

Migration Narratives in Europe

A Social Media Intelligence Study

Country report for the French Republic



A Bakamo Public  **Project for the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung**

- 2019 -

Context of the French migration discourse

- **France** is located on the western edge of Europe with a population of 66,415,161 as of 2015. At its peak, official **asylum seekers in the country made up 0.41% of the population**, which is the 8th largest ratio in Europe.*
- Public social media conversation in France around migration in one year consists of ~7,235,696 posts. Compared to population size, the **conversation on migration in France is the 7th largest in the EU**.
- Led by **Emmanuel Macron**, the French government is dominated by the centrist, social-liberal party, La République En Marche, and has **adopted increasingly tough migration policies** in 2018. This move followed the electoral gains of **far-right parties**, the majority of which **seized on anxiety over the large number of migrants** who have arrived in the continent since 2015 to **promote the idea that migrants are fake and not entitled to French assistance**.



*Source: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu>



Introduction | FR

The French Context: *Politics of Calais*

The French discourse on migration is reflected in large part by the debate surrounding the ongoing situation of Calais - a port town in northern France where migrants in the early 2000s began settling in encampments, many of which were attempting to cross over to Britain via the Port or Eurotunnel.

While these migrant encampments have given rise to both security and humanitarianism concerns for the past two decades, engagement flared over the topic in 2016 when one of the more better known Calais camps dubbed the “Jungle” (home to around 7,000 migrants), was dismantled by the French authorities. This move by the French government was done in the wake of a sequence of terrorist attacks and in the midst of rising anti-migrant rhetoric.

Despite the demolition, between 2017 and 2018 the media continued to report on migrants wandering around the area of the Channel Tunnel--prompting both anti- and pro-migrant voices to insist further action be taken by the newly-elected President, Emmanuel Macron.

Like the larger French migration debate, anti-migrant sentiment (usually propagated by those supporting far-right political parties) securitizes the Calais situation by insisting such migrant encampments present a major security risk to France. In contrast, pro-migrant voices (usually aligned with the French political-left) are deeply sympathetic of migrants and claim France’s ongoing treatment of migrants from Calais is inhumane.

The Jungle camp is near the port of Calais and close to the 31-mile Channel Tunnel



All images represented in this report appeared as attachments to posts on public social media platforms, and are used here as illustrations of the public online conversation.



Key Findings | FR

Contentious Debates Around Humanitarianism

Size of Pan-European Narratives

The **strongest narrative** in the French discussion on migration is **humanitarianism**. The majority of discussions descend into divisive debates when discussing the effectiveness of France's current migration policies.

Local Issues

When it comes to migration, many French are concerned about the refugee camps set up in **Calais**. Some people also contemplate **secret plots**, coordinated by the "liberal elite," to **profit from the migration** crisis in Europe.

EU & Domestic Politics

References to **European politics** dominate each narrative, which reflect that French people often regard migration crisis management at a Pan-European level.

Conversation Tone

Majority of the French discussion demonstrates a **reserved and conversational tone**. Security-related issues trigger the most heated comments, as that topic mainly reflects the threat imposed by migrants in the country.

Conversation Channels

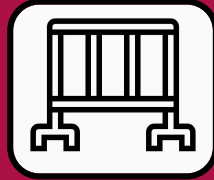
Twitter is the dominant platform used to discuss topics of migration in France. However, **blogs** and online **news sites** also foster lively debates on the topic.



Pan-European Narratives: *The French Context*



The economy narrative is permeated with discussions concerning the **ability of the French government to provide social benefits to the native French population**, as well as the new migrant arrivals.



The security narrative in France is dominated by the belief that **migrants impede upon French sovereignty and security** by threatening its national borders and local safety.



A significant part of the population in France is concerned about the **preservation of French identity and customs**, especially when faced with an influx of Muslim migrants.



Humanitarianism is the largest narrative, and the debate revolves around **France's migration policies**. Many people insist that more must be done to assist migrants, while others point out that not all migrants deserve assistance.



The **demographic narrative in France is small**: in contrast to many other European countries suffering from a deficit of labour, the country is currently **struggling with a surplus of labour**, rather than a shortage.

+ *Pan-European Narratives in France*

1.



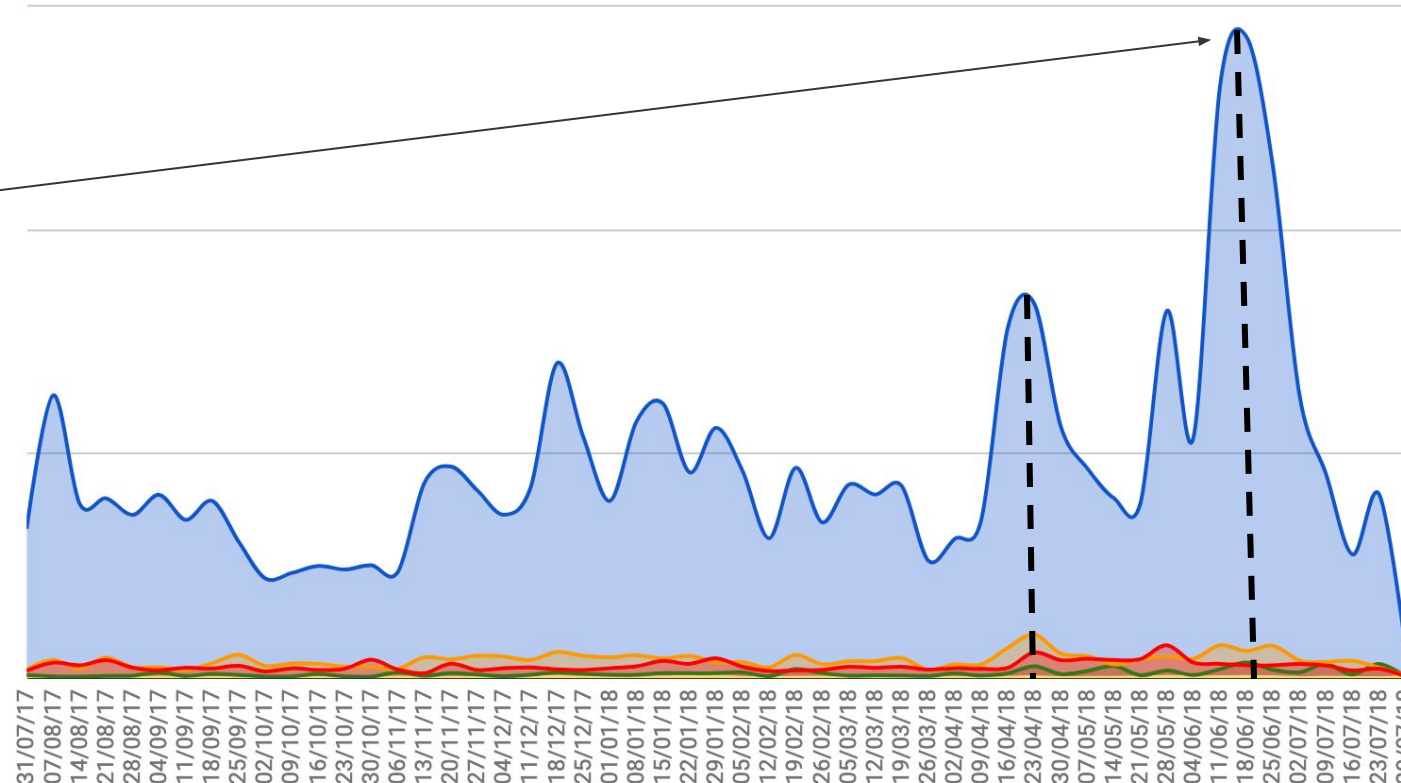
The shape of the migration discourse

When discussing the topic of migration in France, conversations spike in the **humanitarianism**, **identity and customs**, and **security narratives when discussing France's migration policies**, especially those pertaining to the provision of humanitarian aid, as well as the effectiveness of the current local and international legal framework around migration.

