

Migration Narratives in Europe

A Social Media Intelligence Study

Country report for the Republic of Latvia



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

- 2019 -



Context to the Latvian Discussion on Migration

- The Republic of Latvia has been a member of the European Union since 2004, with a population of 1,986,096 in 2015, out of which 26% are ethnic Russians. At its peak, official **asylum seekers in the country** made up 0.01% of the population, which **is one of the lowest proportion in the EU**.*
- Compared to population size, **the conversation on migration in Latvia is small** – it is only the 22nd in the EU. Public social media conversation around migration in one year consists of ~33 600 posts.
- The current, **right-wing government of Latvia** is lead by Prime Minister Māris Kučinskis, and is based on a coalition between the green conservative, agrarian '*Union of Greens and Farmers*', the liberal conservative '*Unity*', and the right wing-populist and national conservative '*National Alliance*'.
- The Latvian economy suffers from a **negative migration rate**: local businesses struggle to find capable work, and the European migration crisis is discussed in this context.
- Latvia's **history with Russian immigration** also strongly influences the Pan-European narratives on the subject. Although there is a strong Russian-speaking community in the country, this report analyses comments posted in **Latvian**.

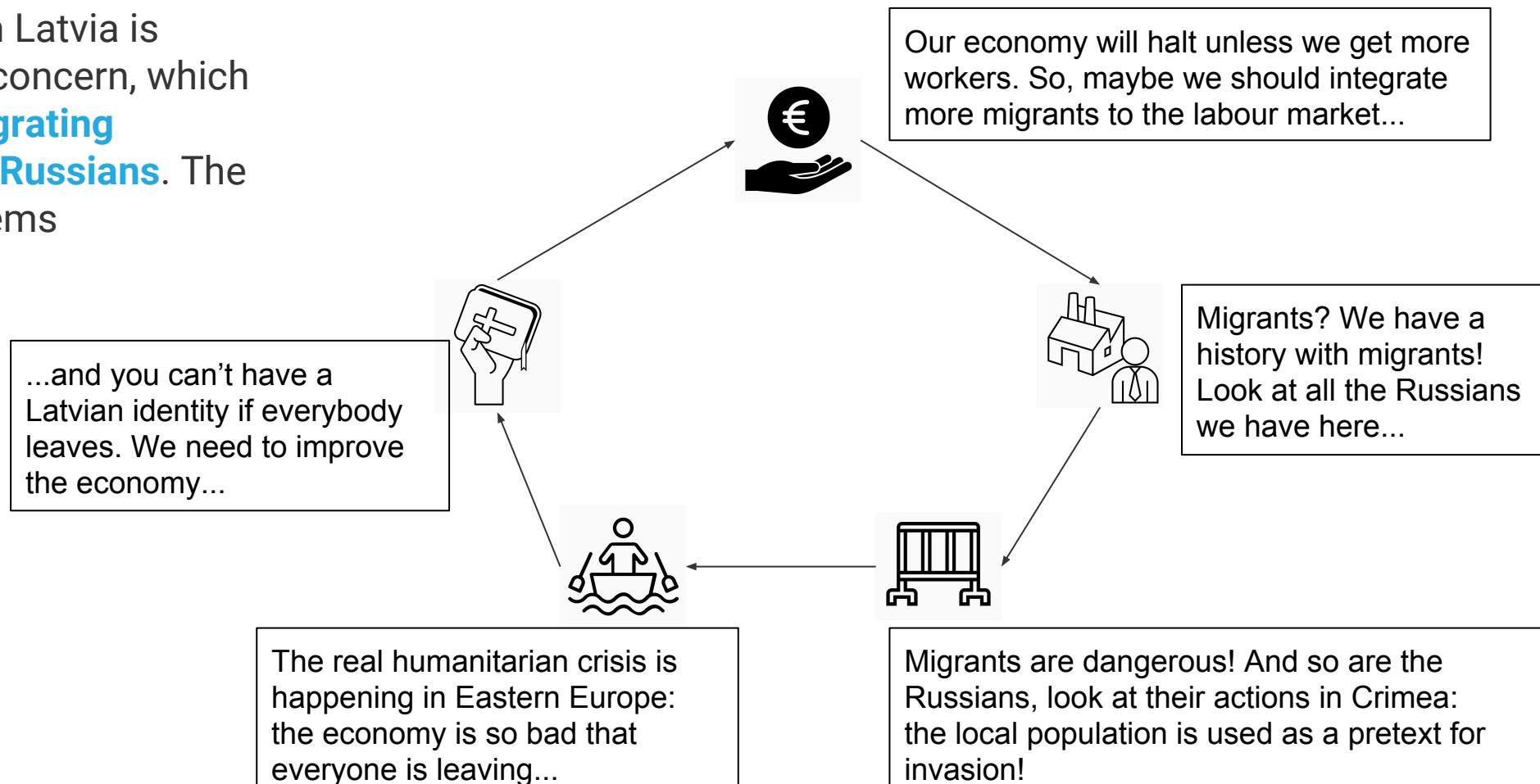


*Source: europarl.europa.eu



Context to the Latvian Discussion on Migration: The Anxiety Spiral

The migration discourse in Latvia is underpinned by a general concern, which has developed due to **emigrating Latvians** and **immigrating Russians**. The resulting anxiety spiral seems impossible to break.





Key Findings | LV

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

Size of Pan-European Narratives

Humanitarianism and **security** are the most discussed narratives in Latvia around migration, and both are heavily influenced by the local narratives.

Local Issues

Latvia has **more people leaving** than moving in, and the concern over this trend dominates the conversation on migration.

Security issues around migration are also viewed through the perceived **threat of Russia**.

EU & Domestic Politics

International politics play a huge role in the discussion, especially in the context of **security**.

Domestic policies aiding Latvians in moving back home are also discussed.

Conversation Channels

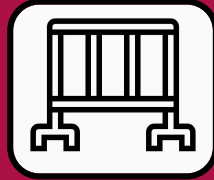
The discussion takes place equally on **traditional online news sites** and on **Twitter**, the former being more objective and the latter more polarizing.



Pan-European Narratives in the Latvian Context



The **economic impact** of migration is discussed with the backdrop of a **desperate need for workers** in Latvia.



Some emphasize the **crimes** associated with migration. However, this is overshadowed by the anxieties over **security issues related to Russian actions**.



Identity questions regarding migration in Latvia are intimately tied to the local **history with Russia and the local ethnic Russian population**, which are compared to the wider influx of migrants in Europe.



While a lot of people empathize with migrants and refugees, there is a broad agreement in Latvia that **before welcoming anyone, the country should be liveable** for their own citizens.



The government as well as the people are discussing ways to **bring back Latvians and halting the population decline**, which is priority number one in the migration context.

+ *Pan-European Narratives in Latvia*



1.



