

# **Migration Narratives in Europe**

## ***A Social Media Intelligence Study***

*Country report for the United Kingdom*



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

**- 2019 -**

# Context to the UK Discussion on Migration

- With a population of 64,875,165 in 2015, the United Kingdom has been member of the EU's predecessor, the European Economic Community since 1973, and is **scheduled to exit the EU in 2019**.
- The UK received a **relatively steady flow of asylum seekers**, with a slight increase in 2015. That year, asylum seekers made up 0.05% of the population. The country hosts approximately 120,000 people (0.2% of the population) with refugee status, which is the 15<sup>th</sup> largest number in the EU.\*
- Public social media conversation in the UK around migration in one year consists of ~11,664,000 posts. Relative to the size of the resident population, **the migration conversation in the UK is the second largest in the EU**.
- The British **government, led by Theresa May, has an anti-migration approach** rooted in the 2010 hostile environment policy. Migration was also a key aspect of the **2016 Brexit referendum**.



\*Source: [europarl.europa.eu](http://europarl.europa.eu)



## Introduction | UK

# Deeply Divided Conversation Ignited by Brexit

The conversation on migration in the UK is the second largest in Europe, while the country is only the 15<sup>th</sup> among member states regarding the proportion of people with refugee status.

Wide attention towards the issue lies partly in the Brexit referendum and the subsequent withdrawal process. **Theresa May** has long been taking up an **anti-immigrant stance**, and the sentiment was fuelled during and after the referendum as well. It did **not only focus on people en route due to the current migration crisis, but also on citizens of other EU member states, living and working in the UK.**

However, immigrant workforce is a two-edged sword in the UK, as the country's economy is highly dependent on it. Although migration's consequences to the job market are relatively rarely discussed on public social media platforms, people express both support and opposition towards immigrant labour.

A similar division between pro- and anti-migrant opinions appear in other, more pivotal aspects of the conversation: **on the anti-migrant spectrum, commenters are alert to crime related to migrants or question asylum seekers' need for help, while pro-migrant voices express sympathy for asylum seekers' hardships, both during their route and within the UK.**



*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 | UK

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

### Size of Pan-European Narratives

**Security and humanitarianism** are the most often discussed narratives in the UK, followed by demographics, economy and identity.

### Local Issues

Consequences of **Brexit** (especially its influence on demographics and the local economy) is an issue that is present in each terrain of the conversation around migration.

### EU & Domestic Politics

Among **Pan-European** migration narratives, the key topics are **security and humanitarianism**. Brexit is mainly discussed as a consequence of local behavior, and also a problem that has to be dealt with locally.

### Discussion Tone

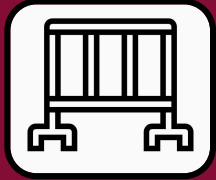
Migration in general triggers passionate and conversational comments equally. However, the **identity** and **demographics** narratives often inspire **passionate comments online**.

### Conversation Channels

The majority of the discussion takes place on **Twitter**, dominated by opinions of professional journalists.



# Pan-European Narratives in the British Context



Pro and anti-migrant voices alike engage in discussions concerning security risks caused by mass migration. Specific attention is given to **local attacks and crime rate** in general.



With a few exceptions, people express **sympathy and pro-migrant sentiment** in the humanitarian narrative. Migrants' hardships in the UK are detailed, and some even discuss the UK's role in the Syrian war.



The UK's **economy is already highly dependent on migrant labour**. Despite some anti-migrant voices, most people emphasize the country's pressing economic need to open its borders to migrants.



Brits discuss the economic consequences of mass migration on the local **labour market and public services**.



**Cultural openness and change** is applauded by some Brits, while others fear the loss of national identity due to mass migration. People emigrating from Britain find it hypocritical to be called **expats** instead of refugees.

# + *Pan-European Narratives in the United Kingdom*



---

1.

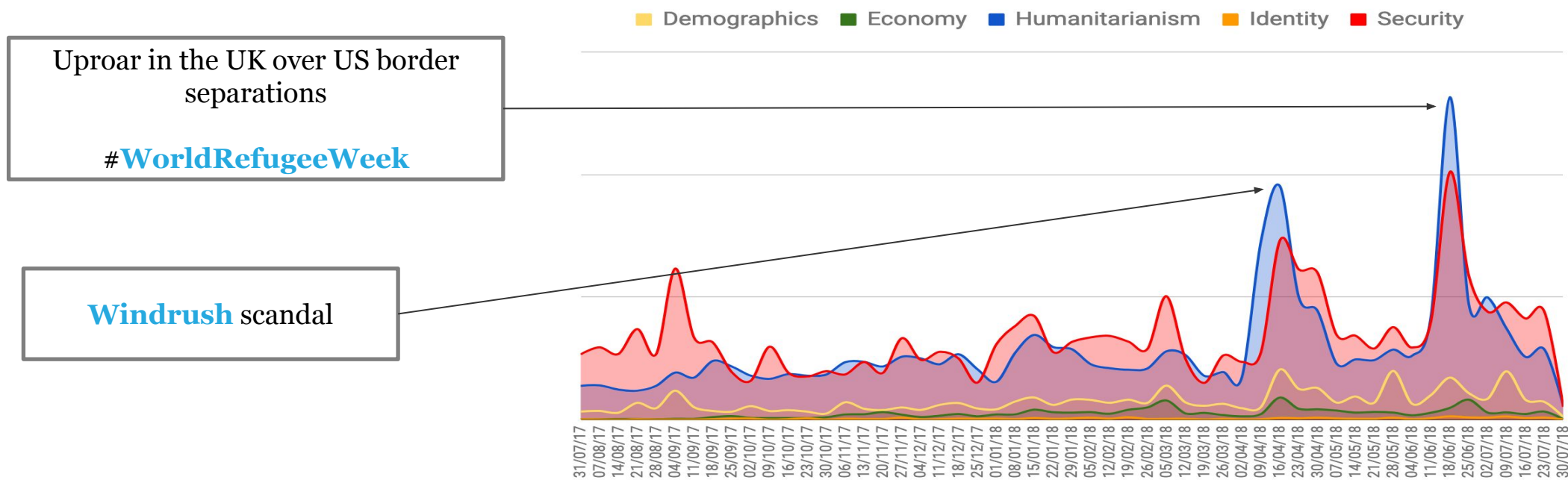




# The shape of the migration discourse

The conversation in the UK is mainly triggered by domestic and international misconduct affecting refugees and migrants. The Windrush scandal is a hot topic in Britain as people often discuss how the UK Home Office wrongly detained, denied the legal rights of, or deported members of the Windrush generation (people arriving in Britain before 1973 mainly from countries of the Caribbean).

