FRAMING THEMSELVES

YouTube Discourses on Young Migrants and the Conditions of Self-Positioning

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Research focus and questions

Digital discourse shapes the conditions within which young migrants interpret belonging, mobility and place.

Core questions

- Which narratives about young migrants dominate on YouTube?
- Which speakers and frames gain prominence in audience discussion?
- How are mobility, belonging and images of abroad evaluated?
- How might young migrants navigate, resist or internalize these representations?

Macro discourse

Maps large-scale narrative patterns across videos and comments.

Micro subjectivity

Identifies self-positioning, testimony and inferred young-migrant voices.

Method bridge

Combines computational coding with qualitative interpretation.

The study bridges macro-level representation with micro-level subjectivity.

Why YouTube is a consequential discursive space

90%

of U.S. teens report using YouTube

Pew Research Center, 2024

TraNa perspective

- Self-positioning links subjective experience to circulating discourses and structural inequalities.
- YouTube combines mass representation, audience reaction and peer-to-peer negotiation in one visible arena.
- Comments expose the interpretive environment through which mobility and belonging are affirmed, contested or delegitimated.

The platform matters because young people encounter representations and audience judgments at the same time.

Data and analytical design

1 YouTube API
505 videos
675,839 comments

→

2 GPT-assisted coding
100-comment batches
structured codebook

→

3 Analytical filtering
149,132 relevant comments

→

4 Mixed-method interpretation
distributions, cross-tabs,
qualitative memos

Coding dimensions

- Narrative frames, sentiment and attitude toward young migrants
- Emotion, speaker position and self-positioning relevance
- Positioning effects, mobility evaluation and spatial scale
- Misinformation risk, toxicity and discursive function

Interpretive safeguards

- Relevant-comment figures exclude explicitly irrelevant comments.
- Misinformation scores indicate verification risk, not adjudicated truth.
- Speaker identity is inferred only when explicitly stated or strongly implied.
- Results describe the collected corpus, not the whole YouTube platform.

