nationalism   scapegoat
diversity   pragmatism   fairness   multiculturalism
violence   duty   neighbors   messaging   solidarity   prosperity
demographics   crisis   immigrants   narratives   resilience
policy
majority   competition   jobs   society   opportunity   hospitality
welcome
migration   country   values   threat   asylum   safety   language
rights   norms
integration   control   pride   law   change   stories   counternarrative
newcomer   territory   migrant   frame   insecurity   ideology
institutions   advocacy   identity   government   benefits   immigration
terrorism   crime   essential
culture   climate   economy   power   refugee   unity
responsibility   frustration   border   influence   civil-society
tradition   compassion   well-being   brotherhood
humanitarianism   history
customs   empathy   resources   population
victim
reciprocity

How We Talk about Migration

The Link between Migration Narratives, Policy, and Power

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Contents

Executive Summary

International migration has more than tripled worldwide since 1960, with some of the most dramatic increases seen in places least accustomed to large-scale movements across borders. Colombia went from having fewer than 40,000 Venezuelan refugees and migrants in 2015 to more than 1.7 million five years later; in Lebanon, the number of refugees now exceeds 25 percent of its population; and one in five Swedes is now foreign born. This rapid social and demographic change in many countries around the world has triggered a new reckoning around what immigration means for societies, giving rise to a plethora of narratives or stories about how the movement of people across international boundaries reinforces—or undermines—national values, security, and prosperity.

The stories told about migration and migrants can paint a rich picture of how people view the opportunities and challenges associated with the movement of people, and through what lenses. As more people globally are on the move and migration levels rise, societies with large numbers of immigrants are facing competing narratives about migrants and migration. There is dissonance between top-down narratives from government and political leaders, and bottom-up narratives that spread through person-to-person contact, media and social media channels, and other popular outlets. Both top-down and bottom-up narratives can be "positive" (viewing immigration as an asset or source of pride) or "negative" (viewing migration as a threat)[1] and can be used—and at times manipulated—to advance different agendas. The COVID-19 pandemic added a new layer of complexity to the conversation about the role of migration and migrants. While in some places negative narratives about migration have intensified since the onset of the public-health crisis and resulting economic disruption, communities also are experiencing new waves of solidarity with migrants. And in many cases, these competing narratives coexist.

> *The stories told about migration and migrants can paint a rich picture of how people view the opportunities and challenges associated with the movement of people, and through what lenses.*

Narratives in turn influence migration policy in powerful ways. They shape how challenges are defined and contextualized, where responsibility is assigned, and what solutions are articulated. Perhaps most vividly, narratives can be used (or misused) to drive changes in policy direction. Narratives can be actively orchestrated and shaped (for example, through organized messaging campaigns or government speeches) or they can be engrained but diffuse (such as the idea that the United States is a "nation of immigrants"). They can be spread through peers and neighbors, through media and social media, and by politicians at all levels. Narratives can also develop and take root in institutions, particularly those responsible for crafting and implementing policy. They can spread in different parts of government (such as law enforcement institutions), the private sector (including employers), and civil society (such as nongovernmental organizations or advocacy groups). Together, at all of these levels, they interact with pre-existing beliefs to determine how people perceive the world around them, particularly in times of crisis.

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1   When discussing narratives, this report uses the shorthand "positive" or "welcoming" to discuss narratives that are favorable towards immigration and see it as an advantage; "negative" or "restrictive" are used to refer to narratives that see migration as a threat, whether economic, security, or cultural, and thus as something to be reduced.

Yet not enough is known about how certain narratives become dominant, how they interact with existing values and anxieties, and why certain frames gain strength in some contexts, yet lie dormant in others.

BOX 1
Defining Narratives and What Goes into Their Creation

A **narrative** is a way of seeing—the world, issues, other groups—that is accepted as true by a critical mass of people. This way of seeing informs what people think, believe, and do, and what they see as normative. The narratives people accept as true also shape their responses to their own lived experiences and are sustained and advanced through storytelling.

The building blocks of narratives are **stories**. The stories people hear, see, and experience over time shape how they see opportunities and threats around them. Stories are typically embedded in a **frame** that communicates values. The way stories are framed provides a clear definition of a problem (and its solution), and the designation of blame or responsibility. Frames also inform **messaging** strategies that dictate how stories are told. The aggregate of these stories and underlying frames are narratives, which create an easy-to-understand thread that connects multiple (and often competing) pieces of information, and thus help people make sense of complex events in their lives.

Narratives can occur either **organically** or in an **orchestrated** manner. Organic narratives are typically the product of similar stories told by various individuals from their own perspective without any preconceived motivations or desired outcomes. Conversely, orchestrated narratives are created and advanced by a powerful storyteller or a coalition of storytellers with specific objectives. **Counternarratives** may be introduced by different actors to attempt to shift the prevailing point of view. How individuals react to narratives depends on their **receptivity** to or **resilience** against them. Both of these responses are influenced by lived experiences, the surrounding environment, and the echo chambers from which people seek information.

Migration narratives follow similar patterns. They provide a way of making sense of what people may see or hear, including how to interpret sometimes competing "knowledge claims" on the causes and effects of migration. They establish distinct views on both policy problems and the right solutions, laying out what people see as normative and shaping what solutions they actively pursue or tolerate. A diverse set of actors creates, disseminates, and reinterprets migration narratives, including policymakers, politicians, civil society, researchers, international organizations, traditional and social media, and migrants themselves. As Boswell et al. point out, these narratives are typically most resonant when they are "cognitively plausible, dramatically or morally compelling, and, importantly, where they chime with perceived interests."

Sources: Kevin T. Kirkpatrick et al., *Voice: Shifting Narratives for a Just and Sustainable World* (Portland: Metropolitan Group, 2019); Christina Boswell, Andrew Geddes, and Peter Scholten, "The Role of Narratives in Migration Policy-Making: A Research Framework," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 13, no. 1 (2011): 1–11; Zeynep Sahin-Mencutek, "Migration Narratives in Policy and Politics" (Ryerson University Working Paper No 2020/17, December 2020); Peter Thisted Dinesen and Frederik Hjorth, "Attitudes toward Immigration: Theories, Settings, and Approaches," in *The Oxford Handbook of Behavioral Political Science*, eds. Alex Mintz and Lesley Terris (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2020).

This study by the Migration Policy Institute, Metropolitan Group, the RAND Corporation, and the National Immigration Forum seeks to help fill this gap in knowledge about how narratives take hold. The partners conducted an initial literature scan covering five countries (Colombia, Lebanon, Morocco, Sweden, and the United States) that were chosen to illustrate the diverse geographic, political, and cultural contexts in which

migration narratives shape policy. All of these countries have seen increased migration over the last five to ten years, and have experienced significant public debate over migration policy. Despite differences in the volume, characteristics, and history of migration across these countries, a comparative analysis reveals several patterns in terms of how narratives are used to frame migration positively, negatively, or using both frames, and to consider why certain frames gain salience over others. As migration increases in volume and complexity, there is an urgent need to better understand how narratives form, gain currency, and spread— and how they interact with other messages in the broader narrative ecosystem to shape policy.

The scan identified eight core findings:

1   **Both positive and negative narratives use a moral framework as a justification and trigger to tap into values.** Both welcoming and restrictive narratives can be rooted in a view of what is right—for instance, calling for generosity or compassion toward refugees because of humanitarian values, or arguing for penalties for irregular or unauthorized immigrants because of a commitment to law and order.

2   **Many positive migration narratives invoke feelings of national pride rather than attempting to "sell" concrete benefits of migration.** In many countries, top-down stories about migration tap into (and affirm) core notions of national identity (such as humanitarianism or diversity) and attempt to invoke pride (such as being a nation of immigrants). Other pro-migration narratives take a more transactional approach by highlighting how immigration reaps benefits for receiving societies, often focusing on migrants' economic contributions.

3   **Elite, top-down messages about migration often clash with views on the ground.** Many government leaders spread messages about the benefits of migration, but these do not always align with people's lived experiences. And in many places, the public has a fundamental mistrust of government or perceives that policymakers have failed to effectively manage migration challenges, which can also spark skepticism.

4   **Narratives about migration are not always ideologically driven; they can be motivated by political pragmatism or used to advance other political or policy goals.** Political rhetoric on migration is not always connected to ideology or values per se, but may instead be used as a calculated means to advance other policy goals (such as boosting foreign aid, gaining votes, or maintaining political power). The link to political pragmatism may offer an important clue as to why certain messages are amplified in certain settings and with certain audiences but not others.

5   **The most dominant threat narratives are driven by insecurity—whether related to economics, culture and identity, personal safety, or national security.** The stickiest negative narratives about migration are often interwoven with perceived threats to security (for instance, anxiety about jobs and resources, crime, or about changes to culture or social norms), even if these threats are not well supported by data. Threats to personal safety and security or economic livelihoods can be highly destabilizing, even if they are episodic or only affect a small number of people—and these fears are not easily defused with contrary evidence.

6 **There is often a tipping point when feelings of acceptance shift and feelings of insecurity begin to dominate.** Welcoming stances toward migration are not always permanent. Even if they are rooted in core values, if countries have immigration levels perceived as too large or increasing too quickly, they may reach a tipping point where narratives of threat, loss, and fairness gain power.

7 **The perception of losing control over migration can exacerbate existing threat narratives, and in many cases elevate them so that migrants are perceived as existential threats.** Perceived threats to rule of law, government management capabilities, resources and infrastructure, culture, or political power posed by immigration can become destabilizing under the right mix of circumstances, with anxious publics fearing that immigrants will gain disproportionate representation in their society—or change its fundamental character.

8 **Narratives around climate migration are not dominant in the case-study countries, despite the impact of climate change on many communities.** Growing numbers of people are migrating because of a mix of factors that includes the impact of climate change. At the same time, the research scan did not see significant climate migration narratives outside of climate-focused stakeholders. Moreover, narratives about climate migration are often hard to disentangle from other drivers of migration.

Societies around the world will continue to face the sometimes destabilizing effects of large-scale movements of people against the background of other seismic changes, including the uneven recovery from the pandemic, the continued effects of globalization, and the multifaceted effects of climate change on mobility. And as they do, they will seek ways to explain the role of immigration in their lives—whether positive, negative, or both. This creates new urgency to understand how different narratives take root, gain credibility, spread, and ultimately, interact with policy decisions, and to better understand what happens when narratives are in conflict.

1   Introduction

International migration has more than tripled since 1960, outpacing population growth such that migrants now comprise 3.6 percent of the world's population (up from 2.6 percent half a century ago).[2] These seismic changes have not been evenly distributed. Some countries without a history of international migration have experienced particularly fast growth: Colombia went from having fewer than 40,000 Venezuelan refugees

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2   According to UN estimates, there were 281 million international migrants in the world in 2020 (3.6 percent of the world's population), defined as individuals who live in a country other than their place of birth. This number includes migrants who choose to move for work, family, or education (or a combination thereof), as well as the forcibly displaced who are fleeing persecution, loss of livelihood, or violence. These categories may overlap. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 34.4 million people as of the end of 2020 had been forcibly displaced across international borders (a number that includes recognized refugees under UNHCR's mandate, Palestinian refugees, asylum seekers, and Venezuelans displaced abroad, all subject to different legal statuses). See UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *International Migration 2020 Highlights* (New York: United Nations, 2020); UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2020* (Copenhagen: UNHCR Global Data Service, 2021); Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Data Hub, "International Migrants by Country of Destination, 1960-2020," accessed August 12, 2021.

and migrants in 2015 to more than 1.7 million five years later;[3] in Lebanon, the number of refugees now exceeds 25 percent of its population.[4] Other countries that had not previously thought of themselves as countries of immigration have experienced significant demographic shifts. For instance, one in five Swedes is now foreign born.[5] And even in the absence of large-scale movements, the characteristics of certain periods of migration (especially when it is unplanned or irregular) can constitute a "crisis," with ripple effects across society.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the competing narratives that surround migration. In some places, it has been leveraged to scapegoat migrants, portraying them as a drain on scarce resources or spreaders of disease, and thus garner support for more restrictive migration policies. Meanwhile in other places, immigrants have been celebrated as "essential" workers and critical contributors to their communities. Often, these narratives coexist. While it is too early to evaluate the sum total of the pandemic's effects on either public attitudes or policy, it is clear that societies are grappling with competing narratives about how migration reinforces or undermines national values, security, and prosperity.[6] These storylines intersect to shape political discourse and policy at a time of heightened polarization around who migrates and how.

These storylines intersect to shape political discourse and policy at a time of heightened polarization around who migrates and how.

Policymakers and community leaders are faced with the weighty task of disentangling xenophobia from concerns over specific public policy problems, allocating resources equitably, making evidence-based policy decisions, and boosting community cohesion and resilience at a time of great uncertainty. While many are committed to combating harmful misinformation and disinformation, the right tools are not always available to do so. Effective policies and activities must be grounded in a much better understanding of the narratives that dictate how migration is seen and what messages people create and are absorbing about migrants. As many countries face increasingly complex decisions about who immigrates, in what numbers, and under what conditions, there is a critical need for reasoned discourse and narratives rooted in facts that do not further foment division.

Narratives are more than just words: They shape the way we see what surrounds us and what we think, believe, and do. Therefore, how we see and talk about migration is intimately connected to the design and implementation of policies that affect not just newcomers, but the health of communities as a whole. This is particularly important in the current moment, as decisions made today as the world begins to recover

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3   Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V), "Cifras Clave," updated January 31, 2021; Presidency of Colombia, *Acoger, Integrar y Crecer. Las políticas de Colombia frente a la migración proveniente de Venezuela* (Bogota: Presidency of Colombia, 2020).

4   UNHCR estimates that Lebanon hosts the largest number of refugees per capita in the world, with 1.5 million Syrian refugees, 16,584 refugees of other origins, and 200,000 Palestinian refugees, out of a population of 6.8 million people. UNHCR, "Lebanon" (fact sheet, September 2020).

5   Statistics Sweden, Population and Economic Welfare Statistics Unit, "Summary of Population Statistics 1960–2020," updated March 18, 2021.

6   See International Organization for Migration (IOM), "Countering Xenophobia and Stigma to Foster Social Cohesion in the COVID-19 Response and Recovery" (issue brief, IOM, Geneva, July 2020); Claire Kumar and Elsa Oommen with Federica Fragapane and Marta Foresti, "Beyond Gratitude: Lessons Learned from Migrants' Contributions to the Covid-19 Response" (working paper, Overseas Development Institute, London, March 2021).

from the global pandemic will have consequences for societies for decades to come. With the number of global migrants expected to rise dramatically from the intersecting impacts of conflict, economic shifts, and climate change, there is new urgency to understand how positive and negative narratives about migration develop, spread, and take root.

The Migration Policy Institute (MPI), National Immigration Forum, Metropolitan Group, and the RAND Corporation have launched a multiphase research initiative to provide nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and policymakers with new data and analysis about salient migration narratives, why different migration narratives resonate, and under what conditions they shift. The goal of this project is to go beyond a static understanding of how migration is perceived and instead map the dynamic landscapes in which narratives exist and interact. By beginning to understand the underlying narrative architecture (stories, values and frames, and counternarratives) and building a new baseline of information, it aims to inform policymaking as well as public discourse and communication about migration during this unique moment in history—in the process opening space for reasoned discourse rather than fomenting fear or insecurity.

