

Migration Narratives in Europe

A Social Media Intelligence Study

Country report for the Republic of Austria



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

- 2019 -



Introduction | AT

Context to the Austrian Discussion on Migration

- The Republic of Austria has been a member of the European Union since 1995, with a population of 8,576,261 in 2015. At its peak, official asylum seekers in the country made up 0.84% of the population, thus **Austria welcomes the third largest amount of asylum seekers in the EU, compared to population size**.*
- Public social media conversation in Austria around migration in one year consists of ~417,300 posts. Compared to population size, **the conversation on migration in Austria is the 12th largest in the EU**.
- The Austrian government is lead by **Sebastian Kurz** representing the **center-right coalition** between the Christian-democratic, conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the right-wing populist, national-conservative Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ).
- While Austria hosts one of the biggest contingent of asylum seekers compared to population size, the government represents a strong **anti-migrant stance**.



*Source: europarl.europa.eu



Introduction | AT

Security Threat Overshadows Humanitarian Sentiment

The relatively large amount of migrants in Austria trigger an avid conversation on the matter. The country looks out to Germany and perceives *Willkommenskultur* with its refugee crime and high migrant-support expenditures as a threatening example.

The local solution is provided by chancellor Sebastian Kurz: to reflect the widespread fear of refugees posing a security threat, he proposes a more controlled immigration policy with strengthened border protection and cuts on refugee welfare. The Austrian online conversation peaked around the EU summit on migration in July 2018, following the meeting and discussion of Sebastian Kurz and CSU leader Markus Söder on immigration control.

Kurz's policy is welcomed in Austria as the appropriate action to maintain security. However, he is opposed by a certain – albeit smaller – amount of locals based on humanitarian arguments. These people fear that the political justification of anti-immigrant sentiment fuels the growing popularity of right-wing ideology in the country.

The threatening example



The solution



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 | AT

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

Size of Pan-European Narratives

Security issues dominate the Austrian conversation on migration.

Humanitarianism and economic aspects are discussed less frequently, while the topic of cultural and labour market integration is barely present.

Local Issues

The discussion in Austria is mainly driven by two key topics: the anti-immigrant policies of right-wing chancellor **Sebastian Kurz**, and the constant recitation of issues **Germany** has to face due to the *Willkommenskultur* policy.

EU & Domestic Politics

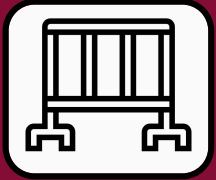
Most of the political references present in the Austrian discussion either point at Sebastian **Kurz**, or the **German** way of handling migration.

Discussion Tone

Majority of the Austrian conversation expresses a **reserved, conversational** tone, but the two key narratives – security and humanitarianism – trigger a substantial amount of passionate conversations.

Conversation Channels

Majority of the conversation takes place on **Twitter**, and key opinion leaders appear to be **leading political figures**.



Security is the key concern discussed in Austrian public social media. The narrative is enhanced by Sebastian Kurz's agenda to strengthen **border protection** and control refugee influx, and is fuelled by **violent attacks committed by migrants** in Austria and Germany.



Austrians express **sympathy** towards migrants and seek opportunities for action to support refugees. **Kurz's measures** are sometimes perceived as **contradictory**, while some condemn *Willkommenskultur* as pro-migrant humanitarian 'propaganda'.



The economy narrative consists of mainly anti-immigrant comments, which reflect the **zero-sum game** thinking: many Austrians are outraged over the assumedly disproportionate help provided for migrants.



The discourse on the cultural aspect of immigration is tiny, and expresses locals' **hopelessness** about the success of Muslims' integration.



In the rare occasions when **labour market integration of migrants** is discussed, many people in Austria support the idea and demand residence permit holders to find a job.

+ *Pan-European Narratives in Austria*

1.



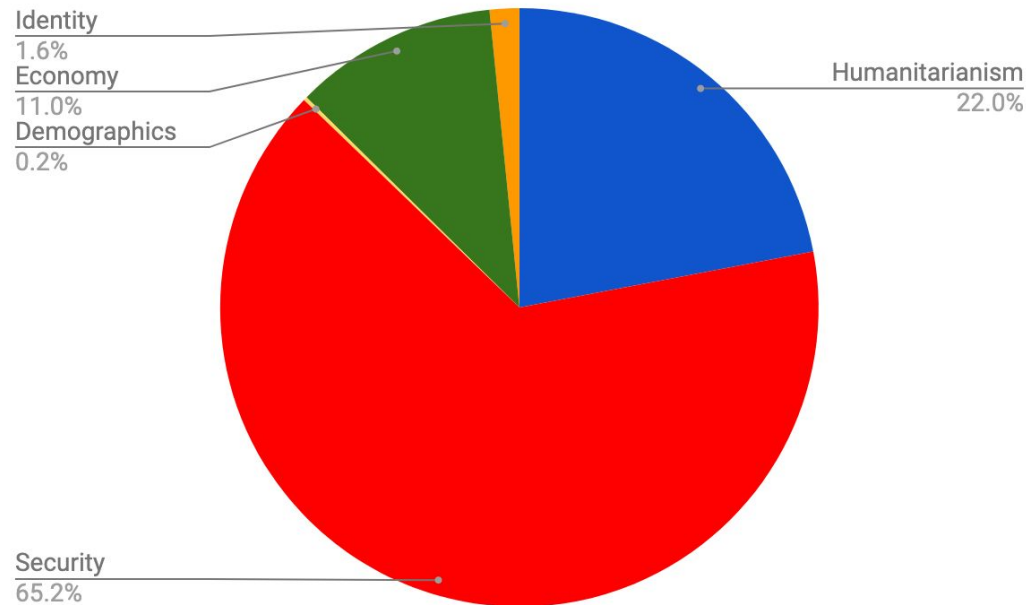
Pan-European Narratives | AT

The shape of the migration discourse

Most Austrians are concerned about the **security** threat of welcoming refugees and argue political measures to control migration.

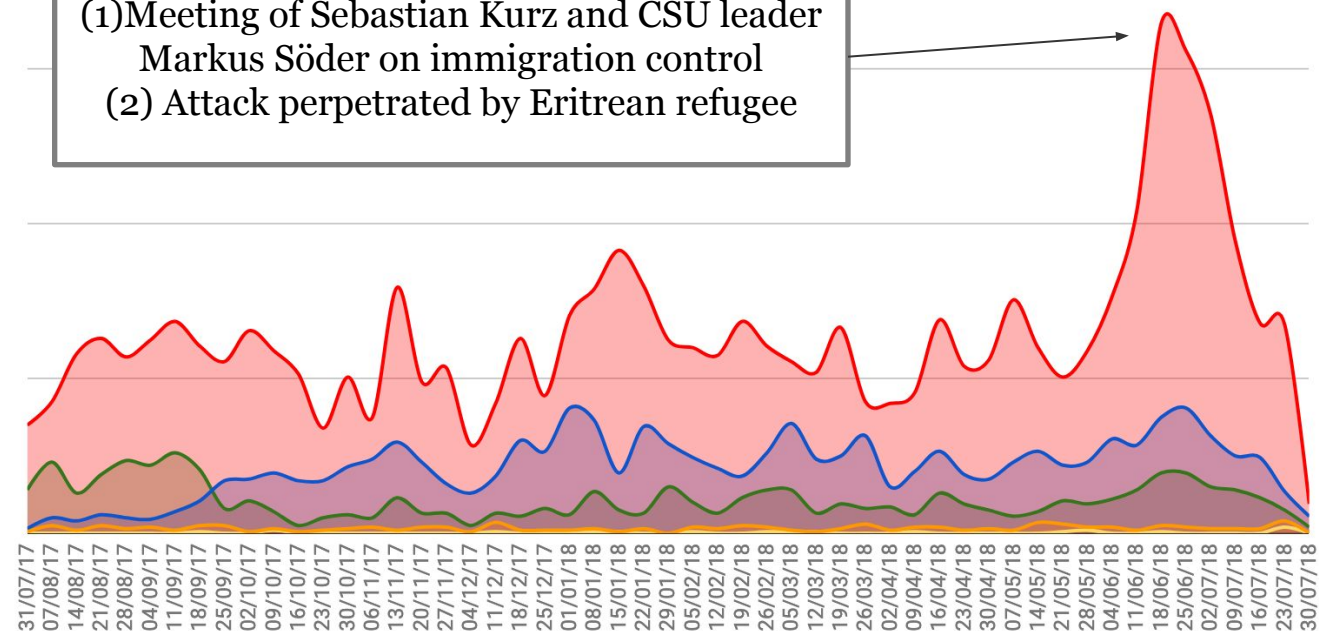
A fifth of online conversations discuss the **humanitarian** aspects of migration, while the economic implications trigger an even smaller interest. Cultural and labour market integration of immigrants are barely mentioned.

