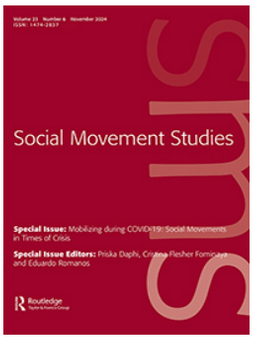

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Far-right leadership in comparison: shifts and continuities in German-speaking movements

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ABSTRACT

Leadership has long been acknowledged as a crucial feature of social movement activity. Theorisation has delved into the types of leadership and, more recently, the activities performed by leaders. However, comparative research on leadership and detection of any changes over time is scant. Our paper attends to these tasks by looking at the activities of two German-speaking far-right leaders. For many years, Christian Worch was one of the most active and influential neo-Nazi leaders in Germany, communicating much of his activity and strategy in the mid-2000s through a regular circular (Rundbriefe). Similarly, Martin Sellner, both as leader of the Identitarian movement and independent activist, today exercises an outsized role in the German-speaking far-right scene, including through his regular publications in the magazines Compact and Sezession. Our paper uses data of Worch's and Sellner's writings, scraped from webpages and gathered from archives, in a mixed-methods comparative design to identify the tasks performed by these leaders, and how frequently. Quantitative text analysis techniques guide the qualitative evaluation of leaders' activities and reveal shifts – and continuities – in far-right movement leadership. The paper thereby contributes to scholarship on an important aspect of contemporary far-right movements as well as broader social movement literature on the topic of leadership.

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Introduction

Leadership is crucial in social movement activity, but often it is relegated to the status of ineffability in scholarly accounts. 'Such and such leader was influential, charismatic'; such is the cursory nod to leadership that often precedes a turn to examine organisations and surrounding contexts. Yet, given its undisputed importance, movement leadership deserves more attention – particularly with movements marked by deference to and reliance on leaders.

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What tasks are leaders performing? Has movement leadership fundamentally changed with the advent of social media tools? This article answers these questions by examining the activity of two prominent leaders of modern German-speaking far-right movements, Christian Worch and Martin Sellner. Worch, a neo-Nazi activist since the 1970s and longtime leader, particularly in the 2000s, represents an earlier generation of the far right. Contrastingly, Sellner, leader of the Austrian Identitarian movement (Identitäre Bewegung Österreichs), is one of the most active and visible leaders of the contemporary far right. Using collections of their public writing obtained from archives and scraped from the Internet, we compare these movement leadership cases with mixed-methods: quantitative text analysis (QTA) helps systematically to parse and juxtapose the corpuses of writing, measuring both a single leader's changing focuses over time and the difference between two generations of far-right leaders. The QTA guides a qualitative examination of Worch's and Sellner's actions in key campaigns that they led.

We find that Worch's focus on mobilizing and conducting demonstrations, and attending to concomitant strategic concerns and legal issues, contrasts sharply with Sellner's concentration on articulating ideology and framing tasks. This dissimilarity is reflected in their campaign leadership, where Worch fixates on actions and their direct, tangible benefits for the movement (and costs for its targets) and Sellner emphasizes the symbolic value of actions and attempts to leverage that into attention and resource mobilisation. Notwithstanding this important difference, Worch and Sellner articulate similar beliefs in the transformative potential of street politics and the need to assail the citadels of their opponents. We observe that, for Sellner at least, social media has changed the strategic utility of demonstrative action compared to Worch, but not overridden fundamental and longstanding commitments to street politics and the prospect of menacing the houses of state authority with masses.

Movement leadership

The literature on social movements does not want for theories of leadership. It is a rich area of theorisation. Scholars have sought to define leader types and, allowing for greater differentiation, their roles and actions. Together, these theories inform our analysis.

Much theorisation on leadership stems from Weber's (1922) ideal typology of authority: legal, traditional, and charismatic. The last of these has attracted the lion's share of scholarly attention. While Weber used 'charisma' to refer to leaders recognized as possessing 'supernatural or superhuman or at least extraordinary talents or abilities,' the term has more recently been used with a less mystical denotation to mean exceptionally captivating. In this vein, researchers have used charisma as a lens with which to examine the leaders of far-right political parties (Eatwell, 2002; McDonnell, 2016; Meret, 2015; Pappas, 2016). McDonnell (2016), for example, describes how Umberto Bossi, the founding leader of Italy's Lega Nord party, attracted a following based on his 'unique qualities, the unconditional acceptance of his authority, and strong emotional attachment to his leadership.'

Charisma is an even more appropriate descriptor for leadership in movements, which typically have fewer rules and organizational procedures, and correspondingly display more of the 'free recognition' of leadership that Weber refers to in his original typology. Several researchers have applied the concept to far-right movements. Charismatic

leadership is associated with a higher likelihood of violent activity among U.S. hate groups (Chermak et al., 2013). In his study of six British far-right leaders, Macklin (2020, p. 5) is quick to point out the dearth of charisma in all but Oswald Mosley.[1] Jamie Cleland (2020) dilates on the charisma of Tommy Robinson during and after his leadership of the English Defence League,[2] ascribing it to great weight in the mobilization of supporters. Yet Macklin (2020, p. 553), referring to Robinson's abortive attempt to establish a British PEGIDA movement, rightly points out that 'technological innovation [i.e., using social media] and charisma alone are not enough' to mobilize effectively.

Although charisma is useful for understanding how movement leaders gain and maintain support, it can obscure the many roles played and actions performed by leaders. Consequently, another strain of theorisation seeks to distinguish more leadership features. Nepstad and Bob (2006) identify 'leadership capital' as crucial to movement development. Consisting of social (building trust and interpersonal networks), cultural (applying knowledge and skills), and symbolic (amassing prestige, honor, and social recognition) components, they point to examples where leadership capital was potent enough to overcome resource or opportunity deficits.

Nepstad and Bob (2006, p. 19) also ask whether there are 'types of movements in which leadership plays a particularly crucial role.' We answer that leadership is particularly important in far-right movements, which by both tradition and ideology are inclined to hierarchical organizations and autocratic leaders (the *Führerprinzip*).[3] The importance of far-right movement leaders has resulted in some attempts to theorize leadership roles. Looking at key figures in the German scene, Virchow (2013a) identifies seven leader types defined by their functions: pioneers, veterans (both of the Third Reich's armed forces and of post-war movement activism), mentors, thought-leaders, networkers and mediators, and financiers.[4] Virchow's empirical typology is useful for describing Germany's far right, but it glosses over the various functions leaders can perform simultaneously (cf. Gusfield, 1966).

Earl (2007) avoids pigeonholing movement leaders by speaking instead about 'leading tasks.' As in Earl's cases, leading tasks are well suited to explaining how leadership occurs in leaderless movements, but just as suitable for examining the diverse activities of identifiable leaders in any social movement. Through a survey of movement research, Earl (2007, pp. 1330–1331) identifies nine leading tasks: articulating vision and ideology, engaging the political environment, framing the movement and its issues, managing relations with non-movement actors, making strategic and tactical decisions, organizing specific actions, managing the internal life of the movement, innovating and entrepreneurial activity, and providing social capital. In performing these tasks, leaders activate followers, give sense to kinds of actions through the movement's political philosophy, make and explain decisions to cooperate with other groups, and promote individuals into roles within the movement.

