

Migration Narratives in Europe

A Social Media Intelligence Study

Country report for the Netherlands



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

- 2019 -



Context to the Dutch Discussion on Migration

- The Netherlands is one of the founding members of the EU, with a population of 16,900,726 in 2015. At its peak, official **asylum seekers in the country made up 0.52% of the population**.*
- Public social media conversation in the Netherlands around migration in one year consists of ~1,343,732 posts. Compared to population size, **the conversation on migration in the Netherlands is the 10th largest in the EU**.
- The Netherlands has a long history of immigration. Both refugees and economic migrants have come to the country in large numbers. **Currently almost 20% of the Dutch population are first or second generation migrants**.
- However, **there is an ongoing trend of stricter policies and attitudes on migration since 1998**.
- Throughout the conversation, we can see the migration discourse is dominated by the **identity, security and humanitarianism narratives**.



*Source: europarl.europa.eu



Introduction | NL

Curbing Populism by Adopting Stricter Policies

Attitudes towards migration in the Netherlands are complex, evolving through the relationship between public discourse as well as public policies.

What we see from the data is that there is a **strong anti-immigrant sentiment arising in multiple narratives**, and we can see how **the official policies are slowly turning away from the formerly welcoming and integrating attitude**, as Prime Minister Mark Rutte argues for stricter handling of immigration, adopting some of the more moderate lines of the sometimes extreme voices.



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 | NL

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

Size of Pan-European Narratives

Identity and **Security** are the biggest narratives, highlighting a shift in the multicultural Dutch attitudes.

Local Issues

A society that has historically been defined by its multiculturalism is now discussing its anxieties and compatibility with the perceived threat of **Islamization** and the fears of criminality that are associated with poorly integrated migrants of previous and current generations.

EU & Domestic Politics

As a central player in the EU, **both domestic and European politics were discussed quite frequently** in migration, as most opinions favor halting migration and solving the crisis outside of the Union--with the consensus of the Union.

Discussion Tone

The conversation in the Netherlands is **highly polarized**, with strong feelings attached to the subject of migration - showing the intensity behind the shifting attitude of the country towards migration, immigration and in general - immigrants.

Conversation Channels

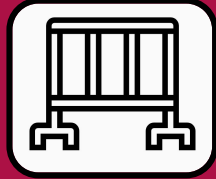
70% of the conversation was driven by **Twitter**, reacting to different news sources, indicating a chatty and open public sphere that was highly opinionated.



Pan-European Narratives in the Dutch Context



Despite 20% of the population having an immigrant background, the identity discourse puts a **stark contrast between the difference in Muslim and European cultures**, and calls for stricter policies on the idea of "to each their own".



The security narrative is generally anti-**immigration**, viewing it **as a threat**, and using it to judge the EU and Rutte's migration policies as too tolerant, meaning that the EU is not trustworthy in this regard.



The Dutch humanitarian discourse is open to helping refugees and migrants--but not in "their backyard," choosing instead to promote **solutions outside of the EU**.



While relatively minor, the economy discourse talks either about the costs side of migration, while others are pointing out that the entire **migration debate is only a foil on more pressing economic problems (inequality, corruption)**.



The demographic arguments follow the line that the **new wave of migrants are not beneficial to the economy** as they have trouble integrating into the Dutch workforce--despite all the effort that goes to help them.

+ *Pan-European Narratives in the Netherlands*



1.

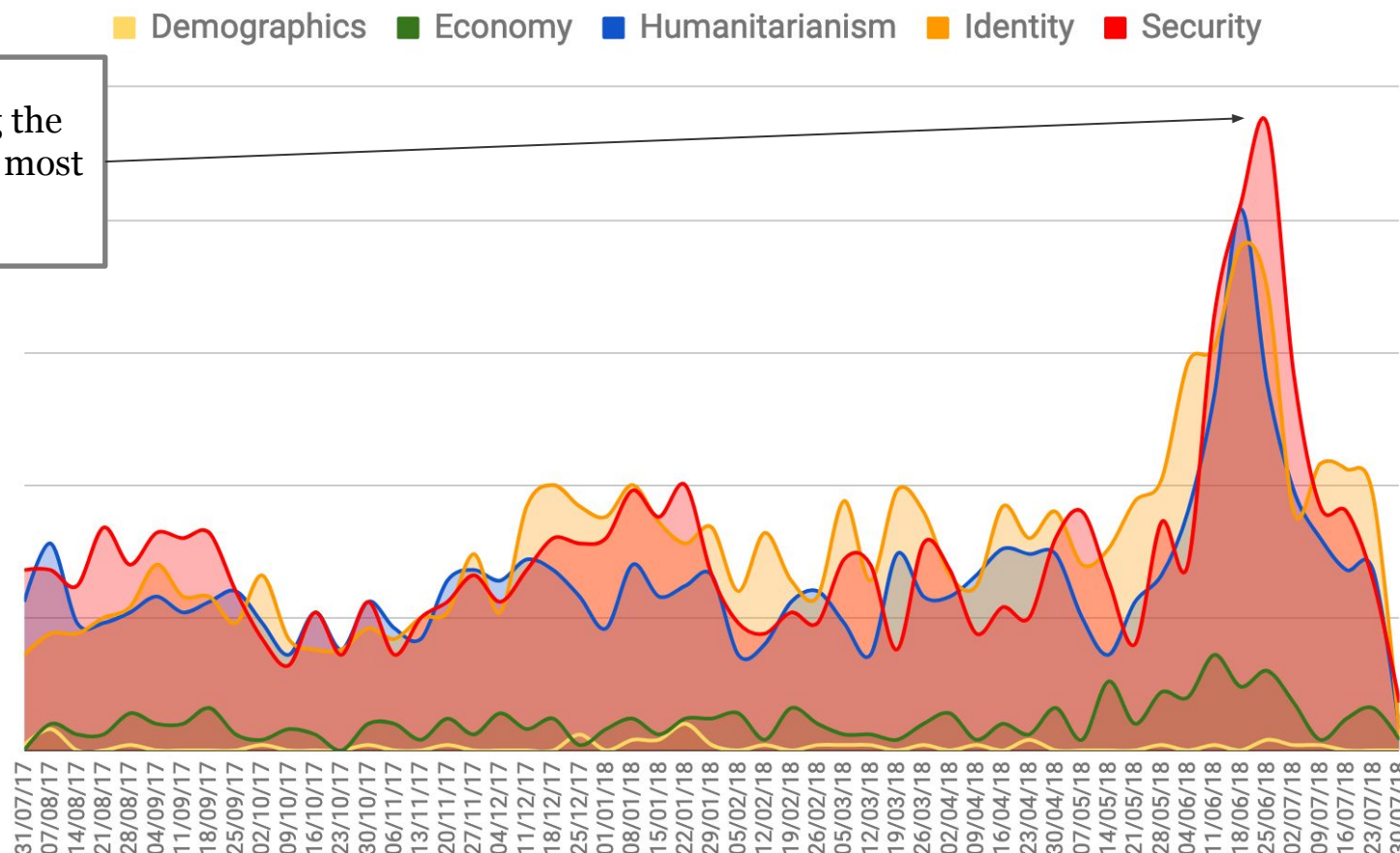
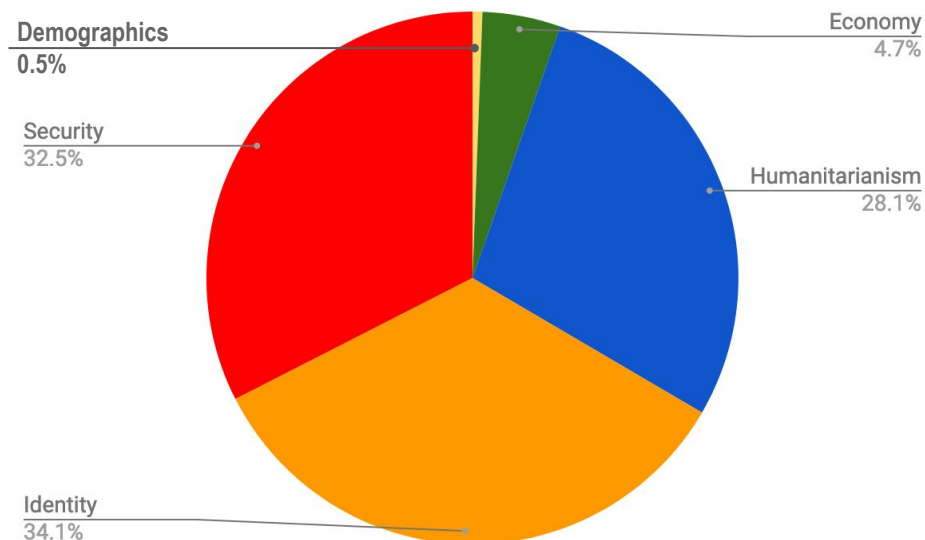


The shape of the migration discourse

Like in other countries, the Dutch conversations on migration were gearing up towards the EU migration summit in June 2018, however, here we see that **identity, security and humanitarianism go hand in hand**--all of which are **arguing for stricter migration policies locally and in the EU**.