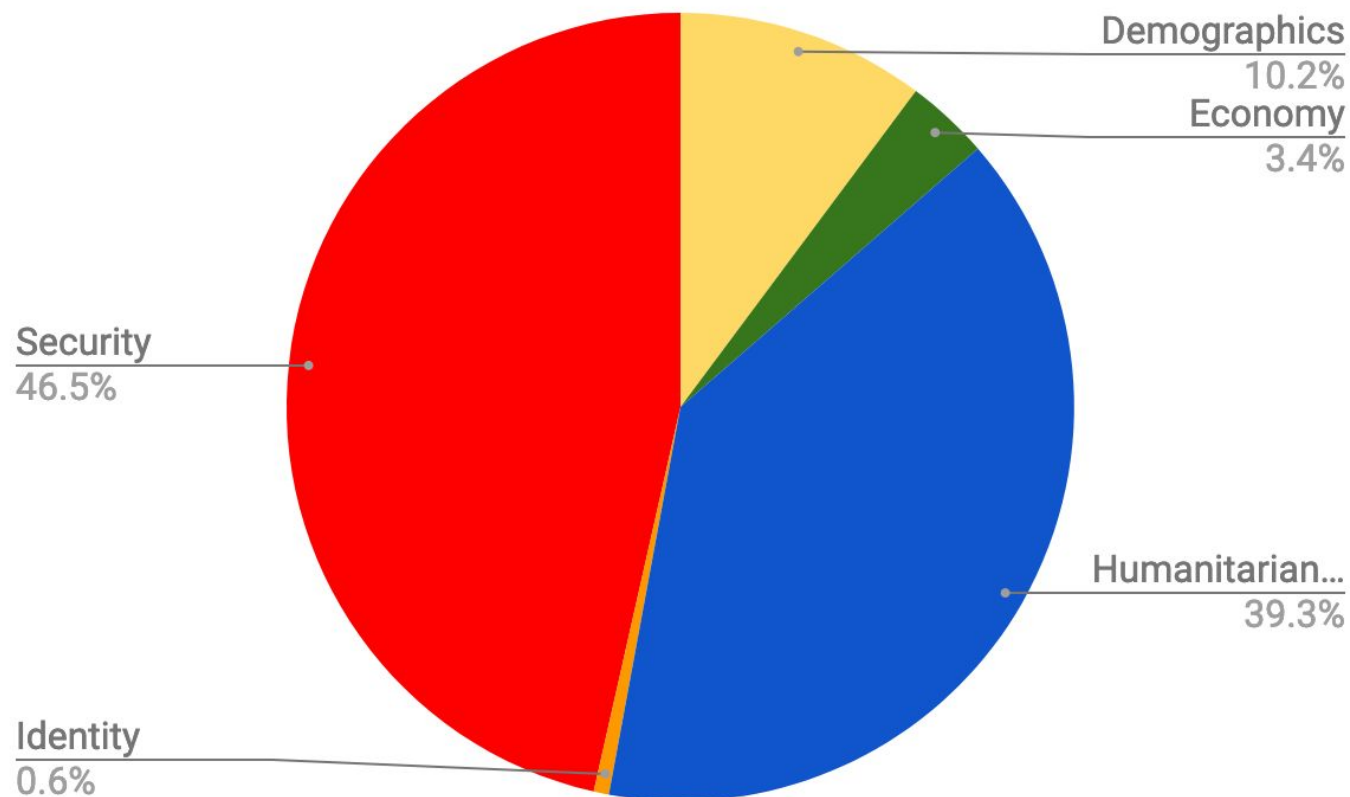
**Results:**  
~11,664,000



# Pan-European Narratives | UK

## Context of the UK migration discourse

Most conversations in the UK reflect either **security-related** or **humanitarian** aspects of migration. Demographics are discussed in one-tenth of all public social media posts, while issues connected to the economy and local identity are barely mentioned.





# Pan-European Narratives | UK

## Demographics (1)

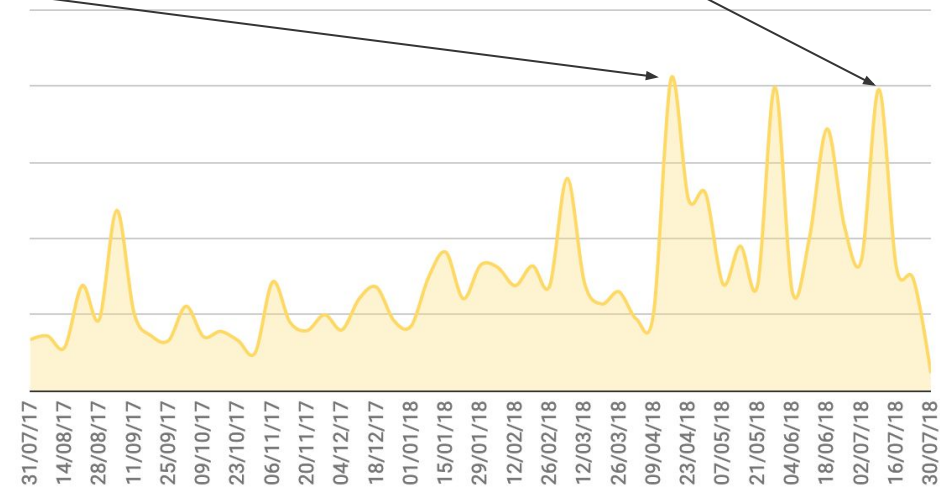
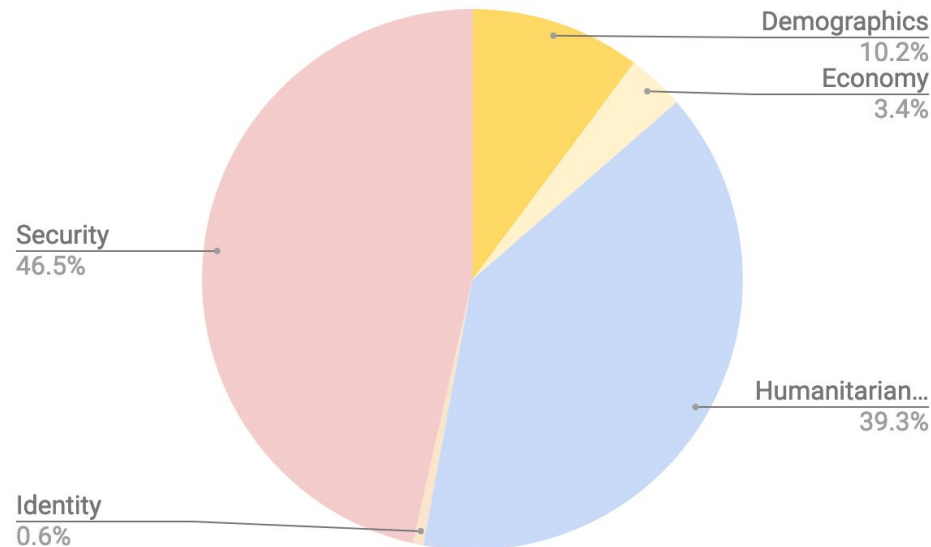
Although some call it risky to build the national economy on migrants, most people express pro-migrant sentiment and emphasize that the UK is highly dependent on foreign labour.

Many find it unsustainable to close borders before migrants regardless of their level of skill, and point out the UK Home Office's misconduct with migrants living in the UK for decades.

