

Migration Narratives in Europe

A Social Media Intelligence Study

Country report for the Kingdom of Sweden



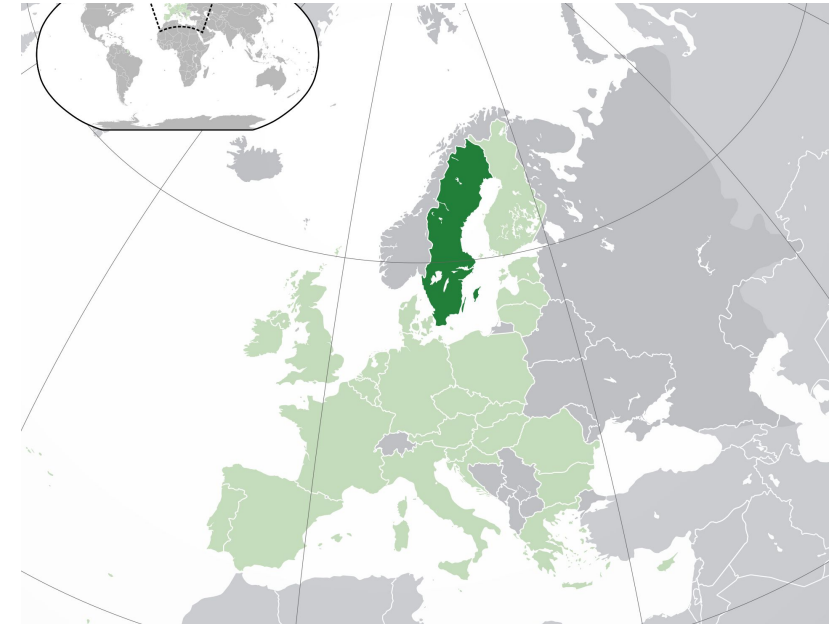
A Bakamo Public  **Project for the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung**

- 2019 -



Context of the Swedish migration discourse

- **Sweden**, a Scandinavian Nordic country in Northern Europe, has a **population of 9,747,355**, as of 2015. At its peak, official **asylum seekers in the country made up 1.74% of the population**.*
- The public social media conversation in Sweden around migration in one year consists of **~ 1,933,048 posts**. Compared to population size, **the conversation on migration in Sweden is the largest in the EU**.
- **During the run-up to the Swedish general elections** in September 2018, the government was dominated by the **Social Democratic Party**. Despite adjusting its stance on migration to garner additional votes, **the election dealt a harsh blow to the Social Democrats**, as their vote share fell dramatically, **while the right-wing Sweden Democrats made major gains**.



*Source: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu>



The Swedish Context: *Politics & Migration*

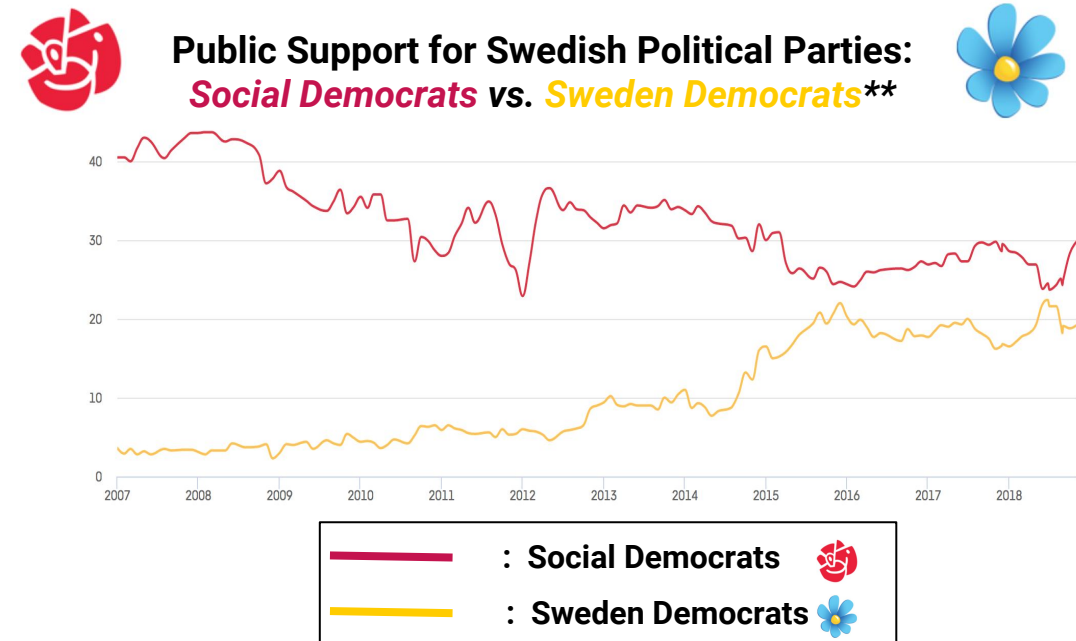
Sweden has a long history with migration. The oldest and largest political bloc, **the Social Democratic Party**, developed structures over time which sought to successfully **integrate migrants into wider society** by first integrating them into the labour market.* While right-wing parties, such as the **Sweden Democrats**, have been loud critics of the Social Democrats, they have historically received little-to-no political power due to their extreme rhetoric and policies. This changed in 2014 when the **Sweden Democrats started to campaign on growing fears of the “migration crisis.”** In the years that followed, the party steadily gained popularity and legitimacy by turning the migration crisis into a narrative of **failed integration**.

The success and influence of this message is clearly evident today, as **nearly all political parties** running up to the 2018 general election **repositioned their communication on migration to be closer to the Sweden Democrats’**.

The final election results verify this surge in public support for such policies: the Sweden Democrats received a 12.9% gain since the last election, which earned them enough votes to be the third largest party in Parliament. Though they barely hung onto a slight majority, the Social Democrats experienced historic losses despite their efforts to realign themselves with more restrictive migration policies.

*Source: <https://sweden.se/society/political-parties-in-sweden/>

**Source: <https://www.svt.se/special/valjarbarometern/>





Key Findings | SE

How and Where Do Swedes Discuss Migration On Social Media?

Size of Pan-European Narratives

Most conversations about migration in Sweden are driven by the **humanitarianism** and **security narratives**. Today, security and **humanitarianism can be understood as two sides of the same coin**: the same events are discussed, but from two completely different perspectives.

Local Issue

The migration conversation is inextricably linked with the **Swedish 2018 general election**. Anti-migrant sentiments are influenced by the ring-wing Sweden Democrats, whereas the pro-migrant voices support the center-left Social Democrats.

EU & Domestic Politics

European politics and countries do not appear often in the Swedish discourse on migration. Instead, **local politics and politicians are frequently mentioned, appearing in about 18% of the discussion**.

Conversation Tone

The conversation tone is **charged with passion**, especially in discussions taking place right before the 2018 general election. **Humanitarianism, identity and customs, and security** are narratives which spark the most impassioned discussions.

Conversation Channels

Twitter is the dominant platform used to discuss topics of migration in Sweden. However, **newspapers** and online **blogs** host conversations on the topic as well.

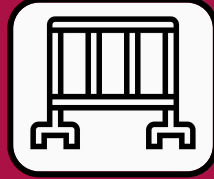


Pan-European Narratives: *The Swedish Context*



Humanitarianism is the largest migration narrative.

Pro-migrant voices worry about an erosion of the humanitarian values that are the foundation of their country's identity. Anti-migrant voices debate the obligation Sweden has to migrants.



Many Swedes assert that **violent crime and the threat of terrorism is increasing in areas with an influx of migrants**. However, others counter these anxieties by pointing out **Swedes are just as likely to commit violent crimes as migrants**.



Sweden has historically used **humanitarianism as a foundation for its national identity**, proudly welcoming those in need and praising multiculturalism. However, **after the shock of the 2015 migration crisis, Swedes are wary of outsiders** and demand migrants learn the local language.



The principal concern within the economy narrative is the **preservation of the Swedish welfare state**. Both pro and anti-migrant voices debate the impact of Sweden's past migration policies on the current economy.



Though demographics is the **smallest narrative**, it contains extremely passionate discussions about the implications of Sweden's aging population. **The need for young labour spikes debate, alongside fears of a rising retirement age and a strained welfare state.**