Results:
~68,400



Demographics Economy Humanitarianism Identity Security

(1) Meeting of Sebastian Kurz and CSU leader Markus Söder on immigration control
(2) Attack perpetrated by Eritrean refugee

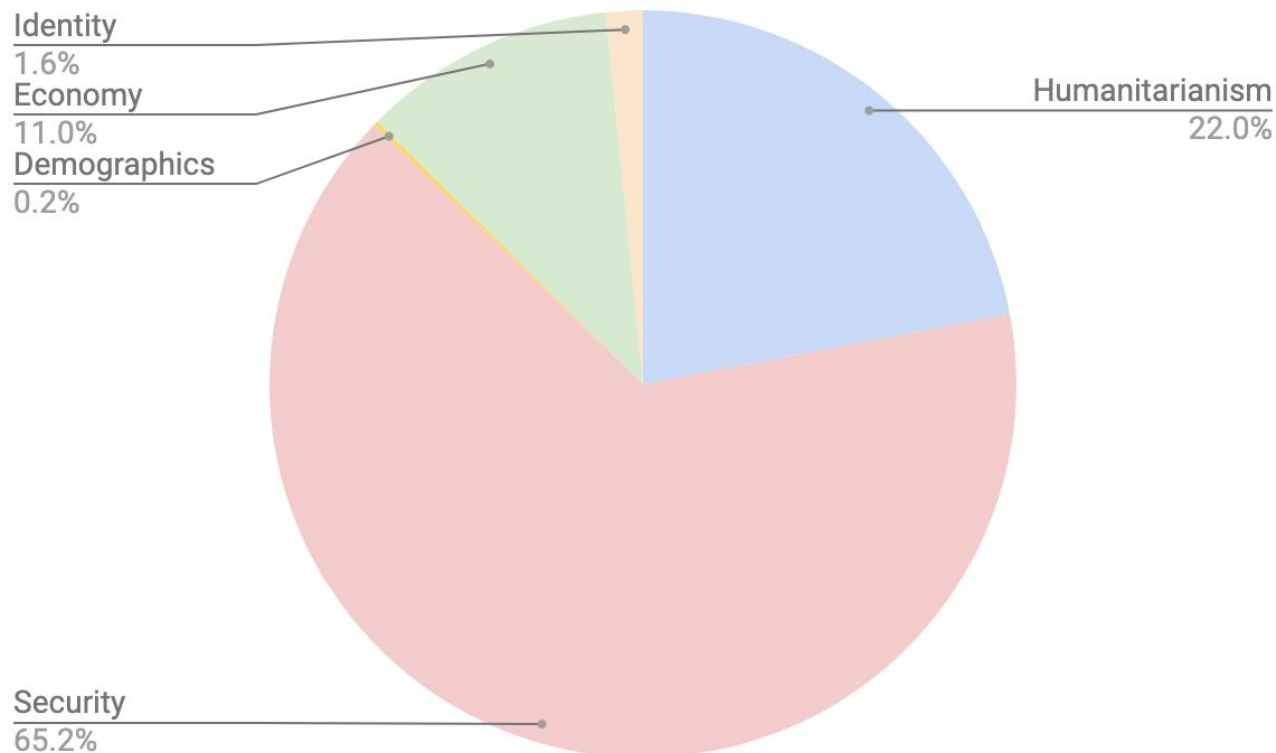


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Demographics (1): Migrants Are Demanded to Find a Job

Most Austrians very rarely discuss the topic of integrating migrants to the local labour market. Some people express disappointment over the low rate of jobs among Muslim residence permit holders, but the majority of those reflecting the topic find immigrant workforce beneficial. They cite the labour shortage in certain fields which can be filled up with immigrants, and also applaud initiatives that support refugees in finding jobs.

However, some people point out the challenges in finding a job that matches the refugee applicant's level of qualification.





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Demographics (1): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Migrants are not participating at the labour market, even after they receive their residence permit

Only one-tenth of the refugees who got a positive residence permit status in 2016 and registered after that at AMS had a job by the end of June of this year. What is happening with the 90% of those holding a residence permit?!

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Program to help migrants' integration on the job market

Daniela Wolf (29), Alexander Hartveld (26) and Stefan Steinberger (29) set up their association "Refugees Code" to help migrants. Within nine months, refugees learn basic IT knowledge, and they cooperate with companies which search for software engineers.

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Immigrants may be overqualified for many jobs offered to them

Nearly over a quarter of the young earners feel overqualified for their job. This is relevant specially for young migrants, as 37% of them feel like this.

There is such a teacher shortage in Vienna that immigrant teachers must be applied

#Refugees as teachers at schools: The #city_of_Vienne has to counter the shortage of teachers due to retirements. From this Autumn, 23 refugees will teach on secondary schools and NMS, who were #teachers in their country of origin.

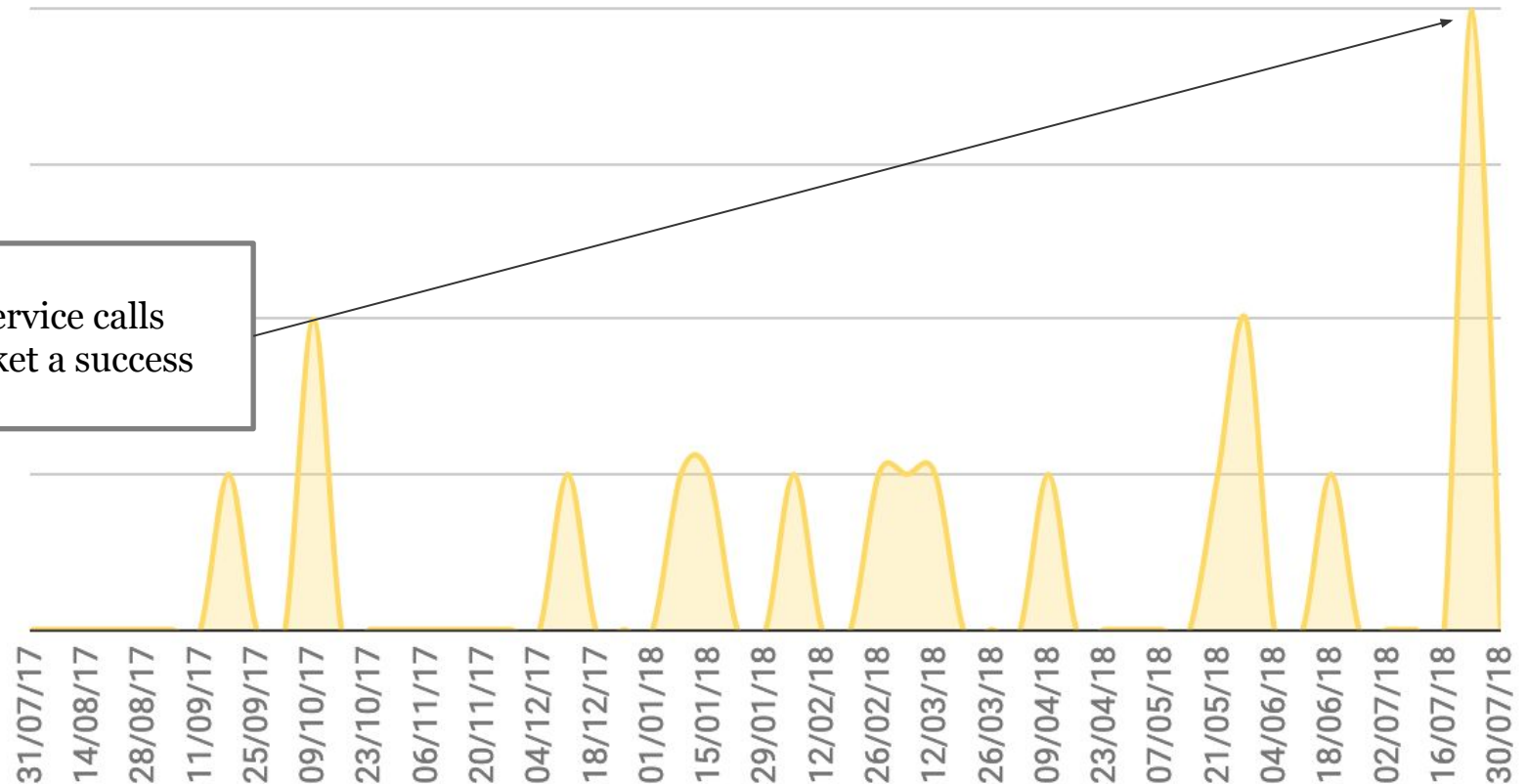
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Demographics (3): Top Stories

Success in integrating immigrant workforce to the local labour market triggers strong interest in the Austrian discussion.

