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*Actively Listening . Rationally Analyzing*

# Lebanon's 2022 Parliamentary Election

A Look into Political Parties' Online Behavior Vis-à-vis Alternative Candidates



**Dec 2022**

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THE SAMIR KASSIR FOUNDATION



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Lebanon and Syria



## INFLUEANSWERS

*Actively Listening . Rationally Analyzing*

InflueAnswers is a research and strategic communications consulting firm focused on driving digital transformation in MENA. InflueAnswers deploys innovative techniques in the field of research and communications, pushes for a data-driven approach, and builds data-driven strategies to help clients achieve their goals in their respective sectors.

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## THE SAMIR KASSIR FOUNDATION

The Samir Kassir Foundation is a Lebanese non-profit organization, which aims to spread democratic culture in Lebanon and the Arab world, encourage new talents in journalism, and build the movement for a cultural, democratic, and secular renewal. The Foundation's SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom has become the largest center monitoring violations against journalists and artists in the Arab Levant, as well as a reference for research on journalism and for training media professionals and enhancing their skills.

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Lebanon and Syria

The Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF) is the German Foundation for Liberal Politics. Established in 1958 by Theodor Heuss, the first President of the Federal Republic of Germany, FNF promotes liberal values; above all the freedom of the individual in their pursuit of happiness. FNF promotes liberal thinking and policies in cooperation with its local partners through civic education, international political dialogue, and political counseling. Within Lebanese civil society, the Foundation's work aims at contributing to building a state of law, fighting corruption, promoting good governance, and supporting participation in local politics.

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## I- Executive Summary

**“Lebanon’s 2022 Parliamentary Election: A Look into Political Parties’ Online Behavior Vis-à-vis Alternative Candidates”** is a report that monitors and analyzes quantitatively and qualitatively election-related content on social media from April 1 to May 24, 2022.

During this phase, 1,914 data entry points were analyzed out of 30,647 captured. These entry points analyzed were negative content disseminated by users against alternative lists and candidates. This report focuses on a sample of four alternative electoral lists, namely:

- *Twahhadna lil Taghyir* توحدنا للتغيير (United for Change), in Mount Lebanon’s fourth district (Shouf-Aley);
- *Maan Nahwa al Taghyir* معاً نحو التغيير (Together towards Change), in South Lebanon’s third district (Nabatiyeh-Bint Jbeil-Marjayoun-Hasbaya);
- *Nahwa al Dawla* نحو الدولة (Towards the State), in Mount Lebanon’s second district (Metn); and
- *Shamaluna* شمالنا (Our North), in North Lebanon’s third district (Besharri-Zghorta-Koura-Batroun).

In the case of *Beirut al Taghyir* بيروت التغيير (Beirut Change), in Beirut’s second district; keywords used to scrape the data resulted in insufficient number of data entry points, preventing a holistic analysis. The team had to resort to manual methods to retrieve data, mainly related to media appearance and online reactions, preventing as such a holistic analysis and limiting it to a timestamp analysis.

This study explores three main objectives:

1. Identifying the narratives circulated by traditional political party supporters and their digital behavior;
2. Understanding social media communication techniques and tools of potential misinformation used by established political parties; and
3. Defining archetypes of polarization in the digital sphere.

The main findings can be summarized as follows:

- Compared to traditional political party-affiliated candidates, alternative candidates were not offered the same ratio of media appearances. Nevertheless, these few appearances were occasions for traditional political party supporters to circulate negative content, be it trolling, disinformation by taking sound bites out of context, or allegations of hidden affiliation with different coalitions and external powers.
- Trolling was omnipresent throughout the content analyzed. We noticed that trolling was deployed to cover up a lack of political arguments, or through the form of users attacking candidates on their looks or choice of words.
- Traditional political parties “othered” alternative candidates. Othering implied warning, i.e., creating a portrait of an enemy out of the alternative candidate, and/or downplaying, i.e., taking away the ability of the alternative party to make a tangible change, hence keeping the power where it already lies, i.e., within the incumbent traditional political party.
- The reference to Lebanon’s civil war was common in the online discourse of traditional political party supporters. The accusation of communism was frequently used against alternative candidates, who were criticized for their alleged leftist tendencies or accused of being affiliated with the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP). This accusation was mainly used against Christian alternative candidates, echoing the civil war antagonism between leftist parties and the mostly conservative Christian population. Another civil war narrative resurfaced in Christian-majority districts, with allegations of affiliation with the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) and the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP). For example, users from the Lebanese Forces (LF) massively accused Shamaluna candidates of receiving support from SSNP, making this accusation an implicit warning against voting for these candidates. Also, Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) supporters warned against voting for Aley candidate Mark Daou, alleging he is “affiliated with PSP” in an attempt to revive the deeply rooted Michel Aoun-Walid Jumblatt opposition.
- Treason was an allegation used as a marker of patriotism. It was waged against candidates who are opposed to Hezbollah, accusing them of being “Zionists” and “traitors” conspiring against Hezbollah to serve an Israeli agenda. On the other end of the spectrum, treason was also used by LF supporters to warn against voting for candidates who were allegedly affiliated with Hezbollah calling them “Dhimmis,” meaning Christians seeking Muslim protection or aiming for Muslim votes in order to win elections.
- The popular protests of October 2019 were one of the pillars of polarization. In addition to the 2005-born polarization between the March 8 and March 14 blocks, and the subsequent positioning vis-à-vis Hezbollah, a new axis of polarization emerged: a “revolutionary” spectrum, evaluating candidates according to their conformity level and proximity to the traditional political establishment, their affiliation with banks and other parties, and their relationship with incumbent public figures.

## II- Introduction

### A- Context and Background

**“Lebanon’s 2022 Parliamentary Election: A Look into Political Parties’ Online Behavior Vis-à-vis Alternative Candidates”** is a report issued by InflueAnswers for Digital Analysis in collaboration with the Samir Kassir Foundation and Friedrich Naumann Foundation, following the May 15, 2022 parliamentary election in Lebanon. It is a report using mixed methodology, both quantitative and qualitative, relying mainly on scraping Twitter and media outlets. The report aims to understand behaviors, narratives, and archetypes of polarization circulated by Lebanese traditional political parties vis-à-vis alternative lists and candidates.

2005 was a year of drastic change in Lebanon. The assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri on February 14 led to a series of popular protests demanding the withdrawal of Syrian troops, directly accused of plotting and executing the assassination.

The 2005 Cedar Revolution, also known as Independence Intifada, marked the establishment of two political coalitions that differed on their position toward the role of Syria in Lebanon.<sup>1</sup> On March 8, 2005, Hezbollah and Amal Movement, aligned into what came to be known as the March 8 coalition,<sup>2</sup> staged a demonstration in support of Syria’s role in Lebanon.. On the opposing front, citizens from various Lebanese sects and political leanings took to the streets on March 14, 2005, demonstrating in downtown Beirut and demanding the immediate withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon.

These two political coalitions engaged in tense clashes and heated debates that split Lebanon into two main camps, March 8 and March 14. While March 8 and March 14 alliances do not necessarily capture the entire ideological spectrum in Lebanon, they embody, nonetheless, the wider spectrum of political parties that have constituted more than 90% of representatives<sup>3</sup> in the Lebanese Parliament. March 8 gathered Hezbollah, Amal Movement, Marada Movement, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), and the Lebanese Democratic Party (LDP), in alliance, as of 2006, with the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM). The main March 14 parties were the Future Movement (FM), the Lebanese Forces (LF), the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), and the Kataeb Party.

The polarization and antagonism between the two political coalitions were reflected on several occasions, where both camps turned media, elections, syndicates, demonstrations, and socio-economic issues into symbolic battlefields.

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1- Khatib, L. (2007). Television and public actions in the Beirut Spring. In Sakr, N. (Ed.), Arab media and political renewal: Community, legitimacy and public life (pp.28-43). New York, NY: I.B. Tauris.

2- Nasr, A. (2010). Imagining identities: Television advertising and the reconciliation of the Lebanese conflict. Arab Media & Society. Retrieved from [http://www.arabmediasociety.com/articles/downloads/20100330131339\\_Nasr\\_-\\_Lebanon\\_-\\_for\\_.pdf](http://www.arabmediasociety.com/articles/downloads/20100330131339_Nasr_-_Lebanon_-_for_.pdf)

3- *Idem*

On October 17, 2019, Lebanon witnessed mass anti-system demonstrations upon the government's announcement of new taxes. The countrywide protests devolved into expressions of anger against the entire political establishment, whom protesters blamed and continue to for the country's dire economic crisis. Following the October 17 decentralized protests, new faces emerged from outside the two coalitions and provided platforms for those long left marginalized, and from these faces, some decided to run for the 2022 election as alternative candidates.

## **B- Research Objectives**

The purpose of this report is to analyze digital behaviors, narratives, archetypes of polarization, and misinformation techniques of traditional Lebanese political parties and their supporters (broken down by party and by electoral district) vis-à-vis alternative candidates and lists. Social listening, data aggregation and analysis allow behaviors to be mapped and capture shaped narratives by partisans, in addition to drawing digital archetypes of polarization driven by offline political coalitions and events. The analysis focuses on three keys elements:

1. Narratives circulated by political party supporters and their digital behavior;
2. Techniques and tools of potential mis- and disinformation; and
3. Archetypes of polarization in the digital sphere.

### III- Research Methodology

The study uses mixed method research (MMR) to account for all aspects of behaviors and narratives. This report draws its results from the analysis of quantitative data retrieved from the digital space from April 1 to May 24, 2022, to capture the pre- and post-election digital activity as well as election day digital activity. The analysis then mirrors the outcomes with the thematic content analysis of observations, linking to a thematic and literature review to better understand different contexts of the emergence of each narrative. The quantitative data enables the extraction of trends in behavior and narrative, while further deep profile analysis is conducted using qualitative methods to 'read between the lines' and try to better explore the underlying discourse that fails to be reflected in quantitative data.

Recent trends in research methods have moved beyond an exclusivity of methods, and regardless of the type of method used at each level, it remains essential to integrate micro and macro explanations, as well as quantitative and qualitative techniques to enhance the power of results.<sup>4</sup>

#### A- Sampling and Data Aggregation

Due to the fact that digital spaces are vast and diverse resulting in their content taking countless different forms,<sup>5</sup> the main source of data aggregation was based on keywords captured from the official names of alternative candidates' electoral lists:

- *Twahhadna lil Taghyir* توحدنا للتغيير (United for Change), in Mount Lebanon's fourth district (Shouf-Aley);
- *Maan Nahwa al Taghyir* معاً نحو التغيير (Together towards Change), in South Lebanon's third district (Nabatiyeh-Bint Jbeil-Marjayoun-Hasbaya);
- *Nahwa al Dawla* نحو الدولة (Towards the State), in Mount Lebanon's second district (Metn); and
- *Shamaluna* شمالنا (Our North), in North Lebanon's third district (Besharri-Zghorta-Koura-Batroun).

With the digital social listening tool used in this analysis, instant access to the keywords mentions across social media, news, blogs, videos, forums, and podcasts were given across social platforms.

- In the case of *Beirut Al Taghyir* بيروت التغيير (Beirut Change), in Beirut's second district; keywords used to scrape the data resulted in insufficient number of data entry, preventing a holistic analysis. The team had to resort to a manual method to retrieve data, mainly related to media appearance and online reactions, hence the analysis of this electoral list being limited to timestamp analysis.

4- Thaler, K. M. (2017). Mixed methods research in the study of political and social violence and conflict. *Journal of mixed methods research*, 11(1), 59-76.

5- What is Digital Spaces. IGI Global. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/it-is-real-colouring/50086>



The time frame for this study was from April 1 to May 24, 2022, capturing the pre-election phase (mainly lists announcements, media appearances, and offline events), election day, and the post-election phase, including media appearances and reactions.

To meet one of the objectives of this report, which is analyzing users' behaviors, inauthentic accounts, deleted accounts, suspended accounts, and deleted tweets were also taken into consideration for analytical purposes.

The digital tool allowed the aggregation of all users employing any of the predetermined key words, in their text or using the key word as hashtag. It is important to note that following the Cambridge Analytica and Facebook scandal,<sup>6</sup> both Instagram and Facebook changed their policies and rules and limited access to individual accounts, meaning only public accounts could be tracked on Meta platforms.

## **B- Data Labeling and Cleaning**

For this report, a total of 30,647 data points were aggregated. These entry points do not include retweets and other impressions. Within the scope of this report, campaigns and users supporting alternative lists and candidates were not taken into account and instead only negative interactions from users were. The data was organized as such:

1. News labeled as neutral and excluded from the analysis.
2. Sentiments labeled as positives and excluded from the analysis.
3. Negative sentiments labeled by tags (tags and themes being analyzed at a later stage).

After cleaning the data points for analysis, a sample of 1,914 data points were retained for the purpose of this report.

## **C- Data Visualization**

Quantitative data analysis was based on keywords, narratives, themes, user positioning, and identification of inauthentic accounts, deleted tweets, suspended, and deleted accounts.

Keywords were the main words taken out of the original text and helped understand the narrative circulated by the user and the text. Narratives were the overall 'story' told by the text. Themes were the aggregation of similar narratives under one umbrella topic. User positioning was identified through a deep profiling method, tracking the activity of the user up to three months prior to the period of the study in order to precisely label the political affiliation of the user.

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6- Confessore, N. (2018, April 4). Cambridge Analytica and Facebook: The scandal and the fallout so far. The New York Times. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/04/us/politics/cambridge-analytica-scandal-fallout.html>

It is important to highlight a number of preliminary remarks:

Some users' political affiliations were stated by the users themselves, either in their Twitter biography, their banners, and/or their open statements supporting a certain party or by their activity of consistently retweeting one party's statements.

In this exercise, the people who worked on the report did not, at any moment, engage with any user and operated within an ethical framework of do no harm, to preserve the objectivity of the results.

Analyzed data was sent in its final form to the data scientists who used [Tableau software](#)<sup>7</sup> for data visualization to extract visual charts of the data and to perform a number of meaningful calculations, including:

- 1- Percentage allocated to each theme
- 2- Percentage of users per political party
- 3- Percentage of narratives circulated by users
- 4- Percentage of inauthentic behavior per political party
- 5- Percentage of influencers' accounts per political party
- 6- Distribution of activity peak per time/event

## D- Limitations

Throughout the study, the team was faced with certain limitations, mainly:

- Interviews done on mainstream channels (shaping public opinion/setting the agenda) throughout the campaigning period were not stored on the news outlets' platforms and removed from their social media channels.
- Private accounts on Instagram and Facebook cannot be monitored due to their privacy policies. Only data collected from Twitter and Reddit as well as news outlets was analyzed.
- Keywords used during the data scraping exercise were mainly the names of the electoral lists and not the candidates' names. Data collected for *Beirut al Taghyir* was insufficient and did not provide significant information for analysis, hence the analysis only focused on offline versus online campaigning.

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7- <https://www.tableau.com/>

## IV- Definitions of Themes

Falling back on the introduction, this report will rely on the year 2005 to draw the thematic framework of the analysis, the year that left the Lebanese political landscape dominated by two main camps: the March 8 and the March 14 alliances.

Hence the definitions of these themes:

### 1- Allegation of affiliation with March 14 and its entities

These are allegations against independent candidates accusing them of being affiliated with FM, LF, PSP, and Kataeb, and/or connected to entities such as media platforms and/or TV channels which were or still are owned by March 14 parties or by people affiliated with this alliance.

### 2- Allegation of affiliation with March 8 and its entities

These are allegations against independent candidates accusing them of being affiliated with Hezbollah, Amal, FPM, and SSNP, in addition to allegations of supporting the Assad regime and Iran, allies of Hezbollah.

### 3- Treason

Treason is a recurring theme, and allegations are context dependent. For example, in the case of *Maan Nahwa al Taghyir* in South Lebanon's third district or *Twahhadna lil Taghyir* in Mount Lebanon's fourth district (Shouf-Aley), treason is directly related to accusations of being pro-Israel manifested by words such as "Zionist," "traitor," or "collaborator." Whereas the analysis around *Nahwa al Dawla* in Mount Lebanon's second district (Metn), treason can be either related to Israel or to the alleged candidate affiliation with Hezbollah. The latter is manifested with the word "Dhimmi," referring to Christians who seek the the protection of a Muslim entity, in this case, Hezbollah.

### 4- Othering

Othering is a phenomenon in which some individuals or groups are defined and labeled as not fitting in within the norms of a social group. It is an effect that influences how people perceive and treat those who are viewed as being part of the in-group versus those who are seen as being part of the out-group.

Othering also involves attributing negative characteristics to people or groups that differentiate them from the perceived normative social group. It is an "us v. them" way of thinking. Under othering, we include smearing, trolling, allegations of unclear political positioning, and downplaying. These allegations contribute to discrediting the candidate, harming their reputation, and to building a negative image around them.

### 5- Hate by proxy

Alternative candidates were often associated with controversial public figures and organizations. This association came from a media appearance with these figures, open statements from these figures supporting candidates, or just assumptions and/or allegations of support. Users often took a stance against some candidates because of their association with figures such as comedian Shaden Fakih, journalist Dima Sadek, journalist Ghadi Francis, former minister Charbel Nahhas, banker Antoun Sehnaoui, and media magnate Tahsin Khayyat, or organizations such as Al Jadeed television or Kulluna Irada, a political action group.

## **6- Conformity**

Allegations of corruption, unclear sources of fundings, protecting groups of thugs, inciting violent acts, and acting like the establishment, are all narratives used under the theme of conformity.

## **7- Electoral law disagreement**

The theme concerns the narrative around the actual electoral law, which by default forces candidates to form lists together even if they do not share the same political agenda, thus preventing voters from cherry-picking their candidate. Attacks focused on candidates who had on their lists other people with tainted reputation.

## **8- Mis- and disinformation**

This theme refers to all photos, videos, documents, and texts that were either photoshopped, cropped, edited, taken out of context, or referring to an event that did not take place and/or with a lack of a credible source.

## **9- Context specific allegations**

These were allegations targeting Jad Ghosn from the *Nahwa al Dawla* list in Metn. These allegations are either related to the Metn context or to Jad Ghosn as a journalist and candidate; they were not observed in other districts. Allegations were composed of accusations of conspiring against the church and being opposed to decentralization.

## **10- Ties with the West**

This theme encompasses allegations against alternative candidates who are accused of affiliation with Western embassies, getting funding support from Western organizations, promoting European and American sanctions against other political leaders, or having close ties with David Schenker, the former United States Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs.

## **11- Affiliation with banks**

This narrative was circulated to accuse alternative candidates of affiliation with the Lebanese banking system and promoting the banks' economic and financial interests.

## **12- GCC-focused narrative**

All accusations of affiliation with or opposition to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are assembled in this theme. Narrative such as promoting anti-Saudi sentiments or being affiliated with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

## **13- Allegation of support for federalism**

Specifically in North Lebanon's third district, *Shamaluna* was accused of promoting federalism, be it from its name, or because of allegations of identitarian politics.

## **14- Leftism**

Some alternative candidates were accused of being affiliated with the Lebanese Communist Party or being leftist with their approach to the economy. Some users used this narrative to demonize other candidates, especially in Christian-majority areas, where this type of allegation is rooted in the history of mostly conservative Christian parties opposed to the Communists and the leftists in general during the civil war.

