

Migration Narratives in Europe

A Social Media Intelligence Study

Country report for the Republic of Slovenia



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

- 2019 -



Introduction | SI

Context to the Slovenian Discussion on Migration

- Slovenia has been a **member of the European Union since 2004** and joined the euro-zone in 2007. In 2015 the country's population was 2,062,874.
- **The presence of refugees is miniscule in Slovenia.** Asylum applications peaked in 2016 with 1,310 cases and dropped to regular by 2017 with 160 cases. The ratio of refugees compared to the local population is 0.01%, which is one of the smallest in the EU.*
- Despite the small number of migrants in the country, the **Slovenian conversation on migration is the 5th biggest in the EU**, as public social media conversation on the topic in one year consists of ~231,300 posts.
- Although a majority of the votes was won by Janez Jansa's right-wing populist Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) at the 2018 parliamentary elections, the government was formed based on the coalition of the current prime minister **Marjan Šarec's** list (LMŠ), the center-left **social-democrats** (SD), previous prime minister Miro Cerar's social-liberal **Modern Centre Party** (SMC), the social-liberal **party of Alenka Bratušek** (SAB), and the social-liberal **Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia** (DeSUS).
- To minimize immigrant influx, the previous **Slovenian government built a wire fence at the country's border with Croatia**, and introduced strict controlling policies to recognize applicant's need for humanitarian aid.



*Source: europarl.europa.eu

Introduction | SI

Politicians' Fear-mongering Set the Tone

Slovenia hosts very few refugees, yet the anti-migrant sentiment is strong in the country with homogenous ethnic background and strong religious traditions.

Although Slovenia struggles with severe labour shortage, such constructive aspects of migration are overshadowed by the perceived security threat posed by refugees. Politicians strongly fuel this negative sentiment and the run-up to the parliamentary elections held in June 2018 generated extensive discussions about the consequences of migration. Although failed to form the government, the party that collected most votes was Janez Janša's Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), which strongly built on the affirmation to protect Slovenia against migration.

While the fear-mongering tenor resonates with many Slovenians, many find that migration is just another domain for politicians to pursue corruption in the name of crisis management.





Key Findings | SI

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

Size of Pan-European Narratives

Almost half of the Slovenian discourse reflects the **security** threat of migration, while humanitarian and cultural aspects both come up in a fifth of the overall conversation. Demographic and economic consequences are rarely discussed.

Local Issues

During the **2018 Parliamentary Election** campaign, political parties used the migration crisis to amplify the threat of refugees and to offer a solution by posing as a savior of the country.

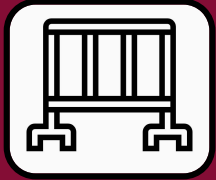
EU & Domestic Politics

As domestic politicians frequently offer arguments on migration, **people's discourse on the topic is strongly political**. Apart from Slovenian political references, international examples and events are also frequently discussed.

Conversation Channels

A majority of the Slovenian discussion on public social media takes place on **Twitter**, where the right-wing, anti-migrant outlook is pushed by individual users, politicians and media conglomerates alike.

Pan-European Narratives in the Slovenian Context



The **security** threat posed by refugees is the **most prevalent aspect** of the migration discussion in Slovenia. **Mainly anti-immigrant voices** demand strengthened protection of borders, while isolated voices warn about the threats of criminal stereotypization.



A fifth of the discourse reflect the necessity of humanitarian help: a good portion of people **acclaim the help for those in need** (often citing international examples), while **many argue that humanitarian aid is unnecessary** as migration is not Slovenia's problem.



While Slovenians often express **strong anti-Muslim sentiment**, the scandal of the deported Syrian illegal refugee, Ahmad Shamieh revealed that immigrants may integrate well in Slovenia and pose no real harm on local culture.



Despite Slovenia's crippling shortage of workers, the issue rarely comes up in context with migration. While some people call for the bare consideration, **many strongly oppose migrants' integration to the labour market**, calling the threat of migration bigger than its economic opportunity.



Although few Slovenians address the economic aspects of migration, the topic channels **frustration over the unfairly generous treatment of refugees, while locals suffer poor economic conditions**.

+ *Pan-European Narratives in Slovenia*



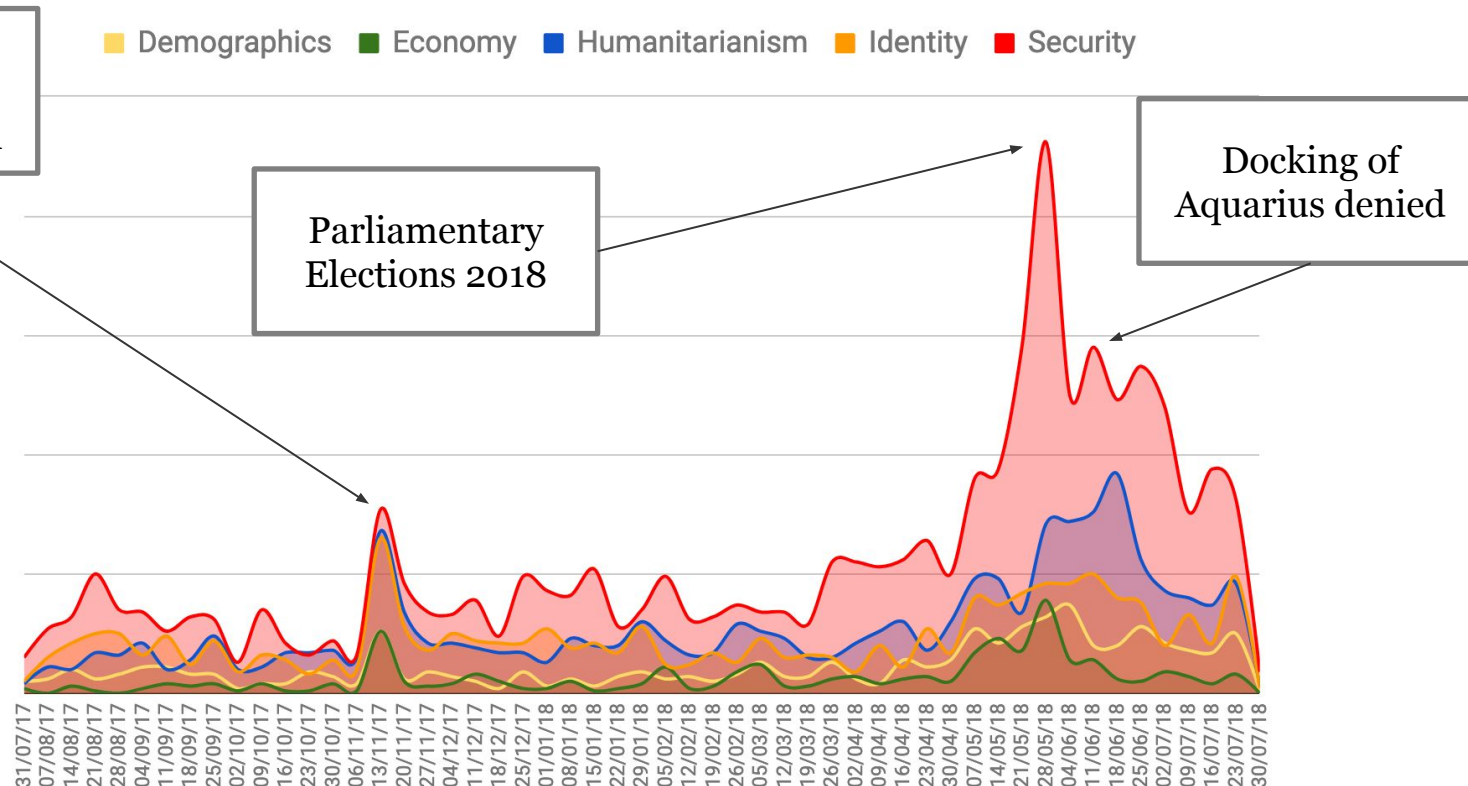
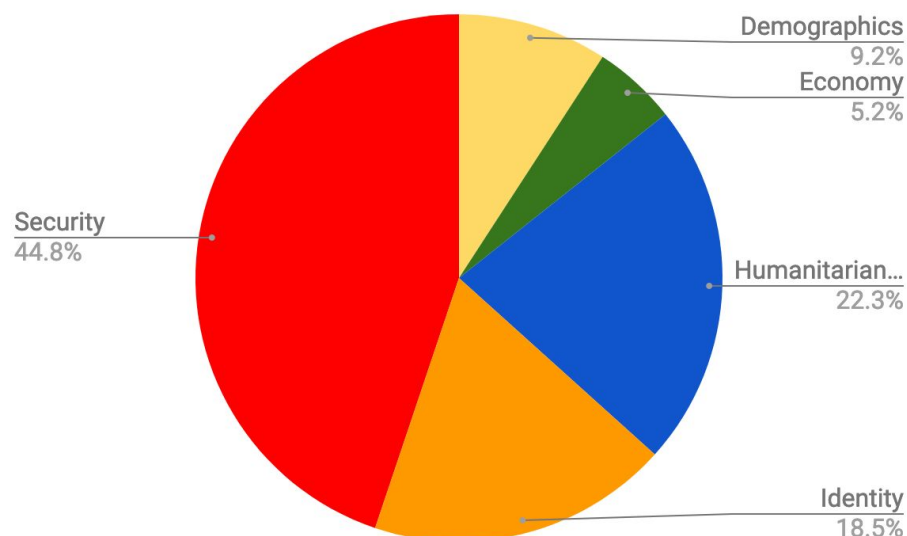
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Context of the Slovenian Republic migration discourse