To lead a movement is to attend to these tasks. The attention leaders devote to one or the other can be reconstructed from the communication where they address their respective activities. Leaders often produce accounts of their leadership activity in speeches or writing. Such text passages provide longitudinal evidence of contextual demands, of necessities particular to movements, and of leaders' inclinations. Leadership may also be bolstered by individuals' accumulation and maintenance of 'street credibility'; this too is reflected in the profile of their activities.

These tasks are the characteristics of leadership that interest us here. In the sections that follow, we connect this theoretical conversation to two important cases. Doing so, we comparatively and longitudinally measure leadership tasks with quantitative techniques and reflect on leadership theory with parallel qualitative analysis.

Leaders

This paper focuses on two modern far-right movement leaders in the German-speaking context. Christian Worch, long-time leader of the German neo-Nazi movement, and Martin Sellner, the most well-known representative of the Identitarian movement in Germany and Austria, have shaped and directed modern far-right activism in the German-speaking world.

Christian Worch (*1956) joined a militant neo-Nazi group named Hansabande in Hamburg in 1974 and soon became an activist of the Aktionsfront Nationaler Sozialisten (ANS, 'Action Front of National Socialists') led by media-savvy Michael Kühnen. When Kühnen went to prison in 1979, Worch assumed group leadership, albeit only briefly as he was also convicted in 1980, receiving a three-year prison sentence (Thein, 2008).

By the 1990s Worch had become one of the most influential neo-Nazi movement leaders. Proscription of two organizations[5] in which Worch had a leading role caused him to avoid direct organizational activity; he rather acted individually, drawing on a large network of long-standing confidants to project his influence. A hallmark of his activism was the promotion of demonstration tactics and strategy, and the legal battle for far-right demonstration rights. Although German authorities often banned far-right demonstrations in the 1990s, a decision by the Constitutional Court in 2000 stated that, contrary to earlier juridical practice, rallies may be held even if they include Nazi slogans. By propelling this court case, Worch improved the neo-Nazi movement's options for organizing followers and mobilizing protest events. For years, Worch devoted his time to organizing demonstrations. He frequently spoke at rallies and regularly distributed Rundbriefe ('circular letters') to like-minded activists. Bolstered by his role in several demonstration campaigns – including in Wunsiedel, Halbe, Leipzig, and Dortmund (Zeller, 2021) – Worch exercised his greatest influence over Germany's far-right scene in this period, the 2000s.

Over time, however, Worch's activism shifted and influence waned. In 2012, Worch founded Die Rechte ('The Right') party and appeared less frequently as a demonstration organizer. On the national level, Worch lost influence as a new generation of neo-Nazis started to organize activities and create their own organizational structures. Though he still occasionally speaks at demonstrations, his importance in the neo-Nazi milieu has declined considerably. Worch is now a spent force.

By contrast, few figures loom as large in the contemporary far-right scene as Martin Sellner (*1989). Sellner is the public face of the Identitarian movement, operates several social media channels, and is a frequent author in far-right publications. Although neo-Nazi Gottfried Küssel acted as his mentor in the 2000s (Schäller, 2019), Sellner has tried to distance himself from extremism and to give far-right activism a more attractive image by adopting the model of the French group Génération Identitaire (see Nissen, 2022), a movement of young people purportedly defending European culture against mass

immigration and Islamization. Sellner became a well-known speaker for the movement, not only in Austria, but also in Germany, where he has frequently appeared at meetings, commented on politics and liaised with far-right politicians, and suggested what strategies would be effective.

Sellner is perhaps most known for leading the so-called 'Defend Europe' campaign in 2017, which we examine below. More recently, Sellner was heavily involved in protests against restrictions imposed to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic. And his meeting with far-right politicians in November 2023 to talk about 'remigration' triggered a wave of protests against the Alternative für Deutschland party (Zeller, 2024).

Sellner, well-known for digital activism, frequently uses social media platforms such as Youtube, Twitter, and Telegram (Gartner et al., 2020). However, since these channels have been blocked repeatedly, he also uses print media. He started a regular column in the monthly magazine *Compact* and also writes for *Sezession*, the 'right-wing intellectual' magazine published by the Institut für Staatspolitik (Volk, 2022). Sellner's regular contributions to these publications are his most consistent and coherent accounts of his activism and views.

Notwithstanding their comparable importance for the far right, the overviews of Worch's and Sellner's activism make plain a key difference. Worch was reared into a far-right scene of interpersonal connections. His mode of mass communication, his Rundbriefe, predated widespread use of the Internet. Even in the 2000s, Worch's Rundbriefe, though circulated as e-mails and now published online, relied on his personal network for circulation. Sellner, on the other hand, is a digital disciple. He has been active on the whole array of prominent social media sites, though he has been deplatformed from several (Fielitz & Schwarz, 2020). Sellner's publications gain readership through his self-promotion. The generational divide between these two leaders is stark. It allows us to draw conclusions from the following analysis about changes over time and the shifting nature of far-right movement leadership.

Data and methods

Analysing texts[6] produced by Worch and Sellner allows us to compare two similarly positioned leaders from two near but distinct periods: the analogue activism of Worch in the 2000s and the digital activism of Sellner since 2015. Worch in his regular *Rundbriefe* ('circular') and Sellner in his articles in *Compact* and *Sezession* address similar audiences, German-language speakers (mostly in Germany and Austria) in the far-right milieu.

From a preliminary reading of these articles, we created lexicons containing keywords corresponding to Earl's (2007) nine leading tasks (see Appendix I). Applying these lexicons to Worch and Sellner text corpuses, we measure comparably the tasks they emphasize and prioritize; then, looking closely at how these tasks manifest, we characterize the content and manner of their leadership.

Data description

We drew on three sources for our textual data. First, all Worch's Rundbriefe from 2005 onwards (until 2012) are available on his personal website.[7] His readership is unclear, but as mentioned above Worch's personal network was extensive and his influence weighty.

His ideas and accounts of events, as articulated in Rundbriefe, had unmistakable impacts on far-right activity. For example, the presence at demonstrations of 'autonomous nationalists,' far-right activists adopting the 'black bloc' tactic of (leftist) Autonomists, is attributable to his promotion of the idea.

Second, all Sellner's contributions to Sezession are accessible, available on the magazine's website. Sezession's editor, Götz Kubitschek, claims a regular readership of more than 4,000 subscribers, besides non-subscriber circulation. Given that, Sezession affects a posture of intellectual prestige – according to its website, a 'right-wing intellectual magazine' with '[intellectually] high-level' contributions and focused less on 'reaching as many readers as possible' and more on 'reaching the right readers' – 4,000 regular readers is considerable.

For both of these text sources we scraped the webpages, compiling the text data described in Table 1.

Third, we collected all Sellner's contributions to Compact between 2015, when he started writing a regular column ('Sellner's Revolution'), and the end of 2021. While not freely available, we obtained digitized copies from the archive of 'Argumente und Kultur gegen Rechts Bielefeld.' Compact, edited by Jürgen Elsässer, has a broader readership than Sezession, counting roughly 40,000 subscriptions and many non-subscription purchases, and its articles are more topical.[8] By including it, we guard against some particularism of Sellner's writing in Sezession and obtain a fuller view of his leadership tasks.[9]

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for the text corpuses used in our analysis. Because we have more data from Worch than Sellner, in the quantitative analysis we use proportional rather than absolute frequencies. Additionally, we observe that Sellner's writing in Sezession, unlike in Compact and unlike Worch's Rundbriefe, tend to be long-form, a few thousand words. Nevertheless, we maintain that the Sezession articles are

Table 1. Text data descriptive statistics.