Results:
~130 (0,2%)

Head of Austrian Public Employment Service calls integration of migrants to the labour market a success



Demographics



Pan-European Narratives | AT

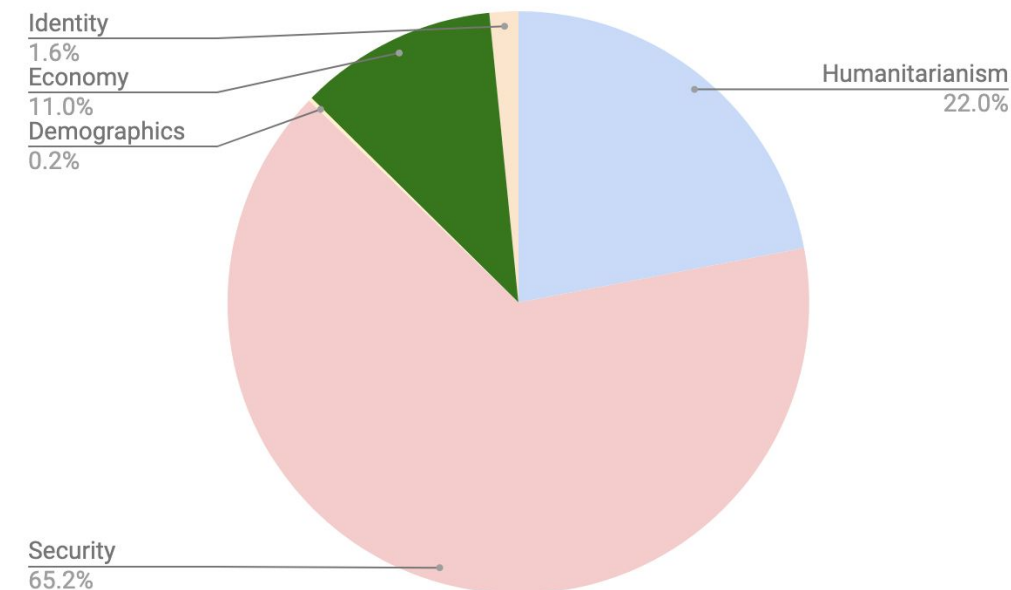
Economy (1): Zero-sum Game Against Migrants

The economy narrative consists of mainly negative comments with a clear presence of the zero-sum game thinking: many people claim that migrants only come to Austria to enjoy and exploit the welfare system. Most locals are also outraged over the grandiose help migrants receive from the state – houses and other benefits for which locals work for decades.

To prevent the local social system from collapsing under the financial pressure of migration support, some people call for a clear differentiation between asylum seekers (in need of humanitarian aid) and economic migrants (unworthy of Austria's financial help).

Sebastian Kurz's policies to cut immigrant welfare is often applauded and put in contrast with the previous, left-wing SPÖ government, which is condemned for spending a disproportionately large amount of the Austrian domestic income on migrant support.

The few pro-immigrant voices claim that Austrians indeed possess the financial tools to support migrants and instead of personal benefits, they should prioritize the needs of refugees.





ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Clear differentiation is needed between economic migrants and asylum seekers to avoid exploitation of the local welfare system

*The person threatened by persecution, torture or even death at home has a right to asylum. This right applies to women and men without exception, but in order to be able to fulfill this responsibility in Europe **we have to differentiate carefully between real refugees and economic migrants***

*Back then it were real political #refugees which fled into the neighbouring country. **Today's #welfare state migrants travel across the whole world to immigrate into the countries with most generous welfare system.** That's misuse of asylum.*

*Till this day the government did not understand, that we have to differentiate between migration and asylum and that the so called economic migrants are staying illegally. "For those who does not want to integrate, I have only one destination: **Go back to your homeland, have a nice flight, as we already have enough people out-of-work.**"*

Real price of welcoming migrants

*There are those who support an unregulated influx since we have enough money. **On the other hand, some people form their opinion taking basic mathematics into account, and they have a much more critical opinion.** Some even decline openness to mass migrant influx.*

*The central budget spends **8.1 billion** euros on migrants from 2015 till 2019 – this is how much it costs for us to welcome migrants.*

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Pointing out Austrians' hypocritical approach to migration aid

*Actually **most of the people in Austria** don't care about equality. Rather they **care about their own personal benefit** and the defense of measures that could narrow these benefits, for example the refugee relief. And the government still stimulates this atmosphere.*

Pan-European Narratives | AT

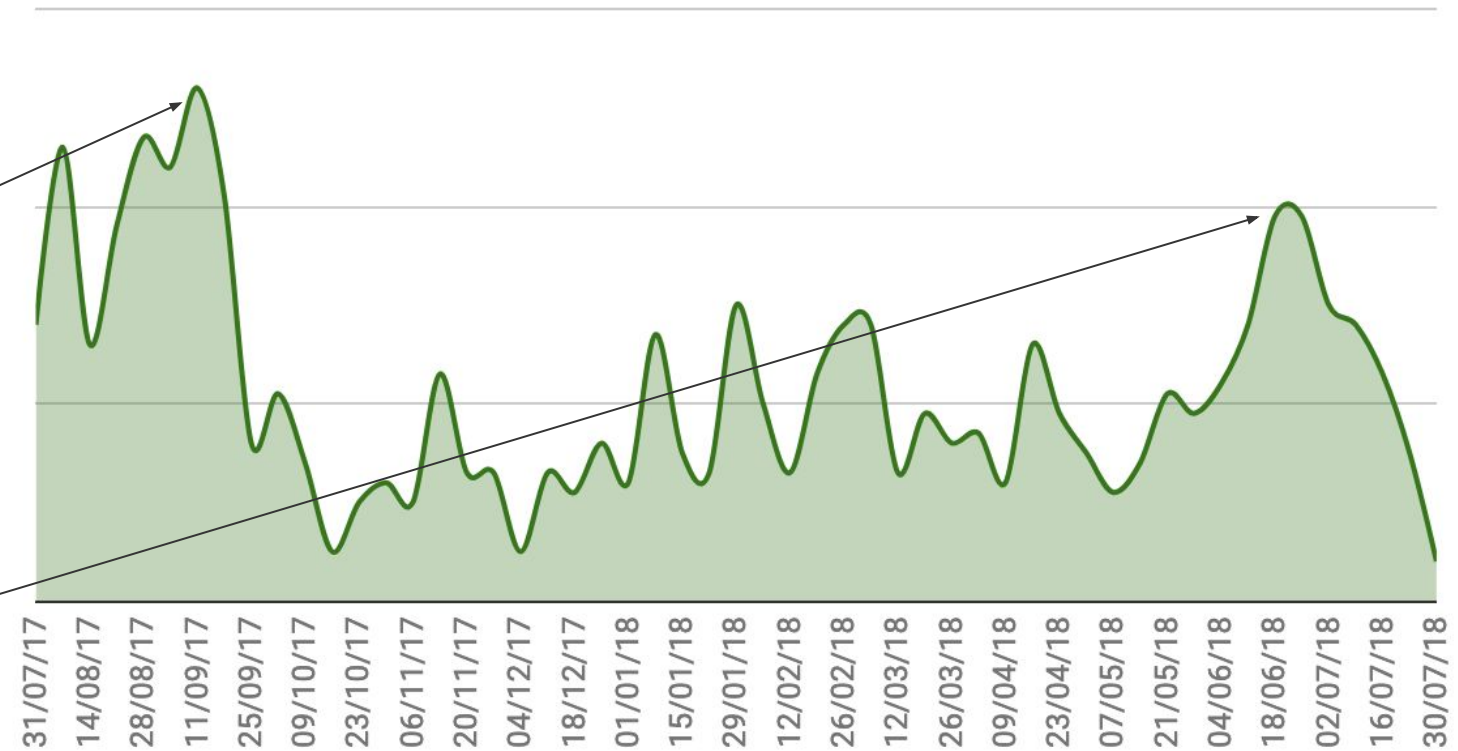
Economy (3): Top Stories

Most engaging stories in the economic narrative reflect how some Austrians are worried about the financial consequences of the EU's welcoming migration policy.