The research team selected five initial case-study countries: Colombia, Lebanon, Morocco, Sweden, and the United States, which are diverse in their geography, income levels, ethnoreligious backgrounds, types of migration, and historical context, yet for whom migration has triggered significant nationwide public and policy debates. This cross-section of immigrant-receiving countries is designed to build knowledge on narrative patterns within and across different regions and national experiences, highlighting both similar and diverging narratives, and identifying specific gaps in knowledge of migration narratives and their efficacy.

The researchers started with an extensive review of existing studies of migration sentiment and narratives[7] with the goal of building on the existing literature and filling gaps in understanding rather than replicating existing studies. The research team then conducted individual literature scans for each of the five countries studied to identify dominant narratives in the past three to five years. The literature review in each country considered historical, demographic, and policy contexts; public opinion polls; how different entities (such as politicians, government leaders, the private sector, service providers and NGOs, community leaders, and the media) described aspects of migration; and five particular "hot-button" issues that draw considerable attention: jobs, safety and security, national identity and culture, health and well-being, and integration. Rather than examining these themes in silos, the research mapped how they overlap, intersect, and influence each other, both within and across case-study countries.[8] The scans included a range of sources in English, Arabic, Spanish, French, and Swedish, such as social media and media analysis, open-source

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7   The research team consulted and attempted to build on existing attitudinal segmentation and narratives studies, most of which have historically been clustered in the United States and Europe. Key sources include but are not limited to: More in Common, "The New Normal?" (slides, More in Common, September 2020), which examined COVID-19-specific research in France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, the United Kingdom, and the United States; Roxane Cassehgari, *Working with the Moveable Middle: Lessons from SCI's Stories of Change Case Studies Migration Narrative Project* (Belfast: Social Change Initiative, 2020); Jill Rutter and Rosie Carter, *National Conversation on Immigration: Final Report* (London: British Future and HOPE Not Hate, 2018), which included online and in-person surveys in the United Kingdom. In addition, the research team looked at organizations that have done research on messaging and narratives, including Over Zero, *Counteracting Dangerous Narratives in the Time of COVID-19* (Washington, DC: Over Zero, 2020); Steve Ballinger, Jill Rutter, and Sunder Katwala, *Calling out Hatred and Prejudice: A Guide to Communications Planning, Audiences and Messaging* (London: British Future, 2019).

8   The authors note this report is a scoping scan and does not represent an exhaustive review of all migration-related discourse in every country studied.

reporting, regional and international polling and surveys,[9] policy briefs and research papers, and speeches and other official government documents.

Beyond providing an initial analysis of the types of narratives that are prevalent about migration in different parts of the world, the report examines how they become salient in certain contexts. It offers a complement to traditional research on public opinion, which cannot on its own fully explain how attitudes form, endure, and shape policy directions. Most research on public attitudes focuses on one of two variables—individual characteristics (how attitudes differ among different groups of people) or external factors (how attitudes are affected by formative events and crises)—but does not fully account for the different messages people are absorbing about migrants, and how this in turn interacts with their predispositions and life experiences. This project aims to fill this gap by generating a better understanding of the narrative ecosystem in which different messages exist, providing another way to understand how and when certain narrative frames become salient, and what happens when different narratives are in conflict.

A second stage of this project will translate this research into publicly available tools that can be used by policymakers, NGOs, academics, and others to open the space for more reasoned discourse based on formative research and testing, and that reflect people's values and experiences.

2   How Narratives Shape Migration Policymaking

Narratives are directly linked to policy outcomes because the stories we tell—through neighbors, the media, and politicians—determine how people perceive the world around them, particularly in times of crisis (see Box 1). Stories are what people see, hear, and experience over time that, in the aggregate, create or reinforce a narrative. They help people make sense of disparate, often complex, or uncertain events. They create threads that are easy to understand and shape how people rank issues, what solutions they consider, how they see opportunities and threats around them, and where they assign responsibility. The sum total of these stories is a narrative, which creates a point of view on an issue. A common threat narrative—that migrants take jobs from locals—is an example of drawing a causal relationship between migration and labor market dynamics in order to explain a phenomenon that people may be observing in their own lives (in this case, loss of jobs). The American narrative that "we are a nation of immigrants" presents a way to view migration through the lens of national identity and shared history.

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9   The following global surveys and polls were among those used to establish a baseline of attitudes and to capture changes over the past five years: Gallup World Poll, see Neli Esipova, Julie Ray, and Anita Pugliese, "The World Grows Less Accepting of Migrants," Gallup, September 2020; Pew Global Attitudes Survey, see Laura Silver, Kat Devlin, and Christine Tamir, "Attitudes toward Diversity in 11 Emerging Economies," Pew Research Center, June 16, 2020; Ipsos Global Trends, see Ipsos, *Ipsos Global Trends 2020: Understanding Complexity* (London: Ipsos Mori, 2021); World Values Survey, see European Values Study and World Values Survey, "Joint EVS/WVS 2017-2021 Dataset (Joint EVS/WVS)," November 2020. It also includes a number of regional barometers and polls including: Afrobarometer, see Mohammed Abderebbi, Imen Mezlini, and Najib Saad, "Afrobarometer Round 6: The Quality of Democracy and Governance in Morocco" (Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research, January 2018); AmericasBarometer, see Diana Alejandra Rivera Rivera, Juan Camilo Plata Caviedes, and Juan Carlos Rodríguez Raga, *Barometro de Las Americas: Colombia* (Bogota: Observatorio de la Democracia Universidad de los Andes, 2018); Arab Barometer, see Arab Barometer, *Arab Barometer V: Lebanon Country Report* (N.p.: Arab Barometer, 2019); Eurobarometer, see European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer 469: Integration of Immigrants in the European Union* (Brussels: European Commission, 2018); Gallup regional polls, see Mohamed Younis, "Americans Want More, Not Less, Immigration for First Time," Gallup News, July 1, 2020.

BOX 2
Common Migration Narrative Categories

Prevailing research, reinforced by the literature scan for this report, indicates that migration narratives tend to fit within three broad categories:

► **Benefit/Hero frame.** Emphasizes the contributions that migrants can make to the receiving society, whether economic or cultural, often highlighting exceptional talent (e.g., emergency room doctors, tech entrepreneurs, or national sports stars). This frame sets up migrants as deserving of being welcomed due to their actions and contributions (and thus something that can be taken away). During COVID-19, this frame has been expanded to include "essential" workers at all skill levels who exposed themselves to health risks to perform critical tasks, such as seasonal agriculture work or elder care.

► **Victim frame.** Designed to elicit empathy, often highlighting the humanitarian needs of refugees and other migrants, portraying them as vulnerable or as victims in need of compassion and support. This framing can reinforce stereotypes of migrants requiring more resources from a society than they put in and can further dehumanize and remove perceptions of agency.

► **Threat/Villain frame.** Depicts immigrants as a burden or threat, likely to exacerbate disorder or danger, or competing with the native born for resources or influence within society. These narratives tend to fall along four main axes: economic (that migrants take limited jobs or drive down wages), security (they are a threat to safety or public order), health (that they spread disease), and culture and identity (that newcomers' beliefs and practices are incompatible with core national values).

Source: Aliyyah Ahad and Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan, *Communicating Strategically about Immigrant Integration: Policymaker Perspectives* (Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2019).

Migration narratives create the context in which attitudes, behaviors, practice, and policy choices are made and shaped. Narratives resonate with the public for different reasons, ranging from how they align with a country's history, identity, or values; whether they convincingly explain a complex event; whether they reinforce individual preferences or beliefs; and even how easily they spread. The set of stories that gives life to a narrative is reinforced and maintained by people's lived experience, what they are exposed to (echo chambers or resonance rooms), and what they see around them in their environment. While many narratives are organic and spontaneous, others are highly orchestrated and designed to effect particular policy outcomes, reinforce or shift the status quo, and often influence power and political dynamics within society.

Narratives can be used at three critical points in the policy process:[10]

► **To set the policy context.** Narratives are used to establish how migrants and migration relate to national identity and values, and how migration may be connected to a nation's history or origin story.

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10   See Christina Boswell, Andrew Geddes, and Peter Scholten, "The Role of Narratives in Migration Policy-Making: A Research Framework," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 13, no. 1 (2011): 1–11; Zeynep Sahin-Mencutek, "Migration Narratives in Policy and Politics" (Ryerson University Working Paper No 2020/17, December 2020).

► **To define a threat or problem or to define an opportunity.** Narratives are used to explain how migration is causally related to societal challenges and fears, for instance around loss of economic opportunities, cultural change, or threats to personal safety and security. Alternatively, they can be presented as part of the solution to existing challenges, such as labor market shortages, providing sanctuary to people in need, or benefiting from the skills and experiences of people from around the world.

► **To mobilize support for policy actions.** Narratives are used to make a case for (and legitimize) certain policy actions, such as either facilitating or restricting migration.

It is important to note that narratives do not need to be accurate to be persuasive, and indeed, may gain currency precisely by oversimplifying, distorting, or omitting details. As an extension of this, it is established that public attitudes about immigration—and public policy preferences—do not always flow from economic or other interests. Instead, both problems and preferred solutions can be constructed by different actors, because they trigger different values and emotions.[11]

3   Narrative Architecture in Five Case-Study Countries

The five case-study countries examined in this report—Colombia, Lebanon, Morocco, Sweden, and the United States—illustrate the diverse geographic and cultural contexts in which migration narratives can take hold and shape policy. Despite the differences in culture, history, and migration trends between these countries, there were clear patterns in terms of the most salient narratives (both positive and negative) that emerged (see Table 1).

This analysis of patterns is based on the initial research scan in each country and was refined in a series of group workshops held to compare and contrast the findings across the countries. In these sessions, the research team analyzed the most dominant narratives and sketched out the narrative architecture, including the country context, frame and values underlying the narrative, stories that supported the narrative, counternarratives, and policy impact when that was clear. (See this report's appendix for additional country-level details.)

Despite the differences in culture, history, and migration trends between these countries, there were clear patterns in terms of the most salient narratives (both positive and negative) that emerged.

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11   Boswell, Geddes, and Scholten, "The Role of Narratives in Migration Policy-Making."

TABLE 1
Salient Migration Narratives in Colombia, Lebanon, Morocco, Sweden, and the United States

Core Positive or Neutral Narratives	Messages that Reinforce the Narrative
Brotherhood, solidarity, and compassion	▶ They welcomed us as migrants, so we should welcome them. (Colombia) ▶ My country is your country (transliterated Arabic: "Bladi bladek"). (Morocco) ▶ Migrants are victims and deserve protection and support. (Colombia, Lebanon, Morocco, and the United States) ▶ Family separation is morally wrong and not who we are as a nation. (United States)
National pride	▶ Migration reflects our diversity and heritage. (Morocco) ▶ We are a nation of immigrants. (United States) ▶ We are providing a global good by hosting refugees in need. (Colombia, Lebanon) ▶ We pride ourselves on our multiculturalism and humanitarian values. (Sweden)
Pragmatism	▶ Migration is going to happen one way or another, so we must take commonsense approaches to it and harness its benefits. (Colombia) ▶ Migration is part of the solution, not the problem, and we believe that immigration is a wealth for our society. (Morocco, United States) ▶ Migration contributes to our economy. (Colombia, United States)
Core Threat Narratives	Messages that Reinforce the Narrative
Economic and resource insecurity	▶ Migrants are stealing jobs from locals. (Colombia, Lebanon, Morocco, United States) ▶ Refugees are contributing to resource scarcity and are straining public infrastructure. (Colombia, Lebanon) ▶ Migrants abuse public benefits. (United States)
Threats to physical security	▶ Migrants and refugees are more likely to commit crimes and increase the risk of terrorism. (Lebanon, Sweden, United States) ▶ Crime rates have increased because of migrants and refugees. (Colombia, Morocco) ▶ Migrants entering without proper immigration procedures undermine the rule of law and should be punished. (United States)

TABLE 1 (cont.)

Salient Migration Narratives in Colombia, Lebanon, Morocco, Sweden, and the United States

Core Threat Narratives	Messages that Reinforce the Narrative
Threats to national identity	▶ Multiculturalism erodes national identity. (Sweden) ▶ We are losing our country because immigrants don't integrate the way previous waves did. (United States) ▶ Immigrants threaten the social fabric of the country. (Lebanon, Morocco, Sweden, United States) ▶ Lebanese before all (Lebanon), America First (United States)
Tipping point or loss of control	▶ We've welcomed migrants and been generous, and now it's time for them to go home. (Lebanon, Sweden) ▶ We cannot absorb more people. (Colombia, Lebanon, Sweden) ▶ The international community has not done enough to help. (Lebanon, Sweden) ▶ The situation on the border is a crisis and we can't keep taking people in until we regain control. (United States)
Existential threat	▶ Refugees are an existential threat to the country's demographic mix, culture and identity, security (both terrorism and crime concerns), values, livelihoods, and political system, which is based on ethnicity. (Lebanon)

Source: Authors' analysis based on the scoping scan; a more comprehensive version of these narratives and the original source material is included in the appendix.

Findings

Finding 1: Both positive and negative narratives use a moral framework as a justification and trigger to tap into values.

Both welcoming and restrictive narratives can be rooted in a claim of what is right or invoke a country's moral compass—for instance, calling for generosity or compassion toward refugees because of humanitarian values (a moral duty to help), or arguing for restrictions because of a commitment to law and order (the immorality of breaking the law through unauthorized crossing of a border). Numerous narratives trigger moral frameworks, including around fairness and fair distribution of resources, following and enforcing the rule of law, the value of diversity, and meeting obligations to other human beings. Understanding where these different narratives are gaining salience and where they overlap will be critical to understanding how and why certain narratives resonate with different groups.

Numerous narratives trigger moral frameworks, including around fairness and fair distribution of resources, following and enforcing the rule of law, the value of diversity, and meeting obligations to other human beings.

Particularly in places where a commitment to the rule of law is a core value (either valuing public order as a societal moral priority or a moral sense that people who do not follow the rules should be punished), the sense that migration is happening outside of legal channels can activate anxieties. In the United States, the perceived lack of consequences for employers who hire unauthorized immigrants[12] mobilizes some anti-immigration groups, as do questions around offering a path to legalization for populations who are illegally present.[13]

On the other side, many governments have anchored their migration policies and positions in values of humanitarianism, benevolence, or brotherhood (see Finding 2). A sense of moral obligation and reciprocity underlies Colombia's generous migration policies toward Venezuelans, and messages of unity and brother-hood underpin the Moroccan government narrative on migration. Activists have also harnessed compassion and solidarity for campaigns against discrimination. Several anti-racism campaigns have taken place in Morocco (namely in 2014 and 2016)[14] that have run on slogans promoting migrant integration, particularly focused on migrants from sub-Saharan Africa. Messages have included slogans such as, "Je ne m'appelle pas azzi,"[15] against the use of derogatory names (English: My name is not azzi, a reference to a racial slur used for sub-Saharan Africans) and the welcoming message "Bladi bladek" (English: My country is your country). The first pan-Maghreb campaign against racial discrimination was organized under the slogan "Ni Oussif Ni Azzi, Baraka et Yezzi" (English: "Neither slave, nor azzi, stop, that's enough").[16]

12   Spencer Raley, Madison McQueen, and Jason Pena, "By the Numbers: How the Biden/Harris Immigration Platform Will Fuel a Staggering Increase of Immigrants and Population Growth," Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), September 14, 2020.