Results:
~1.2m

EU migration deal following the scandal of Aquarius sparked the most discussion



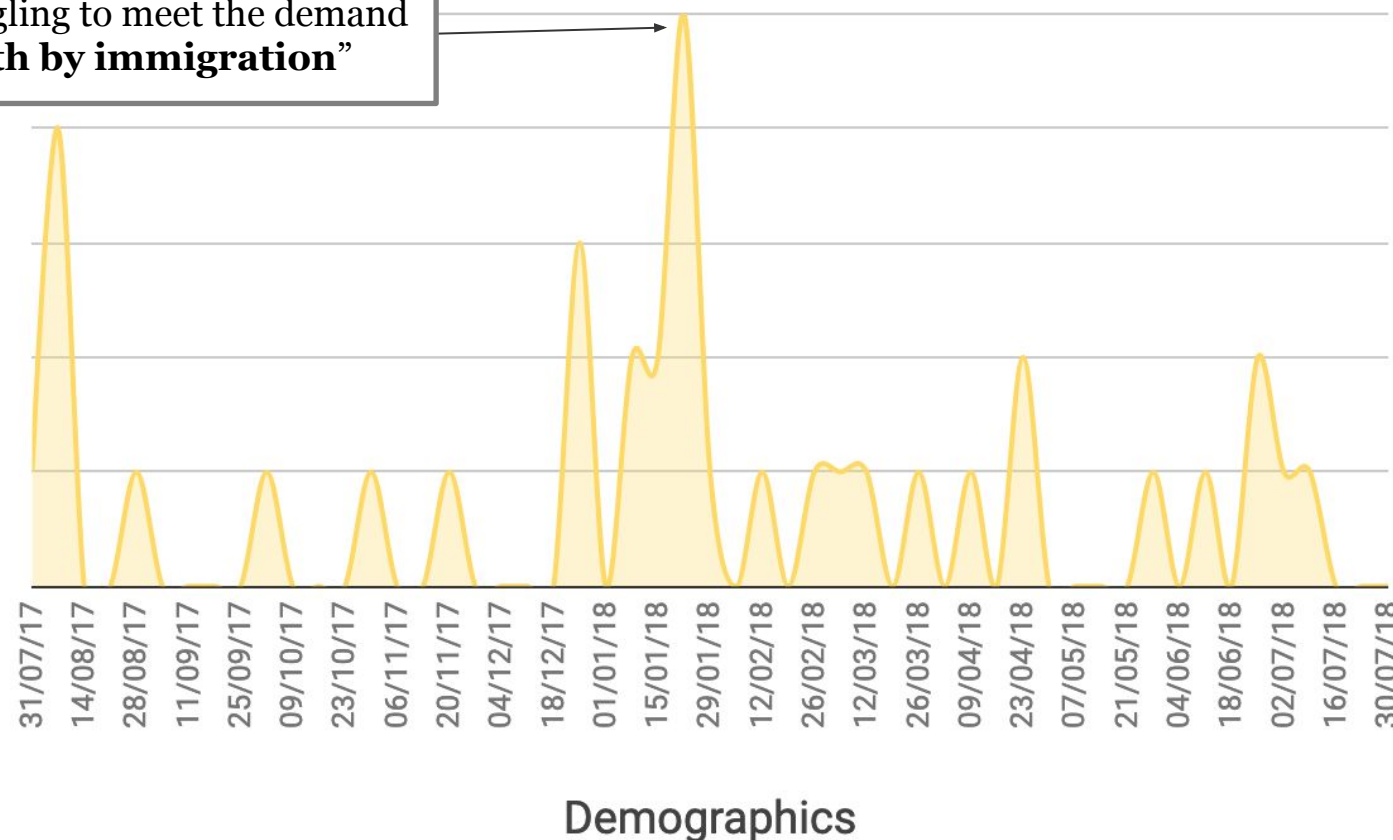
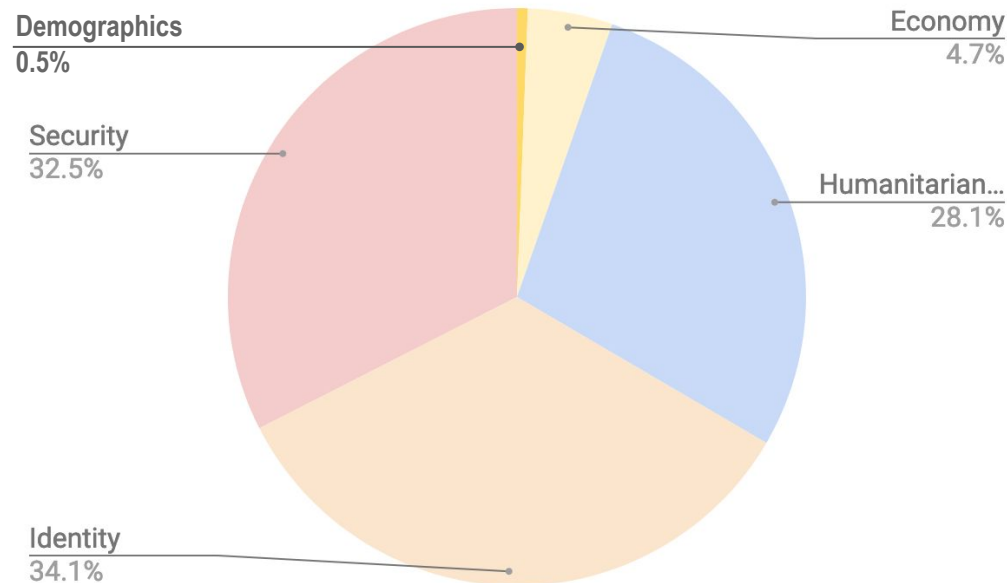
Pan-European Narratives | NL

Demographics (1)

The demographic narrative was the tiniest and the most positive to migration, arguing that **a healthy economy runs on migrants who come to work**, with which the Dutch are already familiar with. Others, however, were arguing that the costs that are spent on integrating them to the workforce and society should be spent on the needy Dutch instead.

Results:
~78k

“The housing market is struggling to meet the demand of the **population growth by immigration**”



Pan-European Narratives | NL

Demographics (2)

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

The costs of integrating migrants to the workforce is emphasized

“Everyone knows why this difference is occurring. Diversity and mass migration does NOT bring enrichment. There is only evidence to the contrary.”

*“My brother-in-law worked in refugee work in the early 90's and saw how **many Somalis were crammed with money and furnished homes and that many were not satisfied with the interior. Then got other furniture. More than 70% are still in assistance.**”*

“Refugees do not easily find a job. It is not easy for refugees to find work here. Language and adaptation problems often play a role. The groups are also very different.”