Results:
~7,500 (11%)

State of the Union speech by
Jean-Claude Juncker

"Imagine this: 28 heads of government, responsible for 500 million people, who are supposed to manage schools, health systems, pension funds, transport networks, environmental protection, etc. And they are so dilettante that a few thousand immigrants overwhelm them."



Economy

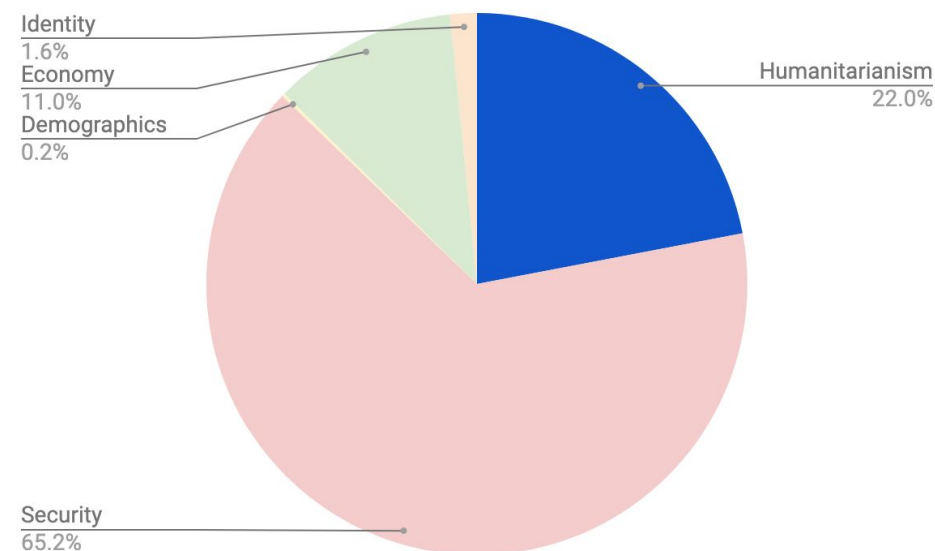
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Humanitarianism (1): Humanitarian Aid VS. Pro-migrant Propaganda

The conversation around the humanitarian aspects of migration in Austria mainly consists of pro-migrant voices, that detail the hardships refugees face along their journey and in detention centers in the EU. Many people in Austria are willing to help refugees and thus opportunities for support are often discussed.

There is widespread criticism of Sebastian Kurz's anti-immigrant policy, as people claim his efforts for strengthened border control are against humanitarian values. Some also fear that Kurz's anti-humanitarian narrative provides fertile ground for far-right arguments fuelled by hate against immigrants.

Anti-immigrant voices in the narrative condemn the moral pressure triggered by the *Willkommenskultur* 'propaganda'. They claim that the coverage on refugee deaths is disproportionately high compared to that on victims of migrant crime and this imbalance is intended to trigger unjustified sympathy towards refugees.



Pan-European Narratives | AT

Humanitarianism (2): Quotes

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Active support for migrants arriving in Austria

*There is an information evening tomorrow about **sponsorships for unaccompanied refugee minors** in Vienna. A sponsorship is an option of relationship without financial or legal obligation.*

*The public social aid of Vienna is a nonprofit and benevolent organisation, which engages around 2000 full-time workers and volunteers in the area of social service (**helps in shelters, with baby sitting, and with refugee support work**).*

Empathy towards migrants' hardships

*Austrian authors worked together for two years with refugees on the publication "Dust – About flying stories and bursted dreams". What was published is not only a unique collection of narrations of directly affected people, but also **a peek into how politics handle the topic of migration in comparison with refugees' reality of their life**.*

Condemning the public's hypocritical approach to migration

*I am not afraid of refugees. The worst thing that they are doing is showing us a mirror, because we sacrificed our humanness against uncontrolled consumption. **What I am afraid of is the people's indifference and their why-should-I-care mentality which ends up with nazis in our governments.***

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Calling out the pro-migrant refugee propaganda

*The tragic death of illegal immigrants on the Mediterranean Sea (decoyed by Merkel) has been "highly instrumentalized" to do even more immigration propaganda through moral blackmail. **Susanna, Mia and co. are the "collateral damages" of this politics, the "beta victims"**.*



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Humanitarianism (3): Top Stories

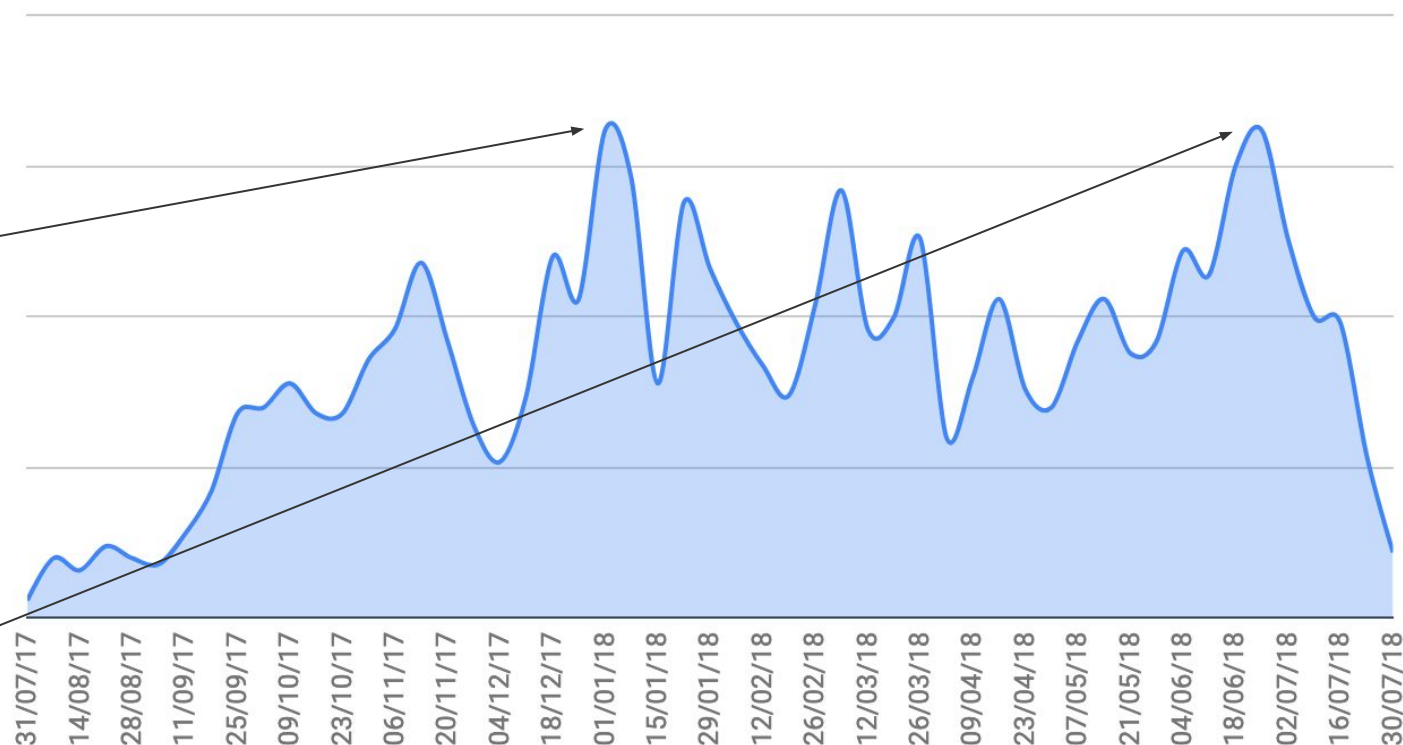
Many Austrians are deeply moved by dramatic events involving refugees, and such disasters trigger sympathy towards migrants. Demonstration of refugees asking for family reunification in the EU also trigger substantial interest as many Austrians extensively discuss the implications of Germany's migration policy.

Results:
~15,000 (22%)

*“A recent **refugee drama in the Mediterranean** killed at least 25 people on Saturday.”*



Flüchtlinge: 'Mama Merkel, open the doors!'