Fear of deteriorating security is the biggest concern of Slovenians over the current migration crisis. This sentiment was leveraged during the run-up to the 2018 Parliamentary Elections, while another key event, the deportation of an otherwise well-integrated Syrian refugee, triggered extensive discussions on the humanitarian and cultural aspects of migration.

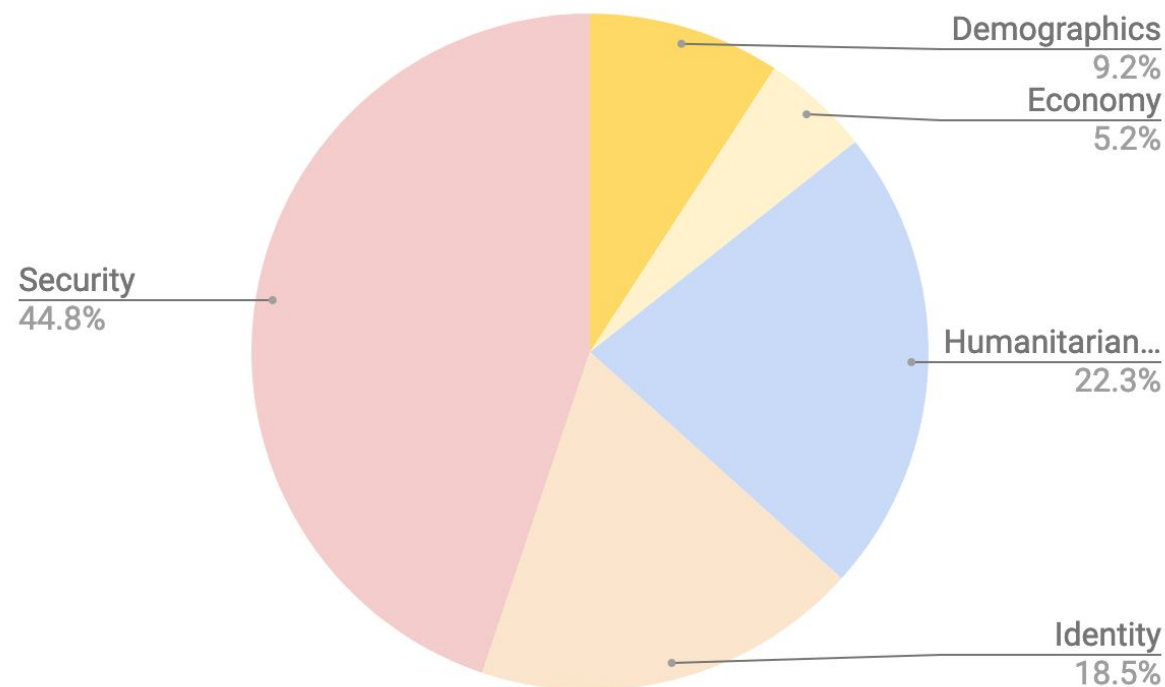
Results:
~231,300



Demographics (1): Threat Over Opportunity

Slovenia is suffering from mass emigration of talented workforce, while low-skilled workers travel frequently to take up jobs in Austria. The resulting **labour shortage cripples the economy**, but the problem is relatively rarely discussed in context with migration.

While there are some people who consider migrant workforce as a tool to manage labour shortage in Slovenia, others claim that this is a utopia, and warn that **the security threat that migration poses is more severe than the labour market crisis**.



Pan-European Narratives | SI

Demographics (2): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

It is a utopia that labour market crisis can be solved through migration

*Some are shouting that we need migrants as a workforce. Those idiots don't get it that **refugees didn't come here to work, but to spread Islam.** With terror.*

***Slovenian patriots see a solution in support of Slovenian families, development and new jobs, so that more children will be born and young people will not leave to go abroad.** If you want more migrants, you should bring them to your own house so they will not endanger Slovenia.*

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Migration should be considered as a means to solve the labour market crisis

Slovenia currently has extremely low unemployment.** We are practically in the shortage of labor. Payments for work must be raised, and **it will also be necessary to slightly change the discourse on migrants.

