2022 REPORT FACT-CHECKING



مهارات Maharat

Government of the Netherlands

INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the Lebanese legislative elections of 2022, Maharat-news continued to fact-check rumors and information circulating on social media and most notably statements emanating from political actors. The post-election era saw a lot of information spread about the degradation of many infrastructure sectors, including the energy and telecommunications sectors, which were severely hit by Lebanon's unprecedented economic crisis.

The negotiations over the demarcation of the maritime border between Israel and Lebanon also dominated public debate as decision-makers attempted to politicize this matter in order to mislead the public and advance their own political agenda.

In addition, it is worth noting that the majority of fact checks during the post-election period tackled constitutionality and legislation issues as an important number of political statements in this regard were erroneous and exhibited a lack of legal knowledge in addition to a disregard for the rule of law.

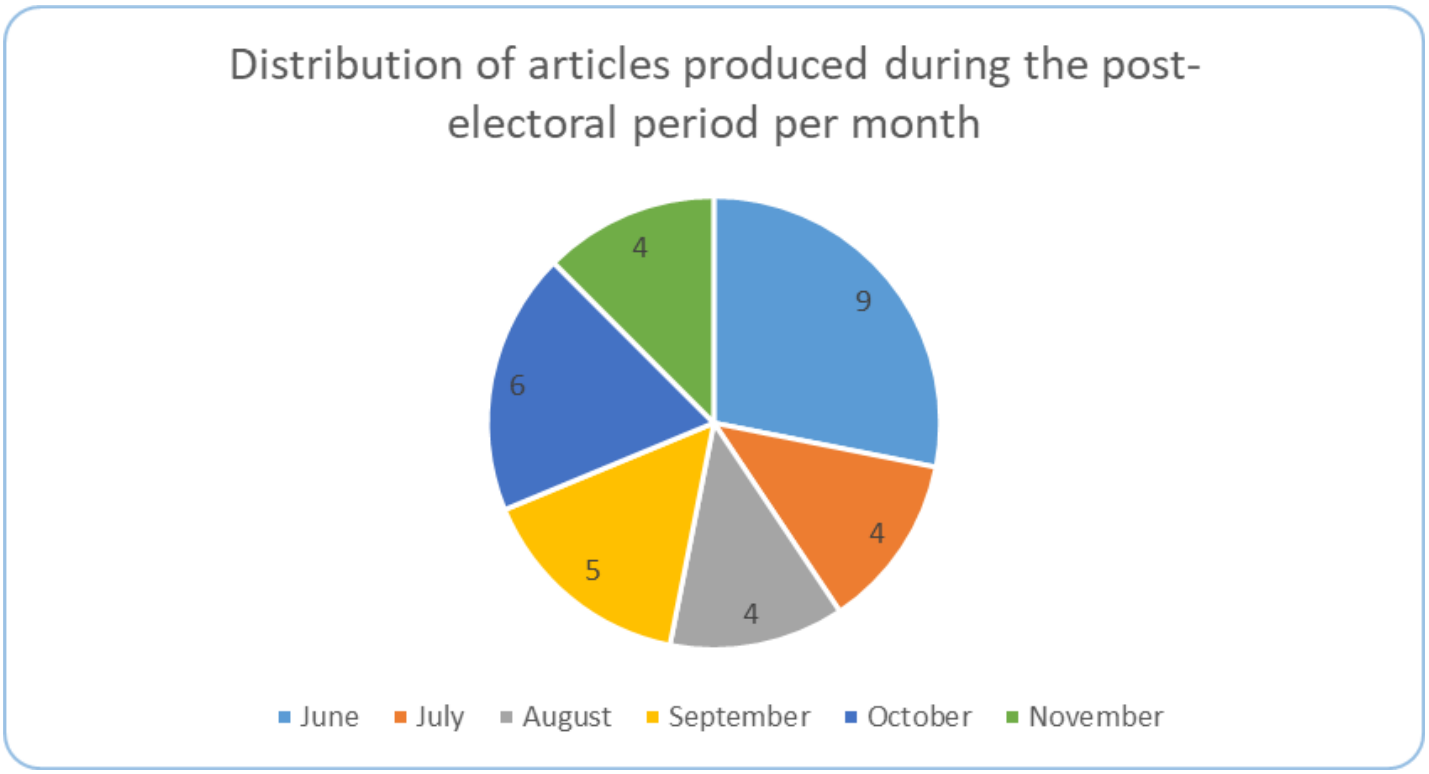
THE SAMPLE

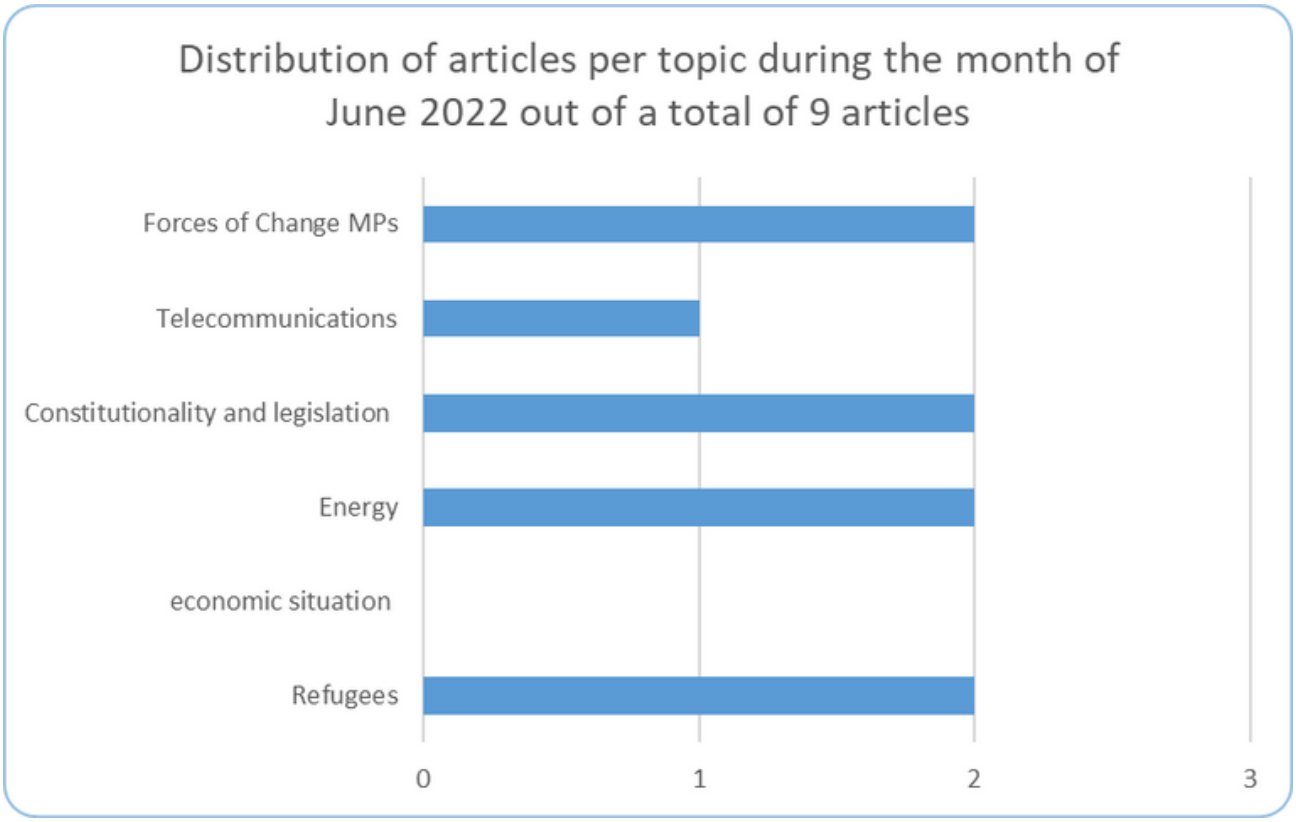
FACT-CHECKING

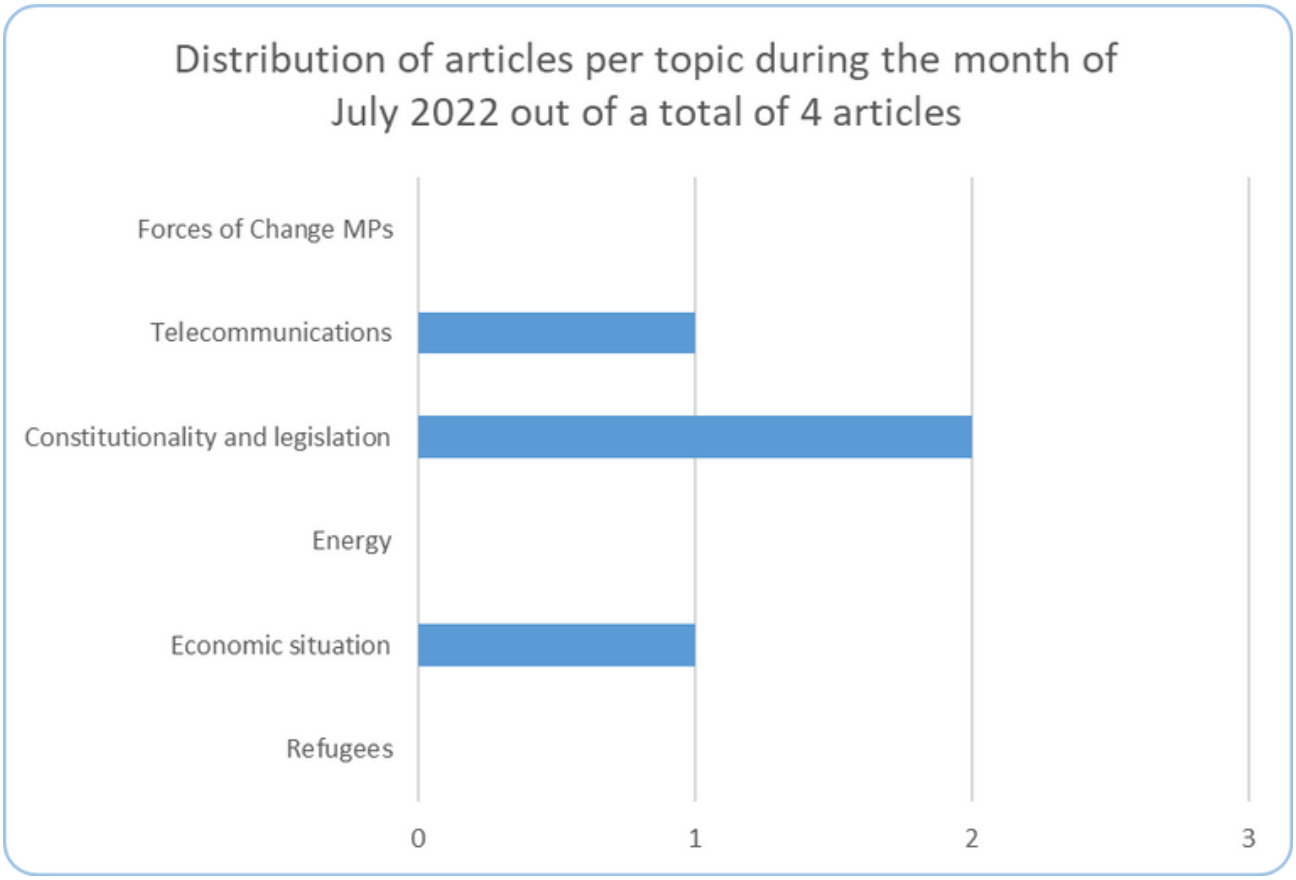
