou, Gardikiotis, and Prodromitis (2017) have argued, social influence is a struggle over the societal meaning of issues, beyond the matter of numerical strength. In this context, dominant actors may strategically adopt a minority-style consistency to induce cognitive conflict and facilitate "conversion", a deep-seated, latent shift in the audience's social

representations. In this sense, power is discursively inverted to simulate the moral urgency of a marginalized group, thereby facilitating the normalization of exclusionary social representations.

While Moscovici developed Social Representations Theory and Minority Influence as distinct frameworks often applied in different research contexts, they are fundamentally linked by a shared epistemology (Orfali, 2002). Both theories examine how social groups negotiate meaning and challenge the status quo through communicative action. As recent scholarship suggests, integrating these frameworks allows for a more holistic understanding of how active minorities transform the social landscape by reshaping the very representations that stabilize collective reality (Leroy et al., 2025). In this study, this integration is crucial for modeling how Alt-Right actors utilize a minority style to inject new, exclusionary meanings into the shared representational field.

Overall, this study attempts to contribute a) to understanding Alt-Right discourse, by theorizing pseudo-minority influence as a rhetorical mechanism that converts moralized narratives into legitimacy, specifying how civilizationism, moral antagonism and affective style construct a repeatable rhetorical architecture and b) to socio-psychological theory, by integrating Social Representations Theory with Minority influence to model how anchoring, objectification, and emotional condensation furnish the symbolic raw material for minority-style influence claims in majoritarian actors.

From the above, the theoretical framework proposed, locates Alt-Right communication in the intersection of a rhetorical architecture that moralizes antagonism (populism, nativism and authoritarianism), b) social representations that stabilize meaning via anchoring, objectification and emotional condensation and c) minority-style influence mechanisms that translate moralized meaning into legitimacy. Accordingly, the research questions were the following:

RQ1: How do Alt-Right leaders construct moral legitimacy discursively?

RQ2: How do the mechanisms of social representations, such as anchoring, objectification and emotional condensation, transform ideological positions into shared moral meanings within Alt-Right discourse?

RQ3: What social representations and moral imaginaries define collective identity and belonging in Alt-Right rhetoric?

RQ4: How do mechanisms of minority influence operate in Alt-Right discourse to transform dissent and perceived marginality into sources of moral authority and ideological normalization?

Together, these questions operationalized the study's threefold theoretical focus on moralization, representation and influence, structuring both the coding framework and the thematic presentation of results.

The empirical corpus (6.938 words) consisted of four speeches delivered during the CPAC Hungary 2025:

1. Viktor Orbán (Prime Minister of Hungary – 2.585 words)
2. Giorgia Meloni (Prime Minister of Italy – 1.546 words)
3. Alice Weidel (Co-leader of Alternative für Deutschland – 962 words)
4. Geert Wilders (Leader of the Party for Freedom in Netherlands – 1.305 words)

These cases were purposefully selected to capture the transnational diffusion of Alt-Right discourse. CPAC Hungary serves as a symbolic and ideological bridge for right-wing populist movements, providing a unique setting for examining the globalization of far-right rhetoric. Collectively, these four leaders embody both institutional authority and anti-establishment populism, offering comparative insight into how strategic narratives and moral framings are adapted across national and cultural contexts.

METHODOLOGY

The analysis proceeded through iterative cycles of coding, thematic integration, and cross-case comparison, following a social constructionist stance. This perspective assumes that discourse does not merely reflect but actively constructs social and moral realities. The study employs a theory-driven (deductive) thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). This approach was deemed most appropriate as it allows for the systematic identification of patterns (themes) within the data while being explicitly guided by the theoretical tenets of Social Representations Theory and Minority Influence. The analysis was further enriched by an interpretive discursive lens, focusing not only on the content of the themes but also on their function in constructing political legitimacy.

Using ATLAS.ti 25, each transcript was examined for rhetorical, affective, and symbolic patterns related to moralization, representation, and influence. Initial codes were generated based on the theoretical framework, while emergent codes were integrated to capture context-specific nuances. Code co-occurrence tables and frequency analyses were then used to identify dominant discursive configurations across speakers, supported by visual mapping (e.g., Sankey diagrams and

co-occurrence networks) to examine how rhetorical and representational mechanisms intersect. To ensure the conceptual rigor and interpretive depth of the analysis, a thematic agreement procedure was employed. In line with a constructionist perspective, this process aimed to enhance the consistency and transparency of the coding frame through a dialogical validation process, where an independent coder reviewed a representative subset of the data (approximately 20%). Discrepancies were resolved through iterative deliberation and refinement of the codebook definitions until full conceptual convergence was reached, ensuring that the themes were consistently grounded in the data

These analytical steps culminated in the four code groups presented in the results: a) Alt-Right rhetorical architecture, b) Mechanisms of social representations, c) Contents of social representations and d) Mechanisms of (pseudo) minority influence. These results are employed to interpret how language mobilizes identity and emotion to secure ideological resonance. This analysis aligns with Krzyżanowski's (2020) focus on discursive shifts, examining how far-right actors normalize exclusionary rhetoric through subtle linguistic transformations, while also drawing on Haslam's, Reicher's and Platow's (2020) social identity approach to political leadership and mobilization (for the full coding frame and individual codes, see Appendix A).

All speeches were manually transcribed by the researcher to ensure accuracy in capturing both linguistic and paralinguistic elements (e.g., pauses, emphasis, rhetorical tone). The transcription process followed verbatim conventions adapted from political discourse analysis protocols (Fairclough, 2010; Wodak & Meyer, 2016) (Fairclough, 2010; Wodak, 2021). To ensure transcription reliability, each transcript was cross-checked against the original audio twice and corrected for omissions or misheard segments. Particular attention was given to rhetorical emphasis and affective markers relevant to the analytical focus of the study. After verification, transcripts were cleaned and imported into ATLAS.ti 25 for qualitative coding and indicators of groundedness (quotation frequency) and density (code interconnection) were provided by the software and presented in the results. The analysis combined deductive and inductive reasoning. Deductively, theoretical insights from the literature on Alt-Right rhetoric (Mudde, 2019; Wodak, 2021), social representations (Howarth, 2006; Moscovici, 1981) and minority influence (Moscovici, 1976; Papastamou et al., 2017) guided the initial coding structure. Inductively, emergent codes were generated to capture context-specific nuances that went beyond the explicit categories of the initial theoretical model. For example, while the framework provided a general mapping of "threat",

inductive coding allowed for the identification of more granular themes such as “civilizational siege” and “moral contamination”. These emergent codes better captured the unique affective intensity and the metaphorical landscape of the Alt-Right leaders' rhetoric. This design ensured both conceptual precision and empirical openness, ensuring empirical fidelity without compromising theoretical depth.