**Results:**  
~1,129,000 (10.2%)

People living in the UK for decades with **“indefinite leave to remain”** migration status **threatened to be kicked out** of the country

**16 of France's 23 #LesBleus** ( #Mbappé, etc.) are **#migrants or the children of migrants.**  
*migrants-we can get the job done !*



# Pan-European Narratives | UK

## Demographics (2)



### ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

It is suicidal to put the country's future into the hands of illiterate migrants

**SOS!!** 🙄🔥 *So these are the migrants who will catapult Europe into a golden age & pay the pensions of tomorrow's pensioners. Example from #Sweden, **this hijab was asked: Can you read? No! Can you write your name? No! Do you have a social security number? No! Good luck Sweden!***

### PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

UK economy is highly dependent on migrant workforce

*As an NHS doctor, let me correct that for you. **Without its small army of immigrant doctors & nurses** - my amazing, dedicated colleagues - **the NHS would collapse**. But, hey, never let xenophobia get in the way of shamelessly exploiting a pensioner's death, right?*

*In the next 10 years, 23% of the Leave vote will be dead. They voted to be poorer during their final decade, **refuse entry to the 190,000 immigrant geriatric nurses who will look after their failing bodies**, and ruin the life-chances of their own grandkids. And boasting about it.*

***Christmas shopping may get more hectic and crops might go unharvested unless the government ensures access to unskilled migrant labor after Brexit**, the British Retail Consortium warned.*

### PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

#### Controversies around migrants' integration in the UK

##### Migrants perceived as economic resource

*In case you were wondering whether **immigrants are human beings or a resource** the answer is that they are human beings*

##### Unauthorized data access by UK Home Office to track down migrants

*BREAKING: the High Court just granted @migrants\_rights permission to **bring a legal challenge against @NHSDigital's sharing of patient data with @ukhomeoffice to help them track down migrants.** This is vital to protecting patient confidentiality for us all*

##### Reactions to the Windrush scandal

(UK Home Office wrongly detained, denied legal rights or deported members of the Windrush generation, people arriving to Britain before 1973 mainly from the Caribbean countries)

*The Windrush kids story is truly appalling, even by Home Office standards. The **message to immigrants is clear: you'll never belong here**, not ever, not even after decades of legally living here.*

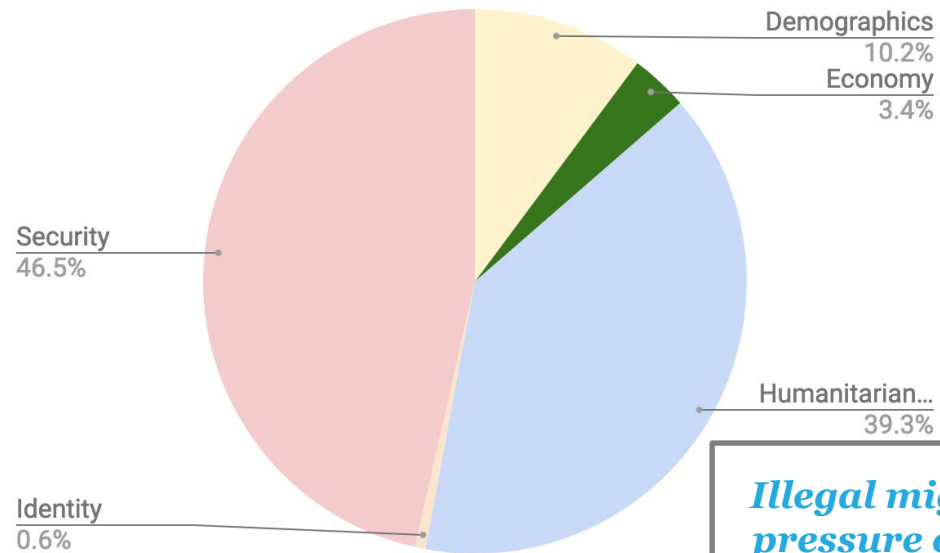
*The **son of a Windrush immigrant has been forced to declare himself as 'stateless'** after he was threatened with deportation despite being born in the UK*



# Pan-European Narratives | UK

## Economy (1)

Although the narrative is not substantial, there is a fierce debate in the UK about the economic toll of illegal migration on the job market, public services, and particularly on the NHS. Citizens also discuss whether locals or migrants should be the first to receive social support or a job offer.



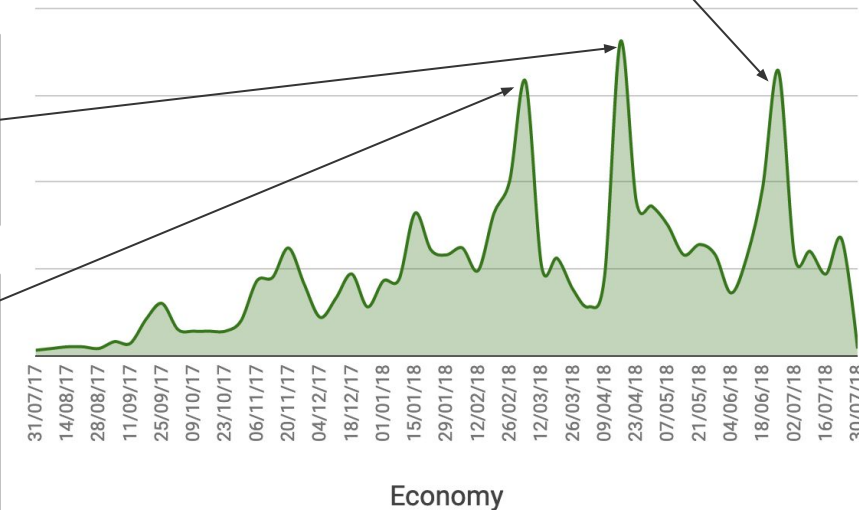
**Results:**  
~376,000 (3.4%)

**Comment by @theresa\_may:** "Whatever your age, wherever you live, the **Government is making good progress delivering for you** – a Britain fit for the future.

**Reply :@DavidLammy:** **\*unless you're:** 1) A #Grenfell survivor 2) Homeless 3) **From the #Windrush generation** 4) An EU citizen living in the UK 5) A UK citizen living in the EU 6) An Airbus worker 7) On a zero hours contract 8) Young 9) Disabled 10) A refugee Have I left anyone out? #PMQs

**Illegal migration** impacts whole of society, puts **pressure on public services**, leaves vulnerable people open to exploitation (...)

Hi, **NHS doctor here. "Mass migration" is not the problem.** The bulk of the patients needing our help are not young, EU citizens, but elderly acutely sick people. Fund social and health care properly, and stop exploiting tragedies like vampiric parasites





## ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Local poor should receive government assistance before migrants

*Proper common sense from Italy's new deputy prime minister @matteosalvinimi. He's **disgusted at the billions being spent on migrants while his own people suffer poverty** - and he's putting a stop to it!*

Why favour migrants instead of talented Brits?!

*Certain business groups **prefer mass immigration to training & paying decent wages to British workers***

***If British government cut net migration down to tens of thousands the wages forecast will become a lot more rosy.** Companies might even start investing in training UK workers again!*

## PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Migrant support is actually cheaper than detention

*RT @AyoCaesar: It costs over £30,000 a year to lock someone up in an immigration detention centre, and a further £15,000 to deport them. Let's put it this way: even **if a migrant was able to claim every benefit under the sun, it'd still be about £20,000 cheaper per annum for the public purse.***

Why favour lazy Brits instead of motivated migrants?!

