

Migration Narratives in Europe

A Social Media Intelligence Study

Country report for the Italian Republic



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

- 2019 -

Introduction | IT

Context to the Italian Discussion on Migration

- The **Italian Republic was a founding member of the European Economic Community (EEC)** in 1957 (later European Union). In 2015 the country's population was 60,795,612.
- Italy has been hosting a substantial amount of immigrants from North Africa for decades, but the number of asylum seekers arriving in the country increased rapidly during the current migration crisis. **In 2017, asylum seekers made up 0.19% of the population, which is close to the EU-average.***
- Public social media conversation in Italy around migration in one year consists of ~7,465,000 posts. Compared to population size, **the conversation on migration in Italy is the 4th biggest in the EU.**
- Head of state is the President of the Italian Republic Sergio Mattarella since 2015. The current, **right-wing populist government** is lead by Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte since June 2018. It is a coalition between the 5 Star Movement (*Movimento 5 Stelle*) and the Lega (previously *Lega Nord*) with a strong anti-migrant stance.
- The issue of immigration has been a key tool to gain political power in Italy and the current government sealed its power through its promise to lower the immigration flow.



*Source: europarl.europa.eu

Demand to Prioritize Locals Over Migrants

Italy is on the Central Mediterranean route in close proximity of the migration crisis. Many Italians have a strong opinion on the consequences of immigrant influx. The previous left-wing government followed a lenient migration policy. While some people felt sympathy towards those in need, these policies amplified the existing economic hardships in the country.

The consequent frustration of the Italian public was leveraged by the Coalition of the right-wing populist Lega Nord and the , which formed a government after the general elections in March 2018 and introduced anti-immigrant policies complemented with prompt decisions, such as the one which declined the docking of the refugee rescue ship Aquarius. This became the symbol of the new Italian government's stance on migration, alongside the slogan #PrimaGliItaliani [*Italy First*] from Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini.

The right-wing government's agenda resonates with all those Italians who are frustrated about the security threats and financial setbacks the country suffered since the beginning of the migration crisis.

**Close proximity of
immigrant influx**

**Political power based on
anti-migration rhetoric**

Struggling local economy

**#PrimaGliItaliani [*Italy
First*] by Salvini**

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



Size of Pan-European Narratives

While each aspect of migration sparks lively debates in Italy, the highest interest emerges around the issue of **humanitarian help**, security threats, and economic consequences of immigration.

Local Issues

The **Italian mafia** is regularly accused of making profit on mass immigration by participating in human trafficking and stealing the funds eligible for immigrant integration.

EU & Domestic Politics

The **Italian public demands action from domestic politicians** to manage the migration crisis, while references to other member states and European politicians occur less frequently.

Discussion Tone

Italians often express their views on migration in a reserved, **conversational manner**. The exception for this is the small but more passionate discourse on identity.

Conversation Channels

Majority of the Italian conversation takes place on **Twitter**. Politicians, journalists, and everyday people equally use the platform effectively to share their opinion with a substantial amount of users online.

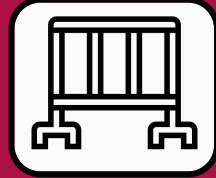


Key Findings | IT

Pan-European Narratives in the Italian Context



Since migration is in close proximity for many Italians, the necessity of humanitarian aid triggers the most heated debate. The spectrum of opinions range from immediate help until the opposition of humanitarian aid.



Security threat of migrants is discussed extensively. Refugee crime cases receive wide exposure, and fuel domestic insecurity, which is leveraged by politicians. In the meantime, some people warn to avoid criminal generalisation against migrants.



Economic costs of migration cause outrage in Italy, while the benefits are only discussed in general. The zero-sum-game approach is strongly present as locals demand to be prioritized over immigrants in social welfare.



Although migration's influence on the local labour market is rarely discussed in Italy, it channels locals' frustration as they perceive immigrants as a threat against Italians' employment.



Cultural implications of immigration trigger small interest in Italy, and conversations focus on the cultural incompatibility (or, on the other hand, potential domains of mutual respect) between immigrants and locals.

+ *Pan-European Narratives in Italy*



1.



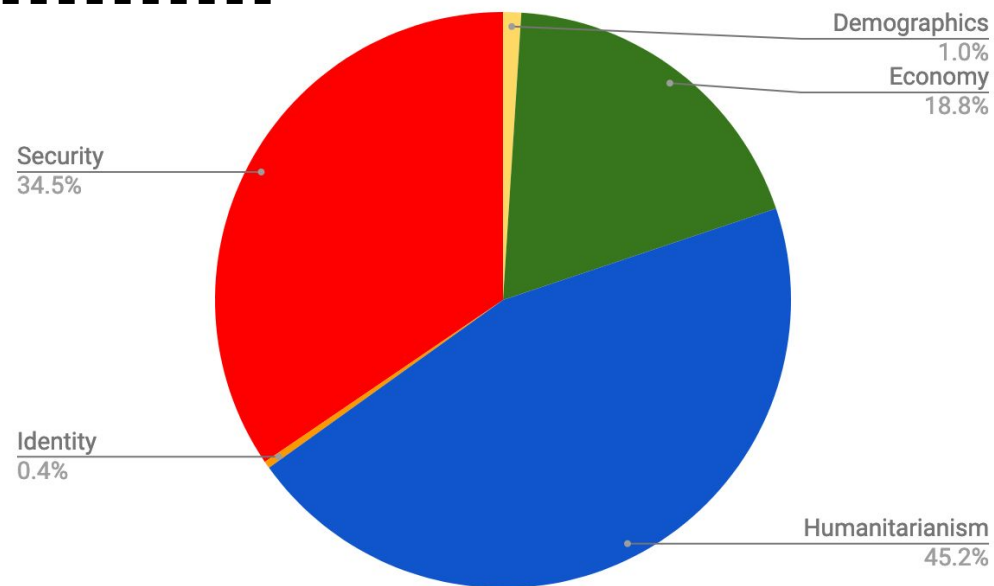
Pan-European Narratives | IT

The shape of the migration discourse

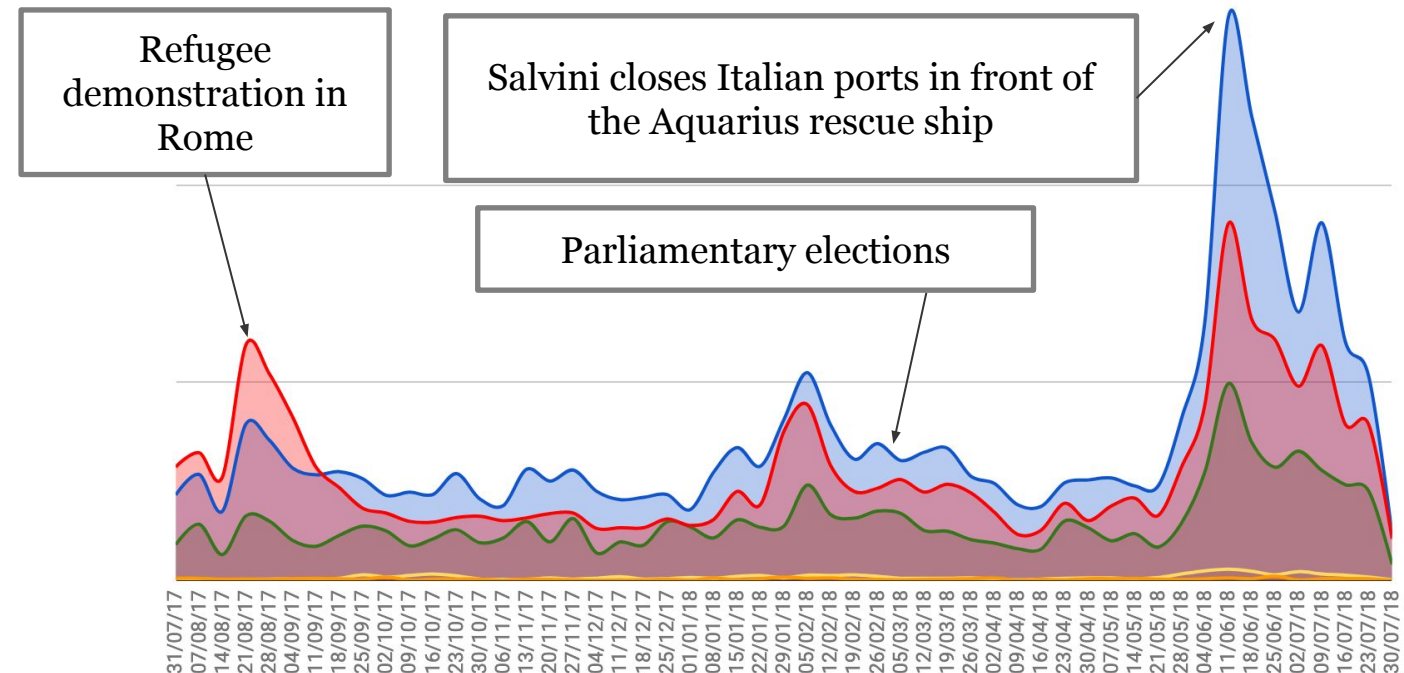
The highest interest on online social platforms culminate around the humanitarian and security-related aspects of migration. Both topics trigger pro- and anti-immigrant sentiment alike, reflecting the division that the migration crisis created in Italian society.