## V- Behavior of Political Groups vis-à-vis Alternative Candidates

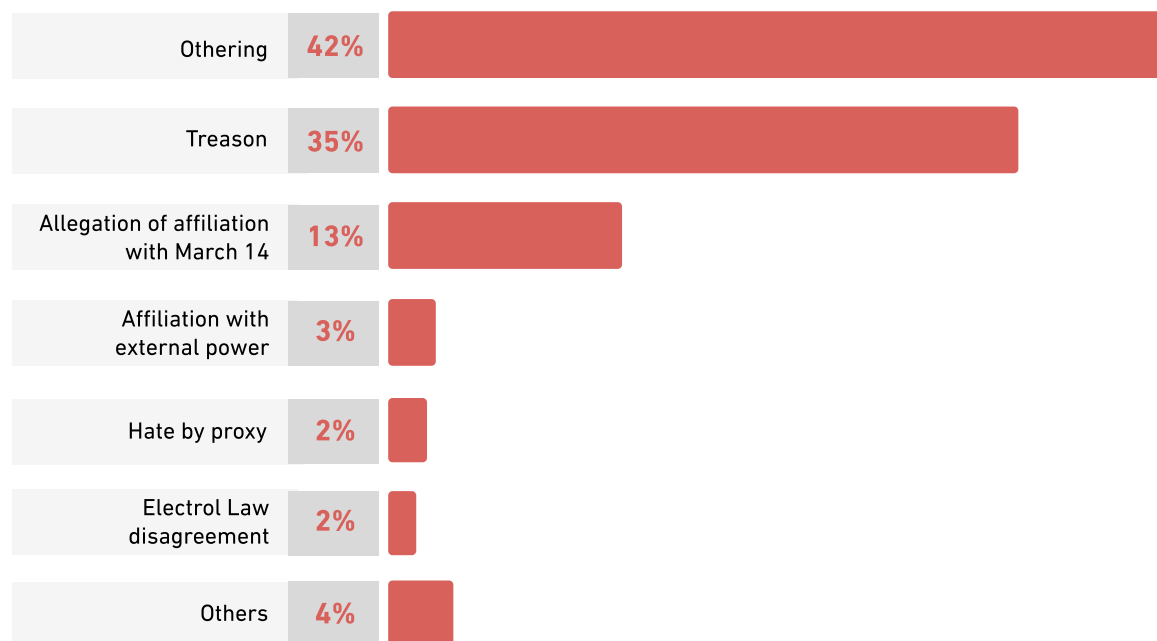
The following analysis mixes between quantitative data collected, labeled, and visualized and qualitative analysis. The structure of the analysis follows the three main variables: users, narrative, and timestamp.

### A- The case of *Maan Nahwa al Taghyir*, South Lebanon III

On April 10, 2022, the *Maan Nahwa al Taghyir* electoral list was publicly announced under the slogan “We liberated the land; we need to liberate the person.” This list was composed of 11 members, the most notable names being Firas Hamdan, Elias Jradeh, and Ali Mourad.

The South III district was long dominated by the Amal-Hezbollah coalition without any significant competition. “The display of power and support as polling stations closed across the country reflected the parties’ confidence that they would keep a tight grip in their [southern stronghold](#).”<sup>8</sup>

The following section tackles the type of narratives circulated by users around candidates from the *Maan Nahwa al Taghyir* list.



**Fig.1 - Distribution of themes**

8- Rose, S. (2022). Hezbollah dominates election campaign in southern Lebanon, but opposition holds out hope. The National. Retrieved from <https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/lebanon/2022/05/15/hezbollah-dominates-south-lebanon-vote-day-but-opposition-hold-out-hope/>

Others include: Affiliation with banks, allegation of affiliation with March 8, conformity, leftism, mis- and disinformation.



Fig.2 - Word cloud aggregated through key words

42% of the narratives were about othering, 35% about allegation of treason and 13% about allegation of affiliation with March 14 while the other narratives such as affiliation with external powers and electoral list disagreement were present but to a lesser extent.

The theme othering encompasses several narratives, like trolling, warning, and accusing alternative candidates of not having a clear political positioning. Othering also included comparing Marwan Kheireddine, a former minister of State and the chairman of Al Mawarid Bank, running on Hezbollah and Amal's list with the endorsement of PSP leader Walid Jumblatt, to independent candidate Firas Hamdan. The former, being accused of several cases of corruption, was labeled as "better" than the "traitor" Firas Hamdan.



Img. 1

In the article [Lebanese political opposition faces intimidation in Hezbollah-controlled South](#) published in The National,<sup>9</sup> Ali Mourad talked about being branded as a traitor as part of Hezbollah's election strategy. "When Hezbollah said that the elections was their political July war, that means that everybody against them are traitors," said Mr. Mourad, referring to a speech by a top Hezbollah official in February in which he compared the upcoming parliamentary election to the 2006 war that pitted the group against Israel. This weapon was clearly waged against alternative candidates, especially Firas Hamdan and Ali Mourad, with 35% of the narratives being allegations of treason, and users taking positioning towards Hezbollah as a benchmark for a candidate's loyalty to Lebanon or treason.

A clear example can be given here. The allegation of treason against Firas Hamdan was opposite to the support for Elias Jradeh, who was a candidate on the same list, as Jradeh was an ex-detainee at the Israeli-controlled Khiyam detention center.

9- Rose, Sunniva. "Lebanese Political Opposition Faces Intimidation in Hezbollah-Controlled South." The National, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/2022/04/20/lebanese-political-opposition-faces-intimidation-in-hezbollah-controlled-south/>.

Deleted Tweet/Tweet from Deleted Account



للصراحة ما حدا هاجم الياس جرادي اقله مش الكل الهجوم كان فراس حمدان

Deleted Tweet/Tweet from Deleted Account



قارن خطاب الياس جرادة عن المقاومة ب خطاب فراس حمدان عن المقاومة، بتعرف انه خبرية لائحة وحدة بتحمل خطاب واحد هي تفنيصة، حسب الظاهر الياس جرادة رح يكون عالنقيض من فراس حمدان بمجلس النواب.

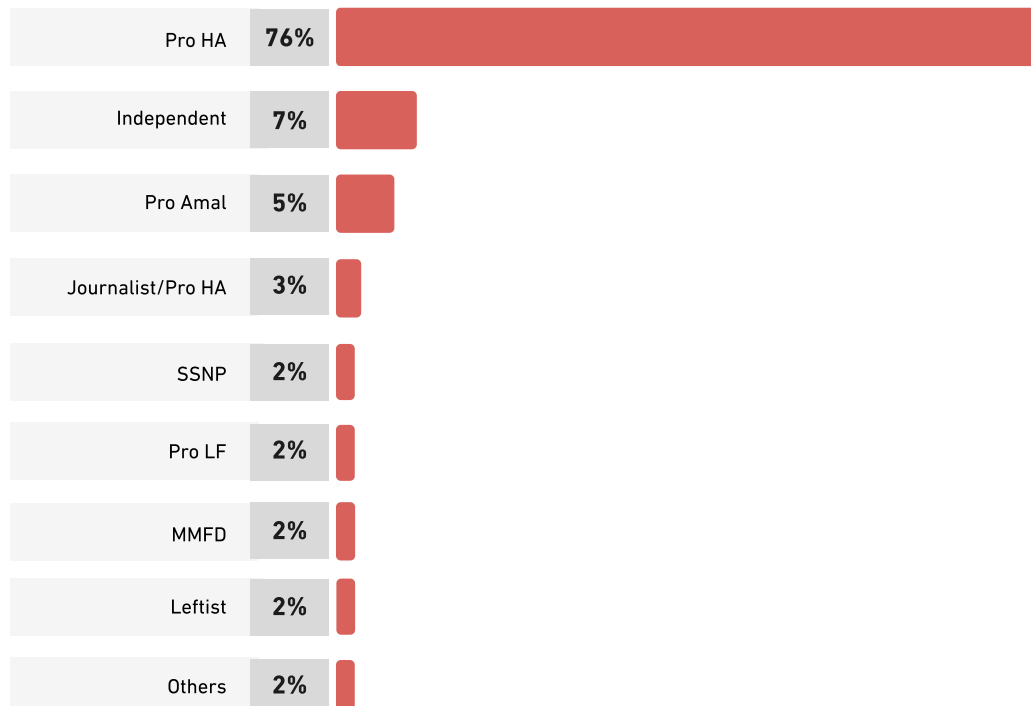
The allegation of affiliation with March 14 was mainly waged against Firas Hamdan who was frequently accused of affiliation with the Progressive Socialist Party. Another accusation claimed that Walid Jumblatt, head of PSP, was using Hamdan to display power in the South, Hezbollah's stronghold, even though PSP officially supported Kheireddine's candidacy on Hezbollah's list.

Deleted Tweet/Tweet from Deleted Account



جماعة جنبلاط منقسمين وأغلبهم متعاطف مع فراس حمدان

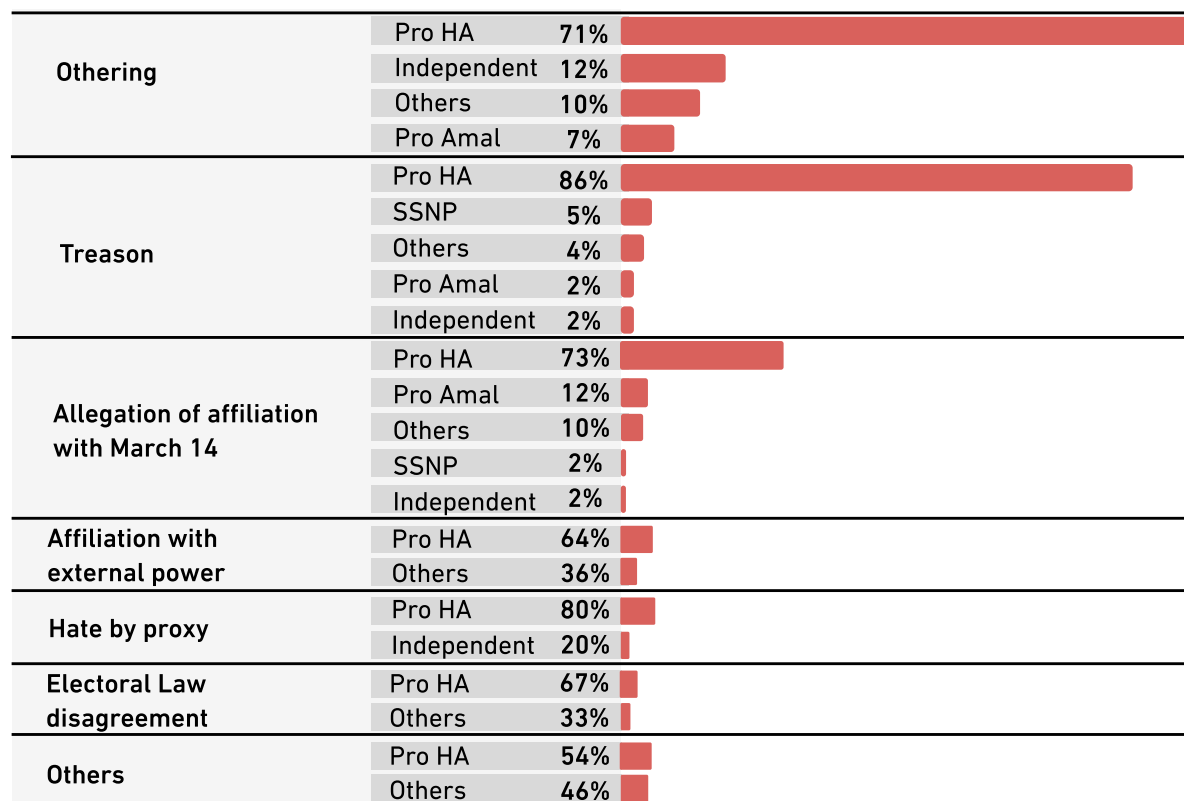
While 90% of the narrative around alternative candidates centered around the themes of othering, allegation of treason and allegation of affiliation with March 14, further investigation revealed that 76% of users were directly affiliated with Hezbollah while 7% were independent (see in the figure below). This goes back to the fact that South III has long been a Hezbollah stronghold.



**Fig. 3 - Distribution of users per political affiliation**



Others include: Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), Independent against Muwatinoun wa Muwatinat fi Dawla (MMFD), pro-FPM, pro-FM, Nasserist, pro-October 17. The figure below links users' political affiliation with the narrative they are circulating.



**Fig. 4 - Distribution of narratives of users by political affiliation**

We can see clearly that the three main themes othering, allegation of treason, and allegation of affiliation with March 14 were mainly circulated by users affiliated with Hezbollah. The same applies for allegations of affiliation with external powers and hate by proxy.

One of the tactics deployed by pro-Hezbollah users, is to extract photos from personal Facebook accounts to confirm allegations.

Photos from Ali Mourad's Facebook page were taken and republished by pro-Hezbollah individuals, showing his support to the Syrian revolution and holding the Kurdistan flag. This aimed to circulate the narrative of allegations of conspiring against Hezbollah and treason, through deduction, i.e, if he is pro-Syrian revolution, then he is a traitor.



**Img. 2**



**Img. 3**

It is interesting to highlight that the hate by proxy theme was mainly a narrative built around the association of the candidates with Dima Sadek, Shaden Fakih, and Lokman Slim, three anti-Hezbollah Shiite figures.



**Img. 4**

Independent users, who were second after Hezbollah affiliated users with 7% of content dissemination, were focusing on three narratives, othering, hate by proxy, and electoral law disagreement. Hate by proxy was mainly targeting candidates associated with MMFD.



**Img. 5**

And othering was about some independent candidates' unclear political positioning towards Hezbollah.



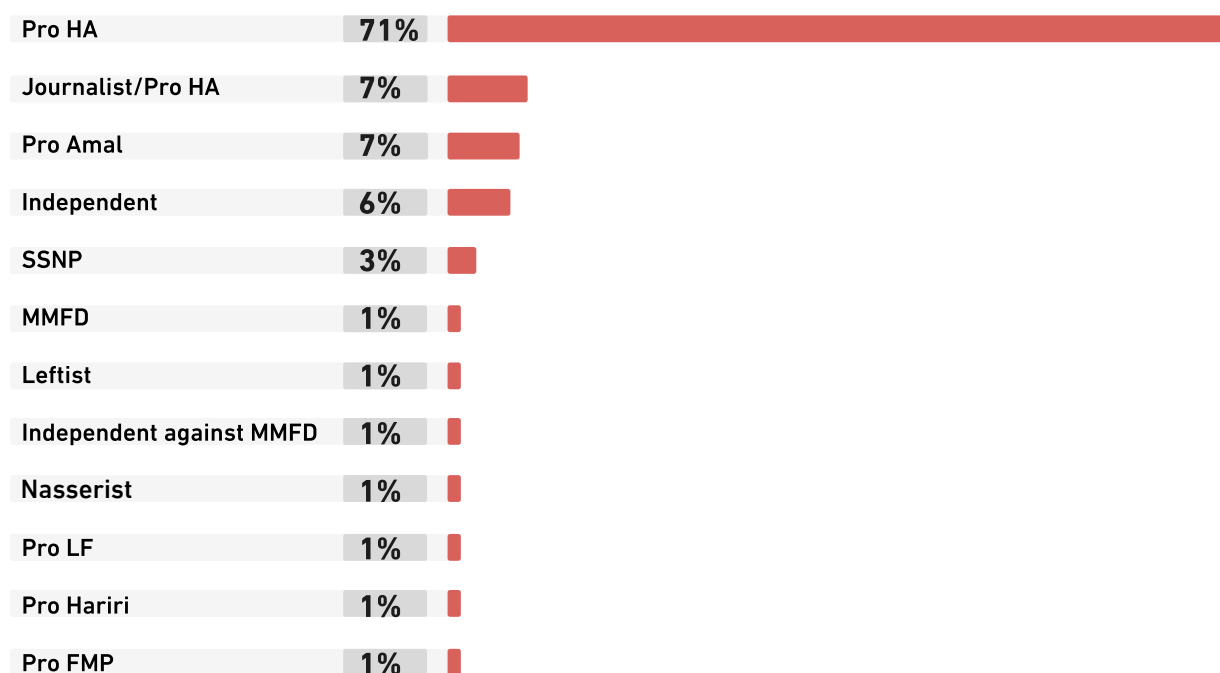
The figure below depicts inauthentic behavior and the political affiliation of users conducting an inauthentic behavior vis-à-vis the campaign.



**Fig.5- Source of inauthentic behavior**

Inauthentic behavior was identified through the aggregation of inauthentic accounts (recently created and having less than 10 followers), suspended accounts, deleted accounts, and deleted tweets. This type of behavior is divided among two types of users: Hezbollah affiliated users and independent users.

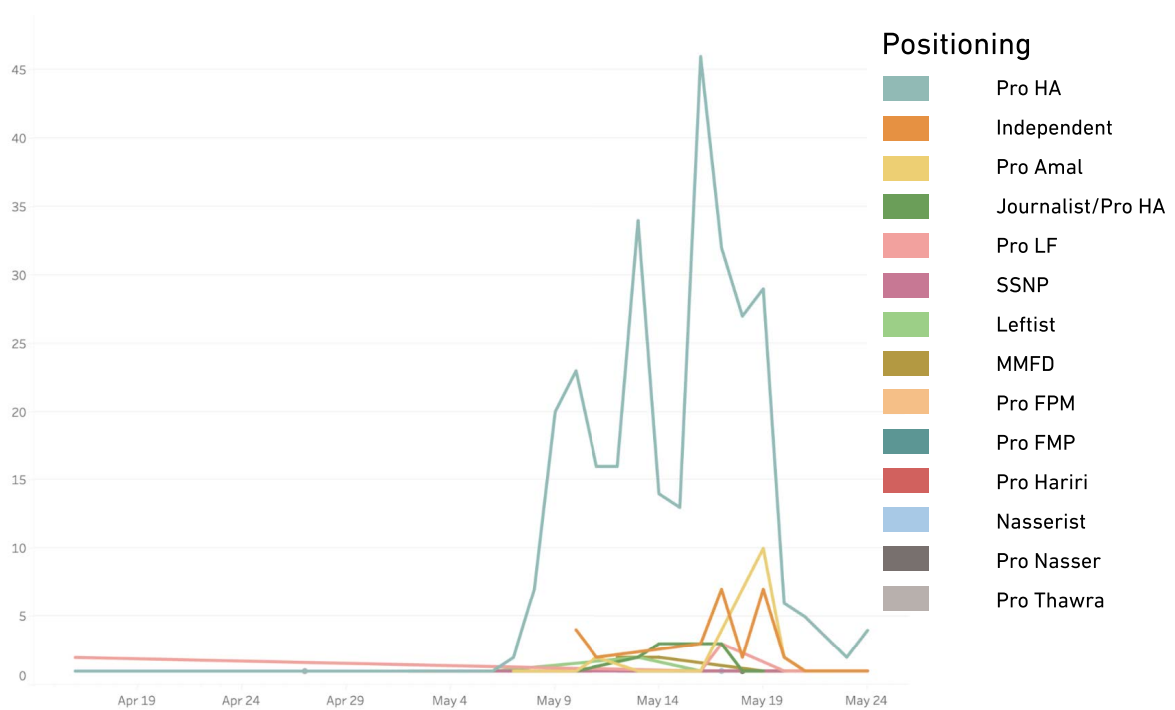
As for influential accounts, be it from accounts with large following and/or journalists' accounts, we can see that 78% of accounts with large following are held by Hezbollah affiliated users and pro-Hezbollah journalists, as shown by the figure below:



**Fig.6- Influential accounts per user's political affiliation**

## Timestamp

In the section below, offline and online events were mirrored in order to put online activity in context. This process is useful to understand and analyze the spike in users' online activity per political affiliation and link it with what was happening on that day in the media or online.



**Fig.7- Timestamp online/offline events for Maan Nahwa al Taghyir**

On April 10, 2022, the *Maan Nahwa al Taghyir* electoral list in the South III district was announced.



