

Parliamentary Elections 2022 and rumors



#1: Parliamentary Elections 2022 and rumors



01. Introduction

"Dollar and diesel as bribes to buy votes"

***Problems between political parties about who participated in approving laws that have not been
".passed until today"***

"Accusations between the parties about illegal funds and corruption in institutions"

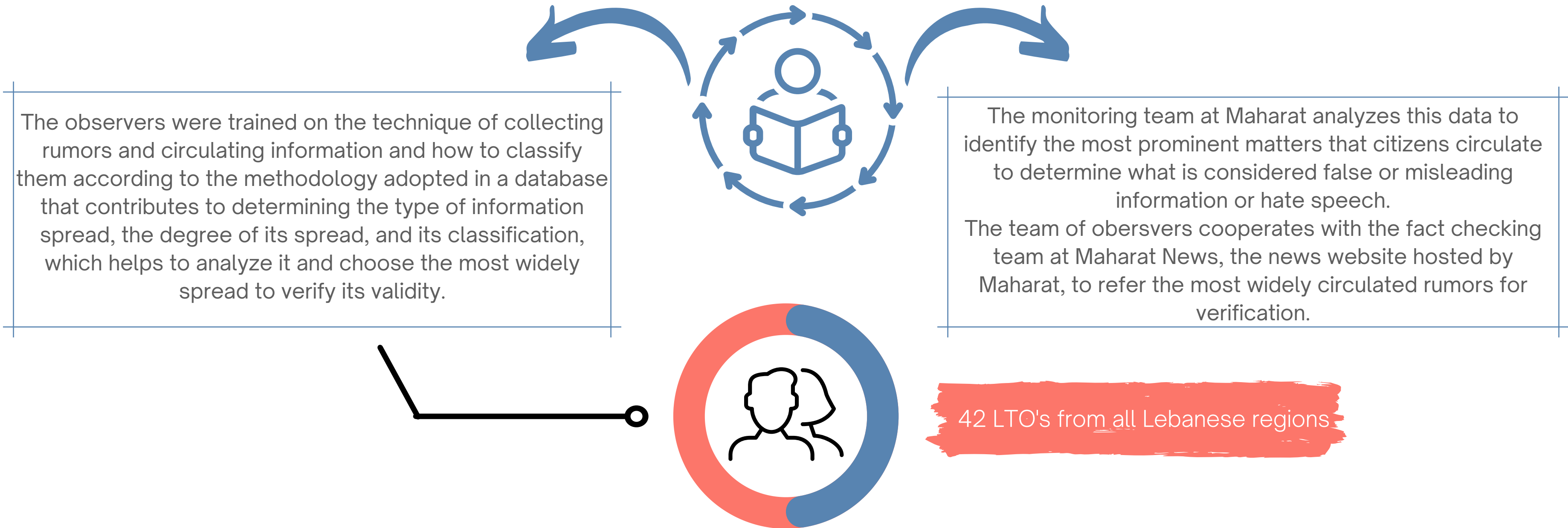
This is a small sample of a wave of rumors and news that spread among people in all Lebanese regions during the month of March, which is the crucial month during which the names of all candidates for the parliamentary elections taking place on May 15, 2022 are determined, as March 16 is the last deadline for accepting candidacy and March 31 is the last deadline to withdraw from the candidacy according to the electoral calendar.

People circulated rumors as facts, depending on their political positions and the electoral atmosphere. If you agree with their political opinion, they quickly publish it on private and social networking sites without verifying its credibility. The approaching date of the parliamentary elections has undoubtedly led to an increase in the level of this false or misleading news in light of the difficult political and social environment that the Lebanese currently live in.

Within the framework of the "SHARAKA" project carried out by Maharat Foundation and the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE) with the support of the Dutch Embassy, it aims to monitor the democracy of the electoral process through observers spread over the Lebanese territories from the North to the South to Bekaa, Mount Lebanon and Beirut. Maharat, in cooperation with the observers, collects rumors, political statements and false and misleading news in all Lebanese regions and works on analyzing these data and news circulating in the local communities. Then the fact checking team at "Maharat News" verifies the veracity of these rumors to re-publish the inspected information. This first report covers the time period from March 10, 2022 to March 31, 2022.