Humanitarianism



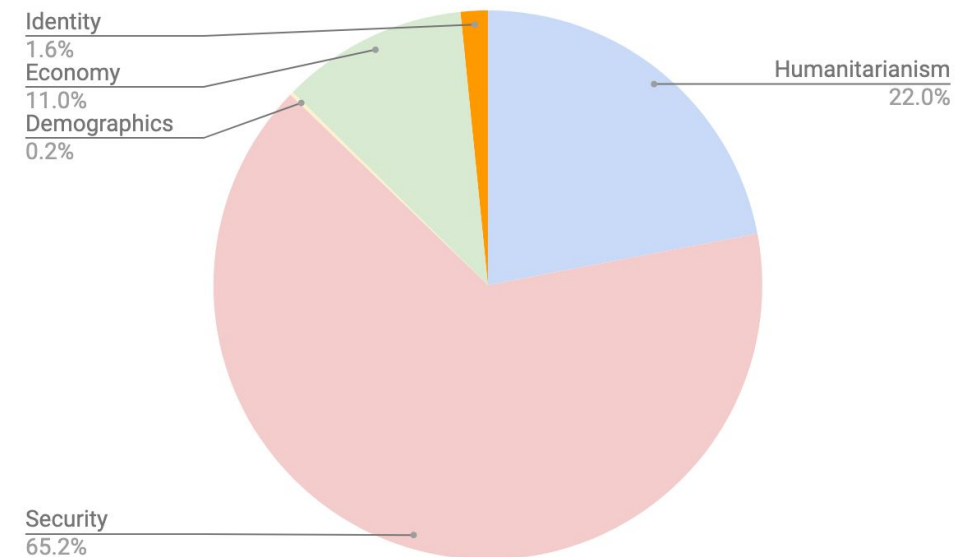
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Identity and Customs (1): Muslim Refugees' Integration is Perceived as Hopeless

Very few Austrians use public social media to address the influence of migration on the local culture. Majority of the people engaged in this topic express an anti-immigrant stance, claiming that it's impossible to integrate Muslims into a European society.

People opposing integration also point out the setback in the local culture due to migrants' presence. They point out, for example, the influence of immigrant teachers' poor German skills on Austrian children's education.

The tiny minority of those representing a pro-migrant argument claim that migration is an inevitable and natural part of the local culture.





Pan-European Narratives | AT

Identity & Customs (2): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Migrants do not share local values

*Study of #university of Vienna about muslim #refugees. Central results: **uneducated, anti-semitic, homophobic, misogynic, violence oriented, deeply religious.***

Giving in to migrants' customs is a dangerous path for Austria

*Everybody sees, that **the use of certain symbols (such as the headscarf for the children) could result in a society driven by oppression** and often compulsion. I think it's dangerous, if the municipal councillor identifies with these.*

Challenges of migrant integration

*It is a fact: **every fifth pupil reads badly.** In the case of pupils at risk, **nine out of ten have migration background.***

***Islam is** rooted very deeply and is in my opinion often **obstructive to integration**, and most Muslims prioritize their religion a lot (sometimes too much, in my opinion). There are enough integration reports/studies that show this.*

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Outrage over the poor German language skills of immigrant teachers working in primary schools

*"It is known, that the pupil of Vienna have often enormous language deficit. And **the problem will hardly be improved by teachers who have language deficits themselves.***

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

The influence that migration has on a culture is actually beneficial

*Migration is a social reality, which has always been existing: People have been migrating over centuries and settled down on new places. **Migration concerns all social areas of life and thus shapes our culture.***

Pan-European Narratives | AT

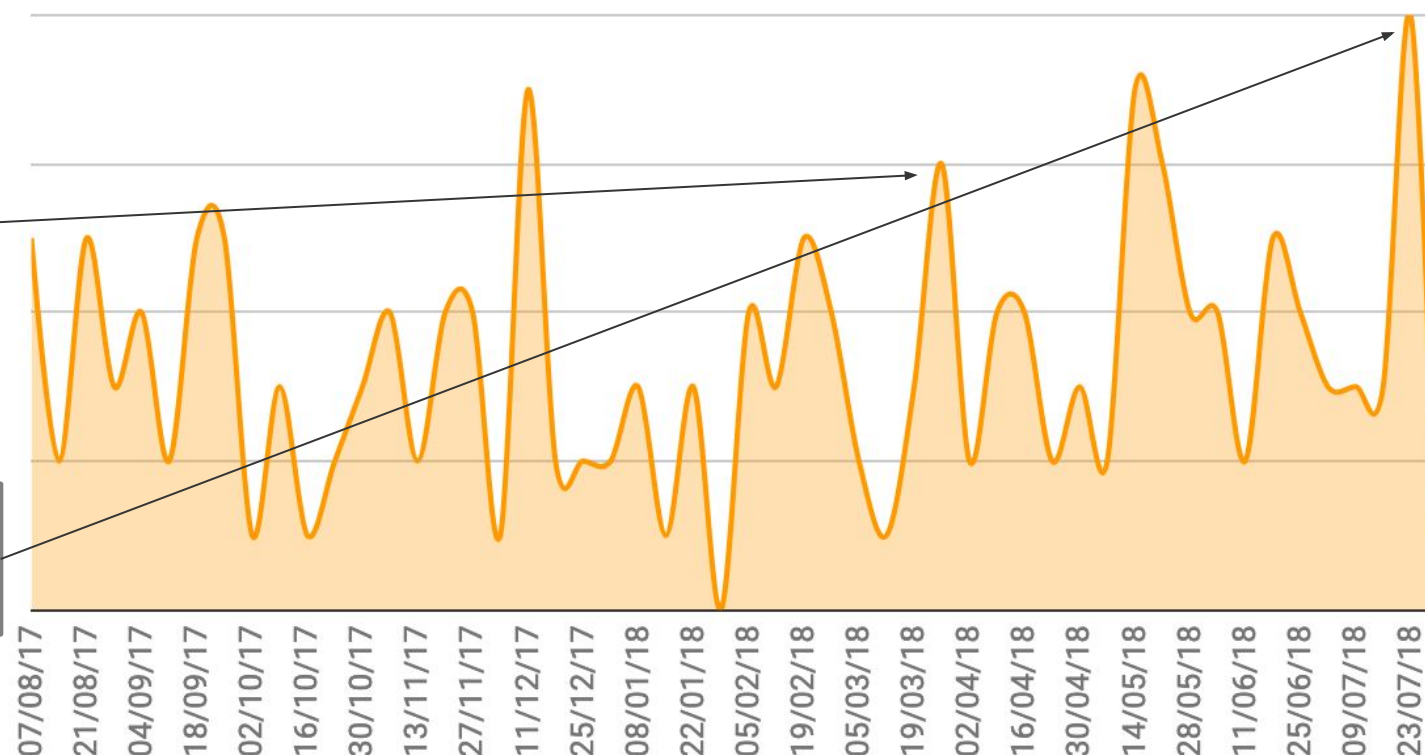
Identity & Customs (3): Top Stories

Challenges of integration that arise on a daily basis are often interpreted as proof for the hopeless case of migrants' integration to Austrian society.

Results:
~1,100 (1,6%)

University of Vienna's research on Muslim refugees' customs

Commentary on the elimination of Turkish-language driver's license examinations



Identity

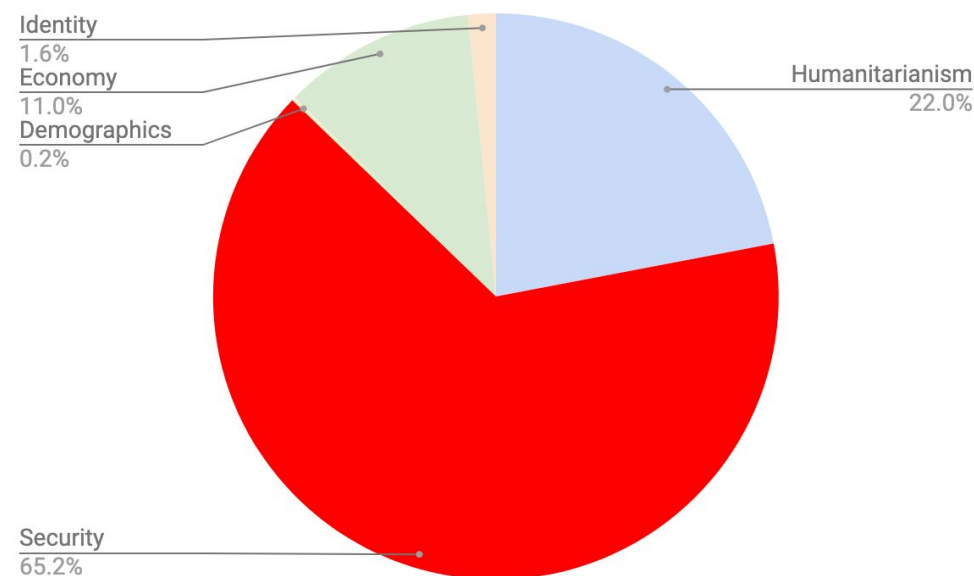
Pan-European Narratives | AT

Security (1): Border Protection and Crime Committed by Migrants

Security is the most important aspect for most Austrians, people usually expressing an anti-migrant point of view.

