

# **Migration Narratives in Europe**

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

*Country report for the Federal Republic of Germany*



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

**- 2019 -**



# Context to the German Discussion on Migration

- Germany is a **founding member of and most populous state in the European Union**, with 81,197,537 inhabitants in 2015.
- The country received the **highest number of asylum applications during the 2015 migration crisis**. Submitted applications peaked in 2016 (744,155), and decreased in 2017 (223,560).\*
- In 2017, official asylum seekers in the country made up 0.39% of the population, thus **Germany hosts the 4<sup>th</sup> largest group of refugees in the EU**.
- Despite the vast number of refugees stationed in the country, **the conversation on migration is only the 8<sup>th</sup> largest in the European Union**.
- The German government consists of a grand coalition between the **Christian-democratic** CDU-CSU alliance and the **social-democratic** SPD. The alliance's stance is key to the EU's migration policy and the government lead by Angela Merkel has held a **relatively pro-migrant position** since the crisis' outbreak in 2015.



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



# Humanitarian Help, Rising Security Threat and Growing Xenophobia

Germany has been the epicentre of the migration crisis since 2015. In the name of **Willkommenskultur**, Germany's inclusive approach to foreigners, the CDU-CSU-SPD government has decided to keep the country's borders open and has welcomed the highest number of refugees among all EU member states.

However, many blame *Willkommenskultur* for the escalation of the migration crisis. While some loath the **rising security threat**, others claim that **growing xenophobia** is the country's main problem.

This change in sentiment is reflected in the outcome of the 2017 federal election: as voters demanded more efficient strategies to deal with refugees already in Germany, the far-right leveraged the growing frustration with a strongly anti-immigrant campaign.

Negative sentiment is often fuelled by the **lack of transparency in welcoming refugees**: many people feel that uncontrolled migration means both a security threat and obscure funding spent on refugees. Reflecting on the latter, a **new immigration law** is often mentioned as a tool to better control migration and leverage the economic potential that lie in the successful integration of immigrants to the labour market.

*"We do not need immigrants who make our life a living hell. What we need are balls to tear the mask off from the face of the lying press and the betrayers in the government."*

*"I can live well with 1 million refugees. But with 6 million AfD voters...?"*



# AfD Campaign Messages Reflect Pan-European Narratives of Migration

Although it missed the 5% threshold to enter the Bundestag in 2013, the far-right party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) successfully leveraged the anti-migrant sentiment with an openly racist campaign and became the third largest party in the Bundestag after the 2017 federal elections.

Economy	Identity	Demography	Security
<p><i>“Migration-studies were altered! How many lies does the government finance?”</i></p>	<p><i>“Islam? It does not fit our cuisine.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Clarification on our position: Immigration – yes, only if it is absolutely necessary”</i></p>	<p><i>“Cologne, Essen, Bochum, Düsseldorf... More security for our wives and daughters!”</i></p>

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 | DE

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

### Size of Pan-European Narratives

**Security** is the biggest narrative: Germans often discuss crime committed or attempted by refugees. The **second biggest issue is identity**: while some Germans fear the loss of local traditions due to migration, others dread the growing racist sentiment in the country.

### Local Issues

Although rarely discussed, the historic and contemporary presence of **Turkish immigrants** trigger contradictory opinions among Germans.

### EU & Domestic Politics

As Germany is in the epicenter of the European migration crisis, domestic political references are more frequent than international mentions. Also, **political parties' messages often influence public social media discourse.**

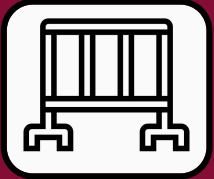
### Sentiment

While majority of the comments appear to be reserved in tone, we find that **factual statements often support radical arguments.**

### Conversation Channels

Almost two-thirds of the conversation is taking place on **Twitter**, and the most engaging authors often voice radically anti-immigrant opinion.

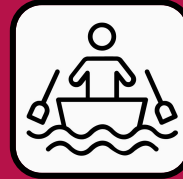
# Highly Political Conversations Focused on Security



The most dominant topic in the German discussion is security. Apart from discussing **crime-related news**, people express their concern over the **threat that uncontrolled migration poses to Germany**.



Identity is the second-most dominant narrative in the discussion. Opinions addressing the **problem of growing xenophobia and racism** are equally present in the conversation as voices questioning the **compatibility of migrants' customs with European values and customs**.



Humanitarian arguments claim that Germans have a **moral responsibility to help migrants**. Others also argue that refugees do not appreciate the help and, as such, humanitarian aid should be suspended.



When it comes to economic consequences of migration, Germans sometimes engage with the zero-sum game logic. **Outrage** is expressed **over favouring migrants over locals** when it comes to social benefits, while some highlight the **short-term economic benefits of welcoming migrants**.



Within the demographics narrative, Germans mainly discuss their **responsibility and long-term tasks in integrating migrants to the local labour market**, while others postulate that migrants simply do not want to work and contribute to the local labour market.



# + *Pan-European Narratives in Germany*



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1.



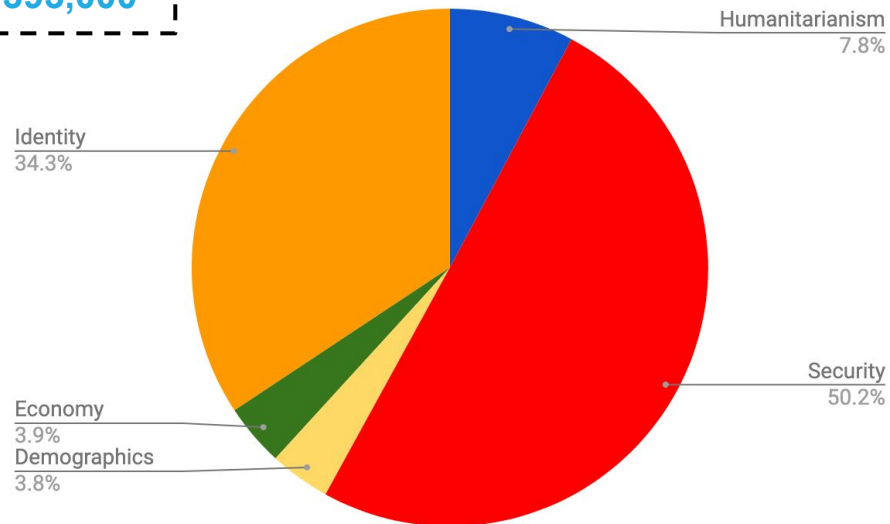
# Pan-European Narratives | DE

## The shape of the migration discourse

**Security** is the strongest narrative: people discuss the threat that uncontrolled migration poses to locals, and demand strengthened border protection measures.

**Identity** is the second largest narrative, reflecting the ongoing debate over the contradictory cultural consequences of welcoming refugees.