Author	Source	Total no. of texts	Year	No. of texts	Mean no. of sentences (total)	Mean no. of words (total)
Worch	Rundbriefe	260	2005	54	35.9 (*1940*)	640.4 (*34,580*)
			2006	57	39.2 (*2235*)	719.7 (*41,023*)
			2007	46	47.1 (*2165*)	791.4 (*36,406*)
			2008	36	41.3 (*1488*)	737.2 (*26,538*)
			2009	39	70.7 (*2757*)	1286.5 (*50,175*)
			2010	14	45.9 (*642*)	754.9 (*10,569*)
			2011	9	28.7 (*258*)	475.7 (*4,281*)
			2012	5	63.0 (*315*)	1093.8 (*5,469*)
Sellner	*Sezession*	100	2015	15	94.1 (*1411*)	3429.0 (*51,435*)
			2016	12	92.0 (*1104*)	3617.8 (*43,413*)
			2017	14	86.4 (*1209*)	3302.6 (*46,237*)
			2018	10	95.7 (*957*)	3639.2 (*36,392*)
			2019	12	97.1 (*1165*)	3931.7 (*47,180*)
			2020	12	90.0 (*1079*)	3728.6 (*44,743*)
			2021	15	80.7 (*1211*)	3430.7 (*51,461*)
			2022	10	76.0 (*760*)	3339.4 (*33,394*)
Sellner	*Compact*	54	2016	2	55.0 (*110*)	899.0 (*1798*)
			2017	7	40.0 (*280*)	618.7 (*4331*)
			2018	11	34.9 (*384*)	588.5 (*6474*)
			2019	12	39.4 (*473*)	674.5 (*8094*)
			2020	13	39.6 (*515*)	625.5 (*8132*)
			2021	9	41.7 (*375*)	677.4 (*6097*)

a site of performing leadership tasks and therefore not qualitatively different from the other texts. While Sellner's social media presence gave him access to a larger audience, we rely on his Sezession and Compact articles for two reasons: (1) social media posts are much shorter and can less clearly articulate leadership tasks and (2) deplatforming measures disabled several of Sellner's accounts.

Methods

Our analysis applies a mixture of quantitative text analysis techniques and qualitative content analysis. This mixed-methods design uses quantitative techniques to guide and contextualize our qualitative assessment of leadership tasks performed by Worch and Sellner.

One of the principal advantages of computerized text analysis is its ability to analyze quickly characteristics, themes, and specified elements of large text data. In one approach, QTA is used to assign texts to predetermined categories – such as policy positions (Laver and Garry 2000), issue areas (Pardos-Prado and Sagarzazu 2015), or 'assuredness' and 'tentativeness' (Hart and Childers 2005) – and to quantify theoretically relevant features within texts (Grimmer & Stewart, 2013, p. 270). These are precisely our aims.

We performed standard text pre-processing for our QTA analysis. First, the textual data was prepared for analysis by removing formatting commands (collected during webscraping) and transforming the text to lowercase. To identify leadership tasks performed by Worch and Sellner, we applied a dictionary method of QTA using the lexicons (see Appendix I) corresponding to Earl's leading tasks conceptualization. For these lexicons, we relied on an initial reading of corpus texts – but we also performed a basic topic-modeling analysis (see summary graphics in Appendix II) to guide the identification of further terms for our lexicons.

The QTA guides our subsequent qualitative analysis, a closer reading of the texts and how Worch and Sellner perform leadership tasks therein. We examine writings that exemplify certain leadership tasks, gaining a detailed view to complement the overview of Worch's and Sellner's movement leadership activities.

Results

Quantitative analysis: leadership tasks overall

Our QTA reveals a conspicuous dissimilarity in the leadership tasks addressed in Worch's and Sellner's writing. Figure 1 shows the proportion of text corresponding to performing leadership tasks. Both Worch and Sellner devote significant attention to engaging the political environment, but the dissimilarity in the proportion of other leadership tasks is revealing.

Worch's writing is attentive to making strategic and tactical decisions (26.9%) and executing actions (36.4%) – much more so than Sellner (5.7% and 17.7%, respectively). Figure 2 shows that this differing focus is consistent over the years covered by our data.

Many of Worch's Rundbriefe describe his initiatives, especially demonstrations. In fact, a common sequential pattern emerges. First, Worch announces a demonstration

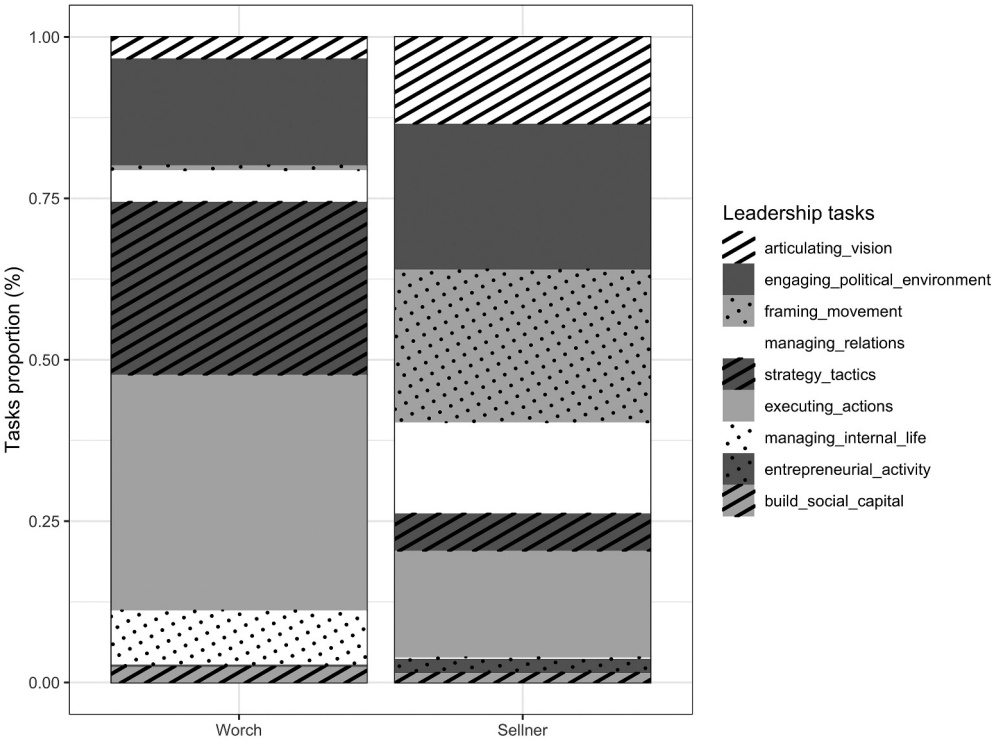

Figure 1. Leadership tasks represented in complete corpuses of Worch (left bar) and Sellner (right bar).

and facilitates participation. For example, on 11 November 2005, he published participation instructions (demonstration time, travel information, event rules, etc.) for demonstration in Halbe to honor Third Reich soldiers-one of the most important mobilizations in Germany's far-right scene in the 2000s (Virchow, 2007). Then, Worch offers an account of the demonstration. His description of the event in Halbe on 12 November 2005 fulminates against judicial and policing authorities which allowed counter-protesters to blockade the far-right march, a common and often effective tactic against far-right marches (see examples in Virchow, 2013b; Zeller, 2022). He writes,

> Police headquarters wanted by hook or by crook to prevent us going to the cemetery. Because they failed in court [to get an event ban], they let the so-called 'democrats' do their thing and block us with the help of the state's monopoly on the use of force. That's called breaking the law. Occupying an intersection to block people who have a court-appointed right to cross that intersection to the cemetery is called coercion. Coercion is a criminal offense. The non-prosecution of criminal offenses by the police is also called a criminal offense, namely obstruction of justice . . .