Results:
~7,236,000

“Migrants, rescued at sea, rest aboard the “Aquarius”, the MSF ship, about twenty nautical miles from the Libyan coast on August 2nd. Since 1 August, a “Code of Good Conduct” of the Italian Ministry of Interior must oversee migrant rescue operations carried out by NGOs. These thirteen articles, including the presence of armed members of the police, have further tended the climate surrounding the work of NGOs.”

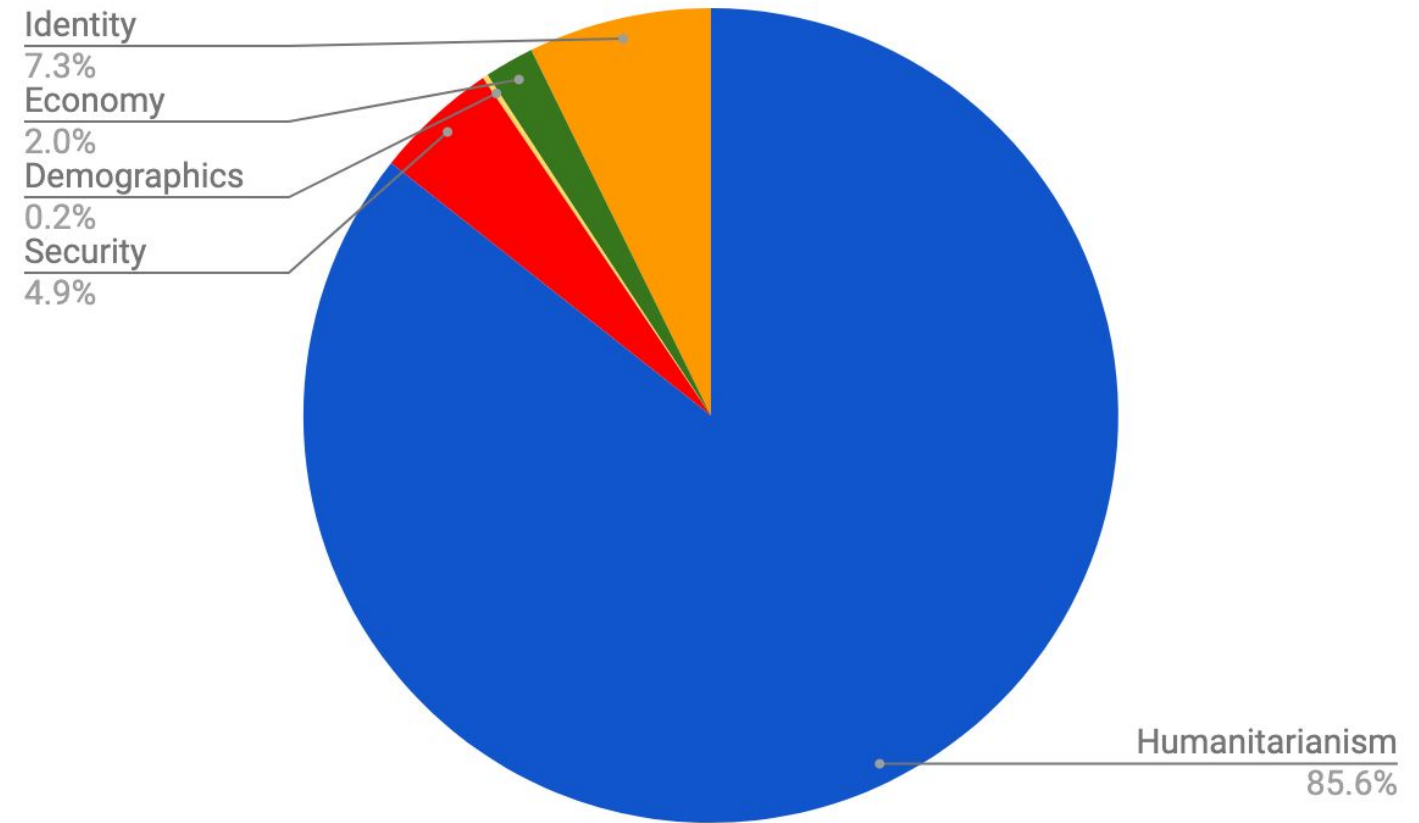
■ Demographics ■ Economy ■ Humanitarianism ■ Identity ■ Security



Pan-European Narratives | FR

Narrative Size in France

Most conversations in France reflect concerns about **humanitarian** or **identity and customs** aspects of migration.