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Hard working migrants and refugees are beneficial to the Dutch economy

*“The Dutch **population is growing** and that is mainly due to the arrival of migrants.”*

*“**The refugee student Ous wants to become a lawyer and works hard on his study in Law.** He must be available from the municipality for factory work.”*

*“A statement from the late Ruud #Lubbers that I have always remembered: **‘Refugees are strong people with perseverance’**”*



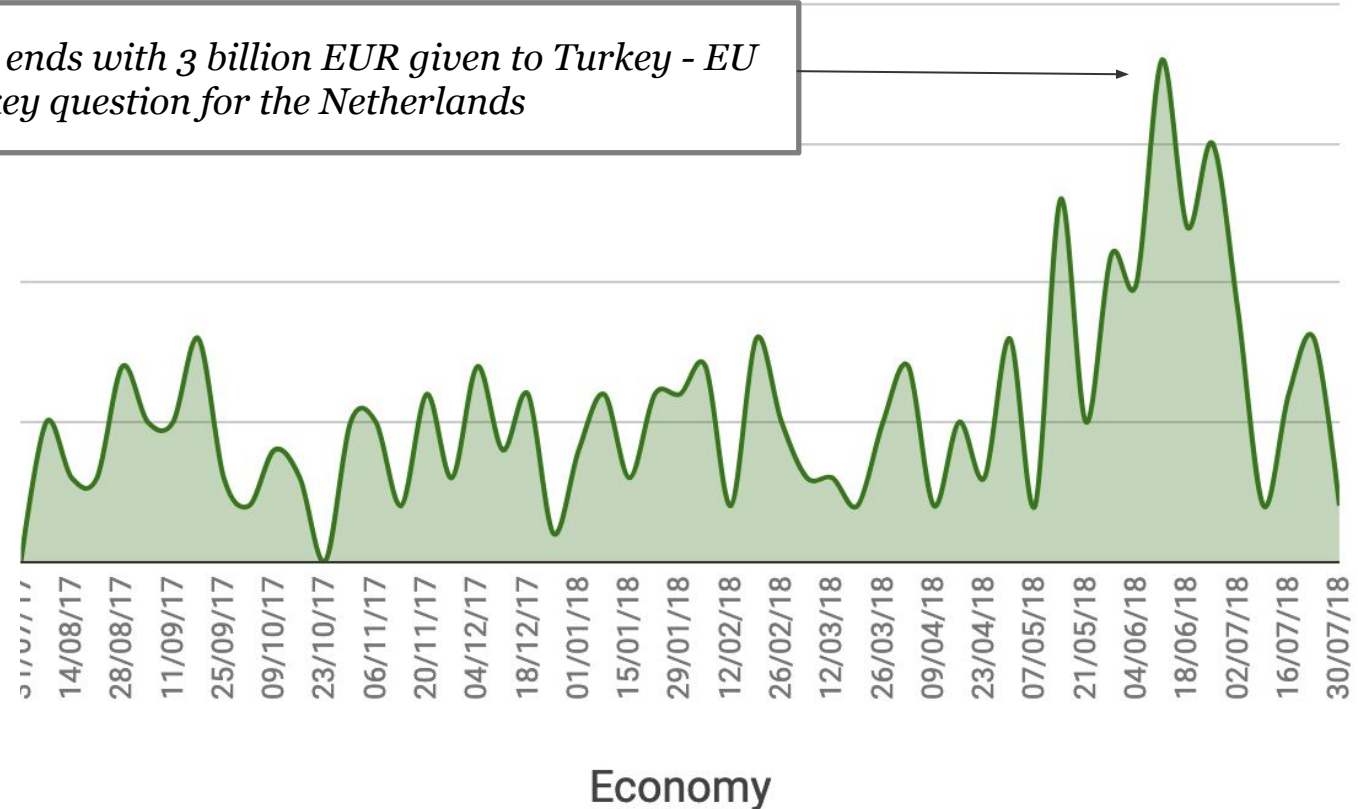
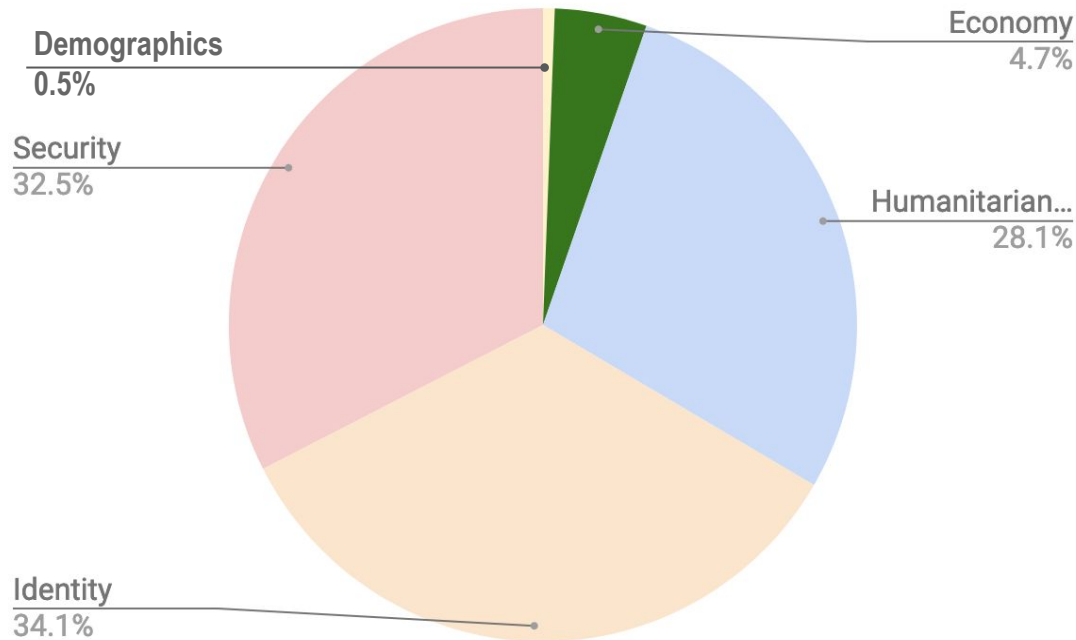
Pan-European Narratives | NL

Economy (1)

The economic discourse on one hand argued that **migration is not a benefit, but a cost**, both locally and on the EU level, as the Netherlands are a key contributor to the budget. On the other hand, in a domestic political scandal involving Rutte and the proposed dividend tax, other users highlighted that the entire **migration discourse is just a smokescreen to cover up corruption and economic inequality**.

Results:
~62k

European migration summit ends with 3 billion EUR given to Turkey - EU financing is a key question for the Netherlands



ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Migration has more economic costs than benefits

“Scientific research has shown that mass migration has a negative effect on the economy. The differences do not only concern culture but above all socio-economic.”

“Minister: stop the illogical Mali mission. Especially since we can already use the future extra tax on meat and milk to motivate even more refugees to Europe!!!”

“Give NLers € 25,000 per year instead of Migrants. ALL food banks can close. But that is not what Links want! Because Links is a-social for Dutch!”

Migration discourse is a smokescreen

“The elite will sow hate against Muslims / migrants and use wars / nationalism to derive from corruption”

“Lol .. while you are screaming and crowing about immigration, Rutte smiles at his fist, and shoves another 1.5 billion to his Unilever and Shell friends. Anyway. Can you explain why immigration is so much more important to you than your own prosperity?”

“Migration is a problem. Theft apparently is not.”