Worch's accounts are also marked by wryness and sarcasm underscoring his perspective. In the same post, he adds a parenthetical remark after intentionally misspelling the name of Brandenburg's Minister President, Matthias Platzeck: 'someone like Minister President Placzek (I always have trouble spelling his name correctly; it must be either because of my lack of education or because the name doesn't sound very German to me) . . . ' Finally, in such instances where far-right

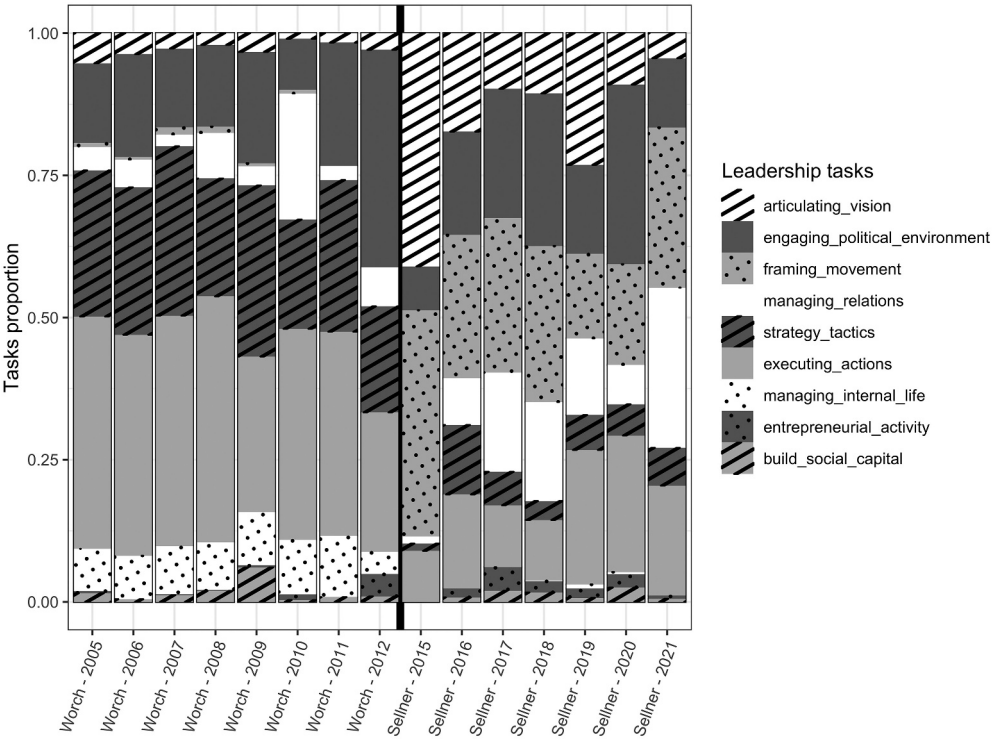

Figure 2. Leadership tasks represented in corpuses of Worch and Sellner by year.

activity encounters resistance from police or private counter-mobilisation, one or more Rundbriefe will follow about Worch's legal action, as with the Halbe case on 14 November 2005:

> Today I filed criminal charges against some of the known blockaders from last Saturday. . . . It is desirable that many comrades also file criminal charges with the public prosecutor's office. Incidentally, this can also be done by those who were not present in Halbe on 12 November.

This sequence, (1) plan demonstration, (2) perform demonstration, and (3) support with legal action, is repeated often in Worch's Rundbriefe. It evinces his inclination towards demonstration tactics and a strategy built around them. Demonstrations offer places to create and solidify collective identity, recruit new members and promote leaders, voice ideology, and assert the movement's place in the public sphere (Virchow, 2007). Worch's commitment to this tactic and broader strategy is clearly reflected in his writing.

Sellner, on the other hand, concentrates more on articulating vision and ideology (13.0%) and framing the movement and its issues (25.4%) than Worch (3.4% and 0.8%, respectively). This accords with the posture Sellner affects in other venues: a deep-thinking activist, assessing and altering 'metapolitical' conditions. Writing in Sezession in February 2022, Sellner suggests that his Identitarian group has made three revolutionary advancements for the far-right scene:

(1) An ideological revolution in breaking with the [neo-]Nazi tradition,
(2) A stylistic revolution in appropriating contemporary pop culture and fashion, and
(3) A strategic revolution in shifting to a focus on 'metapolitics.'

Given Sellner's personal history in the neo-Nazi scene, it is difficult not to see these advancements as amounting to hipster make-up on largely unchanged far-right ideology. Nevertheless, this is Sellner's consistent portrayal of himself and Identitarians: a novel movement with new ideological tenets.

In one instance of both articulating vision and framing, Sellner, writing in Compact in October 2018, stresses the need to transform raw grievance into far-right support by making people see elites' malign intentions:

> Those who are rightly outraged feel it instinctively - and we must raise this instinct to consciousness: this is not about 'individual cases'. It is about the transformation of people and state into a multicultural jungle over which an untouchable elite is enthroned. There is no escaping this epochal change, because it will reach every town, even the smallest. You must face it and resist!

He is talking about the 'population exchange' (Bevölkerungsaustausch) or 'Great Replacement,' the belief that elites are replacing autochthonous populations with immigrants in order to assert control (Ekman, 2022). This ethnopluralist notion has motivated activism and violence and has pride of place in Sellner's ideology. All his leadership activity is rooted in a resolution to oppose the elites insidiously pursuing this replacement.

Sellner's fixation on the Great Replacement conspiracy belief emanates from his ideological core: ethnic identity as the crux of modern far-right activism. He is steeped in the ideas of Nouvelle Droite authors like Alain de Benoist and Renaud Camus, even authoring the afterword for the German translation of Camus's 2011 book, Le Grand Remplacement. Where flashes of mobilization deviate from that focus, he becomes puzzled. For example, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, in October 2020, he expressed confusion about the protests against restrictions.

> And all because of the mask requirement? Don't get me wrong: I am aware of the scope of global vaccination cards, compulsory vaccinations and an international hygiene dictatorship. But even that would be a minor evil compared to Islamization and population exchange. Even when the restrictions on going out and mask regulations represent bullying control, it is nothing compared to the humiliation caused by mass rapes of our wives and daughters.

For Sellner, the Great Replacement is the all-encompassing motivation for activism. His view of strategically useful action is framed by orientation towards that overarching ideological concern.

