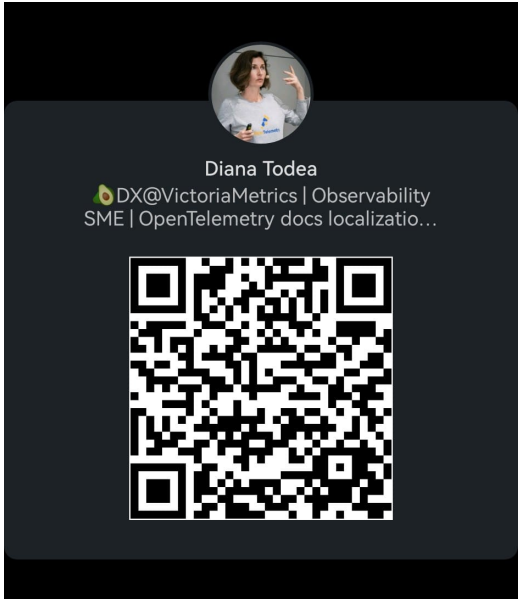
Cutting Through Metrics Cardinality Noise with VictoriaMetrics

SREDay London | 18 September 2025

Diana Todea - DX Engineer

Bsky: @didiviking.bsky.social
X: @dianavtodea
Github: @didiViking/Conferences_Talks

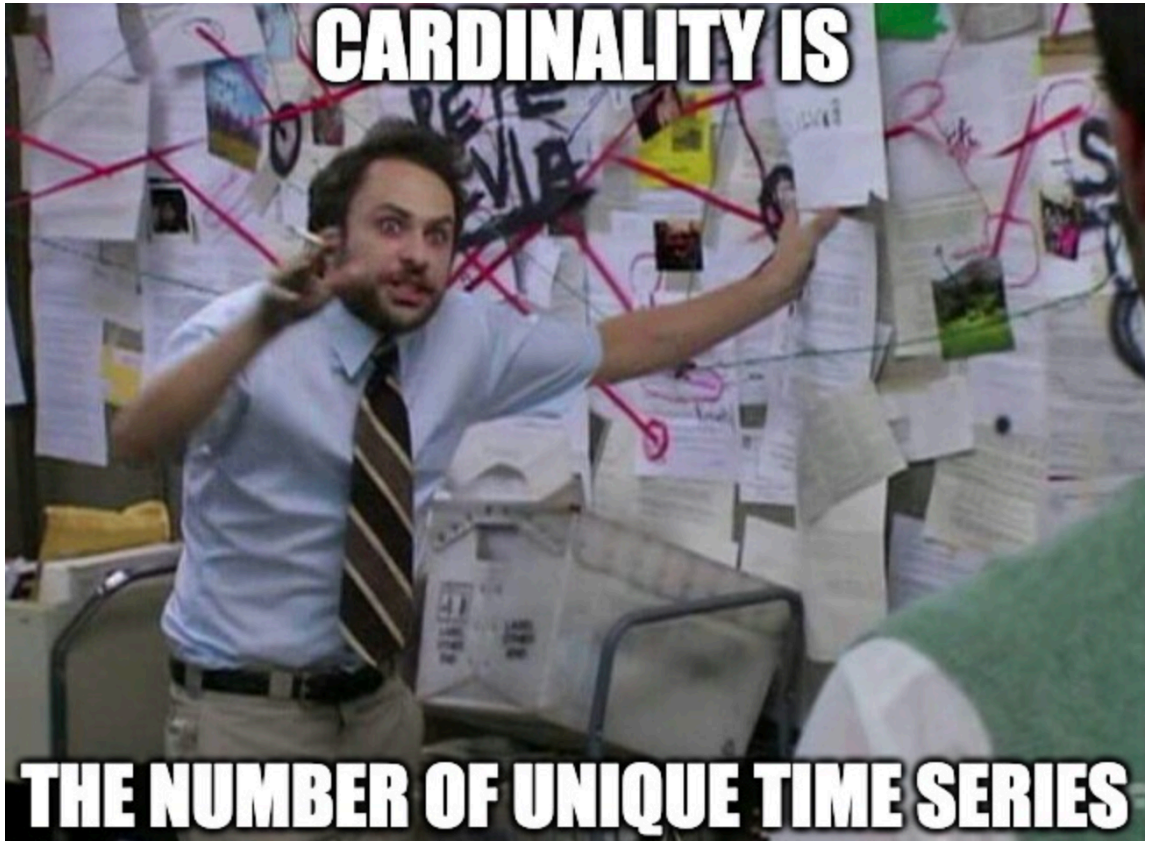


Agenda

- High cardinality: what is it and how to fix it?
- VictoriaMetrics architecture
- Cardinality explorer + demo
- Spot high cardinality in VictoriaMetrics clusters
- Wrap up