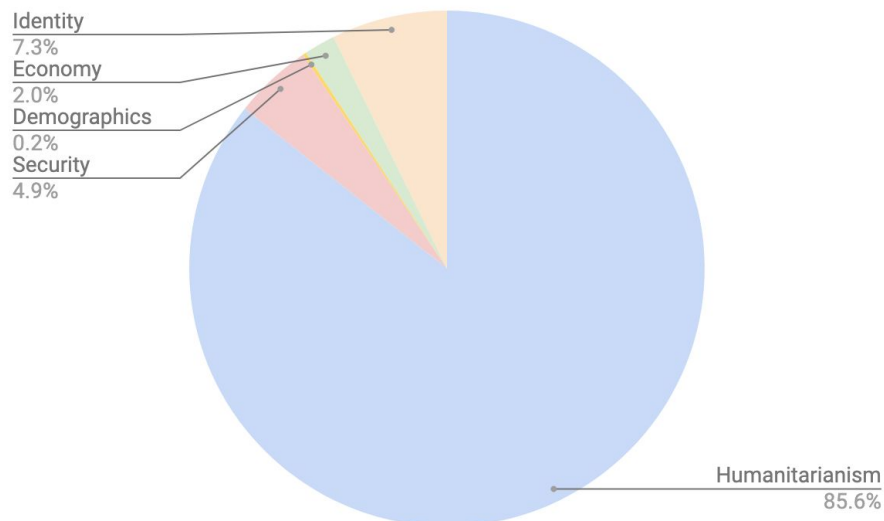
Pan-European Narratives | FR

Demographics (1): *Key Points*

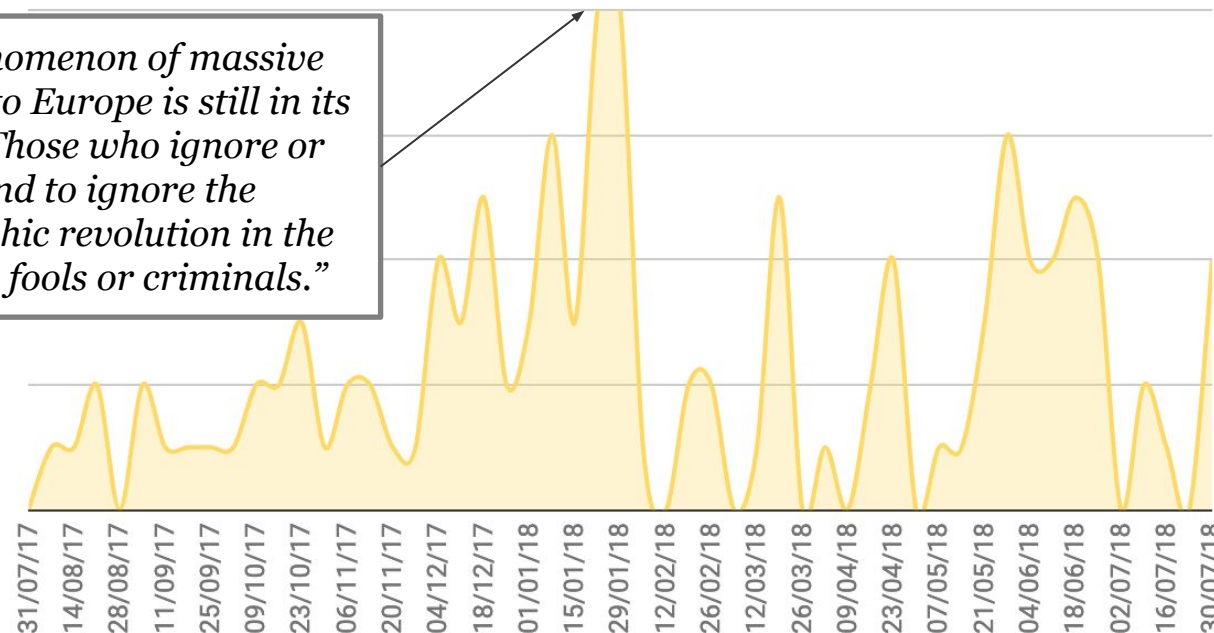
The **demographic narrative in France is small**. In contrast to many other European countries suffering from a deficit of labour, the country is currently **struggling with a surplus of labour**. However, when present, **pro-migrant voices** often push the idea that the **successful integration** of migrants could **assist with filling low-wage jobs, especially in rural areas in France**.

Anti-migrant voices tend to **reject such proposals** and insist France should be extremely worried about accepting migrants into the workforce as the country is already struggling with a surplus of unemployed residents.

Results:
~15,500 (0.2%)



“The phenomenon of massive migration to Europe is still in its infancy. Those who ignore or pretend to ignore the demographic revolution in the world are fools or criminals.”





Pan-European Narratives | FR

Demographics (2): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Migrants as a “solution” for current demographic issues in France would be harmful

The **policy of distribution of migrants** has **unbearable consequences for the French**.

In the past, the French economy sometimes needed low-skilled immigrants. But now...**the massive immigration of low-skilled people is only increasing our unemployment...it's a ruin.**

Migrants should not be encouraged to stay long-term, as unemployed French need work

What if we tried instead to settle the migrants in their countries of origin? **The unemployed French do not have work!**

"Former socialist minister declared..."migrants welcome" policy should be amplified, one of the reasons being to "help reviving French villages" **IN MY VILLAGE THE ANSWER IS NO AND NO**

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Migrants can ease the pressure of changing demographics

...Immigration [could] blur the effects of [France's] aging population [and decreasing] birth rate...The non-renewal of the generations in many territories already has visible effects on the real estate market, moribund notably in the Morvan. Lack of attractiveness, many territories struggle to maintain their population and the closure of services or poor organization of health professionals only amplify a vicious circle.

This agency will ensure a synergy of actions between Malians of the diaspora living in France and their compatriots remained in the country in order to **pool the financial resources of migrants with the financing needs of the national economy.**

The results are clear: 1 large and **permanent flow of migrants ... has only positive repercussions on the economy of the host country**, especially in terms of unemployment and GDP / hbt