Video corpus: broad reach, highly concentrated attention

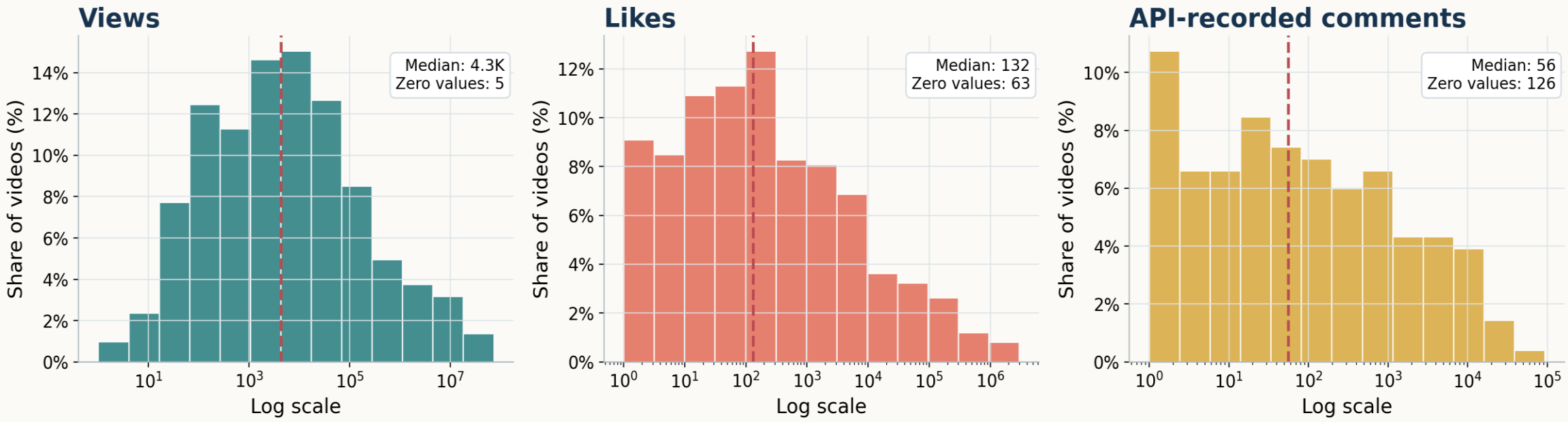
505
videos

380
channels

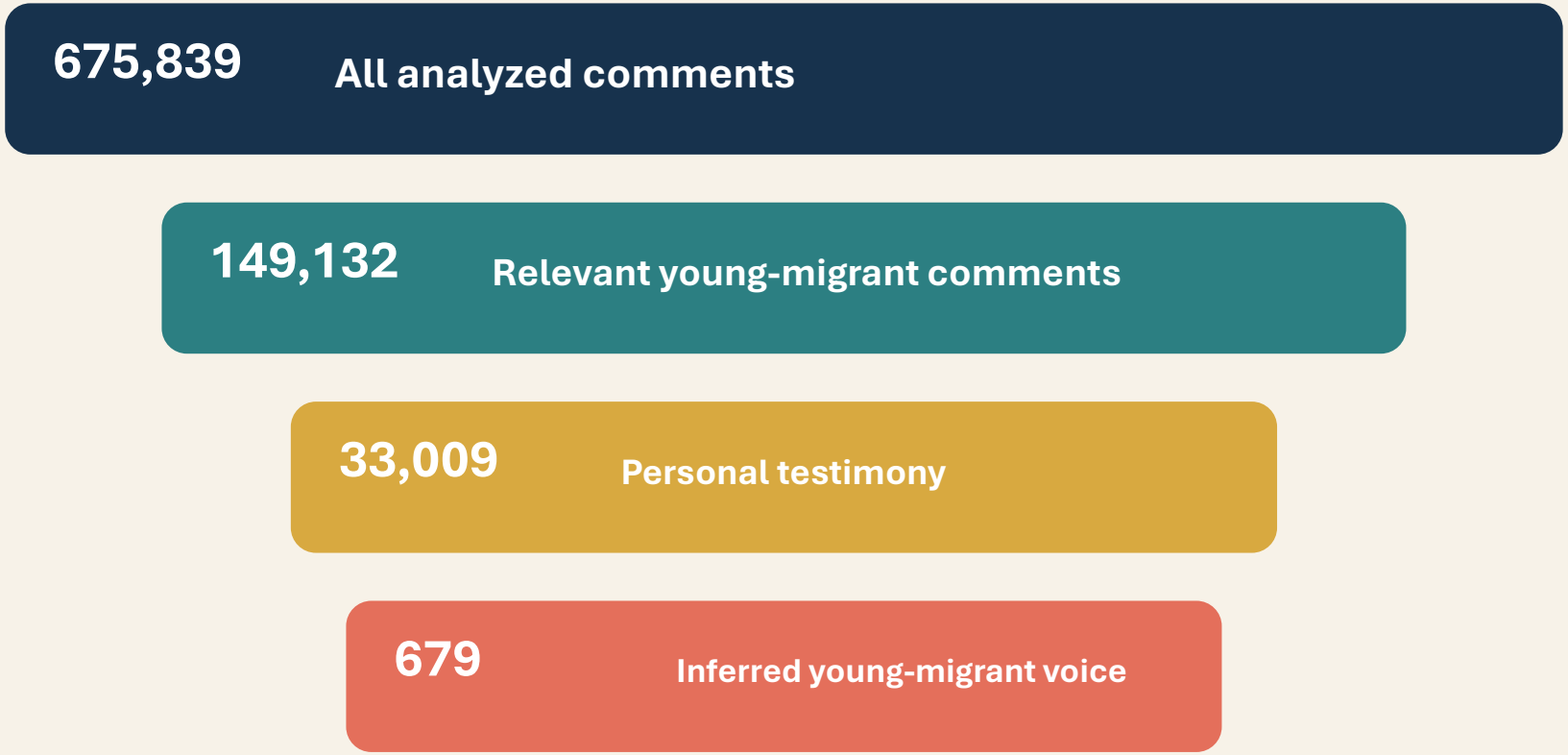
480.7M
recorded views

15.5M
recorded likes

Platform attention is highly concentrated



Comment corpus: a large discourse, a smaller relevant core



22.1%

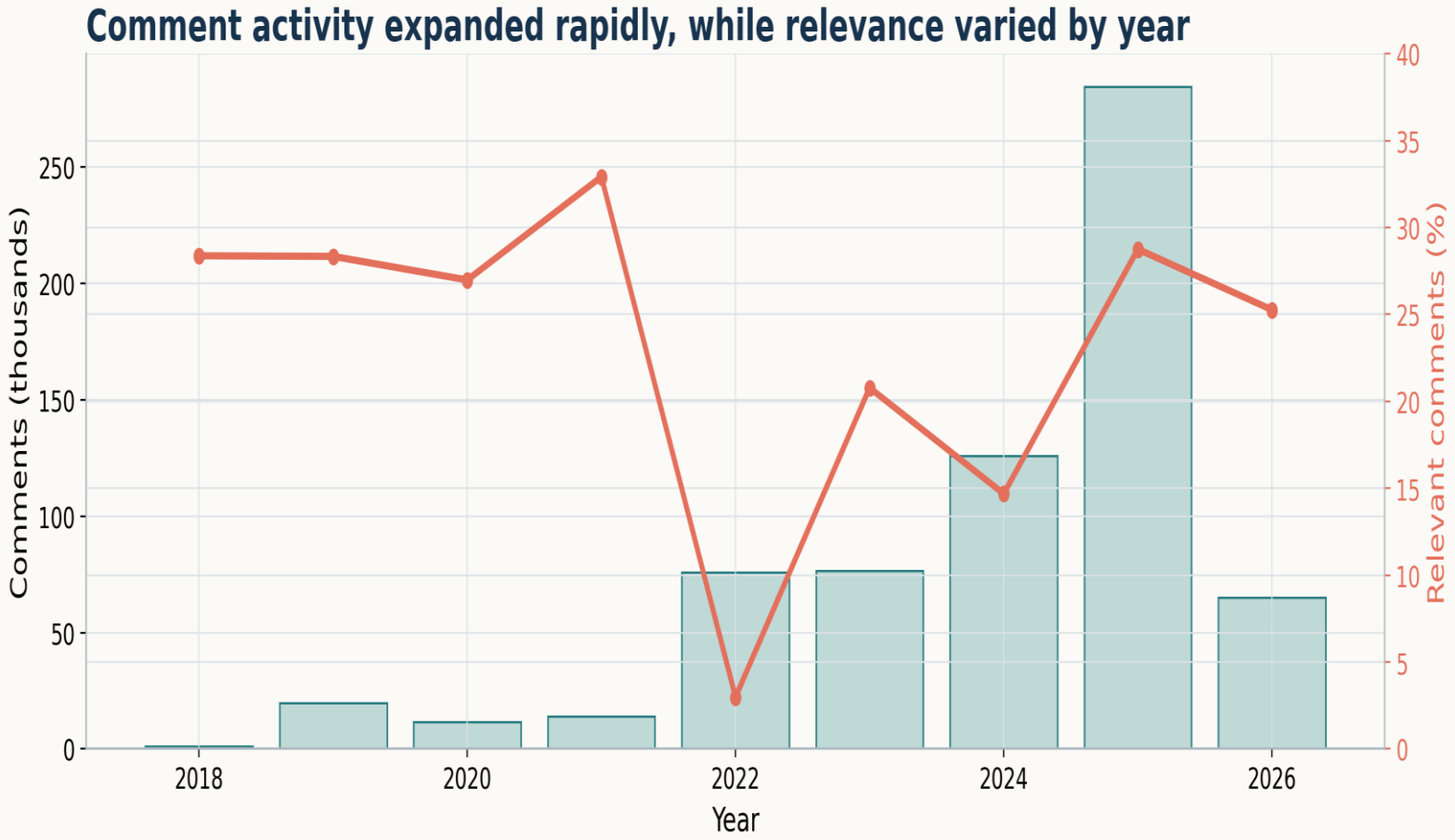
of all comments were coded as directly relevant

Substantive findings use the relevant-comment subset unless noted otherwise.