One reason behind the topic's popularity is that it is on top of chancellor Sebastian Kurz's agenda: he often discusses the importance of strengthened border protection and the elimination of uncontrolled migration. Violent crime cases from Germany are widely discussed, but attacks that took place in Austria are also mentioned.

A small minority of people point out the danger of such hate-mongering discourse, claiming that the current climate makes way to false accusations against immigrants.





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

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Border protection is perceived to be key to maintain security in Austria

*The current situation is dramatic. The FPÖ was right concerning the early-warning system and border protection preparation. **We will secure our borders with all means available to us and protect the Austrians!** #migration*

Muslim immigrants are assumedly plotting and committing crime against locals

*For a long time now experts of Islam has been warning of **Islamists and Jihadists, who can move freely all over the Austrian capital and who pose a threat** which shouldn't be underestimated.*

*The refugee **Saifallah from #Tunisia is jihadist with heart and soul: he constructed already 1000 toxic gas bombs!***

***Young women invites a refugee to a "friendly evening", and it ends with rape!** Where is it all going to end, if we cannot even trust refugees?*

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Discussing crime committed by refugees in Germany as a threatening example

***Refugee Abdullah A. in #Burgwedel stabbed a 24 year old person in a supermarket**, and even prides himself over his act.*

*This is outrageous. **A refugee rioting in #Fulda injured a delivery driver and then attacked the police.** The police then shot him, and @ntvde thinks that the important question to ask is whether the shot was racially motivated... Instead ask why a migrant shots the police!!!*

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Concerns over negative generalization

*Due to insufficient background information, **the person sharing the news of the attack wrongly suggests that this crime was committed by a refugee.** But it is more likely that the murderer was a mentally ill gang member from Sweden, who killed three people.*



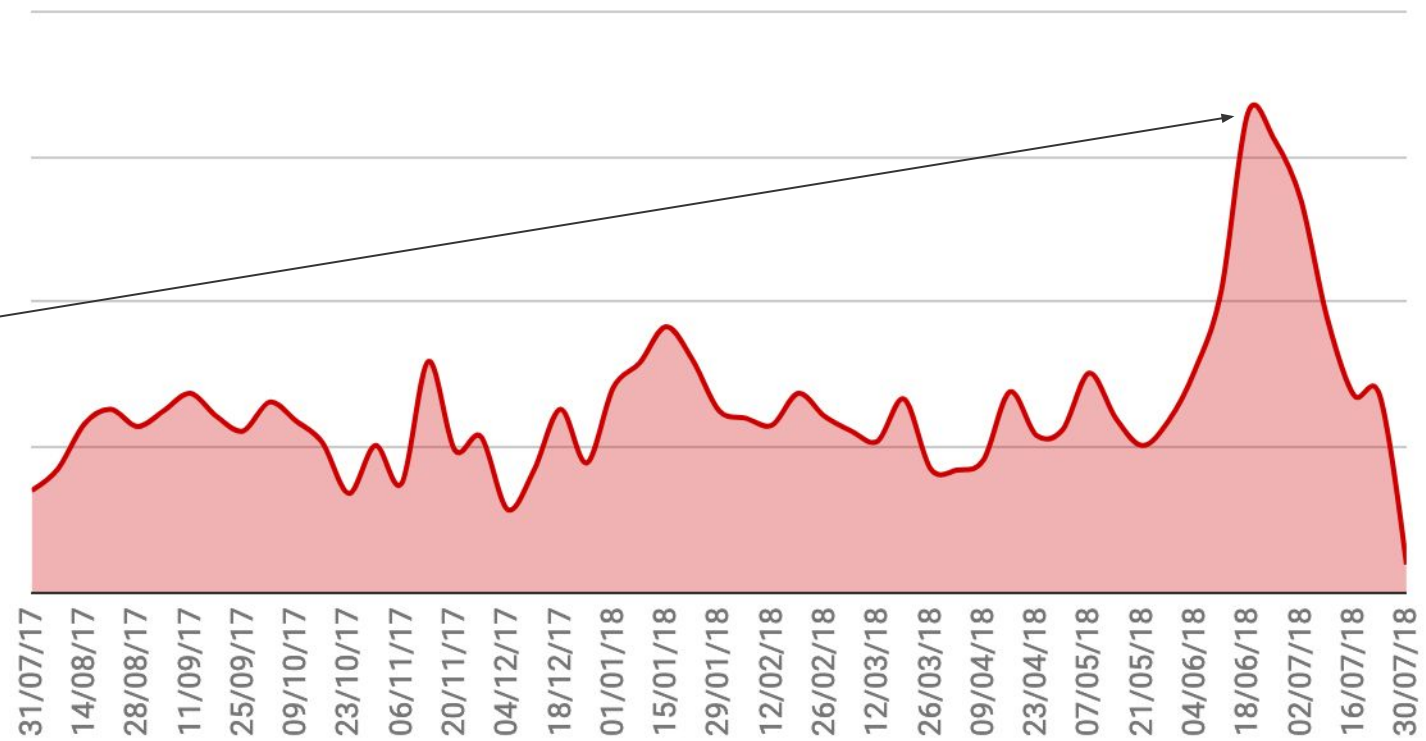
Pan-European Narratives | AT

Security (3): Top Stories

Many Austrians are deeply concerned about the security threat migrants pose on the country, and this fear is fuelled by acts of crime perpetrated by migrants in other countries. Consequently, Austrians pay close attention to the measures politicians take or plan to take to protect the country against immigrant influx.

Results:
~44,600 (65,2%)

- (1) **Sebastian Kurz meets CSU leader Markus Söder** in Germany to discuss the threats of uncontrolled immigrant influx
- (2) An **Eritrean refugee attacks an ambulance car in Germany**, the paramedic suffers severe injuries



Security

+ *Local Issues in Austria Around Migration*



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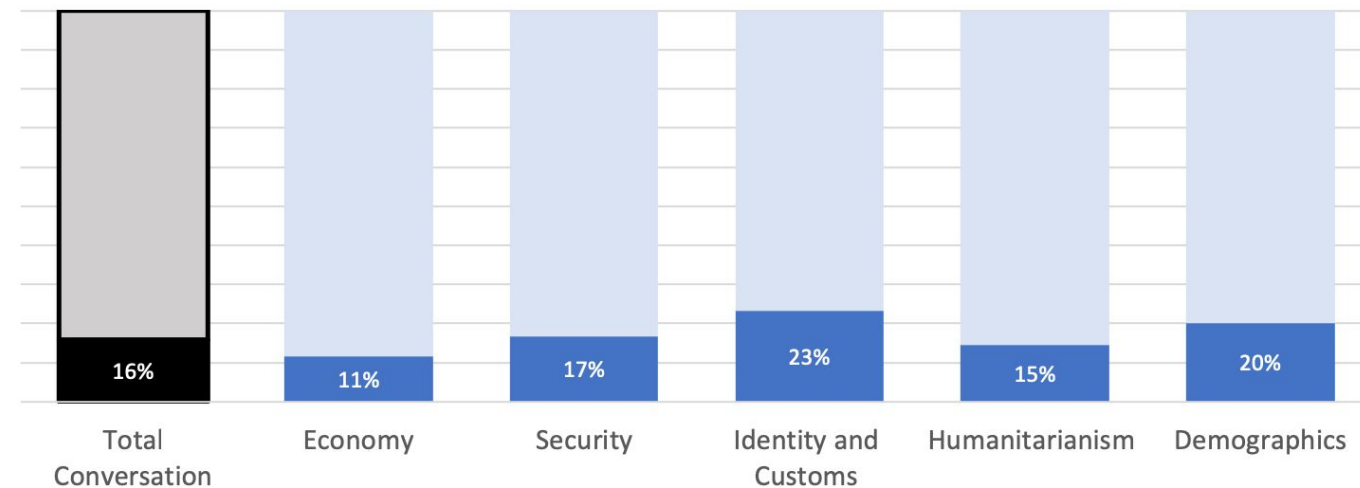
Local Issues | AT

Chancellor Sebastian Kurz

Chancellor Sebastian Kurz is a prominent figure of the migration discussion in Austria, and his anti-immigrant stance influences key territories of the discourse. His proposal to strengthen border protection is applauded as an effective tool to enhance domestic security, while some people oppose it from a humanitarian point of view.