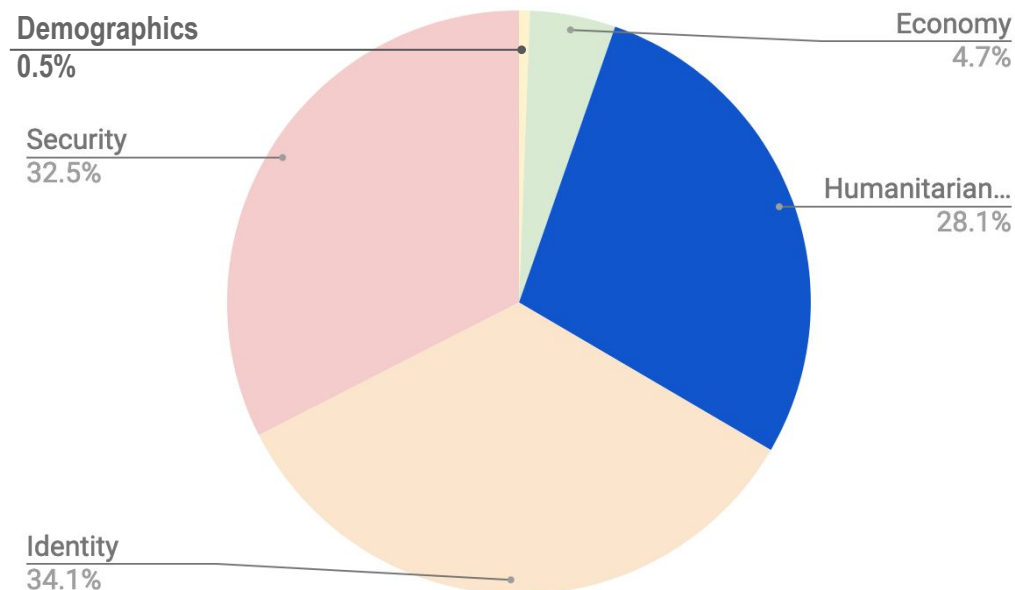


Pan-European Narratives | NL

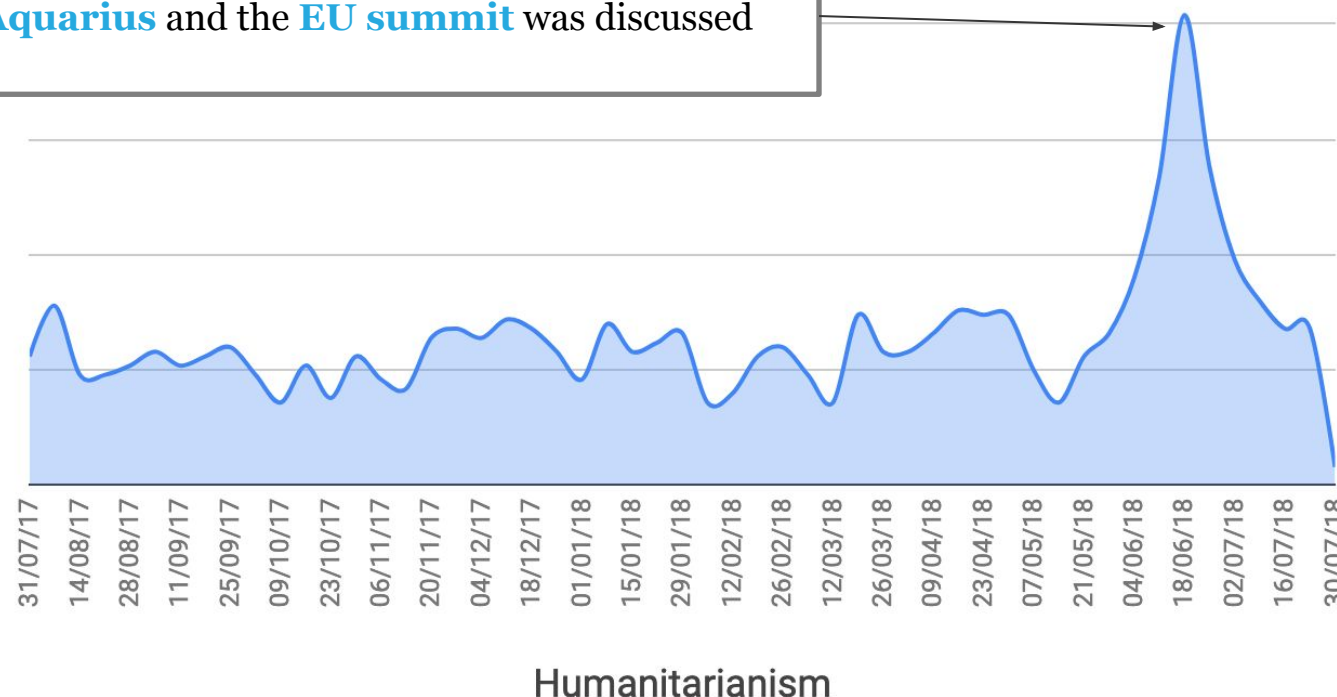
Humanitarianism (1)

Humanitarianism was the third largest narrative, however, opposed to the usual trend, it wasn't arguing for the acceptance of migrants in the Netherlands, but rather argued for **solutions outside of Europe on humanitarian grounds**. The discourse was most heated around the crisis of Aquarius, preceding the EU migration summit. This was underlined by several comments emphasizing the **difference between refugees who need help and migrants who are undeserving**.

Results:
~360k



Aquarius and the **EU summit** was discussed



Pan-European Narratives | NL

Humanitarianism (2)

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

The humanitarian discourse calls for a difference between real refugees and migrants

*“**Illegal migrants from Nigeria** are enjoying themselves on the deck of the Aquarius of AzG / SOS Med. They **see a free life at the expense of Europeans**. Meanwhile, the Aquarius is still sailing between Malta and Italy. Fully blackmailing.”*

*“**98% of 14,000 asylum applications from safe countries were rejected. Only 18% of them left the country.** Bad for support and for real refugees”*

“Many Dutch media still use the word refugee instead of migrant for those who go from Libya to Italy. But there’s war Only in Syria!”



The images in the humanitarian discourse portrayed **migrants and refugees** in different settings, often **coming up in controversial or heartwarming news stories**--at the top, refugee students from Afghanistan are portrayed, while the Supreme Court declared Afghanistan a safe country. In the middle: migrants on the streets of Italy.



