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When, If Ever, May States Induce Lawful Residents to Leave? The Ethics of "Remigration"

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Abstract: Political theory has extensively debated the morality of immigration restriction. It has paid little, if any, attention, however, to the question of whether (and if so when) states may permissibly induce (through either forceful or voluntary means) the *emigration* of lawful residents. This question has recently been made newly salient by real-world political controversies about the proposed "remigration" of migrants and migrant-descended persons in various Western countries. This paper argues that states may sometimes induce remigration, but that the permissibility of doing so is significantly constrained by two principles. **Proportionality** requires that the end achieved through induced departure justify the moral cost such policies impose on their targets; a mere majority preference is not enough. **Maximal Specificity** requires that collateral moral costs be avoided whenever feasible. Applying these principles, I show that broadly-targeted, highly coercive remigration programs aiming at ethnic homogeneity as an end in itself are impermissible; but narrowly-targeted, less coercive programs aiming at civic goals are sometimes permissible in principle. Permissible, of course, does not mean all-things-considered justified in any real-world case.

Keywords: immigration; integration; citizenship; exile; denationalization; remigration

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Political theory has extensively debated whether, and if so when, states may permissibly exclude would-be migrants from entering their territories.[1] It has not, however, explicitly and systematically considered the distinct but related question of whether and when states

[1] See e.g., (Miller, 2018; Wellman and Cole, 2011; Abizadeh, 2008; Carens, 2015; Oberman, 2016).

may permissibly induce lawful residents to *leave* their territories. An important theoretical puzzle arises from this fact. Many, if not all, of the reasons that states have to restrict immigration—such as population control, influencing dependency ratios, managing crime and welfare dependency, and (controversially) influencing their populations' cultural, religious, or ethnic make-up—are also potentially reasons to induce *emigration*. At the same time, inducing lawfully resident persons to leave a state involves distinctive moral issues that immigration restriction does not, such as the thwarting of residents' potentially-legitimate expectations of continued unburdened residency, the burdening of residents' maintenance of affective ties to their place of residency, and the possibility of sending disparaging messages about the political status of migrant or migrant-descended residents.

A fragmented political theory literature addresses questions adjacent to induced emigration. Literature on the ethics of banishment addresses the permissibility of a particular, punitive kind of forced emigration (e.g., Sheng, 2023); debates around citizenship revocation and denationalization are also adjacent to induced emigration, since revocation policies are often a component of remigration plans that involve this induced emigration (Lenard, 2018; Gibney, 2017). But few, if any, works of political theory have treated state-induced departure of lawful residents as a general normative category—encompassing the induced departure of both citizens and non-citizens, in both punitive and non-punitive ways, and through both coercive and non-coercive means.

The recent rise to prominence in public discourse of the concept of "remigration" provides a pressing reason to address these issues. Initially a concept used only by the farthest-right political fringe and primarily in marginal online spaces (Leidig and Khan, 2026: 9–12), online content deploying the term increased more than thirty-fold between 2023 and 2025 (Leidig and Khan, 2026: 4). After the Austrian activist Martin Sellner presented a detailed "remigration" plan at a meeting of nativist activists in Potsdam, Germany in November 2023 (Vock, 2024), the term gained wide currency in the *Alternative für Deutschland* (The Economist, 2026), and was adopted rhetorically by the leadership of the Austrian Freedom Party (Brunnersum, 2024), which won the largest share of the vote in the country's 2024 legislative election (Kirby and Bell, 2024). "Remigration" is therefore part of mainstream electoral contestation in several democracies, even as critical sources dismiss it as a "far-right" idea involving violent "ethnic cleansing" (e.g., Kassam, 2024; Global Democracy Coalition, 2026).

A closer look at policies advanced under the "remigration" heading shows why the concept must be disaggregated. Not all remigration policies involve violent "ethnic cleansing", i.e., the forced and indiscriminate deportation of members of particular migrant-origin ethnic groups. Sellner's published plan, for instance, does not as presented involve forced deportation of citizens, but includes less coercive and sometimes formally civically oriented policies of visa non-renewal, financial incentives, and pressure toward assimilation or departure (Sellner, 2025). Other prominent remigration proposals occupy intermediate or different positions on this spectrum. For instance, the French philosopher Renaud Camus, who is perhaps the most publicly prominent advocate of remigration,[2] has called for the induced departure of most immigrant-descended citizens of European countries while claiming that this could occur in a "civilized and pacific

[2] See his famous essay on "the great replacement" (Camus, 2023).

manner" (Camus and Sayers, 2025: 12:56–14:43) and seemingly allowing exceptions for some migrant-descended citizens who "behave like people totally integrated" (Camus and Sayers, 2025: 20:37–22:10).

Remigration, in popular discourse, is not the mere deportation, or inducement to leave, of *unlawfully* resident persons; remigration policy proposals also concern inducing lawfully resident persons to leave a state's territory.[3] Remigration policy is a politically salient subcategory of the more general class of policies through which states aim to induce lawful residents to leave their territories: namely, the sub-class that targets lawful residents with such inducement wholly or partly on grounds of their migrant origin or descent. This does not imply that rationales for remigration policy must attribute intrinsic moral significance to migrant status: whether and how this status matters—intrinsically, due to its causal connection to other circumstances, or as a proxy for something else—will vary with the justificatory rationale for a particular remigration policy. I define "remigration" policies, for the purposes of this paper, as a broad family of policies, varying across both the scope of the persons targeted and the level of coercion proposed, that aim to induce the departure of lawfully resident persons of migrant origin or descent (including, depending on the policy in question, lawfully resident non-citizens, naturalized citizens, and/or born citizens descended from migrants). The wider normative framework developed below therefore concerns state-induced departure of lawful residents generally, while remigration supplies the politically urgent application through which that framework is developed and tested.

This paper argues that carefully disaggregating remigration policies reveals that some, but not all, such policies are *permissible* in principle, i.e., in at least some possible empirical circumstances. It does not, however, claim that any particular remigration policy is permissible in any actually-existing state with its specific empirical fact pattern, still less that any such policy is all-things-considered *desirable*. Nor does this paper endorse or defend (nor does it criticize) any political actor or movement associated with remigration advocacy. Where I refer to such actors and movements, I do so only to illustrate philosophical points.

The argument proceeds across the four sections of this paper. In Section 1, I develop what I call the Reverse Cantilever Argument. This shows that, if states have a *presumptive right to restrict immigration*, they also have a *presumptive right to induce departure*, because all the reasons that ground the first right also ground the second. Section 2 then identifies the distinctive moral claims against induced departure that lawful residents tend to possess. In Section 3, I formulate two plausible mid-level principles governing permissible departure-inducing policies, motivated by the minimal principle of the *basic moral standing* of all persons, which I call Proportionality and Maximal Specificity. Relational egalitarianism, if accepted, supplies further constraints on permissible departure-inducing policies. Finally, Section 4 tests the resulting evaluative framework against two stylized models of remigration policy, one highly coercive and broadly targeted, the other less coercive and more narrowly targeted. The second model is potentially permissible in principle; the first is not.

[3] The claim that states may, in principle, induce unlawfully resident persons to leave their territory is much less controversial. Debates about the removal of unlawful residents are outside the scope of this paper.

1. Immigration Restriction and the Reverse Cantilever Argument

This section will develop my core argument for the presumptive permissibility of induced departure, including through remigration policies. I call this argument the Reverse Cantilever Argument, in deliberate reference to Joseph Carens's "Cantilever Argument" for the presumptive impermissibility of immigration restrictions (see Carens, 2015: 238–48).[4] While Carens argues that the reasons grounding people's rights to migrate unhindered *within* states also apply to migration *between* states, I will argue that the reasons grounding the right of states to restrict *immigration* also ground a right to induce *emigration* (including through remigration policies). My argument is conditional on the claims of one side of the debate among political theorists to which Carens's Cantilever Argument was a contribution, namely, the debate about the morality of immigration restriction.