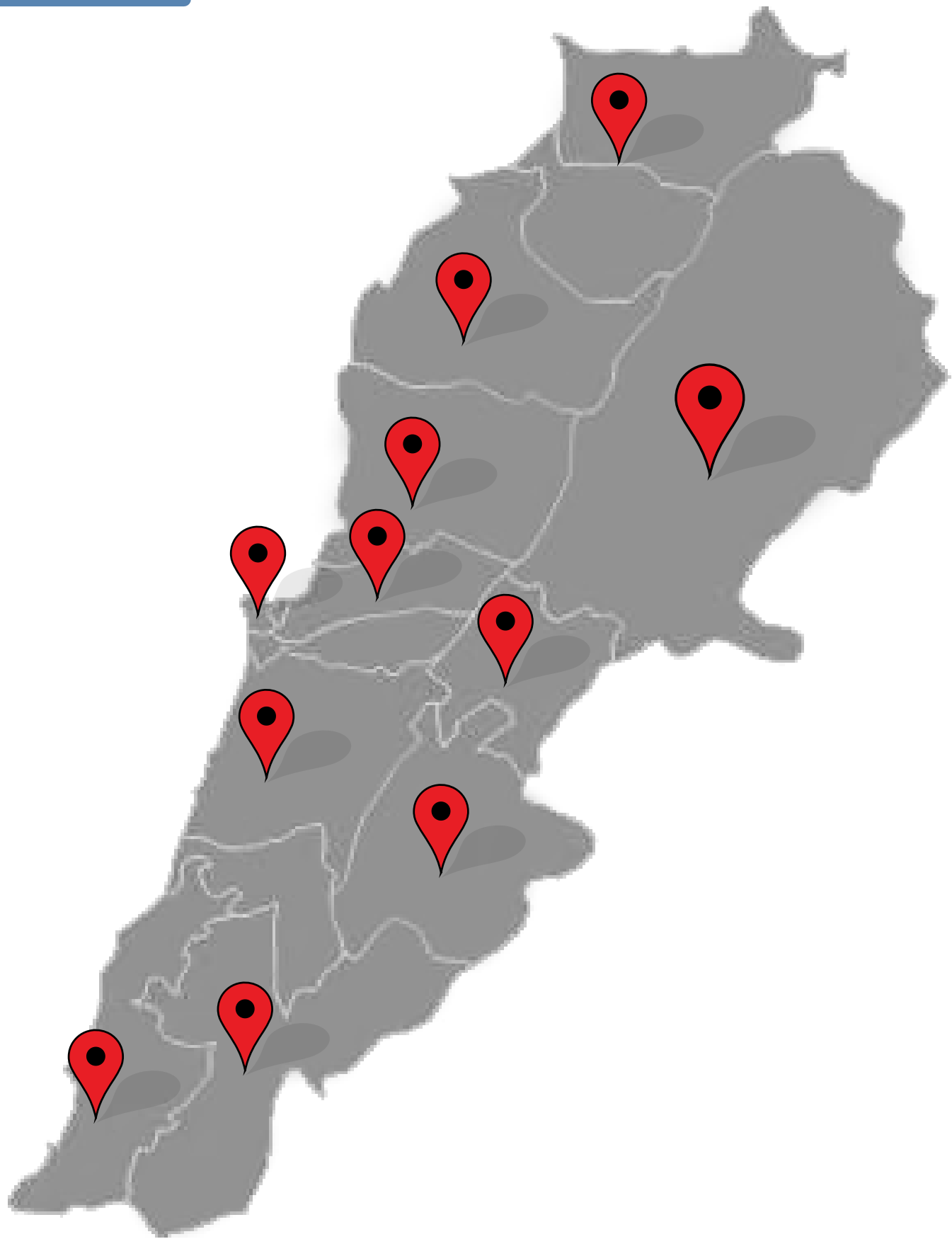
02. Monitoring methodology

Maharat built on its experience in monitoring the media and social media platforms during the election period and adopted the “Social Listening” method to monitor and collect information circulated about the electoral process in these communities at the local level, especially through private applications such as WhatsApp or on open social media platforms or even on the field.