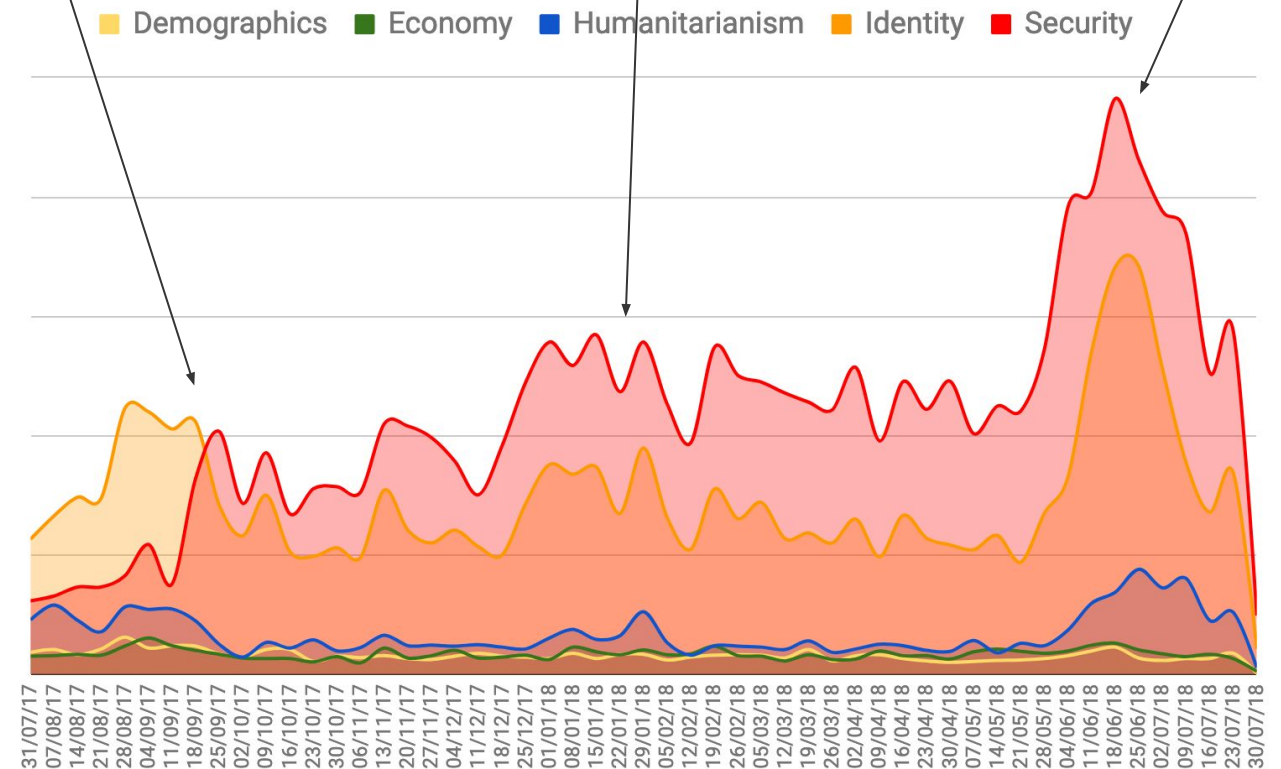
**Results:**  
~8,393,000



Extreme right-wing party **AfD** reaches **12.6% at German elections** and thus receives 94 seats in the Bundestag.

- (1) EU Migration summit
- (2) CDU-CSU agreement on border transit centers

***"More refugees arrive again through Italy."***







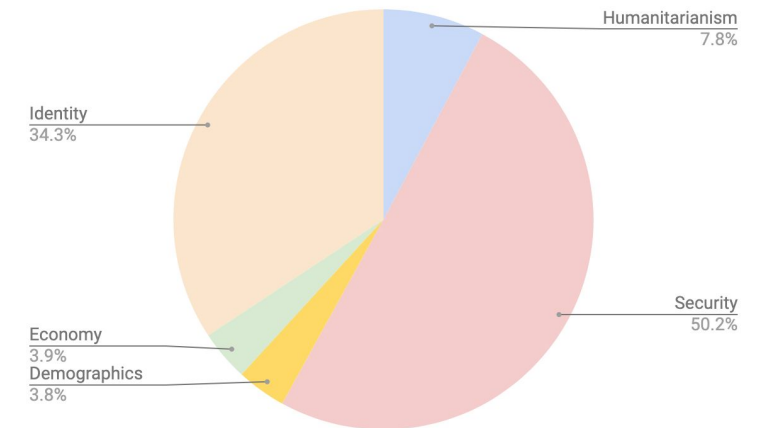
# Demographics (1): Contribution to Local Labour Market is Necessary but Brings Tasks for Locals

The demographic narrative is addressed by few, but in these cases it is often a vehicle for outrage.

Germany is one of the very few countries where people refer to the labour of migrants as a means to manage the rising costs of locals' pensions. However, this argument is often countered by the right-wing AfD claiming that it is actually **German pensioners who must work longer to pay for the costs of the migration crisis**.

Labour of foreigners in Germany raise two types of concerns. On the one hand, anti-immigrant sentiment is fuelled by the perception that migrants receive benefits without contributing to the local economy through their work. On the other hand, some people point out that Germany is in fact very attractive to workers worldwide, and the country needs a long-term strategy to integrate foreign workers in a way that will maximize this asset.

Apart from an efficient governmental strategy, tasks in labour market-integration appear at micro-level too, as some people emphasize the importance of **educating immigrants to be eligible for high-skilled jobs**.





# Pan-European Narratives | DE

## Demographics (2): Quotes

### ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Pensioners pay for migrants, and not vica versa

*Pensioners should work longer to finance refugees!*

*Pensioners, vote for AfD in September !*

Migrants are unwilling to take up jobs in Germany

*From the refugee shelter directly to a house with garden?! **They** do not integrate, **do not work**, do not pay taxes and are still treated like king?! This has to stop!*

Masses of unskilled workers are looking to take up jobs in Germany, while an immigration law is missing for successful labour market integration



*But they are not allowed to, because **an immigration law is missing**, and so does the skilled workforce.*

*Skilled labor shortage will not be solved by refugees, but only by a regulated Immigration Law*

### PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Claiming that migrants take away locals' jobs is a hypocrisy

***They take away our jobs and live off our taxpayers' money, both at the same time.** Schrödinger's migrants.*

It shall not be expected that immigrants will integrate in the labour market without locals' assistance

*I really hope that you also know that Japanese and Turkish "**Gastarbeiter**" also came from different backgrounds and **education was key to their integration!***

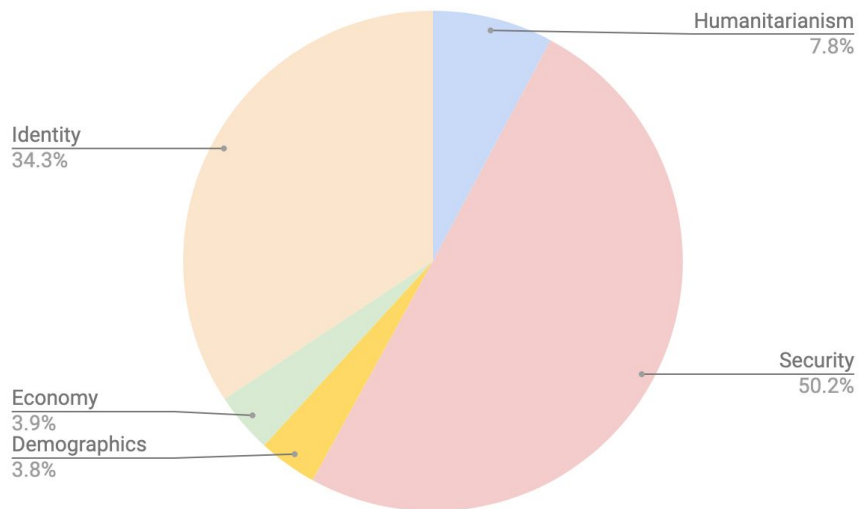


# Pan-European Narratives | DE

## Demographics (3): Top Stories

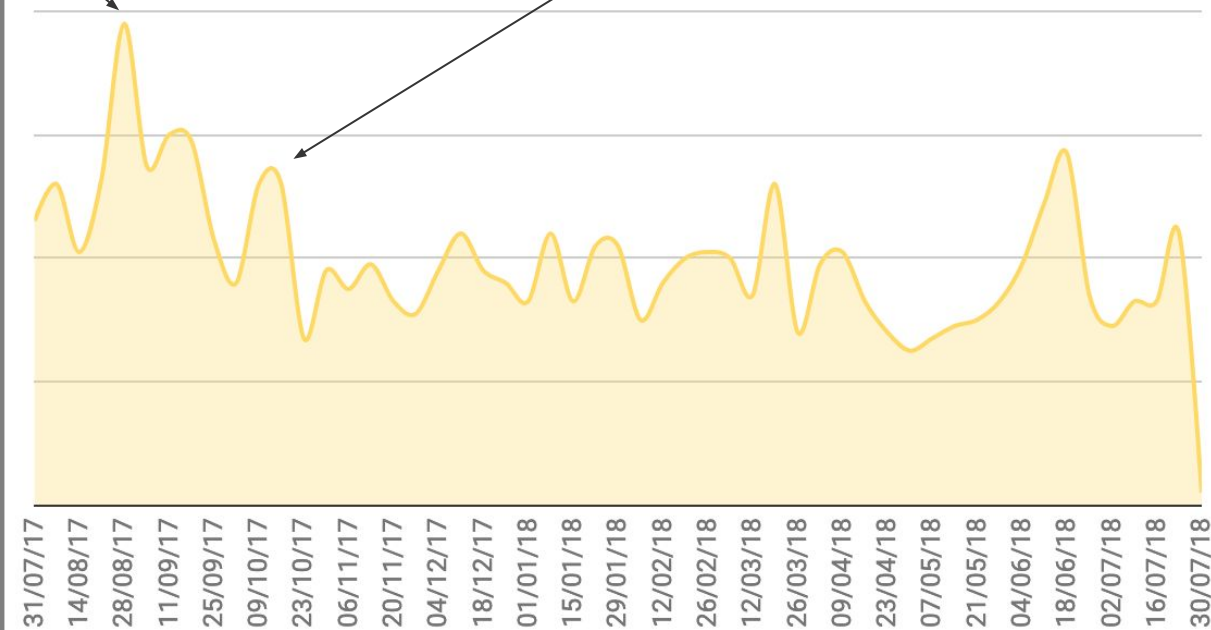
The comments that trigger highest engagement in the narrative point to the demand for **economically efficient mechanisms** which aim to successfully integrate migrants into the labour market.