Each unit of analysis corresponded to a rhetorically coherent segment, typically a sentence or short paragraph, expressing a single discursive function (e.g., justification, moral contrast, threat construction). This ensured analytical granularity while maintaining contextual integrity. In addition, emphasis was placed on semantic meaning and performative context rather than word frequency (Gee, 2014; Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

Theoretical Derivation of Codes

The coding framework employed in this study was theoretically derived through an integration of three major strands of literature: a) research on the rhetorical mechanisms of the populist and Alt-Right communicative style, b) social representations theory, focusing on the production and circulation of collective meaning and c) social influence theory, particularly minority influence and identity-based persuasion. Each cluster of codes was grounded in these theoretical foundations and operationalized through recurrent rhetorical and affective patterns across the four speeches analyzed. This theoretically informed yet empirically attuned approach ensured that the analytical categories captured the ideological architecture, symbolic mechanisms and persuasive dynamics that underpin contemporary far-right discourse (Wodak, 2021; Papastamou, Gardikiotis, & Prodromitis, 2017).

The first code group, Alt-Right Rhetorical Architecture, captures the structural logic of Alt-Right communication as theorized in the populist-radical-right tradition (Mudde, 2019; Rydgren, 2018). Building on the triad of *nativism, authoritarianism and populism*, this rhetorical architecture constructs political meaning by moralizing social difference and transforming political conflict into moral antagonism. Codes such as *Elites as corrupt and deceitful*, *People as pure and virtuous* and *Reference to the will of the people* derive directly from populist theory, where antagonism between a virtuous “people” and a corrupt “elite” constitutes the core discursive frame (De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017). Other codes, including *Civilization under attack*, *Defense of Western/Christian civilization* and *Immigration framed as invasion*, originate from the concept of *civilizationism*

(Brubaker, 2017), which extends nationalism to a transnational defense of “the West”. Empirically, these appear through recurrent metaphors of defense, contamination and restoration that reframe exclusion as moral duty. Finally, codes such as *Nation as family/community* and *Protection of tradition* capture the moralization of belonging through familial and sacred metaphors (Wodak, 2015), highlighting how affective and moral appeals replace policy reasoning in legitimizing hierarchy as authenticity (Moffitt, 2016). These rhetorical architectures do not merely express ideology but actively produce social representations. They create the symbolic raw material, e.g., heroes, threats and sacred values, that later become stabilized through anchoring and objectification processes.

The second group, Mechanisms of Social Representations, derives from Moscovici’s theory of social representations (Moscovici, 1976) and subsequent developments in the field (Howarth, 2006; Marková, 2017). These codes reflect the mechanisms through which discourse turns abstract ideological positions into elements of “common sense”. *Anchoring to moral order* and *Anchoring to threat/decline* capture the classificatory process by which complex phenomena, e.g., migration, globalization, social change, are integrated into familiar moral schemas such as “danger”, “loss”, or “corruption” (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999; Wagner et al., 1999). *Objectification via exemplars and metaphors* and *Objectification via purity/contamination* express the materialization of abstract ideas through vivid imagery and binary oppositions, transforming ideology into tangible reality. For example, metaphors of “flood”, “siege”, or “pollution” concretize anxiety into threat representations (Krzyżanowski, 2020). *Emotional condensation* and *Repetition and familiarization* describe how affectively charged language and iterative slogans stabilize these meanings until they become perceived truths (Salmela & von Scheve, 2017; Howarth & Jovchelovitch, 2019). Empirically, such mechanisms appeared as moralizing refrains, e.g., “defend”, “restore”, “save” and repetitive associations between national identity and virtue.

The third group, Social Representations (Contents), specifies the substantive content of these representations, the shared symbolic resources that define the moral landscape of Alt-Right rhetoric. The content of these representations is organized around antinomian themata (Marková, 2017), fundamental, oppositional dyads such as 'purity vs. contamination' or 'the sacred family vs. globalist decay'. These themata allow Alt-Right leaders to anchor diffuse anxieties into concrete, moralized social representations that define the symbolic 'moral world' used to justify belonging and exclusion (see Appendix A for the corresponding codes and their thematic grouping). Codes

such as *Freedom and truth as identity anchors* and *Authenticity and outrage as proof of truthfulness* draw on work that links emotional expression to epistemic credibility. Exclusion reframed as protection and *Purity as moral value* echo Wodak's (2021) argument that xenophobic positions are legitimated as protective acts. Similarly, *Moral majority claim* and *Nation as sacred or familial community* derive from the process of moral inversion (Forscher & Kteily, 2020). Finally, *Nostalgic restoration* captures the performative appeal to a lost "golden age" (Moffitt, 2016). The mechanisms of social representations were analyzed separately from their contents to capture the dual nature of representational processes. Following Moscovici's (1976) distinction between how representations are formed and what they contain, this study treated anchoring, objectification and emotional condensation as semiotic and affective mechanisms that stabilize meaning, while the contents of social representations (e.g., purity, family, nation) were examined as symbolic resources that constitute the moral landscape of Alt-Right discourse. This distinction allowed the analysis to differentiate between the formative dynamics that turn ideology into "common sense" and the substantive moral imaginaries that give it emotional and cultural depth. Analyzing these two dimensions separately ensured conceptual precision and revealed how the same mechanisms can sustain different moral contents across contexts.