13   Speech by Donald Trump, U.S. President, on immigration, Yuma, Arizona, August 18, 2020.

14   Mark van Gurp, "Anti-Racism Campaign in Morocco: Black Isn't My Name," Osocio, March 31, 2014; Jeune Afrique, "'Ni esclave, ni nègre': coup d'envoi de la première campagne transmaghrébine contre le racism," Jeune Afrique, March 24, 2016.

15   "Azzi" is a derogatory term for a dark-skinned man.

16   Jeune Afrique, "'Ni esclave, ni nègre.'"

In Lebanon, counternarratives to negative messages have also focused on anti-racism, advocating for rights for foreign-born workers. The Lebanese Anti-Racism Movement (ARM Lebanon), for instance, has launched public campaigns over social media[17] advocating for foreign-born workers who are subject to the Kafala system in Lebanon.[18] In Sweden, the connection to core values triggered in welcoming narratives (such as those tying Swedish national identity to humanitarianism) is also seen in *counternarratives* that frame natives as the "real Swedes." This framing has helped propel the nationalist Sweden Democrats party from one of the country's smallest to one of the largest (for more, see Finding 3).

Finding 2: Many positive migration narratives invoke feelings of national pride rather than attempting to "sell" concrete benefits of migration.

In many countries, migration is foundational to the national narrative of who "we" are—whether this is because immigration is part of a country's nation-building story (as in the United States), because a country publicly recognizes its diverse heritage (Morocco), because it upholds a strong commitment to diversity and humanitarian values (Sweden), or even because the population draws from a collective memory of emigration (Colombia). Some of the most dominant narratives are thus connected to a metanarrative about history and identity, or tell a collective story about how the country has reacted to or managed immigration. Some of the national identity narratives tap into feelings of benevolence, solidarity, and valuing other people and cultures. This shared history and collective memory of migration can manifest in several ways.

In Sweden, the commitment to generous asylum and integration policies invokes national pride connected to many Swedes' national identity as humanitarian leaders.[19] In Colombia, there is a sense of moral obligation and reciprocity behind the generous welcome policies toward Venezuelans because of the reception that Colombians fleeing civil war received in Venezuela.[20] In Morocco, the 2011 constitution highlights the country's diverse heritage. Morocco's king has also called for a positive approach to

> *In Colombia, there is a sense of moral obligation and reciprocity behind the generous welcome policies toward Venezuelans because of the reception that Colombians fleeing civil war received in Venezuela.*

migration, underscoring a sense of shared responsibility and solidarity toward migrants. Echoing that sentiment, Morocco's Ministry of Religious Affairs regularly highlights Morocco's "mixture of cultures, religions, peoples, and races" as one of its defining characteristics.[21]

At the same time, even in countries that do not have a positive stance toward immigration, the act of having welcomed large populations of migrants and refugees can spark national pride. In Lebanon, where

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17   Anti-Racism Movement (ARM) Lebanon, "About Us," accessed January 10, 2021.
18   This migration sponsorship system restricts migrants' ability to obtain legal protection, making them vulnerable to forced labor practices, abuse, and exploitation. See Amnesty International, *Their House Is My Prison: Exploitation of Migrant Domestic Workers in Lebanon* (London: Amnesty International, 2019), 12-14.
19   Admir Skodo, "Sweden: By Turns Welcoming and Restrictive in Its Immigration Policy," *Migration Information Source*, December 6, 2018; Kerrie Holloway with Amy Leach, "Public Narratives and Attitudes towards Refugees and Other Migrants: Sweden Country Profile" (key messages, Overseas Development Institute, London, June 2020).
20   Luisa Feline Freier, "Colombia Went Big on Migration. Will Others Follow?" *Americas Quarterly*, February 11, 2021.
21   Mohammed VI Foundation of African Oulema, "Multiculturalism in Morocco," updated April 9, 2019.

top-down narratives are overwhelmingly negative and where there is significant frustration with hosting so many refugees (Lebanon has the highest ratio of refugees to citizens per capita in the world), many Lebanese have taken pride in the fact that their country is providing a global good by hosting refugees, despite many feeling resentment for not receiving adequate international support and acknowledgment of their sacrifice.[22]

This is not to say that these metanarratives are not sometimes contested or have different resonance among different subsets of the population.[23] Whether they resonate also depends on how they interact with other narratives (for instance, whether they contradict other messages being spread), which actors promote them, and how credible they are for different audiences.

By the same token, migration can also be part of core values because a country defines itself in opposition to immigration. In Lebanon, a country defined by its ethnic and religious diversity, there is a pronounced fear that newcomers (primarily Sunni Muslim refugees from Syria) could shift the delicate ethnoreligious status quo and demographic balance between Christians, Shia Muslims, Sunni Muslims, and Druze, which upholds the country's confessional political system and distribution of power.[24] In addition, many Lebanese remember Syria's occupation of their country, which generates some resentment toward Syrian refugees.[25]

While immigration is a core part of the United States' origin story, beginning with the Pilgrims and early European settlers and continuing with large-scale immigration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it has a history of alternating between welcoming and restricting immigration based on race and ethnicity. The 20th century saw widely varying immigration legislation that was more restrictive after World War I, more open during and after WWII, restrictive in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and more open in successive decades.[26] This duality can be seen in the contrast between the political campaigns of the country's last two presidents. While Donald Trump cast immigrants as criminals and drains on the economy, stating in his 2016 campaign for president that "we need a system that serves our needs, not the needs of others.… It's called America First,"[27] Joe Biden's 2020 campaign declared immigration as "essential to who we are as a nation, our core values and our aspirations for our future."[28]

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22   The authors note that after the 2020 explosion in Beirut that caused significant damage to housing and other infrastructure, narratives of a country too overwhelmed to continue to host so many refugees have risen to the forefront. *The Daily Star*, "Lebanon Crisis Response Plan Appeals for $2.75B," *The Daily Star*, March 12, 2021; Will Todman, "Supporting Syrian Refugees amidst Lebanon's Crises" (project report, Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 2021); Jamie Dettmer, "Lebanon's Politicians Want Syrian Refugees to Leave," Voice of America, August 27, 2019.

23   Sometimes, the contested nature of narratives is exemplified at the highest levels of government. For example, the Trump administration removed the culturally ubiquitous phrase "nation of immigrants" from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) website in February 2018 (which as of this writing has not been restored). The revised mission statement reads: "U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services administers the nation's lawful immigration system, safeguarding its integrity and promise by efficiently and fairly adjudicating requests for immigration benefits while protecting Americans, securing the homeland, and honoring our values." See Richard Gonzales, "America No Longer a 'Nation of Immigrants,' USCIS Says," NPR, February 22, 2018.

24   Dina Eldawy, "A Fragile Situation: Will the Syrian Refugee Swell Push Lebanon over the Edge?" *Migration Information Source*, February 21, 2019.

25   Eldawy, "A Fragile Situation."

26   Douglas C. Ligor, "Neither Deportation nor Amnesty: An Alternative for the Immigration Debate Building a Bridge across the Deportation–Amnesty Divide" *(RAND Perspective brief, RAND Corporation, Washington, DC, 2018).*

27   *The New York Times*, "Transcript of Donald Trump's Immigration Speech," *The New York Times*, September 1, 2016.

28   Biden Presidential Campaign, "The Biden Plan for Securing Our Values as a Nation of Immigrants," accessed January 11, 2021.

Finding 3: Elite, top-down messages about migration often clash with views on the ground.

Linking migration to national pride does not necessarily mean the public does not have frustrations with migration policy and its effects on communities. In fact, discontent with how governments have managed previous waves of migration and a broader mistrust of government have affected the resonance of top-down narratives. Government-led narratives embracing values such as diversity, solidarity, or brotherhood—even in countries with diverse populations or where national identity is linked to diversity—may conflict with public sentiment if those messages clash with people's beliefs, assumptions, and experiences, and fail to address underlying anxieties regarding migration (such as those related to the labor market or cultural change) or other issues. Across the case-study countries there has often been tension between bottom-up and top-down narratives, where the latter (promoted by government and senior leaders) are sometimes seen as papering over people's real concerns or stifling legitimate debate. When this disconnect is significant (and opportunities to express dissent are few), this dissonance can spill over into political conflict.

> *There has often been tension between bottom-up and top-down narratives, where the latter (promoted by government and senior leaders) are sometimes seen as papering over people's real concerns or stifling legitimate debate.*

In Sweden, for example, voicing opposition to immigration or open discussion about aspects of migration policy became taboo within establishment political parties and among many Swedes in general, who feared being accused of racism.[29] Social norms around agreeableness and conformity[30] further limited dissent. With a lack of open discussion about the policy issues that come with fast, large-scale immigration, and an inability to express healthy concerns about immigration within mainstream discourse, the public debate was funneled to the extremes. Such funneling arguably propelled the success of the anti-immigration Sweden Democrats party, which after gaining its first seats in Parliament in 2010, won 17.5 percent of votes in the last election in 2018.[31]

Populations across case-study countries also expressed deep disappointment in government performance and a lack of trust in government policies more broadly. In interviews with supporters of the Sweden Democrats, researcher Danielle Lee Tomson found that interviewees described the party and "alternative media" as the only sources that spoke "directly" about difficult topics such as immigration, crime, and religion.[32] Every respondent discussed the 2015 European refugee crisis and the government's response to it as one of the primary reasons for supporting the Sweden Democrats.[33] In Colombia, a December 2019 survey found that 62 percent of Colombians disagreed with the government allowing Venezuelans to stay, and in January 2021, another poll reported that more than 80 percent of Colombians signaled that they did not approve of the government's handling of Venezuelan migration.[34]

29   Danielle Lee Tomson, *The Rise of Sweden Democrats: Islam, Populism and the End of Swedish Exceptionalism* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2020).
30   Laura Hautala, "Social Media's Echo Chamber Fuels Migrant Backlash in Sweden, Finland," CNET, August 27, 2016.
31   Johan Ahlander and Simon Johnson, "After Years on the Fringe, Sweden Democrats Take Centre Stage," Reuters, June 24, 2021.
32   Tomson, *The Rise of Sweden Democrats*.
33   Tomson, *The Rise of Sweden Democrats*.
34   *El Espectador*, "El rechazo a los venezolanos que muestra la encuesta de Invamer," *El Espectador*, December 5, 2019; Manuel Rueda, "Venezuelan Migrants Welcome New Colombian Protection Measure," Associated Press, February 9, 2021.

In Morocco, overwhelmingly positive narratives about migrants from the king, state religious authorities, and senior government officials do not appear to resonate with the population, which holds relatively negative attitudes toward migrants. It is unclear if these attitudes are connected to citizens' faith in government more broadly, as polling data from the Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis shows that the majority of Moroccan citizens do not trust the government or political parties.[35] There is no such data or polling on perceptions of the monarchy.

Data from Lebanon, however, show that the overwhelmingly negative top-down narratives expressed by the president and senior government officials do not necessarily translate into anti-immigrant public sentiment. For instance, according to 2019 Arab Barometer data, 59 percent of Lebanese respondents answered neutrally to the question of whether they would like, dislike, or not care about having an immigrant or foreign worker as a neighbor.[36] One possible explanation is that Lebanese in general are angry at their government for widespread corruption, mismanagement, and failure to address a wide range of socioeconomic challenges. Thus, government credibility is directly connected to how top-down messages resonate.

In the United States, research has identified an "exhausted majority" who are tired of polarization, do not trust politicized language from some political leaders, show flexibility in their views, and believe that different sides can and should find common ground—but are often overlooked in public discourse.[37] Even as the Trump administration made migration restrictions one of its signature policy achievements, many in this sizeable middle group said they believed that immigration is good for America, that the United States should take in refugees, and that young unauthorized immigrants who came to the country as children should have a path to citizenship.[38]

Understanding which messages and messengers have credibility and legitimacy is key to opening up space for reasoned discourse.

Finding 4: Narratives about migration are not always ideologically driven; they can be driven by political pragmatism or in some cases used to advance other political or policy goals.

While many narratives have emerged organically, others are orchestrated, and in some cases manipulated, by political or other actors. These may be used not just to further migration goals, but to advance other policy aims or to gain or maintain political power more broadly. Top-down narratives may also reflect political pragmatism, for instance recognizing that a certain level of migration is unavoidable under certain circumstances, rather than ideological positions on migration per se. Governments may thus disseminate messages that promote acceptance of large-scale migration simply because there is no real alternative.

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35   Trust in government is among the lowest from all the surveyed institutions in the Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis (MIPA) 2020 Trust Institutions Index, with only 23 percent of respondents showing confidence in their government. Trust in political parties is also among the lowest levels of trust throughout the survey with an average of 22 percent of respondents reporting that they trust the political parties. See MIPA, "Trust in Institutions Index 2020: The Parliament and Beyond," updated October 21, 2020.
36   James Dennison and Mohamed Nasr, *Attitudes to Immigration in the Arab World: Explaining an Overlooked Anomaly* (Geneva: IOM, 2020).
37   Stephen Hawkins, Daniel Yudkin, Míriam Juan-Torres, and Tim Dixon, *Hidden Tribes: A Study of America's Polarized Landscape* (New York: More in Common, 2018), 8, 13, 61, and 110.
38   Hawkins, Yudkin, Juan-Torres, and Dixon, *Hidden Tribes*.

The idea that people should come up with pragmatic solutions is a theme found in several countries. Morocco's king has publicly referred to his country's migration policies as both "humanist" and "proactive,"[39] and has led a suite of efforts to advance migration reforms both domestically and internationally, including by hosting the intergovernmental conference to adopt the Global Compact for Migration in 2018.[40] Despite this, analysts have pointed to the lack of implementation of the government's 2014 migration policy as a key example of Morocco's tendency to alleviate public criticism in the short term, rather than making genuine policies intended to last in the long run, especially in terms of migration.[41]

In Colombia, narratives by national political leaders have mostly been positive (focusing on solidarity and brotherhood with Venezuelans)[42] but are also driven by pragmatism. With the long and porous shared border with Venezuela, officials know there is no real way to stop flows, so it is more practical to prepare for and try to proactively manage migration. This pragmatism is evident in President Iván Duque's March 2021 proposal for a large-scale regularization for Venezuelans in the country, stating: "We want to set an example and [be] a reference that can be adopted by other countries. We want to demonstrate that although we're not a rich country, we can do something that is humanitarian, that is fraternal, but at the same time is an intelligent and sound migration policy."[43]

In the United States, widespread public support for a pathway to legal status for unauthorized immigrants (especially those brought to the country as children)—despite the ongoing congressional stalemate around reform—suggests a certain level of pragmatism about managing these populations, especially as mass deportations on this scale would be unrealistic and viewed as cruel.[44] The pragmatism narrative has also been used to advance the idea that it is not feasible to deport 11 million unauthorized immigrants, 60 percent of whom have lived in the United States a decade or more,[45] without negatively affecting the U.S. labor force or breaking up families.[46]

The pragmatism narrative has also been used to advance the idea that it is not feasible to deport 11 million unauthorized immigrants, 60 percent of whom have lived in the United States for a decade or more.