**Results:**  
**~315,000 (3,8%)**



“No one has ever claimed that refugees only generate economic costs and benefits. **All studies from 2015/16 explain that the benefits CAN outweigh costs in the LONG-RUN, if integration measures are implemented early on and in a comprehensive manner.**”

**How can the #integration of refugees into the labour market succeed?** SVR boss Thomas Bauer in the @Tagesschau



Demographics

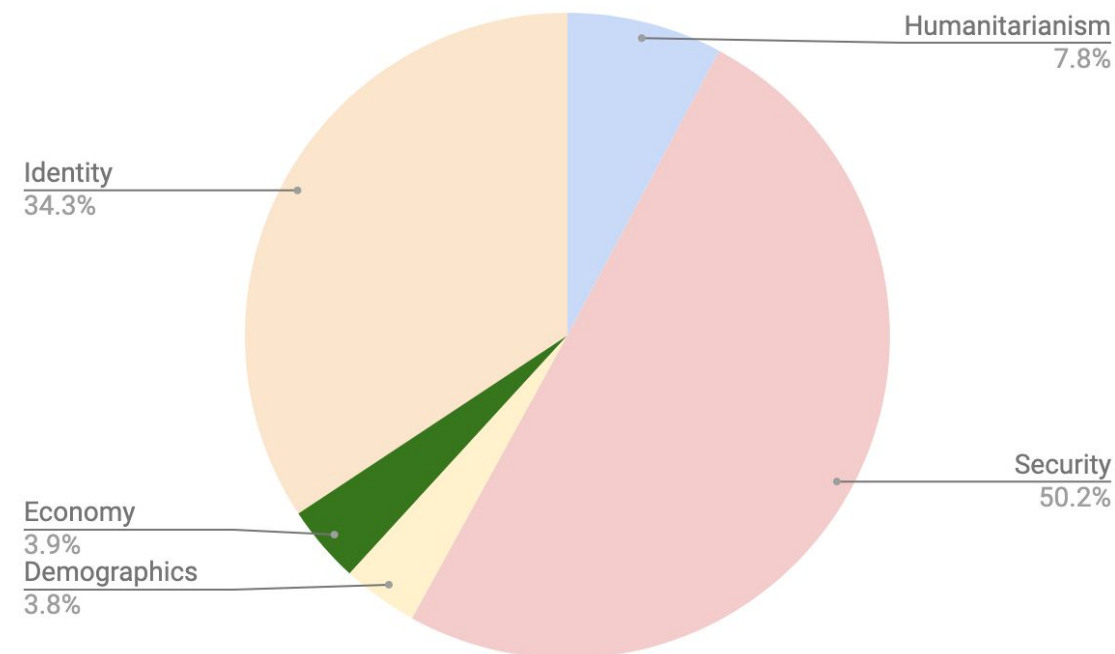


# Pan-European Narratives | DE

## Economy (1): Why Migration Costs Are a Taboo?

Although the economic implications of migration are rarely discussed, many people channel deep frustration over the **unfairness of migrant support**. The zero-sum-game thinking manifests in the rising competition for social benefits, while many people demand more **transparency about the costs** and financial implications of hosting migrants.

There are very few voices countering these arguments. Some people cite the **short-term economic benefits**, while others point out that a **comprehensive immigration law is required** to maximize any potential financial gain over the welcoming of refugees.



# Pan-European Narratives | DE

## Economy (2): Quotes

### ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

**Zero-sum game** for social benefits between locals and migrants

*“Rents are exploding and families are being driven out of the inner cities. And then 900,000 refugees arrive, plus the jobseekers from other EU countries. Of course, this increases the competition for work and housing and increases fear of losing status.”*

*“The countries that have just overcome the worst wounds of socialism should now **prefer migrants over their own people**? Only the Germans can be so stupid. Migrant costs are a taboo.”*

*“They have not rescued refugees, but **dragged social tourists to Europe**.”*

### PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Migrants have a **positive short-term impact on the economy**

*“Integration: **Refugees create jobs for locals and contribute to GDP already in the asylum status** - An immigration law supporting integration and demographic change is required for the benefit of the local economy and society.”*



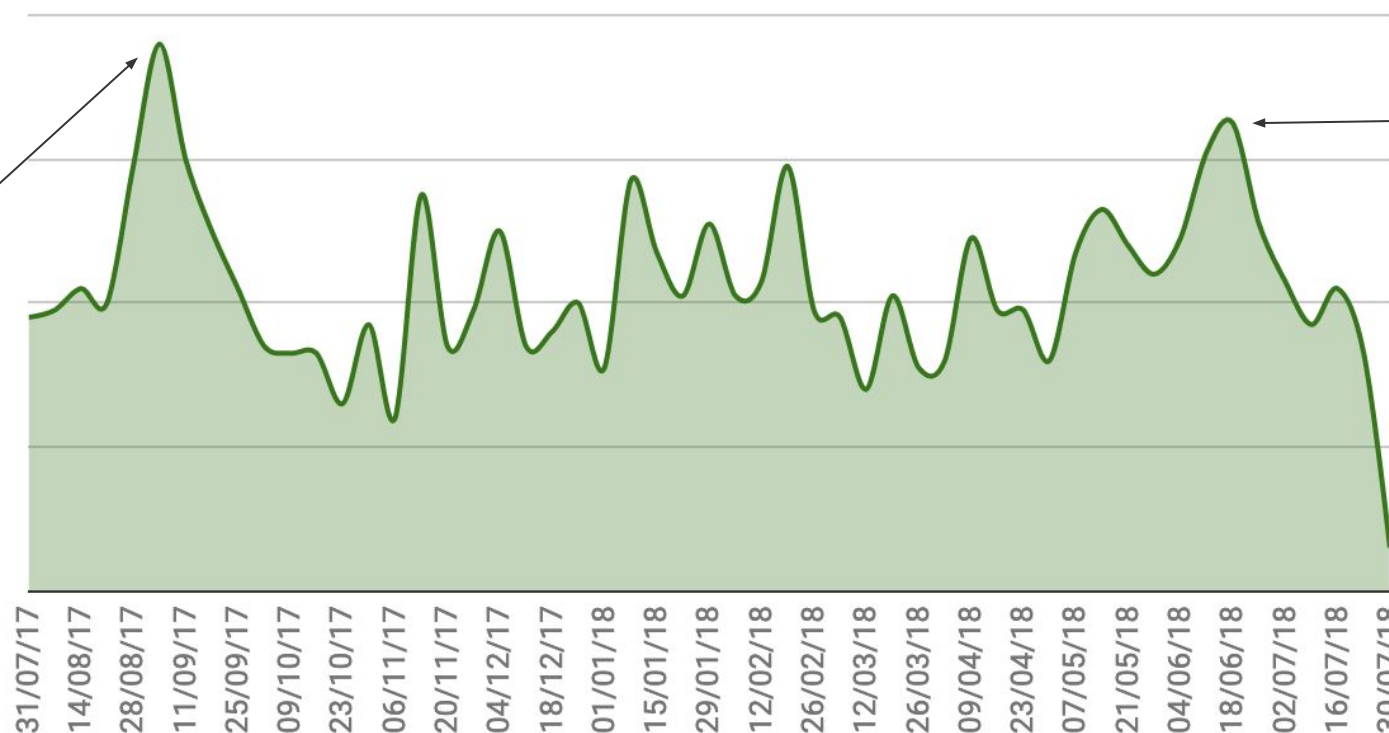
# Pan-European Narratives | DE

## Economy (3): *Top Stories*

Conversation peaks reflect Germans' **outrage over the financial cost of migration support**: people are outraged when migrants are perceived to be prioritized over locals, and claim that the image of a tolerant and multicultural country is not worth such an enormous financial sacrifice.