In this debate, political theorists take a variety of views on the question of whether states may permissibly limit immigration. Some theorists defend the view that persons have a presumptive right to migrate between states and that states therefore have no presumptive right to restrict immigration. Kieran Oberman, for example, grounds the presumptive right to migrate in individuals' interests in freedom, including the interest in "being free to access the full range of life options" and in accessing "a free and effective political process" (Oberman, 2016: 35–6). Carens, separately from his aforementioned Cantilever Argument, argues that equality of opportunity grounds a presumptive right to migrate, since "citizenship in Western democracies is … an inherited status that greatly enhances one's life chances" (Carens, 2015: 226). Arash Abizadeh instead grounds the presumptive right to migrate in the value of democracy, arguing that immigration restrictions coerce would-be migrants and therefore cannot permissibly be imposed unilaterally without their democratic participation (Abizadeh, 2008).

Other political theorists defend a presumptive right of states to restrict immigration. David Miller grounds this right in democratic self-determination: if the citizens of a state have a right to self-determination, this must include a right to restrict immigration, since immigration can substantially affect both the material functioning of a state and the identity of the collective 'self' (Miller, 2018: 58–66). Christopher Heath Wellman instead grounds the right to restrict immigration in freedom of association. Since people have a weighty interest in the freedom to associate, and not associate, with others on terms that they choose, and since a state is a form of association, Wellman argues that citizens have a weighty interest in the right to exclude others from their state (Wellman and Cole, 2011: 15–55).

Carens offers his Cantilever Argument—which is perhaps the most well-known argument for the presumptive right of persons to migrate regardless of the wishes of receiving states—as a contribution to the anti-restrictionist side of this debate. The argument proceeds as follows:

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[4] See also Sheng's "cantilever strategy" for defending the permissibility of punitive banishment on the grounds that any objection that does not defeat the permissibility of punitive incarceration cannot defeat the permissibility of banishment either (Sheng, 2023). My Reverse Cantilever Argument addresses the broader category of induced emigration, not just punitive banishment.

P1: Individuals have a presumptive right to migrate within a state's territory, grounded by some moral rationale;

P2: Whatever rationale grounds individuals' presumptive right to migrate within a state also grounds a presumptive right to migrate between states;

C: Individuals have a presumptive right to migrate between states (Carens, 2015: 238–48).

P2 is the main load-bearing premise of the Cantilever Argument. Carens supports it by observing that every reason people may have for moving within a state may also arise between states (Carens, 2015: 239), and by arguing that any proposed morally relevant disanalogies between internal and cross-border movement fail (Carens, 2015: 239–48). P2 is plausible insofar as the rationale for the right to migrate within a state is grounded in the significance of the interests that internal movement serves for individuals. However, if the rationale for the right to internal migration is instead grounded in other considerations—such as the prophylactic argument that protecting this right is necessary as a means of limiting state power—Carens's argument from the similarity of individuals' reasons for migrating within and between states provides less support for P2.

Even if P2 is supported, however, it remains an open question whether the presumptive right to international migration that the Cantilever Argument establishes overrides receiving states' claims to exclude. This depends on the weight of the considerations grounding the right to migrate vis-à-vis the countervailing considerations grounding states' claims to restrict immigration. If the considerations grounding the right to migrate are relatively weak and the countervailing considerations grounding states' claims to restrict are sufficiently weighty, then the argument establishes only that a *pro tanto* right to migrate exists—one that may frequently be defeated. It may be that rights to international migration are more frequently defeated than rights to internal migration, not because of any disanalogy in the interests they serve, but because of a disanalogy in the countervailing interests of states in restricting each kind of migration.

However, my aim here is not to criticize Carens, but to develop a parallel argument, imitating his structure, for the presumptive right of states to induce departure, including through remigration policies. Before doing so, I will clarify my positioning with respect to the immigration-restriction debate.

In this article, I take no position on whether states have a presumptive right to restrict immigration. My aim is to identify the distinctive constraints that morality imposes on inducing people to leave a state. Since, if states lack a right to restrict immigration, most arguments for a general right to induce departure seemingly lose their central justification, I assume for the sake of argument that states do have a presumptive right to restrict immigration. I then ask what follows from this presumptive right to exclude for a possible right to induce lawful residents to depart, and what distinctive additional constraints apply to policies exercising that right: remigration policies then constitute one politically salient subclass. A further reason for this assumption is that nearly all mainstream political actors appear to accept such a right; beginning from it therefore helps connect the argument to real-world debate.

My argument, then, will assume the immigration-restrictionist position. For simplicity, I will not build explicit constraints on permissible *reasons* for immigration restriction into my position. Such reasons may exist. Indeed, theorists who defend immigration-restrictionist positions typically also defend constraints on permissible reasons for restricting

immigration, holding that it is (at least) impermissible to restrict immigration on the grounds of the race of potential immigrants, and sometimes that it is also impermissible to restrict immigration on other grounds such as religion or ethnicity.[5] My aim, however, is to identify the *distinctive* constraints on the permissibility of inducing lawful residents to depart, i.e., those that do not simply 'carry over', so to speak, from constraints on the permissibility of the (reasons for) immigration restriction. Building such constraints into my assumptions would needlessly complicate my argument's structure and invite irrelevant controversy about precisely what the constraints should be. But readers who hold that a reason, R, is an impermissible ground for restricting immigration may simply assume that R is also an impermissible ground for inducing departure.

It appears that immigration restriction typically involves at least some moral cost by virtue of thwarting the interests or desires of would-be immigrants, and that these costs generate reasons not to restrict immigration—reasons that may nevertheless be overridden, perhaps very frequently, by countervailing reasons. (Of course, conversely, permitting immigration may sometimes impose moral costs on existing residents, costs that generate *pro tanto* reasons not to permit immigration). Restricting immigration involves using force, or imposing costs on people, to prevent them from moving to places to which they desire to move. Assuming that would-be immigrants are correct in their apparent belief that their welfare would be enhanced by moving to the places to which they desire to move, immigration restrictions reduce their welfare. I assume that deliberately reducing someone's welfare involves a moral cost that requires justification from some similarly or more weighty moral good to which the welfare reduction is a means.

The same point applies to most remigration policies. Some remigration policies, such as forced deportation, taxes on remittances, or restrictions on religious or cultural practices, involve the use or threat of force or impose costs, and do, presumptively, therefore reduce the welfare of their targets. But as we saw above, remigration policies do not always involve the use of force or the threat of force; nor do they always impose material costs on their targets. In fact, some remigration policies involve only verbal or symbolic exhortation or giving financial subsidies to persons who choose to remigrate. Exhortation seemingly need not reduce a person's welfare, while giving someone a financial subsidy if they choose to do X seemingly increases their welfare vis-à-vis the scenario in which X carries no subsidy.

However, some remigration policies that do not involve the use of force or impose material costs still plausibly reduce the welfare of their targets and may thus be considered to harm them. This is because some forms of exhortation, or offers of financial subsidies for remigration, plausibly communicate (either intentionally or unintentionally) that other residents of the state do not want the persons targeted with these measures to remain resident in the state. Plausibly, this communication imposes a *dignitary* harm on the targets of these policies (see e.g., Simpson (2013) on dignitary harm). Nevertheless, I leave open the possibility that some remigration policies avoid imposing dignitary harms and thus avoid harming their targets altogether—but purely voluntary and non-harmful policies do not pose the main theoretical problems this paper addresses. I will focus in

[5] E.g., Miller lists a society's economic self-determination, social trust, and population size (and not immigrants' race or ethnicity) as generating permissible reasons for a state to restrict immigration (Miller, 2005: 61–66).

the remainder of this paper only on remigration policies that *do* impose (material and/or dignitary) harm on their targets, and thus impose moral costs that require justification.

As I will shortly explain, there are other important *pro tanto* moral costs, aside from those arising *directly* from the targeted persons' reduced welfare, involved in policies that aim to induce remigration through reducing would-be remigrants' welfare. However, before analyzing these distinctive remigration-related *pro tanto* moral costs, I will first set out the core argument for the presumptive permissibility of policies that aim at induced departure, including remigration policies.

Following Carens's Cantilever Argument, I call this argument the Reverse Cantilever Argument. The argument proceeds as follows:

> P1: States have a presumptive right to pursue policies aimed at reducing immigration into their territories, grounded by some moral rationale;
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> P2: Whatever rationale grounds states' presumptive right to pursue policies aimed at reducing immigration also grounds a presumptive right to pursue policies aimed at inducing departure, because any reason states have for wanting to reduce immigration to their territories can also be a reason for wanting to induce departure from their territories;
>
> C: States have a presumptive right to pursue policies aimed at inducing departure from their territories, including through remigration policies.