32 fact checks

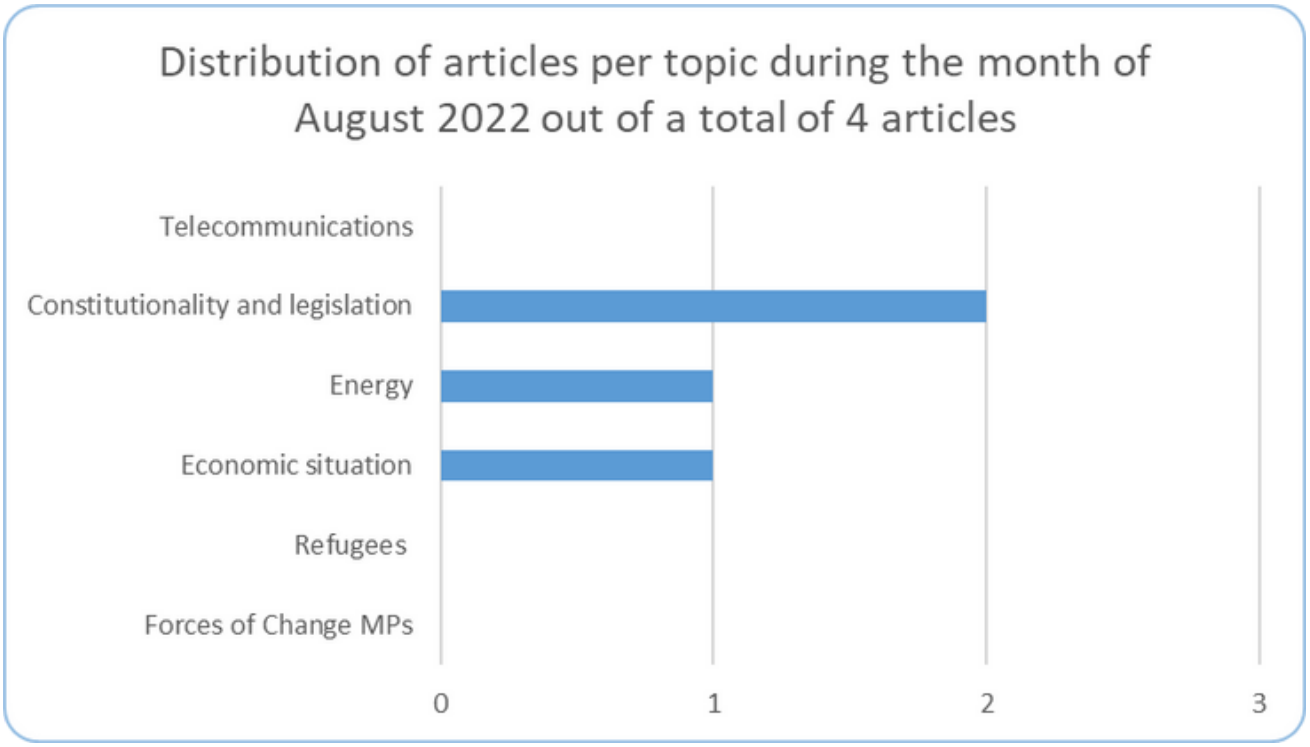


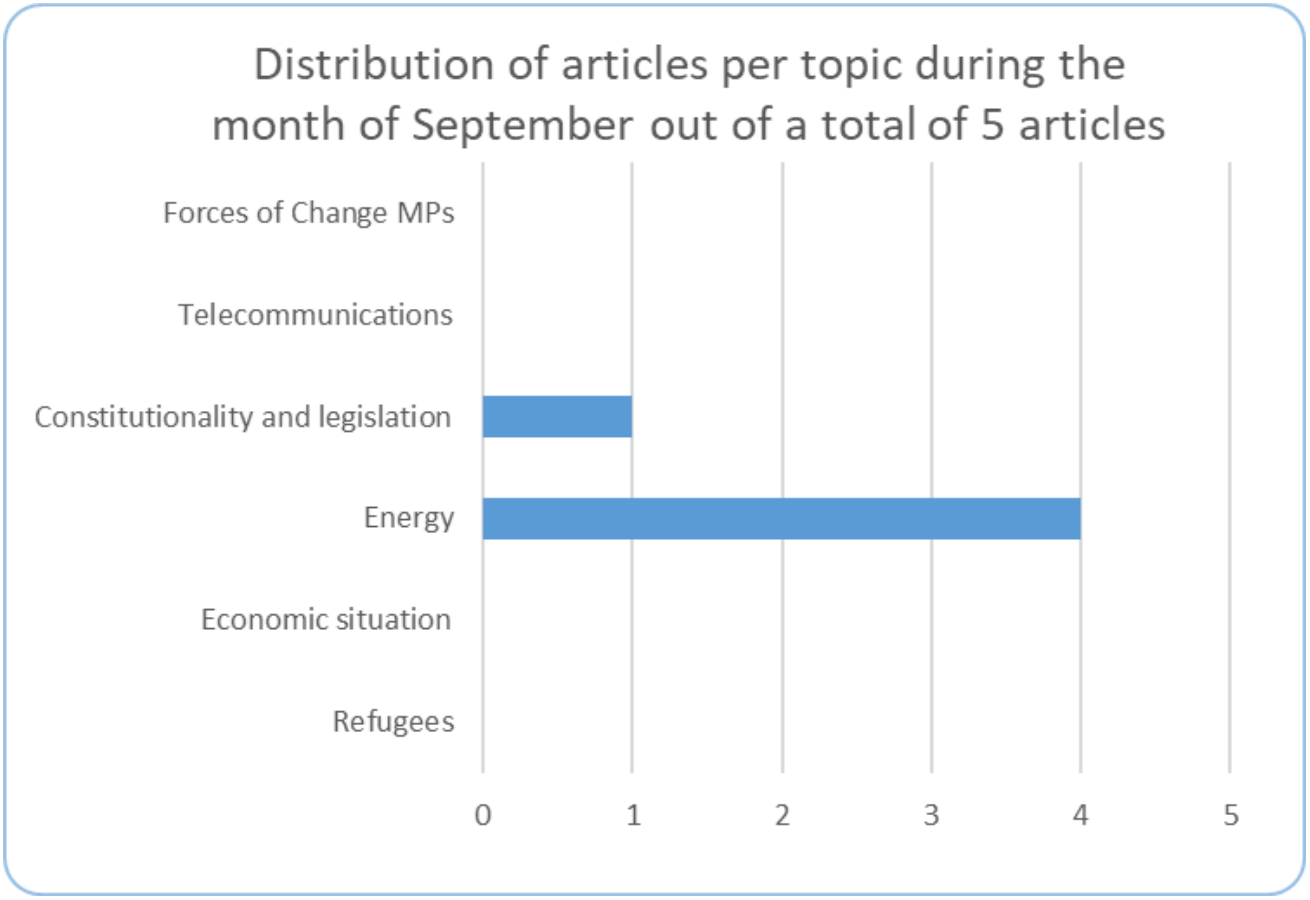
During the post-election period ranging from June 2022 until November 2022, Maharat-news produced 32 fact checks covering a wide range of topics including constitutionality and legislation, members of Parliament from the Forces of Change, energy, telecommunications, refugees as well as the economic situation in Lebanon.