+ *Pan-European Narratives in Sweden*

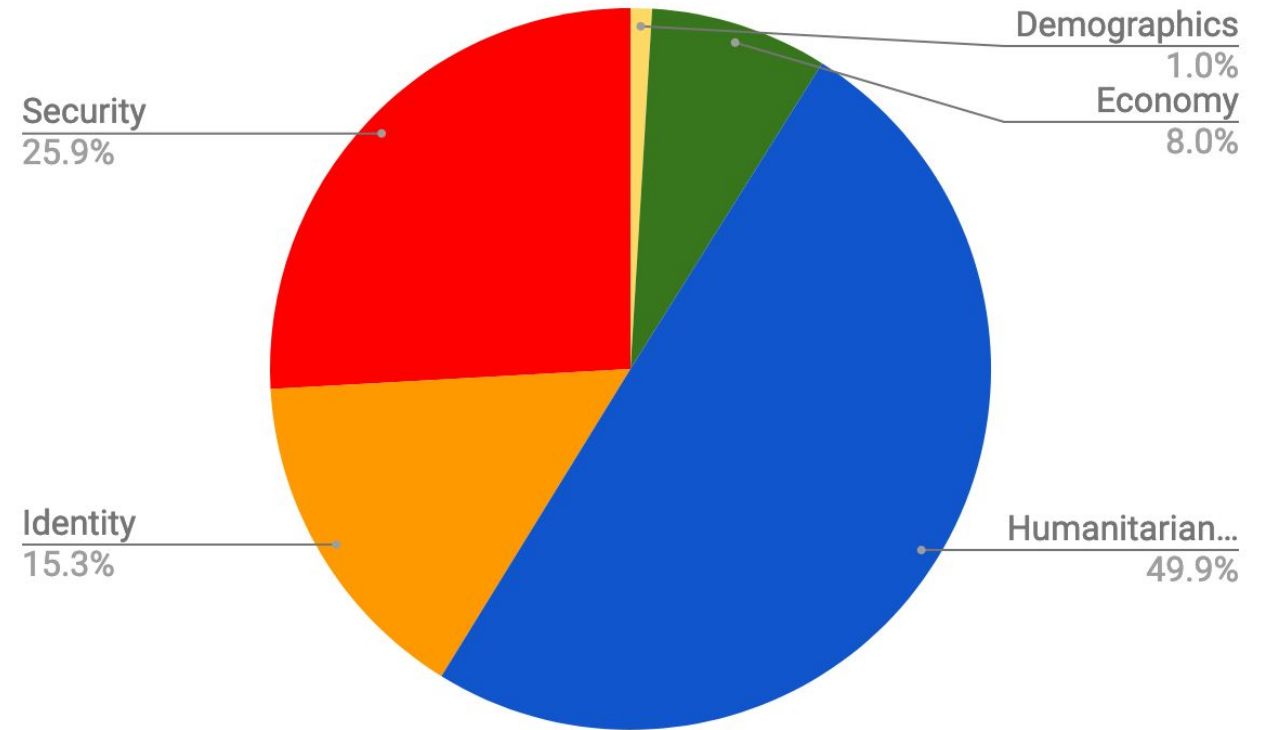


1.

Pan-European Narratives | SE

Narrative Size in Sweden

Most conversations in Sweden are driven by aspects of the **humanitarianism** and **security narratives** when discussing migration.





The shape of the migration discourse

Discussions debating the efficacy of both new and existing migration policies, as well as the political parties who propose them, spark the largest spikes in the overall conversation in Sweden. Notably, there are points in the overall conversation where certain events trigger engagement across all narratives.

Results:
~1,921,000

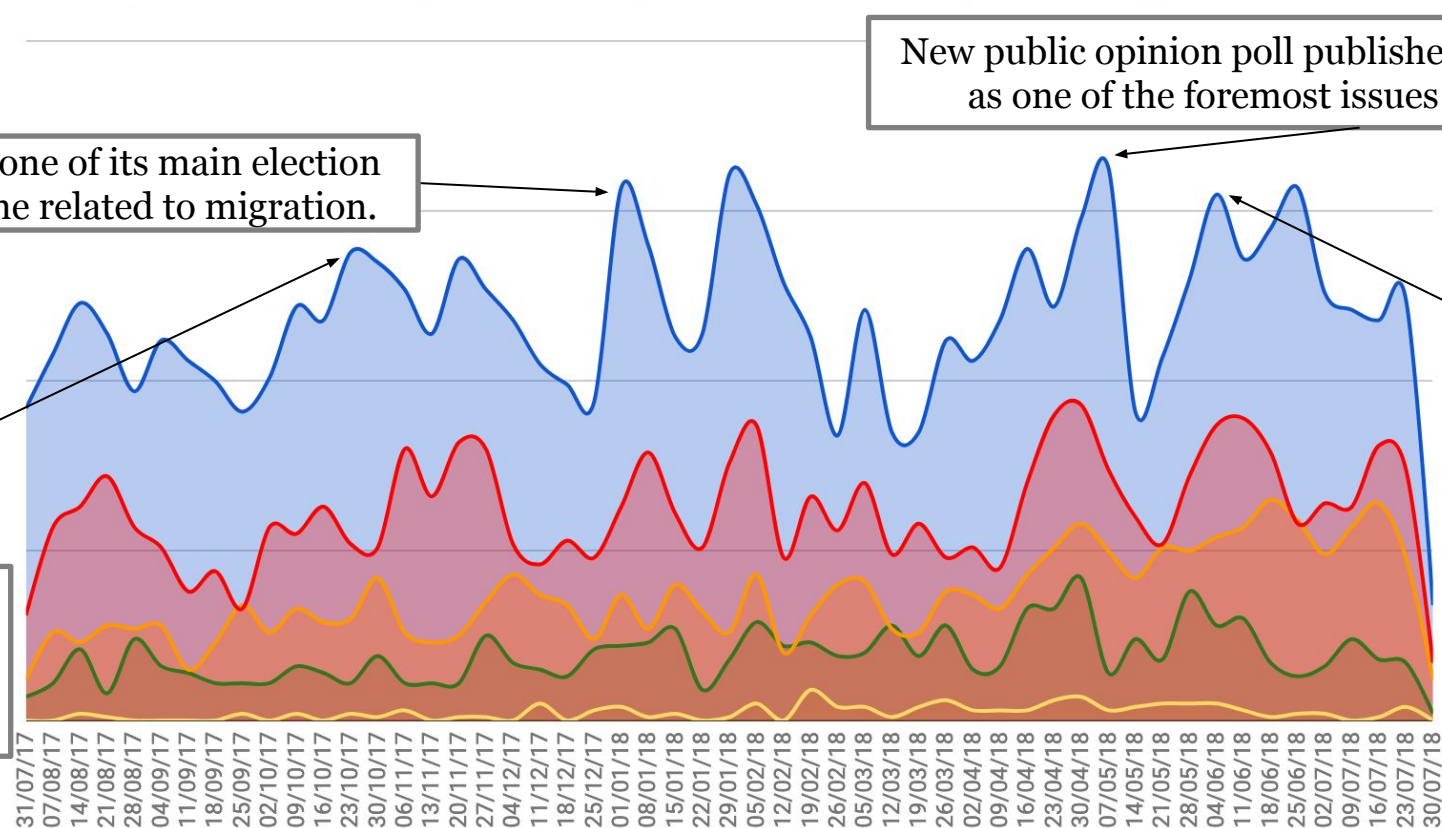
Demographics Economy Humanitarianism Identity Security

Social Democratic Party announces one of its main election issues will be cracking down on crime related to migration.

New public opinion poll published ranking immigration as one of the foremost issues for Swedish voters

Published survey results show public support for the Swedish Democrats surging

Swedish police introduced jogging policemen initiative to help citizens feel safe while running in places with higher ratio of migrants.

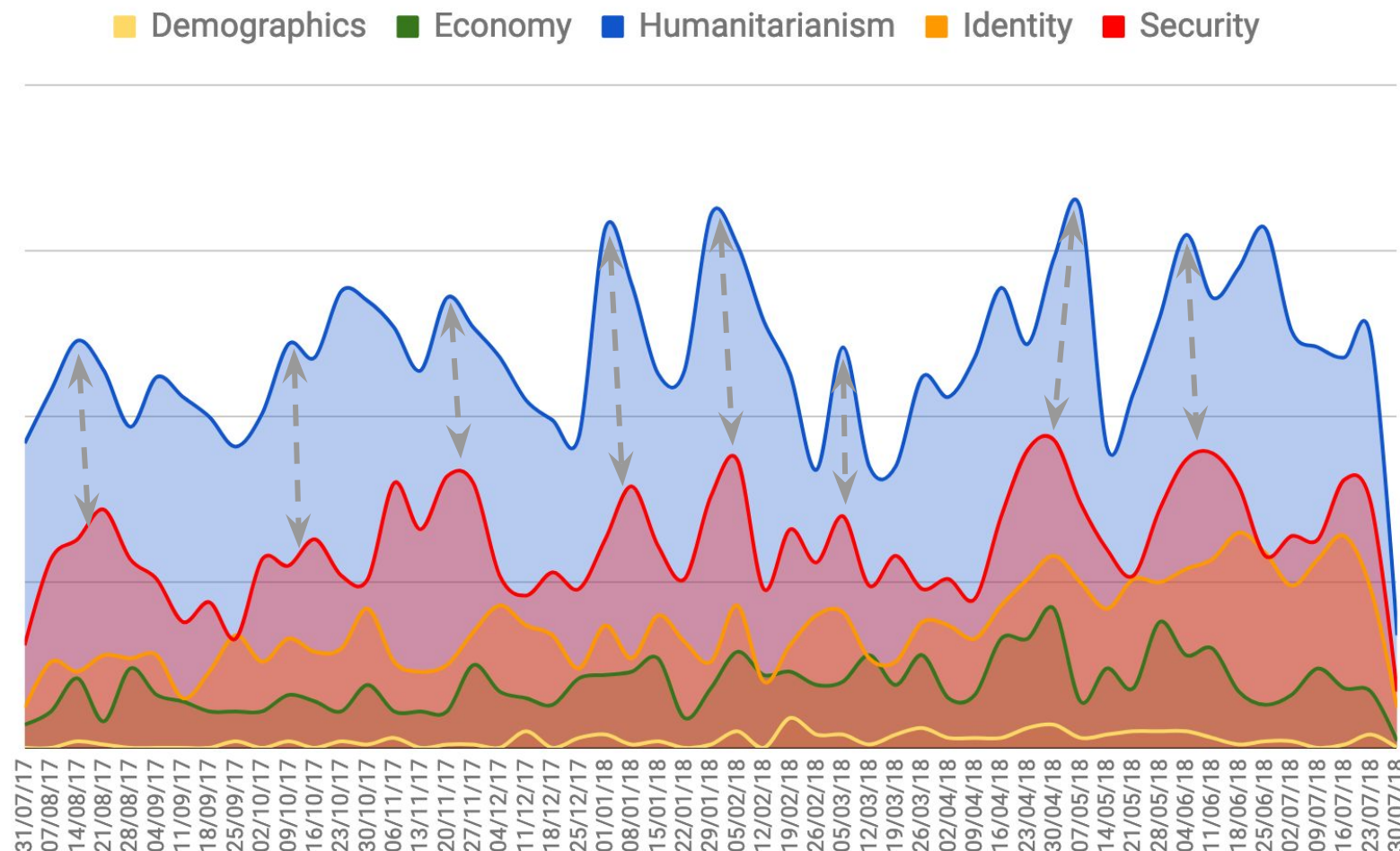


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Peak Analysis: *Narrative Comparison*

The humanitarianism and security narratives tend to correlate when looking at the overall trends in the migration discussion. This relationship may be rooted in the transformative years which followed the 2015 migration crisis: in early 2015, the Swedish government (lead by the Social Democrats) believed it was the country's humanitarian responsibility to assist refugees, a stance consistent with Sweden's historical position on migration. However, opinions on migration quickly shifted when over 163,000 migrants flooded into Sweden, overwhelming the local services, triggering conflict, and creating massive anxiety amongst Swedish locals. Consequently, the topic of migration morphed into an issue with two parallel narratives: some maintained migration as a humanitarian issue, while others began seeing the influx of migrants as a threat to individual and national security.