The reasons that states *may* have for wanting to reduce immigration include interests in managing population numbers; in maintaining or increasing social trust and/or social and political integration; in limiting crime; in influencing dependency ratios, economic productivity, and labor conditions; and (more controversially) in influencing the religious, cultural, ethnic, or racial make-up of a state's residents. All these reasons can also be reasons for wanting to induce departure, including through remigration policies. This provides support for P2—the argument's load-bearing premise—in the same way that the similarity of individuals' reasons for internal and international migration supports P2 in Carens's original Cantilever Argument. The Reverse Cantilever Argument establishes only a *presumptive* or *pro tanto* right to induce departure. This right may be defeated by countervailing considerations that arise in the case of induced departure but not, or not to the same extent, in the case of immigration restriction. The remainder of this article identifies and analyzes precisely these possible defeaters.

Any such defeaters must pertain to distinctive moral considerations relevant to inducing departure but not involved, or not involved to the same extent, in reducing immigration. What distinctive moral considerations arise when the persons a state seeks to induce to depart are already lawful residents? Section 2 analyzes these considerations, with remigration serving as the paper's principal application.

2. Lawful Residents and Claims Against Induced Departure

In the preceding section, the Reverse Cantilever Argument showed that, if states may permissibly restrict entry, they also have a presumptive but overridable right to induce departure. A state's existing lawful residents, however, occupy a distinctive moral situation from that of would-be immigrants, and have *pro tanto* claims against state action to induce their departure that would-be entrants typically do not have against state action to deter

or prevent their entry. These claims do not, in every case, automatically defeat a state's right to pursue remigration policies, but they generate moral costs and constraints on the permissibility of these policies that typically do not apply to immigration restriction. This section will determine precisely what these costs are and identify the considerations that affect the strength of lawful residents' claims against their imposition. Subsequently, Section 3 will develop more precise moral principles for determining the permissibility of remigration policies.

Immigration restriction is not, of course, the only possible comparison with state-induced departure: exile, banishment, denaturalization, and related practices also raise overlapping moral issues. I begin with immigration restriction because the political theory debate on restricting entry supplies the premises and argumentative structure for the Reverse Cantilever Argument: it allows us to ask what follows when reasons offered for *preventing entry* are carried over to policies aimed instead at *inducing departure*. Once a presumptive right to induce departure is established, the distinctive moral situation of persons already lawfully resident in a state can then be treated as supplying possible defeaters of this presumptive right.

For purposes of assessing proportionality and collateral harm, the distinctive moral costs of remigration policies can be grouped into three main clusters. First, remigration policies often impose *settlement-related costs* on remigrated persons by disrupting their legal status, social and geographical attachments, and (in some cases) legitimate expectations of continued unburdened residence.[6] Second, these policies often impose *material and practical costs* by disrupting remigrated persons' employment, housing, access to welfare, and other opportunities, as well as (in some cases) their family proximity, and potentially imposing material costs of relocation.[7] Finally, these policies also often involve *public-standing costs*, including dignitary harms and the impugning of persons' civic status. These harms can sometimes spill over to affect untargeted but similarly-situated persons, for instance if a policy is reasonably interpreted as impugning the civic membership of some persons that it does not formally target. These various moral harms must be taken account of, as we will see in Section 3, when judging whether a given remigration policy is proportionate and whether it imposes unnecessary collateral burdens on persons to whom its justification does not apply.

For several reasons, the moral situation of lawful residents, as opposed to that of would-be immigrants, tends to generate *pro tanto* (hence, defeasible) reasons against the permissibility of imposing the moral costs associated with inducements to departure. Lawful residents often acquire *pro tanto* claims against the burdening of their continued residence through two main sources: claims can arise from (i) morally *legitimate expectations* of continued reliance on unburdened lawful residence, which roughly map onto settlement-related costs; and (ii) *affective ties* to one's place of residence, including ties to geographical location and to family, friends, and other persons in that location, which roughly map onto material/practical costs.

Legitimate expectations arise, and generate *pro tanto* claims against the burdening of a person's ongoing residence, where a person has been given legal authorization to

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[6] I do not assume that *all* such expectations are morally legitimate.

[7] Though remigration policies that offer financial incentives to leave may mitigate the direct costs of relocation.

migrate to or remain in a country under conditions that are sufficiently morally legitimate to make their interest in relying on that authorization objectively weighty.[8] I do not assume that every formally valid legal authorization is morally legitimate or generates *pro tanto* claims. In the limiting case, a dictator might issue residence permits to foreign citizens for the purpose of recruiting them into a repressive apparatus directed against his own population. Such permits may be formally legally valid. But neither the authorization process nor the purpose of authorization is morally legitimate. In such a case, the recipients' expectations of continued unburdened residence may be understandable, but they do not generate significant legitimate-expectation claims.

In nearly all real-world cases, however, grants of legal residence, while often *defectively* legitimate, will not be *completely* illegitimate, and their defectiveness will therefore *attenuate*, rather than *nullify*, the *pro tanto* claims arising from expectations of continued unburdened residence. I do not offer here a full theory of when legal authorization is morally legitimate. Such a theory would need to consider many factors, including democratic authorization, administrative regularity, the purpose of the authorization, the good faith of the recipients, and the degree to which authorization wrongfully burdens existing residents. My point is only that all these factors can affect the strength of expectation-based claims.[9]

For instance, suppose a broadly democratic government grants residence authorization in circumstances that are defective in some morally relevant respect—for example, because the policy authorizing migration departed substantially from an express electoral commitment—but that the authorization remains formally lawful, is accepted by migrants in good faith, and is issued partly for legitimate (albeit controversial) public purposes. The resulting authorization will plausibly generate weaker legitimate-expectation claims than fully legitimate authorization would, but those claims are not thereby rendered null. Expectation-based claims are scalar, not binary, and defects in the legitimacy of authorization will typically weaken rather than eliminate them.

The second type of distinctive *pro tanto* claim that persons targeted by remigration policies may have against inducements to leave their country of residence arises from *affective ties*. Persons resident in a locality for a significant period typically acquire 'roots': social and familial ties, affective ties to physical geography, and psychological identification with their place of residence. Of course, the *lawfulness* of residence is neither necessary nor sufficient for acquiring these roots; still, lawfulness often tends to correlate with residency length and depth of social and psychological embeddedness. These roots are often important even for migrants or migrant-descended persons who are not 'integrated' or 'assimilated' into the national community of their country of immigration. Even persons living in 'parallel' communities, *de facto* segregated from the rest of the nation, and/or unable to speak the national language, may often have strong affective, social, familial, and psychological ties to their place of residence. Since people have a morally significant interest in being able to preserve such ties, remigration policies that

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[8] For a version of the legitimate-expectations objection within right-facing debate over remigration, see Carl (2025).

[9] For an analogous discussion of the general legal principle of *stare decisis* and the moral importance of stably reliable rules, see Douglas (1949).

burden such ties must overcome these *pro tanto* claims; these policies therefore require justification by sufficiently weighty countervailing moral reasons.

Public-standing costs may also generate *pro tanto* claims against remigration policies, but I do not decide here whether they ground a third fully *independent* type of claim. Where public-standing costs burden targeted persons, they often do so by undermining legitimate expectations of secure residence or by damaging affective ties of belonging and rootedness. Where they burden untargeted but similarly situated persons, they are best understood as collateral moral costs. In either case, they must be accounted for when assessing a remigration policy's permissibility.

The claims arising from legitimate expectations and affective ties can sometimes come apart. Their strength varies with several morally relevant features, including the permanence and moral legitimacy of a person's authorization to reside in a state's territory; the extent to which they have structured their life plans around a continued right to reside there; the depth of their social, familial, geographical, and affective rootedness there; and whether they possess any realistic alternative citizenship or place of residence. Legal status is relevant because it often correlates strongly with these variables: persons with more permanent and substantial forms of legally-authorized residence will often have relied more extensively on continued residence for a longer time and developed stronger roots. But legal categories do not mechanically determine the strength of claims, still less does migrant descent, as such, do so. A migrant-descended born citizen with no meaningful alternative home and deep social and familial roots may have stronger claims against induced departure than a native-descended dual citizen with weak local ties and a realistic alternative place of residence. The ethics of remigration do not constitute a distinct, *sui generis* moral issue: remigration is a politically salient applicatory subcategory of the more general ethics of policies through which states induce lawful residents to depart. The principles developed in Section 3 will therefore apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to other such policies, including those that target non-migrant-descended citizens.

