

Migration Narratives in Europe

A Social Media Intelligence Study

Country report for Lithuania



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

- 2019 -

Context to the Lithuanian Discussion on Migration



- The Republic of Lithuania has been a member of the European Union since 1995, with a population of 2,921,262 in 2015. At its peak, official **asylum seekers in the country made up 0.04% of the population**.^{*} Such a figure reflects that, compared to other EU countries, Lithuania does not have a pressing migration problem.
- Public social media conversation around migration in one year consists of ~24,700 posts. Compared to population size, **the conversation on migration in Lithuania is one of the lowest in the EU**.
- Lithuania is currently governed by the **Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union** and the **Social Democratic Labour Party of Lithuania**. Their migration policies tend to revolve around the question of Lithuanian emigrants, as they are not a destination country for migration.
- Overall, migration is a low priority in the discussions in Lithuania, and it's strongly influenced by their more pressing local issues.
- Although there is a strong Russian-speaking community in the country, this report analyses comments posted in **Lithuanian**.



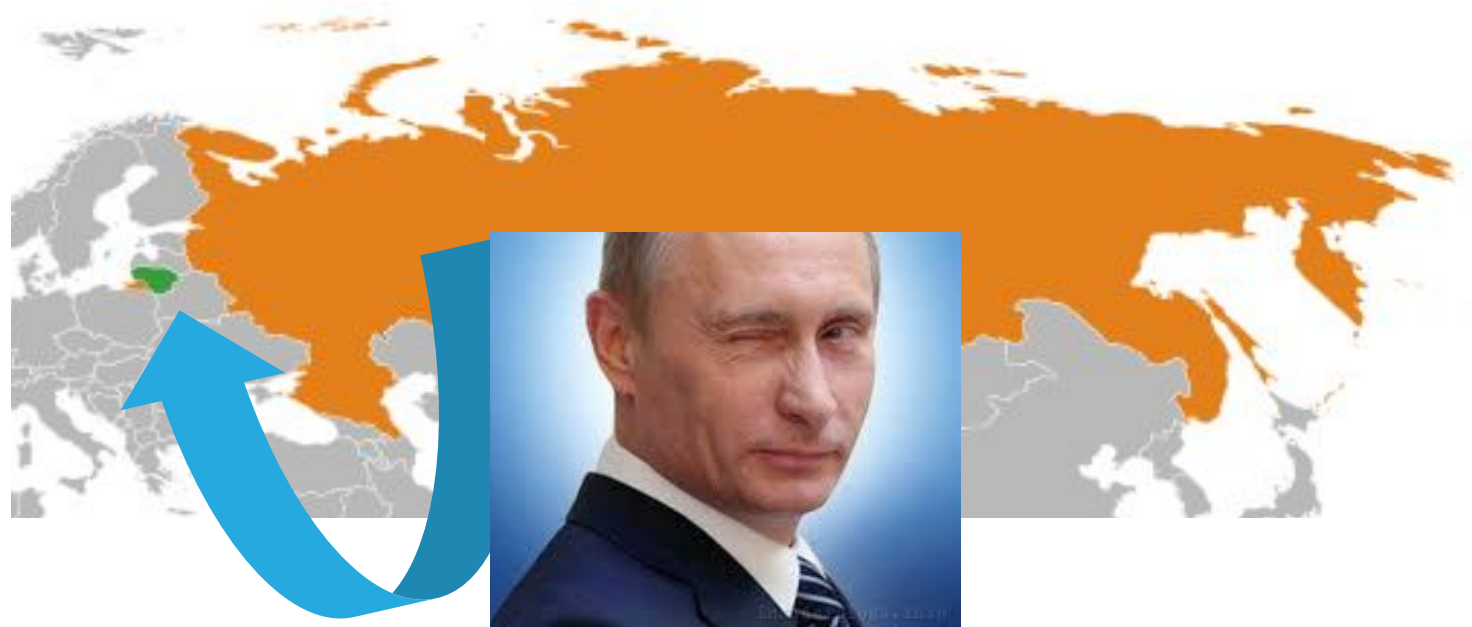
^{*}Source: europarl.europa.eu

Local issues overshadow migration in Lithuania

With a tiny amount of asylum seekers coming to Lithuania, the discourse on migration usually follows **controversial, international events along the lines of security and humanitarianism**.

However, these distant problems are underlined by the threat posed by **Vladimir Putin and Russian foreign policy**, which is discussed both in domestic and international politics, eg. regarding the refugees from Crimea.

Furthermore, as many Lithuanians have **emigrated** over the years, their situation as migrants is also heavily featured in the conversation. The local demographic situation and the country's livability is also discussed in the context of migration.





Key Findings | LT

How and where do Lithuanians discuss migration in the social media space?

Size of Pan-European Narratives

Humanitarianism and security come head to head in Lithuania when discussing migration in an international context, with **demographics** featured strongly in the local discussion.

Local Issues

The **threat of Russia** and the poor local economic situation that lead many people to **emigrate**, influences and overshadows the conversation.

EU & Domestic Politics

EU politics are mentioned twice as much as domestic ones within the discussion, showing that by their relative lack of immigrants and more pressing problem with the potential Russian threat, they are **looking at international solutions** more.

Conversation Channels

The majority of the discussion happens through established **online news** portals.

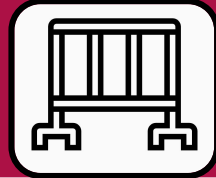


Key Findings | LT

Pan-European Narratives in the Lithuanian Context



Humanitarian attitudes were expressed in times of **international controversies**, especially when it came to the fallout of Russian actions, in Syria or Crimea.



The security discussion on migration was dominantly influenced by **Russia's foreign policies** (in Crimea and Syria) which contextualized the wider EU questions on migration, as long as it came with security solutions.



Emigration and low fertility rates have had a lasting effect on the country, but locals do not consider managing the problem through welcoming migrants, mainly due to nationalist and xenophobic sentiments.



The economy narrative in Lithuania was concerned by **migration related policies in Europe** affecting Lithuanian and other emigrants. It's also used to signal the **"health" of the local** economy - are people coming for prosperity, or leaving because of poverty?



Only a minority of Lithuanians were concerned with the cultural consequences of immigration, yet stories unfolded that these identity concerns are raised because of **Lithuanian emigrants** and them establishing families abroad.

+ *Pan-European Narratives in Lithuania*



1.