Additional indicators

65,902 policy claims
8,837 dehumanizing comments
212,769 replies

Temporal expansion of the corpus



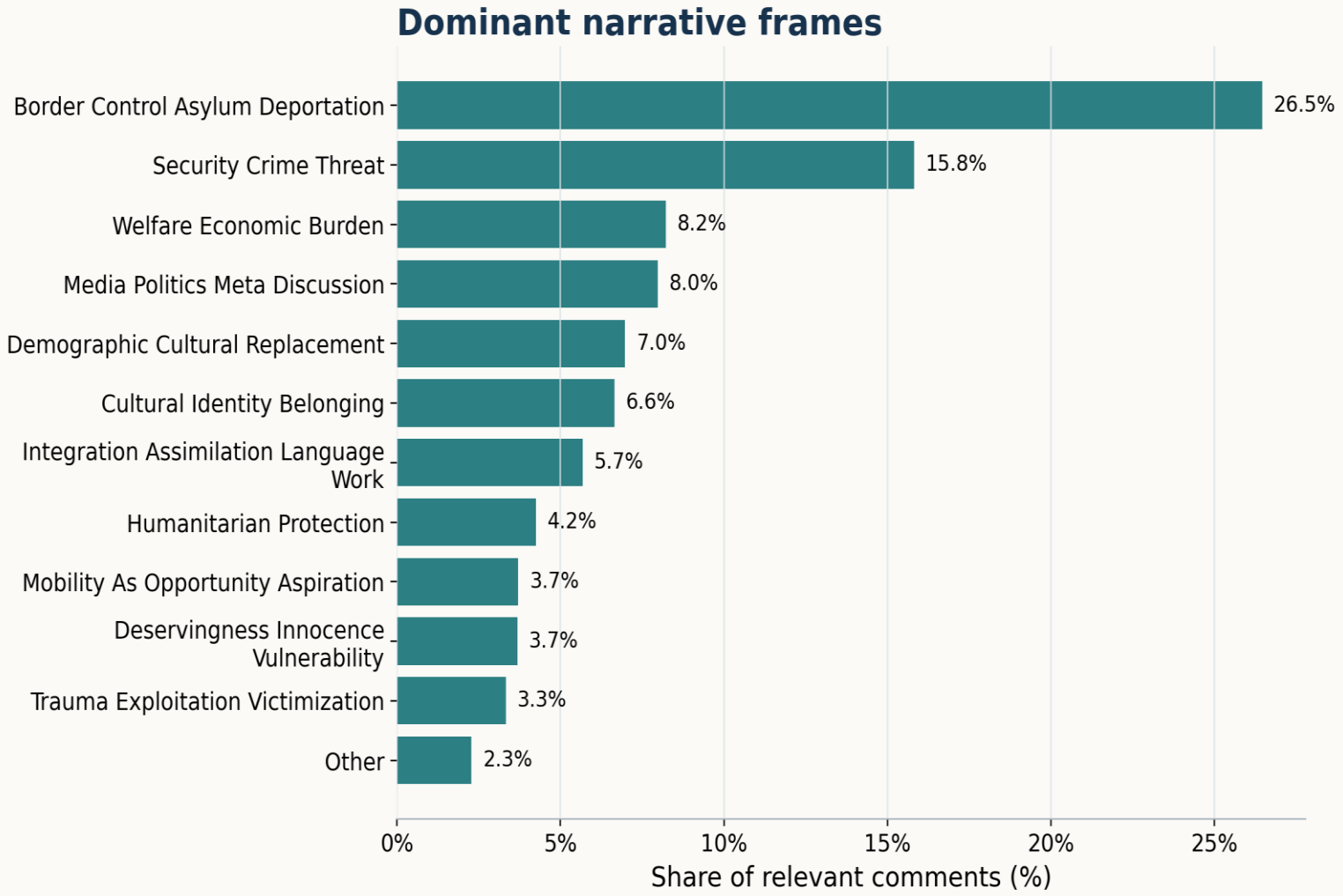
What changed?

- The corpus accelerates after 2022 and peaks in 2025.
- Relevant-share variation reflects the heterogeneity of videos retrieved by the broad search term.
- The analytical design therefore separates platform volume from substantive relevance.

2025 alone accounts for 284,508 analyzed comments.

Dominant narratives emphasize control, threat and burden

Relevant comments only



Three leading frames

26.5% Border control, asylum and deportation

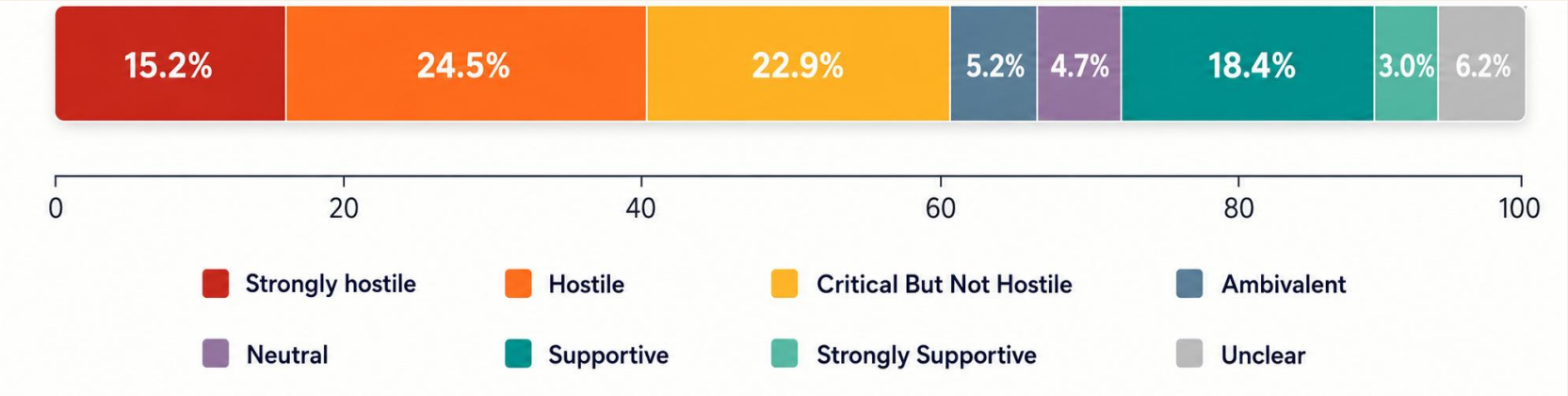
15.8% Security, crime and threat

8.2% Welfare and economic burden

Humanitarian protection appears, but it is not the organizing center of the discourse.