The policies to which the principles apply therefore include—again, *mutatis mutandis*—decolonization-era policies of induced or compelled departure of settler-origin populations. Many postcolonial states pursued policies intended to diminish or remove previously lawfully resident settler-origin populations, and in some cases treated the ethnic or racial transformation of their populations as a political end in itself. These policies plainly exhibit a structural symmetry with contemporary actual and proposed remigration policies. This symmetry does not, of course, automatically establish moral equivalence. Many decolonization-era cases plausibly involved defectively authorized settler residence that severely attenuated settler-origin populations' legitimate expectations, as well as appeals to the remediation of historic injustices. Nevertheless, the symmetry does at least imply that anyone who rejects contemporary remigration proposals while endorsing the justice of decolonization-era induced emigration must meet the burden of explaining how one or more differences between the *structurally* symmetric cases grounds the *moral* asymmetry.

Recognition of the moral weight of the foregoing claims—those arising from legitimate expectations and from affective ties—can be motivated by appeal to a minimal moral principle of *basic moral standing* (though the validity of the claims is not strictly derived from this principle). This principle holds that the serious interests and claims of persons subject to a state's power may not be treated as null or practically negligible. Since *basic moral standing* applies to all persons universally, it does not itself explain why lawful residents possess the distinctive claims arising from legitimate expectations and affective

ties discussed above. Rather, the role of the principle here is simply to explain why, given that these claims exist, their moral weight cannot be treated as null or negligible.

Basic moral standing is a largely uncontroversial premise. It can be defended on grounds appealing to any of the major theories of normative ethics. Utilitarians can defend the principle on the ground that, in aggregating utility, no person's utility is to be excluded from the calculation (see Nathanson, 2025). Kantians can defend it on the ground that treating the interests and claims of some human persons as of no or negligible moral significance is not a universalizable maxim. Thinkers who derive ethical norms from theistic premises can defend it on the ground that all human beings are endowed by God with a basic dignity.[10]

Migrant origin or descent may nevertheless remain relevant to particular remigration policies in several ways. It may correlate with morally relevant characteristics such as the security or duration of residence, depth of rootedness, or possession of a realistic alternative citizenship or place of residence. It may also be used instrumentally by a state as a proxy for some conduct, status, or threat pathway, in which case its permissibility is governed by Maximal Specificity. Finally, on some ethnocentric or ethnonationalist views of political morality, demographic or ethnic composition may itself be treated as a legitimate political end, in which case migrant origin or descent can enter the policy's justificatory rationale directly. Nothing in the framework, of course, assumes any particular evaluation of such ethnocentric or ethnonationalist views.

The principle of basic moral standing does not, however, require equal weighting of all persons' interests; it does not deny that states may have special duties to their own citizens, or perhaps even to members of particular ethnic groups. *Basic moral standing* is formally compatible with *ethnocentrism* (the view that persons have special duties, possibly to be fulfilled through the mediation of a state, to their co-ethnics). Nor does basic moral standing, by itself, settle whether *ethnonationalist* political ends—roughly, these are ends intelligible only in light of the view that national identity is, or ought to be, at least partially indexed to ethnicity—are morally legitimate for states to pursue.[11] Nor does *basic moral standing* imply that a particular person's claims against departure inducement ought to prevail over a state's presumptive right to induce departure. *Basic moral standing* does, however, rule out treating the serious interests of persons burdened by remigration or other departure inducement policies as imposing no constraint on permissible state action. The question, then, is not whether these claims of potential targets of remigration policies matter, but what kinds of countervailing reasons may permissibly override them, and under what conditions.

3. Proportionality, Maximal Specificity, and Relational Egalitarianism

The previous section identified the distinctive claims that lawful residents may possess against state-induced departure and the moral costs imposed by policies that burden their continued residence. The claims generated by lawful residence do not automatically

[10] For a relevant, broader discussion of human equality and moral standing, see Waldron (2004: 1–6).

[11] For a philosophical discussion of ethnocentrist and ethnonationalist views, as articulated in the "ethnopluralist" theory of Alain de Benoist, see Camus (2019: 75–8). Even many strongly ethnonationalist writers and actors claim to accept baseline universal human-rights constraints—see e.g., Johnson (2014).

defeat the presumptive right of states to induce departure established by the Reverse Cantilever Argument. To see precisely when these claims *do* render remigration policies impermissible, and when they do not, I will now establish two mid-level principles that are both plausible in their own right and motivated by the uncontroversial principle of *basic moral standing*. I will then show that a third possible constraint on permissible remigration policies holds if (and only if) relational egalitarianism is a true mid-level principle (i.e., if avoiding hierarchical sociopolitical relationships between citizens or residents of a state is a morally weighty end). These three mid-level principles are needed to determine how burdens, which *basic moral standing* tells us cannot be ignored or negated, are to be balanced against the justificatory ends of remigration policies.

3.1. Proportionality

The first mid-level principle constraining permissible remigration policies that I will adopt is a principle I call Proportionality. This principle holds that a remigration policy imposing significant moral costs on its targets or on other persons is permissible only if its expected contribution to a sufficiently weighty moral end justifies the moral costs it is expected to impose. These moral costs, as we saw above, are potentially of several kinds. Policies may burden their targets' legal security and settled expectations, for instance by cancelling or refusing to renew residence rights or making previously settled status newly precarious, or by uprooting persons from places, communities, and relationships to which they have affective ties; they may impose material and practical burdens, such as loss of employment, housing, or welfare access, or the direct costs of relocation; and they may impose public-standing costs, including dignitary harms and civic-status harms, on the persons they target. The ends to which remigration policies are intended to contribute are also diverse, including managing rates of welfare dependency; influencing dependency ratios; controlling population size and structure; protecting civic values from persons using their residence to undermine or subvert them;[12] and (controversially) influencing a population's cultural, religious, ethnic, or racial make-up.

Proportionality simply imposes an evidentially-sensitive test on remigration policies seeking to achieve these ends. Once all relevant evidence, including that pertaining to the policies' probability of success, is taken into account, the policies must make a sufficient contribution to a sufficiently morally weighty end to justify the harms they impose. This criterion is motivated by *basic moral standing*. To hold that a remigration policy is permissible despite the fact that its expected contribution to its end is insufficient to justify the costs it imposes is, in effect, to treat those costs as morally negligible, and doing so is inconsistent with *basic moral standing*.

Proportionality, therefore, rules out a strong membership- or sovereignty-prerogative based view in which a nation or state with legitimate authority over political membership has no obligation to justify burdens it imposes on persons in exercising this authority (by inducing them to leave its territory, for instance). States may not simply disregard the burdens they impose on persons targeted for induced remigration or another form of departure by appealing to their authority over political membership. The *pro tanto* right

[12] This rationale for remigration policies is structurally similar to the Rawlsian idea of "containment", in which states may take proportionate steps to limit the influence of non-liberal doctrines (see Badano and Nuti, 2024).

to induce departure established by the Reverse Cantilever Argument does not permit states to ignore the potential moral harms of exercising this right. A departure-inducing or remigration policy exercising this *pro tanto* right can therefore fail Proportionality, and turn out to be all-things-considered impermissible, if it makes only a small or improbable contribution to serving a legitimate state interest and imposes disproportionately grave costs on the persons induced to leave (or on other persons). A state cannot appeal to its legitimate authority over membership to justify, for instance, forcibly expelling a large class of law-abiding migrant-descended citizens merely because doing so would marginally increase the per capita income of other citizens. Exercises of the *pro tanto* right to induce departure are all-things-considered permissible only if their moral costs are proportionate to the ends they serve.

3.2. Maximal Specificity

The second principle, also motivated by *basic moral standing*, that constrains permissible remigration policies I call Maximal Specificity. A remigration policy may be proportionate if the moral costs it imposes are outweighed by the value of its contribution to the moral ends to which these costs are a means. But such a policy may nevertheless be morally impermissible if it imposes unnecessary *collateral* moral costs on persons to whom the justificatory reasons for inducing remigration do not apply, when an alternative policy would avoid these collateral moral costs without sacrificing Proportionality.