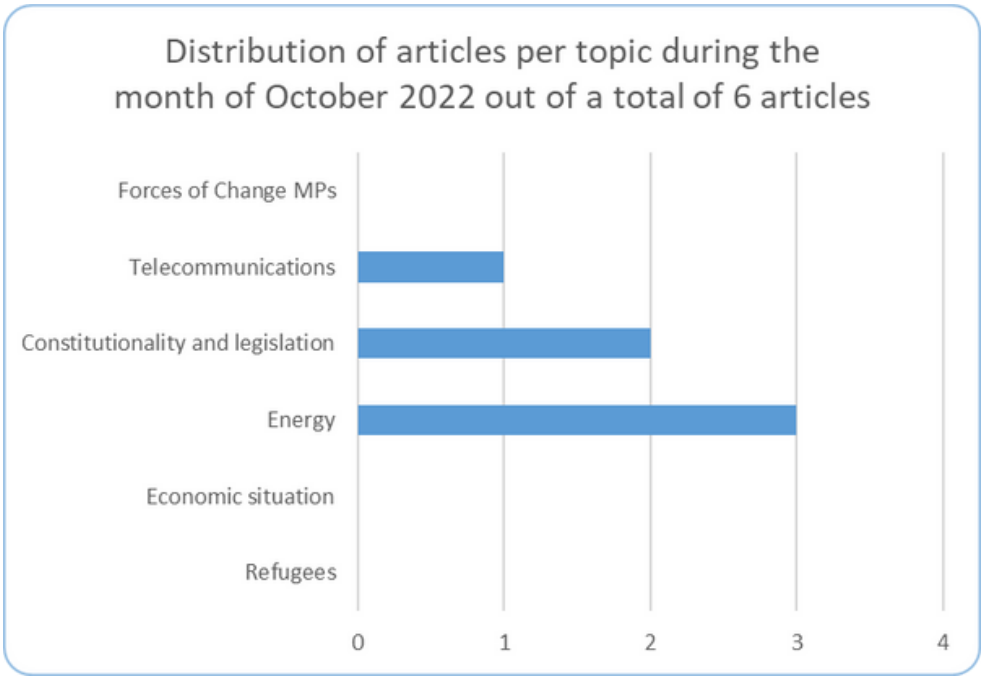

Distribution of articles per topic during the month of June 2022 out of a total of 9 articles
Forces of Change MPs
Telecommunications
Constitutionality and legislation
Energy
economic situation
Refugees
0
1
2
3