**Img. 6**

Prior to the launch, pro-Hezbollah individuals dug up old tweets and statements from candidat Firas Hamdan and started circulating accusations of treason against him. Additionally, Hamdan and Ali Mourad were associated with MMFD and other alternative candidates like Jad Ghosn, in an attempt to circulate a narrative of othering against them.



Img. 7 and 8



Img. 9 and 10

Digging up old statements to generate an online campaign against Hamdan was a common tactic. Tweets from 2020 and 2021 were reshared by pro-Hezbollah users to validate accusations of treason against him.



Img. 11, 12 and 13

On May 8, Al Akhbar Journalist Hassan Illaik known for being pro-Hezbollah, published [a video on Al Mahatta](#), under the title: "This candidate is an insult to the people of the South."

In parallel, pro-Hezbollah individuals launched allegations of treason against both Mourad and Hamdan in an attempt to discredit them a few days before the elections.



Img. 14



Img. 15



Img. 16



Img. 17



Img. 18

On May 10, Megaphone [published a video](#) in which it depicts six tactics used by Hezbollah to discredit any opposition candidate in the south. Soon after, a counter-campaign was indeed launched warning people from voting for alternative candidates, following a narrative of treason.





Img. 19



Img. 20



Img. 21



Img. 22



Img. 23



Img. 24



Img. 25



Img. 26



Img. 27



Img. 28



Img. 29



Img. 30



Img. 31

Finally, on May 16, *Maan Nahwa al Taghyir* secured two seats in parliament, Elias Jradeh for the Greek Orthodox seat and Firas Hamdan for the Druze seat in Hasbaya-Marjayoun. This development marked a precedent in post-war elections, in a district strictly controlled by Hezbollah, Amal, and their allies. Along with the news, a spike in negative content against Hamdan was noticed, pro-Hezbollah users recalled the Chouaya incident and Hamdan's position then. On August 7, 2021, [a truck carrying a multi-barreled rocket launcher](#), used by Hezbollah to target Israel, was intercepted by residents of the village of Chouaya, in the caza of Hasbaya. The video widely circulated on social media shows angry villagers, some in traditional Druze attire, blocking the passage of the truck and accusing Hezbollah of endangering civilian lives by launching rockets near residential areas. In response to the interception of the truck, Hezbollah militants attacked Druze farmers in the region.



Img. 32



Img. 33



Img. 34



Img. 35



Img. 36



Img. 37



Img. 38

## B- The case of *Nahwa al Dawla*, Metn

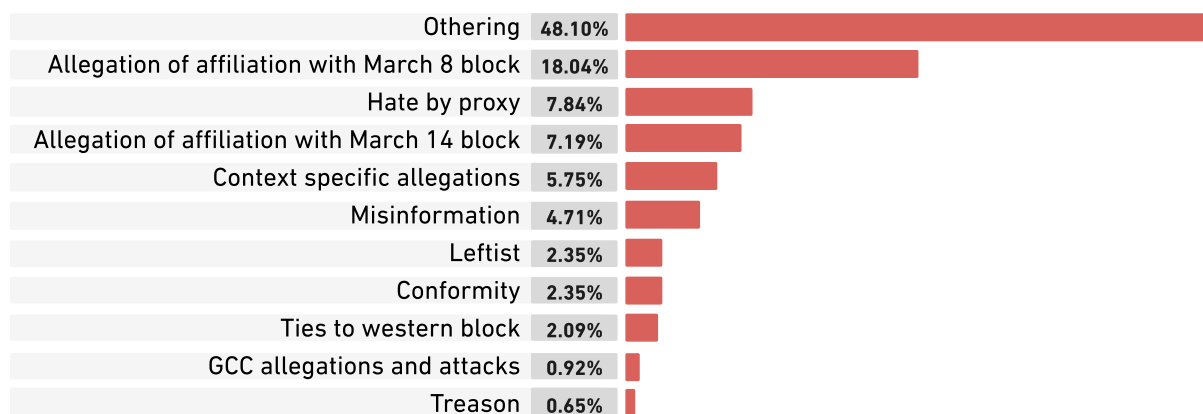
On May 8, 2022, the *Nahwa al Dawla* electoral list was publicly launched in the second Mount Lebanon district (Metn) under the slogan “We can turn the crisis into an opportunity.” This was the slogan adopted by MMFD across Lebanon. The list included five candidates, the most prominent among them being Jad Ghosn. Ghosn is a journalist, television host, news reporter, and documentary producer. He was a news reporter for OTV and Al Jadeed and is now independently hosting the “Reflections with Jad Ghosn” podcast on YouTube.

The Metn area is a Christian majority district, with Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, and Armenian Orthodox voters mainly. The Metn electorate has traditionally been divided among traditional forces such as FPM, Kataeb, LF, and Tashnag as well as supporters of the Murr family.

Quoting Imad Salamey, a professor of political science at the Lebanese American University in his [interview with AP](#): “The new independent lists are non-sectarian, so they lack communitarian support, which is the dominant discourse in Lebanese politics.”

The diversity and strength of traditional forces in the Metn district is reflected in the diversity of themes and allegations against alternative candidates and the diversity of political affiliation of users waging these allegations.

The following section tackles the type of narratives circulated by users around candidates from this list.

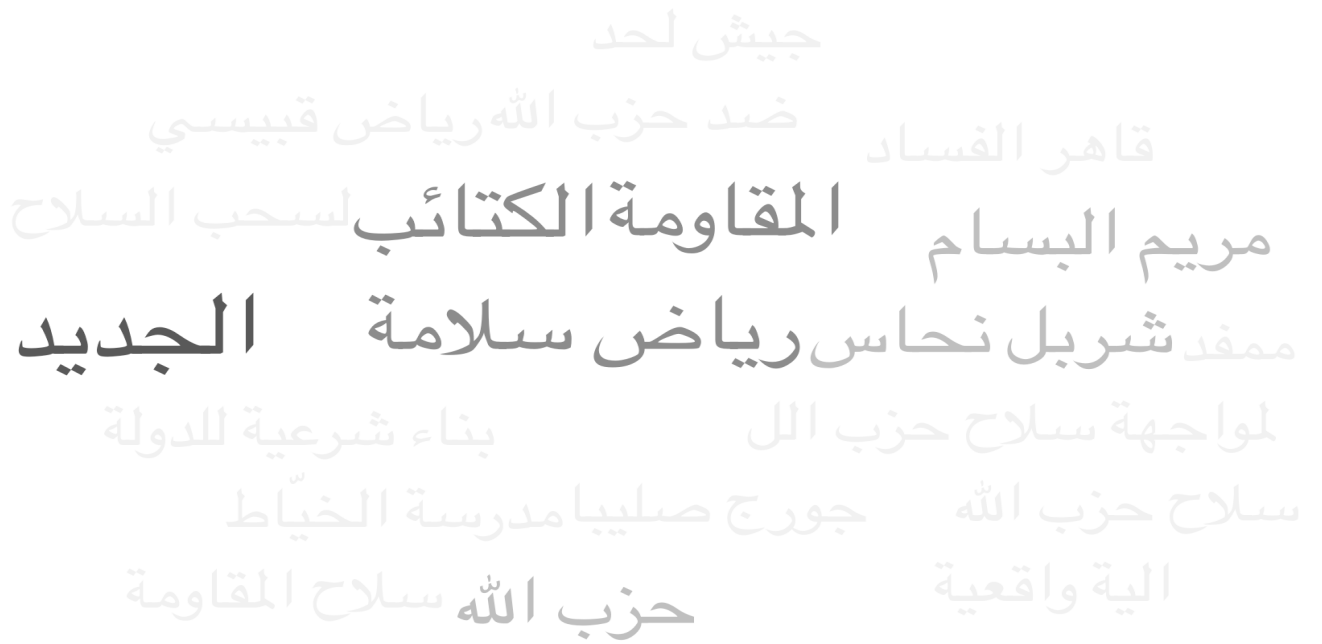


**Fig.8- Distribution of themes**



**Fig.9- Word cloud for context specific allegations aggregated through key words**





**Fig.10- Word cloud for allegations of affiliation with March 14, aggregated through key words**

48% of the narratives were about othering, 18% about allegation of affiliation with March 8, and 8% about hate by proxy. Whereas the other narratives such as allegations of affiliation with March 14 and context specific allegations were present but to a lesser extent.

The theme othering encompasses several narratives, like trolling, warning, accusing alternative candidates of not having a clear political positioning, allegations of racism, having double standards, being opportunists, and being strangers to Metn.



Although all candidates on this list were subject to a smear campaign, Jad Ghosn was the main targeted candidate, followed by Lucien Bou Rjeily, Verena Al Amil, and Shaden Maalouf. The hate by proxy theme is one to highlight, as Ghosn was associated with more than 10 organizations and public figures covering a wide range of political affiliation, ranging from Asaad Abou Khalil, a pro-Hezbollah columnist, and Sami Kleib a journalist with March 8 leanings, to Riad Salameh, governor of Banque du Liban, to Gino Raidy an independent digital influencer producing anti-Hezbollah content, and Ghadi Francis a pro-Hezbollah journalist.



**Img. 39**

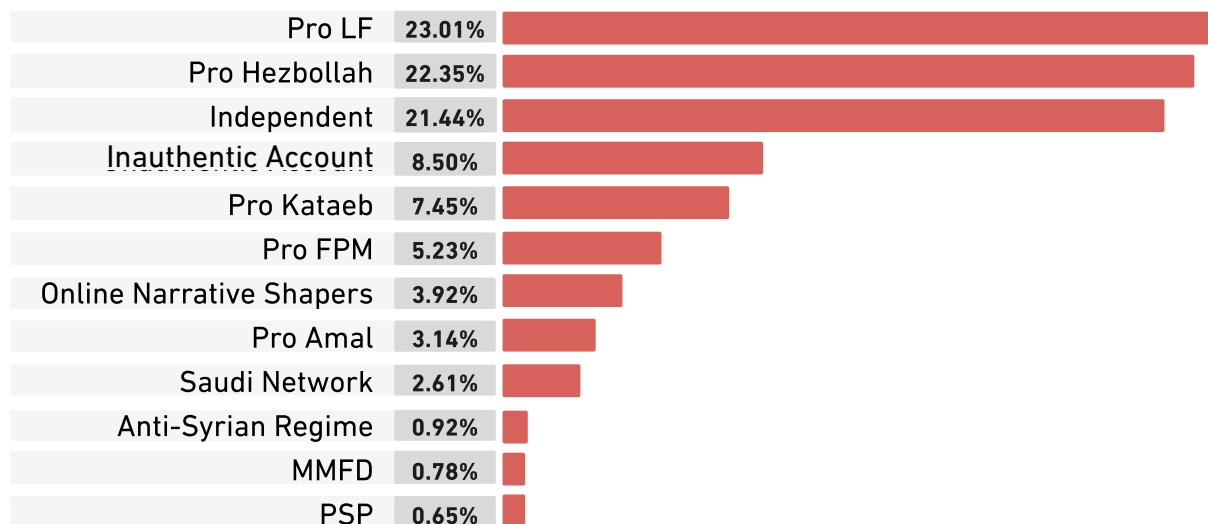


The allegation of affiliation with the March 8 theme, ranking second after othering, is inclusive of the following allegations: allegations of affiliation with FPM and Hezbollah. These affiliations were based on several factors: Ghosn’s previous work for OTV, a channel linked to FPM, being on the same list with MMFD, headed by Charbel Nahhas, who was a minister of Telecommunications and Labor endorsed by President Michel Aoun’s FPM, and Ghosn’s take on Hezbollah’s weapons.



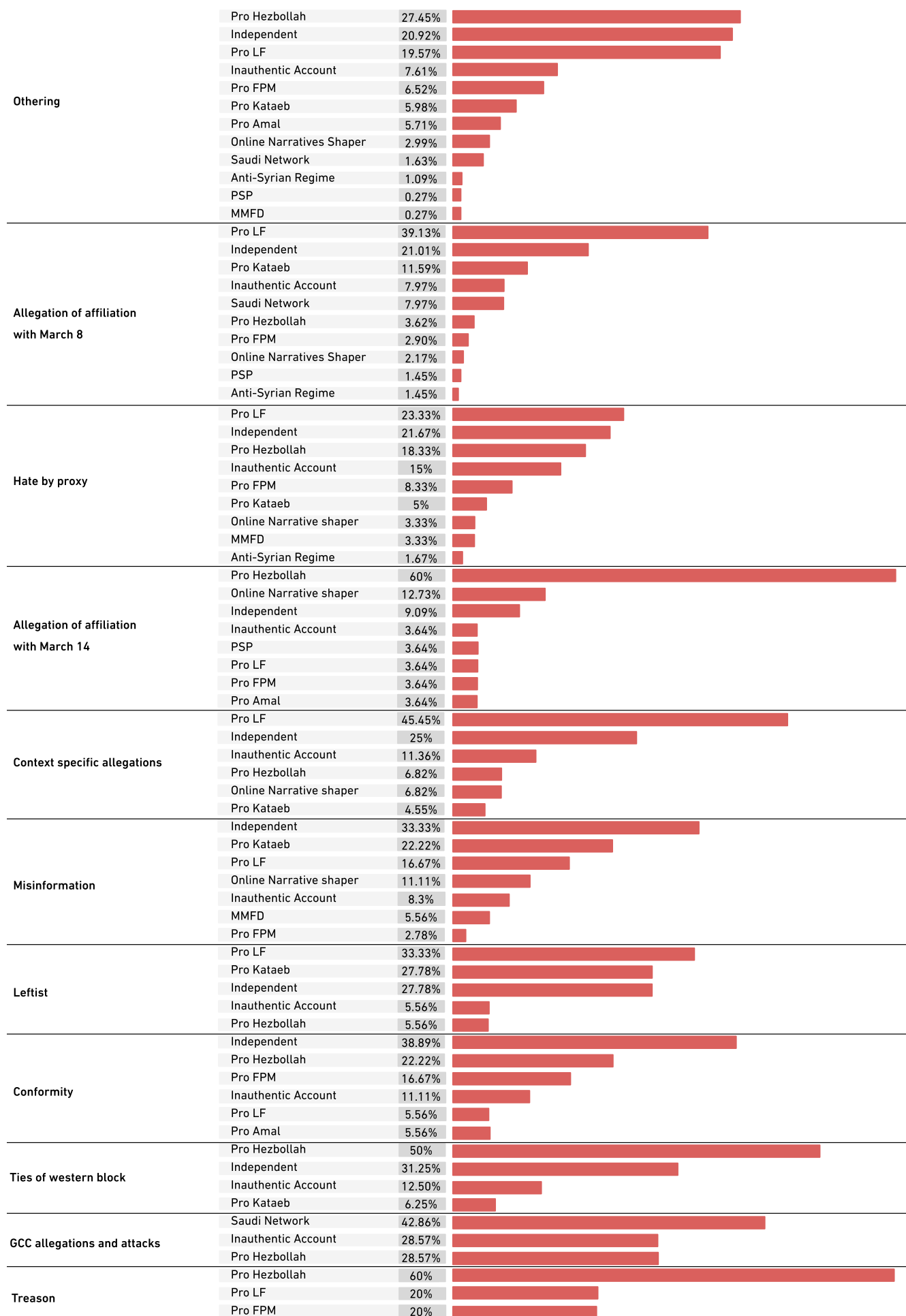
**Img. 40 and 41**

The political diversity in Metn, highlighted above, was reflected through the variety of allegations against alternative candidates. The figure below showcases the different political groups users were affiliated with.



**Fig.11- Distribution of users per political affiliation**

While 23% of the users are affiliated with the Lebanese Forces, 22% are pro-Hezbollah, 21% are independent, 7% are pro-Kataeb and 5% pro-FPM. The number of inauthentic accounts (deleted and suspended accounts, accounts with less than 10 followers, and deleted tweets) is remarkable with 8.5%, exceeding that of users openly affiliated with established political parties such as Kataeb and FPM.



**Fig.12- Narrative per users' political affiliation**

The three main themes, i.e., othering, allegation of affiliation with March 8, and hate by proxy are being circulated by four main groups of users. While independent and pro-Hezbollah are mainly circulating othering messages, pro-LF and pro-Kataeb users are accusing candidates of being affiliated with the March 8 alliance and circulating messages of hate by proxy.



#### Img. 42

Users affiliated with political groups and even public figures and candidates deployed several methods and tools to circulate the narratives above, such as videos, media appearances and photos.

[In this video](#), on July 13, 2021, Jad Ghosn published on his own YouTube channel a speech he delivered before a sub-commission at the European Parliament. In the video, Ghosn described the current political and economic situation in Lebanon while conducting a historical review of the current political ruling class track record.



#### Img. 43

This video resurfaced during the pre-election period, and allegations of calling for sanctions were mainly circulated by pro-Hezbollah users.



Img. 44

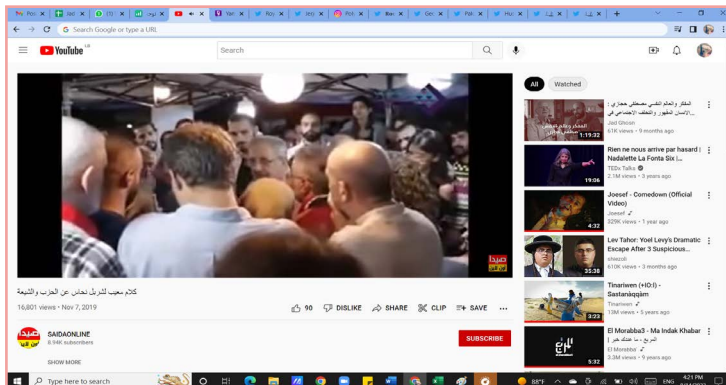


Img. 45



Img. 46

[In this video](#) of former Minister Charbel Nahhas, during the October 17, 2019, protest, Nahhas's words were twisted and taken out of the total context where Nahhas was saying that people of the South are true Lebanese citizens and "we shouldn't be afraid of them."



Img. 47

This video re-emerged during the elections and was used to build a narrative accusing Nahhas of conspiring against Hezbollah, mainly by pro-Hezbollah users.



Img. 48



Img. 49



Img. 50

On May 2, 2022, [another video](#), generated by a pro-FPM user, contained a collage of several videos featuring Charbel Nahhas and other MMFD members through several media appearances. The collage aimed at discrediting Nahhas and it got retweeted 310 times and received 474 likes.



Img. 51





**Img.52**

[In this article](#), Samir Saliba, a candidate on Kataeb's list in Metn, accused Jad Ghosn and his fellow candidates of conformity and affiliation with Hezbollah. This article was published after Ghosn and Saliba's back-to-back media appearances on MTV program *Beirut Al Yawm*.



**Img. 53**

This news was soon picked up by pro-LF and pro-Kataeb users to accuse Ghosn of being affiliated with Hezbollah.