Some remigration policies, as we have seen, plausibly have significant collateral effects. This is often especially true with regard to public standing-related moral costs. Policies that target one class of persons may indirectly impugn the civic standing of, or communicate a disparaging message to, other, similarly-situated but not formally targeted persons. For instance, if a policy targets residents who speak a particular ethnic language, members of the relevant ethnic group who do *not* speak the language may reasonably feel that their civic standing or welcome in the state is impugned even if they are not formally targeted. Material-practical and settlement-related costs can also involve collateral harm, for instance if the non-targeted families of persons targeted face the choice of either relocating to retain family ties or accepting separation from family members.

Maximal Specificity holds that, provided the Proportionality test has been passed and the policy's contribution to its ends justifies the moral costs it imposes, the policy must also be *as narrowly targeted as reasonably feasible* given the justificatory end and the costs of further specification. For instance, if a remigration policy aims to reduce welfare dependency or crime, the conditions for being targeted by the policy should be a person's actual welfare dependence or criminal behavior, if it is reasonably feasible to target these characteristics.[13] If a policy's end is a material, economic, or civic goal like reducing crime or containing ideologies that threaten the civic order, the policy may only target persons on grounds of ethnicity, race, or religion as *proxies* for the behaviors or statuses that justify targeting—*even if the proxies are statistically reliable*—if other, more direct but still reasonably feasible criteria are not available.

[13] Allowing for the fact that some welfare-dependent or criminal persons will have stronger claims against remigration policies than others arising from their affective ties or legitimate expectations.

For instance, suppose adherents of a particular religion are ten times more likely than the general public to be involved in terrorist plots. If, however, the disproportionate involvement in terrorist plots were confined to adherents of a specific *sect* of this religion, it would be impermissible to make membership of the *religion* the formal ground for a remigration policy aiming to combat terrorism, even if the policy were proportionate—and *even if the overwhelming majority of adherents of the religion were members of the sect in question,* making membership of the religion an *empirically reliable proxy* for the targeted characteristic—so long as targeting membership of the sect, as opposed to the religion, remained reasonably feasible.[14] But conversely, where no more direct criterion is reasonably feasible, Maximal Specificity does not by itself rule out the use of a demographic proxy, even if that proxy is ethnic, religious, or racial. Indeed, if a demographic category *were* the most specific reasonably feasible targeting criterion, using a criterion that tracked the justificatory feature less closely instead, merely to avoid controversial ethnic, racial, or religious targeting, would in fact *violate* Maximal Specificity.

Maximal Specificity also does not rule out, however, remigration policies whose justifying goal is precisely ethnic, religious, or racial homogeneity conceived of as ends in themselves. As we will see later, when discussing possible justificatory ends of remigration policies, such policies may, consistently with Maximal Specificity, target persons on grounds of ethnic, religious, or racial membership because that membership just *is* the characteristic to which the policy's justificatory rationale is indexed. Of course, such homogeneity-based policies may be impermissible for other reasons; they may fail Proportionality, or any other independent constraint on permissible state ends. But Maximal Specificity does not build ethnic or racial blindness into political morality.

Maximal Specificity is also motivated by the principle of *basic moral standing*. To target a policy at a wide group of persons, or to knowingly implement the policy when collateral moral costs for non-targeted persons will foreseeably be high, when a policy more narrowly targeted toward the justifying aim and with lower collateral moral costs is reasonably feasible, is effectively to treat the moral costs imposed on the wider group, or on persons affected collaterally, as practically negligible—which is impermissible under *basic moral standing*.

3.3. Specifying the Justificatory End

In order to apply the principles of Proportionality and Maximal Specificity to actual or proposed remigration policies, we must first, of course, determine those policies' ends. This is not always easy, since remigration advocates sometimes specify the aims of their policies in vague language. Martin Sellner, for example, claims that his preferred remigration policies aim to "save … the constitutional state … from ethnic fragmentation", but he does not specify precisely what he means by the "constitutional state" (Sellner, 2025). Remigration policies with under-specified aims are not automatically impermissible; they are merely incomplete objects of moral assessment. A vague public slogan may gesture toward a permissible policy, an impermissible policy, or a family of policies of which some are permissible and some not.

[14] My intention is not to claim that this stylized example accurately describes any actual religious group.

Nothing in this framework assumes any general theory of the moral relevance of intention. I assume merely that, whatever considerations are properly included in a policy's justificatory rationale, they must be sufficient to justify all foreseeable, probability-weighted moral costs of the policy, including both intended and collateral costs. I deliberately leave open both whether all morally beneficial effects may enter the justificatory rationale and whether intended and collateral costs differ in moral weight. The framework therefore presupposes no particular position on double effect or, more generally, on the moral significance of intentions and consequences, including the significance of genuinely unforeseeable consequences.

In general, the most evidently weighty moral ends remigration policies might possibly target include the prevention or mitigation of serious, imminent material harms like serious crime, severe welfare dependency, organized efforts to subvert constitutional norms or the rule of law, or credible risks of ethnic violence.[15] Clearly, preventing or mitigating these harms can often be a very weighty reason for pursuing a policy. Still, Maximal Specificity requires that policies be targeted at the concrete conduct, status, or threat pathway that produces the harm wherever it is reasonably feasible to do so, and not simply at other statuses, like ethnic identity, that may serve as proxies for these unless more direct targeting is infeasible.

This is not to deny that some harms are genuinely group-mediated, and that some weighty ends may therefore require responses to such harms. Some harmful behavior patterns can be mediated by collective ethnic identity, religious or communal institutions, or organized anti-constitutional movements. For instance, collective ethnic loyalties might induce persons working in government welfare services to overlook fraud committed by co-ethnics, religious schools might teach children to accept constitutional norms only as a temporary *modus vivendi* until their religious group is able to seize power, or politico-religious networks might organize patterns of non-compliance with the rule of law. Still, even in such cases, the harms are ultimately attributable to the actions of individuals—albeit individuals whose actions are shaped by collective identities, group-based incentives, or institutions internal to the relevant community. Recognizing group-mediated harms, therefore, does not require ascribing collective guilt to ethnic or religious groups. Maximal Specificity does not rule out policies targeting the relevant threat pathways, such as coercive communal institutions, teacher-training programs operated by anti-constitutional religious institutions, mechanisms through which ethnic loyalties that threaten the rule of law are inculcated, or organized networks of anti-constitutional non-compliance. It does, however, rule out treating ethnic or religious membership itself as sufficient grounds for burdening continued residence if more direct criteria remain reasonably feasible. Anti-constitutional *beliefs* and political commitments, even if not currently acted on, may form part of such a threat pathway, especially where they are widely held, resistant to ordinary persuasion, and plausibly liable to later manifest in organized non-compliance with or subversion of constitutional norms; but

[15] In extreme cases, a remigration policy could conceivably be necessary to prevent mass ethnic violence or genocide. Obviously, preventing such mass violence is an especially weighty justificatory end. Still, Maximal Specificity would require the remigration policy response to this risk to track the concrete conflict-generating threat pathway, rather than ethnicity as such, wherever reasonably feasible.

their justificatory force will normally be weaker and more indirect than that of actively anti-constitutional *conduct*.[16]

The weightiness of cultural and social ends is often more controversial. Remigration policies sometimes aim to address concerns about low rates of social integration, endogamy, or high levels of religious conservatism among migrant or migrant-descended communities. The weightiness of ends like "increase integration" or "reduce religious conservatism" is contestable, and will depend on controversial views about the requirements of political justice. Moreover, many vaguely-specified ends—like "increase integration"—often seem to collapse *either* into aims focused at civic/material harms, like combatting anti-constitutional attitudes or preventing ethnic violence, *or* into more highly controversial ends like ethnic or cultural homogeneity. If "integration" is specified as accepting constitutional norms and the rule of law, it becomes civic-material; if specified as cultural and religious homogeneity, it becomes more deeply controversial.