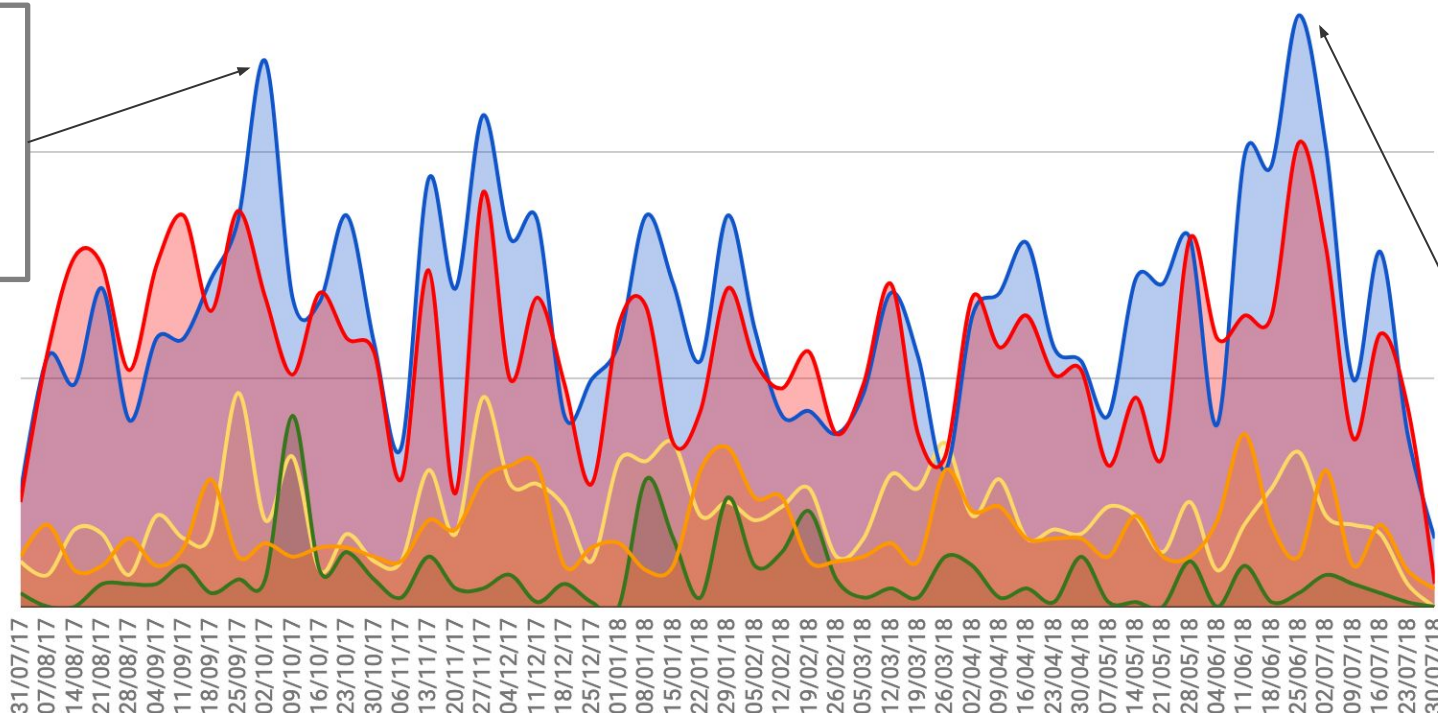
The shape of the migration discourse

While the migration question is discussed mostly in **humanitarian or security terms**, the biggest peaks in the conversation are sparked by the **emigration of Latvians**. This highlights that **the local demographic and economic situation** frames the discussion of the country's attitude to the question.

Results:
~45300

■ Demographics ■ Economy ■ Humanitarianism ■ Identity ■ Security

“Latvian businesses lack employees. In the meantime, in Ireland the number of immigrants from Latvia has even increased this year.”



“Labor in Latvia is missing; if we have several job vacancies, we might as well apply migrants” - Karl Bukowski, Institute of Foreign Policy”
nra.lv

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.

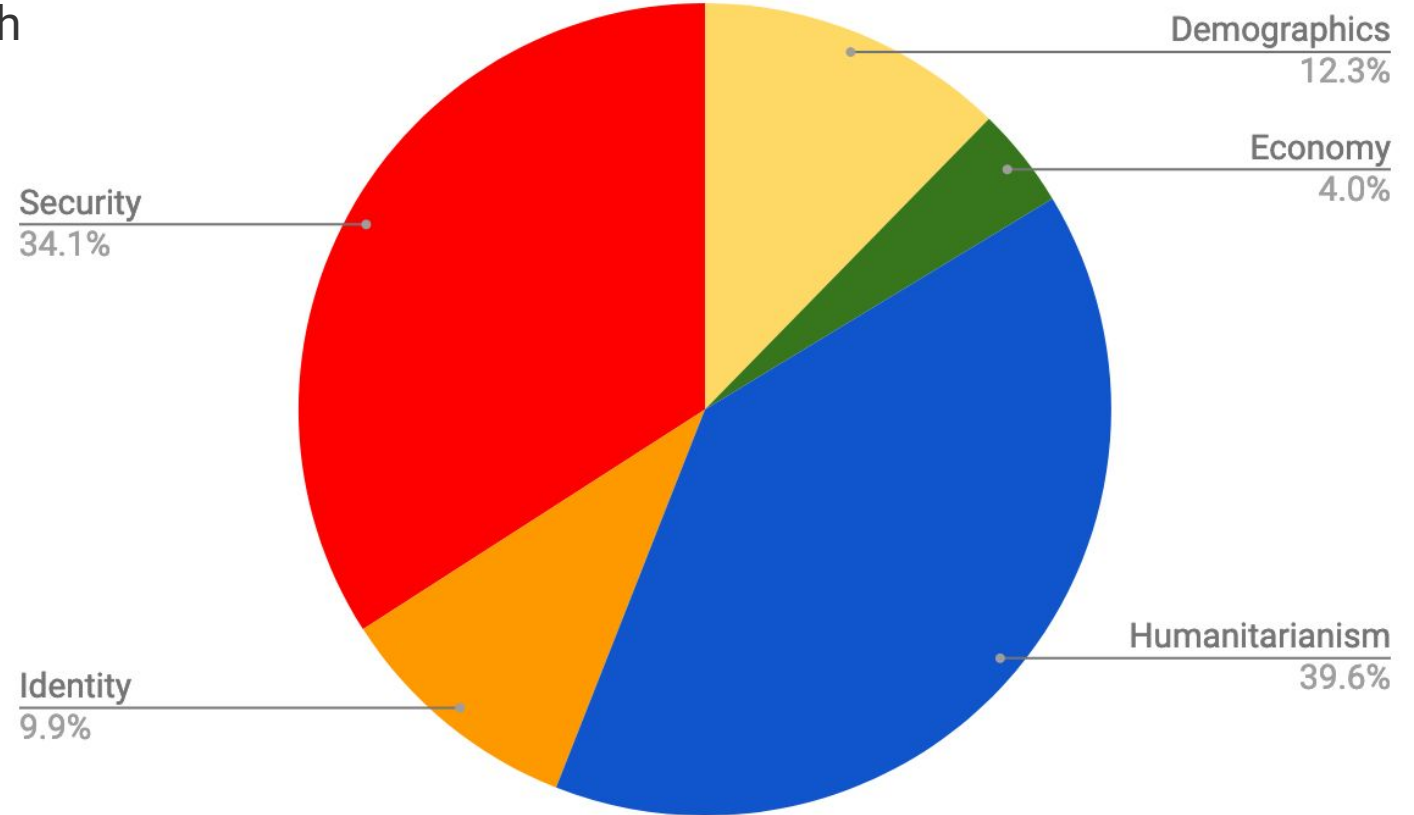


Security and Humanitarianism Dominate with a Twist

The Latvian conversation is dominantly tied with the **humanitarian** and **security** aspects of migration, driven by international events and their international interpretation.

Furthermore, security is influenced by the actions of Russia in Crimea, which ties in to Latvians' **identity-related anxieties** as a kind of mirror to the European questions around migration.

The third biggest narrative of **demographics** is mainly focused on the implications of local economic challenges.