The fact checking unit includes male and women journalists trained with the tools, methods and techniques for information verification. The results of information verification are published through reports that follow a clear methodology to measure the validity of the information circulated, in the “factometer” section of Maharat News, which is a member of IFCN, the international network for fact checking. And the observers contribute to the re-dissemination of the inspected information using the same channels through which the disinformation was circulated for a wider spread.

The distribution of LTOs



False and misleading news and its impact on the elections

Free and fair elections can only be achieved through inclusive participation, equal opportunities, and reliable information that contributes to shaping citizens' choices away from political propaganda, false and misleading information, and rhetoric of incitement and hate. This is of great importance in Lebanon, which constitutes an encouraging environment for misleading rhetoric, incitement and political propaganda in light of the prevailing political division.

The information environment accompanying the electoral process witnessed a radical transformation with social media platforms and changed the way news and information were consumed, which used to be limited to traditional media, thus this contributed to the spread of rumors and false news at a faster rate.

The spread of rumors undoubtedly leads to manipulation of public opinion and affects the choices of voters. Therefore, it is not possible to monitor the electoral process and monitor elections' democracy without looking at the impact of information circulated on social media.

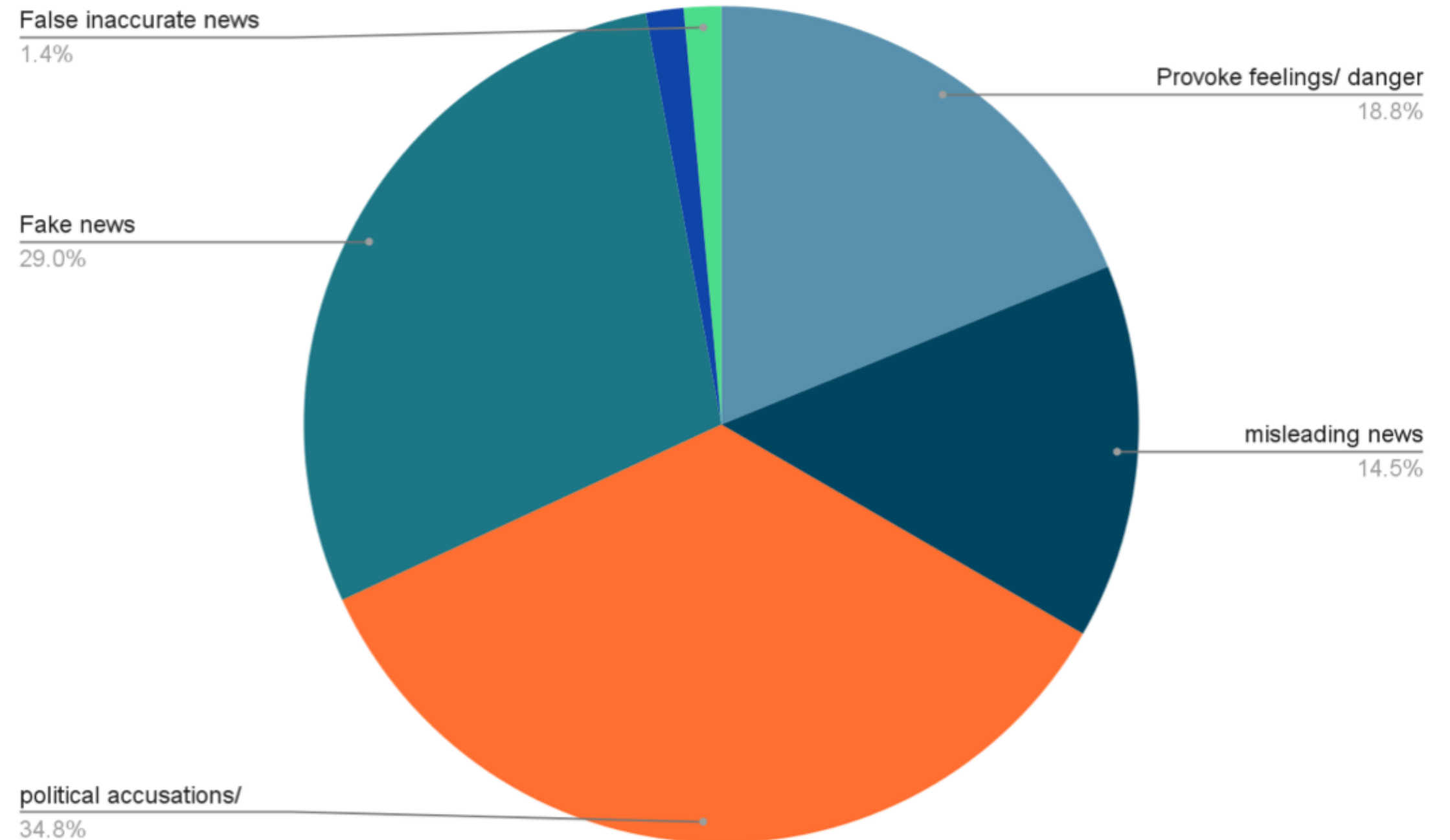
It is noteworthy that information disruption in all its forms, whether false or misleading, would affect voters' choices and spoil the integrity of the democratic process. And that false information is incorrect information, but the person who publishes it believes that it is true, while the misleading information is false information and the person who publishes it knows that it is false, and therefore it is a premeditated lie. There is another type of harmful information, which is information based on the truth and reality, but is used to harm people or groups.