Both Worch and (especially) Sellner allude in their writing to a rich world of ideas – episodes from the distant past, abstract concepts, nuanced philosophical writings, and complex schools of thought. But their use of these rich allusions is to seem intellectual heavyweights before a lightweight audience. Their arguments do not stand up well against scrutiny; their short citations of philosophy or history are rarely concordant with a fuller view of source texts or events. Worch and Sellner are activists and movement leaders; they are thinking seriously but are not serious thinkers.

Therefore, their writing must be closely connected back to their actions. To bridge the gap between their writings and activism, the next sections look closely at key campaigns they led.

Qualitative analysis: leadership in campaigns

To examine how Worch and Sellner carry out leadership tasks, we turn to their actions in campaigns. We selected one case for each, cases in which they played a central role and clearly acted as leaders. For Worch, it is his multi-year demonstration campaign in Leipzig; for Sellner, the 'Defend Europe' campaign in 2017.

Worch's Leipzig campaign

In the 2000s, Worch became fixated on leading demonstrations through Leipzig up to the *Völkerschlachtdenkmal* (the Battle of the Nations monument). The 91-meter tall monument commemorates an 1813 battle in which troops from Russia, Austria, Sweden and Prussia defeated Napoleon's army. Members of German states fought on both sides. Nationalists and right-wing extremists regard the monument as a symbol of German virtues, such as bravery, fidelity, popular strength, and willingness to make sacrifices. Hitler regularly visited the Völkerschlachtdenkmal. It also served as a site of mythical significance during swearing-in ceremonies of the Nazi party and Wehrmacht units. For these symbolic reasons, as well as the urge to attack the leftist city of Leipzig, Worch mobilized 19 demonstrations, recorded in Table 2, in the space of six years.[10]

On 1 September 2001, Worch organized a demonstration in Leipzig; however, approximately 2,000 assembled neo-Nazis had to turn around after 500 meters because anti-fascists blockaded the route and police did not disperse them. The neo-Nazis were held in place for three hours before being escorted back to the train station. In his Rundbrief of 13 January 2004, Worch explained his strategic response to this episode:

> In Leipzig, the repression on September 1, 2001 was particularly severe. Therefore, we decided there would be demonstrations in Leipzig until it diminished. Thus, other cities will reconsider how to deal with our demos in future.

For Worch, Leipzig became a target to punish through demonstrations, disrupting the city and imposing high policing costs. Following this 'demonstrate and punish' strategy, Worch registered another demonstration for 3 November 2001. Again, about 2,000 right-wing extremists gathered, but again failed to reach the Völkerschlachtdenkmal. Yet Worch had hired a truck from which the neo-Nazi band Oidoxie played live music, including songs glorifying the National Socialist regime and figures like Rudolf Hess. This was celebrated as a coup in neo-Nazi magazines.

Despite repeated obstruction by anti-fascist blockades and police, Worch and his followers persisted. In its account of the 6 April 2002 demonstration, the neo-Nazi group Aktionsgruppe Otto von Bismarck wrote,

> More than 1000 nationalists came to the fight for the street, which Christian Worch called for. (. . .) The climax of repression was the failure to march to the Völkerschlachtdenkmal. Such incidents should encourage every nationalist to continue the struggle into the streets in an upright and determined manner. (. . .) We hope for Leipzig IV [i.e., another

Table 2. Demonstration events of Worch's Leipzig campaign.

Date	Participation	Slogan	Counter-demo	Result
1 September 2001	2000	1 September - then and now: for freedom, peace and self-determination	1500	Police disperse rally because neo-Nazis shout banned slogans such as *Glory and honor for the Waffen-SS*
3 November 2001	1200	For freedom of assembly and against repression	3000	Demonstration fails to reach monument after long police checks and counter protests block the streets
6 April 2002	1000	Against repression and left-wing violence - for freedom of assembly	10,000	Police impose long checks on neo-Nazis; demonstration remains stationary
8 June 2002	600	Our fathers were not criminals - we are proud of them!	800	Demonstration marches from main station to Ostplatz and back
13 July 2002	500	Against state repression - we are the people!	400	Demonstration marches from main station to Ostplatz and back
3 August 2002	130–250	Remembering the victims of the American atomic bombing of Hiroshima	unknown	Demonstration marches from main station to Ostplatz and back. Police restrictions prevent neo-Nazis from proceeding farther east to the Völkerschlachtdenkmal
7 September 2002	135	Against state repression - we are the people!	250	For the first time the neo-Nazi demonstration comes within sight of the Völkerschlachtdenkmal
3 October 2002	300	Away with the wall in people's heads!	unknown	Demonstration marches from main station to Ostplatz and back
19 July 2003	150	Against repression and left-wing violence, for freedom of demonstration. We are the people!	unknown	Demonstration marches from main station to Ostplatz and back
3 October 2003	350	Leipzig X - The Jubilee	1000	Route from the main station to junction Gerichts/Täubchenweg
1 May 2004	900–1100	The country remains German! For the people's community and the welfare state!	1000	Court prohibits march to Völkerschlachtdenkmal
5 June 2004	*canceled*	We are the people!		
3 October 2004	180	Away with the wall in people's heads!	unknown	Demonstration route into 'leftist' Connewitz district blocked; neo-Nazis were allowed a route in the city center
1 May 2005	800–1000	National Labor Day	4000	Demonstration route cut by half after long police checks and due to anti-fascist protests.
1 October 2005	170–200	Away with the wall in people's heads!	2000	Demonstration advances only a few hundred meters due to anti-fascist blockades
1 May 2006	540	National Labor Day	5000	Demonstration cut short by anti-fascist blockades. Worch's tactic of multiple simultaneous march routes fails
3 October 2006	210	Away with the wall in people's heads!	2000	Demonstration marches from main station to Ostplatz and back
1 May 2007	*canceled*	National Labor Day		Canceled by Worch in favor of similar rally in Dortmund
21 July 2007	37	Fair wages for work in the homeland	1500	Worch cancels all subsequent demonstration (which had been registered until 2014)

demonstration in Leipzig] - We will be back! And the National Resistance will march at the next call through the historic city in which many a demonstration has been successful!

For the next five years, at least twice a year, Worch organized demonstrations in Leipzig. He adapted tactics to maintain mobilization. Live music was used to energize the neo-Nazi participants. To overcome march route obstructions, Worch registered two (and later multiple) simultaneous demonstrations, set to converge on the Völkerschlachtdenkmal from different directions. He scheduled demonstrations for Labor Day (1 May) and for the Day of German Unity (3 October). Though none of demonstrations reached the monument, there was certainly a punishment of Leipzig in the repeated social disruption and the need to requisition extra police units. Nevertheless, in 2007, after continually low turnout, Worch canceled all further Leipzig demonstrations in order not to weaken a similar campaign in Dortmund.

Worch used his Rundbriefe to explain legal proceedings, tactical decisions, conflicts and rivalries with other extreme-right actors and demonstration performances and actions by counter-demonstrators. Most importantly, he asserted the importance of demonstrations as central to strategic activism in Germany. He wrote on 2 May 2006:

> If we only demonstrate where we think it's easy, Antifa will keep pushing us back in an unspoken alliance with authorities and the police. If we allow ourselves to be ousted from the cities with high Antifa potential, Antifa will soon move on to the more quiet cities, then also to the small towns and even to the villages. And if we ultimately demonstrate on the proverbial 'green field' just to have our peace, we will also experience official and police reprisals there; AND we will experience that Antifa will also follow us there and dig for stones in the grass to throw them at us.