Pan-European Narratives | LV

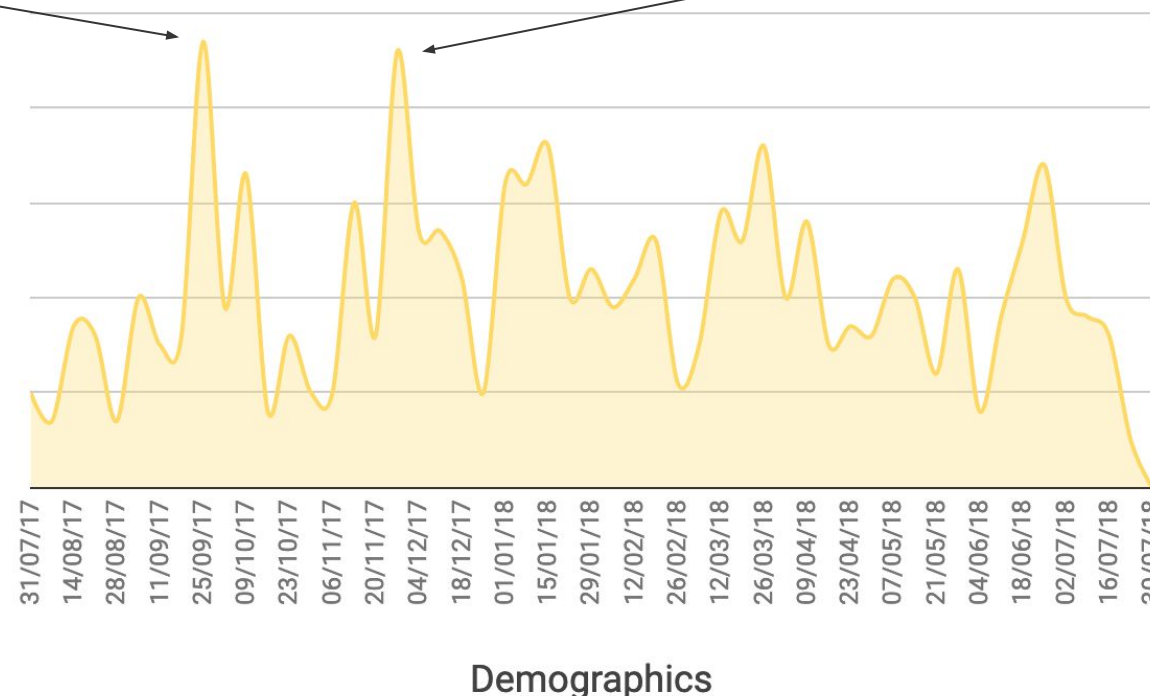
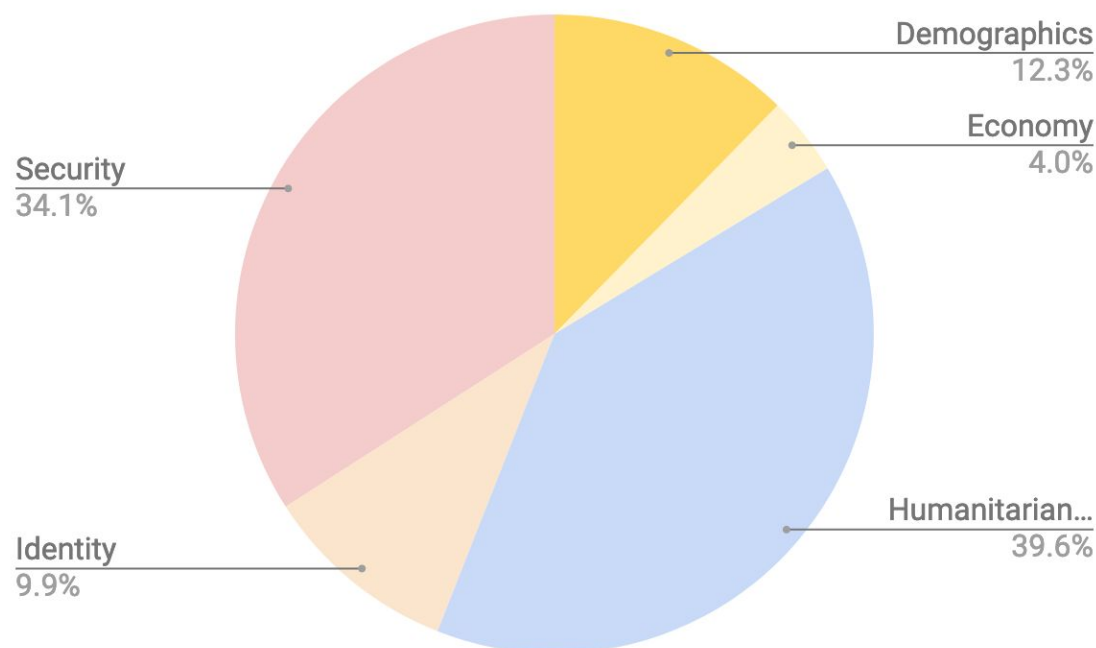
Demographics (1)

Since there is such a small amount of people looking to migrate to Latvia and a large portion of the local population has moved abroad, the demographic conversation is mainly **concerned with bringing emigrated Latvian people back**.

Results:
~5600

“Immigration is essential to ensure the stability of the Latvian economy and prosperity of local people in the future”

“By 2050, the number of Muslims in several European countries could triple”



Pan-European Narratives | LV

Demographics (2)

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Migration would add to the demographic problem, not solve it

*There is a crisis due to **persistent lack of workforce and some think that opening doors to mass migration and foreign workers would resolve this.** However, such processes are very complex, especially if we're talking about high amount of people in a short period of time.*

*In Latvia, **migration and the downward-spiral processes are threats to the state's infrastructure,** therefore, the state should start solving the problem of demography.*

***What will we do when those migrants, who are now multiplying like rabbits, will want their pensions?** We will need more immigrants who will work for the previous immigrant's pensions and this will be a vicious circle.*

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

“Remigration” and beneficial migration are welcomed

*Latvia should learn from **Estonians, who by raising salaries, creating more jobs, have managed to spur remigration.***

By welcoming refugees** and ensuring them a good standard of life, **Latvia could gain excellent musicians, architects, scientists and business leaders.

*The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development has developed a pilot-project to **encourage the remigration of people.***

Pan-European Narratives | LV

Economy (1)

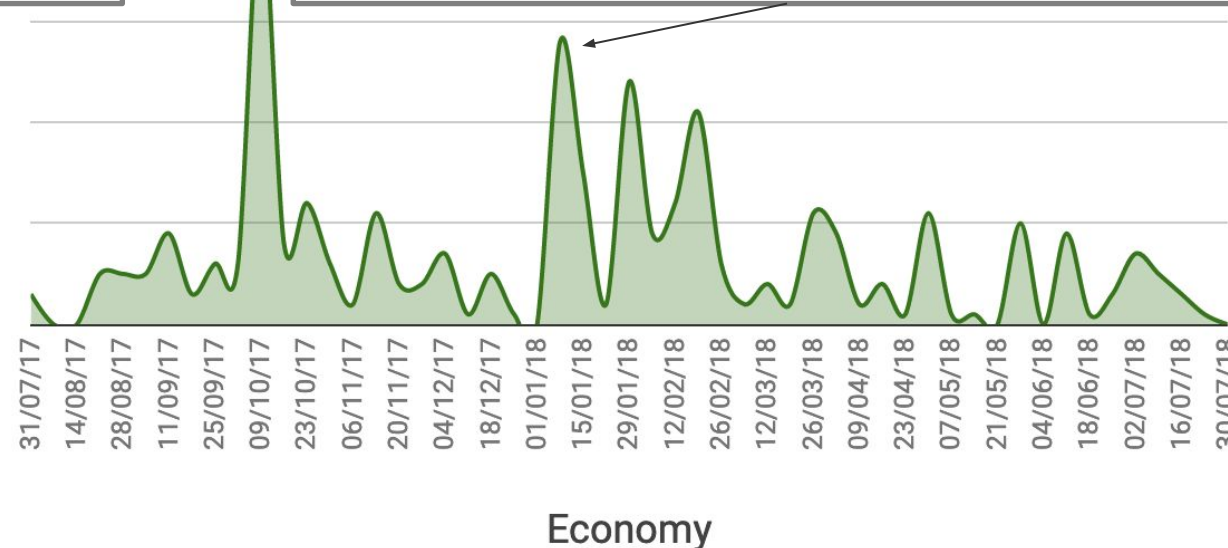
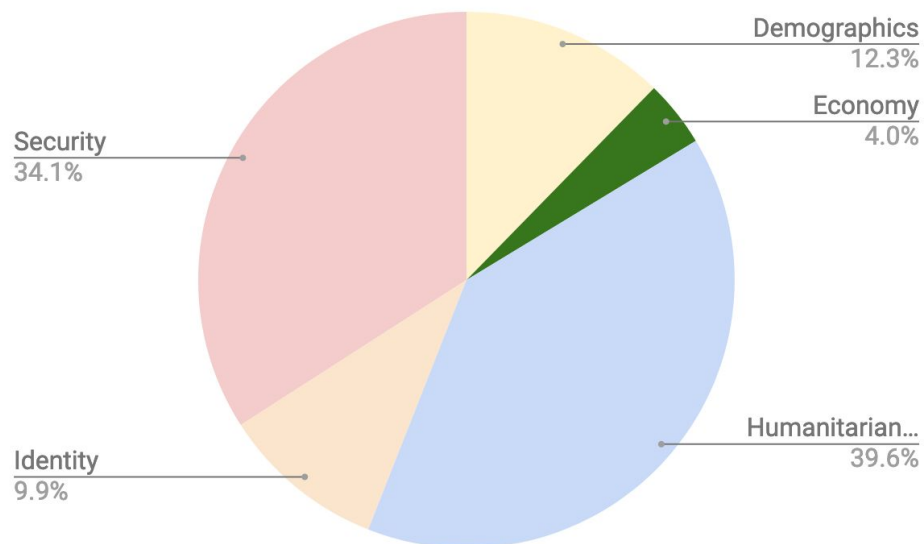
The economy narrative in Latvia is less about the potential costs of accepting refugees, and more **focused on local people leaving the country**. There is a tension around the lack of labour locally, which makes a strong argument for **accepting migrants to ease the problem**.