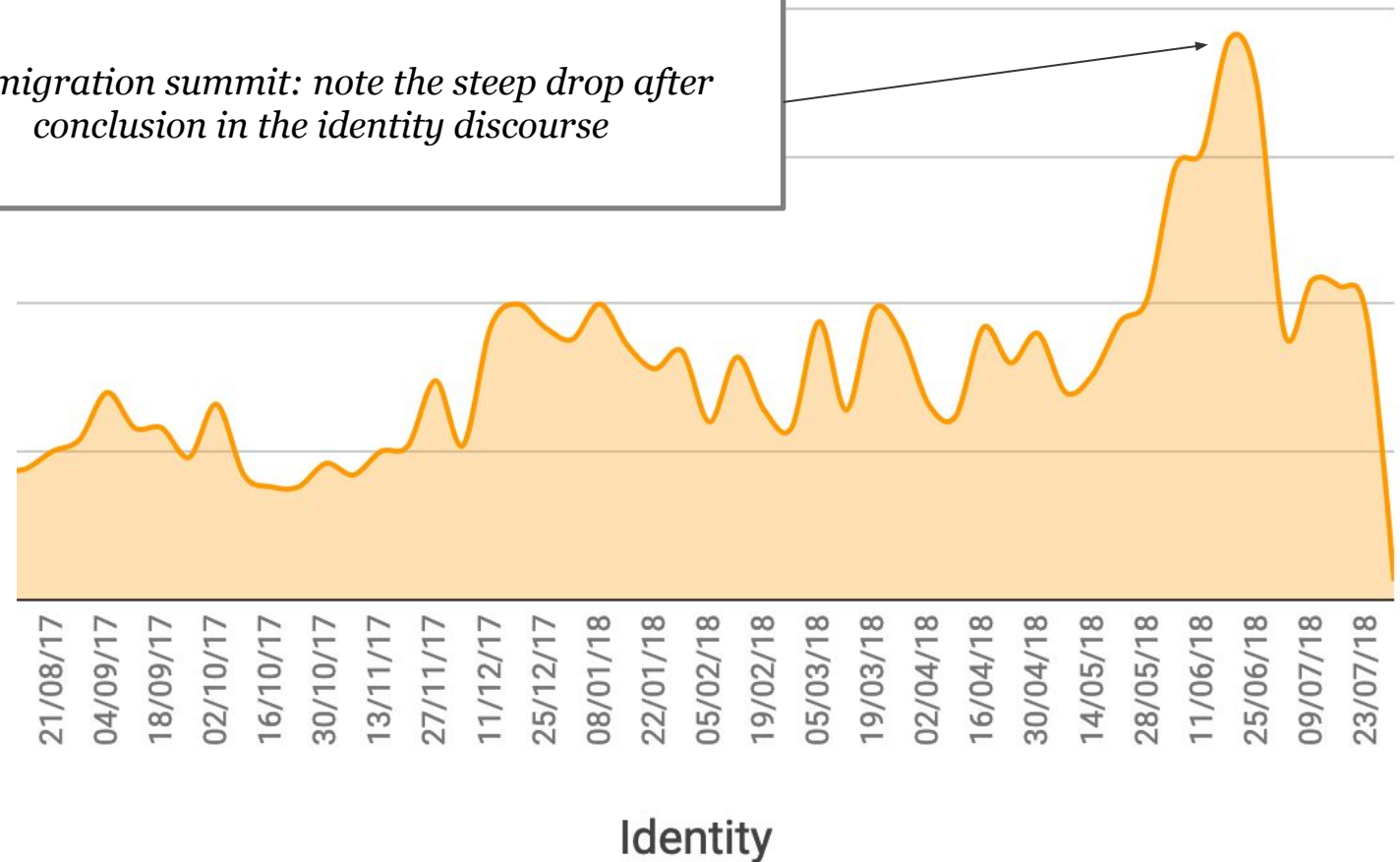
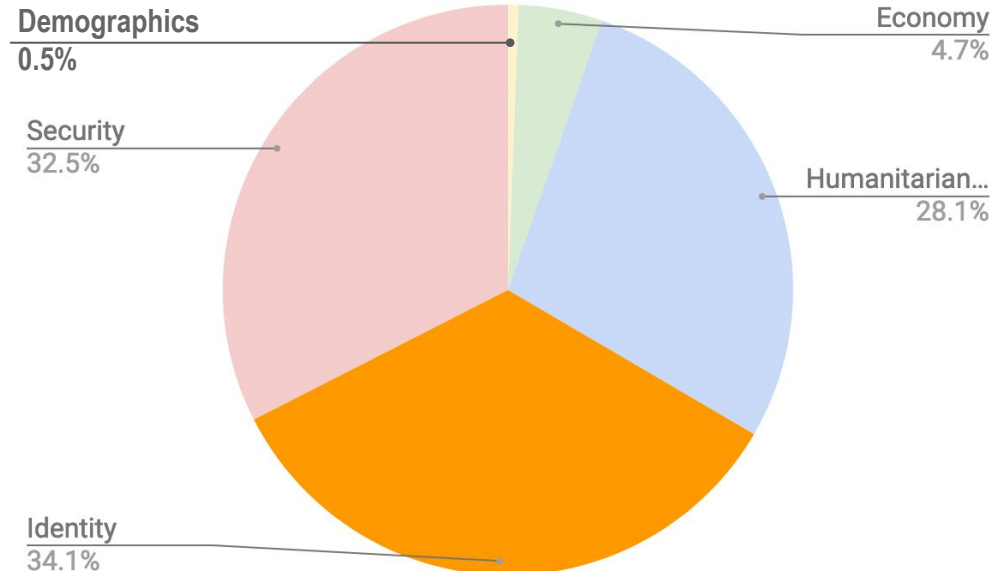
Pan-European Narratives | NL

Identity and Customs (1)

Identity was the dominant Dutch narrative, focusing on how the **perceived culture of Muslim migrants are incompatible with European values**, which must be protected from them. The identity discourse ramped up at the **EU migration summit**, and contrasted people who were seen as **protectors of the European identity** with those who would ruin it.

Results:
~450k

EU migration summit: note the steep drop after conclusion in the identity discourse



Pan-European Narratives | NL

Identity and Customs (2)

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

The identity discourse was used to tackle political opponents through migration

“#Soros sponsors all kinds of leftist activist groups that oppose everything that is white, against sovereignty, parenthood, religion, nationality, culture + humanity. He supports pro-abortion, #NGOs that bring #migrants to #EU / US. In short: every form of rottenness!”

“We are NOT prosperous through multicultural. Neehee, the migrants come to prosperity. We are multicultural because of prosperity, not the other way around. Hopeless huh, such a nitwit. A frequently heard left mantra lately.”

“Trump is bad because his country is rising, Orban is bad, because he is rising for his country. Well, we do not know that here, as everything is given away here to others that we and our parents have built up”



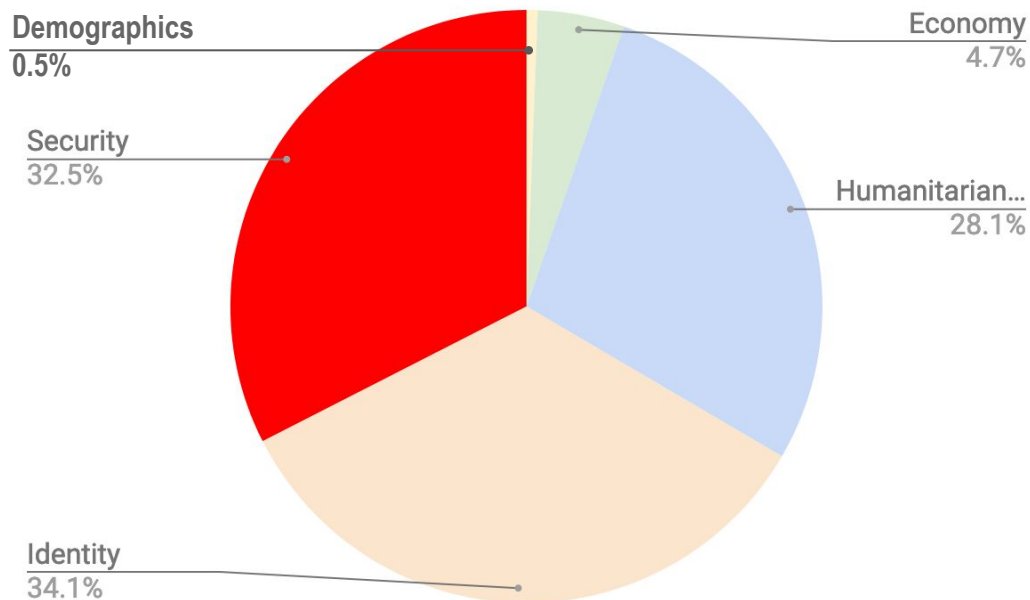
The key figures showing up in the identity related media are **Geert Wilders, the modern pioneer of European identity based anti-migration discourse**, and Viktor Orbán, seen as a role model for the politics that this sort of narrative supports.