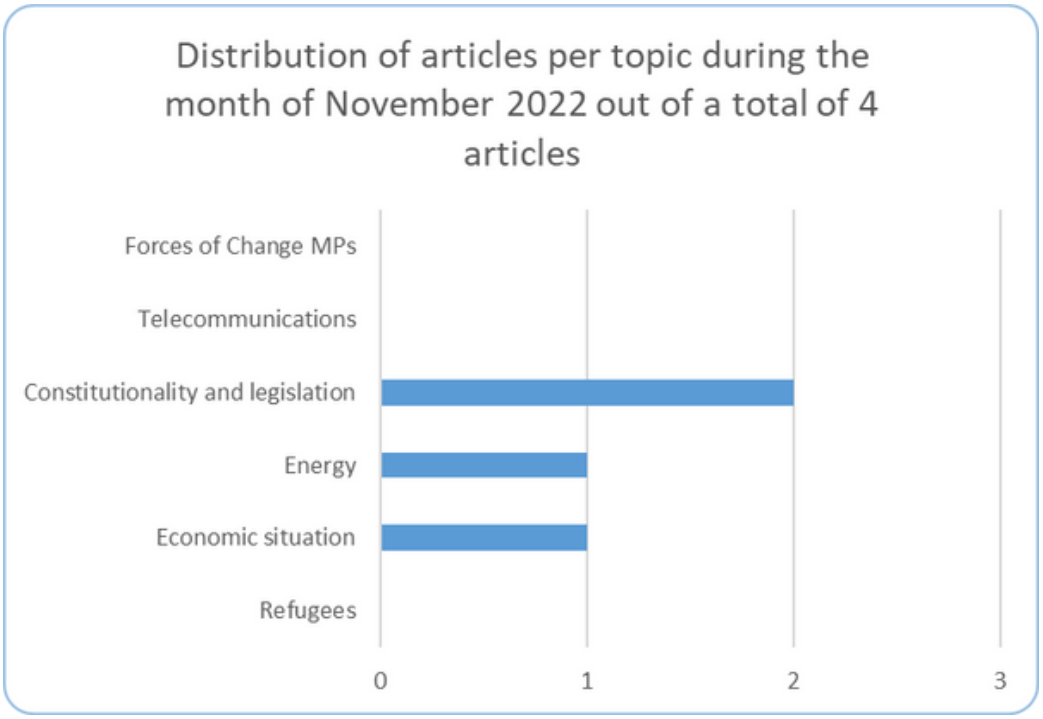

Distribution of articles per topic during the month of July 2022 out of a total of 4 articles
Forces of Change MPs
Telecommunications
Constitutionality and legislation
Energy
Economic situation
Refugees
0
1
2
3


Distribution of articles per topic during the month of August 2022 out of a total of 4 articles
Telecommunications
Constitutionality and legislation
Energy
Economic situation
Refugees
Forces of Change MPs
0
1
2
3


Distribution of articles per topic during the month of September out of a total of 5 articles
Forces of Change MPs
Telecommunications
Constitutionality and legislation
Energy
Economic situation
Refugees
0
1
2
3
4
5

The majority of articles produced in the aftermath of the elections covered the topic of constitutionality and legislation as well as energy-related subjects. Indeed, 11 articles were written about each of those 2 subjects. Additionally, 3 articles focused respectively on the economic topic and the telecommunications topic. Finally, 2 articles centered around refugees and 2 others aimed to spread disinformation against members of Parliament who support change.





ENERGY AT THE HEART OF THE DEBATE

As Lebanon faces an unprecedented energy crisis, much information about this topic has circulated during this period. Consequently, a significant number of articles published during the post-election period covered this topic. Indeed, the pricing of electricity and the number of supply hours were at the center of the debate, since the energy issue constitutes one of the major concerns of the Lebanese people at the moment. Furthermore, the accuracy of some energy-related information such as Bassil's rejection of Kuwait's fund offer to finance electricity projects in Lebanon in 2012 and the government's approval for the use of non-compliant fuel, reveals the bad governance of the Lebanese government in this regard, as well as the lack of legal knowledge of decision-makers. In addition, The Minister of Economy's request to citizens not to pay value-added tax on private electric generators bills which was unlawful constitutes another example of decision-makers' lack of legal expertise and disregard for the rule of law, further emphasizing bad governance.

- The political elite, notably the President of Lebanon and the member of Parliament Elias Bou Saab used misleading information building on unfounded data, to justify adopting line 23 instead of line 29 as a maritime border, thereby exploiting energy issues for political propaganda purposes. Indeed, the fact that the Qana field holds a significant amount of gas has not been established. In addition, the assumption that the agreement on the maritime border demarcation between Lebanon and Israel will directly generate positive externalities on the Lebanese economy as a whole is also based on irrational expectations.

Similarly, the claim made by the minister of energy, Walid Fayad on August 24, 2022, that the oil exploration contracts in Blocks No. 4 and 9 are unaffected by Novatek's withdrawal was imprecise and intended to deceive public opinion. All these fallacious statements emanating from politicians aim to present oil and gas as the solution to the escalating economic crisis for political gain while drawing attention away from the unwillingness and inability of the government to carry out crucial reforms.

LACK OF LEGAL KNOWLEDGE AND DISREGARD FOR THE LAW

Inaccuracies in information circulating on social media and politicians' statements regarding the Constitution or the Law reflected a lack of constitutional and legal knowledge in public discourse. Indeed, Sami Gemayel's intervention on the 13th of October 2022 in Parliament regarding the unconstitutionality of the two-third quorum required by the Parliament speaker for the second turn of the election of the presidential election demonstrates this lack of constitutional expertise.

In the same vein, posts circulating on social media which criticized "Forces of Change" MPs for submitting an amendment to protect Lebanon's gold reserves exactly similar to the pre-existing law were inexact as the amendment contained additional articles that would prohibit the Central Bank from undertaking gold swaps or any other operations without the Parliament's approval.

This lack of constitutional and legal knowledge was also demonstrated by the ministers' ignorance regarding the powers and prerogatives of other ministers as set by the law. This can be illustrated by the declaration of the Minister of Labour who stated that the Minister of Finance can unilaterally decide to amend the value of the customs dollar, even though it contravenes applicable laws.



Furthermore, the fact-checking conducted by Maharat-news also revealed the political institutions' flagrant disregard for the rule of law by confirming the statement of the member of Parliament Michel Douaihy on Twitter which declared that Parliament adopted the 2022 budget without approving the previous year's accounts which is contrary to the rules of procedure of the Lebanese Parliament.