im lagging
how often
all the

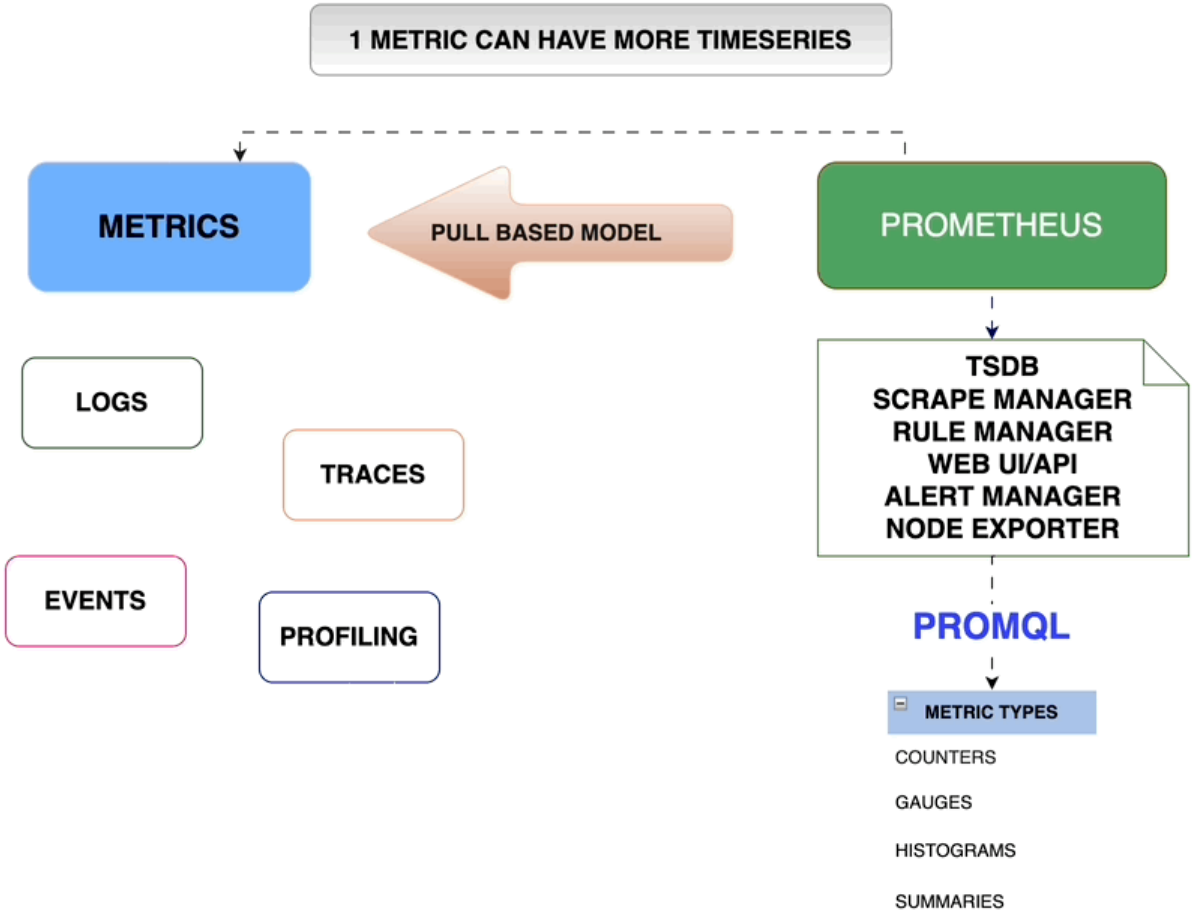

SLOW
MONITORING


CARDINALITY IS
THE NUMBER OF UNIQUE TIME SERIES


HIGH CARDINALITY MEANS
HIGH NUMBER OF
ACTIVE TIME SERIES

High cardinality impact on o11y

- Increased resource consumption (storage, memory, CPU)
- Slower query performance
- System stability risks
- Increased cost
- Alert noise and signal dilution
- Increased complexity affecting actionable insights