Pan-European Narratives | NL

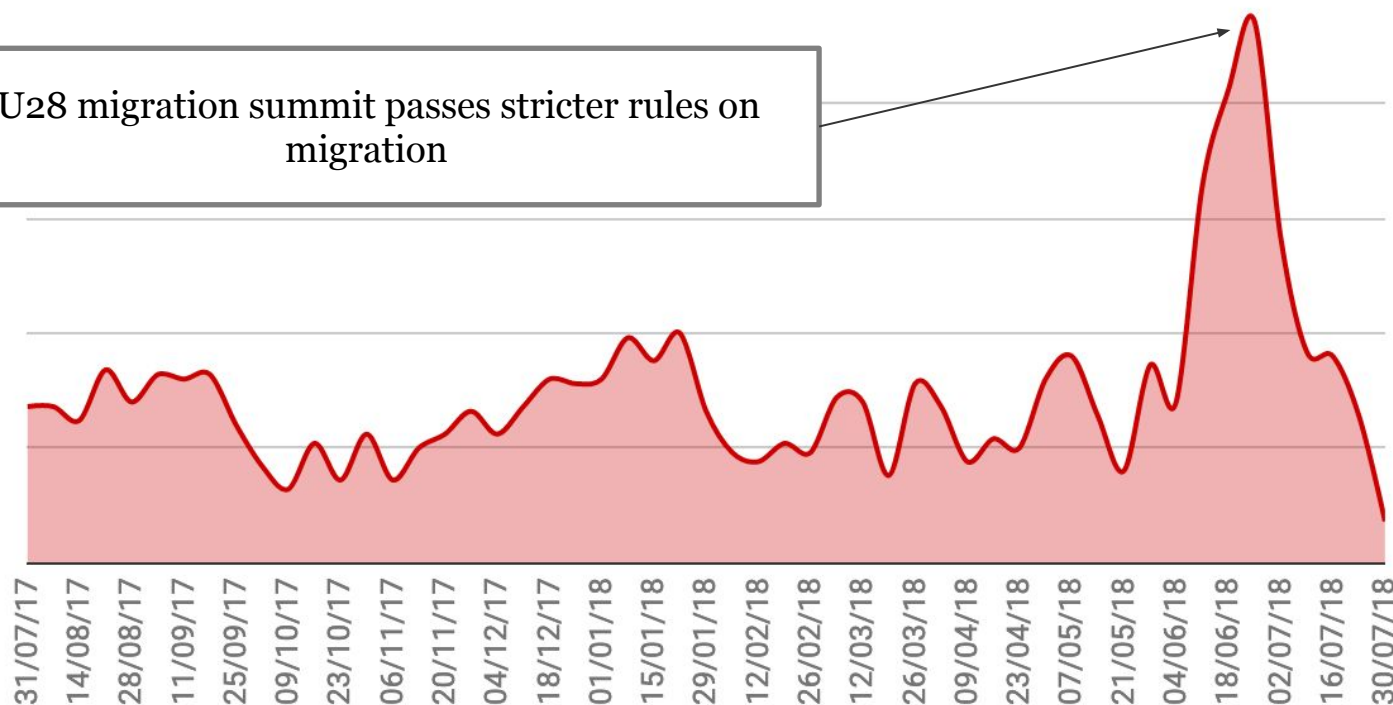
Security (1)

Security was one of the dominant narratives in the Netherlands and is almost **exclusively anti-migrant**. It portrays **immigrants as a threat to society** and uses examples of crimes committed by people with immigrant background to **call for stricter border policies**, frequently putting the blame of the state of things on political opponents such as Merkel or the “leftists”, while calling Rutte to follow the example of Kurz or Wilders.

Results:
~424k



EU28 migration summit passes stricter rules on migration



Security

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Migration is a subject with which to attack political opponents

*“Kurz is on the train that both Wilders and Le Pen (anti-EU) and Rutte and Buma (uncritical to the EU) have missed. Stupid, because it's simple and I've been calling this for months: **migration policy has to go back to member states. The EU can strengthen the external border.**”*

*“What a great prime minister, ‘he is there for his people.’ **Come in here. Legal, illegal, criminal, true refugee or fortune seeker, it does not matter anymore. THE BORDERS ARE OPENED ALL THE WAY.**”*

*“With false passports, **ISIS fighters dressed as 'refugees' came to Europe without problems and now have residence permits.** Sleeping cells, ready to allow. The main culprit is Merkel.”*



Images in the security narrative **contrast the “good politicians” who are standing up to protect Europe** or their countries, **with images of the ills that the migrants are perceived to bring**--as well as the supposed mastermind behind the turmoil, George Soros.

+ *Local Issues in the Netherlands Around Migration*



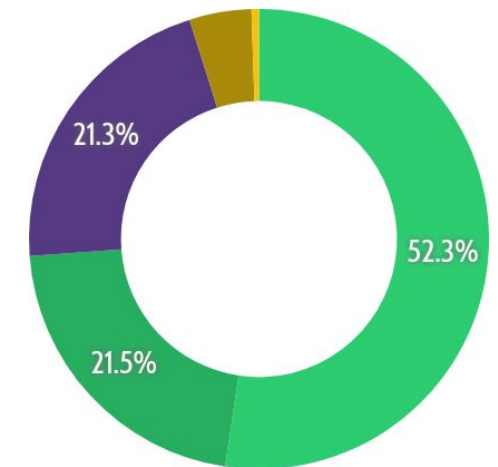
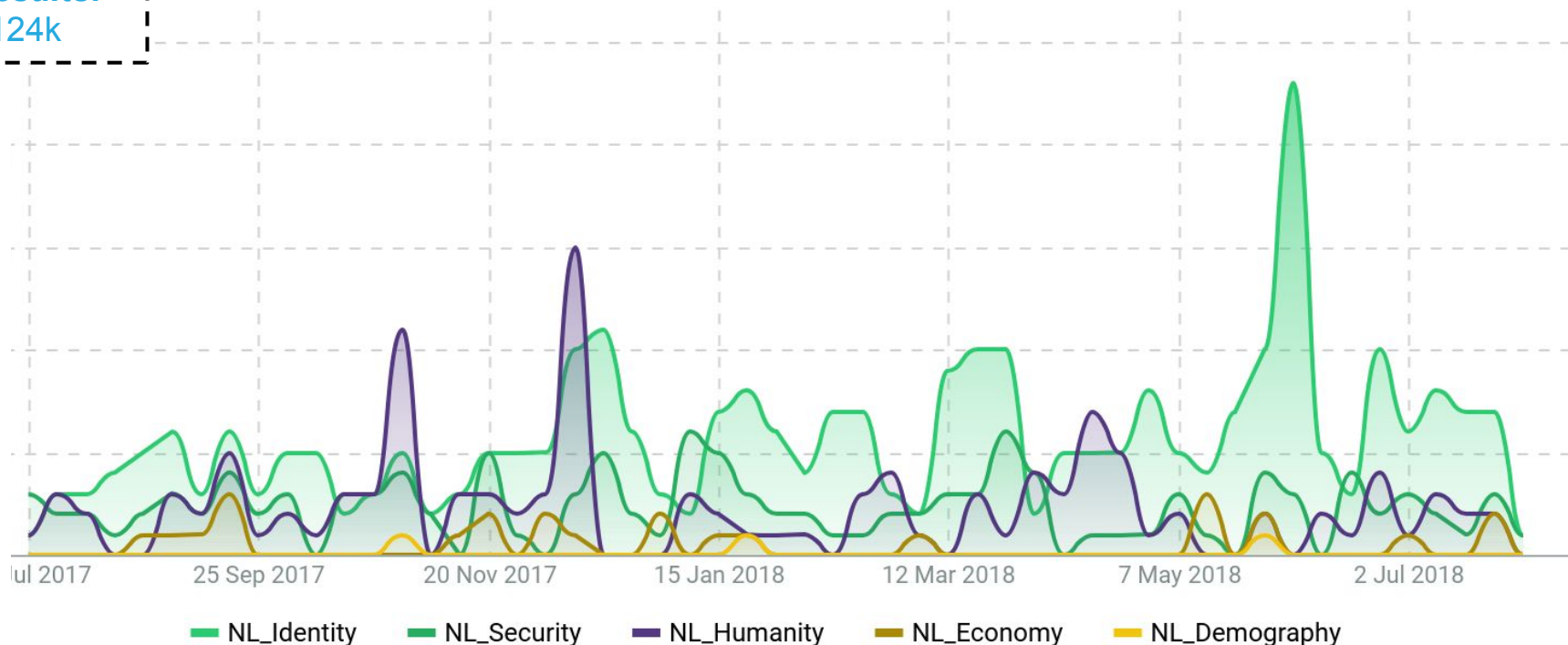
2.



Islamization & Right-Wing Populism

If we look at what was behind most narratives in the Netherlands, we can find a common streak of ideas: whether it's about identity, economy or demographics, **Muslim migrants are seen, at best, undeserving of benefits, a cost to society or a threat to security**. The driver of these conversations is a set of ideas and the **"threat of Islamization"** pushed by Geert Wilders and now carried by many other populists in Europe.

Results:
~124k



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



3.