Attitudes are more often hostile or critical than supportive

Relevant comments only



39.7%

Hostile or strongly hostile

22.9%

Critical but not hostile

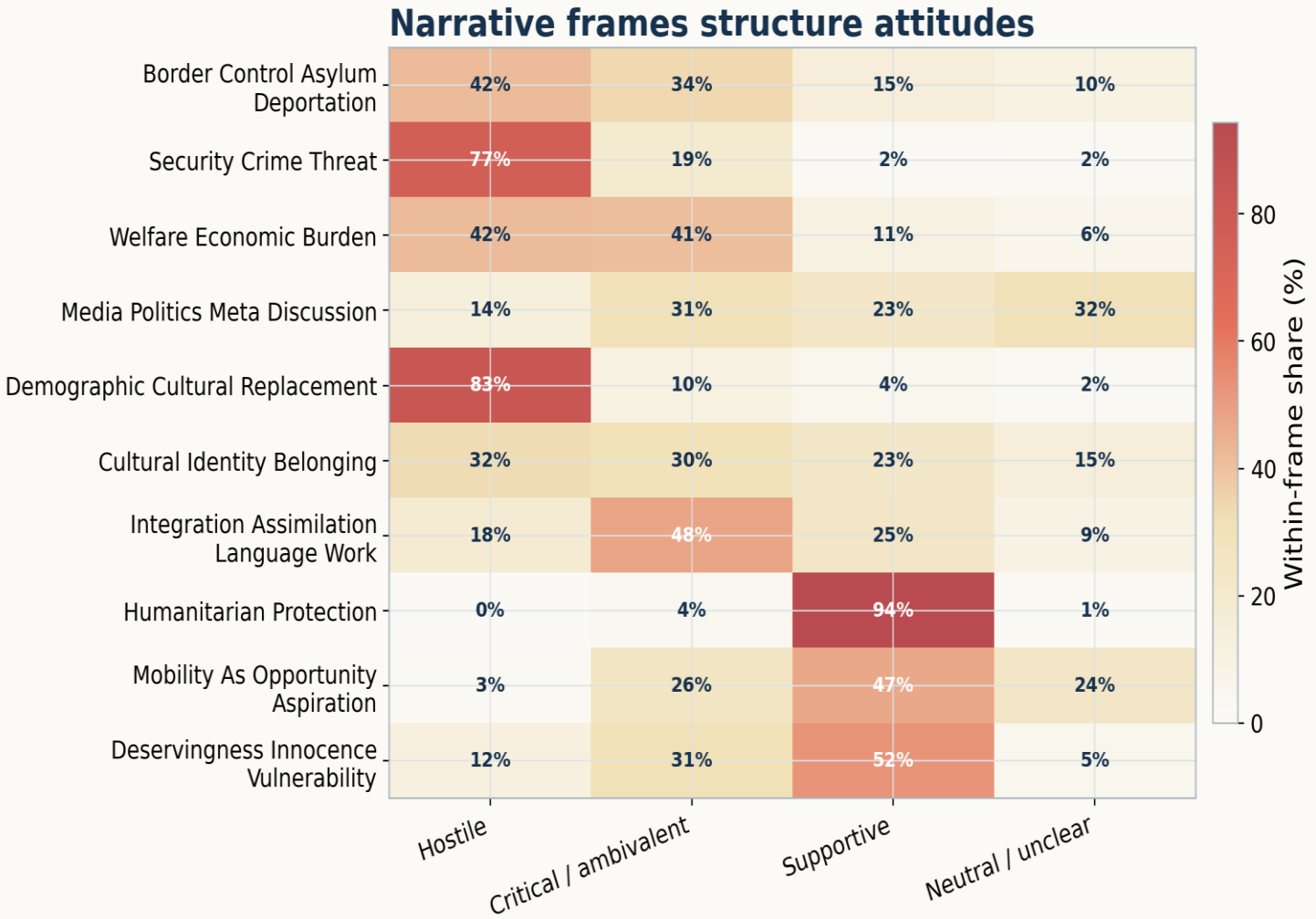
21.4%

Supportive or strongly supportive

Negative orientation extends beyond overt hostility: critical-but-not-hostile discourse is also a major component.

Narrative frames organize distinct moral positions

Within-frame attitude composition; relevant comments only



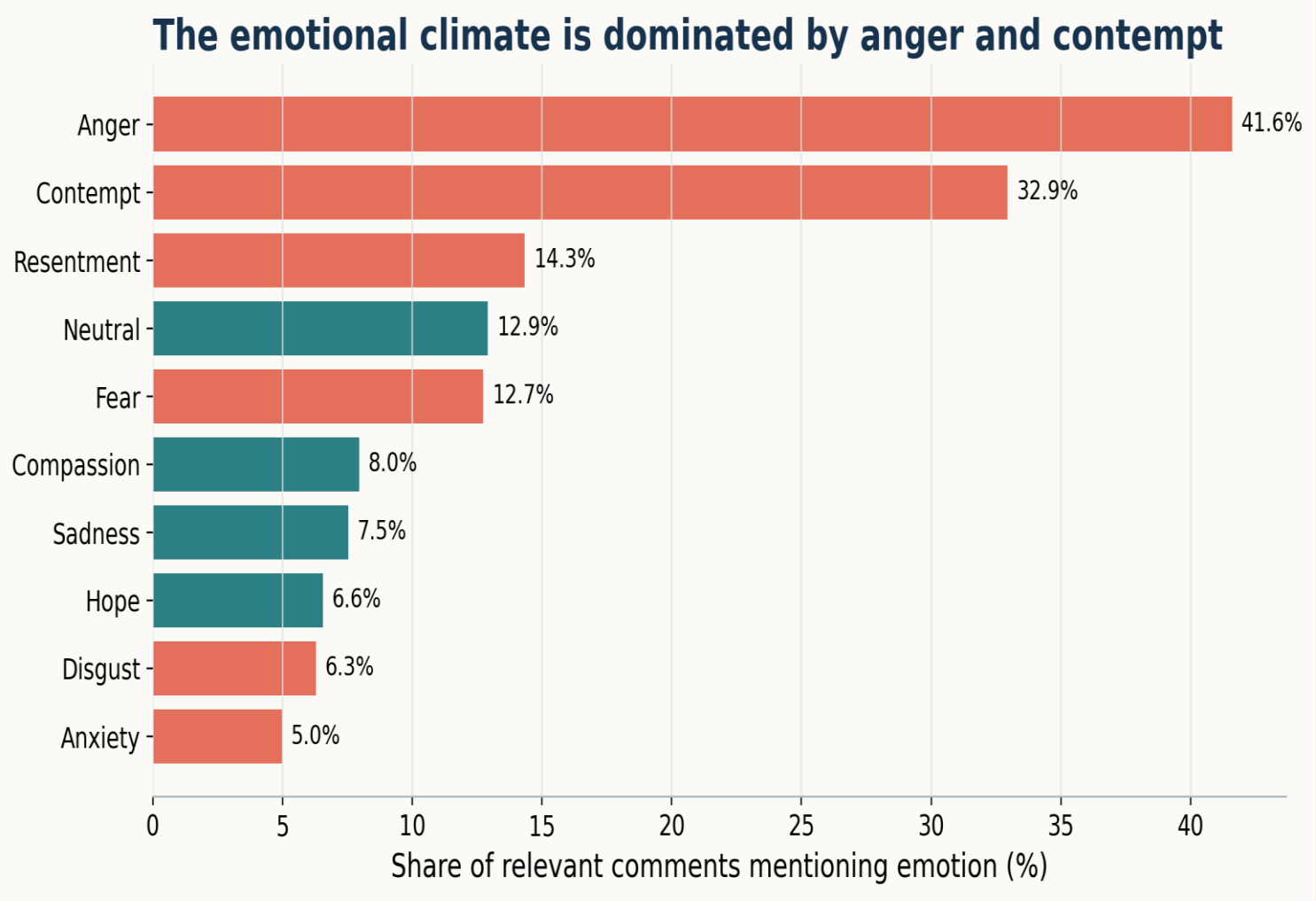
Strong contrasts

- Security/crime and demographic-replacement frames are overwhelmingly hostile.
- Humanitarian-protection and agency/resilience frames are strongly supportive.
- Integration and welfare frames concentrate in critical-but-not-hostile evaluations.
- The same topic (migration) therefore supports sharply different moral worlds.

Frame choice changes the evaluative horizon available to audiences.