Pan-European Narratives | LT

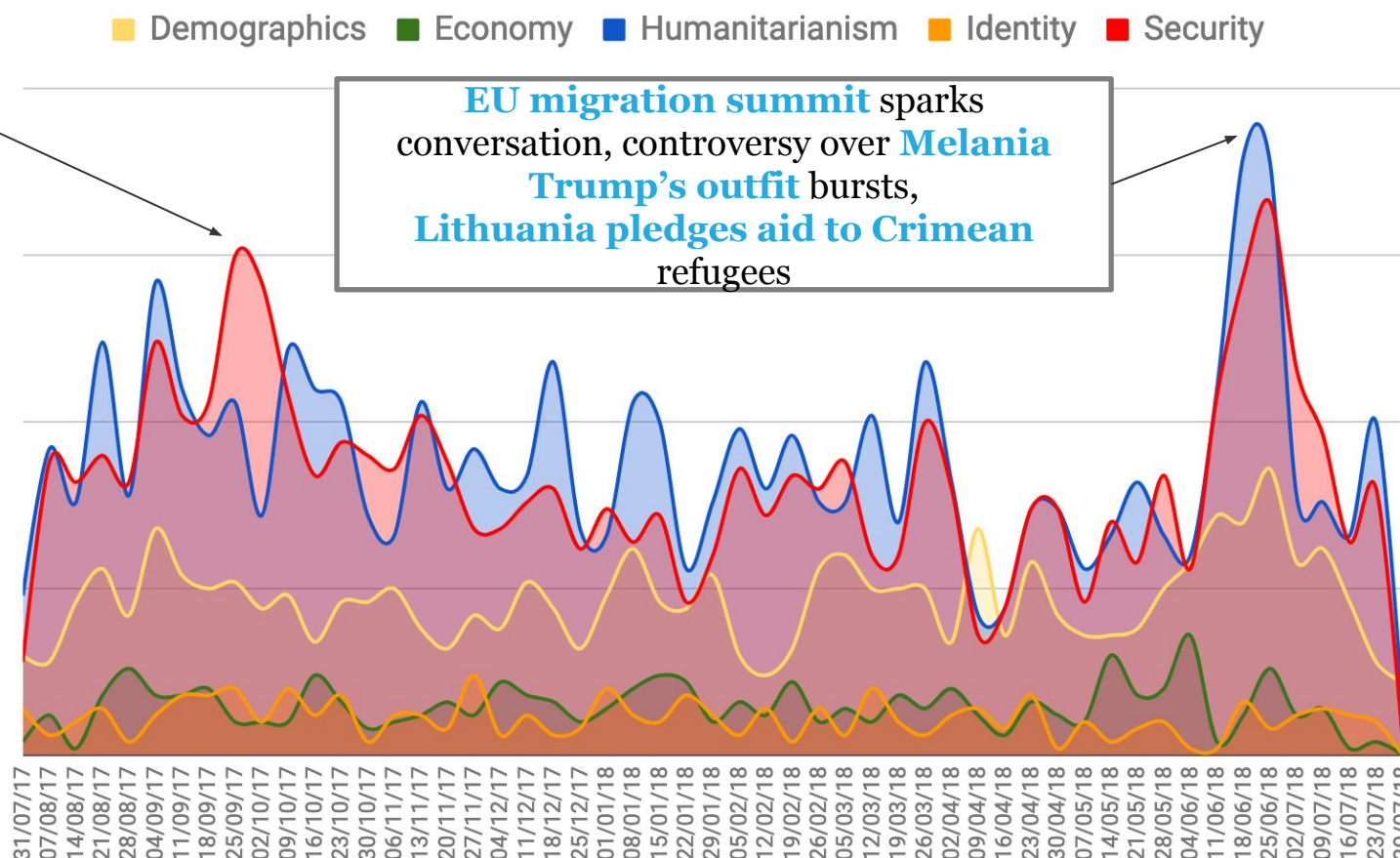
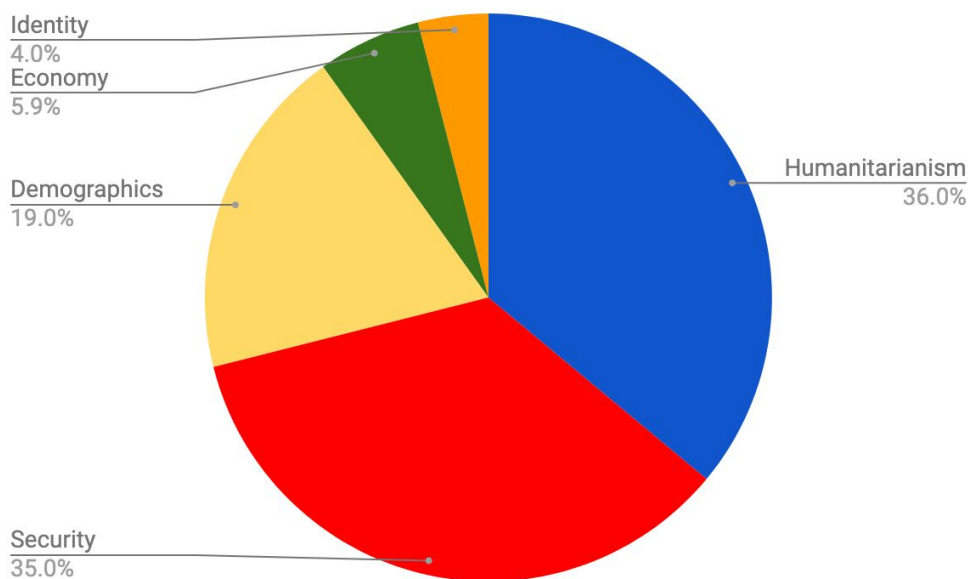
The shape of the migration discourse

The dominant narratives, **humanitarianism** and **security** follow domestic and international events related to either Russia or the EU. **Demographics** holds the third place, underlying the entire migration discourse with its' focus on Lithuanian emigration.

Results:
~24,700

Scandal erupts over **Russians** having access to confidential material in the Ministry of Immigration

EU migration summit sparks conversation, controversy over **Melania Trump's outfit** bursts, **Lithuania pledges aid to Crimean refugees**