However, instead of the concerns of migrants' integration to the labour market, the discourse is centered around prospects facing Latvians abroad.

Results:
~1800

*"In 2030, the number of people employed in Latvia will have **decreased by 20%**. Robotics is the main hope of **immigration adversaries**."*

*"There is no point in thinking about the future of the country! Every year, 10 000 able-bodied compatriots **leave the country on average**."*



Pan-European Narratives | LV

Economy (2)



ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Economic hypocrisy in migration policy

*Apparently there is enough money to support refugees. In addition, Latvia is attracting workers from the 3rd World, **but does not pay (enough) to Latvia's own people.***

Latvians are outraged by local companies' attitude, which reflects that **business needs overrule people's concerns**

*Companies in Latvia should **firstly focus on employing the local workforce** and only after the domestic workforce reserves are exhausted, employ foreign immigrants.*

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Direct monetary benefits of EU's pro-migrant incentives

*Latvia is **receiving money from EU for hosting migrants.***

To businesses, it makes no difference if migrants or locals are applied, as long as they are qualified

*Would companies happily employ refugees? State Employment Agency representative answered that after contacting 70 companies, all of them said that the main thing for them is language knowledge and professional skills (so **there is no prejudice based on the origin or legal status.**)*

*Migration contributes to the **competitiveness, as well as to the quality** of businesses.*



Pan-European Narratives | LV

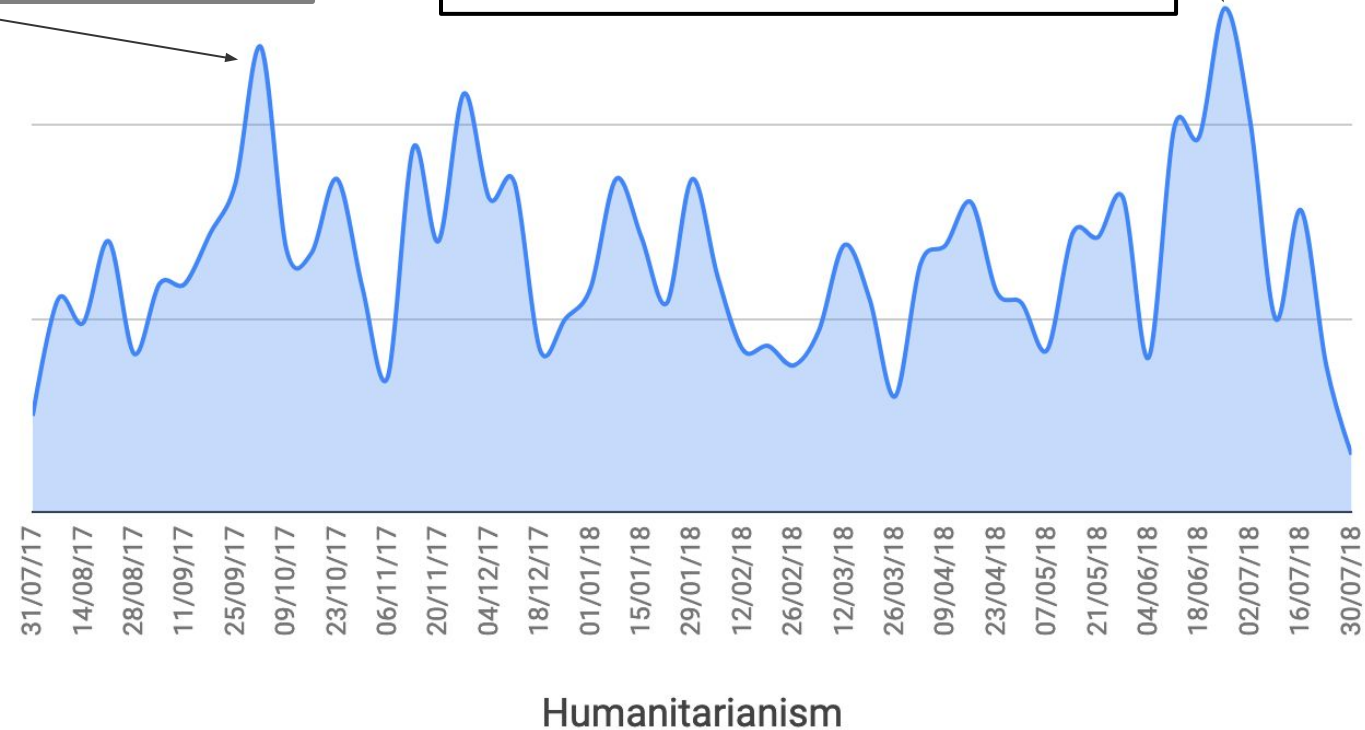
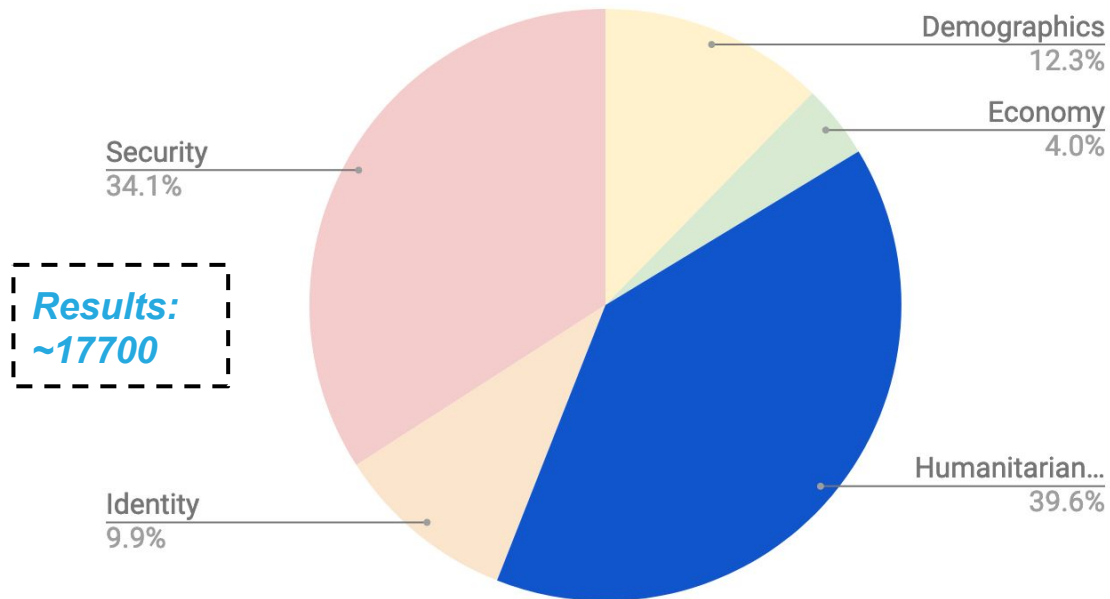
Humanitarianism (1)

On the surface, the humanitarian streak in the Latvian conversation follows the **anti-migration tone of Europe**. However, **beneath lies an empathy** for migrants and refugees prompted by Latvians' own history of fleeing or economic migration.



Polish believers participated in a joint prayer at the border on Saturday to "**protect Poland and the world from imminent danger**"

Orbán: "(...) **The invasion must be stopped**, and stopping the invasion means a strong border."