The event that pushed Italians over the edge and flared up the debate over migration was Matteo Salvini's refusal to allow the refugee rescue ship Aquarius' docking in Italy.

Results:
~7,465,000



Demographics Economy Humanitarianism Identity Security



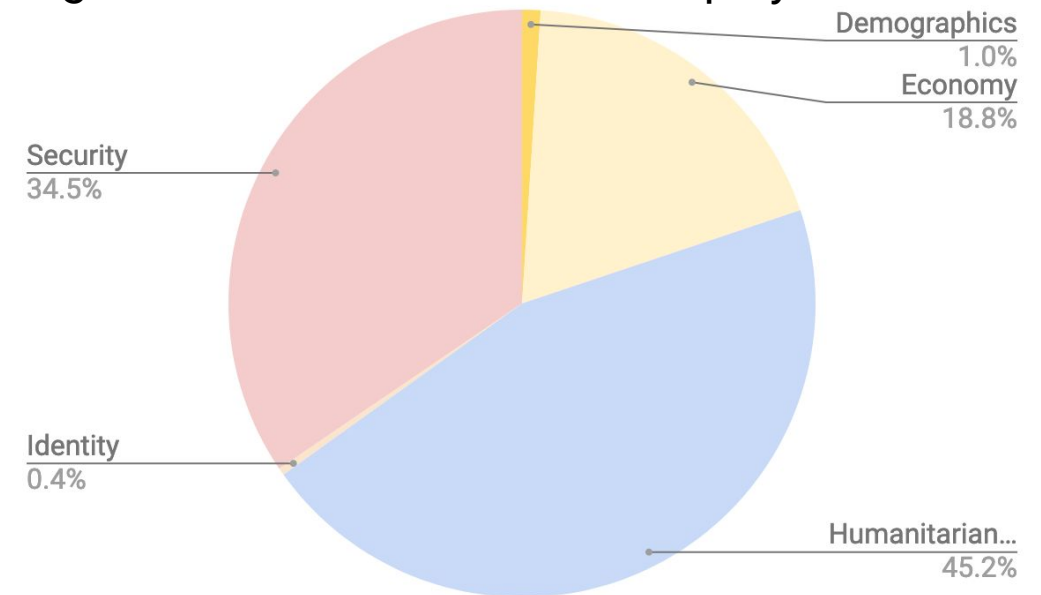


Demographics (1): Immigrant Workforce is a Threat to Locals

Although migration's influence on the local labour market is rarely discussed, it does reflect a vocal frustration in the Italian society: instead of supporting the local economy, immigrants are perceived as a threat to local workers.

The previous (Democratic Party) government's focus on migrants' labour market integration backfired in Italy's weak economic environment. As the country suffers from high unemployment rate among Italian citizens, the presence of migrants at the labour market is perceived to lower wages and locals' chances of employment.

Immigrants willingness to integrate into the labour market is also called into question by some, while others claim that this argument is fed by just another stereotype. However, right-wing politics leverage this debate when they argue immigration control, stating that it is in favour of registered labour force.





Pan-European Narratives | IT

Demographics (2): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Employment of migrants is a priority while the unemployment rate of Italians is skyrocketing

*“PD (Democratic Party), are you Italians or Sorosians? **You say you give work to 600,000 illegal immigrants but what happens to the millions of unemployed you have created with the Renzi government?** Do you not think about them?! You are betraying Italy. But why would you care if you have Soros.”*

Migrant labour force is applied at low wages, which 1) is not substantial income for the Italian economy

*If **youth unemployment is high** because young people can not find a job appropriate to their qualifications, then do you think it will solve the problem if you **flood the job market with migrants who work at € 3 per hour?**”*

2) will lower wages for everyone

*They call it mass immigration. It's **mass deportation of slaves** to be used to lower the costs of workforce in general.*

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Immigrants are used as cheap labour

*Two arrested immigrants in Sicily. **They worked for 3 euros** per hour in the countryside of Marsala and Mazara del Vallo, they received hard bread for lunch and dinner, and **had to work for 12 hours a day**. This is what immigrants are forced to do.*



Pan-European Narratives | IT

Demographics (3): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Migrants must integrate to the labour market

*Salvini said it right @ the tent city of San Ferdinando: "You must not stay in the barracks! **Those who are allowed to stay in Italy must stay with all the rights and duties of other citizens.** Those who want illegal immigration want slaves. Those who want regular immigration want citizens!"*

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Stereotype that immigrants do not want to work

Judging immigrants thinking that they want to be around doing nothing is like judging the Italian people thinking that we would like to be all like those who are hours and hours at the bar to spend unemployment money. #Salvini