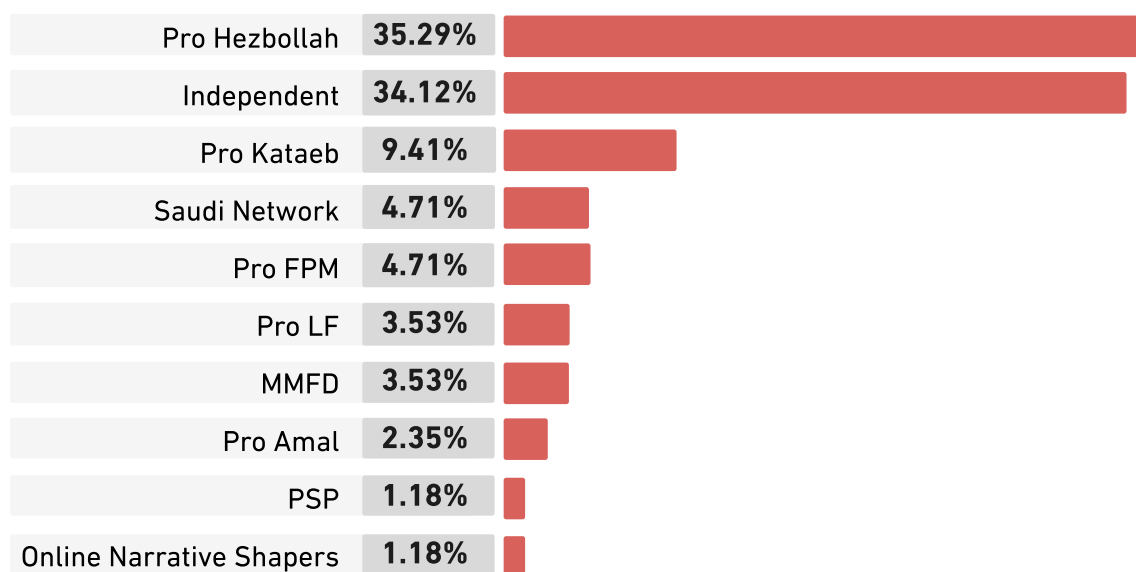


Img. 54



Img. 55

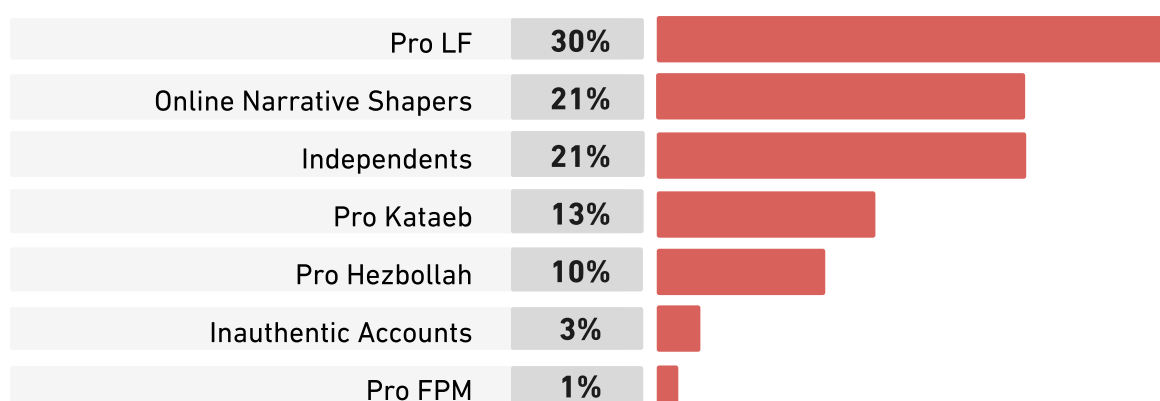
The figure below depicts inauthentic behavior vis-à-vis the campaign and the political affiliation of users conducting an inauthentic behavior vis-à-vis the campaign.



**Fig. 13- Distribution of inauthentic accounts across political parties**

Inauthentic behavior was detected through the aggregation of inauthentic accounts, suspended accounts, deleted accounts, and deleted tweets. This type of behavior is divided into three types of users: Hezbollah affiliated users, independent users, and pro-Kataeb users.

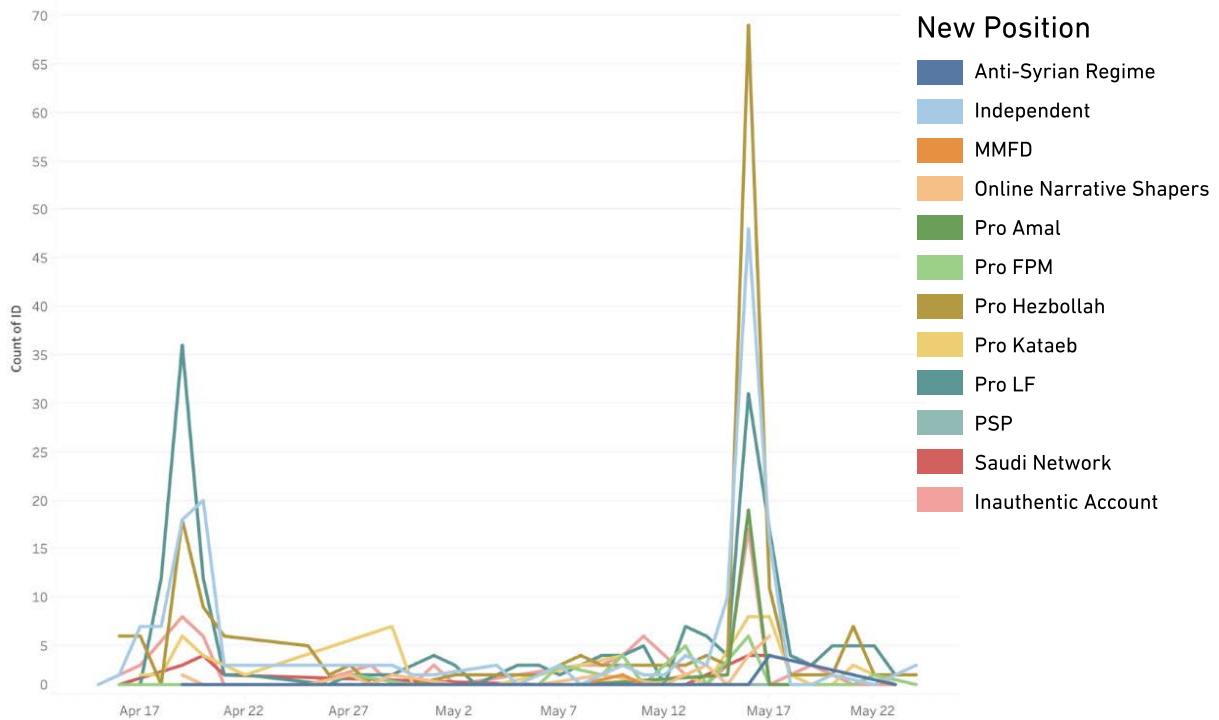
As for influential accounts, be it from accounts with more than a thousand followers and/or journalists' accounts, 30% of them were attributed to pro-LF users, 21% to online narrative shapers, i.e, academics and influencers, and 21% attributed to independent users.



**Fig. 14- Influential accounts per user's political affiliation**

## Timestamp

In the section below, offline and online events were mirrored in order to put online activity in context. This process is useful to understand and analyze the spike in users' online activity per political affiliation and link it to events happening on the same day, be it in the media or online.



**Fig.15- Timestamp online/offline events for Nahwa al Dawla**

On April 18, pro-LF users caused a spike in online activity, which came after Jad Ghosn's appearance on Al Jadeed TV, on a program entitled "[Btefroq 3a Watan](#) – بتفرق عوطن"<sup>10</sup>. In this video Paul Nakouzi, a candidate on the Metn Sovereignists' electoral list, accused Ghosn of conspiring against and insulting the church. This triggered a series of online reactions.



The allegations of conspiring against the church were labeled under context specific allegations, as Nakouzi accused Ghosn of “not being from Metn” or being “foreign to Metn” in a narrative of othering. And as demonstrated through data above, this theme was mainly circulated by pro-LF users with 45.5% of content disseminated by them.

On April 18 as well, journalist Ghadi Francis, who is an active member of the SSNP, and openly pro-Hezbollah, expressed her support to Jad Ghosn. Her tweet triggered a series of reactions which were labeled under the hate by proxy theme encompassing association with public figures.



**Img. 57, 58 and 59**

This spike was also led by pro-LF users. As shown in the distribution of theme per users' political affiliation, the overall theme of hate by proxy was also spearheaded by pro-LF users, with a share of 23% of the content of this theme.

On April 19, a pro-Kataeb user published two minutes of a [100-minute long interview](#) of Ghosn by podcast host Ronnie Chatah. On May 6, 2021, Chatah debated with Ghosn Hezbollah's accusation of having killed his father, Mohammad Chatah, in a car bomb attack in Beirut in December 2013. Mohammad Chatah was a former ambassador and Finance minister.



**Img. 60**

Following these allegations, the narrative of Ghosn being affiliated with Hezbollah spread widely and were connected to the assassinations of journalists Samir Kassir and Gebran Tuéni in 2005 and writer Lokman Slim in 2021. These allegations were labeled under allegations of affiliation with March 8, which, as seen above, took 39% of the online conversation around Ghosn and were mainly circulated by pro-LF users.



**Img. 61**

Conversely, on April 25, following Michelle Tuéni's [one hour-long interview](#) with Jad Ghosn, pro-Hezbollah users picked up on this interview, instigated by Asaad Abou Khalil, a controversial pro-Hezbollah journalist and academic.



Img. 62



Img. 63

On April 26 and April 29, Lucien Bou Rjeily, another candidate on the list, published two photos, one of the campaign’s bus and one of the candidates meeting in a humble place.



Img. 64



Img. 65

Both photos generated trolling content. Lucien Bou Rjeily, a playwright and movie director, had embarked on a political career during the 2015 garbage crisis and ran for parliament in Beirut during the 2018 election.



Img.66





**Img. 67**

Trolling content against this electoral list was omnipresent. In fact, following the [night of May 12](#), when volunteers campaigning for *Nahwa al Dawla* were attacked in Burj Hammoud, a series of trolling tweets was launched against the candidates, mainly by pro-FPM users.



**Img. 68**



**Img. 69**

On May 3, three days before the diaspora election day, Polyblog, a pro-Kataeb alternative media platform published a video under the title [six reasons why not to vote for Jad Ghosn](#). This video circulated even more the narrative concerning the allegations of affiliation with Hezbollah. This video was followed by another 12-minute video, from the same media platform, hosting a psychologist to answer the question: [How do you perceive Nahhas's attitude towards other opposition figures?](#)



Img. 70



Img. 71



Img. 72

This video was soon re-shared by a pro-LF user to circulate warning content against Ghosn, MMFD, and Nahhas.



Img.73

### C- The Case of *Shamaluna*, North III

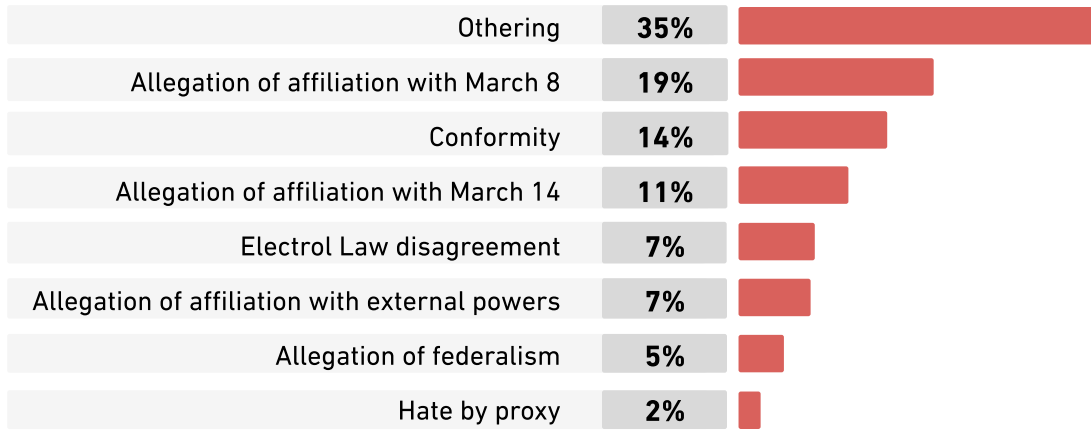
*Shamaluna* is a political coalition in the four cazas of Besharri, Zghorta, Koura, and Batroun (North Lebanon's third district) with ten candidates running for parliament: Rabih Chaer and Loyal Bou Moussa in Batroun; Kozhaya Sassine and Riad Tawk in Besharri; Shaden Daif, Michel Douaihy, and Gistelle Semaan in Zghorta; Semaan Bachawati, Jihad Farah, and Fadwa Kallab in Koura.

The coalition faced off against multiple traditional political parties in this district, including the Free Patriotic Movement, the Lebanese Forces, Kataeb, the Marada Movement, the Independence Movement, and SSNP.

Quoting Dr. Rania Koleilat Khatib in her article [Lebanon has too many dictators to be a democracy](#): "Under the *Shamaluna* initiative in northern Lebanon, citizens may register as candidates or as voters. To do so, they may not be affiliated to a political party, and they must be people of integrity. This is the start of a democratic process for candidate selection; it is no longer the leader of a party who dictates the selection of a candidate, it is the people themselves who make a democratic choice."

The absence of affiliation with political parties in a highly politicized area, North III, is reflected by both a panoply of users' political affiliation and allegations towards *Shamaluna's* candidates.

The following section tackles the type of narratives circulated by users around candidates from this list.



**Fig.16- Distribution of themes**

لسفارة الأميركية والسعودية  
 زوجته موظفة في السفارة الأميركية ودائع لغيرهم سفاراتكم  
 قوي التغيير برئاسة السفير السعودي بتمشكون إيران  
 كلاب شنكير وكر مخابرات واحد ديما صادق الثائرة  
 "القوات اللبنانية، لبنانية وبس لبنانية". الخليج مستوردين  
 بجمعيات اميركي كلنا ارادة امر الشمطاء شيا والبوخاري  
 ودعمت بوخارية

**Fig.17- Word cloud for allegations of affiliation with external power, aggregated through key words**

35% of the narratives were about othering, 19% allegation of affiliation with March 8, and 14% conformity, while the other narratives such as allegation of affiliation with March 14 was at 11% and electoral law disagreement and allegation of federalism were present to a lesser extent.



**Img. 74**



In this electoral list, Layal Bou Moussa was the main target of a misinformation campaign accusing her of receiving SSNP's support through a memo published by the party. Bou Moussa along with Semaan Bachawati were both accused of affiliation with SSNP, following this photo that was spread widely, hence the 19% allocation to the theme allegation of affiliation with March 8.

**tweet**

**Layal Bou Moussa** @layal\_boumoussa

كل يوم بيعملولي بطاقة حزبية  
آخر اشاعة كانت "ليال قومية" وزوروا ورقة ونشروها  
أنا بطاقتي الوحيدة هي لبنان والشعب اللبناني ومشروع  
الانتخابي مصلحة لبنان وحقوق  
اللبنانيين في مواجهة دويلة السلاح  
ودويلة الفساد  
واشاعاتك اللي كل يوم بتنشروها، دليل على  
خوفكن وقلقكن من لائحة شمالنا

Translate Tweet

إير: جميع البطاقات والفروع المستقلة  
المصنوعة للانتخابات البلدية الثانية

مصدره المسؤول الماتر  
لجنة مينة لوجبة لاشاعة  
ثالثا وثالثا قرار حاضرة الرئيس حزب الامتياز بمسورس الانتخابات البلدية في لبنان، المشائين  
أسماء الاغلبية (الواتر الصغير) وأسماء المرشحين الطوار (صطوهم الصوت للقسطنطين)  
- طارا: ايل حويد.  
- طراس: لائحة الكرامة (القسطنطين بركه لخبار الرقاء في الفرج).

**FAKE**

التي  
- الشون: ليل بو موسى.  
- بشري: ملهم طوق.  
- زناخة: لائحة سلا للشمال ولبنان (القسطنطين بركه لخبار الرقاء في الفرج).  
- حويل: محمد الطقاد.  
- الكروان: حوزين زابنه.

بعدا: رقاء السائل واسف الحركة، رقاء الشن الأمل رأيا المسرى.  
- الكوفد: ونام وعل.  
- صوت الأمل: بركه لخبار الرقاء في الفرج.  
- بويوه: سلا - - - - -  
- بلكه: لورا  
- زناخة: بركه 1.

**LEB ELECTIONS**

**Fake**

11:46 PM · May 6, 2022 · Twitter Web App

16 Retweets 6 Quote Tweets 190 Likes Tip

These allegations will be tackled in the second part of the report under mis- and disinformation techniques and tools.

**mia kenaan**  
@mia\_kenaan

مذكرة صادرة عن الحزب السوري القومي الاجتماعي يطلب فيها من القوميين منح أصواتهم التفضيلية لكل من:

- ليال بو موسى، مرشحة على لائحة شمالنا في البترون
- جوزفين زغيب، مرشحة على لائحة نعمة افرام في كسروان
- ملحم جبران طوق (ويليام) مرشح على لائحة المرده في بشري

واصف الحركة مرشح في بعيدا

3m

مذكرة صادرة عن الحزب السوري القومي الاجتماعي يطلب فيها من القوميين منح أصواتهم التفضيلية لكل من:

- ليال بو موسى، مرشحة على لائحة شمالنا في البترون
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- ملحم جبران طوق (ويليام) مرشح على لائحة المرده في بشري

واصف الحركة مرشح في بعيدا

الحزب السوري القومي الاجتماعي  
هذه القائمة

مذكرة صادرة عن الحزب السوري القومي الاجتماعي يطلب فيها من القوميين منح أصواتهم التفضيلية لكل من:

- ليال بو موسى، مرشحة على لائحة شمالنا في البترون
- جوزفين زغيب، مرشحة على لائحة نعمة افرام في كسروان
- ملحم جبران طوق (ويليام) مرشح على لائحة المرده في بشري

واصف الحركة مرشح في بعيدا

9:07 AM · May 6, 2022 · Twitter for Android

4 Retweets 1 Quote Tweet 29 Likes

**Img. 76**

Although the narrative of allegation of federalism ranked seventh among themes with 5% of the content, it is worth highlighting, as *Shamaluna* starting by its name, “Our north,” was accused of identitarian politics, working towards federalism, and dividing regions based on communitarian affiliation. These allegations were mainly circulated by MMFD members.



Img. 77

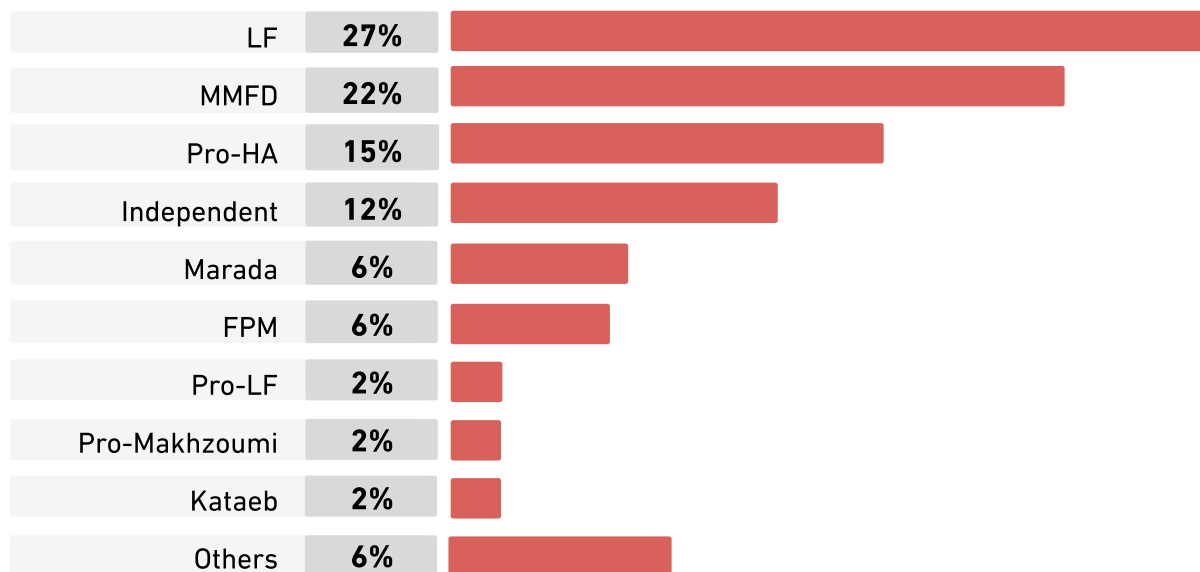


Img. 78



Img. 79

Users from different political affiliations circulated content against the coalition, as seen in the figure below.