Pan-European Narratives | LT

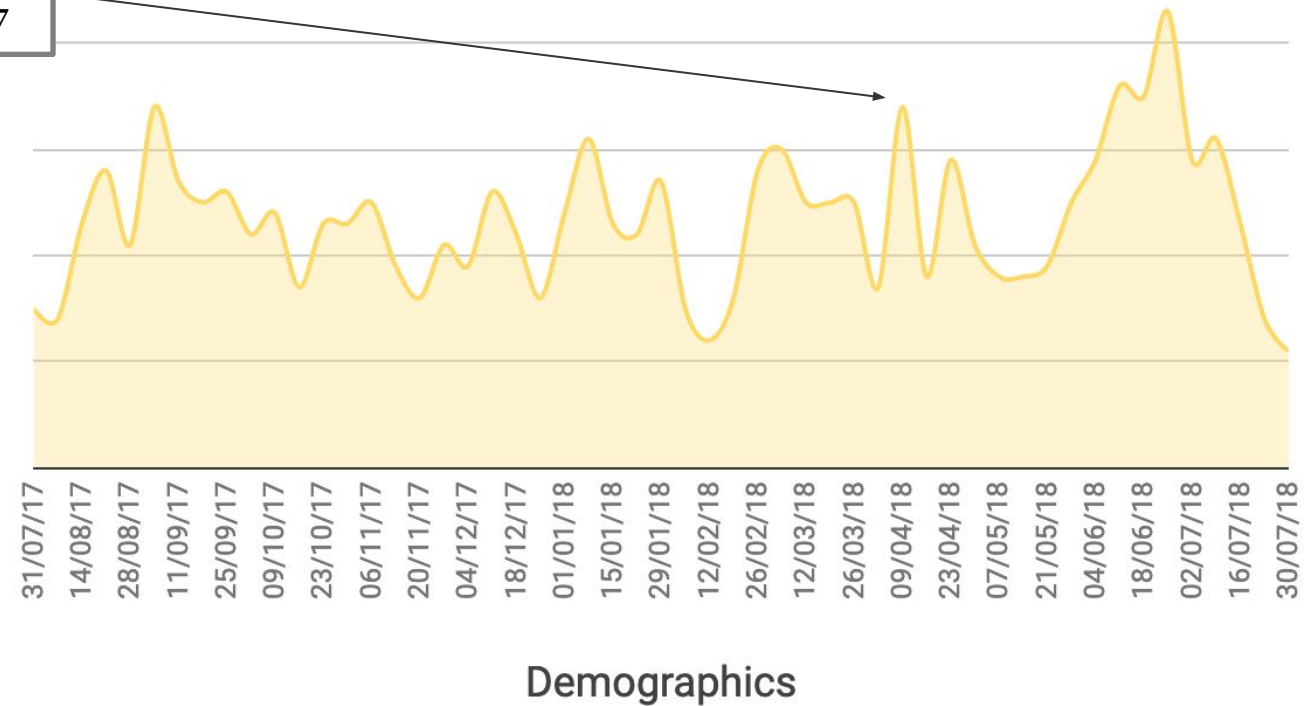
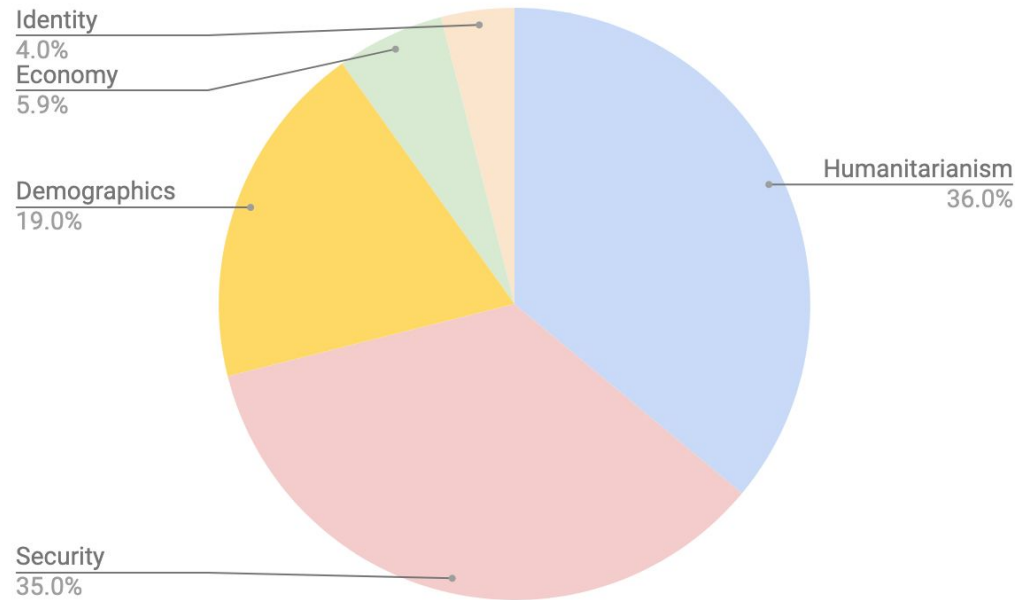
Demographics (1)

Demographics is a thorn in the Lithuanian conversation, but most of it is concerned with emigration.

While most Lithuanians are generally antagonistic towards third-world migration, they are happy when more people immigrate to Lithuania than emigrate: in this case, the wider migration problem is used to talk about their main economic and demographic issues of relative poverty.

Results:
~4,700 (19%)

News breaks that there were more people moving to Lithuania than moving out in 2017



Local Issues

Local demographic problems over migration



The demographic discourse was driven primarily by **statistics over emigration and immigration rates**, which served as a barometer for the country's success in building a strong economy. Emigration and immigration are seen as effects of the wider economy: a poor country is left behind, while a rich country is left to.

EU politics

European policy questions regarding migration



The questions regarding the emigrant population lended attention to the discourse not only over EU migration quotas, but the more pressing matter of **Brexit** and its consequences which would be directly influencing Lithuanians.

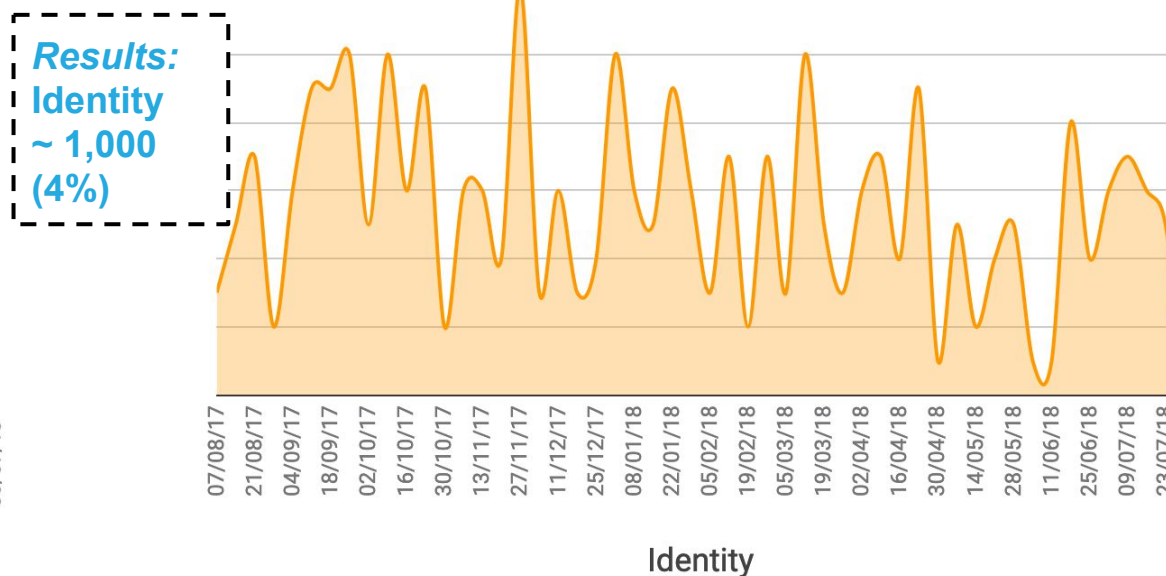
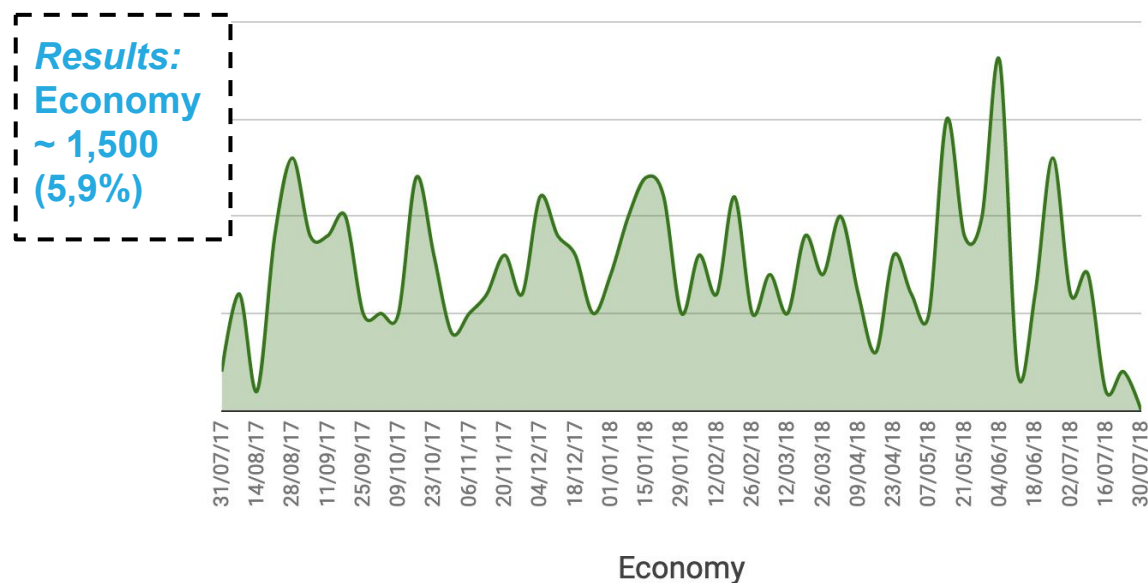