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39 Moroccan Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs, "SM le Roi adresse un message aux participants à la 2ème Conférence internationale sur le dialogue des cultures et des religions," updated September 12, 2018.

40 Morocco's 2011 constitution states that non-nationals should enjoy the same fundamental freedoms as nationals, and in 2014, the Moroccan government initiated a regularization campaign for irregular migrants, irrespective of nationality. A National Strategy of Immigration and Asylum was implemented by the Ministry in Charge of Moroccans Residing Abroad and Migration Affairs (SNIA) in 2014, and in 2018 Morocco hosted the intergovernmental conference to adopt the Global Compact on Migration and inaugurated the African Migration Observatory in Rabat.

41 Anna Jacobs, "Morocco's Migration Policy: Understanding the Contradiction between Policy and Reality," MIPA, June 30, 2019).

42 Colombian President Iván Duque referred to the arriving migrants as "Venezuelan brothers," saying his country has and will always receive the migrants with affection "despite any social and fiscal difficulties because we are united by fraternity." See Megan Janetsky, "Here's Why Colombia Opened Its Arms to Venezuelan Migrants—Until Now," *Foreign Policy*, January 14, 2019.

43 John Otis, "Colombia's President on Amnesty for Venezuelans: 'We Want to Set an Example'," NPR, March 3, 2021.

44 A 2020 Pew survey found that 74 percent of Americans were in favor of granting legal status to immigrants who were brought to the United States illegally as children, while 75 percent supported a pathway to legal status for unauthorized immigrants, if certain conditions were met. See Jens Manuel Krogstad, "Americans Broadly Support Legal Status for Immigrants Brought to the U.S. Illegally as Children," Pew Research Center, June 17, 2020.

45 MPI Migration Data Hub, "Profile of the Unauthorized Population: United States," accessed July 27, 2021.

46 Jeanne Batalova, Mary Hanna, and Christopher Levesque, "Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States," *Migration Information Source*, February 11, 2021.

In Morocco, positive migration narratives by the government are used to advance specific foreign policy goals. For one, Morocco seeks to position itself as a regional and global leader that is working for cooperative ways to address migration challenges. Moreover, promoting a positive message of inclusivity and solidarity, especially toward migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, has been an important part of Morocco's Africa outreach strategy and effort to build support, which culminated in it joining the African Union in 2017 after leaving the predecessor Organization of African Unity in 1984.

In the United States, Trump's 2016 presidential campaign leveraged immigration to advance his "America First" platform and rally supporters. Slogans such as "Build the Wall" became part of a general anti-establishment narrative that repudiated the political elite's more tactful approach to sensitive issues such as immigration, connecting to a broader set of non-immigration policy issues centered around cultural and economic anxieties.[47] In Sweden, the Sweden Democrats party similarly used narratives opposing migration policies to build support and gain votes more broadly (as noted in Finding 3 above).

In Lebanon, the goal of returning Syrians has been embraced by several religious parties and leaders, even those on opposing sides of key policy issues, who each see it as advancing specific political aims. For instance, the Shiite parties and leaders of Hezbollah and Amal frequently mention that refugee return is safe and critical for reviving Syria as a crucial ally.[48] Similarly, the (Christian) Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), to which President Michel Aoun belongs, believes that linking refugee return to change in Syria means that most refugees could stay forever,[49] and even Kataib, which opposes the Assad regime in Syria, has indicated its disdain for migrant populations, ultimately seeking a swift return of Syrian refugees.[50] While these actors each have their own motivations, it is clear that these disparate narratives coalesce around the recognition of return being the only feasible solution to the crisis.

Finding 5: *The most dominant threat narratives are driven by insecurity—whether related to economics, culture, or safety.*

Feeling secure (whether in terms of personal, economic, or cultural security) is a top value driving narratives across the five countries studied. The stickiest negative narratives about migration are often interwoven with perceived threats to security, even if these threats are not well supported by evidence or data. For example, even where there is no direct or significant link between migrants and crime or terrorism, or between migration and job loss, a perception of insecurity can blossom.[51] Threats to personal safety and security or economic livelihood can be highly destabilizing, even if they are episodic or only affect a small number of people—and these fears are not easily defused with contrary evidence.[52]

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47   See, for example, The American Presidency Project, "President Donald J. Trump Is Putting American Workers First as We Restore Our Economy to Greatness" (fact sheet, June 22, 2020); Eugene Scott, "Trump's Most Insulting—and Violent—Language Is Often Reserved for Immigrants," *The Washington Post*, October 2, 2019.

48   Al-Ahed News, "Sayyed Nasrallah's Full Speech on Resistance and Liberation Day," Al-Ahed News, May 25, 2019.

49   Patrick Wintour, "Thousands of Syrian Refugees Could Be Sent Back, Says Lebanese Minister," *The Guardian*, June 15, 2019.

50   International Crisis Group, *Easing Syrian Refugees' Plight in Lebanon*" (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2020).

51   Anna Flagg, "The Myth of the Criminal Immigrant," *The New York Times*, March 30, 2018.

52   Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan, *When Facts Don't Matter: How to Communicate More Effectively about Immigration's Costs and Benefits* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2018).

Economic scarcity narratives are frequent in both lower- and higher-income countries (and in both strong and weak labor markets), coalescing around messages that migrants take jobs from citizens or drive down wages.[53] Even in countries such as the United States, where a prevailing narrative from the business community highlights the importance of immigrants filling labor market needs and supporting innovation and economic growth in numerous sectors from agriculture to health care to the tech industry, the economic scarcity narrative about immigrants competing with American citizens for jobs is strong.[54] Migrants competing with citizens for jobs was a narrative theme found to some extent in all of the case-study countries, regardless of the health of their labor market, but with particular prevalence in Colombia, Lebanon, Morocco, and the United States. In Sweden, notably, the concern is less about wages and competition, but more about the ability to integrate low-skilled workers, with the accompanying social risks of not having work for new communities. These narratives are particularly powerful in the context of high unemployment (especially youth joblessness) and a stagnant labor market.

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Across all the case-study countries, certain narratives have emerged characterizing refugees and migrants as an economic burden both because of the perception about competition for jobs and the costs involved in providing public services for them. Still, there are significant differences in terms of whether these are top-down narratives (as is the case in Lebanon) or bottom-up narratives (as in Morocco and Colombia) that in many cases conflict with the national government narrative. In Lebanon, the Free Patriotic Movement states that migrants are putting undue strain on the economy (taking jobs and expending already limited resources) and national infrastructure, including electricity. As Lebanon's caretaker minister of state for displaced affairs explained: "We have to safeguard some businesses for the Lebanese."[55] Another side of the economic burden narrative is resource scarcity. When migration is large, unanticipated, or sudden—and especially when crises endure over long periods—public infrastructure can struggle to catch up with needs, and feelings of competition over scarce resources may heighten. In Colombia, there are also concerns about the strain on infrastructure in local areas where demand for city services had to accommodate unprecedented levels of immigration.

Economic scarcity narratives have been so dominant that they seem to have eclipsed health-related narratives that equate migrants with spreading disease (narratives that have existed in some form throughout modern history and were feared to have been exacerbated by the pandemic). Despite initial scapegoating of migrants as spreaders of disease when COVID-19 appeared, this seems to have waned in importance as many countries have exited the acute emergency phase of the pandemic. However, there is potential for these narratives to spread again. For example, in July 2021, the governor of Texas justified

53   Michelle Leighton, "Feeding the Global Compact on Migration: How Do Immigrants Contribute to Developing Countries' Economies?" Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Matters Blog, March 12, 2018; Michael Clemens, Cindy Huang, Jimmy Graham, and Kate Gough, "Migration Is What You Make It: Seven Policy Decisions that Turned Challenges into Opportunities" (CGD Note, Center for Global Development, Washington, DC, May 2018).

54   Alex Nowrasteh, "The 14 Most Common Arguments against Immigration and Why They're Wrong," Cato Institute, Cato at Liberty Blog, May 2, 2018.

55   Michal Kranz, "Lebanese Security Forces Crackdown on Syrians as Pressure Builds," The New Arab, November 21, 2018.

issuing an executive order to stem cross-border flows by making a direct connection between "the influx of noncitizens" and the "devastating spread of COVID-19,"[56] despite evidence that this population has been found to have lower rates of the virus than the broader population in Texas.[57]

Earlier in the pandemic, COVID-19 provided cover for enacting more restrictive migration policies in some countries. For example, some municipalities in Lebanon (particularly those affiliated with political parties that oppose the presence of Syrian refugees) have deported Syrians under the guise of combating the virus.[58] In the United States, the Trump administration used COVID-19 as cover for restrictive immigration policies, some of which remained in effect in the early months of the Biden administration.[59]

Fears over personal safety and security—in other words, that migrants commit crimes or support terrorism—are also salient across the five study countries. In Lebanon, a 2017 survey revealed that 51 percent of Lebanese respondents said they felt unsafe because of Syrian refugees, a number that has risen significantly in recent years.[60] During a 2019 visit, the American Task Force for Lebanon noted that government security sources revealed that not only are crimes attributed to refugees inflated, but they have actually increased by less than 1 percent in the past several years. The committee determined that, in fact, most Syrians are arrested not for petty or more serious crimes but instead detained for not having proper paperwork.[61]

A majority of Moroccans feel that sub-Saharan migrants engage in petty theft and begging and increase the public's sense of insecurity, though there is no evidence that migrants are engaged in higher rates of crime.[62] And in Colombia, the public feels crime has increased, especially in areas with high levels of unemployed Venezuelans. But statistics show a more nuanced story. While Venezuelans made up 3.2 percent of the population in 2019, they were responsible for 2.3 percent of violent crimes; at the same time they have higher rates of committing petty crime than Colombians.[63]

In Sweden, more than half of those surveyed in 2017 believed that terrorists posing as refugees had entered the country and committed violent and destructive acts.[64] The November 2015, ISIS-inspired terror attacks in

56   Steve Vladeck, "Texas' Covid Surge Isn't due to Immigrants. Gov. Greg Abbott Doesn't Care," MSNBC, July 30, 2021.

57   Nicole Sganga, "FEMA Chief Says COVID-19 Positivity Rate among Migrants Is Less than 6%, Lower than Texas Average," CBS News, March 16, 2021.

58   Global Detention Project, "Lebanon Immigration Detention Data Profile" (Data Profile, Global Detention Project, Geneva, June 2020).

59   See Danilo Zak, "Immigration-Related Executive Actions during the COVID-19 Pandemic," National Immigration Forum, November 18, 2020.

60   In 2013, 25 percent of Lebanese felt unsafe because of the presence of Syrian refugees; the share rose to 46 percent in 2015, and most recently, to 51 percent in 2017. See Faten Ghosn and Alex Braithwaite, "Could Contact Stem the Rising Tide of Negative Attitudes towards Hosting Syrian Refugees in Lebanon?" Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration: Field Monitor 7, no. 2 (2018): 69–74.

61   Edward Gabriel, "Lebanese Are Tired of Hosting Syrian Refugees," Washington Institute, Fikra Forum, July 16, 2019.

62   According to the results of a 2018 survey conducted by the French-language Moroccan newspaper L'Economiste and the market research firm Sunergia Groupe, a majority of Moroccans polled held this sentiment. See Amin Rboub, "Enquête L'Economiste-Sunergia/Migrants subsahariens: Des résultats surprenants!" L'Economiste, March 21, 2018.

63   The same study notes that while Venezuelans are overrepresented in total crimes (5.4 percent), including offenses such as theft and larceny, they are less likely to commit a violent crime than Colombians. And most of the reported crimes are concentrated in border regions, which could be related to smuggling networks. See Dany Bahar, Meagan Dooley, and Andrew Selee, Venezuelan Migration, Crime, and Misperceptions: A Review of Data from Colombia, Peru, and Chile (Washington, DC: MPI and Brookings Institution, 2020).

64   Ipsos, Global Views on Immigration and the Refugee Crisis (Paris: Ipsos, 2017).

Paris (perpetrated by attackers posing as refugees) shifted public perceptions across the Atlantic—leading several U.S. states to sue to ban the resettlement of Syrian refugees and some Republican lawmakers to suggest the United States should focus its resettlement efforts on Christian refugees rather than Muslims.[65]

And in both Sweden and the United States, a small number of highly publicized violent crimes associated with refugees and irregular migrants have spurred anxiety.[66] In Sweden, for example, local studies and media articles have reported that violent crimes such as rape are disproportionately perpetrated by immigrant men,[67] amplifying security fears. In the United States, Trump invoked the killing of a young woman in San Francisco by an unauthorized Mexican immigrant to support the claim that "criminals, drug dealers, and rapists" were being pushed into the United States from Mexico.[68]

Finding 6: *There is often a tipping point when feelings of acceptance shift and feelings of insecurity begin to dominate.*

Hospitality or generosity toward migrants is part of core national values in many countries. Yet countries that have initially welcomed large influxes of migrants or refugees may reach a tipping point when early feelings of generosity or solidarity sour. This is particularly the case if publics perceive there is no end in sight to migration or that it has been poorly managed, if a narrative of scarcity takes hold, or if they feel that migration is not taking place in a legal or orderly manner. Even countries with an initial welcoming stance may begin to see hospitality fatigue as crises wear on and populations perceive international assistance to be scant.

Some countries that have accepted large numbers of migrants or refugees have citizens who feel their generosity is being exploited or that they have already done their duty to help (Lebanon, Sweden), while other countries that have taken in large numbers have not reached this point (Colombia). In Lebanon, for example, calls for refugees to return to Syria are mounting based on the idea that welcoming refugees is supposed to be temporary and the country has already done its part. These calls are bolstered by the strong top-down narratives from across the political spectrum that Syria is now safe for the refugees to return home.

Even in Sweden—a country with much greater resources—the 2015 migration crisis left many feeling the country had accepted too many people too quickly. As early as November 2015, the government acknowledged that it could not cope with the number of arriving asylum seekers (which was the highest number per capita of any country) and that the situation had become unsustainable. The finance minister stated: "Sweden cannot absorb more people than it is ready for."[69] The durability of Sweden's renowned

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65   See, for example, Tal Kopan, "Donald Trump: Syrian Refugees a 'Trojan Horse,'" CNN, November 16, 2015; Rebecca Kaplan, "Jeb Bush: Focus on Christian Syrian Refugees," CBS, November 16, 2015; Theodore Schleifer, "Ted Cruz: Muslim Refugees from Syria Should Go to Other Islamic Countries," CNN, November 17, 2015.