1 METRIC CAN HAVE MORE TIMESERIES
METRICS
PULL BASED MODEL
PROMETHEUS
LOGS
TRACES
EVENTS
PROFILING
TSDB
SCRAPE MANAGER
RULE MANAGER
WEB UI/API
ALERT MANAGER
NODE EXPORTER
PROMQL
METRIC TYPES
COUNTERS
GAUGES
HISTOGRAMS
SUMMARIES

High Cardinality = High Risk

- Pain points: out-of-memory errors, slow queries, alert storms

```
http_request_duration_seconds{user_id="12345", endpoint="/checkout", status="200", session_id="abcde123", pod="web-xyz"}
```

- user_id and session_id have huge cardinality
- every request generates a unique time series
- hundreds of thousands of active users
- hard to query, slow dashboards, OOM risk in Prometheus or alert manager

High cardinality root causes

- labels with a large number of unique values (user_id, request_id, url, ip)
- over-scraping/exporting
- exporters that tag too much (unique IPs, device IDs)

Over-scraping

```
# Prometheus scrape config
scrape_configs:
  - job_name: 'node'
    scrape_interval: 5s
    static_configs:
      - targets: ['node1:9100', 'node2:9100']
```

- You're over-collecting by 12x
- Increased CPU/network usage
- Your TSDB has to ingest/store redundant samples

Over-exporting

```
api_request_duration_seconds{endpoint="/search",status="200",user_id="1234",region="us-west",...}
```