Pan-European Narratives | LT

Economy & Identity - minor discourses (1)

Questions of economy or identity together cover about 10% of the discourse, playing only a minor part in the conversation. These conversations revolve less around the effect of immigration to Lithuania from third world countries (which is almost nonexistent), but have more to do with international affairs, especially the anti-migration sentiment across Europe affecting Lithuanian emigrants, like the illegal migration laws passed in Britain, Brexit, social system changes etc.

Identity was also fueled over issues of Lithuanian emigrés' children, from mixed families being able to register their names in the Lithuanian national system with the original alphabet or not - an example that highlights their main concerns in the wider migration discourse as well.





Pan-European Narratives | LT

Economy & Identity - minor discourses (2)

Anxieties over Brexit

The economic fallout of migration...



The new wave in Europe is: tougher stances on immigration, border control, welfare cuts. Even when the conversation starts with African or Middle-Eastern migrants, policies often affect Lithuanian emigrés first, catapulting Brexit as the top concern on the subject.

Questions of European identity

...is tied to the identity of Europe



Identity questions tie into international politics - whether it was Viktor Orbán's tough stance on immigration or Macron's tough stance versus the Brexiters.

European identity is being shaped - not necessarily by the influx of migrants, but by the change of attitudes towards migrants and open borders.

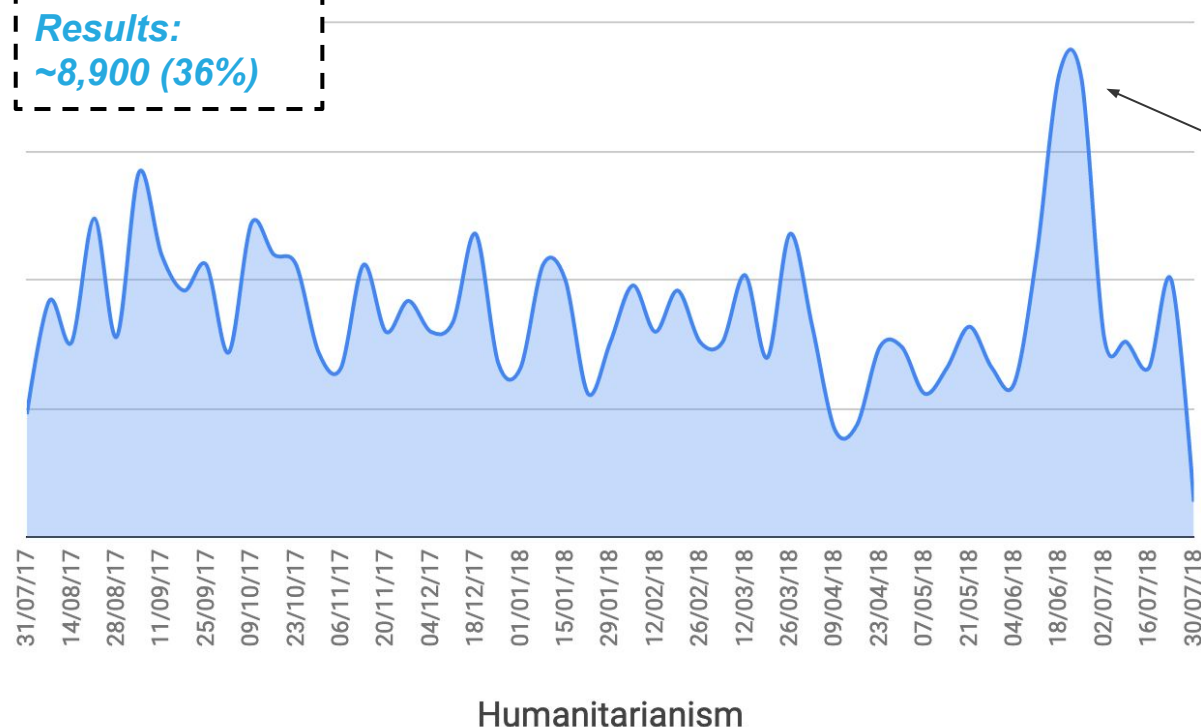
Pan-European Narratives | LT

Humanitarianism (1)

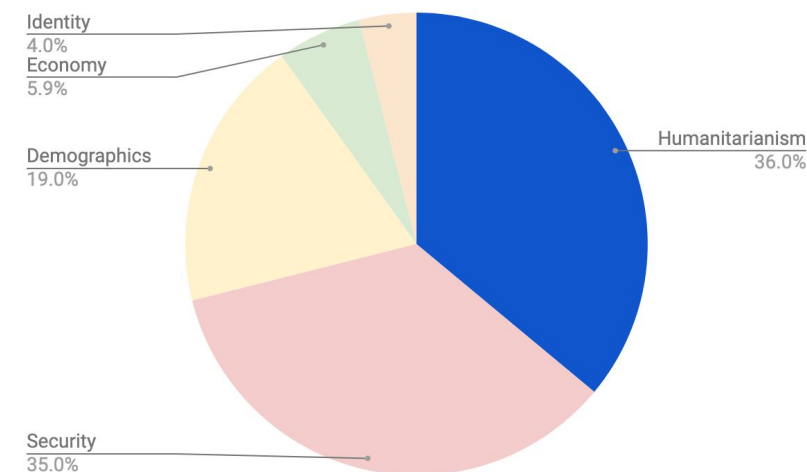
The strongest streak in the migration discourse is humanitarianism in Lithuania, but it should be noted that compassion is mostly reserved for Lithuanian emigrants (5% of the narrative) or those affected by Russia (15%).