Similarly, the fact-checking also demonstrated that judicial institutions did not uphold the rule of law either as the Supreme Judicial Council exceeded the limits of its powers in its decision to appoint an alternate judge for the Beirut port blast, based on the proposal of caretaker Justice Minister Henri Khoury.

This decision resulted from political pressure, further confirming the judiciary's lack of independence in Lebanon. It is also worth mentioning that, as proven by the fact-checking conducted by Maharat-news, the Minister of Justice's request to appoint an alternate judge in the Beirut port blast case is unconstitutional and constitutes undeniably an abuse of power.

STIGMATIZATION OF SYRIAN REFUGEES

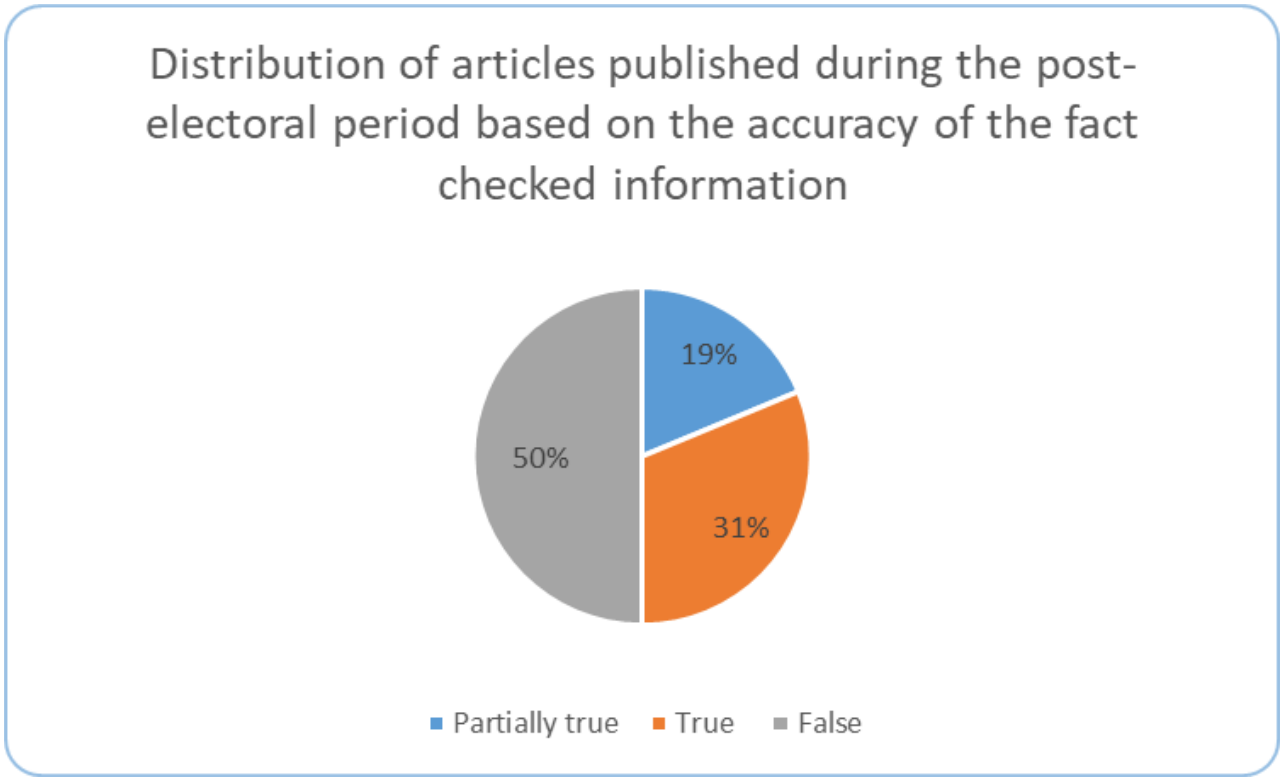
Lebanon’s compounded crises have contributed to reinforcing the stigmatization of Syrian refugees, which was already driven by media and manipulative political discourses. Indeed, Syrian refugees are increasingly used as scapegoats by decision-makers who try to draw blame away from the deficiencies of the Lebanese state, as proven by the fact-checking conducted by Maharat-news. Those manipulative political discourses contribute to the misrepresentation of the refugee crisis and its impact on host communities, fueling a harmful narrative that perpetuates a cycle of hatred, violence and discrimination.