Pan-European Narratives | SI

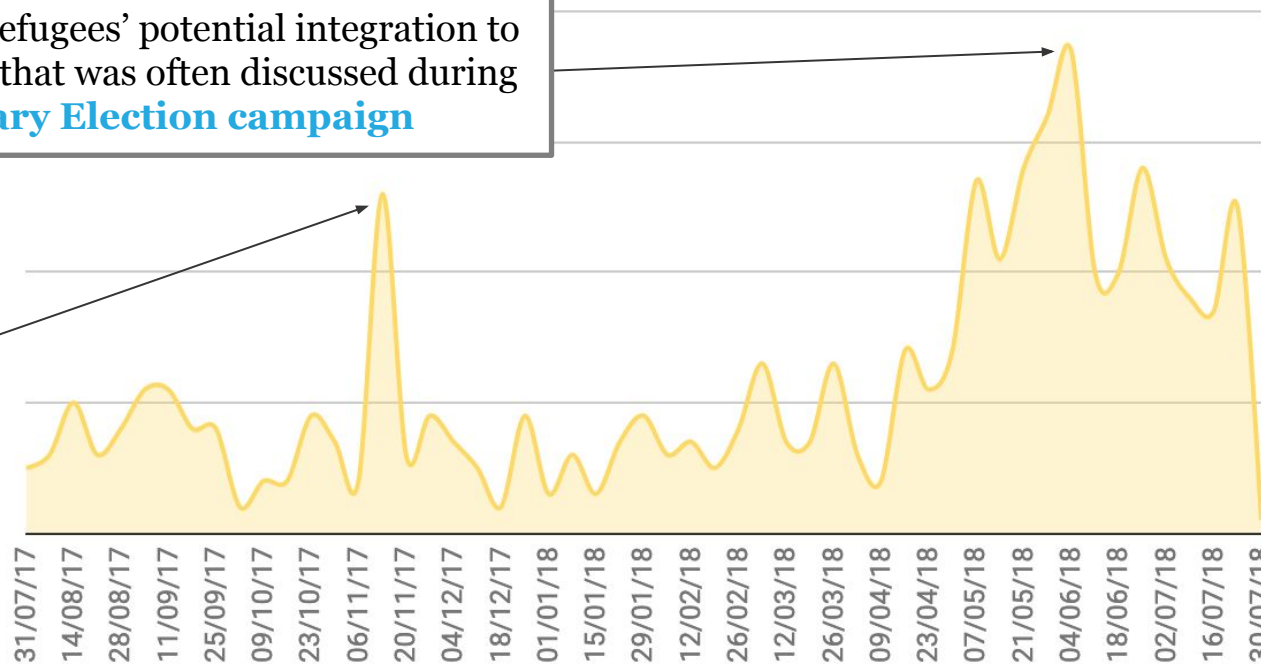
Demographics (3): Top Stories

Refugees' integration to the local labour market was extensively discussed at two landmark events of the migration discourse in Slovenia: first, the deportation of Ahmad Shamieh showed that migrants are able to take up jobs and become beneficial members of the local community. The second event was the 2018 parliamentary election campaign, during which anti-immigrant parties emphasized the security threat over the economic opportunity.

Results:
~21,000 (9%)

The labour market crisis and refugees' potential integration to the labour market was a topic that was often discussed during the **2018 Parliamentary Election campaign**

The deportation of **Ahmad Shamieh** triggered discussions on the integration of refugees to the local labour market



Demographics



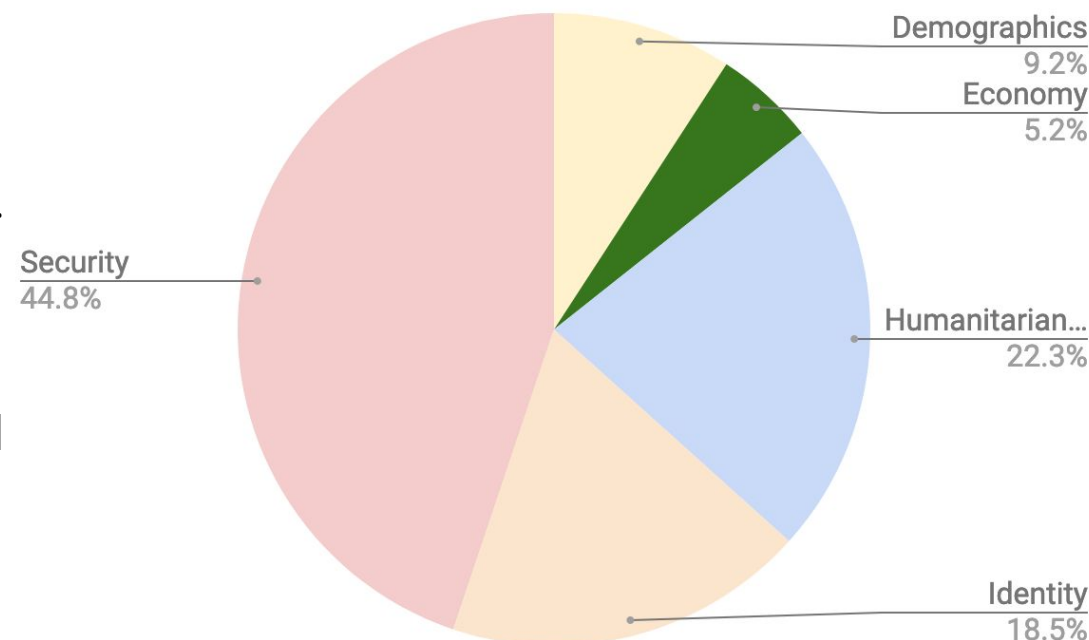
Pan-European Narratives | SI

Economy (1): Disappointment Over Refugees' Financial Support

Although the economic aspects of migration are rarely discussed, it reveals the disappointment of many Slovenians. Anti-migrant voices point out that **many of those who are currently migrating** are not fleeing war but look for better economic environment and on this basis they **do not deserve the special financial aid** that they receive. This seems **especially irritating in light of the poor economic status of less privileged locals**, in which context the zero-sum-game argument arises.

This sentiment was clearly referred to during the **2018 election campaign**, when right-wing parties called out the economic unfairness locals have to suffer against migrants.

However, some form a more contrasted opinion on refugee aid distribution and point out that the real **winners of the current crisis are corrupt local politicians**, who are engaged in shady deals over refugee funding.





Pan-European Narratives | SI

Economy (2): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Refugees in the current crisis do not deserve help

*In the old days, **healthy men who were fleeing a war instead of defending their homeland were called deserters. Nowadays, we call anyone a refugee and offer them residence**, food and pocket money, at the expense of taxpayers.*

Refugees must not receive more than locals

*Many Slovenian retirees, who have been paying taxes to the state and the pension fund for 40 years, are now living at a minimum level – **illegal migrants must not be any higher**. The luxury that migrants have is actually unavailable for many Slovenian families.*

500 euros a month just to feed a single illegal immigrant**. Think about it: **do you also spend that much?

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Pointing out the corruption connected to the economic support of refugees

*A migrant gets only **18 €**, the rest (**1963 €**) goes to the **central organisation for their defence**. And this is paid by ordinary workers who have to work all month. Fine. But it is time for ordinary people to understand the corruption behind this.*