The final code group, Mechanisms of (Pseudo) Minority Influence, integrates social-influence theory with the observed persuasive strategies of the Alt-Right. Moscovici's (1980) and Nemeth's (1986) models of minority influence emphasize that social change stems from consistent, independent and morally grounded communication rather than coercion. The codes *Consistency and moral conviction* and *Independence from institutions* translate these principles to ideological rhetoric: persistence and defiance signal authenticity and courage. *Framing dissent as moral resistance* and *Value appropriation (freedom, justice, democracy)* align with Mugny's (1982) and Moscovici & Pérez's (2007) insight that minorities gain legitimacy by reclaiming universal values and presenting opposition as moral reform. The Alt-Right exemplifies this through claims of defending democracy and free speech against "censorship". *Silenced majority claim* reflects Papastamou et al.'s (2017) notion of the "majoritarian minority", wherein groups with structural power rhetorically adopt minority status to justify antagonism. Finally, *Symbolic identification with the people* and *Cross-border patriot network* demonstrate Haslam's et. al (2020) concept of identity leadership, in which speakers present themselves as the embodiment of the ingroup and as part of a transnational "patriot" movement (Froio & Ganesh, 2019). Furthermore, the code *Civilizationism*

as transnational identity extends the logic of identity leadership to the civilizational level, positioning “the West” as a supra-national in-group. This process reinforces cross-border identification among audiences and transforms ideological solidarity into a perceived moral alliance.

Together, these four clusters show how Alt-Right rhetoric performs ideological persuasion as a communicative practice. The *rhetorical architecture* provides the antagonistic grammar of discourse, the *mechanisms of social representations* describe how meaning is stabilized and affectively charged, the *contents of representations* specify the moral imaginaries that anchor identity and the *mechanisms of (pseudo) minority influence* explain how these imaginaries are mobilized to expand legitimacy and normalize exclusion. This theoretically grounded derivation conceptualizes Alt-Right influence not as a linear process but as a recursive dynamic, arguing that rhetorical architectures generate representations that mobilize influence, which in turn reinforces the underlying symbolic frames. Such circularity accounts for the durability of these discourses across contexts and speakers.

RESULTS

Before presenting the thematic findings, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the analyzed corpus. Viktor Orbán’s address functioned as a strategic call to arms, aiming to unify European and American “patriots” for a “decisive battle” to dismantle the “liberal deep state” in Brussels and Washington. Giorgia Meloni’s speech focused on showcasing Italy as a successful empirical model of conservative governance, aiming to debunk “mainstream propaganda” by highlighting economic growth and migration control. Alice Weidel’s intervention primarily addressed the domestic crisis in Germany, framing the country as a “danger zone” due to mass migration and energy costs, with the aim of positioning the AfD as the only authentic democratic opposition. Finally, Geert Wilders’ address centered on the existential threat of “mass immigration” and the urgent need for radical border closures, aiming to mobilize a moral defense of national identity, faith, and family. While differing in national emphasis, the analysis revealed a coherent rhetorical and affective architecture across the four CPAC speeches, through which Alt-Right leaders legitimized exclusion and mobilized collective identity (representative excerpts and their analytic interpretations are provided in Appendix B). Despite stylistic and contextual differences, all discourses shared a recursive moral

logic, namely an antagonism between purity and corruption, affective anchoring of threat, moralized visions of belonging and performative claims of moral resistance.

The following sections detail the four thematic clusters identified. To ensure transparency in the analytical process, the full coding hierarchy is provided in Appendix A, while a comprehensive selection of verbatim excerpts for each category is presented in Appendix B.

Table 1

Distribution of Code Groups Across the Corpus

Code group	Total quotations	% of total	Interpretive emphasis
Alt-Right rhetorical architecture	212	33.8%	Core structural grammar of antagonism and civilizationism
Mechanisms of social representations	160	25.5%	Processes of anchoring, objectification and affective stabilization
Social representations (contents)	93	14.9%	Moral imaginaries of purity, heritage and freedom
(pseudo) Minority influence	161	25.7%	Strategies of legitimation through defiance and moral resistance
Total	626	100%	

Note. Frequencies represent the relative rhetorical salience of each theoretical mechanism rather than statistical weight. Percentages are proportional to the total coded quotations across all four speeches (Orbán, Meloni, Weidel, Wilders).

The distribution of code groups across the corpus indicates that Alt-Right rhetorical architecture accounts for the largest proportion of coded segments (33.8%), reflecting the dominance of binary moral constructions and civilizationist framing in the analyzed speeches. Mechanisms of social representations (25.5%) and (pseudo) minority influence (25.7%) appear in comparable frequencies, suggesting that affective anchoring and strategies of moral resistance are recurrent rhetorical operations rather than isolated features. The smallest category, Social representations (contents) (14.9%), captures stabilized symbolic repertoires that provide the emotional texture sustaining ideological coherence. Together, these distributions suggest a balanced but hierarchy-driven rhetorical structure in which ideological architecture organizes and legitimizes affective and moral appeals. Frequencies therefore reflect rhetorical salience across the corpus rather than statistical significance.

Table 2*Cross-Case Presence of Code Groups Across Speakers*

	Meloni GR=83	Orban GR =99	Weidel GR =45	Wilders GR =61	Totals
Alt-Right rhetorical architecture GR=212; GS=15	59	76	38	39	212
Mechanisms of SR GR=160; GS=6	33	55	23	49	160
Minority Influence (Pseudo) GR=161; GS=9	40	59	30	32	161
Social Representations GR=93; GS=7	26	21	14	32	93
Totals	158	211	105	152	626

Note. GR (Groundedness) represents the absolute frequency of quotations linked to a code or group. GS (Density) refers to the number of linkages/connections between a code and other codes in the network. The values in the table cells represent the frequency of occurrences across the corpus

Table 2 displays the relative presence of the four code groups across the speeches of Meloni, Orbán, Weidel and Wilders. While all leaders mobilize the same discursive repertoire, variations in emphasis are evident. Orbán and Meloni exhibit the highest overall coding density, showing extensive use of Alt-Right Rhetorical Architecture and Social Representations (Contents). Their speeches integrate civilizational and moral themes with sustained antagonistic framing, marking them as the most rhetorically layered cases.