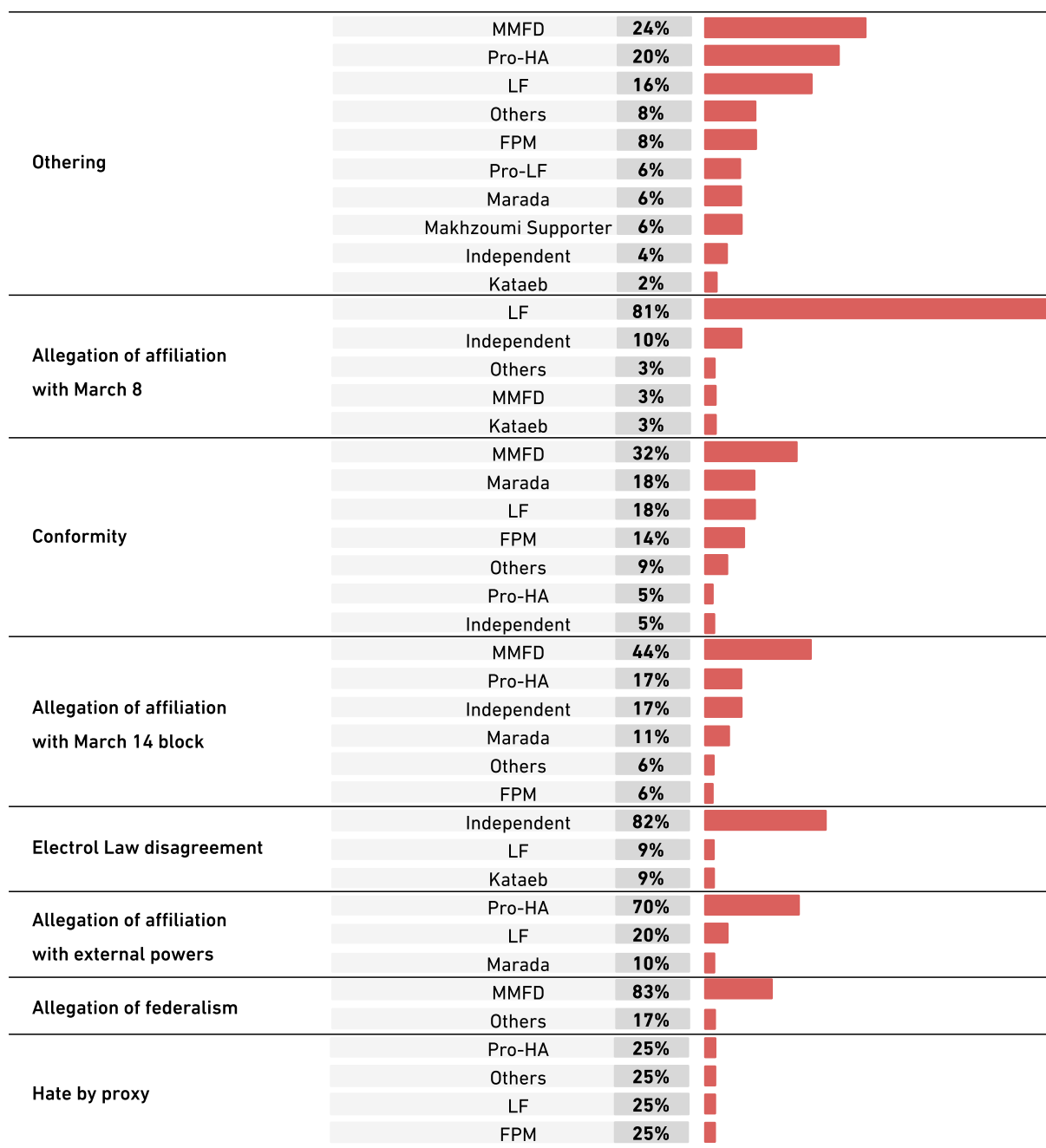
**Fig. 18- Distribution of users by political affiliation**

Others include federalists, inauthentic account, Journalist, Journalist/Pro-Hezbollah, Pro-Amal, Pro-Hariri, Pro-Michel Mouawad, PSP, and SSNP.

27% of the content analyzed was circulated by pro-LF users, while MMFD affiliated accounts accounted for 22% of the total users, with 15% of users being pro-Hezbollah.

MMFD users' high presence is due to three facts. Firstly, Loyal Bou Moussa, a candidate on Shamaluna's list, was a founding member of MMFD and then dropped out from the party. Additionally, MMFD along with the LCP were asked by independent users to withdraw from the race to optimize the chances of Shamaluna. Finally, Riad Tawk, a candidate on Shamaluna's list, attacked Charbel Nahhas, the head of MMFD during a media appearance.





**Fig.19- Distribution of narrative per political affiliation**

MMFD users mainly circulated narratives of othering, conformity, allegation of affiliation with March 14, and allegation of federalism. Pro-LF users circulated the allegation of affiliation with March 8 due to the memo by the SSNP mentioned above. Pro-Hezbollah users were mainly disseminating hate by proxy, allegation of affiliation with external powers and March 14.

**Sally Abdallah**  
@SallyAb27550172

شمالنا هبي مش أكثر من تجميع ناس معها مصري وعندها ميول سياسية معينة مخيايتها بتظهرها بدون قصد بما يسمي ب"زلة لسان" بس ما بدت ينزلوا مع لوائح أحزاب السلطة لأنو هلي الموضة نعمل حالنا معارضة.  
[#قادرين\\_نغير](#)

**Mery Joe** @MeryjoMatar · May 3  
أكثر سؤال عم ننسألو من الناس هو ليش ما تحالفنا بالشمال الثالثة مع شمالنا. هالفديو كافي ليوضح إني لو تحالفنا معهن، كنا منكون عم نكذب على حالنا ونناقى بكل مشروعنا.  
لا، نحن ما متفق مع سمير جعجع، اللي ما عندو مشكلة بتهجروا شبابنا كرمال نعيش ب ٢٠٠\$ بالشهر، و لا، ما متفق معه

Show this thread



0:15 17.6K views

12:01 PM · May 4, 2022 · Twitter for Android

1 Retweet 2 Likes

Img. 80

**Mo**  
@MMFIDIAN

مرشح كوكتيل [#شمالنا](#) سمعان بشواتي والترويج للنظام التوافقي الطائفي. يعني هيدا إيلي الفرزلي بس عفريز.  
صوتك ل [#قادرين](#) هو صوت للقطيعه مع النظام الطائفي التوافقي، صوت للعلمانيه وللمشروع الواضح بعيدا عن الحصص والمحاصصه.



0:28 522 views

5:19 AM · May 10, 2022 · Twitter for Android

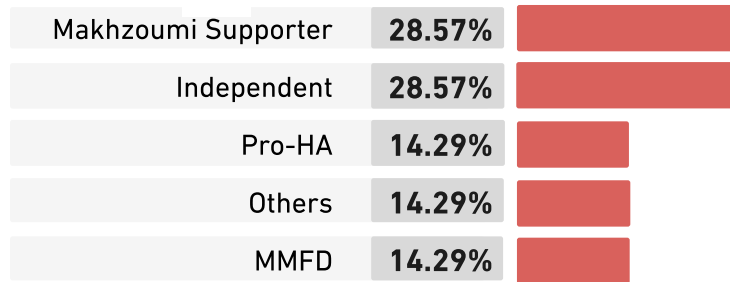
6 Retweets 1 Quote Tweet 33 Likes

Img. 81



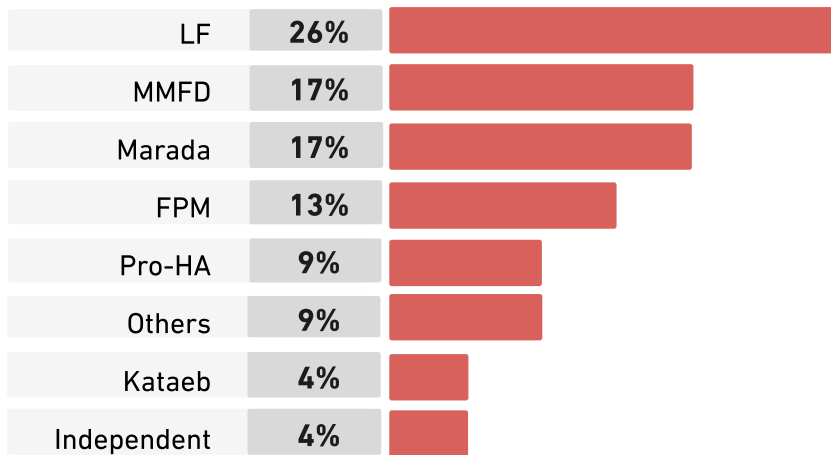
**Img. 82**

Supporters of Beirut MP Fouad Makhzoui surprisingly accounted for 28% of inauthentic behavior generated by one account making up the large percentage. Pro-Hezbollah accounts accounted for 14% of inauthentic behavior.



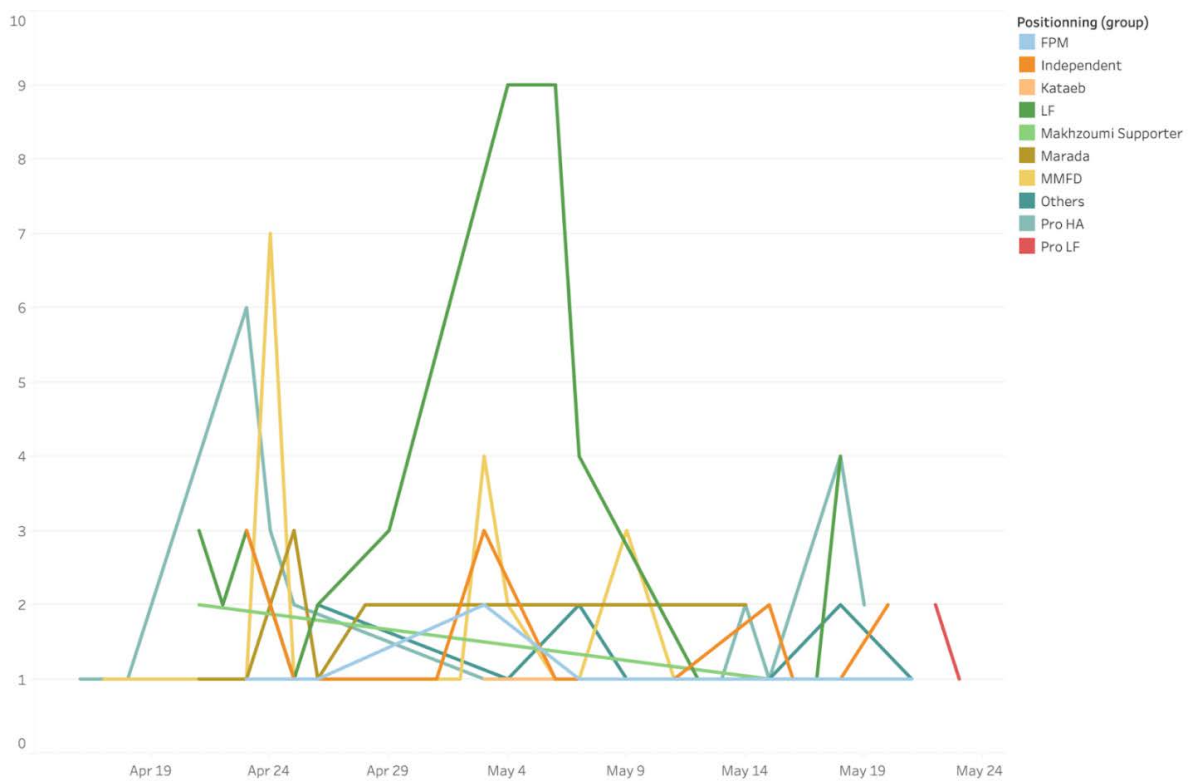
**Fig.20- Distribution of inauthentic accounts per political affiliation**

As for influential accounts, be it from accounts with a large following and/or journalists, 26% were held by pro-LF users, 17% by MMFD users and 17% are held by Marada supporters.



**Fig.21- Distribution of influential accounts across political affiliation**

### Timestamp

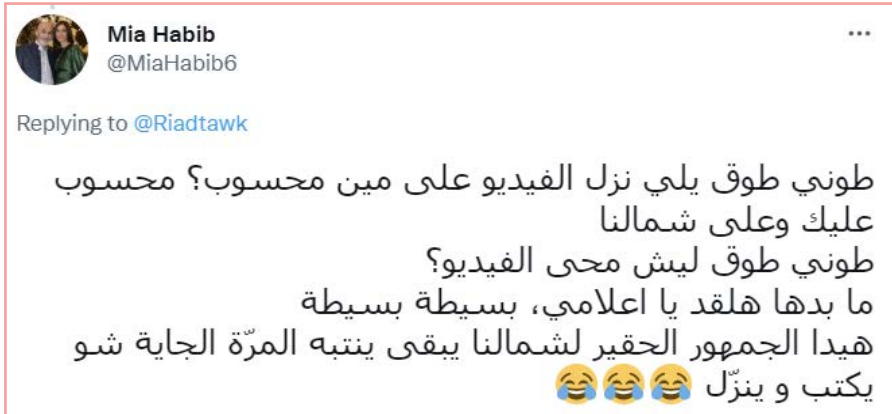


**Fig. 22- Timestamp online/offline events for Shamaluna**

On April 5, a video montage showing a collage of photos of Riad Tawk on a Hezbollah music theme was circulating on TikTok. The video triggered a reaction from pro-LF users.



Img. 83

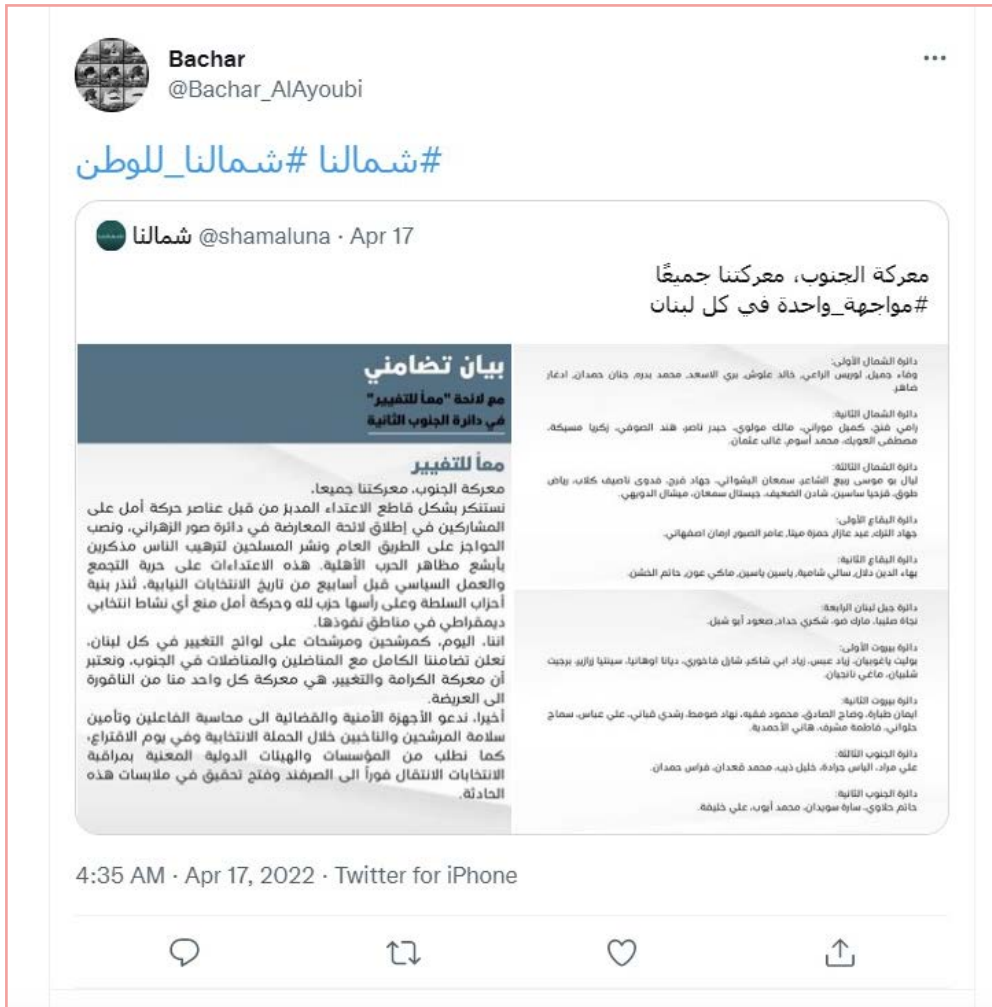


Img. 84

On April 14, candidates from the alternative list *Maan lil Taghyir*, in South II, were physically attacked in Sarafand by pro-Hezbollah and pro-Amal groups. Soon this offline event generated sentiments of solidarity from *Shamaluna* candidates and pro-*Shamaluna* users.



Img. 85



Img. 86



جو كيروز (Joe Keyrouz)  
@joekeyrouz

...

## #مواجهة\_واحدة

شمالنا @shamaluna · Apr 17

### معركة الجنوب، معركة جميعاً #مواجهة\_واحدة في كل لبنان

**بيان تضامني**  
مع لائحة "معاً للتغيير"  
في دائرة الجنوب الثانية

**معاً للتغيير**

معركة الجنوب، معركةنا جميعاً، نستنكر بشكل قاطع الاعتداء المبرر من قبل عناصر حركة أمل على المشاركين في إطلاق لائحة المعارضة في دائرة صور الزهراني، ونصب الحواجز على الطريق العام ونشر المسلحين لترهيب الناس مذكرين بأبشع مظاهر الحرب الأهلية. هذه الاعتداءات على حرية التجمع والعمل السياسي قبل أسابيع من تاريخ الانتخابات النيابية، تُنذر ببناء أحزاب السلطة وعلى رأسها حزب الله وحركة أمل منع أي نشاط انتخابي ديمقراطي في مناطق نفوذها.

أنتا، اليوم، كمرشدين ومرشحات على لوائح التغيير في كل لبنان، نعلن تضامناً الكامل مع المناضلين والمناضلات في الجنوب، ونعتبر أن معركة الكرامة والتغيير، هي معركة كل واحد منا من النافورة إلى العريضة.

أخيراً، ندعو الأجهزة الأمنية والفضائية إلى محاسبة الفاعلين وتأمين سلامة المرشحين والناخبين خلال الحملة الانتخابية وفي يوم الاقتراع، كما نطلب من المؤسسات والهبات الدولية المعنية بمراقبة الانتخابات الانتقال فوراً إلى الصنف وفتح تحقيق في ملاسات هذه الحادثة.