Pan-European Narratives | SI

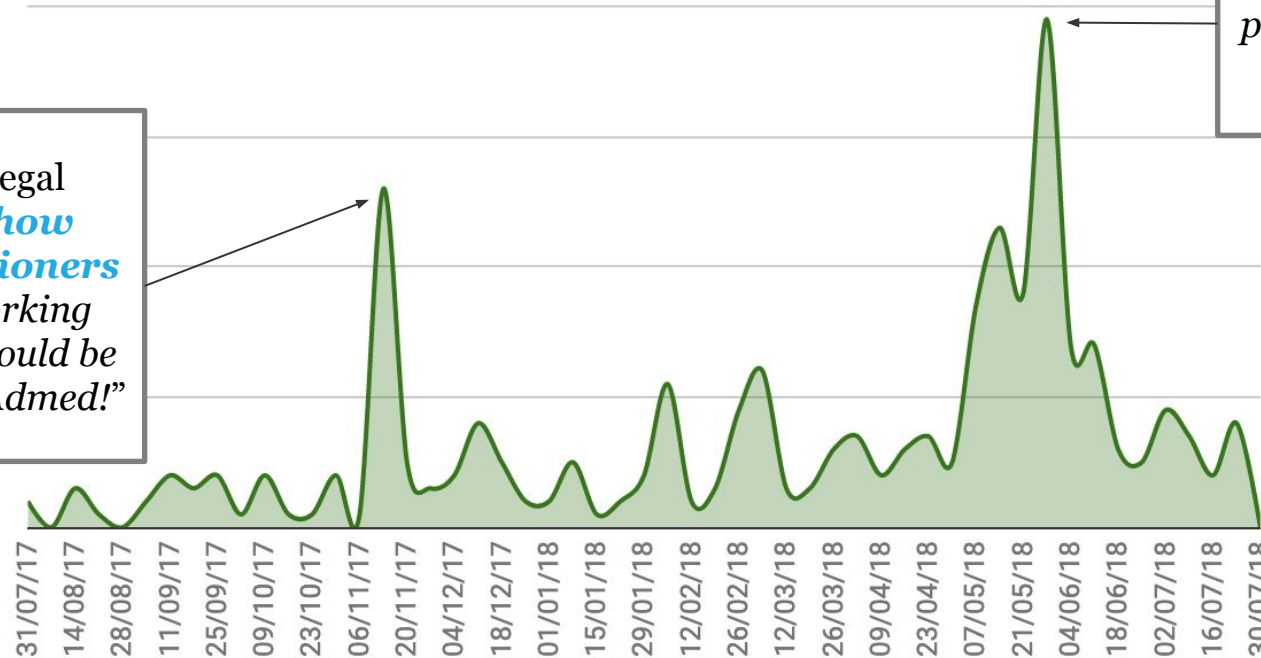
Economy (3): Top Stories

The conversation around the economic aspects of migration peaked around the two key events of the topic: Ahmad Shamieh's deportation triggered outrage over the economic unfairness of migrant support and this sentiment was leveraged during the election campaign by leading right-wing parties.

Results:
~12,100 (5%)

On a TV show about the illegal migrant Ahmad: ***No TV show about our Slovenian pensioners*** who do some 40 years of working with a 400 euro pension. It would be more sad than the one about Admed!"

"1963 eur per migrant? Stop! We will protect Slovenia!" (Election billboard of SDS)



Economy

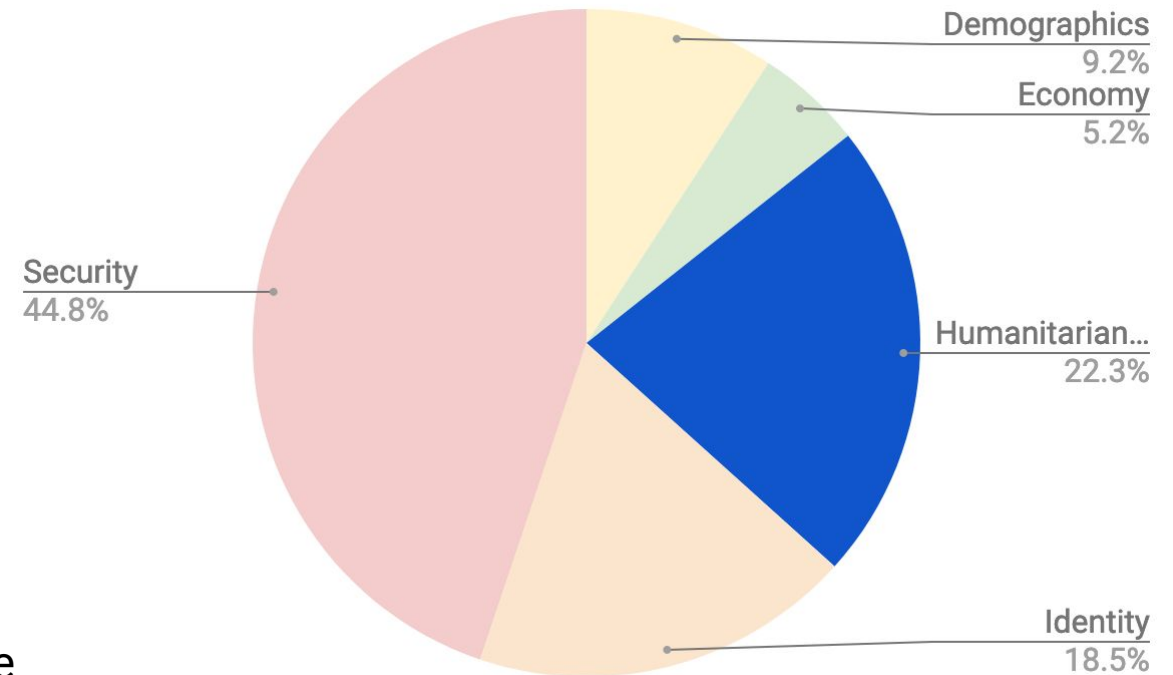


Pan-European Narratives | SI

Humanitarianism (1): Controversial Sentiment Around Humanitarian Help

About one-fifth of the Slovenian online discourse reflects the humanitarian aspect of migration, and this segment shows the most pro-migrant sentiment. **Initiatives to raise awareness on refugees' sufferings** receive relatively wide exposure in social media, and people also **applaud other countries** such as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Greece for **providing humanitarian aid for refugees**.

However, some Slovenians claim that **humanitarian help is hypocritical**, especially when those politicians call for it who's been involved with parties that committed war crimes similar to the ones people now flee. In some cases cynicism goes even further as people claim that the best form of humanitarian help is the one that does not have to take place at all.





Pan-European Narratives | SI

Humanitarianism (2): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Supporting migrants is hypocritical

@ Tanja Fajon (politician of the Social Democrats Party) You are still in a party that has never apologized or regretted the interwar and post-war killings of women and children. (...) **Every word of "compassion" to illegal migrants from your mouth sounds extremely hypocritical.**

The best way of humanitarian help would be if it was entirely unnecessary

The idea of ordering refugees to abandoned settlements is an idea for a new ghetto. **It is important to find ways to deal with those who arrived in Slovenia, but the best would be to deter them from the desire to come here at the first place.**

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Events to raise awareness of refugees

An exhibition of Turkish children's illustrations are displayed in Ljubljana in the Pritličje cafe, in the atrium of ZRC Sazu and at the Faculty of Education.