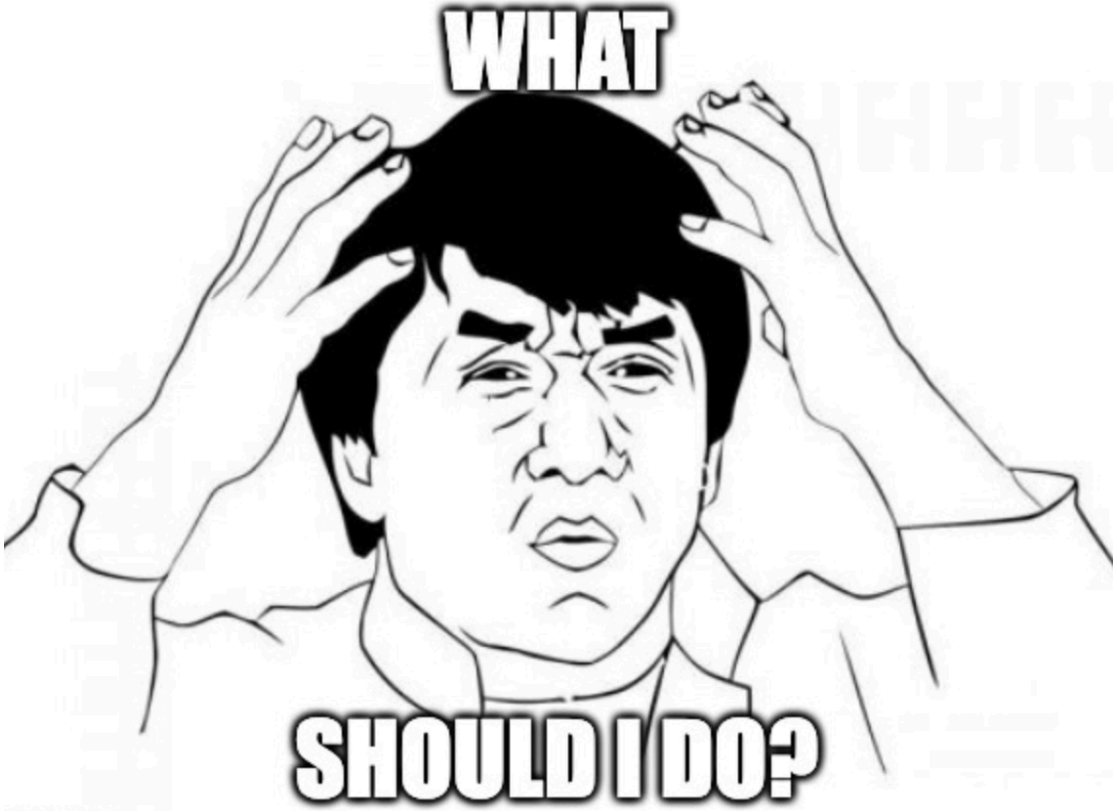
SOOO many labels

- Stop! Unique labels are killing your metrics
- Unused metrics = wasted resources
- Cardinality up, performance down

Over-tagging

```
node_disk_reads_total{device="nvme0n1"}
node_disk_reads_total{device="nvme1n1"}
node_disk_reads_total{device="nvme2n1"}
```

- If all node exporter collectors are enabled each metric gets multiplied


WHAT
SHOULD I DO?

Scrape strategies

- Don't scrape faster than metrics change

```
scrape_interval: 60s
```

- Drop unneeded labels

```
relabel_configs:
  - source_labels: [__name__, user_id]
    regex: api_request_duration_seconds;.*
    action: labeldrop
```

Use pre-aggregated views

- Aggregate early and export less (stream aggregation)
- Summarize with histograms, not IDs

```
api_request_duration_seconds_bucket{le="0.1", endpoint="/search"}
```

Instance grouping & job deduplication

```
- job_name: app-v1
- job_name: app-v2
```

```
- job_name: app
  relabel_configs:
    - source_labels: [__meta_kubernetes_label_app_version]
      target_label: version
```

Cut the noise at the source

```
metric_relabel_configs:
  - source_labels: [__name__]
    regex: "go_gc_.*"
    action: drop
```

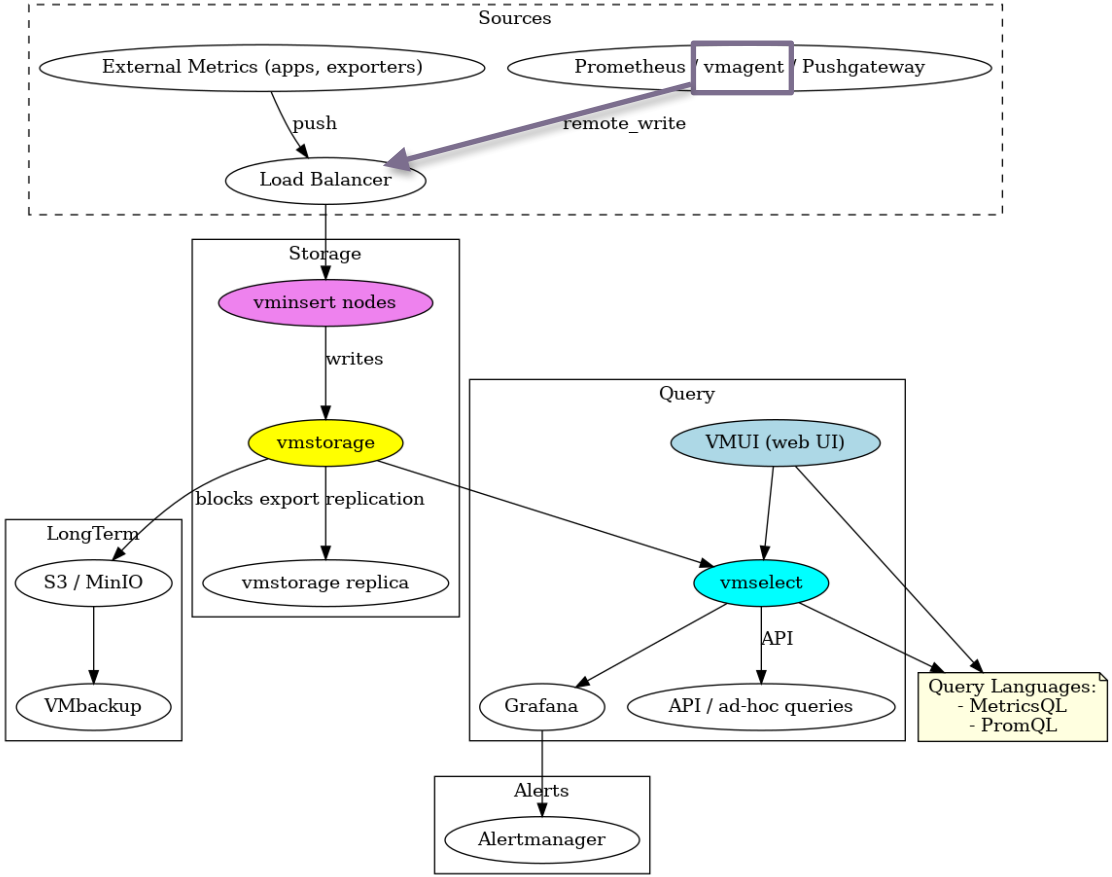
(*if not used)