دائرة الشمال الأولى:  
وشاء جميل، لويس الرامي، خالد علوش، بوني الأسعد، محمد بريم، جنان حمدان، ادغار شاهر

دائرة الشمال الثانية:  
رامي شح، كميل موزاني، مالك مولوي، حيدر ناصر، هند الصوفى، زكريا مسيكة، مصطفى العويك، محمد أسوم، غالب عثمان

دائرة الشمال الثالثة:  
أيال بو موسى، نجى الشاعر، سمعان الشوالي، جواد فريج، فدوى ناصيف، كلاب، رياض طوق، فريحا ساميون، شادن الشيخيف، جيسل سمعان، ميشال النهدي

دائرة الطاق الأولى:  
جواد النور، عبد عازر حمزة ميلا، عامر الصبور، ارمان اصغواني

دائرة الطاق الثانية:  
بهاء الدين دلال، سالي شامية، ياسين ياسين، ملكي عور، خالد الشنن

دائرة جبل لبنان الرابعة:  
نخلة صليبا، مارك موز، شكري حداد، نجود أبو شبل

دائرة بيروت الأولى:  
بوليت باوقيان، ريان عيسى، ريان ابي شاكور، شارل فاخوري، دينا اوهانبا، سينا لارا، بروجيت شفيان، ماضي ناقدان

دائرة بيروت الثانية:  
اميان طيار، وصال الصادي، محمود هنية، نهاد فومعة، رشدي شابي، علي عباس، سماح خلواني، فاطمة شوق، هاني الأحمدي

دائرة الجنوب الثالثة:  
علي مراد، اناس جراد، خليل نبيه، محمد سعدان، فراس حمدان

دائرة الجنوب الثانية:  
خاتم حوي، سارة سويدان، محمد اوب، علي خليفة

5:44 AM · Apr 17, 2022 · Twitter for Android



Img. 87



شمالنا @shamaluna · Apr 17

...

### معركة الجنوب، معركة جميعاً #مواجهة\_واحدة في كل لبنان

**بيان تضامني**  
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دائرة جبل لبنان الرابعة:  
نخلة صليبا، مارك موز، شكري حداد، نجود أبو شبل

دائرة بيروت الأولى:  
بوليت باوقيان، ريان عيسى، ريان ابي شاكور، شارل فاخوري، دينا اوهانبا، سينا لارا، بروجيت شفيان، ماضي ناقدان

دائرة بيروت الثانية:  
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دائرة الجنوب الثالثة:  
علي مراد، اناس جراد، خليل نبيه، محمد سعدان، فراس حمدان

دائرة الجنوب الثانية:  
خاتم حوي، سارة سويدان، محمد اوب، علي خليفة

1 22 43



Souheil Al Hajj  
@Bagheera77

...

Replying to @shamaluna

#سهلنا\_والجبل + #شمالنا + #معاً\_للتغيير وُلدنا أحراراً  
وسنبقى ، نحن لسنا عبيداً لأمراء الحرب ولا للزعامات الفارغة

..

Img. 88

On April 18, Albert Kostanian hosted Layal Bou Moussa on his Twenty30 show on LBCI where her stance on Hezbollah triggered a series of negative reactions mainly by pro-Hezbollah users.



Img. 89



Img. 90

On April 21 and 22, the online conversation spiked as a result of two different events. The first one being a speech by Hezbollah's deputy-Secretary General [Naim Kassem](#), during which he accused Independence Movement MP Michel Moawad and Kataeb of being long affiliated with the establishment and not alternative forces.



Img. 91



This speech was soon picked up by pro-Kataeb and Moawad supporters to throw allegations of affiliation with Hezbollah on *Shamaluna* candidates.



Img. 92



Img. 93



Img. 94

The second event was an invitation by Michel Douaihy, a candidate on the *Shamaluna* list, to Moawad and Marada Movement MP Tony Frangieh for a public debate. Candidate Gistelle Semaan and other alternative candidates joined the conversation, while online users had mixed reactions to the invitation.



Img. 95



Img. 96

On the night of April 21, 2022, Loyal Bou Moussa and Riad Tawk were both guests on MTV's *Sar El Wa2et* (It's About Time) talk show, for a short segment, during which Tawk stated: "We agree with Geagea on several points." This sentence alone was enough to trigger a wave of online attacks and a series of allegations of affiliation with LF by pro-Hezbollah, pro-FPM and pro-MMFD users.



Img. 97



Img. 98



Img. 99



### Img. 100

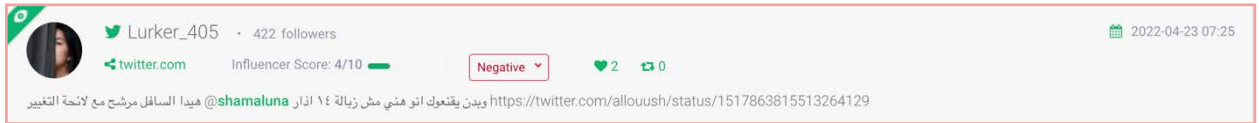
On April 23, 2022, the day of *Shamaluna's* public launch, the abovementioned interview of Tawk and Bou Moussa on *Sar el Wa2et* still dominated the online narrative with trolling, allegations, and othering from pro-Hezbollah, pro-FPM, pro-LF, and pro-MMFD individuals.



### Img. 101



Img. 102



Img. 103



Img. 104



Img. 105



### Img. 106



### Img. 107

On May 3, 2022, MP Michel Moawad [published a video titled](#) “Why we didn’t form an alliance with *Shamaluna*.” This video was soon picked up by MMFD users and linked with Tawk’s appearance on MTV to launch a series of allegations and othering attacks.



### Img. 108



Img. 109



Img. 110



Img. 111



Img. 112





### Img. 113

Lastly, from May 5 to 9, 2022, the peak in pro-LF users' activity was due to a video circulating about Semaan Bachawati, with allegations of affiliation with SSNP. This allegation was not exclusive to Bachawati but was backed up with documents and articles accusing Loyal Bou Moussa of being affiliated with SSNP as well. This section will be discussed further in the mis- and disinformation part as all videos and documents that were spread were actually fake.



### Img. 114



Img. 115



Img. 116



Img. 117



Img. 118

#### D- The Case of *Twahhadna Lil Taghiyr*, Mount Lebanon IV

United for Change, *Twahhadna lil Taghiyr*, was comprised of candidates from a variety of parties and backgrounds, mainly pulling from groups that took part in the protest movements of 2015 and 2019. Prominent candidates on the list included political activist Mark Daou, academic Najat Saliba, lawyer Halima Kaakour, and television host Ghada Eid. Daou and Saliba belong to the Taqaddom party founded in November 2019 by several civil society activists.

As shown by the data analyzed, most of the content was generated around Mark Daou, who managed to unseat veteran MP Talal Arslan, heir of a powerful dynasty in the district.

Daou was heavily accused of being actually supported by Walid Jumblatt's PSP. An accusation explained by academic Makram Rabah in an interview with Global Voices:<sup>11</sup> "Mark Daou's victory in Aley district, however, still constitutes a triumph for the October 17 uprising. (...) Druze citizens, including pro-Jumblatt ones, were heavily involved in the uprising," says Dr. Rabah, the most notable example being Alaa Abou Fakher, one of the uprising's first victims who lost his life when an army officer shot him dead as he attempted to block a road in the coastal town of Khaldeh, south of Beirut.

11- The fall of the house of arslan: How a Lebanese political newcomer ousted a dynasty. Global Voices. (2022). Retrieved from <https://globalvoices.org/2022/06/12/the-fall-of-the-house-of-arslan-how-a-lebanese-political-newcomer-ousted-a-dynasty/>



يضيف ماء ذاكرتهم اساليب السلطة اشتراهن  
 نعم التغيير بس تغييرين بقوة شوية حمرة وبودرة. ، مارك ضومعكن  
 منظومة\_الفساد أين له كل هذا المال شقفة اقطاعي زغير برنامج زعماء الطوائف خرق انتخابي  
 بتشغل بالحروقات عندو ٢٠ محطة بنزين سنحاسب الفاسد مارك تحميل الخسائر للمصارف  
 worse ouweit ممول من جماعات إسرائيلية وأمريكية أحزاب المنظومة أصحاب المؤترات والكارتلاتش تغيير  
 ارباح اوجيرو وبنك انترا ومرفأ بيروت vote for the establishment, banks الكتاب والعونية والقوات  
 صاحب شركة محروقات يملك 20 محطة بيع اصول الدولة خدو فريش و صوتو لا مارك من موله ليتنقل بطائرة خاصة  
 بدولة الإمارات الديمقراطية انيك من السياسي تزويد وقود لقوى الأمن mauvais Exemple يصيرو بالاحزاب  
 لأصول الدولة Argent eshterakeye بتحالف مع فاسدة. يسكر محطات البنزين اصحاب المصارف  
 كلب سلطة لائحة تغيير زعماء الطوائف معو هلقد مصاري ضد عودة النازحين وليد جنبلاط  
 ناخب مافيا المصارف

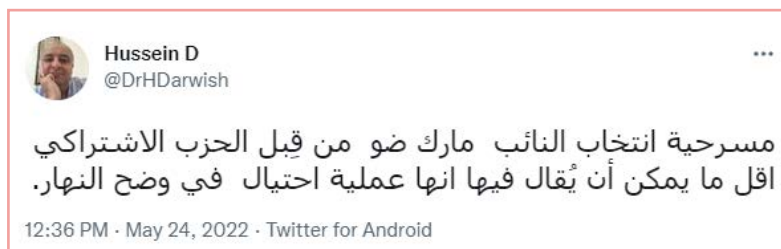
**Fig.25- Word cloud for allegations of conformity, aggregated through key words**

39% of the content was around allegations of affiliation with March 14, 34% othering, 13% conformity, and 5% treason.

The highest percentage being the allegations of affiliation with March 14, is due, as mentioned in the introduction of this section, to the allegation against Mark Daou of receiving support from PSP, as well as Daou and Saliba's proximity with the Kataeb party.

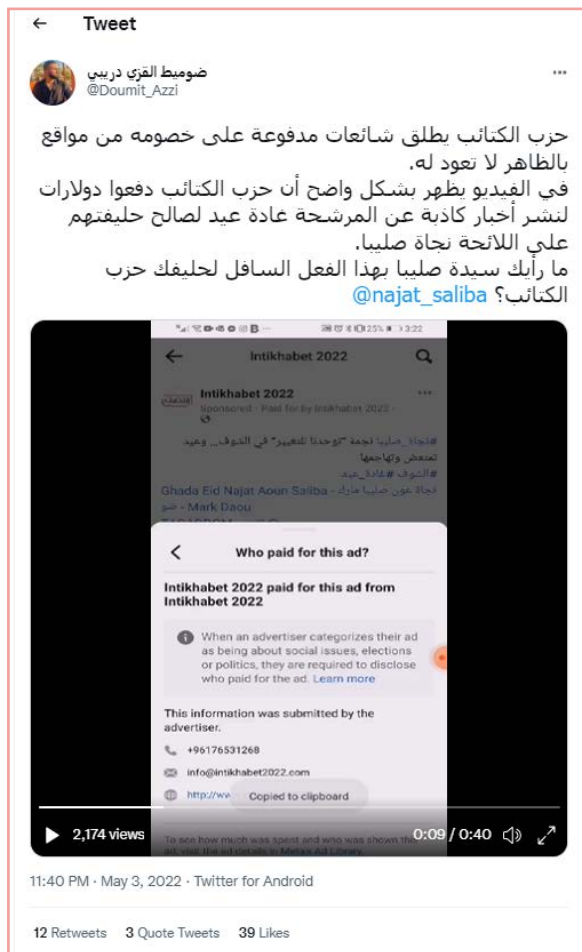


**Img. 119**



**Img. 120**

The electoral list was directly accused of receiving funds from the Kataeb party, which allegedly paid for their digital campaign, as showcased in this [tweet below circulated by an influencer](#).



Img. 121

The othering theme was mainly targeting both Mark Daou and Najat Saliba, following their media appearances. For instance, following her appearance on MTV, Najat Saliba was the target of a trolling campaign, attacking her looks and her words in addition to general smearing.



Img. 122

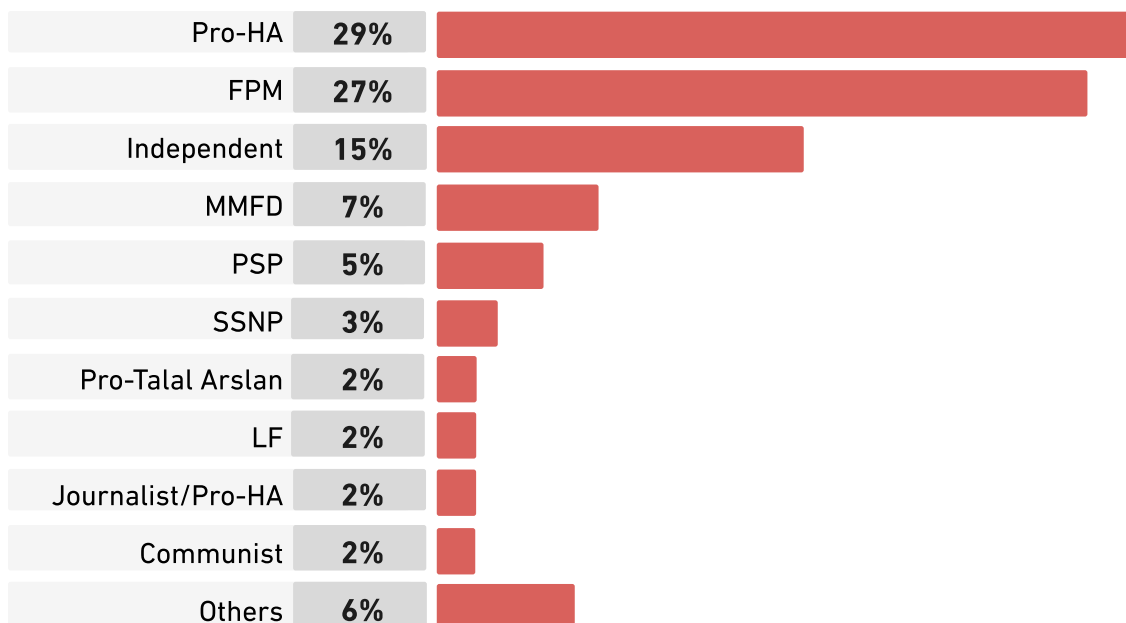


**Img. 123**

The conformity theme was shaped mainly around Daou, as Daou's family owns gas stations across Mount Lebanon. It also included allegations of Daou's partnership with the Jumblatt-owned petrol company Cogeco as well as allegations against Daou of affiliation with the banking sector.



Users from different political affiliations were circulating content against the list, as seen in this figure below.



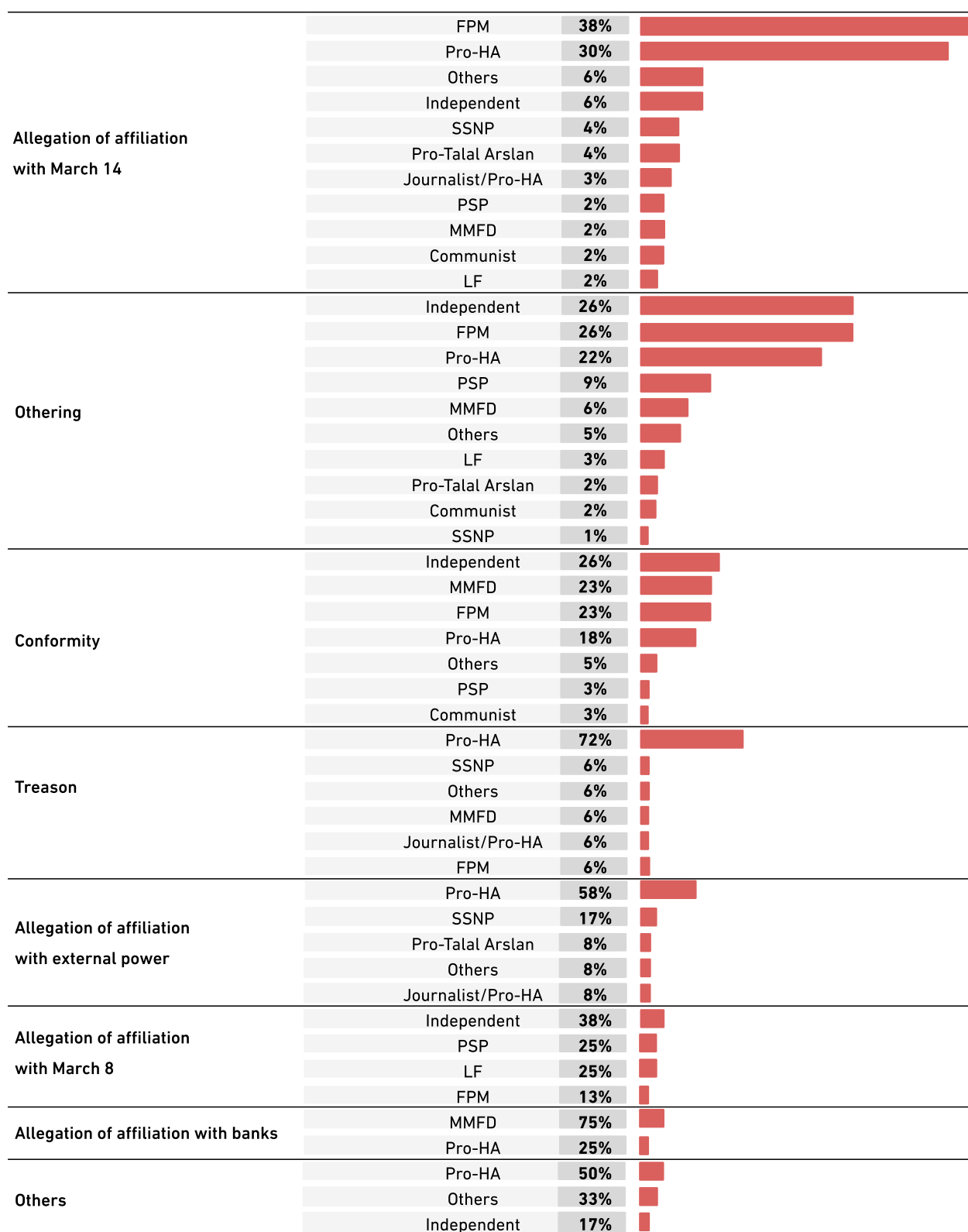
**Fig. 26- Distribution of users per political affiliation**

Positions which have less than 2% are grouped in others, including suspended and deleted accounts, inauthentic accounts, influencers, journalists, Journalist/Pro PSP, Media Platform, News, PNO, Pro Amal, Kataeb, and Pro Wiam Wahhab. 29% of the content analyzed was circulated by pro-Hezbollah users, while pro-FPM affiliated accounts accounted for 27% of the total users, and 15% of users being independent.

The pro-Hezbollah users' high presence is due to the fact that Daou is presumably supported by Jumblatt, in addition to accusations about his affiliation with external powers. As for FPM supporters' campaign against Daou, it refers to the civil war era, which opposed on several occasions Aoun and Jumblatt, the alleged supporter of Daou.

As seen below, pro-FPM users mainly circulated narratives of affiliation with March 14, specifically PSP, while independent users were leading the content of othering and conformity, and Pro-Hezbollah users circulated 72% of the treason narrative.





**Fig.27- Distribution of narratives on users' political affiliation**



**Img. 124**



**Img. 125**

Politically affiliated users circulated these allegations by the mean of videos and media appearances. [In a thread composed of four videos](#), a pro-Hezbollah user with more than 10,000 followers, created a series of collages stating that he is bringing proof against Mark Daou. The thread is called Statement 38, Statement 39...

These allegations are as follows: allegation of affiliation with March 14, allegation of affiliation with external powers and NGOs, questions about funding, etc. This also reinforced what was mentioned above in the narrative and the fact that 29% of the content analyzed was circulated by pro-Hezbollah users, mainly the one alleging affiliation with external powers.