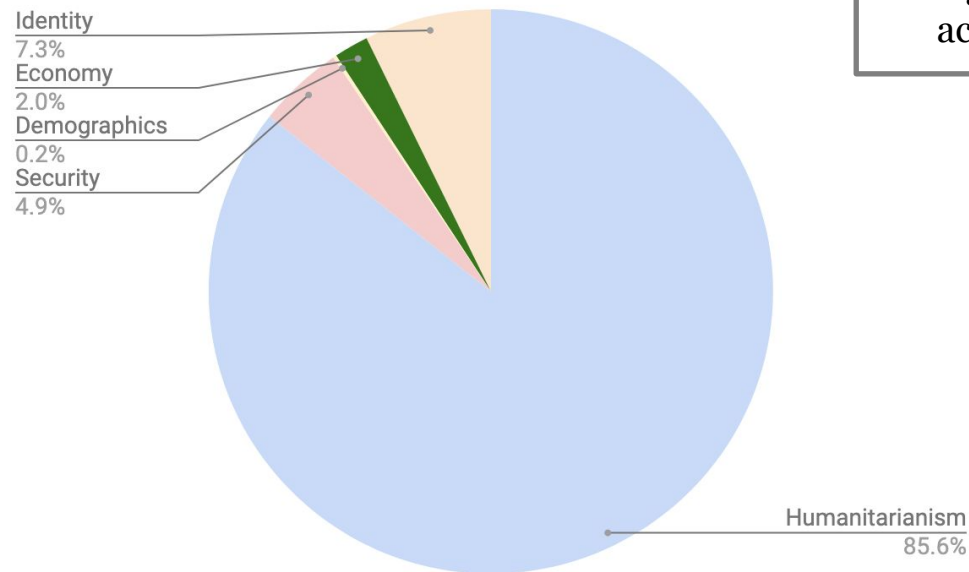


Pan-European Narratives | FR

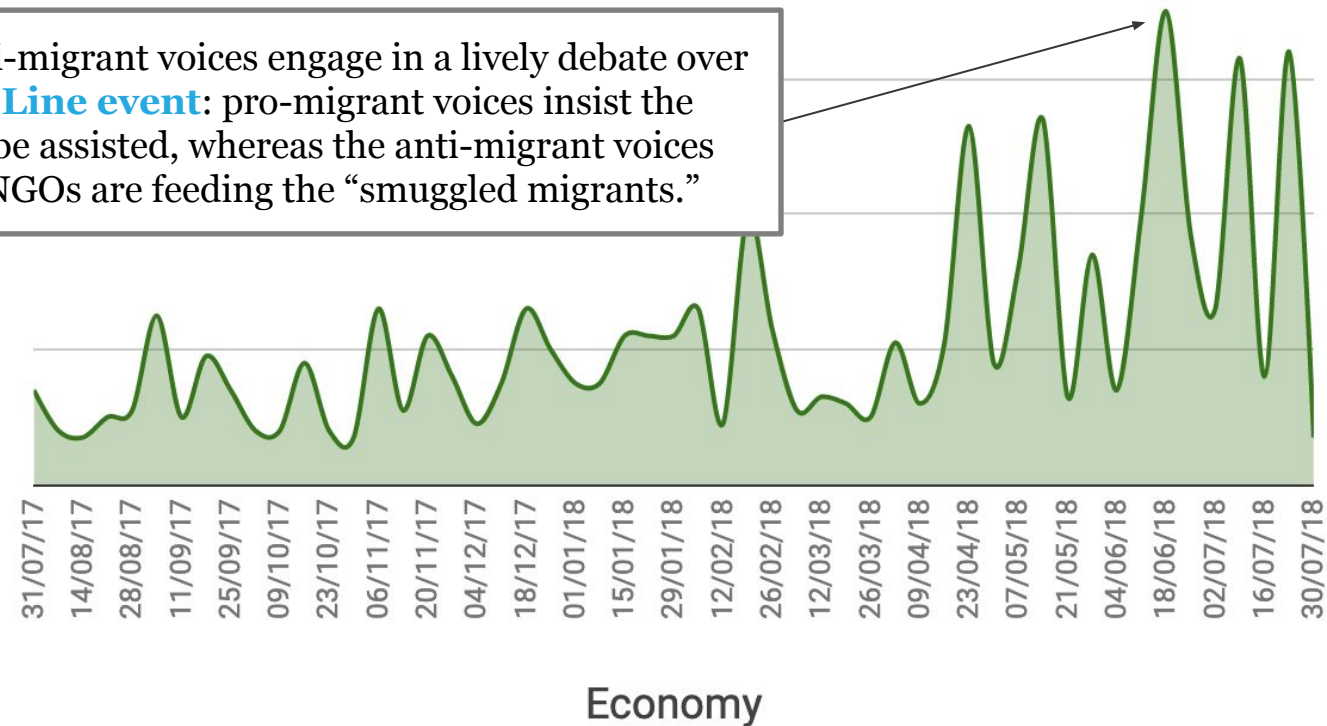
Economy (1): *Key Points*

The economy narrative is permeated with discussions concerning the **ability of the French government to provide social benefits to the native French population**, as well as the new migrant arrivals. **Anti-migrant** voices often express anger over the government's expenditure on migrants, often pointing to the government's inability to address local struggles like **homelessness, unemployment** and **poverty** as reasons not to spend tax money on migrant assistance. In contrast, **pro-migrant** voices believe **migrants are hard-working people who do not weigh too heavily upon the French social system**.

Results:
~142,600 (2%)



Pro and anti-migrant voices engage in a lively debate over the **Life Line event**: pro-migrant voices insist the migrants be assisted, whereas the anti-migrant voices accuses NGOs are feeding the “smuggled migrants.”





Pan-European Narratives | FR

Economy (2): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Why prioritize the welfare of illegal migrants when there are thousands of homeless French in need?

MACRON...prefers to take care of the migration and billions are spent each year [to help them], leaving thousands of Frenchmen in distress [without assistance]!

France has between 5 and 8.9 million poor. And we welcome migrants?

Migrants threaten the French economy--the country will go bankrupt trying to assist everyone

France's problem is that we are bankrupt and our social assistance is too generous and too important. We can not take care of migrants yet. France is just too poor to deal with migrants.

This situation is one of the best indicators of the socialist economic fiasco, which Macron assumes and wants to extend.

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

There is no competition for resources between migrants and homeless French

You are the king of false chips by creating a rivalry between migrants and homeless when there is no reason to do so.

Migrants are hard-working and benefit France's economy

No, asylum seekers and migrants are not a threat to our economy . Thanks to CNRS researchers for this new study based on 30 years of #immigration . This is helpful in illuminating current and future debates.

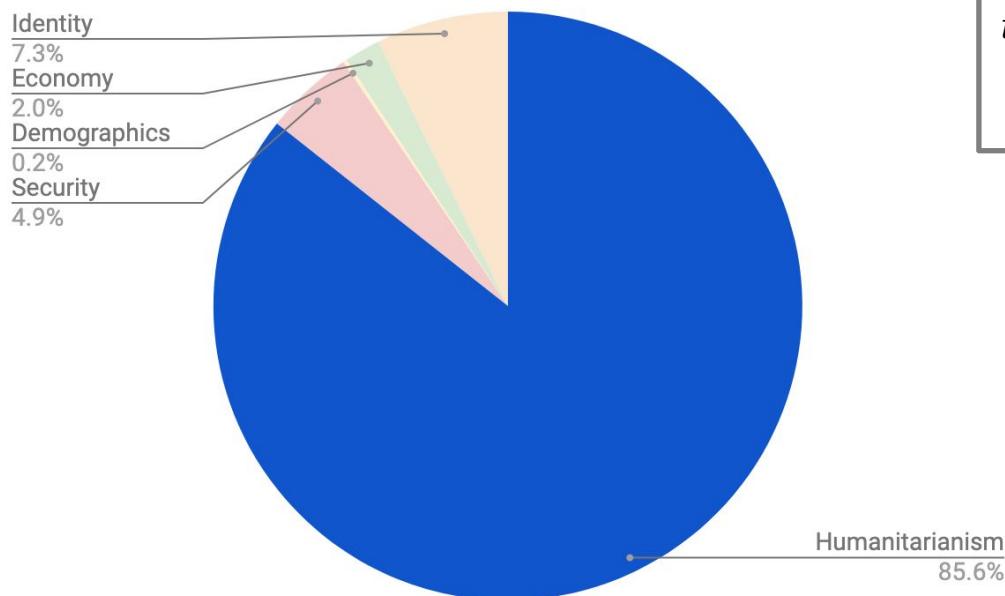
I listen to the far-right, which explains that migrants come to France to enjoy social benefits... in the meantime, in the metro at 5.40 AM, I notice that "this France that wakes up early" has a rather dark skin...

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Humanitarianism (1): *Key Points*

Humanitarianism is the **largest narrative** in the French discussion around migration. **Anti-migrant** voices tend to express **doubt** that migrants coming to France are **in real need of assistance**, and voice extreme **dissatisfaction with the current government's handling of the situation**.

Pro-migrant voices indicate the opposite: they claim that the current government is **not doing enough to assist migrants** and that Macron and his allies are **guilty of** great **humanitarian violations** in their policies and treatment of migrants.



"We traveled by bus all over France for a year to meet the French favorable to the reception of refugees . For the #WorldRefugeeDay , we will deliver these messages. Our activists and our bus are currently blocked by the police in front of the Elysee."





Pan-European Narratives | FR

Humanitarianism (2): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Selective humanitarianism

*We must stop believing that all these people are **refugees**, they are economic migrants... smugglers go to villages in Africa and trade human beings.*

France's current policies encourage illegal migration, break the law, and are ineffective

***Illegal immigration is an offense punishable by law.** France is the only country in the world where when we violate a law we receive 2500 €.*

Since 2008 **everything has been tried** to provide humanitarian solution for migrants but it is a **failure**

*I am writing to you [to let you know the current assistance to migrants] remains a **criminal offense**. Because of [its current] policy, the city of Grenoble is violating the article L622-1 of the CESEDA.*

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

All migrants deserve to be helped

*There is a **distinction that we try to make between good and bad migrants**. There is a kind of categorization of the population that is **absolutely harmful**.*

France's current policies put human lives at risk and must be changed

*Good evening **@EmmanuelMacron**, geography question: which country, which includes ports, is between Italy and Spain and could have welcomed 629 migrants? (**You have the right to consult an atlas as well as a dictionary on the page "decency"**).*

*In France, **the asylum and immigration bill endangers the rights of refugees and migrants**. There is still time to take action to say no to this dangerous text!*



Pan-European Narratives | FR

Humanitarianism (3): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

NGO vessels are not saving lives, they are human traffickers

*It heavily accuses NGOs and smuggling networks of **fueling migrant smuggling**...nothing prevents a certain porosity between these smugglers and a part of the community. **Nothing is easier than to abuse the notion of the right of asylum to make the trafficking of human beings flourish**.*