*Unless you are a British employer, then any your rights to **hire a legally entitled migrant to a job over any old Brit who just wants money and doesn't want to do the work**, that type of British citizen must come second to the lazy British patriot looking to steal his money.*

# Pan-European Narratives | UK Economy (3)



## ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Mass migration drives down wages

*#JeremyCorbyn is ignoring #economic reality. **Mass #migration drives down #wages for #workers.** FACT!*

Migrants take people's jobs

*– Yer Da hates the **immigrants**. #Brexitinfivewords  
– Der **all takin ar Jobs***

NHS suffers due to mass migration

*#NHS CRISIS: A&E waiting times hit record highs, only 85% seen within FOUR hours. **“Unprecedented pressure” due to a surging population fuelled by mass #migration.***

*Leftists claim to be pro working class, pro environment, pro national health service. But **what suffers the most from mass immigration?** The working class, the environment, **the national health service.** Immigration is just ideology*

## PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Mass migration *does not* drive down wages

*I can't reply to you all so I'll just repeat this again. It's really unhelpful in the current climate for anyone, Labour or Tory, to **imply migrant workers drive down wages. They don't.** You have been lied to.*

Migrants *do not* take people's jobs

*This is really weird, but interesting: When a bunch of people move to an area, unemployment goes down.  
<https://t.co/Wg1BOOiWgp> **This could help explain why immigrants don't take people's jobs.***



# Pan-European Narratives | UK

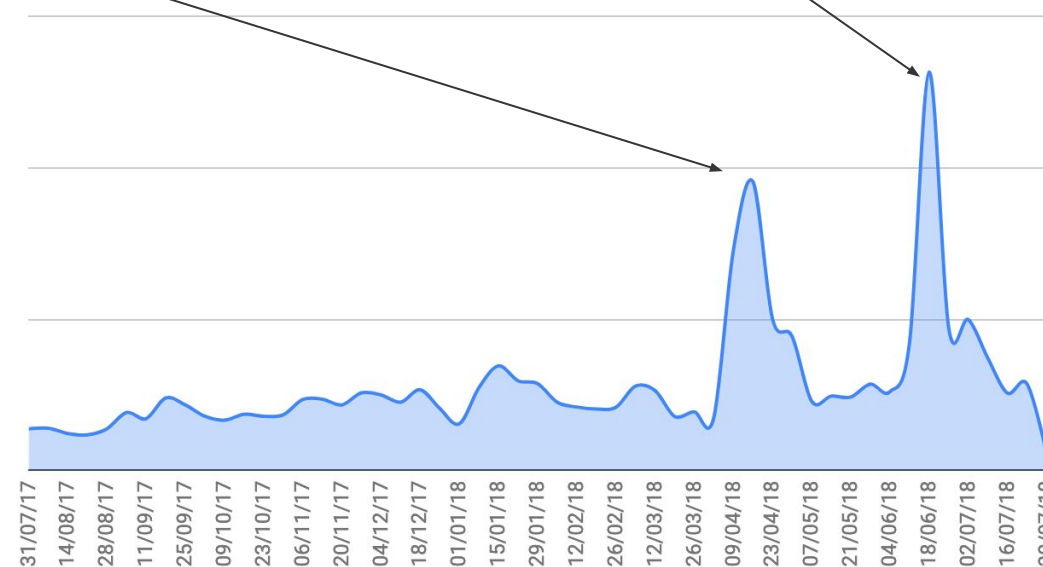
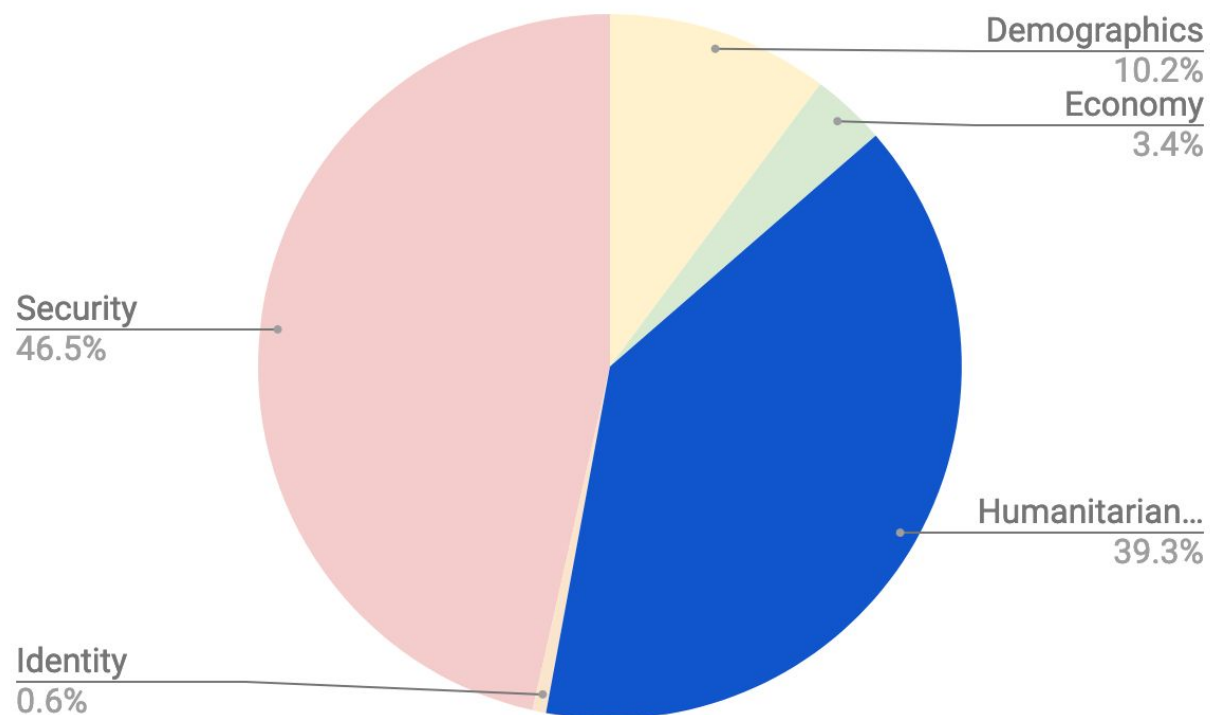
## Humanitarianism (1)

The humanitarian narrative is dominated by pro-migrant voices rooted in sympathy for asylum seekers' current hardships in the UK and the reasons behind their displacement. Anti-migrant voices question asylum seekers' need for help and demand the UK to close its borders to them.

**Results:**  
~4,349,000 (39.3%)

People express **solidarity** with those affected by the **Windrush scandal**

Pro-refugee discussion triggered by the **#RefugeeWeek2018**



Humanitarianism

# Pan-European Narratives | UK Humanitarianism (2)



## ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Fake refugees should go home

Send the ***Fake Refugees Back Home*** (Janice Atkinson MEP) [youtu.be/3QZZ3xi5ZUY](https://youtu.be/3QZZ3xi5ZUY) via @YouTube She also states how we should WALK AWAY NOW, #EU Lose Not GB!