Pan-European Narratives | LV

Humanitarianism (2)

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Encouraging migrants' influx in the name of humanitarianism is hypocritical

*I therefore have **respect for the conservatives** for their honesty and directness. **They hate the Russians, gays, immigrants, the poor, and they will tell you straight away.** While the Liberals are hypocritical, and lie to themselves and others.*

*Helping refugees may be a duty, but **accepting migrants to live in our country is evil stupidity.***

*To fix holes in the system with migration would be the same as to quench your thirst by **drinking poison.***

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Migration is natural under poor circumstances, which should be improved

*The cause for migration is a natural inclination for better life both economically and socially. **Migration, therefore, is not a crime.***

*Both **migrants and Latvian citizens (as economic migrants in other countries)** are running away from Latvia and **it will continue** to happen **if the standard of living will not improve.***

*It would be nice if, **before we were concerned about refugees, we would make Latvia a place where one of them would be willing to stay.***



Pan-European Narratives | LV

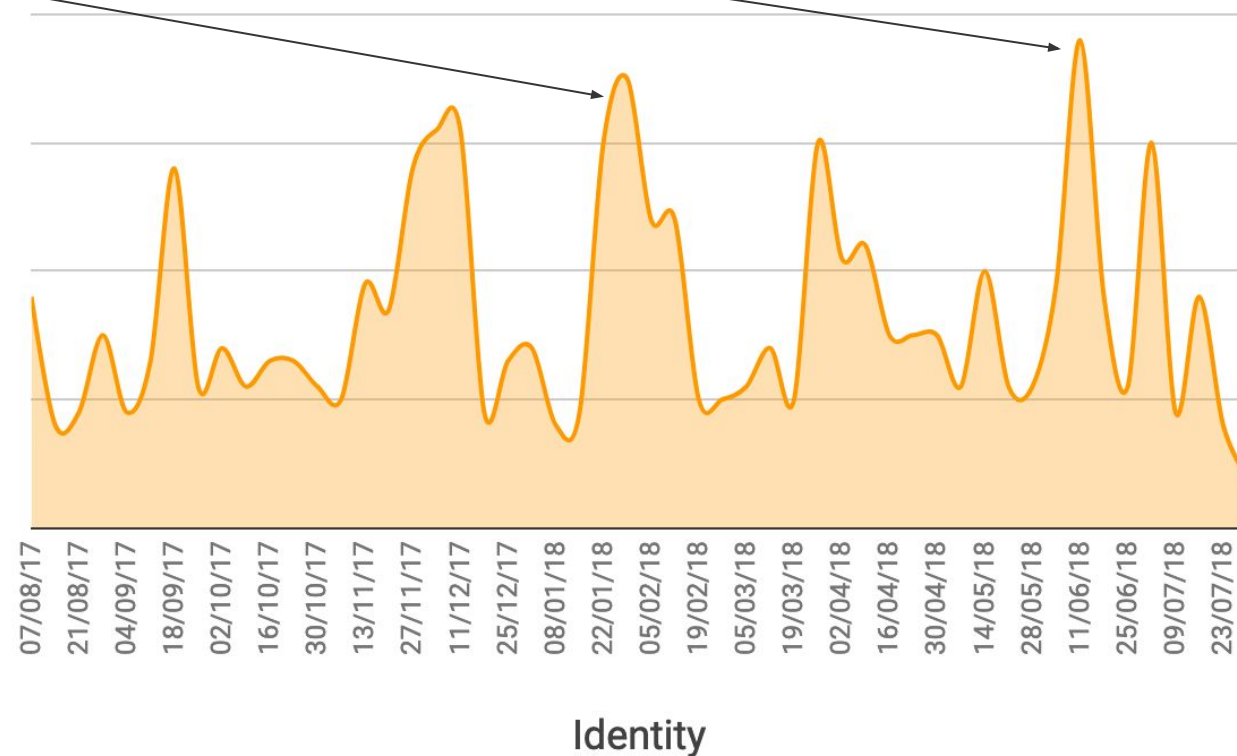
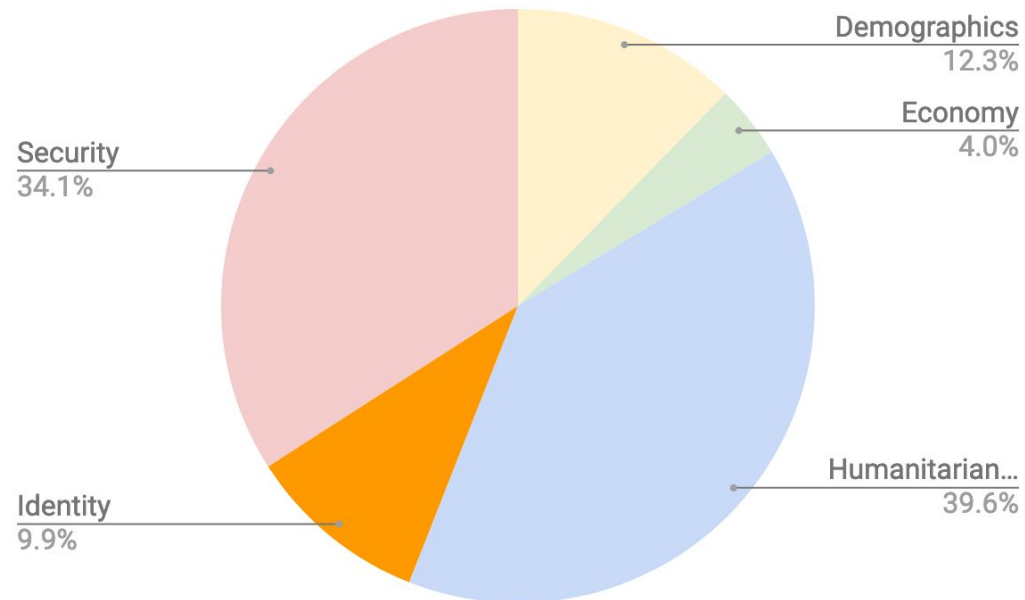
Identity & Customs (1)

Identity issues around migration are juxtaposed with Latvia's history with their Russian minority and heritage. The **subjective interpretations of history frames the discourse on migration's influence on the local identity.**

Results:
~4500

At the age of six, *she* left her native Riga *with his family* and arrived in the United States in 1948 as a refugee. Nowadays, *Vija Celmin's works are exhibited in the most significant contemporary art collections in the world.*

People here say that it's so good that I speak Latvian, because Russians who live here for life, for example, do not speak. I'm confused. This means that through me these people find a way to criticize another migrant?!



Pan-European Narratives | LV

Identity & Customs (2)

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Migration is a threat to Latvian identity, with the Russian minority used as an example

I support the Nationalist political party because it's concerned both about the refugee influx as well as the degradation of Latvian language, which are very harmful!

Discussions on Russian schools, Latvians frequently use the term "national minority". Although no official definition, **the de facto definition of a national minority does not include the concept of migrants – which Russians actually are! They arrived during the occupation** and their descendants are not a national minority!

Liberals are trying to impose atheism on Latvians (paradoxically, mixed with the aggressive religion of Islamic migrants) using Marxist ideology!

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Identity is fluid and is influenced by and benefits from migration

*I have a wonderful daughter - Belarusian Soviet-era immigrant daughter. **She is now a Latvian citizen, a teacher, and speaks Latvian** more correct than I do.*

Kokalis explained that the aid measure is intended to ensure the target group's integration, including a **basic Latvian course**. Integration courses for people under international protection will be adopted to the Latvian socio-economic and cultural programs in order **to better adapt to the new circumstances and to society**.

It would be brave to **calm down and stop being agitated about the idea that refugees will ruin Latvia** and dilute Latvian-ism.