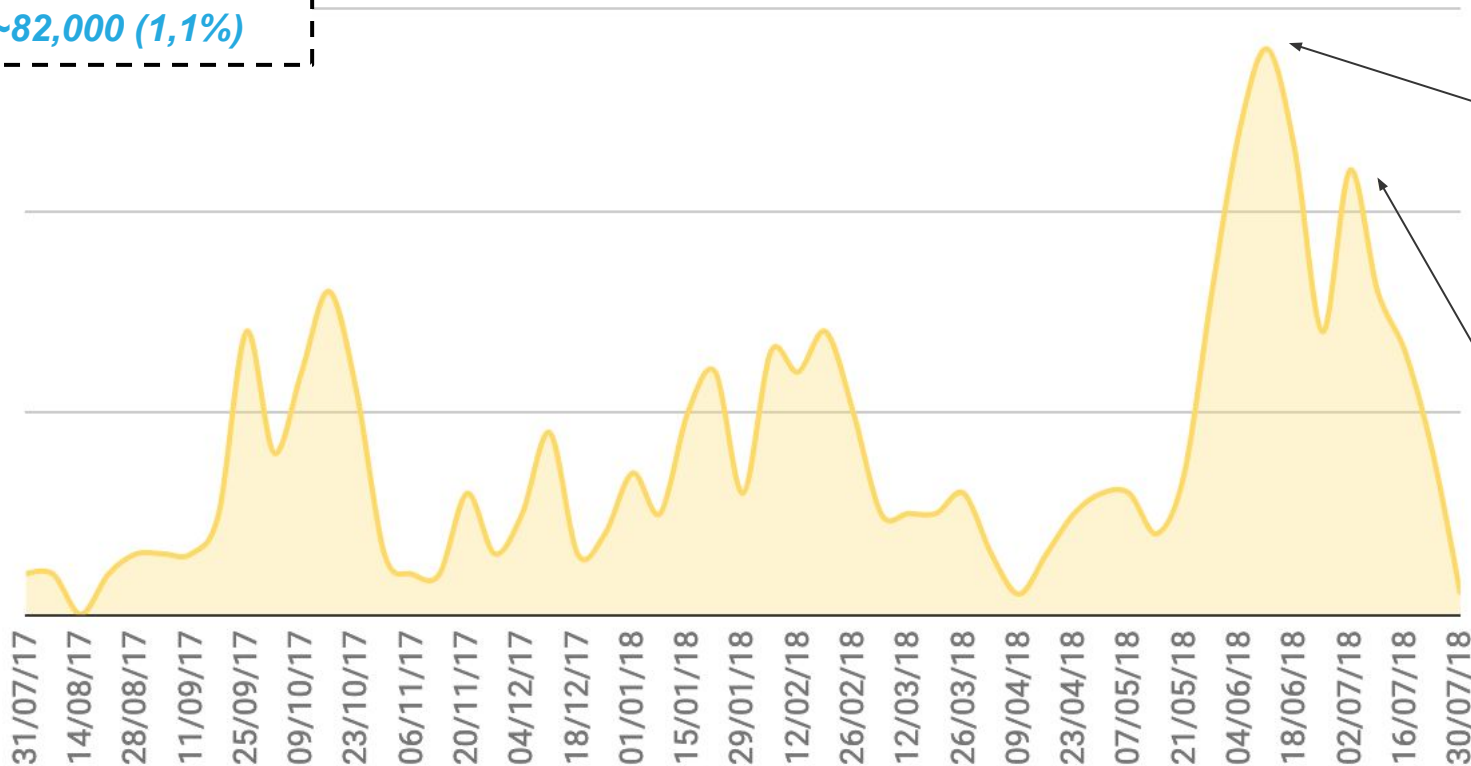


Pan-European Narratives | IT

Demographics (4): Top Stories

Immigrants influence on the local labour market is perceived negatively in many aspects of the labour market.

Results:
~82,000 (1,1%)



"They wanted to send me away, today I give work to 150 Italians": she is the Immigrant Entrepreneur of the Year. **And what company has she created? One that helps to more than 800 migrants.** Oh oh well...



Italy, June 2018. Glimpses of **daily life after migrants have stopped stealing work.** #Immigration #Ferrari #Italia #work

Demographics

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.

Pan-European Narratives | IT

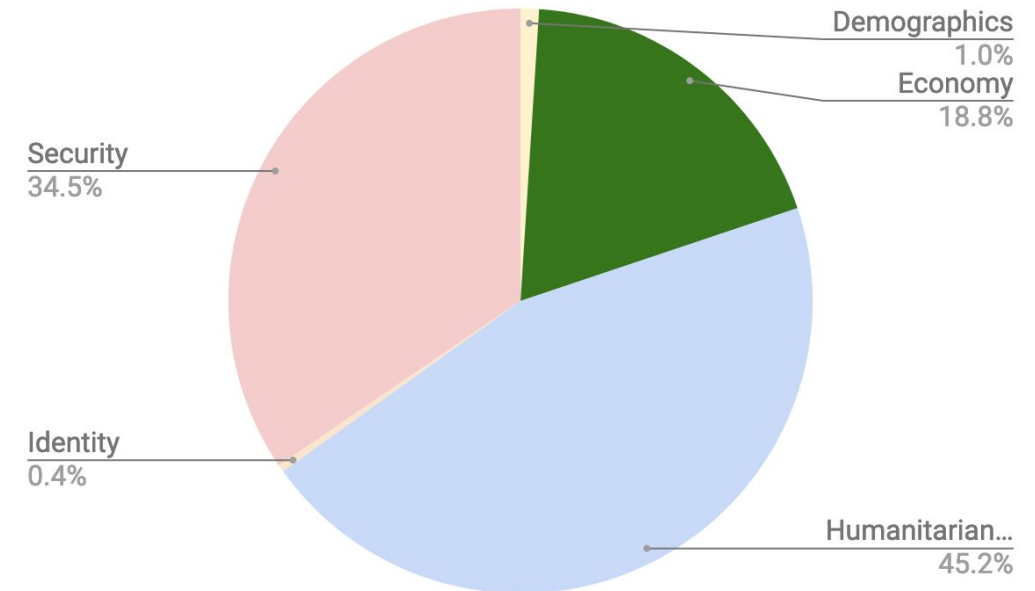
Economy (1): Zero-sum-game Against Migrants

Economic implications of migration are clearly discernible in Italy, triggering both pro- and anti-migrant arguments.

While the economic losses are discussed in detail (costs of rescuing and hosting migrants seem palpable), those who argue the economic benefits of migration tend to present more general arguments.

A clear zero-sum-game approach emerges from the conversation, as many people demand that Italians in need should be prioritized over migrants, especially when it comes to social benefits.

Going one step further, some people also argue that the return on investment for migrant support is unclear and the financial assets used to help migrants should be invested more efficiently.





Pan-European Narratives | IT Economy (2): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Italians in need should have priority over migrants

Meloni: "It is **easier to find a home for refugees** than for an Italian family in difficulty"

Earthquake in the cold, illegal immigrants in the hotel. This is RACISM. For me always and only #PrimaGliItaliani [Italy First]

For an (often illiterate) **economic migrant we spend € 40,000 (including € 12,000 of pocket money) plus free health services for life**, while for the support of mothers we spend € 1,800 a year!!! Someone explain to me where the rationale is.

Investments of helping refugees goes in vain

"For years psychologists and educators went to the home of K. and M., the two Moroccan minors investigated for the rape committed in Rimini. Years of work thrown away! **We have invested so much on the boys, we have given them all the possible tools that they have not grasped.**"

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Migrants are not to blame for a struggling local economy

Immigrants are not at fault for the economic conditions of Italy. **Mafia, tax evasion, cunning of all kinds, and corruption is the reason for the country's current situation...** It would take a little 'mea culpa...

Multiculturalism is necessary for economic growth

Let's admit that integration, hospitality and "**melting pot**" aren't anything but a good **recipe for an economical growth of a nation or a continent.**

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

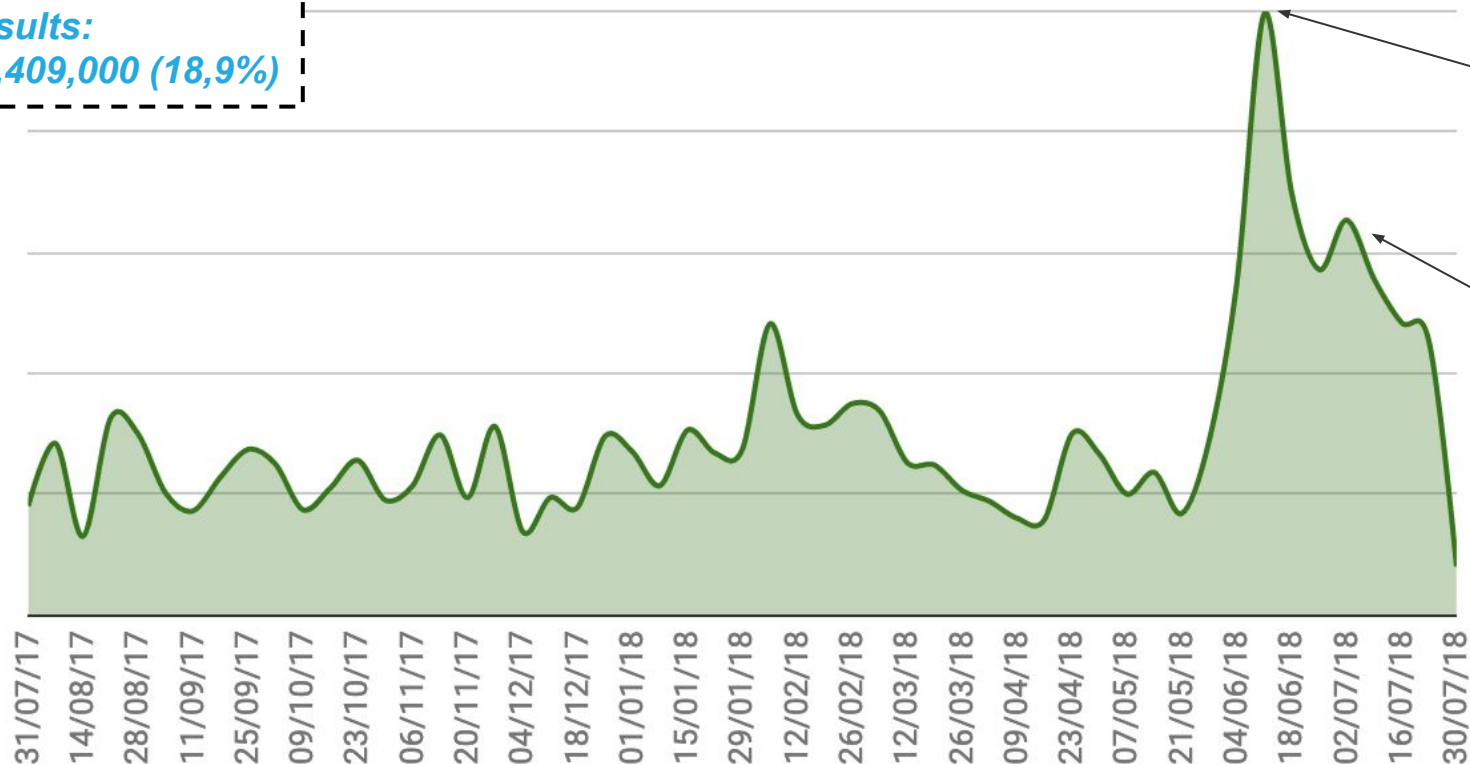
Instead of fleeing a war, migrants come in search of a better life and to exploit Italy