**Results:**  
~329,000 (3,9%)

*“Mother of three became homeless while we are reading in the news that new homes are being built for migrants. How do these two come together?”*



*“Cologne is diverse, tolerant and soon also bankrupt?”*  
#Cologne  
#Migration  
#Costs  
#Communities  
#refugees”

Economy

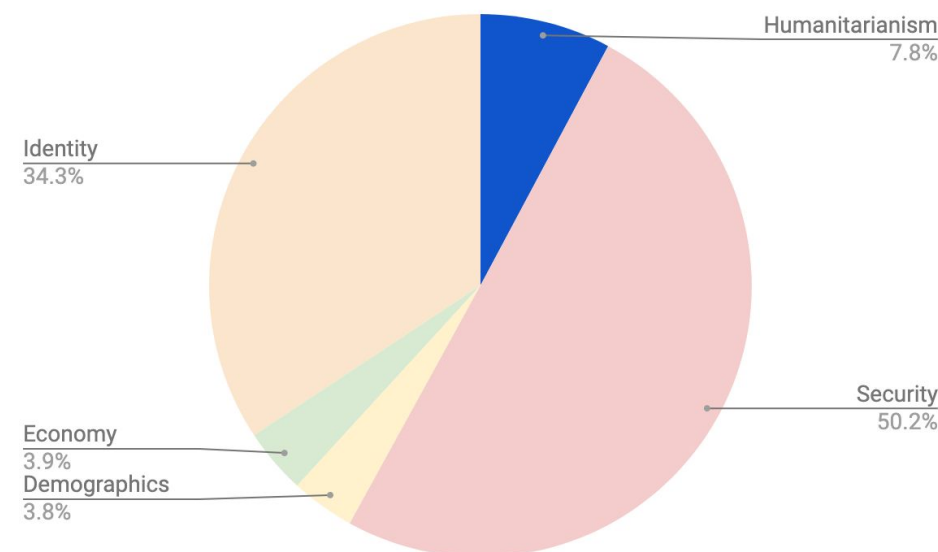
# Pan-European Narratives | DE

## Humanitarianism (1): Humanitarian Help Triggers Contradictions

The humanitarianism narrative was surprisingly small in Germany, taking up only 7.8% of the conversation.

A majority of the voices in this discourse reflect a pro-migrant sentiment and argue that **helping refugees is a duty of Germany**. Apart from the necessity of rescue operations and the demand to minimize deportations, these voices take a step further in pleading the case when they point out that migration (and the disadvantaged, defenceless people involved) is an easy target to blame for all Germany's problems.

However, there is a substantial amount of people who disagree, and claim that **migrants are unworthy of help**. These people are outraged over the stories of migrants being “dissatisfied” with what they find in Germany, and thus state that humanitarian help is in vain and must be discontinued.





# Pan-European Narratives | DE

## Humanitarianism (2): Quotes

### ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Anti-humanitarian voices claim that migrants do not appreciate Europeans' help

*"Who would have thought: **Majority of the migrants on Aquarius boat do not want to stay in Spain.**"*

*"In the country where Holocaust denial is against the law, **we are listening to the fairytale of refugees.** What happened here with full force has nothing to do with people in need of protection. Quite the contrary."*

*"Have just seen a post by #Panorama about **Syrian refugees who are dissatisfied in Germany and flee back to Turkey. What. The. Fuck?!**"*

### PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Rescue operations are a duty when the migration crisis is so severe

*"Over 4,000 people **protesting for the continuation of the sea rescue operations** in the Mediterranean."*

Migrants are the current scapegoats for all of Europe's problems

*"**Earlier it was the Jews who were responsible for all the problems, today it's the refugees** - says Holocaust survivor Hanni Lévy."*

Challenges of the refugee experience

*"Germany needs to **deport more migrants**, many politicians demand. But **many people forget what this actually means to the deported people**"*

*I sat in the Hanover Administrative Court today next to a **ten-year-old refugee from Syria who tearfully told how much he misses his mother.** He can't make up for his mother and sisters because he has only subsidiary protected status. It's unbearable.*

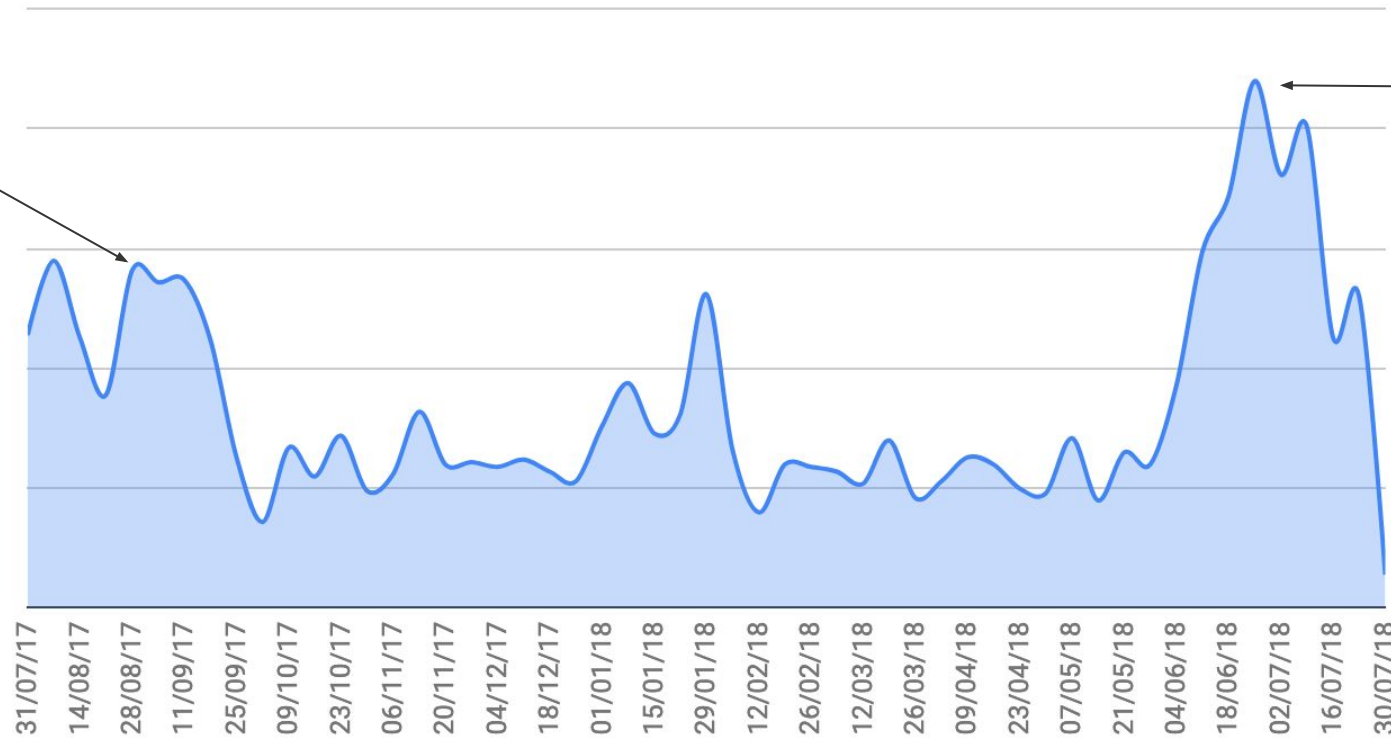
# Pan-European Narratives | DE

## Humanitarianism (3): Top Stories

Peaks in the humanitarian discourse reflect a general need to help refugees who are stuck at the Mediterranean, but also highlight a strong demand for **transparency in rescue operations**.