Pan-European Narratives | LV

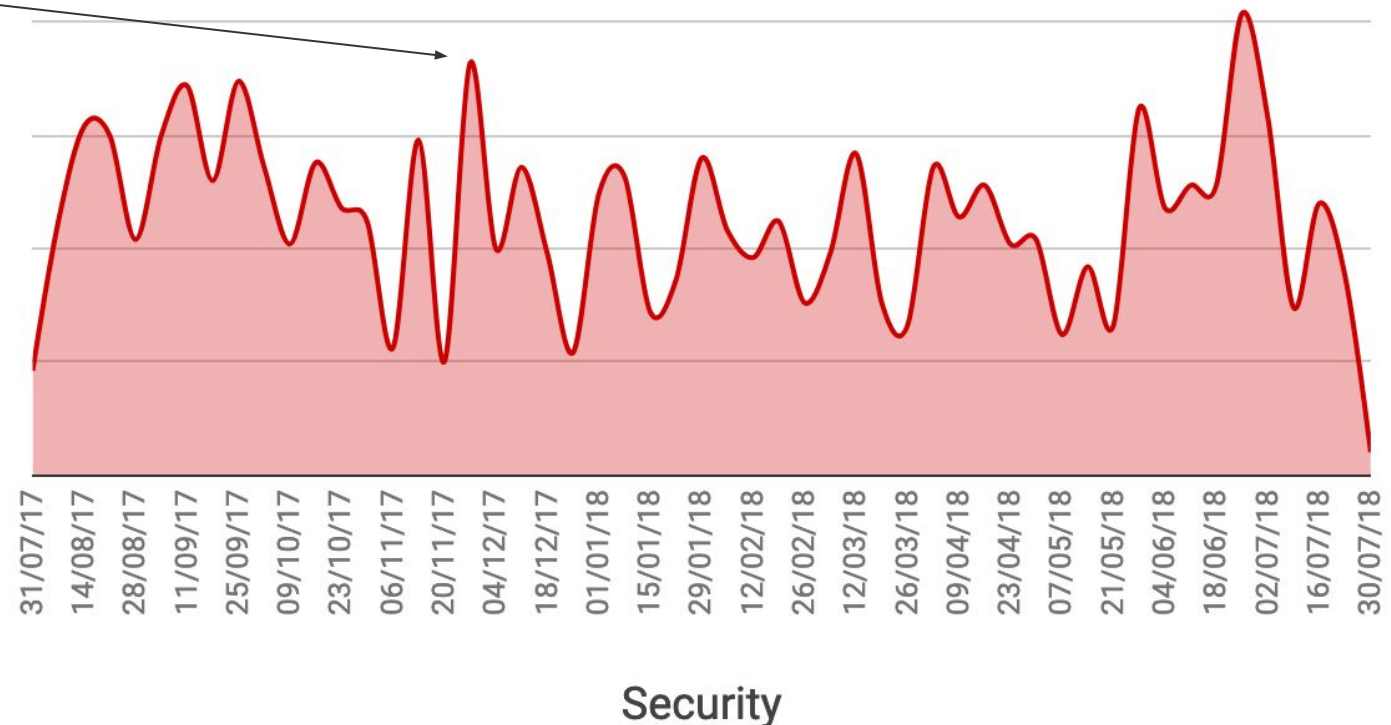
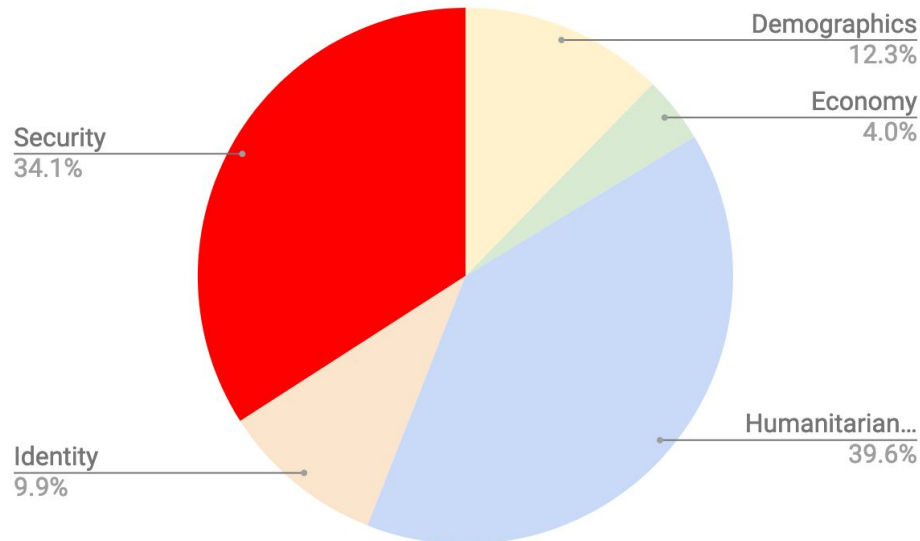
Security (1)

Migrants are considered by many as a security problem based on reports received from abroad. However, **the majority of the security discourse is dominated by Russia's regional politics and the refugee problem of Crimea**, which overshadows the broader discourse on the European migration crisis.

Results:
~15700

*"The EP can be satisfied with the 2018 budget. "We reached an agreement because our priority was to support programs that prepare the future of the EU and **protect Europeans**"*

*"It is estimated that about **15% of migrants are currently being returned to Germany from the first country of registration** in the EU. This agreement will allow Germany to significantly **increase** this figure."*



ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Migrants pose a security threat that is otherwise avoidable

*It is easy to avoid crime committed by migrants. The **level of crime** committed by locals is lower percentage-wise and it **should not be increased by the crimes of migrants, who are criminals.***

International events fuel the fear of refugees

***Situation in the coastal Europe reminds me of a medieval invasion,** not refugees who need help. Europe needs coastal security.*

*In those countries which already have ratified the Istanbul Convention (e.g., **Germany, Sweden, France**), **it does not seem that in practice women are in any way protected from arbitrary actions of migrants.***

The Russian threat is stronger than the fear of third country migrants

*Don't be surprised if it turned out that **Russia** is not only to make efforts to contribute to the instability of the so-called-refugees' regions of origin, but also **secretly financed the "Open Arms Policy" of Germany,** etc.*

***Latvians were deported to Siberia, property and flats were taken by immigrants,** estates destroyed, secular roots wiped out. .. now the "Useful Idiot" tells us how "good" the occupation forces are.*

+ *Local Issues in Latvia Around Migration*



2.

Local Issues | LV

The Russian Threat

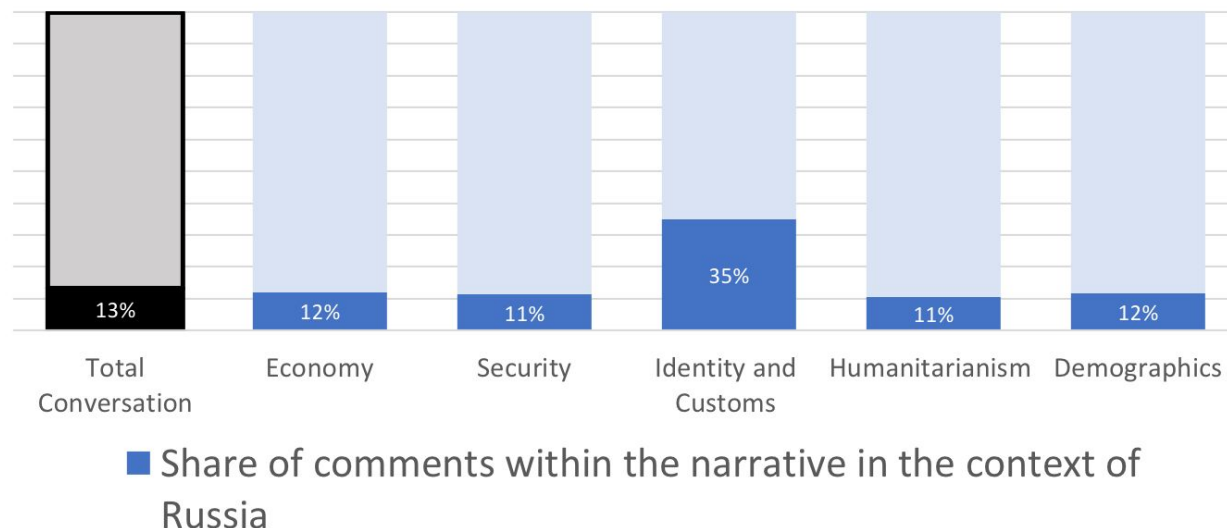
The migration crisis in Europe – and its security-, demographics-, or identity-related aspects – are like a proxy through which people discuss their anxiety over Russia in Latvia.

The scammers are trying to link the Latvian refugees whose homeland was occupied by the world's greatest evil - Stalin and communists – with the “better-life-seekers” and Islamic warriors who creep into their country before invading!