Results: ~1,921,000

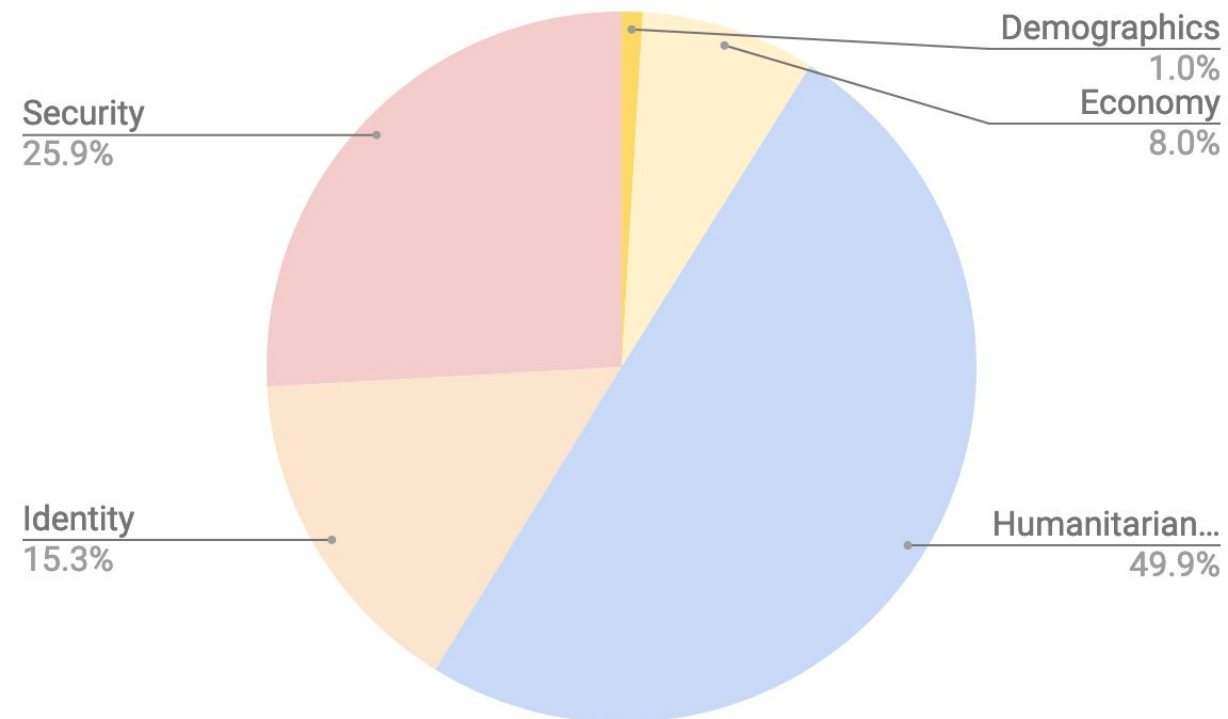


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Demographics (1): *Key Points*

Though demographics is the smallest narrative within the Swedish migration conversation, it contains extremely passionate discussions about Sweden's aging population, as the country's elderly is expected to make up 26% of the population by 2050.* Anti-migrant sentiments believe their healthcare system, already under stress from an aging population, cannot handle the additional strain of an influx of migrants, too. Pro-migrant voices continue to advocate for the Social Democrats' solution: creating Swedish social services that will help migrants establish themselves in sectors of the labour market most impacted by the aging society.

Results:
~21,000 (1%)



*Source: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2011.00382.x>



Pan-European Narratives | SE

Demographics (2): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

The healthcare system cannot handle the aging population AND migrants

The healthcare system was created and planned for the country's population, not the country's population AND these migrants. Of course course it will not functioning correctly now.

Migrants are not contributing to the labour force in Sweden

It takes an average of eight years before half of refugee immigrants entered the Swedish labor market...this ratio never reaches the same level as the rate of employment among native born [Swedes]. The average rate of employment among native-born children is approximately 81 % in the same time period.

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Without migrants, the Swedish labour market and economy would have suffered

Enter a shop, go underground, enter a hospital, watch the buses. Who is working? There are people who came to Sweden for the last 10, 20, 30 years and, without them, we would not have managed.

Young migrants can supply the labour needed to effectively run Sweden's huge welfare system

I am ashamed how [Swedes who once] opened their hearts to [migrants, have now] turned into closed and cold hearts. We need people to work in our welfare system. Are not 35,000 [migrant] youngsters, who want to join the country, absolutely perfect fo this?

Unless all these burdensome oldies suddenly got dumped off a flying saucer...[migration] would be kind of the absolute easiest thing to help plan for [the future].

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Demographics (3): *Conversation Peaks*

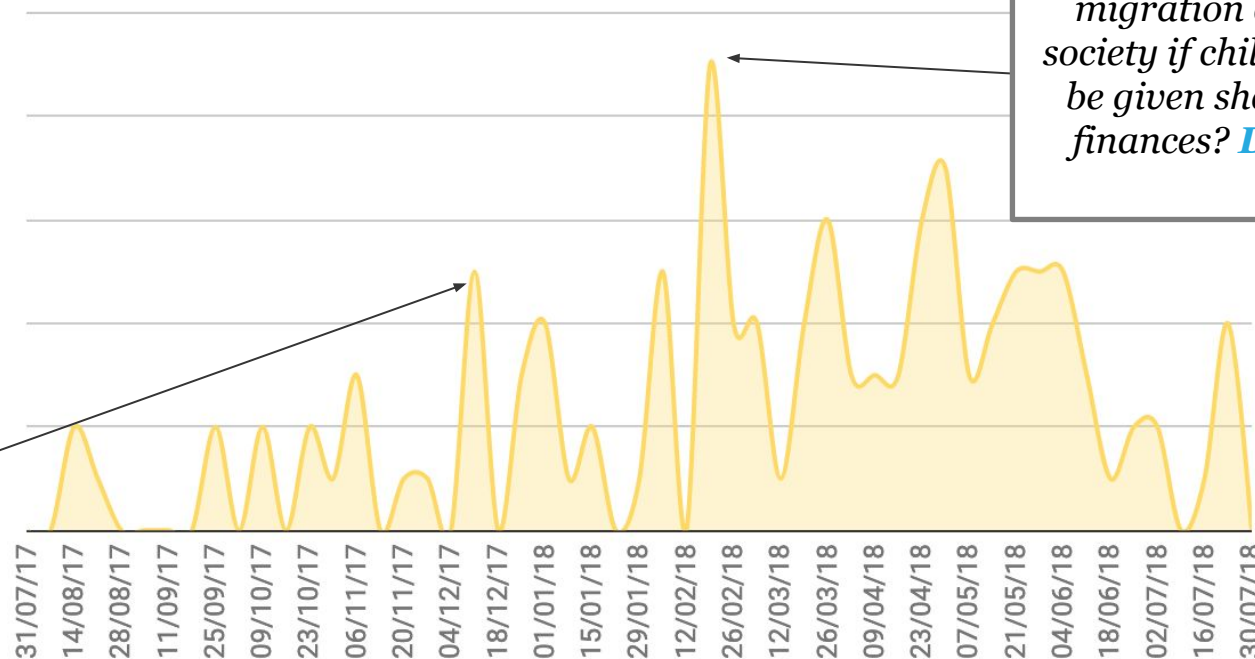
The need for young labour spikes debate, alongside fears of a rising retirement age and a strained welfare state. The Social Democrats' and their leadership are generally blamed for this situation - the Sweden Democrats have pointed to incumbent politicians' contradicting statements to show how their lack of preparation and organization lead to the current delima.

Results: ~21,000 (1%)

"2015, Reinfeldt: Immigration is important for future pensions and our retirement system."