66   This anxiety exists even when statistics show that crime rates among migrants are lower than for U.S. citizens. See Michael T. Light, Jingying He, and Jason P. Robey, "Comparing Crime Rates between Undocumented Immigrants, Legal Immigrants, and Native-Born US Citizens in Texas," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 117, no. 51 (2020): 32340–47; Holloway with Leach, "Public Narratives and Attitudes.

67   A 2018 newspaper investigation found 40 out of 43 gang rape cases to have been perpetrated by immigrants. See Mattis Wikström and Kim Malmgren, "De är män som våldtar kvinnor tillsammans," *Expressen*, March 20, 2018.

68   Tyler Anbinder, "Trump Has Spread More Hatred of Immigrants than Any American in History," *The Washington Post*, July 11, 2019.

69   *Göteborgs-Posten*, "Magdalena Andersson: Sök er till annat land," *Göteborgs-Posten*, December 21, 2017.

hospitality was put to the test as the government warned that capacity to accept refugees was at its limit.[70] When a record 163,000 asylum seekers arrived in 2016, many felt that the country failed to live up to its own standards in terms of reception and housing.[71] This tipping point helped boost support for the far-right Sweden Democrats.

Issues of fairness and lack of reciprocity often precipitated this tipping over to a narrative of resentment. In Sweden, some anti-immigration voices have expressed the view that the country has shouldered a disproportionate burden vis-à-vis its fellow EU members ("Sweden on its own is assuming responsibility for one-quarter of all unaccompanied children coming to the European Union.").[72] Lebanese also feel that they have shouldered a burden by hosting refugees,[73] and that they have not received adequate financial support or recognition from the international community.[74]

> *Issues of fairness and lack of reciprocity often precipitated this tipping over to a narrative of resentment.*

The COVID-19 pandemic may be accelerating this tipping point in some places. For example, in Colombia, public opinion polling shows that natives may be reaching a saturation point in terms of how many migrants they feel prepared to welcome: while the public supports integrating the 1.7 million Venezuelan migrants already in the country, 87 percent say borders should be closed to future flows.[75]

More work is needed to understand what combination of factors signals the threshold in each country before a tipping point is reached, and how to identify the clues leading up to a potential shift before it happens.

Finding 7: The perception of losing control over migration can exacerbate existing threat narratives, and in many cases elevate them so that migrants are perceived as existential threats.

Real and perceived threats to resources and infrastructure, culture, political power, or the rule of law posed by immigration can become destabilizing under the right mix of circumstances—transforming perceived challenges into existential threats. Furthermore, unexpected levels of immigration or perception that a government is mismanaging the policy issues involved can contribute to a perception of loss of control.

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70   David Crouch, "Sweden Slams Shut Its Open-Door Policy towards Refugees," *The Guardian*, November 24, 2015.

71   Skodo, "Sweden: By Turns Welcoming and Restrictive."

72   *Dagens Samhälle*, "Gör inte det bästa till det godas fiende," *Dagens Samhälle*, September 30, 2015.

73   For instance, according to President Michel Aoun in the aftermath of the destruction caused by the Beirut port explosion in August 2020: "We urge IOM to assist in the return of Syrian refugees to their homeland as the explosions of Beirut's port left 300,000 citizens homeless and Lebanon already suffers from several issues and problems." See Rim Zrein, "Aoun Asking the World to Help Lebanon Send Syrian Refugees Back," The961, September 23, 2020.

74   United Nations, "Lebanon Is 'Not a Country of Permanent Asylum,' Prime Minister Tells UN Assembly," UN News, September 22, 2016. See also Anchal Vohra, "Lebanon Is Sick and Tired of Syrian Refugees," *Foreign Policy*, July 31, 2019; *The Daily Star*, "Hariri Urges Chinese to Invest in Lebanon," *The Daily Star*, April 7, 2017.

75   Proyecto Migración Venezuela, "Percepción de la integración de los migrantes en Colombia en tiempos de coronavirus" (newsletter, May 29, 2020).

Regardless of actual numbers, many anxious publics fear that migrants will become dominant in their society—or change its fundamental character (whether through outsized cultural, religious, linguistic, or political influence).[76] In Lebanon, where refugees now constitute one-quarter of the country's population, politicians have said publicly that Syrian refugees pose an "existential threat"[77] and have inflated refugee numbers in public statements.[78] Whether or not migration feels out of control to citizens can be affected by a country's perception about whether the migration is happening within legal channels or irregularly.[79] Demographic fears can also be sparked when newcomers are young and tend to have more children than natives.[80] The perception of lack of control over migration triggers security fears and a sense that the rule of law is being undermined, and can be exacerbated by a lack of legal regulation of migration, uncertainty over the extent of future migration, and concerns about the type of migrants—for example, asylum seekers and refugees versus economic migrants (as in Colombia, Sweden, and the United States). These fears can be acute even with smaller numbers when differences are highly visible or changes happen quickly.

> *The perception of lack of control over migration triggers security fears and a sense that the rule of law is being undermined, and can be exacerbated by a lack of legal regulation of migration, uncertainty over the extent of future migration, and concerns about the type of migrants.*

Sweden's right-wing party (Sweden Democrats) has expressed concerns that migration is transforming the previously culturally homogeneous nation and has hinted at the major demographic threat posed by a growing Muslim minority.[81] In the United States, the rapidly growing Latino population and other demographic changes have led to the observation that the country will become "majority minority" by the next generation, accompanied by the fear that Spanish could eclipse English as the most commonly spoken language. A 2019 Pew survey found that 46 percent of non-Hispanic White Americans believed that the country shifting to a majority non-White population would "weaken American customs and values,"[82] and almost one-third of Americans polled found it bothersome to hear people speak a language other than English in public.[83]

These perceived existential threats sometimes manifest as competition over power and influence in society, or threats to the state itself. In Lebanon, where the entire social and political structure is based on the fragile confessional power-sharing system, migrants and refugees are viewed as a direct risk to the delicate equilibrium between the main ethnoreligious groups and how they are represented in government,

76   Zack Beauchamp, "White Riot," Vox, January 20, 2017; *The Economist*, "Why the Arguments against Immigration Are so Popular," *The Economist*, November 14, 2019.

77   This comment was made during a speech by Kataeb Party leader Samy Gemayel at the General Assembly of the European People's Party. See MTV News Lebanon, "Samy Gemayel: Syrian Refugees Pose Existential Threat to Lebanon," MTV News Lebanon, April 10, 2019.

78   For example, Samy Gemayel has exaggerated that refugees comprise half of the population. MTV News Lebanon, "Samy Gemayel: Syrian Refugees Pose Existential Threat to Lebanon."

79   Alex Nowrasteh, "Immigration Politics Is about Perceptions of Control, Not Immigration Policy," Cato Institute, Cato at Liberty Blog, November 20, 2018.

80   Brian Resnick, "White Fear of Demographic Change Is a Powerful Psychological Force," Vox, January 28, 2017.

81   Tomson, *The Rise of Sweden Democrats*.

82   Kim Parker, Rich Morin, and Juliana Menasce Horowitz, "Looking to the Future, Public Sees an America in Decline on Many Fronts," Pew Research Center, March 21, 2019.

83   Juliana Menasce Horowitz, *Americans See Advantages and Challenges in Country's Growing Racial and Ethnic Diversity* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2019).

which has triggered civil war in the past.[84] The fact that most Syrian refugees (and Palestinian refugees) are Sunni Muslims exacerbates this fear. They are seen as disrupting "the form of the state as it is now."[85] A threat narrative around political power has also bubbled up in Colombia in response to Duque's ambitious February 2021 proposal to regularize all Venezuelans in the country (up to 1.7 million people). Members of the left-wing Colombia Humana political party spread the false rumor that Venezuelan migrants who receive the new ten-year permits would become eligible to vote in 2022 presidential elections.[86]

Of note, there are some areas where fears of an existential threat have not taken hold—for instance, around the impacts of migrant children in communities. Despite overcrowding in schools due to recent migration influxes in several of the countries studied, there is little evidence that these narratives have been manipulated to produce social efforts or policies to reduce education for these children. In future research, understanding why this is the case and if it presents opportunities may provide important insights.

Finding 8: Narratives around climate migration are not dominant in the case-study countries, despite the impact of climate change on many communities.

Growing numbers of people are migrating because of the direct or indirect effects of climate change (in particular, its ability to trigger other motivations to move), though many of these will migrate within national boundaries. Yet as climate is anticipated to become a much more important driver of migration (whether internal or international), it is notable that the scan for this report did not see significant climate migration narratives outside of climate-focused stakeholders or in particular contexts. In the country case studies, narratives about climate migration are often hard to disentangle from other reasons for migration; climate is rarely viewed as the cause of migration in popular culture, although some scholars are making these links. For instance, many migrants might attribute moving to lack of economic opportunity, but that lack of economic opportunity might arise from the impact of climate change on agriculture or on other ways of making a living.

While some scholars have argued that climate change and drought caused a mass migration of Syrians from rural areas to urban areas, straining the country's social fabric and contributing to the Arab Spring protests that sparked Syria's civil war beginning in 2011, few Lebanese are making that connection, viewing the Syrian refugees as having arrived because of conflict. Similarly, while some researchers view climate change and drought as having contributed to Venezuela's refugee movements into Colombia and other countries, that view has not made it strongly into popular parlance.[87]

Several countries in Europe, including Sweden, have laws that provide some temporary protection status to people displaced by natural disasters; while climate change can be a cause of natural disasters, it is not explicitly linked.[88] Some of Sweden's migrants may have migrated due to climate change, but their

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84   Eldawy, "A Fragile Situation."
85   "Lebanon cannot absorb a single additional Sunni if I can put it in a blunt way," according to Lebanese analyst Sami Nader in a *Foreign Policy* interview. He added that "Absorbing the Sunni Syrians would call for a reconsideration of the Lebanese formula and at the cost of the form of the state as it is now." See Vohra, "Lebanon Is Sick and Tired of Syrian Refugees."
86   Adriaan Alsema, "Colombia May Refuse Right to Vote to Citizens Who Fled Venezuela," Colombia Reports, November 16, 2020. See also Luisa Mercado, "Abecé: ¿Migrantes venezolanos podrán votar en 2022?" *El Tiempo*, February 9, 2021.
87   Jean Chemnick, "Where Climate Change Fits into Venezuela's Ongoing Crisis," *The Scientific American*, February 18, 2019.
88   Albert Kraler, Tatiana Cernei, and Marion Noack, *Climate Refugees: Legal and Policy Responses to Environmentally Induced Migration* (Brussels: European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, 2011).

movement has also been intertwined with fleeing economic problems and violence. Similarly, migration surges at the U.S. border, largely of Central Americans, have been attributed to multiple causes, including gang violence, lack of rule of law, and poor economic opportunities. Some of the economic problems have been attributed to climate impacts.[89] Understanding how climate change factors into people's decision to migrate, how that intersects with other motives and drivers of migration, and how climate change migration is perceived in receiving communities is critical to preparing for future climate-related migration.

4   Conclusions and Agenda for Future Research

Rapid increases in immigration in many parts of the world have triggered a new reckoning around what immigration means for societies. These questions are likely to grow in importance as a confluence of forces—including population growth, conflict, corruption, economic crises, and climate change—leads more people worldwide to move. And as migration continues to reshape local and national politics across a diverse range of receiving societies, new stories will emerge around migration's costs and benefits, and the merits and challenges of different policies to manage it. Understanding the narratives that exist and how they develop is critical to fostering more reasoned policy debates and actions in a world of heightened polarization.

This study has found that narratives about migration include both positive narratives (about the economic or cultural contributions of migrants, solidarity with newcomers, national character, providing support to people in need, and pragmatism) and negative narratives that reflect fears of threats related to safety and security, cultural change, or loss of economic opportunity. The negative narratives are particularly sticky, even when they are not firmly rooted in evidence—a trend that poses risks for public policymaking and that calls for better understanding of their origins and evolution.

Understanding the narratives that exist and how they develop is critical to fostering more reasoned policy debates and actions in a world of heightened polarization.

Looking ahead, these findings reveal a need to conduct in-depth fieldwork to further understand the most salient narratives, and what values are driving them, in order to contribute to policy discussions about the significant migration-related shifts occurring in these countries and globally. This research should include analysis of the underlying values, relevance and salience of narratives and messaging; where the public gets information and how it decides which migration messages and messengers are most credible; and the mechanisms behind how certain migration narratives are activated in certain contexts but not others. Further research should seek to address the following questions:

▶ **How do migration narratives form and evolve?** How do people get their information and how do they decide what information is most credible? How do messages in different spheres such as economics, health, culture, and security interact with one another? What is the role of particular events, such as large numbers of unanticipated arrivals?

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89   Abrahm Lustgarten, "The Great Climate Migration," *The New York Times*, July 23, 2020.

► **How are migration narratives activated?** How do messages take root and spread? Why are certain anxieties (cultural or security) and certain frames (for example, migrants as victims versus criminals versus contributors) triggered in certain contexts yet lie dormant in others?

► **What positive and negative frames of migration and migrants resonate and trigger deeply held values?** What are the values that underlny particular narratives?

► **What value triggers connected to balanced and evidence-based migration narratives are the most resonant?** While many closely held value triggers are present across the narrative spectrum, testing is needed to determine which values underpin various migration narratives.

► **What framing and narrative constructs are most effective in opening discourse and discussion?** The research shows the need for disentangling racist and xenophobic discourse from legitimate policy debates and concerns related to migration.

► **What factors trigger tipping points in different societies?** How can public sentiment be gauged in ways that helps predict potential tipping points? Are there common factors that trigger tipping points across different societies and countries?

► **Where is the middle?** There is a disconnect between narratives that reflect opinions on the outer extremes and a missing middle that is silent. There is also a perception that it is not safe to have legitimate discourse around controversial challenges and problems (without being labeled as a racist, for example). Who makes up the uninvolved middle? What elements (stories, values, messages) motivate and make them move to a different space?

► **How will COVID-19 recovery shape migration narratives?** Will refugees and migrants trust host-country governments enough to get vaccinated, and will host countries be willing to provide vaccines to noncitizens? What narratives will be effective to build trust with refugee and migrant communities?

► **How is climate change shaping narratives about migration?** Environmental issues are becoming increasingly linked with conversations on migration. How climate change and resulting migration are framed will have an important impact in developing policies toward displaced populations.

► **What narratives about climate migration resonate and support discussion about practical migration and climate mitigation and adaption policies?** The lack of climate migration narratives presents both a challenge and an opportunity to frame the discourse with new narratives.

Global migration continues to evolve and grow as people move in search of better opportunities and improved security and living conditions. Understanding how large movements of people are perceived and talked about is a crucial step in thinking about and managing current and future migration and its effects on societies around the world.

Appendix. Salient Migration Narratives

This appendix is a selection of the most salient migration narratives found across the five case-study countries, categorized by theme. It is not intended as a comprehensive assessment of all such narratives in each country. Instead, it supports the findings of this report by offering a brief overview of the wide range of positive and negative public sentiments toward migration, triggered by a variety of context-specific values. Many of the narratives overlap and intersect, as do their underlying values and triggers. Some of the most dominant negative narratives center on threats that evoke fear and insecurity connected to jobs and prosperity, safety, cultural and national identity, and resource scarcity. The most positive ones focus on human solidarity, pragmatism, and immigration as a point of national pride and heritage.