Examples of helping migrants from other countries

To everyone who is screaming against refugees and migrants! ☹️ in **Bosnia** they are setting up refugee centers and no one is organizing a rally against this. Neighbors are even ready to help. **They say that it is logical to help people in need because they understand their situation.**

Pan-European Narratives | SI

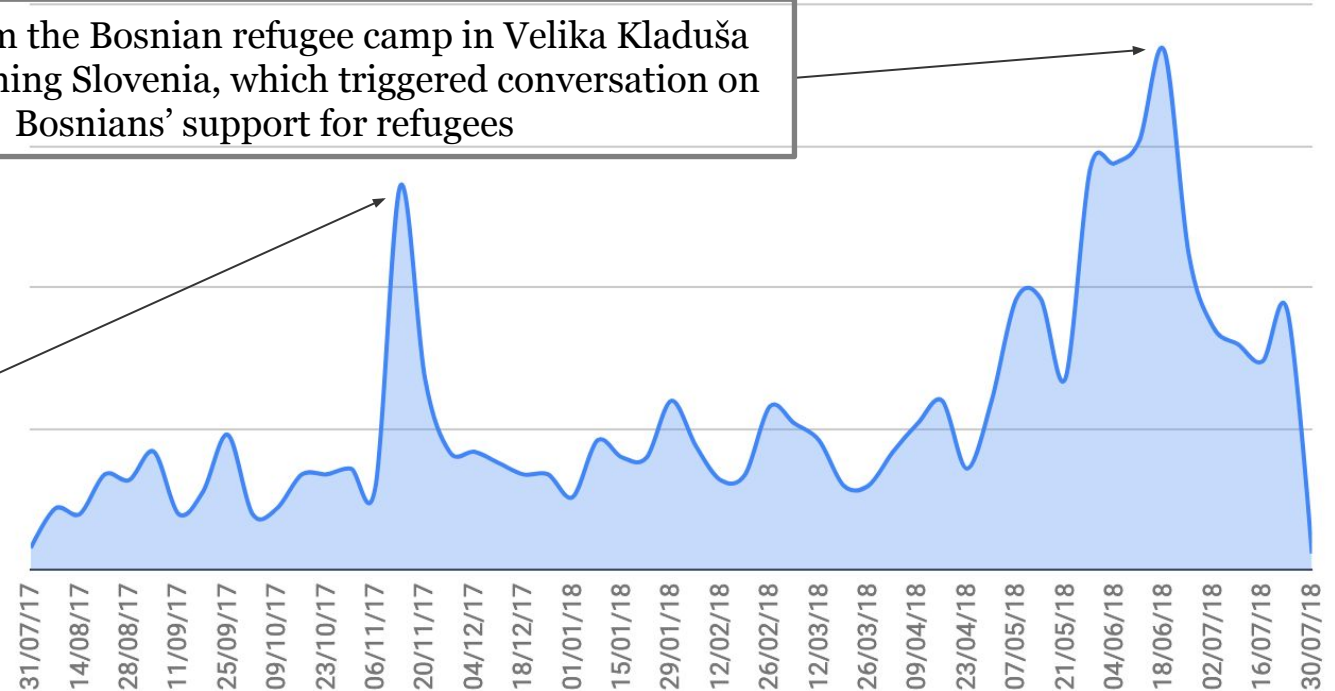
Humanitarianism (3): Top Stories

There is avid interest for news on migration management from countries which refugees reach earlier than Slovenia. This indicates that many Slovenians believe that the migration crisis is not their problem. Controversies around the issue are also present in regards to the Syrian refugee Ahmad Shamieh's deportation, who became a well-integrated citizen in Slovenia without holding a valid residence permit.

Results:
~52,000 (22%)

Migrants from the Bosnian refugee camp in Velika Kladuša were approaching Slovenia, which triggered conversation on Bosnians' support for refugees

Deportation of Ahmad Shamieh triggered both pro- and anti-immigrant discourse



Humanitarianism

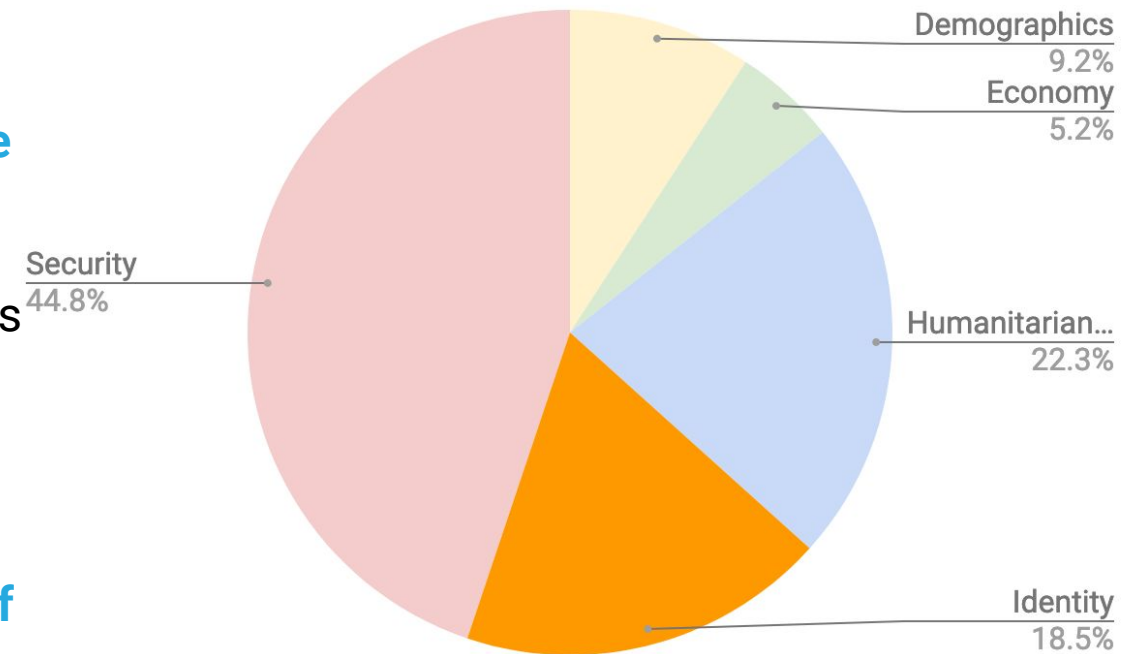


Identity and Customs (1): What is the real nature of refugees' cultural influence?

A strong anti-Muslim sentiment can be recognized in Slovenia as **many people declare multiculturalism unwanted** and oppose the welcoming of people with Muslim religion. This cultural rejection was leveraged during the 2018 parliamentary election run-up, when the conservative Christian-democratic Slovenian People's Party (SLS) used anti-Muslim rhetoric in their campaign.

Naysayers also point out that Slovenia shall not treat refugees with courtesy in a cultural sense – instead, **it is the responsibility of refugees to integrate into Slovenian society**. On the same note, the story of a well-integrated Syrian refugee Ahmad Shamieh confronted many Slovenians with how little actual influence Muslim immigrants have on the local culture.

There are some Slovenians, who examine the current crisis from a wider historical perspective and **warn of the threat of religious and cultural intolerance**.





Pan-European Narratives | SI

Identity & Customs (2): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Integration is the duty and responsibility of migrants

*(...) Integration is not an immigrant's right, but his duty. **It is not the environment's task to deal with the integration of aliens, but the aliens must take steps to integrate in their new home.** This applies to me when I go abroad, and for foreigners here.*

Fear of losing national sovereignty

*What will Slovenia become after 3 June 2018 [election day]? **A sovereign state of the Slovenian nation, or a "multicultural" immigrant conglomerate?***

Fear of Islamisation –
No mosques in
Slovenia!



PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

History should have taught us to avoid religious or cultural intolerance

***It seems that history has not taught us anything and that it repeats itself.** More and more racial and religious intolerance, political accusations and threats; there is still a strong presence of the **stigmatization** of those who are different, whether they are disabled, gay, poor or **refugees**.*

Multiculturalism has always been part of European culture

*I wonder what the patriotic people would think about **implementing Arab numbers in our school system, so that migrants would feel more welcome here.***

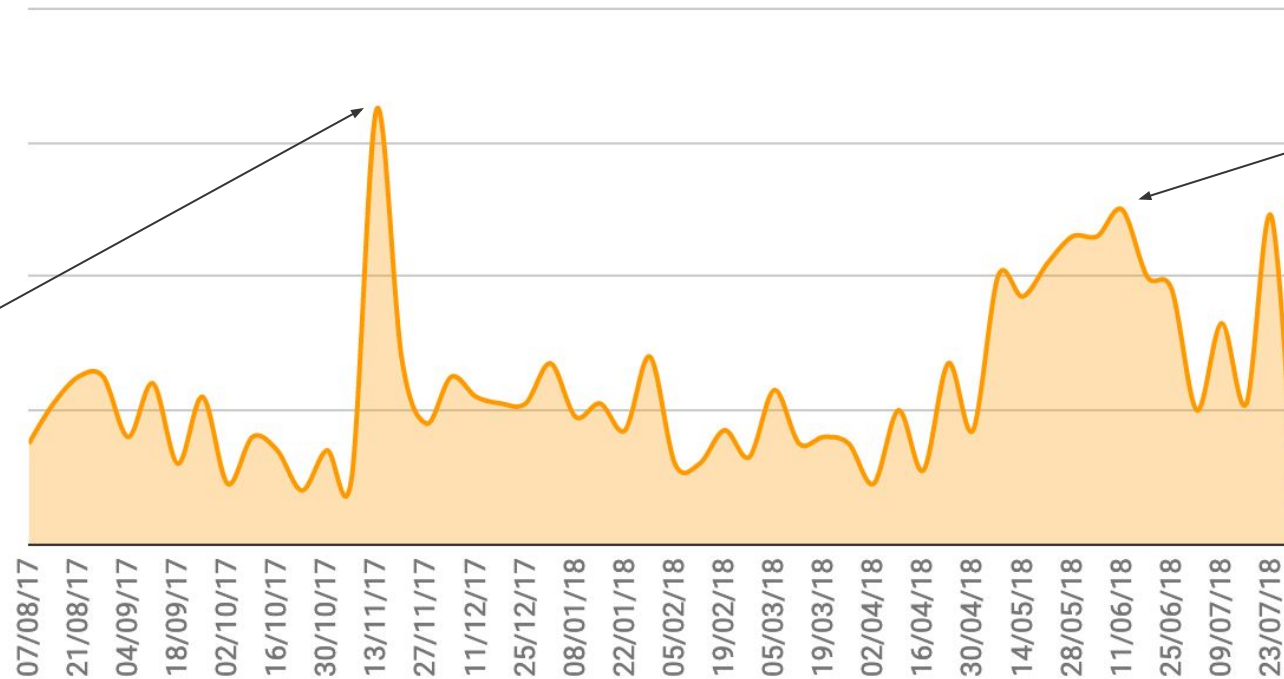
Pan-European Narratives | SI

Identity & Customs (3): Top Stories

The story of Syrian refugee Ahmad Shamieh received close attention: the Syrian held no official residence permit in Slovenia, but operated a successful barber shop and integrated well to the local community. His deportation triggered a debate on the influence of migrants' integration on Slovenian culture and everyday life.

Results:
~43,300 (19%)

Deportation of Ahmad Shamieh triggered discourse on the level of integration to Slovenian society



Migrants coming through Bosnian refugee camp to Slovenia are feared to "turn Europe into darkness"

Identity



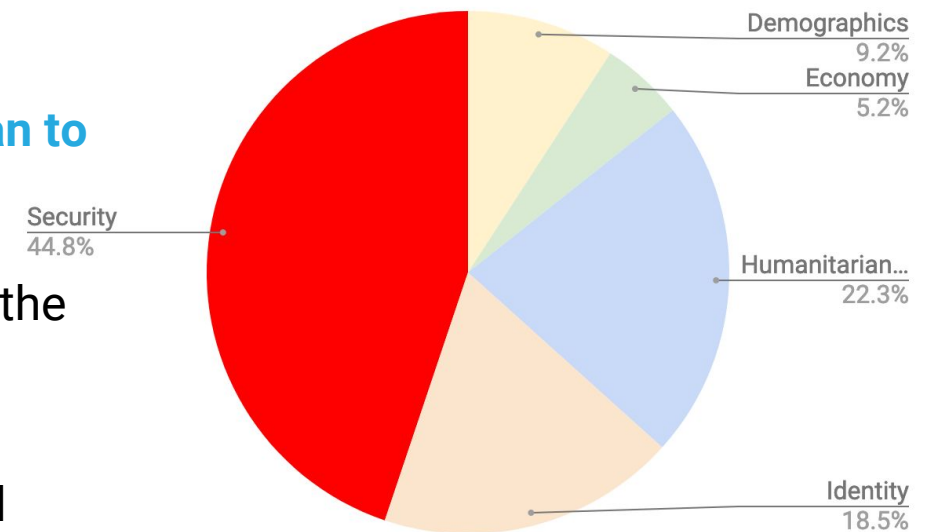
Security (1): Islamophobia Fuels Fear of Migrants

Slovenian **Islamophobia** contributes to a general fear of immigrants, thus the security threat is the most prevalent topic of the online discussion around migration. Many people cite crimes committed by migrants in other European countries, sometimes pointing out that European women face a serious risk of rape by refugees. Furthermore, some people claim that refugees face lesser charges for the same crime than locals.

Consequently, the anti-immigrant sentiment in Slovenia is strong, and many people discuss the importance of the local army and specific border protection measures. Suggestions appear that **Slovenia should strengthen ties with the Visegrád 4 countries** and stand up against Europe's welcoming approach to migrants.

In the meantime, Slovenia takes a particular measure to deal with immigrant influx. **Police vehicles transport refugees from the Croatian to the Austrian border**, thus avoiding refugees' actual presence in the country. The action is somewhat divisive but shows the general anti-immigrant approach of Slovenians: while some people condemn the police for the very effort to transport migrants, others applaud the efficiency in minimizing the threat of refugees.

Pro-migrant voices are few in Slovenia, but mainly point out the cruel stereotypes Muslims have to face in the country.





ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Migrants pose a threat on national security

Don't jump on the French-German bandwagon, because is full of migrants, criminals, and rapists. We have to jump on the Visegrad bandwagon instead.

Reliable sources claim that about 4-7,000 migrants have left the refugee camp of Velika Kladusa in Bosnia, and are heading to Slovenia. Rumour has it that they have weapons, some even possess firearms.

Today is International Women's Day. Has anyone pointed out all the violence and rape that is threatening European women through migrants?

Immigrant crime is met by lesser consequences compared to violence committed by locals

If an illegal migrant commits a burglary, he goes to an asylum home, but if the same burglary is committed by a Slovenian national, he goes to jail!? This cannot happen! (...)

Threat of immigration must be taken seriously

Tanja Fajon has tweeted that those who want to remove the fence at the border will consequently "import 10,000 migrants each year". Islamic migrants fear only the military. In the modern world of security and prosperity, you need an army!

Authorities transport refugees from the HR-SI to the SI-AT border to avoid their presence

I suggest we cut wages of policemen to pay for all the expenses we have with the migrants, since they are just a taxi service for migrants.