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

France has a responsibility to help migrants

*[Migration Policy] 📢📢 #WelcomingEurope 📢📢 **No one should be mistreated and humiliated by those who are supposed to save and protect them.** And yet ... 📝 Today more than ever, WE MOBILIZE FOR A Hospitable #Europe*

*We must preserve the asylum, strengthen it. **It is the honor of France to welcome the refugees**, the persecuted, those who flee the war. #ClassiqueMatin*



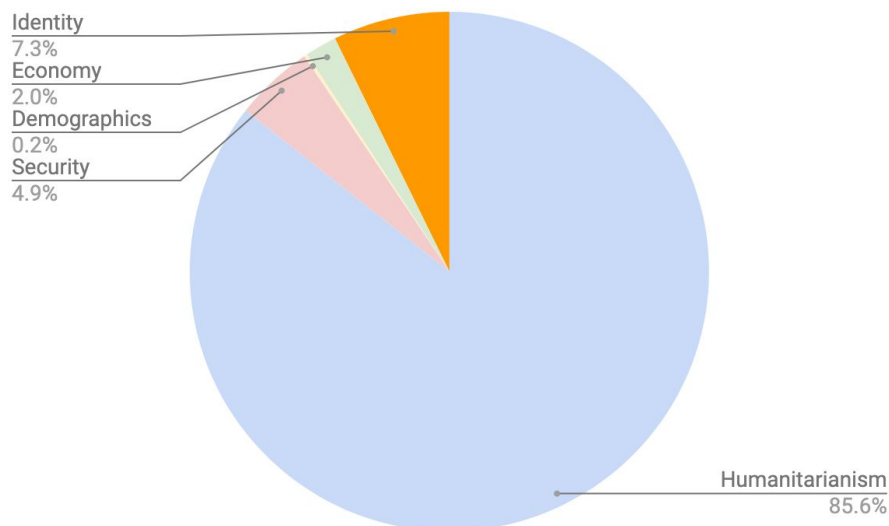
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Identity and Customs (1): Key Points

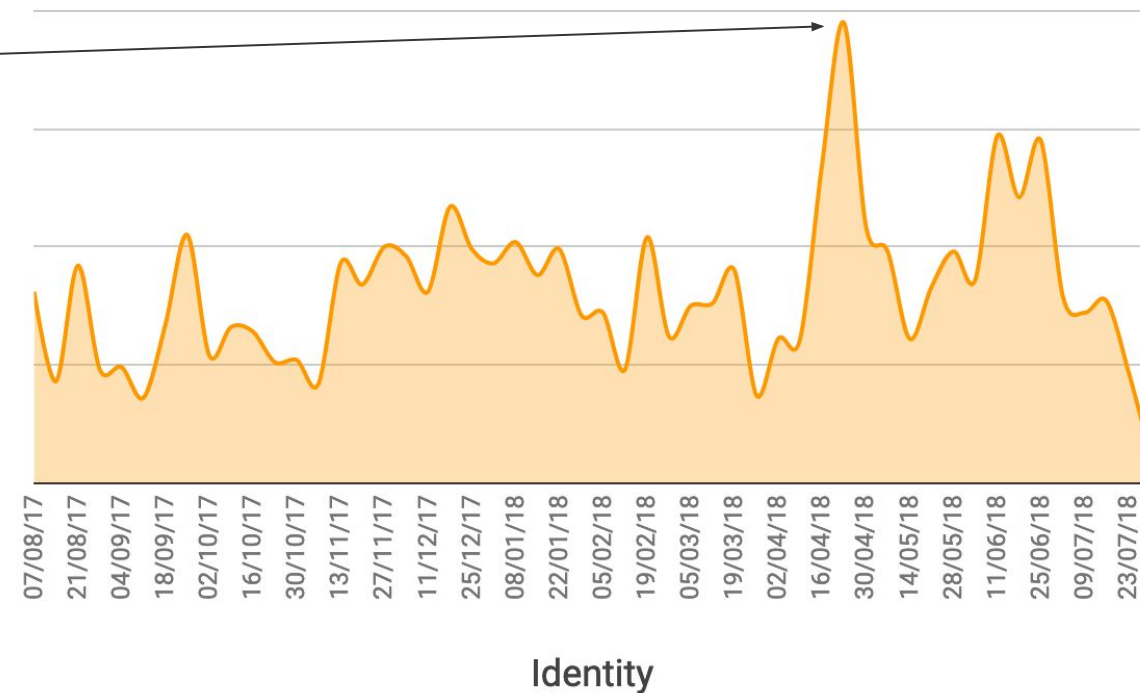
A significant part of the population in France is concerned about the **preservation of French identity and customs**. **Anti-migrant** voices are particularly concerned about the influx of Muslim migrants (some statistics estimating between 5 to 10% of the French population adhere to Islam), and how this mass of new people could **cause the “islamisation,”** and consequently, the **eradication of traditional French identity**.

Pro-migrant voices condemn those who discourage diversity—instead, **they uphold the benefits France has enjoyed from multiculturalism** by providing anecdotal examples of successful integration.

Results:
~525,100 (7,3%)



“Thank you to all these mayors who are always welcoming more and more migrants!!! It had always been good to live in Saint-Brieuc 🙄 Now look at the devastation caused by socialist policies that have reigned in Brittany for more than 30 years! It will change our region 😊”





Pan-European Narratives | FR

Identity and Customs (2): *Key Points*

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Pan-European Narratives | FR

Identity and Customs (3): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Migrants bring values that are not harmonious with French values

Migrants also come with their way of life, their customs, and values sometimes contrary to ours.

Multiculturalism will destroy France

*#Zemmour is completely right "We are **destroying a people with immigration**, we are **destroying a nation with multiculturalism**."*

*While at the #EUROVISION **France defends the idea of multiculturalism** by singing an ideological song praising migrants; **at the same time in Paris we are dying of Islamism. The French suicide continues, in song.***

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

The far-right parties in France ruin French identity, not migrants

*If Europe decided to **expel all those neo-nazis**, it would have enough **room to welcome all the migrants**.*