This most highly controversial set of ends pursued by remigration policies comprises ends that explicitly value ethnic, racial, or religious homogeneity as ends in themselves, and/or seek to preserve or strengthen an ethnically- or racially-indexed national identity. The principle of basic moral standing does not automatically rule out the validity of these ends; I have already noted its formal compatibility with ethnocentric and ethnonationalist views. Nor, as I observed above in the case of Maximal Specificity, can we say *a priori* that remigration policies pursuing these ends cannot satisfy Proportionality or Maximal Specificity. If one's substantive theory of justice ascribes high enough intrinsic value to ethnic homogeneity, for instance, some policies that pursue this end will turn out to be proportionate and maximally specific. Certainly, theories of justice that ascribe such high value to ends of this kind will stand in significant tension with recognizably *liberal* or *egalitarian* views of justice. Still, I have not built liberalism or egalitarianism into my principles, in order to better elucidate those constraints on permissible remigration policies that are *not* also constraints on permissible immigration restriction, and to make my argument acceptable to readers holding a diverse range of substantive conceptions of justice.[17]

Even if basic moral standing does not by itself rule out ethnocentric or ethnonationalist ends, substantive liberal and egalitarian views of political justice may do so. I do not attempt here to derive the implications of all such theories for remigration policies. In many cases, those implications will be controversial, not least because canonical liberal and egalitarian theories often say little explicitly about immigration and still less about the induced departure of lawful residents.[18] However, I will discuss one value that is an element of many egalitarian views of justice, namely relational egalitarianism, because

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[16] I make no assumptions about whether the constitution in question is liberal, or, therefore, whether *anti*-constitutional activity is *anti*-liberal. I assume that both liberal and non-liberal states can have reasons to contain anti-constitutional activity. Neither Proportionality nor Maximal Specificity presupposes a substantively liberal theory of justice. Relational egalitarianism is congruent with many liberal theories of justice, but it is not entailed by liberalism, nor does it entail wider liberal commitments.

[17] A state that is publicly committed to expressly ethnonationalist ends may reject, or restrict the scope of, relational egalitarianism (whether it *rightly* does so is a different question); but the requirements of Proportionality and Maximal Specificity, motivated by *basic moral standing*, still apply to ethnonationalist states.

[18] For instance, John Rawls's hugely influential *A Theory of Justice* simply brackets the question of justice in migration policy by assuming society is "a closed system" (Rawls, 1999: 7).

it bears directly on a distinctive feature of remigration policies: their possible tendency to create or reinforce hierarchical social and political relations between lawful residents, indexed to ascriptive identities like ethnicity or race.

3.4. Relational Egalitarianism

Relational egalitarianism is the view that realizing a society whose members relate to one another on terms of equal social and civic standing is a weighty moral end (see Anderson, 2018). This view is not identical to the concern with public-standing costs discussed above: rather, it explains why some such costs are especially grave, namely when they create or reinforce hierarchical social and political relations. Relational egalitarians differ in precisely how they conceptualize this state of affairs, but all agree that it involves, at least, the absence of hierarchical social relationships indexed to ascriptive identities like ethnicity or race.[19] The *scope* of relational egalitarianism might conceivably vary between different conceptualizations: some versions of relational egalitarianism might value the absence of hierarchical relationships indexed to ascriptive identities between *citizens* of a state, while others might identify the scope with *lawful residents* or simply *residents*. I will assume that the scope of relational egalitarianism is *lawful residents*, because I have defined remigration policies as targeting lawful residents (neither merely residents, nor specifically citizens). If the scope is *citizens*, the objection below will be weaker and will apply only to remigration policies that target citizens, but the structure of the objection will carry over to citizen-targeting policies. Relational egalitarianism, as I have defined it, does *not* require state 'blindness' to race or ethnicity as such. The wrong specified by relational egalitarianism is not the official or unofficial recognition or salience of ascriptive identities; it is hierarchical civic or social standing indexed to such identities.

Of course, it is true that some policies of some existing liberal or multicultural states—race-based affirmative action, for instance, or the granting of rights of collective self-determination to indigenous minorities—plainly do involve official recognition of ethnicity, race, or other similarly ascriptive identities. Bracketing the question of whether these policies are all-things-considered justified, it is clear that many of these policies, despite their formal recognition of ascriptive identities, can be defended on the basis of rationales that do not appeal to the purported *intrinsic* moral relevance of these identities. For instance, a common rationale for affirmative action claims that the policy is remediative of historic or ongoing structural discrimination against the ethnic or racial group the policy favors. Similarly, many multicultural or collective self-determination policies are grounded in a rationale appealing to the value of 'recognition' of ascriptive identities that are constitutively meaningful to individuals. Neither type of rationale appeals to the claim that civic or social standing should be indexed to ascriptive identities, so neither rationale formally conflicts with relational egalitarianism (I bracket the question of whether these policies, in practice, produce racially or ethnically-indexed standing). By contrast, where remigration or other policies are grounded in ethnonationalist rationales, these rationales expressly appeal to the value of indexing at least civic status to ascriptive ethnic identities to some extent, so the rationales stand in tension with relational egalitarianism.

[19] See Moreau (2020) for an application of relational egalitarianism to anti-discrimination principles.

If relational egalitarianism is true, therefore, many remigration policies that satisfy Proportionality and Maximal Specificity may nevertheless be impermissible because they create hierarchical social or civic relationships among lawful residents, indexed to ethnicity or race. This concern arises most clearly in two cases: policies that target ethnicity or race because they aim at ethnic or racial homogeneity as ends in themselves, and policies that use ethnicity or race as proxies for some other status, conduct, or threat pathway. Proxy-based policies will usually already fail Maximal Specificity, since more direct targeting criteria will normally be reasonably feasible.[20] Where they do not, their compatibility with relational egalitarianism will depend on how the state communicates its rationale and how the policy is reasonably understood by those it targets and by other citizens and residents.

The still harder case is that of ethnically/racially-targeted remigration policies that are maximally specific because their ends are simply ethnic or racial homogeneity, conceived of as intrinsic values. Such policies may satisfy Maximal Specificity: they target the persons whose departure is necessary for the relevant end (i.e., persons of the heterogeneity-introducing ethnic or racial groups). But if relational egalitarianism is true, this very specification makes the policy morally defective. A state that publicly grounds remigration policy in the intrinsic value of ethnic or racial homogeneity effectively communicates to citizens and lawful residents that, *ceteris paribus*, it values the continued residence or citizenship of persons of minority or recently established ethnic or racial backgrounds less than that of other persons. It thereby renders the civic membership of persons of the "wrong" ethnic or racial background less secure, less valued, or more conditional, and so creates precisely the kind of ethnicity- or race-indexed hierarchy that relational egalitarianism condemns.[21]

Remigration policies that pursue ethnic or racial homogeneity as ends in themselves are therefore paradigmatic violations of relational egalitarianism, even if they are proportionate and maximally specific. Policies that target ethnicity or race as proxies for other statuses or behaviors will normally fail Maximal Specificity; where they do not, they may still fail relational egalitarianism if they are reasonably interpreted as communicating that some lawful residents' civic membership is inferior, precarious, or conditional because of their ethnicity or race.

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[20] Nevertheless, we cannot rule out *a priori* the possibility that in some circumstances—perhaps involving severe practical difficulties in identifying civically or materially-relevant individual statuses and behaviors in a granular way—ethnic or racial proxy-targeting might satisfy Maximal Specificity.

[21] My claim here does not depend on any controversial theory of the communicative meaning of state action. For a discussion of such meanings in a different context, namely that of religious establishment, see Lægaard (2017). A related, but weaker, relational egalitarian concern may arise in the case of immigration restrictions that aim at ethnic/racial homogeneity as an end in itself. However, a state that restricts future entry by members of group G need not thereby explicitly impugn the civic standing of current lawful residents or citizens from G; indeed, the state could explicitly affirm that such persons remain equal and secure members of the polity. By contrast, a remigration policy targeting existing lawful residents from G directly and immediately burdens their continued residence. Therefore, since the relational egalitarian concern generated by policies grounded in the purported intrinsic value of ethnic/racial homogeneity is, *ceteris paribus*, weaker for immigration restriction than for remigration policies, my claim that remigration policies grounded in this value violate relational egalitarianism does not automatically entail that immigration restrictions grounded in the same value violate it (or violate it to the same degree).

The resulting framework is deliberately layered. Proportionality and Maximal Specificity are motivated by basic moral standing and apply to all remigration policies that impose significant moral costs on their targets or on other persons affected by them. Proportionality requires that a policy's expected contribution to a sufficiently weighty end justify the moral costs it imposes. Maximal Specificity requires that the policy track, as closely as reasonably feasible, the statuses, conduct, or threat pathways that make departure relevant to that end. Relational egalitarianism, if true, adds a further constraint: remigration policies must not create or reinforce hierarchical social or civic standing relationships between lawful residents indexed to ethnicity, race, or migrant descent.[22] I now apply this framework to two major types of remigration policy proposal.