Migrants' rights should not be favoured before locals'

   Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban about EU: ***"They made migrant rights more important than the rights of their citizens."*** Well said!

The UK should not take in migrants when other safe European countries can take them

If they are in France, they can't be refugees. France is a safe country. ***UK shouldn't let ANY of them in***

## PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Docs Not Cops & #PatientsNotPassports stand up against doctors having to check if the patient is migrant and must pay extra fee for NHS

We'll be taking over @NevilleSouthall's Twitter TOMORROW, Tuesday 31st July 7-9PM. We'll be talking about  ***How the '#HostileEnvironment' for migrants affects access to health care and risks public health,***  The #PatientsNotPassports campaign,  #NHS70 and the future of #ournhs!

Criticism of the Home Office's *hostile environment* policy, which is to encourage migrants without citizenship to leave the UK

***What happens when you combine the Home Office's 'hostile environment' policy with a crappy algorithm?*** Real warning here for policymakers that think algorithms are magic



### PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

#### Sympathy for asylum seekers!

*RT @UNHCRUK: We are often asked about **how you can help refugees**. Here are 8 practical suggestions: (...)*

*In 18 months the tabloid scum have transitioned their hate headlines from 'illegal immigrants' via 'immigrants' to 'migrants'. **Whatever your view on immigration, asylum or refugees, being tough on 'migrants' is like being tough on 'customers'** if you run a shop. Thick.*

***This is #Calais. Freezing temperatures & heavy snow; can you imagine sleeping outside in these conditions?** The #refugees do daily. Yesterday we gave out winter coats & waterproof sleeping bag covers. Please keep donating your #Coats4Calais they have never been more needed*

#### Taking responsibility for potential role in the current migration crisis

***Dropping bombs on a country but voting against allowing refugee children fleeing the conflict to come here.** That's got to be worse than running through a wheat field.*

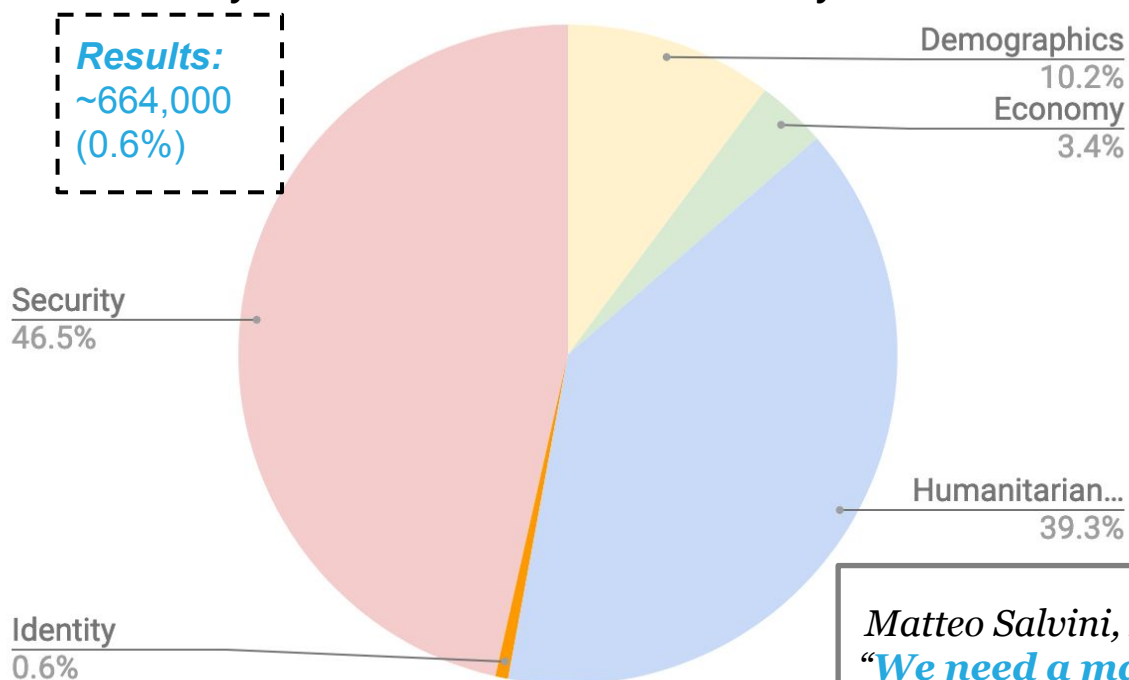
*So, let me get this straight... We're bombing Syria, because Syria bombed Syria, to show Syria that Syria shouldn't bomb Syria. Then, after we've bombed Syria for bombing Syria, **we still won't accept Syrian refugees that are seeking refuge from the bombing**. Got it.*

# Pan-European Narratives | UK

## Identity and Customs (1)

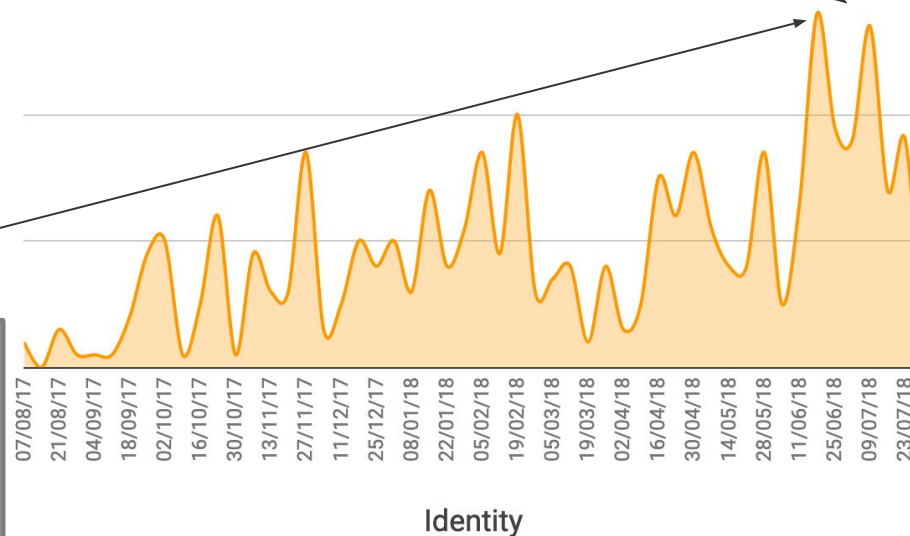
While some Brits fear the destruction of national identity through uncontrollable mass migration, others emphasize the beneficial aspects of cultural change for a nation, and the UK in particular.

Although Identity is a rarely discussed narrative, it is not free of contradictions. For example, some commenters point out how they – originally Western European citizens – become expats instead of migrants, once they relocate to another country.



Went to our local night market in France. English lady engaged us in conversation. To quote her: 'The problem with the UK is that it is overrun with immigrants' Me **'but we are immigrants here in France'** English lady **'But that's different...You're English'** I gave up..

Matteo Salvini, Italy's interior minister: **"We need a mass purification.** Street by street, quarter by quarter." He's talking about migrants, by the way.