**Results:**  
**~659,000 (7,8%)**

*“This image shows the difference between a real emergency rescue at sea and the criminals of hypocritical NGOs. You are responsible for the death of migrants on the Mediterranean! The ‘Defend Europe’ mission was right!”*



*“Libyan Coast Guard is said to have captured a Sea Watch rescue boat with refugees on board. Several dead reported.”*

Humanitarianism

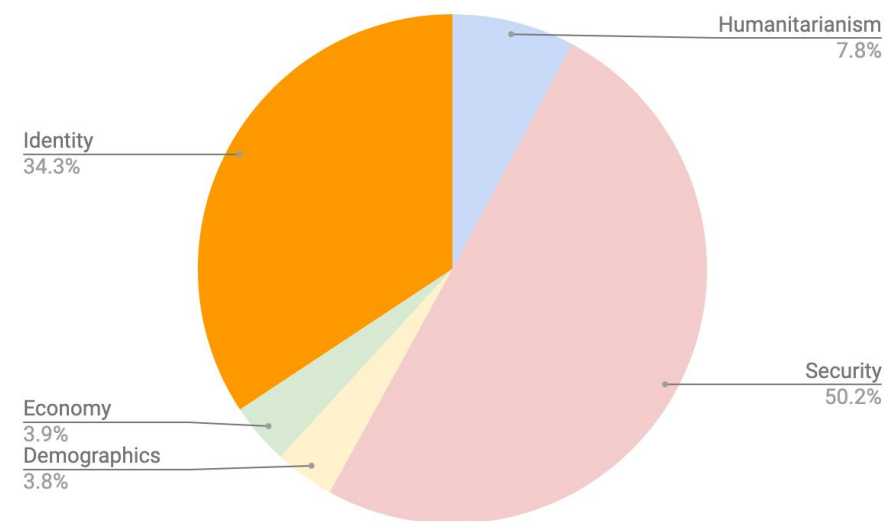
# Pan-European Narratives | DE

## Identity and Customs (1): Cultural Incompatibility VS Rising Xenophobia

The cultural consequences of immigration and its influence on local identity is the second most discussed issue in Germany.

Quoting Aristotle as “*tolerance is the last virtue of a sinking society*,” **many Germans insist that the country should be less open and welcoming**. They point to the incompatibility of Muslim and European customs, and claim that the cultural consequences of the current migrant influx can not be compared to that of previous centuries. Migrants are also accused of being reluctant to integrate, although some people refute this claim by citing personal experiences of refugees’ successful integration.

Parallel to the anti-migrant sentiment, there is a growing number of Germans who express fear over the **spread of racism and xenophobia** in Germany. Other pro-migrant voices claim that immigration has historically been essential to the cultural expansion of Europe, and therefore should be welcomed again.







# Pan-European Narratives | DE

## Identity and Customs (2): Quotes

### ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Immigrants' culture is incompatible with that of Europe

*"Incredible scenes in the once peaceful #Europe . Due to the unbridled entry of #Arabs and #Africans disguised as refugees , rooted in #Islam or archaic society! **Our lives, our culture ... everything is at stake**"*

*"**It is impossible to integrate Muslims in Europe** and require them to follow European cultural customs, because for this they would have to break away from the liabilities of their own religion"*

Cultural influence of the current mass migration of Muslims is very different to that of past migration within Europe

*"Comparing the current **mass immigration of Muslims with the limited immigration of Huguenots** and other European peoples in the last century is completely **absurd**"*

### PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Fear expressed over the growing racial and xenophobic hostility in Germany

***#TogetherWeCanReachMore against Racism** and Hate and chevy - says Nazo Faizie!  
#islamophobia #human rights #**migration** #**migrants**  
#**multikulti** #multiculturalism #racism.*

*"**I want my migrant children** as I like them: modest, humble, complacent, grateful **WITHOUT RACISM EXPERIENCE**"*

Immigration has been essential to the development of European culture

*"What is "our culture"? Keep in mind that **Muslims have been a part of Germany for over 50 years**. Also consider that Europe, including Germany, has become what it is today through immigration"*



# Pan-European Narratives | DE

## Identity and Customs (3): Quotes

### ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Immigrants are accused of being reluctant to integrate

*“Obviously it never occurred to you that the increasingly **negative attitude towards refugees might just be the consequence of Muslims’ lack of willingness to integrate.**”*

### PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Immigrants are taking steps to integrate into German society

*“In my village this is exactly the other way around. German kids of 6-12 years constantly rampage around **while refugee kids are polite and doing their best in terms of integration**”*

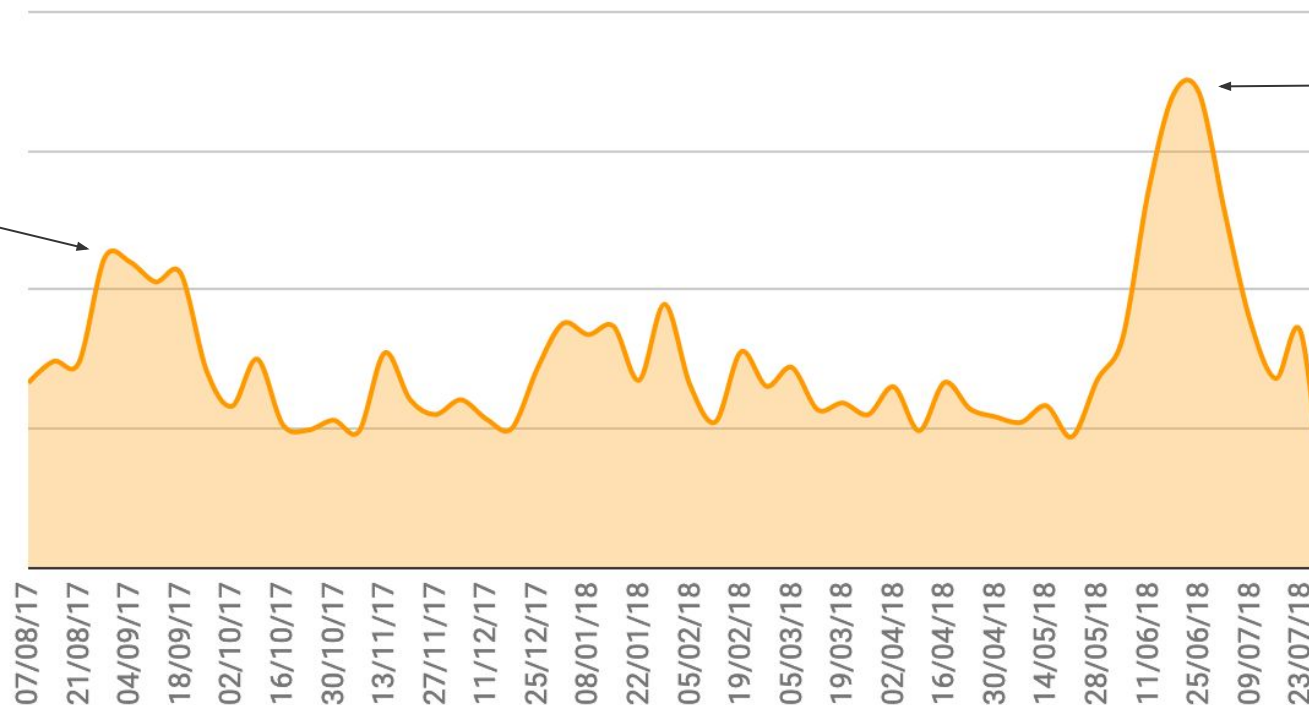
# Pan-European Narratives | DE

## Identity and Customs (4): Top Stories

Discussing the cultural consequences of migration, many Germans express their concern over a broader shift in people's approach: they fear not the influence of Muslim culture, but the **anti-migrant, xenophobe and racist sentiment** that arose in Germany as the migration crisis unfolded.