At the tent camp of #SanFerdinando: "Did you imagine Italy like this, with the barracks?" Migrant: "Not at all. If I had known I would not have left, because **at home I had a good job, but thought that Europe must be even better**"

Pan-European Narratives | IT Economy (3): Top Stories

Significant attention is culminated around opinions that point out examples of financial injustices when migrants are favoured over Italians. This reflects Italians' perception of the financial burden of migration.

Results:
~1,409,000 (18,9%)



Economy

"The PD (Democratic Party) has made us spend 5 billion euros per year on migration and we continue to keep illegal aliens while #italians can starve"



Fratelli d'Italia politician Giovanni Donzelli:
Think of Italians and wear a #bluetshirt. Following the idea of @GiorgiaMeloni I wear this today in response to all the good people engaged in the #redtshirt movement, who do not care about the 5 million Italians below poverty line. It is more trendy nowadays to be moved by illegal immigrants."



Pan-European Narratives | IT

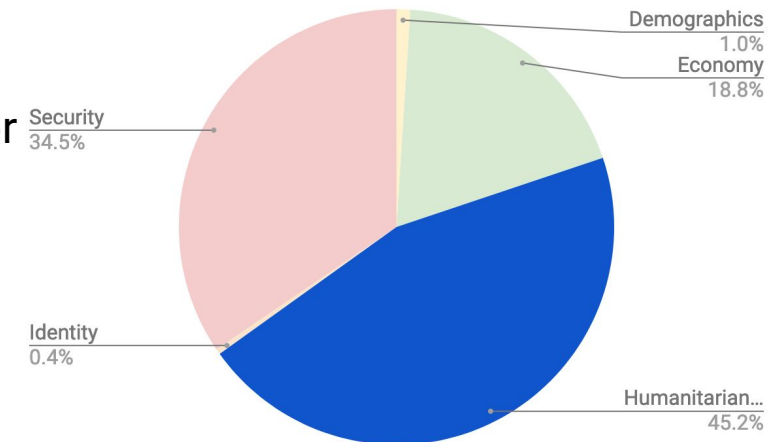
Humanitarianism (1): Fierce Debate Over the Necessity of Help

Many Italians have a first-hand, day-to-day experience with migration, which triggers a heated debate over the necessity of helping refugees. Pro-migrant voices shed light on the aspects of humanitarian crisis and call for immediate help – this point of view is enhanced by various statements of the Pope as well. According to some, help is required, but it should be provided at the country of origin. The system of humanitarian support is sometimes called into question as allowing the uncontrolled flow of migration encouraged human traffickers and thus became part of the humanitarian disaster.

NGOs' role in the process seem contradictory: while some people claim that their operation is essential to save refugee lives, others argue that these organizations are the very catalyst of the migration crisis by creating “pull factors”.

Unconditional humanitarian help is opposed by many Italians, based on three different arguments:

1. News coverage of unsuccessful integration and migrant crime in other member states fuel the anti-migrant sentiment in Italy, offering justification for those who oppose humanitarian help.
2. Some people claim that those who drift ashore in Italy are not fleeing war and thus are not eligible for humanitarian aid.
3. The obligation for help is sometimes interpreted as a moral pressure and comes across as hypocrisy for many Italians, who consequently oppose providing help for refugees.





Pan-European Narratives | IT

Humanitarianism (2): Quotes

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Help in the country of origin

*"Without prejudice to the right of every man to seek fortune out of his homeland, as well as the duty of acceptance for the richest countries in the world, **it is necessary to guarantee to peoples the opportunity not to emigrate**, but to live in their own land and avoid the painful experience of emigration."*

Condemn those who do not recognize the current humanitarian catastrophe

*"There are some people who rejoice at the possibility of denying 629 refugees, 123 unaccompanied foreign minors, 11 children and 7 pregnant women. Men, women, children. **What I am afraid of is your inhumanity, not the people desperately flee their homes because they want to live.***
#Aquarius"

Uncontrolled migration caused the humanitarian catastrophe by encouraging smugglers

*"I feel offended by those who have preached '**immigrants without limits**', and then mourn for the dead that their preaching has caused. **They have generated human pain in the hands of smugglers and traffickers.**"*

NGOs are necessary to rescue refugees at sea

*"The **presence of well-equipped vehicles dedicated to research and rescue at sea is absolutely necessary** if we want to prevent other deaths in the Mediterranean"*



Pan-European Narratives | IT

Humanitarianism (3): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Some who arrive in Italy are not necessarily in danger at home

*"This guy **returned home just after the danger, because this is the desire of every TRUE refugee**"*

Warning examples of the consequences of uncontrolled migration support

*"Sweden decides to check **unaccompanied "minors" entering the country as immigrants ... and discovers that 75% of them are over 18 years**"*

Condemn the moral pressure of unconditional humanitarian help

*"**Why should I fake feelings that I don't have? I don't feel sorry for them.**"*

*"To sum up how everybody is feeling: **if you do not bring a refugee to your home, then you are a bad, radical person.** Why not welcome a sick or an orphan to your home...?"*

NGOs are the force behind the escalation of the migration crisis

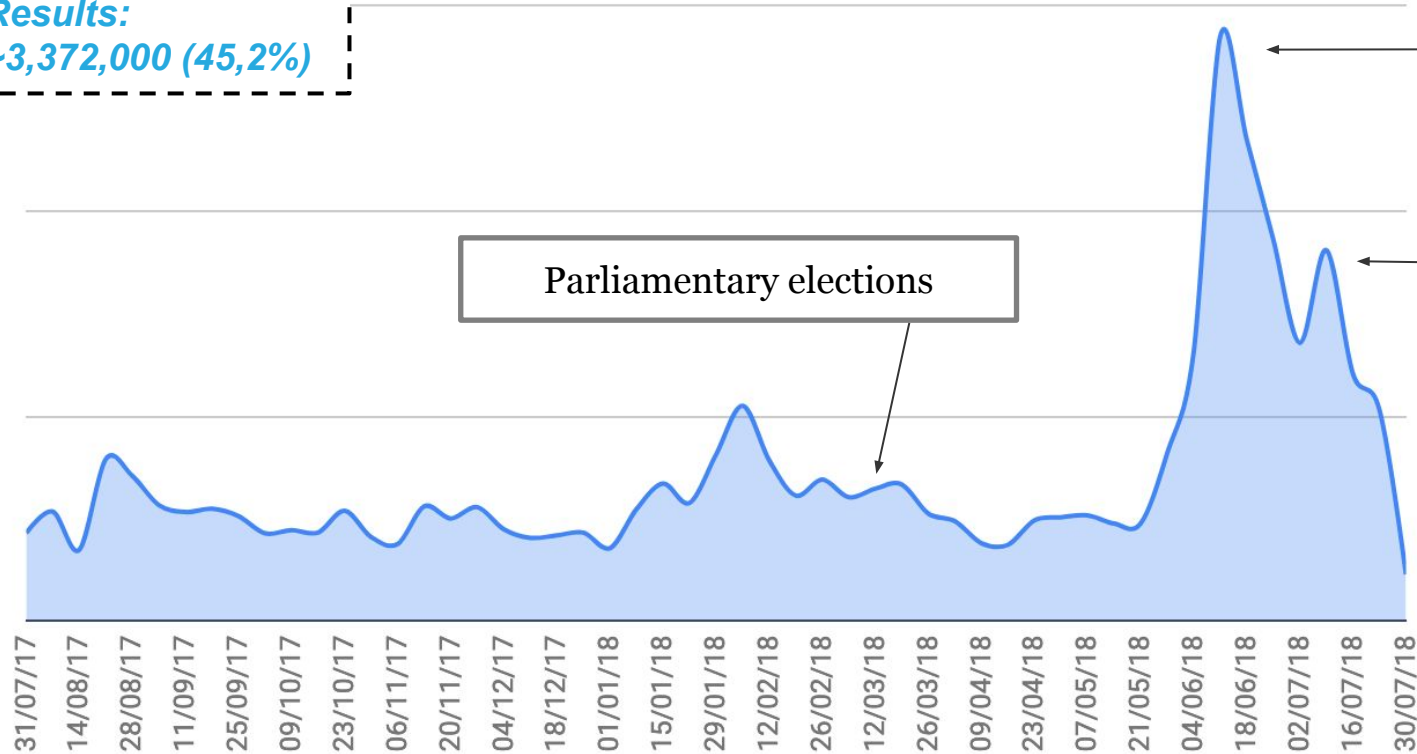
*"NGOs accuse the government for the victims at sea, but **the slaughter is the fault of those who bring immigrants to Italy**"*