Weidel and Wilders display lower overall frequency but distinct configurations. Weidel’s discourse is comparatively rich in (Pseudo) Minority Influence patterns, reflecting a stronger orientation toward moral resistance and self-positioning as an oppositional voice. Wilders emphasizes Mechanisms of Social Representations, particularly anchoring and threat-based imagery, indicating a focus on symbolic stabilization of fear and decline.

Overall, the cross-case distribution supports the view that the Alt-Right rhetorical style is transnationally coherent yet locally adapted. The same structural and moral templates are

reproduced across contexts with different emphases, reflecting the interplay between shared ideological grammar and situational calibration.

Alt-Right Rhetorical Architecture

Across the corpus, the cluster Alt-Right Rhetorical Architecture provided the structural backbone of discourse, framing politics as a moral confrontation between purity and corruption, order and chaos, civilization and decay. This cluster captured the essential antagonistic grammar of the Alt-Right: a binary world in which “the people” and “the nation” embody virtue and authenticity, while “liberal elites”, “Brussels” or “progressive forces” appear as corrupting agents of decline.

In Orbán’s speech, this moralized structure reached its fullest expression. His framing of Europe as a “hijacked dream” and a “civilization under attack” exemplified the codes Civilization under attack (existential framing) and Defense of Western/Christian civilization. These constructions did not merely describe external threats, they rather transformed political conflict into a sacred duty of protection. Meloni’s rhetoric similarly embedded moral hierarchy within civilizational terms, invoking the defense of tradition, family and faith as a unifying narrative.

Weidel and Wilders echoed the same architecture through national lenses. In Weidel’s address, the portrayal of Germany as a “danger zone” and of her party as the “true democratic opposition” extended the moral binary into domestic politics, activating the codes People as pure and virtuous and Elites as corrupt and deceitful. Wilders, meanwhile, amplified the logic of invasion and contamination, associating immigration with loss of sovereignty and cultural decline, a clear manifestation of Immigration framed as invasion and Anchoring to threat/decline.

Although each leader localized the antagonism differently, Orbán through civilization, Meloni through culture, Weidel through legitimacy, Wilders through identity, the construction of crisis and moral confrontation served as a generative template, that organized subsequent themes in the corpus. It provided the interpretive ground upon which moralized representations (purity, family, faith) and influence strategies (moral resistance, silenced majority) could later operate.

Mechanisms of Social Representations

The second cluster, Mechanisms of Social Representations, captures the processes through which abstract ideological narratives were transformed into familiar moral frames. Across the corpus,

these mechanisms appeared in the form of anchoring, objectification and emotional condensation, rhetorical strategies that stabilize meaning through repetition and imagery.

Orbán's phrase "*our European dream has been hijacked*" and his repeated references to "*cities bombarded to ruins*" exemplify anchoring to threat and decline. Complex political tensions are reframed as the moral collapse of a once-pure civilization. The same anchoring process emerged in Wilders' warnings that "*mass immigration is rapidly changing our culture and identity*" and "*the Muslim population in Europe is about to triple*". Here, social change becomes anchored to existential narratives of replacement and loss.

Objectification was particularly salient in the recurring metaphors of invasion and contamination. Orbán's line "*this is not integration, it is organized population replacement*" and Wilders' description of European cities "*looking like medieval Arab towns*" concretized cultural anxiety into visible, tangible threat, an instance of objectification via exemplars and metaphors. Similarly, Weidel's expression "*Germany has become a danger zone for its citizens*" personified abstract political dysfunction as physical insecurity, reinforcing the emotional immediacy of decline.

Emotional condensation was achieved through repetitive, affect-laden phrasing. The recurrence of appeals such as "*we must defend*", "*we must restore*" and "*we must protect*" across all four speeches compressed complex ideological arguments into emotionally charged moral imperatives. These affective refrains functioned less as policy statements and more as collective affirmations, devices that turned political discourse into moral ritual. The emotional content of these imperatives (e.g., "*we must defend*") is grounded in the affective triad of fear, outrage and nostalgic pride. For instance, when Orbán refers to a "hijacked dream", the emotional condensation occurs in the evoking of pathos regarding a lost past and the indignation toward a deceitful enemy. The "must" is therefore a performative climax of an accumulated emotional tension between the "sacred" (family/nation) and the "profane" (threat/globalism).

Overall, these mechanisms show how shared social representations are stabilized within Alt-Right communication. Anchoring links ideology to moral memory, objectification translates fear into imagery and repetition fuses emotion with identity. Together, they transform abstract grievances into common-sense convictions recognizable to audiences across cultural and national boundaries.

Social Representations (Contents)

This cluster captures the substantive moral and emotional content that underpins Alt-Right rhetoric, namely the symbolic “moral world” evoked to justify belonging, exclusion and action. Across all four speeches, these representations appeared as emotionally charged narratives linking purity, protection and pride to collective survival.

In Meloni’s speech, purity and moral duty were intertwined: *“God, homeland and family are the three things we defend”* and *“without our Judeo-Christian civilization, there would be no freedom of speech or equality before the law”*. Such phrasing constructs a sacred moral order in which political defense becomes a moral obligation. Similarly, Orbán invoked civilizational sanctity through references to *“our Christian Europe”* and *“the civilization that made us who we are”*. These statements exemplify Nation as sacred or familial community, turning national identity into a moral inheritance that transcends individual choice.

Exclusion reframed as protection was another core theme. Wilders’ lines *“mass immigration is rapidly changing our culture and identity”* and *“we must stop the three propellers of Islamization”* present restrictive policies not as acts of hostility but as moral necessity. Likewise, Weidel’s remark that *“establishment politics have turned Germany into a danger zone for its citizens”* positions exclusion as a protective act, legitimizing fear as care. This discursive inversion, where defending “our people” means denying others, illustrates how moral inversion stabilizes prejudice through ethical reasoning.