Demonstrations were the heart of Worch's strategic vision; to him, they represented the essential mode of political intervention. Worch's leadership tasks, in his Rundbriefe, in legal proceedings, and elsewhere, were geared towards developing and advocating for that vision.

Sellner's defend Europa campaign

From its inception, the Identitarian movement has relied heavily on generating public resonance through spectacular actions. The first action of the first Identitarian organization, Génération Identitaire in France, was to occupy a mosque construction site in Poitiers. It made headlines for the 'declaration of war' video uploaded to Youtube. The Identitarians' brand is using provocative actions and social media to grab attention and claim a defense of European identity.

Sellner has led several such provocative actions and surrounding media and fundraising campaigns. The most resource-intensive was a 2017 action to patrol the Mediterranean in a rented fishing trawler, see Table 3. With the 'Defend Europe' campaign, Sellner aimed to monitor and disrupt NGO-operated humanitarian rescue ships. It was the outgrowth of an action in May in Catania where a group of Identitarians briefly blocked a Doctors Without Borders ship from leaving port. However, the financial demands for the 'Defend Europe' campaign, chiefly hiring a ship, far outstripped previous activities. Sellner received donations to finance the action and endorsement from numerous far-right actors, many from North America, including the Breitbart News Network, former Grand Wizard of the KKK David Duke, and the Nazi website The Daily

Table 3. Timeline of Sellner's 'defend Europe' campaign.

12 May 2017	Italian coast guard detains three members of *Génération Identitaire* after they used a small boat to block the *Aquarius*, a vessel operated by the NGO *SOS Mediterranée* from leaving the Sicilian port of Catania.
June 2017	*Defend Europe* faces difficulties in securing funding as PayPal freezes their account after pressure from campaign groups such as *Sleeping Giants*. In late June, the British anti-fascist organization *HOPE not hate* identifies the C-Star (then called the Suunta) as the ship chartered by *Defend Europe*, at that time in port of Djibouti.
July 2017	• *Defend Europe* gets support, politically and financially, internationally. For example, David Duke, former Ku Klux Klan leader, asked his Twitter followers to donate. Sellner was interviewed on *Breitbart*. • The C-Star is stopped before entering the Suez Canal towards the Mediterranean when its captain could not present a crew list. • On 27 July, arriving in Turkish Cypriot port of Famagusta, ship's captain and senior crew are detained when it emerged the ship was allegedly carrying refugees aiming to reach Italy. At the end of July, *Defend Europe* activists finally boarded the C-Star. Instead of launching their anti-refugee mission in Catania, Sicily, the activists had to fly to Cyprus.
August 2017	• C-Star monitored NGO rescue ships in search-and-rescue zone off Libyan coast. • On 7 August, when attempting to enter the Tunisian port of Zarzis to refuel and resupply, the C-Star is blocked by local fishermen. C-Star is forced to sail on to Sfax, where it received fuel and supplies by boat, having also been prevented from docking by fishermen. • On 11 August, with the ship having returned to its mission, authorities ordered the German NGO *Sea-Eye* involved in rescuing refugees in the Mediterranean to come to the rescue of *Defend Europe* vessel floating motionless off the coast of Tunisia due to technical problems. • The *Defend Europe* mission comes to an end when a coalition of NGOs, including *Hope not hate*, successfully requests an immediate inspection (a Port State Control Inspection) and on 17 August gets the C-Star banned from Maltese Port. Afterwards, the end of the anti-refugee mission is announced.

Stormer. Nearly 100,000 Euro in donations were ultimately received. Even before it began, the campaign revealed the extent of material support Sellner and Identitarians could solicit from a transnational network of activists and organizations.

The 'Defend Europe' action itself yielded little if any effect on humanitarian and policing activities, then underway in the Mediterranean. In fact, its initial stages were more a comedy of errors. Sellner and company chartered their trip on the 'C-Star,' a British-owned vessel, sailing under the flag of Mongolia, and based at the port of Djibouti. (The irony of its use on a mission to defend Europe was not lost on contemporary observers.) After being searched by Egyptian authorities prior to entering the Suez Canal for not having the proper paperwork, the C-Star sailed to Famagusta in Cyprus to refuel. There, the captain and several senior crew were detained – on suspicion of people trafficking. Twenty people from Sri Lanka were aboard, reportedly training in seafaring; however, five of the twenty applied for asylum upon coming ashore, the other fifteen were deported to Sri Lanka. Those facts are not disputed. One of the main Identitarian organizers, Alexander Schleyer, confirmed it in his account in a Compact article (Pföhringer, 2017). It was also reported that the Sri Lankans had paid Identitarians to be brought to Italy, though that was never corroborated. The captain, senior crew, and Schleyer were arraigned at a court in northern Cyprus but released due to insufficient evidence.

For two and a half weeks after departing Cyprus on 1 August, the Identitarian cruise shadowed and harassed NGO-operated boats off the Libyan coast, was denied refueling and provisioning access to the Tunisian ports of Zarzis and Sfax, had technical difficulties and nearly needed rescuing by a vessel they had been following (the Sea-Eye), and concluded their voyage on 17 August, off the Maltese coast. The action was shambolic,

plagued by mishap, or by concerted counter-action from the 'migration-lobby,' in Sellner's recounting in Sezession.

These shortcomings have not prevented Sellner from touting it as a success and in fact spinning it into one. Sellner's leadership is characterized by his efforts to gain attention, for the Identitarians and himself, to further ethnopluralist narratives and to mobilize more resources. The 'Defend Europe' campaign, in this regard, was successful. After its conclusion, Sellner traveled to the United States and around Europe, speaking with other far-right activists, trumpeting the Identitarians' action and helping set up new national movement branches. In subsequent articles, he employed the experience of his campaign to lend moral weight to his arguments; for example, he rounded off a July 2018 Compact article criticizing humanitarian NGOs working in the Mediterranean with the line, 'I take no malicious pleasure towards migrants, knowing how tough things can get on a ship – but I have no sympathy for the NGO hypocrites on board.' Most importantly, Sellner cashed in on the campaign, using it to solicit donations. Among these were donations (to French and Austrian Identitarian branches) from Brenton Tarrant, who murdered 51 people in a 2019 attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, and with whom Sellner personally communicated. Following the post-campaign wave of donations, the Identitarians were able to start paying wages to branch leaders.

The 'Defend Europe' campaign is the archetypal of Sellner's performance of leadership tasks. The action itself was not impactful, but that was always secondary to its usefulness as propaganda and a tool for mobilizing resources. In several Compact and Sezession articles, not to mention social media posts, Sellner crows about the campaign and 'the C-Star effect':

> That's the [C-Star] effect that the climate of the patriotic resistance milieu is having . . . what we can do, and that's where each and every one of you can work, is to change the mainstream. . .

Cruising around the Mediterranean for a couple weeks, occasionally making a nuisance, enables Sellner to bolster his articulation of movement ideology and framing of movement issues; and it helps garner the material support that sustains his movement's activism.