His measures to cut immigrant welfare expenditure is again appreciated by some as action to favor Austrians over migrants, while others call it anti-humanitarian.

This anti-immigrant point of view is strongly argued by Kurz in the European discourse, and his election to chancellor in 2017 indicates that Austrians demand a more pragmatic approach to migration than that adopted by the previous socialist government.



■ Share of comments within the narrative referencing Sebastian Kurz



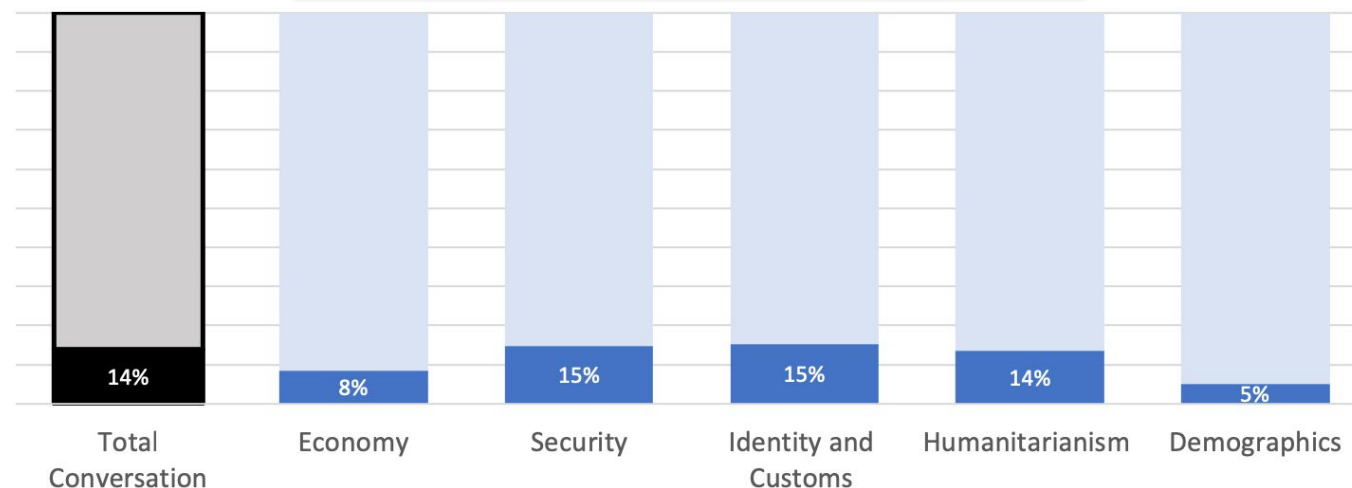
Local Issues | AT

Germany as a Controversial Example

Germany's *Willkommenskultur* is widely discussed in Austria, from various angles. Some people recite the approach's financial burden on German citizens (see quote below), while others point to deteriorating security due to the growing number of attacks by migrants in Germany.

Some people go as far as to claim that *Willkommenskultur* poses a moral obligation on people to show sympathy toward migrants, while this sentiment shields the real threats and costs of the integration.

*Spread the word! 12 average earners (3000 euros per month tax code III) or **5 singles (3000 euros per month tax code I)** are working in Germany for the financial supply of **ONLY ONE** refugee (2500 euros per month)!*



■ Share of comments within the narrative referencing Germany

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



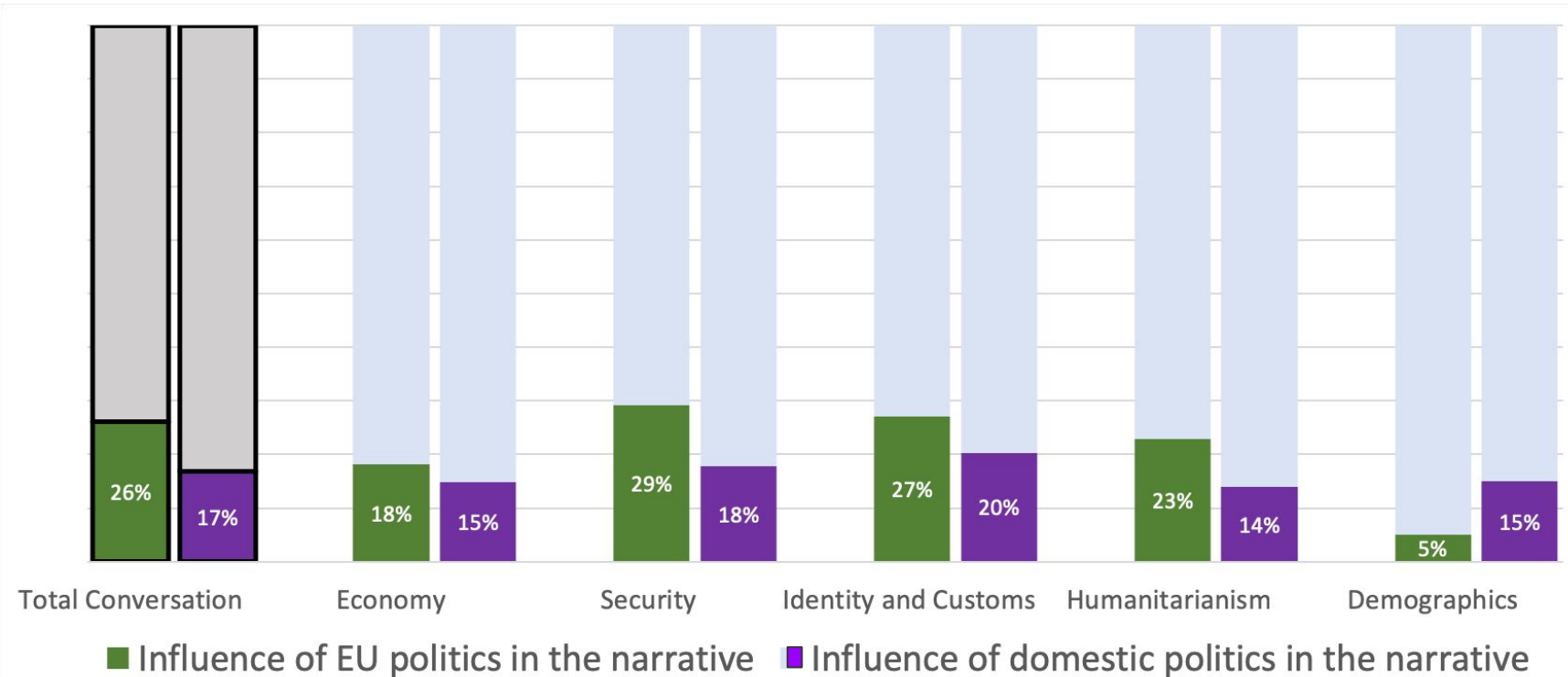
3.

European and Domestic Politics Context within Narratives | AT

Apart from Kurz and Germany, Political References are Rare

Apart from the numerous references to Germany and the Visegrád Four (to which chancellor Sebastian Kurz aims to strengthen ties), the international context of migration is not so much in the center of the discourse. However, in some cases, Austrians consider the example of other EU member states when it comes to security and conservation of local culture.

Furthermore, most Austrians discuss migrants' integration to the job market without referencing international examples. Although this issue triggers only minor interest, those concerned would expect local politicians to deal with the issue.