Emotional climate: anger, contempt and resentment dominate

Relevant comments only; multi-label coding



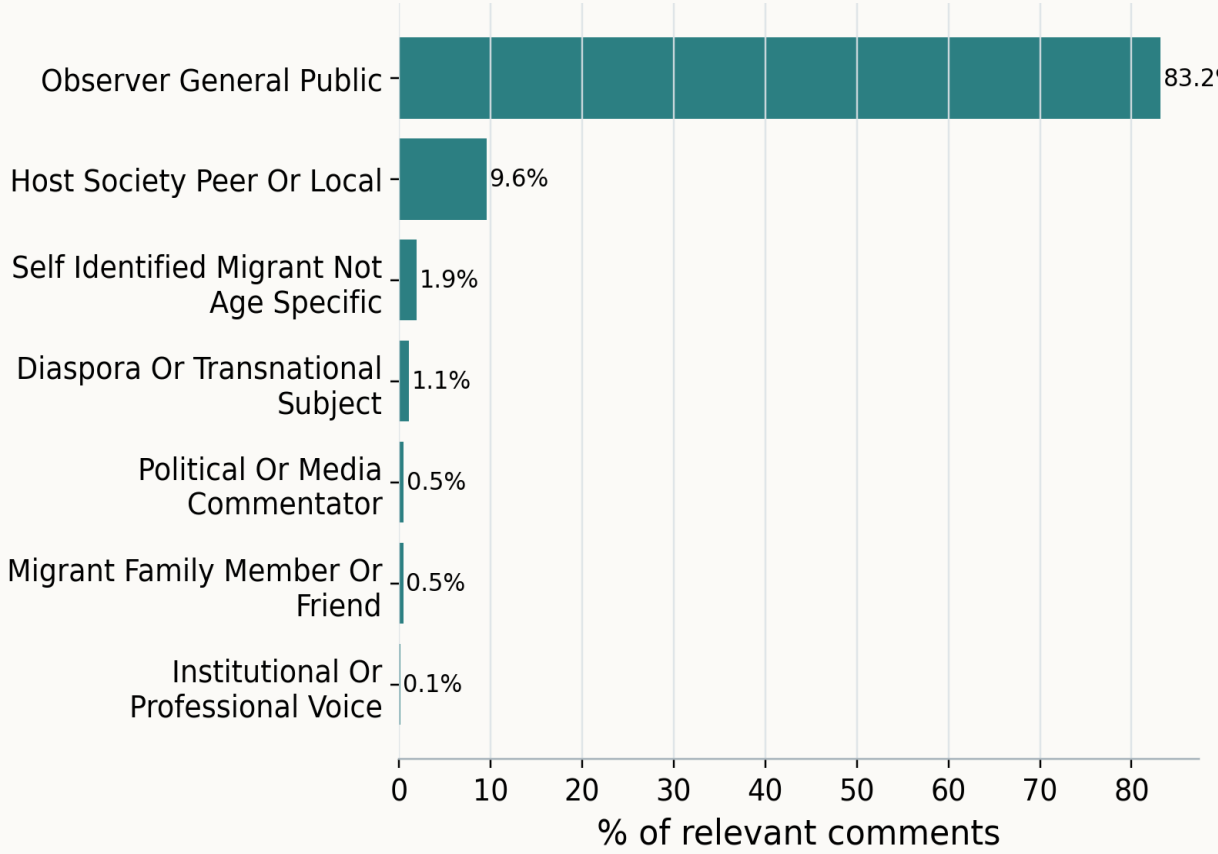
Interpretation

- Anger appears in 41.6% of relevant comments.
- Contempt appears in 32.9%, reinforcing social distance and moral hierarchy.
- Compassion, hope and sadness are present, but substantially less frequent.
- Multiple emotions may be coded in the same comment, so percentages do not sum to 100%.

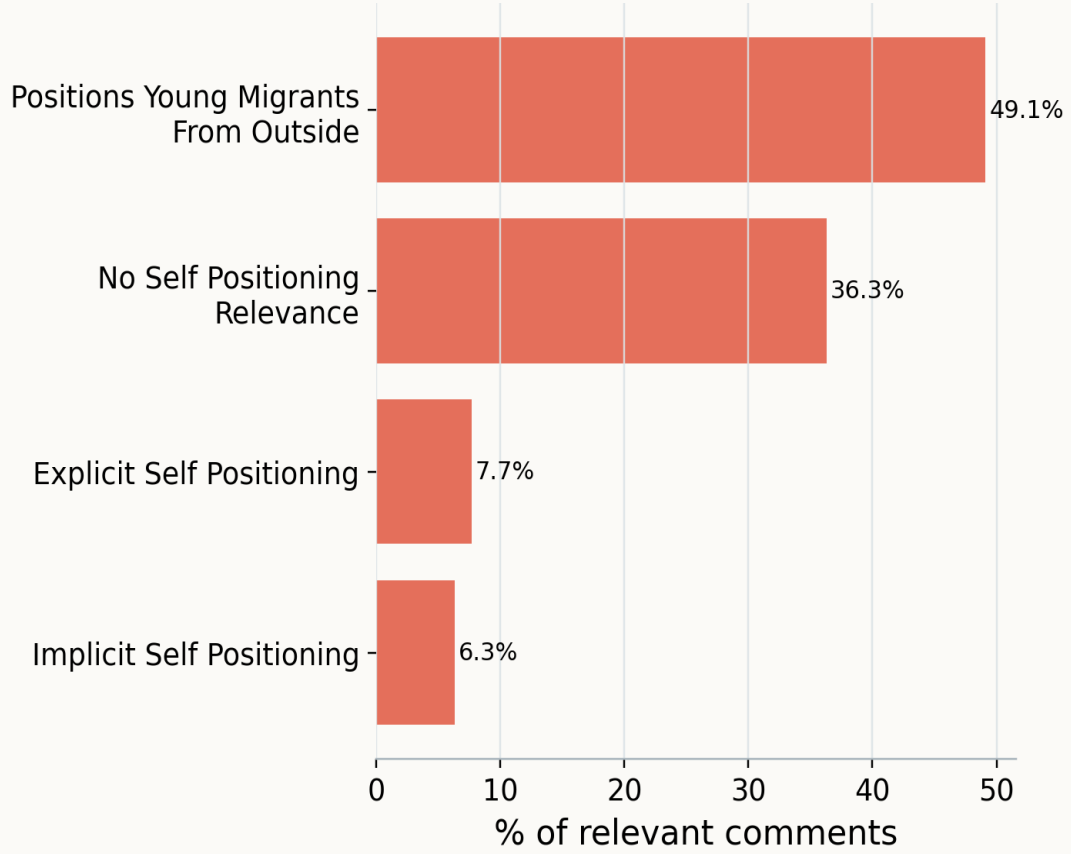
Young migrants are usually positioned from outside