VictoriaMetrics Solutions

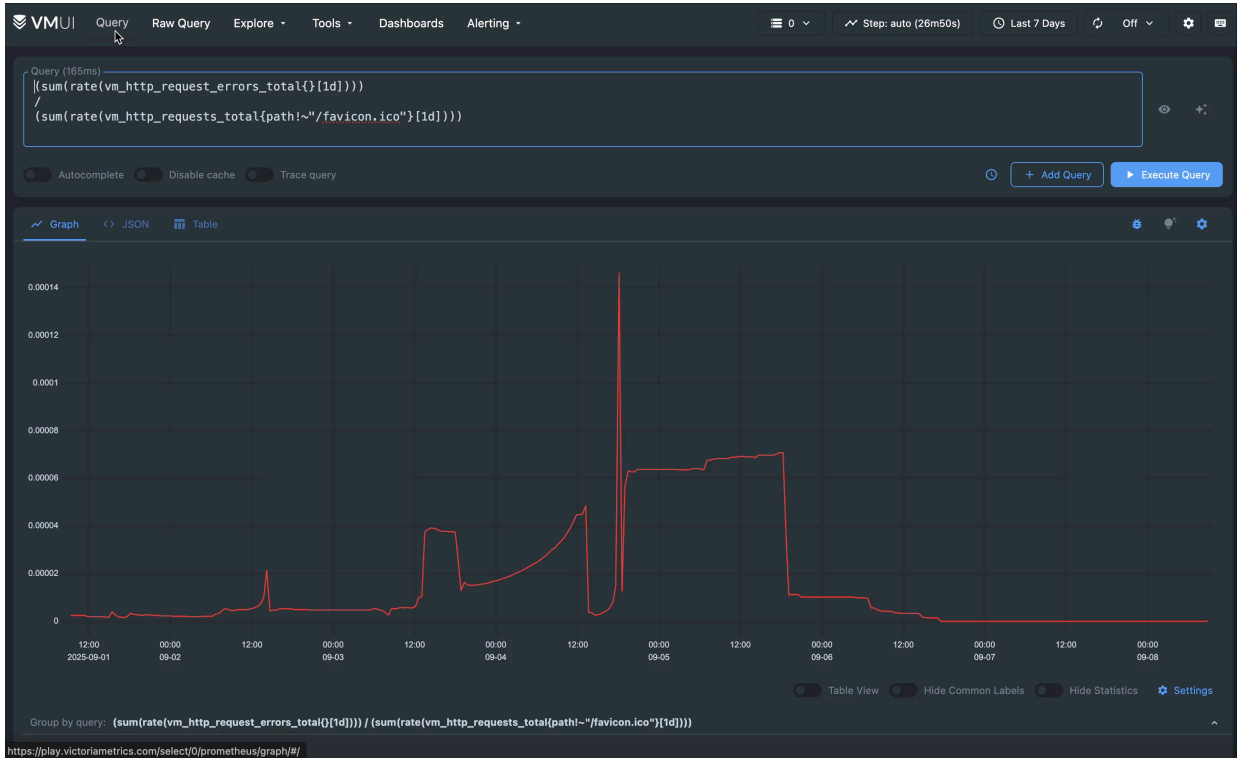
Open Source

Metrics Logs Traces

Enterprise
On Premise | Cloud | Hybrid


Sources
External Metrics (apps, exporters)
Prometheus / vmagent / Pushgateway
push
remote_write
Load Balancer
Storage
vminsert nodes
writes
vmstorage
blocks export replication
vmstorage replica
LongTerm
S3 / MinIO
VMbackup
Query
VMUI (web UI)
vmselect
API
Grafana
API / ad-hoc queries
Query Languages:
- MetricsQL
- PromQL
Alerts
Alertmanager