**Results:**  
~2,879,000 (34,3%)

*"Leitkultur Debate: **What is German?** The answer should not be left only to those people who currently engage in the conversation and show no understanding of human dignity whatsoever."*



*"It's **NOT** the #Migration - but #racism and #discrimination that are the root of all problems!"*

Identity

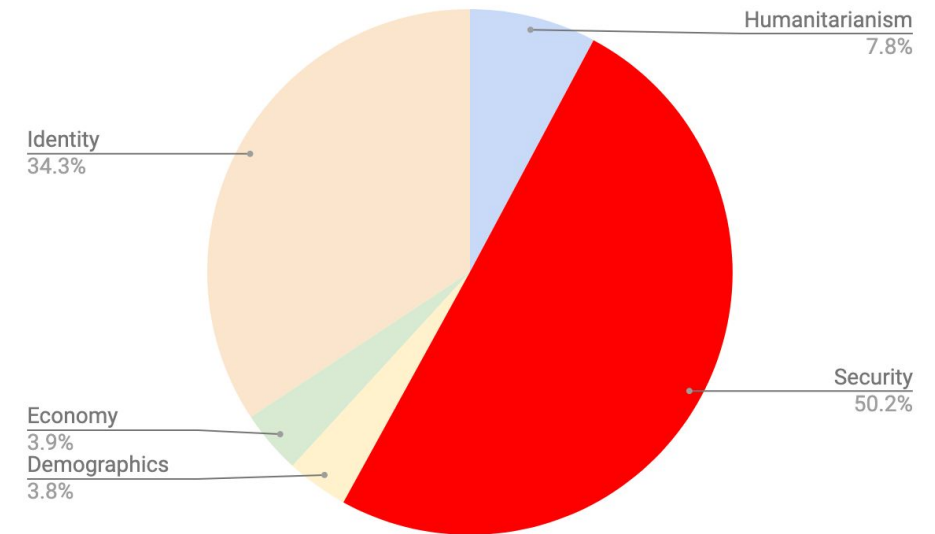


# Security (1): Border Protection is Key to Minimize Security Threat

Germans are most concerned about the security implications of migration, as this issue is addressed in half of all conversations online.

The majority of people voice an anti-migrant sentiment, and **many accuse the government of prioritizing migrants' integration over the security of German citizens**. Crimes committed by migrants on German soil are often referred to, and many demand a strengthened border protection system. **Border protection** is central to the fight to enhance local security, and the topic's importance is reflected by the crisis it caused between the governing coalition parties, CDU and CSU.

There are very few people who oppose the above arguments on public social platforms. Those who do, typically point to the attacks that are committed against refugees in the country, claiming that **migrants face security threats too**.



# Pan-European Narratives | DE

## Security (2): Quotes

### ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

People feel like politicians value  
“Willkommenskultur” more than locals’ security

*“The problem is, that EVERYONE gets in! #Seehofer has been in office for months and does nothing. Nothing is changing. **Seehofer just leaves the #borders wide open and lets everyone in.**”*

***#SPD works together with #Merkel** (who hijacked the #CDU) **on the reconstruction of Germany! Here's the proof #Chemnitz** #NAHLShowcase #Nahles #Merkelhastogo #Nahleshastogo #Migration #Crime*

### PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Attacks against migrants in Germany

*“More than 300 injured in 2017, as **attacks on refugee shelters** took place almost every day”*



### ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Discussion of terror attacks, crime, rape, etc.  
committed by migrants

*“#stuttgart #migration #criminality **Cameroonian repeat offender has been brought back, he keeps on travelling, while he raped & robbed his wife.**” He has had “trauma”, but does not seem to know what the “trauma” was.”*

*“**Another knife attack by an Islamist just prevented, thanks to @polizeiberlin.** The rule of law will only be restored if we finally get rid of all the rejected asylum seekers.”*

*“**An “under-age” refugee stabs Mia in Kandel to death and in Speyer a woman is assaulted by a refugee.** But of course, let’s demonstrate for a multicoloured Germany...”*

Strengthened border protection is required

*“**Now Germany is flooded with refugees who are already “refused” by other countries, because of the unsecured borders.** The bomb is ticking. I’m curious to see how German people’s opinion will change who used to think it is a good idea to welcome so many migrants”*

# Pan-European Narratives | DE

## Security (4): Top Stories

**Border protection** is considered to be essential to minimize the security threat caused by migration in Germany, and thus the discussion between CDU and CSU on the setting up of transit centers at the German-Austrian border triggers avid engagement. Furthermore, many Germans interpreted the **BAMF scandal** as a gate for criminal refugees to enter the country.

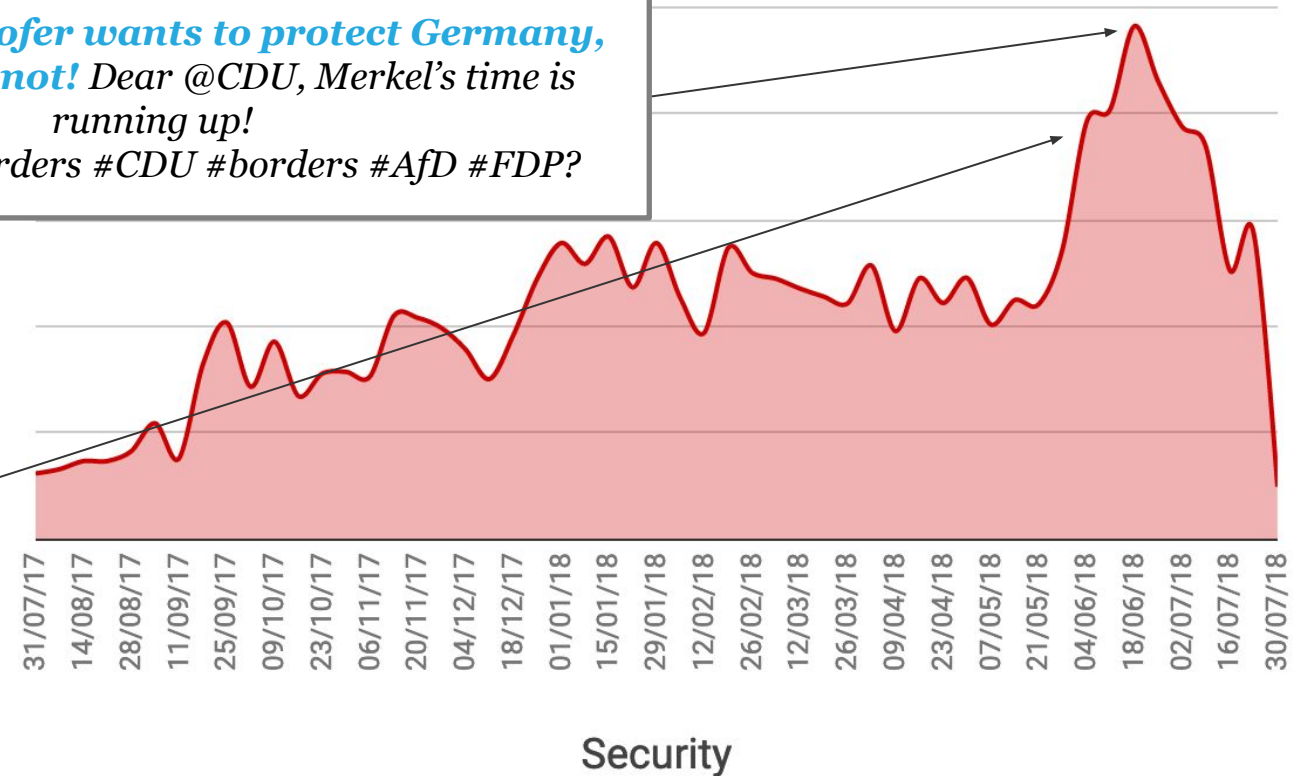
**Results:**  
~4,211,000 (50,2%)



**In short: #Seehofer wants to protect Germany, #Merkel does not!** Dear @CDU, Merkel's time is running up!  
#Migrants #murders #CDU #borders #AfD #FDP?