While these stories triggered the highest engagement in general, humanitarian feelings for the international situation of migrants flared up with the nearing of the EU migration summit, when migrant rescue operations near the shores of Spain and Libya were juxtaposed with Melania Trump's questionable choice of attire.

Results:
~8,900 (36%)



Melania Trump wears a jacket saying "I really don't care, do you" during a trip to a migrant child detention centre



Pan-European Narratives | LT

Humanitarianism (2)

Local Issue

Lithuanian emigration is a pressing problem



Migration is often discussed through **Lithuanian emigrants**. As more people leave the country and few immigrate, Lithuanians are concerned over the country's negative migration rate and discuss the better economic prospects for those who choose to live abroad. Historical accounts of Lithuanian emigration are also popular. In short: the discourse is empathetic primarily to Lithuanian economic migrants.

Pro-migrant voices

Empathy for those who suffer



With a low number of migrants locally, humanitarianism was reflected in the conversations around certain **events that sparked international outrage** regarding the situation of migrants and refugees - whether on the sea or by Trump's controversial policies. The common theme here seems to be an outrage at the apparent **inhumanity** of migration policies and called for compassion.



Pan-European Narratives | LT

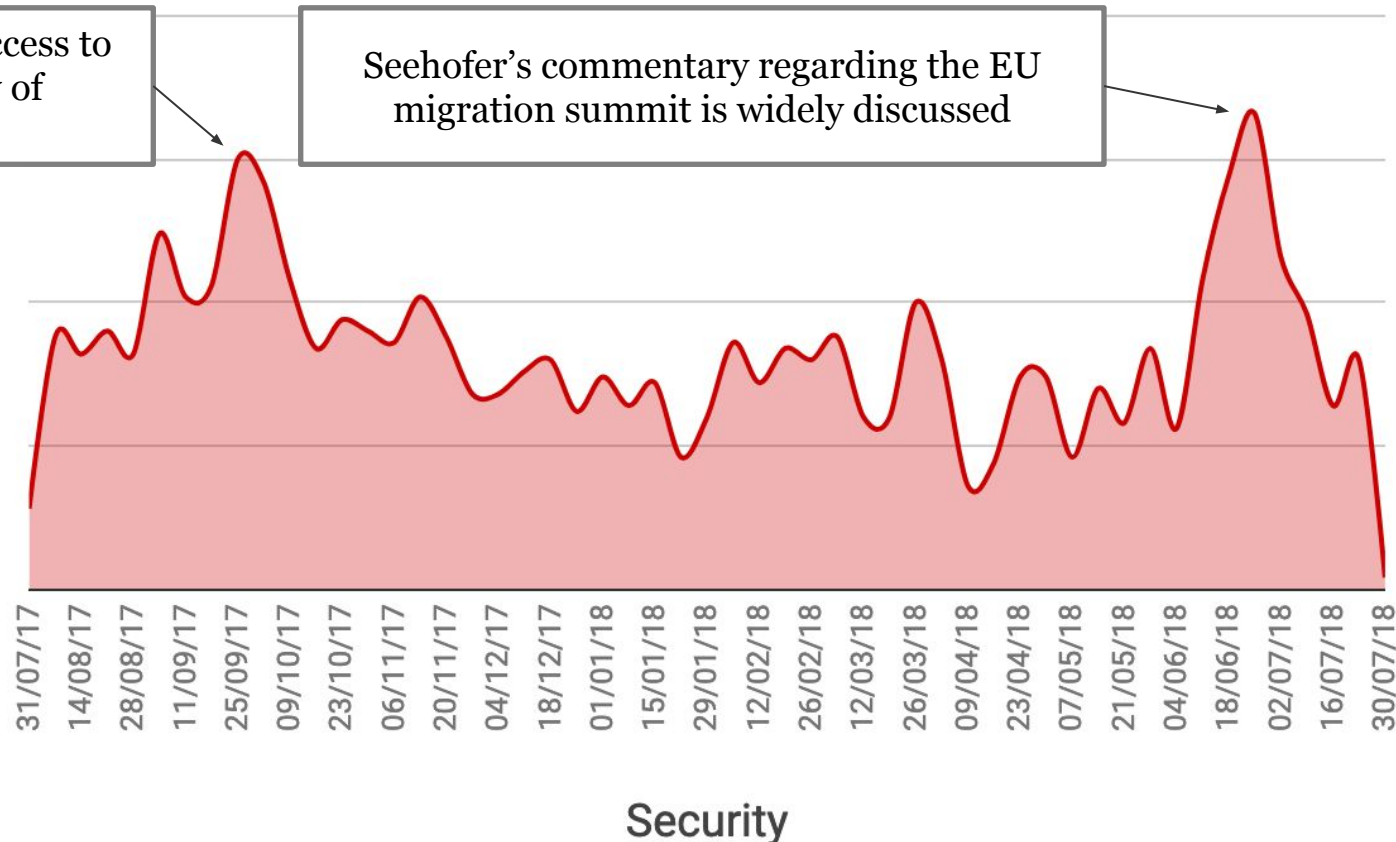
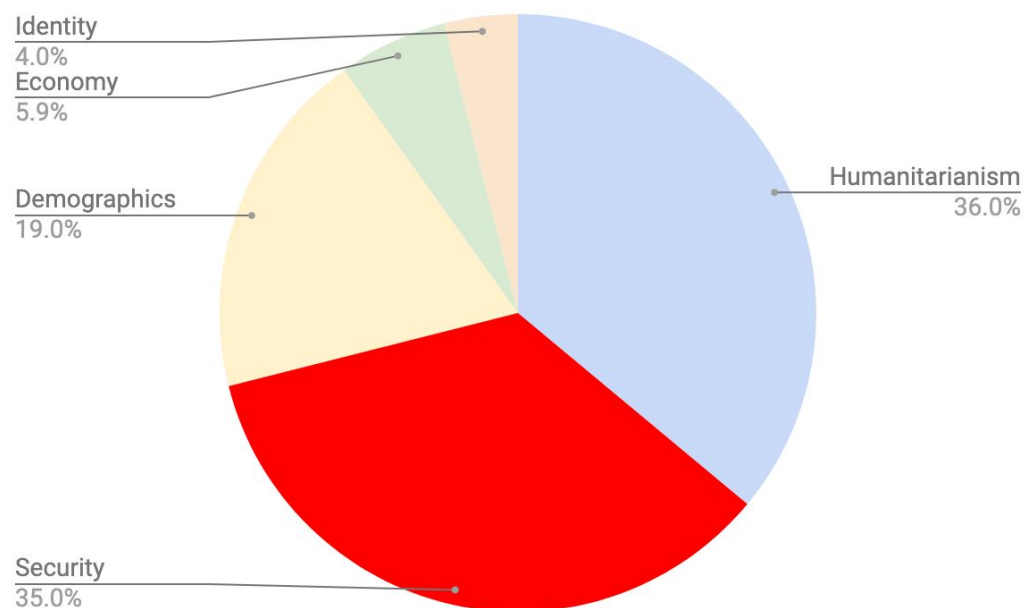
Security (1)

Security issues related to migration are one of the main drivers of the conversation in Lithuania, despite the small number of migrants or asylum seekers in the country. The captured attention mirrors the humanitarian discourse, looking at **international news and politics** with a strong anti-migrant sentiment, but this narrative is also strongly affected by the **local threat of Russia**, which is discussed in 25% of the conversation.