4. Application

I now apply the framework developed above to two broad ideal-typical models of remigration policy: one highly coercive, broadly targeted, and grounded in a rationale appealing to ethnic/racial homogeneity as an end in itself; the other less coercive, more narrowly targeted, and civic in rationale.[23]

4.1. Broad, High-Coercion, and Ethnically Justified Remigration Policies

A maximally broad, coercive, and ethnocentric/ethnonationalist remigration policy would include something like the following features. First, all or almost all lawful residents of ethnic or racial minority status would be immediately or eventually targeted by the policy, regardless of citizenship status, length of residence, place of birth, civic behavior, or cultural assimilation. Even minority-background born citizens who are culturally indistinguishable from the majority population would be targeted on the basis of their ethnic or racial backgrounds alone. Second, highly coercive means would be used to induce departure, including violent force—this would include the violently enforced deportation of many culturally assimilated born citizens who have never lived abroad and have no significant foreign ties. Third, the express rationale for the policy would be ethnic and/or racial homogeneity conceived of as ends in themselves, not as proxies for civic or behavioral characteristics. A person's law-abidingness, loyalty, civic contribution, or economic productivity would be no defense against the application of the policy.

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[22] Strictly speaking, if relational egalitarianism is true, the distinctive wrong-making features it identifies can be incorporated into Proportionality. I nevertheless discuss relational egalitarianism separately because the truth and weight of relational egalitarian concerns are more controversial than the thin principle of Proportionality itself. Proportionality and Maximal Specificity are motivated by *basic moral standing* and should be accepted even by readers who reject liberal egalitarianism or endorse ethnocentric or ethnonationalist political ends.

[23] For a real-world example of a proposal close to the first ideal type, see Laws (2025). Sellner's published proposals approximate the second ideal type with respect to the scope of their targeting and their level of coercion: they distinguish between legal settlement statuses; endorse visa cancellation or non-renewal for some lawfully resident non-citizens; and propose financial incentives, microloans, and counseling rather than forced deportation for citizens, alongside measures targeted at anti-constitutional (often Islamist) networks. The degree to which the rationales to which Sellner appeals are exclusively civic/material, however, is less clear (Sellner, 2025, 2026: Ch. 1). For a seemingly intermediate example, see Camus and Sayers (2025).

Unsurprisingly, as we will see, plans close to this ideal type fail decisively under my framework. Still, it is instructive to see exactly how and why such plans fail to satisfy the principles.

Beginning with Proportionality, would such plans, if successful, contribute sufficiently to a morally weighty end as to justify the moral costs they would impose? The answer will depend on precisely what end the plan is supposed to achieve, and on one's substantive theory of justice. But the moral costs that such plans would impose are so grave that they will fail to satisfy Proportionality on *any* mainstream theory of justice.

Since these plans ultimately involve, if necessary, the forced deportation of all lawful residents of migrant descent, including many born citizens who have never lived elsewhere, their moral costs will be very serious. Many persons targeted will have very strong claims arising from legitimate expectations and affective ties: they may have been born in the country, hold its citizenship, built their entire life plans—including employment, housing, family, and social plans—around continued lawful residence, and acquired strong emotional ties to their place of residence and proximate communities. Forcibly deporting such people therefore involves very serious settlement-related, material, and practical moral costs. Such plans would also impose serious public-standing costs by severely impugning the civic membership of persons of migrant descent irrespective of their economic productivity, cultural or social integration, or pro-civic behaviors and attitudes. Finally, they would impose substantial collateral costs on other citizens whose family members, friends, or co-workers were deported, as well as possible wider economic costs.

Since the moral costs of such plans are very grave, any proportionally justifying contribution to a moral end must be very weighty indeed. By stipulation, the value purportedly justifying this ideal-typical kind of plan is the purported intrinsic value of ethnic and/or racial homogeneity. For this value to justify the grave moral costs of such plans, its intrinsic weight would have to be extraordinarily high—higher than is compatible with any recognizably liberal, egalitarian, mainstream conservative, or even *moderate* ethnocentric or ethnonationalist theory of justice. Such plans therefore fail Proportionality, on almost all substantive theories of justice.

Can such plans satisfy Maximal Specificity? If the justifying ends of such plans are *total* ethnic/racial homogeneity, they may indeed satisfy this principle, by targeting the persons whose departure is necessary for this end to be realized (i.e., all persons of migrant descent or minority ethnic background). But this does not vindicate such plans. It instead reveals that their specificity is wholly generated by the extreme breadth of their ends—ends whose achievement requires the forcible uprooting of vast numbers of people with strong claims of legitimate expectation, affective attachment, and civic membership. If we modify the ideal-typical case to preserve the broad scope and coercive means but stipulate instead a civic or material end like crime reduction, welfare-dependency reduction, or protection of the constitutional order, such plans would clearly fail Maximal Specificity, because they would target many persons to whom those rationales do not apply and who could, with reasonable feasibility, be excluded from policies targeting persons to whom the rationales *do* apply in a more granular way.

Such plans also clearly do not satisfy relational egalitarianism, since they would—and are expressly intended to—create sharply hierarchical relations of civic and social standing between presently-lawful residents prior to and during the process of remigration, since they would treat the continued lawful residence of all persons of minority ethnic

and migrant descent as expressly provisional and temporary, pending escalation to full implementation.[24]

Overall, then, broadly targeted, heavily coercive, and wholly ethnonationalist/ethnocentric plans involve such grave moral costs that they can only satisfy Proportionality on a theory of justice that accords extremely high intrinsic weight to ethnic/racial homogeneity. They also fail to satisfy relational egalitarianism (though presumably the kind of radically ethnonationalist/ethnocentric theory of justice needed for these plans to pass Proportionality would reject relational egalitarianism, or restrict its scope to co-ethnics). These plans *may* satisfy Maximal Specificity, in virtue of the extreme breadth of the class of persons who must depart in order for the plans to achieve their ends, but this does not help them reach the threshold of permissibility. In short, such plans are impermissible on all but the most radically (and implausibly) ethnically-indexed substantive theories of justice.

4.2. Narrow, Limited-Coercion, Civically Justified Remigration Policies

I turn now to a second ideal-typical model of remigration policy: one that distinguishes lawful residence categories in a way that roughly tracks the weight of targeted persons' moral claims against induced departure, limits the use of strongly coercive measures like forced deportation, and is grounded in a rationale expressed in civic or material rather than ethnic or racial terms.

More specifically, suppose such a policy distinguishes between lawfully resident non-citizens and citizens, subjects some non-citizens whose continued residence is claimed to impose specified economic, criminal, or civic burdens to cancellation or non-renewal of residence rights, and uses substantially less coercive measures toward citizens, such as voluntary financial or logistical assistance for departure. Suppose further that, where remigration measures are aimed at protecting the constitutional order, they are directed at concrete anti-constitutional institutions, networks, conduct, or threat pathways rather than broad categories like migrant origin, ethnicity, race, or religion as such. Unlike the first ideal type, this model neither denaturalizes citizens nor subjects them to forced deportation, and its justificatory rationale appeals to civic or material ends rather than to ethnic or racial homogeneity conceived of as an end in itself.

First, consider Proportionality. Policies of this kind impose fewer moral costs than the broad and highly coercive model, but these costs may still be significant. Lawfully resident non-citizens who acquired residence rights and possibly embarked on citizenship pathways under one legal regime may confront another in which their visas are canceled or non-renewed.[25] This may thwart legitimate (or partially legitimate) expectations, disrupt social and geographical attachments, and impose material and practical costs through restrictions on welfare, social housing, or family-reunification pathways. Such measures may also impose public-standing costs by communicating that some residents' lawful residence is more conditional than previously understood. Voluntary financial or logistical

[24] The fact that the plan would, if successful, eventually remove the targeted persons from the polity does not render it compatible with relational egalitarianism, since this value is concerned with how persons subject to a common political order are related *while subject to it*; expelling persons in order to eliminate the need for egalitarian relations with them repudiates relational egalitarianism, rather than satisfying it.

[25] For simplicity, I assume the cancellation/non-renewal process is formally and procedurally lawful.

assistance for departure, by contrast, need not directly impose comparable settlement or material-practical costs, though depending on its administration it may still impose public-standing costs by communicating that the persons targeted are less welcome in the polity.