"2018, Reinfeldt: Now you have to work longer before retiring.
Retirement age is raised following a new political agreement. "

*"Political polarization through the migration debate is wrong. What is our society if children and young people cannot be given shelter in Sweden that has good finances? **Do we not have a need for young labour?**"*



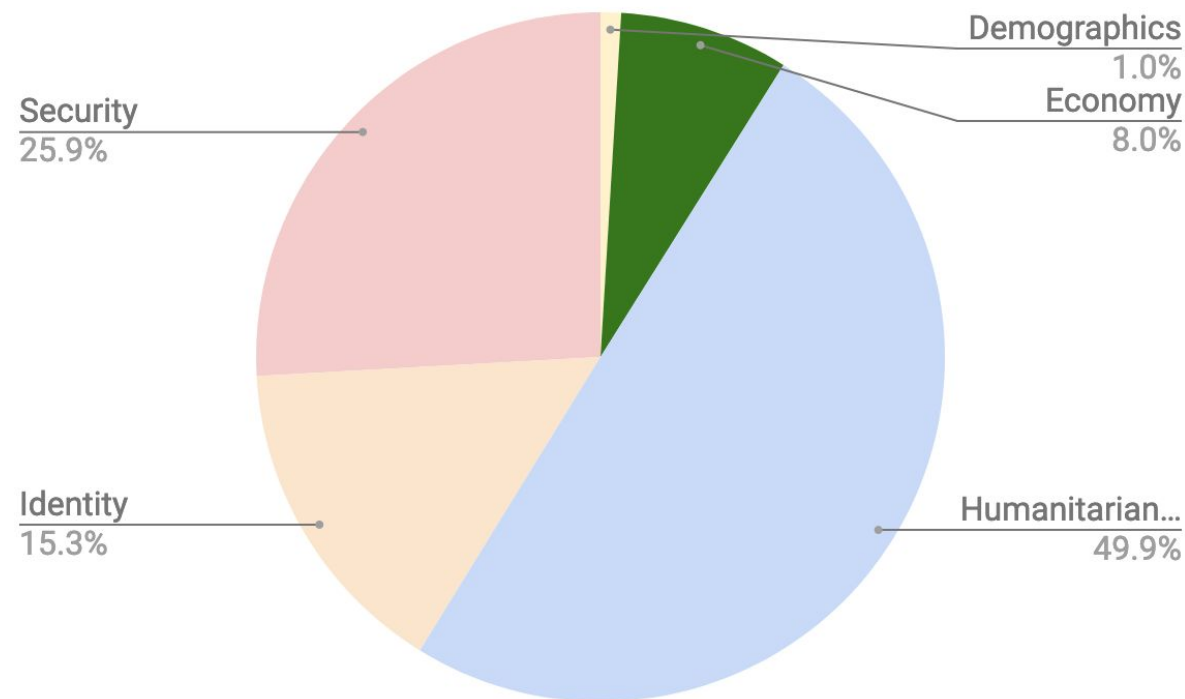
Demographics

Pan-European Narratives | SE

Economy (1): *Key Points*

The principal concern within the economy narrative is the preservation of the Swedish welfare state. Given that the Social Democrats are the oldest and largest political party in Sweden, they are often given the credit for the impressive and well-developed Swedish welfare state of today.* Pro-migrant voices tend to lend support to the Social Democrats' approach of sustainable economic assistance, whereas anti-migrant voices use the Sweden Democrats' position which states Sweden's immigration policy has been too generous which has resulted in huge economic strains on the country.

Results:
~154,000 (8%)



*Source: <https://sweden.se/society/political-parties-in-sweden/>

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

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Migrants pose an unfair burden to Swedish welfare system

*The **Swedish people should not have to ward off their welfare and be taxed to support bankrupt migrants!** Close the border & start deporting! #migpol*

Migrants will put too much stress on the healthcare system

*Then we have healthcare. Of course [migrants] get full benefits. **Sweden spends approximately 13,822 240 000 billion on migrants healthcare. Keep in mind that immigrants are carrying existing diseases and need immediate use of Sweden's healthcare.***

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

We can assist migrants if we share responsibility efficiently

*Sweden is good at accounting the cost of migration. But **we still need to share the burden because there are municipalities with more migrants than others...** we need to compare. Ok?*

We must help migrants help themselves

***Swedish children** move out young and learn to make their own money when they are young. They **learn the importance of earning money and working for an education.** We must **apply the same to** those who beg [migrants]...**Just receiving without** expectation of giving back [or **working for it**], can create an [unsustainable] dependence on help.*

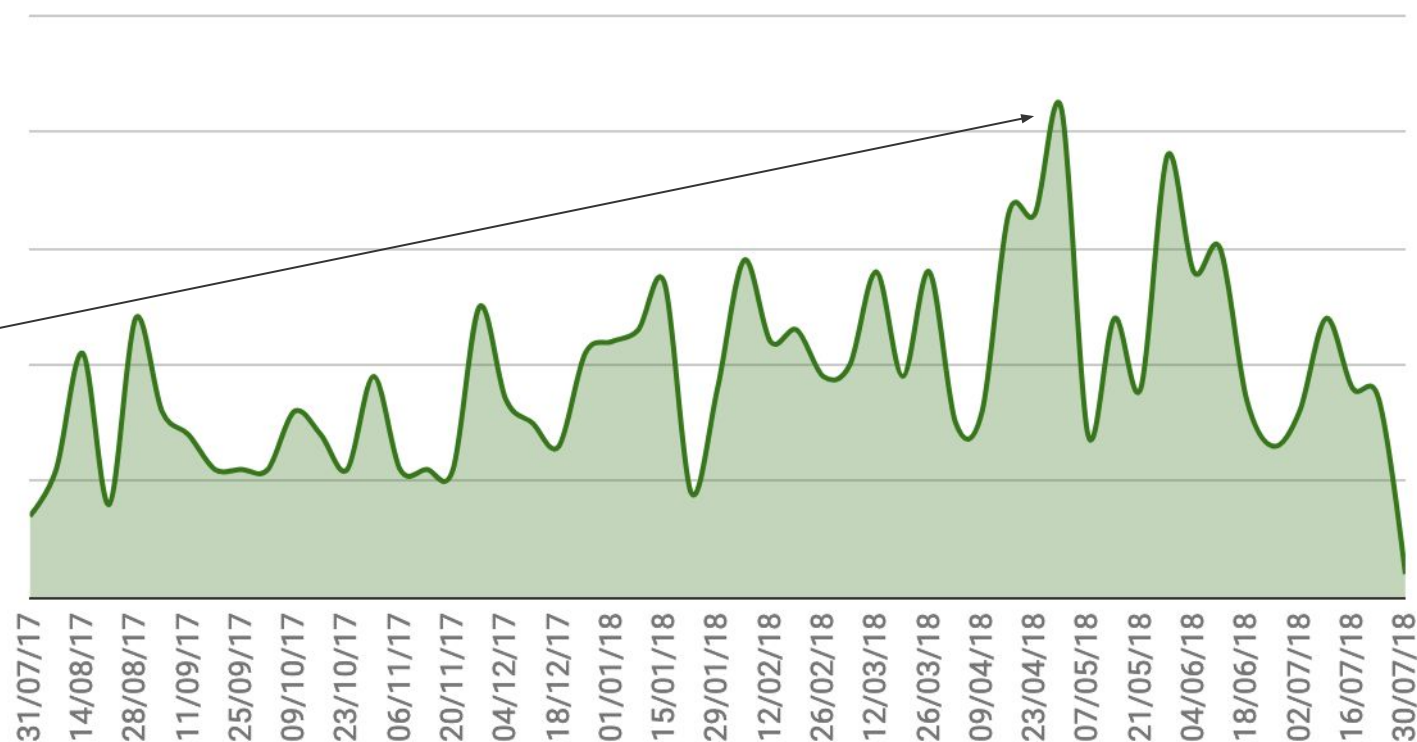
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Economy (3): Conversation Peaks

Swedes were the most engaged within the economy narrative when locals felt the government was using Swedish taxes to pay for services that exclusively assist migrants.

Results: ~154,000 (8%)

“Should it be so difficult to give retirees the same tax as wage earners? Sweden can afford to invest 100-billion billions on immigration and 3 billion in illegal high school students. **Never the question of prioritizing your own population?**”



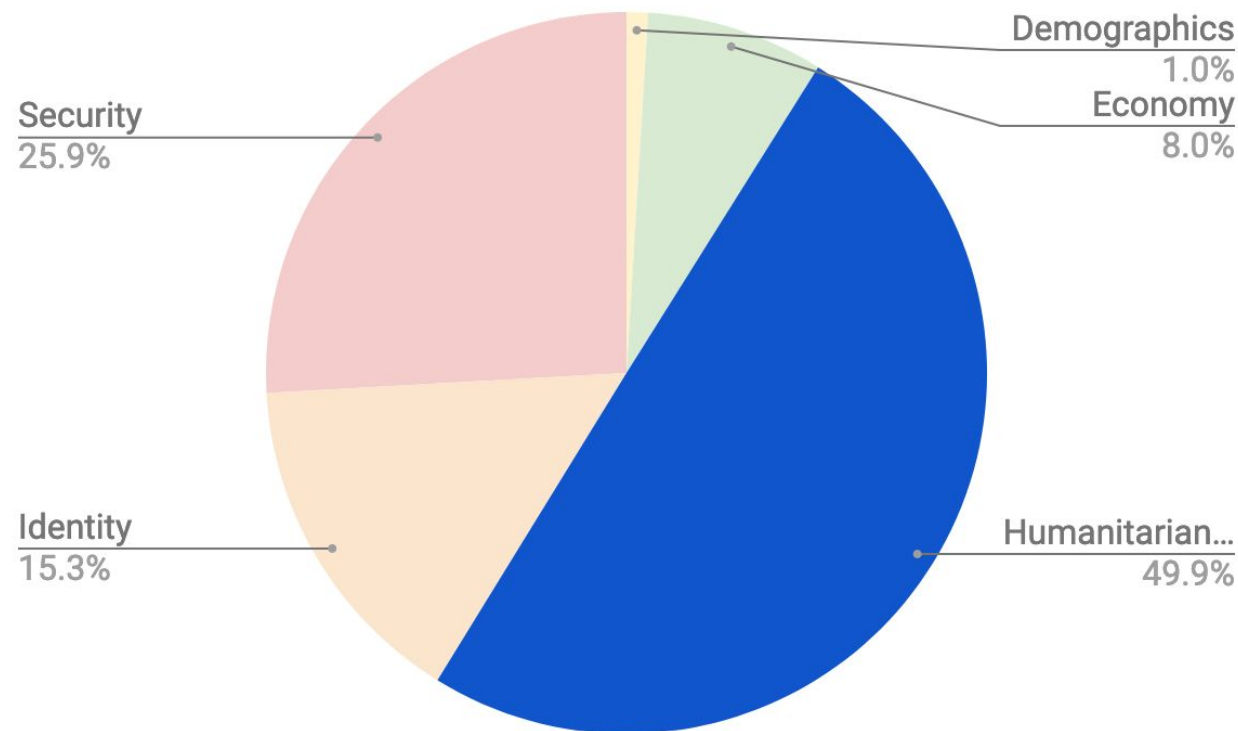
Economy

Pan-European Narratives | SE

Humanitarianism (1): *Key Points*

The largest narrative in Sweden is the humanitarian narrative: voices within Sweden descend into bitter debate when discussing the obligation the country has to migrants, as well as potential legislative initiatives that could be implemented to improve Sweden's current migration services and processes. Pro-migrant voices insist Sweden must “open their hearts” to migrants as they have throughout history, and often condemn the legal system currently in place for migrants for being ineffective and inhumane. In contrast, the anti-migrant voices insist such an open-minded approach has failed and has ultimately wrought havoc on Sweden's economy, identity, and security.