Results:
~8,600
(35%)

Scandal breaks out over Russians having access to confidential material from the ministry of immigration

Seehofer's commentary regarding the EU migration summit is widely discussed



Pan-European Narratives | LT Security (2)

EU politics

Anxiety over the Union...



Security is mostly discussed within the wider **EU context, as migrants are seen as a threat** in other countries which may come with them if they would move to Lithuania – an argument that is in line with the anti-migrant sentiment present in Eastern-Europe.



Lithuania has become a cheap gateway to the EU after the Crimean

On the other hand, the fallout of the **Crimean war** is used to discuss the more pressing local security issues, in particular the threat posed by Russia.

The threat of Russia

...and anxieties over the neighborhood



While local nationalists are rallying around the anti-immigrant sentiment, some are questioning whether or not fuelling hate against a locally nonexistent group of migrants is another ploy from Russian politics.



Furthermore, the **actions of the US regarding migrants are viewed in the wider context of NATO protection** and Vladimir Putin's foreign policy.

The primary security concern is Russia: migration is just a proxy with which to talk about US-Russian relations and Russian geopolitical actions.

+ *Local Issues in Lithuania Around Migration*



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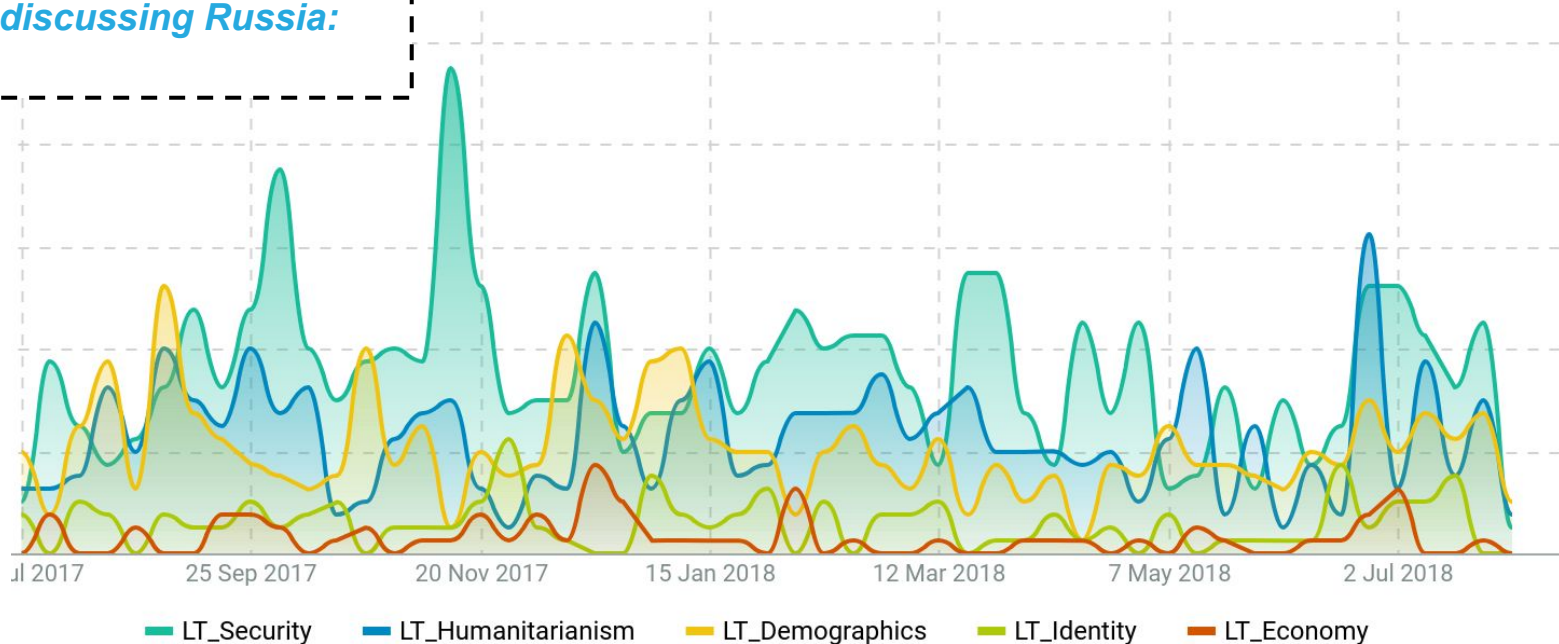


Local Issues | LT

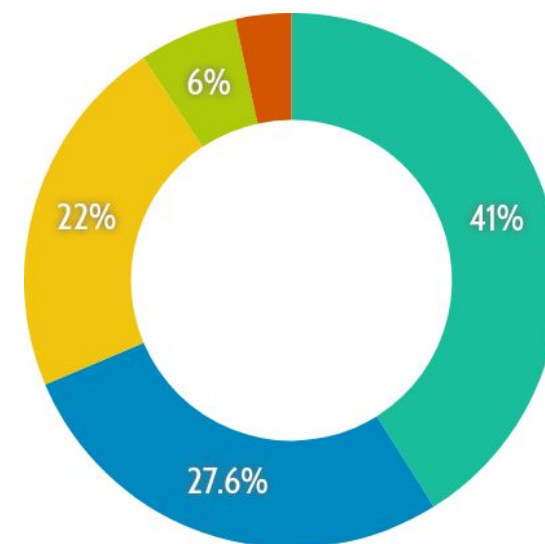
The Russian Question

Russia and its perceived threat was mentioned in **21%** of the total conversation on migration - mostly when it comes to security or humanitarianism. It's quite clear that to some extent, **Lithuanians use the migration narratives to express their own anxieties** - especially when it comes to Trump's friendliness with Putin, or the fallout of Russian actions in the region.