Relevant comments only

Inferred speaker position



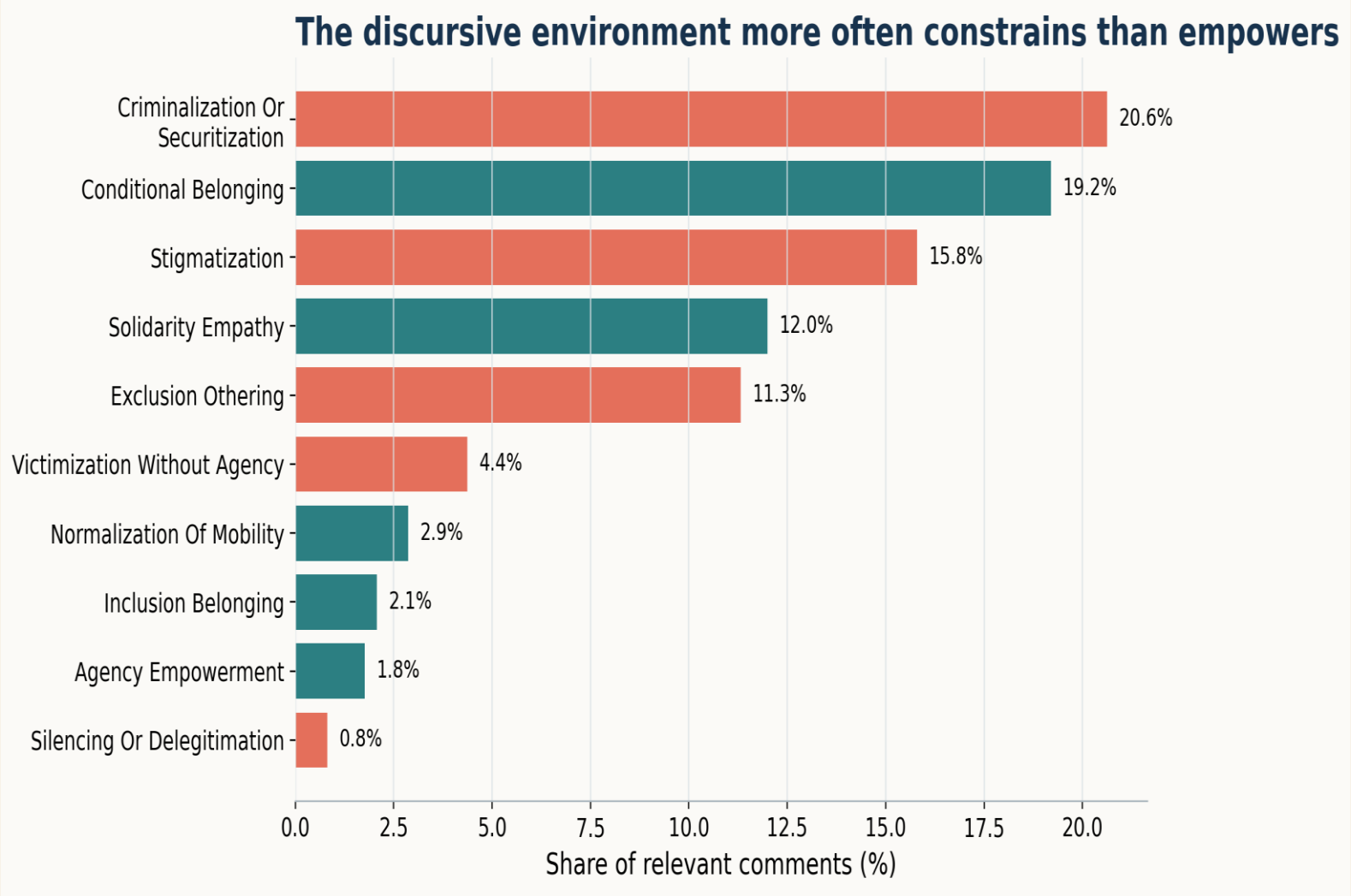
Self-positioning relevance



49.1% of relevant comments position young migrants from outside; explicit or implicit self-positioning appears in 14.0%.

Positioning effects constrain belonging and agency

Relevant comments only



Restrictive effects

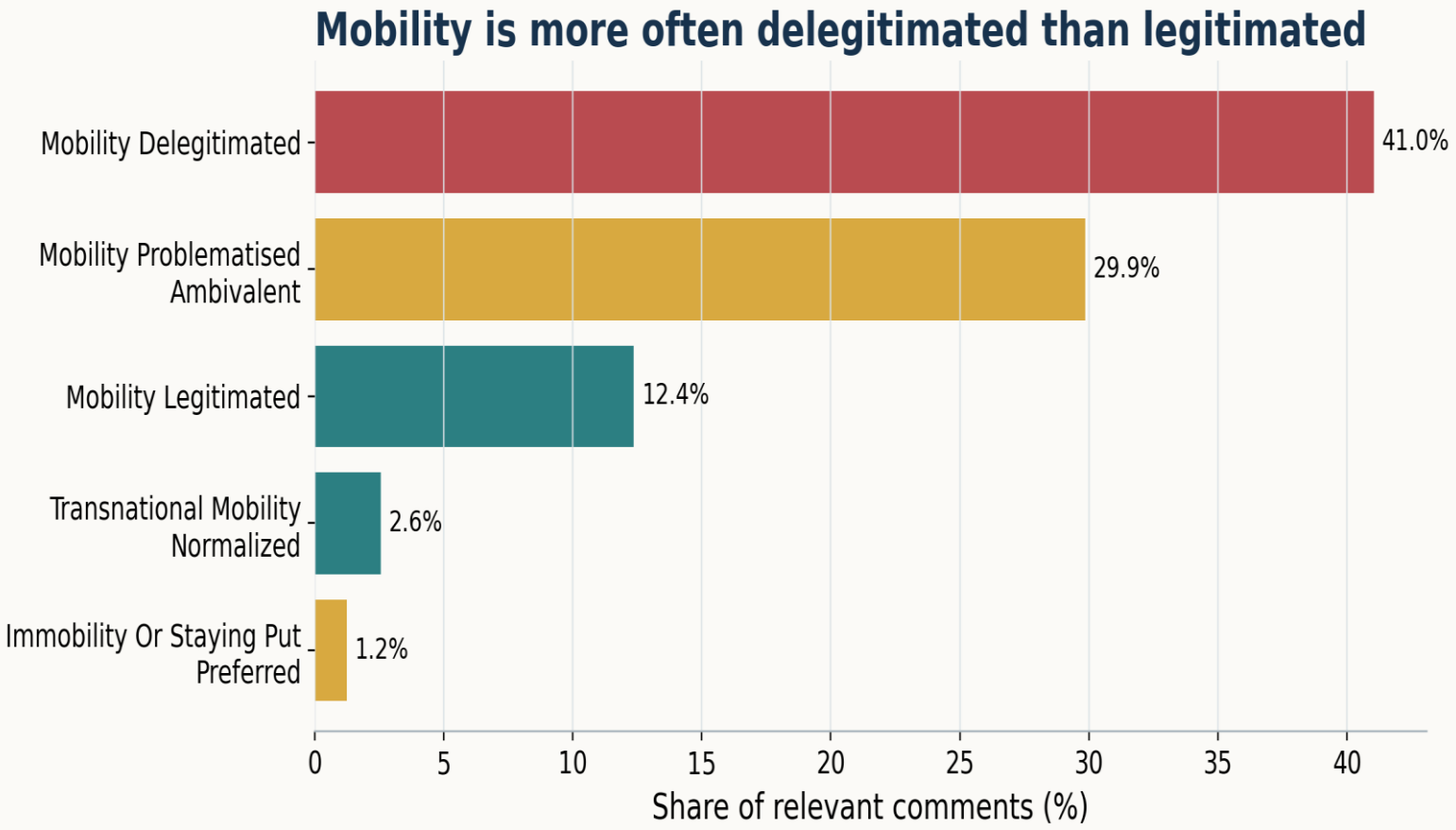
- Criminalization or securitization: 20.6%
- Conditional belonging: 19.2%
- Stigmatization: 15.8%
- Exclusion or othering: 11.3%

Enabling effects

Solidarity/empathy reaches 12.0%, while agency empowerment reaches only 1.8%.