Migrants enrich the local community

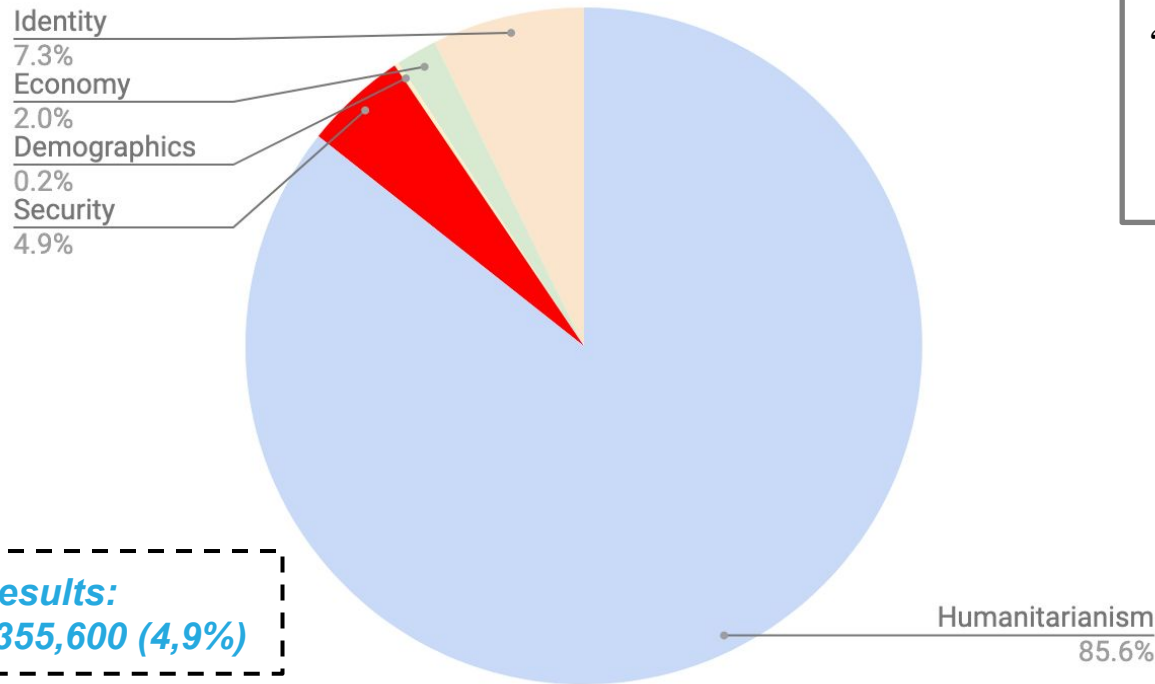
*Surrounded by twirling dancers, the artist mixed in wearing a very explicit t-shirt with the words: "**son of immigrants, black and fagot**."*



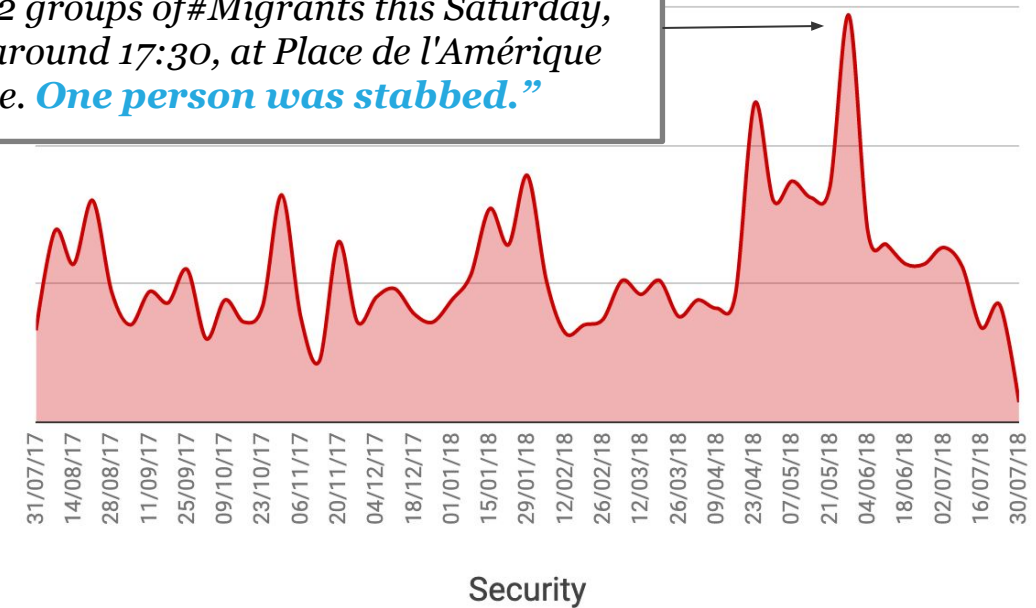
Pan-European Narratives | FR

Security (1): Key Points

The security narrative in France is dominated by the belief that migrants impede upon French sovereignty and security by **threatening its national borders and local safety**. In particular, **anti-migrant voices** are concerned about an **increased risk of terrorist attacks**, as well as a **rise in alleged migrant crime** and violence around provisional **refugee and asylum camps**. In contrast, **pro-migrant** persons are sympathetic about the perilous circumstances causing migrants to flee their home countries, and are also concerned about the **treatment migrants** are subjected to in France by **French security authorities** and **far-right hate groups**.



*"#SaintNazaire : scene of violence and confusion between 2 groups of #Migrants this Saturday, June 2, around 17:30, at Place de l'Amérique latine. **One person was stabbed.**"*





Pan-European Narratives | FR

Security (2): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Migrants are dangerous and threaten the safety of French men, women, and children

*Do you want pictures of a **76-year-old lady beaten and raped by migrants**?*

Migrants in the “Calais Jungle” are dangerous and threaten local security

*We are afraid, we are not reassured. **People do not feel safe anymore at #Calais**. All these testimonies come from Calais which has undergone massive migration. #DefendEurope*

Macron is letting in terrorists

*The **government of @EmmanuelMacron** welcomes more #migrants... **how many are terrorists among them?** #RedouaneLakdim #Trebes #Aude*


PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

The French are just as capable of violence as migrants

*Well, you want to see all the **women raped by "good french guys"**...?*

*Or the **75 women killed since January 2017 by their husbands / ex-husband / good French spouses?***

Migrants face illegal practices by French police and border agents

*Evidence shows that the **#POLICE**  **falsified the date of birth of migrant minors in order to be able to send them back to Italy** ✓ Reminder: if isolated minor migrants are under 18, they must be protected and not returned!*

+ *Local Issues in France Around Migration*



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Local Issues (1)| FR

Calais Refugee Camp

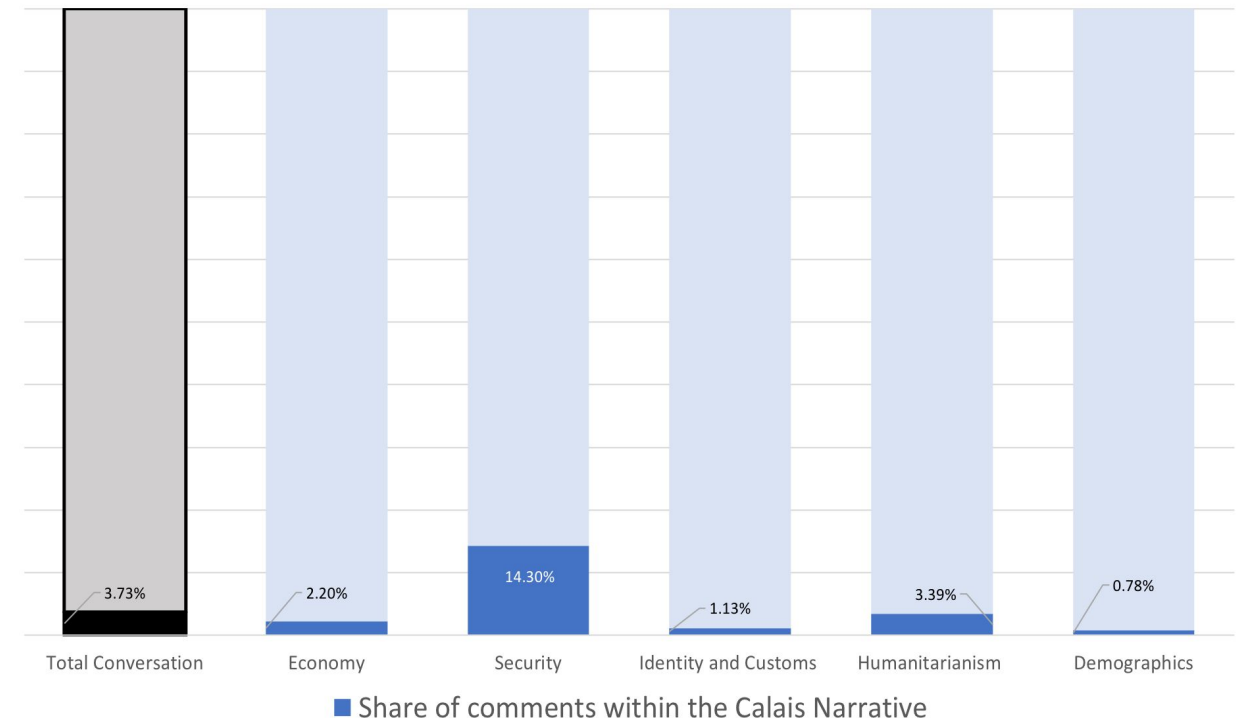
Calais is a historic port city in northern France which has become a hub for an increasingly large number of migrants who started living in the “Calais jungle,” while they attempted to enter the UK from France. **Major security and humanitarian concerns have risen** as some claim France’s treatment of these migrants was inhumane, while others believe such migrant encampments present a major security risk.