Results discussing Russia:
~ 3,300



Composition of the Russian discourse weighs towards security



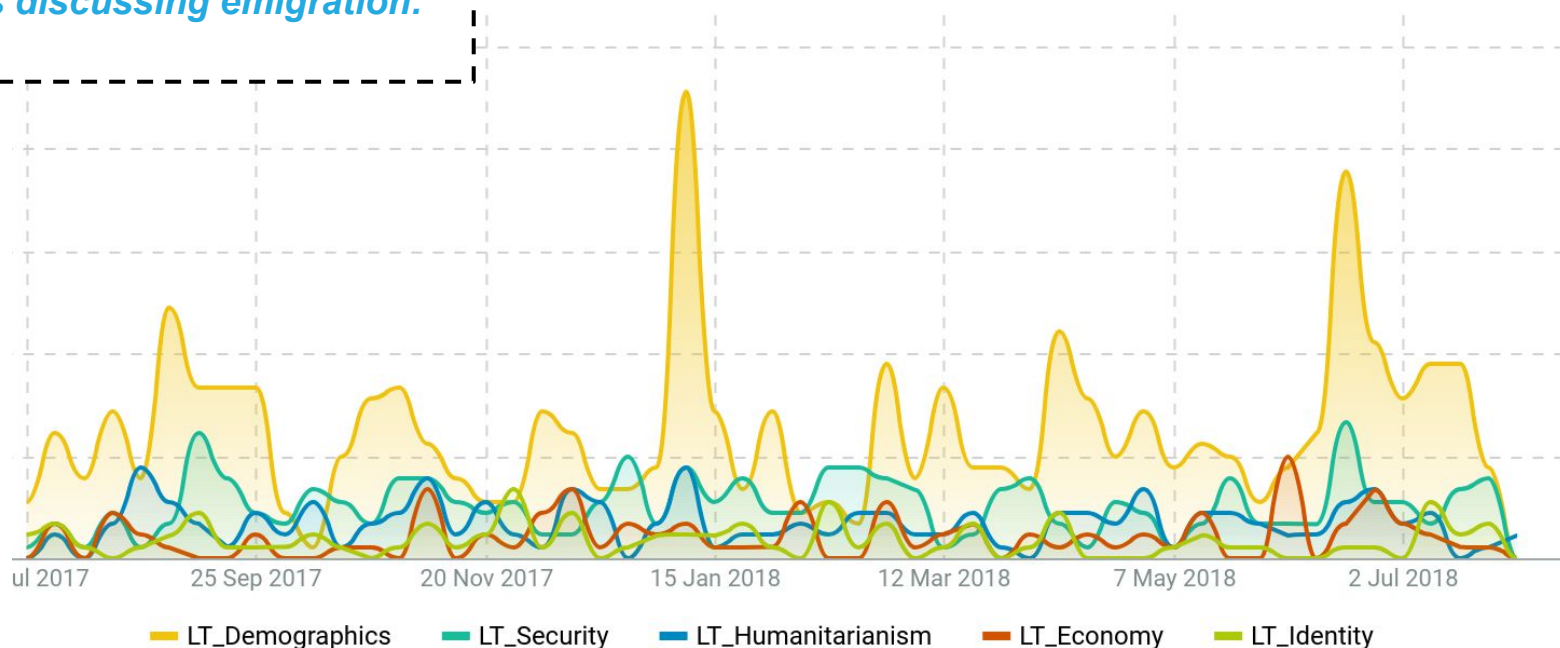


Local Issues | LT

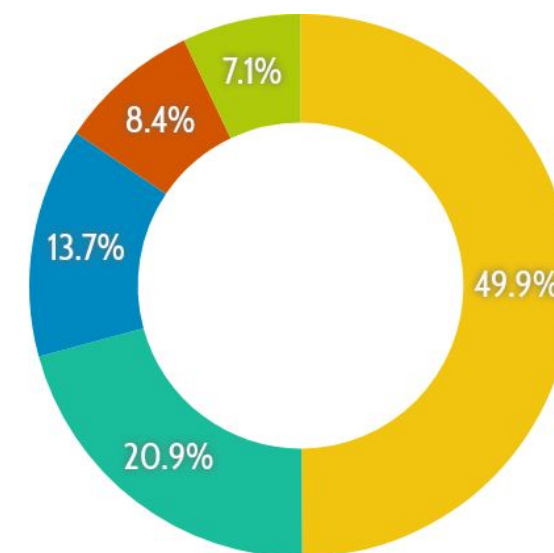
The Emigration Question

Emigration is a big issue in Lithuania, infusing many of the migration narratives. Coming up at 13% of the total discourse, it warps the demographic narrative around itself. A good portion of the security discourse is tied to the security measures taken by Western Europe that end up affecting Lithuanian emigrés.

Results discussing emigration:
~ 2,000



Composition of the emigration discourse weighs towards demography



- LT_Demographics
- LT_Security
- LT_Humanitarianism
- LT_Economy
- LT_Identity

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



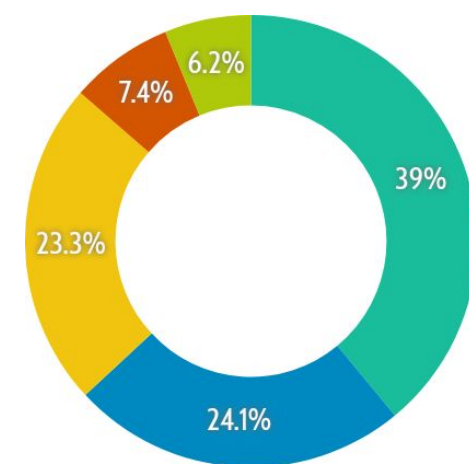
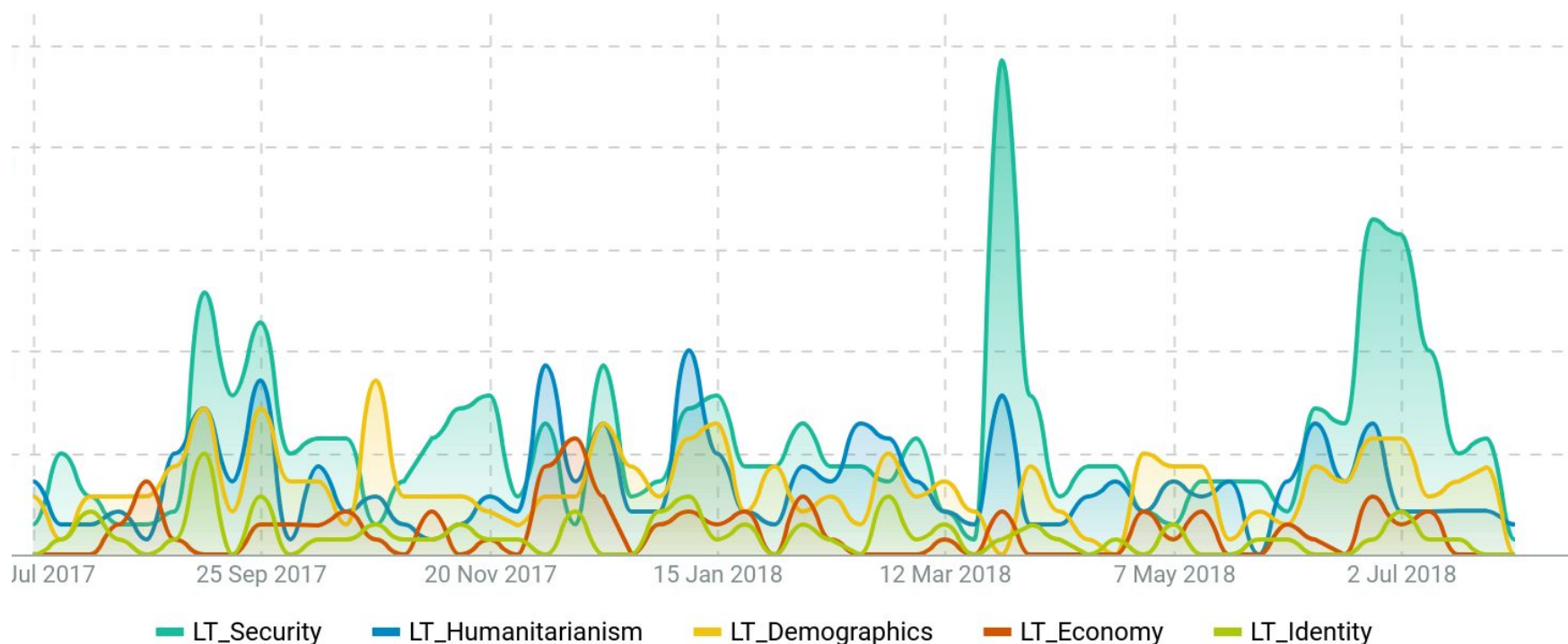
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European and Domestic Politics Context within Narratives | LT