Results:
~95,1000 (50%)





Pan-European Narratives | SE

Humanitarianism (2): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

We do not have an obligation to help “fake” migrants

They are not refugees in any way, they are economic migrants. They are in military age, and in large majority, they are single men! If they were really refugees, wouldn't more families come with them?

Even @WolfgangHansson now admits that Africans who come to the EU have no asylum reasons but are prosperous economic migrants.

Permitting those who lie on their asylum applications is helping no one

It is good that people under 18 are allowed to stay in Sweden when they arrive. But it is not a humane refugee policy to grant residence permits to people who have been lying about their age when they could have done so for many personal reasons that we don't know about.

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

We must open our hearts to migrants - they are in real need

It is important to remind you that the overwhelming majority of those seeking asylum today, in Sweden and Europe, are just war refugees who flee for their lives.

Everyday it hurts our hearts...Please stop sending back children and adolescents and adults to a country where people die every day.

Sending back migrants when they arrive in Sweden is not an option. Don't you know that there are no safe areas for them to return to??



Pan-European Narratives | SE

Humanitarianism (3): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

These migrants are not in real need

It's a lie that immigrants are in danger, an asylum seeker just visited his family in Iran.

The media portrays the Mediterranean voyage as a dangerous journey, but as we learn more and more, day by day, what was described as extremely treacherous and dangerous are largely an unethical journalistic propaganda machine.

We need to help the aging Swedish population before helping migrants

Despite efforts made to offer older immigrants a living environment that feels safe and homey, no corresponding efforts have been made to provide such services to the aging Swedish population.

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

The existing legal framework in Sweden for migration needs to be changed: existing procedures are inefficient and unfair

Legal uncertainty is a fact and strikes hard against the young [migrants] we meet daily...This is something we have long been pointing out through our legal reporting.

Young unaccompanied [migrants] have been negatively impacted by extremely long waiting periods [during the migration process] due to the fact that @Migration [Office] deliberately lowered their caseload. These young migrants are also forced to undergo lengthy legal hearings and [fact-finding procedures as a result of unfair policies put in place by the Migration Office]... NOT because they stated an incorrect age like @bjorklundjan claims.



Pan-European Narratives | SE

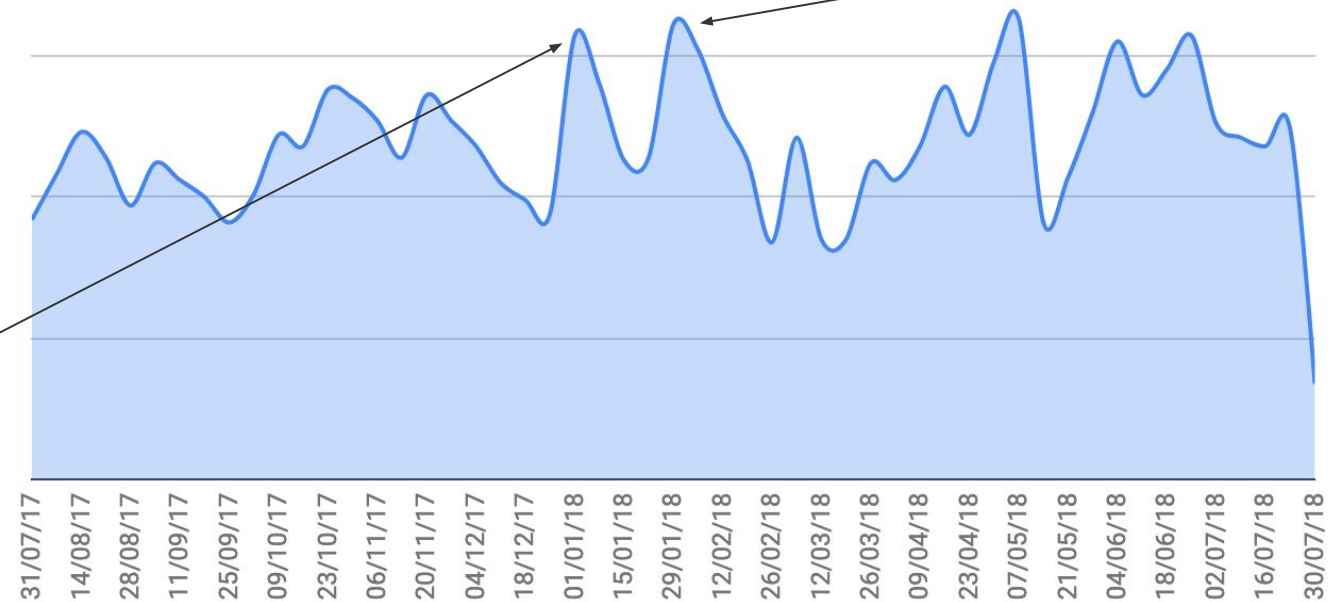
Humanitarianism (4): *Conversation Peaks*

Events and policies which govern the current legal process for migrants drove the majority of the humanitarianism conversation spikes. Moreover, the months preceding the election triggered increased engagement as many Swedes worried the rise of the Sweden Democrats' popularity signaled an erosion of the humanitarian values that are the foundation of their country's identity.

Results: ~95,1000 (50%)

"It is important to create a refugee system that is more human than what we have today," says Frederiksen to DR News."

Swedes express anger over the Social Democrats' new stance on migration: *"Incomprehensible passivity from the [Social Democrats] on this issue..."**[we must push for policies which allow] people under the age of 18 to be granted a residence permit when applying for asylum, if they have not been given a decision for their application within one year."*



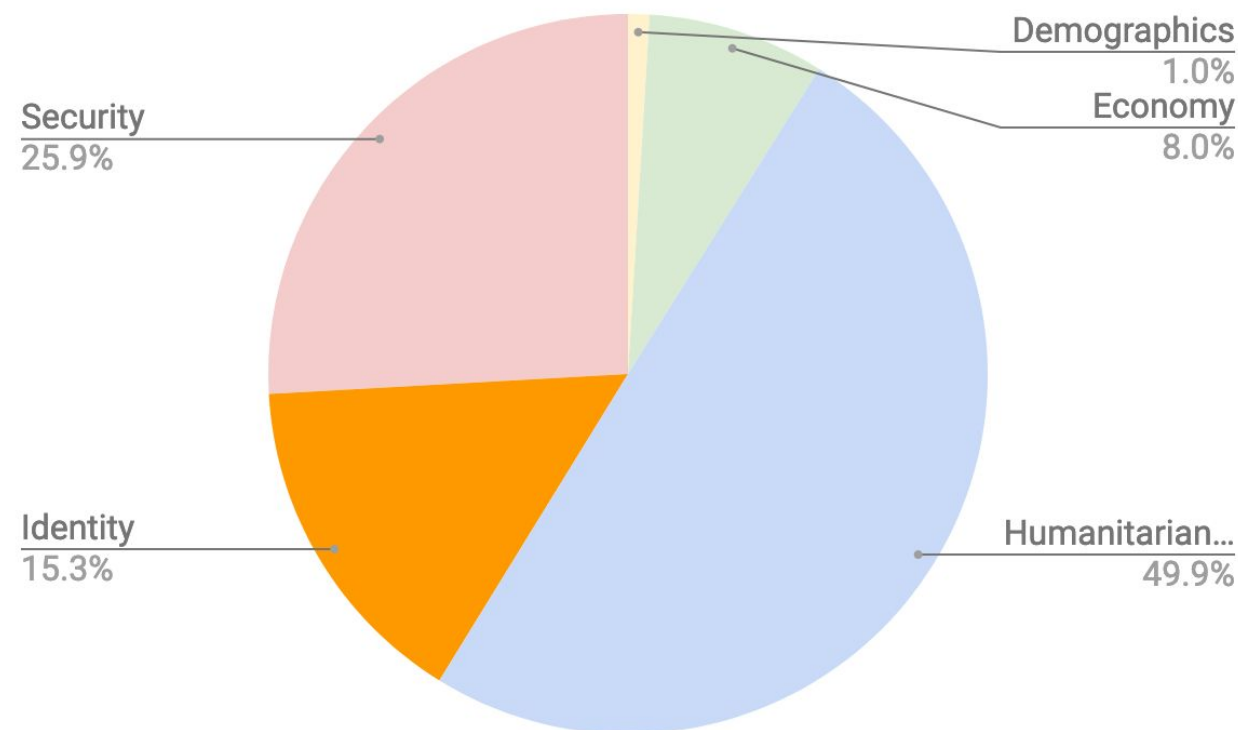
Humanitarianism

Pan-European Narratives | SE

Identity and Customs (1): *Key Points*

There is a sizeable discussion in Sweden within the identity and customs narrative. Swedes seem to view those from culturally closer regions, like Europe or the Nordics, more favorably than those from Africa or the Middle East. Anti-migrant voices tend to emphasize the importance of language proficiency (or lack thereof). Moreover, migrants who arrived and successfully integrated into society generations ago fear that additional migrants from different cultures will increase overall xenophobia in society. In contrast, some Swedes see migration positively, believing it enriches Sweden culturally. These pro-migrant voices often believe the onus of successful integration lies with both Swedes and incoming migrants.