Each narrative is summarized using a similar structure: a brief country context; a list of the values being triggered; the stories that make up the narrative (including news reports, government statements, and social media posts); and counternarratives, when they exist. The narratives repeat many of the takeaways and examples from the findings. Considering these narratives in more detail reveals common themes across countries and might help identify opportunities to develop more effective, evidence-based messaging.

A. Security Threat Narratives

Narrative: Migrants cause crime and violence and contribute to terrorism (Colombia, Lebanon, Morocco, Sweden, United States)

Country contexts:
- In Colombia, many Colombians feel that crime has increased because of the influx of Venezuelans. Data, however, shows that while the petty crime rate is higher among Venezuelans than Colombians, the violent crime rate is lower.[90]

- In Lebanon, refugees, particularly from Syria, are viewed as a security risk. In 2017, a majority (51 percent) of Lebanese felt unsafe because of Syrian refugees.[91]

- In Morocco, a majority of Moroccans surveyed perceived sub-Saharan migrants as causing "an increased sense of insecurity" and an increase in "theft, beggary, and squabbling."[92]

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90   Some Colombians feel the overall crime rate has increased due to the Venezuelan migrants. According to a 2020 MPI-Brookings report, this is only partially accurate as Venezuelans encompassed 3.2 percent of the population in 2019, and represented 5.4 percent of all crimes but a smaller 2.3 percent of violent crimes. This implies Venezuelans are likely to be committing crimes such as theft and larceny, yet are less likely to commit a violent crime than Colombians. See Bahar, Dooley, and Selee, *Venezuelan Migration, Crime, and Misperceptions*.

91   The number of Lebanese who feel unsafe has risen significantly in recent years. In 2013, 25 percent of Lebanese felt unsafe because of the presence of Syrian refugees. The number of Lebanese who felt unsafe rose to 46 percent in 2015 and to 51 percent in 2017. See International Alert, "Citizens' Perceptions of Security Threats Stemming from the Syrian Refugee Presence in Lebanon" (background paper, International Alert, London, February 2015).

92   The majority of Moroccans polled held this sentiment. See Rboub, "Enquête *L'Economiste*-Sunergia/Migrants subsahariens."

- In Sweden, a large segment of the public is concerned that crime levels are rising alongside immigration, although national political leaders have explicitly avoided public statements linking immigration to crime. In a 2019 poll, Sweden was one of only seven European countries to hold a majority opinion that immigrants are more likely than other groups to commit crimes and increase the risk of terrorism in their country.[93]

- In the United States, some political and media narratives associate immigrants with increased crime rates, and frame individuals or migrant caravans seeking to reach and cross the U.S. southwest border without authorization as a national security threat. Polls show a political split, where more conservatives than moderates and liberals associate unauthorized immigrants with an increased likelihood of serious crime.[94]

Values:
- security, safety

Stories:
- In Sweden, public perceptions of immigration are influenced by reports of violence and crime associated with refugees, including highly publicized crimes such as the fatal 2016 asylum center stabbing[95] of a young woman, and the 2015 IKEA stabbing attack that left two people dead. In 2016, masked men assaulted immigrants in retaliation for the asylum center stabbing.[96]

- Anders Thornberg, the head of Sweden's police force, has warned that Sweden's democracy could be threatened if the country fails to get a grip on gang violence and allows parallel societies to develop in its inner-city areas.[97]

- In August 2020, Ulf Kristersson, head of the center-right Moderate Party, accused the government of failing to act after more than 200 shootings and 24 deaths in that year, saying: "The deadly violence is Sweden's second pandemic."[98]

- The Swedish newspaper *Aftonbladet* conducted a review of gang-rape cases heard in Swedish courts between July 2012 and December 2017. It found that of the 112 men convicted, three-quarters were foreign born (nearly all non-European), and 30 percent were asylum seekers.[99]

- Following a 2017 terrorist attack carried out by five suicide bombers in a refugee camp in Arsal, Lebanese President Michel Aoun warned that Syrian refugee camps in Lebanon were turning into "enabling environments for

93   Ana Gonzalez-Barrera and Phillip Connor, *Around the World, More Say Immigrants Are a Strength than a Burden* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2019).

94   Pew Research Center, "Shifting Public Views on Legal Immigration into the U.S.," Pew Research Center, June 28, 2018.

95   Joakim Magnå, "Ung man döms för att ha dödat 22-åriga Alexandra Mezher," *Aftonbladet*, August 8, 2016.

96   BBC News, "Sweden Masked Gang 'Targeted Migrants' in Stockholm," BBC News, January 30, 2016.

97   Richard Milne, "Police Chief Warns Gang Violence Is a Threat to Sweden's Democracy," *Financial Times*, November 1, 2020.

98   Richard Milne, "Sweden's Right Seizes on Crime to Warn of 'Second Pandemic'," *Financial Times*, August 30, 2020.

99   Ayaan Hirsi Ali, "Migrants and the Threat to Women's Rights in Europe," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 22, 2021.

terrorism."[100] Both the Lebanese president and Hezbollah applauded the army's response to the attack,[101] which involved the detainment of 350 people and the deaths of four Syrian detainees, drawing criticism from Syrian human rights organizations.

Counternarrative:	• The Swedish foreign ministry published an English-language web page (as English is commonly understood by other Europeans) to dispel common myths about crime and migration; it documents how crime has been declining for 20 years amid high immigration levels.[102]

Narrative: People who break the law should be punished, not rewarded (United States)

Country context:	• Many Americans across the political spectrum dislike immigration into the United States that occurs outside of established legal immigration channels and want functioning, legal immigration pathways.
Values:	• fairness, morality, rule of law, security, responsibility
Stories:	• After Vice President Kamala Harris was appointed to address the surge of migration at the U.S. southern border in 2021, she noted the simultaneous importance of both humanitarian values and law enforcement. While saying "we are clear that people should not come to the border now," she also explained that "we must address the root causes that … cause people to make the trek."[103]
	• Examples of reactions left on social media by members of the Patriots AZ, a right-wing, anti-immigration organization, include: "What in the actual hell is this? No more rewards for being in the country illegally!"; "So let's help the illegals but the hell with Americans who are struggling wtf."

100 Naharnet, "'عون يحذر من 'تحوّل مخيمات النازحين الى بئية حاضنة للارهاب," Naharnet, July 5, 2017 [English: "Aoun: Refugees Encampments Could Turn into Safe Haven for Terrorism"]; *The Daily Star*, "Cabinet Pledges More Progress on Key Public Issues, Postpones Refugee Return Discussion," *The Daily Star*, July 5, 2017.

101 Al Manar TV, "Hezbollah Hails the Lebanese Army Raids in Arsal, Calls for Unifying Efforts," Al Manar TV, June 30, 2017.

102 Richard Orange, "Swedish Suburb Becomes a Part of the Trump Media Circus," *The Guardian*, February 25, 2017; Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, "Facts about Migration, Integration and Crime in Sweden," updated March 15, 2019.

103 The White House, "Remarks by President Biden and Vice President Harris in a Meeting on Immigration" (briefing, March 24, 2021).

B.   Competition and Scarcity Narratives

Narrative: Migrants are stealing jobs from locals (Colombia, Lebanon, Morocco, United States)

Country contexts:	• In Morocco, nearly half of Moroccans polled in the 2019 Afrobarometer agreed with the statement "Migrants take jobs from Moroccans," [104] and some employers have reportedly refused to hire newly documented sub-Saharan migrants, citing high rates of unemployment among the native born.[105]
	• In Lebanon, refugees and migrants are perceived to increase job competition and lower wages. Touching on this fear in a press interview, Lebanon's Caretaker Minister of State for Displaced Affairs, Mouin Merehbi, noted, "We have to safeguard some businesses for the Lebanese."[106]
	• Colombians similarly resent Venezuelans, who are often willing to work for lower pay, undercutting wages.[107]
	• In the United States, narratives of migrants stealing jobs from American workers largely come from the far right and conservative end of the political spectrum. For instance, ahead of the 2020 U.S. presidential election, the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), an anti-immigration organization funded by John Tanton, published a report arguing that "the focus of all presidential candidates needs to be on how to help American citizens find gainful employment, not importing millions of new migrants to compete for the few jobs currently available."[108] Critiques of the Biden-Harris immigration plan similarly focused on new immigrants' impact on the job market.
Values:	• security, prosperity, fairness
Stories:	• In the United States, a variety of narratives focus on maintaining jobs for Americans. For instance, the executive director of the organization Californians for Population Stabilization, designated as an anti-immigrant hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center,[109] argued that big tech should hire Americans instead of importing foreign workers, noting that in

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104 Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye and Mhammed Abderebbi, "Jobs Loom Large in Moroccans' Attitudes toward in- and out-Migration" (Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 285, Afrobarometer, March 2019).

105 Imane Bendra, "Sub-Saharan Migrants' Life Circumstances under the New Moroccan Migration Policy—Migrating out of Poverty" (policy update, Migrating Out of Poverty, 2017), 9. See also Haut-Commissariat Au Plan, "Situation de l'emploi et du chômage au Maroc et ses déterminants structurels et politiques dans un contexte de transition" (press release, 2009).

106 Kranz, "Lebanese Security Forces Crackdown."

107 "Venezuelans come to the country, often so they can send money back to their families, they compete for those jobs, accepting drastically lower pay than their Colombian counterparts. For Colombians working in that sector, wages and job opportunities have been undercut, bringing with it a simmering resentment." See Janetsky, "Here's Why Colombia Opened Its Arms."

108 Raley, McQueen, and Pena, "By the Numbers."

109 Southern Poverty Law Center, "Anti-Immigrant," accessed March 11, 2021.

light of Black Lives Matter, there are other low-income Americans who could do the job.[110] Other American civil-society organizations have been more direct in their demands. For instance, the Colorado Alliance for Immigration Reform has proclaimed "No amnesty! No sanctuary cities! American workers first!" on its website.[111]

Counternarratives:

- In the United States, several segments of the population, particularly business groups, promote employers' access to particular categories of immigrant workers, especially those with high skills (such as in science, technology, and innovation) and those with "low" skills (such as in agriculture, hospitality, and personal care).

- When polled, the majority of Americans tend to see immigrants positively in terms of their contributions to the workforce and the economy. For example, among respondents to the World Values Survey (2017–20), 56.1 percent said yes when asked whether immigrants fill useful jobs in the workforce.[112]

- Policy groups such as the American Action Forum have argued that migration benefits the U.S. labor sector. The group estimates that deporting every unauthorized immigrant would cause a slump of $381.5 billion to $623.2 billion in private sector output, amounting to roughly a loss of 2 percent of U.S. GDP.[113] Doug Holtz-Eakin, the forum's president, said that mass deportation would "harm the economy in ways it would normally not be harmed."[114]

- Even though the majority of Moroccans view an influx of migrants as a threat to jobs, the king has publicly spoken of migrants as a "positive element," and a senior official in the Ministry of Interior (which has a security and policing portfolio) has described immigration as a source of wealth for Moroccan society.[115]

- In Sweden, people are less worried about immigrants taking jobs than they are about the problems of integrating a low-skilled population into the Swedish labor market, and a resultingly large unemployed population. In 2019, the unemployment rate of foreign-born populations was nearly

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110 "Big Tech has been quick to issue woke statements of support for Black Lives Matter and banalities about valuing diversity, and equally quick to condemn President Trump for suspending H-1B visas. When it comes to tech companies actually hiring African American workers, that's an entirely different story." See Ric Oberlink, "Big Tech Should Stop the Hypocrisy and Hire Americans, Including Black Americans, Instead of Importing Foreign Workers," Californians for Population Stabilization, October 8, 2020.

111 Colorado Alliance for Immigration Reform (CAIRCO), "CAIRCO—Home," accessed March 10, 2021.

112 World Values Survey, "World Values Survey—Online Data Analysis," accessed February 5, 2021.

113 Luciana Lopez, "Trump's Deportation Plan Could Slice 2 Percent off U.S. GDP: Study," Reuters, May 5, 2016.

114 Kelley Beaucar Vlahos, "Messy Legal Process Could Challenge Trump's Mass Deportation Plan," Fox News, November 27, 2015 (updated May 2, 2016).

115 "We believe that immigration is a wealth for our society. We are not afraid of it," Khalid Zerouali, the migration and border control chief of the Ministry of Interior, stated in July 2019. See Andrea Alfano, "Marocco, responsabile immigrazione: 'È una ricchezza, non ne abbiamo paura'," *LaPresse*, July 18, 2019. See also Safaa Kasraoui, "Moroccan Official: African Youth Also Have Right to Travel the World," Morocco World News, July 22, 2019.

three times as high as that of the native born.[116] Nevertheless, increased arrivals of working-age refugees are seen by some as presenting economic benefits to Swedish society.[117] Refugees with skills in high-demand areas such as medicine are a case in point.[118]

- Sweden's Jag är 2015 ("I am 2015") campaign was started by former refugee Atoosa Farahmand in response to the Moderate Party posting a photo of its leader in hunting gear with the message: "Strengthen the border! The refugee crises from 2015 shall never be repeated." Refugees joined the campaign by posting their pictures with the caption "I am 2015" and sharing how they had become bus drivers, nurses, artists—and taxpayers.[119]

C.   National Identity Threat Narratives

Narrative: Migrants are an existential threat (Lebanon)

Country context:	• Many Lebanese fear that taking in additional refugees will upset Lebanon's precarious ethnoreligious balance. According to one Lebanese analyst, "Lebanon cannot absorb a single additional Sunni…"[120]
Values:	• self-preservation, identity, ethnoreligious identity, national identity
Stories:	• In a speech at the General Assembly of the European People's Party, Samy Gemayel, the leader of the Kataeb Party (a Maronite Christian political party), said that "the Syrian refugees in Lebanon now constitute about half of the country's population after exceeding 1.5 million, which poses an existential threat to Lebanon, next to economic and social dangers."[121]
Counternarrative:	• Anti-racist movements, including demonstrations, have taken place in opposition to anti-migrant policies.[122] In July 2019, hundreds of protesters in Lebanon, consisting of primarily Palestinian and Syrian refugees, turned out to protest new policies put in place by the Lebanese Ministry of Labor that they deemed to be racist in nature.

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116 In 2019, unemployment was 18.5 percent for male, foreign-born Swedes and 19.6 percent for female, foreign-born Swedes, compared to 6.9 percent for native-born Swedes. See Swedish Public Employment Service, "Unemployment Is Declining Most among Men" (press release, March 12, 2019).

117 ETC, "Flyktingkrisen är inget ekonomiskt bekymmer för Europa – tvärtom," ETC, November 26, 2011.

118 Stefan Löfven, "Regeringens proposition 2015/16:100," Government of Sweden, April 13, 2016.

119 Atoosa Farahmand, "Jag är 2015 - En folkrörelse" (Facebook campaign, accessed March 11, 2021); Glimt Film, "I Am 2015. People, Not Numbers. Atoosa Farahmand" (YouTube video, accessed March 11, 2021).