European References are Strongest in Security



The EU political share of the migration discourse is at 12.5% - showing that for Lithuanians, EU politics are a minority aspect compared to all the other related daily issues. Notable sparks in the discourse were around the victory of Salvini in Italy with a generally positive tone, with a similar spark after the EU migration summit - which was regarded as “weak on security” by CSU-leader Horst Seehofer.



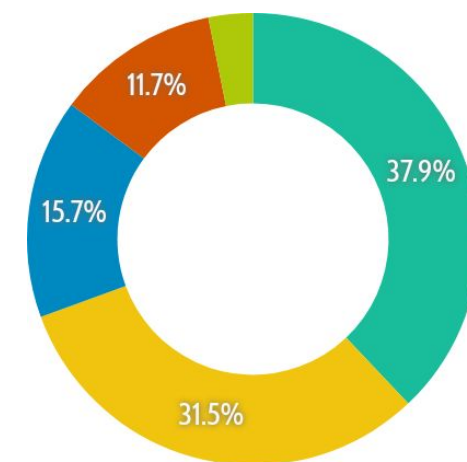
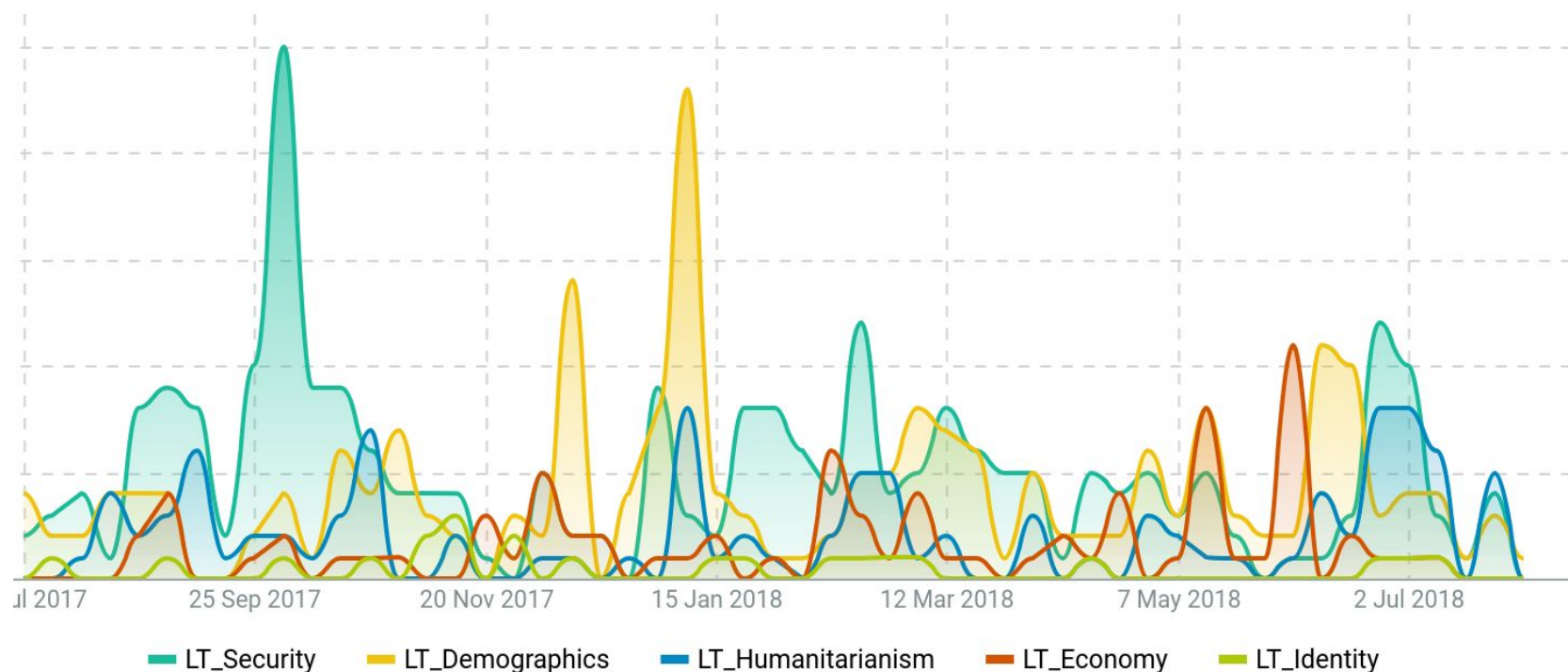
● LT_Security
● LT_Humanitarianism
● LT_Demographics
● LT_Economy
● LT_Identity



European and Domestic Politics Context within Narratives | LT

Local references paired with local issues

Local politics are reinforced by the data: security is in the lead by a domestic scandal over possible Russian involvement with the Migration Department of the Lithuanian Ministry of Interior. Also, people discuss local demographic and economic policies to make the country more habitable for Lithuanians, while international migration seems to be just an afterthought. Local political discourse affects about 8% of the total conversation, but warps some issues disproportionately.



- LT_Security
- LT_Demographics
- LT_Humanitarianism
- LT_Economy
- LT_Identity

+ *Conversation Channels*



4.



Most Influential Authors | LT

Established media drives the conversation

The discourse in Lithuania was mostly driven by established media and their respective web portfolios. Public social media does not seem to have a significant footprint in the migration discussion, as no voices or influencers of note have emerged out of this fray.