03. Monitoring results and analysis: People's interactions with elections have not started

According to the data monitored through social listening via WhatsApp groups and open social media platforms including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Tik Tok, interviews with LADE observers about the current political atmosphere and the participation of public opinion in the electoral battles process, it was found that there is stagnation or even a lack of interactions and people's participation in any event related to the upcoming elections compared to the 2018 elections.

In terms of monitoring the types of false and misleading news, the observed data identified five types of news and interactions with the parliamentary elections that were shared through all social media:

In this context, political accusations and circulations dominated the voters' interactions (34.8%) as well as popular and inaccurate information (29%) aimed at defaming or glorifying political parties participating in the elections. On the other hand, with the aim of misleading voters and seducing the emotions of public opinion, false information (14.5 percent), incorrect facts (1.4 percent), and interactions to provoke feelings (18.8%) appeared in the observed data.



#1

The observed data showed that the candidates' speeches centered on most topics related to the elections, neutrality, money and monetary policies, and the explosion of the port of Beirut. Candidates focused their speeches during their election campaigns on these topics in order to appeal to the voters' emotions. Most of these statements were opinions that were not based on facts and could be placed within the framework of political promotion.



Despite the people's interest in these topics, the interaction with these statements and speeches was scarce, and the highest interaction was by the partisans to promote the ideas of the parties to which they belong to.

Candidates' speeches focus on appealing to voters' emotions



By monitoring the statements of candidates and the interactions of voters via Twitter, the above scheme identifies the most popular hashtags among the public opinion according to the observed data, including: the 2022 elections, now what, reveal accounts, all means all...

انتخابات 2022

كلن_يعني_كلن

دقيقة_مع_جبران

المحكمة الدولية



ونخبة_بخط

سيادة_حرية_استقلال

حوار_انتخابي

كشف_الحسابات

حزب الله

مع وعي الشباب

تسليم لبنان لايران لن يكون

و هلق شو

ثابتون_اليوم_وغداً

القوات_اللبنانية

خطي_عينك_دولار_لبنان

نحن_قدا

فضيحة_كبرى_قبل_الانتخابات

وجهان لعملة واحدة

#2 Daily problems and resentment against politicians is the priority

Daily economic and social conditions and poor conditions dominate the voters' discourse and are a priority for most citizens. Therefore, there has been an almost complete absence of local communities' engagement and interaction with election campaigns and political battles, as well as a resentment against traditional parties and politicians via social media on Twitter, Facebook, Tik Tok, Instagram and private applications such as WhatsApp.

The data collected showed that the electoral process at the local level has not yet begun, especially compared to the last elections in 2018, in which the electoral battle and political battles between the candidates began months before the elections, according to the observers who monitored the last elections.



#3 Fear of not being able to change is the basis of non-participation

The voters' political stances were absent regarding the new forces of change who ran for the elections, although these voters were among the supporters of the October 17, 2019 demonstrations.