Pan-European Narratives | IT

Humanitarianism (4): Top Stories

The Aquarius scandal and the campaign to raise awareness to immigrants' struggles both triggered controversial debates over the necessity of humanitarian help.

Results:
~3,372,000 (45,2%)



Parliamentary elections

Rejection of docking to the refugee rescue ship **Aquarius**

Humanitarian organisations in Italy announced the “red shirt” (**#magliettarossa**) campaign to commemorate refugees’ struggles. However, instead of sympathy, it became a channel for local frustration: “*What will you wear for the unemployed, the emigres, or the victims of immigrants?!*”

Humanitarianism

Pan-European Narratives | IT

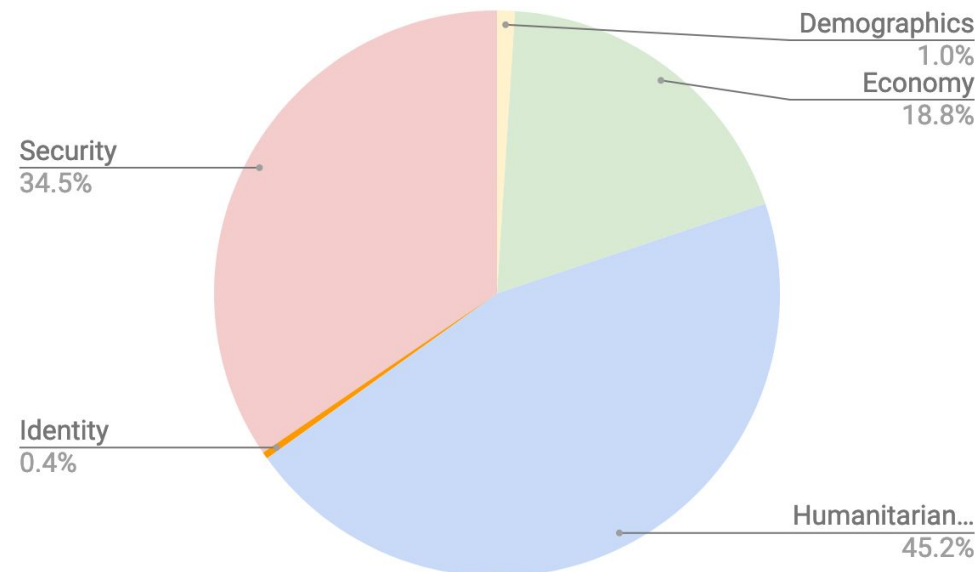
Identity & Customs (1): Cultural Implications

Trigger Weak Interest

Immigration's cultural influence is barely discussed in Italy. Cultural incompatibility between Muslims and Europeans is addressed in a legal context, while some people point to differing religious customs of immigrants.

While some people discuss the threat of mass immigration transforming Europe into a third-world area, others condemn racism and instead point to the cultural injustice immigrants suffer from in Europe.

Although they are discussed only to a minor extent, there are some initiatives in Italy aiming to build mutual respect between European culture and that of immigrants.





Pan-European Narratives | IT

Identity & Customs (2): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Islam is incompatible with local customs

*"You are saying something very right. Soon the judges will have 2 books on their tables: on the one hand the **code of criminal procedure for Italians**, and on the other side the **Quran if a Muslim is tried**. Or the **jungle book for other immigrants**"*

*A **Muslim migrant got married 2 times**. Now the Turin court acquitted him of the charge of bigamy for "tenuous nature of the act". How is this possible?*

Migrants' provocation cause outrage

*Islamic provocation in #Naples: immigration supporters from the social centers staged a prayer in Piazza del Plebiscito during the **protest for their "rights"**, including **easier residence permits**, chanting "Allah will give us the **victory**"*

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Racism is heavily criticized

***The priest refused to wash the feet of immigrants**. It happened last Thursday in the church of San Michele Arcangelo in Manduria.(...) Shamefully, racism rose to the altar tonight.*

Building mutual respect between differing cultures

*In Sesto Fiorentino the integration takes place at the table. **The competition is between the typical Tuscan and African dishes**.*

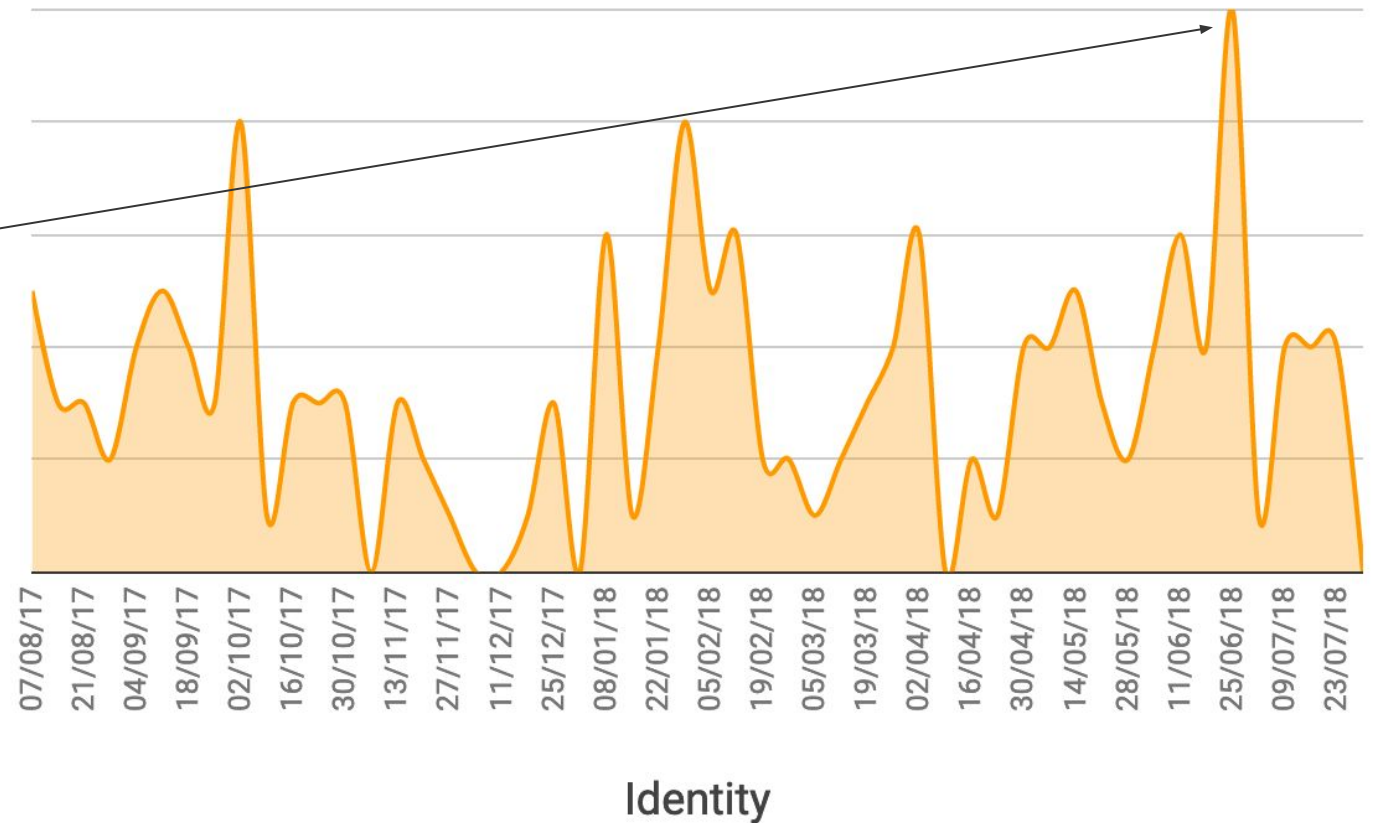
Pan-European Narratives | IT

Identity & Customs (3): Top Stories

Issues that trigger the highest public attention around cultural aspects of immigration often reflect openness to refugees and the cultural diversity they bring to Italy.