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Criminal Muslims is a stereotype

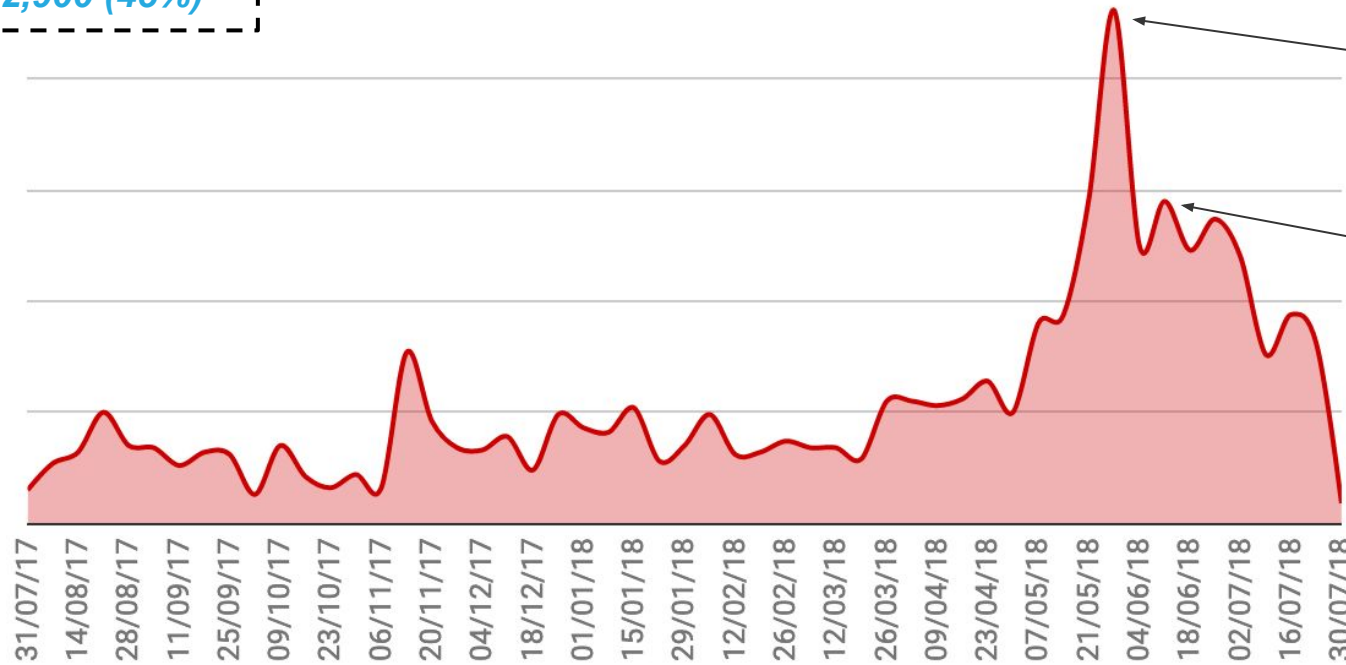
Perhaps Ahmed Shamiah's biggest problem is that he is completely opposite to the disguised stereotype of a dangerous migrant.

Pan-European Narratives | SI

Security (3): Top Stories

Slovenians' fear of migrants was strategically fuelled during the election campaign in 2018, as right-wing politicians used the migration threat to gain momentum and popularity among voters. Consequently, international news on migration was often interpreted as a way of undermining European security.

Results:
~102,900 (45%)



Parliamentary elections on June 3rd – many of the right wing parties' campaigns were built on offering protection against migrants

Docking of Aquarius was denied in Italy and Malta due to security threats (the vessel was eventually allowed to dock in Spain)

Security

+ *Local Issues in Slovenia Around Migration*



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Local Issues | SI

Parliamentary Election 2018

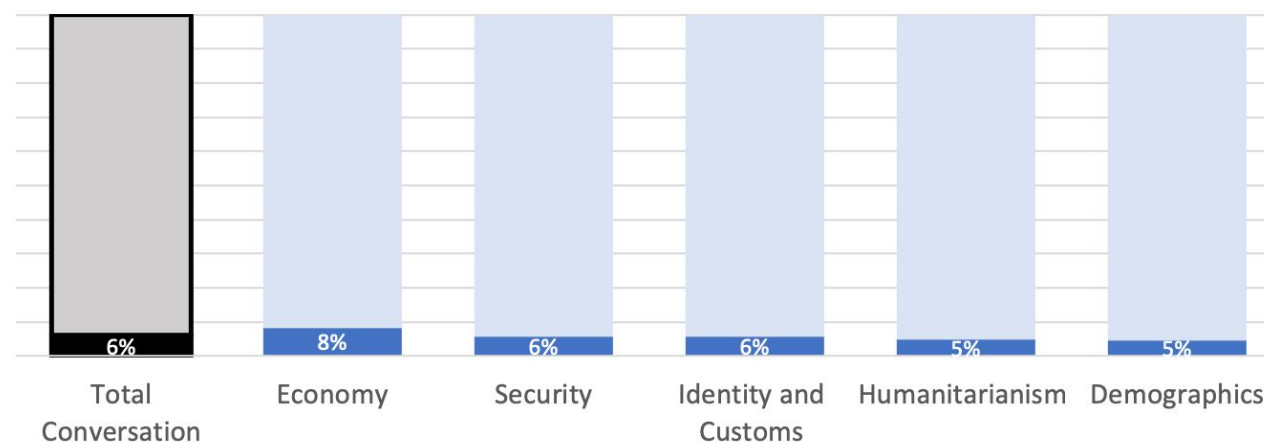
The 2018 Parliamentary Elections in Slovenia exposed several aspects of the migration crisis. As it was shown by the Pan-European narratives, economic and security concerns over refugees' arrival was discussed in detail during the campaign.

Right-wing politicians used the threat to gain popularity among voters and argued for the need to protect Slovenia against refugees.

Although the right-wing, anti-migrant Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS, lead by Janez Janša) gained most seats in Parliament, the government was formed by a coalition of five parties which are not explicitly anti-migrant and look for a feasible option to manage the crisis in Slovenia.

*In 2015, I studied for a semester in Greece. **How did I feel when they warned me not to walk alone on the streets, because migrants could be violent towards girls? Horrible!! I do not want that in Slovenia, and so on 3rd June I will vote for SDS!***

*Spreading fear of migrants or spreading fear of Janša, it is the same strategy either way. **No matter the side, all fears are taken advantage of and are used to motivate voters.***