Conclusion

We can classify Christian Worch and Martin Sellner as successful activists, at least insofar as they persist in activism, Worch for about four decades beginning in the 1970s and Sellner since the late 2000s. They are moreover reasonably successful movement leaders. Neither has brought about the far-right socio-political regimes they so vehemently crave, but they continuously attracted attention and followers, exercising significant influence. In their common sphere, German-speaking far-right activism, they enjoy comparable prominence, though with Worch belonging to an earlier generation and Sellner a contemporary figure. Focusing on this generational distinction, this article investigated what difference in leadership tasks exists between Worch and Sellner based on their public writing and on their actions leading campaigns.

Two overaching conclusions emerge. First, our quantitative text analysis shows that Worch and Sellner have different priorities in their leadership roles. Whereas Worch is

practical, focused on boots on the street and corresponding tactics and strategies (like punishing antagonistic cities), Sellner is more ideological, concentrated on 'metapolitics,' articulating vision and framing movement issues. This is reflected in their campaign leadership: Worch used demonstrations as a bludgeon to batter Leipzig, disrupting the city and requiring costly policing operations; Sellner instrumentalized the Defend Europe campaign, which had no immediate impact, to promote his framing of the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean and to mobilize more material and human resources.

Moreover, we observe that both are products of their time. Worch is the archetypal post-reunification German activist. His concerns are the German 'Volk' and addressing grievances like American military bases in Germany. Sellner is a post-9/11 activist, concerned with supposed threats of Islamization. The scope of his activism is transnational and aided by social media and other Internet-based tools. This shift, we assert, is typical of the change from far-right leaders in Worch's generation to contemporary far-right leaders.

Yet, second, important similarities and continuities persist across the distinctions between Worch and Sellner. Both are convinced of the necessity of street politics for socio-political transformation. That is as expected for Worch but may surprise observers of Sellner's digital activism. Both strongly oppose the 'retreat' of far-right forces into villages or areas controlled by far-right groups and instead insist the far right must assail the citadels of their opponents. We observe that, for Sellner at least, social media has changed the strategic utility of demonstrative action compared to Worch, but not overridden the fundamental and longstanding commitments of the far right to street politics and the prospect of menacing the houses of state authority with masses. Since several of Sellner's accounts have been suspended, it might also be of interest how such a leading figure, highly active both online and offline, dealt with those restrictions, particularly whether they led to changes in his leadership profile.

This study is limited to a descriptive analysis of just two important far-right movement leaders. Beyond the comparison and what it suggests about changes and continuities in German-speaking far-right movement leadership, we have shown the potential of Earl's framework as a heuristic to compare movement leaders systematically. The most obvious way to build upon this contribution is to expand the scope of study and look at more leadership cases in the far right and elsewhere. Gradually relaxing scope conditions may be the optimal way of generating more representative and robust findings. For example, one could compare leaders from different types of organizations, such as adding to our comparison the figure of Björn Höcke, a German far-right politician of the AfD, but one deeply involved in the movement sphere; or our comparison could be extended transnationally to movement leaders in other countries. Such research offers the means to enhance the positioning of studies of individual movement leaders by setting them within a comparative light.

Notes

1. The other figures Macklin studies displayed only 'coterie charisma,' a term he borrows from Eatwell (2002, p. 5), which refers to winning and maintaining the following of 'a relatively small band of supporters, who tend to form the basis of the movement's organization.'
2. See also Busher et al. (2018).

3. We acknowledge the importance of 'leaderless resistance' among far-right groups, especially when discussing extreme violence (Chermak et al., 2013), but still insist that for more visible far-right movements – that is, those not engaged in terrorism and extreme violence – leaders are especially important.
4. Virchow also mentions martyrs, terrorists, dropouts, and informants, but these are more like 'key figures' (*Schlüsselfiguren*) than leaders.
5. The Nationale Liste, which Worch co-founded and led, was proscribed in 1995, as was the Freiheitliche Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, for which he acted as vice-chairman.
6. One could approach our research questions through interviews with leaders, but such data collection is perilous, which we explain in Appendix I.
7. Table 1, showing the sizes of text data used in our analysis, reveals that the number of Worch's Rundbriefe decreased sharply after 2009. This does match a certain diminuendo in the volume of Worch's activism. Rather than differentiating in the available data between periods of activism – one might also differentiate Sellner's activities before and after he was deplatformed from several mainstream social media platforms – we include all available text data in our quantitative analysis.
8. On Compact magazine, see Schilk (2017).
9. We contend that using Sellner's magazine articles is preferable to using his posts on social media. See further in Appendix I.
10. Protest event data is drawn from the authors' own archive of state and media reporting on events.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Identifying Leadership Tasks through Lexicons

Our study uses quantitative text analysis (QTA) to identify the discussion of leadership tasks in Christian Worch's and Martin Sellner's writings. With our data, the quantitative component of this article employed packages for textual analysis and natural language processing. First, in the R programming environment, the textual data was prepared for analysis by removing formatting commands (collected during webscraping) and transforming the text to lowercase. Our main intention for QTA is to identify leadership tasks performed by Worch and Sellner. Therefore, we created lexicons that correspond to leadership tasks, which allows us to use the 'dictionary method' of identifying the relative frequency of tasks referred to in the text. This appendix contains a description of the tasks and their corresponding lexicons. To build these lexicons we relied both on a preliminary reading of many corpus texts and on a close familiarity with the activist histories of Worch and Sellner. However, we also performed a basic topic-modeling analysis (summary graphics in Appendix II) to guide the identification of further terms for our lexicons.

Two notes related to are data and methods are needed. First, one might approach our research questions about leadership through interviews with movement leaders. While such data collection might yield valuable insights about leaders' motivations and perceptions, we argue that interviewing far-right leaders is *impractical* due to potential researcher safety concerns, *unreliable* since leaders' accounts of their past leadership activity are likely to offer insights about their current perceptions rather than a consistent narrative about the evolution of their leadership, and *highly susceptible to instrumentalization* by far-right leaders seeking to advance their cause (especially so for active far-right leaders, like Martin Sellner).

Second, given Sellner's focus on activism through social media, sampling his posts on platforms is one source for assessing his leadership activity. We contend though that his writings in Compact and Sezession are preferable for three reasons. First, several social media platforms have removed (and in some places reinstated) Sellner, so a long-term view of his leadership through those channels is patchy. Second and relatedly, we expect that Sellner, like other extremists, moderates his messaging on mainstream platforms to minimise the risk of deplatforming; his contributions to Compact and Sezession need not be circumspect. Third, his longer-form magazine articles are more comparable in length and character to Worch's Rundbriefe.

Table A1 contains the leadership tasks lexicons that we created for our quantitative text analysis. The asterisk (*) affixed to several words or word stems means that the analytical package will include any combination of letters attached to the word, so 'national*' would capture mentions of 'national', 'nationalist', 'nationalisten', etc.

Appendix II: Worch and Sellner Topic Modeling

Table A1. Leadership tasks lexicons.