120 Vohra, "Lebanon Is Sick and Tired of Syrian Refugees"; *The Daily Star*, "Hariri Urges Chinese to Invest in Lebanon."

121 MTV News Lebanon, "Samy Gemayel: Syrian Refugees Pose Existential Threat to Lebanon."

122 AP Archive, "Protest against Hate Speech Targeting Refugees" (YouTube video, June 13, 2019).

Narrative: Multiculturalism erodes national identity (Sweden)

Country context:	• There is tension between Swedish respect for multiculturalism, and concern that some immigrant communities do not share mainstream views about gender equality. The right-wing Sweden Democrats serve as the main anti-immigration force in Swedish politics. After expressing support for "increasing foreign aid to help refugees stay closer to home," one party member commented that, "We [Swedes] have to make them [refugees] understand that here in Sweden, it's our values that matter, our way of looking at women, our way of looking at children, etc."[123]
	• Far-right media sites in Sweden have also promoted anti-immigration narratives focused on the erosion of Swedish values and identity. Meanwhile, political elites who disavow White supremacists associate criticism of immigration with right-wing extremism. Essentially, "Over time, 'openness' and 'multiculturalism' were pitted against 'hatred' and 'racism,'" effectively ending discussions airing dissenting views from the left and right ends of the political spectrum.[124] With open debate about immigration being avoided by establishment parties, for fear of sparking accusations of bigotry, a silent majority of voters looked to fringe parties, often with racist roots. Eventually, the Sweden Democrats prevailed as the main anti-immigration voice in Swedish politics, and have garnered increasing support in recent years.[125]
Values:	• tradition, freedom, liberalism, women's rights, culture
Stories:	• One of Sweden's most visited far-right sites, Nyheter Idag, often features articles that center on the erosion of Swedish national identity by multiculturalism and support for the Sweden Democrats. A 2018 headline from its home page reads: "Muslim woman refused to shake hands during job interview."[126]
Counternarrative:	• Despite the rise of anti-immigration rhetoric, Swedes generally do not tolerate sexist, racist, or inappropriate jokes in public spaces,[127] including jokes about migrants. The public is highly sensitive to ethnic stereotyping and most individuals largely avoid making assumptions about people based on their ethnicity. The phrase *åsikskorridor* (literally "opinion corridor") refers to the views or opinions that people are expected not to go against. For example, most people oppose discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, or ability.[128]

123 Jason Margolis, "Swedes Ask: Can We Take in More Migrants and Maintain Our Generous Social Benefits?" The World, February 05, 2016.

124 Tino Sanandaji, "The Cost of Sweden's Silent Consensus Culture," Politico, September 09, 2018.

125 The percentage of votes allocated to the Sweden Democrats jumped from about 1 percent in 2002 to about 13 percent of the vote in 2014. Sanandaji, "The Cost of Sweden's Silent Consensus Culture." See also Vanessa Gera and David Keyton, "Anti-Migrant Mood Boosts Far-Right Party in Swedish Election," AP News, September 4, 2018.

126 Alice Kantor, "More and More Swedes Reading Misleading Anti-Immigrant News Sites," Open Democracy, October 17, 2018.

127 Kwintessential, "A Guide to Sweden – Etiquette, Customs, Clothing and More," accessed July 15, 2021.

128 Chara Scroope, "Swedish Culture: Dos and Don'ts," Cultural Atlas, 2017.

Narrative: We are losing our country (United States)

Country context:	• Among the various narratives about how U.S. national identity relates to immigration, some view new immigrants as a threat to national identity, and fear changes to the ethnic, religious, racial, or language demographics of the country.[129]
Values:	• national identity, cultural pride
Stories:	• Perceived threats to American national identity include threats to language demographics. For instance, D.A. King, a key voice in the U.S. anti-immigration movement, has described migrants in the United States as "subsidized illegal aliens who are lowering wages and straining our schools, hospitals, jails, and common language."[130]
Counternarrative:	• During his U.S. presidential campaign in 2020, Joe Biden campaigned against former president Donald Trump's "unrelenting assault on our values and our history as a nation of immigrants." In opposition to Trump's stance, Biden's campaign framed immigration as "essential to who we are as a nation, our core values, and our aspirations for our future."[131]

Narrative: Immigrants threaten the social fabric (Morocco)

Country context:	• In Morocco, a member of the Justice and Development Party (PJD), the party that leads the governing coalition, was quoted as stating that "immigrants threaten the social fabric of the city" and wrote a 2019 letter to the minister of the interior describing sub-Saharan migrants as a problem.
Values:	• fairness, tradition, national identity, cultural pride
Stories:	• In November 2018, Moroccan authorities banned an annual cultural festival called Migrant Scene without providing explanation. The festival was organized by GADEM (Le Groupe antiraciste d'accompagnement et de défense des étrangers et migrantes) to celebrate migrants and cultivate solidarity, tolerance and understanding. A government official in the area remarked that he would not tolerate the activities in Tangier, which according to him were backed by "a leftist association coming from Rabat, and which attacks the government."[132]

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129 For instance, Arizona Senate Bill 1070, "Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act," passed in 2010, requiring police to determine the immigrant status of someone arrested or detained when there is "reasonable suspicion" they are illegally in the United States. See Paige Newman, "Arizona's Anti-Immigration Law and the Pervasiveness of Racial Profiling," *Georgetown Immigration Law Journal* 31, no. 3 (Spring 2017).

130 Southern Poverty Law Center, "Dustin Inman Society," accessed March 11, 2021.

131 Biden Presidential Campaign, "The Biden Plan for Securing Our Values."

132 Algerie Presse Service, "Le Maroc interdit le festival Migrant'scène de Tanger, les organisateurs dénoncent," Algerie Presse Service, November 10, 2018.

Counternarrative: • The PJD parliamentary group in the House of Representatives blocked a letter and disavowed the remarks of a colleague who claimed that "immigrants threaten the social fabric," which a PJD member claimed was "not in accordance with the principles of the party."[133]

Narrative: "Lebanese before all" (Lebanon)

Country context: • In Lebanon, the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), a Christian political party, and Gebran Bassil, the movement's leader, are some of the main messengers of anti-immigration rhetoric, disseminating messages that Lebanon is for Lebanese nationals. In June 2020, while serving as Lebanese foreign minister, Bassil ignited a public debate on Twitter after claiming that "our affiliation to the Lebanese is above any other," adding that national affiliation was "genetic" and that national affiliation is about "integration" among Lebanese "while [also] refusing refugees and displacement."[134]

Values: • fear, resource scarcity, tradition, nationalism, ethnoreligious nationalism

Stories: • The FPM's youth branch has frequently used the hashtag "#Lebanese_before_all" (Arabic: اللبناني_قبل_الكل#) on Facebook and Twitter along with other hashtags such as "#Lebanon_first" to promote the ideology that Lebanon is for the Lebanese.[135] In June 2019, the same group circulated a digital campaign poster over Facebook calling for followers to shut down businesses illegally employing non-Lebanese nationals (particularly Syrians).[136]

Counternarrative: • Counternarratives tend to focus on migrants as victims of the kafala labor system. See the 3rd solidarity-focused narrative, below.

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133 A member of the Justice and Development Party (PJD) representing the city of Tiznit was quoted as stating that "immigrants threaten the social fabric of the city" and wrote a 2019 letter to the minister of the interior describing sub-Saharan migrants as a problem. The PJD parliamentary group in the House of Representatives blocked his letter and disavowed his remarks, which a PJD member claimed were "not in accordance with the principles of the party." Ya Biladi, "Racisme: Le PJD fait barrage à la question écrite de son élu à Tiznit," Ya Biladi, April 6, 2019; Al-Yaoum24, "فريق 'البيجيدي' يمنع سؤالا لأحد برلمانييه لوزير الداخلية بسبب حمولته العنصرية," Al-Yaoum24, June 4, 2019 [English: "The 'Begidi' Team Prevents a Question by One of Its Parliamentarians for the Minister of the Interior Because of His Racist Burden"].

134 Twitter post by Gebran Bassil Twitter Status, June 7, 2019.

135 Facebook, "#Lebanese_Before_all" (اللبناني_قبل_الكل#) hashtag," accessed January 11, 2021.

136 Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) Youth, "Photos," Facebook, June 2019. English: "Protect Lebanese workers and file a complaint about violators. Syria is safe for return and Lebanon can no longer take it."
Arabic: "إحم العامل اللّبناني و بلّغ عن المخالف أرسل صورة أو video على الرقم التالي"

D.   *Tipping Points or Loss of Control Narratives*

Narrative: We've welcomed migrants and been generous; now it's time to stop (Lebanon, Sweden)

Country contexts:
- In Lebanon, government officials often stress that the large population of Syrian refugees places immense strain on Lebanon's already limited resources and infrastructure,[137] while simultaneously highlighting the country's generosity in hosting migrants and refugees. Lebanese officials across the political spectrum have advocated for Syrian refugees to return home. Moreover, there is a strong feeling that the country has done its part and it is time for the Syrians to leave, and that Lebanon can no longer uphold its humanitarian commitments without more international humanitarian aid.

- In Sweden, though there is considerable pride in a Swedish asylum policy regarded as comprehensive and generous, the share of the population who would like to see the country accept more refugees dropped from 31 percent in 2015 to 13 percent in September 2016.[138] This change occurred after the government's November 2015 declaration that it could not cope with the inflow of asylum seekers and the situation was unsustainable. In 2016, the government introduced changes to Sweden's asylum legislation, reducing benefits, marking a turning point in the history of "Swedish exceptionalism."[139]

Values:
- responsibility, pragmatism, sufficiency

Stories:
- Several high-ranking Lebanese officials have stressed that they have "generously" accepted migrants and that their country has problems of its own. In the aftermath of the Beirut port explosion, Gebran Bassil, the leader of the Free Patriotic Movement, told French President Emmanuel Macron that "those whom we welcome generously, may take the escape route towards you in the event of the disintegration of Lebanon."[140] Also at that time, Lebanese President Michel Aoun called on the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to repatriate Syrians, stating: "We urge IOM to assist in the return of Syrian refugees to their homeland as the explosions of Beirut's port left 300,000 citizens homeless and Lebanon already suffers from several issues and problems."[141]

Counternarrative:
- In June 2019, a few hundred Lebanese protesters took to the streets to protest hate speech against refugees, holding signs reading "Refugees Welcome" and

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137 Al Shahid, "Lebanese Leaders Divided on How to Handle Syrian Refugees," Al Shahid, March 22, 2019; Middle East Monitor, "Assad Prevents Syrians in Lebanon from Returning Home," Middle East Monitor, March 18, 2019.

138 Anthony Heath and Lindsay Richards, "How Do Europeans Differ in Their Attitudes to Immigration? Findings from the European Social Survey 2002/03 – 2016/17" (OECD Social, Employment, and Migration Working Paper No. 222, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2019).

139 Henrik Emilsson, "Continuity or Change? The Refugee Crisis and the End of Swedish Exceptionalism" (MIM Working Paper Series No. 18:3, Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity, and Welfare [MIM], Malmö, 2018).

140 Abby Sewell, "Overlapping Crises in Lebanon Fuel a New Migration to Cyprus," The New Humanitarian, September 21, 2020.

141 Zrein, "Aoun Asking the World to Help Lebanon Send Syrian Refugees Back."

"Racism is Terrorism." The organizers wrote on the event's Facebook page that the protest was responding to "hate speech that has been spreading during the past weeks," particularly comments made by Gebran Bassil and followers of the Free Patriotic Movement.[142]

Narrative: We cannot absorb more people (Colombia, Lebanon, Sweden)

Country contexts:
- In Sweden, the migration crisis had severe effects on the state budget for migration, particularly in 2015 and 2016. Throughout 2015, several authorities and government departments, including the Migration Agency, the Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB), the police, health-care providers, and schools, issued warnings that the Swedish capacity to accept refugees was at its limit.
- In Colombia, many Colombians resent the strain that a sudden influx of migrants places on their already overburdened infrastructure and public services.[143]
- Lebanon hosts one of the largest per capita refugee populations in the world, and the large population of Syrian refugees places immense strain on Lebanon's already limited resources and infrastructure.[144]

Values:
- fairness, responsibility, sufficiency

Stories:
- Saad Hariri, then Lebanon's prime minister, highlighted the limits of Lebanese infrastructure at a conference with Chinese investors in 2017, stating, "In a nutshell what we are saying is the following: We thank the international community for humanitarian assistance extended to the Syrian displaced and we certainly hope it will continue. But our infrastructure and public services are simply not designed for this massive influx of users."[145]
- In Sweden, various politicians have discussed infrastructure strain. In October 2017, Kjell-Olof Feldt, a former assistant minister of finance and member of the Social Democratic Party, referred to the large number of unemployed immigrants as a disaster waiting to happen,[146] and Minister of Finance Magdalena Andersson said that Sweden cannot absorb more people than it is ready for.[147]
- In Colombia, most incoming migrants live in slums and work in the informal economy, selling candy, cigarettes, or fruit on the street. This provides the bare minimum of subsistence. In addition, school capacity has become a challenge:

142 Civil Society Knowledge Centre, "Collective Action: Few Hundreds Gather in Silent Protest Opposing Hate Speech," updated June 12, 2019.
143 Sergio Guzmán and Juan Camilo Ponce, "Hate against Venezuelans in Colombia Is a Ticking Time Bomb," Global Americans, November 10, 2020.
144 Middle East Monitor, "Assad Prevents Syrians in Lebanon from Returning Home."
145 The Daily Star, "Hariri Urges Chinese to Invest in Lebanon."
146 Louise Andrén Meiton, "S-legendar dömer ut de egna: Blir borgerlig majoritet," Svenska Dagbladet, October 29, 2017.
147 Göteborgs-Posten, "Magdalena Andersson: Sök er till annat land."

the number of Venezuelan children in schools increased tenfold in two years, from 34,000 in 2018 to 334,000 in 2020.[148]

Narrative: We have taken on more than our fair share of the global refugee burden (Sweden, Lebanon, Colombia)

Country contexts:
- Many Swedes believed that Sweden took a disproportionate amount of refugees compared to other European states during the refugee crisis, and only one-fifth believed that EU cooperation was developing in the right direction in 2014.[149]

- In Lebanon, politicians and the president alike have declared that the country shoulders a disproportionate refugee burden compared to the rest of the international community.[150]

- Many Colombians believe their country has not received enough assistance from other countries in comparison to refugee situations in the Middle East.[151]

Values:
- fairness, reciprocity

Stories:
- In 2015, a state secretary for Sweden's minister of employment remarked that "Sweden on its own is assuming responsibility for a quarter of all unaccompanied refugee children arriving to the European Union."[152] Following their entry into Sweden, many unaccompanied children disappear once in the country:[153] over 1,400 did so in 2010–15, according to the Swedish Migration Agency, raising the public's concern about human trafficking, child labor, and organized crime.[154]

- In Lebanon, the threat of a migration wave to Europe is referenced by politicians upset by the disproportionately high number of refugees per capita.