Freedom and truth as identity anchors appeared in recurrent affirmations such as Weidel’s *“we fight for free speech, the cornerstone of all freedom”* and Wilders’ *“of course, I will never be silenced”*. Here, liberty becomes not a shared democratic principle but a proprietary value of the in-group, a symbol of authenticity that separates “truth-tellers” from the “corrupt elite”. These statements also link to Authenticity and outrage as proof of truthfulness, as the emotional intensity of speech itself serves as evidence of sincerity.

Finally, Nostalgic restoration infused the corpus with temporal depth. Orbán’s portrayal of the nation as the “last bastion of Christian civilization” and Meloni’s idealization of “heritage preserved by our parents” express a longing for moral continuity. By situating renewal as a return to purity, these representations channel collective anxiety into redemptive narratives of rebirth.

Analysis of the corpus highlighted four dominant social representations shaping collective identity and belonging: a) the social representation of the nation (as family or sacred community), b) the social representation of purity (as a core moral value) c) the social representation of freedom

and truth (as identity anchors) and d) the social representation of civilization (as being under existential threat).

These representations function as moral imaginaries that justify exclusion as protection and their recurrence across all four leaders demonstrates the emotional and symbolic consistency of Alt-Right persuasion.

Mechanisms of (Pseudo) Minority Influence

The fourth cluster, Mechanisms of (Pseudo) Minority Influence, highlights how Alt-Right speakers construct moral legitimacy through rhetorical strategies that mirror classical minority influence processes, consistency, autonomy and moral framing, while simultaneously claiming to represent a “silenced majority”. Through this paradoxical positioning, they transform opposition into moral superiority and persecution into authenticity.

Across the corpus, consistency and moral conviction were foregrounded through personal sacrifice and perseverance (see Appendix B for coded excerpts illustrating these mechanisms). Wilders’ statement *“I have lived under police protection for more than twenty years only for criticizing Islam”* and *“I will never be silenced”* exemplify the construction of moral steadfastness as proof of truth. Similarly, Weidel’s repeated *“we fight for free speech, we fight for secure borders, we fight for sovereignty”* demonstrates unwavering commitment and repetition of principle, an affective consistency that mirrors Moscovici’s (1980) notion of persuasive persistence.

Framing dissent as moral resistance appeared prominently in references to elites as corrupt and in calls to moral rebellion. Meloni’s denunciation of *“weak politicians who opened Europe’s borders and sold out our Judeo-Christian civilization”* transforms political disagreement into ethical confrontation. By re-casting defiance as virtue, dissent becomes an act of righteousness rather than radicalism.

At the same time, speakers repeatedly portrayed themselves as voices of a silenced majority. Weidel warned that *“legitimate opinions are being criminalized”* and that the government *“attempts to silence critical voices under the pretext of fighting hate speech”*. Wilders echoed this by stating that *“millions of people all over Europe feel like strangers in their own country”*. These narratives of dispossession invert power relations, constructing those in authority as victims of censorship and framing the far right as the true democratic minority struggling against oppression.

Value appropriation further strengthened this moral inversion. By invoking democracy, justice and freedom, leaders redefined universal liberal principles as their exclusive moral property. Weidel's invocation "*we fight for peace, for good relations, for freedom*" and Orbán's "*we are the defenders of real Europe*" exemplify how moral vocabulary is repurposed to legitimize ideological closure under the banner of open values. Such re-signification reframes exclusionary politics as the only authentic form of democratic defense.

Finally, symbolic identification with the people and the emergence of a cross-border patriot network suggested how the Alt-Right extends minority influence beyond national contexts. All four speakers constructed an imagined transnational community of "patriots" unified by faith, freedom and family. Meloni's call "*patriots, claim the future, the future is ours*" and Weidel's echo "*let's make Europe great again together*" situate the audience within a moral fellowship that transcends state borders. This rhetorical internationalism of grievance converts isolation into collective strength, sustaining the illusion of moral consensus across nations.

Overall, these mechanisms demonstrate how Alt-Right discourse simulates the communicative dynamics of minority influence to achieve ideological normalization. By performing consistency, claiming victimhood and appropriating moral universals, these actors expand their legitimacy and transform resistance into a perceived moral duty. The analysis showed that the four code clusters operate as interdependent mechanisms within a single persuasive ecosystem. Rather than functioning as discrete layers, they form a recursive communicative cycle through which ideology is constructed, stabilized and legitimized.

At the foundation, Alt-Right Rhetorical Architecture establishes the antagonistic anti-elite discourse, dividing the world into the virtuous "people" and the corrupt "elite". This binary moral structure provides the initial scaffolding for meaning and defines who belongs, who threatens and why moral defense is necessary. Within this architecture, narratives of siege and purity generate the emotional conditions for collective mobilization.

These rhetorical foundations are then stabilized through the mechanisms of social representations, where abstract ideological conflict is anchored to familiar moral schemas such as purity, decay and loss. Through anchoring and objectification, existential anxieties are translated into vivid imagery such as "floods", "replacement", "civilization under attack". Emotional condensation reinforces these ideas until they crystallize as shared common sense. At this stage, ideology becomes self-evident, emotionally true and socially transmissible. Once stabilized, these

symbolic meanings fill with moral and affective content, as expressed in the Social Representations (Contents) cluster. Here, identity is moralized through purity, protection and authenticity. The nation becomes sacred, freedom is reframed as a collective inheritance and exclusion is reinterpreted as moral duty. These contents supply the emotional energy that sustains adherence to the rhetorical structure and make ideological commitment feel like ethical conviction.

Finally, the Mechanisms of (Pseudo) Minority Influence transform these moralized representations into action and legitimacy. By claiming moral consistency and victimhood, speakers construct themselves as righteous outsiders, minorities who “speak truth to power”. Through value appropriation and transnational identification, this sense of moral resistance is amplified into a global community of “patriots”.