For many years, I did not believe that there were many similarities between the EU and the USSR, but now I admit that they are undeniable. Starting with the "friendship between peoples" and migrant crowds, ending with the communist ideology and Marxist quotations! And we expect to see communist justice?

"Russia's Constitutional Court issued a judgment in one night, legitimizing the Crimean annexation. Now there are 10,000 dead, several thousand people have been injured, as well as about a million people became refugees. This happens when you forget that judgment is not just theoretical, it affects real people."

With one-third of Latvia's population being Russian, and Russia's activities in Latvia's close neighbourhood, the European migration crisis takes a quasi-backseat in the Latvian discussion. **Locals fear the loss of their identity not due to third-country immigrants but because of the Russian influence.**



Local Issues | LV

The Latvian Exodus

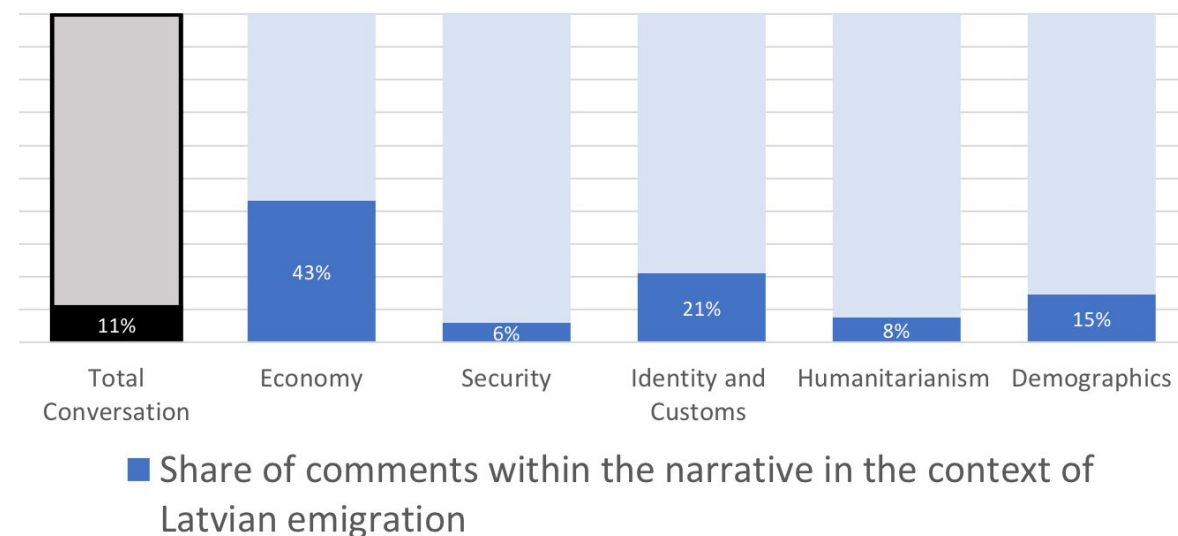
Regardless of the potential problems with integrating migrants, **Latvians are more concerned with their home country being unliveable even for their own citizens** compared to other EU countries.

*International long-term migration of the Latvian population decreased by 7,800 in 2017. (In 2016 - 12,200.). **Last year 9,900 Latvians from other countries came back, while 17,700 emigrated**, 2,900 less than in 2016. About half (55%) of the arrivals are connected with Latvia (for example, born Latvian, etc.).*

***We have a constant negative migration balance in comparison with Estonia**, where the migration balance is positive.*

*Latvian population has a tendency to shrink: **we lost, in total, 113,000 people in 2017 according to a recently published research.***

With a negative migration ratio, Latvians want their country to be welcoming but are struggling to do so, despite local political attempts to remedy the situation.



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



3.

European and Domestic Politics Context within Narratives | LV

Impact of Politics on Migration Narratives

*European Context**

Due to the **Russian threat**, security is a key concern for Latvia. The resulting anxiety is most often discussed in the context of defence cooperation.

As noted earlier in the anxiety circle, Latvian politicians seek EU-level solutions to mitigate the threat of Russia.

**Security of a country depends on its' network of allies (in this case, specifically the EU).*

The role of other European countries in the migrant crisis is discussed extensively. For example, certain countries may accuse others of **taking less of the migration burden**.

The **EU quota system** is mentioned as well, and the responsibility of the current migration crisis is often shifted to key European politicians such as Angela Merkel or Emmanuel Macron.

*Domestic Politics Context***

Domestic politicians are often tasked with **lobbying at the EU level for more resources on defense**.

Latvia has recently introduced a program of “**remigration**” to help with the economic problems related to their demographic issues, balancing against the public opinion which is suspicious of migration from third-world countries.

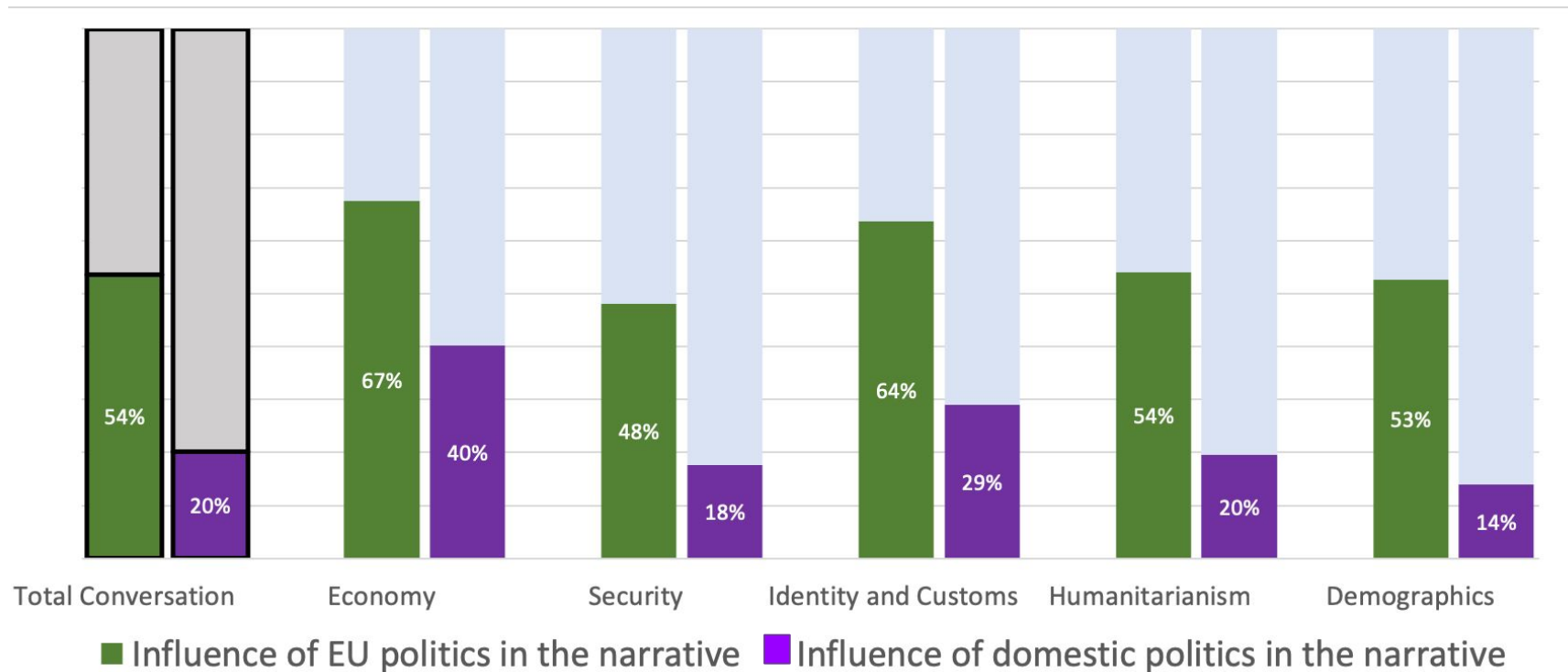
***Domestic politicians taking stance on the migration issue and their strategies to cope with the threat posed by migration.*

Discussions around **local parties and politicians** are prevalent on public social media platforms throughout all EU countries. It is clear that a local political party's position on migration strongly effects its popularity and election results.