Results:
~34,000 (0,5%)

Celebration of World Refugee Day 2018





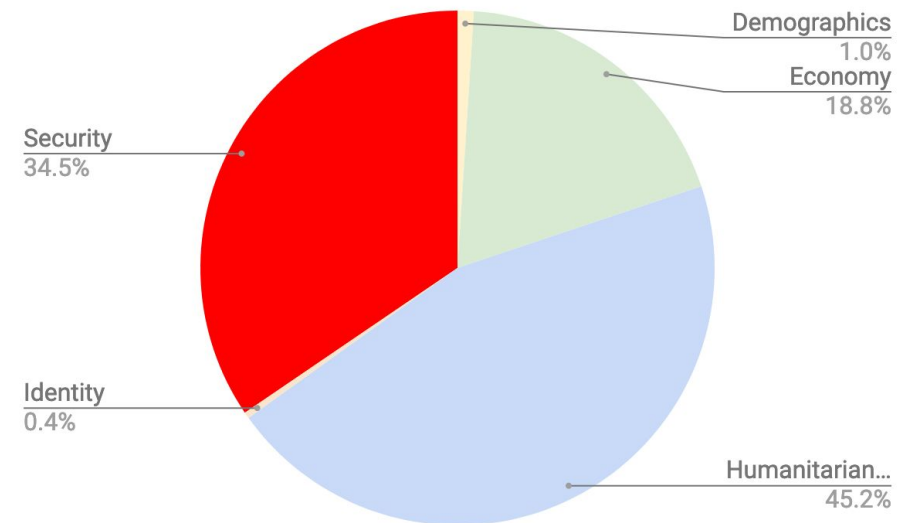
Pan-European Narratives | IT

Security (1): Widespread Insecurity Leveraged by Politics

The security threat posed by migrants arriving to Italy is discussed extensively. Particular cases of attacks receive wide exposure and enhance the sense of insecurity in the country. Some people claim that Italian authorities are unable to handle the threat, and point out that civilian partaking is required to control domestic security.

In general, uncontrolled immigration is seen as the source of danger, resulting in the increased presence of violence, drug abuse, theft and other forms of local conflicts. This fear is leveraged as a political tool: the populist right coalition currently governing the country introduced strongly anti-migrant measures that is supported by many Italians who fear migrant crime.

However, there are some people who wish to avoid generalisation on the matter, and claim that the “migrant danger” is a highly exaggerated threat.





Pan-European Narratives | IT Security (2): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

The threat of migration crime should not be underrated

*"When an immigrant kills an Italian like poor #PamelaMastropietro, the mobs are quick to say that **we should not say that all migrants are criminals. In the meantime, the violence explodes.**"*

Crime committed by refugees is a political tool

*"Salvini: Those who have filled **Italy** by transforming it into a **huge refugee camp** have the moral responsibility of any episode of violence happening in Italy"*

Italy lacks protection against migrants

*"**A 55 yo Tunisian migrant tried to rape a girl on a bus. The authorities aren't there anymore** so the citizens have to step up instead of them and protect themselves."*

***9 out of 10 migrants that come to us are men** ... they increase criminality and human trafficking*

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

It's not only migrants who commit crime

*"One who shoots the immigrants and wrapped in the tricolor makes the fascist salute is no different from one who makes himself explode screaming Allah Akbar. **Lets realize that we have at home terrorism, which is really no different from what migrants are allegedly engaged with**"*

The danger is exaggerated

*"**Look at the photo of this child. This is a 'dangerous migrant'**. Lock yourselves in your homes, Italians! Her smile might just attack you"*

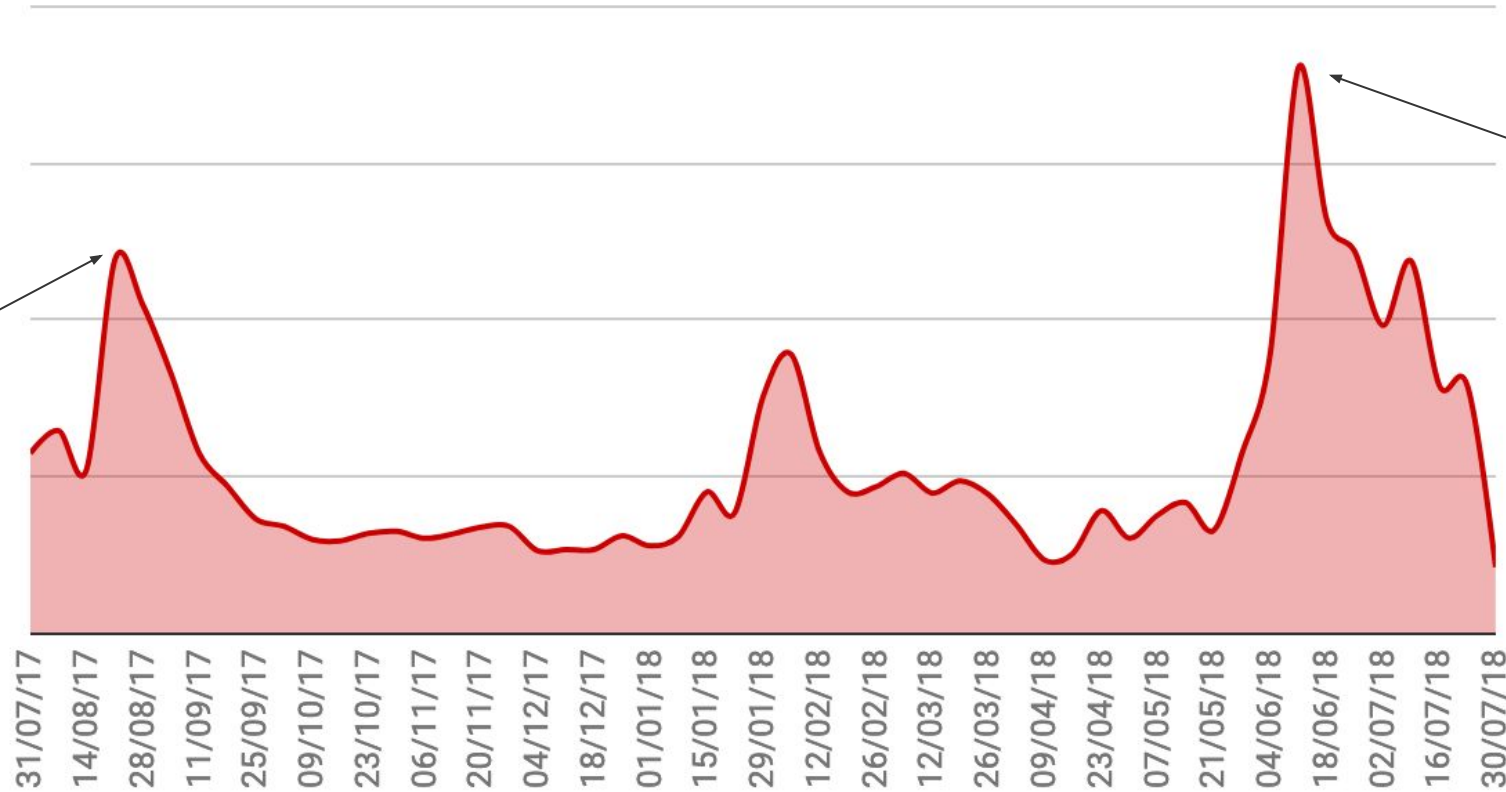
Pan-European Narratives | IT

Security (3): Top Stories

The discussion on the security implication of mass migration towards Italy flares up after key migration-related events in the country:

Results:
~2,568,000 (34,4%)

Migrants protest in Rome after the eviction of refugees from an occupied building at Via Curtatone



Italy closes its' ports in front of the Aquarius rescue ship

Security

+ *Local Issues in Italy Around Migration*



2.