To further illustrate how rhetorical mechanisms of legitimation interact with the contents of social representations, a Sankey diagram was generated from the co-occurrence matrix (Appendix C). The diagram visualizes the frequency with which codes from the Influence and Legitimation group (e.g., Nostalgic restoration, Exclusion reframed as protection, Moral majority claim) co-occur with those from the Social Representations group (e.g., Defense of Western/Christian civilization, Nation as sacred or familial community, Immigrants as existential threat). The visualization reveals distinct rhetorical pathways: affective framings of existential threat and nostalgic restoration flow strongly toward moralized representations of civilization, purity and family protection. Similarly, “Freedom and truth as identity anchors” bridges toward representations of national authenticity and moral order, showing how identity values are mobilized to legitimize political defiance. In other words, the diagram maps the symbolic conversion of moral emotion into ideological legitimacy, making the structural link between defensive imaginaries and moralized discourses of belonging visible.

This visual pattern supports the analytical interpretation that Alt-Right discourse does not rely on isolated themes, but on systematic coupling between emotional–moral appeals and representational contents. It demonstrates that influence mechanisms operate by activating and stabilizing shared symbolic schemas rather than by introducing new ideological claims.

DISCUSSION

This study sought to highlight how Alt-Right political communication performs ideological normalization through the interplay of moralization, representation and influence. The results

suggest that these rhetorical processes do more than simply describe reality; they actively generate a moral meaning that transforms power into virtue. Across all four speeches, moral grammar, emotional condensation and minority-style conviction converge to construct what can be described as a performative ecology of legitimacy.

From Moral Grammar to the Construction of Social Reality

Regarding the first RQ, the first analytical cluster, Alt-Right Rhetorical Architecture, showed that far-right discourse relies on a moral rather than political grammar. The binary between a “pure people” and “corrupt elites” converts political opposition into moral antagonism (De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017; Mudde, 2019). This aligns with Wodak’s (2021) notion of the “politics of fear”, where ideological coherence is achieved by framing political difference as an existential threat to civilization itself. In the current corpus, speakers repeatedly portrayed national preservation as a moral duty, thus collapsing civic belonging into moral belonging. The result is what Moffitt (2016) describes as the aesthetic of authenticity: emotional display replaces policy reasoning as proof of moral integrity. This rhetorical architecture prepares the semiotic terrain upon which social representations can operate. The speeches create symbolic anchors, such as heroes, victims and sacred values, that supply the raw materials for anchoring and objectification. Thus, moral binaries serve not merely to justify exclusion but to manufacture the social ontology of the Alt-Right worldview.

Mechanisms of Social Representation: Anchoring Fear, Objectifying Threat

Through the lens of Social Representations Theory (Moscovici, 1976; Howarth, 2006; Marková, 2017), the findings confirm that ideological persuasion depends on turning abstraction into affectively tangible “common sense”, answering the second RQ. Anchoring to moral order and anchoring to threat/decline map complex phenomena, such as migration, globalization and moral diversity, onto familiar moral schemas such as decay, contamination and loss (Wagner et al., 1999; Bauer & Gaskell, 2008). Objectification via exemplars and metaphors further materializes anxiety through recurring imagery of floods, replacement and siege (Krzyżanowski, 2020). These processes collectively stabilize what Salmela and von Scheve (2017) call emotional condensation, namely the repeated fusion of fear, nostalgia and anger into durable moral emotions. Once condensed, such emotions harden into “truth feelings” that immunize believers against counter-

evidence. These stabilized representations furnish the moral vocabulary that makes 'resistance' feel righteous. By anchoring threat in shared “truth feelings”, the discourse creates the necessary cognitive conditions for minority-style influence to bypass psychological dismissal (Mugny, 1982; Moscovici & Pérez, 2007). To further unpack the emotional dynamics, it is argued that emotional condensation functions as the affective energy generated by underlying antinomian themata (Marková, 2017). The transition from a rhetorical imperative (“we must protect”) to an identifiable emotional expression occurs through the constant interplay between the fear of contamination and the love for the ancestral home, instantiating what Rimé (2002) describes as the social sharing of emotion, where the speaker’s performative outrage serves as an epistemic marker, signaling that the 'truth' is felt before it is understood.

From Nation to Civilization: The Expansion of the In-group

The identified social representations, namely of the nation, purity, freedom, and civilization, highlight a consistent process of moralizing belonging (RQ3). Rather than describing identity in political terms, these representations activate the aforementioned antinomian dyads, such as “purity vs. contamination”, to transform the nation into a sacred moral entity (Wodak, 2021). This process exemplifies what Brubaker (2017) defines as civilizationism: the reframing of nationalism into a transnational moral project. By embedding belonging in moral emotions, these representations naturalize exclusion as moral protection and perform what Forscher and Kteily (2020) call moral inversion, positioning dominant groups as vulnerable communities whose defense becomes an ethical imperative.

Finally, by situating this moral community beyond national borders, the Alt-Right creates a civilizational in-group, a symbolic field that merges identity, faith and culture into a transnational moral order. In this sense, leaders like Orbán and Meloni exemplify Reicher and Haslam’s (2017) concept of identity leadership, since they embody the moral essence of the in-group, presenting themselves not merely as political figures but as custodians of a threatened moral civilization.

The Paradox of Pseudo-Minority Influence

Regarding the fourth research question, the data underline the paradox that Alt-Right leaders appropriate the form and emotional dynamics of minority influence while occupying dominant political positions. This creates the illusion of moral insurgency, a strategy that transforms power

into resistance. Consistent with Moscovici's (1980) and Nemeth's (1986) theorization, influence here is performed through consistency, autonomy and moral conviction, yet detached from the structural marginality these models presuppose. Instead, consistency becomes a symbolic performance of integrity, repeated invocations of "truth", "faith" and "defense" simulate the moral steadfastness of a persecuted minority. Through such narratives, domination is re-signified as sacrifice. This discursive inversion enacts what Papastamou, Gardikiotis and Prodromitis (2017) term the majoritarian minority, namely actors who, despite holding ideological or institutional power, frame themselves as morally besieged truth-tellers. The result is a persuasive asymmetry: their moral capital grows precisely because they appear to resist an unjust consensus.