Calais: several night brawls between migrants, 16 light wounded

The situation [in the Calais camp] for migrants and unaccompanied minors has worsened: isolation, violence, exposure to human trafficking.

It is the third dead migrant in the Calais region since the beginning of the year, after four in 2017, 14 in 2016 and 18 in 2015, according to a count of local authorities.

For the French, the “**Calais Jungle**” embodied the **perceived security threat** that mass migration poses to their country. To a lesser extent, humanitarian aspects of the Calais events were discussed as well.





Local Issues (2)| FR

International Financial Conspiracy

Conspiracies about high levels of corruption and alleged secret plots, coordinated by the “liberal elite,” to profit from the migration crisis permeate the French discussion on migration.

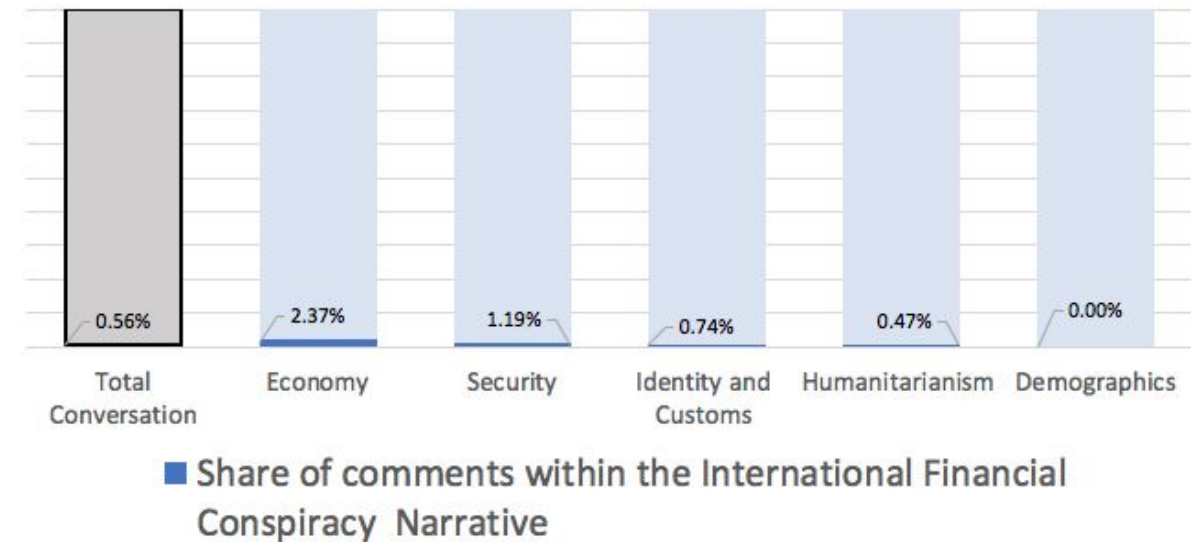
Well-known figures such as George Soros are mentioned when users discuss rumoured surreptitious international schemes to profit off of the migration crisis.

*To **welcome 3 billion poor** is simply **impossible**! Moreover, **migration only impoverishes the world for the benefit of elites, such as Soros.***

*One may think that Soros made his fortune by playing on the devaluation of currencies and the weakness of the states. He has put thousands of women and children on the street. **The more destabilized the state, the more money he makes.***

*An excellent summary of the **[elites'] criminal ideological enterprise** of which the European nations are victims, this abominable plot being supported by unscrupulous **financial interests.***

The elite's conspiracy to profit on the migration crisis is mainly connected to the **economy narrative**, as people claim that while their state suffers from the financial burden of hosting immigrants, some groups are profiting from it.



+ *Migration in the Context of European- and Domestic Politics*



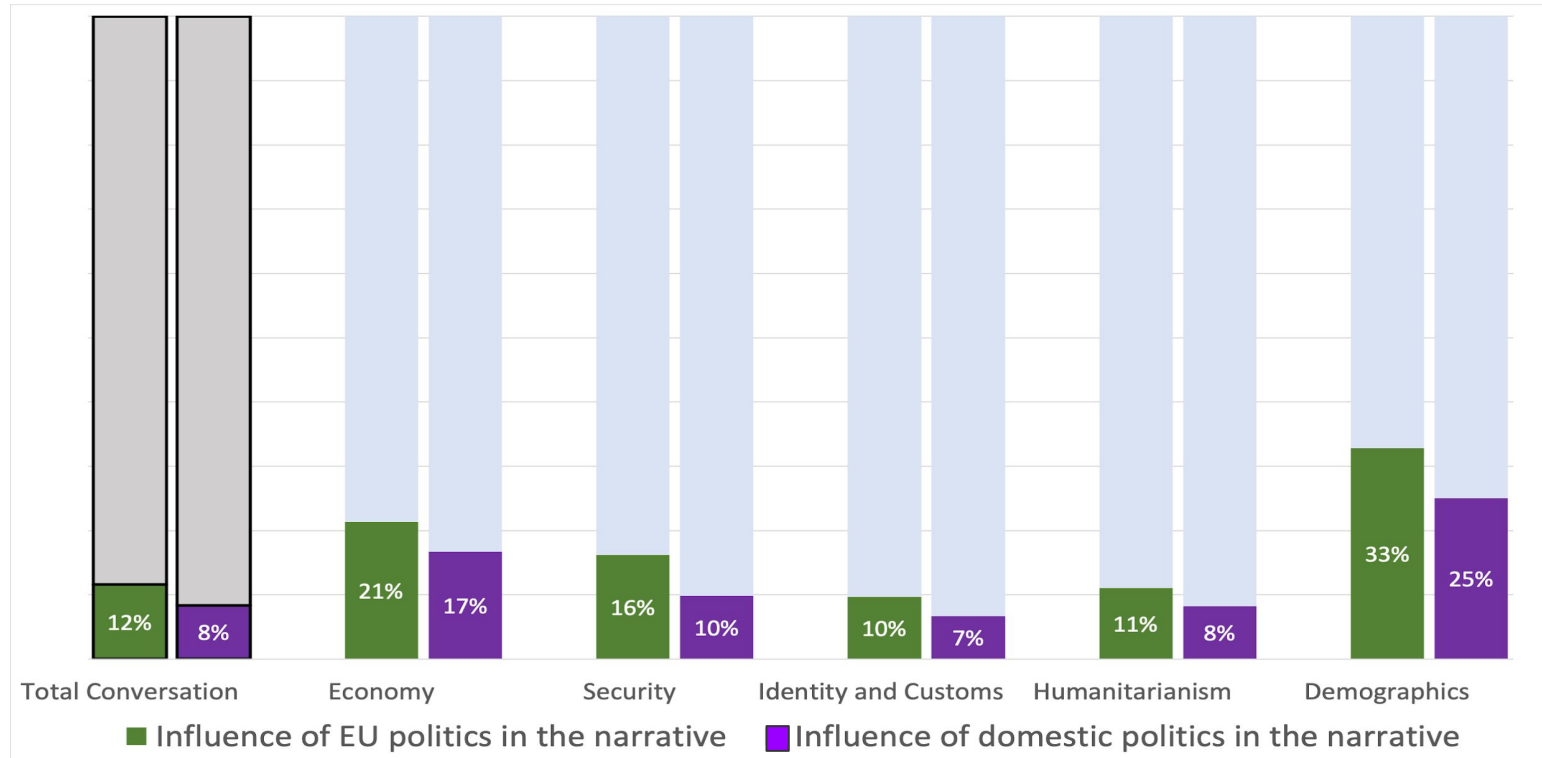
3.