■ Share of comments within the narrative in the context of the 2018 election

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



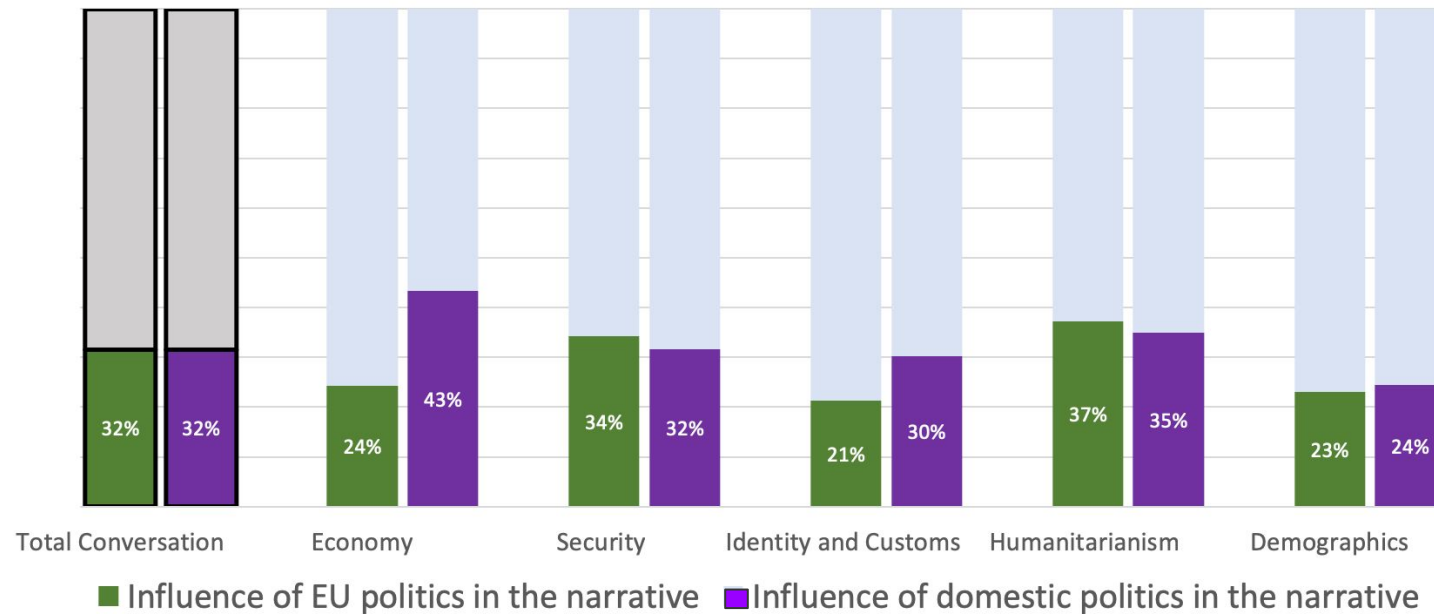
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European and Domestic Politics Context within Narratives | SI

Strongly Political Conversation

As many Slovenian politicians built their communication on the economic, cultural, and security threat that migration poses, locals' discussion is strongly influenced by the political context.

However, since the number of refugees in Slovenia is rather low, international examples (especially those coming from Germany) and events (such as the docking of the rescue ship Aquarius) trigger avid attention in the country.



+ *Conversation Channels*



4.



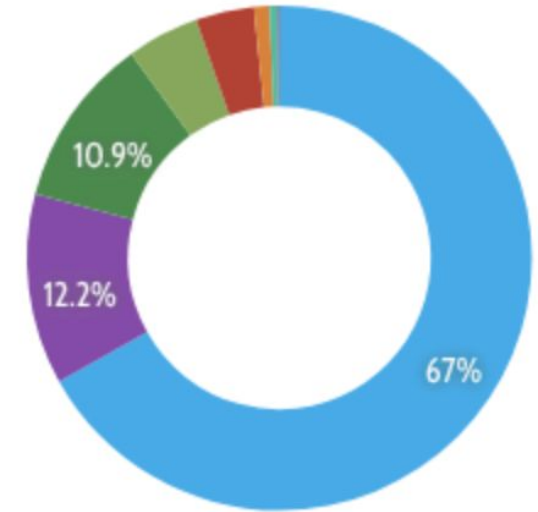
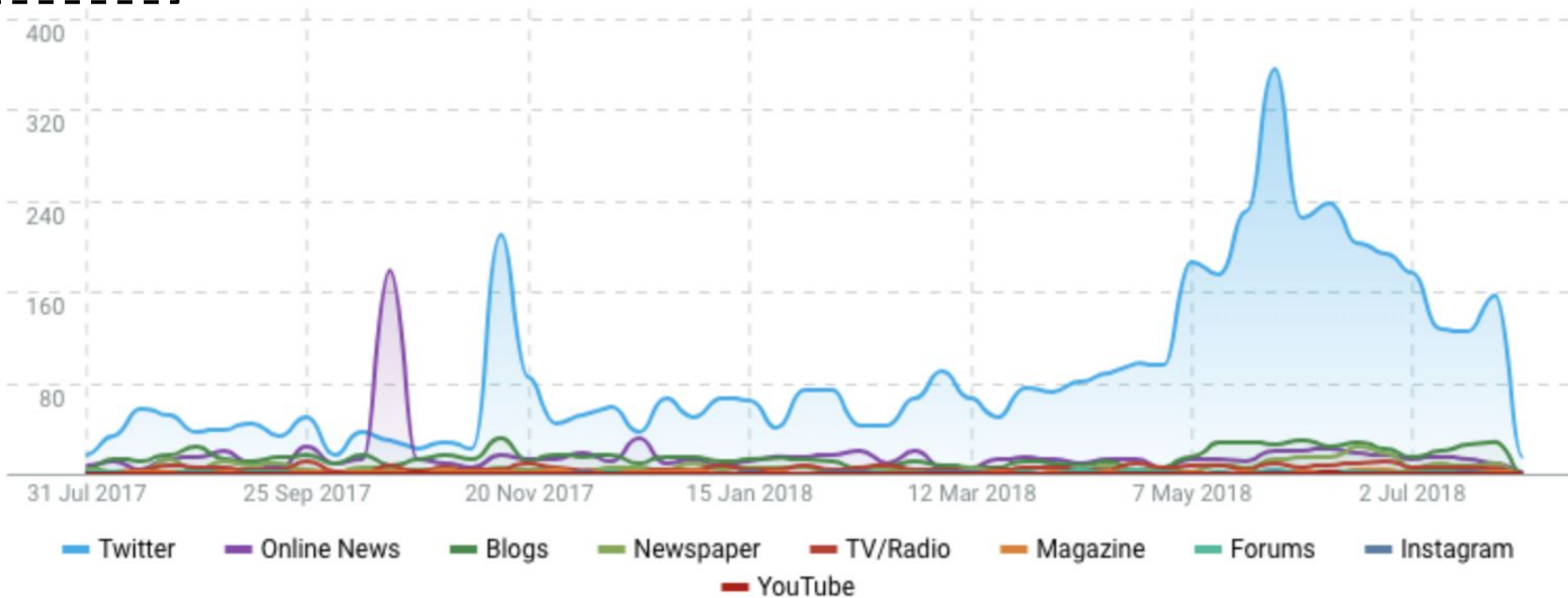
Channel Distribution | SI

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

When it comes to addressing migration in the public online sphere, Slovenians most often use Twitter to share their views.

The remaining discussion takes place on online news sites, blogs, and forums.

Results:
~231,300



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

Most Influential Authors | SI

Politicians' Content Dominate Twitter

The political messaging of the right-wing clearly comes across effectively on Twitter, as the most influential accounts are managed by leading right-wing online media platforms, everyday users amplifying nationalist opinions, and politicians, mainly representing the right-wing Slovenian Democratic Party.

Although prominent voices of less anti-migrant opinion are also present, their influence seem less significant.

Most Influential Twitter Users in the Overall Conversation	
@Nova24TV	right-wing online media site
@JozeBiscak	Nova24.TV journalist
@strankaSDS	Slovenian Democratic Party
@LottaS10	individual user with Slovenian nationalist content
@JJansaSDS	head of the Slovenian Democratic Party
@LahovnikMatej	ex-Minister of Economy, founder of Zares - social liberal party
@lucijausaj	attorney with 4000+ Twitter followers, posting anti-migrant content
@tomltoml	individual user with Slovenian nationalist content
@BozoPredalic	ex-Secretary General of the Government, politician of the SDS
@DamirCrncec	journalist, head of Association for European Slovenia