Local Issues | IT

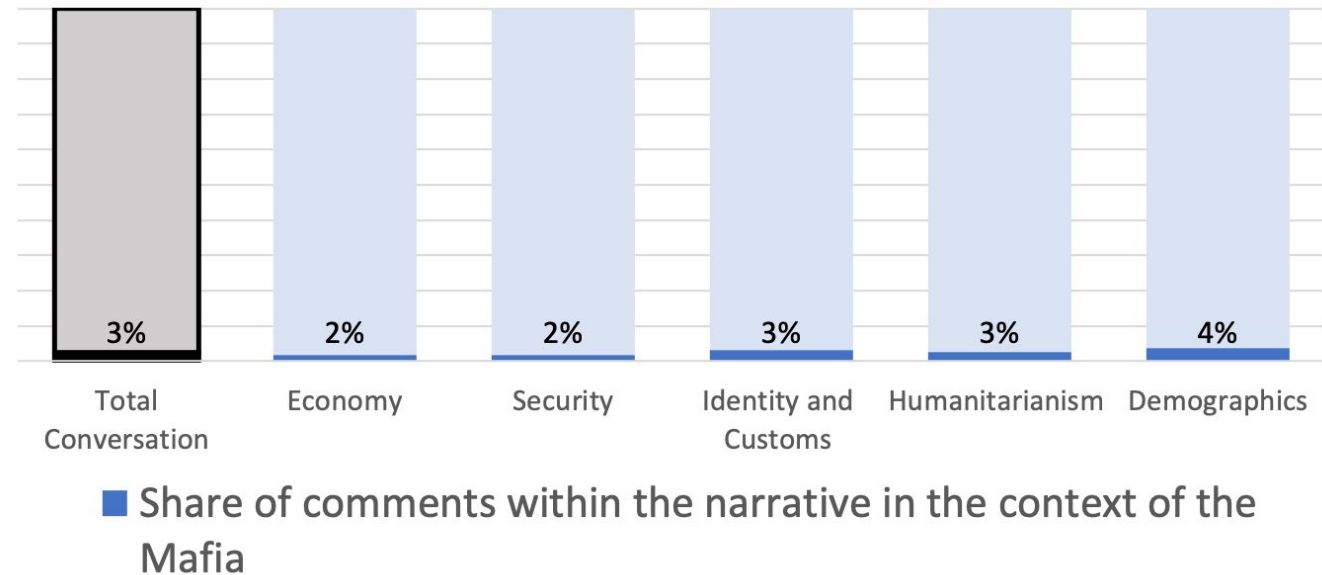
The Italian Mafia

Many Italians blame the mafia for the escalation of the migration crisis. They claim that such criminal organizations efficiently operate human trafficking networks, and have financial interest in the influx of cheap labour and persons who can potentially be involved in criminal deeds.

*Mileage, weight and risk always have a price. Remember what Buzzi of Mafia Capital said? - **"with immigrants you make more money than with drugs"***

The mafia fills us with immigrants and you say you are proud to show humanity towards them. YOU ARE CRAZY

*"Drug trafficking, arms trafficking, crimes relating to illegal immigration and trafficking of humans to be used in prostitution and undeclared work. (...) In short, **facilitating migratory flows from Africa is the best assistance that can be done to the mafia organizations.**"*



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



3.

European and Domestic Politics Context within Narratives | IT

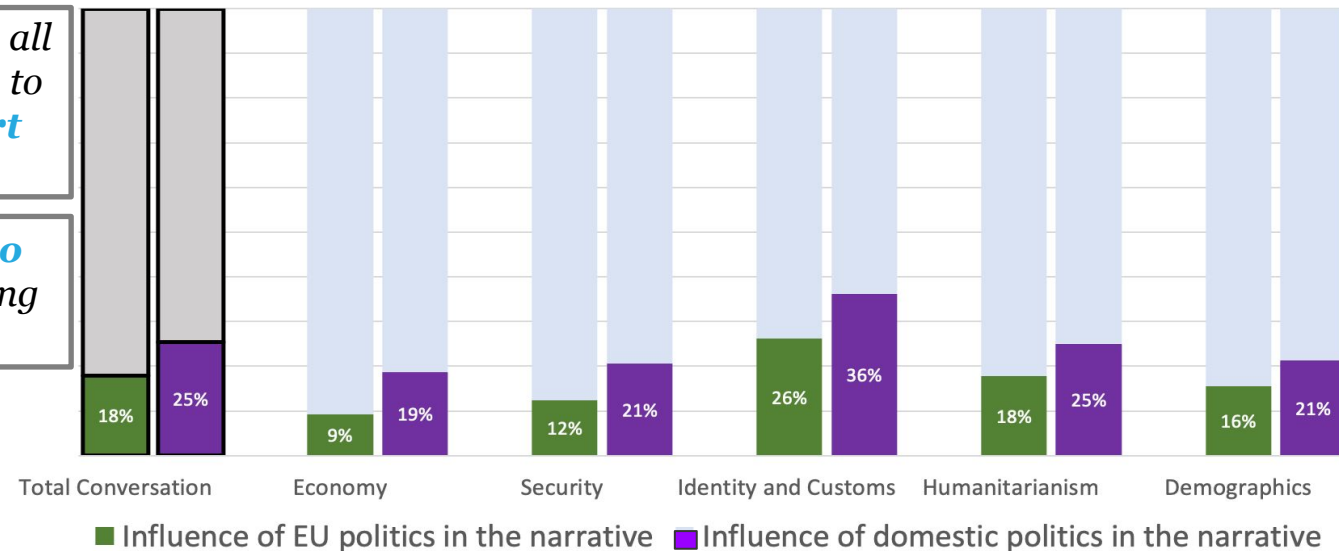
Domestic Political Measures Are Discussed in Each Narrative

As Italy is closely influenced by the migration crisis, local political players are more often mentioned in connection to crisis management, than EU counterparts. Local politicians can not avoid to take a stance – not only in the form of announcements but also at policy level. These steps (the “uncontrolled welcome” policy of the previous PD government, and the more anti-immigrant approach taken by the current coalition) trigger fierce debate in Italy.

*Left-wing governments have granted entry to so-called refugees, all at the expense of Italians, while Islamic communities raise funds to fund terrorism. **I hope that the new government will start deporting all the dangerous Muslims !***

*In one month Matteo **#Salvini made it clear that we are no longer the refugee camp of Europe.** The **LEFT** shrieks as long as it wants, but the **#Lega** is changing things*