Observers explain this absence for two reasons:

The first is their fear that history will repeat itself with the election of the current political class

The second lies in the ambiguity and haziness of the scene led by forces of change candidates



#4 Fear of political abolition among the Sunni community

Sectarian reactions emerged in some of the people's interactions in the electoral districts of a Sunni nature in an atmosphere of fear between presence and cancellation, as a result of the announcement by President Saad Hariri, the main representative of the Sunni sect and the Future Movement, to suspend political work in Lebanon and not to contest the upcoming parliamentary elections, with a collective Sunni support for this position, especially in the absence of strong political rivalries representing the sect.



#5 Funding for media campaigns has not started yet

The electoral campaigns that the candidates used to conduct before the elections were delayed compared to the 2018 elections, according to the observers who accompanied the last elections. The reason may be the lack of campaign funding and the fact that party funds have not yet been used in media campaigns, which makes it likely to become the scenario of buying votes before the election period.



04.

Check for false and misleading news



First news:

A video was circulated on December 14, 2021 through the “Tik Tok” application, showing the opposition of citizens in the town of Al-Marj to the installation of a banner in the name of “the people of the town of Al-Marj” in support of President Saad Hariri by the municipality in preparation for the parliamentary elections.

This video raises the legal problem of hanging party banners by municipalities. Maharat News' fact checking team reviewed the electoral laws for this aspect. It was found that the text of Articles 76 and 77 of the electoral law does not allow state employees, public institutions, municipalities and the Union of Municipalities to promote electoral campaigns for the benefit of a candidate or list, and the municipality, under the supervision of the competent authorities, is required to determine the places designated for posting electoral advertisements during the electoral campaign period.

Therefore, this video documents a violation of the election law, which exposes the municipality to accountability by the Election Supervision Commission, according to Article 19 of the law.

In the context of monitoring the data and verifying the information that is circulated, especially in terms of its legality and its compliance with the election law and general principles that guarantee the integrity and democracy of elections, three stories emerged that were circulated in local communities and through social media, especially in terms of the exploitation of public institutions for political promotion and propaganda and the nomination of representatives who are summoned before the judiciary in the case of the Beirut port explosion:

Check for false and misleading news



Second news:

The interaction of citizens at the local level in several areas was monitored through social media platforms with the movement of the families of the victims of the port, rejecting the decision of the Amal movement to re-nominate MP Ali Hassan Khalil in the South Governorate, Marjayoun District, and MP Ghazi Zuaiter in the Baalbek-Hermel Governorate in the Bekaa to the parliamentary elections 2022, alleging the illegality of this nomination, as the candidates are accused in the file of the explosion of the Port of Beirut on August 4, 2020.

This interaction raises the problem of the legality of the candidacy of wanted figures to the judicial investigation, such as the case of the candidacy of MPs Ali Hassan Khalil and Ghazi Zuaiter. Maharat News' fact checking team reviewed the electoral laws for this aspect. In a review of Elections Law No. 44 dated 6/17/2017 in its eighth article regarding the conditions that prevent candidacy, this article does not include any paragraph related to preventing judicial defendants from running for parliamentary elections.

Therefore, legally, the defendants can run for parliamentary elections, as "the accused is innocent until proven guilty."

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Check for false and misleading news



Third news:

One of the pioneers of social networking questioned on his Facebook page about the legality of donations by candidates running for elections, considering that it “is not for the sake of God but rather an electoral and clientelistic propaganda, it must be registered on these candidates and it is enough to invalidate their representation whenever they are found violating the legal principles of the democratic elections”. he continued, asking, “Are these donations recorded in electoral expenses?” He also attached his post with pictures showing news about candidates running for elections, such as Neemat Frem, Simon Abi Ramia and Emile Nawfal, talking about their provision of fuel oil aid to the infrastructure Department in their areas in order to open roads cut off by snow.

From this context, this interaction raises the question of the legality of these donations: the electoral law allows the candidate, in Article 60 related to spending and financing, to spend some of his own money for his electoral campaigns. According to the election law, when any candidate runs for the elections, he must provide the name of his financial auditor. At the end of each month, the auditor should submit an account statement to the electoral supervisory body. And at the end of the electoral period, the auditor submits a comprehensive account statement showing all electoral expenses. Yet, the steps adopted by the supervisory body are to scrutinize such electoral information are unknown.

Therefore, these donations are supposed to be counted within the electoral spendings, but there is no evidence that they are all scrutinized, and this is also a violation of the election law in the absence of a mechanism to monitor the spending of candidates, parties and groups over the previous years.

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