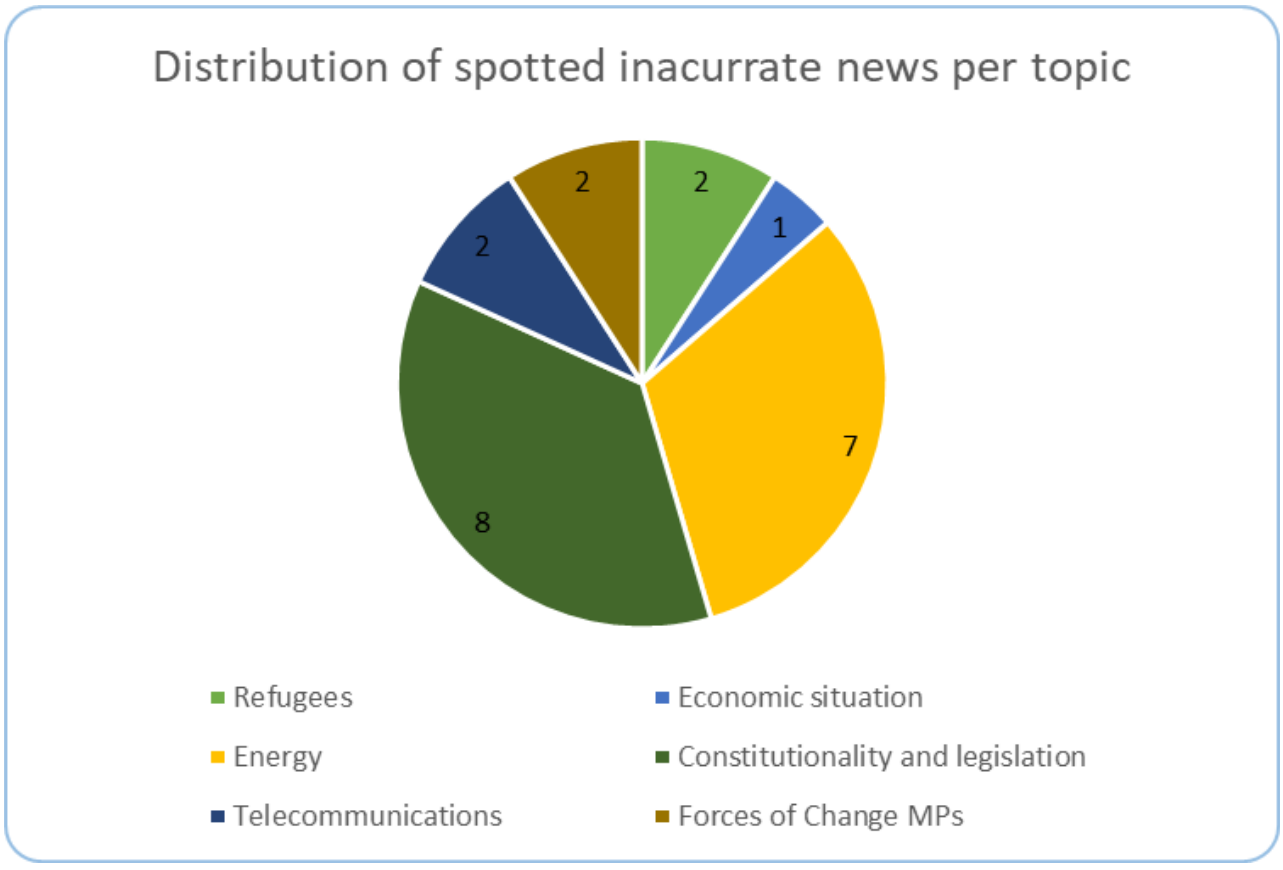
THE ACCURACY OF INFORMATION CIRCULATING DURING THE POST-ELECTION PERIOD

According to Maharat-news' fact-checking, 31% of the verified information during the post-election period was partially true and 50% of it was false. The topic of constitutionality and legislation, on which 8 facts were inaccurate, along with the energy sector, on which 7 facts were inaccurate, accounted for the majority of the disinformation spread in the aftermath of the elections.



the verified information during the post-election period that was was false


Distribution of articles published during the post-electoral period based on the accuracy of the fact checked information
19%
31%
50%
Partially true
True
False


Distribution of spotted inacurrate news per topic
2
1
7
8
2
2
Refugees
Economic situation
Energy
Constitutionality and legislation
Telecommunications
Forces of Change MPs

RECOMMENDATIONS:

01 Civil society organizations should raise legal awareness to promote a stronger rule of law culture and enable citizens to hold decision-makers accountable.

The government should enforce the Access to Information Law to enable journalists and researchers to access data related to key sectors including the energy and the telecommunications sector. 02

03 Civil society organizations should build the capacities of journalists and media practitioners to enable them to deliver balanced and inclusive narratives, avoiding any stigmatization or misrepresentation of refugees.

Media and journalists should produce informative and accurate content related to economic matters to equip Lebanese citizens with the necessary knowledge to actively participate in the public debate. 04

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