Results: ~296,000 (15%)





Pan-European Narratives | SE

Identity and Customs (2): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Multiculturalism is harmful

The price for multiculturalism is far too big. We take in immigrants, then we...must adjust ourselves, and even our laws to be a accommodate. We sacrifice our own cultural, ethnic and historical backgrounds, and also our own freedoms, because we are forced to assimilate to immigrants' cultures.

Migrants bring values that conflict with Swedish values

Islam is an evil ideology based on totalitarianism, expansion, and male domination. Its values are absolute, and not compatible with the western world.

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Multiculturalism is beneficial to Swedish society

We will take immigrants in order to get more diversity in the country, and the chance to experience multiculturalism!

Migrants, taken in by willing Swedish families, can and have integrated successfully into society

Now, after two years, Reza understands Swedish and speaks it with almost no issue. He also knows and understands the Swedish values we have taught him.



Pan-European Narratives | SE

Identity and Customs (3): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

It's the migrants' fault for failing to integrate - they refuse to learn Swedish

Half of the elderly care staff do not speak Swedish. This has led to very dangerous situations for both the staff and the patients.

We do not want to train them because they are only immigrants who do not know Swedish, they fight every training and do not listen.

Internal ethnic conflicts hinder integration

"Old" migrants fear the new wave of migration will cause an increased xenophobia in the country.

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Successful integration requires effort from both sides

[Swedish Separatism] may happen if we are not careful and do not focus on assimilation from the beginning. Polarization is already happening [because we haven't focused on these processes].

The politicians see that the experiment has failed, but they are too arrogant to see the cause... Some blame the Muslims while others blame the Jews. But the main problem is deeper than that. The problem actually is in us, in our neurotic aggression-inhibited mediocrity culture. It is in Sweden that the madness has gone the longest... The problem is thus in us for not also trying.



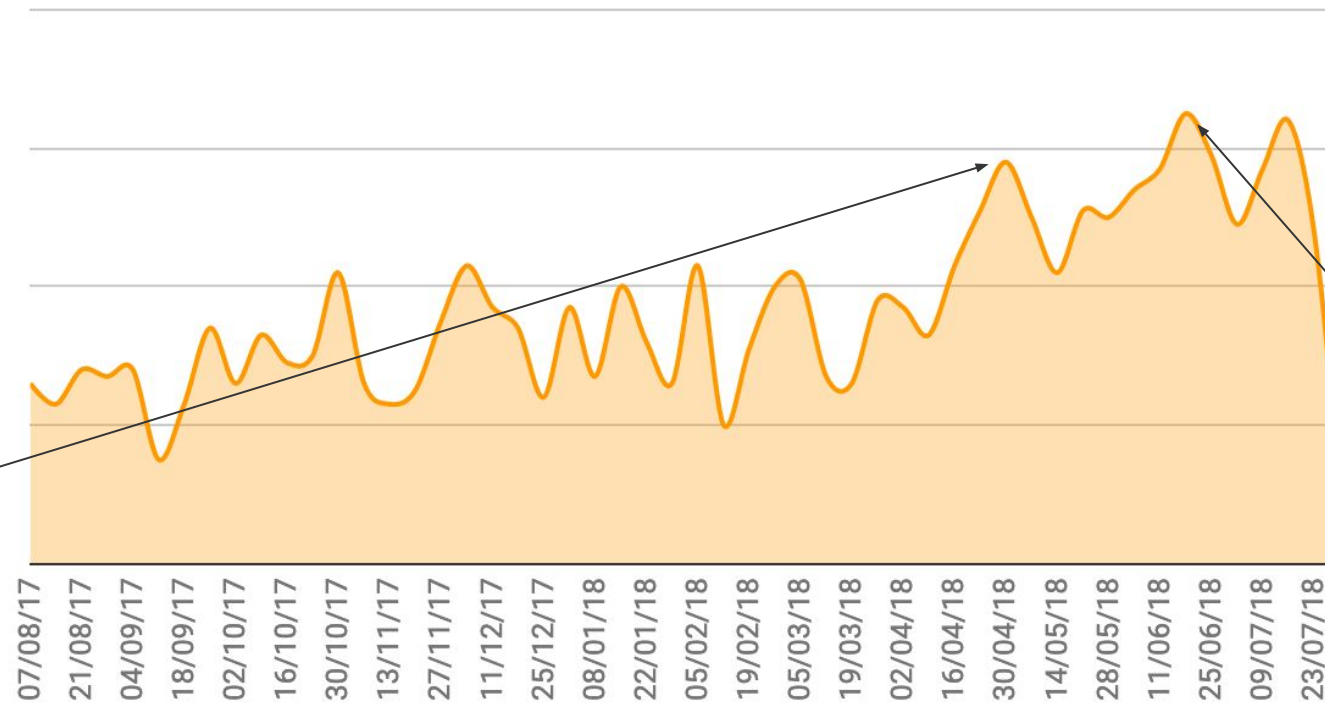
Pan-European Narratives | SE

Identity and Customs (4): *Conversation Peaks*

The political rhetoric being used in the run up to the 2018 general elections drives conversation spikes in the identity and customs narrative. Both pro and anti-migrant voices increased engagement in the months right before election.

Results: ~296,000 (15%)

"Sweden expects us to be assimilate to their culture and give up our own identity and culture. People abandon their traditions, cultures and values and replace them with Swedish...but we are still not accepted because we are still [migrants]. We will never be able to assimilate into the Sweden."



"More often, you hear or read 'immigrants are needed,' 'immigrants make a valuable contribution,' 'immigrants add new exciting culture,' etc. One must wonder, then, how in all the world has Sweden survived until now
🗣️ #svpol #migpol
#migration

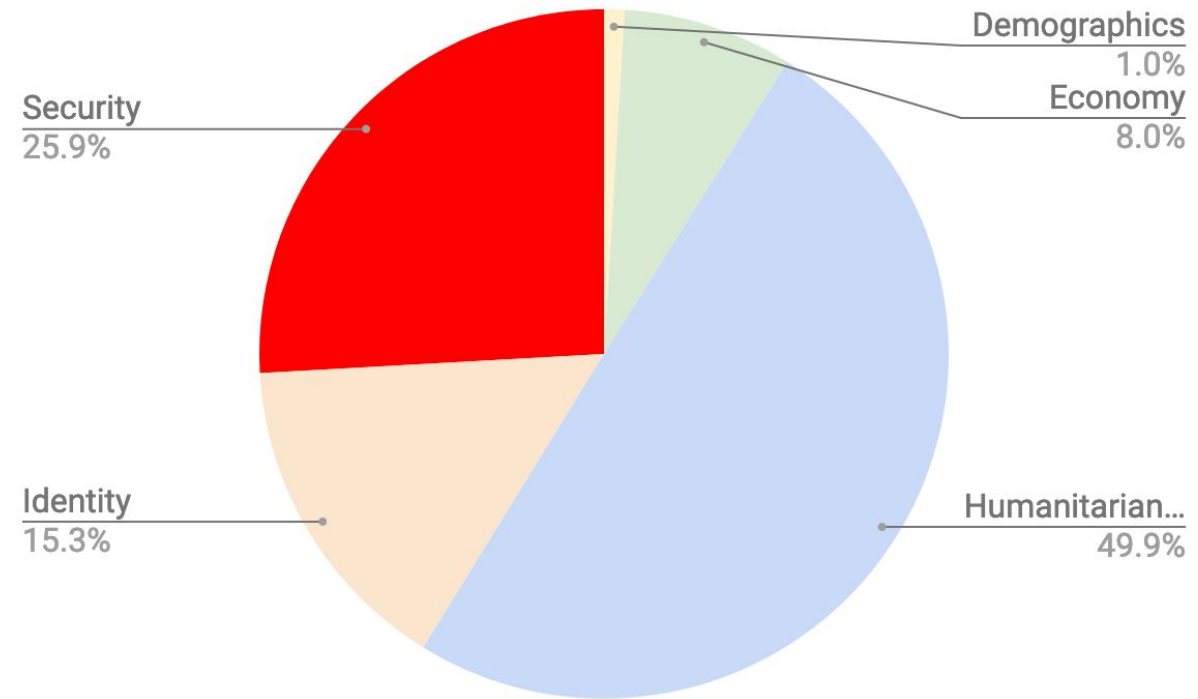
Identity

Pan-European Narratives | SE

Security (1): *Key Points*

Security is the second largest narrative within the Swedish migration discussion, and is dominated by anti-migrant voices. Swedes assert that shootings, gang activity, and sexual and violent crime is increasing in areas with a large ratio of men with migrant-backgrounds. There are also concerns about inter-migrant conflict, as well as terrorist recruitment. Many believe tightening legal frameworks and regulations to control the flow of migrants would reduce this threat. When present, pro-migrant voices often counter these anxieties by pointing out Swedes are just as likely to commit violent crimes as migrants.