# Pan-European Narratives | UK

## Identity & Customs (2)



### ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Local identity is threatened by mass migration

*1,112 Syrian refugees were resettled into the UK in the first 3 months of the year. The Home Office has admitted **not a single one was Christian** despite the persecution they face. In fact Christian applicants were rejected from the resettlement scheme.*

*Even @Nigel\_Farage doesn't seem to understand that **to create a borderless Europe, you have to destroy the national identities of individual nations**. You do this by destroying the cultures of those nations with mass immigration.*

### PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Multiculturalism is beneficial for the country

*The Refugee Food Festival allows refugees to cook their native food at restaurants and **give locals the chance to try new dishes, aiming to overcome some of the anxiety surrounding migration** in Europe following a refugee crisis in 2015.*

*Razan Alsous and her husband Raghid, who are **Syrian refugees, decided to make a version of halloumi when they couldn't source any in their new hometown**. Now as Britain – which consumes more halloumi than any other country outside Cyprus, – faces a halloumi-free summer the ambitious couple's recipe could be called on more than ever.*

Non-UK natives claim UK is their country

*(...) "**Would you have been prouder to have done it for Somalia?**" a reporter had asked Mogadishu-born **Sir Mo Farah** in the aftermath of his 10,000m win in London five long summers ago. The obsessive Arsenal fan had been indignant. **"Not at all, mate. This is my country."**(...)*

# Pan-European Narratives | UK Identity & Customs (3)



## ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Mass migration leads to uncontrollable cultural consequences

*Didn't go down too well for the indigenous Americans when Mass Immigration happened. The clue is in the word '**Mass**'.  
**Even now their few numbers still suffer.***

*RT @ActivePatriots: Denmark, like many European countries, took large volumes of **Muslim migrants. Of course they failed to assimilate & live in parallel societies.** A burka ban has been introduced & compulsory Danish language & values lessons for children*

## PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Cultural change is inevitable and beneficial for any country

***Setting cultures in aspic is** a mugs game in as much as it is **impossible**. The history of humanity is a history of flux, cultures change, French youth rap even if it is in French.*

*Me: **I am thinking of moving to Berlin.**  
People on the internet: **yeah but watch out for all those immigrants**  
Me: I uh I was suggesting becoming an im....  
Internet: immigrants are really awful best avoid them when u move to a country where you're not a citizen  
Me: never mind*



# Pan-European Narratives | UK

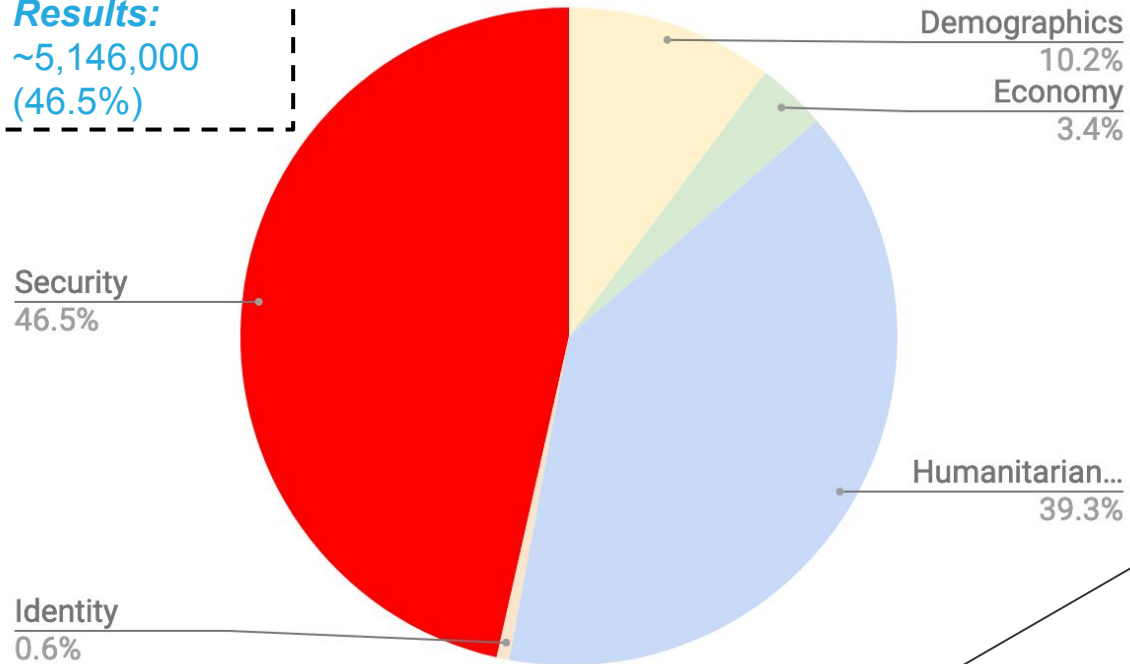
## Security (1)

Almost half of the public social media posts discuss the security aspect of migration, and in general, the consequences of domestic and European migration policies trigger the highest engagement.

Specifically, on the anti-migrant spectrum, commentators are alert to crime related to migrants, while pro-migrant voices emphasize the threat migrants face in the UK due to the growing anti-Muslim sentiment.

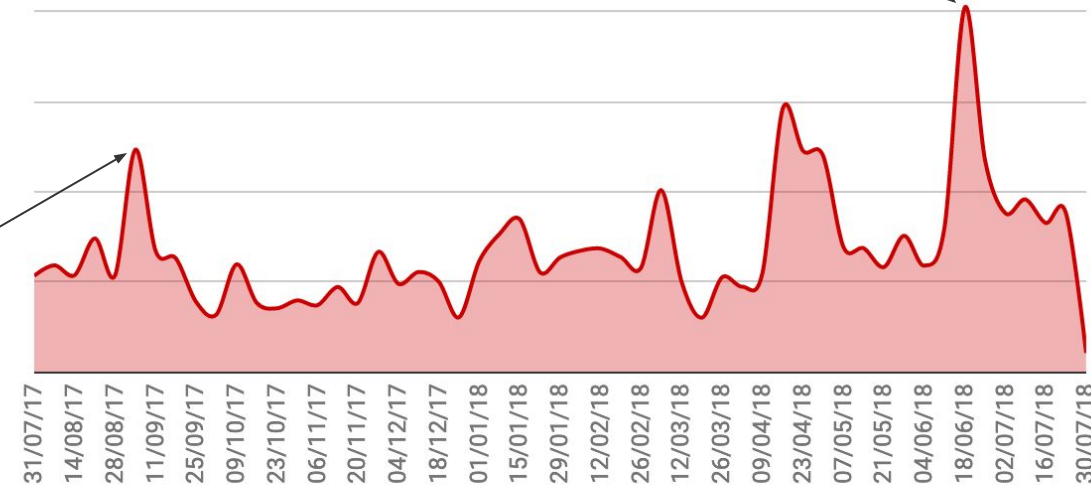
### Results:

~5,146,000  
(46.5%)



Growing row between CDU and CSU over **'open doors' migration policy** may cause Merkel's resignation

Leak of UK Home Office **post-Brexit migration policy**



Security



## ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

### Migrant support goes in vain

**News:** Parsons Green bombing: Police arrest second refugee foster child

**Comment:** *Two Syrian "refugees". Will bleeding hearts who told us to admit "children" without checks have 2nd thoughts? No.*

### Crime rates rise due to growing migration

Khan admits *rising population (caused by migration) is contributing to knife crime*, then says he can't do anything about it. How about not endorsing open borders?