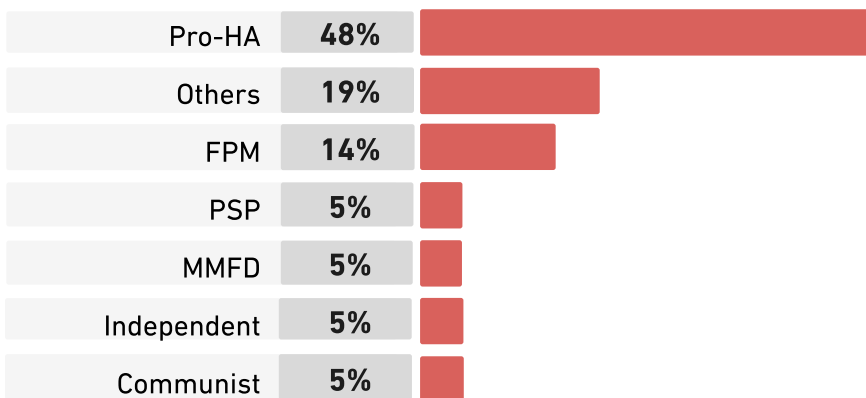
**Img. 126**

[In a 30-second](#) video extracted from a long interview of Mark Daou with Ghadi Francis, a pro-Hezbollah user claimed that Mark Daou is affiliated with the Lebanese Forces. Mark Daou was clearly talking about how the alternative candidates in addition to the Lebanese Forces can affect the quorum of parliament sessions. Daou never said "I am Lebanese Forces." On May 21, 2022, this out-of-context clip generated 73 retweets and 571 likes.



**Img.127**

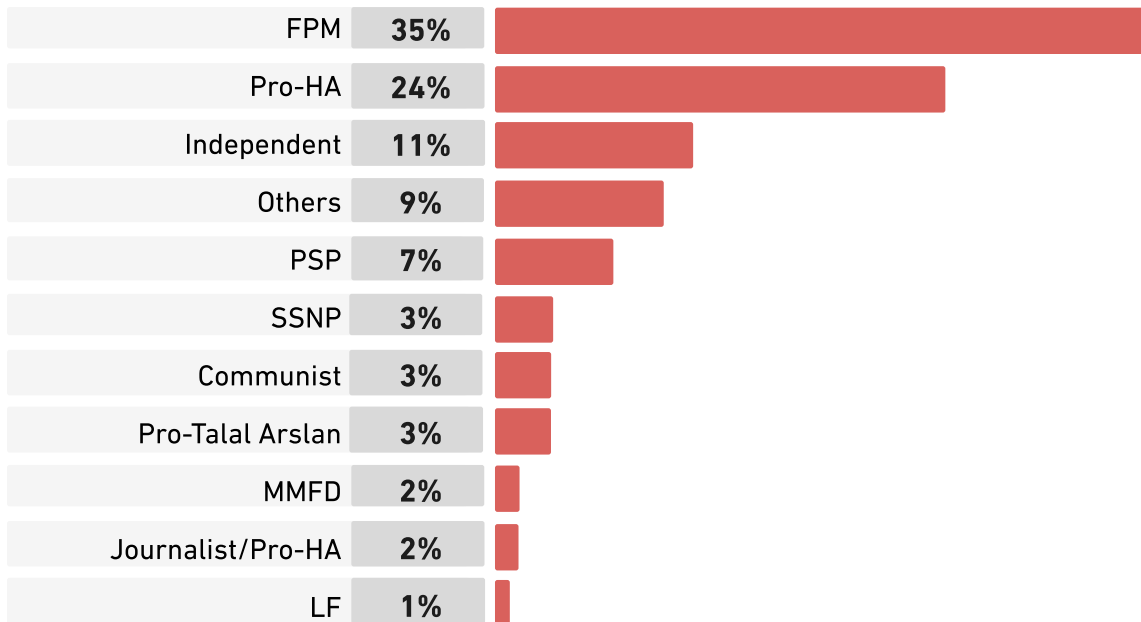
Inauthentic behavior was led by pro-Hezbollah users, accounting for 48% of suspended, deleted accounts, accounts recently created, and accounts with less than 10 followers. Seconded by others which according to the previous graph are local news outlets, pro-Amal, Kataeb, and pro-Wiam Wahhab.



**Fig.28- Distribution of inauthentic accounts per political affiliation**

Others include: Journalist/Pro PSP, Local newspaper/Jabal, Media Platform, News, Popular Nasserist Organization, Pro-Amal, Kataeb, Pro-Wiam Wahhab.

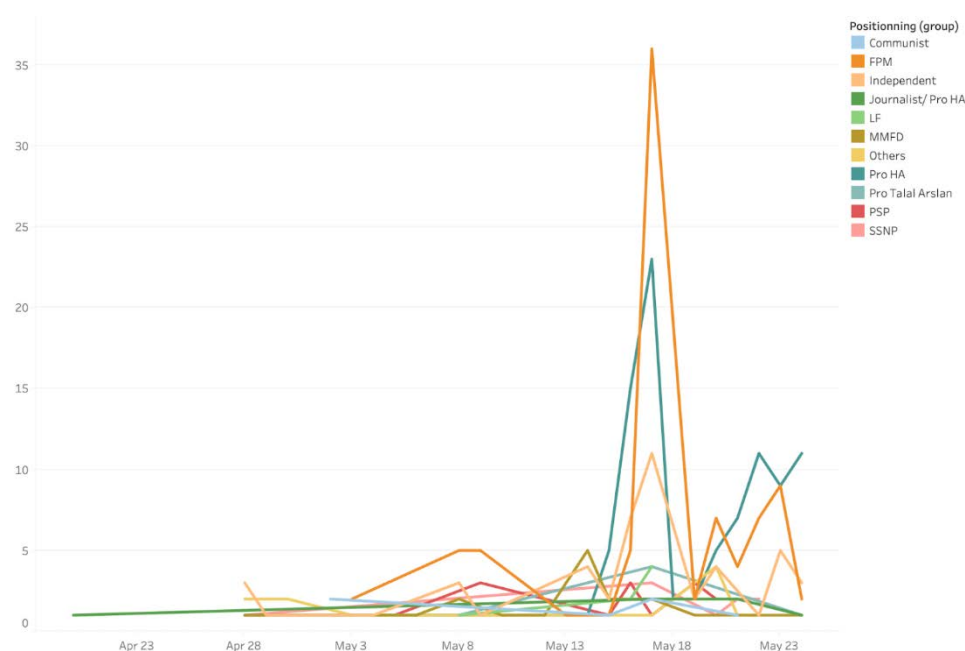
As for influential accounts, as seen below, they mirror the findings in the distribution of users per political affiliation. With 35% being pro-FPM, 24% pro-Hezbollah and 11% being independent.



**Fig.29- Distribution of accounts with large following per political affiliation**

Others include: Journalist/Pro PSP, Media Platform, News, Popular Nasserist Organization, Pro Amal, Kataeb, Pro Wiam Wahhab

### Timestamp



**Fig.30- Timestamp online/offline events for Twahhadna lil Taghyir**

On April 10, 2022, Mark Daou was hosted by Al Mayadeen TV, and during his interview, he was asked by Ghassan Saoud, a pro-FPM journalist, about his previous comments on Ghada Eid. Daou's response triggered a series of comments by mainly pro-Hezbollah and pro-FPM users.



Img. 128



Img. 129



Img. 130



Img. 131

On April 18, the *Twahhadana lil Taghyir* electoral list was publicly [launched](#), triggering a series of online reactions.



Img. 132



Img. 133



Img. 134

On the night of April 18, Mark Daou and Najat Saliba were hosted by *Sar El Wa2et* on MTV. Their media appearance triggered negative reactions such as allegations of corruption, supporting refugees, allegations of support from PSP, and trolling Saliba's looks.



Img. 135



Img. 136





Img. 137

On April 28, Mark Daou made a media appearance on *Btefroq 3a Watan*, on Al Jadeed TV. His appearance triggered reactions of trolling, warning, allegations of federalism, and corruption.



Img. 138



Img. 139



Img. 140

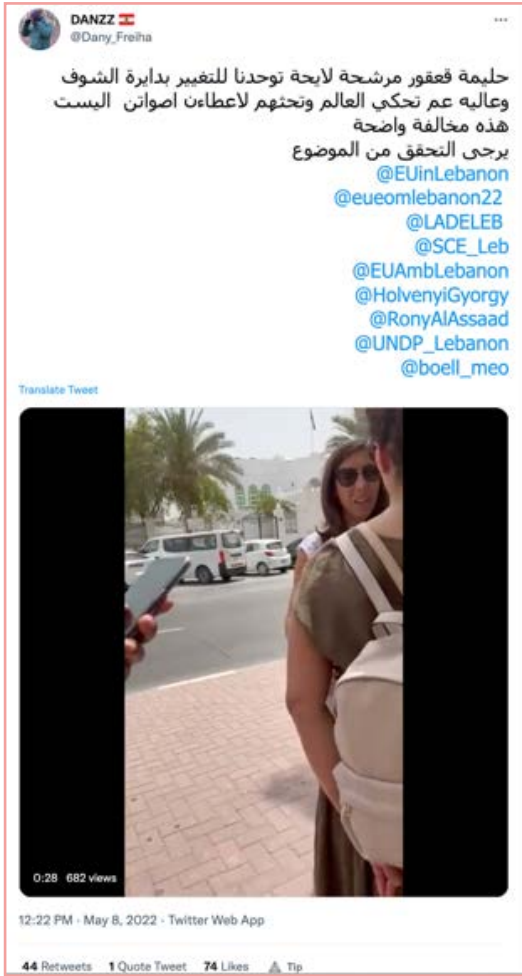


### Img. 141

On May 8, on the diaspora election day, candidates from this list, including Daou, Saliba, Kaakour, and Eid visited polling stations in the UAE. Photos of these candidates spiked a series of allegations of corruption, conformity, and accusations of breaking the electoral law, in addition to a photo of Daou with PSP volunteers, reaffirming the allegations of support from PSP to Daou.



### Img. 142



Img. 143



Img. 144



**Img. 145**

On April 14, pro-Hezbollah users posted a [one minute video](#) taken out of a long interview on Al Jadeed. This video specifically focused on the position of Mark Daou regarding the Syrian regime and sparked negative reactions from pro-Hezbollah users. It is important to note that these users published a disinformation-focused video about Daou, which will be tackled later.



**Img. 146**



**Img. 147**

Lastly, on May 14, one day prior to the elections and during the electoral silence period, MMFD published a video attacking Mark Daou with allegations of affiliations to the banking sector.



**Img. 148**

This video triggered a lot of criticism, be it against MMFD for breaking the electoral silence period for campaigning one day prior to the elections or against Daou himself.



Img. 149



Img. 150



Img. 151

## E- The Case of *Beirut Al Taghyir*, Beirut II

*Beirut al Taghyir* is one of the few lists that managed to unite different opposition groups, including the National Bloc, Tahalof Watani, the Popular Observatory of Corruption, and the Mada Network of secular students' clubs among others. Prominent candidates on the list included political activist Ibrahim Mneimneh, the former head of the Beirut Bar Association Melhem Khalaf, and Waddah Sadek, a communication strategist and businessman.

In the case of *Beirut al Taghyir*, in Beirut's second district, keywords used to scrape the data resulted in insufficient number of data entries, preventing a holistic analysis. The team had to resort to a manual method to retrieve data, mainly related to media appearances and online reactions, hence the analysis of this electoral list being limited to a timestamp analysis.

As shown by the data analyzed, most of the content was generated around Waddah Sadek being affiliated with former Prime Minister Saad Hariri and supported by former US State Department official David Schenker, Melhem Khalaf's proximity with the establishment and specifically Speaker Nabih Berri, and content generated after candidates from the list showed support for civil marriage.

Sheikh Hassan Merheb, deputy inspector general of Dar al Fatwa, the highest Sunni authority in Lebanon, violently attacked the three new Sunni MPs in Beirut II and the Shouf, respectively Ibrahim Mneimneh, Waddah Sadek, and Halima Kaakour. During their appearance on Marcel Ghanem's talk show on MTV, they stated being in favor of legalizing civil marriage in Lebanon, which to this day remains illegal.<sup>12</sup>

The following section tackles the online reactions to offline events related to *Beirut al Taghyir*.

### **Timestamp**

On May 2, 2022, a screenshot from a Zoom meeting with former US Undersecretary of State David Shencker and Waddah Sadek, a candidate on *Beirut al Taghyir* list in Beirut II, was circulated among independents and pro-Hezbollah individuals. Trolling and allegations of affiliation with an external power dominated the conversation.

12- [Quand le mariage civil devient une arme contre les députés de la contestation](#)



Img. 152



Img. 153



On May 4, *Beirut Madinati*, an alternative electoral list which was running in both Beirut I and II, decided to withdraw from the race in Beirut II and invited its supporters to vote for *Beirut al Taghyir*. This development triggered a series of both negative and positive reactions. Among the negatives are allegations of conformity to discredit the *Beirut al Taghyir* list.



Img. 154



Img. 155



Img. 156

On May 5, the former head of the Beirut Bar Association Melhem Khalaf, a candidate on *Beirut al Taghyir* list, was hosted on the *Btefroq 3a Watan* show on Al Jadeed, where he was asked about his relationship with Speaker of Parliament and Amal Movement leader Nabih Berri. Soon, his answer was picked up by individuals from different political standpoints, with a trolling [video](#).

The allegation of Khalaf having a special relationship with Berri was constantly circulating, especially after the 2019 Beirut Bar Association election.



Img. 157



Img. 158

From May 9 to 13, pro-MMFD individuals were targeting Khalaf and Sadek with allegations of intending to sell state assets as part of the financial recovery plan proposed by banks.



Img. 159



Img. 160



Img. 161



Img. 162



Img. 163

On May 10, another candidate on the list, Ibrahim Mneimneh, was hosted on the Twenty30 show with Albert Kostanian, where he addressed Beirut voters warning them of the dangers of not voting. His statement was in response to the Future Movement's election boycott campaign. Soon, pro-Future Movement users countered his statement, reaffirming their support to former Prime Minister Saad Hariri by boycotting the polls.



Img. 164



Img. 165



Img. 166

On May 18, allegations of affiliation with Hariri and allegations of conformity, mainly corruption, were spread by different users from different political affiliations against Beirut al Taghyir candidates.



Img. 167



Img. 168



Img. 169



Img. 170

On May 21, in his Friday sermon, Sunni cleric Sheikh Hassan Merheb incited violence against alternative MPs who endorsed civil marriage. This soon sparked online controversy around newly elected MPs on the *Beirut al Taghyir* list.



Img. 171





Img. 172



Img. 173



Img. 174

## VI- Mis- and Disinformation in the 2022 Election

Social media mis- and disinformation is a significant and rampant global problem. In Lebanon specifically, activists feared the political establishment would spread disinformation to retain power, in a country where the convoluted media landscape is already rife with political agendas.

While engagement on social media platforms is used in certain cases to inform, support, organize, and mobilize, it is often used as a tool for propaganda, surveillance, harassment, and incitement of violence or hate speech. It is undeniable that social media platforms reached new audiences and equipped them with knowledge, space, and tools for emergence, but also these spaces are also used as echo chambers to reinforce and reaffirm existing power relations.<sup>13</sup>

This section highlights how social media platforms were used intentionally to disinform public opinion about alternative candidates. The aim was to discredit alternative candidates, break social trust, breed apathy, raise tensions, and incite hate speech and violence.

During the pre- and post-election period, rumors and deliberate lies circulated heavily, allowing both new and old disinformation to spread quickly, and without the same geographic, regulatory, and moral constraints imposed by offline traditional media and face-to-face interactions.<sup>14</sup>

Disinformation and electronic armies have been deployed by the Lebanese ruling class on several occasions, and their implications on the elections is not a new phenomenon. In an analysis written by [Justin Salhani for the New Arab](#), Dr. Zahera Harb, Director of the International Journalism and Media and Globalization programmes at City University of London, said that “During the October 2019 protests and then later the Beirut explosion in August 2020, we saw an expansion and an influx in the amount of disinformation, a few weeks into the protests of October 2019, the ruling class was trying to delegitimize what people on the streets were doing. We started hearing stories about collaboration with foreign governments, money coming in, the demonisation of anything that is referenced to as a non-government organization and putting them all in one basket.”

The same tactics, techniques, and tools were deployed to delegitimize, discredit, and demonize alternative candidates in an attempt to disorient public opinion as well as maintain and display power. Below are some flagrant examples of videos, photos, and statements with high engagement.

---

13- Larry Diamond, 'Liberation technologies', *Journal of Democracy* 21, 3 (2010), pp. 69–83; Wilberforce S. Dzisah, 'Social media and elections in Ghana: Enhancing democratic participation', *African Journalism Studies* 39, 1, 27–47; Elena Gadjanova, Gabrielle Lynch, Jason Reifler and Ghadafi Saibu, 'Social media, cyber batallions and political mobilization in Ghana', 2019, Retrieved from [https://www.eleagadjanova.com/uploads/2/1/3/8/21385412/social\\_media\\_cyber\\_battalions\\_and\\_political\\_mobilisation\\_in\\_ghana\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://www.eleagadjanova.com/uploads/2/1/3/8/21385412/social_media_cyber_battalions_and_political_mobilisation_in_ghana_report_final.pdf)

14- Michelle Osborn, 'Fuelling the flames: Rumour and politics in Kibera', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 2, 2 (2008), pp. 315–327; Gadjanova et al., 'Social media'; Cheeseman et al., 'Social Media Disruption'.

## A- Videos

Videos were a powerful tool for mis- and disinformation, be it edited videos, videos taken out of context or twisted and reshaped narratives through videos.

[In this video](#), allegations of affiliation with SSNP were heavily circulating by pro-LF users against Semaan Bachawati, although Bachawati published on his channel a [video](#) to deny these accusations. Pro-LF users continued to circulate the fake video. Allegations of affiliation with SSNP were orchestrated by pro-LF users, and this was also highlighted with the fake memo against Layal Bou Moussa, previously mentioned.



Img. 175



Img. 176



Img. 177



Img. 178



Img. 179

One day prior to the diaspora elections date, [video montages](#) circulated on WhatsApp within the Beirut II district targeting constituents with the aim of warning them against voting for the Beirut al Taghyir list, under the pretense that candidates from the list are promoting civil marriage and LGBTQI rights.

[These products](#), lacking both an identifiable source and good quality editing, were widely spread in Beirut instigating controversy online, as they framed civil marriage, secularism, and equality as prelude for homosexuality, hence the methodic destruction of the Beirut Sunni community's values.

# في مجتمعنا البيروتي المسلم؟

Img. 180



Img. 181



Img. 182, 183 and 184

[In another video](#), a voice-note of an unknown person claimed that South III candidate Ali Mourad is receiving funds from former Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. The association with Siniora, a controversial figure, and questioning over funding were both circulated among pro-Hezbollah users.



Img. 185



Img. 186

## B- Photos

A photo collage was taken from Jad Ghosn's public Instagram account from his days as a television reporter. A pro-LF user used these photos to circulate allegations of Ghosn's affiliation with the Syrian regime and March 8. These photos published on May 11, were retweeted 111 times and liked 557 times. This narrative by pro-LF users aimed to discredit Ghosn and warn against voting for him.



Img. 187



Img. 188

Allegations of treason were widespread when considering Firas Hamdan's case. This allegation was mainly circulated by pro-Hezbollah users in South III. This allegation was supported by a photoshopped image of Hamdan's face on an Israeli general's body and was heavily circulated and shared.