Results: ~49,000 (26%)



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

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Migrants from Africa and the Middle East are making Sweden unsafe

...95.6 % of assault violence is committed by immigrants...who are from Algerians, Afghans, Tunisians, Moroccans and Palestinians.

Sweden's image was a so-called utopia...but that image has been shattered and replaced by the image: "Sweden the rape capital of the west" ...The rapists come from countries where Islamic laws and norms have influence.

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

The legal framework for migration must change

If we address the migration and integration problems, migration needs to be tightened. We want temporary residence permits to be the main procedure for migrants, and these regulations also need to be tightened up.

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Different generations of migrants cause conflict

Did the politicians really believe that all conflicts would end like a magic battle and different groups of migrants would just coexist on Swedish soil?

Group violence has nothing to do with "socio-economic factors". It is about conflicts between different groups of different [migrants coming from] cultures.

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Swedes commit violent crimes too

Migrants are overrepresented in crime statistics because of you control for socio-economic factors and age, the difference [between migrants and locals] completely disappears...so what are you afraid of?



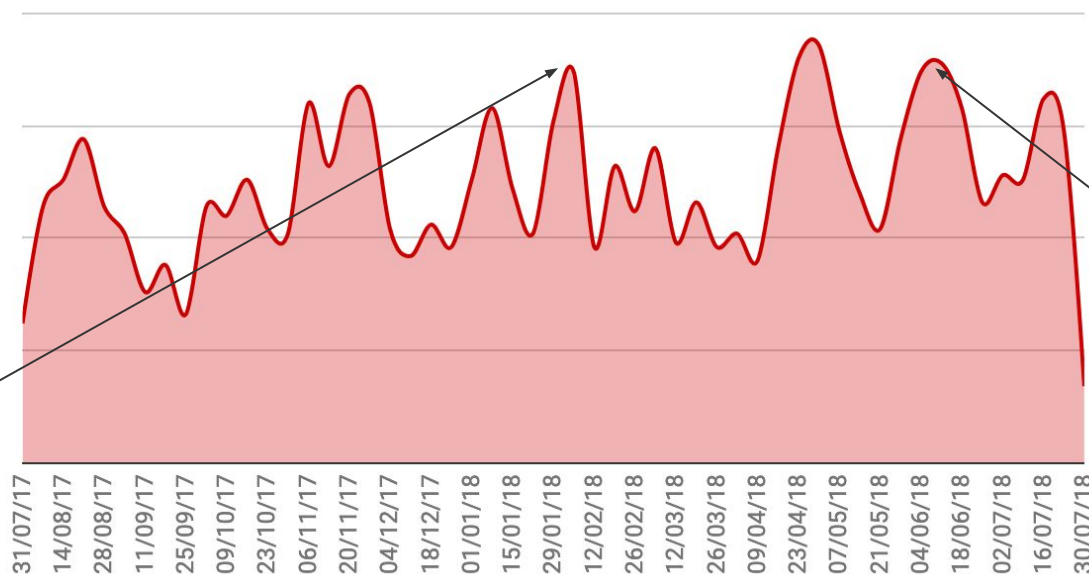
Pan-European Narratives | SE

Security (3): Conversation Peaks

The conversation peaks within the security narrative generally occur when Swedes echo the anti-migrant rhetoric pushed by the Sweden Democrats. In the months leading up to the 2018 general election, there is an overall increase in security narrative conversations because the majority of candidates campaigning also adopted language and positions similar to that of the Sweden Democrats in an attempt to win votes. When the Social Democrats also decided to move closer to this security-oriented position, there was a backlash from both pro and anti-migrant voters, both sides calling this move massively hypocritical.

Results: ~49,000 (26%)

*“That **Social Democrats** all of a sudden want to try to protect **Sweden**, they all of a sudden really want to care about Swedish citizens...well [**considering the crisis we are in now is their fault**], it's hard to believe. Unfortunately.”*



*“The elderly don’t dare go out in the evenings. Women feel insecure as soon as they see an immigrant. Swedish children feel unsafe at school because 80% of their peers are Muslim. **Opening the door today means being subjected to rape, theft or robbery tomorrow.**”*

Security

+ *The Local Issue in Sweden Around Migration*



2.

Local Issue| SE

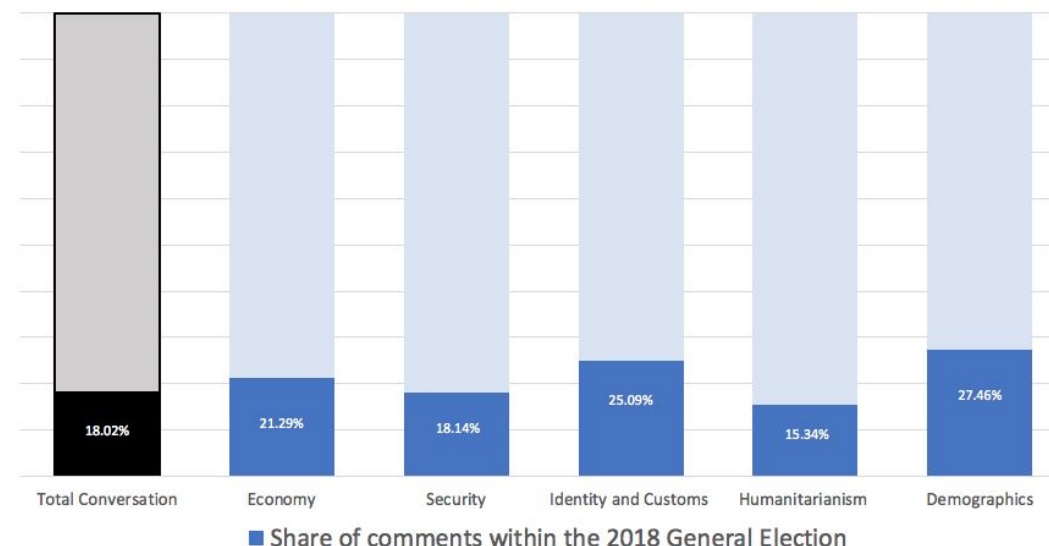
2018 Swedish General Elections

Discussions about the **2018 general elections in Sweden**, the first general election since the country took in a record 163,000 migrants in 2015, were present throughout every migration narrative. **The Sweden Democrats' exerted the most influence over migration narratives by transforming the "refugee crisis" into a new narrative dubbed, "failed integration."**

By emphasizing the risks migrants pose to the security, economy, and national values of Sweden, the **Sweden Democrats acknowledged the shock, pain, and fear experienced by many natives in the aftermath of the 2015 migration crisis**. This new narrative also pointed to the over-generous policies pushed by the Social Democrats as one of the main causes of turmoil.

The results of the general election reflect the massive success of this narrative. Social Democrats barely maintained the majority, as voters handed them their worst-ever election results. Simultaneously the once-fringe party (the Sweden Democrats) gained 12.9% since its last election - earning them enough votes to be the third largest party in Parliament.

"A genocide is going on, political leaders [Social Democrats] are betrayers, serve foreign interests and destroy the country by supporting unchecked immigration."



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



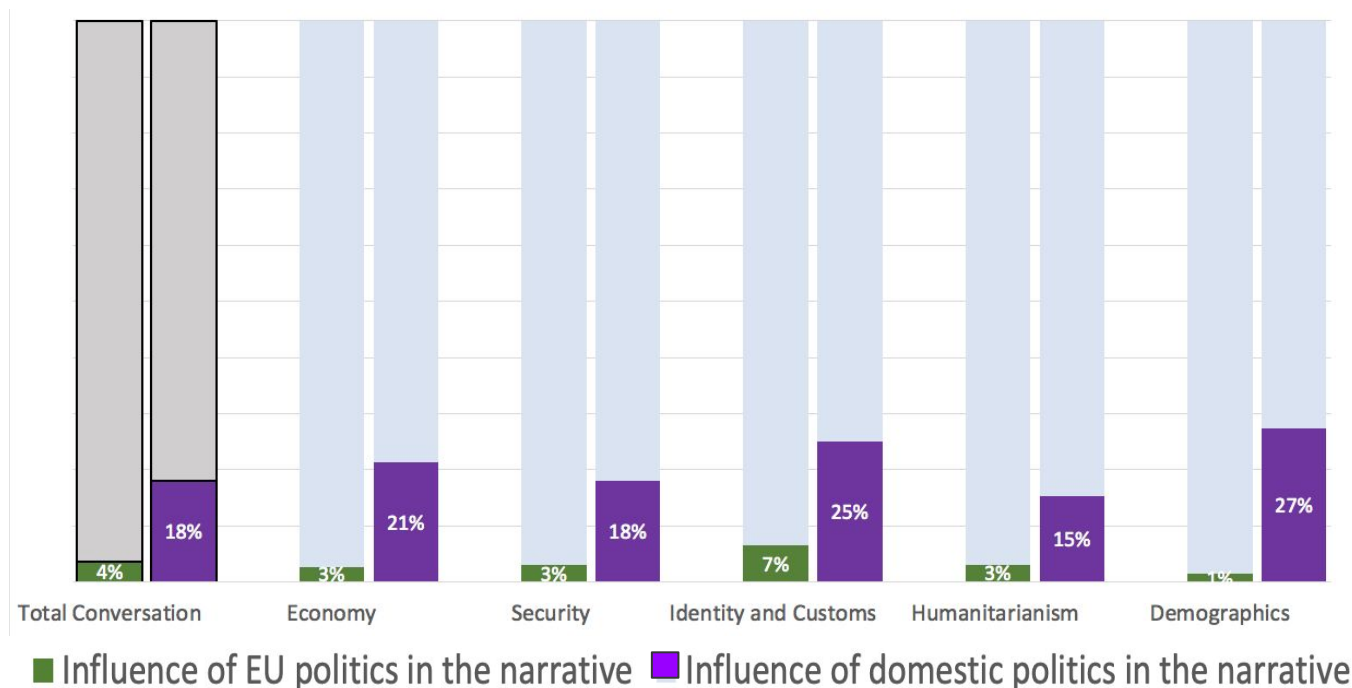
3.