We are not racist, we believe in a fair Britain. *We want our country back from illegal immigrants*. We want our laws obeyed, and want grooming gangs eradicated. *We want an end to knife crime and acid attacks*. We also feel we should have Free Speech in our own country. #IAMTOMMY

## PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

### UK citizens threatened by anti-Muslim sentiment

Humza Yousaf reveals he carries attack alarm over *fears for his safety after racist threats*. The Scottish Transport Minister insists the abuse has gotten worse since the Brexit vote and Donald Trump's election as US President

### Crime has fallen despite large-scale migration

Never mind that evidence suggests *immigration is linked to higher levels of social mobility or that crime has fallen*. Moral panic and a scapegoat for why life is tough generate better headlines

### Undocumented migrants in the UK are defenceless against hate crime

They often fled their homelands to *escape sexual abuse* - but for many asylum seekers, *it continues in the UK*. Fear of deportation often means they don't tell police (...)

# + *Local Issues in the UK Around Migration*



---

2.

# Local Issues | UK

## Brexit

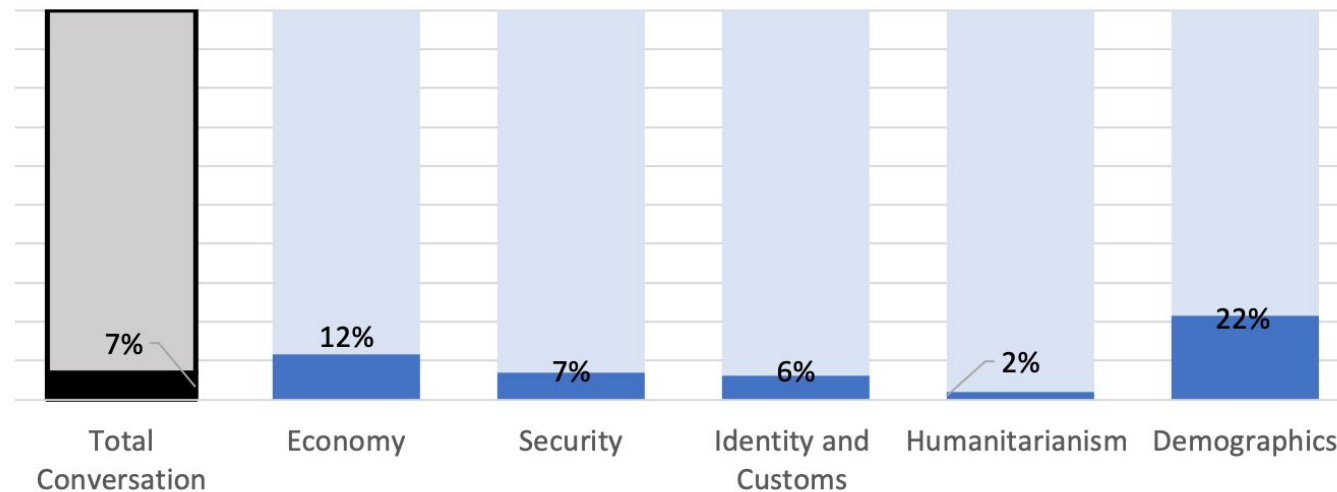
In a referendum on 23 June 2016, small majority of those voting supported the UK's leave of the European Union. Circumstances of the exit are currently under negotiation, and the UK is due to leave the EU on 29 March 2019.

*I know UK immigration laws & it's also a fact that **I will become an illegal immigrant without a deal at 23:00 on 29/03/19**. It was immigration minister Caroline Nokes who refused to reassure us last week that settled status would happen in that scenario. What a scaremonger, eh?*

*Saying they want to stay in the Customs Union & Single Market. So **uncontrolled borders, unmanaged immigration subordination to the EU Court = a total betrayal of #BREXIT** & the #British people. If you want #Brexit, only #UKIP is committed to delivering it! 🇬🇧*

*The entire project 'fear the eu' has misled, lied about 'floods of immigrants,' overspent and broken electoral commission rules, accepted funds from dodgy and deranged sources, had no concrete policies of any kind...need we go on!*

**Future of the UK's economy** is the main concern of Brits in the wake of Brexit and considering the prospect of guest workers having to leave the country under the new regulations.



■ Share of comments within the narrative in the context of Brexit



# + *European- and Domestic Politics' Context in the Discussion Around Migration in the UK*



---

3.