No policy of the kind described above, however, necessarily imposes such grave moral costs that no specification of it could possibly be a proportionate response to a sufficiently weighty civic or material end in some empirical circumstances. If a group of non-citizen residents are actively obstructing the rule of law or using their residence to undermine constitutional institutions, for example, declining to renew or cancelling these residents' visas is not an obviously disproportionate response. Similarly, if some citizens are affiliated with institutions or networks that actively obstruct the rule of law or cultivate credible anti-constitutional threat pathways, and if some members of those networks wish to relocate abroad, offering financial and logistical assistance for them to do so is not obviously disproportionate.[26] Protecting the constitutional state and its associated values, for instance, is—according to liberal, egalitarian, democratic socialist, libertarian, and mainstream conservative theories of justice—a very morally weighty end.[27]

Achieving this goal, or other similarly weighty goals, could therefore justify the significant settlement, material-practical, and public-standing moral costs that at least some specifications of policies within this second ideal type would impose. Whether, given the empirical facts in any actually-existing state, implementing such policies would in fact satisfy Proportionality is a very different question, which this paper will not attempt to settle. Still, there are conceivable circumstances in which some specifications of policies within this second ideal type could satisfy Proportionality. This is, itself, a significant result.

Could policies within this second ideal type satisfy Maximal Specificity? Again, this depends on how the individual policies are specified. Measures ostensibly aimed at protecting the constitutional order satisfy Maximal Specificity only insofar as they target the concrete statuses, conduct, institutions, or threat pathways that generate the justificatory reason for inducing departure. Suppose, for example, that the relevant threat consists in radical Islamist networks that actively obstruct the operation of the rule of law in particular localities. Targeting all Muslim residents or citizens with remigration policies would be highly unlikely to satisfy Maximal Specificity, since it is highly unlikely that no more narrowly targeted policy to counter the actual threat is reasonably feasible. On the other hand, if the state targets only persons known or reasonably believed to be affiliated with the relevant anti-constitutional networks, the policy may well satisfy Maximal Specificity.

The same point applies to categories like "economic burden", "non-assimilation", and "hostile parallel society", which are often invoked in relatively civically justified real-world remigration plans that are closer to the second ideal type (see e.g., Sellner, 2025). Such categories satisfy Maximal Specificity only insofar as they are specified in terms

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[26] Noah Carl goes so far as to claim that "none of" these policies, as described in the proposals of Martin Sellner (see Sellner, 2026: Ch. 2–5), are "particularly controversial" (Carl, 2025). I do not claim that they are uncontroversial here, merely that none of the policies discussed above are obviously disproportionate on every specification.

[27] A left-liberal like John Rawls, a libertarian like Robert Nozick, a democratic socialist like G. A. Cohen, and a mainstream conservative like Robert P. George would all agree that protecting these values is a very weighty goal, even as they strongly disagree about which other political goals are weighty (compare Rawls, 1999; Cohen, 2010; Nozick, 1974; George, 1995).

of concrete statuses, conduct, or threat pathways that make departure relevant to the policy's justificatory end. Where they are specified in this way, policies indexed to them may well satisfy Maximal Specificity; where they are specified loosely or crudely, they are unlikely to do so. Conversely, as I argued previously, Maximal Specificity does not *categorically* prohibit the use of a demographic proxy where no more direct criterion is reasonably feasible.

Finally, an analogous judgment holds for relational egalitarianism. Distinguishing between temporary residents, permanent residents, naturalized citizens, and born citizens does not automatically violate relational egalitarianism, since these legal-status distinctions often track real differences in claims against induced departure grounded in legitimate expectations and affective ties, not just purported claims indexed to ascriptive identities.[28] Moreover, policies that burden continued residence because of criminality, welfare fraud, participation in coercive institutions, or concrete anti-constitutional activity need not communicate that migrant-origin residents as such have inferior civic standing.

By contrast, more broadly specified policies that fail to track justificatory ends and/or differences in claims against induced departure often will violate relational egalitarianism. If the concepts of "non-assimilation" or "cultural burden", for instance, are specified so as simply to track failure to conform to civically and materially unimportant aspects of majority culture like dietary preference or private religious practice, then remigration policies indexed to these concepts may impugn the civic standing of persons with unusual dietary or religious preferences that reflect their countries of ancestry.[29]

Overall, then, the second ideal type of remigration plan cannot be judged permissible or impermissible wholesale. There are certainly at least some specifications of narrowly targeted, limited-coercion remigration policies with civically grounded rationales that are capable of satisfying all three of my criteria in at least some empirical circumstances. None of the principal policy types considered here—status-sensitive visa non-renewal, voluntary financial or logistical assistance for departure, or measures directed at concrete anti-constitutional institutions and networks—is in principle, and on every specification, absolutely impermissible. Whether such policies are actually permissible, or even all-things-considered desirable, in any actually-existing state with its complex empirical circumstances is a question beyond the remit of this paper.

5. Conclusion

This paper began by identifying a neglected moral problem in political theory. Political theorists have extensively debated immigration restriction, but have paid much less attention to the related question of when states may permissibly induce existing lawful residents to leave. Remigration is one politically salient subcategory of this broader

[28] I assume that the operative conception of relational egalitarianism is not so demanding as to forbid semi-hierarchical relationships indexed to these real differences in claims. A highly demanding conception, which requires (say) the complete socio-political equality of all lawful residents irrespective of differences in legitimate expectation or affective tie claims, would pose many more problems for even the most moderate remigration policies. Such a highly demanding conception would also, however, impugn many of the ordinary and largely uncontroversial practices of real-world liberal states, which, almost without exception, distinguish between different classes of lawful residents when allocating, e.g., voting rights and entitlements to public welfare.

[29] For a similar discussion of civically relevant and non-relevant aspects of culture, see Miller (2018: 67–8).

problem. I have argued that lawful residents often possess claims against induced departure—arising principally from legitimate expectations, affective ties, and sometimes from public-standing considerations—that would-be immigrants typically lack, or possess to a lesser degree.

Basic moral standing motivated two mid-level principles that constrain permissible remigration policies: Proportionality requires that the policies contribute sufficiently to a morally weighty end to justify the moral costs they impose; Maximal Specificity requires that the policies are targeted as closely as reasonably feasible at the persons to whom the justificatory reasons apply. A third principle, relational egalitarianism, holds that states should not create hierarchical relationships among residents or citizens indexed to ascriptive identities like ethnicity or race. Relational egalitarianism is an additional, more controversial principle that is not directly motivated by basic moral standing. It also stands in tension with ethnocentrist or ethnonationalist views, so may be controversial among supporters of remigration, but if true it rules out remigration policies that pursue racial/ethnic homogeneity as ends in themselves.

I then applied these three principles to two broad types of proposed remigration plans: broadly targeted, highly coercive plans with ethnonationalist or ethnocentric rationales; and more narrowly targeted and less coercive plans with civic or material rationales. Broad, coercive proposals fail to satisfy Proportionality and relational egalitarianism, and may only satisfy Maximal Specificity if the end they purport to achieve, such as total or near-total ethnic/racial homogeneity, is extremely broad—which only exacerbates such proposals' incompatibility with Proportionality and relational egalitarianism. Narrow, less coercive proposals cannot be assessed wholesale; rather, the Proportionality, Maximal Specificity, and relational egalitarian-compatibility of many of the policies comprising them depends on the policies' precise specifications, and also on empirical circumstances. Nevertheless, the main policies contained in such narrower, less coercive proposals—visa non-renewal for specified economic or criminal burdens, for instance, or measures directed at concrete anti-constitutional networks—cannot be ruled out as absolutely impermissible, on every possible specification and in every empirical circumstance, *a priori*.

This paper has attempted to impose conceptual order and normative discipline on an important debate that academic political theory has largely neglected. That this debate has controversial—sometimes profoundly controversial, or even toxic—real-world implications may help justify this paper's existence, but does not change its argument or purpose. The broader ethics of state-induced departure raises important moral questions that political theory has largely neglected, while contemporary remigration proposals make those questions especially politically salient. Analyzing remigration as one application of this broader normative problem allows us to distinguish policies that differ sharply in their justificatory ends, targets, coerciveness, and moral costs. Once we disaggregate the concept of remigration, and recognize that not every policy traveling under the label involves violent and indiscriminate ethnic cleansing, we can begin to make progress in a debate too often left to slogans and mutual denunciation.

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