***In 2050, when immigrants will outnumber local Italians,** PD (Democratic Party) will again be the ruling party.*



+ *Discussion Tone in Italy*

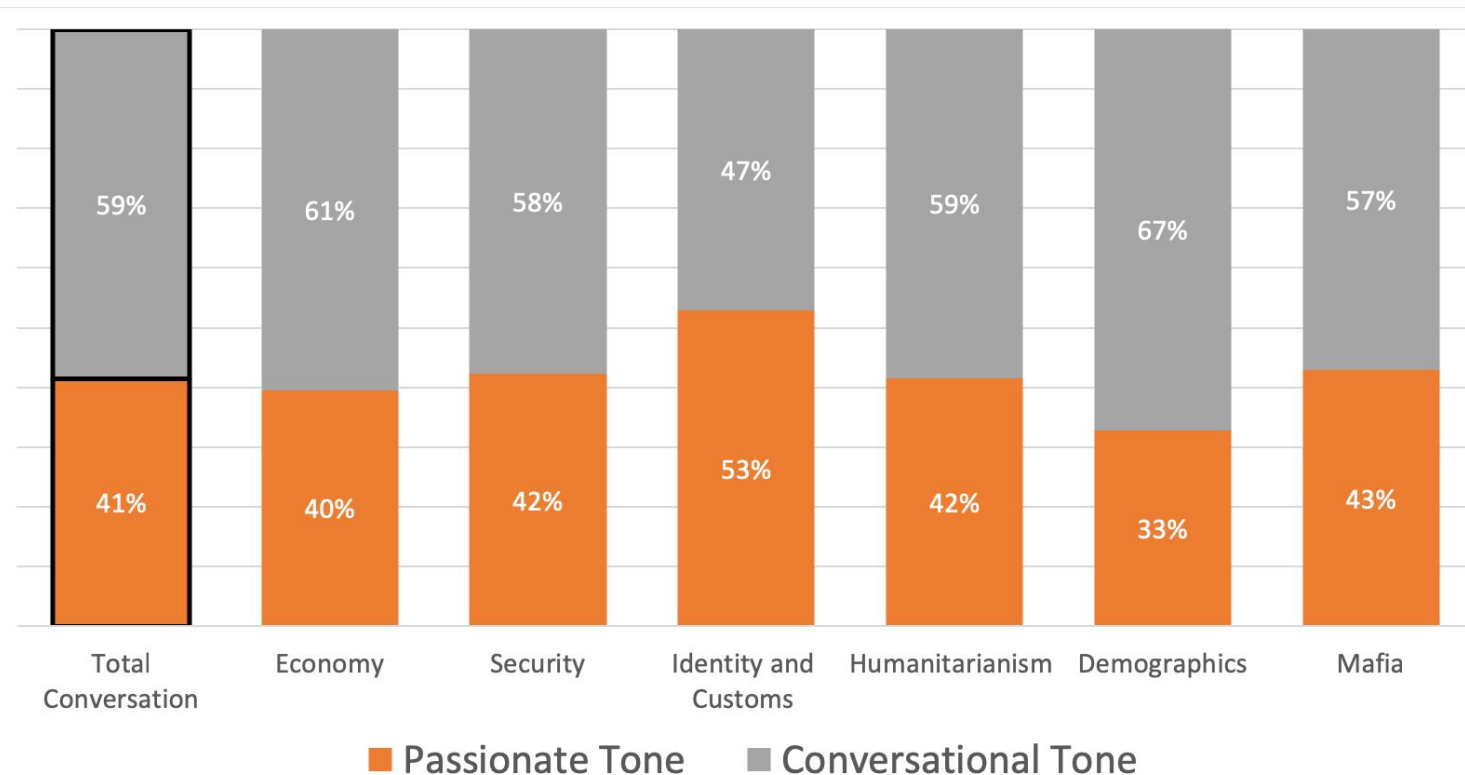


4.

Discussion Tone | IT

Seemingly Conversational Tone Dominates the Discussion

When addressing the migration crisis, it seems that Italians often express their views in a reserved, conversational manner. An exception to this is the otherwise small section of comments on identity and customs, where people often use a more passionate tone.



+ *Conversation Channels*



5.

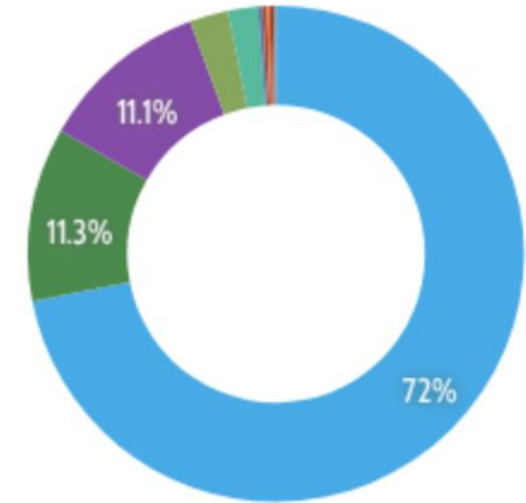
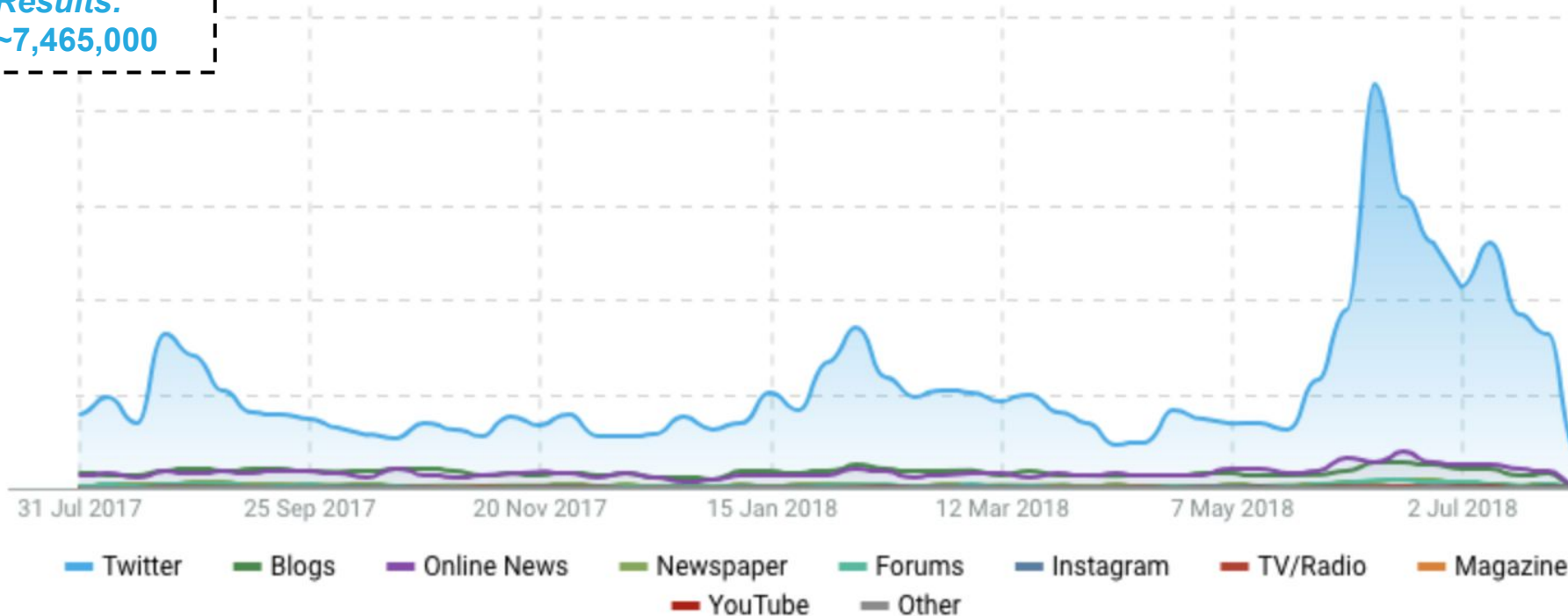


Channel Distribution | IT

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

When it comes to addressing migration in the public online sphere, Italians most often use Twitter to share their views. The remaining discussion takes place on blogs, online news sites, and forums.

Results:
~7,465,000



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

Most Influential Authors | IT Politicians, Journalists, and Everyday Users Equally Trigger Large Interest

The most engaging opinions on Twitter are published by journalists and politicians. However, in some cases, individual content creators focused on non-political topics also post content that triggers extensive public interest.

This reflects that in Italy political opinion is not only shared by those who are professionally invested in the public issues – everyday people may also capture an opinion that is shared by many.

Most Influential Twitter Users in the Overall Conversation	
@creTania_	human rights activist
@CesareSacchetti	right-wing, anti-EU journalist
@andr900	author
@matteosalvinimi	politician (Lega Nord)
@masechi	journalist (supporter of Mario Monti)
@RogerHalsted	anti-migrant content, 12500 follower
@FontanaPres	politician (president of Lombardy)
@ClaudioPerconte	political activist for Lombardian sovereignty
@DVACMILAN	sport content creator for YouTube
@carmentpf	blogger, Lega Nord supporter