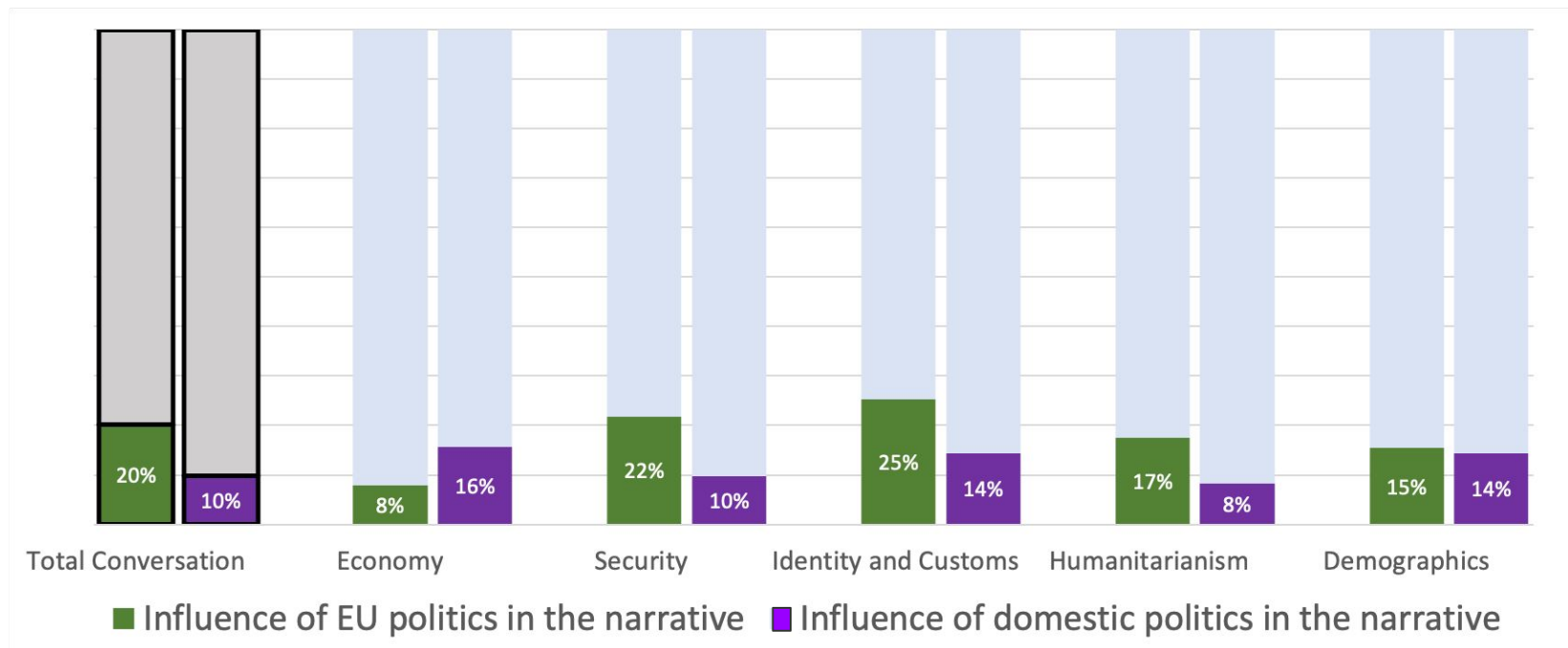


## European and Domestic Politics Context within Narratives | UK

# Migration is a largely international problem, while Brexit is framed by domestic politics

European politicians and countries often appear in the debate around security and humanitarianism, the two key narratives around migration in the UK.

Brexit is mainly discussed in relation to the local context: it appears to be perceived as a problem created by Brits themselves, instead of the European Union or its other member states.





# + *Discussion Tone in the UK*



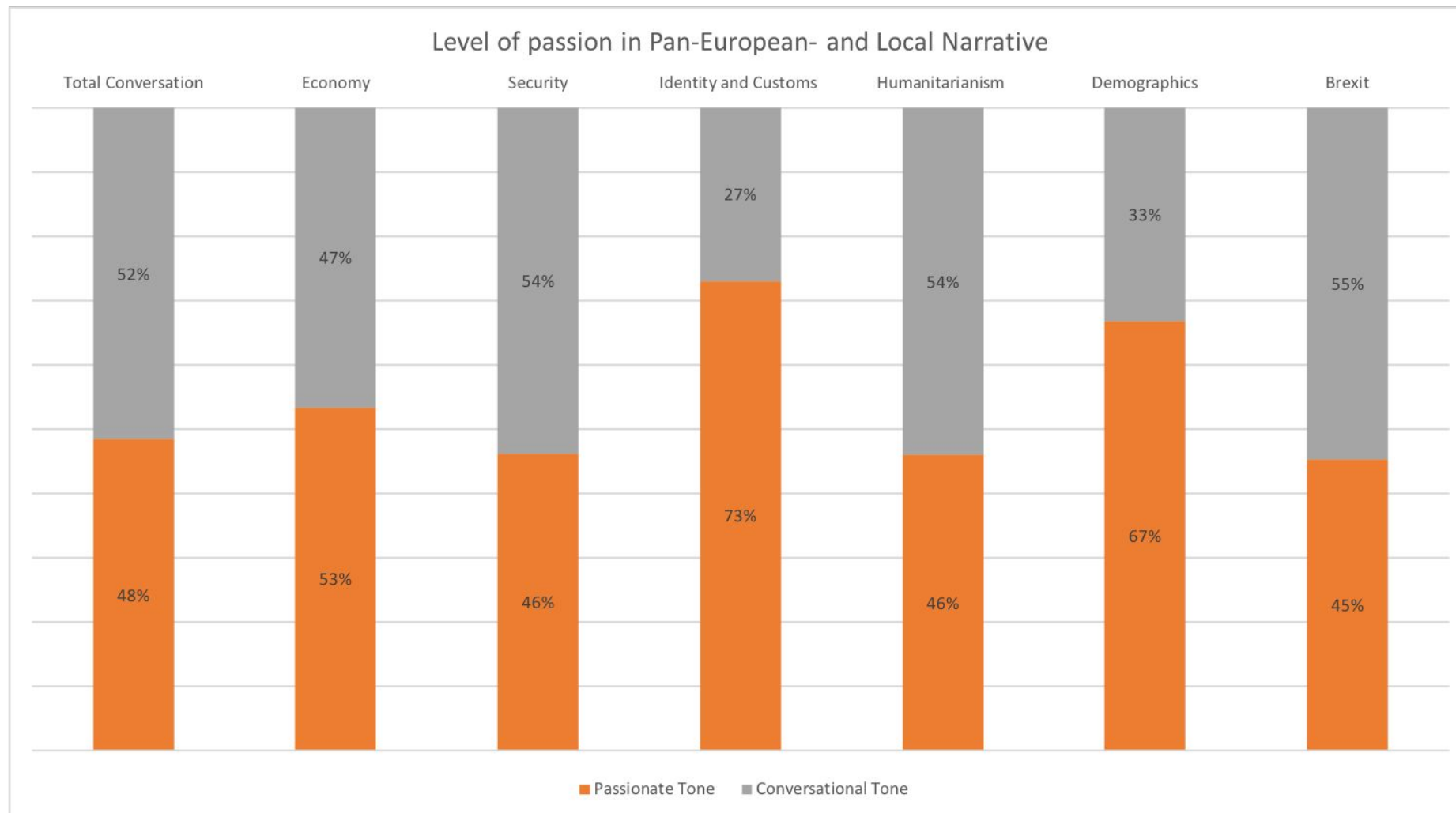
---

4.

## Discussion Tone | UK

# Overwhelmingly Passionate Conversation on Identity and Demographics

Passionate and conversational comments appear equally in the overall conversation around migration in the UK. Certain narratives, such as **identity and demographics**, trigger posts that are loaded with emotions.



# + *Conversation Channels in the UK*



---

5.

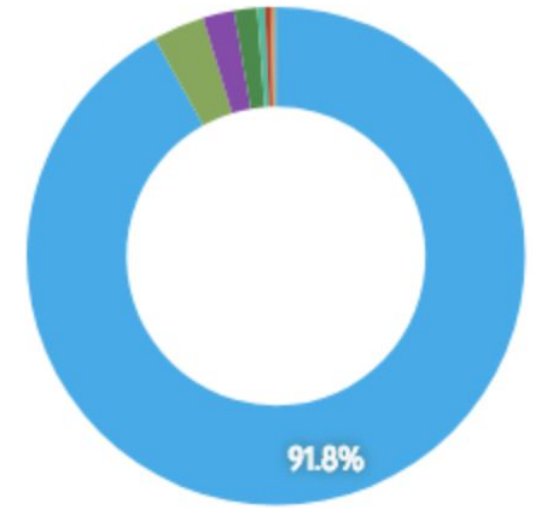


## Channel Distribution | UK

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

When it comes to addressing migration in the public social media space, British people most often go to Twitter to share their views. This platform contains more than 90% of the public conversations, while the rest is divided between online news sites, blogs and forums.

**Results:**  
11 066 000



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



# Most Influential Authors | UK

## Professional Journalists Write Most Influential Posts

The highest number of shares, retweets, comments and likes are triggered by posts that appear on professional journalists' Twitter accounts, and the daily news section dominates the conversation.

Most Influential Websites	Description
msn.com	50th biggest news source globally
theguardian.com	Online news, rank 21
dailymail.co.uk	Online news, rank 23
news.yahoo.com	Online news, rank 13
thestudentroom.co.uk	Online forum with active politics section