148 Education Cannot Wait, "Education Cannot Wait Approves US $27.2 Million for Venezuelan Refugees and Host Communities in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru" (press release, December 4, 2020).

149 Ipsos, *Global Views on Immigration and the Refugee Crisis*.

150 Al-Nahar, "أبي خليل: لولا الأزمة السورية لوصلنا الى 24 ساعة تغذية بالكهرباء," Al-Nahar, February 21, 2017 [English: "Abi Khalil: Had It Not Been for the Syrian Crisis, We Would Have Had 24 Hours of Electricity Supply"].

151 Jorge G. Castañeda, "Colombia Is Dealing with a Terrifying Refugee Crisis. Will Wealthy Nations Step up to Help?" *The New York Times,* March 10, 2020.

152 *Dagens Samhälle*, "Gör inte det bästa till det godas fiende."

153 Annika Selin, "Många ensamkommande flyktingbarn försvinner i Sverige," Sveriges Radio, August 7, 2015.

154 Andreas Björklund, "Många flyktingar försvinner utan att söka asyl," SVT Nyheter, October 10, 2015.

E.   Brotherhood, Solidarity, and Empathy Narratives

Narrative: They welcomed us as migrants, so we should welcome them (Colombia)

Country context:	• A sense of moral obligation and reciprocity underlies Colombia's generous migration policies toward Venezuelans, who welcomed Colombian migrants during a long period of civil war in the 1990s and 2000s. In February 2021, Colombia's president, Iván Duque Márquez, announced a proposal to regularize all Venezuelans in the country (up to 1.7 million people).
Values:	• reciprocity, solidarity, moral responsibility
Stories:	• In Colombia, the president has referred to arriving migrants as "Venezuelan brothers,"[155] and in a televised address stated that "For those who want to outcast or discriminate against migrants, we stand up today… to say that we are going to take them in and we are going to support them during difficult times."[156]
Counternarrative:	• Members of Colombia's left-wing Humana political party spread the false rumor that Venezuelan migrants who receive the new ten-year permits would become eligible to vote in the 2022 presidential elections.[157]

Narrative: "My country is your country" (*Bladi bladek*) (Morocco)

Country context:	• Morocco's positive and unifying messages on migration serve its ideal of being an accepting, multiethnic, and multireligious country. Several campaigns (namely in 2014 and 2016) have run on slogans promoting the integration of migrants, particularly from sub-Saharan Africa. Slogans include *Bladi bladek* ("My country is your country") and *Je ne m'appelle pas azzi* ("My name is not *azzi*"),[158] a reference to a racial slur against sub-Saharan Africans.
Values:	• hospitality, moral responsibility, unity, solidarity, brotherhood, diversity
Stories:	• A Moroccan short film produced by Leila Alaoui in 2016, "Bladi bladek,"[159] features sub-Saharan Africans and Moroccans discussing their experiences in Morocco. A Moroccan man can be heard at the end of the film declaring, "Morocco is African. My country is your country. Let's live together with respect."[160]

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155 Janetsky, "Here's Why Colombia Opened Its Arms."
156 Dylan Baddour, "This Country Is Setting the Bar for Handling Migrants," *The Atlantic,* August 16, 2019.
157 Alsema, "Colombia May Refuse Right to Vote." See also Mercado, "Abecé: ¿Migrantes venezolanos podrán votar en 2022?"
158 "Azzi" is a pejorative term often used for sub-Saharan Africans or individuals with dark skin.
159 Twitter post by CMODH, March 22, 2016.
160 Masmiytich Azzi, "Videos," Facebook, accessed January 26, 2021.

- At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic in late March 2020, local government officials in Morocco showed their support of the migrant community. One video shows government authorities in a predominantly sub-Saharan African neighborhood announcing over a megaphone (in French) "…you are all welcome. This is your home."[161]

Counternarrative:
- According to the results of a 2018 survey conducted by the French-language Moroccan newspaper *L'Economiste* and a local market research firm, Sunergia Groupe, the majority of Moroccans polled felt that incoming migrants increased their feelings of insecurity.[162] Migrants, particularly those from sub-Saharan Africa, have also reported instances of racism and discrimination, and accused the Moroccan police authorities of discriminatory actions, such as racial profiling and excessive use of force.[163]

Narrative: Migrants are victims and deserve protection and support (Lebanon)

Country context:
- In Lebanon, grassroots efforts and campaigns advocate for the protection of migrants who are exploited within the kafala system, an inherently abusive migration sponsorship system that places restrictions on migrants' ability to obtain legal protection and makes them vulnerable to forced labor practices and exploitation.[164]

Values:
- solidarity, empathy, care

Stories:
- "This Is Lebanon" is a grassroots coalition of former migrant workers and activists that has publicly named individuals who have abused migrant workers.[165] The coalition advocates for the protection and support of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon, claiming that "these are our heroes, and this is Lebanon as well."[166] Their Facebook page was reportedly blocked for a short period following a government court order in 2019.[167]

- The Lebanese Anti-Racism Movement (ARM) drew on shared experience of COVID-19 lockdowns in Lebanon with its campaign "#AbolishKafala" and the campaign slogan "end their lockdown." The campaign advocated for protection and support for migrant domestic workers, claiming, "this lockdown has shown us finally, a fraction of a glimpse of what hundreds of thousands call life locked down in the kafala system."[168]

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161 At the time of writing, the video had more than 93,000 views on YouTube. See 3LACK TV,
     "قائد يخطف الأنظار ..شاهد كيف خاطب الأفارقة المقيمين بالمغرب و خاف عليهم من فيروس كورونا" (YouTube video, March 22, 2020).
162 Rboub, "Enquête *L'Economiste*-Sunergia/Migrants subsahariens."
163 Aida Alami, "Morocco Unleashes a Harsh Crackdown on Sub-Saharan Migrants," *The New York Times*, October 22, 2018; Aida Alami, "African Migrants in Morocco Tell of Abuse," *The New York Times*, November 28, 2012.
164 Amnesty International, *Their House Is My Prison*.
165 This is Lebanon, "Home," Facebook, accessed January 22, 2021.
166 This is Lebanon, "Why Our Name?" accessed January 21, 2021.
167 Kareem Chehayeb, "'Our Lives Matter': Lebanon's Migrant Workers Fight for Their Rights," Middle East Eye, May 28, 2019.
168 Anti-Racism Movement – Lebanon, "Abolish Kafala," accessed January 28, 2021.

Counternarrative:
- Government officials have blamed Syrians for exacerbating existing strain on public infrastructure (Cesar Abi Khalil, Minister of Energy and Water: "If it weren't for the refugee crisis, Lebanon would have electricity 24/7")[169] and highlighted the country's inability to host refugees while simultaneously dealing with its own problems (President Michel Aoun: "The explosions of Beirut's port left 300,000 citizens homeless and Lebanon already suffers from several issues and problems.")[170]

F.   *Pragmatism Narratives*

Narrative: Migration is part of the solution, not the problem (Morocco)

Country context:
- Migration is a key foreign policy issue in Morocco's bilateral relations with Europe and Africa, and its migration policies have been partly shaped by shifting foreign policy priorities.[171] Not only has it positioned itself on migration to attract financial aid from Europe, but it has also done so to strengthen diplomacy in Africa and show leadership on an important global and domestic issue. Morocco's king has publicly proclaimed that "migration is part of the solution, not of the problem."[172] Morocco has attempted to position itself as a regional and global leader advocating for practical solutions to the global migration challenge. In 2014, the Moroccan government rolled out a regularization campaign. In addition to a one-year legal residential status, it gave migrants accompanying work rights and access to social services. The program successfully gave residency permits to the majority of irregular migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa in Morocco. The initial program took place in 2014, during which approximately 24,000 migrants were regularized, and in 2017, a second regularization process took place, during which approximately 28,400 migrants were regularized.[173] In December 2018, Morocco hosted the United Nations intergovernmental conference centered on the Global Compact for Migration.

Values:
- pragmatism, leadership, responsibility, creativity

Stories:
- At the Second International Conference on the Dialogue of Cultures and Religions, King Mohammed VI remarked, "While some see migration from the perspective of a challenge, the Kingdom sees it as an opportunity. An

169 Al-Nahar, "أبي خليل: لولا الأزمة السورية لوصلنا الى 24 ساعة تغذية بالكهرباء"

170 Zrein, "Aoun Asking the World to Help Lebanon Send Syrian Refugees Back."

171 See Mehdi Lahlou, "Migration Dynamics in Play in Morocco: Trafficking and Political Relationships and Their Implications at the Regional Level" (MENARA Working Paper No. 26, Middle East and North Africa Regional Architecture, Barcelona, November 2018); Christina Lowe, Nathalie Both, Marta Foresti, and Amy Leach with Kate Rist, *What Drives Reform? A Political Economy Analysis of Migration Policy in Morocco* (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2020).

172 Kingdom of Morocco, "HM the King Suggests Setting up of African Migration Observatory and Creation of Post of AU Special Envoy for Migration," updated January 30, 2018.

173 Driss El Ghazouani, "A Growing Destination for Sub-Saharan Africans, Morocco Wrestles with Immigrant Integration," *Migration Information Source*, July 2, 2019; Jacobs, "Morocco's Migration Policy."

opportunity which offers Morocco the opportunity to constantly confirm its African dimension, of which it is proud. Our country is welcoming a growing number of sub-Saharan migrants, thanks to a humanist and proactive migration policy."[174]

- The king has publicly called migration a "positive element" rather than a constraint or threat. In a speech to the African Union heads of government in 2017, he noted the political benefits of migration, stating, "Since time immemorial, has migration not been a factor of rapprochement between peoples and civilizations?"[175]

Counternarrative:
- Polling data suggests a disconnect with large segments of the public, which may view migrants with suspicion. The majority of Moroccans want few or no refugees, migrants, or asylum seekers. In a 2019 Afrobarometer survey, 36 percent of Moroccan respondents said "some" or "many" refugees, migrants, and other displaced persons should be allowed to live in Morocco. However, 30 percent want only "a few," and 26 percent prefer "none at all."[176]

Narrative: Migration is going to happen one way or another, so we must take commonsense approaches to it (Colombia, United States)

Country contexts:
- Colombian policies toward Venezuelan migrants have been pragmatic, featuring new types of temporary and longer-term permits and visas for Venezuelans and offering citizenship to their children born in Colombia. New permit approaches have helped to ensure the safety of the migrants and more efficiently manage migration.

- Many Americans recognize that unauthorized immigrant children who grew up in the United States benefit the country and would have difficulty leaving home to live in a now-unfamiliar country of origin. In 2021, the Democrat-controlled House passed the *American Dream and Promise Act* with some Republican support.[177]

Values:
- pragmatism, humanitarianism, responsibility

Stories:
- Colombian President Ivan Duque Martinez had hoped the adoption of generous immigration policies would prompt other countries to offer financial assistance. Though Colombia has not received much of the requested assistance, it has been applauded by the international humanitarian community.

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174 Moroccan Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs, "SM le Roi adresse un message."

175 Kingdom of Morocco, "Full Text of HM the King's Speech to 29th AU Heads of State and Government Summit," July 3, 2017.

176 Appiah-Nyamekye and Abderebbi, "Jobs Loom Large in Moroccans' Attitudes."

177 Maria Sacchetti, "'It's Time': As Congress Debates Citizenship Legislation Yet Again, a DACA Recipient Grows Frustrated," *The Washington Post*, April 11, 2021.

- Some Americans across the political spectrum take a pragmatic approach to the future of unauthorized immigrant children, stating that their deportation would be both impractical and cruel.[178]

G.　*National Pride Narratives*

Narrative: Migration reflects our diversity and heritage (Morocco)

Country context:	• King Mohammed VI has highlighted Morocco's connection to Africa and its diverse heritage, which is acknowledged in the country's 2011 constitution. This positive narrative serves several critical policy objectives. First, it is part of a broader foreign policy outreach strategy to Africa. Second, it reflects the king's effort to undermine xenophobic and ultraconservative interpretations of Islam, which in extreme forms support divisive takfiri and violent salafi groups such as al Qaeda and ISIS.
Values:	• solidarity, tolerance, brotherhood, shared destiny (between Moroccans and people from other African nations)
Stories:	• Sub-Saharan, and African constituents more broadly, are included under the umbrella of Morocco's national identity as enshrined in the constitution. The second preambular paragraph of the constitution outlines the national identity of Morocco as "... a sovereign Muslim State, committed to the ideals of openness, moderation, tolerance and dialogue to foster mutual understanding among all civilizations; A Nation whose unity is based on the fully endorsed diversity of its constituents: Arabic, Amazigh, Hassani, sub-Saharan, African, Andalusian, Jewish, and Mediterranean components."[179]
	• The prime minister, acting on behalf of King Mohammed VI, has publicly remarked that, "Migrants are too often set up as scapegoats, refugees instrumentalised and minorities stigmatized," referring broadly to the "increasing role" of hate speech in fueling forms of discrimination. He added that Morocco is "the meeting point of Arab-Islamic, African, and Judeo-Christian civilizations, is faithful to an immutable tradition of moderation, coexistence, and mutual understanding."[180]
Counternarrative:	• Dissenting opinions that contradict the monarchy's position on strategic issues such as migration are generally not tolerated, particularly those that are

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178　See, for example, Thiru Vignarajah, "Deporting Dreamers Is as Cruel and Unusual as It Gets," *Seattle Times,* November 12, 2017.
179　Younes Abouyoub, "Morocco: Reforming the Constitution, Fragmenting Identities," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 6, 2011.
180　Moroccan Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs, "SM le Roi adresse un message."

racist or xenophobic in nature.[181] However, polling data suggests a disconnect with large segments of the public, which may view migrants with suspicion.[182]

Narrative: We are a nation of immigrants (United States)

Country context:	• U.S. President Joe Biden stated that "immigration is essential to who we are as a nation, our core values and our aspirations for our future" during his campaign for president.[183]
	• Many U.S. presidents (from Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush) have used this frame, as has popular culture, school curriculums, and, often, immigrant community support organizations and pro-immigration advocates.
Values:	• identity ("city on the hill," "melting pot"), exceptionalism, morality, pride, diversity
Stories:	• In 2018, during the Trump administration, the separation of families at the U.S. border was a major topic of public concern. Several messages from elected and political officials during this period invoked notions of America's morality and identity. U.S. Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal stated, "What I saw today [in reference to children detained at the border] is simply not who we as a country should be"[184] and former First Lady Laura Bush emphasized America's morality: "Americans pride ourselves on being a moral nation. ... We should pride ourselves on acceptance ... it is our obligation to reunite these detained children with their parents."[185]
	• Many showed solidarity with migrants on social media, using hashtags such as #NoKidsinCages, #FreeTheFamilies, and #WhereAreTheChildren. This attention was amplified by liberal activists, Democratic lawmakers, and celebrities, among others. At its peak, the hashtag #WhereAreTheChildren was being tweeted 35,000 times an hour.[186]
Counternarrative:	• Donald Trump's America First narrative claimed: "We must protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies, and destroying our jobs. Protection will lead to great prosperity and strength."[187]

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