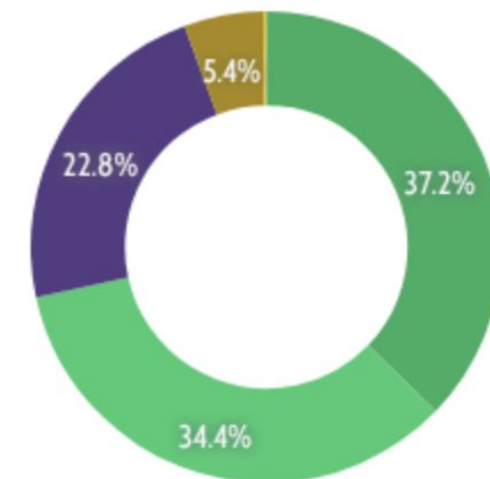
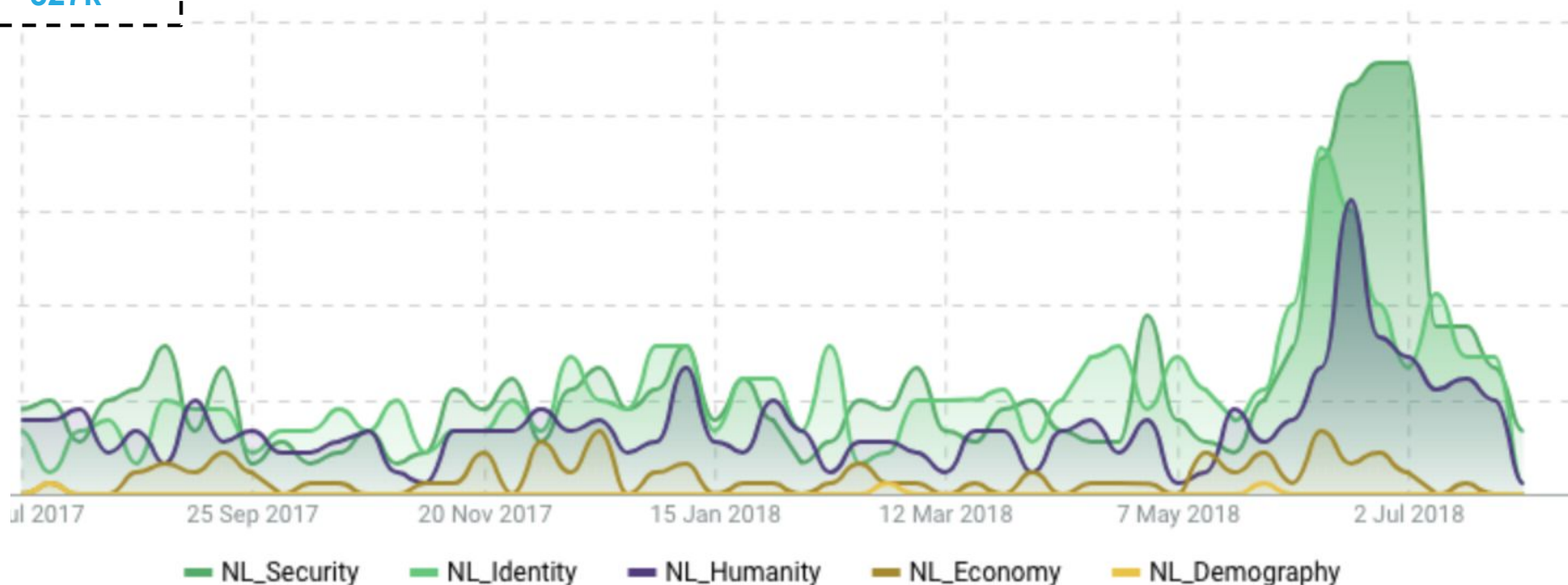


European and Domestic Politics Context within Narratives | NL

EU Migration: Political or Politicized?

At the heart of the EU, local and domestic politics were referenced in a third of the conversation, following a similar composition as the overall discourse, with peak securitization occurring around the summit, indicating a definite change in the Dutch attitude towards migration from a welcoming to a more closed one, which was echoed on the higher level of EU political changes.

Results:
~327k



● NL_Security
● NL_Identity
● NL_Humanity
● NL_Economy
● NL_Demography

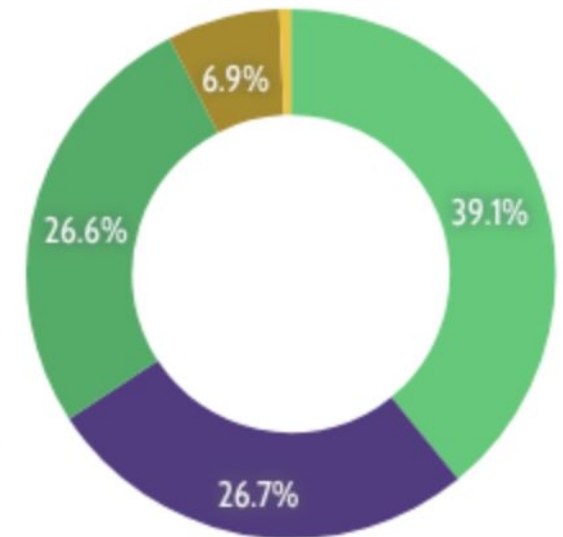
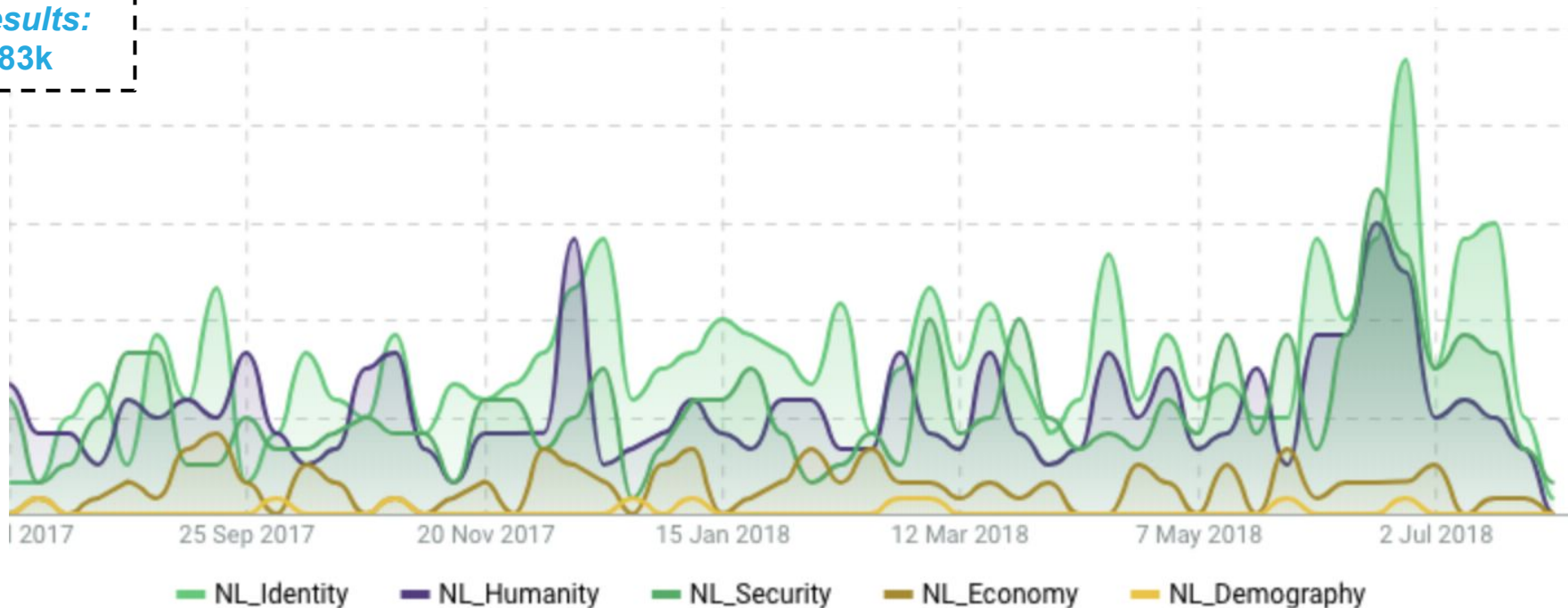


European and Domestic Politics Context within Narratives | NL

Domestic Politics: “Not in our backyard” humanitarianism

While the largest slice of domestic politics was covered under identity, as per the local political flavour, we can see a clear trend towards the EU summit how **local politics influenced the humanitarian discourse**, in which help provided outside of the EU, or questioning the humanitarianism of present, welcoming EU policies were prevalent.