European and Domestic Politics Context within Narratives | FR

Migration Perceived As an Issue of Foreign Countries

References to **European politics dominate each narrative**, reflecting how the French people often contemplate the migration crisis' management at a Pan-European level.

Although it is a tiny narrative, the discussion around demographic issues related to migration are the most permeated by international and domestic political references.



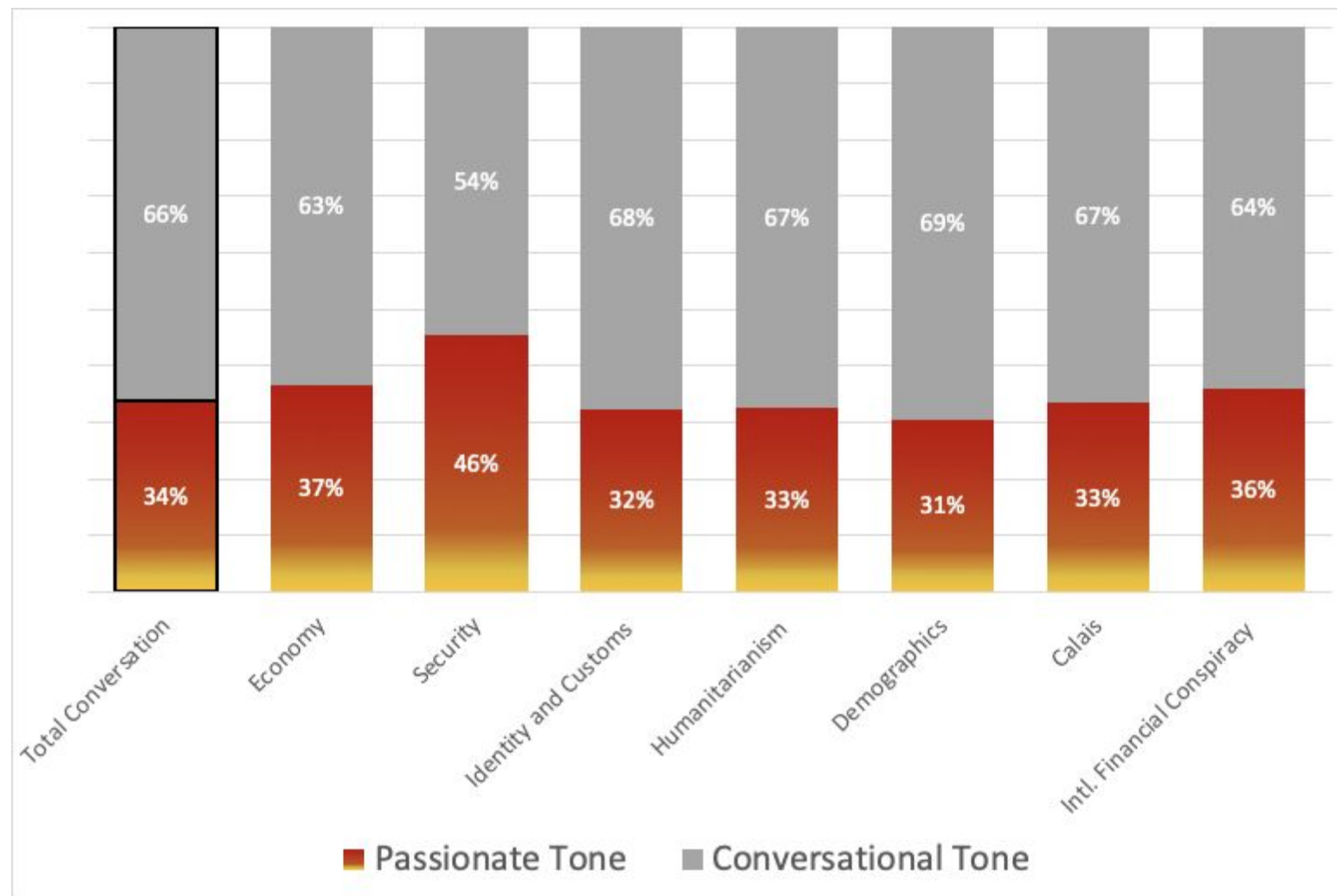
+ *Discussion Tone in France*



4.

Majority of the French discussion demonstrates a reserved and conversational tone.

Security-related issues trigger the most heated comments, as that topic mainly reflects the threat imposed by migrants in the country.



+ *Conversation Channels*



5.

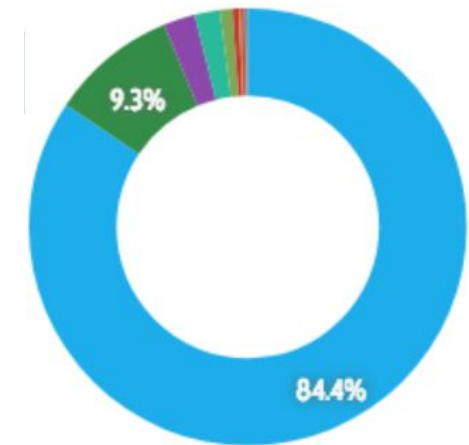


Channel Distribution | FR

From the Analysed and Publicly Available Data, Twitter Dominates the Debate

Twitter is the dominant platform used to discuss topics of migration in France. However, **blogs** and online **news sites** also foster lively debates on the topic.

Results:
~723,6000



- Twitter
- Blogs
- Online News
- Forums
- Newspaper
- TV/Radio
- Magazine
- YouTube
- Instagram
- Other

Most Influential Authors | FR

Traditional Media & Newcomers

Driving Engagement

The conversation was largely driven by both the established, traditional media, as well as new politically-affiliated platforms.

Where the established platforms tended to report EU politics and relevant events, new media platforms tended to provide information through visual messages (pictures and videos) with politically-heated messages.

Overall Conversation: Most Influential Authors	Platform Description
Fdesouche (@F_Desouche)	Official twitter account of right wing news channel
Oh (@incomprxs)	Twitter account
lexpress. fr	Established online news media
Brut FR (@brutofficiel)	Official twitter account of left-leaning news channel
bfmtv.com	Established online news media