Cardinality explorer



Cardinality explorer helps identify

- Metric names with the highest number of series
- Labels with the highest number of series
- Values with the highest number of series for the selected label
- label=name pairs with the highest number of series
- Labels with the highest number of unique values

Spot high cardinality on VictoriaMetrics clusters

- High memory usage on vmstorage – indexes for many unique series sit in memory

vmstorage

CPU usage spike on vmstorage, each unique series requires a separate TSID mapping and index entry

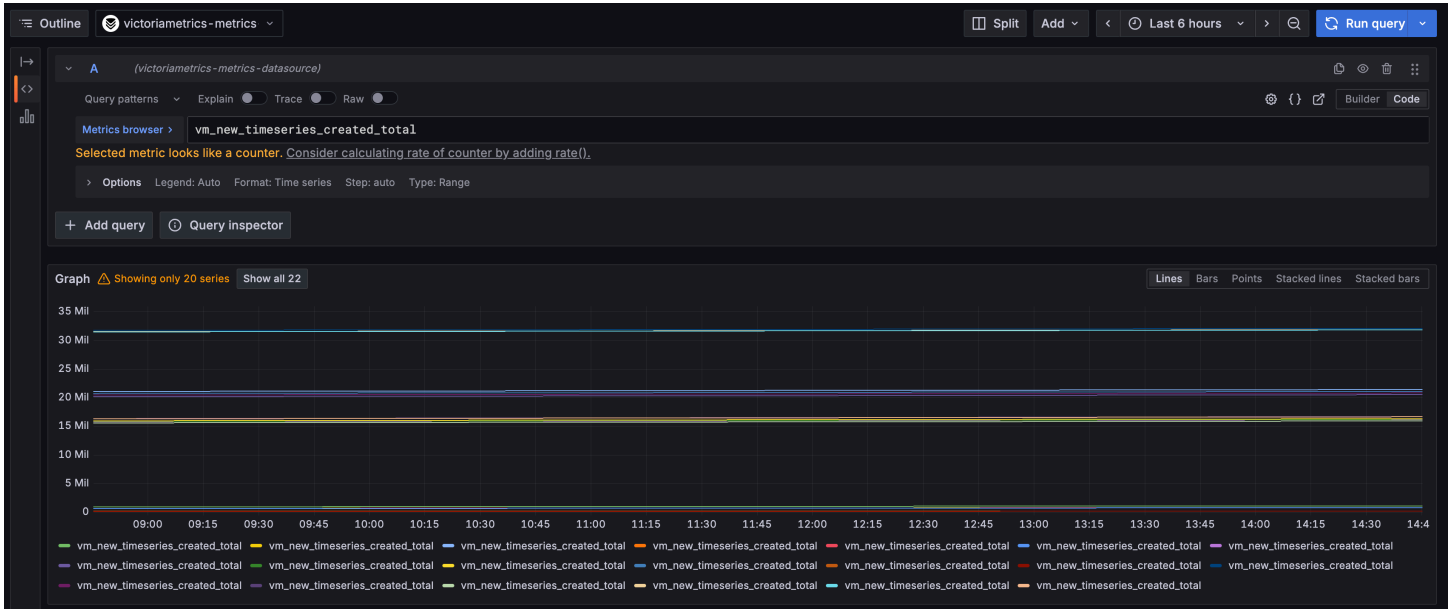
vmselect - query processing

Memory spikes on vmselect, when queries need to touch millions of series

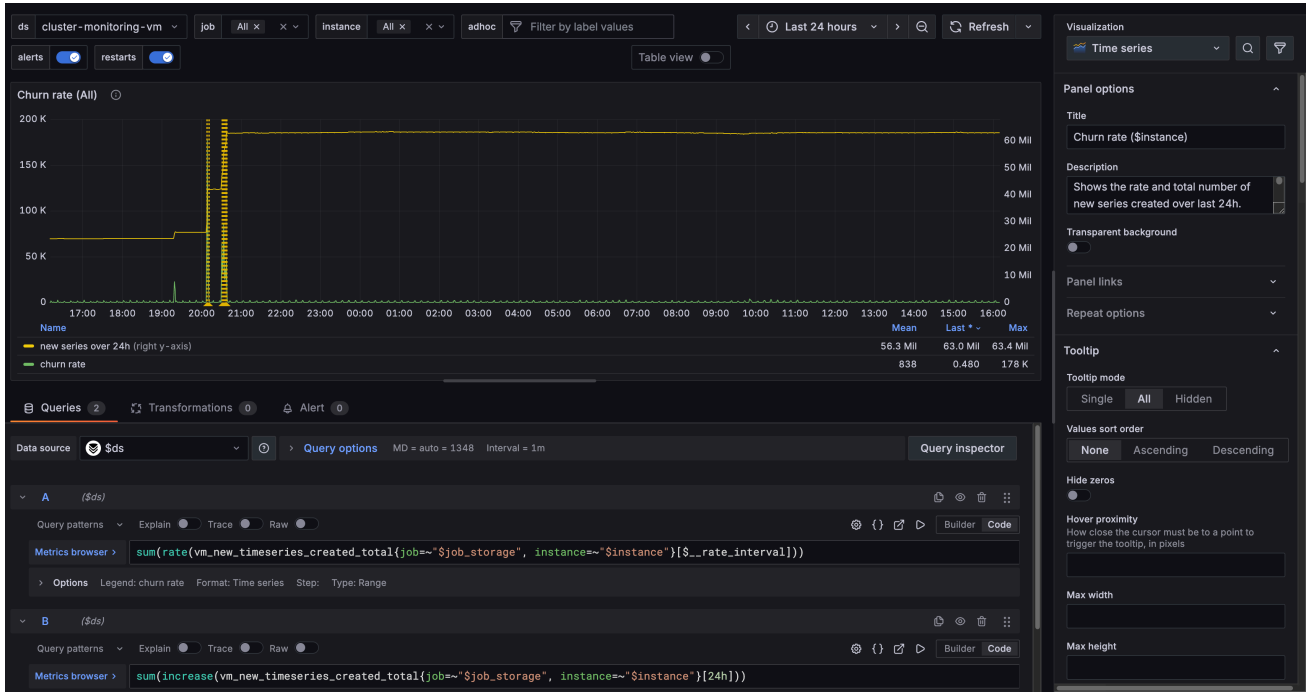
vminsert connects to multiple vmstorage nodes

- Increased ingestion latency, vminsert takes longer to batch and deduplicate incoming series before writing

Useful queries



How to use it in a Grafana dashboard



Recap

- Reduce histogram buckets, aggregate data with functions like sum() or avg()
- Look for metrics insights in vmui's Cardinality Explorer
- If labels can’t be removed, pre-aggregate data before ingestion with stream aggregation
- Reduce query load by aggregating with MetricsQL instead of pulling raw series
- VictoriaMetrics uses optimized inverted indexes, efficient storage, aggressive compression

Resources

- https://play.victoriametrics.com/ & https://play-grafana.victoriametrics.com/
- https://github.com/VictoriaMetrics/prometheus-benchmark
- https://victoriametrics.com/blog/cardinality-explorer/
- https://medium.com/@romanhavronenko/victoriametrics-promql-compliance-d4318203f51e
- https://valyala.medium.com/prometheus-vs-victoriametrics-benchmark-on-node-exporter-metrics-4ca29c75590f
- https://github.com/VictoriaMetrics-Community/opentelemetry-demo

More on **VictoriaMetrics** Solutions

VictoriaMetrics

Open Source Available on Github

VictoriaLogs

Open Source Available on Github

VictoriaMetrics Enterprise

Commercial Licence

VictoriaMetrics Cloud

Pay-as-you-go

Thank you for listening

Any Questions?

Bsky: @didiviking.bsky.social
X: @dianavtodea
Github: @didiViking/Conferences_Talks
LinkedIn: @diana-todea-b2a79968

VictoriaMetrics Community