Results:
~283k



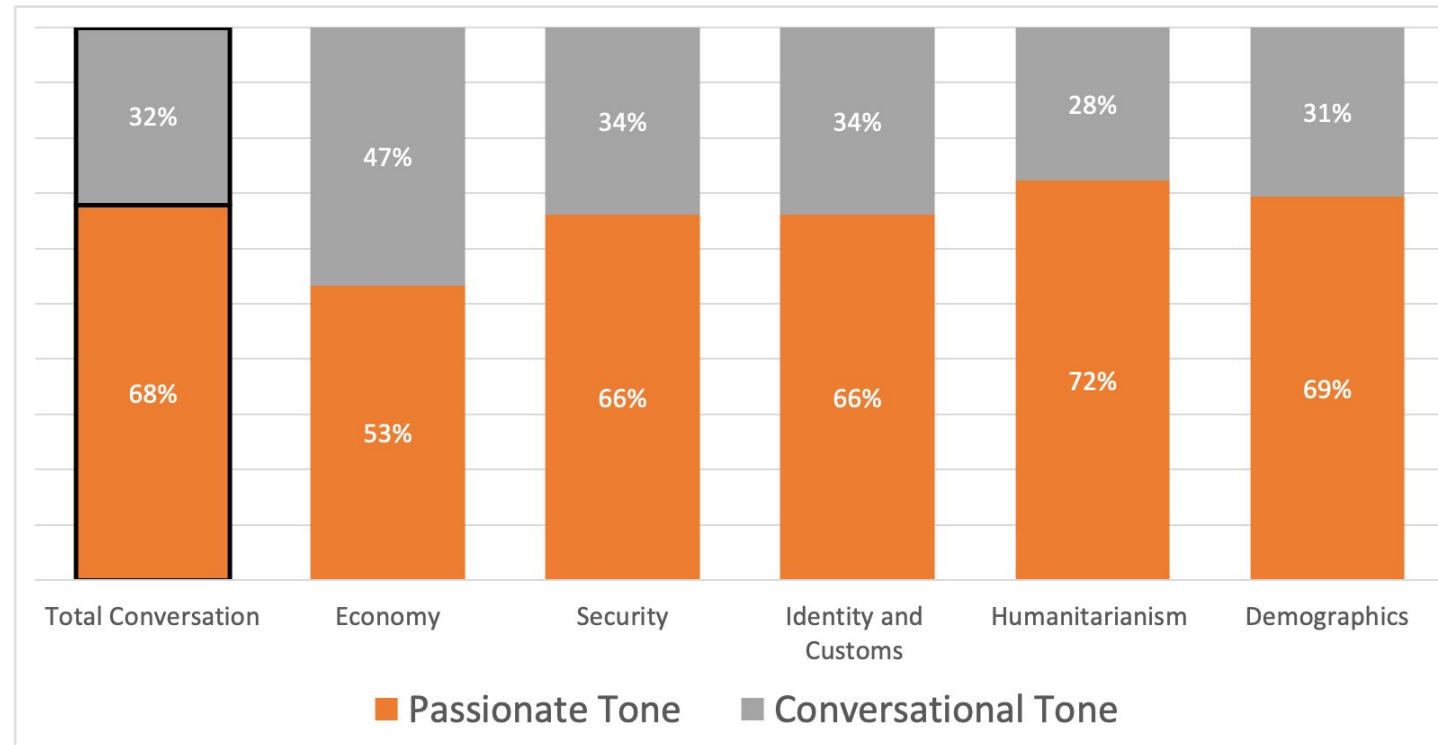
+ *Discussion Tone in the Netherlands*

4.

Discussion Tone | NL

A polarized conversation

In all narratives we see a high degree of passionate conversations happening, indicating a very polarized discourse, with strong feelings attached to the subject of migration - showing the intensity behind the shifting attitude of the country towards migration, immigration and in general - immigrants.



+ *Conversation Channels*



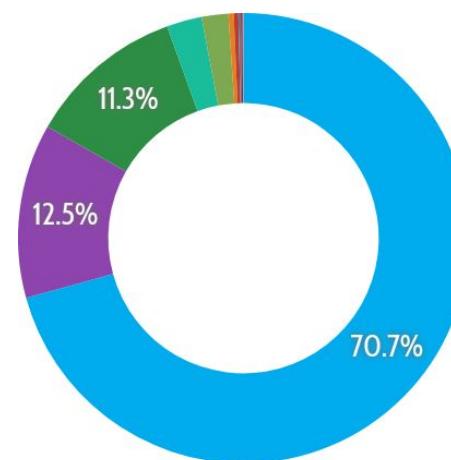
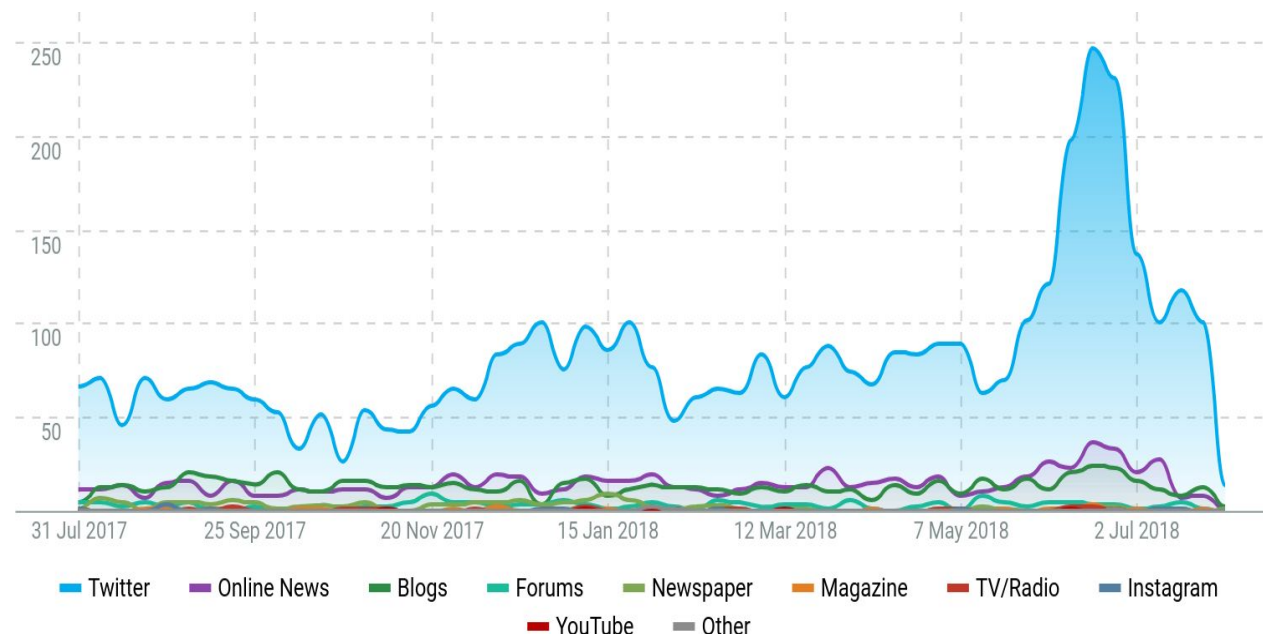
5.



Channel Distribution | NL

Online News Drives the Conversation

Seventy percent of the discourse was carried out on twitter, while the most influential authors were self-identified right wing conservative blogs or thought leaders, critical of immigration in variously different narratives, showing how a group of dedicated authors can frame a given conversation.



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



Paaldanseres, dagelijksestandaard.nl



Afshin Ellian, elsevierweekblad.nl



Tim Engelbart, dagelijksestandaard.nl



Joost Niemoller
@JoostNiemoller



Jan Gajentaan
@jangajentaan



andreas kouwenhoven, nrc.nl



De Speld
@DeSpeld