**BAMF scandal:** the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) reportedly mismanaged and approved more than 1,000 asylum applications, with a potential bribery involved

*"Migration fraud at all levels! Immigration Authority allowed years of fraud"*



# + *Local Issues in Germany Around Migration*



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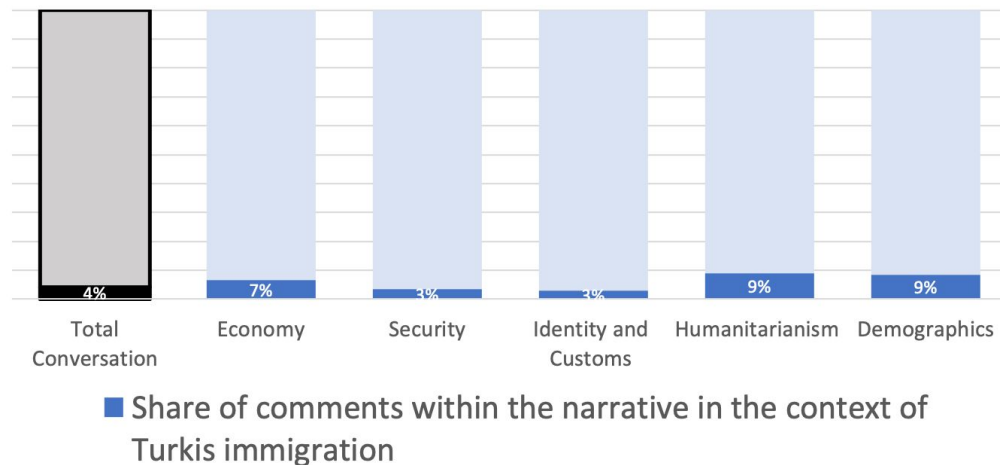


# Local Issues | DE

## Turkish immigrants

Germany has a long history of welcoming migrants from Turkey. Although relatively few people discuss the integration of Turks, it is an issue full of contradictions: **while some people claim that the integration of Turkish migrants is a failure, others warn about the racism that is rising as a consequence of the anti-Turkish sentiment.**

The conversation flared up after football player Mesut Özil's comments following Germany's World Cup failure. His support for Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan triggered outrage and was declared an example of how anti-democratic opinion is spreading in Europe through migration.



*Does it actually catch your eyes that in Germany **it is EVERYTHING about Muslims, Turkish and German-Turkish**? You should examine **why do Buddhists, Asian people, Indians and EU-Migrants** have no "integration problems" in Germany?*

*Stop racism & propaganda against migrants! With your preconceptions you are pursuing collective punishment [Sippenhaft]. 🤨 **It is not fine that 700.000 German-Turkish people support Erdogan and wish for autocracy for people in Turkey. But do not forget that in Germany there still is a #fuehrer cult and the AfD is an elected party.** #NoAfD*

*Mesut Özil: **'I am German when we win, immigrant when we lose'***

*Being a migrant with Muslim background I'd like to add to the Özil case that I do **not find it acceptable that Özil reproaches the Germans for racism after he took photos with the fascist Erdogan** (saying "he is my president"). A democrat cannot accept that.*



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



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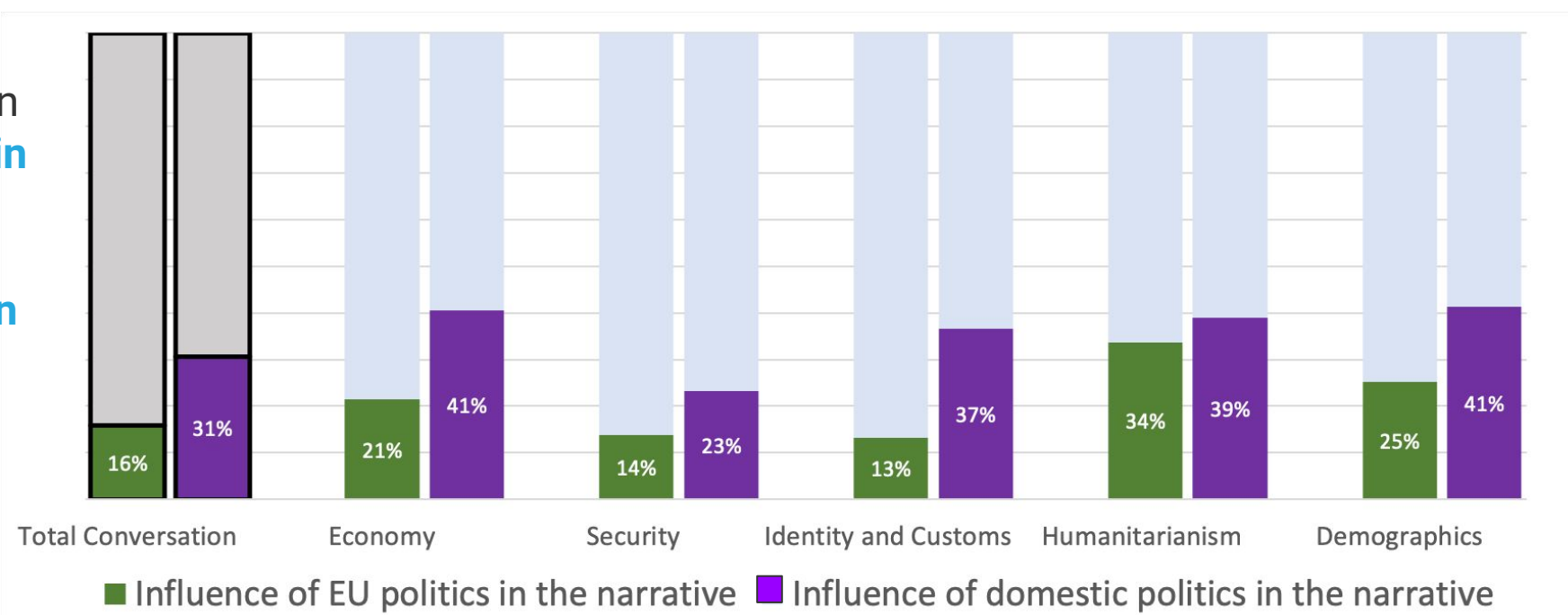


# European and Domestic Politics Context within Narratives | DE

## Migration is a Central Topic of Domestic Politics

Unlike citizens of many other EU member states, **Germans consider their country to be a key player in managing the migration crisis**. Domestic politicians and political parties are mentioned often, which indicates that **migration is a local political issue in Germany**, and the solution for handling refugees became one of the most prevalent topics in the 2017 elections.

International politics are less frequently discussed in relation to migration, although **events in other member states, as well as the Mediterranean were often a cause for humanitarian concern**.