Mobility is framed primarily as a problem

Relevant comments only



41.0%

Mobility delegitimated

29.9%

Problematised / ambivalent

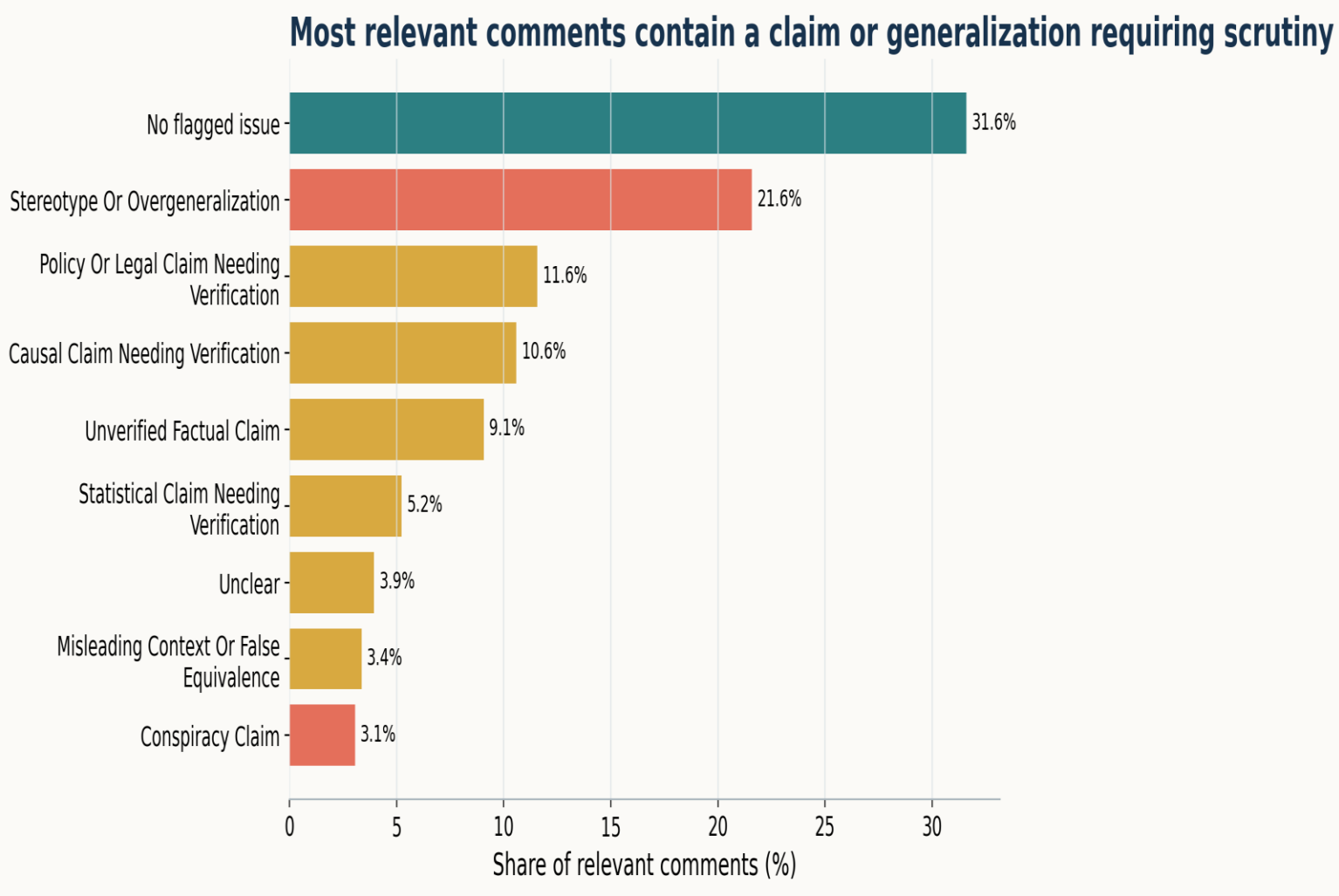
12.4%

Mobility legitimated

Across the corpus, mobility is most often framed as conditional, suspicious or socially costly.

Misinformation risk: generalizations and policy claims

Relevant comments only; risk coding is not factual adjudication

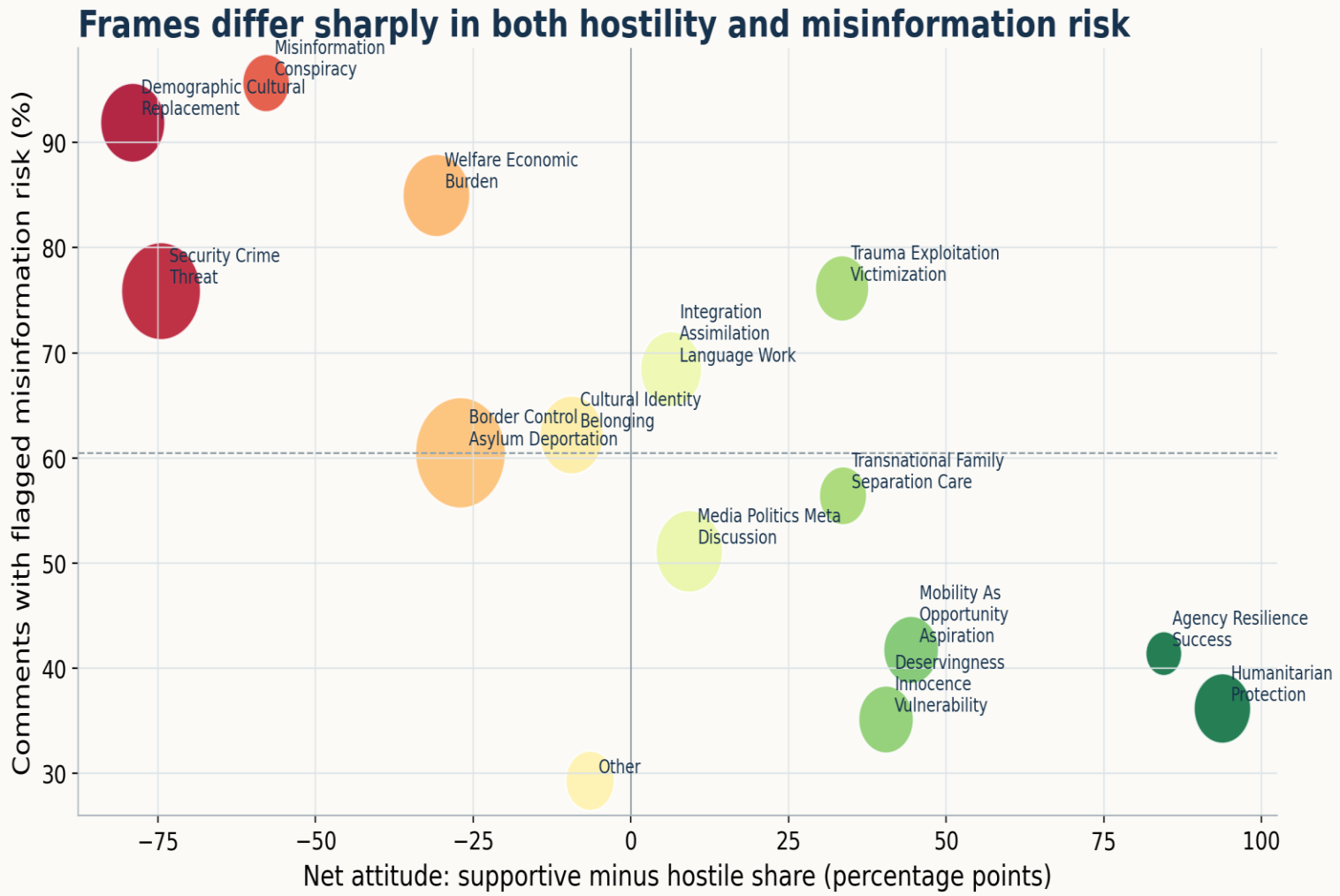


Risk profile

- Only 31.6% contain no flagged issue.
- 21.6% rely on stereotypes or overgeneralization.
- 11.6% contain policy or legal claims requiring verification.
- 10.6% contain causal claims requiring verification.
- 3.1% are coded as conspiracy claims.