European and Domestic Politics Context within Narratives | SE

Migration Seen as a Local Issue

European politics do not appear often in the Swedish discourse on migration. Instead, **local politics and politicians are frequently mentioned, appearing in about 18% of the conversations**. Such findings are compatible with the patterns of this report - that the Swedish migration conversation is strongly connected to local discussions, specifically those relating to the 2018 general election.

The **demographic narrative** contains significantly more references to **local**, rather than European politics. This can largely be attributed to the Sweden Democrats' usage of the topic to fire up voters against the incumbent, the Social Democrats in the months preceding the 2018 general election.



+ *Discussion Tone in Sweden*

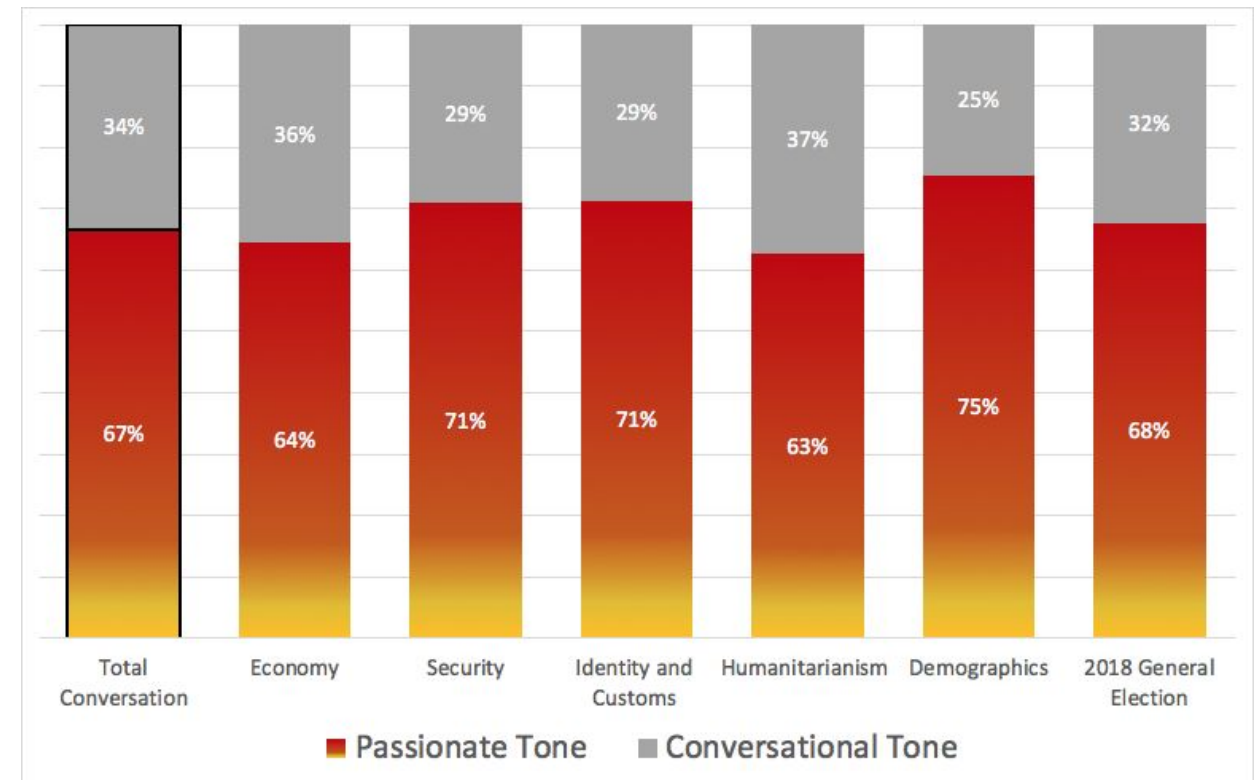


4.

Passionate Tone Throughout the Discussion

The conversation tone around migration is **charged with emotional tension**, especially in discussions taking place right before the 2018 general election. **Humanitarianism, identity and customs**, and **security** narratives spark the most passionate discussions.

Conversations morph into different narratives when Swedes emphasize different aspects of the same story. For example, when discussing residence permits, the humanitarian narrative portrays the current process as discriminatory and unfair; the identity and customs narrative expressing a fear that expanding legal residence options for migrants will result in the liquidation of Swedish culture; the security narrative sees the current process as threatening national security due to lax screening processes.



+ *Conversation Channels*



5.

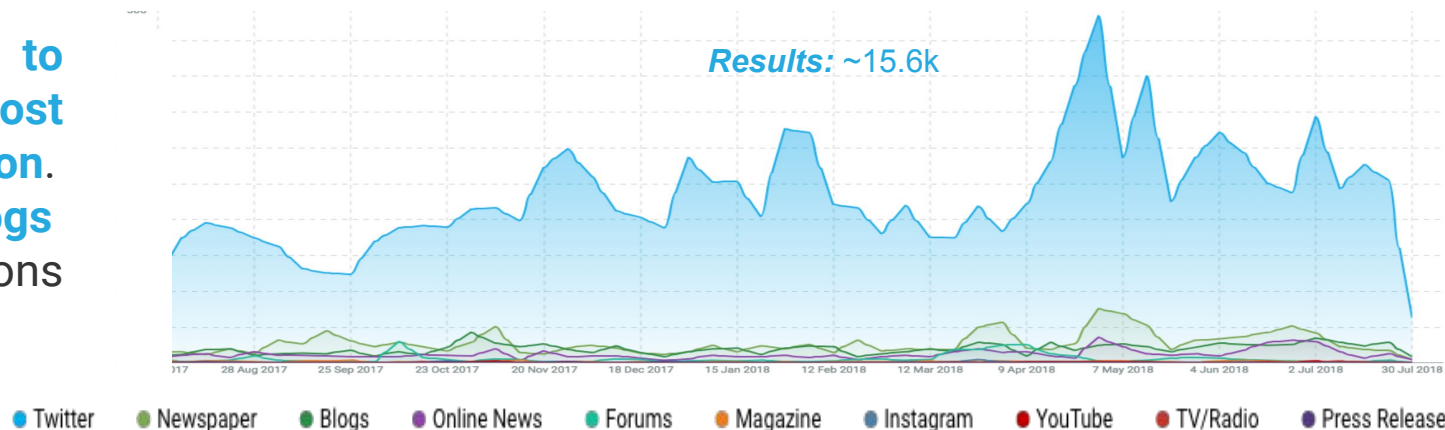


Channel Distribution | SE

Twitter Generates Content, Newspapers Spark Engagement

Swedes use Twitter to generate the most content about migration. Newspapers and blogs generate conversations on the topic as well.

Content Generation: Twitter Generates the Most Content



Twitter
Content
Generation:

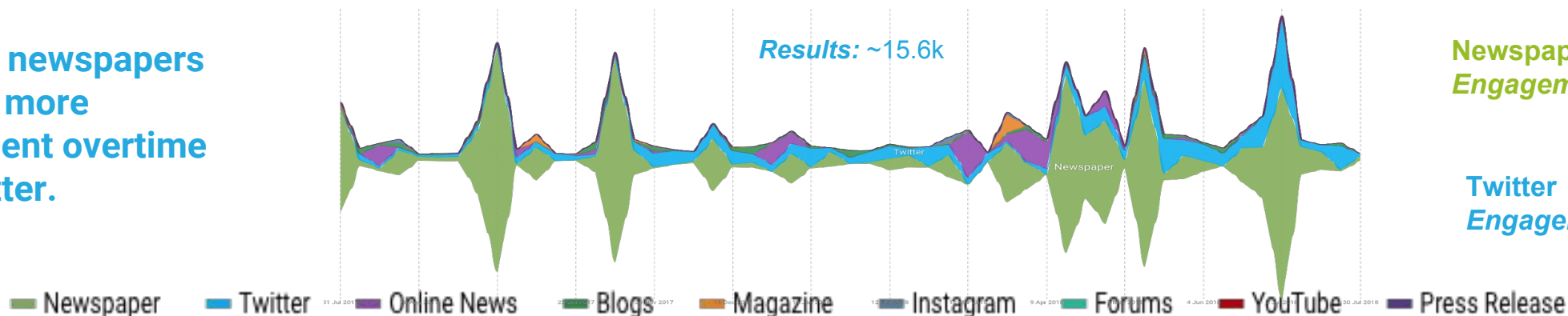
11.7K

Newspaper
Content
Generation:

1.4K

Content Engagement: Newspapers Spark the Most Content Engagement

However, newspapers spark far more engagement overtime than Twitter.



Newspaper
Engagement:

89K

Twitter
Engagement:

27.3K

Most Influential Authors | SE

Journalists' Posts Trigger the Highest Engagement



The highest number of shares, retweets, comments and likes are triggered by journalists' posts.

The conversation was mostly driven by journalists, sharing posts via traditional media platforms, focusing on domestic politics and local migration issues events.

Most Influential Authors in the Overall Conversation	Publication	Description
Ann Heberlein	debate, expressen.se	Newspaper
Thomas Mattsson	expressen.se	Newspaper
Filip Johansson	expressen.se	Newspaper
Fredrik Sjöshult	expressen.se	Newspaper
Daniel Sjödahl	jp.se	Online News