+ *Discussion Tone in Austria*



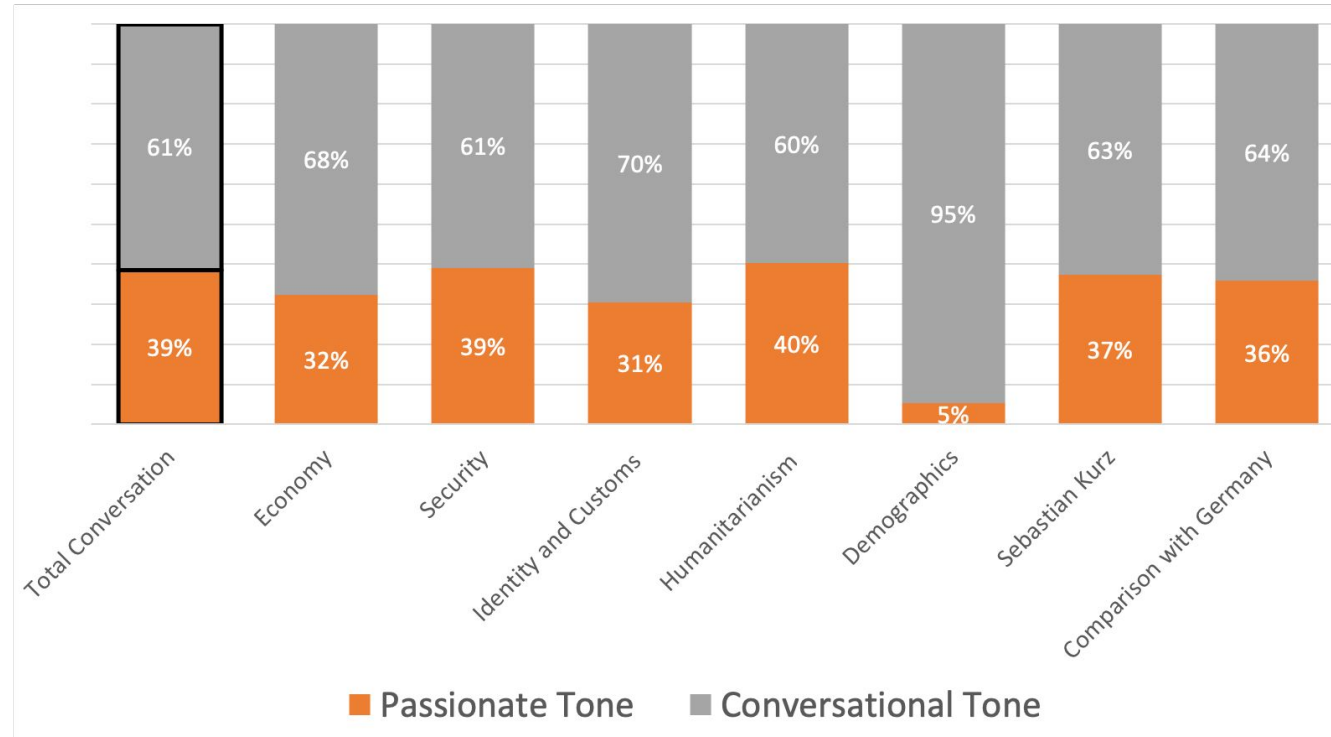
4.



Humanitarianism and Security Triggers Strongest Emotions

The discussion on migration in Austria mainly takes place in a conversational tone with the two main narratives – humanitarianism and security – triggering the strongest emotions.

Interestingly, significant passion arose around Sebastian Kurz and the comparison with Germany: both the politician and the assumedly negative precedent set by Germany triggered intense passion.



+ *Conversation Channels*



5.

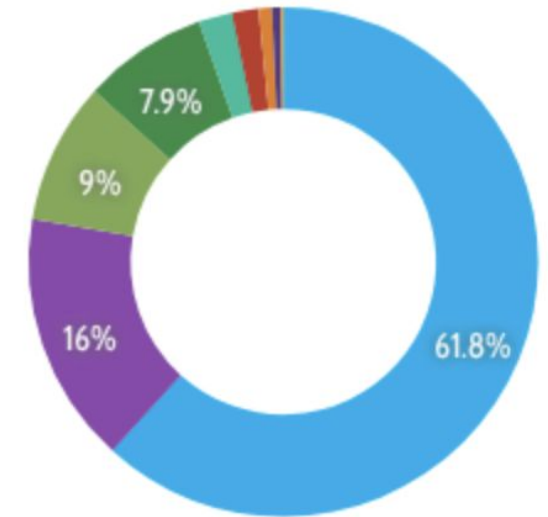
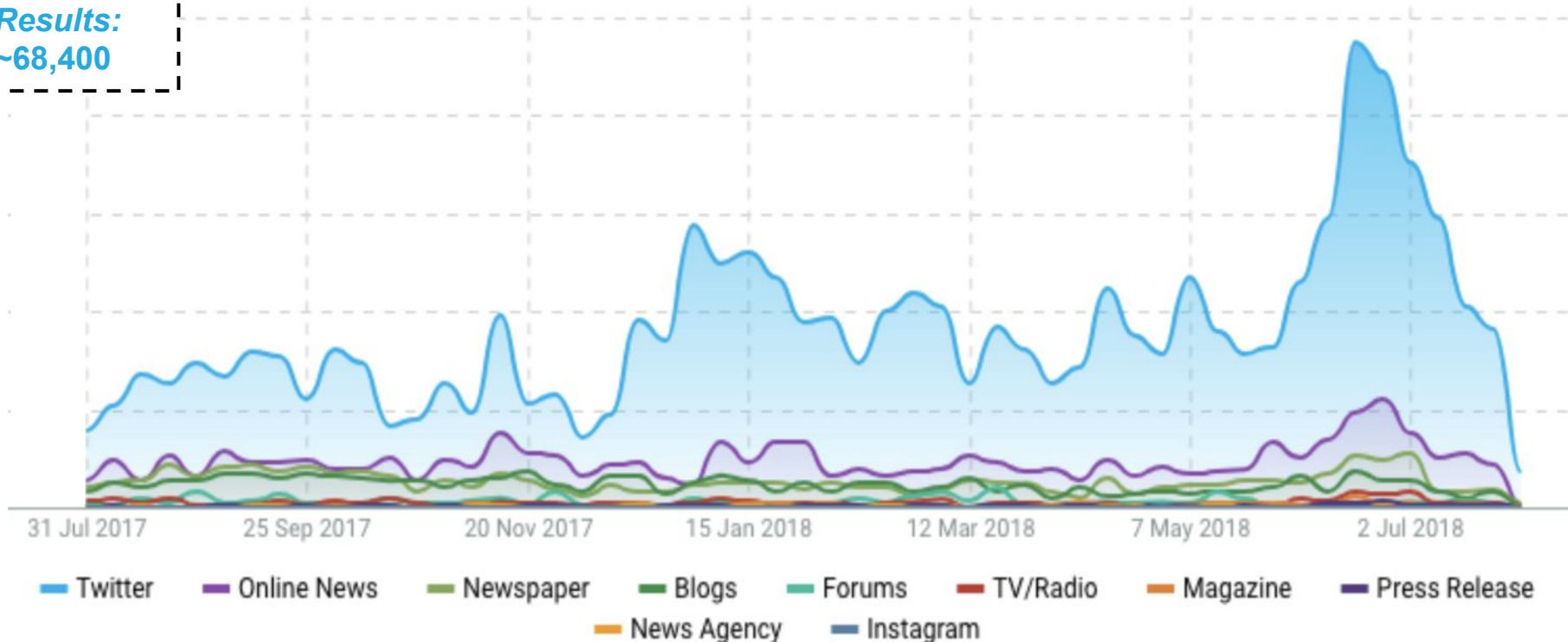


Channel Distribution | AT

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

When it comes to addressing migration in the public online sphere, Austrians most often use **Twitter** to share their views. This platform **captures almost 60% of the public conversation**. The remaining discussions can be found on online news sites and forums.

Results:
~68,400



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



Most Influential Authors | AT

Politicians' Posts Trigger The Highest Engagement

Twitter makes up for the majority of the online conversation on migration in Austria, and key opinion leaders appear to be leading political figures.

Most Influential Authors in the Overall Conversation	
@Hartes_Geld	Journalist
@florianaigner	Physicist and Author
@aufklaerer2017	Anti-immigrant account focused on migration-related news
@Tom_de_Before	Personal profile with pro-migration content
@michelreimon	EU parliament member, member of The Greens Party
@sebastiankurz	Chancellor of Austria
@microfox	Personal profile on economic implications of migration
@Martin_Sellner	Right-wing political activist, member of the Identitarian Movement of Austria (IBÖ)
@HCStracheFP	Vice-chancellor of Austria
@raphstar)	Head of communication of SPÖ Vienna