European and Domestic Politics Context within Narratives | LV

International Humanitarian- and Security Discussion Influences Latvia

Apart from the pan-european security and identity narratives, which are firmly dominated by right-wing populism internationally, the strongest discussions were around humanitarian issues. However, in Latvia this is more focused on the local economic plight or the fallout of Russian regional military actions.



+ *Conversation Channels*



4.

Twitter and Online News Dominate the Discussion



In Latvia the conversation around migration is triggered by **tweets** and **online news platforms equally**.

A majority of the conversation is generated by established news sites covering international events, while the discussion on Twitter is a lot more polarizing (see next slide).

Results:
~45300

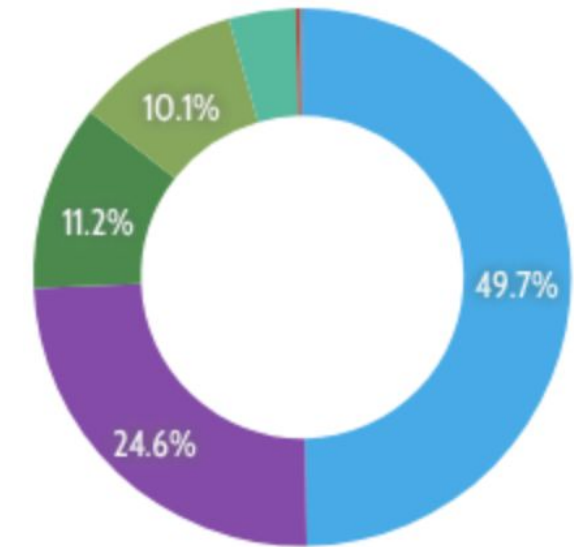
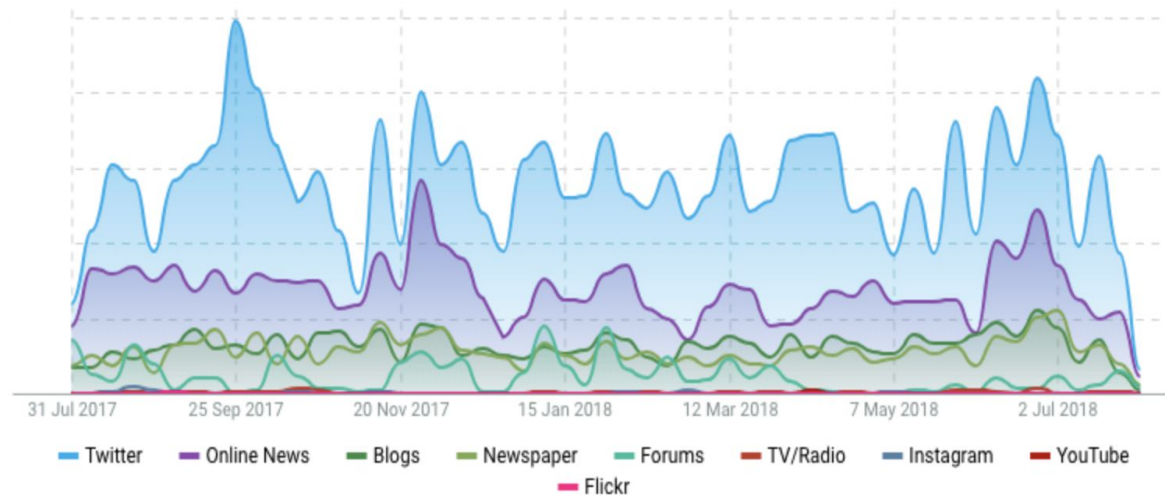
Most Influential News Sites in the Overall Conversation

delfi.lv

nra.lv

diena.lv

tvnet.lv



Twitter
Online News
Blogs
Newspaper
Forums
TV/Radio
Instagram
YouTube
Flickr

Most Influential Authors | LV

Most Active Twitter Users Post Far-right, Anti-migrant Content

Most Active Users	Typical Comments
@juriskazha	"Germany created a capacity crisis on its own by letting refugees / migrants flood from other countries where they really had no place to stay and the authorities were not in a position to deal with it."
@GaumigsJoks	"The fact that migrants will integrate into Western society is a tale of some idiots, in fact, the West "will" integrate "in a coerced (loose-to-be) Muslim community. Can not stop it anymore? Without big blood it will not work! Will the West be slaughtered?"
@Nodusgordius	"A video on how "refugees" are showing disdain for the country that took them. It speaks for itself"
@viedis	"All that trouble now in the Middle East, the failure of the refugee smuggling in Europe and the failure of the Irish and EU leaders, and the reluctance to defend the interests of their citizens, suggest a large-scale, coordinated action"
@IKrukovska	"Time will tell you how everything is really. The current leadership of the EU, supported by Soros, runs counter to the interests of EU countries - Merkel supports and has effectively dismantled the EU with migrant populations."
@JolantaRubene	"Not only Latvians do not want Muslim migrants , the East Germans also do not want migrants. Demonstration all the time. Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig. And fortunately there are other sources of news, not just those who are controlled by migrant friends."
Blog News L V (@DikembeSakamoto)	"In Hungary, they will turn against immigrant- supporting organizations"
@MaijaBadune	[Retweets only] "(...) Citizens' protests against violent behavior of immigrants"
Хэроуи (@ainarsbr11)	"In Germany, the currently "popping" rape case is 3 older Afghan migrants versus a 16-year-old German "
@nralv	"They did not get their monthly allowance on time, thus two migrants put their rage on social worker"



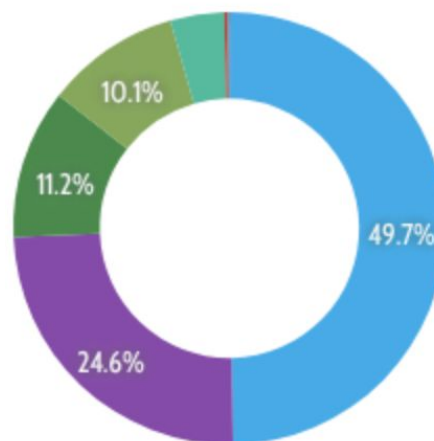
Channel Distribution | LV

Comparison with Other Topics

Leading communication channels may vary in a country depending on national specifics of channel usage.

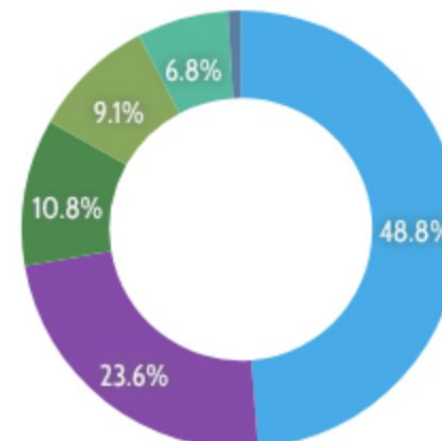
In Latvia, **Twitter and online news sites** seem to be the most dominant platforms of the public online content when it comes to political issues, while other topics such as sport brands trigger more image-driven content.

**Overall
Conversation on
*Migration***



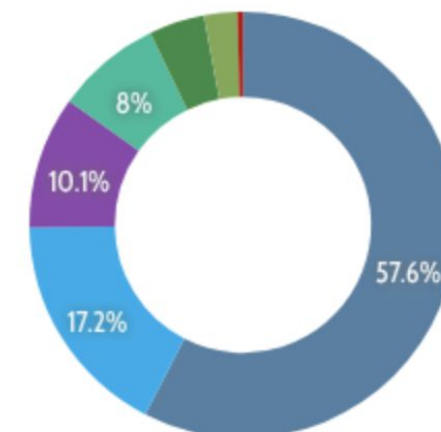
- Twitter
- Online News
- Blogs
- Newspaper
- Forums
- TV/Radio
- Instagram
- YouTube
- Flickr

**1 month
conversation on
*Angela Merkel***



- Twitter
- Online News
- Blogs
- Newspaper
- Forums
- Instagram

**1 month
conversation on
*Nike***



- Instagram
- Twitter
- Online News
- Forums
- Blogs
- Newspaper
- YouTube