Img. 189



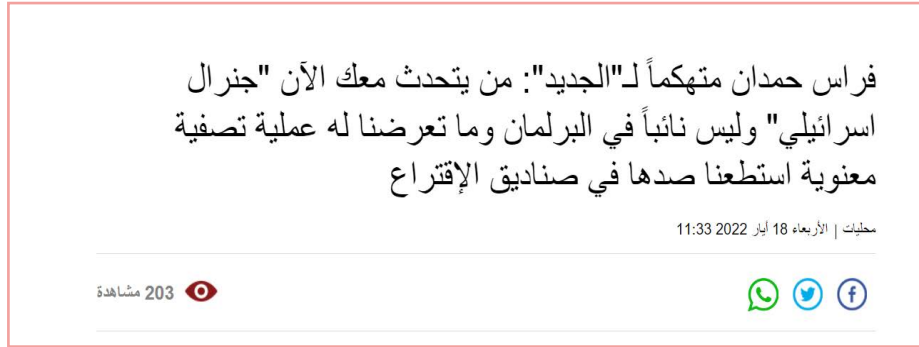
Img. 190



Img. 191



Following his win, Hamdan appeared on Al Jadeed where he jokingly said: "You are talking to an Israeli general now."



### Img. 192

Allegations of affiliation with SSNP against Mark Daou were circulated by pro-PSP supporters through an image of Daou with the SSNP logo.



### Img. 193



**Img. 194**

Allegations of affiliation with SSNP against Layal Bou Moussa started on May 6, with this photo of a memo allegedly circulated by SSNP. The memo was soon debunked as false information.



**Img. 195**



Img. 196

But this did not stop pro-LF users from continuing to share this false information as an attempt to demonize Bou Moussa.



Img. 197



Img. 198

Pro-Marada supporters shared a picture where *Shamaluna* candidate Gistelle Semaan is inviting MP Tony Frangieh for an open debate. This photo was used to launch an orchestrated attack on Semaan by pro-Marada users. Semaan went on an interview with journalist [Michelle Tuéni](#) to respond to the campaign. The photo was deleted by the source.



Img. 199



Img. 200



Img. 201

## C- Statement of Wrong Facts and Events

Following a misleading news spread by [VDL News about former minister and Hezbollah ally Wiam Wahhab's support to Mark Daou](#), Al Nadim News recirculated this false information in [this article](#). However, it did not get significant traction and engagement among users.



Img. 202



Img. 203

Fake news about cases of corruption among *Shamaluna* candidates was [published](#) by some news outlets and picked up by pro-LF users.



Img. 204



Img. 205



Nathalie  
@Nathali25437459



والجبل "و"شمالنا" | خاص بالوثيقة: فاسدون على لائحتي "سهلنا  
IMLebanon

Translate Tweet



imlebanon.org

! "خاص بالوثيقة: فاسدون على لائحتي "سهلنا والجبل" و"شمالنا | IMLebanon

في معلومات خاصة بموقع IMLebanon أن رئيس لائحة "سهلنا والجبل" في البقاع الغربي- راشيا ياسين ياسين  
المناذي بالثورة والتغيير ومحاربة الفساد سبق وحُكم عليه في الولايات المتحدة مع شقيقه بجرم التهريب...

9:32 PM · May 7, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

Img. 206



Chris  
@CokyA28



والجبل "و"شمالنا" | خاص بالوثيقة: فاسدون على لائحتي "سهلنا  
IMLebanon  
[imlebanon.org/2022/05/07/ele...](https://imlebanon.org/2022/05/07/ele...)!  
هول بدن يشيلوا الفاسدين ويقعدوا محلّن 🤔

Translate Tweet



imlebanon.org

! "خاص بالوثيقة: فاسدون على لائحتي "سهلنا والجبل" و"شمالنا | IMLebanon

في معلومات خاصة بموقع IMLebanon أن رئيس لائحة "سهلنا والجبل" في البقاع الغربي- راشيا ياسين ياسين  
المناذي بالثورة والتغيير ومحاربة الفساد سبق وحُكم عليه في الولايات المتحدة مع شقيقه بجرم التهريب...

8:15 PM · May 7, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

2 Retweets 17 Likes Tip

Img. 207



In this article, allegations of a meeting with Hezbollah were waged against Shamaluna candidates. The allegations of affiliation with Hezbollah were soon reinforced by a second article. These allegations were picked up by pro-LF users to attack Shamaluna.



Img. 208



Img. 209



Img. 210



**Img. 211**

On May 13, [VDL News published](#) a brief in which Mneimneh was accused of promoting homosexuality, this news was soon reshared in an [article](#) by Nabd news, a video was circulated via WhatsApp among Beirut II residents.



**Img. 212**



Img. 213



Img. 214

Following Mneimneh's appearance on MTV a few days before election day, [VDL news](#) and other media outlets reported on the interview, underlining Mneimneh's stance promoting equality among all Lebanese citizens. This mass media coverage subsequently spurred online reactions, resulting in videos composed by anonymous sources being circulated in Beirut on WhatsApp, cautioning specifically Sunni constituencies against voting for the *Beirut al Taghyir* list, comprised - among others - of the National Bloc, Ibrahim Mneimneh, and Waddah Sadek.



Img. 215

On May 14, [Diasporaon website](#) published an article stating that Beirut II candidate Waddah Saddek was using Beirutis' stolen funds to run for elections.

## وضّاح الصادق يخوض الانتخابات بأموال أهالي بيروت المنهوبة

أخبار الوطن | Saturday, May 14, 2022 4:22:00 PM

من ممّن لا يعرف فضيحة الزينة والاحتفالات التي مولتها بلدية بيروت بملايين الدولارات؟ لكن ما يعرفه القليل وأنّ يعرفه الجميع أنّ وضّاح الصادق هو واحد من أبرز الذين استفادوا من أموال البيارة المهذورة...

تحت اسم BEASTS كان وضّاح يستغلّ قربه من تيار المستقبل ليستمسك الملايين من صندوق المجلس البلدي الذي يموله البيارة من الرسوم التي يدفعونها للبلدية.

هذه الفضيحة تضاف إلى فضيحة نهب وضّاح الصادق لتعاونيات لبنان التي سبق وأوضحت ابنة المرحوم منير فرغل بالتفاصيل الدقيقة للاحتيال الذي قام به وضّاح الصادق.

اليوم يترشح وضّاح ويمول حملته من أموال البيارة التي جناها بعقود بالتراضي مفضوحة مشبوهة. لا يوجد اليوم فلس واحد في صندوق بلدية بيروت. بينما يحاضر لنا ناهب الصندوق عن محاربة الفساد وزعمه محاربة الطبقة السياسية التي جنى ثروة على ظهرها بعد أن كان مجرد مذيع للأخبار الرياضية على شاشة تلفزيون المستقبل. فتحوّل بسحر "سليم دياب" إلى رجل أعمال وتأثراً العجب العجب يا وضّاح العجيب...

Img. 216

On May 18, another news platform, [Tyrosc.com](#), published an article about a meeting held between Nabih Berri and candidate Melhem Khalaf to conclude a deal about the upcoming election of the Parliament deputy-speaker.



Img. 217

# Archetypes of Polarization

The issue of polarization online has been gaining attention in recent years amid the changing political landscapes of many parts of the world. In Lebanon, several studies observed the existence of echo chambers in the digital realm, instigating public opinion shaping. Here, the opinion model is shaped by the political affiliation of users.

This section of the report will look into identity-based polarization better called as the affective polarization. Meaning the increasing dislike, distrust, and animosity towards those from other parties or groups; more specifically, from political party supporters vis-à-vis alternative candidates. As defined by Build Up, a social enterprise working at the intersection of peacebuilding and technology, “Affective polarization is a dynamic process intertwined with conflict escalation, by which a self-reinforcing spiral cooperates to separate ideologies or identity groups into increasingly distanced and aggregated adversaries.”<sup>15</sup>

Archetypes are models or patterns of behavior, images, or characters that serve as helpful tools to conceive and build a certain narrative.

This section will explore affective polarization, as an offline dynamic, and demonstrate how it found new roots online. As conflict dynamics intersect with the architecture and affordances of social media platforms, recurring patterns and existing fault lines arise to be exacerbated and amplified with the tripartite propellants of identity construction, incentives, and scaled discourse that social media provides.<sup>16</sup>

From 2005, the date that instigated the deep political division from which emerged the March 8 and March 14 coalitions, to October 2019, the popular uprising, three main pillars are dividing the country.

One being the rally behind the two coalitions, pro-March 8 and pro-March 14 and subsequently, the second being positioning towards Hezbollah. The third being the positioning towards the popular uprising (pro-establishment v. pro-*Thawra*), i.e., alternative parties.

For the sake of the research, themes enlisted below, which were highlighted across all case studies, were grouped under these pillars. These themes created polarized conversations circulated by polarized crowds with herd behavior. These themes are omnipresent in all case studies; hence the analysis is inclusive of regions, except some specificities related to the context.

1- 2005 division: allegations of affiliation with March 8, allegations of affiliation with March 14 and of their respective entities

2- October 2019: Othering, conformity, affiliation with banks, hate by proxy, ties with Western powers

3- Positioning vis-a-vis Israel and Hezbollah: Treason

---

15- Build Up. (2022). Archetypes of polarization on social media. Medium. Retrieved from <https://howtobuildup.medium.com/archetypes-of-polarization-on-social-media-d56d4374fb25>

16- Idem

As shown by data, in South III, themes of othering, treason, and allegations of affiliation with March 14 were generated by pro-Hezbollah users and independents. While quantitative data shows that both groups do meet on themes like othering and hate by proxy, they diverge on narratives related to treason and allegations of affiliation with March 14. Labeled as independents were users who showed disagreement with established political parties and support to popular protests, hence their content related to othering and warning against the conformity of some alternative candidates. Contrary to this behavior, pro-Hezbollah users will spread content of hate by proxy and othering for candidates affiliated with public figures, who are known to be pro-popular protests, or Shiite figures against Hezbollah, such as Shaden Fakhri, Lokman Slim, and Dima Sadek.

In Mount Lebanon II (Metn), themes of othering, treason, allegations of affiliation with March 8, and allegations of affiliation with March 14 were generated by three main groups, pro-Hezbollah, independents, and pro-LF users. Quantitative data shows that the narrative of treason was circulated by pro-LF and pro-Hezbollah users. Pro-LF users lead on the narrative of affiliation with March 8 and pro-Hezbollah users lead on the affiliation with March 14, while both independents and pro-Hezbollah generated a narrative of othering.

The definition of treason also diverges between pro-LF and pro-Hezbollah users, as pro-LF users consider whoever is affiliated with Hezbollah as a traitor. Meanwhile, Hezbollah uses words such as “Zionist” and “traitor” against all those who hold an anti-Hezbollah position.

In North III, two main networks were circulating polarizing themes, MMFD users and pro-LF users. The allegation of affiliation with March 8, which was mainly circulated by pro-LF users, is worthy of attention, as this narrative was focusing on an allegation of affiliation with SSNP in particular. SSNP, historically present in Koura, was long opposed to Lebanese Forces, and this political opposition is rooted in their respective ideologies, the former lobbying for including Lebanon in a greater Syria and the latter a proponent of Lebanese nationalism. Pro-LF users capitalized on this allegation to discredit and demonize candidates. As for the high activity of MMFD users, it is due to the fact that MMFD was running against *Shamaluna*, hence accusing *Shamaluna* candidates of practicing identity politics and speaking exclusively to a Christian crowd in a specific area, while MMFD’s ideology is presented as nationwide and secular.

In Mount Lebanon IV (Shouf-Aley), three main networks were disseminating polarizing themes: pro-FPM users, pro-Hezbollah users, and independent users. The allegation of affiliation with March 14, which was mainly circulated by pro-FPM users, is worthy of attention, as this narrative was focusing specifically on allegations of affiliation with PSP.

In conclusion, two types of polarization narratives were identified across all regions included in our case studies: crowd polarization and conversation polarization. Each crowd replicated the offline behavior of the political party it belongs to or supports, in an attempt to reinforce and reaffirm political positioning and display political power.

With the absence of sufficient data related to *Beirut al Taghyir* crowd polarization and conversation polarization were not captured and narratives could not be categorized by users and themes.

## Conclusion

**“Lebanon’s 2022 Parliamentary Election: A Look into Political Parties’ Online Behavior Vis-à-vis Alternative Candidates”** draws its originality from the use of mixed methodology, digital tools, and from the richness of the experiences in terms of number and diversity of data entry points, in both qualitative and quantitative dimensions.

The purpose of this report was to analyze digital behaviors, narratives, archetypes of polarization, and disinformation techniques of Lebanese political parties and their supporters vis-à-vis alternative candidates and lists. The analysis focused on three key elements:

1. Narratives circulated by political party supporters and their digital behaviors
2. Techniques and tools of disinformation
3. Archetypes of polarization in the digital sphere

The report covered five alternative lists spread all over Lebanon, *Maan Nahwa al Tayghir* (South III), *Nahwa al Dawla* (Mount Lebanon II), *Beirut al Taghyir* (Beirut II), *Shamaluna* (North III), and *Twahhadna lil Taghyir* (Mount Lebanon IV).

Overall, from April 1 to May 31, 2022, the timeframe of this report, 14 themes were circulated on social media platforms: allegation of affiliation with March 14 and its entities, allegation of affiliation with March 8 and its entities, treason, othering, hate by proxy, conformity, electoral law disagreement, mis- and disinformation, context specific allegations, ties with the West, affiliation with banks, affiliation with GCC, allegations of federalism, and leftism.

These themes were disseminated by users affiliated with political parties in addition to independent users, who were also visible and active. Although all parties from the Future Movement to SSNP, from PSP to Talal Arslan and Wiam Wahhab’s parties, from Kataeb to Marada, were involved in the online campaign, the users behind the most controversial content were mainly affiliated with FPM, Hezbollah, LF, and MMFD.

Disinformation tools were divided into three types: videos, photos, and articles. They were composed of all information that was taken out of context, edited, reshaped, reworded in order to spread rumors, demonize and discredit the alternative candidate, display power, and/or push for the political parties’ narrative and ideology.

Inauthentic behavior was also highlighted with a relatively high number of deleted tweets and accounts, suspended accounts, and recently created accounts.

Polarization was drawn around three main events: 2005 and the political dichotomy that left the country with two main coalitions (March 14 v. March 8), the popular protests of 2019 that divided the country between pro- and anti-“*Thawra*,” and positioning vis-à-vis Hezbollah. What was concluded is that the offline carriers of political positioning and ideologies echoed the online narrative shapers.

In conclusion, in a highly polarized political scene, a panoply of tools and tactics were deployed in order to display power, discredit alternative candidates, and minimize their chances of victory.



## Nahwa al Dawla - Metn

Theme	Narrative
Allegation of affiliation with March 14 and its entities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Association with Kataeb</li> <li>- Conspiring against Hezbollah</li> </ul>
Allegation of affiliation with March 8 and its entities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Affiliation with FPM</li> <li>- Affiliation with Hezbollah</li> <li>- Supporting Assad Regime</li> <li>- Supporting Iran</li> </ul>
Hate by proxy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Association with Tahsin Khayat</li> <li>- Association with Ghadi Francis</li> <li>- Association with Charbel Nahhas</li> <li>- Association with Gino Raidy</li> <li>- Association with Riyad Salameh</li> <li>- Association with Verena el Amil</li> <li>- Association with Shaden Maalouf</li> <li>- Association with Assaad abou Khalil</li> <li>- Association with Road Blocking</li> <li>- Association with Albert Constanian</li> <li>- Association with Sami Kleb</li> <li>- Association with Lucine Bou Rjeily</li> <li>- Association with the establishment</li> </ul>
Allegation for conformity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Speculations</li> <li>- Association with violence/thugs</li> <li>- Allegation of corruption</li> <li>- Allegation of fundings</li> <li>- Allegation of fake accounts</li> </ul>
Othering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Trolling</li> <li>- Warning</li> <li>- Not having a clear political positioning</li> <li>- Allegations of racism</li> <li>- Having double standards</li> <li>- Being opportunists</li> <li>- Being stranger to Metn</li> <li>- Calling for boycotting Ghosn</li> </ul>
Context specific allegations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Being anti-Church</li> <li>- Assassinations</li> <li>- Pro-Sanctions</li> </ul>

GCC affiliations or attacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attacking KSA</li> <li>- Sky news position</li> <li>- Anti-saudi narrative</li> <li>- Pro-Saudi narrative</li> <li>- Pro-UAE narrative</li> </ul>
Treason	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Normalization</li> </ul>
Ties with western blocks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Affiliation with embassies</li> <li>- Allegation of funding</li> <li>- Pro-Sanctions</li> </ul>
Leftist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Association with Melenchon</li> <li>- Communist</li> <li>- Affiliation with LCP</li> </ul>

### Twahhadna lil Teghyir - Shouf Aley

Theme	Narrative
Allegation of affiliation with March 14 and its entities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Affiliation with Kataeb</li> <li>- Affiliation with PSP</li> <li>- Affiliation with LF</li> </ul>
Allegation of affiliation with March 8 and its entities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Affiliation with SSNP</li> <li>- Affiliation with Hezbollah</li> </ul>
Hate by proxy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Association with Kulluna Irada</li> <li>- Association with Ghadi Francis</li> </ul>
Allegation for conformity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Affiliation with banks</li> <li>- Affiliation with establishment</li> <li>- Corruption</li> <li>- Affiliation with gas companies</li> <li>- Partnering with Jumlat</li> </ul>
Othering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Trolling</li> <li>- Warning</li> <li>- Not having a clear political positioning</li> <li>- Smearing</li> <li>- Downplaying</li> <li>- Discrediting</li> </ul>
Treason	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Normalization</li> <li>- Traitor</li> </ul>
Ties with western blocks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Affiliation with embassies</li> <li>- Allegation of funding</li> <li>- Affiliation with Shencker</li> </ul>

## Shamaluna - North III

Theme	Narrative
Allegation of affiliation with March 14 and its entities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Association with Kataeb</li> <li>- Association with LF</li> <li>- Conspiring against Hezbollah</li> </ul>
Allegation of affiliation with March 8 and its entities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Affiliation with SSNP</li> <li>- Affiliation with Hezbollah</li> <li>- Affiliation with FMP</li> </ul>
Hate by proxy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Association with Nehmat Frem</li> <li>- Association with MMFD</li> <li>- Association with Dima Sadek Baroud</li> <li>- Association with Kulluna Irada</li> </ul>
Allegation for conformity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Secularism</li> <li>- Identitarian politics</li> <li>- Questions about funding</li> </ul>
Othering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Trolling</li> <li>- Warning</li> <li>- Not having a clear political positioning</li> <li>- Discrediting</li> <li>- Downplaying</li> </ul>
Allegation of federalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Secularism</li> <li>- Identitarian politics</li> </ul>
Treason	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dhimmis</li> </ul>
Ties with western blocks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Affiliation with US embassy</li> </ul>

## Maan Nahwa al Taghyir - South III

Theme	Narrative
Allegation of affiliation with March 14 and its entities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Association with Kataeb</li> <li>- Association with PSP</li> <li>- Conspiring against Hezbollah</li> <li>- Association with LF</li> </ul>
Allegation of affiliation with March 8 and its entities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Affiliation with Hezbollah</li> </ul>
Hate by proxy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Association with Paula Yacoubian</li> <li>- Association with MMFD</li> <li>- Association with Dima Sadek</li> <li>- Association with Shaden Fakih</li> <li>- Association with Lokman Slim</li> <li>- Association with Marcel Ghanem</li> <li>- Association with Kulluna Irada</li> <li>- Association with Charbel Nahas</li> </ul>
Allegation for conformity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Corruption</li> <li>- Affiliation with banks</li> </ul>
Othering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Trolling</li> <li>- Warning</li> <li>- Not having a clear political positioning</li> <li>- Discrediting</li> <li>- Downplaying</li> </ul>
Treason	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Zionist</li> <li>- Traitor</li> <li>- Chouaya incident</li> </ul>
Ties with western blocks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Affiliation with US embassy</li> <li>- Affiliation with embassies</li> <li>- Association with Shencker</li> </ul>
Leftist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Affiliation with LCP</li> <li>- Communist</li> </ul>

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