# + *Discussion Tone in Germany*



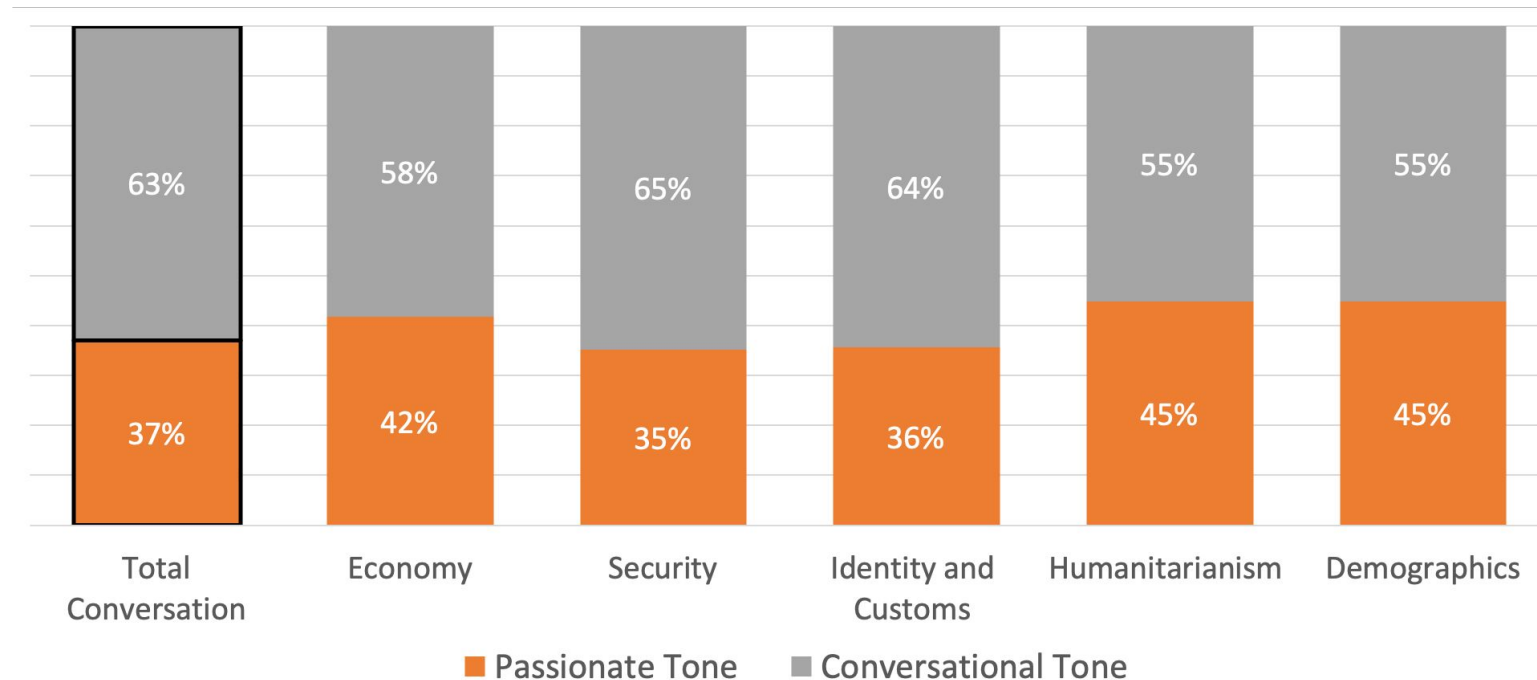
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# Conversational Tone Conceals Radical Arguments

Although the online discourse on migration takes place in a mainly conversational tone, it is worth recognizing that there is a strong divide between those who support or oppose migration. **Passionate arguments are used in the debate around each narrative, but very often we see that factual statements are used to support even a radical argument.**



# + *Conversation Channels*



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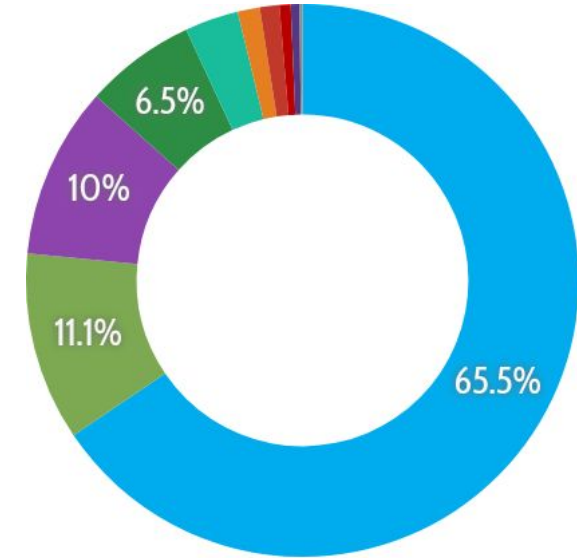
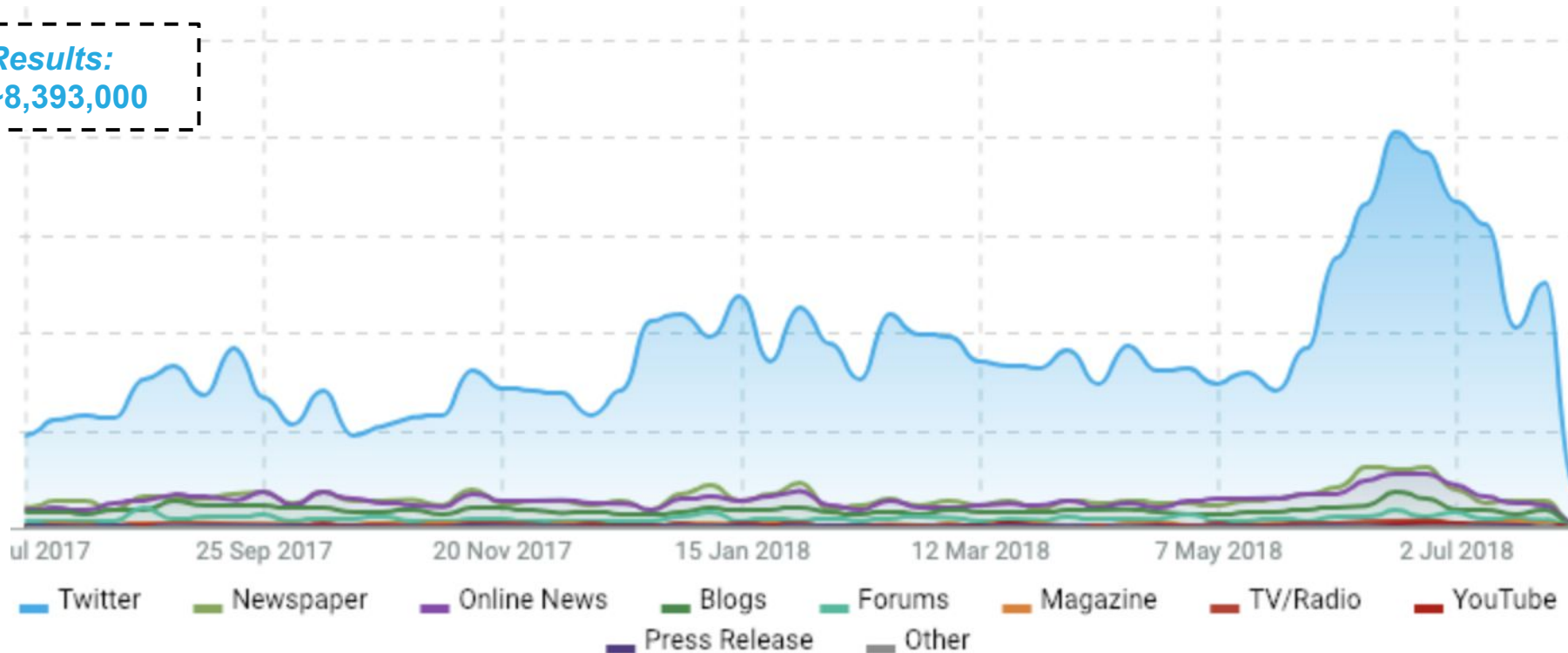
## Channel Distribution | DE

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

The majority of the discourse around migration in the public online sphere takes place on **Twitter**, which provides for more than 65% of the conversation.

The remaining conversations around migration take place on platforms such as online news sites, blogs, and forums.

**Results:**  
~8,393,000



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

# Most Influential Authors | DE

## Anti-Migrant Accounts Trigger Highest Engagement

The highest number of shares, retweets, comments and likes are often accumulated by accounts which push an anti-migrant agenda.

While some of the most engaging accounts are run by journalists or political organizations, radical anti-migrant opinions are sometimes pushed by seemingly independent accounts.

Most Influential Twitter Accounts in the Overall Conversation	
@heuteshow	media outlet
@bsteveker	lawyer with one influential tweet about a Syrian refugee child
@BlondJedi	individual user with anti-immigrant content
@NorbertBolz	philosopher and media theorist
@Einzelfallinfos	blog on reports of crimes by refugees, migrants and suspected migrants
@GottfriedCurio	AfD politician
@IBDeutschland	Identitäre Bewegung, far-right national identitarian movement in Germany
@KokoLores20	individual user with anti-immigrant content
@drguidoknapp	Verrückte Geschichte, site of TV-quiz winner Joachim Telgenbüscher