Frames differ in hostility and misinformation risk

Bubble size reflects frame frequency



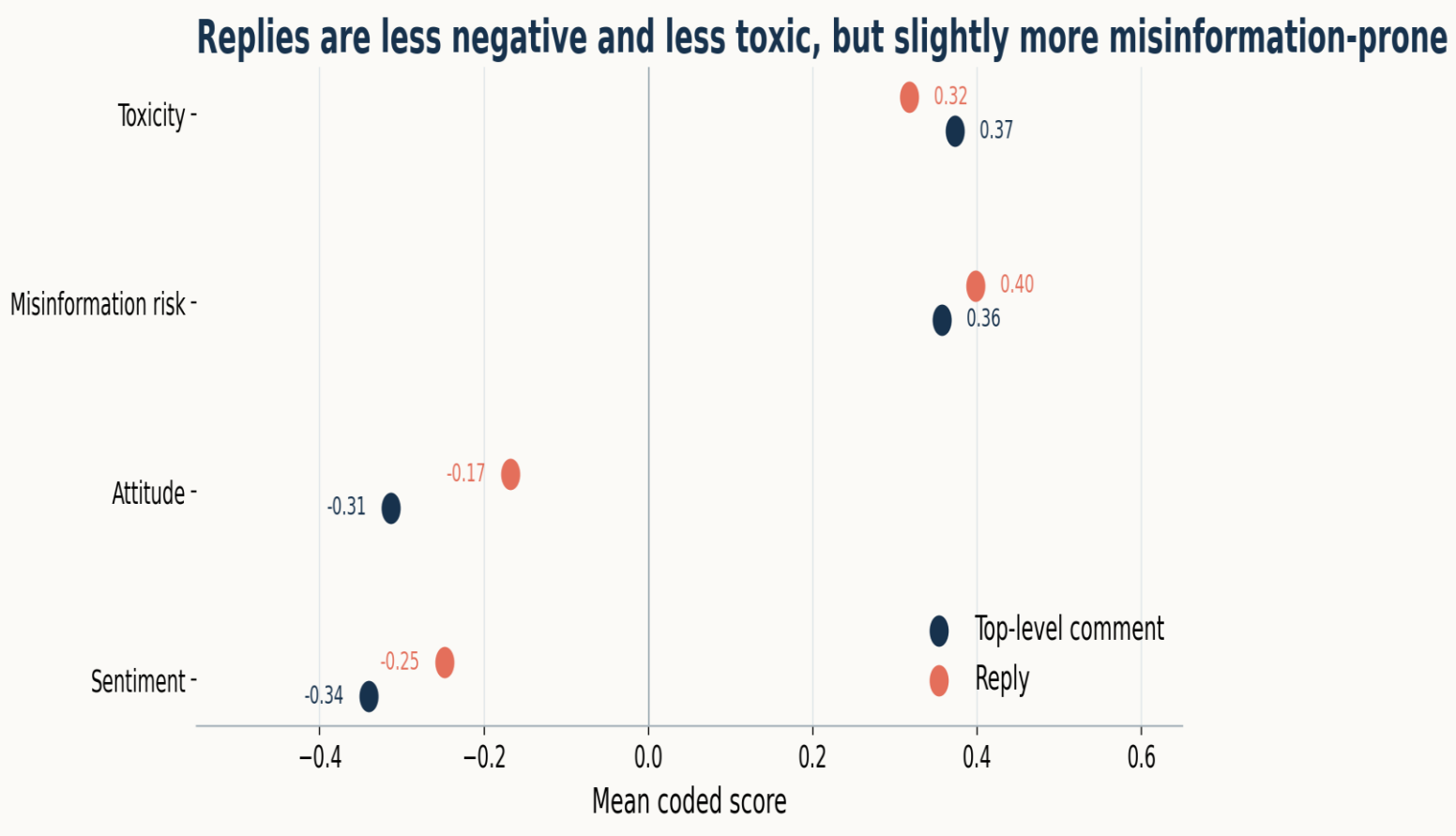
Reading the map

- Left side: hostility outweighs support.
- Right side: support outweighs hostility.
- Higher position: more comments contain claims or generalizations requiring scrutiny.
- Demographic-replacement and conspiracy frames occupy the highest-risk hostile region.

Humanitarian and agency frames show that supportive discourse is possible, but less frequent.

Replies soften tone but intensify contestation

Relevant comments only



Top-level comments

More negative sentiment
More hostile attitudes
Higher toxicity

Replies

Less negative and less toxic
Slightly higher misinformation risk
More direct disagreement

Replies soften tone, but informational quality does not clearly improve.

What conditions of self-positioning does this discourse create?

1

A discourse of suspicion

Control, security, burden and demographic-replacement frames dominate.

2

Belonging becomes conditional

Young migrants are frequently assessed against assimilation, legality and deservingness.

3

Voice is structurally asymmetric

Most comments position young migrants from outside; direct young-migrant voice is rare.

4

Counter-narratives remain available

Humanitarian, solidarity and agency frames create alternative repertoires of belonging.

Self-positioning unfolds in an unequal discursive field: young migrants encounter both scripts of exclusion and resources for resistance.

Implications and limitations

Implications

- Media literacy should address framing and emotional cues, not only discrete false claims.
- Educators and social workers can use counter-narratives to support agency and belonging.
- Platform governance should consider how comment environments amplify stigma and securitization.
- Policy communication should avoid reproducing burden, threat and demographic-replacement frames.

Limitations

- Search-query and API coverage do not represent the entire platform.
- Commenters are not equivalent to viewers or young people in general.
- GPT-assisted classifications are coded indicators and require qualitative validation.
- Speaker identity and migrant status can rarely be established with certainty.
- Engagement counts and platform content can change after collection.

Next step: purposive qualitative analysis of high-engagement threads and comments with explicit self-positioning.

CONCLUSION

YouTube does not simply represent young migrants.

It helps define the discursive conditions under which mobility, belonging and identity become thinkable.

- The relevant discourse is dominated by control, security and burden frames.
- Hostility and critical evaluation outweigh support.
- Young migrants are more often positioned from outside than heard as self-positioning subjects.
- Humanitarian and agency-centered counter-narratives remain important resources for resistance.

Framing themselves requires navigating frames already built around them.