Lexicon (and description from Earl, 2007)	Terms
Articulating vision and ideology (generating a vision for the social movement; providing an ideology that justifies action; articulating concerns and needs of followers)	"austausch", "elite*", "europa", "freiheit", "heidigger", "held*", "identität", "ideolog*", "patriot*", "revolution*", "totalitar*", "volksfront", "*ismus"
Engaging the political environment (recognising and pursuing available political opportunities; recognising threats to the movement)	"cdu", "demokratie", "fdp", "Kickl", "Kurz", "Merkel", "övp", "partei", "repression", "spd", "spö", "staat", "stgb", "system", "verbot", "verfassungsschutz", "*gericht", "*gesetz"
Framing the movement and its issues (creating frames; lifting frames; using appropriate symbolism in frames)	"austausch", "bevölkerung", "gesellschaft", "ib*", "identitä*", "multikult*", "überfrem*", "volk"
Managing relations with nonmovement actors (obtaining public sympathy and support; generating publicity; crafting/delivering messages; packaging and sharing indigenous narratives)	"afd", "dvu", "elsässer", "fpö", "kubitschek", "partei", "rieger", "voigt"
Making strategic and tactical decisions (resolving "what is to be done"; developing and/or deciding on movement strategy and tactics)	"autonom*", "*lock", "connewitz", "demonstrat*", "gegendem*", "gegner", "gewalt", "kundgebun*", "leipzig", "strategi*", "takti*", "volksfront"
Organizing specific actions (initiating and coordinating actions; mobilising rand and file for actions)	"demo*", "gegendem*", "megaphon", "polizei", "treffpunkt", "uhr", "*marsch"
Managing the internal life of the movement (recruiting, motivating, and retaining members and future leaders as well as serving "as an example to followers and leaders"; maintaining organisations, managing resources, fund-raising, setting goals, training new leaders and followers; limiting intra-movement conflict)	"mitglied*", "mitkom*", "teilnehm*"
Innovating and entrepreneurial activity (engaging in political entrepreneurship through innovation and opportunism; building organisations)	"bank", "facebook", "kanal", "konto", "platfor*", "spend*", "telegram", "youtube"
Providing social capital (providing access to social networks; importing "new ideas", new information, and new tactics through networks)	"autonom*", "facebook", "kanal", "telegram", "youtube"

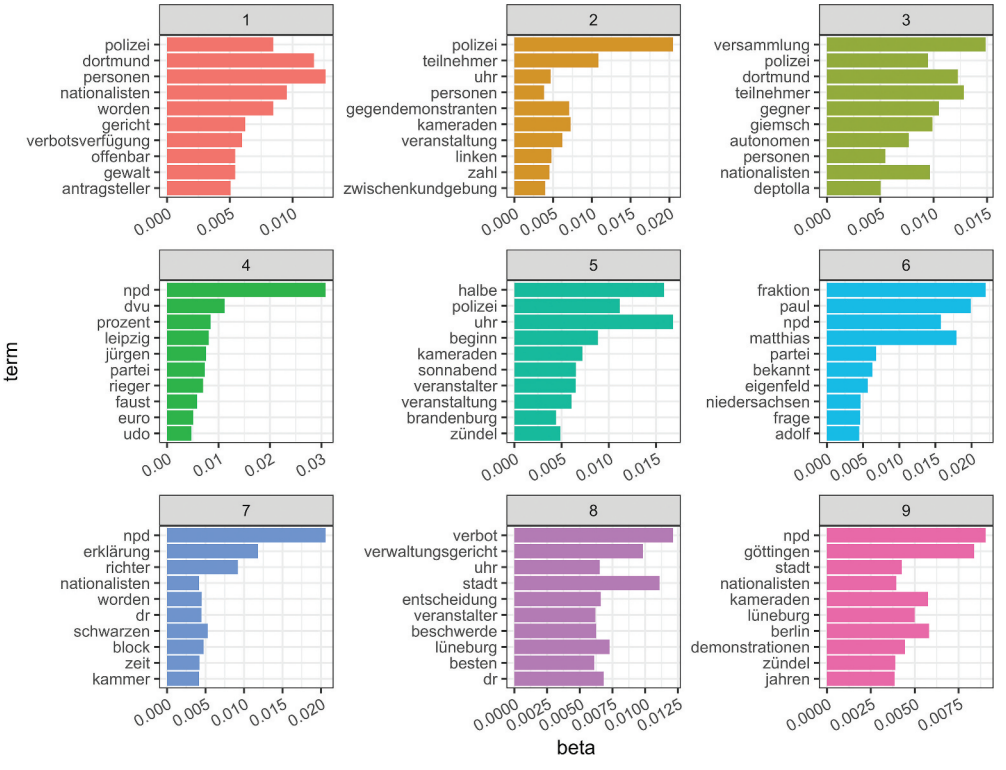

Figure A1. Barplot of topic modeling of Worch *Rundbriefe* text corpus.

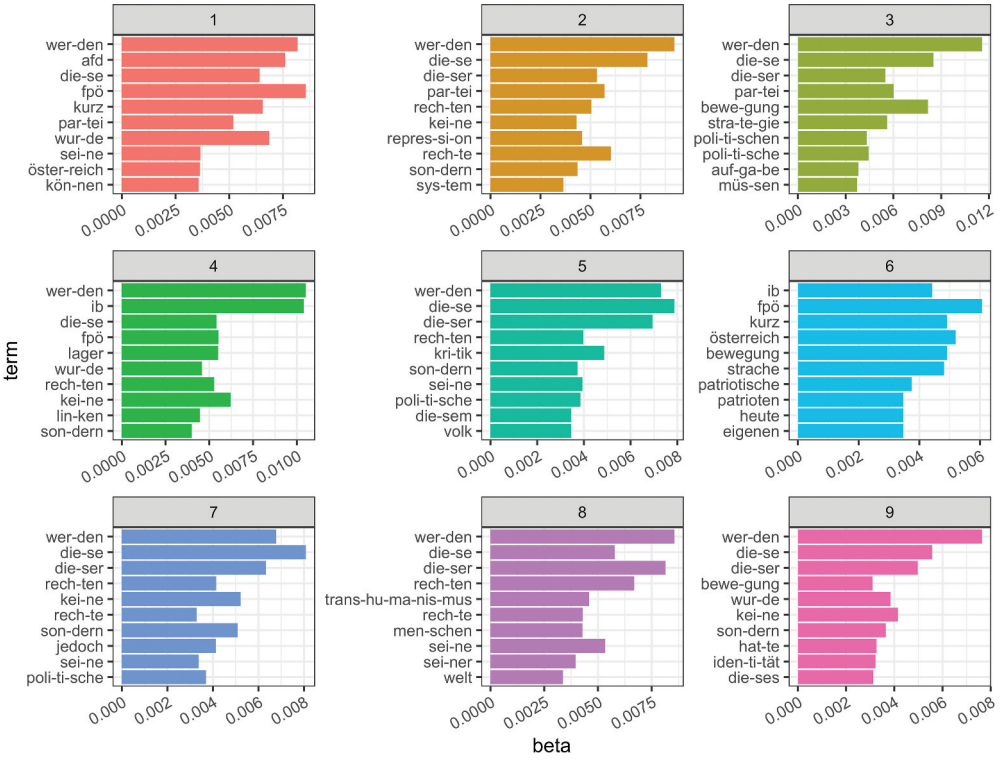

Figure A2. Barplot of topic modeling of Sellner *Compact* and *Sezession* text corpuses.