The impact of this pseudo-minority performance lies in triggering a socio-cognitive conflict that facilitates a "sleeper effect" (Moscovici, 1980). By maintaining high perceived consistency framed not as dogmatic "stiffness" but as principled investment in sacred values, these actors trigger a validation process in the audience. While their rigid imperatives (e.g., must/never) may provoke immediate public resistance, the simultaneous use of "value-bridges" (e.g., protecting democracy) allows them to maintain conflict while minimizing psychologization (Mugny & Papastamou, 1982). This strategic "flexible consistency" ensures that, despite visible public opposition, exclusionary representations are incrementally internalized as a latent 'common sense' in the private sphere (Paicheler, 1977).

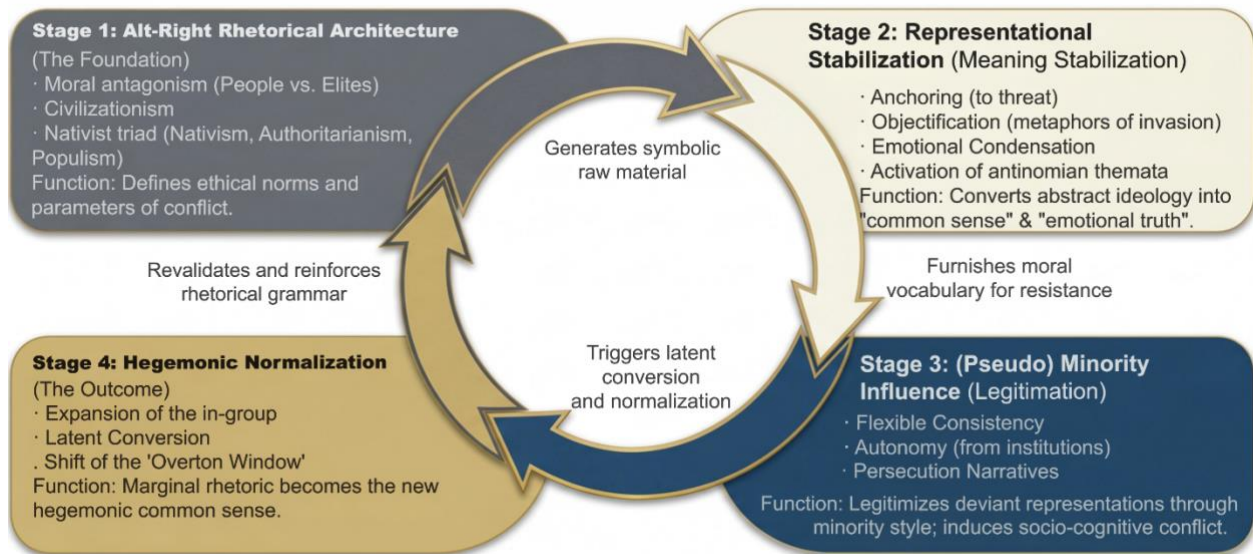
In this way, the Alt-Right's claim to persecution becomes both a narrative of legitimacy and a vehicle for ideological diffusion. The communicative power of this pseudo-minority stance lies in its moral re-framing of hegemony, exclusionary policies are recast as protective acts, censorship as self-defense and political aggression as courage. As Forscher and Kteily (2020) argue, such moral inversion allows dominant groups to appropriate the language of justice and emancipation, thereby neutralizing moral critique. Ultimately, this dynamic demonstrates how the Alt-Right transforms structural dominance into perceived dissent. By using narratives of minority influence without marginality, it converts emotional authenticity into political immunity. The data further confirm that emotionality is constitutive of influence. The speeches activate the purity, loyalty and authority foundations that underlie conservative moral cognition. Emotional intensity therefore becomes a shortcut to credibility, what Rimé (2009) calls the social sharing of emotion that consolidates group cohesion. Through this mechanism, affect operates as moral proof: to feel strongly is to be right. This affective turn also aligns with Moffitt's (2016) account of populism as

performative style. The dramatization of grievance and the promise of renewal turn politics into moral theater. Here, emotional display is not a by-product of ideology but its operational mode, a vehicle for binding followers through shared moral emotion.

The analytical findings are synthesized into a recursive model (Figure 1) illustrating how Alt-Right discourse transforms moral emotion into ideological legitimacy through four integrated stages. First, the Alt-Right Rhetorical Architecture (Stage 1) establishes the foundational moral grammar and binary antagonisms. This framework provides the symbolic raw material for Representational Stabilization (Stage 2), where anchoring to threats and the activation of antinomian themata (e.g., purity vs. contamination) translate abstract ideology into affective “common sense” These stabilized meanings are then mobilized through a Pseudo-Minority Influence Style (Stage 3). By performing flexible consistency and moral resistance, leaders bypass the accountability of power and trigger socio-cognitive conflict. Finally, this process facilitates Hegemonic Normalization (Stage 4), where exclusionary representations are internalized as latent common sense instigating a gradual shift of the “Overton Window” regarding what can be legitimately expressed in public discourse. The process is recursive: this normalization feeds back into the initial rhetorical architecture, revalidating the moral grammar and ensuring the discourse’s durability across contexts.

Figure 1

The Recursive Loop of Alt-Right Legitimation: A conceptual model of the interplay between rhetorical structures, social representations, and pseudo-minority influence



This self-reinforcing dynamic explains both the adaptability and the persistence of the Alt-Right across contexts: it moralizes identity, aestheticizes fear and transforms emotion into legitimacy. By integrating discourse analysis, social representations theory and minority influence, this study highlights that ideological normalization is not imposed from above but cultivated through everyday affective and moral communication. What begins as rhetoric solidifies into moral certainty, a process through which democratic language itself becomes colonized by the grammar of exclusion. Understanding this cycle is therefore essential not only for explaining the endurance of far-right movements, but also for recognizing how the emotional infrastructure of persuasion can quietly erode the boundaries between conviction and coercion. The study's claims concern discursive pathways (not audience outcomes), we specify process-level mechanisms that future audience research can test (e.g., delayed private agreement, post-speech variance widening after rigid segments).

This study faces limitations. The sample is restricted to elite speeches from a single political event (CPAC 2025), which may limit the generalizability across different levels of Alt-Right discourse. Furthermore, as a qualitative discourse analysis, it identifies the pathways of influence

rather than measuring actual behavioral outcomes in audiences. Future research should employ experimental designs to test whether this pseudo-minority style leads to the 'delayed private agreement' characteristic of minority influence.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the CPAC 2025 speeches reveals a coherent rhetorical ecosystem in which moral emotion, symbolic condensation, and populist narrative merge to produce ideological legitimacy. Across leaders, the same moral grammar recurs, purity versus corruption, protection versus invasion, truth versus deceit. Through anchoring and objectification, these binaries translate ideology into moral “common sense”, fusing nationalism with virtue and exclusion with care.

Synthesizing these findings, the study highlights three core arguments regarding the nature of Alt-Right legitimation. First, Alt-Right legitimacy relies on an “affective economy” where emotional condensation (fear, indignation and pride) hardens social representations into “truth feelings” that immunize the discourse against counter-evidence. Second, this influence is exerted through a “majoritarian minority” paradox, where dominant institutional actors appropriate a minority style, performing consistency, autonomy and moral resistance, to bypass the accountability of power. Third, the normalization of this discourse functions via a “sleeper effect”; the initial socio-cognitive conflict created by rigid rhetoric, paves the way for the incremental, private internalization of exclusionary values as a new latent common sense.

This synthesis underscores how contemporary right-wing populism functions not as a doctrine but as an emotional technology. Understanding this dynamic is essential for decoding far-right communication but also for grasping how emotion itself becomes the infrastructure of influence and political legitimacy in the twenty-first century.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Code-Groups and Individual Codes

Code-Groups	Individual Codes
Alt-Right Rhetorical Architecture	Border protection as security duty, Civilization under attack (existential framing), Civilizationism as transnational identity, Defense of Western/Christian civilization, Elites as corrupt and deceitful, Immigration framed as invasion, Moral antagonism (good vs evil), Nation as sacred or familial community, National pride and authenticity, Opposition as chaos and moral decay, Ordinary citizens as moral center, People as pure and virtuous, Protection of family, Protection of tradition, Reference to will of the people as ultimate legitimacy
Mechanisms of SR	Anchoring to moral order, Anchoring to threat/decline, Emotional condensation, Objectification via exemplars and metaphors, Objectification via purity/contamination, Repetition and familiarization
Minority Influence (Pseudo)	Consistency and moral conviction, Cross-border patriot network, Framing dissent as moral resistance, Patriotic renewal as restoration of moral order, Persecution narrative, Silenced majority claim, Symbolic identification with the people, Value appropriation (freedom, justice, democracy) Exclusion reframed as protection; Moral majority claim.
Social Representations (Content)	Civilization under attack; Civilizationism; Defense of Western/Christian civilization; Freedom and truth as identity anchors; Immigrants as existential threat; Immigration framed as invasion; Nation as sacred or familial community; National pride and authenticity; Ordinary citizens as moral center; People as pure and virtuous; Protection of family; Protection of tradition; Purity as moral value; Border protection; Nostalgic restoration

Appendix B. Sample of Coded Excerpts

Below are representative excerpts illustrating how the codebook was applied to the corpus. Each quotation includes its assigned codes and brief analytic interpretation.

Speaker	Verbatim	Applied Codes	Analytic Interpretation
Viktor Orbán	“The people of Europe do not feel safe in their own countries... This is not integration, it is organized population replacement”.	<i>Immigration framed as invasion; Immigrants as existential threat; Exclusion reframed as protection.</i>	Orbán objectifies migration as a military-style “replacement”, transforming exclusionary policy into moral defense of homeland and purity.
Giorgia Meloni	“We must say loudly and clearly to those sabotaging the West from within... we will never be ashamed of who we are”.	<i>Defense of Western/Christian civilization; Protection of tradition; Freedom and truth as identity anchors.</i>	Meloni fuses affective pride with civilizational duty, portraying affirmation of Western identity as moral courage and emotional unity.
Alice Weidel	“They attempt to silence critical voices by framing them as extremist under the pretext of fighting hate speech”.	<i>Silenced majority claim; Elites as corrupt and deceitful; Persecution narrative.</i>	Weidel constructs victimhood as virtue, depicting repression by elites as proof of moral authenticity and democratic legitimacy.
Geert Wilders	“Mass immigration is rapidly changing our culture and identity... Islam and freedom are incompatible”.	<i>Immigrants as existential threat; Purity as moral value; Opposition as chaos and moral decay.</i>	Wilders condenses fear and moral judgment into an existential frame of contamination, fusing cultural purity with freedom.
Viktor Orbán	“Make Europe great again! Go Hungary, go Patriots!”	<i>Emotional condensation; Repetition and familiarization; Patriotic renewal as restoration of moral order.</i>	Through performative repetition, Orbán mobilizes collective emotion and transforms political participation into ritualized moral renewal.
Giorgia Meloni	“We conservatives do what we say. We fight for what we believe in”.	<i>Freedom and truth as identity anchors; People as pure and virtuous; Moral majority claim.</i>	Meloni moralizes consistency and authenticity, aligning conservative identity with truth and integrity against deceitful elites.
Alice Weidel	“One in four German voters have cast their ballots for us... To exclude more than	<i>Reference to will of the people; Moral majority claim; Value appropriation (democracy).</i>	Weidel reclaims democratic language to legitimize populist authority, equating her party

	10 million voters destroys democracy itself’.		with the authentic democratic will.
Geert Wilders	“We fight for faith, family and freedom... God, homeland and family are the three things we defend”.	<i>Nation as sacred or familial community; Protection of family; Emotional condensation.</i>	Wilders blends religious and national imagery into an affective triad, transforming political identity into sacred moral duty.

Appendix C. Co-occurrence Sankey diagram linking mechanisms of legitimation with the contents of social representations.

Co-occurrence Sankey diagram visualizing linkages between mechanisms of legitimation and contents of social representations. Thickness of flows indicates frequency of code co-occurrence within ATLAS.ti

